



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence
County Manager



Date: July 22, 2014
Board Meeting Date: Sept. 9, 2014
Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: John L. Maltbie, County Manager

Subject: San Mateo County Parks – Response to 2013-14 Grand Jury Report “Is the New Devil’s Slide Trail Safe?”

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Board of Supervisors’ response to the Grand Jury report titled; “Is the New Devil’s Slide Trail Safe?”

BACKGROUND:

On July 8, 2014 the Civil Grand Jury filed a report titled: Is the New Devil’s Slide Trail Safe? The Board of Supervisors is required to submit comments on the findings and recommendations pertaining to the matters under control of the County of San Mateo within ninety days. The County’s response to the report is due to Hon. Lisa A. Novak no later than October 7, 2014.

Acceptance of this report contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of a Collaborative Community by ensuring that all Grand Jury findings and recommendations are thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate County departments and that, when appropriate, process improvements are made to enhance the quality and efficiency of services provided to the public and other agencies.

DISCUSSION:

Findings:

F1. The Trail does not have an emergency call box, and cell phone service on or near the trail is unreliable.

The County Board of Supervisors Response to F1: Agree.

- (i) The County chose to explore cell phone service improvements rather than installation of a call box.

- (ii) On July 10, 2014, representatives of AT&T visited Devil's Slide Trail to determine feasibility of installing one or more additional cell phone tower. AT&T continues to work on a solution.

F2. At times, there will be no Park Ranger present to respond to an emergency on the Trail.

The County Board of Supervisors Response to F2: Agree.

This is a statement of fact. As a section of the California Coastal Trail, Devil's Slide Trail is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The parking lots are open on the same schedule as all County Parks, which is 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM in the summer and reduced hours when days are shorter. Parks Rangers are present on the trail at times and always available on the radio. In addition, volunteer Trail Ambassadors patrol the trail and are often present on the trail when Park Rangers are working in other parks in the area. Volunteer Trail Ambassadors carry county radios for emergency contact.

F3. The Trail is not suitable for simultaneous mixed-use by horses, dogs and hikers.

The County Board of Supervisors Response to F3: Partially agree.

While County Parks originally was opposed to use of the trail by equestrians, this was a contentious issue. No horses have been observed on the trail to date. County Parks proposes to discourage horse use on the trail and will continue to monitor the issue.

F4. Sections of the existing fencing inadequately prevent unauthorized access to Bunker Hill.

The County Board of Supervisors response to F4: Partially agree.

Subsequent to the opening of the trail, County Parks contracted to have additional fencing placed on the north corner of Bunker Hill to prevent people swinging around the end of the fence, and additional cross-fencing was added. Moreover, additional warning and regulatory signs were placed at Bunker Hill.

F5. The guard-railed sections of the Trail do not prevent children from accessing the cliffs.

The County Board of Supervisors response to F5: Partially agree.

The existing guardrails are a common feature on trails and roads. In the case of Devil's Slide Trail, the task force considered a variety of factors in selecting barriers and fencing including: safety, cost, aesthetics, viewing areas, durability in the elements and visually screening people from birds nesting on rocks. A balance was struck among competing variables. All outdoor recreation settings present inherent risks which parents and others need to keep in mind.

Recommendations:

The Grand Jury recommends that the County's Board of Supervisors do the following:

R1. By December 31, 2014, research improving the emergency communication system currently available.

This recommendation is already underway.

R2. By December 31, 2014, complete a study regarding the prohibition of horses on the Trail.

Given funding priorities, the County elects not to do a study. Rather than prohibiting horses, equestrian use will not be recommended on Devil's Slide Trail and the trail will be signed as such (see bottom line in example photo). This will also be posted on the County Parks website.



R3. By December 31, 2014, extend the current fence to discourage future unauthorized entry to Bunker Hill.

While County Parks has already implemented this recommendation, staff will continue to look at options for improving the fence.

R4. By December 31, 2014, replace the existing guardrail and install K-rail to reduce the risk of injury.

Simply replacing guardrail with K-rail may not be the best alternative to reduce the risk while at the same time maintaining the aesthetics of the trail and view. By December 31, 2014, County Parks staff will determine the best options to meet multiple objectives for the trail and begin implementation to address the Grand Jury's concerns.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no Net County Cost associated with approving this report.