



Help John Muir National Historic Site Create a Vision for Mt. Wanda

Dear Friends:

The National Park Service (NPS) is beginning a comprehensive site management plan for the Mt. Wanda unit of John Muir National Historic Site. The 330-acre area of the park is an important part of the ranch where John Muir lived. Prior to Muir's time, the site was owned by Ygnacio Martinez as part of the Mexican era Rancho El Pinole, and is the ancestral homeland of the Karkin Ohlone Indians. Today, this land enables people to walk in Muir's footsteps and experience a historically and ecologically rich landscape through outdoor exploration, research, and appreciation of the wildness of the area. The plan for Mt. Wanda will identify new visitor opportunities and functions, balancing facility needs and resource management, while improving connectivity to other areas of the park and the broader community.

As part of this process, we are inviting public comment on initial ideas and proposals for the Mt. Wanda unit which are organized into three preliminary concepts. This newsletter describes these concepts and provides an overview of the planning process. You are encouraged to share your thoughts about the concepts to help us focus the planning effort, and to offer new ideas or potential issues for the park to consider. Information obtained during this comment period will be used to refine the preliminary concepts, identify issues, and ensure that we have the information needed to move forward. The comment period begins on April 21st and will extend through June 15, 2018.

We also invite you to join us for two public events planned for this Spring (see below). At these events, the NPS will explain the planning process, share preliminary options, answer your questions, and gather your ideas for Mt. Wanda. Once we have refined the range of proposals with public input and can analyze the potential impacts, we will initiate the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

We look forward to hearing from you! Your participation is a key component of this process.

Sincerely,

Sue Fritzke, Acting Superintendent
John Muir National Historic Site



John Muir



The Nature Trail on Mt. Wanda

Join Us for Upcoming Events and Meetings!

Saturday, April 21, 2018

**John Muir Birthday-Earth Day Celebration
Comment Table, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm**
John Muir National Historic Site
4202 Alhambra Ave
Martinez, CA 94553

Saturday, May 19, 2018

**Public Meeting at Strentzel Creek
1:00 - 4:00 pm**
Meet at the Visitor Center
(see page 8 for more information)

Mt. Wanda Background and Planning Objectives

Background

John Muir National Historic Site is composed of portions of the 2,600-acre ranch where John Muir lived, raised a family, farmed, wrote, advocated for environmental conservation, and was buried. Established in 1964 and expanded subsequently, the park consists of three areas, the Strentzel-Muir house estate, the open space lands of Mt. Wanda, and the Strentzel-Muir family gravesite.

Most of the Mt. Wanda unit became part of the park in 1991. In 2016, a 3.8-acre parcel in the Mt. Wanda unit along Strentzel Creek, formerly known as the Strain Ranch, came under NPS management with expiration of the 25 year reservation to the Strain family. The transfer of the Strentzel Creek parcel provides the park an opportunity to explore new visitor amenities at Mt. Wanda to better support the park's purpose. Additionally, a 44-acre parcel (referred to as the West Hills Farm) adjacent to Mt. Wanda was recently acquired by the John Muir Land Trust for donation to the park which would further expand opportunities at Mt. Wanda.

Planning Process and Objectives

This comprehensive site management plan is intended to build on existing plans and the laws that govern the park to provide a vision for the future use and management of the Mt. Wanda unit. With the new availability of the Strentzel Creek area and the potential addition of the West Hills Farm, the plan is needed to address the challenges and opportunities described on the next page, under *Mt. Wanda Planning Challenges and Opportunities*.

The first phase of the process begins with a comment period on the preliminary concepts described in this newsletter. NPS will then refine the concepts and ideas and gather necessary information to meaningfully evaluate related costs and effects. In the second phase of the plan the NPS will initiate the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. During this phase the NPS anticipates: 1) conducting a public scoping comment period; 2) drafting an Environmental Assessment for public review; 3) selecting an alternative for implementation and completing a finding of no significant impact (Decision Document).

Park Purpose - John Muir National Historic Site

"John Muir National Historic Site preserves and protects the home and portions of the Alhambra Valley agricultural estate where John Muir lived, worked, and is buried, to memorialize and connect people with Muir's global legacy as an influential naturalist, writer, and champion for protecting national parks and wild lands."



1910 photo of Mt. Wanda's northern slope. Taken from the orchards near the Muir House



Existing facilities include trails, benches, and waysides.



The Strentzel Creek area contains ranching structures built after John Muir's era. In addition to the red barn shown above, other structures include two homes, ranch accessory buildings and corrals.

Mt. Wanda Planning Challenges and Opportunities

Each of the preliminary concepts presented on the next few pages seeks to address the following challenges and opportunities for Mt. Wanda.

Visitor Experience Improvements

Access and Trails. Currently, there is only one unimproved trailhead on Mt. Wanda. Vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian linkages between Mt. Wanda, the John Muir House, and the Stentzel-Muir gravesite are not well delineated, non-existent, and/or unsafe. The plan will identify opportunities for trailheads, as well as pedestrian, transit, and bicycle connections between the various park sites.

Visitors today experience Mt. Wanda through its road and trail networks, some of which predate the addition of these lands to the park. In some cases roads and trails are sited poorly along steep slopes and sensitive areas resulting in impacts to visitor experience and causing erosion. The plan will explore new trail opportunities and improved alignments and consider future connections to the West Hills Farm.

Visitor Facilities. Beyond the trail network, Mt. Wanda has minimal visitor serving facilities. There are no restrooms, picnic, or gathering areas. The plan will identify visitor opportunities that reflect a high quality, accessible, visitor experience that draws inspiration from the Stentzel-Muir history and heritage. Consideration will be given as to whether existing buildings at Stentzel Creek could be used for visitors.

Resource Management

The mosaic pattern of woodlands and grasslands on Mt. Wanda was present throughout the John Muir historic period and remains today. The plan will identify an integrated approach to managing the natural resources and the cultural landscape, including strategies to protect native habitats, the historic olive orchard, and threatened species (Alameda whipsnake).

Stentzel Creek. Stentzel Creek is a seasonal creek which runs along the southern side of Mt. Wanda. Some existing buildings and development in the Stentzel Creek area are located within the Stentzel Creek floodplain area. The plan will determine the degree of creek restoration desired.

Park Operational Needs

The park has a shortage of curatorial, office, and, educational space. The plan will explore and identify opportunities for facilities to address operational space needs for park collections, educational activities, and administrative functions.



Currently there is no protected crosswalk from the pedestrian tunnel under Highway 4 that connects the John Muir House to the Franklin Canyon trailhead at Mt. Wanda.



City of Martinez parking lot at the existing Mt. Wanda Trailhead.

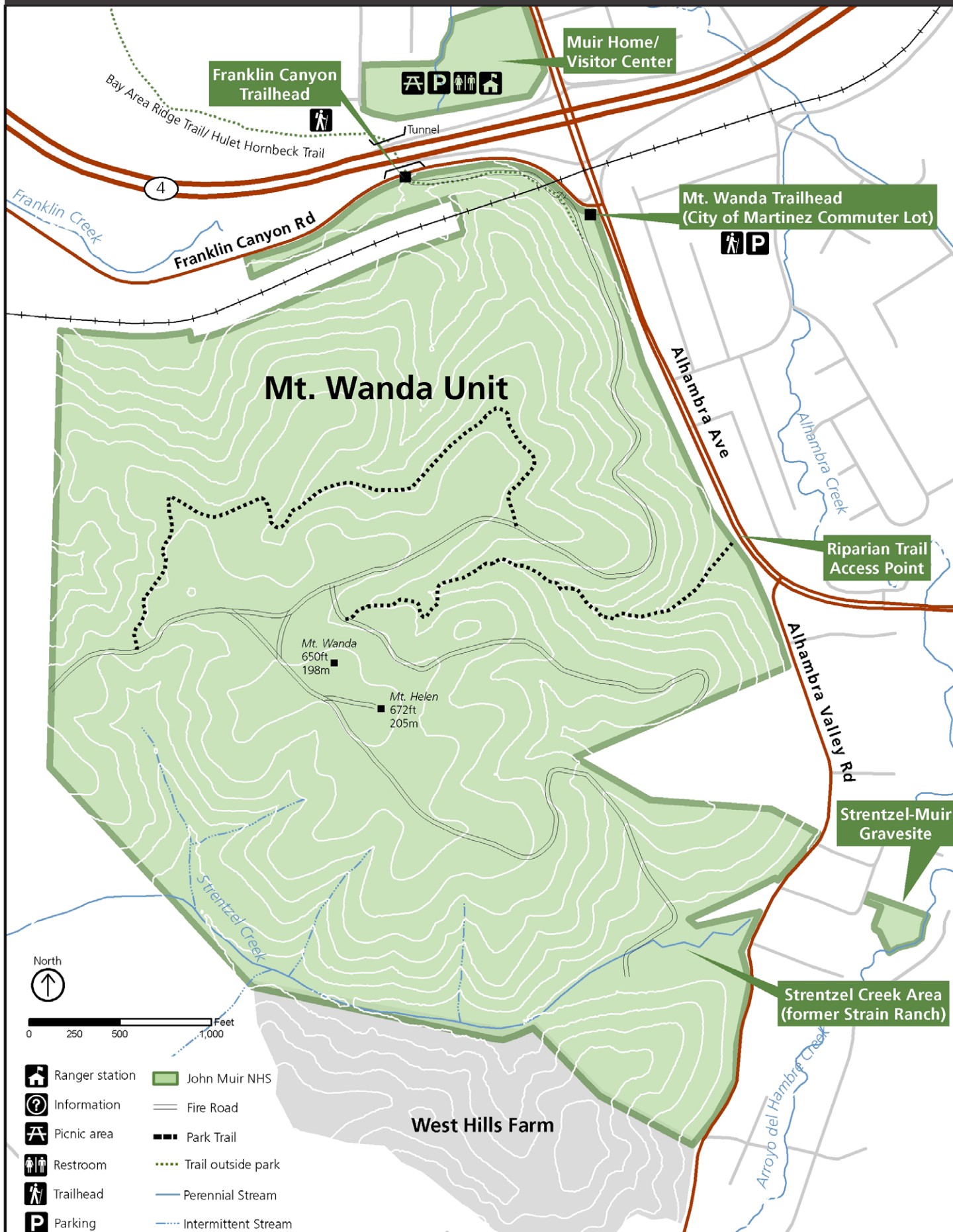


Bungalow at the Stentzel Creek area.



Stentzel Creek area looking north towards Mt. Wanda.

Park Map - Current Conditions



PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

The NPS has developed some initial ideas for Mt. Wanda, and we'd like to know what you think of them and what other ideas you have! Our initial ideas are organized into three concepts, described below and in more detail on the following pages.

Concept A: Muir Legacy

Visitors could follow in the footsteps of John Muir's own experience on Mt. Wanda, focusing on activities such as hiking and learning about nature and botany. Trails would be hiking-only, in keeping with the experience of John Muir. This concept has the lowest level of facility development. The Strentzel Creek area would be minimally developed as a trailhead; the remaining area would be restored to a natural state.



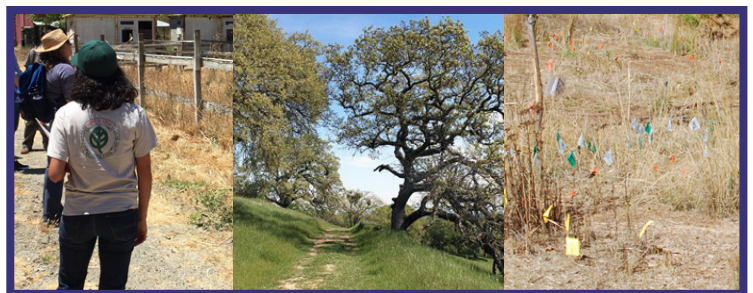
Concept B: Access and Outdoor Experience

This concept creates a diversity of experiences for people to connect to the nature and history of Mt. Wanda. Multiple access points and the greatest number of new trail opportunities would facilitate safe pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian recreation. At Strentzel Creek, two existing buildings would be retained as a visitor contact station (the bungalow) and gathering space for educational groups (barn). Retaining the barn means that the Strentzel Creek restoration area would be reduced in comparison to Concepts A and C.



Concept C: Stewardship

Visitors could participate in active stewardship of the Mt. Wanda ecosystem, such as restoration projects and community science. The Strentzel Creek area would be the hub for stewardship activities. It would also provide recreational opportunities such as hiking and picnicking. A new resource stewardship and education center would provide lab and classroom space for researchers and students.



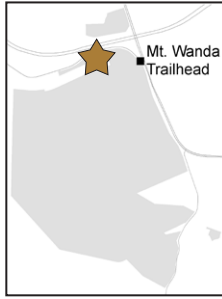
In all concepts the NPS would...

- Work with the City of Martinez to keep the current Mt. Wanda trailhead at the commuter lot open, clean, and accessible.
- Work with the City of Martinez and Contra Costa County to create safe pedestrian connections between park units.
- Work to protect the landscape of Mt. Wanda, the historic features that connect it to John Muir, and native plants and animals including the state and federally threatened Alameda whipsnake.

PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

What do you like? What would you

Franklin Canyon Trailhead



Current conditions:

Visitors can access Mt. Wanda from the Muir House/Highway 4 tunnel via a trailhead at Franklin Canyon Road, but there is no protected road crossing.

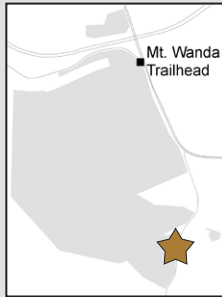


Concept A:

Create a safe pedestrian crossing to the trailhead on Franklin Canyon Road from the Highway 4 tunnel. Expand nearby park maintenance facility for park collections and administrative functions.



Strentzel Creek Area



Current conditions:

The Strentzel Creek area (former Strain Ranch) is currently closed to the public.



Concept A: (Visitor Facilities)

Develop a new trailhead with parking, water, and restrooms, plus a safe pedestrian route to the Strentzel-Muir family gravesite. Remove all current structures and construct a restroom. A log circle would provide an outdoor gathering space for school groups. Once the new trailhead is built, the riparian trail access point would be removed.



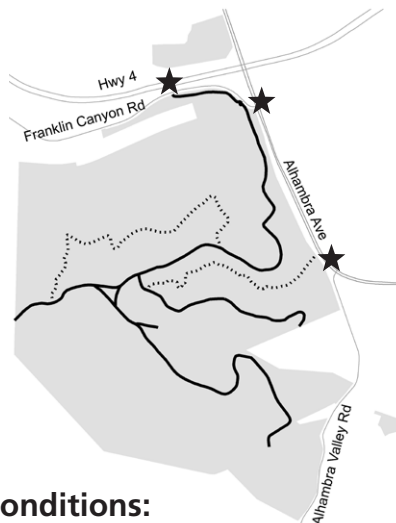
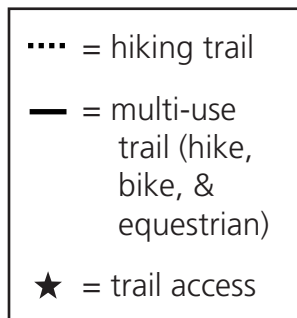
Current conditions: (Creek Restoration)

An improved storm drain and pilot restoration projects have slowed water helping to mitigate downstream flooding.

Concept A: (Creek Restoration):

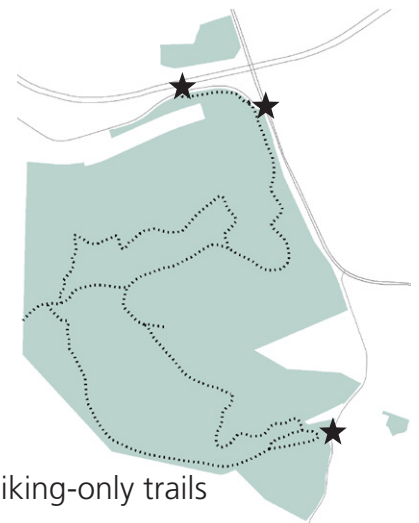
Expand the restoration area to nearly the entire natural alluvial fan for Strentzel Creek. Remove buildings and unnatural water diversions that have altered the landscape and allow the vegetation and stream to recover with minimal human intervention.

Trail Network



Current conditions:

1.3 miles of hiking-only trails
2.7 miles of multi-use trails



Concept A:

3.8 miles of hiking-only trails

If West Hills Farm is added to the park, a new trail would be constructed there as well (avoiding sensitive habitat).



Concept B:

Create a safe pedestrian crossing of Franklin Canyon Road from the Muir House/Highway 4 tunnel. Provide new trailhead amenities across from the tunnel, including parking and restrooms.



Concept C:

Create a safe pedestrian crossing of Franklin Canyon Road from the Muir House/Highway 4 tunnel.. Provide new parking on Franklin Canyon Road across from the tunnel.



Concept B: (Visitor Facilities)

Develop a new trailhead with parking, water, restrooms, picnic facilities, and a safe pedestrian route to the Strentzel-Muir Gravesite. Rehabilitate the existing bungalow into a visitor contact station, and convert the existing barn into an open-air, covered gathering space for school groups.



Concept C: (Visitor Facilities)

Develop a new trailhead with parking, water, restrooms, picnic facilities, and a safe pedestrian route to the Strentzel-Muir Gravesite. Remove existing structures and construct a stewardship education center that would house an educational classroom and lab space, park archival collections, and other administrative functions. Once the new trailhead is built, the riparian trail access point would be removed.



Concept B: (Creek Restoration)

Expand the creek restoration area downstream of the existing barn, roughly half of the natural alluvial fan for Strentzel Creek.

Concept C: (Creek Restoration)

Expand the restoration area to nearly the entire natural alluvial fan for Strentzel Creek. Remove buildings and unnatural water diversions that have altered the landscape and engage school groups, volunteers, and researchers in active restoration such as planting and weeding.



Concept B:

2.5 miles of hiking-only trails
3.4 miles of multi-use trails

If West Hills Farm is added to the park, a new trail would be constructed there as well (avoiding sensitive habitat).



Concept C:

2.3 miles of hiking-only trails
1.5 miles of multi-use trails

Public Events/Meetings

John Muir Birthday/Earth Day Celebration
Saturday, April 21, 2018, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Visit the Mt. Wanda planning table at the park's annual Birthday/Earth Day Celebration at the John Muir House. We will have maps and displays and opportunities for you to share your thoughts and ideas. For details about the event, please visit the John Muir Association website: www.johnmuirassociation.org/php/bday-earthday/bday-earthday.php

The event will take place at the Strentzel-Muir House estate area at 4202 Alhambra Avenue at Highway 4 in Martinez, California. For directions, visit: www.nps.gov/jomu

Public Meeting at Strentzel Creek
Saturday, May 19, 2018, 1:00 to 4:00 pm

Join park staff and planners for a brief walking tour of the Strentzel Creek area of Mt. Wanda. Participants will meet at the park visitor center at 4202 Alhambra Avenue in Martinez. From there the park will shuttle participants to the Strentzel Creek area in buses and vans. Participants will then return to the Visitor Center for discussion and comment.

Please note that the Strentzel Creek area is largely undeveloped with gravel roads and no paved pathways. The park can provide off-road wheelchairs for participants upon request at the number/e-mail below. To attend, please RSVP to: Jim MacDonald at 925-228-8860 x6431

How to Comment

There are several ways to comment:

1. Submit comments electronically at:
https://parkplanning.nps.gov/JOMU_MtWanda
2. Submit written comments at an in-person **public event or meeting**.
3. **Mail or hand-deliver** written comments to the park headquarters:

Mt. Wanda Comprehensive Site Plan
Superintendent
John Muir National Historic Site
4202 Alhambra Ave
Martinez, CA 94553



Comments will be accepted through June 15, 2018

Please note that comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Project Schedule - What's Next

