President’s Message: Spring 2021

The crowds on the mountain on weekdays are not as overwhelming now.

It’s great that more people have been enjoying Mt Tamalpais, but the crush of crowds led to some unpleasantness, and an experience of quiet or solitude was a distant dream last year.

The lupine (lupinus nanus) are painting glorious displays on tilting meadows, but the grasses already look a bit dry. We all know it’s going to be a brown-hilled year early.

Many people have been distressed at the nearly-empty Phoenix lake. It is not normally part of our water supply, but has been pumped up to Bon Tempe for inclusion in our drinking water this year.

It looks likely that we will not be able to hold our annual meeting outdoors at Lake Lagunitas this spring; the site was reserved pending confirmation, but the MMWD confirmed they will not be able to accommodate large groups due to continued Covid-19 restrictions. We hope to see you in the fall when we are able to reschedule.

Janice D Barry, MD
Pictured: Kathy Hyde Sennello at Lake Lagunitas in March 2021.

Last year there were more of these signs at Lake Lagunitas. Most have disappeared.

Below: Lake Lagunitas

Photos courtesy of Kathy Hyde Sennello
MMWD Meeting

By Joan Bennett

At MMWD’s March 18, 2021 Watershed Committee meeting, the hiring of two new rangers to handle the unabated surge in visitation to the watershed was discussed. Currently, in comparison with comparable public lands agencies, MMWD is significantly undermanned, with just only six rangers and one contracted Marin County Deputy Sheriff, who are not on patrol simultaneously, to cover the District’s 21,000 acres. The rangers perform more than law enforcement duties. They are first responders providing medical aid, run search and rescue missions, and are historians and naturalists who share their knowledge with the public.

Before the pandemic, a typical holiday weekend drew weekend crowds of roughly 10,000 visitors. Since the pandemic, that number has doubled, if not tripled, with no signs of diminishing any time soon, for non-holiday weekends. Annual visitation to the watershed before the pandemic was 2,000,000 people. That number is expected to skyrocket as well.

Even the most casual observation of the watershed since the rise in public use sees litter, especially masks, from the top of Mt. Tamalpais to the parking lot at Phoenix Lake, dogs off leash, people wading in the lakes, bike tracks on trails, new social trails, cars parked illegally, speeding, and the like. Absent sufficient staffing, enforcement of the District’s rules (and NOT just illegal biking on trails, but all misuse of the watershed) is hit or miss. There simply are not enough rangers to enforce and educate the public about the acceptable uses of the watershed.

A final decision on this matter is a ways off. The District will conduct a series of hearings on this matter in the early May and June of this year. Further public hearings on this matter are scheduled for this year.

According to the District, the Public Scoping Process initial topics to be reviewed by stakeholders and the expert panel will include:

- Managing Visitor Access
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Open Space
- Solutions to Address Ongoing Visitor Conflicts
- Outreach and Partnerships Needed to Influence Recreational Culture
- Strategies for Balancing Natural Resource Protection and Recreation Preliminary Schedule

Scoping Meeting #1-Early May;
Scoping Meeting #2-Early June; and
Recreation Management Request for Proposals (RFP) August/September.

If you are interested in viewing MMWD’s Agenda Packet for the meeting, please visit: https://www.marinwater.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/03-18-2021%20Agenda%20Packet%20Watershed%20Committee.pdf

The TCC welcomes MMWD's decision to hire additional rangers, and we encourage members to contact the District and to participate in the upcoming meetings to voice your support of same.
ANNUAL MEETING POSTPONED—AGAIN

By Kathy Hyde Sennello

It is with the utmost regret that we inform you that the TCC Annual Meeting, Election of Officers and Directors, and picnic are postponed until Fall 2021. Although our reservation at Lake Lagunitas picnic grounds was made months ago, the MMWD has just informed us that they are unable to accommodate large groups due to State of California Covid-19 restrictions. We sincerely hope that by fall these restrictions will be lifted. Look for notifications and your ballot in the August TCC Guardian newsletter. In the meantime, happy hiking!