



Introduction

1 INTRODUCTION



Coastal Prairie below Peaked Hill, Source: EDAW 2003

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

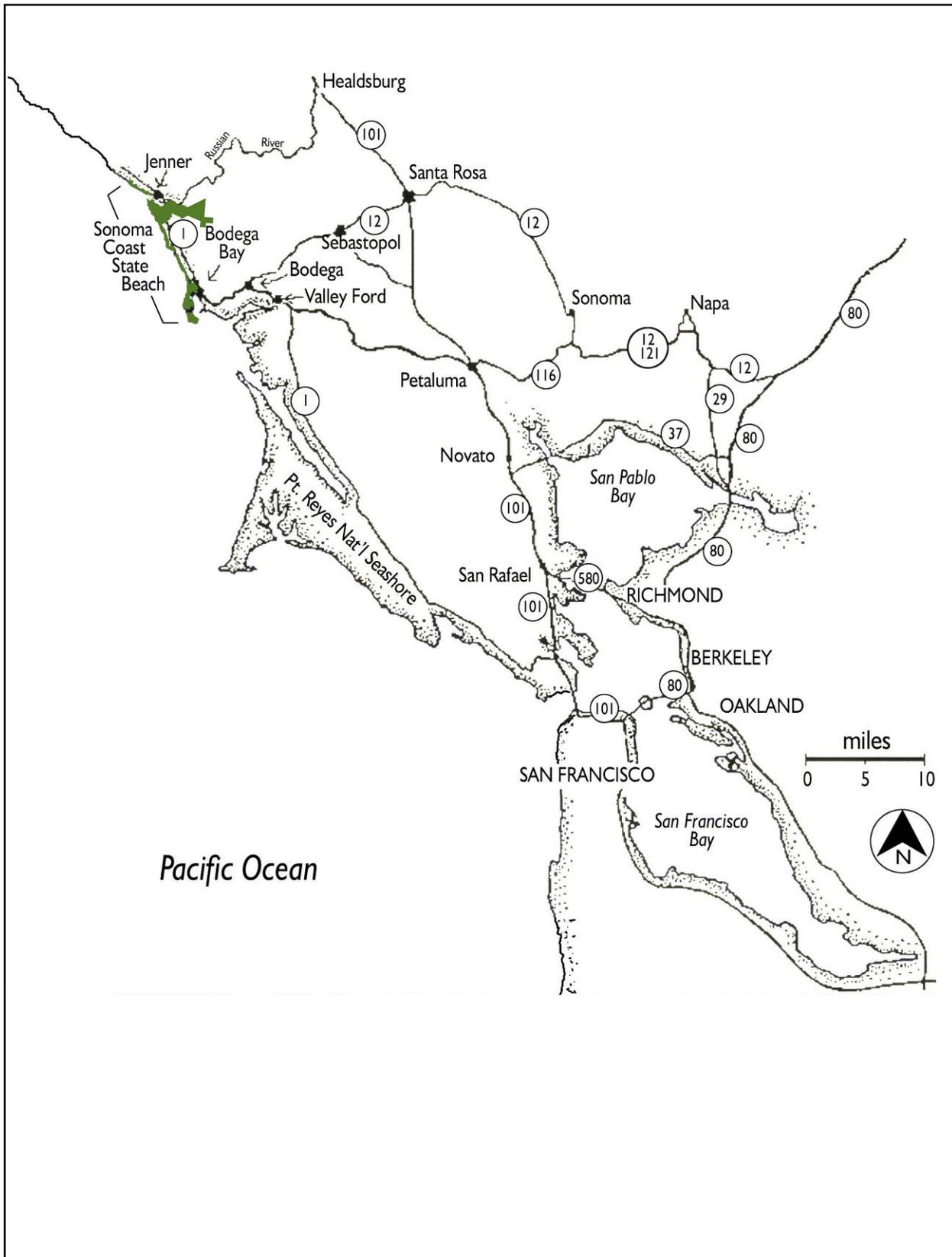
1.1.1 LOCATION AND SETTING OF THE PARK

Located approximately 70 miles north of San Francisco, Sonoma Coast State Beach (Sonoma Coast SB) comprises a series of beaches, separated by rocky bluffs and headlands, and portions of two inland valleys that draw millions of visitors year-round. Sonoma Coast SB extends 19 miles from Bodega Head at the southern end to beyond the Vista Trail 4 miles north of Jenner (Exhibit 1-1) and encompasses 9,619 acres of land, 19 miles of coastline, and 667 acres of the ocean (leased from the State Lands Commission), for a total of 10,286 acres. The offshore leased areas extend from Bodega Head to Schoolhouse Beach and extend from the ordinary high water mark out to a contour line 18 feet below mean lower low water mark. A 3,378-acre acquisition of the Upper Willow Creek and lower Freezeout Creek watersheds was added in 2005 to the 2,226-acre Lower Willow Creek subunit of Sonoma Coast SB. Park ownership now encompasses approximately 80 percent of the Willow Creek watershed, a major tributary to the Russian River.

Beachcombers, fishermen, sunbathers, and picnickers can access the beaches and sea cliffs from more than two dozen points along State Route 1.

1.1.2 PURPOSE FOR ACQUIRING THE PARK

Sonoma Coast SB was acquired in 1934 and was classified as a state beach in 1964. The purpose of Sonoma Coast SB is “to make available to the people, for their inspiration and enjoyment forever, a segment of the scenic Northern California coastline in the vicinity of Bodega Bay and the Russian River, embracing sandy beaches, tide pools, and rugged headlands; together with all the scenic, historic, scientific, and recreational resources of the area” (Declaration of Purpose 1964). Since the original acquisition (approximately 600 acres), several significant adjacent properties have been purchased as additions to Sonoma Coast SB that have resulted in the current park ownership of 10,272 acres.



Source: EDAW 2003

Regional Location of Sonoma Coast State Beach

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EXHIBIT 1-1

This plan is prepared in accordance with CEQA guidelines (Title 14, California Code of Regulations), Article 9, Contents of EIR 15120(c) states that Draft EIRs shall contain the information required by sections 15122 through 15131. Appendix A contains a table that shows where the required items are found in this General Plan/EIR.

1.1.3 SPIRIT OF PLACE

For thousands of years, people have been captivated by the visual masterpiece and natural wonder of the Sonoma Coast. The natural resources abundant along the coast and within the inland watersheds have attracted people to come and live in this area throughout prehistoric, historic, and present times. The area leaves an intense and lingering imprint on all who have witnessed this magical realm. The rugged landscape sparks the imagination of those contemplating the awesome powers of geologic forces. For others, the dramatic scenery is the perfect backdrop for a day at the beach or a hike through shady redwood groves. Still others are intrigued by the plants and wildlife that have adapted to this unique environment over the eons.

Born of the clash between land and sea, the rivalry between the North American and Pacific tectonic plates, the forces of flowing water, and the symbiosis between living beings and the environment, the Sonoma Coast is painted with a palette of distinctive vegetation on a canvas of rolling hills, rugged cliffs, sloping prairies, and broad beaches. Inland, this fabric is expanded by forest covered hills interspersed with grassy openings and magnificent views of the coastal watershed. Sprinkled about the coast are jagged rock outcroppings and other reminders that agents of change are ever-present in the timeless ambience. Inland, the sweeping vistas have inspired names such as



Redwood Grove in Willow Creek



Willow Creek Watershed



Coastline at Arched Rock



Sunset at Sonoma Coast SB

Source: EDAW 2003

“Islands in the Sky”. Of all the agents of change that have shaped Sonoma Coast State Beach, the San Andreas Fault is perhaps the most famous. But it is the impact of modern society that is most considerable.

As Sonoma Coast SB continues its path in the modern era of leisure and preservation, the stewardship of the coastline and inland watershed areas is pivotal in maintaining a balance between a pristine vision of the Sonoma Coast as it once was naturally and an alterative extreme of a natural playground that it could be. Aesthetic quality, resource values, and recreational opportunities are inseparable characteristics that are the basis of attraction to Sonoma Coast SB. To preserve all three is to sustain the popularity of Sonoma Coast SB.

1.1.4 PARK AREA DESCRIPTIONS

COASTAL AREAS

Coastal access areas at Sonoma Coast SB are described below, starting at the southern end of the Park and extending in a northbound direction.

Bodega Head

Bodega Head located at the southern end of Sonoma Coast SB is the rocky headland that forms the entrance into Bodega Harbor. The harbor side provides a popular crabbing area along the jetty, and the many hiking trails on the ocean side allow access to small, sandy coves and spectacular scenic blufftop views. The high cliffs offer excellent vantage points for observing migrating gray whales.

Bodega Dunes

Bodega Dunes is the coastal dune peninsula that extends south to Bodega Head and forms the western and northern sides of Bodega Harbor. At the northern end of Bodega Harbor is the Bodega Dunes Campground which includes 98 campsites that can accommodate recreation vehicles. Campground amenities include hot showers, flush toilets, and a trailer sanitation dump station. The day use area includes a disabled accessible boardwalk out to a classic sandy beach. Hiking and equestrian trails provide access to dune areas. Snowy plover habitat areas are located along the coastal areas.

Salmon Creek Beach

Salmon Creek Beach includes a coastal lagoon that forms as sand closes the mouth of Salmon Creek. This beach is a popular summer destination. Nearly two miles of unbroken, scenic, sandy beach make this an excellent place for surf fishing, beachcombing, and picnicking. This area is also popular with surfers. Snowy plover habitat areas are located in this area. The existing park headquarters is located adjacent to State Highway One at this location.

Portuguese Beach and Schoolhouse Beach

Portuguese Beach and Schoolhouse Beach are beautiful sandy beaches surrounded by rocky headlands. Rock fishing and surf fishing are popular in these locations.

Duncan's Landing

Duncan's Landing is a coastal promontory point that is famous for two things: as an early-day landing for loading small coastal ships with lumber and food products and for being the most dangerous point along the Sonoma Coast due to large and unpredictable surf, the steep beach, and severe undertow. In the spring the wildflower displays are spectacular.

Wright's Beach

Wright's Beach is a broad sandy beach located approximately at the midpoint of the Sonoma Coast coastline. The name refers to the Wright family who once owned the ranch lands in this area. Dangerous surf occurs in this location. A campground consisting of 27 developed campsites is located adjacent to the beach. No showers are present at the Wright's Beach campground, but campers may use the hot showers at nearby Bodega Dunes Campground. Running water and flush toilets are nearby. When the campground is filled, the overflow area in the Wright's Beach Picnic Area can be used for self-contained vehicles.

Shell Beach

Shell Beach is a favorite location for beachcombing and tidepooling. It is used by schools as an outdoor classroom for the study of tidal pool marine life and enjoys a reputation as a prime fishing spot.

Goat Rock and Goat Rock Beach

Goat Rock and Goat Rock Beach, near the mouth of the Russian River, are known for the scenic shoreline and easily accessible sandy beach. Dangerous surf occurs in this location. Day use picnic tables and restroom facilities are available at this location. Goat Rock Beach is home to a colony of harbor seals.

Jenner Visitor Center

The park's volunteer-staffed Visitor Center is located in the coastal community of Jenner near the mouth of the Russian River.

Carrington

Carrington is a former ranch land parcel located on the inland side of State Highway One between Salmon Creek and Marshall Gulch. The western terminus of Coleman Valley Road is located at Carrington. Several ranch structures that are on the Sonoma County Historic Register are present on the Carrington parcel. No park facilities have been established here yet.

Red Hill

Red Hill is a coastal open space parcel located inland of State Highway One between Wright's Beach and the Willow Creek watershed. It consists mostly of coastal grassland. Trail access to the coastal ridgetop and the inland Pomo Canyon Environmental Camp are available from the Red Hill Parcel.

Other beaches and coastal locations at Sonoma Coast SB include Miwok Beach, Coleman Beach, Arched Rock Beach, Marshall Gulch, Carmet Beach, Gleason Beach, Furlong Gulch, Gull Rock, Arched Rock, Blind Beach, Jenner Beach, and Russian Gulch.

WILLOW CREEK WATERSHED

The Willow Creek watershed is a key natural open space connecting the Sonoma Coast and the Russian River watershed. The recent addition of the Upper Willow Creek property ensured park ownership of the major portion of the coastal watershed of Willow Creek, an important tributary to the Russian River. The Willow Creek Watershed Management Plan completed in March 2005 provides for a comprehensive and cooperative approach to resource recovery of the watershed. The Willow Creek watershed was once part of the Willow Creek Ranch, which also operated a ferry there.

Willow Creek Environmental Camp

The Willow Creek environmental camp consists of eleven primitive campsites with fire rings, picnic tables, and pit toilets. Campsites are within 1/4 mile from the parking lot and no running water is provided at the camp sites. The Willow Creek Environmental camp is the only State Park campground on the Russian River within Sonoma Coast SB. Sites are shaded by willows and are located close to a large beach for swimming and fishing. Blue heron, egrets, osprey, and occasionally river otters can be seen by the river. To protect the wildlife, no dogs are allowed.

Pomo Canyon Environmental Camp

The campground is located in the lower portion of the Willow Creek watershed. The campground consists of 20 campsites with fire rings, picnic tables, pit toilets, and running water nearby. Campsites are within 1/4 mile from the parking lot. One of the campsites is disabled accessible. Camps are set in a beautiful redwood grove among the ferns. A three mile trail to Shell Beach takes off from the campground, crossing seasonal streams, and rising up into the grassland with marvelous views of the river and finally the ocean. To protect the wildlife, no dogs are allowed.

1.1.5 REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT

SONOMA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN AND LOCAL COASTAL PLAN

Sonoma Coast SB is located within the planning area of the Sonoma County General Plan (County General Plan) and with the exception of the Freezeout Creek watershed Sonoma

Coast SB is located within the planning area of the Local Coastal Plan (LCP). While the County General Plan does not apply to State-owned properties such as Sonoma Coast SB, the LCP is applicable as Sonoma Coast SB lies within the designated Coastal Zone. Both the County General Plan and the LCP directly affect the surrounding land use and thereby the context of Sonoma Coast SB.

The Sonoma County LCP was most recently updated and adopted in 2001. Another update of the LCP is expected by 2007. The LCP contains the local land use zone map and the zoning ordinances, which define the land uses that may occur in the unincorporated areas of the county if the properties are not federally owned. The existing LCP, which is based primarily on data collected in 1979 for the preparation of the previous LCP, includes maps on biological, cultural, and visual resources in the coastal zone of the county, as well as geologic hazards.

The broad purpose of the County General Plan is to express policies that will guide decisions on future growth and development. Specific plans, area plans, zonings, subdivisions, local agency projects, and other local land use decisions must be consistent with the County General Plan.

The County General Plan includes many elements that guide various facets of growth and development within the county. The elements most applicable to the Sonoma Coast SB planning process include the Land Use, Open Space, Resource Conservation, and Circulation and Transit elements. The Land Use element describes where the different kinds of land uses may be established in the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County. The Open Space element designates various portions of the county in several open space classifications. The limitations on types and intensities of permissible uses and special development and permit review requirements are expressed in the text for each open space classification. In the Resource Conservation element, policies are expressed for managed production and conservation of various resources, including soils, water, forests and timber, vegetation and wildlife, fisheries and harbors, geothermal, mineral and energy, atmospheric resources, and air quality. In the Circulation and Transit element, the plans for the county's future highway and transit systems are described (County of Sonoma 1989).

Sonoma County is currently updating its General Plan, which was last updated in 1989. The new General Plan, with a planning horizon to 2020, is expected to be adopted in 2007.

NEARBY CITY GENERAL PLANS

The nearest incorporated cities are Sebastopol and Santa Rosa. The City of Sebastopol General Plan was adopted in 1994, and the City of Santa Rosa General Plan was adopted on June 18, 2002. Because the boundaries of these cities do not extend to properties in the immediate vicinity of Sonoma Coast SB, they do not directly affect Sonoma Coast SB and the surrounding land uses.

The smaller unincorporated communities within or adjacent to Sonoma Coast SB, including Bodega Bay, Duncans Mills, and Jenner, do not have their own general plans and are subject to the Sonoma County General Plan and LCP described above.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS GENERAL PLAN

1.2.1 GENERAL PLAN AND THE STATE PARK PLANNING PROCESS

General plans are broad-based policy documents that provide management guidelines for a park by defining a framework for implementing diverse missions of resource stewardship, interpretation, and visitor use and services. By legal mandate, every State Park in California must develop a general plan prior to approval of major developments. The general plan defines the purpose, vision, and long-term goals and guidelines for the management of Sonoma Coast SB. A general plan is not a project specific document, and typically does not define specific objectives, methodologies, and designs on how to accomplish its goals.

General planning provides opportunities to assess Sonoma Coast SB resource stewardship, its facility development and management, and its interpretation to the public. It provides guidelines for future land use management and designation, including land acquisition and the facilities required to accommodate expected increases in visitation.

The general plan provides a comprehensive framework that guides the Park's developments, ongoing management, and public use for the next 20 years or more. Because it is in effect for so long, the plan must remain consistent in the vision for the Park's future, general in its scope, and flexible in its proposed approaches for solving future management problems.

1.2.2 SUBSEQUENT PLANNING ACTIONS

Major programs and projects that will be implemented during the lifespan of the general plan will require additional planning. Future planning efforts may include the preparation of specific resource management plans to protect sensitive resources or the development of site-specific area development plans for new facilities to determine how they will relate to their surrounding.

Future planning efforts also include the preparation of project-specific environmental compliance documents for implementation of management plans and subsequent development projects. These documents should tier off and be consistent with the General Plan's Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Securing any permits required for future implementation projects would also be part of subsequent planning actions.

Finally, the general plan may need to be amended if new developments or major commitments of resources are proposed for areas not covered in this plan or if circumstances change, making facts and findings in this plan no longer accurate.

1.2.3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public input is an important component of the general planning process. It is sought at the very beginning and throughout the planning process for a variety of reasons. State Parks are entrusted by the people of California to the Department for managing natural and cultural resources and for providing recreational opportunity. Constituency building is needed to ensure the public's support for their local Parks. A variety of methods, such as public meetings, and user surveys were used to identify stakeholders of Sonoma Coast SB and the general plan and to identify their needs and concerns for the future of Sonoma Coast SB.

Local residents and stakeholders as well as specific user group were able to provide important information about Sonoma Coast SB that is not common knowledge and not contained in Sonoma Coast SB Unit Data File.

Finally, all general plans have an amendment/revision process built into them, allowing the plans to be flexible if new situations arise.

1.3 CONTENTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN

1.3.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The existing conditions section of the plan describes the current physical and social conditions of Sonoma Coast SB. It includes information on land use; significant physical, biotic, cultural, aesthetic, and recreation values; and existing facilities. The existing conditions section also lists system-wide and regional planning influences affecting Sonoma Coast SB, describes its demographic resident and visitor profile, and lists issues to be addressed in the General Plan that have been identified during the early phases of the planning process. Input for the existing conditions section has been gathered through a variety of sources including:

- ▶ review of Sonoma Coast SB data file,
- ▶ review of other applicable technical documents,
- ▶ review of local and regional applicable planning documents,
- ▶ database searches,
- ▶ limited fieldwork,
- ▶ contact with agencies and other knowledgeable individuals, and
- ▶ user surveys and public meetings.

1.3.2 PLAN SECTIONS

The "Plan" component of the General Plan (Chapter 3) for Sonoma Coast SB contains the following sections:

- ▶ Purpose and Vision
- ▶ Park-wide Goals and Guidelines
- ▶ Park Carrying Capacity
- ▶ Park Management Zones

1.3.3 PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

The Program EIR contained in the General Plan (Chapter 4) includes the following sections:

- ▶ Introduction to the Environmental Analysis
- ▶ Summary
- ▶ Project Description
- ▶ Environmental Setting
- ▶ Environmental Effects Eliminated from Further Analysis
- ▶ Environmental Impacts
- ▶ Other CEQA Considerations
- ▶ Alternatives to the Proposed Project

In addition to these sections, the General Plan environmental analysis section contains a list of the organizations and persons consulted during its preparation, the report preparers, a complete list of references, a glossary of terms, technical appendices, exhibits, and tables.

Volume II of the General Plan and EIR contains all public comments received during the circulation of the draft EIR, responses to these comments, mitigation monitoring plan, and additional appendices, as applicable. (Volume II will be provided after the draft EIR is circulated to the public.)

1.3.4 PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM EIR

The purpose of the Program EIR is to analyze and disclose the preferred alternative's effects on the environment, in accordance with Section 15168 of the State CEQA Guidelines. It discloses any significant and potentially significant effects that may result from the implementation of the General Plan. The EIR informs decision-makers and the public about the environmental consequences of the adoption of the General Plan, consistent with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State CEQA Guidelines.

1.3.5 PROGRAM EIR SCOPE

Because the EIR prepared for the General Plan is programmatic in scope, it does not contain project-specific analysis for any of the projects recommended in the General Plan. Specific projects will undergo subsequent CEQA review in the future as described above under "Subsequent Planning Actions."

The tiering process of environmental review is incorporated into this EIR. Tiering in an EIR prepared as part of a general plan allows agencies to consider broad environmental issues at the general planning stage, followed by more detailed examination of actual development projects in subsequent environmental documents. These later documents incorporate, by reference, the general discussions from the broader EIR in the General Plan and concentrate solely on the issues specific to the projects [Public Resources Code Section 21093; California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15152]. This document represents the

goals and guidelines for resource management, visitor use, and administration and first tier of environmental review.

Future second tier review will provide more detailed information and environmental analysis. For example, each future management plan and area development plan will be subject to further environmental review to determine if it is consistent with the General Plan and to identify any significant environmental impacts and mitigation measures that may be specific to the area development plan.

Mitigation generally requires resource specialists to evaluate the scope of work, identify the cause of the impacts, and specify measures to avoid or reduce the impacts to a less-than-significant level. More comprehensive environmental review will be possible at the more specific levels of planning, where facility size, location, and capacity can be explicitly delineated, rather than at the general plan level.