UNIT 442

MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH

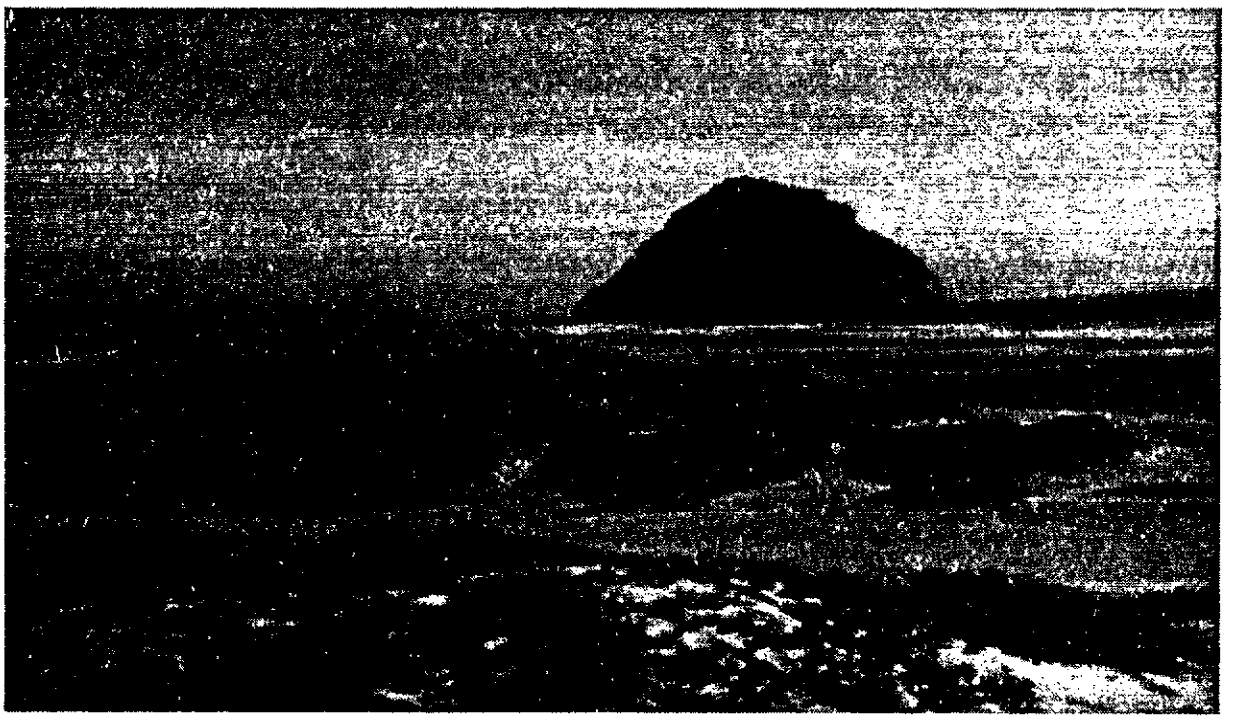
GENERAL PLAN (*)

June 1988

(*) Published in a two-plan document with the General Plan for Atascadero SB – June 1988

MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

Preliminary General Plan



November 1987

State of California – The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

George Deukmejian
Governor

Gordon Van Vleck
Secretary for Resources

Henry R. Agonia
Director

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General Plans

MORRO STRAND
AND
ATASCADERO STATE BEACH
Preliminary General Plan

November 1987

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Note: The Park and Recreation Commission approved this Preliminary General Plan in APRIL 1988.
A Final General Plan was printed dated APRIL 1988.

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

ATE OF CALIFORNIA—RESOURCES AGENCY
PARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
TATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
O. Box 942896, SACRAMENTO, CA 94296-0001

GEORGE DEUKMEJIAN, *Governor*

Resolution 7-88
adopted by the
CALIFORNIA STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
at its regular meeting in San Luis Obispo on
April 8, 1988

WHEREAS, the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation has presented to this Commission for approval the proposed General Plan for Morro Strand and Atascadero State Beach; and

WHEREAS, this reflects long-range development plans to provide for optimum use and enjoyment of these units as well as the protection of their quality;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the California State Park and Recreation Commission hereby approves the Department of Parks and Recreation's Morro Strand and Atascadero State Beach Preliminary General Plan, dated November 1987, including staff's "Recommended Changes," and expanding language in Priority 1 on Page 60 to exclude off-road vehicles, subject to such environmental changes as the Director of Parks and Recreation shall determine advisable and necessary to implement the provisions and objectives of said plan.

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SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF GENERAL PLAN PROPOSALS

Long-range planning proposals for Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach, both located in San Luis Obispo County, are presented in this General Plan, prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. These two units are closely related, and are therefore included together in this one plan. It is a recommendation of this plan to change the name of Atascadero State Beach to Morro Strand State Beach, thereby combining the two units into one.

This summary provides a quick reference to all proposals. The reader should refer to the separate sections of the plan for details of individual proposals.

When fully implemented, the plan's proposals will improve visitor services, further protect resources, and help offset additional expenses.

MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH

Resource Management

-- Protect existing water features and water quality in the state beach.

-- Protect and perpetuate the Old Creek wetland ecosystem.

-- Reduce invasive exotic plant species in the unit.

-- Use indigenous species for landscape plantings where feasible.

-- Provide for monitoring of geological hazards and beach profile surveying.

-- Design and locate new developments to reduce impacts on or impacts from the coastal erosion process.

-- Provide for the monitoring, reporting, and protection of archeological resources.

Land Use and Facilities

-- Limit use to beach-oriented day uses only.

-- Construct outdoor shower, exhibit shelter, and five additional picnic sites at the existing paved parking area.

-- Install entrance sign and interpretive panel at Studio Drive parking area.

-- Improve Studio Drive parking area, and install vehicle barriers and erosion control plantings.

Interpretation

-- Develop a series of rotational exhibits for the interpretive facilities recommended above.

-- Install metal interpretive signs at the five coastal access points along the state beach.

-- Encourage the recruitment of more volunteers.

-- Schedule interpretive walks, talks, and demonstrations as visitor participation warrants.

-- Develop more interpretive literature highlighting the resources of the unit.

-- Update teachers guide, and encourage more visitation by school groups during off-season.

ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

-- Change unit name to Morro Strand State Beach.

Resource Management

-- Regulate use and development to prevent the destruction of the significant sand dune environment.

-- Provide for monitoring of geological hazards and beach profile surveying.

-- Design and locate new developments to reduce impacts on or impacts from the coastal erosion process.

-- Reduce invasive exotic plant species in the unit.

-- Use indigenous species for landscape plantings where feasible.

-- Protect nest sites of the snowy plover and other ground-nesting seabirds.

-- Provide for the monitoring, reporting, and protection of archeological resources, including the initiation of archeological investigations when necessary.

Land Use and Facilities

-- Establish a wide range of beach use, including camping.

-- Renovate existing campground.

-- Replace existing entrance station.

-- Expand day-use parking at campground to 20-25 spaces.

-- Install beach accessways, fencing, and erosion control plantings in the campground area.

-- Develop parking at the "Cloisters" site (50-75 cars).

-- Develop up to 20 picnic sites at the "Cloisters" area.

-- Install comfort station at the "Cloisters" area.

-- Develop beach accessways and install vehicle barriers at the "Cloisters" area.

-- Install interpretive panels at both campground and "Cloisters" area.

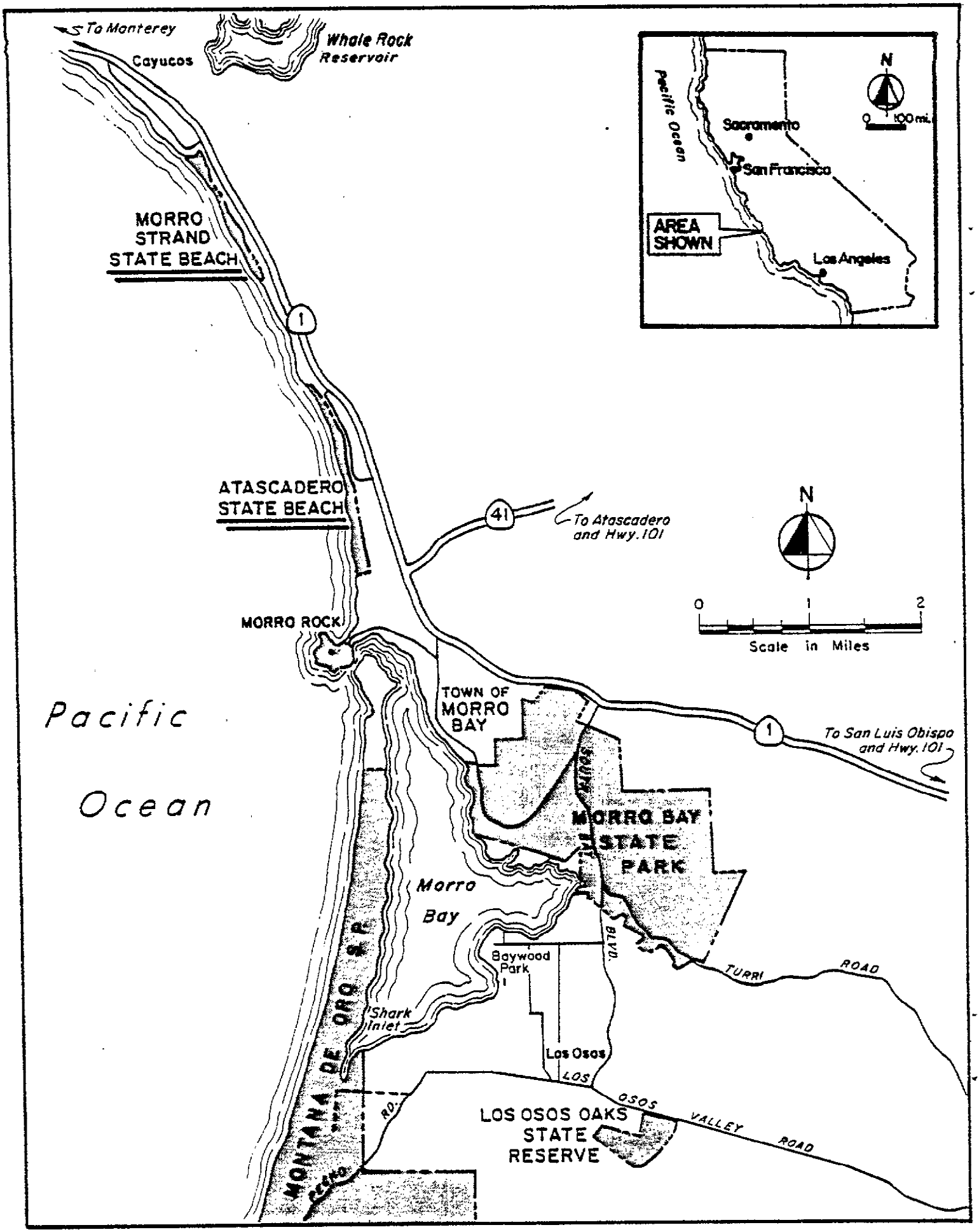
-- Improve existing parking and access area at the end of Hatteras Street.

Interpretation

-- Recommendations for interpretation at Atascadero State Beach are the same as listed for Morro Strand State Beach, with the exception of installing metal signs at coastal access points.

INTRODUCTION

UNIT DESCRIPTIONS



MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH
MAP No.1
VICINITY MAP

RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

APPROVED _____ DATE _____

REVISIONS	DATE

DESIGNED
DRAWN
CHECKED

SHEET No.

UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH

Location: San Luis Obispo County, three miles north of the city of Morro Bay. Sixteen miles northwest of the City of San Luis Obispo.

Size: A narrow strip consisting of 33.81 acres and 6,850 feet of ocean frontage.

Topography: Gently sloping from east to west. Some areas contain nearly vertical sea cliffs, with a maximum height of approximately 40 feet.

Vegetation: A majority of the unit consists of a sandy beach area, with very little vegetation. At the northern end, however, there is a small salt marsh and riparian area containing a dense thicket of willows.

Existing Facilities: A paved parking area for 50 cars, a restroom building, and five picnic tables off Pacific Avenue. A dirt parking area for 59 cars off Studio Drive.

Existing Operation: The unit is operated as part of DPR's San Luis Obispo Coast District. Cayucos State Beach (operated by the County of San Luis Obispo) is one mile north. Atascadero State Beach is three miles south.

ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

Location: In the City of Morro Bay, in San Luis Obispo County. Thirteen miles northwest of the City of San Luis Obispo.

Size: A strip of land consisting of 125.34 acres, including 9,950 feet of ocean frontage.

Topography: Gently sloping sand dunes and a steeper bluff area at the northern end of the unit. Maximum elevation varies from sea level to 40 feet.

Vegetation: Predominantly low-growing sand dune vegetation. Some larger trees, eucalyptus and cypress, occur on the Cloisters site. Myoporum is the predominant vegetation in the campground.

Existing Facilities: Contact station, 104-unit campground, 10 day-use parking spaces, two picnic sites, and two comfort stations with outdoor showers, all located at the northern end. Undeveloped dirt parking area at Cloisters site, which accommodates 50-75 vehicles.

Existing Operation: The unit is operated as part of DPR's San Luis Obispo Coast District. Morro Strand State Beach is three miles to the north. Morro Rock, part of Morro Bay State Park, is approximately 3,000 feet south of the southern end of this unit.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Plan

Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach are closely related in many respects. They contain similar resources, both natural and recreational. They are currently managed together in one operational area, and are in close proximity. In addition, there has been some confusion with regard to the name of Atascadero State Beach. It lies entirely within the city limits of the City of Morro Bay, and bears little proximity to the city of Atascadero, which lies approximately 12 miles to the northeast. Therefore, both units are included in this one document, and it is a recommendation of this plan to change the name of Atascadero State Beach to Morro Strand State Beach. However, until the state Park and Recreation Commission approves such an action, they will continue to be referred to as two separate units. That is the way they are referred to in each element of this document.

This General Plan establishes guidelines for the long-term use, management, and development of Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach. It has been prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation in compliance with Public Resources Code Section 5002.2. The law requires approval of the General Plan by the California State Park and Recreation Commission prior to construction of any development that would constitute a permanent commitment of natural or cultural resources.

The plan summarizes the available information about the parks, documenting the planning process and the relevant data used in making land use decisions and management and development proposals. As conditions change, the plan may be reviewed and updated as necessary to responsibly guide departmental actions at the parks. The plan, however, is not meant to provide detailed plans for site development, resource management, or park operation and maintenance. These details should be provided at the time actual funding and implementation occur.

Discussions about land not owned by the Department of Parks and Recreation have been included. These lands represent potential acquisition opportunities, based on available data. However, the discussions are intended for long-range planning purposes only, and do not represent an intention or commitment for acquisition.

Objectives of the Plan

The General Plan attempts to meet the following broad objectives:

1. Preserve and perpetuate the natural and cultural resources.

2. Provide, preserve, and protect public opportunities for ocean beach-oriented recreation in a high-quality environment.

3. Restore and protect the natural values of the Old Creek wetland area.

4. Preserve a natural setting for recreational activities.

5. Develop facilities needed to help meet current and future recreation demands.

6. Provide appropriate interpretive services and facilities for educational and recreational purposes.

7. Promote a safe, enjoyable, and well-managed recreation environment.

8. Minimize environmental damage caused by recreation use and development.

9. Monitor recreation use, and periodically reassess the ability of the resources to absorb the use they are receiving, and adjust recreation use as necessary, to adequately protect resource values.

The Planning Process

The development of this General Plan has been part of a larger planning effort for all state park units in this area. This effort is broadly referred to as the Morro Bay Area State Park Units General Plan, and includes Los Osos Oaks State Reserve, Morro Strand State Beach, Atascadero State Beach, Montana de Oro State Park, and Morro Bay State Park.

The planning process included a comprehensive evaluation of all available resource and recreation information. Based on this evaluation, a number of plan alternatives were prepared. These were again analyzed in cooperation with local agencies, interest groups, and the public. Single plans then emerged for each unit which were considered to offer the optimum balance between resource preservation and providing public access and educational opportunities.

General Plan Elements

This plan is a culmination of this effort with respect to Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach. It is divided into the following elements:

- Resource Element - Evaluates the natural and cultural resources of the units, and sets policies for protection, restoration, and use of these resources.

- Land Use and Facilities Element - Evaluates existing land use and facilities, and describes proposed land use and facilities which are consistent with the unit's resources and visitor needs.

- Interpretive Element - Establishes interpretive themes, and recommends methods for interpretation of the unit's natural and cultural values.

- Operations Element - Describes specific operational and maintenance requirements of the units, and establishes operational guidelines for implementation of the plan.

- Concessions Element - Evaluates existing and potential concession activities, and establishes guidelines consistent with the classification of the units.

- Environmental Impact Element - In conjunction with the General Plan, serves as the Draft Environmental Impact Report required by the California Environmental Quality Act. It assesses environmental effects and proposes mitigation measures and alternatives.

Public Involvement

The public played a major role in creating this plan. From the outset, the planning team attempted to identify all parties interested in or affected by this plan, and to encourage their participation in the decision-making process. An active mailing list of more than 800 names was developed, and more than 5,000 user surveys were distributed at the state parks in the study area. Public workshops were held at three critical stages in the plan's evolution, and newsletters were sent to all on the mailing list four times to keep the public informed throughout the process. (See Appendix A for sample user surveys and newsletters.)

An initial newsletter was sent out after completion of the information gathering period. It summarized the information we had received through the user surveys, informed everyone of our planning process, and of our first public workshop.

The first public workshop was held on November 12, 1986, in Los Osos. The purpose of the workshop was to present the Draft Resource Element, and to allow us to communicate with interested groups, individuals, and agencies to learn more specifically about the issues and concerns they felt should be dealt with. One hundred twelve people were in attendance, actively and openly sharing many concerns.

Issue 2 of the newsletter reported the comments, concerns, and ideas expressed by participants at the first public workshop. It also described the next phase of the process, and informed everyone of the next public meeting.

The planning team then took the wealth of information and ideas that had been generated, and synthesized it into a series of alternative plans. These were presented at a second public workshop on March 18, 1986. This meeting attracted well over two hundred participants. A wide range of opinions and suggestions were received. The third issue of the newsletter summarized this input.

The planning team then embarked on the task of taking the many proposals received from the second public workshop and developing them into a single plan for each unit.

The single plan was then announced in the fourth issue of the newsletter, and was presented for evaluation at a third series of public meetings held on September 1 and 2, 1987. Approximately fifty people were in attendance at each of these meetings. The plans were reevaluated after the meetings, appropriate changes were made, and the preliminary plan and environmental impact report were issued in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act for review and comment.

In addition to the newsletters sent out by the planning team, prior to each public meeting, news releases were made which resulted in numerous newspaper articles and radio and television announcements. The meetings were attended by a broad representation of user groups whose enthusiastic and insightful participation has strongly influenced this plan.

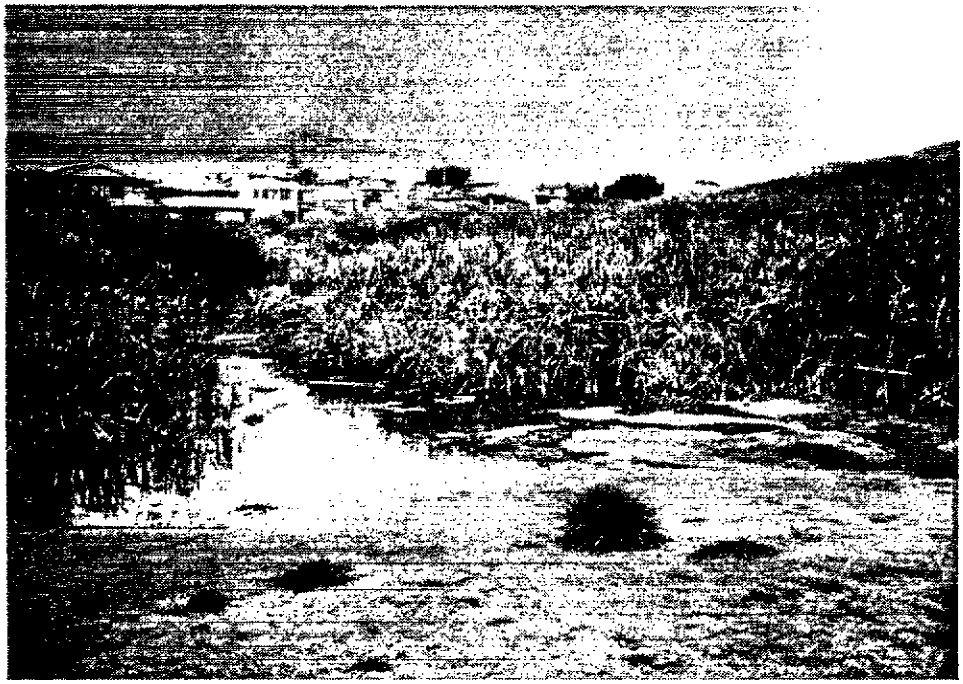
Agency Coordination

Valuable input was also solicited and received through coordination with the following agencies:

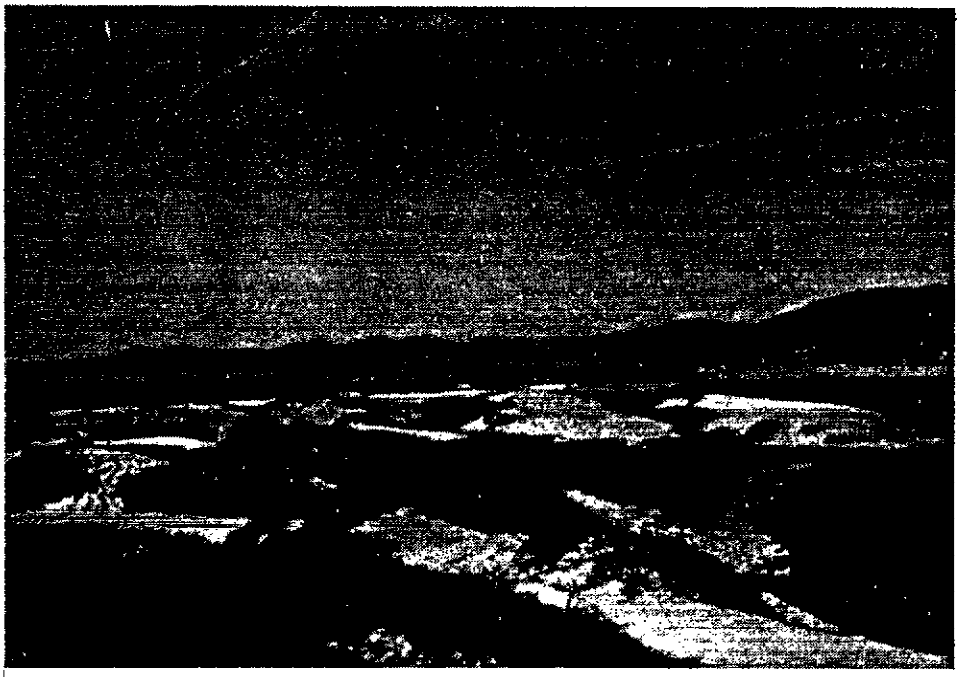
- County of San Luis Obispo
  - Department of Planning and Building
  - Park Facilities Division
  - Engineering Department
  - Department of General Services
- City of Morro Bay
  - City Administrator
  - City Council
  - Planning/Community Development
  - Public Works
  - Recreation and Parks
- California Department of Transportation
- California Department of Fish and Game
- California Coastal Commission
- State Water Quality Control Board
- Pacific Gas and Electric
- Pacific Bell

MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

RESOURCE ELEMENT



Old Creek wetlands — Morro Strand



Sand dunes — Atascadero

RESOURCE ELEMENT

This Resource Element was prepared to meet requirements set forth in Section 5002.2, Subsection (b) of Division 5, Chapter 1 of the Public Resources Code, and Chapter 1, Section 4332 of Title 14 of the California Administrative Code. In compliance with this section of the Public Resources Code, the Resource Element sets forth long-range management objectives for the natural and cultural resources of the unit. Specific actions or limitations required to achieve these objectives are also set forth in this element; maintenance operations and details of resource management are left for inclusion in specific resource management programs that will be prepared at a later date.

This element also identifies specific resource sensitivities and physical constraints, and establishes the department's guidelines for acceptable levels of development and use with respect to these concerns.

The Resource Element has two main parts. The first is a brief summary of the unit's resources. More detailed information on these subjects is on file with the Department of Parks and Recreation. The second part deals with policy formulation, which begins with unit classification and declaration of purpose, and concludes with specific resource management policies.

MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH

RESOURCE SUMMARY

Natural Resources

Topography

Morro Strand State Beach is located on the central California coast, on the southern end of the Coast Ranges Geomorphic Province. In the area of the state beach, the principal ranges are the northernmost Santa Lucia Range, trending northwest to southeast, and the Irish Hills of the San Luis Range, paralleling the Santa Lucia Range to the south. Between these two ranges lies the Los Osos Valley, bordered on the west by Estero Bay and the Pacific Ocean, and on the southeast by the San Luis Valley.

The unit consists of a strip of flat, sandy beach bordering the southern part of the town of Cayucos. Facing southwest toward Estero Bay, the beach is backed by a narrow wave-cut terrace, the hills of the Santa Lucia Range, and the alluvial canyon of Willow Creek. The elevational range is from mean sea level to less than 40 feet. The outlet of intermittent Willow Creek crosses the middle of the beach strip. The northern end of the unit contains a small wetland and riparian area created by the outlet of Old Creek, emanating partially from the Whale Rock Reservoir located northeast of the unit. Coastal dunes and most of the vegetation found within the unit boundaries are located at the wider, northern portion of the unit; the remainder of the strip is bordered by the homes of the community of Cayucos. Sea stacks and submerged rocks may be seen from the beach.

Meteorology

The Morro Bay area has a Mediterranean climate which is characterized by mild temperatures, with little diurnal fluctuation, moist winters, and warm, dry summers. Low cloudiness often occurs along the coast during the summer, with an average frequency of 200-250 hours per month. The average annual temperature ranges from 56° to 60°, with summer maximums of 65°-70° and winter maximums in the 50s or low 60s. There are usually 40 to 50 days per year with measurable precipitation. The coastline of Estero Bay at Morro Strand State Beach is directly exposed to the wind from the west and southwest.

Morro Strand State Beach is located in the Non-Salinas Valley sub-area of the South Central Coast Air Basin. The major pollutants monitored in this basin are ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, hydrocarbons, and total suspended particulate matter (TSP). The Non-Salinas Valley sub-area meets state and federal standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen dioxide; the sub-area is unclassified for TSP and sulfur dioxide.

Hydrology

Morro Strand State Beach is situated in the San Luis Obispo Hydrologic Unit of the Central Coastal Drainage Province. Morro Strand State Beach is in the Old Creek Hydrologic Subarea of the Cambria Hydrologic Subunit. The unit includes the mouths of two small ephemeral streams, Old Creek and Willow Creek. The flows of Old Creek are regulated by Whale Rock Reservoir, located 11 miles upstream from the unit. When Old Creek reaches the beach at Morro Strand, the water forms a pool and percolates into the sand; water generally does not flow directly into the ocean. These creeks are both ephemeral, and water quality is generally good, with some potential for degradation due to upstream land use practices. Land use in these watersheds includes irrigated agriculture with more pasture and alfalfa acreage than field crops, and recent urban and suburban development. These creeks are included in a current study by the State Water Quality Control Board investigating the effects upstream mining activities have had on water quality and aquatic habitat.

The unit is underlain by a portion of the Old Creek ground water basin, which is supplied primarily by precipitation percolation into recent alluvium. Groundwater quality is generally good, with a possibility of groundwater overdraft from overpumpage in dry years. Salt water intrusion into the aquifer is a transitory problem during dry periods.

Much of the beach is in the 100-year coastal flood zone, with additional area falling in the 500-year coastal flood zone. Tsunami or seismically induced waves and winter storm surges are sources of coastal flooding. The unit encompasses the 100-year flood zone for Willow Creek, and there is the possibility of flooding due to failure of the Whale Rock Reservoir dam.

Geology

The Coast Ranges geomorphic province is made up of rocks of widely differing origins -- the Franciscan Complex representing a subduction zone complex, the Great Valley Sequence representing forearc basin sediments, and plutonic and metamorphic rocks of the Salinian Block representing a magmatic island arc.

These rocks were formed at roughly the same time during the Late Mesozoic, as the eastward-spreading Farallon Plate collided with the North American Plate. Current geological theory holds that the thinner, denser oceanic Farallon Plate was subducted beneath the thick North American Plate, and subsequently partially accreted to the continent as the accumulated sediments were scraped off, overridden, and sheared by the large-scale tectonic forces. As the Farallon Plate was "consumed," strike-slip movement began as a result of northwest movement of the Pacific Plate and eastern movement of the North American Plate. This later strike-slip movement juxtaposed rocks in incongruous relation to each other.

Bedrock in the Morro Strand area is Franciscan Complex -- rocks that are thought to represent the subduction zone complex. The rock outcrops belong to the "Broken Formation B," which consists of interbedded greywacke and shale. These rocks include small percentages of potassium feldspar (2 to 5%) and fragments of older Franciscan debris, such as red and green chert. The shale consists of illite, montmorillonite, and chlorite.

Morro Strand State Beach is very young, geologically. Beach sands, low dunes, and alluvial and terrace deposits make up the present-day surface, with some offshore and beach rocks and a few cliff rocks providing some hint of the dramatic history of this section of coastline.

The hillslopes inland from the unit are prone to landslides, and the cliff-edge houses are subject to damage from erosion and seacliff retreat. The entrance road and unimproved parking lot may suffer from extreme erosion or storms; however, they are constructed in the best available locations.

Soils

Morro Strand State Beach is located in the southernmost tip of the Northwestern Coastal Ranges Soil Region (Soil Region I), which is characterized by steep mountain ranges and small valleys. Two soil map units are found within the boundaries of the state beach: beaches and Cropley clay.

Beaches, the dominant soil mapping unit, consist of layers of sand grains of rock washed down waterways from inland areas to the ocean, and distributed southward along the coast by longshore currents. Found on the shore of Estero Bay, beach sand is essentially barren of vegetation. The soil permeability is high and very rapid, the available water capacity is low, and the erosion hazard due to wind and wave action is high, limiting the use of the beach almost exclusively to recreation.

Gently sloping (2-9% slope) Cropley clay is found behind the beach. Formed in alluvium weathered from sedimentary rocks, the vegetation types found on this soil are coastal foredune and coastal dune scrub, and northern coastal salt marsh bordered by willow riparian vegetation. It has slow permeability and surface runoff, lessening the hazard of water erosion but interfering with septic tank absorption fields. The available water capacity is high, and the soil has a high shrink-swell potential and low strength, posing limiting factors for its use as a site for building structures or roads, or for its use as a construction material for embankments, dikes, and levees.

Plant Life

Native vegetation at Morro Strand State Beach occurs in the vicinity of Old Creek, and consists of northern coastal salt marsh and willow riparian community types. Dominated by herbaceous perennials, the salt marsh occurs primarily on the southeast side of Old Creek, inland from the active beach. The salt marsh intergrades with the riparian zone along the creek banks, and with small areas of freshwater marsh in shallow depressions adjacent to State Highway 1. Principal saltmarsh species include jaumea and salt grass. Freshwater marsh species include beach silverweed and Douglas' coyote bush. Beach silverweed and three-square also grow along the banks of Old Creek. Coyote brush occurs adjacent to the freshwater depressions. The Old Creek riparian zone is dominated by arroyo willow. Arroyo willow occurs as a dense, wind-pruned thicket of low trees. Shallow areas in the creek adjacent to the banks are dominated by cat-tail.

No rare and endangered species or special interest plants occur in this unit.

Several exotic species occur in the wetland area at Morro Strand State Beach. The most invasive of these species are periwinkle, castor bean, Fuller's teasel, and ice plant. Periwinkle forms an extensive understory in the riparian zone inland from Old Creek. Castor bean is established adjacent to the boundary fence at State Highway 1. Fuller's teasel and ice plant are established in the salt marsh area.

Animal Life

Bordering the Pacific Ocean on Estero Bay and virtually surrounded by human development on its landward side, Morro Strand State Beach consists primarily of a beach and the coastal strand biotic community, with its associated, integrated faunal resources. Despite the harsh environment, the animal life is plentiful and diverse, and easily accessible to interested visitors. The beach receives nutrients from the ocean which feed its myriad burrowing invertebrate populations. Small crustaceans such as mole crabs and amphipods serve as a food source for many species of seabirds, making this area a popular overwintering or migratory stopover point. Willets, marbled godwits, and least sandpipers can be seen searching for food in the sand. Pelagic or ocean-going birds such as surf scoters and common loons may be seen from the beach, as can marine mammals such as the California sea lion and the harbor seal. Several species of gull frequent the beach to scavenge, as do some terrestrial birds such as the Brewer's blackbird.

Behind the beach, wind-created sand dunes offer some protection, vegetation, and freshwater ponds. Red-winged blackbirds, song sparrows, and meadowlarks take advantage of the seeds provided by the dune vegetation, and their songs can often be heard above the sound of the waves. The deer mouse and the black-tailed jackrabbit forage in the coastal strand during the night, and may themselves become forage for predators such as the short-eared owl and the bobcat.

The outlets of Old Creek and Willow Creek cross the beach, and the flow of fresh water provides habitat for additional flora and fauna. Numerous insects feed Pacific tree frogs, long-billed marsh wrens, and flycatchers such as the

black phoebe. Fish and amphibians are favored foods of the kingfisher, the great blue heron, and the black-crowned night heron, which also finds roosting cover and possibly nesting opportunities in the riparian vegetation.

Historically, the coastal dunes and wetlands were far more extensive. Urban development, altered streams, and intensive human use of the coastal areas have affected the pristine wildlife of the area; some species have been reduced, and others, including beach-nesting seabirds like the least tern, have disappeared.

Four state or federally listed rare (R), threatened (T), or endangered (E) species may occur in the state beach. Those that may forage in the unit include the brown pelican (SE, FE), the least tern (SE, FE), the bald eagle (SE, FE), and the American peregrine falcon (SE, FE). The state is also concerned about the welfare of many other animals, identified as species of special concern, that may occur in the unit. Some of these include the double-breasted cormorant and the California gull, both of which breed in the vicinity, and the western grebe, the common loon, and the elegant tern, which forage in the area.

Marine Life

Morro Strand State Beach is located along a broad curve of the coastline extending 20 miles from Point Estero south to Point Buchon. Although it is called Estero Bay, this stretch of coastline is not protected from wave action. The surf is often heavy during the winter, when Pacific storms bring strong winds and waves to the coast. The tide range in the area is from approximately the minus 2-foot level to the plus 7-foot level. The tide cycle is a mixed semi-diurnal type, characterized by two high tides and two low tides per day. Ocean water varies by about 13 degrees F. during the year. Water temperatures range from a low of about 51 degrees F. in the months from February through May to a high of 64 degrees in October.

Morro Strand State Beach is primarily a sandy beach, with only a few scattered rocks. The sand is not a suitable substrate for surface attachment and protection from surf, and, thus, limits the kind of intertidal organisms to those that can burrow in the sand. The scattered rocks serve as attachment sites for many organisms, but many are seasonally buried by sand.

Sixty-two species of multi-cellular plants have been identified in the intertidal area adjacent to this unit. Many of the rocks in the mid-littoral zone are covered with plant material. Plants of particular interest occurring here are species in the genus Porphyra. This algae is eaten by humans more than any other. Also known as nori, its cultivation and marketing is a multi-million dollar industry in Japan. Porphyra lancelolata occurs in large quantities in the mid-littoral zone at the north end of the unit.

As a result of wave action, large masses of kelp often come to rest on the sandy beach. These decomposing masses of kelp become an important part of the beach environment. Large populations of beach hoppers, flies, crustaceans, and other organisms inhabit these kelp masses.

Other than in the decaying kelp masses, the sandy beach fauna are mostly subsurface. Unless they are dug out, only those individuals washed out by strong wave action are seen. In the mid-littoral zone, bloodworms are often found in sufficient numbers to provide bait for fishing. The larger sandy beach organisms are found in the sub-littoral fringe, including the spiny mole crab and the eccentric sand dollar. Specimens of the Pismo clam, once locally abundant, are not often encountered. The population decline is an apparent result of the sea otter reestablishing itself as the top carnivore in the local ecosystem.

Fishes commonly caught at Morro Strand include bard surf perch, white croaker, and flatfish. In offshore areas, there are seasonal occurrences of king salmon and albacore in sufficient numbers to support recreational and commercial fishing activity. Five species of marine mammals are seen in the vicinity on a regular basis: harbor seals, California sea lions, Stellar sea lions, southern sea otters, and Pacific gray whales. The sea otter is a federally listed threatened species. The gray whale is a federally listed endangered species.

Cultural Resources

Archeological Sites and Standing Structures

There are no known prehistoric or historic archeological sites or standing structures located within the boundaries of Morro Strand State Beach. Historic documents have been researched and a complete archeological survey conducted for this unit.

Ethnographic Background

The Native American people who inhabited the central California coast prior to the Euroamerican period were known as the Chumash. The accounts of the early Spanish explorers depict sharp contrasts between the Chumash groups along the Santa Barbara Channel and those inhabiting the territory north of Point Conception. Cabrillo commented on the number and size of the villages found along the channel, and the lack of villages on the coast north of the point. Fages, a member of Portola's 1769 expedition, described the large villages found along the channel, all having populations in excess of 400, as pueblos. North of Point Conception, Fages depicted habitation sites as small or insignificant villages. The inhabitants were characterized as "very poor ill-conditioned Indians;" there is mention of a village without houses at Morro Bay.

Fages noted that the large villages along the channel had chiefs or captains (wot). The chief's primary role was that of military commander. The position was for life, and the individual had absolute, total independence. There is reference in the early Spanish accounts to only one captain or wot among all of the Northern Chumash; his name was Buchon. The Spaniards were told that Buchon, whose village was near Pismo Beach, took tribute for 20 leagues in all directions.

Based on archeological evidence and early ethnographic accounts, the Northern and Southern Chumash apparently shared similar food procurement and processing strategies. An extensive array of traps, nets, disguises, blinds, missiles

and projectiles, fishing gear, and vegetable-gathering equipment was used. The wide variety of animals eaten included deer, sea mammal, bear, dog, wolf, fox, puma, skunk, raccoon, rodent, rabbit, mole, eagle, buzzard, snake, fish, and shellfish. Grinding implements, earth ovens, stone boiling in baskets, and sun and smoke drying, as well as other implements and techniques, were used in food preparation.

Structures used by the Northern and Southern Chumash included ceremonial sweathouses, domed and conical buildings, and communal houses. The remains of a dwelling were excavated here in 1961. The structure was circular, 25 to 30 ft in diameter; archeological evidence indicates that it was dome-shaped.

All of the coastal Chumash groups fished. Ethnographic accounts and faunal remains from excavated sites indicate that both the Northern and Channel Chumash used weir traps; dip, drag, gill, and seine nets; and hooks and lines. Hooks were made from cactus spines, shell, and bone. Spears and harpoons were also used. Both groups probably used the kelp fishery year-round. Channel Chumash, the only group to build and use the tomol (plank canoe), had access to the more seasonally available larger pelagic species, such as tuna and swordfish. Both the Channel and Northern Chumash used tule and dugout canoes.

Historic Background

Morro Strand State Beach was once part of the Rancho Moro y Cayucos land grant, and, in the 19th century, was simply known as "Morro Beach". At low tide, the beach was the commonly traveled "road" from Cayucos to the village of Morro (modern day Morro Bay). In 1916, developer E. G. Lewis purchased the southern half of Morro Beach, and christened it "Atascadero Beach," as part of his land development colony at Atascadero (the old J. E. Henry Ranch). In 1932, the State of California acquired the beach frontage of Morro Beach, and renamed it Morro Strand State Beach.

The site of the historic Old Creek store and saloon located "in a beautiful little valley off the beach" is not on State Park System property.

Esthetic Resources

Morro Strand State Beach provides sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean south to Morro Rock and the headlands of Montana de Oro State Park. The beach and offshore areas are accented by rock outcrops and small seastacks. The delicate tracery of small red algae and contorted streamers of kelp invite close examination of the cobbled and sandy beach.

There are several prominent negative esthetic features in the viewshed of Morro Strand State Beach. The most obvious of these features is the continuous row of houses atop the low bluff at the back of the beach. The owners of these houses have constructed stairways onto the beach, and, due to storm damage, many are in a state of disrepair. The base of the bluff has also been riprapped or covered by concrete retaining walls. Trash associated with storm wrack is also unsightly. The smoke stacks of the Morro Bay Power Plant detract from downcoast vistas to Morro Rock.

Recreation Resources

Morro Strand State Beach experiences an average yearly visitation of 40,000. Principal recreation activities in this unit include picnicking, wading, surfing, beachcombing, surf fishing, and nature study. Restrooms and five picnic sites are provided in this unit. Rough surf and cold ocean temperatures, as well as gusty winds, are constraints on recreational activities in this unit.

RESOURCE POLICY FORMATION

Classification

Classification of a State Park System unit forms the foundation on which all management and development policies are based. Classification statutes contained in Article 1.7 of the Public Resources Code specify broad management objectives and improvements appropriate in a state beach.

The first acquisition by the state of the land which now constitutes Morro Strand State Beach occurred in 1932, in response to public pressure for a public park in the Morro Bay area. In the 1960s, the present State Park System classification system was established, and in July 1963, the State Park and Recreation Commission classified the unit as Morro Strand State Beach. Classification by the commission directs the department to manage the unit as specified in Public Resources Code Section 5019.56. This section defines and describes a state beach as a type of state recreation unit, as follows:

> 5019.56. State Recreation Units. State recreation units consist of areas selected, developed, and operated to provide outdoor recreational opportunities. Such units shall be designated by the commission by naming, in accordance with the provisions of Article 1 (commencing with Section 5001) and this article relating to classification.
>
> In the planning of improvements to be undertaken within state recreation units, consideration shall be given to compatibility of design with the surrounding scenic and environmental characteristics.
>
> State recreation units may be established in the terrestrial or underwater environments of the state and shall be further classified as one of the following types: . . .
>
> (d) State beaches, consisting of areas with frontage on the ocean, or bays designed to provide swimming, boating, fishing, and other beach-oriented recreational activities. Coastal areas containing ecological, geological, scenic, or cultural resources of significant value shall be preserved within state wildernesses, state reserves, state parks, or natural or cultural preserves.

Declaration of Purpose

A declaration of purpose describes the purpose of the unit, and identifies the prime resources, long-range management objectives, and the relationship between the unit's resources and recreational uses. A declaration of purpose was written for the state beach in 1975, but was never presented to the state Park and Recreation Commission for approval.

A revised declaration of purpose is proposed, to clarify the department's management goals and objectives. The original and proposed declaration of purpose for the unit are as follows:

Original:

The purpose of Morro Strand State Beach is to make available to the public for recreational enjoyment the ocean shore and sandy beach at the mouth of Old Creek in the community of Cayucos. Developments shall be for the purpose of making the beach resources available to the public for recreational enjoyment, and shall not impair the scenic quality of the state beach.

Proposed:

The purpose of Morro Strand State Beach is to make available to the people, for their benefit and enjoyment, the scenic, natural, and recreational resources of the ocean beach and the Old Creek wetland.

The function of the California Department of Parks and Recreation at Morro Strand State Beach shall be to provide, preserve, and protect public opportunities for ocean beach-oriented recreation in a high-quality environment, and to restore and protect the natural values of the Old Creek wetland area. A natural setting for recreational activities shall be preserved.

Zone of Primary Interest

The zone of primary interest is that area outside the unit in which land-use changes could adversely affect the resources of Morro Strand State Beach. This area includes the adjacent community of Cayucos, the adjacent offshore areas, and the watersheds of Old Creek and Willow Creek.

In addition, the department should be concerned about activities on all lands, no matter how far from the unit, that can, through their development and use, adversely affect the resources and features in the unit. Air pollution generated by the Morro Bay and Diablo Canyon power plants, oil spills from offshore oil development, and pollution from other sources all potentially could affect Morro Strand State Beach. The damming of rivers and the development of both offshore and onshore protective structures could disrupt the normal movement of littoral sand, resulting in narrowing of the beach. Department officials should be aware of these potential threats, and take action whenever possible to minimize them.

Resource Management Policies

Resource management in the State Park System is governed by laws contained in the Public Resources Code, by regulations in the California Administrative Code, by directives approved by the department's director, and by policies approved by the state Park and Recreation Commission. General policies related to the unit classification and the declaration of purpose have been addressed in previous sections.

Specific departmental resource management directives amplify the legal codes, and provide clear management guidelines. Directives that are especially pertinent to existing or potential problems related to the management of resources in Morro Strand State Beach are:

#15 State Recreation Units; protection of resources
#18 State Beaches; avoid using sandy beaches for secondary uses
#19 State Beaches; protection of resources
#33 Exotic Plant Species
#35 Wildlife Protection
#46 Environmental Quality
#58 Cultural Resource Protection
#70 Archeological Sites

Directives #18 and #19 are particularly relevant to planning issues for the state beaches along Estero Bay:

> (18) INSOFAR AS IS POSSIBLE IN STATE BEACHES, THE ENTIRE AREA OF THE SANDY LITTORALS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR RECREATION USE AND VISUAL ENJOYMENT. IT IS AN OBJECTIVE OF THE DEPARTMENT TO AVOID USE OF NATURAL SANDY BEACHES FOR PARKING OR FOR OTHER SUPPORTIVE OR SECONDARY USES.
>
> (19) THE SCENIC, NATURAL, AND CULTURAL VALUES OF STATE BEACHES, INCLUDING THE ECOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE LITTORAL, TIDAL AND NEARSHORE AREAS WILL BE IDENTIFIED, EVALUATED, AND PROTECTED SO THE TOTAL QUALITY OF THE RECREATION EXPERIENCE MAY BE PERPETUATED AND ENHANCED.

Following several years of significant storm damage in many coastal State Park System units, the department adopted a policy for coastal erosion on October 24, 1984. The intent of the policy is to avoid construction of new permanent facilities in areas subject to coastal erosion unless the risk of loss is clearly offset by the need for the facility, and to promote the use of expendable or movable facilities in erosion prone areas. The policy reads as follows:

> THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION SHALL AVOID CONSTRUCTION OF NEW STRUCTURES AND COASTAL FACILITIES IN AREAS SUBJECT TO OCEAN WAVE EROSION, SEACLIFF RETREAT, AND UNSTABLE CLIFFS, UNLESS SPECIFIC DETERMINATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE THAT THE RISK OF LOSS OF THE FACILITY IS CLEARLY OFFSET BY THE INVESTMENT AND NEED FOR THE FACILITY. MEASURES SHALL

BE TAKEN TO MINIMIZE HUMAN INDUCED EROSION BY REDUCING: CONCENTRATED SURFACE RUNOFF FROM USE AREAS, ELEVATED GROUNDWATER LEVELS FROM IRRIGATION AND URBANIZATION, AND SURFACE DISTURBANCE OF BLUFFTOP SOILS. IN RECOGNITION OF CALIFORNIA'S ACTIVELY ERODING COASTLINE, NEW STRUCTURES AND FACILITIES LOCATED IN AREAS KNOWN TO BE SUBJECT TO OCEAN WAVE EROSION, SEACLIFF RETREAT, OR UNSTABLE BLUFFS SHALL BE EXPENDABLE OR MOVABLE. STRUCTURAL PROTECTION AND REPROTECTION OF DEVELOPMENTS SHALL BE ALLOWED ONLY WHEN THE COST OF PROTECTION IS COMMENSURATE WITH THE VALUE (PHYSICAL AND INTRINSIC) OF THE DEVELOPMENT TO BE PROTECTED, AND WHEN IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT THE PROTECTION WILL NOT NEGATIVELY AFFECT THE BEACH OR THE NEAR-SHORE ENVIRONMENT.

In addition to policies, directives, and laws that apply statewide, the following specific resource policies have been developed for Morro Strand State Beach:

Natural Resources

Hydrologic Resources

The water features are important to perpetuation of the natural and esthetic values at Morro Strand State Beach. Any significant alteration of the hydrologic systems supporting these water features, either inside or outside the unit, may affect them significantly. These impacts need to be identified, monitored, and prevented or corrected before major park system values of the unit are lost.

> Policy: The department shall be actively involved in local activities and land use decisions that may result in such adverse impacts on the unit's water features as stream channelization, diversion, or pollution sources. Measures to maintain water quality, channel flow, and sediment rates shall be recommended and supported. No water shall be diverted within the unit's boundaries that will significantly affect the water features and the ecosystems they support.

Geological Hazards

Geological hazards at Morro Strand State Beach include landslides, block falls, liquefaction, tsunamis, and seismic shaking. Site-specific investigations prior to new developments can help to avoid building in areas subject to these hazards.

> Policy: New developments shall avoid geological hazards. Site-specific geologic reports shall be prepared by a registered geologist or certified engineering geologist prior to final siting of facilities, to assure that geological hazards have been avoided or mitigated to the fullest extent feasible. The report shall identify potential geologic hazards of the site, and provide for mitigating measures to ensure structural stability and integrity throughout the economic useful life of the development.

Coastal Erosion

The seacliffs and beaches of Morro Strand State Beach are subject to coastal erosion, seacliff retreat, and beach sand loss. No DPR facilities are currently threatened by this natural process; however, conditions could change in the future.

> Policy: The department shall support a beach monitoring/profiling program to document baseline beach and cliff conditions and changes over time. A topographic and property line survey shall also be performed in support of the monitoring effort. Future permanent facility developments at Morro Strand State Beach shall be sufficiently set back to ensure that the developments will endure. New developments shall neither create nor contribute significantly to erosion or geologic instability.
>
> Development shall not be permitted on the cliff face except for engineered staircases or accessways to provide public access to designated public use areas. These access structures shall be designed to minimize the alteration of the bluff and beach.

Paleontological Resources

No fossil resources are known to exist at Morro Strand State Beach. It is possible that the sand deposits or alluvial deposits in the terrace could yield fragmentary fossil material, although none has ever been reported to date.

> Policy: In the event that a fossil discovery is made at Morro Strand State Beach, the incident shall be promptly reported to the appropriate departmental staff person, who will determine the validity and significance of the discovery, and take appropriate protective or stabilization action.

Exotic Plant Species

Exotic species have become naturalized in and adjacent to the wetland in Morro Strand State Beach. In this area, they are successfully competing with native species. Exotic species have also been planted around the parking area. Perpetuation of native plant communities is dependent on the control and removal of exotic species.

> Policy: The department shall pursue a long-range objective of reducing exotic plants, including periwinkle, castor bean, Fuller's teasel, and ice plant, that have become established in the unit. Highest priority for control efforts shall be given to those species most invasive and conspicuous in the landscape.

Landscaping

Exotic species detract from the natural appearance of Morro Strand State Beach, displace native species, have lower habitat value for native wildlife, are more prone to insect attack and disease, and can require permanent irrigation and greater maintenance costs.

Policy: In order to maintain the diversity of native species, landscaping in developed areas should consist of species indigenous to the unit. If exotic species are used, these shall be species which are incapable of naturalizing in the wild, and which will not require a permanent irrigation system.

Old Creek Wetland

The term "wetland" refers to any watercourse or body of water, the lands underlying or adjacent to these waters, and the wildlife and natural communities dependent on the wetland habitat (California Administrative Code, Section 5812). Coastal wetlands are essential to fish as spawning and nursery areas, and to migratory waterfowl and shorebirds as resting, feeding, and nesting sites. From a human standpoint, wetlands may help to minimize the effects of flooding and erosion, and to buffer the effects of pollution. With their diversity of animal and plant life, wetlands are also important esthetic and recreational resources.

In California, 70 percent of coastal wetlands have been destroyed since 1900. Of the remaining wetland acreage, seven percent occurs on the coast between San Francisco Bay and the Mexican border; 80 to 89 percent is in the San Francisco Bay complex. Of the historic marshes reported in the Morro Bay area, many have been drained and converted to residential, industrial, or agricultural use.

The wetland at Morro Strand State Beach includes coastal saltmarsh and willow riparian areas. Old Creek, a small freshwater/tidal creek, provides habitat for the tidewater goby, a Category II species of special concern. The willow thickets may also provide roosting and nesting sites for the black-crowned night heron.

Policy: The wetland ecosystem in Morro Strand State Beach shall be protected and perpetuated. In order to preserve the integrity of the wetland, a vegetation management plan shall be developed and implemented. Control of exotic species shall be an important element of this plan.

The management plan shall address changes in historic hydrology and sedimentation, exotic species removal, sensitive species management, and water quality and pollution abatement. Sewage treatment facilities in proximity to the wetland shall be monitored for discharges. All flows from treatment facilities or leach fields shall be directed away from the wetland.

Cultural Resources

Archeological Resources

No archeological resources are known to exist in Morro Strand State Beach. It is possible that such resources are concealed by vegetation or more recent sand and soil deposits, and that future disturbances will uncover such resources.

Policy: In the event that an archeological discovery is made at Morro Strand State Beach, the incident shall immediately be reported to an appropriate department staff person who will determine the validity and significance of the discovery, and will recommend appropriate protective or stabilization action. Specific management programs shall be developed when significant cultural resources are threatened, endangered, or of special concern.

Allowable Use Intensity

The California Public Resources Code, Section 5019.5, requires that a land carrying capacity survey be made prior to the preparation of any development plan for any park or recreation area. Section 5001.96 further requires that attendance be held within limits so established. Allowable use intensity is a refinement of the land carrying capacity concept, and is prepared as part of the Resource Element of the General Plan in fulfillment of the above code sections.

Allowable use intensity is just one of several factors considered in developing the Land Use Element of the General Plan. Other factors that may also be considered in determining land use for any unit of the State Park System are classification and purpose, recreation needs, design considerations, and social carrying capacity or the desired quality of the recreation experience.

Allowable use intensity determinations establish the limits of development and use an area can sustain without an unacceptable degree of deterioration in the character and value of the scenic, natural, and cultural resources. Determinations are based on analysis and integration of resource management and protection objectives, resource constraints, and resource sensitivities information.

Resource management objectives are defined by the Public Resources Code and other law, unit classifications and declarations of purpose, and specific declarations of resource management policy presented in this Resource Element.

Resource constraints are factors which would make visitor use or facility development unsafe, economically impractical, or undesirable. They are determined by evaluating such factors as erodibility and compaction potential of soils, geologic hazards, slope stability and relief, hydrologic conditions, potential for pollution of surface waters, and flooding.

Sensitivities are conditions, locations, or values of resources that warrant restricted use or development to protect resources. Sensitivities are evaluated by considering such factors as the ability of the ecosystem to withstand human impact (ecological sensitivity), not only in the short term but also over a more extended time span; the fragility and significance of archeological and historical resources; vegetation characteristics such as durability, fragility, and regeneration rates; and wildlife considerations such as tolerance to human activity, population levels, and stability. Sensitivities may also include scenic resources; rare, threatened, or endangered plants, animals, and habitats; unique or scientifically important botanic features; and other resources of regional or statewide significance.

Based on the preceding factors, allowable use intensities for lands in Morro Strand State Beach have been determined, and are shown on the allowable use intensity map. Three use intensity categories have been developed: low, moderate, and high. The low intensity use zone is the wetland area at the mouth of Old Creek. Appropriate facilities here are limited to trails. The moderate intensity use zone is the sandy beach, which can withstand relatively heavy visitor use, but is subject to daily to infrequent ocean wave inundations. The high intensity use zone is the site of an existing parking area.

ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

RESOURCE SUMMARY

Natural Resources

Topography

Atascadero State Beach is located on the central California coast, on the southern end of the Coast Ranges Geomorphic Province. In the area of the state beach, the principal ranges are the northernmost Santa Lucia Range, trending northwest to southeast, and the Irish Hills of the San Luis Range, paralleling the Santa Lucia Range to the south. Between these two ranges lies the Los Osos Valley, bordered on the west by Estero Bay and the Pacific Ocean, and on the southeast by the San Luis Valley.

Located at the northern end of the town of Morro Bay, the unit consists of a long, wide, and flat beach front, bordered by a vegetated foredune area. Facing west onto Estero Bay, the unit is backed by a wide wave-cut terrace, the alluvial canyon of a small, unnamed intermittent creek, and the hills of the Santa Lucia Range. The northern end of the unit is bordered by the homes of the community of Morro Beach, while less development exists along the border of the southern end. The unit encompasses 125.34 acres and 9,950 linear feet of waterfront footage, and the elevation range is from mean sea level to less than 40 feet, with some small topographical relief offered by the seasonally variable sand dunes. Dune slack and ponding are found in some areas behind the foremost dunes, and several small drainages across the beach flow into the sea. The northern tip of the unit is a rocky beach with sea stacks and submerged rocks offshore, while the remainder is a sandy beach with no rocks visible.

Meteorology

The Morro Bay area has a Mediterranean climate which is characterized by mild temperatures, with little diurnal fluctuation, moist winters, and warm, dry summers. Low cloudiness often occurs along the coast during the summer, with an average frequency of 200-250 hours per month. The average annual temperature ranges from 56° to 60°, with summer maximums of 65°-70° and winter maximums in the 50s or low 60s. There are usually 40 to 50 days per year with measurable precipitation; rainfall averages approximately 17 inches annually. The coastline of Estero Bay at Atascadero State Beach is directly exposed to the wind from the west and southwest.

Atascadero State Beach is located in the Non-Salinas Valley sub-area of the South Central Coast Air Basin. The major pollutants monitored in this basin are ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, hydrocarbons, and total suspended particulate matter (TSP). The Non-Salinas Valley sub-area meets state and federal standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen dioxide; the sub-area is unclassified for TSP and sulfur dioxide.

Hydrology

Atascadero State Beach is situated in the San Luis Obispo Hydrologic Unit of the Central Coastal Drainage Province. The unit is in the Toro and Morro Hydrologic Subareas of the Cambria and San Luis Obispo Hydrologic Subunits, respectively. Both Toro and Morro Creeks are outside the unit boundaries, but the outlet of a small ephemeral creek, Alva Paul Creek, crosses the beach in the northern third of the unit. This small creek has not been monitored for water quality. The state beach falls in the area currently being investigated by the State Water Quality Control Board (WQCB) for the effects of upstream mining on water quality and aquatic habitat. In addition, the WQCB requires the City of Morro Bay to regularly monitor coliform bacteria at the shoreline to assess the potential impact from the city's sewage treatment plant discharge 3,000 feet offshore. The ocean waters have proven free of pollution except during heavy rains and runoff episodes which bring land runoff to the surf zone.

The unit is underlain by the Morro ground water basin, which is recharged primarily by perennial flows and storm runoff percolating into surficially exposed Franciscan formation and recent alluvial materials in the upper reaches of the drainage area. Fluctuating groundwater levels result from groundwater withdrawals, and are probably affected by ocean tide fluctuations, the level of the water table being higher in the spring than in the fall. The groundwater has a basic magnesium-calcium bicarbonate character, and there is a general seaward hydraulic gradient, the outflow paralleling Morro Creek. During dry periods, groundwater levels are drawn down to below sea level by overpumpage, resulting in sea water intrusion into the aquifer. This is generally a transitory problem, diminishing with increased freshwater recharge of the aquifers.

As a beach area, the unit falls in the 100-year and 500-year coastal flood zones, and, in addition to storm-generated ocean waves, seismically induced waves or tsunami pose another possible source of coastal flooding.

Geology

Atascadero State Beach is in the southern Coast Ranges geomorphic province. The Coast Ranges geomorphic province is made up of rocks of widely differing origins -- the Franciscan Complex representing a subduction zone complex, the Great Valley Sequence representing forearc basin sediments, and plutonic and metamorphic rocks of the Salinian Block representing a magmatic island arc. These rocks were formed at roughly the same time during the Late Mesozoic, as the eastward-spreading Farallon Plate collided with the North American Plate. Current geological theory holds that the thinner, denser oceanic Farallon Plate was subducted beneath the thick North American Plate, and subsequently partially accreted to the continent as the accumulated sediments were scraped off, overridden, and sheared by the large-scale tectonic forces. As the Farallon Plate was "consumed," strike-slip movement began as a result of northwest movement of the Pacific Plate and eastern movement of the North American Plate. This later strike-slip movement juxtaposed rocks in incongruous relation to each other.

Bedrock in the Atascadero State Beach area is Franciscan Complex -- rocks that are thought to represent the subduction zone complex. The rock outcrops belong to the "Broken Formation B," which consists of interbedded greywacke and shale. These rocks contain small percentages of potassium feldspar (2 to 5%) and fragments of older Franciscan debris, such as red and green chert. The shale consists of illite, montmorillonite, and chlorite.

Atascadero State Beach is very young, geologically. Beach sands, low dunes, and terrace deposits make up the entire present-day surface, with the offshore rocks and cliff rocks at the northernmost part of the unit being the only hints about the dramatic history of this section of coastline.

A landslide at the northern end of the unit has been mapped in the terrace deposit. It was triggered by ocean-wave erosion removing previously existing buffer material (sand) from the base of the cliff.

Soils

Atascadero State Beach is located on the southernmost tip of the Northwestern Coastal Ranges Soil Region (Soil Region I), which is characterized by steep mountain ranges and small valleys. Four soil map units are found within the boundaries of the state beach: beaches, Cropley clay, Diablo and Cibo clays, and duneland.

Beaches, the dominant soil mapping unit, consist of layers of sand grains of rock washed down waterways from inland areas to the ocean, and distributed southward along the coast by longshore currents. Found on the shore of Estero Bay, beach sand is essentially barren of vegetation. The soil permeability is high and very rapid, the available water capacity is low, and the erosion hazard due to wind and wave action is high, limiting the use of the beach almost exclusively to recreation.

Found behind the beach in the southern part of Atascadero State Beach, Duneland consists of sand dunes stabilized by coastal foredune vegetation and coastal dune scrub. With limiting factors similar to those of beaches, duneland surface runoff is slow, and the hazard of soil blowing is very high, limiting the area to recreational uses.

Gently sloping (2-9% slope) Cropley clay is found behind the beach. Formed in alluvium weathered from sedimentary rocks, it has slow permeability and surface runoff, lessening the hazard of water erosion but interfering with septic tank absorption fields. The available water capacity is high, and the soil has a high shrink-swell potential and low strength, posing limiting factors for its use as a site for building structures or roads.

Diablo and Cibo clays are strongly sloping (9-15%) soils found at the northern tip of the unit, and vegetated by coastal dune scrub. This soil exhibits slow permeability and a high shrink-swell potential, making it vulnerable to slippage when wet. Other limitations to be considered when planning for structures, roads, or sanitary facilities include low strength and shallow depth to rock.

Plant Life

Native vegetation at Atascadero State Beach occurs to the north of the Cloisters site and in the dune slack area, and consists of coastal foredune and coastal dune scrub vegetation. Coastal foredune vegetation is dominated by low-growing herbaceous perennials that colonize embryonic dunes. Principal native species at Atascadero State Beach include common sand verbena, whiteleaf saltbush, beach evening primrose, and American dune grass. Hottentot fig/sea fig also occurs on dunes in this area. Foredunes south of the Cloisters have been extensively colonized by European beach grass. When areas in dunes are eroded down to or near the water table, additional species are found in foredune vegetation, and include mesophytic or hydrophytic plants such as arroyo willow and sedge. The willows are wind-pruned and low-growing.

Coastal foredune at Atascadero State Beach intergrades with coastal dune scrub in inland areas, where wind, salt spray, and blowing sand are reduced. Coastal dune scrub is characterized by soft or woody shrubby species, and is dominated by dune lupine, mock heather, and beach aster.

No rare or endangered plant species occur in this unit. The dune slack and native coastal foredune areas are of interpretive and scientific interest.

Principal exotic species that occur at Atascadero State Beach are hottentot fig/sea fig and European beach grass. European beach grass has become established south of the Cloisters site, and occurs in dense, monospecific stands.

Animal Life

Despite the harsh environment, animal life is plentiful and diverse at Atascadero State Beach. The beach receives nutrients from the ocean which feed its burrowing invertebrate populations. Small crustaceans such as mole crabs and amphipods serve as a food source for many species of seabirds, making this area a popular overwintering or migratory stopover point for waterfowl and other birds. Willets, marbled godwits, and least sandpipers can be seen searching for food in the sand. Pelagic or ocean-going birds such as surf scoters and common loons may be seen from the beach, as can marine mammals such as the California sea lion and the harbor seal. Several species of gull frequent the beach to scavenge, as do some terrestrial birds such as the Brewer's blackbird.

Behind the beach, wind-created sand dunes offer some protection, vegetation, and freshwater ponds. Red-winged blackbirds, song sparrows, and meadowlarks take advantage of the seeds provided by the dune vegetation, and their songs can often be heard above the sound of the waves. The deer mouse and the black-tailed jackrabbit forage in the coastal strand during the night, and may themselves become forage for predators such as the short-eared owl and the bobcat.

The outlet of a small ephemeral stream crosses the beach, and the flow of fresh water provides habitat for additional flora and fauna. Numerous insects feed Pacific tree frogs, long-billed marsh wrens, and flycatchers such as the black phoebe. Fish and amphibians are favored foods of the kingfisher, the great blue heron, and the black-crowned night heron, which also finds roosting cover and possibly nesting opportunities in the riparian vegetation.

Six state (S) or federally (F) listed rare (R), threatened (T), or endangered (E) species may occur in the state beach. Those that may forage in or near the unit include the brown pelican (FE, SE), the least tern (FE, CE), the bald eagle (FE, CE), and the American peregrine falcon (FE, CE). The state is also concerned about the welfare of many other animals, identified as species of special concern, that may occur in the unit. Some of these include the double-breasted cormorant and the California gull, both of which breed in the vicinity, and the western grebe, the common loon, and the elegant tern, which forage in the area.

Marine Life

Atascadero State Beach is located along a broad curve of the coastline extending 20 miles from Point Estero south to Point Buchon. Although it is called Estero Bay, this stretch of coastline is not protected from wave action. The surf is often heavy during the winter, when Pacific storms bring strong winds and waves to the coast. The tide range in the area is from approximately the minus 2-foot level to the plus 7-foot level. The tide cycle is a mixed semi-diurnal type, characterized by two high tides and two low tides per day. Ocean water varies by about 13 degrees F. during the year. Water temperatures range from a low of about 51 degrees F. in the months from February through May to a high of 64 degrees in October.

Atascadero State Beach is primarily a sandy beach, with scattered rocks concentrated at the north end of the unit. The sand is not a suitable substrate for surface attachment and protection from surf, and, thus, limits the kind of intertidal organisms to those that can burrow in the sand. The scattered rocks serve as attachment sites for many organisms, but many are seasonally buried by sand. The main rocky area, providing a suitable habitat for larger marine plants, is the area north of Yerba Buena Street. In the lower intertidal zone in this area, there are a number of water channels that run parallel to the coast between the rocks. These channels as well as the rocks around them have an abundant growth of marine plants.

Ninety-one species of multi-cellular plants have been identified in the intertidal area adjacent to this unit. This is an impressive number of species for a stretch of rocky beach only about 1,000 feet in length. A few species are very abundant and conspicuous. Two species consumed by humans, nori (*Porphyra lancelolata*) and sea lettuce (*Ulva* sp.), are common.

As a result of wave action, large masses of kelp often come to rest on the sandy beach. These decomposing masses of kelp become an important part of the beach environment. Large populations of beach hoppers, flies, crustaceans, and other organisms inhabit these kelp masses.

Other than in the decaying kelp masses, the sandy beach fauna are mostly subsurface. Unless they are dug out, only those individuals washed out by strong wave action are seen. In the mid-littoral zone, bloodworms are often found in sufficient numbers to provide bait for fishing. The larger sandy beach organisms are found in the sub-littoral fringe, including the spiny mole crab and the eccentric sand dollar. Specimens of the Pismo clam, once locally abundant, are not often encountered. The population decline is an apparent result of the sea otter reestablishing itself as the top carnivore in the local ecosystem.

Fish in the intertidal areas of Atascadero are dominated by sandy bottom species. These include surfperches, such as the barrel surfperch and calico surfperch, as well as bottom fish, such as white croakers and California halibut. In offshore areas, there are seasonal occurrences of king salmon and albacore in sufficient numbers to support recreational and commercial fishing activity. Five species of marine mammals are seen in the vicinity on a regular basis: harbor seals, California sea lions, Stellar sea lions, southern sea otters, and Pacific gray whales. The sea otter is a federally listed threatened species. The gray whale is a federally listed endangered species.

Cultural Resources

Archeological Sites

There is one small and apparently minor archeological site in the state beach south of the existing campground, Site SLO-1158, found during a recent complete survey of the unit. The Northern Chumash used the area prehistorically for fishing, gathering, and hunting, but no ethnographic locations or place names are recorded for the land now in Atascadero State Beach.

A mound of earth, some concrete curbing, and a few trees are all that remain visible of Edward G. Lewis' land development scheme of the post-World War I era. The site is the location of the former "Cloisters Inn," or "Morro Beach Inn," a project of the Atascadero Beach Land and Development Company. The "Cloisters Inn" site has very limited historic value, but may be suitable for interpretation of the issues of early 20th century coastal land development projects and recreational usages of San Luis Obispo County beaches.

Ethnographic Background

The Native American people who inhabited the central California coast prior to the Euroamerican period were known as the Chumash. The accounts of the early Spanish explorers depict sharp contrasts between the Chumash groups along the Santa Barbara Channel and those inhabiting the territory north of Point Conception. Cabrillo commented on the number and size of the villages found along the channel, and the lack of villages on the coast north of the point. Fages, a member of Portola's 1769 expedition, described the large villages found along the channel, all having populations in excess of 400, as pueblos. North of Point Conception, Fages depicted habitation sites as small or insignificant villages. The inhabitants were characterized as "very poor ill-conditioned Indians;" there is mention of a village without houses at Morro Bay.

Fages noted that the large villages along the channel had chiefs or captains (wot). The chief's primary role was that of military commander. The position was for life, and the individual had absolute, total independence. There is reference in the early Spanish accounts to only one captain or wot among all of the Northern Chumash; his name was Buchon. The Spaniards were told that Buchon, whose village was near Pismo Beach, took tribute for 20 leagues in all directions.

Based on archeological evidence and early ethnographic accounts, the Northern and Southern Chumash apparently shared similar food procurement and processing strategies. An extensive array of traps, nets, disguises, blinds, missiles and projectiles, fishing gear, and vegetable-gathering equipment was used. The wide variety of animals eaten included deer, sea mammal, bear, dog, wolf, fox, puma, skunk, raccoon, rodent, rabbit, mole, eagle, buzzard, snake, fish, and shellfish. Grinding implements, earth ovens, stone boiling in baskets, sun and smoke drying, as well as other implements and techniques, were used in food preparation.

Structures used by the Northern and Southern Chumash included ceremonial sweathouses, domed and conical buildings, and communal houses. As previously mentioned, Unamuno's expedition reported seeing large and small dugouts near Morro Bay. Clemmer excavated the remains of a dwelling in 1961. The structure was circular, 25 to 30 ft in diameter; archeological evidence indicates that it was dome-shaped.

All of the coastal Chumash groups fished. Ethnographic accounts and faunal remains from excavated sites indicate that both the Northern and Channel Chumash used weir traps; dip, drag, gill, and seine nets; and hooks and lines. Hooks were made from cactus spines, shell, and bone. Spears and harpoons were also used. Both groups probably used the kelp fishery year-round. Channel Chumash, the only group to build and use the tomol (plank canoe), had access to the more seasonally available larger pelagic species, such as tuna and swordfish. Both the Channel and Northern Chumash used tule and dugout canoes.

Historic Background

Martin Olivera and Vicente Feliz petitioned in November 1837 for a grant of land north of the rock of El Moro, fronting the ocean for two square leagues. They called it San Cayetano. The concession was given provisionally, meaning it must be renewed every other year. In October 1842, Governor Alvardo issued a new grant to the same two men. The rancho was called El Moro y Cayucos under this new grant. Martin Olivera was awarded legal title to El Moro. Just before the American occupation, James McKinley, a naturalized citizen of the republic of Mexico, bought out Olivera and Feliz. During the American period, McKinley went through the ordeal of getting his grant confirmed, but died three years before the patent was issued. While the heirs, and apparent heirs, of McKinley's holdings struggled in court over legal ownership, the land was subdivided, and the coastal terraces behind the sand dunes became farm land. The beach from Morro Bay to Old Creek was traditionally known as "Morro Beach."

At the south end of this area, and beyond the current unit boundary, was a marsh on the property owned by the Greening family. This marsh went by the local title of Greening Lake or Green Lake. It was used as a limited recreation area prior to 1911. In that year, Morro Creek cut a new channel, and "Green Lake" disappeared.

Edward G. Lewis, developer of the "Atascadero Colony" or "Atascadero Community," added the idea of a beach community to his 1913 plan for Atascadero. In 1916, he began to buy up the beach frontage on what was to become "Atascadero Beach." He created the Atascadero Beach Land and Development Company in the hope that many of the people who bought at Atascadero would also buy recreational lots on the ocean shore. Sales began before he completely consolidated his holdings. Financing was irregular; the project did not mature as expected, and Lewis created the Atascadero Seed Company, which farmed the vacated land, raising vegetables and flowers for seed. By 1919, Lewis had acquired 463 acres on the oceanfront. While beachfront lots sold, few were developed. Only one house was built.

In the early 1920s, Lewis sought a new attraction, and by 1925 had constructed a hotel and cottage resort. He named it "Cloisters Inn and Cottages," though at times it was known as the "Morro Beach Inn." The hotel complex included single and double rooms, a restaurant, an adjoining 3,000-yard-long golf course to the north and east, and for the economy-minded, wood and canvas cabins, i.e., "the cottages." Lewis, however, found himself in financial trouble by the late 1920s. His efforts to recover entangled the project in a web of problems, and left Lewis in trouble with the law; he went to jail.

The project floundered, and, with the coming of the Great Depression, died. The development company was disbanded in 1932. County records indicated that many owners, unable to sell and unable to pay their taxes, defaulted on the property, which passed into governmental ownership. Some of the beach frontage was held on separate mineral claims for processing sand, but by the 1950s, the company was defunct.

The Cloisters Inn struggled through the Depression and into the first year of World War II. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, a Texas Coastal Artillery Regiment assigned to Ford Ord sent a detachment to Morro Bay to guard the oil tanks. Soon, it was augmented to company size. The U.S. Army took over the Cloisters Inn. When the army departed, the resort was plucked to pieces by vandals and scavengers. Shortly after World War II, the site had been picked clean. In 1957, the state acquired the beach for addition to the State Park System. The unit was called Atascadero State Beach, retaining the name given the area by E. G. Lewis in 1916. Improvements at the new state beach were delayed until 1964 due to problems of clear title and ownership. The mineral claims were declared invalid in 1962, allowing public facilities planning to begin.

Esthetic Resources

Atascadero State Beach provides panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean, Morro Rock, and the headlands of Montana de Oro State Park. The vista is ever-changing and dramatic: Morro Rock enshrouded by fog and then lit by brilliant sunlight, the gray-green ocean suddenly translucent, and breakers throwing back a rainbow spray. The storm waves clear the beach, and provide a palette for footprints of shorebirds. The flow of water from the dune lakes creates braided meanders between grass-topped dunes and knolls. Summer brings a burst of color. Sand verbena and dune lupines accent the white sand with purples and blues. Sea sounds of waves and birds provide a counterpoint to the scenic beauty of this unit.

Negative esthetic features in the viewshed of Atascadero State Beach include houses at the unit boundary and the prominent cooling towers at the Morro Bay PG&E plant. Trash associated with storm wrack is also unsightly.

Recreation Resources

Although initial acquisition of Atascadero State Beach was made in 1957, the area has a much longer history of recreational use. A marsh and lagoon at the mouth of Morro Creek was a popular site in the 1890s. Known as Greening Lake, the site was used for duck hunting and summer boating excursions. The 1920s saw an expansion of facilities in the Morro Bay area. The Cloisters Inn was built in what is now Atascadero State Beach, and summer visitors could rent rooms or stay in small beach cottages. In 1926, a campground was also established.

Atascadero State Beach currently experiences an average yearly visitation of 100,000. Principal recreation activities in this unit include picnicking, wading, surfing, beachcombing, surf fishing, and nature study. There are 104 family campsites at Atascadero State Beach. Each site has a table and a stove, and can accommodate trailers and motor homes up to 24 feet long. No hook-ups are provided. Restrooms and cold showers are located in the campground. There are a limited number of paved day-use parking spaces in the campground. Rough surf, cold ocean temperatures, and gusty winds are constraints on recreational activities in this unit.

RESOURCE POLICY FORMATION

Classification

Classification of a State Park System unit forms the foundation on which all management and development policies are based. Classification statutes contained in Article 1.7 of the Public Resources Code specify broad management objectives and improvements appropriate in a state beach.

Atascadero State Beach was acquired by the state in 1957. Following establishment of the current State Park System classification system in the early 1960s, the state Park and Recreation Commission classified the unit as Atascadero State Beach. Classification by the commission directed the department to manage the unit as specified in Public Resources Code Section 5019.56. This section defines and describes a state beach as a type of State Recreation Unit as follows:

5019.56. State Recreation Units. State recreation units consist of areas selected, developed, and operated to provide outdoor recreational opportunities. Such units shall be designated by the Commission by naming, in accordance with the provisions of Article 1 (commencing with Section 5001) and this article relating to classification.

In the planning of improvements to be undertaken within state recreation units, consideration shall be given to compatibility of design with the surrounding scenic and environmental characteristics.

State recreation units may be established in the terrestrial or underwater environments of the state and shall be further classified as one of the following types: . . .

(d) State beaches, consisting of areas with frontage on the ocean, or bays designed to provide swimming, boating, fishing, and other beach-oriented recreational activities. Coastal areas containing ecological, geological, scenic, or cultural resources of significant value shall be preserved within state wildernesses, state reserves, state parks, or natural or cultural preserves.

Declaration of Purpose

A declaration of purpose describes the purpose of the unit, and identifies the prime resources, long-range management objectives, and the relationship between the unit's resources and recreational uses. A declaration of purpose was written for Atascadero State Beach in 1975, but was never presented to the state Park and Recreation Commission for approval.

A revised declaration of purpose is proposed, to clarify the department's management goals and objectives. The original and proposed declarations of purpose for the unit are as follows:

Original:

The purpose of Atascadero State Beach is to make possible the public use of the sandy ocean beach in the area immediately upcoast from Morro Rock in San Luis Obispo County. The emphasis on public use will be on optimum public enjoyment of the ocean and ocean beach recreational resources. Only those developments may be undertaken which do not impair the utility of the ocean beach for recreational purposes, or which do not impair the public enjoyment of the scenic and recreational qualities of the ocean beach and the ocean at this location.

Proposed:

The purpose of Atascadero State Beach is to make available to the people, for their benefit and enjoyment, the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the ocean beach and adjacent uplands.

The function of California Department of Parks and Recreation at Atascadero State Beach shall be to preserve and protect public opportunities for ocean beach-oriented recreation in a high-quality environment, and to restore and protect the natural values of the coastal dunes. A natural setting for recreational activities shall be preserved.

Zone of Primary Interest

The zone of primary interest is that area outside the unit in which land use changes could adversely affect the resources of Atascadero State Beach. The area includes the adjacent city of Morro Bay, adjacent offshore areas, and the watersheds of the two creeks which terminate in the unit.

In addition, the department should be concerned about activities on all lands, no matter how far from the unit, that can, through their development and use, adversely affect the resources and features in the unit. Air pollution generated by the Morro Bay and Diablo Canyon power plants, oil spills from offshore oil development, and pollution from other sources all potentially could affect Atascadero State Beach. Alteration of inland surface water flow and the development of both offshore and onshore protective structures could alter the available sand supply to the beach, potentially resulting in a permanent or progressive loss of beach sand. Department officials should be aware of these potential threats, and take action whenever possible to minimize them.

Resource Management Policies

Resource management in the State Park System is governed by laws contained in the Public Resources Code, by regulations in the California Administrative Code, by directives approved by the department's director, and by policies approved by the state Park and Recreation Commission. General policies related to the unit classification and the declaration of purpose have been addressed in previous sections.

Specific departmental Resource Management Directives amplify the legal codes, and provide clear management guidelines. Directives that are especially pertinent to existing or potential problems related to management of resources in Atascadero State Beach are:

#15 State Recreation Units; protection of resources
#18 State Beaches; avoid using sandy beaches for secondary uses
#19 State Beaches; protection of resources
#33 Exotic Plant Species
#35 Wildlife Protection
#46 Environmental Quality
#58 Cultural Resource Protection

Directives #18 and #19 are particularly relevant to planning issues for the state beaches along Estero Bay:

> (18) INSOFAR AS IS POSSIBLE IN STATE BEACHES, THE ENTIRE AREA OF THE SANDY LITTORALS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR RECREATION USE AND VISUAL ENJOYMENT. IT IS AN OBJECTIVE OF THE DEPARTMENT TO AVOID USE OF NATURAL SANDY BEACHES FOR PARKING OR FOR OTHER SUPPORTIVE OR SECONDARY USES.

(19) THE SCENIC, NATURAL, AND CULTURAL VALUES OF STATE BEACHES, INCLUDING THE ECOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE LITTORAL, TIDAL, AND NEARSHORE AREAS WILL BE IDENTIFIED, EVALUATED, AND PROTECTED SO THE TOTAL QUALITY OF THE RECREATION EXPERIENCE MAY BE PERPETUATED AND ENHANCED.

Following several years of significant storm damage in many coastal State Park System units, the department adopted a policy for coastal erosion on October 24, 1984. The intent of the policy is to avoid construction of new permanent facilities in areas subject to coastal erosion unless the risk of loss is clearly offset by the need for the facility, and to promote the use of expendable or movable facilities in erosion-prone areas. The policy reads as follows:

THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION SHALL AVOID CONSTRUCTION OF NEW STRUCTURES AND COASTAL FACILITIES IN AREAS SUBJECT TO OCEAN WAVE EROSION, SEACLIFF RETREAT, AND UNSTABLE CLIFFS, UNLESS SPECIFIC DETERMINATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE THAT THE RISK OF LOSS OF THE FACILITY IS CLEARLY OFFSET BY THE INVESTMENT AND NEED FOR THE FACILITY. MEASURES SHALL BE TAKEN TO MINIMIZE HUMAN-INDUCED EROSION BY REDUCING: CONCENTRATED SURFACE RUNOFF FROM USE AREAS, ELEVATED GROUNDWATER LEVELS FROM IRRIGATION AND URBANIZATION, AND SURFACE DISTURBANCE OF BLUFFTOP SOILS. IN RECOGNITION OF CALIFORNIA'S ACTIVELY ERODING COASTLINE, NEW STRUCTURES AND FACILITIES LOCATED IN AREAS KNOWN TO BE SUBJECT TO OCEAN WAVE EROSION, SEACLIFF RETREAT, OR UNSTABLE BLUFFS SHALL BE EXPENDABLE OR MOVABLE. STRUCTURAL PROTECTION AND REPROTECTION OF DEVELOPMENTS SHALL BE ALLOWED ONLY WHEN THE COST OF PROTECTION IS COMMENSURATE WITH THE VALUE (PHYSICAL AND INTRINSIC) OF THE DEVELOPMENT TO BE PROTECTED, AND WHEN IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT THE PROTECTION WILL NOT NEGATIVELY AFFECT THE BEACH OR THE NEAR-SHORE ENVIRONMENT.

In addition to policies, directives, and laws that apply statewide, the following specific resource policies have been developed for Atascadero State Beach:

Geological Hazards

Geological hazards at Atascadero State Beach include landslides, block falls, liquefaction, tsunamis, and seismic shaking. Site-specific investigations prior to new developments can help to avoid building in areas subject to these hazards.

Policy: New developments shall avoid geological hazards. Site-specific geologic reports shall be prepared by a registered geologist or certified engineering geologist prior to final siting of facilities, to assure that geological hazards have been avoided or mitigated to the fullest extent feasible. The report shall identify potential geologic hazards of the site, and provide for mitigating measures to ensure structural stability and integrity throughout the economic useful life of the development.

Natural Resources

Coastal Erosion

Atascadero State Beach is subject to coastal erosion, seacliff retreat, and beach sand loss. The access road and campground may be vulnerable to periods of extreme high waves and storms.

> Policy: All future permanent facility developments at Atascadero State Beach shall be sufficiently set back to ensure that the developments will endure. New developments shall neither create nor contribute significantly to erosion or geological instability.

Paleontological Resources

No fossil resources are known to exist at Atascadero State Beach. It is possible that the sand deposits or terrace deposits could yield fragmentary fossil material, although none has ever been reported to date.

> Policy: In the event that a fossil discovery is made at Atascadero State Beach, the incident shall be promptly reported to the appropriate departmental staff person, who will determine the validity and significance of the discovery, and take appropriate protective or stabilization action.

Coastal Dune Management

Dune systems are composed of unconsolidated sand that has been transported by strong onshore winds. Natural dune systems consist of several stages of dune development that range from embryonic foredunes to rear dunes. Dunes are initially stabilized by low-growing plants adapted to moving sand. With sufficient stabilization, woody species can become established. Typically, once vegetation is removed, a dune blowout occurs, and natural revegetation of the blowout may not occur. Human activities in sand dunes can destroy vegetation and destabilize the dunes. Ongoing human use of a blowout area renders natural revegetation virtually impossible.

Coastal dunes provide important habitats for many, often endemic, species of plants and animals. The use of coastal zones for residential, agricultural, and industrial purposes has degraded or destroyed a large portion of native dune habitat in California. Heavy recreational use of coastal lands has also resulted in the degradation of dune habitat in many areas.

Most of the remaining natural dune environment in the Morro Bay area is in units of the State Park System. The continued existence of coastal dunes and of the species associated with them is dependent on the effective stewardship of the coastal dune resource.

> Policy: Human activities in the dunes at Atascadero State Beach shall be regulated to prevent destruction of the natural dune environment. Hiking, horseback riding, and other recreational uses shall be restricted to designated areas and routes. Vehicular trespass and egress from adjacent residences onto the dunes shall be prevented through signing and fencing. Destabilized areas in the dunes shall be revegetated with species indigenous to the unit.

Exotic Plant Species

Exotic species have become naturalized in Atascadero State Beach, for example, in the sand dunes. In this area, they are successfully competing with native species. Exotic species have also been planted in the campground area. Perpetuation of native plant communities is dependent on the control and removal of exotic species.

> Policy: The department shall pursue a long-range objective of reducing exotic plants, including European beach grass and hottentot fig, that have become established in the unit. Highest priority for control efforts shall be given to those species most invasive and conspicuous in the landscape.

Landscaping

Exotic species detract from the natural appearance of Atascadero State Beach, displace native species, have lower habitat value for native wildlife, are more prone to insect attack and disease, and can require permanent irrigation and greater maintenance costs.

> Policy: In order to maintain the diversity of native species, landscaping in developed areas should consist of species indigenous to the unit. If exotic species are used, these shall be species which are incapable of naturalizing in the wild, and which will not require a permanent irrigation system.

Snowy Plover

The snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) is a small, ground-nesting shorebird that is listed as a Second Priority Bird Species of Special Concern by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). Although these birds prosper wherever they are left undisturbed in suitable habitat, the snowy plovers are threatened by human harassment and direct destruction of nest sites and breeding habitat on every beach used for human recreation. Off-highway vehicle use and free-running dogs have been cited as particular sources of disturbance at Atascadero State Beach.

> Policy: The department shall survey appropriate areas for snowy plover nest sites. Information on ground-nesting seabirds, and snowy plovers in particular, and cautions against disturbing the nesting birds shall be posted. Vehicle trespass and dog leash laws shall be strictly enforced. If deemed warranted and necessary, access shall be limited seasonally to beach areas below high tide line, leaving the sensitive areas of soft sand preferred for nesting undisturbed.

Cultural Resources

Archeological Resources

One archeological resource is known to exist at Atascadero State Beach. There may be other such resources concealed by vegetation or more recent sand and soil deposits. There may be archeological remains at the Cloisters Inn site, where an early 20th-century recreation and commercial resort once stood. It is possible that future disturbances, natural or human, will uncover such resources.

Policy: In the event that a new archeological discovery is made at Atascadero State Beach, the incident shall be immediately reported to the appropriate department staff person, who will determine the validity and significance of the discovery, and will recommend appropriate protective or stabilization action. Specific management programs shall be developed when significant cultural resources are threatened, endangered, or of special concern.

Archeological Investigations

Like archeological resources in general, those found in Atascadero State Beach are non-renewable resources relating to California's past. They contain information necessary to reconstruct the complex mosaic of past cultures in our state covering many millenia. It is department policy to preserve such resources in place whenever possible. It is also important for the department to have as much data as possible on record about the resources it is charged to protect, and to present this information to the public as accurately as possible.

Policy: When land uses, facility development, or natural causes, such as erosion, create ongoing or unavoidable impacts to archeological sites, or where there is a necessity to know the nature of the subsurface deposits, the department shall initiate a project to study these sites in an effort to preserve their heritage values. Such studies shall include efforts to assess age, cultural affiliation, artifact content, and significant attributes of these sites. Information collected through these efforts shall be used to guide preservation, management, and interpretive actions. Sites determined to be threatened shall prompt the department to take appropriate stabilization or protective measures to ensure against the inadvertent loss of heritage values.

Allowable Use Intensity

The California Public Resources Code, Section 5019.5, requires that a land carrying capacity survey be made prior to the preparation of any development plan for any park or recreation area. Section 5001.96 further requires that attendance be held within limits so established. Allowable use intensity is a refinement of the land carrying capacity concept, and is prepared as part of the Resource Element of the General Plan in fulfillment of the above code sections.

Allowable use intensity is just one of several factors considered in developing the Land Use Element of the General Plan. Other factors that may also be considered in determining land use for any unit of the State Park System are classification and purpose, recreation needs, design considerations, and social carrying capacity or the desired quality of the recreation experience.

Allowable use intensity determinations establish the limits of development and use an area can sustain without an unacceptable degree of deterioration in the character and value of the scenic, natural, and cultural resources. Determinations are based on analysis and integration of resource management and protection objectives, resource constraints, and resource sensitivities information.

Resource management objectives are defined by the Public Resources Code and other law, unit classifications and declarations of purpose, and specific declarations of resource management policy presented in this Resource Element.

Resource constraints are factors which would make visitor use or facility development unsafe, economically impractical, or undesirable. They are determined by evaluating such factors as erodibility and compaction potential of soils, geologic hazards, slope stability and relief, hydrologic conditions, potential for pollution of surface waters, and flooding.

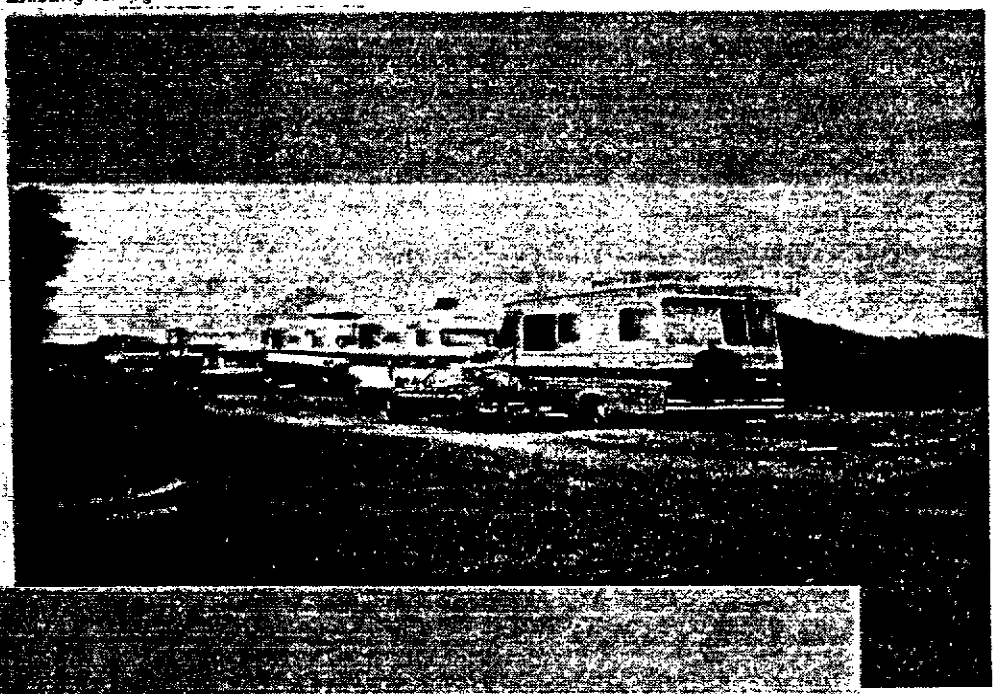
Sensitivities are conditions, locations, or values of resources that warrant restricted use or development to protect resources. Sensitivities are evaluated by considering such factors as the ability of the ecosystem to withstand human impact (ecological sensitivity), not only in the short term but also over a more extended time span; the fragility and significance of archeological and historical resources; vegetation characteristics such as durability, fragility, and regeneration rates; and wildlife considerations such as tolerance to human activity, population levels, and stability. Sensitivities may also include scenic resources; rare, threatened, or endangered plants, animals, and habitats; unique or scientifically important botanic features; and other resources of regional or statewide significance.

Based on the preceding factors, allowable use intensities for lands in Atascadero State Beach were determined, and are shown on the allowable use intensity map. Three use intensity categories have been developed: low, moderate, and high. The low intensity use zone includes the vegetated coastal dunes, archeological sites, and riparian areas. The moderate use zone is the coastal beach, where relatively heavy visitor use can occur but is subject to ocean wave inundation. The high intensity use zone includes the sites of existing facilities (the campground) and a small portion of the Cloisters area.

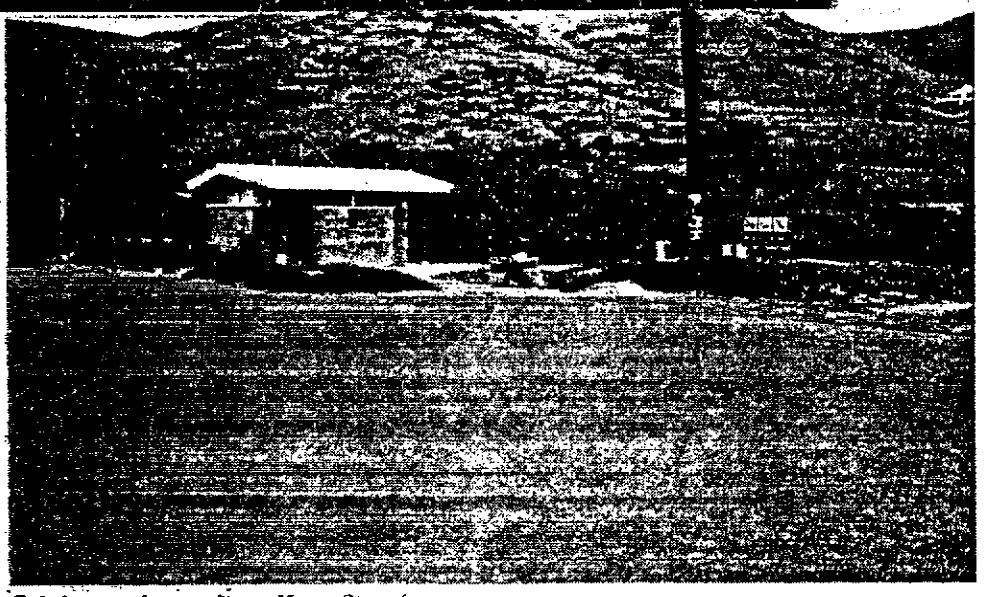
MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

LAND USE AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

Existing campground — Atascadero



Existing informal parking at "Cloisters" site — Atascadero



Existing comfort station — Morro Strand

LAND USE AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

This element of the General Plan addresses the current and proposed land use and facilities at Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach. The specific proposals recommended in this element are a logical extension of the analysis of allowable use intensities prepared in the Resource Element, which is based on the ability of the natural and cultural resources to accommodate recreational needs. However, the plan at this point also takes into consideration other factors such as the expressed interests of the public and other agencies, regional and statewide recreational issues, and actual physical design parameters. After all factors are taken into consideration, a set of guidelines is established from which specific recommendations are made.

Regional Recreation Profile

The regional recreation profile provides a brief analysis of recreation needs by Planning District (a grouping of contiguous counties with general economic and geographic similarities). The eleven planning districts in California are designated by the State Office of Planning and Research and are generally consistent with the boundaries of the regional Councils of Government. Because California is a state with great social, economic, and geographic diversity, the division into manageable geographic units allows the department to more accurately identify recreation needs, problems, and priorities.

The Morro Bay State Park units are within Planning District 7, which includes five counties: San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz. This district contains about 4 percent of the state's population, yet only 2 percent of the district is urbanized. Therefore, much of the land is either undeveloped natural areas or in agricultural use.

Economically, agriculture ranks first in District 7. Tourism and recreation-associated services comprise the second most important industry, centering around the cities of Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and the Monterey Peninsula, but relying on the region's wide beaches, spectacular natural beauty, and unspoiled areas for support.

The coastal areas (346 miles) offer most of the region's recreation opportunities, except for a variety of water-oriented recreation opportunities offered at several inland reservoirs. The district is a popular destination zone for tourists from the San Francisco Bay area, Southern California, and the Central Valley.

Of the 11,230 square miles in the planning district, one-third is in public ownership. The U.S. Forest Service (Las Padres National Forest) manages a considerable portion of that land and is a principal recreation supplier. The California Department of Parks and Recreation manages 56 percent (63,000 acres) of the district's state-owned lands and offers a diversity of recreational opportunities.

Recreational demand and deficiencies - Emphasizing the statewide demand for recreation in Planning District 7 is the fact that although 6 percent of all State Park System land area is in the district, almost 30 percent of the total state park visitor use occurs in this region. Demand for coastal camping and picnicking is particularly high throughout the district.

Closely associated with recreation demand and deficiencies is population growth. During the 30 years between 1955 and 1985, California's population doubled. During the same time period, attendance in the State Park System grew ten-fold. San Luis Obispo County, in which all the Morro Bay State Park units lie, is the fastest growing coastal county in the state and is seventh fastest statewide. Population in 1985 was 189,605 and is projected to increase to 301,851 by the year 2000.

Out of 28 selected recreation activities, those with the highest projected demand in San Luis Obispo County by the year 2000 are picnicking, ocean swimming, camping, hiking/backpacking, and nature appreciation. All things considered, Planning District 7 is projected to have a deficiency by 1990 of 6,450 campsites, 12,843 picnic sites, and 1,642 miles of trail.

MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH

Existing Conditions

Land Use: Morro Strand State Beach lies in the Cayucos planning area of San Luis Obispo County. This is an unincorporated community of approximately 2,600 people. Since 1970, population growth has increased by approximately 30%. Population is expected to reach 3,246 by the year 2000. It is predominantly a retirement community, with a small resort and commercial section. The community's socioeconomic structure is stable, and not expected to change significantly in the foreseeable future. Land and utilities are limited with regard to any major land developments. So growth has been occurring by the infilling of vacant lots. Local recreation facilities consist of one community park and Cayucos State Beach, which is operated by the county, located at the north end of the community.

Single-family residences adjoin the state beach along the eastern boundary for more than three quarters of its length. Near the northern end of the unit, park ownership extends easterly to Highway 1, then continues northerly to a point where single-family residences again adjoin the state beach on its north end. Estero Bay and the Pacific Ocean are to the west of the unit. Undeveloped beach extends southerly from the unit.

Existing land uses in the unit have been limited exclusively to beach-oriented day uses such as picnicking, wading, surfing, beachcombing, surf fishing, sunbathing, wind surfing, jogging, walking, and nature study. Many visitors just come to the park and watch the surf or whales from their vehicles. A number of visitors also use the unit as a staging area from which to skin or scuba dive. Visitor attendance for 1986-87 was approximately 40,000 people.

Facilities: A paved day-use parking lot is located off Pacific Avenue at 24th Street, near the northern end of the state beach. This lot is the primary access point for the unit, and will accommodate approximately 50 vehicles. A restroom building is located at the southeast corner of the parking lot. Both the parking lot and the restroom building are in good condition, even though they have been subjected to occasional flooding due to winter storms. Five picnic tables are located to the south of the parking area.

The facilities mentioned above are all located just to the north of the mouth of Old Creek. Just to the south of Old Creek, approximately 600 feet downcoast from the paved parking area, is another parking area. Vehicular access to this is via Highway 1 at the northern end of Studio Drive. Access is paved down to the parking area. However, the parking area itself is dirt. It can accommodate approximately 60 vehicles. No restrooms or other facilities exist at this location.

Although there are no other developed park facilities in the unit, the county maintains five coastal access points through the residential area bordering the southeast portion of this unit. Some of the residents in this area have also developed erosion protection devices and/or private accessways down to the beach. The department has been working with adjacent landowners and local governing agencies to protect the sandy beach resources in a manner consistent with established state policies.

Engineering Evaluation

The purpose of the Engineering Evaluation is to provide a general background of the capabilities and problems related to the engineering and utility aspects of the proposed park development. This report is based on information from various public agencies, utilities, and records.

Information is very preliminary is nature, and does not constitute an in-depth engineering analysis that is necessary for the final design of any particular development.

Water and Sewage: The existing water supply service is provided by Cayucos City, and the existing sewage service is provided by the City of Morro Bay. There are no water wells located in the unit. Although other potential water supply sources are Willow Creek and Old Creek, these two creeks are too small to provide a dependable water supply, and the wetland areas are protected as a natural preserve. The water quality and quantity of these creeks are unknown.

Electricity: Pacific Gas and Electric Company is the current power source at this state beach. Service extension is available. The existing source provides 120 volts, single-phase power.

Telephone: Telephone service is currently provided by Pacific Bell.

Gas: Natural gas service is not available at this unit. Liquid propane gas is an available alternative.

Waste Disposal: Solid waste service is currently provided by the Morro Bay Garbage Service Company.

Guidelines for Land Use and Facility Development

After careful consideration of user surveys, public concerns, regional and statewide recreational issues, departmental resource policies, and existing on-site conditions, the following guidelines were formulated to serve as a framework on which specific land use and facility recommendations can be based.

-- Although camping demands are great in this planning area, because of its small size and resource sensitivities, day uses are all that are appropriate within the current boundaries of this unit.

-- Demands on the existing day-use facilities are high, and have been increasing with the growth of surrounding communities. Improvements shall therefore be made to existing facilities in order to adequately provide for this increasing day use.

-- Bluff and beach erosion factors should be taken into consideration with regard to the development of any facilities, and should be in conformance with coastal erosion policies outlined in the Resource Element of this plan.

-- Because Morro Strand State Beach is in a seismically active area, new facilities should be designed to withstand a Richter magnitude 6.0 earthquake, with a repeatable ground acceleration of 0.3 gravity (g).

-- The Old Creek watershed is a sensitive resource area which should be protected from the encroachment of public use facilities.

-- Signing and interpretation of the unit should be improved to increase visitor awareness of resources, dangers, and regulations.

Recommendations for Land Use and Facility Development

The following recommendations are made in order to maintain an optimum balance between providing quality visitor use facilities and preserving the natural and cultural resources of Morro Strand State Beach over the next 20 years.

-- Land use in the Old Creek watershed area shall be limited to low-intensity day uses. This shall include, but not be limited to, nature study, photography, and birdwatching.

-- Facilities in the Old Creek wetland area shall be limited to foot trails only.

-- Land use in the remainder of the state beach, outside the Old Creek wetland, may be moderate-to-high-intensity day uses. This shall include, but not be limited to, beachcoming, sunbathing, fishing, picnicking, wading, surfing, wind surfing, jogging, walking, skin and scuba diving, photography, whale watching, and nature study (see Allowable Use Intensity map).

-- The existing paved parking area shall be retained, along with the existing restroom building.

-- Vehicle barriers will be installed at the existing parking area.

-- An outdoor shower will be installed in the vicinity of the existing restroom building.

-- An interpretive shelter will be constructed adjacent to the existing paved parking area.

-- Five additional picnic sites will be developed in appropriate locations adjacent to the parking area.

-- An entrance sign and an interpretive panel will be installed at the Studio Drive parking area.

-- The Studio Drive parking area will be raised and graded in order to protect it from storm damage.

-- Vehicle barriers and erosion control plantings will be installed at the Studio Drive parking area.

Implementation Priorities

The priorities of this section are intended to be a general guideline for implementation of the recommendations in this plan. Over a period of time, these are likely to change due to such factors as availability of funds or staff, unforeseen changes in resource conditions or off-site factors, or safety considerations. As each phase is completed, it will be prudent to evaluate how the facilities are being used, and to determine what changes, if any, should be considered within the constraints of this plan.

The recommendations are listed in order of priority, from highest to lowest.

1. Make improvements to the Studio Drive parking area. This would include signs and interpretive developments.

2. Make improvements to the existing paved day-use parking area. This would include the interpretive shelter, outdoor shower, and additional picnic sites.

Local Coastal Plan Conformance

Morro Strand State Beach falls in the Estero planning area of the San Luis Obispo County General Plan and Local Coastal Plan. That plan places the state beach in a recreational land use category. The recommendations contained in this plan, except as outlined below, are in conformance with the standards established in the Local Coastal Plan.

Where this plan varies is regarding the paving of the Studio Drive parking area, and the construction of a new restroom building at that location. These would be considered permanent new facilities developed in an area subject to significant coastal erosion. It is the policy of this department not to invest in permanent improvements of this nature (see resource management policies in Resource Element). This is, of course, because of the high cost of maintenance, repair, or replacement caused by storm damage.

ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

Existing Conditions

Land Use: This unit lies entirely within the city limits of the city of Morro Bay. Morro Bay is an incorporated city of approximately 10,000 people. Its population in 1970 was 7,110. Projections indicate that 13,047 people will be living in the city by the year 2000. This growth rate is much higher than other areas of the county. However, due to severe utility limitations, especially water, development has been more moderate than it might otherwise have been. The city's economy is primarily oriented to the strong attraction of tourism/recreation activities and the desirability of the area as a place of retirement. It is the principal visitor-serving center for this section of the coast. The state beach encompasses the westerly edge of the extreme northerly extension of the city. This area is bisected by Highway 1, which contains a strip of commercial uses. However, a majority of the land use is residential. The city operates five local parks and two beach areas, one on each side of the Morro Bay entrance. Three of the five parks and one of the beach areas serve the northern portion of the city, of which the state beach is a part. The community has a very strong orientation toward park and recreation values. It is expected to continue to maintain these values as the community grows.

Land adjoining the unit on the south is city-owned beach. Morro Bay High School is adjacent to the unit, at the southeastern corner. North of the high school, along the eastern boundary, is a large undeveloped area which is commonly referred to as the VRM property. A system of sand dunes extends from the state beach onto this property. The remainder of the eastern edge of the state beach, from the VRM property north, is bordered by a single-family residential area. The beach area extending north from the unit is undeveloped. This beach is owned by Chevron USA, and public access is limited. Chevron operates two offshore marine terminals from this location for loading tankers with crude oil through underground pipes. Another marine terminal is operated offshore from the state beach by the U.S. Navy. This terminal, however, is used for unloading jet fuel through underground pipes. These pipes pass under the state beach, extending to storage tanks on the hill east of the highway.

Land use in the state beach includes camping, picnicking, beachcoming, wading, surfing, fishing, and nature study. Many local residents also use the unit for walking and jogging. Visitor attendance for the 1986-87 year was 100,849 people. This is down somewhat from the previous year. However, for the last several years, it has been nearly level at around 100,000 people. This is an indication that use of existing facilities is being maximized.

Facilities: The main vehicular access point for this unit is at Yerba Buena Street and Beachcomber Drive. This is at the extreme north end of the state beach. A paved entrance road enters the unit at this point, and descends the bluff to a small entrance station. The station has no restroom, and has other poor design features. However, it is in fair condition. Just inside the entrance station and to the east, a paved loop has been installed which has 10 day use parking spaces and two picnic sites. From the entrance station, the road enters directly into a 104-unit campground. The campground is laid out in the form of a very large parking lot. This is because it was originally designed to serve as a day-use area only. However, due to the high

demand for camping in this area, it was converted. It has no RV hookups, and can handle vehicles up to only 24 feet in length. Yet it is used extensively by RVs which are self-contained.

Two large restroom buildings exist in the campground. They have large dressing rooms on each side, and outdoor showers. The campground facilities are beginning to deteriorate from age and extremely heavy use. At the south end of the campground, a paved road bridges an unnamed creek, and ascends the bluff to Hatteras Street. This road has been blocked off at the campground and at Hatteras Street, and is used only for vertical access by foot. At one time, this was to be the main entrance to the state beach. An undeveloped parking area exists near the middle of the unit, where Azure Street intersects the beach. This is known as the "Cloisters" site, and accommodates between 50 and 75 vehicles. No facilities have yet been developed here. No other developed facilities exist in the unit.

Engineering Evaluation

The purpose of the Engineering Evaluation is to provide a general background of the capabilities and problems related to the engineering and utility aspects of the proposed park development. This report is based on information from various public agencies, utilities, and records.

Information is very preliminary is nature, and does not constitute an in-depth engineering analysis that is necessary for the final design of any particular development.

Water and Sewage: Water supply and sewage services are currently provided by the City of Morro Bay. There are no water wells located in the unit. Other potential water supply sources are Toro and Morro Creeks located just outside of the state beach boundary, and the outlet of small Alva Paul Creek in the northern area of the unit. The State Water Quality Control Board is currently studying the effects of upstream mining on water quality and aquatic habitat. The quality of these creeks is unknown; no data have been recorded.

The City of Morro Bay is the only currently available treated water supply source for any new construction at the proposed park unit. The city has strict control concerning new connections. Water supply is limited, and water policies are governed by the "Water Allocation Model" written by the California Coastal Commission, and "Measure F," a city ordinance.

Electricity: Pacific Gas and Electric Company is the current power source at this state beach. Service extension is available. The existing source provides 120-volt, single-phase power.

Telephone: Telephone service is currently provided by Pacific Bell.

Gas: Natural gas service is not available at this unit. Liquid propane gas is an available alternative.

Waste Disposal: Solid waste service is provided by the Morro Bay Garbage Service Company.

Guidelines for Land Use and Facility Development

After careful consideration of user surveys, public concerns, regional and statewide recreational issues, departmental resource policies, and existing on-site conditions, the following guidelines were formulated to serve as a framework on which specific land use and facility recommendations can be based.

-- There is no other nearby campground having direct access off the highway and such a close orientation to the sandy beach. Therefore, this campground serves a popular demand for camping, and should continue.

-- Any major expansion of camping within the current boundaries of the unit is inappropriate. This is because of natural and visual sensitivities and space limitations.

-- Existing camping facilities function poorly, and are heavily used. Consideration should be given to renovation of the campground.

-- Erosion is a major issue at this unit, and should be taken into consideration in any land-use or facility recommendations.

-- Because Atascadero State Beach is in a seismically active area, new facilities should be designed to withstand a Richter magnitude 6.0 earthquake, with a repeatable ground acceleration of 0.3 gravity (g).

-- Due to its location near an urban area, day use has been and is expected to continue to be heavy. Because of limited facilities, there have been conflicts between camping and day use. Day-use accommodations should be increased and more clearly designated to minimize conflicts with other uses.

-- Sensitive sand dune habitat throughout the southeastern portion of the state beach should be managed for its preservation. No major permanent facilities should be considered in this area.

Recommendations for Land Use and Facility Development

The following recommendations are made in order to maintain an optimum balance between providing quality visitor use facilities and preserving the natural and cultural resources of the state beach over the next twenty years.

Land Use:

-- Beach areas subject to direct wave action shall be open to a wide variety of uses, which shall include, but not be limited to, fishing, sunbathing, birdwatching, beachcombing, jogging, hiking, and nature study.

-- A sand dune protection and stabilization program shall be developed, and use in these areas shall be limited to protect dune systems.

-- The "Cloisters" site is suitable for high intensity day use and possibly some limited overflow camping during peak seasons, if adequate operational can could be maintained.

-- Land use in the existing campground shall remain as is.

-- Land use along both sides of the unnamed creek at the south end of the campground and east of the culvert shall be limited to hiking only.

Facilities:

-- Replace and relocate existing comfort stations with smaller and less visually intrusive combination buildings, including hot showers.

-- Replace and relocate entrance station with one that has a restroom and adequate space for dry storage.

-- Improve existing day use picnic area, and increase parking to 20-25 cars.

-- Renovate layout of existing campground to provide more tent sites and more landscaping between sites.

-- Install esthetically pleasing fencing, integrated with erosion control plantings, along the base of the bluff behind the campground.

-- Install interpretive panels at both the campground and the "Cloisters" day-use area.

-- Develop up to 20 picnic sites in the upland area of the "Cloisters" day-use area.

-- Develop off-street parking for 50 to 75 vehicles behind the frontal dunes, off Azure Street, at the "Cloisters" day-use area.

-- Install a permanent comfort station in the vicinity of the parking/picnic area at the "Cloisters" day-use area.

-- Install vehicle barriers where necessary to control vehicle access into sensitive sand dune and beach areas.

-- Develop four accessways to the beach, one from Beachcomber Drive north of the campground, one from Beachcomber Drive at the south end of the campground, one from the "Cloisters" picnic area, and one from the "Cloisters" parking lot.

-- Improve the existing parking and access area at the end of Hatteras Street. Reconstruct barriers at the end of Hatteras Street, in order to use three existing paved parking spots and improve pedestrian access to the beach.

Implementation Priorities

The priorities of this section are intended to be a general guideline for the implementation of the recommendations in this plan. Over a period of time, these are likely to change due to such factors as availability of funds or staff, unforeseen changes in resource conditions or off-site factors, or safety considerations. As each phase is completed, it will be prudent to evaluate how the facilities are being used, and to determine what changes, if any, should be considered within the constraints of this plan.

The recommendations are listed in order of priority, from highest to lowest.

1. Construct day-use and interpretive improvements at the "Cloisters" site in order to help relieve the increasing impacts of inadequate day-use facilities in other areas of the unit.

2. Install beach accessways, fencing, and erosion control plantings in order to reduce the impacts of erosion in the unit.

3. Replace the entrance station, and expand the existing day-use area at the campground.

4. Renovate the existing campground layout and facilities. This would include replacement of both restrooms and installation of interpretive developments.

Local Coastal Plan Conformance

This unit falls in Planning Areas 1 and 2 of the Local Coastal Plan for the City of Morro Bay. The city's plan places it in an Open Space/Recreation land-use category. The recommendations contained in this plan, except as outlined below, are in conformance with the standards established in the Local Coastal Plan.

The Local Coastal Plan makes specific recommendations for the state beach in Policies 1.10 and 1.12. This General Plan does not include the improvements proposed as Item (b) of Policy 1.10. This would require the state to construct a small parking area on the blufftop, just below Hatteras Street. This General Plan proposes to increase day-use parking in two locations under state ownership. One area is the Cloisters site, and the other is at the campground. To expand day-use parking in other areas would create operational difficulties, and further increase traffic throughout the adjacent residential neighborhood. At the end of Hatteras Street, there is currently space for three or four cars to park and have access to the state beach. There is also a paved parking area for three additional cars which has been blocked off. The General Plan recommends that this existing area be improved. However, no expansion of parking is recommended. Also, state ownership does not include all of the open bluff area between Hatteras Street and the first house to the south. A portion of this bluff area is owned by the Texaco Corporation.

Appropriate Future Addition

Adjacent and to the east of the state beach, between Morro Bay High School and the "Cloisters" site, is an undeveloped parcel of land known as the VRM property. This is a privately owned parcel, approximately 84 acres in size. It was nominated for state acquisition using funds from the California Park and Recreational Facilities Act of 1984. Although it was designated in priority group II, funds were insufficient to proceed with acquisition.

This coastal plain area is highly suited for development of recreational facilities, protection of scenic coastal dunes, and buffering the beach from encroaching urban development. Throughout this planning effort, members of the public have urged the state to continue to maintain this property as a high priority for acquisition. Should future funding become available, it would be an appropriate addition to the state beach.

MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

INTERPRETIVE ELEMENT

INTERPRETIVE ELEMENT

The general purpose of interpretation in a state beach or park is to: orient the visitor; stimulate interest; and promote understanding and appreciation of the resources, thus making a visit more meaningful and enjoyable.

This Interpretive Element provides guidance for ongoing and future interpretive development at Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach. It identifies interpretive themes, makes specific proposals, and establishes priorities. The element was initiated following the first public meeting for the Morro Bay Area State Park Units General Plan, held in Los Osos on November 12, 1986.

MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH

INTERPRETIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental Influences

The quality of the recreational experience at Morro Strand State Beach is directly proportional to the esthetic appeal of the environment in which it takes place. Rain, wind, cold temperatures, cloudiness, and heavy fog influence visitation to the unit, as well as the types of interpretive facilities and programs which can be developed. The corrosive and abrasive effects of salt- and sand-laden sea breezes must be considered in the design, placement, and construction of interpretive facilities. Vandalism can be a problem, and interpretive development should be designed and placed to minimize this risk.

Interpretive consideration should be given to the safety of the visitor as well as to the preservation of the unit's resources. The ocean can present potential hazards to beach users. Occasional rip currents can be confusing, frightening, or even fatal to unwary swimmers. Beach users can also have unpleasant encounters with poisonous jelly fish and stingrays, as well as less natural beach litter, such as broken glass and hot coals covered by sand.

Where the bluffs are high and steep, bluff erosion is in evidence, the result of natural processes at work, often accelerated by human activities. Dune erosion and destruction of the natural dune environment has similarly been accelerated because of unplanned "volunteer" trails. Revegetation of the destabilized dune and bluff areas with indigenous species of the unit will be an ongoing concern of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Visitors, Their Needs and Expectations

On the average, 40,000 people make use of Morro Strand State Beach each year. Day users generally come from the local area, although some are from outside the area, and stay in nearby overnight accommodations.

The visitors' principal needs and expectations are for a readily accessible, affordable, clean, safe, and scenic spot in which to pursue their chosen forms of recreation and relaxation. Though not a strong expectation of the average visitor, interpretation can enhance the public's enjoyment and appreciation of

Morro Strand State Beach, and promote safety. Visitors may also benefit from an orientation to the region, and from more knowledge about the resources of the area. From the department's point of view, interpretation is an excellent tool for presenting resource and visitor protection information, as it explains the reasons behind rules, and thus encourages compliance.

INTERPRETIVE PERIOD

The department will interpret a flow of history at Morro Strand State Beach from geologic times to the present -- whether or not the whole spectrum of change is actually presented to the public.

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretive themes for Morro Strand State Beach separate into three loosely connected groups: resources, recreation, and management and safety (specific themes may fit more than one of these categories). Although the scope of interpretive development will not be extensive in this unit, a range of appropriate interpretive themes has been presented in this section to provide flexibility for future interpretation, using a variety of media.

Resources

There are a wealth of resource-related themes to interpret at Morro Strand State Beach. Natural history themes can be interpreted in two ways: through ecological associations, and through singular outstanding species. This approach addresses both the interrelatedness of associated species and the uniqueness of some of those species. In some instances, themes covering resource-oriented topics have ramifications that aid in management of the unit and protection of the resources.

Primary Theme: The Ever-Changing Coast

The coast is a dynamic place. Interpretation will encompass the constant motion of sand particles, their downcoast movement, and the seasonal transport of sand and its impact on the coastal beach. The concepts of "littoral drift," "littoral cells," and "the sand budget" will be explained. In addition, the process that uplifted the marine terraces and formed the coastal bluffs will be interpreted. Bluff erosion is a natural process in this area, but human intrusions have accelerated that process. Interpretation will stress how visitors can prevent erosion.

Primary Theme: The Resourceful Life on the Beach

The range of habitats found at and around the state beach should be interpreted for visitors, with emphasis on how the physical and vegetative make-up of each area determines what wildlife will be present.

Sub-Themes:

The Underwater Community. Interpretation will focus on the rich offshore flora and fauna found in the region of Estero Bay.

The Sandy Beach Community. The varied lifestyles and lifeforms of the common invertebrate and vertebrate animals found on Estero Bay beaches will be presented. Interpretive approaches may include: "Life Under Foot" (invertebrates which live in the sand in the wave wash zone); "A Bill for Every Purpose" (shorebirds, their specialized feeding techniques, size differences, and migratory patterns which minimize inter-species food competition); "Flotsom and Jetsam" (evidences of various lifeforms found washed up on the beach, such as shark egg cases, jellyfish, and kelp, and the animals which scavenge these castaways).

Bluff Ecology. Interpretation will examine the continually evolving (eroding) nature of the bluffs in this region of the California coastline, and the plants and animals that are adapted to live on the bluff face.

The Wetland: Home to Critters Great and Small. The coastal salt marsh and willow riparian areas of Morro Strand State Beach are home to many forms of wildlife. The prolific nature of a healthy estuarine system will be presented. Tidal influence will be described, major species presented, and food chain relationships explained. The theme will also seek to foster an esthetic appreciation of the wetland landscape, and an understanding of the need to protect it.

Primary Theme: Special Species to Seek

Beach visitors will be directed toward unusual plant and animal species that may require some effort to find at Morro Strand State Beach.

Sub-Themes:

Watching for Whales and Other Marine Mammals. Morro Strand State Beach offers excellent views of the winter and spring migrations of the gray whale. Subjects that should be covered include: size, appearance, habits, diet, navigation; when, where, and why they migrate, and a map to illustrate their route; courtship and rearing of the young; and a brief history of whaling, their threatened extinction, the need for protection, and the present status of the species. In addition, indentifying information about other marine mammals commonly observed along this coastline should be provided.

Unusual Plants and Animals of Estero Bay. This theme will highlight those species that are uncommon in their appearance or habits, and are found around Estero Bay, including grunion.

Primary Theme: Bygone Beachcombers

The use of Estero Bay's beach and wetland environments by the Chumash and later settlers will be the focus for interpretation. This should incorporate comparative information about the various cultures (Native American, Hispanic, American), their different technologies, and their use of the environment through time.

Primary Theme: The State Park System Story

The development of the State Park System and how Morro Strand State Beach came into public ownership will be interpreted. This theme will treat the coast as a region, orienting visitors to the resource and recreational values of the nearby state beaches and parks, as well as parks administered by other agencies.

Recreation

The diverse recreational opportunities available at Morro Strand State Beach should be interpreted, along with appropriate regulations and safety tips.

Primary Theme: Having Fun in the Surf

Opportunities for board and body surfing, wind surfing, and boating should be interpreted for visitors unfamiliar with the beach. Techniques, regulations, and points of access should be covered, along with wave formation and its relationship to surfing. A tide schedule should also be posted.

Primary Theme: Fishing for Sport

Interpretation will highlight edible fish commonly caught in the surf, including barred perch, jacksmelt, kelp greenling, silver perch, starry flounder, and walleye surfperch. Fishing techniques and applicable regulations will be covered.

Primary Theme: Dive into the Underwater World

Interpretation will illustrate appropriate skin and scuba diving equipment, techniques, regulations, safety, and favorable water conditions.

Management and Safety

Interpretation at a beach unit should inform visitors about how to use the beach safely, as well as indicating ways they can preserve the environment. It should support the unit staff involved with enforcing regulations, providing visitors with the justification for regulations.

Primary Theme: Be Safe at the Beach

Interpretation will aid visitors by explaining the formation and hazards of rip currents and sleeper waves, methods swimmers can use to escape them, and other rescue techniques. It will also warn visitors about other dangers, such as stinging jellyfish, stingrays, sunburn, and buried fires and glass.

Primary Theme: You Can Prevent Erosion

Interpretation will address the cumulative effects of individual impacts on unstable bluffs at the state beach. It will stress how each tiny gully from runoff, ground squirrel holes, and volunteer trails can eventually lead to the loss of large portions of the bluffs. Interpretation will remind visitors to stay off the bluff face, and to use the stairways, marked trails, etc. for their own safety, and to preserve the natural environment.

PROPOSED INTERPRETATION

Facilities and Media

There are currently no interpretive facilities at Morro Strand State Beach. The lack of buildable land precludes any extensive interpretive structures. Consequently, minimal interpretive facilities, such as free-standing exhibit shelters with panels, or exhibit shelters attached to permanent buildings, are proposed. These should be located near the day-use parking area.

Exhibit panels should be the principal fixed interpretive medium used by the department at Morro Strand State Beach. Panels should be placed in exhibit cases that are impervious to the elements, not only to protect them from corrosion and vandalism, but also to make them appear attractive and substantial. The cases could be made free-standing or attached to permanent structures, and installed in the heavily used Old Creek day-use area, where they will be seen often, and better protected from vandalism. Free-standing exhibit structures, located at sites susceptible to unusually high tides and flooding, should be modular in design to aid their temporary removal. The size of the panels and cases should be standard, so seasonal exhibits or those that are worn out can be easily replaced. A program of seasonally rotated panels is strongly suggested. Modular cases and panels should be used throughout the Morro Bay District, enabling the rotation of panels from unit to unit, especially panels with themes that have coast-wide value. Metal interpretive signs should also be installed at the beach's coastal access points.

Publications, such as trail guides, monthly or seasonal visitor activity guides, bird and plant lists, orientation brochures, and books are valuable interpretive media, and their development should be encouraged for the state beach. Publications have souvenir value, and they allow visitors, by way of text and bibliographies, to learn more about the park after they leave, or to prepare themselves for a return visit.

Visitors should be encouraged to make use of the nearby Morro Bay Museum of Natural History at Morro Bay State Park for a more comprehensive interpretation of the natural history of the area. Also, the department's California coastal wetlands van, which focuses on wetlands ecology, should make regularly scheduled visits to the beach, particularly when park visitation is at its height.

Visitor Activities

Talks, guided walks, and orientation services offered by park personnel and docents provide the most effective interpretive techniques, because they allow interactive communications, and are responsive to the immediate needs of visitors. At present, most of the interpretation at Morro Strand State Beach is carried out through these personal services. It is recommended that they be continued.

Appropriate visitor activities for Morro Strand State Beach should include formal and informal talks (on the unit's natural and historic resources and the State Park System); guided walks on the beach or near the wetlands; bird

study walks; demonstrations (lifeguard rescue, aquatic safety, board and body surfing, and surf fishing); and Junior Ranger programs. Trained and certified docents could aid the unit staff, augmenting the number and variety of interpretive programs offered to visitors.

INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATIONS

The Natural History Association of San Luis Obispo Coast, Inc., is the department's official cooperating association for state parks along the San Luis Obispo Coast. Founded in 1977, the association's membership periodically schedules interpretive programs for Morro Strand State Beach. Headquartered at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History at Morro Bay State Park, the organization boasts more than 800 members, of which 150 are active docents. They produce a monthly newsletter with a calendar of their activities, which includes nature walks, on- and off-site talks, school programs, docent training, etc. They also sponsor special events to produce revenue for planned development and programs.

INTERPRETIVE CONCESSIONS

A general statement of concession policy, adopted by the California State Parks and Recreation Commission, reads as follows:

> Recognizing the diverse missions of the Department of Parks and Recreation relative to providing recreation opportunities and preserving and interpreting natural and historic resources, it shall be the department's policy to enter into concession contracts for the provision of products, facilities, programs, and management and visitor services which will provide for the enhancement of visitor use and enjoyment, as well as visitor safety and convenience.
>
> Such concessions should not create added financial burden on the state and, wherever possible, shall either reduce costs or generate revenues that aid in maintaining and expanding the State Park System. In carrying out this policy, the department shall observe and adhere to the provisions of the Public Resouces Code and forbid commercial exploitation of resources in units of the State Park System, and that limit the kinds of improvements and activities that are allowed in certain types of units.

Appropriate concession activities for Morro Strand State Beach could include concessions that are interpretive in nature.

INTERPRETIVE COLLECTIONS

There are no interpretive collections directly associated with Morro Strand State Beach. However, resources at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History in Morro Bay State Park may be available for use in interpretive programs to trained docents and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following ongoing interpretive activities should continue to be encouraged:

-- Schedule interpretive beach and dune walks, on- and off-site talks, aquatic safety demonstrations, and surf fishing demonstrations when projected visitor participation warrants these efforts.

-- Develop and update monthly or seasonal visitor activity guides; bird, animal, and plant lists; orientation brochures, books, and bibliographies highlighting the state beach's resources; and a teacher's guide with lesson plans for Estero Bay state beaches, to encourage and facilitate visitation by school groups during the off season.

-- Recruit volunteers to augment the unit's personal services interpretation for beach visitors.

Development priority should be given to the interpretive activities listed below:

-- Construct new exhibit shelters in the existing day-use parking areas near Old Creek.

-- Develop a series of interpretive panels, based on the themes listed, along with a seasonal rotation program for them, in the Old Creek day-use area.

-- Locate metal interpretive signs at the beach's various coastal access points.

ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

INTERPRETIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental Influences

The quality of the recreational experience at Atascadero State Beach is directly proportional to the esthetic appeal of the environment in which it takes place. Rain, wind, cold temperatures, cloudiness, and heavy fog influence visitation to the unit, as well as the types of interpretive facilities and programs which can be developed. The corrosive and abrasive effects of salt- and sand-laden sea breezes must be considered in the design, placement, and construction of interpretive facilities. Vandalism can be a problem, and interpretive development should be designed and placed to minimize this risk.

Interpretive consideration should be given to the safety of the visitor, as well as to the preservation of the unit's resources. The ocean can present potential hazards to beach users. Dangerous rip currents can be confusing, frightening, or even fatal to unwary swimmers. Beach users can also have unpleasant encounters with poisonous jellyfish and stingrays, as well as less natural beach litter, such as broken glass and hot coals covered by sand.

Where the bluffs are high and steep, bluff erosion is in evidence, the result of natural processes at work, often accelerated by human activities. Dune erosion and destruction of the natural dune environment has similarly been increased because of unplanned "volunteer" trails. Revegetation of the destabilized dune areas with indigenous species of the unit will be an ongoing concern of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Smoke stacks of the Morro Bay Power Plant detract from the downcoast vistas of Morro Rock.

Visitors, Their Needs and Expectations

On average, one hundred and nine thousand people visit Atascadero State Beach each year. The unit has two types of use, camping and day use. Day users outnumber campers, and are generally from the local area, although some come from outside the area, and stay in nearby overnight accommodations. Campers, many with their own recreational vehicles, come from greater distances. Some are traveling enroute to another destination and only stop overnight, while others stay as long as allowed (seven consecutive days in the summer months). The campground is generally filled during the summer.

The visitors' principal needs and expectations are for a readily accessible, affordable, clean, safe, and scenic spot in which to pursue their chosen forms of recreation and relaxation. Park personnel have noted that visitors to Atascadero State Beach tend to be older and more inclined to do their own recreating, without taking part in organized activities. Although not a strong expectation of the average visitor, interpretation can enhance the public's enjoyment and appreciation of the beach, as well as promoting safety. Visitors may also benefit from an orientation to the region, and from more knowledge about the resources of the area. From the department's point of view, interpretation is an excellent tool for presenting resource and visitor protection information, as it explains the reasons behind rules, and thus encourages compliance.

INTERPRETIVE PERIOD

The department will interpret a flow of history at Atascadero State Beach from geologic times to the present -- whether or not the whole spectrum of change is actually presented to the public.

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretive themes for Atascadero State Beach separate into three loosely connected groups: resources, recreation, and management and safety (specific themes may fit more than one of these categories). Although the scope of interpretive development will not be extensive in this unit, a range of appropriate interpretive themes has been presented in this section to provide flexibility for future interpretation, using a variety of media.

Resources

There are a wealth of resource-related themes to interpret at Atascadero State Beach. Natural history themes can be interpreted in two ways: through ecological associations, and through singular outstanding species. These approaches address both the interrelatedness of associated species and the uniqueness of some of those species. In some instances, themes covering resource-oriented topics have ramifications that aid in management of the unit and protection of the resources.

Primary Theme: The Ever-Changing Coast

The coast is a dynamic place. Interpretation will encompass the constant motion of sand particles, their downcoast movement, and the seasonal transport of sand, with its impact on the coastal beach. The concepts of "littoral drift," "littoral cells," and "the sand budget" will be explained. In addition, the process that uplifted the marine terraces and formed the coastal bluffs will be interpreted. Bluff and dune erosion is a natural process in this area, but human intrusions have accelerated that process. Interpretation will stress how visitors can prevent erosion.

Primary Theme: The Resourceful Life on the Beach

The range of habitats found at and around the state beach should be interpreted for visitors, with emphasis on how the physical and vegetative make-up of each area determines what wildlife will be present.

Sub-Themes:

The Underwater Community. This theme will interpret the rich offshore flora and fauna found in the region of Estero Bay.

The Sandy Beach Community. The varied lifestyles and lifeforms of the common invertebrate and vertebrate animals found on Estero Bay beaches will be the focus. Interpretive approaches may include: "Life Under Foot" (invertebrates which live in the sand in the wave wash zone); "A Bill for Every Purpose" (shorebirds, their specialized feeding techniques, size differences, and migratory patterns which minimize inter-species food competition); "Flotsom and Jetsam" (evidences of various lifeforms found washed up on the beach, such as shark egg cases, jellyfish, and kelp, and the animals which scavenge these castaways).

Dune Ecology. Subjected to strong, salt-laden winds, high tides, and extremes in temperatures, plant and animal species that comprise the duneland community of Atascadero State Beach have adapted well to their harsh environment. Interpretation will look at these "survivors," as well as the concept of dune succession.

Bluff Ecology. This theme will examine the continually evolving (eroding) nature of the bluffs in this region of the California coastline, and the plants and animals that are adapted to live on the bluff face.

The Wetlands: Home to Critters Great and Small. The prolific nature of a healthy estuarine system and its related uplands will be presented, focusing on tidal influence, major species present, and food chain relationships. The theme will also seek to foster an aesthetic appreciation of the wetland landscape, and an understanding of the need to protect it.

Primary Theme: Special Species to Seek

Beach visitors will be directed toward unusual plant and animal species that may require some effort to find at Atascadero State Beach.

Sub-Themes:

Watching for Whales and Other Marine Mammals. Atascadero State Beach offers excellent views of the winter and spring migrations of the gray whale. Subjects that should be covered include: size, habits, diet, navigation; when, where, and why they migrate, and a map to illustrate their route; clues to identification; courtship and rearing of the young; and a brief history of whaling, their threatened extinction, the need for protection, and the present status of the species. In addition, identifying information about other marine mammals commonly observed along this coastline should be provided.

Unusual Plants and Animals of Estero Bay. Those species that are uncommon in their appearance or habits and are found around Estero Bay (e.g., grunion) will be highlighted.

Primary Theme: Bygone Beachcombers

The use of Estero Bay's beach and wetland environments by the Chumash and later settlers will be the focus for interpretation. This should incorporate comparative information about the various cultures (Native American, Hispanic, American), their different technology, and the changing use of the environment through time.

Primary Theme: A Boom Gone Bust

Edward G. Lewis' ill-fated development scheme for a resort community along Estero Bay should be interpreted, highlighting the buildings and grounds that once comprised the Cloisters Inn and Cottages.

Secondary Theme: The State Park System Story

The development of the State Park System and how Atascadero State Beach came into public ownership will be interpreted. This theme will treat the coast as a region, orienting visitors to the resources and recreational values of the nearby state beaches and parks, as well as notable local parks administered by other agencies.

Recreation

The diverse recreational opportunities available at Atascadero State Beach will be interpreted, along with appropriate regulations and safety tips.

Primary Theme: Having Fun in the Surf

Opportunities for board and body surfing, wind surfing, and boating should be interpreted for visitors unfamiliar with the beach. Techniques, regulations, and points of access should be covered, along with wave formation and its relationship to surfing. A tide schedule should be kept posted.

Primary Theme: Fishing for Sport

Interpretation will highlight edible fish commonly caught in the surf, possibly including barred perch, jacksmelt, kelp greenling, silver perch, starry flounder, and walleye surfperch. Fishing techniques and applicable regulations will be covered.

Primary Theme: Dive into the Underwater World

Interpretation will illustrate appropriate skin and scuba diving equipment, techniques, regulations, safety, and favorable water conditions.

Management and Safety

Interpretation at this beach unit will inform visitors about how to use the beach safely, as well as indicating ways to preserve the environment. It should support the unit staff involved with enforcing regulations, providing visitors with the justification for regulations.

Primary Theme: Be Safe at the Beach

Interpretation will aid visitors by explaining the formation and hazards of rip currents, methods swimmers can use to escape them, and other rescue techniques. It should also warn visitors about other dangers, such as stinging jellyfish, stingrays, sunburn, and buried fires and glass.

Primary Theme: You Can Prevent Erosion

Interpretation will address the cumulative effects of individual impacts on unstable bluffs and dunes at the state beach. It will stress how each tiny gully from runoff, ground squirrel holes, and volunteer trails can eventually lead to the loss of large portions of the bluffs and dunes. Interpretation will remind visitors to stay off of the bluff face and fragile duneland, to use the stairways, marked trails, etc., for their own safety, and to preserve the natural environment.

PROPOSED INTERPRETATION

Facilities and Media

There are currently no interpretive facilities at Atascadero State Beach. The lack of buildable land precludes any extensive interpretive structures. Consequently, minimal interpretive facilities, such as free-standing exhibit shelters and exhibit shelters attached to permanent structures, are proposed. A program of seasonally rotated panels is strongly suggested. Possible locations for exhibit structures could be at the proposed day-use area for the unit near the site of the former Cloisters Inn and Cottages, at overlooks in the campgrounds, and against permanent restroom walls. At such time as a trail is formalized through the duneland, there will be additional opportunities for interpretation.

Exhibit panels should be the principal fixed interpretive medium used by the department at the state beach. Panels should be placed in exhibit cases that are impervious to the elements, not only to protect them from corrosion and vandalism, but also to make them appear attractive and substantial. Whether free-standing or attached to permanent structures, the cases should be installed in well-lit, heavily used areas, where they will be seen often and better protected from vandalism.

The size of the panels and cases should be standard, so that seasonal exhibits or those that are worn out can be easily replaced. Modular cases and panels should be used throughout the San Luis Obispo Coast District, enabling the rotation of panels from unit to unit, especially panels with themes that have coast-wide value.

Publications, such as trail guides, monthly or seasonal visitor activity guides, bird and plant lists, orientation brochures, and books are highly valuable interpretive media, and their development should be encouraged for the state beach. Publications have souvenir value, and they allow visitors, by way of text and bibliographies, to learn more about the park after they leave, or to prepare themselves for a return visit.

Visitors should be encouraged to make use of the nearby Morro Bay Museum of Natural History at Morro Bay State Park for a more comprehensive interpretation of the natural history of the area. Also, the department's California Coastal Wetlands Van, which focuses on wetlands ecology, should make regularly scheduled visits to the beach, particularly when park visitation is at its height. A teacher's guide with lesson plans should be developed for the state beach to facilitate visitation by school groups during the off-season.

Visitor Activities

Talks, guided walks, and orientation services offered by park personnel and docents provide the most effective interpretive techniques, because they allow interactive communication, and are responsive to the immediate needs of visitors. At present, the greater part of interpretation at Atascadero State Beach is carried out through these personal services. It is recommended that they be continued.

Appropriate visitor activities for Atascadero State Beach should include formal and informal talks (on the unit's natural and historic resources and the State Park System); guided walks on the beach or through the dunes; bird study walks; demonstrations (lifeguard rescue, aquatic safety, board and body surfing, and surf fishing); and Junior Ranger Programs. Trained and certified docents could also aid the unit staff, augmenting the number and variety of interpretive programs offered to visitors on and off site.

INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATIONS

The Natural History Association of San Luis Obispo Coast, Inc., is the department's official cooperating association for Morro Bay area state parks. Founded in 1977, the association's volunteer membership schedules almost all of the interpretive programs for Atascadero State Beach. Headquartered at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History, located in Morro Bay State Park, the organization now boasts more than 800 members, of which 150 are active docents. They produce a monthly newsletter with a calendar of their activities, which includes nature walks, on- and off-site talks, school programs, docent training, etc. They also sponsor special events that produce revenue for planned development and programs.

The Morro Coast Audubon Society, Inc. also has some interest in providing interpretation at the state beach.

INTERPRETIVE CONCESSIONS

A general statement of concession policy, adopted by the California State Park and Recreation Commission, reads as follows:

> Recognizing the diverse missions of the Department of Parks and Recreation relative to providing recreation opportunities and preserving and interpreting natural and historic resources, it shall be the department's policy to enter into concession contracts for the provision of products, facilities, programs, and management and visitor services which will provide for the enhancement of visitor use and enjoyment, as well as visitor safety and convenience.
>
> Such concessions should not create added financial burden on the state and, wherever possible, shall either reduce costs or generate revenues that aid in maintaining and expanding the State Park System. In carrying out this policy, the department shall observe and adhere to the provisions of the Public Resources Code that forbid commercial exploitation of resources in units of the State Park System, and that limit the kinds of improvements and activities that are allowed in certain types of units.

Appropriate concession activities for Atascadero State Beach could include interpretive concessions.

INTERPRETIVE COLLECTIONS

There are no interpretive collections directly associated with Atascadero State Beach. However, resources at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History in Morro Bay State Park may be available for interpretive programs to trained docents and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following ongoing interpretive activities should continue to be encouraged:

-- Schedule interpretive beach and dune walks, on- and off-site talks, aquatic safety demonstrations, and surf fishing demonstrations when projected visitor participation warrants these efforts.

-- Recruit volunteers to augment the unit's personal services interpretation for beach visitors.

-- Develop and update monthly or seasonal visitor activity guides; bird, animal, and plant lists; orientation brochures, books, and bibliographies highlighting the state beach's resources; and a teacher's guide with lesson plans for Estero Bay state beaches, to encourage and facilitate visitation by school groups during the off season.

Development priority should be given to the interpretive activities listed below:

-- Construct new exhibit shelters in the campground and in the proposed day-use area near the Cloisters Inn site.

-- Develop a series of interpretive panels, based on the themes listed, along with a seasonal rotation program for them.

-- Locate metal interpretive signs at the beach's various coastal access points.

MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

OPERATIONS ELEMENT

OPERATIONS ELEMENT

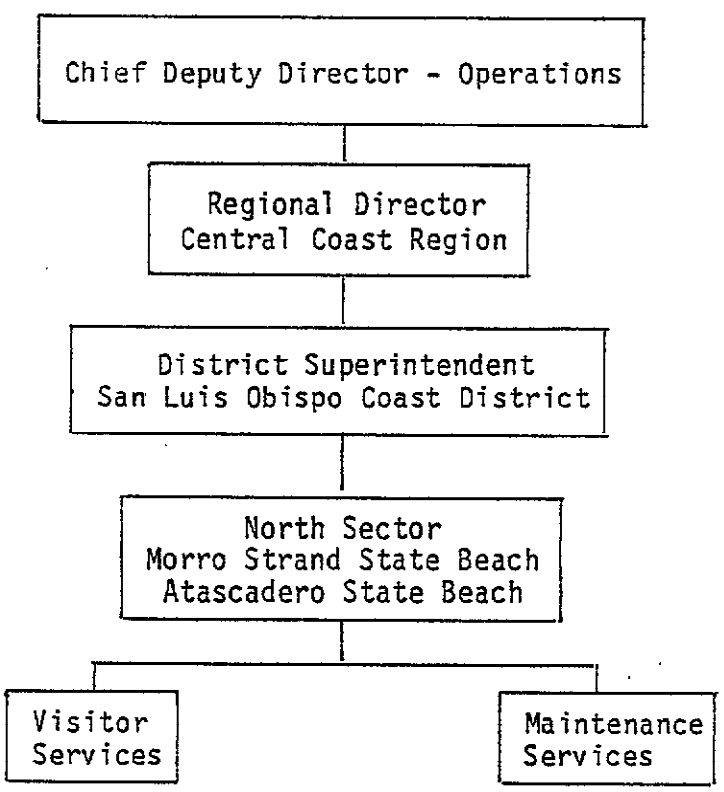
This element defines how the operations staff will carry out its responsibilities to operate and care for the park, protect the resources, serve park visitors and provide interpretive opportunity, enforce the law and ensure proper park use, and maintain facilities within statewide standards for maintenance.

The Operations Element outlines broad operational goals for the unit within the objectives for implementing the General Plan. This element assesses the impact of the General Plan's resource management policies and land use/facilities proposals on the unit's existing operations. It identifies existing and potential operations problems and strategies for solution.

The operational responsibilities are carried out by personnel at the unit, who are organized in the North Sector of the San Luis Obispo Coast District. The district superintendent provides supervision for three sectors; the district superintendent reports to the regional director of the Central Coast Region in Monterey. At the unit level, operating functions are divided into visitor services and maintenance; administrative services are provided at the district level.

FIGURE 1

PARK OPERATIONS ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE



Existing Situation

Operations Summary

Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach are operated as two distinct units. They received 140,000 in attendance during fiscal year 1986-87; 40,000 at Morro Strand State Beach, and 100,000 at Atascadero State Beach. Year-round permanent staffing provides for routine visitor services and maintenance functions. Summer and holiday operations require additional daily services provided by seasonal staffing; entrance station operations and housekeeping are provided by seasonal employees.

Special Considerations

For the most part, operational considerations are very similar for these units. Therefore, the following apply to both Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach, except where specifically noted.

Public Protection

Law enforcement in these units requires a highly visible presence. The close proximity of the existing facilities to a residential area and a major highway have led to a pattern of excessive minor crimes committed in the parks. Local law enforcement's interpretation of concurrent jurisdiction requires that state park personnel respond to all crimes within park boundaries.

Maintenance and Housekeeping

With new use facilities and the already increasing use of these units, greater emphasis will have to be placed on the additional demands associated with this increased use. More refuse, litter, and maintenance of new facilities will all add to the workload, and the staff will have to develop ways to best deal with this increase and still maintain other areas of responsibility at the present high level.

Community Interest

These units are heavily used due to their long expanse of beach and ease of availability. At Atascadero State Beach, the ability to camp right next to the beach, and all aspects of recreation associated with this type of unit, make it a favorite of many people. The development of more usable facilities while pleasing visitors will also concern residents in the area by increasing visitation and the problems associated with that increase.

Emergency Preparation

The safety of visitors at these state beaches is a prime concern. Water rescues in the ocean and emergencies on the beach require four-wheel-drive capability so emergency and first aid equipment can be quickly transported to the site. Radio communication between responding agencies will be a problem that will have to be addressed in a pre-accident plan.

Utility Emergencies

There is an ever-present danger of a radiological release from the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant. The park staff would have to implement emergency procedures which will be identified in a comprehensive evacuation plan. The plan will also require coordination of park efforts with the California Highway Patrol and Caltrans. This coordination of efforts will require a park representative to be at the county Office of Emergency Services building.

Off-Highway Vehicles

Off-highway vehicle activity will continue to be a problem for these units. There is open access to the area from the city beach and by off-highway vehicle users that elect to drive directly onto the beach from state park parking lots. It is recommended that access routes be blocked, that signs be posted at all entrance locations, and that enforcement staff take strict enforcement action.

Easements and Rights-of-Way

Both units are, in part, bordered on the east by private properties, and will have to be monitored to avoid and control existing encroachments. Other easements for utilities will also have to be controlled to ensure public access and safety.

Jurisdictions

Operations depend on maintenance of close working relationships between the state parks and all of the agencies we deal with locally. The district superintendent carefully coordinates with federal, state, and county governments, and provides for liaison with elected officials to ensure that through good communications, problems and conflicts can be anticipated and avoided.

General Plan Implementation

Goals and Objectives

Both Morro Strand State Beach and Atascadero State Beach were established to preserve for the people of California a unique stretch of coastline which provides a setting for outdoor recreational activities. DPR's primary objective is to provide for the public access and enjoyment, while protecting the underlying resources.

Operational Problems and Solutions

The preceding list of special considerations includes existing problems undergoing resolution. As development and facilities increase, public visitation will also increase. Each of the following factors will create important new impacts on operations.

Atascadero State Beach

-- Development of Cloisters Picnic Area

Development of the Cloisters site creates a new focus for public use. Additional personnel, equipment, and operating expenses will be required to provide new public service. Facilities will be designed for minimum maintenance requirements, but high impact day-use workload cannot be absorbed; additional operations resources are necessary.

-- Redevelopment of Campground

Redevelopment and reconfiguration of the campground will result in an even more attractive camping facility. These improvements will increase the demand for beach camping; we expect more off-season use, which, in turn, will create more workload for maintenance, visitor services, and administrative personnel. Operating expenses for longer seasons and additional costs for hot showers must be increased.

-- Resource Management

The Resource Element identifies several major resource management programs which will increase operations responsibility. Control of exotic species, protection of sandy beach resource, wildlife protection, and cultural resource protection are some of the most important programs. Protecting these identified natural and cultural resources and educating the visiting public and staff about the sensitive nature of all non-renewable resources will be a continuing challenge to management.

Morro Strand State Beach

-- Day-Use Improvements

Day-use facility development and improvements are proposed for the unit. These facilities will be accessible to the public from Highway 1. These new facilities will increase park maintenance functions. The impact on ranger personnel will have an effect on the patrol function and interpretation.

-- Resource Management

As for Atascadero State Beach, the Resource Element identifies several major resource management programs which will increase operations responsibility. Of particular concern will be resource management efforts at Old Creek and protection of the sandy beach resource.

Volunteerism

-- Camp Host Program

At Atascadero State Beach, the camp host program may continue to be used in order to allow both maintenance and ranger personnel the time for more critical park problems.

-- Docent Interpretive Organization

A docent organization has been formed in the district, with limited activity at both Morro Strand and Atascadero. With the development of the day-use facilities, additional parking, and resource management efforts at both units, the docent program will be enhanced to increase interpretive activities.

Visitor Safety

In order to protect the safety of visitors, it is important to identify the (a) existing and proposed visitor activities; (b) history of accidents; (c) need for a monitoring program; and (d) need for an interpretive program.

There is a variety of visitor activities at these units, including camping, picnicking, wading, surfing, hiking, beachcombing, surf fishing, and nature study. The ocean waters are generally too cold to attract visitors to swimming or body surfing. The proposed development in the General Plan will not significantly change these activities.

Although the operations staff has responded to such typical accidents as dog bits, vehicle accidents, and health problems, there have been no recorded drownings at these units in the past twenty years. The beaches are currently patrolled, but lifeguard services are unavailable. The department will closely monitor the status of aquatic and other safety measures to determine whether lifeguarding services may be required in some form.

Many of the interpretive methods described in the Interpretive Element will help protect the safety of visitors, such as interpretive signs, warning signs, and educational programs.

MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

CONCESSIONS ELEMENT

CONCESSIONS ELEMENT

The Concessions Element of the General Plan consists of an evaluation of existing and potential concession activities, an inventory of additional visitor services, and a statement of appropriate concession policies and guidelines consistent with the unit's classification.

A Concessions Element is a required aspect of general planning for all park units. The Public Resources Code, Section 5080.02 et seq., describes the manner in which concessions can be operated in the State Park System.

Definition

A concession is defined as authority to permit uses of state park lands and/or facilities for a specified period of time. The intent is to provide the public with goods, services, or facilities which the department cannot provide as conveniently or efficiently, or to permit limited uses of state park lands for other purposes compatible with the public interest and consistent with the Public Resources Code.

Purpose

It is the department's policy to enter into concession contracts for the provision of services, products, facilities, programs, and management and/or visitor services which will provide for enhancement of recreational and educational experiences in concert with visitor safety and convenience. Such concessions should not create added financial burden on the state, and, wherever possible, shall reduce costs and/or generate revenues to aid in maintaining and expanding the State Park System.

Compatibility

Concession developments, programs, or services must be compatible with a unit's classification, and in accordance with the Public Resources Code.

General Concession Policies

1. A study of the economic feasibility of proposed concessions shall be conducted by the Office of Economic and Fiscal Affairs, with participation and review by the Resource Protection Division, the Office of Interpretive Services, the Development Division, the Operations Division, the Acquisition Division, and the Statewide Planning Section. Final approval for development and operation of a proposed concession will be made by the director of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

2. It is the policy of the department to cultivate and encourage small business and ethnic and racial minority-owned/operated businesses as concessionaires in the State Park System.

3. Specific concession proposal shall be analyzed on a case-by-case basis, as submitted to the department.

4. It is the department's policy to generally avoid entering into convenience-type concession agreements for facilities, products, or programs that are adequately provided for a short distance outside state park unit boundaries, when such travel will not unduly endanger or inconvenience visitors, or lead to an unreasonable consumption of transportation fuels.

5. It is the policy of the department that concessions shall provide facilities, products, programs, or services at prices competitive with similar businesses outside State Park System units.

Current and Recommended Concessions

Morro Strand State Beach

Currently, there are no concession facilities at Morro Strand State Beach, and no recognized need has been identified by the study. However, a future food concession, possibly a seasonal mobile food unit, could be established, should a need develop.

Atascadero State Beach

There are no concession facilities currently at Atascadero State Beach, and no recognized need has been identified by the study. However, a seasonal mobile food unit could possibly be established, should a need develop. Such a concession would be intended to serve day-use needs. Staples and other supplies needed by campers are available in the surrounding communities.

MORRO STRAND AND ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ELEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ELEMENT

Morro Strand State Beach

The Environmental Impact Element serves as the environmental impact report required by the California Environmental Quality Act and the state EIR Guidelines.

The Environmental Impact Element incorporates by reference the other elements of the General Plan (the Project Description and the Description of the Existing Environment). It should be recognized that the level of detail of the Environmental Impact Element is commensurate with that of the General Plan. As site-specific development and resource management plans are proposed, they will be subjected to further environmental review, and the appropriate environmental documents will be prepared, if necessary.

This Environmental Impact Element covers the proposals for resource management and protection, land use, and facility development.

Project Description

See the Resource, Land Use and Facilities, and Interpretive Elements.

Description of the Existing Environment

See the Resource and Land Use and Facilities Elements.

Significant Environmental Effects

Increased foot traffic could accelerate dune instability and soil erosion.

Unavoidable Environmental Effects

Public use will incur some impacts to soils, wildlife, and vegetation. The impacts will be minor and/or mitigatable.

Mitigation Measures

1. All excavation proposals will be reviewed by department historians and/or archeologists. If any cultural resources are accidentally uncovered during development, all work will cease until the site has been checked by an archeologist or historian, and appropriate mitigation is developed.

2. New utility lines, where they could be visual intrusions, will be installed underground next to roads, where possible.

3. Facilities will be sited to reduce vegetation loss.

4. During periods of extreme fire hazard, certain uses or activities, such as campfires, may be curtailed or restricted.

5. The Studio Drive parking area will be landscaped to reduce soil erosion.

Alternatives

Several alternative facility development configurations and levels of development were considered and presented to the public during the evolution of the proposed plan. The alternatives considered, but not selected as the proposed plan, are discussed here, along with the no project alternative. The alternatives of less or more intensive development are not ruled out with the adoption of the General Plan. The General Plan is only a guideline for development. Additional or more intensive development may be possible to a minor degree, within the environmental constraints and General Plan guidelines, to meet increased or changing recreational demands. Conversely, in preparation of site development plans, previously unknown environmental constraints may require less intensive development. The facility development proposals indicate what is estimated to be an acceptable range.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would remove the Studio Drive parking area and retain the existing (north) parking area, with no additional development other than that an interpretive shelter or panels. This alternative would reduce parking for the public.

Alternative 2

The no project alternative would not allow for protection and restoration of the Old Creek wetland area, or provide any additional recreational facilities for the public. It would allow bluff erosion and dune instability to continue. Uncontrolled access to the beach through the Cloisters site would continue.

Relationship Between Short-Term Uses and Maintenance or Enhancement of Long-Term Productivity

The proposed long-term and short-term use is preservation and recreation. The resources will be protected, and should another use prove more beneficial to the public than preservation, the resources will be available. There is no intent to enhance potential productivity; that natural resource value may be improved through restoration of the Old Creek wetland area.

Irreversible Environmental Changes

No new land areas or natural resources will be irreversibly committed with implementation of the plan. Development proposals generally involve areas of previous impact or with suitability for development, and the nature of the development is such that it could be removed, and the sites returned to a near pre-development condition. Only the building materials and the energy consumed in construction, operation, and maintenance may be considered an irreversible commitment of resources.

Growth-Inducing Impacts

There will be a minor growth-inducing impact due to increased recreational use resulting from improved facilities. Increased recreation use may influence the demand for support facilities such as service stations, grocery stores,

restaurants, and sports equipment outlets. However, the impact is not expected to be significant, given the level of the proposed facility development; the facility development is proposed to enhance or better accommodate existing use. The potential increased use relative to the existing regional supply of visitor support facilities is relatively small.

Effects Found Not Significant

1. No rare or endangered plant or animal species inhabit Morro Strand State Beach, although six state or federally listed threatened or endangered animal species may occur in or be seen from the unit. There is the tidewater goby, a candidate for federal listing, which occurs in the Old Creek wetland.

2. Other than in the Old Creek wetland, there are no unique or significant natural communities in Morro Strand State Beach.

3. Traffic volumes should not significantly increase. The proposed facilities would not substantially increase visitor capacity. Generally, they accommodate or enhance the existing use. Population growth and changing recreational use patterns will have greater impact on the level of recreational use.

4. The proposed development will create new impervious surface areas which will alter the rate and timing of runoff. However, in comparison to the total watershed area, the increase will not be significant.

5. Air quality and noise impacts were not considered significant. The background noise from Highway 1 and the ocean generally cover the noise level from recreational activities at Morro Strand State Beach.

6. Sewage and waste production, water consumption, and fuel consumption will rise proportionally with public use.

Atascadero State Beach

The Environmental Impact Element serves as the environmental impact report required by the California Environmental Quality Act and the state EIR Guidelines.

The Environmental Impact Element incorporates by reference the other elements of the General Plan (the Project Description and the Description of the Existing Environment). It should be recognized that the level of detail of the Environmental Impact Element is commensurate with that of the General Plan. As site-specific development and resource management plans are proposed, they will be subject to further environmental review, and the appropriate environmental documents will be prepared, if necessary.

This Environmental Impact Element covers the proposals for resource management and protection, land use, and facility development.

Project Description

See the Resource, Land Use and Facilities, and Interpretive Elements.

Description of the Existing Environment

See the Resource and Land Use and Facilities Elements.

Significant Environmental Effects

1. Increased foot traffic could accelerate dune instability and damage vegetation.

2. The beach accessways could accelerate dune instability and create "blowouts," if the design does not consider dune landform, revegetation, and prevailing wind direction.

3. Increased public use of the Cloisters site may create traffic and litter problems for nearby residents.

4. Renovation of the existing campground may require removal of existing vegetation.

Unavoidable Environmental Effects

Removal of vegetation, construction and maintenance of roads and trails, and creation of impervious surface areas will accelerate soil erosion in disturbed areas.

Mitigation Measures

1. All excavation proposals will be reviewed by department historians and/or archeologists. Excavations or ground disturbances in known culturally sensitive areas will be monitored. If any cultural resources are accidentally uncovered during development, all work will cease until the site has been checked by an archeologist or historian, and appropriate mitigation is developed.

2. New utility lines, where they could be visual intrusions, will be installed underground next to roads, where possible.

3. Facilities will be sited to reduce vegetation loss.

4. During periods of extreme fire hazard, certain uses or activities, such as campfires, may be curtailed or restricted.

5. Beach accessways will be developed to reduce dune erosion and instability.

6. A fence will be constructed in the campground area to reduce bluff erosion.

7. A sand dune protection and stabilization program will be developed.

8. Vehicle control barriers will be placed at the Cloisters site to reduce illegal vehicle travel through the dunes and on the beach.

Alternatives

Several alternative facility development configurations and levels of development were considered and presented to the public during the evolution of the proposed plan. The alternatives considered, but not selected as the proposed plan, are discussed here, along with the no project alternative. The alternatives of less or more intensive development are not ruled out with the adoption of the General Plan. The General Plan is only a guideline for development. Additional or more intensive development may be possible to a minor degree, within the environmental constraints and General Plan guidelines, to meet increased or changing recreational demands. Conversely, in preparation of site development plans, previously unknown environmental constraints may require less intensive development. The facility development proposals indicate what is estimated to be an acceptable range.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would convert the north end of the campground to a day-use area, and provide parking at the Cloisters site for 25-50 vehicles. This alternative would provide fewer recreational opportunities than the proposed plan, but would reduce public use problems for residents near the Cloisters site.

Alternative 2

The no project alternative would not provide any additional recreational facilities for the public, and would allow bluff erosion and dune instability to continue. Uncontrolled access to the beach through the Cloisters site would continue.

Relationship Between Short-Term Uses and Maintenance or Enhancement of Long-Term Productivity

The proposed long-term and short-term use is preservation and recreation. The resources will be protected, and should another use prove more beneficial to the public than preservation, the resources will be available. There is no intent to enhance potential productivity; that natural resource value may be improved through resource management programs such as native plant revegetation or dune stabilization.

Irreversible Environmental Changes

- No new land areas or natural resources will be irreversibly committed with implementation of the plan. Development proposals generally involve areas of previous impact or with suitability for development, and the nature of the development is such that it could be removed, and the sites returned to a near pre-development condition. Only the building materials and the energy consumed in construction, operation, and maintenance may be considered an irreversible commitment of resources.

Growth Inducing Impacts

There will be a minor growth-inducing impact due to increased recreational capacity and improved facilities. Increased recreational capacity may influence demand for support facilities such as service stations, grocery stores, restaurants, and sports equipment outlets. However, the impact is not expected to be significant given the level of the proposed facility development; most of the facility development is proposed to enhance or better accommodate existing use. The potential increase use relative to the existing regional supply of visitor support facilities is relatively small.

Effects Found Not Significant

1. No rare or endangered plant or animal species inhabit Atascadero State Beach, although six state or federally listed threatened or endangered animal species may occur in or be seen from the unit.

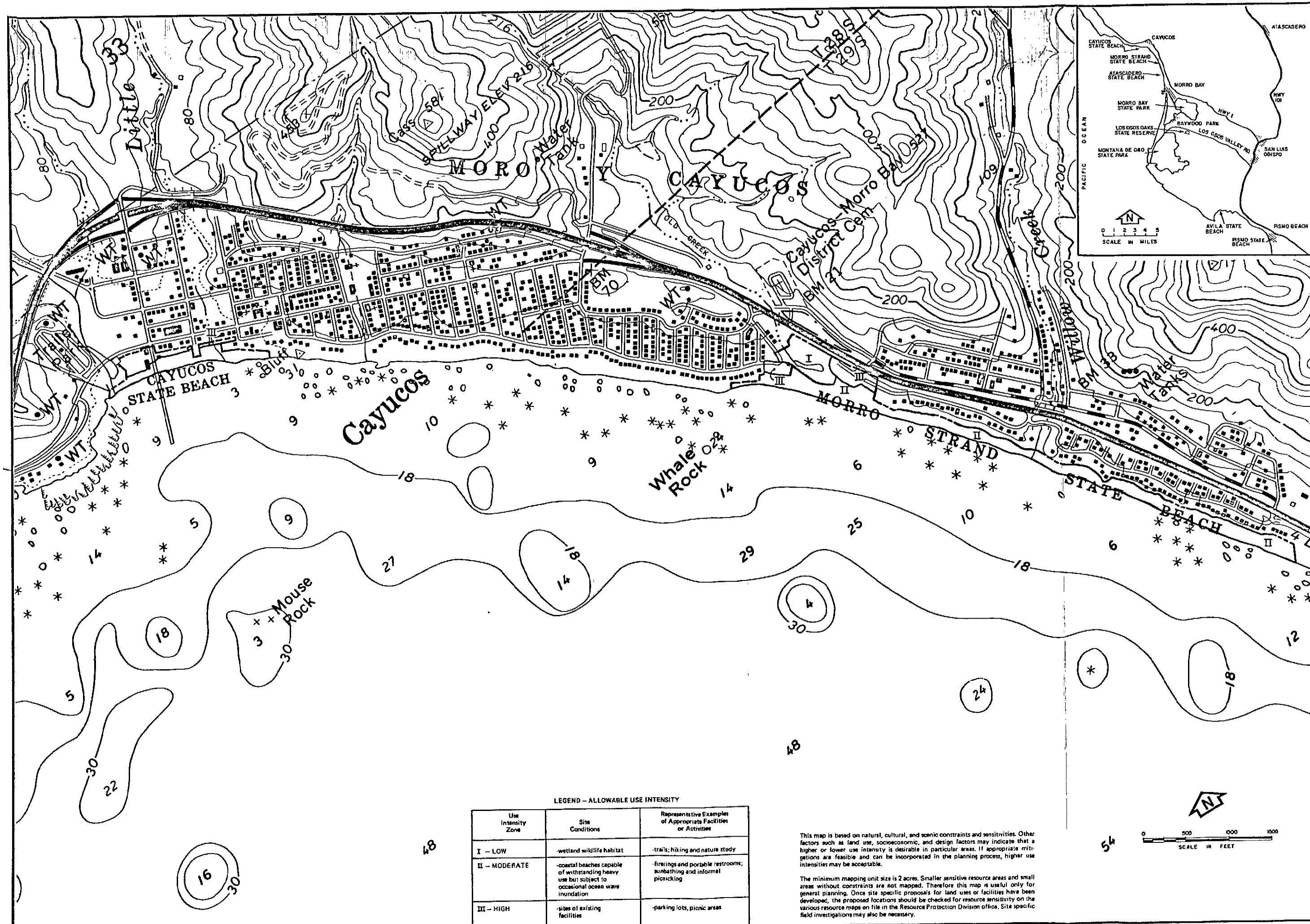
2. There are no unique natural communities in Atascadero State Beach.

3. Traffic volumes should not significantly increase. The proposed facilities would not substantially increase visitor capacity. Generally, they accommodate or enhance the existing use. Population growth and changing recreational use patterns will have greater impact on the level of recreational use.

4. The proposed development will create new impervious surface areas which will alter the rate and timing of runoff. However, in comparison to the total watershed area, the increase will not be significant.

5. Air quality and noise impacts were not considered significant. The background noise from Highway 1 and the ocean generally cover the noise level from recreational activities at Atascadero State Beach.

6. Sewage and waste production, water consumption, and fuel consumption will rise proportionally with the public use.



LEGEND – ALLOWABLE USE INTENSITY

Use Intensity Zone	Site Conditions	Representative Examples of Appropriate Facilities or Activities
I – LOW	-wetland wildlife habitat	-trails; hiking and nature study
II – MODERATE	-coastal beaches capable of withstanding heavy use but subject to occasional ocean wave inundation	-firerings and portable restrooms; sunbathing and informal picnicking
III – HIGH	-sites of existing facilities	-parking lots, picnic areas

This map is based on natural, cultural, and scenic constraints and sensitivities. Other factors such as land use, socioeconomic, and design factors may indicate that a higher or lower use intensity is desirable in particular areas. If appropriate mitigations are feasible and can be incorporated in the planning process, higher use intensities may be acceptable.

The minimum mapping unit size is 2 acres. Smaller sensitive resource areas and small areas without constraints are not mapped. Therefore this map is useful only for general planning. Once site specific proposals for land uses or facilities have been developed, the proposed locations should be checked for resource sensitivity on the various resource maps on file in the Resource Protection Division office. Site specific field investigations may also be necessary.

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DRAWN 8/86 D.M.A.

CHECKED

DATE

REVISIONS

RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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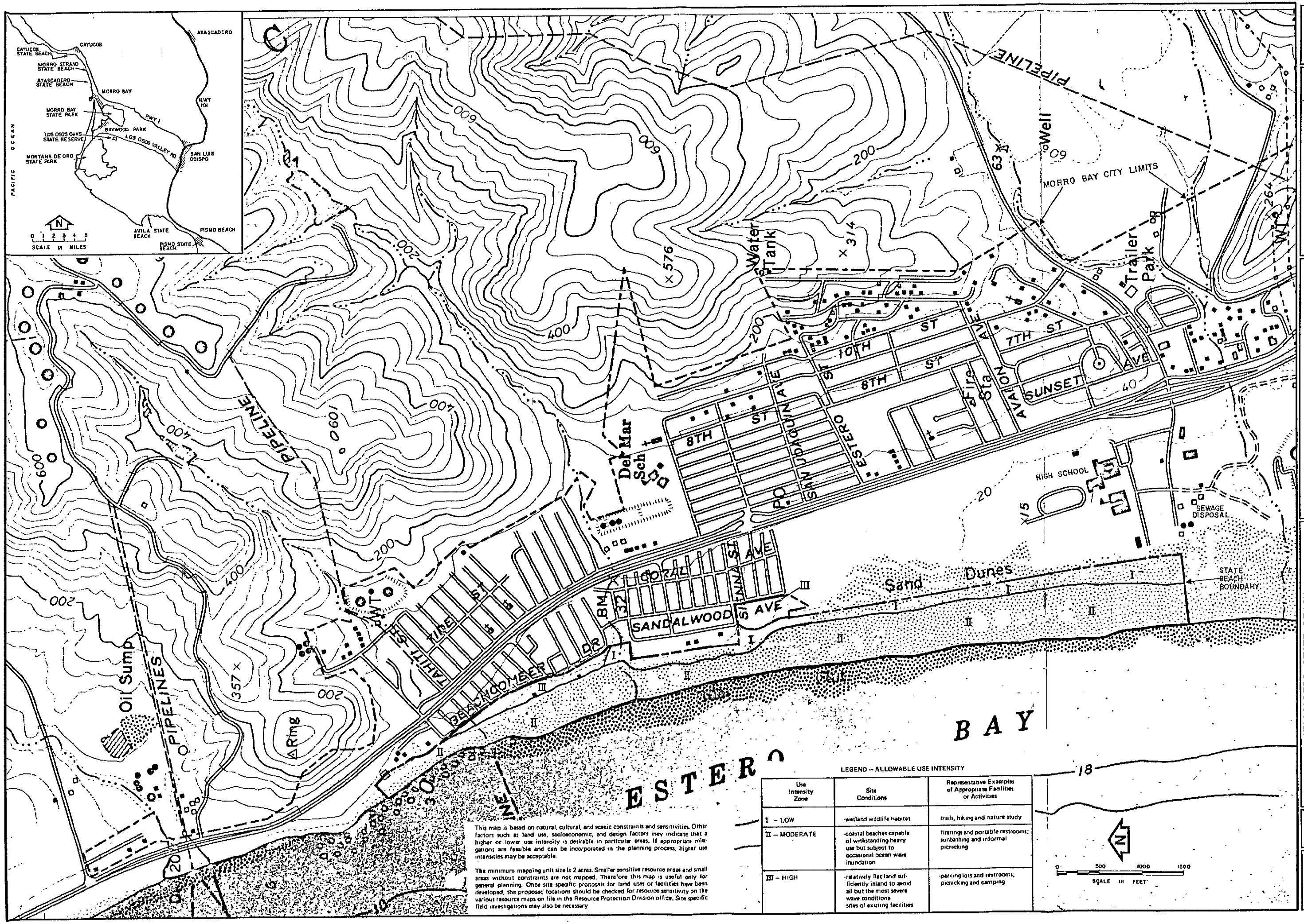
MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH
ALLOWABLE USE INTENSITY MAP
GENERAL PLAN - RESOURCE ELEMENT

DRAWING No. 21602

MAP 2



This map is based on natural, cultural, and scenic constraints and sensitivities. Other factors such as land use, socioeconomic, and design factors may indicate that a higher or lower use intensity is desirable in particular areas. If appropriate mitigations are feasible and can be incorporated in the planning process, higher use intensities may be acceptable.

The minimum mapping unit size is 2 acres. Smaller sensitive resource areas and small areas without constraints are not mapped. Therefore this map is useful only for general planning. Once site specific proposals for land uses or facilities have been developed, the proposed locations should be checked for resource sensitivity on the various resource maps on file in the Resource Protection Division office. Site specific field investigations may also be necessary

LEGEND -- ALLOWABLE USE INTENSITY

Use Intensity Zone	Site Conditions	Representative Examples of Appropriate Facilities or Activities
I – LOW	-wetland wildlife habitat	trails, hiking and nature study
II – MODERATE	-coastal beaches capable of withstanding heavy use but subject to occasional ocean wave inundation	firerings and portable restrooms; sunbathing and informal picnicking
III – HIGH	-relatively flat land sufficiently inland to avoid all but the most severe wave conditions sites of existing facilities	-parking lots and restrooms; picnicking and camping

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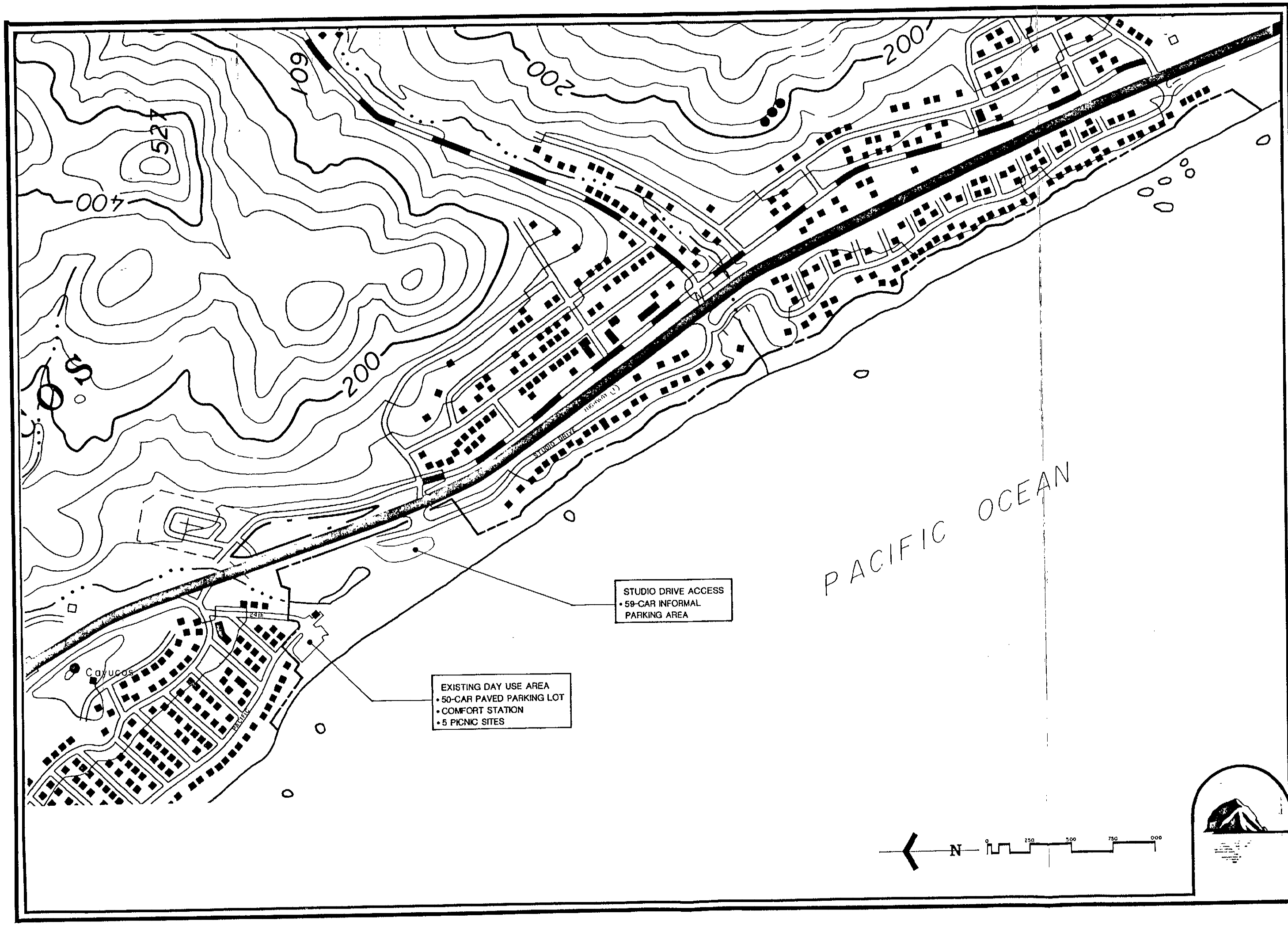
ATASCADERO STATE BEACH
ALLOWABLE USE INTENSITY MAP
GENERAL PLAN - RESOURCE ELEMENT

DRAWING No.
21601

MAP 3



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MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH
EXISTING FACILITIES
GENERAL PLAN-LAND USE AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

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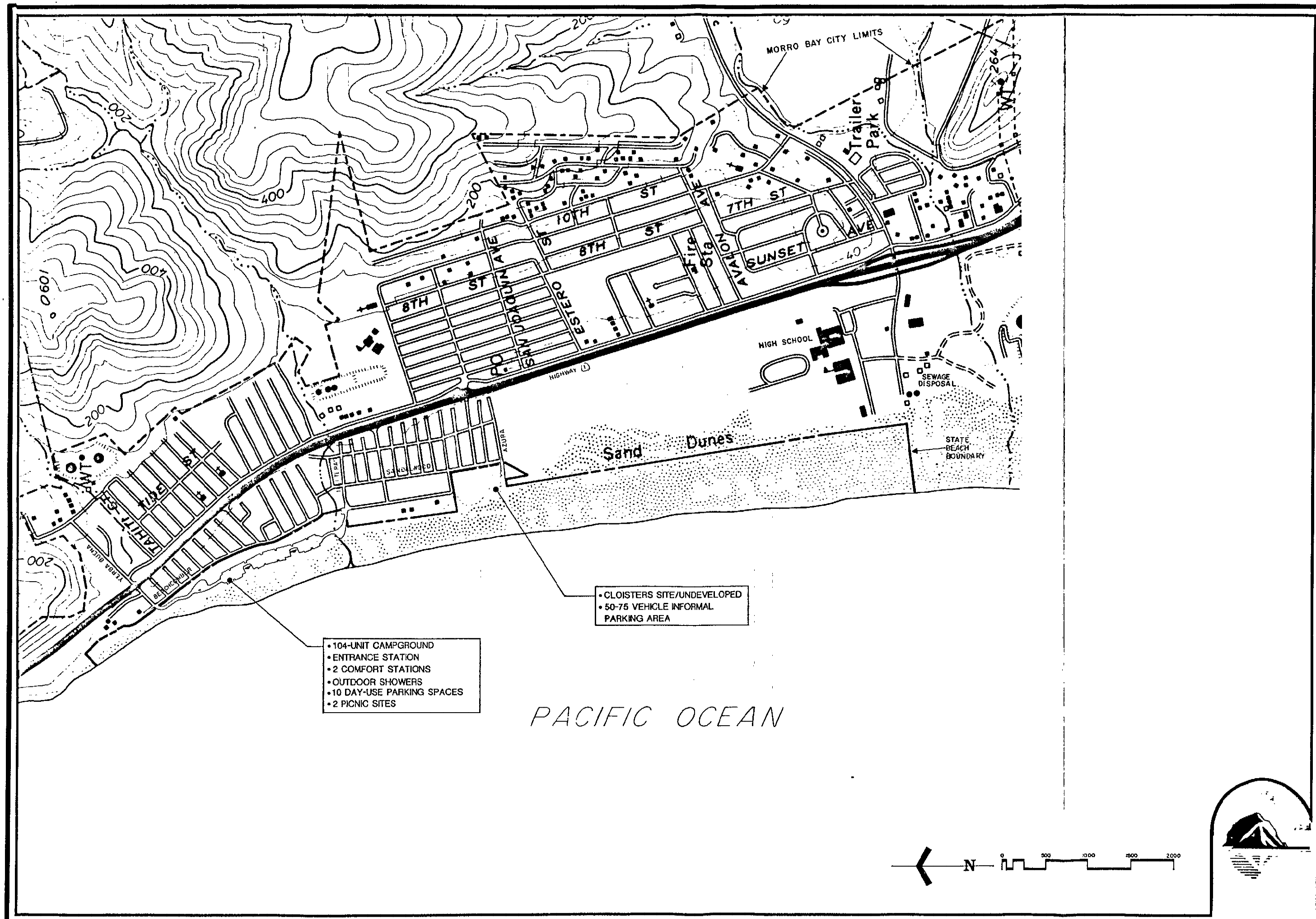
MAP 4



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ATASCADERO STATE BEACH

EXISTING FACILITIES

GENERAL PLAN-LAND USE AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

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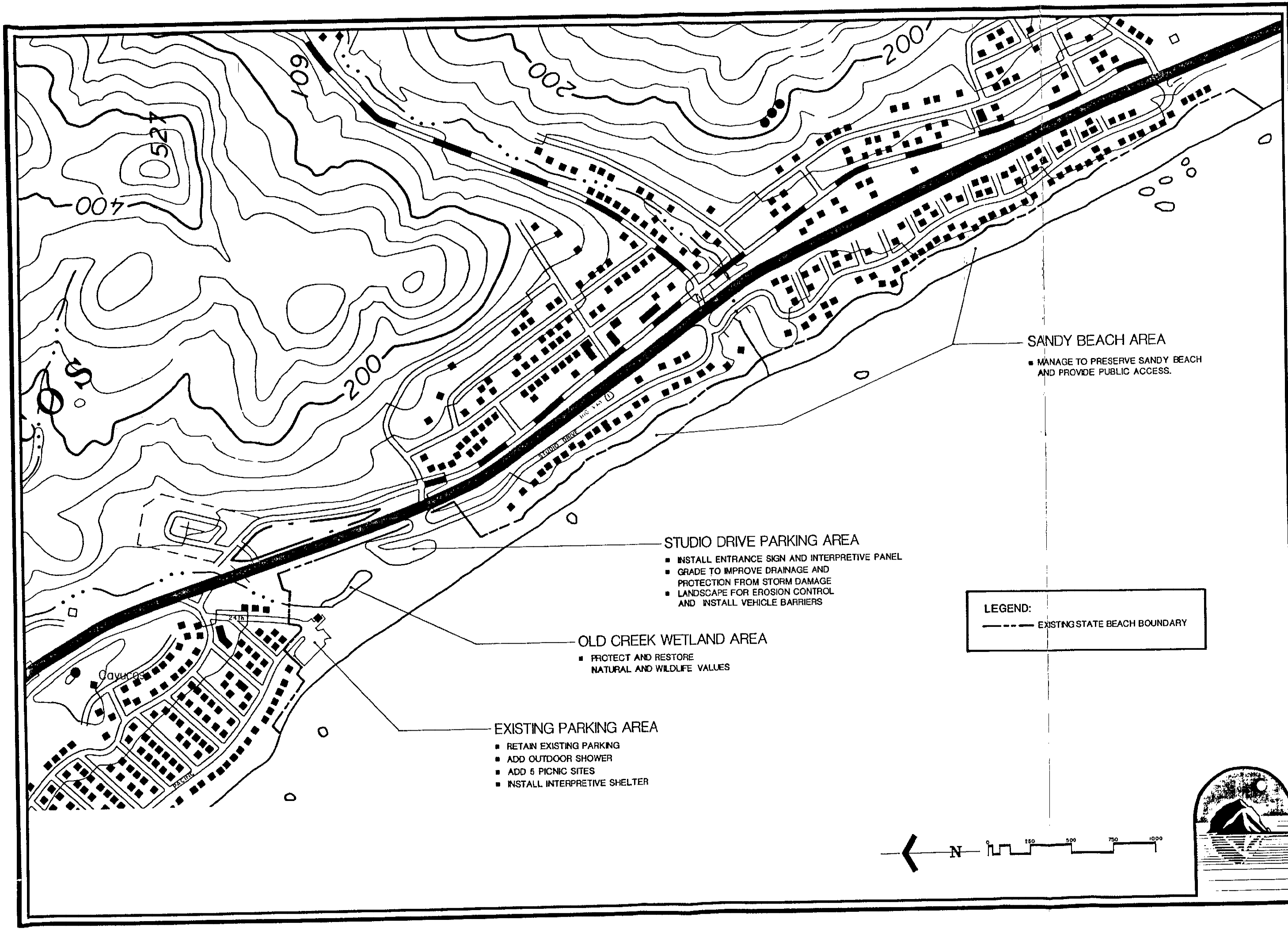
MAP 5



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MORRO STRAND STATE BEACH
PROPOSED LAND USE AND FACILITIES
GENERAL PLAN-LAND USE AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

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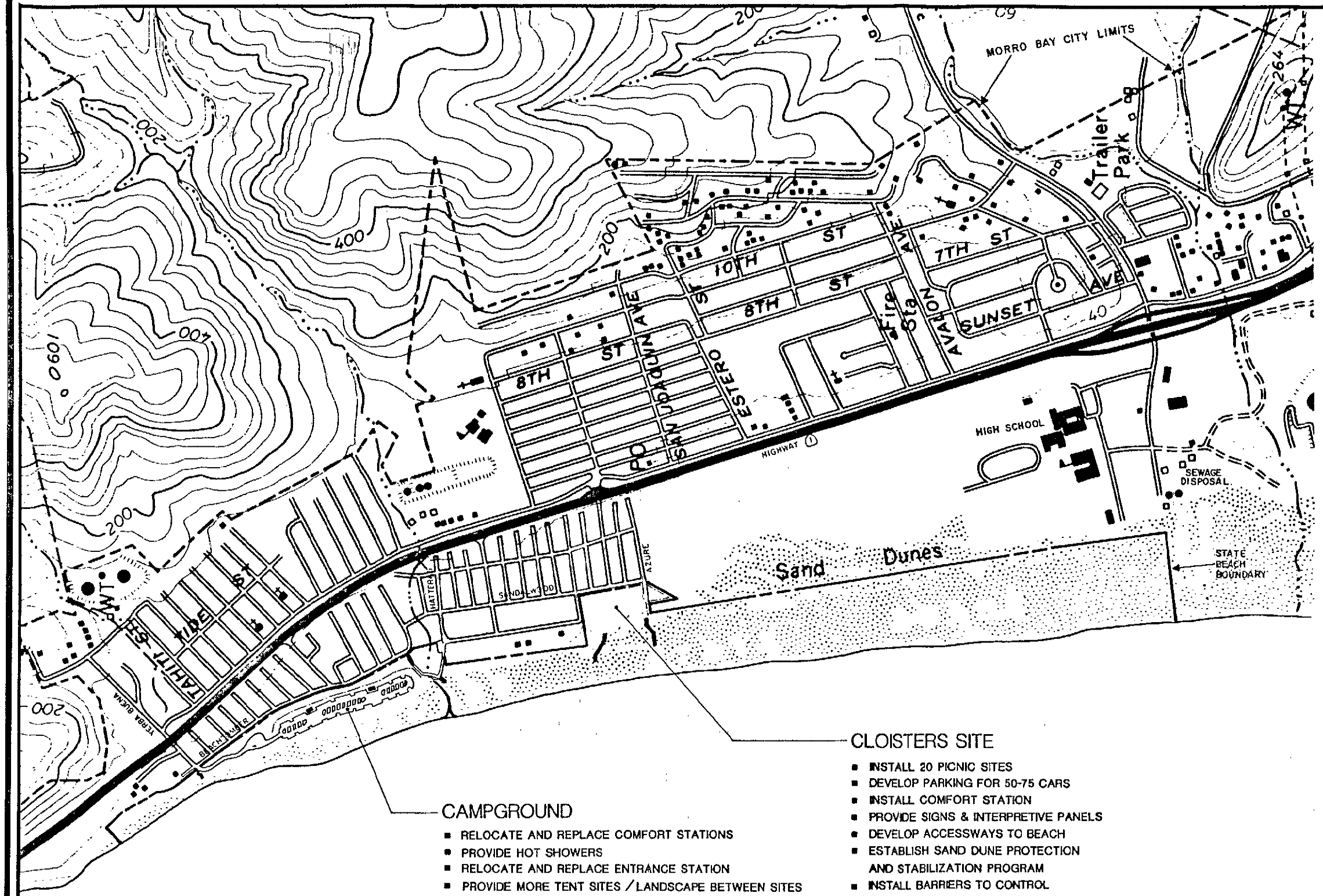
MAP 6



CLOISTERS SITE

- INSTALL 20 PICNIC SITES
- DEVELOP PARKING FOR 50-75 CARS
- INSTALL COMFORT STATION
- PROVIDE SIGNS & INTERPRETIVE PANELS
- DEVELOP ACCESSWAYS TO BEACH
- ESTABLISH SAND DUNE PROTECTION AND STABILIZATION PROGRAM
- INSTALL BARRIERS TO CONTROL VEHICLE USE

CAMPGROUND

- RELOCATE AND REPLACE COMFORT STATIONS
- PROVIDE HOT SHOWERS
- RELOCATE AND REPLACE ENTRANCE STATION
- PROVIDE MORE TENT SITES / LANDSCAPE BETWEEN SITES
- FENCE & PROVIDE EROSION CONTROL PLANTINGS
- INSTALL INTERPRETIVE PANELS
- INCREASE DAY USE PARKING TO 20-25 CARS AND IMPROVE DAY USE AREA
- ESTABLISH SAND DUNE PROTECTION AND STABILIZATION PROGRAM
- DEVELOP ACCESSWAYS TO BEACH
- RECONSTRUCT BARRIERS AT HATTERAS ST.

LEGEND:

- EXISTING STATE BEACH BOUNDARY
- PROTECTIVE BARRIERS
- BEACH ACCESSWAYS

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ATASCADERO STATE BEACH
PROPOSED LAND USE AND FACILITIES
GENERAL PLAN-LAND USE AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

DRAWING NO.

MAP 7

This plan was prepared by:

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Richard E. Felty	Regional Director, Central Coast Region
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With thanks to:

The many citizens who have helped shape this plan through participation in planning at workshops and meetings.