



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Quality, Excellence, Innovation

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DIRECTOR

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SUBJECT: Muir Woods National Monument Memorandum of Understanding Update Report, National Park Service and County of Marin

Dear Board Members:

RECOMMENDATION: Accept the update report of the Muir Woods National Monument Memorandum of Understanding between National Parks Service and County of Marin

SUMMARY: In accordance with the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding between the County of Marin and National Parks Service dated June 30, 2015, County staff and representatives of the National Park Service (NPS) are providing an update on the activities that have occurred in support of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) since the last community meeting on the MOU efforts was held on May 4, 2021.

Discussion:

Prior to the efforts provided through the MOU, visitation to Muir Woods National Monument (Muir Woods) was steadily increasing. The uncontrolled flow of visitors to Muir Woods was overwhelming the transportation infrastructure, including Muir Woods Road and Frank Valley Road. Over the years, the County has worked with various stakeholders including NPS, 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.

In late 2014, Congressman Huffman created an 'ad hoc' group of government, community, and environmental groups to establish a consensus on a path forward to improve traffic congestion and parking problems. The parties worked together and developed a MOU that included goals and objectives, collaboration on the implementation of an NPS parking reservation system, detailed road shoulder parking limits, enhanced parking enforcement, and greater marketing and community outreach.

Two meetings were held in June 2015 by your Board to received publiccomment on the draft MOU, and after recommended changes were made, the MOU was adopted by your board on June 30, 2015 (attached). NPS subsequently signed the MOU after conducting an Environmental Assessmentfor the implementation of the Muir Woods Reservation System, soliciting publiccomment, and releasing a finding of No Significant Impact determination.

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- Disability Access
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- Flood Control & Water Resources
- Land Development
- Procurement
- Real Estate
- Reprographic Services
- Road Maintenance
- Stormwater Program
- Transportation & Traffic Operations
- Waste Management

Memorandum of Understanding Summary:

The MOU created the framework for the NPS to implement a parking and transportation reservation system as summarized below:

- NPS created a reservation system for visitors using motorized transportation, including managing tour bus operators.
- NPS managed the reservation system to limit visitation levels and reduce peak attendance, and associated traffic congestion and parking demand.
- Created a parking Management Corridor for NPS parking permits along Muir Woods Road/Frank Valley Road between approximately Conlon Parking Lot and Kent Canyon.
- Over the course of seven years, the parking reservation system would allow Muir Road shoulder parking to be prohibited south of the Redwood Creek Bridge (approximately 30 parking spaces were to remain between Muir Woods entrance and the concrete bridge).
- Parking enforcement and controls were enhanced for all of Muir Woods/Frank Valley Road through a cooperative agreement between the Sheriff and National Park Service.
- Both the County and NPS continued to collaborate to improve Redwood Creek water quality and environmental conditions and worked to improve public transit and public service messaging.

Memorandum of Understanding Phasing:

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

The second phase of the MOU began on January 16, 2018, with the implementation of NPS's reservation system. This phase continues for five years following implementation, 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 the parking demand and Muir Woods Road shoulder parking would be limited to 30 spaces north of the bridge, near the Muir Woods Monument entrance, with no parking spaces south of the concrete bridge (up to 400 vehicles previously parked at peak times).

The MOU does allow for use of up to 80 spaces in the last 2 ½ years of the MOU during any NPS off-street parking lot construction periods associated with any upgrade or expanded parking facility work.

Memorandum of Understanding Accomplishments:

Reservation System: The largest single effort outlined in the MOU has been achieved with the implementation of parking and arrival reservation system by NPS. The MOU focused on traffic operations, parking, and arrival management aspects of Muir Woods National Monument by creating a reservation system that reduced and limited parking demand and peak arrival times. NPS completed a concessionaire procurement process and implemented a reservation system for Muir Woods that includes marketing and outreach, and a one-stop web-based system for both parking and transit reservations. Starting on January 16, 2018, an \$8 parking reservation was required for each privately-owned vehicle. The system balances visitation levels and parking availability throughout the day.

As part of the overall parking management plan, NPS also reconstructed the commercial vehicle overflow parking area at Conlon Avenue so that it can be used for general public parking or other needs as the reservation system was implemented. The Muir Woods Shuttle (operated by Marin Transit) is also a key component of the overall parking management and arrival at Muir Woods; shuttle reservations can be made on the system web site, <http://gomuirwoods.com>. Since 2019, the Muir Woods Shuttle, as well as tour bus operators were restricted from using vehicles larger than 30-feet in length on upper Muir Woods Road. Since the length restriction went into effect, the shuttle and tour buses now approach the Muir Woods Monument from Frank Valley Road via Highway One. To accommodate the increased bus traffic on Frank Valley Road, temporary alternating stop controls were placed on Frank Valley Road at various locations to improve safety until slides downhill of the road can be repaired.

The reservation system started with some challenges including queuing at the parking lot entrances as some visitors had no reservation and parking attendants needed to provide instructions. There were also periods of education for the public to become accustomed to creating a reservation prior to arrival at Muir Woods. This resulted in some cars having to return to the Four Corners intersection to re-gain cell phone service to make a reservation. This problem has largely been addressed through the continuing education outreach by NPS through signage and electronic communication.

General Coordination:

The local governmental agency staffs convened an interagency working group to plan and coordinate all roadside activities. The working group included staff from County, NPS, State Parks, & Sheriff. A construction team was also created to interact during the detail design and construction of the roadside bollards and erosion control measures.

Parking Barriers, Bollards:

Public Works prepared construction drawings and NPS contracted and funded the installation of a parking barrier post system along the road to discourage parking in early 2016. Approximately 1,200 redwood posts were installed, some with cables added between the posts next to steep shoulder drop-offs for added pedestrian safety. The barrier system extended both north and south of the Muir Woods entrance. The system not only discouraged parking but also created a greater buffer from the creek to allow vegetation to grow. Erosion and sediment control measures were also installed behind the posts in areas that were previously used for parking. Additional delineators were installed south of the concrete bridge when the reservation system began to further discourage parking along the road shoulder.

Additional Parking Restrictions & Higher Fines:

In October 2015, your Board adopted additional no parking zones and increased the fines to the maximum allowed of \$99 per violation.

Parking Enforcement:

The Sheriff provided authority, through a separate agreement, for NPS to enforce traffic and parking regulations. In doing so, the Sheriff did not relinquish or reduce any of its existing authority. However, this allowed NPS to add parking enforcement staff, and parking violation ticketing rates increased until the start of the reservation system. NPS has been actively enforcing parking violations and issuing citations since November 2015, with citations paid through the Marin Parking Authority. Parking citations have declined significantly since the launch of the reservation system as compliance with no parking zones has been better than expected during this period.

Other Future Road Improvements:

The County has obtained a \$6.5 million Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant to reconstruct 2.48 miles of road. The project scope includes a segment of Muir Woods Road and all of Frank Valley Road from the Muir Woods National Monument entrance to State Route 1. The project includes downhill slope stabilization at key locations, drainage culvert replacement to improve water quality in the watershed and full rehabilitation of the pavement. The project is currently at the 30% design phase. The current project cost estimate for design and construction is \$16.3 million dollars which is nearly \$10 million dollars over the initial grant amount. Due to FLAP grant funding limitations the construction funds have been reprogrammed for fiscal year 2025. Replacement of the concrete bridge at milepost 1.91 has been added to the FLAP project scope, and the now-combined project is being managed by the Federal Highway Administration.

Other Infrastructure Improvements and Changes:

NPS continues to maintain and improve the Muir Woods National Monument parking, pedestrian trails, and other arrival facilities. These future projects will improve and reorganize parking, trails, and other arrival infrastructure to address deferred maintenance, improve safety and visitor experience, and upgrade stormwater management design.

CONCLUSIONS: All milestones set by the MOU within the first six and a half years have been met by the stakeholders. The County and NPS are committed to meeting future milestones, making progress on common goals, and reporting out publicly. The MOU provides for public updates at least twice a year, one to the Board of Supervisors and one at a local community meeting in Southern Marin. Today's report satisfies one of the two annual meeting requirements.

EQUITY IMPACTS: As the action by your Board is to receive the presentation and no decision or direction is sought, there are no adverse impacts to equity. NPS and the County of Marin are pursuing solutions for providing resources to help diverse populations according to their needs. In the interest of advancing the interests of equity, NPS provides programs to encourage those who may not be able to afford fees to the national parks including free admittance to children under 15, active military, veterans and Gold Star families. There are also various passes that help to reduce the cost of park visitation for families and seniors. NPS also provides special outreach programs through schools, community centers, and libraries to introduce local communities to national parks. These outreach programs often include transportation. Staff will, however, ensure that ongoing implementation of the MOU in partnership with NPS does not generate inequities or adversely impact underserved communities.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no impact to the General Fund net County cost with this action.


REVIEWED BY:	[]	County Administrator	[X]	N/A
	[]	Department of Finance	[X]	N/A
	[]	County Counsel	[X]	N/A
	[]	Human Resources	[X]	N/A


Respectfully submitted,



John Neville
Civil Engineer

Attachments: Memorandum of Understanding between NPS and County of Marin

C: Congressman Jared Huffman, Member of Congress
Laura Joss, General Superintendent
 Robert T. Doyle, Sheriff-Coroner
Nancy Whelan, Marin Transit



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