

## 11.0 RECREATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS

This chapter provides analysis of recreation and public access effects of the project. This chapter includes regional and project settings to provide a context for analyzing the effects of the project. Sources of information used in this chapter include applicable documents from the City of Novato and the Marin County General Plans.

### 11.1 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

In the past, land uses at the project site have included open space, wildlife conservation, and recreation. Future uses will consist primarily of open space and wildlife conservation. Public access for recreational use of the site will be allowed, but is not a planned major use of the site. The project site is, by design, removed from development for housing, commercial or industrial uses although it is adjacent to a housing development. Public access to the site would be allowed for the following recreational uses: fishing (including subsistence fishing but excluding commercial fishing), walking, hiking, bird watching, jogging and guided nature tours. The project site adjoins or is near to bicycle and foot trails, shallow waterway used for recreational and public access, and open space refuge.

Within the immediate project vicinity are the Bahia Parks and the Bahia Homeowner Association (HOA) Community Center. The Bahia Parks include six mini-parks with playgrounds and small lawn areas, located along Topaz Drive and Santana Road. These parks, which allow public access to the shoreline of the West Bahia Lagoon, are operated and maintained by the City of Novato. Two of the mini-parks have small docks with no vehicle access or dedicated parking. These docks were originally intended to allow visiting boats from outside the Bahia area to temporarily dock and allow boating access for residents within the Bahia community without their own private docks. In addition to the public docks, some Bahia residents along the lagoon have private boat ramps and/or docks, and the Bahia HOA installed a boat ramp on the north side of the lagoon for private use. Since the lagoon and HOA channel have silted in, private and public boat access is no longer available. The Community Center has a swimming pool which is located outside a community recreation/meeting building. These facilities are open to HOA members only. The pool is fenced and supervised during the hours of use by HOA employees and volunteers.

Marshland access can create impacts for sensitive plants, birds, and other wildlife. The Marin Audubon Society (MAS) controls access to the project site and allows informal walking and leashed dogs. Marshland access can create impacts for sensitive plants, birds, and other wildlife. There are currently only casual hiking trails within the project site or immediate vicinity of the Bahia community. A designated trail runs along the south shore of Central and West Bahia on MCOSD land, moving in and out of the blue oak woodlands that line that shore. Casual trails also run along the edge of the Western and Central peninsulas in East Bahia. Additional casual foot paths branch out along all three East Bahia peninsulas. These trails and paths have been used primarily by Bahia residents for walking/jogging, dog walking, and wildlife viewing.

In the greater project region, the City of Novato identifies 30 parks and 17 additional recreational facilities within its jurisdiction (<http://www.cityofnovato.org/parks/parks.cfm>). The Bahia Parks are the only parks north of Atherton Avenue and East of Highway 101. Stafford Lake County Park is the only facility that has water access and it is to a fresh water lake that is over 10 miles from the Bay. Other parks and facilities listed on the City of Novato website are not discussed further in this EIR as they are different types of resources than the project site. These facilities have little bearing on the project site and, likewise, current and future recreational use of the project site has little bearing on these facilities.

Of greater import for the analysis of project recreational impacts are other existing wildlife refuges, open space areas, and nature trails in the project region. DFG maintains and administers the Petaluma Wildlife Area in the region. The nearby subunits of this wildlife area are:

- The Green Point Unit, adjacent to the project site
- Day Island Unit, 2 miles southeast
- Rush Creek Unit, 3 mile west
- Burdell Unit, near Gness Field and north of Black John Slough
- Novato Creek Unit, 4 miles southwest

These units include open bay/tidal marsh, mud flats, and seasonal and managed wetland habitats and offer environmental education, fishing, limited seasonal hunting, interpretation, photography, and wildlife observation. The units are open during daylight hours. The three open spaces in the region are:

- Rush Creek open space preserve, 2 miles west of the project
- Deer Island open space preserve, 3 miles southwest
- Mt. Burdell open space preserve, 4 miles west

The open spaces were purchased and are maintained by MCOSD and the Marin Community Foundation. These habitats are managed to protect and enhance their natural, undeveloped character while accommodating educational activities and trail-oriented uses such as hiking, horseback riding and mountain bicycling.

The northern portion of the San Francisco Bay Trail is proposed to travel along State Route 37 (SR 37), which is about 1.5 miles due south of the project site.

## *11.2 CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS*

The impacts of the project on recreation and public access were analyzed qualitatively. Criteria based on the State CEQA Guidelines and professional judgment were used to determine the significance of impacts. The proposed project would have a significant impact on recreation and public access if it would:

- Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated

- Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment
- Create a public nuisance or safety hazard.

### **11.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

The Bahia Marsh Restoration Project is part of the San Francisco Bay Goals Project and part of an overall effort to preserve and restore the Bay wetlands, for wildlife conservation and human recreation. All four alternatives considered in this EIR would be consistent with policies and plans pertaining to recreational use of the project area.

During project construction (Proposed Project and Alternatives 1 and 2), access to the project site will be restricted for a period of two to six weeks. In addition, construction truck traffic through the Bahia community would create a temporary safety hazard for users of neighborhood parks.

Public access to the project site for recreational use would not permanently change under any of the alternatives. Improvements to wildlife abundance and diversity, as well as a reduction in pond odors and mosquito habitat, anticipated under the three restoration alternatives (Proposed Project), would make recreational use of the site more attractive. However, the project site does currently and would in the future primarily serve recreational needs of the local Bahia community. None of the proposed alternatives would promote an increase in the use of recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of a recreational facility would occur or be accelerated.

#### **11.3.1 Construction Phase Recreation and Public Access Impacts**

##### **11.3.1.1 Proposed Project**

As noted above, construction of the Proposed Project would temporarily impact public access to the project site for recreational use. Casual trails, used primarily by residents of the Bahia community, would be temporarily unavailable. The duration of this impact would be two to six weeks. These trails would cease to exist upon project completion.

Initial construction mobilization may temporarily impede access to the HOA Community Center and the pocket parks of the neighborhood. However, construction staging would be located at the project site and, following the initial mobilization period (1 to 2 days), the project should not impact access to these recreational facilities. Since this impact is very minor, it is not evaluated further here.

Increased truck traffic along Topaz Drive during project construction could also create a short-term safety hazard for children and other users of neighborhood parks located on Topaz Drive. This impact is also dealt with under Traffic Impact-2 (see Chapter 6).

**Recreation Impact-1: Truck Traffic along Topaz Drive will create a safety hazard for the users of Topaz and Santana Parks.** The increased truck traffic during construction along Topaz Drive will create a pedestrian safety hazard along the street boundaries of Topaz and Santana Parks.

Significance: Significant

**Mitigation for Recreation Impact-1: Post construction barriers (two level tapes) along the street boundary of the parks during the time of construction and pre-construction notification of the neighborhood.**

Post-mitigation Significance: Less than significant (this mitigation would be sufficient to avoid provide a safe environment for the two parks along Topaz Drive).

### **11.3.1.2 No Project Alternative**

The No Project Alternative does not involve construction and therefore would not cause any construction-phase recreation or public access impacts.

### **11.3.1.3 Alternative 1 (Reduced Fill Removal from East Bahia)**

Impacts and mitigation for Alternative 1 would nearly the same as those for the Proposed Project. Since this alternative reduces the number of trucks hauling fill material through the Bahia community, the safety hazard to users of neighborhood parks would be somewhat reduced.

### **11.3.1.4 Alternative 2 (No Fill Removal from East Bahia)**

This alternative does not involve the trucking of materials through streets close to existing pocket parks or playgrounds. Therefore, Alternative 2 would not cause any recreation or public access impacts.

## **11.3.2 Post Construction Phase Recreation and Access Impacts**

All construction truck traffic will cease at the end of the construction phase. There may be limited vehicular activity in the project area associated with maintenance and monitoring of the project, as well as with limited recreational use and levee maintenance.

Following construction, there would be no change to the existing provisions for public access and recreational use of the project site. MAS and the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) do not propose to formalize or improve any of the existing informal trails on the site and most existing trails will become inaccessible following tidal restoration on the East Bahia peninsulas. However, since access to those trails is not currently protected, this is not considered a project impact. The restoration alternatives (Proposed Project and Alternatives 1 and 2) would all improve existing problems with odors and mosquito habitat at the project site, making the site more attractive for recreational use. Improvements to the productivity and diversity of habitat and wildlife,

including improved habitat for special-status species, would improve recreational wildlife viewing opportunities at the site. The site is expected to primarily serve the recreational needs of the local Bahia community and is not expected to attract many outside visitors.

Under the No Project Alternative, public access and allowed recreational use of the project site would remain unchanged. However, ongoing or worsening problems with odors and mosquitoes could make the site less attractive for recreational use by Bahia residents