

CASTLE ROCK

GENERAL PLAN NEWS

APRIL 1998

NEWSLETTER #4

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON STATE PARK PLAN

Preferred Plan presented at Public Meetings

In January, the planning team held two public meetings (one in Santa Cruz and the other in Saratoga), to present the draft plan proposals for the future of Castle Rock State Park. Twenty-five people attended a rainy night meeting in Santa Cruz, expressing interest to park planners and State Park managers about the wilderness and opportunities for climbers and hikers at Castle Rock.

On the second night in Saratoga, the weather improved and over 125 people attended a "standing room only" meeting at the community library. This group was as diverse as are the visitors to the park: rock climbing and mountain bike groups, equestrians, hikers, astronomers, nearby residents, and other public agencies' representatives interested in the park's future.

Comments and suggestions were made at both meetings in response to the detailed presentation made by park staff and planning specialists. The following represents a list of primary public concerns:

Public Concerns

1. Protecting wilderness and wildland values,
2. Preservation and use in the proposed Natural Preserve,
3. State Park's plans for use of former Caltrans Maintenance Yard,
4. Multi-agency Visitor Center concept for Saratoga Gap,
5. Partridge Farm development,
6. Parking locations and park carrying capacity,
7. Rock climbing opportunities,
8. Trail access and Mountain bike use,
9. Astronomy and protection of the "dark sky" resource.

Wildland Values

People want to preserve the wild character of the park . . .

The protection and perpetuation of the "wild" character inherent to Castle Rock State Park has been shown to be very important to the public. The planning team agrees that the park exhibits "wild" characteristics, as expressed in its rugged remoteness, as well as the functions that it serves in conserving native plants and animals.

Past proposals have referred to the park as a "near-wilderness." The

term "wilderness" has a legal definition in the Public Resources Code (PRC 5019.68) that describes a wilderness area as being ". . . untrammelled by man . . ." and ". . . retain(ing) its primeval character and influence . . ." The planning team feels this term is not appropriate for Castle Rock State Park because the park has been subjected to repeated logging, road building, powerline corridor development, and the flight paths of air traffic to two major metropolitan airports. While the park is still recovering from past human-caused disturbances, impacts of these disturbances continue to scar the landscape.

This does not mean that the Department of Parks and Recreation rejects the idea that the park's "wild" character is important. While we do not believe that the park is a true wilderness, we agree that the term "wildlands", is an appropriate and more accurate term to be used in the park's purpose statement. The Unit Purpose, found in the Resource Element of the General Plan, directs the management actions of the park. The planning team defines "wildlands" as follows:

Wildlands - a large area of land that has functioning natural processes and is occupied by native plant and aquatic communities that support native fauna; includes areas recovering from prior human-caused disturbances and therefore are not necessarily pristine or unaltered.

The modern science of Landscape Ecology tells us that, in order to preserve the values that we find in our animal and plant life, we must set aside reserves and corridors that connect reserves. The general plan directs departmental staff to work with other agencies, groups, and private individuals who support these values to identify and protect habitat corridors from the park to adjacent "wildlands" so our natural heritage will continue for generations yet unborn.

The park has been classified by the California State Park and Recreation Commission as a "State Park." The purpose of this classification is to preserve the outstanding natural, cultural and scenic values, as well as the indigenous flora and fauna of the unit. Protection and preservation of these values applies to all areas of the park.

The planning team feels that the park has important roles to play in interpretation and recreation. Interpreting the story of how past extractive uses have affected the park, of how the park is recovering, and of how it has changed are all important to the understanding of our wildland values.

Providing access to the park through low-impact recreation is important for the health of the visitor. It provides an opportunity for the public to enjoy the park, experience its values, and gain an appreciation of its significance. This, in turn, will enhance support for park values.

Natural Preserve

In recognition of some of the park's more significant wildland values, the planning team has proposed the creation of a 2,000-acre natural preserve that is meant to protect unique geologic formations, rare plant communities such as knobcone pine forest and riparian areas, and habitat for a great diversity of animal life, including threatened and endangered species. The configuration of the preserve's boundaries is easily defined and manageable.

Approximately 50% of the park is proposed for subclassification as a Natural Preserve. Most of this area includes special wildlife habitat and plant communities on slopes of 30% or greater. Roads, parking, restrooms, and other structures are located outside natural preserves. Limited trails for interpretive purposes will be considered. The Superintendent has the authority to regulate use and prohibit certain activities in the park.

Some people believe that the size of the proposed natural preserve is too large and will lock out opportunities for free roaming and discovery; Others want to expand it, to include Travertine Springs and all of the Black Oak Woodland, with no access trails at all in order to preserve ecosystems and natural processes.

The general plan will make recommendations and provide justification for limited access and use of the proposed natural preserve. The plan will recommend that bicycles, horses, and rock climbing activities not be allowed in the natural preserve.

The issue of "free-roaming" in the natural preserve is not specifically governed by official policy, other than for potential impacts and protection of natural and cultural resources. These issues will be guided by the unit trails plan and future management plans, to be prepared through the Santa Cruz District office.

Travertine Springs is a special habitat separated from the proposed natural preserve by a powerline corridor. This special habitat will be protected through sound resource management efforts, including proper trail construction and interpretation. Powerline maintenance and its associated vegetation management doesn't fit within the philosophy of a natural preserve. Therefore, the preserve boundary will not be proposed to include Travertine Springs.

A portion of the black oak woodland (approximately 55%) lies within the proposed natural preserve, where restoration and preservation is paramount. The remaining portion of the black oak woodland is located in the Castle Rock Ridge Resource Management Zone (RMZ). While this RMZ allows for low-impact rock climbing, resource preservation is the primary management philosophy within this zone. Preservation of the black oak woodland will be a high priority in future management plans for this State Park.

Old logging roads will not be restored for purposes of preserving cultural features. Old road alignments (where they present erosion and other problems) will be surveyed and removed, and the native landscape restored.



Southwest view of the San Lorenzo River Canyon

PARK MAP

Resource Management and Protection

The Department of Parks and Recreation is committed to the long-term preservation of the natural, cultural, and scenic resources at Castle Rock State Park. Further planning efforts recommended by the proposed General Plan for the park include a group of resource management plans that apply to vegetation management, prescribed wildfire management, watershed management, trails, climbing management, and wildlife management. Issues such as the control of invasive exotic vegetation and wildlife (e.g., feral pigs), soil erosion, special plant and animal management, and low-impact climbing will be addressed in these plans.

Park managers are also directed to work with outside agencies, private industry and local landowners to protect park resources, reduce sources of noise pollution, and provide for the landscape needs of native wildlife.

Managing Visitor Impacts

Throughout this planning process we have referred to specific methods used for establishing acceptable and appropriate resource and social conditions in recreational settings. Such methods as the Visitor Impact Management (VIM) system developed for the National Park Service or the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) used by the U.S. Forest Service have been developed for this purpose. Each of these methods employs a similar design for collection of baseline resource information, establishment of a resource monitoring element, and setting standards for acceptable change. We recognize that any recreational use produces at least some impact, and that we need processes and strategies for managing visitor impacts within acceptable levels.

We recognize the importance of providing and maintaining diversity in resource features and conditions of the park. A method similar to the VIM or LAC will be used by park officials to improve recreation management and resource protection. It is the department's goal to create quality visitor opportunities while providing optimal resource protection.

This process provides the framework for managing visitor impacts. On-going monitoring furnishes data to compare to established standards; when impacts threaten to exceed standards, actions are triggered to bring resource conditions within acceptable limits. In contrast, when the system is stable and the potential for increased capacity is possible, action may be taken for a subtle increase in use above the current level. This process for establishing an equilibrium between use and protection avoids setting arbitrary limits for "carrying capacity".

Unit Purpose

The purpose of Castle Rock State Park is to preserve the outstanding natural resources, wildland values 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 the unit purpose, the California State Park System will 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 toward the balances that existed prior to the arrival of Euro-Americans. Restoration and preservation of wildland resources and ecological processes will be primary within the Natural Preserve.

Management and interpretation will aim to increase the visitors' understanding and appreciation of resources within the park and surrounding region, and will 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.



Goat Rock

Climbing

Climbers believe they can climb without causing damage and that they should be allowed to pursue new climbs throughout the park to avoid over-concentration in a few locations. Comments and letters indicate a willingness to accept some regulations and limits on use. Also, climbers expressed a willingness to help with the climbing management plan, trail patrols, maintenance and new trail construction.

Ridge Trail Cliff is a climbing rock that is located within the proposed Natural Preserve and a significant distance from other climbs. This is one of a few sites along the Ridge Trail (in addition to Lion Caves) that the General Plan will recommend be closed to climbing. The purpose is to restore impacted areas and provide what we perceive as a manageable climbing area within the Castle Rock Ridge resource management zone (RMZ). A Climbing Management Plan will be prepared with help from the climbing community to guide low-impact use in the climbing area.

Park Headquarters, Administration, and Maintenance

Residents in the Indian Rock Ranch Subdivision are concerned about how State Parks might use the Caltrans property, and what public facilities would be developed at Saratoga Gap.

The South Skyline Association, representing nearby residents, requested that more rangers be added to patrol the park for visitor safety and protection of resources. Neighbors also want assurance that State Parks will not acquire any type of property interest from unwilling landowners.

The general plan indicates that the Caltrans site is a good location to establish necessary administrative, maintenance, and storage functions but will require specific studies and investigations prior to State Park's acquisition. The planning team has also concluded that the Caltrans site should not be considered for a public park headquarters office or public use, citing potential conflicts with private property access and adjacent residential land use.

Tin Can Ranch will be considered as an alternative site for park administrative and maintenance functions if the Caltrans site is not available.

The park headquarters and primary public contact are recommended for Partridge Farm. Visitor contact could take place from a kiosk operation or park headquarters office, with either adaptive use of the Partridge house or a new structure. A future area

development plan and resource management plans will guide the low-intensity development and appropriate uses at Partridge Farm. The process for managing visitor impacts will help determine what levels of use would be compatible with protecting resource values. Significant natural and cultural resources will be protected and interpreted to the public.

Multi-agency Visitor Center

The visitor center concept is seen as the subject of a future multi-agency planning effort. It would be a facility that serves more than Castle Rock State Park and should include other interested agencies and consider alternative sites outside Castle Rock State Park. The general planning team recognizes that the Saratoga Gap location is a candidate for this type of facility and acknowledges that a future feasibility study will be needed to evaluate traffic conditions and potential environmental impacts.

The general plan will identify the needs of the department and any appropriate functions that could be served by a Saratoga Gap Visitor Center. This facility may serve for visitor orientation to the entire Santa Cruz Mountains including State Parks. It should not focus just on Castle Rock. Parking for the visitor center should be planned and managed to serve short term visits. It is not intended to serve as a trailhead, or long-term parking for other day use visitors.

Visitor Parking

Nearby residents believe that parking and visitor safety along Highway 35 is a problem. They also expressed their desire for “preserving the ecosystem and limiting use to present uses.”

With new parking being proposed at Partridge Farm, it was unclear if the general plan will increase or decrease parking and use for the Castle Rock and the Partridge Farm areas?

Several people who attended the public meetings questioned if more camping is needed for Castle Rock State Park and, if so, whether or not it should be at Partridge Farm?

The general plan does not propose an increase in day use parking for Castle Rock State Park. The Department will coordinate with Caltrans to evaluate existing roadside parking areas along Highway 35 and 9 for possible closure or continued parking use. The general plan also directs park management to improve off-highway visitor parking conditions in the Castle Rock - Partridge Farm areas. The plan allows for parking development at Partridge Farm, within certain use limits as directed by resource management objectives.

Prior to establishing parking and recreational uses at Partridge Farm, the Department shall determine, through the LAC or VIM process, the desired ecological and social conditions for the surrounding areas (Lion Caves, Black Oak Woodland, and Castle Rock Ridge RMZ). Appropriate management strategies and systematic monitoring shall be implemented to achieve desired conditions. Visitor capacity

and use limits may be adjusted up or down based on a continued assessment of visitor impacts and the determination if desired conditions can be maintained. Park interpretation should include discussions of visitor impact management and long term objectives for Castle Rock State Park.

The General Plan will propose phasing the parking lot development at Partridge Farm and define visitor parking in other areas.

Phase 1

- Develop a 50 car parking lot at Partridge Farm
- Request Caltrans to post “no parking” signs along Highway 35
- Keep the existing main parking lot (50 cars)
- Total of 100 car parking capacity for combined parking areas (existing parking capacity)

Phase 2

- If the LAC process supports the initial parking capacity in Phase 1, then up to an additional 50 cars could be developed at Partridge Farm and

the main parking lot removed, with no net increase in overall parking. Alternatively, the parking arrangement could vary between the two parking areas, based on the outcomes from resource monitoring and established limits for acceptable change.

Walk-in campsites are considered low impact development and compatible with other objectives at Partridge Farm. The General Plan will propose 20 campsites initially, with a few campsites designed for people with disabilities. Additional (20 -30 cars) parking will be needed for this overnight use. Parking and lighting designs will protect dark sky viewing by amateur astronomers.

Highway 9 parking:

The plan will focus on a few improved parking lots near trailheads, with interpretive and information panels and restrooms. Possibilities include Sempervirens Point, Red Mountain, Oil Creek, and Waterman Gap. Tin Can Ranch could serve for trailhead parking if compatible with other uses. The primary intent for Tin Can Ranch is to create an Environmental Living Program for grade school children.



Interpretive Shelter at Partridge Farm

Other smaller roadside parking areas should be removed (requires further evaluation and coordination with Caltrans). The amount of visitor parking made available will also establish a basis for managing a carrying capacity for the park.

Management of roadside parking along Highway 9 should accommodate horse trailers where there is sufficient size and easy access to equestrian trails (for example, at Oil Creek parking lot).

Highway 35 parking:

The general plan will encourage the Department to coordinate with Santa Clara County and Caltrans for parking management and use at the Summit Rock (Sanborn County Park) and Vista Point (Caltrans) parking lots.

Issues outside the scope of the General Plan

Gun Club: The park has received both supportive comments and opposition for the gun club on nearby private property. At the last public meeting we were asked to recognize in the plan that the Gun Club is a valuable community resource and should be maintained as a privately owned and operated shooting facility. However, results of our visitor survey indicated that most visitors would prefer that the gun club be reestablished elsewhere because of the noise impact on the park. The Department does not have jurisdiction or authority over the gun club operations, and therefore it will not propose specific actions in the general plan. In contrast, as a close neighbor, we are concerned for

Continued on page 8: Other Issues



Astronomy

A group of amateur astronomers and supporters proposed that the “dark sky” be listed as a natural resource and the general plan include a provision supporting use of the park for public astronomy interpretive presentations.

Castle Rock State Park is a good location for viewing dark skies. The park’s distance and orientation away from the city lights creates favorable conditions along Skyline Boulevard for this type of activity. Partridge Farm, with its easy access and open space provides an opportunity for astronomers who live in nearby urban areas to gather in groups for star parties or individual viewing under the dark skies. Light pollution impacts this viewing potential for most people living in or near urban areas. Support facilities, such as vehicle access, parking and restrooms are the same for this activity as they are for most day use activities (hiking, rock climbing, bird watching, etc.). However, managing this after-hours use presents certain operational needs and design considerations. The Planning Team believes that this use can be accommodated at this location, in conjunction with other proposed uses and desired facilities.

The “dark sky” will be identified as a resource in the resource summary of the general plan, although no specific resource management directives will be proposed. Planning and design for Partridge Farm facilities will consider astronomy activities by avoiding impacts from surrounding area lighting. However, resource management practices will not be changed to perpetuate sky viewing, such as tree removal or other such measures.

Other Issues

Continued from page 7

visitor safety and the impact the shooting range has on the visitor's experience and surrounding resource values. The Department will maintain a cooperative relationship with the gun club to minimize potential impacts for as long as the gun club operates next to the park.

Mountain Bikes: Trails at Castle Rock are currently closed to mountain bike use. Most park visitors believe that we should keep it this way and not open any park trails for mountain bikes because they can damage the resources and change the trail experience for current trail users (hikers and equestrians). Local residents and equestrians point to the problems occurring on multi-use trails in the surrounding open space preserves and wish to preserve an alternative to this at Castle Rock.

Mountain bike users want access off the highway with a connection from the Skyline to the Sea but are not necessarily advocating use of all existing trails. 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 general plan does not propose specific trails and will leave the decisions on future trail use to the District and departmental statewide policies.

What's the next step?

We will finish writing the general plan and provide the public an opportunity to review the document and make additional comments. A draft general plan document will be circulated to "DPR staff" and the advisory committee for their review (scheduled for May-June 1998).

Where we are in the planning process:

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

The Preliminary General Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report will be available for public review at the park, Santa Cruz District office, and local libraries in the summer of 1998 for a 45-day public review period. A public notice will announce when this occurs. At that time, people will have an opportunity to make comments, and the Department will respond to those comments.

The general plan document with the public comments and responses will constitute the Final Environmental Impact Report. This document will be presented to the California State Park and Recreation Commission during a public hearing in the Fall of 1998.

*Thank you...
for your interest
and participation in this
planning effort.*

Following the completion of this general plan, our planning team will undertake the preparation of a general plan for Big Basin Redwoods State Park. Watch for future bulletins regarding this new planning process.

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:

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