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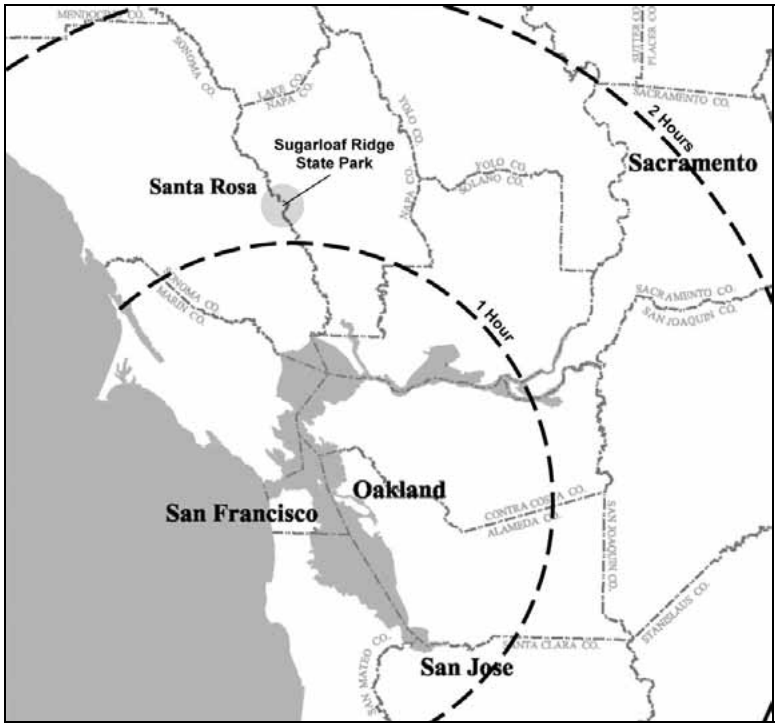
Executive Summary

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park is 5,100 acres of preserved land along the highest points of the Mayacamas Ridge between the productive and expanding wine producing regions of the Sonoma and Napa Valleys. It is a wildland park, approximately an hour away from San Francisco, as shown on the Regional Map, Figure ES-1. The Park is managed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (the Department) for quality outdoor recreation experiences and for its long-term ecological health, as it sits atop three watersheds and supports critical wildlife habitat in the Mayacamas Ridge.

Figure ES-1: Regional Map



The park has almost doubled in size in the last five years due to acquisitions and transfers of land from the Sonoma County Agricultural Protection and Open Space District[1] (SCAPOSD). This evolving context for park planning and operations has redefined park boundaries and created an opportunity to reconsider the future vision of the park. The most recent addition of Nunns Canyon, an entirely new area encompassing the Calabasas Creek watershed to the south (but disconnected from the park), was completed only in the final days of preparation of this *Preliminary General Plan*. In 1996, the acquisition of the Santa Rosa Creek headwaters to the north added dramatic ecological diversity to the park and the opportunity for a second point of access. Also, to the west is the Hood Mountain Regional Park, operated by the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department. This plan

[1] Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District uses dedicated funding from sales tax revenue to conserve lands in Sonoma County.

focuses on Sugarloaf Ridge State Park and evaluates its role in providing recreational resources and protected habitat in the combined parklands and surrounding area. In all, the study area for this General Plan is approximately 10,000 acres. Map 1 shows the general geophysical features of the study area and the current park boundaries. During the general planning process, Hood Mountain Regional Park also benefited from a SCAPOSD acquisition of a property just outside the study area that could enable a new fourth entrance to the combined parklands.

Within the expanded boundaries, the purpose for Sugarloaf Ridge State Park continues to be the protection of large and diverse habitat areas as well as the provision of high-quality outdoor recreational experiences. The vision has been expanded, however, to consider the reality of enlarged park boundaries, current thinking about the importance of connected wildlife corridors, and the scientific, interpretative, and recreational opportunities presented by such a large wildland area near large urban populations. The General Plan considers the proximity and expansion of the user base, and the appropriate carrying capacity of the park to both protect its resources and to provide high-quality visitor experiences. It emphasizes the importance of long-term sustainability, the use of environmental indicators, and adaptive management practices. This *Preliminary General Plan* provides the goals and guidelines that would direct short- and long-term management decisions and environmental stewardship in park for the next 20 years. It is acknowledged that achieving the stated vision in this General Plan would be made incrementally, as funding becomes available, and would be reached over time through daily operational actions taken by Department staff.

Map 1. Geophysical Features

APPROACH TO THE PRELIMINARY GENERAL PLAN

A thorough analysis of existing conditions was undertaken as a part of the general planning process. The District and other interested agencies, along with individuals and nonprofit groups all provided information about the conditions at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. A geographic information system (GIS) compiles much of the information collected about the natural and cultural systems of the park and was used to help make informed decisions regarding environmental constraints to development.[2] In studying the conditions at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, a series of the most important issues emerged.

Existing conditions and preliminary issues analysis were presented at a public workshop held in February 2002 to inform the public about the general planning process and to explore ideas for park enhancements and different visions for the park's future. Public and agency scoping efforts also revealed existing issues to be resolved, conflicts between existing recreational uses, and areas where resources have been degraded and are in need of restoration.

The Department developed three alternatives to be considered for the park's General Plan. Each presented different options for resolving existing resource management and visitor use issues for the park and vary in terms of the number and location of new or expanded visitor facilities. The alternatives were presented to the public and resource agencies in May 2003 for their review and feedback.

The Preferred Alternative reflects statewide interests, agencies' relevant rules and regulations, the park's purpose and vision, and environmental constraints and resources. Input from the local community and resource agencies were also important considerations during the alternative selection process. The Preferred Alternative has been refined into the goals and guidelines presented in this *Preliminary General Plan.*

SUMMARY OF THE PLAN

This *Preliminary General Plan* responds to the issues affecting the park and seeks to balance the need for recreational facilities, the desire for a positive visitor experience supported by the park's facilities and aesthetics, and protection of the park's natural and cultural resources.

The goals and guidelines presented in Chapter 3, Park Plan, create a management framework that would protect existing natural and cultural resources while establishing needed visitor support facilities and an active program for enhancing and interpreting the park's resource values. This plan also proposes measures to correct existing patterns of use that are degrading park resources, suggests programs to restore resources, and provides generalized recommendations for siting new facilities so that they minimize potential impacts to the environment.

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[2] The GIS developed for this General Plan is available and recommended for continued District use.

One of the key concepts of this plan is to provide trail connections between the broader areas of the park to bring the park together as a unified whole. The extended trail loops into the wildland areas of the park would enhance the visitor's experience, allowing for longer hikes and horse rides than are currently available. The trail connections would also be wide enough to be used for wildland emergency vehicles, closing current gaps in the emergency access network.

The preservation of large expanses of wildland areas, as proposed in this General Plan, would have many benefits to the ecological health of the region. Sugarloaf Ridge State Park protects important biocorridors for species, including the mountain lion, whose presence is used as an indicator of the overall health of the ecosystem. This plan also includes guidelines for the protection and restoration of sensitive habitats that contribute to wildlife diversity.

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park contains the headwaters of four creeks, and maintaining water quality is a priority. This Plan includes guidelines for restoration and protection of the resources and riparian vegetation along the creeks and for managing park activities to reduce the potential for water quality degradation. New trails would be constructed and existing trails reconstructed using best management practices for reducing erosion and sedimentation in the creeks.

Managing the quality of the recreational experience with increasing park use is another key component of this plan. Demographic trends indicate that demand for outdoor recreation will continue to increase in the future, especially at parks like Sugarloaf Ridge State Park that are located near urban areas. This *Preliminary General Plan* provides guidelines for improving the visitor experience within Adobe Canyon, the hub of visitor facilities within the park. The establishment of design guidelines for the park would improve the visual character of park facilities, which in the past have been built as temporary facilities, due to the lack of a General Plan. This plan also includes guidelines for enhancing interpretive programs within the park and establishing themes for interpretation that better connect the visitor with the natural and cultural history of the park.

Relocating the large group camp away from the observatory would resolve existing light conflicts between the two uses that currently limit the use of the large group camp to nights when the observatory is not being used. Corrals for public use would be installed near the group campsite to bring equestrian camping back to the park, and the expansion of the family campground, visitor center, picnic facilities, and the observatory would meet some of the expected increase in visitor demand.

Although the hub of visitor-serving facilities would remain in Adobe Canyon, this General Plan also recommends the construction of trails and a public parking lot in Nunns Canyon to allow visitors to experience the natural beauty of this newest addition to the park. Limited-access campsites, located in more remote areas of the park, would bring a wildland camping experience to the Mayacamas Mountain Range.

STRUCTURE OF THE PLAN

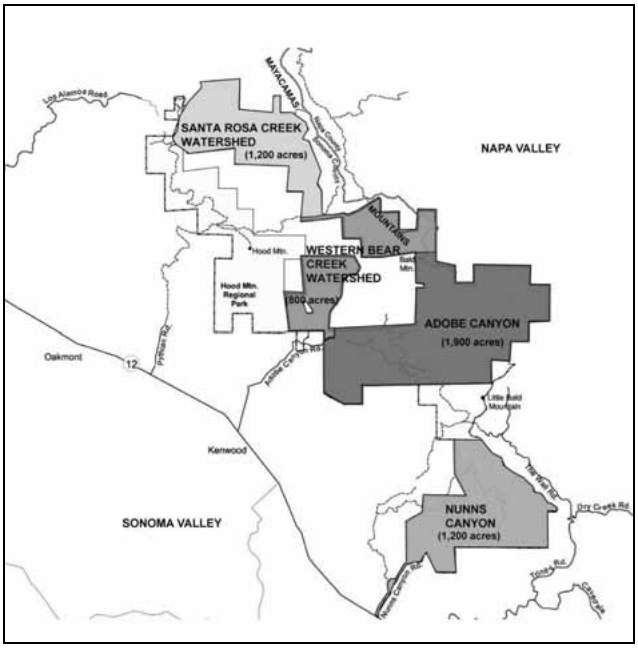
This *Preliminary General Plan* presents parkwide goals and guidelines that apply to all geographic areas of the park: resource management, protection, and enhancement; trail connections, recreation, and visitor experience; circulation and parking; maintenance and operations; aesthetic resources; and interpretation. The plan also includes guidelines for implementation of area-specific projects to protect sensitive resources during facility siting and construction.

The goals and guidelines are segmented into various environmental topic areas to facilitate an understanding of the individual resource characteristics and sensitivity zones. Some guidelines include measures to address resource agency and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) environmental review requirements for protection of resources during area-specific project planning and implementation. Others include recommended programs and day-to-day operations to protect and restore specific environmental resource values within the park.

Four broad management zones have been established for Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, defined by the four watersheds within the park (Figure ES-2):

- Adobe Canyon Management Zone (Sonoma Creek watershed)
- Bear Creek Watershed Management Zone
- Santa Rosa Creek Watershed Management Zone
- Nunns Canyon Management Zone (Calabazas Creek watershed)

Figure ES-2: Management Zones



Management zones represent portions of the park that share the common characteristics of each watershed and would be managed as identifiable subareas of the park. The goal in each watershed is to maintain or improve water quality and to use water quality as an indicator of overall health of the park. This *Preliminary General Plan* provides operational guidelines and recommendations for projects specific to each management zone.

Natural habitat values would be protected and restored throughout each zone by adjusting the recreation intensity to be compatible with and dependent on those values. For each management zone, visitor/operational uses are located in previously disturbed areas that can accommodate more intensive human use. Restoration activities are proposed to correct for existing degradation and enhance the park's resources. The presence of mountain lions would be the indicator of overall health of the habitat.

Diagrammatic maps depicting the general locations recommended for new or expanded facilities are presented for the park as a whole. The "bubbles" indicating the locations of facilities, use areas, and trail connections are conceptual in nature. Please see Map 2 for a diagram of the Preferred Alternative.

The conceptual locations for future facilities and recreational uses seek to avoid or minimize disturbance of sensitive environmental resources. In most cases, these areas have been previously developed, are characterized as having limited habitat value, and are able to accommodate parking, utilities, and infrastructure needed to support the prescribed use.

Precise facility locations would be determined when each facility is evaluated at a project level. Implementation of any proposed project or facility development would also trigger managerial consideration of funding sources for the project and the corresponding personnel and equipment augmentation that may be needed.

Table 1 provides a summary of key facility recommendations for each management zone. The numbers presented in this table are preliminary estimates only. In some cases, assumptions are made for environmental review purposes. This document also includes an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that identifies the potential environmental effects of the General Plan, consistent with the requirements of CEQA. The plan establishes resource-specific management guidelines to become a "self-mitigating" plan, designed to avoid, reduce, or minimize environmental impacts of proposed recreational facilities to a less-than-significant level.

The opportunity for public review of this *Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR* is also provided during the CEQA process. The CEQA environmental review process and the opportunity provided for written comment are described in Section 4.1 of this document.

Map 2. General Plan Key Concepts

Table ES-1: Existing and Proposed Facilities

AREA	EXISTING	NEW PLAN
SANTA ROSA CREEK WATERSHED MANAGEMENT ZONE		
▪ Construct new bridge(s) over Santa Rosa Creek	No	Yes
▪ Additional visitor use and operational facilities	No	Yes
▪ Primitive campsites (8 people per site)	0	2
▪ Los Alamos Road trailhead and parking (by County)	30	30
ADOBE CANYON MANAGEMENT ZONE		
Camping Facilities		
▪ Family campsites (8 people per site)	50	70
▪ Large group campsite (50 people)	1	1 – relocated
▪ Move corrals for Small equestrian Group Camp	1	1
▪ Limited-access small group campsites (15 people per site)	0	4
▪ Limited-access family campsites (8 people per site)	0	4
▪ New restroom facility with showers at family campground	No	Yes
Observatory	Yes	Expand
Horse Barn		
▪ Horse concession	Yes	Yes
▪ Maintenance	Yes	No
▪ Interpretive center	No	Yes
▪ Picnic areas	No	Yes
Visitor Center	Yes	Expand
Picnic Areas	5	Up to 20
Maintenance and Operations		
▪ Construct new bridge to family campground	No	Yes
▪ Consolidate maintenance shop and equipment storage	No	Yes
NUNNS CANYON MANAGEMENT ZONE		
▪ Quarry area restoration and trailhead	No	Yes
▪ Parking spaces	0	40
▪ Interpretive displays	No	Yes
▪ Picnic areas	No	Yes
▪ Primitive campsites (8 people per site)	0	2
WESTERN BEAR CREEK WATERSHED		
Red Barn Area		
▪ Primative campsites (8 people per site)	0	2 campsites
▪ Picnic area	No	Yes
▪ Interpretive displays	No	Yes
Harr Ranch Area		
▪ Employee residence	Yes – vacant	Yes
Total Parking Spaces	311	508
Estimated Maximum People in Park at One Time[a]	950	1,600

HOOD MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK (by County, under separate action – for reference only)		
Pythian Road trailhead & parking	No	County
Primitive campsites (Azalea Camp)	No	County

a Visitor estimates and parking assumptions table are provided in Appendix E.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The *Preliminary General Plan* for Sugarloaf Ridge State Park reflects the Department's dual mandates as the steward of sensitive resources and the provider of recreation opportunities. The protection and restoration of natural and cultural resources are key components of the General Plan. The plan leaves large expanses of the park as near-wilderness, which supports wildlife biocorridors; allows for greater biological diversity, watershed recharge, and water quality protection; preserves scenic and cultural landscapes; and contributes to protecting the dark night sky. The plan also identifies conceptual sites for proposed new and expanded park facilities. Facilities would be located in the least environmentally constrained areas of the park.

Chapter 3, Park Plan, identifies goals and guidelines for protection of the natural environment; resource restoration; and the siting, design, and construction of area-specific projects to avoid potential adverse environmental effects. The goals and guidelines of this *Preliminary General Plan* seek to avoid potentially significant effects on the environment.

An evaluation of the potential for significant environmental effects to visual resources, biological resources, cultural resources, water quality, transportation/traffic, air quality, and noise is provided in Section 4.3. The specific guidelines that, when implemented, would maintain potential environmental impacts at a less-than-significant level are identified for each environmental resource area.

The environmental analysis prepared for the *Preliminary General Plan* is programmatic in scope and does not contain project-specific analysis for the facilities recommended in the plan. However, the plan also includes guidelines that govern project-level environmental review of area-specific projects to avoid or minimize any potential adverse site-specific effects to some resources during construction or operations of the facilities. Specific projects would undergo subsequent CEQA review in the future as appropriate.