

Austin Creek State Recreation Area Annual Operations Report 2014/2015



STEWARDS OF THE COAST AND REDWOODS

Operations Report – July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015

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, 4-5 weekdays 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

ARMSTRONG REDWOODS VISITATION: (Stewards handles fee collection)

Year	Free DU	Paid DU
2013-2014	820,523	53,672
2014-2015	886,020	60,656

- The above visitation figures for Austin Creek and Armstrong Redwoods show a significant increase over the past 3 years with visitation at 994,943 in 12/13 and 1,216,362 in 14/15, representing a 221,419 increase over time.
- 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 for the Spring and Summer of 2015 was exceptional.
- Our reservation system with Hipcamp continues to provide camping reservation services at Bullfrog Pond campground. Fourteen sites are reservable 7 months in advance and 9 sites are first come, first serve. This effort increased camping revenue from \$71,014 in 13/14 to \$93,346 in 14/15. 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.
 - Overall customer service was excellent and our ratings are high with hipcamp users.
- 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 early this year, which extremely dry weather and little rain. Trees in the campsites were limbed and we maintain a 5-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 was very successful. Camphosts were also watchful of the campfires in the campgrounds. In addition, a meeting was held with State Parks, Cal Fire and property owners adjacent to Armstrong/Austin Creek to discuss fire strategies.

Campground Operations and Maintenance

- Our camphost program has been very successful. We have one camphost who works the majority of the weekends and another that fills in when needed. During busy weeks we also had a camphost mid-week. Our camphosts are paid a stipend to cover their mileage and meals.
- With increased visitation we have had to pump the septic tanks at the campground restrooms more often.
- Our Ops team solicited tool donations so they now have a well-stocked shop in the Ranger Station garage. A donor also solicited funds from an equestrian trail organization to provide a larger chainsaw, which will enable staff to handle larger trees that might fall in Austin Creek during the fall/winter months with the threat of an el Niño this season.
- This summer our Ops crew worked with the Youth Ecology Corps for two weeks to rebuild and replace all the food lockers in the campground.

Special Events

- Hipcamp booked the use of the entire campground for one weekend in 2014. It was a successful event and a good trial for future events of this type, which we would only be able to book during the shoulder seasons and only if there were no reservations. We did decide that we should charge more for this type of event.
- Weddings: Stewards had inquires about weddings in Austin Creek but none were booked.
- In early May, Stewards conducted the 3rd 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 second Sunset Dinner on August 1st, 2105 was held again at Schoolhouse Flat. This year was a benefit for Pond Farm Pottery and guests met at Pond Farm first for appetizers, champagne and a tour and talk. 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 catered and we conducted a successful auction with pottery made by some of the pond farmers who were in attendance. We raised \$5,000 for Pond Farm Pottery.
- We also put on a Family Day in your Park event in July (after the report period). We promoted this event to Latino park visitors. There were activities at Armstrong Redwoods including horse and carriage rides, a live bird exhibit by the Bird Rescue Center, Reptile Rescue, and other activities put on by our docents and naturalists. There

was multi-cultural music put on by youth groups and an Aztec blessing and dancing. We had Spanish-speaking staff and docents available for those who needed translation.

- Other events that were held in Armstrong Redwoods and provided support for operations in Austin Creek SRA: Art in the Park (June), 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.
- Two Star-gazing weekends were held again at Vista Point during the summer.
- Docent-Led Hikes took place with school groups and one group camped at Bullfrog Pond campground.
- We also worked with scout groups who did stewardship projects and camped overnight.
- Stewards sponsored our second UC California Naturalist Certification Program with almost 30 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 was convened to start working on the docent training manual as part of the Landmarks Commission grant.

Cultural Resource Stewardship

- Pond Farm Pottery continued with our partnership with State Parks, the California State Parks Foundation (CSPF) and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) to restore and repurpose the site for future sustainability made great progress this past year.
 - Stewards helped coordinate numerous site visits to Pond Farm with project partner affiliates and potential donors.
 - Monthly planning meetings were scheduled by CSPF staff to keep everyone updated on project plans.
 - Pond Farm was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance, ensuring increased protection and recognition of the site.
 - Partners attended and held a reception during the Contemporary Jewish Museum exhibition in San Francisco.
 - Stewards acquired the url for pondfarmpottery.org and began working on the website.
 - Stewards acquired letters at an auction written by Marguarite Wildenhain to Mr Gump requesting his help with bringing her husband to America. The nonprofit partners split the cost of the purchase.
 - Michele attended the Alliance of Artists Communities Conference in Omaha, Nebraska to learn more about Artist in Residency Programs.
 - Caitin Strokosch met with Stewards and partners during a visit as part of her contract to help provide guidance for the AIR program.

- The HALS Report was completed by ARG/Cathy Garrett and funded by CSPF and the NTHP.
- Stewards designed and produced a Pond Farm rackcard as part of our grant with the SC Landmarks Commission.
- Stewards developed a partnership with UC Davis Humanities Institute to complete oral histories for Pond Farm – Cal Humanities grant was submitted.

Natural Resource Stewardship (workdays)

- Stewards' Trail Crew did stewardship workdays in Austin Creek every other month during the year. Activities included trail maintenance, wood splitting, campground maintenance, tree limbing and dealing with down trees.
- Stewards supported the Youth Ecology Corps by providing 2 weeks of work, 4 days a week for 5 hours/day. They built ten new food lockers for the campground. They also helped with cleanup at Pond Farm before the Sunset Dinner event.
- 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 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 every weekend.
- Backcountry campsites were kept clean up and outhouses were serviced once a week.

Signage and Marketing

- Information about Austin Creek operations was 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.
- Marketing brochure was developed about Pond Farm Pottery.

Concession Operations

- None

AB 1478 Funding

- 1478 Funding was tracked and Monitored
 - DPR Staff were paid to monitor special events put on by Stewards to benefit Austin Creek SRA.
 - Some trail improvements were made
 - Funds were used to cover DPR staff time for a pot grow cleanup

Annual Revenue and Expenditure Report – July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015

Park Unit: AUSTIN CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA

Operator: Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

State's Fiscal Year: July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015

Estimated Visitors: 289,685

Volunteer Hours:

	Stewardship	Public Assistance
2014-2015	337	95

ANNUAL REVENUE	3rd Fiscal Year Total 2014-2015
Armstrong/Austin Creek	July - Jun
Austin Creek – Camping fees	93,346
AR/AC Entrance Station – Day-Use - 30% for AC	63,254
CSPF Grants	30,000
Other grant support (Pond Farm)	3,133
Other Donations and Fundraising	15,810
Firewood Sales	9,827
Total Revenue Austin Creek	215,369
EXPENSES	
Armstrong/Austin Creek	
Salary -Executive Staff (ED, AD)	10,738
Accountant - New Contractor	1,070
Salary -Admin Staff (OC, OA, AA)	2,125
Salary -Field Operations Manager (FOM)	42,699
Salary - Service Aides (SA)	45,288
Salary -Programs Director (PD)	2,000
Salary - Volunteer Manager (VM)	1,224
Benefits - 15%	15,772
Contracts - Marketing and Website	14,781
Office - Equipment & Supplies	1,185
Housekeeping Supplies	1,574
Insurance/Legal	12,500
Signage/Brochures	346
Vehicles, gas, storage container	5,154
Field Equipment and Supplies	2,513
Utilities - Trash, Electricity, pumping, Phone	2,116
Camphosts (trailer and supplies) storage, stipends	5,050
Pond Farm Expenses (Docent Program)	322
Total Expenses Austin Creek	166,456
Net Rev/Exp Austin Creek - Cash GAP	48,913

FINANCIAL NARRATIVE

July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015

Background: Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods entered into an Operating Agreement with DPR for Austin Creek State Recreation Area on August 1, 2012. The agreement was signed by the Director on June 27, 2012 but was delayed going to the Department of General Services and the Attorney General's office. Stewards was given an early entry permit to operate until the final agreement went into effect. The entrance kiosk for both Armstrong Redwoods and Austin Creek began operating under Stewards' management on August 15, 2012 and Bullfrog Pond Campground opened on August 17, 2012. The Backcountry campsites in Austin Creek were opened before Memorial Day in 2013. Stewards has updated our agreement twice with the most current amendment completed in May of 2014 with the Department of General Services providing approval on June 17, 2014.

Revenue: Stewards' operational revenue from Austin Creek day-use and camping fees generated \$156,600 during the report period, which is an increase of \$31,462 from 2013/2014.

Stewards retains 30% of the day-use fees for Austin Creek. Stewards requested that State Parks contribute ½ of the cost of an Interpreter for Armstrong Redwoods and Stewards would contribute the other half. That request was denied for the 2014/2015 fiscal year but it might be considered in 2015/2016.

DPR revenue goals for Armstrong Redwoods were exceeded by 126.75% with Stewards handling day-use fee collection and park pass sales were 136.94% over target.

Other revenue generated for park operations were derived from grants (\$33,133), donations and fundraising (\$15,810) and special events and campfire wood sales (\$9,827). Firewood sales provided a significant increase in revenue due to the fact that there was no fire ban put in place this year.

In-Kind Volunteer Time: Volunteers were used to accomplish stewardship and natural resource projects. Volunteers contributed 432 hours @ \$24.75/hour for a value of \$10,692 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 \$48,913. This excess will cover increased expenses for staffing and special maintenance projects for the peak of the busy season (July through October).

Staffing included one full-time Field Operations Manager and two part-time service aides during the slow season. During the busy season, Stewards employed one full-time service aide and 2 full time and 2 part-time during the busy season. During this accounting period, Field Staff expenses were \$87,987 and increase of \$16,700 over 2013/2014.

Additional staffing costs include administrative hours for Stewards' Executive Director, Administrative Director, Administrative Assistant, Programs Director and Volunteer Manager. Including employee benefits other personnel expenses were \$32,879 for the reporting period, a decrease of \$968 from 2013/2014.

Other large expenses incurred were for insurance, vehicle expenses and enhancements to our website. Insurance costs for the 5700 acres and campground operations are \$12,500 annually.