

Sugarloaf Mountain Master Plan

January 2016

Introduction

The acquisition of Sugarloaf Mountain has been a priority for the City since the adoption of the City's General Plan in 1986. The City partnered with the State Parks & Recreation Department, the Nevada County Land Trust (now named Bear Yuba Land Trust and referred to as such throughout the rest of this document), the County of Nevada and Friends of Sugarloaf to make the vision of opening this property to the public as open space a reality. The City acquired the Sugarloaf Mountain property in January 2011. The City has taken great strides to be good stewards of the open space parcels they own. This plan will provide guidelines and policies to continue this stewardship.

Vision Statement

Sugarloaf Mountain has always been an iconic backdrop to Nevada City. The City maintains a vision of preserving the natural appearance of the mountain from the surrounding area; within and from the mountain to encourage the appreciation of the open space and the City. The City hopes to preserve the environmental attributes of the space by reducing non-native plants, allowing native plants and wildlife to flourish on the current landform, and by protecting the biological integrity. Passive recreational opportunities will be encouraged. It will be accessible to the public for low-impact passive recreational activities.

Background Information

Sugarloaf Mountain is a 36 acre parcel located north of Highway 49 at 10730 Coyote St. (APN: 36-020-26). This parcel was acquired by the City of Nevada City in January 2011 with funding from the following sources:

State of California Parks & Recreation Department – Proposition 40 funding

County of Nevada – AB1600 funds

The Bear Yuba Land Trust – loan to cover balance of purchase until County AB1600 funds were available

Friends of Sugarloaf

Appendix A is a map of the Sugarloaf Mountain parcel.

There are some use restrictions on the property due to the funds used to purchase the property. The intent of the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Prop. 40) is to acquire and develop parks and recreational areas for the purpose of land, air, and water conservation programs. It is also intended to acquire, restore, preserve and interpret California historical and cultural resources. The purpose of County AB1600 funds are to assist in meeting the park and recreation needs of Nevada County residents.

This Plan takes these restrictions and intended purposes into consideration. The City does not intend to use the property for purposes that would be in conflict with these restrictions.

In addition, the City is in the process of annexing Sugarloaf Mountain into the City. Through this process the entire 36 acre property will be zoned Open Space. The City's Municipal Code states the following:

“The purpose of Open Spaces is to provide for and encourage the creation and permanent maintenance of open space, both natural and landscaped for the purposes of maintaining and enhancing aesthetics, recreational opportunities, resource management, public health and safety, and mitigation of development.”

Principal permitted uses, accessory uses and conditional uses are included in the zoning code. Appendix B provides a full Chapter 17.56 of the Municipal Code.

Sugarloaf Mountain is mentioned several times in the City's General Plan – adopted March 24, 1986 in reference to conservation, land use and scenic resources. This confirms the importance of this property to the citizens of Nevada City. Therefore, the care and decisions regarding this property shall be well thought out.

Historical Information

Uses of Sugarloaf Mountain prior to the gold rush days are largely unknown as members of the Nisenan Nevada City Rancheria tribe shared their history from generation to generation in the form of oral stories – not written. Shelly Covert, Secretary of the Tribal Council of the Nevada City Rancheria, shared the following

bits of history with the Recreation Committee (August 26, 2015 meeting) as told to her by her grandfather.

- The top of Sugarloaf Mountain was round before it had been “cut” off.
- The top of the mountain was used for communicating with other villages by sending up smoke signals. This was possible because there is a line of site to other hills in the area.
- There was a battle with their “Camptonville Cousins” at this location.
- They called this mountain Koo’ Lăŭ.

During the gold rush days the mountain received its name because it resembled a loaf of coarse brown sugar, as it was processed and sold during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Sugarloaf Mountain was largely used as a landmark during the gold rush era as noted in various diaries, such as these from Harry L. Wells (1880, History of Nevada County)

“Lying north of Nevada City and on the opposite (side) of Sugarloaf is Selby Flat, a place that was a quiet village...”

“Tomlinson...owned some water power near Sugarloaf that he had used in elevation and washing dirt...”

Commercial Uses

Although the property has been logged many times since the area was settled, the Cooper Toll Road and a water delivery ditch are the only commercial uses that may have occurred on this property.

Recreation Uses

Sugarloaf Mountain was used for celebratory announcements. In 1876 a cannon was fired from the summit of Sugarloaf to welcome the train which arrived on newly constructed rail from Colfax; through Grass Valley and into Nevada City.

On the 4th of July it was common to shoot guns or explode dynamite atop Sugarloaf Mountain.

More information about the history of Sugarloaf Mountain can be found in Appendix C: *Sugar Loaf Nevada City’s Promontory and the Adjoining Manzanita Diggins* Compiled by Robert M. Wyckoff, MA

Recent History

A timeline of events taking place to encourage and ensure the City's acquisition of Sugarloaf Mountain was provided by the Friends of Sugarloaf and is available in Appendix D.

Purpose

This Master Plan is intended to serve as a consensus-building document expressing general guidelines for amenities, programs, and management practices of the Sugarloaf Mountain property. Projects and development would be dependent upon availability of funding and completion of detailed environmental impact studies and public review. It is intended to suggest ways of precluding development that is inconsistent with the Vision for the property.

Current Property Uses and Development

There are trails on the property which have existed for many years by non-permitted, non-structured users. Since Sugarloaf Mountain is public property, these trails are open for the public to use.

A maintenance and emergency road begins at Coyote St. (see Appendix E: Easement Deed) and twists around the property to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain. This maintenance drive also serves as a walking trail to access the top of the property.

Three (3) benches have been approved for placement on the property through the process of the City's "Policy for Placement of Items in City Parks and Open Space". Those three benches are in place at the top of Sugarloaf Mountain and are used for picnicking and enjoying the surrounding views.

No other development is in process or has been approved at this time.

Possible Future Property Uses and Development

The following suggestions are ideas that are proposed for the property, but would need sufficient funding, completion of detailed environmental impact studies and public review before proceeding with any projects or development mentioned herein.

Trails

Appendix F shows potential trails that the property could connect to:

- The Hirschman Trail to the west (red)
- The trail at Tobiassen Park to the west (purple)
- The NID trails along their ditches to the northwest (green)
- The conceptual County Trail Plan trail to the south and east (pink)

Sugarloaf Mountain could serve as an eventual side hike, if not an important connector of a much longer trail system. The Western Nevada County Non-Motorized Recreational Trails Master Plan was adopted September 21, 2010 by the Board of Supervisors. The Master Trails Plan highlights the Sugarloaf Mountain area as a potential regional trail connection between Nevada City and Pioneer Trail. Pioneer Trail begins at the Five-Mile House Restaurant on Highway 20 and connects to Eastern Nevada County. Pioneer Trail is heavily used by hikers, bikers and equestrians. This connection would create optimum use of trails on Sugarloaf Mountain.

The City conducted a workshop to receive public input for this Master Plan. The top priority that came out of that workshop was that Sugarloaf Mountain provide connectivity to town, bike lanes, sidewalks or other trails. Another top priority was mountain bike trails. However, there was some concern about a trail shared by mountain bikers and hikers. The concern with a shared trail is the difference in speed between the two user groups. Development of more than one trail could interfere with other recommended policies included in this Master Plan that embrace the efforts of being “light on the land”. It is recommended that rather than constructing multiple trails on the property, any trail development should adopt the following policies to allow for a shared trail as well as good trail management.

The following policies are recommended in relation to any trail construction:

1. All trail development should be presented to the public for review.
2. Environmental review should be completed on any trail project.
3. Trails shall be constructed at no more than 4 feet wide. Narrow, winding trails, like narrow, winding roads, encourage slower travel speeds.

4. Trails should be constructed at a minimal slope to discourage excessive speeds by bikers. A 5% slope (5 foot drop per 100 feet of trail) is recommended and all slopes should be below 20%.
5. The brush and tree cover along the trail route should be managed so that the vegetation provides a visual and physical barrier to cutting switchbacks, creating new trail routes, etc. and the trail clearing should be used to both provide a visual barrier ahead, so that excessive speeds are discouraged, as well as taking efforts to clear specific areas to provide a view of the trail ahead for the safety of the user but not encourage faster speeds.
6. Use reverse grades throughout the trail route (ie: downhill trail should reverse and become an uphill trail for 20 to 35 feet before returning to the downhill). This will assist with draining the trail and the uphill sections of trail will moderate speed of trail users.
7. To minimize development and disturbance to the property there should not be separate trails for bikers & hikers.
8. Signs at trailheads with reminders about trail etiquette.
9. Mile markers shall be placed on trails.
10. Accessibility to the property should be improved by creating parking spaces.
11. The steep slope of the property will most likely not allow for trails that would meet ADA requirements. However, every effort should be made to design trails that can be used by as many people as possible.
12. Any new trails that are considered should integrate with existing or future regional non-motorized trails. (See Appendix F)
13. Trails should be discrete, cleverly designed and not scar the mountain as it is viewed from town.
14. Only trails for pedestrians and bikers should be constructed. Equestrian and trails for motorized vehicles are not appropriate for this property.
15. Existing trails should be mapped with attempts made to incorporate those trails into new trail development.

It is common during trail development to include directional and interpretive signs. Those signs would be reviewed with the proposal of a trail development project. City Council will have final approval on all sign design and language as described in the Policy for Placement of Items in City Parks & Open Space.

Parking

Currently there is not a safe place for the public to park when going onto the Sugarloaf Mountain property. There are several options for development of parking spaces. It is recommended that the parking area be driven by a trail project, so that parking is in a location that allows for the best access to the trail.

A suggestion that was made at the public workshop on December 8, 2015 was that the City utilize the parking lot of the United States Forest Service (USFS). This would require permission and possible easements from the USFS and the property owners. This may be worth investigating if a proposed trail aligns with this parking lot.

Bathrooms

The second highest priority that evolved from the December 2015 Workshop was that there should be no bathrooms (or picnic tables) placed on Sugarloaf Mountain. The City created this same policy for the Hirschman's Pond property. City human and financial resources are minimal and the addition of bathrooms on this or other City Open Space parcels would cause additional strain on those limited resources.

The disadvantage to not providing bathrooms is that the public may go "off trail" and create their own facilities.

It is recommended that the City not construct bathrooms on this property. If in the future, it becomes more desirable to provide such facilities, it is recommended that bathrooms only be constructed if there is a way to include the facility in a trail adoption program or other similar program to insure that maintenance and upkeep meet the high standards that are expected from our community. If constructed, bathrooms should be located near a road or trailhead, not placed anywhere near the top of the mountain or visible from a distance. Bathrooms should only be installed if necessary and in association with a trail.

Rules and Regulations

The following rules and regulations are currently posted on the Sugarloaf property.

1. Alcohol not allowed.
2. Property is closed dusk to dawn.
3. Camping is not allowed.
4. No Smoking.
5. Pack it in – pack it out.
6. Motorized vehicles are prohibited.
7. Due to fire danger campfires are not allowed.
8. No Firearms.
9. Dogs must be on a leash.

It is recommend that the Sugarloaf Mountain property be added to ordinance 12.12.070 (Appendix G)

At the December 2015 Workshop, the following suggestions were made as potential rules for the property and are not already posted rules or included in ordinance 12.12.070.

No bicycles: Refer to the Trails section on page 5.

Provide bags for dog clean up: The City has made a practice of providing dog bags in City parks and on trails.

No lights: Refer to policy #8 in the Goals and Policies Section on page 9.

NO rentals for special events: Refer to policy #4 in the Goals and Policies Section on page 9.

No parking in E. Broad/N. Pine neighborhood: It is unclear how this would be enforced. If any trails are developed on the property, trail users should be encouraged to park in a more appropriate location.

Abide by city/county noise ordinances: The Sugarloaf Mountain property is being

annexed into City limits. All City ordinances will be enforced. In the case of noise ordinance, the City's code is more restrictive than the county's. No special events will be permitted on the property, so no amplified music or noise should take place. No maintenance work on the property shall begin prior to 7:00 a.m. and will end before sunset.

Goals and Policies

The City's General Plan states, "A goal of the City is to preserve its strong sense of entry and the sense of a distinct city surrounded by green, wooded hills. A joint city-county effort should be made to preserve the forested part of Nevada City's historic setting." It also states that the City should "Preserve the existing impression of a historic town surrounded by open forest... [and] preserve and enhance the important natural features, e.g., Sugarloaf..." In addition at the December 2015 Workshop, a top priority was that there be minimal uses and minimal impacts.

The following policies will help to insure that Sugarloaf Mountain is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

1. Avoid any land disturbance such as major grading and/or tree removal which would cause visible scars. (City's General Plan 1985; pg. 22)
2. Any tree removal shall adhere to the City's tree removal policies. The City desires to preserve the landscape of recent history and not the historic landscape from the gold rush era, when the property was generally bare of vegetation from logging.
3. Prevent soil erosion and hillside scarring through control of grading, restrictions on removal of vegetation, and limitation of development of steep slopes. (City's General Plan 1985; pg. 33)
4. Sugarloaf Mountain shall be a space for passive recreational opportunities for current and future residents and visitors. To maintain the integrity of the peaceful open space, the City will not rent the property for special events of any size.
5. The City will encourage schools and other groups to use City open spaces for environmental and historical education.

6. The City will partner with non-profit organizations for development of recreational opportunities, ongoing fire control management of the property and educational programs.
7. No historical artifacts, art work, statues, etc. shall be placed on the property to ensure that the green spaces are protected and there is minimal impact to the property.
8. The property is closed from 30 minutes after sunset to sunrise. Therefore no lighting should be placed on the property.

Management Practices

The City adopted a Hazardous Fuels Reduction Plan on October 28, 2015. (Appendix H) The plan identifies the types of fire fuels that should be removed from the property and how to remove them to reduce the risk of wildfire. The benefits of reducing hazardous fuels include:

1. Reduction of wildfire risk
2. Opening up the landscape for better views
3. Invasive, non-native plants prevent native plants from being established on the site
4. Native plants provide food and shelter for native wildlife; non-native plants may exclude plants that provide valuable food and shelter
5. Invasive, non-native plants are costly to maintain as they aggressively invade public use areas (trails, parking areas, gathering areas, etc.)