



STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Residence Inn by Marriott San Jose Cupertino

Cupertino, CA

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STAFF REPORT: Agenda Item 8: Santa Cruz District Updates

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SUBJECT: Introduction to the Santa Cruz District and an Informational Report on Seacliff State Beach and Big Basin Redwoods State Park

OBJECTIVE

This district has been greatly impacted due to climate change implications. Staff will provide a brief introduction to the features of the Santa Cruz District followed by informational reports on the status of public access and park planning at both Seacliff State Beach and Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

The January 5, 2023 storm event destroyed the pier, campground and much of the seawall at Seacliff State Beach. This report includes a summary of the storm impacts, an overview of public engagement, and the planning steps anticipated to create a more resilient park in the face of predicted sea level rise impacts.

All park facilities were lost in the 2020 CZU Fire at Big Basin Redwoods State Park. This report will also include a summary of the Reimagining Big Basin Vision, the Big Basin Redwoods State Park Cornerstone Document, and future planning phases for rebuilding park facilities.

AGENDA ITEM 8a: SEACLIFF STATE BEACH

INTRODUCTION

On January 5th, 2023, a bomb cyclone formed just off the California coast. The storm and the rapid cyclogenesis that characterizes such event brought large swell and storm surge that resulted in 30 to 40-foot breaking waves throughout the region as well as a categorized strong atmospheric river. The waves

associated with this storm event caused massive failures in the seawall that protected the Seacliff SB Beachfront Campground. Areas behind the seawall failures saw rapid loss of sediment fill, loss of concrete and asphalt surfaces, and loss of underground hookups for the RV campground. The storm destroyed over half of the pier that allowed visitors to view the S.S. Palo Alto up close, with pier material contributing to the debris throughout the park. Sections of seawall in the day-use were also lost, leading to damage of the pedestrian promenade behind the seawall. Over the course of the next four days two additional strong atmospheric rivers continued to saturate the bluffs leading to bluff failures and subsequent loss of access and cleanup at Seacliff that continued well into the summer.

UPDATES

Seacliff & New Brighton Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Study

As a result of the damage received during the 2022-2023 winter, plans for a sea level rise analysis as recommended by state guidance were prioritized for Seacliff SB. In summer of 2023 the district started a Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Alternatives study (study). The goal of this study is to:

- 1) identify coastal processes and their effect on Seacliff and New Brighton
- 2) assess the vulnerability of park assets to future sea level rise and storm conditions
- 3) develop short- and long-term shoreline adaptation alternative pathways
- 4) engage with public throughout the process to inform recommendations

Current Steps – We are currently assessing the impact of future sea level rise and storm scenarios and their impact on park assets. This involves a detailed technical analysis of coastal processes, how those processes would change in regard to sea level rise, and what sort of affect that might have on a facility or resource.

Next Steps – Once vulnerability is understood, alternatives can be recommended that best adapt to the expected changing conditions brought by climate change and sea level rise. Discussion of alternatives will start another phase of public engagement in spring 2024 that will inform a preferred alternative identified at the completion of the study, expected summer 2024.

Public Engagement – Last year we conducted a visitor experience survey to gauge community interest, help quantify visitor sentiment surrounding the park, and inform our understanding of visitation. We discovered tremendous interest with 3,855 surveys from across California with respondents stating they valued

the most the physical and mental health benefits, the beauty, and the activities present at Seacliff SB.

Conditions since the Storms & Study

Following the 22/23 winter, staff worked to reinstate temporary day-use access to Seacliff SB. This included rerouting elements of the compromised pedestrian promenade with an aggregate trail, resurfacing stairs, installing 2x4 handrail, and safety elements. Public access was formally reopened for Memorial Day weekend.

Before winter 23/24 arrived, Seacliff SB had experienced its first high wave event that overtopped the remaining seawall and caused erosional damage behind the day-use seawall. In the months following, Seacliff SB has experienced 6 events where waves have overtopped the seawall causing bluff failures, flooding, seawall damage, and beach and aggregate fill erosion. This highlights the importance of the sea level rise study in providing staff alternatives to create an adaptable, resilient Seacliff that can be enjoyed and accessed for all in the light of climate change and sea level rise.

AGENDA ITEM 8b: BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK

INTRODUCTION

In August of 2020, the CZU Lightning Complex Fire burned 97% of the area of Big Basin Redwoods State Park, including burning of much of the forest canopy and the destruction of all park structures and facilities needed to operate the park for recreational access. The park was closed until July 2022, and since then has been open to limited public access while planning and recovery work is ongoing. State Parks initiated the Reimagining Big Basin Vision process to develop a collaborative vision for the future of the park, which was completed in 2022, and was the basis for the development of the Big Basin Redwoods State Park Cornerstone Document which was approved in October 2023.

UPDATES

Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary

In preparation for long-term rebuilding, State Parks initiated the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary process 2021 – 2022. This process was an opportunity to develop a vision for the management and construction of a renewed park that is focused on the goals of climate resiliency and increasing equity in access to the park. The public process included a series of public webinars, a public survey, and input from an Advisory Committee of partnering organizations, and a Steering Committee of State Parks managers.

The Vision describes a future park that is centered around the resilience, health and stewardship of the old growth redwood forest amidst the changing future climate conditions. The vision also includes eight guiding principles which will guide future park

planning efforts. To implement these guiding principles, the vision describes some differences in how the park will be rebuilt in comparison to how the park facilities were located and operated pre-fire. These differences are to have a smaller built footprint in the old growth area, to establish a park welcome center at the Saddle Mountain site, and to establish a shuttle system to bring a similar level of park visitors to the park but with a reduced amount of development in the Main Day Use area in the heart of the old growth.

Cornerstone Document

The Cornerstone Document (CD) is the newest planning document for State Parks, developed by the Planning Transformation Committee and identified in the Committee's 2018 final report *Transforming the Planning Process*. A streamlined vision-setting tool, the CD summarizes what is known about a park, establishes the Department's position as to its primary purpose, and highlights the park's sense of place and its significant resources and values. It is based on research and technical advice from diverse disciplines, as well as input from community stakeholders, including California Native American Tribes. The CD forms the basis for future detailed strategies and projects for park operation and improvements. It is a dynamic document subject to revision as new information is discovered about a park or as public recreation values change. Each unit of the State Park System should have a CD because it sets the foundation that serves as the basis of all future decisions for a park.

The Big Basin Redwoods State Park Cornerstone Document was prepared based on the information included and process undertaken in the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary. The Cornerstone Document includes updated information post-fire, recognizing the adopted General Plan for the Park from 2013. The adopted General Plan is the guiding land use document for reconstructing park facilities. The 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. The CD includes the following sections:

- **Park Summary:** including a summary of the park and impacts of the CZU Fire, declaration of purpose, a vision statement, guiding principles and sense of place.
- **Core Components:** Including updated park conditions related to natural, aesthetic and cultural resources, proposed interpretive themes, and develop facilities that were lost in the CZU Fire.
- **Dynamic Components:** Including stakeholder and community feedback during the Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary Process, challenges of climate change, issue identification, and planning needs and planning pathway for building the renewed park.
- **Map atlas:** Including maps of park resources and opportunities and constraints.

Ongoing and Future Planning Efforts

District staff and consultants are currently developing a Facilities Management Plan (FMP) for Big Basin. The FMP is critical to moving forward with rebuilding according to the park's General Plan, the changed conditions post-fire, the Reimagining Big Basin

Vision Summary and the Big Basin Redwoods State Park Cornerstone Document, and in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

The FMP is intended to be utilized by California State Parks management, staff, park partners, and stakeholders. Restoration of public use areas will be explored in a series of opportunity sites and conceptually and graphically represented in the FMP. These concepts and accompanying recommendations will be based on the Vision Summary's guiding principles, consultation with Santa Cruz District and other State Parks staff, stakeholders, non-profit partners, representatives from Tribal Nations and other Indigenous group representatives, as well as feedback from the public.

Simultaneously, State Parks staff and consultants are preparing a Forest Management Strategy to manage natural resources for future climate resiliency in the park after the CZU Fire. The Forest Management Strategy identifies the increased use of prescribed fire as the primary management tool for maintaining lower fuel loads and a resilient forest structure with increased likelihood of future fire during severe drought and weather conditions in the changing climate.

In the future, other planning documents may be prepared after the FMP is complete including a Roads and Trails Management Plan for Butano, Ano Nuevo, and Big Basin Redwoods that will consider additions, any potential changes, or new access points to the trail networks for these three park units.

Park Status and Public Access

Currently the Main Day Use area is open for limited public day-use through an online parking reservation system. There are temporary facilities to allow access including a temporary visitor center, chemical toilets, and an entry kiosk, and over five miles of trails are open to hiking and over 26 miles of fire roads are open to hiking and biking in the park. Utilities and drinking water are not available at the park.

On the coastal side of Big Basin, day-use parking is available at Waddell Beach, the Hoover Trail is open, and the Marsh Trail is open seasonally. The Nature Center is open at Rancho del Oso and in 2023 the newly renovated Welcome Center opened in partnership with Save the Redwoods League and the Waddell Creek Association. In 2023 the Rancho del Oso Walk-In Campground re-opened at the Horse Camp, allowing interim walk-in camping until trail access into the park is restored in the future, at which time the campground will be re-instated as an equestrian camp. In the future District staff will continue to open trails and areas within the park as they are made safe for public access while permanent park facilities are planned.

NEXT STEPS

As described in the report.

COMMISSION ACTION(S)

For information only.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Associated websites:

[Reimagining Big Basin](#)

[Cornerstone Documents](#)