

*Santa Clara County Parks  
2018 Strategic Plan*

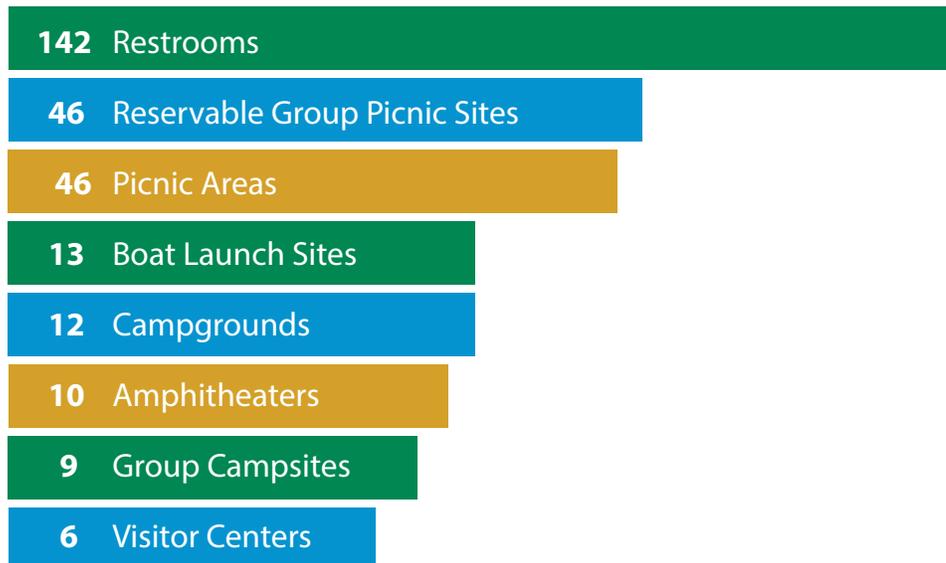
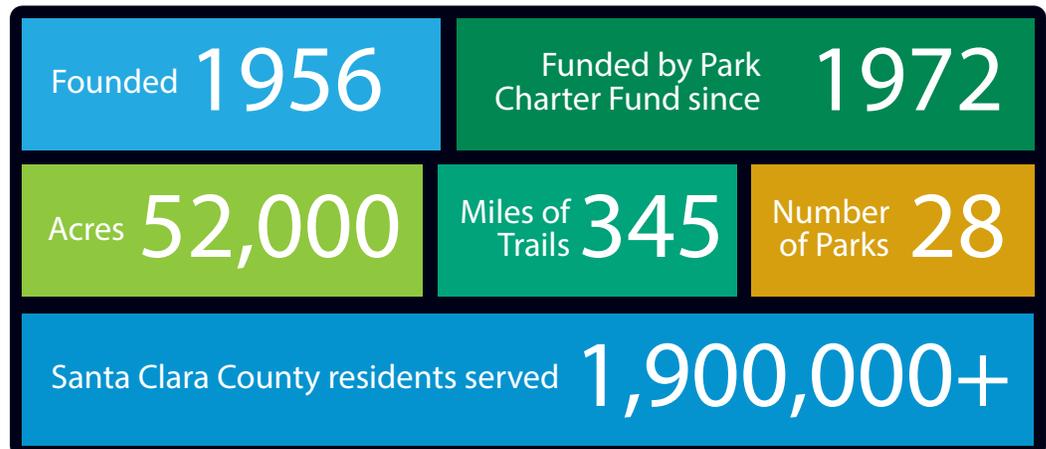
# *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*



## 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.

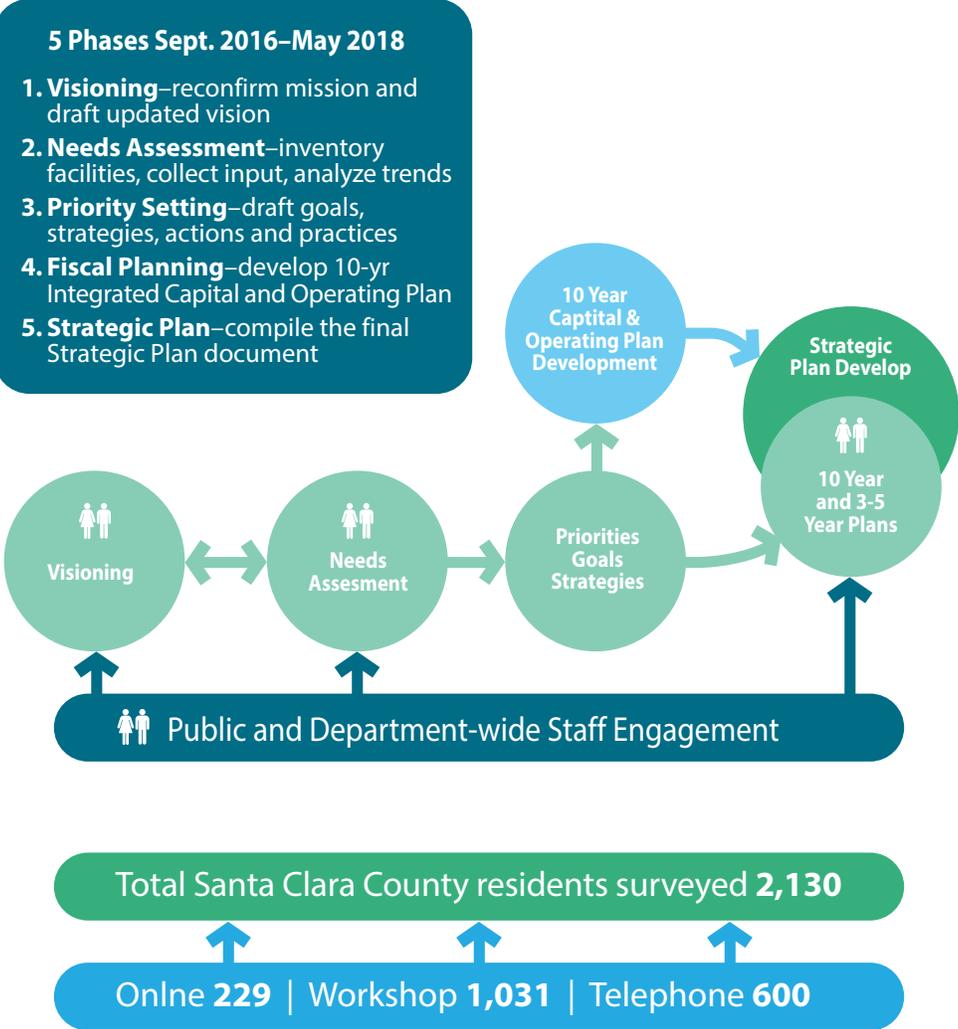


# ◆ Planning For A Sustainable Future

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.*

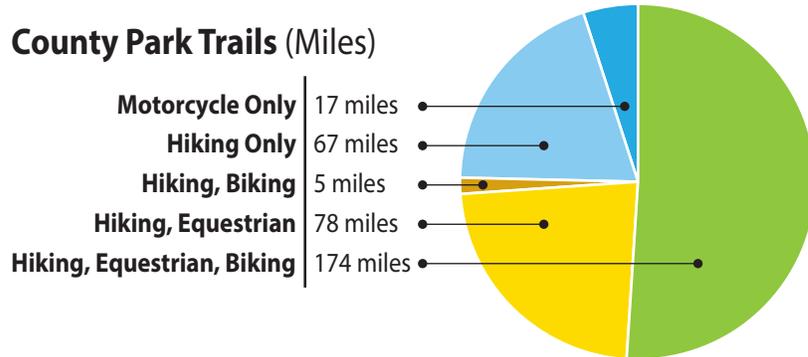
The near future for the Department includes challenges of aging infrastructure, rising capital and operational costs, climate change and a growing population. Identified capital improvement needs will exceed available funding by nearly 2:1. Developed in five phases, the 2018 Strategic Plan will guide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



## ◆ Needs Assessment

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.

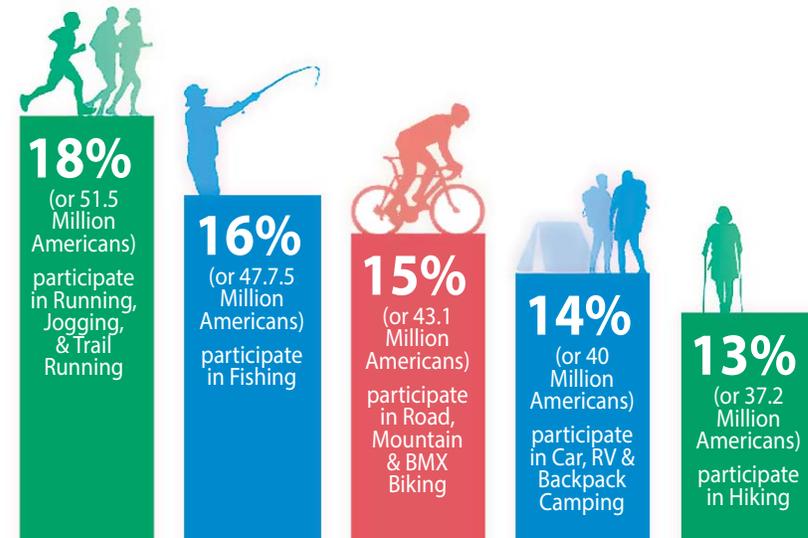
### County Park Trails (Miles)



### County Population Growth



### Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Participation Rates



# ◆ 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.

Findings			Takeaways
<b>Parklands, Trails and Facilities</b>			
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	Stay informed on trends and needs Provide leadership in closing gaps
<b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>			
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	Evaluate new cultural and historic investment for regional significance
<b>Natural Resources</b>			
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	Manage in context of larger region and for lands' ecosystem services Engage in regional and landscape level park management
<b>County Demographics</b>			
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	Engage in innovative partnerships Expand role in public health Find new ways to engage people
<b>Outreach and Market Trends</b>			
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)	Support traditional uses Identify new ways for people to engage in parks Deliver relevant communications, facilities & services





## ◆ Vision To Action

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.

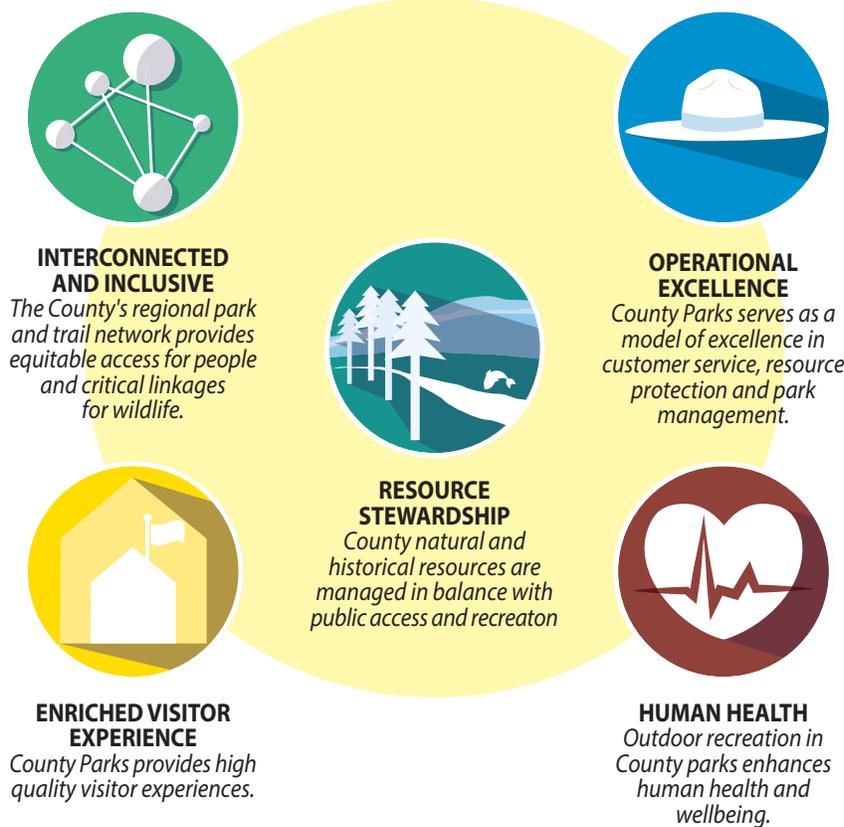


### Updated Vision Statement

*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.



## 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.*



INTERCONNECTED  
AND INCLUSIVE



RESOURCE  
STEWARDSHIP



#### 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.*



INTERCONNECTED  
AND INCLUSIVE



ENRICHED VISITOR  
EXPERIENCE



HUMAN HEALTH

#### 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.*



OPERATIONAL  
EXCELLENCE



#### 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.*



ENRICHED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

HUMAN HEALTH

#### 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.*



RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

ENRICHED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

HUMAN HEALTH

#### 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.*



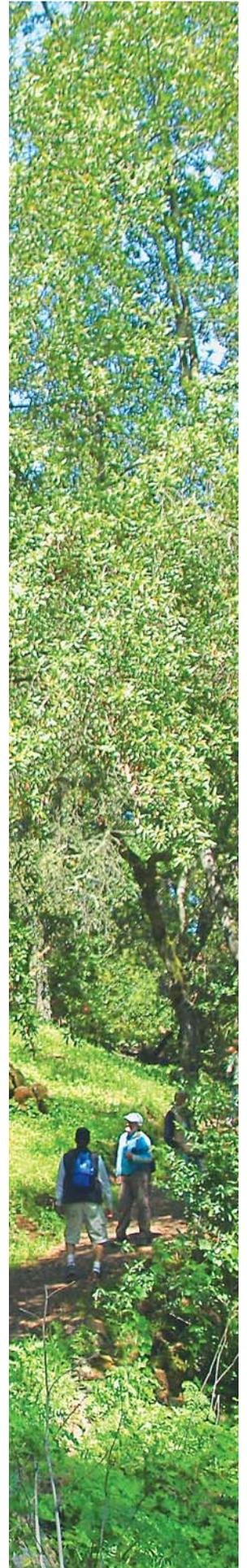
OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

ENRICHED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

HUMAN HEALTH

#### 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.





## ◆ 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.*



ENRICHED VISITOR  
EXPERIENCE

#### 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.*



INTERCONNECTED  
AND INCLUSIVE



HUMAN HEALTH

#### Strategies

- Improve 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.*



RESOURCE  
STEWARDSHIP



OPERATIONAL  
EXCELLENCE



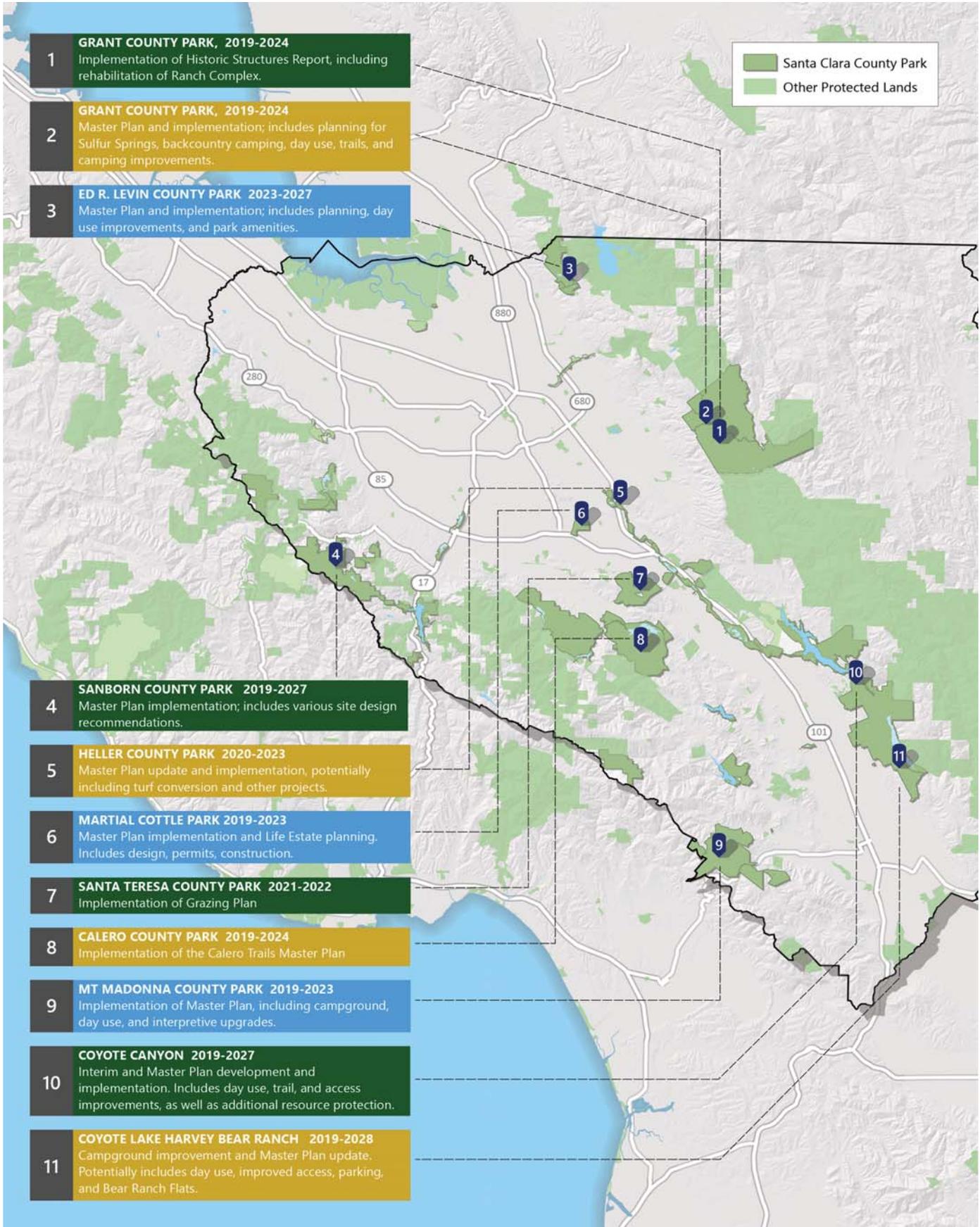
ENRICHED VISITOR  
EXPERIENCE



#### 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.

# Capital Project Locations 2019–2029





# SANTA CLARA™ COUNTY PARKS

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Connect with us!



Read the Strategic Plan at [parkhere.org](http://parkhere.org) or write [parkinfo@prk.sccgov.org](mailto:parkinfo@prk.sccgov.org)