

AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Misti Arias
General Manager

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.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE

FY 2024-25

Expenditures

Departmental Operating Expenditures	\$73,395,240
Internal Transfers	\$1,355,007

Funding Sources

Total Revenues/Use of Fund Balance	\$74,750,247
Total General Fund Contribution	\$0
% Funded by General Fund	0.0%
Total Staff	36.00

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) partners with willing landowners, public agencies, and non-profit organizations to permanently protect land through agreements with landowners (conservation easements), purchase of land, and stewardship activities on existing easements and fee title owned properties. Ag + Open Space actions are guided by the Vital Lands Initiative, which reflects community desires and values, and directs preservation to the highest priority farmlands, greenbelts, natural resource areas, and recreational lands. Ag + Open Space has a strong focus on climate resiliency and provides a lead role on land conservation actions identified as high priority to ensure our community's ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Ag + Open Space is also committed to ensuring that our work benefits everyone in our community and we are actively pursuing ways to incorporate tenants of diversity, equity and inclusion into every aspect of our conservation work.

Ag + Open Space is funded by Measure F, a Sonoma County sales tax measure. Most of this funding goes toward acquisition of land and easements, stewardship activities, and department operations. In addition, up to 10% of sales tax revenue can be used for initial public access, and operation and maintenance of lands purchased by Ag + Open Space for transfer to park agencies and non-profit partners for outdoor recreation. For more information, call (707) 565-7360, or visit <http://sonomaopenspace.org/>

Service Area Description

The **Community Resources Program** provides outreach and communication, outings and education, government relations, grant funding, and technical expertise to increase resilience of natural and human communities.

The **Acquisition Program** leads the purchase of conservation easements and land to protect farmland, greenbelts, natural resource areas, and recreational lands.

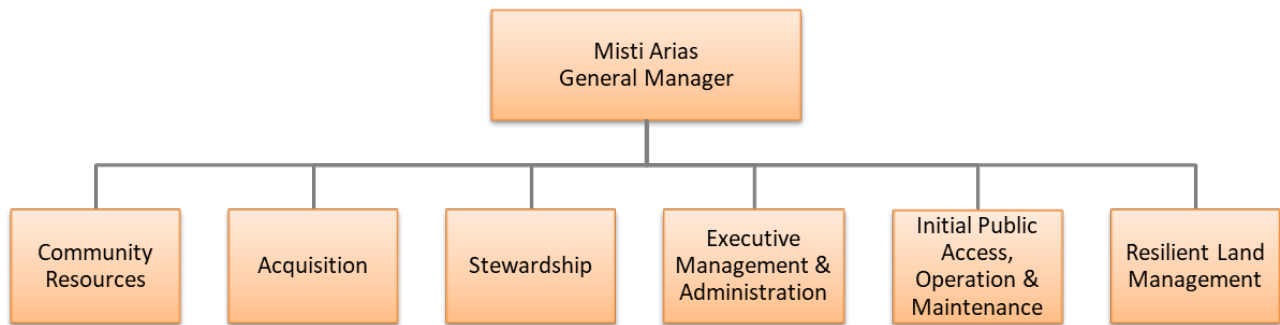
The **Stewardship Program** ensures that the conservation values of lands and conservation easements acquired with taxpayer funds are protected in perpetuity. Ag + Open Space staff monitor and enforce conservation easements and manage fee-title owned properties.

The **Executive Management & Administration Program** manages the core financial, human resources, and contract functions of Ag + Open Space.

Initial Public Access, Operation and Maintenance (IPAOM) reflects eligible expenditures by Ag + Open Space to other agencies to accelerate initial public access on protected properties intended for public recreational use.

Resilient Land Management provides technical and financial support to landowners to enhance land management efforts that minimize risk from extreme events and increase resilience of our natural and human communities. All program costs are funded by the PG&E settlement with Sonoma County.

DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Permanent Positions by Service Area

Service Area	FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget	FY 2024-25 Recommended Budget	Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted	% Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted
Community Resources	6.50	7.00	0.50	7.7
Acquisition	9.00	9.00	0.00	0.0
Stewardship	10.50	10.50	0.00	0.0
Executive Management & Administration	8.0	8.00	8.00	0.0
Initial Public Access, Operations and Maintenance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0
Resilient Land Management	1.00	1.50	0.50	50.0
Total Permanent Positions	35.00	36.00	1.00	2.9

FINANCIAL SUMMARIES

Expenditures by Service Area

Service Area	FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget	FY 2024-25 Recommended Budget	Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted	% Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted
Community Resources	\$2,084,259	\$3,380,629	\$1,296,370	62.2
Acquisition	\$40,834,578	\$61,059,865	\$20,225,287	49.5
Stewardship	\$3,522,129	\$3,337,866	(\$184,263)	(5.2)
Executive Management & Administration	\$3,408,050	\$3,116,880	(\$291,170)	(8.5)
Initial Public Access, Operations and Maintenance	\$3,382,636	\$2,939,500	(\$443,136)	(13.1)
Resilient Land Management	\$304,007	\$915,507	\$611,500	201.1
Gross Departmental Expenditures	\$53,535,659	\$74,750,247	\$21,214,588	39.6
Internal Departmental Transfers	\$943,507	\$1,355,007	\$411,500	43.6
Departmental Operating Expenditures*	\$52,592,152	\$73,395,240	\$20,803,088	39.6

*Departments often need to transfer funds from one operating unit to another for a variety of reasons. While these transfers net to zero when looking at revenues, they appear double counted if only looking at expenditures. As a result, the more accurate illustration of the cost to provide services removes these internal transfer amounts.

Department Budget Details

Expenditures by Character	FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget	FY 2024-25 Recommended Budget	Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted	% Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted
Salaries and Benefits	\$6,930,065	\$7,479,109	\$549,044	7.9
Services and Supplies	\$7,563,334	\$7,816,657	\$253,323	3.3
Capital Expenditures	\$32,485,000	\$45,800,000	\$13,315,000	41.0
Other Expenses*	\$5,594,443	\$12,276,943	\$6,682,500	119.4
Transfers within the County**	\$962,817	\$1,377,538	\$414,721	43.1
Total Expenditures by Character	\$53,535,659	\$74,750,247	\$21,214,588	39.6

*Reflects contributions to Matching Grant Program projects.

**Reflects all funds that are transferred both within this department as well as between departments.

Revenues/Reimbursements/ Use of Fund Balance (Sources)	FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget	FY 2024-25 Recommended Budget	Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted	% Change from FY 2023-24 Adopted
Open Space District Sales Tax Revenue (OSSTA)	\$32,570,959	\$32,290,873	(\$180,086)	(0.7)
State, Federal, & Other Govt. Revenue	\$4,864,000	\$10,450,000	\$5,586,000	114.8
Other Departmental Revenue*	\$2,029,000	\$8,675,000	\$6,646,000	327.6
Use of Fund Balance**	\$13,077,803	\$21,873,137	\$8,795,334	67.3
Transfers & Reimbursements within the County***	\$993,897	\$1,36,237	\$367,340	37.0
Total Revenues/Use of Fund Balance	\$53,535,659	\$74,750,247	\$21,214,588	39.6

*Other Department Revenue includes \$8,540,000 in donations and contributions, the sale of capital assets, and interest.

**Includes a contribution to the Ag + Open Space Reserve of \$7,500,000 from OSSTA with no planned expenditures, which is partially offset by use of fund balance, including \$28,926,660 in accumulated OSSTA revenue.

***Transfers within the County reflect all funds that are transferred both within this department as well as between departments.

DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Major Variances

- **Community Resources** is increasing by 62% (\$1.3 million). The Community Resources budget includes a pass through for the Resilient Land Management budget; \$612,000 of the \$1.3 million increase is attributed to Resilient Land Management activities, which are explained below. The remaining \$685,000 is attributed to grants to purchase conservation easements and other land conservation activities, and the addition of 0.5 FTE to support grants.
- **Acquisition** is increasing by 50% (\$20 million) due to increases in potential acquisitions and anticipated projects in the Matching Grant Program. Revenue from federal grants, state grants and donations related to acquisition activities is expected to increase commensurately.
- **Stewardship** is decreasing by 5% (\$184,000) due to the decreased activity on fee land properties, which varies annually based primarily on maintenance needs.
- **Executive Management and Administration** is decreasing by 9% (\$291,000) as program costs are being reallocated to the program in which they occur rather than budgeted to Executive Management and Administration.
- **Initial Public Access, Operations & Maintenance** is decreasing by 13.1% (\$443,136) as the costs associated with the four transfer agreements anticipated to occur in FY 2024-25 (Chanslor Ranch, Mark West Wikiup Preserve, Russian River Redwoods, and Soda Springs Ranch Open Space Preserve) are less than the amount that was needed to facilitate initial public access on the six transfer agreements that occurred in FY 2023-24.
- **Resilient Land Management** is increasing by 201% (\$612,000) due to increased consulting services for additional community outreach, technical assistance and planning for the Vegetation Management Grant Program, and the addition of 0.5 FTE of an Administrative Aide for program support. The increase is supported with one-time PG&E funds.

Opportunities and Challenges

- Given the deficit in the state budget, grant programs from such agencies as the State Coastal Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Board, and the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program may have reduced funding available, or may not have any funding available this year. This will impact Ag + Open Space's ability to leverage outside funding for acquisition and other key functions.
- The current tax (Measure F) which funds Ag + Open Space land conservation activities is slated to go back to voters for reauthorization prior to the measure's sunset in 2031, therefore Ag + Open Space will:
 - During FY 2024-25, develop a strategy for reauthorization of the Open Space sales tax measure, to continue land conservation and other operations beyond 2031.
 - Fund the Ag + Open Space Reserve and pursue an endowment. In 2016 Ag + Open Space refinanced the 2015 Measure F bond, which was retired in 2023. The annual debt payment was approximately \$7.5 million. That annual payment is being redirected to the Ag + Open Space Reserve while Ag + Open Space pursues an endowment. Through establishment of an endowment, Ag + Open Space will ensure that it can meet its perpetual obligation to steward lands and conservation easements in the event that voters do not reauthorize a sales tax. Ag + Open Space plans on introducing state legislation in the 2025 session to allow for wider diversity of investment options.
- Ag + Open Space continues to identify opportunities to provide technical and financial support to increase land management practices on public and private lands that enhance the health and function of District-protected lands. These efforts include building upon local partnerships with experts that can provide technical assistance, pursuing private foundation and public agency grants, and initiating consultation with the Federated

Indians of Graton Rancheria as outlined in the Recurring Community Benefit Contributions section of the Intergovernmental Mitigation Agreement.

- Sonoma County farmers and ranchers have identified affordable, stable land access and land tenure as one of the biggest barriers to their success. This is especially true for individuals and communities who have historically faced discrimination and exclusion. In addition to “traditional” conservation easement acquisitions, Ag + Open Space will implement a Buy-Protect-Sell pilot as a part of the Farmland for All program to enhance equitable access to productive farmland, approved by the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors on March 12, 2024.

