



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** PARKS

**File #:** 26-011

Board Meeting Date: 1/6/2026

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**From:** Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director

**Subject:** Nomination of Sam McDonald County Park to the National Register of Historic Places

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution authorizing the Parks Director to submit an application nominating a specified portion of Sam McDonald County Park to the National Register of Historic Places, and to approve and execute any and all related forms or documents.

**BACKGROUND:**

Sam McDonald County Park is an 850-acre County-owned and operated park that is located three miles west of La Honda, and that features redwood forest, ridgelines with ocean views, and facilities for hiking, horseback riding, and camping.

The park memorializes Emanuel "Sam" McDonald (1884-1957), a prominent African American figure in San Mateo County history. Mr. McDonald worked at Stanford University for five decades, eventually retiring as Superintendent of Athletic Buildings and Grounds (1923-1954). During his life, he acquired a 430-acre property in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and upon his death, he desired for it to be used for the betterment of the community. After his death, Stanford University received the bequest and sold the property to San Mateo County in 1958 with the intent of it serving as a park.

The San Mateo County Parks Department ("Department") desires to nominate the 430 acre portion of the park formerly owned by Mr. McDonald, including a cabin on the west bank of Alpine Creek, for addition to the National Register of Historic Places; the remaining 420 acres of the park that was not owned by Mr. McDonald is not eligible for a historic designation. A map showing the 430 acres proposed for addition to the National Register of Historic Place is included on page 35 of Exhibit A attached hereto. If successful, this segment of the park would be designated as the Sam McDonald County Park Historic District, in recognition of McDonald's historical significance and contributions to the County of San Mateo, and to document and preserve the historic character of the property.

**DISCUSSION:**

The nomination (attached as Exhibit A) was prepared by the Department, in consultation with the San

Mateo County Historical Association, the Stanford Historical Association, and the State Historic Preservation Office. As the landowner and local jurisdiction, the Board's authorization to submit the nomination is required. If the Board authorizes the submission, the State Historical Resources Commission will review the nomination; if approved at the state level, the nomination will be submitted to the Keeper of the National Register in Washington, D.C., who has 45 days to take final action.

The establishment of the Sam McDonald County Park Historic District would document and interpret an important piece of San Mateo County's cultural history, will make the property eligible for preservation grants and incentives, and can enhance public awareness. The Department already administers two National Register Historic Districts (Sanchez Adobe and the Folger Stable site at Wunderlich), both of which have supported interpretive improvements and partnerships with local historical organizations.

The County Attorney's Office has reviewed and approved the resolution as to form.

**Community Impact:**

Sam McDonald made a lasting impact as an African American conservationist through his donation of more than 400 acres in the Santa Cruz Mountains which eventually became the County park that bears his name. His gift protected the land from development and created a sanctuary for wildlife and a space for public recreation and education, particularly for young people, as he specified in his will.

**Fiscal Impact:**

There are no net County costs associated with this nomination.