

# Austin Creek State Recreation Area

## Annual Operations Report

### 2015/2016



Sunset Dinner – 2015



Youth Ecology Corps Fence Building



Day Camp Overnight



Field Operations Staff 2016



Pond Farm Student Reunion

# STEWARDS OF THE COAST AND REDWOODS

Operations Report – July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016

Austin Creek State Recreation Area

Prepared by Michele Luna, Executive Director

## Hours of Operation

- Austin Creek, like Armstrong Redwoods, is open daily from 8 am to one hour past official sunset.
- Bullfrog Pond Campground was open the entire year with no periodic closures.
- Three backcountry sites stayed open the entire report period as well.
- The entrance station at Armstrong Redwoods was staffed year-round on the weekends, 4-5 weekdays during the winter, early spring and late fall, and 7 days a week during the later spring, summer and early fall.

## Visitor Services & Public Safety

### AUSTIN CREEK PARK VISITATION:

| Year      | Camping | Free DU | Paid DU |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2013-2014 | 5,240   | 227,896 | 25,390  |
| 2014-2015 | 8,093   | 251,687 | 29,906  |
| 2015-2016 | 10,426  | 264,646 | 35,990  |

### ARMSTRONG REDWOODS VISITATION: (Stewards handles fee collection)

| Year      | Free DU | Paid DU |
|-----------|---------|---------|
| 2013-2014 | 820,523 | 53,672  |
| 2014-2015 | 886,020 | 60,656  |
| 2015-2016 | 923,816 | 71,981  |

- The above visitation figures for Austin Creek and Armstrong Redwoods show a significant increase over the past 4 years with visitation at 994,943 in 12/13 and 1,306,859 in 15/16, representing a 311,916 increase over time.
- With limited Ranger staff time at Armstrong Redwoods, Stewards continued to handle most of the Visitor Service non-law enforcement operations in Armstrong as well. Armstrong has its own maintenance staff. Our Ops team continue to provide excellent visitor services under the leadership of our Field Operations Manager, Scotty Lawyer.
- Our reservation system with Hipcamp continues to provide camping reservation services at Bullfrog Pond campground. Sixteen sites are reservable 7 months in advance and 7 sites are first come, first serve. This effort increased camping revenue from \$71,014 in 13/14 to \$93,346 in 14/15 and back down again in 15/16 to \$83,747 due to a rainy winter and spring. Hipcamp continues to make enhancements to their software based on our needs and recommendations and their expanded services to private landowners.
  - Office and kiosk staff handled the customer service issues including cancellations and complaints (of which there were very few). There is a \$10 cancellation fee per night.
  - Overall customer service was excellent and our ratings are high with Hipcamp users.

- Stewards has a few public assistance volunteers who give out information, provide directions, dispense water, and report any unusual activity in the back country.
- Stewards continues to meet with CalFire annually to get feedback on our fire prevention plan, which includes having campers sign a fire permit whether they are allowed to have fires or not. Fire season began a little later this year however we closed the backcountry to fires by May 20, 2016 and Bullfrog Pond Campground by July 25, 2016. Trees in the campsites were limbed and we maintain a 5-foot perimeter around each fire pit. Our move to put buckets at each water spigot and ask campers to use water to put out their fires at the end of the night was very successful. Camphosts were also watchful of the campfires in the campgrounds. In addition, communication was maintained with Cal Fire and to discuss fire prevention strategies.

### **Campground Operations and Maintenance**

- Our camphost program has been very successful. We have two camphosts who work the majority of the weekends and another that fills in when needed. During busy weeks we also had a camphost mid-week. Our camphosts are paid a stipend of \$50 per 24 hours to cover their mileage and meals.
- With increased visitation we have had to pump the septic tanks at the campground restrooms more often. We have also replaced 2 toilets and done other plumbing repairs.
- Our Ops team solicited tool donations so they now have a well-stocked shop in the Ranger Station garage.
- This summer our Ops crew again worked with the Youth Ecology Corps for two weeks to build and install fencing in Armstrong Redwoods in order to prevent visitors from going off trail and impacting the fragile understory plants beneath them.

### **Special Events**

- Weddings: Stewards had inquires about weddings in Austin Creek and we have one booking for spring 2017.
- In early May, Stewards conducted the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Armstrong/Austin Creek Trail Run in partnership with Pacific Coast Trail Runs, Inc. The event was a success and raised money for Austin Creek SRA.
- The Third Sunset Dinner on August 1st, 2016 was held again at Schoolhouse Flat. This year was again a benefit for Pond Farm Pottery and guests met at Pond Farm first for appetizers, champagne and a tour. We enlarged historic photos and put them around the site to show what it used to look like when Marguerite was there. The dinner and appetizers were catered and we conducted a successful auction some pottery made by a few the pond farmers who were in attendance.
- We also put on a Family Day in your Park event in June. We promoted this event to Latino park visitors. There were activities at Armstrong Redwoods including horse and carriage rides, and other activities put on by our docents and naturalists. There was music and our Steward Ship was on display with great interpretive displays. We also held our summer auction at this event.

- Other events that were held in Armstrong Redwoods and provided support for operations in Austin Creek SRA: Art in the Park (July), the Old Grove Festival (September). Both events were well attended and did well financially.

### **Interpretive Programs**

- Ten Junior Ranger Programs were held on Saturday mornings from 10:00 – 11:00 am at the campfire center at Bullfrog Pond Campground from June to August.
- Docent-Led Hikes took place with school groups and a couple groups camped at Bullfrog Pond campground.
- We conducted our first Forest to the Sea Day Camp in July with 25 participants in 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades attending a day at Armstrong, one in the Willow Creek Watershed, one Tide Pooling on the coast, and the final day and night at Bullfrog Pond Campground in Austin Creek.
- Stewards sponsored our third and fourth UC California Naturalist Certification Programs with about 20 participants for each session. This 6-week course took place in all our parks including Austin Creek.
- Seminar about the Legacy of Pond Farm and Marguerite Wildenhain took place in June.
- National Leave No Trace trainer program in collaboration with the Northern Area Boy Scouts Pomo District took place at Bullfrog Pond Campground.
- A working group of volunteers continued to work on the docent training manual and helped put on the Pond Farmer Reunion (see below).

### **Cultural Resource Stewardship**

- Pond Farm Pottery continued with our partnership with State Parks, the California State Parks Foundation (CSPF) and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) to restore and repurpose the site for future sustainability made great progress this past year.
  - Stewards helped coordinate a number of site visits to Pond Farm with project partner affiliates and potential donors.
  - Monthly planning meetings were scheduled by CSPF staff to keep everyone updated on project plans.
  - The Prop. 84 stabilization work was mostly completed with a new roof on the barn and Marguerite's house, new foundation work, support structures to make the buildings earthquake safe and the replacement of some windows.
  - Partners attended and held a reception during the SFO Airport exhibit featuring the Forrest L. Merrill collection of Marguerite's pottery.
  - Stewards put on a Pond Farm reunion with students of Marguerite Wildenhain in March. It was attended by over 20 students from all over the country who enjoyed a welcome reception, a day of meetings to catch up on project work, oral history interviews and an exhibit of Pond Farmer pottery at the Healdsburg Center of the Arts and a fundraiser auction.
  - Stewards worked with the Bank Club in Guerneville to develop a display about Pond Farm for their history exhibit.
  - The oral history video project began with seed money from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and continued with another grant that Stewards

received from the California State Parks Foundation. David Washburn was contracted with as our videographer. Overall there have been about 20 short 5-minute interviews and about twelve longer interviews with about 3 more to do. The current funding will also provide for a 3-minute promotional video about Pond Farm.

- Stewards developed a partnership with UC Davis' Humanities Institute to complete oral histories for Pond Farm with the help of a public scholar during the summer months. Emma Silverman also helped organize the documentation for the oral history interviews and reviewed and made corrections to the transcriptions.

### **Natural Resource Stewardship (workdays)**

- Stewards' Trail Crew did stewardship workdays in Armstrong Redwoods or Austin Creek every other month during the year. Activities included trail maintenance, wood splitting, campground maintenance, tree limbing, dealing with down trees, fuel load reduction and fence building.
- Stewards supported the Youth Ecology Corps by providing 2 weeks of work, 4 days a week for 5 hours/day. They built cross-pieces for new fencing at Armstrong Redwoods and installed about 1,000 feet of fencing.
- Staff did significant amounts of brush cleaning, campground clean up, weed eating, and clearing of down trees in Austin Creek.

### **Recreation**

- Stewards maintained and operated 24 campsites (including a camphost site at Bullfrog Pond Campground. Campsites were cleaned, tree hazards were removed, and fire rings were kept clean. Restrooms were held to a high standard of cleanliness and we continue to provide hand sanitizer for park visitors.
- The camphost site was used almost every weekend during the busy season.
- Backcountry campsites were kept clean and outhouses were serviced once a week.

### **Signage and Marketing**

- Information about Austin Creek operations was kept updated on Stewards' website.
- Stewards staff worked with DPR to update the DPR website with current information about the park.
- Suggestions were also made to update the Hipcamp website. Their software upgrade now makes it easy for us to update the site ourselves.
- Marketing brochure was developed about Pond Farm Pottery.

### **AB 1478 Funding**

- 1478 Funding was used and most projects were completed including trail work, new fence at Pond Farm and special event fees covered.

## Annual Revenue and Expenditure Report – July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016

**Park Unit:** AUSTIN CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA

**Operator:** Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

**State's Fiscal Year:** July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016

**Estimated Visitors:** 311,062

**Volunteer Hours:**

|           | Stewardship | Public Assistance |
|-----------|-------------|-------------------|
| 2015-2016 | 420         | 95                |

| ANNUAL REVENUE                                     | 4th Fiscal Year<br>Total 2015-<br>2016 |
|--|--|
| <b>Armstrong/Austin Creek</b>                      | <b>July - Jun</b>                      |
| Austin Creek – Camping fees                        | 83,746                                 |
| AR/AC Entrance Station – Day-Use - 30% for AC      | 69,615                                 |
| Grants   | 5,000                                  |
| Other Donations and Fundraising                    | 30,046                                 |
| Special Events – Weddings, EcoAdventures           | -                                      |
| Revenue-Generating for Pond Farm                   | 3,577                                  |
| Firewood Sales                                     | 3,846                                  |
| <b>Total Revenue Austin Creek</b>                  | <b>195,831</b>                         |
| EXPENSE PROJECTIONS                                |  |
| <b>Armstrong/Austin Creek</b>                      |  |
| Salary -Executive Staff (ED, AD)                   | 7,349                                  |
| Accountant - New Contractor                        | 1,110                                  |
| Salary -Admin Staff (OC, OA, AA)                   | 4,062                                  |
| Salary -Field Operations Manager (FOM)             | 44,923                                 |
| Salary - Service Aides (SA)                        | 51,572                                 |
| Benefits - 15%                                     | 16,352                                 |
| Contracts - Marketing, Website and Hipcamp fees    | 20,556                                 |
| Office - Equipment & Supplies                      | 2,583                                  |
| Housekeeping Supplies                              | 1,357                                  |
| Insurance/Legal                                    | 12,802                                 |
| Signage/Brochures                                  | 178                                    |
| Program Expenses                                   | -                                      |
| Vehicles, gas, storage container                   | 6,579                                  |
| Field Equipment and Supplies                       | 9,256                                  |
| Tree survey/Fire Suppression                       | -                                      |
| Utilities - Trash, Electricity, pumping, Phone     | 2,793                                  |
| Camphosts (trailer and supplies) storage, stipends | 5,200                                  |
| Pond Farm Expenses                                 | 7,356                                  |
| <b>Total Expenses Austin Creek</b>                 | <b>194,028</b>                         |
| <b>Net Rev/Exp Austin Creek - Cash GAP</b>         | <b>1,803</b>                           |

## FINANCIAL NARRATIVE

July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016

**Revenue:** Stewards' operational revenue from Austin Creek day-use and camping fees generated \$153,361 during the report period, which is a decrease of \$3,200 from 2014/2015. This is attributed to the normal rainy season we had which decreased camping significantly over the previous year.

Stewards retains 30% of the day-use fees for Austin Creek. Stewards requested that State Parks contribute ½ of the cost of an Interpreter for Armstrong Redwoods and Stewards would contribute the other half. That request was denied for the 2014/2015 fiscal year and in 2015/2016 State Parks thought they would be able to fund the position themselves but that never happened. We will be entering into discussions with State Parks about increasing our percentage of the day-use considering the extent of the services we provide in Armstrong Redwoods and also perhaps to cover this position.

DPR day-use revenue goals for Armstrong Redwoods were exceeded by 123.42% with Stewards handing day-use fee collection and park pass sales were 154.68% over target.

Other revenue generated for park operations were derived from grants (\$5,000), donations and fundraising (\$30,046) and special events and campfire wood sales (\$7,423). The fundraising we did for Pond Farm provided additional revenue this year plus we got a sizable donation of \$10,000 from a Pond Farm supporter.

**In-Kind Volunteer Time:** Volunteers were used to accomplish stewardship and natural resource projects. Volunteers contributed 420 hours in Austin Creek specifically @ \$24.75/hour for a value of \$10,395 of in-kind services. [http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer\\_time](http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time)

**Expenses:** Per the Operating Agreement, all money derived from operational revenue must be used for Austin Creek operations. During this report period, Austin Creek Operational expenses were less revenue by \$1,803, which means that we pretty much broke even.

Staffing included one full-time Field Operations Manager and two part-time service aides during the slow season. During the busy season, Stewards employed two full-time service aide and 2 part-time during the busy season. During this accounting period, Field Staff expenses were \$96,494 an increase of \$8,507 over 2014/2015.

Additional staffing costs include administrative hours for Stewards' Executive Director, Administrative Director, and Administrative Assistant. We did not charge off time for our program staff in 14/15 although much of their time was covered by grants and we continued to provide programming in the park during this time period. Including employee benefits other personnel expenses were \$28,873 for the reporting period, a decrease of \$4,006 from 2014/2015.

Other large expenses incurred were for insurance, vehicle expenses and enhancements to our website. Insurance costs for just the 5700 acres of land are over \$7,000 a year. We would love to see this reduced and State Parks resume liability for the land itself as the landowner and Stewards continue covering liability for all our activities in the park including campgrounds and programming and stewardship.