

Austin Creek State Recreation Area

Annual Operations Report

2016/2017



STEWARDS OF THE COAST AND REDWOODS

Operations Report – July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017

Austin Creek State Recreation Area

Prepared by Michele Luna, Executive Director

Hours of Operation

- Austin Creek, like Armstrong Redwoods, is open daily from 8 am to one hour past official sunset.
- Bullfrog Pond Campground was open the entire year with no periodic closures.
- Three backcountry sites stayed open the entire report period as well.
- The entrance station at Armstrong Redwoods was staffed year-round on the weekends, most weekdays with shortened hours during the winter, early spring and late fall, and 7 days a week during the later spring, summer and early fall.

Visitor Services & Public Safety

AUSTIN CREEK PARK VISITATION:

Year	Camping	Free DU	Paid DU
2013-2014	5,240	227,896	25,390
2014-2015	8,093	251,687	29,906
2015-2016	10,426	264,646	35,990
2016-2017	8,821	204,431	35,803

ARMSTRONG REDWOODS VISITATION: (Stewards handles fee collection)

Year	Free DU	Paid DU
2013-2014	820,523	53,672
2014-2015	886,020	60,656
2015-2016	923,816	71,981
2016-2017	692,148	71,287

- In the past year visitation went down due to the increase in rain, after a few years of drought. There were 283,000 less visitors than in 15/16. Camping was also less by about 1600 campers. Overall visitation in both parks for 16/17 was 1,012,490.
- With limited Ranger staff time at Armstrong Redwoods, Stewards continued to handle most of the Visitor Service non-law enforcement operations in Armstrong as well. Armstrong has its own maintenance staff. Our Ops team continues to provide excellent visitor services under the leadership of our Field Operations Manager, Scotty Lawyer.
- Our reservation system with Hipcamp continues to provide camping reservation services at Bullfrog Pond campground. Sixteen sites are reservable 7 months in advance and 7 sites are first come, first serve. This effort increased camping revenue from \$71,014 in 13/14 to \$93,346 in 14/15 and back down again in 15/16 to \$83,747 due to a rainy winter and spring. In 16/17 camping revenue was up to an all-time high of 94,663. Hipcamp continues to make enhancements to their software based on our needs and recommendations and their expanded services to private landowners.

- Office and kiosk staff handled the customer service issues including cancellations and complaints (of which there were very few). There is a \$10 cancellation fee per night.
- Our overall customer service rating was 91% with Hipcamp users. We consistently get positive comments about how clean the campground and restroom are.
- Stewards has a few public assistance volunteers who give out information, provide directions, dispense water, and report any unusual activity in the back country.
- Stewards continues to meet with CalFire annually to get feedback on our fire prevention plan, which includes having campers sign a fire permit whether they are allowed to have fires or not. Fire season began a little later this year however we closed the backcountry to fires by May 12, 2017 and Bullfrog Pond Campground by July 10, 2017. Trees in the campsites were limbed and we maintain a 10-foot perimeter around each fire pit. Our move to put buckets at each water spigot and ask campers to use water to put out their fires at the end of the night in the past two years has been very successful. Camphosts were also watchful of the campfires in the campgrounds. In addition, communication was maintained with Cal Fire and to discuss fire prevention strategies.

Campground Operations and Maintenance

- Our camphost program has been very successful. We have two - three camphosts who worked the majority of the weekends and another that worked periodically during the week during the summer. Our camphosts who work weekends are paid a stipend of \$50 per 24 hours to cover their mileage and meals. Weekday camphosts are not paid a stipend.
- With increased visitation, we have to pump the septic tanks at the campground restrooms 2 times a year. In the past year we replaced 2 toilets and done other plumbing repairs.
- Our Ops team solicited tool donations so they now have a well-stocked shop in the Ranger Station garage. Items donated in the past year include: a 120/240v generator, shop heaters, building materials, planer, various hand tools
- This summer our Ops crew again worked with the Youth Ecology Corps for one week to to work on, and repair a variety of job needed throughout both Armstrong Redwoods SNR, and Austin Creek SRA. They repaired trails that were impacted by last year's storms, cleared downed trees, cleared waterways, and repaired interpretive panels at Pond Farm.

Special Events

- Weddings: Stewards had inquires about weddings in Austin Creek and we booked and held one in September of 2017.
- In early May, Stewards conducted the 5th Annual Armstrong/Austin Creek Trail Run in partnership with Pacific Coast Trail Runs, Inc. The event was a success and raised money for Austin Creek SRA.
- The Fourth Sunset Dinner on August 12th, 2016 was held again at Schoolhouse Flat. This year was again a benefit for Pond Farm Pottery and guests met at Pond Farm first for

appetizers, champagne, a tour, and kick wheel demonstration by a Pond Farm student. We enlarged historic photos and put them around the site to show what it used to look like when Marguerite was there. The dinner and appetizers were donated by a caterer and we conducted a successful auction with pottery made by the pond farmers who were in attendance.

- We also put on a Family Day in your Park event in June. We promoted this event to Latino park visitors. There were activities at Armstrong Redwoods including horse and carriage rides, and other activities put on by our docents and naturalists. There was music and our Steward Ship was on display with great interpretive displays.
- Other events that were held in Armstrong Redwoods and provided support for operations in Austin Creek SRA: Gourmet Walk in the Woods (July), the Old Grove Festival (September). Both events were well attended and did well financially.

Interpretive Programs

- Ten Junior Ranger Programs were held on Saturday mornings from 10:00 – 11:00 am at the campfire center at Bullfrog Pond Campground from June to August.
- Docent-Led Hikes took place with school groups and a couple groups camped at Bullfrog Pond campground.
- We conducted our first Forest to the Sea Day Camp in July with 10 participants in 5th-8th grades attending a day at Armstrong, one in Austin Creek, and two days on the coast with being an exploration of the intertidal, and the final day and night at Bullfrog Pond Campground in Austin Creek.
- Stewards sponsored our Fifth UC California Naturalist Certification Programs with about 23 participants. This 6-week course took place in all our parks including Austin Creek.
- Seminar about the Legacy of Pond Farm and Marguerite Wildenhain took place in June.
- National Leave No Trace trainer program in collaboration with the Northern Area Boy Scouts Pomo District took place at Bullfrog Pond Campground.
- A working group of volunteers completed work on the docent training manual for a training to take place in the Spring of 2018.

Cultural Resource Stewardship

- Pond Farm Pottery continued with our partnership with State Parks to restore and repurpose the site for future sustainability made great progress this past year. Our two non-profit partners, the California State Parks Foundation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation dropped their regular participation with this project in 2017.
 - Stewards helped coordinate a number of site visits to Pond Farm with potential donors.
 - Monthly planning meetings were scheduled by Stewards' Executive Director to keep everyone updated on project plans.
 - The planning for the Guest House rehabilitation was completed and the construction work began in the Fall of 2017. It is expected to conclude in January 2018.
 - Stewards started planning for an exhibit of Marguerite Wildenhain pottery and the sale of Pond Farm student works at the Sebastopol Center for the Arts (SCA) for Spring 2018.

- Another Pond Farm reunion is also planned In conjunction with the SCA exhibit and sale.
- The oral history video project was completed with a new beautifully done 11 minute promotional video about Pond Farm Pottery that is now displayed on YouTube and on Stewards' website.
- Stewards continued a partnership with UC Davis' Humanities Institute to host another public scholar during the summer months. Grace Kuipers helped build a story map for the Pond Farm website and she also visited the Smithsonian and took photos of Marguerite Wildenhain's papers.
- One of the most exciting new partnerships for Pond Farm is with Hybrid Design, a graphic design and marketing company in San Francisco. They are donating over \$150,000 of pro bono services to benefit Pond Farm. They started by branding Pond Farm and then moved onto redesigning pages about Pond Farm for our new website. In addition, the designed the invitations for the Sunset Dinner in 2017 and they will also be involved with developing design materials for the SCA Exhibit in the Spring of 2018.

Natural Resource Stewardship (workdays)

- Stewards' Trail Crew did stewardship workdays in Armstrong Redwoods or Austin Creek every month during the year. Activities included trail maintenance, wood splitting, campground maintenance, tree limb removals, dealing with down trees, fuel load reduction and fence building.
- Staff did significant amounts of brush cleaning, campground clean up, weed eating, and clearing of down trees in Austin Creek.

Recreation

- Stewards maintained and operated 24 campsites (including a camphost site at Bullfrog Pond Campground. Campsites were cleaned, tree hazards were removed, and fire rings were kept clean. Restrooms were held to a high standard of cleanliness and we continue to provide hand sanitizer for park visitors.
- The camphost site was used almost every weekend during the busy season.
- Backcountry campsites were kept clean and outhouses were serviced once a week while access was allowed.

Signage and Marketing

- Information about Austin Creek operations was kept updated on Stewards' website.
- Stewards staff worked with DPR to update the DPR website with current information about the park.
- Suggestions were also made to update the Hipcamp website. Their software upgrade now makes it easy for us to update the site ourselves.

Co-Management Agreement

Annual Revenue and Expenditure Report – July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017

Park Unit: AUSTIN CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA

Operator: Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

State's Fiscal Year: July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017

Estimated Visitors: 311,062

Volunteer Hours:

	Stewardship	Public Assistance
2016-2017	490	69

ANNUAL REVENUE	Fiscal Year Total 2016- 2017
Armstrong/Austin Creek	July - Jun
Austin Creek – Camping fees	94,663
AR/AC Entrance Station – Day-Use - 30% for AC	71,594
Other Donations and Fundraising	15,120
Revenue-Generating for Pond Farm	1,959
Firewood Sales	5,432
Total Revenue Austin Creek	188,768
EXPENSE PROJECTIONS	
Armstrong/Austin Creek	
Salaries	
Salary -Executive Staff (ED, AD)	7,755
Accountant - New Contractor	1,305
Salary -Admin Staff (OC, OA, AA)	2,429
Salary -Field Operations Manager (FOM)	48,746
Salary – Field Operation Asst and Service Aides (SA)	56,667
Salary -Programs Director (PD)	2,000
Salary - Volunteer Manager (VM)	2,000
Benefits - 15%	17,835
Contracts - Marketing, Website and Hipcamp fees	10,235
Insurance/Legal	13,500
Program Expenses	883
Vehicles, gas, storage container	4,054
Field Equipment, Supplies, Utilities	8,871
Camphosts (trailer and supplies) storage, stipends	5,805
Pond Farm Expenses	8,157
Total Expenses Austin Creek	190,242
Net Rev/Exp Austin Creek - Cash GAP	-1474.05

FINANCIAL NARRATIVE

July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017

Revenue: Stewards' operational revenue from Austin Creek day-use and camping fees generated \$166,257 during the report period, which is an increase of \$12,896 from 2014/2015.

Stewards retains 30% of the day-use fees for Austin Creek until 6/30/17, after which we received a 10% increase in day-use fees as an interim agreement until our Co-Management Agreement is approved in 2018.

Other revenue generated for park operations were derived from donations and fundraising (\$17,079) and campfire wood sales (\$5,432).

In-Kind Volunteer Time: Volunteers were used to accomplish stewardship and natural resource projects. Volunteers contributed 480 hours in Austin Creek specifically @ \$24.75/hour for a value of \$11,880 of in-kind services. http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time

Expenses: Per the Operating Agreement, all money derived from operational revenue must be used for Austin Creek operations. During this report period, Austin Creek Operational expenses were less revenue by \$1,474. This is somewhat deceiving since we did not charge off as much administrative staff time as we actually put in. This meant that Stewards used reserve funds to cover this time, putting our organization in a precarious situation with cash flow.

Staffing included one full-time Field Operations Manager and one full-time assistant Field Operations Manager, and two part-time service aides. During the slow season, service aide hours were reduced. During this accounting period, Field Staff wages were \$105,413, an increase of \$8,819 over 2015/2016.

Additional staffing costs include administrative hours for Stewards' Executive Director, Administrative Director, and Administrative Assistant. As stated above we did not charge off as much time to Operations this year because we anticipated it would create a deficit. We only charged \$4,000 for program staff time in 16/17, which covered costs for the day camp and overnight at Bullfrog Pond Campground.

Other large expenses incurred were for insurance, vehicle expenses and enhancements to our website. Insurance costs for just the 5700 acres of land are over \$7,000 a year.