



STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Berkeley, CA

September 21, 2023

STAFF REPORT: Bay Area District Overview

STAFF: Maria Mowrey, Bay Area District Superintendent

SUBJECT: Overview of the Bay Area District and Partnerships

OBJECTIVE

Maria Mowrey, Bay Area District Superintendent, plans to provide a brief overview for commissioners and the public regarding the Bay Area District and information pertaining to the district partnerships. Highlights from the commission tour will also be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Bay Area District is spread across 5 counties and consists of 16 state park units (1 State Recreation Area, 9 State Parks, and 6 State Historic Parks), of which 3 are co-managed with a county open space district, and 5 are co-managed with non-profit operating partners. With over 30,000 acres, the state parks in the Bay Area District protect a myriad of natural and cultural resources while providing recreation to three million visitors per year. Recreational opportunities include equestrian access, bioluminescence tours, hiking, camping, boating, mountain biking, beach access, conference facilities, fishing, and more. The district also hosts a variety of programs such as poetry in parks, museum tours, beach clean ups, and hip-hop youth camps. Special events include Transcendence Theater Company, Sound Summit, Redwood Rides, the Dipsea Race (the oldest trail race in America), and numerous other recreational events from mountain biking and group picnics to weddings and family gatherings.

DESCRIPTION (REPORT/UPDATE)

Bay Area Partnerships

The Bay Area District is what we like to call “partner rich,” hosting 13 partnership agreements, six concessions, and five donor agreements all providing programs, services, park management, and enhanced services to the public. The following partnership updates were selected to provide you with a small sampling of just a few of the incredible and important partnerships in our District.

Marconi Conference Center State Historic Park

Marconi Conference Center State Historic Park (Marconi SHP) is located along Tomales Bay near the community of Marshall in Marin County. Formerly the site of the famed Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company beginning in 1912, was once owned by the Synanon cult beginning in the 1960s, the property was acquired by the California State Parks Foundation in 1984 and transferred to the Department in 1989. It was classified by the State Park and Recreation Commission as a State Historic Park in 1991.

Background

The purpose of Marconi SHP is to promote small and medium sized conferences in a rural setting, preserve and restore the historic buildings on the property, interpret the history associated with the Marconi period, and to preserve the natural resources of the site. Public resources Code § 5080.38 allows State Parks to enter into an operating agreement with a qualified nonprofit organization for the development, improvement, restoration, care, maintenance, administration, and control of the Marconi SHP.

During the COVID pandemic, the property was shuttered and quickly fell into disrepair. The Department worked closely with MCCOC and developed a sub-operating agreement with Marconi Hospitality LLC, a private corporation with the objectives of bringing hospitality expertise to Marconi, and to bring funding to get the property back into service for the enjoyment and benefit of the public, and ultimately restore and protect the historic structures.

Report/Update

The new 55-year operating agreement began May 1, 2022. Marconi Hospitality LLC quickly began to complete deferred maintenance projects and reopen the property to the public. These projects included landscaping maintenance and development of a landscape plan, roof repairs and replacements, building crack repairs and painting, trail maintenance, and overall beautification of the exterior buildings and grounds.

In June of 2023, the operations completely closed down to complete major interior renovations of the 40 hotel rooms, including improvements and upgrades to all interiors, adding safety features and energy consumption/conservation features of all existing guest rooms, and modernizing Cypress, Pine and Redwood Halls.

A soft reopening occurred on September 1, 2023, and the property is back in business with a fresh new look. Rooms and conferences are now available to be booked moving forward, and the grounds will remain open for public access to recreation opportunities.

Tamalpais Lands Collaborative (One Tam)

The Tamalpais Lands Collaborative, known as “OneTam” was officially formed in 2014, when State Parks, the National Park Service, Marin Water, Marin County Regional Parks, and the Golden Gate Park Conservancy signed an MOU around a collective vision to preserve, restore and interpret Mount Tamalpais, an iconic natural landmark in the San Francisco Bay Area, and an important source of

drinking water, recreational opportunities and ecologically significant protected natural habitats as part of the UNESCO recognized Golden Gate Biosphere Reserve/Network.

Report/Update

OneTam has been a successful partnership that other groups aspire to model their collaborative efforts after. Through the collaborative, the OneTam partners have increased community engagement with programs focused on youth engagement and citizen science. Key trail projects like the Redwood Creek Trail Realignment have improved access for park visitors while also restoring natural resources. As one of the original OneTam projects, which is being built by State Parks trail staff, the Redwood Creek project has been a vital component of an effort to restore endangered Coho salmon in the Redwood Creek watershed across jurisdictional boundaries, connecting with restoration work being carried out by the National Park Service in Muir Woods.

Most recently, the OneTam partners, in collaboration with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, have released the Marin Regional Forest Health Strategy. Utilizing best available data, local knowledge, and expert analysis, the Forest Health Strategy provides essential insight into the threats currently impacting forest resilience in Marin. In addition, it furnishes a science-based framework for identifying how and where agencies can work both independently and together across jurisdictional boundaries to increase and protect forest health in our region.

The OneTam partners are currently working on renewing the MOU which expires in 2024, and strategic vision, for another ten years. Using lessons learned from the first ten years, and building on the partnerships' successes, all of the partners are committed to continuing the landscape-scale stewardship and community engagement work of OneTam forward into the next ten years.

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF)

Located in the middle of San Francisco Bay, Angel Island State Park has diverse natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The island is the ancestral land of the Coast Miwok people, now the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria, a tribe made up of Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo people. In later years a cattle ranch, US army base, US Quarantine Station, and US Immigration Station all operated on the island. Angel Island State Park has two cooperating associations, the Angel Island Conservancy which operates island-wide and the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF/Foundation) which focuses its efforts on the historic immigration site.

The US Immigration Station, Angel Island was in operation from 1910-1940. The site was also used during WWII housing US soldiers and detaining Japanese Americans as well as Prisoners of War. Originally built to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Laws which excluded immigrants based on race, the facility ultimately held people from about 80 countries including returning American citizens with Chinese ancestry. The facility's role was to process immigrants arriving in San Francisco and keep out 'undesirable' immigrants based on race, class, health, sex, as well as political and moral standards.

California State Parks's original plan for the old immigration station was to remove the buildings to make way for camping and picnicking. Ranger Alexander Weiss spoke to professors and students at San Francisco State University about writing he had seen on the walls of the former station's detention barracks. Their classes made informal field trips to the site and some students later learned their own parents had been detained on Angel Island when they immigrated to the United States. Those students and teachers spread the word and created the community-based organization, the Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee (AIISHAC). The Committee evolved into AIISF.

This year the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation commemorates 40 years of their continuing work to preserve the US Immigration Station and share the stories of those impacted by detention on Angel Island. The US Immigration Station is now one of the park's most significant historic resources and a National Historic Landmark. In partnership with California State Parks, the Foundation has raised over \$40 million in public and private funds toward the restoration efforts of the buildings, infrastructure improvements, and interpretive exhibits. The work done so far has helped preserve inscriptions left behind by detained immigrants from around the world in a dozen languages, as well as writing from World War II including Japanese American internees and POWs from Germany and Japan. The most well-known writing in the building are more than 100 Chinese poems carved into the wooden walls expressing detained immigrants' frustrations, fears, and hopes as they awaited the US government's decision on whether they would be allowed to enter or be deported.

Report/Update

The latest efforts of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation and California State Parks were focused on the historic hospital building at the US Immigration Station. The building had been abandoned since 1946 and was in disrepair. Water was intruding through the roof as well as from the hillside above the building damaging the structure and without intervention ultimately the building would have collapsed. A phased project on the site started with building stabilization and hazardous materials removal, as well as relocating Townsend's big-eared bats living inside the structure. The construction work replaced the crumbling plaster on the walls and provided all new electrical, plumbing, and climate control in the building. Due to continued fund raising, the final interpretive elements in the building are phased as well, but three permanent exhibits were completed in 2020. Due to pandemic delays the building's official opening event was held virtually on January 22, 2022. 102 years to the day after the first immigrant was detained on the island. The new museum space is called AIIM (Angel Island Immigration Museum) and highlights personal stories of historic and contemporary immigration. The space features some flexible spaces as well where temporary exhibits, speakers, performances, and public and private events can be held.

An additional permanent exhibit in the World War II era mess hall opened in May 2022 funded by Japanese American Confinement Sites grant awarded to AIISF. "Taken From Their Families" introduces visitors to the story of 600 Japanese Hawaiians and 100 mainland Japanese Americans detained on Angel Island on

their way to more permanent camps around the US. There is a poignant oral history turned into an animated feature of one family describing their experiences. They recall the day their father was taken away in the days after the attack on Pearl Harbor and later their own internment and birth of their younger sibling in a horse stall at the Tanforan Racetrack.

The Foundation also hosts many of the permanent exhibits from the park online as virtual exhibits for those who cannot visit the island, as well as collects oral histories related to stories of immigration through “Immigrant Voices” on their website (www.aiisf.org).

Roots and Branches – Sound Summit

Quick Facts:

- Roots and Branches founded Sound Summit in 2015 to support Mount Tamalpais State Park
- Sound Summit is an outdoor concert that takes place once per year at the Cushing Memorial Amphitheater (a.k.a. Mountain Theater) within Mount Tamalpais State Park
- Roots and Branches has donated over \$250,000 to California State Parks since 2015
- California State Parks and Roots and Branches formalized a Donation Agreement in early 2020 which runs through Fall 2026
- In 2023, Roots and Branches donated \$50,000 to California State Parks’ Steep Ravine Trail repair project

Report/Update

Roots & Branches Conservancy is a San Francisco Bay Area-based non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of natural resources, both physical and cultural. Their mission ranges from regional environmental and educational work to the preservation and evolution of artistic and cultural traditions – musical, visual, narrative, and beyond. Wherever possible, they aim to create intersections between the environment, education, and the arts to their mutual benefit.

During budget shortfalls for State Parks, roots & Branches created Sound Summit, a celebratory music and arts festival held high atop Mount Tamalpais in Marin County. This was launched in the fall of 2015. Sound Summit’s aim was to raise money for, broaden awareness of, and deepen community connection to this very special place in the neighborhood. And it has succeeded in doing just that, raising \$250,000 for Mount Tam to date and fostering old and new ties to this gem of our local landscape.

Just this year, \$50,000 in funds we’ve donated from Sound Summit were allocated to the restoration of the recently reopened Steep Ravine Trail, one of the most beloved and well-traveled on the mountain, which had been closed to the public for over six months due to unsafe conditions. The grants paid for the replacement of all decking and railings on nine key bridges, as well as supported the replacement of a tenth failed bridge. “It’s rewarding to see funds we’ve been able to contribute through our work and your support go to projects that have

direct positive impact on the public's access to and enjoyment of the mountain's wealth of resources."

Districtwide Wildfire Prevention Stats and Partnerships

The Bay Area District and surrounding communities have experienced some of the largest and most devastating wildfires in recent years in California, starting with the Nuns and Tubbs fires (the "Wine Country fires") in 2017 which burned Robert Louis Stevenson, Trione-Annadel, and Sugarloaf Ridge State Parks, and the 2020 Glass Fire, which burned Bothe-Napa Valley, Bale Grist Mill, Robert Louis Stevenson, Sugarloaf Ridge, and Trione-Annadel State Parks. Following the 2017 fires, the Bay Area District (District) has engaged in building and maintaining a range of partnerships aimed at increasing wildfire prevention and resilience, forest health, and the use of prescribed fire, or "good fire" on a regional basis.

Report/Update

State Parks is part of a unique public/private partnership called the Sonoma Valley Wildlands Collaborative (SVWC) with the Sonoma Land Trust, Sonoma Valley Regional Parks, Sonoma County Ag and Open Space District, Audubon Canyon Ranch, and Sonoma Mountain Ranch Preservation Foundation. The six partners work together, with the local CalFire unit, across 18,000 acres to maintain and improve ecosystem health, increase resilience to wildfires and climate change, and reduce future impacts of wildfire to communities in the Sonoma Valley. The district also participated in the 2022 North Bay TRES, a regional prescribed fire training exchange, in which fire practitioners from many different organizations come together for an intensive training exchange to build skills and networks for prescribed burning. State Parks hosted TRES participants in pile burning in Trione-Annadel State Park. Also key to increasing the pace and scale of wildfire prevention and resilience work, the district has built collaborative working partnerships with CalFire's Sonoma Lake Napa LNU unit, Marin County Fire, and local fire agencies that help to increase both fire preparedness and on-the-ground fuel reduction and prescribed fire work in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) and wildland areas of the district.

Approximately 1,800 acres of varied treatments have been accomplished over the last couple years including broadcast and pile burning, shaded fuel break work, dead tree removal, invasive plant removal, grassland, and scrubland maintenance. As part of this work, over 2,000 piles of dead and cut vegetation have been burned in partnership with CalFire, Marin County Fire, and the Sonoma Valley Wildlands Collaborative (SVWC). This work has been funded by a combination of grant funding obtained by the SVWC, state Wildfire and Forest Resilience Program funding, and State Parks natural resource funding. Through the SVWC, over \$750,000 in direct financial support has come to the district to support contract labor, surveys and compliance, and implementation of fuel reduction work. This partnership has provided access to equipment and expertise to support on-the-groundwork and expanded community outreach capacity through the SVWC's website, community presence, and targeted efforts

to share collaborative work with broader and more diverse audiences (i.e., hosting a webinar on the collaborative's work with Spanish translation).

ATTACHMENTS

Bay Area District Fact Sheet

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Bay Area District](#) webpage