

**MONTEREY PENINSULA REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT
STAFF REPORT**

BOARD MEETING: December 02, 2020

SUBJECT: Monthly Staff Report

PRESENTER: Rafael Payan, General Manager

REPORT: The following briefly summarizes some of the key tasks and projects MPRPD's Staff undertook from mid-October through Mid-November 2020 in addition to performing the District's regular business. This work was accomplished in compliance with the CDC's recommendations and the State's and County's shelter-in-place orders.

ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

- 1. Annual Financial Statement Audit:** Staff continues working with the Audit Firm CliftonLarsonAllen LLP to complete the District's Financial Statement Audit. The Preliminary Draft Audited Financial Statements are ready for presentation to, and review by, the Board at the December 02, 2020 Board Meeting, and are scheduled to be presented for final approval by the Board at the Board's January meeting.
- 2. Cross Country/Fitness Course and Sewer Line Project at the Rancho Canada Unit:** The fitness course's proponents and MPRPD staff met with the Carmel Area Wastewater District (CAWD) to discuss CAWD's alignment for a sewer line and service road project that will cross the entirety of the Rancho Canada Unit from east to west, north of the Carmel River. Where possible, the sewer line's service road will be integrated as part of the fitness course. The sewer line project will be bid in December of this year with construction beginning in late winter or early spring. Wedgewood has been notified.
- 3. COVID-related Orders, Meetings, and Updates:** Staff continued to participate in regular meetings held by the County Health Officer to ensure we have the latest information, and that planning and implementation practices align MPRPD with the CDC's, State's, and County's latest guidelines. This information is vital to the development of Return to Work policies and procedures. Per the County of Monterey, outdoor playgrounds and picnic facilities are authorized to be open for public use in compliance with the County Health Officer's parameters regarding social distancing, and other safety measures.

- 4. Eolian Dunes Preserve (former Sand City Landfill) Monitoring:** Staff met with the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) regarding Eolian Dunes Preserve, which formerly functioned as the Sand City Landfill. Staff was notified several months ago that the SWRCB had determined that the District was responsible for several years of unpaid fees related to monitoring of the former dump site. The fees amounted to tens of thousands of dollars. The SWRCB had reviewed their records and discovered that unbeknownst to them, they had been billing a bankrupt corporation for these past several years and had now determined these fees belong to the District which now owns the property. Legal Counsel communicated with the SWRCB resulting in a notice from the SWRCB that they would waive the prior years' fees through Fiscal Year 2019-20. Staff continues to meet with the SWRCB to determine what future monitoring requirements must be met and their respective estimated costs, and what ongoing fees will consist of.
- 5. Frog Pond Wetland Preserve:** MPRPD met with the City of Del Rey Oaks to discuss potential opportunities to collaborate on the wetland's expansion, master planning, native habitat restoration, and enhanced public access as part of the FORTAG project.
- 6. Human Resources:** Staff continued to work on miscellaneous confidential Human Resources projects and issues.
- 7. Inmate Labor Crews:** Staff met to discuss and implement a plan that allows MPRPD to continue to benefit from the much-needed labor these crews provide, while also ensuring that crews', and MPRPD visitors' and staffs' health are protected. This primarily entails limiting contact to be between MPRPD's rangers and each crew's chief. Signage will be posted informing the public that inmate crews are working in the area.
- 8. Project B – Restroom, Outdoor Classroom, Tent Pad and Entrance Plaza:** Staff continues to meet with the architectural firm, Page & Turnbull, to further develop and design the amenities required to welcome and accommodate visitors to Palo Corona Regional Park and its Rancho Canada Unit. In addition to the restroom's multiple unisex and family friendly cabins, Project B will also provide Wi-fi capabilities for the outdoor classroom and event pad thus facilitating outdoor education opportunities and/or live streaming for events held at the tent pad.

EECO DIVISION

- 1. Exhibits:** Volunteers and Staff worked together to harvest tule shoots and leaves, and willow and cottonwood stalks that will be used to construct a life-size Rumsien House that will be exhibited inside the Palo Corona Regional Park's Discovery Center.



Along the banks of the Carmel River, volunteers (Linda and Violet) prune sand willow to encourage new growth. Sand willow branches are beautifully colored and straight making them a choice plant for basketry.

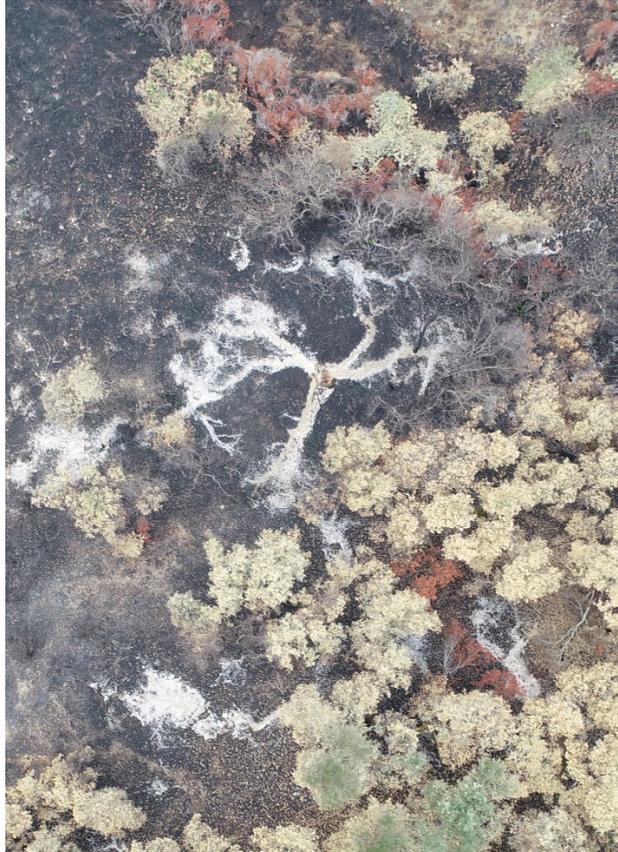


Rafael Payan surveys willows for Native American home (Ruk) exhibit.

2. **Joyce Stevens Monterey Pine Preserve Dedication Ceremony:** Staff continued to work with Architect Stevens' team to finalize plans for the Dedication Ceremony which is scheduled to take place in mid-December 2020.
3. **LGO! Newsletter:** In lieu of the *LGO!* catalogue that MPRPD typically issues announcing the various courses, hikes, and events we offer, MPRPD will issue a newsletter to provide the public an update and featured stories including the *Joyce Stevens Monterey Pine Preserve* and *Our Rangers are our Heroes*. This is in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and our inability to provide programs and events for the time being. The newsletter is scheduled to be mailed the week of December 2, 2020.
4. **San Clemente/Blue Rock:** CSUMB Professor Doug Smith takes drone imagery of the burn site at the San Clement/Blue Rock prior to forecasted rains. The imagery will determine photo monitoring points to document ground-cover changes and seasonal variability through a time series of photos historically documenting restoration activities.



Dr. Doug Smith collects drone following its mission to capture imagery of burn areas at San Clemente/Blue Rock

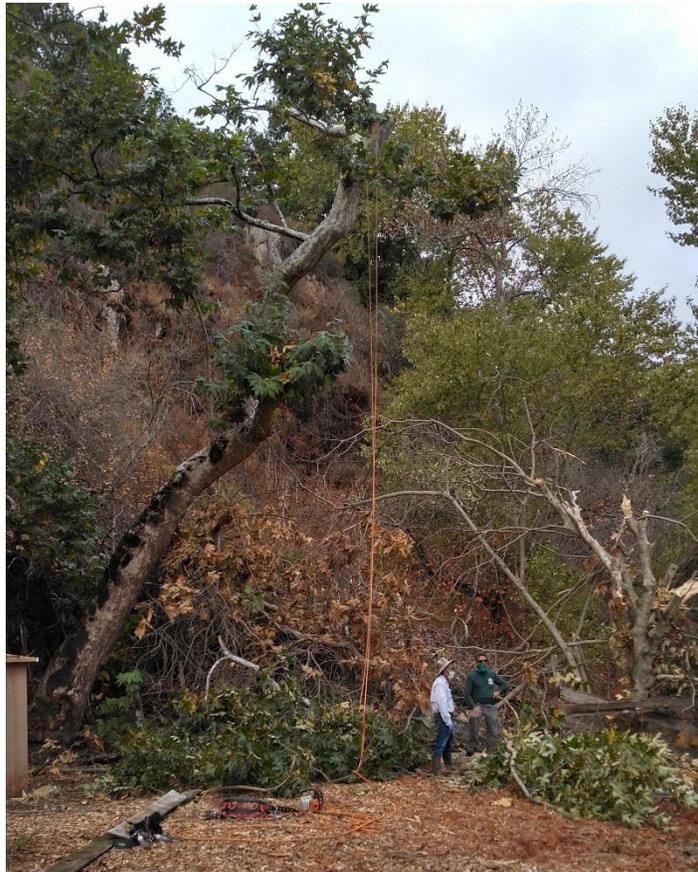


Termed “Ghost Tree” the image is of the ashes left behind after the tree burned

5. **Strategic Plan:** The Admin and EECO Divisions partnered to complete the plan’s narrative, graphics, and layout. Comments made by the public, Board, and staff during the November 17, 2020 Special Meeting, focusing on the Plan’s review and revision, were incorporated into the document’s final draft.

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE DIVISION

1. **BSMAAC / RCD Coordination Meetings:** Rangers represented MPRPD at the quarterly Big Sur Multi-Agency Advisory Council Meeting on November 6, 2020. Rangers continue to participate in planning meetings for the Carmel Valley Strategic Fuel-break Project coordinated by the Resource Conservation District for Monterey County.
2. **Hazard Tree at GRRP:** Rangers and the District’s GIS Consultant determined a hazard sycamore tree threatening to crush a neighboring property’s fence-line was located on District property. Rangers contacted local tree service companies to obtain bids for removal and ultimately hired Tope’s Tree Service to complete the work. Permission to pass through the adjacent neighbor’s property was granted and the tree was removed on November 18, 2020.



Ranger Joseph Narvaez discusses progress with the property owner

- 3. Palo Corona Road Grading:** In preparation of the upcoming winter rainy season, Ventana Forestry utilized their road grader to repair and reestablish the out-slope along Palo Corona Road leading to Inspiration Point. Rangers worked with Ventana Forestry to provide compaction using the District's roller and kept the road wet using the District's water tender. The Front Ranch parking lot was also regraded in preparation for winter.



**Ranger John Palaniuk
operating the Roller**



**Ranger Jacob Sanderson
watering the road using the
District's water tender**

- 4. RCU Tree Removals:** 34-dead but still-standing trees were removed at Palo Corona Regional Park's Rancho Canada Unit during the month of November. Rangers obtained bids and contracted with Tope's Tree Service to complete the project. Most of the trees were Monterey Pines, with a few cottonwoods, and one dead redwood. The felled trees were chipped and stockpiled at Rancho Canada for future use as mulch and other purposes. Some of the former golf course's

trees are in senescence or have died because they were planted as part of the former golf course and were reliant upon the frequent irrigation practices necessary to maintain the links' manicured lawns.



Trees that were adjacent to facilities required climbing to be removed piece by piece



Tope's Tree Service owns a very large chipper/grinder capable of accommodating 30" logs

- 5. Safe Harbor Agreement Pond Work at PCRP:** The District's Safe Harbor Agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service requires the District to maintain ponds identified as habitat for threatened and endangered species, specifically tiger salamanders and red-legged frogs. Through the month of October, Rangers worked with the District's amphibian biologist and Ventana Forestry to dewater Animas Pond, remove red-legged frogs and larvae, divert incoming water, dredge the pond, rehabilitate pond walls and the surrounding area, and return the frogs to their new and improved habitat.



Tom "Little Bear" Nason using his excavator to remove overgrown vegetation and accumulated sediment from Animas Pond



Approximately 30 adult red-legged frogs and 500 larvae were captured during pond de-watering using nets, kept alive in water troughs, then returned



Rangers installed symbolic fencing along the pond's edge



As an erosion control measure, Rangers installed straw waddles at the spoils dump site and along the pond's edge



- 6. Western Snowy Plover Fencing:** In cooperation with Point Blue Conservancy, Rangers relocated the symbolic fencing used to prohibit access into the plovers' nesting sites at Marina Dunes Preserve. Each year, Rangers coordinate with Point Blue to relocate this fencing to accommodate the snowy plover nesting season which runs from spring through late summer. The symbolic fence is relocated back to the base of the foredunes in fall to accommodate winter's high tides.





LET'S GO OUTDOORS! NEWS

Winter 2020-2021

The trail for 2021 is before us. While MPRPD offices and centers remain closed, our parks are open from sunrise to sunset. You are encouraged to get outdoors and stay connected through social media and at mprpd.org.

Rangers are Essential

Our rangers are on the front line of park operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are working harder than ever to keep our parks open, clean, and safe. They tackle these tasks while keeping a smile on their face - even if you can't see it under their masks.

As guardians of our parks and trail systems, MPRPD's rangers have always been friendly, informative, and diligent while maintaining trails, infrastructure, tools, and vehicles, and consistently providing high-quality public service. Each ranger is a jack of all trades. Beyond maintenance, their tasks include: patrolling parks, responding to medical calls, rescuing wildlife, and working with the community. These "busy bees" deserve all of the thanks we can muster.

Since the shelter-in-place order began in March, parks have seen an influx of new visitors resulting in more traffic than ever before. Our rangers work tirelessly to keep up with the extra wear and tear on the trails and debris that is left behind. Be kind to your forests' guardians.

Pack up what you bring in, use garbage bins, and be respectful of all rules. Most importantly please be sure to thank your rangers when you see them.



Rangers starting from left: Jeff, Nico, and Hatton on their reconstructed Fern Falls footbridge in Kahn Ranch. Not pictured: Caine, Jake, Joe, and John.

Marina Dunes Preserve Sharing the Beach

Rolling hills of sand create a magnificent backdrop as the tranquil waves tumble in from the emerald

sea. The Marina Dunes Preserve is not only picturesque, it also provides habitat for many threatened and endangered species. Dune dwellers like the black legless lizard enjoy protection provided by large woody

shrubs like mock heather, silver beach lupine, and coyote brush. Shorebirds like the western snowy plover lay their eggs in small depressions in the sand. The Smith's blue butterfly relies on coast buckwheat plants for the entirety of its life cycle. Monterey spineflower grows in mats on open sandy soil. Other native plants like beach sagewort and beach burr are fast growing and deep-rooted. These characteristics help stabilize the shifting sands of the dunes, enhancing habitat quality and promoting biodiversity. This unique blend of coastal species is remarkable, and we need your help to preserve this rare community of common and rare plant and animal species.

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You can help by staying on designated trails, heeding signs in closed areas, keeping your dogs on leash, taking your garbage home with you, and leaving naturally-occurring driftwood in place. Through these practices, we can enjoy the scenic and biological diversity of Marina Dunes Preserve for many years to come.



Joyce Stevens: A Force For Good

One of the newest additions to the impressive list of parkland conserved by the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District is the *Joyce Stevens Monterey Pine Preserve*. This 850-acre mosaic of Monterey Pine Forest, rare Maritime Chaparral, Coastal Scrub and pocket meadows of native grassland surrounds the County-owned Jacks Peak Park on three sides and includes the entrance road to Jacks Peak where Monhollan and Olmsted meet.

The new Monterey Pine Preserve is named in honor of Joyce Smith Stevens, one of the primary catalysts for open space conservation in the Monterey Bay region. Joyce has worked for over 50-years to safeguard, advocate, and educate on behalf of the Central Coast's incomparable environment. She is admired by local volunteers for her keen humor and tireless energy, and by civic leaders as an organizer, mentor, and visionary. She has been involved in numerous local causes that have protected scenic, ecological, and cultural resources throughout the Park District,

and the naming of the new Monterey Pine Preserve honors her many years of service in our community.

Joyce was born in Alaska and studied architecture at a time when there were few women in that profession. After practicing in Alaska, Joyce moved to Carmel in 1962 with her young daughter and felt awe and admiration for the beauty of the trees and natural landscape of the Central Coast. She worked as the staff architect at the Fort Ord Army base and designed the vaulted, open-beam church at Fort Hunter Liggett in south Monterey County.

Joyce has been active in the Sierra Club, The Monterey Bay Dunes Coalition, California Native Plant Society, Monterey Pine Forest Watch, and Big Sur Land Trust, where she was first appointed to the Board of Trustees in 1988 and later served as Secretary in 1991 and President of the Board in 1996.

Joyce has been a leading voice behind community efforts to preserve the Monterey Peninsula's iconic Monterey Pine Forest habitat - a unique forest type found in only three coastal California groves and on two

islands off the west coast of Baja. Joyce has raised our community's awareness of the rarity of Monterey Pine Forest, as well as the inherent value of natural resources and landscapes we all appreciate.

Her inspirational work dedicated to the conservation of our region's signature open spaces and natural resources has truly benefited all residents and visitors to the Monterey area. Her legacy of conservation endeavors are aptly acknowledged with a new preserve named in her honor. *Article by Nikki Nedeff.*



Joyce Stevens and MPRPD Ward 4 Director Kathleen Lee.

A Good Deed Indeed: Frog Pond Parcel Expands by 6.9 Acres

A joint agreement between Fort Ord Reuse Authority (FORA) and MPRPD in July 2020, has resulted in MPRPD's possession of the deed to a parcel east of General Jim Moore Boulevard adjacent to the Frog Pond Wetland Preserve. This new addition is currently closed, and will open upon completion and implementation of the site's Habitat Management Plan.

Human History of the Land

This new parcel and the land surrounding the Frog Pond has a rich history of changing habitats and land use. In the early 1900's the land was a grassy marshland. From 1917 to 1940, surrounding areas were used as a maneuver and artillery target staging area. Several of these parcels formally became part of the Fort Ord Army base in 1940. The 1994, deactivation of Fort Ord opened the landscape for re-use.

The Frog Pond had always been a thriving wetland used in various ways. Prior to the 1970's, the land was likely used to graze horses, cattle, and other livestock by the local ranchers.

Plans for building condominiums were proposed in the 1970's and through grass-roots efforts residents successfully protected Frog Pond Wetland Preserve. In 1977, MPRPD acquired the first parcel of this natural marshland to preserve it and provide access to the public through recreational trails.

Over the next 25 years, the cities of Del Rey Oaks and Monterey, FORA, MPRPD, and other stakeholders discussed road improvements, drainage issues, upstream development plans, public access, parcel delineation, and habitat protection plans. Today, the preserve is over 37-acres, with the western portion of the preserve open for passive recreation.

A Jewel of a Park

Frog Pond Wetland Preserve is part of the Highway 68 corridor watershed; part of a larger wetland habitat system that connects groundwater and surface water along Canyon Del Rey Boulevard, from Laguna Seca to the ocean and, is critical to flood protection.

Where else can you find a seasonal pond with its migratory birds and wildlife, willow trees, a small redwood grove, an oak woodland with a viewing platform over the water, and a walkable trail? A refuge for us all... indeed!



Know Before You Go: Your Social Distancing Keeps Our Parks Open

Many doors have shut amid the pandemic. Closures have disrupted life around the Peninsula and beyond. Places to recreate are few and yet we are able to keep many of our parks open through unwavering staff commitment and astounding public support. Staff continues to work diligently to implement COVID-19 related measures in our parks as visitors quickly adapt to new protocols.

We are enjoying an influx of new visitors to the parks. All users are asked to follow guidelines regarding trail usage. As our efforts continue, we say to you, "Keep up the good work!" Remember to be courteous, clean up after yourself, and stay home if you're sick so we can keep your parks open.

In order to protect the public, all indoor spaces are closed and will remain shut until further notice. New exhibits are being planned for both the Garland Park and Palo Corona centers, and we are excited to unveil them when we reopen. For now, stay in touch with us via our social media accounts or the MPRPD website. Share with us by posting your photos using the hashtag **#mprpdandme!**



California Wildlife Day

**Saturday & Sunday,
March 20-21, 2021**

**Virtual Experience
Visit carmelriverwatershed.org
and mprpd.org**



Board in Your Ward

In the November 1972 election, Monterey County's voting members approved the measure which created the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District (MPRPD) and entrusted it to acquire lands for the express purpose of preserving open space and providing recreational opportunities. Mirroring the Monterey Peninsula College District's boundaries, MPRPD includes the Monterey Peninsula's seven incorporated cities, and the unincorporated communities of Carmel Valley, Pebble Beach, and the Big Sur Coast. The District consists of five wards with each ward governed by a voter-elected member of the MPRPD Board of Directors. We asked each Director to share their commitment as your representative...



Ward 1

"I will continue protecting regional parks for all to enjoy as well as enhancing the infrastructure and natural assets of the District."

Kelly Sorenson - Director
ksorenson@mprpd.org



Ward 2

"I will continue to work to maintain and increase peoples' ability to benefit from MPRPD's resources while working to protect these diverse resources for current and future generations."

Shane E. Anderson - President
shanea@mprpd.org



Ward 3

"My main goals are to help increase access and opportunities for our residents and visitors to enjoy our regional parks while also conserving and protecting our natural areas for generations to come."

Kevin Raskoff - Director
kraskoff@mprpd.org



Ward 4

"Our parks belong to everyone. I am proud of the work our District has done to ensure that our parks are open and accessible to all members of our community with equal access to these open spaces that are so vital to our mental and physical health."

Kathleen Lee - Secretary/Treasurer
klee@mprpd.org



Ward 5

"I am committed to helping everyone experience the physical and mental health that comes from spending time in parks."

Monta Potter - Vice President
mpotter@mprpd.org



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Parks and Open Spaces Reveal Themselves

The COVID-19 pandemic has, in one manner or another, negatively affected all of humanity. Even so, MPRPD has navigated these turbulent times by responsibly keeping many of our hiking trails, parks, and natural areas open for your use even as schools, businesses, and many federal, state, and local governments shuttered their properties.

Parks and natural areas revealed and reinforced themselves as essential to our physical, emotional, and mental health. The public's response has been enormous! Many people visited our sites for the very first time, discovering the magnificent lands, passive recreation, and environmental education opportunities MPRPD offers, and many visitors have returned. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to respect each other,

nature's wildlife, and the habitats we all depend on.

The model MPRPD formulated and implemented strives to make our properties responsibly available while protecting our natural and cultural resources. This model has been shared with and implemented by parks, recreation, and open space organizations across the United States.

As we continue to traverse this ever changing 'new world' in which we live, MPRPD is committed to protecting, restoring, and monitoring critical habitats, and natural and cultural resources, offering exceptional hiking experiences and high-quality environmental education programs, and upholding MPRPD's transparent, award-winning best business practices.

MPRPD will continue to function with essential personnel on site. The *Let's Go Outdoors!* programs, visitor

and nature centers, offices, and volunteer activities however, remain on-hold as we continue to navigate these challenging times while providing you the best services and experiences possible.

So, please continue to visit our parks and natural areas regularly to get some fresh air, sunshine, and experience a place free of the confines four walls pose. Take a full breath, stretch your legs, and allow your senses to take in the natural beauty that surrounds us! Enjoy one of our region's most essential places where you can take control and be in control of your own wellbeing.

For more information, please visit: MPRPD.org

Dr. Rafael Payan,
MPRPD General Manager

