

Auburn State Recreation Area – General Plan Virtual Tour

On September 30th, 2021, the California State Park and Recreation Commission will consider for approval the Auburn State Recreation Area Preliminary General Plan (GP) and Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR). Because a public tour of the Auburn State Recreation Area has not been possible during the pandemic, the staff of California State Park's Gold Fields District prepared this virtual tour. Enjoy! [Link to Virtual Tour](#)

Transcript of Virtual Tour

(00:00) Auburn State Recreation Area General Plan Virtual Tour

Hello, my name is Barry Smith, District Superintendent of the Gold Fields District of California State Parks.

We'd like to take this opportunity and welcome you to Auburn State Recreation Area [SRA], for it is here - in the heart of California's famed "Gold Country" - where the North and the Middle Forks of the American River join together at their confluence before continuing their journey south into Folsom Lake. Visitors from the Sacramento Valley and beyond are drawn to Auburn State Recreation Area for its rugged natural beauty and endless opportunities it provides for high-quality outdoor recreation, including camping. With 40 miles of steep and picturesque canyons, river recreation is one of the park's main attractions, and it is also one of California's top destinations for whitewater rafting. And with 130 miles of trail, there's no doubt it is incredibly popular with hikers, cyclists, trail runners, and equestrians. It even features its own Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) day-use area, Mammoth Bar. And if that's not enough for you, Auburn State Recreation Area features a three-and-a-half-mile reservoir, Lake Clementine, which accommodates motorized and non-motorized boats.

(01:19) General Plan/Resource Management Plan

Hi, my name is Jim Micheaels, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist for the Gold Fields District and the district lead for the Auburn [SRA] General Plan process. We're here along the Middle Fork of the American River to talk a little bit about why a General Plan now, and a bit about the General Plan process.

So, why a General Plan for Auburn [SRA] right now? The last planning document for Auburn State Recreation Area was the 1992 Interim Resource Management Plan. This plan provided interim direction for the State Recreation Area until Auburn Dam was constructed. The plan focused on management and protection of resources and assumed much of the area would eventually be inundated by a reservoir. Because construction of Auburn Dam is on hold indefinitely, there's a need for a long-range

planning document for the Auburn State Recreation Area in its current condition, which is two river canyons. Another factor is that use has increased at Auburn State Recreation Area over the past several decades, from an estimated 300,000 visitors in 1995 to more than a million visitors currently. This increase in visitation is primarily driven by regional population growth. The plan was developed to provide guidelines to manage, not just the current use and management challenges at Auburn State Recreation Area, but also to anticipate the increased visitation we know will occur as the regional population grows. Due to the uncertainty of Auburn Dam, there have been few public use facilities developed within the [Auburn] State Recreation Area.

Many access points have few facilities and inadequate parking. The General Plan provides the opportunity to assess current and future public use facility needs. This includes considering the statewide latent demand for developed camping, which has long been recognized and was identified in the 2002 California State Park System Plan. Nearly all of the 30,000 acres of land within Auburn State Recreation Area is federal land administered by the U.S Bureau of Reclamation. These lands were acquired or withdrawn following authorization of Auburn Dam in 1965.

Following the cessation of Auburn Dam construction activities in the mid-1970s, California State Parks started managing Auburn State Recreation Area through a series of agreements with the U.S Bureau of Reclamation. In 2012, State Parks and Reclamation entered into a 25-year Managing Partner Agreement (MPA) for the federal lands within Auburn State Recreation Area. The MPA defines the roles and responsibilities of each agency and provides for a cost-share agreement.

The General Plan was prepared in partnership with the U.S Bureau of Reclamation. This single joint document meets both State Parks' General Plan requirements and the Bureau of Reclamation's Resource Management Plan requirements. Following the release of the final EIR/EIS [Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement] for the General Plan in June 2020, Reclamation developed and signed a Record of Decision which adopted the General Plan and Resource Management Plan that August [2020]. The federal approval process for the General Plan and Resource Management Plan is complete.

(04:41) Management Zones

Through this video, Auburn Sector Superintendent Mike Howard is going to take you on a tour of a number of the management zones that were developed in the General Plan process. Mike will be highlighting the existing resources, recreation uses, management challenges, and some of the key proposals for each of these areas throughout this video.

Hi, I'm Mike Howard, Sector Superintendent of Auburn State Recreation Area. I'm excited to take you all on a virtual tour of this incredible gem of the state park system. Hop in, let's go for a ride!

(05:28) Confluence Management Zone

We're here at "the Confluence" along Highway 49 which is one of our busiest day-use areas within Auburn SRA. This particular area has the highest rate of day-use [in the park] and therefore has the highest amount of traffic congestion. This leads to days where there is a lot more demand for our day-use facilities than there is parking. The General Plan seeks to alleviate the traffic and congestion issues throughout the park by working with multi-jurisdictions to improve parking access, formalize parking areas where necessary, provide additional parking facilities where feasible, and additionally, to provide off-site shuttle services to the Confluence, and potentially other areas, to help reduce the number of vehicles parking in this area.

People are drawn to Auburn State Recreation Area for a variety of high-quality water recreation opportunities. These include the North and Middle Fork of the American River - both of these canyons are beautiful pristine remote areas with high-quality whitewater recreation from Class 2 to Class 5, Lake Clementine, which provides motorized and non-motorized recreation for about three-and-a-half miles in the North Fork Canyon, and behind me is the Confluence, which is probably the most widely used area of the park for water recreation. Sadly between 1983 and 2019, 50 people [have] drowned in Auburn SRA's waters. The General Plan provides several guidelines to increase water safety throughout Auburn SRA. These include additional and more enhanced social media messages, press releases, partnerships with other agencies, and a variety of ways to help inform the public of the specific dangers in the specific areas of Auburn SRA.

I'm very excited to share that in 2021 at Auburn SRA we started the first lifeguard program in the state that is dedicated to a swift-water rescue environment which very likely has resulted in the saving of lives, especially here in the Confluence.

(07:35) Auburn Interface Management Zone

We're here in the Auburn Interface Management Zone and this particular place has a ton of unique history. This is the location of what would have been the Auburn Dam. You can see the excavation from the Auburn Dam on both sides of the river here. The river was de-watered and re-channeled through diversion tunnels. To the left of me, through this hillside, the Auburn cofferdam, you can see part of that scar behind me. And what we have today is unique to the state of California - this is the only set of man-made rapids anywhere in the state, and one of only a handful in the United States. As you can see, there's nobody behind me. Access to this area is particularly difficult.

Boaters who do want to come here to recreate need to put-in at the Confluence which is about three or four miles upstream from us. The only real vehicle access is at Birdsall which is a boat ramp just downstream from here, but that doesn't provide access to this particular section of river for people to enjoy. A whitewater park like this is really intended to be run over and over. The General Plan does provide guidance for additional day-use facilities and parking facilities and day-use access in this management zone, primarily to get people down to this particular section of the river. Adding additional day-use facilities in this area has the potential to relieve the impacted Confluence Management Zone and the traffic that we discussed there earlier. When the river was diverted, through the diversion tunnels I mentioned a moment ago, there was no water in the river which you see behind me. People could easily take trail hikes, ride their horses from the Auburn side of the river to the Cool side of the river. When this facility was built, and the river was re-watered in its original channel, that Auburn-to-Cool trail crossing was lost. In 2007 State Parks did a feasibility study on a new Auburn-to-Cool trail crossing. The preferred alternative for the Auburn-to-Cool trail crossing could include a bridge somewhere in this area, likely downstream from this location. It was decided during that feasibility study to wait until the Auburn [SRA] General Plan was completed to determine if an Auburn-to-Cool trail crossing was appropriate for this area.

(09:45) Knickerbocker Management Zone

We're here in the Knickerbocker Management Zone of Auburn SRA. This area is unique within the park, in that it can be characterized by rolling grassy hills and oak woodland, as opposed to the steep river canyons that dominate the rest of the park. From where I'm standing, I can see the buildings in downtown Sacramento, as well as the tops of the Sierra crest around Lake Tahoe behind me. This area has an extensive trail system consisting of many miles of trails that were once old ranch roads, dam access roads, and various other trails that dominate the area. Because of the extensive trail system throughout the Knickerbocker Management Zone, this area is very popular with special events including equestrian events, running, and bicycling events. Within the General Plan there are guidelines to potentially increase camping in this area, which could potentially include a group campsite which would be popular with our special events.

(10:35) Mammoth Bar Management Zone

This is the Mammoth Bar Management Zone at Auburn SRA. This area is a great example of the kinds of mixed-use that we see throughout Auburn State Recreation Area. At the Mammoth Bar OHV area we have two motocross tracks - one for kids and one for adults - which, you can see behind me, is being rebuilt right now. We also have about nine miles of OHV trails and this area is very popular with mountain bikers, swimmers... it's a raft takeout... you can see people gold-panning and picnicking here

just about any day of the week. Some of the highlights for the Mammoth Bar Management Zone in the Auburn General Plan include potentially repairing, re-routing, closing, or adding new trails to our trail system. If the track were to wash out again like it did in 2017 and has done in prior years, we would consider relocating the track at more of an upland location. There are also provisions in the Plan for adding day-use facilities and potentially camping here at Mammoth Bar.

(11:37) Lake Clementine Management Zone

This is the Lake Clementine Management Zone. Behind the picturesque North Fork Dam, Lake Clementine extends about three-and-a-half miles upstream towards Upper Lake Clementine. Lake Clementine is very popular with both non-motorized and motorized boating. Lake Clementine also features a boat-in campground and a marina consisting of about 50 boats. Upper Lake Clementine is a very popular spot for day-use due to its beautiful swimming pools and wide gravel beach. Because of the steep terrain surrounding Lake Clementine, there are not many opportunities to expand the facilities here. The General Plan primarily seeks to maintain the existing facilities and does provide the potential for expanding a trail connection from the Confluence to the Ponderosa Bridge and additionally the expansion of potential paddle-craft concessions near the marina.

(12:27) Ruck-A-Chucky and Cherokee Bar Management Zone

We're here in the Ruck-A-Chucky and Cherokee Bar Management Zone along the beautiful Middle Fork of the American River. The primary uses in this area currently are a campground at Ruck-A-Chucky consisting of five campsites and a whitewater boat takeout, and Cherokee Bar is largely used as a day-use area. The General Plan has provisions for enhancing road improvements in this area as well as the potential for expansion of camping opportunities, and it also includes the potential for a trail bridge crossing the Middle Fork of the American River. Both the Tevis Cup and the Western States Endurance Run cross the Middle Fork of the American along the Western States Trail which is why the potential for a trail bridge was included in this area.

(13:12) Upper North Fork Management Zone

We're here in the Upper North Fork Management Zone which extends from Lake Clementine to the Mineral Bar Campground along the pristine North Fork of the American River. This management zone primarily consists of two areas, Yankee Jim's Bridge area and the Ponderosa Bridge area, both of which are excellent day-use opportunities. The General Plan provides guidance for working with counties to enhance road and parking access to these areas, as well as providing a potential trail connection

between Yankee Jim's Bridge and the Mineral Bar Campground. Providing this trail connection would link these two beautiful pristine areas of the North Fork for our visitors.

(13:53) Mineral Bar Management Zone

I'm standing here on the historic Iowa Hill Bridge in the Mineral Bar Management Zone. At Mineral Bar we have a campground that offers 16 campsites with excellent access to the North Fork of the American River. This area is very popular due to its camping, swimming, and whitewater boating activities. During spring runoff, Mineral Bar is the put-in for the Class 4-5 section of whitewater on the North Fork of the American River extending from Mineral Bar Campground to the Ponderosa Bridge. The General Plan provides guidance for enhancing the existing day-use facilities, restrooms, paddle-craft launching facilities, as well as adding up to 20 campsites within the Mineral Bar Campground footprint.

(14:35) Wildfire Management

We're here on Stagecoach Trail in the middle of the Auburn shaded fuel break to discuss some of the key points regarding fire management within the Auburn General Plan/Resource Management Plan [GP/RMP]. As previously noted, State Parks manages Auburn SRA with a Managing Partnership Agreement [MPA] between Reclamation and California State Parks. Within the Managing Partnership Agreement [MPA], the roles for each agency are defined. State Parks is primarily responsible for managing recreational opportunities. The Bureau of Reclamation's primary role is to manage cultural and natural resources as well as fire management. Reclamation has developed a fire plan for Auburn SRA which is updated as conditions change. Reclamation has recently developed and funded a five-year fuel management plan which would implement fuel breaks similar to the one you see behind me throughout Auburn SRA in key locations. The General Plan provides some strategies for reducing wildfire risk within Auburn SRA by expanding goals for fuel treatment and minimizing fire risk when planning any new facilities. These planning strategies would include planning for emergency ingress [and] egress, implementing fuel clearance around any new facilities, evacuation planning for all new facilities, identifying fire restriction needs for site-specific areas, and determining whether fire rings should be provided in new facilities. Lastly, any significant new project would need to be approved by the State Fire Marshal.

I hope you've enjoyed this tour of Auburn State Recreation Area and the General Plan process. We look forward to providing additional information about the General Plan and answering any of your questions. Thank you.