July 31, 2019

**Background and Setting**

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commissions (SFPUC) owns approximately 23,000 acres of land on the Peninsula. The watershed supports three drinking water reservoirs - Pilarcitos, Crystal Springs, and San Andreas. These reservoirs serve approximately 1 million people in northern San Mateo county and San Francisco County. These lands have been protected from development as a water source and therefore harbor a high number of rare and endangered species.

The northwestern border of SFPUC-owned property includes a cell tower that has been leased to San Mateo County since 1963. The area up to our property line is accessible to the public via North Peak Access Road and the Montara Mountain trail operated by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), both of which pass through McNee Ranch State Park to the northwest.

The property in and around the cell tower at Montara Mountain is private property – the property of the SFPUC - and has been marked as No Trespassing. Vandals have been known to remove the signs. Staff replace them when they notice them missing.

The fence that divides SFPUC-owned watershed and the GGNRA areas had been in general disrepair for years. SFPUC watershed staff continually repaired the fence, but had been remiss in not keeping the fence, or a broken gate across the road in good working order. Thus, many hikers trespassed onto the property around the cell towers for the view.

In 2018, the SFPUC began environmental review for a project at the site to enhance watershed communications and install the proposed Montara Mountain Rainfall Prediction and Radio Replacement Project in the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed.

**Sensitive Habitat**

During environmental surveys performed as part of this project in 2018, staffers noted the presence of habitat for two rare and endangered butterflies. More importantly, some of the butterflies were observed near this location, and its host plants were being trampled by trespassers.

Because of this discovery, the SFPUC swiveled resources to this area to protect this habitat as part of its environmental stewardship policies. Watershed Managers began vegetation removal along the fence line to make space for an upgraded fence. The fence along this area has been gradually replaced. The final element was to reinstall the gate, which was put in place in late June / early July. The gate and fence upgrade were constructed independently of the proposed project. Regardless of the outcome of the proposed project, the fence and gate would remain in place to protect SFPUC watershed property and the sensitive habitat for these extremely rare and endangered butterflies.

**Next Steps**

The environmental review for the radar and radio project is nearly complete, with project approval slated for August. This project will take extreme pains to avoid the sensitive butterfly habitat.

Regarding recreational opportunities in the watershed, there are more than 31 miles of public trails in the Peninsula Watershed. SFPUC has plans to release the draft EIR for the extension of the Fifield Cahill Ridge Trail in the fall of 2019.

There are other future trail connections and projects that are being planned over the long term for areas that provide recreational opportunities in appropriate areas that do not compromise sensitive habitats.

**For More Information**

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