

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Parks and Recreation Commission
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: August 2020 Director's Report

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept the August 2020 Director's Report.

BACKGROUND:

With health officials projecting a surge in COVID-19 cases, and staff reporting unsafe behavior at trailheads, in parking lots, and on playgrounds throughout the park system, the San Mateo County Parks Department ("Department") closed its parks on March 27. The parks remained closed until May 4.

In preparation for its reopening, the Department developed its COVID-19 Reopening Plan ("Plan"). The Plan, which is comprised of four phases, allows the Department to strategically open its parks and facilities in a safe manner. While each phase builds on the preceding phases, the triggers for transitioning from one phase to the next is not based on timing, but rather trends in COVID-19 cases, the availability of cleaning supplies, and the Department's ability to properly maintain the parks.

On June 23, the Department updated the Plan to be consistent with the County's most recent health order (No. C19-11; dated June 17, 2020) and industry guidance provided by the State of California. Since June 29, the Department has been operating according to Phase 2 of the Plan. A summary of the four phases is below.

Parks Department COVID-19 Reopening Plan

In *Phase 1*, trails in 15 parks are open to the public. Edgewood Park and Natural Preserve, the Memorial Park Complex, San Pedro Valley Park, Junipero Serra Park, and San Bruno Mountain host one-way trail systems. The Coyote Point Recreation Area, Flood Park, Devil's Slide Trail, Moss Beach Park, Friendship Park, the tidepools at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, Tunitas Creek Beach, and all playgrounds, picnic site, reservation sites, campgrounds, and visitor centers are closed. Limited restrooms are open, and made available based on what parks, parking lots, trails, and amenities are accessible to the public.

In *Phase 2*, trail access remains the primary focus, with 17 parks open to the public. A one-way trail system is sustained in Sam McDonald Park, San Pedro Valley Park, Junipero Serra Park, and San Bruno Mountain. Approximately 50% of restrooms systemwide are open, and most parking lots are available. During Phase 2, small drop-in picnic sites are made available for use by single households only. Playgrounds,

reservation sites, campgrounds, visitor centers, Tunitas Creek Beach, and the tidepools at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve remain closed.

During *Phase 3*, all trails systemwide are open in a bi-directional manner, except in San Pedro Valley Park where a one-way trail system remains. Small drop-in picnic sites are available for use by single households only. If permissible by local and state health orders and guidelines, large-group reservation sites will be available for use. Approximately 75% of restrooms will be open to the public throughout the system. Restrooms supporting facilities and amenities not yet open to the public will remain closed. Playgrounds, visitor centers, the tidepools at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, and Tunitas Creek Beach will remain closed.

Under *Phase 4*, all facilities, amenities, and reservation sites will be open to the public. Phase 4 represents the Department's new "normal" operations post-COVID. Details of this phase will be prepared as more information regarding best practice for parks post-COVID-19 are developed.

Visitor Numbers

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department has seen a significant increase in visitors. The charts in Attachment A compare trail counter data from May and June of 2019 with trail counter data from May and June of 2020.

As a result of the unprecedented increase in visitors, there has been greater demand for garbage service and litter pickup, restocking of restrooms, and increased patrols to educate visitors about park rules. The increased number of people on the trails has also required staff to conduct more trail maintenance and fire fuel reduction work. Furthermore, due to COVID-19, the Department had to increase the frequency of cleaning restrooms. The Department has also experienced a significant increase in complaints regarding litter and garbage, visitors not wearing face coverings, dogs in parks where they are not allowed, and bicyclists speeding on trails.

One-Way Trails

When the Department reopened some parks on May 4, it implemented one-way trail systems in Edgewood Park and Natural Preserve, Huddart Park, Memorial Park Complex, San Pedro Valley Park, Junipero Serra Park, and San Bruno Mountain. After operating the one-way trails for approximately one month, the Department determined that the one-way trail systems in Huddart Park and Edgewood Park and Natural Preserve were causing conflicts between visitors.

Parks staff observed that conflicts occurred for three main reasons. First, many people chose to not follow the one-way trail markers. This was either due to not planning the hike properly or blatantly ignoring signage. When trail users informed others that they were traveling in the wrong direction, it would often lead to a verbal altercation. Second, because people hike at different speeds, individuals or families hiking at a slower rate than those behind them would cause a backup on the trails. In these scenarios, staff would hear complaints from both parties either expressing frustration that they were

held up and couldn't enjoy their hike or that they were passed on a narrow trail. Lastly, people would turn the one-way arrows around or remove the signs, which caused confusion on the trails. Correcting this would take a significant amount of time, and shift rangers away from brushing trails, cleaning restrooms, reducing fuel loads, removing litter and garbage, and engaging with and educating visitors about the new rules.

Programs and Special Events

In accordance with state guidelines, special events and in-person programming has been suspended until further notice. The Department has increased the number of virtual events offered, including Reading with a Ranger, Campfire Singalong with a Ranger, and Nature Minute videos. In person events, including Take A Hike, Nature Hikes, Movie in the Park, and Junior Ranger will resume when organized group activities are allowed, and the Department has developed the necessary protocols to make these types of events as safe as possible.

Capital Projects

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department has continued to advance its capital projects. These include, but are not limited to, the Tunitas Creek Beach Improvement Project, Memorial Park Restroom and Shower Room Replacement Project, Memorial Park Collection System Project, Re-Imagine Flood Park, Coyote Point Eastern Promenade, the Quarry Park Pump Track, and the Old Haul Road Sediment Reduction Project.

Attachment A





