

Editorial: A good fix for McGrath Beach campground

Posted: Nov. 26, 2015

We're still quite a ways from being able to book a weekend at McGrath State Beach campground, the hidden gem for locals looking for a great escape to the shore.

But we're a lot closer to making that experience available again, and also re-establishing a key coastal estuary thanks to the partnership of the California State Parks and the Wishtoyo Foundation. The state agency and the nonprofit group recently released a plan to accomplish that after a year's work.

The proposal calls for moving the campground down the beach from its current location and then restoring 42 acres at the present site as part of the Santa Clara River estuary.

The wetland habitat is expected to help revive steelhead trout, tidewater goby, California least tern and western snowy plover, among dozens of species that would call the estuary home.

This is a project that, if the additional funding is found to get it to completion, will be one of the rare instances where all sides may come out happy.

The National Marine Fisheries Service had identified the Santa Clara River as one of its highest priority sites for recovery of the steelhead. Campers and recreational users had chafed for years at the closure of McGrath due to flooding.

If this project comes to pass, what was flooded will become a marvelous wetlands that will provide home to coastal wildlife. And recreational users will find a high and dry beach campground, with expanded opportunities, that will be the location for many years of family memories.

The proposal is the result of a one-year project funded by more than \$947,000 from several sources that brought together advocates of all sides, combined with quality engineering and environmental consultants, plus several independent academic advisers, with the singular goal of fixing this broken piece of the coast.

And they did it. Thanks to Jason Weiner, who managed the project for Wishtoyo, as well as Rich Rozzell, state parks superintendent for this region, and the dozens of other individuals who worked under the direction of cbec eco engineering to pull this off.

This is not a done deal. There is a need for more design work as well as an environmental review. A number of additional agencies that have not yet been included need to sign off, and some need to issue permits. And there needs to be a source of money to pay for it all.

But this is a solution that makes sense. We anticipate there will be significant public support for the plan partly because it provides for expanded opportunities for camping at the new location, including room for recreational vehicles, tents and cabins, as well as promising recreational opportunities including hiking and biking sites.

We support the plan and we urge all those agencies, organizations and individuals that will be involved in the process to do the same.

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