



JULY 2022



REIMAGINING BIG BASIN

VISION SUMMARY

A collaborative vision to guide the reestablishment of
Big Basin Redwoods State Park after the 2020 CZU Fire

REIMAGININGBIGBASIN.ORG

REIMAGINING BIG BASIN PROCESS (2021-2022)

In the wake of the CZU Lightning Complex Fire that burned 97% of Big Basin Redwoods State Park in 2020, the California Department of Parks and Recreation set out to reimagine the future of Big Basin. Conversations with the public reinforced the significance of Big Basin as one of California's most iconic parks. The re-set created an opportunity to build greater resilience and inclusion in the park's design. This one-year long visioning process was a critical step in the park's ongoing process of recovery and reestablishment, and the vision that has emerged will guide all future efforts.

*Coast redwood trees (*Sequoia sempervirens*) are resilient to wildfire, and while many were damaged, scientists estimate that the majority of redwoods that burned in the CZU Fire will survive.*

Recovery and reimagining efforts at Big Basin inspired a new vision for the park. The process and lessons learned will help inform future disaster recovery efforts in other California parks in this era of changing climatic conditions, particularly those areas facing increased wildfire threats.

IMMEDIATE RECOVERY EFFORTS

In the weeks and months following the fire, efforts were initiated to assess and address urgent safety and access issues. This included removal of hazard trees along Highway 236 and key access roads. Coordination with Caltrans, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and other agencies was essential to these efforts. In addition to identifying next steps, the damage assessment process allowed time to acknowledge the loss and for opportunities to reveal themselves.

VISIONING

The CZU Fire was a transformative event for Big Basin, and the loss of almost all historic facilities prompted the need to revisit the vision for the future of the park. The engagement process and resulting vision presented in this document establish a shared understanding of new conditions. Recognizing opportunities and remaining open to new ideas were essential to this visioning process.

VISION SUMMARY

**VISION STATEMENT
AND CONCEPTS**

**GUIDING
PRINCIPLES**

**ACTION
ITEMS**

LONG-TERM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The collective vision will be the basis for planning and design documents that will guide all future reestablishment efforts.



**FOR MORE DETAILS OF ONGOING
PLANNING EFFORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES
TO STAY INVOLVED, OR TO VIEW A
COMPENDIUM OF ALL PUBLIC INPUT,
VISIT [REIMAGININGBIGBASIN.ORG](https://reimaginingbigbasin.org)**

WHAT WE SHARED

Resources shared throughout the visioning process explored the challenges and opportunities of reestablishment, creating a collective understanding that informed discussions. Ideas explored included how the land has been managed over millennia, the role of prescribed burns in forest management, effects of changing climate on Big Basin, and potential planning, design, and management strategies for improving safety, resilience, and visitor experience.



BIG BASIN

REDWOODS STATE PARK
POST-FIRE CONDITIONS



LEGEND

-  Big Basin Redwoods SP
-  Most Severely Burned Areas*[^]
-  Regional and Paved Routes
-  Trails and Unpaved Routes
-  Park Access Point
-  Bridges with Fire Damage (53)

*97% of the park was burned, areas highlighted indicate highest burn severity



[^]SOURCE: https://tiles.arcgis.com/tiles/qmhndvC947rDNI6t/arcgis/rest/services/FIRE_DAMAGE_CZU/MapServer

HOW PEOPLE GAVE INPUT

Online and in-person outreach efforts encouraged people to participate in the visioning process by...



Online Survey

Taking an online survey that gathered information on how people used the park prior to the fires, and visions for the park's future.



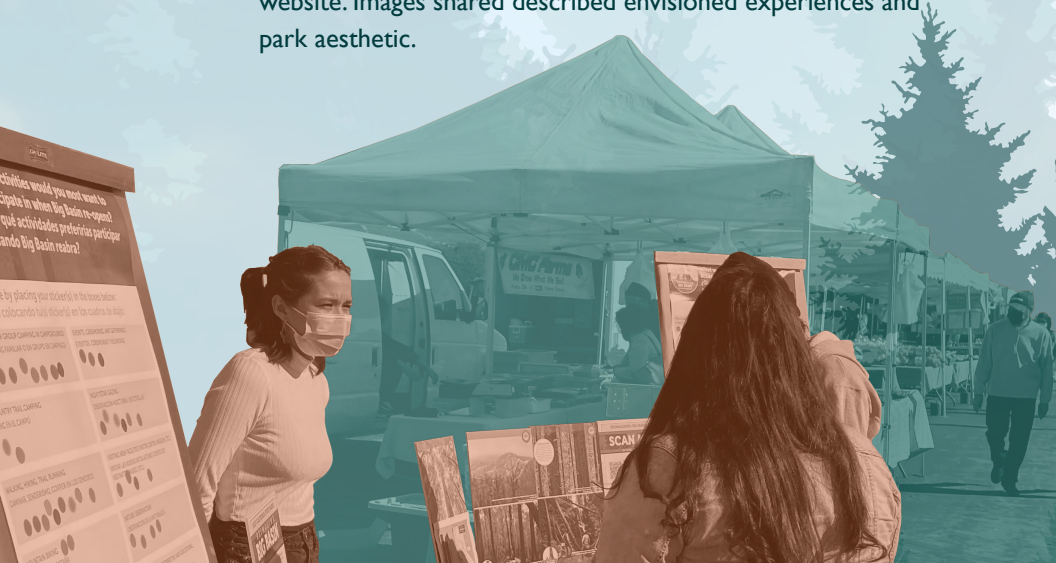
Memory Mapping

Sharing memories using an interactive map that was available through the project website. The memories that were shared provide great insight into the places, resources, and experiences that make the park a landmark in many people's life journeys.



Social Media Hashtag Wall

Sharing images that represented their vision for Big Basin either by hashtagging social media posts or uploading images to the website. Images shared described envisioned experiences and park aesthetic.





Virtual Events (2 events, over 500 participants)

Attending virtual events where recognized subject area experts helped to establish a deeper understanding of the opportunities and constraints for reestablishing the park. The first event focused on how the landscape has been managed over time. The second event shared on the ground studies and forest management work and explored alternative transportation and design strategies that have been used at other parks to address similar challenges.



Visioning Workshop (120 participants)

Attending a virtual visioning workshop that built upon themes explored in prior virtual events and culminated in engagement activities. Participants were asked to get more specific about what the vision will look like on the ground, and what the Big Basin experience will be like. Key discussions included the potential for a shuttle and relocating facilities outside of old growth redwoods.



Pop-up Events (8 events)

Participating in activities at the Reimagining Big Basin table at events and happenings in Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Daly City, San Jose, Watsonville, and Oakland; or through the virtual event booth for the Wild & Scenic Film Festival. Participants included individuals familiar with Big Basin, as well as many who had not yet had the chance to visit California's redwood forests.

Outreach for the project was tailored to be consistent with local public health guidelines for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Online events and forums were primarily used to avoid large gatherings. In-person events were held outside and included social distancing and masking.

WHAT WE HEARD

These themes summarize perspectives that emerged consistently during visioning efforts but do not reflect all of the detailed comments and data gathered during the visioning process.

1

Protecting the old growth redwoods and other sensitive resources is paramount. The old growth redwoods of Big Basin are clearly the signature element of the park, and through all visioning efforts participants emphasized protecting old growth redwood forests as well as other sensitive resources as a primary purpose for the park. Relocating facilities out of sensitive old growth habitat was frequently identified as a strategy for protecting resources by workshop participants.

2

Access to old growth redwoods is essential to the Big Basin Experience. The old growth redwoods were also identified as the primary draw for park visitors. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining access to the old growth, yet they also supported reducing the footprint of visitor facilities there.

3

The public would like to see prescribed burns continue at Big Basin and the utilization of Indigenous land management techniques. Forest management was a focal topic for one virtual event, and participants revealed a keen interest in learning more about forest management and in ensuring necessary and sustainable management. In particular, participants were highly supportive of management strategies incorporating prescribed burns and Indigenous land management techniques.

79%

of Visioning Workshop participants indicated that locating higher use facilities outside of old growth areas was a high priority

4**There is high demand for a diversity of experiences and opportunities, particularly related to camping and trail uses.**

While park visitors are drawn to Big Basin by a common drive to experience nature and the wonder of old growth redwoods, the ways in which they prefer to engage with park resources are varied. The experiences that are most sought were camping and trail use, with participants describing interest in a range of camping and trail experiences (including hiking and biking opportunities). Furthermore, participants envisioned a broad range of facilities that enable evocative nature experiences for all user groups including families, hikers, bikers, backpackers, groups, volunteers, picnickers, locals, tourists, individuals with limited outdoor experience, and individuals with visual or mobility impairments, among others.

5**Regarding park access and circulation, there is support for multiple transportation options.**

Through surveys and discussions, participants expressed interest in reconsidering where vehicular routes and parking are most appropriate, improving non-automotive access to the old growth redwoods, and exploring a shuttle or other new transportation strategies to improve access to destinations and facilities while protecting sensitive resources. Participants also emphasized the importance of evacuation routes, of minimizing congestion within the park and surrounding roadways, and considering impacts to community safety. There is substantial support for a shuttle, particularly if rides are enjoyable and convenient; the shuttle system does not supersede all vehicular access; and the shuttle system helps mitigate traffic impacts for surrounding communities. Local neighbors are interested in continuing to dialogue with State Parks about the design of park infrastructure and mitigating congestion at park entrances.

100%

of Visioning Workshop participants indicated that access to the park by means other than personal car should be improved.

6

The future park should thoughtfully integrate technology.

Many participants indicated that they appreciate the rustic and technology-free experience of retreating to a large natural area like Big Basin. However, there are ways in which technology might be explored to improve interpretive programs, wayfinding, and outreach to younger park visitors. Careful consideration of what technologies may support or detract from the core mission of the park are important to defining the park experience.

7

Built elements should complement Big Basin's natural character and should prioritize sustainability and accessibility.

While many expressed a sense of nostalgia about the former park facilities in terms of their style and rustic quality, others were eager for the park to embrace a more modern aesthetic. However, there was substantial agreement that built facilities should prioritize resilience and sustainability; be consistent in architectural style and materiality; and place emphasis on the redwood experience. Safety is a significant concern for participants and nearby communities, and many emphasized the importance of designing buildings to current building codes and fire marshal standards, as well as implementing fire safe and defensible space strategies when designing and siting new structures.

8

Education and interpretation within the park is an opportunity to share diverse and inclusive stories.

Big Basin has a rich history as California's first State Park. However, the history of Big Basin area clearly stretches back thousands of years and includes the careful management and stewardship of the forest by Indigenous communities. The role of women and minority communities in establishing Big Basin as a park is also valuable to share as part of the park's legacy. In addition to incorporating these stories into interpretive programming, many participants envisioned the integration of these deeper histories in all aspects of park planning and design, including architectural style, land management practices, and partnerships. Other stories that emerged as central to Big Basin included those of plants, animals, and habitats; forest management; and climate change and resilience strategies.

72%

of survey respondents indicated that either trail uses (45%) or camping (27%) were the most desired activities when Big Basin reopens.

9

While Big Basin is loved by many, not everyone has had the opportunity to experience California's redwood forests. While most of those that engaged in visioning activities had visited Big Basin Redwoods State Park, some participants had never visited. Through outreach at pop-up events, the project team was able to connect with many individuals who had limited knowledge or experiences with Big Basin or even redwood forests in California. This indicates that there is a need for additional outreach and programs to help ensure that all Californians are aware of and have the opportunity to experience old growth redwood forests.

10

The public is eager to experience Big Basin to recreate and contribute. Input received through all outreach efforts illustrated that Big Basin is a very special place and that people are eager to return. Participants shared that camping and trail use activities were particularly desired, and expressed concern that the planning process would not expediently lead to park reopening. Numerous participants offered volunteer support for reestablishment efforts, from on-the-ground recovery efforts to communications and artistic efforts. The hunger to return as stewards of the forest was clear.

1

Among Virtual Workshop participants, integrating facilities in a natural setting was the top priority regarding future facilities.



WHAT IS THE REIMAGINED PARK?

*Our shared vision for the reimagined
Big Basin Redwoods State Park includes:*

1

***Resilient Natural Landscapes Guided
by Ecological Processes***

2

Diverse Experiences by Future Californians

3

***Equitable Access and Meaningful Visitor
Experiences for All***

4

Aesthetic Facilities with Reverent Design

A silhouette of a person crouching in a forest, reaching out to a small plant. The background shows a dense forest of tall trees, with a large tree trunk in the foreground on the right. The sky is a gradient of purple and blue.

VISION STATEMENT

Big Basin Redwoods State Park endures as one of California's most iconic natural landscapes. In the aftermath of the CZU Lightning Complex Fire that burned much of the park and destroyed nearly all facilities, the long-standing commitment to protecting old growth and stewarding natural lands will be reinvigorated. Park stewardship, based on scientific and Indigenous knowledge, will foster forest health and create opportunities to connect visitors of all backgrounds and abilities with redwood forests for generations to come. The park will be welcoming and accessible, offering new transportation options, diverse recreational opportunities, and inclusive storytelling that will evolve as the forests recover. While ecosystem health and quality visitor experiences may be defined differently over time, they will always serve as the measures for Big Basin's success.



The Guiding Principles were developed and refined with the help of the Big Basin Visioning Advisory Committee which included members representing a diverse range of stakeholders including representatives from Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks, In Solidarity Project, Latino Outdoors, Mountain Parks Foundation, Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area, Parks California, Save the Redwoods League, and Sempervirens Fund.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Refined based on public input, these principles provide a framework to direct reestablishment efforts.



Prioritize Forest Health

The health of old growth redwoods and sensitive resources will be the primary consideration for park reestablishment and ongoing planning, design, and management. The forest lifecycle and resource management needs, especially as we face changing climatic conditions, will inform planning and design decisions, helping to guide expectations of the park experience. Facilities and high-use areas will be located away from old growth redwoods and other sensitive resources and sited to facilitate sustainable forest stewardship and protect opportunities for provocative nature experiences.



Provide Equitable, Diverse, and Evocative Visitor Experiences

Big Basin will provide a diversity of safe and welcoming opportunities for people of all backgrounds and abilities to experience and be inspired by the park's old growth redwoods and other outstanding resources. Big Basin was the site of family gatherings, adventures, and connections to nature for generations of visitors. Big Basin will continue to provide unique natural experiences for all Californians with an expanded commitment to equitable access and inclusive storytelling. Facilities will be designed and managed to support a broad range of uses, including a variety of campground types. People have strong memories of their time at Big Basin prior to the CZU Fire and the park will continue to be a landscape for memory making with enhanced facilities making it more accessible to more people.



Diversify Transportation and Access Opportunities

Reestablishing Big Basin as a safe, resilient, and accessible park will necessitate establishing a multi-modal transportation system that reduces congestion and improves non-automotive access to old growth redwoods and destinations. Strategies will include a shuttle system that provides access from staging areas located at the periphery of the park to key park destinations, as well as improved pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian trails that connect to park destinations as well as more remote experiences. Forest health, visitor experience, and visitor safety will inform access and circulation at Big Basin.



Practice Land Stewardship

Land stewardship practices will be guided by natural ecological processes and Indigenous practices and informed by current science to create landscapes that will be resilient in the face of future climate change. Management planning will focus on promoting forest and ecosystem health for future generations. Volunteers and stewardship corps, and the greater “Park Family” will play an important role in stewardship, actively working to promote forest health, improve visitor experience, and engage with visitors to foster curiosity and appreciation for the redwoods.



Include Indigenous Perspective

Formal consultation with Tribal Nations and cultural practitioners will inform and guide planning, land management, park design, and park programs. California Native American knowledge will be foundational. Indigenous perspectives will be foregrounded in tribal resource management as well as interpretation and educational programs.



Foster Landscape Connectivity

The CZU Lightning Complex Fire demonstrated the importance of planning at the landscape scale. Opportunities to enhance both ecosystem connectivity and visitor experiences regionally will inform reestablishment and ongoing management. Coordination with adjacent landowners and managers and strategic acquisitions will strengthen wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity, trail connectivity, and the diversity of recreational experiences in the region.



Design with Reverence and Resilience

Natural and historic character will be honored in built elements, yet resilience and sustainability will be paramount in all planning and design decisions. Built elements will work together to consistently frame and complement the natural setting and create a space and unique aesthetic that celebrates Big Basin as the iconic first California State Park while inspiring staff and the public to imagine a robust and resilient future for all parks. The facilities will work together to aesthetically complement the forest setting.



Engage the Park Community and Build Partnerships

Coordination with park neighbors and managers across the region and landscape will create opportunities to enhance landscape connectivity. Consistent communication from State Parks on the park's conditions and recovery will educate and inform the public, stakeholders, and partners. The reestablishment process will allow for continued dialogue with the public, engage previously underrepresented groups, and foster support for the park and the special location it protects. Expectations for re-opening and for future experiences will be guided by clear, honest, and engaging communication.

PARK ACCESS & REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY



SAN FRANCISCO

OAKLAND

San Francisco Bay

**BUTANO
STATE PARK**

Reestablish
existing trail
network

**AÑO NUEVO
STATE PARK**

Pursue additional trail
access and recreation
opportunities to
backcountry areas

**WEST WADDELL
CREEK WILDERNESS**

**RANCHO
DEL OSO
ENTRANCE**

Pacific
Ocean

TO SANTA CRUZ

State Parks strives to be an anchor and leader with surrounding land owners in managing the landscape for resilience and fostering landscape connectivity.



BIG BASIN

REDWOODS STATE PARK

Manage post-fire recovery of forested areas through regional strategy and enhance connectivity among forested areas.

LEGEND

- Regional overnight multi-use trail loop (to be pursued)
- Skyline to Sea Trail (to be reestablished)
- Regional trail connections (to be pursued in collaboration)
- California Coastal Trail connections (to be pursued in collaboration)
- Primary park entrance
- Secondary park entrances

PARK CORE VISION CONCEPTS



1 OLD GROWTH

Restored with an emphasis on natural resource protection, this area will include restrooms, interpretive features, a shuttle stop, limited parking, a network of trails, and trailheads for longer excursions.

2 SKY MEADOW & HUCKLEBERRY

New campgrounds and cabins will be established outside of the old growth core with a campfire center and new trailheads. The Sky Meadow area will include some park operations and park housing facilities.

3 BIG BASIN SHUTTLE

A new shuttle service will take park visitors from Saddle Mountain to the old growth core. The 2.8 mile route will include additional camping and day use destinations. The ride will take about 20 minutes and run regularly throughout the day. Strategies to limit wait times and offer an enriched shuttle experience will be a priority of implementing the program.

4 UPPER 236 / CHINA GRADE

Directional traffic management and potentially additional trailhead parking will be pursued.

5 SADDLE MOUNTAIN

Primary entrance will be designed to fit in with the surrounding landscape and will include some visitor parking; services for visitors, such as camping check-in or camp store; shuttle pick up; interpretive exhibits; and limited park operations and staff housing.

6 LITTLE BASIN

Group recreation site with overnight camping options (personal tents, tent cabins, and cabins) and space for environmental education and large gatherings set within the new growth redwoods. New trailheads and trail connections will be explored. Partnerships will be developed to create ceremonial space and cultural facilities with local Indigenous groups.

WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE TO VISIT BIG BASIN IN THE FUTURE?



The historic buildings that burned during the fire are no longer there, but a **new welcome center will greet you at Saddle Mountain** and historic structures will be memorialized through interpretive features. The forest will also be in recovery and will show the scars of the CZU Fire.

The **old growth core will have fewer vehicles and provide a more natural experience.** There will be limited development in this area and most visitors will experience it for day use activities. There will be interpretive features and minimal visitor amenities, such as trails, restrooms, and seating areas with limited visitor parking. Facilities here will be designed to have a light footprint.

Sempervirens and Blooms Creek campgrounds will not reopen. **Campgrounds will be located along Lodge Road and at Little Basin.** Campground design will strive to recreate previous camping experiences as well as provide a variety of different types of camping experiences in Big Basin's forest, prioritizing seclusion and a feeling of "being away."

Hiking, biking, and equestrian use within the park will feel similar to the experience prior to the CZU Fire once the trail and fire road network is reestablished. In the future, additional trails, trail access, and trail camping will be explored. The shuttle will include stops for trailheads and allow park visitors to hike between destinations and have return transportation.

Visiting Big Basin will require some planning but will likely continue to feel like **a natural retreat from congestion and crowds.** Online reservations may be required during busy seasons to enter the park and use facilities such as parking and campgrounds.

Rancho del Oso will be a potential alternative to starting your journey into the park. Trail connections through the wilderness and into the old growth core will provide prime opportunities to experience the forest.

236

Saddle Mountain
Welcome Area

5

Little Basin
Campground and
Group Recreation

6

7

UPPER LODGE ROAD

Primitive camping will be located in opportunity areas along the road. These campsites will be for walk or bike-in experiences.

8

TRAILS &
WILDERNESS AREA

Most trails within the park prior to the CZU Fire will be re-established, including those within the wilderness area and connected to hike-in camping. Priority will be to re-establish trails within the old growth core and provide upgrades to improve accessibility, interpretation and resource protection.

ACTION ITEMS

Specific actions that will help implement the Guiding Principles are identified below and will be further developed as part of the next steps in the planning process.

CREATE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ❑ Re-open trails and service roads to recreational use as they become safe and operational.
- ❑ Initiate planning and design for new and reestablished park amenities such as gathering spaces, trailheads, and picnic areas.
- ❑ Reestablish campgrounds in the park and explore ways to provide additional overnight options at Big Basin.
- ❑ Explore opportunities for additional wilderness education and recreation.
- ❑ Develop a park shuttle system within the park and pursue additional transportation programs to bring people to the park during peak season.
- ❑ Collaboratively pursue strategic acquisitions to enhance park resiliency, improve connectivity, and enhance options for recreation and park operations.

MANAGE FORESTS AND NATURAL RESOURCES FOR RESILIENCY

- ❑ Complete Forest Management Strategy and implement forest management projects throughout the park to increase resiliency in the changing climate.
- ❑ Develop a Climate Adaptation Plan for Big Basin.
- ❑ Support the restoration of natural ecological processes in old growth areas.
- ❑ Pursue development of a stewardship corps training and seasonal housing facility to support education, job training, ongoing park stewardship projects, and Indigenous land management.
- ❑ Conduct studies and on-going monitoring of park use to inform adaptive management decisions.

ESTABLISH PARK OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

- ❑ Pursue establishing facilities for staff residing within or near the park to support staff's critical role in operations and safety, and design them to foster a sense of community.
- ❑ Reestablish park utility systems to support park operations and allow park recreation.
- ❑ Assess existing roadways to support new and continued uses and improved ingress/egress.
- ❑ Work collaboratively with partners to identify funding needs and raise funds for park reestablishment and management.

TELL INCLUSIVE STORIES

- ❑ Share tribal histories of various park locations and the region, as well as current-day tribal perspectives and stories, in the park's interpretation programs and materials.
- ❑ Highlight stories of the diverse communities in California and their role in Big Basin and the local region.
- ❑ Carefully incorporate technology to support equitable access and inclusive storytelling.
- ❑ Continue to engage and collaborate with representatives of local Indigenous communities.

CONNECT WITH COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERS

- ❑ Develop programs for volunteer stewardship.
- ❑ Implement programs that support increased park access by under-represented groups, including communications and outreach initiatives, inclusive outdoor programs, and new educational opportunities.
- ❑ Engage and collaborate with diverse groups of park users to address barriers to accessing Big Basin.
- ❑ Work with partners on studies and projects that extend beyond park boundaries.



OUR MISSION

To provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.
