



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

## LEGISLATIVE, FUNDING, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

R-19-15

February 5, 2019

### AGENDA ITEM 4

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Briefing on Midpeninsula Region Open Space District's Youth Engagement Opportunities

#### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

1. Receive an informational report on the 2018 Youth Engagement Recap.
2. Review and provide recommendations to inform the goals, direction, and next steps for the Youth Outreach Plan.

#### SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) Board of Directors (Board) set a goal to expand educational programs to reach underserved communities. The District recognizes the importance of engaging youth as they are the next generation of environmental leaders. The development of a Youth Outreach Plan is a Public Affairs project on the Fiscal Year 2018-19 Action Plan.

Public Affairs staff determined that a strategic next step in developing the Youth Outreach Plan is to document the District's existing youth engagement activities. To set a benchmark, staff surveyed all the youth programs and outreach work currently underway at the District across all departments to understand the depth and breadth of this work, and identify gaps and potential new opportunities. Current programs target youth aged 5-21, in elementary school, middle school, high school, and college.

#### DISCUSSION

##### External Partnerships

Since 2012, the District has partnered with external organizations and agencies to engage students and young adults with the outdoors in a variety of ways. These external partnerships have reached approximately 2,200 youth.

##### **Eagle Scouts and Girl Scouts Service Projects (2012 to present)**

District staff have worked with Eagle Scouts and Girl Scouts to complete their service projects and Silver Awards. The majority of the projects have been at Deer Hollow Farm in the Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve. Staffing changes at the farm are underway, and the District will reevaluate the program model in 2019.

**Morgan Center (2016 to present)**

The Morgan Center is an autism support center that provides educational services for children and adults with autism. District Volunteer Program staff have partnered with the Morgan Center since 2016. About two times a month, the Morgan Center sends a group of autistic youth and their teachers to work together to clean and rake leaves at Deer Hollow Farm. The outings provide the students a regular opportunity to work as a team while spending time in nature. Students also have a chance to visit Deer Hollow Farm during their trips. This is an ongoing program that will continue in 2019.

**San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School (2017 to present)**

San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School (SJCCCS) is a San Jose-based non-profit that provides job training to local youth, ages 18-27, in a wide variety of environmental fields while they work to obtain their GED. In September 2018, eleven (11) SJCCCS students spent a week working alongside District staff to create a fuel break in a closed area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve. The students had an opportunity to cultivate teamwork, learn new technical skills, and develop a passion for the natural world. In November 2018, the District collaborated with SJCCCS to train six students to plant native plants in a closed area of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. District staff plan to continue collaborating with SJCCCS on at least three projects in 2019.

**Grassroots Ecology (2015 to present)**

Grassroots Ecology is a Palo Alto-based non-profit focused on engaging and educating the public to restore local ecosystems. They work with the District to provide stewardship and volunteer engagement services with youth and the community. In 2018, Grassroots Ecology facilitated 17 restoration projects with over 600 volunteers in District Preserves, focusing on the removal of invasive species and planting native plants at Windy Hill and Russian Ridge Preserves. The District plans to continue to partner with Grassroots Ecology in 2019.

**Student Conservation Association (2015 to present)**

Student Conservation Association (SCA) is a national youth agency that aims to build the next generation of conservation leaders through outdoor service experiences. SCA manages a GIS mapping program that recruits students from underserved schools to conduct field inventories using iPads and GIS collector applications. In summer 2018, the District's GIS Department worked with nine SCA students and two program leaders to collect GIS data on trailhead structures at various Preserve parking lots. Students received iPad training on GIS data collection and learned how to use the ArcGIS application, measuring tapes, measuring wheels, and laser rangefinder tools on site visits. The program helped the students build awareness of the many career paths in conservation field. The data collected was used by the GIS Department to inform map requests and enhanced the data collection of visitor amenities at District preserves.

In addition, a group of 10 SCA students worked with the Natural Resource Department to map invasive, non-native species in Purisima Creek Redwoods and Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserves. Natural Resource staff worked closely with students, providing training on GIS mapping. By the end of the program, the SCA students were provided stipends for their five weeks of work. The partnership provides an excellent opportunity for underserved students to experience the open space preserves, learn new technical skills, and develop an appreciation for the natural environment. The District will continue to partner with SCA in 2019.

**Save the Redwoods League (2015 to present)**

Interpretation and Education Program (Visitor services) staff have partnered with Save the Redwoods League (SRL) to offer high school students field trip excursions at Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. SRL is a San Francisco-based non-profit whose mission is to protect and restore coastal redwood forests and connect people with nature. With staff guidance, students worked together to measure the height and diameter of redwood trees, calculated the carbon storage of the tree, studied the effects of climate change on sword ferns, and conducted plant observations. Students also participated in a Bioblitz, a citizen science activity that documents as many different species as possible with the iNaturalist app. The District provides transportation reimbursement for these field trips. Approximately 120 students have participated in these field trips in the 2017-2018 school year. The District will continue to partner with SCA in 2019.

**Ranger Talks at Deer Hollow Farm (2018 to present)**

Deer Hollow Farm is a working farm located within Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve. In 2018, District rangers began partnering with Deer Hollow Farm to provide support to school life science programs, providing 15 educational presentations to students. The rangers discuss trail safety, everyday ranger duties, and environmental protection guidelines. In 2019, the District's ranger staff plans to continue to work with Deer Hollow Farm and find additional interpretive opportunities for youth programming.

**Environmental Volunteers (2018 to present)**

Environmental Volunteers (EV) is a Palo Alto-based non-profit whose mission is to promote environmental understanding through hands-on science education. The District's Interpretation and Education Program has collaborated with EV to offer educational field trips to students at various District preserves. In the 2017- 2018 school year, 1,200 students from three different schools have participated in field trips to Monte Bello, Los Trancos, and Windy Hill Open Space Preserves.

***Internal Partnerships/Outreach***

The District offers youth opportunities to work directly with staff from different departments on a variety of special projects, offering insight into the large range of environmental career paths available. In addition, District staff conducts outreach via tabling at community events and presentations to libraries and schools. These internal outreach efforts have reached approximately 7,328 youth.

**Spaces & Species Program (2002 to present)**

Spaces & Species is a free field trip program designed for third- through fifth-grade students. The program offers 20 field trips every spring and fall and reaches about 750 students a year. Staff work with Outdoor Education Leader (OEL) docents to plan, schedule, and coordinate environmental education programming. OEL docents lead a group of about 30 students with adult chaperones on a guided walk at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve, including a visit to the Daniels Nature Center. This program offers children a hands-on opportunity to learn about the natural world and understand the benefit of open space.

**Internships (2009 to present)**

In 2018, the District offered several internships across different departments. Two GIS interns worked closely with GIS staff to complete map requests. Two Natural Resources

interns helped conduct field research and assisted with department projects. A high school intern worked with Visitor Services Department to create a new electronic communication platform to bridge communication between staff and volunteers. In most cases, interns have a maximum of 1000 internship hours and are compensated for their work. The District will continue to offer internships across different departments.

#### **Daniels Nature Center (1996 to present)**

The Daniels Nature Center at Skyline Ridge is the District's only nature center facility. Open on weekends from April to October, the Nature Center offers interpretative information about local habitats, with emphasis on Alpine Pond. District docents host and greet visitors (more than 2000 each year), sharing natural history information, and wildlife viewing activities. Inside the Nature Center, there are pond strata mobiles, a large-scale natural community exhibits, pond food webs, and a skulls and skins display.

#### **Community Outreach Events (2011 to present)**

Since 2011, District staff have conducted community outreach at a variety of different public events. In 2018, Public Affairs staff have provided informational resources at 27 community events. Thirty percent (8 in total) of these events were targeted to children, youth, and families, including the Siena Youth Center Bike Rodeo, Half Moon Bay Kids Health and Wellness Fair, Saratoga Elementary School Earth Day, Wildlife & Harvest Day. Anecdotally, participants are typically interested in finding information on beginner hiking trails suitable for all age levels, so staff provides brochures, maps, and information to cater to new users, families, and youth. Staff will continue to table at community events that have a focus on youth and the outdoors.

#### **Youth Category in District Photo Contest (2018 to present)**

The District has hosted an annual photo contest since 2008. The photo contest encourages community members to visit a Preserve and submit photographs taken at the Preserves. In 2018, the Public Affairs department added a youth category (grades 6-12) and promoted the contest to middle school and high schools within the District via a flyer. Youth had the option to submit their photo entries through the District's website or through Instagram, and the District received 20 photo submissions from nine youth participants. The winner of the youth category of the photo contest was highlighted in the fall 2018 Views Newsletter. Public affairs staff will continue to offer the youth category in the 2019 photo contest and increase outreach efforts.

#### **Community Presentations**

District staff have provided many educational presentations to engage youth in 2018. District rangers have provided classroom visits on an ad-hoc basis, discussing the different duties of a ranger and offering tips on how to get started in the environmental field. These engagements are not typically tracked by ranger staff. In 2019, staff will work together to develop a method for tracking District staff's presentations and talks to youth.

In August 2018, Public Affairs staff provided an introductory presentation at Los Altos Library to 15 community members. In December 2018, Public Affairs staff provided an introductory presentation to 25 students in an environmental club at Menlo-Atherton High School. Staff plans to continue to connect to youth through presentations at local high schools and public libraries.

New Programs

In 2019, the District will be working closely with several partner agencies to offer new youth programming.

**Latino Outdoors Pilot Program (2019)**

In 2015 the District began collaborating with Latino Outdoors (LO) to bring families, youth, seniors, and new users to District preserves for outdoor programming, including family-friendly monthly hikes, an annual backpacking trip, and to participate in habitat restoration volunteer projects. In 2019, a new component of the partnership includes creating a pilot program focused on bringing youth and families from local community groups to District preserves. LO and District staff will facilitate several guided hikes for youth-focused community organizations within District's service area. The goal is to introduce these youth-focused community groups to the District's preserves, promote environmental stewardship, and foster a love for nature in young minds. LO staff will facilitate contact with the community groups and recruit participants. District staff will provide transportation services for the program. At the end of the year, staff will evaluate the pilot program and provide a summary report.

**District Grantmaking Program (2019)**

In 2007, the District began awarding Resource Management grants to local researchers to support the District's mission, enhances public education, and advance the understanding of natural processes while strengthening local partnerships. In 2019, the grantmaking program was expanded to \$250,000 annually and included additional funding categories; applied science, network and partnership support, and environmental education, interpretation, and access. The updated program aims to build a more communitywide approach to environmental stewardship by building the capacity of local academic, nonprofit, and community organizations. District staff will work to promote the grant program to local partners, community groups, and youth-focused agencies.

**Amah Mutsun Tribal Band Stewardship Program (2019)**

In 2014, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band was awarded a five-year grant to survey and map culturally significant plant species at Mt. Umunhum in Sierra Azul OSP. The Tribal Band is involving the next generation of tribal members to conduct land surveys, mapping, and document significant plant species.

In 2019, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band will be working with the District to develop a program to bring young members to Mt. Umunhum to work on a variety of restoration and land stewardship projects. This new program is a promising collaboration effort to develop local conservation stewards.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

The costs associated with providing these youth engagement opportunities are listed below and were included in the FY2018-19 operating budget.

<b>External Partnerships</b>	<b>Contract Amount Budgeted in FY 18-19</b>
Eagle Scouts and Girl Scouts Service Projects	Staff time
Grassroots Ecology	\$47,956
Student Conservation Association	\$49,683

Save the Redwoods League	Staff and docent time
San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School	\$33,422
Ranger Talks at Deer Hollow Farm	Staff time
Environmental Volunteers	Staff and docent time
Latino Outdoors	\$35,000
<b>Internal Programs</b>	<b>Contract Amount Budgeted in FY 18-19</b>
Internships	\$60,000
Spaces and Species Program	Staff and docent time
Daniels Nature Center	Staff and docent time
Community Outreach Events	Staff time
Youth Category in District Photo Contest	Staff time
Community Presentations	Staff time
District Grantmaking Program	\$250,000

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. No additional notice is required.

## **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Incorporating the Committee's input and recommendations, staff will work cross-departmentally to identify gaps and brainstorm opportunities to expand youth outreach. Public Affairs will compile a draft Youth Outreach Plan to present to the Committee for its review and consideration in forwarding the item to the full Board.

### **Responsible Department Head:**

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