

Big Basin Redwoods State Park - Resource Inventory Overview

OVERVIEW

Big Basin Redwoods State Park is the oldest State Park in California. It was established in 1902 with an initial acquisition of approximately 3,000 acres. The park contains the largest continuous stand of ancient Coast Redwoods south of San Francisco. The park now consists of over 18,000 acres of old growth and recovering redwood forests with mixed conifer, oaks, chaparral, and riparian habitats. Elevations in the park vary from sea level to over 2,000 feet. The park has over 80 miles of trails. Some of these trails connect Big Basin Redwoods State Park with Castle Rock State Park, Butano State Park, Pescadero Creek County Park and Portola Redwoods State Park. Also included in the park are the Waddell Creek Wilderness Area and the Theodore J. Hoover Natural Preserve. Big Basin Redwoods State Park is located 25 miles northwest of Santa Cruz via Highways 9 and 236 and about 65 miles south of San Francisco.

The following subsections of the Public Resources Code (PRC) define the State Park, Wilderness Area, and Preserve classifications and, provide guidelines for the planning and management of the park.

Subsection 5019.53 (*State Park*)

State Parks consist of relatively spacious areas of outstanding scenic or natural character, oftentimes also containing significant historical, archeological, ecological, geological, or other such values. The purpose of state parks shall be to preserve outstanding natural, scenic, and cultural values, indigenous aquatic and terrestrial fauna and flora, and the most significant examples of such ecological regions of California as the Sierra Nevada, northeast volcanic, great valley, coastal strip, Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains, southwest mountains and valleys, redwoods, foothills and low coastal mountains and desert and desert mountains.

Subsection 5019.68 (State Wilderness Area)

State wildernesses, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, are hereby recognized as areas where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man and where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. A state wilderness is further defined to mean an area of relatively undeveloped state-owned or leased land which has retained its primeval character and influence or has been substantially restored to a near-natural appearance, without permanent improvements or human habitation, other than semi-improved campgrounds, or structures which existed at the time of classification of the area as state wilderness and which the State Park and Recreation Commission has determined may be maintained and used in a manner compatible with the preservation of the wilderness environment, or primitive latrines {sic},

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which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions, and which:

- a) Appears generally to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable.*
- b) Has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.*
- c) Consists of at least 5,000 acres of land, either by itself or in combination with contiguous areas possessing wilderness characteristics, or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.*
- d) May also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.*

Subsection 5019.71 (Preserve)

Natural preserves consist of distinct areas of outstanding natural or scientific significance established within the boundaries of other state park system units. The purpose of natural preserves shall be to preserve such features as rare or endangered plant and animal species and their supporting ecosystems, representative examples of plant or animal communities existing in California prior to the impact of civilization, geological features illustrative of geological processes, significant fossil occurrences or geological features of cultural or economic interest, or topographic features illustrative of representative or unique biogeographical patterns. Areas set aside as natural preserves shall be of sufficient size to allow, where possible, the natural dynamics of ecological interaction to continue without interference, and to provide, in all cases, a practicable management unit. Habitat manipulation shall be permitted only in those areas found by scientific analysis to require manipulation to preserve the species or associations which constitute the basis for the establishment of the natural preserve. (Added by Stats. 1978, Ch. 615)

The following is the approved Declaration of Purpose for Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

The purpose of Big Basin Redwoods State Park, which was established in 1902 as the first park unit of what is now the California State Park System, is to make available to the people forever, for their inspiration, enlightenment, and enjoyment, in an essentially natural condition, a coast redwood forest in the Santa Cruz Mountains, including the entire watersheds of Waddell and Ano Nuevo Creeks, and embracing coastal chaparral, evergreen woodland, and ocean shore; together with the outstanding recreational resources of this area and all related scenic, historic and scientific values.

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The function of the Department of Parks and Recreation at Big Basin Redwoods State Park is to manage the resources of the park in such a way as to perpetuate them for the continuing benefit of the people in accordance with the declared purpose of the park; to interpret them effectively; and to provide such facilities and services, consistent with the purpose of the park, as necessary for the full enjoyment of the park visitors.

The Resource Inventory

The Resource Inventory is a component of the California Department of Parks and Recreation's (Department) long-range planning strategy as outlined in the General Plan Handbook (DPR 1998). The data gathered during inventory efforts serve as the critical base of information from which land management decisions are made. The Department recognizes the need to continuously inventory our parks in order to maintain current information for effective park management. As such, the inventory is recognized as a dynamic document, one that will continuously be enhanced through time. The inventory efforts described herein represent a systematic effort to document the resources of the park including natural and cultural resource values as well as recreational opportunities and significant aesthetic features.

The mission of the Department is *"to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality recreation."* The inventory provides an accounting of the mountain and wilderness features that have supported Native Americans, drawn loggers, academic researchers and casual visitors for hundreds of years. The completion of this inventory provides park staff with information to better preserve the special qualities of Big Basin Redwood State Park, to understand the experiences people seek and to offer greater educational opportunities for all of the people of California and beyond.

The objectives of this Resource Inventory are to provide sufficient information to:

- Provide public information
- Develop resource management policy
- Develop resource management and protection programs
- Serve as a reference to clarify and solve resource problems
- Serve as the basis for preparing the Big Basin Redwoods State Park General Plan
- Serve as background information to plan facilities in the park
- Assess environmental impacts

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- Develop interpretive programs
- Provide background information for maintenance and operation

Approach to Completing the Inventory

The Resource Inventory is compiled and organized by subject matter, with digital data bases, a written text summary and Geographic Information System (GIS) data files. The use of a GIS system allows for both a visual display of the data as well as complex analyses of the data that can otherwise be extremely time consuming. The organization of these data in text and digital form increases daily effectiveness in managing resources, including the visiting public, through an increased flow of information and better utilization of park staff. The content of the inventory follows recommended Department protocol with the content of subject chapters as indicated in the table of contents.

The first effort of the inventory process included a systematic assessment of the available information describing park resources, boundaries and legal provisions (easements, rights of way, lease agreements). Baseline data were gathered from universities, libraries and natural and cultural history museums. In addition, local specialists were contacted and assisted in identifying known information and data gaps. Data collection needs were then identified, prioritized and approached on a systematic basis. Field investigations were performed by park staff and through contract agreements. The scope of the inventory, including field investigations, was designed to provide the data necessary to develop a General Plan and subsequent Management Plan documents for the park and provides the framework for continued inventorying that compliments this initial effort.