



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Watershed Committee/Board of Directors
Title: Draft Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study
From: Shaun Horne, Director of Watershed Resources
Through: Ben Horenstein, General Manager
Meeting Date: February 29, 2024

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TYPE OF ACTION: Action X Information Review and Refer

RECOMMENDATION: No action to be taken. Receive a staff presentation of the draft Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study

SUMMARY: The Main Municipal Water District (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 develop of a Watershed Recreation Management Plan Feasibility Study. Since June 2022, the District has hosted six (6) community workshops, two (2) site visits, and completed an updated watershed census survey to solicit input relating to watershed operations and visitor management. Staff will provide a presentation on the Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study.

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 2 million visitors annually 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 relating to existing facilities and 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.

Watershed Recreation Management Planning Feasibility Study

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 Feasibility Study reviews existing watershed recreational facilities, visitor use data, biological resources, stewardship and volunteer programs, and visitor management strategies. The planning process aligns with the District's adaptive watershed management strategy and is informing multi-benefit outcomes that can be advanced to help protect the unique goals of different watershed visitors and the biodiversity of the District's watershed lands. The Feasibility Study identifies various Strategic Opportunities that could be pursued to work towards a future desired condition to address various recreation related issues. These Strategic Opportunities have been identified for future consideration and adoption by the Board.

The final section of the Feasibility Study presents a series of Strategic Opportunities organized around stewardship initiatives, visitor services, watershed facilities, and adaptive management operations. Some of these efforts align with the current Watershed Roads and Trails Management Plan. While others require longer-term efforts and additional environmental review prior to adoption and implementation. Staff will present the Feasibility Study to the Watershed Committee and is requesting direction on near term and long-term priorities. The District will bring the Feasibility Study to the March 21, 2024 Watershed Committee meeting to review and refer the document to a future regular board meeting so that the Board may consider accepting the final Study as a blueprint to pursue implementation of the various Strategic Opportunities.

The District has developed a webpage to keep the community updated on the planning process, and the Feasibility Study can also be viewed on this webpage, beginning on Monday, February 26 by going online to marinwater.org/WatershedRecPlan.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: Not applicable.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENT(S): None.