

Valuable Assets: Parks and Park Rangers

by Michele Beasley

When I first sat down to write this article, I was focused on how the pandemic magnified the importance of parks and park access. With so much closed this summer, parks were open and seen as safe. Thousands of first-time visitors descended on parks seeking fun and escape.

Resulting challenges included littering, enforcing social distancing and addressing unequal access. This latter problem is not new. San Mateo County Parks documented it well in their 2015/2016 Visitor Survey. However, the pandemic forced the issue when people were encouraged to enjoy 'nearby nature'— at first, no more than five miles from home. Some people live conveniently close to parks, while others do not.

Then, over Memorial Day weekend, racial tensions flared nationwide when a white woman called the police on a black birder in New York's Central Park. This begged the question: Who are the parks for? Everyone, we say; yet not everyone feels welcome in parks. If we want to pass on these special places to future generations, that must change.

Parks are the stage on which so many issues are playing out.

And now they are on fire. As I write this, Northern California has the worst air quality in the world from multiple wildfires. That makes it unsafe to go out so we are stuck inside yet again. Fire season has begun and the implications are daunting.

Surely, if 2020 is one thing, it is the year of seeing clearly. Climate change is real. Ignoring it doesn't mean it will ignore us. Forest health is critical. We would do well to honor and acknowl-



A San Mateo County Park Ranger operates a masticator to create a fuel break.

edge the indigenous wisdom that has long used fire to manage the landscape. Parks are an essential part of our green infrastructure. They are not a luxury; they are a necessity. They deserve to be regarded and funded as such.

This is too much to unpack for one newsletter article. Instead, I will focus on something that gets me through the darkest days: gratitude.

Gratitude for firefighters, park rangers and all emergency first responders who rush toward danger to protect life and

property. Firefighting crews from throughout the Western United States came to the aid of California. MidPen sent rangers to assist San Mateo County Parks in containing the fire. Sheriff's Department volunteers evacuated large animals, like horses and goats, away from the fire's path.

When there is so much chaos vying for our attention, a little reframing goes a long way. As Katherine Wright, Interpretive Park Ranger, mused, "I'm

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San Mateo County Parks

Coyote Point Recreation Area
Crystal Springs Regional Trail
San Andreas Segment
Sawyer Camp Segment
Edgewood Park & Preserve
Devil's Slide Trail
Fitzgerald Marine Reserve
Pillar Point Bluff
Flood Park
Friendship Park
Junipero Serra Park
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Memorial Park
Pescadero Creek Park
Sam McDonald Park
Heritage Grove
Mirada Surf
Moss Beach Park
Quarry Park
San Bruno Mountain Park
Sanchez Adobe
San Pedro Valley Park
Tunitas Creek Beach
Woodside Store
Wunderlich Park

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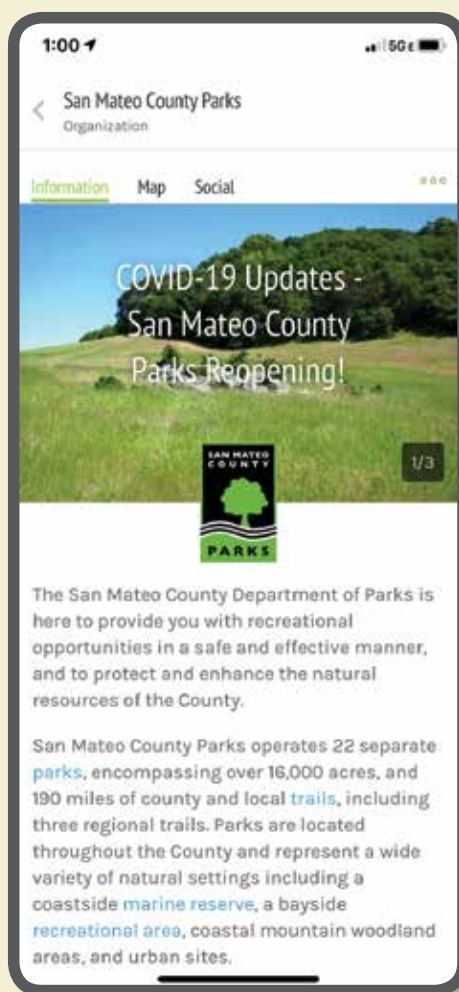
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You can now find San Mateo County Parks on OuterSpatial, an app that is free for the end user. Prepare for your next park visit by accessing current park information from your smartphone. OuterSpatial stands apart from other apps in that park agencies and land managers have direct control over the information presented so you are getting to know the organizations that protect and manage your favorite outdoor places.

- Know before you go- find out about park and trail closures and conditions
- Discover new places- check out nearby parks and have a backup plan in case your first park choice doesn't work out.
- Get connected- find events and volunteer opportunities (as well as virtual outings)
- Stay on track- while out on the trail use the app to see nearby amenities like restrooms, picnic areas and trail junctions
- Share information- document hazards, take photos and answer surveys

The San Mateo County Parks Foundation is proud to sponsor this new service for County Parks and park visitors.



(Continued from page 1)

again reminded of Mr. Roger's quote to 'look for the helpers.'" Helpers are everywhere.

Heroes on the Fire Line

San Mateo County park rangers rushed to the fire line to assist CalFire. With CalFire's resources spread thin fighting hundreds of blazes across the state, San Mateo County Parks' resources were badly needed and proved invaluable.

In addition to keeping people out of the parks and away from danger, our park rangers were cutting fire lines. They used hand tools to scrape away vegetation and reach soil which removes the fuel a fire needs to grow. They also operated heavy equipment, like a masticator, for hours on end to assist in creating fuel breaks.

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers — so many caring people in this world."

— Fred Rogers



Photo: San Mateo County Parks

A masticator is a wood chipper mounted on a tractor.

And as fire approached a repeater*, threatening regional communications, County park rangers cut a fire line within an hour to protect it.

These are brave men and women who worked all hours to contain a wildfire that had been sparked by lightning. They are our essential heroes. Once the fire is contained, efforts refocus on fire prevention projects throughout the park system. More fuel breaks will be created, especially adjacent to neighborhoods, and more areas will be cleared of fire-hazardous plants, like French broom and eucalyptus. And while that is happening, let us not forget, there is still a pandemic with which to deal.

A Hard-Working Team Stretched Thin

During the early days of the pandemic, parks were closed but park rangers continued to work on projects behind the scenes. They renovated campsites at Memorial Park and planted native trees and vegetation at Sanchez Adobe.

To prep for reopening parks, they redoubled efforts to keep restrooms clean and marked one-way trails for socially-distanced hiking. And then they welcomed lots of park visitors.

In fact, at many parks, the number of people using the trails between spring 2019 and spring 2020 doubled. San Pedro Valley, with 6,000 visitors in spring 2019, had 12,600 park visitors this year. Nearly 12,000 people visited San Bruno Mountain in 2019, while this spring over 33,000 hit the trails. The most popular park, Crystal Springs Regional Trail, jumped from 66,300 visitors in 2019 (including cyclists) to 122,000 visitors in 2020 (not including cyclists)!

And with this influx of visitors, there are still only 51 park rangers covering 190 miles of trails and 17,000 acres of parkland. They are stretched thin, doing their best every day to ensure trails are clear, restrooms are clean, and most recently, that fires are put out. So here is a big shout out to our essential workers, San Mateo County Park Rangers. Thank you for all you do to make our parks welcoming, safe and enjoyable! We applaud you.

* a repeater is an electronic device that receives a signal and retransmits it. Repeaters are used to extend transmissions so that the signal can cover longer distances or be received on the other side of an obstruction.



Photo: San Mateo County Parks

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Updates from around the SMC Parks System



Crystal Springs Regional Trail featured on OpenRoad

The 2020 season of *OpenRoad with Doug McConnell* featured **Crystal Springs Regional Trail** and aired on June 28. Park Ranger Katherine Wright, local historian Michael Svanevik and Tim Ramirez with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission talk with Doug about the popular trail, the reservoir's function and the wild watershed that surrounds it. The San Mateo County Parks Foundation is proud to be an underwriter for *OpenRoad*. You can watch this episode at SupportParks.org.



Reserve a camping or picnic site 6 months in advance

Campsites for the 2021 season at **Memorial Park** will be available for reservation starting November 10, 2020 at 12:00am. San Mateo County Parks recently changed how far in advance a reservation can be made for any site that requires one from one year in advance to six months.



Flood Park Parking Fees Removed

It used to cost \$6 to park at **Flood Park** in Menlo Park. Not anymore. At their August 4 meeting the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to eliminate the vehicle entry fee. This is one less barrier keeping people from enjoying their parks.

Next Steps with the Tunitas Creek Beach Improvement Project

San Mateo County Parks is partnering with Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and the Coastal Conservancy to protect natural resources and improve access at **Tunitas Creek Beach**. The community has been invited to provide input as to how this future park should be developed. Phase 1 of the development survey has closed, but stay tuned for another round of online engagement slated for October.

Please Note!

If you have an Annual Parks Pass that expired March 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020, it will be extended through September 30, 2020. Annual passes that expired or will expire July 1, 2020 to April 30, 2021 will be extended three months from the original expiration date.



Wunderlich Oak Woodland Restoration

PG&E and San Mateo County Parks have been engaged in a wildfire prevention and native habitat restoration project at **Wunderlich Park** since last year. The restoration site encompasses 16 acres within the 942-acre park and was thick with trees. A eucalyptus grove had 1,000 – 2,000 trees per acre. Non-native trees and undergrowth have been removed and an oak woodland is being restored. The project resumed this past August with the installation of erosion control elements. Work will occur through September.

Park Ranger Rob Cala captures the magic of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve



Gorgeous sunset over Fitzgerald Marine Reserve



Brooding sea anemone babies



Lightning strikes over the ocean



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For more information, please contact Michele Beasley, Executive Director, at Michele@SupportParks.org or (650) 321-5812.

Our commitment

The San Mateo County Parks Foundation is committed to providing funding to improve the quality of County Parks for our community.

**To get this newsletter by email,
send an email to Michele@supportparks.org**