

COMMUNITY REPORT

2020-2021



Photo: Cal (Gault)

Temescal Regional
Recreation Area, Oakland

Parks Are Essential

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2020 was an unprecedented year for the world as well as for the East Bay Regional Park District. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) created enormous challenges for the Park District, both as an employer and as a park agency. During the pandemic, visitation increased exponentially. Furthermore, the SCU Lightning Complex Fire in August severely damaged five Regional Parks which required substantial firefighting resources, trail repairs, and debris removal.

Nevertheless, 2020 established an irrefutable fact: **Parks are essential.** Parks provide a safe place for restorative health. Our two County Health Offices have stressed the importance of staying physically active while sheltering in place; this includes visiting parks for physical and mental health benefits. Amidst ever-changing local health orders, we have steadfastly kept parks open with abundant safety signage, and with park staff cleaning restrooms, maintaining trails, clearing vegetation to mitigate wildfires, and managing park projects to successfully launch three park openings.

We thank you for doing your part to keep parks open and safe in 2020 and into 2021. *Let's continue to keep active, healthy, and safe in the Regional Parks!*



Briones Regional Park, Lafayette

Keeping Parks Open

In July 2020, we commissioned a scientific survey to understand how our community members are coping during the pandemic and the role parks play in their lives. The survey was a follow-up to our 2019 online survey on park usage, services, and future priorities. The 2020 survey results showed overwhelming support for our efforts to keep parks open and accessible during the pandemic (92%); and that the community greatly values parks for physical and mental health benefits (96%).

The pandemic underscored the efficacy of our decade-long Healthy Parks Healthy People partnerships with healthcare providers prescribing nature to their patients to build health and resilience in the Regional Parks. Our extensive network of parks and trails, which provide fresh air and a place to relieve stress and strengthen connections, contributes \$20 million annually towards healthcare cost savings, according to a 2017 Economic Impact Analysis.



Crown Memorial State Beach, Alameda

Standing Together

In June 2020, the Park District Board of Directors unanimously approved a resolution denouncing racism and systemic racial injustice and directed staff to develop a plan for addressing social justice issues in the Park District and in its parks. The Park District also committed to review policing practices and implement additional employee training on implicit bias and microaggressions.



Unparalleled Fire Season

California's 2020 fire season was the largest on record, with nearly 10,000 fires and over 4.2 million acres burned. In the East Bay, the SCU Lightning Complex Fire in August included fires in five Regional Parks – Mission Peak, Morgan Territory, Ohlone Wilderness, Round Valley, and Sunol Wilderness – and burned 396,624 total acres over 44 days.

At the Park District, wildfire protection is a 365-day-a-year activity and includes ongoing fire hazard reduction, grazing, weather monitoring, and special wildland firefighting training. In 2020, our staff responded to 91 fire incidents and our Eagle 7 helicopter conducted 223 water drops totaling 24,238 gallons. During the SCU Fire, Eagle 7 helped as the “eye in the sky” detecting fires and providing tactical guidance.

Our perennial fuels management, grazing program, and trail maintenance work have proven highly effective in wildfire mitigation. In many cases, the wildfires decelerated in grazed areas and stopped at well-maintained trails and fire roads.



Ohlone Wilderness Regional Preserve, Sunol



Preserving Land Forever

Land preservation continued in 2020, with 400 acres – some of the last few remaining unprotected places in the East Bay – protected into perpetuity. Key acquisitions include the **A** Gherini Property at Las Trampas, **B** Northern California Laborers Union property at Bishop Ranch, and **C** Chouinard Winery at Garin. The Park District also secured purchase options and other agreements to acquire 626 additional acres of parklands in the future.



Gherini Property at Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve, San Ramon

Connecting People with Nature

In 2020, our naturalists were busy connecting people to parks virtually. With in-person programs prohibited, we expanded our Digital Learning program to include live virtual programs and field trips, virtual and augmented-reality park experiences, and field study videos. These programs were made available on our website and via social media, Zoom, and YouTube. Over 770,000 people were served during more than 1,200 virtual programs.

Our Regional in Nature Activity Guide, with a reach of over 400,000, was redesigned to include self-directed activities and articles on park history and environmental education.



Keeping People and Parks Safe

Keeping people and parks safe is our topmost priority. In 2020, our police and fire services staff responded to a record 23,924 calls for services, including medical emergencies, fires, and park Ordinance 38 violations. Our staff adapted quickly to COVID-19 safety requirements. Utilizing public service announcements, social media, and park signage, we provided critical education to park visitors on safety protocols which included wearing face masks and staying 6 feet apart.

To mitigate wildfire risks in parklands, our ongoing efforts include:

- Thinning and removing overgrown brush and plants
- FEMA, CalFire, and California Coastal Conservancy projects
- An eight-person year-round fire fuels reduction crew
- Maintenance of fuel breaks
- Vegetation maintenance and trail work by seasonal California Conservation Crews (CCC)
- Grazing



Strong Fiscal Management

In 2020, we faced significant financial challenges with the loss of revenues from user fees and facility rentals and the additional costs for COVID-19 safety training, personal protective equipment, safety signage, and public service announcements. However, through strong fiscal management, our 2020 budget remained balanced.

2020 accomplishments:

- Continued to generate nearly \$500 million in regional economic benefits
- Continued to receive AAA ratings from Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service
- Commissioned an economic report that showed planned construction projects will generate \$214.4 million in economic benefits for the region
- Received the Distinguished Budget Award and Certificate of Achievement for Financial Reporting for the 19th consecutive year

Climate Action

We expedited several environmental and habitat restoration projects, including water quality improvements to combat blue-green algae (cyanobacteria). At Lake Temescal, we used mechanical and nanobubble technology to reduce the nutrients that support cyanobacteria. At Lake Anza, we installed an oxygenation system that sends pressurized oxygen to the bottom of the lake to reduce nutrient levels.

To protect parks and trails from climate change, we are building recreational amenities and wildlife habitat that can withstand extreme weather, sea level rise, and wildfires. Planning and assessments are underway, including a regional study to assess the effects of sea-level rise on the San Francisco Bay Trail, of which 40 miles are managed by the Park District, and a joint Hayward Shoreline Master Plan with the City of Hayward and Hayward Area Recreation and Park District to address the impacts of sea-level rise along the Hayward shoreline.



Temescal Regional Recreation Area, Oakland

Dublin Hills Regional Park, Dublin

Key Milestones

During the pandemic, we forged ahead completing and advancing several major projects, including:



Judge John Sutter Regional Shoreline and Bay Observation Pier

Opened a new gateway park in Oakland featuring a 600-foot-long public observation pier built atop six remaining piles from the old Bay Bridge. Includes connection to the Bay Bridge Bicycle-Pedestrian Trail.



Albany Beach Improvements and SF Bay Trail Extension

Completed a one-mile SF Bay Trail extension, including cantilevered bridge structures, from Gilman Street to Albany Beach – creating 18 miles of continuous Bay Trail running from Oakland to Richmond. The \$18.9 million project also included public access improvements and habitat restoration.



Bay Point Regional Shoreline Trail Improvements and Habitat Restoration

Reopened Bay Point after an 18-month closure for habitat restoration and construction of visitor amenities, including new picnic areas, trails, restrooms, a drinking fountain, and a kayak launch – all elevated to withstand projected sea level rise.



McCosker Creek Restoration and Public Access Project

Broke ground on the largest creek restoration project in the Park District's history at Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve in Oakland – daylighting 3,000 feet of currently-culverted creek and re-establishing natural habitat for 10 special-status species. Completion expected in 2023.



Awards

In 2020, we received national and statewide awards and recognition, including:

Three awards for Park District 85th Anniversary/Regional Parks Foundation 50th Anniversary:

- Outstanding Public Engagement Award from Public Lands Alliance
- Excellence in Public Information and Communications (EPIC) Award from California Association of Public Information Officials
- Outstanding Community Outreach Campaign Award from California Association of Recreation and Park Districts (CARPD)

Outstanding Community Organization/ Partner Award from CARPD for Regional Parks Foundation

Innovation in Green Community Planning, Award of Merit from American Planning Association for Judge John Sutter Regional Shoreline (EBRPD and Caltrans)

Frank Cabot Public Rock Garden Award from North American Rock Garden Society for Regional Parks Botanic Garden

Advanced Law Enforcement Reaccreditation from Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) for EBRPD Police Department



New General Manager Sabrina B. Landreth

In March 2021, the Park District's Board of Directors appointed Sabrina Landreth as General Manager. Ms. Landreth has held top executive leadership positions managing the cities of Oakland and Emeryville. Most recently, she served as City Administrator in Oakland from 2015-2020 where she was credited with strong fiscal management and developing a capital improvement program that included community equity goals.

General Manager Robert E. Doyle Retires

General Manager Emeritus Robert Doyle retired in 2020 after an illustrious 47-year career with the Park District – ten as General Manager. His legacy includes 65,000 additional acres protected, 20 new Regional Parks, 200 miles of Regional Trails, and \$1 billion raised for public access improvements and land preservation through grants, bond measures, and state and federal funding.



Regional Parks Foundation



The Regional Parks Foundation continues to support the Park District and raise funds for universal access, environmental stewardship, education and recreation programs, and acquisition of new parklands. In 2020, the Foundation continued its leadership, launching an initiative to provide 750 free memberships to underserved Black, indigenous, and people of color, shifting funding to provide 500 educational toolkits and over 17,914 youth Campership virtual programs, and distributing 7,500 face coverings that were handed out to park visitors.



East Bay
Regional Park District

Healthy Parks Healthy People

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Mission

Preserve a rich heritage of natural and cultural resources and provide open space, parks, trails, safe and healthful recreation, and environmental education. An environmental ethic guides the District in all of its activities.

Vision

The District envisions an extraordinary and well-managed system of open space parkland in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, which will forever provide the opportunity for a growing and diverse community to experience nature nearby.