

**UNIT 158**

**MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK**

**GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**March 1976**

MINIARY

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

# MENDOCINO HEADLANDS

STATE PARK

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

and

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK  
Resource Management Plan  
and  
General Development Plan  
January 1976

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**Note:** The Park and Recreation Commission approved this Preliminary  
General Plan in MARCH 1976  
A Final General Plan was printed dated JAN 1977.

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# SUMMARY

The purpose of Mendocino Headlands State Park Resource Management Plan and General Development Plan is to provide a document that will guide the responsible growth and management of resources at Mendocino Headlands State Park now and in the future. To achieve this, a thorough inventory of all the cultural and natural resources of the park has been made.

Using this comprehensive knowledge of the park in conjunction with an analysis of the recreation needs of the region, it was possible to decide upon a plan of development that would take full advantage of the resources within the limitations imposed by ecological factors. The plan is flexible and can be adapted to unforeseen future changes.

Presently the park lands encompass 139 acres, but funded acquisitions will increase the area by about 379 acres. In addition, it is proposed that the Department of Parks and Recreation assume the responsibility of managing the Wildlife Conservation Board lands that form a narrow strip along the western and northern sides of the headlands.

The developments planned for implementation in the near future within the present park boundaries are:

- Restoration of the Ford House — This will include its development for use as an Orientation Center and the construction of a 28-car parking facility and comfort station on adjacent land;

- Construction of several limited parking facilities along Heeser Drive;

- Upgrading the existing 15-car parking facility and comfort station on the northeastern corner of the headlands;

- Soil conservation measures, especially on the bluffs and trails to the beach;

- Interpretive signing where appropriate;

- Construction of a youth hostel on parcel recently acquired south of Big River.

Future developments proposed for the lands which are in process of acquisition will include:

- Construction of a 130-car parking facility and comfort station at Big River Beach;

- Construction of several group camps on the plateau south of Big River.

# INTRODUCTION







PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable] COURTESY OF [unreadable]

# MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK

## INTRODUCTION

### General Description

Mendocino Headlands State Park is located on the Mendocino County coast, approximately ten miles south of Fort Bragg. The park and the community of Mendocino occupy a headland between Coast Highway 1 and the ocean. The community forms the inland boundary of the park, whose 139 acres occupy the entire western and southern portions of the headland.

This southern section of park consists of gently sloping fields that end abruptly in fifty-foot bluffs along the shoreline of Mendocino Bay. At the base of the bluffs, a rocky shoreline connects the large Big River Beach at the mouth of Big River with the much smaller Portuguese Beach near the southwestern tip of the headland.

The scenic values of the park area are spectacular. The western face of the headlands is a mass of large, off-shore rocks and islets. This coastal strip (about 3 miles) along the entire western and northern coast of this point of land is presently under the jurisdiction of the Wildlife Conservation Board.

The park has the fog, mist, and rain that are typical of the north coast, as well as its share of sparkling, clear days. The moderate climate is especially attractive to visitors from inland areas during the summer months and the park is enjoyed year-round by fishermen and weekend tourists.

The park has only a few structures, the most notable of which is the Ford House, a residence built in 1855. The Ford House is the only building remaining on the south side of Main Street in the Mendocino community. It is now occupied by a tenant, but will be restored and developed as the chief interpretive facility of the park.

As a unit in the State Park System, Mendocino Headlands State Park's intimate association with the community of Mendocino places it in a position considerably different from that of most coastal parks.

The community of Mendocino was the first of a number of towns that developed along the northern coast in the last half of the nineteenth century. It had its origin in the establishment here of one of the earliest sawmills on the coast in 1851. During the last century it developed into a major settlement of New England lumber and fishing interests.

Today the town of 1,100 inhabitants, many of them artists and retired persons, remains much as it was in earlier days. It is a community that is noted for the many fine examples of Victorian architecture that are still standing.

Mendocino has no heavy industry, although logging occurs on lands nearby. The community has many art and craft shops and other businesses geared to tourism that figure importantly in the local economy. In recent years there has been an influx of young residents and transients to this small, unincorporated village.

There is no community water system; wells are used throughout Mendocino. There is a sewer district and a sewage treatment facility is being built on park land at the southwestern end of the town. Park sanitary facilities will be connected to the sewer system.

Due to its increasing growth as an art colony and tourist center, efforts to preserve the cultural values have been made. The county has passed an ordinance establishing a historical preservation district that controls the architecture and other developments through zoning restrictions so that the scenic, historic, and architectural character of Mendocino will be protected. The district includes the park lands.

### The Establishment of Mendocino Headlands State Park

Chiefly in response to the need to preserve the natural environment around the community, a park acquisition feasibility study was submitted to the state legislature in February, 1970. This study, carried out pursuant to legislative direction, called for a park with objectives that emphasized the retention of open space around Mendocino and at the mouth of Big River.

On March 8, 1974, the Commission of the State Department of Parks and Recreation officially classified the lands that had been acquired as Mendocino Headlands State Park.

A citizens advisory committee (Mendocino Headlands Advisory Committee), appointed by the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation, has been established to provide local recommendations and to support the park planning and development. The committee meets with departmental personnel when the need arises.

### Proposed Acquisitions

In accordance with the original recommendations of the feasibility study made in 1970 to protect the region surrounding the mouth of the Big River and to preserve its environment for public use and enjoyment, additional acquisitions in this area are funded and in process.

These acquisitions comprise a total of approximately 379 acres, in two sections, one on either side of the river. The two sections stretch along the river banks for a distance of about one mile upstream from the mouth.

The land on the northern bank of Big River to be acquired extends from a narrow parcel presently owned by the county and lying immediately east of Highway 1, upriver for approximately 1,250 yards. This land is now owned by Georgia-Pacific Corporation who wish to receive timber lands in exchange. The state is attempting to find lands suitable for such an exchange at this time.

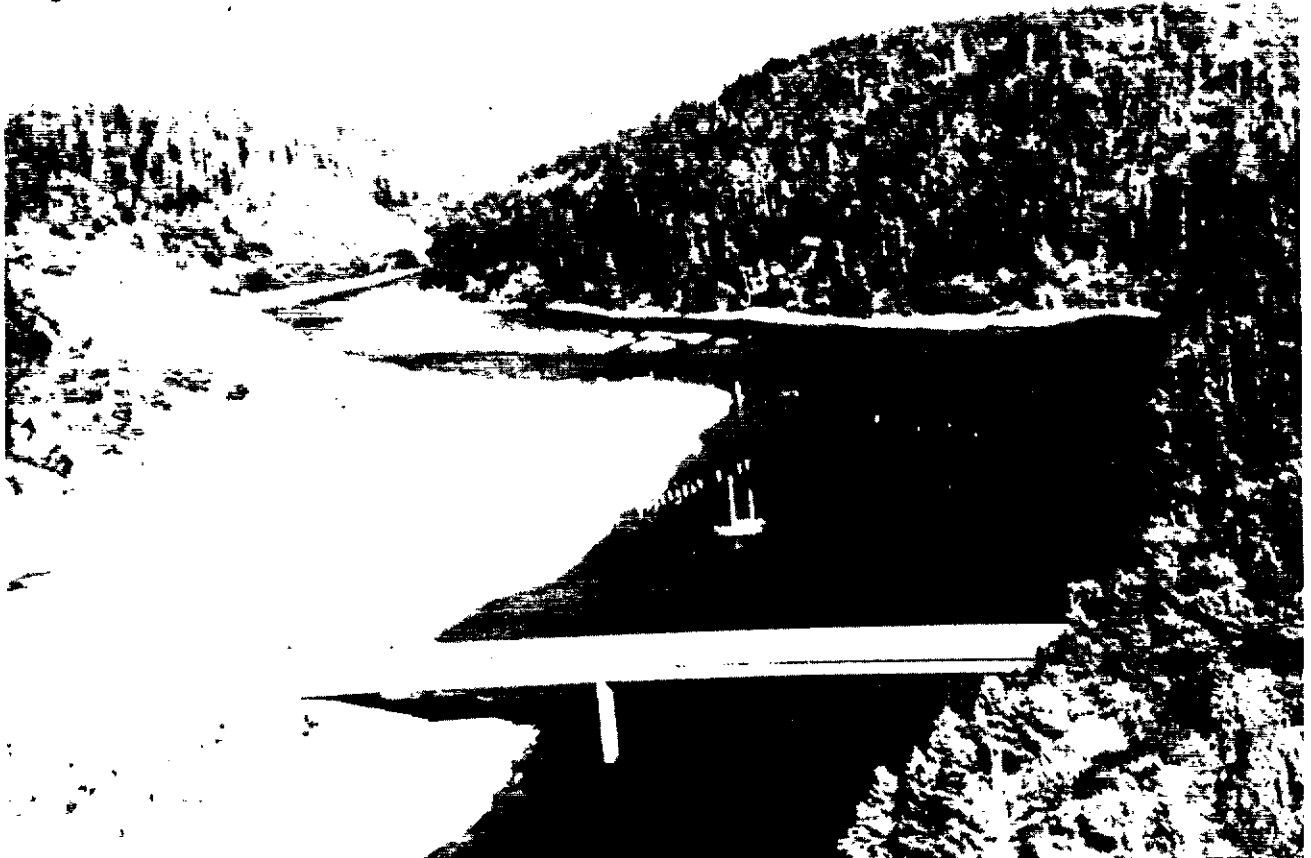
Approximately 300 acres lying along the south bank of Big River and extending inland about one mile are planned for acquisition. In addition a strip of land south of the river's mouth and extending about 650 yards along Mendocino Bay will also be purchased.

### Proposed Transferrals

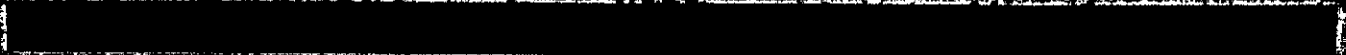
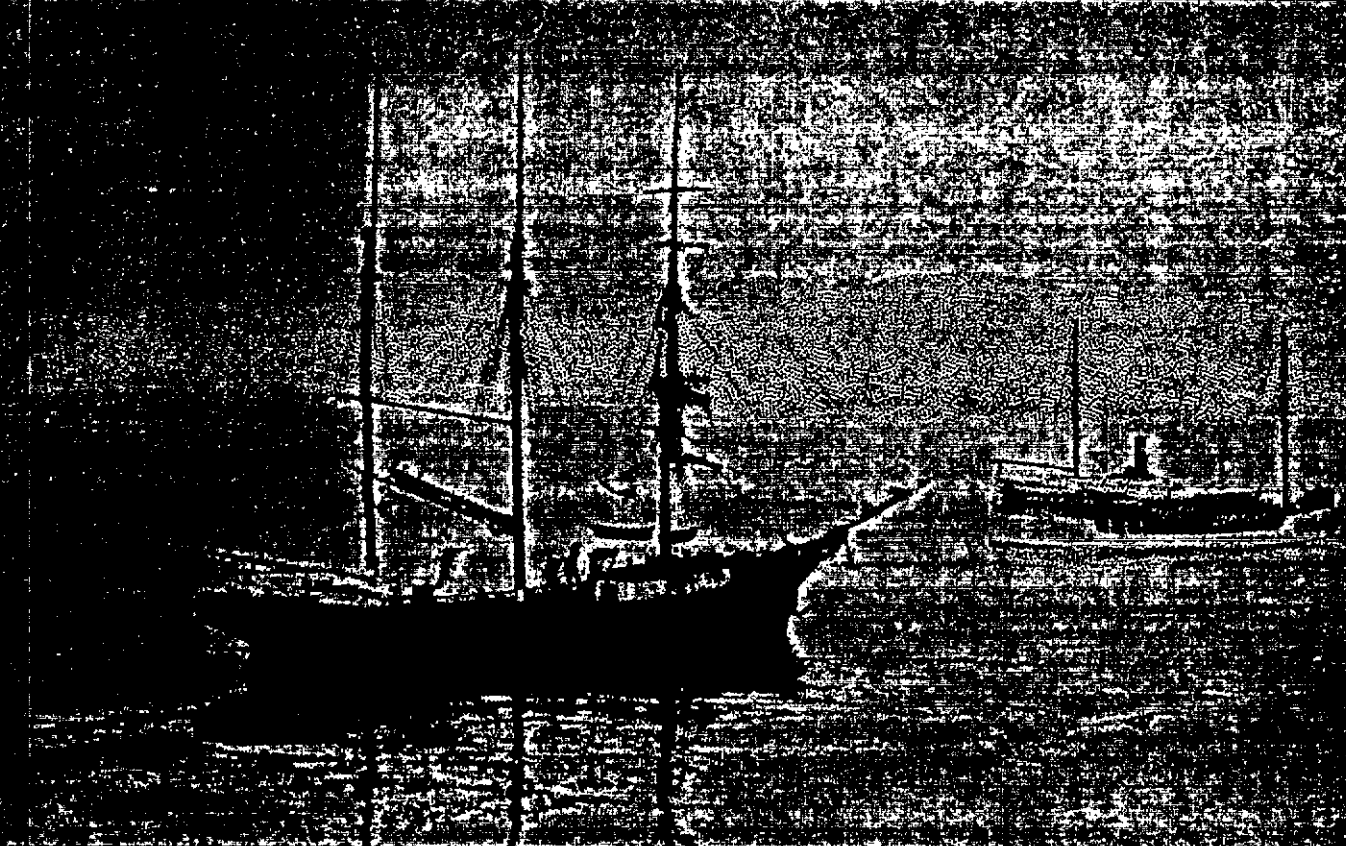
One narrow parcel within the privately owned land on the north bank of the river — a roadway joining the general area to the highway at the north end of the bridge across Big River — belongs to Mendocino County. Transfer of title from county to state on this narrow parcel would be a logical step to consolidate ownership and eliminate jurisdictional confusion. A proposal to this effect has been referred to the County Planning Director for presentation to the County Board of Supervisors.

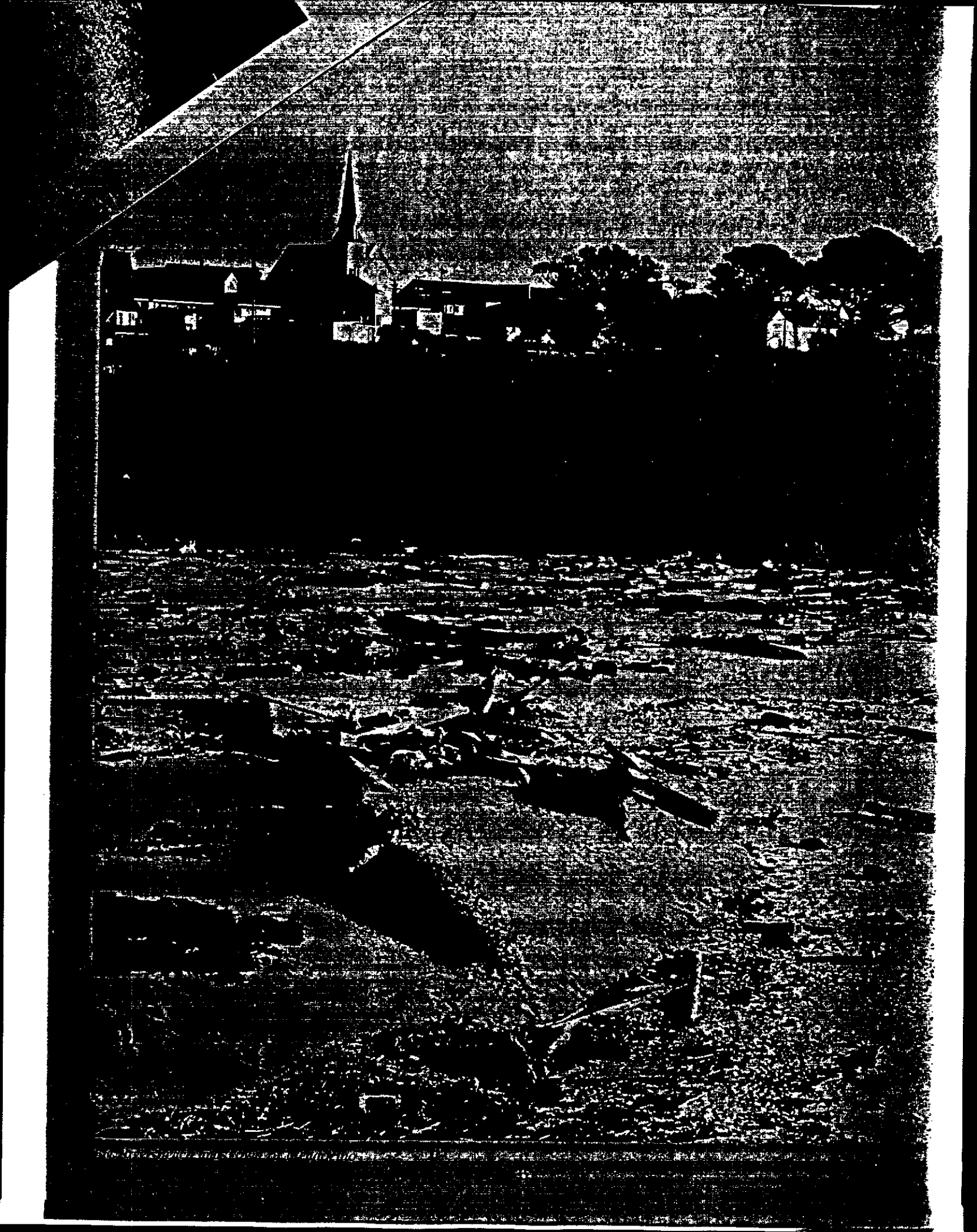
To simplify jurisdiction, it has been suggested that the Wildlife Conservation Board lands occupying the shoreline north and west of Mendocino be transferred to the Department of Parks and Recreation. If approved, such a transfer is planned in September, 1978.

### *Big River Flat and Estuary*



# RESOURCES ANALYSIS





## RESOURCES ANALYSIS

An analysis of the natural and cultural resources compiled in the Resource Inventory provides a sound basis for the framing of a General Development Plan. Each resource is analyzed with respect to its effect — enhancing or restrictive — on potential developments for the use and enjoyment of the area by the public. The purpose is to ensure that any such development, through careful planning, will have the minimal adverse impact on the existing environment.

This Resource Inventory and Analysis has been completed for the presently owned lands at Mendocino Headlands State Park. Prior to the development of these lands proposed for acquisition, an additional Resource Inventory and Analysis will be prepared.

### Natural Resources

#### Geology

The Mendocino Headlands are located on the coastal shelf which is part of a series of elevated, ancient coastal terraces. The area is characterized by rugged, 40-foot high cliffs which rise up to a relatively level terrace bounded by Highway 1 on the east.

Geologic features are unique and for the most part unspoiled. The picturesque coastline is formed by the occurrence of variously strong and weak rock strata which, through the process of differential weathering, have developed caves, arches, blowholes, and sinkholes.

The weaker sandstones are being eroded away at a much greater rate than the stronger shales in this undifferentiated Cretaceous or Upper Jurassic formation.

Older terrace escarpments can be viewed beneath the sea. One very prominent and interesting arch occurs on the southwestern point of the headlands at a depth of about 30 feet.

Overlying the uplifted gray sandstones and graywacke shales are Pleistocene marine terrace deposits that consist of weakly consolidated, fine, even-textured sand deposits. These deposits are stratified and the upper layer, which is about three feet thick, is the parent material of the overlying terrace soils. Recent alluviums make up the beach area at the mouth of Big River.

This area is subject to some degree of seismic hazard as the San Andreas Fault lies off-shore. During the 1906 earthquake, the town of Mendocino suffered considerable damage. Recognition of this potential danger will be taken in planning for any development, and in the restoration of the Ford House.

#### Climate

Mendocino Headlands State Park has a climate typical of the north coast of California. It is classified as Mediterranean maritime, and is characterized by moderate temperatures and rainfall year-round.

The mean seasonal temperatures fall within a rather narrow range — 48° F in winter and 56° F in summer. As in any coastal region, the land temperatures are strongly influenced by the temperature of the ocean waters.

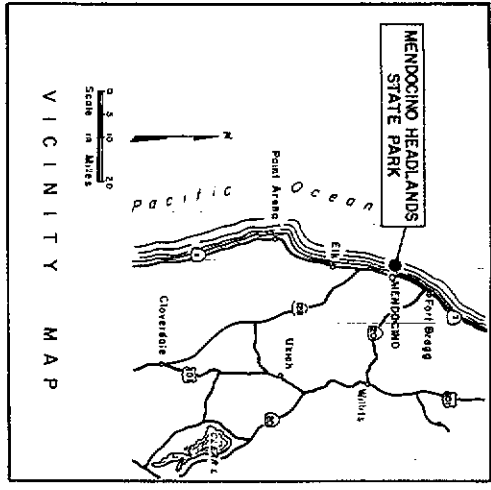
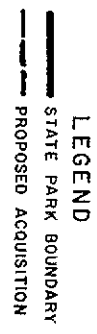
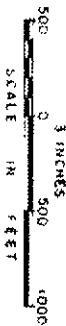
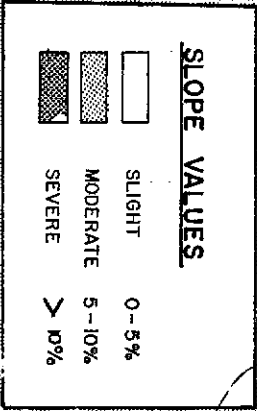
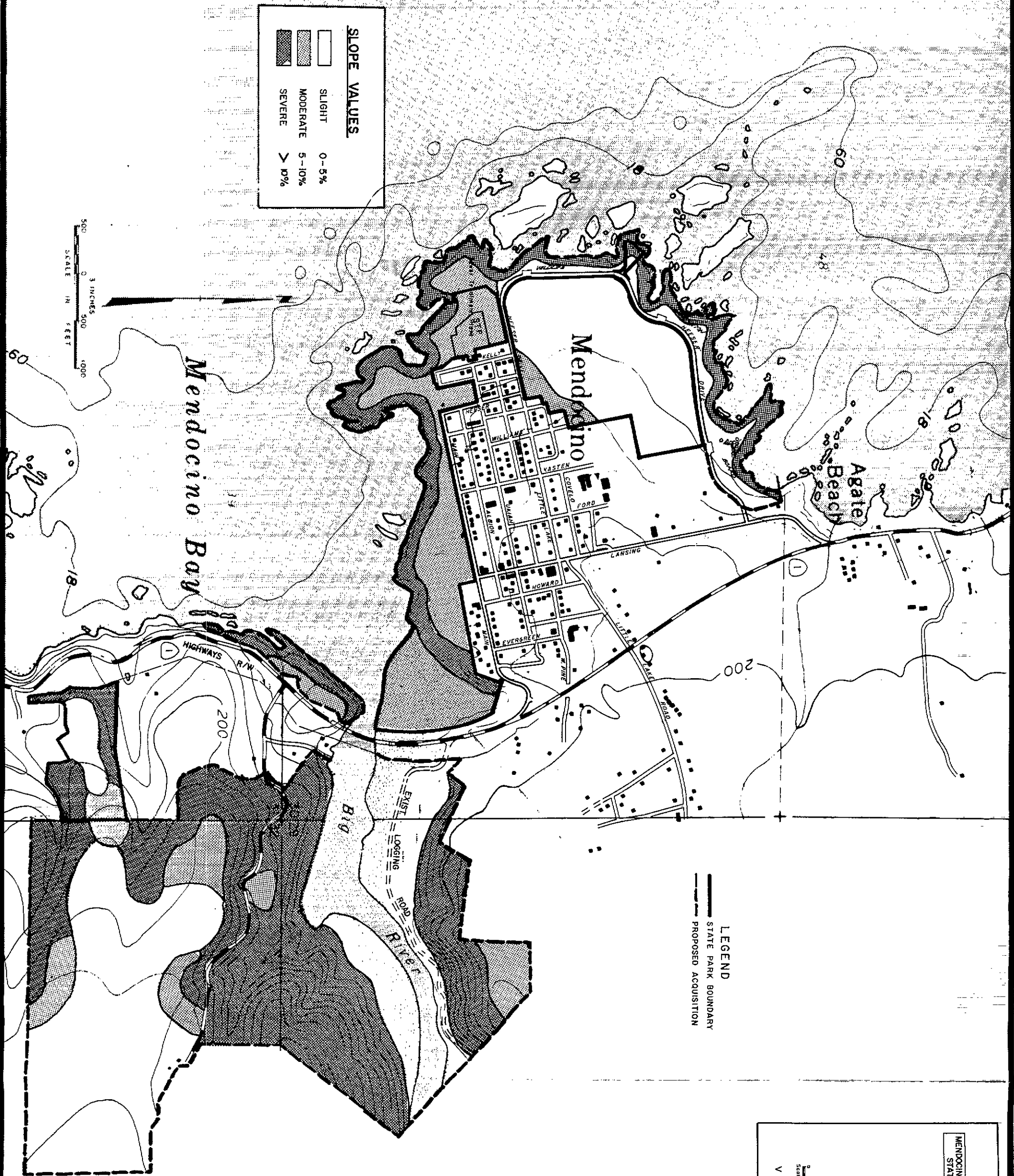
The annual rainfall total ranges from 50 to 80 inches. Most of this precipitation occurs from October through April, with the remainder of the year being relatively free of precipitation, but cool and foggy.

During the summer, winds are generally from the north, but display a diurnal onshore-offshore variation which is common to coastal climates. Fog and low level stratus clouds, associated with a strong low-level temperature inversion, are especially frequent. Wet season winds prevail from the southeast and are associated with the arrival and passage of storm systems.

In analyzing the climatic conditions, it is evident that these elements become a limiting factor to certain recreation activity. The clear days of spring and fall may be considered the most favorable periods. On the other hand, the cool summer weather is appreciated by people who live in hot interior zones.

## Slope

Slope is a major factor in determining land use capability. In order to analyze the slope better, the site has been divided into three categories: (1) 0-5 percent slope (supports intensive use); (2) 5-10 percent slope (supports moderate use); and (3) greater than 10 percent slope (reserved for minimal use, such as hiking trails). Figure 2 presents the slope analysis of the present park and lands proposed for acquisition.



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		DRAWN <i>2/74 Cochran</i>	
SHEET NO. <b>2</b> OF <b>6</b>	MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK RESOURCE ANALYSIS SLOPE VALUES FIGURE 2		DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
	APPROVED _____ DATE _____		CHECKED <i>Humphrey</i>

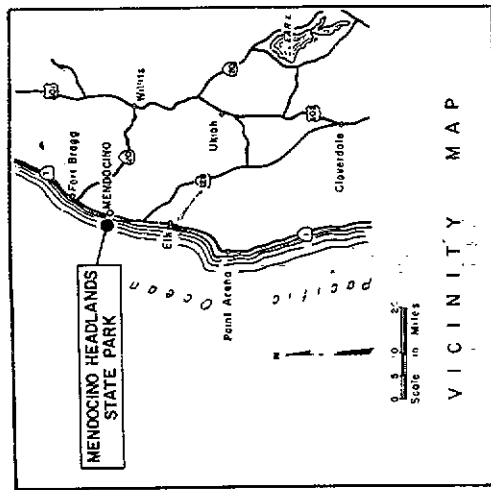


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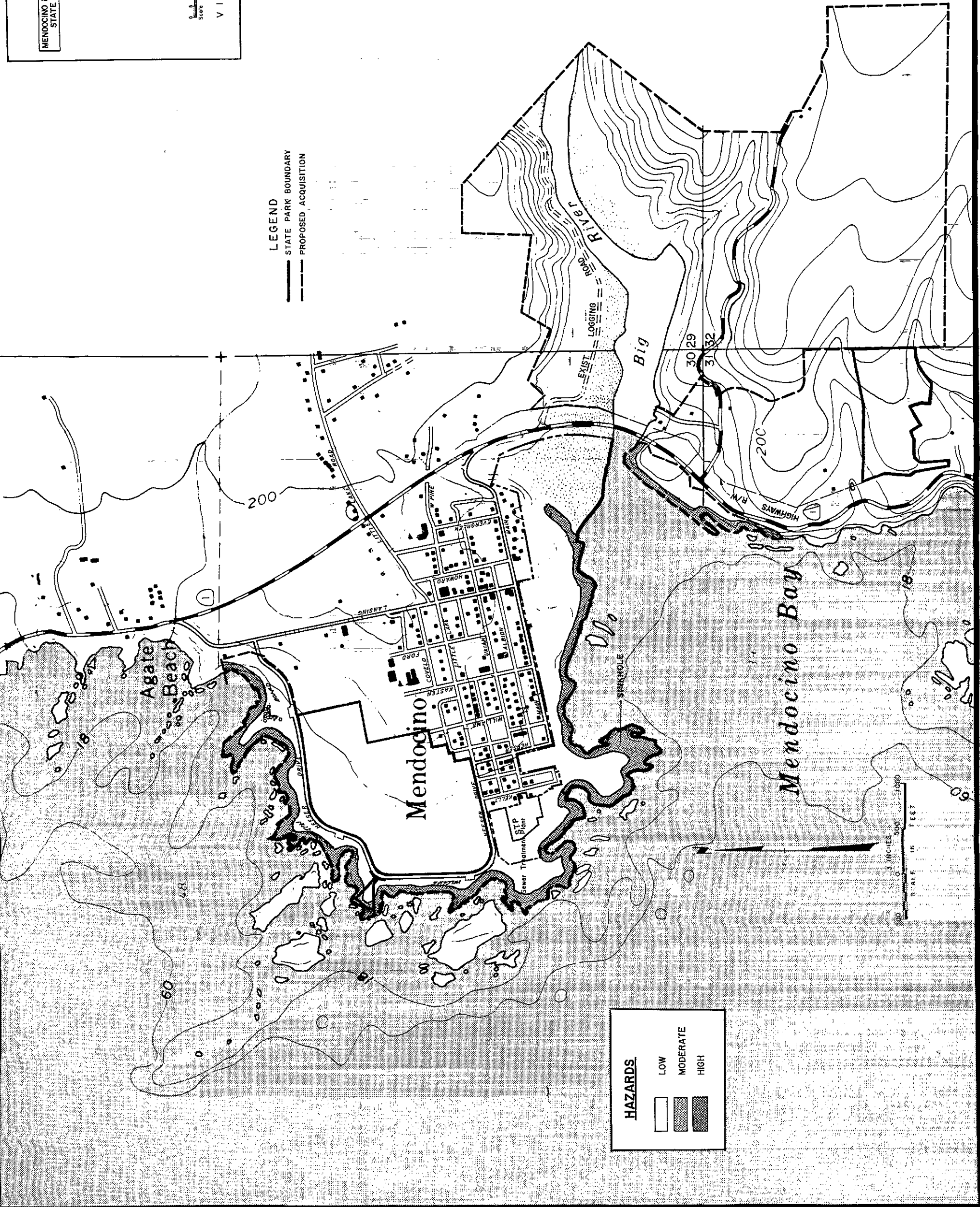
RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
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MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK  
 RESOURCE ANALYSIS  
 HAZARDS  
 FIGURE 3

DRAWING NO. 14104  
 SHEET NO. 6 OF 9



LEGEND  
 STATE PARK BOUNDARY  
 PROPOSED ACQUISITION



## Hazards

The purpose of the hazard map is to indicate the natural and man-made hazards. These hazards present a danger to the user, and careful consideration should be given to hazardous areas in relation to land use intensity and development planning.

Natural hazards include:

*Cliffs* — The heights of the cliffs range from 40 to 80 feet and some of the faces are sheer or undercut. Some tops of cliffs are sloughing. The area along the bluffs will have to be used with caution. Any type of restrictive barrier along the headlands will affect the aesthetic quality of the area.

*Sink Holes* — There is one sink hole located in the southwest portion of the headlands. It has a drop of 40 feet and presents a hazard; caution should be exercised when developing and using this area.

*Seismic* — A seismic hazard does exist and will be carefully considered in planning the restoration of the Ford House.

Man made hazards include:

*Trail Access (Surface Defects)* — There are a number of steep meandering trails along the headlands that lead down to the ocean. Users include scuba divers, skin divers, anglers and other nature seekers. The trails are often slippery from moisture or loose material and in need of improvement.

To provide safer, easier access, these trails should be improved and consideration given to trail closure or warning devices until such time as funds for improvement are available. Most of these are within Wildlife Conservation Board lands.

Figure 3 presents the hazardous areas of the park.

## Soils

The two primary types of soils on the site are Baywood, a coarse, sandy loam (18 to 24 inches deep), and Santa Lucia, a clay loam (6 to 18 inches deep). These soils are high in organic material with grass roots occurring throughout the topsoil.

Soils of this type are subject to compaction. Along the bluffs, where traffic has been extensive and uncontrolled, vehicular and foot trails have been compacted 6 to 8 inches in depth. Continued passive recreation is recommended along the bluffs, since this is a prime area for visitor enjoyment; however, some control of use to reduce compaction will be necessary.

Except where compaction has occurred, soils on the site are quite permeable with high infiltration rates; however, the underlying rock stratum is quite impermeable. This creates a poor leaching situation in which water percolates through permeable soil to the impermeable rock strata and begins lateral movement, entering the sea via seeps that emerge along the ocean cliffs. Pit toilets and any type of leaching system should be avoided. The leaching characteristics would permit effluent to become a serious pollution problem. (See Figure 4.)

## Hydrology

In analyzing the hydrology, one has to consider climate as a contributing factor. Between the months of October and April, the rainfall ranges from 50 to 80 inches, with the remainder of the year relatively free of precipitation, but cool and foggy. With this persistent moisture, it is evident that the soils will be saturated much of the time, which will limit certain recreation activity and make the soils highly vulnerable to compaction.

Surface runoff occurs during the intensive rainy season. Water will soak into the soil until it reaches a point of saturation, allowing the rest of the water to run off over the topsoil. A second source of runoff is irrigation water that eventually leaches to the impermeable rock stratum and emerges through the cliff seeps.

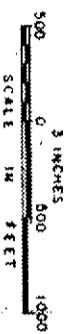
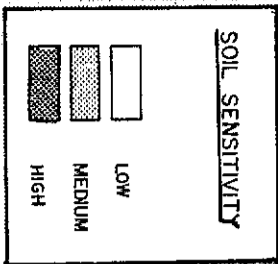
The marshes and mudflats of Big River are a good environment for wetlands-associated wildlife.

Development planning will have to allow for occasional flooding of the gravel bar east of the highway and north of the river.

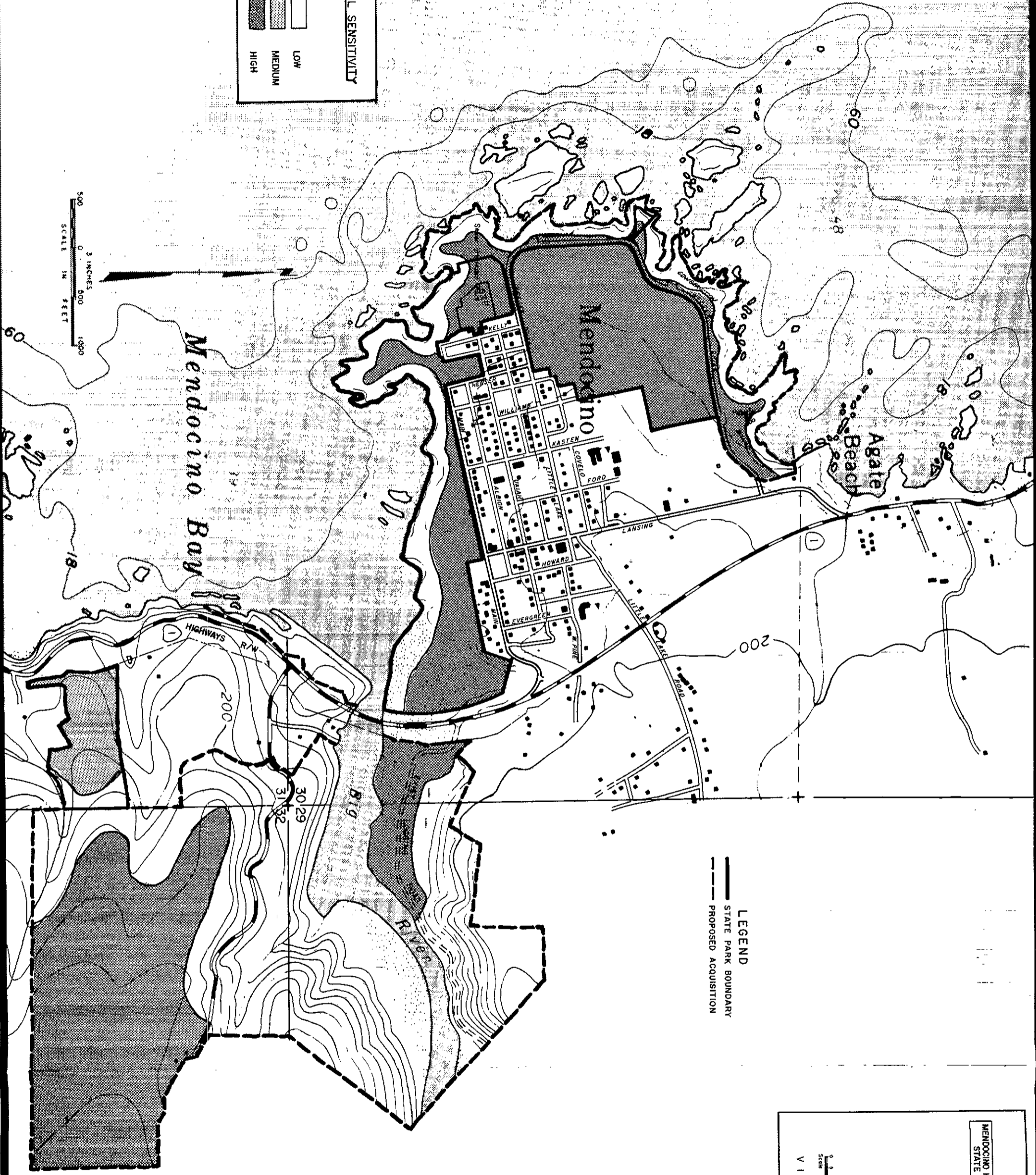
There are two wells on state property. Recent tests taken of the wells show that this water is of good quality and the supply is adequate to serve the park's present needs. Development for funded acquisition calls for group camping and a youth hostel. The hostel area has its own water supply and there is water available at the proposed group camp area.

## *Mendocino Headlands*

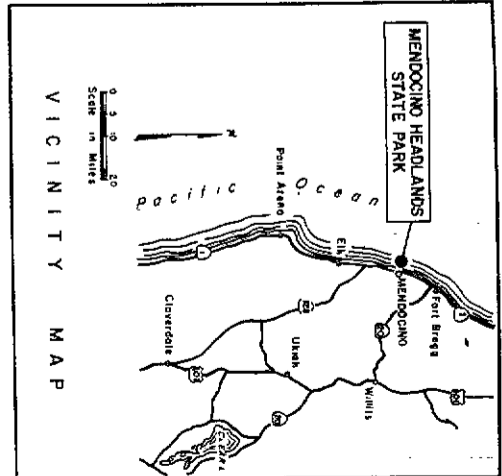




Mendocino Bay



**LEGEND**  
 — STATE PARK BOUNDARY  
 - - - PROPOSED ACQUISITION



**MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK  
 FIGURE 4  
 RESOURCE ANALYSIS  
 SOIL VALUES**

RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
 APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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		DRAWN <i>2/74 Cochran</i>
		CHECKED <i>Humphrey</i>

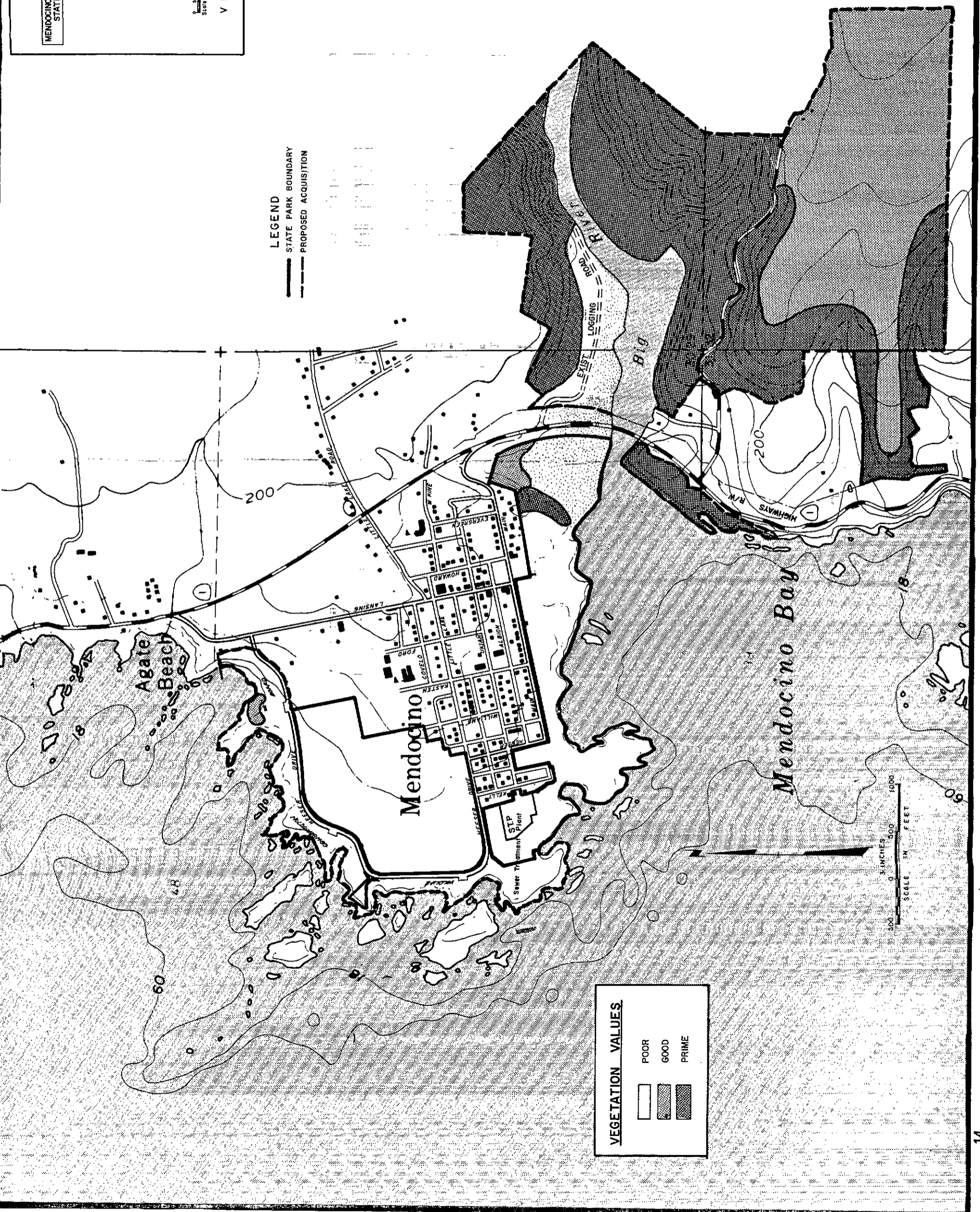
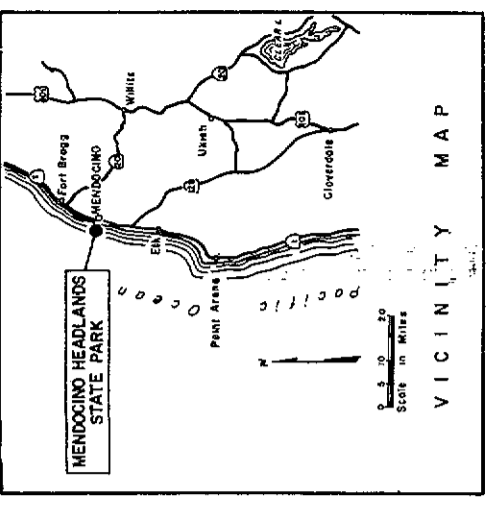
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RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
 APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK  
 RESOURCE ANALYSIS  
 VEGETATION VALUES  
 FIGURE 5

DRAWING NO. 14104  
 SHEET NO. 3 OF 6



## Vegetation

Several distinct plant communities occur at Mendocino Headlands State Park. Communities observed range from 65 feet below sea level to 120 feet above sea level. In ascending order, these are: benthic, littoral, coastal strand, freshwater marsh, coastal cliff, coastal prairie, bishop pine forest, and coastal scrub communities.

The benthic communities observed consist notably of purple sea urchins and red abalone, and various red, green, and brown algae. Kelp is uncommon.

The rocky littoral communities contain sea palms in harsh, exposed areas, while sea lettuce, sea moss, and acorn barnacles occur in protected rocky areas. The sandy littoral is quite sterile, with some surfgrass occurring in the lower littoral and very few clams occurring in the upper littoral.

The coastal strand community consists of some typical strand and dune pioneer plants such as beach-bur, sand verbena, and evening primrose. A unique consociation occurs on flat, sandy areas in which *Poe douglasii* is always one of the dominant plants.

A small freshwater marsh, dominated by several varieties of cinquefoil, occurs at the east edge of the strand area (north bank of the confluence of the Big River and Mendocino Bay). A small alder swamp is directly to the north of the marsh and contains alders and willows.

The coastal cliff community contains salt grass and ice plant in the splash zone, various succulents on exposed cliffs, and at the top of the cliffs, seaside daisy and sea pinks.

The north coastal prairie occurs on the plain immediately behind the cliff community. Various grasses predominate here.

Scattered specimens of bishop pine occur along the bluffs in the southern portion of the headlands. Small areas of coastal scrub are found in the southeast section, the dominant plants being coyote brush, Scotch broom, and wild rose.

The Department's plant ecologist reports that there is one rare or endangered plant species known at the park, and another has been found near the park. The swamp harebell (*Campanula californica*), a rare plant that is endangered in part, was located on the north side of Big River, within the park property. The Mendocino Coast paintbrush (*Castilleja latifolia ssp mendocinensis*) was observed on the coastal terrace south of Big River. It is in part rare and endangered. Thirty-five rare and endangered plant species are known in Mendocino County, ten of which are quite likely to be found in the park, upon further investigation. (See Figure 5.)

## Wildlife

The natural environment of Mendocino Headlands supports a diversified wildlife, including both aquatic and terrestrial representatives. Probably in large measure because of the proximity of the town to the park lands, the wildlife is not sufficiently significant in numbers to affect the proposed developments.

Offshore mammals most often seen would include the harbor seal, the California sea lion, the Steller sea lion, and the California gray whale.

The headlands provide some excellent fishing from the rocks. Commonly found species include blue, black, china, yellowtail and vermillion rock fish, lingcod, rubberlip perch, striped sea perch, greenling sea trout, Pacific sanddab and cabezon.

Steelhead and silver salmon run up Big River in November, or later, depending on the rains; flounder are frequently caught at the river's mouth.

Goat Island, the largest of the islands adjacent to the Mendocino Headlands, is considered to be one of the 37 major sea bird rookeries off the coast of California and should be protected. The number of species of land birds common to this area is quite large due to the variety of habitats.

Land animals common to the headlands include the big brown bat, botta pocket gopher, raccoons, rabbits, skunks, and numerous varieties of mice.

There are no rare and endangered species inhabiting this park, but three endangered bird species may be observed migrating through the area — the brown pelican, the southern bald eagle, and the peregrine falcon.

## Scenic Resources

The very dramatic meeting of land and sea at the Mendocino Headlands State Park provides the visitor to the park with some of the most spectacular views of the rugged, rocky northern California coastline available. The town of Mendocino and the park are situated on a coastal terrace surrounded on the north, west, and south by the sea. The grassland terrace slopes gently toward the sea, but ends abruptly in 50 to 65-foot cliffs that drop precipitously to the shoreline below. These rugged, sculptured cliffs, sea caves, arches and islands present a nearly endless variety of breath-taking, spectacular vistas.

The southern shore of the headlands forms a part of Mendocino Bay into which Big River empties. Here the shoreline widens slightly to provide about 1,800 feet of usable beach — Portuguese Beach and Big River Beach. Portuguese Beach is a very narrow strip of land bordering a small cove. Big River Beach is much larger and a similar flat area containing a large gravel bar extends upriver from it.

The lands on either side of the river are steep and wooded. To the east, the coastal mountains form a densely forested backdrop.

A major objective of any park development will be to preserve the very high quality of the scenic resources for the public to enjoy now and in the distant future. (See Figure 6.)

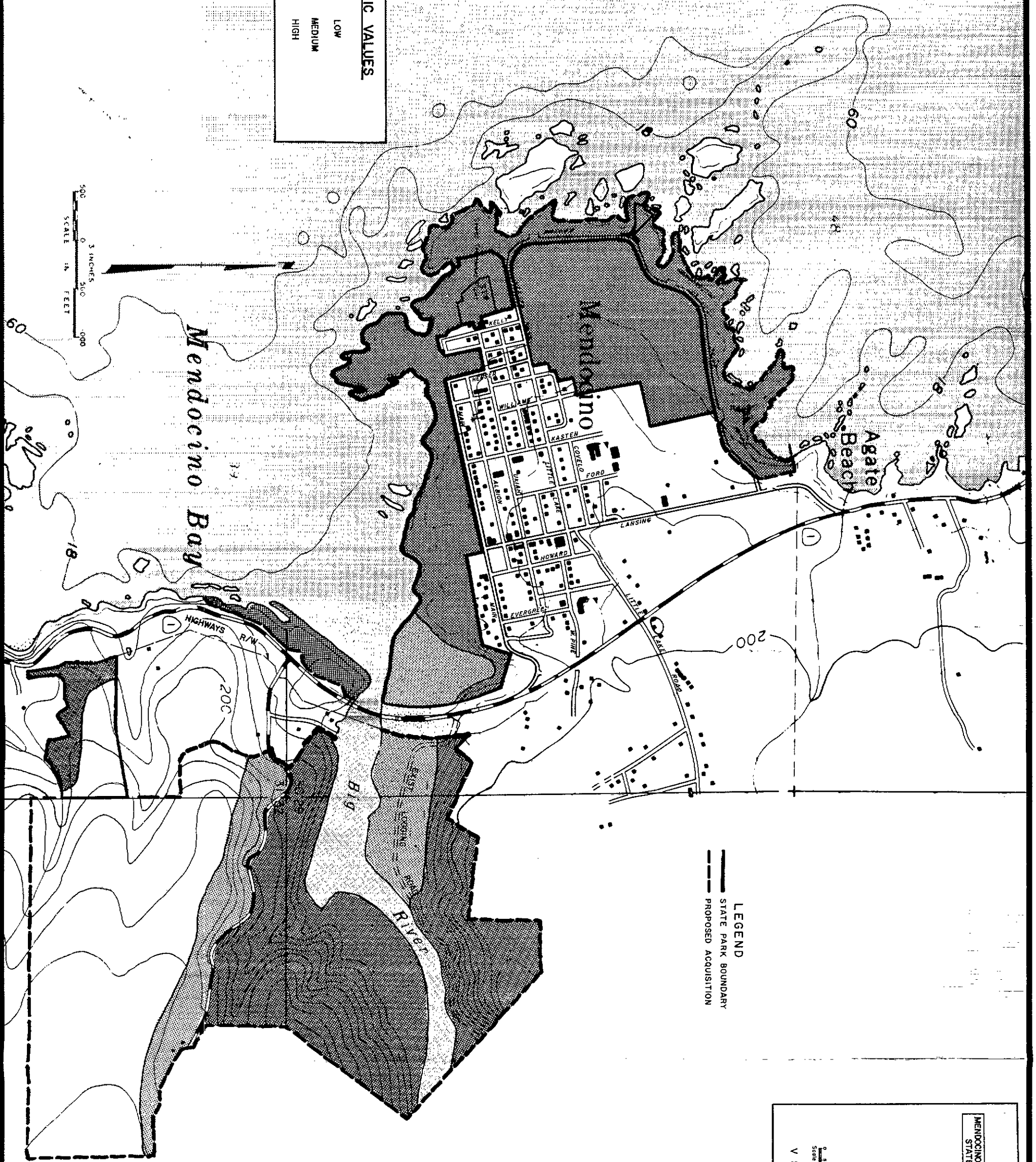
### *Community of Mendocino Looking Across Mouth of Big River*



**SCENIC VALUES**

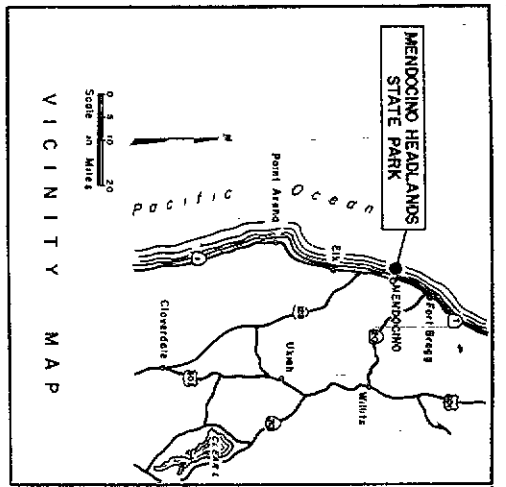
[White box]	LOW
[Dotted box]	MEDIUM
[Cross-hatched box]	HIGH

Scale  
 3 INCHES = 500 FEET  
 3/16" = 500'



**LEGEND**

- STATE PARK BOUNDARY
- - - PROPOSED ACQUISITION



DRAWING NO. 14104  
 SHEET NO. 4 OF 6

MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK  
 RESOURCE ANALYSIS  
 SCENIC VALUES  
 FIGURE 6

RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
 APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

REVISIONS	DATE	DESIGNED
		Mills
		DRAWN
		2/74 Cochran
		CHECKED
		Humphrey

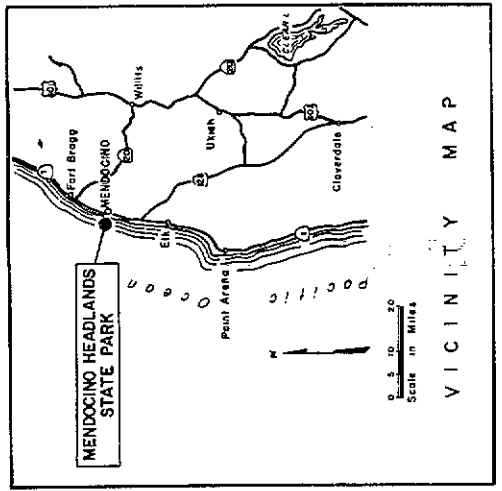


DESIGNED	Mills
DRAWN	2/74 Cochran
CHECKED	Humphrey
REVISIONS	DATE

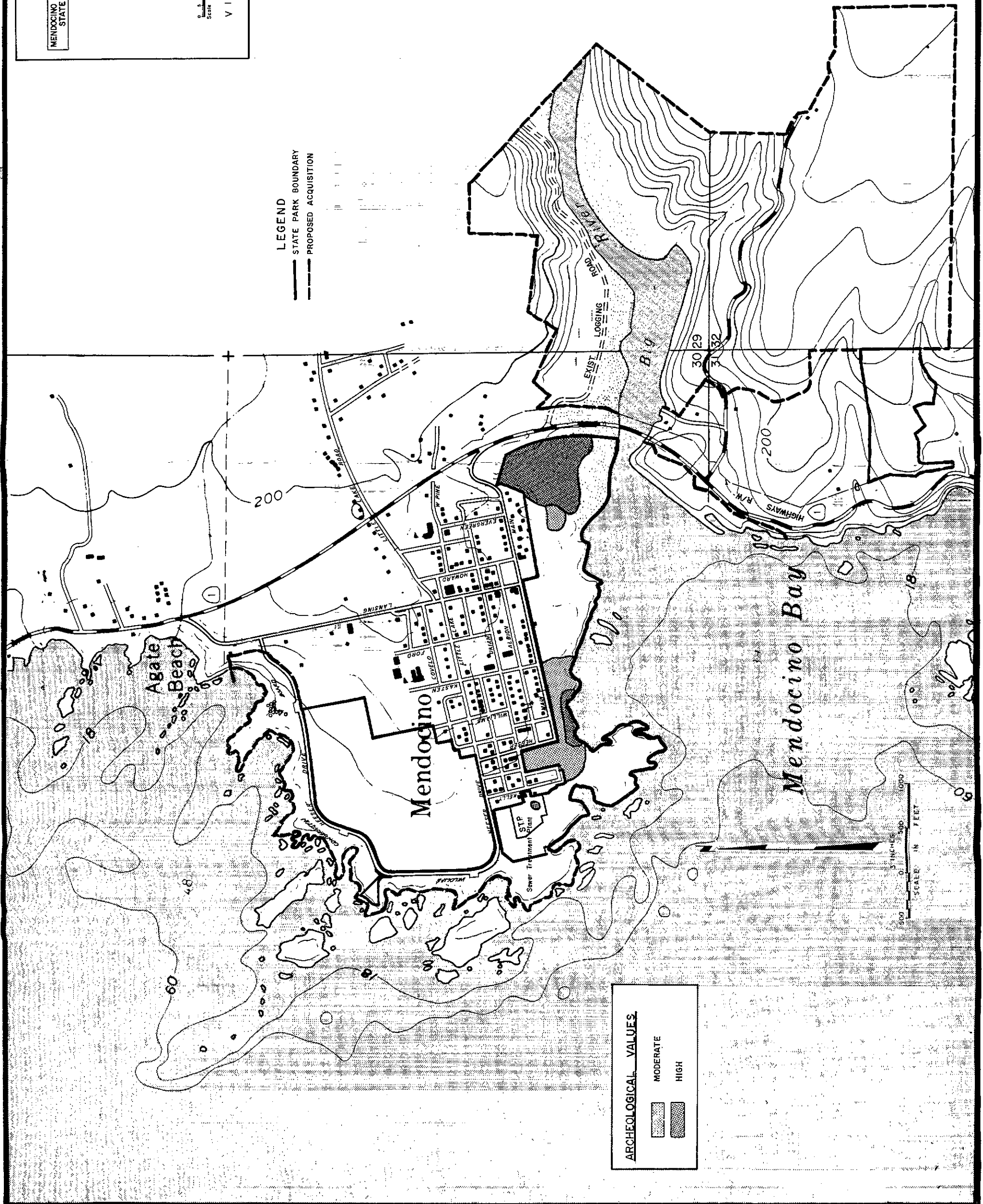
RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
 APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK  
 RESOURCE ANALYSIS  
 FIGURE 7  
 ARCHEOLOGICAL VALUES

DRAWING NO. 14104  
 SHEET NO. 5 OF 6



LEGEND  
 - - - STATE PARK BOUNDARY  
 - - - PROPOSED ACQUISITION



## Cultural Resources

### Archeological Resources

For hundreds, if not thousands, of years the Indians of this region used the Mendocino headlands for gathering shellfish. It is known that in later years members of the Kashia Pomo tribe set up summer camps on Mendocino Bay. At least two important archeological sites have been identified within the boundaries of Mendocino Headlands State Park, and the likelihood of finding other sites in the area is very high. Any increase of visitor use increases the chance for misuse of these resources.

The two known sites, located in the vicinity of Big River Beach, have been found to contain human skeletal material as well as the usual shell and fire-fractured cobbles. There is in effect at the present time a statute that forbids any excavation of a burial ground; therefore, no evaluation of these sites can be made. Under such circumstances no alternative exists but to assign them a high-value rank and take all precautions possible to preserve and protect the archeological sites from degradation by natural forces or man's activities. (See Figure 7.)

### Historical Resources

The town of Mendocino was the first of a number of north coast towns that sprang up during the height of lumbering activity in this region (1851–1920). Though the settlement has remained small, it has become a thriving artist colony and tourist attraction, largely because of the charm of its architecture and beautiful surroundings.

The architectural character of Mendocino is Victorian, with many fine examples of that style still standing. Some of the buildings date back to 1852. The town has established an historic area through zoning controls to preserve this heritage for the increasing number of visitors who come to enjoy the old town atmosphere.

Mendocino Headlands State Park, one boundary of which lies along the south side of Main Street, is an integral part of this historic settlement. The park surrounds the town on three sides and provides a setting of spectacular beauty for the town and its visitors. Indeed, the most important objective in establishing this park was protecting the environment of this historic town from incompatible development. August Heeser, son of the founder of Mendocino, William Heeser, donated a portion of the headlands to the state in 1957.

On the park lands along the south side of Main Street, is located the Ford House, built in 1855. The state plans to restore this historic house and use it as an interpretive center for the park.

There are several boat sheds located in a small cove on the south side of the headlands. These sheds are in bad condition, presenting a possible hazard, but because they are quaint and reflect an historic usage, the sheds may be retained. If the sheds are not torn down, it is proposed that the people enjoying the use of this property pay the state lease money and provide liability insurance against hazards.



*Maxwell House Built in 1880*



*McCallen House Built in 1885*

## Recreational Resources

Mendocino Headlands State Park offers many recreational opportunities, both active and passive in nature. The dramatically beautiful scenery of the headland bluffs and many islets are sources of pleasure to visitors hiking, walking, picnicking, and painting or taking photographs.

Active recreation focuses chiefly on fishing. Both the headlands and Big River support excellent fishing year-round. The tidal action enhances the recreation potential of the river. The incoming tide provides an upstream current that can be taken advantage of for boating. By raising the level of the lower reaches of the river, it also extends the navigable zone. The river flows year-round, leaving the estuary open to the ocean. This provides an excellent recreation experience for the fisherman. In the fall and winter, Big River has migratory runs of salmon and steelhead. Summer anglers fish for flounders and several species of ocean perch.

Other shore areas provide good skin and scuba diving. The water is too cold for most swimmers, but wading, sunbathing, walking, and exploring along the beach can be enjoyed.

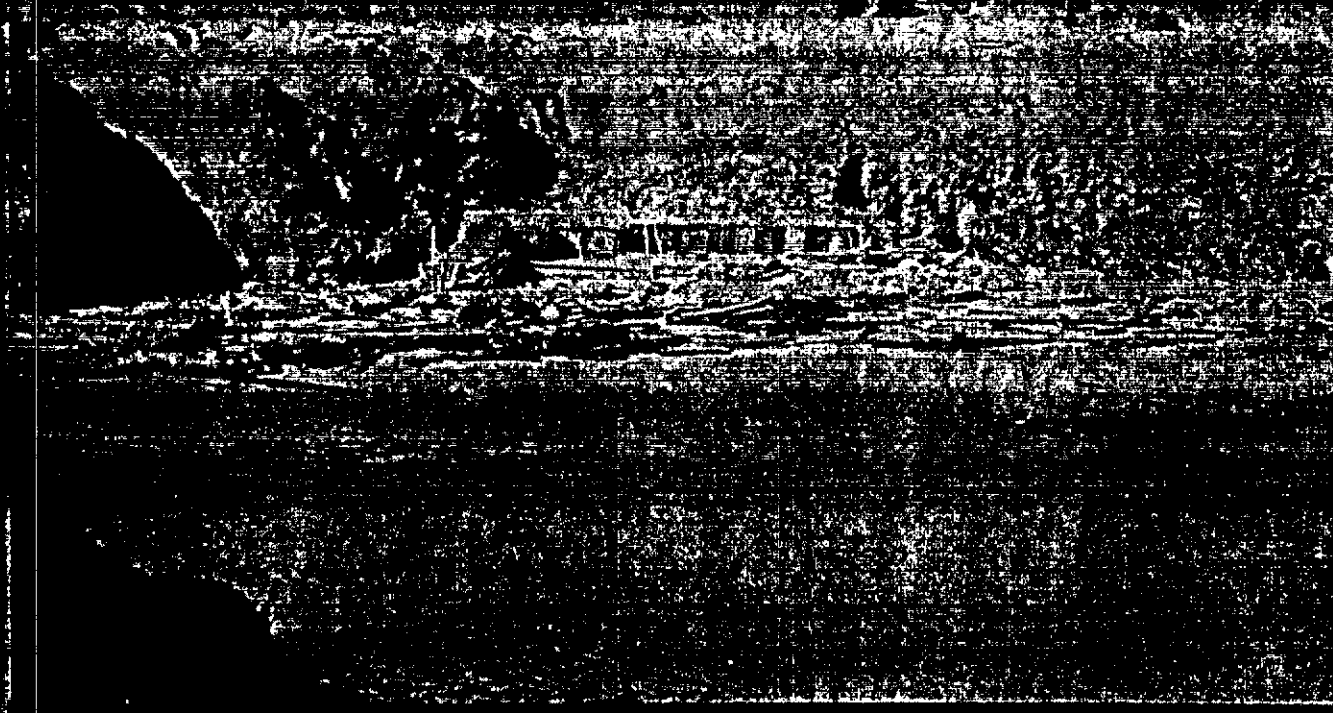
The wooded plateau above the hillside south of Big River provides a good camping area.

*Main Street, July 4, 1884*



*Main Street Today* —

# RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN



1. Introduction  
2. Purpose and Scope  
3. Resource Inventory  
4. Assessment of Resource Values  
5. Management Objectives  
6. Management Strategies  
7. Implementation and Monitoring  
8. Conclusion

# MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Mendocino Headlands State Park, located on the central coast of Mendocino County, was named and classified by action of the State Park and Recreation Commission in 1973. The present park occupies 139 acres and an additional 679 acres are in the process of being acquired with funds from the State Beach, Park, Recreational and Historical Facilities Fund of 1974.

## Purpose

The purpose in relation to park classification is contained in the Public Resources Code, Section 50145 (c):

Mendocino Headlands State Park is an area of outstanding scenic character and contains significant historical, archeological, ecological and geological values. Generally its purpose is to preserve outstanding natural, scenic, and cultural values, indigenous fauna and flora that represent a significant example of coastal strip and low coastal mountains ecological regions, and to make these values available for public enjoyment and education.

Mendocino Headlands State Park is to be managed as a composite whole in order to restore, protect and maintain its native environmental complex.

The long range resource management objectives for Mendocino Headlands State Park are the identification and protection of those areas which are necessary for the restoration of scenic, natural, and cultural resources of the park. In order to meet these objectives, developments must be located and use and access must be controlled to avoid irreversible resource degradation. The land carrying capacity (Section 50145, Public Resources Code) will determine the level of use, based on the ecological sensitivity of each area. Areas within the park will be managed to insure the natural ecosystem concept, that is, each area (ecologically, terrestrial plants and animal communities) will be managed as one with its physical environmental habitat as an ecosystem (ecological entity).

## Resource Situation

Mendocino Headlands State Park lies within the coastal landscape province and the coastal biogeographic province. The park contains examples of the north coastal bluff, north coastal prairie, north coastal scrub, coastal strand, freshwater marsh, alder swamp, bishop pine forest, manzanita wood, and oak biotic communities. Some of these communities have historical significance and are of great value to the state.

The main road, Leger Drive, has been subjected to heavy erosion and compaction due to heavy use and maintenance of the road.

The park's plant communities has been altered greatly due to the introduction of exotic plants and animals. Some of the introduced plants are white clover, and wild barley. North coastal scrub also contains introduced plants such as periwinkle and Scotch broom. All exotic plants should be eradicated.

The park's coastal scrub ecosystem contains the very rare and endangered Mendocino bush (Castilleja mitata) spp. mendocinensis along the south bluff of Big River and Mendocino Creek.

The park's coastal scrub ecosystem contains excellent stands of native Douglas fir which should be managed with a high degree of preservation in public objectives.

The park's coastal scrub ecosystem (alder swamp and freshwater marsh) are small but of high value. The park's coastal scrub ecosystem along with the adjacent coastal scrub ecosystem (very rare and endangered swamp marsh) *Menyanthes* is very rare and should be protected in the wetlands.

The soils are formed on Franciscan parent rock and are among the most erodible in the world. Special precautions and careful site selection for development are necessary to protect these soils. On the coastal terrace the Baywood loamy coarse sand is more fragile than the Santa Lucia loam, but both have limitations for use and development.

A number of archeological sites exist along the bluff and near the mouth of Big River. Most of these sites have been seriously damaged by man and natural processes, and require mitigation measures.

The historic Indian site of *Buldam* is very important, as it represents a typical example of early white and Indian contact. Only research can tell which site it is, but Site No. 4-Men-539 is *tentatively* identified as *Buldam*.

### **Declaration of Purpose**

The primary purpose of Mendocino Headlands State Park is to make available to the people its outstanding scenic, natural, educational, and historical values, existing in a relatively small area, which extends from the mouth of Big River upcoast to Russian Gulch and includes the estuary of Big River. The scenic values are as spectacular as any found on the California coast, and include both the quaintness of the historic Mendocino City and the boldness of the wave-sculptured Mendocino Headlands.

### **Declaration of Management Policy**

#### **Resource Management Policy in Relation to Natural Values**

The Baywood soils exposed in the bluffs are often used to illustrate formation of prairie soils in relation to the internationally famous Pygmy Forest Ecological Staircase in Jughandle Creek, and represent an important link in the natural history of the Mendocino Coast (see Pygmy Forest Ecological Staircase Legislative Feasibility Study, 1974). The Mendocino Headlands resource inventory points out important ecological values in the small wetlands and at Goat Island. This island rookery is to be managed as a totally protected area. The north coastal prairie and bluff are to be managed to maintain uncluttered vistas and to protect against adverse human impact on the fragile bluffs. Parking or other developments should be carefully limited to avoid scenic or ecological damage. Resource management units are to include the following ecosystems: north coastal bluff and stacks (rocky off-shore islets), north coastal prairie, north coastal scrub, coastal strand, wetlands (including the Big River estuary), bishop pine forest, coast redwood forest, and Mendocino cypress pygmy forest. Each unit must be managed separately but with careful coordination using the ecosystem concept of resource management. The north coastal bluff and stack ecosystem is very fragile and highly susceptible to human impact. The bluffs are a main attraction of the unit, therefore, protection of that ecosystem is both urgent and difficult.

Correct placement of access trails and parking areas will be important to the protection of the bluffs. Parking facilities should be placed far back from the bluffs, and trails designed to disperse people to the least erodible areas and bare rock fishing points. Trails should be designed with esthetics in mind; they should be as unobtrusive as possible. Surfacing should be soil cement or other unobtrusive material, with well-defined trail edges. Presently much of the bluff soils are devoid of vegetation and have been subjected to severe erosion and soil compaction. These soils between the bluffs and Heeser Drive should be loosened by cultivation. A disc should be run (parallel to the bluffs) through the soils in early spring and the area planted with grasses and wildflowers native to the north coastal prairie. This treatment should not occur, however, in areas of archeological sites, unless such sites have been totally excavated by qualified archeologists.

Excluding the areas adjacent to the bluffs, the north coastal prairie ecosystem is probably the least fragile ecosystem in Mendocino Headlands. This community can stand a great deal of trampling without much damage to the vegetation. The vegetation contains a number of introduced

grasses and should be managed with the reestablishment of native grassland species as the main objective. The known habitats of very rare and endangered plants should be protected, and developments not allowed to encroach on these habitats.

The north coastal scrub ecosystem is not well represented in the unit, and some management is necessary to restore this ecosystem to its natural state. North of Big River there are several aggressive exotic species (i.e., Scotch broom and periwinkle) which need to be controlled. South of Big River the very rare and endangered Mendocino coast paintbrush (*Castilleja latifolia* ssp. *mendocinensis*) occurs along the bluffs. The north coastal scrub habitat in this area should be left undisturbed to insure perpetuation of this species.

The coastal strand ecosystem is highly fragile and very susceptible to human impact. A very good example of the coastal strand is found north of the Big River mouth. This area, embracing most of the upper strand and the adjacent wetlands, should be afforded the fullest measure of protection. Access routes should be along the seaward side of the coastal strand (non-vegetated beach area). Logging in the Big River watershed has caused an unnaturally high accumulation of driftwood each spring on the coastal strand near the mouth of Big River. This driftwood may be removed annually without impairing natural values; however, such removals should be carefully controlled so as not to disturb the very fragile strand vegetation.

The wetlands ecosystems (alder swamp and freshwater marsh) have been reported as containing the very rare and endangered swamp harebell (*Campanula californica*). This area should be left undisturbed and encouraged to maintain its natural state, beauty, and wildlife habitat values. The ecosystems should also be afforded the most careful protection.

Management of the bishop pine forest ecosystem should consider the regeneration requirements of these beautiful, contorted trees as a prime objective. Bishop pine stands have declined in recent years due to their dependence on fire for regeneration. Fire is usually necessary for these closed-cone pines to release their seeds; seed-containing cones remain closed until opened by intense heat. Fire suppression programs have been in effect for more than 50 years in California. Fire also makes an excellent seed bed for the young pines; few if any seedlings become established in the deep litter or duff of an unburned forest floor. Therefore, to maintain this ecosystem, controlled ecological burns should be initiated every 5 to 10 years.

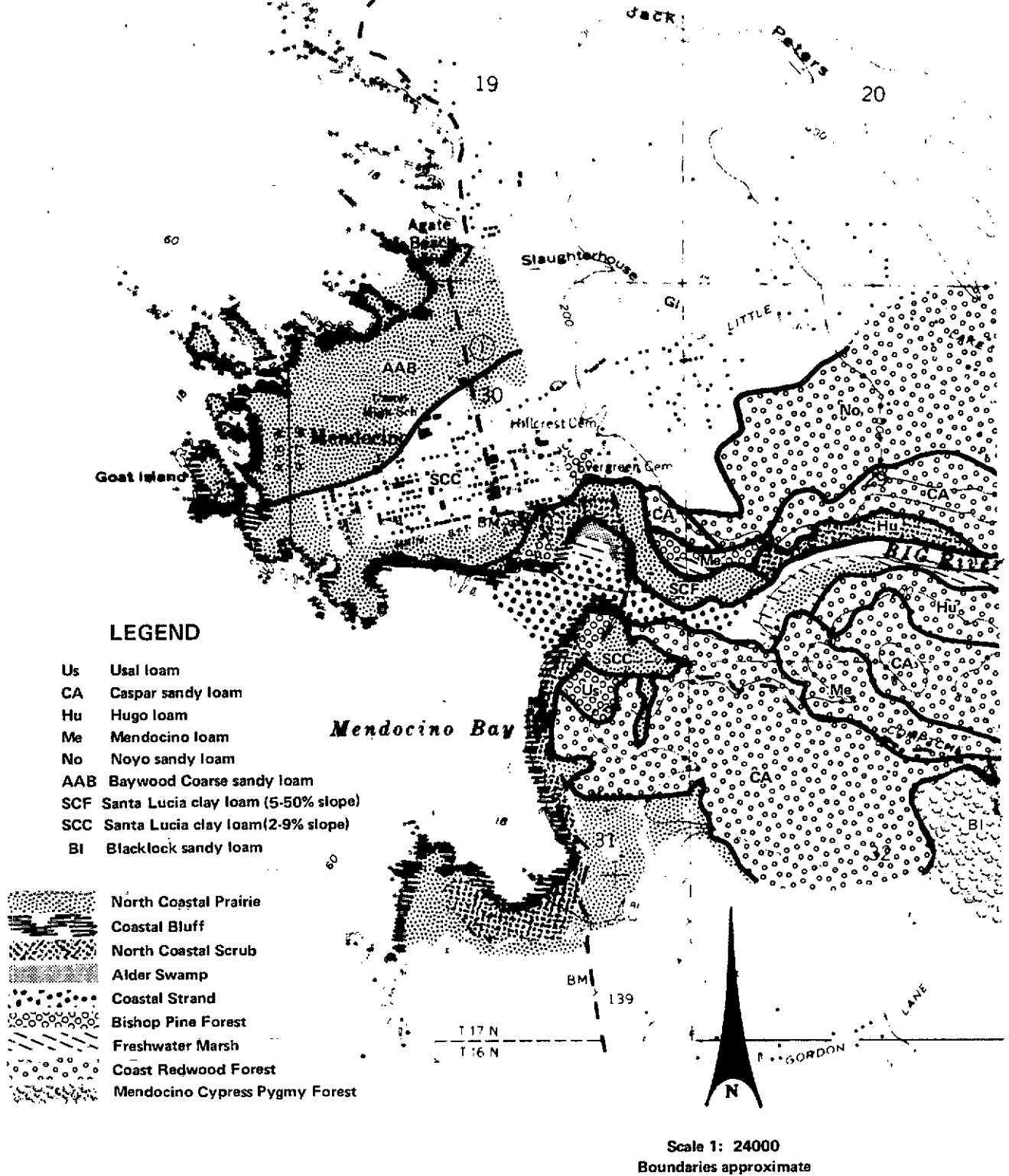
The coast redwood ecosystem should be managed using controlled ecological burns initiated every 25 years or less, depending on fuel buildup in the understory.

Mendocino Headlands State Park should be planned and managed with respect to its value as part of a much larger unit. The California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan (1971) proposes "Mendocino State Park", which would include all the coastline from the south boundary of Van Damme State Park to the north boundary of Russian Gulch State Park.

The California Advisory Board on Underwater Parks and Reserves has recommended that the underwater area from Big River north to the boundary of Russian Gulch State Park be transferred to the Department as an underwater park.

The Jughandle Creek watershed to the north contains the famous Ecological Staircase, which offers tremendous opportunities for study and education and interpretation of ecology and natural history, specifically for California's north coast, as well as North America generally. Therefore, Mendocino Headlands State Park should be managed with respect to possible future expansion in both directions along the coastline. Resource management needs to be conducted with the ultimate boundaries recommended for the larger "Mendocino State Park" in mind. Our current investigations indicate that the ultimate coastal park boundary should extend from the Mitchell Creek watershed on the north, southward to Cobbly Reef. Since Mendocino Headlands State Park has the potential of becoming the major educational and interpretive center for the north coast, it should be planned and managed with these objectives in mind.

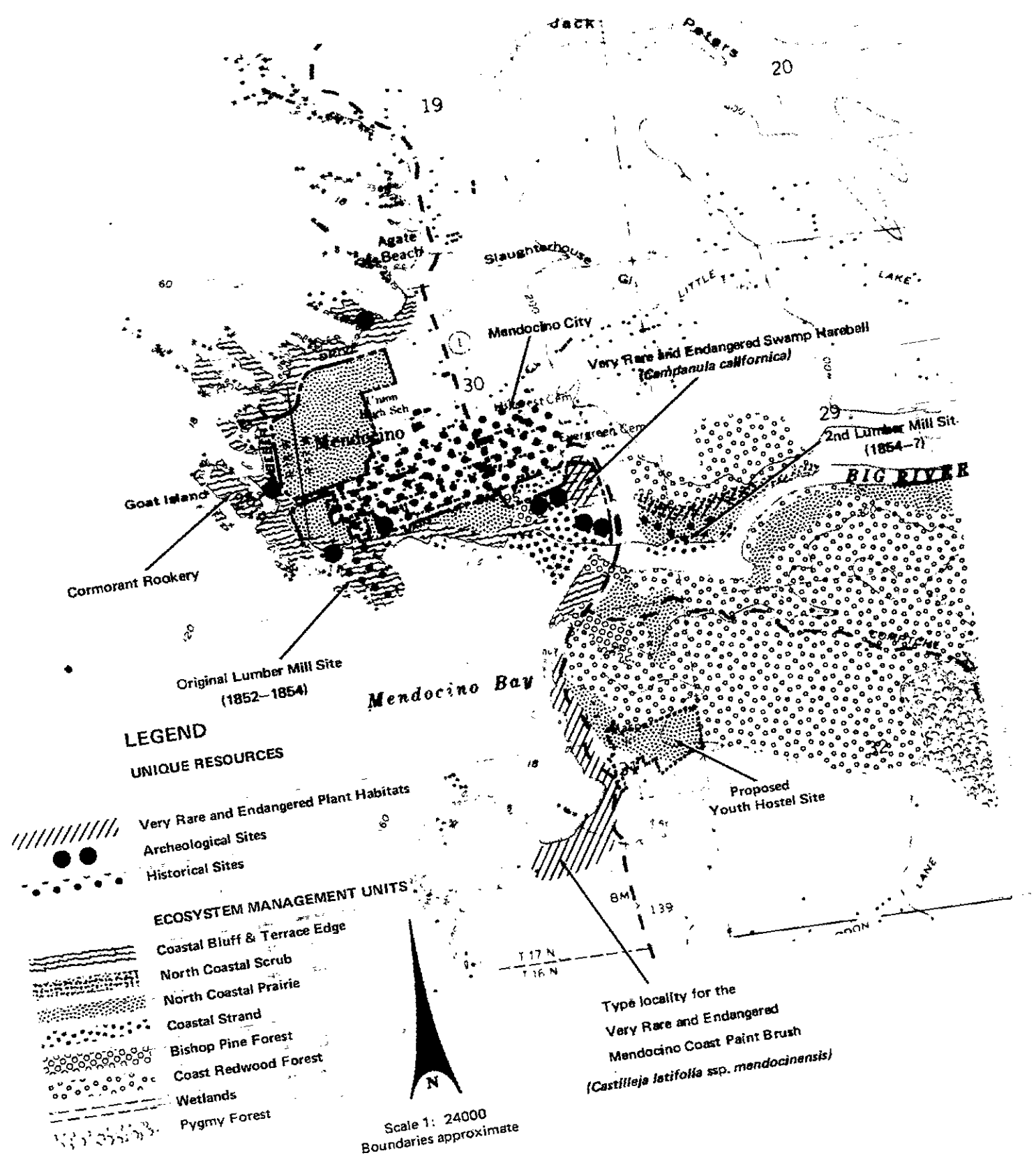
**FIGURE 8  
SOILS AND BIOTIC COMMUNITIES  
OF  
MENDOCINO HEADLANDS**



W. J. Barry 12-4-72  
revised W.J.B. 8-22-75



**FIGURE 9  
RESOURCES MAP  
MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK**



## Resource Management Policy in Relation to Cultural Resources

Nearly all the archeological sites in the Mendocino Headlands State Park area have been seriously impacted by human and natural processes. One site, 4-Men-539, located near the mouth of Big River, on the north side, may be the historic Indian site, *Buldam*. This site, according to current records, is relatively less impacted than others. In the light of the impacted status of these sites, and especially the significance of the site tentatively identified as *Buldam* in terms of its representing early white and Indian contact in the area, the management policy of these resources shall involve mitigation. Professional archeological excavations must be conducted to save artifactual materials and derive data useful for understanding and interpretation. In addition to this, stabilization and either partial or total reconstruction of 4-Men-539 should be accomplished, if it can be reasonably demonstrated that the site is the historic village of *Buldam*. For reconstruction, the historic location of the village is of first priority; however, if current environmental conditions make this difficult, a near-by location that is historically appropriate relative to visual qualities is recommended.

The sites of the first lumber mill (approx. 1852 to 1854) and its replacement should be identified, interpreted, and any physical evidence (i.e., "ruins") should be stabilized. These mills were very important to the development of the town.

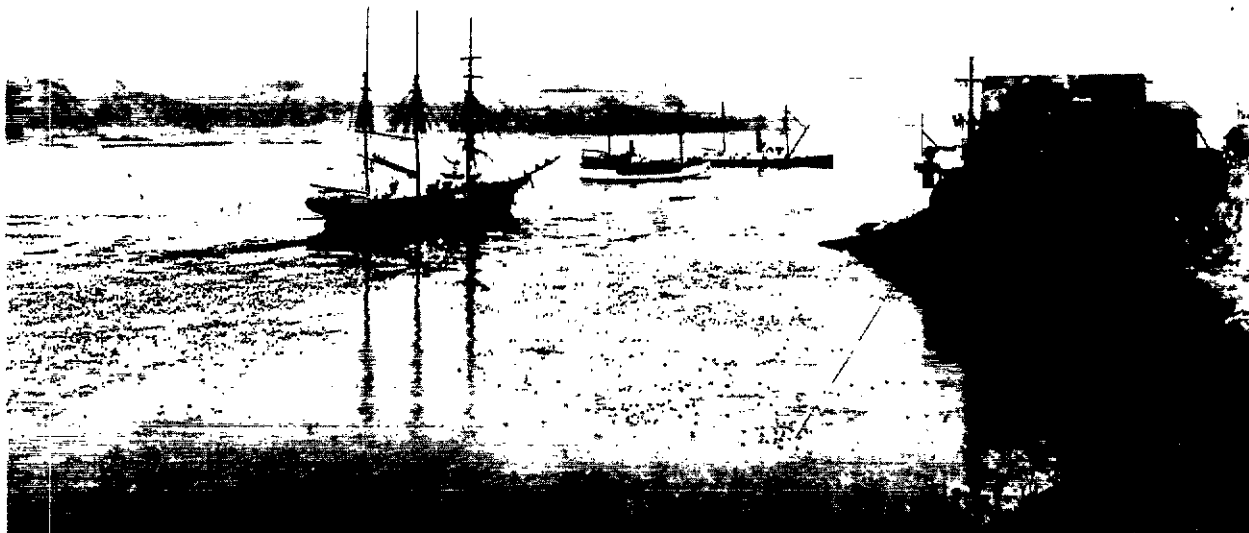
Since the town of Mendocino is an important part of both California history and the historical story of the park, the local history of the area is valuable for interpretation to park visitors. The Department is already involved with Mendocino townsite in that the town is an historic district on the National Register. Since the Department not only administers the register in California in terms of paperwork and evaluations of nominations, and should be concerned with monitoring Register resources, it is only reasonable that the Department avail itself of the opportunity to integrate the town into the historical interpretation of its adjacent park. Further, the Department should take positive steps to encourage the preservation and development of the town, while tying the area of the town to the park through interpretation.

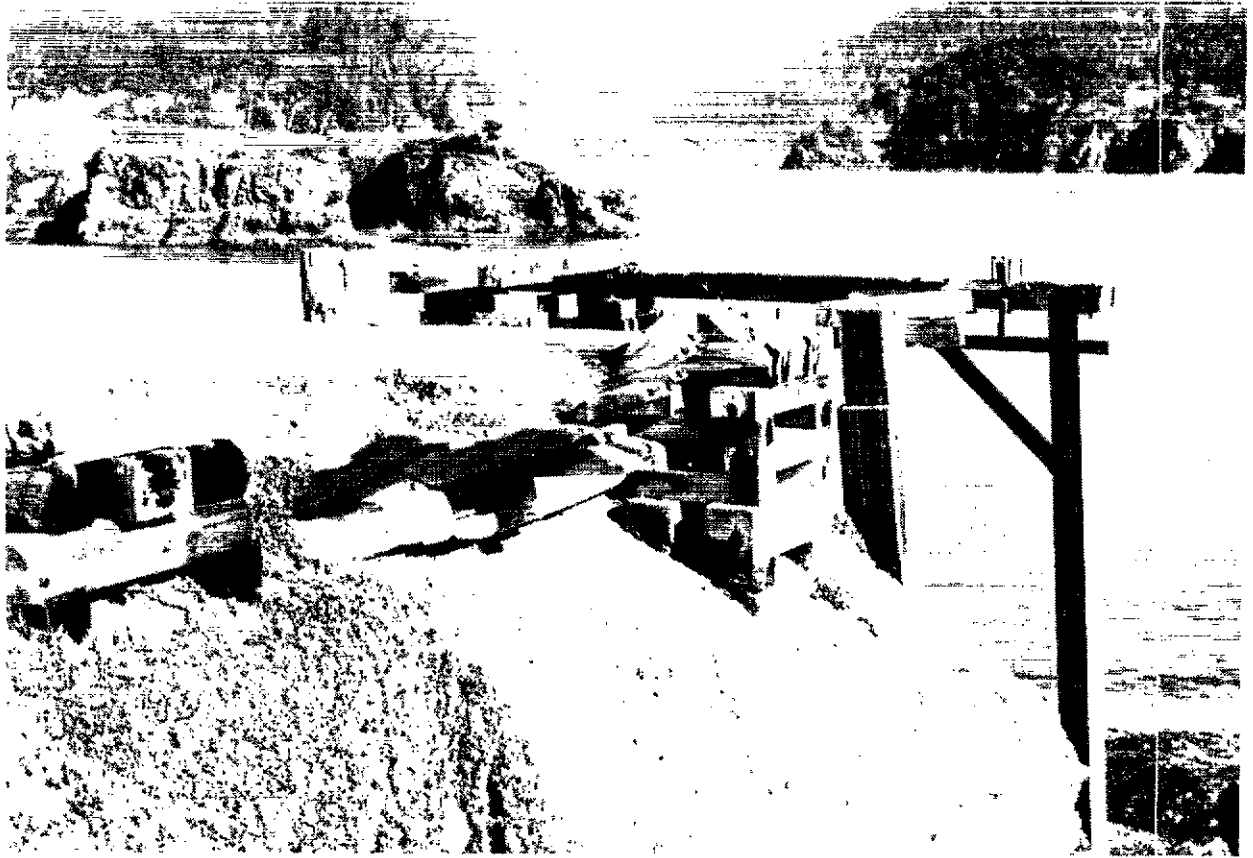
All departmental activity within Mendocino Headlands State Park shall be carried out in conformance with the Resource Management Directives of the Department.

## Resources Maps

The Soils and Biotic Communities Map (Fig. 8 ) is useful in determining edaphic and biotic relationships, while the Resources Map (Fig. 9 ) identifies significant recreational, natural, and cultural values of Mendocino Headlands State Park. Significant values on adjacent lands are also noted. Areas proposed for preservation, boundaries of management units, archeological sites, and historical sites are also delineated.

*Ships Waiting to be Loaded with Lumber*



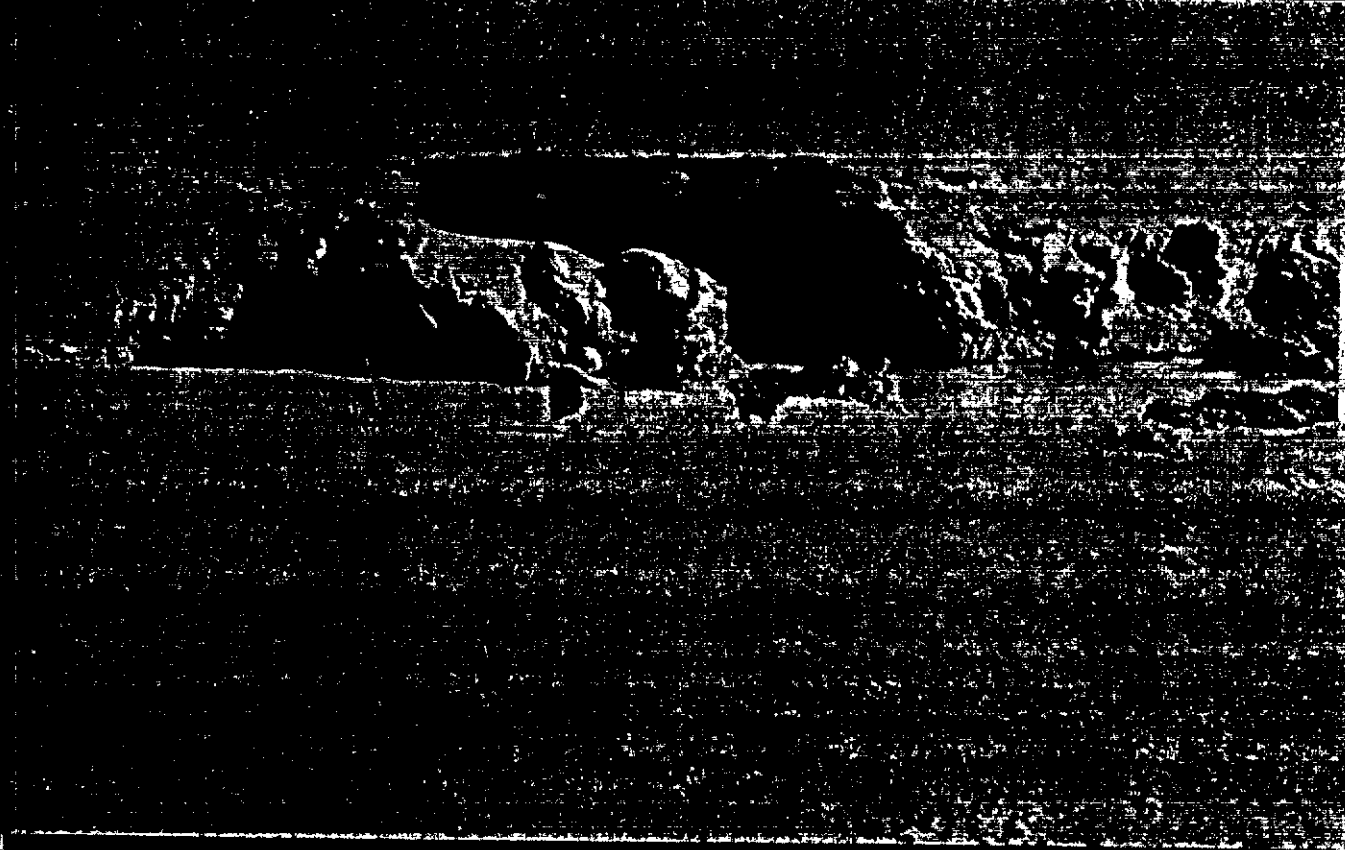


*Remains of Original Sawmill on Headland*

*Original Sawmill on Headlands*



# LAND USE PLAN



## LAND USE PLAN

The land use plan is graphically presented in Fig. 10. Its recommendations are based on a realistic appraisal of what developments will permit both the preservation of natural and cultural resources and the enhancement of the quality of visitor experience. This compromise between complete protection of sensitive resources and the desire to provide the visitor with the maximum opportunity of enjoying them is the final basis of the General Development Plan.

### Allowable Use Intensity

To determine the land use plan, a statement of what developments and activities are ecologically suitable for particular areas of the park. It was first necessary to develop an allowable use intensity plan. This plan (see Figure 11) designates the maximum number of people/acre of land may support at any one time without unduly compromising the natural resources of that area. It takes into account the effects calculated to result from year-round use, the maximum use being only on peak days.

Normally a park is divided into areas of low, moderate, and high use intensity, the high use intensity areas having the fewest restrictions on development. In the case of Mendocino Headlands State Park, the protection of the resources requires that the park be limited to low and moderate intensity.

**Low Use Intensity Areas (10-15 persons/acre)** - Approximately 32 acres (95 percent) of the park lands are designated as low use intensity areas due principally to the fragility of their natural resources. These areas, comprising almost all of the land within the park boundaries, are suitable for low intensity human activities. Conservation Board rules, especially those relating to motor vehicles, are strictly enforced in these areas. The restricted motor vehicle use is limited to walking, jogging, and bicycling on designated routes.

The park will continue to maintain a good stand of Mendocino Headlands State Park. The soil is a heavy clay loam, and the headlands are a large number of people to 10-15 acres, where the soil is heavy clay loam. Heavy water runoff and vehicle traffic are a major problem in these areas. The soil is a heavy clay loam, and the headlands are a large number of people to 10-15 acres, where the soil is heavy clay loam.

The proposed developments will allow vegetative cover. It is advisable to continue to restrict parking areas to designated areas and to restrict parking to planned parking areas. The number of parking spaces will be maintained at a reasonable density of people per acre. The proposed developments will allow vegetative cover. It is advisable to continue to restrict parking areas to designated areas and to restrict parking to planned parking areas.

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**Moderate Use Intensity Areas (10-15 persons/acre)** - Moderate use intensity areas are those areas which are suitable for moderate use. These areas are suitable for moderate use. These areas are suitable for moderate use. These areas are suitable for moderate use. These areas are suitable for moderate use.

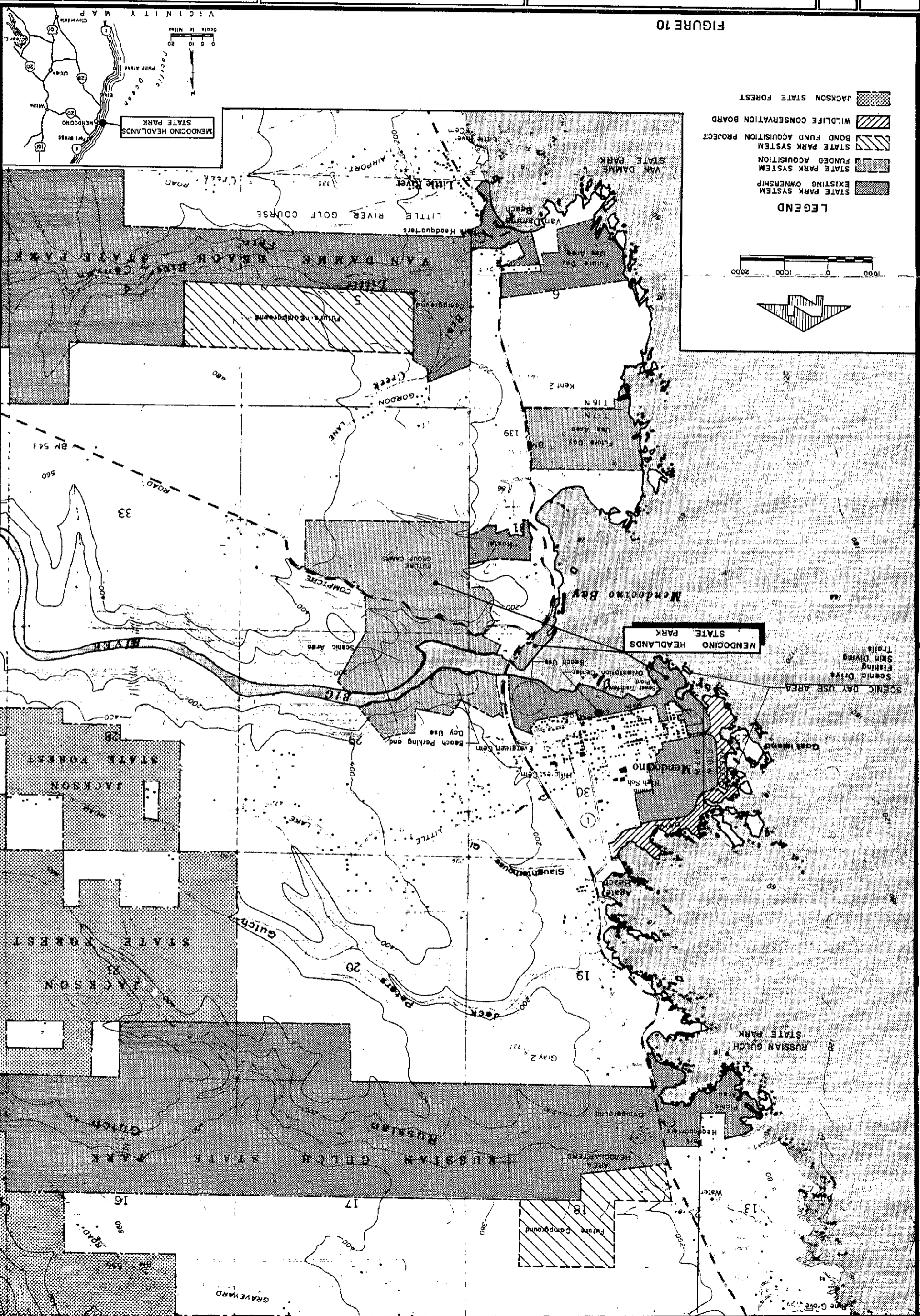
The proposed developments will allow vegetative cover. It is advisable to continue to restrict parking areas to designated areas and to restrict parking to planned parking areas. The number of parking spaces will be maintained at a reasonable density of people per acre. The proposed developments will allow vegetative cover. It is advisable to continue to restrict parking areas to designated areas and to restrict parking to planned parking areas.

MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK  
LAND STATUS MAP AND  
LAND USE PLAN



RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

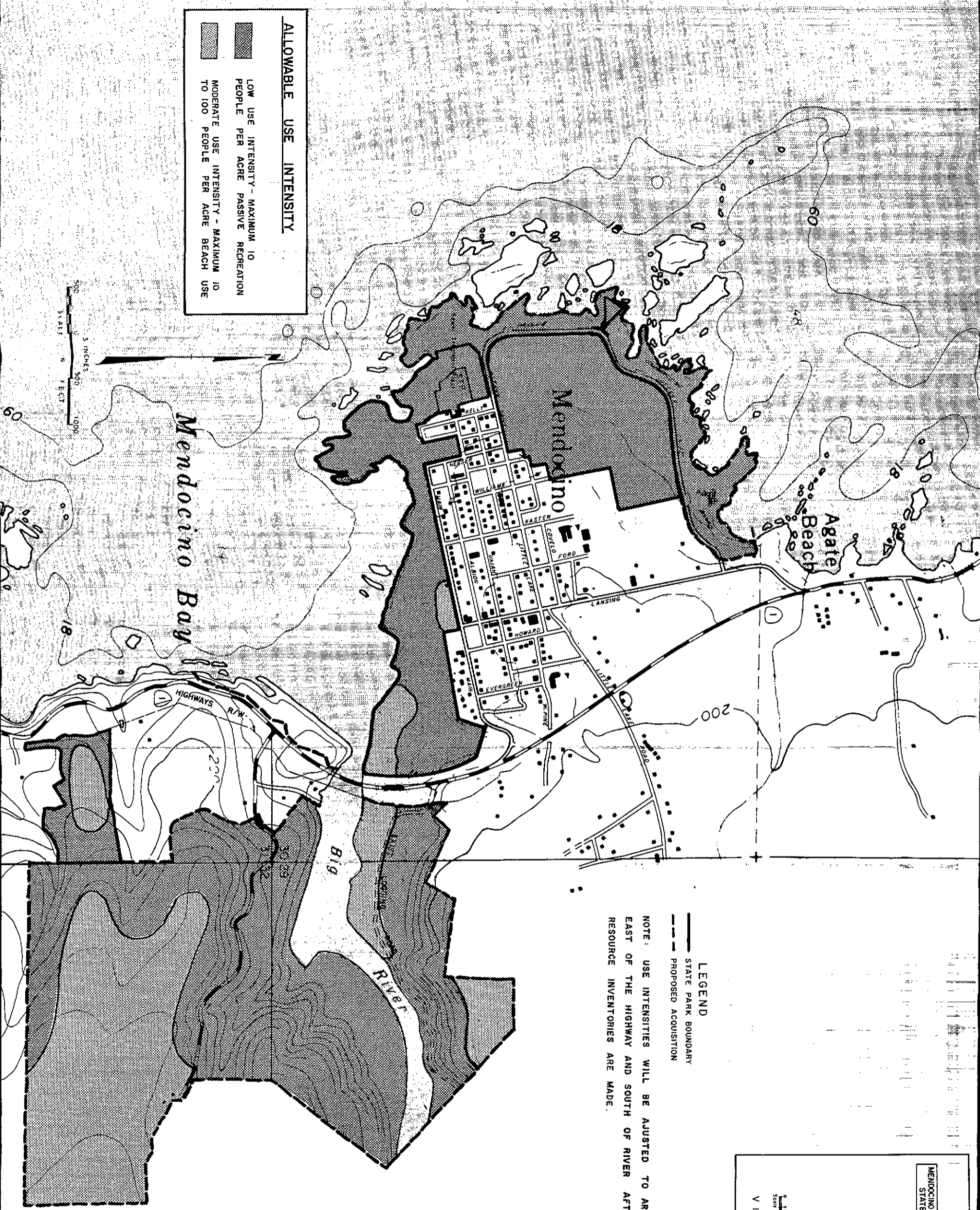
APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
DESIGNED D. Mills  
DRAWN \_\_\_\_\_  
CHECKED R. Humphrey  
MAY 1974

FIGURE 10





**ALLOWABLE USE INTENSITY**

 LOW USE INTENSITY - MAXIMUM 10 PEOPLE PER ACRE PASSIVE RECREATION  
 MODERATE USE INTENSITY - MAXIMUM 10 TO 100 PEOPLE PER ACRE BEACH USE

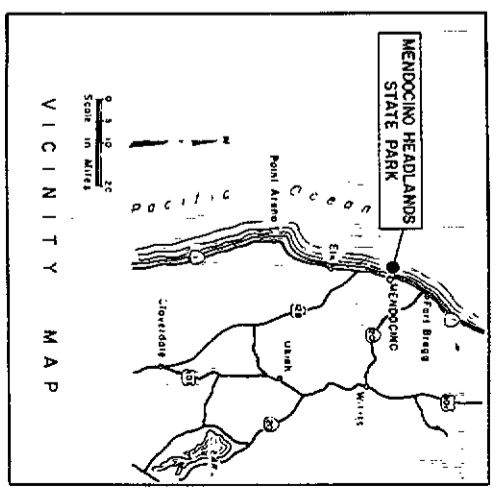


500  
SCALE 3 INCHES = 1000 FEET

**LEGEND**

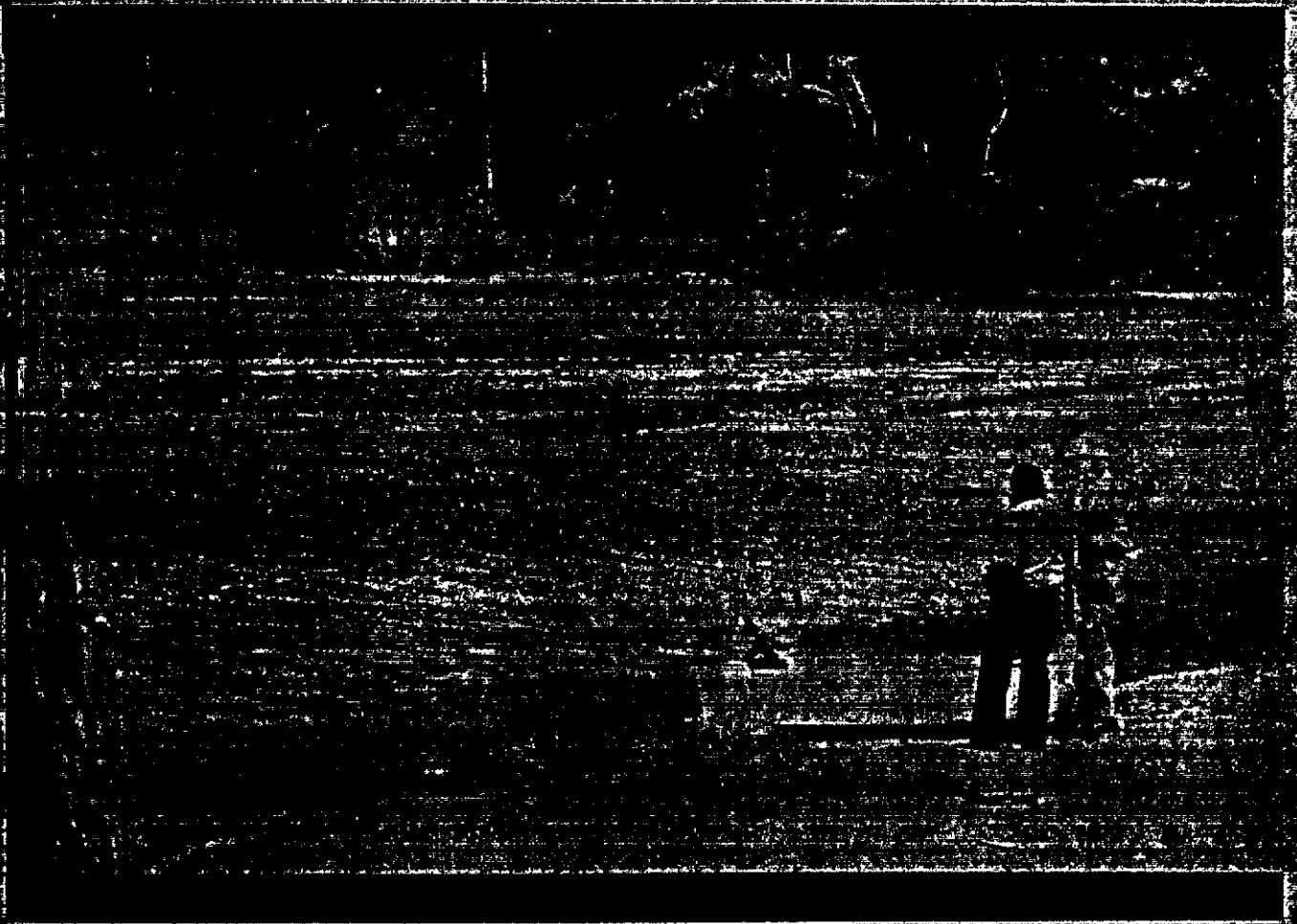
 STATE PARK BOUNDARY  
 PROPOSED ACQUISITION

NOTE: USE INTENSITIES WILL BE ADJUSTED TO AREAS EAST OF THE HIGHWAY AND SOUTH OF RIVER AFTER RESOURCE INVENTORIES ARE MADE.



DRAWING NO. <b>14105</b> SHEET NO. 1 OF ONE	MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK <b>ALLOWABLE USE INTENSITY</b> FIGURE 11	RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION APPROVED _____ DATE _____	REVISIONS DATE	DESIGNED Mills DRAWN 2/74 Cochran CHECKED Humphrey
	MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK			

# RECREATIONAL DEFICIENCY ANALYSIS





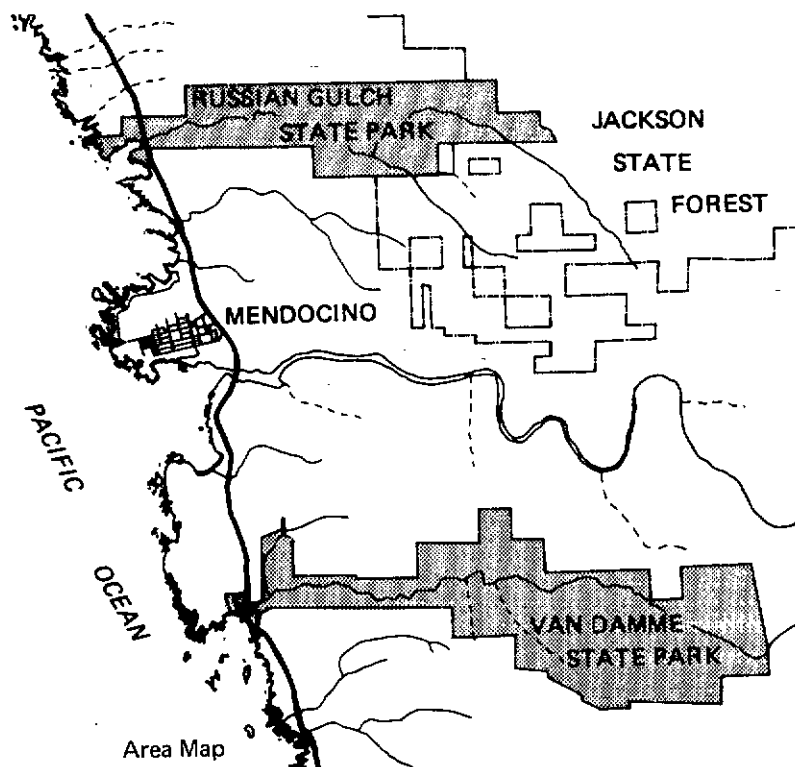
## RECREATION DEFICIENCY ANALYSIS

Mendocino Headlands State Park was established primarily to protect an outstandingly scenic area, and the overwhelming thrust of development plans for this area is toward the preservation of these natural and cultural resources. Specific developments are proposed to accommodate the increasing numbers of visitors *in order to* maintain the high quality of enjoyment of the beautiful vistas of land and sea, and the historic setting of the town. It is a fact that many people come here to fish along the shoreline and at the mouth of Big River, but it can be said that, at the present time, the park is oriented toward passive recreational pursuits.

Upon the completion of the acquisition of lands along the north and south banks of Big River, a detailed Resources Inventory of these lands will be made, followed by an Analysis and a specific General Development Plan that relates directly to them. This General Development Plan merely suggests that the area south of Big River appears to be amenable to development for much-needed group camps.

The park was initially acquired in 1972 and therefore it is difficult to detect any trends in the attendance figures. Data made available by the Statistical Reports for the fiscal years 1972-73 and 1973-74 show attendance rising from 10,921 to 20,371. Further studies would be needed to determine, for example, how many of these visitors had made Mendocino Headlands State Park their main destination and how many were also part of the statistical attendance of nearby parks where they were camping. However, the attendance figures for nearby parks as well as those for state parks all along the north coast indicate an increasing demand for recreation facilities despite higher travel costs.

The only sources for visitor origin information are the two parks located nearby — Van Damme State Park, three miles to the south, and Russian Gulch State Park, two miles to the north. No attempt is made here to apply the data for these parks directly to Mendocino Headlands State Park because there are significant differences between Mendocino Headlands and its neighbors. Both of the other parks are much larger, both have overnight camping facilities, and neither has as much ocean frontage as does Mendocino Headlands. However, information from these two parks does give a general picture of visitors to this area. Tables 1 and 2 summarize this information.



The data in Table 1 indicates that although roughly half of the visitors to these parks do come from the San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Complex, the entire state does contribute an important portion of the total attendance. Table 2 shows that attendance has been steadily increasing at both parks. Traffic studies by CALTRANS corroborate this.

Since all indications point to an increase in attendance at this park, it is very important to take the measures proposed in this report to preserve the resources for the public's enjoyment now and in the future.

**TABLE 1**  
**A Summary of Visitor Origin at Van Damme and**  
**Russian Gulch State Parks – 1969**

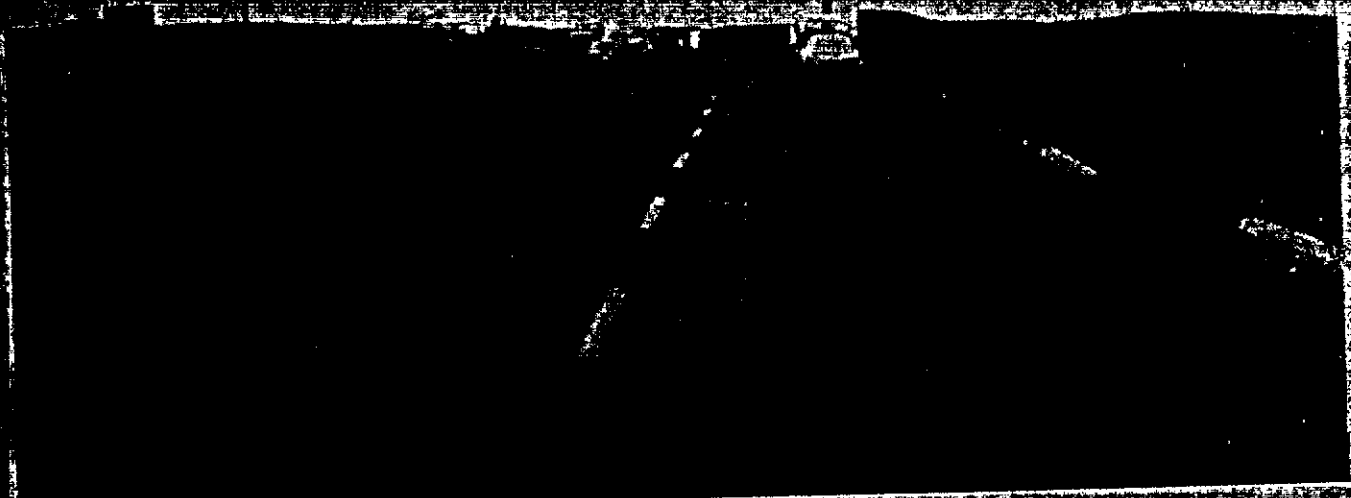
(Percent of Total Attendance)

		<i>Central Valley Sacramento</i>	<i>North Non- Metropolitan</i>	<i>San Francisco Bay Area</i>	<i>Others</i>
Van Damme	Day	12	36	35	17
	Overnight	12	17	56	15
Russian Gulch	Day	6	36	48	10
	Overnight	12	17	55	16

**TABLE 2**  
**A Summary of Attendance at Van Damme, Russian Gulch, and**  
**Mendocino Headlands State Parks – 1970-74**

	<i>1970-71</i>	<i>1971-72</i>	<i>1972-73</i>	<i>1973-74</i>
Van Damme	94,797	108,924	114,517	114,376
Russian Gulch	46,101	64,249	99,045	92,538
Mendocino Headlands	---	---	10,921	20,371

# GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Map of the area shown in the photograph above.

# GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Mendocino Headlands State Park was established to preserve the natural resources of the park lands and to develop them in an ecologically suitable manner. The park contains 139 acres located adjacent to the town of Mendocino on Highway 1, about ten miles south of Fort Bragg. It is located within the two-to-four-hour travel time zone of the San Francisco and the Sacramento metropolitan complexes.

The major objectives of the project are to preserve the environmental quality of the Mendocino Headlands and to provide for public enjoyment of it by constructing facilities and implementing a program.

The Resource Inventory and Analysis and the Land Use Plan defined areas where development is feasible and areas where development should be restricted. The General Development Plan is based on this information and seeks to outline specific developments within the guidelines these reports and the Resource Management Plan provide. The proposed actions will be discussed according to their locations within the existing park and the lands in process of acquisition. (See Figure 12)

## Planned Development

### Headlands

All the coast headlands north and west of Mendocino are under the jurisdiction of the Wildlife Conservation Board to whom they were deeded with the stipulation that free public access should also be maintained. The areas are now operated and maintained by Mendocino County and the Department of Parks and Recreation has proposed that it assume the responsibility for the operation and maintenance of these lands. Although technicalities of the transfer for this proposal have not been completed, this report assumes that the transfer will be successful.

The headlands are accessed by Heeser Road which joins the western and northern boundaries of the park. The major vehicle access on this area, particularly the coils, are used by both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. People park and walk at random on the area and this has led to the elimination of grasses and other low vegetation due to wear and tear on the soil.

The Department of Parks and Recreation proposes to consolidate the parking into certain blocks of asphalt with a concrete shoulder provided for parallel parking on the east side of Heeser Drive. The exact number of such areas would depend on the remaining soil after restriction of maintaining a low-use intensity of ten persons per acre will be maintained.

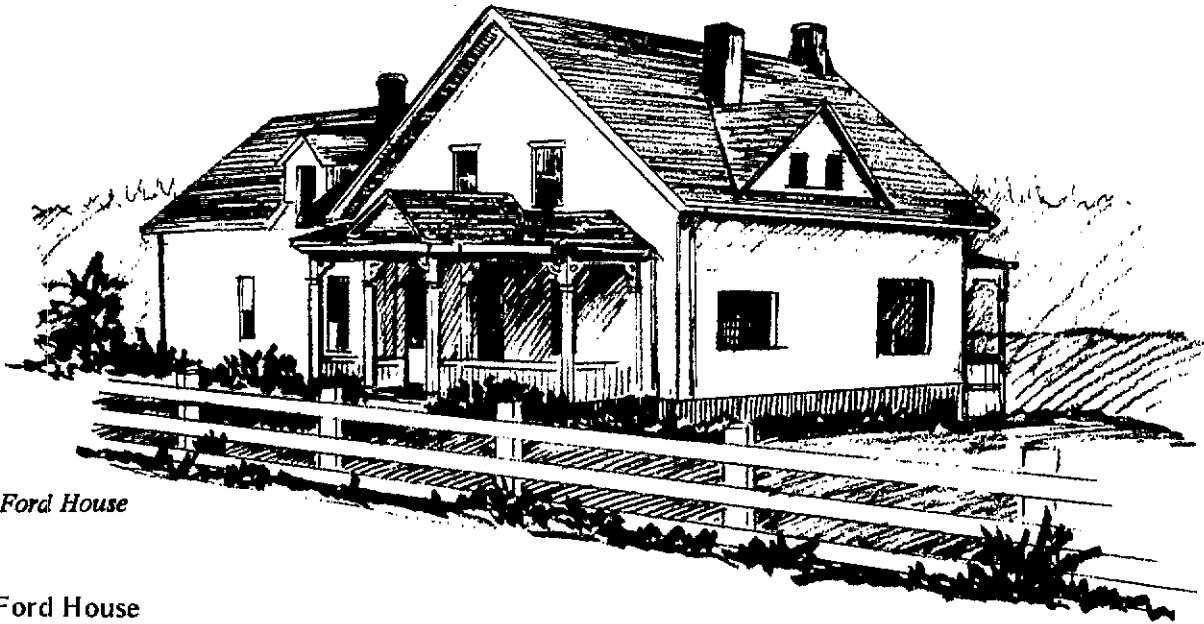
A picnic facility now exists near a comfort station at the northwest corner of the headlands. It is proposed that this picnic parking will be upgraded by appropriate landscaping and a paved area.

Restroom facilities are to be provided along the rim of the headlands and where ones are available, improvements will be constructed to provide for general enjoyment of the area. The primary purpose for which the Heeser Drive lands were acquired is to provide a shoreline for fishing. A pier is for public safety and convenience and will be maintained. New timber walkways will be developed to connect the

park with the headlands. These walkways will be developed to connect the park with the headlands. The walkways will be developed to connect the park with the headlands. The walkways will be developed to connect the park with the headlands.

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*Ford House*

### **Ford House**

The restoration of the Ford House, built in 1855 and one of the oldest structures extant in the town of Mendocino, is considered to be a very important part of the development plans. The house is located on the south side of Main Street, the only building left on that side of the street following a devastating fire. Its restoration will enhance the historic scene of the village and will also enable it to serve as an orientation center and interpretive unit. An office for a park administrator will be included, although the main administrative center and service yard for Mendocino Headlands State Park will remain at Russian Gulch State Park, two miles to the north.

A 28-car parking facility is planned for construction on the east side of Ford House to accommodate the anticipated increase in visitors. Because of the boggy soil in the area, it will be necessary to construct drainage corrections, a foot bridge, and walkways between the parking facility and the house to minimize pedestrian impact on the soil and vegetation. The parking facility will be obscured from Main Street by a change in elevation as well as existing and proposed plantings.

### **Thomsen Property – Youth Hostel**

This property, located south of Big River and adjacent to and inland from Highway 1, has recently been acquired. It is proposed that a youth hostel be developed on this land, utilizing the existing residence and barn. Utilities are available.

### **Lands in Process of Acquisition**

Proposed developments on the lands along the north and south bank of Big River will, of course, ultimately depend on a specific Resource Inventory and Analysis, Resource Management Plan, and General Development Plan to be done after the acquisition has been finalized. The suggested constructions described here are presented as probable recommendations based on what appear to be the needs and suitabilities of the lands.

*Big River Beach:* East of the highway, on the gravel bar north of the river, parking for beach use and fishing now occurs on land that is a hodgepodge of ownership – State Highway Land, a narrow strip of county land, and private ownership. Available Parks and Recreation acquisition funds will provide for consolidation of this jurisdiction under the ownership of the State Park System. Improvement of the parking there will then be possible, providing a paved area that will accommodate 130 cars. This will result in a neater arrangement of vehicles that will be screened by appropriate plantings.

Near this parking facility, a portable sanitation facility should be installed. Later a permanent flush-type may be constructed. In addition, a boat-launching ramp and a comfort station are proposed. Access to this area is via the county road from Highway 1.

Presently the Georgia-Pacific Corporation has a haul road that traverses the flat area of the gravel bar. It is suggested that this road be moved to the base of the hill, thus freeing a large area for recreation activities and still permitting the corporation to retain access to its timber lands.

*Land South of Big River:* The section of the land along the south bank of Big River is very steep and hilly. No park development is anticipated either here or on the parcel that lies along Mendocino Bay, adjacent to the mouth of the river. However, the terrain south of Comptche Road in the interior region is quite amenable to development. It is recommended that this area be considered for a number of group camps. It may be reasonable to develop these camps and have them administered by the staff of Van Damme State Park.

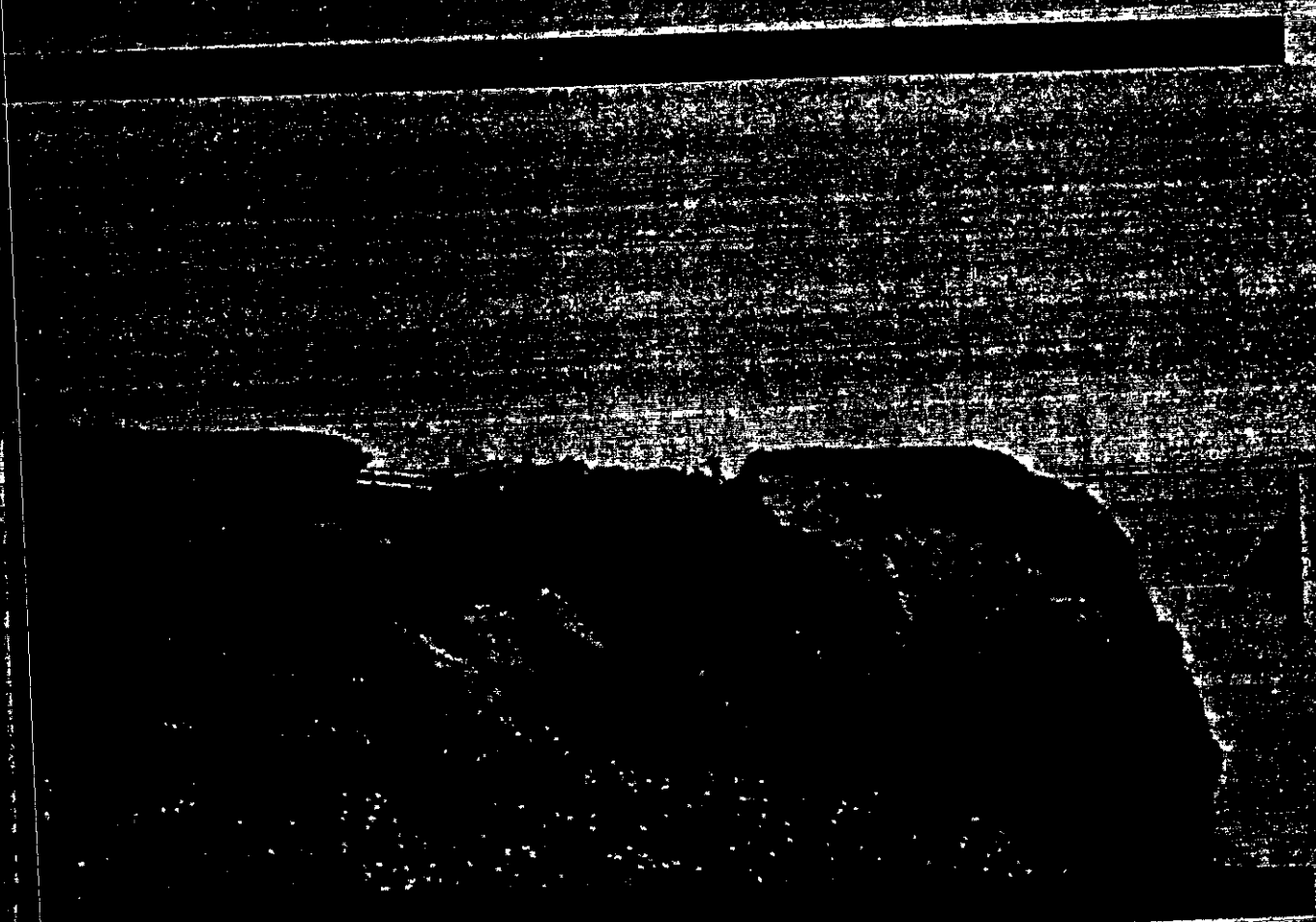
### Interpretive Facilities

It is proposed to restore the exterior of the Ford House to its nineteenth century appearance and, inside, provide an orientation audio-visual program and displays telling about the resources of the park and of the Mendocino coast. Also, along the bluff trail, a series of interpretive panels explaining the shore life, historic and prehistoric sites and landmarks will be provided. The Ford House will require staffing, while trail exhibits will be self-guiding. There is great opportunity for guided walks and programs along the trails and, in inclement weather, for interpretation at the Ford House.





# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT





## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

A detailed description of this project may be found in the Introduction to the Resource Management Plan and General Development Plan. This section will analyze the possible impacts development may have and the measures proposed to avert any harmful effects.

### Environmental Impacts

#### Modification of Management

The only management change that is anticipated is the transfer of the management of the Wildlife Conservation Board lands to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This transfer should result in improved management of the natural resources due to consolidation of jurisdictions.

#### Land Transformation and Construction

No major land transformation or construction is anticipated. The minor impacts that will be felt are:

- Some vegetation near the proposed parking facility at Ford House will be removed. Additional trees will be planted here to screen the facility.
- Landscaping will be done at the proposed parking facility at Big River Beach and to screen the proposed comfort station there. Similar plantings are planned at the comfort station at the northeast corner of the headlands.
- Some grading will take place in constructing the parking facility at Ford House. Measures will be taken to improve drainage in this area.
- Paving will be done for all parking facilities. (This includes the two major areas for parking — Ford House and the Big River Beach development — as well as a minimum number of parking units along the east side of Heeser Drive.) A few paths around the Ford House will be paved. This will cause some increase in runoff.
- Only one permanent, flush-type comfort station is planned at this time; this would be near the Ford House. All other sanitation facilities will be portable chemical toilets.
- The existing haul road on the north bank of Big River will be moved to the base of the hillside. No adverse environmental impact is expected by this change.

#### Air and Water Modifications

Some increase in noise is expected from the anticipated increase in the numbers of people and vehicles in the area. The effect of an increase in traffic will also add to the air pollution through increased exhaust emissions. Changes in traffic routes will be minimal.

#### Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided

If the project is implemented, the adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided are considered to be:

- The visual impact of man and man-made features constructed as support facilities (parking units and comfort stations) will intrude upon the natural scenic beauty of the area to some extent.

- Continued erosion of soil and vegetation will occur, especially along the bluffs, but to a lesser degree than currently.
- Some plant and animal habitats will be disturbed.

### **Mitigation Measures Proposed to Minimize the Adverse Impacts**

The following measures are proposed to mitigate the adverse impacts to the greatest extent possible:

- The consolidation of parking in specified areas will, in fact, decrease the danger of compaction of soils and subsequent erosion by confining pedestrian traffic to a smaller number of paths and limiting the areas subject to compaction by vehicles. These paths will be checked by the park staff and measures taken to prevent severe erosion.
- Landscaping will be judiciously used to prevent comfort stations and parking facilities from intruding on the natural scene.
- All sites that might possibly yield important archeological data will be protected from any development until their importance can be verified.
- The majority of the wildlife habitats in the park will be left undeveloped. Some wildlife habitats are benefited by landscaping. Native plants will be favored for use in any landscaping that is deemed necessary.
- Cut and fill operations and grading will be held to a minimum.
- Any utility lines that may be required will be placed underground, unless historical authenticity dictates otherwise.
- All building plans will be submitted to a local historical architectural review board prior to development.

### **Alternatives to the Proposed Action**

The primary alternative to the proposed action is no action whatsoever. Such an alternative is not acceptable because it would result in continued (if not an increase in) erosion of the soils and vegetation of the headlands, continued visual blights, and the probability of sanitation problems due to the lack of adequate facilities.

### **Relationship Between Short-Term Use and Long-Term Productivity of the Recreational Environment**

The park purposes relate primarily to preservation and interpretation of the present scene. Little is proposed in the way of additional development. In this situation, short-term use and long-term productivity are not very different goals.

Control of human activities and protection of the area will preserve the quality and character of the headlands for long-term productivity. What little impact that will occur on the vegetation will be more than offset by the gains in preservation of the resources.

### **Irreversible Environmental Changes Which Would be Involved**

No adverse irreversible environmental changes would be involved in the development of Mendocino Headlands State Park as outlined in this report.

### **Growth-Inducing Impact**

No growth-inducing impact is anticipated as a result of the implementation of the proposals contained in this report. The establishment of the park in 1972 deliberately (and with the approval of the local citizenry) set limits on the growth of the town of Mendocino, since the park lands surround the town on three sides.

#### **Organizations Consulted in Preparing the Environmental Impact Report**

Mendocino Coast Citizens Advisory Committee  
Mendocino County Park Department  
Mendocino County Planning Director  
Mendocino Headlands Citizens Advisory Committee  
California Wildlife Conservation Board

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