

GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS STATE PARK GENERAL PLAN COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 1 SUMMARY

California State Parks held its first virtual community workshop for Great Valley Grasslands State Park (GVGSP) on October 8, 2024, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The workshop began with welcome remarks and a brief PowerPoint presentation introducing the General Plan process and its importance. Following the presentation, attendees had the opportunity to provide input on four key topics: (1) Resource Management, (2) Interpretation and Education, (3) Recreation Facilities, and (4) the Unit Purpose and Vision. Input was collected using Slido, an interactive virtual platform that allows participants to submit questions, vote on polls, and provide real-time feedback during the workshop. The workshop provided Spanish translated materials and a live interpreter to ensure the region's Spanish-speaking community has access to information and updates about the General Plan. Both English and Spanish recordings of the meeting were posted on the project website.

This input will build upon previous feedback from stakeholders and inform the General Plan process. The following summary describes the feedback received during the workshop and will be used to ensure alignment with community and park visitor values. It includes an overview of the information shared during the presentation, the results from the discussion portion, and next steps.

1.1 Workshop Introduction

The workshop began with team introductions and a highlight of the importance of public input during the development of the General Plan. Participants were encouraged to engage throughout the workshop. Opening questions were provided via Slido to ensure participants were familiar with the virtual platform and to understand of who was in attendance.

Introduction questions included:

Slido Question #1

How long does it take you to get to GVGSP from your home?

- Less than 15 minutes – 0 votes
- 15-30 minutes – 2 vote
- 31-60 minutes – 1 vote
- 1-2 hours – 4 votes
- More than 2 hours – 6 votes
- I'm not sure – 0 votes

Slido Question #2

How often do you visit GVGSP?

- Never been – 1 vote
- Once a year or less – 4 votes
- 2-5 times a year – 5 votes
- 6-12 times a year – 2 votes
- More than once a month – 0 votes

Slido Question #3

In one or two words, what's your favorite outdoor recreation activity?

Top answers included hiking, paddling/kayaking, camping, and birding/spotting wildlife (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Favorite Recreation Activities



Source: Developed by Ascent in 2024 using Slido.

1.2 General Plan Overview

Following the opening Slido question and introductions, a brief PowerPoint presentation provided attendees with an overview of the GVGSP. It covered the park's current condition, including details on its size, location, and available recreational activities.

The presentation also highlighted that the General Plan is a long-range, policy-level document mandated by the Public Resources Code for each state park unit. It establishes goals and guidelines for current and future park facilities, offering recommendations for resource management, educational programs, partnerships, and recreational opportunities. Additionally, it addresses the need for increased access to parks and open spaces in the rapidly growing Central Valley.

1.3 Discussion

The discussion portion of the workshop focused on the following four key topics: 1) Resource Management, (2) Interpretation and Education, (3) Recreation Facilities, and (4) the Unit Purpose and Vision. Participants were encouraged to share their input using Slido

questions, the raise hand function, or the chat. The following sections provide an overview of each discussion topic.

Resource Management

The Resource Management section began with an overview of the current challenges at the park related to climate change and a brief summary of natural and cultural resources. The presentation specifically highlighted the anticipated effects of climate change on the park's environment and ecosystems. It also outlined the role of GVGSP in supporting biodiversity, particularly for special status species and migratory birds, as well as ongoing resource management projects such as floodplain restoration, cannabis remediation, and North Park planning. Finally, it emphasized the cultural significance of the region as the traditional homeland of the Northern Valley Yokuts, underscoring the importance of both natural and cultural resource management.

Resources management questions included:

Slido Question #4

What climate change impacts are you most concerned about?

- Heat waves and extreme heat
- Prolonged droughts
- Flooding
- Wind events and increased dust
- Impacts on wildlife and their habitats
- Desertification
- Wildfire risks

Slido Question #5

Which TWO of the following resource management opportunities do you consider most important?

Note: Slido ranks options by assigning more points to higher-ranked choices.

- River and Flood Restoration – 1.15
- Cultural Traditional Ecological Knowledge – 0.54
- Invasive Species Control – 0.46
- Sensitive Plant Community Preservation – 0.39
- Climate Adaptation and Greenhouse Gas Reduction – 0.31
- Cultural Resources Preservation – 0.15

Slido Question #6

What resource improvement opportunities would you like to see at Great Valley Grasslands? (e.g., cultural burning, vernal pool restoration, grassland restoration)

Summarized Responses:

- Ecosystem restoration
 - Floodplain restoration
 - Riparian corridor restoration
 - Vernal pool restoration
 - Grassland and wetland restoration
- Cultural resources
 - Incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)
 - Implementing cultural ecological management practices
- Ecological management
 - Invasive species management

Interpretation and Education

The workshop highlighted that there are limited interpretive and educational opportunities for visitors, presenting a significant opportunity to implement options that align with their interests. The General Plan will include guidelines for expanding interpretation and education in the park. It was emphasized that future opportunities will be shaped by feedback from park visitors and local communities. The following questions helped identify the interests and topics attendees would like to see at Great Valley Grasslands.

Interpretation and education questions included:

Slido Question #7

What types of events or activities would you like to see at the park? (select up to 3)

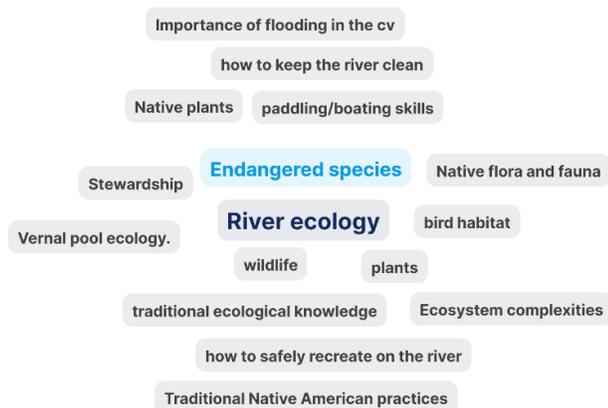
Note: Slido ranks options by assigning more points to higher-ranked choices.

- Guided nature walks – 1.33
- Cultural demonstrations by local California Native American tribes – 1.25
- Regular pop-up events at the park – 0.75
- Hands-on conservation workshops (e.g., habitat restoration) – 0.67
- Interactive exhibits on local flora and fauna – 0.67
- Environmental education classes – 0.67
- Seasonal wildlife watching events (e.g., bird migrations) – 0.5
- Storytelling sessions about the park's cultural heritage 0.17

Slido Question #8

What educational topics are you and your family most interested in learning about at Great Valley Grasslands? Top responses related to ecology (e.g., river ecology, vernal pool ecology, ecosystem complexities) and endangered species (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Educational Topics Attendees Would Like to See



Source: Developed by Ascent in 2024 using Slido.

Recreation and Park Facilities

An important component of GVGSP is its recreational facilities, and the workshop

provided an excellent opportunity to gather input on which amenities should be prioritized. Possible options to consider include a diverse range of facilities, such as hiking and biking trails, accessible paths, picnic areas of various sizes, camping facilities, a visitor information center, and water-related amenities like boat launches and fishing platforms.

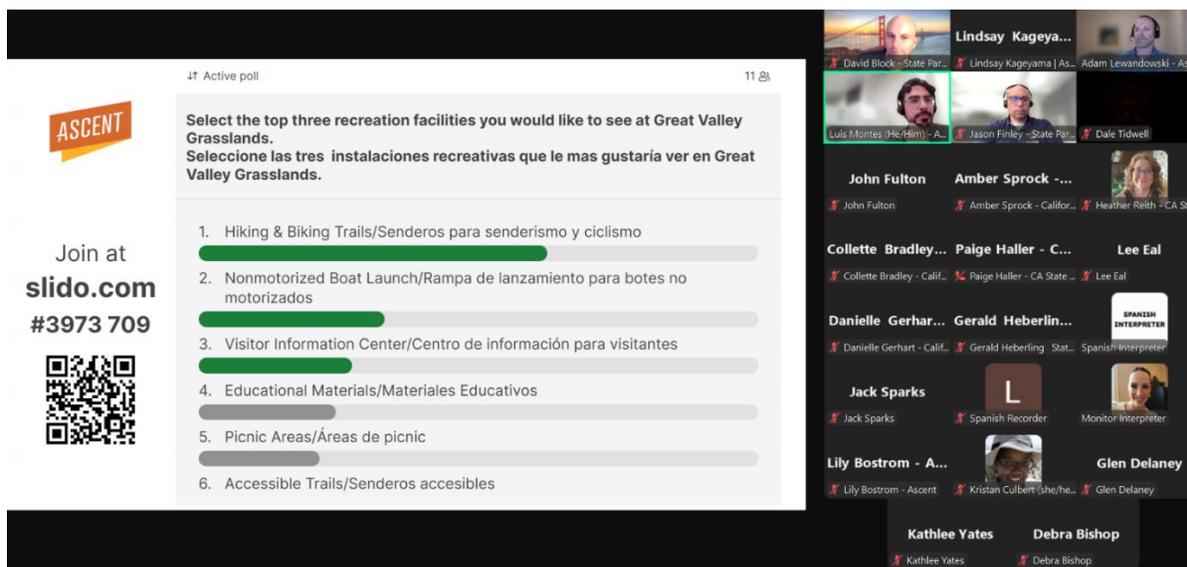
Recreation and park facilities questions included:

Slido Question #9

Select the top three recreation facilities you would like to see at Great Valley Grasslands.

Note: Slido ranks options by assigning more points to higher-ranked choices.

- Hiking & Biking Trails - 1.67
- Nonmotorized Boat Launch - 1.0
- Educational Materials - 0.83
- Visitor Information Center - 0.67
- Picnic Areas - 0.58
- Accessible Trails - 0.42
- Campgrounds - 0.42
- Fishing Platform - 0.42



Screenshot from the workshop showcasing the use of Slido and participating attendees to gather feedback.

Slido Question #10

What additional recreation facilities or improvements should be included in the General Plan?

Summarized Responses:

- Raised boardwalk trails, especially to vernal pools
- Flood-resistant boardwalks
- Safe, basic parking areas
- Raised parking lots for access during flood season
- Flood-resistant parking
- Kiosk Interpretive Center
- Separate hiking and biking trails
- Paths to fishing locations
- Connection to local public transportation or tram service
- Educational components along trails
- Wildlife viewing platforms
- Citizen science data collection stations
- Community space
- Dog-friendly areas
- Opportunities for passive recreation
- Careful siting of facilities to avoid floodplains and sensitive areas
- Breaching the levee will provide material for creating a parking area along Hwy 165 for school buses. Nothing else is necessary for students to access a natural habitat including vernal pools and riparian habitat and a functional floodplain.

Draft Purpose and Vision

The unit purpose and vision portion of the workshop provided an overview of the foundational elements guiding the GVGSP General Plan. These elements form the basis for park planning and management, outlining the park's significance, key resources, and future direction. The purpose and vision statements describe the park's importance to California and the desired future condition, including potential visitor opportunities. The draft purpose statement for GVGSP was shared during this portion of the workshop and feedback from the public aimed to see how the draft statement aligns with the community's values. This portion of the presentation also served to gather feedback on how the public envisions the park's long-term development, to influence the park vision statement.

Draft purpose and vision questions included:

Slido Question #11

What core values should guide the planning and management of GVGSP?

Top write-in answers included ecosystem restoration, conservation, inclusivity, and community connection (Figure 3). There was also an additional write-in answer: "Most of the grasslands in California, and in the US in general, have been lost to development. It is important to preserve this area for its grassland characteristics."

Figure 3: Core Values to Include



Source: Developed by Ascent in 2024 using Slido.

Slido Question #12

Share your thoughts on the draft purpose. Does it align with your core values for the park?

Summarized Responses:

- General agreement that the draft captures the park's purpose, with some participants simply responding "Yes" or "mostly"
- More emphasis needed on the park's importance to the San Joaquin River ecosystem
- Include the park's context beyond adjacent preserved lands
- Highlight the importance of greater connectivity throughout the valley and along the river
- Emphasize connecting the community to the historic landscape
- Include more information about tribal history and stewardship
- Recreation appears to be underemphasized, seeming like an afterthought
- It is difficult for every park to offer a quality experience for all types of

activities. Grasslands, for example, are better suited for environmental education than other uses.

Slido Question #13

In one or two sentences, share your vision for the future of GVGSP. What do you hope the park will look like 20 years from now?

Summarized Responses:

- Restoration of the landscape and ecosystem:
 - Return to native grasslands with reduced invasive plants
 - Restored riparian forests and river channels
 - Healthy, climate-resilient floodplains with thriving vernal pools
 - Expanded riparian corridors
- Enhanced biodiversity:
 - Support for a wide range of native species
 - Diverse native wildlife in restored river and floodplain areas
- Cultural resources management:
 - Incorporation of tribal-led burning and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in land management
 - Opportunities for people, especially youth, to connect with the native landscape
- Educational opportunities:
 - Interpretive programs, kiosks, and on-site rangers
 - Citizen science data reporting and collection facilities

- Recreational facilities:
 - Safe access points for passive activities (hiking, paddling, nature walks)
 - Accessible trails and open spaces
 - Family-friendly destination for sustainable recreation
 - Basic amenities (parking, flush toilets, running water)
 - Small visitor center at the western edge parking lot
 - Pier for high water flow and recreation for boats/jet skis
 - it may be unrealistic to expect every park to offer a high-quality experience for all types of activities. McConnell and San Luis Creek are well-suited for camping and picnicking, while Grasslands is better for environmental education but not for boating. The Fremont boat ramp primarily supports duck hunting and fishing when water levels permit, meaning that Hwy 165 isn't crucial for boating access.
- Environmental awareness:
 - Inspire visitors to recognize the importance of nature and preservation
 - Aid collective understanding of environmental interconnectedness
- Accessibility:
 - Linkages to local public transit in Merced County
 - Easy parking and access for visitors

1.4 Next Steps and Opportunities to Engage

After the discussion portion of the workshop, the next steps were outlined, providing an overview of upcoming project milestones and future opportunities for engagement. It was noted that the next phase of engagement will begin in early 2025 and will focus on sharing conceptual alternatives and gathering feedback to explore a range of potential approaches to managing and improving GVGSP.

Additional resources were provided, directing attendees to the project website for more information and to the project contact email for any further questions, comments, or concerns. Attendees were also encouraged to complete and share the survey to ensure ongoing feedback throughout the process. Links to the information shared are listed below:

- Project website: www.parks.ca.gov/GVGSP_GP
- Survey: [Great Valley Grasslands State Park General Plan | Engage Ascent \(mysocialpinpoint.com\)](https://mysocialpinpoint.com)
- Listserv: [Great Valley Grasslands State Park General Plan Sign Up - Formstack](#)
- Project Email: greatvalleygrasslandsgp@parks.ca.gov

