



# SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PARKS STRATEGIC PLAN

PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT  
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JEFF GAFFNEY  
DIRECTOR

# County of Santa Cruz

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## DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, OPEN SPACE & CULTURAL SERVICES

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## FORWARD

Dear Friends and Partners,

The Santa Cruz County Parks Department is pleased to present to you our first Strategic Plan. This document represents a year-long process of assessment, inquiry, and outreach to our community, partner organizations, public officials, staff, and supporters. We are proud of the comprehensive and collaborative nature of the document as well as the process which created it.

Our goal was twofold: first, provide a ten-year roadmap for the department that will assist us in adapting and growing our support for a healthy, connected, and culturally vibrant Santa Cruz County. Second, to create a resource for understanding of what we do and how we serve the community, as well as guidance for partnering and collaboration.

The premise of this document is that our system of parks, open spaces, beaches, and recreation and cultural services represent one of our county's most valuable investments. The department's primary role is to ensure that this investment is well-managed, relevant and accessible to all, regardless of age, cultural background, physical ability, or income. We also must see that it is preserved and enhanced for generations to come.

Thank you for your contribution and dedication to our amazing park system and the public value we provide. We hope you will find this plan useful; it is the beginning of a relationship and an open conversation about community priorities.

Sincerely,

Jeff Gaffney  
Parks Director

*The Mission of the Santa Cruz County Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services is to provide safe, well designed and maintained parks and a wide variety of recreational and cultural opportunities for our diverse community*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan would not have been possible without the assistance and participation of a great number of individuals. We would like to thank all the members of the public who participated in the public process that created this Strategic Plan, and to all the staff and volunteers who contributed.

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Meetings that Matter

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

The County Parks Strategic Plan describes a collective vision for the County Parks Department and establishes goals and objectives within a ten-year timeframe. This plan is intended to serve as a road map and reference for the department and staff, and for the wider community of parks users, members of the public, and partners as we continue to make decisions about resources and community priorities. More specific operations planning will take place as part of an annual cycle aligned with the County budget process, and is intended to help us achieve the goals of this plan.

To develop this Strategic Plan, our staff undertook an extensive outreach process and collected substantive input from the community. All-in-all, over 1,000 individuals participated in the process including five initial community meetings, an online survey, a series of Strategic Plan Working Group meetings, and a series of staff strategic planning meetings. Staff also conducted research and summarized the status of the department and catalogued needs in the county. This needs assessment served as a basis for developing the vision, priorities, and goals in this Strategic Plan.

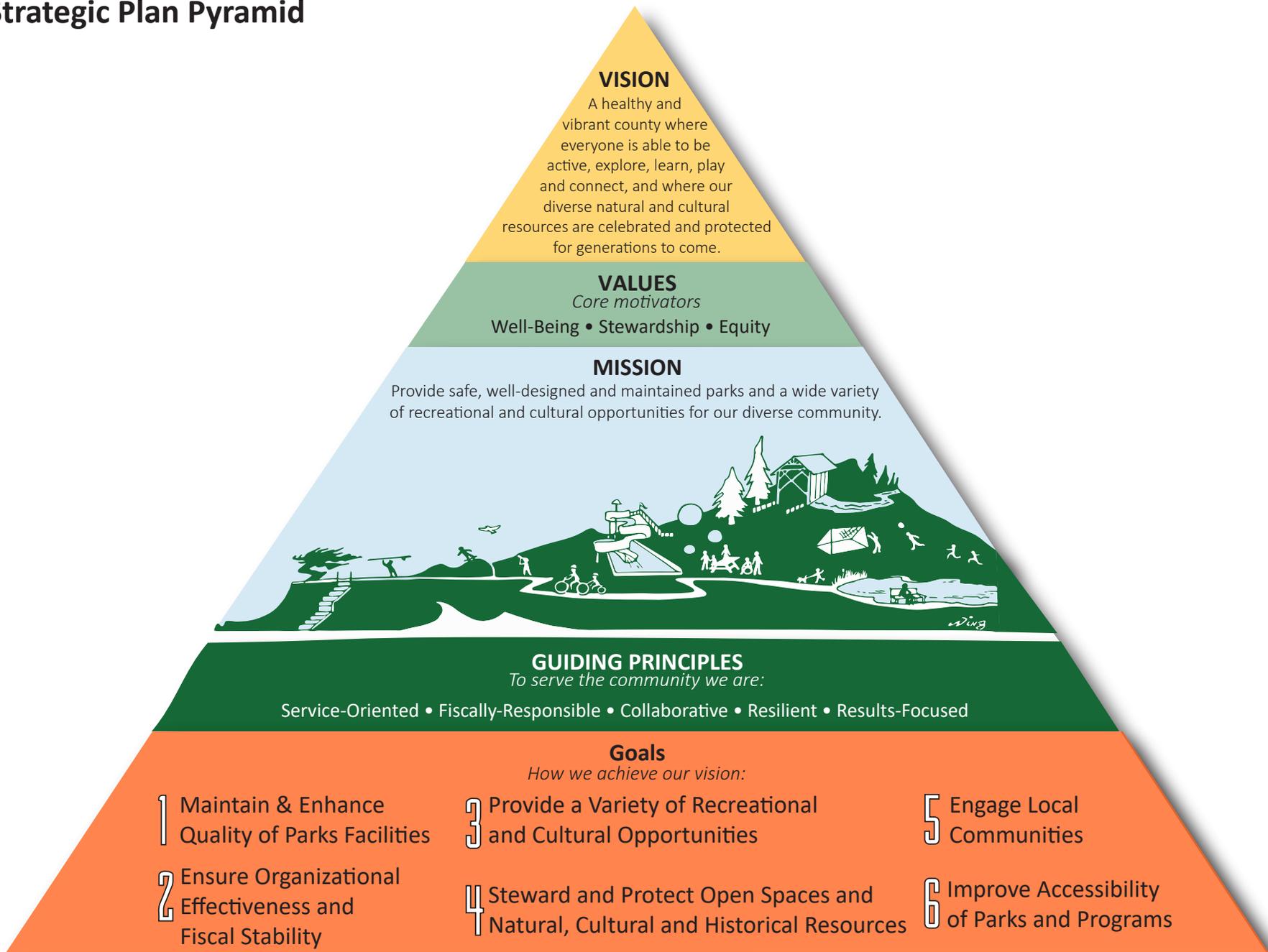
## STRATEGIC PLAN RESULTS

The graphic on the next page summarizes the results and key elements of this Strategic Plan. On the top is the Parks Department vision, which describes the desired future and the largest purpose for *why* we exist. The values shown in the next layer down represent the core motivators for the work of this department: namely to support *well-being, stewardship, and equity* in Santa Cruz County.

The six goals for our department as identified by the strategic planning process are grouped (in no priority order) at the bottom of the pyramid. These statements describe *what* we will do to achieve our vision. Not pictured here – under each goal, we have identified specific objectives, and under each objective are more specific strategies – representing focused ways we will achieve these goals.

Fulfilling the priorities in this Strategic Plan will require partnerships and additional funding and resources. The Parks Department will continue to collaborate with partners in order to identify these opportunities, and to implement many of the priorities in this Strategic Plan. Together we can work towards implementing the vision for the future of the County Parks Department.

# Strategic Plan Pyramid



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT AND PROJECT APPROACH.....	1
CHAPTER 2: WHY PARKS MATTER .....	9
CHAPTER 3: VISION, MISSION AND VALUES .....	11
CHAPTER 4: YOUR COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT .....	15
CHAPTER 5: KEY FINDINGS.....	29
CHAPTER 6: GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES.....	39
CHAPTER 7: PLAN IMPLEMENTATION.....	47

## FIGURES

FIGURE 1: STRATEGIC PLAN FLOW CHART.....	4
FIGURE 2: WORDS USED IN THE RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY.....	6
FIGURE 3: NEIGHBORHOOD-PARK-PROVIDING JURISDICTIONS.....	16
FIGURE 4: PROTECTED LANDS IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY .....	17
FIGURE 5: COUNTY PARKS, FACILITIES, AND COASTAL ACCESS POINTS.....	21
FIGURE 6: PARKS REVENUE SOURCES IN FISCAL YEAR 2016/17 .....	23
FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF PARKS AND NUMBER OF PARKS DEPARTMENT STAFF .....	24
FIGURE 8: KEY THEMES AND IDEAS RECEIVED FROM STAFF.....	30
FIGURE 9: PERCENT OF TOPICS RAISED IN COMMENTS DURING PUBLIC MEETINGS .....	33
FIGURE 10: COUNTYWIDE PARK IMPACT ANALYSIS.....	38
FIGURE 11: STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT CYCLE .....	47
FIGURE 12: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.....	48

## TABLES

TABLE 1: KEY NEEDS SUMMARY .....	34
TABLE 2: PARKSCORE SUMMARY.....	36
TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES .....	40

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARKSCORE ANALYSIS	
APPENDIX 2: OUTREACH MATERIALS AND SUMMARY	



# CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT AND PROJECT APPROACH

This Strategic Plan represents the first comprehensive and collaborative planning effort between the County Parks Department and the local community in Santa Cruz County. The Strategic Plan seeks to articulate the vision and strategic priorities for the future of the County Parks system in a ten-year timeframe. The vision and priorities established through this process reflect the strong value that Santa Cruz County places on parks, coastal access, open space, programs and the events and activities that bring us together as a community.

The Strategic Plan addresses the County's existing park system, including its strengths and challenges, and identifies the necessary areas of improvement to remain responsive to the changing needs of our community. Ultimately, the plan will serve as the basis for future department work plans (operations plans) and as a roadmap for the department.

## OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE:

*A healthy and vibrant county where everyone is able to be active, explore, learn, play and connect, and where our diverse natural and cultural resources are celebrated and protected for generations to come.*

## WHY A STRATEGIC PLAN?

The Santa Cruz County Department of Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services (County Parks Department or County Parks) has grown in both the size of its holdings and its importance in the lives of county residents since its inception in 1979. Over the course of the last 38 years, the department has undergone many changes, while the County Parks system has grown into a large network of parks, open spaces, facilities, trails and coastal access points throughout the unincorporated portions of the county.

Some highlights of the department's history:

- **1979 - 2002:** Established in 1979, the County Parks system grew for two decades in the number of parks, programs and employees. By 2002 there were 55 County Parks facilities, parks and coastal access points.
- **2002 - 2011:** The number of full time permanent budgeted department staff positions declined from 68 funded full time or equivalent staff positions in 2002/03 to only 35 in 2011/12, along with a decline in program offerings. At the same time, the number of park facilities steadily increased.
- **2011 - 2014:** In the wake of the economic downturn, the Parks Department was temporarily dissolved into the County Department of Public Works from 2011 to 2014.

- **2014 - 2018:** Some limited additional funding for County Parks was established through the passing of Measure F in 2014. The County Parks Department was re-established as an independent department in 2014 and a new director was hired in 2015.

Over the years the County Parks system has grown to be a significant resource to a wide number of county residents. Santa Cruz County is unique in having such a large portion of the population living outside of incorporated cities (about 130,000 people, or 49 percent according to the 2010 Census). The County Parks Department provides local neighborhood and community parks and event facilities in these unincorporated areas as well as providing typical county regional parks and open spaces serving the entire county population, despite having a smaller relative tax apportionment and ability to leverage funding than other counties and cities (see page 26 for more explanation).

Today, with increasing demand placed on the county's existing park facilities, trails and open spaces by our growing population, and the rising costs of maintaining and improving them, it is imperative that we consider how best to preserve and protect our natural and cultural resources into the future.

As the County Parks system moves forward and continues to grow under new leadership, the Strategic Plan will provide a vision and establish priorities for the department.

Working within the current framework of the County's General Plan, the Strategic Plan represents the current vision of the community, and identifies opportunities for leveraging funding and resources to move the department towards this vision. The Strategic Plan does not create or change any County policy, but provides a framework to assist us in working more effectively within existing policies.

The goals of the strategic planning process have been to:

- **Define** the status of the County Parks system by creating an up-to-date inventory of parks and services.

- **Assess** gaps in the network of parks and services through creation of a needs assessment.
- **Involve** the community and incorporate ideas, priorities and goals that align with the needs of residents.
- **Articulate** a vision for the future of the County Parks Department through creation of a vision statement and clear priorities, and by highlighting the department's values.
- **Plan** the direction for the department for the next ten years by defining goals, objectives and strategies.



*Simpkins Family Swim Center in Live Oak*

## STRATEGIC PLANNING METHODS AND PRINCIPLES

Throughout the strategic planning process, the following principles have guided our work: *inclusivity, responsiveness, sustainability and transparency.*

To assure we served the diverse needs of our community to the best of our ability, we worked hard to make our process inclusive and accessible to all. In order to be responsive and to make certain that the department continues to evolve to meet our community's changing needs, we sought to hear from a wide range of stakeholders about their wishes. To assure we created a plan that would support the fiscal and environmental health and sustainability of our parks system, we engaged the public in meaningful conversations about community values, priorities, and resources. Because we seek to partner and problem-solve with local government, our patrons, and our partners, we focused on creating a clear, open, and transparent process for identifying community needs.



County Parks Strategic Plan Community Meeting

## HOW THE STRATEGIC PLAN WILL BE USED

This document consolidates background information, community feedback, key findings and other information that was used to develop the vision, values, goals, objectives and strategies contained in this Strategic Plan. County Parks has gained a wealth of information about the community and the environment through this process, and this summary will be used by staff, community stakeholders, the County Administrative Office, and the Board of Supervisors as the County moves forward to carry out the vision outlined in this Strategic Plan. Much of this information will be referenced or serve as a jumping-off point for strategic decision-making. Additionally, this Strategic Plan will serve as the basis for future operations plans for the department, which will contain performance measures, more time-specific priorities, and detailed actions to implement the Strategic Plan and achieve our goals.

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE VISION SANTA CRUZ COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

The County Administrative Office is developing its first-ever countywide strategic plan – called *Vision Santa Cruz County*, to be completed in 2018. This plan establishes a common vision and set of goals that will be implemented by all of the County departments. *Vision Santa Cruz County* will contain broad, inter-departmental goals. The goals and objectives in the County Parks Strategic Plan will work together and align with the *Vision Santa Cruz County* goals, while being more specific to the provision of parks and recreation in the county.

The County Parks Department is not the only County department to undergo its own strategic planning process. Under the direction of our County's new Chief Administrative Officer, all County departments will be asked to develop plans and to align those plans with the overarching County plan.



Recreation Trip to US Potomac



Scott Creek County Beach



Felt Street County Park

## PROJECT APPROACH

The Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative process that sought to be both geographically and culturally inclusive. Input was solicited through meetings with staff, community members and the Strategic Plan Working Group. Generally, the process is illustrated in Figure 1, and includes outreach, visioning and goal-setting.

### GUIDANCE & OVERSIGHT

The Strategic Plan was instigated and the process was led by a Strategic Planning Team which consisted of two lead project designers from the department along with parks leadership. In addition, a Strategic Plan Working group was formed in December of 2016 for the distinct purpose

of helping with the County Parks Strategic Plan process. It was composed of ten outside members of varying backgrounds with diverse interests, expertise, experience and partnerships. A list of Working Group members is included in the Acknowledgements section at the beginning of this document.

The Working Group met periodically, for a total of five times over the course of developing the Strategic Plan, to review and give input into all Strategic Plan materials and project phases. This review included project outreach and public engagement, creation of the parks vision and values, and the framing of the goals and objectives for the department. The Working Group also helped implement the public meetings.



Figure 1: Strategic Plan Flow Chart

### STAFF INVOLVEMENT

In Spring 2017 the Parks Department hosted a series of three meetings for staff across the department to solicit their input and engage them in the strategic planning process. Each meeting drew a mix of attendees from various sections, and a total 48 staff members provided input. Ultimately, all sections of the department were represented: maintenance and operations, recreation and cultural services, administration and reservations, aquatics, and planning and development.

These initial meetings included a series of visioning and brainstorming exercises aimed at gathering ideas on how the department can improve and evolve to meet the needs of the community and continue to be a great place to work. Through this process we sought also to identify what changes were needed to both enhance the department's ability to serve the public and to improve job satisfaction for Parks employees.

These meetings generated a wide range of specific ideas and feedback – all of which has been valuable to this process and will be important to the department in future planning. Staff input was synthesized and used to populate a large graphic. See the 'Department Needs' summary section of this plan for a copy of the graphic.

Just as staff input was vital to developing the Parks Vision and Values, it contributed foundationally to establishing the department's priorities. An additional 'All-Hands' meeting took place later in the process to generate specific goals and objectives for the Strategic Plan.

Internal feedback about what is missing, and what can improve the department will continue to be gathered on a regular basis from staff as part of the new Strategic Improvement Cycle.

### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community input was an integral part of the Strategic Plan process. The people that live in Santa Cruz County care deeply about their parks system; in total over 1,000 people participated in the Strategic Plan process through completing online surveys, attending one or more of the community meetings about the project, or providing comments or feedback in other ways. Strategic Plan outreach included engagement of County communications staff, Board of Supervisors' staff, department staff and members of the Strategic Plan Working Group for assistance in personally contacting various groups of stakeholders, key community organizations and interested community members to solicit their input via the survey and to publicize the community meetings.



Strategic Plan Staff Meeting



The meetings were publicized through individual letters and emails to over 200 stakeholder groups and their membership, publishing in each of the Board of Supervisors’ newsletters, posting on both the County’s and the Parks Department’s website and social media, posting on Nextdoor, posting in the Parks Activity Guide and at parks and community bulletins, distributing flyers to school districts where feasible, and a press release which generated several articles in local media. Outreach materials were provided in English and Spanish.

Community meetings included about an hour and fifteen minutes for public comments. Participants were split into four groups for the comment period, and each group rotated through a series of four stations. Each station was facilitated by staff and/or volunteers and focused on one of four topics, including vision and values, parks and facilities, programs and events, and priorities. Facilitators asked a series of prompts and led a series of exercises with each small group, and all comments were recorded. Spanish translation services were available at each meeting.



Strategic Plan Community Meeting in Watsonville - Small Group Exercises

## STRATEGIC PLAN VOCABULARY

Throughout the Strategic Plan, the following terms will be used frequently and have a specific meaning within the context of this Strategic Plan.

- Vision:** A brief statement articulating the desired future state, describing *why* the department does the work that it does.
- Values:** Core *motivators* reflecting community ideals that drive the work of the Parks Department and relate directly to the vision.
- Mission:** A brief statement describing *what* the department does.
- Goals:** Broad statements of *how* we pursue our vision.
- Objectives:** Specific *ways* we plan to achieve our goals and impact our community.
- Strategies:** The *approach* we plan to take to achieve our objectives.



## CHAPTER 2: WHY PARKS MATTER

In any community, a public parks system provides a variety of benefits to both individuals and the community. A growing body of research points to several attributes of park systems that provide measurable economic value.<sup>1</sup> Parks provide opportunities for people of all ages to come together across economic and cultural divides, enjoy cultural offerings, and experience the outdoors. Parks support greater mental and physical health by providing community activities, relief from stress, and opportunities to be physically active. Parks and open space can also support functional ecosystems, biodiversity, and environmental health. In this community our parks, beaches, open spaces, arts and cultural offerings and recreational opportunities are an important part of why people love to live, visit, and do business in Santa Cruz County.

Parks and recreational opportunities are an important contributor to quality of life, or what makes a particular community a “great place to live.” According to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, Santa Cruz County was the community with the highest overall well-being in California, and the second highest in the Country in 2015-2016.<sup>2</sup> Two of the five criteria for this study directly relate to the provision of public parks and programs and access to outdoors community spaces. Quality of life is a primary motivator for why people want to live, work and visit a particular place. The following things represent some of the important benefits provided by parks that are currently recognized as key contributors to local quality of life.

1. See “Measuring the Economic Value of a City Parks System” (The Trust for Public Land, 2009) and “Quantifying our Quality of Life: An Economic Analysis of the East Bay’s Unique Environment” (East Bay Regional Park District)

### *HEALTH & WELL-BEING*

Parks and recreational programming improve physical and mental health by providing vital spaces for both recreation, and support for families and communities through helping to build a sense of social cohesion and mutual trust among neighbors. Parks offer an increasingly important respite and escape from the pressures and stress of everyday life, and offer opportunities to connect with nature that have found to be important contributors to mental health and well-being.

### *EDUCATION & ENRICHMENT*

Parks and cultural services programs provide a variety of community benefits through recreational offerings such as art and crafts, science, and nature interpretation programs. Parks enrich our community through environmental education for youth and adults, arts programming, kids’ summer camp programs, and after school recreation and volunteer programs. These programs also provide mentorship and leadership opportunities for young adults, and support learning and early socialization for younger children.

### *PUBLIC SAFETY*

Parks and programs provide positive ways for youth to spend time outside of school, and encourage community-spirited activities. Parks agencies may partner with schools and community-based youth organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club to engage youth in positive

2. “State of American Well-Being: 2016 Community Well-Being Rankings” Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, 2017.

Mesa Village County Park



East Cliff Parkway



Photo by Alyssa Johnson

ways and support them and their families. Parks programs activate public spaces, encouraging positive use and bringing eyes to public areas—things that have been found to make crime less likely to occur.<sup>3</sup>

### COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Parks, open space and beaches are integral to the community identity for any community fortunate enough to have them. They are part of the landscape and help define the unique feel and beauty of a region, while contributing to community identity, pride, and sense of place. Parks provide focal points for the community and locations to celebrate, recreate and gather.

### ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

The conservation and management of lands and natural resources allows ecological processes to do their work to maintain clean air, fresh wa-

ter, fertile soil, and an amenable climate. Parks support benefits from healthy ecosystem such as stormwater treatment, groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, and the provision of habitat connectivity and support of biodiversity.

### ECONOMIC BENEFIT

An area's parks, open spaces, and beaches support tourism and draw visitors to the area, bringing economic activity and spending to a region. Much of the investment in the parks system stays local and is reinvested into the local economy through providing jobs to help build, maintain and operate the parks system. Parks, beaches and open space are an important driver of an area's economic health, in large part because of the role they play in attracting people to the area. Parks also contribute to property values.

3 Sherry Plaster Carter: "Community CPTED" in The Journal of The International Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Association, 2002.

## CHAPTER 3: VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

### VISION

The vision for the future of Santa Cruz County Parks describes the desired end state of the work that we do. Our Vision Statement articulates the biggest ‘Why’ for the County Parks Department’s existence. The vision statement was created with extensive input from the staff, the community, and partners during the Strategic Plan process.

### MISSION

The County Parks mission statement describes what the department does to serve the community. The mission statement was adopted for the department prior to this Strategic Plan process, and is the most essential and basic explanation of the department’s purpose.

#### OUR VISION:

*A healthy and vibrant county where everyone is able to be active, explore, learn, play and connect, and where our diverse natural and cultural resources are celebrated and protected for generations to come.*

#### OUR MISSION:

*The Mission of the Santa Cruz County Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services is to provide safe, well designed and maintained parks and a wide variety of recreational and cultural opportunities for our diverse community.*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles describe the strong value the parks department places on **service**. These principles were identified by staff and the community during the strategic planning process, and reflect how the department operates to increase the values of well-being, stewardship, and equity.

**Service-Oriented:** We work as a team to provide a consistent high level of service to our community.

**Fiscally-Responsible:** We allocate and use resources responsibly and pursue sustainable funding proportional to the system of parks and parks services.

**Collaborative:** The department works together with other agencies, organizations, businesses, volunteers, community members and staff to provide the highest possible level of service and to leverage new opportunities.

**Resilient:** The department remains nimble and creative as it responds and adapts its parks and programs to the changing needs of the community.

**Results-focused:** We establish community driven goals, measure our performance, and communicate with the public our success in meeting long-range goals in support of community well-being, stewardship and equity.



*Aptos Village County Park*



*Quail Hollow Ranch County Park*



*Parks Department Core Values*

## VALUES

The values listed in this section represent the core motivators that drive the work of the Parks Department, as identified through the strategic planning process. The values directly support the new Parks Department vision and have been used to identify and define department priorities and our goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan.

The values are grouped into three categories, including *Well-Being, Stewardship and Equity*.



Anna Jean Cummings County Park in Soquel



Community Garden at Felt Street Park

**WELL-BEING**

*Creating a happier and healthier Santa Cruz County and improving quality of life*

**Community:** The department serves to foster positive interaction among community members.

**Health:** Parks and programs promote physical and mental health through opportunities for active recreation, creativity, fun, and relief from everyday stress.

**Safety:** Park users feel safe and facilities and programs are safe and enjoyable for all types of people.

**STEWARDSHIP**

*Sustaining natural systems and conserving resources throughout the parks system for future generations*

**Partnership:** Staff, volunteers and park users work together and take pride in caring for parks, open spaces and facilities.

**Protection:** Sensitive natural, cultural, historical and scenic resources are protected and enhanced.

**Education:** The department provides parks and programs with interpretive and educational opportunities for youth and adults to learn and connect with our rich and diverse natural, historical and cultural resources.

**Renewal:** Residents and visitors have opportunities to renew themselves through connecting to the natural world.

**EQUITY**

*Serving diverse communities throughout the county*

**Inclusivity:** The department’s facilities and programs welcome residents and visitors throughout the county and support the well-being of all people.

**Accessibility:** People of varying abilities, interests and needs are able to access parks and programs throughout the county.

**Connectivity:** Individual parks and programs are linked together and fit into a greater network to enhance peoples’ experience of the county as a whole.



# CHAPTER 4: YOUR COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT

## SANTA CRUZ COUNTY'S PARKS & OPEN SPACE NETWORK

The County Parks Department is one of several entities that provide parks, open space, cultural services and recreation facilities and programs in the county, along with several other public agencies, organizations, and private landholders. Together, these various entities provide a network of parks and open space that serves the entire county. Generally, local urban-type neighborhood and community parks are provided by the cities, County Parks, and the four park and recreation districts. Larger regional-serving parks are provided by State Parks, County Parks, and other entities. Local park-provider jurisdictional lines are shown in Figure 3. Parklands and protected lands are shown in Figure 4.

### COUNTY PARKS

Generally, the County Parks Department provides two broad categories of services: local neighborhood and community parks and programs in the unincorporated portions of the county (areas outside one of the four city limits), and larger regional-serving parks and facilities that serve the entire county. In Santa Cruz County, there are many urban neighborhoods that are not within a city limit, including the communities of Live Oak, Soquel, and Aptos, and the County provides neighborhood parks in these areas.

### CITY PARKS

There are four incorporated cities in the county, including Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Watsonville. Each of these four cities has their own city parks department providing local neighborhood-serving parks and recreation services within that city's limits.

### INDEPENDENT RECREATION AND PARK DISTRICTS

The four independent park and recreation districts of Alba, Boulder Creek, La Selva Beach and Opal Cliffs are responsible for providing local neighborhood and community parks to urban and rural neighborhoods within their independent jurisdiction boundaries.

### OTHER PARKS AND OPEN SPACE AGENCIES & LANDHOLDERS

In addition to the local parks provided by the County Parks Department, the four city parks departments, and the four recreation and park districts, California State Parks also provides several large parks and beaches in the county. State Parks provide important recreational opportunities for local county residents as well.

There are also recreational facilities and open space provided by other agencies in the county including local school districts, the Bureau of Land Management, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the City of Santa Cruz Water Department, the San Lorenzo Valley Water District, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

Figure 3: Neighborhood-Park-Providing Jurisdictions

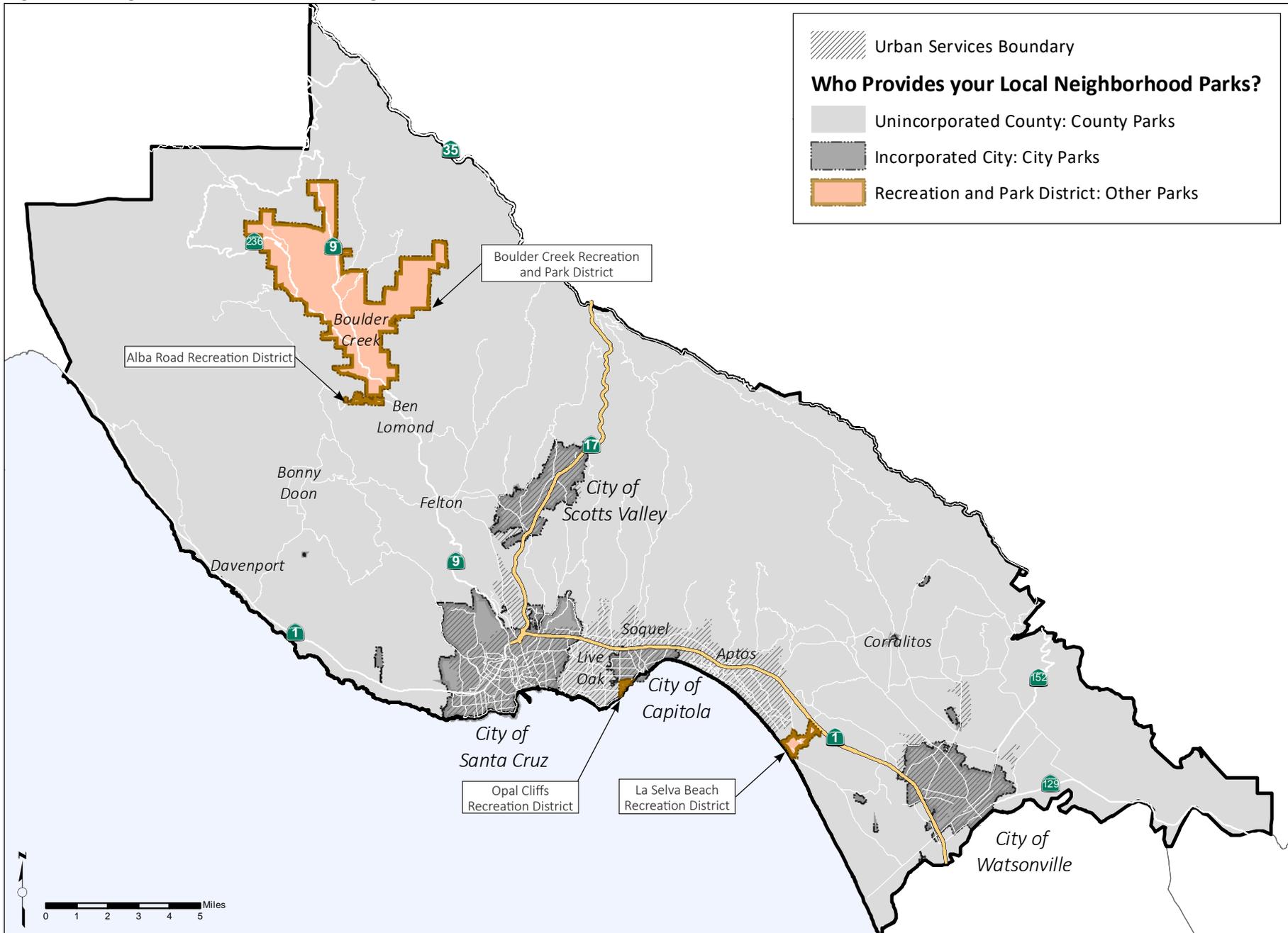
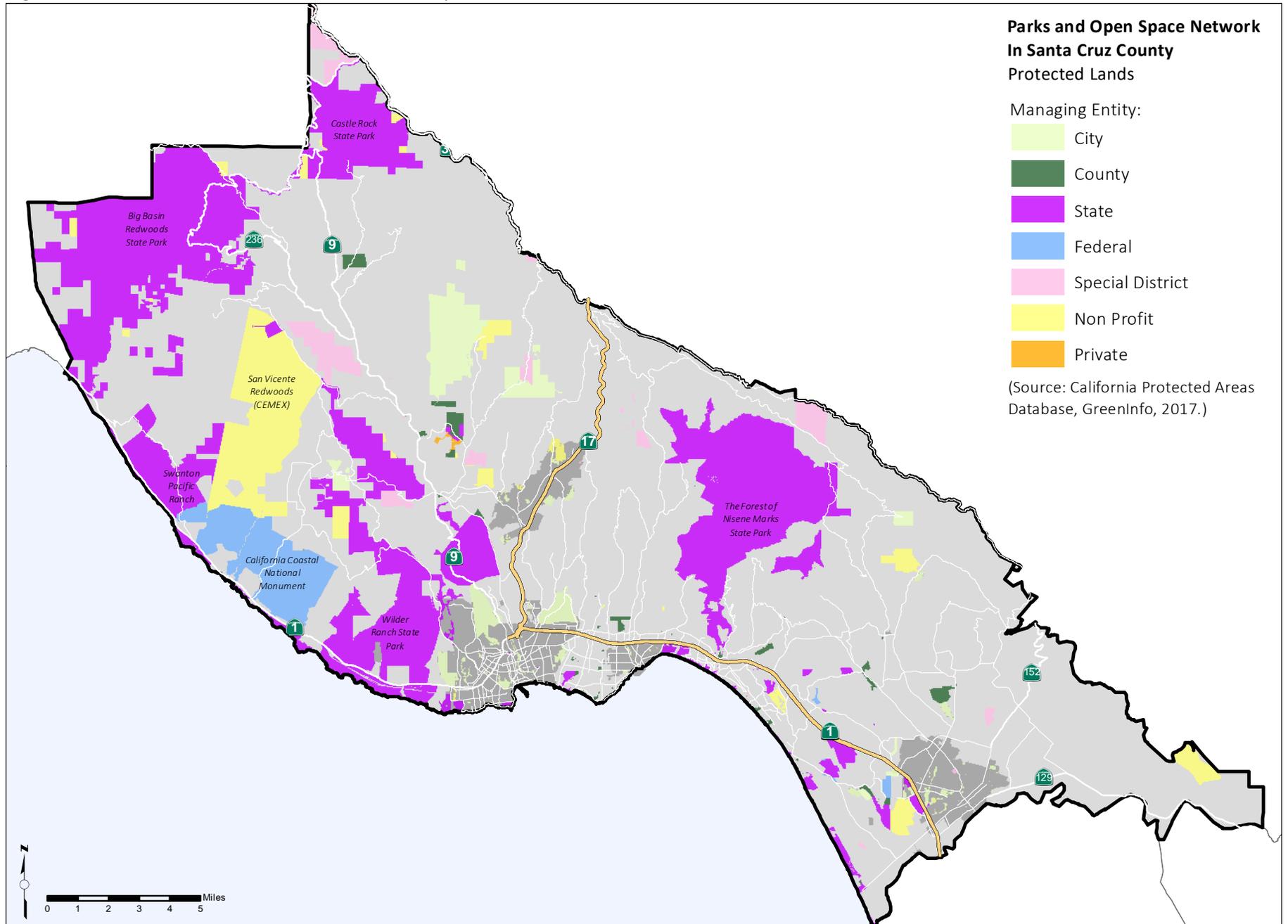


Figure 4: Protected Lands in Santa Cruz County



Today the County Parks Department manages:

- 1,593 acres of parkland including 883 acres of parks and 710 acres of open space
- 38 neighborhood, community, regional or rural parks
- 27 coastal access points
- 23 playgrounds
- 6 parks with sports fields
- 8 parks with basketball courts
- 5 parks with tennis courts
- 5 parks with community rooms
- 1 regional swim center with aquatics and fitness programs and special events throughout the year. Swim Center visits exceed 180,000 per year
- Recreational, cultural and youth programs throughout the unincorporated county
- 4 parks with wedding event facilities

## COUNTY PARKS SERVICES

Since 1979, the County Parks Department has managed a diverse parks system including neighborhood, community, regional, and rural parks, coastal access points, trails, and cultural and recreational programs and activities for all ages throughout the unincorporated county. County Parks facilities' locations and amenities are shown in Figure 5.

The County Parks Department also provides financial support to community arts and recreational programs provided by other organizations such as the Museum of Art and History, the Davenport Teen Center and local school district facilities and programs in various locations around the county.

The Parks Department provides the following services.

*Seascape County Park in Aptos*



*Photo by Mary Chavez*

## REGIONAL PARKS



Regional parks, located throughout the county, include Quail Hollow Ranch in the San Lorenzo Valley, Polo Grounds in Aptos, and Pinto Lake in Watsonville. These parks and their facilities have unique geographic features, draw people from a wide area, and provide a wide variety of public amenities such as trails, sports fields, dog parks, and rental facilities.

## NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY PARKS



Among the County's 29 neighborhood and community parks are Highlands Park in Ben Lomond, Brommer Park in Live Oak, Seascape Park in Aptos, and Aldridge Lane in Corralitos. These parks serve the surrounding communities and provide amenities such as places to picnic and hold gatherings, play structures for children to explore, benches to rest on, community art for visitors to enjoy, community gardens, skate parks and bike pump tracks, and facilities for community events and weddings.

## SIMPKINS FAMILY SWIM CENTER



The Swim Center, also a regional park, is located in Live Oak. Among the aquatic programs offered are swim lessons, recreation and lap swim, water exercise, and water polo, as well as the popular Pool Jr. Guards and Little Guards summer camps. It is the primary public pool in the area and provides services for every age group 363 days a year.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS



The County Parks Department puts on events such as the Parks & Rex pool party, where dogs can take a dip in the pool, the Holiday Art & Craft Faire and the Floating Pumpkin Patch.

## TEEN PROGRAMS



Zombie Camp (pictured), for ages 11-14, is held at Aptos Park. Teens can gain valuable job skills while having fun by volunteering as a Junior Leader at County Parks youth summer camps, as well as assisting with after-school programs.

## COASTAL ACCESS POINTS



Coastal access points include Scott Creek Beach near Davenport, Sunny Cove Beach in Live Oak, and Hidden Beach in Aptos. County Parks, together with State Parks and other entities, provides and maintains coastal access points in the unincorporated portions of the county. These coastal access points sometimes include restroom facilities, trash receptacles, natural plantings, and infrastructure such as stairs and fencing to protect sensitive areas and species.

## YOUTH PROGRAMS



School-age youth can enjoy a variety of camps and programs, including Nature Adventure and Science Sleuths at Quail Hollow Ranch, Kreative Kids at Wilder Hall, and art and science camps at Aptos Park. Afterschool programs are held at Mar Vista Elementary and La Selva Beach clubhouse.

## ADULT AND SENIOR PROGRAMS



Programs for adults and seniors include local day trips (pictured, trip to Harley Farms), water and dry-land exercise classes at the Swim Center, Spanish language and tap classes, interpretive hikes and workshops at Quail Hollow Ranch, and a popular Mall Walk Program.

## ARTS



The Percent for the Arts Program, art exhibitions at the Government Center, Artist of the Year, and Outside the Box are just a few of County Parks art-related programs. Arts programming for youth is provided through summer camps and is integrated into parks after school programs. County Parks-sponsored public art can be enjoyed at locations throughout Santa Cruz County. The department also supports the Arts Council and the Museum of Art and History.



*Jose Avenue County Park in Live Oak*



*Recreational Trip to Suisun Marsh Natural History Cruise*



*Mar Vista Kinder Enrichment Program*

## **DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE & STAFFING**

The County Parks Department is made up of five sections with distinct functions.

### **ADMINISTRATION AND RESERVATIONS**

Administration staff provides support and customer service to all Parks staff and customers, and oversees the department budget, finances, human resources, and office operations. Reservations staff administers the use and rental of all park buildings, beaches and park sites; manages concessionaires and the rentals of private houses in county park sites; provides oversight of community gardens and horse-boarding facilities; and works closely with maintenance staff to maximize the use and enjoyment of public facilities.

### **AQUATICS**

Aquatics staff manages the Simpkins Family Swim Center and the extensive aquatics programs offered there. Swim Center visits exceed 180,000 a year. Staff continues to develop new program opportunities to meet the needs of the community and increase participation at the Swim Center.

### **MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS**

Maintenance staff provides maintenance to all park locations, beaches and facilities. In addition, staff maintains the landscaping around all County government facilities. A partial list of respon-

sibilities include mowing, minor construction projects, trash pick-up, restoration of natural resources, building maintenance, and pool maintenance at the Simpkins Family Swim Center. Maintenance staff also assists Reservations staff in preparation, set up and clean up for events.

### **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Planning staff oversees the implementation of the Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects, develops plans and studies for components of the County Parks system, and oversees park construction projects. Planning and Development staff works with specialists from a variety of disciplines and members of the public to develop short, medium and long term plans such as feasibility studies, acquisition studies, park master plans, environmental review documents, design and construction documents, and permits for park projects. Staff leads the submission and administration of grant applications for County Parks projects. The planning section also reviews plans for projects led by other agencies for potential impacts on the County Parks system.

### **RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES**

Recreational Program staff administers an extensive list of programs including youth programs, interpretive nature programs centered at Quail Hollow Ranch, adult and senior programs, cultural services and arts programs. Recreation and Cultural Services staff also conducts annual special events, such as the Holiday Art and Craft Fair.





## PUBLIC OVERSIGHT

As with all County departments, the Parks Department is overseen by the Board of Supervisors. In addition, it is supported by two Commissions: the Arts Commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission. These commissions are appointed by the Board of Supervisors, make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for park-related actions, and assist in coordinating between the public, the department, and the Board.

### THE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

The mission of the Santa Cruz County Parks and Recreation Commission is to advise and support the Board of Supervisors in its work to provide excellent and accessible parks, open spaces, recreational programs and facilities that promote health and enhance the quality of life for all.

### THE ARTS COMMISSION

The mission of the Santa Cruz County Arts Commission is to promote, expand and plan for the cultural life of Santa Cruz County and to bring artists and arts organizations together with government for the benefit of all residents of the county.

## DEPARTMENT FUNDING

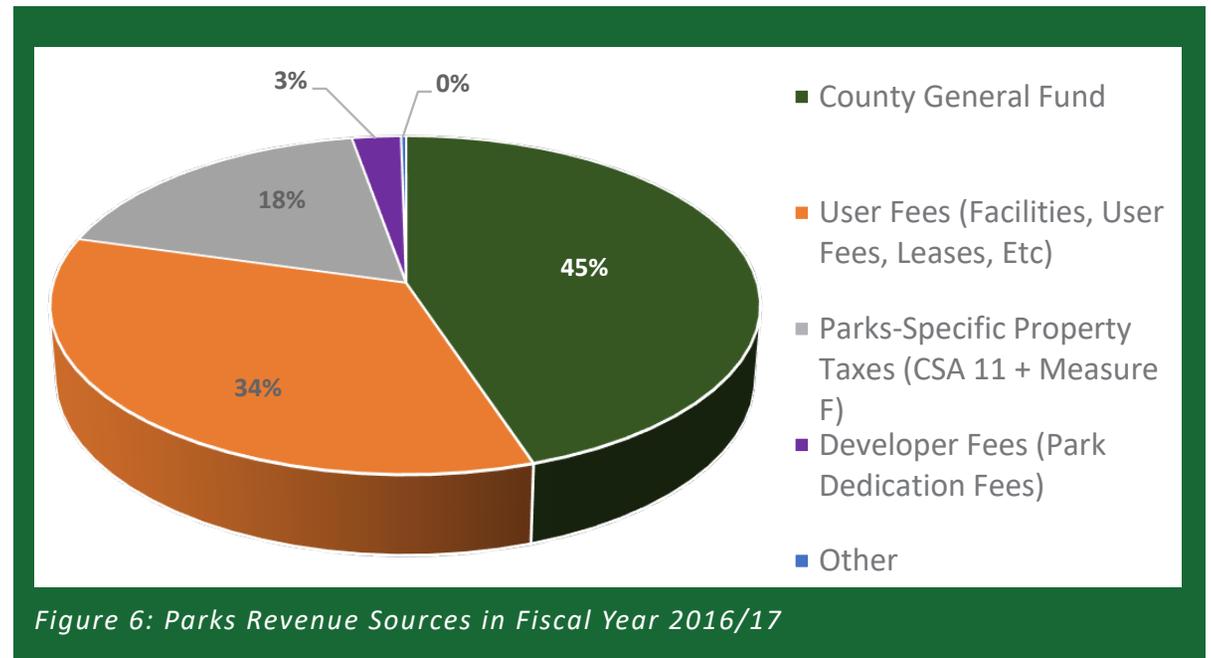
County Parks funding comes from a variety of sources including the County General Fund, property taxes, recreation and park facility user

fees, grants, and developer fees (for capital projects only) as shown in Figure 6. The amount of each of these sources varies by year depending on specific grants and several other factors. Property tax money includes funds associated with County Service Area (CSA) 11, which exists to provide funding specifically for County Parks.

Generally, the budget can be divided into two categories. First, the operating budget includes the costs associated with operations and main-

tenance of the existing parks facilities and programs. Second, the capital projects budget includes costs associated with the acquisition of new park properties, development of new or additional park facilities on park properties, and deferred maintenance.

The Parks Department budget, including both the operating budget and the capital projects budget, has not remained proportional to the growing size, demands and costs of operating the parks system (see Figure 7).





Hidden Beach County Park in Aptos

### OPERATING BUDGET

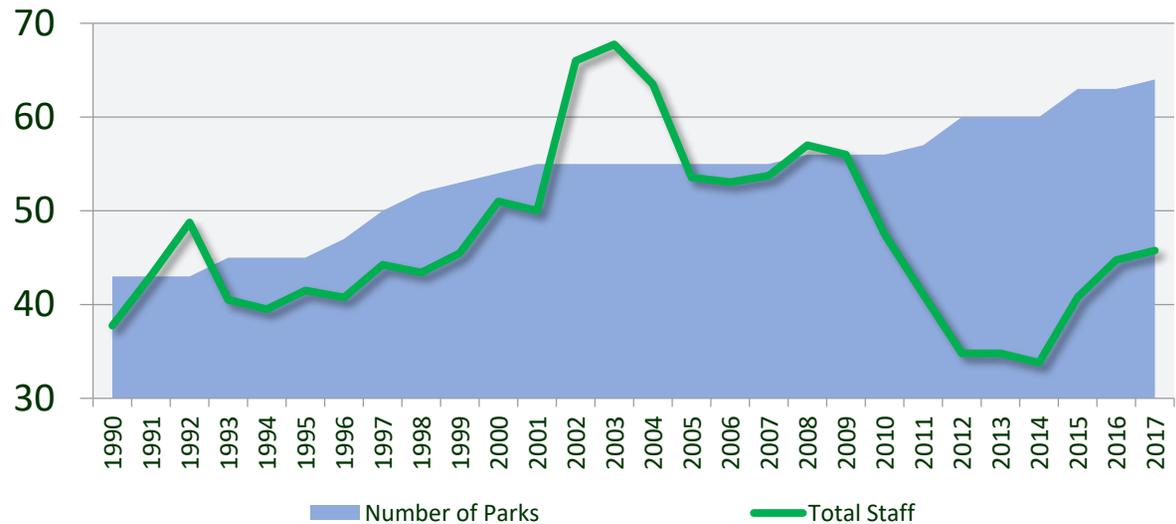
The sources of funds used for department operations generally include the County General Fund, park user fees, CSA 11, and Measure F.

The overall department operating budget decreased with the recession in 2008, and has only recently (in 2015/16) returned to the pre-2008 level. Additionally, costs associated with staff, supplies and services have increased over the same time period. To illustrate both of these points, Figure 7 shows that there were 68 funded full time or equivalent staff positions in 2002/03, and only 46 in 2016/17. While staff numbers have decreased, the number of parks and facilities for which the department is responsible has increased from 55 in 2002/03 to 64 in 2016/17.

### COUNTY GENERAL FUND CONTRIBUTION

Each fiscal year, the County Board of Supervisors approves the department budget which includes a contribution from the County General Fund. This General Fund contribution generally has increased slightly each year proportionate to rising costs of operating the department. However, in the economic downturn of 2008, with the fiscal crisis and the dissolving of the County Parks Department into the Department of Public Works, the General Fund contribution to the Parks Department was reduced significantly, from \$4.3 million in 2007/08 to \$2.1 million in 2012/13. Although the total operating budget has partially recovered – due to increasing program participation, user fees and Measure F – in 2016/17 the General Fund contribution was \$3.7 million, and has still not returned to pre-recession levels.

Figure 7: Number of Parks and Number of Parks Department Staff





Valencia Hall

#### COUNTY SERVICE AREA 11

County Service Area (CSA) 11 is a special district that covers the entire unincorporated county (outside the four cities) except areas that are within one of the four distinct recreation and park districts. This service area was created in 1971 to provide additional property tax funds in an effort to address the gap between needed parks services and available funding. This relatively small fund has been essential to the department in maintaining the most important department services. Because the Santa Cruz County Parks Department provides an urban level of service in some areas while collecting proportionally fewer taxes than a city, this was a necessary step.

#### MEASURE F

Measure F was approved by the voters of CSA 11 in 2014, to include a specific per-parcel property tax within CSA 11 that provides a small additional amount of funding to the County Parks Department. Measure F provides less than 4 percent of the annual department budget.

#### CAPITAL PROJECTS BUDGET

There is no consistent source of funding allocated to capital projects in the County Parks system for upgrades to park infrastructure, deferred maintenance, planning and construction of new park uses and facilities, and acquisition of new park properties. These types of projects must be funded through unique combinations of funding sources such as grants, park dedication (developer) fees, one-time individual funding sources such as property sales, and public-private funding partnerships.

#### REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Throughout the past 30 years, the Redevelopment Agency provided the largest amount of capital funding for parks projects. Since the agency was dissolved in 2011, this source of funding is no longer available for development of the County Parks system. Redevelopment Agency funding was only available for parks within the Redevelopment Project Area, which included Live Oak and Soquel. The parks throughout the rest of the County Parks system were not eligible to receive these significant contributions of capital project funds.



Photo by Alyssa Johnson

The Hook County Park at Pleasure Point



*Felton Covered Bridge County Park*

### PARK DEDICATION FEES

New residential development in the unincorporated portions of the county requires either dedication of new public park land or paying an in-lieu fee to offset additional demand for parks created by the residential development. In-lieu fees go to the County Parks Department and are used to fund capital projects or acquisition of new parkland. The intent of these funds is to allow the parks system to grow proportionally with the increased demand created by new residential development. These fees have not been adjusted to reflect inflation or the increase in property values since 1998.

### KEY CHALLENGES

A number of key challenges face this county and this department. Understanding these challenges is critical to creating a way forward that is strategic, holistic, and proactive, rather than reactive. Understanding these challenges will also help the department focus on the big picture rather than responding individually to specific circumstances in a way that is at best piecemeal or partial. The following issues have been identified by staff during the strategic planning process.

#### *LARGE URBANIZED UNINCORPORATED AREAS*

The passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 locked in the apportionment rate for each county in California in addition to establishing a maximum property tax rate of one percent statewide. The apportionment rate determines the percent-

age of property taxes that go to the County as opposed to other local agencies such as cities and special districts. Since that time, Santa Cruz County has been locked into a lower property tax apportionment, on average 13 cents of each tax dollar, than many other counties and cities in California, some of which may receive about twice that for each tax dollar. At the same time, about half (49%) of Santa Cruz County's population lives in the unincorporated area (e.g. outside the cities of Capitola, Scotts Valley, Santa Cruz or Watsonville) compared to the median of 19% living in unincorporated areas in all California counties with populations over 200,000. This means that our parks facilities experience high use and many urban-type challenges, and that the County Parks Department is responsible for providing more urban-type parks than would typically be provided by a county. At the same time, the County has fewer financial resources to meet those challenges.



*The Shore Trail in Aptos*

### *DECLINE IN AVAILABLE FUNDING*

In the wake of the economic downturn of 2008, available funding for parks and services was reduced dramatically in favor of directing funds toward other essential services such as fire and policing. The General Fund contribution to the department has still not returned to pre-recession levels, while costs have risen. Despite passage of Measure F in 2014, staffing has still not returned to pre-2008 levels despite significant new demands on the department such as new properties and facilities. The number of funded full time or equivalent staff positions has dropped from 68 in 2002/03, to 41 in 2015, and is up only to 46 in 2016/17 (see Figure 7). In addition, in response to our state’s budget crisis, in 2011 California’s Redevelopment Agencies were shuttered. Redevelopment was previously the primary funding source for almost all parks development and capital projects in the Redevelopment Area of Live Oak and Soquel. The only other source of funding currently available to help us meet community demand for new or improved parks and facilities is Park Dedication Fees, and these haven’t been adjusted for inflation since 1997 and are limited due to the small amount of new development in the county.

### *DEFERRED MAINTENANCE*

The Parks Department estimates that there are approximately \$100 million in deferred maintenance projects needed to address critical or primary maintenance needs within the County Parks system. These deferred maintenance projects include critical upkeep and routine maintenance

such as roof replacements, repairs to the Simpkins Family Swim Center, and replacement of facilities such as playground equipment that has reached the end of its usable lifespan. There is a strong potential for ‘cascading’ effects and permanent negative impacts if we don’t address these issues in the near term.

### *COUNTY LAND AND HOUSING COSTS*

Santa Cruz County is now one of the least affordable places to live in the world based on median house price and median household income.<sup>1</sup> Considering the cost of living there’s a great need for low and no-cost programs and facility access. Many residents are housing unstable, and a growing number are currently experiencing homelessness. Impacts of increased homelessness on parks include use of parks property to meet basic human needs (for sleeping, bathing, storage, etc.), which puts additional environmental and maintenance demands on parks-owned facilities and open spaces. Additionally, the high cost of land means it is much more expensive to purchase and develop new parks facilities.

### *CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS*

The demographics and needs of the community in our county continually evolve, causing changes in the demands on the parks system. The parks system must continually adjust its services as needed to meet these changing demographics. Most significantly, over the past two decades, the county’s median age has

increased and the percentage of the population identifying as Latino has increased.<sup>2</sup> For example, these demographics may be disproportionately underserved by the parks system. Our Parks Department seeks to serve communities with significant demographic differences which are dispersed throughout the county. Each community has unique needs, and the department strives to understand and address these needs as they continue to evolve.

### *PARK ACCESS CHALLENGES*

Transportation difficulties exacerbate County Parks’ challenges in providing accessible park facilities and programs throughout the county. The county’s population is spread out, with many residents commuting long distances to jobs. There are few functional alternatives to private automobile use for residents and visitors to access many of the county parks. The one primary transportation corridor is narrow and heavily impacted. This increases the cost of doing business in a number of important ways such as increased construction and shipping costs, and increased travel time for parks field staff who travel between facilities. Transportation challenges also increase the need to provide local parks within close proximity to all neighborhoods, to make parks more accessible to more people.

1 13th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey, 2017.

2 “Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010,” for Santa Cruz County, US Census, 2017.



# CHAPTER 5: KEY FINDINGS

## KEY DEPARTMENT NEEDS

Community members and parks staff have provided significant contributions during the Strategic Plan process, describing the needs of the parks system and the needs of the department. Funding constraints are a key limiting factor in the ability to meet these needs. For a discussion on needed funding, see Chapters 4 and 7. This chapter summarizes key findings from staff and the community that identifies the needs for the County Parks Department. These needs form the basis for the development of the goals, objectives and strategies in Chapter 6.

### INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

All staff in the County Parks Department was given the opportunity to give input into the strategic planning process through an initial series of three staff meetings, additional written comments and interviews, and as part of a follow-up mid-year ‘All-Hands’ meeting, where they were able to prioritize their ideas on ways to improve the department’s functioning.



In the course of the initial internal strategic planning meetings, staff was asked to consider both the internal needs of the department and what the community most wants and needs—from the perspective of those who are on-the-ground directly serving the public.

### DEPARTMENT NEEDS

Parks staff identified the following most important staff needs:

- **More financial resources to maintain the growing number of parks and facilities:** It has been increasingly challenging for the small number of staff (see ‘Key Challenges’)—particularly maintenance staff—to do their jobs while being given increasingly more responsibilities with less time.
- **More training and support:** Staff sees great value in participating in training to develop new skills as well as cross-train and share knowledge within the department. These opportunities could increase staff capacity and efficiency, allow for personal growth and career advancement, and allow the department to retain skilled employees with experience and knowledge.

▪ **Improved internal communication:**

Increasing and improving communications between parks management and staff, and between individual parks staff members, has been a consistent key need raised by staff as part of this process. Ideas for improving communication include technological upgrades for staff such as email and network access, as well as improved communications planning and disseminating information throughout the department.

**COMMUNITY NEEDS**

Parks staff considered the most important community needs as follows:

- Safe, clean and well-maintained parks facilities
- More programs for youth, especially in underserved communities
- Expanded volunteer opportunities and community involvement

- Better awareness of what the Parks Department offers

The input collected in the course of these meetings was used to fill in a large graphic summarizing the key themes and ideas received from staff (see Figure 8).

Many of the specific actions identified as priorities at the internal staff meetings will be incorporated into our first operations plan and will continue to be referenced as the department moves forward.

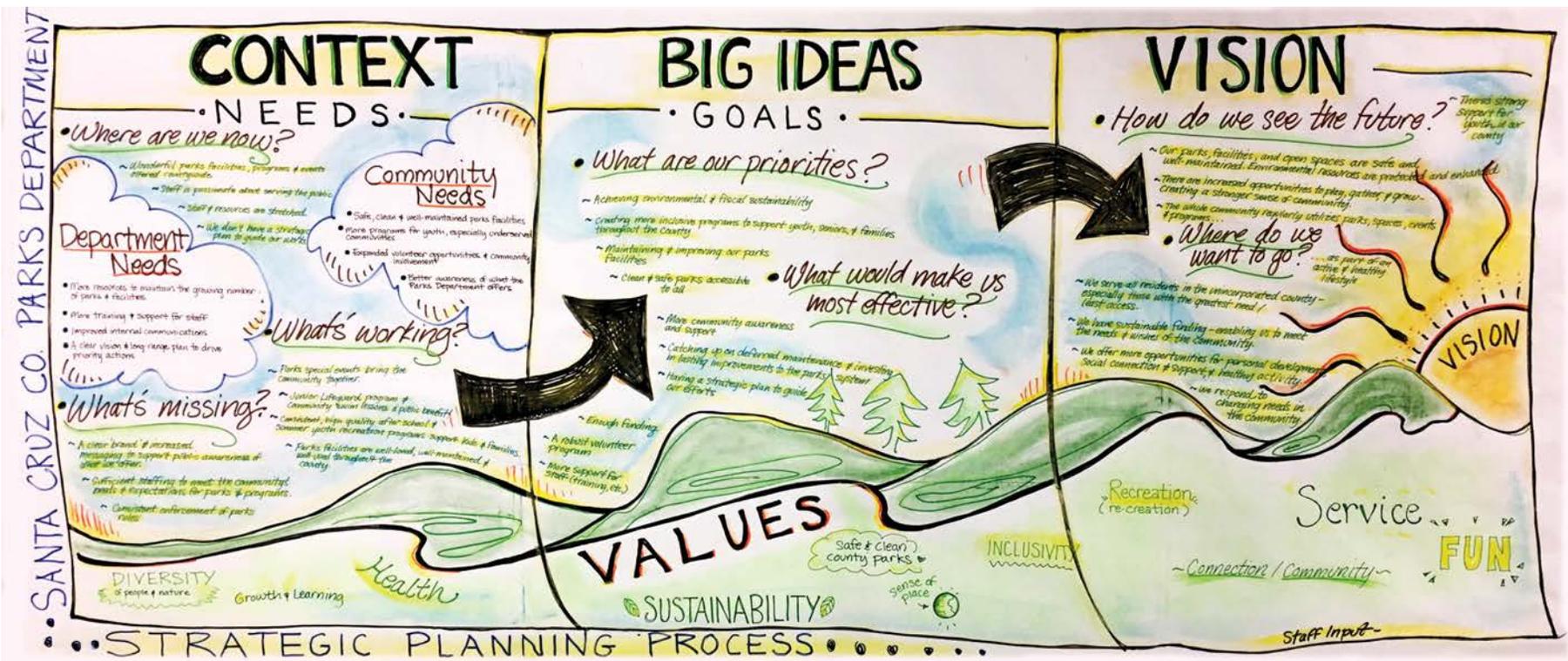


Figure 8: Key Themes and Ideas Received from Staff

*Highlights from Graphic Text (Figure 8)*

**CONTEXT  
Needs**

Where are we now?

- Wonderful parks facilities, programs & events offered countywide
- Staff is passionate about serving the public
- Staff & resources are stretched

What's working?

- Parks special events bring the community together
- Junior Lifeguard program and community swim lessons a real public benefit
- Consistent, high quality after school & summer youth recreation programs support kids & families
- Parks facilities are well-loved, well-maintained (for the most part) & well-used throughout the county

What's missing?

- Sufficient staffing to meet the community's needs & expectations for parks & programs
- Consistent enforcement of parks rules

**BIG IDEAS  
Goals**

What are our priorities?

- Achieving environmental & fiscal sustainability
- Creating more inclusive programs to support youth, seniors & families throughout the county
- Maintaining & improving our parks facilities
- Clean & safe parks accessible to all

What would make us most effective?

- More community awareness & support
- Catching up on deferred maintenance & investing in lasting improvements to the parks system
- Having a strategic plan to guide our efforts
- Having a robust volunteer program
- More support for staff development

**VISION**

How do we see the future?

- Our parks, facilities & open spaces are safe & well-maintained. Environmental resources are protected & enhanced
- There are increased opportunities to play, gather & grow – creating a stronger sense of community
- The whole community regularly accesses/utilizes our parks, outdoor spaces, events & programs... as part of an active & healthy lifestyle
- There's strong support for all youth in our County of Santa Cruz

Where do we want to go?

- We serve all residents in the unincorporated county—especially those with the greatest need/least access
- We have sustainable funding—enabling us to meet the needs & wishes of the community... while maintaining what we have
- County residents have more opportunities for personal development, social connection & support & healthy activity
- We respond to changing needs in the community



Every person  
regardless of age  
or ability can  
access the public  
parks ↑  
& enjoy

Vision Statement from Public Meeting

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The outreach process provided valuable insight into community needs that could be addressed by the County Parks Department. It also clarified priorities and hopes for the future of parks in the county.

In the community conversations, five general themes emerged as being important to community members. These themes include 1) the quality of park experience; 2) opportunities for outdoor recreation; 3) stewardship and protection of open space and natural, cultural and historical resources; 4) accessibility of parks and programs; and 5) engagement of the local community. Generally, these themes are well represented by the number of comments, as shown in Figure 8. However, the most common theme overall was engagement of the local community, which included interest from the community in topics such as programs, outreach, volunteers, events and educational opportunities. Themes are explained below, and the most prominent themes, topics, and comments are summarized in Table 1.

### QUALITY OF PARK EXPERIENCE

The community consistently emphasized the need for maintaining and improving the quality of the existing park experience for park visitors. Essential to a positive park experience, things like improving *safety* for park users, improving the *cleanliness* and availability of restrooms, and *maintaining aging parks infrastructure* are of utmost importance. Community members also

expressed a need for allocating additional and consistent levels of resources to the parks system to allow improvements and consistent levels of service in times of economic downturn.

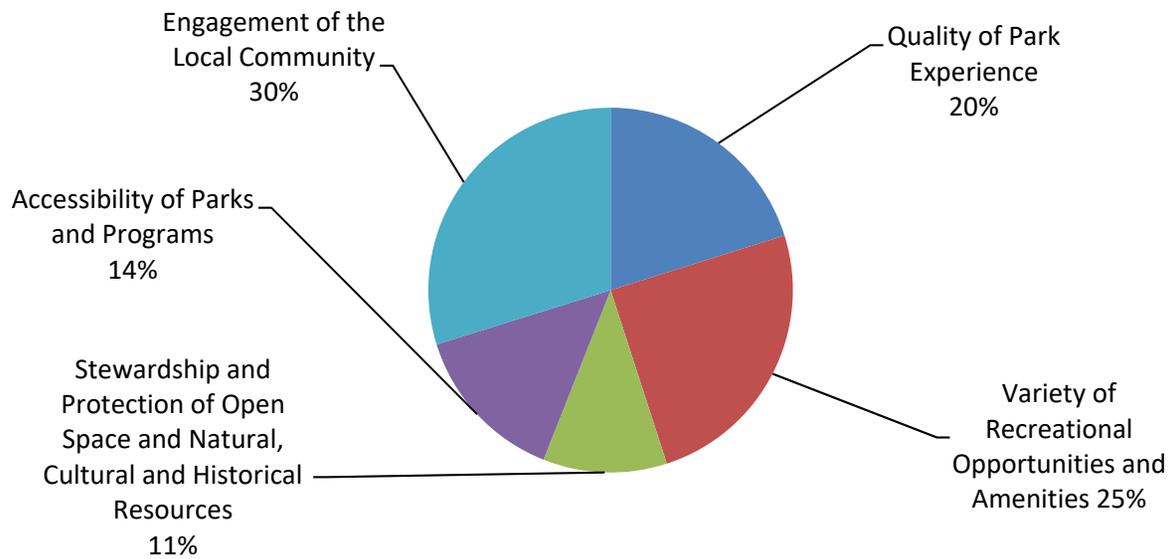
### VARIETY OF RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND AMENITIES

The parks system needs to provide adequate and appropriate opportunities for both active and passive recreation, and common outdoor spaces and facilities for group activities. Community members expressed a need for a variety of specific activities and new facilities they wished to see within the parks system. These facilities and uses included *sports facilities, trails, community centers, natural open areas, places to take dogs, additional amenities for youth*, and other types of parks uses. The range of suggestions reflects the community's diverse needs and their vision for what a healthy lifestyle and improved quality of life mean to them.

### STEWARDSHIP AND PROTECTION OF OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Santa Cruz County residents feel strongly about the importance of protecting the natural environment and cultural and historical resources. Particularly, in the parks system, there is a need to *preserve natural open space* and to balance the development of recreational facilities with the protection of the environment. There also is a need to improve the *management* of natural areas and to restore and enhance natural habitats within the parks system. There is a strong desire to preserve our historical and cultural buildings, sites, landscapes and resources.

Figure 9: Percent of topics raised in comments during public meetings



**ACCESSIBILITY OF PARKS AND PROGRAMS**  
 People find accessibility of parks and programs to all people and geographic areas in the county to be a key need. Many comments related to increasing *equity in park and program distribution* and access. Another consistent topic is *universal access* to facilities for people with various types of abilities. Improving *connections* between and to parks to make them more accessible to local neighborhoods is another key need.

**ENGAGEMENT OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**  
 Locals expressed a desire for more opportunities to engage with and learn about the Parks Department, the parks system and parks programs. The department needs to increase *outreach* about offerings, and especially outreach to *underrepresented communities*. People would like to see more programs, events and volunteer opportunities in the parks and to have better and more accessible information about these opportunities. This would increase individuals’ and the community’s connection to the parks system. Educational opportunities and particularly *interpretive programs* and facilities are important throughout the parks system.

**REGIONAL DIFFERENCES**  
 There are specific needs and unique gaps in the park network in each part of the county, and in each of the five meetings, topics that were most important to participants varied. Prominent themes by region are summarized in more detail in Appendix 2.



Greyhound Rock County Park

Table 1: Key Needs Summary

**THEME:** **QUALITY OF PARK EXPERIENCE**

**PROMINENT TOPICS:**

- Safety of park users
- Cleanliness of park restrooms and facilities
- Local stewardship of parks
- Updating and maintaining aging park infrastructure
- Adequate and sustainable funding for parks system
- Working with other park agencies to provide consistent facilities, hours and regulations

**OTHER FREQUENT COMMENTS:**

- Keeping park facilities operational
- Upgrading park facilities to accommodate increases in use
- Enforcing park rules
- Appropriate resources for maintenance and operations of existing facilities
- Consistent park funds that are not significantly reduced in times of economic downturn such as the recession of 2008



*Restroom and Concession Building at Polo Grounds County Park in Aptos*

**THEME:** **VARIETY OF RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND AMENITIES**

**PROMINENT TOPICS:**

- Providing a variety of types of community-serving park amenities
- Adapting to provide opportunities for current and future trends in recreation
- Opportunities for active and healthy lifestyles
- Adding new uses and improvements to existing park properties
- Opportunities for people to access open spaces and natural landscapes in the parks system
- Partnering with other parks agencies to provide new facilities



*Shared Pickleball, Tennis and Basketball Courts at Brommer County Park in Live Oak*

**OTHER FREQUENT COMMENTS:**

- Additional sports facilities such as soccer, baseball and softball fields, and basketball, tennis and pickleball courts
- Additional pool facilities and programs in underserved areas
- Additional trail connections for all types of trail users
- Spaces to take dogs
- Community centers for programs and events
- Youth facilities such as bike jumps and pump tracks, skate parks, adventure courses and climbing walls
- Joint use agreements with schools and other agencies to provide public access to park-like facilities during off hours

Table 1: Key Needs Summary (Continued)

**THEME:**  
**STEWARDSHIP AND PROTECTION OF OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES**

**PROMINENT TOPICS:**

- Balancing the development of recreational facilities with protection and enhancement of natural, cultural and historical resources
- Functional habitat for native flora and fauna
- Protecting sensitive biological communities
- Protecting natural open spaces in parks
- Working with other park agencies to provide consistent facilities, hours and regulations

**OTHER FREQUENT COMMENTS:**

- Connectivity between open spaces and natural areas to maximize benefits to wildlife
- Conserving long-term viability of the variety of ecosystems within the county
- Allowing natural biological processes to occur and biological systems to adapt to future conditions



*Pinto Lake Regional County Park in Watsonville*

**THEME:**  
**ACCESSIBILITY OF PARKS AND PROGRAMS**



*Future Site of LEO's Haven, an Inclusive Playground at Chanticleer County Park*

**PROMINENT TOPICS:**

- Equitable opportunities for access to parks and programs for all county residents and people with varying economic resources
- Universal accessibility to built infrastructure for people of all abilities
- Additional neighborhood parks within walking distance of people's homes, especially in underserved areas
- Increasing youth programs and bringing them to new locations

**OTHER FREQUENT COMMENTS:**

- Safe pedestrian and bicycle routes to access parks
- Public transportation to parks and programs
- Signs and materials in both English and Spanish
- Shuttle services or other forms of transportation to people who need it to access parks and programs

**THEME:**  
**ENGAGEMENT OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

**PROMINENT TOPICS:**

- Outreach to all demographics, particularly underrepresented communities
- More volunteer opportunities
- Additional programs and events
- Partnering with community organizations and local cities
- Educational opportunities

**OTHER FREQUENT COMMENTS:**

- Relevant publicity of parks, programs and events
- Coordination with school districts in publicizing parks and programs
- Events for families with activities for multiple age groups
- Interpretive programs
- Working with neighbors and being respectful to local residents



*Strategic Plan Community Meeting in Watsonville*

## COUNTY PARKS NETWORK GAPS

For the Parks Department to move forward and improve services to the community, it is important to understand where there are gaps in park distribution, coastal access and programs and events.

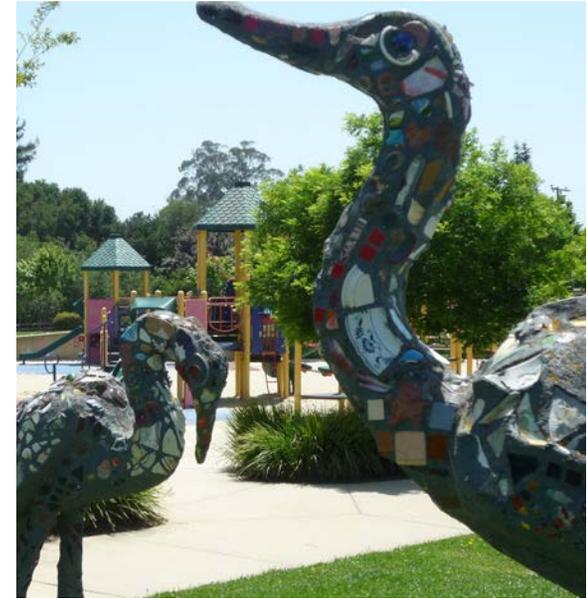
### PARK ACCESS

To assess the distribution of parks throughout the county and to determine how geographically accessible parks are to communities countywide, the entire network of parks is relevant (including those administered by cities, State Parks, local park and recreation districts and other agencies in addition to County Parks). The Trust for Public Land (TPL) completed a ParksScore analysis for the county in 2017, which uses a set of benchmarks to evaluate coverage and adequacy of parks in the county and offers a comparison to other relevant places. The summary of overall ParksScore numbers are shown by jurisdiction in Table 2, and the full ParksScore analysis is included as Appendix 1.

TPL’s ParksScore analysis includes an overall score describing the quality and value of the parks system for the community based on the acreage of parks, the access to parks, and the investment in parks. In Santa Cruz County, the overall score is 57.5 out of 100, which is average when compared to selected California cities and slightly above average when compared to national medians. Generally, the acreage of parkland is quite high in Santa Cruz County while the median park size is small. Overall spending on parks per capita as compared to other areas in California is higher in the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola and Scotts Valley, and lower in Watsonville and the unincorporated areas.

In terms of access to parks, throughout the county 65 percent of people live within a 10-minute walk of the closest park, which is close to the national median of 66 percent. However, within the rural unincorporated portions of the county, the percentage is only 25 percent. Not surprisingly, with the low population density in rural areas it is not realistic to provide parks within a half mile of every household. The County General Plan standard for park access in rural areas is three to five miles.

Figure 10 shows a map of the “level of park need” throughout the county, as calculated by TPL. These categories are for areas that are further than a 10-minute walk to the closest park, and are based on demographic profiles including population density, density of population age 19 and under, and density of low income households.



*Jose Avenue County Park in Live Oak*

**Table 2: ParksScore Summary**

Area	Overall ParksScore (out of 100)	Population Served (% within 10-minute walk of closest park)
City of Capitola	71	89%
City of Santa Cruz	76	94%
City of Scotts Valley	56	47%
City of Watsonville	51	88%
Unincorporated County	42	44%
Unincorporated County – Urban Areas Only	-	76%
Unincorporated County – Rural Areas Only	-	25%
Overall – Countywide	58	65%

### COASTAL ACCESS

The County General Plan identifies specific locations where future public access should be provided to beaches for both regional and local access throughout the unincorporated portions of the county. Some of these access points are currently the responsibility of State Parks and some the responsibility of County Parks. While many of the designated access points have been developed, there are still many gaps in the coastal access network in the unincorporated portions of the county. This is especially true in the southern part of the county, where there are a lot of communities that lack the level of coastal access that is envisioned in the General Plan and Local Coastal Plan. Barriers to providing access points in these locations include physical barriers and lack of public agency resources to acquire, develop and maintain them.

### RECREATIONAL & EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The extent of Parks programming and community events the department is able to provide has not returned to pre-recession levels, leaving gaps in the geographic areas and different populations served by the department. This is in large part due to a 64% decrease in the number of full time permanent funded Recreational and Cultural Services staff positions—which dropped from over 14 in 2001 to 5 in 2011. Today (in 2017) there are still 5 funded positions. In the past, the County Parks Department has administered many additional programs beyond current offerings. Past programs have included a teen club, a mobile recreation van that visited underserved

areas, free movies in the parks, tennis classes, sports leagues administered by the County Parks Department, and after-school and summer programs at additional sites.

Throughout the strategic planning process, communities throughout the county expressed a strong need for additional programs, events and educational opportunities. The voids left by the discontinuation of previous programs are still being felt throughout the county. Additional programs and events are needed to fill these voids and to increase the level of service provided by County Parks.

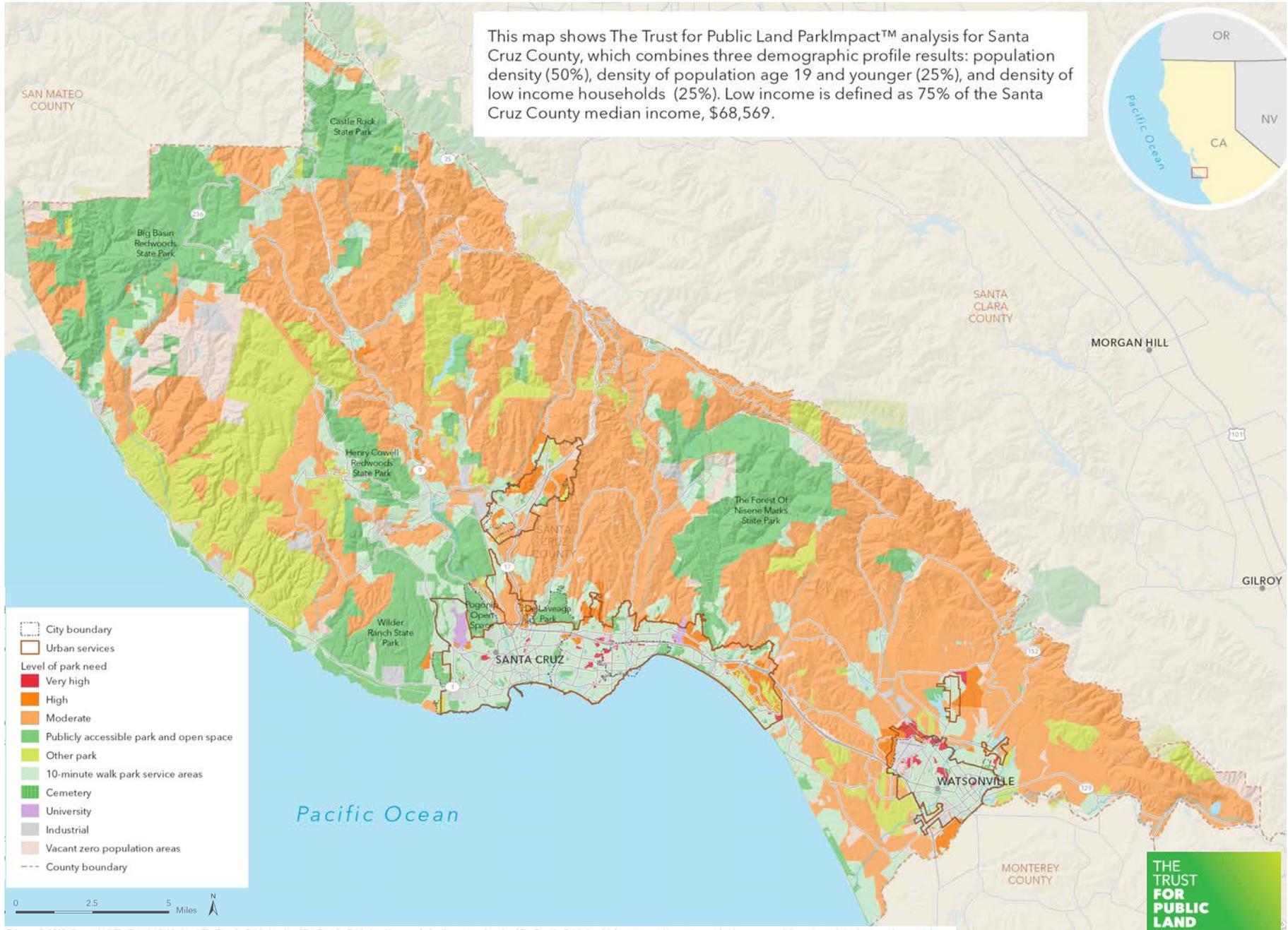
### ARTS & CULTURE

Public art programs have been reduced from prior years. In the past the department administered a program to purchase additions to the County Art Collection from entries at the annual County Fair, as well as Open Studios and other public art programs. The discontinuation of these arts and cultural programs, and the lack of any expansions to the County Parks Department's public art programs, continue to leave gaps in the coverage and need for public art programs in the county.



*Heart of Soquel Plaza County Park*

Figure 10: Countywide Park Impact Analysis of Urban Services, by Trust for Public Land



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## CHAPTER 6: GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

For the purposes of articulating the vision of the Parks Department, specific means for implementing the plan are described through Strategic Plan goals, objectives and strategies. These means are intended to describe the direction and priorities for the department for the next 10 years. These statements respond to the key issues and themes that emerged during the strategic planning outreach process.

Definitions for goals, objectives and strategies are described in the text box to the right. A summary table of goals and objectives is shown in Table 3. Strategic goals and objectives are listed in random order and numbered only for reference. Note that these strategies do not include specific measurable actions. Actions to implement the Strategic Plan will be developed in future operations plans for the department (see the next section of this Strategic Plan).

Generally, goals 1, 2 and 3 represent the core focus for the department in the past. Goals 4, 5 and 6 represent additional focus areas identified by the community during this Strategic Plan process. Our ability to successfully pursue all of these goals will require additional resources.

### **Goals:**

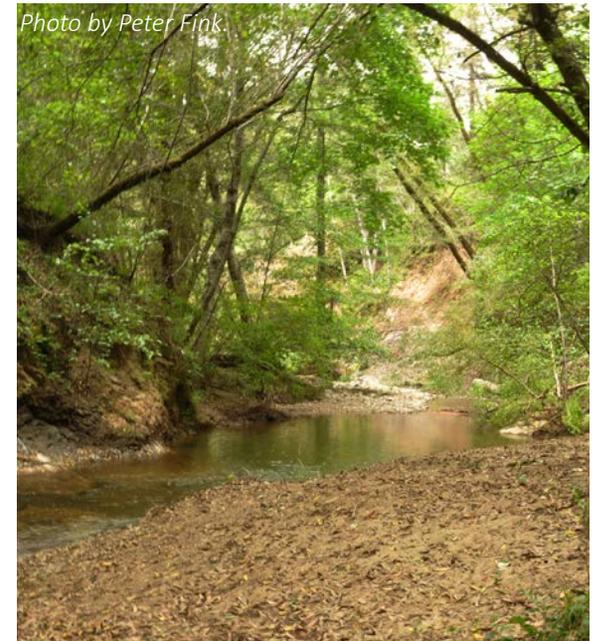
Broad statements of how we pursue our vision

### **Objectives:**

Specific ways we plan to achieve our goals and impact our community

### **Strategies:**

The approach we plan to take to achieve our objectives



*Photo by Peter Fink*

*Miller Property County Park in Boulder Creek*

## COUNTY PARKS STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

<p><b>1. MAINTAIN &amp; ENHANCE QUALITY OF PARKS FACILITIES</b></p> <p><b>VALUES:</b> <i>STEWARDSHIP, WELL-BEING</i></p>	<p><b>2. ENSURE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND FISCAL STABILITY</b></p> <p><b>VALUES:</b> <i>SERVICE</i></p>	<p><b>3. PROVIDE A VARIETY OF RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p><b>VALUES:</b> <i>WELL-BEING</i></p>
<p><b>OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <p>1.1 Maintain and update parks facilities to a consistently high standard</p> <p>1.2 Ensure safety and cleanliness of parks facilities</p> <p>1.3 Provide a variety of community-serving parks amenities</p> <p>1.4 Lead, innovate and partner with other departments, agencies and organizations to better serve the community</p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <p>2.1 Ensure department efficiency and effectiveness</p> <p>2.2 Invest in staff development and promote excellence</p> <p>2.3 Develop sources of sustained funding for operations and enhanced services</p> <p>2.4 Institute improved systems for departmental management and operations planning</p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <p>3.1 Provide additional recreational programs and events to meet community needs</p> <p>3.2 Support local families and youth by expanding after school and summer offerings</p> <p>3.3 Cultivate the arts and strengthen the culture of the county through public art programs and events</p>
<p><b>4. STEWARD AND PROTECT OPEN SPACES AND NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES</b></p> <p><b>VALUES:</b> <i>STEWARDSHIP</i></p>	<p><b>5. ENGAGE LOCAL COMMUNITIES</b></p> <p><b>VALUES:</b> <i>WELL-BEING, EQUITY</i></p>	<p><b>6. IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY OF PARKS AND PROGRAMS</b></p> <p><b>VALUES:</b> <i>EQUITY</i></p>
<p><b>OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <p>4.1 Manage existing open spaces and natural resources for ecological function and multiple long-term environmental benefits</p> <p>4.2 Protect and enhance cultural and historical resources</p> <p>4.3 Provide Interpretive programs and opportunities to increase awareness and appreciation of natural, cultural and historical resources</p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <p>5.1 Conduct broad community outreach and engage all demographics regarding parks programs and facilities</p> <p>5.2 Increase opportunities for volunteerism in parks facilities and programs</p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <p>6.1 Add additional parks, facilities and programs in underserved areas</p> <p>6.2 Collaborate to improve walking, biking and public transportation connections to parks</p> <p>6.3 Increase the number of facilities and programs accessible to people of differing abilities and financial resources</p>

Table 3: Summary of Goals and Objectives

## GOAL 1: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE QUALITY OF PARKS FACILITIES

### **OBJECTIVE 1.1: MAINTAIN AND UPDATE PARKS FACILITIES TO A CONSISTENTLY HIGH STANDARD**

#### STRATEGIES:

Regularly inventory and prioritize system-wide needs for deferred maintenance projects

Create and implement a deferred maintenance plan and budget, identifying potential funding sources

Determine staffing needs based on department goals, number of properties, facilities and programs, and pursue appropriate staff levels

Assess the operational costs for potential new parks projects and budget for projected staffing levels and maintenance costs

### **OBJECTIVE 1.2: ENSURE SAFETY AND CLEANLINESS OF PARKS FACILITIES**

#### STRATEGIES:

Pursue resources to increase paid staff presence in parks

Increase volunteer presence in parks under direction of staff

Engage community and volunteers in supporting safe and clean parks

Partner with law enforcement to enhance security in parks and facilities

Improve and expand system for tracking and responding to citizen reports of maintenance and safety issues

Increase staff input in identifying and prioritizing maintenance needs

### **OBJECTIVE 1.3: PROVIDE A VARIETY OF COMMUNITY-SERVING PARK AMENITIES**

#### STRATEGIES:

Inventory and develop system to prioritize planned park projects

Pursue resources to develop additional amenities to serve the community

With input from the community, identify new park uses for existing parklands, including both active and passive recreation opportunities

Work with the Planning Department and other permitting agencies to increase efficiency in the park development process

### **OBJECTIVE 1.4: LEAD, INNOVATE AND PARTNER WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS TO BETTER SERVE THE COMMUNITY**

#### STRATEGIES:

Partner with other public land owners to provide increased recreational access to existing public open spaces

Partner with school districts, land trusts, non-profit groups, community organizations, and public agencies to provide additional public access to existing facilities

Collaborate to develop an interagency vision for the countywide network of trails

## GOAL 2: ENSURE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND FISCAL STABILITY

### **OBJECTIVE 2.1: ENSURE DEPARTMENT EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS**

#### STRATEGIES:

Provide excellent customer service to park users and the wider community

Provide resources and systems to ensure effective staff communication throughout the department

Engage and deploy volunteers effectively to increase departmental capacity

Upgrade technology where it makes the most difference to staff effectiveness

Regularly survey staff regarding department priorities and effectiveness, and solicit ideas for improving department functionality

### **OBJECTIVE 2.2: INVEST IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTE EXCELLENCE**

#### STRATEGIES:

Create and maintain a variety of opportunities for staff training and leadership development

Encourage collaboration across the department and promote ways for staff to learn from each other and share expertise

Increase regular communication between staff and supervisors

Track and recognize staff performance

Pursue opportunities for networking and staff development with other agencies

### **OBJECTIVE 2.3: DEVELOP SOURCES OF SUSTAINED FUNDING FOR OPERATIONS AND ENHANCED SERVICES**

#### STRATEGIES:

Pursue new opportunities for revenue generation

Collaborate for the creation of a parks funding measure or other sustainable source of park funding

Evaluate park dedication fees and update as needed

Work with County Administrative Office and Board of Supervisors to assess department operations and capital projects budgets and secure adequate funds

### **OBJECTIVE 2.4: INSTITUTE IMPROVED SYSTEMS FOR DEPARTMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS PLANNING**

#### STRATEGIES:

Develop metrics and performance measures for Strategic Plan Objectives and Strategies and share compelling data with stakeholders and potential funders

Develop and annually update an Operations Plan, integrated with the Capital Improvement Program and department budget

Regularly track and report progress on Strategic Plan Objectives and Strategies through implementation of the department's strategic management cycle

Work to align the Parks Department's Strategic Plan with County's Strategic Plan

## GOAL 3: PROVIDE A VARIETY OF RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

### **OBJECTIVE 3.1: PROVIDE ADDITIONAL RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS**

#### STRATEGIES:

Regularly assess needs and inventory priorities for classes, programs, and events, especially in underserved areas

Pursue resources for expanding programs and events to address community priorities

Sponsor and co-sponsor a variety of events for families & diverse audiences

### **OBJECTIVE 3.2: SUPPORT LOCAL FAMILIES AND YOUTH BY EXPANDING AFTER SCHOOL AND SUMMER OFFERINGS**

#### STRATEGIES:

Pursue resources for expanding programs and classes for youth, especially in underserved areas

Regularly survey youth, parents, teachers and school administrators to identify current gaps in services and areas of unmet need

Partner with other agencies and non-profits to expand the cultural, recreational, educational and interpretive program options available to families and youth countywide

Expand the Junior Volunteer Program and Junior Lifeguard programs to support job and life skills development and opportunities for mentoring

### **OBJECTIVE 3.3: CULTIVATE THE ARTS AND STRENGTHEN THE CULTURE OF THE COUNTY THROUGH PUBLIC ART PROGRAMS AND EVENTS**

#### STRATEGIES:

Continue to work with the County Arts Commission and partners to: a) fund arts programs, b) include public art components in public projects, c) provide art in public spaces, d) develop new public art programs and e) conserve existing public art

Continue to offer opportunities to engage in rich, hands-on arts curriculum through arts-based summer camps and class offerings

## GOAL 4: STEWARD AND PROTECT OPEN SPACES AND NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

### **OBJECTIVE 4.1: MANAGE EXISTING OPEN SPACES AND NATURAL RESOURCES FOR ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION AND MULTIPLE LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS**

#### STRATEGIES:

Create a natural resources program with staff and volunteers dedicated to developing and implementing resource management goals

Create a parks natural resources management plan

Partner with other agencies, organizations, and land owners in an integrated regional approach to resource management

Pursue additional resources to increase department's available expertise, staff capacity, and leadership in natural resource management projects on parks properties

Provide ongoing educational and interpretive opportunities related to natural resources

Regularly meet with local conservation partners to assess opportunities to lead and/or provide support for stewardship projects

### **OBJECTIVE 4.2: PROTECT AND ENHANCE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES**

#### STRATEGIES:

Inventory and assess priority projects to enhance preservation of cultural and historical resources in the parks system

Pursue additional resources and partnerships to support preservation of cultural and historical resources identified within the existing parks system

### **OBJECTIVE 4.3: PROVIDE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION OF NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES**

#### STRATEGIES:

Develop an interpretive plan for the parks system

Pursue resources to increase interpretive staff presence at parks throughout the county to run programs, manage volunteers, and engage with park users

Develop additional interpretive facilities and amenities throughout the parks system

## GOAL 5: ENGAGE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

### **OBJECTIVE 5.1: CONDUCT BROAD COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGE ALL DEMOGRAPHICS REGARDING PARKS PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES**

#### STRATEGIES:

Conduct outreach to the county's diverse communities in a culturally competent manner to increase access to and knowledge of parks facilities and programming

Regularly engage community members and other agencies and organizations in assessing community needs

Regularly conduct surveys of park and program users to determine how parks facilities and programs are used and how they can be improved

### **OBJECTIVE 5.2: INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERISM IN PARKS FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS**

#### STRATEGIES:

Grow the volunteer and intern programs to provide experiential learning opportunities and promote land stewardship throughout the parks system

Establish regional and neighborhood-based Adopt-A-Park programs to encourage community engagement in parks

Provide a variety of types of opportunities for volunteering in the parks system

Increase involvement, collaboration, communication and coordination with "friends of" groups to pursue the department mission

## GOAL 6: IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY OF PARKS AND PROGRAMS

### **OBJECTIVE 6.1: ADD ADDITIONAL PARKS, FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS IN UNDERSERVED AREAS**

#### STRATEGIES:

- Pursue park acquisitions in areas that lack access to parks
- Pursue partnerships and program development where programs are needed
- Pursue partnerships to provide park facilities in underserved areas

### **OBJECTIVE 6.2: COLLABORATE TO IMPROVE WALKING, BIKING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS TO PARKS**

#### STRATEGIES:

- Collaborate with other agencies to identify, plan and develop active transportation improvements linking parks to neighborhoods
- Partner with other agencies to address barriers to public access to existing open space

### **OBJECTIVE 6.3: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE OF DIFFERING ABILITIES AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

#### STRATEGIES:

- Conduct physical accessibility assessments of existing parks facilities, identifying and prioritizing needed improvements
- Increase relevance of parks and programs to families with young children, youth and aging populations, and ensure that all demographics are served by parks and programs
- Promote program scholarships based on financial need offered by non-profit organizations
- Continue to offer free and low cost programs and events to the community

# CHAPTER 7: PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

## DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM & OPERATIONS PLANNING

### THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Implementing the Strategic Plan will require future cooperation and planning. The strategic management cycle illustrates how the plan will be implemented (Figures 11 and 12) including the phases of planning, implementing and monitoring, evaluating, and adjusting. These phases will help keep the department on track with the Strategic Plan goals, will set regular times to engage the community, and will help continually improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The Strategic Plan lays the groundwork and sets the framework for future operations plans which will serve to implement the Strategic Plan and help manage department staff work plans and budget. Together, the Strategic Plan and these future operations plans make up this strategic management system. This is the framework for managing the department and steering us towards our vision and the realization of our Strategic Plan goals.

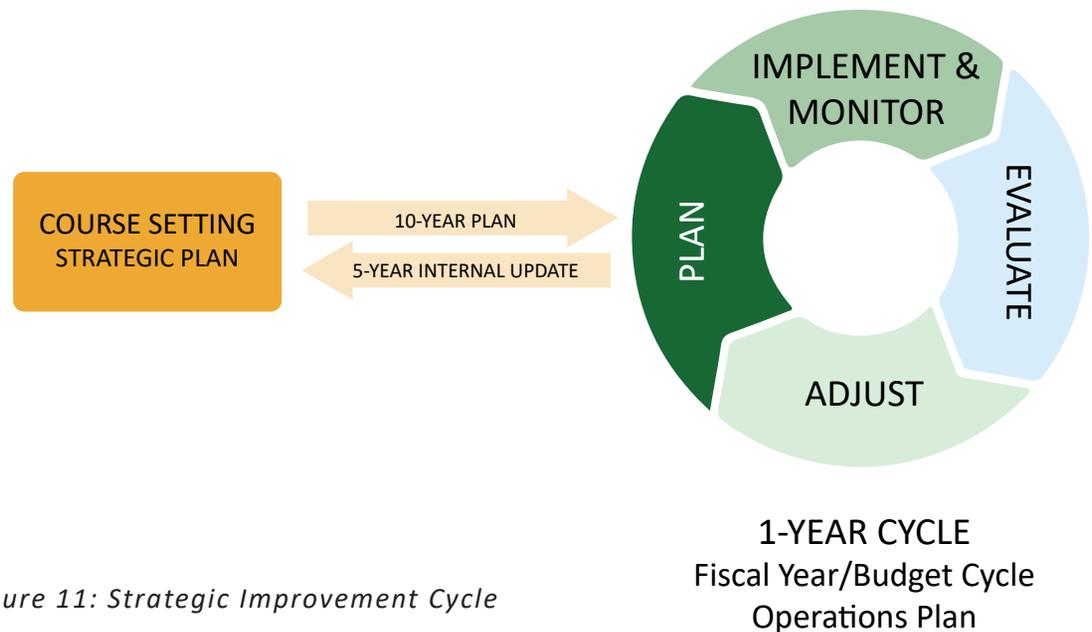


Figure 11: Strategic Improvement Cycle

Figure 12: Strategic Management System





### THE OPERATIONS PLAN

The Operations Plan represents how we will go about implementing this Strategic Plan. The Operations Plan will be updated regularly and will identify shorter-term (1-2 year) actions that will flow from Strategic Plan goals and objectives and support department priorities. Each operations plan will identify the concrete steps that the County Parks Department will take to assign resources and staff toward achieving the strategic priorities and goals laid out in the Strategic Plan.

The heart of these operations plans will be the formulation and tracking of *actions* and *performance measures*. Operations plan actions are specific, measurable, achievable steps to be taken to implement Strategic Plan objectives. In each operations plan, priority will be given to specific actions that further multiple goals and objectives identified in the Strategic Plan. Performance measures will be established and tracked on an annual basis.

### CRITERIA FOR PRIORITIZING ACTIONS

With finite staffing levels and budget, the Parks Department must prioritize. In order to determine which actions take priority, the following set of criteria will be used to maximize the potential to achieve the goals, objectives and strategies in this Strategic Plan. Since each goal and objective will require additional resources and needs to build on additional progress, the emphasis is on actions that set the stage and overcome initial barriers, enabling the department to work towards multiple Strategic Plan goals.

Actions should meet all of the following criteria:

1. Lay the groundwork for implementing the long-term goals
2. Work towards fulfilling multiple goals and priorities as identified in the Strategic Plan
3. Create additional resources and enable pursuit of additional goals and priorities identified in the Strategic Plan
4. Be readily achievable in the short-term, with existing funding and staff levels.
5. Capitalize on previous momentum and continue previous progress

### THE STRATEGIC PLAN WILL EVOLVE

Over the 10-year horizon for the County Parks Strategic Plan, the priorities and context will evolve in response to changing circumstances. To succeed, we must revisit our Strategic Plan goals regularly and refine our course by adjusting the actions in the Operations Plan. Every five years, the Strategic Plan should be updated internally to ensure that the priorities articulated reflect the changing environment, economy, and department and community needs.



Seaside County Park in Aptos

## KEYS TO MAKING PROGRESS

### *FOCUSING*

Priority Actions for the first Operations Plan have been selected based on the criteria stated above, as applied to the goals, objectives and strategies included in this Strategic Plan. Based on this approach, the first and highest priorities identified for the Parks Department include the following:

1. Increase organization and clearly articulate the funding needs of the department through creation of a deferred maintenance plan (Objective 1.1), a system to prioritize capital projects (Objective 1.3), and an assessment of appropriate staff levels needed to operate and maintain the existing parks system (Objective 1.1).
2. Pursue additional funding for the department through potential collaboration on a parks funding measure, working with the Board of Supervisors and County Administrative Office on department budget allocations, pursuing additional revenue sources, and evaluating park dedication fees (Objective 2.3).
3. Develop metrics and performance measures with the first operations plan (Objective 2.4) for Strategic Plan goals and objectives, and begin to share compelling data with stakeholders and potential funders.

We hope that the focus objectives named here will help the Parks Department achieve the goals, objectives and strategies identified in this Strategic Plan by increasing the capacity and organization of the department.

### *FUTURE FUNDING*

The improvement and growth of the County Parks Department will require investment. This investment is expected to yield a wide range of recreational, environment and socio-economic returns to the community. In order to realize the goals articulated in this plan, additional department resources and revenue must be pursued.

Before other goals and objectives can be realized, we will need to first develop sources of sustained funding for operations and enhanced services (Objective 2.3). Strategies to meet that objective are detailed below.



*Polo Grounds County Park in Aptos*



*Willowbrook Park in Soquel*

#### PURSUE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR REVENUE GENERATION

The County Parks Department currently generates revenue through user fees and reservations of facilities. There may be future opportunities to generate new revenue sources through increased services such as providing additional facilities available for reservation.

#### COLLABORATE FOR THE CREATION OF A PARKS FUNDING MEASURE OR OTHER SUSTAINABLE SOURCE OF PARK FUNDING

The County Parks Department is not the only agency providing parks and recreation services in the county, and is not the only agency that requires additional funding to meet community needs for parks and recreation. Working together, the various parks agencies and the community may pursue a ballot measure to fund parks in the county. This could be in the form of a dedicated parcel tax or a sales tax, which could be used to fund projects identified by the community as important, and could help us implement the goals and objectives of this Strategic Plan. The Parks Department could also individually pursue a ballot measure to secure a sustainable funding source for County Parks.

#### EVALUATE PARK DEDICATION FEES AND UPDATE AS NEEDED

The Park Dedication Fees are required for residential development in the unincorporated county, and are used locally to provide additional park facilities proportionally to serve increased demand resulting from new development. Fees are based on the standard provision of three acres of parkland for every 1,000 new residents established by the General Plan, and fees are adopted by the Board through resolution. These fees were last evaluated and updated based on market conditions in 1997, and should be assessed for appropriate levels for current economic conditions.

#### WORK WITH COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE AND BOARD OF SUPERVISORS TO ASSESS DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS AND CAPITAL PROJECTS BUDGETS AND SECURE ADEQUATE FUNDS

The largest source of funding for the County Parks Department is the County General Fund. The General Fund contribution to the department budget has decreased from its pre-recession level, while operational costs and the size and demands on the County Parks system have increased. The Parks Department should work cooperatively with the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrative Office to develop a sustainable source of revenue that is commensurate with the long term needs identified in this plan.

### **THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

This Strategic Plan represents a collaborative vision developed with the Parks Department and the community at large. The County Parks Department cannot implement the goals of this plan alone. Realizing this vision will require the leadership of other organizations and agencies as well as increased participation and support from the community. New partnerships will be needed to pursue strategies identified in this plan that will improve the County Parks system, and that the community sees as important, but which are currently outside the scope of the department to implement (such as improving neighborhood bike and pedestrian infrastructure and connections to parks). Community support will be especially important to help us generate new resources and additional funding, as many goals of this plan simply will not be realized without it.

By focusing on collaboration and partnership, this department intends to foster and to amplify the leadership and innovation in this community, to implement this plan, and to support community values. Working together, County Parks will strive to create a healthier and more vibrant Santa Cruz County for all.



*Volunteers at Quail Hollow Ranch County Park*