

Agenda Item VI.

Title: Consideration to approve the Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan river park proposals or to continue to consider additional modifications.

Background:

During the Board Policy Workshop in 1999, the Board requested more analysis on public recreation opportunities on the Russian River. (See A.5.c on page vi of the introduction to the June 2000 Draft Plan). This information is included as Appendix IX of the Draft ORP.

Discussion:

The Russian River is a navigable waterway and the public has the right to use the river. There are six new public river access sites proposed in the Draft ORP. These additional sites would augment the existing eight public access sites on the Russian River between the Sonoma/Mendocino County line and the Pacific Ocean.

Five of the existing public river access sites are in the lower Russian River below Wohler Bridge. These include Willow Creek State Park, Monte Rio Beach, Forestville River Access (a.k.a Mom's Beach), Steelhead Beach and Wohler Bridge. Wohler Bridge is a fishing access and is open from October to May each year. These facilities are located along a twenty- two mile stretch of the Russian River.

There are three public access facilities on the upper Russian River, north of Wohler Bridge. Healdsburg Memorial Beach and Del Rio Woods serve as summer swimming facilities. Del Rio Woods is operated by an independent Park and Recreation District. The northernmost public river access is the newly constructed Cloverdale River Park. These three facilities are located along a forty-one mile stretch of the Russian River.

In 1991 the State Coastal Conservancy commissioned "The Russian River Public Access and Trespass Management Plan". The Plan covered both Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. The Plan was completed in 1996. Among the issues that the Plan addressed were:

- ~ To determine what could be done to alleviate the problem of trespass on private properties along the Russian River.
- ~ To evaluate eighteen sites along the Russian River and make recommendations as to their suitability as public river access sites. At the time of the study sixteen of these sites had some form of public ownership, however eight of the sites were areas below existing bridges within the public road right of way. These sites had established patterns of informal

public access and had often been the focus of problems with the public trespassing onto adjoining private properties.

- ~ Make recommendations for the development of additional public river access sites.

The Plan recommended the development of three river access sites, two in Sonoma County and one in Mendocino County. Since the completion of the Plan two sites have been constructed in Sonoma County at Steelhead Beach Regional Park and Fishing Access and the Cloverdale River Park.

The Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan proposes to add the additional six public access sites, which would provide formal public access at regular intervals along the river. Some of these sites may development, improvement and management of some of the existing informal sites and provide the types of amenities such as parking, trash cans, and sanitation. There would also be signage and maps available to river users identifying where public access is available and informing the public of river etiquette and safety. A copy of the existing Russian River Guide is attached (VI -1) as an example of the type of outreach. The map and guide is also available in Spanish.

Of the six sites identified, two are already in public ownership; the proposed Guerneville River Park access and Preston Bridge which are both owned by Caltrans. A third site, Sunset Beach, is in negotiation with the Open Space District.

The remaining three proposed sites are located on the upper stretch of the Russian River which has the least public access. These include proposed sites in Geyserville, Asti and the Alexander Valley. These three proposed sites would create formal managed public access sites between the Cloverdale River Park to Alexander Valley at approximately five and a half-mile intervals. The fifteen mile stretch of the river between Alexander Valley to the Healdsburg Memorial Beach is already a well-traveled route for canoeists and there is a public access at the mid point at Del Rio Woods.

Recommendation:

The proposed river access sites in the Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan meet the needs of recreation users of the Russian River. By providing formal managed public access at regular intervals along the Russian it is anticipated that this will reduce trespass over private properties.

Options:

1. The Committee could continue to accept comments from the public and make modifications to the river access component of the Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan.
2. The Committee could approve the proposed river access sites as shown on the Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan and close further discussion.