



Santa Barbara Audubon Society
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

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February 4, 2020

To: Goleta Parks and Recreation Commission

From: Santa Barbara Audubon Society (SBAS)

Re: Prioritizing the Recommendations from the Goleta Parks, Facilities and Playgrounds Master Plan

We would like to congratulate JoAnne Plummer, Parks & Recreation Manager, Vyto Adomaitis, Neighborhood Services & Public Safety Director, their staff, and their consultants for bringing the Goleta Parks, Facilities and Playgrounds Master Plan to completion and approval. We know this plan required a tremendous amount of time and effort. We also thank Joanne, Vyto, and others for meeting with SBAS members to discuss the Plan and to integrate our input into its final form.

Through our direct meetings, email exchanges, and participation in Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council meetings, we collectively discovered that the management of active parks versus passive open space areas was distinctive, with active parks being overseen by Neighborhood Services/Parks and Recreation, and passive open space areas managed by Public Works, including the new Open Space Manager. The Master Plan describes both open space areas and active parks, and its recommendations, as outlined below, encompass both (e.g., see Goals 5.5.1 and 5.5.2). Further, the Park and Recreation Commission's mandate, itself, stipulates that the Commission provides guidance on parks and open space matters for the City of Goleta.

As a consequence and as a result of the Master Plan's development, we assume that Public Works and the new Open Space Manager, as well as the Parks and Recreation Manager, will report regularly to the Commission so that the Commission can provide direction and recommendations for both active parks and open space. Although we believe that parks and open space could be more effectively managed under one administrative umbrella, we understand that there are fiscal and administrative reasons why this might be difficult at this time. Given the current administrative structure, then, we believe that the following goal and objective need to be effected as soon as possible.

Goal 5.2.1: Maximize active park acreage on public lands without disturbing passive natural areas.

Objective 1.1: Re-categorize active parks and passive open spaces.

This action will clarify the purviews of Public Works versus the Parks and Recreation Department regarding planning and management for active parks and open space areas.

As was evident from our letters and oral comments on the Master Plan, SBAS's top priority is the preservation and restoration of natural habitat and native wildlife, particularly birds. Further, the Plan's consultant found through surveys that the preservation of open space was the top priority for Goleta's citizens, with the development and maintenance of trails rated highly as well. Goleta's open spaces, such as Lake Los Carneros and the Sperling Preserve/Ellwood Bluffs, are regional gems that are heavily used and highly treasured by Goleta's citizens. As a consequence, SBAS recommends giving high priority to the following recommendation, which was not distilled in the Master Plan, but which was extensively discussed and which encompasses many of the Plan's recommendations.

SBAS High- Priority Recommendation #1: Review, update, and implement Management or Master Plans for open space areas, particularly Lake Los Carneros and Sperling Preserve/Ellwood.

Although Habitat Management Plans exist for Lake Los Carneros and Ellwood, they are 15 – 20 years old, have not accommodated changes in the surrounding landscapes, and have largely not been implemented. Although more recent plans for trails and, in the case of Ellwood, Monarch Habitat exist, these deal with only specific aspects of the overall management of these entire open space areas. Such open space-specific plans, however, are critical in providing coherent, integrated guidance for many of this Master Plan's recommendations, and the development of such plans should be given the highest priority so implementation of the Parks Master Plan's recommendations can be pursued.

We strongly urge the Parks and Recreation Commission to give the highest priority for the recommendation listed above, i.e., that specific open space plans be reviewed, updated, and implemented. Such plans, then, are a necessary precursor for meeting a number of the Parks Master Plan goals and would address the highest priorities for Goleta's citizens and SBAS. The open space plans, then, would address all or parts of Priority Goals 5.2.5, 5.3.1, 5.4.1, 5.5.1, 5.5.2, and 5.7.1 dealing with the preservation and restoration of open space, and public access and education in open space areas.

Further, we believe that the Parks and Recreation Commission could deal with several current problems pertinent to open spaces by calling for studies or actions relevant to Goals 5.4.1, 5.7.2, and 5.8.2. As a consequence, we also strongly endorse the following action.

SBAS High-Priority Recommendation #2: Conduct studies and actions that insure that activities with negative impacts on wildlife in open space areas are minimized.

These actions include studies of the sighting of possible off-leash dog parks (Goal 5.4.1, Objective 9.1), enforcement of current leash laws (Goal 5.4.1, Objective 9.2), enforcement of other laws that prevent damage to habitat and wildlife, and clear plans and protocols for vegetation maintenance (Goal 5.8.2, Objective 18.3). The enforcement of current laws that prevent environmental damage could be greatly enhanced by a park ranger program (Goal 5.7.2, Objective 16.3).

Master Plan Goals/Objectives Related to the Two SBAS High-Priority Recommendations:

Below we list and address the Goals and Objectives of the Master Plan relevant to the two high-priority recommendations described above.

Goals 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 are directly relevant to open space preservation, restoration, and management. These goals need to be subsumed into clear, comprehensive, cohesive, and up-to-date Master Plans for open space areas.

Goal 5.5.1: Preserve and make open space more accessible for the general public.

Objectives: 12.1 Work with other departments and landowners to preserve existing open space.
12.2 For new development seeking a discretionary permit, work with the applicants to preserve open space where appropriate.

Goal 5.5.2: Restore open space.

Objectives: 13.1 Where open space is already preserved or dedicated, look at ways of enhancing the habitat quality or the extent of the habitat.
13.2 Where open space is already preserved or dedicated, look at ways of enhancing the public's use of the open space.
13.3 Where open space is already preserved or dedicated, look at ways of enhancing the public's understanding of nature.
13.4 Where open space is already preserved, analyze site resources and plans for future sustainable preservation or infill.

SBAS also endorses Master Plan recommendations that increase public access to, and nature education in, open space areas including:

Goal: 5.2.5. Consider other parks and alternative recreation facilities when determining park deficiencies in certain areas.

Objectives: 5.2. Strive to connect open space areas to existing or planned parks.
5.3. Identify opportunities to turn open space areas into linear connections that can provide nature appreciation and science with education.
5.5 Allow other forms of open space areas that are mostly natural areas to count towards park requirements.

Goal: 5.3.1. Implement the Active Transportation Plan, with an emphasis on Park Connections.

Objectives: 7.1. Identify open space areas that could benefit from new trails.
7.2. Develop plans to build new trails through open space areas.

Goal: 5.7.1. Increase partnerships for programs.

Objective: 15.1. Improve special event offering[s].

These goals and objectives (e.g., 5.2.5, 5.3.1) largely deal with the trails that provide public access to open space areas, which should be integral parts of any comprehensive Master Plans for open space areas. For now, the Lake Los Carneros trails plan should be reviewed and, if necessary, updated, whereas the Ellwood trails plan should be implemented. It is critical, however, that any planning for open space areas integrate the preservation and restoration of natural habitats and native wildlife with provisions for public access and education. We also appreciate our past partnerships with the City of Goleta to provide public education, such as Goleta funding for SBAS's 2020 Winter Bird Count 4 Kids at Lake Los Carneros, and offer our expertise and services for both mounting special educational programs and for providing advice on our open space areas.

The goals listed below deal with the enforcement of laws, and maintenance plans and protocols, that prevent environmental damage, so embody our other high priority recommendation.

Goal 5.4.1: Address off-leash dog matters.

Objectives: 9.1 Initiate a study for the possibility of a designated dog park
 9.2 Enhance the enforcement of dog leash rules

Regarding Goal 5.4.1, SBAS has provided many references and reviews showing the negative impacts of off-leash dogs on wildlife, but also on human and pet safety and health. Further, off-leash dog parks increase the City's liability substantially, as shown by the failed experiment to provide an off-leash dog park at Girsh Park. SBAS does recognize the need to develop an off-leash dog park, given the public's comments, but strongly feels that such a park should be developed in one of the City's active parks or neighborhood open spaces, NOT in regional open spaces like Lake Los Carneros and Ellwood. Further, the Parks Master Plan and Goal 5.2.1 emphasize that the highest priority for regional open spaces is to protect and/or restore their natural habitats and native wildlife with the only compatible uses being those related to trails. As a consequence, off-leash dog parks are not a viable or compatible use in Goleta's regional open spaces.

SBAS, however, believes that many of the impacts of off-leash dogs on habitat, wildlife, and human safety and health can be mitigated by enforcement of the City's leash laws. As a consequence, SBAS views leash law enforcement in open space areas as a high priority, which can be addressed in plans specific to open space areas as well as by more active current enforcement. The enforcement of laws prohibiting off-leash dogs, as well as of laws that address any activity that could damage habitat or wildlife, could be augmented by the implementation of the proposed park ranger program.

Goal: 5.7.2. Enhance division efficiencies.

Objective: 16.3. Implement ranger plan.

In the past, SBAS has also been concerned about the effects of maintenance activities, such as mowing, thinning, brushing, or tree removal or trimming on natural habitats and native wildlife. As a consequence, we resonate with Goal 5.8.2.

Goal: 5.8.2. Low impact park system.

Objective: 18.3. Tree maintenance.

However, we would expand Objective 18.3 to address any vegetation maintenance activities that affect habitat and birds in open space areas. It is critical that maintenance activities be planned and implemented so as to prevent damage to habitat and birds.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Katherine Emery". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Katherine" and last name "Emery" clearly distinguishable.

Katherine Emery, PhD
Executive Director
Santa Barbara Audubon Society