

SECTION 7: ACCESS GUIDELINES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The comprehensive nature of this planning document looks beyond the impact of a single restoration project on an individual landowner, maximizing the benefits of restoration efforts to the community. This section discusses methods of communicating the value of San Francisquito Creek’s resources through improved access. The term “access” is used broadly here to include the many ways individuals can connect with the creek environment. Through improved pedestrian and visual access, enhanced public education, and interpretation, the community’s relationship to the creek will be strengthened.

Existing and proposed access sites identified in this Section by approximate station point are also illustrated on the Master Plan Maps in Section 4.

7.2 SUMMARY OF EXISTING ACCESS

7.2.1 EXISTING ACCESS INTO THE CREEK

Currently, access into the creek by pedestrians is limited to a few informal narrow paths and service roads extending down the banks. Many of the informal paths were created for purposes of cleanup and police patrol. In addition, homeowners have constructed their own private bridges and paths into the creek.

There is agreement that some access into the creek is necessary and should be encouraged within limits. In general, there is a need and desire for safe access into the creek for police patrol, debris and litter pick up, and exotic plant removal (particularly in densely wooded areas). However, random access by the general public has impacted the environment and caused liability and privacy concerns among landowners. Regular

Table 7A: Existing public pedestrian access into the creek channel

Station Point	Site Description
123+50	At Woodland Avenue, appx. 250’ upstream (u/s) of Cooley Avenue
137+80	At Woodland Avenue, appx. 120’ downstream (d/s) of Manhattan
182+20	At Woodland Avenue, appx. 400’ u/s of Chaucer Street
218+20	At Woodland Avenue, appx. 300’ d/s of Baywood Avenue
224+50	Appx. 150’ u/s of Middlefield Road
270+00	At El Palo Alto Park
294+30	At Creek Drive, 100’ u/s of University Drive
377+50	At Oak Creek Apartments Road

creek patrols in conjunction with resident neighborhood watch programs have curbed the use of the creek as an encampment.

Existing public pedestrian access into the creek is focused primarily at the locations listed in Table 7A (identified by approximate station point at which the path begins):

Table 7B: Existing creekside access locations

Station Point	Length	Site Description
From 81+00 to 95+00	1400'	SCVWD paved easement
From 178+70 to 189+50	1080'	Palo Alto Ave. (beginning at Marlowe Street)
From 193+00 to 200+00	700'	Along Palo Alto Avenue
From 223+00 to 266+00	4300'	At Timothy Hopkins Creekside Park
From 319+40 to 345+00	2560'	Along new Sand Hill Road development
From 345+00 to 374+00	2900'	At Oak Creek Apartments

7.2.2 EXISTING CREEKSIDE ACCESS

In addition to access into the creek, creekside access occurs at parks, road overcrossings and pedestrian bridges with nearly 2.5 miles of formal public linear access exists along the creek at several intermittent locations along the study reach, as detailed in Table 7B.

Because of the floodwall barrier, the existing shoulder that stretches along Woodland Avenue in East Palo Alto has not been included in the existing access linear footage number.

A multi-use pedestrian path is under construction at the new Sand Hill Road development. This new, compacted soil path will be ten feet wide and set back twenty feet from top of bank, with a split rail barrier between the trail and bank edge. This path follows the historic alignment of old Sand Hill Road (Jones, 2000).

A few park sites exist along the creek, including El Palo Alto Park (at station point 270+00), two pocket parks within the Timothy Hopkins Creekside Park system (station points 236+00 and 228+50), and a community garden (station point 173+00). An existing pedestrian bridge near San Mateo Avenue is also a creekside access point of note.

7.2.3 EXISTING VISUAL ACCESS

Visual access allows the community to feel closer to their creek and appreciate the natural corridor within the urban setting. Currently, while the creek functions as a green backdrop to many of the adjacent land uses, focus generally is directed *away* from the creek. Erosion has damaged many of the existing formal and informal trails and fences have

been erected for security purposes, restricting a sense of connection to the creek.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED ACCESS

Types of access discussed here include paths/trails along the top of bank, overlooks, small pocket parks at top of bank, and improved visual access. The following recommendations focus on access and interpretation opportunities within the public right-of-way and are not specific to property or parcel lines.

7.3.1 ACCESS INTO THE CREEK CHANNEL

Additional formalized access into the creek channel is not recommended as part of this Report. Access down the steep slopes may exacerbate bank instability, disturb restoration efforts and sensitive habitat, opposing the Master Plan's goal of preserving the creek's resources. The moderate slope and adequate bank width required to allow safe, universal access is rarely available on public lands within the study reach. Additionally, with the proximity of public to private property, increased access into the channel would aggravate the trespassing problem.

7.3.2 PROPOSED LINEAR CREEKSIDE ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Linear paths along the top of banks or parks adjacent to the creek are the preferred methods of connecting the community with the creek without threatening the natural resource. Creekside paths also offer an attractive means of pedestrian travel from neighborhoods to the urban core.

As shown in the Master Plan Maps, some public top-of-bank access is possible along almost the entire length of the study reach. Table 7C summarizes proposed top of bank pedestrian access paths that, if imple-

Table 7C: Proposed top of bank access path locations

Station Point	Length	Site Description
From 80+50 to 86+50	600'	At new development
From 166+00 to 169+00	300'	Palo Alto Avenue 100' u/s of Marlowe Street
From 176+00 to 177+50	150'	Along Palo Alto Ave. d/s of Chaucer Street
From 189+50 to 193+00	350'	Along Palo Alto Ave. u/s of Hale Street
From 200+00 to 202+00	200'	Along Palo Alto Ave. d/s of Everett Street
From 207+00 to 222+00	1500'	Along Palo Alto Ave. d/s of Middlefield Road
From 277+00 to 306+00	2900'	Creek Drive u/s of El Camino Real (formalize)

mented in conjunction with bank stabilization projects, would create a nearly continuous pedestrian route along the top of bank from West Bayshore Road to Sand Hill Road.

Restoring the top of bank access along Palo Alto Avenue would return Timothy Hopkins Creekside Park to a true continuous linear park. A new creek crossing downstream of the Children’s Health Council (station point 306+00) between Stanford lands and Creek Drive in Menlo Park would allow pedestrian travel on the new path through Sand Hill Road development, along Oak Creek Apartment’s footpath, to Sand Hill Road. Pedestrians could also continue along Woodland Avenue upstream from Chaucer Street in Menlo Park to the new crossing. Additional top-of-bank access may also be provided at the new Windriver development in East Palo Alto.

This combination of new and existing creekside access should integrate with urban pedestrian routes of travel at Chaucer Street, Middlefield Road, and El Camino Real as well with the many local roads in Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

A floodwall at the upper reaches of the study area adjacent to the Stanford Golf Course inhibits access into the creek, although there are several pedestrian bridge crossings in this area. Because it is a private course, public access is not proposed.

7.3.3 PROPOSED POCKET PARKS AND OVERLOOKS

New overlooks and parks may be located in areas of stable banks or in conjunction with bank stabilization projects. Overlooks are small, level areas that provide better views into the creek, particularly at high-water season. Pocket parks are landscaped destination points oriented toward the creek. Both can be rustic, should feature an appropriate barrier at the top of bank, and may include seating and/or interpretive elements.

Table 7D: Proposed pocket park and outlook locations

Station Point	Park or Overlook	Site Description
101+50	Overlook	At Woodland Ave., appx. 1100’ d/s of Newell Road
198+00	Park	At Palo Alto Ave., 500’ u/s of Seneca Street
203+00	Overlook	At Palo Alto Avenue and Everett Street
210+30	Overlook	At Woodland Avenue and Lexington Road
353+00	Overlook	At Oak Creek Apartments Road

City of Palo Alto Park, with San Francisquito Creek as backdrop.



Table 7D summarizes the proposed pocket park and outlook locations illustrated on the Master Plan Maps in Section 4.

7.3.4 PROPOSED VISUAL ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Currently, many of the existing parks “turn their backs” on the creek, focusing toward the road with the creek as a backdrop. Relocating benches to face the creek and adding interpretive amenities (as discussed later in this section) would improve the relationship of the park user to the creek. Replacement of tall fences with lower barriers where safe, and in conjunction with bank stabilization projects, would also allow the community better visual access to the creek corridor.

Providing creek identification at major road crossings and in locations where local streets terminate at the creek would enhance public awareness of San Francisquito Creek. This roadway identification would be effective at locations listed below (illustrated on the Master Plan Maps in Section 4):

- West Bayshore Road
- Newell Road
- University Avenue
- Manhattan Street
- Marlowe Street
- Chaucer Street
- Seneca Street
- Everett Street
- Middlefield Road
- Emerson Street
- El Camino Real
- University Drive
- Sand Hill Road
- Junipero Serra Boulevard

In general, any access improvements should comply with the guidelines and recommendations set forth in this Master Plan and great care should be taken to protect existing native vegetation and habitat.

7.4 THE CREEK'S COMMUNITY IMAGE

In a move to cross jurisdictional boundaries and address issues related to the creek with a singular mind, a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) formed in May 1999.

This collective effort presents an opportunity to create a unified image for the creek corridor that is immediately identifiable and effective in establishing the creek corridor as a unit. A thematic connection that threads throughout any future signage, interpretive panels, benches, communications, and other site amenities would emphasize the positive aspects of the creek, improve its visibility, and potentially reduce abuses of the resource. This image should be developed in conjunction with the interpretive program discussed in the section below. Figure 7A provides an example of typical trail system imagery.

7.5 SAN FRANCISQUITO CREEK AS AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Many groups have acknowledged the importance of the creek as a community resource and an opportunity for public education. CRMP recommends several educational and interpretive programs in the “Public Education and Involvement Task Force” chapter of their Draft Watershed Management Plan (CRMP, 1997). To reconnect people to the creek, and to its story, is an integral part of the restoration effort.

An effective interpretive program promotes a sense of discovery among visitors. It provides enough information to stir visitor’s interest and encourage them to pursue further research or involvement. It is designed to work in conjunction with companion orientation and regulation signage and is contiguous with the image that has been established for the overall park. An interpretive program for the creek should be developed in conjunction with image identification as discussed in Section 7.6.

Because there are so many topics of interest on which to focus, locating interpretive panels at various sites along the creek within the public access zones is recommended. These panels may be developed in conjunction with a descriptive brochure as part of a self-guided tour. Possible interpretive topics include:

Figure 7A: Example of a trail system's logo/imagery, Sanctuary Scenic Trail, Monterey, CA. Courtesy Leslie Stone Associates

Figure 7B: Example of interpretive panel design, Yosemite Indian Village, Yosemite, CA. Courtesy Leslie Stone Associates

- Bird Watching
- Endangered Animals
- Geomorphology
- History of Floods in the Creek
- Hydrology
- Creek Mammals
- Native American History
- Native Vegetation
- The Creek’s Relationship with the Bay
- The Early Explorers and Mission System
- The Urban Stream
- Victorian Era History
- The Stanford Family
- A Watershed Overview

Interpretive and creek image-building elements provide an excellent opportunity for partnership with local businesses along the creek, for private donations in memorial, and a myriad of public involvement opportunities. There is a prime opportunity to create an interpretive trailhead at El Palo Alto Park that identifies all of the interpretive sites and kicks-off a self-guided tour. Interpretive elements need not be linked or linear, as creekside pathways do not necessarily have a beginning, middle and end.

Locate interpretation at parks and formal trails and at points of interest where users may have questions. Many existing and proposed pocket parks/overlooks would be excellent sites for interpretation. The Master Plan Maps in Section 4 identify nineteen potential interpretive sites. Table 7E summarizes these proposed sites.



Table 7E: Proposed interpretive panel sites

Station Point	Site Description
80+90	At beginning of SCVWD easement in Palo Alto
95+20	500 feet upstream of Clarke Avenue, East Palo Alto
138+20	At Manhattan Street in East Palo Alto
166+00	At Palo Alto Avenue and Marlowe in Palo Alto
169+30	At Palo Alto Avenue in Palo Alto
177+60	At Chaucer Street and Palo Alto Avenue in Palo Alto
180+80	At Palo Alto Avenue near Hale Street in Palo Alto
198+00	At Palo Alto Avenue near Seneca Street in Palo Alto
203+00	At Palo Alto Avenue near Everett Street in Palo Alto
223+00	At Middlefield Road in Palo Alto
228+40	At Existing Park, Palo Alto Avenue and Webster Street in Palo Alto
236+00	At Existing Park, Palo Alto Avenue near Cowper Street in Palo Alto
259+00	At Palo Alto Avenue near Emerson Street in Palo Alto
270+60	At Pedestrian Bridge in El Palo Alto Park in Menlo Park
292+30	At Creek Drive and University Drive in Menlo Park
306+00	At Creek Drive in Menlo Park
319+40	At Pedestrian Bridge in Menlo Park
345+00	At Existing Trailhead, Oak Creek Apartments in Palo Alto
377+50	At Oak Creek Apartments in Palo Alto

Permanent interpretive site materials used must be unimposing, consistent with the surroundings, low maintenance, and able to withstand effects of seasonal high flows and flooding.

7.6 REFERENCES

San Francisquito Creek Coordinated Resource Management and Planning (CRMP). 1997. Draft Watershed Management Plan. Palo Alto, CA. January.