



TO: Chair and Members of the Parks and Recreation Commission
FROM: JoAnne Plummer, Neighborhood Services Director
CONTACT: George Thomson, Parks and Open Space Manager
SUBJECT: Parks and Open Space Division Report

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive and file a report regarding recent activities and initiatives in the Parks and Open Space Division.

DISCUSSION:

Ellwood Butterfly Grove

Work at the Butterfly Grove is progressing rapidly with on-the-ground activities occurring daily. Major recent accomplishments include completion of the new trail renovation and butterfly viewing area at Ellwood Main, installation of 1.3-miles of a permanent belowground 3-inch irrigation mainline, and on-going planting of new trees. As of early-November, 246 new trees were planted that will help restore the monarch butterfly habitat. Weekly volunteer events are proving to be very successful with 50-80 people attending Saturday morning planting events. Additional weekday volunteer events are also attracting local businesses and community groups to help plant trees and native plants. Volunteers can sign up for upcoming events here:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeQ0m74Emy22xnGi9cWmn5xNyrtYKLYMzAe71sDWOgEb-7HaQ/viewform>

The community can stay up to date on all the various activities at Ellwood Mesa by visiting this site:

<https://www.cityofgoleta.org/play/parks-recreation-open-spaces/ellwood-mesa-and-monarch-butterfly-habitat/ellwood-now-work-in-progress>

Annual monarch butterfly counts have begun and only a handful of butterflies have been observed at Ellwood. Reports from other monarch butterfly sites across coastal California indicate this may be another low year for monarchs, with the summer heat waves contributing to high butterfly egg loss. At Ellwood, counts are conducted every two weeks and results are available here:

<https://www.cityofgoleta.org/play/parks-recreation-open-spaces/recreation-across-the-city/goleta-butterfly-grove>

Urban Forestry Grant

On October 15, 2024, City Council accepted \$1,000,000 in grant funds from the US Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Program. The funding comes from the Inflation Reduction Act and was awarded via a competitive grant process. The City will use the \$1,000,000 grant award to improve our urban forest. Specific activities funded by the grant include creating a digital inventory of all parks trees that will serve as an important management tool for annual maintenance and long-term planning; addressing deferred tree maintenance and improving safety in all City parks; expanding annual Arbor Day celebration activities; creating park tree planting plans; and installing 250 new trees at the Ellwood Monarch Butterfly Grove. The grant funds work will continue through November 2027. Staff will return to the Commission with multiple opportunities to advise on the grant-funded work as it relates to park issues.

Staff Recruitments

The Parks and Open Space Division recently welcomed Mark Thomas to the parks maintenance team. Mr. Thomas brings a variety of experience with tree care, light construction, and manufacturing. He most recently worked with a local tree company and performed work in various City parks and open spaces. With Mr. Thomas’ hiring, the Division now has one remaining vacancy on our maintenance team. That vacancy is expected to be filled towards the end of the month, just in time for our busy winter storm season. The maintenance team fulfills a variety of critical roles for the City, including assisting with daily park maintenance, playground safety, urban forest management, and a variety of project-related tasks, including helping with restoration efforts at the Ellwood Butterfly Grove.

The Division is also currently interviewing candidates for the Management Analyst position. Interviews are tentatively scheduled for early December and a successful candidate will hopefully start in early 2025. This position serves as a project manager for various initiatives, including the implementation of various grant-funded projects (Urban Forestry, Ellwood Monarch Butterfly Grove, Ellwood Beach Access Improvements) and operational activities such as the splash pad maintenance contract, playground safety program, parks maintenance work order system, and staff training programs.

Approved By:


JoAnne Plummer,
Neighborhood Services Director