

BURTON CREEK STATE PARK

**PRELIMINARY GENERAL PLAN AND
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

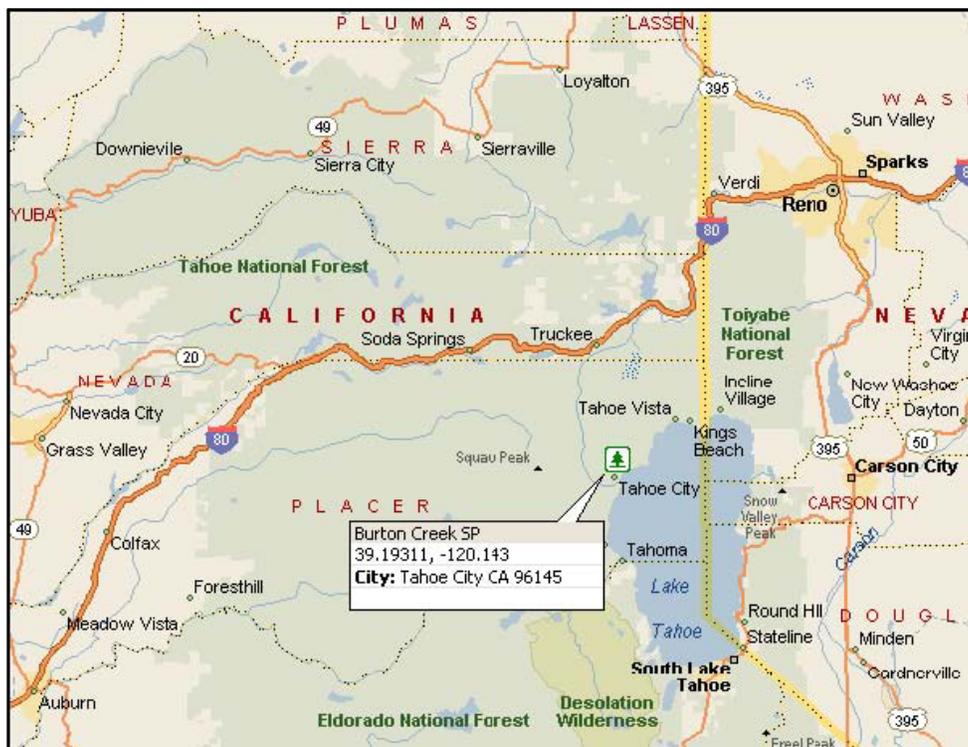


BURTON CREEK STATE PARK PRELIMINARY GENERAL PLAN AND DRAFT EIR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Burton Creek State Park (BCSP) has been in existence since 1978 when it was acquired by California State Parks. The purpose of the acquisition was to provide a large area of resource protection and outdoor recreation opportunities on the north side of the Lake Tahoe Basin.



Vicinity Map

The park consists of typical mid-elevation west-side mixed conifer forest, a wet meadow complex and two main stream courses. The few cultural resources found on the property consist of isolated prehistoric artifacts and old cabin sites with little remaining. The park has remained to this day relatively undeveloped with no park facilities. Dirt roads from previous logging activities criss-cross the 2000 acre park along with many trails established by local residents living adjacent to the park. The roads are blocked to vehicle access. In the winter many of these same roads become part of a cross country ski concession operation. The property is surrounded by undeveloped U.S. Forest Service land with connecting roads and trails and serves as part of an unobstructed habitat

corridor to within a few hundred yards of the shoreline of Lake Tahoe.

Purpose of the General Plan

California State Parks has developed this General Plan for Burton Creek State Park for several reasons:

- To provide the foundation for future facility development in the park.
- To describe and address the immediate need to develop day use and access facilities.
- To implement a Roads and Trails Management Plan for the park. The Management Plan will address current resource and recreation issues occurring in the park.
- To facilitate the transfer of the Dollar Parcel from the California Tahoe Conservancy (CTC) to California State Parks. The Dollar Parcel is a 900 acre undeveloped parcel adjacent to BCSP, currently owned by the CTC. The purpose of the acquisition is to protect the property's natural and cultural resources, and provide public access. The Conservancy has indicated it will transfer the property to State Parks upon completion of a general plan acceptable to the governing board.

Park-Wide Planning Goals

There are several major park-wide planning goals in the General Plan, including:

Natural Resources: Provide special protection for listed species, as well as for other exceptional natural resources. Manage the mixed conifer forest to reduce fire hazard and encourage the development of old growth stands. Protect and ensure the perpetuation of native wildlife species populations. Preserve, rehabilitate and, as appropriate, establish new habitat linkages between the park and other protected lands in order to maintain biological diversity. Establish and preserve buffers around existing significant park resources. Rehabilitate watershed functions, thereby significantly reducing or eliminating unnatural soil erosion and stream sedimentation within the park's watersheds. Identify the beneficial uses and the surface water quality objectives for BCSP and the Dollar Parcel.

Cultural Resources: Ensure a high level of appropriate protection, stabilization, preservation, and interpretation of the park's cultural resources, focusing in areas of exceptional archaeological and historical significance.

Recreation: Provide a multitude of recreational opportunities that will allow California's diverse population to visit, enjoy, and better understand the

significance of the park's resources.

Interpretive Resources: Interpret the resources, resource protection measures, and restoration efforts underway in the park. Make connections between the quality of the environment and the quality of the recreation experience.

Plan Proposals

The general plan proposes the development of day use facilities, including four trailhead parking areas, roads (an entrance road and interior park roads), and trails, as well as a campground. The campground, ranging from 1 – 200 campsites, may provide alternative camping including yurts or cabins. Administrative buildings, maintenance buildings, and employee residences could be developed. The plan also proposes interpretive exhibits and facilities, vegetation management projects and programs, and landscape rehabilitation in disturbed areas.

Unavoidable Significant Environmental Effects

The largest issue surrounding the General Plan proposals is the potential for additional traffic generated by the development of public facilities and an increase in visitor use. Traffic in the Tahoe City area is extremely congested throughout the summer and on winter weekends. Traffic on Highway 28 is currently rated Level F (Considerable Delays), the lowest level of service rating. Proposed campground development in the General Plan may contribute to the traffic congestion. The plan incorporates several elements that address this traffic issue.

- A traffic analysis will be prepared that will analyze the levels of use for a range of campground sizes to determine the associated effect on existing traffic conditions. The analysis will consider traffic on Highway 28 by referring to the Caltrans Level of Service (LOS) for Tahoe City. Caltrans' goal is to improve the traffic index to Level D, representing only minor delays in traffic flow, through traffic and road planning efforts now underway. The intent of this General Plan is to provide campground facilities that will allow Caltrans to meet this goal.
- Designing park facilities, roads and trails to encourage travel by foot bike, and ski to allow visitors access to the park and surrounding areas while leaving their cars parked at the campground. This can be accomplished by clustering development and taking advantage of the existing trail and road system.
- Locating the proposed park and campground access route in an undeveloped area with no current traffic congestion.

Although some of the expected increase in traffic from the proposed campground development may be minimized through various measures such as project design, developing public transportation options, and limiting the size of the campground, not all of the additional traffic may be mitigated to a level below significance. Therefore, an increase in traffic of an undetermined amount must be considered at this time an unavoidable significant environmental effect.

Potential Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

Potential significant environmental impacts are those commonly associated with facility development and visitor use. Potential adverse impacts identified in this plan include disturbance to or loss of natural and cultural resources, degradation of water quality due to excessive soil erosion and sedimentation, increases in traffic, and impacts to visual resources. Potential mitigation measures for each type of impact have been discussed.

This General Plan is the first phase of a tiered EIR and, as such, proposed development and associated mitigation are general in nature. Detailed mitigation measures will be developed as specific projects are proposed, designs are prepared, and environmental analysis documents are developed. The most appropriate mitigation measures will be developed as specific projects are proposed and implemented. Separate environmental and planning documents complying with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) will be prepared at the time when projects are funded and ready to be implemented.

State Parks has determined that potentially significant impacts can be mitigated to a less than significant level for all impacts except traffic. Adding traffic of any amount to the Tahoe City area may be considered a significant impact.

The following potential significant environmental impacts and associated mitigation measures refer to proposals planned within the existing park boundaries. Impacts to resources will be mitigated to a less than significant level through the implementation of General Plan goals and guidelines and any additional site-specific mitigation measures.

Aesthetic Resources

Any changes that substantially degrade the visual experience for visitors to the park have the potential to cause significant impacts. The development of new facilities could create adverse visual impacts if proper design for color, scale, location, style, materials, and architectural mass are not carefully considered. The use of inappropriate colors, design, and materials in the natural landscape or historic setting may be visually offensive.

Visual impacts can be avoided or reduced by appropriate siting, design, and selection of materials. The development of aesthetic design standards and

objectives, management plans, and specific project designs will define aesthetically appropriate design features, identify visual resources, and identify optimum methods for protecting existing resources. Appropriate native plant species should be used to screen or soften the visual effect of parking areas, roads, and trails; buffer intrusive or distracting views and activities outside park boundaries; and enhance scenic views. Construction and maintenance activities should be scheduled to decrease the impacts to visitors and adjacent property owners. Placement of a campground near the center of the park, away from nearby neighborhoods, will mitigate the potential negative aesthetic impacts.

Biological Resources

Human activities and associated impacts (including timber harvest, fire suppression, and recreation use) have altered native plant and animal communities throughout the region, including lands in what is now Burton Creek State Park. The remaining habitats provide food, shelter, and reproductive habitat for many species and are highly valued park resources. Consequently, protection and restoration of these habitats, especially forest, riparian, and wetland communities, is essential and will help ensure the stability of plant and animal populations. The park has an important role as a link between fragmented forest habitats of the Sierra Nevada. Specifically, the park also serves as a corridor between the lakeshore zone and the upland forest zone.

There are several sensitive habitat types within the park including aspen groves, wetlands, wet meadows and riparian forest. These habitat types are found in the natural preserves. Facility rehabilitation and development, including additional trails, regional trail linkages, and resource management projects have the potential to disturb, degrade, or remove habitat. The construction of new facilities and structures in previously undisturbed areas of the park could create substantial adverse impacts to wildlife.

Vegetation management in the park can result in significant impacts as well as pose potential risks to humans and property. Among management activities that will require further impact assessment prior to implementation are prescription burning of vegetation, habitat restoration projects (including stream restoration, soil grading, and other activities), and removal of plants, whether exotic or native.

The General Plan proposes a number of guidelines to preserve, enhance, and minimize disturbance to vegetation and wildlife. A comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan will be developed that will provide guidance for identification, protection, habitat restoration, and adaptive management of the park's resources, especially species of special concern and sensitive habitats. Site-specific surveys for sensitive species and habitats will be completed as part of the planning process for resource management projects, construction, maintenance, or rehabilitation of facilities and trails. State and federal resource agencies will be consulted to assist with appropriate resource protection, habitat enhancement, and management techniques. There will be no new facility

development in areas of known sensitivity. This may include limiting access to some areas of the park, or temporarily closing or relocating facilities to promote restoration. Construction and restoration will be scheduled whenever possible to avoid disturbance to sensitive wildlife, especially during the breeding season. In addition, all large trees, significant rock outcrops, and other sensitive habitat will be preserved and protected from construction impacts. Efforts will be made to reduce or eliminate human influences to wildlife (including access to food and garbage). A program of revegetation of disturbed areas with appropriate native species will be implemented.

Cultural Resources

Burton Creek State Park contains potentially significant cultural resources that could be destroyed or degraded by new development and facility improvements. Although most of the park has been surveyed for cultural resources there has not been a complete inventory of the park's cultural resources; therefore, there is potential for the discovery of previously unknown prehistoric and historic sites during facilities construction, rehabilitation, resource management projects, restoration, or maintenance operations.

Interpretive facilities and trails and their associated amenities, such as picnic sites, placed in or near historic landscapes can potentially decrease historic ambiance and increase the threat of vandalism or damage due to additional public use.

Prior to construction or reconstruction, significant repairs, implementation of interpretive programs, or other site-specific development, areas of potential impact will be inventoried and reviewed to determine the presence and significance of cultural resources, the potential impact, and recommended mitigation, if appropriate. Impacts may be reduced by project avoidance, site capping, structural stabilization/renovation, project redesign, and data recovery. The alteration or removal of any historic or archaeological features will be subject to Public Resources Code 5024.5 review requirements.

Water Quality Resources

Surface and ground waters are of varying quality in the Lahontan Region and the protection of water quality is extremely important in the Tahoe Basin. Many water quality problems are related to non-point sources, such as soil erosion (from construction and timber harvest areas), storm water runoff (sediment and chemicals), and individual wastewater disposal systems.

Surface waters within the park include Burton Creek, Barton Creek, Dollar Creek and a small portion of Lake Forest Creek (located on the Dollar Parcel). Sedimentation of these surface waters may increase turbidity and physically alter the streambed and lakebed habitat. As tributaries flowing into Lake Tahoe, any increase in sediment loading to these waters may be considered a significant impact.

Soils in many areas of the park are classified as highly erosive. Any proposed soil disturbing activities or increases in impervious surfaces may contribute to potentially significant adverse impacts to water quality.

Human activities in the watershed can greatly accelerate the rate and amount of erosion and sedimentation. Activities at the park that could increase sedimentation may include construction of new facilities, rehabilitation of existing facilities, operations and maintenance practices, and outdoor recreation.

Potential impacts associated with construction practices include soil and vegetation disturbance from grading, filling, and construction equipment use and storage. Surface and groundwater contamination may occur from construction materials, such as concrete, paint, and other chemical products. Ground disturbance, especially in floodplains and wetlands, may reduce the natural processes for sediment and nutrient absorption.

Impervious surfaces may contribute to water pollution as a source of vehicle contaminants, such as oils, grease and other petroleum and chemical products. These substances become suspended or dissolved in storm water runoff and may enter surface or groundwater.

Maintenance practices may include snow removal, which can carry de-icing chemicals and vehicle fluids from the roadway into surface or ground water. Sand used on road surfaces to provide traction in the winter can be crushed and dissipated and may enter surface waters. Normal park operations may also include trail maintenance and vegetation removal by mechanical or chemical methods. These practices can disturb the ground surface, contributing to increased erosion and sedimentation, and excess pesticides may enter groundwater or surface waters.

Recreation impacts can include soil compaction in day use areas and along trails and roads. Intense visitor use, particularly mountain biking, may also cause increased erosion on trails, disturbance to or destruction of sensitive wetland and riparian vegetation. Watershed damage by natural or human-caused wildfires can decrease water quality by sedimentation.

As part of the planning process for any proposed development of site-specific plans, resource management plans, or facility construction, site-specific studies of soil conditions will be conducted. All new projects, projects to rehabilitate existing facilities, and increased visitor use in the park will be evaluated to ensure that they do not contribute to degradation of water quality. Any accelerated erosion, sedimentation, and habitat degradation will be reduced or eliminated where feasible.

Natural vegetation, soils, and the duff layer will be protected and restored to

preserve natural infiltration. Erosion control practices should be used near surface waters for all activities that disturb the ground surface. Existing drainage patterns should not be significantly modified.

Mitigation measures for construction impacts will include: the use of erosion control best management practices to stabilize soils during construction and for any activities that involve soil disturbance; stabilizing all disturbed areas by the beginning of the wet season (October 15); protecting all non-construction areas to prevent unnecessary disturbance; stabilizing and vegetating areas at the completion of construction; and avoiding storage of surplus or waste materials in the 100-year floodplain, near surface waters, or in drainages.

Recreational facilities will be designed to minimize water quality impacts by avoiding disturbance to steep slopes, highly erosive soils, and riparian and wetland areas. Recreation impacts may be avoided or reduced by; utilizing erosion control measures near surface waters for all human activities which disturb the ground surface; and developing ongoing programs of trail maintenance and watershed restoration for areas disturbed by recreational use. To allow the recovery of compacted soils and natural vegetation, temporary closure, reconfiguration, or relocation of campgrounds and other facilities will be considered.

To avoid potential impacts to water quality, park visitors will be restricted from entering sensitive habitat areas, including wetlands, riparian areas, and streambeds, by the use of fencing and signage. Appropriate biotechnical stream bank erosion control methods will be utilized where feasible.

The General Plan proposes development of a Roads and Trails Management Plan to evaluate all roads and trails in the park, including trail location, use, and maintenance practices.

The existing interpretive program will be improved in order to educate the public on ways to improve and maintain water quality, including information on the water quality impacts of recreation.