



Big Basin Redwoods State Park

CORNERSTONE DOCUMENT

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CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS MISSION

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 outdoor recreation.

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INTRODUCTION

The General Plan and Environmental Impact Report for Big Basin Redwoods State Park (SP) was approved by the State Park and Recreation Commission in May 2013. Big Basin Redwoods SP operated under this General Plan until August 2020 when nearly 97 percent of the park burned during the CZU Lightning Complex fire. The park closed to the public following the fire, and staff began the initial recovery process of conducting post-fire inventory and stabilizing the area.

The adopted General Plan is the guiding land use document for reconstructing park facilities. With the loss of all park facilities, the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary process was completed to establish a future vision for the park given the losses in the fire, and to consider and confirm the relevance and consistency of many of the ideas in the adopted General Plan. This Cornerstone Document builds on the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary to lay out and formalize the post-fire planning steps needed for reestablishing the park that are consistent with the current General Plan.

Although Cornerstone Documents are typically reserved for park units without current General Plans or little or no planning history, Big Basin Redwoods SP was uniquely positioned to benefit from the development of a Cornerstone Document. The Cornerstone Document is intended to be an adaptive tool that provides a concise summary of the park, the basis for future strategies for operations and improvements, and a suggestive roadmap for implementing park goals and projects.

Why develop a Cornerstone Document for Big Basin Redwoods State Park?

The [Cornerstone Document](#) is designed to be a working tool or handbook for each individual California State Park unit.

Source: California State Parks Transformation Team Planning Committee. Cornerstone Document Outline and Definitions.





A Renewed Park

It may take decades for the forest to heal and reestablish the majestic canopies typical of old growth redwood groves before the 2020 fires, yet the signs of rebirth are already evident. Spontaneous wildflowers, returning wildlife, verdant green sprouts around redwood trunks, and the outpouring of support from individuals and organizations are setting the stage for Big Basin Redwoods SP to become a model for climate resilient parks.

In addition to building off the General Plan, this Cornerstone Document integrates findings from the Reimagining Big Basin planning process focused on public education and engagement around reopening and the long-term sustainability of the park. This process was unique to Big Basin Redwoods SP and findings are highlighted in the following chapters.

CZU LIGHTNING COMPLEX FIRE

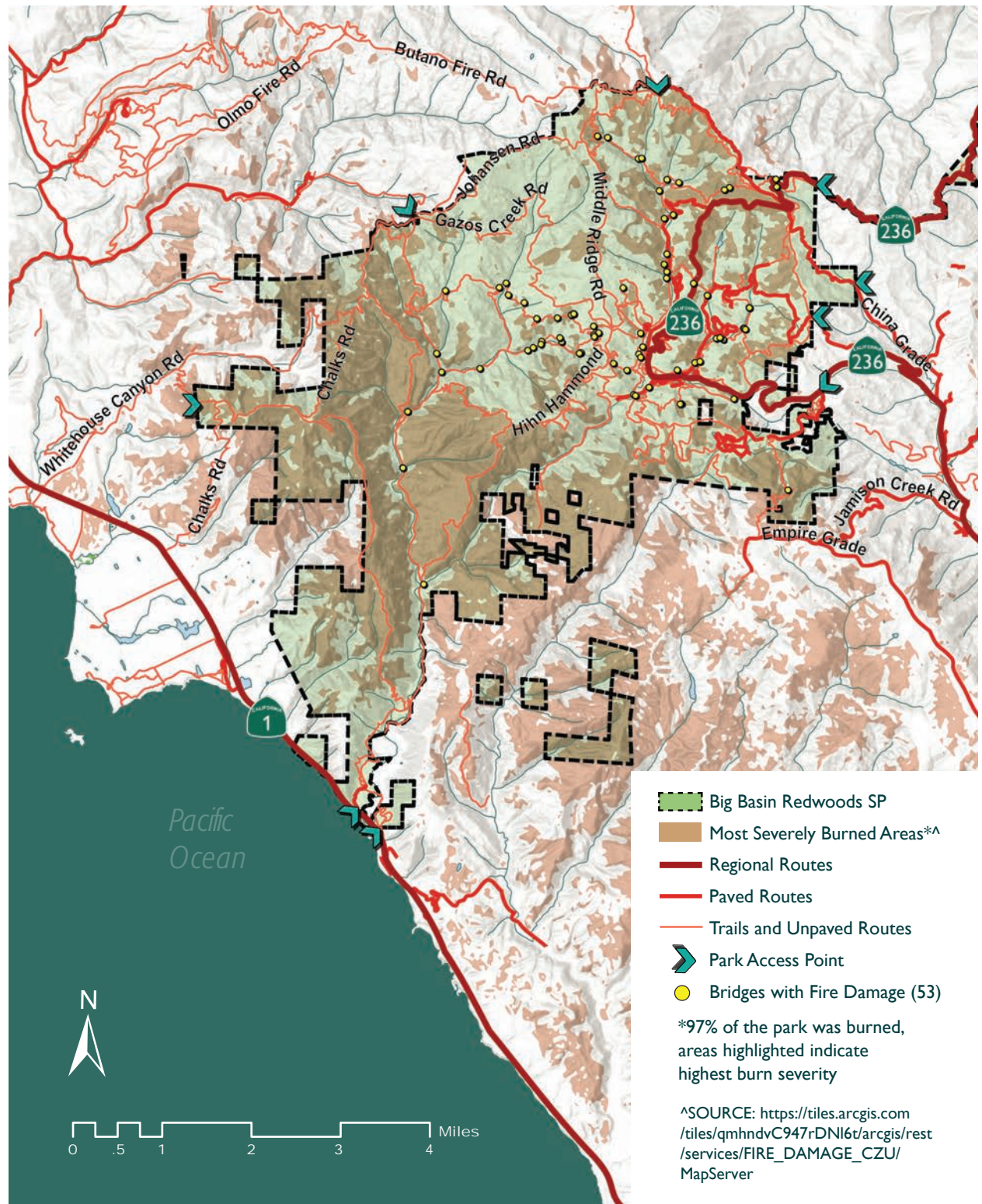
The CZU Lightning Complex Fire (CZU Fire) burned approximately 86,500 acres in Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties. The fire was particularly destructive due to severe weather conditions and high fuel loads resulting from a history of fire suppression, as well as drought and high temperatures indicative of future conditions caused by climate change. Nearly all historic buildings and structures within Big Basin Redwoods SP were destroyed, including the visitor center and campfire center amphitheater, which was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as a part of the 1930s' New Deal programs. All overnight facilities, including campground infrastructure (sewer/water) and tent cabins were lost. At least 47 pedestrian bridges, 6 vehicular bridges, and many other trail structures were destroyed. Extensive repair will be needed to reopen 85 miles of trails within the park.

The forest and natural resources of the park were also changed; however, the redwood ecosystem is adapted to living with fire. While the understory and trees less resilient to fire, such as Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) perished in the fire, many coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), including much of the old growth, is still living and sprouting the next iteration of its forest. The wildlife communities supported by the coastal redwood ecosystem are also returning to Big Basin Redwoods SP, and while it will carry the scars of the fire for generations, the park will continue to thrive as habitat for these species.

Immediate recovery from the fire focused on stabilizing the area, clearing hazardous dead trees along roads and trails,



Figure 1. Big Basin Redwoods SP Post-Fire Conditions



- Big Basin Redwoods SP
- Most Severely Burned Areas*^A
- Regional Routes
- Paved Routes
- Trails and Unpaved Routes
- Park Access Point
- Bridges with Fire Damage (53)

*97% of the park was burned, areas highlighted indicate highest burn severity

^ASOURCE: https://tiles.arcgis.com/tiles/qmhndvC947rDNI6t/arcgis/rest/services/FIRE_DAMAGE_CZU/MapServer





and removing the burn debris and associated contaminated soils from all damaged facility areas. Reestablishing public access at Big Basin Redwoods SP will focus on a road and trail network that allows visitors to safely experience the park's resources, while also protecting sensitive and recovering habitats. Post-fire access planning at Big Basin Redwoods SP will exemplify the integration of forest stewardship strategies such as expanded prescribed fire management with the need to provide safe access for high quality visitor experiences.

REIMAGINING BIG BASIN

The Reimagining Big Basin project was a year-long effort between June 2021 and June 2022 to engage with the community and diverse leaders about reestablishing Big Basin Redwoods SP after the CZU Fire and challenges facing the park in the future. This process informed a Vision Summary that is available at the project website: www.reimaginingbigbasin.org

The Reimagining Big Basin vision and conversations have informed this Cornerstone Document and key elements related to future planning of the park have been integrated. In addition to engagement with the general public, Reimagining Big Basin established an external advisory committee including representatives from the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks, In Solidarity Project, Mountain Parks Foundation, Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area, Parks California, Save the Redwoods League, Sempervirens Fund, and the founder of Latino Outdoors. These groups and others will continue to be important stakeholders and advocates for Big Basin Redwoods SP.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENERAL PLAN AND CORNERSTONE DOCUMENT

While Big Basin Redwoods SP is greatly changed after the CZU Fire, particularly with the loss of many cultural and recreational resources, the framework and vision of the 2013 General Plan remains relevant, is adopted and will guide future planning at Big Basin Redwoods SP and the reestablishment of facilities as described in the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary. This Cornerstone Document is intended to be a companion to the



Reimagining Big Basin Community Engagement Toolkit



ONLINE SURVEY

Taking an online survey that gathered information on how people used the park prior to the fires, and visions for the park's future.



MEMORY MAPPING

Sharing memories using an interactive map that was available through the project website. The memories that were shared provide great insight into the places, resources, and experiences that make the park a landmark in many people's life journeys.



SOCIAL MEDIA HASHTAG WALL

Sharing images that represented their vision for Big Basin either by hashtagging social media posts or uploading images to the website. Images shared described envisioned experiences and park aesthetic.



VIRTUAL EVENTS

(2 events, over 500 participants)

Attending virtual events where recognized subject area experts helped to establish a deeper understanding of the opportunities and constraints for reestablishing the park. The first event focused on how the landscape has been managed over time. The second event shared on the ground studies and forest management work and explored alternative transportation and design strategies that have been used at other parks to address similar challenges.



VISIONING WORKSHOP

(120 participants)

Attending a virtual visioning workshop that built upon themes explored in prior virtual events and culminated in engagement activities. Participants were asked to get more specific about what the vision will look like on the ground, and what the Big Basin experience will be like. Key discussions included the potential for a shuttle and relocating facilities outside of old growth redwoods.



POP-UP EVENTS

(8 events)

Participating in activities at the Reimagining Big Basin table at events and happenings in Santa Cruz, San Jose, San Francisco, Daly City, Oakland, and Watsonville; or through the virtual event booth for the Wild & Scenic Film Festival. Participants included individuals familiar with Big Basin, as well as many who had not yet had the chance to visit California's redwood forests.





General Plan, focusing on strategic next steps for planning at Big Basin Redwoods SP to implement the General Plan.

Some critical elements that are core to planning at Big Basin Redwoods SP have been incorporated directly from the General Plan or modified to reflect current conditions. The major areas of change include the focus on historic features that are no longer within the park, including the facilities in the Headquarters. The Cornerstone also suggests recommendations for replacing recreational resources, such as campgrounds, visitor centers, and trails, that were considered existing in the General Plan.







PART 1: PARK SUMMARY

PARK DESCRIPTION

Big Basin Redwoods SP is California’s oldest state park, established in 1902 through a land purchase and donation. Originally called the California Redwood Park and consisting of 3,800 acres, Big Basin Redwoods SP is now more than 18,000 acres in the Santa Cruz Mountains, within 60 miles of major metropolitan centers in the San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Clara Valley. At the heart of the park is the redwood grove that inspired admirers to form the Sempervirens Club and advocate for the creation of a state park.



Coast redwood trees

CLASSIFICATION STATUS

Big Basin Redwoods State Park is classified by State Park and Recreation Commission as a ‘State Park’ as described in California Public Resources Code (PRC).¹ The State Park also includes classified sub-units within its boundaries, including RDO sub-unit, West Waddell Creek State Wilderness² and Theodore J. Hoover Natural Preserve.³

¹ See PRC 5019.53 <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PRC§ionNum=5019.53> for full description of ‘State Park’

² See PRC 5019.68 <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PRC§ionNum=5019.68> for full description of ‘State Wilderness’

³ See PRC 5019.71 <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_



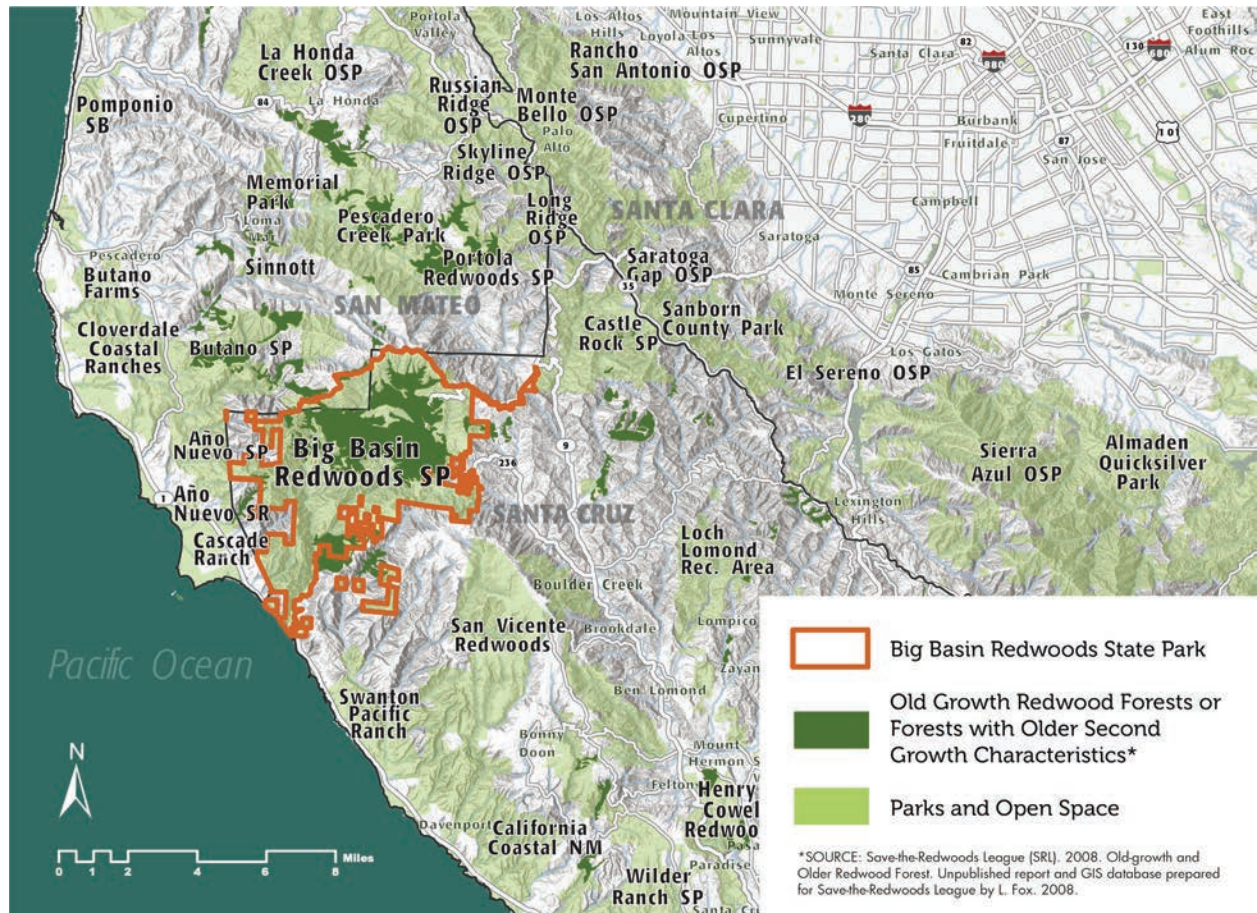


The park contains two distinct areas, the uplands and the coastal areas, and elevations within the park range from sea level to over 2,000 feet. Three watersheds (Waddell Creek, East Waddell Creek, and Scott Creek) form the dominant landscape features of the park. Approximately 5,900 acres within the state park is designated a state wilderness, and together with the backcountry (10,540 acres), constitutes 85% of the park.

The upland area makes up the majority of the park and is characterized by old growth and previously-logged coast redwood forests mixed with other conifers, oaks, and chaparral. The 2020 CZU Lighting Complex Fire (CZU Fire) burned the majority of the park; however, many of the native plant species, including the redwoods, are adapted to living with fire, and will continue to thrive at Big Basin Redwood SP.

[displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PRC§ionNum=5019.71.>](#) for full description of 'Natural Preserve'

Figure 1-1. Regional Context Map

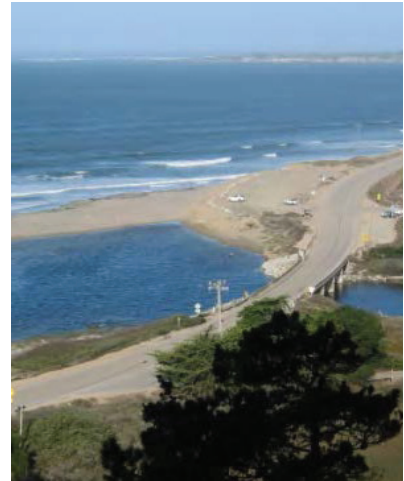


Prescribed burns had been used within some areas of the park prior to the CZU Fire. However, this larger event, caused by lightning strike, burned areas of the park that had not burned for long periods of time, and allowed for less fire resilient species to establish. It is anticipated that the forest that returns to the uplands following the CZU Fire will resemble the redwood forest, oak woodlands, and chaparral areas that have existed in this area for centuries.

In 2011, the upland area was expanded when the Little Basin property (535 acres) was acquired and added to Big Basin Redwoods SP, and in 2022, Sempervirens Fund acquired a 153-acre 'Gateway' parcel east of Saddle Mountain along highway 236 that is anticipated to be incorporated as part of Big Basin Redwoods SP.

The coastal area of the park is characterized by coastal scrub, grasses, marshes, flat terrain, and sandy beaches. At Waddell Beach, the big surf, persistent winds, and ease of access attract surfers, kite surfers, windsurfers, and spectators to this well-known water sport venue. Inland from Highway 1 is Rancho del Oso (RDO) and the 23-acre Theodore J. Hoover Natural Preserve. This area includes remnants of the early Theodore Hoover farm operations, the Nature and History Center, a welcome center, an equestrian camp, trail camps, and trailhead facilities. These areas were burned by the CZU Fire but damage to facilities was not extensive.

Prior to the CZU Fire, the Headquarters area had the highest concentration of development and visitor activity in the park. All facilities in this area, including the visitor center, campgrounds, interpretive facilities, picnic areas, store and gift shop, and trails were destroyed in the fire. It is anticipated that all of these visitor uses will return to the park although with significantly less development within the old growth area. Upon complete reopening, it is anticipated that Big Basin Redwoods SP will serve the same number of visitors with similar visitor experiences as before the CZU Fire. Public access was restricted to Big Basin Redwoods SP immediately following the CZU Fire; limited interim access began in Summer 2022.



Waddell Beach

Remembering the Past

Buildings and facilities from the park's early history, including CCC-era and post-World War II construction, were lost in the CZU Fire. These structures held not only cultural significance for their construction period and style but familiarity for visitors to Big Basin Redwoods SP who cherished them as part of their park experience. Where it did not pose a safety risk, remnants of these structures were left during the post-fire recovery period to allow for future interpretation and cultural resource study.





Opening of limited interim access following CZU fire.

PARK PURPOSE

A Declaration of Purpose describes the purpose of a park and is the broadest statement of management goals designed to fulfill the vision for the park.⁴ The 2013 General Plan revised the previous Declaration of Purpose statement from 1964 to assure that the current park ownership and its resources, which have greatly expanded beyond the original park ownership, are encompassed.⁵ Following the transformative effects of the CZU, further revisions were needed and are suggested in the Revised Declaration of Purpose below.

Revised Declaration of Purpose

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 and recognized as a catalyst in the emergence of the American Conservation Movement, is to protect, restore and perpetuate the outstanding coast redwood forests of the Santa Cruz Mountains and their unique resiliency to fire, including the Waddell creek watershed and surrounding watersheds, and recognize these resources for their educational and recreational value. While established in the early 20th century, the park and its scenic landscape was inhabited and utilized by California Native American tribes who managed it for generations prior to European settlement. The park offers an opportunity to appreciate their legacy and learn from the Native American forestry management practice. Many significant cultural resources burned in the 2020 CZU Fire, including those built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the development of the park in the 1930s, will be remembered in images, as well as with preserved remnants of the structures. The regeneration of the redwood forest following the CZU Fire provides educational opportunities related to the role of fire in the landscape and the resilience of redwood forests. The park's wilderness characteristics and the outstanding scenic qualities of the old growth redwoods, canyon streams and waterfalls, and ridge top ocean vistas extending beyond the coastal resources at Rancho del Oso, together with its cultural history, high-quality recreation and opportunities for the inspiration, enlightenment, and enjoyment of current and future park visitors, make Big Basin Redwoods State Park one of California's premier parks.

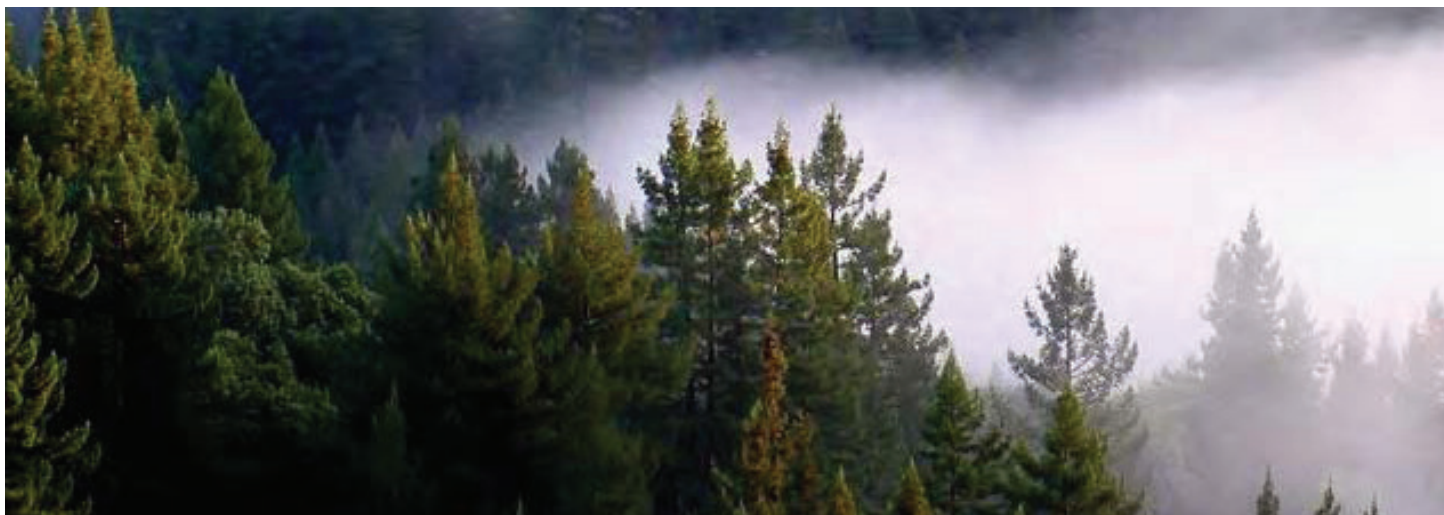
⁴ A Declaration of Purpose for each state park is required by PRC, Section 5002.2(b), "...setting forth specific long-range management objectives for the park consistent with the park's classification..."

⁵ See Section 4.2 in the [2013 General Plan](#) to review previous Declarations of Purpose.

In addition to the declaration of purpose, the 2013 General Plan included a vision statement to provide an overview of desired future conditions within the park.⁶ Although not typically part of a Cornerstone Document, that vision statement was revised as a part of the Reimagining Big Basin visioning process and is presented below, incorporating input from the public and the Reimagining Big Basin visioning advisory committee.

Vision Statement | *From the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary*

Big Basin Redwoods State Park endures as one of California’s most iconic natural landscapes. In the aftermath of the CZU Lightning Complex Fire that burned much of the park and destroyed nearly all facilities, the long-standing commitment to protecting old growth and stewarding natural lands will be reinvigorated. Park stewardship, based on scientific and indigenous knowledge, will foster forest health and create opportunities to connect visitors of all backgrounds and abilities with redwood forests for generations to come. The park will be welcoming and accessible, offering new transportation options and diverse recreational opportunities that will evolve as the forests recover. While ecosystem health and quality visitor experiences may be defined differently over time, they will always serve as the measures for Big Basin’s success.



Fog in the Santa Cruz Mountains

⁶ See Section 4.3 in the [2013 General Plan](#) to review previous Vision Statement





Guiding Principles

Eight guiding principles emerged from the Reimagining Big Basin visioning process. They were refined based on public input and provide a framework for future planning at Big Basin Redwoods SP.



PRIORITIZE FOREST HEALTH

The health of old growth redwoods and sensitive resources will be the primary consideration for park reestablishment and ongoing planning, design, and management. The forest lifecycle and resource management needs, especially as we face changing climatic conditions, will inform planning and design decisions, helping to guide expectations of the park experience. Facilities and high-use areas will be located away from old growth redwoods and other sensitive resources and sited to facilitate sustainable forest stewardship and protect opportunities for provocative nature experiences.



PROVIDE EQUITABLE, DIVERSE, AND EVOCATIVE VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Big Basin Redwoods SP will provide welcoming opportunities for people of all backgrounds and abilities to experience and be inspired by the park's old growth redwoods and other outstanding resources. Big Basin Redwoods SP was the site of family gatherings, adventures, and connections to nature for generations of visitors. Big Basin Redwoods SP will continue to provide unique natural experiences for all Californians with an expanded commitment to equitable access and storytelling that is inclusive of a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Facilities will be designed and managed to support a broad range of uses, including a variety of campground types. People have strong memories of their time at Big Basin Redwoods SP prior to the CZU Fire and the park will continue to be a landscape for memory making with enhanced facilities making it more accessible to more people.



DIVERSIFY TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES

Reestablishing Big Basin Redwoods SP as a safe, resilient, and accessible park will necessitate establishing a multi-modal transportation system that reduces congestion and improves non-automotive access to old growth redwoods and destinations. Strategies will include a shuttle system that provides access from staging areas located at the periphery of the park to key park destinations, alongside improved pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian trails that connect to park destinations as well as more remote experiences. Forest health, visitor experience, and visitor safety will inform access and circulation at Big Basin Redwoods SP.



PRACTICE LAND STEWARDSHIP

Land stewardship practices will be guided by natural ecological processes and practices of California Native American tribes and informed by current science to create landscapes that will be resilient in the face of future climate change. Management planning will focus on promoting forest and ecosystem health for future generations. Volunteers and stewardship corps, and the greater “Park Family” will play an important role in stewardship, actively working to promote forest health, improve visitor experience, and engage with visitors to foster curiosity and appreciation for the redwoods.



INCLUDE TRIBAL PERSPECTIVES

Formal consultation with California Native American Tribes will inform and guide planning, land management, park design, and park programs. Tribal knowledge will be foundational with Indigenous perspectives foregrounded in resource management as well as interpretation and educational programs.



FOSTER LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY

The CZU Lightning Complex Fire demonstrated the importance of planning at the landscape scale. Opportunities to enhance both ecosystem connectivity and visitor experiences regionally will inform reestablishment and ongoing management. Coordination with adjacent landowners and managers and strategic acquisitions will strengthen wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity, trail connectivity, and the diversity of recreational experiences in the region.



DESIGN WITH REVERENCE AND RESILIENCE

Natural and historic character will be honored in built elements, yet resilience and sustainability will be paramount in all planning and design decisions. Built elements will work together to consistently frame and complement the natural setting and create a space and unique aesthetic that celebrates Big Basin Redwoods SP as the iconic first California State Park while inspiring staff and the public to imagine a robust and resilient future for all parks. The facilities will work together to aesthetically complement the forest setting.



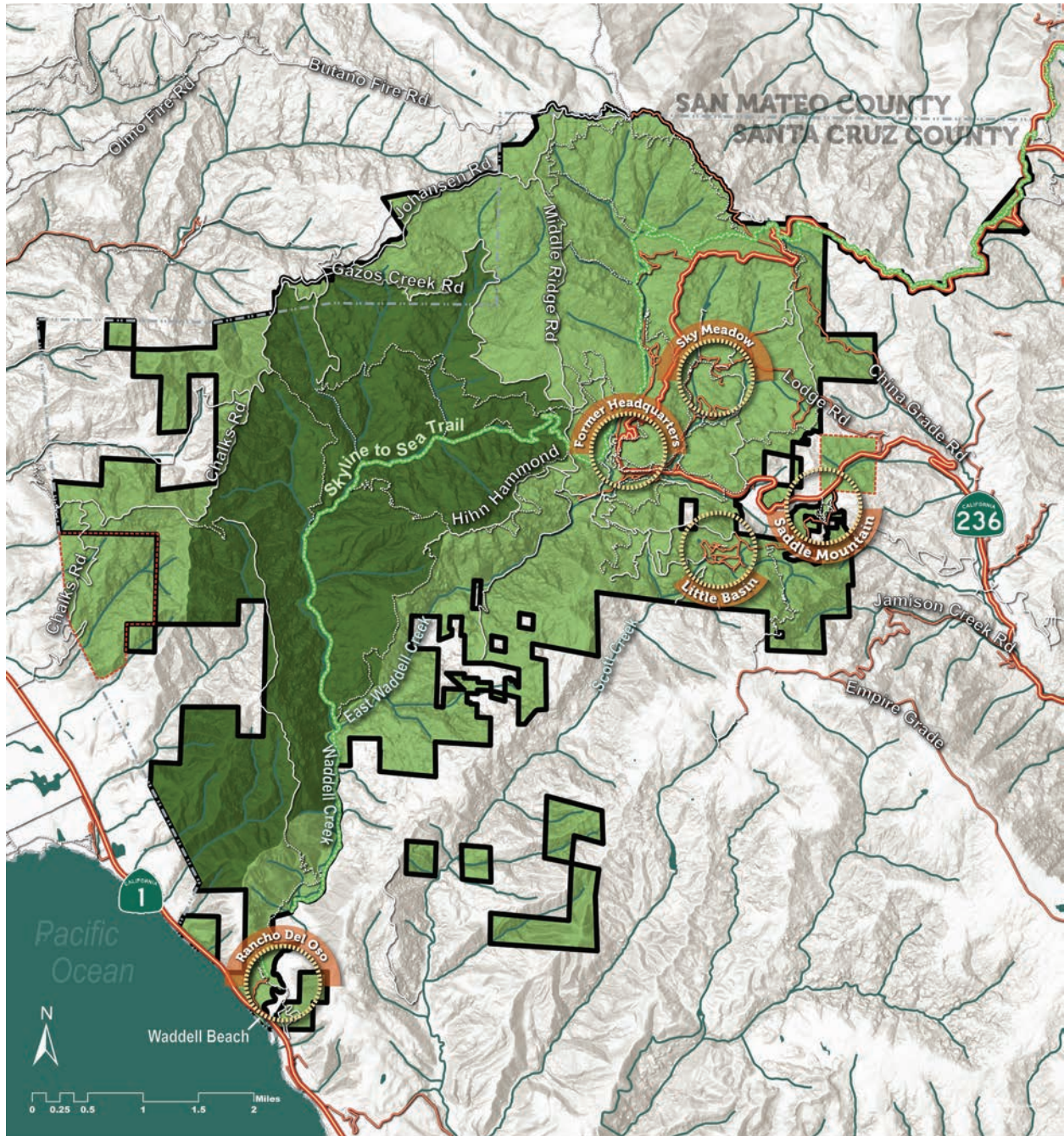
ENGAGE THE PARK COMMUNITY AND BUILD PARTNERSHIPS





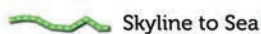

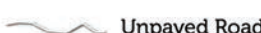

Coordination with park neighbors and managers across the region and landscape will create opportunities to enhance landscape connectivity. Consistent communication from State Parks on the park’s conditions and recovery will educate and inform the public, stakeholders, and partners. The reestablishment process will allow for continued dialogue with the public, engage previously underrepresented groups, and foster support for the park and the special location it protects. Expectations for re-opening and for future experiences will be guided by clear, honest, and engaging communication.





Figure 1-2. Park Area Map



- | | | |
|---|--|--|
|  Big Basin Redwoods SP |  Major Paved Road |  Trail
Alignment prior to CZU Fire |
|  Potential Acquisitions
Includes Cascade Creek parcels along Chalks Road; and Gateway parcel (acquired in 2022 by Sempervirens Fund) near Saddle Mountain |  Paved Road |  Skyline to Sea Trail |
|  West Waddell Creek SW |  Unpaved Road |  Streams |



SENSE OF PLACE

Each of California's state parks has a unique sense of place. This awareness of the sense of place leads to a sense of belonging and reconnection. State parks offer opportunities to reconnect, enriching people and communities with an enhanced sense of connection to the natural systems that sustain us and to our cultural heritage. Big Basin Redwoods SP represents an important legacy that relates to the preservation of its sense of place, with the first efforts to save old growth coast redwoods inspired by its ancient trees and early establishment as a State Park.

While the park was subject to fire as a naturally occurring landscape event throughout history, the CZU Fire was an extreme fire event that demonstrated the compounding effects of years of fire suppression and the growing impacts of climate change. While the landscape has been dramatically changed in the short term by extreme fire, the forest has become a living display of regrowth, regeneration, and resilience in the face of changing climate. As the forest regrows, visitors to Big Basin Redwoods SP will witness that story.

During the forest recovery period, Big Basin Redwoods SP will offer a different view of the physical features, as landforms will be temporarily evident without the veil of vegetation. The park preserves an environmentally diverse segment of the California Coastal Landscape. Its mountainous watersheds set a dramatic context for the spectacular resources it contains. Differences in terrain and elevation separate the western and eastern parts of the park, but the park remains cohesive through an extensive trail system that will be reestablished. In addition to variations in geography, landscape, and facilities, shifting marine and mountain weather conditions often add a particular mystique and dynamic to many park areas.

Prior to the CZU fire, visitors to Big Basin Redwoods SP experienced distinct settings in various areas, each with its own sense of place. It is anticipated that visitors will be able to travel through these landscapes again as the park reopens.

Forest Recreation

Day use and overnight stays in the historic headquarters were a central component of the sense of place at Big Basin Redwoods SP. Visitors appreciated the unique and rare opportunity to spend time among the old trees and historic structures built under their canopies. During the Reimagining Big Basin Process, the public confirmed that access to old growth redwoods is essential to the Big Basin Experience. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining access to the old growth, yet they also supported reducing the footprint of visitor facilities there and expanding recreational activities outside of the historic headquarters area as a way of protecting the forest and facilities over the long term. Maintaining the ability to recreate the immersive quality of being away in the forest will be central to reestablishing that sense of place as Big Basin Redwoods SP reopens to the public.





Child enjoys a fallen tree

The **old growth coast redwood** groves on the east side of the park have inspired generations of visitors with wonder and amazement. In the words of John Steinbeck: *"The redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always. The feeling they produce is not transferable. From them comes silence and awe...they are not like any trees we know, they are ambassadors from another time."*⁵



Camping in the redwoods

The **former Headquarters area** in the old growth redwood forest imparts a sense of history through interpretation of the CCC-era and the park's longtime recreational use. While all historic facilities were lost during the CZU Fire, many visitors will bring their cherished memories of previous eras and interpretive elements will illustrate this history for new visitors.

Waddell Beach has salt-laden winds, crashing breakers, and a sandy beach. In summer, the parking lot is often full of beachgoers eager to ride the waves or watch others head to the ocean to surf, board or kite sail.

The **Theodore J. Hoover Natural Preserve** marks a transition zone between land and sea that scientists believe contains a greater concentration of sensitive plant and animal species than any other place of similar size in California. The preserve can awaken a sense of wonder and the desire to safeguard such a unique environment.

⁵ Steinbeck, John. Travel with Charley: In Search of America. 1962



Waddell Valley enchanted former residents and inspires visitors with its wide open spaces bordered by Monterey pines on steep slopes and the red alders and willows lining its lush riparian corridor. Hulda Hoover McLean, whose father purchased extensive property in the Waddell Valley area in the early 1900s, spent many years enjoying the natural wonders of the coast. Her words describe the coastal environment and its spirit of place.

In the Waddell Valley, seasons come gently, merging into each other in small increments.⁶

Spring brings us a mounting chorus of bird songs. They sing... just for the joy of spring... In meadows, fresh green grass pushes through gray litter... Spring wind blows up the valley and whips us as we prepare garden beds for fresh planting...

Summer Flowers are in full bloom and scent the air. Green meadows turn to pale gold... Out at sea, a river of fog clouds the horizon and moves in to cool our nights.

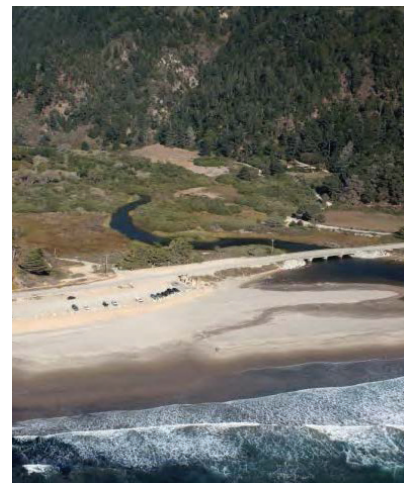
Autumn. The smell of autumn is shale dust and sagey plants, bay trees and eucalyptus... Poplars turn to gold...

Winter. First rain brings up mushrooms... A flooded creek wreaks havoc upstream but brings steelhead and salmon into the creek to spawn... Rainbows span the valley: they tell us of coming spring.

The creation of the California State Park system and Big Basin Redwoods SP were inspired by the spirit and beauty of the Santa Cruz Mountains and the coast redwood trees that continue to delight and inspire those who visit them.



Waddell Beach



Mouth of Waddell Creek

⁶ McLean, Hulda Hoover. Almost a Hundred Years. Waddell Creek Association, Santa Cruz, CA. pp. 110-111. 2002.





PART 2: CORE COMPONENTS AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES AND VALUES

While the CZU Fire was a transformative event for Big Basin Redwoods SP that had a devastating impact on nearby communities, it also provided an opportunity for an ecosystem reset for the fire-resilient coastal redwood forest. Many of the park's physical and natural resources, which are identified and described in the 2013 General Plan, remain intact or in recovery and will help shape the regeneration of the State Park's varied ecosystems. The redwood forest, the coastal geology and soils, and the hydrological systems at the park continue to be the significant resources.

In the short term, the aesthetic resources within the park will be altered as the landscape that provided the treasured scenery recovers. Internal views from within the redwoods and views from ridges of the forest are considered special scenic resources that provided the motivation to preserve this inspiring and unique landscape. As the forest returns, these views will return and their preservation will be an important element in the recovery process.

The fire's impact on the park's recreational capacity and cultural resources is more enduring because most facilities and utilities were lost. Preserving the legacy of the lost resources and providing a similar level of visitor experience will be the priority for reestablishing the park.

Resilience

Resilience is “the capacity of any entity—an individual, a community, an organization, or a natural system—to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience. A community’s resilience is determined by its ability to survive, adapt, and thrive no matter what acute shock or chronic stressor it experiences.”

Source: resilientca.org





Prescribed Burns

While California State Parks has previously employed prescribed burns as a forest management strategy in Big Basin and other parks throughout the state, the absence of significant fine fuels in Big Basin following the CZU Fire will enable a more comprehensive deployment of this forest management technique. During the Reimagining Big Basin planning process, there was significant public support for the execution of low-intensity prescribed burns to support forest management. This stewardship approach was deployed by the Cotoni and Quiroste tribes and other California Native American tribes to manage redwood forests for thousands of years.



Redwood violets in bloom along the Redwood Loop Trail in March 2022

NATURAL RESOURCES

The 2013 General Plan describes the plant and animal life found in Big Basin Redwoods SP prior to the CZU Fire. Some plant and animal communities will recover more quickly than others, and the successional reset of many ecosystems within the park will provide new opportunities for other flora and fauna to thrive as the forest regenerates.

The post-fire forest at Big Basin Redwoods SP is thinner, provides less shade, and contains large downed trees on the forest floor. Scientists estimate that the majority of coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), that burned in the CZU Fire will survive, providing an optimistic forecast for the long-term resilience of the forest. While they are resprouting, burned redwood trunks and new green shoots and regrowth on the forest floor will be the most pronounced features of the forest for years to come.

Coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), tanoak (*Notholithocarpus densiflora*), and madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*) trees are also sprouting from their bases, signifying the beginning of recovery for these species, as well. The most significant tree loss in the fire was Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), the second-most dominant conifer in the forest prior to the CZU Fire. These trees burned so severely they will not recover. Many of these dead trees that were left standing created hazards along roadways and in use areas and had to be removed. Most of the removed trees are being left within the park, as heavy wood on the forest floor is an integral component for old growth forests.

With most canopies burned and more open space where dead trees fell or were removed, there is more sun on the forest floor. Herbaceous species are taking advantage of the increased light to sprout, creating more flowers and grasses.

Researchers will be assessing the impacts to wildlife that depend on the old growth redwood forest. Most animals in the forest have ways to escape fire. Many flee the area or seek refuge in safe spots. Some species take advantage of the fire — such as woodpeckers returning to dead trees and deer browsing on new shoots. Other species will shift to unburned



*Coast Redwoods sprout regrowth from charred trunks in April 2021
(Credit: AP Photo/Nic Coury)*

areas until their habitat re-grows. Approximately one year after the CZU Fire, most of the birds species have returned to Big Basin Redwoods SP. Reptiles, amphibians, and mammals are also making a return. Downed trees have created new habitat for fish and aquatic species in creeks and streams.

While the flora and fauna of redwood forests are incredibly resilient to wildfire, it will take decades for Big Basin Redwoods SP to heal. Scientists are currently monitoring the forest to evaluate its condition and to estimate the time it will take to recover. It is known that the forest of Big Basin Redwoods SP will not fully recover from the CZU Fire in a human's lifetime, and the park will need to be adaptively managed in response to the forest's long-term recovery, including closing access to areas with recovering resources. Ongoing surveys and inventories of plants and animals will help inform ecosystem stewardship.

AESTHETIC RESOURCES

The 2013 General Plan points out that the landscape character in the park is extremely variable with a variety of scenic resources. Site topography and climatic conditions will continue to provide compelling vistas and visitors will continue to come to Big Basin Redwoods SP to witness the redwood forest and coastal landscape. However, the aesthetic of the former scenery, dominated by dense forest, will be dramatically changed for the immediate future due to impact of the CZU Fire and thinning of the forest.

Marbled Murrelet

The marbled murrelet is a federally endangered seabird that nests in the large wide branches of coast redwood and Douglas-fir trees. The birds are secretive around their nests to avoid predators. Of the few nests that have been found, they are in the heart of the former headquarters area. The first marbled murrelet nest ever discovered was in Big Basin Redwoods SP in 1974, the protection of the park's trees also protecting critical habitat for the species. The CZU Fire burned 70% (or more than half) of their breeding habitat in the Santa Cruz mountains threatening the long term viability of this southern most breeding population. Prior to the fire, park staff developed the Crumb Clean Campaign to address the impact park visitors can have on murrelet survival, this campaign will continue as the park is re-built to ensure protection of this species.





Preserving History

While building demolition and debris removal was part of the initial recovery and clean up, several elements from historic structures in the park were preserved in place. In cooperation with the Office of Historic Preservation, these will be nominated as California Points of Historical Interest to describe the resources lost, the tragedy of the fire and how Big Basin is rising again.

- » Stone Steps at the Headquarters Building
- » Chimney of Big Basin Lodge

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Big Basin Redwoods SP's over 18,000 acres are host to a rich variety of cultural resources. These archaeological, historical, and tribal cultural resources are a testament to history of human involvement in this redwood park for millennia. Sites relating to California Native American tribes and their stewardship, brief but consequential explorations by Spanish colonists, natural resource extraction like logging followed by conservation movements that led to the park's development are dispersed throughout the groves, beaches, and meadows of Big Basin.

While the CZU Fire destroyed nearly all historic structures and museum collections, ongoing post-fire archaeological studies as well as new museum acquisitions aim to preserve artifacts and sites that substantiate thousands of years of cultural resources within the park. An updated Scope of Collections Statement was initiated in 2021 and describes the cultural resources lost during the fire, as well as new goals related to



Site of Former Headquarters, September 2020 (Credit: Ian Bornarth)

the fire response and recovery, salvaged collections, and new acquisitions collected post-fire and into the future.

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretation uses themes to connect visitors to the significant recreational, natural, and cultural resources of the park in personally meaningful ways. Themes provide a point of view for presenting information and inspiration through various interpretive media.

The 2013 General Plan includes a unifying theme to integrate a set of eight primary themes and eight secondary themes. While many of the themes presented there remain relevant, this Cornerstone Document revisits those themes in the context of additional information, changes in the park landscape and resources as a result of the CZU Fire, and public and stakeholder input received as a part of the Reimagining Big Basin visioning process.

Several themes could be considered in a future amendment to a General Plan.

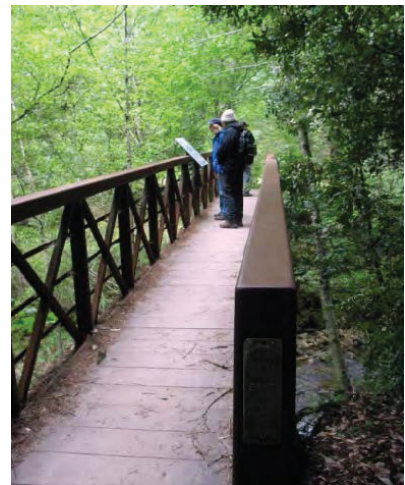
PRIMARY THEMES

1. Preservation Story

The legacy of men and women who inspired the redwood preservation movement continues through visitors like you, a diverse group of individuals, communities, and state park partners committed to learning from the past in order to protect Big Basin Redwoods SP into perpetuity. The establishment of California Redwood Park is a significant aspect of Big Basin Redwoods SP's cultural and natural history. This theme encompasses the many diverse individuals and groups who have worked to protect Big Basin Redwoods SP through the years and tells the story of the activism and support to preserve the redwoods and other unique vegetation communities to create a California State Park system. This theme covers a span of history from the park's inception through today.

UNIFYING THEME

Waddell Creek, its springs, and its tributaries are a major influence on Big Basin Redwood SP's cultural and natural history. The Waddell Creek watershed provides the right growing conditions for coast redwoods in its upper reaches, and the distinctive mosaic of natural communities near its mouth, including the wetlands of the Theodore J. Hoover Natural Preserve. The year-round streams have provided people with refreshment, livelihood, beauty and rejuvenation for millennia.



West Waddell Creek bridge on the Skyline to the Sea Trail





Slippery Rock



*Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
Salmon Ceremony at Coast
Dairies, Wilder Ranch State Park.*

2. Evolving Land Management

Land management practices are ever evolving. The preservation call to save the redwoods signaled a desire to protect, but those efforts marked a huge shift from the management practices of California Native American tribes. The early preservationist movement aimed to protect redwoods by returning parks to a perceived ‘wilderness’ or ‘pre-human’ environment. We now know people are inextricably linked to the natural world and look to Traditional Ecological Knowledge and scientific research to guide land management towards sustainability and climate change resilience.

3. Native California Indians

The Ohlone tribes known as the Quiroste and Cotoni understood the area that is today Big Basin Redwoods SP as a place of refuge, resource base, and a corridor that helped facilitate the trade of vital maritime resources to a network of inland tribes. The Cotoni upland village site known as Achistaca was likely located nearby the grassland’s meadows region known today as Little Basin. The Quiroste and Cotoni are ancestral relatives to multiple contemporary Ohlone tribes, and many of these descendants continue to feel a connection to this land.

4. Fire

Big Basin Redwoods SP and its redwood forests are a mosaic of fire adapted landscapes. Fire is no longer seen just as a threat, but as an integral part of how forests are shaped. Big Basin Redwoods SP reintroduced fire through prescribed burning beginning in 1978. Nevertheless, a history of fire suppression and exclusion have resulted in fuel buildups that, combined with climate change, have led to an increase in high severity fires as evidenced by the 2020 CZU Fire. Big Basin Redwoods SP continues to mitigate fire risk and promote healthy and resilient forests. Prescribed fire, influenced by Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and other fuel treatments are solutions to better coexist with fire into the future. This theme provides opportunities to tell the story of the 2020 CZU Fire and the impact it had on the park.



5. Coast Redwoods

The redwood, impressive and well-adapted as it appears, lives on the edge at Big Basin Redwoods SP. This theme explores the specialties and adaptations of the coast redwood, especially its adaptations to the conditions found at Big Basin Redwoods SP. It goes further to explain how the redwood's need for a foggy cool climate, like those at Big Basin Redwoods SP, are at risk from the climate crises. This theme can further tell the story of the 2020 CZU Fire and how the redwoods were impacted.

6. Wildlife

Big Basin Redwood SP's 18,000-acre park is home to an array of mammals, birds, insects, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and other wildlife that rely on a diverse ecosystem. From deer feeding troughs to a crumb-clean campaign (CA State Parks' approach to prevent intentional and unintentional animal feeding), human relationships with wildlife are evolving. We are intent on protecting the ever-changing needs of vulnerable species. A love of wildlife is now expressed through efforts to understand, protect and respect wild animals by managing our own behaviors.

7. Recreation History and Historic District

Historic structures arose to meet changing societal needs and continued to animate the public's perception of Big Basin Redwoods SP. The first amenities in Big Basin Redwoods SP imagined the health and recreation needs of Californians and were developed to attract and accommodate visitors. Responding to a community that sought togetherness and group activities, these features evolved to become more intensive and resort-like, including a dance floor, tennis courts, and swimming pool. Beginning in the 1960's the back-to-earth movement and people's desire to escape urban environments highlighted solitude and a movement away from intensive development. Meanwhile, the efforts of the CCC, park rustic style architecture using primarily timbers and stone, and activities among the well-loved buildings of the historic



Former Campfire Center





district helped to shape community, visitor experiences, and memories. The built environment of the park is now designed to meet the needs of California's diverse visitors, promote sustainability, minimize human impact, and honor the park's historical legacy.

8. Physical Forces and Natural Communities

Geology, weather, water, and fire continue to shape Big Basin Redwood SP's plant and animal communities.

This theme covers the geologic formation of the Waddell Creek Watershed, how the park's topography transforms weather into microclimates, and how geology, wind, water, and fire help determine plant and animal communities. This theme also covers the evolutionary adaptations that species in the park use to survive, the park's special status plant communities and plant and animal species, the scientific research opportunities the park provides, and how global climate change may affect the park's natural communities.

9. Marbled Murrelets

Marbled murrelets nest in the old growth redwood groves of Big Basin Redwoods SP.

This theme covers the natural history of the marbled murrelet, especially its nesting behavior, and the cultural/natural history account of how the mystery of where they nest was solved at Big Basin Redwoods SP. It also addresses threats to the marbled murrelet, especially corvids, reasons behind park policies in nesting areas and campgrounds, and actions visitors can take to help protect the species. Survival of Marbled Murrelets are contingent upon the actions we take to minimize human impact and keep the park crumb clean.

10. Hoover Family

Influenced by her father's love of nature, her mother's interest in history, and her uncle's public service, Hulda Hoover McLean chose to conserve Rancho del Oso for future generation.

This theme encompasses the Hoover family's time at Rancho del Oso, including Theodore's interest in nature and sense of connection to the Waddell Valley,



Mildred Hoover’s influential California history writings, Herbert Hoover’s visits to Rancho del Oso, the transfer of land from the family to State Parks— especially Hulda Hoover McLean’s home and surrounding land— Hulda’s natural and cultural history writings and artwork, her commitment to public service, and her continued involvement with the park and the Waddell Creek Association until her death.

SECONDARY THEMES

1. Portolá Expedition

Gaspar de Portolá’s 1769 expedition named the Rancho del Oso area Cañada de la Salud (Canyon of Health) after several very ill men recovered during their stay there. This theme focuses on the Portolá expedition’s experience in the Rancho del Oso area, with brief background information on their explorations from Mexico up the California coast.

2. Lumber, Tanbark, and Early Settlement

Logging and tanbark harvesting flourished in and around the Big Basin Redwood SP area in the second half of the 1800s, and a few settlers made homes in the redwoods during that time. This theme covers the forest product production in the Big Basin Redwoods SP area, including William Waddell’s large operation, the people who worked in the forest, and the hardy handful of early settlers such as Thomas Barlow and Tom Maddock.

3. Big Basin Redwoods SP Workers

Park workers have made important contributions to Big Basin Redwoods SP and to the California State Park System and many of them recognize their work at the park as an important life experience. Among these workers are the heroes who saved lives during the 2020 CZU Fire. This theme covers the Big Basin Redwoods SP employees, concessionaires, and volunteers who have worked at the park through the years. It incorporates workers’ memories of their time at Big Basin Redwoods SP, and their accomplishments. This theme tells the story of the workers that lost their homes





Thoughtful Integration of Technology in Interpretive Programming

Many appreciate the rustic and technology-free experience of retreating to a large natural area like Big Basin. However, there are ways in which technology might be explored to improve interpretive programs, wayfinding, and outreach to younger park visitors. Careful consideration of what technologies may support or detract from the core mission of the park are important to defining the park experience.

during the 2020 fire and the heroes among them who saved lives and worked on the fire even while their own residences were burning. The memories of these workers are kept alive through the telling of stories in documented oral histories and passing down from one generation to the next.

4. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

People, desperate for work in the Great Depression and given the opportunity by the federal government to earn a small wage, joined the CCC and built many of the park's trails, and roads still used today. While the buildings they constructed were lost in the 2020 CZU Fire, interpretive elements in the historic park core will memorialize the historic structures. This theme covers the purposes of the CCC, the CCC Companies active in the park, CCC camp life, the role of the National Park Service in designing park improvements, the Park Rustic style architecture, and points to images in interpretive displays showing the work of the CCC prior to the 2020 CZU Fire.

5. California Grizzly Bear

Rancho del Oso was named for the grizzly bears that were once found there, and was the site of one of the last California grizzly bear attacks on a human. Cultural and natural history are tied together in this theme, in the cultural and natural history of the now-extinct California grizzly, and the attack on William Waddell. It also addresses changes in scientific understanding of large predators' roles in the ecosystem that have taken place since the California grizzly was exterminated.





Big Basin Redwoods State Park reopened for limited day-use access in Summer 2022.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Prior to the CZU Fire, Big Basin Redwoods SP was experiencing up to 1 million visitors per year with peak visitation periods between May and September. Most visits to the park were for day use, but overnight camping was also popular, with most campgrounds entirely full during summer months.

Results from a an online survey conducted as part of the Reimagining Big Basin planning process indicated that walking, hiking, or running along trails; nature observation; and camping were the most popular activities at Big Basin Redwoods SP and it is anticipated that these activities will continue to be the primary visitor uses at the Park.

Prior to the CZU Fire, visitor activity was focused primarily in the headquarters area where visitors could view interpretive exhibits, attend naturalist programs or events, and visit the camp store, as well as use trails and camp.





Camping Opportunities

Following are considerations for camping that emerged from the Reimagining Big Basin planning process:

- » Redeveloping campgrounds at Huckleberry and Little Basin.
- » Establishing new hike-in and bike-in campgrounds along Lodge Road.
- » Establishing increased camping opportunities at Sky Meadow outside of the old growth core area.
- » Creating more walk-in campgrounds that allow for increased seclusion.
- » Providing equipment rentals and cabins for people who may be new to camping.
- » Providing a diversity of camping and overnight options and opportunities for variety of experiences.

Camping

Prior to the CZU Fire, most campgrounds were located in or around the former headquarters with the exception of Little Basin. The overall capacity for camping was approximately 2,330 people per night between a variety of campground options, including drive-in sites, tent cabins, hard-sided cabins, trail camps, equestrian camps, and group camps. All existing campgrounds and associated infrastructure were destroyed during the CZU Fire.

The 2013 General Plan highlights the growing demand for camping facilities and it is assumed that this will continue in the region, particularly with the loss of the existing camping facilities. Strategies for expanding camping at Big Basin Redwoods SP prior to the CZU Fire focused on providing additional facilities outside of the old growth forest. During the Reimagining Big Basin planning process, public response to this approach was generally supportive, but it was noted that the previous appeal of camping at Big Basin Redwoods SP prior to the fire was the experience of being among the old trees and there is a need to create a quality forest experience wherever the campgrounds are located.

Trails

Trail use was the primary recreational activity at Big Basin Redwoods SP prior to the CZU Fire and will be among the first recreational activities to return to the Park. Before the fire, Big Basin Redwoods SP had over 100 miles of backcountry roads and trails offering a range of experiences for users of differing abilities. It is anticipated that all of these trails will reopen and that additional trail connections will be explored. With proposed relocation of facilities outside of the old growth forest and away from the former headquarters, there is an opportunity to develop new trails throughout this area. Limited parking in the former headquarters area also increases the need for new trails to access it.





State Parks, CalOES and contractors review cultural resource and natural resource protection at the site of the Old Lodge where the stone fireplace and chimney will remain

DEVELOPED FACILITIES

The CZU Fire destroyed most facilities within the forested areas of Big Basin Redwoods SP, including all visitor serving buildings, staff housing, offices, and maintenance areas. To restore full capacity of the park it is assumed that the facilities will be rebuilt to a similar capacity although their location will be determined in future planning efforts.

Utilities

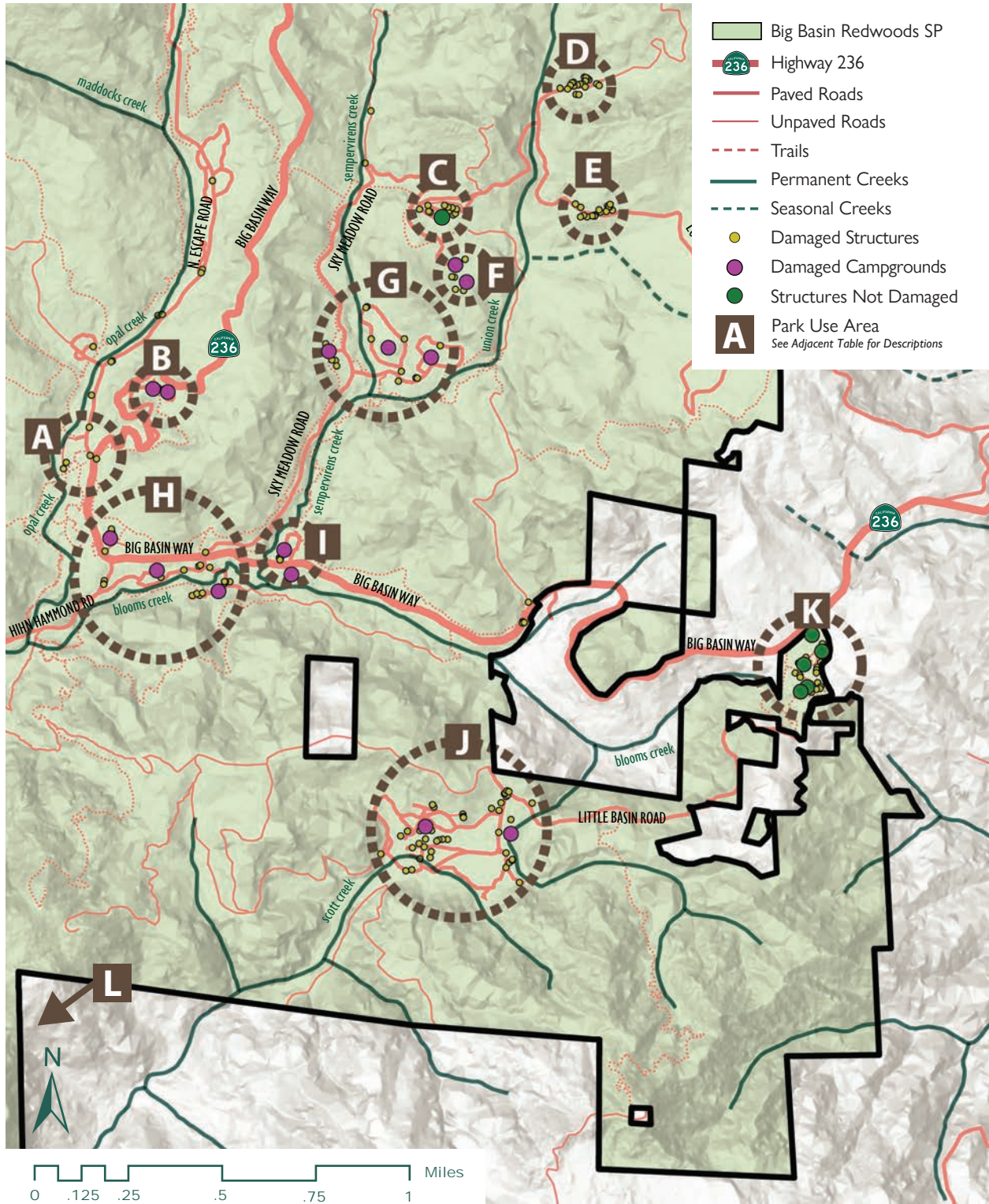
Big Basin Redwoods SP maintains its own potable water supply and has an on-site wastewater treatment facility. The 2013 General Plan indicates that these facilities need upgrades and should be considered for future planning efforts.

The CZU Fire further damaged park infrastructure. All bridges within the park burned and many of these bridges held water and sewer lines. Furthermore, all electrical poles burned removing power from the park. A parkwide utility assessment and upgrade will be incorporated into the rebuilding process.





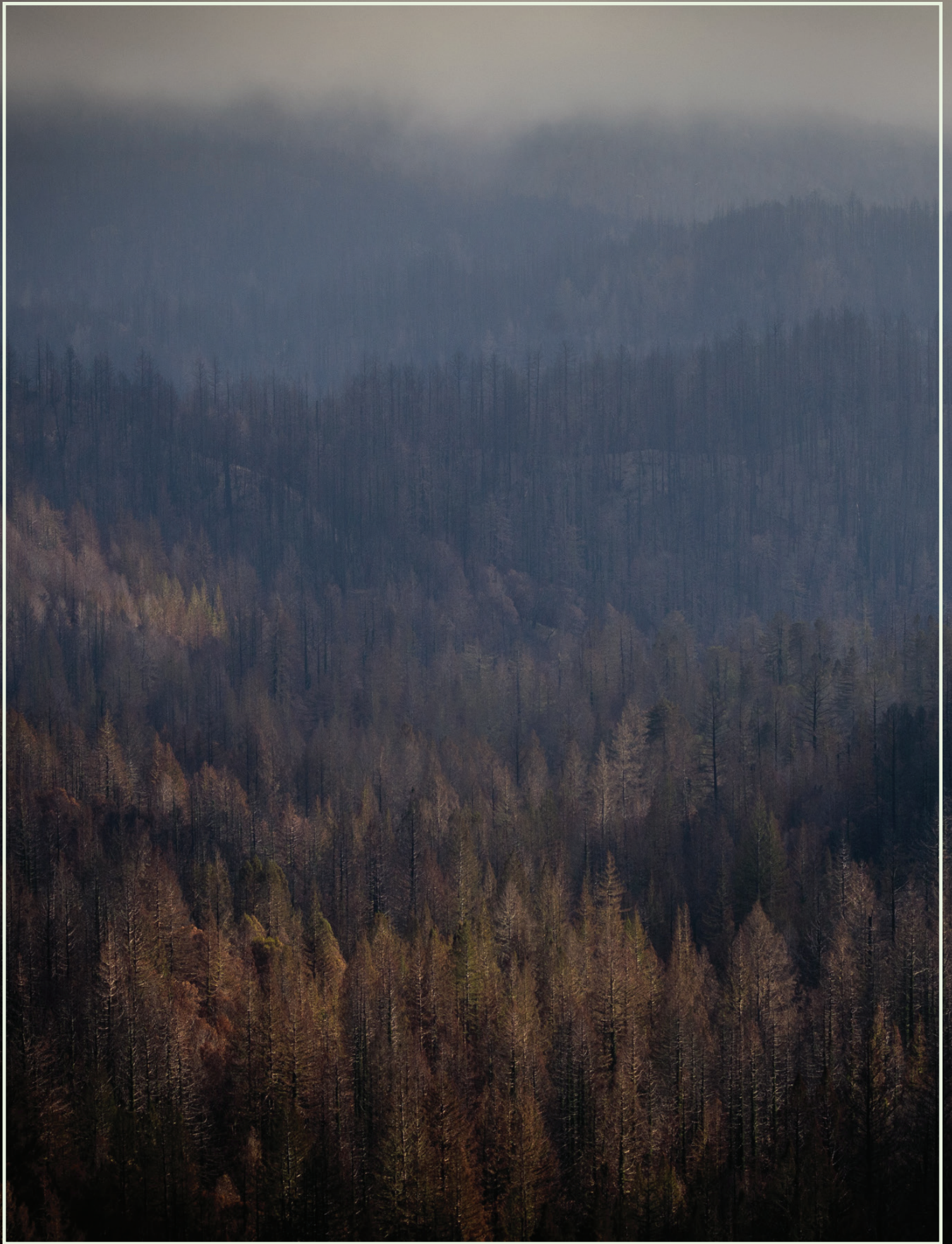
Figure 2-1. Big Basin Facilities Lost to Fire



Part 2: Core Components and Existing Conditions

Map Label	Use Area	Post-Fire Facilities Description
A	Former Park Headquarters and Visitor Center	18 structures plus outbuildings lost, including historic buildings and campfire center.
B	Sequoia Group Campground	2 group camp sites lost; 1 restroom remains.
C	Lower Sky Meadow	7 residential structures plus outbuildings lost; 1 residential structure remains.
D	Staff Housing and Maintenance	15 structures lost, including 1 residence.
E	Upper Residence Area	4 residential buildings plus outbuildings lost.
F	Sky Meadow Group Campground	2 group campsites lost. 1 camping shelter and vault toilets lost; 1 vault toilet remains.
G	Wastahi and Huckleberry Campgrounds	62 campsites and 37 tent cabins lost. 6 restrooms lost; 1 restroom building remains.
H	Jay and Blooms Creek Campgrounds	14 structures lost, including 8 restrooms and 6 residences. 59 campsites lost. 1 restroom building remaining.
I	Sempervirens Campground	31 campsites and 1 restroom lost.
J	Little Basin Campground	28 structures lost including 1 maintenance building, 1 operations/residence building, 1 mobile residence, 1 kiosk, 2 sheds, 1 recreation center, 2 restrooms, 2 storage buildings, 1 kitchen, 14 cabins, 1 covered picnic area, and 1 campfire center. 36 campsites and 1 group camp site lost.
K	Saddle Mountain	7 structures lost including 1 residence, 5 cabins, and 1 campfire center. Remaining structures include park administration building, 2 combination restrooms, 7 cabins, and 1 multi-family park residential building.
L	Rancho Del Oso	1 residence lost. Remaining structures include 2 residences plus outbuildings, 1 nature center, 1 office, and vault toilets.





PART 3: DYNAMIC COMPONENTS

The information in this section provides foundational information for park management and future planning by describing key stakeholders and partners, identifying key issues and potential management strategies, and presenting the planning and data needs to implement future projects at the park. Big Basin Redwoods SP is in transition with immediate needs for reestablishing operations and visitor use following the CZU Fire while balancing strategies for long-term sustainability of the park. The components presented in this section are intended as a snapshot of current conditions and are to be reexamined and considered as future planning efforts are completed.

Regional Preparedness

Large-scale disasters like the CZU Fire highlight the need for regional partnerships and planning to ensure that land management strategies and disaster preparedness do not end at jurisdictional boundaries.

PARK STAKEHOLDERS

Collaborative planning and partnerships with local groups ensures that California State Parks is responsive to the communities they serve. Furthermore, it is necessary for the implementation of region-wide management strategies. The CZU Fire burned lands owned by a variety of different jurisdictions and individuals. Recovery efforts and long-term forest management will require active partnership and negotiations to ensure meaningful outcomes.

While park stakeholders do not determine park policies, they provide important perspective on project implementation





and can play a role in building public support for visionary actions. The following stakeholders will likely be active participants in future planning at Big Basin Redwoods SP.

The groups identified with an asterisks (*) own and manage open space properties near Big Basin Redwoods SP and could coordinate on a regional fire management strategy. Groups noted with a caret (^) were represented as a part of the Reimagining Big Basin Advisory Committee, which was established to assist in community engagement and provide feedback on the planning process and long-term vision for the park.

Local Agencies

Santa Cruz County* manages roads that pass through Big Basin Redwoods SP and issues permits for project implementation.

San Mateo County * manages open space properties near Big Basin Redwoods SP.

State Agencies

CAL FIRE (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection) reviews parks Wildfire Management Plan and provides support for fire-related activities.

Caltrans (California Department of Transportation) manages Highway 236, which runs through Big Basin Redwoods SP. Modifications to the roadway require coordination.

California Coastal Commission (CCC) is a state agency within the California Natural Resources Agency that plans and regulates land use and public access within the Coastal Zone along the state's coastline. Part of Big Basin Redwoods SP is within the Coastal Zone and development in this area requires a coastal development permit (CDP) coordinated through Santa Cruz County or the CCC depending on conditions.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) manages and protects the state's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend. CDFW serves as the permitting agency for projects with impacts to protected habitats.



Community Feedback from Reimagining Big Basin

Following are themes that emerged from the public responses received during outreach events. These are described in greater detail in the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary.

- » Protecting the old growth redwoods and other sensitive resources is paramount.
- » Access to old growth redwoods is essential to the Big Basin Experience.
- » The public would like to see prescribed burns continue at Big Basin and the use of Traditional land management techniques held by California Native American tribes.
- » There is high demand for diverse experiences and opportunities, particularly related to camping and trail uses.
- » Regarding park access and circulation, there is support for multiple transportation options.
- » The future park should thoughtfully integrate technology.
- » Built elements should complement Big Basin's natural character and should prioritize sustainability and accessibility.
- » Education and interpretation within the park is an opportunity to share diverse and inclusive stories.
- » While Big Basin is loved by many, not everyone has had the opportunity to experience California's redwood forests.
- » The public is eager to experience Big Basin to recreate and contribute.

Land Trusts and Open Space Land Managers

Sempervirens Fund^{*^} is the original land trust established in 1900 to protect Big Basin Redwoods SP. The non-profit group continues to advocate for and acquire property for the protection of redwood forests.

Save the Redwoods League^{*^} is a non-profit group that protects redwood forests and educates people on these ecosystems.

Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay for the benefit of all.





Forest after CZU Fire



Auto Tree burning after CZU Fire

Parks and Open Space Advocates

Mountain Parks Foundation[^] advocates for upland parks in the Santa Cruz Mountains and funds initiatives to improve and protect these areas.

Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks[^] provides direct financial support for California State Parks in the Santa Cruz District as an operating partner.

Waddell Creek Association, in cooperation with California State Parks, operates the Rancho del Oso Nature and History Center. The association helps to interpret and preserve the resources of the Waddell Valley section of the Park.

Santa Cruz Mountain Trails Stewardship builds and maintains trails in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The group has been active at Big Basin Redwoods SP rehabilitating park trails, including the Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail.

Santa Cruz County Horsemen's Association advocates for equestrian use of redwood and coastal trails within the County.

Center for Biological Diversity is a nonprofit membership organization known for its work protecting endangered species through legal action, scientific petitions, creative media and grassroots activism.

California State Park Rangers Association is an organization of active and retired State Park professionals dedicated to advancement of the highest principles of public service, established to support and preserve California State Parks for present and future generations.

Santa Cruz Mountains Bioregional Council is dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of regional biodiversity over time through education, the dissemination of accurate scientific information and assistance in the planning, coordination and implementation of conservation efforts.

Wildlands Restoration Team is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to preserving the rich biodiversity of the Santa Cruz Mountains.



Parks California[^] provides resources for projects that improve visitor experience and welcome younger and diverse visitors to parks and public lands.

Outdoor Education and Park Equity Advocates

In Solidarity Project[^] advocates for a more inclusive outdoor industry and experience.

Latino Outdoors[^] is a Latinx-led organization working in support of outdoor recreation, conservation, and environmental education with a focus on expanding and amplifying the Latinx experience in the outdoors.

Exploring New Horizons is an overnight outdoor education program for elementary students with a goal of engaging more low-income schools in outdoor education.

Local Neighbors

While Big Basin Redwoods SP is relatively remote, there are some local residents in close proximity to the park. These neighbors were directly impacted by the CZU Fire and will be informed and included in engagement related to future planning and reestablishment activities at the park.

CALIFORNIA NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that California Native American tribes be consulted as part of any planning effort at the park. Representatives from the **Amah Mutsun Tribal Band**[^] and the **Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area**[^] were part of the Advisory Committee for the Reimagining Big Basin planning process.

While formal consultation will be required, there was strong public support for more direct partnership with tribal groups to create a park that remember California Native American tribe history, values sustainable lessons from land management techniques held by California Native American tribes, and provides spaces for tribal groups to use and steward the land where their ancestors lived.

Opportunities for Leadership by California Native American Tribes

During the Reimagining Big Basin planning process, there was significant support for including stories from California Native American tribes within the interpretive material at the park and for engaging with tribal groups on land management strategies practiced by California Native American tribes





LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Major wildfire events like the 2020 CZU Fire are reminders that the development of adaptive park management strategies and risk mitigation efforts are important to protect park ecosystems, infrastructure, and resources in the context of changing climatic conditions. Such strategies will incorporate insights from the most up-to-date and relevant climate change projections and impact analyses including California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment: Central Coast Region Report (2018) and the Santa Cruz Mountains Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (2021). Some of the specific climatic changes that will impact Big Basin Redwoods SP are listed below.



Park Staff Viewed through Burned Tree

- Longer periods of drought, more instances of extreme heat, reduced coastal fog, and more frequent high wind events could generate drier fuels and longer periods with potential for high severity wildfires.
- More erratic precipitation patterns with longer periods of drought result in direct stress to plant and wildlife communities, as well as more significant storm events causing coastal and inland flooding.
- Potential changes to coastal fog patterns could deprive coast redwoods of an important water source and could lead to reduction in overall redwood forest cover in the long term.
- Increased pests and pathogens can kill trees, providing additional tinder for wildfires.
- Rising sea-levels and increased coastal erosion.

In addition to preparing for the impacts of changing climatic conditions, California State Parks is working to reduce its greenhouse gas footprint in alignment with statewide carbon neutrality goals. At Big Basin Redwoods SP, on-site renewable energy generation and increasing non-automotive accessibility through a shuttle service and other projects are key components to making progress toward this goal.



ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

With climate change as the core challenge for Big Basin Redwoods SP, specific key issues were identified as critical to address through the next planning phases for the park.

1 Rebuilding resilient park facilities and trails.

The park critically needs to reestablish visitor-serving facilities with pre-fire visitor capacity to bring back the experiences that so many Californians had when visiting the park before the CZU Fire. While this expansive effort will be a large investment in time and capital, it offers the opportunity to increase resiliency within the park with thoughtful site planning and design of facilities with future fire in mind.

2 Addressing resource impacts from visitation.

The footprint of visitor serving amenities in the old growth area, namely parking and structures, had negative impacts on the hydrology, soil health, understory vegetation and ability to conduct prescribed fire in the basin. When reestablishing visitor capacity, it needs to be done in a way that is less impactful to natural resources.

3 Managing post-fire forest recovery and developing forest management strategy to address future fire.

While immediate recovery and hazard removal is complete, there is a need to determine how best to support forest recovery and manage the forest long term to limit extreme disaster.

Saddle Mountain Welcome Center

The 2013 General Plan identified Saddle Mountain as a location to establish a main park entrance and new welcome center. The General Plan also emphasized the need to limit development in the old growth forest, recommending “no new building construction in the old growth forest except when necessary for ADA accessibility.” With the destruction of park buildings in the CZU Fire, planning for and constructing new park facilities will be an essential next step. Locations shall be consistent with these goals from the current adopted General Plan and the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary.





Knowledge and Perspectives from California Native American Tribes

Feedback from the Reimagining Big Basin planning process indicated significant public interest in not only including narratives of California Native American tribes in the story of Big Basin, but actively working with tribal groups to utilize traditional ecological knowledge practiced by California Native American tribes and provide space for gatherings for California Native American tribes.

4 Ensuring long-term watershed health.

Planning should consider how future facilities, roads and infrastructure work to complement and enhance natural systems and site hydrology to ensure long-term function and resilience of the park's natural resources.

5 Creating equitable access and meaningful visitor experiences for all.

While Big Basin Redwoods SP was a popular destination before the CZU Fire, it was determined through the Reimagining Big Basin process that there are many residents, even in nearby urban areas, that had limited knowledge of Big Basin Redwoods SP or of redwood forests anywhere in California.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

While not critical to immediate park needs, the following issues are also important to long-term management of Big Basin Redwoods SP.

6 Addressing historic and archaeological resources.

Most of the historic structures at Big Basin Redwoods SP were destroyed in the CZU Fire; however, the redwood forest landscape and locations associated with inspiring the establishment of the Sempervirens Club remain and contribute to the park as a significant historic place. The historic structures lost at Big Basin Redwoods SP will need to be delisted from the National Register of Historic Places, and where appropriate with the State Historic Preservation Office. Furthermore, strategies to interpret the new condition at Big Basin Redwoods SP will be needed. Findings from post-fire archaeological studies will also need to be incorporated within the collection of resources at the park.



7 Coordinating new acquisitions.

Expanding the park allows for greater preservation of coastal redwood forest, increased fire management capacity, and improvements to park connectivity, while enhancing options for recreation and park operations. Strategic acquisitions, particularly around Saddle Mountain, where the new park welcome center is proposed, need to be considered, pursued, and incorporated into future planning.

PLANNING NEEDS

Concurrently with this Cornerstone Document, the District and Park partners are conducting various on-going studies, including:

Natural Resource Management

- Forest Management Strategy
- Marbled Murrelet Monitoring Program
- Redwood Canopy Re-Growth Monitoring
- Post-Fire Wildlife Recovery Monitoring

Planning Studies

- Transportation Study
- Visitor Use Management Study

The studies plus additional future planning efforts will be needed to address key issues, particularly related to rebuilding. Table 3-1 summarizes the anticipated Planning Needs at Big Basin Redwoods SP and Figure 3-1 illustrates the Planning Pathway to implementation.

Park Shuttle

The 2013 General Plan included a goal to create a park shuttle to reduce traffic and parking within the Headquarters area. This idea was included in the Vision Summary presented during the Reimagining Big Basin planning process. There was substantial support for a shuttle, particularly if rides are enjoyable and convenient; the shuttle system does not supersede all vehicular access; and the shuttle system helps mitigate traffic impacts for surrounding communities





Table 3-1. Planning Needs

Priority	Planning or Data Needs <i>(Name of Plan or Data Needed)</i>	Description <i>(General description of the plan or data)</i>
High	Road Access and Improvement Study	A Road Access and Improvement Study examines the existing roads within the park to determine potential level of use that could be accommodated and what road improvements would be necessary.
High	Shuttle and Transportation Studies	A Shuttle and Transportation Study analyzes potential benefits and challenges to implementing a shuttle at Big Basin Redwood SP. The study will examine impacts to congestion and present strategies for effectively initiating the shuttle and managing vehicular congestion park-wide.
High	Facilities Management Plan(s)	A Facilities Management Plan is designed to guide the stewardship, management, and use of existing and future facilities. The plan can recommend alternate uses for an existing facility, location of a new facility or a critical path for replacement and/or expansion of all park facilities.
Medium	Big Basin Redwood SP General Plan Amendment	A General Plan Amendment is issued when a planned course of action is not included in the existing General Plan.
Medium	Project Plans	Project Plans include the detailed planning done in order to implement projects. This component requires the most detailed planning documents, including feasibility studies, construction documents and interpretive project plans.
Medium	Road and Trail Management Plan	A Road and Trail Management Plan for Butano SP, Año Nuevo SP, and Big Basin Redwoods SP



Purpose <i>(Why it is needed at Big Basin Redwoods SP)</i>	Related Plans or Data Needs <i>(Needed ahead of the study unless otherwise noted)</i>
<p>To determine if existing roads have capacity to implement projects outlined in the General Plan and Vision Summary</p>	
<p>To establish a strategy for implementing the shuttle and managing vehicular congestion.</p>	<p>A Shuttle Pilot Program will be explored within the first three years of reopening Big Basin Redwoods SP. Evaluation of this program, including parking counts will provide valuable data for a permanent shuttle program. Strategies for data collection should be built into the Pilot Program.</p>
<p>To conceptualize new facilities to return Big Basin Redwoods SP to the operational capacity prior to the CZU Fire. The studies described at right will help determine whether it will be most efficient to develop one Facilities Management Plan for all areas of the park or separate ones based on the management zones.</p>	<p>A Visitor Use Management Study to assess the desired outcomes and indicators associated with different levels of use. A Utilities Feasibility Study to determine how to meet the utility needs for future development associated with the planned levels of use in the management zones.</p>
<p>To allow for planning any future projects that are not covered by the existing General Plan, if needed.</p>	<p>Depending on the location, potential use and timing of future acquisitions, the appropriate process for classifying the property and incorporating into park plans will be determined and completed.</p>
<p>To develop construction documents for new facilities.</p>	<p>Facilities Management Plan(s) and associated studies.</p>
<p>To assess new trail opportunities and multi-use trails outside the Waddell Creek SW and old growth redwood areas and to pursue new trail access and connection points in Big Basin Redwoods SP, Butano SP, and Año Nuevo SP.</p>	





Table 3-1. Planning Needs (Continued)

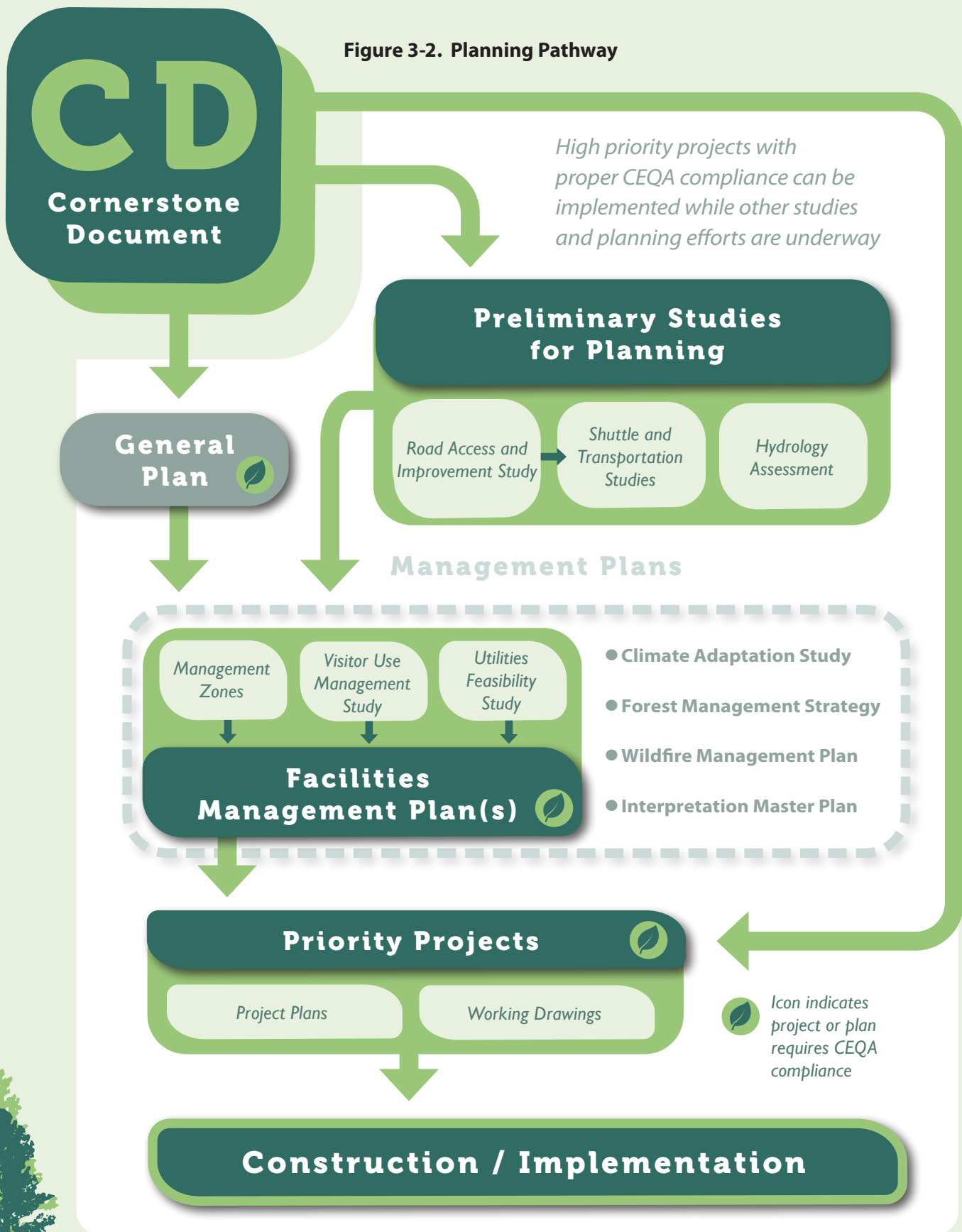
Priority	Planning or Data Needs <i>(Name of Plan or Data Needed)</i>	Description <i>(General description of the plan or data)</i>
Medium	Hydrology Assessment	A Hydrology Assessment evaluates hydrologic conditions with the park and suggests actions to improve watershed health.
Medium	Forest Management Strategy	A Forest Management Strategy is a comprehensive approach for regional forest management that includes considerations for forest ecosystem as a whole and incorporates multi-jurisdictional management.
Medium	Climate Adaptation Study	A Climate Adaptation Study outlines the direct risks to a park unit associated with climate change and recommends actions to mitigate these risks to the extent possible.
Medium	Wildfire Management Plan	A Wildfire Management Plan is developed in partnership with CAL FIRE as part of an Interagency Fire Protection Agreement and addresses all aspects of wildfire planning, including prevention, pre-suppression, and suppression.
Low	Interpretation Master Plan	An Interpretation Master Plan takes a long-range approach to interpretation planning and may be developed for a unit, sector or geographical region, or may be used for particular resources found throughout the state. It updates and expands upon the General Plan or Cornerstone Document (depending upon which is available). The Master Plan provides background and context, while analyzing existing conditions and looking at opportunities and constraints for expanding interpretation and meeting visitor needs. The Master Plan can be a stand-alone document or combined with an Interpretive Action Plan.



Purpose <i>(Why it is needed at Big Basin Redwoods SP)</i>	Related Plans or Data Needs <i>(Needed ahead of the study unless otherwise noted)</i>
<p>To determine priority hydrologic and topographic restoration projects in previously developed areas.</p>	
<p>To develop long-term stewardship of forest resources with neighbors and local partners.</p>	
<p>To develop long-term management strategies to address climate change risk.</p>	
<p>To update the existing plan for Big Basin Redwoods SP.</p>	
<p>To formalize the approach to interpretation at Big Basin Redwoods SP. The park did not have an Interpretation Master Plan prior to the CZU Fire and could expand on the themes described in this document.</p>	<p>An update to the Scope of Collections Statement (SOCS) Plan to reflect what remains in the collection at Big Basin Redwoods SP following the CZU Fire.</p> <p>A Cultural Resources Management Plan could accompany the Interpretation Master Plan to reflect the post fire conditions.</p>

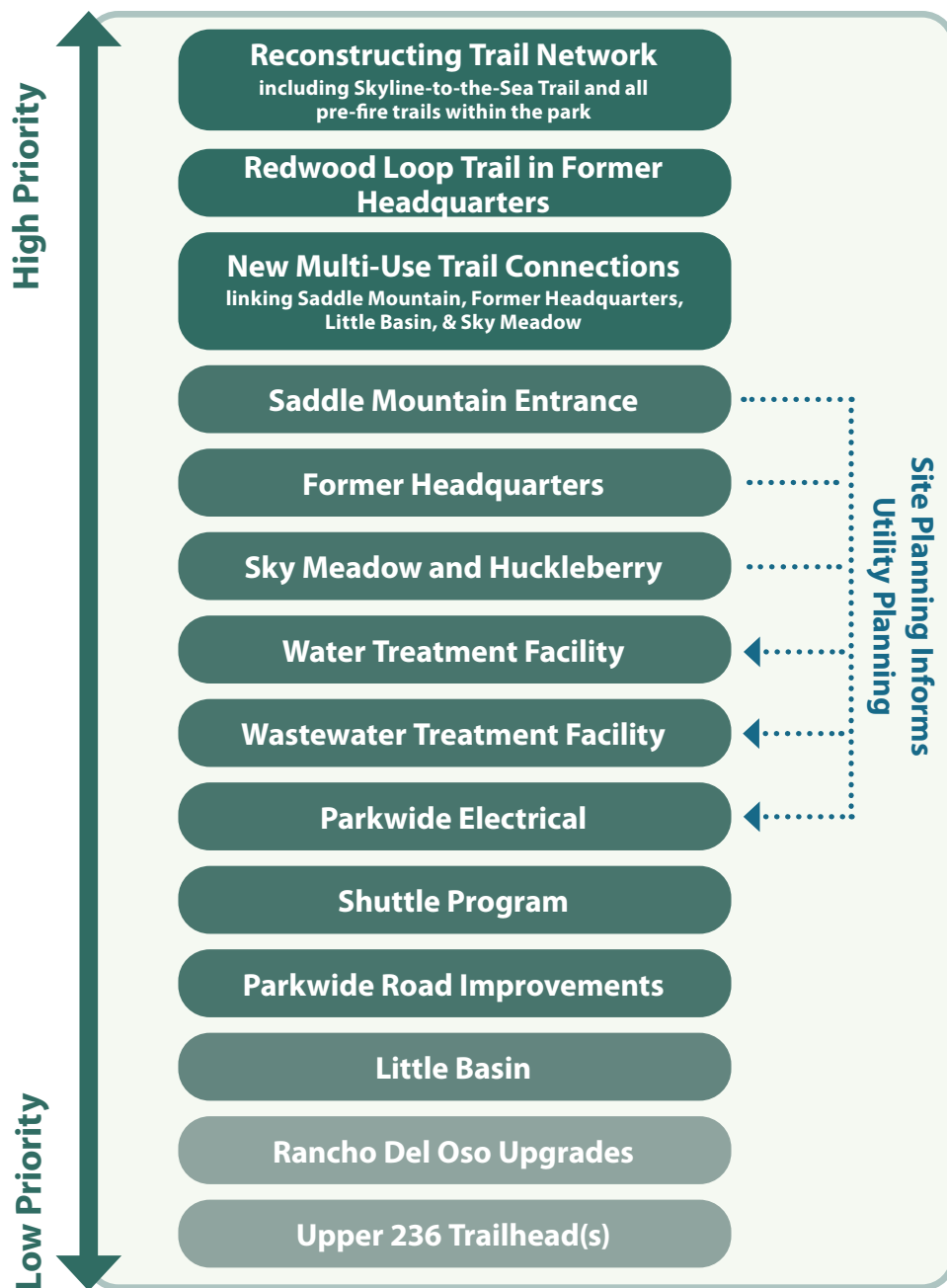


Figure 3-2. Planning Pathway



PLANNING PRIORITIES

While there is significant preliminary planning work that needs to be carried out prior to implementation of major, multi-phased capital projects, such as building a new visitor center, it is valuable to prioritize planning needs by location or project type. Following is the ranking of general project areas in order of priority based on reestablishing visitor needs and necessary sequencing to provide recreational services.





PART 4: MAP ATLAS

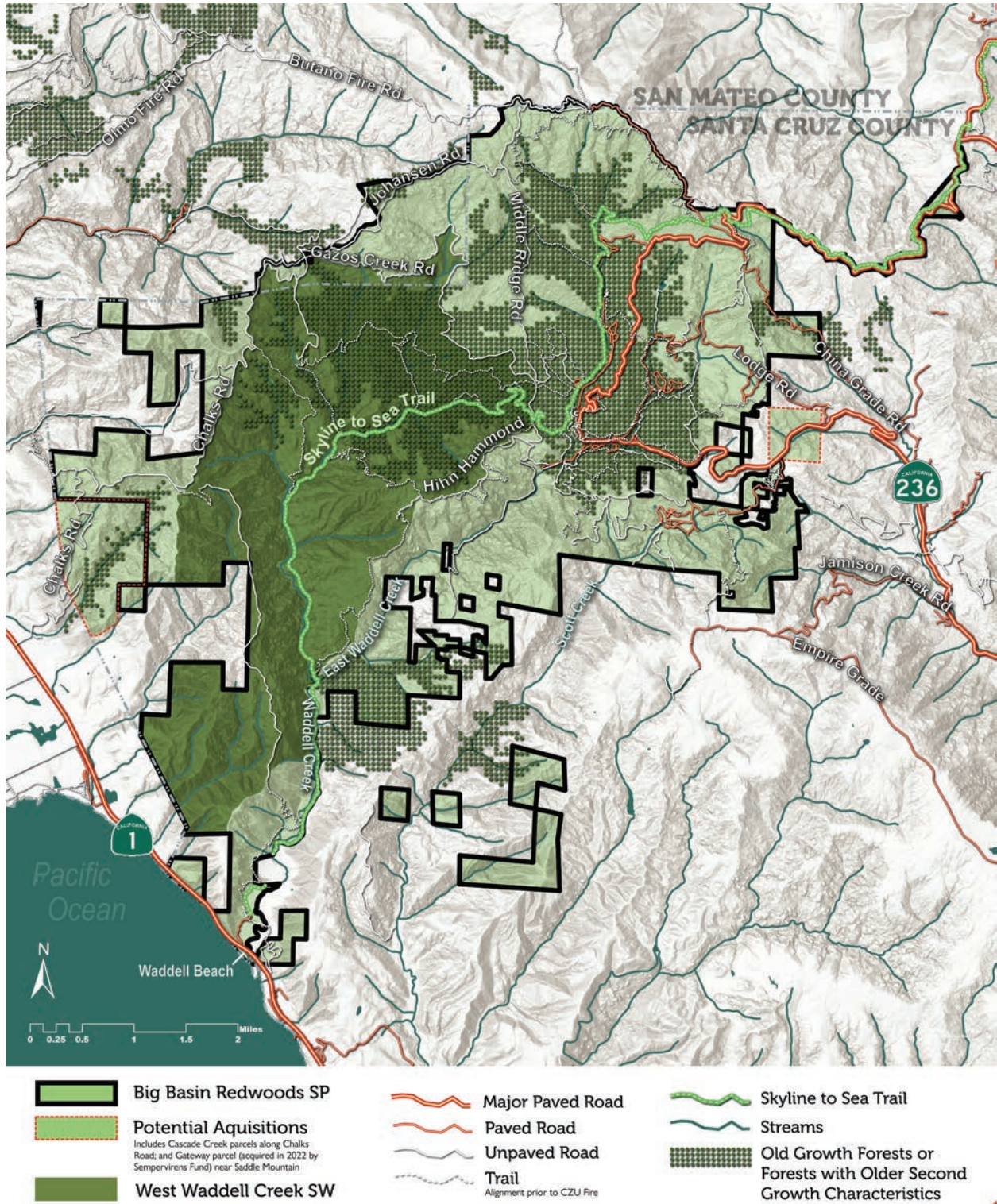
INTRODUCTION

Most maps in the General Plan are still relevant for understanding the resource context and planning goals for Big Basin Redwoods SP, with the exception of the maps that locate existing facilities that burned in the CZU Fire. The maps shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2-1 illustrate those lost facilities. The maps in this section provide additional information that may be useful in planning for future improvements. All maps reflect currently available data. As the Cornerstone Document is intended to be a “living document,” allowing for iterative updates, it is anticipated that new maps will be added to this section as new information becomes available.



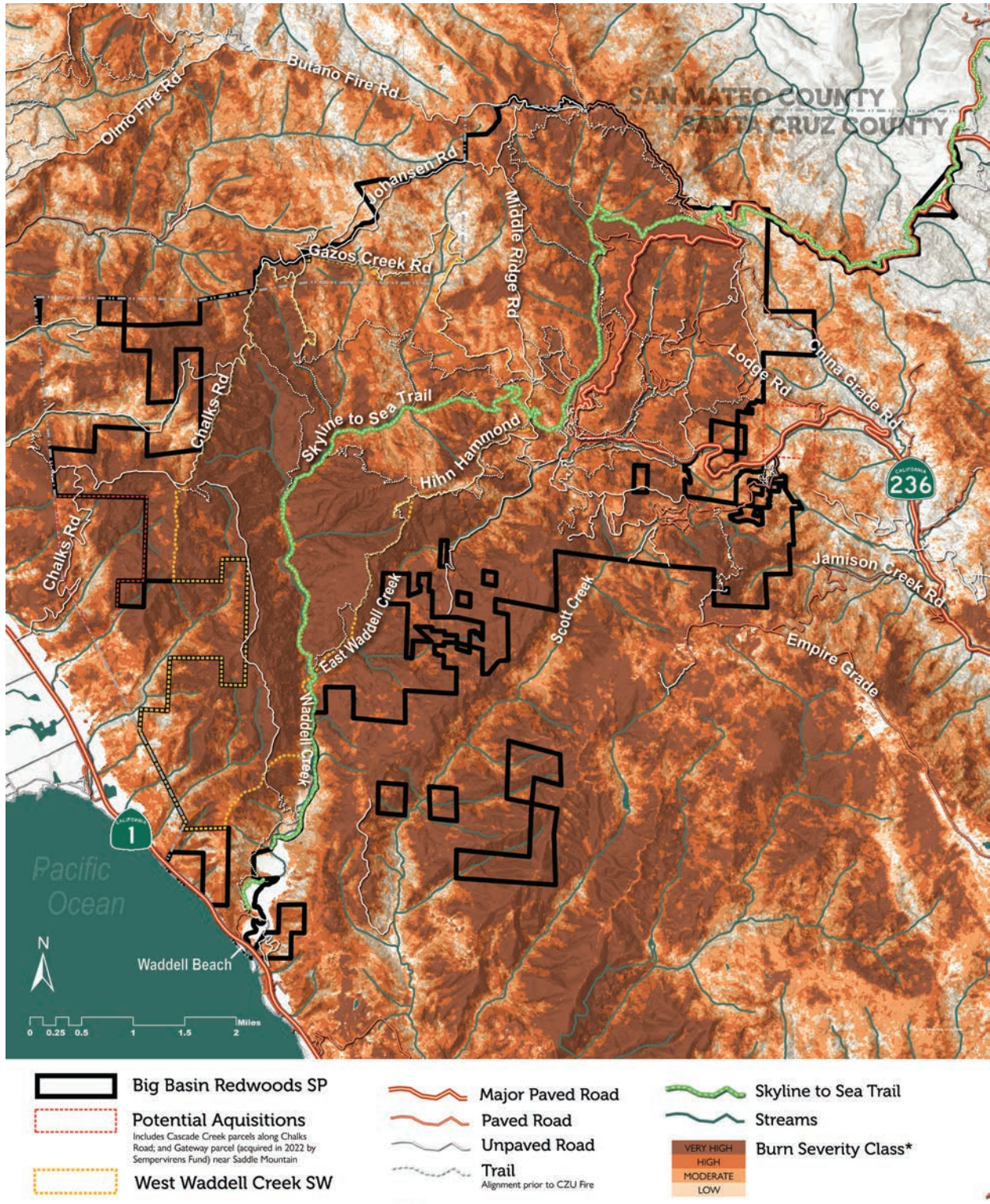


Figure 4-1. Old Growth Coast Redwood Forest



Source: Save-the-Redwoods League (SRL). 2008. Old-growth and Older Redwood Forest. Unpublished report and GIS database prepared for Save-the-Redwoods League by L. Fox. 2008.

Figure 4-2. CZU Burned Area

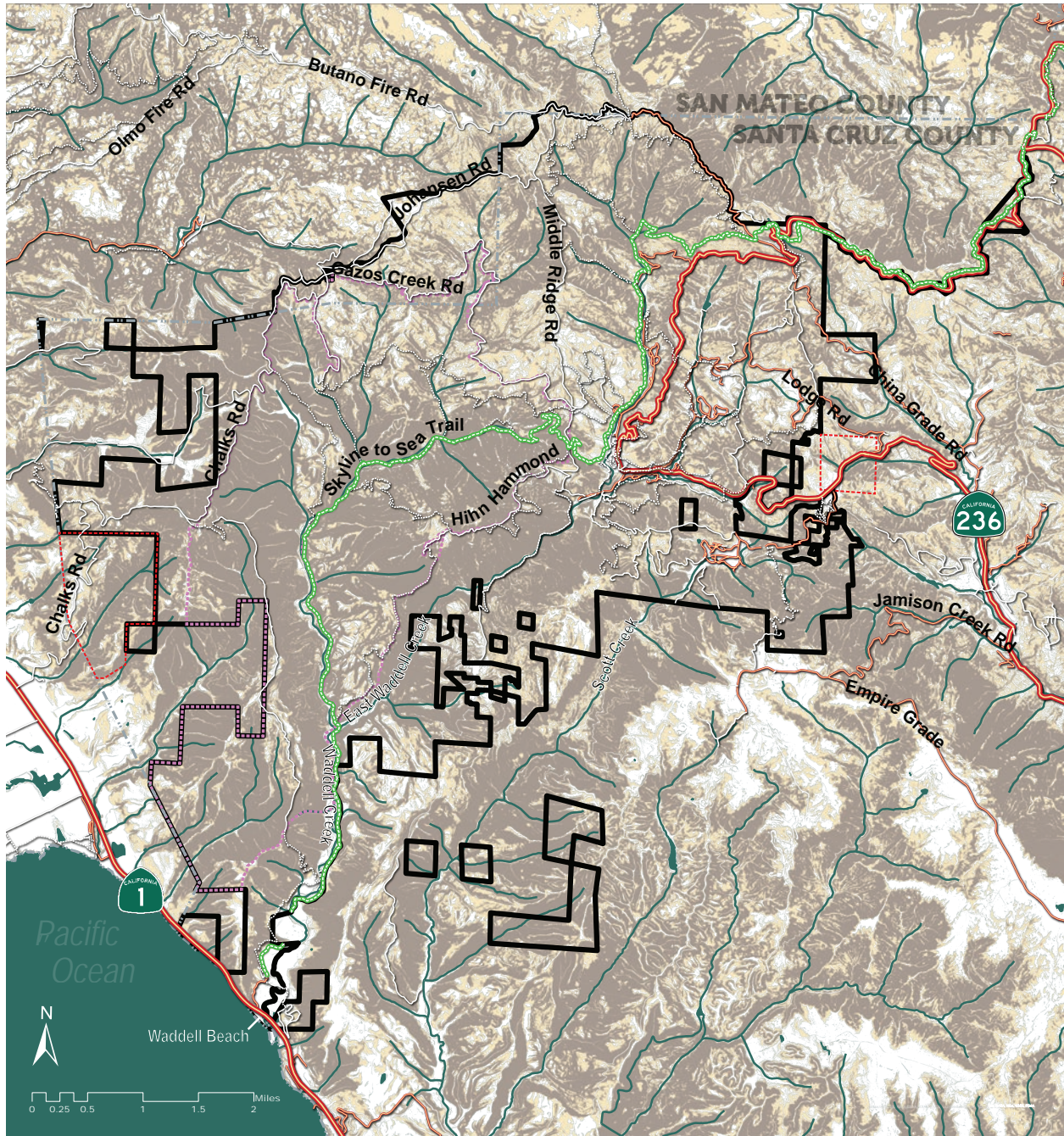





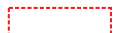







Source: https://tiles.arcgis.com/tiles/qmhndvC947rDNI6t/arcgis/rest/services/FIRE_DAMAGE_CZU/MapServer
 *The data represents differenced normalized burn ratio (dNBR) from NBR derived from pre-fire Sentinel-2 imagery and burn ratio derived from post fire burn severity. Resulting dNBR values were binned according to guidance proposed by USGS. Severity bins are as follows: Low: .1 - .269; Moderate: .270 - .436; High: .440 - .659; Very High: .660 - 1.3





Figure 4-3. Steep Slopes



- | | | |
|---|---|---|
|  Big Basin Redwoods SP |  Major Paved Road |  Skyline to Sea Trail |
|  Potential Aquisitions
<small>Includes Cascade Creek parcels along Chalks Road, and Gateway parcel (acquired in 2022 by Sempervirens Fund) near Saddle Mountain</small> |  Paved Road |  Streams |
|  West Waddell Creek SW |  Unpaved Road |  Highest Slope Areas ($\geq 40\%$) |
| |  Trail
<small>Alignment prior to CZU Fire</small> |  High Slope Areas ($\geq 20\%$) |

Source: <https://elevation.arcgis.com/arcgis/rest/services/WorldElevation/Terrain/ImageServer>





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