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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch County Park Master Plan establishes a direction for development of this significantly expanded park site in southern Santa Clara County. The master plan strives to balance a diversity of recreational needs of Santa Clara County residents with goals for natural and cultural resource preservation and restoration, along with a desire to maintain the ranchland character that historically, and up to the present, defines much of the region.

The Master Plan is one of three documents being prepared simultaneously to guide future development and environmental protection/restoration of the park. The other documents include:

- a Natural Resource Management Plan, to guide long-term protection and enhancement of the park's valuable natural resources.

- an Environmental Impact Report, to assess the potential environmental impact of proposed park development and use, and to provide recommendations to mitigate these potential impacts.

Together, the Master Plan, Natural Resource Management Plan, and Environmental Impact Report assure that development decisions and long-term park management complement the park's unique cultural and environmental context.

Given the incredible size of the park, master plan implementation time frame of at least twenty years, and multiple proposed uses, the recommendations in the Master Plan are conceptual in nature. More specific design will be developed and refined for each proposed park use as a part of phased implementation. Trails, a major component of the proposed first phase of implementation, are described in somewhat greater detail in the master plan.
Source: Environmental Science Associates
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Park Location
Coyote Lake–Harvey Bear Ranch County Park is located in the western foothills of the Mt. Hamilton Range. The park lies east of the City of Gilroy, in southern Santa Clara County. The 4,448 acre site encompasses the entire western side of Coyote Lake, straddles the ridgeline that divides the upper Coyote Creek watershed and Coyote Lake from the Santa Clara Valley, and reaches to the valley floor near the community of San Martin. (See Figure 1)

History of the Park
Coyote Lake County Park was established in 1969 when the County entered into a long-term lease with the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) to operate and maintain a park for recreational purposes. The District owns 760 acres including the lake (635 acres) and lands contiguous to the lake (125 acres). These leased lands, plus 36 acres of County owned lands, comprised the original park. SCVWD is responsible for management of the reservoir as a water supply for the Santa Clara Valley. Over 70,000 people visited Coyote Lake County Park in 2000. In 1998 the park became significantly larger through acquisition of the Harvey Bear and adjacent Mendoza Ranches. The acquisition of these ranches, coupled with a small acquisition in 1997, have increased the size of the park to 4448 acres, the second largest park in the Santa Clara County Parks system. The park is now called Coyote Lake–Harvey Bear Ranch County Park.

While the original park remains open to the public, the Bear and Mendoza properties do not yet provide for public access, pending completion of the new master plan for the expanded park. In 1992, prior to the acquisition of the Bear and Mendoza properties, a master plan was prepared for the Coyote Lake Park, but was never adopted, pending completion of a Watershed Management Study by SCVWD. Acquisition of the Bear and Mendoza properties has more than quintupled the size of the original park, necessitating a new master planning effort.

Master Plan Process
The master plan process was divided into four phases:
• development of the master plan program document;
• development and evaluation of master plan alternatives;
• selection of a preferred alternative; and
• preparation of a final master plan.
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Concurrent to Master Plan preparation, draft and final Environmental impact Reports (EIR’s) and the Natural Resource Management Plan were also prepared. Preparing these documents concurrently allowed for coordination between the goals, findings and recommendations of each document. The final Master Plan, Natural Resource Management Plan, and EIR will be reviewed by the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Commission; Housing, Land Use, Environment, and Transportation Committee of the Board of Supervisors (HLUET); and the Board of Supervisors, consistent with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The master planning process was assisted by a 13-member citizens advisory Task Force representing a diversity of neighborhood, recreational, and environmental interests. The Task Force served as an advisory body to the Parks Department staff and to the Parks and Recreation Commission, which in turn is advisory to the Board of Supervisors. The Task Force held 14 public meetings over a period of 2 years to review each step of the Master Plan. A Technical Advisory Committee was created representing the many local, state and federal agencies that influence the park’s development and long-term management.

A project team of Parks Department staff representing managers, planners, rangers, maintenance staff, and others involved with day-to-day park operations, also provided input during the master plan process.

To further assist the Task Force and Park’s Department staff, the public was actively involved in the master planning process through participation at regular Task Force meetings and at community meetings that were periodically scheduled to gather community input.

While consensus was reached on most areas of the 4,448-acre park, differences of opinion arose regarding the intensity and type of development that would be appropriate for the approximately 375-acre West Flat Area. This area, located adjacent to San Martin Avenue, has the easiest access to Santa Clara County population centers and is the most developable due to its flat topography. This became an area of focus throughout the process, and three alternatives were developed and evaluated for the West Flat Area during the preferred alternative phase. Task Force, Parks Department staff, Parks Commission and HLUET recommendations for the West Flat Area were presented to the Board of Supervisors in December, 2002. At that time, the Board unanimously provided direction for the West Flat Area and concurred
with the consensus recommendations for the remaining areas of the park. This direction became the basis for the draft Master Plan.

**MASTER PLAN GOALS**

One of the first steps of the Task Force was to establish goals for the Master Plan to guide the Master Plan process. These goals were compiled after reviewing a variety of sources, including the County General Plan, Countywide Trails Master Plan, Strategic Plan documents, the previously prepared Coyote Lake Master Plan, and comments from the first community meeting.

1. **Recognize and plan for the regional context of Coyote Lake–Harvey Bear Ranch County Park.**
   a. Where appropriate and feasible, provide regional trail connections to State, County, and other public parks and open spaces.
   b. Provide consistency with the goals and policies of the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, Countywide Trails Master Plan, and County General Plan.

2. **Provide a variety of sustainable recreational opportunities consistent with the needs of Santa Clara County residents and compatible with the environmental, cultural and historic resources of the land.**
   a. Provide areas of high and low-intensity recreational use activities based on sound resource management principles.
   b. Provide areas of land-based and water-based recreational activities.
   c. Recognize the needs of adjacent residents and property owners.
   d. Consider both environmental and financial aspects of sustainability.
   e. Incorporate opportunities for environmental, historic and cultural preservation, restoration, and interpretation.

3. **Ensure public access to the park for a wide range of users.**
   a. Design recreational facilities, including trails, to be accessible to all people, regardless of physical abilities, consistent with the constraints of the natural landscape and physical resources of the site.
   b. Provide trails for a variety of users, including hikers, bicyclists and equestrians.
c. Accommodate public transit access to the park.

d. Consider the concerns of adjacent residents and property owners when locating parking and staging areas.

e. Consider public safety in remote and fire hazardous areas.

4. **Preserve and enhance the natural, ranchland character of the park.**

   a. Park structures and recreational facilities should reflect and reinforce the distinct ranchland character of the park. Consider the visual impact of park facilities and structures.

   b. Facilities and infrastructure should be subordinate to the natural landscape setting. Indigenous plant material should be used where feasible.

   c. Management of the natural resources of the park should enhance wildlife habitat, protect environmentally sensitive areas of the park, reduce the threat of erosion and wildfire, restore native plant communities, and protect the water quality of Coyote Lake.

   d. Incorporate opportunities for interpretation of the park’s natural and cultural history.

   e. Consider programs and facilities to educate the public, especially youth, about Santa Clara County’s ranching heritage.

5. **Develop a plan that can be implemented over time, taking into account available resources, potential phasing, and long-term management implications.**

   a. Consider the environmental resources of the land, as well as the existing and potential future human and financial resources of the County Parks and Recreation Department, as well as other agencies that will be responsible for the implementation and long-term management of the master plan.

   b. Consider opportunities for revenue generation that can off-set long-term management costs, consistent with other master plan goals.

   c. Continue to encourage interagency coordination and collaboration throughout the design process, as well as during implementation and long-term management.

   d. Coyote Lake and the surrounding watershed shall be managed to meet the mutually beneficial goals of the County and the Santa Clara Valley Water District, for joint water supply and recreational use, meeting the needs of Santa Clara County residents.
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e. Encourage partnerships with other agencies and organizations that can assist in implementing and maintaining park facilities and programs.

f. A phased program of park improvements should be based on plan priorities determined by natural resource implications, funding for development, recreational need, logical construction and sequencing, coordination with reservoir management, and maintenance implications.

g. Incorporate regular monitoring, review and update of the Master Plan to assess natural resource impacts, changes in recreational need, and available management resources to ensure the long-term sustainability of the park.

h. Strive to open portions of the park for public use as soon as possible, consistent with other goals and CEQA requirements.