

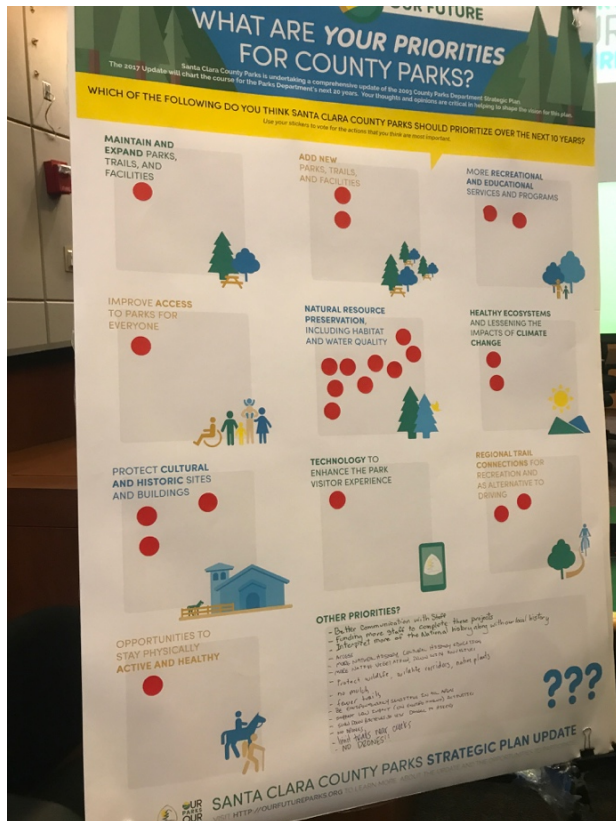


March 5, 2018

Re: Santa Clara County Parks Department 2018 Strategic Plan

Dear President Simitian and Santa Clara County Supervisors,

The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter, Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful, and California Native Plant Society, Santa Clara Valley Chapter write to ask that you direct staff to amend the proposed vision for the Santa Clara County Parks Department 2018 Strategic Plan, and to allocate more resources to the protection of natural and biological resources in our County Parks. We believe the proposed vision in front of you today and the resulting priorities for funding do not adequately reflect the love and appreciation that residents of Santa Clara County have for their natural biological riches and natural landscapes that our parks encapsulate.



During the public outreach effort for the strategic plan update, natural resource preservation, including habitat and water quality, was identified as a top priority for Santa Clara County residents (left). People cherish the park system’s natural landscapes and wildlife, and rely on County parks to access and enjoy nature.

The vision statement and sub-statements should better reflect this priority and consider natural resource preservation independent from human experience in order to capture what the public really desires. We are concerned that the words “sustainable” and “resilience” may be too vague and obscure, and the word “vibrant” may be perceived to literally pave the way to the urbanization of all parks, including remote and natural county parks. The proposed vision does not ensure real stewardship of habitat and wildlife.

We suggest the following modification to the vision may be appropriate:

“We create and manage a resilient ecosystem of regional parks and trails where habitats are enhanced and preserved. We provide exceptional visitor experiences that enrich the human spirit and offer all people the opportunity to connect with the County’s protected natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources.”

Similarly, the Sub-statements and Goals of the vision should also be modified -

- A Sub-statement of vision is resource stewardship: Please modify to include protection of habitat for endangered/special-status species in ways that protect these species from intense “provision of public access and outdoor experiences”.
- Goal #5 should be changed to elevate the role of parks in improving human health **and** protecting natural resources.
- Goal #7 should be changed to prioritize “**passive** outdoor recreational uses”

We concur with the expressed preference “to maintain, sustain and enhance existing parks over new/expand”. We also agree that “resource protection ranks high.” However, we believe that:

- Sustaining the parks should include protecting endangered species, native vegetation, and riparian ecosystems. It is important to designate currently natural areas of parkland for natural resource preservation with limited access for people, and allow only passive recreation and contemplation areas near sensitive habitats.

Unfortunately, in the “10-year projection by focus area” only 7% of resources are dedicated towards natural/ecological stewardship even though county residents identified this as top priority. Visitor experience and ecological stewardship are linked, since funding ecological stewardship brings people and connects them to nature, and improves visitor experience

The “Integrated Capital and Operating Plan” includes “provide low intensity public access to unopened properties”. It may be necessary to only permit volunteer, docent-led activities in unopened properties similar to the successful program in the Crystal Springs Watershed as administered by San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

Lastly, it is our opinion that the “Roads & Trails program” does not belong under Natural/Ecological Stewardship.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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