

# 5

## PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES



**Open Space Resources.** *The public acquisition and restoration of Mori Point has been a recent achievement with significant local involvement. A similar outcome could extend this preserve to include portions of the Quarry site.*

Pacifica contains over 3,700 acres of public open space. The great majority of this open space is regional park land: Pacifica features the Sweeney Ridge, Milagra Ridge, and Mori Point units of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), as well as San Pedro Valley County Park and Sharp Park. The trail system in these regional open space areas is considerable. At the same time, the city includes land that could be developed and may have high habitat value. There is a shortage of neighborhood parks and recreation facilities. And the trail system, while extensive, has shortcomings. A proposed approach to future parks and recreation priorities for the General Plan is proposed in this chapter.

## 5.1 PARK TYPES AND STANDARDS

The current General Plan identifies several types of park land, and standards to measure the appropriate amount of land in each category, based on population. These park types and standards, and how they compare to existing inventory, are shown in Table 5-1.

As noted above, Pacifica has a wealth of regional park land. As counted for this analysis, there are 3,149 acres in this category, far above the generous City standard of 20 acres per resident (though not owned or managed by the City of Pacifica.) The City also features 154-acre Sharp Park Golf Course, 133 acres of greenbelts and other protected open space that may not provide public access. Schools in Pacifica include 102 acres of playfields that may be available informally to residents, or by fee to athletic leagues. The current General Plan does not currently have standards for these park types, and does own these lands.

In three categories for which the General Plan does have acreage standards, Pacifica falls short. The current standard for “Large City Parks” may be meant to apply to Sharp Park, which is being counted here as regional park land or as a golf course. The updated General Plan may remove this category. Frontierland Park qualifies as a “district park” according to the General Plan; the City would need a second park of nearly 40 acres to meet its current standard. Pacifica’s seven neighborhood parks amount to 55 acres, falling short of the current acreage standard by nearly half. Most areas of the city also fail to meet the General Plan standard of being within a one-quarter mile of a neighborhood or district park.

Pacifica has a variety of “vest-pocket parks” and “special facilities” such as the fishing pier and the skate park. These may provide recreational or social value out of proportion to their small acreage, and may be important types to emphasize in future development.

**TABLE 5-1: PARK ACREAGE AND STANDARDS**

<b>Open Space Type</b>	<b>General Plan Standard: Acres/1000 Persons</b>	<b>Acres Appropriate for 40,000 Residents</b>	<b>Current Parkland Acreage</b>
Playlots and Vest Pocket Parks	NA	NA	3
Neighborhood Parks	2.5	100	55
District Parks	2.5	100	63
Large Urban Parks	5	200	-
Regional Parks	20	800	3,149
Special Areas and Facilities	NA	NA	62
Golf Courses	NA	NA	154
Other Protected Open Space	NA	NA	133
Public School Open Space	NA	NA	102
<b>TOTAL PUBLIC OPEN SPACE</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>3,722</b>

Source: City of Pacifica, 2009; Dyett & Bhatia, 2009.

## 5.2 PROPOSED OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS PLAN

### Key Objectives

The General Plan update should help direct future public investment decisions and development standards as they relate to park land. It will propose locations for new parks in under-served neighborhoods; identify priorities for public open space and habitat conservation; and priorities for the trail system.

#### *Prioritize Areas in Need of Neighborhood and Pocket Parks and Identify Potential Sites*

Pacifica falls short of its current standard of 2.5 acres of neighborhood park land per 1,000 residents by 45 acres, and most parts of the city are beyond a quarter-mile walk to a neighborhood park, as shown in Figure 5-1. The General Plan will identify opportunities to add to the City's inventory of neighborhood parks, in a context of land and fiscal constraints.

#### *Identify Recreation Facility Needs and Potential Locations*

While it has not been a primary focus, Pacifica has a relative shortage of recreational facilities for league use and the general public. Opportunities to meet the top priorities will be considered in the General Plan update.

#### *Identify Potential Sites for Future Open Space and Habitat Protection*

As discussed in Chapter 4, Pacifica includes designated critical habitat for the California red-legged frog and California Coast Steelhead. Habitat currently designated for the CRLF is already within protected open space, but habitat expansion is being considered that would extend onto private, potentially developable land. Other areas that have clearer development potential may be needed to sustain special-status species and communities, or may be considered by the community to be of exceptional scenic or public access value. Past studies of potential open space priorities are shown in Figure 5-2.

#### *Identify Public Access Priorities to Enhance Trail System*

The Bay Area Ridge Trail includes a segment along Sweeney Ridge, and other GGNRA trails extend down the ridges toward the coast. The Coastal Trail exists in places as a Class I trail, and in others is simply a route along roadways. There are gaps between these systems, and in terms of providing access to and between neighborhoods. Trail system priorities will be identified.

### New Neighborhood and Pocket Parks

Pacifica has a shortage of neighborhood parks, and significant parts of the city are not within reasonable walking distance of a park. At the same time, almost all land is either developed or very difficult to either provide access to or build on, and funding for new park land is a challenge. The new General Plan will propose a strategy of making better use of existing public land, ensuring that public spaces are created as part of new development on larger sites, and pursuing opportunities for pocket parks in park-deficient areas. Proposals are shown in Figure 5-3 and summarized below.

#### *Neighborhood Parks*

The Sanchez Adobe is Pacifica's oldest structure, and the site's history stretches back further as a Native American settlement. The majority of the site itself is currently undeveloped. It has the potential to become a park for the Linda Mar neighborhood, a better setting for the historic structure, and a place for current residents to be better connected to local history.

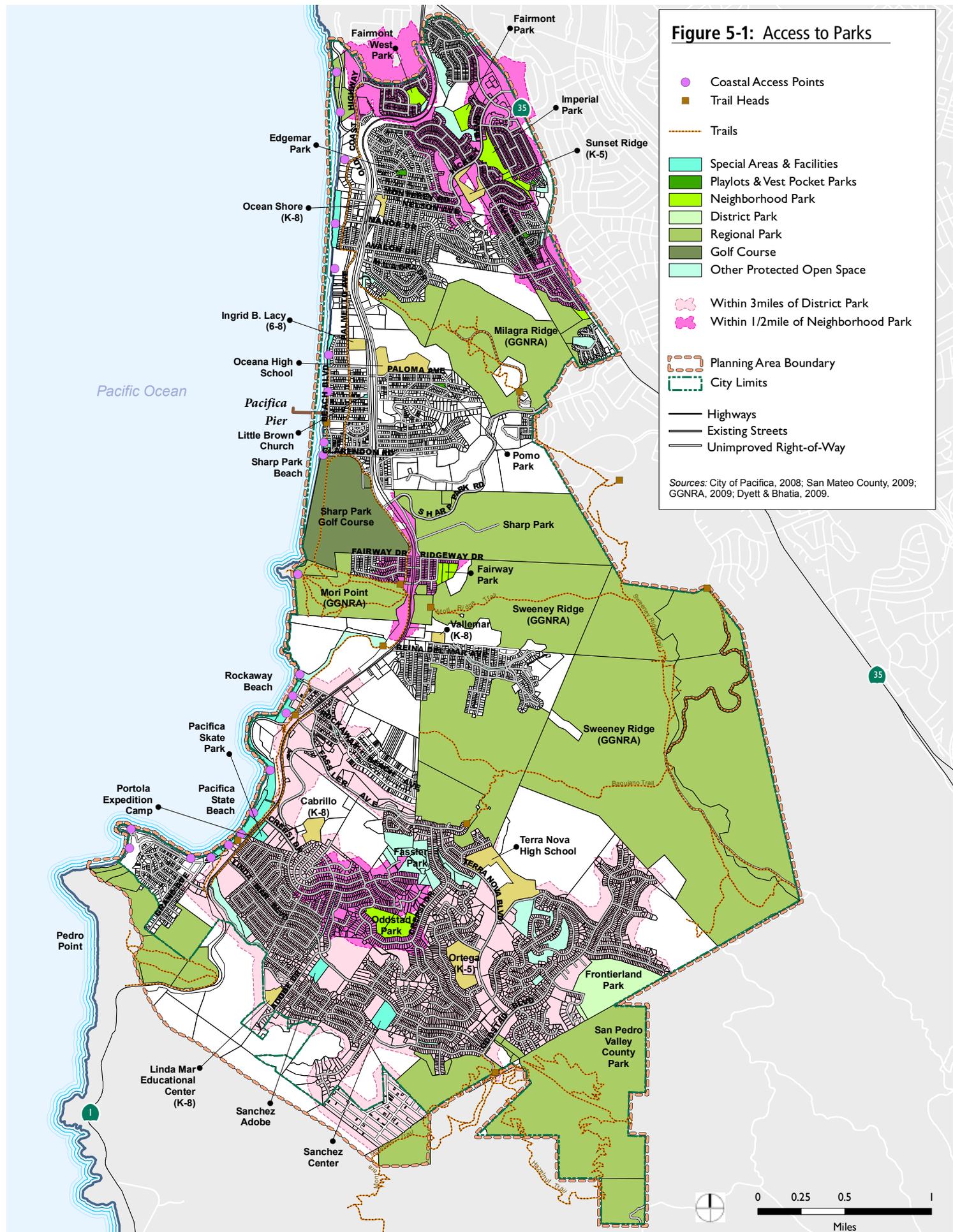
#### *Pocket Parks and Plazas*

Smaller pieces of public land can also be converted to pocket parks or plazas. Opportunities exist at street stub-ends no longer needed for future development, as at the west end of Fairway Drive (West Fairway Park); on unused right-of-way as on San Pablo Terrace (East Sharp Park), and in median strips as on Cragmont Court (East Edgemar-Pacific Manor) and Reina del Mar Avenue (Valleamar.)

**Figure 5-1: Access to Parks**

- Coastal Access Points
- Trail Heads
- Trails
- Special Areas & Facilities
- Playlots & Vest Pocket Parks
- Neighborhood Park
- District Park
- Regional Park
- Golf Course
- Other Protected Open Space
- Within 3 miles of District Park
- Within 1/2 mile of Neighborhood Park
- - - Planning Area Boundary
- - - City Limits
- Highways
- Existing Streets
- Unimproved Right-of-Way

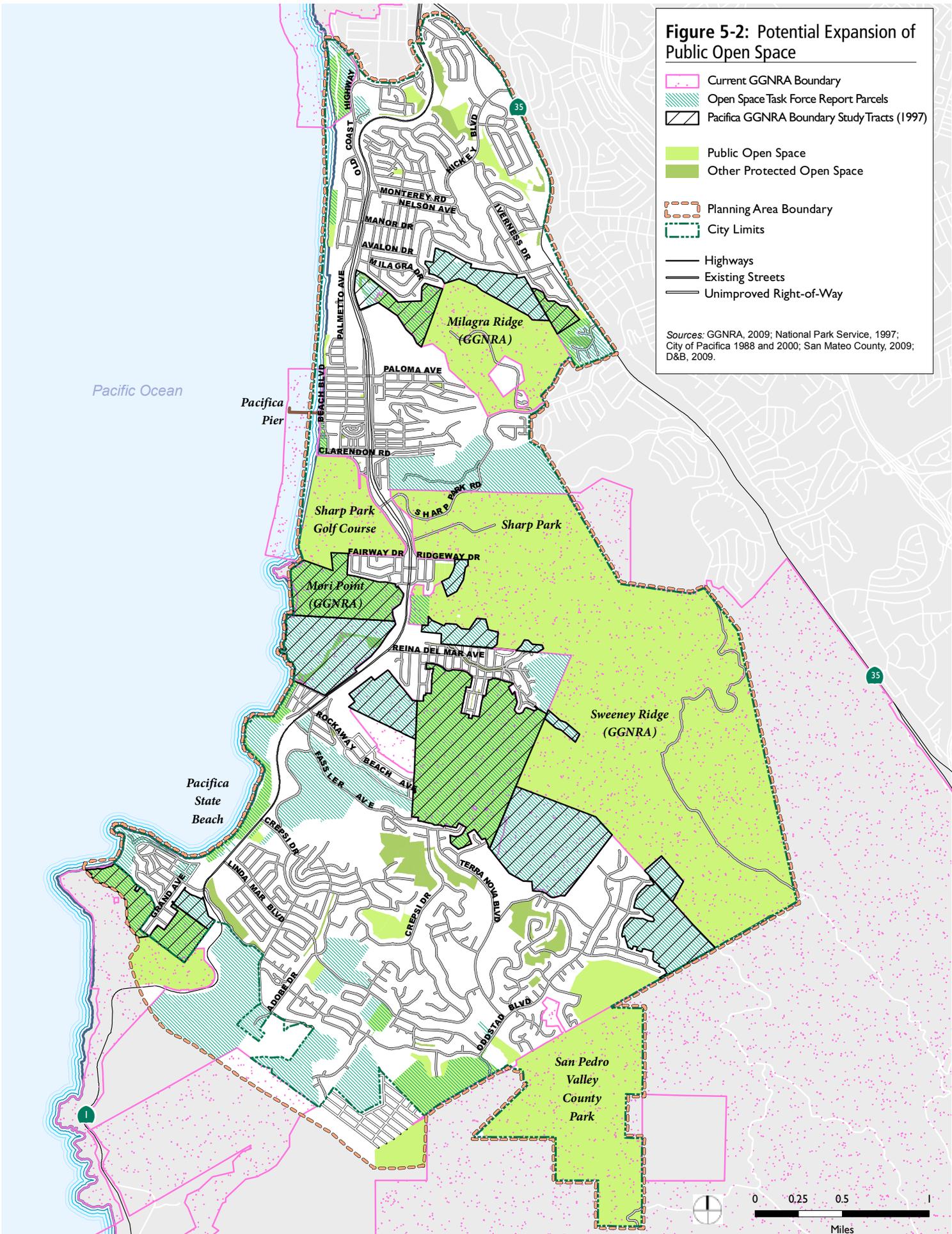
Sources: City of Pacifica, 2008; San Mateo County, 2009; GGNRA, 2009; Dyett & Bhatia, 2009.



**Figure 5-2: Potential Expansion of Public Open Space**

-  Current GGNRA Boundary
-  Open Space Task Force Report Parcels
-  Pacifica GGNRA Boundary Study Tracts (1997)
-  Public Open Space
-  Other Protected Open Space
-  Planning Area Boundary
-  City Limits
-  Highways
-  Existing Streets
-  Unimproved Right-of-Way

Sources: GGNRA, 2009; National Park Service, 1997; City of Pacifica 1988 and 2000; San Mateo County, 2009; D&B, 2009.



Future public spaces should be created as part of the development of publicly owned sites, including the Old Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Sanchez Branch Library. Development of larger privately-owned sites should also include new public spaces. If the Quarry site is developed, it must include a new public park. Depending on the type and scale of development, this could be a civic park or an entry point to the regional park system. Development of the Calson site should also include public space.

### *Improvements to Existing Parks and Recreational Facilities*

Sanchez Park is minimally developed with ball fields. This park should be targeted for improvements so that it functions better as a neighborhood park. Along lower San Pedro Creek, there is an opportunity to create a small, improved place for viewing, the restored creek and accessing the trail system. The Community Center or adjacent land could also incorporate public space marking the historic Portola campsite and relating to the trail system and the existing public activities there. The former rifle range in Sharp Park, currently undergoing environmental remediation, could be developed with recreational facilities such as lighted ball fields.



**Neighborhood Parks.** Land owned by the City or other public agencies presents opportunities for park improvements, such as at adjacent to the Pacifica Center for the Arts.



**Pocket Parks.** New pocket parks or playgrounds should be created as part of larger new development projects.

**Figure 5-3: Proposed Open Space & Trails Plan**



## Open Space Conservation and Habitat Protection

The General Plan Update will help the City prioritize land for long-term conservation, as shown on Figure 5-3.

### *Addition to Regional Open Space*

GGNRA currently owns a portion of the northern coastal bluffs along Old Coast Highway. Other land in this area is currently privately owned, and should be a top priority for permanent conservation to protect the sensitive natural community of coastal bluff scrub and to respond to the ongoing hazard of coastal erosion.

### *Partial Conservation with Development*

On a variety of other sites, analysis must be done prior to development to ensure that critical habitat or wildlife corridors are maintained. Future development on sites including Gypsy Hill, the Quarry, and Fassler Ridge should include conservation areas determined based on habitat needs and site conditions, using strategies of clustered development, conservation easements, and transfer of development rights.

## Trail System Priorities

### *Public Access and New Trails*

Certain missing links in the trail system are identified as priorities for the City to secure public access either through easements or larger conservation strategies, and to improve as trails. The most essential locations for trail connections to be ensured are on the highlands of the Quarry site, on Cattle Hill and Fassler Ridge (see Figure 5-3). Fassler Ridge in particular provides the opportunity for a permanent trail connection between the Portola campsite and the San Francisco Bay Discovery Site on Sweeney Ridge, giving visitors the experience of this historic route.



**Partial Conservation with Development.** Future development on Fassler Ridge and elsewhere should include conservation areas determined based on habitat needs, views, and public trail access.



**Trail System Enhancements.** A complete trail system will require completing gaps, providing crossings of Highway 1, and creating consistent and attractive signage.

### *Crossings of Highway 1*

Highway 1 presents a barrier between the ridge trails and the Coastal Trail. A number of over-crossings and under-crossings of the highway exist. An important new crossing must be created linking GGNRA lands at Mori Point with the Sweeney Ridge unit. In the longer term, the pedestrian bridges at the base of Milagra Ridge and between East and West Sharp Park should be rehabilitated or replaced to provide more attractive and convenient trail crossings.

### *Signage and Wayfinding*

The trail system will follow City streets in some areas. Talbot Avenue can provide a clear trail from the Sharp Park Road lookout point to the Pier, Fassler Avenue can be used as part of a trail linking the Portola campsite with the San Francisco Bay Discovery Site, and Rosita Road can be used to connect San Pedro Valley County Park with lower San Pedro Creek and Pacifica State Beach. On these segments, pedestrian space should be ensured, and routes should be clearly marked. Consistent, visible and attractive signage and wayfinding must be developed for Pacifica's trail system as a whole, to build the overall image and accessibility of Pacifica's natural assets.

## **5.3 COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

Meeting attendees were encouraged to provide open-ended comments regarding the open space presentation on the worksheets. The following paragraphs discuss the level of agreement with each element of the proposal, based on worksheet comments and table discussion notes. Complete worksheet comments are in Appendix B, Table discussion notes are in Appendix C, and additional responses are in Appendix D.

### *New Neighborhood and Pocket Parks*

#### **INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES**

The comments indicate a relatively high level of support for new parks, with many echoing the idea that the City has an abundance of open space but a shortage of neighborhood park land. A handful of responses argue that the City should instead focus on maintaining the park land it has. Most comments on the subject seem to support requiring developers to provide neighborhood or pocket parks as part of new development. Some argue that scarce developable land should not be set aside for park land. Other participants question the value of "pocket parks," suggesting that they require a commitment to maintenance and that they may not be used as intended.

Comments show a mixed reaction to the proposed pocket parks that would be required as part of development of the Calson site and the Old Wastewater Treatment Plant. One person disagrees with the idea of developing park space adjacent to the Sanchez Adobe, out of concern for the integrity of historical resources there.

#### TABLE DISCUSSION NOTES

The discussion notes echo the themes of the comments. Multiple notes show agreement with the goal of having parks and playgrounds within walking distance of home. Three tables noted concerns about maintenance and inappropriate use at pocket parks.

#### *Future Open Space Preservation*

#### INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES

Community members seemed to narrowly support conserving more natural open space, with eight comments clearly in favor of more open space preservation and five against. For those in favor, open space is seen as a “huge quality of life feature” and the basis for a potentially expanded tourism economy. Those opposed to more open space preservation point out that regional open space already makes up half of the City and the focus must now be on “smart growth, economic development and sustainability.” Some comments pointed to specific open space preservation priorities: the northern coastal bluffs, Milagra Canyon, and the western end of Cattle Hill.

Regarding habitat preservation, one responded voices support for a clustered development strategy, and another proposes that the City could become a “Wildlife Certified Habitat Community.”

#### TABLE DISCUSSION NOTES

As on the worksheets, discussion notes were split between a strong desire to protect open space and a sense that Pacifica has enough open space and needs to maintain and “leverage” what it has. To this end, better access and parking for GGNRA land were noted.

#### *Enhanced Trail System*

The individual worksheets and follow-up responses indicate very strong support for improving the trail system: 18 comments note general support for the proposal, with no comments in general opposition. The concept of a legible and connected trail system seems to have been readily embraced, and generated many more specific comments.

#### INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES

#### *Crossings of Highway 1*

Several comments showed excitement about creating new pedestrian over-crossings of Highway 1 associated with the trail system. In particular, the proposed connection between Mori Point and Sweeney Ridge was seen as essential. Some comments stressed the importance of such overcrossings to allow wildlife to move between coastal and ridge open spaces.

#### *Trailheads*

Trailhead access points were the subject of some comments. Four respondents expressed concern about traffic impacts on neighborhoods and indicated that visitors should not be encouraged to drive into residential neighborhoods to access the trail system.

#### *Signage*

The comments show a general understanding that signage is a key part of making the system successful, and some respondents mentioned maps; a visitors’ center; volunteers; and information about wildlife or other themes.

#### *Other Trail Ideas*

Some respondents proposed additional trails or trail improvements. One group of comments suggested connecting Shelter Cove to San Pedro Mountain via the future trail along Highway 1 at Devil’s Slide. A number of others promoted the idea of establishing connections to the San Francisco Watershed Area trails, connecting the Sweeney Ridge trail with the San Pedro Valley County Park trails, and opening up possible “Coast to Bay” connections.

#### TABLE DISCUSSION NOTES

Most discussion notes were positive about trail system improvements, with notes about the need for linkages, better signage, highway overcrossings, and promotion. One comment noted the possibility of a GGNRA visitors’ center to be located at the Sharp Park Golf Course club house. Two comments reflected the desire to provide public access between the beach at Shelter Cove and the future Devil’s Slide trail.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS***Dog Areas*

The need for dog areas comes through resoundingly in the worksheets and the discussion notes, though the issue wasn't addressed in the presentation. Dog parks and off-leash dog areas are clearly in demand.

*User Groups*

The need to consider the needs of different users was also brought up more generally.

*Revenues and Maintenance*

Finally, the need to develop and maintain parks and trails was an area of concern, pointing to the need for fiscal sustainability.

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