

The creation of Penitencia Creek Park Master Plan is a response by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department to create a regional park within the Berryessa and Alum Rock Planning Areas.

The study was developed under the guidance of the County Parks and Recreation Department and with the cooperative input and support of the Santa Clara Valley Water District (S.C.V.W.D.), East Side Union High School and Berryessa Union School Districts; and the City of San Jose.

As part of the planning process, citizen meetings set goals and objectives for the Park as follows:

- Goals:
- Benefit the daily life-style of the users
  - Immediate accessibility to a regional park
  - Bring together the involved public agencies in a single purpose
- Objectives:
- Citizen involvement and participation
  - Preservation of the existing natural Creek environment
  - Public access to the Creek

In 1975, the Board of Supervisors allocated 3.5 million dollars from a Trust Fund from a 1972 Charter Amendment including land acquisition for Penitencia Creek. In the spring of 1976, the firm of Royston, Hanamoto, Beck & Abey was retained by the County Board of Supervisors as design consultants to conduct a study and prepare the Master Plan.

- Create a linear park system inter-connecting existing public facilities and lands
- Create a secondary trail system connecting adjacent public facilities
- Rehabilitate disturbed areas
- Consideration of adjoining land-owners

Regionally, Penitencia Creek is located in the northeasterly section of Santa Clara County. The Creek flows westerly from an elevation of 2,600 feet in the foothills of the Diablo Range, east of Alum Rock Park to an elevation of 52 feet at its confluence with Coyote Creek near Berryessa Road. The existing public lands which border on the Creek or lie within its immediate influence area include seven school sites of some 225 acres, 63 acres of Santa Clara Valley Water District lands; and 770 acres of land owned by the City of San Jose.

The predominant natural characteristic of Penitencia Creek, within the design area, is its natural alignment and picturesque profile in a narrow green swath lined by Alders, Eucalyptus, Sycamores, orchard trees and pines. Agricultural use adjacent to the Creek typically reaches within 10 feet of the Creek's bank allowing natural growth to the stream.

Floodplains designated by the Santa Clara Valley Water District anticipate the 100 year flood and new residential construction is designed with the "Flood Control Program Guidelines."

Land use east of King Road is predominately residential and the west side is zoned light industrial.

Between Noble Avenue and Piedmont Road, there are five percolation ponds, devoid of natural amenities. Between Piedmont Road and Capitol Avenue, there are four school sites and several large parcels of agricultural land. Below Capitol Avenue, the narrow channel has numerous roadway crossings, and levees overgrown by an impenetrable undergrowth of black berries.

The concept for this Park development is designed into three zones: A Natural Zone, very low intensity development, adjacent to the Creek, limited to trail construction, minor grading and planting. A Transition Zone of lakes, major grading, trees and natural grasses abutting the natural area. An Activity Zone furthest from the Creek to include the major grading, lakes, meadow and lawn planting; major tree planting and/or parking areas, restrooms, interpretive displays, etc.

The "chain-of-lakes" concept will be developed by reshaping the existing percolation ponds and Piedmont Road; by eliminating the linear percolation ponds; and by purchase of lands in large enough parcels so that lakes could be developed for recreational purposes as well as fulfill future Water District percolation requirements.

The Master Plan for Penitencia Creek Park has two general functions: As a planning document to serve as a guide for future improvements along Penitencia Creek, and as a focus for developing joint-use agreements for lands held by the various agencies.

Utilizing the park concept, the Master Plan recommends a park, simulating the natural California landscape, using the Creek as its spine. The chain-of-lakes, totaling about 21 acres, will be developed for aquifer recharge facilities where soils permit and for recreational uses such as model boating, fishing, bird watching and waterside picnicking.

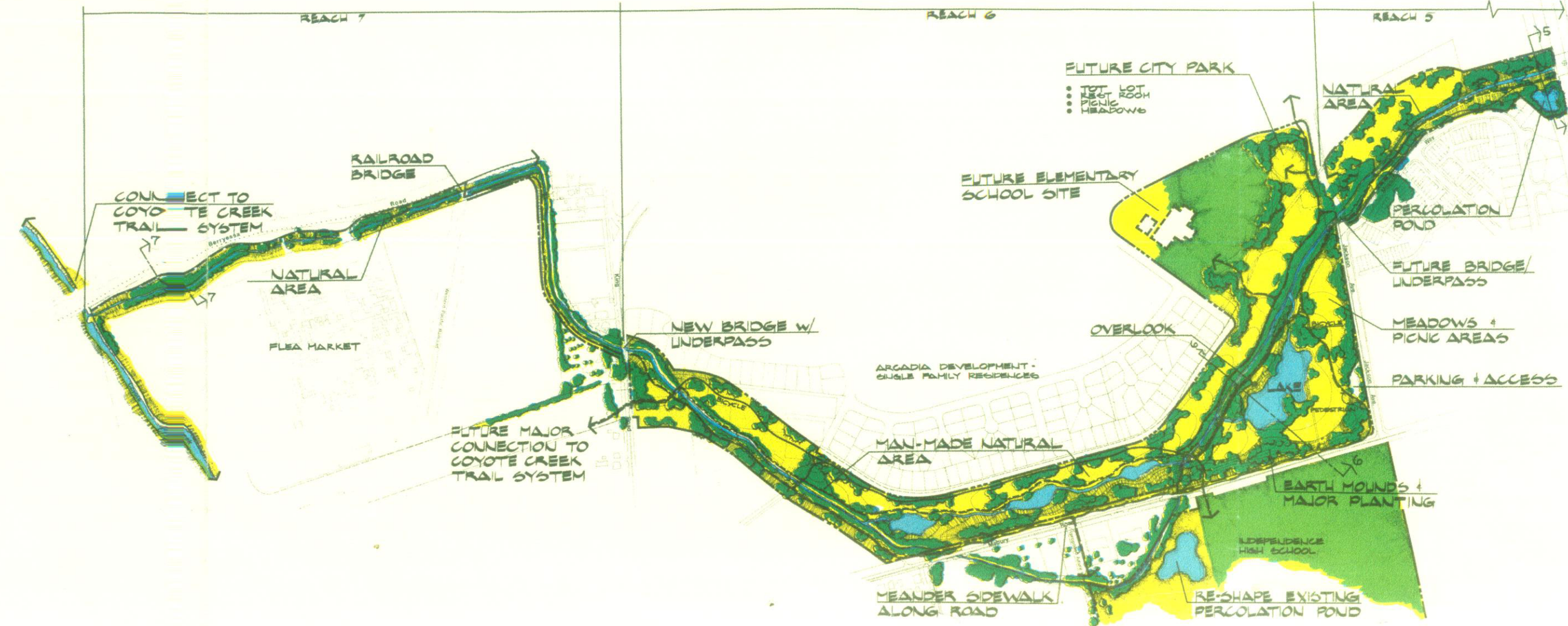
The Park Plan incorporates picnic areas, several types and levels of ecological study areas, a native plant arboretum and interpretive facility; and 12 miles of bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian trails.

Substantial grading, designed to balance cut and fill, is proposed to simulate the rolling topography of the surrounding foothills, to create intimate usable outdoor spaces, and to provide buffers from surrounding urban influences. The pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian trail experiences are the principal recreation facility of Penitencia Creek Park. The trails will maximize the natural Creek and lake experience, provide a linear recreation system and connections to other public lands and facilities.

Where feasible, separate pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian trails will be constructed as unobtrusive as possible to avoid steep grades and with minimal disturbance to the land.

Plant material, sizes, shapes, color, texture and seasonal variation provide contrast, buffers; areas of activity and continuation of the existing Creek environment. Fruit trees will provide a link to the recent history of the valley and the introduction of freshwater marshes, the re-establishment of Creek and lakeside understorey planting will encourage wildlife habitats.

The Master Plan design recognizes that planting of the creekside, the addition of freshwater marshes and California plant communities and the incorporation of extensive tree masses will establish a park of significant regional and environmental quality for this local Santa Clara County Region.



In conclusion, Penitencia Creek is an irreplaceable natural resource contributing to the enrichment of the urban environment. The visual analysis, site reconnaissance, public meetings, citizens goals and objectives; the history and the final Master Plan exhibits the following recommendations:

- Penitencia Creek Park is a significant natural asset and should be sensitively developed to begin capturing intrinsic values associated with natural water courses.
- Recognize the importance and influence of existing and future development adjacent to the Creek which require evaluation and recommendations to improve the Creek experience.
- Recognize the optimum potential of the existing and proposed lakes as a recreation resource.
- Continue a mutually beneficial relationship between the various agencies and the County of Santa Clara, endeavoring to develop programs for roadway and creek beautification.
- Continue the essential citizen involvement and staff review of flood control and development projects, relating to the Penitencia Creek system, in order to continue to monitor their goals and objectives.
- Recognize the flood control measures as essential to flood water containment, water transportation, and park development. The level of protection afforded by their inherent design should be determined according to the needs and desires of the community.
- Establish a grounds maintenance program as a necessary responsibility accompanying new Park development. The initial three years of plant establishment are critical, and it is recommended that sufficient funds be allocated by maintenance departments.
- Continue participation by scientific and educational groups in monitoring the rehabilitation progress and evaluating project effectiveness.
- With the various agencies, whose lands have been incorporated within the Park, develop joint-use agreements and specific guidelines for future development, goals for financial participation; and a time-frame requirement. Coordinate development as well as analyze the changing user needs and desires.

# Master Plan Penitencia Creek Park

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Park and Recreation Department

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Scale in feet  
0 100 300 500

NORTH

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