

Why has Sonoma County Regional Parks placed a measure on the ballot?

Sonoma County Regional Parks has built one of the most diverse park systems in California. Fifty-six parks, trails and beaches attract 5 million annual visits to the Sonoma Coast, Russian River, Sonoma Valley and the county's other unique landscapes. Park attendance has increased 38 percent since 2010 and parkland has increased by 6,000 acres (+ 96%).

But funding has not kept pace with this growth. The ballot measure would provide additional funding for Regional Parks and local city parks to address significant unmet needs and preserve the diversity and integrity of the system for future generations to enjoy.

What are the needs?

The funding needs of Sonoma County's parks are substantial. They include increasing costs to operate and maintain parks, protect natural resources, reduce wildfire risk, and open new parks to the public. Regional and city parks also struggle to meet growing demand for recreation, health, safety and education programs, including for our aging population. All of these needs affect our parks systems' abilities to deliver quality services to Sonoma County residents.

What is the ballot measure?

Voters in Sonoma County will be asked in the Nov. 6, 2018 general election to consider a one-eighth cent sales tax (0.125%) to support the Sonoma County Regional Parks and city parks system for 10 years. The tax would apply to all areas within Sonoma County and would generate an estimated \$11.5 million annually for improving and maintaining parks.

How much would the tax cost?

At 0.125%, the tax would add 3¢ to the cost of a \$25 pair of shoes and 12¢ to the cost of a \$100 restaurant meal.

How would the ballot measure help the Sonoma County Regional Parks?

If adopted by voters, two-thirds of the funds collected would be spent on Sonoma County Regional Parks, enabling Regional Parks to:

- Maintain Parks, Trails & Open Spaces
- Help Protect Water Quality
- Reduce Risk of Future Wildfires
- Protect Wildlife Habitats & Fisheries
- Improve Access for the Underserved
- Support Local Neighborhood Parks & Recreation

How would the measure benefit city parks?

If adopted by voters, one-third of all the money would be shared by Sonoma County's cities to maintain and improve city parks.

Individual cities would determine how best to prioritize their funding projects. Each city has a diversity of needs, as Regional Parks has learned through countywide outreach it began in 2015.

How would this make our parks safer?

Funds would be used to maintain parks and trails, restore parks impacted by fires, reduce fuels, address invasive plants, improve signs and maps for visitors, modernize facilities, including restrooms, and maintain sports fields and recreation areas – all of which help make our parks safer.

How can we be sure the tax revenue would be spent on parks?

A citizens oversight committee would be appointed to regularly review how the tax revenue is spent and to ensure public transparency throughout the 10-year life of the measure. The measure would also require that the revenue not be used to reduce existing funding for parks and recreation.



Would the sales tax apply to all areas of Sonoma County?

Yes, all jurisdictions within Sonoma County, including every city and unincorporated area, would see tax collected. The funds collected would be split among the Sonoma County Regional Parks system and the city parks. Two-thirds of the funds would go to the Regional Parks and one-third would go to city and neighborhood parks.

How would the funds be spent from the tax revenue?

The measure's expenditure plan designates revenue for specific needs within four categories. Each category would receive a percentage of the proposed sales tax revenues:

- Support for Local Neighborhood Parks, Recreation Needs and Fire Risk Reduction – 33.3%, estimated at \$38,300,000
- Protect Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat and Natural Resources in Sonoma County Regional Parks, Trails and Open Space Preserves – 18.3%, est. \$21,110,000
- Investing in Maintenance, Safety and Recreation Services in Sonoma County Regional Parks, Trails and Open Space Preserves – 25%, est. \$28,750,000
- Improve Access to Sonoma County Regional Parks, Trails and Open Space Preserves – 23.4%, est. \$26,840,000

Would the parks ballot measure increase or affect the County's pension liability?

No, the pension liability for current employees and retirees is unrelated to this measure, and is based on preexisting assumptions about returns on investments and future health care costs. Passing such a measure would not affect the current pension liability. Any new employee hired due to this measure, or for any other reason, would be hired under the County's current pension plan with more conservative benefits designed to be financially sustainable in the future.

Who would pay the tax?

Anyone who buys a taxable good in Sonoma County would contribute to the tax revenue, regardless of where they live, including tourists and day visitors. Many taxable purchases are discretionary, according to county tax data, with the greatest taxable spending on wine, gas station purchases, and restaurant meals.

Would there be independent oversight of the funds raised?

Yes, the measure's legal language would establish a citizens oversight committee to provide transparency and ensure fiscal accountability. The committee would review the receipt and expenditures of revenue generated by the parks measure and would do so in conjunction with Sonoma County's budget process. The committee would produce annual reports and present them to the Board of Supervisors at public meetings. The committee could make budget recommendations to the Board and City Councils regarding expenditures from the parks measure. All written reports from the committee would be public records.

When did voters last consider a Sonoma County Parks measure?

Voters in Sonoma County's unincorporated areas in 2016 narrowly missed (65.1% voted yes) passing Measure J, which was a one-half cent (0.5%) sales tax in unincorporated areas only. If the proposed measure moves forward, it would go before voters in the cities as well as the unincorporated areas. It would be the first tax measure dedicated to our county's park maintenance and recreation needs, as well as to park water quality and the continuing need to reduce fire risks.

Didn't we just approve a Parks Measure in June 2018?

Proposition 68 is a statewide bond measure approved by California voters in June 2018 for parks and natural resources. Local park departments will each receive a one-time grant from this state bond, based on the population they serve. While these grants are welcomed, the amounts are small compared to the overall needs of Sonoma County's parks. However, if Sonoma County voters approve this funding measure for regional and city parks in November, the county's park agencies will be eligible to compete for an additional \$40 million in Prop. 68 funds. The additional state bond funds are available only to jurisdictions whose voters have approved a local parks funding measure by November 2018.

How can I get more information?

The ballot measure's expenditure plan and ordinance are available on the Regional Parks website, SonomaCountyParks.org, and in Regional Parks' office, 2300 County Center Drive, Suite 120A, Santa Rosa. For questions and comments, contact Regional Parks at (707) 565-2041 or Parks@sonoma-county.org.

Revision date: 7/26/18

Learn More at SonomaCountyParks.org

