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**Version 9.0**

Parks and Recreation
Master Plan

A Strategy for Meeting Recreation Needs in Calaveras County

January 2013

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Mission Statement

Calaveras County

Parks & Recreation Commission

The Calaveras County Parks & Recreation Commission was established by the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors to initiate the process of creating an efficient and adequately funded system of parks and recreational programs within Calaveras County. The Commission’s mission is to provide support to local governments and volunteer organizations that provide park facilities and programs serving County residents. In locations not currently served by an agency, the Commission shall be the local provider for new facilities and programs as they are proposed and funded.

In its initial year the Commission will institutionalize the parkland dedication program under the Quimby Act and make it operational.

In the subsequent one to three years the Commission will seek collaboration with local agencies (e.g., veterans’ districts, park and recreation agencies, school districts, the City of Angels, and water districts) to create a permanent governmental structure capable of implementing the *Master Plan*.

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**A Historical Snapshot of Northeastern Calaveras County**

The Up-Country communities of northeastern Calaveras County were born during the Gold Rush with an economy based on gold mining, lumber, and subsistence farming. Survival demanded long hours of hard work almost every day by everybody in the family. Despite these demands, our forefathers maintained a sense of community.

Our vision of early recreation largely comes from the journals of Artie Wilson (1881 – 1959). He ran the store on the corner of Pine and Main Streets in West Point where it still stands today. His story goes like this.

*Toys and luxuries did not exist. Whistles and trumpets were made from willows, popguns from alders, slingshots from a forked stick, and tops from oak knots. We played ball games, and running games, and marbles, and walked on stilts. A length of willow, piece of string and a pin made wonderful poles for the rivers full of fish. Everyone had their favorite swimming hole and swam all summer. The Fourth of July was celebrated in style with horse racing, ball games, foot races, sack races, greased pole climbing, drilling contests, and a merry-go-round. And in winter, we slid down the snow-covered hills on homemade sleds and, for excitement, we bombarded Chinatown with snowballs. In addition to all of this, West Point even had a skating rink and a sports pavilion where boxing matches were held.*

*Baseball was a big deal with teams in West Point and Rail Road Flat. Dirt fields were leveled from private pasture land and equipped with simple wood bleachers under a roof to protect fans from the sun. During the summer our baseball teams traveled by wagon to towns throughout Calaveras and Amador counties – Jackson, Sutter Creek, Rail Road Flat, Mokelumne Hill, San Andreas, Angels Camp, Paloma, and Wallace. And the young ladies attended the games in full gowns and fancy hats to catch the eye of an eligible bachelor.*

*Finally, hunting and fishing were major events for the men who made camping expeditions by pack train to Bruce's Camp and Salt Springs on the North Fork of the Mokelumne River.*

It is important to note that government agencies provided no support for any of this recreation and that the sports fields, skating rinks, pavilion, racetrack and fishing trails were all on private land and this system worked because of a profound sense of community where everybody knew and respected their neighbor. This community spirit lasted until the 1960's and 70's. Because of liability and other issues such as vandalism, graffiti and trash, many private landowners withdrew their land from public use leaving progressively fewer recreational opportunities.

# Master Plan

**Calaveras County
Parks and Recreation
Master Plan**

*A Strategy for Meeting Recreation Needs
in Calaveras County*

**Introduction**

Calaveras County’s natural resources are community treasures. With almost 200,000 acres of federal, state and local parklands, these vast resources have the potential to contribute immeasurably to our quality of life, making Calaveras County a desirable place to live, work, play and visit.

In general, these resources are largely undeveloped, are not well integrated with our communities, and in large part are not readily accessible. At the same time, statistics for Calaveras County show that our population is aging, economic activity is less than robust, childhood obesity is rising in epidemic proportions, and our young adults leave to pursue opportunities elsewhere. The question is: How can we best use our wealth of natural resources to help our aging population stay fit, stimulate the local economy, reverse the trend in obesity, and create attractive opportunities for young adults in our communities?

Many studies have shown, and intuitively you would likely agree, that parks deliver benefits to the wellbeing of our personal health, our economy, our environment and our community (Exhibit A). Yet we ask rhetorically: “why do we need more parks?” Our growing and aging population needs better access and connectivity to our public lands. Our commercial centers need to offer inviting public spaces and those public spaces need to be connected to the surrounding community. Park facilities need to be developed, expanded and improved to serve these needs.

To address these challenges, the Board of Supervisors (Board) created the Calaveras County Parks & Recreation Commission (CPARC) in 2007. At that time, the Board directed CPARC to return in due time with recommendations regarding how best to serve the communities’ park and recreation needs, both organizationally and financially. While the development of parks and recreational opportunities may not completely resolve a single one of these concerns, the strategies outlined in this *Master Plan* offer the potential for tangible improvements in each of these quality-of-life issues.

The goal of this *Master Plan* is to offer an immediate course of action that is guided by a long-range vision in a format that is thorough yet accessible. To that end, the body of the *Master Plan* is less than a dozen pages and it is the executive summary. However, it is supported by 14 exhibits that provide an in-depth look at every aspect of *Master Plan* development:

* Exhibit A, *Plan Development* describes the context and purpose of the Master Plan.
* Exhibit B, *County Profile* discusses the setting of Calaveras County as it relates to parks and recreation services and needs. It includes a discussion of community areas and demographic characteristics.
* Exhibit C, *Existing Parks and Recreation System* summarizes existing County facilities, parkland designations for local parks, trails, major recreational facilities, and other recreational facilities. It provides an overview of existing parkland in various communities.
* Exhibit D, *Goals, Policies and Programs* outlines the park and recreation objectives that will be used to identify specific needs and prioritize resources.
* Exhibit E, *Needs Assessment* presents an assessment of parkland and recreational facilities deficiencies and outlines recommendations to correct the deficiencies. Specific projects are identified in Exhibit L Capital Improvement Plan.
* Exhibit F, *Identify Resources*, summarizes recreational opportunities on public lands, district lands, and non-profit lands as well as the army of volunteers that serve in their operations and maintenance.
* Exhibit G, *Governance*, lists the types of recreation agencies available under California law and ranks them on their suitability to implement the Master Plan.
* Exhibit H, *Financing*, summarizes funding options and recommends the most likely to be implemented in Calaveras County.
* Exhibit I, *Implementation Plan,* outlines the next steps to be taken to fulfill the objectives of the *Master Plan*.
* Exhibit J, *Park Development Concepts*, outlines suggested improvement standards and guidelines.
* Exhibit K, *Parkland Dedication (Quimby Act Implementation),* describes the county parkland dedication program.
* Exhibit L, *Capital Improvement Plan*, lists specific projects by community needed to meet its recreational needs.
* Exhibit M, *National Park and Recreation Standards*, recognizes the National Park & Recreation Standards.
* Exhibit N, *References*, …

While the Master Plan has been crafted to serve as a platform for the systematic development of our park and recreation system, proposed park and recreation programming is intended to be flexible and responsive to changing conditions.

**Master Plan Development Process**

To develop a Master Plan that attempts to tackle the daunting challenges outlined above, CPARC embarked on a process in collaboration with its community partners to articulate our collective vision, goals and objectives for parks and recreation in Calaveras County. The product of this effort sets the course for the development of parks and for the growth and stewardship of our park and recreation system over the next 10-20 years. The graphic below shows this plan development process.

The outcome from each of these steps is summarized in the following sections of the *Master Plan*. More detailed documentation is provided in the attached exhibits, each of which is devoted to a step in the process.

To assure consistency with parallel and concurrent planning efforts, CPARC has met regularly with Planning Department staff during this process to coordinate our efforts with respect to the General Plan Update, the numerous community plans, and bike and pedestrian plans.

**County Profile**

Before attempting to assess park and recreation needs, the *Master Plan* creates a profile of Calaveras County, which is outlined in the snapshot to the left. This profile is based primarily on the 2010 US Census and a review of local planning documents as discussed more extensively in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

**County Snapshot**

***Age***–*The median age in 2010 was over 49, one of the highest in the State, and getting older. In 2000, the County’s median age was 44.*

***Population growth***–*Like California, Calaveras County is characterized by a history of growth. Continued growth is anticipated, particularly west of Hwy 49.*

***Dispersed population***–*Unlike any other jurisdiction in the State, the County lacks a single concentrated population center.*

***Unique communities***–*Each**of our communities is unique and distinguishable by their clear differences in median age, income, part-time residency and county of employment.*

***Ethnic homogeneity***–*The County’s residents are overwhelmingly white in an ethnically diverse State.*

***Part time residents***–*Some communities, notably Arnold, are characterized by a high proportion of part-time residences that exceed 50%.*

***Disabilities***–*More than 17% of residences report disabilities compared to a Statewide average of 10%.*

***Development***–*Less than 3% of the County is considered developed.*

With a reported population of 45,578, Calaveras ranks 44th among the State’s 58 counties. While the average annual population growth rate in the 1970s and 1980s exceeded 4%, the growth rate since 2000 has slowed to less than 2% per year.

Compared to the rest of the State, Calaveras residents are generally older, report a higher proportion of disabilities, and live in more dispersed developments with a higher percentage of seasonal or second homes.

About 8.7% of families and 11.80% of the population were below the poverty line, including 15.6% of those under age 18 and 6.2% of those age 65 or over.

The largest employers in the County were government services, schools, hospitals, wineries, golf courses, and grocery stores. More than half of the labor force travels out of the County to work with an average commute time of 34.5 minutes.

Within the County, Calaveras can be seen as a tale of two places: one to the east and one to the west with Highway 49 symbolically setting the two apart. The one to the west is characterized by rapid population growth, younger residents, and more households with children. Homes are typically owner-occupied in more densely populated developments characterized by open terrain with expansive reservoirs. In contrast, the east is experiencing negative population growth and is comprised of more senior residents living in more sparsely populated developments in heavily-forested and more mountainous terrain where most housing units are seasonal or vacation homes.

**INVENTORY Assets**

As a starting point in assessing park and recreation needs, the *Master Plan* provides a comprehensive inventory of public parks and recreation facilities currently present throughout Calaveras County. This inventory, summarized in the table below, catalogues almost 200,000 acres of public lands.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Entity** | **Organizational Unit** | **Acreage** | **Percent of Total County Acreage** |
| Federal | US Forest Service | 85,000 | 12.83% |
| Bureau of Land Management | 39,000 | 5.88% |
| Bureau of Reclamation | 35,000 | 5.28% |
| State | Parks and Recreation | 2,400 | 0.36% |
| Local | School Districts | 75 | 0.01% |
| Veterans Districts | 6 | <0.01% |
| County | 2 | <0.01% |
| Special Districts | 28,000 | 4.23% |
| Community Organizations | 61 | 0.01% |
| Private | ? |  |
| **TOTAL** | 189,544 | 28.60% |
| *Source: (Calaveras County Planning Department, 1996)* |

Insert inventory of developed parks facilities

As shown in Figure 1, the preponderance of this land is undeveloped open space that is distant from our community centers and difficult to access. By contrast, few neighborhoods have a park within walking distance.

**Define Goals and Objectives**

Relying on community input received during the course of this process, the Master Plan identifies six key themes based on community priorities and concerns:

1. Support existing parks and recreation programs and service providers
2. Improve proximity, connectivity and accessibility to our public lands via walkways and trails
3. Create diverse recreational opportunities for all age groups regardless of disabilities
4. Provide secure and safe facilities
5. Support community economic goals
6. Collaborate and partner with all stakeholders with an interest in parks and recreation

While these themes form the basis for our vision, the *Master Plan* identifies five overarching goals with corresponding objectives, strategies and actions that will guide the development of a recreational system to meet current and future needs of the county:

| **Goal** | **Grow and Link a System of Parks, Open Spaces and Trails**1 | **Support, Lead, Innovate and Partner**2 | **Foster Discovery, recreation and Stewardship**3 | **Establish An Effective Organizational Structure**4 | **Fulfill Financial Needs**5 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Objective** | Develop park facilities and recreational programming that offers all people opportunities to be active and healthy while enjoying a safe environment. | Cultivate partnerships, explore new approaches, and adopt best practices and technologies. | Engage the community by providing volunteer and cooperative experiences for people to discover, enjoy, protect and restore their parks and open space. | Establish an agency with responsibility for implementing the CPARC Master Plan. | Generate sustainable, long-term revenue for operations and maintenance, needed capital requirements and desired programs and services. |
| **Strategies** | Provide safe, quality recreation facilities and programs that promote healthy lifestyles through physical activity and socialization for all.Create a capital improvement program to develop an integrated system of parks, open space and trails.Manage a prioritized land and trail acquisition, preservation, and improvement plan.Ensure that accessible and inviting trails, parks, and open spaces connect communities.Provide amenities and promote land uses that enhance public spaces and commercial districts.Secure and preserve public access to public lands.Provide diverse recreation choices for use by all. | Support the efforts of other agencies, organizations, and communities to fulfill their recreational objectives.“Piggyback” on existing facilities and programs to create synergies and develop additional recreational opportunities.Integrate recreational considerations based into projects, policies and the planning process through partnerships with other agencies, organizations, businesses and communities.Identify key partnerships to share best practices, technical knowledge, expertise and resources to implement plans and projects.Employ innovative technologies and best practices for agency administration, programs, operations and land management. | Recognize that implementing the Master Plan will foster healthy lifestyles, vibrant communities, economic development and natural resource conservation.Establish an active community-based public participation program on all phases of park and recreation activities.Develop an outdoor education program that complements existing local programs.Outreach to the community to increase access to and enjoyment of our lands.Grow the volunteer program to provide experiential learning opportunities that promote land stewardship. | Petition the Board and/or LAFCO to create/approve an agency with responsibility for implementing the CPARC Master Plan.Involve all stakeholders in implementing the Master Plan.Update the Master Plan to respond to changing community needs and recreation trends.Initiate and encourage collaboration among CPARC and other land use agenciesFoster staff productivity, empowerment and satisfaction.Establish and maintain clear lines of communication and responsibilities. Monitor Master Plan implementation and evaluate successes and failures in an annual report to the public. | Secure new funding to support the preservation, enhancement, development, operation and long-term maintenance of parks and recreational facilities.Maximize efforts to secure grant funding and donations from all available sources to support park facilities and recreational programs and services.Develop a five-year Capital Improvement Plan to identify priority projects and funding needs.Assure implementation of the Quimby Act.Support legacy fund-raising activities of our partner agencies, organizations, and communities.Promote transparency by including the annual budget in the annual report. |
| **Action** | Develop, adopt and implement a **Park and Trail Master Plan.** | Develop, adopt and implement an **Advocacy and Partnership Plan.** | Develop, adopt and implement a **Public Outreach Plan.** | Develop, adopt and implement a **Governance Plan.** | Develop, adopt and implement a **Capital Improvement Plan** and **Finance Plan.** |

**Assess Needs**

The *Master Plan* asks somewhat rhetorically: Why do we need more and better parks and recreations?

***Planning Expert Cites Parks and Recreation Facilities as One of the Major Deficiencies within Calaveras County***

*“One of the major deficiencies within communities is a lack of parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, and similar facilities devoted to active recreation. Calaveras County does not directly maintain a system of park and recreation facilities. The ownership of these facilities is divided among a wide variety of public agencies, such as school districts, and private foundations / clubs. There is a shortage of facilities devoted to active recreation such as playgrounds and ball fields which especially affects children, teens, and persons with disabilities.”*

*Source:* (Mintier & Associates, 2008)

The Master Plan identifies specific needs in specific communities that are based on the following sources:

* Community input from a series of town hall meetings
* Needs analysis based on existing facilities in a service area and the application of population-based standards published by the National Park and Recreation Association and other agencies
* Commissioners’ judgment

In general, community input stressed that our growing and aging population needs better access and connectivity to our lands. Our commercial centers need to offer inviting public spaces and those public spaces need to be connected to the surrounding community. Additional park facilities need to be developed, and existing ones need to be expanded and improved.

EXPAND THE FOLLOWING INTO A COHERENT PARAGRAPH.

The applications of standards established by studies in other rural areas clearly describe the low level of service in Calaveras County. Two criteria are used to evaluate the LOS for recreation:

Capacity

Proximity by type

Regional park = 20-mile) What facilities go into a regional park?

Neighborhood park (walking distance) What facilities go into a neighborhood park?

Draw a 20 mile buffer around each community and determine the number of Regional and Neighborhood parks recommended against the actual number in the service area. Look in the Interim P & R Plan, Cutler’s notes and the Amador Plan for these types of data.

Standards established by studies in other rural jurisdictions. Reference Colorado.

Results for the following categories within each planning area (community – 20-minute radius):

Open space – parkland

Play facilities

Integration of this input led to the articulation of strategies and actions outlined in the following section.

**Identify Resources**

Embracing the challenge of creating something from nothing, we are fond of saying: “CPARC has no staff, no budget, and no authority” and yet we commissioners publish a *Master Plan*. Yet, upon further reflection, there are a number of resources available to further the goals and objectives of the Master Plan:

* Existing federal, State and local public lands surveyed in Exhibit C
* Existing recreational facilities and programs as catalogued in Exhibit C
* Army of dedicated volunteers who take responsibility for existing facilities
* Quimby Act and the local Parkland Dedication Ordinance (County of Calaveras, 2008)

In addition, we have the democratic process provided under the State Government Code that allows the formation of a special district and, with public support, the ability to generate revenue through a variety of means.

CPARC’s survey, analysis and recommendations for agency formation and financing required to implement this *Master Plan* and serve the communities’ recreation and park needs are presented in Exhibit D. As discussed, CPARC recommends that certain actions be taken to form an independent special district whose sole function is to serve the county’s recreation needs: a recreation and park district authorized under California Public Resources Code Section et seq.

While we recognize that our recommendations have the potential to elicit controversy, we believe that voters will recognize the value of our proposition and demand decisive action to secure the health and general welfare of our communities and their residents, both current and future.

Describe the process for creating a R&PD supported with TOT

**Set Priorities**

Implementation / Action Plan

Long-range vision with immediate actions

Support local community based efforts

**Implementation Strategy**

Without an “Implementation Strategy,” the *Master Plan* is just another book on the shelf. The “Implementation Strategy” outlined below is intended to guide the deployment of agency resources in accordance with established priorities to fulfill the county’s recreation and park needs and as necessary to achieve the stated goals and objectives. The Implementation Plan consists of a series of exhibits that cover the following priority actions that are deemed necessary to implement the *Master Plan*:

* ***Goal 1- Parks and Trails Plan***. The Parks and Trails Plan envisions an interconnected and accessible system of parks and recreation facilities that offer everyone opportunities to be active and healthy while enjoying safe and well maintained lands and facilities. Based on community outreach and a formal needs assessment, the Parks and Trails Plan identifies specific improvements and actions for each of our communities that will provide different recreation experiences that meet the emerging needs of the diverse and aging population of Calaveras, including:
	+ New recreational facilities and family gathering spaces such as sports fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, dog parks, water play areas, swimming pools, and OHV parks
	+ Walkways and trails (pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian) connecting communities, commercial centers, parks and public lands
	+ Improved access and facilities at existing venues for the mobility impaired
	+ Expanded outreach and education efforts that connect the public with their recreation facilities and programs
	+ Confirm that these improvements are included in Exhibit L!!!
* ***Goal 2 & 3- Advocacy, Outreach & Partnering***. The Advocacy, Outreach and Partnering Plan maps out the collaboration necessary for a catalyst organization to connect and contribute to an already vibrant, but not well-integrated, collage of recreation providers, educators, and volunteers.
* ***Goal 4- Governance***. The Governance discussion in Exhibit F catalogues the various forms of local government entities authorized under State law and evaluates their suitability for achieving the goals and objectives of the *Master Plan*. Based on this survey and analysis, CPARC recommends the formation of an independent special district, a recreation and park district, under the authority of Government Code §66477. The geographic boundaries of this district would include the unincorporated areas of Calaveras County, excluding the existing San Andreas Recreation and Park District.
* ***Goal 5- Finance***. The Finance discussion in Exhibit G attempts to reconcile the cost of mitigating our existing deficiencies (aka fulfilling our needs) with the amount of funding that is currently available. Not surprisingly, CPARC finds that additional funding is necessary to implement the *Master Plan*. Exhibit G reviews the revenue-generating measures that are available to local governments, in general, and recreation and park districts, in particular. Based on this review, CPARC recommends placing a voter initiative on the fall 2014 general election ballot that would authorize an increase in the transient occupancy tax (TOT) and dedicates revenues to a Countywide Recreation and Park District created under Goal 4. In addition, CPARC would rely upon dedications under the Quimby Act to fund park development serving new subdivisions and localized benefit assessments to assure park operation and maintenance of those new facilities.
* ***Goals 1 & 5- Capital Improvement Plan***. The Capital Improvement Plan presented in Exhibit L is an extensive, prioritized list of projected improvements to the parks and recreation system for the next 20 years and identifies $10 million in capital projects that fall into the following types:
	+ Land acquisition as required for the development of new facilities
	+ Parks development and improvement including a range of projects to construct new facilities, improve existing facilities, improve accessibility and to increase the diversity of recreational amenities
	+ Park stewardship includes a range of projects to improve habitats and natural resources, reduce wildfire hazards, provide for road and trail improvements and address other land management responsibilities

The current Capital Improvement Plan is preliminary in nature as the project list has yet to be finalized. However, it serves as the basis for developing a comprehensive plan for ultimate adoption by the new recreation agency.

**Next Steps**

With adoption of the Master Plan, our next steps would be to initiate the following actions:

* Seek adoption of a Board resolution petitioning LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) to review district formation
* Collaborate with the Planning Department and its consultants to incorporate higher tier goals, objectives and standards of the *Master Plan* into the General Plan
* Partner with other community service organizations to place a funding initiative on the ballot of the fall 2012 general election