

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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The Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD or District) provides water, sewer, and refuse disposal services to the coastal communities of Montara, Moss Beach, and adjacent areas in the unincorporated San Mateo County, and is located north of Half Moon Bay and south of Pacifica. The District owns and operates water storage, treatment, and distribution facilities that currently provide domestic water to approximately 1,800 domestic and fire water connections. The District operates a surface water source, a water treatment plant, twelve groundwater wells, and four water water storage tanks.

# 2 BACKGROUND

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The “Caltrans Bypass” or “Caltrans Right-of-Way (ROW)” is a strip of empty land running east of Elm Street in Montara, CA, that is owned by Caltrans, and is also commonly known as Martini Creek Bypass Lands. It had been intended for use as a freeway through Montara and down to the Half Moon Bay Airport, however, the northern tunnel option was selected and this land was never utilized.

The northern portion of the original Caltrans ROW was sold to the California State Parks system as a condition of building the tunnel, however, the portion that runs through Montara and Moss Beach had no established plan for ownership transfer.

In its communications to the County’s regarding Local Coastal Plan (LCP), the Midcoast Community Council (MCC) recommended that the Caltrans Right-of-Way be rezoned from residential to open space. Other Local Coastal Plan recommendations urge Caltrans to voluntarily merge existing subdivided lots within the ROW and then transfer the resulting single parcel to a public agency. This would promote the use of the property for trails and other open space uses.

The local population currently uses this land for recreation, and advocacy groups maintain that it could be formally designated as a recreational trail stretching all the way from the Half Moon Bay airport to Pacifica.

# 3 PLAN OF SERVICE

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## 3.1 Watershed Protection

MWSD is pursuing the acquisition of the Caltrans ROW primarily to promote its watershed protection by maintaining the natural landscape of the Caltrans ROW, which currently provides critical source protection benefits to the existing District water sources. Ensuring safe and adequate drinking water supplies requires

maintaining the quality and availability of present and future water supply sources. The conversion of undeveloped land to rooftops, pavement, and other surfaces that are impervious to the infiltration of rain presents a challenge to municipalities responsible for supplying high quality, safe drinking water to their residents. Industrial, commercial and residential development within the MWSD service area and watershed has the potential to degrade drinking water quality at District sources.

Natural landscapes filter the water that feeds both groundwater and surface water sources used as water supplies in the MWSD watershed and service area. Undeveloped land helps to filter water and release it more gradually than developed surfaces, preserving both the quality and quantity of water sources.

The Caltrans ROW is currently an undeveloped, natural landscape within the District's watershed that plays an integral part in protecting the District's water supplies. As established by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), purchasing land or placing conservation easements on critical water supply land - over which water flows towards surface water and groundwater drinking water sources - is considered the most effective way to protect drinking water by preserving forested buffers.

The San Mateo County LCP specifically aims to address the following:

- Discourage urban sprawl,
- Maximize the efficiency of public facilities, services, and utilities,
- Minimize energy consumption,
- Protect and enhance the natural environment, and
- Revitalize existing developed areas.

### **3.2 Recreation**

The 2013 LCP policy 11.3 defines recreation facilities as "...lands and facilities serving primarily a recreation function which are operated by public agencies...", including "...natural reserves, wild areas, and trails". The District currently operates trails through its property that provide public recreation for the community and visitors alike. While ensuring watershed protection, the District intends to further contribute to the development and operation of recreation facilities.