Existing Conditions

The following is primarily a summary of information compiled in the Master Plan Program Document (October 2001).

Regional Context

Coyote Lake–Harvey Bear Ranch County Park is located adjacent to or near several park and publicly-owned properties, including Henry Coe State Park, Lakeview Meadows Ranch (the Palassou Ridge property acquired by the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority and the Nature Conservancy), Anderson Lake County Park, and Gilroy Hot Springs, recently acquired by California State Parks for inclusion into Henry Coe State Park. (See Figure 2.) These properties provide the potential for a large network of open space and park land in southeastern Santa Clara County. Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch is also an important link in many regional trails as defined in the Countywide Trails Master Plan, including the Bay Area Ridge Trail, Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail; (Southern Recreation Retracement Route), Benito-Clara Trail, and the San Martin Cross Valley Trail.

Adjacent Land Uses

Several county land use zones apply adjacent to and west of the Bear and Mendoza properties that comprise a large portion of the Park. Land contiguous to Bear Ranch to the west is zoned Rural Residential (RR), with the exception of a small area of Hillside zone land near its northwest corner. Rural Residential land is considered outside of city service areas and allows a minimum parcel size of five acres. Primary uses allowed include agriculture, open space and low density residential of five to twenty acres per dwelling, depending on the slope of the land (G.P. Land Use Policy R-LU 58). All land bordering Mendoza Ranch on the western side is zoned Hillside (H). Hillside zones are described in the General Plan as “Mountainous lands and foothills unsuitable and/or unplanned for annexation and urban development. Lands so designated shall be preserved largely in natural resources-related and open space uses in order to: a. support and enhance rural character; b. protect and promote wise management of natural resources; c. avoid risks associated with natural hazards characteristic of those areas; and, d. protect the quality of reservoir watersheds critical to the region’s water supply.” (General Plan Land Use Policy R-LU 16).
Existing Conditions

FIGURE 2
Surrounding Properties and Trails

Source: County of Santa Clara Parks and Recreation Department
Existing Conditions

Large areas of nearby land not contiguous to the park are reserved for agriculture. Zoning designations are Agriculture-Large Scale (AL), indicating minimum parcels of no less than 40 acres, and Agriculture-Medium Scale (AM) with parcel sizes no less than 20 acres. These lands are limited to agriculture and ancillary uses because they are favored with a combination of “the finest soils, dependable growing climate, and adequate water supply” (G.P. Land Use Policy R-LU 8).

Bordering the eastern boundary of the park, the primary zoning designation is Ranchland (R). Ranchlands are defined in the General Plan as “Lands predominantly used as ranches in rural unincorporated areas of the county, remote from urbanized areas and generally less accessible than other mountain lands. Important resources include watersheds for regional water supply, grazing lands, mineral resources, forests and wildlife habitat, rare or locally unique plant or animal communities, historic and archeological sites, and recreational and scenic areas of importance that also serve to define the setting for the urban areas.” (G.P. Land Use Policy R-LU 35).

County zoning for all portions of the Park is currently designated as Regional Park (P). The Regional Parks designation is applied to Park lands of the County, Cities, State of California and United States government agencies which serve a region-wide population (General Plan Land Use Policy R-LU 51). As of July 2002, the land use designations of the two large parcels acquired by the County for Park expansion—Harvey Bear Ranch and Mendoza Ranch—were changed to Regional Park in the County General Plan’s land use designation map (County of Santa Clara Planning Office, 2002).

**Biological Resources**

A more detailed inventory of the park’s natural resources is found in the *Master Plan Program Document* (October 2001), and the Draft *Natural Resource Management Plan* (May 2003). Biological resources information was compiled in 2001 through the review of existing reference materials, aerial photo reconnaissance, and extensive field review. Vegetation and resource information was mapped using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. The following are key points that influence the development of the Master Plan.
Vegetation and Wildlife Habitats

Vegetation is typical of the western inner coast ranges and includes the following plant communities. The plant communities are divided between “non-sensitive” and “sensitive” in the Natural Resource Management Plan.

Non-sensitive plant communities:
- Mixed chaparral (Diablan sage scrub)
- Annual (non-native) Grassland

Sensitive plant communities:
- Coast Live Oak Woodland
- Valley Oak Woodland
- Blue Oak Woodland
- Native Grassland
- Serpentine Grassland
- Wetlands (including freshwater seeps, basins and stock ponds)
- Willow Riparian

The following map (Figure 3) illustrates the distribution of plant communities within the Park. A detailed description of each of these plant communities/habitats and associated flora and fauna can be found in the Program Document and the Natural Resource Management Plan.

Sensitive Species

Sensitive species known to occur within the park include the Big-Scale Balsamroot and the Western Pond Turtle. Thirty species of sensitive bird species are also listed as known or likely to occur within the park. About 617 acres within the park lie within the Bear Ranch unit of critical habitat for the federally listed threatened Bay Checkerspot Butterfly as designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001. The Constraints map (Figure 4) notes areas within the park with the potential to support sensitive habitat and special status species.

Fisheries

Coyote Lake and Coyote Creek provide fisheries habitat for native and introduced fish, including stocked gamefish and unstocked bluegill, crappie and bass. The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) periodically stocks the lake with rainbow trout. The condition of native fisheries in the lake was not evaluated for this Master Plan, although the up-
FIGURE 3
Vegetation and Wildlife Habitats

Source: Rana Creek Habitat Restoration
stream reaches of Coyote Creek may still support a native trout population. Management of the lake as an emergency domestic water supply and inspection of the earth dam for seismic concerns necessitates periodic draining the lake, which limits the long term viability as a fishery. Downstream, the dam at Anderson Lake presents an insurmountable barrier to anadromous fish passage. Therefore, the lake is excluded from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s designation of critical habitat for steelhead and salmon, which are presumed absent from the lake.

**Cultural Resources**

The Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch County Park property contains the full range of cultural resources, representing a long span of occupation and land use beginning in prehistoric times and continuing into the recent historic period. The property has a rich history, revealing information on important people and historic themes that may be of national, state and local interest, including the last western expansion of the United States, early California history, and the development of the communities that now make up southern Santa Clara County.

The extent of cultural resources located within the park is largely unexplored. However, given what is known about prehistoric and historic use of the region and general settlement patterns, it can be assumed that some areas within the park have potential for prehistoric and historic resources. Based on the distribution of sites within the region, the following areas may be considered moderately to highly sensitive for prehistoric cultural resources:

- Areas around springs and natural watercourses west of the ridge paralleling Coyote Lake;
- Plateaus above the current shore line of Coyote Lake, and areas currently under water;
- Portions of upper canyon environments on the east and west side of the ridge;
- Areas around all recorded prehistoric sites;
- Flat open areas at the interface between canyon mouths and the valley floor on the western portion of the project area;
- The alluvial plain between the valley floor and the base of the hills on the western portion the Park property; and
- Low areas at the south end of Coyote Lake, including marsh areas above the lake.
Existing Conditions

Historical resources include potential historic structures and remains near Coyote Lake, as well as structures in the flat area of the Bear Ranch property. It is commonly believed that the Bear Ranch was once part of the Martin Murphy holdings acquired around 1845, and one area is believed to be the Martin Murphy homesite. Further documentation is needed to confirm specific site locations associated with Murphy. One structure, the Foreman’s House, was determined to be a significant historic resource on the state and local levels.

The following areas are considered highly sensitive for historic resources:
• All flat open areas below the hills west of the ridge
• The current shore of Coyote Lake, and areas currently under water.
• Flat open areas along the south end of Coyote Lake
• The Bear Ranch complex of buildings at the end of San Martin Avenue.

Soils, Seismic Hazards, and Hydrology

Soils
The following map indicates the soil types that are found within the park (see Figure 4). More detail about each specific soil type is found in the Program Document. Perhaps of greatest significance to the Master Plan are serpentine soils which support sensitive habitats, and clay soils which are difficult to cross in winter and stay wet throughout much of the Spring. Clay soil conditions may result in seasonal trail access restrictions.

Seismic Hazards
The Coyote Lake–Harvey Bear Ranch County Park is located on and adjacent to the Calaveras fault and therefore is in an area susceptible to earthquake ground shaking and its related ground failures, as well as surface fault rupture. Slope failures through both static and seismically induced forces are possible considering the underlying bedrock and hill slopes within the project site. In addition, excessive soil erosion caused from the action of wind and water on exposed surficial materials and landslide debris is considered a potential geologic hazard, especially in areas adjacent to Coyote Lake.

Hydrology
The park includes the entirety of Coyote Lake, which was formed by damming a portion of Coyote Creek in 1936. In addition, numerous springs are located throughout the property,
FIGURE 4
Soils and Hydrology

Source: Rana Creek Habitat Restoration
Existing Conditions

and the Park incorporates the headwaters of Skillet Creek, Church Creek, New Creek, Center Creek, San Martin Creek, and a branch of Little Llagas Creek.

Drainage within the park is divided, with the eastern edge draining into Coyote Creek, which flows northwest along the Diablo Range before eventually emptying into Coyote Valley and later the San Francisco Bay. A small ridge, which reaches around 1,000 feet, divides Coyote Creek and Coyote Lake from the remainder of the park hydrologically. The springs and creeks which originate along the western flank of the foothills flow west down onto the floor of the Coyote Valley near the towns of San Martin and Gilroy, and become tributaries of Llagas Creek.

Due to its elevated topographic status, the majority of the park is located outside of the 100-year and 500-year flood zone, as designated by the Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program. However, the shoreline around Coyote Lake, particularly the south end of the lake, is located within the 100-year flood zone.

VISUAL RESOURCES

The landscape of the Park typifies the California coastal foothills, with varied topography that ranges from nearly flat on the western valley floor to gently rolling hills, with several steep canyons and rugged escarpments. A northwest-southeast trending ridgeline dominates central portion of the Park and divides the major viewsheds. To the west is the Santa Clara Valley, which is visible in an unbroken sweep from many of the highest elevations, and which retains a rural appearance from these vantages. To the east is Coyote Lake with Palassou Ridge rising sharply above it. Views of the lake from the central ridge are periodically broken by dense stands of foothill oak woodland, which follow narrow side canyons and draws down the slope toward the lake’s edge. Between the stands of oaks and other evergreen and deciduous trees are broad expanses of annual grassland, which also cloaks the entire western slope of the hills above the valley floor. Through the seasons, these areas undergo the dramatic transformations that are the landscape’s expression of California’s Mediterranean climate, from the velvet green of winter and spring to the burnished brown and gold of summer and fall. From the valley floor, the hillside and ridges of the Park provide a stunning vista and reminder of the rural and rugged qualities of the natural landscape.
Existing Conditions

Within the Park, there are a few structures associated with the Park headquarters near the Lake, the Bear Ranch houses, barns and associated farm buildings, and the Mendoza Ranch, with its associated house, barns, and out buildings. Each of these localities is isolated from the others and the ranch buildings retain much of their historic visual appeal.

Traffic and Circulation

U.S. Highway 101 is located west of the Park and provides access via interchanges at Leavesley Road and San Martin Avenue. The main local roadways serving the vicinity of the park include: Roop Road, New Avenue, San Martin Avenue, and Leavesley Road.

Currently, there is no public transportation to the park. Within the region, bus transportation is provided by the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA). Train service is provided by CalTrain to the communities of Gilroy, Morgan Hill and San Martin. The nearest train station is about 3 miles from the Park’s western boundary.

On-Street Bicycle routes with proposed parallel trails are proposed in the Countywide Trails Master Plan for Foothill, San Martin, and New Avenues and Roop Road adjacent to the park. A cross valley trail from the Hayes Valley area on the west side, to the Bear Ranch on the east side is proposed along San Martin Avenue.

More detailed existing traffic information, including traffic counts and intersection analysis, can be found in the Program Document.

Opportunities and Constraints

The following opportunities and constraints maps (Figures 5 and 6) summarize the existing conditions and define the most significant environmental issues for development of the park master plan. The “constraints” map provides an evaluation of the site from the perspective of the most environmentally sensitive areas that may be unsuitable or incompatible for recreational use. Conversely, the “recreational opportunities” map looks at the site from the perspective of areas that are most compatible for recreational development. There are some inherent conflicts between the two maps. For example, streams, which are highly sensitive ecosystems, are also highly desirable destinations for trails and other recreational pursuits. Some of the existing ranch roads, which are ideal for trails, pass through sensitive habitat.
Existing Conditions

areas. These potential conflicts were further evaluated as the master plan was developed with the intent of balancing recreational opportunity with the need to protect and restore natural resources.

**Constraints Map**
The constraints delineated on the map exhibit fall into four categories, Erosion Hazards, Sensitive Habitat, Special Status Species Habitat, and Steep Slopes. The erosion hazards on the property are areas where erosion features are currently present. These erosion features can be described as slides, slumps, gullies, or headcuts. The sensitive habitats of the property consist of the vegetation communities that are of specific concern in California. These communities are blue oak woodland, riparian, wetlands (including vernal basins and ponds), and serpentine grassland. Habitat for of two special status species, the Bay Checkerspot Butterfly and Big-Scale Balsamroot, has been identified as currently or historically occurring on the property by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001.

**Recreation Opportunities Map**
The Opportunities Map shows areas that are most compatible for recreation. The following elements were considered in developing the map:

**Slopes** Flatter areas of the park are more desirable for many recreational facilities, including structures, staging areas, campgrounds, play fields, golf courses, equestrian areas, etc., as well as for accessible and less strenuous trails. Therefore, the opportunities map indicates areas with slopes up to 15%.

**Lakefront** The western shoreline of Coyote Lake has been, and will continue to be, an area of recreational activity.

**Ranch Roads** Existing ranch roads provide opportunities for trails as well as for service/emergency access routes with minimal additional disruption to the landscape. (The Trails Master Plan indicates segments of ranch roads to be maintained for recreational use.)

**Streams and Ponds** Streams and ponds provide changes in landscape character and water features that are highly desirable as trail destinations. As noted above, these are also fre-
Existing Conditions

quently environmentally sensitive areas that can be degraded through inappropriate or extensive human use.

**Vista Points**  Vista points along the ridgeline provide spectacular views that can also serve as trail destinations.

**Structures**  Existing structures may have recreational and/or interpretive value along with historical value. For example, the existing barn structures may be used as part of an equestrian center or ag/ranching education center.

**Vegetation**  Two vegetation types have been shown on the recreation opportunities map. Non-native grassland, which covers much of the site is more suitable for recreational development. In addition the foothill oak woodland indicates oak species that are fairly common (coast live oak) and not as sensitive to recreational use as the blue oak. Oaks provide shade and visual contrast to the grassland and are therefore desirable for some recreational activities, such as hiking, picnicking, and camping.

More detailed information regarding the opportunities and constraints maps, as well as recreational program elements that were discussed for incorporation in the master plan, can be found in the *Program Document*.

**Recreation Trends**

In addition to responding to the resource issues of the site, the master plan must also respond to regional recreational needs. This section looks at recreation trends in Santa Clara County as noted in recent surveys conducted by the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department for development of a proposed Parks Strategic Plan currently being developed as well as other sources.

**Demographics**

According to the County Planning Office’s demographics publication, *INFO conditions and Trends in Santa Clara County*, Santa Clara County’s population is projected to increase from 1,599,100 in 1995 to 2,016,700 in 2020.\(^1\) (2000 population has been estimated at 1,755,300.) Some of the county’s fastest growing communities are located near the Park, including Gilroy, Morgan Hill and San Martin. Communities in adjacent San Benito County, such as Hollister
FIGURE 5
Constraints

Source: Rana Creek Habitat Restoration
Existing Conditions

FIGURE 6
Opportunities

Source: Rana Creek Habitat Restoration
are also growing rapidly. This population increase will certainly have an impact on South County and will result in increased recreational use of the County’s parks.

**Telephone Survey**

In May 2001, the Parks and Recreation Department conducted a public opinion survey of Santa Clara County residents, as part of a continuing marketing and public outreach study and to assist in developing its Strategic Plan for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation system. The telephone survey of five hundred randomly selected county residents was conducted in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 4.4 percentage points. An earlier similar survey was conducted in English only in April 1999. As noted in the presentation of survey results, prepared by Evans/McDonough Company, Inc:

“Walking and running are still the most popular outdoor activities with 58% mentioning these as one of the activities they do most frequently (56% in 1999). Picnicking is the second most popular outdoor recreation with one in five (20%) listing it as a frequent activity (23% in 1999). Biking, hiking, swimming, tennis, playgrounds, fishing and baseball/softball are all popular as well with more than one in ten mentioning these as common activities”

When reviewing Parks Department activities that are important to residents, a number of activities rank as “very important” or “somewhat important” that should be considered in developing the Coyote Lake–Harvey Bear Ranch Master Plan. The following table shows a ranking of activities and their percentage receiving an “important” rating:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage Very or Somewhat Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing maintenance and improvements at existing parks</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving the natural resources in our County parks</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing activities and programs for children and youth</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing diverse recreation experiences and opportunities for all ages, ethnicities, types of users and levels of abilities</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying land to protect open space and natural resources</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family oriented outdoor opportunities</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Existing Conditions

Adding patrols and security to the parks and trails 81%
Active outdoor facilities with courts, fields and playgrounds 81%
Improved public transit 80%
Educational programs 82%
Places to exercise 79%
New neighborhood parks 78%
Swimming locations 75%
Unpaved trails 75%
Camping facilities 72%
New regional parks 71%
Parks with open space and trails 71%
Lake/stream access 69%
Using parks for agriculture 64%
Developing public golf courses in environmentally appropriate areas 43%

The survey information compiled should not be construed as a market study. A golf course feasibility study prepared for the County by Economics Research Associates in 1998 found a strong demand for public golf courses, stating that “within five years, demand for public golf is projected to exceed supply by nearly 40 percent in Santa Clara County.” (More recent financial research has indicated a slight weakening in the golf course market.)

When asked to list what three leisure activities that they do most frequently, respondents were presented an open-ended question, where survey choices were not presented for their selection.

As noted in the responses from both April 1999 and May 2001 below, there is a slight change in public opinions about their preference in various leisure activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>April 1999</th>
<th>May 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking/Running</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnics</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biking</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Existing Conditions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Countywide</th>
<th>South County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playgrounds</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball/Softball</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boating</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equestrian Use</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were also asked which activity should be the highest priority for Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation over the next five years. Responses are given Countywide and also for South County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Countywide</th>
<th>South County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing outdoor recreation facilities and programs</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing land to create new parks and protect natural resources and open space</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing extensive education programs about nature</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upgrading and/or developing new trails</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above (not read as an option)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/don’t know</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that “trails” is a much higher priority in South County than countywide.

**Other County Park Use Trends**

In addition to the results of the telephone survey, County Parks Department staff shared their observations of changes in park use at a meeting for the Strategic Plan as noted in the Strategic Plan’s Draft Summary of Trends:

- “Trail use by hikers and bicyclists is expanding. Equestrian use is declining."
- “Weekend trail use is no longer the ‘spike’ it once was. Trail use is consistently heavy before and after work as well as on weekends.”
Existing Conditions

- “Bird watching is increasing.”
- “Parks are increasingly being used for exercise.”
- “The buffer between urban areas and parks that were once ‘remote’ is disappearing.”
- “Some parks are being used less and less for family picnicking.”

**Gilroy and Morgan Hill**

In addition to this countywide information, recent parks and recreation master plans prepared for the cities of Morgan Hill and Gilroy indicate a shortage of park land, trails, sports fields and aquatics facilities to meet current and projected future population needs. Existing sports fields, including school facilities, are fully impacted. Both Morgan Hill and Gilroy have ambitious plans to develop sports parks in the future with an emphasis on serving municipal and league team sports. Morgan Hill has recently acquired land and is in the planning stages for a regional aquatics center that will include an outdoor recreation pool with slides and other features, as well as a 50-meter competition pool. Morgan Hill is also designing an indoor recreation center with gymnasium, indoor pools, youth and senior facilities, and outdoor multi-use concrete skate/BMX park.