



# SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PARKS STRATEGIC PLAN 5-YEAR UPDATE

AUGUST 14<sup>TH</sup>, 2023





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan would not have been possible without the assistance and participation of a great number of individuals. We would like to thank all the members of the public who participated in the public process that created this Strategic Plan 5-Year Update, and to all the staff and volunteers who contributed.

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# PART I: Background

## PARKS DEPARTMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

### WHY UPDATE THE 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN NOW?

The Santa Cruz County Parks Department Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2018. The Strategic Plan guides Santa Cruz County Parks Department’s programming, services, and investments for a 10-year period. This document is a 5-year update at the halfway point in the 10-year Strategic Plan to measure the Parks Department’s progress in meeting our goals. Preparing a 5-year update was a stated goal in the 2018 Strategic Plan and is an opportunity for the Department and staff to hold ourselves accountable.

The Department’s vision is articulated in the four goals which are broad statements of how

we pursue our vision. To achieve the four goals stated in the 2018 Strategic Plan, a set of objectives was created. The objectives are specific ways the Department plans to accomplish its goals and are organized into two categories: “core” and “stretch”. These categories were assigned in 2018 based on what the Department could pursue with its existing resources such as staffing (core) and which ones would require additional resources (stretch).

To prepare the 5-year update, the Department followed a similar approach to creating the 2018 Strategic Plan: a Strategic Plan Update Team was formed, and a Working Group was chosen to represent the diverse array of Parks stakeholders and guide the 5-year update process.



*LEO's Haven at Chanticleer Park*

## WHAT HAS THE PARKS DEPARTMENT ACCOMPLISHED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS – WHERE ARE WE IN MEETING OUR GOALS?

During the last five years, Santa Cruz County and the Parks Department have experienced many changes, from an important increase in staffing, to dramatic events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, CZU Fire, and historic winter storm events. Despite the ever-changing world around us over the past five years, the Department has been successful in working towards the goals set forth in 2018; **1: Great Facilities, 2: Strong Organization, 3: Awesome Programs** and **4: Effective Stewardship.**

We have successfully created a deferred maintenance plan for needed work or upgrades to our facilities and parks, we have updated multiple playgrounds and athletic fields, and even opened our first all-inclusive playground, LEO's Haven at Chanticleer Park. The Department has also increased staffing in areas that have not been filled in over 20 years including Park Planners, increased and diversified Recreation staff, Park Maintenance workers and key leadership positions to continue to guide the organization. We have worked on providing trainings in leadership, equity, and diversity, as well as safety and equipment handling courses, and will work to provide more as well as focus on areas of foundational department support such as sustainable funding and increased partnerships.

Our programs have greatly diversified for multiple communities that we support and the partnerships that we have created with local agencies, our own non-profit County Park Friends, as well as local school districts, have been integral in this. Lastly, with the addition of more Park Planning staff and partnerships, specifically with other local land managing agencies, we are increasing our natural resource management planning and outdoor educational opportunities, specifically in re-creating the interpretive programs sustained in our north county parks to south county parks and communities.



County Parks Friends | Walking for Wellness



LEO's Haven at Chanticleer Park

# HOW SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HAS CHANGED SINCE THE CREATION OF THE 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN

## PUBLIC HEALTH

### COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic began roughly a year and a half after the release of the Department's 2018 Strategic Plan. The pandemic caused millions of deaths and upended lives around the world. In Santa Cruz County, there were a total of 72,744 cases and roughly 1 in 757 residents have died of COVID-19, a total of 361 reported deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic shed light on the essential role of local parks and recreation. The pandemic underscored that close-to-home parks are crucial to a community's quality of life: during the crisis, people turned to their parks like never before—for fresh air, exercise, meditation, solace, and a much-needed break from the stresses of a rapidly changing world.

When the pandemic took hold in Santa Cruz in early March 2020, schools, businesses and restaurants closed, and the County Health Officer ordered everyone except essential workers to shelter in place. For County Parks this meant the temporary closure of after-school programs, community programs, the Simpkins Family Swim Center, park restrooms and playgrounds. Half of Parks staff were directed to work from home while Park Maintenance staff were deemed essential to maintain parks and coastal accesses open for the public. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic halting almost all County Parks programs and operations, the Department continued to support the community in new and different ways outside of what was initially set forth in the 2018 Strategic Plan.



Anna Jean Cummings Park



East Cliff closure

*County Parks actions during the pandemic:*

- In order to support distance learning in our community, childcare was established in three Parks locations: Highlands, La Selva Beach Clubhouse and Aptos Village Park, with Parks staff running the centers.
- The Virtual Recreation and Resources Center on the Parks' website now features a section dedicated to senior resources, including the Senior Center Without Limits daily calendar.
- Parks worked with County Public Health to bring back reservable picnic areas following approved COVID guidelines of no more than 15 people, no more than 3 households and a two-hour reservation limit.
- Parks hosted a Virtual Holiday Art & Craft Fair in December in 2020, 2021 & 2022.

- County Parks now offers free virtual movement and art classes for all levels in collaboration with Tannery World Dance and Cultural Center. Classes ranging from Pilates, Hip Hop, Contemporary and Modern dance, Capoeira, Soca/Zumba, Yoga, and more are available for enjoyment at home.
- Parks worked to re-open Simpkins Swim Center quickly with guidance and approval from the Public Health Officer.
- To best serve those communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its related economic outcomes, Parks partnered with County Park Friends to deliver culturally relevant communications and outdoor programming for health.
- Opened, closed, cleaned and maintained all public restrooms and playgrounds based upon guidelines from County Health Department.

**MENTAL HEALTH**

The COVID-19 crisis worsened an already severe mental health crisis among people of all ages. Youth have been particularly impacted as losses from COVID and disruptions in routines and relationships have led to increased social isolation, anxiety, and learning loss. Black and Brown communities are often disproportionately undertreated even as their burden of mental illness has continued to rise. Studies have shown that more time spent in parks and green spaces can help individuals fight against mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress. Making sure that all people have access to parks and outdoor programming is a critical way to increase these positive effects on health and quality of life in our community.

To better understand the mental health needs of our Black community, Parks supported partner County Park Friends to collaborate on the *Black Health Matters Spotlight*, leading to essential and first time data collection.



Quail Hollow Ranch



Jose Ave. Park

## ENVIRONMENT

### CZU FIRE

The 2020 CZU Lightning Complex fires consisted of multiple fires throughout San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties. The fires started in mid-August from lightning strikes that ignited forest vegetation dried out from a multi-year severe drought exacerbated by climate change. These separate fires merged and rapidly spread through nearby communities, including Swanton, Boulder Creek, and Bonny Doon.

In the Santa Cruz Mountains, the CZU Fire burned 86,509 acres (over 125 square miles), destroying 1,490 structures and causing one death.

*County Parks actions during the CZU Lightning Complex Fire:*

- Parks staff transformed Simpkins Family Swim Center into a shelter for fire evacuees.
- Parks staff in all sections were deployed as Disaster Service Workers (DSWs) and assisted in running many shelters and distribution centers.
- Parks Maintenance staff helped to deliver over 25 pallets of donated water from Watsonville to Ben Lomond to provide residents repopulating San Lorenzo Valley with drinking water.
- Parks Maintenance staff helped build and install over 160 horse stalls at the Fairgrounds for CZU fire evacuees.
- Maintenance staff transported County assets out of evacuation zones.
- To serve those affected by the CZU fires, Parks partnered with County Park Friends to staff and run the Resource Recovery Center at Kaiser Arena.



*County Parks staff helping during CZU Fire*



*CZU Fires in San Lorenzo Valley by SLV Steve*



### CLIMATE CHANGE

The County Park system is already strained from the impacts of climate change. In California and Santa Cruz County, climate change has resulted in higher year-to-year rainfall variability, meaning we have both more intense drought years and more frequent high rainfall years. We are also experiencing fewer, more intense storms, which can damage park infrastructure, and combined with sea level rise, threaten some of our coastal access points and beaches. Santa Cruz County is also one of a few counties in California that does not receive any water from outside the County. As a result, Santa Cruz County faces an ongoing water crisis, and the Parks Department is evaluating efforts to reduce water usage in Parks.

### 2023 STORMS

As the earth's temperature warms because of climate change, the atmosphere can hold more moisture – which leads to wetter atmospheric river events. In the winter of 2023, a series of atmospheric rivers sent an unprecedented amount of moisture to California and to Santa Cruz County. Over roughly three weeks, parts of the county got between 2 and 3 feet of rain. The coast was battered by 30-foot waves, and the Santa Cruz Mountains endured hurricane force winds.

In Santa Cruz County, a creek bloated by rain destroyed a portion of Main Street in Soquel, isolating several neighborhoods. The San Lorenzo River hit its second-highest level in 85 years, pounding a section of road into rubble, flooding at least a

dozen homes, and swept a tree trunk into the historic covered bridge, built in 1872, shearing off one of two posts holding the span up above the river. In Watsonville, the Pajaro River breached its levee, flooding hundreds of homes and forcing thousands to evacuate. The storms, and associated flooding, erosion and debris, caused damage to six County Parks facilities and thirteen coastal access points.



*Coastal Access closed*



*Felton Covered bridge flooding-playground*



*Moran Lake bank erosion*



*Storm at Heart of Soquel County Park*

## EQUITY

### INCOME INEQUALITY

By many measures, the Santa Cruz-Watsonville metropolitan area is the most expensive rental market in the nation. The top five most expensive jurisdictions in the nation are all from California, including neighboring Santa Clara and Monterey counties. According to the Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board's 2023 State of the Workforce study, 69% of white county residents owned their homes in 2021 compared to just 16% of Hispanic or Latino residents. Given the higher housing cost burden for renters, these figures indicate that individuals from communities of color are more likely to face challenges with high housing costs, further reinforcing socio-economic disparities.

### RACIAL INEQUALITY

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis triggered a wave of Black Lives Matter protests that grew into the largest protest movement in US history, peaking in June of 2020 when half a million people turned out to march in nearly 550 places across the United States. In Santa Cruz, public spaces became places of gathering, protest and demonstration. In August 2020, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution declaring racism a public health crisis affecting society and committed to assessing internal policies and procedures to ensure racial equity is a core element of the County. The County resolution included commitments to train all elected officials and staff on workplace biases, to have administration view human resources, vendor, grant management and economic and workforce

development through a “racial equity lens” and to direct all County departments to “incorporate educational efforts to address and dismantle racism.” As a division of the County, County Parks plays a crucial role in implementing and enacting the Board of Supervisors resolution in its parks and open spaces.

*County Parks actions to address racial and income inequalities:*

- To ensure equitable access to County Parks programs, Parks partnered with County Park Friends to establish equity criteria for program financial support, including County Parks programs, CPF Park Rx and Youth Leadership programs.
- In 2023, Parks started printing the Activity Guide in Spanish to better facilitate Spanish speaking residents access to programs.
- To ensure equitable access to County Parks facilities, Parks partnered with County Park Friends to establish equity criteria for event and programming permit fee waivers.
- To ensure equitable access to green space, Parks partnered with County Park Friends to establish equity criteria for prioritization of infrastructure and capital improvement campaigns.



# PART II: Creating the 5-year Strategic Plan Update

## PROJECT APPROACH

The bulk of the work on the 5-year update to the strategic plan is centered around getting feedback from Parks staff, stakeholders, and the community around our progress in meeting the four goals outlined in the Strategic Plan. This section provides a summary of the planning and outreach conducted during the update process.

### INITIAL PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT

The Strategic Plan Update Team (SPUT) held a series of kick-off meetings in the Summer of 2022 to plan and develop the 5-year update process. Discussions centered on:

- Creating a list of accomplishments over the last five years, to measure our progress in meeting the four goals established by the 2018 Strategic Plan.
- Identification of Equity, Access and Natural Resource Management as top Parks' priorities to focus on for the update, pending engagement with the Working Group and community.
- Formation of a Working Group to represent the diverse array of County residents and Parks stakeholders.
- Establishing a schedule and engagement process that started with an initial round of staff and community engagement to gauge internal and external opinions about Parks' progress in meeting the four goals of the Strategic Plan.

### STAFF INVOLVEMENT

In September 2022, the SPUT created a short survey for staff to collect input on the Department's progress toward meeting the four goals established in the 2018 Strategic Plan. A small group discussion with staff was conducted during the October 2022 All-Hands Meeting as a follow-up to the survey. Staff broke into small groups and were asked two questions: Are there important objectives that the strategic plan is missing? How can we achieve unmet objectives? Staff input was collected a third time at the June, 2023 All-Hands meeting.

In the survey, staff rated the department best at increasing the accessibility of parks facilities, maintaining parks and ensuring safety, and providing recreation programs and events. Staff rated the Department poorest on providing interpretive programs, investing in staff development, creating systems for department management and operations, and cultivating the public art program.

The small group discussions identified equity and inclusion as missing objectives in the strategic plan. Groups also identified the need for more staff support, including training, education, and development, as well as additional and more efficient hiring as missing objectives and ways to meet unmet objectives. Better outreach, branding, and marketing of existing programs were also identified by staff as missing objectives, and as a way to meet unmet objectives.

## WORKING GROUP

The SPUT worked with Parks partners to develop a diverse Working Group to guide the Update process and help Parks engage with our stakeholders and the community. The working Group members were selected to encompass a diversity of race, ethnicity, age, gender, geographic distribution, physical abilities, expertise and overall leadership and credibility in their communities. Working Group members were charged and empowered to communicate and solicit the type of feedback required to accomplish the update. The process consisted of a series of six Working Group meetings over six months. Major themes included: Access, Accountability, Connection, Nature, Equality, Health, Well Being, Stewardship, Safety, Fun and Community. Other topics included: important social and environmental events of the past five years; Department accomplishments to date and missing goals and objectives from the 2018 Strategic Plan; how best to engage with their respective communities; and the development of a fifth goal related to equity. The Working Group also helped develop a survey instrument to gather public input on the Strategic Plan Update.

The feedback from the Working Group was reviewed and categorized in three major areas (*Doing Good, Need to Improve, and Equity*) as shown in the table.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### MEETINGS AND EVENTS

The Department hosted or attended over a dozen events to gather public input on the Strategic Plan Update process, including the 2022 Santa Cruz County Fair, two Parks hosted public meetings (one in south county and one in mid/north county), and seven existing community events. In keeping with best practices that encourage going to the community rather than asking the community to come to you, staff attended seven outside events to solicit feedback from disadvantaged communities and groups and people that don't normally attend community meetings. The events were selected from a list suggested by the Working Group members.

### COMMUNITY SURVEY

With the help of the Applied Research Survey team, and the guidance from the Working Group, the SPUT designed a survey composed of four sections, one per each goal of the strategic plan. The questions were intended to gauge how the community evaluates the progress in accomplishing the four goals and objectives after five years of implementing the 2018 Strategic Plan. A fifth section with a potential new goal on Equity was included in the survey based on recommendations from the Working Group. The survey was translated and made available in Spanish and a bilingual map showing County Park's more than 70 coastal accesses, neighborhood parks, public facilities, open spaces and historical venues was displayed at

the beginning of each section of the survey to orient the community to Parks facilities.

The survey was the main way in which SPUT gathered community input and staff administered it at the various Parks hosted meetings and community events, and distributed it via an email blast to stakeholders, community members, and Activenet account holders (County Parks reservation system).



Working Group meeting

<b>Goal 1: Great Facilities</b>	<b>Goal 2: Strong Organization</b>
<p><b>NEED TO IMPROVE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflicts between core and stretch objectives</li> <li>- Continue to update and maintain older facilities</li> </ul> <p><b>EQUITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More inclusive playgrounds for younger kids</li> <li>- Make natural parks to foster imagination and connection with our environment</li> <li>- Make parks more accessible to people with disabilities</li> </ul> <p><b>DOING GOOD:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beautiful, clean parks</li> <li>- Facilities concentrated in high density areas</li> </ul>	<p><b>NEED TO IMPROVE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Long term fiscal sustainability</li> <li>- Interdepartmental communication for projects/emergencies</li> </ul> <p><b>EQUITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jobs that support multiple goals/departments</li> <li>- Inclusive policies</li> </ul> <p><b>DOING GOOD:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- County Parks Department has invested in increasing staff</li> </ul>
<b>Goal 3: Awesome Programs</b>	<b>Goal 4: Effective Stewardship</b>
<p><b>NEED TO IMPROVE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More staffing</li> <li>- Make it easy to find available programs</li> <li>- Expand full/popular programs</li> </ul> <p><b>EQUITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More bilingual programs</li> <li>- More programs in South County and in San Lorenzo Valley</li> <li>- Expand program ages (younger kids and older adults)</li> <li>- More programs for people with disabilities</li> </ul> <p><b>DOING GOOD:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No specific comments</li> </ul>	<p><b>NEED TO IMPROVE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Managing natural resources &amp; fire safety</li> <li>- Educating the public</li> <li>- Protect above restoration or enhancement</li> <li>- Increase awareness from maintenance staff to better maintain native eco-systems</li> <li>- Balance between conservation and recreation</li> <li>- Increase collaboration between operations and planning staff</li> <li>- Consult outside advisors with expertise in NRM</li> </ul> <p><b>EQUITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making trails more accessible</li> <li>- Inclusive signage</li> <li>- Partner with public transit agencies to increase access to facilities</li> </ul> <p><b>DOING GOOD:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partnering with regional networks</li> </ul>
<b>NEW GOAL?</b>	
<p><b>NEED TO IMPROVE/ADD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overarching equity commitment</li> <li>- Welcoming facilities for everyone in the community</li> <li>- Standalone fifth equity goal</li> </ul>	

# KEY FINDINGS

## COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

As part of the 5-year Strategic Plan Update, County Parks reviewed the progress of the four goals defined in the 2018 Strategic Plan with the help of a Community Survey. The survey was administered to over 1500 individuals at various community events and meetings and online. To supplement survey responses, the update team recorded responses from one-on-one discussions with participants to provide more personal and substantial feedback. Based on this experience, the data analysis presented below contains, in addition to the analysis on quantitative responses, examples of the most representative open-ended responses per each goal.



Mid and North County community meeting

*“Arreglar el parque en el Pinto Lake para montar bicicletas y patinetas”*

*“Cuando se podía pescar en Pinto iba más”*

*“Mas baños y seguridad”*

*“Hacer eventos, comunicación con la comunidad preguntar qué es lo que se necesita. Hacer grupos de edades y preguntarles que podemos mejorar, traer o hacer para nuestra comunidad”*

*Mas personal en parques; que nos saluden y nos hagan sentir bienvenidos”*

*“Casi todos los parques son muy bonitos y céntricos, pero con que haya personal cerca es mejor para sentirnos seguros.”*

*“More parks and programs in south county”*

*“Watsonville needs more parks, too many kids in current parks”*

*“Swim Center in South County with warm water pool for water aerobics. It’s too hard to get to Simpkins from here.”*

*“I am grateful for our parks!”*

*“I feel welcome and safe, thank you”*

*“Make sure bathrooms are clean and have toilet paper.”*

*“Homelessness still continues to be an issue and more-so IV needles are the bigger issue.”*

*“Make playgrounds handicapped accessible for children like at Leo’s on Chanticleer.”*

*“Poner cosas para niños de autismo o con necesidades especiales. Un par que en Watsonville que apoyo a todos los niños”*



Watsonville farmers market

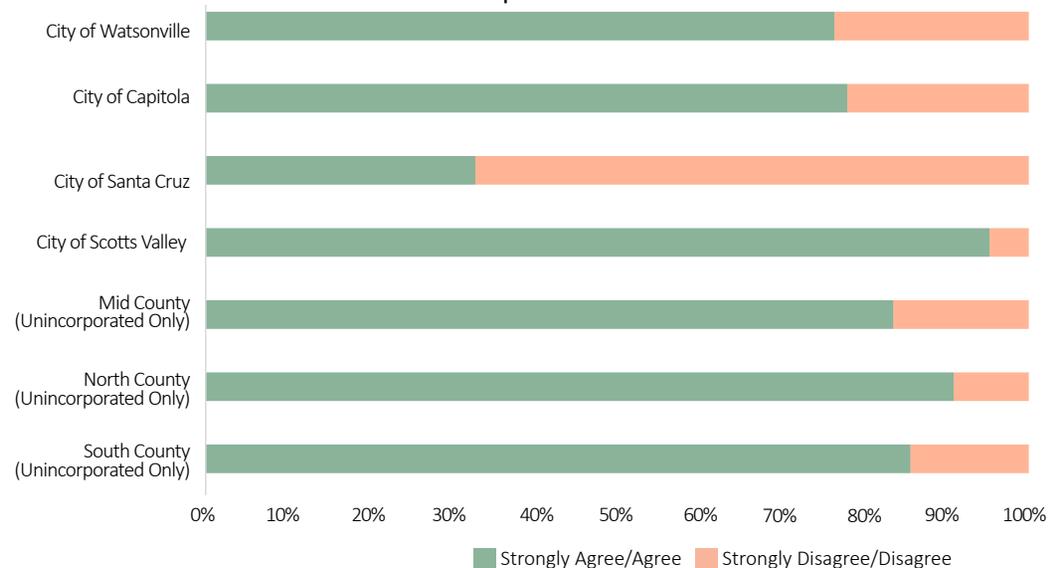
### Goal 1: Great Facilities

The first survey question corresponded with **Goal 1: Great Facilities** and asked whether respondents believed County Park Facilities are well maintained in areas where they live or frequent. The majority of individuals responded that County Park facilities are well maintained, with very little differentiation between North, Mid and South County, with the exception of City of Santa Cruz residents. These individuals, however, may be more likely to visit City Parks, for which there are the second most of any Parks agency in Santa Cruz after the County.

What could we do to make our County Park facilities more accessible to everyone?

The comments on the open-ended question for **Goal 1: Great Facilities** predominantly expressed the need for cleaner and better equipped bathrooms in all facilities; the implementation of more facilities accessible for people with disabilities and different ages (ADA); more staff and hours available in Simpkins Swim Center; safety concerns related to homelessness and drug use in parks; improved transit and bike access to parks; and more parking available.

County Parks facilities in the area that I live and/or I frequent are well maintained



*“More outreach to groups who may not otherwise feel they can access parks for events so that people know what is available to them (nonprofit partner outreach, schools’ outreach, etc.)”*



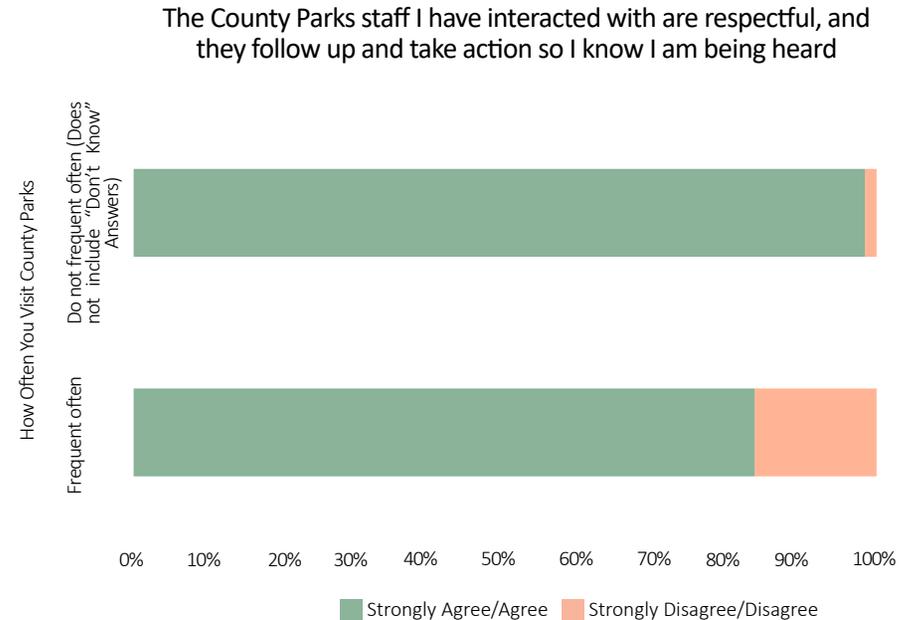
Watsonville farmers market

## Goal 2: Strong Organization

In what areas could County Parks improve to have better coordination with outside groups?

These findings show that members of the public are generally favorable to the notion that County Parks staff are respectful and attentive. This is shown both among the groups that frequent County Parks and among those who do not.

Responses shared in the open-ended questions for **Goal 2: Strong Organization** were low as not all respondents were familiar with County Parks coordinating process with recreational clubs and non-profit organizations for use in parks. The Strategic Plan 5-Year Update Team acknowledges this missing data and is committed to reaching out to these specific users to get more precise feedback. Nevertheless, the principal opinions regarding strong organization suggested increasing advertisement and outreach with the community, balancing diverse sports access to fields, and increasing shared agreements with schools to have more sport fields available.



“More diverse programs, LGBTQ2+ events, Spanish tours at parks, music festivals, art markets”

“More outdoor fitness classes at parks that are open to all” “More youth and adult sports programs.”

“Programas para todos”



Watsonville farmers market

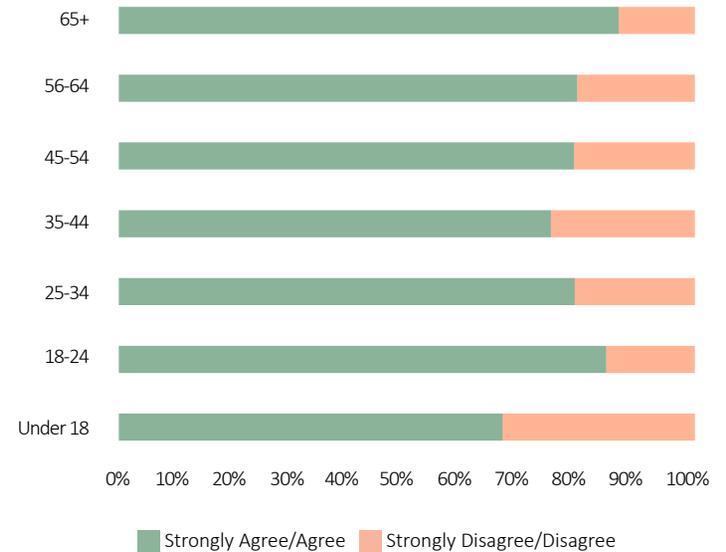
### Goal 3: Awesome Programs

What other programs would you like to see the County Parks provide?

The next question asked respondents about their perceptions of Parks programs. The results indicate that the public is generally favorable to the notion that the County Parks Department provides programs for all ages across the county, with youth under 18 and City of Watsonville residents the least agreeable. This suggests that County Parks should do more to advertise programs for youth, especially in South County.

Most of the comments for *Goal 3: Awesome Programs* requested more diversity in programs (fitness, arts, history, nature), more programs for seniors and young kids, more swimming lessons, and bilingual programs.

County Parks provides a variety of programs for all ages in the area that I live



How is County Parks inspiring the next generation to take care of nature?

*“By providing nature trails like the ones at Highlands Park.”*

*“If schools organize field trips to introduce them to programs, and resources that the county parks provide”*

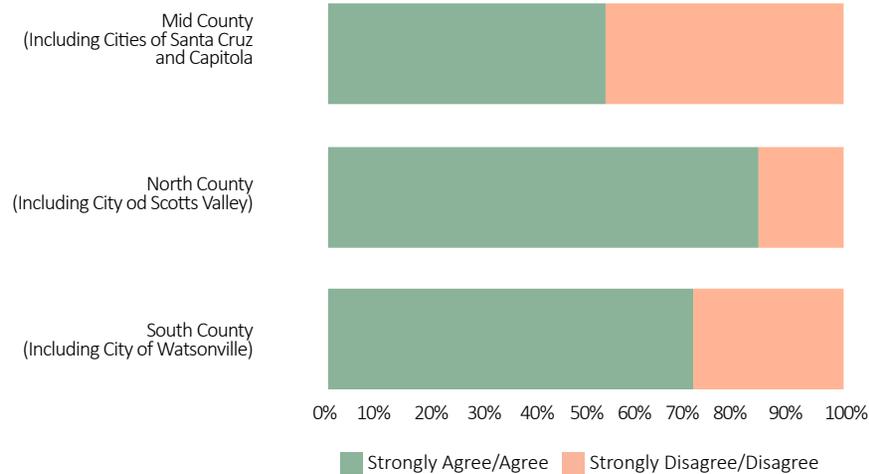
*“More opportunities for volunteers.”*

### Goal 4: Effective Stewardship

The next section of the survey relates to *Goal 4: Effective Stewardship*. The responses indicated mixed opinions as to whether the Department provides sufficient programming related to nature, the environment and cultural resources. While over 80% of North County residents responded favorably, just over 50% Mid-County residents did so, with South County residents in between. This may partially be due to the relatively greater number of County parks with trails and/or historic features in North County but also suggests a need to enhance stewardship-focused programming, particularly in mid-County.

Responses to open-ended-questions mentioned the implementation of more interpretive trails and signs and programs, partnering with schools and other academic institutions, youth programs dedicated to caring for nature and increasing environmental volunteer programs.

County Parks provides useful and engaging information about nature, the environment, and cultural resources



Quail Hollow volunteers

In the open-ended question, the participants were asked what County Parks could do to make them feel more welcome and safer when visiting park facilities. Most of the participants mentioned not feeling safe around homeless and drug use in parks but what actions can be taken are perceived differently depending on the responder.

Some people would feel safer having police and sheriffs in the parks while POC communities mentioned having Parks staff and rangers to control homeless and drugs would make them feel safe. All of them agreed having lighting in the parks would improve perceptions of safety.

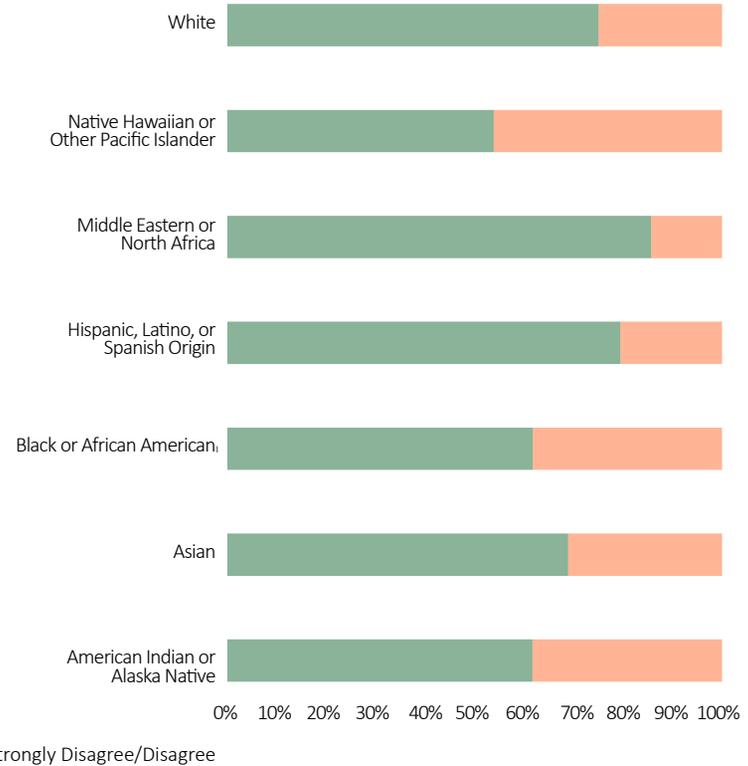
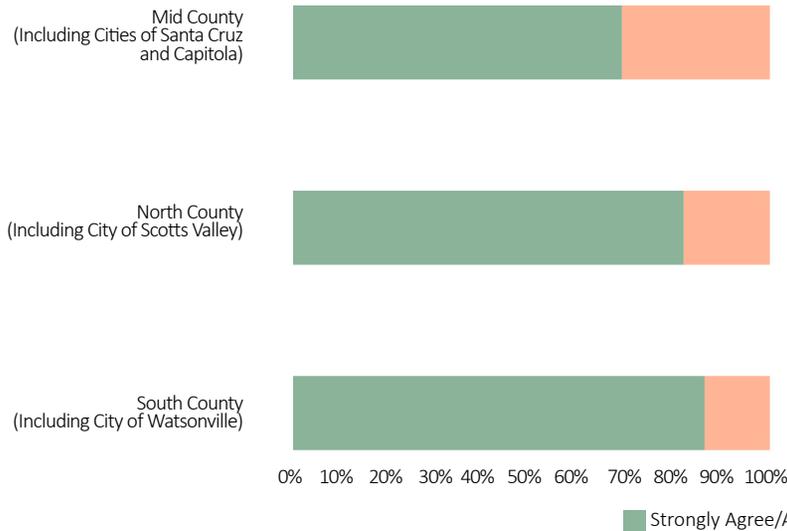
### Goal 5: Equity

What could we do to make you feel more welcome and safe when visiting the County Parks?

The County Parks system in my area provides accessible outdoors spaces for everyone regardless of income level

The survey then asked a series of questions related to developing a *new equity goal* in the Strategic Plan.

Asked whether the County Parks system provides accessible outdoor spaces for everyone regardless of income, White, Hispanic/Latino and South County residents agreed most while BIPOC groups and mid-county residents agreed least, suggesting gaps in programs and facilities related to geography and race/ethnicity.





El Mercado. Ramsay Park, Watsonville

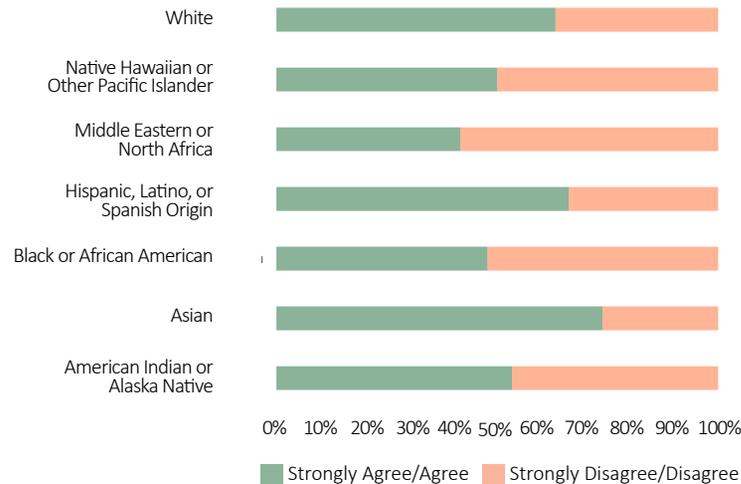
### Goal 5: Equity

Asked whether County Parks offers diverse programs to meet the needs of all community members, Middle Eastern and Black or African American individuals disagreed most while respondents identifying as White or Asian respondents were slightly more agreeable, suggesting that County Parks could improve programming to meet the needs of BIPOC communities. There was little geographic variation in responses to this question.



Mesa Village Park

#### County Parks offers diverse programs to meet the needs of all community members



As for what would make County Parks more welcoming, some participants mentioned having more signage in the parks while others would prefer to have someone talking directly to them about the parks and programs. Some members of the Hispanic population would feel more welcome if the staff greets them and are available to respond to questions in Spanish.



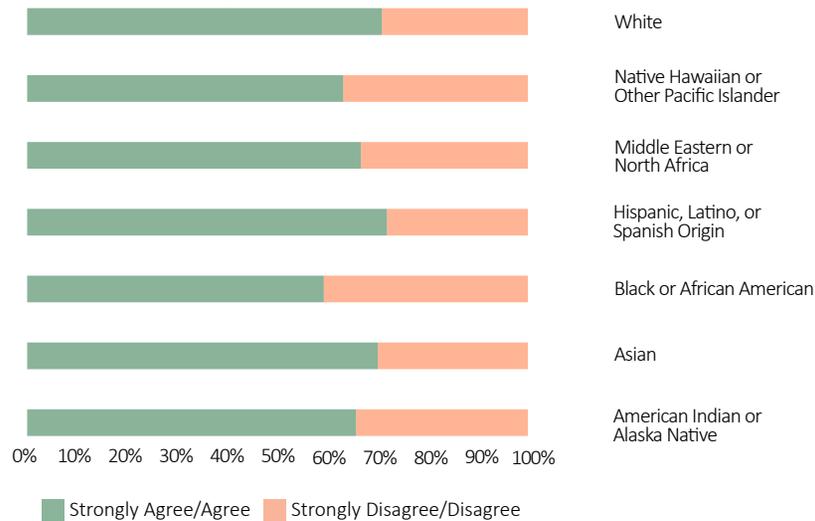
Watsonville farmers market

### Goal 5: Equity

Middle Eastern and Black or African American respondents were the most disagreeable to the notion that County Parks offers diverse programs to meet the needs of all community members. This sentiment is shared by people from Native American backgrounds. In contrast, White, Hispanic/Latino and Asian respondents were slightly more agreeable.

70% of residents all across the county agreed that there are options for them to participate in County Parks programs despite income level.

There are options for me to participate in County Parks programs despite income level



Santa Cruz Juneteenth at Laurel Park

*"I don't visit due to homeless population and trash..."*

*"The problem with homeless folks and open drug use and trash is an ongoing problem that currently has no answer. I feel like the libraries and the parks are severely impacted"*

*"Increasing police presence to keep kids safe"  
"Hire Park rangers to patrol and monitor."*

### Goal 5: Equity

The final section asked respondents whether they felt County Parks engages all community members in the design and planning of their parks. These findings show mixed results among

the public's sentiment over County Parks' planning and design outreach. Mid County residents are notably unfavorable to this notion, with around 15% responding positively. There was also quite a bit of variation based on race/ethnicity.

#### County Parks engages all community members in the design and planning of their parks

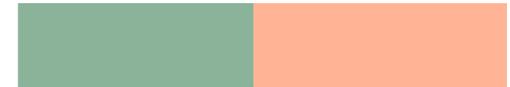


Public meeting in the Veterans Hall, Watsonville

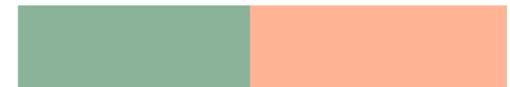
Mid County  
(Including Cities of Santa Cruz and Capitola)



North County  
(Including City of Scotts Valley)



South County  
(Including City of Watsonville)



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Strongly Agree/Agree Strongly Disagree/Disagree

# INTRODUCING GOAL 5: EQUITY

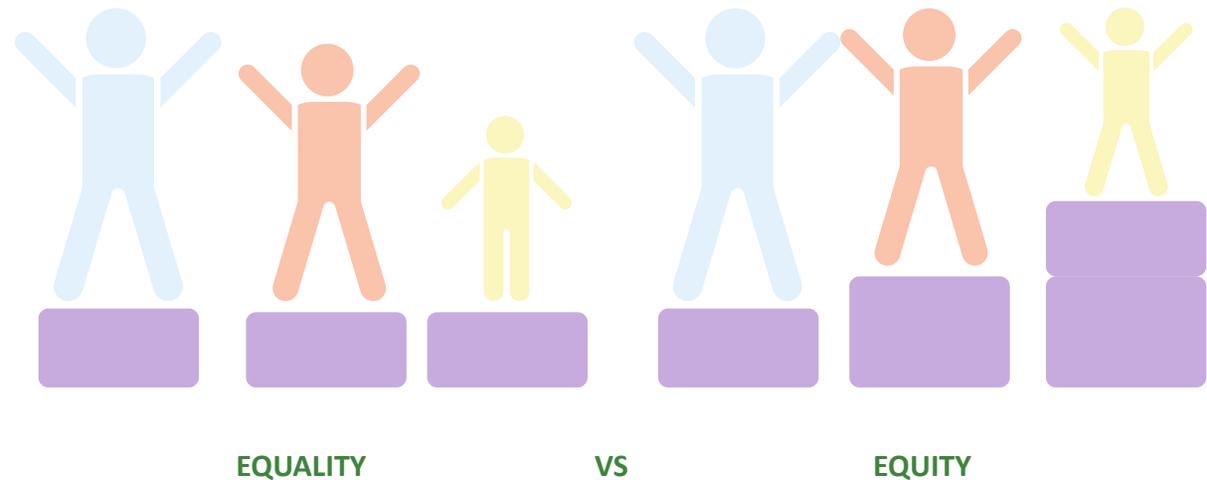
The events of the last five years, along with the feedback gathered from the Working Group and public at large during the strategic plan update process, have underscored the need for County Parks to center equity in our work. Centering **equity** means we focus on racial inequities, commit to continuous learning, and examine how inequitable systems and exclusionary practices are perpetuated in the way we plan, build and program. As we consider how to confront the challenges that our county and our parks and recreation systems are facing related

to health, the environment, and equity, we must recognize that communities of color – who have been historically underserved and often mis-served by our institutions – are at greater risk of being further negatively impacted by these challenges. We must prioritize addressing historical racial inequity as we pursue opportunities to improve mental and physical health, combat climate change, plan for continued growth, and increase the vibrancy of our county.

### ***Definitions and differences***

**EQUITY** THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES THAT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT PAST HISTORY AND CURRENT POSITION, SO THAT FUTURE OUTCOMES ARE FAIRLY DISTRIBUTED

**EQUALITY**, IS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES SO ALL RECEIVE THE SAME AMOUNT REGARDLESS OF PAST HISTORY, CURRENT POSITION, OR FUTURE OUTCOME



While equity is already identified as a key value within the 2018 Strategic Plan, it only has relevant actionable goals in some of the *Stretch Objectives*. That is why this update proposes adding a fifth goal to the Strategic Plan centered on equity.



Watsonville farmers market

Moving forward, the Department will continue to have deliberate community conversations to touch base with residents and stakeholders about how priorities have evolved and to adjust and course-correct our strategic direction and funding priorities. We will seek to recognize and acknowledge those who have not had a voice or been prioritized or asked to ensure everyone in the community feels welcome and that they belong in County Park's programs and facilities. We will actively center **equity** in decision-making, investments, and planning. We will acknowledge and address disparities through the implementation of practices designed to disrupt historical and current race-based marginalization and disenfranchisement.

County Parks is committed to bringing park and recreation resources to those who have been overlooked, underserved and mis-served by discriminatory policies, practices, and histories. We firmly believe the Department can best serve our community today and in the future by leading with equity in strategic planning and in our actions. *The fifth goal: Equity* is focused on advancing opportunities for people in our County who have less access to the resources they need to support their health and well-being and to leverage our resources toward a future that is just, equitable, and inclusive of our diverse community.

To aid in the implementation of this goal, County Parks will continue to strengthen collaboration with local non-profit groups such as County

Park Friends to further develop equity-based criteria for *programs access, permits for park reservations and capital infrastructure*.



covid Anna Jean Cummings Park

### **Goal 5: Equity**

INCREASE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO PROGRAMS AND PARKS WHILE PROMOTING A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

5.1 ADOPT A SET OF EQUITY METRICS TO IDENTIFY DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES\* AND GROUPS IN WHICH TO FOCUS INVESTMENT AND DEPARTMENT RESOURCES (*FOUNDATION*)

5.2 IMPROVE ACCESS TO PARKS, AND MAINTENANCE OF PARKS FACILITIES, FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES\* AND GROUPS BY IMPLEMENTING NEW PARKS AND MAINTENANCE PROGRAMS STRATEGICALLY LOCATED BASED ON EQUITY METRICS (*GREAT FACILITIES*)

5.3 IDENTIFY AND EXPAND PROGRAMMING THAT RESPONDS TO THE SPECIFIC NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF/FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES\* AND GROUPS (*AWESOME PROGRAMS*)

5.4 PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL PARKS EMPLOYEES TO LEARN ABOUT AND CELEBRATE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN ORDER TO CREATE A MORE EQUITABLE WORKPLACE (*STRONG ORGANIZATION*)

5.5 PRIORITIZE STEWARDSHIP FOR PARKS IN VULNERABLE/DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES\*, FOSTERING PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING BY PARTNERING WITH TRUSTED ORGANIZATIONS IN IMPACTED COMMUNITIES. (*STEWARDSHIP*)

*\*DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES REFERS TO THE AREAS THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA WHICH MOST SUFFER FROM A COMBINATION OF ECONOMIC, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL BURDENS.*

## CONCLUSION: ACTION PLAN

The community and stakeholder input received during the 5-year Strategic Plan Update process has revealed that County Parks has made significant progress towards realizing the goals and objectives established in the 2018 Plan, despite the significant environmental, public health and social challenges of the past five years. While much work remains to be done, the purpose of this update is to ensure County Parks is prepared to meet the challenges of the next five years and beyond.

Specific actions include:

- Identify *disadvantaged communities* and groups specific to Santa Cruz County based on metrics and data collected from other credentialed or academic organizations.
- Prepare and execute an outreach plan to work continuously in the next 5 years with the *disadvantaged communities* and groups identifying their needs and priorities while partnering with already trusted organizations working with these communities.
- Prepare a plan for short- and long-term actions to improve County Parks facilities and programs in *disadvantaged communities* and groups based on the outreach process already undertaken and the outreach that will take place.



Scott County Park



Pinto Lake County Park

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE REQUIRED TO MEET THE COMMUNITY NEEDS FOR PROGRAMMING AND FACILITIES, ESPECIALLY IN SOUTH COUNTY, AND FOR ENHANCED STEWARDSHIP OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES.

- Prepare a plan to support stewardship in *disadvantaged communities* and groups and execute implementation of a natural resource plan for disadvantaged communities and increase the interpretive programs dedicated to the care and protection of natural resources in those areas.
- Partner with land stewards working in *disadvantaged communities* and groups to promote holistic and collaborative solutions to promote climate justice, action and understanding for all communities in Santa Cruz County.



Felton Discovery Park



Pinto Lake County Park

