

# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Quality, Excellence, Innovation

Raul M. Rojas

DIRECTOR

June 30, 2015

Marin County Board of Supervisors  
3501 Civic Center Drive  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Administration

PO Box 4186

San Rafael, CA 94913-4186

415 473 6528 T

415 473 3799 F

415 473 3232 TTY

CRS Dial 711

[www.marincounty.org/pw](http://www.marincounty.org/pw)

**SUBJECT:** County of Marin and National Park Service Muir Woods Road  
Draft Memorandum of Understanding

Dear Board Members:

Accounting

**RECOMMENDATION:** 1) Conduct the continued public hearing, 2) authorize the President of the Board to execute the agreement; and 3) approve the Categorical Exemption.

Airport

Building Maintenance

**SUMMARY:** Visitation to Muir Woods National Monument (Muir Woods) has steadily increased, especially at peak periods, overwhelming the current transportation infrastructure that services it, including Muir Woods Road (aka Franks Valley Road). Over the years, the County has worked with various stakeholders including the National Park Service, California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR), Marin Transit, and various other local government organizations and community interest groups to develop solutions. The Muir Woods Shuttle is an example of such a successful element.

Capital Projects

Certified Unified Program  
Agency (CUPA)

Communications  
Maintenance

County Garage

More recently, the National Park Service (NPS), in consultation with the County, CDPR, and other stakeholders, has proposed to create a reservation system in conjunction with public transit, to reduce roadside parking, enhance parking enforcement, and improve public service announcements. Congressman Huffman created an 'ad hoc' group of government, community, and environmental groups to establish a consensus on a path forward to improve traffic and parking congestion problems. Staff has worked with all parties to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that includes goals and objectives, and detailed road shoulder parking limits, which will significantly decrease road shoulder parking along Muir Woods Road within seven years.

Disability Access

Engineering & Survey

Flood Control &  
Water Resources

Land Development

Purchasing

On June 16, 2015, your Board held a hearing on the draft MOU and received public comment. The Board also provided direction to staff, which is discussed further in this letter. The hearing was continued to June 30, 2015. Attached for your consideration today is a revised draft MOU, including a new attachment to the draft MOU detailing stormwater best management practices.

Real Estate

Reprographic Services

Road Maintenance

Stormwater Program

Transportation &  
Traffic Operations

Waste Management

**DISCUSSION:**

**Memorandum of Understanding Summary**

The MOU identifies the following goals:

- To protect, preserve and enhance the health of Redwood Creek watershed, including its salmonids.
- To reduce traffic congestion at Muir Woods, on Muir Woods Road and in the local communities adjacent to and leading to Muir Woods.
- To improve traffic and pedestrian safety and reduce environmental impacts that may arise from parking along Muir Woods Road.
- To increase local transit and better manage buses, both commercial buses and public transit.

The MOU would allow the NPS to implement a visitation reservation system as summarized below:

- NPS will create a reservation system for visitors using motorized transportation, including managing tour bus operators.
- NPS will manage the reservation system to limit visitation levels and reduce peak attendance, and associated traffic congestion and parking demand.
- A Parking Management Corridor will be created by the County for NPS parking permits along Muir Woods Road between approximately Conlon Avenue to Kent Canyon.
- Over the course of seven years, the parking reservation system will allow Muir Woods shoulder parking to be prohibited south of the Redwood Creek concrete bridge (30 parking spaces will remain between Muir Woods entrance and the concrete bridge).
- Through a cooperative agreement between the Sheriff and the Park Police, parking enforcement and controls will be enhanced for all of Muir Woods Road.
- Both the County and NPS will continue to collaborate to improve Redwood Creek water quality and environmental conditions, and will work to improve public transit and public service messaging.

*MOU Phasing*

The draft MOU implementation is divided into two main phases. The first two years is for the development of the reservation system by NPS. During this time period, road shoulder parking south of the Redwood Creek bridge is reduced to a maximum of 80 spaces during peak periods through additional regulatory parking restrictions, physical barriers and parking enforcement.

The second phase of this draft MOU begins upon the initiation of NPS's reservation system and continues for the next five years, which is the end of the MOU term. During the first 2 ½ year period, parking is capped at 80 spaces south of the concrete bridge, then for the following 2 ½ year period to 40 parking spaces. At the end of this time, the reservation system would accommodate all of the parking demand and Muir Woods parking would be limited to 30 spaces north of and near the Muir Woods entrance, and no parking spaces south of the concrete bridge (up to 400 vehicles can park at peaks times today).

The MOU does allow for use of up to 80 spaces in the last 2 ½ years during any NPS off street parking lot construction periods associated with any upgrade or expanded parking facility work. In order to enhance parking enforcement, NPS will add from current levels

two additional parking enforcement officers upon commencement of the reservation system.

The entire length of Muir Woods Road is designated as the Parking Enforcement Corridor, where the parties will undertake parking enforcement per the draft MOU. The NPS will hire additional parking enforcement officers to conduct parking enforcement and control.

In conjunction with the reservation system implementation, the parties agree to jointly work to expand public transit to Muir Woods utilizing Marin Transit's Muir Woods Shuttle. NPS will also manage changeable message signs (CMS), provide information on its website, and conduct other public service announcements to inform visitors of the need to secure a reservation before visiting Muir Woods.

#### **June 16, 2015 Board Hearing and Public Comment**

At the June 16, 2015, Board of Supervisors' hearing on the draft MOU, various comments on a wide range of issues were received. The following section aggregates similar comments and provides a response to those comments.

##### *Draft MOU Timeframes*

A number of comments were made that the parking reduction schedule should be accelerated, including eliminating parking immediately to within 3 years of the draft MOU approval. Based upon the experience in December (emergency Muir Woods Road shoulder parking prohibition due to the storm damage closure of State Route 1), elimination at a rapid rate without sufficient public notice and development/implementation of the reservation system may result in unintended consequences, such as significant lack of compliance with the parking restrictions/reservations and diversion of parking to other undesirable locations. In addition, the reservation system, and its development and implementation, is crucial to reducing parking along the road. The draft MOU is structured to allow the reservation system to be implemented and tested before eliminating parking south of the concrete bridge.

The draft MOU states that the objective is to initially restrict parking to no more than 80 spaces downstream of the concrete bridge. Per Supervisor Kinsey's suggestion at the June 16, 2015 hearing, language has been added to the draft MOU to have no more than 80 spaces south of the concrete bridge no later than June 1, 2016.

To that end, a County, NPS, and CDPR line staff level working group has been formed, and a number of meetings have been held, to develop standards and plans to implement the shoulder parking restrictions, improve pedestrian safety and protect the nearby creek environment. We expect that additional parking restrictions will be phased and that the initial field work can begin as early as this Fall.

##### *Parking Management Zone*

A comment was received that the Parking Management Zone should be shorter. The draft MOU provides a framework to both implement the Muir Woods visitor and parking reservation system, and to significantly decrease road shoulder parking. One of the draft MOU goals is to improve traffic and pedestrian safety. As details are worked out and implemented to eliminate shoulder parking and construct physical barriers, the priorities include:

- Prohibit parking where parking impacts traffic in the traveled way and creates hazards
- Prohibit parking where the potential impacts to the creek are greatest
- Prohibit parking such that it facilitates pedestrian traffic
- Start parking prohibition and reduction from the furthest point from Muir Woods entrance and progress towards the entrance
- Allow interim parking where vehicles can parallel park outside of the roadway and recovery zone

The Parking Management Zone identifies the area where this work will occur and where the potential parking reservation zone will be created. There are other areas, such as above Muir Woods entrance, that are currently No Parking zones that will be expanded and the shoulder will not be used for future parking permits. Note that CDPR trailhead access will be maintained as indicated below.

#### *Buses*

Comment was received that, as a result of the actions outlined in the draft MOU, the number of buses using Muir Woods Road and Panoramic Highway will increase. Concerns were also expressed that, due to sharp curves on these roads, more buses on these roads impact traffic safety. Through implementation of the reservation system, attendance to Muir Woods will be spread out during the day and within days of the week. Some increase in transit and private tour bus service will likely occur due to limited availability of parking during certain times. An increase in the number of buses may occur during these times, but would also result in substantially fewer auto trips during these times as visitors shift to other modes of transportation.

The County recently adopted an ordinance that vehicles, including buses, in excess of 36 feet are prohibited from using Muir Woods Road and Panoramic Highway. The length restriction has been found to be adequate at this time, but is also being monitored to identify the need for additional restrictions. In addition, bus size restrictions are included in Marin Transit specifications for the Muir Woods Shuttle and in NPS service agreements with private bus tour companies. Any additional vehicle length or size restrictions (including those for buses) would be implemented as needed through these existing mechanisms, separate from the proposed draft MOU.

#### *Watershed Improvements and Special Status Species*

Comment was received that more work needs to be done to protect the Redwood Creek watershed and special status species (e.g., salmon, red-legged frogs, steelhead trout). A request was also made for comprehensive watershed monitoring. The draft MOU reaffirms the County and NPS commitment to protect, preserve and enhance the health of Redwood Creek watershed including its salmonids. Projects have been implemented in the past, not only in Redwood Creek, but other watersheds in Marin County, to improve and protect watershed and salmonid resources. Future projects are also being contemplated which are separate from this draft MOU, but which the parties support. The draft MOU is focused on traffic operations and road shoulder parking reduction, and arrival management aspects of Muir Woods. We expect these changes will have environmental benefits. The suggested comprehensive watershed monitoring is, however, beyond the scope of what is contemplated in the draft MOU.

The NPS and County have agreed to undertake interim stormwater measures to reduce impacts from roadside parking near Redwood Creek. As suggested at the June 16, 2015 Board hearing, those actions have been added to the draft MOU as Attachment C, Stormwater Management Best Management Practices (attached).

*'Carrying Capacity' and Visitor Caps*

Various comments requested that a 'carrying capacity' study be conducted before the draft MOU is approved. The 'carrying capacity' refers to the number of visitors at any one time for an area, total visitation, and controls or management of the area. The draft MOU is focused on traffic operations and parking, and arrival management aspects of Muir Woods by creating a reservation system that reduces and caps peak arrival and parking demand. We expect these changes will have environmental benefits. The larger issue of total visitor management in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area parklands, and at the Muir Woods National Monument, is addressed by the GGNRA in their General Management Plans.

*Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation*

Comment was received on undertaking a bicycle and pedestrian access study from southern Marin to Muir Woods. The County of Marin has a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan that includes existing conditions, needs analysis, and proposed system improvements, including a southern Marin County proposed Bikeway Network (Figure 5.2 of the Master Plan). Section 5.3.4 of the Master Plan discusses access to public park and open space lands. The section states, "A key strategy being pursued by entities such as the National Park Service is measures to eliminate or minimize the use of private vehicles to access these destinations, including use of bus service and shuttles." The proposed MOU is consistent with the County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.

In addition, the County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan is currently under a public process to revise and update the plan in conjunction with other city plan updates. This process provides a forum for discussion and input to proposed Master Plan amendments. The information received at hearing has been forward to the County's consultant working on the Master Plan update.

*State Parks Trailhead Parking*

Comment was received that rather than eliminating all parking south of the Redwood Creek concrete bridge, trailhead parking to Mt. Tamalpais State Park should be preserved. It is the intent of the draft MOU to maintain trailhead parking as expressed under Article IV.A. 1.d. The intent is that some parking will be maintained at Deer Park Fire Road and other trailheads, and in the vicinity of Santos Meadow. In the short term, signage and other measures will be used to designate these areas. In the longer term, and with the successful implementation of the reservation system, it is expected that Muir Woods Monument parking will no longer compete with CDPR trailhead parking.

*Muir Woods Road 'Control'*

Comments were received regarding County of Marin continued 'control' of Muir Woods Road, usually in the form of ability to enforce traffic laws. While the Sheriff will provide authority necessary to NPS to enforce traffic and parking regulations in order to enhance parking enforcement, the Sheriff would not relinquish or reduce any of its existing authority to perform those functions. Muir Woods Road would also continue to be a County maintained road.

*Environmental Documentation*

Comment was received that the draft MOU should undergo either an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or an Initial Study, or that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is being ignored. The action currently being considered is approval of the draft MOU. The consequence of that action and implementation of the MOU constitutes the project being considered. This proposed project has been reviewed by County staff, and staff determined that the Categorical Exemption is the appropriate CEQA related action. The activities associated with the MOU consist of creating a preferred parking zone in association with a reservation system, installation of No Parking Signs, bollards and/or guardrails, minor road shoulder edge paving, and installation of stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) for areas that are removed from parking, all within the existing road shoulder that is currently utilized. There is negligible or no expansion of use. The project will not result in any potentially significant impacts. The project does not involve any work in wetlands or Redwood Creek. Adequate public notice has been provided and a Notice of Exemption is proposed to be filed.

Lastly, environmental review is based on the proposed project. Other future projects can occur in the area, such as creek restoration work, and they will undergo their own environmental review. This project does not preclude or impede other watershed activities.

**Categorical Exemption**

Under the MOU it is recognized that each agency has certain environmental review compliance requirements within their responsibility. The County must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act, whereas NPS must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. Staff has reviewed the scope of work and County actions, and determined that there will not be a significant effect on the environment and a Categorical Exemption is appropriate (see attachment).


**CONCLUSIONS:** While the actions outlined in this MOU will take place over a number of years and some improvements will be gradual, the County and NPS are committed to meeting milestones, making steady progress on common goals, and reporting publicly on that progress, including parking enforcement, to all interested stakeholders. The MOU provides for public updates at least twice a year, one before the Board of Supervisors and one at a local community meeting in Southern Marin. Staff will also be returning to your Board for traffic ordinances and resolutions to implement parking restrictions and permit parking zones contemplated in this draft MOU.

Following public comment, staff recommends that the Board approve the draft MOU with NPS, and direct the President of the Board to execute the MOU. In so doing, staff also recommends that the Board approve the filing of the attached draft Notice of Exemption with the County Clerk and post it pursuant to CEQA Guidelines. The MOU will not take effect until the National Park Service also approves the MOU.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** This action will result in the installation and ongoing maintenance of new signs, implementation of stormwater best management practices, and additional Sheriff staff time. The MOU provides NPS is to fund parking restriction measures. County costs are within existing budgets. There is no additional impact to the General Fund.

<b>REVIEWED BY:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	County Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Department of Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	County Counsel	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Human Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N/A

Respectfully submitted,



Eric Steger  
Assistant Director

Attachments:

Memorandum of Understanding including Attachments  
Notice of Exemption

- C: Congressman Jared Huffman, Member of Congress  
Chris Lehnertz, General Superintendent, GGNRA  
Victor Bjelajac, California Department of Parks and Recreation  
Robert Mota, CHP Commander  
Robert T. Doyle, Sheriff-Coroner  
Nancy Whelan, Marin Transit

