

**SUSTAINABLE TAMALMONTE
215 JULIA AVENUE
MILL VALLEY, CA 94941**

May 7, 2014

Congressman Jared Huffman
999 Fifth Ave., Suite 290
San Rafael, CA 94901

Re: National Park Service (NPS) General Management Plan

Dear Congressman Huffman,

We have recently learned that the National Park Service (NPS) has ignored all concerns and requests of local Marin residents and their representatives and has finalized their General Management Plan with virtually no changes made to the original draft. Moreover, at a community meeting on May 1st, Golden Gate National Recreational Area (GGNRA) Representatives stated that they would no longer accept public comments and would make no changes to the Plan except "errata".

Despite prior agreements, concerns expressed by the Marin County Board of Supervisors and strong support from you, the NPS forged ahead with plans to add turnouts, bus stops and lights at 4-corners, parking, a substantial Muir Woods Visitor Center near Hwy 101 & Hwy 1, and further commercialize Muir Woods.

The National Park Service's quest for greater revenue by increasing the number of visitors to Muir Woods is contrary to what is best for the preservation of the Muir Wood's habitat and what is best for the surrounding communities. Potential consequences from the increase in visitors include: destruction of sensitive habitat; harm to wildlife (including endangered species); increased traffic congestion; more pollution and debris; and greater risk of public harm due to more accidents, pollution, blocked evacuation routes and fires.

We wish to emphasize the seriousness of the NPS General Management Plan's impact on Hwy 1 traffic congestion. The 2007 Countywide Plan's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluated Hwy 1 and found it to be the most congested highway in Unincorporated Marin with an unacceptable Level of Service "F". The approximately one million annual visitors to Muir Woods greatly contribute to this traffic congestion. The EIR also concluded that implementation of the Countywide Plan would further worsen the traffic and that there was no viable mitigation measure to mitigate the congestion and thus the traffic congestion impact on Hwy 1 would remain a Significant **Unavoidable** Adverse Environmental Impact. The 2012 Marin County Housing Element's Supplemental EIR confirmed this finding.

Furthermore, Air Pollution Expert Geoffrey Hornek, whom we hired to review and evaluate the air quality analysis done for the 2012 Marin County Housing Element's SEIR, found that the Toxic Air Contaminants (TACs) emitted by vehicles on Hwy 101

and on Hwy 1 far exceeds the threshold that the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (“BAAQMD”) deems to be safe. Due to this, residents living near Hwy 101 or Hwy 1, who are regularly exposed to the TACs, are at greater risk of developing chronic and life-threatening illnesses (E.g. low birth weight, cardiovascular mortality, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, suicide, schizophrenia, pediatric asthma, among other health effects.) We have attached Mr. Hornek’s letter.



TRAFFIC ON HWY 1 IN TAM JUNCTION



TRAFFIC AT HWY 1/ STINSON BEACH EXIT OFF HWY 101

(Typical of a warm day, traffic was backed up across the entire span of the Richardson Bay Bridge)

So, Hwy 1 already exceeds capacity. If the National Park Service's plan increases our traffic congestion even more, it doesn't just mean more aggravation, it means there would be greater risk that more residents would be involved in accidents on Hwy 1 and that more residents living near Hwy 1 would develop serious illnesses or that the illnesses would occur sooner. Accidents and illnesses can both lead to loss of life.

The Toxic Air Contaminants and noise from the traffic could also impact the natural habitat and wildlife in the area. Bothin Marsh sits directly next to a section of Hwy 1. Bothin Marsh, a Marin County Open Space District Preserve, is a mix of tidal wetlands, sloughs and Bay that provides habitat for hundreds of native bird and wildlife species, including the endangered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse and California Clapper Rail. It's also a resting stop for over 400 species of migratory birds traveling on the Pacific Flyway. Moreover, Bothin Marsh is part of Richardson Bay, an estuary of the San Francisco Bay, that is protected by the 1971 Ramsar Convention which is an international treaty among 163 countries to limit damaging development along ecologically important waterways by restoring the bay front and seasonal wetlands.

We are very grateful for your letter, dated May 1, 2014, expressing opposition to the National Park Service's plans for more parking lots on Panoramic Drive, Santos Meadows and White Gate Ranch. However, we hope you will address other concerns too. Therefore, we urge you to use your influence and persuade the National Park Service to make the following changes to their General Management Plan:

1. **Require An Independent Scientific Carrying Capacity Study:** Halt the National Park Service plan until a trustworthy INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC CARRYING CAPACITY STUDY of Muir Woods and the surrounding communities, including impacts on adjacent habitats and traffic, is completed.
2. **Establish Visitor Caps:** Don't just keep the number of Muir Woods visitors at current levels but LOWER the number of tourists allowed to visit Muir Woods by establishing hourly, daily, monthly, and yearly CAPs on the number of tourists allowed to visit Muir Woods BEFORE implementation of a reservation system occurs. Such CAPs should be based on findings from the Independent Scientific Carrying Capacity Study to set levels of visitation that will be sustainable over time and NOT based on NPS marketing studies. Until the study can be completed, temporary CAPS, based on an annual CAP of 700,000 visitors, should be used
3. **Reduce Traffic Impacts:** Significantly LOWER the traffic impacts that Muir Woods' visitors have on traffic congestion along Shoreline Hwy and other local roads. Don't allow an increase (as proposed by NPS) and don't just maintain the status quo. This is a tremendous opportunity to improve the unacceptable traffic conditions in Manzanita, Tam Junction and all along Hwy 1.
4. **Require A Regional 'Point of Origin' Shuttle System:** If an Independent Scientific Carrying Capacity Study on visitor load for Muir Woods and related parking & traffic proves the need for a more robust shuttle system, establish a Muir Woods Shuttle System (using small shuttle buses) that picks up and

drops off Muir Woods' visitors at **regional points of origin** (E.g. San Francisco, East Bay, and North Bay) and NOT within the Tamalpais Area Community Plan area. The number of vehicles exiting off Hwy 101 and entering onto congested Hwy 1 (with an LOS "F") must be reduced.

5. **Prevent A Muir Woods Visitor Center In Our Highest Congestion Area:** Prevent the establishment of a Muir Woods Visitor Center in Manzanita near Hwy 101 & Hwy 1. This is one of our most congested areas, with bottleneck traffic at LOS "F". A visitor center would increase the number of cars entering the Manzanita/Tam Junction area and worsen an already unbearable and perilous traffic situation. Rather than increasing congestion, the number of vehicles exiting off Hwy 101 and entering the Manzanita/Tam Junction area must be reduced. Therefore, the idea of a visitor center within the Manzanita/Tam Junction area should be discarded.
6. **Prevent New Parking Lots:** Prevent new parking lots at Panoramic Drive, Santos Meadows or White Gate Ranch.
7. **Retain County Control Of Shuttles And Parking Enforcement:** Retain local control (Marin County's control) over shuttles and law enforcement related to managing and controlling Muir Woods' visitor load. This will allow locals to control how much traffic is generated by Muir Woods in order to prevent adverse impacts on the environment, public health and safety, and quality of life in our residential communities. Also, make certain that no illegal parking is allowed and parking regulations are enforced near Muir Woods and along Hwy 1.

Thank you in advance for your conscientious consideration.

Very truly yours

/s/

Sharon Rushton

Chairperson

Sustainable TamAlmonte

Enclosure