

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
MUIR WOODS NATIONAL MONUMENT RESERVATION SYSTEM**

National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Golden Gate National Recreation Area

December 2015

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**INTRODUCTION**

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is prepared by Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA, the Park), a unit of the National Park Service (NPS), for the Muir Woods National Monument Reservation System, in accordance with the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NPS NEPA guidance in Director’s Order 12 (2011). The FONSI combined with the Muir Woods National Monument Reservation System Environmental Assessment (EA), comprise the full and complete NEPA record of the analysis of environmental impacts and NPS decision-making process on selecting an implementation strategy. None of the modifications to the selected project (described below) alters the impact assessments contained in the EA or results in major changes to the alternatives.

This document summarizes the alternatives considered in the EA and focuses on the Selected Alternative. It includes the decision rationale for selecting Alternative B for implementation. The FONSI lists the specific actions NPS will follow when implementing the proposed project and explains the reasoning behind the statement that the Selected Alternative will result in no significant impacts to the environment as defined by the NEPA regulations (42 CFR pts. 1500-1508) and NPS NEPA guidance in Director’s Order 12. The FONSI and the EA (along with Errata attachment) will guide future actions for the implementation of the reservation system. Also, in keeping with 2006 Management Policies, the Determination of No Impairment (DNI) for the selected alternative was also prepared.

**PURPOSE, NEED AND OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of the proposed action is to reduce peak visitation levels at Muir Woods by managing motorized vehicle access in order to achieve, in part, the goals identified in the General Management Plan (GMP). The proposed action will allow the park to manage demand for parking both within the monument’s parking lots and on the adjacent road (Muir Woods Road which is owned and managed by the County of Marin). Access will be managed to a level that meets goals while providing visitors with a high-quality arrival experience. The proposed action will also reduce the visitor crowding and traffic congestion currently experienced during peak periods at Muir Woods.

The management of visitation is needed in order to address the complex, longstanding problems with overcrowding and traffic congestion that visitors experience during peak periods. These conditions, caused by growing visitor demand, have resulted in a degraded visitor arrival and departure experience, with overcrowding and traffic congestion occurring during peak periods. These periods of high visitation have expanded in recent years and now occur throughout much of the year. Conditions visitors experience during these times include public safety risks, difficulty finding a parking space, long walks along Lower Muir Woods Road to reach the monument, and a general sense of overcrowding and frustration. These conditions detract from one of the principal park goals for the monument—providing an inspiring and contemplative experience. Additionally, traffic congestion affects nearby residents and neighbors of the monument, as well as County of Marin and California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) resources.

Prevailing conditions do not meet the following park management goals outlined in the GMP:

- Create enjoyable and welcoming transportation experiences for all visitors.
- Preserve and protect park resources by minimizing transportation impacts.
- Create equitable and convenient multimodal transportation options to and within the park.
- Inspire environmental consciousness by demonstrating environmental excellence in transportation.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A successful proposed action will achieve the following objectives:

- Manage visitation levels to reduce peak season overcrowding, preserve periods of lower levels of visitation on weekdays and off-peak periods, and meet associated visitor experience standards in the GMP.
- Manage motorized access to Muir Woods, including car, shuttle, and commercial tour buses to reduce traffic congestion in the park, enhance the protection of resources in the Redwood Creek watershed, and enhance overall visitor experience.
- Provide for continued through vehicular access for park operations and staff, local residential access, as well as for emergency vehicles.
- Improve the ability for visitors to plan their trip to Muir Woods, adhere to their planned daily itinerary (which often includes other Northern California destinations) and make efficient use of their recreational time.
- Maintain equitable access for visitors, and charge no more than the reasonable fees necessary to manage transportation activities, along with the development of a complimentary access program for underserved communities.

#### **SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

The Selected Alternative is Alternative B – Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative. Under Alternative B, NPS will actively manage access to Muir Woods through establishment of a reservation system for all modes of motorized access to Muir Woods. The reservation system (hereinafter referred to as “reservation system” or “system”) includes two separate, but coordinated systems. Reservations for personal occupancy vehicle (POV) and for the Muir Woods Shuttle will be made directly through a reservation system operated by a third-party operator. Commercial carriers will be required to obtain a reservation for one of the parking spaces designated for commercial carrier use through another, separately-managed system.

Parking in Muir Woods and on Muir Woods Road will be formalized and regulated in order to effectively manage the reservation system. The number of parking spaces that will be managed by the reservation system will be approximately 232 visitor spaces (personal occupant vehicle), and 16 commercial vehicle spaces. These spaces will include:

- Parking within Muir Woods National Monument.
- Parking along select portions of Muir Woods Road, as shown in Figure 1 (Parking Management Corridor) and described in the Memorandum of Understanding between NPS and County of Marin (Appendix B of EA) (here therein referred to as “MOU”).

Annual visitation is expected to be reduced from the estimated 1,000,747 visitors in 2014 to a projection of 924,400 visitors in 2017. The reservation system will manage demand for parking and also reduce peak period visitation. The number of reservations released by the system will be managed to ensure that monument visitation levels are maintained at or below those identified in Figure 2. This level of visitation will meet the goals and performance standards in the GMP and serve to ensure protection of park resources and visitor experience by managing to visitation levels consistent with the GMP, and Figure 2. The number of reservations issued per day will be adjusted based on information from on-going monitoring of transportation, resource, and visitor experience conditions as well as to ensure visitation is at or below those in Figure 2.

Reservations for POV's and the Muir Woods Shuttle will be made through a website and a call center, operated by a third-party operator selected by NPS through a competitive bid process. In addition, in cooperation with Marin Transit or other shuttle providers, existing shuttle service to the monument will be expanded and managed through the reservation system. Visitors will have the option to travel to Muir Woods by shuttle or by POV by reserving a parking space. Parking management services and operation of the reservation system will be funded through a new concession service charge to visitors and/or a transportation fee. The fee will be tied to the cost of providing these services, which has been estimated to be approximately \$3.00 per visitor on average. It will be administered to ensure that all visitors are treated fairly and equitably in securing reservations, regardless of residence or other factors. The system will be operated in alignment with GGNRA education and outreach goals and may include waiver of reservation fees for target groups that meet requirements as approved by GGNRA leadership. Complimentary reservation programs will be coordinated with other entrance fee programs and event programs as appropriate.

The reservation system for commercial carrier parking will be managed separately from the concession-managed system. The selected alternative assumes that vehicle trips and visitation by commercial vehicles will remain unchanged from current conditions, but managed to ensure effective use of commercial parking and compliance with relevant commercial use authority and commercial use permit conditions. It will likely be a web-based only system, with the ability for operators to reserve a parking space in one of those designated for commercial vehicles.

The selected alternative includes, but is not limited to, all federal actions included in the MOU (Appendix B of EA). With this FONSI, the NPS will be able to execute the MOU. All federal actions under this alternative, including those within the MOU are below. It should be noted that actions in the MOU that are not listed below were excluded because they are not considered actions under NEPA (e.g. attending meetings, supplying regulations to CUA operators, etc). Based on the comments, NPS is clarifying that the actions covered by the EA and this FONSI are federal actions of NPS.

## Phase 1

Prior to the reservation system being launched, a series of preliminary actions will be implemented that support the system's operations and in meeting the project's goals. The actions in this phase include:

- Placement of physical barriers and signage along Muir Woods Road between Panoramic Highway and Highway 1 to prevent vehicles from parking illegally. The barriers will support enforcement of the parking supply limits allowed in the MOU. The physical barriers will include placement of a combination of posts and post-and-cable fencing approximately two feet off the fog line of the road, as well as other minor improvements to ensure compliance of parking restrictions. The extent and placement of these measures will be determined by mutual agreement between the National Park Service and County of Marin; however, because the road is owned and maintained by the County, they retain authority and must permit these actions.
- In the Conlon Avenue area within Muir Woods, a set of maintenance and modest improvement actions will be taken. These will include light grading of approximately 20,000 square feet of currently disturbed area (currently used as overflow parking and maintenance bone yard), laying down of gravel base, installing wattles and other stormwater Best Management Practices (BMP), widening the driveway into the area to improve emergency vehicle access, and removal of one tree, which is showing evidence of sudden oak death. The tree will be removed and disposed of according to standard practice for trees with that disease. Install wattles and other stormwater Best Management Practices (BMP) to minimize pollutants or sedimentation from shoulder areas.
- Installation of a small, temporary visitor contact station near the entrance of Muir Woods for on-site parking management staff to answer visitor questions related to reservations and parking, and to store any equipment they need to conduct their work (radios, computer, phone, etc.). The location has not been specifically identified, but will occur on NPS property.
- Provide additional NPS Law Enforcement Ranger capacity (equivalent to one full time person) for parking enforcement and management within Muir Woods National Monument and along the Parking Enforcement Corridor and assume primary responsibility for parking management and enforcement along that corridor beginning no later than January 1, 2016.
- Coordinate with California Department of Parks and Recreation to ensure annual non-toxic vegetation management for safety purposes within the right-of-way in areas where physical barriers prevent efficient access by County Road Maintenance staff.

## Phase 2

This phase of the project includes the following actions associated with starting and operating the reservation system for the first 2.5 years. In general, these actions will include the operation and management of the reservation system, enforcing parking restrictions along the entire length of Muir Woods Road, performing routine maintenance, and implementing a monitoring plan. The specific actions include:

- Implementation of a transportation reservation system for motorized access to Muir Woods that:
  - Manages visitation levels at or below those identified in Figure 2.
  - Prohibits bus parking along Muir Woods Road (per county ordinance).

- Manages changeable message signs (CMS) along Highway 101 and other State or local roads to support the reservation system.
- Provides information on NPS websites and public service announcements to inform visitors of the need to secure a reservation.
- Implement a reservation system for POV's and Muir Woods Shuttle services to the monument (website, call center, parking management, parking enforcement, etc.), including Muir Woods Road. A third-party operator will be selected through the competitive federal government prospectus process; the selected operator will develop and implement the transportation reservation system to manage motorized access to the monument, with oversight by NPS.
  - Require reserved permit parking in the area defined in the Parking Management Corridor and in the NPS Muir Woods parking lots in accordance with the MOU. Parking on the road will not exceed approximately 110, with approximately 80 downstream of the concrete bridge during this phase.
  - Collect and retain reservation/permit fees from Muir Woods's visitors to support the system's operation and other obligations in the MOU.
- Implement a parking reservation system for commercial carrier parking to be managed separately from the concession-managed system. It will likely be a web-based only system, with the ability for operators to reserve a parking space in specifically-designated areas for commercial vehicles. A third-party operator will be selected through a competitive federal government procurement process; the selected operator will develop and implement the transportation reservation system to manage commercial carrier motorized access to the monument, with oversight by NPS.
- Assume routine day-to-day operational responsibilities within the Parking Management Corridor on Muir Woods Road, which includes, but is not limited to, parking management, non-toxic vegetation management, litter collection, and routine maintenance (surface treatment) of shoulder and pedestrian areas.
- Upon commencement of the reservation system, provide one additional NPS Law Enforcement Ranger capacity (equivalent to 1 full time person, for a total of 2 full time employees) for routine day to day operational responsibilities for parking enforcement and management within Muir Woods National Monument and along the Parking Enforcement Corridor.
- The selected action includes monitoring to track how effectively the reservation system is meeting GMP performance standards (GMP, Vol. 1, pg. 289-295). If the established performance standards are not being met the reservation system will be modified. Specific measures to be monitored will include:
  - Hourly and daily vehicle and visitor arrival rates, including POV's, commercial vehicles, shuttles and pedestrians.
  - Visitor metrics and level of service within the monument arrival plaza.
  - Visitor use metrics inside the monument (i.e., people at one time, people per view, encounters on trails, noise levels, and social trails).

### Phase 3

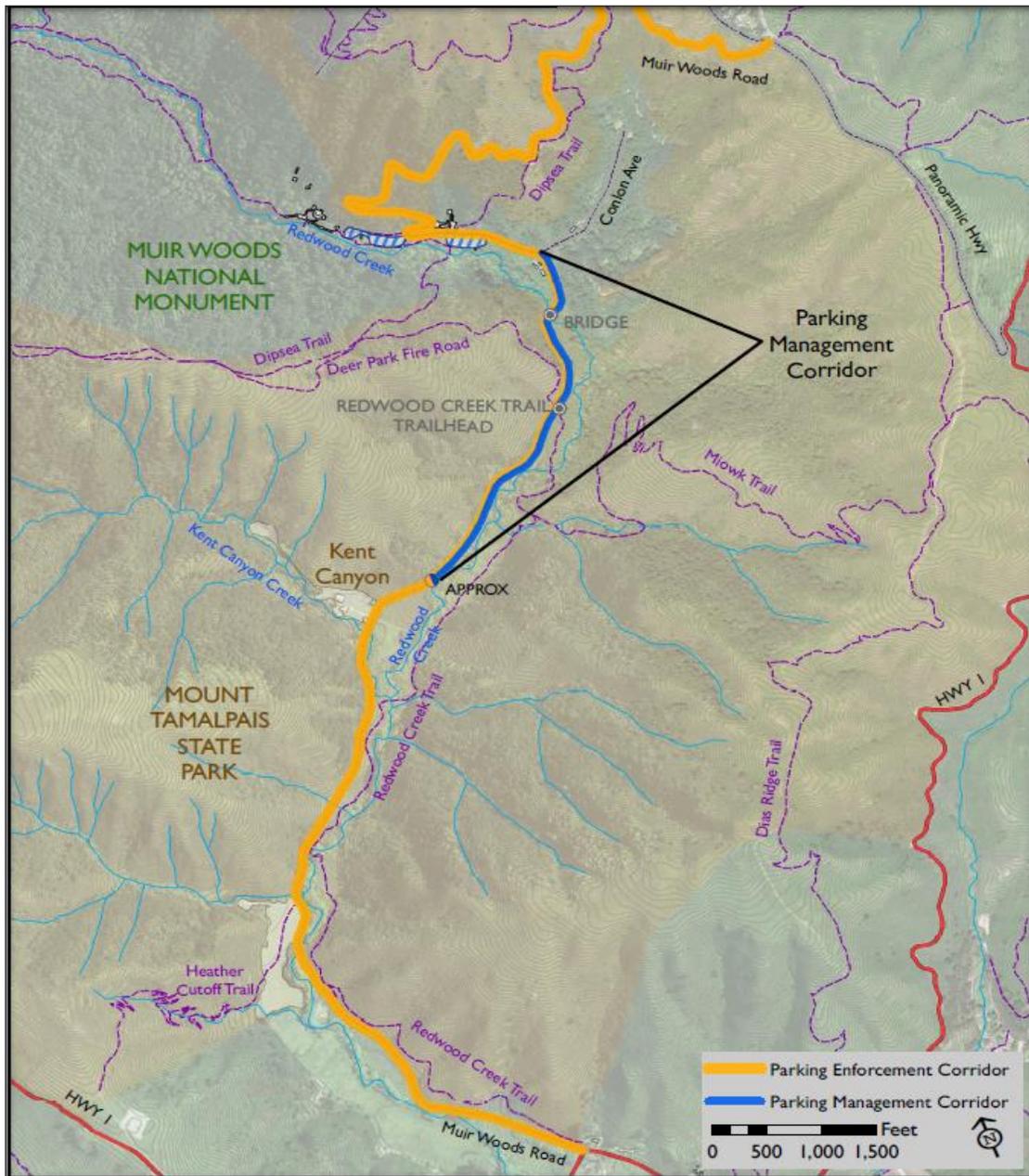
This phase of the project is for the second 2.5 years of operation of the reservation system. It includes the same actions as Phase 2, but parking on Muir Woods Road is reduced to approximately 70, with

approximately 40 downstream of the Concrete Bridge. The exception to these limits is that during periods of construction on projects within the Muir Woods area that displaces vehicles parked elsewhere in the watershed, up to 80 vehicles may be parked downstream of the bridge.

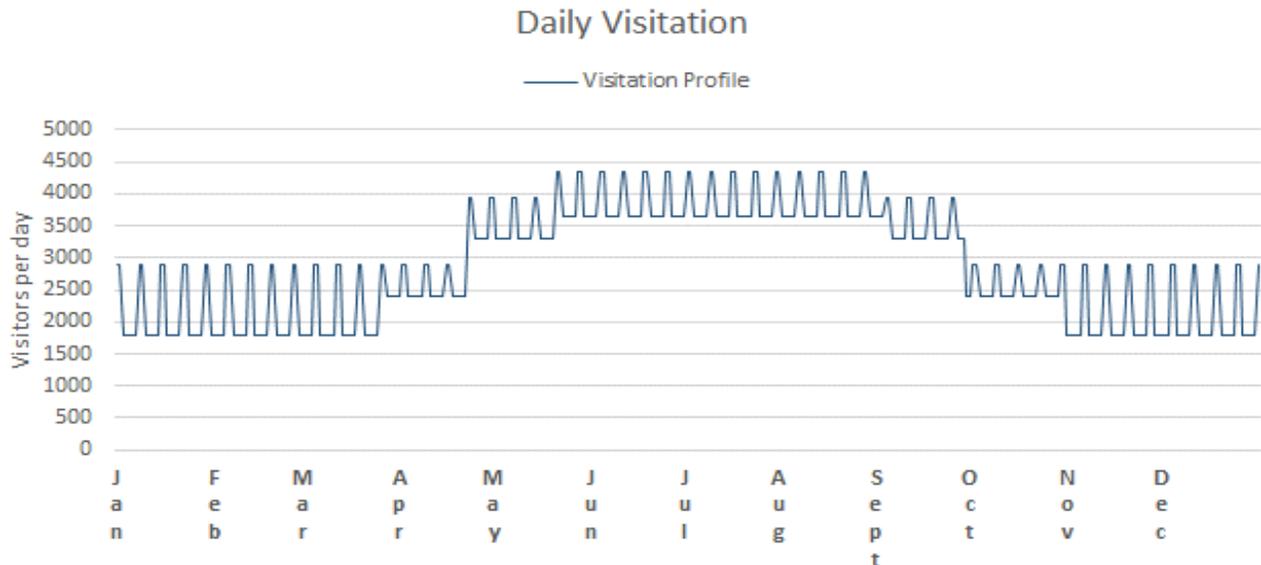
Phase 4

This phase of the project extends from the conclusion of year 5 of the reservation system through year 20. It includes the same actions as Phase 2, but parking on Muir Woods Road is reduced to approximately 30, with none downstream of the Concrete Bridge.

**Figure 1. Parking Management Corridor for Muir Woods National Monument**



**Figure 2. Daily Visitation Capacity for Muir Woods National Monument (MOU)**



**RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The EA describes and analyzes two alternatives; one action alternative and one no-action alternative. The alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the “Alternatives” section of the EA.

Alternative A, the No Action Alternative is required in all NEPA analyses to provide a baseline against which the other alternatives can be compared. The alternative will leave existing access to Muir Woods unchanged by NPS. Under this alternative, visitation to Muir Woods will be expected to increase by approximately 1% growth per year or an increase from an estimate of 1,000,747 visitors in 2014 to a projection of 1,031,000 visitors in 2017. Existing access could be described as managed, but relatively unregulated. Visitors will continue to be encouraged through the Muir Woods website, signs, and other media to visit during off-peak hours and use alternative forms of transportation such as public transit (e.g., the Muir Woods Shuttle) and commercial tours. Enforcement of parking regulations along Muir Woods Road will continue to be coordinated with the County of Marin Sheriff and California Department of Parks and Recreation with limited participation from NPS, to reduce parking in illegal, unsafe, and/or resource-damaging areas. This alternative assumes that the county will enforce parking restrictions that it has established on Muir Woods Road, including reduction of parking supply to approximately 110.

Alternative B, the Preferred Alternative is as defined above in the selected alternative.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND DISMISSED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS**

Expanded Shuttle and Information Systems (without Reservation System)

As an alternative, NPS considered significantly expanding the existing Muir Woods Shuttle to reduce personal vehicle trips and manage overall demand, as the sole proposed action. NPS began operating the Muir Woods Shuttle in cooperation with Marin Transit in 2005. Service has expanded significantly over the shuttle’s ten years of operation. Marin Transit and NPS have increased the number of coaches and the frequency of trips to and from the monument, as well as modified routes to improve efficiency. In tandem with the shuttle service, NPS has installed changeable message signs on highway approaches,

as well as through messages on the NPS website about when parking is full. Ridership has increased more than tenfold since the service's inception, from carrying fewer than 5,000 visitors to and from the monument in 2006, to carrying over 50,200 in 2014. The shuttle currently operates 10 coaches during peak periods, with shuttle frequency every 10 minutes. On days of operation during peak season, the shuttle provides transportation for 20–25% of Muir Woods' visitors.

Despite increases in shuttle ridership, annual visitation to the monument via all other transportation modes has increased at an even faster rate. Over the period the shuttle has been operational, overall visitation has risen from approximately 775,000 visitors in 2005 to approximately 1,000,747 visitors in 2014, an increase of approximately 226,000 visitors. During the same period, shuttle ridership has increased from 0 to 50,200 (visitor round trips). The net difference between these numbers, approximately 176,000 annually, have predominantly come by personal vehicles. The shuttle service has become an integral component of the Muir Woods transportation system, but it has not reduced vehicle trips sufficiently, due to the lack of a system in place to control overall visitor demand. For this reason, this alternative will not meet project objectives.

#### **ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

The environmentally preferred alternative is defined by CEQ NEPA regulations as the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources (40 CFR 1500–1508). The CEQ NEPA regulations also indicate that the environmentally preferred alternative is the one that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA's Section 101 (Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning CEQ's National Environmental Policy Act Regulations 40 CFR 1500 – 1508; Question 6a).

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.
- Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.
- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety or other undesirable and unintended consequences.
- Preserve important historical, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice.
- Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of unsustainable resources.

Using both the CEQ's interpretations of the Section 101 purpose statements and the comparison of environmental effects to natural and cultural resources expected under each alternative, Alternative B was identified as the environmentally preferred alternative.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public involvement has been extensive for the project. The following is a list of public meetings and scoping activities that NPS has conducted since the start of external scoping on September 18, 2013. NPS has attended and presented at dozens of meetings with the public, with local and state agencies, and with local, state, and national interest groups, including:

### **Public Meetings**

- September 18, 2013 – Tam Valley Elementary School
- June 18, 2014 – Tamalpais Valley Community Center
- May 26, 2015 – Mill Valley Community Center

### **Local, State, and Federal Agencies**

- County of Marin
- Marin Transit
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- City of Mill Valley
- City of Sausalito
- Tamalpais Valley Community Services District
- Muir Beach Community Services District
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association - National Marine Fisheries
- US Fish and Wildlife
- Regional Water Quality Control Board

### **Local, State, and Federal Interest Groups**

- Marin Conservation League
- Marin Audubon
- Marin Watershed Alliance
- Sierra Club – Bay Area Region
- Mount Tam Task Force
- Muir Woods Community Association

As a part of the scoping process for the reservation system, which began in September 2013, NPS considered comments from the public and stakeholders. The comments submitted in writing during the open comment period between September 18, 2013, through January 11, 2014, showed that public support for implementing a reservation system was strong, with over 60 commenters expressing support for the system and only five expressing opposition. In addition to written comments, NPS has received a large volume of comments at meetings with community stakeholder groups. The most common themes of these comments included:

- Desire to see established visitation levels based on the “carrying capacity” of Muir Woods. There was also a common desire to ensure that there be continued periods of the year when visitation is lower to ensure quiet times and access by local residents, who tend to avoid the area during peak periods.
- Support for increasing the use of shuttles.
- Concern over commercial tour management.
- Concern over fees and costs.
- Concern over use of the county road and potential impacts to Redwood Creek’s habitat.

In order to discuss public comments received during the scoping and to form a common understanding of the critical issues, a series of meetings was organized by Congressman Jared Huffman. The congressman's meetings were attended by an ad-hoc committee that included:

- Congressman Jared Huffman
- National Park Service
- County of Marin
- Marin Transit
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- City of Mill Valley
- Mount Tam Task Force
- Marin Conservation League
- Muir Woods Community Association
- Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
- Tennessee Valley Community Services District
- Save our Seashore

#### **WHY THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE QUALITY OF THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

NPS used the following NEPA criteria and factors defined in 40 CFR §1508.27 to evaluate whether the Selected Alternative will have a significant impact on the environment.

Impacts that may have both beneficial and adverse aspects and which on balance may be beneficial, but that may still have significant adverse impacts that require analysis in an EIS.

Whether taken individually or as a whole, the impacts of the Selected Alternative do not reach the level of significant adverse effect. Most adverse impacts associated with implementation of the Selected Alternative will be temporary during construction of the improvement on Muir Woods Road and Conlon Avenue. Newly compiled BMP are incorporated into the Selected Alternative further reduce or avoid potential effects.

#### Degree of effect on Public Health or Safety

The Selected Alternative will have beneficial impacts to Public Health and Safety. The reduction of vehicle trips and the phased reductions of parking along Muir Woods Road will contribute to improved safety for the public.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas.

The Selected Alternative will have no impact on historic, cultural resources, wetlands, or prime farmlands. It will have a minor beneficial impact on park resources and ecologically critical areas.

#### Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

The project generated significant public concern related primarily to the level of visitation and associated impacts. The Selected Alternative has modified the specifics of the visitation levels reducing

visitation levels, most significantly to ensure preservation of quiet periods throughout the year. These changes resulted in a unanimous consensus within an ad-hoc group convened by local and federal elected officials with the participation of local, state, and federal interest groups and local, state, and federal agencies. Concern over the level of visitation within the Selected Alternative was the subject of only eight comments.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

The actions that comprise the Selected Alternative are primarily management related, with very modest physical activities. This fact makes the degree of uncertainty regarding effects minimal.

Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The Selected Alternative will not predetermine or establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects at the site or the parklands in the site vicinity.

The Selected Alternative will not be precedent setting and will have no significant effects either alone or cumulatively with other actions.

The EA considered the cumulative impacts of the Selected Alternative with several past, present and future projects. The analysis for all impact topics indicated the effects of the Selected Alternative when considered with the projects of the cumulative scenario could result in effects that were both individually and cumulatively less than significant.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

NPS evaluated the effect of the selected action on historic structures and landscapes and found that in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800.11 (d), no historic properties will be affected by the proposed undertaking. NPS conducted consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and they concurred that there will be no effect.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat

NPS has determined that the selected action is likely to have no effect on Central California Coast Coho salmon, Central California Coast steelhead, or the designated critical habitat for these species. Implementing the Selected Alternative will violate no federal, state or local environmental protection laws. Assessment of the proposed action has been performed pursuant to NEPA, which requires consideration of environmental protection laws and regulations.

**Conclusion**

Implementation of the Selected Alternative for the Muir Woods National Monument Reservation System Environmental Assessment will not have significant impacts on the human environment. The

determination is sustained by the analysis in the EA, agency consultations, the inclusion and consideration of public review to reduce or avoid impacts. Adverse environmental impacts that could occur are negligible to minor in intensity, duration, and, would be less than significant. Beneficial impacts range from negligible to moderate. As described in the EA, there are no highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects or elements of precedence. There are no previous, current or planned actions, which in combination with the Selected Alternative, would have significant effects on the human environment. Requirements of NEPA have been satisfied and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The GGNRA will implement the Selected Alternative as soon as practical.

**Recommended:**



Christine Lehnertz, General Superintendent  
Golden Gate National Recreation Area  
National Park Service

12/22/2015

Date

**Approved:**



Martha J. Lee, Acting Regional Director  
Pacific West Region  
National Park Service

12/23/2015

Date