

SJMN JUNE 29, 1995.

Fewer campsites proposed

Wilder Ranch

Report recommends scaled-back plan for Wilder Quarry

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Public outcry over plans to turn a quarry near Santa Cruz into California's largest recreational vehicle park has led state park officials to consider scaling it back by a third.

Park officials Wednesday released a draft environmental impact report on the proposed Wilder Quarry Campground that fa-

vors fewer campsites as an "environmentally superior alternative."

The report, required under state environmental laws, was prepared for the Department of Parks and Recreation, which plans to develop the park with Graniterock Inc., the quarry owner.

The report said current plans calling for 380 campsites — all but 20 of which would accommodate RVs — will not seriously hurt the environment or neighboring communities, provided measures are taken to lessen its impact.

But a park with 260 campsites would produce a third less traffic and lessen fire danger, water use and other concerns, the report said.

State Parks planner Roger Calloway said public criticism influenced the recommendation. The Santa Cruz City Council this month voted to deny more water for the park, saying the proposed development is too dense.

"The department would like to develop a facility that is acceptable to the people of Santa Cruz," Calloway said. "That was a factor in scaling back the project. I would say that was the key fac-

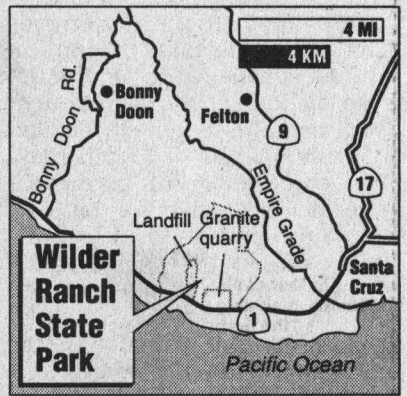
tor."

Even with fewer campsites, the project would be one of the biggest RV campgrounds in the state park system. The largest, Lake Perris near Riverside, has 265 campsites, Calloway said.

The report offers the first detailed look at what the state and Graniterock have in mind for the park. It has a few surprises, such as an equestrian center for up to 50 horses.

The park would be loaded with amenities, regardless of the number of campsites. A campground

See **WILDER**, Page 2B



CARL NEIBURGER — MERCURY NEWS

Report calls for fewer campsites

SJMN JUNE 29, 1995

■ WILDER

from Page 1B

center would have a convenience store, restaurant for 48 customers, heated outdoor pool, children's playground, barbecue pavilion and recreation hall for dances, movies and potlucks. All would be in "California Ranch style" one-story buildings to "provide a village atmosphere," the report says.

The park also would have courts for basketball, bocce ball, volleyball and shuffleboard, as well as horseshoe pits, showers and spas, and a maintenance garage. An environmental education center would have a 200-seat outdoor amphitheater and 160-bed dormitory.

The project would alter previous plans calling for 265 campsites along the coastal bluffs in the 4,500-acre Wilder Ranch State Park along Highway 1 a mile north of Santa Cruz.

The original plans, adopted in 1980, would have put 120 campsites and an 80-bed hostel at Four Mile Beach and 160 campsites — 30 of them tent-only — at two locations inland from the highway.

Camping consolidated

The new plan eliminates all but 15 of the tent sites and consolidates camping on about 100 acres of Graniterock's 300-acre quarry. Park officials like the idea, saying it moves campers from pristine bluffs to an area already damaged by decades of mining.

Plans call for Graniterock to give the quarry to the state and to lease back the campground and run it for 35 years. The state would earn about \$100,000 a year, Calloway said.

Graniterock had envisioned 575 campsites for the quarry when the company approached state park officials with the idea in 1990, Calloway said, but state officials talked them down to 380.

Graniterock officials were unavailable Wednesday, but Calloway said they "have not indicated they could not go forward with a scaled-back project."

'A slap in the face'

Bruce Bratton, a Bonny Doon resident who has been one of the proposal's most vocal critics, called the report's finding of no significant environmental impacts "a slap in the face."

The report assumes Santa Cruz will provide city water for the project. Calloway said he hopes city officials will reconsider that issue for a scaled-back park.

The parks agency will accept public comment on the draft report through Aug. 13 and then issue a final report. The project will be forwarded to the Coastal Commission for approval.