

SDC OPEN SPACE NEWSLETTER



ISSUE NO 1 | MAY 2026 | BY CARMEN VANNI



Photo by: California State Parks

WELCOME!

Thank you for reading our very first issue of the Sonoma Developmental Center Open Space Newsletter, otherwise known as the SDCOS Newsletter.

In this publication, we are bringing you the latest news on the SDC Open Space from us at California State Parks. We plan to release new issues periodically, depending on the frequency of updates.

Regardless, our staff are working hard to preserve and enhance the natural beauty and hidden stories of this cherished space.

We hope you enjoy perusing this newsletter!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is the Sonoma Developmental Center Open Space? Learn about the park as well as the new State Park staff.

What is the Cannabis Watershed Protection Program? Learn how this statewide program applies to the SDCOS.

Want to know more about some upcoming special events? Check out our event calendar and see how you can get involved.

Our latest news and updates on the SDCOS.

Check out our photo gallery!

What is Sonoma Developmental Center Open Space?

Established in 1891, the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) occupies a cherished spot in the Sonoma Valley. Comprising approximately 180 acres of developed campus and 765 acres of natural areas, SDC provided a serene and therapeutic setting for individuals with developmental disabilities. Its extensive trail system and essential water infrastructure, including two reservoirs and a treatment plant, enhanced its significance.

For over a century, SDC offered specialized care, earning national recognition as a healing community. As the valley's primary employer, it fostered deep connections with neighboring communities until its closure in 2018. Despite this, SDC's legacy persists, leaving an enduring mark on the region's history.

On January 1st, 2024, the transfer of approximately 750 acres of open space to California State Parks was finalized, marking the largest land acquisition in the Sonoma Valley since 2010. This new addition to State Parks ensures protection under our mission, with management plans already underway to safeguard and enhance the property.

We at California State Parks are eager to partner with various organizations who have a vested interest in the future of the property. I was invited to our first informal meeting of partners on a beautiful public hike around the property hosted by Tracy Salcedo, Chair of Sonoma Mountain Preservation on Saturday, May 2nd, 2026. Also in attendance was Steve Lee of the Sonoma Ecology Center, Angela Nardo-Morgan of the Glen Ellen Historical Society, and other interested locals. It was a fun and educational networking event. I look forward to next year!

[Official Webpage](#)

Together with our partner organizations, we will continue to improve public access and recreational opportunities at SDC Open Space.

What is the Cannabis Watershed Protection Program (CWPP)?

The Cannabis Watershed Protection Program (CWPP) is a multidisciplinary team dedicated to restoring watersheds affected by illegal cannabis cultivation. State Parks created the program in 2019 with funding from Proposition 64 ([The Control, Regulate, and Tax Adult Use of Marijuana Act](#)), to repair the damages done by decades of illicit growing activities throughout California State Parks. Unique to California, this multifaceted team brings a holistic approach to the complex work of protecting parks from cannabis cultivation and restoring degraded watersheds back to their natural state.

In more recent times, remote areas of the SDCOS property were damaged by illegal cannabis cultivation. As part of an effort to protect and preserve the local natural and cultural history, State Parks has teamed up with Sonoma State University to conduct a cultural survey to inventory and protect cultural resources within this new acquisition. Insights from this survey will inform future exhibits and educational activities in the park.

For more information on the Cannabis Watershed Protection Program, please go to the CWPP webpage [here](#).

Who is working at SDCOS?

We have two new staff members who have joined the State Parks team to serve the SDC Open Space.

First, we have Associate State Archaeologist (PI) Sally Gaston. Sally joined us in late 2025 under the Cultural Resources Division. At SDCOS, she will be surveying, cataloging, and stewarding our cultural resources through research and consultations. Together with Sonoma State University's Anthropological Resource Center, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, and California State Parks, Sally and the rest of the division will collaborate under the CWPP to create a cultural inventory of the park. This inventory will serve as the basis for new interpretive signage, kiosks, and programming at SDCOS.

Likewise, we also have myself, Carmen Vanni, joining the team as the State Park Interpreter I (PI). My role is to collaborate with internal staff and outside partners to foster public relations related to SDC Open Space. In collaboration with Sally Gaston, Daniel Williford of the CWPP, Cultural Resources Supervisor/State Historian III Noah Stewart, and many others, my role is to both communicate the progress of the CWPP project to the public and create educational programming regarding the impacts of illegal cannabis cultivation to our watersheds.

We are in the process of hiring more staff in various divisions. Please keep on the lookout for more announcements in future issues.

News & Updates

Pile Burning on SDC Open Space - Fern Lake

Starting on April 20th, 2026, California State Parks and CAL FIRE cooperated on a scheduled pile burn at Fern Lake on the SDC Open Space property. The burn officially concluded on April 30th, 2026. Read more [here](#).

Thanks to Naftali Moed and Maxwell Psaledakis from the Bay Area District Wildfire & Forest Resilience Program for their hard work in preserving and enriching the park and its future.

Calendar of Events

May

- **23rd - SDC Open Space Clean Up Day**
 - Tired of seeing trash in the park? Come and join us on Saturday, May 23rd from 10 AM to 12:30 PM for a chance to beautify and protect the SDC Open Space. Meet at the intersection of Harney and Railroad. Gloves, bags, and trash grabbers will be provided. Water, hats, and sturdy shoes are recommended. This event is part of the [Litter Getter Program](#).
- **30th - Guided Hike**
 - Take a hike around SDC Open Space on Saturday, May 30th at 10 AM with a State Park Interpreter! Meet at the intersection of Harney and Railroad. Water, hats, and sturdy shoes are recommended.

June

- **10th - 14th - State Parks Week**
 - California State Parks Week is an annual event that celebrates the amazing diversity of California's State Park System. We invite Californians to celebrate the communities and cultures that make California special! Check out the event calendar [here](#).

Want to become a volunteer with California State Parks?
Apply [here](#)!

Image Gallery

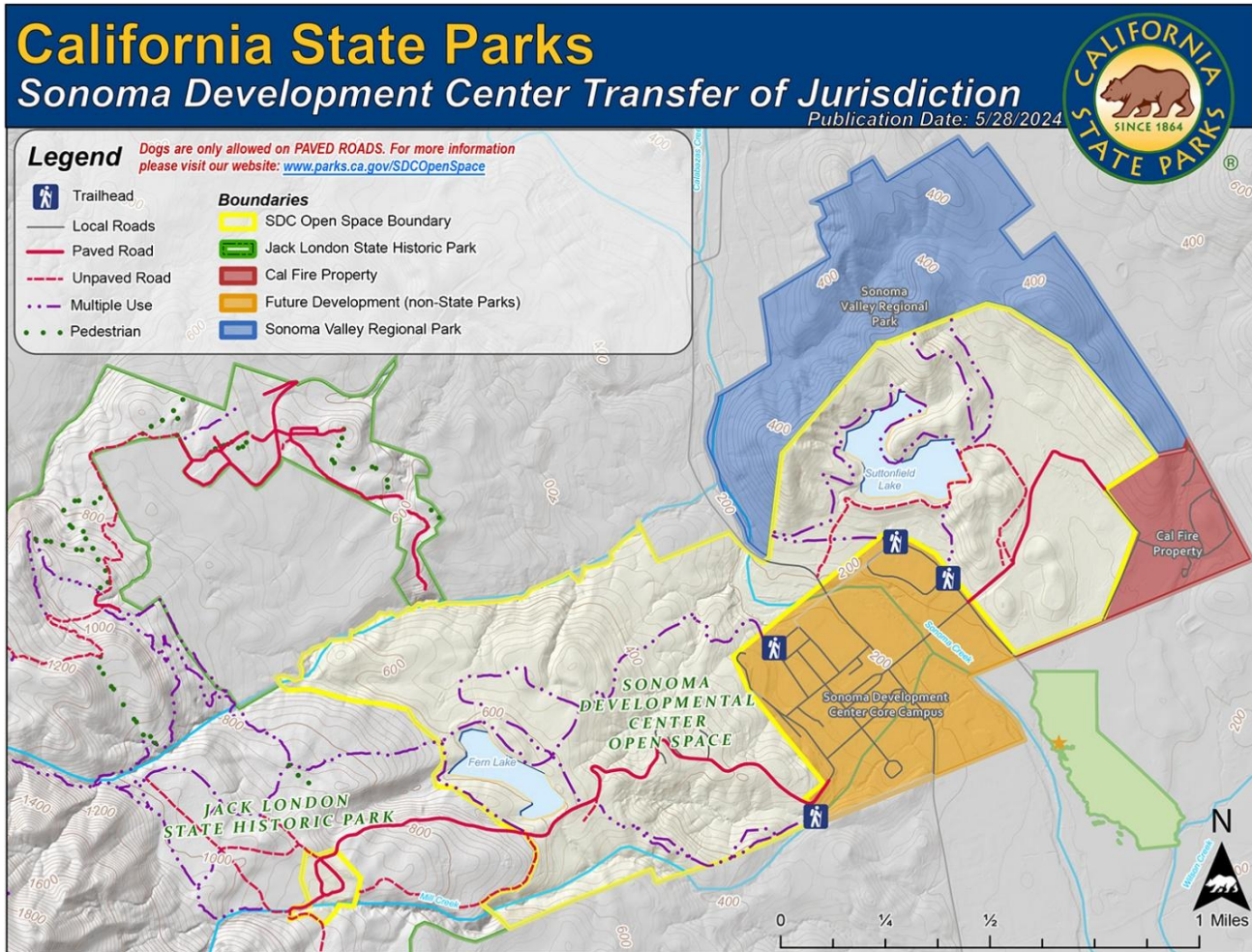


Photo by: California State Parks



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SDC Plan

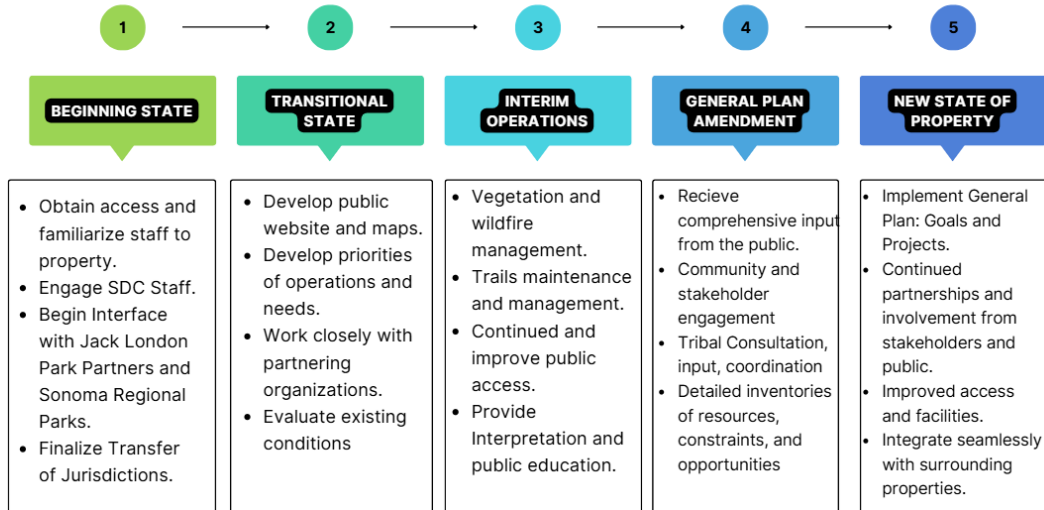


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