

# Executive Summary

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® (ABDSP) is a vast state park stretching from the mountains in eastern San Diego and Riverside counties across the desert and into Imperial County. Containing over 600,000 acres, it is among the largest state parks in the United States. The ABDSP also holds the distinction of containing the largest area of State Wilderness in California, with over 400,000 acres of ABDSP falling under this designation.

Two major east–west highway routes (County Route S22 and State Route 78) and one north–south route (County Route S2) cross the Park. The Park surrounds the unincorporated communities of Borrego Springs, and Shelter Valley, and borders residential areas in Ocotillo Wells, Ranchita, Anza, and Canebrake. It shares common boundaries with Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area on the east, and a number of adjacent public and private lands.

In accordance with the requirements set forth in § 5002.2 of the Public Resources Code and § 4332 Title 14 of the California Administration Code, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CSP) is required to prepare a General Plan for the park. The General Plan does not provide detailed management recommendations, but rather provides conceptual parameters for future management actions. General planning provides an opportunity to assess a park’s resource stewardship and interpretation, regional significance, facilities development, and recreational opportunities (discussed in the Existing Conditions Section as well as back up materials and the *Appendices*).

The General Plan provides guidelines for future land use management within a park in the Plan Section, including land acquisitions and the facilities required to accommodate an expected visitation increase. A first-tier Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as defined in §15166 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines is also incorporated into this General Plan. The California Department of Parks and Recreation is the lead agency for this EIR. Please refer to the Preface for a description of how the General Plan functions as a joint General Plan/EIR. The EIR addresses the broader impacts of plan implementation in the Environmental Analysis Section, and does not address specific projects, which may be proposed in the future.

General Plans are broad policy documents intended to guide park development and management for many decades. For a unit of the State Park system, law requires completion of a general plan prior to permanent, park development. Although in existence since 1933, ABDSP has never had a general plan. Numerous circumstances have combined to spur preparation of this General Plan. These include increasing pressures on the Park’s sensitive plant and animal species, the need to identify and properly protect cultural resources, and the realization that growing human impacts will continue to play a role in the future of the Park. In addition, increasing recreational demands dictate that the Park be evaluated for increasing recreational opportunities.

The Park's Declaration of Purpose has been updated to reflect modern park issues, public uses and perceptions, and a stronger philosophy of park stewardship while describing the Park's unique qualities and character. The updated Declaration of Purpose shall be as follows:

*“The purpose of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® is to preserve the unique and diverse natural, cultural, and scenic resources of this Western Colorado Desert Region and to provide opportunities for high quality recreation that supports a healthy natural environment.*

*This desert park environment nurtures peaceful solitude, astronomical clarity, amazing forms of life, glimpses of the past, and a tremendous scope for the imagination. Therefore, management of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® will be based upon the goal of preserving, instilling an appreciation for, and making available these treasured qualities and experiences for present and future generations.”*

The Plan Section of the GP/EIR delineates six management zones and a set of goals and guidelines that will guide park management, as well as specific project management and implementation. These goals and guidelines address recreational, operational, interpretive, and resource management opportunities and constraints consistent with the classifications of State Park and State Wilderness, as set forth in § 5019.53 and §5019.68 of the Public Resources Code and with Department Resource Management Directives. The General Plan does not locate or design facilities, but instead provides goals and guidelines for the appropriate types, locations, and designs of those that may be proposed in the future. The General Plan also establishes the primary interpretive themes for interpretive programs and activities.

#### **THE GENERAL PLAN (PREFERRED PLAN) PROPOSES TO:**

- Extend the existing State Wilderness by approximately 9%. The General Plan proposes to add approximately 19,122 acres to four existing wilderness areas in the park. These areas will be included in the existing Santa Rosa Mountains State Wilderness, the Grapevine Mountain Wilderness, Sheep Canyon Wilderness,” and Vallecito Mountain Wilderness. In addition, two new wilderness areas are proposed that would equal about 36,675 acres. These new wilderness areas are titled *Wil-yea Wilderness* and *Sin Nombre Wilderness*. The total proposed acreage for additional and new wilderness equals approximately 55,797. See Figure 6.6 “Management Zones Preferred Alternative” Map for the location of these proposed additional and new wilderness areas.
- Classify approximately 443 acres as the *We-nelsch Cultural Preserve* sub-unit in the San Felipe Valley area, in which development and uses are restricted to protect the integrity of significant sensitive resources.
- Establish management goals and guidelines and management zones for resource management, facility operations, and accessible interpretive and recreational programs for the public within ABDSP.

Management zones in this General Plan describe the overall management purpose and intent of specific regions within the Park as well as depict their intended uses. Each zone provides direction for the general level and type of development and use within the Park.

The management zones are ordered, in general, from the highest intensity of visitor use to the lowest. Areas within each zone may also have varying degrees of use intensity. The six management zones are as follows: Information/Entrance Zone, Focused-Use Zone I (FUZ I), Focused-Use Zone II (FUZ II), Backcountry Zone (BZ), Wilderness Zone (WZ), and the Cultural Preserve Zone.

The General Plan also defines management goals and guidelines that are more specific to individual areas in ABDSP and clarifies the application of broader park-wide goals and guidelines. The following seven specific areas have multiple, co-dependent issues that require comprehensive management action: Blair Valley and Little Blair Valley, Carrizo Impact Area, Coyote Canyon, Lucky 5 Ranch Area, Sentenac Canyon, Indian Canyon, Vallecito Ranch, and Grapevine Canyon. Many goals and guidelines within the Plan Section provide direction for management plans (MP) and/or studies. The following list identifies these future planning efforts: Public Use Interface Element for Specific Geographic Areas, Cultural Resources MP, Camping MP, Roads MP, Trails MP, Natural Resources MP, Interpretive MP, and Facilities MP.

California State Parks is the lead agency responsible for preparation of the proposed ABDSP General Plan in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as required by the Public Resources Code § 5002.2 and §21000 et. seq. The Environmental Analysis Section and other sections of the General Plan document constitute the first tier Environmental Impact Report (EIR) as defined in § 15166 of the CEQA Guidelines. It should be recognized that the level of detail addressed by this EIR is comparable to the level of detail provided in the land-use proposals of the General Plan. As subsequent management plans and site-specific projects are proposed, they will be subject to further environmental review.

Although the goals and guidelines proposed in the General Plan will be largely self-mitigating, new development, maintenance, facility use, and recreational activities allowed by the General Plan have the potential to cause impacts to the environment. These impacts could include soil disturbance, erosion, lowered water quality and quantity, degradation of cultural resources, degradation of aesthetic resources, and degradation of sensitive plant and animal populations or their habitats. As a program level (first-tier) EIR (see CEQA Guidelines § 15166, § 15168), the General Plan identifies broad, park-wide environmental impacts and mitigation measures that address such impacts. Future management plans, activities, and projects will be subject to additional environmental review in order to identify specific impacts and appropriate mitigation and monitoring plans.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

During the General Plan process, four Plan Alternatives were considered including Alternative 3, the Environmentally Superior Alternative, and the No Project Alternative. These alternatives are discussed in Section 4.4 and Table 5.7, the Alternatives Matrix. The primary distinctions between the alternatives reflect State Park, Wilderness, and Natural/Cultural Preserve designations and the allowable activities and facilities in each of these land use areas. The Preferred Plan was developed as a combination of

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 after a series of public meetings and additional visitor and resource studies brought forward new information.

Alternative 1 provided the largest amount of Focused Use I and II acreage for public facilities but was deemed inconsistent with the purpose of the park with limited protection for the park's varied resources. Alternative 2 proposed different amounts land in management zones, primarily in the Wilderness and Backcountry zones. About 1,300 acres of new State Wilderness was proposed. Alternative 2 is inconsistent with the park purpose because it does not provide adequate protection to natural and cultural resources. Alternative 3 would have afforded greater resource protection through the creation of 47,650 acres of Natural and Cultural Preserves but would have had an adverse recreational effect on many popular activities in the park that would be excluded from the Preserves.

Each of these Alternatives contained a Wetland-Riparian Zone that was not adopted in the Preferred Alternative. Instead, natural resource protection that would have been available in the Wetland-Riparian Zone, was incorporated separately under each of the remaining management zones and in the Goals and Guidelines of the Preferred Plan. By addressing wetland protection through the Goals and Guidelines within each management zone, more area is protected than would have been protected under the designated Wetland Riparian Zone.

The No Project Alternative is not feasible because the park facilities must be improved to meet recreational needs and protective measures for the park's resources need to be incorporated into the park operations. Public Resources Code § 5003 requires completion of a General Plan prior to implementation of new facility construction.

# Preface:

## The General Plan as an Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

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## **P.1 CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)**

### ***P.1.1 COMBINED PLAN/EIR***

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 establishes a requirement for state agencies to analyze and disclose the potential environmental effects of a proposed action. The familiar environmental impact report (EIR), prepared by state and local governments, is usually a freestanding document intended to meet the requirements of CEQA. However, CEQA also encourages options to avoid needless redundancy and duplication, such as combining General Plans and EIRs (CEQA Guidelines 15166) and the use of tiering, a process where a lead agency prepares a series of EIRs, progressing from general concerns to more site-specific evaluations with the preparation of each new document (CEQA Guidelines 15152). When the lead agency combines a General Plan and an EIR, all requirements of CEQA must be covered and the document must identify where the requirements are met. The following section provides a guide to the structure and contents of the General Plan/EIR, which meets the CEQA requirements.

As explained here, the General Plan/EIR in its whole constitutes the required content of an EIR, therefore this document refers to the “General Plan/EIR” to reinforce the concept of a single document fulfilling the dual requirements of park general planning and CEQA compliance.

### ***P.1.2 TIERED CEQA ANALYSIS***

The ABDSP General Plan/EIR serves as a first-tier Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as defined in §15166 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. Individual and/or site-specific projects and appropriate CEQA compliance will follow the General Plan/EIR. The analysis of broad potential environmental impacts discussed in the Environmental Analysis Section of this document will provide the basis for future second-level environmental review, which will provide more detailed information and analysis for site-specific developments and projects. These projects include management plans and facility development projects. Planning and feasibility studies for park management, recreation, and resource protection are ongoing and have occurred prior to the General Plan approval.

This General Plan/EIR provides discussion of the probable impacts of future development and established goals, policies, and objectives to implementing such development in a manner which will avoid or minimize such environmental impacts. This approach is consistent with a tiered approach to EIRs.

Where a proposed project covers a wide spectrum of action, from the adoption of a Plan, which is by definition tentative and subject to further refinement, to activities with a site-specific impact, CEQA requires that “environmental impact reports shall be tiered whenever feasible[.]” (Public Resources Code sec. 21093(b).) Tiering is defined as “the coverage of general matters and environmental effects in an environmental impact report prepared for a policy, plan, program, or ordinance followed by narrower or site-specific environmental

impact reports....” (PRC sec. 21068.5; CEQA Guidelines sec. 15385.) While a tiered EIR may not defer all consideration of impacts to a point in the future, it can legitimately indicate that more detailed studies and project-specific impacts may be considered in future environmental documents. Generally, the courts have recognized that environmental studies at the general plan level will be general. It has been found acceptable, that a more detailed analysis be considered later in the process. Subsequently, that analysis will be measured against specific performance criteria, formulated at the time of Plan approval.

The level of detail addressed in the Environmental Analysis section is comparable to the level of detail provided in the land use proposals of the Plan. Tables 5.7 and 5.8 of the Environmental Analysis section provide quantitative data relative to the land use proposals in the rest of the General Plan. What is critical, and what is set forth in the Plan, is the formulation and eventual adoption of a set of policies designed to minimize and mitigate impacts that might occur from the implementation of projects under the General Plan.

For example, the Plan designates Park property into land classifications, such as state wilderness, natural preserves, and cultural preserves and additional management zones. Goals and policies are proposed for adoption for each of these zones which provide conceptual parameters for future management actions. The Plan specifically envisions that a series of focused management plans (Cultural Resources, Natural Resources, Camping, Roads, Trails, Interpretive, and Facility) will be prepared subsequent to adoption of the General Plan. These management plans will propose the activities to be carried out, and will require CEQA compliance and public review as part of their approval.

**P.1.3 STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN/EIR**

This project is prepared in accordance with CEQA Guidelines (Title 14, California Code of Regulations), Article 9. Contents of EIR §15120(c) states that Draft EIRs shall contain the information required by Sections 15122 through 15131. The following table shows where the required items are found in this General Plan/EIR.

Table P.1—Location of EIR Required Content

| CEQA Guidelines Content                 | Location in ABDSP General Plan/EIR  |
|---|---|
| <b>15122</b> Table of Contents or Index | Beginning of this document.   |
| <b>15123</b> Summary                    | Follows the <i>Table of Contents</i>  |
| <b>15124</b> Project Description        | <b>Ch. 3</b> <i>The Plan</i> (description)<br><b>Sec. 4.2</b> Project Description (summarized)<br><b>Ch. 1</b> <i>Introduction</i> (information about project objective & general plan process) |
| <b>15125</b> Environmental Setting      | <b>Ch. 2</b> <i>Existing Conditions</i><br><b>Sec. 4.3</b> <i>Environmental Setting</i> .   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>15126</b> Consideration & Discussion of Environmental Impacts   | <b>Ch. 4</b> <i>Environmental Analysis</i>  |
| (a) Significant Environmental Effects of the Proposed Project.   | <b>Sec. 4.5.3</b> Significant Effect & Proposed Mitigation.   |
| (b) Significant Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided if the Proposed Project is Implemented.                        | <b>Sec. 4.5.2</b> Unavoidable & Irreversible Significant Environmental Effects.   |
| (c) Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes Which Would be Involved in the Proposed Project Should it be Implemented. | <b>Sec. 4.5.2</b> Unavoidable & Irreversible Significant Environmental Effects.   |
| (d) Growth-Inducing Impact of the Proposed Project.  | <b>Sec. 4.5.5</b>   |
| (e) The Mitigation Measures Proposed to Minimize the Significant Effects.  | <b>Ch. 3</b> <i>The Plan</i> , Sec. 3.3 <i>Goals and Guidelines</i> (intended to minimize adverse environmental effects)<br><b>Sec. 4.4.5.3</b> Discussion of Guidelines as mitigation for subsequent action. |
| (f) Alternatives to the Proposed Project.  | <b>Sec. 4.4</b> <i>Plan Alternatives</i><br><b>Table 5.7</b> “Alternatives Matrix—Proposed Uses & Environmental Impacts”  |
| <b>15127</b> Limitations on Discussion of Environmental Impact   | <b>Sec. 4.5.2</b> (discussion - irreversible changes)   |
| <b>15128</b> Effects Not Found to be Significant   | <b>Sec. 4.5.4</b> Effects found not to be significant<br><b>Appendix A</b> (attaches the Initial Study)   |
| <b>15129</b> Organizations and Persons Consulted   | <b>Ch. 7</b> <i>Bibliography</i><br><b>Back Cover</b> Report Preparers  |
| <b>15130</b> Discussion of Cumulative Impacts  | <b>Sec. 4.5.6</b>   |
| <b>15131</b> <b>Economic</b> and Social Effects (optional topic)   | <b>Ch. 3</b> <i>The Plan</i><br>Throughout the document under discussions of recreation & visitor experience  |

***P.1.4 USES OF THIS GENERAL PLAN/EIR***

The General Plan/EIR has been prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Park Acquisition and Development Division, Southern Service Center. The

California State Park and Recreation Commission has approval authority for all State Park General Plan/EIRs. The Commission determines whether or not to:

1. Accept the certified General Plan/EIR as a “Final EIR” under CEQA Guidelines §15166.
2. Adopt the General Plan/EIR as a general plan under PRC 5002.2.
3. Designate the proposed State Wilderness under PRC 5019.50 and 5019.68.
4. Designate the proposed Cultural Preserve under PRC 5019.50 and 5019.74.

The ABDSP General Plan is the guiding policy document for subsequent operation and management of the Park. The Plan utilizes six management zones within the Park. These zones are described in detail in §3.2.4 of the ABDSP General Plan/EIR. Additionally, the Plan specifically envisions that a series of seven focused management plans (Cultural Resources, Natural Resources, Camping, Roads, Trails, Interpretive, and Facility) be prepared subsequent to adoption of the General Plan.

Some of the provisions of these focused management plans as well as development, maintenance, facility use, and recreational activities allowed by the General Plan have the potential to impact the environment. Prior to taking any further action, CSP must evaluate whether that action constitutes a “project” under CEQA, whether it is categorically exempt (for example routine maintenance), whether it may have a significant impact on the environment and if so, whether a negative declaration or an EIR needs to be prepared.

All future action by CSP will need to be found consistent with the adopted ABDSP General Plan. The Plan’s Management Zones along with the Goals and Guidelines, define the main approach to avoid and mitigate subsequent actions and the General Plan/EIR establishes the baseline for future environmental review as a first tier program EIR.

Included in the General Plan is the proposed sub-unit classification change of land classified as State Park to 55,797 acres of State Wilderness and approximately 443 acres of Cultural Preserve. The sub-unit classification change would conform to the proposed Management Zones in the General Plan. The designation of the State Wilderness and Cultural Preserve may be made with no further environmental review than that provided by this General Plan/EIR.

### ***P.1.5 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS AND RECIRCULATION***

The General Plan/EIR addresses the entire area and operation of the Park; hence, it is broad and comprehensive in scope. A series of meetings and a formal public process were used to determine the Plan and the content of the environmental analysis.

An Initial Study and a Notice of Preparation (NOP) was circulated to state agencies, local city, and county planning offices, interested public organizations and interested individuals. (See *Appendices*)

CSP conducted extensive public involvement during the planning process. (See §2.3.5.)

The Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR containing the environmental assessment was published January 17, 2003 (see Notice of Availability in the *Appendices*). After the public comment closed in March 2003; CSP staff prepared responses to comments and proposed text changes for the Preliminary General Plan/Final EIR. The comment letters, CSP responses, and the proposed text changes were published as part of the Preliminary General Plan/Final EIR on the CSP website in November 2003

This document was revised and recirculated in order to: 1) clearly explain how the Preliminary General Plan/EIR complies with CEQA; 2) update the document to address recent significant acquisitions (Vallecito Ranch and Mason Valley); and 3) to integrate the proposed text changes as well as substantive material from the “responses to comment,” (based on the January 2003 Preliminary General Plan/EIR). Grey highlighting identified these revisions in ***July 2004 Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR***, and was recirculated from July 16, 2004 to September 13, 2004 for a 60-day public review period. Changes subsequent to the July 2004 Preliminary General Plan/EIR were indicated in the “Staff Recommended Changes” and approved by the State Park Commission on February 11, 2005.

The following document incorporates all changes mentioned above and therefore provides the complete and Park Commission approved:

***Final General Plan and EIR – February 11, 2005.***

