

executive summary

study of alternatives

new area june 1979

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Inactive Proposed

SWEENEY RIDGE

CALIFORNIA

B&W Scans

3/22/2005

Publication of this document should not be construed as representing either approval or disapproval of the Secretary of the Interior. This document provides information to the Secretary of the Interior for his consideration in making his recommendation to the Congress. This document also provides information for further consideration of the area as a potential submission to the Congress in compliance with Section 8 of the General Authorities Act of 1970, as amended by Public Law 94-458.

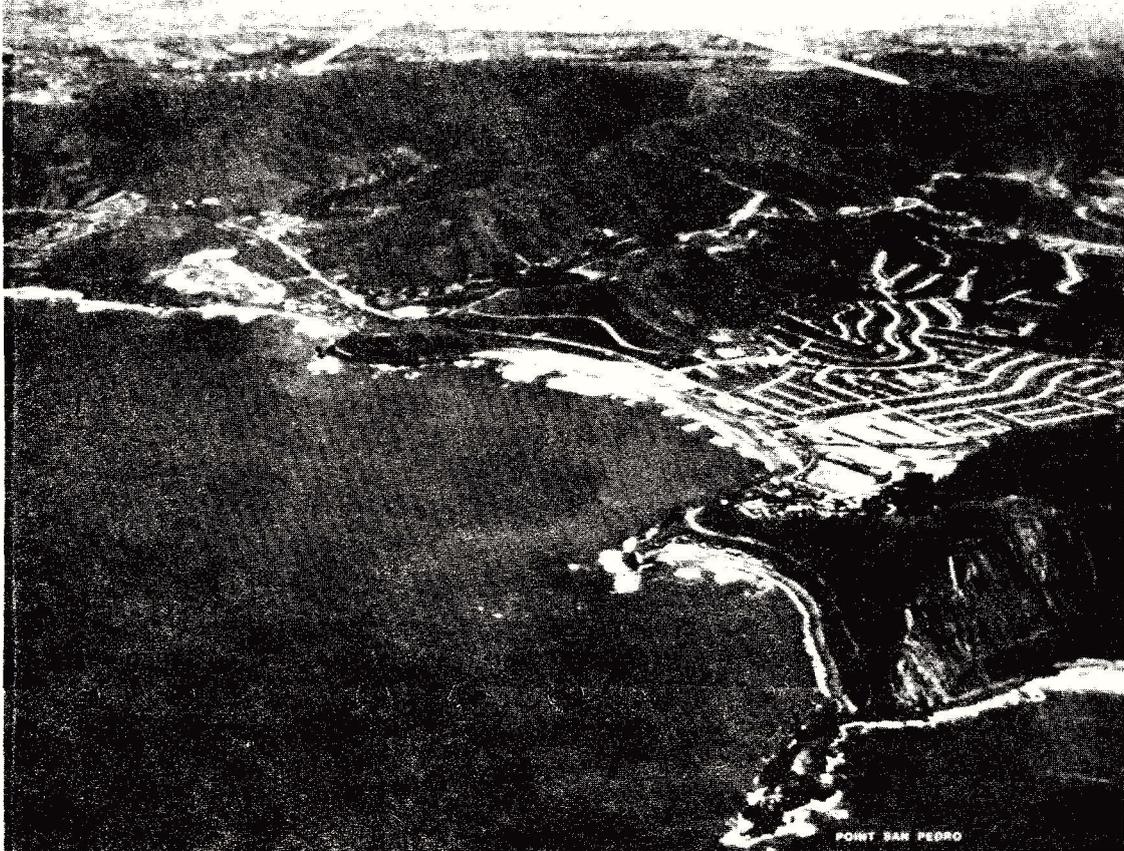
As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
STUDY OF ALTERNATIVES
NEW AREA**

**SWEENEY RIDGE
CALIFORNIA**

United States Department of the Interior/National Park Service

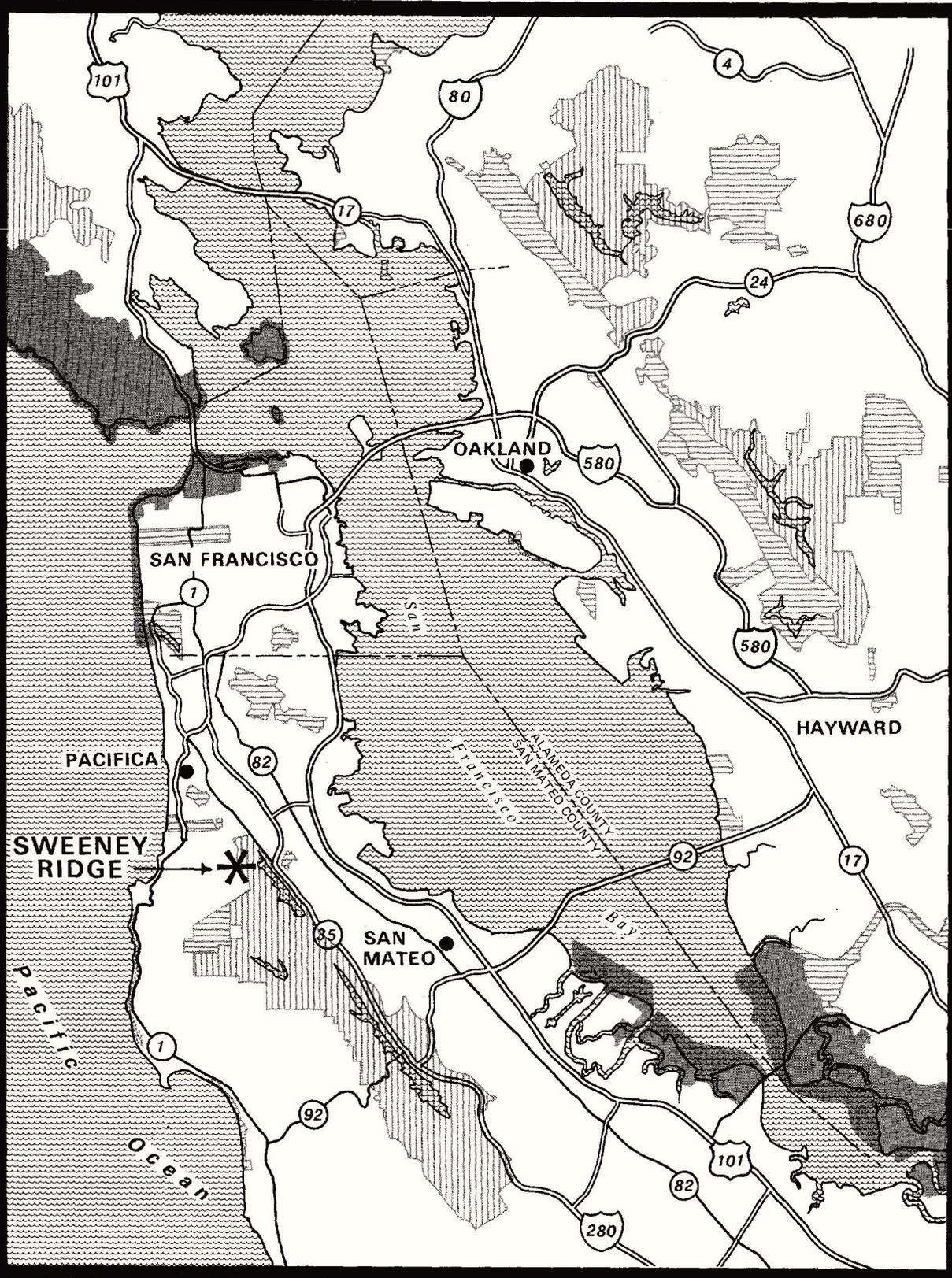
SWEENEY RIDGE



Sweeney Ridge and other connecting ridgelines embrace the City of Pacifica. San Francisco Bay is visible along the horizon.



SWEENEY RIDGE



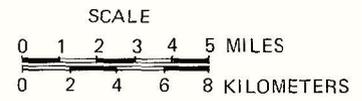
VICINITY MAP

LEGEND



- FEDERAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE REFUGE
- PUBLIC WATERSHED
- STATE AND LOCAL PARKS

ON MICROFILM



SW-R1 | 80,000
JUNE 79 | WRO-PP



SUMMARY

CONDITION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESOURCE

Sweeney Ridge, in combination with other connecting ridges, provides a natural backdrop for the City of Pacifica. Located in northwestern San Mateo County, the two mile, north-south running ridge consists of approximately 1,500 to 2,000 acres of coastal scrub and grass. Except for the remnant structures of an abandoned missile radar site and water tanks, the grassy level crest of Sweeney Ridge remains undeveloped. The crest of Sweeney Ridge and the crests of two lateral connecting ridges are being proposed for residential development by the property owners, the West Aspen Company, who also own the western slopes of Sweeney Ridge, altogether about 1,000 acres. The development project consists of 1,500 residential units and would extend over about 200 acres. The publically owned San Francisco Bay Discovery Site, a national historic landmark, is located on the crest of Sweeney Ridge.

There are several thousand acres of public park and watershed lands all devoted to open space uses in the vicinity of Sweeney Ridge. This public open space includes the 18 acre Discovery Site atop Sweeney Ridge. The resource values of these nearby public lands are similar to those identified and evaluated in this report for Sweeney Ridge. Sweeney Ridge's principal

resource values are the Discovery Site and the spectacular views which can be enjoyed from along the crest. These views currently can be viewed in a natural setting. The Sweeney Ridge area is currently being used for outdoor recreation purposes, hiking, riding and picnicking, mostly by local residents.

The proposed mixed residential development would impact resource values along the crest of Sweeney Ridge and the two lateral ridges. However, it is judged these impacts would not significantly detract from these values, due to the 18 acres in public ownership among the Discovery Site and the cluster nature of the proposed residential development. The development project has not yet been officially presented to the City of Pacifica who has jurisdiction over whether or not the project can proceed. The city is scheduled to take action on the proposal late this summer.

ALTERNATIVES

Three alternatives have been identified by the National Park Service which provide in varying degrees for the protection of the resource values associated with Sweeney Ridge. One of these alternatives provides a means for preserving natural values associated with an extensive open space area in the vicinity of Sweeney Ridge.

ALTERNATIVE A - The implementation of this alternative would ensure the preservation and protection of the natural, cultural and recreational values associated with the entire Sweeney Ridge Area. This would be accomplished through the acquisition and management of the crest and the western slopes of Sweeney Ridge along with the two connecting lateral ridges, about 1,000 acres in all, by a public park agency. Under this alternative, proposed residential development along the ridge crests would be precluded. The area would be preserved, protected and open to the public for passive outdoor recreation uses. The San Francisco Bay Discovery Site would be protected by a large buffer, and the opportunity to enjoy unobstructed scenic views from Sweeney Ridge in a natural setting would remain unimpaired. An arc of protected open space would be completed around the City of Pacifica.

Assuming project approval and completion, and based on a fair market value currently estimated at \$155,000,000 for the completed project along the crest of Sweeney Ridge, a maximum of \$1,550,000 in property tax revenue would be lost to San Mateo County if this alternative were implemented. The City of Pacifica's share of the project revenue, estimated by consultants to the property owner at about one million dollars during the six year construction period and a small annual surplus upon full development, also would be precluded. *

*See Addendum

Acquisition cost for the 1,000 acres owned by the West Aspen Company is estimated at \$15,000,000 to \$20,000,000 in 1979 dollars. The escalation rate on developable lands of this type is currently 18 to 24 percent per year. Development costs of \$75,000 have been estimated for recreation facilities. The annual operation and maintenance budget has been estimated to range from \$50,000 to \$75,000.

Due to the size of the area, the significance of its resource values and its potential draw as a public park, management of Sweeney Ridge is feasible at the county or state level. Federal management of the area by the National Park Service is possible, but only on a conditional basis. The following management options have been identified as means of implementing this alternative:

Option (1) - Management by the San Mateo County Department of Parks and Recreation. Implementation of this option would be possible only if the county were provided with Federal financial assistance for acquisition, development, operation and maintenance. This is due to the effect which Proposition 13 has had on the amount of revenues now available to the county for park purposes. Therefore, costs of implementation of this option would be borne entirely by the Federal government.

Option (2) - Management by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The Department has committed its capital outlay program for parklands acquisition for the next five years. The Sweeney Ridge area is not included therein despite a preliminary survey of the resource values of Sweeney Ridge by the Department. Consequently, this option could not be implemented unless the State were provided with Federal financial assistance for acquisition. Under this alternative, the cost for land purchase would be borne by the Federal government. Any development of recreational facilities on Sweeney Ridge would be up to the State and the attendant costs would be their responsibility, as would the annual operation and maintenance costs.

Option (3) - Management by the National Park Service. Due to the relatively small size of the area and the limited significance of the resource values, it would not be feasible for the National Park Service to manage Sweeney Ridge as a separate unit of the national park system. However, the proximity of the nearby Golden Gate National Recreation Area makes it possible for Sweeney Ridge to be managed as a component of the national recreation area. Under this option, the National Park Service would have full

management responsibility for development, operation and maintenance of parklands in the Sweeney Ridge area.

ALTERNATIVE B - This alternative would provide a means for the preservation of the Sweeney Ridge area and for the preservation of certain other significant resource values located within an extensive natural area identified in this study in the vicinity of Sweeney Ridge. This preservation would be carried out through designation as an Area of National Concern the 35,000 to 40,000 acres involved. Implementation of this alternative would preclude the proposed residential development along the crest of Sweeney Ridge. Through designation as an Area of National Concern, a planning body would be legislatively authorized to develop a comprehensive land use management plan for this entire area. The planning body would be made up of those units of government currently having jurisdiction over the area. The Federal government would provide technical and financial assistance to carry out the goals of the comprehensive plan. Financial assistance for land acquisition would be made available following review and approval of the plan by the Secretary of the Interior, except in certain legislatively identified areas. The Secretary would have the responsibility to ensure that all proposed Federal projects are consistent with the comprehensive plan.

The property tax revenues, currently estimated at \$1,550,000, generated by the residential development proposed along the crest of Sweeney Ridge would be lost to San Mateo County. The City of Pacifica, it has been estimated, would be losing about one million dollars during the six year construction period for the project. The City would also lose the estimated small annual surplus which would be accruing to them upon full development of the project. This alternative allows for selected land acquisition beyond the purchase of the Sweeney Ridge Area, so additional lands would eventually be taken off of the tax rolls.

This alternative provides \$25,000,000 to \$30,000,000 in Federal monies for land acquisition. The current (1979) purchase price for the West Aspen property is estimated to be in the \$15,000,000 to \$20,000,000 range. There are no park development or annual operation or maintenance costs associated with this alternative.

ALTERNATIVE C - Under this alternative there would be no additional action taken by the Federal government to preserve or protect the resource values associated with either Sweeney Ridge or the adjoining open space area. Consequently, there would be no costs to the Federal government associated with this alternative.

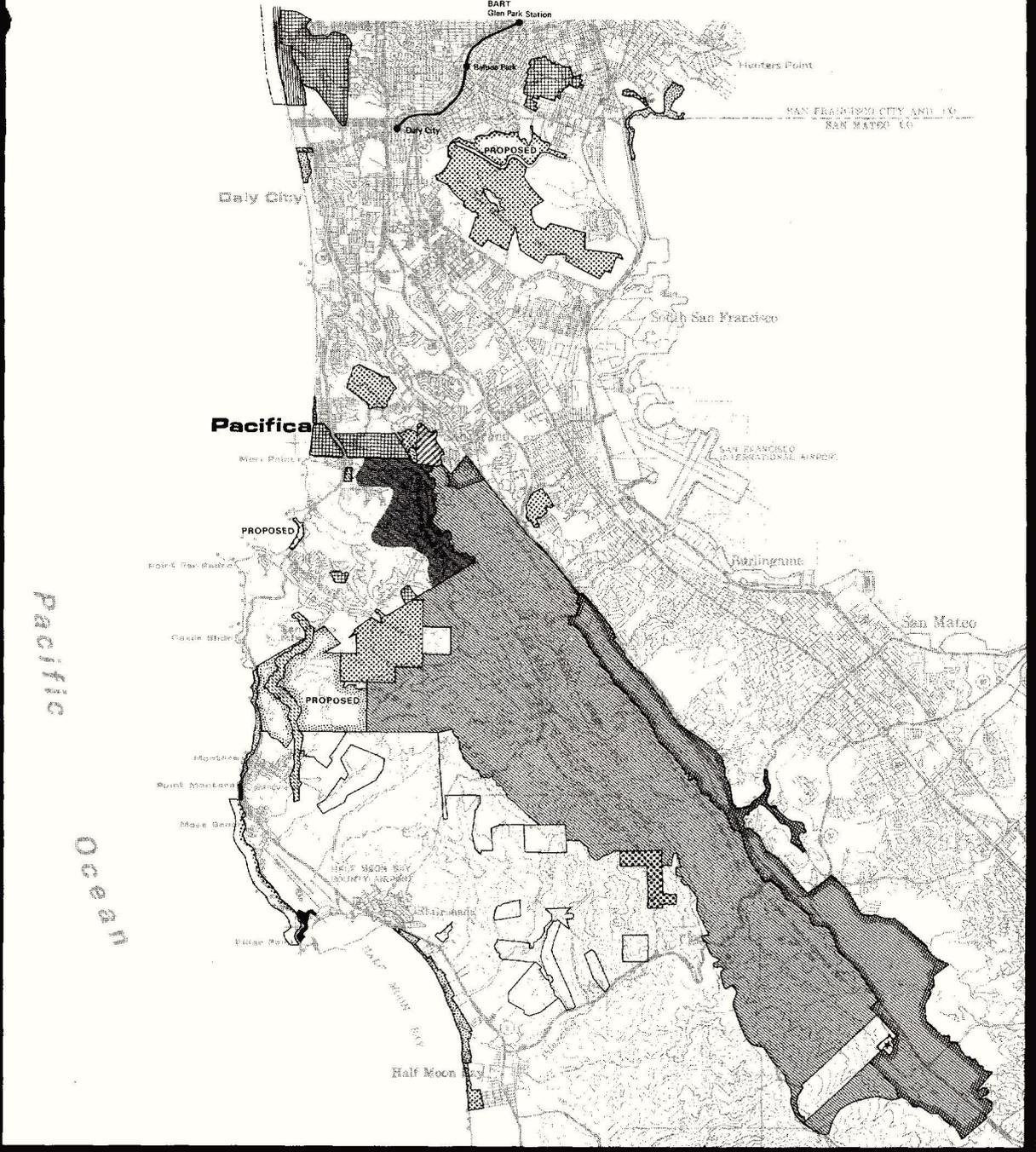
Assuming that the 1,500 units of residential development proposed along the crest of Sweeney Ridge does, in fact, take place the resource values of the crest area would be diminished. The opportunities to enjoy the scenic views in a natural setting from atop Sweeney Ridge would be reduced by that development. However, the clustering of the units means that some of the viewpoints from along the Sweeney Ridge crest would remain unobstructed. Some residential development would take place along the western boundary of the 18 acre San Francisco Bay Discovery Site. However, the basic integrity of the Discovery Site would remain intact and the "historic view" of San Francisco Bay to the east would be virtually unaffected. There would be some diminishment of the habitat of the endangered San Francisco garter snake.

The completed development would provide housing for about 3,500 people and according to consultant estimates would result in a small annual surplus accruing to the City of Pacifica. In addition, the consultant has indicated the city would realize an estimated one million dollars during the six year construction phase. As part of the development, a four lane access road including an interchange would be built by the developer to provide connection with the coast highway. San Mateo County would gain an estimated \$1,550,000 in property tax revenue from the project.



NORTH

SWEENEY RIDGE



LEGEND

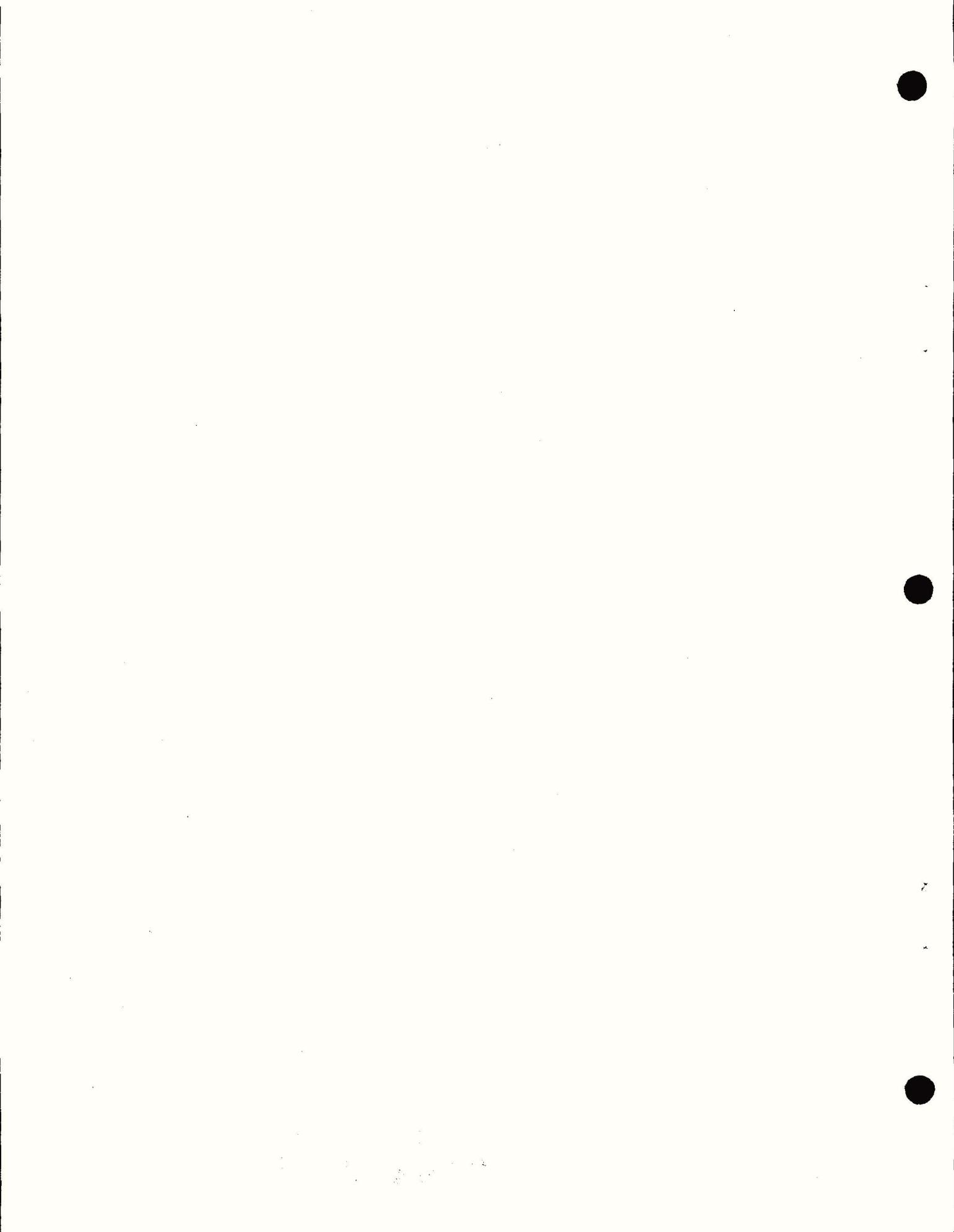
-  SAN FRANCISCO (Jail Site)
-  COUNTY PARKS
-  STATE PARKS
-  LOCAL PARKS
-  GOLDEN GATE NRA
-  FEDERAL LANDS
-  NATIONAL TRUST
-  STATE OF CALIFORNIA
-  AGRICULTURAL PRESERVES
-  COASTSIDE WATER DISTRICT
-  SAN FRANCISCO WATER DEPARTMENT
-  SCENIC EASEMENT
-  SCENIC AND RECREATION EASEMENT

ALTERNATIVE A

MANAGEMENT BY A PUBLIC PARK AGENCY
(APPROXIMATELY 1000 ACRES)



ON MICROFILM





NORTH

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LEGEND

-  SAN FRANCISCO (Jail Site)
-  COUNTY PARKS
-  STATE PARKS
-  LOCAL PARKS
-  GOLDEN GATE NRA
-  FEDERAL LANDS
-  NATIONAL TRUST
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-  COASTSIDE WATER DISTRICT
-  SAN FRANCISCO WATER DEPARTMENT
-  SCENIC EASEMENT
-  SCENIC AND RECREATION EASEMENT

ALTERNATIVE B 

AREA OF NATIONAL CONCERN DESIGNATION
(APPROXIMATELY 40,000 ACRES)



ON MICROFILM

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Just prior to the printing of this report the City of Pacifica released its own cost/revenue figures for West Aspen's proposed residential development along Sweeney Ridge. According to these figures, annual expenditures for the proposal total more than three times the annual revenue. Pacifica used the current (interim) allocation formula to derive these figures. These estimates contradict figures generated by HKS Associates, consultants to the West Aspen Company, who concluded that the proposed development would generate a slight surplus of revenue upon completion. This conclusion was based on what was assumed to be a likely approximation of the new state allocation formula. When Pacifica's figures for revenues and expenditures are applied to this new formula, expenditures come to about one and one half the revenues. In neither instance according to Pacifica's estimates, is the proposed development paying for itself.

This information conforms to conclusions of a recent survey* by the State Office of Planning and Research (OPR). Information obtained

*New Housing: Paying Its Way, an analysis of the fiscal impact of new residential development in post-Proposition 13, California - ten case studies," Office of Planning and Research, Sacramento, May 1979.

by OPR from ten California cities indicated that, since Proposition 13, new residential development is generating more costs than revenues. The current State allocation formula was used to arrive at this conclusion. Moreover, factors such as employment gains and environmental impacts were not included.



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