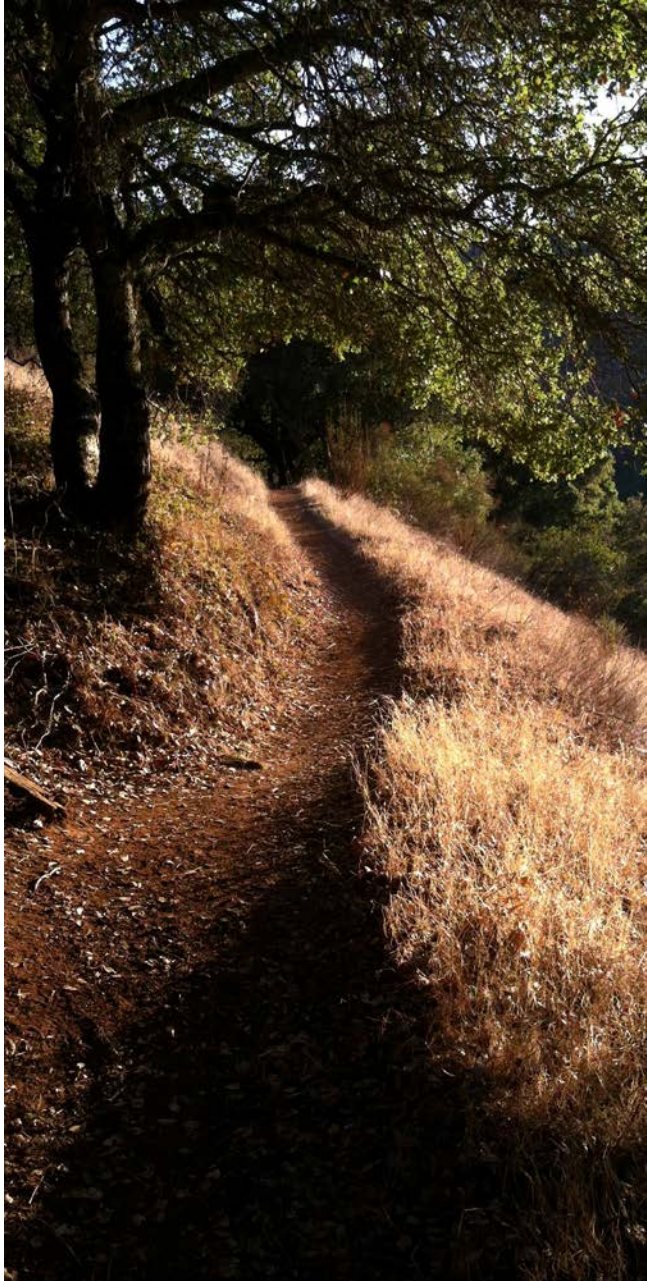


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FOOTHILLS PARK ACCESS City Council Discussion

August 3, 2020



BRIEF HISTORY OF FOOTHILLS PARK

- 1,400-acres in the Palo Alto foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains
- Acquired by the City from the Lee family in the late 1950s for \$1.3 million
- Park opened to Palo Alto residents in 1965

CURRENT FOOTHILLS PARK USAGE RESTRICTIONS

- PAMC 22.04.150(a) limits access to Foothills Park to Palo Alto residents and their accompanied guests
- Since 2005, non-resident hikers welcomed to enter via the Bay to Ridge Trail
- Unlawfully entering FHP is a misdemeanor
- No misdemeanor citation has been issued in at least the last 20 years
- Only one administrative citation has been issued (like a parking ticket)

CURRENT PARK USAGE RESTRICTIONS

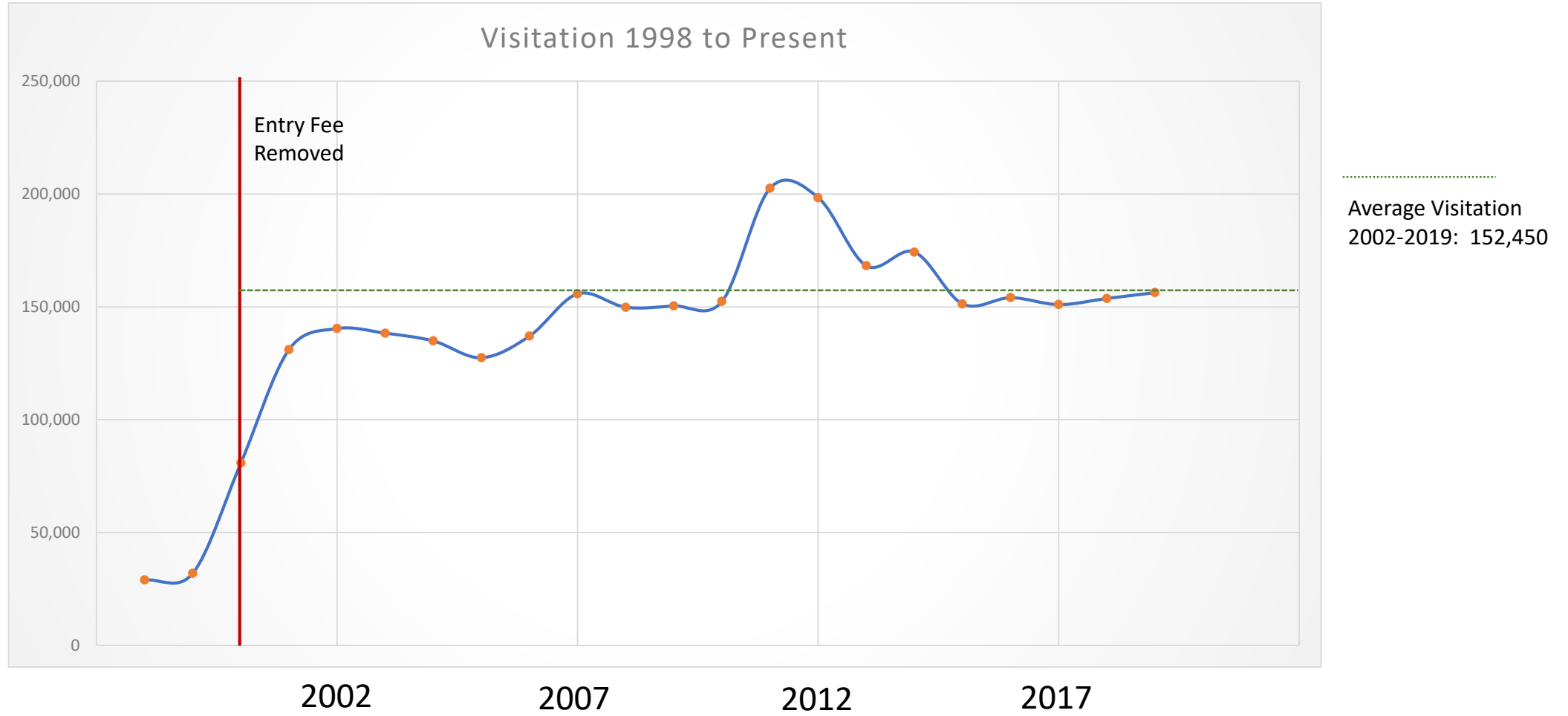
- PAMC 22.04.150(k) caps visitors at 1,000 at any time:
 - In 1965, the cap was 2,000
 - In 1976, it was changed to 1,600
 - In the late 90s, it changed to 1,000
 - The 1,000-person cap roughly corresponds to parking capacity
 - Cap has not been reached in past 20 years

VISITATION TRENDS

- In past 20 years, visitation steady at ~152,000 persons visiting each year
- Approximately 292,000 visitors in 1969
- Peaked at ~372,000 visitors in the early 1970s
- Declined in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s
- Entry fee was charged in the 1980s and 1990s to help recover costs of Boronda Lake dam repairs
- Fee removed in 2001
- Visitation bottomed out in 1998 at ~29,000 visitors



VISITATION TRENDLINE



VISITATION DATA

- Busiest days are holidays:
 - New Year's, Mother's and Father's Day
 - Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, 4th of July
- Busiest months are late spring and early summer (May to July)
- Least busy months are late fall through winter (November to February)
- 5-year average of ~3,100 non-resident vehicles turned away (2015-19)
- Increase in visitation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic
 - Approximately 137% increase on weekends compared to 2019
 - Approximately 8% decrease on weekdays compared to 2019



<u>Weekends</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2011</u>
<u>Memorial Day Weekend</u>	1,249	729	1,017	1,447
<u>2nd Weekend after Memorial Day</u>	1,960	931	763	1,261
<u>3rd Weekend</u>	2,309	1,398	1,224	1,041
<u>4th Weekend</u>	2,472	700	1,081	907
<u>5th Weekend</u>	1,671	622	561	1,041
<u>6th Weekend</u>	2,118	1,025	937	907
<u>7th Weekend</u>	2,753	739	1,121	811
<u>8th Weekend</u>	1,911	787	1,178	940

August 3, 2020

<u>Weekdays</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2011</u>
<u>June</u>	10,203	11,040	7,360	24,459
<u>July</u>	10,789	11,731	7,593	18,413

August 3, 2020

PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION PROCESS AND OUTREACH

- **Fall, 2018:** Parks & Rec Commission's Foothills Park ad hoc committee
- **2019:** PRC public meetings on
 - July 23, 2019 Foothills Park Access Discussion
 - Sept. 24, 2019 Pilot Program Discussion
 - Nov. 12, 2019 Foothills Park Access Pilot Program Recommendation

PRC PILOT PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION

November 2019, PRC vote 6-1 to recommend pilot program to City Council

- One-year pilot to test concepts of:
 - (1) a limited and adjustable number of Park vehicle passes for non-residents via online reservation system
 - (2) broader availability for student fieldtrips
- Max cap of 50 passes per day (adjusted based on historic data)
- \$6 fee for non-resident passes

PILOT PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION

- School Field Trip Program with reservation process
- No change in current 1000 person per day ordinance
- Prioritize resident access – no changes to current access policy
- At end of pilot, staff, PRC review Park visitation and impact data and recommend how to move forward

FACTORS SUPPORTING PILOT PROGRAM

- Effectively mitigates concern about overcrowding/overuse
- Incorporates focus for students and volunteers
- Allows adaptation based on data collection during pilot
- Fees expected to generate modest revenue

THE WORLD LOOKS MUCH DIFFERENT THAN IT DID A FEW MONTHS AGO

- COVID-19 limitations and changes in recreational patterns
- Unprecedented financial crisis
- City Council unanimously supports Black Lives Matter proclamation (Jun. 8)
- Civic and faith leaders calling for repeal of “residents-only” ordinance
- Human Relations Commission unanimously passed recommendation to repeal “residents-only” ordinance (Jun. 11)

FOOTHILLS PARK ACCESS PANEL DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

- Panel experts provided deeper understanding of complex issues
- Increased visitation impacts wildlife, habitat, trails & visitor experience
- Impacts manageable with consistent monitoring, mitigation, adjustment
- Staff & park management affected by pilot program & visitation increase
- Access benefits physical & emotional well-being and natural environment
- Stewardship focus – preserve special community resource today & tomorrow

PANELISTS

- **Professor Nicole Ardoin** – Director, Emmett Interdisciplinary Program in Environment & Resources, Stanford University EEES
- **Lester Hendrie** – Former Foothills Park Supervising Ranger
- **Taylor Peterson** – Director of Biological Analysis, MIG
- **Roger Smith** – Co-Founder & Director, Friends of Palo Alto Parks
- **Alex Von Feldt** – Executive Director, Grassroots Ecology

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PANEL DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

- Goals
 - Deeper understanding & appreciation of varied perspectives & complexities
 - New expert information on potential impacts and park management issues
- Format
 - Congenial panel conversation, facts & expert opinion, moderated by Chair
 - Questions selected in by Chair, Vice-Chair, and CSD Staff
 - Opportunity for each panelist to respond to all questions
- Questions & Comments from Commissioners, Liaison, & City Manager
- Staff Presentation (Daren Anderson)
- Public comments (7), emails to Commission (14)



IMPACTS OF INCREASED VISITATION

- Wildlife
- Vegetation / Habitat
- Trails
- Visitor Experience
- Varies by amount of human use & type of activity
- Different for high-use vs. more remote, natural areas



IMPACT MONITORING, MITIGATION, COMMITMENT

- Baseline data for vegetation, wildlife, and trails
- Multi-year monitoring & analysis of impacts
- Adaptive management to quickly address issues
- Implement changes carefully for proper assessment
- Install physical mitigations
- Commit to mitigation plan funding – “do it right”

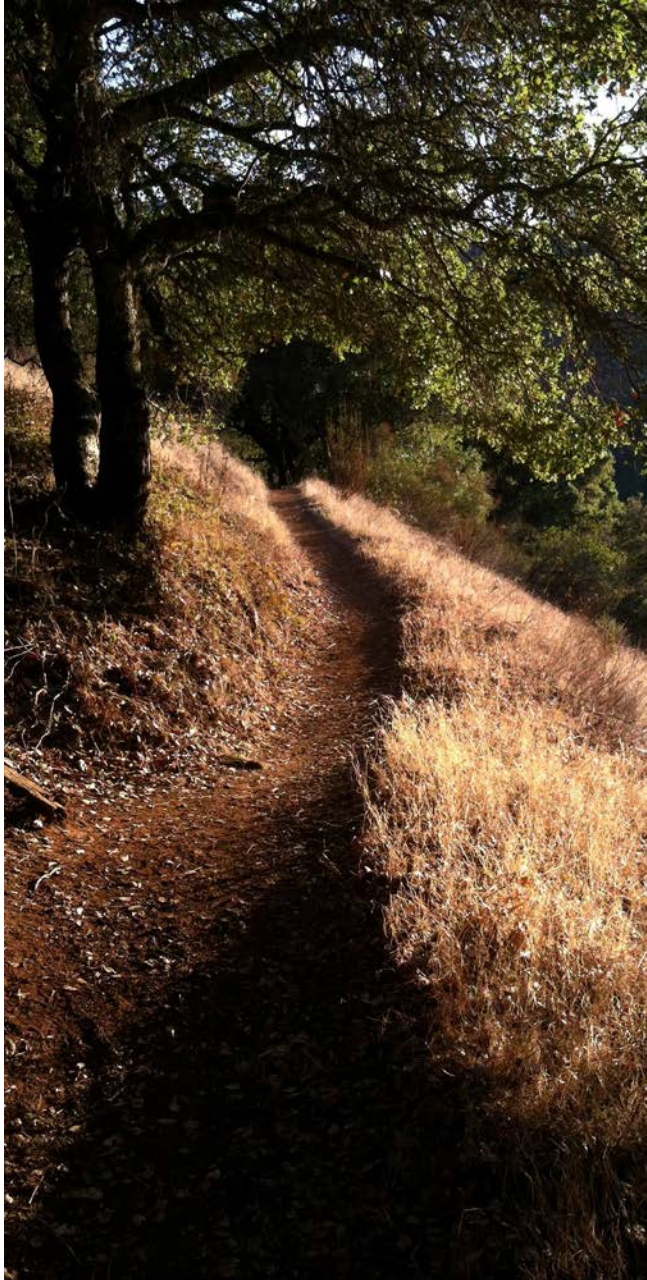


PARK MANAGEMENT CONCERNS / FEEDBACK

- Critical importance of staff well-being repeatedly emphasized
- Palo Alto Open Space staff is very limited – 6 Rangers
- Pilot program or managing increased visitation will impact basic daily duties
- Primary infrastructure issues – Restrooms & Parking
- Budget and timing (Covid-19) concerns
- New online reservation system is an intriguing idea
- “Drive through” required for count of cars / visitors in park
- Early peak park visitation numbers likely not accurate, inflated

BENEFITS OF OPENING

- Increase ease of access to “nature rich” experiences
- Support well-documented health & developmental benefits for youth and adults
- Engender a stronger sense of belonging and support for nature
- Encourage outside partnership in environmental projects
- Reduce impact on neighboring open space preserves
- Be a good neighbor



STEWARDSHIP FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

- Foothills Park is a special place and we can keep it special
- Preserve by carefully considering changes & investment
- Nurture outdoor experiences to develop enduring connections to community & environment
- Positive public engagement to foster ownership and commitment to sustainable behavior
- Instead of “leave no trace”, “*make it better than you found it!*”

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

City Council discuss the Parks and Recreation Commission's proposed pilot plan to increase access to Foothills Park for nonresidents and either:

A. Direct staff to return with an Ordinance to amend the Municipal Code to allow non-residents to access Foothills Park under a pilot plan and a Resolution to define the pilot plan itself

or

B. Provide feedback and direct staff to explore and evaluate alternative scenarios to open Foothills Park to non-residents



Foothills Park Presentation