



MONTARA WATER AND SANITARY DISTRICT AGENDA

For Meeting Of: February 13, 2025

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: Clemens Heldmaier, General Manager *CH*

**SUBJECT: Review and Possible Action to Address Fire
Danger on CalTrans Montara Bypass Lands**

The District has expressed its interest in ownership of the Caltrans Right of Way (RoW) many times. Caltrans acquired the property by eminent domain for the construction of a highway over Montara Mountain that has long been abandoned. Today, the Tom Lantos tunnels serve as an alternative for the project that would have cut our coastal communities in half.

Since Caltrans abandoned the highway project, MWSD has attempted to acquire the RoW property to secure water rights and preserve the underlying watershed for our community, which would result in our ability not only to remove fuel and reduce the present fire danger for Montara and Moss Beach, but to maintain it as public recreational property consistent with the objectives of San Mateo County Local Coastal Plan Policy 11.33, ultimately leading to local control to the RoW. San Mateo County, the California Coastal Commission, and other main stakeholders were initially in support of the property transition to MWSD. Since 2017, the current owner, CalTrans, and the responsible party for the implementation of the LCP policy 11.33 San Mateo County, has been unresponsive and stalling the transition process.

In 2017, the Tubbs fire destroyed parts of Santa Rosa, followed by the Camp fire that annihilated the City of Paradise in 2018. Since then, fire season in California is year-round, and very large uncontrollable fire events threatening and destroying communities in California has become the norm. The CZU Complex Fire in San Mateo County in 2020 hit close to home. The reason for the magnitude of the wildfires is largely attributed to unmaintained forest and landscapes that encroach in urban spaces.

One of the highest fire dangers and associated insurance costs in the country exists in coastal San Mateo County, with its large amounts of flammable eucalyptus and other tree species that have not been maintained for decades. The Caltrans RoW directly threatens our community and its water system. Most of our homes are within half a mile of the dangerously unmaintained property. MWSD has many pipes and above ground facilities located on the RoW, and our water treatment plant is in direct vicinity of the RoW.

MWSD has urged Caltrans to take action and clean up their property. While



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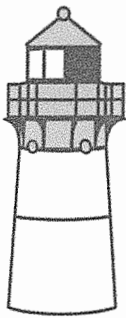
TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: Clemens Heldmaier, General Manager

some small sections were improved, the vast majority of the land is completely overgrown and poses one of the highest fire risks in the country. The immediate property transfer to MWSD would allow the District to take action and work cooperatively with the Coastside Fire Protection District to reduce the eminent danger.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss and receive public input. Direct staff as needed.



Montara Water & Sanitary District

Serving the Communities of Montara and Moss Beach

P.O. Box 370131

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Montara, CA 94037-0131

E-mail: mwsd@coastside.net

Visit Our Web Site: <http://www.mwsd.montara.com>

September 15, 2021

Mark L. Weaver
Deputy District Director
Right of Way and Lands Surveys
California Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 23660, MS-11
Oakland, CA 94623-0660

Mr. Weaver:

Thank you for your letter of July 23, 2021 in response to Montara Water & Sanitary District's (MWSD) correspondence on behalf of our community regarding continuing hazardous conditions on Caltrans property within Montara, California. As you mention these unused properties were acquired for the original Devil's Slide Bypass alignment, now resolved with the Tom Lantos Tunnels.

We are pleased to hear Caltrans plans to address the unmaintained property and fuel loading. However, we feel it critical to note that though work was promised within the month, over 6 weeks later, no work has been undertaken. If we could obtain your scope and schedule of upcoming work, it would be greatly appreciated as we regularly update our community as to Caltrans' efforts and progress in mitigating the fire hazard that exists on the property. Similarly, we feel it important to have a full and accurate record (dates and work undertaken) of Caltrans' maintenance and fuel reduction work on this parcel since 2014. Though we commend your stated record of maintenance, on behalf of the adjacent neighbors we feel it is important to have an exact record given the history of poor maintenance and fuel loading.

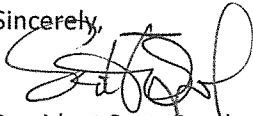
As mentioned, we are happy to share (attached) the initial estimate MWSD received from Davey Tree Service for the immediate fire reduction work necessary on the property. This quote estimated a daily rate for 100 days of work, focused only on the eucalyptus rich areas in the northern section of the property. The work does not include any tree removal, solely ground vegetation removal and tree limb pruning close to the ground. We want to emphasize that this estimate only addresses what is essential immediately (as estimated in June 2021 – now two months ago), but there is much more work needed to fully address the fire danger going forward.

In closing, we thank you for clarifying to important steps necessary for transfer of these properties. As stated previously, MWSD, on behalf of the local residents and communities we represent, has interest in

acquiring these properties to ensure the land will better serve our residents. Given that preparation of a Specific Plan is necessary, MWSD would like to meet and discuss how we can assist in ensuring that the process is undertaken and is a community-driven and informed endeavor. We ask that you meet with us to discuss the process and schedule to advance this critical planning document, as well as our interest in acquiring the parcels.

We will contact you shortly to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,



President Scott Boyd

On behalf of the Montara Water and Sanitary District Board of Directors

Director Peter Dekker

Director Jim Harvey

Director Ric Lohman

Director Kathryn Slater-Carter

Encl. as stated

cc: *Via electronic transmission*

CA State Assemblymember Kevin Mullin

CA State Senator Josh Becker

County of San Mateo Board of Supervisors:

President David J. Canepa

Vice President Don Horsley

Supervisor Dave Pine

Supervisor Carole Groom

Supervisor Warren Slocum

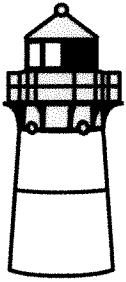
Lennie Roberts, Committee for Green Foothills

Steve Monowitz, San Mateo County Planning

Jeannine Manna, California Coastal Commission

Martha Poyatos, San Mateo Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)

Midcoast Community Council



Montara Water & Sanitary District

Staying Ahead of our Local Community Needs

Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) works every day to deliver water, garbage and sewer services for the residents of Montara and Moss Beach. Over 6,000 residents rely on our services for their homes and businesses.

August -
September 2021

News for You: Statewide Conservation Needed; Standing Up for Our Community: Caltrans Fire Hazards

15% STATEWIDE WATER CONSERVATION GOAL Take Action Today

On July 8, Governor Newsom expanded California's drought emergency and announced a 15% statewide water conservation goal. Though our community's water supplies continue to be adequate to meet our local needs, MWSD supports the statewide conservation effort. Taking additional conservation actions today will stretch precious water supplies for future use. Consider an additional action to reduce your use!

Take action today: *(Para obtener consejos importantes sobre cómo conservar agua, llame (650) 728-3545.)*

- Irrigate outdoor areas in early morning or late evening.
- Don't allow water to run-off your property.
- Don't over water! Fix leaks within 5 days!
- Don't hose down cars, equipment or driveways. Wash your car at a car wash that recycles water.
- No washing of streets, parking lots and buildings*.
- Use automatic shut-off devices on hose or filling apparatuses.
- No fill or refill of swimming pools, spas, artificial lakes, ponds or streams*.
- No outdoor water use of any kind during power outages.

**except as necessary for public health or fire protection*

MWSD Stands Up for Community Fire Safety: Addressing the Caltrans Bypass Lands in Montara

On July 16, the MWSD Board issued a letter to Caltrans District 4 Deputy Director Mark Weaver regarding the hazardous fire conditions on the Caltrans' Bypass Lands property.

On behalf of the residents of Montara and Moss Beach, as well as other adjacent property owners in San Mateo County, we feel compelled to bring to your attention a matter of great concern; the untended, hazardous conditions on Caltrans property within Montara, California.

The Montara Bypass Lands, locally known as the Caltrans Right of Way (ROW), in Montara, have been left vacant and untended for decades under Caltrans' ownership. MWSD, the sole local public jurisdiction in Montara and Moss Beach, has frequently cleaned this parcel - at our ratepayer's expense. This work was undertaken to avoid a catastrophic fire within the critical local watershed which supplies all of our community's water.

MWSD has repeatedly communicated to Caltrans our interest in acquiring these lands to benefit our local community.

Montara Water and Sanitary District is a locally elected body charged with representing and taking action for our community members. We are prepared to continue the critical stewardship of our local lands, including safeguarding the watersheds that protect our local water resources for our community, now and in the future.

We asked that Caltrans address the hazardous conditions immediately or initiate immediate discussions with MWSD on a collaborative solution that addresses both hazards and property ownership. Otherwise we and the community will hold Caltrans liable for past current and future damages and risks to our livelihood.

We shared this with our various elected representatives at the state, county and local level, as well as our valued stakeholders on the Coastside.

We look forward to a rapid resolution and will keep you informed.

As our community continues its recovery from COVID-19, MWSD is committed to providing safe public access via ZOOM teleconference for our regularly scheduled public meetings for the foreseeable future.

Board Meetings on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at 8888 Cabrillo Highway, Montara.

Call: (650) 728-3545

Email: mwsd@coastside.net

Visit: mwsd.montara.org

Resolution

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA
RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE

MONTARA WATER AND SANITARY DISTRICT

Request for Caltrans Donation of 'Bypass Lands'

WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District provides water, sewer, and refuse disposal services to the coastal communities of Montara, Moss Beach and adjacent areas in unincorporated San Mateo County; and

WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District owns and operates water storage, treatment, and distribution facilities that currently provide domestic water to approximately 1,800 domestic and fire water connections; and

WHEREAS, the commonly called "Caltrans Bypass", also known as Martini Creek Bypass Lands, is unimproved state surplus land east of Elm Street in Montara, with the northern portion having been sold to the California State Parks System as a condition of building the Tom Lantos Tunnels at Devil's Slide, and the remaining portion running through Montara and Moss Beach without current ownership transfer plan by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans); and

WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District has applied to Caltrans for acquisition of such land and also agrees with the Midcoast Community Council's recommendation that such property be rezoned from residential to open space; and

WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District is a public agency serving the same community that has already been using the land for recreation and would like to enhance its stewardship and watershed protection of the property; and

WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District currently provides critical source protection benefits to existing District water sources, which could be adversely affected should the Bypass Lands be developed commercially; and

WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District desires to maintain and preserve the natural landscapes of the area, and protect the watershed which constitutes an integral part of the District's necessary water supplies; and

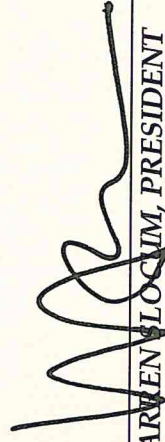
WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District will adhere to the San Mateo County Local Coastal Program with such proposal by discouraging urban sprawl, maximizing the efficiency of public utilities, minimizing energy consumption, protecting the natural environment and revitalizing existing developed areas; and


WHEREAS, Montara Water and Sanitary District would also preserve the Bypass Lands for use as recreational facilities and watershed protection and maintenance.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors of San Mateo County hereby strongly supports **Montara Water and Sanitary District** in its request to Caltrans for donation of the specified property known as the "Bypass Lands" in Montara, and encourages Caltrans to execute such transfer as soon as possible.

Dated: May 24, 2016

SUPERVISORS:


WARREN LOCUM, PRESIDENT



DAVE PINE




CAROLE GROOM


DON HORSLEY


ADRIENNE J. TISSIER

Attest: 
Deputy Clerk of the Board of Supervisors