



Sonoma County Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 11, 2025, 5:30pm

Nathan Junge, Chair
5th District

Luis Gonzalez, Vice Chair
4th District

John Roney
1st District

Carol Eber
2nd District

Beth Steffy
3rd District

Amara Galvan
Youth Commissioner

Tomas Mercado
Youth Commissioner

This meeting will be held in-person at Regional Parks main offices located at 400 Aviation Blvd, Suite 100, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.

Public Comment: Members of the public may address the Commission. Designated time for open public comment is allotted during the meeting (See Item 3 below). Public comment is also held for action items, prior to the Commissioners vote. Time limitations are at the discretion of the Chair the Director of Regional Parks and may be adjusted to accommodate all speakers.

In addition to oral public comment at the meetings, the community can also submit commentary via email. Members of the public who would like to make statements that may exceed the time limits for public comment, suggest topics to be placed on future agendas, or suggest questions to be raised and discussed by Commission members or staff, may send an email addressing these matters to parkspublicmeetings@sonoma-county.org.

Agendas: The agenda for each Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission meeting will be posted 72 hours in advance of the meeting on Regional Parks' website at <https://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov/learn/about-us/regional-parks-boards-and-commissions/parks-and-recreation-advisory-commission>. The agenda is also available at the Regional Parks office, located at 400 Aviation Blvd., Suite 100, Santa Rosa.

Accommodation Request: Please contact Sonoma County Regional Parks at (707) 565-3351 or parkspublicmeetings@sonoma-county.org with as much advance notice as possible to request arrangements for an accommodation.

Language Interpretation: Interpretation services will be provided as an accommodation if requested in advance. Please contact Regional Parks at (707) 565-3351 or by email at parkspublicmeetings@sonoma-county.org at least one week prior to the meeting. We will make every effort to provide interpretation.

Agenda

1. Welcome & Land Acknowledgement – Bert Whitaker, Director of Sonoma County Regional Parks

I want us to remember that we are on the ancestral land of the Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo peoples. These resilient communities are still here today, and we want to honor them as it was and is their land that we have had the opportunity to recreate on. Let us consider how we can continue to protect these beautiful places for our future generations.

2. Call to Order & Duties of the Commission – Vice Chair Luis Gonzalez

Call to Order by vice-chair Luis Gonzalez at 5:34pm.

Commissioners present: Amara Galvan, Beth Steffy, Luis Gonzalez, John Roney

Commissioners absent: Nathan Junge, Carol Eber, Tomas Mercado

Duties of the Commission include:

- Acting in an advisory capacity to the Board of Supervisors in promoting, aiding and encouraging public recreation, including the development of recreation, park and open space facilities.
- Acting in an advisory capacity to Regional Parks Director in the maintenance, development and operation of recreation areas and facilities serving the residents of the county.
- Establishing general procedures to carry out the purpose of the advisory commission.

3. Comments from the Public – Lead by Vice Chair Luis Gonzalez

During this time, members of the public may address the Commission on matters that are not on the agenda. However, The Ralph M. Brown Act (the State local agency open meeting law) prohibits the Commission from acting on any matter that is not on the agenda. Members of the public wishing to suggest an item for a future Commission agenda item may do so. Speakers are limited to three minutes each; the Commission Chair or Director of Regional Parks may adjust the time limit in accordance with the number of anticipated speakers.

Mr. Nathaniel Seavy introduced the topic of model aircraft fields on park land.

Mr. Seavy offered a proposal to partner with Parks or another open space within Sonoma County. He commented on a need for a community resource.

In response, Regional Parks Director offered coordination with the Regional Parks planning department to consider interests and needs of community.

4. Approval of the Minutes (Action Item) –Vice Chair Luis Gonzalez

Approval of the minutes for the April 2, 2025, Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission meeting.

Motion to approve: Commissioner John Roney

Second: Commissioner Amara Galvan

VOTE

In-favor: 4 (Amara Galvan, Beth Steffy, Luis Gonzalez, John Roney)

Opposed: 0

Abstain: 0

Absent: 3 (Nathan Junge, Carol Eber, Tomas Mercado)

5. Commissioner Reports – Lead by Vice Chair Luis Gonzalez

Individual brief verbal reports regarding parks-related activities, observations, acknowledgements, concerns, questions, and/or suggestions.

Beth Steffy- working with Nubia on accessibility. Wheelchair at Doran is appreciated. Measure M funds could potentially be used to keep city public pool open.

Amara Galvan – Visited Sonoma Valley, Cougar Trail. Used park pass.

John Roney – Spring Lake looking good. Appreciative of food venues being open and available.

Vice-Chair Luis Gonzalez – noted graffitied bench was quickly cleaned up. Lots of poison oak at Shiloh, kudos to Regional Parks maintenance team.

6. Director's Report – Bert Whitaker, Director, Sonoma County Regional Parks

An informational verbal report on Regional Park's updates and current events followed by an opportunity for attendees to ask questions.

- Great hiking experience at Sugarloaf hike
- Annual budget adoption process – funding request relating to Park Ranger program. Board was supportive.
- Intragovernmental mitigation ~\$1 million/yr for Regional Parks projects and for Tolay Lake Regional Park specifically
- 2-day salmon fishing season. 24/7 operation lead by Parks to support public safety.
- Monte Rio Redwoods expansion. Closing escrow next week.
- Joint powers agreement with city of Cloverdale; cost effective

- Taylor Mountain trails completed and open to the public. More public announcements coming by mid-July, following additional trail management efforts.
- Park Ranger changes – peace officer status has changed; removed hiring barrier. No changes to pay or benefits.

7. **Parks Foundation Presentation – Melissa Kelley, Executive Director, Sonoma County Parks Foundation**

A PowerPoint presentation about the Parks Foundation.

Introduction to the Parks Foundation – the Parks Foundation supports what Regional Parks does

- 501(c)(3)
- Expected grants for fiscal year 2024-2025: \$1.3 million

2024-2025 funding highlights

- Community engagement – environmental education, programs like YES! Parks, summer camps, etc.
- Planning division -purchase of 100-acre ranch at hood mountain, Taylor mt trails; Natural Resources – water catchment system at Helen Putnam Regional Park; vegetation management
- Operations and Management – 2 ATVs this year; a Kawasaki mule at Wright Hill; 2 electric golfs (donated) for use by camp hosts; electric tools
- Accessibility – two freedom trax

Foundation revenue sources

- Mostly funded by individuals. Approx. 2000 donors.
- Significant grants, sponsorships, and photo contests

Upcoming fundraising

- Top Dog Photo Contest
July 2025
\$10 for online entry
\$1 to vote
Last year's photo contest raised \$25,000
- Spring Lake Water Bark
Sept 2025

Sign up for newsletter

- Do you have connections to dog community who might be involved?
- Sign up for an Olivers Market Community Card

Opportunity to ask questions

Commissioner Steffy posed the question: Of the 1.3 million, how much is cash vs. in-kind? Kelley responded: Gifts are not included in this estimate – ex. golf carts not included.

8. Grazing Program – Lulu Waks, Natural Resources Program Supervisor, Sonoma County Regional Parks

An overview of livestock grazing in Sonoma County Regional Parks including where, why, and how livestock resources are utilized.

Notes:

- Over 18,000 acres, 6,000 grazed annually.
- Year round or seasonal grazing by cattle
- Tool to manage vegetation – fire fuels reduction. Reduces thatch – dead, dry grass material- opens space for other plants to grow and persist. Maintain habitat. Control invasive plants.
- Cattle grazing vs. “targeted grazing” (goats – prone to eat more woody material, and sheep) considerations include size of the park, intensity of recreation, dietary preferences and management goals.

Question posed by Commissioner Gonzalez:

Is there a challenge getting ahold of people? Do we have enough?

Response by Waks: We have contracts with 5 different operators. Demand for the work is very high. We have established contracts, so we’ve found there’s enough to go around.

Commissioner Steffy: started in 2020? Only been 5 years? What caused Parks to start doing this?

Regional Parks/Lulu Waks/Hattie Brown: Origin story – Measure M funding has allowed the opportunity, including appropriate staffing. The 5 years refers to Foothill Regional Park specifically. Most parks have been grazed for a very long time.

Evolved significantly for fire safety. Disturbance specific.

Commissioner Roney: Payment of these vendors – lease agreement; they are paying us?

No money exchanging hands? Mutual?

Parks response: Variable and park specific.

Commissioner question: Lands historically had elk – any thoughts of introducing elk?

Regional Parks response: Not actively introducing them to any of our properties.

9. Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan – David Robinson, Park Manager, Sonoma County Regional Parks

A presentation on Sonoma County Regional Parks’ Climate Adaption and Resilience Plan (CARP) and associated executive summary.

Question posed by Commissioner Steffy: EV changers at the parks – thoughts?

Response by Robinson: For new facilities we are prioritizing the infrastructure. Also, more “arcs in the parks” – off the grid and more cost effective.

Commissioner question: Are there jobs that you can get out of high school into Sonoma County Regional Parks?

Response by Robinson: Yes; park aide position, internships. Entry level maintenance. Environmental education internship. The age requirement for park rangers is 18.

10. Adjournment – Commission Vice Chair

Vice Chair Gonzalez adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:30pm.