

**SOLANO COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
July 9, 2020**

**County Administration Center – CAC 1st Floor MP Rooms 1600, 1610
675 Texas Street, Fairfield
10:00 am**

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|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Members Present: | Leong, Alvarez, Riddle |
| Members Excused: | Whited, Hermsmeyer |
| Staff Present: | Chris Drake and Melissa Catron |

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman Alvarez called the meeting to order. A quorum was confirmed.

2. Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of March 12, 2020 were approved as prepared.

3. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved unanimously.

4. Chair and Commissioner Comments

Chairman Alvarez thanked RM Staff for holding the meeting with respect to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines and supplying masks, surface wipes, pens and other PPE items to the Commissioners and any members of the public who were in attendance.

5. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

**6. Parks and Recreation Division Staff Report (Informational, with Possible Action)
B. Attendance and Revenue Summary**

Chris Drake indicated that revenues were tracking higher than anticipated through the month of December 2019, at 58%. At the end of third quarter, revenues were tracking over 80%, and then mid-March the Parks Dept had to scale back operations at Sandy Beach, Lake Solano, Belden's Landing and Lynch Canyon due to COVID-19. This resulted in a reversal of where revenues were trending prior to COVID-19. March, April, May and June were all negative revenue months.

Many reservations had to be cancelled and/or rescheduled, due to the uncertainty of when Solano County parks would be able to re-open to the public and honor those reservations. For all reservations that were cancelled, Solano County Parks waived the non-refundable reservation fee and provided a full refund or credit/voucher. Commissioner Leong applauded Chris for his decision to waive the non-refundable fee.

Chris indicated that due to COVID-19 and the closures of the Parks, end of year revenues made 70% of total revenue projections, despite being on track for a record year for revenues. Chris mentioned that there were some funds in the Parks budget that he is

planning on utilizing to offset some of the revenue short-fall, with the goal of trying to mitigate the impact to County's General Fund annual contribution as much as possible to keep the parks affordable for the public to enjoy.

Commissioner Alvarez asked Chris if there were any budget adjustments made to offset the 30% loss of revenue. Chris responded that he would better be able to respond to that question when he addressed item C of the Staff Report.

A. Regional Parks Update

In continuation of the reporting provided to the Commission on this topic in the March 12, 2020 meeting minutes, Chris stated that the efforts have been suspended at the advisement of the Solano Land Trust consultant. They advised back in March to put the movement for a district creation/discussion on pause until after there was some settling down of the COVID-19 virus. The consultant and Solano Land Trust still feel this is the best course of action at this time; Solano County is serving in a supporting capacity and awaiting guidance from the Solano Land Trust consultant as to when this will move forward. Chris stated that it's possible things will pick up and move forward with this topic towards the end of 2020, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, it may be a while longer.

Chair Alvarez commented that the success of this type of district in Solano County is going to require voter support and his opinion is that the County has made a good decision to place a hold on this at this time. The COVID-19 pandemic has saturated the economy, the workplace, everyone's personal lives, everything; now is not the right time to move this parks district forward. The Parks & Rec Commission is still in full support of the parks district, it's just not the right time currently.

Commissioner Riddle commented that placing the parks district on hold right now is the right thing to do. Mr. Riddle echoed what Chairman Alvarez stated above and added that moving forward right now and potentially adding increased assessments to tax bills for the public or increasing sales tax or fees for the public for this is the wrong thing to do right now. It's not the right time.

B. Closure Operations/Impacts

Effective March 17, all day-use public areas and youth areas were closed; Parks announced the closures to the public, this also included any reservations for the group picnic areas, refunds were provided. All public events were also cancelled at that time. Once those areas were shut down, the Day-Use areas became extremely popular, attendance for the day-use areas in March mimicked attendance during the Summer months. Day-use areas were shut down a short time later, due to the public not following COVID-19 social distancing guidelines, and verbal threats/implied violence towards Park staff who were trying to enforce the social distancing guidelines as outlined by Governor Newsom.

Effective March 27, all remaining public access operations (campgrounds) were closed or cancelled. All in-bound reservations were cancelled, the gates were closed, and physical assets were put in place to prevent access. Despite the closure signs, public were still using/launching from Belden's Landing, Public Works aided with hard assets and set up K-Rails to prevent access. At Lake Solano, gates were closed, only allowing access for First Responders/Vacaville Fire District. Lynch Canyon was also closed.

Effective May 5, limited operations began for boat launch access at Belden's Landing; launch and leave only. At Lake Solano, "short term release" was initiated; allowing for limited access during highest volume days. Boat launch operations started (launch and leave access only) with Friday through Monday, from 8am to 4pm, available for anyone coming in with a non-motorized vessel; car-topper only. Restroom facilities were kept closed, but later opened only

at the boat launch area at limited times/days as staff was available to sanitize and keep the restrooms clean per the state guidelines. Sandy Beach was able to have a designated launch schedule, staff identified the peak days/times for public use; Sandy Beach was opened from 8am to 4pm, Friday - Monday. Sandy Beach has had limited use, most access is for pleasure boating, i.e. jet ski's; recreational boating has noticeably slowed down at Sandy Beach due to the shoreline area being closed.

Effective May 16, Lynch Canyon was opened with Phase 1 protocols, on Saturday and Sunday only for the first 2 weekends. The limited days allowed Parks to observe the amount of traffic coming and going, and to be able to create a plan to anticipate staffing needs for that location. Lynch Canyon is open Friday through Monday, and the staff at Lynch Canyon also covers operations at Belden's Landing. The first weekend Lynch Canyon was open, additional staff were brought in to that location to aid and to educate the public regarding social distancing guidelines, and overall expectations of everyone while they were in the park. Parks staff were vigilant in educating the public on social distancing protocols both within the park and in the parking lot; the hope was that after the first two weeks, all returning guests to Lynch Canyon would understand the behaviors expected of them to be allowed into the park; Chris reported that it was very successful.

Effective May 29, Parks was able to open Lynch Canyon back up to "normal" operations; open Friday through Monday from 9am to 5pm. It requires heavier staff sanitization practices, the operations model in place at that location has proven effective and efficient in addressing the rigorous sanitization needs.

Since the campgrounds have been shut down, Parks has been working diligently to create an operations model that would allow them to re-open and still adhere to the state guidelines for social distancing; whether that be a day use model, campground model, or both.

On June 22, after reviewing the Governor's guidance document for recreation and outdoor facilities, Solano Parks was able to create an operations model that met/exceeded the criteria. A strategy has been identified at Lake Solano; in reviewing normal occupancy, the vehicles allowed into the park at any given time was capped at 30 vehicles at a time from Monday through Friday, as well as occupancy inside the vehicle being capped to 6 people. Monday through Friday there is less Ranger staff, and more supporting staff with maintenance activities happening.

Conversely, on the weekends, there is more Ranger staff, staffing levels are heavier because occupancy is higher. There is a 90-vehicle maximum enforced on the weekends, and staff closely monitors entry. Solano Sheriff has also been contracted to provide after-hours security, assist with after-hours campground operations, and also transitioning to assisting staff with educating the public and assisting in enforcing the 90-vehicle max at the entry gates. All social distancing standards are posted on site (at each campground/park) and online.

Chris and Parks staff have worked diligently and tirelessly to create standards and practices that promote a safe environment with socially distanced campgrounds and campsites for the public to use; moving picnic tables and creating individual camp sites, etc.

With the social distancing rubric in place, Lake Solano's max occupancy is at 60% of the normal capacity. The 60% model in place allows for the use of all the different spaces that are offered at Lake Solano; *full hook-up* sites (water, sewer, electricity), *regular utility* sites (water and electric), *premium* sites (water front views), *tent* sites, *premium tent* sites, etc. Once that operations model was in place, staff contacted those with reservations that had to be cancelled/rescheduled and offered them comparable sites within the new social distancing model to honor those reservations. As of the date of this meeting, all reservations waiting to be rescheduled have been honored, and reservations are now available to the public via the Solano Parks website; only the spaces that are socially distanced are available to reserve.

As the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions change, whether restrictions are loosened or tightened, Solano Parks will address the changes required immediately and without hesitation.

Chair Alvarez asked how the staff were being protected throughout this process of closing, and then re-opening with restrictions.

Chris responded that staff have received proper training on COVID-19, resources and PPE gear to have on hand. Both staff and public safety is Parks' #1 priority.

Commissioner Leong asked for clarification: From March 27 – May 4 parks were closed; how did that affect staffing levels? Did Parks have to lay off any staff? Chris responded that no staff were laid off or let go, some of the extra help staff saw reduced hours. Chris further stated that operations have adjusted from being public access-centric to being more deferred maintenance/project-forward, knowing that COVID-19 is a temporary situation. Taking advantage of the public occupying the parks at either a reduced rate, or not at all, and being 100% staffed, the goal was to look at all the ways to ways to occupy staff that benefitted the parks and avoided having to let any staff go. Some Extra-Help staff did have their hours reduced, but no one was let go. With the limited funding available, staff looked for ways to address the many deferred maintenance projects; for example, re-sealing the floors in the restrooms, re-painting the restrooms, tree trimming in popular campsites, etc.

Commissioner Leong stated that towards the end of April/early May, he visited Lynch Canyon to monitor an incident in the parking lot, and he noticed that Parks staff were monitoring the number of vehicles coming and going in the parking lot, and he was appreciative of that.

Chris commented that the only Solano County Park location that they cannot open for anything other than boat launches, is Sandy Beach. Staff is continually observing and trying to figure out a way to provide responsible and safe services at Sandy Beach. The challenge at that location is the uncontrolled access point: *the beach*. The beach is 287 yards long and fluctuates between 7 feet wide and 20 feet wide depending on what the tide is doing on that day. The beach is the most popular area there, most days in the summer, if you were to look down the beach, you would have a solid row of 10-foot pop-up tents strapped together down the shoreline. The public is growing increasingly impatient with the beach being closed, staff are continuously having to re-direct the public, whether they launched from another boat launch area and landed on the beach or if they are coming in from the park entrance.

Chair Alvarez asked if there was signage posted for the public that makes it clear that the beach is closed. Chris responded that there is signage posted online, on the beach, the launch, and anywhere else they think people may look and see it. There is also a camp host on site, who sends text messages to park staff with a nightly update about any incidents that took place.

Chair Alvarez commented that Chris Drake has absolutely met the challenge of creating a safe space to recreate for Solano County residents and visitors and applauded him and his staff for their efforts.

7. Endorse the Inclusion of Belden's Landing Water Access Facility as a San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Site – Action Item

Commissioner Riddle asked for clarification on this item, whether Belden's Landing had already been included into the SF Bay Area Water Trail Site program? Chris replied that he was asking the Commission to give support and to make a recommendation to the Solano

County Board of Supervisors to endorse the inclusion of Belden's Landing into the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Site program.

Chris provided some history on this program; AB1296, the Water Trail Act, was voted into law in 2005, it effectively created the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail. The idea of it was to link a network of launch and landing sites in the bay area for non-motorized small craft. Suisun Marina is currently listed as a designated launch site (page 1-2 map), Belden's Landing is not. It is on the map for the program, but not an officially designated site. Solano Parks has been thinking creatively about new ways to market Belden's Landing to the public and to create excitement about it's location and the amenities it offers. Belden's Landing is very popular with those interested in outdoor sporting, such as hunting and fishing. It is also becoming popular with those interested in non-motorized boat launch access, such as kayaking.

Chris feels strongly that Belden's Landing is an appropriate location for this program and should be recognized as a site on the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail. It would increase responsible recreation opportunities and attract a new group of users, in addition to the existing core group of users who use it for access to fishing and hunting. Joining the Water Trail program would increase marketing for Belden's Landing and effectively open access to an entire new group of users who could truly appreciate its intrinsic value and wide array of recreational activities, whether it's access for fishing, access to hunting, kayaking, birding, even the observation of the natural flora and fauna in the Grizzly Island and Montezuma slough areas.

Joining the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program would encourage the public to view these areas from the water as opposed to driving through or by in a vehicle. There does come some challenges for new users to the Montezuma Slough area, however. The challenges of the Montezuma Slough area are that there are a lot of "spurs" and "fingers", and unless you are a familiar to that area, you can very easily navigate yourself in the middle of private property during duck hunting season. Joining the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail would provide more resources to increase the visitor-ship and visitor experience in that area. Grant funds tied directly to that program could potentially be tapped into for future funding and improvements to Belden's Landing. These future grant monies would allow those utilizing non-motorized boats, such as kayaks, to increase their way-finding operations, increasing signage so that they can use a QR code which would load up a map, so they can see where they area and better navigate the waters. This would also allow for seasonal updates, such as safety updates during duck season. Parks is hoping to add signage or other interpretative messaging with future grant monies to make the experience more safe and engaging for users.

A past National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant offered the opportunity to add native plantings and assets to the shoreline. This grant also allowed Parks to install (in the near future) an accessible non-motorized boat launch onto the existing boat launch ramp at Belden's, to allow for non-motorized boat use. Chris stated that the current operations plan for the installation of the non-motorized launch is a "piggy-backed" system that connects to the non-vehicular side of the launch area. If you brought your kayak or canoe in as a "car top", you could carry your kayak or canoe down from the parking lot, or you could back down into the launch area with your vehicle and unload it to the designated launch spot.

Chairman Alvarez asked what the status of the structure was, whether it was installed already or on order. Chris responded that it had been ordered, monies were used from a prior restoration grant.

Commissioner Leong stated that he really liked the idea of obtaining a grant to build a kayak rental building and have staff on site to facilitate those rentals. Chris agreed.

Chairman Alvarez commented that, with regards to Leong's suggestion of the kayak rental building, there would need to be staff on site to provide security because Belden's Landing is so far out. Chris agreed and expressed that making large improvements to Belden's Landing

needed to be approached cautiously and were appropriate to the location. The need is to not have such high traffic in and out in that area than is responsible. Chris commented that approximately 8 years ago, there was discussion about installing another boat launch ramp with floating dock at Belden's Landing; Chairman Alvarez agreed that there was enough space to do that. It would allow tandem access. Chris said that there is not active research being done on this right now, but that it was a future possibility via a grant with Cal-Boating once Covid-19 is no longer an issue.

Chris has been in contact with representatives from the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail for the past few years, communicating with them regarding the criteria for joining the program, in anticipation of bringing this item before the Commission. At this time what is needed is the support and recommendation from the Commission to bring this item before the Solano County Board of Supervisors. If the Commission supports inclusion into the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail, Chris proposed bringing the item before the Solano County Board of Supervisors as an agenda item in August of 2020, which would then allow the item to be heard before the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail board in September.

Chair Alvarez clarified on the criteria for Solano County to apply to join the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program; the reason Chris brought the item before the Commission is because a resolution is required from the governing board as part of the "package".

Vice-Chair Riddle stated that he fully recognizes the benefits of joining this program for Solano County, but are there any costs that aren't being considered (i.e., having to hire more staff, or additional outlay of funds)? Chris said that while additional resources are being directed to service Belden's Landing, that is from prior grant monies received and not related to potentially joining the Water Trail.

Vice-Chair Riddle is concerned that in trying to obtain approval from the Board of Supervisors, they may reject the idea of inclusion/expansion and, instead, favor the idea of recovery from Covid-19. Chris recognized Riddle's concern and countered with his idea of inclusion to the Bay Area Water Trail as representing multiple user groups (some already belonging to the Bay Area Water Trail) for responsible recreation in an under-utilized location. Due to Covid-19, the public cannot readily access entertainment and recreation venues that they normally could have, they are looking for alternatives and new experiences, and Belden's Landing could be that new experience and draw more awareness, visitor-ship, and appreciation to Solano County and Belden's Landing, which could then mean an increase in revenues. In joining the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program, we would receive a large amount of free signage at no cost to us as well as access to grant monies previously unavailable to us. Commissioner Leong asked if the restoration grant had come from the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program? Chris said no, that it was from a different agency, but the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program does offer many grants. Currently, Solano County Parks does not qualify for any grants from the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program because Belden's Landing is not one of the designated locations within their program. For future use, however, if Belden's Landing can join the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program, grants will be available.

Commissioner Leong commented regarding page 15, the opportunities for "birding". He expressed to Chris the need for signage in the Marsh and asked if grant monies could be used for that signage. Chris responded that he was hoping to expand the signage to a more "green" route; instead of putting pamphlets out which will get blown away in the wind, add kiosks with QR codes that people can scan with their smart phones to reveal the information. Maybe able to involve Suisun Resource Conservation District with that signage and possibly a grant. SRCDC approves of Solano Parks' inclusion into the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail program.

It was pointed out by Commissioner Leong and Chair Alvarez that the Commission should be looking into the Goodyear/Pierce Harbor location off 680 for inclusion as a premier launching

location for those canoeing and kayaking due to its proximity to the Pacific Flyway, Suisun Marshes, and 680 corridor.

Commissioner Leong moved for a motion for the Commission to endorse the inclusion of Belden's Landing into the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail. Riddle seconded. The motion was passed.

8. Additional Comments

Parks Staff advised of grant funds being made available for Parks, at the time of the meeting the funds had not yet been received.

9. Confirm date of next regular meeting

The next Commission meeting was confirmed for September 10, 2020. Since there was no further business the meeting was adjourned.