

# Austin Creek State Recreation Area

## Annual Operations Report

### 2017/2018



# STEWARDS OF THE COAST AND REDWOODS

Operations Report – July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

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	9,311	212,760	36,856
2017-2018	9,898	218,646	38,603

### 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	717,403	73,392
2017-2018	745,047	77,200

- In the past year visitation went back up, due to favorable weather conditions and the impacts associated with Muir Woods going on a reservation system. There were 39,000 more visitors than in 16/17. Camping was more by almost 600 campers. Overall visitation in both parks for 17/18 was 1,089,394.
- 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 continue 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 \$94,425 in 17/18. 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% based on 1181 responses 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 10, 2018 and Bullfrog Pond Campground by June 22, 2018. Trees in the campsites were limbed to a minimum 15 feet, 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.
- Stewards has also raised grant funds to assist State Parks with fuel reduction in Austin Creek SRA. This is helping reduce underbrush and ladder fuels that can impact the park in the event of a wildfire.

### **Campground Operations and Maintenance**

- Our camphost program has been very successful. We have two - three camphosts who worked the majority of the weekends and 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 have had to do only minor 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, portable air compressor, various hand tools
- The Trail Crew worked with a number of groups including: Fencing, emergency access clearing, hazardous tree removal, trail maintenance, equipment repair, firewood processing, brush clearing, and various stewardship project supervising.

### **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 supported the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Armstrong/Austin Creek Trail Run in partnership with Pacific Coast Trail Runs, Inc. The event was a success and raised money about \$500.

- The Fifth Sunset Dinner on August 12th, 2017 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 2018. We promoted this event to Latino park visitors. There were activities at Armstrong Redwoods including raptor demos, and other activities put on by our docents and staff. 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**

- Docent-Led Hikes took place with school groups and a couple groups camped at Bullfrog Pond campground.
- We conducted our Second Forest to the Sea Day Camp in June with 25 participants in 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 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 Sixth 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.
- A working group of volunteers completed work on the docent training which took place in March of 2018.

### **Cultural Resource Stewardship**

- Pond Farm Pottery continued with our partnership with State Parks to restore and revitalize the site for future sustainability.
  - 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 Guest House renovation took place in 2017/2018 and was completed with ADA improvements.
  - Stewards put on a wonderful five week Exhibit of the works of Marguerite Wildenhain and her students at the Sebastopol Center for the Arts. Pond Farm students sold work that helped raise about \$10,000 for Pond Farm.
  - Another Pond Farm reunion took place in conjunction with the exhibit with about 30 students in attendance.
  - One of the most exciting new partnerships for Pond Farm is with Hybrid Design, a graphic design and marketing company in San Francisco. They donated over

\$150,000 of pro bono services to benefit Pond Farm including help with curating the Exhibit. They designed the wall graphics and layout of the show.

### **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, firewood processing, campground maintenance, tree limb removals, dealing with down trees, hazardous tree removal, 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.
- We had the opportunity to host several volunteer work groups, such as scouting groups from Boy Scouts of America, Medtronic, and Day of Caring from Sonoma County for other stewardship projects. These groups made a significant impact on the trail maintenance projects throughout the year.

### **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**

Stewards and State Parks have been working on a new co-management agreement for Austin Creek and Armstrong Redwoods. The agreement is awaiting approval by State Parks in Sacramento.

## Annual Revenue and Expenditure Report – July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

**Park Unit:** AUSTIN CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA

**Operator:** Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

**State's Fiscal Year:** July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

**Estimated Visitors:** 267,147

**Volunteer Hours:**

	Stewardship	Public Assistance
2017-2018	490	69

ANNUAL REVENUE	Fiscal Year Total 2017- 2018
<b>Armstrong/Austin Creek</b>	<b>July - Jun</b>
Austin Creek – Camping fees	94,425
AR/AC Entrance Station – Day-Use	96,086
Other Donations and Fundraising	12,500
Revenue-Generating for Pond Farm	9,009
Firewood Sales	3,257
<b>Total Revenue Austin Creek</b>	<b>215,277</b>
<b>EXPENSE PROJECTIONS</b>	
<b>Armstrong/Austin Creek</b>	
Salary -Executive Staff (ED, AD)	12,147
Accountant - New Contractor	250
Salary -Admin Staff (OC, OA, AA)	1,037
Salary -Field Operations Manager (FOM)	48,015
Salary - Field Operations Assistant	31,617
Salary - Service Aides (SA)	31,362
Benefits - 15%	18,664
Contracts - Marketing, Website, Internet and Hipcamp fees	14,230
Insurance/Legal	8,852
Program Expenses	6,463
Vehicles, gas, storage container	3,037
Field Equipment, Supplies, Utilities	9,128
Camphosts (trailer and supplies) storage, stipends	4,050
Pond Farm Expenses, fundraising	11,551
<b>Total Expenses Austin Creek</b>	<b>200,404</b>
<b>Net Rev/Exp Austin Creek - Cash GAP</b>	<b>14,873</b>

## FINANCIAL NARRATIVE

July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

**Revenue:** Stewards' operational revenue from Austin Creek day-use and camping fees generated \$190,510 during the report period, which is an increase of \$24,253 from 2016/2017.

Stewards started the financial period retaining 40% of the day-use fees for Austin Creek which accounts for the increase in revenue.

Other revenue generated for park operations were derived from donations and fundraising (\$21,509) and campfire wood sales (\$3,257). The Pond Farm Exhibit raised additional grant funds and sponsorships in support of the event. Wood sales were down from the previous year due to the fire ban that went into effect earlier in the year.

**In-Kind Volunteer Time:** Volunteers were used to accomplish stewardship and natural resource projects. Volunteers contributed 490 hours in Austin Creek specifically @ \$29.09/hour for a value of \$14,254 of in-kind services. [http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer\\_time](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 great than revenue by \$14,873. This is a result of the fundraising Stewards did with respect to the Pond Farm exhibit and Sunset Dinner.

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 \$110,995, an increase of \$5,582 over 2016/2017.

Additional staffing costs include administrative hours for Stewards' Executive Director, Administrative Director, and Marketing Communications staff. We charged \$13,434 for administrative staff time in 17/18, which covered costs for the Executive Director to administer and manage fundraising efforts for Pond Farm.

Other large expenses incurred were for insurance, vehicle expenses and enhancements to our website. We also had to install new internet access at the front of Armstrong Redwoods to handle operations and the visitor center. Insurance costs for just the 5700 acres of land are over \$7,000 a year.