

Marin County Open Space District Resource Management Plan Framework September 23, 2008

1. Introduction

a. Purpose and Need

Open space is a defining characteristic of Marin County's landscape. Within the mosaic of other public lands in Marin, those owned and managed by the Marin County Open Space District (OSD) define the boundaries of many of Marin's communities and are the extended "backyards" for many people who live in Marin. This juxtaposition of open space and neighborhoods did not occur by chance, but rather was intentional and is the manifestation of the County's 1971 seminal planning document *Can the Last Place Last?* This document described a vision for the creation of an open space system that would be integral to the communities and environment of Marin. Open Space District lands, together with Marin's other public lands, are the county's "last places"; and since 1971, the OSD has made great progress in protecting and caring for those "last places".

Over the past several decades, the OSD has focused primarily on the acquisition and permanent protection of these lands. Today the OSD manages 34 preserves comprising 15,500 acres of land throughout Marin County. These open space lands provide the public with many benefits. Among them are vital "ecosystem services" related to clean water and clean air; quality of life attributes; beauty and inspiration; places to walk, run, hike, and ride a bicycle or a horse; and a place to find peace and quiet. In addition, these places provide habitat for many native plants and animals; and in many cases, the last remaining critical habitats can be found on the OSD lands. The ecological value of these lands cannot be understated, which is why there are limitations placed on the use of the lands. These limitations – that work to protect habitat and natural resources, while also making the lands available for public use – differentiate "open space" from "parks."

Besides the fact that good land stewardship demands it, there are a number of compelling reasons for developing and implementing a system-wide resource management plan at this time.

- To preserve ecologically healthy open space lands for future generations of visitors and for the native plants and animals inhabiting these lands.
- To provide safe public access to use designated parts of the lands.
- To reclaim and restore native habitat by controlling non-native plant and animal populations that are continuing their advance, reducing native habitat quality and availability, contributing to high fuel loads and, in some cases, adversely affecting local agriculture.
- To reduce the threat that wildfires pose to communities located near open space by managing vegetation and fuel loads.

- To protect the health of the County's watersheds, streams and creeks, and the health of local fisheries, by reducing erosion originating from roads and trails on District lands.
- To protect the habitats of certain endangered plants and animals, for which District lands are the last refuge.
- To ameliorate the effects of climate change through the ecosystem services provided by well managed open space lands.

This Resource Management Plan (RMP) Framework will serve as the OSD's guide to achieve the highest standards of excellence in resource conservation and management. The RMP, and successive preserve-specific plans that would provide more detailed resource management recommendations when necessary, will guide the stewardship of open space in such a way as to achieve protection and conservation of resources and the allowable public use of preserves and open space for all to enjoy now and into the future.

b. High Level Goals

i. County

The implementation of a Resource Management Plan for OSD lands will contribute to the County's achievement of several high level community goals set forth in the County wide plan and Marin County's Strategic Plan:

- Environmental preservation
- Safe communities
- Sustainable communities

ii. Department

The mission of the Marin County Parks and Open Space Department states that it is dedicated to educating, inspiring and engaging the people of Marin in the shared commitment of preserving, protecting and enriching the natural beauty of Marin's parks and open spaces, and providing public enjoyment for all present and future generations. Guided by this mission, the OSD has acquired 15,500 acres of natural lands throughout the County, with approximately 15,000 additional acres targeted for protection, through fee acquisition or conservation easement, in future years. The OSD has a proven track record and proud history of protecting at-risk lands, responsible stewardship, and responsiveness to community needs.

Recently, the Department of Parks and Open Space completed a Strategic Plan that was developed collaboratively among hundreds of community members, staff, commissioners, board members and workshop participants. The Strategic Plan articulates a vision for the future of the County's park and open space system. The Strategic Plan also lays out goals for the Department, chief among them and most relevant to the creation of a Resource Management Plan, is the goal to: *Protect, restore and preserve the natural systems of the lands held in trust for current and future generations.* This goal is to be accomplished by implementing the following strategies:

- Employing best land management practices that preserve natural resources and promote habitat diversity.
- Completing inventories and monitoring biological resources to develop, evaluate and redefine management protocols.
- Working at the watershed level to ensure diverse and thriving biological communities.
- Incorporating habitat preservation strategies within flood control, fire protection and other critical land management plans.

The primary goal for this Resource Management Plan is to *Improve the long-term management and stewardship of Open Space lands.*

In certain cases and as needed, the OSD may develop specific resource management plans for particular preserves or areas. These specific plans may include an inventory and analysis of significant resources, and recommendations for resource management activities.

The OSD is in the process of initiating a District-wide vegetation and biodiversity management plan, a component of this overall Resource Management Plan, to guide the management and stewardship of vegetative and natural resources on an overall basis. Critical to the success of both initiatives is striking the correct balance between long-term resource protection and public use of OSD lands.

c. Partners and Collaborators

The most effective means of achieving balance in protecting and enhancing natural resources and providing for public access on OSD lands will be through joint efforts and partnerships between the OSD and local municipalities, and state and federal agencies, in addition to County Departments and Water Districts. Key entities include Mt. Tamalpais State Park, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Marin County Fire Department, the Marin County Department of Public Works, Marin Municipal Water District, and the North Marin Water District.

d. Principal Stakeholders

Community participation and stakeholder engagement are an integral part of the planning process. Neighbors, special interest groups, and others interested in shaping the direction and ultimate decisions regarding how OSD lands are managed and used in the future are encouraged to participate in community meetings and other outreach efforts. Clearly, the success of the OSD in implementing its Resource Management Plan will also be contingent on building and sustaining relationships with these interested parties and entities, adjacent landowners, and the general public.

e. Current Management Policies

i. Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

An IPM policy was adopted by the County of Marin in 1983. The policy states that the County, in carrying out its pest management operations, “*shall focus*

on long term prevention or suppression of pest problems with minimum negative impact on human health, nontarget organisms and the environment.” Implementation of IPM has resulted in significant overall reduction in use and elimination of the most hazardous pesticides. Marin County’s current IPM ordinance and policy is undergoing review and revision, with Board consideration anticipated this fall.

ii. Policy Review

The resource management planning process would be principally guided by policies developed as part of the OSD’s Policy Review Initiative, which was conducted in 2004 and 2005. An outcome of this process was a new core land management policy that reads: *“MCOSD holds lands in trust and in perpetuity for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of Marin County. MCOSD shall steward its lands in a sustainable manner, and primarily for resource protection. MCOSD lands shall be available to the public for nature-based, trail-based, and educational uses. MCOSD shall steward its lands so they remain positive asset to the communities they serve.”*

Of the eleven land management policy areas that underwent review, those most closely related to development of a Resource Management Plan are fire, special status species, and nonnative plants and animals.

f. Measures of Success

Measures of success provide targets by which the OSD will be able to monitor progress toward achieving its goals. The Strategic Plan identifies high-level performance measures for the OSD. As part of developing and implementing a Resource Management Plan, the OSD may elect to craft additional and more specific performance measures that are directly relevant to resource protection and enhancement.

2. Resource Management Program Elements

a. Vegetation and Biodiversity Management Plan

i. Purpose and Need

In 1995, the OSD released a Vegetation Management Plan for preserves in the vicinity of Mt. Tamalpais. This plan was released in partnership with the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) and prescribed a wide range of fuel reduction and fire suppression treatments for OSD lands, many of which have been implemented. The plan also outlined goals for biodiversity protection and weed suppression. Since then, the science and understanding surrounding wildfire risk reduction, biodiversity protection, and weed suppression has advanced significantly. At this point, the OSD must update its vegetation management planning to include all 34 preserves, and to more directly address the topic of biodiversity management.

ii. High Level Goals

A Vegetation and Biodiversity Management Plan will allow for the biological assessment of existing natural resources and, perhaps more importantly, provide

guidance for the future protection, restoration, and enhancement of those resources that have been impacted by human and natural causes. The OSD will maintain and manage vegetation to:

- Conserve, enhance and restore native plant communities.
- Preserve and protect populations of rare and/or threatened or endangered species and their habitats.
- Protect biodiversity to achieve a high representation of native plants and animals.

iii. Intended Outcomes

The implementation of a Vegetation and Biodiversity Management Plan will be achieved through partnerships between the OSD and other agencies and stakeholders (see above) to address critical and specific single-purpose problem areas, but also to address larger more system-wide challenges including the creation of landscape linkages and the preservation of wildlife corridors between protected areas, conserving soil and water quality, and promoting overall plant and animal diversity. Vegetation and biodiversity management will:

- Conserve and enhance natural communities.
- Restore native species populations and their habitats.
- Reduce fire hazard conditions.
- Limit the introduction and encroachment of invasive plant species (such as broom).

To this end, the OSD will endeavor to integrate the principles of biodiversity conservation into the management of resources to maintain stable and thriving natural communities.

b. Road and Trail Management Plan

i. Purpose and Need

The OSD maintains miles of roads and trails throughout its 34 preserves and protected areas, most of which were extant when the District acquired the land. Many of these roads and trails were not built to minimize their impact on the environment and, as a consequence, have contributed to sedimentation and associated habitat degradation in streams and creeks. Some of those waterways provide critical habitat to special status species such as Coho salmon and Steelhead. A Road and Trail Management Plan would provide the OSD with the information necessary to better maintain existing roads and trails and to make determinations regarding future use and management.

ii. High Level Goals

A well designed and maintained road and trail system is critical to the health of watersheds. Because District lands comprise the headwaters of many watersheds in Marin, a Road and Trail Management Plan will complement the County's current watershed planning efforts. A Road and Trail Management Plan will allow for the assessment of the physical condition of existing roads and trails. In addition, it will assist the OSD by providing insight into better maintenance and management practices that will contribute to the protection, restoration, and enhancement of

natural resources that have been impacted by poor road and trail alignment and visitor use. The OSD will:

- Review current best management practices for maintaining high quality roads and trails.
- Develop targets and set a schedule for meeting improved road and trail conditions.
- Reduce sedimentation from roads and trails in critical watersheds.
- Preserve in-stream habitat to protect populations of rare and/or threatened or endangered species.
- Protect water quality to protect aquatic biodiversity.

iii. Intended Outcomes

A Road and Trail Management Plan (and subsequent road and trail assessments in specific preserves) will serve critical functions related to land and resource management decision-making. It would be the OSD's key vehicle for striking the appropriate balance between resource protection and public use, and provide guidance for sustainable maintenance of roads and trails. Key to sustainability will be to ensure that roads and trails function in concert with the benefits that healthy watershed provide, including clean runoff and a reduced runoff volume. The assessments will enable determinations of whether road and trail designations might be changed, or whether particular roads and trails might be decommissioned as a means of improving the health of aquatic environments. By slowing and/or reducing runoff and Road and trail management will:

- Achieve higher quality roads and trails.
- Improve the user experience.
- Protect in-stream habitat for special status species.
- Improve water quality and aquatic health.

c. Cultural and Geologic Resource Management Plan

i. Purpose and Need

Open Space District lands are home to a rich cultural and history. Native American populations, as well as early settlers, left a legacy that provides unique opportunities for education and celebration. These cultures also left behind significant resources and special areas, and the OSD has a responsibility to preserve the legacy and the history of the peoples that once inhabited these lands. To this end, the OSD is committed to protecting cultural resources, which include archaeological, historical, and scientifically valuable sites.

In addition, many OSD lands possess geologic features, such as rock outcrops and mineral occurrences, requiring protection. Occasionally, the former display evidence of Native American use, which is the reason for linking cultural and geological features in a single management plan.

ii. High Level Goals

A Cultural and Geologic Resource Management Plan will allow for the identification and subsequent protection of existing cultural resources, and provide

the opportunity for developing public awareness of and appreciation for those resources. The OSD will:

- Identify and maintain a list of significant cultural and geologic resource locations on OSD lands.
- Work with the appropriate entities to provide appropriate protection for cultural resources.
- Increase awareness of and generate appreciation for these resources and the cultural legacy on OSD lands through education and interpretation where appropriate.

Existing policies enable the OSD to “accommodate remnants of non-native species when they contribute to an understanding of historic and cultural landscapes”.

iii. Intended Outcomes

A Cultural and Geologic Resource Management Plan will provide the OSD with the ability to protect and preserve significant cultural resources and legacy sites. It will also provide the OSD with a key tool for land and resource management decision-making. Cultural and geologic features and sites will be inventoried, preserved and protected from human effects of road and trail building and maintenance, and visitor use. The OSD, in partnership with leaders and representatives from Native American and other culturally significant groups, will determine whether it is appropriate to provide for the interpretation of particular sites. Cultural and geologic resource management will:

- Lead to an inventory of cultural and geologic resources.
- Guide protection of those resources.
- Enhance the user experience.

d. Carbon Management Feasibility Study

i. Purpose and Need

The State of California must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, per the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. The County of Marin, and by extension the OSD, is a willing partner in achievement of the state-wide goal.

ii. High Level Goals

Goals and strategies would include implementation of measures that build on highly successful long-standing practices, such as energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources. Other measures make changes to agricultural and forestry practices. The OSD will:

- Understand how to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Establish measures and practices to guide its land management decisions.
- Develop educational materials to assist in elevating awareness of the issue of climate change and the role the public can play in helping meet County and State goals.

- Identify changes in land management practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

iii. Intended Outcomes

The OSD will determine how best to contribute to the County's and the State's commitment to reducing greenhouse emissions in the short and long term, improving environmental conditions, and mitigating public health concerns. At this time, intended outcomes are anticipated to include:

- Modifications to land management practices that reduce the OSD's "carbon footprint" without compromising land stewardship and best management practices.
- Enable implementation of measures and practices that contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Contribute to reduction in County-wide emissions.
- Increase public awareness of benefits to reducing emissions.

3. Summary

a. Next Steps

Upon approval of this Resource Management Plan Framework, the OSD will begin the process of developing each element of the RMP. The OSD is in the process of preparing a Request for Proposals for the Vegetation and Biodiversity Management Plan, to be released in August. In early 2009, subject to funding availability, the OSD plans to release an RFP for its Roads, Trails, and Visitor Management Plan, and an RFP for a Carbon Management Feasibility Study. In mid 2009, the OSD would begin the Cultural and Geologic Resource Management Plan.

b. Workplan

See attachment.