

Castle Rock State Park General Plan

Newsletter #3

Prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Northern Service Center

December 30, 1997

Sacramento, California

Planning Workshops

January 15, 1998

6:30 PM - 9:00 PM

Louden-Nelson Community Center
301 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA.

January 16, 1998

7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Saratoga Community Library
13650 Saratoga Ave. Saratoga, CA
(one mile north of Hwy. 9)

You are invited to attend the third planning workshop in preparation of a general plan for Castle Rock State Park. At this workshop, planners will present the draft plan proposals for future park management, interpretation, development and recreational use. We would like your thoughts and suggestions on these planning proposals, before we formulate a "Preliminary General Plan Document", to be circulated in the Spring 1998.

Public Involvement

Public involvement is key throughout the general plan process. With your participation, we can learn how this park should be improved to meet your needs and protect resources. At our first planning workshop and through surveys of park users, people expressed the importance of preserving wilderness characteristics and improving interpretation of resources. People also wanted access and opportunities for recreation.

In June, the planning team held the second public workshop in Los Gatos and presented issues and alternatives being considered for the general plan. Rock climbers, mountain bikers, hikers, equestrians, and amateur astronomers were among the 90 workshop participants, along with park neighbors and representatives from various agencies and organizations. The purpose was to present alternatives under consideration by the planning team and receive feedback from workshop participants.

Generally, people felt that a medium to large natural preserve was appropriate, so long as trail access was allowed. Public use of Partridge Farm was supported for day use and walk-in camping, although people remained concerned about the ability of park staff to protect resources from damage with more people in this area. Amateur astronomy programs were popular with one segment of the workshop participants.

Summary of Planning Issues and Public Concerns

The following is a summary of problems, issues, and suggestions made by the public during our first and second planning workshops:

Parking: Many park visitors feel that parking and restroom facilities are limited. Some suggested that the park should consider opening the Partridge Farm area near the interpretive shelter for parking. Others feel that limiting the amount of parking will help limit the numbers of people in the park at any one time, thereby reducing impacts from overuse of the Castle Rock area.

Visitor Center: It is proposed to develop a multi-agency visitor center at Saratoga Gap to provide information on resources, trails, and available recreation opportunities in the Santa Cruz mountains. While most people favor this public facility, local residents expressed their concerns about traffic congestion already being experienced from vehicles and bicycles. Some residents indicated that we should only consider the potential use of the former Caltrans facility for a state park office.

Rock Climbing: There is strong interest among the climbing community in maintaining the availability of rock climbing in Castle Rock State Park. Ecologists point out that damage is occurring due to climbing around and on the rock formations. Climbers and ecologists said that we need a climbing management plan to preserve access and avoid further degradation of park resources. Non-climbers wanted to keep some rock areas free of climbing activity (such as the Lion Caves) to preserve unique moss covered tafoni sandstone formations and protect plant and wildlife habitats.

Protect Resource Values: Many park visitors believe that Castle Rock State Park should be protected from overdevelopment and overuse. They said that development of facilities should be consistent with limiting the number of visitors at levels consistent with wilderness values. Only essential operations and visitor support facilities should be provided and located at the perimeter of the park. Education and interpretive programs are needed to ensure that visitors are aware of the park's history and the delicate nature of the naturally occurring flora and fauna.

Provide Recreation Opportunities: Mountain bike enthusiasts expressed interest in gaining access to park trails; in particular, trails which connect to regional trails, such as the Saratoga Toll Road, Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail, and the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Other suggestions regarding trails included: preserve the hiking experience with larger network of hiking trails; improve horse trails with loop trail system

and trailer parking, and improve access trails to high use areas. Many hikers and equestrians feel that multiple-use of trails (with the addition of mountain bikes) will displace current users. The Castle Rock Advisory Committee advised the department not to allow mountain bikes on trails in Castle Rock State Park.

Reduce Impacts & Disturbances: Visitors expressed their displeasure with the gun noise from the Los Altos Rod and Gun Club, located adjacent to the park. They feel gun noise impacts the quality of visitor experience. The public also expressed concern for gun club debris and its potential negative impact on park resources. The visiting public indicated they would like to see the gun club moved.

Provide Adequate Staffing: Many people have expressed concern that future development programs need to include funding for park operations.

Summary of Draft General Plan Proposals

Unit Purpose

The purpose of Castle Rock State Park is to preserve the outstanding natural resources and supporting ecosystems on the upper watershed of the San Lorenzo River, while providing opportunities for the visiting public to enjoy and be inspired by the unique and diverse topography, geology, biotic communities and scenic views.

Unit Vision

Castle Rock State Park is a place of spectacular scenic beauty — a natural area mostly unencumbered by human habitation or sensory intrusions. The park is an integral component of the Santa Cruz Mountains ecosystem and its evolutionary processes. It provides public access into this unique environment and offers a place for all visitors to enjoy and appreciate its inherent resource values.

Unit Management

To accomplish this purpose, the California State Park System is to manage the park resources for the continuing scenic, educational, scientific, and recreational benefits of present and future generations. Park management shall guide the recovery of natural processes and features in the park towards the balances that existed prior to the arrival of Euro-Americans.

Management and interpretation will aim to increase the visitor's understanding and appreciation of resources within the park and surrounding region, and strive to motivate visitors to help protect and preserve these resources. Significant cultural features will be interpreted and managed for their long-term preservation.

Facilities, where necessary for public health, safety, enjoyment and convenience, shall be unobtrusive, and provided in locations with the least disturbance to the scenic beauty and resource values of the overall area.

Resource Management

Castle Rock State Park is a 3,868 acre unit of the State Park System situated primarily in the northeast corner of Santa Cruz County. Some of the important natural features found at the park include:

- uncommon and fragile tafone rock formations,
- special plant assemblages such as knobcone pine, riparian, black oak woodland, and redwood plant communities, and
- habitat for marbled murrelets, golden eagles, steelhead trout and several other sensitive animal species.

Most of the forested and chaparral-covered park is situated on steep to very steep slopes, with soils that have a high potential for erosion when disturbed. Numerous springs and seeps in the park feed tributaries to King's Creek, Deer Creek and the San Lorenzo River. Travertine formations unique to Santa Cruz County are also found at the park.

In order to protect and preserve these features, the preferred general plan includes a series of directives that set policy for long term resource management. Key among these are directives that instruct the department to:

- Develop park-wide watershed and vegetation management plans for the perpetuation of native vegetation and natural processes;
- Establish a high priority for sensitive species management;
- Develop a "Limits of Acceptable Change" program that determines objectives and defines conditions, whereby visitor impacts can be assessed and limits established for the continued protection of features and resources;
- Provide protection for wetland soils at springs, seeps, and riparian areas;
- Control and eradicate invasive exotic plant and animal species such as yellow starthistle and feral pigs ;
- Work cooperatively with other government agencies, private land owners, and organizations to provide for optimal native species diversity throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains; and
- Protect 2,000 acres of the upper San Lorenzo River and King's Creek watershed by requesting that the State Park and Recreation Commission subclassify the area as a Natural Preserve.

Natural Preserve

A natural area of about 2,000 acres in the Kings Creek and upper San Lorenzo River drainages is being proposed

for subclassification as a Natural Preserve. This classification will establish protection for sensitive plant communities, wildlife habitats and geologic features, and provides for the continuing occurrence of natural processes. Sensitive resources include riparian areas, marbled murrelet habitat, remnant old growth redwood forests, and rare tafone sandstone outcrops. The proposed natural preserve extends across different ecological units and Resource Management Zones (RMZs), notably: The Kings Creek, Kings Creek Canyon, San Lorenzo River, Wildlands, and Lion Caves RMZs.

Recreational activity and development within the preserve will be limited to trails and interpretive facilities required for the visitor's visual and sensory enjoyment of the resources. Trails will provide access, but active forms of recreation such as camping, rock climbing, and others that may occur off the trails will be prohibited in order to protect soil, rock, plant and wildlife features.

Cultural Resources

A partial cultural resource inventory has been conducted at Castle Rock State Park. Work has focused on existing roads, trails, and campgrounds, and areas proposed for future development.

One significant prehistoric archaeological site has been recorded in the Partridge Farm area, and there is evidence that Euro-American activities have taken place since 1855. Earliest recorded activities were associated with gold prospecting in the upper San Lorenzo river. Potential mining claims were made for six decades, but none proved valid. The growing demand for firewood and lumber by the Santa Clara Valley residents spurred the development of roads and the earliest settlement of the area. In the mid-1880s, farmers began to claim land along the slopes of Summit Ridge. Apple and pear orchards were planted on the open, dry, rocky soils.

Historic evidence of these activities still remains at Castle Rock. The most significant of these include: the Partridge House, the Saratoga Toll Road, "Hall's Station" site, various orchard sites, and "Tin-Can Springs". Three historic roads have been modified and maintained to the present as trails and service roads (Saratoga Gap Trail, Service Road Trail, and Kings Creek Truck Trail). There are a number of other minor historic sites of limited significance located in the unit. These are primarily lumber products camps, orchards, and various recreational cabin/cottage sites. Primary inventory work indicates that the Gap toll station (Brewer's Station) and the last Castle Rock District school were in the area of the park. However, the sites have not been positively located due to modern road and parking improvements.

The General plan provides for protection and interpretation of all significant archaeological and historic resources.

Trails

Castle Rock State Park is part of a larger system of regional open space recreation areas. These parks are

administered by State Parks, Santa Clara County, and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. The General Plan supports regional trail objectives and encourages appropriate connections between Castle Rock State Park and these adjacent public lands.

Hiking is the primary trail use at this state park. Occasional horseback riding occurs on unpaved roads. Trails also provide access for rock climbers and visitors to the natural areas. Multi-use trails located outside the state park provide opportunities for mountain bike activity.

While mountain biking is recognized as a legitimate form of recreation, currently bikes are excluded from Castle Rock State Park. The District Superintendent may open and close specific roads and trails to mountain bike use based on Department policy and criteria established for determining environmental and social impacts. The Saratoga Toll Road and Kings Creek Truck Trails appear to be the only trails designed with potential for multi-use.

The General Plan calls for the preparation of a Unit Trails Plan. The trails plan will determine priorities and identify specific routes and appropriate use. It will include design criteria and guidelines for trail construction, signing, maintenance, monitoring and protection of resources.

Trail Objectives:

- Develop loop-trails at the park's perimeter;
- Provide interpretive-nature trails into the proposed natural preserve;
- Improve trail connections between Saratoga Toll Road and Saratoga Gap Trails; and
- Rehabilitate existing trails, or realign trails to minimize resource impacts.

Interpretation

Interpretation is a communication process designed to reveal meaning and relationships of our natural and cultural heritage to the public. Interpretation, both passive and active, may require some facilities.

- A multi-agency Visitor Center has been proposed for the west corner of Saratoga Gap (the junction of Highways 9 and 35). Services provided at the center would include visitor information on nearby recreational opportunities and interpretive exhibits focusing on the area's natural and cultural history.
- An interpretive panel is currently being developed in conjunction with the parking lot improvements at Sempervirens Point.
- An Environmental Living Program, an overnight program for elementary school children, is being proposed for Tin Can Ranch.

Partridge Farm will serve as the primary entrance and orientation area for most visitors to Castle Rock State Park.

Interpretive facilities and programs developed at Partridge Farm area will complement the modest development being proposed. Any such development, while providing for the restoration and protection of natural and cultural resources, will include interpretation of these resources. Partridge Farm will focus on visitor contact, orientation and programs for resource education and awareness. The existing interpretive displays at the shelter will be upgraded.

An important part of the proposed Natural Preserve will be the development of an interpretive trail through the preserve, providing the visitor with an understanding of the values of the area it encompasses.

Castle Rock Ridge

Castle Rock Ridge, with its scenic vistas, easy access, and interesting rock features is the most popular area of the unit. This popularity, together with its sensitivity, has also led to overuse problems such as soil erosion, vegetation loss, and destruction of rock features. The proposed general plan calls for allowing low impact rock climbing (only in this area of the unit) with the preparation of a climbing management plan in cooperation with the climbing community. The plan also calls for improving education and interpretation, and improving trails and signing to reduce impacts. Following the completion of the resource inventories, management plans and geologic studies, a monitoring program will be implemented to determine the appropriate level of use to maintain the resources. Temporary and seasonal closures may be necessary to permit rehabilitation.

Partridge Farm

Partridge Farm has the greatest potential in the park to become a center for providing visitor services and additional facilities. Its relatively flat terrain, vehicular access, available utilities, and close proximity to trails, scenic overlooks, and popular recreation areas make it desirable for facilities development. However, the development of Partridge needs to consider the surrounding areas and additional visitor use that such development may encourage. This balancing of recreation development with resource protection of nearby sensitive areas is addressed in the proposed General Plan by the following goals and guidelines.

Goals

- Partridge Farm is to serve as a primary entrance (or portal) for access to Castle Rock State Park. As such, it will provide for visitor orientation, day use parking, and interpretive/educational facilities.
- Continued protection and preservation of natural and cultural features of the Partridge Farm area and its surrounding environs will be provided. Establishment of native plants will improve overall site conditions and is considered an essential component in this goal.

General Guidelines

- A detailed site plan will be prepared for the Partridge Farm area (prior to any development), to guide specific development, parking and campground capacities.
- A Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) program for the Lion Caves and Castle Rock Ridge RMZs shall become an integral planning element of the Partridge Farm area. The LAC program will assess the amount of visitation that is appropriate for the area and will guide any future development.
- All development decisions will be guided by the intent to provide a quality first impression and a sense of place, consistent with the park's resource values.

Specific Guidelines include:

- Provision for vehicle access and day use parking (initially 50 car capacity with adjustments based on the LAC);
- Upgraded interpretive facilities and programs with improved trailhead signing (including trails information and use regulations);
- Provision for restrooms, potable water, picnic and camp tables, and garbage facilities;
- Development of walk-in campsites with additional parking (approx. 20 sites, 20 cars);
- Development of an outdoor visitor program area and scenic overlook;
- Inclusion of native plant restoration;
- Adaptive use of farm house for residence or appropriate adaptive uses (possible house museum, park administrative office, etc.); and
- Establishment of an office near the entrance road to Partridge Farm (may be part of contact station).

Unit Operations

The operations element of the General Plan is an overview of existing operational activities and the expected effects of the General Plan. It identifies basic types of operational services provided at the time of the Plan's preparation, discusses operational problems and addresses the operational impacts of the Plan's proposals. The operations element does not recommend staffing needs or identify specific functions of staff.

The general plan proposes that the park headquarters and maintenance facilities be removed from the existing trail camp. The general plan proposes that a base for unit operations be established at Partridge Farm or in the former Caltrans Maintenance Yard at Saratoga Gap (this would require Caltrans to surplus its property, then be acquired by State Parks for this purpose).

Where we are in the planning process:

- Data Gathering
- Identify Issues & Concerns
- Prepare Alternatives
- ☑ Develop Preferred Plan (draft)
- ☐ Public Review & Comment (CEQA)
- ☐ Park Commission Approval

The Preliminary General Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report will be circulated in the Spring of 1998 for a 45 day public review period. The public may make comments and the Department will respond to those comments. The Preliminary General Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report with the comments and responses will constitute the Final Environmental Impact Report and will be presented to the Park and Recreation Commission in the Fall of 1998 for its consideration in the approval of the General Plan.

Castle Rock State Park Advisory Committee

An advisory committee from the local community was established at the beginning of our planning effort to advise the park staff on local concerns. For information, you may contact Jan Anderson, Park Superintendent at (408) 429-2850, or write to the committee: Attention Stu Langdoc, 17680 Bruce Ave., Monte Sereno, CA 95030.

How to get information?

If you are not currently on our mailing list, and would like to receive the newsletter and notice about future planning actions, please give us a call, or write to the address below:

Dave Keck, Project Manager
1725 23rd Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95816
Phone: (916) 322-2997
Email: dkeck@parks.ca.gov

Visit the State Parks Web Site at:

<http://www.cal-parks.ca.gov>



Interpretive shelter at Partridge Farm



*Lion Caves
"tafone" sandstone formation*

California State Parks Mission Statement

The Mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's most extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.