



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 23-212

Board Meeting Date: 4/11/2023

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director

Subject: Director's Report Regarding Impact of Recent Storms on San Mateo County Parks

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept this report regarding recent storm damage in the San Mateo County Parks System

BACKGROUND:

Due to the unprecedented levels of precipitation, wind speeds, and wind gusts experienced during the first quarter of 2023, the San Mateo County parks system has sustained significant amounts of damage. Almost every park has experienced flooding, landslides, erosion, and/or falling trees. Consequently, several recreational trails and service/fire roads have been impacted by uprooted trees or earth movement, numerous picnic sites and campsites were damaged by falling trees, and critical park infrastructure and utilities have been damaged to the point where partial or full replacements are required. It will likely take several years for the parks system to recover.

Initial assessments conducted by staff indicate there are several factors that contributed to the magnitude of damage sustained in the County's parks system. First, throughout the system, trees had been stressed by extended drought conditions, leaving many weak and unable to withstand the severe storms experienced. Second, the volume and frequency of precipitation received resulted in elevated ground-saturation levels for long durations of time. This reduces the ability for trees' root systems to hold in high-wind events. Third, as trees either fell or were removed to reduce threats to public safety during storm events, the remaining grove structure changed, causing some trees to be directly exposed to wind for the first time. Lastly, public facilities and infrastructure in and around parks were not designed to withstand such severe storms causing the facilities and infrastructure to be overwhelmed and fail.

Closures

The Parks Department ("Department") has a responsibility to provide safe and accessible parks for the public. During the storm events, the Department was forced to close sections of parks, and in some cases close parks entirely, when it deemed them unsafe for use. Washed out trails and flooding are often easier to identify. Conversely, hazard trees are harder to identify but still present a threat to high use areas like picnic sites, campsites, playgrounds, parking lots, and structures.

The Department notices the public regarding these closures by posting on the Department's website and social media accounts, sending out Department newsletters, emailing park and project-specific email groups, and posting notices at the entrance of the closed parks.

As of April 5, several parks remain closed, including:

- Coyote Point Recreation Area (no electricity, hazard trees)
- Sawyer Camp Trail (landslides possibly undermining trail)
- Dean Trail, Chinquapin Trail, Richards Road, and Toyon Group Campground Road in Huddart Park (landslide eliminated sections of trails)
- Alambique Trail in Wunderlich Park (landslides, uprooted trees)
- Azalea and Wurr Campgrounds in Memorial Park (flooding, hazard trees)
- Dardenelle Trail/Coastal Trail at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve (bridge damaged by failed tree)
- Brooks Creek Trail and Trout Farm Trail in San Pedro Valley Park (landslide)
- Pillar Point Bluff Trail at Pillar Point Bluff (landslide)
- Shingle Mill Trail, Bravo Fire Road, West Brook Trail, Bear Ridge Trail, and Canyon Trail in Pescadero Creek Park (landslides and trail erosions)

DISCUSSION:

Facilities and Utilities

While each park sustained varying degrees of damage during the storms, the Department is focused on first repairing high-priority facilities. These include the bridge on the Dardenelle Trail/Coastal Trail in the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, Sawyer Camp Trail, the transformer at Coyote Point Recreation Area, and Toyon Group Campground Road/Richards Road in Huddart Park. Also considered high-priority facilities, but not highlighted here, are picnic sites and campsites.

- Dardenelle Trail Bridge: The County has initiated the necessary process to procure a new bridge. It is anticipated that a bridge can be purchased this spring, and it will take approximately 12 - 16 weeks to be fabricated and delivered. The Department is working with the Department of Public Works to retain a contractor to remove the damaged bridge and install the new bridge. The Department will seek federal reimbursement for these expenses.
- Sawyer Camp Trail: There are fissure cracks visible at three locations along the Sawyer Camp Trail. Each of these locations is on the downslope side of the trail indicating a potential risk that the trail could collapse because of a landslide. The Department and Department of Public Works met with a geotechnical engineer who conducted a geotechnical analysis the week of April 3 at each location. The Department is awaiting the results to determine if the trail is safe to open to the public or if engineered repairs are required.
- Coyote Point Recreation Area: In March, a eucalyptus tree fell on the park's main electrical transformer disabling all electrical service. Until parts of the transformer can be replaced, the electrical grid at the park is inoperable. The Department approved the purchase of all parts required to repair the transformer. These parts are being fabricated and are estimated to arrive to the park for installation in mid-May.
- Toyon Group Campground Road/Richards Road: Two of the three fire/service roads providing access to the northern boundary of Huddart Park are impassable due to storm damage; this limits Department staff and first responders' ability to respond to incidents in this part of the park. At least one of these access points will need to be repaired in the coming years. No scope of work or schedule has been developed.

Hazardous Trees

Throughout the parks system, trees were uprooted and dropped limbs during storm events causing damage to facilities and infrastructure. Many trees in the parks system have likely had their root

systems compromised, leaving them vulnerable.

Recognizing that the threat of hazardous trees may remain elevated throughout the year, the Department recommends the development of a system-wide Tree Risk Management Program ("Program"), which would be presented to the Board of Supervisors at a future meeting.

The program would be initiated by a one-time allocation of funding, and on-going funding would come from the Department's annual allocation of **Measure K**. With the initial allocation of funding, the Department would hire a limit-term arborist to develop the program and complete the highest priority projects. On-going hazardous tree remediation will continue to be part of the Department's standard operation procedure.

The Program would focus on mitigating hazardous trees and identifiable tree risk to park visitors, staff, and neighbors by identifying high-use areas, managing the trees that present threats, and determining how to restore these areas to a more natural and safer condition. The Department defines high-use areas as picnic sites, campsites, playgrounds, parking lots, restrooms, visitor centers, and boundaries with private residences. For the purposes of this Program, CuriOdyssey would also be considered a high-use area.

This Program is focused on mitigating the potential health and safety risk posed by hazardous trees, and is not intended to clear cut forests, unnecessarily remove trees from parks, or adversely impact ecosystems by removing native and ecologically beneficial trees.

FISCAL IMPACT:

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