



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Board of Directors
Title: Azalea Hill Trail Restoration Project Revisions
From: Shaun Horne, Director of Watershed Resources
Through: Ben Horenstein, General Manager
Meeting Date: April 1, 2025

TYPE OF ITEM: X Action Information

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the project revisions pursuant to an addendum prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act

SUMMARY: The District’s Board of Directors certified an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Azalea Hill Restoration project on May 14, 2019 (State Clearinghouse Number 2004082018) (Marin Water District, 2019). The IS/MND was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to assess the environmental effects of the Azalea Hill Trail Restoration Project (Project), including the associated amendment to the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Roads and Trails Management Plan (RTMP). The Notice of Determination for the Project was posted on May 15, 2019. Since adoption, the District has been working with community volunteers, contractors, and District staff to improve stream crossings, construct bridges, remove social trails, improve trail drainage, harden tread surfaces, prune vegetation, construct a retaining wall and maintain temporary project signage. The District’s stated approach in the Project called for being “light on the land” in order to minimize effects to sensitive resources, including rare plants. Staff has identified revisions the Project to help meet this objective. Staff has analyzed the proposed revisions to the Project pursuant to Section 15164 of the CEQA Guidelines, which provides that an addendum to an adopted Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or IS/MND shall be prepared if only minor technical changes or additions are necessary and none of the conditions described in Sections 15162 and 15163 of the CEQA Guidelines have occurred that call for preparation of a subsequent or supplemental EIR or IS/MND and has prepared an addendum documenting the revisions as minor, consistent with Sections 15162 and 15163 of the CEQA Guidelines.

The Watershed Committee reviewed the Azalea Hill Trail Restoration Project revision at the March 20, 2025 meeting.

DISCUSSION: Marin Water adopted an Amendment to the RTMP for the Project on May 14, 2019. The Project will: 1) remove approximately 4.4-miles of non-system roads and trails and restore those routes to natural conditions to improve habitat and water quality; 2) adopt and improve a 1.9-mile

Class IV road comprised of the existing Liberty Gulch Road (1.2 miles) and convert an existing non-system trail (0.7 miles) to the wider, small vehicle route; 3) improve the hiking and equestrian route over Azalea Hill by correcting erosion and drainage problems along approximately 1.1 miles of existing Class VI trail, rerouting the trail around sensitive plants and adopting 250 feet of an existing non-system trail; and 4) treat the Azalea Hill parking lot to correct its erosion problems and improve the visitor amenities. Upon completion, the Project will prevent an estimated 219 cubic yards of sediment from entering Azalea Hill's creeks and Alpine Lake annually (or 4,380 cubic yards over 20 years) and would restore approximately one acre of habitat. The Project consolidates the use on two existing routes proposed for upgrades and provides a much-needed connection and safety improvement between the "Lakes" and "Pine Mountain" areas.

The Project is currently being implemented; however, an approximately 288-foot section of Liberty Gulch Road planned to be improved to a Class IV road through widening from approximately 18 to 24 inches to 4 feet is flanked by extensive populations of sensitive plants. While the approved Project allows for widening the trail and mitigating the effects to these plant populations, the District staff have found that the least impactful method in this area is to leave this section of the road at its current width so as to not actively disturb the rare plant populations. The revised Project will include speed calming features, signage along the road warning users not to step off of the road in this area and indicating the sensitive environmental area, and ongoing monitoring that will inform any needed mitigation per the Project IS/MND. Additionally, improvements to Liberty Gulch Road under the Project included stream crossing upgrades at 34 sites. Upon closer review, staff has found that six of these sites no longer need upgrades or found that upgrades can be minimized while still protecting water quality and reducing erosion from the road and trail improvements which aligns with the "light on the land" construction approach outlined in the Project.

Attached to this Staff Report is the '2025 Azalea Hill Addendum', that describes the proposed revisions to the Azalea Hill Restoration Project, including the associated amendment to the RTMP (referred to as the "revised Project"), and sets forth additional analyses in accordance with the Appendix G resource questions analyzed in the IS/MND. The Addendum finds that the revised Project will not result in new significant impacts, nor would the revisions substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant impacts (CEQA Guidelines Section 15162). Based on this analysis, the Addendum is an appropriate approach to document the changes since certification of the IS/MND, given that no new information of substantial importance has been identified, and none of the conditions described in Sections 15162 and 15163 of the CEQA Guidelines that call for preparation of a subsequent CEQA document are present. Specifically, Section 4 of the Addendum, Determination, provides a detailed summary as to why none of the circumstances described under Section 15162 and 15163 are triggered. With approval of the revised Project, construction of Phases I & II will be completed and the road can be opened. Additionally, District staff is planning to host a volunteer appreciation event to thank the community for supporting the construction efforts. This event is anticipated in May 2025.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: The Project is subject to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). On May 14, 2019 the district Board approved Resolution No. 8533 which adopted the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Amendment of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Road and Trail Management Plan for the Restoration of Azalea Hill, and (2) approved Resolution No. 8534, which approved the Project and amended the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Road and Trail Management – Restoration of Azalea Hill. The Addendum analyzed the proposed Project revisions and finds that the proposed revisions to the Azalea

Hill Restoration project will not result in new significant impacts, nor will the revisions substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant impacts (CEQA Guidelines Section 15162). Therefore, approval of the revised Project complies with CEQA requirements.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Addendum to the Amendment of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Road and Trail Management Plan – Restoration of Azalea Hill Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration

DEPARTMENT OR DIVISION	DIVISION MANAGER	APPROVED
Watershed		
	Shaun Horne Watershed Resources Director	Ben Horenstein General Manager