



Foundation Document Overview

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

California



Contact Information

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Purpose

Established to fulfill the conservation and recreational purposes of the Central Valley Project in Northern California, WHISKEYTOWN NATIONAL RECREATION AREA provides opportunities for recreation in both a lake-based and scenic mountain setting while conserving the scientific, natural, historic, and cultural values for the enjoyment and inspiration of present and future generations.



Significance

Significance statements express why Whiskeytown National Recreation Area resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- From the peak of Shasta Bally to the Sacramento Valley floor, the wide range in elevation, location, connection to surrounding areas, and convergence of four ecological provinces support diverse ecosystems and provide habitat for protected plant and animal species, including the only known global location of Howell's alkali grass (*Puccinellia howellii*).
- Whiskeytown Environmental School, managed by the Shasta County Office of Education, is one of the longest-running outdoor environmental education centers in the national park system. Together with the park's interpretive program, research, and partnerships, the school provides outstanding opportunities for understanding and appreciating the area's natural and cultural resources.
- Whiskeytown National Recreation Area provides a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities in both a lake-based and scenic mountain setting, ranging from family boating to inspirational experiences in wild, undeveloped places.
- Whiskeytown National Recreation Area's landscape, historic sites, and remnant gold mining features provide unique opportunities within the national park system to understand the dramatic effects of the California Gold Rush.
- Whiskeytown Lake is an important component of the Central Valley Project that transformed California's growth, economy, and agriculture through the delivery of clean water. The creation of Whiskeytown National Recreation Area also helped fulfill one of the goals of the Central Valley Project—to provide recreational opportunities to the local community and visitors from afar.
- Whiskeytown protects and preserves a continuous record and remnant sites of people. Beginning with Native American settlement thousands of years ago, Whiskeytown's landscape reflects the stories of how diverse groups of people have utilized the area's resources through time.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

The following fundamental resources and values have been identified for Whiskeytown National Recreation Area:

- **Recreational Opportunities.** Whiskeytown National Recreation Area provides an exceptionally wide variety of experiences for a diverse group of users. This occurs on the lake, beaches, and in the backcountry, and includes boating, swimming, camping, hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, and gold panning.
- **Opportunities to Enjoy Scenic Resources and Explore Special Places.** Whiskeytown National Recreation Area provides abundant opportunities to explore special places and experience viewsheds and scenic resources—from picturesque waterfalls to views of the Trinity Alps and Mt. Lassen from the top of Shasta Bally.
- **Legacy of Learning.** Whiskeytown National Recreation Area has provided more than 40 years of environmental education that includes public outreach through the National Environmental and Educational Development (N.E.E.D.) Camp (currently Whiskeytown Environmental School), and a variety of interpretive activities that include cultural experiences.
- **High Biodiversity Supported by Natural Processes.** Whiskeytown National Recreation Area supports biologically diverse flora and fauna, including the only known global location of Howell's alkali grass (*Puccinellia howellii*). Critical to maintaining their integrity are the natural processes, such as fire and geologic and hydrologic processes, necessary for supporting healthy ecosystems. The park's forests, including seven sections of old growth, are complex and of conservation significance. Whiskeytown is within the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion, an area considered a center of biodiversity, an International Union for Conservation of Nature "Area of Global Botanical Significance," and a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization proposed "World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve."
- **Stories Related to Human Use of the Land.** Oral histories, historical research, and collections at Whiskeytown provide an excellent opportunity to share stories about the dramatic changes that have occurred to the landscape over time, from the discovery of gold and followed by the immigration of pioneers to California, requiring an increase in food production. Whiskeytown Lake and Dam provide opportunities to tell the story of the Central Valley Project and how local visionaries and the U.S. President John F. Kennedy made contributions to a 50- year legacy of outdoor recreational development.



- **Sites, Structures, and Archeological Resources.** Whiskeytown contains a wide range of historic sites and structures, cultural landscapes, and archeological features related to human use of the landscape over time. This includes resources related to American Indian occupation, mining features and settlement (Tower House Historic District), and components of the Central Valley Project that created the lake, such as Whiskeytown Dam. The Tower House Historic District exemplifies early European American settlement in Northern California, beginning with the gold rush.
- **Water Resources.** Whiskeytown National Recreation Area provides valuable, clean water for hundreds of thousands of people of California and is one of many important sources of water for the Central Valley. Whiskeytown's watersheds provide a source of fresh water to seven major creeks that lie at the confluence of Whiskeytown Lake. These watersheds support a diversity of plant and animal species, including critical habitat downstream of the dam for steelhead and spring-run Chinook salmon, both federally listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act.



Interpretive Themes

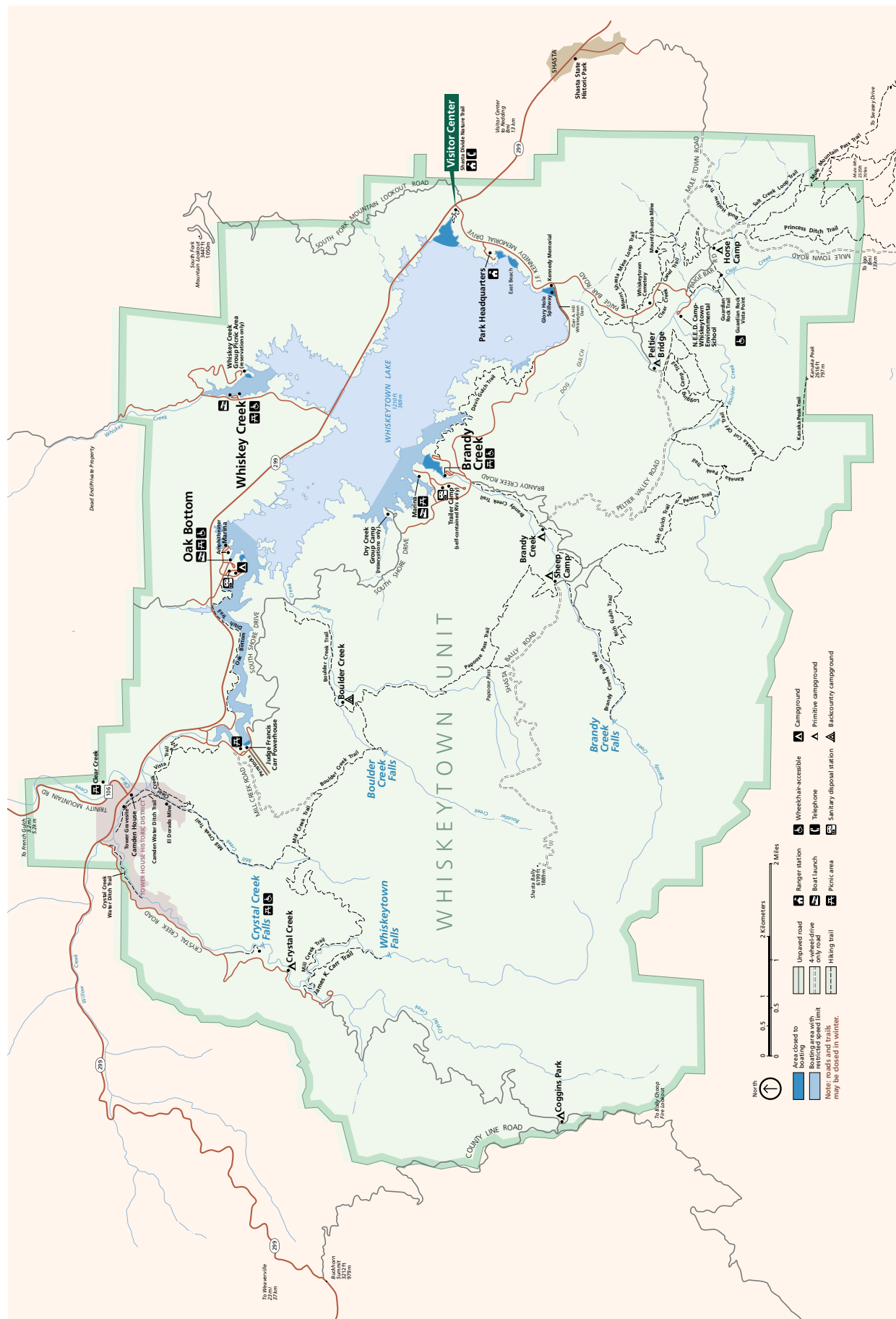
Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

The following interpretive themes have been identified for Whiskeytown National Recreation Area:



- **Healthy Ecosystems.** The convergence of four geographical provinces (the Great Basin, Cascade, Klamath, and Coast Range) and the range in elevation (from the top of Shasta Bally to the Sacramento Valley foothills) have created a remarkable diversity of habitats and life in Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, and therefore provide opportunities for research so that we can better understand the natural world.
- **Water.** Water is today's gold, and as the final project of the transformative Central Valley Water Project, the clean waters of Whiskeytown Lake embody the vital roles of water in the West and throughout the world—supporting communities, agriculture, producing power, and providing recreational opportunities.
- **Human Connections to the Landscape.** The region's many historical and cultural resources stand in testimony to the rich and diverse human presence in this region spanning thousands of years—from prehistoric American Indian cultures to current day tribes as well as evidence of modern day miners, explorers, and settlers. Today's visitors value the opportunities to recreate, rejuvenate, and reconnect with nature.
- **Legacy of Learning.** Whiskeytown embraces the value and role of environmental education. From its very beginning as a forerunner in America's environmental education movement in promoting understanding and appreciating our nation's natural resources and history, Whiskeytown National Recreation Area continues its legacy of stewardship and playing a vital role in nurturing connections between people and their park.
- **Conservation.** The creation of Whiskeytown National Recreation Area reveals the efforts of the visionaries who elevated a planned county park to a unit of the national park system and established a treasured place.





Description

Whiskeytown is a unit of the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area, a shared recreation area with the U.S. Forest Service. It is located in Shasta County, California, about eight miles west of downtown Redding. The U.S. Forest Service manages the Shasta and Trinity units as the Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area. The National Park Service manages the Whiskeytown unit as Whiskeytown National Recreation Area.

The creation of Whiskeytown National Recreation Area was a product of a developing conservation movement in America. The park is a result of both local and national forces that recognized the value of the area's natural resources for sustainability and conservation purposes. The park's evolution from its original concept as a 5,000-acre county park to a 42,000-acre national recreation area within the national park system is a testament to those political leaders who had the vision to pursue it. From its original conception in 1937 and through its congressional creation in 1965, Whiskeytown continues to evolve as a treasured place for nearly one million annual visitors.

Whiskeytown Lake, created by an earth-filled dam on Clear Creek, is managed in partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation. The reservoir provides high-quality recreation opportunities because of its forested mountain setting and a mode of operation that keeps it full throughout the primary recreation season. In this regard, Whiskeytown is unlike most other major California reservoirs, including the two other units of the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area, which experience large drawdowns during summer months. At Whiskeytown, visitors can enjoy high-quality swimming beaches, lakeside camping, boating, and picnicking. Sport fishing is also a popular activity at Whiskeytown. While the primary focus for Whiskeytown visitors is water recreation, the park also contains cool rugged canyons, forests, streams, and waterfalls. Whether hiking, mountain biking or horseback riding, the land surrounding Whiskeytown Lake provides many opportunities for enjoyment.

Whiskeytown Lake, itself, comprises less than 10% of the park's acreage; the vast majority of the park is the surrounding forested land. Elevations range from 800 feet in lower Clear Creek below Whiskeytown Dam to more than 6,200 feet atop Shasta Bally, the highest peak in the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. The natural vegetative communities at Whiskeytown are varied, with a mixture of mixed conifer forest, riparian communities,

oak woodlands, and chaparral. These habitats provide shelter and sustenance to an abundant and diverse wildlife community, including numerous species of concern and other rare species, as well as providing highly desirable natural settings for recreation activities. The high-elevation forests have been profoundly influenced by disruption of the historic fire regime, and today fire management plays a key role in the preservation and restoration of the natural communities in the park.

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area includes parts of Shasta and Trinity counties. It is located within the territorial boundaries of the Wintu, who used the area for thousands of years before the arrival of European Americans in the 19th century. Archeological remains document their extensive habitation and use of the land that is now encompassed by Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. Traditional ties to Whiskeytown remain among contemporary Wintu.

European explorers and trappers began visiting the upper Sacramento Valley in the early part of the 19th century. They were soon followed by parties of settlers on their way to central California and Oregon, and in 1848, gold was discovered on Clear Creek just west of Whiskeytown. "Boomtowns" such as Shasta, Whiskeytown, and French Gulch grew quickly as large numbers of miners arrived in the area. The remnants of the mining history of the area are evident at many places within the park.

In the fall of 1850, Levi Tower and Charles Camden arrived in the area and began mining for gold. They soon expanded their business prospects by investing in a hotel, orchards, sawmill, construction of a toll road, and water ditches. The Tower House Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, is significant because of the contributions of these two men to the development of commerce, transportation, agriculture, and industry in Northern California in the two decades following the discovery of gold in 1848.

