

Recreation on Marin Water's watershed—still a Plan in progress

by Nona Dennis

Marin Water ("District") continues to pursue developing a Watershed Recreation Management Plan ("plan" or "WRMP") that begins with a question: How can the District continue to accommodate the nearly 2 million annual visitors who come to recreate on the Mt. Tamalpais watershed without jeopardizing the vaunted quality of the water it supplies or doing further damage to the natural resources for which it is responsible? This is a daunting challenge for a public utility whose primary responsibilities are to assure reasonably-priced water to its 191,000 customers and to protect the well-documented biodiversity of its lands on Mt. Tamalpais. The land itself is finite; the water sources it supports are limited; and threats of drought, wildfire risk, disease, and invasive species in a changing climate are real and costly to manage.

In late 2020, the District Board announced its intention to pursue a plan to manage recreation (See MCL newsletter articles: "[Planning for recreation on MMWD's watershed](#)", Jan Feb 2021, and "[Planning for recreation on MMWD's watershed: an update](#)", Sept Oct 2022). On April 6th of this year, District staff concluded two years of public outreach, with the last in a series of six virtual public

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Alpine Lake's spillway after winter storms filled MMWD's reservoirs to capacity.

Marin Water's roadmap to water supply resilience

by Larry Minikes and Roger Roberts

Marin Municipal Water District (Marin Water, MMWD or District), founded in 1913, is the first and oldest water district in California. Relative to other water districts MMWD is small, serving 191,000 residents or approximately 62,000 metered customers.

The 22,000-acre watershed consists of seven reservoirs: Kent and Alpine Lakes, Nicasio and Soulajule Reservoirs, Bon Tempe and Phoenix Lakes, and the smallest, Lake Lagunitas. In total, these seven reservoirs store approximately 80,000 acre-feet (AF) of water representing approximately a two-year supply. The District is unique as one of the only in the Bay Area managing its own watershed. The majority of Bay Area water districts receive water from the California Water Project.

Because of Marin's unique topography, the District's operations depend on three water treatment plants, 97 pumping stations, 130 storage tanks and 908 miles of buried pipeline. Many of the older tanks and pumping stations are in need of upgrading and replacement as they reach the end of their useful life. Additionally, 300 miles of MMWD pipeline is cast iron (75 years or older) and in need of replacement. The current replacement pace is below 5 miles per year at an average cost of \$2 million dollars per mile. The District is looking to at least double this pace in upcoming years. There are other critical, large CIP projects needed for district sustainability, as well.

Marin Water has several planning projects in progress, each with its own timeline and set of challenges. The long-term Capital

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President's Message

Our focus is on Mission

I recently visited with the freshman class of Marin's School of Environmental Leadership. We met at Dunphy Park in Sausalito, talked about the opportunities for nature-based adaptation to sea level rise, and I introduced them to MCL. To prepare for the meeting, the students visited MCL's website. Surprising to me, what stood out to many of them was that MCL advocated against billboards in one of its first campaigns. Protecting Marin's scenic values aligns with its mission of protecting Marin's natural assets. As a result, we see the lovely green hills and beautiful waters that Marin County is known for, instead of billboards blanketing Highway 101. Marin looks like it does because of organizations like MCL. Seeing natural assets reinforces valuing them. Valuing assets motivates protecting them.

MCL's mission is to "preserve, protect and enhance the natural assets of Marin in a changing environment." This will be MCL's 90th year advocating for that mission—it is a perfect time to refresh our organization. We are in the final stages of our search for a new Executive Director (ED) and with an ED's help, and with the support of MCL's first and second vice presidents, I will be regularly directing MCL's focus back to our mission—it is such an incredibly important one!

MCL is busy working on new policy statements for advocacy, and is updating others, to address the current issues that challenge our county. We are focused on protecting Marin's biological diversity as it responds to the impacts of climate change through habitat, large landscape management, wildlife corridors and ecological connectivity. We

are updating our 1995 Housing policy and positioning the organization to advocate for environmentally-sensitive adaptations to sea level rise as it begins to claim our shores, as well as for efforts to preserve our natural assets while reducing wildfire risk. Other policies in the works include one on carbon sequestration and one addressing our approach to agriculture on national park lands. Finally, MCL is in the process of reviving a committee specifically focused on water to best address Marin's many water-related issues.

As MCL moves forward, we enthusiastically welcome new board members Aviva Rossi and Jane Medley, and we acknowledge the productive efforts of our outgoing leaders. Bob Miller put three years into his Presidency on the Board. During that time, he also grew our climate change program and will continue as Chair of MCL's Climate Action Working Group. All of us at MCL stand on the shoulders of Nona Dennis and Susan Stompe! They are retiring from the Board after decades of contributions and serving in many roles. Their leadership and devotion to this organization has made it what it is today. We also thank David Lewis, who is also stepping down from the board, for his years of building partnerships with the agriculture community.

Lots of change is underway and you can be one of the changemakers! I invite you to help us break out of Covid's shell and interact with others interested in preserving Marin's environment. Join us in making a difference. Let us know how we can better include you.

Let's make a difference together!

Terri

Water supply resilience from page 1

Improvement Plans (CIP) are underway; the 10- and 30-Year CIPs are expected to be finalized by May 2024. Other plans include: a Water System Master Plan, a Strategic Water Supply Assessment Process, a Watershed Recreation Management Plan (see *"Recreation on Marin Water's watershed—still a Plan in progress,"* page 1), a Water Conservation Plan, and an Information Technology Replacement Strategic Plan.

A roadmap for water supply resilience in a changing climate

Marin Water has been pursuing an integrated strategy as part of its Water System Master Plan and Strategic Water Supply Assessment. The aim is to develop a water supply portfolio to assure customers adequate water in response to extended droughts and climate change. The District's study of integrated strategies includes:

- developing in-district water supply improvements,
- developing Sonoma-Marín partnerships,
- increasing local storage enhancement,
- developing new water supply, and
- increasing conservation efforts.

Over the past year, Jacobs Engineering assessed MMWD's water supply needs. A report with the study's recommendations was released in March. (Jacobs conducted a similar assessment for Sonoma Water.) The climate models that Jacobs developed for the North Bay forecast hotter and dryer future conditions over time. To ensure a reliable four-year supply of water, it was estimated as much as 20,000 AF of additional supply may be needed to reach the District's stated water resiliency goals. The District is exhaustively analyzing supply options that can be developed with the least environmental impacts and at reasonable financial costs.

In-district improvements

The District is looking in the short-term to enhance supply by 3,500 AF by 2025, while continuing to work on longer-term resiliency projects. The current Water Supply Plan has identified several "no-regrets" interim investments in water supply projects. These include additional conservation actions as well as early water resiliency plans to electrify the Soulajule pump station, which is currently operated by diesel, as needed during dry years. Also included is a pipeline to pump winter water into Bon Tempe from Phoenix Lake. These two projects are relatively low-cost resiliency projects that will add nominally to supply.

Sonoma-Marín partnerships

Currently Sonoma Water supplies 25% of MMWD's water supply. An important

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A loosening: Nona and Susan create space – not separation

by Kate Powers

For decades, two of MCL's longest-serving and most highly-respected board members, **Nona Dennis and Susan Stompe**, have personified Marin Conservation League. On April 21, 2023, both stepped down, with intention, from MCL's Board of Directors. Nona noted, "I was simply 'termed out' not having filled an officer's position for six years ... and that was a deliberate decision." For Susan, "I like to say I retired from the board." Both recognized this as a time for creating space for succession, for bringing in new leaders, and for letting others learn more about the organization and take root.



Nona Dennis and Susan Stompe

A short history

Nona joined MCL's board in 1998, following her brief participation in the mid-1970s. During the 70s, 80s, and 90s, Nona kept busy volunteer teaching with Environmental Forum of Marin, serving for a time on the Mill Valley Planning Commission, and she began an environmental consulting career in 1972. In 1998, following her retirement as a consultant and as a part-time adjunct teacher at USF, she chose to return her focus to Marin County, her family's home since 1960. In joining MCL's board, Nona put to use her professional experience with CEQA and NEPA and their application to many kinds of projects.

Over her past 25 years with MCL, Nona has served in various officer positions including as President between 2008 and 2011. She chaired MCL's Land Use Committee for a bit; then later, became chair of MCL's Parks & Open Space committee (POS). During her presidency, she initiated new programs and revived MCL's Newsletter, taking it from four pages to twelve, with then Office Manager Dru Parker doing production. "I couldn't have done it without her!"

Nona retired as editor of MCL's Newsletter and as chair of POS in the past two years, but she has remained active and connected—continuing to regularly write and edit for MCL's communications, providing sage advice to her successors, and supporting the organization in other myriad ways. "Every one of my 25 years on the MCL board has been a year of learning; most of all in doing the Newsletter, digging into MCL history and developing the 25 Walks into Conservation History including Senior Walks [two of MCL's most popular public programs], and chairing the Parks & Open Space Committee over the past decade." In March 2022, Marin County recognized Nona with a formal commendation for her many contributions to the County in her role as Chair of MCL's POS.

Susan first joined MCL by way of a complimentary membership from the Environmental Forum's Master Class program. She reactivated

MCL's North Marin Unit committee (NMU), and soon was recruited to join the Board (in 1979). Susan has been on MCL's board for an incredible 43 of the past 44 years. She too has served in various MCL officer positions, including as President 1992 to 1994, 1997 to 1998, and again 2011 to 2013. In addition to chairing NMU and briefly chairing MCL's POS, Susan has chaired MCL's Land Use committee on and off since the 1990s.

Susan has engaged in both public service and activism most of her adult life, serving on numerous nonprofit boards, as Novato Planning Commissioner and City Councilmember, and two terms as Novato Mayor. In 2013, she was recognized as Novato's Citizen of the Year.

Prior to joining MCL, Susan was active in the League of Women Voters. "Having been involved with governmental operations in four states, I was very pleasantly surprised to encounter the County of Marin, which has public engagement like I had never seen before. Environmental issues are important to me." Susan will continue to be an active committee member on the North Marin Unit and Land Use, Transportation and Water committees. She also plans to help with MCL events—flowers from her garden, homemade recipes, and her personal touch have been a mainstay of MCL culture.

Both Nona and Susan have been honored with MCL's Volunteer award and the Peter Behr Lifetime Achievement award. Susan also received MCL's Marin Green Award for Environmental Leadership in 1993.

Hopes for MCL's future

Why have you devoted your time, energy, and leadership to MCL over these many years?

Nona: "The more I have learned about MCL's work and leadership over the years the more I have come to appreciate the talents and dedication of board members and the working style of the organization – informed, thoughtful, and authoritative in its approach to environmental issues, many of them complex and rarely 'black or white'. I have learned from all of my fellow board members and am grateful for their contributions to Marin County; I have enjoyed them, had fun with them! I won't miss them because I intend to stay connected with them through committee work as long as I am able."

Susan: "MCL board members were/are involved, intelligent people willing to analyze issues and engage with governmental entities for better outcomes. I have met and worked with people from all over the County who have skills in various fields. It has been stimulating. I have loved

Water supply resilience *from page 2*

opportunity for enhancing supply is in strengthening partnership on regional strategies with North Marin Water and Sonoma Water. There are several proposals suggested for study for long-term water supply solutions: developing a regional brackish desalination plant on the Petaluma River, a possible source of the 5,000 AF/year new water needed as part of the District's roadmap (The District's board in March approved \$200,000 to study the feasibility of a regional plant, but there are no plans at this time to consider a Marin-only desal plant.); building new pipelines directly to Soulajule or Nicasio reservoirs; and capturing excess winter water flows from the Russian River.

Compared to MMWD's relatively modest 22,000-acre watershed, the Russian River watershed basin covers 1,485 square miles, or nearly one million acres, in Sonoma and Mendocino counties. Its annual average discharge is 1.6 million AF per year. A vast majority of

Russian River winter water travels to the Pacific. Several projects are under consideration to study more capture of winter runoff. Such projects would need environmental assessment. They include a new dedicated pipeline from Cotati to Soulajule and a conveyance via Stafford Lake, Novato's one major reservoir. Also, under consideration is the potential for groundwater recharge in Petaluma and the Sonoma Valley. However, groundwater storage capacity and Marin's ability to tap this source may be limited. There are also a number of system bottlenecks that could be addressed allowing Marin to buy more water from Sonoma.

Local storage enhancement

In Marin County, several options are under consideration including installation of dam gates to increase holding capacity, and the raising of one or two dams. It is too early to determine if these are viable options. More study is required.

Dredging of current reservoirs or building new reservoirs are not under consideration, either in Marin or Sonoma, due to anticipated uncertainty of environmental impacts, long timelines, and extreme financial costs. No new viable sites appear available in Marin.

New water supply

Purchasing water supply imports from new sources and transporting via Bay interties are currently off the table due to projected costs and concerns over water availability in the event of extended drought conditions, including further planning for an intertie to the East Bay. The proposed pipeline across the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge was to tie into either East Bay Municipal Utility District or Contra Costa Water District systems and from there into the Delta. Intertie feasibility may come back to the board at a later time for consideration.

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MCL supports Marin Water's four-year water rate increases and restructuring

MCL is devoted to the preservation of clean water as well as maintaining healthy biodiversity in the Marin Water watershed. To that end, MCL supports the four-year Cost of Service Analysis (COSA-based) water rate increases. The increased water rates are necessary to ensure the District's ability to meet the existing and future cost of operations, fund necessary ongoing infrastructure replacement investments and for the District to maintain delivery of high-quality water while also maintaining the protection of ecological health and biodiversity on its watershed lands.

Marin Municipal Water District is a public agency that by law does not make a profit. The District bills customers for the cost of providing reliable drinking water. As the oldest district in the state, there are maintenance and operational challenges in maintaining that commitment. There are also factors that are beyond the District's management control, especially related to a changing climate.

MCL continues to support conservation and efficient water use as the most environmentally responsive and least expensive means to securing water supply and managing demand. However, we recognize the need to invest now in an integrated water management portfolio adapted to a warming climate.

The period between April 2019 and March 2021 was recorded as the fourth driest two-year period on record in California. At the height of the drought, MMWD customers were asked to cut summer use by 40%. These mandatory conservation efforts resulted in a significant drop in water sales.

Water districts are high fixed-cost operations. Ninety five percent of Marin Water's operating costs are fixed regardless of how much water is used. Because of the small size of its mostly residential customer base (61,000 metered), the District does not achieve nor benefit from economies of scale. As a result, during this fiscal year, the District has been losing over \$1 million per month in revenue because the existing water rates for service are not covering the breakeven cost of producing and delivering water.

Recent inflationary pressures have added to the deficit. While similar Bay Area districts have raised rates an average of 8% to 10% per year, MMWD has not raised rates during sixteen of the past 25 years. Failure to increase water rates to cover that accumulated inflation over time has caused the District to deplete its reserves to the point that, without a substantial increase in rates this year, Marin Water will be in a financially tenuous, unsustainable position.

A substantial rate increase, in this and upcoming years, is necessary to ensure the long-term financial health of the District. The increases are necessary not only for the District to maintain its commitment to delivery of reliable, high-quality water but also to continuing protection of the ecological health and biodiversity of its watershed lands. Investments now will also best serve Marin's future generations. See MCL's recent [letter of support](#) for Marin Water's 2023 proposed water rate increases.

Photo: Echo Times

Photo: Justin Sullivan, Getty Images

Postcards from the edge... the parched shorelines of Nicasio Reservoir (top) and Phoenix Lake (bottom) during the 2014 and 2021 droughts.

Increasing conservation efforts

At the urging of the MMWD board and members of the public, the District engaged a leading consulting firm, Maddus Water Management (MWM), to conduct a strategic water supply assessment of the District's water conservation efforts. The following were some of the recommendations:

- 50% of all summer water use in Marin is for landscaping. The water rate restructuring will eliminate summer water discounts which will help to encourage conservation by high summer water users. The cost for water in the summer and in other months will be the same going forward.
- Marin Water currently ranks statewide in the median for per person water use, 124 gallons per capita per day (GPCD). The goal from 2020 to 2045 is to reduce per capita use by 15% to 106 GPCD. Among the tools considered to reach and perhaps lower GPCD is systemwide installation of Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) which would allow both the District and

customers real-time access to their water use data. When fully implemented, conservation savings in the low digits are expected. Implementation is expected in 2027.

- Among the successful ongoing conservation financial incentives or rebates is the district's "Cash for Grass" turf removal rebate program. Marin Water is encouraging its customers to replace turf with primarily native, drought tolerant plants which support Marin's wide range of local, and in some cases, endangered pollinators. On the other hand, discontinuation of rebate programs with low participation and/or low return on investment was encouraged. These rebate programs include those for rainwater catchment, pool covers, and laundry-to-landscape graywater systems. The study suggests shifting conservation funding from those to other areas while continuing educational efforts.

Water reuse ("purple pipe" expansion)

Several water reuse options under study include Indirect Potable Reuse (IPR) where

pre-treated water is pumped into a reservoir or sent to a water treatment plant for final treatment, and Direct Potable Reuse (DPR) which is water treated to a higher level of drinking water purity. Both methods treat water using reverse osmosis similar to the desalination process. Of all water resiliency options under study, IPR and DPR are among the highest cost per AF due to very high per-mile costs to expand the purple pipe system. Installation would require street and neighborhood trenching resulting in disruption to traffic and business. A purple pipe system makes the most sense when entire neighborhoods can be connected to the system.

Watershed vegetation management

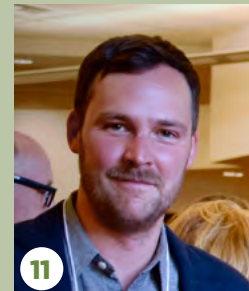
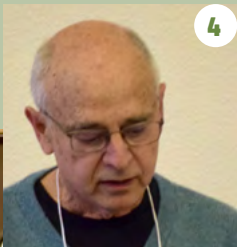
In addition to providing safe, reliable drinking water, the District is responsible for managing its watershed lands, including minimizing the risk of wildfires. The District conducts vegetation management on watershed lands throughout the year under its Biodiversity, Fire, and Fuels Integrated Plan (BFFIP), which was adopted in October of 2019. MMWD coordinates with Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA), other agencies in the One Tam collaborative, and Marin County Fire in an effort to facilitate cross-jurisdictional planning and management, to leverage the Countywide Vegetation Map that informs and prioritizes fuel reduction efforts, and to support coordinated grant applications. The District is also participating in One Tam's Forest Health Strategy to develop multi-benefit forest restoration priorities.

In order to meet the future challenges of climate change and the real risk of multi-year drought conditions, it is encouraging that there is increased interest by Sonoma Water, the North Marin Water District and MMWD to find and develop joint North Bay regional water supply solutions. While much is happening on many levels, implementing the District's roadmap to water supply resilience through an integrated approach will require time and funding. As customers, we must be prepared to absorb the cost of what is a necessary investment to meet Marin's long-term water supply needs in a changing and increasingly unpredictable climate..

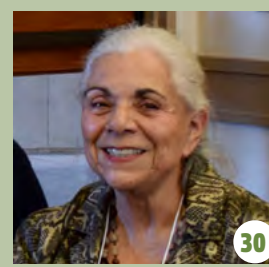
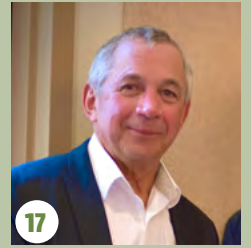


MCL's *Annual Dinner & Environmental Awards*

April 21, 2023 at the Key Room



For an index of
who's who,
see page 11.



Watershed recreation plan from page 1

workshops plus two field visits. The workshops were sequentially themed to: introduce the watershed facilities, including roads and trails, and describe natural resources; receive feedback on differing visitor goals and sources of conflict; identify issues and desired future watershed conditions; review existing applicable plans and other data sources for managing the watershed and consider elements of a visitor survey; explore volunteer opportunities; and consider what "multi-benefit solutions" might look like. Every workshop allowed ample time to receive 1-minute comments from a host of attendees.

A shift in visitors' overall attitudes to one of respect for the watershed would be a worthy outcome of the new plan.

A draft plan is scheduled to be completed and presented to the District Board in November of this year. At this point, the actual product of this intensive effort to engage a broad community of interests in planning seems far from being a plan however – certainly not a plan ready for implementation any time soon.

What will the plan look like?

Our guess is that it will take the form of a "report" or "feasibility study" that identifies the numerous problem areas, desired outcomes as articulated by the public, and some "good ideas" for immediate consideration while leaving any major policy decisions or bold actions for further analysis. We anticipate that the report will estimate likely costs and benefits of such actions and recommended priorities for next steps. We also expect the report to contain updated and very useful information about how visitors are using the watershed, garnered from multiple sources—visitor surveys in the field and online, Strava data, installed eco-counters, small group meetings with many organizations in addition to the public workshops, and others. The District will have a new and informative baseline for the plan.

Community interests

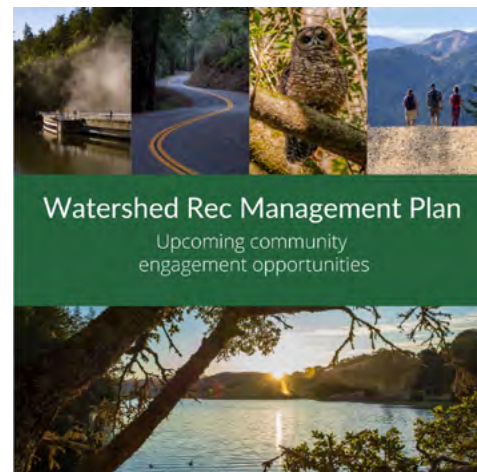
As for the "broad community of interests" engaged by the District, participation in workshops and field trips has been robust, although a large majority of attendees have represented

a single interest: access for mountain bikes to currently restricted trails. Other interests have also been represented: equestrians, hikers and runners, bird and other wildlife watchers and plant conservationists, water rate payers with fiscal concerns, and others. The long-standing divide in perceptions of acceptable recreational behavior and past and continuing damage to water quality, wildlife, and other natural resources from overuse of roads and trails between mountain bikers and other trail and road users hasn't gone away, but discussions over the past months seem to have engendered a recognition that all visitors who enjoy the watershed should take responsibility to protect it—to be "good stewards" of sensitive resources, at a minimum, and to volunteer in active maintenance or restoration or as trail ambassadors.

Thus, the upcoming report will identify the "needs" and "desires" expressed over the past two years by the diverse public who recreate on District lands, and it may identify some "fixes" that can be undertaken in the near future, such as improved signage and maps, an ambassador program, trail stewardship and other volunteer opportunities, coordination with One Tam, interpretive enhancements, and broader educational programs. These were identified as "Near Term Takeaways" at the April 6th Workshop. Also identified was a list of "Takeaways Requiring More Analysis." If these are predictive of the expected report in November, it seems unlikely that any bolder actions will be proposed without further study.

These could include updating regulations or policy, reclassifying trails or roads, identifying specific roads or trails for future multi-use or connections, decommissioning or repairing non-system trails, or considering "zoning" of use areas according to their environmental sensitivity.

Any physical "project" that goes beyond the work outlined in the 2005 Road and Trail Management Plan (RTMP) or identified in Project Restore (which was designed to mitigate almost 1,000 sources of sediment production identified in the RTMP) is not likely to be considered at this point. Nor do we expect to hear a clear plan for CEQA review in November, although that question has been raised more than once by the public. Unlike the 2005 RTMP, which mapped and named every road and trail and identified the various conditions needing attention, the



Watershed Rec Management Plan

Upcoming community engagement opportunities

Public outreach on Marin Water's Recreation Management Plan has concluded for now, after six online workshops and two field trips.

now-in-process WRMP has not yet identified any specific roads or trails for changes.

MCL Perspectives

MCL has submitted more than one comment letter to the Marin Water board and staff expressing our concerns. (See recent letters to Marin Water on page 9.) At the outset, given the inability of District financial resources and ranger staff to keep pace with the expanding visitor demand over several decades, MCL continues to recommend that the District plan within the limits of available resources – i.e., "Manage what we have – but do it better." Certainly hire another ranger, but otherwise focus first on correcting (fixing) existing problems and enforcing existing regulations, before venturing into policy changes or possible conversions of trails or roads to multi-use trails.

MCL has also asked Marin Water board and staff to shift the plan's starting premise away from trying to satisfy recreational demand, to caring first for sensitive resources and providing clean water, and accommodating recreation only where and as consistent with this mission. (See boxed article on page 9.)

For several decades, we have heard complaints from mountain bikers that they are deprived of their rightful share of trails on Mt. Tamalpais. Our perception is that for mountain bikers, there will never be enough. In particular, we have recommended that the District resist pressure to expand recreational travel

cont. next page

into remote wild areas of the watershed that offer essential refuge for wildlife to carry out life functions away from human disturbance. This would especially apply to bike riding and possibly trail running at night.

We support education as a first approach to guiding visitor behavior toward respect for both natural resources and other visitors' well-being, but at the same time believe that education alone cannot control the behaviors of renegade visitors. Ranger enforcement needs to be supported by a board that is committed to the principle that bad behavior cannot be tolerated.

Finally, the Watershed Recreation Management Plan that eventually emerges from the current planning effort, as well as new management strategies requiring further study, are unlikely to bring about major changes to the road and trail system on the watershed. They should, however, prioritize restoration in areas of existing recreational damages, as initiated in the 2005 RTMP.

Some trail enhancements for all users seem likely. At the same time, we expect the District to continue its decades-long high standards for managing the priceless natural resources in its watersheds. Most important, a shift in visitors' overall attitudes to one of respect for the watershed would be a worthy outcome of the new plan. In the meantime, updates are available on the project web site: marinwater.org/WatershedRecPlan.

Recent letters to Marin Water regarding the WRMP:

[Response to Recreation Planning Workshops from Marin Conservation League](#), May 3, 2023

[Comments on Environmental Review of Watershed Recreation Management Plan Projects from Marin Audubon Society \(MAS\) and Marin Chapter of the California Native Plant Society \(CNPS\)](#), Apr 6, 2023

[Recommendations from the Working Group for Responsible MW Watershed Visitation](#), Mar 23, 2023

[MCL Suggested Approaches to Watershed Recreation Management Plan](#), Jun 29, 2022



How do other water supply utilities in the Bay Area manage recreation on their watersheds? *—by Nona Dennis*

That question prompted MCL's Parks and Open Space Committee to invite two watershed resource managers of Bay Area utilities to its April 13th meeting. ([View recording.](#)) As Marin Water continues to wrestle with a plan to (better) manage the recreation that is so popular on its watershed(s), are there any lessons to be learned from: (1) how San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) manages access and recreation on its 23,000-acre watershed lands surrounding the Crystal Springs and San Andreas Reservoirs on the San Mateo Peninsula, or (2) how East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD) manages recreation on the 28,000-acre watersheds surrounding its five reservoirs in the East Bay hills?

Lisa Wayne and Scott Hill, Natural Resource Managers of the SFPUC and EBMUD watersheds respectively, provided informative accounts of the utilities for which they work and how recreation has been allowed to fit into their primary missions. Similar to Marin Water, these long-standing water utilities are entrusted to protect the quality of water supply and to manage and preserve the biologically and culturally rich resources in their watersheds, particularly in these times of changing climate. It is noteworthy that their watersheds are roughly comparable in size to Marin Water's.

Here the similarity with Marin Water ends. Both SFPUC and EBMUD bring pure water from the Sierra Nevada via lengthy pipeline and intermediate reservoirs for storage in local reservoirs and local delivery. Their customer bases range from 2.8 million for SFPUC to about 1.4 million for EBMUD, an order of magnitude larger than Marin Water's 191,000 customers served and covering vastly larger service areas. The most relevant difference between these utilities and Marin Water, however, lies in their early history of public exclusion from lands surrounding their reservoirs. In both cases, large swaths of land were purchased for the primary purpose of protecting water supply and were immediately fenced off, predictive that any future planning for access would be carefully considered as to where and how much to open to the public, and under what kinds of permit or other controls. Compare these histories with Marin Water's watershed, which was open from "day one"—with its total absence of fencing, its porous boundaries, its geographically connected customer

base, and its history of welcoming visitors. These distinctions have made a critical difference in public expectations and have fostered an attitude which takes recreation on Marin Water's land for granted as a public right.

Takeaways applicable to Marin Water's Watershed Recreation Plan

Our purpose here is not to describe the two invited water utilities in detail. Each representative related a fascinating history and recounted how their agencies now support recreation, but with clearly defined limits and controls. Despite contextual differences, some takeaways from their experience can still be useful to Marin Water, as listed here:

- 1) **Pay absolute fidelity to the primary mission of protecting water and resources first**, with appropriate recreation a distant second;
- 2) **Keep recreation away from the remote "wild" areas of watersheds**;
- 3) **Require a low-fee, renewable visitor permit system** with easy to obtain online permits, signed by the visitor, and with convenient trailhead check-ins, referred to by EBMUD as a "contract" between District and visitor;
- 4) **Define recreation modes, limiting bike access to well-monitored trails**. (Note that the Bay Area Ridge Trail received diligent post-construction monitoring after it was completed on SFPUC lands; the same could be applied to Marin Water's Azalea Hill project when completed);
- 5) **Expand educational outreach** widely into schools and other venues to cultivate respect for water and its watersheds;
- 6) **Ensure adequate Ranger presence** for purposes of educating the public, with citations for illegal behavior provided by cooperating police departments; and
- 7) **Support Ranger and maintenance programs with robust volunteer involvement**, such as volunteer patrols.

History may have charted a somewhat different course for Marin Water, but the two visiting utilities offered numerous fruitful ideas that deserve consideration in Marin.

Marin County loses an environmental legend – Jean Berensmeier

by Nona Dennis

Jean Berensmeier, credited with preserving San Geronimo Valley's public open spaces, forested ridges, and bucolic village character from development for over 60 years, passed away on March 15, at the age of 90. The timing was especially poignant. She was about to be inducted with four other women into the Marin Women's Annual Hall of Fame on March 23, a highlight among other accolades she had received for her service to San Geronimo Valley and the larger Marin County. The gala event took place as planned, and Jean's contributions and achievements were indeed honored posthumously. As her son Paul, partner in many adventures and in teaching children about nature, read Jean's response that he had helped her compose, the room silenced to acknowledge the fresh personal loss to Jean's bereaved family, friends and colleagues, and then erupted into a standing ovation as the crowd celebrated her life-long contributions to Marin's environment.

Jean and artist husband-to-be Fred (Lee) first discovered San Geronimo Valley in the 1950s when, as San Francisco State students, they served as arts counselor and "horse wrangler" at the Forest Farm Summer Camp in Forest Knolls. They remained connected to the Valley off-and-on, and made a permanent move to Lagunitas from San Francisco in 1963 with infant son Paul. Their "fixer-upper" cabin on the slopes of Mt. Barnabe evolved into Jean's center of action and the foundation for her deep knowledge and affection for the Valley. Even as she continued what would be a long career as a professor of Physical Education at College of San Mateo, she managed to hike every trail, initially with Paul in tow until he could run them on his own.

In response to a question from a fellow Valley resident at the combined 90th Birthday and Berensmeier family exhibit at the San Geronimo Valley Community Center in 2022: "What is your favorite spot in the Valley after all those years?" she replied without hesitation: "Mt. Barnabe, the ridge above us – we would often take a simple meal up there and enjoy the view of the world around us!"

It was through a chance question that she learned in 1961 that a Master Plan for

developing a community of 5,000 homes for 20,000 people in the Valley was in play. She talked to her neighbors, and the successful fight to save the Valley was on! The eventual result would be formation of the San Geronimo Valley Planning Group, a changing cast of residents over the years who, under Jean's tutelage, continue to this day to study upcoming plans and projects and weigh arguments from all sides before advocating to the community and county decisionmakers what seems best for the Valley's environment, as well as its inhabitants. Later in the 1960s, she attended a meeting in the aging Community Center building, heard that it was going to be razed for a parking lot, and insisted on further investigation of its structural soundness for use. The result was a year-long lease by Jean to engage children in after-school classes in arts and crafts. A year later she convinced parents with kids in the popular program to incorporate as a non-profit – and thus the San Geronimo Valley Community Center was born. The Center continues after more than 50 years to offer residents from across the Valley a wide array of community activities in addition to art.

Jean's work in the Valley inevitably led to working with the County as well as Marin Municipal Water District. With passage of the Marin County Open Space District property tax measure in 1972, came the opportunity to save private lands under threat of development. Jean got to know her supervisor Gary Giacomini and with his support over the years successfully negotiated the acquisition of Roy's Redwoods, the first open space preserve in the recently formed District. The Giacomini Open Space Preserve acquisition came later, then the donated Maurice Thorner Memorial open space and later, with Supervisor Steve Kinsey's support, acquisition of French Ranch open space through the development process. She could claim either direct or indirect responsibility for saving more than 2,500 acres of county open space. Jean was also Gary's appointee to the County Parks and Open Space Commission, where she served for 27 years.

Although Jean is remembered largely for her environmental contributions in San Geronimo Valley, she also she spent many active years



with Marin Conservation League during the 1980s and 1990s. She served on the Board ('80 - '89, and '90 - 2000), as President (1990 to 1993), and as Chair of the MCL Parks and Open Space Committee (into the early 2000s). Her involvement with MCL ebbed after she and her son Paul founded the non-profit "Wilderness Way" in 2001, a program committed to taking classes of children into the outdoors to learn about Indigenous People, birds and nature, and how to care for the land. She continued to participate in MCL events, however, attended committee meetings when possible, supported MCL generously, and served as an unofficial "liaison," connecting MCL with the environmental politics of "almost" West Marin. She was recognized with MCL's Green Award in 2002, and in 2014 with MCL's Peter Behr Lifetime Achievement Award for her years of energetic leadership and dedication to preserving and protecting open space and biological diversity in Marin County and for introducing generations of children to the wonders of the natural world.

Jean's concluding words at the Women's Hall of Fame gala, through Paul, were noteworthy. Far from ready to rest on her laurels, she listed the tasks still to be done, among others the need to continue taking children into the natural world to become stewards of the land. That continuing "work" will get done, and her legacy will live on through others, both in and outside the Valley. It will not be as much fun to be "conservationists" without Jean, however! She told stories to make her points; her spirit was larger than life; and her laugh was at once mischievous and infectious. But her resolve was firm. Jean's life may have been cut short of achieving all that she aspired to do, but it could not have been more richly lived!



Nona and Susan *from p 3*

knowing and working with incredible people, achieving wonderful goals for the benefit of future generations and the environment."

As the organization moves forward to address these new demands, it should never forget the people and the work that preceded them – these many efforts, and MCL's legacy of protected public lands in Marin, make up the solid foundation of a timeless organization! I'm proud to have been part of it!

— Nona Dennis

What do you want for this current group of directors and for the organization in the future?

Nona: "I have a few minor concerns as new board members and officers move forward: they will be missing a lot of MCL's historic representation on both executive committee and board. There's no one way to tell MCL's story, and it can't all be found in our manuals or approved policy statements. Over the years the board responded as issues arose, many of those may now seem obvious. Now new environmental issues like climate change and biodiversity have moved into first place, sometimes at odds with each other.

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Susan: "I want the directors to carry on the legacy of the organization's engagement."

As MCL's current board continues to fully get its legs in filling the spaces that Nona and Susan have created, our understanding of both the quality and magnitude of their enduring commitments and our gratitude for their substantial roles in furthering MCL's mission continue to grow.

Annual Dinner & Environmental Awards

Index to photos on pgs.6-7

Photos by Kate Powers

1. Armando Quintero, Director of California State Parks and the evening's speaker
2. Reva Siu, Youth Environmental Leadership awardee
3. Rebecca Porrata and Carlos Porrata, Peter Behr Lifetime Achievement awardee
4. Jeff Schriebman accepting the Ted Wellman Water Award on behalf of his late wife, Judy Schriebman
5. Greg Zitney, Arlin Weinberger, and Debra Minikes
6. Larry Minikes, MCL Volunteer awardee
7. Carolyn Lai with husband Tom Lai, MCL's Special awardee for Environmental Achievement
8. Jerry Riessen of Tiburon Open Space Committee, Marin Green awardee for Environmental Leadership
9. Julia Riessen with Erica Williams of The Trust for Public Land
10. Aviva Rossi, newly elected MCL board director
11. Adam Clark and Joe Bartl of Bartlett Tree Experts, Green Business awardees
12. Bonnie Marks and Bob Miller, MCL's outgoing president
13. Damon Connolly, CA State Assemblymember, with Monty Schmitt, Marin Water board director, and David Behar
14. Faye D'Opal, retired Marin County Superior Court Judge
15. Susan Stompe, outgoing MCL board director, putting flowers and final touches on the tables before guests arrive
16. David Lewis, outgoing board director; chair of MCL's Agricultural Land Use committee
17. Mike Swezy
18. Burr Heneman
19. Nona Dennis, outgoing MCL board director with Katie Rice, Marin County Supervisor
20. Stephanie Moulton-Peters, President of Marin County Board of Supervisors
21. Marilee Eckert with Wanden Treanor, College of Marin Trustee
22. Gary Oates and Paul Jensen
23. Nancy Hughes with Minna Kim, MCL Communications, and Martha Richter Smith, MCL Office Administrator
24. Pam Reaves, MCL's incoming 2nd Vice President and Terri Thomas, MCL's incoming President
25. David Smith, Golden Gate National Recreation Area's new Superintendent
26. Linda Novy, MCL's incoming 1st Vice President with Bill Carney
27. Kristen Keck and Matt Samson, Marin Water board director
28. Rich Jensen, MCL Treasure with Ken Drexler, MCL's former Treasurer
29. Eric Lucan, Marin County Supervisor
30. Randy Greenberg



MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Terri Thomas, Sausalito, President
Linda Novy, Fairfax, 1st Vice President
Pam Reaves, San Rafael, 2nd Vice President
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Georgia McIntosh, Mill Valley
Jane Medley, San Rafael
Bob Miller, San Rafael
Kate Powers, San Rafael
Aviva Rossi, Fairfax
Jeff Stump, Inverness
Mike Swezy, Fairfax
Greg Zitney, Novato

Board of Directors meetings are held at 6:00 PM on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

Issue Committee Meeting Schedule
(subject to change—check website)

Land Use and Transportation:
1st Wed. of the month, 10:00 AM—12:00 PM

Parks and Open Space:
2nd Thurs. of the month, 3:00 PM—5:00 PM

Climate Action Working Group:
3rd Fri. of the month, 9:00 AM—11:00 AM

Agricultural Land Use:
Meets quarterly, 4th Fri. of the month,
9:30—11:30 AM

North Marin Unit:
Check website for times

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MCL's Business-Environment Breakfast



**State Senator
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NEWS FROM THE CAPITOL

**Transportation
Housing
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Friday, June 16

7:30 – 9:00am

**McInnis Park Club Restaurant
\$25 MCL members
\$30 non-members**

Please register by 6/13/23

<https://BBMcGuire2023.eventbrite.com>

Questions? Call 415-485-6257