




December 30, 2014

TO: Harlan L. Kelly, Jr., General Manager 

FROM: Steven R. Ritchie, Assistant General Manager, Water

SUBJECT: Recreation and Education Improvements on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed

SUMMARY

The SFPUC Peninsula Watershed encompasses approximately 23,000 acres of land in San Mateo County. The Peninsula Watershed is a state-designated Fish and Wildlife Refuge, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) administers scenic and recreation easements over these SFPUC properties.

Consistent with the Final Peninsula Watershed Management Plan (PWMP, 2002) and Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 373-97 (attached), the Water Enterprise has been working to provide recreation and education opportunities on the Peninsula Watershed that are compatible with the needs to protect both drinking water quality and a wide array of native, and sometimes rare, species. There are two major regional trail systems that run north/south on the Peninsula Watershed – the Crystal Springs Regional Trail, operated and maintained by San Mateo County Parks; and the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail). The existing Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail Program, operated by the SFPUC, was included in the PWMP Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR, 2001). These regional trails, and related connectors, provide 31 miles of exiting trail access to the Peninsula Watershed.

The Water Enterprise has been working on three new trail projects that were presented in the PWMP (collectively these would provide an additional 11 miles of trail access), plus a fourth that was not included in the PWMP (approximately 5 miles). These are described in more detail below, and shown on the attached Peninsula Watershed Trails map. In addition, once the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension (Ridge Trail Extension) is constructed, the Water Enterprise proposes to make its portion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail available for use under a well-controlled and closely monitored annual permit system to complement its docent-led usage. Coordination and outreach on all of these proposals has occurred with San Mateo County Parks, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

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Bay Area Ridge Trail

The Ridge Trail is a project started in 1987 by the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (Ridge Trail Council) to create an approximately 550-mile long continuous trail for hikers, mountain bicyclists, and equestrians along the ridgelines overlooking San Francisco Bay. The Ridge Trail currently has approximately 340 miles of trail open and permanently protected for recreational use. The proposed construction of the Ridge Trail Extension would fill the largest gap (approximately 6 miles) on the Peninsula Watershed in San Mateo County between Highway 92 and the GGNRA's Phleger Estate (see map, "Planned extension of Ridge Trail").

The PWMP Final Environmental Impact Report (2001) and Final PWMP (2002) included the Ridge Trail Extension. At that time, the specific route was yet to be defined, but was included in the PWMP as two alternatives: (1) trail alignment along Skyline Boulevard or new trail on SFPUC property and/or private property adjacent to Skyline Boulevard, or (2) trail alignment to be included as part of the Highway 92 widening project. SFPUC staff have moved forward with alternative (1) as a new trail on SFPUC property.

Construction of the Ridge Trail Extension would meet the PWMP goal to provide opportunities for compatible recreational uses in the Peninsula Watershed and enhance public education opportunities and awareness of natural resources, water quality, and water supply issues. Similar to the existing Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail, this would provide an opportunity to educate the general public about the SFPUC's responsibilities as a regional water provider and environmental steward of the Peninsula Watershed.

The proposed Ridge Trail Extension would be operated in coordination with the Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail, which currently is operated by the SFPUC under a docent-led only access program three days a week. The docent program is limited to three trips per day, and includes hiking, running, mountain bikes, and equestrian uses. With the completed construction of the Ridge Trail Extension, the SFPUC staff propose to operate the entire length of the Ridge Trail on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed (approximately 16 miles) under an annual permit program. As proposed, the existing uses on Fifield/Cahill would remain unchanged and apply to all 16 miles, and access would be provided 7 days per week, dawn to dusk. Each trail user would be required to apply for an annual permit, and carry this permit with them when using any section of the Ridge Trail on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed. The annual permit program would ensure that trail users are aware of their responsibilities when accessing the trail, and also provide a measure of use to the SFPUC.

Additionally, the Ridge Trail Council has acquired a trail easement from Skylawn Cemetery, which includes approximately 1 mile of the Ridge Trail that connects to SFPUC property immediately to the north and south. As part of these improvements, the SFPUC would accept and record this perpetual easement from the Ridge Trail Council, to facilitate consistent and efficient management of the entire Ridge Trail on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed. Finally, improvements would be made at Cemetery Gate to enhance education opportunities and facilities to support trail users. With these trail head improvements made, the SFPUC would no longer use the Quarry as a trail head for public access to the Ridge Trail.

Ridge Trail Extension Funding and Schedule

The SFPUC received a grant from the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC, \$185,000) in 2010 to develop detailed plans and engineering designs, and in 2013 was recommended for a SCC grant for construction (\$1,000,000). The construction grant also includes planning and design for the 1.5 mile segment of the Ridge Trail on the GGNRA's Phleger Estate, to ensure a continuous and consistent alignment to the south. The current schedule for this work is:

- Final Conceptual Engineering Report – January 2015
- Final Plans and Bid Documents – December 2015
- Award Construction Contract and NTP – February 2016
- Start Construction – April 2016
- Complete Construction – October 2016
- Trail Opening – December 2016

Planned North San Andreas Trail Connector

This trail connection will provide 1.25 miles of new trail from San Mateo County's North San Andreas Trail to GGNRA's Sweeney Ridge property at the Sneath Lane gate (see map, "Planned North San Andreas Connector"). The trail would be on SFPUC Peninsula Watershed lands and would connect existing trail easements operated by San Mateo County and GGNRA. The trail will be multi-modal and provide access to hikers, bikers and equestrians. The design was initiated July 2013 and is expected to be completed by May 2015. Environmental review and final design would then be initiated, with construction targeted for Spring/Summer 2017. This trail connector was described in the PWMP Final EIR (2001) and Final PWMP (2002).

Crystal Springs Regional Trail

In November 2013 the SFPUC approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with San Mateo County to contribute towards the funding of trail improvements on the Crystal Springs Regional Trail, which is operated and maintained by San Mateo County Parks. The funds were used for the construction of security and watershed fencing for the South of Lower Crystal Springs Dam to Highway 92 segment in 2014. This newly constructed trail segment will help close one of the remaining gaps in what will eventually be a 15 mile continuous trail in the Peninsula Watershed (see map, "Crystal Springs Regional Trail").

San Mateo County Parks was also working on closing another gap in this regional trail, south of Highway 92. All of the funding was acquired for construction, but the project is currently on hold pending the resolution of construction and operation permits from federal and state environmental regulatory agencies.

Proposed Whiting Ridge Connector

This trail connection was not included in the PWMP Final EIR (2001) or Final PWMP (2002); it was presented in the GGNRA General Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (2014). The Peninsula Open Space Trust and GGNRA have recently acquired additional properties to the west of the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed, and have started to provide public access (e.g., Rancho Corral de Tierra) on these immediately adjacent lands. No construction of trails would be required (as proposed, the trail would use the existing access road), but there would need to be environmental review and potentially an agreement among the GGNRA and SMC Parks regarding

operations, maintenance, and management of this trail system. The SFPUC staff have begun discussions with staff from these agencies, but the timing and specifics of this project still need to be developed.

Attachments:

Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 373-97

Peninsula Trails map