



Agenda Item A.3
CONSENT CALENDAR
Meeting Date: December 1, 2021

TO: Chair and Members of the Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Jaime A. Valdez, Interim 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:

The Public Works Department's Parks and Open Space Division is responsible for maintenance of the City's developed parks, open spaces, and other undeveloped City land. The Division is also responsible for advancing several open space capital projects focused on plant and wildlife habitat restoration, trail improvements, and stewardship of the City's roughly 500-acres of parklands. As we move into the winter months, our in-house and contracted maintenance staff continue to focus on turf and playground maintenance, detecting and repairing irrigation leaks, and addressing abandoned encampments on public, City-owned properties. Responding to storm-related damage and flooding emergencies is also an important role during this season. In addition to overseeing seasonal work, the Parks and Open Space Manager is focused on two capital improvement projects at the Ellwood Mesa Monarch Butterfly Grove and Lake Los Carneros. More detail is provided in the following summaries:

UPCOMING TREE MAINTENANCE AT FOUR PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The city has over 15,000 trees in its inventory of public street, parks, facility, and open space trees. The urban forest provides many benefits to the City, including diverse wildlife habitat, improved aesthetics and air quality, and amelioration of heat island effects. However, as trees die or unplanned saplings become established, tree maintenance work becomes an increasingly important sector of work undertaken by the Parks and Open Space Division. The Division solicited bids to complete dead tree removals and trimming of live trees for wildfire prevention at four parks and open spaces—Evergreen Park, Brandon Open Space, La Goleta Open Space, and San Jose Creek Open Space at Berkeley Avenue. In addition, trimming of trees along the eastern

and southern boundary of Stow Grove is moving forward. Competitive bids were received and work is pending contract execution and final permitting, which is taking longer than originally anticipated. The first round of work is expected to begin later this month at Stow Grove and Evergreen Park. Pre-work biological surveys and certified arborist supervision will be provided before and during work, respectively.

In an unrelated incident, a very large coast live oak tree branch fell at Stow Grove onto Group Picnic Area 2 on November 4. Nobody was injured, but several picnic tables were damaged. A certified arborist inspected the tree and determined the remaining standing tree trunk and branches should be removed due to instability. A contractor removed the tree the following day. Chipped wood was kept onsite to mulch the adjacent redwood trees, and the large oak trunk sections were preserved to later mill into picnic table tops and other park amenities. Replacement oak trees will be planted in the area to provide shade and habitat.

ENCAMPMENTS AND ILLEGAL DUMPING CLEAN UP

City staff continue to work collaboratively with our community partners to relocate encampment residents into supportive housing. During the past several months, City staff worked with CalTrans and Union Pacific Railroad to prioritize outreach efforts, housing assistance, and clean-up coordination along the major transportation corridors. A large encampment was cleared, and housing assistance services provided near the US 101 highway northbound onramp at Patterson Avenue. Current outreach housing assistance efforts are focused on other large encampments along transportation corridors and smaller encampments at Ellwood Mesa, Ellwood Beach, and occasional camps at Lake Los Carneros.

Community members are encouraged to report encampments to George Thomson, Parks and Open Space Manager at gthomson@cityofgoleta.org or 805-961-7576. If reporting an illegal campfire, a personal safety issue, or other emergency, residents are directed to call 911.

ELLWOOD MESA MONARCH GROVE

The western monarch butterfly, a population distinct from monarch butterflies in the central and eastern portions of North America, spends winter months clustering in aggregations along the California coast. During the past several years, the number of monarchs overwintering declined dramatically, with only 2,000 individuals showing up last year at coastal sites. At Ellwood Mesa, less than 20 monarch butterflies were counted from October 2020 through February 2021. The City contracts with a local consulting firm to provide butterfly monitoring every two weeks during the winter months. Monarch butterflies at Ellwood Mesa increased in number during the past several weeks.

Twenty-nine monarchs were at Ellwood in mid-October and by early-November that number increased to 498. In mid-November there were 10,070 monarch butterflies at Ellwood. This large increase was mirrored at other sites throughout central California. Although the return of tens of thousands of monarchs across the state is very welcome news, conservation groups are quick to highlight that overall numbers are still lower than historic populations counted during the 1990s and 2000s. Butterfly counts will continue at

Ellwood Mesa every two weeks through February. In addition, focused counts of overwintering butterfly aggregation sites by volunteers throughout California is occurring during the Thanksgiving Count (November 13th-December 5th) and the New Year's Count (December 25th-January 9th). More information about these citizen science efforts and the current monarch butterfly count is available at www.westernmonarchcount.org.

PLAYGROUND MAINTENANCE


Parks and Open Space staff perform monthly and as-needed inspections of the City's public playground facilities. Any safety issues identified during these inspections are promptly addressed. Playground replacements are considered capital projects and are overseen by Neighborhood Services staff. Currently, playground maintenance is required for the play structures at Nectarine Park, Evergreen Park, and Armstrong Park. Due to global supply chain issues and manufacturing delays related to COVID-19, some playground replacement parts are taking six months or more to receive from vendors. During this time, individual playground elements may be closed until repairs can be made. Once received, parts are typically installed within two to three days by Parks and Open Space staff.

TURF MAINTENANCE

Parks maintenance staff are using a topsoil and sand mixture to infill depressions on the recreational fields at Evergreen Park and Stow Grove Park, as well as select smaller fields. These field surface irregularities are created by burrowing rodents and dogs, as well as areas where soils are high in clay and tend to shrink and swell. Areas infilled with the topsoil and sand mixture are then seeded with turf grass to produce a more even playing surface.

In the coming months, portions of the recreational fields at Jonny D. Wallis Neighborhood Park and the Goleta Valley Community Center will need to be closed to rehabilitate the turf. Temporary closures will be needed to allow the turfgrass to regrow in areas of high use. Community outreach and onsite signage and temporary fencing will be implemented prior to work commencing.

Approved By:



Jaime A. Valdez, Interim
Neighborhood Services Director