

**SUSTAINABLE TAMALMONTE  
215 JULIA AVENUE  
MILL VALLEY, CA 94941**

June 28, 2015

Marin County Board of Supervisors  
3501 Civic Center Drive, #329  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Re: DRAFT Memorandum of Understanding between the County of Marin and the National Park Service regarding Muir Woods

Dear Marin County Board of Supervisors,

We have reviewed the Staff Reports prepared for your June 16th and June 30<sup>th</sup> hearing and evaluated the revised DRAFT Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), a proposed agreement between the County of Marin and the National Park Service regarding the Muir Woods Monument, and have the following comments.

The MOU between the County and the NPS has the potential to lower visitation to Muir Woods, reduce traffic congestion and ensure safe parking for Muir Woods visitors and, in so doing, preserve the environment and protect public health and safety. Unfortunately, the revised DRAFT MOU is almost identical to the previous draft and fails to achieve these objectives.

The June 30<sup>th</sup> Staff Report regarding the DRAFT Muir Woods MOU recognizes concerns and comments that residents expressed but unfortunately dismisses or ignores most of these concerns and comments.

The main negotiation tool that the County has with the National Park Service is control of Muir Woods Road. Once the County gives up this control in the MOU, it will have little leverage to achieve additional goals that are not addressed by the MOU.

It is better to 'get it right' than to get less than what is needed with a premature completion of the agreement. A 'step in the right direction' for 7 long years provides too little, too late. The Board of Supervisors should only approve a comprehensive MOU that provides for what is already evident and needed now.

Once again, we strongly urge you to follow our below recommendations.

**1. Require an Independent Scientific Carrying Capacity Study:**

The DRAFT MOU still does not mention an **Independent Trustworthy Scientific Carrying Capacity Study** to determine the number of visitors the park can sustainably handle.

Staff's answer to this is that a Carrying Capacity is not within the purview of the MOU. Rather "the DRAFT MOU is focused on traffic operations and parking, and arrival management aspects of Muir Woods by creating a reservation system."

First of all, the purview of the DRAFT MOU is a negotiation. If the County wanted to include a Carrying Capacity Study, it could.

Second, without determining sustainable goals for visitation, traffic, and parking, it is impossible to determine if the traffic operations, parking and arrival management are effective.

## **2. Establish enforceable Visitor CAPs that lower yearly visitation to Muir Woods:**

Most organizations engage a reservation system to increase sales, among other objectives. The Muir Woods reservation system, proposed in the DRAFT MOU, would most likely increase visitation and traffic.

Yet, the reservation system could be used to lower sales, attendance, and related traffic and environmental impacts. However, the only way to ensure this is to establish sustainable, hourly, daily, monthly and yearly Visitation CAPs. Such Visitation CAPs should be based on findings from an Independent Scientific Carrying Capacity Study. Unfortunately, the revised DRAFT MOU still lacks enforceable Visitor CAPs.

As currently written, the Visitation Levels of Attachment B of the DRAFT MOU are **not** enforceable. Even if they were enforceable, Attachment B does **not** reduce yearly visitation.

According to the National Park Service's website, Muir Woods had 1,049,000 yearly visitors in 2014. Attachment B allows about the same number.

Therefore, at best, if Attachment B were enforceable, the DRAFT MOU does NOT meaningfully lower total visitation but rather spreads about the same amount of visitation that we currently have throughout the year. This is **unacceptable**. Yearly visitation to Muir Woods must be significantly reduced.

Staff's response is that this issue of total visitor management in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) parklands, and at the Muir Woods National Monument, is addressed by the GGNRA in their General Management Plans.

Relying on the GGNRA General Management Plan to lower visitation is irresponsible. The General Management Plan simply furthers the National Park Service's wish to continue the status quo, a continued increase in visitation to GGNRA parklands and Muir Woods National Monument. The County cannot rely on the GGNRA or NPS to lower visitation.

## **3. Establish enforceable bus & car CAPs that are consistent with the Visitor CAPs:**

The number of cars and some buses are somewhat limited through reservations of parking spaces in the Muir Woods parking lot. However, if all the parking spaces were used every hour of the day throughout the year, the result would be the status quo or, worse, an increase in visitation to the monument. Moreover, other buses, such as public

transit buses, simply drop off passengers and go and then return without the need of a reserved parking space. As currently written, the MOU allows a 4-fold increase in bus traffic on an LOS “F” Road. This must be rectified by establishing bus and car CAPs that are consistent with the before referenced Visitor CAPs.

#### **4. Require a regional ‘Point of Origin’ Shuttle System:**

The DRAFT MOU still does not mention establishing a regional ‘Point of Origin’ shuttle system that picks up and drops off Muir Woods visitors at places of origin.

One of the DRAFT MOU’s goals is to “increase local transit”. The June 16th Staff Report states; “The parties agree to jointly work to expand public transit to Muir Woods utilizing the Muir Woods Shuttle.” The main pick up and drop off place for the Muir Woods Shuttle is in Manzanita. Manzanita is where the worst bottleneck traffic congestion on Hwy 1 occurs. To shift Muir Woods’ parking problems to Manzanita is **totally unacceptable**.

Establish a regional ‘Point of Origin’ Muir Woods Shuttle System (using small shuttle buses) that picks up and drops off Muir Woods’ visitors at **regional points of origin** (E.g. San Francisco, East Bay, and North, Bay) and NOT within the Tamalpais Area Community Plan area. The number of vehicles exiting off Hwy 101 and entering onto congested Hwy 1 (with an LOS “F”) must be reduced.

#### **5. Eliminate parking on Muir Woods Road, both South & North of Redwood Creek Bridge, in 3 Years:**

Parking on Muir Woods Road presents a safety hazard, threatens the health of the Redwood Creek watershed and diminishes the visitor experience. The revised DRAFT MOU still allows 110 cars to be parked along Muir Woods Road near Redwood Creek Bridge for the next 7 years. Although, the DRAFT agreement ostensibly lowers parking down to 80 cars and then 40 cars South of the Redwood Creek bridge, 30 parking spaces would remain between Muir Woods entrance and North the bridge. Moreover, in the last 2 ½ years there is a provision for 80 cars to continue to park South of the bridge while construction occurs in the Park Service parking lot.

Rather than slowly lowering (and never eliminating) the number of cars parking along Muir Woods Road, reduce parking along Muir Woods Rd., both downstream and upstream of the Redwood Creek Bridge, to 80 parking spots within one year and totally eliminate parking in perpetuity along Muir Woods Road within three years.

#### **6. Lower bus lengths to 25 Feet:**

The June 30<sup>th</sup> Staff Report states; “The County recently adopted an ordinance that vehicles, including buses, in excess of 36 feet are prohibited from using Muir Woods Road and Panoramic Hwy. The length restriction has been found to be adequate at this time, but is also being monitored to identify the need for additional restrictions. Any additional vehicle length or size restrictions (including those for buses) would be implemented as needed through these existing mechanisms, separate from the proposed DRAFT Mou.”

We acknowledge that safe bus length limits can be dealt with through the established ordinance. However, the County should already be aware that 36 feet is too long for a bus to be able to remain inside its lane on the winding roads leading to Muir Woods. The statement that “the length restriction has been found to be adequate” doesn’t make sense. The County should modify the ordinance to prohibit vehicles in excess of 25 feet from using Muir Woods Road and Panoramic Hwy.

The following recommendations are described in more detail in our June 9<sup>th</sup> letter to the Board of Supervisors. We urge you to review that letter again.

- 7. Insert Realistic Compliance Mechanisms Into The MOU;**
- 8. Arrange for the County to participate in revenue collected from parking on Muir Wood Road, a County road.**
- 9. Retain County control of shuttles and parking enforcement;**
- 10. Prevent new parking lots and visitor centers at Panoramic Drive, Santos Meadows, White Gate Ranch and Manzanita in writing;**
- 11. Establish social equity measures and lower entrance and parking fees for lower income households.**
- 12. Establish a special provision for locals to visit Muir Woods National Monument; and**
- 13. Ensure transparency by posting reservation and admission statistics regularly on a public website.**

For the sake of preserving the environment and protecting public health and safety, we strongly urge you to follow our recommendations.

Thank you for your conscientious consideration.

Very truly yours,

/s/

Sharon Rushton

Chairperson

**Sustainable TamAlmonte**