

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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This environmental impact report (EIR) has been prepared by Environmental Science Associates for the County of Santa Clara Department of Parks and Recreation (County) pursuant to the applicable provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and its implementing guidelines (CEQA Guidelines). The County is the lead agency for this EIR, which examines the overall effects of implementing the proposed Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch County Park Master Plan (referred to throughout this document as the “Master Plan,” “project,” or “proposed project”) for the 4,448-acre Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch County Park (referred to throughout this document as “Park,” “project site” or “site”), located in the southeastern portion of Santa Clara County.

CEQA requires that, before a decision can be made to approve a project with potentially significant environmental effects, an EIR must be prepared that fully describes the environmental effects of the project. The EIR is a public informational document for use by governmental agencies and the public. It is intended to identify and evaluate potential environmental consequences of the proposed project, to identify mitigation measures that would lessen or avoid significant adverse impacts, and to examine feasible alternatives to the project. The information contained in the EIR is reviewed and considered by the lead agency prior to its action to approve, disapprove, or modify the proposed project.

CEQA states that the lead agency (in this case the County) shall neither approve nor implement a project as proposed unless the significant environmental effects of that project have been reduced to a less-than-significant level, essentially “eliminating, avoiding, or substantially lessening” its expected impacts. If the lead agency approves the project despite residual significant adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated to less-than-significant levels, the agency must state the reasons for its action in writing. This “Statement of Overriding Considerations” must be included in the record of project approval.

This EIR has been prepared to inform the County, responsible agencies, trustee agencies, and the public of the proposed project’s environmental effects. The EIR is intended to publicly disclose those impacts that may be significant and adverse, describe the possible measures that would mitigate or avoid such impacts, and describe a reasonable range of alternatives to the project. The illustrative figures of the proposed project contained herein, although necessarily conceptual in nature, describe the major features of the Master Plan.

HISTORY OF PLANNING EFFORTS FOR COYOTE LAKE- HARVEY BEAR RANCH COUNTY PARK

THE EARLY YEARS – 1936 TO 1990

In 1936, Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) constructed a dam on Coyote Creek that created the lake and leased out lands along its shoreline to private concessionaires for recreation. By the 1960's, efforts to improve water quality and interest in creating more public access led the SCVWD to conclude that private leases should be phased out at the lake. Coyote Lake County Park was established in 1969 when the County entered into a long-term lease with SCVWD to operate Coyote Lake for recreational purposes. The County Park included 760 acres owned by SCVWD, including the 625 acre lake. This land, plus 36 acres of County Parks property, comprised the original Park. Under the lease, operation of all recreational activities became the responsibility of the Santa Clara County Parks Department while the SCVWD retained control of the lake's waters.

From 1969 to 1990, County Parks made improvements to facilities at Coyote Lake that emphasized water based recreation. Boating, fishing, water skiing, camping, and swimming were popular pastimes. By 1979 any remaining leases for private cabin plots had expired and all cabins were removed. In the late 1980's, Coyote Lake was designated as Secondary Drinking Water Source by SCVWD and swimming was prohibited. In 1989, Coyote Lake was drained by SCVWD to construct new dam outlets. The California Department of Dam Safety was also considering new seismic regulations that would eventually limit the lake level to 50% of capacity, thereby impacting boating and fishing.

THE RECENT PAST – 1990 TO 1997

With increasing water restrictions at Coyote Lake and rising demand for outdoor recreation in the County, the Parks Department began a master planning effort in the early 1990's. As one of its goals, the 1992 Draft Master Plan sought to look beyond water based recreation for the area. The 1992 Draft Master Plan outlined an ambitious plan to diversify recreation at Coyote Lake and meet the demands for many types of recreation otherwise unavailable in the area. In 1993, the Draft Master Plan was put on hold pending the completion of a countywide SCVWD Watershed Management Study. Coyote Watershed Stream Stewardship Plan was completed studying February 2002.

In 1997, the County Parks and Recreation Department acquired 2,940 acres of the former Harvey Bear Ranch and 711 acres of the adjacent Mendoza Ranch. The families of the former owners wished that these properties be retained as open space and parklands in memory of their parents. These properties were added to Coyote Lake County Park.

PLANNING EFFORTS TODAY

Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch County Park is now a much larger Park than was previously addressed in the 1992 Draft Master Plan. The original 796-acre Park has been expanded with the above-noted acquisitions by an additional 3,652 acres. It now encompasses the entire western side of Coyote Lake, the ridgeline and lands west of the ridge. The regional context of area has also changed. Since 1992, the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, in cooperation with the Nature Conservancy, has acquired the 9,000 acre Lakeview Meadows Ranch directly east of Coyote Lake. A significant number of acres have been added to nearby Henry Coe State Park. Meanwhile, suburbanization of southern Santa Clara County has occurred. It was determined that a new master plan effort would be required to make considered and informed decisions about the use and management of Coyote Lake Harvey Bear Ranch County Park for the next twenty years.

Preparation of a new master plan began in November 2000. It included extensive cataloging of natural resources, sensitive habitats, emerging trends and use patterns of Parks visitors, and the direct involvement of the local community. The new Master Plan has considered earlier planning efforts, best management practices, and cost/benefit analysis of any proposed new uses. It also focused on diversifying water and land-based recreation, as well as the preservation and enhancement of the Park's natural resources.

The proposed project is the adoption and implementation of the proposed Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch County Park Master Plan. The Draft Master Plan was published in May 2003 (Bellinger Foster Steinmetz Landscape Architecture, 2003), and is incorporated by reference into this EIR. The Master Plan includes implementation of the Natural Resource Management Plan (Rana Creek, 2003), which also is incorporated by reference into this EIR.

APPROACH OF THE EIR

The Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch County Park Master Plan is subject to a program EIR because the Master Plan constitutes a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project that is related: "...a) geographically; b) as logical parts in a chain of contemplated actions; and c) in connection with the issuance of...plans...to govern the conduct of a continuing program..." (CEQA Guidelines 15168[a]). A program EIR generally establishes a foundation for "tiered" or project-level environmental documents that may be subsequently prepared in accordance with the overall program. According to CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(b), a program EIR can provide the following advantages:

- (1) Provide an occasion for a more exhaustive consideration of effects and alternatives than would be practical in an EIR on an individual action;
- (2) Ensure consideration of cumulative impacts that might be slighted in a project-level analysis;
- (3) Avoid duplicative reconsideration of basic policy considerations;
- (4) Allow the lead agency to consider broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures at the earliest possible time when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative impacts; and

- (5) Allow a reduction in paperwork.

The Program EIR analyzes, at a general level, a broad range of policies and management actions. In this way, decision-makers and the public can get a sense of the overall physical effects of the whole Master Plan. The purpose of the Program EIR is to focus attention to those aspects of a future project (often a long-range plan) that could bring about adverse physical impacts. A Program EIR in this way serves as a foundation for subsequent environmental documentation and/or clearance. CEQA Guidelines Section 15146 indicates that “the degree of specificity required in an EIR will correspond to the degree of specificity involved in the underlying activity which is described in the EIR....”

The Program EIR identifies and analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the program-wide policies and management actions presented in the Master Plan, and proposes mitigation measures that would reduce those impacts determined to be significant. With the Program EIR, the County and the public will be able to consider the Master Plan in its entirety and the impacts of associated with policies and management actions in the Master Plan, some of which might be overlooked if considered on a case-by-case basis. The Program EIR also allows for consideration of broad policy alternatives and their possible environmental effects in a more exhaustive manner than would otherwise be possible. Optimally, this process allows for development of program-wide mitigation measures at a stage when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative environmental impacts, and provides an opportunity to reduce paperwork. Program-level analysis differs from project-level analysis, which benefits from detailed, specific plans of a project (i.e., grading, footprint) and usually applies more directly to actual construction.

This Program EIR calls out specific management actions or policies that would probably require further project-level environmental analysis, such as new trails or facilities. In addition, some County activities that require approval from other agencies may be subject to subsequent CEQA review. The project description included in Chapter II indicates those management actions that could require further environmental analysis. In addition, if new information becomes known prior to implementation of an action that could lead to significant impacts, such as project location, further environmental analysis would be required.

The following elements of the Master Plan are reviewed at a project-level in this report:

- Interim Park entrance at West Flat area
- Picnic areas in Western Flat area
- Trail staging areas at West Flat area and Mendoza Ranch
- Overflow Parking/equestrian camping in West Flat Area
- Phase 1 trails, gates and fencing, and trails naming and signage, West Flat Area and Mendoza Ranch Area,
- Implementation of the Natural Resource Management Plan
- Hang-gliding launch and emergency landing site in northern ridge area, and landing area adjacent to Roop Road
- Campground improvements: addition of showers and reduction of campground density
- Lakeside pedestrian trail and fishing improvements
- Self-launch areas for kayaks/non-motorized boats

- Historical/Cultural Preservation/Interpretation
- Use of southern pond for annual Fishability Days event

The following elements of the Master Plan are reviewed at a program-level in this report:

- Bicycle park
- Dog off-leash area
- Equestrian/agricultural events center
- Events pavilion
- Golf course
- Fishing pond
- Historic restoration and interpretation
- Maintenance facilities at West Flat and Lakeside areas
- Park Entrance (West Flat final configuration to replace interim plan; new entrance at Mendoza Ranch area)
- Ranger office
- Completion of staging areas
- Phase 2 and Phase 3 trails as described in the Trails Plan
- Informal lawn play area
- Implementation of the Natural Resource Management Plan
- Campground amphitheater
- New Lakeside campground (based on demand)
- Improvements to existing Lakeside entrance area, visitor center and maintenance yard
- Increased fish stocking, habitat and shoreline improvements
- Picnic area improvements and new group picnic area
- Water play area
- Youth campground
- Hang-gliding landing site Mendoza Ranch area
- Environmental education center
- Lakeside roadway safety improvements

This includes a specific analysis and mitigation so that decisions regarding these projects could be made as quickly as possible. If new information becomes known about these projects prior to implementation that could lead to significant impacts, such as a change in the project description, further environmental analysis could be required.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

On March 14, 2003, the County issued a Notice of Preparation–Environmental Impact Report (NOP) to governmental agencies, organizations, and persons interested in the project. The NOP is included as Appendix A in this EIR. The NOP requested those agencies with regulatory authority over the project to identify the environmental issues relevant to their authority that should be addressed in the EIR, and encouraged agencies and the public, in general, to provide comments on the proposed content of the EIR. Comments on the NOP were received from the several local, state, and federal agencies. No members of the public submitted written comments on the NOP.

A kickoff meeting was held in November 2000 to provide the public opportunity to present comments on the proposed content of the Master Plan and EIR. The meeting was advertised in

the *Gilroy Dispatch* and *Morgan Hill Times* newspaper and on the Parks Department website, and the public was invited to attend. Approximately 120 members of the public attended the meeting; participated in roundtable discussions, and filled out comment cards. From this meeting and subsequent meetings, a mailing list of almost 500 names was developed. Only 22 people provided comments.

This Draft EIR will be published and circulated for review and comment by the public and other interested parties, agencies, and organizations for a 45-day period. The Draft EIR will also be available for review and comment on the internet, accessible at: <http://www.parkhere.org> and the Gilroy Public Library. The public review period will be from June 4, 2003, to July 21, 2003. A public hearing on the Draft EIR will be held during this time. The public is invited to attend the hearing and to offer comments on the Draft EIR. All comments or questions about the Draft EIR should be addressed to:

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Following the public review, responses to all substantive comments received on the adequacy of the Draft EIR and submitted within the specified review period will be prepared and included in the Final EIR. The County will then review and consider the Final EIR prior to any decision to approve, revise and approve, or reject the proposed project. Prior to County approval of the Master Plan, the County must certify the Final EIR as complete and adequate and adopt a Mitigation Monitoring Program.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DRAFT EIR

This EIR is organized to allow the reader to quickly and logically review a summary of the analysis, review the recommended mitigation measures, and identify the residual environmental impacts after mitigation, if any (see Executive Summary). Those readers who wish to read the Draft EIR in greater detail are directed to Chapter 3, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures.

The Draft EIR begins with this **Introduction (Chapter 1)**. The chapters following the Introduction are organized as follows:

Chapter 2, Project Description, provides a description of the project site and location, the project objectives, the proposed project characteristics, and an outline of the approval process.

Chapter 3, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures, contains an analysis of environmental topics. The discussion of each topic is divided into the *Setting* section that describes baseline environmental information and the *Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures* section that describes the project-specific impacts and mitigation measures.

Chapter 4, Alternatives to the Project, provides an analysis of a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project. As required by the CEQA Guidelines, a discussion of the reasons for selecting the alternatives analyzed in this section is provided, along with a comparative analysis of each alternative and identification of the “environmentally superior” alternative.

Chapter 5, CEQA Statutory Sections, reviews the significant, irreversible effects (if any) and cumulative impacts identified in Chapter 4, and describes the project’s potential for inducing growth, as well as the short-term versus long-term productivity of the proposed project, as required by CEQA.

Chapter 6, List of Preparers, lists the firms and staff members that prepared the Master Plan and EIR.

Appendices, presents the background documents and technical information used in support of the impact analyses provided in the EIR. Appendix A is the NOP for the project. Appendix B is a summary of laws and regulations.