



Napa County Regional Park
and Open Space District

Year One Report

Dedicated to the preservation and enjoyment
of the natural resources of Napa County



January 28, 2008

Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District

Introduction

Three basic concepts have guided the District's first year of work:

- (1) Existing public open space lands deserve better management;
- (2) Partnerships with other agencies and organizations are the key to efficient and effective action, and
- (3) Big visions require a solid foundation and methodical nuts-and-bolts planning.

Over the past twelve months the District has advanced plans for 16 parks, trails and restoration projects. Each of these plans has involved open space lands owned by public agencies or non-profit land conservation organizations whose public values have not been fully realized. Progress on each of these plans has come about through District efforts to strengthen partnerships with others. The District's job this past year has been to listen to the ideas and hopes of people throughout the county, and to turn those ideas into practical projects that can be approved, funded and implemented.

These 16 projects represent an interim plan for the District. They reflect high priority needs that required immediate action so that favorable circumstances and opportunities would not be lost. The District has concurrently initiated the development of a Master Plan. The Master Plan will expand and enhance this interim plan to establish a comprehensive and systematic approach to meeting park and open space needs during the next five years. A draft of the Master Plan will be released for public review this spring.

Projects

The first year work program and accomplishments include the following projects:

1. Napa River/Bay Trail. Completed the feasibility study for a nearly nine mile walking and bicycling trail connecting the cities of American Canyon and Napa, utilizing lands owned by seven different public agencies along the eastern side of the Napa River; established a partnership with the City of American Canyon to implement the first phase between American Canyon and Green Island Road; prepared a River Parkway Grant Program application in partnership with the City of American Canyon; and initiated the process of securing other agency approvals.
2. Camp Berryessa. Prepared and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Reclamation to develop a facility design and operational plan for the reopening and development of the former Boy Scout Camp on Lake Berryessa as a community-based group and environmental education camp.
3. Oat Hill Mine Trail. Researched and obtained County Board of Supervisors' authorization to reopen the abandoned Oat Hill Mine Road easement for public use as a non-motorized recreational trail between Calistoga and Aetna Springs Road;

- initiated planning for a major volunteer effort to repair erosion problems and improve the trail.
4. Milliken Ridge Trail. In consultation with the City of Napa, completed a feasibility study including a draft management and operations plan for the development of approximately 3 miles of Bay Ridge Trail, and 7 miles of other connector and loop trails including a staging and picnic area on 2,198 acres of land around Milliken Reservoir owned by the City of Napa but closed to the public for the past 29 years.
 5. Napa River Ecological Reserve. Oversaw the completion of initial improvements to the Napa River Ecological Reserve on the Yountville Crossroad, working in partnership with Napa County, including installing parking area improvements and implementing a more effective cleaning and maintenance program; facilitated an Eagle Scout candidate volunteer in constructing an attractive trash enclosure and restoring the main entry sign; applied for and obtained a grant to restore native habitat and improve interpretive signage, working in partnership with the Napa County Resource Conservation District, Acorn Soupe and the California Department of Fish and Game.
 6. Berryessa Estates. Drafted a trail plan and initiated community review for a no-cost transfer to the District, and opening to the public, of 360 acres of Bureau of Land Management open space next to Berryessa Estates.
 7. Lake Hennessey. In consultation with the City of Napa, began development of a plan for opening for public enjoyment several miles of existing dirt roads and trails in the Oak woodlands on the north side of Lake Hennessey.
 8. Napa River Flood Control Easement. Agreed to hold a conservation easement over Napa County Flood Control District lands on the east shore of the Napa River and north of the Imola Bridge, to facilitate a Flood District project and their ability to secure grant funding.
 9. Newell Preserve. Arranged for funding for a solar water pump and distribution system at the Newell Preserve in American Canyon, to promote public use and protect riparian habitat, once the City is successful in drilling a productive well; facilitated City/County discussions to resolve impediments to public access.
 10. River to Ridge Trail. Worked with Napa County to prepare lot line adjustment documents to resolve encroachment problems with the River to Ridge Trail connecting Kennedy Park to Skyline Park; facilitated an Eagle Scout candidate volunteer project in install a wildlife interpretive display.
 11. Skyline Park. Worked with Napa County to protect Skyline Park from development by seeking authorization to purchase the park from the State; with the veto by the Governor of that approach, proposed General Plan and Zoning

Ordinance changes to protect the park; oversaw Proposition 12-funded erosion control work on Lake Marie Road and the paving of the campground loop road to eliminate dust emissions.

12. Wild Lake Ranch/Duff/Robert Louis Stevenson State Park. Worked in cooperation with the Land Trust of Napa County and California State Parks on developing a master plan and long term ownership and management arrangements for protecting and providing public access to protected open space lands extending from Angwin to Mt. St. Helena.
13. Rector/Stags Leap Ridge Trail. Initiated discussions with the Veterans Home and started the process of securing the appropriate permits and grant funding to development approximately 6 miles of Bay Area Ridge Trail from Silverado Trail to east of Stags' Leap.
14. Vallejo Lakes. Working with the Solano Land Trust, Solano County, the Coastal Conservancy and the Vallejo Water District, began planning for the purchase of 1,100 acres of surplus watershed lands to protect habitat and more than double the size of Skyline Park.
15. Berryessa Vista. Initiated the below-market purchase of 224 acres of land from the Land Trust of Napa County to create the Berryessa Vista Wilderness Park on the southern shore of Cappell Cove at Lake Berryessa.
16. South Wetlands Opportunity Area. Initiated discussions with the Napa County Flood Control District for the no-cost transfer of 774 acres of wetlands owned by the Flood Control District, located between the Napa River, Highway 29 and Newport Drive, for use as habitat and nature-based recreation.

Organizational Capacity Building

In addition to work on the above 16 park, trail and resource interpretation and protection projects, the District also completed a number of actions associated with the initial startup of the District and the laying of the foundations necessary for effective, sustainable and accountable long-term operations. These are summarized as follows:

1. Governing Board. Seated first governing board, selected Board and staff officers, and determined individual board member terms of office.
2. County-District Partnership. Approved work program and agreements formalizing the partnership between the District and the County, setting expectations for District performance and providing for the use of selected County staff and elected officials to provide services to the District.
3. District Procedural Guidelines. Approved a Conflict of Interest Code, California Environmental Quality Act Local Guidelines, and District By-laws to assure effective and accountable decision making.

4. Outreach Strategy. Developed initial District strategy for outreach to community organizations.
5. Master Plan. A Board-appointed ad hoc committee initiated working with staff in developing a draft District Master Plan.
6. Non-Profit Foundation. A Board-appointed ad hoc committee initiated working with staff to research options for establishing a non-profit foundation to assist the District with fundraising.
7. District Logo. A Board-appointed ad hoc committee developed, and the District Board approved, a District Logo.
8. Internet Communications. Established a rudimentary web page for the District using the County web site, and initiated planning for a dedicated District web page.
9. Volunteer Involvement and Stewardship. Developed and filled a contract position to manage District parks and trails with an emphasis on community involvement and volunteerism.
10. Work Plan and Budget. Developed an annual work plan and budget, and instituted a monthly public Board review process.
11. Performance Review. Approved and implemented district performance review procedures for County staff working for the District.
12. Priority Conservation Areas. Developed and approved Napa County area nominations for the ABAG Priority Conservation Area (PCA) planning process.
13. General Plan. Reviewed and made recommendations on the Recreation and Open Space and Conservation Elements for the update of the County's General Plan.

Financial Capacity Building

In supporting the formation of the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District, the Board of Supervisors relied on budget estimates indicating that County-funded District operations in the first years would cost between \$300,000 and \$350,000 per year. The District has been careful to pace the development of projects to stay within this estimate. The current year operating budget is \$287,982; next year's preliminary operating budget, including election costs, is projected at \$330,000.

The District is committed to efficiency in its operations. To meet this commitment, the District has adopted the strategy of partnering with other agencies and organizations, contracting for services, and developing volunteer support as much as possible, rather than setting up an elaborate independent bureaucracy. In addition to contracting with Napa County for basic staffing services, the District in October of 2007 retained contract staff to help develop and manage a volunteer trail and camp host program, a volunteer trail patrol program, and other volunteer-based events and activities.

In terms of capital needs, the District has adopted a three-part strategy. First, it is focusing on projects where the land can be acquired at either no cost or at below-market rates. For example, the District is acquiring the Berryessa Vista Wilderness Park property from the Land Trust of Napa County at one-third of its fair market value, and its proposed acquisitions of the 774 acres of wetlands south of the City of Napa from the

Napa County Flood Control District, and the 360 acres of open space adjacent to Berryessa Estates from the Bureau of Land Management, would involve no-cost interagency transfers. Other projects, including the Napa River/Bay Trail, the Milliken Ridge Trail, the Rector/Stags Leap Ridge Trail and Camp Berryessa are proposed to utilize no-cost Memorandums of Understanding with the affected agency partners.

Second, the District is researching donation and sponsorship programs to provide capital improvements including kiosks, benches and interpretive materials. The first implementation of this initiative will be associated with improvements to and the formal opening of the Oat Hill Mine Trail scheduled for May 2008.

The District is very serious about obtaining and using outside grant funds. In its first, year, the District actively assisted the County complete \$255,000 in Proposition 12 grant-funded projects, including the Connolly Ranch outdoor dining area, improvements to the Napa River Ecological Reserve, improvements to Skyline Park, and the purchase of Berryessa Vista. The District is now turning its attention to how to best utilize \$890,000 of Proposition 40 Per Capita grant funds available in Napa County.

The District has also made a strong drive to bring others projects to a level of readiness that will enable the District to aggressively seek new grant funding. This has resulted so far in the award of a \$100,000 grant for restoration of native vegetation at the Napa River Ecological Reserve, and the submittal of a \$1,223,300 application to the River Parkway Grant Program for the Napa River/Bay Trail project (which incorporates an additional \$932,900 in funding provided by the City of American Canyon utilizing both a federal transportation grant plus City general fund revenues).

Additional projects which are now at or near the point where the District can seek outside grant funds include Camp Berryessa, the Milliken Ridge Trail and Rector Ridge Trail segments, and the expansion of Skyline Park through the purchase of surplus Vallejo Water District property near the Vallejo Lakes. To help advance more projects to the point where they are eligible for outside grant programs, the District in December successfully competed for \$344,700 in County Special Project Fund grants, which over a three year period will assist with Oat Hill Mine Trail improvements, phase two of the Napa River/Bay Trail, and Camp Berryessa.

Another District approach to bringing more outside grant funding to Napa County has been to support grant funding for District partners. The District has worked with and is supporting the Land Trust of Napa County obtain a \$1,000,000 grant to complete the Duff Acquisition next to the Oat Hill Mine Trail, and a \$290,000 grant to complete a integrated management plan for more than 12,000 acres of open space north and east of Calistoga owned variously by California State Parks, California State Lands Commission, the Bureau of Land Management, Napa County and the Land Trust of Napa County.

In total, over the past year the District has obtained, sought or involved with partners on capital grants totaling \$5,035,900.