CALIFORNIA STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
STAFF REPORT COVER PAGE

Scotts Valley, CA
July 2, 2026

AGENDA ITEM: 08 Big Basin Redwoods State Park Supplemental Environmental Impact Report and General Plan Amendment

STAFF: Will Fourt, Santa Cruz District

SUBJECT: Big Basin Redwoods State Park General Plan Amendment, Facilities Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Report

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I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. Certify the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Big Basin Redwoods State Park General Plan Amendment and Facilities Management Plan.

2. Approve the proposed General Plan Amendment for Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

II. BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

To address consistency with the park's 2013 General Plan, staff have prepared the proposed General Plan Amendment (GPA) to update specific sections of the 2013 General Plan to ensure consistency with the BBFMP.

A supplement to the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2013 General Plan has been prepared according to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to cover both the BBFMP and the GPA.

IV. ATTACHMENTS

1. Staff Report
2. Primer for Review of the Draft General Plan Amendment and Final EIR
3. Final Big Basin Redwoods State Park Facilities Management Plan
4. Proposed Big Basin Redwoods State Park General Plan Amendment

5. Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the Reimagining Big Basin Redwoods State Park Facilities Management Plan and General Plan Amendments
6. Resolution 09-2026: Certification of Final Environmental Impact Report for Big Basin Redwoods State Park, Exhibit A: CEQA Findings of Fact, and Exhibit B: Statement of Overriding Considerations
7. Resolution 10-2026: Approval of the General Plan Amendment for Big Basin Redwoods State Park

CALIFORNIA STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
STAFF REPORT

Scotts Valley, CA
July 2, 2026

STAFF REPORT: Big Basin Redwoods State Park General Plan Amendment and EIR

STAFF: Will Fourt, Santa Cruz District

SUBJECT: Proposed General Plan Update and Final Environmental Impact Report

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OBJECTIVE

This staff report provides a summary of the post-fire planning at Big Basin Redwoods State Parks and the proposed General Plan Amendment and Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report.

INTRODUCTION

Big Basin Redwoods State Park is California's oldest state park, located in the central coastal side of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Most of the park is in Santa Cruz County and a small northern portion is in San Mateo County. Most of the park is made up of old growth and previously logged coast redwood forests mixed with other conifers, oaks, and chaparral. BBRSP encompasses approximately 18,200 acres.

Prior to the CZU fire, the park received an average of 20,000 visitors a month, offering a variety of recreational opportunities including camping and day use. Visitor activity was focused primarily in the Old Growth zone in the former Headquarters area, along Highway 236, where some of the historic buildings were used to operate the park. Here, visitors could view interpretive exhibits, attend naturalist programs or events, visit the camp store, and access trails and campgrounds.

In 2020, the CZU Lightning Complex Fire (CZU Fire) burned approximately 86,500 acres in Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties, burning 97 percent of the park and all park facilities. Nearly all historic buildings and structures within the park were destroyed, including the visitor center and campfire center amphitheater, which were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps as a part of the 1930's New Deal programs. All overnight facilities, including campground infrastructure and utilities, and tent cabins, were lost. At least 47

pedestrian bridges, 6 vehicular bridges, and many other trail structures were also destroyed. The park remained closed to the public after the CZU fire until it partially reopened for limited day-use access with temporary visitor facilities in Summer 2022.

Immediately after the fire, State Parks initiated a process to look at the future for the park and establish guiding principles for how to rebuild and manage the park after the fire. This vision process culminated in the creation of the *Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary* document in the summer of 2022.

Building on the *Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary*, State Parks finalized a *Cornerstone Document* for the park in 2024 that provides a summary of the post-fire park, the basis for future strategies for operations and improvements, and a suggestive roadmap for implementing park goals and projects.

DESCRIPTION

State Parks staff and consultants have prepared the *Big Basin Redwoods Facilities Management Plan* (BBFMP) to guide rebuilding the park according to the *Reimagining Big Basin Vision Summary*. To address consistency with the park's 2013 General Plan, staff have prepared a proposed General Plan Amendment (GPA) to update specific sections of the 2013 General Plan to ensure consistency with the BBFMP. A supplement to the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2013 General Plan has been prepared according to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to cover both the BBFMP and the GPA. The following sections summarize these documents and provide context.

The Big Basin Facilities Management Plan (BBFMP)

The BBFMP provides a framework for rebuilding and restoring facilities at Big Basin Redwoods State Park following the 2020 CZU Fire. The plan would guide the reconstruction of recreational, operational, and visitor-serving facilities while prioritizing forest health, climate resilience, ecological restoration, and increasing equity in park access.

The plan would emphasize restoring and protecting the park's old-growth redwood ecosystem. Rebuilding the park according to plan would significantly reduce development within sensitive forest areas as compared to pre-fire development by removing former campgrounds and infrastructure and minimizing paving and soil compaction in the old-growth core. Restoration strategies in sensitive areas have the goal of allowing natural processes to occur and would include removing paving, reducing building footprints, converting some roads to trails, restoring natural hydrology, enabling forest stewardship projects, including prescribed fire, and expanding meadow and wetland habitat.

The BBFMP also would plan renewed visitor access and recreation. The park would support pre-fire visitation levels through a shuttle-based circulation system and expanded transit connections from outside the park. The plan includes a diverse range of overnight accommodations such as car camping, walk-in/bike-in camping, group camps, friends and family campsites, RV camping, cabins, and tent cabins. The plan would provide

recreational access to the redwood forest including the park's extensive backcountry trail system.

The BBFMP includes facility planning, design, and management that respond to changing conditions and increased environmental hazards as a result of climate change. Park-wide strategies for climate adaptation include active stewardship for forest health and fire resilience, hydrologic restoration, climate change hazards and adaptations, old growth restoration projects, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

The BBFMP was developed by parks staff and consultants from 2023 – 2025. Developed through extensive public, stakeholder, and Tribal engagement, the BBFMP represents a collaborative process balancing many priorities and viewpoints, including historically underrepresented groups, local and environmental stakeholders, and Indigenous partners. There were three rounds of community engagement and opportunities for the public and stakeholders to participate in the process. The Public Draft Plan was published in October of 2025, and minimal edits to fix typographical errors were included before the Final Plan was approved by the Planning and Acquisition Committee in April 2026.

General Plan Amendment (GPA)

The proposed GPA would update the park's 2013 General Plan to align with the park facilities as proposed in the BBFMP. The GPA would cover Lower Sky Meadow, Saddle Mountain, and Little Basin. In these areas, the GPA proposes text changes to ensure consistent representation of the facilities envisioned in the BBFMP. The GPA would also add future acquisition parcels around Saddle Mountain to the General Plan area.

At Lower Sky Meadow, the GPA changes would reflect the BBFMP's proposed overnight hub that would replace campgrounds lost in the old-growth core at Lower Sky Meadow. Proposed facilities include car camping, cabins, tent cabins, group camps, shuttle stops, camp stores, parking, staff operations, and visitor amenities while protecting and expanding the adjacent wet meadow ecosystem and managing surrounding forests for long-term resilience. The description of Lower Sky Meadow would also be expanded to include Upper Sky Meadow, Rogers Road, and Upper Lodge Road. These areas would support walk-in camping, group camps, cabins, trails, parking, and ecological restoration projects.

At Saddle Mountain, the GPA would add a recommendation to develop staff housing and staff operation areas on properties owned by State Parks around Saddle Mountain.

At Little Basin, the GPA would add recommendations are added to provide a mixed Tribal use area with a cultural center for collaboration with Indigenous groups for stewardship, interpretation and cultural activities, and to provide staff housing.

A Draft GPA was released to the public in October 2025, and no comments on the GPA were received during the comment period for the Draft EIR. Only formatting changes were made to the Draft GPA to create the proposed GPA with a date of July 2, 2026.

Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (EIR) Process

The Supplemental EIR addresses the environmental effects associated with the implementation of the proposed BBFMP and GPA (proposed project) for Big Basin Redwoods State Park. CEQA requires that local government agencies consider the environmental consequences before acting on projects over which they have discretionary approval authority. An EIR analyzes potential environmental consequences to inform the public and support informed decisions by local and State governmental agency decision makers. The Supplemental EIR focuses on impacts determined to be potentially significant in the Initial Study completed for this project. This Supplemental EIR has been prepared pursuant to the requirements of CEQA and the California Department of Parks and Recreation's (Department's) CEQA procedures.

In 2013, the Big Basin Redwoods State Park General Plan EIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2001112104) was certified. It identifies a significant and unavoidable impact on Biological Resources: "State Parks finds that there is a significant, unavoidable impact with respect to the speculative nature of the marbled murrelet research at this time. It is unclear what is causing the decline in numbers, and conversely, it cannot be said with certainty that the activity of park visitors in the old-grove redwoods is the reason for the dwindling numbers. This lack of definitive information leads State Parks to make overriding findings for a significant unavoidable impact on the marbled murrelet population." All other impacts are less than significant.

CEQA requires that subsequent activities in a program "must be examined in the light of the program EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared." In this case, the CZU Lightning Complex fire constitutes a substantial change to the circumstances under which the project is undertaken. A Supplement to the 2013 EIR is appropriate because only minor additions or changes to the previous EIR are necessary.

Prior to preparation of the Draft Supplemental EIR, the Department issued a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on June 16, 2025. The CEQA-mandated scoping period for this EIR was between June 16, 2025, and July 18, 2025, during which interested agencies and the public could submit comments about the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. During this time, the Department received comment letters from several State and local agencies and organizations, including: Amah Mutsun Land Trust, Native American Heritage Commission, State Water Resources Control Board, Monterey Bay Air Resources District, Center for Biological Diversity, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Pacific Seabird Group, as well as spoken comments at the July 10, 2025, public scoping meeting.

A Draft Supplemental EIR was made available for review by the public and interested parties, agencies, and organizations for the CEQA-mandated 45-day comment period starting Friday, October 17, 2025, and ending Monday, December 1, 2025. During this time, the Department received comment letters from several State and local agencies, organizations, and individuals including: California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Audioguide.app, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity (Center), Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), and three individuals.

A Final Supplemental EIR was prepared and was posted to State Clearinghouse on April 29, 2026, and sent to all interested individuals and organizations on May 18, 2026 along with a notice of the July 2 State Park and Recreation Commission hearing. The Final Supplemental EIR provides complete responses to all written comments on the Draft Supplemental EIR received during the public review period, and provides a reproduction of portions of the DEIR with proposed revisions to text made by State Parks and in response to comments.

Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (EIR) Summary of Impacts and Findings

The Supplemental EIR provides a detailed analysis of the potential significant environmental effects resulting from the implementation of the Project. The environmental analysis found that, when compared to the 2013 General Plan EIR, the proposed project would not result in new impacts or a substantial increase in the severity of impacts, and further analysis of the following topics is not warranted in the Draft Supplemental EIR for the proposed project:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Parks and Recreation
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Transportation
- Utilities and Service Systems

The Supplemental EIR indicates that the project would result in two significant impacts related to ***Biological Resources***. These impacts cannot be avoided or reduced to a less-than-significant level through implementation of mitigation measures, because it remains unclear whether habitat modifications associated with the project would have a substantial adverse effect on marbled murrelet. Due to the uncertainty in the scientific understanding of marbled murrelet and its status in the project area, even with the Department's Standard Project Requirements (SPR), potential impacts remain significant and unavoidable:

> **Impact BIO-1**: Given the uncertain nature of marbled murrelet research, a conclusive determination on the effects the proposed project on the marbled murrelet species cannot be made and is thus assumed to be significant.

Impact BIO-2: The proposed project, together with cumulative projects, has the potential to contribute to a significant cumulative impact on marbled murrelet in Zone 6.

Pursuant to Section 15093 of the CEQA Guidelines, the Commission may adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations, determining that the project's significant and unavoidable impacts to Biological Resources, as detailed in the EIR, are acceptable due to specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits that outweigh the project's significant unavoidable impacts.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of the proposed General Plan Amendment and certification of the Final EIR, California State Parks will move forward with the design, permitting and construction of the first phase of recreational facilities to rebuild Big Basin Redwoods State Park after the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire.

RECOMMENDATION

California State Parks recommends that the Commission take actions related to the Big Basin Redwoods State Park General Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Report by adopting resolutions to:

- Certify the Final Environmental Impact Report and
- Approve the proposed General Plan Amendment

COMMISSION ACTION(S)

Vote to adopt resolutions to:

- Certify the Final Environmental Impact Report and
- Approve the proposed General Plan Amendment

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Reimagining Big Basin Project Website