



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Watershed Committee/Board of Directors
Title: Update on the Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study
From: Shaun Horne, Watershed Resources Manager
Through: Ben Horenstein, General Manager
Meeting Date: December 12, 2023

SH
BH

TYPE OF ACTION: Action X Information Review and Refer

RECOMMENDATION: Receive a staff update on the ongoing Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study

SUMMARY: On May 21, 2021 the District initiated the development of the Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study. As an initial step, the District partnered with the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) to engage District Board members, executive leadership, stakeholders, and constituents in early scoping of a Watershed Recreation Management Plan (Plan). At the February 18, 2022 Board of Directors meeting, the Board approved a contract with Alta Planning to complete a Watershed Visitor Census Survey and development of a Watershed Recreation Management Plan Feasibility Study. Since June 2022, the District has hosted six (6) community workshops and two (2) site visits to solicit input relating to watershed operations and visitor management. Staff will provide an update on the planning process and progress made to date on the draft report.

DISCUSSION: Mt. Tamalpais and its adjacent watersheds support a rich array of plants and animals, panoramic vistas, and recreational opportunities that are treasured by residents and visitors alike. Since before the turn of the last century, Mt. Tamalpais has been a magnet for recreationists. The Marin Municipal Water District's Mt. Tamalpais watershed lands receive approximately 1.8 million visitors annually (MMWD 2013) and are part of the Golden Gate Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO 2002). Watershed users include anglers, hikers, equestrians, nature viewers, runners, walkers, youth camps, cyclists and many more. With the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic and associated Shelter in Place Orders the number of watershed visitors drastically increased, overwhelming many of the District's facilities (restrooms, parking lots, trash receptacles and popular trails). This dramatic increase in users demonstrates the significant value of natural areas and open space lands to the community and the community's deep connection to these areas. However, this increase in visitors also accentuated long-standing watershed issues and ongoing conflicts between different visitor groups.

Currently, the District has two overarching management plans for the watershed: the Roads and Trails Management Plan (RTMP) and the Biodiversity, Fires, and Fuels Integrated Plan (BFFIP). The primary goals and objectives of the RTMP is to protect water quality through the application of best management practices for roads and trails maintenance, while the BFFIP focuses on the actions that the District will implement to reduce fire hazards to protect water quality and maintain and enhance ecosystem function. Neither of these plans directly address recreational activities on the watershed. A Watershed Recreation Management Plan Feasibility Study will evaluate current watershed use patterns and opportunities to support safe, inclusive use with an emphasis on protecting the watershed's unique biodiversity, habitat, and water quality. The aim is to facilitate safe community access supported by appropriate regulations, facilities, partnerships, stewardship programs, and signage, which collectively will help protect the District watershed lands, which provide most of the District's water resources.

The planning process has been designed to facilitate a conversation with the community around existing visitation in an effort to help address long-standing issues around various modes of recreation on Mt. Tamalpais. The WRMP is a feasibility study that will identify various opportunities that could be pursued to address various recreation related issues, which have been identified for future consideration and adoption by the Board. The WRMP will entail a review of existing watershed recreational facilities, stewardship and volunteer programs, visitor management strategies, and explore multi-benefit outcomes that can help to protect the unique goals of different watershed visitors and the biodiversity of the District's watershed lands.

Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study

It is anticipated that WRMP will identify many outcomes relating to trail maintenance, restoration, and stewardship, which align with the current Watershed Roads and Trails Management Plan. Other identified outcomes may require longer-term efforts and additional environmental review prior to adoption and implementation. The District has developed a webpage to keep the community updated on the planning process which may be viewed at the following link(<https://www.marinwater.org/WatershedRecPlan>).

Staff will provide an update on the planning process and progress made to date on the draft report.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: Not applicable.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENT(S): None.