



MEMORANDUM

TO: Shaun Horne, Watershed Resources Manager, Marin Water

FROM: Rich Freitas, Project Manager

SUBJECT: Summary Memo: Watershed Recreation Plan, Public scoping

DATE: July 26, 2021

CC: Matt Sagues (Marin Water), Don Wick (Marin Water), Rob LaPorte (GGNPC),
Claire Mooney (GGNPC)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Marin Water manages 21,860 acres that attract 1.8 million visitors annually to over 200 miles of trails and fire roads, five picnic areas, and seven municipal reservoirs. The watershed is home to a rich diversity of plants and animals – 400 wildlife species and 1000 species of plants. The agency’s primary purpose is to sustainably manage natural resources and provide its customers with “reliable, high-quality water.” The agency is also entrusted with managing its lands for passive outdoor recreation.¹

Marin Water has a stable of biological monitoring studies, inventories, and management plans, including the Mt. Tamalpais Roads and Trails Management Plan (2005). In 2013, a Watershed User Census Study was completed to better understand how visitors are using the watershed. Additionally, Marin Water manages vegetation to reduce wildfire hazards under the Biodiversity Fires, and Fuels, Integrated Plan (BFFIP). However, none of these plans address outdoor recreation management. The agency plans to issue an RFP for a Watershed Recreation Plan to complement existing monitoring activities and management plans.

In preparation, the agency conducted two public meetings to solicit early input from community members. The meetings were designed to frame the planning process and collect feedback from the public regarding the focus of a recreation management plan and future desired conditions. This Memo summarizes the public scoping meetings process and outcomes. The intent of this memo is to inform development of the RFP and be a resource for development of the Recreation Plan.

Participants in the meetings shared their ideas for improving the culture and conditions for recreation on the watershed.

PROCESS

Marin Water and the GGNPC organized the public scoping process around two initial stakeholder meetings. Meeting number one (1) was designed to provide some foundational language and concepts relating to recreation planning, the roles of partnerships and social issues relating to access to public lands. The second meeting was designed to solicit public input from community members and was focused on getting early input on the value of a recreation management plan and the future desired conditions for the watershed that community members wanted to see.

Meeting Number 1 - Panelists & Presentations

The first public meeting was conducted on May 21, 2021 as a Zoom webinar that featured presentations from four expert panelists followed by a Q&A session and a public comment period. The meeting attracted 104 participants, including support staff. A recording of the meeting and the panelists' presentations are available online. The meeting was advertised several ways. Marin Water noticed the meeting through regular channels as a special meeting of the Marin Water Board so that multiple board members could attend. A description of the two meetings and access details were distributed to Marin Water's and One Tam's community contacts:

- Access 4 Bikes
- Afro Outdoors
- Audubon Canyon Ranch
- Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
- Brown Girl Surf
- California Alpine Club
- California Mountain Biking Coalition
- California Native Plant Society
- California State Parks
- Canal Alliance
- CCNB
- Coast Miwok of Marin County
- Cross country high schools teams in Marin
- Dipsea Race Foundation
- E-Bike Access
- Friends of Mt. Tam
- Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
- Golden Gate National Recreational Area
- Grassroots Ecology

- High School Mountain Bike Teams
- Huckleberry Community Center
- Latino Outdoors
- MALT
- Marin Audubon
- Marin Chapter of the Sierra Club
- Marin Conservation League
- Marin County Bicycle Coalition
- Marin County Parks and Open Space
- Marin Env Housing Collaborative
- Marin Horse Council
- Marin Stables and Trails
- Mikes Bikes
- Mt Play Association
- Multicultural Center of Marin
- Muwekema Ohlone Tribe of SF
- Northern California Society of Botanical Artists
- River Otter Ecology
- San Anselmo Open Space Committee
- San Geronimo Valley Planning Association
- Sausalito Women's Club
- Save the Redwoods League
- Slide Ranch
- SPAWN
- Stinson Beach County Water District
- Student Conservation Association
- Tam Valley Community Services District
- Tamalpais Conservation Club
- the Baywood Artists
- The Meadow Club
- The New Wheel Electric Bikes
- Together Bay Area
- Trout in the Classroom
- Various contacts from Marin High School Mountain Bike Teams
- West Point Inn
- Yes to Nature
- Youth Outside

Potential panelists were identified that included experts in academia, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations. Phone conversations were conducted with each of them to discuss the planning process and determine their interest in participating. Through this outreach, the topics and presenters were finalized. Panelists presented on Historic Land Use in Marin; Balancing Natural Resource

Protection and Recreation; Developing Partnerships to Influence Recreation Culture; and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Outdoors. The topics were selected to shape process, not outcomes. They were defined to establish a shared background for discussing issues the Plan will address and provide ideas for the public to respond to. Presentations are included in Attachment A.

“A Brief History of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed”

Dewey Livingston

Dewey Livingston is the map archivist and a reference librarian at the Anne T. Kent California Room at Marin County Free Library, and historian/co-curator of the Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History.

“Recreation Planning – Balancing Natural Resource Protection and Recreation”

Ashley D’Antonio

Dr. Ashley D’Antonio is an Assistant Professor of Nature-based Recreation Management in the College of Forestry at Oregon State University. Dr. D’Antonio is a recreation ecologist whose research focuses on understanding the relationships between visitor behavior and ecological impacts in parks and protected areas (PPA).

“Trails Forever – A Case Study”

Kate Bickert

Kate is the Senior Director of Engagement and New Initiatives at the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Kate’s work focuses on finding creative and effective ways to engage the public and interagency teams in the planning, implementation and experience of place in public lands.

Untitled

José G. González (he/him) is the Founder and Former Executive Director for Latino Outdoors. As a Partner in the Avarna Group and through his own consulting, his work focuses on Equity & Inclusion frameworks and practices in the environmental, outdoor, and conservation fields.

After an introduction from Marin Water staff and remarks from the General Manager, participants were asked, “What do you love about Mt. Tam?” The results were compiled into a word cloud:

Following the breakout sessions, a moderated youth panel reported back on what they heard in their groups. The youth participants all have an active relationship to the watershed through recreation, volunteerism, or stewardship commitments (including participants from CCNB).

Across the 14 total breakout sessions, a common set of overarching themes emerged:

DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Make decisions regarding how and where recreation is allowed (or isn't allowed) based on data and publicly share it.

INCLUSIVITY (EQUITY OF ACCESS/ DIVERSE USER GROUPS)

Make the outreach process more equitable by actively including racially, ethnically, and economically underrepresented visitors in both the planning process and recreational opportunities.

BALANCE CONSERVATION WITH RECREATION

Co-manage for natural resource values and recreation.

STEWARDSHIP

Build watershed education and stewardship into the plan.

Participants expressed optimism for a recreation plan to hit the refresh button on historic recreational use and allow for a deeper connection with the community. There is a desire to tackle the hard problems and create a framework for addressing existing issues and new trends. As such, some feel that the plan might be more responsive as a "living document" as well as one that fits into the recreation plans and policies of adjacent land managers.

A recording of the meeting is [available on Marin Water's website](#).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEXT STEPS

Ground the Plan with Data

Participants felt a strong need to understand ecological and recreational conditions on the watershed as a whole and the differences between discrete areas. The group felt that studying conditions would produce specific benefits:

- Provide rationale for where recreation should or should not take place, e.g., reservoir-based activities, closing certain areas to protect resources, and opening new areas to trails to spread out visitation.
- Map and understand where recreation is happening.

- Collect data on watershed visitation with a focus on heavily visited areas.
- Let people know where ecological damage is occurring and encourage them to stay on designated trails.
- Identify frequency for updating Watershed Census Study.
- Open communication channels between Marin Water and the public to understand what visitors want.

Conduct Robust Public Engagement

Participants identified public engagement as a key element for the planning process and as an ongoing management practice. They identified the need for a new approach to outreach that goes beyond public meetings. Numerous ideas for expanding outreach were proposed:

- Conduct physical, in-person events, such as field trips and interpretive hikes on the watershed.
- Conduct future recreation management planning meeting in the evening outside of regular work hours to facilitate participating by more working professionals and students.
- Visit community events and schools.
- Prioritize communities near trail heads.
- Partner with local businesses, such as bike shops, restaurants, and recreation-based businesses.
- Conduct trailhead surveys.
- Increase social media presence.
- Conduct robust outreach in unreached areas to include everyone in this effort; reach out to canal communities and underserved communities.

Participants prioritized outreach efforts to youth and communities of color, as well as to new and existing users. There is a desire for multi-lingual signage on the watershed and increased communication about conditions on the mountain, such as the reason for trail closures.

Natural Resources and Stewardship

Participants expressed a desire to support recreational access without compromising natural resource values. Education about watershed resources was identified as a key element of outreach efforts. The thinking is that if visitors better understand the resource values being managed then they will become more proactive stewards of the land.

- Expand existing volunteer programs to be more recreation focused.
- Develop management practices that include participatory trail management.

- Evaluate sensitive biological areas and consider visitor management methods for reducing potential impacts from visitation.
- Establish “friends of” groups to foster relationships and long-term investment.
- Enhance watershed signage with more natural resources conservation and responsible recreation messaging.
- Consider opportunities for expanding trail maintenance efforts through volunteer programs, and partnerships with California Conservation North Bay.

Visitor Management Strategies

Dispersing use across the watershed emerged as a major theme in the breakout room discussions. In order to minimize bottlenecks at popular areas and reduce conflict between user groups, some participants advocated for expanding access and adding entry points to the watershed. Others saw existing parking as a desirable limiting factor to overcrowding. It was suggested that future visitation numbers be considered when considering access.

- Have more trailheads and parking areas that connect directly to underserved communities.
- Implement free days for parking at the larger parking lots.
- Consider trail user fees.
- Establish trail permit for popular trails to reduce parking congestion and overcrowding.
- Consider all visitors holistically and provide a more diverse network of roads and trails to separate different visitor groups.
- Consider one way trails and fire roads for heavily visited areas.
- Collaborate with public transit to provide easier access to watershed entry points and recreation.

Adaptive Visitor Management

Ideas for how to best manage recreational access varied widely, and represent the issues users expect the Recreation Plan to address, such as studying new recreational opportunities and minimizing conflict between user groups:

- Consider alternating days of the week for different visitor groups.
- Disperse recreational uses by opening new areas to recreation and separating visitors.
- Limit number of recreational visitors to areas with sensitive habitat to protect water quality and biodiversity.
- Recognize Mt. Tam as the birthplace of mountain biking and reflect this in trail management.
- Consider implementing different visitor and or management practices in high and low usage areas.

- Consider adopting social trails for single track bike access over building new trails.
- Implement directional trails.
- Separate trails by visitor type to reduce conflict and improve safety, especially for visitors with disabilities.
- Determine which water-based sports won't impact water quality.
- Manage recreation based on data collected through monitoring visitation. Adaptive management is dependent on long term monitoring and can feed back into the agency's decision making.