

Questions and issues raised by District neighbors

District Staffing

What are District field staffing levels, what is their availability for patrol, and how is their performance reviewed?

- *Currently, 10 field staff members reside in employee housing, located strategically and geographically throughout District preserves. All District staff are available for “call-out”.*
- *The District has continued to add both patrol and maintenance positions as the District’s acreage and facilities increase. The San Mateo Coastside Protection Area Service Plan specifies that one field staff person be added for every 1,720 acres of land acquired and/or managed.*
- *The District has an Internal Affairs procedure, which was developed following the requirements for Peace Officers, and the model of many local police departments. An evaluation process also reviews the performance of District staff at least twice annually. The District receives an average of less than one complaint per year regarding District rangers’ activities. The District also has an official biannual performance evaluation program for all District employees.*

When the incorporation of the San Mateo coastal area is complete, what is the District’s staffing plan for hiring experienced farm and ranch managers?

- *The Board adopted a resolution that outlines a plan for hiring or contracting with an individual or organization with agricultural management expertise to assist the District in managing purchased lands which are in agricultural use. This plan will continue the District’s current practice of contracting with agricultural experts to work with staff in developing grazing plans for the Alpine Road area of Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve and studying the feasibility of agricultural operations when preparing Use and Management Plans.*
- *The District will also be developing additional agricultural Policies in conjunction with the Farm Bureau and Agricultural Advisory Committee which will further help to guide such hiring practices.*

Fire Hazards

What is the District's policy regarding fires, particularly campfires, and fire rings on District lands, and the use of fire as a land management tool?

- *The District has been very proactive when it comes to preparing for the threat of fire. The District uses a variety of fuel load reduction techniques and has been proactive in encouraging and supporting live-fire training (for District staff and other fire protection agencies) and fuel load reduction exercises on District lands, including successful burns in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserves. The California Department of Forestry and Santa Clara County Fire have expressed their appreciation for these opportunities, which can often only be provided by the District because of the unique nature of District lands.*

Campfires

- *Fires are prohibited in all preserves (District Ordinance 401.1) and the District has not installed any fire rings in any preserve except for the Monte Bello backpack camp. But even in this designated camping area, the only allowed use of "fire," is a contained camp stove, and only within the enclosed, bare-dirt triangular fire ring.*
- *The occurrence of illegal campfires and camping has greatly decreased as property has gone from private to District ownership because of the resulting increase in signage, patrol efforts and public presence. The District is interested in hearing any reports from neighbors and/or visitors about people who are illegally camped or conduct illegal campfires on District lands. If a neighbor and/or member of the public sees such a violation, they are encouraged to call the 24-hour non-emergency dispatch number (650) 903-6395.*

Closing Preserves

- *Closing all of the District preserves during dry fire seasons is not practical and in the past some surrounding public agencies have closed only a few selected park areas. The District has completed an Operating Plan with San Mateo County Fire, which outlines how District staff will work with County Fire representatives to evaluate which Preserves in the Coastside Protection Area should be closed on high burn index days. Also, the District and other agencies focus on public education and other fire prevention measures. There is also a benefit to having members of the public in the preserve, where they assist in reporting any fires that might break out.*

Training and cooperation with other agencies

- *District staff is trained in responding to wildland fires and, with trained professionals from other organizations, participates in regional efforts to evaluate and reduce hazardous fuel loads. All District rangers and most of the other District field staff receive a one week training in wildland fire response, receive annual refresher training, and participate in live fire training. District staff participates in the San Mateo and Santa Clara Fire Safe Councils, which emphasize community outreach, education, and hazardous fuel reduction. Currently, the Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council is conducting a regional hazardous fuel assessment of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The District is also working with San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties and the California Department of Forestry to formalize mutual aid agreements in responding to wildland fires. The San Mateo Coastside Protection Area Service Plan specifies that as new lands are acquired, the District will consult with the San Mateo County Fire Department and the California Department of Forestry in developing site-specific fuel modification and management programs.*

Discing

- *On an annual basis, the District “disks” specified property boundaries and critical areas as directed by local fire marshals to serve as fuel breaks. Fire clearance areas are maintained around all District buildings to a County Fire Safe Standard.*
- *The District has Policies for Road Maintenance Agreements which were adopted by the Board of Directors on June 23, 1982. Where roads do not degrade the environment, the District continues to maintain roads that were pre-existing on District lands. Because of these policies the District has not received any complaints or concerns from fire agencies about access to locations. The District has actively worked to increase the number of helicopter landing zones on District lands because they assist in fire situations, and are also frequently used for medical emergencies, which occur both on and off District lands.*

Land Purchase and Management

What is the District’s policy regarding land purchases, providing public amenities, and what is its response to trespass and vandalism issues?

- *The District purchases land from willing sellers on an as-available basis.*
- *The District provides the public services needed for its visitors, including parking and restrooms. But the District’s open space preserves are not developed to the same extent as urban parks, because the preserves are intended for low-intensity day-use recreation. That’s why, similar to other open space agencies, the District does not provide drinking water*

facilities. (The only exceptions are at the Backpack Camp on Black Mountain and the Daniels Nature Center at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve, where water is necessary to accommodate overnight visitors and environmental education nature center activities). The District typically provides vault toilets at each of its parking areas. The toilets are permanent facilities that are routinely pumped and well maintained.

- *The District installs signs in areas where visitors have been known to trespass. The District also works with neighbors to identify and respond to problem areas. Neighbors are encouraged to call the 24-hour non-emergency dispatch number (650) 903-6395 whenever they observe a visitor trespassing from District lands on to private lands.*

Invasive Nonnative Species

What is the District's policy regarding the control of invasive nonnative species?

- *One high-priority mission of the District is to protect and restore the natural environment. Throughout California nonnative invasive plants are spreading and causing problems worldwide. The District's invasive species control program focuses on identifying invasive species, including star thistle, scotch broom, and greasewood, and controlling them with effective methods and subsequent follow-up treatment. The District annually spends approximately 5,000 hours and \$50,000 controlling invasive species with staff, volunteers, contractors, and special work crews.*
- *The District also works with Santa Clara and San Mateo County Vector Control agencies on addressing rodent issues. Annual training is provided to staff on the current vector problems and how to safely work around them. In addition, they are trained in what to watch for in order to prevent the spread of disease.*

The District provides educational information on wildland hazards, such as predators, in signs, brochures, newsletters, and on the District's Web site. The District has developed Wildlife Response Protocols to assist staff in evaluating wildlife-human interactions and determining appropriate actions.

Community Outreach

How does the District seek opportunities to communicate with its constituents and provide District information to community members?

- *The District encourages and welcomes communication from all its constituents by being as accessible to the public as possible and by regularly soliciting public comments and input about what the District should be accomplishing and how it should proceed.*

The District regularly communicates with all of its constituents by attending community meetings, through its quarterly newsletter “Open Space Views”, mailings, and its Web site. District Board members and staff routinely participate, present, and serve in a wide range of community meetings and joint organizational committees, including the Kings Mountain Association, San Mateo County Resource Conservation District, Pescadero Municipal Advisory Committee, San Francisquito Watershed Joint Powers Authority, South Skyline Association, San Mateo County Weed Management, and the Native Plant Society, to name a few.

In addition, during the Coastside Protection Program approval process, Board members, managers, and staff met with groups and individuals who had questions or concerns about the District’s current practices or the Program, including 17 Citizens’ Advisory Committee meetings, 21 District Board meetings, and 7 public hearings on the Environmental Impact Report.

The District and its staff will continue to actively seek invitations from local groups and be available to attend and participate in community association meetings within the District’s boundaries and to answer any questions or concerns from its constituents or other interested members of the public.

- *The District recently re-designed its Web site to provide District information to the public in a more user-friendly, visually appealing, and effective manner.*

For example, we’ve enhanced and increased the site’s informational elements. A number of Web pages provide information that District neighbors may find of interest, including links from the home page to the La Honda Creek Master Plan and the District’s existing Good Neighbor Policy as well as the upcoming revision process. There are other pages that are relevant to neighbor issues, including the “Plans + Projects” section where information is currently available on the La Honda Creek, Bear Creek/Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve Master Plans, the El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve Watershed Protection Program, and Resource Management, and the “About Us” section where we post information on the Good Neighbor Policy.

- *Agendas, minutes, Board reports, and press releases are available to any interested member of the public on the District's Web site at www.openspace.org, or can be picked up at the District office at 330 Distel Circle in Los Altos, free of charge the Monday preceding the scheduled Board meeting.*

Agenda subscriptions are also available by mail for a nominal fee, which is charged to offset the District's copying and mailing costs.

Assistance with Local Services

What is the District's policy on providing assistance with local services, and does the District currently provide such assistance?

- *Designating areas as rural service centers that provide stores and public facilities other than low-intensity recreation would not be consistent with the District's mission "To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity; protect and restore the natural environment; and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education."*
- *The District provides assistance to a number of local services, for example first response emergency services, and works cooperatively with local fire and emergency medical services. District staff provides mutual aid services, and often assists other agencies, and many times is the first on-scene to accidents and incidents occurring off District lands. In addition, the District reached an agreement with the San Mateo County Fire Department for fire prevention services and suppression strategies for lands in the Coastsides Protection Program area. A mutual aid agreement was formalized for these services, which include land management programs, joint training opportunities, coordination on review of hydrant water resources, emergency response, and the use of a 1,500-2,000 gallon District water truck for mutual aid calls.*
- *The District also entered into an Agreement with the La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District (LHPUSD) formalizing the goal of LHPUSD and the District to work together cooperatively to further the mission of both agencies for the public benefit by providing an environmental education program pertinent to the Coastsides. In consideration of that program, the District will provide compensation for potential reduction in property tax revenue to LHPUSD as a result of the purchase of lands in the Coastsides Protection Area by the District. Like all public agencies, land purchased by the District is not subject to property taxes, and, therefore, purchase in some cases can result in a property tax loss to other public agencies in the Coastsides Protection Area. An independent analyst has found that tax losses to all public agencies on the Coast due to the removal of parcels from tax rolls, once purchased by the District, are estimated to be less than \$100,000 over a period of 15 years with the majority of that tax loss attributable to San Mateo County.*

- *On questions regarding the provision of water resources from the Driscoll property to aid La Honda neighbors, the District has no control over any of these assets because Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) currently owns the former Driscoll property. In addition, all the water in the San Gregorio Watershed system has been adjudicated and allocated by law. We don't know how much water was allocated to the former Driscoll property, but there are a number of residences and a cattle-grazing operation currently on the property and it is unlikely there were any "extra" water allocated. During the water adjudication process, the water system flow was not sufficient to accommodate all of the legal claims and therefore everyone utilizing the system had to take less than the amount of water that they were legally entitled to take.*

Democratic Representation

With the recent approval of the *Coastside Protection Program*, what was the District's process for redrawing the ward boundaries?

- *By law (the District's enabling legislation Public Resources Code 5515), the District is limited to a maximum of seven wards, which must represent approximately equal populations. Before the Coastside Protection Program was approved, each of the 7 wards contained approximately 93,000 residents that served a combined population of 649,711. With the addition of approximately 30,000 coast side residents, the wards had to be redrawn in order to extend representation to all new constituents.*

The total population within the new District boundaries that include the coastside is approximately 679,700. Dividing the new District population equally means that each of the 7 wards will include approximately 97,100 residents. Since the coastside population is 30,000, a separate ward for the Coastside Protection Area is not feasible and would not meet legal requirements. This also applies to the mountain/rural voters. The population in these areas is not sufficient for one ward to represent the mountain/rural voters. (Population figures are based on the 2000 Census.)

In adjusting ward boundaries, the following criteria were used:

- *Population*
 - *Balancing the population of each ward to within +/- 1% of the other wards.*
- *Geography*
 - *Using major roads, streams, and other major geographic features to define boundaries.*
- *Cohesiveness, contiguity, integrity, and compactness of territory*
 - *Avoid splitting cities or communities wherever possible.*
 - *Follow established census block boundaries wherever possible.*
- *Community interests of the District*
 - *Keep Director's residences within their wards.*
 - *Avoid crossing County lines in more than one ward.*

Special redistricting software designed for use with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology was utilized in redrawing the ward boundaries. Using GIS, very detailed Census data was analyzed at the block-level to make precise boundary adjustments and to achieve the goal that the population within each ward remains within +/- 1 % of the other wards.

Voters within each ward elect one Director to the District's Board every 4 years. Each Director must be a resident and voter within the ward he or she represents.

Every District Board Director who was originally appointed by the Board to fill a vacancy was subsequently elected to the Board by the constituents. This includes Director Pete Siemens (Ward 1), Director Deane Little (Ward 4), and Director Larry Hassett (Ward 6).

Prior to the redistricting process the Kings Mountain Homeowner's Association (KMHA) fell within portions of Ward 7 and Ward 6. In the two-ward scenario for the coastside approved by the Board, the boundary between Ward 7 and Ward 6 remains unchanged. This was done specifically to minimize the number of constituents who would have to switch wards following redistricting.

Extending District ward boundaries to the Coastside Protection Area was an extremely complex process that required balancing a number of competing factors. To include the KMHA solely within Ward 6 would have precluded the ability to extend Ward 7 to the coast, effectively eliminating that two-ward scenario, which was favored by public input. To include the KMHA solely within Ward 7 would have required extending that ward's boundary nearly 5 miles to the south, encompassing a very large geographic area historically represented by Ward 6.

Expansion of the District Boundary

With the District's *Coastside Protection Program* proposal, was the public provided with the opportunity to vote on the Program?

- *The Coastside Protection Program was developed through a multi-year collaborative effort involving over 40 public meetings, including 17 Citizens' Advisory Committee meetings, 21 District Board meetings, and 7 Public hearings on the Environmental Impact Report. In addition, an advisory vote in 1998 yielded a solid majority for the program.*

- *In accordance with State laws regarding annexation, the San Mateo Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) held a protest hearing in which landowners and voters from within the annexation area were able to submit written protests. The rules are that if less than 25% of the registered voters or less than 25% of landowners owning less than 25% of the assessed value submit written protest, the annexation is completed. If 25% but less than 50% submit written protest, an election is ordered and approval by a majority of registered voters is required for the annexation to be complete. If over 50% of either threshold submits written protest, the annexation is terminated. The protest hearing took place in June 2004. Working with the San Mateo County Elections Division, LAFCo determined the value of the written protests submitted and not withdrawn and found that the protest vote was not sufficient to warrant an election nor was the vote sufficient to deny the annexation. Therefore, on September 7, 2004, the Certificate of Completion of Annexation was recorded and the District's boundary was extended to the Pacific Ocean from the southern boundary of Pacifica to the Santa Cruz County line.*

Good Neighbor Policy

What will the District's process be for the upcoming revision of its Good Neighbor Policy?

- *Hearing from you – our neighbors and everyone who lives within the District's boundaries – is what's most important to us in revising our Good Neighbor Policy. To make it easy for all constituents to actively contribute, we will meet with various neighborhood groups and associations and hold three facilitated public Board workshops – on the coastside, on the bayside, and on Skyline.*
- *Conducting Interviews. We have already conducted a number of individual interviews with constituents in order to determine some important Good Neighbor Policy issues.*
- *Presentations to Community Groups. In the Spring and Summer 2005, we will meet with various neighborhood groups and associations to present and discuss some preliminary issues identified in connection with the Good Neighbor Policy. We look forward to receiving public input.*

Submitting Suggestions. The District's neighbors and constituents will also be able to provide their suggestions electronically, through e-mail or our Web site, and of course by regular mail.

- *Drafting Good Neighbor Policy Amendments. After hearing from people in the public meetings as well as via e-mail, our Web site, and regular mail, the District's Legislative, Finance, and Public Affairs Committee (LFPAC) will meet and consider the input received. Taking all of these contributions into consideration, LFPAC will draft a Good Neighbor Policy and recommend it to the Board.*
- *Conducting Public Meetings. We will hold three formal public meetings and invite all interested members of the public to review and comment on the proposed amended policies.*
- *Revising Draft Policy. After we've received comments during the public meetings, we will revise the draft policies.*
- *Review by the Board and Board decision. The District's Board of Directors will take final public comments during a meeting open to the public. The District's Directors will then discuss the policy recommendations and vote to adopt a final Good Neighbor Policy.*