



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 22-932

Board Meeting Date: 12/6/2022

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: Pescadero Creek County Park Climate and Habitat Resiliency Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution authorizing:

- A) The adoption of the Pescadero Creek County Park Climate and Habitat Resiliency Plan; and
- B) The establishment of the Pescadero Creek County Park Trust Fund, which will support future restoration and stewardship activities solely within Pescadero Creek County Park.

BACKGROUND:

As part of the San Mateo County Parks Department's ("Department") response to the CZU Lightning Complex Fire, a comprehensive forest resource assessment was conducted for Pescadero Creek County Park ("Park"). The assessment, which was conducted by Auten Resource Consulting ("ARC"), analyzed impaired forest conditions and opportunities to conduct forest management work within areas of the Park impacted by the fire and historic logging operations. Through this assessment, over 1,000 acres of the total 5,943 acres that comprise the Park were identified as areas where forest management work could improve ecological function of the forest and mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire. To identify the types of projects that could accomplish these goals and standards that should be met to maximize effectiveness, a Climate and Habitat Resiliency Plan ("CHRP") was developed for the Park.

The CHRP provides a comprehensive strategy and clear standards for forest management work in the Park. It also outlines the regulatory framework these forest management projects may need to comply with prior to implementation. Components of the CHRP are intended to allow for streamlined implementation of:

- Ecologically restorative forest health and fuels reduction treatment activities.
- Forest density reduction projects and selective thinning of forest resources.
- Sensitive resource protection, impact avoidance, and mitigation measures.

- Long-term monitoring, education, and research opportunities.

It is essential that as the Department learns from the projects implemented and as science regarding forest management evolves, the CHRP is updated to reflect best practices. Therefore, the CHRP is a living document that will be modified and updated over time.

During the development of the CHRP, the Department formed a Technical Advisory Committee, with participation from current and former Department staff, ARC, CAL FIRE, the San Mateo Resource Conservation District, Green Foothills, Peninsula Open Space Trust, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and California State Parks. The Department has also engaged with local environmental advocacy groups, the Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council, the Parks Commission, and has hosted a public interpretive hike and virtual public webinar to share details of the CHRP.

DISCUSSION:

Climate and Habitat Resiliency Plan

The overarching goal for the CHRP is to promote the presence and enhancement of native species, habitats, and ecosystems in the Park that are resilient to disturbance (i.e., wildfire and drought) and climate change.

Subcategories for CHRP goals are categorized as follows:

- Conserve and protect biodiversity, habitat, wildlife, and other Park natural resources;
- Increase resiliency to disturbance and climate change and reduce catastrophic wildfire in forest stands;
- Conduct innovative monitoring, research, demonstrations, and education; and
- Provide an actionable plan for the Department to implement forest restoration projects.

Desired outcomes of these goals include the development of old growth trees and habitat characteristics, promoting forest stand diversity, improving wildlife habitat including creation of additional high quality nesting habitat for the federally protected marbled murrelet, controlling/reducing non-native invasive species, reducing fire fuels that increase the threat of catastrophic wildfire, and promoting carbon sequestration to combat climate change. The Department also intends to create interpretive, educational, and research opportunities related to forest restoration and management.

Restorative forest management strategies proposed in the CHRP are focused on silviculture, which is the art and science of the establishment, growth, diversity, health, and quality of forests. Forest management methods include forest density reduction to create un-even aged forest stands, single tree and group selection stand thinning, and creation of shaded fuel breaks and fuel density reduction. These may occur through mechanical treatment, manual treatment, prescribed burning, grazing, or herbicide application.

Upon adoption of the CHRP, the Department will be positioned to streamline project planning, permitting, and implementation with clear guidelines and strategy for responsible forest management. It will also be prepared to seek grant funding for forest health and fuel reduction projects. Over time, as this plan is implemented, the Park will be on a trajectory toward a forest that has a more diverse structure, more old growth redwood characteristics, and that is more resilient in the face of climate change.

Trust Fund

When conducting forest restoration work, it is sometimes necessary to reduce competition for resources including by removing redwood and Douglas fir trees. There are a variety of ways in which these trees can be used to advance further management and restoration of Pescadero Creek County Park. Some trees can be chipped on site to create mulch that enhances soil composition, some can be repurposed for habitat and stream restoration project, and some can be sold to generate revenue that advances management practices. It is part of the San Mateo County Parks Department's mission to restore and preserve parklands, and in this endeavor, the Department will only consider removing trees if it achieves habitat and resiliency benefits and enhances the ecological function of the forest. At no point will the Department remove trees for the purpose of financial gain.

If the Department removes redwood and Douglas fir trees during a restoration project and it is determined that the best use of the timber is to be sold for commercial purposes, the Department will deposit revenue generated from the commercial sale of timber into a trust account that will be established for the sole benefit of Pescadero Creek County Park. Funds from this trust can only be used to advance restorative projects in Pescadero Creek County Park and cannot be used for operations or recreational improvements. These funds will be deposited directly in the Pescadero Creek County Park Trust Fund and budgeted for accordingly.

Permitting

The adoption of the CHRP does not lead to the direct implementation of any projects, or obligation for the Department to take an action, and thus is statutorily exempt from CEQA as a planning effort. However, the Department will be required to ensure CEQA compliance and obtain other necessary permits prior to implementation of any project identified within the CHRP.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Department requests the establishment of a Pescadero Creek County Park Trust Fund for the sole purpose of using any project revenue for future habitat restoration projects within the Park. Expenditures in excess of deposits made into the Pescadero Creek County Park Trust Fund will be funded by other means, including grants. There is no Net County Cost associated with adopting the CHRP.