

# Recreation Element

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE ELEMENT***

The recreational amenities of Ojai Valley have been long valued by local residents and visitors alike. The natural composition of the Ojai Valley facilitates a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities and contributes to the overall beauty of the City and its quality of life. Numerous recreational facilities are available. They range from hiking and horseback riding to tennis and golf.

The amount, distribution, and accessibility of recreational land within a community are important in the development of an adequate park and recreation system. An overall recreation system must be developed with facilities that will meet the diverse needs of all residents. By providing regional and community parks, trails, and other recreational amenities, open recreational spaces contribute to the health and well being of local residents.

The Recreation Element of the Ojai General Plan is a planning tool prepared to meet the recreational needs of the community. These needs have been identified by City staff, the Ojai Parks and Recreation Commission and active community leaders and citizens. The Ojai Parks and Recreation Commission serves the community by voicing the recreational needs of the community and formulating plans, programs and other methods by which to improve the recreational opportunities available to residents. The commission's participation in formulation of this Element reflects future recreational needs and plans of Ojai. The Element is composed of the following planning components:

- o Definitions and categories of recreational requirements and opportunities;
- o Inventory of existing facilities (included in the Ojai MEA);
- o Identification of recreational issues and needs;
- o Goals and Policies to guide recreational activities and development;
- o Implementing Programs to attain defined Goals and Policies;

### ***ASSUMPTIONS/DEFINITIONS***

Base data for the Recreation Element was derived from the Master Environmental Assessment (MEA) Recreation Section. The MEA section provides a complete recreation facilities inventory based on research of existing and proposed recreation

# Recreation Element

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facilities in the Ojai Sphere of Influence (see MEA "Recreational Facilities Matrix"). The MEA Recreation section was utilized to identify recreational issues and needs of the Ojai community. The Goals, Policies, and Programs of this Element were then created in response to the identified issues.

Definitions and examples are provided below as a reference to categorization of, and standards, for recreational facilities in this General Plan Element.

## **Recreation**

Recreation may be defined as the refreshment of one's mind or body through activity that amuses or stimulates.

## **Park**

An area of land set aside for public recreational use is the common understanding of "Park". Two categories of parks discussed in this General Plan include:

### **Regional/County Parks**

These parks include regional facilities operated by the County of Ventura. They attract people from a wide range of age and interest. Examples of County parks in Ojai's Planning Area include Soule Park and Camp Comfort. These widely utilized facilities provide recreational opportunities to Ojai Valley and Ventura County residents.

### **Local/Community Parks**

Local/community parks generally provide facilities to serve the daily needs of a defined neighborhood or community. Facilities may include: open areas for passive recreation; active sport areas, e.g., baseball and court games; and neighborhood activity centers. A local park may be a small neighborhood park (less than 5 acres) such as Daly Park or a larger city park such as Sarzotti Park or Libbey Park and it may have specialized facilities used for community recreation needs.

## **Trails**

Trails are defined in this Element as paths designed to accommodate hiking, horseback riding and bicycling through an area and they may or may not be removed from vehicular traffic.

Trails are categorized in this Element according to function. Types of trails discussed in this General Plan include:

# Recreation Element

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- o Hiking
- o Equestrian
- o Bicycling

In some cases one trail will serve two functions as in the case of a hiking/equestrian trail. These trails may also be used by off-road (mountain) bicycles. Bicycle routes and some equestrian trails may exist on or adjacent to streets; hiking trails occur primarily in the nearby hills of Ojai or the back country of Los Padres National Forest to the north.

Existing and proposed trails, as identified on the Master Plan of Trails of the Recreation Element, are also classified according to purpose. "Primary Trails" are those routes that area portion of a regional system. They are used mostly for recreation but may be used for commuting purposes to locations outside the city. "Secondary Trails" are those located within the city that primarily serve local needs.

## Specialized Facilities

These facilities provide specific recreational opportunities for local or regional use. They usually have an individual element of attraction. The facility may exist alone or be within a park, school, or other larger facility, and may be privately or publicly owned and operated. Examples include:

- o Arts, Museums, and Cultural Centers
- o Auditoriums/Amphitheaters
- o Botanical Gardens/Nature Center
- o Campgrounds
- o Equestrian Centers
- o Festival Grounds
- o Golf Courses
- o School Playing Fields
- o Vista Points/Scenic Areas

# Recreation Element

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- o Water Activity Areas (e.g. fishing, swimming, boating)

## Preserves

An area of land that is highly valued for its natural condition, unique scenic/aesthetic resources, biological resources, geologic phenomena or cultural significance may be classified or considered for designation as a Preserve. It is generally protected in its natural state from extensive urban development in order to maintain or enhance the aesthetic, natural quality of an area. An example of an existing Preserve is the Los Padres National Forest located to the north of Ojai.

## ***LEGAL AUTHORITY***

This Element of the General Plan is not mandated by State planning legislation. Instead, the subject of parks and recreation is included as an integral component of two other Elements, namely, Land Use and Open Space. Section 65302(a) of the Government Code of the State of California stipulates that the General Plan shall include:

"A land use element which designates the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the land for housing, business, industry, open space, including agriculture, natural resources recreation, and enjoyment of scenic beauty, education,..."

and Section 65560 states that all cities and counties in California must adopt...

"A local open space plan for the comprehensive and long range presentation and conservation of open space land within its jurisdiction...including, but to, areas of outstanding, scenic, historical and cultural value, areas particularly suited for park and recreation purposes, including access to lakeshores, beaches, and rivers and streams, trails, and scenic highway corridors."

Recognizing the important functions served by parks and recreation facilities in the Ojai community, the City of Ojai has chosen to expand this subject into a separate General Plan Element. This approach is permitted by Section 65303 of the California Government Code which states the following:

"...general plans may include the following element or any part or phase thereof:

- (a) A recreation element showing a comprehensive system of areas and public sites for recreation, including the following, and, when practicable, their location and proposed development:

## Recreation Element



- (1) natural reservations
- (2) parks
- (3) parkways
- (4) beaches
- (5) playgrounds
- (6) other recreation areas."

Although this Element of the General Plan is not mandated, community certification for all federal and most State open space and conservation funding programs requires the preparation of a Parks and Recreation Element.

The Index Matrix within the Introduction Section of this General Plan provides an index/reference of State General Plan requirements and under which sections of the Ojai General Plan the State requirement is fulfilled.

# Recreation Element

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## ISSUES AND NEEDS

### OVERVIEW

Recreational opportunities in Ojai are numerous. The area is known for its scenic beauty, natural resources and recreational amenities. Types of facilities and activities are defined and categorized in the above paragraphs for reference. An inventory of existing recreational facilities is provided on Exhibit REC-1 of the City of Ojai MEA. The Recreation Element Map further illustrates types and locations of existing and proposed facilities; the Master Plan of Trails depicts existing and proposed bicycle, equestrian and hiking trails.

The General Plan inventory, analysis, and Goals, Policies, and Programs of recreation facilities is divided into four issue areas. General recreation issues and the four areas are discussed in following pages.

### GENERAL

Issues regarding the overall recreation services and facilities in Ojai were raised based upon research and analysis of existing conditions. The primary recreation issues in the community are briefly listed below:

- Continuation and enhancement of coordination between the City, County and other involved recreational agencies and organizations and their facilities
- Recreation's role related to tourism in Ojai
- Optimum utilization by the City of the proceeds of the Parkland Recreation Tax in improving Ojai's recreation system
- Funding of the maintenance of all existing and future recreational facilities

### PARKS

Numerous parks exist in the Ojai area. These parks consist of public and private facilities that serve local residents and visitors. The parks are generally sufficient to serve existing demands in the Valley.

Park land in the City of Ojai is considered sufficient by standard per capita requirements. However, parks in Ojai are utilized by many non-city residents and by visitors, thus the parks serve more than local residents.

## Recreation Element

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City parks facilities in Ojai are generally considered less than adequate in size and scope to serve near future demands due to their wide usage by local and non-local people. A need has been identified by the community to expand the City's local/community park system. There have been no scheduled major additions to existing city parks facilities in the recent past.

Major issues related to parks in Ojai include:

- o Optimum utilization and park development of existing park areas
- o Funding the maintenance, enhancement, and expansion of existing and future city park areas
- o Identification of potential new park sites and the retainment of that land for future potential park and recreational uses

### ***TRAILS***

The three types of trails in Ojai (bicycle, equestrian, hiking) are separate in purpose but often overlap in use (i.e., a hiking/equestrian trail in Los Padres National Forest). As such many interrelated issues have been raised. Trails issues identified below pertain generally to all trails in the Ojai Planning Area. Issues relating to specific bicycle, equestrian, or hiking trails are indicated by that specific trail in parenthesis.

- o Formal General Plan designations of all trail systems
- o Proper directional signing and marking of established trails
- o Connection of all "Primary" Trails to regional trail systems
- o Safety in design and use of trails
- o Establishment of trail heads and/or staging areas and parking areas (hiking and equestrian)
- o Education program to inform the public of opportunities, existence and location of trails
- o Establishment of a cross-town connector (equestrian)

# Recreation Element

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## ***SPECIALIZED FACILITIES***

Numerous recreational and cultural opportunities exist in Ojai. Specific programs within the City Recreation Department are based in a variety of facilities. Activities are provided from various locations in parks and facilities. The MEA Recreation Facilities Matrix provides an index of all recreation activities in Ojai and lists the activity facilities available in each park or recreation area (see MEA Recreation section).

Many participants in City recreation programs are non-City residents (25% of participants are Ojai City residents). The City Recreation Department programs are popular and are often full or over capacity. Cultural programs are also popular and in need of additional facilities in which to be conducted. The Recreation Department uses schools and other facilities to conduct programs when parkland is not available or appropriate. The City has identified a need to expand the variety of recreational and cultural facilities and programs to satisfy these demands.

County parks are appropriate for use in City programs but often are underutilized. Joint use of facilities could be coordinated with City recreation systems to enable optimum use of facilities. For example a reservation system could be established for use of county parks or schools by City recreation programs. In this way, an equitable system could be established, balancing the provision and use of the area's recreation facilities between the County, City, and other involved parties as appropriate.

The major issues and needs relating to specialized facilities include:

- o Additional lighted ball fields
- o More efficient/extensive use of school facilities for recreational and cultural arts programs
- o Additional recreation classes and organized programs
- o Additional fine arts and other cultural programs and activities
- o Utilization of all existing facilities within the community to the optimum extent feasible and desirable
- o Vista Points and designation of Scenic Areas
- o Child-care integration with Recreation Department Program (i.e., babysitting service for children whose parents participate in recreation programs)

## Recreation Element

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- o Additional water sports facility (long-term, e.g., pool)
- o A new equestrian center (long-term)
- o Performing Arts Center with Civic Auditorium, Gallery (long-term)

### ***PRESERVES***

Los Padres National Forest provides protected, recreational open space for the area. Recreation issues of concern to the Forest Service and other needs regarding preserves include:

- o Coordination between City and Forest Service personnel in planning and operation efforts
- o Access from urban areas (northern city boundary) to National Forest land and facilities (including acquisition of rights-of-way through private property to National Forest land)
- o Directional and informational signing, parking, and formal establishment of "trail heads" at National Forest trails entrances
- o Establishment of new trails in National Forest
- o Establishment of new preserves and related facilities in other areas (such as to the south of the City) where potential biological, aesthetic or other recreational or open space values have been identified
- o Acquisition of land for new preserves outside established parkland or preserve area
- o Public education and awareness of the long-term importance of "Preserves"

# Recreation Element

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## GOALS, POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS

### **INTRODUCTION**

This section of the Recreation Element sets forth Goals, Policies, and Programs. These were formulated from analysis of the Element's Issues and Needs section. Policies and Programs were created to implement each Goal. The goals, Policies, and Programs are presented in a format to enable the reader to clearly understand how each Goal is to be realized. Overall Recreation Goals are stated first, followed by Goals for each recreation category.

### **GENERAL**

**IT SHALL BE THE OVERALL GOAL OF THE CITY OF OJAI TO ADEQUATELY PROVIDE FOR THE RECREATIONAL NEEDS OF OJAI VALLEY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.**

**Policy:** The City shall facilitate communication and coordination between recreation agencies and organizations to optimize the area's recreational opportunities.

**Program:** The City shall establish a staff level recreation committee. Representatives of Federal, State and County agencies will be invited to attend.

**Program:** The City shall require non-City residents to pay a proportional share of administrative and park maintenance costs. This will allow them the use of City facilities and programs until a Special District is created.

**Policy:** The City shall support and accommodate, where appropriate, the recreation related tourist industry in Ojai as consistent with environmental and quality of life standards in Ojai to the extent that tourism does not compromise other General Plan goals.

**Program:** A comprehensive signage program to orient the visitor to all recreational areas and facilities shall be implemented. These signs will be an extension of existing directional signs.

**Program:** The Ojai visitors information center which is located at the Chamber of Commerce Office shall continue to be used to assist visitor's use in discovering recreation opportunities in the area by providing literature and direction/information assistance.

## Recreation Element

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**Policy:** The City shall actively pursue methods to improve and expand existing recreational facilities in Ojai and the Ojai Valley.

**Program:** Park and Recreation Tax proceeds shall be utilized to the maximum extent feasible to improve and expand upon parks and recreational facilities.

**Program:** The City shall encourage Ventura County, school districts and other public agencies and private interests to combine efforts for recreation facilities' improvements to adequately serve the recreational needs of all residents of the Ojai Valley.

**Program:** The City shall request that the County improve and maintain regional park facilities in the Ojai Valley. Further, the City shall request that the County recognize that regional recreational facilities in the Ojai Valley contribute to the overall economic vitality for the community. In making this contribution they need not be fiscally self-sufficient.

### **PARKS**

#### **THE CITY OF OJAI SHALL SUPPORT METHODS TO OBTAIN AN EXCEPTIONAL PARKS SYSTEM IN OJAI TO SERVE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS OF THE OJAI VALLEY.**

**Policy:** The City shall work in coordination with the County of Ventura and other agencies and interests to optimize the use of all County parks and to balance the use of County and City parks.

**Program:** The City shall encourage the County and other public agencies to formulate a Park-Sharing Agreement regarding the proportionate provision and use of parks and their services. The Agreement will address park maintenance responsibilities in Ojai and its vicinity.

**Policy:** The City shall maximize uses within all existing parks in the area to their fullest, and then improve and expand upon existing City parkland to meet the growing recreational demands of the City.

**Program:** The City shall explore and pursue the utilization of park in-lieu-fees to enhance and expand upon existing City park facilities.

**Program:** Park Master Plans for Libbey Park and Sarzotti Park shall be prepared and/or updated to reflect ultimate development.

## Recreation Element

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**Program:** An overall Parks Maintenance Plan shall be formulated to provide funding for the maintenance of all existing and future City parks areas.

**Program:** The following improvements to Libbey Park shall be pursued, incorporated into the Master Plan, and implemented when appropriate and feasible:

- o Pro-shop at lower courts (to sell sporting goods and schedule court use and supervision)
- o Stairs from upper parking lot to lower courts (currently a potential danger area)
- o Additional tennis courts next to lower courts



**Program:** The following improvements to Sarzotti Park shall be incorporated into the Master Plan, pursued and implemented when appropriate and feasible:

- o Sidewalk lighting
- o Combination maintenance/store/restroom building
- o Redevelopment of ballfield #3 into multi-use social area with small stage, additional trees, benches, etc.

**Policy:** In the long-term planning of City parkland, the City shall identify and retain open space for potential future parkland.

**Program:** In future General Plan Amendments the City shall identify and procure land for park use.

**Program:** The City shall encourage donations and dedications to the City of suitable park land within, and adjacent to, the community. Such dedication shall include maintenance responsibility agreements.

### **TRAILS**

**THE CITY OF OJAI SHALL SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE, SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE TRAIL SYSTEMS FOR USE BY LOCAL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE OJAI VALLEY.**

**Policy:** The City shall formally identify trails systems and bike routes in the



## **City's Sphere of Influence.**

**Program:** The General Plan shall officially designate on the Master Plan of Trails all Primary and Secondary trails and Bicycle Routes within the City Sphere of Influence.

**Program:** All established trails shall be identified via directional signage and/or bike lanes and trails signs. Upon implementation of future proposed trails, each trail/route shall be given appropriate signage for identification and access.

**Policy:** **The City shall continually work towards connecting all Primary Trails within the City Sphere of Influence to County Regional and National Forest trail systems.**

**Program:** Regarding implementation of the Master Plan of Trails, priority shall be given to Primary Trails and Bicycle Route that connect to Regional Trails.

**Program:** Trail heads and/or equestrian staging areas shall be established as depicted on the Master Plan of Trails. Priority shall be given to significant regional trail connections. Adequate parking should exist at all established trail heads and staging areas.

**Policy:** **Safety shall be a major consideration in location, access, design and use of trail systems throughout the community.**

**Program:** Safety standards shall be incorporated into all ultimate trail and bicycle route design.

**Program:** Safe street crossing provisions shall be incorporated into any trails/routes crossing Ojai Avenue and Highways 33 and 150. Formal "crossings" shall be established as depicted on the Master Plan of trails.

**Program:** The City shall explore alternate east-west routes for bicycle and equestrian trails in the downtown area of Ojai (i.e. alternate route from Ojai Avenue near the Arbolada).

**Program:** Trails/routes adjacent to or leading to schools and recreational facilities shall be located on streets considered the safest for children and shall be marked for safety.

**Program:** Proposed trails, especially bicycle routes, located adjacent to or

## Recreation Element

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leading to schools and recreation facilities shall be given high priority in implementation.

**Policy:** **The City shall strive to inform the public of recreational trail systems in the Ojai Valley.**

**Program:** Maps of existing trail systems and bicycle routes shall be printed, published and made available to the public.

**Program:** Information pertaining to the location, access, use and safety of trails shall be made available through the public school system, Recreation Department, Chamber of Commerce and regional agencies such as Ventura County General Services Agency/Parks Department and the National Forest Service.

**Policy:** **Trail systems for cross-town connections shall be given priority in implementation.**

**Program:** In establishing new trails and improving existing routes, priority shall be given to the funding and construction of a safe north-south route through the Ojai community.



### **SPECIALIZED FACILITIES**

**IT IS THE GOAL OF THE CITY OF OJAI TO PROVIDE AN ARRAY OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES IN THE OJAI COMMUNITY.**

**Policy:** **The City shall work with the County of Ventura and other involved agencies and interested parties to provide a balance of recreational services programs and facilities in the community.**

**Program:** The Ojai Parks and Recreation Commission shall review and update its long range plan of recreation services and facilities. This effort should be conducted in cooperation with Ventura County and other interests.

**Program:** The City shall develop an equitable Recreation Fee System for non-City residents participating in City Recreation programs. Funds shall be utilized by the City Recreation department for the provision and improvement of recreation services.



**Program:** Staff levels for the Recreation Department shall be periodically reviewed by the City Staff and City Council in order to facilitate the organization, conduct, and supervision of Recreation Programs. Funding shall be encouraged to be included in the Ojai Recreation long-range plan and the City should pursue support of other involved agencies.

**Policy:** The City shall attempt to utilize all existing facilities within the community to the maximum extent feasible and desirable.

**Program:** The City shall propose a coordinated work effort with the County to formulate an agreement pertaining to shared use of all facilities, incorporating an equitable fee system to allocate financial obligations for maintenance of facilities, and supervision of programs.

**Policy:** The City shall attempt to supplement existing recreation and cultural facilities by developing new facilities at the time they are considered needed and desired by the community.

**Program:** Pursuant to the Policy above, the following are identified as future short-term needs for additional recreational facilities:

- o Additional lighted ballfields
- o Additional recreation classes and organized programs
- o Child-care (or babysitting) facility/services integrated with recreational services
- o Vista Points and designation of scenic areas
- o New restrooms/storage building in Sarzotti Park
- o Improve lighting in Sarzotti Park

**Program:** Pursuant to the Policy above, the following are identified as future long-term needs for additional facilities:

- o A new multi-purpose youth facility center
- o New performing arts center/civic auditorium/public art gallery

## Recreation Element

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- Additional water sports activities (i.e., swimming, classes)
- A new equestrian center

### ***PRESERVES***

**THE CITY SHALL STRIVE TO ENHANCE AND PROVIDE ACCESS TO EXISTING PRESERVE LAND AND ESTABLISH NEW PRESERVES WHERE APPROPRIATE AND FEASIBLE.**

**Policy:** The City shall coordinate with the National Forest Service in planning access to and operation of the Los Padres National Forest (LPNF).

**Program:** The City shall provide support to the County and Forest Service to establish formal access from urban areas to LPNF. Access shall include directional signing, parking, trail heads and mechanisms to inform the public of recreational opportunities in the LPNF.

**Program:** The City shall encourage the Forest Service and Ventura County to combine efforts in the establishment of new trails and related facilities in the LPNF.

**Policy:** The City shall, on a long-term basis, strive to establish new preserves in areas with biological, aesthetic, recreation or other open space values.

**Program:** The General Plan Conservation and Open Space Elements shall be the basis for the identification of potential future preserves. Identified valuable areas shall be retained as open space for potential future preserve designation.

**Program:** Upon identification and conservation of preserve areas, the City shall work towards acquisition of the land by appropriate agencies and other entities.

**Program:** The City shall incorporate public awareness education into school and recreational programs in order to inform the public of the long-term importance and value of preserve lands and open space.