There’s a lot to get excited about...

by Michele Beasley

When I head to my favorite park, it’s usually for a long hike, and I’m either lost in my thoughts or paying keen attention to the sights and sounds around me. I feel gratitude for clear trails and clean bathrooms. What I’m usually not thinking about is all the work that goes on behind the scenes to make the experience so enjoyable, safe and interesting — for me, you and the nearly 3 million people who head to a San Mateo County park every year.

And the work is significant. It’s amazing when you sit back and acknowledge all the planning and projects underway. Read on for project updates and get excited, because a lot is coming together right now. And that’s a good thing because in 2024, your beloved San Mateo County Parks turns 100.

The Eastern Promenade Project — Bringing the living shoreline back to Coyote Point

Coyote Point is San Mateo County’s premier sandy spot on the bay. The shoreline, though, is plagued by chronic erosion and flooding from king tides, which limits beach access. Without mitigation measures, this problem will only get worse, as scientists predict a four-foot rise in sea levels by 2050.

Well, if you’ve visited Coyote Point lately, then you know a big improvement has been underway. The Eastern Promenade Project is a climate-adaptation project that will facilitate year-round, universal public access to the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The design incorporates a perched sandy beach within a crenulated bay to mimic more resilient natural forms. An elevated Promenade Trail and new linear seat wall will offer places to watch kite-boarders soar and airplanes land. We look forward to walking the Eastern Promenade later this spring!

Upcoming Milestone: On April 22, join San Mateo County Parks for an informal open house to view the improvements.

Flood Park — 86 years young

Flood Park, the second-oldest in the County Parks system, once had a 180,000-gallon, unheated, sixty by one-hundred-foot pool, built in the 1930s. In the 1940s and 1950s, Flood Park was one of the most popular recreation spots in south San Mateo County, with up to 200 people splashing in the pool at any given time. The pool was removed in the 1970s and in the following decades, Flood Park fell into more quiet use.

In 2015, Flood Park began receiving long overdue attention. An assessment revealed that all of the park’s facilities and infrastructure either needed repair or replacement. At the same time, community demand for recreational facilities and a safe place for kids and teens to gather was growing. San Mateo County Parks held a series of community meetings to seek input on what should be included in a redesigned Flood Park. A pump track, basketball court, soccer field and renovated tennis courts were included in the resulting concept plan, which went through environmental review between 2017 and 2019. In 2020, after the Parks Department made changes to the plan to address neighbors’ concerns, the County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the Flood Park Landscape Plan.

One of those changes was to move the soccer field away from neighbors’ back fences. However, this could mean the removal of several mature trees. Now that the planning process has moved into the design phase, some are keen to move the soccer field again to protect the trees, a mix of coast live oak and California bay laurel. The challenge though, is where?

It is very important that the planned site for the soccer field remain separate from the baseball field. One cannot forget the numer-
(Continued from previous page)

ous local youth who passionately advocated for the soccer field. Many of them spoke at the Board of Supervisors’ hearing, like Destiny, age 14, “I forget all of my problems when I play soccer.” Meeting the needs of youth is a critical goal (no pun intended).

In the design phase, we’d like to see as many healthy trees preserved as possible. We also want to see this process move forward and the many diverse interests and previously heard hopes and desires honored.

**Upcoming Milestone:**

Parks is in the final phase of the planning process before breaking ground in early 2023. Community workshops and pop-up events will be held between now and September.

**Memorial Park — San Mateo County’s first park is getting ready for its centennial**

In 2024, we’ll celebrate the birth of San Mateo County Parks and the very first county park, Memorial Park. Leading up to that significant milestone, this popular redwood park is benefiting from major infrastructure improvements. In 2017, a new water treatment plant was installed that delivers clean water from Pescadero Creek to campsites. A new wastewater treatment plant and collection system was completed in 2021.

During the pandemic, Memorial Park was closed for additional upgrades including new accessible restroom and shower buildings with accessible water fountains. This is a HUGE improvement over the previous, derelict restrooms. San Mateo County Parks’ goal is to have installed 21 new restroom and combination restroom/shower buildings by July 2024. Roadways have also been resurfaced and new ADA parking spots delineated.

**Recent Milestone:**

Memorial Park opened to campers again Memorial Day weekend 2021 after being closed for 18 months. Campers with reservations in Sequoia, Redwood and Tan Oak areas were the first to experience the improvements. A new group campground, the Doug Fir Group Campground with a capacity of up to 30 people, is being added in the Sequoia area.

**Coastside Wildfire Safety — Agencies work together to mitigate fire risk at Quarry Park**

A wildfire in El Granada is a big fear and real risk. CAL FIRE, San Mateo County Parks and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) are taking proactive steps to mitigate risk at Quarry Park, which CAL FIRE classifies as a Very High Fire Severity Zone.

Proactive action at home means having a plan for your family in case of a major wildfire, including identifying evacuation routes, and making sure your home has at least 100 feet of defensible space. Proactive action in the parks means creating shaded fuel breaks and...
reducing fuel loads like dead and dying vegetation.

In the year ahead at Quarry Park, County Parks and RCD will work on a 100-acre fire mitigation project that builds upon the original 100 acres of fuel reduction work conducted in 2019. Understory vegetation near trails less than 10 inches in diameter, including eucalyptus and acacia, will be removed. This type of work decreases a fire's intensity, slows its progress and prevents fire from reaching the canopy. It also helps firefighters respond to fire while allowing people to evacuate. Additional benefits include supporting native plant growth and a more resilient forest.

**Recent Milestone:** A wildfire fuel reduction project near the meadow was completed, clearing the way for a pump track to be built.

**Quarry Park Pump Track — Popular element in Master Plan moves forward**

A pump track is a continuous circuit of banked turns interspersed by rollers and other features that cyclists can ride on without pedaling. Growing in popularity, the first two pump tracks coming to San Mateo County are in county parks — Flood Park and Quarry Park, with the latter moving forward very soon.

San Mateo County Parks worked with the Midcoast and mountain biking communities on the "Flying X" design of the pump track, which will be located in the meadow at Quarry Park. The need to complete the first phase of a wildfire fuel reduction project near the meadow took precedence, and ensures no conflict between that work and the construction of the pump track.

**Upcoming Milestone:**
American Ramp Company was selected as the contractor in March and construction will break ground soon with a goal of completing this project by June.

**Off-leash dogs — A balancing act between habitat and recreation**

For the last few years, San Mateo County Parks has become more welcoming of dogs and their humans. Access for dogs on leash was expanded to Junipero Serra Park in San Bruno and Coyote Point in San Mateo in 2019. Dogs on leash were already allowed at most coastal parks. The conversation then shifted to areas where dogs could be off-leash. A dog policy committee recommended Quarry Park in El Granada and Pillar Point Bluff in Moss Beach.

While Quarry Park was an agreeable place for off-leash dogs to most, Pillar Point Bluff raised alarms among environmentalists. Pillar Point Bluff is a rare environmental and geological resource. Off-leash dogs can threaten wildlife and their habitats, as well as other dogs and people. Many special status species including osprey, perigrine falcon, burrowing owl, San Francisco garter snake and California red-legged frog have been reported at Pillar Point Bluff. Thus, the bluff is protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Providing parks that meet the needs of our diverse communities is challenging. The key is to remember what we do have access to — coastal trails, scenic vistas and a diversity of landscapes and wildlife — and to give thanks every day for these blessings.

**Recent Milestone:** The County Planning Commission denied the permit for the off-leash dog pilot program at their February meeting due to concerns raised by the environmental community. The Parks Dept. is coming back to the Board of Supervisors in April with a compromise — Parks is amending the request to only do the off-leash dog pilot program at Quarry Park.

**Wunderlich and Huddart Forest Health Work — Fighting fire before it starts**

Important and long overdue efforts to reduce wildfire fuel began at Wunderlich and Huddart County Parks a few years ago.

San Mateo County Parks partners with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District to do this work, which is also supported with funding from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Crews are wrapping up work at Wunderlich Park, where they have created shaded fuel breaks by selectively thinning vegetation and removing trees that are dead, dying and/or diseased.

Although the change to the landscape can be initially jarring, the effect is to help the forest
and surrounding communities become more resilient to wildfire. Reducing the fuel that helps a fire spread protects nearby homes, preserves evacuation routes and provides the right conditions for native plant species to thrive.

San Mateo County Park staff biologists regularly perform nesting bird surveys, and members of the project team flag sensitive resources and coordinate trail closures. Areas within the parks that were worked on over a year ago have seen new life sprout, as there is more room to grow. Over the next year a total of 402 acres will be treated—218 acres in Huddart Park and 184 acres in Wunderlich Park.

**Upcoming Milestone:** Crews are moving back to Huddart Park to reduce wildfire-fuel loads on Chickadee Trail and at Zwierlein and Miwok picnic areas; be on the lookout for trail closures through May.

**Tunitas Creek Beach — 58 gorgeous acres of beach and bluffs**

On its way to becoming the newest county park, Tunitas Creek Beach is a hard-to-access, yet supremely scenic stretch of coastline. It is currently closed to the public as a design that reflects community input comes together. The conceptual design addresses parking, walkways and trails, overlooks, interpretive signs, restrooms and picnic areas. It also provides protections for snowy plovers and their habitat.

In fall 2021, the community was invited to complete a survey about details such as the design and style of structures, guardrails, picnic tables and seating. Their feedback, along with the conceptual design can be found online. Survey respondents also expressed a lot of interest in programming such as volunteer days, wildlife viewing and cultural outings, with a particular interest in learning more about the history of Ohlone tribes.

**Upcoming Milestone:** Final designs are underway with a goal of beginning construction in the summer of 2022 and opening to the public by summer 2023!

As you can see, there is a lot to get excited about — better access, new parks, improved facilities and more resilient forests. A big THANK YOU to all who help care for these special places today so that future generations may be inspired to care for, learn about and enjoy San Mateo County parks.

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**Can You Guess the Park?**

(answers on page 7)

1. Part of _____________'s fascinating history was when the short-lived Pacific City Amusement Park rose up along the shoreline with a roller coaster and a young Houdini challenged local policemen.

2. ______________ is a wonderful starting point if you want to reach the peak of Montara Mountain.

3. The Peninsula AIDS Memorial Grove is located at ______________

4. ______________ contains large exposed formations of serpentinite, California's state rock.

5. Ross' Cove is below ______________ and is part of the Montara State Marine Reserve. It is designated a Marine Protected Area and dogs are not allowed here.

6. Accessible via the __________, the Pulgas Water Temple is a dramatic landmark built by the City of San Francisco as a monument to the engineering feat that brought water from Hetch Hetchy to the Bay Area.

7. At 5,860 acres, ______________ is the largest San Mateo County Park.

8. Periwinkle, Fingered Limpet and Acorn Barnacle all live in the 'Splash Zone' at ______________

9. Before it became a San Mateo County Park, ______________ was part of Highway 1.

10. ______________ is turning 100 in 2024, making it the first San Mateo County Park.
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