



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Watershed Committee/Board Meeting
Title: Azalea Hill Trail Restoration Revisions
From: Shaun Horne, Director of Watershed Resources
Through: Ben Horenstein, General Manager
Meeting Date: Month 20, 2025

TYPE OF ITEM: Action X Review and Comment

RECOMMENDATION: Review and comment on proposed revisions to the Azalea Hill Trail Restoration

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 Project, including the associated amendment to the 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.

DISCUSSION: Marin Water adopted an Amendment to the *Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Road and Trail Management Plan* (RTMP) for the Restoration of Azalea Hill (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 the trail at its current width and not actively disturb the rare plant populations. The Revised Project will include speed calming features, signage along the trail warning users not to step off of the trail and indicating the sensitive environmental area, and ongoing monitoring that will inform any needed mitigation per the original project. Additionally, improvements to Liberty Gulch Road under the Project included stream crossing upgrades at 34 sites. Six of these sites no longer need upgrades or 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 the Staff Report is the '2025 Azalea Hill Addendum', that describes the proposed changes and additions to the Azalea Hill Restoration project, including the associated amendment to the RTMP (referred to as the "revised Project"), and identifies any additional analyses in accordance with the Appendix G resource questions analyzed in the IS/MND. The Addendum finds that the proposed revisions to the Azalea Hill Restoration project and its associated IS/MND would 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. Refer to Section 4, Determination, for a detailed summary as to why none of the circumstances described under Section 15162 and 15163 are met. With adoption of the Addendum, construction of Phases I & II will be completed and the trail can be opened. Additionally the District is planning to host a Volunteer appreciation event to thank the community for supporting the trail construction efforts, which will be held in April or 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 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 and its associated IS/MND would not result in new significant impacts, nor would the revisions substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant impacts (CEQA Guidelines Section 15162).

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