



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 5/13/2025

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Regional Parks
Staff Name and Phone Number: Steve Ehret, 707-565-1107
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Fourth

Title:

Russian River Parkway Project

Recommended Action:

Adopt a Resolution for the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Russian River Parkway Project and approving the Project.

Executive Summary:

Regional Parks has prepared an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (ISMND) for the Russian River Parkway Project (Project). The Project will create three new formal public access areas to the Russian River and a connector path along a 1.75 mile stretch of Geysers Road between Cloverdale and the Mendocino County line (see Exhibit A). The three access areas to be improved total approximately 19 acres. The Project includes construction of trailheads, parking areas, picnic facilities, restrooms, refuse and recycling containers, interpretive features, new and improved trails accessing the Russian River, a connector path along Geysers Road to the three use areas, and invasive species management.

The Project supports the northern portion of the Russian River Waterway Trail identified in the Open Space and Resource Conservation Element Policy OSRC-17d of the Sonoma County General Plan 2020.

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and as recommended by the Environmental Review Committee, an ISMND was prepared for the Project. The ISMND was released for public review and comment on August 9, 2024. During the public review period several comments were received and as a result, minor modifications were made to the ISMND. None of the comments received, the responses provided, or minor changes to the document affected the conclusions of the ISMND.

Regional Parks recommends the Board approve the resolution adopting the ISMND for the Russian River Parkway Project, creating three new formal access areas to the Russian River with new public amenities between Cloverdale and the Sonoma County/Mendocino County line, and approve the Project.

Discussion:

Historically, access to the Russian River in northern Sonoma County above Preston Bridge has been informal with minimal management and services to support the safe and sanitary use of one of Sonoma County's most important resources. The overall goal of the Project is to create new managed formal public access to the Russian River north of Cloverdale along Geysers Road with appropriate amenities to support the activities.

Regional Parks' management of the Project area for recreational use will improve degraded environmental conditions and discourage illegal activities, such as camping, trespass, litter, firearm use, and dumping of vehicles. Regional Parks management of the area will also reduce community conflicts between neighbors and the public and provide an identified organization to respond to concerns and issues as they arise. Recently, Regional Parks and the Sheriff's Unit dedicated to County parks have been working with neighbors and other stakeholders to address some ongoing concerns on the park property. Regional Parks has also coordinated with the Russian Riverkeeper and other organizations for clean-up and homeless outreach activities and will continue these partnerships moving forward.

The Project area is a subset of a 48-acre highway easement that was granted to the County by the State in 2007 after the Highway 101 bypass was completed by Caltrans along with acquisition of Russian River Access off Geysers Road in 2020. The fee title acquisition included two additional areas that extend down to the Russian River, providing opportunities for river access and recreation. The Geysers Road right-of-way and the northern most access area included in the 19-acre Project property is adjacent to the Mendocino County line and was already owned by the County in Fee. The remaining two access areas were acquired through a quitclaim deed accepted by the Board of Supervisors in 2020. The combined access rights allowed the County to proceed with providing North County with a new river access park, described as the Russian River Parkway Project.

The master planning and CEQA process for the Project and subsequent ISMND began in 2017 at the Citrus Fair in Cloverdale. Regional Parks prepared preliminary site assessment materials and project objectives to share with the public, and a survey to solicit initial comments and information based on local knowledge. After collecting initial public input, cultural and biological resource surveys were conducted, and reports prepared to guide the development of conceptual alternatives to share with partner agencies and the public.

In 2020, Regional Parks presented a general concept for the Project to the Cloverdale City Council, including a strategy for public outreach. The original outreach plan included public workshops, but due to the Covid outbreak, opportunities for public engagement were mostly moved to virtual formats and other types of non-contact methods. These included on-line presentations, on-line postings with interactive maps, on-line and mailed surveys, videos, zoom and postcard stakeholder outreach.

The result of the community and stakeholder engagement was a preferred Russian River Parkway Project and the proposed Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Project. Postcards notifying the public of the availability of the ISMND and the public comment period were sent to all property owners within 1000 feet of the park property.

Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration:

The Project includes the implementation of a Master Plan with improvements designed for public access based on community engagement, environmental and cultural resource protection, geotechnical conditions, public safety, and other factors.

Potential impacts were identified in the Initial Study, along with mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts to less than significant. The primary potential Project impacts and the majority of the mitigation measures are directly related to air quality and biological resources. The specific areas that were addressed

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and where mitigation measures will be implemented as applicable are: Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology and Soils, and Transportation. In total, there are forty-one individual mitigation measures included in the ISMND and in the Mitigation and Monitoring Plan for the Project.

On July 16, 2024, the proposed ISMND was presented to the Sonoma County Environmental Review Committee (ERC) to determine the type and adequacy of the document for the Project to be prepared under CEQA. The ERC requested some minor changes to the document, and once these changes were made, determined that a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) was the appropriate CEQA document for the project.

Regional Parks prepared the MND and submitted it to the State Clearinghouse for public review. The 30-day public review period pursuant to CEQA occurred from August 9, 2024, to September 9, 2024. Regional Parks received letter comments from one individual prior to the release of the MND regarding trash, restrooms, signs, and fires along with a list of possible solutions. These issues were already addressed in the master plan and ISMND, and responses were sent to the individual and are included in the MND.

Regional Parks recommends the Board approve the resolution adopting the Mitigated Negative Declaration and approve the Project for implementation.

With approval, Regional Parks would proceed with the project. Phase 1 design is nearly complete, with construction anticipated starting fall of 2025 through summer of 2026.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

September 12, 2023, Board of Supervisors accepted the County of Sonoma Capital Project Plan 2023-2028, including subject Preston River Access Phase 1 project.

July 7, 2020, by Resolution 20-0238 Board of Supervisors accepted the Quitclaim Deed for 48-acre County highway easement to provide safe amenities for the public's use of this river access opportunity and authorized filing of a notice of exemption pursuant to CEQA.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

None

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

None

Attachments:

Resolution

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Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration
Exhibit A Project Location Map

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

Russian River Parkway Response to Comments Memo
Russian River Parkway Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan