



R-19-104
Meeting 19-19
July 24, 2019

AGENDA ITEM 13

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Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve Public Opening Summary

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Receive an informational report on activities related to the public opening of Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space, including preserve previews, ribbon-cutting event, and opening weekend visitation. No Board action required.

DISCUSSION

Staff will present a summary on activities related to the public opening of Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space, including preserve previews, ribbon-cutting event, and opening weekend visitation. In May 2019, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) hosted multiple preview events with small groups to thank partners and stakeholders while educating them about the new public access areas and amenities. The Ribbon-Cutting and Partner Recognition Event for partners, legislators, contractors, and the media celebrated the collaborative effort to realize the vision and plan for this preserve. During the public opening weekends, District staff hosted a welcome booth. Also, District docents offered interpretation and guided hikes to help visitors learn about the preserve's trails, amenities, and future plans, as well as the cultural and natural history of the land while introducing them to or deepening their knowledge of the District and Measure AA funding for public access.

District staff from every department contributed to the success of these events, providing essential services and event assistance leading up to and during the celebrations, and volunteer docents provided significant event support.

These events allowed the community to celebrate bringing the grandeur of the redwoods closer to many thousands of people in the South Bay, now and for generations to come, while shining a light on the District's full mission in action — from acquisition to restoration to public access — and the decades-long efforts of partners, staff, and the public to make it happen.

I. Preview Events

In addition to the Special Park Districts Forum that visited Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve on May 7, 2019, the District hosted several preview events to communicate and recognize significant partner relationships. A late rainy season and construction activities that continued up to the public opening date made scheduling these previews challenging.

- a. **Partner Hikes** to recognize historic partnership efforts that helped protect this preserve and raise awareness for the ongoing importance of our partnerships:

- i. Peninsula Open Space Trust – May 10, 2019 (15 donors and staff)
- ii. Committee for Green Foothills – May 31, 2019 (25 donors and staff)

b. **Bear Creek Stables – June 2, 2019**

The District hosted 12 borders and Friends of Bear Creek Stables to deepen relationships and show equestrians how to access the new Upper Lake area and trails.

c. **Docent Trainings – June 2 and June 6, 2019**

Twenty docents, both new and seasoned, were trained about the preserve and new areas opened to the public, which differ from the previously permitted areas.

II. **Ribbon-Cutting and Partner Recognition Event – June 7, 2019**

The District welcomed about 90 attendees, including elected officials, partners, contractors/vendors, and staff, to celebrate the public opening of Phase I and thank them for their roles in saving, restoring, and opening the preserve. Speakers representing major partners and local officials included: Ana Ruiz, General Manager; Pete Siemens, Director, Ward 1; Baltazar Lopez, Senior Field Representative, Office of U.S. Congresswoman Anna Eshoo; Jonathan Perez, Senior District Representative, Office of State Senator Jim Beall; Audrey Rust, POST, former President; Megan Fluke, Executive Director, Committee for Green Foothills; Amy Hutzler, Deputy Executive Officer, California State Coastal Conservancy; and Rebecca Fris, Assistant Executive Director, California Wildlife Conservation Board. After lunch, 12 attendees participated in a guided tour of Upper Lake, 25 attendees joined three District staff on a guided hike to the old-growth redwoods and six joined a driving tour to the redwoods.

The large number of attendees and the need to use some of the main parking lot for event space (to avoid trampling vegetation) required setting up off-site parking and shuttling from the Presentation Center.

A post-event email survey showed a 97% satisfaction rate with communications, check in, program, info booth, hikes, appreciation gifts, and food. One key area of critical feedback was to allow more time for the Upper Lake guided tour and give more time between that tour and the redwood hike, as a number of people were eager to do both.

III. **Media Coverage**

Event coverage included the major daily newspaper in the region (San Jose Mercury News), a major TV news station (ABC7), a major regional news website (SF Gate – owned by SF Chronicle/Hearst), two regional radio stations (KQED and Alt 105.3) and the main community news outlets for Los Gatos residents (Los Gatos Weekly Times and Mountain Network News). A significant percentage of people reported hearing about the opening from the San Jose Mercury News article that published online Friday night and in print on Saturday morning.

IV. **Opening Weekend Activities – June 8-9 and 15-16, 2019**

The District's goal was to celebrate the opening of Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve in an appropriate scale that aligns with the mission of providing "ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education". Due to the anticipated high demand and limited parking, the opening was lightly promoted as a series of Opening Weekends, rather than one "grand opening day". This was a conscious decision based on prior experience from the high-profile opening events for Mount Umunhum. This sustainable approach offered visitors

the opportunity to explore on their own or engage with District activities to learn more about the preserve while avoiding major traffic and parking issues.

For the first two opening weekends, District staffed a welcome table from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. Docents also provided guided hikes to the old-growth redwoods and engaged with visitors around the Upper Lake Loop Trail.

Visitors who volunteered their email addresses were sent a post-visit survey. Ninety-five percent said they *would definitely* return to Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve, visit another District preserve and recommend this preserve to a friend. The remaining 5% said they *probably would*. There was 100% satisfaction with the helpfulness of District staff and the quality of the information provided. Forty percent of respondents acknowledged learning that Measure AA helped fund the preserve and 60% said they learned about the property's history.

Suggestions and feedback from visitors verbally and from the survey included comments on the steepness of the trail and a concern from one survey respondent about people parking along Bear Creek Road, which has been shared with the Visitor Services Department for evaluation.

To avoid having to turn visitors away if the parking lot filled to capacity, District staff devised a Plan B parking option for the two opening weekends to temporarily open off-site parking at the Presentation Center and shuttle visitors via a hired 10-person passenger van. This required significant advanced planning, interdepartmental coordination and resources to implement.

On the first weekend, the Preserve parking lot neared capacity on both days but only completely filled for a brief period requiring shuttling of a few carloads of people. The second weekend included Father's Day, and perhaps with the news of the opening spreading further via word of mouth and social media, the parking lot filled up before 9 a.m. on both days. Plan B shuttling was used both days and on Sunday, the second lot also filled to capacity for a short time.

Based on the car counter at the entrance of the Preserve parking lot, staff estimates that the Preserve had 7,000 visitors by June 12, 2019, and is averaging about 420 people on the weekend and 120 people on weekdays.

V. **Additional Engagement Statistics**

- During opening weekends, approximately 1,175 people visited the welcome table. The audience was diverse, both ethnically and in terms of being both first time visitors and seasoned hikers.
- The District collected 80 email opt-ins; 43 people signed up for the docent-led hikes to the old-growth redwoods.
- The BCR web page was the most visited page on www.openspace.org from June 3, 2019 to July 7, 2019, garnering 11,860 unique website visitors (11% of all site traffic).
- The BCR storymap drew 867 visits (19 links from the QR code) through July 7, 2019.

VI. **Staff Hours**

Public Affairs department staff estimates spending in excess of 825 hours on planning,

interdepartmental coordination, and executing the previews and partner events, media coverage and four opening weekend days (over and above creating the brochure map, web page, icon graphic and storymap).

Rangers and maintenance staff spent about 255 hours staffing the ribbon-cutting and the first two weekends.

VII. Budget

Expenses came in at approximately \$14,100, which is under the \$20,000 budget allocated prior to developing the “lightly promoted” opening weekend plan.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with receipt of this informational report.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act. The Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve Plan was evaluated in an Environmental Impact Report, which was adopted by the Board of Directors in January 2017.

NEXT STEPS

The Public Affairs department will continue to promote Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve to the public.

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