

Austin Creek State Recreation Area

Annual Operations Report

2018/2019



STEWARDS OF THE COAST AND REDWOODS

Operations Report – July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019

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 were closed from February to June due to storm damage.
- The entrance station at Armstrong Redwoods was staffed year-round on the weekends, most weekdays with shortened hours 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
2016-2017	9,311	212,760	36,856
2017-2018	9,898	218,646	38,603
2018-2019	8,007	198,388	34,971

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
2016-2017	717,403	73,392
2017-2018	745,047	77,200
2018-2019	676,473	69,934

- In the past year visitation decreased, due to unfavorable weather conditions and the fact that Guerneville flooded in early 2019. There were 101,621 less visitors than in 17/18. Camping was less by 1,891 campers. Overall visitation in both parks for 18/19 was 987,773.
- 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 94,425 in 17/18. In 18/19 camping went down to 79,384. 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.
 - Our overall customer service rating was 92% based on 1530 responses with Hipcamp users. We consistently get positive comments about how clean the campground and restroom are.
- 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 June 1, 2019 and Bullfrog Pond Campground by August 1, 2019. Trees in the campsites were limbed and we maintain a 10-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 in the past three years has been 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.
- Stewards has also raised grant funds to assist State Parks with fuel reduction in Austin Creek SRA. This is helping reduce underbrush and ladder fuels that can impact the park in the event of a wildfire.

Campground Operations and Maintenance

- Our camphost program has been very successful. We have two - three camphosts who worked the majority of the weekends and periodically during the week during the summer. Our camphosts who work weekends are paid a stipend of \$50 per 24 hours to cover their mileage and meals. Weekday camphosts are not paid a stipend.
- With increased visitation, we have to pump the septic tanks at the campground restrooms 2 times a year. In the past year We have repaired two water systems leaks.
- Our Ops team solicited tool donations so they now have a well-stocked shop in the Ranger Station garage. Items donated in the past year include: Various hand, and power tools. Mostly for use with the Volunteer Trail Crew
- The Trail Crew worked with a number of groups including: Fencing, Cleanup projects for Special Events, camp site renovations, improved parking barriers, firewood production, trail work to fix pot holes, and fallen debris, and hazardous tree clean up.

Special Events

- Weddings: Stewards had inquires about weddings in Austin Creek but we did not book any during the 2018/2019 year.
- In early May, Stewards supported the 7th Annual Armstrong/Austin Creek Trail Run in partnership with Pacific Coast Trail Runs, Inc. The event was a success and raised about \$500.

- The Sixth Sunset Dinner on August 11th, 2018 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, a tour, and kick wheel demonstration by a Pond Farm student. 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 prepared by a caterer and we conducted a successful auction with pottery made by the pond farmers who were in attendance.
- We also put on a Family Day in your Park event in June 2019. We promoted this event to Latino park visitors. There were activities at Armstrong Redwoods including raptor demos, and other activities put on by our docents and staff. Our Steward Ship was on display with great interpretive displays.
- Other events that were held in Armstrong Redwoods and provided support for operations in Austin Creek SRA: Gourmet Walk in the Woods (July 2018), the Old Grove Festival (September 2018). Both events were well attended and did well financially.

Interpretive Programs

- Docent-Led Hikes took place with school groups and a couple groups camped at Bullfrog Pond campground.
- We conducted our Third Forest to the Sea Day Camp in June with 23 participants in 5th-8th grades attending a day at Armstrong, one in Austin Creek, and two days on the coast with being an exploration of the intertidal, and the final day and night at Bullfrog Pond Campground in Austin Creek.
- Stewards sponsored our Seventh UC California Naturalist Certification Programs with about 23 participants. 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.

Cultural Resource Stewardship – update this section

- Pond Farm Pottery continued with our partnership with State Parks to restore and revitalize the site for future sustainability.
 - Stewards helped coordinate a number of site visits to Pond Farm with potential donors.
 - Monthly planning meetings were scheduled by Stewards' Executive Director to keep everyone updated on project plans.
 - The Guest House renovation took place in 2017/2018 and was completed with ADA improvements.
 - Artist-in-Residence Program: With the completion of the ADA improvements to the Pond Farm guest house in 2018, Stewards was ready to launch the Artist-in-Residence program at the beginning of 2019. We set up submission on www.submittable.com and we had 13 applicants the first round and 7 for the second round. We had artists in residence from February through June. We took July off. For more information go to www.pondfarmpottery.org.

Natural Resource Stewardship (workdays)

- Stewards' Trail Crew did stewardship workdays in Armstrong Redwoods or Austin Creek every month during the year. Activities included trail maintenance, wood splitting, campground maintenance, tree limb removals, dealing with down trees, fuel load reduction and fence building.
- Staff did significant amounts of brush cleaning, campground clean up, weed eating, and clearing of down trees in Austin Creek.
- Raised funds to support Youth Ecology Corp for 2 weeks in the summer. They did fuel reduction projects, cleared down trees and more.

Recreation

- Stewards maintained and operated 24 campsites (including a campsite 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 campsite was used almost every weekend during the busy season.
- Backcountry campsites were kept clean and outhouses were serviced once a week while access was allowed.

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.

Co-Management Agreement

Stewards and State Parks have been working on a new co-management agreement for Austin Creek and Armstrong Redwoods. The agreement is awaiting approval by State Parks in Sacramento.

Annual Revenue and Expenditure Report – July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019

Park Unit: AUSTIN CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA

Operator: Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

State's Fiscal Year: July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019

Estimated Visitors: 241,366

Volunteer Hours:

	Stewardship	Public Assistance
2018-2019	490	69

ANNUAL REVENUE	Fiscal Year Total 2018- 2019
Armstrong/Austin Creek	July - Jun
Austin Creek – Camping fees	79,170
AR/AC Entrance Station – Day-Use	105,629
Other Donations and Fundraising	16,509
Artist-in-Residence	1,937
Firewood Sales	4,749
Total Revenue Austin Creek	207,994
EXPENSE PROJECTIONS	
Armstrong/Austin Creek	
Salary -Executive Staff (ED, AD)	17,510
Salary -Admin Staff (OC, OA, AA)	686
Salary -Field Operations Manager (FOM)	50,123
Salary - Field Operations Assistant	32,237
Salary - Service Aides (SA)	29,388
Benefits - 15%	19,491
Contracts - Marketing, Website, Internet and Hipcamp fees, bank fees	10,846
Insurance/Legal	8,852
Vehicles, gas, storage container	3,092
Program Expenses	6,463
Field Equipment, Supplies, Utilities	9,225
Camphosts (trailer and supplies) storage, stipends	1,900
Pond Farm Expenses, fundraising	11,551
Total Expenses Austin Creek	201,364
Net Rev/Exp Austin Creek - Cash GAP	6,630

FINANCIAL NARRATIVE

July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019

Revenue: Stewards' operational revenue from Austin Creek day-use and camping fees generated \$184,799 during the report period, which is a decrease of \$5,711 from 2017/2018.

Stewards started the financial period retaining 40% of the day-use fees for Austin Creek which accounts for the increase in revenue. In addition, we increased day-use to \$10 per vehicle and \$9 for Senior in March 2019.

Other revenue generated for park operations were derived from donations and fundraising (\$16,509) and campfire wood sales (\$4,749). The Pond Farm Exhibit raised additional grant funds and sponsorships in support of the event. Wood sales were up from the previous year. The new Artist-in-Residence program generated \$1,937 in the first half of 2019.

In-Kind Volunteer Time: Volunteers were used to accomplish stewardship and natural resource projects. Volunteers contributed 490 hours in Austin Creek specifically @ \$29.95/hour for a value of \$14,676 of in-kind services. 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 greater than revenue by \$6,630. This is a result of the fundraising Stewards did with respect to the Pond Farm exhibit and Sunset Dinner.

Staffing included one full-time Field Operations Manager and one full-time assistant Field Operations Manager, and two part-time service aides. During the slow season, service aide hours were reduced. During this accounting period, Field Staff wages were \$111,748, an increase of only \$753 over 2017/2018.

Additional staffing costs include administrative hours for Stewards' Executive Director, Administrative Director, and Marketing Communications staff. We charged \$18,196 for administrative staff time in 18/19, which covered costs for the Executive Director to administer and manage fundraising efforts and the Artist-in-Residence Program for Pond Farm.

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.