

Fitzgerald Marine Reserve
Master Plan Progress Report and Near-Term Priorities
DRAFT April 2017

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to summarize the progress that has been made in implementing the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve (FMR) Master Plan, which was completed in May 2002 and amended in 2004. The existing Master Plan was the result of seven years of planning that included 17 public meetings and workshops. In addition to summarizing progress, this report describes what is yet to be accomplished, identifies priorities, and notes important changes in the environment, public use, or regulation which have affected the need for and relevance of FMR Master Plan policies.

This report will be used to guide San Mateo County Parks (County Parks) management and investment in FMR, working with partners. Through the identification of next steps, partners can align resources and focus energy to further the stewardship of this special place.

Over the next five years, **visitor use management** is identified as the highest priority area to focus resources.

This report is based on a review of the FMR Master Plan by County Parks staff that was discussed with the Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Board of Directors and a working committee from this group. The Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, a non-profit organization, is a group of dedicated volunteers who provide education to the public regarding the rich and fragile resources of FMR, including docent-led tours of the tidepools. The Friends have been active for over 30 years.

Background

FMR has a rich and varied history starting with the Native Americans who used the resources of the intertidal zone and settled nearby as evidenced by several cultural resource sites in the area. In 1769, Gaspar de Portolá and his expedition were fed by Native Americans near Pillar Point. More recently, the shoreline and reef of FMR have been of interest to marine biologists, preservationists, and collectors. As early as the 1960s, human activity appeared to be depleting resources within FMR, and in 1969, the governor of California approved legislation designating FMR as a “marine life refuge.” Since that time, six attempts to establish FMR as an Ecological Reserve under State law failed largely due to opposition by fishing interests.

In 2002, County Parks issued a Master Plan for FMR, describing its rich history and identifying policies to guide management of its natural resources, visitors, and facilities. The Master Plan stresses the protection of the outstanding natural resources of FMR and recognizes that the best way to accomplish this goal is to “emphasize the sensitivity of the resource, to enhance the educational value of the Reserve, to manage visitation, and to limit use of the Reserve as a recreation destination.”¹ These goals remain relevant today.



In May 2010, the State of California under the Marine Life Protection Act created the Montara State Marine Reserve, which encompasses the beach, inter-tidal, and marine areas of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. Of the available categories of Marine Protected Area (MPA), a Marine Reserve receives the highest level of protection. Within a Marine Reserve, it is unlawful to injure, damage, take, or possess any living, geological, or cultural marine resource, except under a scientific collecting permit issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or specific authorization from the California Coastal Commission for research, restoration, or monitoring purposes.² CCR Title 14, Section 632(a)(1)(A). Within MPAs, non-consumptive uses are generally allowed, including but not limited to swimming, surfing, diving, boating, hiking and walking, unless otherwise specified in individual MPA regulations.³

In August 2016, the California Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a final Master



Plan for MPAs that focuses on managing California’s MPA network to meet the goals of the Marine Life Protection Act. Staff reviewed this document in conjunction with its review of the FMR Master Plan. In general, the goals identified in the MPA Master Plan align with those reflected in the FMR Master Plan. Specific opportunities to further that alignment are identified below.

¹ FMR Master Plan at p. 37.

² California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 14, Section 632(a)(1)(A).

³ CCR Title 14, Section 632(a)(4).

Accomplishments and Priorities

Below are priority policies for the Department for the next five years. The Department will not be able to take action on furthering all of these policies at once, but this report will help focus action and resources of the Department regarding FMR. Policies that have been superseded by the creation of the MPA, that simply restate the application of existing County ordinances to FMR, or that have already been implemented through operational practice are not discussed.

Visitor Management

Policy 1: Visitor use of the Reserve will be managed and limited to the number of persons that can be accommodated without damage to resources.

Accomplishments: In 2016, with funding support from the Friends of FMR, County Parks assigned a Park Aide to work at FMR to manage and educate visitors, particularly during low-tide events. The dedication of staff to this effort was very effective in reducing visitor impacts to seals and to the tidepools.

Changes: When the Master Plan was amended in 2004, annual visitation was 135,000. For calendar year 2015, visitation was approximately 192,000 persons. The Master Plan set limits for the Moss Beach Reef to be implemented over a ten-year period: 300 persons at one time and no more than 500 in one day. Frenchman's Reef was limited

to 200 persons at one time. The Department does not have a system in place to implement such limits.



Actions: Develop a long-term visitor management strategy and recommendations for implementation that would provide an analysis of visitor use and specific and concrete recommendations for managing it. Such a report could provide the basis for seeking additional funding and potentially a staff position assigned to FMR whose focus is visitor education and management.

Policy 2: The primary purpose of visitor use of the Reserve will be education.

Accomplishments: Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve continue to provide docent-led educational programs. Self-guided tour materials were developed and are being translated into Spanish. An award winning educational video was created and is shown on a screen at the Visitor Center, which was also recently improved with new and enhanced exhibits. Interpretive signs can be found on Pillar Point Bluff, Seal Cove stairs, FMR main parking lot, FMR cypress bluff, and along the Dardanelle Trail. Park rangers provide roving interpretation and enforcement during peak use times and during seal pupping season as budget allows.

Actions: Seek approval and funding for a full-time staff position for FMR focused on visitor education and management.

Policy 3: All groups are required to make advance reservations to go onto the reef.

Policy 4: Each group will be limited to no more than 100 individuals.

Policy 5: Any group of 10 or more individuals must be led by a staff member, docent or other qualified leader to be on the reef.

Accomplishments: County Parks manages the reservation system for the docent-led tours and group reservations.

Actions: Develop a communication plan targeting groups of 10 or larger. Start with education to build awareness about the reservation system and docent-led tour requirement for groups. Improve communication with groups known to arrive at FMR without reservations (for example schools that typically arrive without reservations). Develop a strategy to turn away groups without reservations.



Enforce the policy. For the longer-term, develop a visitor management strategy as noted under policy 1 that provides analysis and recommendations for group size limits, group management, and reservation practices.

Policy 6: Visitor fees will be charged for access, visitor services and/or parking.

Changes: Parking or entrance fees have not been established due to neighborhood opposition.

Actions: The Department intends to start a comprehensive review of its fees this year. Include FMR day use or parking fees in this fee assessment to determine the feasibility of charging fees. Evaluation of fees should also be part of the long-term visitor management strategy and recommendations.

Natural Resource Management

Policy 1: Natural resources within FMR will be protected and restored through development and implementation of resource management policies and programs.

Accomplishments: As recommended in the Master Plan, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission designated the Montara State Marine Reserve and Pillar Point State Marine Conservation Area as no take Marine Reserves in May 2010. In 2013, CDFW facilitated the forming of an MPA collaborative with education and enforcement as its focus. In 2014, SMC Parks hired a natural resources manager who has been building a natural resources program, including the development of vegetation management guidelines and mapping of sensitive resources, including within FMR.

Changes: Since the development of the Master Plan, the reef has become a major harbor seal haul out, including a seasonal area for seal pupping and rearing.

Actions: Analyze and apply knowledge gained through research studies permitted within FMR such as Long-term Monitoring Program and Experiential Training for Students (LIMPETS) to identify significant resources that require protection.

Policy 2: Visitor management policies and programs will focus on education, one of the priority missions of the Preserve.

See discussion of visitor management policy 2 above.

Policy 3: The Moss Beach Reef and Frenchman's Reef will be continuously monitored over a minimum of 10 years to develop baseline information on the ecological system, to determine the rate and degree of recovery and to determine the effectiveness of the Master Plan policies limiting visitor use.

Accomplishments: Data are being collected Long-term Monitoring Program and Experiential Training for Students (LIMPETS), but there needs to be an assessment of the data's usefulness for establishing baselines and evaluating the effectiveness of Master Plan policies and current management of FMR.

Actions: Evaluate existing data to determine its usefulness to evaluating Master Plan policies and current management practices. The August 2016 Master Plan for MPAs adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission identifies the need to create statewide metrics and evaluation questions for monitoring. Some of the metrics identified include focal species abundance, size frequency, diversity, and density; biogenic habitat productivity; and/or community structure and composition. County Parks should

encourage any future monitoring effort to align with baseline and long-term monitoring currently underway or proposed, including use of the focal species and indicators. (See also the State of the California North Central Coast, Summary of the MPA Monitoring Program, 2010-2015).

Policy 4: Portions of the Moss Beach Reef may be closed to visitors as warranted by environmental conditions, research objectives, and monitoring activities.

Accomplishments: County Parks has implemented closures of portions of the Reef and beach to protect seals and their pups from disturbance due to visitors.

Actions: Triggers for closures could be identified as part of a long-term visitor management strategy.



Policy 5: Determine the feasibility of Restoring Tidal Action to the Freshwater marsh across West Point Avenue.

Accomplishments: Some baseline data have been collected

by US Airforce biologists working for Vandenberg Air Force Base.

Actions: Seek funding for a Pillar Point Marsh restoration plan and engage stakeholders.

Policy 6: Water quality improvements in San Vicente Creek and Pillar Point Marsh will be undertaken.

Accomplishments: Parking lot improvements, including green infrastructure, have been implemented to reduce pollutants in stormwater drainage to San Vicente Creek. The Big Wave development will record a conservation easement over all wetlands and wetland buffer areas to protect wetlands. The County and San Mateo County Resource Conservation District (RCD) have implemented best management practices to improve water quality in the San Vicente Creek watershed, and RCD provides technical assistance to residential property owners to identify opportunities for funding projects to improve water quality in FMR and surrounding areas. County Parks is improving dog management along the California Coastal Trail, including minimizing dog waste on the trail.



Largely as a result of these efforts, fecal coliform bacteria levels have improved so that FMR is being delisted by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. County Environmental Health along with RCD will continue to monitor bacteria levels in San Vicente Creek.

Actions: Implement a County Parks pet waste and dog ordinance. Develop a public

education program for dog walkers to responsibly manage pet waste by using bags and receptacles.

Policy 7: Special status wildlife and plant species shall be protected within FMR. Habitat management plans shall be developed to protect and restore all identified special status species.

Accomplishments: County Parks is in the process of identifying and mapping rare and endangered terrestrial plants and animal within FMR. San Vicente Creek is being restored to remove exotic plants and replace with native species. Phase I is complete and Phase II is underway. Vegetation management guidelines were developed for FMR.

Changes: Two MPAs were established within areas of FMR: Montara State Marine Reserve (SMR) and Pillar Point State Marine Conservation Area (MCA). These MPAs collectively span 18.42 miles. Montara SMR prohibits the take of all living marine species. Pillar Point MCA prohibits the take of all marine resources, except the recreational and commercial take of pelagic finfish by trolling or sein, the recreational or commercial take of Dungeness crab by trap and the recreational and commercial take of market squid by handheld dip or round haul net.

Actions: Ensure continued development and updating of natural resource standards and guidelines to protect special status species.

Policy 8: A Vegetation Management program will be developed to restore and protect native plant communities.

Accomplishments: Vegetation management guidelines were developed for FMR. A restoration plan was developed for San Vicente Creek. Phase I of the Restoration Plan has been completed; Phase II is in progress.

Actions: Pursue grant funding for future phases of both San Vicente Creek restoration and cypress grove projects. Implement Vegetation Management Guidelines for FMR, Pillar Point Bluffs and Pillar Point Marsh. Update Guidelines as necessary.

Policy 9: Maintain the historic character and health of the plant community at the Smith-Dolger historic site.

Actions: There is a need to conduct an inventory of the plant community at the Smith-Dolger historic site and an evaluation of its health and vigor, including whether individual species should continue to be maintained. Funding would need to be obtained for any restoration work.

Policy 10: Acquire land in the vicinity of Pillar Point Marsh and lands adjacent to FMR as they become available to add to the ecological system of the Reserve.

Accomplishments: Acquisition of properties along Pillar Point Buff is complete. Pillar Point Marsh properties are identified as they become available.

Policy 11: Introduction of domestic and feral animals is prohibited, including dogs.

Changes: Dogs are prohibited within FMR. County Parks currently allows dogs on leash on Pillar Point Bluff and along the Dardenelle Trail, a segment of the California Coastal Trail. Dog walking was a traditional use prior to acquisition of the properties on Pillar Point Bluff.

Actions: Update County Parks dog management policy and ordinances. San Mateo County Parks Commission has established a committee to provide recommendations for updating dog management policies in County Parks. Manage dog waste. Establish and enforce pet waste ordinance.

Policy 12: Recreational hunting, gathering and collecting are prohibited within the Reserve.

Accomplishments: MPAs were established in 2009 that prohibit take. County Park rangers work with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) wardens to enforce regulations.

Actions: Continue enforcement training and workshops with CDFW. Increase park ranger staffing to enforce the prohibitions for gathering and collecting.