



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

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: Bert Whitaker, 707-565-2041
Vote Requirement: 4/5th
Supervisorial District(s): Fifth

Title:

Commercial Berthing Credit at County of Sonoma Marinas

Recommended Action:

Adopt a Budget Resolution programming \$100,000 of FY 2024-25 General Fund Contingencies to Regional Parks - Spud Point Marina Enterprise Fund to finance a temporary waiver of dock fees at County of Sonoma Marinas for commercial and charter fishing vessels who apply for financial hardship assistance. (4/5th Vote)

Executive Summary:

The commercial fishing fleet is poised to endure another significant economic setback due to a shortened crab season and cancelled salmon season. This is the third year in a row of unprecedented salmon closure and shortened crab seasons. This year, in addition to the commercial closure of salmon, sport fishing will be severely restricted, also impacting commercial charter boat business.

The Board of Supervisors has previously approved General Fund contingency allocations to support commercial fishing operators impacted by fishery closures:

- June 12, 2023 - Approved \$150,000 in GF contingencies for a temporary waiver of dock fees and establishment of the Abandoned Vessel Abatement Fund.
- May 14, 2024 - Approved an additional \$100,000 in GF contingencies for continuation of the Commercial Berthing Credit Program.

Combined, these waivers have provided support to approximately 70% of eligible commercial fishing vessel operators. In 2024, 59 commercial vessel operators received waivers and in 2023, 92 operators received waivers.

This funding provides temporary relief intended to help commercial fishing operators bridge the economic gap caused by the current salmon closure and reduced crab season. For many, this support offers the stability needed to prepare for the next salmon season or invest in gear and operations to diversify into other available fisheries. By easing the immediate financial burden of berthing costs, the program helps maintain commercial fishing activity in Sonoma County and supports fishers' ability to adapt and remain viable in an increasingly unpredictable regulatory and environmental landscape.

General Fund support is requested rather than waiving fees outright to avoid further destabilizing the Spud Point Marina Enterprise Fund. Currently, Spud Point Marina is operating at an approximate \$50,000 deficit,

which staff are working to mitigate through reductions in extra help staffing, decreased operating hours, and deferral of non-essential maintenance and service projects. The marina is also experiencing a \$250,000 decline in total revenue compared to the prior fiscal year, anecdotally reflecting the cumulative impact of multiple years of commercial fishing hardship. As an enterprise fund, Spud Point relies entirely on revenue from berthing, fuel, ice, and wharfage. A poor fishing season not only affects the livelihoods of commercial operators but also diminishes the marina's ability to sustain operations. Backfilling lost revenue with General Fund support ensures that financial relief can be provided to operators without further eroding the infrastructure and services critical to the commercial fleet's long-term viability.

Discussion:

The County operates three marinas in Bodega Bay, providing berthing and other services to support the commercial fishing fleet. Currently, 95 commercial fishing vessels berth at County-owned marinas in Bodega Bay.

The 2024 winter crab season was three months shorter than usual, and allowable crab fishing equipment was reduced by 50% to protect whale populations. This limited commercial fishing operations ability to catch crab by at least half. Compounding this, the 2024 commercial salmon season was canceled for a third consecutive year. Typically, there are times of opportunity between closures and the continued restrictions are compounding. Recreational sport salmon fishing is also severely restricted, with shortened season duration and strict catch limits per vessel.

The combined impact of the shortened 2024 crab season, the continued cancellation of the commercial salmon season, and multiple years of delayed openings and early closures for both crab and salmon fisheries have resulted in significant financial hardship for commercial operators. Many operators are now facing several consecutive years of lost income and unable to cover dock fees. While some attempt to sell their boats, depressed market conditions and ongoing regulatory uncertainty often make this impossible, leading to vessel abandonment and loss of livelihood.

Spud Point Marina operates as an enterprise fund, meaning its operations rely entirely on revenue generated from services like berthing, fuel, ice, and wharfage. When commercial fishing seasons are shortened or canceled, as seen with the recent crab and salmon closures, this directly impacts the marina's revenue. In response, Spud Point has reduced operating hours and staffing, prioritized only emergency repairs, and deferred routine maintenance. Because of these operational and financial constraints, the marina is unable to subsidize berth holders experiencing hardship, despite the growing need for support within the commercial fishing community.

In May 2024, the Board of Supervisors approved a request from Regional Parks to allocate \$100,000 in Fiscal Year 2023-24 General Fund contingencies to provide temporary relief from dock fees for commercial operators

Regional Parks, in collaboration with the Spud Point Advisory Committee and County Counsel, developed a streamlined application process allowing individual commercial fishing vessels and charter vessels to apply for monthly berthing fee waivers. Eligibility required an active commercial fishing permit issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and a minimum of six commercial landings between 2021 and 2023. Priority was given to applicants demonstrating significant financial hardship and meaningful contributions to the local fishing economy. Charter boat operators actively fishing were eligible for a percentage reduction in berthing

fees. Additional consideration was given to circumstances where a fee waiver could help prevent vessel abandonment and the associated costs of removal and disposal.

The waiver program was successful. Between July and December 2024, Regional Parks issued 307 dock fee waivers, expending the full \$100,000 allocation as well as the unspent remainder of the 2023 funding to support 59 commercial operators (70% of the operators who were eligible). Over the same period in 2023, the berthing credit program provided 296 dock fee waivers at a cost of \$94,259.24 which included 92 commercial operators (64% of the operators who were eligible).

Regional Parks now requests an additional \$100,000 in General Fund contingencies to continue providing temporary relief from monthly berthing fees. These funds will support eligible commercial fishers and charter operators impacted by ongoing restrictions in the crab and salmon fisheries. Regional Parks also requests authorization for a six-month suspension of late fees-from June 30, 2025, through December 30, 2025. Late fees on past-due amounts and other delinquent rents would resume on January 1, 2026.

Regional Parks will continue working with the Spud Point Advisory Committee to review monthly applications and ensure that those most in need receive assistance.

General Fund support is necessary because the Spud Point Marina Enterprise Fund does not have sufficient available balance to absorb the cost of the berthing fee waiver program. Over the last three fiscal years, the marina has experienced ongoing financial volatility directly tied to the impacts of poor commercial fishing seasons. In FY 21-22, the unreserved retained earnings available for budgeting were \$98,489. By FY 22-23, the fund had fallen into a deficit of (\$188,795), recovering only slightly in FY 23-24 to \$17,387. However, FY 24-25 is projected to end in a deficit again, with a current estimated shortfall of (\$50,000). These trends reflect the continued revenue loss from reduced wharfage, ice, fuel, and berthing income tied to fishery closures. Without General Fund backfill, offering waivers would deepen the fund's deficit and further delay critical maintenance and operational needs.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Racial Equity:

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

No

Prior Board Actions:

May 14, 2024 - The Board approved the **Commercial Berthing Credit Program** at County of Sonoma Marinas for commercial fishers impacted by the shortened crab season and cancellation of the salmon season. The action included an allocation of **\$100,000 in General Fund contingencies** to support the program.

June 12, 2023 - The Board approved the creation of the **Abandoned Vessel Abatement Fund** to remove abandoned fishing vessels from Bodega Bay marinas and authorized a **temporary waiver of dock fees** for commercial fishers impacted by the salmon season cancellation and crab season delay. The Board allocated **\$150,000 in General Fund contingencies** for this combined effort.

January 12, 2016 - The Board approved a **temporary waiver of dock fees** at County of Sonoma Marinas for commercial fishers impacted by the postponement of the crab season. This action did not include a General

Fund allocation but allowed for a revenue loss to the enterprise fund for the limited duration of the waiver.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY24-25 Adopted	FY25-26 Projected	FY26-27 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested	\$100,000		
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies	\$100,000		
Total Sources	\$100,000		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The \$100,000 of General Fund Contingencies will be transferred into the Spud Point Marina Special Fund. Unspent funds will be carried forward into FY 2025-26, which is when expenditures are expected to begin for this program. An adjustment will be included in FY 2025-26 Q1 Consolidated Budget Adjustments to increase expenditure appropriations in the Spud Point Marina section.

Staffing Impacts: N/A			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

None

Attachments:

Budget Resolution

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None