



## **San Luis Obispo County Park & Recreation Commission 2011 - 2013 Report to Board of Supervisors**

The response to the 2010 Parks and Recreation Commission report from the Board of Supervisors was a clear confirmation of the importance of County Parks. The Commission greatly appreciates the attention and support the Board of Supervisors has given to County Parks. Per Commission's request, the Board's action for the Parks FY 2011-12, FY 2012-13 and FY 2013-14 budgets did not include any reductions to General Fund allocations for County Parks. This action underlined the importance of parks and the need to retain operating funding in these tight fiscal times. Funding was also provided to purchase and install an on-line Park Reservations & Registration System. In addition, though funding was not available for the entire Needs Assessment, a project was established and funded to provide a portion of the project. This 2011-2013 report provides an update on the progress that has been made on County Park projects and priorities.

## **2010 Goal: Complete the Needs Assessment**

The importance of completing a Parks and Recreation – Needs Assessment (NA) was stated in the 2006 Parks and Recreation Element and has been noted many times since. The Board supported PRC priorities for 2010 with approval of a special project including funding of \$30,000 to help start the Needs Assessment. It was hoped that this funding, combined with Cal Poly students' efforts, could complete a portion of the work in FY 2011-12. A full NA would provide a road map for decision makers assembled with recreational wants and needs input from all regions of the County and input from all user groups. While park development funds are limited at present, such a study will be essential once funding becomes more available through residential development or grant sources.

### **Accomplishments:**

Staff initiated conversations with Cal Poly professors to determine support for student projects that would complete portions of the NA while meeting curricula requirements for the students. While some interest was expressed, no professors accepted the project as it was deemed not feasible given the short timeframes of the quarter system and turnover of students.

Staff then focused on another grant opportunity. Working in conjunction with Planning and Building Department, staff located a Sustainable Communities grant opportunity that could provide funding for a significant portion of the NA. The Board approved a grant application on February 7, 2012 and the application was delivered to the State of California before the end of March 2012. This grant was intended to provide the County wide survey that would provide a foundation of needs and desires as expressed by a valid sample of our residents in each community. While not approaching a complete NA, this information would have been utilized to provide recommendations to future projects. However, the application was not selected for funding.

No funding has been located; no additional actions were taken on this project.

### **2013 Recommendation:**

Currently the Commission is maintaining a list of priority projects based on the PRE and utilizing the PRE to prioritize new projects. In addition, as many local groups conduct needs assessments in their community, this information will be added to the prioritization process. Although this does not replace the need for a complete NA, at this time with a shortage of funds, an abundance of high priority projects and no partner to conduct the study the commission is opting to continue with the current process.

However, if funds or a partnership becomes available, the commission would like to implement a comprehensive Needs Assessment for the County.

**2010 Goal: Inventory and map easements we have previously received through the Outstanding Trail Offer (OTO) process and engage the community to take a stake in their trails.**

**Accomplishments:**

Staff has made great strides in completing review and acceptance of Outstanding Trail Offers. Working in batches to address OTO's throughout the County. In addition, community groups have been engaged and four new Adopt-A-Trail agreements have been completed to meet maintenance needs for a portion of the Bob Jones Trail in Avila Beach, The Vineyard Trail in Templeton, The Inga Trail in Nipomo and the Sweet Gum Trail in Nipomo.

**2013 Recommendations:**

The Commission recommends the remaining OTO's be completed, begin the process of review the mapped easements and work with the TAC to identify a plan to complete priority segments.

**2010 Goal: County not consider further reductions to Parks General Fund support.**

**Accomplishments:**

The Board approved operating budgets for FY 2011-12, FY 2012-13 and FY 2013-14 did not require any reductions to General Fund support. The Commission appreciates the Board of Supervisors support for parks and understands that many other services and programs received reduced General Fund for the same period. The Board's support for County Parks has enabled staffing to remain consistent. Though the operating budget is not optimal, funding has been maintained to provide safe and usable parks and recreation areas.

In addition, at the close of FY 2011-12, the Board approved an additional \$600,000 for Park Projects Reserves. A portion of these funds have been allocated to high priority projects (Cayucos Pier, Rios Caledonia, ADA lifts for County Pools and Bob Jones Pathway) with \$287,000 remaining in the Reserve.

**2013 Recommendations:**

The Commission requests that the Board continues to support no reduction in the General Fund support. This had been tremendously helpful in maintaining safe usable parks and recreation areas for our community. The Commission also recommends the remaining funds from the \$600,000 allocated for deferred park maintenance is allocated to continue major deferred maintenance as well as opportunities for completion of major projects.

**2010 Long Term Goal: Improve the reservation system to a web-based up to date, technologically advanced system that is both convenient to customers and efficient for Parks.**

**Accomplishments:**

In June 2011, staff completed debt service retirement for the failed, previous attempt to provide such a system. Staff conducted a Kaizen event to address the County Parks Campground Reservations System. This was an in-depth, multi-level approach to examine all aspects of our current system and locate opportunities for improvement. Along this line, work continues to improve the phone-in reservation system that will continue to be needed for those who desire individual services.

Staff created a business plan and established a project for purchase of a new system for on-line campground reservations to better serve customer needs while reducing staff costs. Funding was identified from the Countywide Automation Fund and a Request for Proposals was released in spring 2012. The preferred vendor (Art Street International, CAMAVA) was selected. Construction and installation of the new web-based site began in December 2012. In September 2013, the new site was launched and is now fully functional to place reservations 24/7.

This system provides full Park facility mapping for all County Park sites throughout the County with ability to scroll over each site to gain information and click to reach the maps for the specific sites. Navigation further into the regional park site provides the visitor maps of each campground loop and photos with information for each individual camp site, a three month calendar noting reservations already in place and dates available up to one-year ahead.

Reservations may be placed through a linked secure site with credit card and a reservation confirmation may be printed immediately upon payment for the reservation. County Parks website ([www.SLOCountyParks.org](http://www.SLOCountyParks.org)) provides a link icon that has already been receiving dozens of reservations outside of the past Monday – Friday, 8:00am to 5:00 pm availability. In January 2014, over 30% of reservations were placed through the new system. This early success points toward a positive customer service and financial outcome for the project.

**2013 Recommendations:**

The Commission is very pleased with the outcome of this project. Staff should be commended on the selection and implementation of the reservation system. Additionally, the Commission recommends continued support and improvement of the website and marketing of the reservation system.

## **2010 Long Term Goal: Enhance marketing efforts to increase the knowledge and use of County Parks.**

### **Accomplishments:**

Staff conducted the first ever marketing campaign to Los Angeles, the Central Valley and Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. Advertisements were placed in the LA Times and major newspapers of those communities and using the web list of Park customers. Promotional offers were introduced and customers increased their spending as compared with previous years.

Through the Board and County Administration support, County Parks received funding to work with the SLO County Visitors Conference Bureau for FY 2011-12. County Parks and Golf created an exceptional display of campground and golf services at the main event for Savor the Central Coast. Many hundreds of residents and visitors made their way through the display booth and participated in games to win prizes such as discount coupons for golf or camping.

Staff continued promotional offers through summer and fall of 2011 succeeding in nominal improvements to fee-based park revenues. By year-end FY 2011-12 revenues had improved approximately 6% as compared with the previous fiscal year.

In May 2012, County Parks and Golf created the first annual Outdoor Discovery Festival to promote all of the services provided with our staff, partners and concessionaires. Print and radio advertisements provided excellent exposure for County Parks and recreation. Located at Lopez Lake, this festival drew several hundred day entries that improved revenues and provided over 120 children the opportunity to complete the DEER Challenge. Each child completed a minimum of ten of the eighteen recreational activities that day. From archery to golf to kayaking to learning to use a compass or ride a mountain bike on one of our scenic trails – the kids **Discovered the Environment through Education and Recreation (DEER)**. Hundreds of visitors and campers enjoyed the music of two local bands, food from non-profit groups and caterers and many have returned to become regular visitors.

In June 2012 County Golf hosted the Morro Bay Oyster Festival at Morro Bay Golf Course. While the course remained open for play and accomplished rounds similar to the previous years, thousands of residents and tourists flooded the golf course to enjoy a festival built around foods and drinks produced locally. As host to the festival, the course received excellent exposure to visitors from as far away as San Diego and San Francisco who attended the festival and were not previously aware of the unique beauty of this course.

In FY 2012/13 County Parks received additional funding to work with the SLO County Visitors Conference Bureau. County Parks and Golf created another exceptional display of campground and golf services at the main event for Savor the Central Coast. As with the previous year, many hundreds of residents and visitors made their way through the display booth and participated in games to win prizes such as discount coupons for golf or camping. However, the response as measured by the small number of “Free Camping/Golf” and discount coupons that have been redeemed did not support continuing with Savor the Central Coast event in 2013.

In May 2013, County Parks and Golf provided the second annual Outdoor Discovery Festival to promote all of our parks and recreation services. Print and radio advertising was expanded to Santa Barbara County and drew over four hundred day entries that improved revenues and provided over 139 children the opportunity to complete the DEER Challenge. Each child completed a minimum of ten of the eighteen recreational activities that day. Stand up paddle boarding was added to the long list of activities provided in 2012 – once again the kids Discover the Environment through Education and Recreation (DEER). Hundreds of visitors and campers enjoyed the music of three local bands, food from non-profit groups and caterers. County Parks has already been asked for camping reservations for the 2014 festival as the community is learning more and more about the services available through County Parks and Golf.

Funding was provided in FY 13-14 operating budgets to perform Marketing and Promotions activities directly with Park and Golf staffs rather than through the Visitors Conference Bureau.

County Parks and Golf kicked off the new fiscal year in a very big way. In July of 2013, we took our marketing and promotions team to the Mid-State Fair! Park Rangers staffed an exciting and educational booth for all eleven days of the California Mid-State Fair. Thousands of visitors passed by our booth and 1,300 kids took part in the DEER Challenge to identify foot prints and match them to mounted animals: a Black Bear, a Badger, Two Foxes, and a Raccoon. While the Rangers guided the kids through the DEER Challenge, parents provided their e-mail addresses for a chance to win a camping package. In this manner we obtained over 750 new e-mail contacts to inform customers of promotional specials to be run in both the cool season and mid-week days of the warm season.

While all of this was going on, the Golf Division Greenskeepers and Concessionaires staffed their portion of the booth with their Golf Simulator. Each visitor took swings simulating actual golf play on the world-famous 17<sup>th</sup> hole of Pebble Beach GC. Prizes were awarded to “Closest to the Hole” for each day with winners receiving free rounds of golf. Each golfer provided an e-mail address for future contacts as we and our concessionaires provide discounts and special events for our customers.

County parks and Golf continues to emphasize Marketing and Promotions as we have contracted with KCOY for short commercials to run on local television in fall 2013. Staff will measure the outcomes of these activities and continue to reach out to new customers while presenting new promotions and activities for our existing customers.

### **2013 Recommendations:**

The Commission recommends continued efforts in marketing and branding SLO County Parks including signage at facilities. In addition the Commission recommends an evaluation of current effort to determine the return on investment for each campaign, evaluate extending or repeating the campaign and developing new ideas for marketing.

**2013 Long Term Goals:**

Please see Appendix C for a list of additional long term goals.

The Commission recommends the following for added long term goals:

- Continue efforts toward completion of major regional trails, Bob Jones, SLO to Pismo, SLO to Morro Bay, and portions of the Coastal Trail and the Anza Trail
- Continue to work to find opportunities for enhanced Park facilities in underserved communities.
- Continue to cultivate strategic partnerships and develop an ongoing community relations program to gain support for parks and recreation, and determine needs throughout the County.

**Attachments:**

A: 2011-2013 Project Accomplishments

B: 2011-2013 Priority Projects List

C: Long Term Goals