



**A V I S I O N F O R
L A N D C O N S E R V A T I O N
I N S O N O M A C O U N T Y**

DRAMA





REPORT AVAILABILITY

Find out more about the Vital Lands Initiative and access digital files for download at www.vital-lands.org. The most updated version of the plan will be posted there, as well as on the Sonoma County Ag + Open Space website: www.sonomaopenspace.org.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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ON THE COVER

Text describing the photo on the cover, including "... Protected forever by the Sonoma Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Photo by [PLACEHOLDER]



THE VITAL LANDS INITIATIVE

A VISION FOR LAND CONSERVATION IN SONOMA COUNTY

COMMUNITY REVIEW DRAFT MARCH 2018



Foreword

General Manager Foreword

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) was envisioned by the voters of Sonoma County to ensure healthy and thriving natural and working lands in Sonoma County. We are honored to have been entrusted with the community’s vision for a vibrant and beautiful Sonoma County, and every day we work with our partners to implement this vision. We have spent the last year working with the community and our partners to develop a shared strategy for the future of land conservation in Sonoma County, informed by the best available science and data. We are excited to share with you the Ag + Open Space Vital Lands Initiative – a comprehensive long-term strategic plan that will guide our conservation work through 2031.

Bill Keene

GENERAL MANAGER

Board of Directors Chair Foreword

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James Gore

BOARD CHAIR





Acknowledgments

Visionary Voters of Sonoma County. The voters of Sonoma County created Ag + Open Space to protect natural and working lands, choosing to tax themselves to ensure that Sonoma County retains open space lands that maintain the beautiful scenic nature of our county, support family farms and local food, protect our watersheds and native habitats, create recreational opportunities, and maintain greenbelts to ensure the unique character of our cities and towns.

Land Conservation Community. Sonoma County is fortunate to have an active, experienced, and well-informed land conservation community that has provided input and feedback about the critical needs and opportunities that exist here. Conservation partners, environmental professionals, and stakeholders have spent hundreds of hours working with us to develop the Vital Lands Initiative.

Agricultural Community. Protecting productive agricultural lands is a complicated and nuanced endeavor. Ag + Open Space has cultivated a strong relationship with our local agricultural community, upon whom we rely to provide guidance about how to protect working lands throughout the county. Numerous individuals and organizations helped craft the Vital Lands Initiative, providing valuable insights and guidance in support of the plan.

Reviewers, Academics, and Technical Experts. Ag + Open Space worked with experts from diverse fields to ensure that the most up-to-date science and data informed the Vital Lands Initiative. The following individuals and organizations provided technical and scientific input to the Vital Lands Initiative:

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Board of Directors. Ag + Open Space is governed by a Board of Directors, which consists of the five elected County Supervisors, one representing each Supervisorial District. Their leadership and policy direction was instrumental in ensuring that this document reflects the Sonoma County community. The current Ag + Open Space Board of Directors includes:

Director Susan Gorin | First District

Director Shirlee Zane | Third District

Director Lynda Hopkins | Fifth District

Director David Rabbitt | Second District

Director James Gore | Fourth District

Advisory Committee. Ag + Open Space is fortunate to be guided by an Advisory Committee. This group provided invaluable suggestions and advice throughout the development of the Vital Lands Initiative, representing a variety of stakeholders and communities throughout the county. At the time of publication, the Advisory Committee includes:

Jan McFarland | First District

John Nagle | Fifth District

Curt Nichols (Chair Pro Tem) | Business

Paul Martin | Second District

Evan Wiig | Fifth District

Don McEnhill (Vice Chair) | Environment

Steve Rabinowitsh | Third District

David Cook | Mayors and Councilmembers

Cary Fargo | Real Estate

Elly Grogan | Third District

John Dell’Osso (Chair) | Mayors & Councilmembers

Halei Trowbridge | Youth

Bill Smith | Fourth District

Neysa Hinton | Mayors & Councilmembers

Eddie Smith | Youth

Doug Lipton | Fourth District

Tawny Tesconi | Agriculture

Fiscal Oversight Commission. Ag + Open Space receives guidance from a Fiscal Oversight Commission, which provides independent fiscal oversight of projects and operations. Their input in the Vital Lands Initiative helped create a logical and clear product. At the time of publication, the Fiscal Oversight Commission includes:

Michael J. Sangiacomo | First District

Bob Anderson | Fourth District

Todd Mendoza | Second District

Eric J. Koenigshofer | Fifth District

Regina De La Cruz | Third District

Jeff Owen | Alternate Commissioner



Table Of Contents

1

Introduction

Mission and vision
of Ag + Open Space

page xx

2

Vital Lands Initiative

A Vision for Sonoma County
Land Conservation

page xx

3

About Ag + Open Space

Primer on how we accomplish
our mission

page xx

4

Past, Present, and Future

Natural and working lands in
Sonoma County

page xx

5

Local Land Conservation

Land protection in
Sonoma County

page xx

6

Outcomes on the Land

Goals, Objectives, Strategies
and Performance Indicators

page xx

7

Looking Forward

Enacting the Vision

page xx

Appendix A: Acronyms | **Appendix B:** Glossary | **Appendix C:** References | **Appendix D:** Data Sources & Analysis Methods | **Appendix E:** Community Engagement

Appendix F: State & Federal Laws Affecting Local Land Use | **Appendix G:** Formation Of Ag + Open Space



Overview

The mission of Ag + Open Space is to permanently protect the diverse agricultural, natural resource, and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. To successfully accomplish this mission, we need a long-term strategic plan that identifies priorities and guides our conservation actions. This plan, developed with input from our partners and the community, will ensure that we are working together with all stakeholders to best achieve our shared goals of land conservation and the protection of the open spaces that we all value.



[SECTION ONE]

Introduction

Sonoma County's natural and working lands provide many benefits to our community: local food, ecosystems that sustain native plant and animal species, greenbelts and scenic vistas that contribute to the beauty and rural quality of our county, and parks and open spaces that allow people to get outside and experience the joy and health benefits of outdoor recreation. In 1990, the visionary voters of Sonoma County formed the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) to ensure that these landscapes, and the benefits that they provide, would be protected forever. Since that time, Ag + Open Space has protected over 114,000 acres of land, achieving many of the priorities of Sonoma County voters, including preserving agricultural productivity, healthy watersheds, functional ecosystems and biodiversity, recreational opportunities, and incredibly beautiful landscapes.





INTRODUCTION

Ag + Open Space Mission & Vision

Our Mission:

The 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.

Our Vision:

Protected land throughout Sonoma County that connects and supports thriving natural areas, agriculture and communities.

WHAT IS OPEN SPACE?

Open space is an area of land or water that is primarily undeveloped and used for the preservation of natural resources, agriculture, outdoor recreation, greenbelts, and community separators. For more information see Appendix ##.

AG + OPEN SPACE HAS PROTECTED:

acres

equivalent to ##% of the land in Sonoma County

acres

of greenbelts

##,### acres

of redwood forest

##,### acres

of wetlands

##

parks and preserves

##,### acres

native oak woodland and forest

properties

producing local food and wine

acres

of grazing land

##

of scenic lands protected





[SECTION TWO]

The Vital Lands Initiative

The Vital Lands Initiative is a long-term strategic plan for Sonoma County land conservation, outlining a set of priorities for the future work of Ag + Open Space. There are abundant opportunities for land protection in Sonoma County, but limited funding available. It is critical that Ag + Open Space prioritize its conservation actions to carry out the community's vision in the most effective way possible.





THE VITAL LANDS INITIATIVE

Purpose and Approach

The purpose of the Vital Lands Initiative is to:

- Outline a set of goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve perpetual protection of the highest priority working and natural lands in Sonoma County
- Provide clear criteria and decision support for Ag + Open Space land conservation actions
- Establish Performance Indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of land conservation actions
- Provide a flexible decision-making framework that allows Ag + Open Space to incorporate new information, adapt, and make effective decisions given new opportunities
- Share Ag + Open Space conservation priorities with the community and our partners

The approach to developing the Vital Lands Initiative:

- Build on a foundation of success, learning from past land conservation experience
- Engage with the entire community, including agriculture, recreation, and conservation partners; local, state, and federal government officials; stakeholders, special interest groups, and members of the public to include their priorities in the development of this plan
- Use science and data to guide decisions, and collaborate with experts and partners to acquire, understand, and share data

VITAL LANDS INITIATIVE
DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

Board Direction

Develop a community supported, comprehensive plan for Ag + Open Space

EARLY 2016

Staff Development & Scoping

Staff considered previous plans completed by Ag + Open Space and other similar organizations, and developed an approach for the Vital Lands Initiative

SPRING 2017

Community Meetings & Workshops

A series of community meetings and workshops helped to provide early direction for what would become the goals, objectives, and strategies outlined in the document

2015 & 2016

Data & Analysis Planning

Data was sourced and additional analyses completed in order to utilize the best available data, or identify data gaps

SPRING 2017-WINTER 2018

Input from Ag + Open Space Advisory Committee

The Ag + Open Space Advisory Committee provided input on the Vital Lands Initiative from an early stage, including technical expertise, community outreach strategy, and final document review



To bring this strategic vision outlined in the Vital Lands Initiative to fruition and achieve the outcomes envisioned by Sonoma County voters, Ag + Open Space will present Implementation Plans for our Board of Directors to consider during the annual budget process. Voter approved elements of the Vital Lands Initiative will remain constant through the 2031 planning horizon, such as the Expenditure Plan and the Vital Lands Initiative Goals derived from legislative mandates. Other elements of the Vital Lands Initiative are subject to updating and refinement during the annual budget process, as Implementation Plans are developed and approved by the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors.



THE VITAL LANDS INITIATIVE

Developing the Vital Lands Initiative

Ag + Open Space has a broad mission and protects land in perpetuity in a county that spans over a million acres. As a result, prioritizing land conservation actions is critically important and must rely on the best available information to ensure the most effective outcome for Sonoma County taxpayers. To develop the Vital Lands Initiative, Ag + Open Space collaborated with community members and key conservation partners to build on our foundation of success and to plan for our next phase of land conservation.

Collaboration and Community Involvement

Our community is fortunate to have a wealth of experts in a variety of fields, some world-renowned for their knowledge of local landscapes. Recognizing that these individuals are a critical resource in helping to identify effective and efficient ways to carry out our mission, Ag + Open Space developed a series of tools to solicit their input, including polling, surveys, interviews, workshops, small group meetings, and one-on-one meetings. Devoting resources to connecting with these experts was critical in shaping the direction of the Vital Lands Initiative and in confirming that the priorities established were sound and well-supported..

Timeframe and Scope

The Vital Lands Initiative is primarily focused on Ag + Open Space priorities and actions across Sonoma County from now until 2031 when the funding measure sunsets. However, given the long-term nature of conservation work, the achievement of some objectives will continue beyond 2031. For example, the responsibility of Ag + Open Space for stewardship of lands protected through conservation easements is perpetual. For more information about how we will protect these lands into the future, please see page ##. (link to finance section re: stewardship reserve)

Science and Data

Ag + Open Space has a long history of using the best available science and data to support its mission. In developing the Vital Lands Initiative, Ag + Open Space updated and refined existing datasets to better support the identification of land conservation priorities. Staying current on science and data related to our mission enables us to constantly improve our effectiveness and most efficiently utilize the dollars generated by the voter-approved measure.





KEY TERMS

Goals

Goals are the primary outcomes toward which land conservation efforts and actions are directed.

Objectives

Objectives reflect desired outcomes which support the goals identified by the Vital Lands Initiative.

Strategies

Strategies are the “hows” – tools or approaches to achieve a particular objective.

Performance Indicators

Indicators document the degree to which Ag + Open Space is achieving a particular objective.

Implementation Plans

Specific actions that Ag + Open Space will take, approved by the Board of Directors.

For a more detailed definition of the above terms and examples, please see Appendix ##.

THE VITAL LANDS INITIATIVE

How will Ag + Open Space use the Vital Lands Initiative?

The Vital Lands Initiative provides a strategic plan to prioritize Ag + Open Space conservation work through 2031. It will guide our efforts in the following specific ways:

- Guides the integration of all Ag + Open Space work. It will support Conservation Planning, Acquisition, Stewardship and Administrative staff to coordinate and focus activities to implement high quality land conservation on behalf of the residents of Sonoma County.
- Provides a set of desired outcomes and tools that we can use to achieve those outcomes. Principles, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies allow us to be responsive to changing conditions, yet they are narrow enough to keep us focused on conserving the highest-value lands in the county.
- Provide a set of Performance Indicators that will help Ag + Open Space staff, our partners, and the public measure and assess the effectiveness of our work.
- Guide the development of Implementation Plans that will outline the specific actions Ag + Open Space will take in order to achieve its goals. These might include particular regions within the county to focus acquisitions, or certain programs to deploy in support of a particular strategy or objective.
- Implementation Plans will integrate information about the current conditions, funding opportunities, trends, and updated data to guide timely and effective decisions about specific actions to support the Ag + Open Space mission. Implementation plans will be brought before the Board of Directors for approval on an annual basis. Each plan will include information regarding which Vital Lands Initiative objectives and strategies will be achieved, the geographic scope and timeline for the work, proposed expenditures, focused actions, partnerships and outside funding.
- Guide collaborative conservation efforts, extending the reach of the quarter-cent sales tax that funds Ag + Open Space, and helping us to align our work with our partner's efforts.





[SECTION TWO]

About Ag + Open Space

Similar to other California counties, Sonoma County's farms and ranches, greenbelt, and natural lands experienced development pressures in the 1980s. In 1990, the voters created a public entity, one of the first of its kind in the country, to protect both agriculture and open space lands. Measures A and C established the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) and funded it through a quarter-cent sales tax through 2011. Measure A set up Ag + Open Space pursuant to Public Resources Code sections 5500 et seq., which allows for the creation of an open space district. Measure C called for the sales tax to fund agricultural preservation and open space acquisition over a 20-year period. In 2006 voters passed Measure F with 76% of the vote to extend the sales tax through 2031. Measure F also updated the Expenditure Plan (See page ##) which describes how the collected tax revenue can be spent.



**AG + OPEN SPACE
HAS PROTECTED**

114,171 acres
to date

108,935 acres
with
234 easements

5,200 acres
over
25 properties



ABOUT AG + OPEN SPACE

Our Roots: California Public Resources Code, The Expenditure Plan, and Funding Measures

In the 1980s, Sonoma County residents decided that it was important to protect Sonoma County's farms and rural landscapes from the urban encroachment engulfing many California counties at the time. In 1990, the voters were asked to create a public entity, one of the first of its kind in the country, to protect both agriculture and open space lands. Voters approved Measures A and C to establish the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and fund it through a quarter-cent sales tax through 2011. Measure A set up Ag + Open Space pursuant to Public Resources Code sections 5500 et seq., which allows for the creation of an open space district. Measure C called for the sales tax to fund agricultural preservation and open space acquisition over a 20-year period. In 2006 voters passed Measure F with 76% of the vote to extend the sales tax through 2031. Measure F also updated the Expenditure Plan (See page ##) which describes how the collected tax revenue can be spent.

California Public Resources Code

The County's creation of Ag + Open Space furthered the state policy on the preservation of open space expressed in Government Code section 65562 and implemented the Agriculture and Open Space Elements of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan. Specifically, Program 4 of the Open Space Element in the 1989 General Plan called for consideration of a ballot measure to establish a district to acquire and administer open space lands.

In addition to enabling the formation of open space districts, the Public Resources Code also clarifies allowable actions of such districts. Section 5540,

for example, limits the re-conveyance of real property interest once it has been dedicated to park and open space purposes. For more information on the laws and early history of Ag + Open Space, see Formation of Ag + Open Space. (HYPERLINK TO APPENDIX ##)

Sonoma County General Plan 2020

The Expenditure Plan specifically guides Ag + Open Space to implement the Sonoma County General Plan and the General Plans of the county's incorporated cities by "preserving agricultural land use and open space." The components of Sonoma County General Plan 2020 (GP2020) most relevant to the mission of Ag + Open Space are the Land Use, Open Space and Resource Conservation, and Agricultural Resources Elements with key supporting policies in the Water Resources Element.

Many of the goals and policies of the Land Use Element (HYPERLINK TO GP2020 WEBSITE) provide fundamental direction for Ag + Open Space, including maintaining open space between and around cities (LU-5), protecting lands currently in and potentially suitable for agricultural production (LU-9), and encouraging "conservation of undeveloped land, open space, and agricultural lands, protection of water and soil quality, restoration of ecosystems, and minimization or elimination of the disruption of existing natural ecosystems and flood plains" (Policy LU-11f).



FAQ

How long do Ag + Open Space conservation easements last?

Forever. Ownership of a property may change over time, but the conservation easement is a legal document that 'runs with the land' even when the land ownership changes.

Does Ag + Open Space take land?

No. The voter-approved Expenditure Plan limits Ag + Open Space to work only with willing sellers. Ag + Open Space does not have the power of eminent domain.



ABOUT AG + OPEN SPACE

Accomplishments to Date

Over the past 27 years, Ag + Open Space has acquired and stewarded conservation easements over farms, ranches, and natural lands, purchased key properties with partners for parks and open space preserves, and helped local cities and community organizations to create and connect neighborhood trails, parks, and gardens. Ag + Open Space has achieved an enduring impact greater than the sum of the benefits of protecting each individual piece of land. Our impact on the Sonoma County landscape includes:

- A belt of protected farms and ranches stretching west from Petaluma to the coast, safeguarding not only the rural character and local food production, but also the critical connections necessary for a strong dairy economy;
- Key links along the Sonoma coast that connect existing public lands, conserve miles of scenic corridors, support grazing, and give residents and visitors the opportunity to see and experience some of the most spectacular scenery in the country;
- Protected properties along the Mayacamas Mountains to preserve wildlife corridors and headwater areas, nurture biodiversity, and for hiking and outdoor experiences close to urban areas;
- Clusters of small farms, wetlands, trails, and community parks along the Highway 101 corridor from Petaluma to Healdsburg that keep buffers between cities, sustain the county's cherished open vistas and agricultural character, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities in easy reach of most residents;
- Open space preserves and parks within or on the edge of every city in Sonoma County and along much of the Russian River; and
- Large properties along San Pablo Bay where land protection is critical for both wildlife and human adaptation to rising sea level, and near the Sonoma/Mendocino County line where the last sizeable areas of wild landscape remain.

Not as readily visible on a map, but equally important is the cumulative effect of land protection on the quality and amount of water in Sonoma County's streams and reservoirs. From the 19,000-acre Cooley Ranch that encompasses a quarter of the land draining into Lake Sonoma to the many farms and parks that allow rainwater to soak into unpaved soil and recharge underground aquifers, these lands help secure sufficient clean water for people and wildlife—an ever more urgent need in the face of changing climate.

See page ## for a map of the lands Ag + Open Space has protected, or explore a map online at www.vital-lands.org/protected





ABOUT AG + OPEN SPACE

What Are Conservation Easements?

A highly effective way to conserve private land is a “conservation easement” – a legal agreement between a willing landowner and a land conservation organization or agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. When an easement is acquired, Ag + Open Space purchases the rights that the landowner is giving up (such as development rights). It allows landowners to continue to own and use their land, and to sell or pass on the property to heirs. Subsequent owners are restricted in the use of the land under the terms of the conservation easement.

Conservation easements are used to achieve a variety of conservation purposes, including agricultural preservation, open space and scenic resource preservation, and natural resource protection. A conservation easement is a flexible tool, and is tailored for each specific property based on the common preservation goals of the landowner and the holder of the easement.

An easement on property containing rare wildlife habitat or scenic landscapes might prohibit any development, for example, while an easement on a farm might allow continued farming and the addition of agricultural structures. The landowner retains title to the land and continues to occupy and use the land under the terms of the conservation easement. Any public access is at the discretion of the landowner.

The conservation easement’s greatest strength – the fact that it is permanent and runs with the land – also poses a challenge. There is a permanent obligation to ensure that the terms of the conservation easement are being honored, even if the land changes hands. This requires easement terms that are explicit so that the conservation purpose is clear and there is very little room for misinterpretation in the future. It also requires that the easement holder (in this case, Ag + Open Space) monitors the property regularly to ensure that the values are protected.

THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

On average, a conservation easement costs 30–70% less than purchasing the same property outright. With that investment, the public derives many of the same benefits as ownership, for a fraction of the price – and an easement is forever. Better still, monitoring and enforcing the terms of an easement requires only 10% of the cost to manage and maintain an Ag + Open Space–owned property of the same size, making this an efficient use of taxpayer funds. The landowner who partners with Ag + Open Space also receives a financial benefit. This benefit varies from project to project, but typically when an agreement is reached the landowner receives a one-time payment and may see a reduction in property taxes. It is up to the landowner to use this income as they see fit, but often these funds are reinvested into the property, which further enhances the values protected by Ag + Open Space.



What Values Can Conservation Easements Protect?



Natural Resources

Values include: habitats and ecosystems that contribute to biological diversity; unique landscapes such as redwoods, oak woodlands, native grasslands, tidal marshes, freshwater lakes, streams, wetlands, and vernal pools; plant communities that occur nowhere else in the world.



Agriculture

Values include: the space for cultivated agriculture such as row crops, vineyards, and orchards that produce our food and fiber; rangelands such as open grasslands and pastures used for grazing.



Greenbelts

Values include: working and natural lands between and near cities that help Sonoma County retain its unique rural and open character; community separators that provide buffers between cities; recreation, scenic beauty, and natural resource protection.



Scenic Landscapes

Values include: beauty and visual interest provided by the diversity of topography, landscapes, and working and natural lands; a rural landscape that feels like home; stunning open valleys, hillsides, and ridgetops that create a backdrop for our daily lives.



Recreation

Values include: places to walk, run or hike; ride bikes and horses; play outside; and enjoy the outdoors – ranging from urban and rural parks, open space preserves, and trails; quiet areas and open spaces that allow for a healthy escape or outdoor adventure.



**HOW
CONSERVATION
EASEMENTS
WORK**

1

**Ag + Open Space and
Public Benefit Interests**

First, we evaluate our conservation goals to determine what we want to protect for the public benefit, which could include such conservation values as sensitive natural areas, scenic vistas, and agriculture, among others.

2

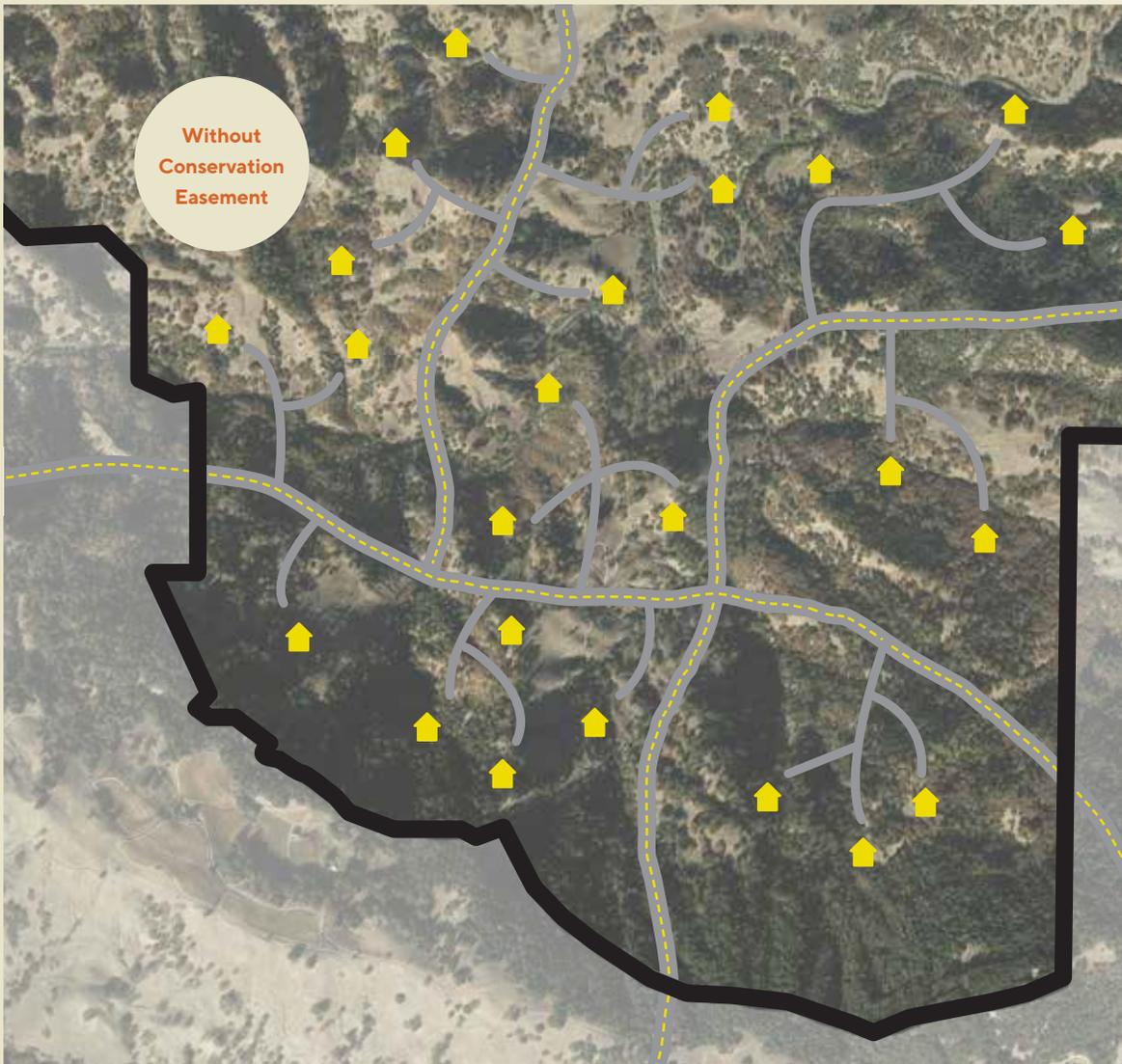
**Current Property
Conditions**

Before designing a conservation easement, we look at the conditions that currently exist on a property – obvious natural features such as a forest or creek, or an agricultural operation.

3

**Potential for
Development**

We also assess the potential for development on the property, meaning the potential to subdivide the land into smaller parcels and/or build houses and roads.



**What Cooley Ranch
Could Have Been**

The 19,000 acre Cooley Ranch contains many of the conservation values that we want to preserve: abundant old-growth redwoods, oak forests, and many miles of creeks and streams. Without a conservation partner this property could have been developed, including:

56 Housing Sites. Large, remote lots with houses along with associated buildings.

Septic Systems & Wells. Each home site could have a septic system and well, which pose threats to water quality and supply.

Roads. Many, many miles of paved roads would have provided access to home sites, causing water runoff and erosion throughout the ranch.

Utility Infrastructure. Electricity and other utilities would have been needed throughout the ranch.

- Cooley Easement Boundary
- 🏠 Potential Buildings
- Potential Roads

4

Landowner Interests

We consider the landowner's interests, which may include uses and improvements they want to retain such as houses, agricultural infrastructure, and recreational amenities, among others.

5

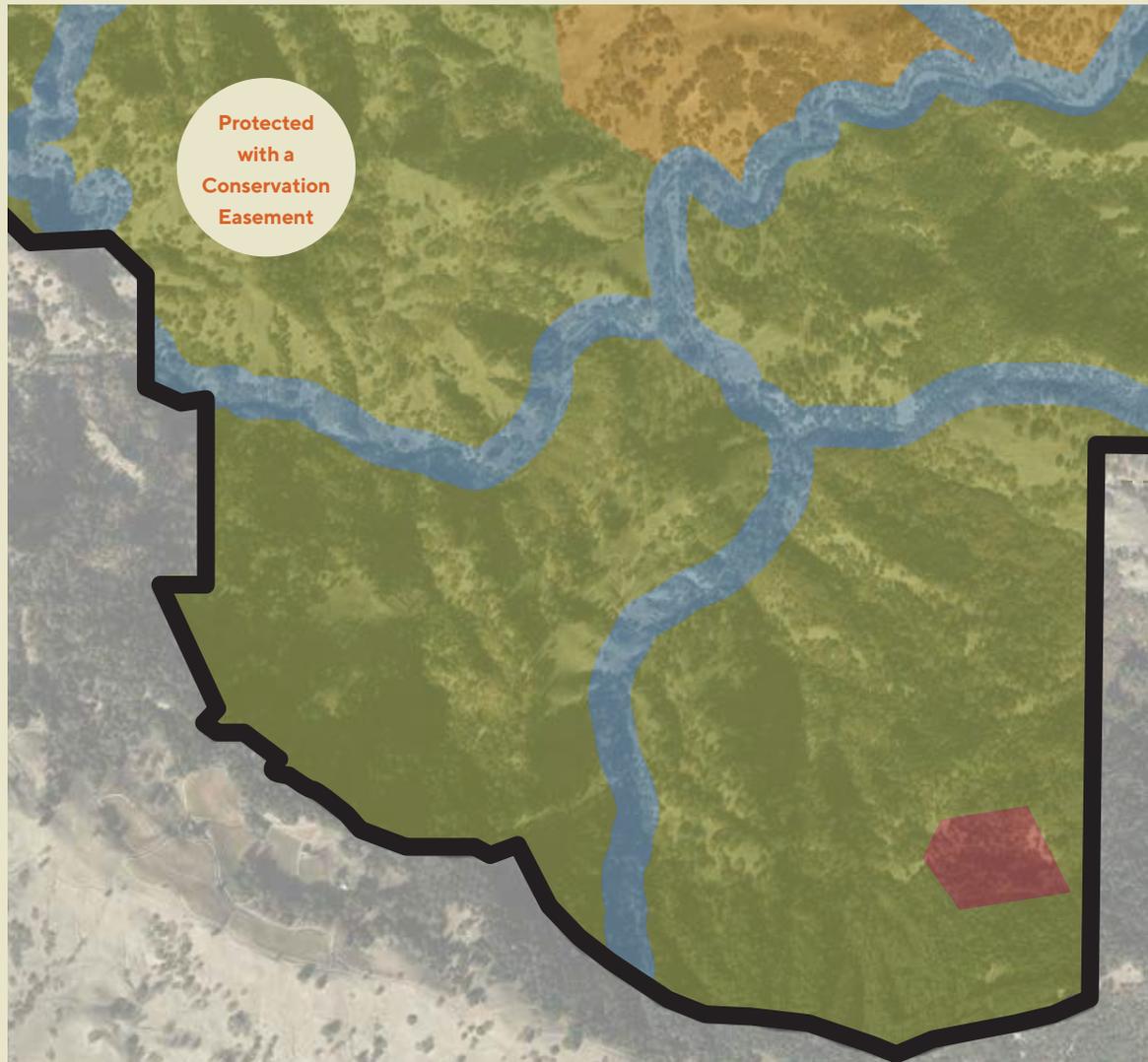
Conservation Easement

We then design a conservation easement that satisfies the interests of the landowner and our agency, including designating building envelopes, scenic, agricultural, or natural areas, and specific locations for other uses on the property.

6

Perpetual Protection

Once the agreement is signed, it becomes our responsibility to visit the property periodically and ensure that the values the public has invested in are protected. This process continues forever, regardless of changes in ownership.



What Cooley Ranch is Today

A conservation easement was developed in partnership with the landowner, resulting in the permanent protection of the Cooley Ranch. Three home sites remain, and many important benefits are protected forever by this conservation easement including:

Working Lands. Cattle graze nearly 17,000 contiguous acres while 1,000 acres of vineyard are allowed within a specified area.

Oak Woodlands. Intact, high-quality oak woodlands and grasslands.

Regular Public Outings. Six guided public outings per year, including hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and overnight trips.

Water Supply. Protects 1/4 of the Lake Sonoma watershed, integral to the county's water supply.

Water Quality. Over 40 miles of sensitive riparian areas are protected from human and cattle impacts.

Wildlife Migration. Unobstructed movement for wide-ranging game and carnivore species.

Forever Wild: area where uses, activities, structure and improvements are greatly limited in order to benefit natural habitats

Natural Area: similar to Forever Wild but typically at a smaller scale such as along a riparian corridor

Unlimited Agriculture: area for all permitted types of agriculture, including crops and grazing

Building Envelope: area where structures and improvements are generally located



ABOUT AG + OPEN SPACE

Governance and Community Representation

As a voter created special district, Ag + Open Space is accountable to the citizens of Sonoma County. Other types of special districts include water districts, schools, and hospitals. The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors serves as the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors. In addition, there are two additional appointed oversight bodies: the Sonoma County Open Space Fiscal Oversight Commission and the Ag + Open Space Advisory Committee.

The Board of Directors, the Fiscal Oversight Commission, and the Ag + Open Space Advisory Committee all conduct regular meetings open to the public, and include opportunities for public comment on their agendas. These bodies, along with additional public meetings on various topics, help ensure that there are regular opportunities for community input into Ag + Open Space activities.

Board of Directors

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors ([HYPERLINK](#)) serves as the Board of Directors for Ag + Open Space. The Board is responsible for all decisions related to the Expenditure Plan, long-term stewardship of Ag + Open Space-owned land and easements, and oversight of the agency's operations. The Ag + Open Space General Manager reports directly to the Board.

There is often confusion about the difference between the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors and the County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors. Although they are governed by the same five individuals, Ag + Open Space and Sonoma County are separate legal entities, each with its own set of purposes, powers, and sources of funding.

Sonoma County Open Space Fiscal Oversight Commission

The Fiscal Oversight Commission ([HYPERLINK](#)) consists of five members and an alternate. Each Director appoints one member, and together they choose the alternate. The Fiscal Oversight Commission is charged with providing

independent fiscal oversight for Ag + Open Space operations. It is responsible for reviewing each proposed acquisition or conveyance of interest in real property, reviewing any borrowing transaction for compliance, reviewing the annual audit, and reviewing other financial records and procurement practices.

Advisory Committee

The Ag + Open Space Advisory Committee ([HYPERLINK](#)) is comprised of 17 members representing specific designations: two appointed by each Ag + Open Space Director, three representing the Mayors' and Councilmembers' Association, and one each representing agriculture, the environment, real estate or property appraisal, and business. In addition, the Advisory Committee has two positions for "youth advisors" who contribute a voice for the county's youngest residents. While solely advisory, the committee offers opinions and makes recommendations at the request of the Board of Directors or the General Manager. The committee also reviews and advises on real property transactions, provides broad-based citizen input on agency operations, and its members act as ambassadors for Ag + Open Space.





DRAFT

SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



How We Work: Program Areas To Achieve Our Mission

Ag + Open Space is organized into four programs, working together to conserve land in perpetuity. Although each program has particular responsibilities, all programs are guided by the Ag + Open Space principles (Page ##), and work together to advance the agency's mission.

Administrative & Fiscal Services

Responsible for ensuring the appropriate use of Ag + Open Space taxpayer funds, maintaining transparent financial and accounting standards and practices, and supporting the effective functioning of administrative and human resources processes.

Conservation Planning

Develops, maintains, and analyzes information to support the Ag + Open Space mission, and operates the community engagement efforts in order to reach out to the community on a regular basis to share information and gather input on the agency's priorities and activities.



**AG +
OPEN
SPACE**
SONOMA COUNTY

Acquisition

Works with willing sellers to protect land with high conservation value by acquiring conservation easements, purchasing land outright with the intent to transfer or resell to another entity, or supporting community open space projects through the Matching Grant Program.

Stewardship

Ensures protection and, where appropriate, enhancement of conservation values for Ag + Open Space-protected lands to safeguard taxpayer investment in perpetuity, using standard easement stewardship practices, and by actively managing land that Ag + Open Space owns outright.





MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM

As of 2018, 52 projects have been accepted into the Matching Grant Program, totaling over 426 acres



ABOUT AG + OPEN SPACE

Ag + Open Space Finances: Funding and Structure

Ag + Open Space was created in 1990 by the Sonoma County taxpayers and funded for twenty years under Measure C, a quarter-cent sales tax. In November 2006, voters overwhelmingly approved Measure F, which reauthorized Ag + Open Space and extended the quarter-cent sales tax through 2031. Measure F began on April 1, 2011. With the passage of Measure F Ag + Open Space was enabled to set aside up to 10% of the sales taxes received for initial public access, operation and maintenance of Ag + Open Space-protected properties intended for recreational use. Since its inception through June 30, 2017, Ag + Open Space has protected over 114,000 acres worth \$390.7 million.

As shown in the chart at right, the sales taxes received through both Measure C and Measure F as of June 30, 2017. During Measure C Ag + Open Space received \$128.1 million and through June 30, 2017, \$287.8 million Measure F sales taxes have been received, for a total of \$415.9 million in cumulative sales taxes since 1990. This chart shows considerable increases to sales tax revenues have occurred since FY 2010-11, the lowest point of the recession, when receipts dropped to \$15.2 million. For FY17-18, sales tax revenues are budgeted at \$23 million.

Through March 2011, the Open Space Authority (the Authority) levied the sales tax and ensured that Ag + Open Space purchases were consistent with the voter-approved Expenditure Plan in Measure C. With the passage of Measure F, on April 1, 2011, the Authority reorganized as the Sonoma County Open Space Fiscal Oversight Commission (FOC) to provide fiscal oversight of Ag + Open

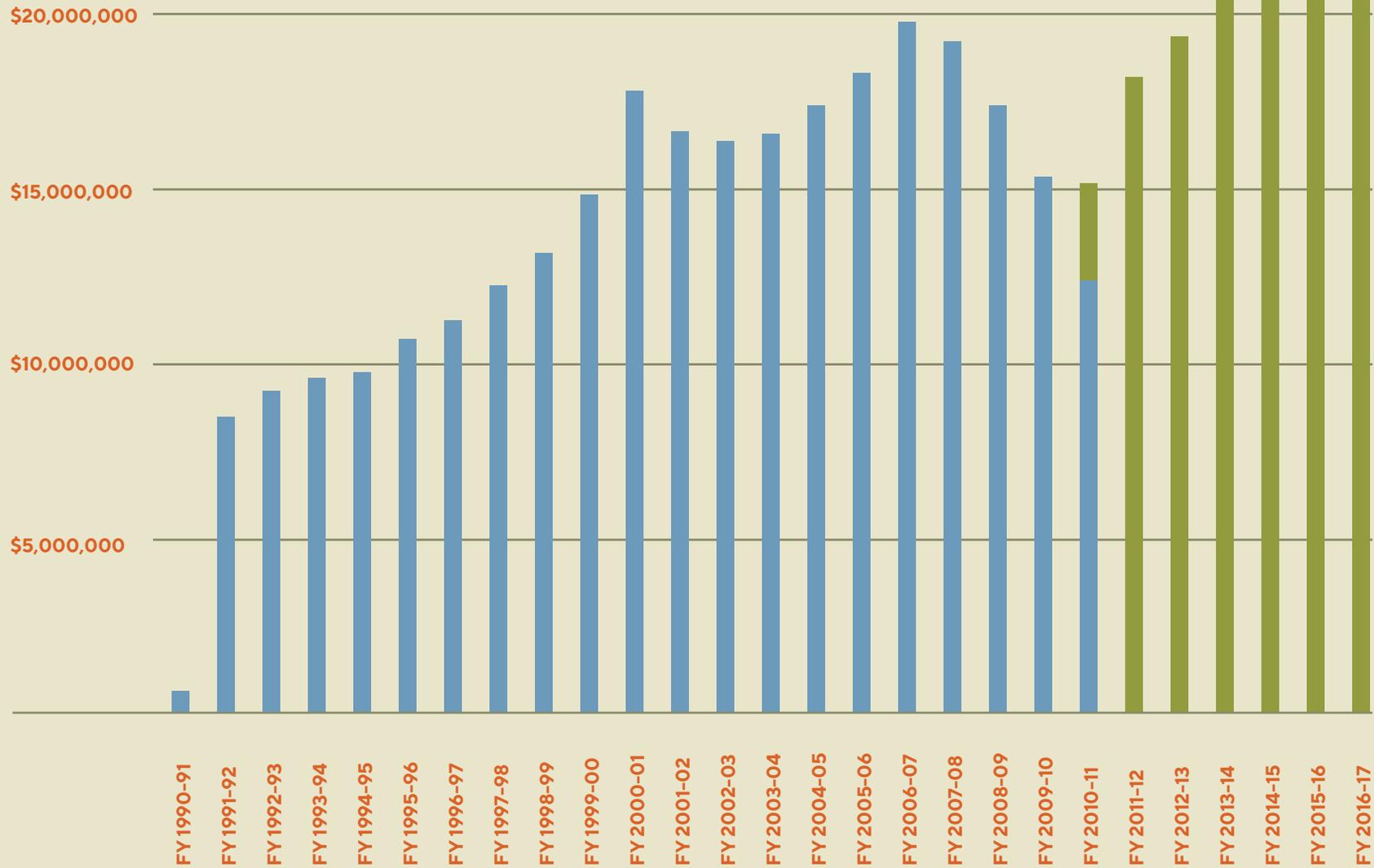
Space expenditures. The FOC reviews the annual audit, including procurement practices and expenditures on Initial Public Access, Operation and Maintenance expenditures, any borrowing transactions, and reviews each proposed Ag + Open Space acquisition or conveyance of interests to determine whether Ag + Open Space is paying more or receiving less than fair market value.

Measure F authorized the County to levy sales tax that funds Ag + Open Space and required the County to enter into a contract with Ag + Open Space. The contract stipulates that the sales tax revenue be used to implement the voter-approved 2006 Expenditure Plan and gives Ag + Open Space the authority for the budgeting and expenditure of the sales tax revenue in accordance with the Expenditure Plan.

Because Ag + Open Space is a separate legal entity from the County of Sonoma, its revenues, expenses and assets are held and accounted for separately from those of Sonoma County. Ag + Open Space holds separate title to its real property and assets, and the County may not use Ag + Open Space property or funds for County purposes absent an appropriate agreement that is consistent with the voter-approved Expenditure Plan. In addition, under state law, Ag + Open Space is also subject to different regulations than the County regarding acquisition and disposition of property.



Sales Taxes Received Through June 30, 2017



■ Measure C | Index 79701 | Sales/Use Taxes ■ OSSTA-Measure F | Index 077313 | EFS 11145 Sales/Use Taxes

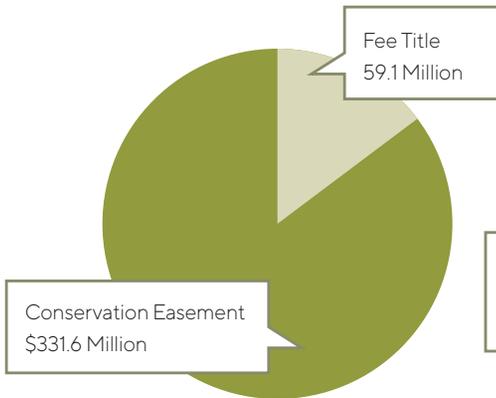


Capital Assets - Land and Conservation Easements

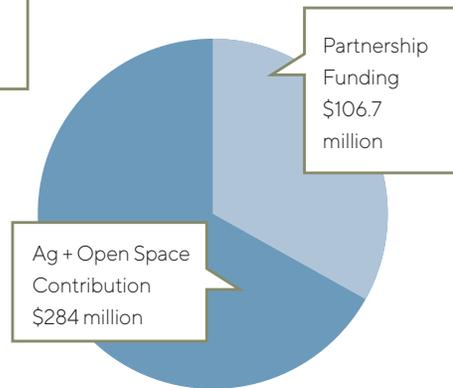
Ag + Open Space has acquired conservation easements and properties in order to permanently protect conservation values of the land that are identified in the Expenditure Plan. As of June 30, 2017, Ag + Open Space holds capital assets valued at \$390.7 million, with conservation easements valued at \$331.6 million and Ag + Open Space-owned properties valued at \$59.1 million.

Not all of the funding for these acquisitions have been from Measure C or F sales tax revenue. As shown in the blue chart below, Ag + Open Space has leveraged funds of \$106.7 million or 27% of the total cost towards these purchases. This leveraged amount is comprised of private and public agency grants through our numerous partners, and generous discounts from landowners at the time of acquisition. In addition, recipients of Matching Grants have spent \$27.2 million as their match on Ag + Open Space funded projects.

Property Types as of June 30, 2017



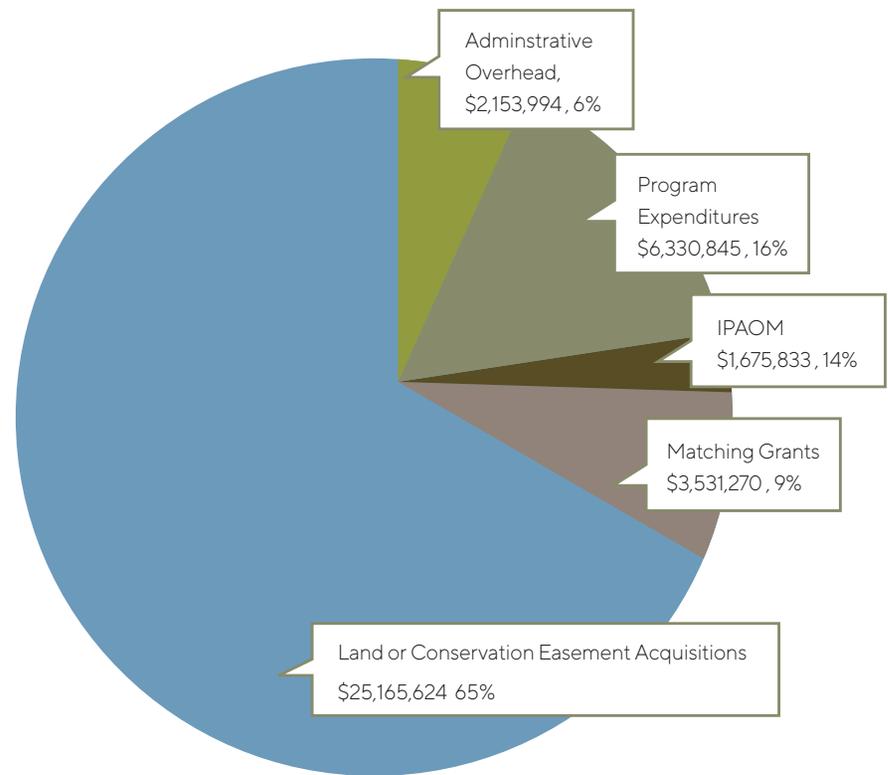
Total Value of Interest in Lands \$390,703,476 as of June 30, 2017



Ag + Open Space Operations, Current Budgets and Annual Work Plans

Acquiring and stewarding conservation easements and land requires program work such as conservation planning, land acquisition, easement stewardship, and land management, as well as administrative functions to support the program work. Annually Ag + Open Space prepares a budget and work plan for consideration by our Board of Directors. For FY17-18, Ag + Open Space expenditures of \$38.8 million are appropriated as shown in the chart below.

Ag + Open Space Fiscal Year 2017-18 Budget

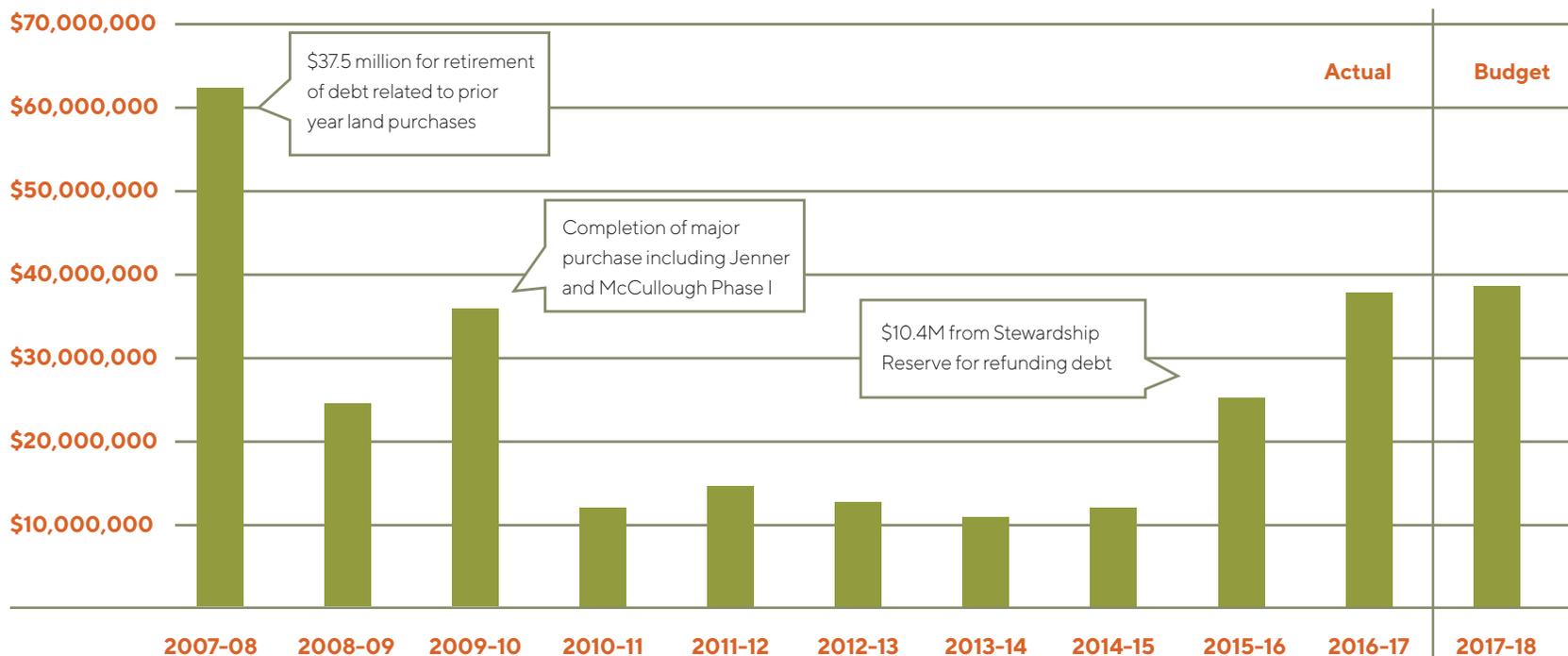


Significant Variances in Annual Budgeting

The nature of budgeting for large multi-year acquisitions presents a challenge. Projects are commonly budgeted multiple times so the amount allocated for capital assets frequently is higher than the average amount expended. The strategy is to budget for each potential acquisition on the assumption that adequate funds are available should the desired transactions be finalized in that fiscal year, instead of having to increase appropriations during the critical timing of an acquisition which could jeopardize the completion of that transaction.

Because of the fluctuating nature of purchasing large acquisitions and other transactional activities, expenditure budgets for Ag + Open Space can have a significant variance from year to year. The graph below shows the actual expenditures for the last ten years and notes some of the major transactions reflected in the expenditures. Variations such as those depicted in the graph below require Ag + Open Space to have adequate resources available to fund the known projects Ag + Open Space is currently working on, as well as unanticipated opportunities for projects that would support the Ag + Open Space mission.

Actual Expenditure History



ABOUT AG + OPEN SPACE

Protecting the Community's Investment

Ag + Open Space protects land forever, irrespective of the sunset date of the funding measure. It is therefore necessary to plan for and fund the long-term stewardship costs associated with protecting the community's investment in conservation easements and to ensure that the values protected by the taxpayers remain intact. While the Ag + Open Space sales tax may be reauthorized, it is prudent to plan for the potential sunset of the current funding measure. Ag + Open Space, working in conjunction with the Center for Natural Lands Management, developed a model that determines a targeted Reserve Fund amount that would generate enough interest earnings each year to support annual easement stewardship activities, provide a legal defense fund, and support annual management of Ag + Open Space-owned land. The model is flexible and can be adjusted as Ag + Open Space nears the end of the measure. A strategy for achieving an adequate return on investment of the Reserve to fund future costs is currently being developed by Ag + Open Space staff.

The Vital Lands Initiative long-term financing plan considers funds currently available, new revenue, including estimated grants and other forms of partnership funding, interest and donations as well as sales taxes through the end of the measure in April 2031. Estimated expenditures include debt service, operating costs, acquisition costs, and establishment of a Stewardship Reserve Fund that would fund stewardship and administrative activities beyond the sunset of the measure.

Maximizing Ag + Open Space Resources

Ag + Open Space continuously strives to maximize our resources, whether it is leveraging funds on acquisitions by partnering with other agencies, negotiating acquisitions at below market prices or structuring our debt in the most cost efficient manner possible. On October 25, 2007 Sonoma County issued \$96.9 million of Measure F Sales Tax Revenue Bonds, Series 2007. The bonds were to mature September 1, 2030, had interest rates between 4.0% and 5.0%, and annual debt service payments averaging \$7.5 million. Upon issuance, Ag + Open Space used bond proceeds of \$37.5 million to repay an outstanding line of credit from the County.

On July 2, 2015, the Series 2007 Bonds were refunded and \$43.3 million of County of Sonoma Measure F Sales Tax Revenue Refunding Bonds, Series 2015 were issued. As part of the transaction \$20 million from the OSSTA special revenue fund and another \$10 million from Ag + Open Space was used to pay down existing principal. The new bonds have a final payment on September 1, 2023, with interest rates ranging from 2.0% to 5.0% and generated a net present value savings of \$13.6 million. The shortening of the term of the bond seven years, while maintaining the same annual payment of approximately \$7.5 million, is designed to provide flexibility to achieve funding of the Stewardship Reserve which will begin when the bonds mature. It also allows flexibility for use of current funds should the Measure be reauthorized. Under a second reauthorization, the Stewardship Reserve could be built over a longer period of time allowing for better cash flow.

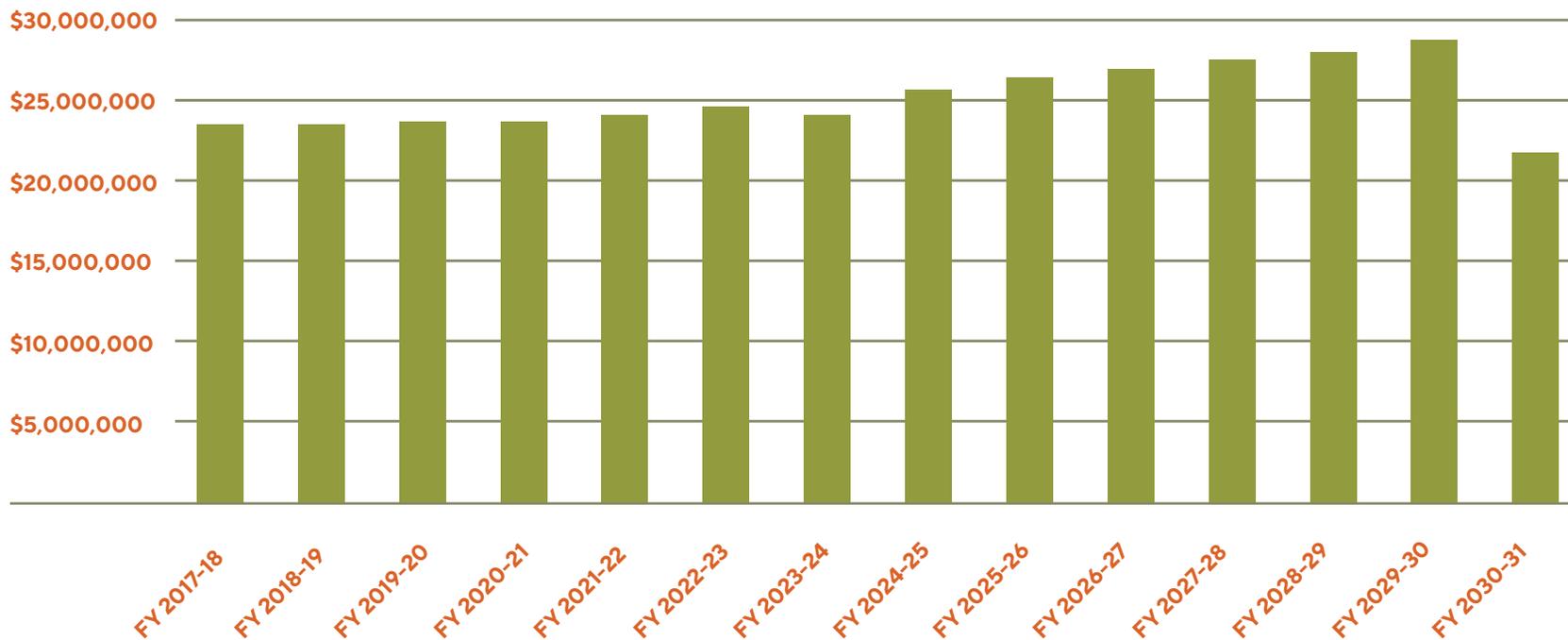


Long-term Fiscal Planning

As shown in the chart below, Ag +Open Space projects conservative growth in sales taxes with a projected total of \$348.3 million for the period of FY2017-18 through March 30, 2031. Projections for additional revenues types fluctuate significantly, but an estimation of grants, interest, donations and miscellaneous revenues between now and the end of the measure are projected to be \$60.9 million, for a total projected revenue through March 30, 2031 of \$409.2 million.

The design of the long-term fiscal plan considers all estimated revenues to fund program commitments, debt service, Stewardship Reserve funding, and any other program expenditures, and then estimates the amount available for acquisitions. Various models are created considering program or staffing changes, additional revenue sources, or commitments towards current acquisitions to determine the availability of funds for new acquisitions. Reviewing the funds available for new acquisitions is evaluated in the long-term plan on a regular basis as new budgets, forecasts, and activities change or acquisitions occur.

Projected Annual Sales Tax



ABOUT AG + OPEN SPACE

Expenditures Projected Through 2031

At this time, total estimated expenditures of \$468 million are projected to provide for all project and program commitments with \$168.2 million allocated for new acquisition of conservation easements and land. These projections fully utilize all future estimated revenue, as well as the current fund balance of \$58.8 million.

Details of the other expenditure categories are as follows:

Capital Assets – Land and Conservation Easements

\$168.2 MILLION , 36%

● Capital Assets – Land and Conservation Easements

Represents funds Ag + Open Space anticipates will be utilized for acquisitions including conservation easements and fee lands where Ag + Open Space has an identified partner to open a park or open space preserve.

● Program Expenditures

Provides funding for the three operating programs of Ag + Open Space: Conservation Planning, Acquisitions and Stewardship.

- The Conservation Planning Program costs include staffing focused on data development and analysis, planning, community education and outreach, media relations, website development, and funding development.
- The Acquisition Program costs include staffing for acquisitions including project setup, negotiations with the landowner, and development of conservation easements private lands and purchase agreements for fee lands. For land purchased in fee, staff are responsible for developing land transfer agreements for recreational lands, including developing conservation easements and recreational covenants to ensure the lands

Program Expenditures

\$102.6 MILLION , 22%

are open to the public in perpetuity. For all acquisitions, staff manage the projects through the appraisal phase, and the project approval phase with the Ag + Open Space Fiscal Oversight Commission and the Board of Directors. For all projects, staff are responsible for leveraging Ag + Open Space funding through negotiating bargain sales, and through procuring federal, state, or private grant funding to offset acquisition costs. Staff also manage the Ag + Open Space Matching Grant Program, which provides funding for community open space projects throughout Sonoma County.

- The Stewardship Program costs include staffing, service contracts and materials to support easement stewardship and land management. Stewardship Program staff monitor and enforce conservation easements, and manage and coordinate land management projects on properties that Ag + Open Space owns in fee to ensure that the values of the properties are maintained. Staff also evaluate permitted use requests, easement violations, and process amendments, and coordinate volunteer programs on Ag + Open Space lands.



Matching Grant Program

\$23.4 MILLION,
5%

● **Matching Grant Program**

Provides funding to public agencies and nonprofits for the protection of community open space within Sonoma County for local agriculture, community recreation, natural resource restoration, and public access. These projects typically occur within cities or more urbanized unincorporated areas, allowing our partners to leverage our funding to develop diverse and innovative projects throughout our county

● **10% Sales Tax Transfer to Initial Public Access, Operations & Maintenance (IPAOM)**

Funds the development of initial public access on recreational properties purchased by Ag + Open Space, and includes limited funding for trails, staging areas, bathrooms, and signage, and funding for the initial three years of Operations and Maintenance costs incurred by a recreational agency partnering with Ag + Open Space. In all cases, Ag + Open Space funding must be used on properties protected by Ag + Open Space for the purpose of a park or open space preserve.

10% Sales Tax Transfer to IPAOM

\$34.8 MILLION,
7%

Transfer to Stewardship Reserve

\$52.5 MILLION,
11%

● **Transfer to Stewardship Reserve**

Represents the funds needed to establish a reserve fund to pay for perpetual stewardship activities upon the expiration of the Measure.

● **Debt Service**

Approximately \$7.5 million is paid annually on the 2015 Measure F Refunding Bonds, which will mature in September 2023.

● **Administrative Overhead**

Expenditures consist of staffing, office lease and utility costs, audit and financial analysis costs, office and field supplies, and county services including information systems, legal services, financial and human resource systems and services, Board of Supervisors costs, insurance and fleet maintenance.

All values listed are estimates and subject to change over time.

Administrative Overhead

\$34.9 MILLION,
8%



[SECTION FOUR]

Sonoma County: Past, Present and Future

The Vital Lands Initiative goals and strategies were developed with an understanding of current conditions and the outlook for Sonoma County's human population and natural resources in the future. This section provides historical context, a brief overview of existing conditions in the county – seen through the lens of land conservation – and discussion of trends that are shaping the county's future. How will Sonoma County's population change in the coming decades? What land use pressures will arise, intensify, or shift? How will our water, wildlife, plant, and agricultural resources be affected by these and other trends like climate change? Ag + Open Space priorities and strategies were developed to consider these factors while protecting land that connects and supports thriving natural areas, agriculture, and communities.





History and Context

Geographical Setting. Sonoma County, the most northerly and largest of the nine counties in the San Francisco Bay Region, is a diverse mosaic of landforms, environments, and human settlements. In the south, the Petaluma Valley includes the City of Petaluma and surrounding rural and agricultural areas. The broad, flat Santa Rosa Plain lies between the Sonoma Mountain range on the east and low coastal hills on the west, and contains the cities of Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park and Cotati, and the Town of Windsor. The City of Sebastopol is at the western edge of the Santa Rosa Plain, between the Laguna de Santa Rosa and the coastal hills. Further west, mountain and coastal areas are more sparsely settled, with redwood and mixed conifer forests of the Mendocino Highlands in the north, and rolling oak studded hills, rangeland and coastal prairies in the south. The Mayacamas Range forms the eastern boundary of the county. Along with the Sonoma Mountain range, it encloses the Sonoma Valley (the "Valley of the Moon"), where the City of Sonoma is nestled, and eases into the marshlands of San Pablo Bay. In the north, the farming regions of Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys, as well as the cities of Healdsburg and Cloverdale, lie in the Russian River drainage before the river angles abruptly westward to meet the ocean near the town of Jenner. The Geysers geothermal area is tucked into the northeast corner of the county in the remote interior of the Mayacamas Range.

Natural Resources. Sonoma County's natural systems are as diverse as its landscape. Redwood and fir forests, oak woodlands, chaparral, grasslands, dunes, and wetlands follow the contours of our mountains, valleys, and coastline, shaped by terrain, soils, and access to sun and water. These natural

landscapes also reflect past and present human uses of the land, and are interwoven with vineyards, orchards, croplands, hayfields and irrigated pastures.

Each of these systems supports people and wildlife in different ways.

Rich alluvial valleys capture and store water and support the cultivation of locally-raised foods and wines. Riparian woodlands and wetlands protect soils from erosion and adjacent developed areas from flooding. Forests provide building materials and sequester carbon. Geothermal systems provide electricity to our communities. Vernal pools and serpentine habitats support species found nowhere else in the world.

Open spaces provide places to exercise, relax, and learn about nature. Each of our natural systems also supports a web of wildlife species, from bees and aquatic invertebrates to bobcats, bald eagles, and mountain lions. Some of these species, like coho salmon and California tiger salamander, are critically imperiled.

History of Human Habitation. History of Human Habitation. The Pomo, Miwok, and Wappo people were the first human inhabitants in the aboriginal territory now known as Sonoma County and continue to live here today. The rich riparian valleys, forests, and grasslands supported hunting, fishing, and gathering. Native Americans shaped the land using fire to convert thick shrubland to the more open oak woodland and grassland that supported the species they relied on for food and fiber (Keely 2002). Native American populations declined substantially with the arrival of Russians and Europeans due to disease, enslavement, massacres, and the destruction of and displacement from their lands.



In the early 1800s, the Russians established the first permanent non-native settlement at Fort Ross along the coast. The Sonoma Mission was established during the Mexican period in 1823 and Sonoma soon became the county's first town. Much of the county was divided into vast land-grant ranchos. Sonoma County was one of the original counties when California became a state in 1850.

Growth and development in Sonoma County was strongly influenced by the Gold Rush beginning in 1849. Logging, ranching, farming, quicksilver mining, and the early development of the wine industry supported the sparsely settled county as building materials and agricultural products flowed to San Francisco and the Sierra gold fields.

Toward the end of the 19th century, the Russian River developed as a vacation destination and communities along the river are now home to thousands of permanent residents. Sonoma County tourism has expanded well beyond the river area. Visitor-serving developments have grown in coastal communities like The Sea Ranch and Bodega Bay, and food and wine-related tourism has become one of the county's economic mainstays.



History of Agriculture. Today, wine grape production leads Sonoma County's agricultural economy, but the county has a long and varied history of agricultural production. Staples like wheat, apples, pears, cherries and prunes thrived and supported the growth of cities, including San Francisco. Hops, first planted near Forestville in 1858, were grown in the county's rich floodplain soils. Until World War II, the poultry industry, the processing of local fruit, and the production of hops sustained the county's economy.

In the early 20th century, the production of wine grapes and hops were threatened, both by the development of diseases like phylloxera and downy mildew, and by Prohibition. The end of Prohibition and the development of phylloxera-resistant rootstocks allowed the resurgence of wine grape growing after World War II, and croplands began to be converted to vineyards at an increasing pace in the 1960s, a trend which has continued. Market forces made the once-popular prune, grown around Healdsburg, into a less desirable product. Land prices and changing land uses have challenged dairies, and apple growers have faced national and international competition.

Sonoma County has historically been a major producer of vegetables and vegetable seeds, livestock, eggs, and dairy products. Luther Burbank put Sonoma County on the horticultural map as a center of plant hybridization, developing new varieties of fruits, vegetables, flowers, berries and vines. Today, Sonoma County has become an international destination for food and wine aficionados, with local production of vegetables, fruit, meat and value-added products like preserves, cheese, baked goods, specialty beverages, and craft beer drawing visitors and supporting world-class restaurants that showcase local produce.

ALL THE DATES AND DOLLAR AMOUNTS TO BE UPDATED



Current Land Use, Demographics, and the Economy

Current Land Use. Land use in Sonoma County is largely a function of geography. With nine incorporated cities and a population just over 500,000, land use in Sonoma County is spatially dominated by agricultural and rural open space. Approximately 66% of the county's population occupies under 5% of the total land area (over 1.1 million acres). Just over 400,000 acres are devoted to agricultural production (including rangelands), about 100,000 acres (about 10% of the county) is neither urban nor working lands. The county includes several unincorporated urban and suburban areas that are distinct

from the cities. These communities provide important services for locals and nearby working lands. Large portions of our county's population live in these communities, some of which are quite distant from other populated areas leaving large swaths of open space and working lands between. The Sonoma coast, for example, is largely undeveloped except for the community of Bodega Bay and The Sea Ranch development to the north.

Demographics. While Sonoma County has experienced a low growth rate since 2000, the county grew rapidly in the last half of the 20th century. As of January 2016, Sonoma County's population was estimated at 501,959, a 0.5% increase over the prior year. About 70% of county residents live within one of the nine incorporated cities, while 30% live in unincorporated areas. The county had an estimated 192,101 occupied housing units in January 2016, with an average household size of 2.55 persons per unit. About 60% of housing units are owner-occupied.

About 64% of county residents are non-Hispanic white (compared to 38% statewide) and about 27% are Hispanic or Latino (39% statewide). Asians make up 4.4% of the population (15% statewide), African Americans are 2% (7% statewide), and American Indians/ Alaska Natives are 2.2% (1.7% statewide) (US Census 2016 Estimates). Sonoma County's population is getting older; in 2015, 79,000 Sonoma County residents were 65 or older, a 19.4% increase in that age group in only 5 years.

Educational attainment is somewhat higher for Sonoma County residents compared to the state, but highly variable across the county. The health outcomes





TRIBAL LANDS

Native American tribes continue to steward land in Sonoma County. Tribes are sovereign nations and the lands they own or that are held in trust by the federal government are not subject to state or local land use controls. Although the tribes do follow tribal and federal guidelines, the tribal governments are the decision makers for these lands. The following is a list of federally and non-federally recognized tribes in Sonoma County: the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians, the Mishewal Wappo, the Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and the Lytton Band of Pomo Indians.

In 2015, Ag + Open Space was one of several funding sources for a conservation easement that facilitated the return of nearly 700 acres of ancestral coastal lands from private ownership back to the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria. This collaboration protects the natural and open space resources on this coastal land, established a trail easement to connect neighboring regional park properties, and preserves the centuries-old homeland for the Kashia to practice their cultural traditions.

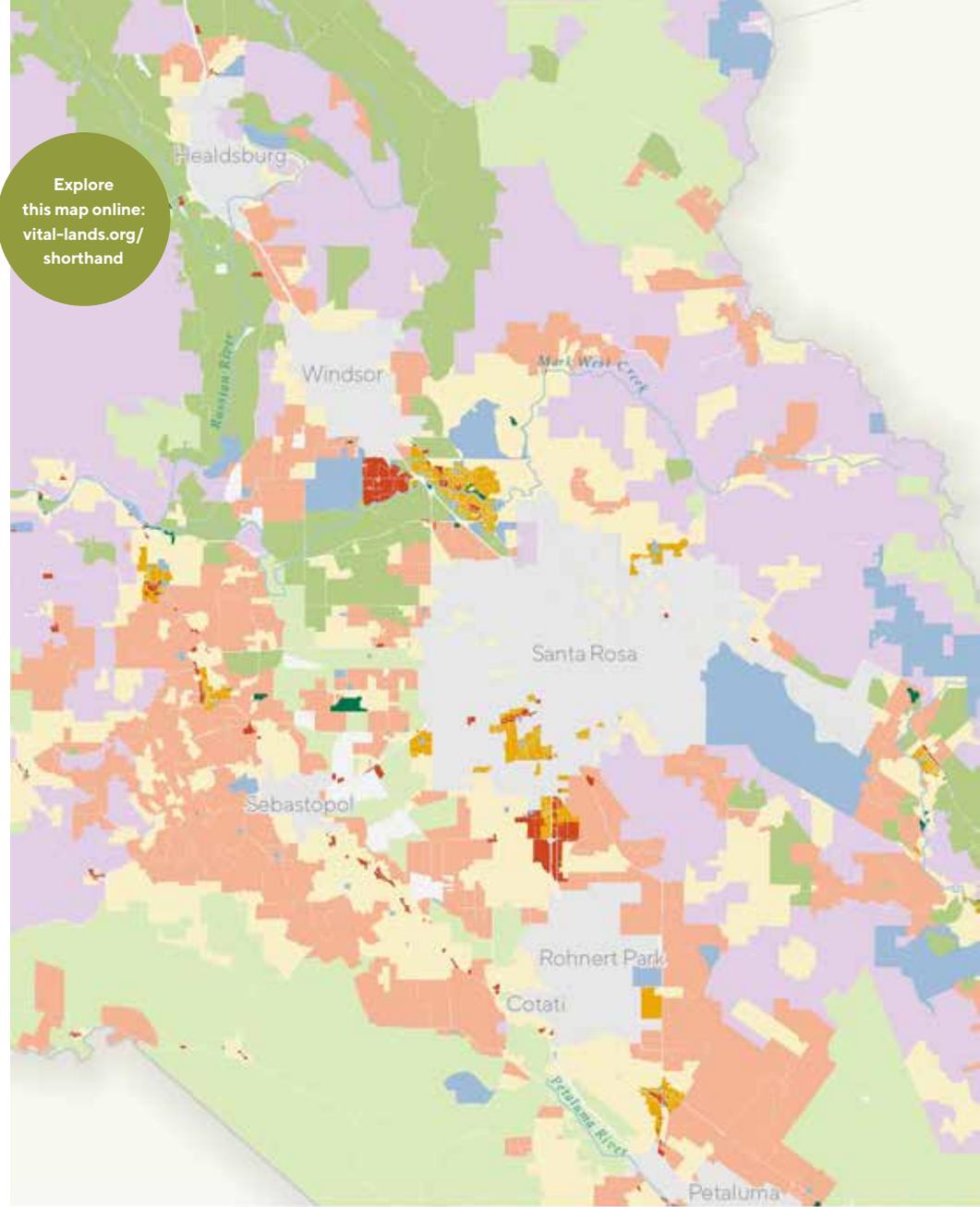
for county residents reflects a similar picture. In March 2017, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ranked Sonoma County fifth healthiest among California's 56 counties. Although Sonoma County is a healthy and affluent county, significant inequalities exist. Disparities in income and educational attainment have a substantial effect on life expectancy with a full decade separating the highest and lowest ranking areas in the county.

Economy. Sonoma County's economy has fully recovered from the 2008 recession. As of early 2017, the county's unemployment rate hovers around 4%. The improving job market has created more labor competition and pushed household incomes higher. In 2016, median household income in Sonoma County was \$63,910. Nonetheless, substantial income disparities exist. About 11% of county residents live below the federal poverty line.

Sonoma County's food and beverage producers have contributed to substantial increases in non-durable goods manufacturing. Tourism and related economic activity, primarily driven by the wine industry, remains a major economic driver in Sonoma County with a total of \$1.87 billion in tourism spending in 2015.

The top ten private employers in Sonoma County include manufacturing and tech companies including Keysight Technologies, Amy's Kitchen, and Medtronic. Two of the top three private employers are health care providers (Kaiser Permanente and St. Joseph Health) and the second largest private employer is the Graton Resort and Casino.

Home sales are approaching pre-recession levels in Sonoma County, and construction employment is increasing after declining significantly in the



General Plan Land Use Designation

- | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Diverse Agriculture | Resources & Rural Development | Public & Quasi-Public |
| Land Extensive Agriculture | Rural Residential | Commercial & Industrial |
| Land Intensive Agriculture | Urban Residential | Urban Growth Boundary* |
| | Recreation & Visitor-serving Comm. | |

*Most land use not designated by the County General Plan within UGBs



recession. The countywide median home price was \$590,000 in late 2016, higher than the statewide average, but still about 30% lower than in San Francisco.

Agriculture remains a fundamental part of the local economy, with agricultural production alone (i.e., not including the value of processed agricultural products, like wine) accounting for over \$898 million in 2016. Wine grape production accounts for nearly 65% of this total, while livestock, poultry and related products account for nearly 30%.

Despite the generally positive picture of the local economy in 2017, economic challenges and uncertainties remain, with housing affordability the major issue for many Sonoma County households.



Local Land Use Planning. The centerpiece of local land use decision making is the General Plan. State law requires every county and incorporated city to have a general plan that provides direction about local land use decisions. Zoning is a regulatory tool that defines where various land uses are allowed (or not allowed), the process by which those land uses are approved and the specific standards that development must meet. Under state law, zoning must be consistent with the adopted general plan.

While state law allows local flexibility around most land use issues, housing is a notable exception. As part of the housing element update process, each city and county is provided a “fair share” number of housing units, divided by income levels, that must be planned for in the next housing element cycle. This



process is known as the Regional Housing Needs Allocation, or “RHNA.” Since the early 2000s regional housing policies have focused growth in core urban areas rather than suburban and outlying areas. As a result, RHNA allocations for Sonoma County communities have declined over the past two decades. For more information about the state and federal laws that influence the work of Ag + Open Space, please see Appendix ##.

Geographic and population influences on land use have been tempered by strong local land use policies aimed at limiting urban sprawl. Beginning in the 1970s, Sonoma County started to address urban sprawl through the creation of Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs). These UGBs and other adopted land use

policies were designed to contain urban development within existing cities. Over the past two decades, all cities have adopted voter-approved UGBs, effectively capping urban expansion.

The county’s General Plan also designated Community Separators, rural and agricultural lands surrounding urban areas intended to maintain the unique identities of cities and communities and to avoid urban sprawl along the Highway 101 corridor. In 2016, voters approved an extension of the protections around Community Separators and added more land to the county’s Community Separator designation. As a result of these land use decisions, today most development is confined to existing urban areas.



SONOMA COUNTY: PAST, PRESENT + FUTURE
Land Conservation and Smart Growth

Protecting Sonoma County’s working and natural lands from sprawl provides myriad benefits, including local food, scenic views, greenbelts and community separators, parks and trails, clean abundant drinking water, and habitat for wildlife. The County General Plan, city urban growth boundaries, and various land use policies have incentivized compact and smart growth in cities and communities, and along with Ag + Open Space have maintained the rural landscape that the Sonoma County community has taxed themselves to protect.

Recent studies in Sonoma County have demonstrated that maintaining open spaces and focusing our growth in cities and towns can significantly reduce health impacts, energy use, water use and household emissions that contribute to climate change. Avoiding sprawl into our agricultural and natural landscapes allows these open space lands to cost effectively provide multiple benefits to Sonoma County communities.

	Standard Suburban Development <i>2 to 40+ Dwelling Units / Acre Less than 10 to 70 Employees / Acre</i>	Compact Walkable Development <i>12 to 40+ Dwelling Units / Acre 10 to 70 Employees / Acre</i>	Urban Development <i>More than 40 Dwelling Units / Acre More than 70 Employees / Acre</i>
Vehicle Miles Traveled	19,500 miles/year	12,000 miles/year	5,000 miles/year
Walking <i>(per person)</i>	4 minutes/day	6 minutes/day	12 minutes/day
Residential Water Use	62,000 gallons/year	40,000 gallons/year	22,000 gallons/year
Residential Energy Use	75,000,000 BTU/year	65,000,000 BTU/year	40,000,000 BTU/year
Vehicle Miles Traveled	12.3 metric tonnes/year	8.6 metric tonnes/year	5.3 metric tonnes/year
Carbon Emissions <i>From driving, residential energy, water-related energy. Excludes commercial energy use.</i>	\$16,100 dollars/year	\$10,400 dollars/year	\$4,800 dollars/year

Calthorpe Analytics, 2017



Trends: Looking to the Future

The Ag + Open Space vision for the future is protected land throughout the county that connects and supports thriving natural areas, agriculture, and communities. Achieving that vision requires understanding the trends that will shape Sonoma County's future, which will help identify key land conservation vulnerabilities and opportunities that can inform priorities in coming years. Looking closely at trends can also help identify specific strategies, like supporting disaster and climate-resilient landscapes, which can help Ag + Open Space meet its goals and objectives.

Economic and Demographic Trends

Economic and demographic forces that will affect Sonoma County's future may be local, statewide, national, or even international. While our conservation efforts are focused on the local Sonoma County landscape, we must be aware of and responsive to the broader trends affecting our region, the state, and the country as a whole.

Globalization. Sonoma County is part of a global economy, meaning that investment, communication and even culture are influenced by entities and institutions that are global in scale and reach. Sonoma County tourism marketing now includes substantial efforts directed at international visitors. Global investment decisions affect the local economy and land development; many prominent Sonoma County wineries and hotels are owned by international firms. Globalization and communication technology have changed the nature of work for many people as well as the nature of cities themselves, creating distinct advantages for denser, more compact urban areas while also allowing some workers to commute less.

Federal Policy. Dramatic changes are still unfolding in Washington, D.C. and these changes are creating uncertainty and concern, especially among those

working on conservation and environmental protection. Reductions in the federal government's efforts to address issues like climate change and public land protection are significant concerns for many Sonoma County residents and Ag + Open Space.

State Policy. State policy continues to favor compact, city-centered development patterns and strong state and local actions to combat climate change. State law also requires each city and county to plan for enough housing to accommodate its fair share of population growth, a major driver for local land use plans. Ag + Open Space actions that support these policies include supporting compact development that reduces automobile use, preventing sprawl by extinguishing development potential outside the UGBs, protecting land important for adapting to climate change, and protecting and increasing carbon capture in natural and working landscapes.

Population and Employment. The low population growth rate experienced in Sonoma County over the past two decades is expected to continue. The most recent forecast completed for the regional transportation and housing plan (Plan Bay Area 2040) projects Sonoma County households increasing by 0.6% per year between 2010 and 2040. Over 90% of this growth is forecast to





occur within the existing urban boundaries. Employment growth is forecast to be substantially less than the Bay Area region and somewhat slower than the county's housing growth.

Housing. Even before the catastrophic fires of 2017, Sonoma County residents were faced with an identified crisis in both housing availability and affordability. After the fires, the situation has become significantly worse. Like many California communities, Sonoma County has a housing affordability crisis in part because housing production has not kept pace with population growth. Many factors

impact housing supply, including land use controls and market forces. Sonoma County's strong commitment to city-centered growth makes it highly unlikely that additional lands outside of the established UGBs will become available for urban-density housing development in the foreseeable future. Ag + Open Space plays a critical role in maintaining working and natural lands outside the established Urban Growth Boundaries, thereby supporting the intention of the community to have vibrant cities and retain rural lands.

Ag + Open Space also helps support housing and community development within cities through its Matching Grant Program that helps increase community open space and parks. Building additional housing is one part of the solution; communities also need to support that housing with infrastructure and facilities that serve the future residents. For example, the Ag + Open Space Matching Grant Program supported acquisition and development of the Bayer Farm Neighborhood Park & Gardens and community center in the Roseland area, which provides an essential community facility for city residents.

Tourism. The combination of world-class wine growing, natural beauty, cultural diversity and proximity to the San Francisco Bay area means that Sonoma County is a highly desirable tourist destination. While wine-related tourism in the county's rural areas was once limited to low-key tasting rooms, that business model has shifted. Wineries now seek to draw new customers and build brand loyalty by creating a unique on-site experience for visitors including food, entertainment, and special events. This tourism model is catching on with producers of other agricultural commodities like artisan cheese and craft-brewed beer, who now offer entertainment and dining experiences in addition





to opportunities to buy agricultural products.

While tourism is an important part of the local economy, many residents are concerned about the volume and intensity of rural tourism, especially its negative effects such as traffic, noise, and the impact on the county's rural character. Since Ag + Open Space does not typically allow non-agricultural commercial visitor-serving uses on land covered by conservation easements, trends in rural tourism could affect future acquisitions by increasing the cost or

reducing a landowner's willingness to enter into an easement that restricts a potentially lucrative land use.

Agricultural Trends

Farmers face many challenges. Not just changes in the weather and in pests that can affect their crops in the short term, but also larger changes – changes to the climate, changes in the labor and real estate markets, changes in local demand for their products. Sonoma County's farming community has a long tradition of resilience and flexible responses to challenges that will serve them well in the coming decades.

Agricultural Land Loss. The amount of productive farmland and grazing land continues to fall, while urban land uses increase. Between 2000 and 2012, the acreage of farmland decreased 8% and the acreage of urban land increased 7%. Loss of agricultural land may be caused by multiple factors, including residential and urban development, conversion to other land uses such as rural estates, the commercialization of agricultural land converted to wineries, event centers, or resorts, and land covered by energy projects such as solar arrays or by greenhouse-style indoor cannabis growing operations.

Agricultural Land Conversion. While existing farmland is being converted for development in some parts of the county, new, expanded, or intensified agricultural operations are being implemented elsewhere, raising potential conflicts with natural resource and open space protection. For example, a 2005 proposal (known as "Preservation Ranch") would have converted about 1,700 acres of ridgetop forest lands in the northwestern part of the county into high-value vineyards, while also allowing significant residential development.





The project site was ultimately purchased by a conservation buyer, with Ag + Open Space holding a perpetual conservation easement to prevent future development and reduce the footprint of the agricultural area. Ag + Open Space easement acquisitions have historically provided for continued or expanded agricultural use while also protecting important environmental resources.

Expanded vineyard cultivation appears to have slowed compared to the rapid expansion seen in the 1980s and 1990s. Nonetheless, agricultural land in Sonoma County remains valuable and economic pressure for additional cultivation will likely continue. While large land conversions such as the former Preservation Ranch project are likely to be uncommon, the impact of smaller



conversions on natural resources can still be considerable cumulatively and/or individually, depending on project specifics and locations.

Escalating Land Costs. Escalating land costs in Sonoma County drive changes in agricultural production: a shift in crops produced, a transition to different production and marketing strategies, and a shift in land use from working agriculture to rural residential estates. High land prices and other market forces encourage farmers to produce the highest possible value crops. This has fueled a shift from orchards and other land use to vineyards. A comparison of per-acre returns from wine grapes at \$9,774 to per-acre returns from apples at \$2,493 (Sonoma County Crop Report 2016) makes it clear why vineyard conversions are common – both conversion of current working land to vineyards, as well as pressure on conversion of open space to vineyards. Sonoma has 65,000 acres of vines and 250 wineries. The wine industry continues strong economic growth, which keeps the pressure on land prices high. Land values now exceed record highs. Open, plantable land is priced at \$45,000 to \$100,000 per acre (up from \$35,000–\$50,000 per acre in 2009), while large tracts of pasture are priced at \$4,500/\$11,200/ acre (2016 Trends in Agricultural Land Lease Values)

Reduced Diversity of Agricultural Crops. Sonoma County's diverse mix of microclimates and soil types, created by the varying topography, underlying geology, and the rivers with their rich alluvial deposits, work together to make this a unique and productive agricultural region well-suited to a diverse array of crops. Many crops can grow here, but what is grown is influenced more by regional, national, and even international fluctuations in markets and by cultural changes affecting the popularity and demand for certain crops.





Farmers today – as they always have – grow what they can sell. Rangelands and some traditional crops, like apples and prunes, have been replaced by high value crops, like wine grapes and cannabis. Because a diverse agricultural heritage is part of what makes Sonoma County unique and special, and supports the production of local food, there is a growing interest in many parts of the community in retaining and increasing the diversity of agricultural production on Sonoma County’s cultivated lands and rangelands. From aspiring farmers who want to continue the county’s rural, agricultural traditions, to restaurateurs and chefs who want to showcase local food, to consumers who want to buy food, fiber, and beverages produced locally, many people value diverse agriculture. Tools that help make farmland accessible and affordable, help support Sonoma County’s rich agricultural heritage and increase local food security.

Farmers and Farm Laborers. Another important trend in Sonoma County agriculture is the aging of our farming community. Knowledge is lost as farmers get older and retire without being replaced by a younger generation with access to land and farming knowledge. The average age of farmers and ranchers has increased from 55 years old in 1992, to over 60 years old in 2012 (2012 Census of Agriculture). Even when beginning farmers want to get started farming in the county, it is a challenge due to the high price of farmland and the high price of housing. Farmers who lease land often can’t live on the land they farm, so they must cover the cost of a lease as well as the high cost of a mortgage or monthly rent. The number of beginning farmers in California has dropped 20% between 2007 and 2012, and today beginning farmers represent the smallest portion of farm proprietors since 1982 (American Farmland Trust). It is also difficult to find sufficient farm workers, due both to issues with immigration and to the high cost of housing in the county.

Processing and Support Facilities. A viable agricultural economy requires a variety of support services. These include places to process and store products from local meat to fruits and vegetables, aggregation and distribution facilities, and locations to market and sell these products. As land prices rise and the percentage of county residents who are farmers or who grew up on farms and ranches declines, locating agricultural support services where they are accessible, affordable, and welcome becomes more challenging.

Cannabis Cultivation. Sonoma County is a focal point for the rapidly growing cannabis industry and cannabis is already a major part of the local economy. One cannabis growers’ organization estimates that there were up to 10,000 grows in Sonoma County in 2016. In December 2016, the County adopted an ordinance





regulating and tightly restricting cannabis cultivation in the unincorporated area. As long as cannabis remains illegal under federal law, Ag + Open Space cannot work with cannabis growers.

Natural Resource Trends

Like all natural systems, Sonoma County's landscapes are dynamic, changing in response to human activities as well as with natural cycles. Some changes are sudden, like the October 2017 wildfires that transformed over 100,000 acres within the county in a matter of days. Others, like climate change and habitat loss, are ongoing but can also have dramatic effects over time.

Climate Change. The region's climate has warmed relative to historic conditions and that trend is expected to continue indefinitely. In the North Bay,

summer temperatures are forecast to rise by approximately 6 to 8°F, on average, by the end of this century. The number of extremely hot days (over 98.7°F) per year is predicted to rise from 4 (in 1961-1990) to 15 (in 2070-2099). More frequent extreme events like droughts, fires, and floods are expected, with a cascade of consequences for plants, wildlife, and people. (REFERENCE)

Sonoma County is already experiencing hotter temperatures and predictions call for continuing increases in temperature, growing drought stress for plants, and more frequent extreme events like droughts, fires, and floods. In response, the distribution, health, and seasonal timing of many species are likely to change, with a cascade of consequences. We can support natural systems' ability to withstand these stresses by protecting habitat connectivity, healthy water resources, and biodiversity. Habitat connectivity helps allow plants and animals to move or disperse in response to changing conditions. Water resources, including the resilience and cooler temperatures that riparian areas provide, will become ever more important as plants and wildlife cope with increasing temperatures. Biodiversity provides the fundamental variety that lets individuals, populations, species and communities adapt to change.

Like everyone in the county, farmers are impacted by climate change, and those impacts are largely negative. However, agriculture can play an important role in mitigating climate change by sequestering and storing atmospheric carbon. The adoption of best practices, including use of compost, intensive/rotational grazing, and cover cropping can sequester carbon in the soil long-term and is an important component of the countywide effort to reduce the carbon footprint. Agriculture's potential role has been recognized by policymakers (cf SB 367) and should be part of a regional solution to climate change.





Habitat Loss and Fragmentation. The central reason for the creation and ongoing mission of Ag + Open Space is to protect working and natural lands in Sonoma County, a need that is driven in part by a larger trend of disappearing natural areas in the western U.S. and the globe. This trend already shows up locally: a recent study by scientists working for the Center for American Progress shows that almost 9,200 acres of natural lands were developed in Sonoma County between 2001 and 2011. This is a higher rate of natural land loss than the state of California as a whole, or other western states, experienced in that time.

In Sonoma County, habitat loss continues to occur where new construction or agricultural conversion happens at city edges and in more remote areas. Habitat fragmentation occurs when large expanses of land are broken into smaller patches, often a result of new roads, developments, or agriculture in areas that were previously in a natural state. The resulting isolation of natural habitats can threaten plant and animal survival by limiting their ability to disperse or move to find resources and mates. Fragmented habitat also has more edges, which can change the habitat's microclimate and encourage invasive species.

Invasive Species. Non-native invasive species are those that have been introduced from other areas and spread rapidly, often with significant effects on local habitat. Invasive vegetation and non-native trees are widespread in Sonoma County, from eucalyptus groves to stands of broom, pampas grass, arundo, and Himalayan blackberry. Invasive animal species are also a concern; wild turkeys, pigs, and bullfrogs all have dramatic effects on the county's landscape and native wildlife. Invasive species conditions strongly shape an area's habitat conservation value, and preventing their further spread is a key consideration in land management.



PHOTO
PLACEHOLDER





PROTECTING FISH

Sonoma County is home to three species of salmonids – steelhead trout, coho salmon and Chinook salmon. These amazing fish travel to the ocean from the streams where they were born, returning to this same stream to spawn and reproduce. The quality of the habitat in Sonoma County creeks and streams is critically important for their survival. Over the past 150 years, their numbers declined dramatically due to many changes including dam construction, development near streams, sedimentation from roads and farming practices, loss of riparian vegetation, and changes to water flows. The Russian River was once home to the largest steelhead trout population in the world, yet all three salmon species have experienced precipitous declines due to habitat loss.

In recent decades, intensive efforts have been undertaken to reverse this trend. These include land conservation, restoring habitat, supporting water conservation, removing fish passage barriers, and captive breeding programs. Successes have been documented for many of these projects, with fish observed spawning in habitat once blocked by dams, captive-bred fish reproducing successfully in the wild, and coho populations improved relative to their near-extirpation in the early 2000s. Ag + Open Space has protected thousands of acres of land that will help these fish survive and thrive.

[SECTION FIVE]

Local Land Conservation

Sonoma County residents have a long history of valuing and caring for natural and working lands. Even before voters acted to ensure that Sonoma County retains its rural character and way of life, we had individuals, public agencies, and nonprofits working to preserve the landscapes that define our region. Over the years we have collectively preserved farming and ranching lands that produce local food and support our economy, community separators that maintain each city's unique identity, and ecosystems that support a rich diversity of plants, wildlife and habitats. We are now fully realizing the multiple benefits of the community's vision to protect what we love about Sonoma County – clean water filtered by our forested watersheds, scenic vistas, local food, places for all people to exercise and experience natural beauty, increased revenues from tourism, vibrant communities, and views of our mountaintops. The beauty of land conservation is that it has multiple benefits – it can preserve a city's iconic backdrop, provide trails for recreation, offer a space for grazing cattle, protect native plants and wildlife, and safeguard a key watershed that sequesters carbon and contributes to our water supply.





LOCAL LAND CONSERVATION

There's more to Land Conservation...

The goals, objectives, and strategies of the Vital Lands Initiative reflect the requirements of the voter-approved funding measure and associated Expenditure Plan, but that is only part of the story. The land conservation mission of Ag + Open Space achieves other substantial benefits for Sonoma County residents including protecting supplies of clean drinking water, avoiding greenhouse gas emissions, sequestering carbon, making our ecosystems and communities more resilient to climate change, providing a landscape resilient to natural disasters, enhancing health and food security, and preserving Sonoma County's cultural heritage.

Clean Drinking Water for Our Communities. Water is life. Sonoma County is fortunate to have a water supply that is naturally filtered by our healthy watersheds and river systems, and stored in part in groundwater basins that underlie our farms and natural habitats. Unlike many places in the United States, this natural filtration is a function of the lands in Sonoma County that remain in open space – allowing the landscape to soak up and filter rainwater in forests, grasslands, cultivated agricultural areas and rangelands. While the Ag + Open Space mission is focused on retaining our natural and working lands in Sonoma County for agricultural productivity and ecosystem function, there is a substantial additional benefit to our community from protecting these watersheds, habitats, agricultural lands and river systems – a benefit that we experience every day when we turn on the tap. Land conservation by Ag + Open Space and its partners has provided natural filtration benefits to over 600,000 people in three northern California counties.

Carbon Sequestration & Avoiding Emissions through Land Conservation.

California and Sonoma County are leaders on climate action – driving innovation in renewable energy, transportation and housing approaches that help our county and state reach its ambitious climate goals. Land conservation plays a significant role in addressing climate change, both by sequestering carbon in our natural and working landscapes and by avoiding emissions associated with sprawl. Over 229 million metric tonnes (more than 250 million tons) of carbon dioxide (CO₂) equivalent are sequestered in the Sonoma County landscape – equal to 48 million passenger vehicles being driven for one year. Given that land use change, predominantly from forest removal, contributes substantially to global CO₂ emissions, conserving Sonoma County's native habitats is an important element in the portfolio of climate action.(REFERENCE)

CARBON SEQUESTRATION

XX tons
of carbon dioxide equivalent is stored in on Ag + Open Space-protected lands, representing

XX% of the County carbon stores.
This is the equivalent to the annual GHG emissions from

XX cars
or XX homes





Explore this map online: vital-lands.org/shorthand

Aboveground Carbon - Carbon density, in metric tons per hectare

150+ Mg/ha	101-150 Mg/ha	51-100 Mg/ha	1-50 Mg/ha	Ag + Open Space Land	Other Protected Land
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Reducing development in remote locations also results in avoiding emissions. New development brings additional vehicles traveling back and forth, often to remote locations in the county, yielding additional emissions. Numerous studies have demonstrated that regions where towns and cities accommodate housing and commercial development have lower greenhouse gas emissions. (REFERENCE) The Ag + Open Space land conservation program has substantially reduced vehicle miles travelled by purchasing development rights from willing sellers, reducing the amount of residential development far from jobs and services. Parks, trails, and nature preserves close to urban areas provide recreation opportunities easily reached by walking, bicycling, or a short drive.

Conserving Culture as well as Land. Land and people shape each other. The first people here—Pomo, Miwok, and Wappo—built shell mounds at the coast, and tended sedge beds, basket willow, wildflowers for pinole, and many other plants - favoring some and suppressing others. They used fire to shape the landscape and left remnants of their early villages and charmstones at the bottom of Tolay Lake. The Russians at Fort Ross, the Spanish missions, the Gold Rush prospectors, and the farmers and ranchers that followed all left their mark on the landscape. Protecting land preserves that history, whether it is a ranch house unchanged since the 1920s, a petroglyph boulder, or a pure patch of harvest brodiaea.

Healthy Lands & Healthy Communities. Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals and communities are healthier when they have access to parks and open space. In a recent study, the health benefits of community open space and parks in Sonoma County have been calculated at over \$57 million per year for our community. The total cost of physical inactivity is over \$274 million per year - a



function of a variety of diseases and conditions associated with a sedentary lifestyle.

Reliable Food Close to Home. How many places are there where every piece of food on the table—from fresh crab or tender lamb chops, beautiful salads and vegetables, artisan cheese with seasonal fruit, a glass of world-class wine, even ice cream—come from your neighborhood? With a range of microclimates, benign weather, and a long heritage of agricultural innovation, Sonoma County is blessed with an abundance and diversity of locally grown food. Land conservation plays an essential role in maintaining viable and productive agriculture even as land prices rise and development pressure grows. Keeping farms and ranches close to consumers assures a dependable local food supply, as well as fostering educated and appreciative buyers. Conservation easements can give farmers the economic boost needed to maintain the county’s variety of food crops which in turn strengthens the industry’s resilience to changes in weather and markets.

Adapting to Climate Change. Natural and working landscapes make our plant, wildlife and human communities more resilient to climate change. Keeping land in agriculture ensures a reliable local food supply. Protecting our groundwater basins, streams and watersheds ensures a source of clean water for fish, wildlife, and people, even during years of drought or changing weather patterns. Maintaining open spaces and parks in our cities and communities will ensure shading and heat refuges for our most vulnerable populations. Natural and working landscapes are more adaptable to the increased volatility that is projected as the climate changes. Unlike cities and areas with a lot of built infrastructure, natural and working landscapes

Explore this map online: vital-lands.org/shorthand



are flexible and allow plants, habitats, wildlife, and people room to move in the face of changing conditions on the landscape. Sea levels are projected to rise anywhere from 1.2 to 2.7 feet in California by 2100, destroying built infrastructure such as roads, residential and commercial development. Sonoma County is

fortunate to have maintained open space and conservation lands along the coast, as these areas can slowly and flexibly respond to rising seas. Unlike built infrastructure, salt marshes and estuarine habitats can adjust to sea level rise, and parks and coastal agriculture can be relocated inland and upslope to adjust to rising seas.



LOCAL LAND CONSERVATION

Land Conservation + Community Resiliency

Although natural disasters will always be part of the human experience, protecting strategic swaths of land and managing them appropriately can lower the impacts of these events on our communities. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of floods, droughts, and wildfires. Land conservation, however, can help make our communities more resilient to these changing circumstances. Minimizing development in especially risky areas can be accomplished using conservation easements, which, in turn, also protect many other values important to the community. Places where there is extreme fire or flood potential can be set aside so that the public can enjoy a variety of benefits, while enhancing public safety and providing a buffer against a variety of natural disasters.

The October 2017 Sonoma County complex fires have demonstrated that working lands provided a buffer against the fires, and that burn severity in

forested areas varied based on how the land was managed. There may be an opportunity to surround communities with fire resilient open space lands – managed in a way to reduce fire severity, while providing benefits such as local food, environmental, scenic and recreational values.

With flooding expected to increase, land conservation along stream corridors can help to avoid flood damage to residential areas, keep people safe, while also enhancing our groundwater supplies and water quality, and increasing habitat for fish and wildlife.

Finally, maintaining Sonoma County natural and working lands makes us more resilient – protecting our groundwater supplies during times of drought, allowing wildlife space to move, ensuring local food, sequestering carbon, and protecting our naturally filtered water supplies.





LOCAL LAND CONSERVATION

Protected Land, Public Open Space, and Parklands in Sonoma County

Of Sonoma County's 1.1 million acres, almost 220,000 are publicly owned or protected by a conservation easement, a 69% increase from 2002. Most of these are owned or protected by federal, state, and county agencies (including Ag + Open Space), by private non-profit organizations, or by cities. Approximately one third of the county's protected lands are open to the public for recreation; another 15% offer restricted access (i.e. guided tours). Two-thirds of the protected lands are publicly owned; the remaining 36% are privately-owned and protected by easements, held by Ag + Open Space and other land conservation organizations. Ag + Open Space also holds easements on ## acres of publicly-owned land, assuring an additional level of protection beyond that provided by public agency ownership alone.

State Lands. Over 45,000 acres of Sonoma County are held by California state agencies, primarily the Department of Parks and Recreation. From Salt Point and Kruse Rhododendron Natural Reserve in the far northwestern corner to Petaluma Adobe and Sonoma State Historic Parks in the southeast, Sonoma County is home to 12 state parks which provide public recreation and education as well as resource protection.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife owns and manages the Napa-Sonoma and Petaluma Marshes Wildlife Areas, Santa Rosa Plain Vernal Pool Ecological Reserve, Laguna Wildlife Area, and a number of smaller properties. These protect specific natural resource values or fishing access; most are open for limited public uses. The State Lands Commission holds jurisdiction over the beds of tidal and navigable waters.

Fairfield Osborn Preserve held by Sonoma State University and Bodega Marine Reserve held by the University of California Davis are managed for research, education, and natural resource protection.

Local Government. Over ##,### acres are owned by local government

entities in the county, such as cities and the County itself. Another #,### acres are protected by conservation easements held by organizations other than Ag + Open Space. Over #,000 acres are in the jurisdiction of Sonoma County Regional Parks. Many of these are parcels that were protected by Ag + Open Space, and over which we continue to hold conservation easements. Sonoma County Water Agency holds some property for water resource protection. Recreation and Park Districts in Monte Rio, Russian River, and Camp Meeker own lands in their service areas for recreation. The incorporated cities in Sonoma County also play an important role in protecting natural and working lands - together they own almost #,000 additional acres for open space preserves and parks. Ag + Open Space retains a conservation easement over any property that it has financially participated in protecting, assuring that the taxpayer investment of Measure C and F sales tax funding will be protected in perpetuity.

Land Conservation Organizations and NGOs. Sonoma County is rich in private organizations that own and/or hold conservation easements over land for open space protection. These include Sonoma Land Trust, Pepperwood Foundation, the Wildlands Conservancy, LandPaths, the Conservation Fund, Audubon Canyon Ranch, Bodega Land Trust, Humane Society Wildlife Land Trust, and many more.



DRAFT

Explore
this map online:
[vital-lands.org/
shorthand](http://vital-lands.org/shorthand)

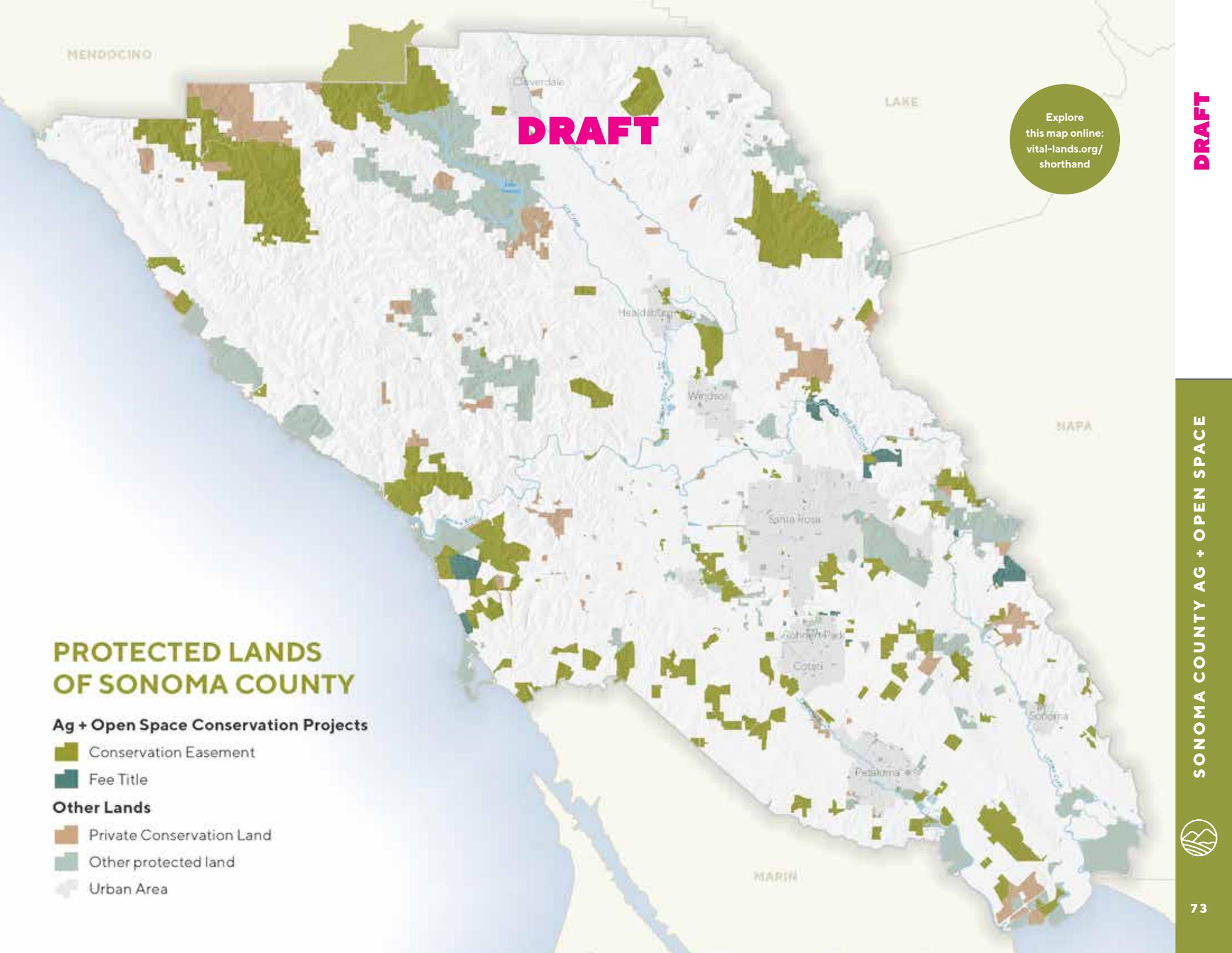
PROTECTED LANDS OF SONOMA COUNTY

Ag + Open Space Conservation Projects

-  Conservation Easement
-  Fee Title

Other Lands

-  Private Conservation Land
-  Other protected land
-  Urban Area



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SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



[SECTION SIX]

Outcomes on the Land

The Vital Lands Initiative is the result of a significant community engagement effort, the culmination of decades worth of experience and know-how in the conservation field by Ag + Open Space and our partners, and the collection and analysis of scientific, land use, and demographic information. The approach to developing the Vital Lands Initiative included a wide range of community and partner meetings, sifting through existing data sets and developing new ones, and connecting with experts at Ag + Open Space, at partner organizations, in academia, and in the community.





Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the Vital Lands Initiative:

Goal: Goals are the primary outcomes toward which efforts and actions are directed in an organization. Goals for Ag + Open Space will often be integrated to achieve a multiple benefits effect. An example of a Goal is “Protect a diverse system of productive agricultural lands in Sonoma County.”

Objective: Objectives reflect desired outcomes which support the goals identified by the Vital Lands Initiative. Objectives are different from goals in that they are measurable and specific. Objectives are also the basis for measuring performance in reaching a goal. Once objectives are identified, one or more strategies are developed for achieving them. An example of an objective is “Ensure that Ag + Open Space-protected agricultural lands remain in agriculture.”

Strategy: Strategies are the “hows,” not the “whats.” A strategy considers the current context and trends, and addresses how Ag + Open Space should best achieve a given objective, given current conditions. Actions necessary to implement the Strategies will be defined in Ag + Open Space Implementation Plans. An example of a strategy is “Resell Ag + Open Space-owned agricultural lands to agricultural producers while retaining a conservation easement that protects and or affirms agricultural use.”

Performance Indicators: Performance Indicators are qualitative or quantitative metrics, used to gauge success, trend direction, or completion of Objectives.

Performance Indicators can be land-based (acres of land acquired or stewarded), financial (dollars spent or leveraged), or social (number of people engaged/educated/within walking distance of Ag + Open Space-protected land). Performance Indicators will be used to (1) measure progress in achieving objectives, and (2) to communicate the progress and success of Ag + Open Space in achieving its goals. An example is “Number of landowners contacted.”

Open Space Designations: Open Space Designations are landscape values or features that Ag + Open Space has identified as being important to protect. Open Space Designations can stand alone, or may overlay each other or other relevant data (such as special status species data), in order to identify places where multiple benefits are achieved. Open Space Designations are intended to help provide the land conservation community a shared view of the landscape and the values it provides. An example is “Cultivated Agriculture.” For more information about Open Space Designations, see page ##.





OUTCOMES ON THE LAND

Expenditure Plan

The text on the following page appeared as “Exhibit A” to Measure F, which was passed in 2006 by Sonoma County residents with over 76% of the vote. This Expenditure Plan is a guiding document for the work of Ag + Open Space. It defines how and on what Ag + Open Space can spend the quarter-cent sales tax generated through Measure F until it sunsets in 2031. Ag + Open Space adheres to the Expenditure Plan to ensure that taxpayers’ money is spent as Sonoma County voters intended.



Agricultural Preservation & Open Space 2006 Expenditure Plan

The purpose of this expenditure plan is to implement the Sonoma County General Plan and the general plans of the County's incorporated cities 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 County and cities' General Plan open space elements and may include the purchase of fee interests for outdoor public recreation where the public use would not be inconsistent with the open space designations listed below.

The open space designations eligible for protection under this expenditure plan include community separators, greenbelts, scenic landscape units, scenic corridors, agriculturally productive lands, biotic habitat areas, riparian corridors and other areas of biotic significance, and other open space projects.

- 1 Community separators and greenbelts are lands that function as open space to separate cities and other communities and protect city and community identity by 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 scenic quality including natural landscapes and backdrops that provide visual relief from urban densities and maintain the open nature of the County.
- 3 Agriculturally productive lands include working farms and ranches and other lands used for the production of food, fiber, and plant materials and the raising and maintaining of livestock and farm animals.
- 4 Biotic habitat areas, riparian corridors, and other areas of biotic significance include freshwater and tidal marshes, wetlands, special status species locations, woodlands and forests, wildlife habitat corridors and lands along creeks and streams critical to protecting fisheries and water quality.

These sensitive natural areas require protection, restoration, and resource management, and include the Petaluma River, Laguna de Santa Rosa, Russian River, Sonoma Creek and San Pablo Baylands.

- 5 Other open space projects include, but are not limited to, urban open space and recreation projects within and near incorporated areas and other urbanized areas of Sonoma County. Funds for these projects shall be available to cities, the County and other entities through a matching grant program, with preference given to acquisition and development projects that link communities. Examples of these projects include creek restoration and enhancement, such as along the Petaluma River, Santa Rosa Creek, and Laguna de Santa Rosa, trails, athletic fields, and urban greenspace.
- 6 Operation and maintenance of land includes limited funding for initial public access, operation and maintenance of recreational lands purchased in accordance with this Plan. No more than 10 percent of total revenues generated over the life of the Measure shall be made available for operation and maintenance purposes.



OUTCOMES ON THE LAND

Open Space Designations

Using the Expenditure Plan as a foundation, Ag + Open Space has developed a suite of Open Space Designations – the values, features, and landscapes that should be protected using funds from Measure F. These Designations are incorporated into many of our key decision making processes, and are used in Implementation Plans to identify specific values for protection. Open Space Designations are also used in conjunction with Performance Indicators to track progress, and share the work of Ag + Open Space with the community.





Rangeland

The Rangeland Open Space Designation is comprised of grasslands used for grazing cattle, sheep, goats and other livestock. These animals provide meat for local consumers and restaurants, dairy products including our well-regarded local cheese, and wool. Mapped data for rangelands were derived from the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. Rangelands in Sonoma County provide benefits beyond food and fiber, such as scenic open spaces, wildlife habitat and corridors, groundwater recharge, and long-term carbon sequestration in the soil.

Cultivated Agriculture

The Cultivated Agriculture Open Space Designation is comprised of lands in agricultural production, including row crops, orchards, vineyards, and other specialty crops. These cultivated lands provide agricultural products, from organic vegetables featured at fine local restaurants and farmer’s markets to high value wines known around the world. The updated mapped data for cultivated agriculture were derived from the Ag + Open Space 2013 Sonoma Veg Map initiative and provides an accurate understanding of where these cultivated lands are and their proximity to other protected lands. These data also provide us with the ability to track changes in agricultural land use over time, and the opportunity to evaluate the multiple land conservation benefits associated with productive agriculture – including scenic, greenbelt and natural resource benefits.



Natural Vegetation Communities

The Natural Vegetation Communities Open Space Designation documents Sonoma County's mosaic of natural habitats and vegetation communities, some of which are unique and contribute to its status as an international hotspot for biodiversity. These include evergreen forests, oak woodlands, chaparral, grasslands, wetlands, vernal pool, and riparian plant communities. The range of topographic, climatic, geographic and physical features and ecosystems creates this diversity. Ag + Open Space used data from the Sonoma Veg Map initiative to refine our understanding of the location and composition of these natural vegetation communities in order to more effectively prioritize them for protection.



Rare Vegetation

The Rare Vegetation Open Space Designation covers the variety of rare vegetation types that contribute to Sonoma County's high level of biological diversity and support diverse wildlife populations. One example of a unique community is serpentine vegetation – plants that have adapted to growing on low-nitrogen, low-calcium serpentine soils – which supports unique insect, bird and mammal species that have evolved to use this habitat. Rare vegetation communities may occur in only a few locations, so identifying them and prioritizing them for protection is critical to their continued existence. Rare vegetation designations are derived from a variety of sources, including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and local experts.

Old growth and Late Successional Forests

The Old Growth Forest Open Space Designation documents the unique habitat values provided by large and old growth trees, which support a different set of plant and animal species than do younger, smaller trees in second-growth forests. These habitat values include homes for hole-nesting bird species, burrows for mammals, roosts and nests for raptors, habitat for canopy dwelling plant and animal species, and a rich substrate for a diversity of insects, amphibians and reptiles. Large trees also sequester significant amounts of carbon and are more resilient to fire than younger stands. When they fall into creeks or rivers, they provide important in-stream habitat for endangered salmonid species. For these reasons, old growth and late successional forests have been identified and mapped by Ag + Open Space as an important priority for protection, using information from the 2013 Sonoma Veg Map project.

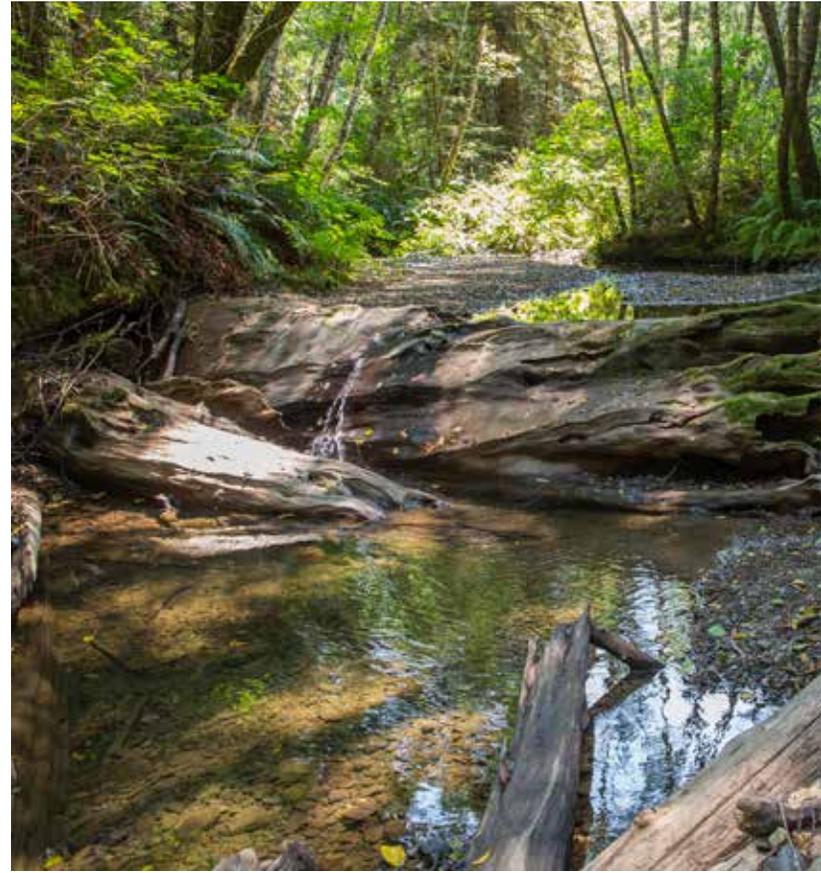


Wildlife Space and Movement

The Wildlife Space and Movement Open Space Designation considers the needs of the wildlife that require large tracts of intact habitat for their continued survival. Many animal species, especially large mammals, require undisturbed space for shelter, food, and reproduction. They also require the ability to move across the landscape to access new habitat areas, escape from predators or natural disasters, and ensure genetic diversity. Ag + Open Space worked with local and statewide experts in wildlife habitats and connectivity to develop an Open Space Designation that reflects this important component of wildlife diversity and abundance.

Wetlands

The Wetlands Open Space Designation documents Sonoma County wetlands – including vernal pools, lakes, freshwater marshes, and salt marshes. These natural systems are critically important for supporting biological diversity, recharging groundwater, and making our communities more resilient to drought and climate change. They also contribute to the scenic beauty of Sonoma County and support rare and endangered species: vernal pools and other freshwater wetlands provide habitat for the threatened California Tiger Salamander and are host to three plant species found only in the north coast region – Sonoma sunshine, Burke’s goldfields, and Sebastopol meadowfoam. Data for wetlands were derived from the Sonoma Veg Map initiative, refining and updating our understanding of the location, size and quality of these rare and valuable features on the landscape.



Salmonid-bearing Streams

The Salmonid-bearing Streams Open Space Designation reflects creek and river systems that are identified by NOAA fisheries and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as critical habitat for Sonoma County’s three species of threatened or endangered salmonids – including Chinook salmon, Coho salmon and steelhead trout. These streams are specifically called out as Open Space Designations because salmonids are important indicators of watershed health and integrity and because they are threatened with extinction.



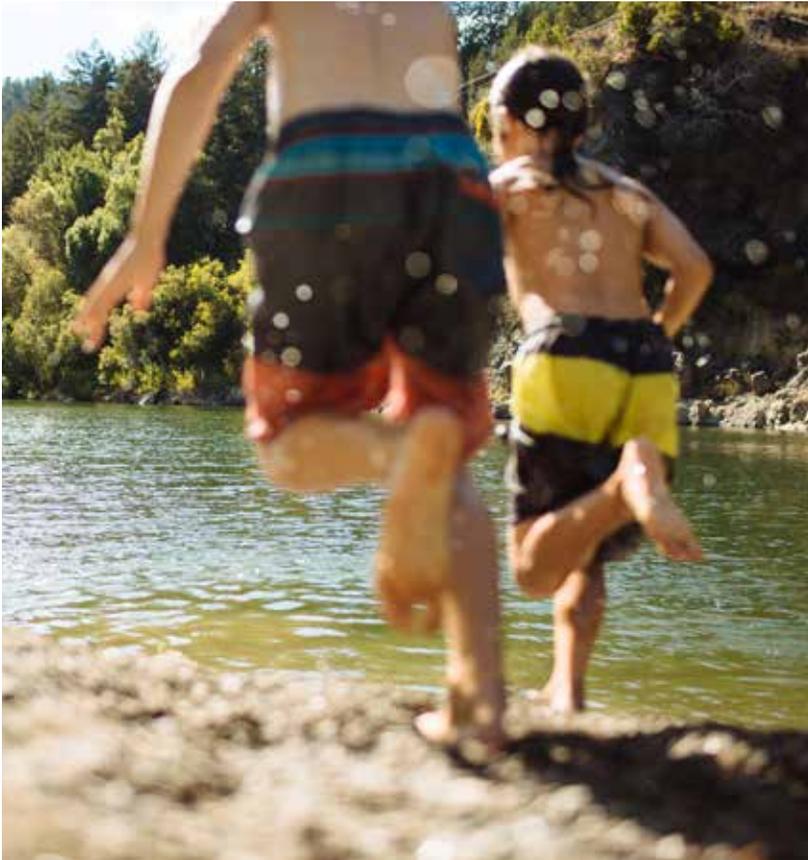
Riparian Corridors

The Riparian Corridor Open Space Designation covers the channel and floodplain areas of major tributaries in Sonoma County. Riparian corridors are some of the most biologically diverse areas in the world, providing habitat for three-fourths of the amphibians and half of the reptiles in California, as well as habitat for migratory and resident bird species, mammals, and three local species of threatened and endangered salmonids. Riparian corridors are challenging to protect, as they move across floodplains over time due to changes in hydrology, soils and large storm events. Ag + Open Space has invested significant resources to understand the functional extent of riparian corridors, so we can prioritize their long-term conservation. The Riparian Corridor Open Space Designation was developed using data from the 2013 LiDAR mapping project, combined with information derived from hydrologic modeling, and expert input. These data, showing the location and extent of riparian corridors in Sonoma County, will allow us to determine where and how much land is required to protect the long-term functions and values these corridors provide.



Habitat for Special Status Species

The Special Status Species Open Space Designation protects special status species – including federally or state threatened and endangered plant and animal species – that live in Sonoma County, and may occur nowhere else. Because of the limited geographical extent of their habitat, their protection is critically important to ensure that they do not become extinct. The land protection role of Ag + Open Space and its conservation partners is critical in preserving these habitats. Special status species information is derived from a variety of sources, including the California Natural Diversity Database, local mapping and expert input.



Public Access

The Public Access Open Space Designation indicates where there may be potential for additional public access that is compatible with Ag + Open Space protection of conservation values. Examples include properties owned in fee by Ag + Open Space, such as Calabazas Creek Open Space Preserve and Carrington Coast Ranch. These areas have the potential to provide Sonoma County residents with additional opportunities to get outdoors and be active, with all the health benefits that are associated with fresh air and physical activity.

Groundwater Basins and Recharge Areas

The Groundwater Basin Open Space Designation identifies land areas that allow for the infiltration and storage of groundwater and the recharge of groundwater basins. Protecting groundwater basins and recharge areas by keeping these areas free of impervious surfaces is critical to the County's water supply and quality. Conserving these lands also helps to maintain the habitats and species that rely on groundwater dependent ecosystems, and maintains flood, drought, and climate change resiliency. These groundwater recharge areas and groundwater basins often support other compatible conservation values, including cultivated or rangeland agriculture, scenic and greenbelt lands, recreation and habitat for special status species. Data for this designation were derived from the Sonoma County Water Agency, United State Geological Survey, the California Department of Water Resources and local experts.



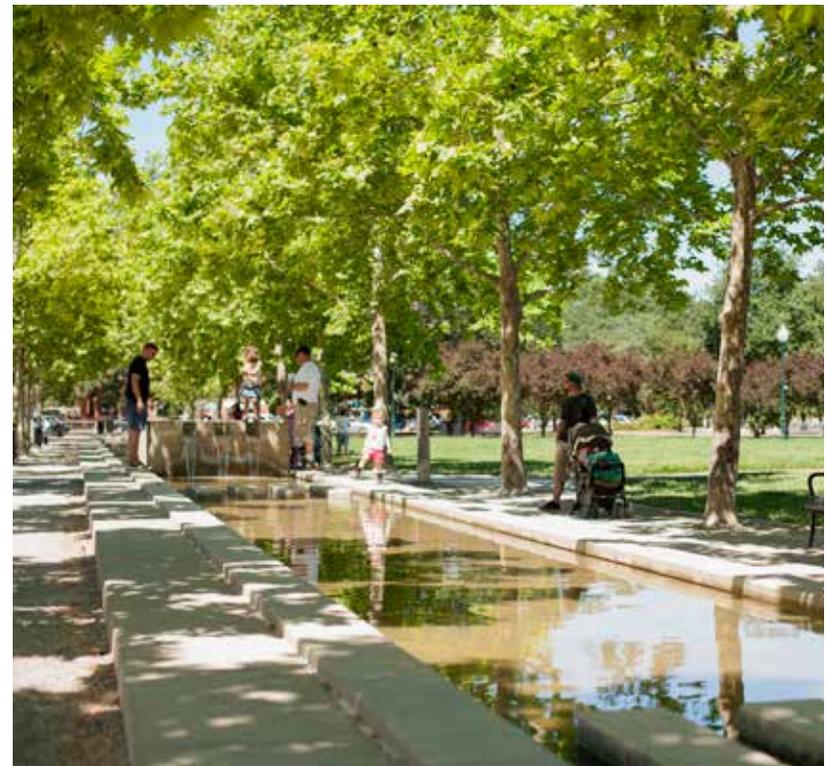


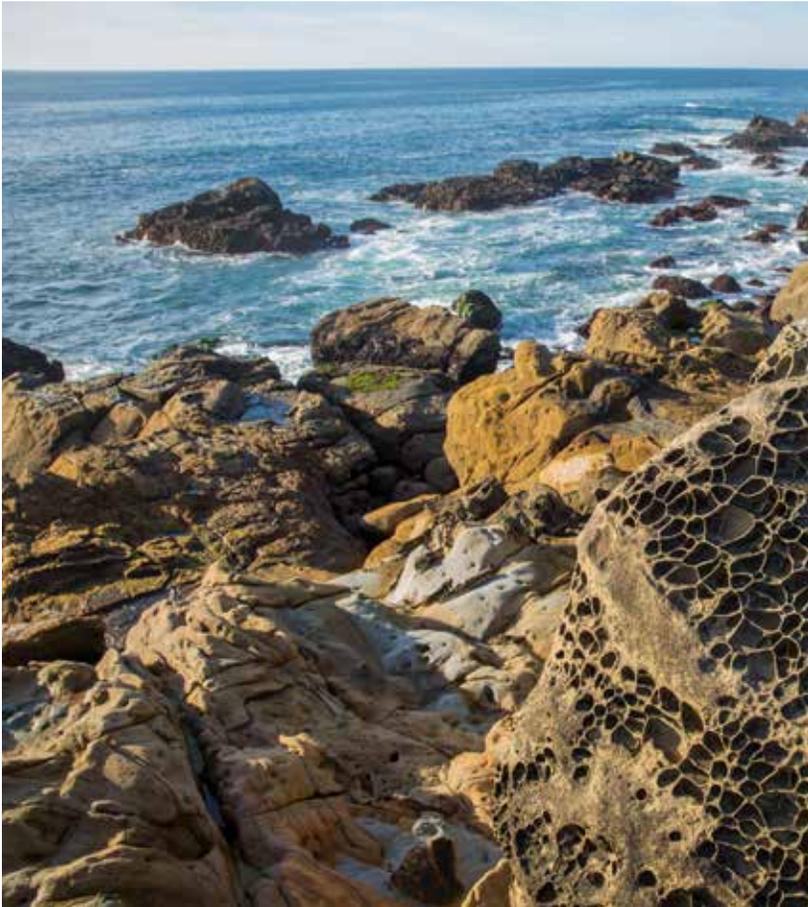
Trail Connections

The Trail Connections Open Space Designation depicts our collaborations with recreational partners to link existing public spaces, via regional trails such as the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Coastal Trail, the Bay Trail, or local alignments identified by Sonoma County Regional Parks, California State Parks, and Sonoma County cities and towns. Many of these trail connections provide other benefits, such as wildlife movement, scenic values, or habitat protection. Data for this designation has been provided by recreational partners.

Community Open Space

The Community Open Space Designation reflects the priorities of the Ag + Open Space Matching Grant Program, which works with partners to enhance and maintain open space in and near Sonoma County cities, towns and communities. Our competitive Matching Grant Program provides funds for local agriculture, community recreation, natural resource restoration, and public access. Projects are generally located within ½ mile of established Urban Growth Boundaries, Urban Service Areas, or other rural communities throughout the county.



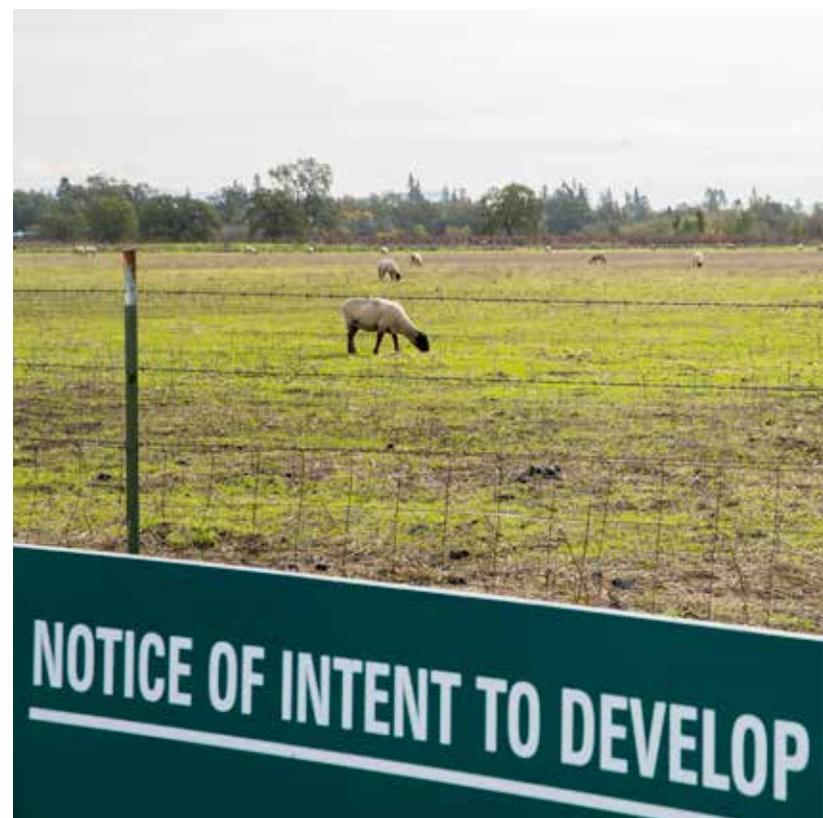


Prominent Landscape Features

The Prominent Landscape Feature Open Space Designation documents areas of significant scenic or visual character in Sonoma County, including mountains and ridgetops, scenic rivers and valleys, and unique landscape features, such as coastal outcrops or unique rock formations. Ag + Open Space has performed extensive analyses to determine what scenic resources are visible to our community and how best to maintain views of these highly visible areas.

Greenbelt

The Greenbelt Open Space Designation identifies the undeveloped lands between and near cities that help Sonoma County retain its unique rural character. Distance from urban areas is the primary driver for this designation, with Sonoma County General Plan Community Separators and those undeveloped, large parcels close to or surrounding the Urban Growth Boundaries of Sonoma County's nine cities receiving the highest priority for protection – the parcels at highest risk of subdivision or urban development.





OUTCOMES ON THE LAND

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles inform all goals, objectives, strategies and actions pursued by Ag + Open Space:

PRINCIPLE 1

Focus on the permanent preservation of land to protect specific conservation values identified in the Ag + Open Space voter-approved Expenditure Plan.

- Use conservation easements as the primary tool for land conservation.
- Ensure that all Ag + Open Space acquisitions are designed to permanently protect land and its identified conservation values.
- Strive to achieve a mutually beneficial balance among agriculture, greenbelts, natural resources, scenic character, and appropriate public access.
- Prioritize protection of lands most at risk of development.
- Prioritize protection of lands with exceptional conservation value or those that address multiple conservation values.
- Strive for connectivity of protected lands where that will enhance conservation values.
- Ensure that the long-term stewardship of Ag + Open Space-protected land safeguards conservation values.
- Where allowable uses have the potential to be in conflict, require the development of management plan.

PRINCIPLE 2

Use the best available information to make decisions.

- Use the best available science and data to identify, prioritize, and protect land.
- Integrate lessons learned from challenges and successes into future work.
- Develop important information that is necessary to best further our work and make it publicly available.

PRINCIPLE 3

Use taxpayer funds responsibly.

- Protect the long-term fiscal health of the organization.
- Ensure fiscal and operational transparency.
- Make financial decisions based upon fiscal and operational capacity.
- Comply with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations and policies.
- Strive for continuous improvement in organizational efficiency and effectiveness.
- Maintain target Stewardship Reserve Fund balance to support perpetual stewardship responsibilities.
- Explore new tools, legislation and funding measures to increase funding for land conservation.
- Actively collaborate with traditional and non-traditional conservation partners to most effectively leverage of Ag + Open Space tax revenue.



PRINCIPLE 4

Communicate, engage, partner, and collaborate to accomplish the Ag + Open Space mission.

- Engage with Sonoma County residents on a regular and substantial basis to gather input and share information about our work.
- Cultivate positive relationships with the community, including landowners, neighbors, and partners.
- Increase outreach to all demographics regarding the multiple benefits and values of protecting working and natural lands in Sonoma County through traditional and social media, events, education and outings programs.
- Increase community involvement in stewardship through partnerships and a volunteer engagement strategy.
- Promote opportunities for youth involvement in Ag + Open Space initiatives and expand environmental education programs to connect children to nature and to support the next generation of conservation leaders.

PRINCIPLE 5

Increase sustainability and climate change resiliency in all Ag + Open Space work.

- Develop standards for ensuring the land protection efforts of Ag + Open Space maximize resiliency to floods, fires, drought and climate change.
- Protect land which increases resiliency to natural disasters, such as fires, floods, and drought
- Evaluate and report out the carbon sequestration benefits provided by Sonoma County land conservation.
- Develop a program to reduce the Ag + Open Space environmental footprint.
- Help landowners access technical and financial resources that support greater carbon sequestration and climate change resiliency on their lands.

PRINCIPLE 6

Leverage Ag + Open Space sales tax dollars to more effectively achieve the mission.

- Identify shared objectives with partners and develop formal partnerships to advance key initiatives and projects.
- Seek opportunities to more effectively collaborate with other agencies.
- Develop a shared strategy with recreational partners for overall outreach, outings, and educational and volunteer opportunities.
- Share data and resources with partners to influence best conservation outcomes.



OUTCOMES ON THE LAND

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The mission of Ag + Open Space is broad. This mission was articulated by the community in the Expenditure Plan ([HYPERLINK](#)), and spans a variety of landscapes, and open space land uses. Building on 27+ years of experience, and with input from the community and technical advisors, Ag + Open Space developed a series of goals during the development of the Vital Lands Initiative. In most cases, the actions that we take advance more than one goal – our work is inherently multi-benefit, a result of the interwoven nature of natural and working lands. Goals are supported with objectives and strategies to help align the desired result with on-the-ground work that Ag + Open Space implements. Indicators of Success are used to track progress, evaluate the effectiveness of strategies, and share our work with the community.

AG + OPEN SPACE GOALS:

Agriculture

Protect lands that support diverse and productive agriculture in Sonoma County.

Community Open Space

Protect and enhance open space and publicly accessible lands in and near Sonoma County cities and communities.

Greenbelts

Protect open lands that surround and differentiate the County's urban areas.

Natural Resources

Protect natural lands and aquatic habitats that support plants, wildlife, biodiversity, water resources and other human benefits in Sonoma County.

Recreation and Public Access

Ensure that the public has a range of opportunities to experience Ag + Open Space-protected lands.

Scenic Views

Protect lands that contribute to the unique scenic character of Sonoma County.



Agriculture

Protect lands that support diverse and productive agriculture in Sonoma County.

Sonoma County agricultural products are world renowned for quality and diversity, and our agricultural producers are recognized internationally for innovation and using sustainable practices. Although existing on the edge of the rapidly urbanizing San Francisco Bay Area, Sonoma County has retained its rural landscapes and working lands due to the economic viability of our productive agricultural lands and the active protection of these lands from development. Agricultural activities offer many benefits to the greater community, including jobs and revenue to the local economy as well as locally produced food and fiber. Protection of agriculturally productive land can also help to maintain open space, scenic views and greenbelts, protect aquatic ecosystems and groundwater basins, and provide habitat for native species of plants and wildlife.

OUR ROLE IN PROTECTING AGRICULTURAL LANDS: The California Public Resources Code and the Ag + Open Space Expenditure Plan authorize the protection of agriculturally productive lands – primarily through the purchase of development rights from willing sellers. Agriculturally productive lands eligible for protection include working farms and ranches and other lands used for the production of food, fiber and plant materials.

There are thousands of acres of agriculturally productive land in Sonoma County – Ag + Open Space has identified all lands currently in agriculture as within the Agricultural Open Space Designation, with the intention of refining the prioritization of these designation areas in the coming years in collaboration with the agricultural community and experts in agriculture.





AGRICULTURE OBJECTIVE

1. Protect agricultural lands that are at risk.

STRATEGIES

- With expert input, refine criteria to identify highest priority lands for sustaining agriculture in Sonoma County.
- Develop an outreach strategy to encourage agricultural landowners to protect their lands with conservation easements and to increase awareness of options and opportunities available through the Ag + Open Space land conservation program.
- Ensure diversity of types of agriculture in the overall portfolio of Ag + Open Space-protected lands via the project selection process and easement structure.
- Develop a legislative strategy in collaboration with key agricultural partners to secure additional funding and promote policies that help protect productive agricultural lands.

AGRICULTURE OBJECTIVE

2. Ensure that Ag + Open Space-protected agricultural lands remain in agriculture.

STRATEGIES

- Evaluate and test new tools for effective and appropriate agricultural land conservation, including affirmative easements, lease to own, auctions, payments over time, right of first refusal, and connecting landowners with succession/estate planning experts.
- Resell Ag + Open Space-owned agricultural lands to agricultural producers while retaining a conservation easement that protects and or affirms agricultural use.

- Develop Ag + Open Space policies that protect land covered by existing conservation easements from converting to non-agricultural uses.
- Design new conservation easements that prohibit the conversion of properties to a non-agricultural use or uses not consistent with other conservation values.
- Connect landowners interested in leasing lands for agricultural production and a list of individuals interested in leasing.
- Work with partner organizations to identify technical and financial resources available to agricultural landowners.

AGRICULTURE OBJECTIVE

3. Encourage management practices that support healthy natural resources on working lands.

STRATEGIES

- Structure easements to include protection of natural resource conservation values such as sensitive habitats and water quality.
- Work with agricultural landowners and operators to identify and secure additional technical resources and funding needed to protect and/or enhance natural resources.
- Collaborate with existing efforts by Resource Conservation Districts, watershed organizations, and others to link work on easement-protected lands with regional or watershed-wide efforts.
- Recognize good stewardship in website, newsletters, tours, and other public outreach.



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MAPA

AGRICULTURE

Cultivated and Rangeland

-  Cultivated Agriculture
-  Cultivated Agriculture and Prime Farmland (FMMP 2014)
-  Prime Farmland (FMMP 2014)
-  Rangeland (FMMP 2014)
-  Ag + Open Space Land
-  Other Protected Land
-  Urban Area

Geatsburg

Windsor

Santa Rosa

Sebastopol

Schriest Park

Cotati

Petaluma

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AGRICULTURE OBJECTIVE

4. Ensure that Ag + Open Space agricultural conservation actions are informed by the technical expertise of the agricultural community.

STRATEGIES

- Expand role and membership of Ag + Open Space Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee.
- Conduct regular outreach to gather insights from landowners with conservation easements and their neighbors to enhance Ag + Open Space efforts to conserve agricultural land.
- Participate regularly in agricultural organization meetings, such as Farm Bureau and Farmers Guild/Community Alliance with Family Farmers, with the intention of gathering input on Ag + Open Space land conservation priorities for agriculture.





Community Open Space

Protect and enhance open space and publicly accessible lands in and near Sonoma County cities and communities.

Sonoma County is fortunate to have communities that are designed with open space areas in mind. We recognize that these areas help to create the character and vitality of a community and contribute to its beauty and sense of place. Ag + Open Space partners with public agencies and non-profit partners to protect these open space areas in our communities through our Matching Grant Program. This program is intended to protect vibrant lands and inviting spaces within and near our cities and communities, providing an opportunity for residents and visitors alike to experience open space. Community open space projects have the potential to transform communities, providing places to find solitude, host public gatherings, to recreate, and to experience and learn about natural resources and agriculture and their importance in the landscape. Community open space is also fundamental to the health of urban residents, allowing visual respite in urbanized areas and to allowing people of all ages to get outside within a few minutes of their homes.

OUR ROLE IN COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE: The Expenditure Plan directs Ag + Open Space to support community open space projects within and near incorporated areas and other urbanized areas of Sonoma County through a matching grants program, with preference given to acquisition and development projects that link communities. Projects funded by Ag + Open Space include urban greenspace, habitat restoration, trails, athletic fields, urban parks and plazas, river access, and community gardens. Because these community open space projects are envisioned, planned and executed by partners, with only partial funding from Ag + Open Space, these priorities are not mapped and are instead identified, reviewed and funded on a regular basis per the Matching Grant Program Board-adopted criteria.





COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE OBJECTIVE

1. Provide funding for a diverse portfolio of community open spaces, supporting the connection of urbanized areas with natural and agricultural lands.

STRATEGIES

- Conduct a competitive Matching Grant Program on a biennial basis.
- Develop, maintain, and continually refine criteria within the Matching Grant Program (HYPERLINK) that ensure that there is a diverse balance of projects across geography, partnerships, and demographics.
- Increase communication about the Matching Grant Program regarding benefits, impacts, and changes to the program.
- Gather input from the community about the effectiveness of the Matching Grant Program and refine the program based on this input.
- Oversee Matching Grant agreements to ensure that grant recipients honor all terms and fully implement the community open space project.

MATCHING GRANT PROJECTS

- 1 Cloverdale River Park
- 2 Giorgi Park
- 3 Keiser Park
- 4 Windsor Town Green
- 5 Riverkeeper Stewardship Park
- 6 Patterson Point
- 7 Creekside Park
- 8 Forever Forestville
- 9 West County Trail
- 10 Santa Rosa Creek Greenway
- 11 Sebastopol Skategarden
- 12 Meadowlark Field
- 13 Tomodachi Park
- 14 Prince Memorial Greenway
- 15 Prince Gateway Park
- 16 Roseland Creek Park
- 17 Bayer Neighborhood Park and Gardens
- 18 Colgan Creek
- 19 Andy's Unity Park
- 20 Falletti Ranch
- 21 Petaluma Community Sports Fields
- 22 Paula Lane Open Space Preserve
- 23 Steamer Landing Park
- 24 Schollenberger Park – Alman Marsh & Petaluma Marsh Additions
- 25 Nathanson Creek Preserve
- 26 Sonoma Garden Park



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Sea Ranch Annapolis

Geyserville

Headsburg

NAPA

Forestville

Windsor

Lakeland

Quinnville

Santa Rosa

Marina Rio

Forestville

Kenwood

Duncan Mills

Camp Meeker

Glen Ellen

Occidentia

Sebastopol

Hot Springs

Ereestone

Robert Porter

Bodega

Vassy Fold

Bloomfield

Penelope

Bodega Bay

Petaluma

Sonoma

COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE

- Matching grant program location
- Urban Service Area
- Half-Mile Buffer
- Ag + Open Space Land
- Other Protected Land

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SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



Greenbelts

Protect open lands that surround and differentiate the County's urban areas.

Sonoma County cities and communities maintain their small-town character because of the open spaces between them – working and natural lands that act as greenbelts and community separators. These lands provide many benefits to Sonoma County residents; they include small farms and ranches that provide local food and a place to see farming from urban communities; places for people to be outside and enjoy nature close to home; habitat for rare plant and animal species; wetlands and stream systems; and important groundwater basins. These greenbelts are beautifully scenic and contribute to the identity of the county. Ensuring protection of these lands helps maintain compact communities with easy access to natural settings.

OUR ROLE IN PROTECTING GREENBELTS: The California Public Resources Code and the Ag + Open Space Expenditure Plan authorizes the protection of community separators and greenbelts to prevent urban sprawl, to retain the rural and open character of Sonoma County, and to preserve agricultural use.





GREENBELTS OBJECTIVE

1. Protect agricultural and natural land on the edges of urban areas and between communities.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize projects that protect land suitable for agricultural use and/or have natural resource value that:
 - is adjacent to established communities and/or
 - provides open space buffers between communities.
- Work with cities to support their Urban Growth Boundaries.

GREENBELTS OBJECTIVE

2. Prioritize protection of greenbelt lands that also offer other benefits to the community.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize projects that:
 - increase passive or low intensity recreational opportunities,
 - provide residents with access to locally grown and produced food,
 - are in areas with limited access to open space, and/or
 - protect natural resource values.



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GREENBELTS

-  Urban Greenbelt
-  Ag + Open Space Protected Land
-  Other Protected Land
-  Urban Area

Hodega Bay

Cloverdale

Geyserville

Healdsburg

Guerneville

Windsor

Forestville

Monte Rio

Graton

Santa Rosa

Occidental

Sebastopol

Rubicon Park

Cotati

Sonoma Valley

Sonoma

Petaluma

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SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



Natural Resources

Protect natural lands and aquatic habitats that support plants, wildlife, biodiversity, water resources and other human benefits in Sonoma County.

Sonoma County is home to a variety of habitats and ecosystems that make it one of the most biologically diverse parts of the world. The county's unique natural landscapes include miles of undeveloped coastline, densely forested mountains, oak woodlands, chaparral, rolling grasslands, tidal marshes, freshwater lakes, streams, and vernal pools. The varied nature of the Sonoma County landscape provides habitat for many species of fish, birds, terrestrial wildlife and plants, including some that live nowhere else in the world. These natural landscapes also provide multiple benefits to human communities – including clean water and groundwater recharge, flood protection, pollination for crops, disaster resiliency, carbon sequestration, adaptation to climate change, places to enjoy nature, and stunning natural beauty for the people of Sonoma County.



OUR ROLE IN PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES: The California Public Resources Code and the Ag + Open Space Expenditure Plan authorize the protection of natural ecosystems and habitats throughout the county, including conservation, restoration, and resource management, with a focus on sensitive habitat areas and riparian corridors.



NATURAL RESOURCES OBJECTIVE

1. Protect high priority natural lands and water resources throughout the county.

STRATEGIES

- Protect a diverse portfolio of habitat types that reflects the full array of Sonoma County's natural landscapes, of a size and configuration that supports functionality of that habitat type
- Prioritize the protection of:
 - riparian corridors and wetlands,
 - streams identified in salmonid recovery plans or defined as high priority by local fisheries experts,
 - old-growth and other mature forests, and
 - groundwater basins and recharge areas.
 - oak woodlands
 - native grasslands
 - unique habitat types
- Develop and continuously update a targeted outreach strategy to landowners with high priority natural resources that are at risk of development or conversion.
- Develop an initiative and tools to implement easements that specifically protect riparian and wetland settings and functions.
- Work with willing landowners to complete an assessment of habitat quality and function on protected lands, and identify strategies to improve Ag + Open Space performance in protecting these.
- Work with the natural resources community to identify and create datasets to update and further prioritize natural resources conservation values, including grasslands, biodiversity, and groundwater.

NATURAL RESOURCES OBJECTIVE

2. Maintain high levels of biodiversity in Sonoma County.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize the protection of lands with high biodiversity.
- Protect landscape connections to support native plant dispersal, wildlife movement, and natural community shifts in response to changing climate.
- Working with local and statewide experts, develop data to better understand biodiversity across Sonoma County.

NATURAL RESOURCES OBJECTIVE

3. Protect areas supporting rare, unique, or special-status plants or animals.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize the protection of land with:
 - known special-status species habitat and/or
 - rare or unique vegetation.
- Where special-status species have been identified, ensure conservation easement language protects the habitat qualities that support that species.
- Where special-status species have been identified, encourage land management practices that protect those species.
- Work with experts to continuously improve Ag + Open Space data and information relating to special-status species habitat, including key locations for fish passage, spawning, and rearing; corridors of seasonal wetlands; nesting bird habitat; and aestivation areas for amphibians.
- Increase efforts to document presence of special-status species on Ag



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NATURAL VEGETATION COMMUNITIES

-  Conifer_Mixed-Conifer Hardwood Forest
-  Herbaceous
-  Hardwood Forest
-  Shrubland
-  Wetland + Riparian
-  Ag + Open Space Protected Land
-  Other Protected Land
-  Urban Area

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SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



11

+ Open Space-protected lands, including in site assessments, baseline assessments, and monitoring reports.

NATURAL RESOURCES OBJECTIVE

4. Protect the lands most important for wildlife habitat and movement.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize protection of land that is critical to maintain wildlife movement.
- Reach out to landowners with land within key wildlife corridors to educate them about opportunities to protect wildlife movement.
- Complete an assessment of missing links or limitations in core habitat areas for wide-ranging species.
- Work with willing landowners and conservation partners to enhance the ability of Ag + Open Space to monitor wildlife on protected lands using current tools and technology.
- Work with partners to identify opportunities to connect fragmented habitats and increase wildlife permeability – both on currently protected lands and lands that have no long-term protection.

NATURAL RESOURCES OBJECTIVE

5. Encourage management practices that protect or enhance natural resources on Ag + Open Space-protected lands.

STRATEGIES

- Use best available science and data to identify, evaluate, and share land management best practices on Ag + Open Space protected land (including invasive species removal; vegetation management using prescribed burns, mowing and grazing; enhancing wildlife movement; preventing pathogen transmission, etc.)
- Collaborate with partners on regional approaches to natural resource management, including invasive species control, habitat mitigation opportunities, fuels reduction efforts
- Leverage Ag + Open Space tax dollars for habitat restoration through external funding sources and community partnerships, and sharing of this information with easement landowners.



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RARE VEGETATION

Vegetation Rarity

- Critically imperiled or locally very rare
- Imperiled or locally rare
- Vulnerable or locally unique
- Apparently secure or locally common
- Ag + Open Space Land
- Other Protected Land
- Urban Area

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RIPARIAN CORRIDOR

-  Channel
-  Floodplain
-  Ag+Open Space Land

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Gualala-Salmon

Russian

NAPA

Tomales-Drake Bays

San Pablo Bay

MARIN

WETLANDS + STREAMS

Salmonid Presence in Streams

- Coho, Steelhead, Chinook
- Steelhead, Coho
- Steelhead, Chinook
- Steelhead only

Watershed Boundary (HUC 8)

- Ag + Open Space Land
- Other Protected Land

Wetlands

- Estuary
- Tidal Salt Marsh
- Freshwater Herbaceous Wetland
- Lake or Reservoir
- Vernal Pool
- Urban Area

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SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



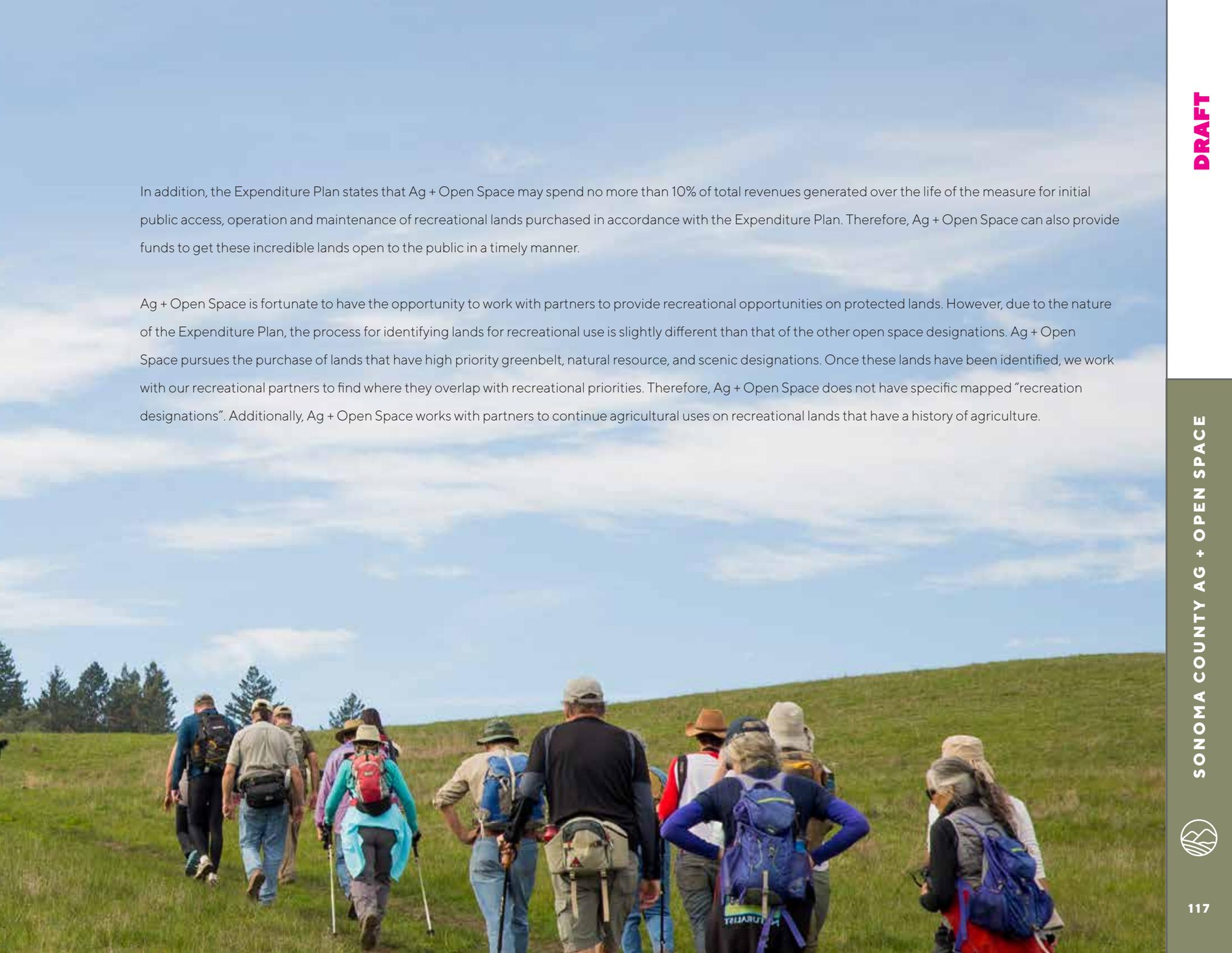
Recreation and Public Access

Ensure that the public has a range of opportunities to experience Ag + Open Space-protected lands.

Sonoma County's diverse natural, scenic, and working lands provide a wide range of opportunities for people to explore and learn about their unique surroundings and the importance of land conservation. Recreational use of Ag + Open Space protected lands provides one of the most direct benefits of our work to our community. Parks and open space preserves offer people the ability to directly experience the natural splendor and scenic beauty of our county including: ridges and mountains, forests and woodlands, rivers and creeks, meadows, and the coast. Public trails offer the community additional opportunities to experience Sonoma County working and natural lands, while guided tours on privately owned protected lands offer opportunities to learn about healthy natural systems, plants and wildlife, and farms and ranches.

OUR ROLE IN RECREATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS: The Ag + Open Space Expenditure Plan states that protection of land may include the purchase of fee interests for outdoor public recreation where the public use would not be inconsistent with the open space designations – including agriculture, scenic, greenbelts, natural resources. This gives Ag + Open Space the opportunity to play a very critical role in providing recreational opportunities by purchasing land for future public use. Ag + Open Space was not created with the intention to operate and maintain parks. Therefore, all projects with a recreational use require that we work with a partner to own and operate parks and preserves. Ag + Open Space enters into permanent legal agreements to ensure that identified conservation values are protected forever and the land remains open to the public for recreation.





In addition, the Expenditure Plan states that Ag + Open Space may spend no more than 10% of total revenues generated over the life of the measure for initial public access, operation and maintenance of recreational lands purchased in accordance with the Expenditure Plan. Therefore, Ag + Open Space can also provide funds to get these incredible lands open to the public in a timely manner.

Ag + Open Space is fortunate to have the opportunity to work with partners to provide recreational opportunities on protected lands. However, due to the nature of the Expenditure Plan, the process for identifying lands for recreational use is slightly different than that of the other open space designations. Ag + Open Space pursues the purchase of lands that have high priority greenbelt, natural resource, and scenic designations. Once these lands have been identified, we work with our recreational partners to find where they overlap with recreational priorities. Therefore, Ag + Open Space does not have specific mapped “recreation designations”. Additionally, Ag + Open Space works with partners to continue agricultural uses on recreational lands that have a history of agriculture.



RECREATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS OBJECTIVE

1. Provide opportunities for the public to learn from and enjoy Sonoma County’s agricultural, greenbelt, natural, and scenic lands.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize the transfer of Ag + Open Space–owned properties that are intended for recreational use to recreational entities for operation as parks and preserves pursuant to 2012 Fee Land Strategy (HYPERLINK).
- Provide Initial Public Access, Operation and Maintenance funding to recreational partners to ensure recreational lands protected by Ag + Open Space are opened to the public in a timely manner.
- Consider opportunities on future acquisitions that expand, create, or connect new parks and open space preserves, trails, or access points to identified water trails.
- Utilize trail easements to provide trail connections for identified regional trail routes, connect protected lands, and enhance the experience of open space.
- Conduct guided outings and educational programs on Ag + Open Space–protected lands that are not open to the public.
- Increase quantity and quality of information on Ag + Open Space website and in printed documents about existing public access opportunities.
- Promote access to protected lands in low impact ways, with emphasis on leave-no-trace ethics.
- Where appropriate, increase access to or views of scenic vistas, wilderness, farmland, and unique natural features.

RECREATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS OBJECTIVE

2. Ensure Ag + Open Space–protected lands are managed to protect identified conservation values while allowing compatible public recreational uses.

STRATEGIES

- Retain easements that protect conservation values over Ag + Open Space–purchased land when transferring to a partner that provides recreational opportunities.
- Ensure that recreational partners design uses and improvements on Ag + Open Space–protected land that do not diminish conservation values.
- Connect landowners and partners with financial and other resources that help support best land management practices.
- Share Ag + Open Space data and information that may be useful in designing, constructing, and managing recreational lands.



MENDOCINO

LAKE

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Explore
this map online:
[vital-lands.org/
shorthand](http://vital-lands.org/shorthand)

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EXISTING + PLANNED PUBLIC ACCESS

- Ag + Open Space Land**
 - Planned Future Access
 - Open to the Public
 - Closed or Restricted Access
- Other Land**
 - Other Protected Land
 - Urban Area



SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



Scenic Character

Protect lands that contribute to the unique scenic character of Sonoma County.

Sonoma County's natural beauty attracts visitors and residents alike. Varied terrain, diverse and extensive open landscapes, and unique features like sea stacks all combine to create a stunning backdrop to daily life. Distinctive peaks including Taylor Mountain, Fitch Mountain, Sonoma Mountain, Bennett Peak, Geysers Peak, and Mount Saint Helena are visible from most points in the county, serving as landmarks and orienting viewers within the landscape. The Petaluma, Russian and Gualala Rivers and Laguna de Santa Rosa are also highly visible from Ag + Open Space-protected lands, roads, and local communities. Seeing these features regularly is not only enjoyable but helps locals and tourists both understand and appreciate the region and its natural resources.

OUR ROLE IN PROTECTING SCENIC CHARACTER: The California Public Resources Code and the Ag + Open Space Expenditure Plan authorizes the protection of areas of high scenic quality, scenic landscape units and scenic corridors, including natural landscapes and backdrops that provide visual relief from urban densities and maintain the open nature of Sonoma County.





SCENIC CHARACTER OBJECTIVE

1. Protect the scenic landscapes that provide residents and visitors the opportunity to experience the visual beauty of Sonoma County.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize the acquisition of conservation easements on open space land that:
 - provide visual relief from urbanized areas in Sonoma County,
 - helps preserve the unique rural character of the county, and/or
 - preserves the scenic open space between communities and at the county boundary.
- Design conservation easements that minimize the visual impact of structures and improvements.



MENDOCINO

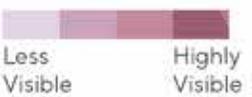
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HIGHLY VISIBLE LANDSCAPES



— Scenic Corridor (from 2020 General Plan)

- Ag + Open Space Land
- Other Protected Land
- Urban Area

MARIN

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SONOMA COUNTY AG + OPEN SPACE



OUTCOMES ON THE LAND

Performance Indicators

In order to effectively carry out a suite of strategies, it is important to have metrics to measure progress towards meeting goals and objectives. The following Performance Indicators will help Ag + Open Space track progress, and will be used to share our work with the community. Additional Performance Indicators may be developed to gauge the success of Ag + Open Space's land conservation efforts.

- Total acres of land protected with an Ag + Open Space conservation easement
- Percent of land owned by Ag + Open Space (fee purchase) transferred
- Percent of land protected within each Open Space Designation
- Number of projects that provide benefits across more than one Open Space Designation
- Percent of agricultural conservation easement protected lands with active agricultural operations
- Diversity of agricultural uses on Ag + Open Space-protected land in comparison to agricultural types outlined in the Sonoma Crop Report
- Percent of projects within ½ mile from incorporated communities or urbanized areas
- Percent of greenbelt protected properties that provide access to locally grown food or recreational use
- Diversity of species protected through Ag + Open Space conservation easements in comparison to overall representation of known species in the county
- Percentage of protected lands that are visible from communities or designated scenic corridors
- Percentage of incorporated communities that have accessible open space within a ½ mile of their city limits
- Percentage of incorporated communities with a protected prominent scenic feature that creates the character of their community
- Percentage of communities with an Ag + Open Space community open space project
- Miles of trails protected by Ag + Open Space
- Acres of publicly accessible land protected by Ag + Open Space
- Acres of future publicly accessible parkland protected by Ag + Open Space
- Number of projects within the Community Open Space Designation
- Percent of public aware of Ag + Open Space, its mission and accomplishments
- Number of hours contributed by volunteers towards Ag + Open Space conservation efforts
- Number of community members attending Ag + Open Space public meetings
- Number of partner organizations and other technical experts engaged with Ag + Open Space work
- Percent of Ag + Open Space sales tax dollars leveraged over life of the measure, including the Matching Grant Program





[SECTION SEVEN]

Looking Forward

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APPENDIX A

Acronyms

BAARI	Bay Area Aquatic Resource Inventory	MGP	Matching Grant Program
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act	NCARI	North Coast Aquatic Resource Inventory
CTS	California Tiger Salamander	RCPA	Regional Climate Protection Authority
DEM	Digital Elevation Model	RHNA	Regional Housing Needs Allocation
FOC	Fiscal Oversight Commission	SFEI	San Francisco Estuary Institute
FMMP	Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program	SGMA	Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
GIS	Geographic Information Systems	UGB	Urban Growth Boundary
GP2020	Sonoma County General Plan 2020		
HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code		
IPAOM or IPA/O&M	Initial Public Access/ Operations & Maintenance		
LiDAR	Light Detection and Ranging		



APPENDIX B

Glossary

Advisory Committee (AC): The Ag + Open Space Advisory Committee is comprised of 19 members representing specific designations: two appointed by each County Supervisor, three representing the Mayors’ and Councilmembers’ Association, two youth members, and one each representing agriculture, the environment, real estate or property appraisal, and business. While solely advisory, the Committee offers opinions and makes recommendations at the request of the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors or its General Manager. The Committee also reviews and advises on real property transactions, provides broad-based citizen input on Ag + Open Space operations, and acts as ambassadors for Ag + Open Space.

Agriculture: The science or practice of farming, including cultivation of the soil for the growing of crops and the rearing of animals to provide food, wool, and other products (source: Oxford)

Alluvial fans: A fan-shaped alluvial deposit formed by a stream where its velocity is abruptly decreased, as at the mouth of a ravine or at the foot of a mountain.

Alluvial fill valleys: Fluvial terraces are elongated terraces that flank the sides of floodplains and fluvial valleys. They consist of a relatively level strip of land, called a “tread,” separated from either an adjacent floodplain, other fluvial terraces, or uplands by distinctly steeper strips of land called “risers.” These terraces lie parallel to and above the river channel and its floodplain. Because of the manner in which they form, fluvial terraces are underlain by fluvial sediments of highly variable thickness.

Alluvial floodplain extent: An alluvial plain is a largely flat landform created by the deposition of sediment over a long period of time by one or more rivers coming from highland regions, from which alluvial soil forms.

Board of Directors (BOD): The Ag + Open Space Board of Directors is the same five individuals who make up the County Board of Supervisors. While acting as Directors of Ag + Open Space, the individual is to remove their “Supervisor” hat and act on behalf of Ag + Open Space’s best interest.

Benefit: A generally accepted benefit to the community, which is not specified in the Ag + Open Space Expenditure Plan, but is often realized when Ag + Open Space protects land for conservation values. Examples include carbon sequestration, water supply, public health benefits, etc.

Carbon sequestration: Carbon sequestration is the process involved in carbon capture and the long-term storage of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Carbon sequestration involves long-term storage of carbon dioxide or other forms of carbon to mitigate or defer global warming. It has been proposed as a way to slow the atmospheric of greenhouse gases, which are released by burning fossil fuels.

Conservation Easement (CE): A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values.



Landowners retain many of their rights, including the right to own and use the land, sell it and pass it on to their heirs. (source: LTA Website)

Conservation Values: Properties of land that provide value for wildlife, plants, and humans. Examples include waterways and natural lands that maintain water quality and supply, diverse natural areas that provide habitat for wildlife, land for agricultural use, scenic vistas, and connections between urban areas, parks, and natural areas throughout the county for both people and wildlife. Protecting these values is the core work of Ag + Open Space.

Ephemeral Streams: An ephemeral waterbody is a wetland, spring, stream, river, pond or lake that only exists for a short period following precipitation or snowmelt. They are not the same as intermittent or seasonal waterbodies, which exist for longer periods, but not all year round.

Expenditure Plan: Measure F passed in 2006 to reauthorize Ag + Open Space through 2031, which includes The Expenditure Plan. The purpose of the Expenditure Plan is to implement the Sonoma County General Plan and the general plans of the County’s incorporated cities by preserving agricultural land use and open space. Full text can be read [here](#).

Fiscal Oversight Commission (FOC): The Fiscal Oversight Commission – five members and an alternate appointed by the Board of Directors – provides independent fiscal oversight for Ag + Open Space operations. It serves as an audit committee and is responsible for reviewing each proposed acquisition or conveyance of interest in real property, previewing any borrowing transaction

for compliance, and reviewing the annual audit. It can also review internal financial records of the Open Space Special Tax Account, operations and maintenance, and procurement practices. It makes an annual report to the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors.

Goals: Goals are the primary outcomes toward which land conservation effort and actions are directed in an organization. They are the “whats,” not the “hows.” An organization usually has multiple goals. Goals will often be integrated to achieve a multiple benefits effect. Goals for Ag + Open Space will often be integrated to achieve a multiple benefits effect. An example of a Goal is to “Protect a diverse system of productive agricultural lands in Sonoma County.”

GP2020: Sonoma County General Plan 2020

High-quality (land): Land that has exceptional conservation values, as determined by local and regional experts using data and the best available science.

Impervious surface: Impervious surfaces are mainly artificial structures—such as pavements (roads, sidewalks, driveways and parking lots, as well as industrial areas such as airports, ports and distribution centers, all of which use considerable paved areas) that are covered by impenetrable materials such as asphalt, concrete, brick, stone—and rooftops. Soils compacted by urban development are also highly impervious.

Incubator farm: An incubator farms provides practical, hands-on training for beginning farmers who want to start and operate successful small farm businesses.



Initial Public Access / Operations & Maintenance of Fee Lands (IPA/O&M):

This plan outlines the amount of funding for initial public access, operation and maintenance of recreational lands purchased in accordance with this Plan. And clarifies that no more than 10 percent of total revenues generated over the life of the Measure shall be made available for operation and maintenance purposes.

Land Conservation Targets: Land in Sonoma County that Ag + Open Space has determined to be of high conservation value based on the best available science and relevant data. The Land Conservation Criteria and their associated data can be used to identify single objective targets or can be used together to identify multiple-objective targets. An example of a single-objective target would be the specific locations of high priority groundwater basins. An example of a multi-objective target would be prime farm soils, groundwater, and California Tiger Salamander to identify a portion of the Laguna de Santa Rosa as a high conservation value.

Matching Grant Program: Every two years, Ag + Open Space, through our competitive Matching Grant Program, provides funding to public agencies and nonprofits for the protection of open spaces within Sonoma County communities for local agriculture, community recreation, natural resource restoration, and public access. This unique program has provided over \$30 million towards projects in all nine incorporated cities and in multiple unincorporated areas, allowing our partners to leverage that funding to develop diverse and innovative projects throughout our county.

Measure F: Measure F is the legislation passed in 2006 to reauthorize Ag + Open Space through 2031, which includes The Expenditure Plan. The purpose of the Expenditure Plan is to implement the Sonoma County General Plan and the general plans of the county’s incorporated cities by preserving agricultural land use and open space. Full text can be read [here](#).

Objective: Objectives differ from goals in that they are measurable and specific. They are the steps Ag + Open Space and its land conservation partners will take in order to achieve the goals and sub-goals identified by Vital Lands Initiative. Objectives are also the basis for measuring performance in reaching a goal. Objectives quantify, qualify and set targets to a goal. Once objectives are identified, a strategy is developed for achieving the goals. Objectives are intended to be achieved by a fixed point in time.

Open Space: Any piece of land that is undeveloped (has no buildings or other built structures) and may be accessible to the public. Open space can include: Green space (land that is partly or completely covered with natural vegetation). An open space preserve is an area of protected or conserved land or water on which development is indefinitely set aside.

Open Space Designation: Open Space Designations are landscape values or features that Ag + Open Space has identified as being important to protect. Open Space Designations were identified using community input, expert opinion, staff knowledge, and mapped using existing countywide data or data developed specifically for the Vital Lands Initiative.



Open Space Easement: An open space easement is a type of easement that may be required by the county as a condition of approval for development or property improvement. It is a legal agreement by the landowner to leave this part of the property undeveloped and in its natural condition.

Performance Indicator: A quantity or quality that can be tracked over time to analyze and report out on the progress that Ag + Open Space has made on achieving the Goals outlined in this Plan.

Principles: A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

Protect: Permanently remove an area of land from the threat of human development or “over-use.”

Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species: Established in the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the Act defines endangered species as any species in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range and threatened species as any species likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A variety of plant and animal species of the United States are so reduced in numbers that they are threatened with extinction. The disappearance of any of these would be a biological, cultural, and in some instances an economic loss. Their existence contributes to scientific knowledge and understanding, and their presence adds interest and variety to life.

Residential development: A residential area is a land used in which housing predominates, as opposed to industrial and commercial areas. Housing may vary significantly between, and through, residential areas. These include single-family housing, multi-family residential, or mobile homes.

Riparian corridor/vegetation: A riparian zone or riparian area is the interface between land and a river or stream. Plant habitats and communities along the river margins and banks are called riparian vegetation.

Spatial data: Also known as geospatial data or geographic information it is the data or information that identifies the geographic location of features and boundaries on Earth, such as natural or constructed features, oceans, and more. Spatial data is usually stored as coordinates and topology, and is data that can be mapped.

Strategy: Strategies are the “hows,” not the “whats.” A strategy integrates threats with objectives, and results in a planned approach in order to achieve a goal. Strategies are not necessarily quantifiable, they include a general completion date, which is further refined in tactics/work plans.

Threat: Threats are a barrier to achieving the mission of Ag + Open Space, specifically impeding a goal or sub-goal. Identified threats will be linked to an accompanying strategy (and resulting tactic and actions). Threats can be regional, countywide, or limited to a specific landscape or area within the county.



Tourism: Travel for pleasure or business; also the theory and practice of touring, the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists, and the business of operating tours.

Urban Growth Boundary (UGB): An urban growth boundary (UGB) separates urban areas from the surrounding natural and agricultural lands, or greenbelts. It puts a limit on how far out the city can expand. UGBs are often set for a specified period of time, such as 20 years. Different cities may call these barriers by different names, such as “urban limit lines” or simply “growth boundaries,” but they serve the same purpose of stopping sprawl development and encouraging sustainable growth practices, also known as urban service areas.

Waterbodies: A waterbody is any significant accumulation of water, generally on a planet's surface. The term most often refers to oceans and lakes, but it includes smaller pools of water such as ponds and wetlands. A body of water does not have to be still or contained; rivers, streams, canals, and other geographical features where water moves from one place to another are also considered waterbodies.

Watershed: An area or ridge of land that separates waters flowing to different rivers, basins, or seas. A ridge or stretch of high land dividing the areas drained by different rivers or river systems.

Waterways: Bodies of water that are navigable are known as waterways. Some bodies of water collect and move water, such as rivers and streams, and others primarily hold water, such as lakes and oceans.

Wetland: Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

Wildlife Corridor: Wildlife corridors are important landscape features comprised of linear strips or patches of habitat that allow the movement of species, often through less suitable habitat, to larger blocks of wildlands with a relatively high likelihood of successful passage. Corridors aid the dispersal of species escaping predators or in search of a mate, better habitat, or habitat essential for a specific life stage.



APPENDIX C

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Data Sources & Analysis Methods

This appendix details the data, criteria and methods used to develop maps in the Goals section of the Vital Lands Initiative report.

Agriculture (page ##)

Cultivated Agriculture

Cultivated agriculture is mapped according to the Sonoma County Croplands data developed by the Sonoma County Vegetation Mapping & LiDAR Program. The croplands were digitized using aerial photos and represent the state of the landscape in 2013.

This Sonoma Veg Map croplands data evolved from an “agricultural fields” dataset that has a long lineage and many contributors. The data originated as collaboration between Adina Merenlender’s team (UC Berkeley) and Ag + Open Space in the early 2000s. Over the past 12 years, the layer has been expanded and refined with help from various contributors, with the Sonoma County Water Agency taking the lead coordination role since 2007.

Vineyards are the predominant crop found in the croplands dataset, representing over 80% of polygon labels. Orchards/groves include fruit, nut and olive groves. Perennial agriculture includes cultivated perennial shrubs such as Christmas trees, blueberries, and strawberries. Annual croplands include row crops.

For more information about the Sonoma County Croplands data, please visit www.sonomavegmap.org

Rangeland & Prime Farmland

Rangeland data in Sonoma County are derived from the grazing land designation in the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program’s (FMMP) 2014 Important Farmland dataset. Grazing land is defined by FMMP as “land on which existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock”. Grazing lands are identified by a local committee consisting of members of the livestock ranching community, livestock ranching organizations, and the UC Cooperative Extension livestock adviser.

Prime farmland is also derived from the FMMP Important Farmland dataset, and is defined as “Irrigated land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term production of agricultural crops. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.”

For more information about the FMMP Important Farmland dataset, please visit <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/>



Community Open Space (page ##)

Urban areas were defined as areas within a ½ mile buffer of the 9 incorporated city boundaries (Petaluma, Sonoma, Cotati, Rohnert Park, Sebastopol, Santa Rosa, Windsor, Healdsburg, Cloverdale), urban service area boundaries published in the Sonoma County’s General Plan 2020, and the center of unincorporated communities. A ½ mile buffer around the following urban service areas was used:

- Airport
- Bodega Bay
- Forestville
- Geyserville
- Graton
- Guerneville
- Larkfield
- Monte Rio
- Occidental
- Penngrove
- Sea Ranch
- Sonoma Valley

And a ½ mile buffer around the centroid of following unincorporated communities was used

- Cazadero
- Bloomfield
- Valley Ford
- Bodega
- Freestone
- Camp Meeker
- Duncans Mills
- Jenner
- Annapolis
- Kenwood

Greenbelts (page ##)

The following attributes were used to create a continuum of greenbelt features from high to low:

- Ownerships adjacent to Urban Growth Boundary or Urban Service Areas
- Ownerships within ½-mile buffer around Urban Growth Boundary or Urban Service Areas
- Size of ownership

- % imperviousness of ownership
- Inclusion in General Plan Community Separator

Ownerships were defined as contiguous parcels owned by the same entity dissolved into one polygon. Ownerships with 10 acres or more inside the ½-mile buffer and with more than 30% of its total area inside the buffer were considered in the analysis.

Urban areas included in the analysis are based on Urban Growth Boundaries for the 9 incorporated cities (Sonoma, Petaluma, Cotati, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Windsor, Healdsburg, Cloverdale) and Urban Service Area boundaries for the Monte Rio, Forestville, Occidental, Geyserville, Airport, Penngrove, Graton, Bodega Bay, Sonoma Valley, Guerneville, and Larkfield communities.

A ½-mile buffer was created around Urban Growth Boundaries and Urban Service Areas. After removing ownerships that did not meet criteria for inclusion, ownerships immediately adjacent to an urban boundary or that were separated from an urban boundary by a right of way were assigned a proximity index value of 1. Ownerships not immediately adjacent but within the ½ mile buffer were assigned a proximity index value of 0.5. Next, ownerships were assigned a size index by scaling ownership acres from 0 to 1. An imperviousness index was assigned by calculating the percent of the ownership covered by impervious surfaces (such as buildings, paved roads, and parking lots) and then scaling values from 0 to 1.

The proximity, size, and impervious indices were totaled and scaled from 0 to



1. For cartographic purposes, ownership boundaries were generalized using 180-meter hexagons and only those hexagons within ¼-mile of an urban area were depicted on the map. The average ownership value within each hexagon was used.

Lastly, General Plan Community Separator boundaries were generalized using 180-meter hexagons and added to the greenbelt areas.

Natural Vegetation Communities (page ##)

The vegetation classes in the Natural Vegetation Communities map are derived from the 83-class Sonoma County Fine-Scale Vegetation and Habitat Map, which was developed as part of the Sonoma County Vegetation Mapping and LiDAR Program. For more information about the Sonoma County Fine-Scale Vegetation Map, please visit www.sonomavegmap.org

Rare Vegetation (page ##)

Vegetation rarity is based on global and state conservation status rankings from the Survey of California Vegetation/NatureServe's Heritage Program methodology, as well as local rarity. A breakdown of vegetation classes by rarity rank is described below.

Rarity Rank 1: Critically imperiled (state rarity rank of 1)

or locally very rare (<0.1% cover)

- Blue blossom chaparral (Ceanothus thrysiflorus Alliance)
- Californian Serpentine Chaparral (Arctostaphylos (bakeri, montana) Alliance)
- Central and South Coastal California Seral Scrub (Eriodictyon

- californicum - Lupinus albifrons Alliance)
- Grand fir forest (Abies grandis Alliance)
- Hairy leaf ceanothus chaparral (Ceanothus oliganthus Alliance)
- Interior live oak woodland (Quercus wislizeni (shrub) Alliance)
- McNab cypress woodland (Hesperocyparis macnabiana Alliance)
- Pacific reed grass meadows (Calamagrostis nutkaensis Alliance)
- Foothill pine / Leather oak chaparral (Pinus sabiniana / Quercus durata Provisional Alliance)
- Ponderosa pine - Douglas-fir forest (Pinus ponderosa - Pseudotsuga menziesii Alliance)
- Sickle-leaf onion - wild buckwheat - jewel-flower serpentine barrens (Allium falcifolium - Eriogonum spp. - Streptanthus spp. Provisional Alliance)
- Sugar pine (Pinus lambertiana Alliance)
- Twotooth sedge seeps (Carex serratodens Provisional Alliance)
- Vancouverian/Pacific Dune Mat Group

Rarity Rank 2: Imperiled (state rarity rank of 2) or locally rare

(state rarity rank of 3 or 4 with <1% cover)

- Hoary, common, and Stanford manzanita chaparral (Arctostaphylos (canascens, manzanita, stanfordiana) A. glandulosa Mapping Unit)
- Bigleaf maple forest (Acer macrophyllum Alliance)
- California buckeye groves (Aesculus californica Alliance)
- Californian Maritime Chaparral Group
- Fremont cottonwood forest (Populus fremontii Alliance)
- Hazelnut scrub (Corylus cornuta var. californica Alliance)
- Interior live oak woodland (Quercus wislizeni (tree) Alliance)



- Leather oak chaparral (*Quercus durata* Alliance)
- Salal – California blackberry tangles (*Gaultheria shallon* – *Rubus (ursinus)* Provisional Alliance)
- Valley oak woodland (*Quercus lobata* Alliance)
- Vancouverian Coastal Riparian Scrub Group
- Wedge leaf ceanothus chaparral/Buck brush chaparral (*Ceanothus cuneatus* Alliance)
- Western North America Vernal Pool Macrogroup
- Western North American Freshwater Aquatic Vegetation Macrogroup
- Whiteleaf manzanita chaparral (*Arctostaphylos viscida* Alliance)

Rarity Rank 3: Vulnerable (state rarity rank of 3) or

locally unique (state rarity rank of 4 or 5 with <1% cover)

- Chamise dominated chaparral (*Adenostoma fasciculatum* Alliance)
- Pacific madrone dominated woodland (*Arbutus menziesii* Alliance)
- California Coastal Evergreen Bluff and Dune Scrub Group
- Californian Mesic Chaparral Group
- Sargent cypress stand (*Hesperocyparis sargentii* Alliance)
- North American Pacific Coastal Salt Marsh Macrogroup
- Tanoak woodland (*Notholithocarpus densiflorus* Alliance)
- Knobcone pine stand (*Pinus attenuata* Alliance)
- Bishop/bull pine stand (*Pinus muricata* Alliance)
- Douglas-fir - tanoak forest (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* – *Notholithocarpus densiflorus* Alliance)
- Canyon live oak woodland (*Quercus chrysolepis* Alliance)
- Blue oak woodland (*Quercus douglasii* Alliance)
- Oregon white oak woodland (*Quercus garryana* Alliance)

- Black oak woodland (*Quercus kelloggii* Alliance)
- Coast redwood forest (*Sequoia sempervirens* Alliance)
- Southwestern North American Riparian Evergreen and Deciduous
- Southwestern North American Riparian/Wash Scrub Group
- Tidal Panne
- Poison oak scrub (*Toxicodendron diversilobum* Alliance)
- Vancouverian Riparian Deciduous Forest Group
- Western North American Freshwater Marsh Macrogroup

Rarity Rank 4: Apparently secure (state rank 4 or 5)

or locally common (>5% cover)

- Coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis* Alliance)
- Barren & Sparsely Vegetated
- California Annual and Perennial Grassland Macrogroup
- Forest Sliver
- Native and Non-native Perennial Coastal Grassland Mapping Unit
- Douglas-fir forest (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* Alliance)
- Oak woodland (*Quercus (agrifolia, douglasii, garryana, kelloggii, lobata, wislizenii)* Alliance)
- Coast live oak woodland (*Quercus agrifolia* Alliance)
- California bay woodland (*Umbellularia californica* Alliance)

For a more detailed description of conservation status ranks, please see the Sonoma County Vegetation Descriptions prepared by CDFW VegCAMP and CNPS for the Sonoma Veg Map Program:

<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=115808&inline=1>



Riparian Corridor (page ##)

Ag + Open Space is working with a team of technical experts, including Tukman Geospatial (geospatial consultants), Dr. Joan Florsheim (geomorphologist from UC Santa Barbara), and O'Connor Environmental (consulting hydrologist) to develop a riparian model for identifying and classifying alluvial riparian areas in Sonoma County. For the Vital Lands Initiative, Ag + Open Space has developed maps of riparian areas, including channel and floodplain boundaries, for alluvial reaches in Sonoma County

Riparian corridors are based on channel and floodplain extents. Riparian corridors are mapped using a combination of historic stream gage records, personal accounts of flooding, field data including top of bank locations and floodplain extent, and spatial data including LiDAR-derived Digital Elevation Models, Height Above River, slope, and upstream catchment area. Using these data and a series of expert rulesets in the Ecognition software program, modeled outputs are generated for channel and floodplain polygons. Outputs are manually corrected and reviewed for accuracy.

Modeled outputs include channel extent, top of bank delineations, and floodplain extent. These data were developed for streams in Sonoma County with catchment areas greater than 2,500 acres. Riparian corridors were not mapped for areas with extensive human manipulation to water infrastructure, for very flat valley areas such as the Laguna de Santa Rosa, or for the main stem of the Russian River. Channels and floodplains were mapped for the following creeks:

In addition to creek level maps, Ag + Open Space is working with technical

- Atascadero Creek
- Austin Creek
- Big Sulphur Creek
- Blucher Creek

- Briggs Creek
- Brooks Creek
- Buckeye Creek
- Calabazas Creek
- Carriger Creek
- Coleman Valley Creek
- Dry Creek
- Dutch Bill Creek
- East Austin Creek
- Ebabias Creek
- Fife Creek
- Franz Creek
- Fuller Creek
- Galloway Creek
- Gray Creek
- Green Valley Creek
- Haupt Creek
- House Creek
- Hulbert Creek
- Little Sulphur Creek
- Lower Lichau Creek
- Maacama Creek
- Mark West Creek
- Marshall Creek
- Matanzas Creek
- Mill Creek
- Pena Creek
- Pepperwood Creek
- Petaluma River
- Pool Creek
- Porter Creek
- Purrington Creek
- Rancheria Creek
- Redwood Creek
- Rockpile Creek
- Rodgers Creek
- Salmon Creek
- Santa Rosa Creek
- Sausal Creek
- Scotty Creek
- Sonoma Creek
- South Fork Gualala River
- Stemple Creek
- Tombs
- Wallace Creek
- Ward Creek
- Warm Springs Creek
- Washoe Creek
- Wheatfield Fork Gualala River
- Willow Creek
- Windsor Creek
- Wolf Creek
- Yulupa Creek



consultants to develop protocols for site-specific evaluation of riparian corridor extent. These guidelines include protocols for sampling vegetation and geomorphic features along elevation transects, as well as best practices for calibrating the Ecognition model with localized field data. In addition, Ag + Open Space plans to model large woody debris recruitment potential as a separate overlay to inform riparian corridor protections.

Ag + Open Space uses modelled riparian corridors as well as other aquatic habitat information (e.g. salmonid distribution information, available groundwater data, and riparian vegetation data) to inform riparian corridor protections.

Wetlands + Streams (page ##)

Water and Wetlands

Wetlands were derived from the Sonoma County Fine-Scale Vegetation map. These map classes were mapped using a combination of field work, photointerpretation, and computer-based machine learning. Many of the vernal pools and herbaceous wetlands in the southern part of the county were taken from existing San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) datasets (namely, the NCARI and BAARI datasets). Extensive manual photo interpretation and field data collection/validation was used to refine existing SFEI datasets based on new imagery.

For more information about the Sonoma County Fine-Scale Vegetation Map, please visit www.sonomavegmap.org

Salmonid Presence in Streams

Streams mapped are those that support threatened and endangered fish species, including coho, steelhead, and chinook. Distribution of steelhead, coho, and chinook is based off of data from NOAA, CDFW, publications, and personal communication, including the following sources:

Databases

- NOAA California Central Coast steelhead distribution layer (June 2005)
- NOAA Northern California steelhead distribution layer (June 2005)
- NOAA California Coastal Chinook distribution layer (June 2005)
- CalFish Winter Steelhead Distribution layer (June 2012)
- CalFish Coho Distribution layer (June 2012)
- CalFish Steelhead Abundance data layer (June 2012)
- CDFW Biosample database

Publications

- Historic Status of CA Coho Populations North of San Francisco (CDFG, 2002).
- Leidy, R. A., Becker, G. S., and B. N. Harvey. 2005b. Historical distribution and current status of steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), coho (*O. kisutch*), and chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*) in streams of the San Francisco Estuary, California. Unpublished report, Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration, Oakland, CA.
- Cox, B. 2000. Major Streams in Sonoma County.
- Jones, W. 2000. NMFS California Anadromous Fish Distributions: California Coastal Salmon and Steelhead Current Stream Habitat Distribution Table.



Personal Communication

- Derek Acomb, CDFW
- Caitlin Cornwall, Sonoma Ecology Center

In addition to mapping salmonid-bearing streams, Ag + Open Space is working with the Sonoma County Water Agency, CA Department of Fish & Wildlife, and the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration to map watershed and reach-specific priorities for protecting fisheries habitat. This work is ongoing and is used by Ag + Open Space to further refine priorities for fisheries protection.

Existing + Planned Public Access (page ##)

Protected lands open to the public were mapped based on data from the California Protected Areas Database: <http://www.calands.org/>

Highly Visible Landscapes (page ##)

The following attributes were used to create a continuum of scenic areas from high to low:

- Visibility from highly traveled transportation corridors
- Visibility from communities
- Visibility from General Plan Scenic Corridors

Viewsheds were created in GIS from highly traveled transportation corridors, communities, and General Plan Scenic Corridors (detailed below). Outputs from each viewshed analysis were scaled from 0 to 1 and combined, with equal weight assigned to all layers. To minimize the inherent bias towards high elevation areas in the viewshed analysis, the final viewshed raster was separated into two rasters: one for valleys and one for ridgetops & hillsides. Valleys and hillsides

were identified using a combination of slope and elevation thresholds, as well as manual digitizing. Finally, urban areas were removed from the viewshed rasters using the “Urban Mask” map class in the Sonoma County Fine-Scale Vegetation Map. Outputs for valleys and hillsides/ridgetops were scaled from 0 to 1 and mapped as a continuum.

Note that this map helps Ag + Open Space identify areas that are highly visible from communities and transportation corridors and does not capture the full nature of what it means to be “scenic”. Additional criteria such as percent imperviousness and road density may be calculated for individual properties in order to better define scenic and open space qualities of a property.

Methods Detail

Highly traveled transportation corridors

Highly traveled transportation corridors were defined as all state highways and the most traveled transportation corridors according to Sonoma County traffic volume data. A shapefile was created of highways and top 24 most highly traveled roads based on average volume total (derived from Sonoma County traffic count data). Then a viewshed analysis was performed from a 10m DEM of Sonoma County and points spaced ½ mile along each road.

The following roads were included in the analysis:

- 5th Street (Sonoma)
- Adobe Rd
- Airport Blvd
- Arnold Dr
- Bodega Ave
- Bodega Hwy
- Broadway
- Cotati Ave
- Fremont Dr
- Fulton Rd



- Guerneville Rd
- Hwy 1
- Hwy 101
- Hwy 116
- Hwy 12
- Hwy 128
- Hwy 37
- Lakeville Hwy
- Leveroni Rd
- Mark West Rd

- Napa Rd
- Old Redwood Hwy
- Petaluma Blvd
- Petaluma Hill Rd
- Petrified Forest Rd
- River Rd
- Santa Rosa Ave
- Sebastopol Rd
- Stage Gulch Rd
- Stonypoint Rd

- Sonoma
- Sonoma Valley

- Windsor

General Plan Scenic Corridors

All Scenic Corridors identified in the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 were included in the analysis. A viewshed analysis was performed from each Scenic Corridor using a 10m DEM of Sonoma County and points spaced ½ mile along each road.

Communities

Communities were defined as those census block groups that intersect urban service area boundaries. Census blocks were clipped by urban service area boundaries and centroids were generated from clipped block groups. Centroids were then grouped by urban service area and a viewshed was run from each group of centroids. A total of 589 centroids were used in the analysis.

The following urban service areas were used in the analysis

- Airport
- Bodega Bay
- Cloverdale
- Cotati
- Forestville
- Geyserville
- Graton
- Guerneville
- Healdsburg
- Larkfield
- Monte Rio
- Occidental
- Penngrove
- Petaluma
- Rohnert Park
- Santa Rosa
- Sea Ranch
- Sebastopol



APPENDIX E

Community Engagement

Community Meetings | Scoping – March 2017

For a complete list of community comments from these public meetings, please visit our website (HYPERLINK).

Meeting dates & locations

- March 14 – Healdsburg Community Center, Healdsburg
Attendance: +/- 40 members of the public
- March 15 – El Molino High School Library, Forestville
Attendance: +/- 50 members of the public
- March 21 – Petaluma Community Center, Petaluma
Attendance: +/- 110 members of the public
- March 29 – Santa Rosa Veterans Building, Santa Rosa
Attendance: +/- 90 members of the public
- March 30 – Finnish American Heritage Hall, Sonoma
Attendance: +/- 30 members of the public

Meeting agenda

Welcome & Introductions – Bill Keene, General Manager & District Directors

Founders Film – Bill Keene, General Manager

Ag & Open Space District Overview & Vital Lands Initiative Planning Process –

Karen Gaffney, Conservation Planning Program Manager

Small Group Breakout Sessions – Facilitated by District staff

Gallery Walk of Listening Stations – Hosted by District staff

Major themes discussed

- Water quality and supply are important and at risk. The District should use a variety of tools to protect the community's water quality and supply.
- Many community separators throughout the county are at risk. These are important and need protection.
- Public access and alternative transportation routes are in high demand. The District should help provide additional public access and safe alternative transportation routes.
- Partnerships should be used to leverage the impact of the District.
- Cannabis may be a threat to the District's mission.
- Connections between protected places are important for people (recreation) and for animals (wildlife corridors).
- Climate change needs to be considered, and is a threat to the District's mission.
- Agriculture community needs new/additional tools for agricultural protection.
- Balance between land conservation and housing needs to be considered.
- Educating the public (especially youth) about agriculture and open space is important for future success.



Thematic Workshops – May 2017

Meeting dates & locations

- May 16: Greenbelts & Community Separators | Steele Lane Community Center – DeMeo Room
- May 17: Agriculture | Steele Lane Community Center – DeMeo Room
- May 23: Natural Resources | Finley Community Center – Cypress Room
- May 25: Recreation & Urban Open Space | Finley Community Center – Cypress Room

Meeting agenda

Welcome & Introductions – Amy Ricard, Community Relations Specialist

Objectives & Outcomes – Amy Ricard, Community Relations Specialist

Ag & Open Space District & Vital Lands Initiative Overview – Karen Gaffney, Conservation Planning Program Manager

Small Group Breakout Sessions – Facilitated by District Staff

Full Group Report Out / Q&A – Facilitated by District Staff

Gallery Walk – Hosted by District Staff

Major themes discussed

- Reinforcement & enhancement of themes heard at the community meetings
- Create an ambitious conservation vision
- More public engagement, increase visibility
- Leverage partnerships to be strategic
- Consider integrated planning & a shared vision for the entire county

Community Meetings & Listening Sessions – October/November 2017

Ag + Open Space staff had planned five community meetings and seven listening sessions throughout the county during the months of October and November to first review the plan’s draft core content (Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Indicators) and then the draft plan itself, but those meetings and listening sessions were cancelled due to the North Bay fires in October 2017. Staff took a three-month hiatus from the Vital Lands Initiative planning process to respond to the immediate needs of the fires and to produce a report of recommended actions for recovery and long-term resiliency of our natural and working lands in the wake of the fires. Agency staff returned to the Vital Lands Initiative work in January of 2018.

Intro Placeholder

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Community Meetings | Draft Plan Review – March 2018

For a complete list of community comments from these public meetings, please visit our website ([HYPERLINK](#)).

Meeting dates & locations

- Sat, Mar 17 – Community Church of Sebastopol | 10:00am – 12:00pm
Attendance:
- Mon, Mar 19 – Sonoma Veterans Memorial Building | 6:00pm – 8:00pm
Attendance:
- Tues, Mar 20 – Bodega Bay Grange | 6:00pm – 8:00pm
Attendance:
- Wed, Mar 21 – Petaluma Veterans Memorial Building | 6:00pm – 8:00pm
Attendance:
- Sat, Mar 24 – Cloverdale Grange Hall | 10:00am – 12:00pm
Attendance:
- Mon, Mar 26 – Sea Ranch Hall | 6:00pm – 8:00pm
Attendance:
- Wed, Mar 28 – Healdsburg Villa Chanticleer | 6:00pm – 8:00pm
Attendance:
- Thurs, Mar 29 – Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building | 6:00pm – 8:00pm
Attendance:

Meeting Agenda

TBD

Major Themes Discussed

TBD

Latino Community Outreach

- Bilingual handouts and surveys
- Vital Lands Initiative webpages in English and Spanish
- Targeted outreach to Spanish-speaking communities to encourage participation in public meetings
- Simultaneous translation services at each public meeting

Participation in specific community events:

- Regional Parks 50th Anniversary Celebration
- Guelaguetza
- Roseland Village Health & Safety Fair

Presentations to the following groups:

- Graton Labor Center
- Healdsburg Labor Center
- Los Cien
- La Luz
- La Esperanza Center



Technical Advisor/Partner Organization Outreach

Ag + Open Space staff spent 60.5 hours meeting with 30 different partner organizations, technical advisors, and working groups to seek valuable input on goals, objectives, strategies, and performance indicators. These technical advisors, partner organizations, and working groups also provided review of draft content and maps.

Online Outreach

Number of unique visitors to Vital Lands Initiative (VLI) web page

2,495

Number of people "engaged" on Facebook posts

16 FB posts re: VLI thus far

6,478 'reached' thus far

Number of people added to email list through process and/or added social media followers

180 new Facebook followers during VLI process

217 email list subscribers through VLI

Number of E-newsletter updates & size of audience

11 total – one per month since March; 678 subscribers.

Number of alerts & size of audience of Nextdoor posts

TBD

Community Events

DATE	EVENT	CITY
11-Feb	Lake Sonoma Steelhead Festival	Healdsburg/Geyserville
26-Mar	California Artisan Cheese Festival	Petaluma
28-Apr	Arbor Day Celebration	Sonoma
29-Apr	SEEC Day of the Child	Santa Rosa
20-May	Rose Parade & Festival	Santa Rosa
3-Jun	Regional Parks Trails Challenge Kick-Off	Sebastopol
16-Jul	Guelaguetza Sonoma County	Santa Rosa
7-Aug	Green Fest – Sonoma County Fair	Santa Rosa
12-Aug	Gravenstein Apple Fair	Sebastopol
16-Sep	Agrarian Games	Petaluma



Advertising

OUTLET	SIZE	RUN DATE
Press Democrat	1/4 page	5-Mar
	1/6 page	12-Mar
La Prensa	1/4 page	27-Feb
El Superior	1/2 page	1-Mar
Impulso News	1/2 page	1-Mar
Press Democrat online	300x250	1-Mar
	728x90	1-Mar

Planned October Meetings

OUTLET	SIZE	RUN DATE
Press Democrat	1/4 page	8-Oct
	1/6 page	15-Oct
Petaluma Argus-Courier	1/8 page	5-Oct
	1/8 page	12-Oct
Sonoma Index Tribune	1/8 page	13-Oct
	1/8 page	17-Oct
Sonoma West Times	2x7	5-Oct
	2x7	12-Oct
Windsor Times	2x7	12-Oct
Healdsburg Tribune	2x7	12-Oct
La Prensa	1/4 page	26-Sep
El Superior	1/2 page	15-Sep
Impulso News	1/2 page	15-Sep
El Guardian	1/2 page	1-Oct
	1/4 page	1-Oct

Press Democrat online	300x250	25-Sep
	728x90	25-Sep

March 2018 Meetings

OUTLET	SIZE	RUN DATE
Press Democrat	1/4 page	
	1/6 page	
Petaluma Argus-Courier	1/8 page	
	1/8 page	
Sonoma Index Tribune	1/8 page	
	1/8 page	
Sonoma West Times	2x7	
	2x7	
Windsor Times	2x7	
Healdsburg Tribune	2x7	
La Prensa	1/4 page	
El Superior	1/2 page	
Impulso News	1/2 page	
El Guardian	1/2 page	
	1/4 page	
Press Democrat online	300x250	
	728x90	



APPENDIX F

State And Federal Laws Affecting Local Land Use

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Adopted in 1970, CEQA requires local and state agencies to investigate and identify the potential environmental impacts of proposed actions. This includes most land use decisions, including adoption of the general plan. CEQA requires agencies to disclose impacts and avoid or mitigate them to the maximum extent feasible.

California Coastal Act. The Coastal Act originated with an initiative approved by the state’s voters in 1972. The overall purpose of the Coastal Act is to ensure that public access to the coastline is preserved and that the unique environmental resources along the California coast are protected. In most coastal areas, including Sonoma County, the Coastal Commission delegates land use decision making authority to the local land use agency.

Endangered Species Acts and Clean Water Act. The federal and state Endangered Species Acts also affect land use in Sonoma County. Protected species include salmonids in the Russian River and its tributaries, and California tiger salamanders (CTS) and endangered plant species in the Santa Rosa Plain. Protections mandated under the endangered species acts affects land uses in these areas. The federal Clean Water Act also requires avoidance or mitigation for filling any wetlands, which are abundant in some areas of Sonoma County.

California Climate Change Laws. California has taken a leadership role in mitigating human-induced climate change. Local governments in Sonoma County created a new regional entity to address climate change—the Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA). In 2016, the RCPA adopted Climate

Action 2020, a countywide plan with regional and local government actions that will reduce GHG emissions.

California Water Management Laws. The Porter–Cologne Water Quality Control Act sets forth water quality requirements that apply very broadly, including stormwater and on-site wastewater management (aka, septic systems). Given the physical limitations for onsite wastewater treatment in Sonoma County, these regulations have a substantial effect on land use in the county’s rural areas. In 2014, the state adopted the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) that requires sustainable management of three Sonoma County groundwater basins: Sonoma Valley, Petaluma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain. The State Water Resources Control Board, Division of Water Rights, regulates water diversions and impoundments, including agricultural ponds, through the California Water Code.



APPENDIX G

Formation Of Ag + Open Space

Ag + Open Space was formed following a series of local planning efforts in 1990.

On January 3, 1990, the Board of Supervisors created the Open Space Committee to recommend policies, procedures and funding mechanisms to establish an open space district that would be (1) consistent with Sections 5500 et seq. of the Public Resources Code and (2) a vehicle for implementation of specified portions of the open space element, the agricultural resources element, and the resource conservation element of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan.¹ (Relevant Excerpts of the 1989 GP are attached.) Notably, Program 4 of the Open Space Element specifically called for the consideration of a ballot measure to establish an Open Space District for the purpose of acquiring and administering open space lands, including an appropriate method of financing.

The Open Space Committee quickly developed and proposed draft legislation, which was approved by the Board of Supervisors on February 27, 1990 and introduced to the legislature on March 1, 1990.² The legislation, then known as Assembly Bill 3630, proposed various changes to Public Resources Code section 5500 et seq. to allow for the creation of an open space district in Sonoma County in the same manner as the County of Marin. Specifically, the bill authorized formation of a district by an election of the voters, which could be called by a resolution of the Board of Supervisors as described in Section 5506.5 of the Public Resources Code.

The bill was signed into law on June 29, 1990 and on July 10, 1990, the Board

called for a July 24 public hearing on the question of the formation of Ag + Open Space.³ The Board resolution calling for the hearing specifically recited that the “preservation of agricultural use of land is a goal of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan and the creation of an open space district is an expressed method of achieving that goal.”⁴ It also provided that 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 Agriculture and Open Space Elements of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan.”

At the conclusion of the hearing held on July 24, 1990, the Board adopted Resolution 90-1419, which called for the special election contemplated by Public Resources Code section 5506.5 and offered the same reason for formation of Ag + Open Space – to further the state policy on the preservation of open space expressed in Government Code section 65562 and to implement the Agriculture and Open Space Elements of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan.

Government Code section 65562 establishes the state policy on preservation of open space as follows:

“It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this article:

(a) To assure that cities and counties recognize that open-space land is a limited and valuable resource which must be conserved wherever possible.



(b) To assure that every city and county will prepare and carry out open-space plans which, along with state and regional open-space plans, will accomplish the objectives of a comprehensive open-space program.”

For the purposes of 65562, Section 65560 defines “open space land” as:

(b) "Open-space land" is any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open-space use as defined in this section, and that is designated on a local, regional, or state open-space plan as any of the following:

(1) Open space for the preservation of natural resources, including, but not limited to, areas required for the preservation of plant and animal life, including habitat for fish and wildlife species; areas required for ecologic and other scientific study purposes; rivers, streams, bays, and estuaries; and coastal beaches, lakeshores, banks of rivers and streams, and watershed lands.

(2) Open space used for the managed production of resources, including, but not limited to, forest lands, rangeland, agricultural lands, and areas of economic importance for the production of food or fiber; areas required for recharge of groundwater basins; bays, estuaries, marshes, rivers, and streams that are important for the management of commercial fisheries; and areas containing major mineral deposits, including those in short supply.

(3) Open space for outdoor recreation, including, but not limited to, areas of outstanding scenic, historic, and cultural value; areas particularly suited for park and recreation purposes, including access to lakeshores, beaches, and rivers and

streams; and areas that serve as links between major recreation and open-space reservations, including utility easements, banks of rivers and streams, trails, and scenic highway corridors.

(4) Open space for public health and safety, including, but not limited to, areas that require special management or regulation because of hazardous or special conditions such as earthquake fault zones, unstable soil areas, flood plains, watersheds, areas presenting high fire risks, areas required for the protection of water quality and water reservoirs, and areas required for the protection and enhancement of air quality.

(5) Open space in support of the mission of military installations that comprises areas adjacent to military installations, military training routes, and underlying restricted airspace that can provide additional buffer zones to military activities and complement the resource values of the military lands.

(6) Open space for the protection of places, features, and objects described in Sections 5097.9 and 5097.993 of the Public Resources Code [native American sites].

(Section 65560’s definition of “open space land” has been amended since 1990 to make minor clerical changes, and to include Native American sites (See Section b(6)). But, it otherwise remains intact. Thus, the language set forth above (with the exception of Section b(6)) captures the intended purpose of the Board in creating Ag + Open Space.)

NEXT STEPS:



1. July 31, 1990: Board establishes Open Space Authority (Resolution 90-1455)
2. August 7, 1990: Board calls special election (Resolution 90-1521) to create the Open Space Authority (to impose the tax):
 - a. Citations to the General Plan Open Space Element, which called for an Open Space Implementation Program for the purposes of furthering state policy on open space preservation expressed in Government Code 65561
 - b. Citation to General Plan language calling for consideration of “a ballot measure to establish and Open Space District to acquire and administer open space lands” with inclusion of an appropriate funding source, such as a tax, to finance acquisition of partial or in-fee interests in lands, including acquisition of development rights on a voluntary basis, in designated open space areas...”
 - c. Citations to general plan focus on “city-centered” development
 - d. Expenditure plan to be adopted by the Authority “shall provide for a limit on the administrative costs of the Authority of 1% of each year’s anticipated revenue.”
3. Board corrects Resolution 90-1286, adopted July 10, 1990, to correctly set forth the language of the ballot measure (Resolution 90-1532); also rescinded Resolution 90-1419, dated July 24, 1990.
4. November 6, 1990 Election: Voters approved formation of Ag + Open

Space and imposition of the tax by the Authority

5. February 20, 1991: Ag + Open Space is declared to be created and established. (Resolution No. 91-0305)

Footnotes:

1 Resolution 90-0079, dated January 3, 1990: BOS appoints members to the Open Space Committee and adopts mission statement for the Committee, which provides “The mission of the advisory committee is to recommend to the Board of Supervisors... the policy procedures and funding mechanisms for establishing and Open Space District which is consistent with Sections 5500 et seq of the Public Resources Code and a vehicle for implementation of portions of the opens space element, the ag resources element, and the resource conservation element of the Sonoma County General Plan.”

2 Resolution 90-0378

3 Resolution 90-1286

4 Id.



Photo Placeholder

