Santa Clara County Parks
2018 Strategic Plan
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Following the establishment of the Parks Department by the County Board of Supervisors in 1956, a vision for an “emerald necklace of parks” guided the early work of the Department. This vision led to the purchase of new lands and expansion of the regional parks and trails network, especially in and around urban areas. Expansion accelerated when Santa Clara County voters first approved the Park Charter Fund in 1972. The completion of the Department’s first Strategic Plan in 2003 further defined the role and purpose of the Department, brought new emphasis to maintenance and enhancement of existing parks, and broadened the vision from an emerald necklace to that of a web that would extend and connect even more extensively into and across the valley floor.

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**Who We Are**

*Our mission is to provide, protect, and preserve regional parklands for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations.*

Following the establishment of the Parks Department by the County Board of Supervisors in 1956, a vision for an “emerald necklace of parks” guided the early work of the Department. This vision led to the purchase of new lands and expansion of the regional parks and trails network, especially in and around urban areas. Expansion accelerated when Santa Clara County voters first approved the Park Charter Fund in 1972. The completion of the Department’s first Strategic Plan in 2003 further defined the role and purpose of the Department, brought new emphasis to maintenance and enhancement of existing parks, and broadened the vision from an emerald necklace to that of a web that would extend and connect even more extensively into and across the valley floor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Founded</th>
<th>1956</th>
<th>Funded by Park Charter Fund since</th>
<th>1972</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acres</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>Miles of Trails</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Parks</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Santa Clara County residents served</td>
<td>1,900,000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 142 Restrooms
- 46 Reservable Group Picnic Sites
- 46 Picnic Areas
- 13 Boat Launch Sites
- 12 Campgrounds
- 10 Amphitheaters
- 9 Group Campsites
- 6 Visitor Centers
The 2018 Strategic Plan updates the 2003 plan, continuing the Department’s role as an essential contributor to the quality of life in Santa Clara County. The 2003 Plan set the Department’s mission, which remains unchanged today. For over 60 years the Santa Clara County Department of Parks and Recreation has grown along with the community of Santa Clara County, providing respite and recreation, and making investments in the ecological health of the County for people and nature.

*Santa Clara County Parks is dedicated to providing a parkland system that balances resource protection and public access.*

The near future for the Department includes challenges of aging infrastructure, rising capital and operational costs, climate change and a growing population. Identified capital improvement needs will exceed available funding by nearly 2:1. Developed in five phases, the 2018 Strategic Plan will guide Department investments and strategic actions to respond to these challenges and fulfill our commitment to the community.

**5 Phases Sept. 2016–May 2018**

1. **Visioning**–reconfirm mission and draft updated vision
2. **Needs Assessment**–inventory facilities, collect input, analyze trends
3. **Priority Setting**–draft goals, strategies, actions and practices
4. **Fiscal Planning**–develop 10-yr Integrated Capital and Operating Plan
5. **Strategic Plan**–compile the final Strategic Plan document

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**Total Santa Clara County residents surveyed 2,130**

*Online 229 | Workshop 1,031 | Telephone 600*
Identifying the park and recreational needs of the County is a critical part of ensuring that planned improvements provide clear benefits for residents and visitors alike. The Needs Assessment included an inventory of parklands, trails, facilities, practices and programs; analysis of existing and projected County demographics; assessment of trends in resource management and outdoor recreation; and the incorporation of public, staff and stakeholder input.

**County Population Growth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2,018,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>2,230,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2040</td>
<td>2,443,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2050</td>
<td>2,640,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2060</td>
<td>2,810,865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Participation Rates**

- **18%** (or 51.5 Million Americans) participate in Running, Jogging, & Trail Running
- **16%** (or 47.7 Million Americans) participate in Fishing
- **15%** (or 43.1 Million Americans) participate in Road, Mountain & BMX Biking
- **14%** (or 40 Million Americans) participate in Car, RV & Backpack Camping
- **13%** (or 37.2 Million Americans) participate in Hiking
Findings And Takeaways

Key findings and takeaways across five focus areas help inform the Department in responding to the needs of County residents and natural resources and improve our ability to make data-driven investments to support the health of the community and ecological systems alike.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Takeaways</th>
</tr>
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| **Parklands, Trails and Facilities** | Stay informed on trends and needs  
Provide leadership in closing gaps |
| 90% of County residents live within 5 miles of a park | |
| Multiuse trails serve the widest array of users | |
| The countywide trails system has significant gaps | |
| **Historic and Cultural Resources** | Evaluate new cultural and historic investment for regional significance |
| County Parks play a critical role in protecting and interpreting history | |
| Undiscovered cultural resources are likely to exist in parks | |
| Restoration and preservation projects are very expensive | |
| **Natural Resources** | Manage in context of larger region and for lands’ ecosystem services  
Engage in regional and landscape level park management |
| County Parks make up 27% of open space in Santa Clara County | |
| There are threats to the ecological health of the system (i.e. climate change, urbanization) | |
| Partnerships are vital to natural resource management | |
| **County Demographics** | Engage in innovative partnerships  
Expand role in public health  
Find new ways to engage people |
| 2.3 million people will live in the County by 2030 | |
| 40% of residents are foreign-born | |
| Different racial and ethnic groups use parks differently | |
| **Outreach and Market Trends** | Support traditional uses  
Identify new ways for people to engage in parks  
Deliver relevant communications, facilities & services |
| Surveys show a 90% approval rating by users | |
| The greatest demand is for traditional uses (i.e. hiking, camping) | |
| Demand is growing for specialized uses (i.e. off leash dog areas, mountain biking) | |
The County of Santa Clara’s regional park system is an essential contributor to the quality of life county residents currently enjoy and will expect in coming decades. The results of the Needs Assessment - our takeaways - reaffirm our Mission but also led to an update of the Department’s Vision Statement and associated Vision Elements. Together they describe the guiding principles for how the park system will operate in the years to come, amidst a dynamic landscape influenced by a burgeoning population, evolving recreation demands, and encroaching climate change effects.

**Updated Vision Statement**

*We create and manage a sustainable, vibrant system of regional parks and trails where exceptional visitor experiences enrich the human spirit and offer all people the opportunity to connect with the County’s protected natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources, consistent with responsible resource stewardship.*
Vision Elements
The Department’s Vision is supported by the following elements that, when taken as a whole, provide a panorama of what the future of regional parks in Santa Clara County should be.

INTERCONNECTED AND INCLUSIVE
The County’s regional park and trail network provides equitable access for people and critical linkages for wildlife.

RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP
County natural and historical resources are managed in balance with public access and recreation.

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE
County Parks serves as a model of excellence in customer service, resource protection and park management.

ENRICHED VISITOR EXPERIENCE
County Parks provides high quality visitor experiences.

HUMAN HEALTH
Outdoor recreation in County parks enhances human health and wellbeing.

Goals And Strategies
The following pages present nine Departmental goals that continue commitments made in the 2003 plan and add clarity for prioritizing investment of our limited Park Charter Funds over the next ten years. The goals express a comprehensive ideal for the Department’s overarching management approach and commitment to stewardship of the natural, cultural, and historic resources under our care. Strategies break each goal into focus areas to assist in successfully fulfilling it. The full Strategic Plan also outlines an extensive list of actions and practices that comprise staff’s day-to-day work.

Investing in a Sustainable Future
Santa Clara County has been purchasing parkland for the protection of natural resources and public enjoyment since the 1920s. 100 years of acquisition has created one of the largest and most diverse regional park systems in California. This large and aging system, facing rising construction and operational costs, has substantial infrastructure challenges that cannot be completely addressed with Park Charter funds and user fees. The Strategic Plan includes a new financial model, the Integrated Capital and Operating Plan, which will guide Department decision making over the next ten years.
Goal #1

PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GREATER REGION

The Department will collaborate with regional partners to ensure the viability of critical habitat linkages, advance awareness of ecosystem services and contribute to climate change resilience.

Strategies
- Participate in regional efforts to prioritize natural resource management.
- Prioritize land acquisition to balance natural resources with public access.
- Transition natural resource management practices to a greater focus on regional coordination.
- Support Countywide efforts to address sustainability and climate resiliency.

Goal #2

MEET THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE CUSTOMER BASE

Although the park system enjoys positive user response in general, a deeper understanding of the County’s diverse population will lead to greater impact in serving user groups.

Strategies
- Increase understanding of the preferences and needs of park customers.
- Improve communications, services and facilities to better serve our diverse population.
- Recruit staff that reflect the diversity of County residents.

Goal #3

MANAGE THE PARK SYSTEM IN A FISCALLY SUSTAINABLE MANNER

The Department has adopted a new comprehensive financial forecasting model to improve its ability to make investment decisions to serve the community for generations to come.

Strategies
- Prioritize sustaining existing park facilities and structures.
- Improve project scoping to better inform prioritization and decision-making.
- Leverage staff talent and partner resources to improve efficiency and enhance services.
Goal #4

**BALANCE THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY**

*Parks must remain places for respite from the hectic pace of Silicon Valley, however technology is a pervasive part of life and an important tool in park management and visitor engagement.*

**Strategies**
- Enhance network connectivity throughout the system.
- Leverage technology to enhance communication, interpretation, education, awareness and the safety of visitors.
- Utilize technology to streamline business processes.

Goal #5

**ELEVATE THE ROLE OF PARKS IN IMPROVING HUMAN HEALTH**

*Enhance the Department's contributions to human health through provision of regional recreational facilities, services and programs that encourage physical activity and mental wellbeing.*

**Strategies**
- Prioritize and communicate the connection between parks and human health.
- Collaborate with partners on programming.

Goal #6

**PROVIDE EXCEPTIONAL FACILITIES AND AMENITIES**

*Uphold an exemplary standard of service in public protection and safety, maintenance of facilities, provision of visitor services, trail development and delivery of recreational features and programs.*

**Strategies**
- Maintain a safe environment; professionally respond to crime and emergencies.
- Encourage a culture of excellent customer service.
- Carry out project implementation to meet public needs and protect resources in contemporary and relevant ways.
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### Goal #7

**Prioritize Core Outdoor Recreational Uses**

While core uses will continue to be given priority, specialty uses that have proven consistent, long term popularity and draw a regional audience will also be a focus in the coming years.

**Strategies**
- Accommodate social and group uses in camping, picnicking, programming and organized events.
- Provide specialty amenities that are popular and fiscally sustainable.

### Goal #8

**Demonstrate Leadership in Regional Trails and Equitable Access**

Lead advocacy for the completion of the Countywide trails network and advocate for public transit, bicycle and other non-motorized access to parks.

**Strategies**
- Investigate relationships with all who are interested in completing the trails network.
- Explore establishing an annual trails summit.
- Proactively facilitate new programs to get visitors to parks while minimizing the number of individual vehicle trips.

### Goal #9

**Protect Significant Historic and Cultural Resources**

Conserve and protect regionally significant cultural and historic resources in balance with providing public access and fiscal constraints.

**Strategies**
- Collaboratively implement cultural and historic resource protection.
- Protect and interpret cultural and historic resources in an efficient manner.
- Protect and interpret significant County historic and cultural sites and resources.

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### Planning For A Sustainable Future

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**Public and Department-wide Staff Engagement**

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Capital Project Locations 2019–2029

1. GRANT COUNTY PARK, 2019-2024
   Implementation of Historic Structures Report, including rehabilitation of Ranch Complex.

2. GRANT COUNTY PARK, 2019-2024
   Master Plan and implementation: includes planning for Sulfur Springs, backcountry camping, day use, trails, and camping improvements.

3. ED R. LEVIN COUNTY PARK 2023-2027
   Master Plan and implementation: includes planning, day use improvements, and park amenities.

4. SANBORN COUNTY PARK 2019-2027
   Master Plan implementation: includes various site design recommendations.

5. HELLER COUNTY PARK 2020-2023
   Master Plan update and implementation, potentially including turf conversion and other projects.

6. MARTIAL COTTLE PARK 2019-2023
   Master Plan implementation and Life Estate planning. Includes design, permits, construction.

7. SANTA TERESA COUNTY PARK 2021-2022
   Implementation of Grazing Plan

8. CALERO COUNTY PARK 2019-2024
   Implementation of the Calero Trails Master Plan

9. MT MADONNA COUNTY PARK 2019-2023
   Implementation of Master Plan, including campground, day use, and interpretive upgrades.

10. COYOTE CANYON 2019-2027
    Interim and Master Plan development and implementation. Includes day use, trail, and access improvements, as well as additional resource protection.

11. COYOTE LAKE HARVEY BEAR RANCH 2019-2028
    Campground improvement and Master Plan update. Potentially includes day use, improved access, parking, and Bear Ranch Flats.
Read the Strategic Plan at parkhere.org or write parkinfo@prk.sccgov.org