

5 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

This chapter is a guide to the parks, recreation and open space resources in Humboldt County. Humboldt is home to recreational, park, and open space resources of statewide, nationwide, and even global significance. With this in mind, the first two sections describe these resources, while the final section addresses existing policies and policy issues identified during Phase I along with policy options that respond to them.

5.1 PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Humboldt County has a wealth of outdoor recreational opportunities and areas of incomparable value and unsurpassed beauty. More than twenty percent of the county's 2.3 million acres are protected open space, forests, and recreation areas. Within the county boundaries, there are 4 federal parks and beaches, 10 state parks (3 of which are encompassed by Redwood National Park), 16 county parks and beaches, recreational areas and reserves, and National Parkland and National Forest land. These areas contribute to the quality of life in Humboldt County and provide needed recreation opportunities for residents of neighboring counties and from all over the world as well. Parklands are important elements of the Humboldt economy through both their role in the timber industry and the tourist industry. As tourism eclipses timber as the stronghold of Humboldt's economy, parks and recreational resources will prove of greater and greater value to Humboldt's future.

The natural qualities of Humboldt County attract a great many people from outside the county. The tourist industry and demand for park resources in Humboldt are linked to the accessibility of parkland. Transportation is critical to the future demand and use of Humboldt's many resources. Additionally, it must be determined at what level parklands and natural preserves can be enjoyed and maintained as habitats. In some instances, the number of tourists wandering through the redwood forests are compacting the surrounding soils and choking the roots.

Several regulatory agencies manage the parks, recreation, and open space resources in Humboldt including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), California Department of Fish and Game, United States Forest Service (USFS), California State Parks Department, local city governments, Humboldt County, Local Native American Tribes, and other state and federal regulatory agencies.

The total acreages of park and reserve lands in unincorporated Humboldt County are listed in Table 5-1. Nearly 468,000 acres of National Forest, Park, and Wildlife lands are in the Unincorporated County. The County has about 76,000 acres of State Beach, Parks, and Reserve Lands and 7,600 acres of Bureau of Land Management Reserve Lands. Figure 5-1 maps the location and extent of the parklands and open space in Humboldt County.

Table 5-1: Parkland in Unincorporated Humboldt County by Watershed

<i>Watershed</i>	<i>National Forest/ Park/ Wildlife Lands</i>	<i>State Beach/ Park/ Reserve Lands</i>	<i>County Park Lands</i>	<i>BLM Forest Reserve Lands</i>	<i>Total Acreage</i>
Eureka Plain	2,227	593	86	7,478	10,384
Lower Eel	20	4,654	18	94	4,786
Lower Klamath	140,231	705	0	0	140,936
Lower Trinity	93,527	0	0	0	93,527
Mad River	30,751	34	327	0	31,111
Mattole	58,154	1,474	33	0	59,661
Middle Main Eel	3,214	374	0	0	3,588
Redwood Creek	70,279	12,205	0	0	82,484
South Fork Eel	0	51,533	4	0	51,537
South Fork Trinity	52,334	0	0	0	52,334
Trinidad	963	4,153	89	0	5,204
Van Duzen	16,231	407	228	14	16,879
Total	467,931	76,131	785	7,586	552,433

Note: Numbers may not sum due to rounding

Source: Humboldt County GIS, 2002.

STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS, BEACHES, CONSERVATION AREAS, AND RESERVES

As shown in Table 5-1, Humboldt County is home to over 500,000 acres of state and national land. The old-growth redwood forests of the Humboldt coastline are some of the last left in the world, providing critical habitat for a number of endangered and threatened species. The cultural significance of the preservation of the natural areas is equal to the environmental significance. These wilderness areas attract visitors and recreationists from all over the world. Federal lands are located generally on the perimeter of Humboldt County, with Six Rivers National Forest along the eastern border of the County, Redwood National Park in the northwestern corner of the County, and the King Range National Conservation Area along the southwest coastline. Several key federal parklands are described below.

Figure 5-1: Parks and Open Space in Humboldt County

King Range National Conservation Area

Under the management of the Bureau of Land Management, the 54,200-acre King Range National Conservation Area is home to the largest stretch of untouched beach on the northern Pacific coast. This rugged and remote coastal area known as the “lost coast” is kept essentially untouched by civilization with the only access through narrow winding roads and limited facilities in the conservation area. The dramatic meeting of the Pacific Ocean with the King Range provides an opportunity to observe the interaction of many different ecosystems. This conservation area provides important recreational opportunities for backpackers who wish to get away from urbanization.

Redwood National and State Parks

Redwood National Park is a joint venture between the National Park Service and the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The park contains three state parks, Del Norte Coast, Jedediah Smith, and Prairie Creek, under cooperative management with the National Park Service. Altogether this park is 106,000 acres, with 30 miles of coastline, 150 miles of hiking trails, and more than 351 developed campsites. Humboldt County’s portion of the park is 67,443 acres of federal land and 15,122 acres of state land. The Redwood National and State Parks are considered a globally significant biological preserve and were designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1980. They were also named part of the United Nations International Biosphere Program’s California Coast Ranges Biosphere Reserve in 1983. The resources protected are significant locally, nationally, and globally. The tallest tree on earth, a 367 foot Redwood, is located in this park.

Six Rivers National Forest

Six Rivers National Forest is named for the six rivers, Smith, Klamath, Trinity, Eel, Van Duzen, and Mad, which create 1,500 miles of waterways through it’s nearly one million acres of wilderness. The forest is also home to six botanical areas, two scenic byways, four wilderness areas, several lakes, numerous campgrounds, 230 miles of trails, Smith River National Recreation area, and 35% of California's Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Table 5-2: Federal Parks and Beaches in Humboldt County

<i>Park</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Facilities</i>	<i>Activities</i>
Mattole Headwaters Ecological Reserve	7,400	20 acres of the reserve are open for recreational activities	Beachcombing, birdwatching
King Range National Conservation Area	54,200	5 developed campgrounds and several primitive camp sites; 16 miles of trails	Saltwater and freshwater fishing, camping, hiking, hunting, off-road vehicle use,
Redwood National Park	106,000	Nearly 200 miles of hiking trails, campgrounds, youth hostel, 5 visitor centers	Hiking, camping, picnicking, birdwatching, whale-watching, horseback riding
Six Rivers National Forest	990,000	Developed campgrounds	Hiking, mountain biking, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, hunting, swimming, camping, fishing, birdwatching, horseback riding

The State Park System integrates with the Federal and County park systems often connecting with or nestled within a larger park system. The Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park is incorporated into the Redwood National State Park System. The Little River State Park adjoins the Clam Beach County Park together creating a larger swath of open space.

Additionally, the State Parks in the county contain many significant natural resources. The Humboldt Redwoods state park is the largest of the California Redwood state parks and contains the largest remaining stand of virgin redwoods in the world. State parks also offer community events, sites of historic and cultural significance, and recreation for inhabitants of Humboldt and all of California. The State park system provides resources of regional importance in Humboldt County with recreational opportunities along the coastal areas closer to population centers and along rivers.

Table 5-3: State Parks in Humboldt County

<i>Park</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Facilities</i>	<i>Activities</i>
Azalea State Reserve	30	Nature trail; Picnic tables	Picnicking
		Campsites; Picnic area	Hiking; Picnicking; Camping; Fishing;
Benbow Lake	1,200		Home to Reggae on the River and Jazz on the Lake
		Historic reconstruction of buildings, grassy bluff, picnic tables, outdoor logging machinery displays, logging museum, fort museum, bookstore and restrooms	Picnicking; Educational tours
Fort Humboldt	N/A		
		30 campsites, group camp and picnic area, 4.5 miles of hiking trails, horse shoe pit, environmental camp, visitor center with exhibits and bookstore	Canoeing; Kayaking; Fishing; Swimming; Camping; Hiking
Grizzly Creek Redwoods	N/A		
Harry A. Merlo	830		Fishing; Boating
		Coastal Trail; Visitor center and bookstore; Picnic areas	Boating; Fishing; Beachcombing; Hiking; Bird watching; Whale watching; Agate Hunting
Humboldt Lagoons	N/A		
		100 miles of hiking trails; Family, group, horse, bicycle and backpack camps; Visitor center with exhibits and bookstore	Hiking; Fishing; Canoeing; Swimming; Mountain Biking
Humboldt Redwoods	52,000		
Little River	N/A	Camp and day use facilities	Beachcombing
		Hiking trails; a reconstructed Yurok Indian Village; Native plant garden; Bookstore; Three family campgrounds; Group camp; Camp for hikers and bicyclists; Picnic areas.	Beachcombing; Agate Hunting; Whale and Sea Lion watching; Hiking
Patrick's Point	640		
		Visitor center with exhibits and a nature store; Campgrounds; Hiking and Biking Trails	Hiking; Nature Study; Wildlife viewing; Beachcombing; Picnicking
Prairie Creek Redwoods	14,000		
		Hiking Trails; Picnic Area; Nature Store; Camp Store; Visitor Center with Exhibits; Redwood Theater	Camping; Hiking; Swimming; Fishing
Richardson Grove	N/A		
		Hiking, biking, and horse trails; Visitor Center; Room rentals at Needle Rock Ranch House	Hiking; Mountain Biking; Horseback riding
Sinkyone Wilderness	7,367		
		Facilities; Picnic area; Parking area; Hiking trails; horse trail; beach access	Hiking; Horseback riding; Fishing; Surfing
Trinidad	N/A		

Source: <http://www.parks.ca.gov/parkindex>, 2002.

*Humboldt County General Plan Update Existing Conditions
Resource Management and Planning for Hazards*

COUNTY PARKS

Humboldt County has a great wealth of park resources sized for the existing community’s recreational and open space needs. The County owns and maintains 16 parks and trails. County parklands are focused on the County’s water resources, with locations along the coastline and along rivers. With approximately 826 acres of County owned parkland in the entire County, there are approximately 6.2 acres of County Park Land for every 1,000 residents.

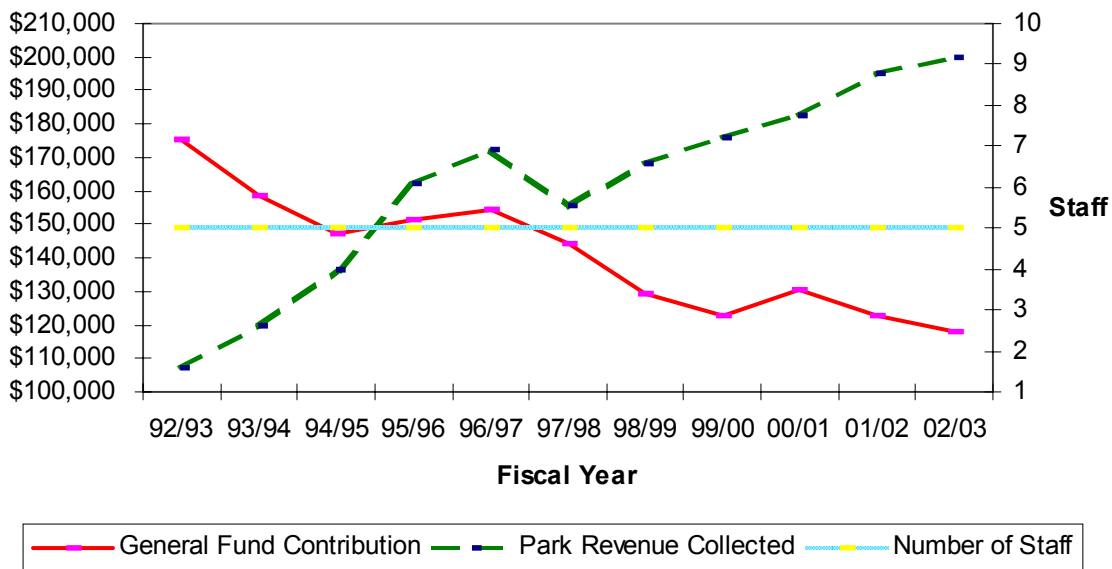
Table 5-3: County Parks and Trails

<i>Park</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Facilities</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Planned Improvements</i>
Arthur W. Way County Memorial Park	20	R.V. and tent sites; Water, Restrooms	Swimming; Fishing; Camping	Upgrade electrical; Septic system for caretaker residence; New picnic tables and fire rings; Replace restroom
Big Lagoon County Park	52	R.V. and tent sites; Water; Restrooms; Boat ramp and floating dock	Swimming; Fishing; Canoeing; Camping Beachcombing;	Roadside fence replacement; Picnic table replacement; Additional toilets; Hot showers
Centerville Beach County Park	2	Parking; Chemical toilet in summer	Beachcombing; Fishing	None Planned
Clam Beach County Park	370	R.V. and tent sites; Water; Restrooms	Beachcombing; Fishing; Camping	Electricity to restroom; Payphone; Two camp host sites; Boulders at beach vehicle access
Crab County Park	10.5	Parking	Beachcombing; Wildlife viewing	None Planned
Fields Landing County Park	1.5	Boat ramp and floating docks; Restrooms; Picnic tables; Vehicle & boat trailer parking	Fishing; Picnicking; Boating	None Planned
Freshwater County Park	7	Restrooms; Picnic tables; Children’s playground; Summer swimming hole behind seasonal dam; Gazebo for parties	Picnicking; Swimming; Parties/ reunions	New playground border; Replace picnic tables; New entrance gate; Landscaping; Upgrade caretaker residence; Fish ladder at seasonal dam
Hammond Trail	5 Miles	Partially paved trail with numerous access points	Hiking; Bicycling; Equestrian	Bridge over Strawberry Creek; Construction of Widow White Creek segment (~2000 feet)
Luffenholtz Beach County Park	7.5	Picnic tables; Restrooms; Trails for beach access & overlook	Beachcombing; Picnicking;	Trail improvements; Parking area resurfacing
Mad River County Park	95.5	Boat launch ramp; Picnic tables; Restrooms; Vehicle & boat trailer parking	Beachcombing; Boating; Fishing; Picnicking	None Planned
Moonstone Beach County Park	8	Parking; Chemical toilets	Beachcombing; Surfing	None planned
Pedrazzini County Park	1	Unimproved boat access	Boating; Fishing	New boat ramp; Vehicle & boat trailer parking
Samoa County Park	8	R.V. and tent sites; Boat launch ramp; Restrooms	Fishing; Boating; Picnicking; Camping	Full R.V. hookups; Additional toilets; Hot showers
Table Bluff County Park	34	Parking	Beachcombing	None Planned
Tooby Memorial Park	9	Picnic tables; Restrooms; Children’s playground	Swimming; Picnicking	Ownership Pending
Van Duzen County Park	200	R.V. and tent sites; Restrooms; Water	Swimming; Hiking; Fishing; Camping; Picnicking	New R.V. sites; Additional toilets & new flush toilets; Road resurfacing

Source: Humboldt County Public Works Department, 2002.

While the County has many park and recreation resources, funding from the County General Fund has decreased steadily over the past ten years, while revenues from park attendance have increased steadily indicating greater use of existing parklands. Despite increases in use and demand on park facilities, the number of County park employees has remained constant. Park revenues indicate a steady increase in demand for park resources with a near doubling in park fees collected in just ten years. This trend can be observed in Figure 5-2.

Figure 5-2: Humboldt County Parks Ten-Year Funding Comparison



Source: Humboldt County Department of Public Works

5.2 OPEN SPACE

Wide open spaces, whether those are in parkland, agriculture, timber production, or preserved open space, are characteristic of Humboldt County. Preserved open space has beneficial impacts on the economy. Proximity to wildlife and open space increases real estate values, therefore a housing development well endowed with open space resources yields greater returns to the developer and the County through increased property values. Additionally, open space policies that promote compact development and “smart growth” reduce management costs for public infrastructure, such as water supply, waste disposal, and transportation costs. Future development in the unincorporated county should be mindful of the value of open spaces.

The different categories of open space that could be established in the General Plan, consistent with state planning law, are further described below in the discussion of issues and policy options.

5.3 POLICY ISSUES

This section focuses on parks, recreation and open space issues from a public policy perspective, starting with existing park standards and policies in the General Plan. As with other resources, the County must consider the various policy options for the issues identified in Phase I of the General Plan Update, which are summarized in the Critical Choices Report. These key questions help frame the issues for policy options for open space resources. The policy evaluation worksheets that will be used to guide discussion of these issues are in the Appendix.

LOCAL PARK STANDARDS

There are currently no countywide park standards in Humboldt. However, individual cities within the County have developed their own standards. McKinleyville maintains a standard of 3 acres per 1,000 residents. However, future park demand in McKinleyville depends upon reliance on state and county facilities or the creation of more local parks. The city of Eureka maintains a standard of 1 acre of Neighborhood Parks and 3 acres of Community Parks per 1,000 residents. While these standards are below the National Park and Recreation Association recommendations, they site their proximity to state and federal parkland as decreasing the need for local open space and parkland.

EXISTING POLICIES

The County General Plan (Framework Plan) establishes the following policies related to parks and recreation.

County Parks and Recreation

GOAL

To provide and adequately maintain park and recreation opportunities which are highly accessible and reflective of public needs; to protect park resources from incompatible uses; and to plan park development in such a manner as to minimize environmental impacts.

POLICIES

1. The County should continue to support efforts to acquire, develop, and maintain county parks and recreation areas that are highly accessible to the public, and serve the unstructured outdoor recreational needs of County residents and tourists.
2. The County shall give priority to the County residents' outdoor recreational needs.
3. Plans for the development of additional County recreational facilities and opportunities shall consider the County's long-term capabilities for the maintenance of all facilities and opportunities.

4. The County shall encourage the private acquisition, development, and preservation of outdoor recreational resources and opportunities and facilities, and the County will coordinate recreation plans with all appropriate agencies.
5. The County shall pursue all feasible sources of funding for the maintenance, development or acquisition of recreational facilities and programs consistent with this plan.
6. The County Parks and Recreation Division staff shall continue to provide information regarding recreational opportunities within Humboldt County and input into land use planning decisions insofar as those decisions may affect recreational opportunities in the County.
7. Policies addressing community recreational needs shall be prepared as part of each community plan.

COASTAL ZONE POLICIES

The California Coastal Act sets out a series of policies to protect and enhance the California Coastal Zone. The Coastal Zone as described by the California Coastal Act is an important biological and recreational resource that must be managed accordingly. Access to the recreational resource of California's coastline must be maximized. Lower cost recreational facilities, including hotels, are encouraged in the Coastal Zone. Oceanfront land suitable for recreational uses should be protected for those uses, including recreational boating.

ISSUES AND OPTIONS

Each key question or issue raised in the Critical Choices Report that relate to open space resources is discussed below. Based on County and public input, these policy options will be refined. Some of these options also will shape preparation of "sketch plans" (generalized land use plans for accommodating future development), while others will be implemented through zoning and subdivision regulations or other programs.

ISSUE

- *Which open space assets need protections through Plan policies or County programs?*

Many open space assets in Humboldt County are already preserved in parks, agricultural preserves, and open space preserves. In a General Plan, open space assets include agricultural and timberlands, other resource lands, land for parks and recreation and land where development should be prohibited or strictly limited because of natural hazards. These types of open space have been discussed in previous chapters of this report. Open space also can include greenbelts – open space to shape and limit urban form.

To create a comprehensive framework for open space management, it may be helpful to synthesize open space assets, using the categories for open space as established in state planning law. State planning law provides a structure for the preservation of open space by identifying four open space categories:

- *Open space for public health and safety* including, but not limited to, areas that require special management or regulation due to hazardous or special conditions. This type of open space might include: earthquake fault zones, unstable soil areas, floodplains, watersheds, areas presenting high fire risks, areas required for the protection of water quality and water reservoirs, and areas required for the protection and enhancement of air quality.
- *Open space for the preservation of natural resources* including, but not limited to, areas required for the preservation of plant and animal life, including: habitat for fish and wildlife species; areas required for ecologic and other scientific study purposes; rivers, streams, bays and estuaries; coastal beaches, lakeshores, banks of rivers and streams; and watershed lands.
- *Open space used for the managed production of resources* including, but not limited to, forest lands, timber lands, rangeland, agricultural lands and areas of economic importance for the production of food or fiber; areas required for recharge of ground water basins; bays, estuaries, marshes, rivers and streams that are important for the management of commercial fisheries; and areas containing major mineral deposits, including those in short supply.
- *Open space for outdoor recreation* including, but not limited to, areas of outstanding scenic, historic and cultural value; areas particularly suited for park and recreation purposes, including access to lakeshores, beaches, and rivers and streams; and areas that serve as links between major recreation and open-space reservations, including utility easements, banks of rivers and streams, trails, and scenic highway corridors.

In addition to these classifications, a fifth open space category could be established to support implementation of Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs).

- *Open space to shape and limit urban form* including, but not limited to, areas meeting other open space objectives, such as greenbelts and open space corridors established to implement community design goals or objectives. The Greenway and Open Space Combining Zone that is used in the Eureka Planning Area is an example of this type of open space.

Designating these open space resources on a General Plan map is not intended to imply that the public interest would be best served by prohibiting development on all lands. Rather, these open space resources likely signify one of three possible scenarios depending upon the hazard potential, fragility, location, regulatory constraints, and other pertinent factors:

- All development should be prohibited.
- Development should be permitted on part of the land and the balance preserved as open space—a clustering concept.

- Development should be permitted subject to subdivision and site plan review and the imposition of specific conditions to protect against hazards and preserve the integrity of the land and the environment.

The synthesis suggested by this open space classification system, and the implications for development opportunities, also is discussed Chapter 14, Summary of Opportunities and Constraints. Chapter 14 also includes a series of maps for the community planning areas and for the Coastal Zone that show how planned development under the current General Plan would be affected by resource constraints and hazards.

Option 5.1 Establish an open space classification system to summarize open space resources in the County and serve as a framework for land use planning and environmental resource management programs. This summary diagram of open space resources also can be helpful in identifying where appropriate linkages may be needed between parks and trails systems and the County's coastal access program.

ISSUE

- *Considering economic development initiatives, incentive programs and regulatory approaches, how can long-term protection be achieved?*

The best way to achieve long-term protection of open space assets is to have a multi-faceted program, including zoning and environmental resource management programs as well as incentives for habitat conservation and agricultural land conservation that complement the County's Timber Production Zones and other economic development strategies and support the federal, state and local park system and management programs for public lands. Secure funding for long-term protection also can help.

As previously suggested, the County could be more pro-active in supporting efforts of agricultural and open space land trusts, who can support long-term open space preservation programs. Leveraging funds also is important, a principle the County already has identified as important in discussions about how best to use Headwaters Funds.

If there are valuable open space resources that are unique, significant natural areas, for example, that provide habitat for threatened or endangered species or represent valuable recreational resources, and also are threatened by development proposals, and regulations and incentives will not provide the protection that County residents want, the County could consider creating an open space acquisition program to add land to the County parks system, thereby creating a parks and open space system. What would be needed to create such an open space system would be a secure funding source, separate from the County's General Fund, for planning, land acquisition and management of parks and open space resources. This could be in the form of a dedicated tax approved by the voters, such as an increase in the Transient Occupancy Tax, a Utility Users' Tax or a Property Transfer Tax. If such a tax were dedicated for open space acquisition and management only, a two-thirds voter approval is required.

Option 5.2 Establish a secure funding source for open space acquisition and management sufficient to enable acquisition of high priority open space that can not otherwise be preserved by regulatory incentives or partnerships with non-profit land trusts or other open space and agricultural conservation organizations. This funding source could complement use of the Headwaters Funds which are intended to improve the economy and create new jobs by focusing on preserving and enhancing critical open space resources and integrating them into a comprehensive parks and open space system. Protecting critical environmental resources also will be good for tourism – a building block for “smart growth.”