



the SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION and OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Connecting Communities and the Land

JUNE 6, 2006

A LONG-RANGE ACQUISITION PLAN

Connecting Communities and the Land

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OUR MISSION

*T*he Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource, and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations.

Connecting Communities and the Land

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CREATING a LEGACY of PRESERVATION

CREATED BY THE COMMUNITY

Sonoma County voters created the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District in November 1990 and funded it with a quarter-cent sales tax through March 2011. The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors oversees the District and serves as its Board of Directors. The Board created the independent Open Space Authority to oversee expenditures of the sales tax and appoints members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee, who offer guidance on policy matters and acquisitions.

With over a million acres of land stretching from the beaches and estuaries of the Pacific Ocean to the Mayacamas Mountains, Sonoma County encompasses a tremendous range of stunning natural areas. The vast open spaces draw many residents and visitors and help define the character of the county. A wide variety of agricultural producers contribute to the vitality and diversity of the economy, and to the stewardship of these natural areas.

For many decades, these areas seemed far from the reach of the urban realm. But today, as jobs become more mobile and businesses move away from city centers like San Francisco, the Sonoma County lifestyle will continue to draw more people to the area. The county's population has grown by more than 20 percent since 1990 and is projected to nearly double by 2020. With growth pressures, many of our agricultural and open lands are at risk and could be lost forever.

However, the people of Sonoma County are committed to protecting forever the working farms and ranches, scenic hillsides and natural areas that

make our county a unique place to live. In 1990, county residents voted to create the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to preserve these lands across the county.

THE DISTRICT TODAY

During the past 15 years, the District has become a national model for land preservation. The voter-approved quarter-cent sales tax currently generates over \$17 million annually. The District has worked with willing sellers to permanently preserve nearly 70,000 acres of open space and agricultural land—an area equivalent to twice the size of the City of Santa Rosa. The District works to protect and provide:

- Urban open space and greenbelts that separate communities;
- Ranches, dairies and farms;
- Sonoma County's rural legacy and quality of life;
- Scenic natural areas for people and wildlife;
- Land along rivers, lakes, streams and creeks;
- Beaches and coastal lands; and
- Recreational opportunities to enjoy the land.



Above: The Cooper's Grove property includes a majestic redwood stand on Sonoma Mountain.

Left: Poppies proliferate on the 168-acre Jacobs Ranch on Sonoma Mountain.

Some of the District's major successes include:

- Permanently protected nearly 70,000 acres of land by conservation easement or fee title purchase, at a cost of \$199.4 million for land worth \$254.7 million—a net savings to taxpayers of \$55.3 million.
- About 72% of projects concentrated around cities and within greenbelts.
- Permanently protected 12 dairy farms (15% of remaining dairies).
- Created the Small Farms Program, which allows farmers to lease District-owned lands near urban areas for agricultural production.
- Added 6,100 acres to five State Parks—equal to the size of Rohnert Park, Cotati and Sebastopol combined.
- Added 2,700 acres to six Regional Parks—equal to three Spring Lake Parks—including the creation of three new parks and four Russian River access points.

BENEFITS TO OUR COMMUNITIES

Open space protection is playing an increasingly vital role in creating

healthy, livable communities. Studies nationwide show that preserving a balance of natural systems, scenic beauty, and working lands keeps communities and economies growing strong. Agricultural lands for local products, natural areas set aside for wildlife, greenbelts between cities, parks and preserves for active and passive recreation, and trails for walking and bicycling all help connect communities to each other and to the land.

BENEFITS TO LANDOWNERS

The District provides landowners who want to conserve their land a full range of options and financial benefits, while respecting private property rights. Protecting land “in perpetuity” can bring peace of mind to those who would like their land to remain as a farm or natural area for generations to come. There are financial incentives as well, such as income from selling a conservation easement. Agricultural conservation easements



Above: Straddling the Sonoma/Mendocino border, the 19,064-acre Cooley Ranch preserves spectacular landscapes and miles of creeks and riparian habitat.

are specifically designed to allow farmers to continue working their land or leave it to their children, while generating needed income. Selling or donating land or conservation easements to the District may also offer landowners income tax, estate tax, or capital gains tax reductions, as well as property tax advantages.

TOOLS FOR PRESERVATION

The District works with willing sellers to protect land in a number of ways, including conservation easements and land purchases.

- **Conservation Easements.** The District acquires a partial interest in the land by purchase or donation, and the landowner voluntarily limits what it can be used for—remaining in agricultural use or as a natural area. A conservation easement protects the land in perpetuity. The District’s stewardship staff monitors properties annually to ensure the terms of the conservation agreement are being met.
- **Land Purchases.** The District purchases the land and may then hold the property; transfer the land or management of the land to a state, regional, or local public entity or non-profit organization; or resell the property subject to a conservation easement. In some cases, the District may purchase farmland and then lease it back to farmers to ensure that it stays in agriculture.
- **Conservation Partners.** The District collaborates with numerous governmental agencies and non-profit organizations to leverage financial and staff resources to purchase or protect land in Sonoma County. The District has also applied for and been awarded grants for assistance with acquisition and management. The District will continue to foster these existing relationships and identify new partnerships to maximize resources and encourage cooperative efforts to strategically protect land throughout Sonoma County.
- **Matching Grant Program.** The District provides funds and technical assistance to local cities, agencies and non-profit organizations for recreation, public access, restoration, and other open space projects in urban areas (see page 26).

In addition, the District has a unique ability to work with city, county, state, and federal partners to leverage funding to enhance land protection throughout the county. The District has received significant funds for acquisition from numerous partners including the California Coastal Conservancy, City of Sonoma, City of Petaluma, Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, Forest Legacy Fund, Sonoma County Water Agency, State of California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Wildlife Conservation Board.

Below: At 1,290 acres, the Calabazas Creek Open Space Preserve (formerly known as Beltane Ranch) along Highway 12 in the Valley of the Moon is one of the District's largest land purchases.

Right: Autumn offers stunning views of turning leaves on protected agricultural lands.



- **Condition of Land-use Approval.** Developers are often required to set aside or dedicate an open space easement over portions of land to mitigate the impacts of a proposed development. These lands or easements are typically conveyed to the District as part of the county's development approval process. The District will continue to work with city and county governments to ensure lands or easements conveyed through the development process further the voter-approved Expenditure Plan and the goals outlined in this acquisition plan.
- **Outreach and Education.** The District works with local organizations to educate the public about the benefits of land protection. The District will increase efforts to communicate with the public about important resources and the efforts to protect them.

The District has developed specific tools for protecting and stewarding different types of land, such as partnerships for recreational lands, leases for agricultural operations, and customized conservation easements for agricultural or natural resource protection. These specific tools are detailed in the sections that follow.


REFINING ACQUISITION PLAN 2000

The District's previous acquisition plan, Acquisition Plan 2000, introduced cutting-edge computerized mapping techniques to identify high-priority areas for protection. Since then, many of those lands were protected, new threats developed and new opportunities have arisen, updated information is available, and mapping systems continue to advance. With "Connecting Communities and the Land: A Long-Range Acquisition Plan," the District presents refined goals, objectives, policies and implementation/action items, based on an assessment of conservation success and identification and prioritization of lands still needing protection. The District will develop an annual work plan to review objectives, action items and land acquisition priorities, and to measure performance.



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES and THE LAND

A LONG-RANGE ACQUISITION PLAN



rotecting land for agriculture, community separators, recreation, and wildlife habitat is becoming as important to our communities as other infrastructure such as roads, sewers, and storm drains. Countywide open space networks can protect agricultural lands and link urban communities, open spaces, trails, and wildlife habitat—a strategic approach to open space protection known as “green infrastructure.”

This Long-Range Acquisition Plan will direct the District’s land conservation efforts, helping shape the quality of communities and carrying out the voter-approved measures for protecting agricultural and open space lands in Sonoma County. The Plan will help ensure that Sonoma County’s natural beauty, farming traditions, and clean air and water are safeguarded for the future. It outlines a strategy that adds to existing protected

LONG-RANGE GOALS

Over the next ten years, the District will work to:

- **Maintain the county’s rich rural character and the unique qualities** of each city and areas throughout the county that help provide our sense of community.
- **Support the economic vitality of working farms** to preserve the agricultural heritage and diversity of the county.
- **Protect the ridgetops, coastal bluffs, hillsides, and waterways** that create the county’s striking natural beauty.
- **Provide connections** between urban areas, parks and natural areas throughout the county for both people and wildlife.
- **Preserve diverse natural areas** that provide habitat for wildlife.
- **Protect the waterways and associated natural lands** that maintain water quality and supply.
- **Partner with local agencies and organizations** to leverage funding for land protection, foster stewardship, and provide opportunities for recreational and educational experiences.



Above: The Small Farms program offers opportunities to farm lands near urban communities.

Left: The 910-acre Red Hill addition to Sonoma Coast State Beach protects stunning coastal lands and offers magnificent ocean views along Highway 1.

lands to create a connected network of great open spaces: agricultural lands, greenbelts, natural areas, multi-use trails, streams, parks, and preserves that will provide people with opportunities to enjoy scenic rural areas and local agricultural products, while protecting the distinct character of individual communities. New connections and trails will also create opportunities for residents to access public lands from nearby communities.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Between January 2005 and March 2006, the District revised and refined Acquisition Plan 2000 to shape this new plan. The District updated county maps with the most recent data on natural resources and open space to help refine priorities; evaluated the successes and lessons learned from

Acquisition Plan 2000; consulted local officials to ensure proposed changes were consistent with local and county plans; and held regular meetings with representatives of different interest groups in the county.

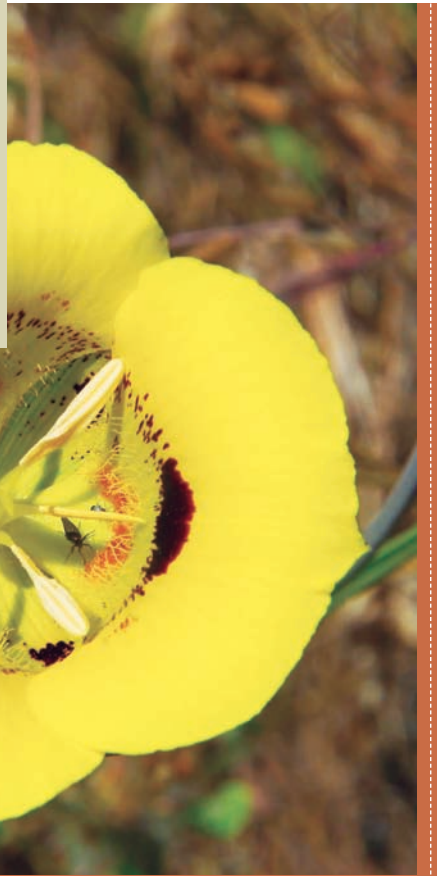
The District also provided a number of opportunities for the local community to play an active role, including:

- Regional public meetings with community members;
- Website and online forums with specific information on the revision process;
- Interviews and meetings with over 50 local organizations (a complete list is included in the Appendix);
- Periodic updates to the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Open Space Authority (see Appendix for a list of members and overviews); and



- Regular meetings with the Acquisition Plan Subcommittee (see Appendix for a list of members and overview).

After adopting the Plan, the District will continue to work closely with the CAC to prioritize implementation and action items for annual work plans and to invite community input on the overall direction and specific land acquisition projects.



Top: The Prince Memorial Greenway on Santa Rosa Creek offers multi-use paths and creek access.

Right: The Jacobs Ranch property preserves stunning wildflowers and native plants.

CATEGORIES

The Plan focuses specific protection efforts into four categories:

- **Farms and Ranches**
- **Greenbelts and Scenic Hillsides**
- **Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas**
- **Recreation and Education**

For each category, the District has developed a set of objectives, policies, action items and performance measures to support our overall goals. The individual categories ensure that projects are evaluated with like projects. For example, properties designated as “greenbelt” are considered in relation to the objectives and policies of the Greenbelts and Scenic Hillsides category and with other greenbelt properties, but not in relation to any other category. Geographic Information System (GIS) maps illustrate important resources and/or focus areas by category. While the GIS maps provide guidance for the District, they do not identify specific parcels for acquisition.

Below: Protected riparian zones are often the only viable wildlife corridors between fragmented landscapes as shown here on the Saddle Mountain Property.

Right: The rolling hills of the 631-acre Bianchi dairy are visible from Highway 1.



PLAN FRAMEWORK

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

The District permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations.

GOALS





FARMS and RANCHES

OBJECTIVES

- **Protect the diverse agricultural character and heritage of Sonoma County.**
- **Support the continued viability of farms and ranches.**

The farms, ranches, and dairies of Sonoma County play a critical role in the local economy and are among the region's most defining features. Fifty-nine percent of the county's land is in agricultural use, with almost 3,400 farms and ranches and about 80 dairies. Local farmers and ranchers preserve the county's agricultural heritage as they continue generations-old traditions. Residents relish local products, as well as the scenic agricultural lands that frame the county's highway corridors and separate our nine cities.

Since 1990, the District has protected 33,000 acres of productive agricultural land in greenbelts surrounding cities, in coastal areas extending from Bodega Bay to the Marin County line and east to Highways 101 and 116, and in valleys throughout the county.

The District's program has become a valuable tool in the effort to maintain local agriculture. Over the years, this has included acquiring conservation easements, leasing farms back to farmers, and helping local farmers and ranchers purchase additional lands for

agricultural production through the purchase of development rights.

The District has emphasized protecting properties sizable enough to sustain economically viable agricultural operations and helping ranching families to acquire lands to expand their agricultural operations. The District's Small Farms Program, established in 2001, supports continued agricultural uses within the community separators by providing farmers opportunities to lease District-owned lands for agriculture. The District has also developed partnerships with state and federal agricultural funding programs and local agricultural organizations. Building on these successes, the District will continue to work with willing landowners to expand its agricultural land protection program.

To preserve the county's rural character, agricultural lands, and agricultural diversity and to help provide local residents opportunities to enjoy fresh locally grown and produced goods, the District will focus future efforts in the following areas:



Left: The Small Farms Program ensures that this 21-acre piece of the Santa Rosa/Windsor greenbelt will remain in agricultural use.

Below: The protected coastal hills and open meadows of the 429-acre Martin Ranch straddle the Valley Ford scenic corridor just west of Two Rock.

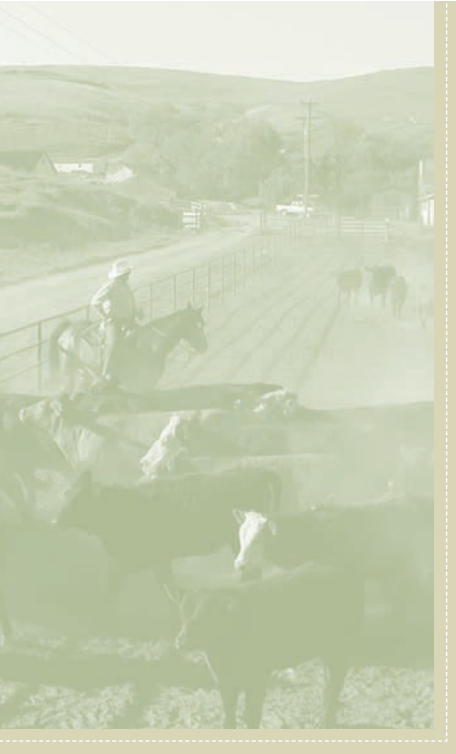


COASTAL DAIRIES AND RANCHES

Since its inception, the District has helped protect many dairies and ranches along the coast, from Two Rock Valley to the Valley Ford area. Many of the largest ranches and remaining dairies have long operated in this region, with its rolling grasslands ideal for grazing. The priority areas for coastal agriculture cover over 130,000 acres and contribute significantly to the agricultural character of the county. With the many changes in the dairy and livestock industries and the real estate market, local ranchers have worked hard to maintain the economic viability of their agricultural operations. In the coming years, the District will continue to focus efforts to protect this important and highly threatened area by targeting agricultural lands of sufficient size and number to facilitate continued economic viability of local agriculture, including the dairy industry.

SMALL FARMS

Small-scale working farms—many of them family-owned and -operated for decades—are especially significant in the agricultural greenbelts that separate the county's communities. However, as development infringes on agricultural lands, both the viability of small-scale farming and the availability of a diversity of locally grown and produced foods are jeopardized. The Small Farms Program and other District initiatives help farmers and ranchers purchase or lease additional land for agricultural production. The program was piloted with a District-owned property north of Santa Rosa in the Santa Rosa/Windsor Greenbelt. The District purchased the 21-acre undeveloped property and it is now leased and operated by a local vegetable farmer. The District will work to expand and improve the Small Farms Program to maintain agricultural land use near urban communities.



UNIQUE AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Sonoma County is also home to a number of distinctive agricultural lands, including heritage farms, orchards, vineyards, horse ranches, grazing lands and secondary industries. The District will continue to support a wide range of agricultural land uses throughout the county by conserving properties that substantially contribute to the agricultural character of Sonoma County.



Top: The 1,217-acre Ielmorini cattle and dairy ranch along Highway 1 is one of the county's largest, protected in 2002.

Right: The Maffia family worked with the District to create a permanent agricultural conservation easement on 245 acres along the Americano Creek.

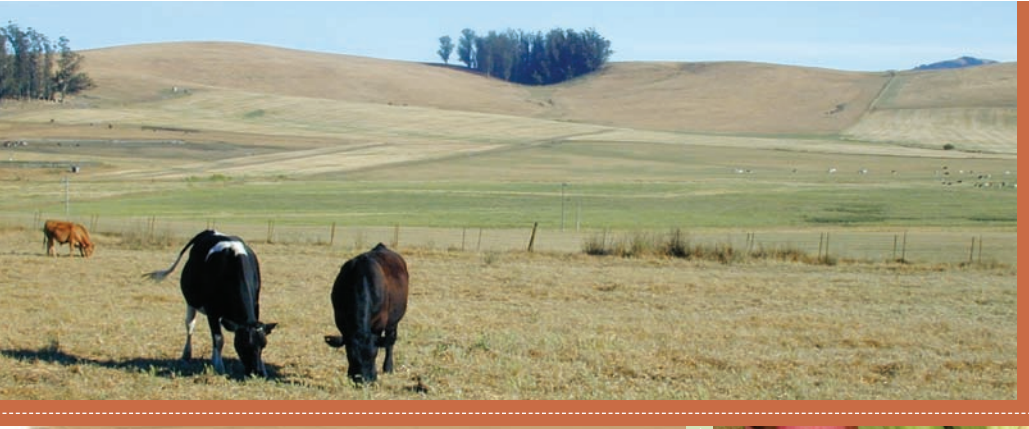
POLICIES

The following policies support the two "Farms and Ranches" objectives:

- (a) Protect lands vital to maintaining ranching and dairy operations.
- (b) Work to link large contiguous areas of protected agricultural lands.
- (c) Protect agricultural lands near the urban edge.
- (d) Protect lands important to local agricultural heritage.
- (e) Provide incentives for farmers and ranchers to remain in agriculture.
- (f) Facilitate the continued agricultural use of farms and ranches.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1) Develop an annual work plan that prioritizes agricultural lands for protection, based on identified priorities, threats and available funding.
- 2) Work with existing lessees, local farmers and agricultural organizations to refine and expand the Small Farms Program.
- 3) Expand outreach to agricultural landowners to inform them of the benefits of participating in the District's land protection program.
- 4) Work cooperatively with agricultural producers and other partners to help them lease or buy District-protected properties.



- 5) Partner with local agricultural producers and organizations to explore ways the District can help preserve services critical to the long-term viability of agriculture.
- 6) Develop an informational landowner handbook that identifies tools and resources that support the viability of farms and ranches.
- 7) Continue to explore the use of leases to maintain the agricultural use of District-owned lands.

SPECIFIC TOOLS FOR FARM AND RANCH PROTECTION

The District primarily uses agricultural conservation easements to protect agricultural lands. However, the District continues to explore innovative methods and tools for protecting agricultural lands and maintaining agricultural production, including:

- **Purchase.** The District may purchase land and then lease the property back to an agricultural producer. This District may resell properties subject to conservation easements designed to protect the conservation values of the land.

- **Conservation Partners.** The District will continue to work with partners to identify additional funding and informational resources to support agriculture in Sonoma County.

Left: Protected in 2003, Brayton Ranch encompasses 162 acres of rolling pasture land.

Above: Sonoma County residents enjoy locally grown produce such as this rhubarb from a greenbelt farm.

GUIDE TO MAP IN BACK

The Farms and Ranches map (in back) illustrates geographic areas important to achieving the objectives of this section. Agricultural lands protected by the District are highlighted to demonstrate how the District works to link large areas of protected agricultural lands. The District will focus future land protection efforts on viable ranching and dairy operations and diverse farms near cities that enhance these areas of protected lands.



GREENBELTS and SCENIC HILLSIDES

OBJECTIVES

- **Protect greenbelts that separate cities and communities.**
- **Preserve key scenic lands that surround cities and communities.**
- **Preserve the gateways to Sonoma County.**
- **Protect lands within greenbelts that enhance residents' quality of life.**

Much of Sonoma County's identity for both residents and visitors comes from the scenic lands that buffer the nine cities from one another and extend into the rural regions of the county. Residents cite the county's rural character and beautiful scenery as among the most important aspects of living in Sonoma County. The District has worked to preserve scenic lands and greenbelts across the county, from the open grasslands and vineyards along Highway 101 to the oak-studded hillsides of Sonoma and Taylor Mountains.

Since 1990, the District has protected nearly 17,000 acres in greenbelts, community separators that buffer the county's nine cities, areas adjacent to scenic highways, and gateways to the county. The District has also protected lands bordering the urban edge of many cities, including Montini Ranch, scenic backdrop to the City of Sonoma, and Taylor Mountain Ranch, a highly visible geographic feature from Santa Rosa.

The District created a network of protected lands on Sonoma Mountain, one of the most prominent topo-

graphic features in the county. In the Laguna de Santa Rosa, protected lands along Highway 12 separate the cities of Santa Rosa and Sebastopol. These greenbelts also protect scenic and natural resources while providing for public recreational use. The District will use these successful models to continue to maintain the unique character of the county and its communities.

To expand networks of protected lands on the urban edge that promote healthy, livable communities with opportunities for recreation, non-motorized transportation and locally grown agricultural products, the District will focus future efforts in the following areas:

LANDS BETWEEN CITIES

Lands between cities—or community separators—help preserve the distinct identities of each community in the county. The residents of Sonoma County have supported efforts to curb sprawl and contain growth by establishing urban growth boundaries and directing development to existing communities. Protecting community



Above: Taylor Mountain is a stunning backdrop to the City of Santa Rosa, with over 1,100 acres protected.

Left: The 152-acre Montini Ranch property protects the scenic backdrop of the City of Sonoma.

separators reinforces these actions, ensuring that one city does not merge into the next, preserving each city’s unique identity and the distinct county gateways. For example, conservation easements on 2,000 acres of the Laguna de Santa Rosa between the cities of Santa Rosa and Sebastopol ensure the lasting separation of those two communities.

PROMINENT HILLS AND MOUNTAINS

Sonoma County’s prominent hills, mountains and ridgelines provide a visual backdrop for local communities and also contribute to the region’s identity. Many of these areas are visible not only from the major highway corridors, but also from local town centers, businesses, parks and residents’ homes. Outstanding examples include Sonoma Mountain, Taylor Mountain and the hillsides framing the City of Sonoma. Protecting these hills and mountains from development means that these views will remain forever.

UNIQUE VISUAL CHARACTER

A rich diversity of scenic lands gives Sonoma County its distinct visual character. Protecting lands that have unique open space features is essential to preserving this defining character. Priority lands include the rural countryside, land with unusual geographic features, scenic vistas as viewed from parks and trails, and scenic lands already identified in the Sonoma County General Plan and general plans of cities.

POLICIES

The following policies support the four “Greenbelts and Scenic Hillsides” objectives:

- (a) Protect contiguous lands that separate cities to help maintain their distinct individual qualities.
- (b) Protect scenic lands that are visible from highly traveled roads and highways and that contribute to the county’s rural character and sense of place.



Top: The oak studded hills of the 63-acre Connolly property protect the southern gateway to Cloverdale along Highway 101.

Above: The 45-acre Young/Armos property, in the Santa Rosa/Rohnert Park community separator, offers opportunities to enhance agricultural and natural resources.

- (c) Protect lands with prominent natural features that contribute to the unique identity of communities or that signal an entrance to a community.
- (d) Facilitate agricultural and recreational uses of lands within greenbelts.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1) Develop an annual work plan that prioritizes lands for protection, based on identified priorities, threats and available funding.
- 2) Work with county and city agencies, local organizations, and community members to identify lands that contribute substantially

to the protection of key scenic features, ridgelines, and greenbelts around cities.

- 3) Target acquisition and/or protection of contiguous properties that provide greenbelts around cities or that separate communities.
- 4) Expand outreach to landowners about the benefits of participating in the District’s land protection program.
- 5) Work with community organizations to expand the Small Farms Program to maintain agricultural production on lands near cities and communities.
- 6) Work with partners and willing landowners to provide recreational opportunities on District-protected lands near cities and communities.
- 7) Work with partners and willing landowners to link urban and regional trails on District-protected lands near cities and communities.

SPECIFIC TOOLS FOR GREENBELT AND SCENIC HILLSIDE PROTECTION

The District uses a variety of tools to protect greenbelts and scenic hillsides, including conservation easements and outright purchase. The District will continue to explore innovative methods and tools to maintain the individual character of communities,



Left: Birders observe wildlife on the protected lands of the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Below: The 76-acre Oken property on Petaluma Hill Road provides a vital open space buffer between Santa Rosa and Rohnert Park.



provide opportunities to connect the public with the land and maintain agricultural land uses, including:

- **Purchase and Leaseback.** The District may purchase land to lease to agricultural producers or to provide recreational opportunities by working with partners. The District may resell properties subject to conservation easements designed to protect the conservation values of the land.
- **Partnerships.** The District collaborates with county and city agencies to protect prominent greenbelt lands on the urban edge. Through the Matching Grant Program (see page 26), the District may also partner with cities and non-profit organizations on urban open space projects within cities.

GUIDE TO MAP IN BACK

The Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside map (in back) illustrates geographic areas important to achieving the objectives of this section. Greenbelt and scenic hillside properties protected by the District are highlighted to demonstrate how the District works to protect contiguous lands that contribute to the preservation of scenic features and greenbelts around cities. The District will focus future land protection efforts on areas that enhance the separation of communities and are highly visible from cities and major roads and highways.



WATER, WILDLIFE and NATURAL AREAS

OBJECTIVES

- **Protect natural areas unique to Sonoma County**
- **Preserve natural systems and lands that support the diverse biological resources of the county.**
- **Protect water resources to benefit human communities, as well as fish and wildlife.**
- **Protect lands that provide viable habitat linkages for wildlife.**

When Sonoma County voters established the District, one of their primary goals was to protect the county's most precious habitats and natural areas where wildlife can flourish for future generations to enjoy. The county's wild lands are home to a wealth of plant and animal species, and rivers, creeks and streams that provide clean water benefitting people, fish and wildlife habitat. The District works to protect these beautiful landscapes and unique habitats for diverse species. By protecting the land on which animal species live, we also protect the natural systems on which humans depend.

Since 1990, the District has protected 34,000 acres of natural areas. In its largest acquisition to date, the District permanently protected over a quarter of the Dry Creek watershed through a conservation easement over Cooley Ranch. The District worked with conservation partners to protect over 2,200 acres of land within the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and 648 acres for restoration in the San Pablo Baylands. Other significant acquisitions have

protected extensive oak woodlands, redwood groves and forests. Aquatic habitats are equally important, and the District has protected riparian lands and upland areas within the Willow, Mark West, Santa Rosa, and Matanzas Creek drainages—among others.

The District will work with conservation agencies and non-profit organizations to enhance protection of threatened natural areas throughout the county, with an emphasis on oak woodlands, coastal forests, riparian areas, lands that protect aquatic habitats and water quality, and lands that connect wildlife habitat.

To maintain the natural diversity of the county with healthy connected habitats for plants and animals and a network of protected streams and watershed lands to preserve water quality for human communities and fish and wildlife, the District will focus future efforts on identifying priorities in the following areas:



Left: The District's 34,000 acres of protected natural areas provide habitat for hundreds of species including the spotted owl.

Below: The 1,737-acre Tolay Lake Ranch near Petaluma establishes a new south county park, as well as preserved wetlands.



OAK WOODLANDS

Oak woodlands are one of the dominant natural communities in Sonoma County and provide some of the region's highest habitat values. The woodlands are home to at least 349 animal species—including mountain lions, deer and raptors—that rely on this unique habitat during key parts of their life cycles. However, oak woodland habitats are increasingly threatened by residential development, agricultural conversion, clearing for firewood, poor regeneration and disease. Areas particularly at risk include those located on lower elevation slopes and valley bottoms, where development is increasing. The District's land acquisition efforts will focus on conserving large stands of contiguous oak woodland and connecting habitats throughout the county, including lands in the Mark West Creek, Big Sulfur Creek, Santa Rosa Creek and

Sonoma Creek watersheds. Other priority areas include lands that maintain the scenic quality of oak-dominated landscapes and areas that conserve and restore valley oaks within the Santa Rosa Plain and other areas of the county.

COASTAL FOREST

The Northern Coastal Range forests include large blocks of conifer forests that are intermixed with hardwood forests, chaparral, and grasslands. Forests provide unique habitat that support a wealth of plant and animal species. Working forests contribute to the maintenance of the county's natural areas while supporting the economy. Land acquisition efforts will focus on conserving areas with significant stands of mature forests within the Coast Range, especially those that contain old growth or contribute substantially to watershed protection;



corridors connecting large forest patches; forests containing high quality fish-bearing streams; and forests adjacent to other conservation lands.

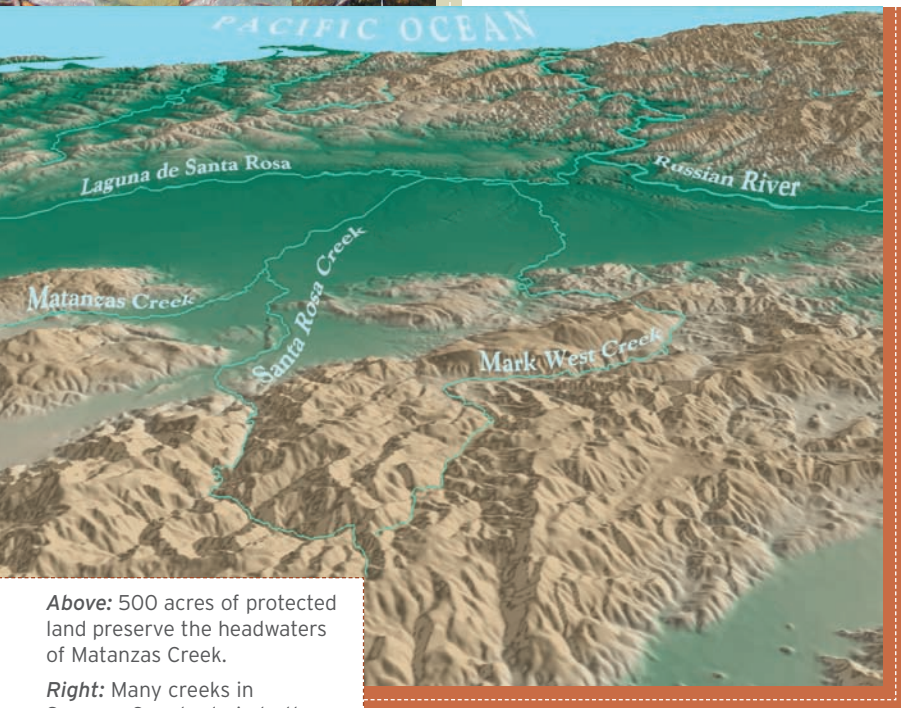
WILDLIFE CONNECTIONS

A critical element of wildlife protection is preserving areas that link existing protected lands or high-quality habitats. Connected natural areas are vital in providing food and shelter for numerous species. The fragmentation of natural lands results in isolated

patches of habitat that are too small to provide adequate food and shelter for many species. The District will focus future efforts on protecting intact core habitat areas and the linkages between them.

RIPARIAN CORRIDORS AND ASSOCIATED UPLAND AREAS

Maintaining natural vegetation along and over streams is critical to protecting, maintaining and restoring inland and coastal fisheries. The tributaries and headwaters of the Russian River basin are the primary spawning habitat for several species of native fish, including steelhead, Chinook and coho salmon. Steelhead and salmon species are critical indicators of water quality, because they react negatively to changes in water quality. Salmon species require clean water to survive, and healthy salmon runs provide important food sources for a number of predators. Riparian areas support over half of the reptiles and three quarters of the amphibians found in California, and are critical to the survival of fish, birds, and other wildlife. Riparian zones are also important corridors for species such as the bobcat, mountain lion, coyote and fox. In many areas of Sonoma County, riparian zones may be the



Above: 500 acres of protected land preserve the headwaters of Matanzas Creek.

Right: Many creeks in Sonoma County drain to the Russian River and the ocean.



Above: Protected lands of the Dry Creek Watershed feed into Lake Sonoma, which provides drinking water for Sonoma County residents.

Left: The Laguna de Santa Rosa permanently protects vital habitats.

only viable corridors remaining between highly fragmented landscapes.

Sonoma County's many open valleys, and some uplands—including wetlands, vernal pools, and other areas—provide significant benefits for people and wildlife. For example, the Laguna de Santa Rosa is the most significant natural freshwater marsh in the Northern Coastal Range and a key area for preservation. Its wetlands contain many rare and endemic plant and animal communities, and the Laguna creates a sizable open space buffer between the cities of Santa Rosa and Sebastopol.

Land acquisition efforts will focus on conserving contiguous areas of high quality riparian habitat, adjacent uplands, and wetlands critical to protecting watershed values, fish and wildlife habitat and water quality, including the Petaluma River, San Pablo Baylands, Salmon Creek and Sonoma Creek, the Russian River and

its tributaries such as the Laguna de Santa Rosa, Mark West Creek, Maacama Creek, Austin Creek and Santa Rosa Creek.

WATER BENEFITS

Natural areas allow surface water to percolate down into the ground, absorbing storm and floodwater, replenishing water and cleansing the water before it enters our streams and rivers. Protecting natural areas along creeks and streams and within floodplains also helps to preserve the land's inherent capacity to retain water.

District acquisitions can help to protect critical groundwater recharge areas. Both the quantity and quality of water can benefit from strategic acquisitions within selected watersheds.

UNIQUE NATURAL AREAS

Sonoma County is a national "hotspot" because of the diversity of plant and animal communities that



Above: Mark West Creek supports existing populations of salmon.

are found here and nowhere else. The District will coordinate with conservation agencies and organizations to enhance protection and restoration of lands that are rich in diverse habitat and wildlife species and/or contain threatened or endangered species.

POLICIES

The following policies support the four “Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas” objectives:

- (a) Protect lands with diverse plant communities that support multiple wildlife species.
- (b) Protect lands with large, unfragmented oak woodland and forest areas.
- (c) Protect lands that are important for supporting healthy aquatic habitat in rivers and streams.
- (d) Protect lands critical to water recharge.
- (e) Protect habitats important for the conservation and restoration of rare, threatened or endangered species including serpentine, streams, vernal pools, tidal marshes, and wetlands.
- (f) Protect areas critical to watershed function by preserving and restoring floodplains, riparian areas and adjacent upland habitat.

- (g) Identify and conserve key habitat linkages.
- (h) Encourage management of District-protected lands to ensure the conservation and restoration of natural resources.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1) Coordinate with local agencies and organizations to develop a conservation strategy to identify and prioritize lands for protection based on research, planning studies, threat analysis and available funding.
- 2) Develop a strategy to identify partners to leverage resources for the protection and management of natural areas.
- 3) Partner with local agencies and organizations to compile existing information and data about resources in the county into a central repository.
- 4) Add watershed and groundwater basin information to the project evaluation process for potential District projects.
- 5) Develop a program to protect riparian corridors, including broad zones of habitat and adequate meander belts along sensitive reaches.
- 6) Partner with local agencies to implement recovery plans for threatened and endangered species.



Left: The 3,373-acre Willow Creek property on the Sonoma Coast protects fish-bearing creeks and streams, coast redwood, Douglas fir forests and picturesque waterfalls.

Above: Riparian habitat supports native species such as the California red-legged frog.

- 7) Establish standards and recommendations for the management of resources on District-protected lands.
- 8) Explore methods to increase other sources of funding.
- 9) Develop an informational landowner handbook that includes recommendations and standards for best management practices developed by local organizations and experts.

SPECIFIC TOOLS FOR WATER, WILDLIFE AND NATURAL AREAS PROTECTION

The District primarily uses conservation easements (natural resource conservation easements) to protect lands high in water, wildlife or natural values.

However, the District continues to explore innovative methods and tools for protecting diverse plant communities, wildlife habitat and water resources including:

- **Working Forest Easements.** The District works with willing landowners to design conservation easements that maintain the natural values of a forest while allowing for the sustainable production of timber resources.

- **Riparian Easements.** The District works with willing landowners to protect lands along streams by designing easements that preserve the functions and values of stream corridors.
- **Partnerships.** The District collaborates with other conservation agencies and organizations to preserve land with significant natural resource values.
- **Purchase.** The District may purchase lands to protect their conservation values and allow for compatible educational and recreational opportunities.

GUIDE TO MAP IN BACK

The two Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas maps (in back) illustrate resources important to achieving the objectives of this section. The District will focus future efforts on protecting areas that have the highest resource values, including those that have multiple mapped resources, provide connected habitat for a number of species, and/or are highly threatened. This work will include additional research in geographic areas to determine which are most important for maintaining diverse natural areas, water resources and connected wildlife habitat.



RECREATION and EDUCATION

OBJECTIVES

- **Work with partners to create and expand parks as part of a connected system of recreational lands.**
- **Work with partners to expand bicycle, pedestrian, and equestrian trail linkages between communities.**
- **Ensure District-protected lands are managed to protect conservation values while allowing compatible public recreational uses.**
- **Promote recreational and educational opportunities for residents to learn about, enjoy and experience the natural diversity of Sonoma County.**

Recreational lands in Sonoma County contribute substantially to residents' quality of life by providing diverse opportunities to explore scenic and wild areas outside of cities and recreate closer to home. There is a strong community desire to continue preserving open space and improving connections between cities and recreational lands, including county and state parks, open space preserves, urban parks and greenspace, community recreation and pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian trails.

Since its creation in 1990, the District has played an important role in providing and increasing recreational opportunities for Sonoma County residents. Working in partnership with local, county and state park and recreation providers, the District acquires land for parks and trails using voter-approved sales tax funding, and transfers these lands to park providers for ongoing operation and maintenance. In its first 15 years, the District acquired 13,700 acres for public recreation, including 6,100 acres for five state parks and 2,700 acres for six county parks and four new Russian River access points.

The District may also hold title to land it has purchased and protected for the benefit of the public if no park agency is interested in accepting the property or until a park agency can accept ongoing management responsibility. Currently, the District holds title to nearly 3,700 recreational acres: the 1,290-acre Calabazas Creek Open Space Preserve (formerly known as Beltane Ranch) in Glen Ellen; 452 acres on the northern slope of Sonoma Mountain; the 1,100-acre Taylor Mountain properties; the 247-acre Lawson property adjacent to Hood Mountain Regional Park; the 335-acre Carrington Coast Ranch on the Sonoma Coast; and the 98-acre Montini property in Sonoma. The District also owns nearly 160 acres in two urban areas: Paulin Creek Preserve in the City of Santa Rosa and the Healdsburg Ridge Open Space Preserve east of Healdsburg. For each of these projects, the District is currently working with park partners to transfer title or enter into mutually acceptable management agreements.

The District also works with agencies, non-profit organizations and landowners to provide guided public



tours, educational outings and volunteer opportunities on working farms and ranches, as well as on future parkland not yet open to the public.

The District will focus its future efforts on partnering to create and expand parks and preserves that protect and increase awareness of Sonoma County's unique natural areas, to prioritize outdoor recreational opportunities close to urban areas, and to implement trail connections between local and regional protected lands.

RECREATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The District typically purchases land and transfers it to cities, the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department or the California Department of Parks and Recreation to develop and manage as parks. These partnerships have resulted in extraordinary new recreational opportunities around the county, including the 3,373-acre Willow Creek addition to Sonoma Coast State Beach; three new regional parks (40-acre Cloverdale River Park, 304-acre Riverfront Park and the 1,737-acre Tolay Lake Ranch); a 550-acre expansion of Hood Mountain

Regional Park and creation of a new staging area from Highway 12; and a new 150-acre open space preserve on the eastern edge of the City of Healdsburg. District partnerships with cities through the Matching Grant Program have successfully created new urban open space (see sidebar on next page).

Since 2000, the District has leveraged its contribution of sales tax revenue for land purchases with over \$23 million of state and federal grants.

ACCESS TO PROTECTED LANDS/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Once land has been purchased for recreational purposes, the District collaborates with its partners to plan, develop and open these properties for outdoor recreational uses that are compatible with protecting the natural resource values. Providing access to protected lands requires extensive planning and environmental study to ensure that visitors can safely enjoy the land without having an adverse impact

Left: The Carrington Coast Ranch is a 335-acre property along Highway 1 that will be added to Sonoma Coast State Beach.

Above: The District protected 21 acres at Sunset Beach to provide public access to the Russian River.

on the site's natural resources. Under the 1990 voter-approved Expenditure Plan, the District can purchase land for public recreation, but public use must be compatible with protection of the site's conservation values. The District identifies a "conservation purpose" for each property prior to purchase and works with its recreation and resource agency partners to ensure the planned public use of the property is compatible with the con-

servation purpose. Recreational properties are also frequently acquired with the aid and financial assistance of other agencies and organizations that have additional resource management requirements/recommendations.

The District also works with private landowners to consider allowing educational programs and organized outings on their properties that are protected by the District. The continued

URBAN OPEN SPACE

The District works with the county's nine cities, local agencies and non-profit organizations in a unique partnership, the Competitive Matching Grant Program. This innovative program offers grants to enhance natural areas and to provide urban open spaces for public recreational opportunities. The District works with partners to create connections to and from urban and natural areas within or near cities and communities.

The program establishes specific requirements, criteria and procedures for considering projects. Partnership projects between cities, public agencies and non-profit organizations are encouraged. Preference is given to acquisition and development projects that enhance both incorporated and unincorporated land and watercourses.

Partnerships with cities through the Matching Grant Program have resulted in new open spaces within urban areas, including a town green for the Town of Windsor, the 46-acre Paulin Creek Preserve and the Prince

Memorial Greenway project in the City of Santa Rosa, and the 250-acre expansion of lands along the Petaluma River for public access and habitat enhancement adjacent to Shollenberger Park.

The scope and range of projects that are eligible under this program is diverse and may accomplish multiple goals for participating cities, local non-profit organizations and the District. Projects can include the preservation and enhancement of significant natural areas; protection of viable agricultural lands near urban centers that provide for locally grown and produced food; and acquisition of local open space for recreation and public access such as greenways, ball fields and urban parks.

The District will commence each annual application period for the Competitive Matching Grant Program with an informational workshop for cities, agencies and non-profit organizations.



Left: Kayakers on Petaluma Marsh enjoy the 221 protected acres next to Shollenberger Park.

Below: The Windsor Town Green offers residents a place to gather under stately old oak trees.



success of the District's public education and outreach programs will help to ensure that the people of Sonoma County understand the important contribution that agriculture and private lands stewardship makes to our local economy and quality of life.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

In the coming decades, connecting the county's communities to one another and to protected lands throughout the county will be increasingly important. The community has expressed a desire for safe and accessible pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian trails, as well as for increased access to District-protected lands.

Through multi-agency partnerships, the District has leveraged grant funding, landowner endowments and technical assistance on a number of regional recreation projects. Recent District partnerships have resulted in linking protected lands and multi-use trails in the Laguna de Santa Rosa between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa,

and between Jack London State Park and the District's Jacobs Ranch on the north slope of Sonoma Mountain.

The District is currently working with public agency and non-profit partners to expand these existing recreational lands and trails into a connected network, which may include links between Jack London State Park, Crane Creek Regional Park and Annadel State Park, and between Calabazas Creek Open Space Preserve and Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. Future projects may also complete a system of trails that connect Santa Rosa to Sebastopol, Graton, Forestville and Cotati and link segments of the California Coastal Trail through Sonoma County.

EDUCATION

The District has developed both public educational outings and schools programs that encourage appreciation and stewardship of the land and increase awareness about the ongoing threats to the county's diverse agricultural, scenic and natural areas. Working with non-



Above: Providing educational opportunities on District-protected lands helps children learn about nature and their place in it.

profit and agency partners such as LandPaths and the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department, thousands of residents participate in such programs each year on many District-protected properties throughout the county.

POLICIES

The following policies support the four “Recreation and Education” objectives:

- a) Partner with city, county, state, and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to establish and expand parks and preserves that protect Sonoma County’s unique natural habitats, scenic areas, and other open space values of regional importance.
- b) Expand recreational partnerships to acquire, develop and manage lands for new parks, multi-use trails, and preserves.
- c) Acquire or protect lands that promote public access in proximity to urban communities.
- d) Work with partners to provide a network of multi-use trails that connect urban communities and recreational lands.
- e) Work with partners to provide timely public access to District-protected recreational lands.
- f) Work with partners to expand volunteer opportunities for stewardship and restoration of natural resources on District-protected lands.

- g) Coordinate efforts with non-profit partners and landowners to expand the District’s public outings program and other initiatives that offer guided access to District-protected properties.
- h) Ensure sound stewardship and maintenance of District-protected lands by encouraging recreational uses compatible with resource management recommendations.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1) Develop an annual work plan that prioritizes land acquisition based on identified priorities, threats and available funding.
- 2) Work with partners to acquire and provide recreation connections between urban areas and the county.
- 3) Identify and coordinate with potential recreational partners at the early stages of an acquisition project to address funding, acquisition and management needs.
- 4) Coordinate with partners to link existing parks and trails along publicly owned rights-of-way and creek channels.
- 5) Establish standards and recommendations for the resource management and compatible public use of District-protected recreational lands.
- 6) Work with partners to identify additional tools and funding mechanisms that will provide and improve public access to District-protected recreational lands.



Left: Over 1,100 acres of Taylor Mountain adjacent to downtown Santa Rosa are now protected forever for future generations to enjoy.

Above: The 304-acre Riverfront Park west of Windsor provides public access and river-oriented recreation.

SPECIFIC TOOLS FOR RECREATION, NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

The District will continue to work with its partners using innovative methods and tools to protect and increase opportunities for public enjoyment of Sonoma County’s scenic open spaces and natural areas including:

- **Purchase and Transfer to Recreation Provider.** The District may purchase land and transfer title to a recreation provider for ongoing operation and maintenance, subject to a grant agreement.
- **Purchase and Resale.** The District may purchase land, develop a conservation or trail easement that will preserve the conservation values of the property, and then resell it subject to the easement.
- **Purchase and Management Agreement.** The District may purchase and hold title to a property and enter into a cooperative funding and management agreement with a government and/or non-profit partner.
- **Trail Easements.** The District may work with willing sellers to acquire trail easements that enhance connections between existing trails, recreational lands, and urban areas.
- **Natural Resource Management.** The District may partner with agencies, organizations and higher educational institutions to conduct research and prepare resource management recommendations for District-protected lands.
- **Recreational Lease Program.** The District may enter into recreational leases that provide the public with the opportunity to recreate on District-protected lands before these lands formally open as parks or open space preserves.
- **Educational Programs.** The District may partner with agencies, non-profit organizations and landowners to provide public educational programs and organized outings on District-protected lands, including conservation easements.

GUIDE TO MAP IN BACK

The Recreation and Education map (in back) illustrates the District’s important role in working with partners to create a connected system of recreational lands and trails. Recreational lands owned or protected by the District are highlighted, as are other public recreational lands. The District will focus future acquisition efforts on identifying potential recreational connections between parks, trails and communities.



MEASURING SUCCESS

This Long-Range Acquisition Plan establishes a set of goals, objectives and action items. The District will develop work plans that will review goals and objectives and identify specific action items. The District will also measure its annual accomplishments in two ways:

- **Efforts:** Is the District accomplishing the action items set forth in this Acquisition Plan?
- **Outcomes:** Have the action items led to accomplishing the goals and objectives established in this Acquisition Plan?

EFFORT-BASED PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Each year, the District will prepare a work plan, based on this Acquisition Plan, to guide its efforts. The District will review each action item (Farms and Ranches, page 12; Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside, page 16; Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas, page 22; and Recreation and Education, page 28), to set target completion dates.

These efforts can be clearly tracked and measured against the Plan.

For example:

SUCCESS: COASTAL AGRICULTURAL BELT

A principal focus of the District's program is the "working agricultural landscapes" of the county, which are an irreplaceable economic and historic resource. The majority of Sonoma County's dairy and cattle ranches are family-run businesses, passed down for generations. By preserving dairies, farms and ranches, the District also ensures that the scenic landscapes they create will be protected forever.

During the past five years, the District has protected close to 10,000 acres of viable agricultural land in the coastal rangelands that extend from Petaluma to Bodega Bay. In

the Two Rock/Valley Ford coastal grassland area alone, the District holds conservation easements over 16 dairy and livestock ranches, and is currently in negotiations on several other ranches.

These acquisitions are categorized as Farms and Ranches projects; however, they also fulfill objectives of the Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside as well as the Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas categories because they preserve sites that offer beautiful vistas from highways and roads, and areas that preserve ecological integrity and landscape diversity.



Left: The 648-acre Dickson Ranch protects critical wetland areas, part of the San Pablo Baylands.

Above: Protecting the Maffia Ranch, in the coastal agricultural belt, also preserves the ecologically rich Americano Creek.

- **Farms and Ranches, Action Item 5:** “Partner with local agricultural producers and organizations to explore ways the District can help preserve services critical to the long-term viability of agriculture.”

The work plan will specify how many new agricultural landowners will be contacted during the year.

- **Recreation and Education, Action Item 4:** “Coordinate with partners to link existing parks and trails along publicly owned rights-of-way and creek channels.”

The work plan will determine how many projects will be undertaken during the year.

OUTCOME-BASED PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The District will measure progress towards the goals and objectives established in this Plan, including the overall goals (page 6) and the objectives set for each of the four categories:

- Farms and Ranches, page 10;

- Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside, page 14;
- Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas, page 18; and
- Recreation and Education, page 24.

Each year, the District will measure its performance in meeting the specific criteria in each of the four plan categories by calculating how its acquisitions have met:

- Acreage goals;
- Desired characteristics of that acreage; and
- Target regions for that acreage.

Acquiring a relatively small urban open space—especially a parcel with potential for recreational use—may be more difficult and expensive than acquiring a large rural natural area parcel. But that small acquisition may actually accomplish multiple goals and objectives for the District. Thus, measuring this type of success solely by acreage goals would not be fully representative.



Above: The Windsor Town Green was created through the District's Competitive Matching Grant Program.

Overall Goals

When evaluating land for potential acquisition or protection, the District will consider whether it meets one or preferably multiple overall goals. Does this property:

- Help protect our rich rural character and the unique qualities of each city and area throughout the county?
- Contribute to the protection of the ridgetops, coastal bluffs, hillsides, and waterways?
- Provide connections between urban areas, parks, and natural areas throughout the county for both people and wildlife?
- Contribute to the economic vitality of our working farms to preserve the agricultural heritage and diversity of our county?
- Help protect our diverse natural areas and native plants?
- Help maintain water quality and supply by protecting the waterways and associated natural lands?
- Enhance the District's relationship with local agencies and organizations to leverage resources, foster stewardship, and provide opportunities for recreational and educational experiences?

The District will also consider performance criteria specific to each of the four plan categories, identifying target conditions and defining property characteristics and geographical

locales that will guide the District's acquisitions.

Farms and Ranches

To meet the Acquisition Plan objectives, the District will evaluate whether it has successfully protected:

- Dairies and ranches along the Sonoma Coast from Two Rock Valley to the Valley Ford area.
- Small-scale working farms that enhance the availability of locally grown and produced foods.
- Properties that substantially contribute to the agricultural character of the county, including heritage farms, orchards, vineyards, horse ranches, grazing lands, and secondary industries.
- Ranches and farms that provide services critical to the long-term viability of agricultural operations.

The District will also consider whether properties:

- Are large enough to sustain a viable agricultural operation.
- Have highly productive farmland soils.
- Are visible from urban areas or highly traveled corridors.
- Are adjacent to other protected agricultural operations.
- Have landowners with a strong commitment to protecting the agricultural values.

Below: The District permanently protected and enhanced habitats on the Petaluma Marsh.

Right: A permanent agricultural conservation easement ensures heifers will continue to be raised on Maffia Ranch for local dairies.



- Have development potential, that could undermine conservation values.

Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside

To meet the Acquisition Plan objectives, the District will evaluate whether it has successfully protected:

- Lands between cities (or community separators) that help preserve the distinct identities of each community.
- Prominent hills, ridgelines and mountains throughout the county.
- Scenic lands visible from major highway corridors and from town centers, businesses, parks and homes.
- Lands that contribute to Sonoma County's unique visual character, including rural countryside, land with unusual geographic features and scenic lands identified in general plans of cities.

The District will also consider whether properties:

- Create a connection between urban communities and/or other protected areas.
- Are adjacent to other protected lands.

- Have potential for an agricultural or recreational use.
- Offer uses and improvements consistent with the protection of the scenic values.
- Have landowners with a strong commitment to protecting the scenic values.
- Have a high risk of being lost without District participation.
- Have development potential, that could undermine conservation values.

Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas

To meet the Acquisition Plan objectives, the District will evaluate whether it has successfully protected:

- Large stands of contiguous oak woodland and connecting habitats, including land in the Mark West Creek, Big Sulfur Creek, Santa Rosa Creek and Sonoma Creek watersheds.
- Lands that conserve and restore oak woodlands within the Santa Rosa



Plain and other areas of the county.

- Lands with significant stands of mature forests within the Coastal Range.
- Lands that contribute to watershed protection.
- Intact core habitat areas and the linkages between them, including riparian corridors and other habitat corridors.
- High quality fish-bearing streams.
- Contiguous areas of high quality riparian habitat, adjacent uplands, and wetlands critical to protecting watershed values, fish and wildlife habitat, and water quality, including the Petaluma River, San Pablo Baylands, Salmon and Sonoma

Creeks, and the Russian River and its tributaries such as the Laguna de Santa Rosa and the Mark West, Mayacama, Santa Rosa, and Austin Creeks.

- Lands that protect critical ground-water recharge areas.
- Lands that maintain the scenic quality of oak-dominated landscapes.
- Lands that are rich in diverse habitat and wildlife species.

The District will also consider whether properties:

- Have strong ecological value (unique site, beneficial habitat, species diversity, protection of endangered species, etc.).

SUCCESS: NORTH SLOPE OF SONOMA MOUNTAIN

During the past four years the District, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, Sonoma County Regional Parks Department, and California State Department of Parks and Recreation have been working to connect a series of properties on the north slope of Sonoma Mountain, the most prominent feature in the county. The District has protected 452 acres of open space access on the Skiles, Wilroth, Cooper’s Grove and Jacobs Ranch properties for a proposed trail corridor between Jack London State Historic Park and the District’s Jacobs Ranch. The trail will greatly increase public recreational access to Sonoma Mountain, extend the existing Jack London trail by about five miles, and become a primary spine segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. This multiple-use trail extension could create many opportunities for increased

public use—including access for wheelchairs, pedestrians, bicycles and equestrians.

These acquisitions are categorized as Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside projects; however they also fulfill objectives of the Recreation and Education and Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas categories, because they preserve sites with spectacular vistas and geographic features and large, unfragmented oak woodland and forest areas—some of the most prominent remaining redwood groves on Sonoma Mountain. These lands provide habitat for many important plant and animal species integral to preserving the natural character of Sonoma County, including raptors, ground nesting birds and a wide variety of mammals.



Left: Looking east on Toley Lake Ranch yields stunning sunrises.

Below: Restoring Petaluma Marsh offers recreation access while preserving natural values.



- Have high quality resources.
- Have sensitive species or habitat.
- Create a connection between core habitat areas or protected lands.
- Are adjacent to other protected lands.
- Offer uses and improvements consistent with the protection of the scenic values.
- Have landowners with a strong commitment to protecting the conservation values.
- Have a high risk of being lost without District participation.

Recreation and Education

To meet the Acquisition Plan objectives, the District will evaluate whether it has successfully established:

- Connections between existing recreational lands and trails, including lands that connect Santa Rosa to Sebastopol, Graton, Forestville, and Cotati.

- Programs that encourage appreciation and stewardship of land and that educate the public about the importance of protecting the county’s diverse scenic and natural areas.
- Public access to District-protected lands for recreational uses compatible with preserving the lands’ resource values.
- Opportunities for residents to visit properties protected by conservation easements.

The District will also consider whether properties:

- Create a connection between urban areas and/or recreational lands.
- Are adjacent to a park or other recreational lands.
- Have important scenic or natural values.
- Have a high risk of being lost without District participation.
- Have a willing recreational partner.

APPENDIX

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plying data used in the preparation
of *Connecting Communities and the Land: A
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California Department of
Conservation, Farmland Mapping and
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County of Sonoma, Information
Systems Department, GIS Central

Madrone Audubon Society
Sonoma County Agricultural
Commissioner's Office
Sonoma County Grape Growers
Association
Sonoma County Regional Parks
Department
Sonoma Ecology Center
Sonoma Land Trust
United States Census Bureau
United States Department of
Agriculture
United States Geological Survey
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
University of California-Berkeley,
Research and Extension Center
University of California Cooperative
Extension

Open Space Authority
Al Alys

Bob Anderson
Jean Kapolchok
Liza Prunuske
Mike Sangiacomo
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Citizens' Advisory Committee

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Paul Brophy, Business
Suzanne Doyle, Environmental
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Cary Fargo, Real Estate
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Caryl Hart, Fifth District
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Councilmembers' Association

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Second District

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Dennis Murphy, Fourth District

Gail Pardini-Plass, Mayors' and
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Carol A. Van Vonno, Executive
Assistant

Former District Staff and Open Space Authority and Advisory

**Committee members who served
during the preparation of** *Connecting
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Lori S. MacNab, AICP, Associate
Open Space Planner

Jennifer McCallum Voight, Citizens'
Advisory Committee

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Bay Area Open Space Council, 246 John Street, Oakland, CA 94611. 510/654-6591 Internet site: www.openspacecouncil.org

California State Coastal Conservancy, 1330 Broadway, 11th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612-2530. 510/286-4176 Internet site: www.coastalconservancy.ca.gov

Land Trust Alliance, 1319 F Street NW, Suite 501, Washington, DC 20004-1106. 202/638-4725 Internet site: www.lta.org

The Nature Conservancy, 201 Mission Street, 4th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105. 415/777-0487 Internet site: www.tnc.org

Sonoma Land Trust, 1122 Sonoma Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95405. 707/526-6930 Internet site: www.sonomalandtrust.org

The Trust for Public Land, 116 New Montgomery Street, 4th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105. 800/714-5263 Internet site: www.tpl.org

MAPPING METHODS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Farms and Ranches

Farmlands near cities were mapped to illustrate areas of concentrated farming adjacent to cities. These areas include farmers' market certified producers, state registered organic farms, pesticide spray permit sites (agricultural uses only), and Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (2002 FMMP) designated prime, state, unique, and locally important farmland. Rangeland experts in Sonoma County identified the grasslands of the southwest, between Bodega and Petaluma, as a critical grazing region for livestock, including cows and sheep. The region was refined using assessor's information and 2002 farmland maps (State Dept. of Conservation) to create a uniform zone of large, viable areas for ranching and dairying.

Data Acknowledgements:

- Farmland Near Cities: County of Sonoma, Agricultural Commissioner's Office pesticide spray permits, registered organic farms, certified farmers' market producers, all current. California State Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (2002).

- Coastal Agriculture: North Coast GIS Lab 1999, revised by Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District 2005.
- Major Roads and Highways, Rivers: County of Sonoma, Information Systems Department, GIS Central.
- Cities and Urban Growth Boundaries: Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.
- District Holdings and Projects, Public/Protected Land: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.
- Major Roads and Highways, Rivers: County of Sonoma, Information Systems Department, GIS Central.
- Cities and Urban Growth Boundaries: Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.
- District Holdings and Projects, Public/Protected Land: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside

Greenbelts and scenic hillsides were mapped to include lands between and around cities and areas undergoing urban growth and rural subdivision. Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside include Community Separators and Scenic Landscape Units, as identified in the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan, as well as other highly visible backdrops to cities. Proposed amendments to the County General Plan were also considered.

Data Acknowledgements:

- Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District with input from technical experts from city and county planning and zoning.

Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas: Forests, Oak Woodlands and Species Rich Areas

Oak woodland and conifer forest priority areas were selected using the following steps. 1) All hardwood- and conifer-dominated communities were identified from the California Department of Forestry (CDF) vegetation map, which is based on 1990-satellite imagery with 25-meter resolution. 2) The vegetation map was updated using several other data sources in order to more accurately identify areas that have been developed or that now support intensive agriculture. 3) The remaining hardwood and conifer areas were then prioritized by selecting only core areas defined as continuous stands of oaks and conifers, separated by no more than 2 pixels (50m) of non-tree habitat (shrub, grass, water, "urban", and other). Thus, several distinct patches

of core forest can exist within a single patch of undeveloped “core habitat.” Patches of conifer or hardwood were considered disconnected if they were separated by 25 meters of either developed or agricultural land. The minimum size for core areas in the northeast, where extensive habitat remains, was 250 acres. In the southeast, where oak woodland stands tend to be much smaller, all core woodlands greater than 50 acres were included. 4) Tanoak-dominated areas mapped by the Land Cover Mapping and Monitoring Program (CDF 1998) were removed from the core areas. 5) The Laguna de Santa Rosa has highly valued Valley Oak trees. Therefore, all hardwoods mapped in the Laguna Priority Plan (Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, 2003) were used to identify remaining Valley Oaks in the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Habitats that are associated with the greatest possible number of vertebrate species (“species rich areas”) according to the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) Wildlife Habitat Relationship (WHR) models were mapped using the California Gap Analysis Program (CA GAP) polygon data.

Data Acknowledgements:

- Core Forest Lands and Core Oak Woodlands: IHRMP, North Coast GIS Lab 2005; Laguna Priority Plan, Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation and Sonoma Land Trust 2003.
- Species Richness: IHRMP, North Coast GIS Lab 1999, derived from California Gap Analysis WHR models 1999.
- Major Highways and Rivers: County of Sonoma, Information Systems Department, GIS Central.
- Cities and Urban Growth Boundaries: Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.
- District Holdings and Projects, Public/Protected Land: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

**Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas:
Aquatic Resources and Water Benefits**

Priority riparian corridors represent stream reaches determined to be important for salmonid fish species and freshwater shrimp by federal, state, and local fisheries biologists. Added to these reaches were upstream headwaters that may not currently support salmonids or freshwater shrimp but are important for water quality protection. Wetlands can be difficult to map due to their small size and ephemeral nature. Wetlands mapped

represent the best available digital information but do not include all wetlands in the county. The information used was taken from the National Wetlands Inventory for the southern part of the county south of the town of Sonoma, and vernal pools and perennial wetlands identified as part of the Laguna Priority Plan (Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, 2003). Major groundwater basins and natural recharge areas were obtained from the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department. The original boundaries were derived from Sonoma County Water Agency hydrology maps and the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan. The underlying source is from a surface geology study by M.E. Huffman and C.F. Armstrong (1980).

Data Acknowledgements:

- Wetlands: National Wetlands Inventory, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1992, Laguna Priority Plan, Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation and Sonoma Land Trust 2003.
- Riparian corridors: NOAA Salmonid Distribution Layers; Historical Distribution and Current Status of Steelhead/Rainbow Trout in Streams of the San Francisco Estuary, California,

Leidy et al (CEMAR, 2005); CalFish Steelhead Abundance Database 2005; Acquisition Plan 2000 salmonid and freshwater shrimp distribution, personal communication with Bob Coey and Bill Cox, Central Coast Region, California Department of Fish and Game 1999; CDFG surveys during 1993-2002; personal communication with Derek Acomb, Central Coast Region, California Department of Fish and Game 2005-2006; personal communication with Caitlin Cornwall, Sonoma Ecology Center 2005; Weldon Jones (CDFG, retired) coastal salmon and steelhead distribution report for NMFS 2000.

- Major Highways and Rivers: County of Sonoma, Information Systems Department, GIS Central.
- Cities and Urban Growth Boundaries: Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.
- District Holdings and Projects, Public/Protected Land: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

Recreation and Education

Recreation connections mapped in this plan reflect the goal of creating connections between communities and existing parks and open spaces.

Included are many recreational priorities set forth by other county departments, such as the Regional Parks and Permit and Resource Management Departments. Added to these priorities are connections to District-protected lands where public access is planned. Mapped river access corridors further reflect the goal of the District to prioritize public access to the county's rivers and streams. The mapped corridors represent priorities designated by the Regional Parks and Permit and Resource Management Departments, and may include riverside trails, boat put-ins, and public beaches.

Data Acknowledgements:

- Recreation Connections: Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan 2003, County of Sonoma Regional Parks Department; 1989 Sonoma County General Plan, Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department; Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.
- River Access: Draft Outdoor Recreation Plan 2003, County of Sonoma Regional Parks Department; 1989 Sonoma County General Plan, Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.
- Major Highways and Rivers: County of Sonoma, Information Systems Department, GIS Central.

- Cities and Urban Growth Boundaries: Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department.
- District Holdings and Projects, Public/Protected Land: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

MEASURES A & C

In February 1990, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors sponsored AB 3630, the enabling legislation for the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. In August 1990, the Board created the Open Space Authority to finance the acquisition of interests in agricultural and open space lands through a 1/4 percent sales tax. The Open Space Authority requested that the Board call a special election on the Authority's measure imposing a 1/4 percent sales tax and Expenditure Plan.

The District was formed under Section 5500 et. seq. of the Public Resources Code. Acquisition and management of lands by the District will conform to the provisions of the enabling legislation. Specifically, Section 6 states that the District shall not exercise the power of eminent domain. Further, the District may not

validly convey any interest in real property actually dedicated and used for park or open space purposes, or both, without the approval of two-thirds of the District's Board of Directors, and consent of a majority of the voters of the District in a special election called by the Board and held for that purpose (Section 5540).

COUNTY OF SONOMA OPEN SPACE DISTRICT FORMATION MEASURE A

Shall the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District be created and established?

FULL TEXT OF MEASURE A

RESOLUTION NO. 90-1532

Dated: August 14, 1990

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SONOMA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA. CONCLUDING THE PUBLIC HEARING, CALLING A SPECIAL ELECTION ON THE FORMATION OF THE SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ANNUAL APPROPRIATIONS LIMIT, ORDERING NOTICE OF ELEC-

TION, ORDERING CONSOLIDATION OF THE SPECIAL ELECTION WITH THE GENERAL ELECTION TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 6, 1990, REFERRING THE MATTER TO THE LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION EXECUTIVE OFFICER PURSUANT TO PUBLIC RESOURCES CODE SECTION 5517.1, AND RESCINDING RESOLUTION NO. 90-1419, DATED JULY 24, 1990.

WHEREAS, this Board did on July 10, 1990 adopt resolution no. 90-1286 noticing a public hearing on the question of the formation of the proposed Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District; and

WHEREAS, that public hearing has been correctly noticed and all persons present were allowed to hear and be heard; and

WHEREAS, following the conclusion of the public hearing this Board did adopt resolution no. 90-1419, dated July 24, 1990 which resolution incorrectly set forth the language of the ballot measure in a manner that does not meet the requirements of Public Resources Code section 5518;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Board of Supervisors hereby finds, declares, determines and orders as follows:

1. That the foregoing recitations are true and correct.
2. That the public hearing is concluded.
3. The name of the district shall be the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.
4. The reason for forming the district is to further the state policy on the preservation of open space expressed in Government Code section 65562 and to implement the Agricultural and Open Space Elements of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan.
5. That the District shall only purchase interests in real property from willing sellers.
6. That all lands within the boundaries of the district will be benefited by being included within the district.
7. It is proposed that the district will be financed by gifts, grants, special taxes, general obligation bonds and other sources of revenue authorized by law or any combination thereof.
8. The boundaries of the district be coterminous with the boundaries of the County of Sonoma.
9. The annual appropriations limit of the district shall be \$20 million.
10. A special election on the following question is hereby called to be held on November 6, 1990:
 Shall the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District be created and established?
 YES
 NO
11. The special election is hereby ordered consolidated with the November 6, 1990 general election and the County Clerk is hereby authorized and directed to do all things required by law to conduct the election.
12. In accordance with Public Resources Code section 5517, the Clerk shall cause a certified copy of this resolution to be published once a week for three successive weeks prior to the date of the election in the Press Democrat.
13. In accordance with Public Resources Code section 5517.1, the Clerk shall deliver a copy of this resolution, within five days of its adoption, by registered mail to the Executive Officer of the Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission for the preparation of an impartial analysis to be included with the sample ballot.
14. That the formation of the District is exempt from the requirements

of the California Environmental Quality Act as a program or project which is submitted to a vote of the people [California Administrative Code §15378(b)(4)].

15. That resolution no. 90-1419, dated July 24, 1990, is hereby rescinded.

SUPERVISORS:

NICHOLAS: absent

HARBERSON: aye

SMITH: absent

CARPENTER: aye

ESPOSTI: aye

AYES: 3

NOES: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

ABSENT: 2

SO ORDERED

COUNTY OF SONOMA AGRICULTURE AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION: MEASURE C

Shall the people of Sonoma County approve an ordinance for agricultural land preservation and open space acquisition, imposing a 0.25 percent sales tax for a period not to exceed 20 years, with an annual appropriations limit of \$40 million?

FULL TEXT OF MEASURE C

AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE EXPENDITURE PLAN

EXHIBIT A

The purpose of this expenditure plan is to implement the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan by preserving agricultural land use and open space. This purpose will be accomplished primarily through the purchase of development rights from willing sellers in areas of the County which are designated in the General Plan Open Space Element but may include the purchase of fee interests for public recreation where the public use would not be inconsistent with the Open Space designation provided below.

Designated open space areas include community separators, scenic landscape units, scenic corridors, critical habitat areas and riparian corridors.

- I. Community separators are generally located between cities, providing visual relief from continuous urbanization. These lands are frequently subject to development pressures, and therefore, have been identified as priority sites for acquisition to prevent urban sprawl, to retain the rural and open character of the County and to preserve agricultural uses.

2. Scenic landscape units and scenic corridors are areas of high visual quality.
3. Critical habitat areas and riparian corridors, such as wetlands, rare and endangered species locations, fresh and salt water marshes, oak savannahs, streams and watercourses, are environmentally sensitive areas requiring protection and careful management.
4. Other areas of biotic significance which may be adversely impacted by development and incompatible land use are the Petaluma River, Laguna de Santa Rosa, and San Pablo Bay margin.
5. Other open space projects including, but not limited to, urban open space projects within incorporated areas of Sonoma County. Funds for these projects will be available on a competitive matching grant basis, with preference given to acquisition and development projects which affect both incorporated and unincorporated lands and watercourses. Examples of such projects include restoration of the Petaluma River and Santa Rosa Creek.

This expenditure plan shall be administered by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open

Space District and the Authority shall enter into a contract with the District for that purpose.

DIRECTORS:

ALYS: aye
 ANDERSON: absent
 COOKE: aye
 GILLEN: aye
 GOUIG: aye
 MERZ: aye

AYES: 5
 NOES: 0
 ABSTAIN: 0
 ABSENT: 1

WHEREUPON, the Chair declared the above and foregoing ordinance duly adopted and

SO ORDERED

s/ Charles Cooke, Chairperson
 Attest: s/ Eeve T. Lewis