



809 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Arana Gulch Park Master Plan

Executive Summary

The Arana Gulch Master Plan completes the last master planning work for the parks and open spaces within the City of Santa Cruz. The Plan has evolved from various planning and management efforts spanning many years. Throughout this process, considerable public interest and participation coupled with scientific surveys and evaluations have contributed to the development of this plan. A copy of the Arana Gulch Master Plan is included in the front sleeve of this packet for your review.

The intent of the Master Plan is to establish a vision and goals that will shape the future of Arana Gulch as a unique open space within the City of Santa Cruz. This Master Plan identifies limited recreational uses, maximizes interpretive opportunities, and provides significant resource management guidelines to direct enhancement of the natural areas. It includes a resource and constraints analysis, analyzes existing uses and impacts, prescribes creation of a more appropriate formal trail system, eliminates existing environmentally damaging trails, and establishes resource management guidelines for each unique area.

This Master Plan is a balance between public access and resource protection in an environmentally sensitive habitat area (ESHA). Recognizing the importance and priority of providing habitat protection, and access that is dependent on and sensitive to the resources on site, the Plan is designed to meet Coastal Act Policies. Currently this open space, which is situated in the middle of our urban environment, is impacted by volunteer trails through Santa Cruz tarplant habitat and other sensitive habitats. At the same time the open space is not accessible to people with limited mobility. Two very clear goals of the City, implemented by this plan, are to develop interpretive programs to foster stewardship of our natural environments and to provide multi-use trails to provide ADA access in this open space. The combination of many funding sources provides the financial resources to successfully implement the master plan.

Project Setting

Arana Gulch is a natural area situated along the eastern boundary of the City of Santa Cruz, to the north of the Santa Cruz Harbor. This 67.7 acre City-owned open space features unique natural resources such as coastal prairie, Santa Cruz Tarplant, and the riparian and wetland habitat areas of Arana Gulch Creek.

Overlooking the upper Harbor, a coastal terrace comprises the central portion of Arana Gulch. Grassland covers the expanse of the terrace, with oak woodland along the bluff edges. On the eastern portion of the property, the grassland gives way to riparian scrub and forest, sloping down to the broad floodplain of Arana Gulch Creek. Hagemann Gulch, a steep wooded canyon, forms the southwestern boundary of the property.

Several unimproved earthen trails, most of which existed prior to the City's ownership, provide existing public access within Arana Gulch. The main trail, eroded and steep in some sections, provides an unofficial bicycle/pedestrian connection from Agnes Street at the north end to the Upper Harbor to the south. A pedestrian trail encircles the grassland area. There are no trail entrances or connections along the eastern or western boundaries of the property. There are also no existing wheelchair accessible trails within Arana Gulch. In addition to the designated trails, there are numerous unauthorized trails crossing the property, several of which are located in the southern grassland and tarplant population areas. Dogs are required to be on-leash at all times within Arana Gulch.

The northernmost portion of the Santa Cruz Harbor property features an existing dry storage area, enclosed in chain link fencing. The designated southern access to Arana Gulch is located along the western edge of the dry storage area. There is also an informal, undesignated pathway along the northern boundary of the dry storage area which is used by some members of the public as a cut-through connection to Arana Gulch.

There are no existing structures, parking or restrooms within Arana Gulch. There is limited fencing and park signage.

Site History

The project site was once part of the ranchlands known as Live Oak Ranch in the late 1800s. Cattle were grazed on the portion of the property now known as Arana Gulch. In the 1920s, the Arana Gulch property became the site of the East Side Dairy. The dairy operation continued through the mid-1950s. A barn and other structures were once located within the northern portion of the property, but were demolished after the mid-1970s. Within the Arana Gulch property, no historic buildings or remnants exist from either the Live Oak Ranch or dairy operations. Foundations remain from some of the structures associated with the East Side Dairy, but these are not considered significant historic resources. Cattle grazing continued on the property until the late 1980s.

In 1994, the City of Santa Cruz acquired the 63-acre property known as Arana Gulch. Years prior to that purchase, the City had acquired a narrow strip of land in the central portion of the property (approximately 4.7 acres). This strip of land was originally

intended for a roadway extension between Broadway and Brommer Street, but the City later decided not to pursue the roadway connection and has included all of the property as open space within the Arana Gulch Master Plan.

Shortly after the acquisition of Arana Gulch, the City opened the property to limited public use, with the City Parks and Recreation Department managing the area. In 1997, the City Council approved the *Arana Gulch Interim Management Plan*, which outlined limited actions to maintain the property but did not include any land use decisions.

Most of Arana Gulch has been designated as critical habitat for Santa Cruz tarplant. Since the purchase, the City has provided various tarplant management regimes, including mowing, raking, light scraping, and limited controlled burns. It is known that the tarplant thrived on the property when it was grazed during the dairy operations. Since that time, even with City and volunteer efforts, the tarplant has experienced a severe decline.

Proposed Project Overview

The City of Santa Cruz is submitting a consolidated coastal development permit application for the Arana Gulch Master Plan and trail improvements within the upper Santa Cruz Harbor. The Master Plan addresses the long-term use and resource management of the 67.7 acre City-owned Arana Gulch open space property.

Most of the Arana Gulch property and upper Harbor area is located within the Coastal Zone. The coastal terrace portion of Arana Gulch is under local permitting jurisdiction, while the Arana Gulch and Hagemann Gulch Creek corridors are deemed tidelands and public trust lands within original Coastal Commission jurisdiction.

The Santa Cruz City Council unanimously approved the Arana Gulch Master Plan and certified the associated Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in July 2006. A local coastal permit was not considered at that time. A legal challenge was subsequently filed against the Final EIR, in which the Court ruled in favor of the City in the proceeding under CEQA. A subsequent appeal was filed and the appellate court upheld the trial court's decision in favor of the city.

Specifically, the coastal development permit application includes the following project components:












- Protection and management of habitat areas (coastal prairie/Santa Cruz tarplant, Arana Gulch Creek and riparian area, seasonal wetlands, and Hagemann Gulch riparian woodland);
- improvement of portions of the existing trail system within Arana Gulch to provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant public access;
- installation of a pedestrian/bicycle bridge spanning Hagemann Gulch to provide a new west entrance;
- interpretive program displays and trail signage;

Arana Gulch MASTER PLAN

- Avoids tarplant areas
- Seasonal wetland buffers
- Expanded grazing
- Closes unauthorized trails



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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Approximate location of Santa Cruz Tarplant subpopulation areas identified in 1989 |  Proposed Grazing Area (approx. 14 acres) |  Master Plan Boundary |
|  Seasonal Wetlands |  Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail (wheelchair accessible) |  City Limit |
|  Meadow Overlook Area (20ft x 20ft) |  Pedestrian Trail (unpaved) | Note: Trail width symbol not to scale |
|  Interpretive Display |  Pedestrian Trail (unpaved/no dogs) | |
|  Overlook | | |

- installation of grazing fencing associated with restoration of coastal prairie/Santa Cruz tarplant habitat; and
- removal and restoration of unauthorized environmentally damaging volunteer trails.

Most of Arana Gulch would remain undeveloped, with a focus on protection and enhancement of the sensitive habitat areas. The paved trails would comprise less than 1% of the total area of the Arana Gulch property.

No on-site parking or restrooms are proposed as part of the project. Visitors may either walk or bicycle to Arana Gulch from the adjacent neighborhoods or park on public streets at the north, south and west entrances. Public restrooms are located at Frederick Street Park and the adjacent Harbor.

Coastal Commission Consideration of Arana Gulch Master Plan

On March 11, 2010 the City of Santa Cruz presented a Draft Arana Gulch Master Plan to the California Coastal Commission for the first time. Coastal Commission staff provided a comprehensive staff report that recommended approval of the Master Plan. City representatives requested the hearing be continued to allow the City opportunity to bring additional information back to the Commission related to their questions. On October 14, 2010 the City presented additional analysis in response to the questions and concerns raised at the March 11, 2010 hearing. Coastal Commission staff provided a comprehensive staff report, again recommending approval of the Arana Gulch Master Plan. Coastal Commissioner's took testimony and deliberated and by a 5-5 vote denied the coastal development permit.

This is a new Coastal Development Permit application. As presented the project has been modified to:

- Further consolidate or eliminate trails and pathways.
- Move all existing and proposed pathways out of historic tarplant areas.
- Substantially expand the areas that may be grazed for habitat enhancement.
- Move fencing out of historic tarplant areas.
- Expand and maximize opportunities for Interpretive Programs.
- Provide additional funding for project and clearly describe the sources.
- Set aside a portion of the total plan funding in a City Trust Fund specially designated for long-term habitat management.
- Clarify and further describe parameters and development of the proposed Habitat Management Plan and its implementation
- Provide permeable all-weather surface for the multi-use trails.

Coastal Commission staff also recommended in their staff report for the October 14, 2010 hearing, that the north-south multi-use trail from Agnes Street be moved to the westerly project boundary. This option would further expand the area for grazing in the northerly site, and is shown on the following map. However, this also puts the ADA-accessible trail to the periphery of Arana Gulch rather than providing an access experience into the property in the northern area. While the City is amenable to this change, the preference is for the multi-use trail to remain in the same alignment as the former farm road in the middle of the northern section, and the unpaved path would be on the periphery.

**PREVIOUS
COASTAL STAFF
RECOMENDATION**
October 2010



LEGEND

- A-D Approximate location of Santa Cruz Tarplant subpopulation areas identified in 1989
 - Seasonal Wetlands
 - Meadow Overlook Area (20ft x 20ft)
 - Interpretive Display
 - Overlook
 - Proposed Grazing Area
 - Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail (wheelchair accessible)
 - Pedestrian Trail (unpaved)
 - Pedestrian Trail (unpaved/no dogs)
 - Master Plan Boundary
 - City Limit
- Note: Trail width symbol not to scale

Project Highlights

The Arana Gulch Master Plan includes numerous elements that are designed to protect the resources while providing public access, and interpretive themes and programs. The City project team has worked with Coastal Commission staff, resource agencies, biologists, native plant experts and advocates, and local nonprofits to provide the best possible balance between resource protection and public access. Through this process many aspects of the Master Plan have been enhanced and/or modified. Some of these are included in the list of highlights which follows:

Habitat Management and Restoration

- A key component of the Plan is to develop and implant an Adaptive Management Plan for restoring and enhancing the native habitats, especially that of the Santa Cruz tarplant with a more aggressive recovery regime.
- The tarplant management plan will be developed and reviewed by a team of qualified botanists, including representatives from responsible agencies (Coastal Commission, California Department of Fish and Game, and US Fish and Wildlife Service), a botanist representing the California Native Plant Society, and two other non-agency biologists.
- The content and parameters of the Habitat Management Plan will be consistent with the details provided in the Master Plan and the list of requirements provided by Coastal Commission staff, including a baseline assessment, description of goals, procedures and timing for treatments, success criteria, reporting and modification of plan if warranted.
- Santa Cruz tarplant thrived on the site in the past when it was actively grazed. The City has increased its mowing regime in recent time in order to reduce invasive species, until a more focused plan with grazing can be commenced.

Interpretive Programs

- The Interpretive Program includes displays at key locations, on such topics as invasive plant species and habitat restoration, historical use of the property, and watershed stewardship.
- The Interpretive Program provides an opportunity for docents to lead walks, classes and workshops by local experts to educate interested groups. The Plan allows the development of a Docent-led School Program administered by the Museum of Natural History that currently serves over 2,000 students and adults annually in other open space areas of the City. As well, O'Neill Sea Odyssey runs an ocean stewardship program for youth at the adjacent harbor, and would include Arana habitats and watershed in their curriculum.
- The Interpretive Program provides an opportunity to further engage neighbors and other groups to support restoration work and lead walks, similar to efforts by neighborhood groups in other areas of the City. Some of these are coordinated by the Museum of Natural History and/or Parks and Recreation.

- A pavilion area will be installed in the Agnes Street meadow that will include benches, an interpretive display, and oak plantings for shade.

Funding

- The Santa Cruz City Council has committed long term funding of the Santa Cruz Tarplant Adaptive Management Plan and will place those funds in separate account of the City's Trust Fund.
- The County of Santa Cruz approved a resolution recommending approval of the Arana Gulch Master Plan and has committed \$1.38 million dollars of Redevelopment funding to complete the project.
- The City is leveraging federal Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds to develop the multi-use trails for the project, as well as carry out the other project elements described, including habitat enhancement. TE funds are commonly used in this type of setting and for this purpose.

Trails and Pathways

- The Plan provides trail connections to adjacent neighborhoods, as well as providing a spur trail to the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail and the California Coastal Trail.
- Both the paved and unpaved trails shown in the trail alignments avoid all areas of historic tarplant populations and seasonal wetlands.
- The spur trail between the central meadow and the Coastal Prairie Loop trail has been eliminated.
- The multi-use trails will be constructed as ADA accessible paths with a permeable all-weather surface of an integral color that blends with the site soils.
- Multi-use trails will provide public access for pedestrians and bicyclists, and provide access that does not currently exist for persons with physical limitations and those with children in strollers.
- Other pathways will be unimproved, but designed and maintained to guide people away from sensitive areas, and to minimize erosion and other environmental damage
- All unauthorized paths causing environmental damage will be removed.
- Interpretive opportunities are integral to the trail design.

Additional Information/Analyses

Attached to the executive summary, Sections 2 through 6 have been provided to respond to questions from Coastal Commissioners, staff and interested members of the public. Those sections concern tarplant management, the interpretive program, cattle grazing, the funding program and a trail materials analysis and matrix.

Appendices 20 through 29 contain the following analysis and mapping:

20. Habitat Fragmentation Discussion
21. Neary Lagoon Wildlife Refuge and Interpretative Trail System
22. Hydrology Report - drainage conditions adjacent to trail
23. Trail/Bikeway Examples Within Sensitive Habitat Areas
24. Arana Gulch Master Plan Team and Supporters
25. Boardwalk discussion/analysis
26. Caltrans funding requirements
27. Trial alignment alternatives
 - Map 1 - Existing trails
 - Map 2 - City proposed alignment
 - Map 3 - Coastal staff recommendation (July 2010)
 - Map 4 - CNPS alignment
28. Comparison Table between City and CNPS alternative alignments
29. Comparative Engineering Analysis
 - AL-1.1 - City Trail alignment
 - AL-1.2 - Cross Sections
 - AL-1.3 - Slope Analysis (ADA)
 - AL-2.1 - CNPS Trail Alignment
 - AL-2.2 - Cross Sections
 - AL-2.3 – Slope Analysis (ADA)