

# Public Outreach





Photo credit: Regional Parks staff

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

Extensive community outreach was conducted by MIG Inc. and Regional Parks staff to solicit input from a diverse group of citizens, neighbors, stakeholders, and future users during the preparation of the Master Plan. The community was asked to help generate the goals and objectives, develop a list of appropriate uses, and comment regarding the concept designs for future improvements. The outreach was conducted so that the community would have meaningful influence on the Master Plan, which would guide the long-term vision for preservation, public use of the property, and management of natural and cultural resources.

### Background and Methodology

The Tolay Lake Regional Park master planning process is divided into three major phases: Phase 1: Discovery, Phase 2: Plan Development, and Phase 3: the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The public outreach process was conducted during Phase 1 and Phase 2 and included a variety of public engagement activities designed to solicit stakeholder and community input regarding desired future activities in the Park. Input was solicited via three community workshops, a focus group on trail use and trail issues, a survey posted online and made available at the Fall Festival in 2012, and interviews with key stakeholders. MIG also facilitated multiple meetings with the Tribe. A summary of those meetings can be found in Appendix A.

Phase 1, Discovery, included Community Workshop #1. This workshop included a variety of public engagement activities designed to solicit stakeholder and community input regarding desired future activities.

During Phase 2: Plan Development, the project team developed the Master Plan conceptual plan alternatives based on the input, as well as evaluations made on the basis of consistency with existing Regional Parks' policies; impacts to natural and cultural resources; impacts on health and safety; impacts to neighbors; costs to build, operate, and maintain; and consistency with federal, state and local environmental laws.

Following the Plan Development tasks, Community Workshop #2 was held to solicit stakeholder and public feedback on the conceptual plan alternatives developed as part of those tasks. Feedback received at this workshop was factored into development of the Master Plan presented herein.

### Summary of Community Meetings

The community meetings included presentations and provided public input opportunities on the community's vision for the Park. Each meeting presented the public with new information, while referring to the results and direction from earlier meetings. Full reports on the Community Workshops, including participant comments, are located in Appendix A.

#### Community Workshop #1

Community Workshop #1 took place on June 15, 2013 at Tolay Lake Regional Park. The workshop was promoted and advertised through a variety of methods, including direct mail, email, posting on the Regional Parks' website, Regional Parks' Facebook page, and press release to local media.

Over 50 stakeholders and members of the public attended the workshop. The majority were Sonoma County residents, although there were also a number of attendees from the greater Bay Area. A variety of stakeholder groups were represented, including residents, local land owners, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (Tribe), various public agencies, and representatives of specific user groups.

## WORKSHOP FORMAT

MIG and Regional Parks conducted the workshop with assistance from the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD), and Master Plan project partners. Each participant received an agenda, a fact sheet, a copy of the community questionnaire, a handout on how the public can continue to be involved in the Master Plan process, and a comment card.

At the conclusion of the overview presentation, workshop attendees were directed to take part in the “walking workshop” that followed. This consisted of three different stations (Natural and Cultural Resources and Agricultural Practices, Recreation and Trails, and Education and Helping People Visit Tolay Lake Regional Park) where participants could view a map of the park, learn about different aspects of the master plan and contribute ideas relevant to each subject.

Participants were asked to submit comments prior to July 15th, when the next phase of planning begins, with additional workshops and other opportunities to participate. Participants were also encouraged to provide additional written comments via comment cards and to complete the Community Questionnaire if they had not already done so.

## Community Workshop #2

Community Workshop #2 took place on January 16, 2014, at the Petaluma Community Center. The Community Workshop #2 was noticed in a similar manner to Community Workshop #1, with the addition of advertisements in La Voz, a bilingual English-Spanish newspaper serving Sonoma and neighboring North Bay counties.

Over 40 stakeholders and members of the public attended the workshop. The majority were Sonoma County residents. A variety of stakeholder groups were represented, including residents, local land owners, the Tribe, various public agencies, and representatives of specific user groups.

## WORKSHOP FORMAT

The workshop was conducted by MIG and Regional Parks, and Master Plan project partners. Each participant received an agenda backed with information on how the public could continue to be involved in the Park Master Plan process; handouts on the Park Vision; conceptual plan alternatives and interpretive concepts; and comment form.

The evening began with a half-hour Open House, during which participants were encouraged to view displays depicting existing conditions and detailing conceptual plan options. Three alternatives were detailed, with Alternative Option A having the smallest development footprint and Alternative Options B and C having successively larger footprints. Potential interpretive concepts and “story zones” giving information about different aspects of the natural, cultural and agricultural history were also listed, with a map displaying where these zones might be located.

A “walking workshop” that included two stations was used to solicit feedback from participants. The two stations were as follows:



Photo credit: MIG

- Station 1: Alternatives for Planning Issues; Conceptual Plan Options for Overall Project Area; Proposed Interpretive Elements
- Station 2: Conceptual Plan Options for Northern Park Core Area; Proposed Interpretive Elements

Workshop attendees were split into two groups of approximately equal size and given approximately 25 minutes to participate in discussion at each station. During each session, facilitators and project staff answered participants' questions and recorded their feedback on flipchart paper.

At the conclusion of the "walking workshop" discussions, the larger group reconvened for a final question-and-answer and comment period.

### Community Workshop #3

Community Workshop #3 presented the Draft Master Plan to the public.

The Workshop held April 22, 2015, was the final development workshop for the Master Plan. The preferred elements of the Master Plan were presented, based on additional studies and public input from Workshop #2. Participants were invited to review the plans at three stations. Station One presented the North Park Core Area final preferred draft. Station Two presented the lake restoration alternatives, including the preferred alternative. Station Three presented interior and trails. At each station, project experts and Regional Park staff and members of the Tribe answered questions; public comments were recorded by meeting facilitators.

### Focus Group on Trail Users

The focus group was held in spring of 2013 at Tolay Lake Regional Park, and included 12 participants. Participants represented various organizations including: Sonoma County Trails Council; Regional Parks Mounted Assistance Unit; Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter; Empire Runners Association; Sonoma County Bike Coalition; Sonoma County Horse Council; Santa Rosa Junior College Disability; and the Tribe. Five topics were discussed with participants, which included:

- Ideal trail system
- Desires for trail infrastructure
- Seasonal trail closures
- Trail access and staging areas
- Special events and races

Key findings for these topics are summarized in the following sections.

### Ideal Trail System

Participants desired as many miles as possible, with a diversity of trail types. Trail types desired include backcountry trails, narrow trails, ADA-accessible trails, and stacked loops that include easy, moderate, and hard loops. There was a desire for hiker only trails for resource protection purposes, but also a desire for multi-use trails.

Participants raised concerns about illegal trails and illegal activities. Participants believed that single use trails must be patrolled, otherwise, illegal activities can occur. In regard to dogs, participants thought the current dogs on leash regulation should remain. One participant indicated there should be a major connecting trail through the park interior to Highway 121, and which should then connect to the San Francisco Bay Trail. Several participants thought it was important to establish a small centralized hiking area that was family oriented and met ADA accessibility requirements.

## Desires for Trail Infrastructure

It would be helpful on the centralized small trail area around the Cardoza Ranch buildings to have benches, and at scenic viewpoints. Trails should have good signage, but simple, easy to maintain and easy to replace. Trails should include interpretive signs so people can understand and know the Park. Trail maps should identify drinking water locations and have water for horses since the property is mostly dry. Picnic tables should be located at viewpoints.

The Master Plan should have trail design standards; for example, there should be a standard to maintain adequate lines of sight for user safety, especially if trails are located in heavily vegetated areas. There are multiple gates (16 currently) so they need to be equestrian friendly. One participant suggested installing water troughs, maybe at the “three bridges” location.

There was some discussion on cattle grazing in the Park. One participant stated that Regional Parks should consider use of old cow trails for new trails. One participant asked if Regional Parks can eliminate cattle grazing. However, another participant stated that grazing is good for ecological system maintenance.

## Seasonal Trail Closures

There is damage to trails in the bottom of Tolay Valley during the wet season. Regional Parks should supply online information on seasonal trail closures. Overall, participants did not express much concern about seasonal closures, participants overall accept that closures are necessary to protect trails.

## Access and Staging

There was some discussion about providing access and staging areas to support trail use. One participant asked if having an entrance from Highway 121 would be possible. One participant remarked that staging area from Cannon Lane is good as is, while another participant desired establishment of equestrian overnight areas.



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## Special Events and Races

Participants believe there should not be races for bikes or equestrians, but a 10k run might be acceptable. Participants overall were open to the idea of encouraging youth events, high school events if they could be managed effectively. Overall, most participants did not support the idea of hosting large events.

### *Summary of Stakeholder Interviews*

During 2013, six stakeholder interviews were conducted with the following individuals: Lorelle Ross and Gene Buvelot from the Tribe; Nick Silva, from the Lakeville Fire Department; Steve Page, from Sonoma Raceway; Fred Cline, neighboring property owner; Nancy Lilly, neighboring property owner; and Dr. Lee Schaller and Ana Keller, neighboring property owners. Interview participants were asked a common set of questions, which included:

- What is your history or experience with the Tolay Lake property?
- What three words would you use to characterize the park land and property now?
- What are the most valuable features of the land and property?
- What are your biggest fears about what could happen to the Park?
- What are the major issues or challenges for the Master Plan from your perspective?

Specific responses from each party above have been kept confidential. However, some general comments can be made from the results of the six interviews. Neighboring property owners are concerned about potential nuisance activities and trespass issues. Enforcement of park regulations and respecting property boundaries will be a critical aspect of implementing the master plan. Several interview participants have had a 20-year+ history with the Park properties. One interview participant's family has lived nearby for more than 100 years. Most of the interview participants are concerned about the potential for over developing the Park. A few participants expressed concern about what is involved with lake restoration and the potential for flooding on neighboring properties. Some of the neighboring landowners would like additional trees planted. One interview participant believes one of the Park's purposes should be to demonstrate sustainable agriculture practices. One interview participant is concerned about Park access, and thinks access needs to be improved to provide better responses to emergencies.

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