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# MARIN COUNTY PARKS VISITORS STUDY REPORT

**Part II,**  
Focus Group  
Results



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**MARIN COUNTY  
PARKS**  
PRESERVATION · RECREATION



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## INTRODUCTION

Marin County Parks Department (MCP), in partnership with San Francisco State University (SFSU), pursued a two-part visitor use/non-use study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand the park-related needs of Marin County's transforming population. This report reflects Phase II whereby two focus groups were conducted. The overall purpose of the study was to assess visitor satisfaction, motivation, and future demands; and, provide new data for potential decision making. The study also aimed to offer recommendations for park programs, facilities, policies, and innovative ways to enhance community engagement and access.

The first phase of the study consisted of an intercept survey on-site at nine parks, six preserves and two bike/walking paths where use levels and visitor characteristics were recorded. SFSU helped to develop the survey questionnaire of park visitors and all results have been analyzed (see P. Tierney report). Additionally, this report represents procedures and results of two focus group interviews held in January and February 2016 with a goal of engaging in more in depth conversations with Marin County residents.

For more information about the purpose and scope of the research contact Kevin Wright, Government and External Affairs Coordinator for Marin County Parks, at (415) 497-3553 or [kwright@marincounty.org](mailto:kwright@marincounty.org). Questions about the survey, sampling, or methods for collection of information, or data analysis, can be directed to Dr. Patrick Tierney, professor and principal investigator (415) 338-2030 or via email [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu). Questions about the focus group process and findings, as depicted in this Phase II report, can be addressed to Dr. Nina Roberts, professor and research associate at (415) 338-7576 or by email at [nroberts@sfsu.edu](mailto:nroberts@sfsu.edu).

### **Special thanks to community partners**

This project could not have been possible nor successful without the help and support of the several important individuals. Thank you is not enough to convey appreciation to our two community partners: First, Anita Renzetti, Director of Program Innovation at "Whistlestop", Marin Senior Coordinating Council, of San Rafael. Their tagline is indicative of the valuable support Anita provided in helping get this group interview set up: *"We share in the responsibility to ensure that our community's older adults are able to age with dignity, independence and grace."*

Second, Florencia Parada, Health Hub Supervisor for Marin Community Clinics, was an amazing ally in this effort and her communication as a trusted leader in the Canal neighborhood, and beyond, was huge. Joining forces in service, we're grateful to Jeannette Sotomayor from the Albert Boro Community Center for hosting this other important focus group with Latino residents of the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael. We are indebted to the Spanish language Interpreter, Maria Aguila, and the two stellar child care providers Maria Rodriguez and Maria Victoria, who kept the children occupied and happy during our interviews.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Phase II Overview**

The second part of this study aimed to capture the experiences of non-users and underserved residents in order to identify substantial barriers to visitation and provide insight for increasing use and park access by these communities. This was comprised of two focus groups in San Rafael representing two distinct communities: Aging in Place/Senior community and the Hispanic/Latino community in the Canal neighborhood.

### **Preparation**

#### ***Development of Collateral Materials & Procedures***

SFSU created the materials needed to successfully set up and facilitate two focus groups such as focus group recruitment fliers, focus group protocol, and interview questions. The MCP department reviewed the materials, provided feedback and input before the materials were finalized, distributed, and implemented accordingly. The recruitment flier was used by community leaders to enlist participants for the focus groups. MCP provided SFSU with materials to distribute at the focus groups (i.e., park maps, event fliers, program brochures).

SFSU also developed a participant sign-in sheet, log for signatures acknowledging receipt of gift card, and sign-up sheet for MCP (e.g., anyone requesting a copy of the final report or wish to be added to mailing list). Other materials used during the focus groups were name tags, MCP brochures, map from One Tam, and Sports Authority gift cards (purchased). SFSU also ordered food from Panera Bread to provide dinner and refreshments at both of the focus groups. Finally, each host organization received a modest facility use fee for providing a space and Whistlestop senior center requested additional financial support to help recruit participants.

### **Focus Groups**

The two focus groups were conducted on January 28<sup>th</sup> and February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in two separate communities targeted by MCP: Canal neighborhood (Latino) and the “aging in place” (senior citizens) population. MCP felt that these communities have been previously underserved and underrepresented in MCP's planning and services provided, and believed the opinions and motivations from these groups could benefit future planning of the county's park system and services.

#### **What occurred, why, and how?**

A focus group is a small group of eight to twelve people, ideally, led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out or few people dominate the conversation. Additionally, the groups should be homogenous as homogeneity levels the playing field and reduces inhibitions among people who come together for the purpose of a group interview.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well executed, a focus group creates a welcoming environment that allows participants to feel at ease and



encourages thoughtful, honest answers providing added meaning to question responses. As a valid methodology, focus groups were chosen as the primary approach to elicit the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and recommendations of traditionally underrepresented communities in Marin County. In addition, focus groups have the ability to generate rich qualitative data that comes from individual participants engaging in deep conversation, potentially capturing themes that would be missed from other, more quantitative, methods. Furthermore, focus groups foster a safe place for participants to be open and honest, particularly among people who use English as a second language.

The SFSU research associate (“investigator”) was the focus group moderator who nurtured disclosure in an open and honest format. The goal was to generate a maximum number of different opinions, experiences, attitudes, and ideas from as many people in the group in the time allotted. As reflected in the protocol that follows, the focus groups were structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions but the discussion was free-flowing. That is, participant comments stimulated and influenced the thinking and sharing of others.

### **Recruitment: Where did participants come from?**

This study used a convenience sampling method that enlisted the leaders of community organizations to recruit focus group participants. MCP department initially sent out an introductory email to community leaders that could best assist with recruitment. SFSU team followed up with a more detailed email and took over the preparations from there. Community organizations were prioritized based on willingness to help and recommendations from MCP department.

Two familiar public settings, in a convenient location, with ample parking and public transportation lines were arranged. Whistlestop, a senior center in San Rafael, was the host for the senior citizen focus group and their staff recruited participants from the senior center to take part in the focus group. And, the Health Hub recruited participants from the Canal neighborhood for the second focus group and, for this process, child care was requested and provided as well as a Spanish language translator hired to be inclusive. (See Appendix A for recruitment fliers designed by the SFSU team).

Host organizations were expected to recruit 12 participants. In return, host organizations were compensated for their time, effort, and providing a space for the focus group. In addition, focus group participants were rewarded with a \$50 gift card to Sports Authority as an incentive to participate. Additionally, participants were informed a dinner-type meal would be provided and thirty minutes was allotted for general socializing (e.g., “meet and greet”) prior to the official start time of the interview process.

### **Focus Group Protocol**

The focus group protocol used for this study was created by the SFSU team and included a description of the overall study, participant guidelines, focus group questions, and logistical information. Focus group questions were developed by both SFSU and MCP teams based on models from prior studies and questions that were desired from the MCP team (staff and key project partners).

A set of two-tiered questions were developed in which Tier 1 questions were the priority and focused on visitors' frequency of park use and experience, level of comfort and safety within parks, how information is obtained about the parks, environmental literacy, program/facility recommendations, constraints or barriers to accessing parks, importance of health, and general recommendations. If additional time remained, Tier 2 questions were asked, which involved how participants received health care in their neighborhoods and maintenance of the parks. The final focus group protocol and questions used during the study are available in Appendix B.

### Data Collection

Two focus groups ( $n = 26$  total participants) were held in January and February of 2016 as reflected in Table 1:

Table 1. Focus group details

<i>Host Organization</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Total Participants</i>
Whistlestop Senior Center	Whistlestop San Rafael	January 28, 2016	$n = 14$
Health Hub	Al Boro Community Center at Pickleweed Park in San Rafael	February 11, 2016	$n = 12$

As participants arrived at the location, SFSU team collected basic demographic information and primary mode of transportation for each participant. This information was administered on a brief questionnaire as part of the participant sign-in sheet before the focus group began.

The investigator facilitated the interview process using the protocol and questions (Appendix B) and established comfort during meal time as well as through a general ice breaker question when the focus group commenced to get the group thinking about parks and park use or non-use. All prepared questions were asked within the 90-minute time allotted and the investigator was responsible for getting all participants to talk and fully explain their answers using helpful probes (e.g., “Can you say more about that?”; “Help us understand what you mean”; and “Can you give an example?”). The investigator demonstrated active listening and occasionally paraphrased long or ambiguous comments, or sought clarification for analysis purposes and/or summarized responses for the whole group.

The research assistant recorded the focus group using smartphone app “SmartVoice Recorder” and took supporting notes on a laptop in case the recorder failed or any parts of the tape were inaudible. Body language or other subtle relevant clues were recorded via typed notes. Both digital audio files were uploaded to Google sites for storage and back up.

At the end of each focus group, participants were thanked and each person received the incentive (gift card) that required a signature on the receipt log for SFSU accounting purposes. If any participants wanted to receive the final report, or expressed interest in being put on a MCP mailing list, the SFSU team passed around another sign-up sheet for them to provide their contact information.



## Data Analysis & Transcription

The focus groups were captured via audio and the research assistant took notes on a laptop, while the investigator moderated, and the interview was then transcribed verbatim. The research assistant transcribed the audio files of the group interview at Whistlestop (English) and an independent translator was hired to translate and transcribe the audio from the focus group conducted in the Canal neighborhood (predominantly monolingual Spanish).

In order for all participant comments to be understandable and useful, they were boiled down to essential information using a systematic and verifiable process. Hence, the research assistant completed a manual content analyses process by first identifying question content categories and emerging themes with groupings entered into a Word document. Subsequently, common themes among both groups were then extracted and explored. Participant demographics are provided in Appendix C. Furthermore, major findings from participants' comments are summarized in the results section that follows and includes a series of direct quotes highlighting relevant responses.

The investigator completed the final examination of the audio files and transcriptions for each focus group. Results were reviewed and synthesized to ensure accuracy of themes and relationship of supporting quotes.



## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This exciting interview process revealed many valuable findings. And, important to note is that, at times, participants may be thinking about, and referring to, San Rafael city parks. This is not uncommon to occur within focus group interviews. The parks literature explains that many people do not differentiate between park agencies. This further accentuates the need for park agencies to work together; and, this reveals the increasing importance to share such park use/non-use interview results with other park managers as well.

### EMERGING THEMES: AGING IN PLACE/SENIORS

**Host: Whistlestop** | 930 Tamalpais Ave. | San Rafael | 415.456.9062



**Setting:** The first focus group took place at a senior community center near Downtown San Rafael. The room had multiple tables put together to make one large table near the center of the room where participants gathered around. Catering for dinner was provided by Panera Bread. The participants were recruited by staff at the community center. Some of the participants knew each other previously. In total, there were 14 participants present. Two participants (#9 and 6) had to leave the focus group shortly before it was completed yet this did not affect the results.

## Health and Well-Being

This group of participants were extremely concerned with their overall health and well-being. As their age increases, they are aware of their need to spend more time nurturing their health. Many of these participants frequent the parks often, at least once a week, in order to exercise and maintain their health. They also enjoy the stress relief they experience while appreciating the outdoors; they find this time to be an important form of relaxation. The parks have a special place in the lives of these participants and their overall health.

### **Common Themes:**

- ❖ **Exercise often in parks, at least once a week**
- ❖ **Involved with other social groups that do physical activities (e.g., hiking, Zumba, bike riding, tennis)**
- ❖ **Find tranquility in parks**
- ❖ **Stress reliever**
- ❖ **Parks indicated as one of their favorite places to relax**

Table 2. Highlighted quotes describing health and wellbeing

<i>"I like to exercise and go walking with others, almost every day." (Female, White, age 72)</i>
<i>"It makes you feel better since you're away from all the pollution. It's energizing since we live by the ocean." (Female, retired, age 70)</i>
<i>"...I was thinking about "re-creation." I get "re-created" in some internal way just taking in the view and watching the waves on the bay, the birds, the butterflies, the flowers, it's like all of the crap that goes on can get out of the way." (Male, retired, age 72)</i>
<i>"I find being outdoors in park settings, not on the streets, is very de-stressing to hear the birds and just see trees and not have a lot of things around except for the trees and nature." (Female, retired, White)</i>
<i>"I usually go twice a day to walk along the marsh in Corte Madera. It's important to me." (Female, age 66, pre-school teacher)</i>

## Information and Communication

Overall, seniors aging in place like to be informed about the events taking place in their county parks. Some of them have experience using the Marin County Park website for information, while others were not very aware that this was available. This group enjoys learning about events and activities from brochures or circulars found in the local newspapers. They also rely on their senior center's newsletters for information. There were a few participants that still try to get information over the phone, but expressed that this was not as reliable a source as before and can be difficult to reach a live person. This group is always looking for activities and "things to do" since they have more free time than most other social groups; they expressed value and importance to be well-informed of what is available in their community. Many of the participants belong to groups that perform different activities and receive information about the parks from those groups.



**Common Themes:**

- ❖ **Receive information through local newspapers, community center newsletters, websites**
- ❖ **Eager to learn of activities, events in their community**
- ❖ **Often join social groups for special activities (e.g., photography, bird watching, foraging)**
- ❖ **Desire to learn more about natural environment**

Table 3. Selected statements highlighting information and communication

<i>"I just wanted to say, the Marin County Parks and Open Space website actually has a wonderful calendar, month-by-month. You can see three months ahead. And, you can do it by Ranger-led walks or by birding and all kinds of ways to look up information."</i> (Retired, age 81, female)
<i>"Newspaper articles, "Favorite Hikes." I'm always picking up brochures and looking at them."</i> (Retired, male, age 72)
<i>"Word of mouth, I'm a wanderer...or you know, from a friend."</i> (Female, age 72, musician)
<i>"I'm fascinated by how the environment is a community and the interactions of how one plant might support another plant's existence, and, of course, all of the plants and animals...how they assist each other in amazing ways."</i> (White male, retired, age 62)

**Barriers and Constraints**

Senior citizens experienced several constraints related to their health and age. There are times when they do not have enough energy to frequent the parks as often as they used to, or cannot participate in the same activities as they did in the past. Many do not drive anymore and must rely on public transportation or carpool with others. They expressed a need for more available transportation to the parks from their neighborhood. Also, there was one participant who felt the events offered at the parks should be held earlier in the day since they cannot stay out as late as they used to. Many enjoy these events, but felt that they should not have to pay expensive fees to partake. Some participants even shared that these types of fees have kept them from attending some of the activities or immerse in amenities offered. Since this population is mostly retired and may not have replenishing income, they choose their expenses wisely and carefully.

**Common Themes:**

- ❖ **Don't have as much energy as they used to**
- ❖ **Cannot drive anymore so public transportation is important**
- ❖ **Time of events should be scheduled to accommodate everyone**
- ❖ **Fees relating to park events or activities should be minimal or non-existent**



Table 4. Quote highlights for barriers and constraints

<p><i>“It’s terrible trying to get around San Rafael if you don’t have a car. If you don’t live on the main strip and you don’t have a car, there’s no public transportation. And if you’re trying to get to another part of Marin, forget it! I have to walk a mile and a half to get to decent public transportation. I don’t drive, I can’t drive.”</i> (Mixed race female, age 72)</p>
<p><i>“When I was younger, I used to love to drive to West Marin and to Point Reyes Seashore, especially to Kehoe Beach and McClure’s. It’s a long drive. And then, it’s a very long walk to the beach. By the time you’ve done all that, you have to turn around and go back, then drive home. At 81, I don’t have the energy anymore to do that, but I would love to.”</i> (White female, retired)</p>
<p><i>“A lot of people do not have a car here. Unless a bus goes, I don’t go to it.”</i> (Female, age 72, does not own a vehicle)</p>
<p><i>“There could even be a modest charge, of say two dollars. But people can bring their kids there, they can have a picnic. People will come.”</i> (Male, age 76, self-employed)</p>

### **Safety and Comfort**

Generally, seniors expressed feeling welcome at their county parks. They spend an ample amount of time outdoors and had many positive experiences to share about the parks and the staff (when encountered). There were some instances that participants had experiences with other park users that prevent them from visiting certain parks more often. For example, there are some trails that allow both bikers and hikers on the trail. Due to some of the participant’s hearing ailments, they noted the ongoing example of having difficulty hearing a bike approaching them, which makes them feel unsafe.

This group of seniors expressed concern that they’ve seen other park users breaking park regulations without consequences, which also effected their level of safety at the park. Furthermore, some of the participants expressed that there was not enough information available on the website regarding accessibility of a particular park and/or trail. This made it difficult for them to plan ahead and know what to expect when visiting the park, which may have effected their safety and comfort at the park. The opinions from this group are similar to what is seen in national research of the senior community.

#### **Common Themes:**

- ❖ **User conflicts effect safety and comfort**
- ❖ **Enforcement of park rules and regulations desired**
- ❖ **Accessibility information not always available**



Table 5. Highlighted quotes describing safety and comfort

<p><i>“It’s unfortunate, but there really is a time when I’m walking the trails and I never know when a bike might be coming from behind me since I’m hard of hearing. I can’t hear the bike until he’s right there going past me. It’s scary when I think about it. I don’t want to go there as often if I have to worry about that.”</i> (Retired, male, age 72)</p>
<p><i>“By San Quentin, there’s a trail, there was kids there that looked like gangs. I was by myself so I was not feeling very safe.”</i> (White female, retired)</p>
<p>“There has been a couple times when I was out fishing and I encountered some people that made me a little uncomfortable. Nothing that made me alarmed enough to create a problem though.” (Male, age 67, retired)</p>
<p>“Too many people there drinking and smoking, we need more enforcement.” (Female, Latina, age 64)</p>



**EMERGING THEMES:  
CANAL NEIGHBORHOOD/LATINOS**

**Host:** Al Boro Community Center & Library | 50 Canal St. San Rafael | 415.485.3077

**Setting:** The focus group for the Hispanic/Latino population took place at the Al Boro Community Center and Library at Pickleweed Park. This is a local community center within the Canal neighborhood in San Rafael. The room was set-up with the tables arranged in a large square in the center of the room so participants could engage with each other. Catering was provided by Panera Bread. The participants were recruited by the **Health Hub**, mainly residents from the Canal community. Many of the participants knew each other either through their children or from other community events. In total, there were 12 participants present.

**Safety and Comfort**

Findings show safety was highly valued among this group of Latinos. Most of the participants grew up in another country that had high rates of crime and lack of enforcement. Now, living in a low-income neighborhood in California, such as Canal, brings forth memories of their past as well as similar insecurities felt during those times. While visiting Marin County parks, it seems to make them feel safer to see rangers enforcing regulations, especially when it comes to keeping the park clean. The parks are an important part of these participants’ lives and are acknowledged as places for their families to spend time together outdoors. Not only do they want to feel secure bringing their children to the parks, they also want to feel comfortable. The participants expressed that some of the parks they visited within the county are not regularly maintained, especially those parks that are nearby the Canal neighborhood. Additionally, they have experienced other park users not respecting the rules of the park and leave behind a mess. With the proper enforcement of the rules, the participants feel that their general level of safety will increase.

**Common Themes:**

- ❖ **Cleanliness of picnic areas (e.g., near and around tables, garbage receptacles)**
- ❖ **Level of safety around other park users**
- ❖ **Lack of enforcement of regulations**
  - **Alcohol and smoking regulations**
- ❖ **Other park users neglect to clean up after themselves and/or their pets**

Table 6. Participant statements describing safety and comfort

<p><i>“Lately, we noticed men gathering at the tables drinking, smoking, and playing cards. I don’t feel comfortable taking my children there and to see that kind of activity taking place at the park.”</i> (Female, age 37, homemaker)</p>
<p><i>“I like nature, it makes me feel relaxed and in peace with myself. However, this feeling could be better for everybody if people keep the parks clean.”</i> (Female Latina, age 38)</p>
<p><i>“Another point I want to bring up is the people that play cards at these parks, when nature calls, they don’t bother going to the bathroom; they do it right there! And of course, it smells during the day when the weather gets hot. That is something that needs to be brought up to the park rangers’ attention.”</i> (Female, age 36, homemaker)</p>

**Information and Communication**

Overall, the Canal community does not feel well-informed about the county’s parks and programs offered. Some members from this Latino community are not technologically skilled and have trouble trying to navigate the parks’ website, especially if the information is not available in Spanish. Many of the participants relied on the news received from their children through their schools to hear about programs and events happening in the parks. Another resource of information for these participants is through word of mouth, either in person or on social media. There were several participants that expressed interest in learning more about the natural environment, but stressed that any signs, brochures, or programs offered should also be available in Spanish, whenever possible. These participants were not aware if this type of information was already accessible in Spanish.

**Common Themes:**

- ❖ **Best resource for information: schools, after-school programs, community centers**
- ❖ **Lack of information available in Spanish**
  - **On website**
  - **Fliers/brochures**
  - **Interpretive signs and trail markers**
  - **Posted rules, regulations, and what to do in an emergency**
- ❖ **Desire to learn more about natural environment and history of the area**



Table 7. Highlights of quotes for information and communication

<p><i>"I learn through my daughter's school, they usually send home all kinds of information on activities for the children and parents, too."</i> (Female, Latina, age 35)</p>
<p><i>"We like to share through Facebook about these new places with other parents where they, too, can take their children to have fun. It is all about keeping informed with friends and family members about other fun areas where they can take their families to explore."</i> (Latina, age 50, housekeeper)</p>
<p><i>"Learning about the trees are very interesting to me. Unfortunately, a lot of the signs are only in English. I would like to see them written in other languages like Spanish. For some of us, these signs do not benefit us because we have no clue what they are about."</i> (Female, age 40, community liaison)</p>
<p><i>"We like to take our children to learn about the natural environment there. It's beautiful! I want my kids to learn more about the area (Mt. Tamalpais). They are learning a lot when they hear the water, when they see the birds, the trees, the wonders that are around us."</i> (Female, Latina, age 50)</p>
<p><i>"I get my information through my school or some programs I go to. I think this community isn't really informed about these types of things because they don't get the word out here, they only tell the kids."</i> (Female, age 20, student)</p>

### **Health and Well-Being**

Staying fit and healthy is vitally important to this group of Latino individuals. They strive to exercise regularly and see the parks as a place to keep up their healthy habits. When they are not working, this community regularly visits the nearby parks for recreation and maintenance of their personal health. These participants enjoy taking their kids to the park to exercise by playing soccer or just simply going for a walk. The parks also allow this community to relax from their busy lives and relieve stress outdoors. Without access to the parks, this community feels that their overall well-being would be affected. They find the parks rejuvenating and cherish the time that they can spend with their families outside. This Latino community relies on the parks for many important family events such as birthdays, reunions, and celebrations. Results show many family memories are created at the parks.

#### **Common Themes:**

- ❖ **Any form of exercise is important (e.g., hiking, soccer, basketball, walking)**
- ❖ **Visit parks to relieve stress, relax, enjoy beauty of nature**
- ❖ **Important family events held at parks frequently**



Table 8. Highlighted quotes depicting health and wellbeing

<p><i>“It is better to go outside when it is very early in the morning. Sometimes, we get to see the sunrise. What a sight! I like to take my children to see it, and just by being outdoors, breathing the freshness of the morning, it makes you feel very good about yourself.”</i> (Male, age 36, contractor)</p>
<p><i>“After my kids get home from school, we also walk around the bay, it’s a beautiful sight! I like to do that often.”</i> (Female, age 38, homemaker)</p>
<p><i>“We have fun walking and exercising, while also learning about the animals that live in that area.”</i> (Male, Latino, age 62)</p>
<p><i>“I also like to go frequently to the parks with my kids during the weekends. I get a ride over there from other parents. I feel really good when we’re there, we get to know each other and see things. And also exercise at the same time.”</i> (Female, age 50, Latina)</p>
<p><i>“It’s really relaxing and it’s a stress reliever. Just helping the community; it’s great!”</i>- (Student, female, age 20)</p>
<p><i>“When we visit the parks after a busy week, we go to the parks because we want to relax. We have carne asada, play music and have fun. After being there all day, we return home more relaxed.”</i>- (Latina, age 35, female)</p>

### Barriers/Constraints

Some of the barriers explored among national research are reflected in this Latino group as well (e.g., time, transportation, fees, safety). Many of the participants only have one car per household; hence, findings show a heavy reliance on public transportation or carpooling with others. According to these participants, there is little to no public transportation to many of the county’s parks, or there is not enough information available to them about current public transportation options to these county parks. Another barrier expressed by this group was the cost to visit these parks. These participants do not have ample resources to be able to visit parks that charge fees regularly; they would rather spend that money on other essentials. Although when there is a special event, they do not mind paying fees to partake. They also expressed that having a better understanding of how these fees are allocated would make them feel better about such personal expenses. Most important, the lack of signage and county park information in Spanish has been a significant barrier for this community. It is difficult for them to learn about activities or understand the rules since the information is only in English.

### Common Themes:

- ❖ **Need more public transportation from their neighborhood to county parks**
- ❖ **Sometimes, they cannot afford fees related to visiting parks on a regular basis**
  - **Only for special occasions (birthdays, family events, etc.)**
  - **Other personal / family expenses are more important than visiting parks**
- ❖ **Concern for safety in parks**
- ❖ **Time is a factor with priorities revolving around meeting core family needs first**

Table 9. Selected quotes representing barriers and constraints

<p><i>“I had gone to other parks with my children where I have been able to carpool with other families. I wish there were more areas like those around here so we won’t have to go that far.”</i> (Female, age 37, homemaker)</p>
<p><i>“Some parks charge, sometimes we don’t have many resources and we are trying to save. I don’t have a car, so that makes it hard.”</i> (Female, age 62, housekeeper)</p>
<p><i>“Some families would rather spend the money on new shoes for their children than fees to go to a park.”</i> (Female, age 38, homemaker)</p>
<p><i>“If it’s a reasonable cost, then I don’t care. If there is not a good reason why the cost exists, then I do not understand.”</i> (Latina, female, age 40)</p>
<p><i>“We’re having a hard time understanding why we have to pay to get in. I think if they educate people on why these expenses exist, it would make me feel better. For a family with children going to the park tends to get very expensive. However, if it’s for a special occasion like a birthday, then the costs aren’t that big of a deal to us.”</i> (Male, age 62, landscaper)</p>
<p><i>“One of the reasons people like to go to the mall is because there are many ways to access it through public transportation.”</i> (Female, age 38, housekeeper)</p>

**Aggregate Themes across both Focus Groups**

Marin County is becoming increasingly diverse; each group, such as the Latino and senior communities, has different needs and expectations of what their county parks should provide for their respective community. Although there are many differences between these two groups, there were some similarities that became apparent from the focus group interviews held. Both groups believe the parks are an important place to relax and escape the bustle of city life. They see the parks as a way to relieve stress and improve their mental well-being. They also believe that the parks are a place to enhance their physical health, as well, and strive to include the parks in their day-to-day habits whenever possible.

The senior and Latino communities, both, rely heavily on public transportation during their daily lives; this means public transportation is a way to reach the county parks. One of the main reasons why these groups do not visit the parks more often is due to limited public transportation available to these locations and from their neighborhoods. Furthermore, one other aggregate finding that was also apparent is that these groups want to feel represented at their county parks. While analyzing the interview transcripts, it was difficult to find many common attitudes, experiences, etc. between these two groups. It was clear that these communities’ differing backgrounds played an integral part in their opinions and use of the parks. Improving the understanding of the various cultures that make up Marin County will only aid the parks department in reaching out, engaging, and increasing visitation across these communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are a direct result of the data analysis procedures:

1. Parks information needs to be bilingual (English and Spanish) to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, pictograms may be an effective communication tool when dealing with limited communications space and multiple languages.  
MCP should prioritize where bilingual information is most important (e.g., maps, visitor information, rules and regulations). MCP should increase bilingual physical and educational activities serving a greater cross-section of the public.
2. Coordinate with local transit providers to look for opportunities to expand bus service to parks. MCP would have to weigh benefits versus costs. Park information (e.g., maps) that show all local and regional parks, regardless of jurisdiction, would educate residents about park opportunities nearest to them. This could possibly eliminate the need for transportation to parks they may be familiar with, but are farther away.
3. Many participants enjoyed completing work outside and would like to see Internet available at the parks through Wi-Fi access. Wi-Fi could also increase access to parks information on the web including free park outings, maps, and rules and regulations.
4. The aging residents would like accessibility information easier to find on the park websites, including trails, activities and/or events. The researchers found out that a plan is in the works to provide more accessible trails within the county system. This information needs to be promoted county-wide so residents are aware that their needs will be met at some point in the future. (Source/article: <http://bit.ly/21VpY4P>).  
Note: This is currently in the works by MCP through their “Inclusive Access Plan” – more information: <http://bit.ly/1qtbywQ>
5. Exercise is important to residents of San Rafael. Many frequent their local gyms and would like to see information about park events and activities visible there. Some even suggested that it would be a great idea to partner with these gyms for special events.
6. There are several computer apps available that help inform people about events and activities happening in their neighborhood. It is suggested for MCP to become immersed with these apps. Examples:
  - a) “Next Door” <https://nextdoor.com> – “The private social network for your neighborhood.” One of the best ways to stay in the know about what’s going on in specific neighborhoods—“There are so many ways our neighbors can help us, we just need an easier way to connect with them.”
  - b) “Meetup” <http://www.meetup.com/> – According to their promotion, “makes community real”. Their app helps locals find groups of people meeting up in real life who share similar interests. This is a premier way to find out “what’s happening near you”. People meetup around the things that matter most to them. “Meetups are neighbors getting together to learn something, do something, share something...”  
Note: Both apps are growing in popularity including relationship to posts about park use, activities, events, and more.



7. There are frequent park clean-up days that occur at various county parks in order to keep the parks safe and maintained. The Canal neighborhood does not have many county parks within close proximity (walking or short drive) and must rely on their neighborhood parks, some of which are not well-maintained or patrolled regularly. One way to increase awareness of county parks is to partner with city parks and host joint clean-up days in the Canal neighborhood parks. This would provide an opportunity for MCP to let these communities know about the county parks and also show that the county cares about their residents regardless of what form of government is overseeing their parks.

The theme of partnering with local park agencies to ensure well-cared for parks at the local level is valid. MPC volunteer coordinators may not have the capacity to maintain parks for other jurisdictions; hence, MCP should work with local park managers to identify strategies for addressing deferred maintenance and capital improvements, through funding development or other means. Measure A is addressing some of these needs and park managers could work together to identify and develop matching funds.

8. Future studies should include a minimum of four focus groups in different cities across Marin County. This allows for a greater comparison across a broader cross-section of the population, plus helps produce even more robust results. That is, when using generally the same battery of questions, you often don't hear anything new (e.g., reach saturation point) after 4-5 focus groups.
9. Share results from this study with San Rafael Parks and Recreation and other local park managers.



## Conclusions and Closing Thoughts

The residents of Marin County are particularly fortunate to have such beautiful open spaces and parks within a short distance of their homes. There are many opportunities available for them to enjoy and appreciate the variety of both ecosystems and recreational opportunities that make up the county park system. Focus groups are an excellent way to obtain information from communities that agencies are trying to serve. They are complex to organize yet project management is always worth the effort. As the focus groups were being planned one of the community liaisons responded as follows to a thank you note sent by the investigator the next day:

*“It was my pleasure. It’s important to us to join efforts to improve access to the Marin County Parks and create more opportunities for outdoors activities. We are here together to support healthy eating active living in Marin, so anything we can do to collaborate please let us know. We loved the experience at the focus group. You understood the audience and the interaction was pretty good. I loved how you set the right tone to engage the participants to share their experiences regarding outdoor activities, what works, what is the challenge and what they would like to do to change the social conditions in their community. Thank you so much for that. I can’t wait to hear the results of this study. Thank you Jeannette Sotomayor from the Albert Boro Community Center for being always present to help and facilitate a place to meet with our community. “*

*In Partnership,*

Florencia Parada,  
Health Hub Supervisor  
<http://www.marinclinic.org>

Participants in this study readily acknowledged that the value of county parks to the local community is as deep as it is wide. While this was a small and purposive sample, the two groups were chosen by the MCP department and considered an important opportunity to tap into individuals who are less visible and not as well represented in public involvement process for park decisions. This study's small sample size limited the number of substantive conclusions or common themes due to demographic divergence between the two groups.

These parks are an important aspect of people’s lives that participants in this study try to incorporate as much as possible. They understand the various benefits associated with frequent park-use and hope to instill those same ideals and habits in their children and other family members. For the senior community, the parks are a place to maintain their physical and mental health, as well as socialize with other community members and friends. The Latino community values the parks as a place to spend time making new memories with their families. Despite their differences, the senior community and the Latino community both share the same love and appreciation for their county parks, and are committed to ensuring that these spaces will be available for many years to come.

MARIN COUNTY  
PARKS  
PRESERVATION • RECREATION



# APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

The following two pages display the fliers that were created and used for recruitment of focus group participants. These fliers were sent to the community leaders to distribute.



## **WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOICE!**

### **JOIN US FOR A FOCUS GROUP WITH YOUR COMMUNITY**

**This session is FREE and open to adults  
18 years & older ~  
Healthy food will be provided!  
The first 12 registrants who participate  
will receive a  
**\$50 Sports Authority gift card**  
for your participation, time and input!**

The Marin County Parks Department is working with SF State University to learn about your park experiences, if there are any barriers that prevent you from visiting, and what you think could improve your county parks.

*We want to hear from YOU! Learn more about Marin County Parks while helping them to better assist your community ~*



For questions or more information, contact:  
Dr. Nina Roberts: [nroberts@sfsu.edu](mailto:nroberts@sfsu.edu)  
(415) 338-7576

**Tell us what you  
think about Marin  
County Parks!**

**Whistlestop  
(Caboose Room)  
930 Tamalpais Ave  
San Rafael  
415-456-9062**

**Thurs. Jan. 28th**

RSVP by Tues. 1/26/16 by  
calling or dropping by the  
front desk

- **Arrive early as you must be in the Caboose by 5:30p to sign-in and have dinner!**
- **Group interview starts promptly at 6p, ends by 7:30p**

**MARIN COUNTY  
PARKS**  
PRESERVATION - RECREATION



CARING FOR WHAT WE HAVE  
• 2012-2021 •





(Photo: Courtesy of Marin County Parks Department)

**¡QUEREMOS ESCUCHAR SU VOZ!  
ACOMPAÑENOS EN NUESTRO GRUPO DE  
ENFOQUE CON SU COMUNIDAD**

Esta sección es GRATIS para adultos de 18 años en adelante ~  
¡Comida saludable y deliciosa será proveída!  
¡Las primeras 12 personas que se registren recibirán una tarjeta de regalo con valor de \$50 de Sports Authority por su participación, tiempo y opiniones!

El Departamento de Parques del Condado de Marin esta trabajando con la Universidad de SF State para aprender acerca de sus experiencias en estos parques, si existen algunas barreras que impiden que usted los visite, y de lo que usted piensa que podría mejorar los parques del condado.

*¡Queremos oír de usted! Obtenga más información acerca de los Parques del Condado de Marin y en ayudarlos a mejorar a su comunidad ~*

*Gracias a la Clínica-Health Hub de la Comunidad de Marin como socio en este proyecto*



Para preguntas y más información, contacte:  
Dr. Nina Roberts: [nroberts@sfsu.edu](mailto:nroberts@sfsu.edu)  
(415) 338-7576

**¡Díganos lo que opina acerca de los Parques del Condado de Marin!**

**En el Centro Comunitario Albert Boro  
50 Canal St.  
San Rafael  
415-485-3077**

**Jueves 11 de Febrero del 2016.**

- Cena comienza a las 6pm.
- Entrevistas en Grupo comienzan puntualmente a las 6:30pm, y terminan a las 8pm.
- Habrá un Traductor de Español
- Cuidado de niños será disponible si se requiere.

**MARIN COUNTY  
PARKS**  
PRESERVATION • RECREATION



CARING FOR WHAT WE HAVE  
- 2012-2021 -

## APPENDIX B

### **Focus Group Protocol and Questions (n=2 groups)**

#### ***Welcome & Introductions***

Hi, my name is [*facilitator name*] and this is [*note taker's name*] from SFSU [*student major/department*]. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today and agreeing to be part of this focus group. We'll do group introductions regarding who you are in a few minutes. First we want to provide a brief overview. This conversation will last about an hour and a half and will be recorded. We would like to record this conversation so we can transcribe the audio into written notes. The recording will be kept in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose other than this project. No names will be associated with any of the comments you make during this interview. When you signed in today, there was a number next to your name, you'll use that which I'll explain in a moment. [*Ask if anyone has any issues/problems with being audio-recorded*].

I will be leading the conversation today and [*note taker's name*] will be taking notes. I am first going to go over a few details before we start. And, each of you will receive [*incentive*] for your involvement today. If you have any questions, please ask as they come up.

#### ***Purpose of the Focus Group***

We are working in partnership with Marin County Parks Department to better understand county resident's attitudes, experiences, recreation use patterns, and preferences and to identify barriers/constraints of non-users or less frequent visitors to Marin County Parks. The information you share will help Marin County Parks determine how well they are supporting their strategic plan and contributing to their long-term goals. In addition, the information you provide can help improve existing park resources and services to meet community needs. Your participation is key as this group represents the ideas of [*community*]. We welcome your input and your voice matters to the Parks Department so we need you to be honest with us and share your thoughts and opinions openly.

#### ***Guidelines***

Has anyone ever participated in a focus group? [*Ask for show of hands*]. For some people being in a focus group can be a new experience. We'll first discuss general ground rules that can help ensure a safe environment where everyone's ideas are shared and valued, and to ensure we capture what everyone says on the recorder and in our notes. Again, your name will not be attached to your comments, only a number.

1. WE WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. We need everyone to participate and talk to each other as you are comfortable. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. We want to hear what each of you think and feel about parks, in general, and within MCP in particular. We brought a map of MC parks for you to check out during the conversation. If you're not familiar with parks in MC, respond based on your knowledge of whatever parks come to mind for you. You don't need to agree with others, but please listen respectfully to different points of view. If you do agree with what

someone says, please speak up, rather than nodding your head or gesturing in some other way. This helps us capture agreement in the notes. Also, if someone else says something that reminds you of something or sparks a thought, please feel free to follow their comments with your own.

3. **WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE.** Everything you tell us today is ANONYMOUS. That means we will not share anything you say with your name attached. While we might use quotes or ideas that you share, as mentioned, we will never use your name in any way.
4. **ONE MIC/1 NUMBER:** Please speak one at a time – this will help us capture everyone’s thoughts and opinions. Before you make your comment, simply state your number first then go for it. For example, I may raise my hand and say, “Number five: I think that parks need to have more...”
5. **STEP UP, STEP BACK:** If you have shared a lot, step back to allow others to share.

Are there any questions before we begin?

*[Respond if yes. If no questions proceed.]*

We are going to begin recording from this moment on.

*[Student assistant turns on digital recorder and begins taking typed notes on laptop].*

## AGING IN PLACE/SENIORS

**Discussion Questions:** As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you're not able to that's fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game.

**Icebreaker:** We'll start the conversation with some general questions then move on from there. When you have no other obligations, how do you spend your leisure/free time? If you could try a new activity, what would it be? When the last time you tried a new activity, and what was your motivation to do so?

### **TIER 1**

1. On average, what does your daily schedule look like? ***[lifestyle]***
  - a) Do you enjoy socializing with others? How often?
  - b) Is this important to you?
2. Is physical activity important to you? ***[health/P.A.]***
  - a) Do you get physical activity on a regular basis?
  - b) Where do you go for health care?
3. Is being outdoors important to you? ***[values]***
  - a) How did it make you feel in terms of being in the outdoors?
4. What do you think about the natural environment? ***[environmental literacy]***
  - a) How does nature affect/impact your experience?
  - b) Is there anything about nature/natural environment/outdoors that you want to learn more about?
5. When you think of a park or open space, what comes to mind? ***[perception]***
  - a) Can you name the nearest park to you?
  - b) Please share sample activities you like to do in parks and what you have enjoyed or liked about those parks. ***[use/experience]***
  - c) What have those experiences meant to you?
6. How do you get most of your information about what is happening in your community, in general? ***[info & communication]***
  - a) How do you hear/learn about the parks?
  - b) Where do you find information about the parks and its programs?
7. In the last 6 months to 1 year, how many times have you visited any Marin county park? ***[frequency]***
  - a) Where did you go? What did you do?
8. If you haven't had as many opportunities to visit or use the county's parks, tell us why? What were some barriers for you or your family to visiting the parks? ***[constraints]***
  - a) Transportation factors –How do you typically visit parks or how would you get there? Is getting to parks an issue for you?
  - b) If “time” is an issue, tell us more, why?
  - c) Do you have some mobility, sight, or other issue that makes navigating outdoor environments difficult?
9. If you do visit parks, do you feel welcome, safe or comfortable in parks? If yes/no, please tell us why or why not. ***[comfort/welcome]***
10. What types of programs/activities would you like to see in Marin County parks? Are there other types of facilities you might like to have? ***[program/facility recommendations]***

- a) What kind of activities would you be willing to travel to (participation)?  
*[use/recommendations]*
- b) What are some other ways MC Parks Department can best communicate with you in the future?

11. Are there any organizations that connect you with important services you need? (i.e., Whistlestop, Marin Community Clinic, others/which ones?)

**Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions**

1. What are the three most important things in your daily life? (i.e. family, comfort, health)
2. Have you ever had any issues or problems in the parks? *[safety, maintenance]*

**Close with: “Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we’ve talked about or something else you’d like to share?”**

*[Student assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends].*

***Closing & Wrap Up***

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve park use throughout the county. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

In appreciation of your time, *[note taker’s]* will be distributing *[incentives]*. In order to receive this *[incentive]* we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.

## CANAL NEIGHBORHOOD

***Discussion Questions:*** As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you're not able to that's fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game.

***Icebreaker:*** We'll start the conversation with some general questions then move on from there. What do you like to do for fun? When you have no other obligations, how do you spend your leisure/free time? If you could try a new outdoor activity, what would it be?

### **TIER 1**

1. On average, what does your daily schedule look like? [*lifestyle*]
  - a) Do you enjoy socializing with others? How often?
  - b) Is this important to you?
2. Is physical activity important to you? [*health/P.A.*]
  - a) Do you get physical activity on a regular basis?
  - b) Where do you go for health care?
3. Is being outdoors important to you? [*values*]
  - a) How did it make you feel in terms of being in the outdoors?
4. What do you think about the natural environment? [*environmental literacy*]
  - a) How does nature affect/impact your experience?
  - b) Is there anything about nature/natural environment/outdoors that you want to learn more about?
5. When you think of a park or open space, what comes to mind? [*perception*]
  - a) Can you name the nearest park to you?
  - b) Please share sample activities you like to do in parks and what you have enjoyed or liked about those parks. [*use/experience*]
  - c) What have these experiences meant to you?
6. How do you get most of your information about what is happening in your community? [*info /communication*]
  - a) How have you heard about the parks?
  - b) Where do you find information about the parks and its programs?
7. In the last 6 months to 1 year, how many times have you visited any Marin county park? [*frequency*]
  - a) Where did you go? What did you do?
8. If you haven't had as many opportunities to visit or use the county's parks, tell us why? What were some barriers for you or your family to visiting the parks? [*constraints*]
  - a) Transportation factors – How do you typically visit parks or how would you get there? Is getting to parks an issue for you?
  - b) If "time" is an issue, tell us more, why?
  - c) Are park-related fees/costs a barrier to visiting (e.g., entrance, camping, food, gas, equip)
9. If you do visit parks, do you feel welcome, safe or comfortable in parks? If yes/no, please tell us why or why not. [*comfort/welcome*]
  - a) Do you have any fears related to visiting parks or open spaces?
  - b) Have visited a Marin County park or path in the last year? If yes, which one(s)? If not in this year, have you visited a MCP park or path in the past? What was a primary reasons why you have not visited a MCP in the past year?



10. What types of programs/activities would you like to see in Marin County parks? Are there other types of facilities you might like to have? [*program/facility recommendations*]
  - a) If you were not born in the US, what other kinds of activities did you enjoy in your home country that you do not see here?
  - b) What kinds of activities would you be willing to travel to (participation)? [*use/recommendations*]
  - c) What are some other ways MC Parks Department can best communicate with you in the future?
11. Are there any organizations that connect you with important services you need? (i.e., Canal Alliance, Marin Community Clinic, Health Hub)

**Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions**

1. What are the three most important things in your daily life? (i.e. family, comfort, health)
2. Have you ever had any issues or problems in the parks? [*safety, maintenance*]

**Close with: “Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we’ve talked about or something else you’d like to share?”**

*[Student assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends].*

***Closing & Wrap Up***

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve park use throughout the county. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

In appreciation of your time, [*note taker’s*] will be distributing [*incentive*]. In order to receive this [*incentive*] we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.

APPENDIX C

Demographic Composition of Participants

	"Aging in Place"/Seniors	Hispanic/Latino	
<b>Host Organization:</b>	Whistlestop	Al Boro Center	
<b>Location:</b>	San Rafael	San Rafael	
<b>Age</b>			<b>Totals</b>
20-35	0	3	3
36-45	0	6	6
46-55	1	1	2
56-65	1	2	3
66-75	7	0	7
76+	5	0	5
<b>N=</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	10	10	20
Male	4	2	6
<b>Race</b>			
White	10	0	10
Hispanic	2	12	14
African American	0	0	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0
Mixed*	2	0	2
<b>Occupation</b>			
Educator/Teacher	1	0	1
Business/Marketing	0	0	0
Administration/Office	0	0	0
Construction/Landscape	0	2	2
Medical	1	0	1
Retail/Sales/Hospitality	0	0	0
Maintenance/Housekeeping	0	3	3
Religious/Community Centers	0	1	1
Student	1	1	2
Retired	7	0	7
Homemaker	1	5	6
Self-Employed	2	0	2
Not Specified	1	0	1
<b>Own Vehicle?</b>			
Yes	9	7	16
No	5	5	10
<b>If no, form of transit?</b>			
Bike	0	0	0
Bus	5	3	7
Carpool	0	2	2
Not Specified	0	0	0
<b>*Self-ascribed mixed race:</b>			
	Caucasian/Indian		
	Italian/African-American		

June 2017  
Final

# SENIOR FOCUS GROUP REPORT

**Phase II,**  
Marin County Parks  
Visitors Study



**Prepared For:** Marin County Parks  
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- Appendix A. Recruitment flyer
- Appendix B. Pre-focus group survey questions
- Appendix C. Focus group protocol and questions

## INTRODUCTION

The Marin County Parks Department (MCP), in partnership with San Francisco State University (SFSU), is conducting a second phase of the Marin County Parks Visitor Study. The overall purpose of the study is to assess visitor satisfaction, motivation, and future demands; and provide new data for potential decision making. The study also aimed to offer recommendations for park programs, facilities, policies, and innovative ways to enhance community engagement and access. This report is on the second phase of the study, which builds upon the work completed in Phase I. A major component of this second phase are focus groups with specific types of park user groups. This report represents the procedures and results of one focus group interview with fifteen West Marin seniors who use trails in Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves. It was held on May 3, 2017 in Point Reyes Station, CA. In this report a reference to “MCP trails” means trails in Marin County Parks and/or Open Space Preserves.

For more information about the purpose and scope of the research contact Kevin Wright, Government and External Affairs Coordinator for Marin County Parks, at (415) 497-3553 or [kwright@marincounty.org](mailto:kwright@marincounty.org). Questions about the focus group process, data analysis or findings can be directed to Dr. Patrick Tierney, professor and principal investigator, at (415) 338-2030 or [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu).

### **Special Thanks To Community Partners**

This project could not have been possible nor successful without the help and support of Pam Osborn and Maurice “Skip” Schwartz of West Marin Senior Services. Both of these individuals helped us find and recruit seniors to participate in this focus group, and hosted the discussion at their organization. We wish to express our thanks to them.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Phase II Overview**

The focus group interview part of this study aimed to capture the experiences of Marin County seniors who frequently use MCP trails. The choice of this user group and the initial contact for seniors were provided by Kevin Wright with MCP. Seniors have been using MCP and many were active participants in past public hearings or volunteer with the department. MCP believed the opinions and motivations from this group, and from all of the focus group participants in both Phase I and in Phase II, could benefit future planning of the county’s park system and services.

### **Preparation**

#### ***Development of Collateral Materials & Procedures***

SFSU created the materials needed to successfully set up and facilitate the focus group, such as focus group recruitment flyers, focus group protocol, and interview questions. The MCP department reviewed the materials, provided feedback and input before the materials were finalized, distributed, and implemented accordingly. The community leaders were asked to recruit at least 12 potential participants for the focus group. SFSU sent the community leaders template materials, including an

invitation email, recruitment flyer and 1-page information sheet about the study. The community leaders sent these materials to persons in their network, and confirmed persons attending the focus group. MCP provided SFSU with materials to distribute at the focus groups (i.e., park maps, event flyers, program brochures).

SFSU also developed a participant sign-in sheet, log for signatures acknowledging receipt of gift cards, and sign-up sheet for MCP (e.g., anyone requesting a copy of the final report or wish to be added to mailing list). Other materials used during the focus groups were name tags, MCP brochures, map of Marin County parks and preserves, and Trader Joe's & Palace Market gift cards (purchased). SFSU also provided a lite lunch and refreshments at the start of the focus group. Finally, SFSU worked with West Marin Senior Services who received a facility use fee for providing a space.

## Focus Groups

### What occurred, why, and how?



A focus group is a small group of eight to twelve people, ideally, led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion, but not so large that some participants are left out or a few people dominate the conversation. Additionally, the groups should be homogenous as homogeneity levels the playing field and reduces inhibitions among people who come together for the purpose of a group interview.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well executed, a focus group creates a welcoming environment that allows participants to feel at ease and encourages thoughtful, honest answers providing added meaning to question responses. As a valid methodology, focus groups were chosen as one approach to elicit the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and recommendations of traditional and under-represented user groups in Marin County. In addition, focus groups have the ability to generate rich qualitative data that comes from individual participants engaging in deep conversation, potentially capturing themes that would be missed from other, more quantitative, methods. Furthermore, focus groups foster a safe place for participants to be open and honest.

The SFSU research associate was the focus group moderator/facilitator who asked initial questions and nurtured disclosure in an open and honest format. The goal was to generate a maximum number of different opinions, experiences, attitudes, and ideas from as many people in the group in the time allotted. As reflected in the protocol that follows, the focus groups were structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions but the discussion was free-flowing. That is, participant comments stimulated and influenced the thinking and sharing of others.

### Recruitment: Where did participants come from?

This study used a convenience sampling method that enlisted a community leader from the West Marin senior community to recruit focus group participants. The community leader was responsible for initial recruitment of potential participants who were seniors and users of MCPs. The SFSU team brought copies of a five question pre-focus group survey about the participant's demographic

characteristics and experience within MCPs (see Appendix B). This short survey was used to gather information about the focus group participants to help the facilitator, and ultimately the report readers, better understand who was involved. The community leaders also emailed and/or phoned these persons a reminder message three days prior to the focus group. The senior focus group was held 5/03/17 at West Marin Senior Services, located at 11435 State Route One in Point Reyes Station.

Community leaders were expected to provide the names and emails for up to 15 participants and help find a location for the event, if possible. Focus group participants were provided with a \$25 gift card to Trader Joe's or Palace Market as an incentive to participate. Additionally, participants were informed a lunch would be provided and thirty minutes was allotted for general socializing (e.g., "meet and greet") prior to the official start time of the interview process.



## **Focus Group Protocol**

The focus group protocol used for this study was created by the SFSU team and included a description of the overall study, participant guidelines, focus group questions, and logistical information. Focus group questions were developed by SFSU based on models from prior studies and questions that were desired from the MCP team (staff and key project partners). A set of two-tiered questions were developed in which Tier 1 questions were the priority and focused on visitors' use, experiences, and recommendations. If additional time remained, Tier 2 questions were asked. Tier 1 questions asked participants about their most recent park experience, types of activities they undertake in MC park and open space preserve trails, how these activities make them feel, where they like to go most often in MCPs, what they like most about MCPs, what they like least about MCPs, and any suggestions for MCP management to improve their park experience coming from the perspective of seniors. The final focus group protocol and questions used during the senior focus group is available in Appendix C.

## **Data Collection**

The senior focus group had fifteen participants. As participants arrived at the location, the SFSU team asked them to sign a participant sign-in sheet. They then enjoyed the lite meal provided, during which comfort and rapport was established by the investigator. After a half hour the investigator then facilitated the interview process, beginning with a general ice breaker to get the group thinking about parks and park use or non-use, and using the protocol and questions (Appendix C). All prepared questions were asked within the 90-minute time allotted and the facilitator was responsible for getting all participants to talk and fully explain their answers using helpful probes (e.g., "Can you say more about that?"; "Help us understand what you mean?"; and "Can you give an example?"). The investigator demonstrated active listening and occasionally paraphrased long or ambiguous comments, or sought clarification for analysis purposes and/or summarized responses for the whole group.

The research assistants recorded the focus group using the smartphone apps "VoiceRecorder" and "Smart Recorder." The research assistants took supporting notes in case the recorder failed or any parts of the digital file were inaudible. Body language, other subtle relevant clues, and tentative



themes were recorded via typed and written notes. Audio files were uploaded to a secure computer for storage and back up.

At the end of each focus group, participants were thanked and each person received the incentive (gift card) that required a signature on the receipt log for SFSU accounting purposes. If any participants wanted to receive the final report, or expressed interest in being put on a MCP mailing list, the SFSU team passed around another sign-up sheet for them to provide their contact information.



## **Data Analysis & Transcription**

The demographics and characteristics of these participants were gathered in the pre-focus group survey. The survey was completed by participants upon arrival at the focus group location. The principal investigator inputted the survey data into SurveyGizmo, an online survey software, which automatically analyzed the data and presented the results in graphs showing frequencies.

The focus groups were captured via audio recordings. The research assistants took both handwritten and typed notes on a laptop, while the facilitator moderated. The interview was then transcribed verbatim by one of the research assistants using the smartphone app, “oTranscribe.”

In order for all participant comments to be understandable and useful, they were analyzed using a systematic and verifiable process. Hence, the research team individually completed a manual content analyses process by first identifying question content categories and emerging themes. Subsequently, the research team extracted and explored common themes at an extensive team meeting with groupings entered into a Word document. The research associate further refined the themes and distributed this to all team members for further review and inclusion of supporting quotes. The major findings from participants’ comments are summarized in the results section that follows and includes a series of direct quotes highlighting relevant responses.

The research team completed the final examination of the transcriptions. Results were reviewed and synthesized to ensure accuracy of themes and supporting quotes. The themes and conclusions presented in this report were reviewed and discussed twice by the investigator and co-investigator before the report was finalized.



## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Many valuable findings have come from the West Marin senior focus group interview process. Important to note, however, is that at times, participants may have been thinking about, and referring to, trails located outside of Marin County parks and preserves. Although maps of the MCPs were provided at the focus group and the facilitator referred participants to this map if there were any uncertainties about the trail location, there is a chance that some trails outside MCPs were



considered. Generalizing park experiences is not uncommon to occur within focus group interviews. The parks literature explains the difficulty for people in differentiating between lands/trails of adjacent park agencies. This further accentuates the need for park agencies to work together; and, this reveals the increasing importance to share such park use/non-use interview results with other park managers as well.

### Participant Characteristics

The pre-focus group survey provided the following data and characteristics about eight individuals who responded. The majority of these individuals (7 out of 8) report living in Marin County for more than 15 years, with three-quarters of the total reporting over 30 years of residence. Only one of the pre-focus group survey respondents reported having a disability that limited their ability to hike or walk in MCPs, and a majority of them reported of never volunteering within MCPs.

Figure 1. How Would You Rate Your Current Hiking Skill Level

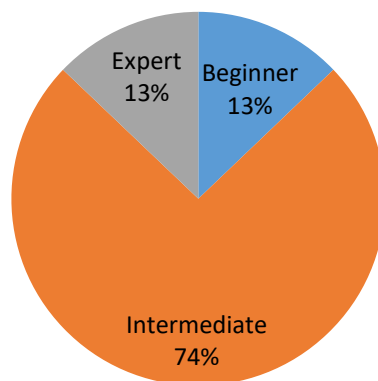


Table 1. Other Participant Characteristics

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Own a dog?	Yes	75%
Ever volunteered in a Marin County Park or Preserve?	No	75%

---

Figure 2. Number of Times Visited a Marin County Park or Preserve in Last 4 Months

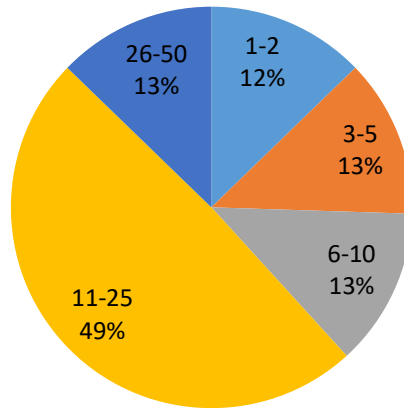
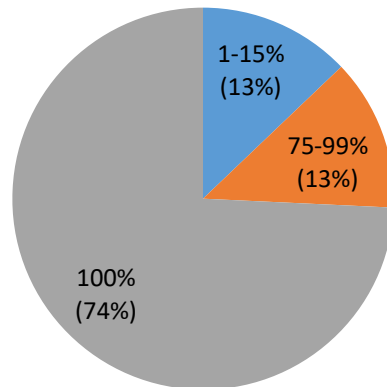


Figure 3. What Percentage of MCP Visits Were Spent for Hiking/Walking Activities<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Percentage in parentheses denotes the percent of respondents indicating 1-15%, 75-99%, and 100% of MCP visits spent hiking or walking.

## EMERGING THEMES: SENIORS

An analysis of focus group responses produced the following themes, subthemes and illustrative participant comments.

**Theme 1:** Focus group participants report their **favorite places** within specific Marin County Parks and Open Spaces (MCP) include Camino Alto, White House Pool, and Chicken Ranch Beach. Other favorite places not managed by MCPs, include Millerton Point, Shell Beach, and other general beaches and lagoons where dogs are permitted.

- “White House Pool has a trail that is not far from the road, but it’s completely sheltered with trees and bushes. And then it takes you over to the creek and you can sit and look at the water and the back trails.”
- “My favorite place is White House...I think that's a great place.”
- “I like Agate Beach and the lagoons. I like Shell Beach. And I like Chicken Ranch and the wetlands a lot. And I really like Millerton, I love Millerton!”
- “I like Shell Beach. That is one of my favorite ones!”
- “I like Shell Beach too because I used to go over there a lot. I like that you can take dogs. It is very nice for children too. It is a very nice beach. I also like to use the South Beach.”

**Theme 2:** Focus group participants reported that their **favorite MCP activities** include recreation and exercise for themselves and their dogs, appreciation of nature, socializing, and hobbies. Example of physical activities are hiking, walking, and swimming. In terms of enjoying open space preserves, focus group members shared their fondness with the natural flora and fauna.

- “I know there are beaches in Marin County Beach. And what I like about that is people get to bring their dogs and people come out specifically to run their dogs and let them play in the water. And everybody gets very happy and the dogs get socialized so that they’re not so hard to be with. And it's a very wonderful thing.”
- “I like hiking.”
- “Hiking as well.”
- “Hiking and running my little dogs around.”
- “Blackberry picking and also hiking.”
- “In the Marin county parks would be sitting and socializing.”
- “I look at the wildflowers do botanical drawings. And swimming.”
- “Flowers in the spring. I do a lot of walks and take photos”
- “I think also picnicking and just being there. Whatever location you're in. Just enjoying that spot.”

**Theme 3:** When asked about the meanings and benefits of visiting MCP, the focus group respondents reported physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual well-being. The following quotes are illustrative of their positive associations with MCPs.

- “I would say therapeutic.”

- “I walk all the time just because it's so beautiful, and I stop and say, how lucky I am. And you can't feel too bad about anything when you live in a nice place. “
- “It always makes me feel my place in the universe out there. It reminds me that I am an animal too and a part of this world.”
- “It feeds the soul to be out here.”
- “I've lived in just about every county in the bay, this is the best.”

Theme 4: The seniors who were part of this facilitated conversation were aware of the ongoing conflicts between user groups and specifically mentioned the behaviors and actions of mountain bicyclists. However, all of the focus group members agreed that **they did not have any problems with other user groups**. Many had ideas and suggestions for addressing user conflicts.

- “I'm also retired, so that's good for me. There's also the issue with bicyclists vs hikers vs horses.”
- “It's a long standing issue that is difficult to solve. Some of the bicyclists are very militant. On the trails mostly. Even out here on the weekends, it's difficult sometimes.”
- “I think it's a simple solution if people could just be polite. And that's hikers, bikers, and equestrian. All they have to do is go single file. But for some reason, cyclists, well I guess every group... they don't do it.”
- “At the same time, I'm not against the bicyclists.”

Theme 5: Focus group respondents feel that in general there are **more and more park and open space visitors on weekends and holidays**. With increased crowds, the seniors reported that there is more congestion on the roads creating traffic and lack of parking, thus limiting their ability to participate in the community and access the parks. They were aware, however, that being retired helps alleviate this issue and while the majority reported being retired, not all were. Furthermore, the **sentiments expressed regarding crowds and tourists were mixed**, with both positive and negative feelings. Most agreed that they can share the parks and feel lucky to live in the area. Their suggestions to address crowds is more education and awareness of sharing the parks.

- “The speed of traffic is pretty high on the weekends.”
- “On holidays the roads can get so packed that it's a serious thing.”
- “There can be a perfect storm that turns into a nightmare of traffic.”
- “And there's no point in even going out on the weekends...It's too busy, there's no place to park, and it's just not pleasant.”
- “I appreciate all the parks. I haven't seen too much negative change. Naturally there's density on the weekends but I'm retired, so I don't care.”

Theme 6: Specific concerns from this focus group that came up were in regards to road use and public transportation. Participants expressed **strong feelings about bicycle use on the highways**, stating that it is difficult and dangerous to pass them while driving. In addition, they felt that the **West Marin Stagecoach is inadequate** as there are no direct connections to Point Reyes Station.

- “Having been a bicyclist there are some situations where bicyclists...should take the whole road, because there's no way to safely pass. So what is safest for them to do is take the whole road.”
- “I also would like to mention that we need a stagecoach up here. Because we would like to come and use this grocery store, which is great. And we like to have more fun with Point Reyes, and we are limited.”

Theme 7: The focus group members discussed their experiences with **Whitehouse Pool**, specifically the **lack of safe walking access** from the west side of the bay to Point Reyes Station. They mentioned how seasonally a dam once enabled them to travel this distance, but currently they must walk on the road which they feel is dangerous. Moreover, they feel that the roads are not safe for children traveling to and from school.

- “You used to be able to go to the West side of the bay and walk to Point Reyes station in the summer time, because there was a temporary damn you could walk across. You can't do that now. You gotta walk on the road to get to the station.”
- “How ridiculous that I have to walk along that road in places where there's no shoulder, its very dangerous just to get to the other part of the trail on both sides of the creek.”
- “So now the only way you can go to the other side is to take your life into your hands, walking along the road.”
- “You also have kids that go to the West Marin School here in Point Reyes station and they live in the neighborhoods. And they either walk or bike past those roads. It isn't really safe for them.”

Theme 8: An interesting point that was raised by the seniors is the overarching **systemic issue of fiscal management and maintenance of infrastructure**. Many cited that West Marin has only 5% of the county's population and therefore the capacity to motivate MCPs to support and maintain local facilities in the area is not prioritized. Examples that were mentioned included the limited public restrooms in Point Reyes Station and lack of maintenance of portable toilets at Whitehouse Pool. A few of the respondents expressed frustration with MCPs promotion of tourism, yet their limited aid for services.

- “This is a systemic issue. That West Marin has about 5% of the population...so the capacity for us to motivate the county parks to give maintenance to our facilities, our local facilities, are sometimes lacking.”

Theme 9: A few **key recommendations** were offered by the focus group respondents to improve their experience in MCPs. These suggestions pertain **to signage, maintenance and infrastructure, park staff presence, and public transit**.

Theme 9A: The seniors suggest that MCPs continue to improve and maintain interpretive signage, and to have more signs with mile markers and directions. Other recommendations include having more detailed water quality and safety signage at Chicken Ranch, and possibly signage encouraging visitors to bring their own water bottles to fill.

- “Sometimes you get somewhere and there's a horrible sign as to where to go.”



- “I do think the signage should be better to identify these places between parks and open spaces.”
- “When you do the signage it would be great to add a dot 5 for 1/2 mile until the next juncture or something.”
- “Chicken Ranch has signs that say the water's not safe and so on. And to me it's very ambiguous what they are talking about. If they are going to have public warnings, they ought to be more explicit as to what the situation is, or what part of the beach.”
- “If there could be some little sign or something that says, did you bring your own bottle?”

Theme 9B: Another suggestion is to expand maintenance of existing infrastructure. Specific examples include more recycling and trash receptacles, and to maintain cleanliness of restrooms and portable toilets.

- “One of the parks here is the playground which is definitely used. But actually its principle use is a public bathroom. Which is now alone. So that is a real big problem, and it exemplifies the challenges MCP has. But I think they have to meet that challenge!”
- “Add plenty of recycling and garbage receptacles.... And clean the restrooms and adding port-o-potties in the area.”

Theme 9C: The seniors who participated in this focus group agreed that increased staff presence would improve their overall experience in MCPs, particularly in their feelings of safety. They also cited that park staff are very helpful, but could use more training on natural history and “customer service” skills.

- “More presence from the county open space staff. The rangers and so forth are really great people, and it’s always nice to see them. They are helpful. But you don't see them very often. I think when people see a presence, it helps with everything... I think it’s reassuring for people who are maybe hiking along the road.”
- “It would be nice if maybe some of the rangers had some natural history training, so that they could answer questions and things like this. That would be a great improvement.”

Theme 9D: There was an overarching feeling that public transportation in West Marin could be improved for both locals and visitors. They shared that very few people use the Stagecoach and suggest that MCPs increase public awareness regarding public transit options to MCPs. They also recommend implementing a shuttle system to and from the parks to address traffic and parking concerns.

- “Transportation. I think it's, on the surface, we talk about transportation from the parks. There's been discussion about having designated parking placement for visitors with transportation from those parking places here (in town of Point Reyes) out into the park.”
- “I want to say something about public transportation. So the Stagecoach goes over the hill to San Rafael and you can get on other buses. And other places like Shell Beach. But the locals or tourists do not know it. 99% of the time no one is on the bus or the coach.”

Theme 9E: While not directly targeted towards MCPs, the focus group members suggest overall improved **communication and coordination across the myriad governmental bodies responsible for services and concerns affecting West Marin**. These may include but is not limited to park land

managers, municipal transit agencies, public works, and local law enforcement. They feel that there needs to be a more efficient way to pool resources to address issues such as parking, traffic, school buses, and road conditions including the development of bike lanes. They feel that more coordinated efforts would result in increased advocacy and capacity.

- “One of my issues is that I don't think there is a lot of coordination between the state parks, the federal lands, and the county parks.”
- “For example, coordination in regards to the parking and traffic. The problems are not just in certain places, they are all throughout West Marin and there should be other resources put together.”
- “One thing that we were talking about--county traffic. The Sheriffs Department is a county agency. And they could help in sharing calming traffic.”
- “Measure A in West Marin doesn't get a portion of the pie. And there needs to be more advocacies for bond money or tax money for mobilizing.”
- “I think it's an education issue. I think tensions get high out here, and we all need to air on the side of being kind to one another. And maybe we need a little encouragement, like why not have more rangers who could aid people more. We have a big problem with speeding drivers who want to get home at the end of the weekend. So any way to educate people leaving town and take it easy, would be good.”
- “Where I drive on Highway 1, there are accidents every weekend. Just a few signs that say: dangerous curves do not go over the double yellow line!”
- “Because of the impact of the preservation, there needs to be better funding and management in Marin County parks and West Marin.”

## Recommendations

The recommendations present below are a direct result of the data analysis of focus group responses. These recommendations presented below are from the perspective of seniors in West Marin, and they may or may not be different from the general public, other seniors, or other types of trail users.

1. Increase, improve, and maintain trail signage alerting users of mile markers, as well as when crossing county, city, and state territories.
2. Include more water quality and safety signage at bay/beaches such as Chicken Ranch.
3. Introduce more recycling and trash receptacles throughout West Marin, as well as increase maintenance on cleaning local bathroom facilities and/or adding more port-o-potties in shared park areas.
4. Increase staff/ranger presence for security and user reassurance when traveling through MCP. Additionally, introduce more training on natural history and customer service skills for those on staff for improved overall user experience.
5. Increase public transportation such as shuttle system to and from parks. Expand on Stagecoach frequency and number of destinations/stops to connect West Marin (Point Reyes) to other locations in Marin County.

6. Better advertising of these transportation services to increase awareness of locals and tourists alike.

7. Improve on coordination between local government agencies to better address concerns towards traffic, transportation, infrastructure, etc.

### **Conclusions and Closing Thoughts**

The following conclusions and thoughts about the senior focus group are from the SFSU team perspective.

It became clear through this process that all participants in the senior focus group feel a shared sense of love, pride, and appreciation for their home of Marin. And all agree that it is in the best interest of residents, government agencies, and tourists alike to work together for a safer and more sustainable environment when using the numerous features/attractions available in Marin County. While West Marin seniors had their own specific concerns, such as overcrowding and safety, many of their reasons for discontent echo those from other groups. These shared concerns indicate some of the structural issues that are affecting everyone in the area, no matter age or demographic breakdown. The wildly helpful element to including a senior focus group is in their ability to clearly and concisely articulate many of these shared issues discussed across different users. It was also incredibly refreshing to hear constant willingness to discuss and share ideas for improvements on the parks and surrounding areas. It is with these very important contributions that more improvements can be made to benefit everyone who enjoys spending time in Marin County Parks.

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MARIN COUNTY  
PARKS  
PRESERVATION · RECREATION



# APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER



**WE WANT TO HEAR  
YOUR VOICE!**

**SENIOR CITIZENS IN WEST MARIN,  
JOIN US FOR A FOCUS GROUP.**

The Marin County Parks Department is working with SF State University to learn about your park experiences, what you like most and least, and what you think could improve visitor experiences in Marin County Parks and Preserves.

Learn more about Marin County Parks while helping them to better assist your community ~

This session is open by invitation only. Food will be provided! Receive a [\\$25 gift card](#) to [Palace Market](#) for your time and active input!

[If you cannot attend or have questions email:](#)

Dr. Patrick Tierney: [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu)  
(415) 338-1531



**Tell us what you  
think about Marin  
County Parks!**

**Location:  
West Marin Senior  
Services  
11435 State Route 1  
Pt. Reyes Station, CA**

**Wednesday  
May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017**

- **Sign-in and light meal at 11:30am.**
- **Focus group starts at 12:00pm & ends by 2:00pm.**

**Please RSVP to Mark  
Solomons—WMSS  
Volunteer Coordinator  
(415) 663-8148 ext. 103**



## APPENDIX B: PRE-FOCUS GROUP ONLINE SURVEY

The following were questions presented in the online pre-focus group survey.

### Senior Pre-Focus Group Survey

- 1) *Please provide your name. (Optional)*
- 2) *How many years have you been living in Marin County?*
- 3) *How would you rate your current hiking skill level?*
- 4) *Do you have a disability that greatly limits your ability to walk or hike in parks or on trails in Marin County?*
- 5) *Do you currently own a dog?*
- 6) *In the last 4 months, how many times have you visited any Marin County park, for any recreational purpose?*
- 7) *What percent of these MCP visits have been primarily for hiking/walking activities?*
- 8) *Have you ever volunteered to work on MCP trails?*
- 9) *Would you be interested in volunteering to work on MCP trails to improve trail conditions?*
- 10) *Since you are or might be interested in volunteering to work on MCP trails, please provide your email address to contact you.*

Thank You!



**APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**  
**PHASE II –MARIN COUNTY PARKS VISITOR USE STUDY:**  
**Senior Focus Group Protocol**  
**May 3, 2017 at West Marin Senior Services**  
**Updated as of 4-26-17**

***Welcome & Introductions***

Hi, my name is [*Ruby Turalba*] I am a faculty of the Health Education Department at SFSU. This is [*Amy Lozano*] [a research assistant at SFSU and UCSF] and [*Lizzie Gritzmacher, a student in the Health Education Department*]. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today and agreeing to be part of this focus group. We'll do group introductions regarding who you are in a few minutes. This conversation will last about an hour and a half and will be recorded. We would like to record this conversation so we can use the recording to transcribe notes. The recording will be kept in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose other than this project. [*Does anyone has any issues/problems with being audio-taped?*].

Thanks also go to many of you for completing the pre-focus group survey. That information is helpful for us to understand more about who is participating. This survey information will only be presented in summary form. No names will be associated with any of that information. No Marin County Parks staff are present here tonight so you should feel free to voice your opinions about Marin County parks and open space preserves. No names will be associated with any of the comments you make during this interview. When you signed in today, there was a number next to your name, you'll use that, which I'll explain in a moment.

I will be leading the conversation today and [*Amy & Lizzie*] will be taking notes. I am going to go over a few details before we start. If you have any questions, please ask as they come up.

***Purpose of the Focus Group***

We are working in partnership with the Marin County Parks Department to better understand park users' attitudes, experiences, use patterns, and preferences and to identify reasons why people don't visit more often. The information you share will help Marin County Parks determine how well they are supporting their strategic plan and contributing to their long-term goals. In addition, the information you provide can help improve existing park resources and services to meet community needs. Your participation is key as this group represents the ideas of [*seniors*]. We welcome your input and your voice matters to the Parks Department so we need you to be honest with us and share your thoughts and opinions openly.

***Guidelines***

Has anyone ever participated in a focus group? [*Ask for show of hands*]. For some people being in a focus group can be a new experience. We'll first discuss general ground rules that can help ensure a safe environment where everyone's ideas are shared and valued, and to ensure we capture what everyone says on the recorder and in our notes. Again, your name will not be attached to your comments, only a number.

1. WE WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. We need everyone to participate and talk to each other as you are comfortable. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. We want to hear what each of you think and feel about parks, in general, and within MCP in particular. If you're not familiar with parks and preserves in MCP, respond based on your knowledge of whatever parks come to mind for you. You don't need to agree with others, but please listen respectfully to different points of view. If you do agree with what someone says, please speak up, rather than nodding your head or gesturing

in some other way. This helps us capture agreement in the notes. Also, if someone else says something that reminds you of something or sparks a thought, please feel free to follow their comments with your own.

3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE. Everything you tell us today is anonymous. That means we will not share anything you say with your name attached. While we might use quotes or ideas that you share, as mentioned, we will never use your name in any way.
4. ONE MIC/1 NUMBER: Please speak one at a time – this will help us capture everyone’s thoughts and opinions. Before you make your comment, simply state your number first (which is on your name tag) then go for it. For example, I may raise my hand and say, “Number five: I think that parks need to have more...” If you forget to state your number, I might ask you for it.
5. STEP UP STEP BACK. If you have shared a lot, step back to allow others to share.

Are there any questions before we begin?

**Icebreaker:** Let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves then we’ll turn on the recorder after this. Please state your first name and your favorite MC park or preserve in and why.  
[Student assistant turns on digital recorder and begins taking typed notes on laptop].

### ***[SENIOR] RESPONDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS***

***Generic Discussion Questions, Tier 1 - (As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you’re not able to that’s fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game. When I say “Marin County Parks”, I mean both Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves).***

1. In the last 6 months, have each of you visited any Marin County park or open space preserve? Any one not?

2. Please share a sample of activities you like to do in [MCPs-Marin County parks and open space preserves \(MCP\)](#). [use/experience—hike/run/walk, group activities, etc.]

3. Where do you like to go most often within MCPs? Why do you prefer these MCP [trailslocations](#)?

4. How have your most recent MCP experiences made you feel? Explain

5. What do you like the most about MCP?

6. If you have not gone to MCP in the last 6 months, please explain why. Have you stopped using MCP [trails-locations](#) altogether? Why?

7. What do you like least about MCP [parks and open space preserves-trails](#)?

8. Do you have any suggestions for MCP management to improve your experience ~~on~~[in](#) MCP [trailsparks and open space preserves](#)? Please explain.

9. How might these suggestions be implemented?

***Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions***

1. Are you familiar with Bonds or Measures in Marin County? A percentage of the general fund, Measure A (.05c, 10-year sales tax initiative), donations/grants, and park fees to help pay for parks & programs. How would you like this money to be spent? Anything that comes to mind for you relating to your county parks!?!? [**fiscal/\$**]
  - a) Any ideas for other sources of funding – what might you suggest and why?

**Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we've talked about or something else you'd like to share?**

***Closing & Wrap Up***

*[Research assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends].*

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve equestrian use throughout the Marin County Parks. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

In appreciation of your time, [*Amy & Lizzie*] will be distributing [a \$25 gift card *incentive*]. In order to receive this gift card we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.

**(PT) I want to thank [*individual names*] for helping organize this event. (Give thank you card to participant organizers). Provide donation (money) to room site (organization) if room not paid in advance.**

***Equipment & Supplies***

- 1) Sign in sheet
- 2) Participant incentive log / accounting sheet
- 3) Name tags
- 4) Protocol copies
- 5) Question copies
- 6) Audio recording device, chargers
- 7) Gift cards
- 8) Visual charts, graphs, maps & brochures
- 9) Writing utensils: pens, pencils, sharpies
- 10) Money for caterer
- 11) Mailing list sheet
- 12) Press release on Phase I results
- 13) Laptops, chargers
- 14) Thank you card
- 15) Bring donation (money) for host/room rental (have receipt for it), if room not paid in advance.

February 22, 2017  
Final

# MOUNTAIN BIKER FOCUS GROUP REPORT

**Phase II,**  
Marin County Parks  
Visitors Study



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## INTRODUCTION

The Marin County Parks Department (MCP), in partnership with San Francisco State University (SFSU), is conducting a second phase of the Marin County Parks Visitor Study. The overall purpose of the study is to assess visitor satisfaction, motivation, and future demands; and provide new data for potential decision making. The study also aimed to offer recommendations for park programs, facilities, policies, and innovative ways to enhance community engagement and access. This report is on the second phase of the study, which builds upon the work completed in Phase I. A major component of this second phase are focus groups with specific types of park user groups. This report represents the procedures and results of one focus group interview with eight resident mountain bicycle riders of trails in Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves. It was held January 17, 2017 in Mill Valley, CA. In this report a reference to “MCP trails” means trails in Marin County Parks and/or Open Space Preserves.

For more information about the purpose and scope of the research contact Kevin Wright, Government and External Affairs Coordinator for Marin County Parks, at (415) 497-3553 or [kwright@marincounty.org](mailto:kwright@marincounty.org). Questions about the focus group process, data analysis or findings can be directed to Dr. Patrick Tierney, professor and principal investigator, at (415) 338-2030 or [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu).

### **Special thanks to community partners**

This project could not have been possible nor successful without the help and support of Tom Boss with the Marin County Bicycle Coalition and Vernon Huffman with Access 4 Bikes. They helped us find and recruit mountain bikers to participate in this focus group. We wish to express our thanks to them.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Phase II Overview**

The focus group interview part of this study aimed to capture the experiences of Marin County resident mountain bicycle riders who frequently use MCP trails. The choice of this user group and the initial contact for mountain bikers were provided by Kevin Wright with MCP. Mountain bikers had been riding in MCP and many were active participants in past public hearings or volunteer with the department. MCP believed the opinions and motivations from this group, and from all of the focus group participants in both Phase I and in Phase II, could benefit future planning of the county’s park system and services.

### **Preparation**

#### ***Development of Collateral Materials & Procedures***

SFSU created the materials needed to successfully set up and facilitate the focus group, such as focus group recruitment flyers, focus group protocol, and interview questions. The MCP department reviewed the materials, provided feedback and input before the materials were finalized, distributed,

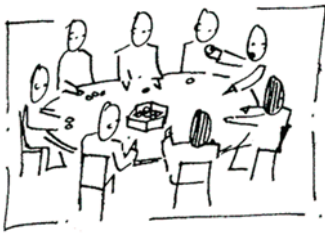


and implemented accordingly. The mountain biker community leader was asked to provide a list of potential participants for the focus group. SFSU sent an invitation and a recruitment flyer to persons on this list, and confirmed persons attending the focus group. MCP provided SFSU with materials to distribute at the focus groups (i.e., park maps, event flyers, program brochures).

SFSU also developed a participant sign-in sheet, log for signatures acknowledging receipt of gift cards, and sign-up sheet for MCP (e.g., anyone requesting a copy of the final report or wish to be added to mailing list). Other materials used during the focus groups were name tags, MCP brochures, map of Marin County parks and preserves, and Trader Joe's gift cards (purchased). SFSU also provided a lite dinner and refreshments at the start of the focus group. Finally, SFSU contacted the Mill Valley Community Center who received a facility use fee for providing a space.

## Focus Groups

### What occurred, why, and how?



A focus group is a small group of eight to twelve people, ideally, led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion, but not so large that some participants are left out or a few people dominate the conversation. Additionally, the groups should be homogenous as homogeneity levels the playing field and reduces inhibitions among people who come together for the purpose of a group interview.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well executed, a focus group creates a welcoming environment that allows participants to feel at ease and encourages thoughtful, honest answers providing added meaning to question responses. As a valid methodology, focus groups were chosen as one approach to elicit the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and recommendations of traditional and under-represented user groups in Marin County. In addition, focus groups have the ability to generate rich qualitative data that comes from individual participants engaging in deep conversation, potentially capturing themes that would be missed from other, more quantitative, methods. Furthermore, focus groups foster a safe place for participants to be open and honest.

The SFSU principal investigator was the focus group moderator/facilitator who asked initial questions and nurtured disclosure in an open and honest format. The goal was to generate a maximum number of different opinions, experiences, attitudes, and ideas from as many people in the group in the time allotted. As reflected in the protocol that follows, the focus groups were structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions but the discussion was free-flowing. That is, participant comments stimulated and influenced the thinking and sharing of others.

### Recruitment: Where did participants come from?

This study used a convenience sampling method that enlisted two leaders from the mountain biking community to recruit focus group participants. These community leaders provided a list of the names and emails of 15 potential participants who were active mountain bicycle riders in MCPs. The SFSU team followed up with an invitation and a recruitment flyer in a more detailed email

about the purpose and details of the focus group (See Appendix A for recruitment flyer designed by the SFSU team). Once there were 12 individuals who agreed to participate, then SFSU emailed these persons a confirmation message which included a link to a five question online survey about the participant's demographic characteristics and riding experience (see Appendix B). This short online survey was used to gather information about the focus group participants to help the facilitator, and ultimately the report readers, better understand who was involved. The mountain biker focus group was held 1/17/17 at the Mill Valley Community Center, located at 180 Camino Alto in Mill Valley.

Community leaders were expected to provide the names and emails for 15 participants and help find a location for the event, if possible. Focus group participants were rewarded with a \$25 gift card to Trader Joe's as an incentive to participate. Additionally, participants were informed a dinner-type meal would be provided and thirty minutes was allotted for general socializing (e.g., "meet and greet") prior to the official start time of the interview process.



## **Focus Group Protocol**

The focus group protocol used for this study was created by the SFSU team and included a description of the overall study, participant guidelines, focus group questions, and logistical information. Focus group questions were developed by SFSU based on models from prior studies and questions that were desired from the MCP team (staff and key project partners). A set of two-tiered questions were developed in which Tier 1 questions were the priority and focused on visitors' use, experiences, and recommendations. If additional time remained, Tier 2 questions were asked. Tier 1 questions asked participants about their most recent park experience, types of activities they undertake on MC park and open space preserve trails, how these activities make them feel, where they like to ride most often in MCPs, what they like most about riding in MCP trails, what they like least about riding in MCP trails, and any suggestions for MCP management to improve their riding experience. The final focus group protocol and questions used during the mountain biker focus group is available in Appendix C.

## **Data Collection**

The mountain biker focus group had nine participants. As participants arrived at the location, the SFSU team asked them to sign a participant sign-in sheet. They then enjoyed the lite meal provided, during which comfort and rapport was established by the investigator. After a half hour the investigator then facilitated the interview process, beginning with a general ice breaker to get the group thinking about parks and park use or non-use, and using the protocol and questions (Appendix C). All prepared questions were asked within the 90-minute time allotted and the facilitator was responsible for getting all participants to talk and fully explain their answers using helpful probes (e.g., "Can you say more about that?"; "Help us understand what you mean?"; and "Can you give an example?"). The investigator demonstrated active listening and occasionally paraphrased long or ambiguous comments, or sought clarification for analysis purposes and/or summarized responses for the whole group.

The research assistant recorded the focus group using the smartphone app "VoiceRecorder" and took supporting notes on a laptop in case the recorder failed or any parts of the digital file were

inaudible. Body language or other subtle relevant clues were recorded via typed notes. Audio files were uploaded to a secure computer for storage and back up.

At the end of each focus group, participants were thanked and each person received the incentive (gift card) that required a signature on the receipt log for SFSU accounting purposes. If any participants wanted to receive the final report, or expressed interest in being put on a MCP mailing list, the SFSU team passed around another sign-up sheet for them to provide their contact information.



## **Data Analysis & Transcription**

The demographic and mountain bike riding characteristics of these participants was gathered in the pre-focus group online survey. The survey was completed prior to arriving at the focus group location. The SurveyGizmo online survey software automatically analyzed the data and presented the results in graphs showing frequencies.

The focus groups were captured via audio recordings. The research assistant took notes on a laptop, while the facilitator moderated, and the interview was then transcribed verbatim by an outside contractor, TranscriptionPuppy.com.

In order for all participant comments to be understandable and useful, they were analyzed using a systematic and verifiable process. Hence, the investigator and research assistant completed a manual content analyses process by first identifying question content categories and emerging themes with groupings entered into a Word document. Subsequently, together the investigator and research team extracted and explored common themes. The major findings from participants' comments are summarized in the results section that follows and includes a series of direct quotes highlighting relevant responses.

The investigator and research team completed the final examination of the transcriptions. Results were reviewed and synthesized to ensure accuracy of themes and supporting quotes. The themes and conclusions presented in this report were reviewed and discussed twice by the investigator and co-investigator before the report was finalized.



## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This focus group interview process revealed many valuable findings. Important to note, however is that at times, participants may have been thinking about, and referring to, trails located outside of Marin County parks and preserves. Although maps of the MCPs were provided at the focus group and the facilitator referred participants to this map if there were any uncertainties about the trail location, there is a chance that some trails outside MCPs were considered. Generalizing park experiences is not uncommon to occur within focus group interviews. The parks literature explains the difficulty for people in differentiating between lands/trails of adjacent park agencies. This further accentuates the need for park agencies to work together; and, this reveals the increasing importance to share such park use/non-use interview results with other park managers as well.



### Participant Characteristics

The pre-focus group online survey provided the following data about the nine focus group participants who responded and their riding characteristics. This was a very experienced group of mountain bicycle riders.

Figure 1. Years Riding Mountain Bicycles in Marin County

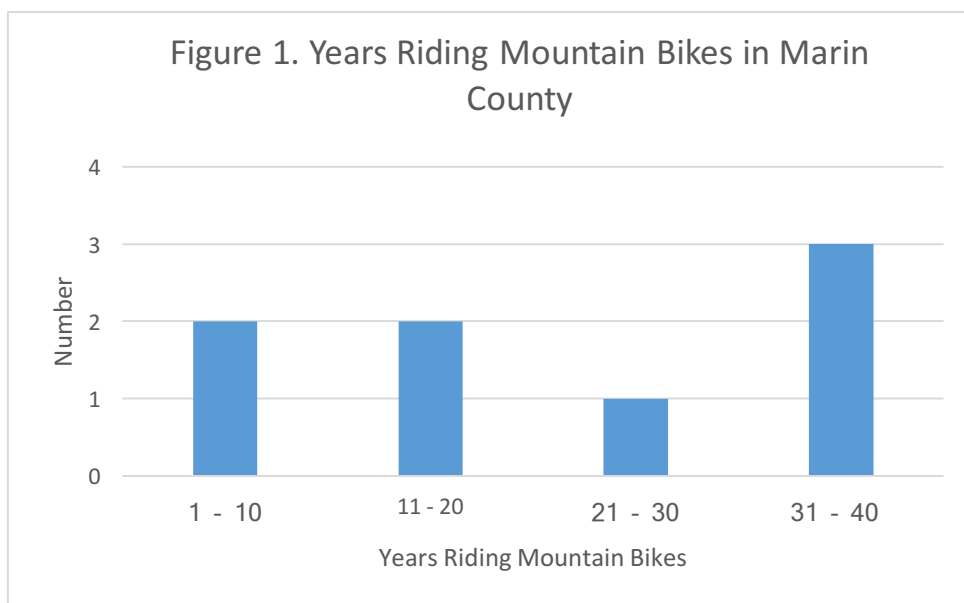


Table 1. Other Participant Characteristics

Live within a short distance from a MCP trail that allows mountain biking?	Yes	90%
How would you rate your mountain bicycle riding skills?	Expert	100%

Figure 2. Number of Times Visited a Marin County Park or Preserve in Last 4 Months

**Figure 2. Number of Times Visited a Marin County Park or Preserve in Last 4 Months**

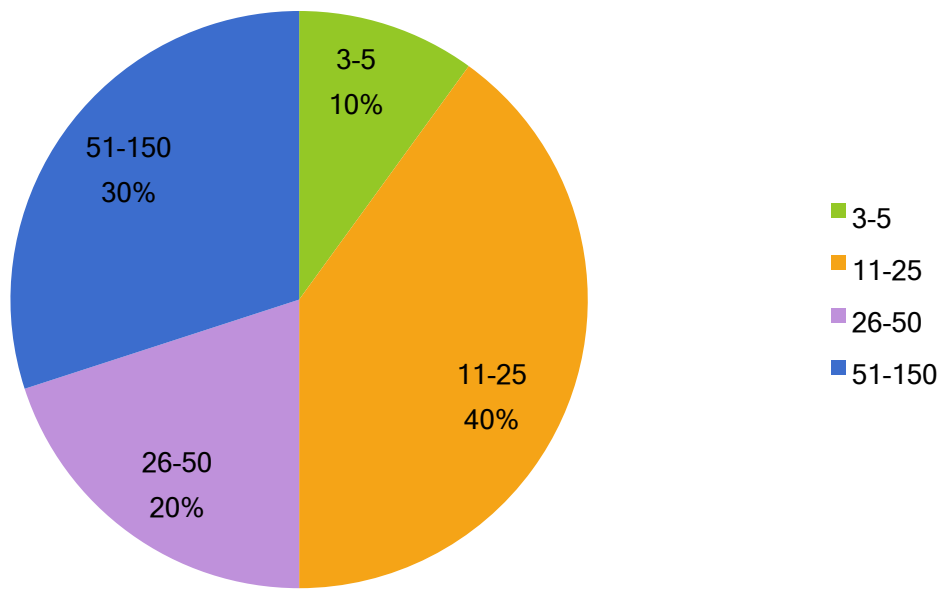


Figure 3. What Percentage of MCP Visits Were Spent Mountain Biking

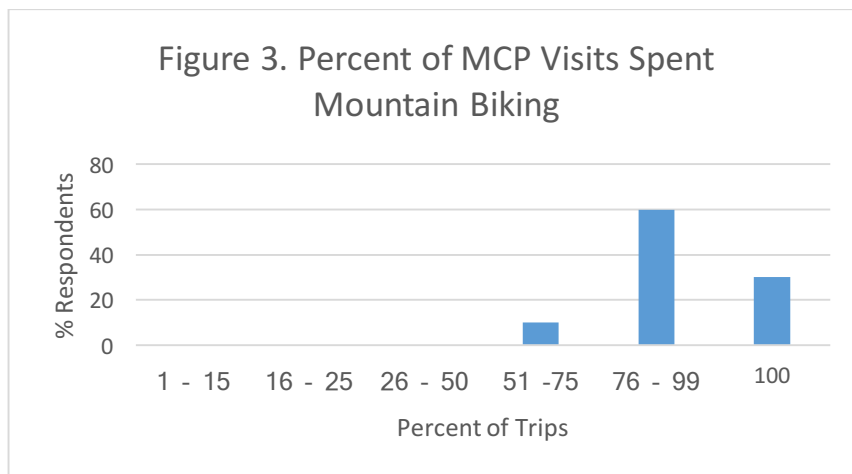
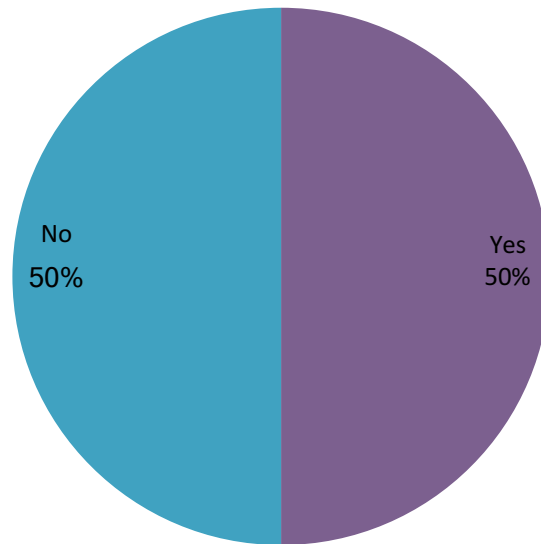


Figure 4. Have You Ever Volunteered In a Marin County Park or Preserve?

**Figure 4. Have you ever volunteered to work in a MCP or Preserve?**



## EMERGING THEMES: MOUNTAIN BICYCLE RIDERS

An analysis of focus group responses produced the following themes, subthemes and illustrative participant comments.

**Theme 1:** Mountain biking now appeals to a wide segment of the public and the number of mountain bikers has increased greatly in Marin County.

*“I think there's a perception amongst those who discredit mountain bikers, who still think that that's a group of...20-year olds who are terrorizing everybody, but it is people from eight to eighty.”*  
*“I think it's become an accepted use and touching all walks of life which wasn't the case when it first started out.”*

*“I think that families have grown up with people like me who have grown up riding a mountain bike, who have kids now, and they're now introducing their kids to mountain biking.”*

*“The technology has gotten so much more accessible, the kind of riding you can do on an affordable bicycle is far greater than what you could've done at a top of the line bike 20 years ago.”*

*“There are now mountain biking riding teams for middle school and high school youth in Marin County.”*

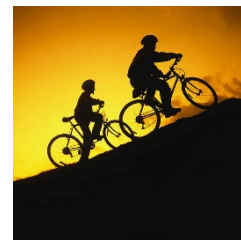
*“The mountain bikes that we use now are way more capable then when the 15mph speed limit was made.”*

**Theme 2.** Favorite trails to ride a bike are Giacomini, Cascade Canyon, Loma Alta, Big Rock, Wagon Wheel, and Camino Alto. By far Giacomini is the most important area because it is large and has steep trails. MCP trails provide connections to outside areas where they like to ride in Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), the water district, and Mt. Tamalpais State Park.

*“Gary Giacomini has challenge trails, things like rocks and roots and steepness, and those things we have, because most of the trails in Gary Giacomini were not created by open space. Those things allow you to challenge yourself while keeping your speed down which is the more responsible way.”*

*“it's hard for me to go far on a bike ride without going through some part of it (Giacomini), whether it is to see if you can get to Cascade, to go through it to get up into Loma Alta, go down on it to the fire tracks of Ross Valley.”*

*“The Gary Giacomini preserve is big, for one, it's all north facing, so it's in those lovely trees. They aren't many people out there, and having been in the valley for 37 years, I've been riding for 24, or 25 of those years, I can honestly say that the number of negative interactions I've had with other users whether I'm hiking or riding my bike or seeing horseback riders or other hikers, it's virtually none existent.”*



**Theme 3:** Mountain bicyclists use their bikes for two main purposes: 1) transportation or commuting to work; and 2) recreation. Sometimes they combine the two. During the weekdays they make short bike rides several times per week close to their home, but on weekends they go for all day rides in MCP and beyond.

*“My most exciting day of the week is my dirt-to-work day.”*

*“I'm looking for good exercise, good climbs and also challenge trails.”*



**Theme 4:** Reasons they ride include to escape into the woods and enjoy nature. It is done for healthy exercise. They want the challenge and riding brings them joy. It is a social activity of sharing a ride and post ride with friends. Because of riders' strong connection to open space, there is a need to pass on its importance to the next generation.

*"We do ride roads, too, but it's much nicer, you're out there, the trees and no cars, and it's beautiful views, it's great. It's very therapeutic."*

*"A big part of that is riding single track trails, when I'm not sweating on a steep fire road, it's nice to actually be in the woods and then you know, I mean, it is also for fun and for challenge."*

*"It's evolved as I got older, into being more of a life style for me."*

*"It is a way for me to meditate but in high speed or to be pushing my body or pushing myself. And I think that, it's a bad word in our circle of people here to say downhill and fast and all this sort of things, but it is, it is critically an important part of my experience on a bicycle."*

*"I just like to go out, a group of guys, we go out every Thursday morning. We, starting with six of us all over 50, for 3-4 hours and then go to the cafe."*

*"I can't really imagine, like, my life without open space... Growing up here, I just was taught to spend all my time there and I was lucky to live close to where a trailhead was. So our Saturdays (growing up) would be in a back pack with bowls and spoons and milk and cereal, and we would go to the top of like waterfall. I feel like now that I have kids, that's what I did when they were born, which is always be out there."*

*"The most important reason I ride is for solitude and to decompress and the open space preserve does more than a lot of others parks."*

*"I also like to do big rides, spend hours riding in the open space preserve, kinda connect the dots in a lot of ways, I can get from out at Mount Tam, you know, out to the coast."*



**Theme 5:** Mountain bikers have a strong preference for single track, versus fire roads, for both enjoyment and safety.

*"I prefer the single tracks where you can find them, if they're legal."*

*"I never feel more at risk of a serious injury than on fire roads, because they're loose, they're steep and it's like, it's easy to go fast but it's not fun fast, it's just fast fast. It's pretty different than going on single track, you can have fun, you'll feel like you're going faster but actually a much lower speed on single track trail versus this loose wide open in steep fire roads."*

*"Single track is what almost everybody is after. Most of the mountain bikers I know, if they were provided with single tracks, and fire roads, they would be on single tracks, 100% of the time."*

*"I would like to be able to take my little kids and then there's the elderly. You exclude them, if all we get are the fire roads in Marin County, it's too steep."*

**Theme 6:** Mountain bikers believe that MCP is not addressing the problem of increasing numbers of hikers and bikers, other than through restrictions on biking use.

*"I don't understand the thought process behind the planning of open space, comparing to urban planning for example, and numbers, and usage and footprints and the lack of creativity."*

*"if concentration of use is a concern, then build us more trails."*

*"I don't think that new trails degrade the environment the way that the environmentalists do."*

*"the actual opportunity for the negative interaction would be further reduced (with more trails) and I think mountain bikers would be happy to share that network and volunteer to build them."*

*“Because we have such limited access, we only have a couple places where’s there’s legal bike single tracks, there’s often people from all over Marin crowding on them, you know, just a few select places where we can ride without risk of being hunted and given tickets. So you see a lot more people, you have a less secluded experience, and that’s a result of us being concentrated in just a few places.”*

**Theme 7:** Mountain bikers strongly feel regulations are taking away access to trails they have historically used and to important parts of why they ride. They have had to seek political help to keep trails open to them or sometimes ride illegal trails. In addition, they feel that there is an over aggressive enforcement of regulations and unbalanced application of rules.

*“I also remember trails that were open to me that suddenly got shut, where I can ride my bike and then it was, felt like one day there was a post that said you can’t ride there now.”*

*“All the new management plan seems to be trying to stop that (the fast downhill) and I feel very disfranchised as a result.”*

*“Giacomini is my favorite, because, with the support of our supervisor, all the trails have been made legally for mountain bikes.”*

*“There used to be other places to ride, there was Cascade Canyon, there used to be King Mountain, there were would be other places that I consider my favorites, but they’re illegal now and I risk a \$250 dollars ticket if I ride there.”*

*“So now we have the policy that states, dangerous (mountain bike) activities are illegal, and it’s problematic, and can be used against us at any time.”*

*“it’s turning into a police state, enforcement has much changed, there is a ranger or a sheriff hiding around every corner looking for bikes.”*

*“the biggest thing that I don’t like about riding in the preserves is that the majority of the trails that I intend to ride, that I enjoy riding are not legal.”*

*“the biggest bummer honestly about riding a bike in the preserves is that there isn’t consistency about the different rules between the preserves, Marin’s Water District, MCP preserves, the national seashore and California state parks department (all have different rules).”*

*“Bicyclists are a significant number of people recreating.”*

*“It’s just a ridiculous amount of enforcement (against mountain bikers).”*

*“They can stand-down law enforcement, it’s an outsized reaction to what has happened on the trails.”*

*“And it’s super imbalanced, like the number of dogs who aren’t ticketed off leash, but you get defensive when you (bikers) are looking at people who are breaking rules and not paying any repercussions.”*



**Theme 8:** Biker conflicts with other trail users are overblown and not supported by data.

*“I’ve never had a single conflict in 15 years. It’s just not really an issue.”*

*“There are situations where you run into people who’re not friendly and ruin your experience and they might even say something because they think we’re somewhere we’re not supposed to be when in fact you are allowed to be there, and it’s really degrading.”*

*“Don’t be misled by the opposition. Marin has become the most dreaded place to be a mountain biker in the country.”*

*“I’d like to see parks collect actual data, I feel like a lot of their policies are based on the perception of danger or the perception of environmental impact.”*

*“Would like to see some statistics on accidents.”*

*“A lot of illegitimate things get thrown on the mountain bike community and I don’t feel like open space insists to limit our access that comes from actual data.”*

**Theme 9.** Focus group participants feel that the primary impact of mountain bikes on other trail users is to startle them and this is not that significant. There are only a few options to reduce people being startled.

*“I think we do startle people and I think that even though the rules say fifteen miles an hour or five miles on corners or when overtaking, if you’ve stopped walking, or walking with a child, having somebody come by you at five miles an hour, bikes are really quiet now, it can startle you for sure.”*  
*“There’s ways that cyclists can increase their presence, but I think that’s more disruptive, whether it’s bells, or whistles or you know even a polite hello can startle somebody if they don’t expect you to be there.”*

*“I see the same reaction when I’m trail running, so to say that it’s specific to bikes, people get startled because they’re not expecting anyone to be behind them, which is sort of silly, because there’re other people out there.”*

*“I see them (hikers), I am slowing down, I have a good brake, and I’m not going to run into them.”*

*“People talk about close calls (with bikes) that they don’t tell anybody about. This is rampant by hikers, and it’s like you’re walking with ear buds, you want to get away from everything, and you have ear buds in and you don’t hear bikers approaching, they deserve to be startled.”*

*“It’s important to clarify that all we’re talking about what impacts biking has on people, the worst thing we’ve talked about is they might startle somebody, the same as somebody can startle you on the sidewalk.”*

*“This bike comes flying by them, that can create an unpleasant experience, but it’s just a reality we have to share the space and they have to live with it.”*



**Theme 10:** Environmental impacts to trails come from all users and the agency itself. The Marin Conservation League and the newly formed Foot People, and the Audubon Society unfairly blame bikers for environmental problems.

*“We are very careful when we’re riding in the winter because it’s obvious that if you ride through a soft spot it can get worse really fast especially if there’s several riders, and so throughout the winter we’re very conscious of these environmental impacts.”*

*“Water district decides to take the truck out for a spin when it is the muddiest possible condition and make a huge rut, it throws everything out of wack.”*

**Theme 11:** Off-leash dogs can be a problem for dogs and bikers.

*“Everybody walks their dog off leash there. We need to be careful, the dogs jump enthusiastically just in front of you, you can have an accident.”*

*“Your dog can be off leash on the fire road if under voice control, and they’re not. If you can’t control your dog that is biting my foot, that is not voice control.”*

**Theme 12:** Mountain bikers feel other trail users have to give up something also and share the trails.

*“Many horseback riders take that (sign showing yield to horses) to mean that they don’t have to do anything at all as far as yielding to users.”*

*“the horseback riders feel like they're entitled and I say if your horse is afraid of wheels, what are they doing out on a single track trail?”*

*“I'm not saying that I need to be yielded to but at least acknowledged, smile and wave and a hello or just give me a minute to get a wider spot in the trail and get out of your way in a second, something like that.”*

**Theme 13:** Electric-assist mountain bikes provide improved access but do not greatly increase trail speeds because they have limited battery power and governors that restrict the top speed. But there are concerns that they will be seen as motorcycles and result in even more restrictions on mountain bike trail access.

*“The guys that I have been riding together with for 35 years, we're old. And fire roads are too steep and we do use those (electric assist) bikes to get up the steep hills.”*

*“So it (electric assist bikes) hasn't really changed anything other than the fact that we can continue to have access to the open space and to the various trails and fire roads. But it hasn't increased anyone's speed so much as access.”*

*“You have to pedal it. So if you're going very far, you have to think about whether you wear your battery out.”*

*“Pedal assisted electric bicycles should be allowed anywhere a mountain bike is allowed without restrictions.”*

*“I'm a bit of a snob when it comes to that but I think for access, for people who can't do it in any other way, that should be reasonable and we say we don't want them, it's like the hikers saying ‘We don't want bikes.’”*

*“I know that regardless of your feelings with electric mountain bikes, it's going to go up 15% to 20% of each year.”*

*“E-bikes on trails is a challenging policy for our organization because they confuse what we're trying to do. We're trying to get trails open to bikes. One puts a motor on that bicycle, we see our work becoming much more challenging.”*

*“I am concerned about potential abuse of that tech bike and it might have an impact on our user group.”*

**Theme 14:** There are alternatives for reducing trail conflicts.

*“The way that the network of trails works, where you have fire roads to go up and single track to go down, works really well.”*

*“Trails where you wanna go ride are narrow enough to keep the speeds down, they're too small for horseback riders and, the line sights are usually good enough for hikers and bikers to see each other.”*

*“I think, education would be a nice thing for bikers and for hikers, to tell them what to expect, a lot of people come from San Francisco, they have no idea.”*

*“I don't know how you do this (reduce conflicts), because there are certain bikers that are very rude, it's a small percentage, it's much worse on the road than on mountain bike trails.”*

*“Just be courteous and polite and say thank you and get off your bike if it's too close...some guys just won't do it.”*

*“I always try to say thank you if somebody pulls over and waits.”*

*“I would say that most mountain bikers that I know already do that, I teach that to the students that I ride with, we're out here, yield to*



*everyone, say hello, call out, like let people know that you're there, it's all about safety, first and foremost, and I think that that's pretty prevalent in the mountain bike community."*

*"There are signs that's got a bunch of red circles and lines on them, no no no no no, these are all the things that you can't do here, but there isn't anything that says this is a shared space, be creative and say hi, something simple."*

*"Part of the messaging for hikers is, you don't own the trail you have to share the trail"*

*"I think user courtesy could be emphasized by the land management."*

**Theme 15:** Opening more trails is by far the single most important way for MCP management to improve the mountain biking experience.

*"Open more trails."*

*"What he said, open more trails."*

*"Single use (trails) would be really fantastic and directional would be even better."*

*"Use the tools in the RTMP to create more trail opportunities. It has trail network expansion, preserve existing routes and designated routes for public use and expand to public trail network."*

*"Buy easements through ranches (to expand trails)."*

*"Use the RTMP to get us more trails and use all of the tools."*

*"It would be better if the trail crew was more open to working with the bike community or even allowing the bike community to do a pilot trail program and build a few trails."*

*"Give bikers an opportunity to maybe build or manage and adopt a trail and take on the responsibility, in partnership with the parks."*

*"Establish regional trail connections, like with the bay area ridge trail council."*

*"I like the idea (of more education of trail users), but I feel that the climate among bikers right now is to open more trails."*

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are a direct result of the data analysis of focus group responses. The recommendations presented below are from the perspective of mountain bike users, and they may or may not be different from the general public or other types of trail users.

1. The experienced expert mountain bikers in this focus group want MCP to recognize that mountain biking now appeals to a wide segment of the public and to acknowledge that the number of mountain bikers has increased greatly in Marin County.
2. Mountain bikers want MCP to acknowledge the great importance of Giacomini Open Space Preserve for riding and to keep the trails open to bikers. It is important because it is large and has steep trails, is less crowded and provides connections to outside areas where they like to ride in GGNRA, the water district, and Mt. Tamalpais State Park. Other favorite trails to ride a bike are Cascade Canyon, Loma Alta, Big Rock, Wagon Wheel, and Camino Alto.
3. Recognize that mountain bikers ride for varied reasons, including escape to nature, commuting to work and healthy exercise. It is often a social activity. But the most important element is the challenge and excitement faster rides provide. When considering new

regulations or trail changes, they strongly recommend MCP should work to maintain or enhance these opportunities in the open space preserves for mountain bikers.

4. Keep single track trails open to mountain biking and build more single track trails because there is a very strong preference for single track trails versus fire roads, for both enjoyment and safety. If offered the choice between riding single track or fire roads, mountain bikers would choose single track 100% of the time.
5. Mountain bikers believe that MCP is not addressing the problem of increasing numbers of hikers and bikers, other than through restrictions on biking use. They want MCP to build more trails and/or open closed trails to mountain biking. Increased use should justify additional trails. Closing of trails to bikers concentrates the use and fosters trail conflicts. They want MCP to be more creative and move beyond just restricting bike use to other means of reducing trail user conflicts.
6. Mountain bikers want MCP to back-off on what they strongly feel are regulations taking away access to trails they have historically used and allow them to ride fast wherever feasible and reasonably safe. They have had to seek political help to keep trails open to them or sometimes ride illegal trails just to have access opportunities that other trail users enjoy. Bikers want to see the same amount of law enforcement attention and ticketing given to other types of trail users.
7. They believe biker conflicts with other trail users are overblown. They want MCP to show them (accident) data that supports the heavy restrictions placed on them.
8. Mountain bikers want other trail users to give up something (trail access, concern about being startled, etc.) like they have had to do, and to be educated about how to share the trails.
9. Bikers agree their primary impact on other trail users is to startle them. They want MCP to recognize this is not that great of an impact. They feel the same thing happens from joggers and horseback riders coming up faster from behind walkers.
10. Bikers believe environmental impacts to trails come from all users and the agency itself. MCP should not unfairly blame bikers for most environmental problems. They want MCP and other agencies to limit their own truck traffic on fire roads under very wet conditions to protect the trails.
11. MCP must recognize the safety problem for bikers created by off-leash dogs on trails and enforce leash regulations.
12. There is a split among mountain bikers as to allowing unlimited electric-assist mountain bike use on trails. Some bikers, especially the older members, say electric-assist mountain bikes are needed for all ages to access steep trails and roads. The minimal impact of these bikes should dictate to MCP that they be allowed where mountain bikes are allowed. Others bikers are concerned that electric-assist bikes will be viewed as motorcycles and used as justification for further trail access restrictions for all mountain bikers.

13. Mountain bikers want MCP to consider different alternatives for reducing trail conflicts, other than placing more limits on bikers. Dedicated and direction trails are seen as effective. Allow bikers on single track in order to keep speeds down and reduce conflict with equestrians. They want MCP to provide education for all users about basic trail etiquette and the need to share the trails.
14. Do not punish all mountain bikers for the rude or dangerous behavior of a small percentage of bikers.
15. Use the approved Road and Trails Management Plan to site and as justification for opening up more trails or building new trails that are open to mountain bikers and other users as well.
16. The mountain bike community is interested in working with MCP to build and maintain new or existing trails. They want MCP to be more willing to work together with them to help reduce user conflicts, conserve the environment and open up new riding opportunities.
17. Mountain bikers are supportive of MCP activities, such as more education programs and more environmental protection, but before backing such programs they want MCP to do what is most important to them: open up more trails to mountain biking.

### **Conclusions and Closing Thoughts**

The SFSU team has the following conclusions and thoughts about the mountain biker focus group. The expert mountain biker participants in the focus group proudly recognize the county as the birthplace of off-road biking and they want to pass-on their passion for it to their sons and daughters, remain able to ride on trails they have used for years and to allow older riders to continue cruising MCP open space trails. However, they question whether they will be able to do this in the future. They feel threatened and not treated fairly by the agency and other trail users. They want the agency to provide more objective information about accidents and actual impacts from mountain biking on other users to justify continued perceived “over-zealous” law enforcement against them. They want MCP to be more creative and less law enforcement oriented on how to reduce perceived trail users conflicts. They support educating new bikers and other trail users about the need to share the trails and engender realistic expectations about what to expect on a multi-user trail. Finally, before they can support more collaborations they want MCP to do one critically important thing – provide more single track trails for mountain bikers.





# APPENDICES



APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER



**YOU ARE INVITED:  
WE WANT TO HEAR  
YOUR VOICE!**

**JOIN US FOR A FOCUS GROUP-  
MARIN MOUNTAIN BIKERS**

This session is open by invitation only.  
Food will be provided! Receive a  
**\$25 gift card**  
for your time and active input!

The Marin County Parks Department is working with SF State University to learn about your park experiences, what you like most and least, and what you think could improve visitor experiences in Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves.

*We want to hear from YOU! Learn more about Marin County Parks while helping them to better assist your community ~*

**Email a confirmation you will participate to:**



**SAN FRANCISCO  
STATE UNIVERSITY**

Dr. Patrick Tierney: [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu)  
(415) 338-1531

**Tell us what  
you think  
about Marin  
County Parks!**

**Location: Forest  
Room, Mill Valley  
Community  
Center, 180  
Camino Alto, Mill  
Valley, CA**

**January 17, 2017**

- Sign-in and lite dinner at 6:00pm.
- Focus group starts promptly at 6:30 & ends by 8:30



## APPENDIX B: PRE-FOCUS GROUP ONLINE SURVEY

The following were questions presented in the online pre-focus group survey.

### Mountain Biker Pre-Focus Group Survey

- 1) *Please provide your name. (Optional)*
- 2) *How many years have you been riding mountain bikes in Marin County?*
- 3) *How many mountain bikes do you own?*
- 4) *Do you live within a short distance from a MCP trail that allows mountain biking?*
- 5) *How do you rate your mountain biking skills?*
- 6) *In the last 4 months, how many times have you visited any Marin County park, for any recreational purpose?*
- 7) *What percent of these MCP visits have been primarily for mountain biking activities?*
- 8) *Have you ever volunteered to work on MCP trails?*
- 9) *Would you be interested in volunteering to work on MCP trails to improve riding conditions?*
- 10) *Since you are or might be interested in volunteering to work on MCP trails, please provide your email address to contact you.*

Thank You!

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### PHASE II –MARIN COUNTY PARKS VISITOR USE STUDY:

#### **Mountain Biker Focus Group Protocol on January 17, 2017 Updated as of 1-11-17**

##### ***Welcome & Introductions***

Hi, my name is [*Patrick Tierney*] I am a professor of recreation, parks and tourism at SFSU. This is [*Ruby Turalba*] [a lecturer in the Health Education Department] and [*Bernice Gao, a student in the Environmental Studies Program*]. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today and agreeing to be part of this focus group. We'll do group introductions regarding who you are in a few minutes. This conversation will last about an hour and a half and will be recorded. We would like to record this conversation so we can use the recording to transcribe notes. The recording will be kept in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose other than this project. [*Does anyone has any issues/problems with being audio-taped?*].

Thanks also go to many of you for completing the pre-focus group survey. That information is helpful for us to understand more about who is participating. This survey information will only be presented in summary form. No names will be associated with any of that information. No Marin County Parks staff are present here tonight so you should feel free to voice your opinions about Marin County parks and open space preserves. No names will be associated with any of the comments you make during this interview. When you signed in today, there was a number next to your name, you'll use that, which I'll explain in a moment.

I will be leading the conversation today and [*Ruby and Bernice*] will be taking notes. I am going to go over a few details before we start. If you have any questions, please ask as they come up.

##### ***Purpose of the Focus Group***

We are working in partnership with the Marin County Parks Department to better understand park users' attitudes, experiences, use patterns, and preferences and to identify reasons why people don't visit more often. The information you share will help Marin County Parks determine how well they are supporting their strategic plan and contributing to their long-term goals. In addition, the information you provide can help improve existing park resources and services to meet community needs. Your participation is key as this group represents the ideas of [*mountain bike users*]. We welcome your input and your voice matters to the Parks Department so we need you to be honest with us and share your thoughts and opinions openly.

##### ***Guidelines***

Has anyone ever participated in a focus group? [*Ask for show of hands*]. For some people being in a focus group can be a new experience. We'll first discuss general ground rules that can help ensure a safe environment where everyone's ideas are shared and valued, and to ensure we capture what everyone says on the recorder and in our notes. Again, your name will not be attached to your comments, only a number.

1. WE WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. We need everyone to participate and talk to each other as you are comfortable. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.

2. **THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS.** Every person’s experiences and opinions are important. We want to hear what each of you think and feel about parks, in general, and within MCP in particular. If you’re not familiar with parks and preserves in MCP, respond based on your knowledge of whatever parks come to mind for you. You don’t need to agree with others, but please listen respectfully to different points of view. If you do agree with what someone says, please speak up, rather than nodding your head or gesturing in some other way. This helps us capture agreement in the notes. Also, if someone else says something that reminds you of something or sparks a thought, please feel free to follow their comments with your own.
3. **WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE.** Everything you tell us today is anonymous. That means we will not share anything you say with your name attached. While we might use quotes or ideas that you share, as mentioned, we will never use your name in any way.
4. **ONE MIC/1 NUMBER:** Please speak one at a time – this will help us capture everyone’s thoughts and opinions. Before you make your comment, simply state your number first (which is on your name tag) then go for it. For example, I may raise my hand and say, “Number five: I think that parks need to have more...” If you forget to state your number, I might ask you for it.
5. **STEP UP STEP BACK.** If you have shared a lot, step back to allow others to share.

Are there any questions before we begin?

**Icebreaker:** Let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves then we’ll turn on the recorder after this. Please state your first name and your favorite MC park or preserve in and why. *[Student assistant turns on digital recorder and begins taking typed notes on laptop].*

### ***MOUNTAIN BIKER RESPONDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS***

***Generic Discussion Questions, Tier 1 - (As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you’re not able to that’s fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game. When I say “Marin County Parks”, I mean both Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves).***

1. In the last 6 months, have each of you visited any Marin County park or open space preserve for mountain biking purposes? Any one not?
2. Please share a sample of *mountain bike* activities you like to do in MCPs. **[use/experience]**
3. Where do you like to ride most often within MCPs? Why do you prefer to ride these MCP trails?
4. How have your most recent MCP *mountain bike* experiences made you feel? Explain
5. What do you like the most about riding on MCP trails?
6. If you have not ridden in MCP in the last 6 months, please explain why. Have you stopped using MCP trails altogether? Why?
7. What do you like least about riding on MCP trails?

8. Do you have any suggestions for MCP management to improve your *mountain biking* experience on MCP trails? Please explain.

9. How might these suggestions be implemented?

***Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions***

1. Are you familiar with Bonds or Measures in Marin County? A percentage of the general fund, Measure A (.05c, 10-year sales tax initiative), donations/grants, and park fees to help pay for parks & programs. How would you like this money to be spent? Anything that comes to mind for you relating to your county parks!?!? **[fiscal/\$]**
  - a) Any ideas for other sources of funding – what might you suggest and why?

**Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we've talked about or something else you'd like to share?**

***Closing & Wrap Up***

*[Student assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends].*

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve equestrian use throughout the Marin County Parks. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

In appreciation of your time, *[Ruby and Bernice]* will be distributing [a \$25 gift card *incentive*]. In order to receive this gift card we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.

**(PT) I want to thank *Vernon and Tom* for helping organize this event.**

***Equipment & Supplies***

- 1) Sign in sheet
- 2) Participant incentive log / accounting sheet
- 3) Name tags
- 4) Protocol copies
- 5) Question copies
- 6) Audio recording device
- 7) Gift cards
- 8) Visual charts, graphs, maps & brochures
- 9) Writing utensils: pens, pencils, sharpies
- 10) Money for caterer
- 11) Mailing list sheet
- 12) Press release on Phase I results
- 13) Bring older laptop and charge cord for Bernice to use
- 14) Thank you card
- 15) Bring donation (money) for host/room rental (have receipt for it), if room not paid in advance.



February 6, 2017  
Final

# EQUESTRIAN FOCUS GROUP REPORT

**Phase II,**  
Marin County Parks  
Visitors Study



**Prepared For:** Marin County Parks

**Prepared By:** Patrick Tierney PhD  
Ruby Turalba MPH

**Email:** [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu)



**MARIN COUNTY**  
**PARKS**  
PRESERVATION · RECREATION





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## Appendices

- Appendix A. Recruitment flier
- Appendix B. Pre-focus group survey questions
- Appendix C. Focus group protocol and questions

## INTRODUCTION

The Marin County Parks Department (MCP), in partnership with San Francisco State University (SFSU), is conducting a second phase of the Marin County Parks Visitor Study. The overall purpose of the study is to assess visitor satisfaction, motivation, and future demands; and provide new data for potential decision making. The study also aimed to offer recommendations for park programs, facilities, policies, and innovative ways to enhance community engagement and access. This report is on the second phase of the study, which builds upon the work completed in Phase I. A major component of this second phase are focus groups with specific types of park user groups. This report represents the procedures and results of one focus group interview with ten resident equestrian (horseback) riders of trails in Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves. It was held January 13, 2107 in Novato, CA. In this report a reference to “MCP trails” means trails in Marin County Parks and/or Open Space Preserves.

For more information about the purpose and scope of the research contact Kevin Wright, Government and External Affairs Coordinator for Marin County Parks, at (415) 497-3553 or [kwright@marincounty.org](mailto:kwright@marincounty.org). Questions about the focus group process, data analysis or findings can be directed to Dr. Patrick Tierney, professor and principal investigator, at (415) 338-2030 or [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu).

### **Special thanks to community partners**

This project could not have been possible nor successful without the help and support of Monte Krueger and all of the important individuals from the Novato Horsemen’s Club. They helped us find equestrians and provided a location for the focus group. We wish to express our thanks to them.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Phase II Overview**

The focus group interview part of this study aimed to capture the experiences of Marin County resident equestrian (horseback) riders who frequently use MCP trails. The choice of this user group and the initial contact for equestrians were provided by Kevin Wright with MCP. Equestrians had been riding in MCP and many were active participants in past public hearings or volunteer with the department. MCP believed the opinions and motivations from this group, and from all of the focus group participants in both Phase I and in Phase II, could benefit future planning of the county’s park system and services.

### **Preparation**

#### ***Development of Collateral Materials & Procedures***

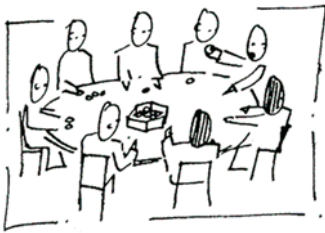
SFSU created the materials needed to successfully set up and facilitate the focus group, such as focus group recruitment fliers, focus group protocol, and interview questions. The MCP department reviewed the materials, provided feedback and input before the materials were finalized, distributed,

and implemented accordingly. The equestrian community leader was asked to provide a list of potential participants for the focus group. SFSU sent an invitation and a recruitment flier to persons on this list, and confirmed persons attending the focus group. MCP provided SFSU with materials to distribute at the focus groups (i.e., park maps, event fliers, program brochures).

SFSU also developed a participant sign-in sheet, log for signatures acknowledging receipt of gift cards, and sign-up sheet for MCP (e.g., anyone requesting a copy of the final report or wish to be added to mailing list). Other materials used during the focus groups were name tags, MCP brochures, map of Marin County parks and preserves, and Trader Joe gift cards (purchased). SFSU also provided a lite dinner and refreshments at the start of the focus group. Finally, each host organization received a modest facility use fee for providing a space.

## Focus Groups

### What occurred, why, and how?



A focus group is a small group of eight to twelve people, ideally, led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion, but not so large that some participants are left out or a few people dominate the conversation. Additionally, the groups should be homogenous as homogeneity levels the playing field and reduces inhibitions among people who come together for the purpose of a group interview.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well executed, a focus group creates a welcoming environment that allows participants to feel at ease and encourages thoughtful, honest answers providing added meaning to question responses. As a valid methodology, focus groups were chosen as one approach to elicit the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and recommendations of traditional and under-represented user groups in Marin County. Visitor intercept surveys in MCP were the other data collection method. In addition, focus groups have the ability to generate rich qualitative data that comes from individual participants engaging in deep conversation, potentially capturing themes that would be missed from other, more quantitative, methods. Furthermore, focus groups foster a safe place for participants to be open and honest.

The SFSU research associate (“investigator”) was the focus group moderator/facilitator who asked initial questions and nurtured disclosure in an open and honest format. The goal was to generate a maximum number of different opinions, experiences, attitudes, and ideas from as many people in the group in the time allotted. As reflected in the protocol that follows, the focus groups were structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions but the discussion was free-flowing. That is, participant comments stimulated and influenced the thinking and sharing of others.

### Recruitment: Where did participants come from?

This study used a convenience sampling method that enlisted a leader from the equestrian community to recruit focus group participants. This community leader provided a list of the names and emails of 15 potential participants who were active equestrian riders in MCPs. The SFSU team

followed up with an invitation and a recruitment flyer (See Appendix A for recruitment flier designed by the SFSU team) in a more detailed email about the purpose and details of the focus group. Once there were 12 individuals who agreed to participate, then SFSU emailed these persons a confirmation message which included a link to a five question online survey about the participant's demographic characteristics and riding experience (see Appendix B). This short online survey was used to gather information about the focus group participants to help the facilitator, and ultimately the report readers, better understand who was involved. The equestrian focus group was held at a familiar and convenient location to equestrians, the Novato Horsemen's Clubhouse, located at 600 Bugeia Lane in Novato.

Host organizations were expected to provide the names and emails for 15 participants and help find a location for the event. In return, host organizations were compensated for their time, effort, and providing a space for the focus group. In addition, focus group participants were rewarded with a \$25 gift card to Trader Joes as an incentive to participate. Additionally, participants were informed a dinner-type meal would be provided and thirty minutes was allotted for general socializing (e.g., "meet and greet") prior to the official start time of the interview process.



## **Focus Group Protocol**

The focus group protocol used for this study was created by the SFSU team and included a description of the overall study, participant guidelines, focus group questions, and logistical information. Focus group questions were developed by SFSU based on models from prior studies and questions that were desired from the MCP team (staff and key project partners). A set of two-tiered questions were developed in which Tier 1 questions were the priority and focused on visitors' and recommendations. If additional time remained, Tier 2 questions were asked. Tier 1 questions asked participants about their most recent park experience, types of activities they undertake on MC park and open space preserve trails, how these activities make them feel, where they like to ride most often in MCPs, what they like most about riding in MCP trails, what they like least about riding in MCP trails, and any suggestions for MCP management to improve their riding experience. The final focus group protocol and questions used during the equestrian focus group is available in Appendix C.

## **Data Collection**

The equestrian focus group had ten participants. As participants arrived at the location, the SFSU team asked them to sign a participant sign-in sheet. They then enjoyed the lite meal provided during which comfort and rapport was established by the investigator. After a half hour the investigator then facilitated the interview process, beginning with a general ice breaker to get the group thinking about parks and park use or non-use, and using the protocol and questions (Appendix C) All prepared questions were asked within the 90-minute time allotted and the facilitator was responsible for getting all participants to talk and fully explain their answers using helpful probes (e.g., "Can you say more about that?"; "Help us understand what you mean?"; and "Can you give an example?"). The investigator demonstrated active listening and occasionally paraphrased long or ambiguous comments, or sought clarification for analysis purposes and/or summarized responses for the whole group.

The research assistant recorded the focus group using the smartphone app “VoiceRecorder” and took supporting notes on a laptop in case the recorder failed or any parts of the digital file were inaudible. Body language or other subtle relevant clues were recorded via typed notes. Audio files were uploaded to a secure computer for storage and back up.

At the end of each focus group, participants were thanked and each person received the incentive (gift card) that required a signature on the receipt log for SFSU accounting purposes. If any participants wanted to receive the final report, or expressed interest in being put on a MCP mailing list, the SFSU team passed around another sign-up sheet for them to provide their contact information.



### **Data Analysis & Transcription**

The demographic and riding characteristics of these participants, was gathered in the pre-focus group online survey. The survey was completed prior to arriving at the focus group location. They SurveyGizmo online survey software automatically analyzed the data and presented the results in graphs showing frequencies.

The focus groups were captured via audio. The research assistant took notes on a laptop, while the facilitator moderated, and the interview was then transcribed verbatim. The investigator transcribed the audio files of the group interview.

In order for all participant comments to be understandable and useful, they were analyzed using a systematic and verifiable process. Hence, the investigator and research assistant completed a manual content analyses process by first identifying question content categories and emerging themes with groupings entered into a Word document. Subsequently, together the investigator and research assistant extracted and explored common themes. Furthermore, major findings from participants’ comments are summarized in the results section that follows and includes a series of direct quotes highlighting relevant responses.

The investigator and research assistant completed the final examination of the transcriptions. Results were reviewed and synthesized to ensure accuracy of themes and supporting quotes. The themes and conclusions presented in this report were reviewed and discussed twice by the investigator and co-investigator before the report was finalized.



## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This focus group interview process revealed many valuable findings. Important to note, however is that at times, participants may have been thinking about, and referring to, trails located outside of Marin County parks and preserves. Although maps of the MCPs were provided at the focus group and the facilitator referred participants to this map if there were any uncertainties about the trail location, there is a chance that some trails outside MCPs were considered. Generalizing park experiences is not uncommon to occur within focus group interviews. The parks literature explains the difficulty for people in differentiating between lands/trails of adjacent park agencies. This further accentuates the need for park agencies to work together; and, this reveals the increasing importance to share such park use/non-use interview results with other park managers as well.



### Participant Characteristics

The pre-focus group online survey provided the following data about the ten focus group participants who responded and their riding characteristics. This was a very experienced group of equestrians.

Figure 1. Years Riding Horses in Marin County

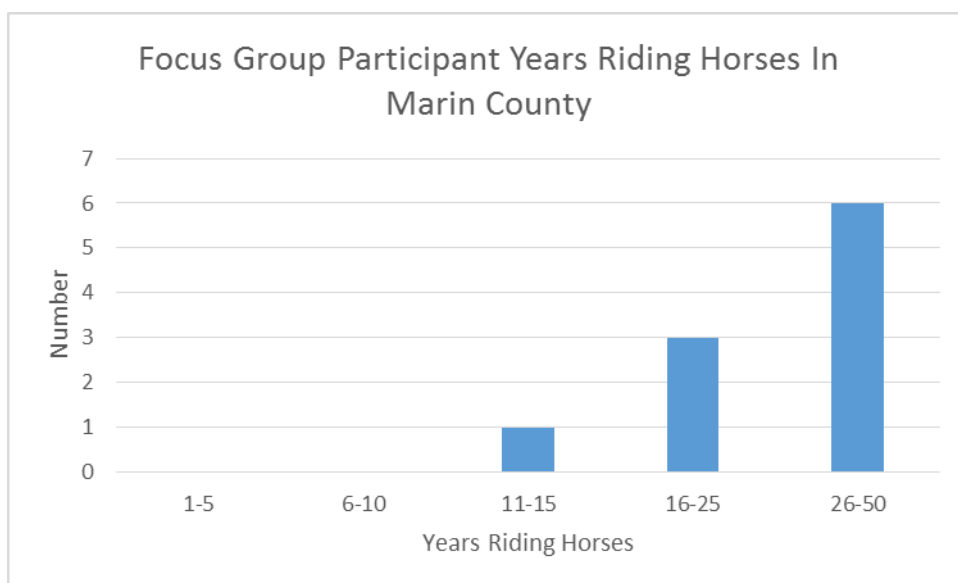


Table 1. Other Participant Characteristics

Board horse(s) near a Marin County Park/Preserve trail- Yes	100%
How would you rate your horseback riding skills?	
Expert	80%
Intermediate	20%
Beginner	0%

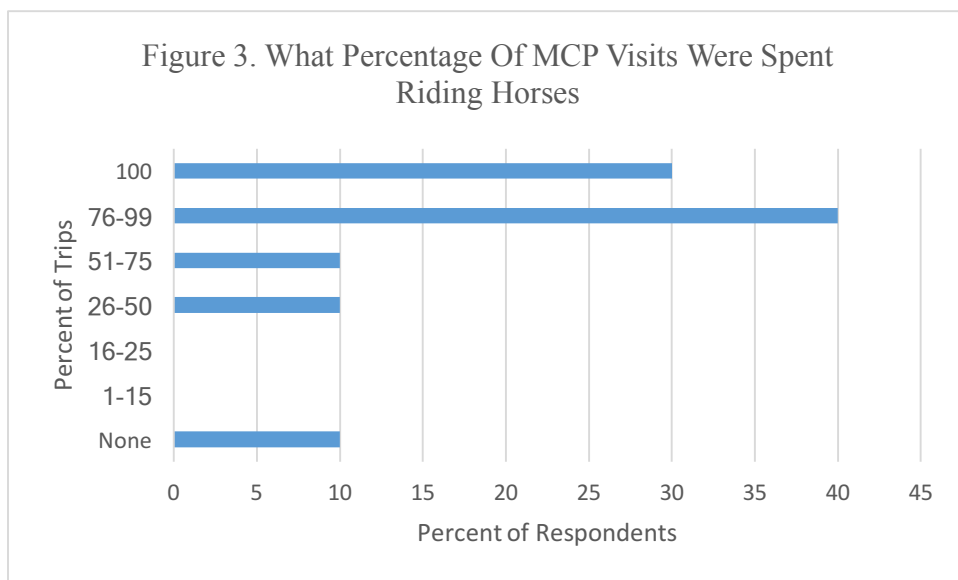
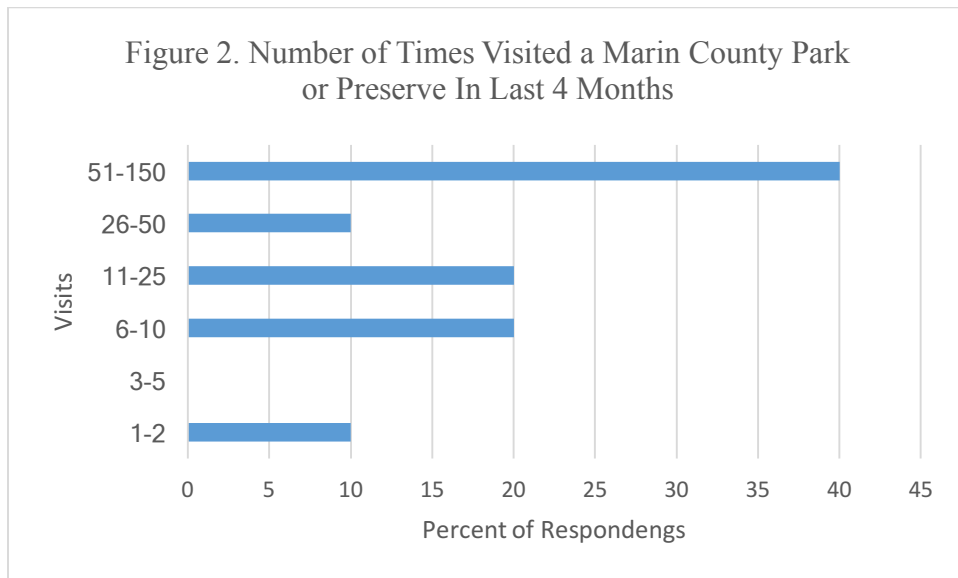
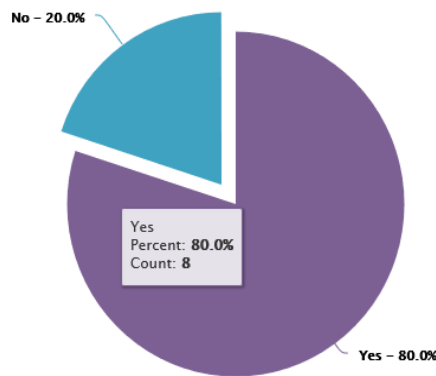




Figure 4. Have You Ever Volunteered In a Marin County Park or Preserve?



## EMERGING THEMES: EQUESTRIAN RIDERS

An analysis of focus group responses produced the following themes, subthemes and illustrative participant comments.

### PREFERRED ACTIVITIES AND LOCATIONS TO RIDE

- Trail riding for pleasure in nature
  - *“Enjoy being out in nature, I take in the wildlife.”*
- Some riders like to be *“Moving out”* – riding fast for long distance
- Prefer narrow trails over fire roads
- Giacomini, Indian Creek, Rush Creek areas have popular trails for equestrians
- Prefer trails at Point Reyes Nat’l Seashore and other places where no bikes are allowed and less crowded



### HOW IT MAKES YOU FEEL

- Rides enhance mental/emotional well-being, almost like therapy
- Appreciation of nature
- Partnership/relationship/bonding with horse

### MANY CHANGES IN RIDING EXPERIENCE

- Tremendous changes in equestrian experience on MCP trails over the last 20 years
- More users/visitors on trails
  - More bicyclists and hikers
  - Crowded on weekends
  - Have to share trails
- Crowds are a result of too much publicity/media coverage by MCP and the media
- Trails approaching “*carrying capacity*” at some times
  - *“I do not ride on some trails on weekends anymore”*
- Less younger-aged equestrians
- Conflicts with other users (bicyclists and dogs):
  - Mountain Bicyclists
    - Greater numbers
    - Have to ride on the “*defensive*” due to bikers
    - No longer safe to ride horses in some places used by bikers so they try to avoid these areas
    - Feel bicyclists have displaced equestrians
    - Majority of mountain bikers are safe and respectful
    - More problems now with bicyclists engaged in illegal activity/breaking of rules – some are rude and confrontational
      - *“When riding in areas off limits to bikes the mountain bikers are rude, not respectful, not mindful, unsafe and know they are breaking the rules.”*
    - Main issue for equestrians is speed of bikes - safety concerns
      - *“There are many mountain bikers that ride safely and are respectful. The element that is riding too fast is what concerns the equestrian community.”*
    - New concern about speed of electric bikes going uphill and downhill
    - Losing places to go that are a “*refuge from bikes*”
    - *“Mountain biking was invented in Marin County. They have a right to be on trails, like we do, but the problem is mountain biking has not been regulated. Still operating with same bike trail rules from 10 years ago.”*



- Dogs
  - Off leash dogs create a serious safety problem for horses and riders
    - Horses have unpredictable responses to dogs
  - Expandable leash is a problem - takes up entire trail
  - Safety concern/reaction to horses
  - Riders have experienced a few dog attacks on trails
  - Need for picking up dog feces bags along trail



### ACCESS AND MOBILITY

- Can mainly ride where horses are boarded, where stables are located
- Difficult and expensive to rent horses
- Many horse owners don't have trailers to take horse to another trail
- All horse stables located near MCP trails are critically important to riders
- Strongly feel, local equestrians should have safe access close to where they live

### SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE EXPERIENCE

- Specialized trails; separate hikers and equestrians trail use from bikers
- There are known "hot spots" where conflicts are frequent, and MCP should work on these
- New hiker-biker trails have been created by MCP, so horses are being forced onto fire roads
- Need for more enforcement
  - A small but significant number of mountain bikers do not follow trail rules
  - Equestrians don't break rules
  - Need to keep up with the times, more mountain bikers now
  - Increase park staff presence on trails
    - *"Just need better management of trail use and enforcement of existing rules/regs."*
  - Post rules
  - Utilize mounted volunteer patrol more
  - Train MCP staff and volunteers on effective and positive (respectful) communication
  - Support for increasing fines and ID on-person requirements
  - Bikers think "Nature cameras" are speed cameras and they slow down



- Need for more education
  - Need to improve communications between equestrians and bikers
  - Visitors need to be educated on how to share the MCP trails and about horses
    - More education about horse behavior and trail etiquette
    - *“The stop and say hello coalition of bikers and horseback riders (in the past) was very successful.”*
    - MCP should take the initiative to bring together equestrians and bikers
  - Develop and distribute info/brochures on sharing trails/trail etiquette
    - “Slow and say hello” is an effective message
  - Increase park staff presence
  - Utilize volunteers
  - Train volunteers on effective communication and policies
  - Encourage people to file observation reports of illegal activities
  - MCP management does not fully appreciate the volunteer mounted trail patrol program. It is a cost effective way to improve user education, reduce conflicts and improve trail safety.
    - There are several volunteer coordinators at MCPs, but the volunteer mounted trail program really needs to be “kicked up into high gear”
    - *“Equestrians patrolling trails to educate but not cite is an economical way to reach trail users.”*

### PRESERVATION OF ENVIRONMENT/PROTECTION OF RESOURCES

- Some riders support reducing the mileage or closing some trails to protect the environment. Closures are in the MCP Roads and Trails Plan
- Some equestrians want to see MCP place a greater emphasis on protecting the environment in the preserves versus more trails or services to users
- Consider short term (not seasonal) trail closures due to wet/rain conditions
- *“Equestrians want to protect the environment, but trail closures will put more people on fewer trails in the future. Remaining trails must be kept appropriate for safe use.”*

### MANAGEMENT AND STAFF RELATIONS

- Equestrians have had a positive working relationship with MCP
- They want to continue to work together

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are a direct result of the data analysis of focus group responses. The recommendations presented below are from the perspective of equestrian users, and they may or may not be different from the general public or other types of trail users.

1. Equestrians want MCP to be more proactive in managing trail use to allow for safe high quality equestrian experiences in the future. They unanimously (in this focus group) felt MCP trails have provided outstanding horseback riding opportunities, but this is changing.
2. Equestrians want better enforcement of existing regulations and a greater presence by MCP staff or volunteers on the trails. They do not see a need for new regulations, with the possible exception of electric-assist mountain bikes and night rides.
3. There should be increased educational efforts by MCP to inform trail users about trail rules and horse behaviors. Many trail visitors inadvertently create safety issues for equestrians because they are unaware of basic horse behaviors and trail etiquette.
4. There is a strong belief among equestrians that use of the current volunteer mounted trail patrol should be expanded to educate and engage visitors, but not give citations. They say this is an effective way to leverage limited MCP funds. Many equestrians (in this focus group) already volunteer for mounted trail patrol and would be willing to spend more time on it. They believe others would be willing to be trained and start to volunteer for the patrol.
5. Equestrians believe MCP must put more effort into addressing their top two trail safety issues: speeding mountain bikes (some on illegal trails) and off-leash dogs.
6. They believe there are strategies to reduce safety risks to equestrians from mountain biking, such as: increased enforcement and fines; separating bike users from equestrian and hiker users; facilitating better communications between bikers and equestrians; use of speed cameras; more use of the “stop/slow and say hello” volunteer program; and better education of users. They have observed that the vast majority of mountain bikers ride safely and are respectful of other trail users. But there are a small number who do not obey the trail rules and this creates unsafe conditions for the riders and their horses.
7. Equestrians recommend MCP take enforcement of off-leash dogs more seriously. This could include better education about horse behavior and trail etiquette, more enforcement of rules, such as dogs must be leashed on trails, and prohibiting the use of long recoiling leashes.
8. Most of this group was supportive of MCP implementing trail closures listed in the MCP Road and Trail Plan in order to protect the resources. There should be greater trail user awareness of what the Road and Trail Plan has identified.

9. Prioritize continued equestrian access to MCP trails that are near existing stables. Most equestrian users of MCP trails are not wealthy and do not have trailers to transport their horses to other areas, therefore they need that nearby access.
10. Address conflict “hot spots” right away
11. Continue to work with the equestrian community on trail issues, as they are willing to collaborate.

### Conclusions and Closing Thoughts

The SFSU team has the following conclusions and thoughts about the equestrian focus group. The equestrian participants in the focus group recognize they are very fortunate to have “world class” horseback riding opportunities on trails in Marin County open space preserves. There are opportunities for relaxed trail rides in nature or more adventurous “move out” rides that are fast and cover many miles. But they feel they are being displaced by changing trail conditions, such as greater numbers of hikers and bikers, and regulations. They are voluntarily avoiding some MCP trails in the interest of safety for their horses and the riders themselves. They feel MCP should do more to keep trails safe so they do not have to give up trails where they have ridden for many years. There is a recognition that other trail users have a right to use MCP trails so they believe more education of trail users and better enforcement of existing regulations are the best approaches to addressing current trail conflicts and safety concerns. Equestrians have appreciated the efforts of Marin County Parks to enforce regulations, restore trails and educate users, but feel more can and should be done. They are willing to volunteer to do more to assist MCP.

MARIN COUNTY  
PARKS  
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# APPENDICES





APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLIER



**YOU ARE INVITED:**  
**WE WANT TO HEAR**  
**YOUR VOICE!**  
**JOIN US FOR A FOCUS GROUP**  
**WITH MARIN EQUESTRIANS**

This session is open by invitation only.  
Food will be provided! Receive a  
**\$25 gift card**  
for your time and active input!

The Marin County Parks Department is working with SF State University to learn about your park experiences, what you like most and least, and what you think could improve visitor experiences in Marin County Parks and Preserves.

*We want to hear from YOU! Learn more about Marin County Parks while helping them to better assist your community ~*

**If you cannot attend or have questions email:**



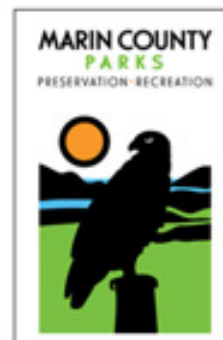
Dr. Patrick Tierney: [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu)  
(415) 338-1531

**Tell us what  
you think  
about Marin  
County Parks!**

**Location: Novato  
Horsemen's Club  
House  
600 Bugeia Lane  
Novato, CA**

**January 13, 2017**

- Sign-in and lite dinner at 6:00pm.
- Focus group starts promptly at 6:30 & ends by 8:30



## APPENDIX B: PRE-FOCUS GROUP ONLINE SURVEY

The following were questions presented in the online pre-focus group survey.

1. In the last 6 months, have each of you visited any Marin County park or open space preserve for equestrian (horseback riding) purposes? Any one not?
2. Please share a sample of equestrian activities you like to do in MCPs.
3. Where do you like to ride most often within MCPs? Why do you prefer to ride these MCP trails?
4. How have your most recent MCP equestrian experiences made you feel? Explain
5. What do you like the most about riding on MCP trails?
6. If you have not ridden in MCP in the last 6 months, please explain why. Have you stopped using MCP trails altogether? Why?
7. What do you like least about riding on MCP trails?
8. Do you have any suggestions for MCP management to improve your equestrian experience on MCP trails? Please explain.

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### PHASE II –MARIN COUNTY PARKS VISITOR USE STUDY:

#### Equestrian Focus Group Protocol on January 13, 2017

##### *Welcome & Introductions*

Hi, my name is [*Patrick Tierney*] I am a professor of recreation, parks and tourism at SFSU. This is [*Ruby Turalba*] [a lecturer in the Health Education Department] and [*Bernice Gao, a student in the Environmental Studies Program*]. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today and agreeing to be part of this focus group. We'll do group introductions regarding who you are in a few minutes. This conversation will last about an hour and a half and will be recorded. We would like to record this conversation so we can use the recording to transcribe notes. The recording will be kept in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose other than this project. [*Ask if anyone has any issues/problems with being audio-taped*].

Thanks also go to many of you for completing the pre-focus group survey. That information is helpful for us to understand more about who is participating. This survey information will only be presented in summary form. No names will be associated with any of that information. No Marin County Parks staff are present here tonight so you should feel free to voice your opinions about Marin County parks and open space preserves. No names will be associated with any of the comments you make during this interview. When you signed in today, there was a number next to your name, you'll use that, which I'll explain in a moment.

I will be leading the conversation today and [*Ruby and Bernice*] will be taking notes. I am first going to go over a few details before we start. If you have any questions, please ask as they come up.

## ***Purpose of the Focus Group***

We are working in partnership with the Marin County Parks Department to better understand park users' attitudes, experiences, use patterns, and preferences and to identify reasons why people don't visit more often. The information you share will help Marin County Parks determine how well they are supporting their strategic plan and contributing to their long-term goals. In addition, the information you provide can help improve existing park resources and services to meet community needs. Your participation is key as this group represents the ideas of [*equestrian users*]. We welcome your input and your voice matters to the Parks Department so we need you to be honest with us and share your thoughts and opinions openly.

## ***Guidelines***

Has anyone ever participated in a focus group? [*Ask for show of hands*]. For some people being in a focus group can be a new experience. We'll first discuss general ground rules that can help ensure a safe environment where everyone's ideas are shared and valued, and to ensure we capture what everyone says on the recorder and in our notes. Again, your name will not be attached to your comments, only a number.

1. WE WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. We need everyone to participate and talk to each other as you are comfortable. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. We want to hear what each of you think and feel about parks, in general, and within MCP in particular. If you're not familiar with parks and preserves in MCP, respond based on your knowledge of whatever parks come to mind for you. You don't need to agree with others, but please listen respectfully to different points of view. If you do

agree with what someone says, please speak up, rather than nodding your head or gesturing in some other way. This helps us capture agreement in the notes.

Also, if someone else says something that reminds you of something or sparks a thought, please feel free to follow their comments with your own.

3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE. Everything you tell us today is anonymous. That means we will not share anything you say with your name attached. While we might use quotes or ideas that you share, as mentioned, we will never use your name in any way.
4. ONE MIC/1 NUMBER: Please speak one at a time – this will help us capture everyone’s thoughts and opinions. Before you make your comment, simply state your number first (which is on your name tag) then go for it. For example, I may raise my hand and say, “Number five: I think that parks need to have more...” If you forget to state your number, I might ask you for it.
5. STEP UP STEP BACK. If you have shared a lot, step back to allow others to share.

Are there any questions before we begin?

***Icebreaker:*** Let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves then we’ll turn on the recorder after this. Please state your first name and your favorite MC park or preserve and why.

*[Student assistant turns on digital recorder and begins taking typed notes on laptop].*

***EQUESTRIAN RESPONDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS - Tier 1***

***As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you’re not able to that’s fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game. When I say “Marin County Parks”, I mean both Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves.***

1. In the last 6 months, have each of you visited any Marin County park or open space preserve for equestrian (horseback riding) purposes? Any one not?
2. Please share a sample of equestrian activities you like to do in MCPs.
3. Where do you like to ride most often within MCPs? Why do you prefer to ride these MCP trails?
4. How have your most recent MCP equestrian experiences made you feel? Explain
5. What do you like the most about riding on MCP trails?
6. If you have not ridden in MCP in the last 6 months, please explain why. Have you stopped using MCP trails altogether? Why?
7. What do you like least about riding on MCP trails?
8. Do you have any suggestions for MCP management to improve your equestrian experience on MCP trails? Please explain.
9. How might these suggestions be implemented?

***Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions***

1. Are you familiar with Bonds or Measures in Marin County? A percentage of the general fund, Measure A (.05c, 10-year sales tax initiative), donations/grants, and park fees to help pay for parks & programs. How would you like this money to be spent? Anything that comes to mind for you relating to your county parks!? **[fiscal/\$]**
  - a) Any ideas for other sources of funding – what might you suggest and why?

**Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we’ve talked about or something else you’d like to share?”**

***Closing & Wrap Up***

*[Student assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends].*

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve equestrian use throughout the Marin County Parks. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

**(PT) I want to thank *Monte* for helping organize this event. (Give thank you card to participant organizer). (Provide donation (money) to room site (organization) if room not paid in advance.)**

In appreciation of your time, [*Ruby and Bernice*] will be distributing [a \$25 gift card *incentive*]. In order to receive this gift card we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.



June 2017  
Final

# TRANSITIONAL-AGED YOUTH FOCUS GROUP REPORT

**Phase II,**  
Marin County Parks  
Visitors Study



**Prepared For:** Marin County Parks

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## INTRODUCTION

The Marin County Parks Department (MCP), in partnership with San Francisco State University (SFSU), is conducting a second phase of the Marin County Parks Visitor Study. The overall purpose of the study is to assess visitor satisfaction, motivation, and future demands; and provide new data for potential decision making. The study also aimed to offer recommendations for park programs, facilities, policies, and innovative ways to enhance community engagement and access. This report is on the second phase of the study, which builds upon the work completed in Phase I. A major component of this second phase are focus groups with specific types of park user groups. This report represents the procedures and results of one focus group interview with twelve West Marin transitional-aged youth (18-24 years) who use trails in Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves. It was held on May 9, 2017 in Point Reyes Station, CA. In this report a reference to “MCP trails” means trails in Marin County Parks and/or Open Space Preserves.

For more information about the purpose and scope of the research contact Kevin Wright, Government and External Affairs Coordinator for Marin County Parks, at (415) 497-3553 or [kwright@marincounty.org](mailto:kwright@marincounty.org). Questions about the focus group process, data analysis or findings can be directed to Dr. Patrick Tierney, professor and principal investigator, at (415) 338-2030 or [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu).

### **Special Thanks To Community Partners**

This project could not have been possible nor successful without the help and support of Madeline Hope of the Tomales Bay Youth Center/The Lounge. Ms. Hope helped us find and recruit West Marin transitional-aged youth to participate in this focus group, and hosted the discussion at her organization. We wish to express our thanks to her.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Phase II Overview**

The focus group part of this study aimed to capture the experiences of Marin County transitional-aged youth who frequently use MCP trails, specifically those living in West Marin. The choice of this user group and the initial contact for transitional-aged youth were provided by Kevin Wright with MCP. This specific age group has been using MCP and they provide a unique perspective about their experiences and perspectives. MCP believed the opinions and motivations from this group, and from all of the focus group participants in both Phase I and in Phase II, could benefit future planning of the county’s park system and services.

### **Preparation**

#### ***Development of Collateral Materials & Procedures***

SFSU created the materials needed to successfully set up and facilitate the focus group, such as focus group recruitment flyers, focus group protocol, and interview questions. The MCP department reviewed the materials, provided feedback and input before the materials were finalized, distributed, and implemented accordingly. The community leader was asked to recruit at least 12 potential

participants for the focus group. SFSU sent the community leader template materials, including an invitation email, recruitment flyer and 1-page information sheet about the study. The community leader sent these materials to persons in her network, and confirmed persons attending the focus group. MCP provided SFSU with materials to distribute at the focus groups (i.e., park maps, event flyers, program brochures).

SFSU also developed a participant sign-in sheet, log for signatures acknowledging receipt of gift cards, and sign-up sheet for MCP (e.g., anyone requesting a copy of the final report or wish to be added to mailing list). Other materials used during the focus groups were name tags, MCP brochures, map of Marin County parks and preserves, and Palace Market gift cards (purchased). SFSU also provided a lite dinner and refreshments at the start of the focus group. Finally, SFSU worked with Tomales Bay Youth Center who received a facility use fee for providing a space.

## Focus Groups

### What occurred, why, and how?



A focus group is a small group of eight to twelve people, ideally, led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion, but not so large that some participants are left out or a few people dominate the conversation. Additionally, the groups should be homogenous as homogeneity levels the playing field and reduces inhibitions among people who come together for the purpose of a group interview.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well executed, a focus group creates a welcoming environment that allows participants to feel at ease and encourages thoughtful, honest answers providing added meaning to question responses. As a valid methodology, focus groups were chosen as one approach to elicit the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and recommendations of traditional and under-represented user groups in Marin County. In addition, focus groups have the ability to generate rich qualitative data that comes from individual participants engaging in deep conversation, potentially capturing themes that would be missed from other, more quantitative, methods. Furthermore, focus groups foster a safe place for participants to be open and honest.

The SFSU research associate was the focus group moderator/facilitator who asked initial questions and nurtured disclosure in an open and honest format. The goal was to generate a maximum number of different opinions, experiences, attitudes, and ideas from as many people in the group in the time allotted. As reflected in the protocol that follows, the focus groups were structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions but the discussion was free-flowing. That is, participant comments stimulated and influenced the thinking and sharing of others.

### Recruitment: Where did participants come from?

This study used a convenience sampling method that enlisted a community leader from the Tomales Bay Youth Center to recruit focus group participants. The community leader was responsible for initial recruitment of potential participants who were transitional-aged youth and users of MCPs. The SFSU team brought copies of an eight question pre-focus group survey about the participants'

demographic characteristics, experience within MCPs, and interest in summer volunteer/intern/job opportunities for a park agency (see Appendix B). This short survey was used to gather information about the focus group participants to help the facilitator, and ultimately the report readers, better understand who was involved. The community leader also emailed, phoned, and/or texted these persons a reminder message three days prior to the focus group. The transitional-aged youth focus group was held 5/09/17 at the Tomales Bay Youth Center, located at 11550 Shoreline Highway in Point Reyes Station.

The community leader was expected to provide the names and emails for up to 15 participants and help find a location for the event, if possible. Focus group participants were provided with a \$25 gift card to Palace Market as an incentive to participate. Additionally, participants were informed a light meal would be provided and thirty minutes was allotted for general socializing (e.g., “meet and greet”) prior to the official start time of the interview process.



### **Focus Group Protocol**

The focus group protocol used for this study was created by the SFSU team and included a description of the overall study, participant guidelines, focus group questions, and logistical information. Focus group questions were developed by SFSU based on models from prior studies and questions that were desired from the MCP team (staff and key project partners). A set of two-tiered questions were developed in which Tier 1 questions were the priority and focused on visitors’ use, experiences, and recommendations. If additional time remained, Tier 2 questions were asked. Tier 1 questions asked participants about their most recent park experience, types of activities they undertake in MC park and open space preserve trails, how these activities make them feel, where they like to go most often in MCPs, what they like most about MCPs, what they like least about MCPs, and any suggestions for MCP management to improve their park experience coming from the perspective of seniors. The final focus group protocol and questions used during the transitional-aged youth focus group is available in Appendix C.

### **Data Collection**

The transitional-aged youth focus group had twelve participants. As participants arrived at the location, the SFSU team asked them to sign a participant sign-in sheet and complete the pre-focus group survey. They then enjoyed the lite meal provided, during which comfort and rapport was established by the research associate. After a half hour the research associate then facilitated the interview process, beginning with a general ice breaker to get the group thinking about parks and park use or non-use, and using the protocol and questions (Appendix C). All prepared questions were asked within the 90-minute time allotted and the facilitator was responsible for getting all participants to talk and fully explain their answers using helpful probes (e.g., “Can you say more about that?”; “Help us understand what you mean?”; and “Can you give an example?”). The investigator demonstrated active listening and occasionally paraphrased long or ambiguous comments, or sought clarification for analysis purposes and/or summarized responses for the whole group.

The research assistants recorded the focus group using the smartphone apps “VoiceRecorder” and “Smart Recorder.” The research assistants took supporting notes in case the recorder failed or any

parts of the digital file were inaudible. Body language, other subtle relevant clues, and tentative themes were recorded via typed and written notes. Audio files were uploaded to a secure computer for storage and back up.

At the end of each focus group, participants were thanked and each person received the incentive (gift card) that required a signature on the receipt log for SFSU accounting purposes. If any participants wanted to receive the final report, or expressed interest in being put on a MCP mailing list, the SFSU team passed around another sign-up sheet for them to provide their contact information.



## **Data Analysis & Transcription**

The demographics and characteristics of these participants were gathered in the pre-focus group survey. The survey was completed by participants upon arrival at the focus group location. The principal investigator inputted the survey data into SurveyGizmo, an online survey software, which automatically analyzed the data and presented the results in graphs showing frequencies.

The focus groups were captured via audio recordings. The research assistants took both handwritten and typed notes on a laptop, while the facilitator moderated. The interview was then transcribed verbatim by one of the research assistants using the smartphone app, “oTranscribe.”

In order for all participant comments to be understandable and useful, they were analyzed using a systematic and verifiable process. Hence, the research team individually completed a manual content analyses process by first identifying question content categories and emerging themes. Subsequently, the research team extracted and explored common themes at an extensive team meeting with groupings entered into a Word document. The research associate further refined the themes and distributed this to all team members for further review and inclusion of supporting quotes. The major findings from participants’ comments are summarized in the results section that follows and includes a series of direct quotes highlighting relevant responses.

The research team completed the final examination of the transcriptions. Results were reviewed and synthesized to ensure accuracy of themes and supporting quotes. The themes and conclusions presented in this report were reviewed and discussed twice by the investigator and co-investigator before the report was finalized.



## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Many valuable findings have come from the West Marin transitional-aged youth focus group interview process. Important to note, however, is that at times, participants may have been thinking about, and referring to, trails located outside of Marin County parks and preserves. Although maps of the MCPs were provided at the focus group and the facilitator referred participants to this map if there were any uncertainties about the trail location, there is a chance that some trails outside MCPs were



considered. Generalizing park experiences is not uncommon to occur within focus group interviews. The parks literature explains the difficulty for people in differentiating between lands/trails of adjacent park agencies. This further accentuates the need for park agencies to work together; and, this reveals the increasing importance to share such park use/non-use interview results with other park managers as well.

### Participant Characteristics

The pre-focus group survey provided the following data and characteristics about 11 individuals who responded. Almost half of these individuals (5 out of 11) report living in Marin County for more than 18 years, and almost two-thirds (65%) of the total reported awareness or familiarity of MCPs. When asked about their active outdoor recreation in MCPs or otherwise, more than a third (36%) reported having done so for more than an hour approximately 3-5 times in the last four months. Additionally, almost half (5 out of 11) stated they have *not* visited any MCP in the same timeframe.

Figure 1. Number of Times Actively Recreated Outdoors in the Last 4 Months

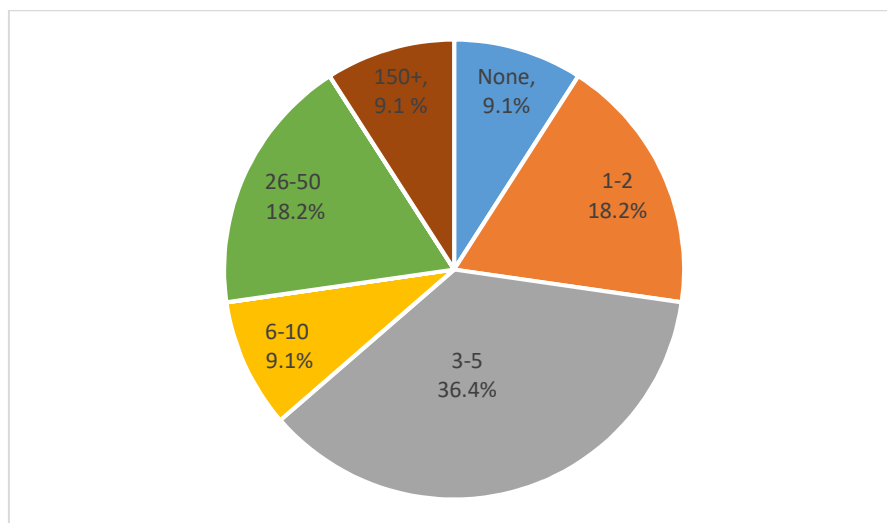




Figure 2. Number of Times Visited a Marin County Park or Preserve in Last 4 Months

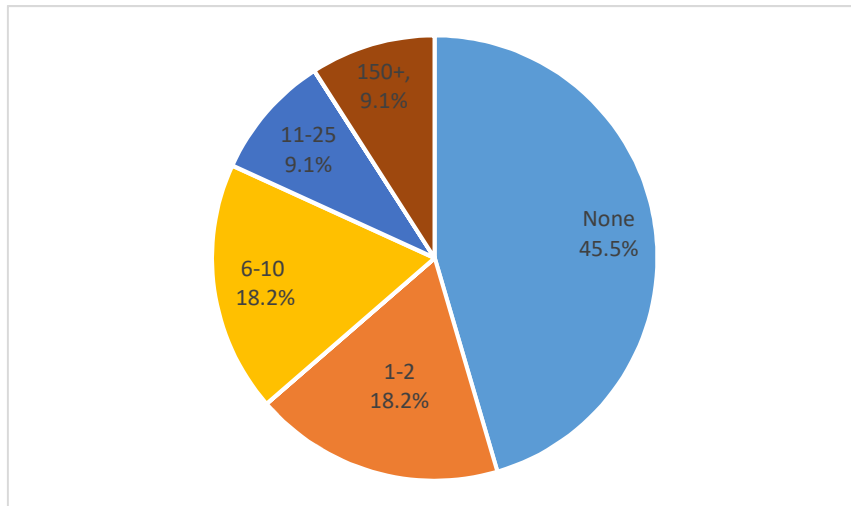


Figure 3. Awareness or Familiarity with any MCP

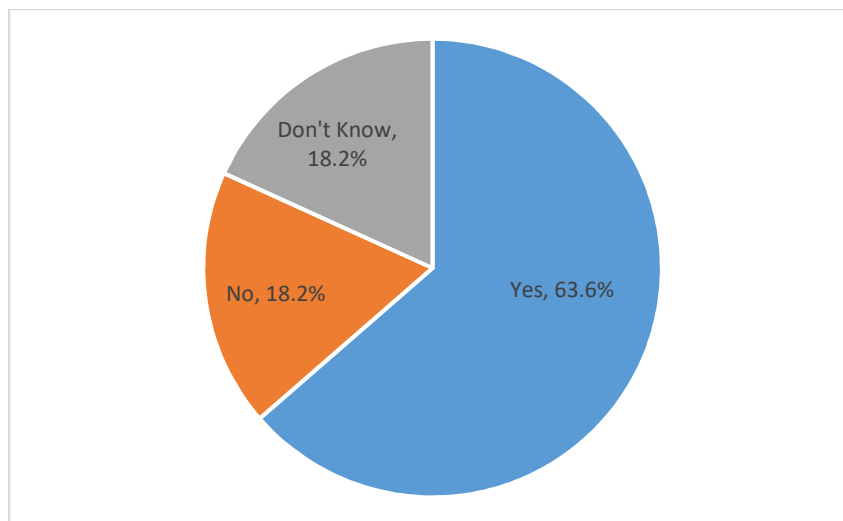


Table 1. Other Participant Characteristics

Ever done a service project or volunteered in a MCP or trail?	No	64%
Very Interested or Interested in a....		
Paid Summer Job		64%
Volunteer Internship		45%
Paid Internship		64%
Finding a Mentor to Discuss Park Career Opportunities		36%
Volunteer to Satisfy School Service Requirements		45%
Class Project in a Park		36%

## EMERGING THEMES: TRANSITIONAL-AGED YOUTH

An analysis of focus group responses produced the following themes, subthemes and illustrative participant comments.

**Theme 1:** Focus group participants report their **favorite places** within specific Marin County Parks and Open Spaces (MCP) include Chicken Ranch Beach and Whitehouse Pool. Other favorite places not managed by MCPs, include Giacomini Wetlands, Shell Beach, McClures Beach, Bear Valley Trail, and other beaches and trails.

- *“Chicken Ranch because it’s the closest to our house and just go over there, enjoy the sun, look at people.”*
- *“[Whitehouse Pool] I just like to walk to the regular trails and go out to the beach and to the viewpoint.”*
- *“[Giacomini Wetlands] Its just nice and sunny and you can see everything.”*
- *“Shell Beach cause, its not like super touristy. Its kind of like, more like hidden. And it’s more like a local beach and its just like a calm place you can go and just relax at the end of the day. Its not so crowded.”*
- *“Probably the Bear Valley Park because that’s like our home park. That’s like the first park we probably ever been. Probably all of us that are here.”*
- *“Bear Park because it has a lot of historic things”*

**Theme 2:** Focus group participants reported that their **favorite outdoor recreational activities** include exercise, sports, and socializing. Hiking, walking, biking, skateboarding/scootering, swimming, and surfing were just a few examples of exercise in which they like to engage. Sports activities included volleyball, basketball, and football. The transitional-aged youth also reported socializing, such as spending time with friends and having bonfires.

- *“I like having bonfires with my friends at the beach.”*
- *“I like to ride my bike and walk. Biking and walking. And scootering.”*
- *“Rock climbing. Ring Mountain has some pretty good rock climbing.”*
- *“Hanging out with friends. I don’t really hang out here all that much. P-town. Petaluma, Petaluma Downtown.”*
- *“I like to play basketball and skateboard.”*
- *“Skateboard. I also like to play volleyball, rugby and football.”*
- *“Swimming is a good one... All over the place, parks desire, Shell, Chicken Ranch, pretty much where ever I can in the bay. Ocean is kind of dangerous so...I can’t really go out there.”*

**Theme 3:** When asked about the meanings and benefits of visiting MCP, the focus group respondents reported primarily **mental/emotional benefits**. The following quotes are illustrative of their positive associations with MCPs.

- *“...a calm place you can go and just relax at the end of the day.”*

- *“In touch with my senses.”*
- *“Refreshed. Rejuvenated.”*
- *“Open to nature.”*
- *“Awesome. Amazing.”*
- *“Euphoric.”*
- *“Blessed.”*
- *“Peaceful.”*
- *“We have a lot of freedom. I feel lucky that we get to live out here...”*

**Theme 4:** When asked **what they like most about MCPs**, the majority of focus group participants responded they appreciate the **nature, views, and open space**. For example, some of the youth mentioned the fresh air, silence, as well as the natural flora and fauna.

- *“The freedom. There’s pretty views. You are in your own space.”*
- *“You always see some type of new wildlife or animals and plants. Like birds.”*
- *“Its awesome living out here because we have so many resources like #7 said. We got the big bay here and all the trails. They have that over there, it’s just, it’s nice out here cause you feel less suffocated by police and stuff.... I feel lucky that we get to live out here because I have a lot of friends that live out in Fairfax and San Rafael but like they have to go to someone’s house to feel free.”*
- *“You can actually hear the silence and the nature. You don’t hear all the cars and the honking. You hear what you need to hear.”*

**Theme 5:** When asked about **what they disliked most about MCPs**, the group agreed that **crowds on the weekends and holidays** was a concern, contributing to traffic and congestion. This question also elicited responses about their **overall concerns and issues in West Marin**, not necessarily specific to the parks and open space preserves. The majority of issues were in regards to **road conditions**, such as bicyclists on the highways, lack of lighting at night, and potholes.

- *“Point Reyes... we like it when it’s not overcrowded with lots of people.... it’s also really annoying when on Memorial Day weekend you have a line of traffic that goes for like a few miles, like 4 miles long...Also like the beaches get overcrowded very often. You know these people are more and more discovering Point Reyes and it makes it very annoying to share.”*
- *“Cyclists because they are not considerate at all. They are not considerate of the drivers and they take up too much space and some people need to go places.”*
- *“They ride in the road. They have space and they don’t take the space, they just want to take your space. They don’t use their arms. They don’t use their signals.”*
- *“The pot holes. They need to fix them. You can’t drive smoothly on them.”*
- *“Its just so uneven everywhere. I mean if you go out to the lighthouse there is a stop sign but of how flooded it gets there, that’s how bad the road is. They should fix that.”*
- *“We need more light posts and stuff like that. Walking up (?) you can’t see anything. Yeah you can’t go out at night because it’s too dark.”*

**Theme 6:** There was a general concern with **public transportation** for the transitional-aged youth in West Marin, especially since 9 out of 12 of the focus group participants reported not having their

own car. Much discussion revolved around the ineffectiveness of the Stagecoach and lengthy bus rides to school, prompting suggestions to improve transit options.

- *“The other thing concerning the Stagecoach is it would be really nice if we could get the bus going from Petaluma or Novato to Point Reyes because if you want to get to any of those you have to go to San Rafael and then up.”*
- *“Oh there’s a Stagecoach but the Stagecoach only goes to... The Stagecoach goes from San Rafael to the farthest it goes here is Inverness which is where the post office is. It doesn’t go any farther than that. Not to like any of the other actual like recreational area,s don’t get public transportation.”*
- *“I live all the way next to the lighthouse like two minutes away from the light house. For me to go to school in the morning takes me about 2 hours on the bus.”*

**Theme 7:** When asked **what they would like to improve their West Marin community**, the transitional-aged youth mentioned **youth centers and programs, community events, and a skate park**.

**Theme 7A:** Ideas for **youth centers and programming** included places to make music and videos, sports leagues, school and college support (fairs/tutoring), skills classes (cooking, public speaking, financial literacy, grant writing), and mixers with other Marin County Youth. They also mentioned how there is a need for such activities especially for older teens, and limited transportation opportunities.

**Theme 7B: Community events** they would like to see in West Marin for older youth include festivals, films, concerts, and dances.

**Theme 7C:** When discussing their desires for a **skate park**, the group mentioned there is no safe or permitted place to skateboard. They also reported that the skating community has gotten bigger further demonstrating this need. The focus group participants had a few suggestions for skate park locations.

- *“Youth center. Adult league sports. Every Friday they could sell stuff like concession stands and like the adults and everybody can come and play basketball and have teams. With adults and teenagers.”*
- *“Maybe a study group or something or something for college students or young college students. Or students who are struggling or need help.”*
- *“I think tutoring sounds awesome, too, but skill classes to get people prepared for actual skills they are going to use.”*
- *“More activities so we are not in crowds and in traffic. More youth centers, which we would need more transportation so we can get out.”*
- *“It would be very beneficial for the community is if we built a skate park here or at least started seeing what the logistics would be to get one going.”*
- *“It should be encouraged I think it would benefit all parts of the community it would bring the youth together with the older people in the community and it would bring youth together, just together.”*

- *“Mini skate park. I know it’s a rule thing like a regulation that schools you are not supposed to skate. But there is this space behind the tennis courts at Tomales where we could make like a mini ramp for kids to go and skate because there is like no where to skate.”*
- *“I know it’s a landmark, the Grandi building downtown the big brick building. It’s a pretty big place so like I don’t know if its too dangerous to put something there but it would be cool to put something there for either the youth. Or the community.”*

**Theme 8:** Overall, the transitional-aged youth expressed **interest in jobs or internships**. Many of the youth are actively involved in the community and stated that if new opportunities were available through MCPs, they would participate. Some of the youth’s past and current outdoor experience included trail maintenance and kayak/paddle support. Other jobs or internships the youth showed interest in were: nutrition, health fitness, office work, childcare, skate instructor, and summer camp counselor.

- *“There’s been a program in the summer called ICC. I’ve done it for 3 years and I’m doing it this summer.”*
- *“I am going to go try to get a job again at Blue Water Packs, the company for the summer because I worked with them last summer. They have a great company and a lot of great people work there.”*
- *“Well I haven’t heard of a lot of camps that do skateboarding out here but there was one (?) they did a skate camp. That would be cool.”*
- *“I worked at Point Reyes Summer Camp last year. No two summers ago. And I am applying for a job there this summer I haven’t heard back yet.”*
- *“Anything. Mostly nutrition, health fitness, dealing with children, working in the office. I could do anything.”*

**Theme 9:** When prompted to share **ways of best outreach and communicating to this particular age group**, the focus group members mentioned community leaders and centers, schools, and social media.

- *“Tell some people in the community who has a voice that is very heard.”*
- *“Just word of mouth. It’s a pretty small town, things get around pretty fast.”*
- *“Going off the fair idea. Kids who are in school. Make the kids skip class to listen and go to it.”*
- *“I think social media because everyone has a phone. And so somehow and on some social media so people see it on their phone.”*
- *“Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram.”*

## Recommendations

The recommendations present below are a direct result of the data analysis of focus group responses. These recommendations presented below are from the perspective of transitional-aged youth in West Marin, and they may or may not be different from the general public, other youth, or other types of trail users.

1. Expand public transportation such as a shuttle system to and from parks. Increase Stagecoach destinations/stops to connect West Marin (Point Reyes) to other locations in Marin County including Petaluma and Novato.
2. Increase youth center programs in order for more of the youth to get involved including starting programs specific to older teenagers. Additional youth programs will allow for more access to recreational sports or activities including sports leagues, skills classes (public speaking, cooking, etc.), school tutoring and college preparation.
3. Introduce more community events for engagement of youth. Community events may include but are not limited to dances, mixers, film or music festivals. The inclusion of youth from all locations of Marin County will increase community engagement but will involve the use of public transportation services. Bus services specifically for these events will encourage more to attend.
4. The youth expressed interest in internships with Marin County if more opportunities became available. They suggest the introduction of camps for skateboarding, sports, music, etc. that they would be interested in participating or facilitating. Additionally, if the internships were paid more would be willing to participate.
5. Creation of a skate park. Many of the youth expressed interest in skateboarding with little to no available space to skate. Suggested areas to build a skate park were in Tomales. The youth expressed interest in the introduction of skate camps which they believe would unite the community of all ages and they would be interested in participating and/or facilitating.
6. Improvements to infrastructure including repairs of the potholes in the roads, widening the roads for cyclists, and increased lighting (lamp posts) alongside the roads in areas outside of the main strip.

## Conclusions and Closing Thoughts

The following conclusions and thoughts about the transitional-aged youth focus group are from the SFSU team perspective.

It was apparent from all of the participants of the transitional-aged youth focus group that they share an appreciation for the nature and freedom they feel at home in Marin County, particularly in West Marin. They all agree that the views, open spaces and being outdoors is important to their lifestyles in Marin County. Inclusion of more community events and programs can increase the engagement of youth within Marin County, specifically focused on bringing together youth from all areas of Marin. These activities will work best if public transportation is increased which is a concern vocalized most by the youth. Lack of public transportation, including limited stops for the Stagecoach and buses, increases their travel time in traveling to school daily and limits their ability to access more of Marin County since many do not own their own cars. In addition to community events and engagement, the youth expressed great interest in being more involved with Marin County Parks through internships. The suggestions of the participants were creation of camps and classes that mirror the interests of this age group, including skateboarding camps, school tutoring and college preparation courses, etc. Overall, the participants appreciate the beauty of the outdoors and their freedom in Marin County but expressed interest in joining with Marin County Parks to include more opportunities to have this demographic more involved in the community.



MARIN COUNTY  
PARKS  
PRESERVATION · RECREATION



# APPENDICES



APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER



**YOU ARE INVITED:**  
**WE WANT TO HEAR**  
**YOUR VOICE!**

**JOIN US FOR A FOCUS GROUP-**  
**WEST MARIN YOUTH**

The Marin County Parks Department is working with SF State University to learn about your park experiences, what you like most and least, and what you think could improve visitor experiences in Marin County Parks and Preserves.

**This session is open by invitation only.**  
**Food will be provided! Receive a**  
**\$25 gift card**  
**for your time and active input!**

*We want to hear from YOU! Learn more about Marin County Parks while helping them to better assist your community ~*

**If you cannot attend or have questions email:**



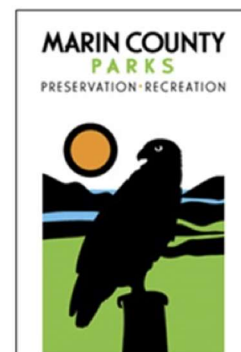
**Dr. Patrick Tierney: [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu)**  
**(415) 338-1531**

**Tell us what  
you think  
about Marin  
County Parks!**

**Location:**  
**11435 State Rout**  
**One, Point Reyes**  
**Station Ca**

**Tuesday, May 9,**  
**2017**

- **Sign-in and lite dinner at 6:00pm.**
- **Focus group starts promptly at 6:30 & ends by 8:30**





**ESTAS INVITADO: QUEREMOS ESCUCHAR ¡TU VOZ!**  
**ÚNETE A NOSOTROS PARA UN GRUPO DE ENFOQUE - WEST MARIN YOUTH**

El Departamento de Parques del Condado de Marin está trabajando con San Francisco State University para aprender más acerca de sus experiencias en los parques: lo que más les gusta y lo que piensan que podría mejorar las experiencias de los visitantes en los Parques y Conservas del Condado de Marin.

**Ésta sesión es por invitación solamente. ¡Habrá comida! Reciba una tarjeta de regalo de \$25 por su tiempo y su participación!**

*¡Queremos escuchar de Ud.! Aprenda más sobre los Parques del Condado de Marin mientras nos ayuda a apoyar su comunidad.*

**Si no puede asistir o tiene preguntas, mándale un correo electrónico a:**

**Dr. Patrick Tierney: [ptierney@sfsu.edu](mailto:ptierney@sfsu.edu)**  
(415) 338-1531

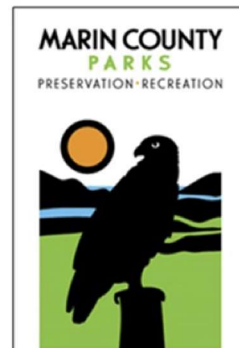


**Díganos lo que piensa acerca de Marin County Parks!!**

**Ubicación:  
11435 State Route 1,  
Pt. Reyes Station, Ca**

**Martes,  
9 de Mayo, 2017**

- **La registración y la cena empiezan a las 6:00 pm.**
- **El grupo de enfoque comienza puntualmente a las 6:30 pm y termina a las 8:30 pm.**



## APPENDIX B: PRE-FOCUS GROUP ONLINE SURVEY

The following were questions presented in the online pre-focus group survey.

### Senior Pre-Focus Group Survey

- 1) *How many years have you lived in Marin County?*
- 2) *In the last four months, approximately how many times have you actively recreated outdoors, such as bicycle riding, skateboarding, surfing, fishing or walking alone or with friends/family, for more than one hour?*
- 3) *Are you aware or familiar with any Marin County Park or Open Space Preserve (not a city park or national park)? Some examples of Marin County Parks and Preserves near Tomales Bay and on the west side are: Chicken Ranch Beach, Whitehouse Pool, Miller Boat Launch, Bolinas Park, Point Reyes Playground, Stafford Lake Park, and Bolinas Lagoon Open Space Preserve.*
- 4) *In the last four months, how many times have you visited any Marin County Park or Open Space reserve, for any recreational purpose?*
- 5) *Have you ever done a service project or volunteered in a Marin County Park or trail?*
- 6) *How interested would you be in each of the following opportunities with a park and open space agency? Options include: a paid summer job; volunteer internship; paid internship; finding a mentor to discuss career opportunities in parks; volunteering to satisfy school service requirements; class project in a park.*
  - 6a) *Since you indicated an interest in working in parks during the summer, how many hours per week are you interested in working with the park agency?*
  - 6b) *Since you indicated an interest doing an internship in parks during the summer, how many hours per week are you interested in interning with the park agency?*
  - 6c) *Since you indicated an interest volunteering in parks or to satisfy school service requirements during the summer, how many hours per week are you interested in volunteering with the park agency?*
- 7) *Since you are or might be interested in working or volunteering in a park agency, please provide your email address to contact you.*
- 8) *What is your name?*

Thank You!



**APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**  
**PHASE II –MARIN COUNTY PARKS VISITOR USE STUDY:**  
**Transitional-Aged Youth Focus Group Protocol**  
**May 9, 2017 at the Lounge – Tomales Bay Youth Center**  
**Updated as of 5-09-17**

***Welcome & Introductions***

Hi, my name is [*Ruby Turalba*] I am a faculty of the Health Education Department at SFSU. This is [*Amy Lozano*] [a research assistant at SFSU and UCSF] and [*Lizzie Gritzmacher, a student in the Health Education Department*]. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today and agreeing to be part of this focus group. We'll do group introductions regarding who you are in a few minutes. This conversation will last about an hour and a half and will be recorded. We would like to record this conversation so we can use the recording to transcribe notes. The recording will be kept in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose other than this project. [*Does anyone has any issues/problems with being audio-taped?*].

Thanks also go to many of you for completing the pre-focus group survey. That information is helpful for us to understand more about who is participating. This survey information will only be presented in summary form. No names will be associated with any of that information. No Marin County Parks staff are present here tonight so you should feel free to voice your opinions about Marin County parks and open space preserves. No names will be associated with any of the comments you make during this interview. When you signed in today, there was a number next to your name, you'll use that, which I'll explain in a moment.

I will be leading the conversation today and [*Amy & Lizzie*] will be taking notes. I am going to go over a few details before we start. If you have any questions, please ask as they come up.

***Purpose of the Focus Group***

We are working in partnership with the Marin County Parks Department to better understand park users' attitudes, experiences, use patterns, and preferences and to identify reasons why people don't visit more often. The information you share will help Marin County Parks determine how well they are supporting their strategic plan and contributing to their long-term goals. In addition, the information you provide can help improve existing park resources and services to meet community needs. Your participation is key as this group represents the ideas of [*transitional aged youth, 18-24 years*]. We welcome your input and your voice matters to the Parks Department so we need you to be honest with us and share your thoughts and opinions openly.

***Guidelines***

Has anyone ever participated in a focus group? [*Ask for show of hands*]. For some people being in a focus group can be a new experience. We'll first discuss general ground rules that can help ensure a safe environment where everyone's ideas are shared and valued, and to ensure we capture what everyone says on the recorder and in our notes. Again, your name will not be attached to your comments, only a number.

1. WE WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. We need everyone to participate and talk to each other as you are comfortable. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. We want to hear what each of you think and feel about parks, in general, and within MCP in particular. If you're not familiar with parks and preserves in MCP, respond based on your knowledge of whatever parks come to mind for you. You don't need to agree with others, but please listen respectfully to different points of view. If you do agree with what someone says, please speak up, rather than nodding your head or gesturing

in some other way. This helps us capture agreement in the notes. Also, if someone else says something that reminds you of something or sparks a thought, please feel free to follow their comments with your own.

3. **WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE.** Everything you tell us today is anonymous. That means we will not share anything you say with your name attached. While we might use quotes or ideas that you share, as mentioned, we will never use your name in any way.
4. **ONE MIC/1 NUMBER:** Please speak one at a time – this will help us capture everyone’s thoughts and opinions. Before you make your comment, simply state your number first (which is on your name tag) then go for it. For example, I may raise my hand and say, “Number five: I think that parks need to have more...” If you forget to state your number, I might ask you for it.
5. **STEP UP STEP BACK.** If you have shared a lot, step back to allow others to share.

Are there any questions before we begin?

**Icebreaker:** Let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves then we’ll turn on the recorder after this. Please state your first name and your favorite MC park or preserve in and why. *[Student assistant turns on digital recorder and begins taking typed notes on laptop].*

***[SENIOR] RESPONDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS***

***Generic Discussion Questions, Tier 1 - (As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you’re not able to that’s fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game. When I say “Marin County Parks”, I mean both Marin County Parks and Open Space Preserves).***

1. In the last 6 months, have each of you visited any Marin County park or open space preserve? Any one not?
2. Please share a sample of activities you like to do in Marin County parks and open space preserves (MCP). **[use/experience—hike/run/walk, group activities, skateboarding, etc.]**
3. Where do you like to go most often within MCPs? Why do you prefer these MCP locations?
4. How have your most recent MCP experiences made you feel? Explain
5. What do you like the most about MCP?
6. If you have not gone to MCP in the last 6 months, please explain why. Have you stopped using MCP locations altogether? Why?
7. What do you like least about MCP parks and open space preserves?
8. Do you have any suggestions for MCP management to improve your experience in MCP parks and open space preserves? Please explain.
9. How might these suggestions be implemented?

10. Are there any other concerns or needs you would like to share with MCPs [*volunteer or employment opportunities*]

***Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions***

1. Are you familiar with Bonds or Measures in Marin County? A percentage of the general fund, Measure A (.05c, 10-year sales tax initiative), donations/grants, and park fees to help pay for parks & programs. How would you like this money to be spent? Anything that comes to mind for you relating to your county parks!?! **[fiscal/\$]**
  - a) Any ideas for other sources of funding – what might you suggest and why?

**Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we've talked about or something else you'd like to share?**

***Closing & Wrap Up***

*[Research assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends].*

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve equestrian use throughout the Marin County Parks. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

In appreciation of your time, [*Amy & Lizzie*] will be distributing [a \$25 gift card *incentive*]. In order to receive this gift card we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.

**(PT) I want to thank [*individual names*] for helping organize this event. (Give thank you card to participant organizers). Provide donation (money) to room site (organization) if room not paid in advance.**

***Equipment & Supplies***

- 1) Sign in sheet
- 2) Participant incentive log / accounting sheet
- 3) Name tags
- 4) Protocol copies
- 5) Question copies
- 6) Audio recording device, chargers
- 7) Gift cards
- 8) Visual charts, graphs, maps & brochures
- 9) Writing utensils: pens, pencils, sharpies
- 10) Money for caterer
- 11) Mailing list sheet
- 12) Press release on Phase I results
- 13) Laptops, chargers
- 14) Thank you card
- 15) Bring donation (money) for host/room rental (have receipt for it), if room not paid in advance.