

AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION & 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.

RECOMMENDED BUDGET AT A GLANCE

FY 2022-23

Expenditures

Departmental Operating Expenditures	\$46,513,349
Internal Transfers	\$629,640

Funding Sources

Total Revenues/Use of Fund Balance	\$47,142,988
Total General Fund Contribution	\$0
% Funded by General Fund	0.00%
Total Staff	30.50

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 acquisitions are guided by the newly adopted 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 will provide 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 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, 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 <https://www.sonomaopenspace.org/>

Program Area Description

Ag + Open Space is organized into three program areas, and is currently evaluating its organizational structure to ensure effectiveness in climate resiliency efforts and to advance the goals and objectives outlined in the Vital Lands Initiative.

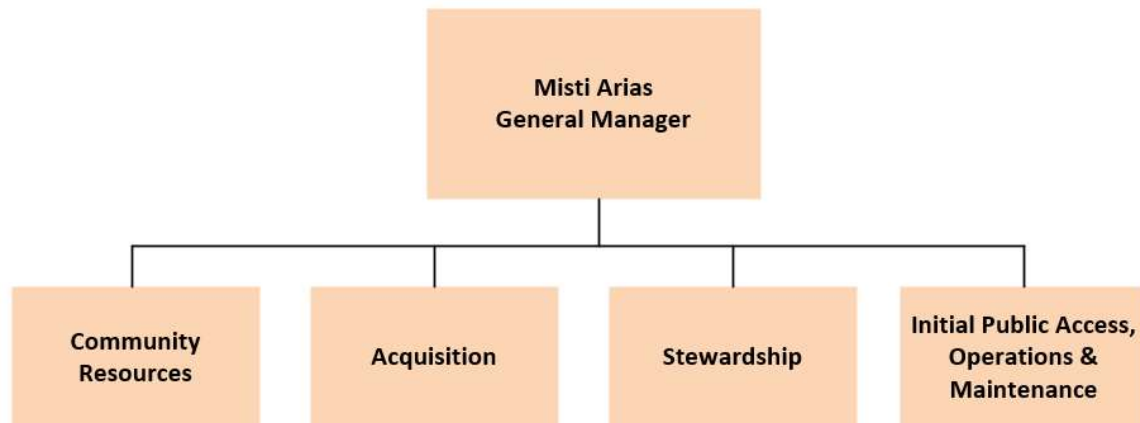
The **Community Resources Program** provides community support and engagement through outreach and communication, outings and education, government relations, grant funding, and technical expertise to increase resilience of natural and human communities. This program includes the **Vegetation Management Program** funded with PG&E Settlement funds, coordinated by a time-limited position.

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.

While not a separate program, **Initial Public Access, Operation and Maintenance** reflects eligible expenditures by Ag + Open Space to other agencies to provide initial public access on protected properties intended for public recreational use.

DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Permanent Positions by Program Area

	FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget	FY 2022-23 Recommended Budget	Change from FY 2021-22 Adopted	% Change from FY 2021-22 Adopted
Community Resources	10.00	10.00	0.00	0.0
Acquisition	9.00	9.00	0.00	0.0
Stewardship	12.50	11.50	(1.00)	(8.0)
Initial Public Access, O&M	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0
Total Permanent Positions	31.50	30.50	(1.00)	(3.17)

**Reduction of 1.0 FTE is for a Time Limited Planner set to expire on 6/30/22. The Board approved conversion of the position to permanent on 4/19/22, and the change will be reflected in the FY 2022-23 Supplemental Adjustments.*

FINANCIAL SUMMARIES

Expenditures by Program Area

	FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget	FY 2022-23 Recommended Budget	Change from FY 2021-22 Adopted	% Change from FY 2021-22 Adopted
Community Resources	\$3,594,213	\$3,592,881	(\$1,332)	(0.0)
Acquisition	35,773,671	36,919,009	1,145,338	3.2
Stewardship	4,129,662	4,089,458	(40,204)	(1.0)
Initial Public Access, O&M	2,786,500	2,541,640	(244,860)	(8.8)
Gross Departmental Expenditures	\$46,284,046	\$47,142,985	\$858,943	1.9
<i>Internal Departmental Transfers</i>	<i>647,592</i>	<i>629,640</i>	<i>(17,952)</i>	<i>(2.8)</i>
Departmental Operating Expenditures*	\$45,636,454	\$46,513,348	\$876,894	1.9

*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

	FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget	FY 2022-23 Recommended Budget	Change from FY 2021-22 Adopted	% Change from FY 2021-22 Adopted
Expenditures by Character				
Salaries and Benefits	\$5,749,314	\$6,652,471	\$903,157	15.7
Services and Supplies	9,157,550	8,752,161	(405,389)	(4.4)
Capital Expenditures	26,565,000	28,415,000	1,850,000	7.0
Matching Grant Program	4,146,943	2,676,943	(1,470,000)	(35.4)
Transfers within the County****	665,239	646,413	(18,826)	(2.8)
Total Expenditures by Character	\$46,284,046	\$47,142,988	\$858,942	1.9
Revenues/Reimbursements/ Use of Fund Balance (Sources)				
Open Space District Sales Tax Revenue*	\$41,359,644	\$40,772,000	(\$587,644)	(1.4)
State, Federal, & Other Govt. Revenue	2,275,000	5,095,000	2,820,000	124.0
Other Department Revenue**	1,995,000	625,000	(1,370,000)	(68.7)
Use of Fund Balance***	(660,000)	0	660,000	(100.0)
Transfers & Reimbursements within the County****	1,314,402	650,988	(663,414)	(50.5)
Total Revenues/Use of Fund Balance	\$46,284,046	\$47,142,988	\$858,942	1.9

*Open Space District Sales Tax Revenue includes \$31,897,720 in anticipated FY 2022-23 sales tax revenue and \$8,874,280 accumulated sales tax revenue from prior years.

**Other Department Revenue includes \$135,000 in use of money and property and \$490,000 in donations and contributions.

***Reflects a one-time allocation from the PG&E settlement fund in FY 2021-22 to support the time-limited Vegetation Management Program.

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

DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Major Variances

- **Acquisitions** expenditures increased by 3.2% (\$1.15 million) for FY 2022-23 due to the acquisitions that may close and two pilot projects: 1) Buy-Protect-Sell whereby Ag + Open Space will create opportunities for farmers and ranchers to own land by purchasing agricultural lands and selling them subject to a conservation easement, and 2) Identifying Priority Areas for Proactive Solicitation to actively seek out willing landowners who may be interested in protecting their land. Due to climate change initiatives at the Federal and state level grant revenues are anticipated to increase for conservation easements, dependent on the conservation value of each project.
- **Initial Public Access, Operations and Maintenance** expenditures decreased by 8.8% (\$245,000) due to the reduction of operations costs for transferred fee lands for FY 2022-23.
- **Community Resource:** There were not significant changes to the budget in the Program Area for FY 2022-23

Key Issues

- Increasing the amount of conserved land in Sonoma County – filling newly added staff positions and streamlining processes to accelerate pace of land conservation.
- Enhanced land management for resilience to climate change and extreme events – identifying funding sources and technical expertise to support enhanced land management and agricultural production including the PG&E settlement funded vegetation management grant program and consultation with Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria to determine use of Park and Open Space funding Mitigation Agreement funding.
- Increasing the equitable access to open space and agricultural lands – working closely with the Office of Equity and recreational and agricultural partners to increase equity in our land conservation efforts and ensure that our work benefits all communities in Sonoma County.
- Funding the perpetual Stewardship obligation - ensuring that conservation agreements are upheld by developing a clear and detailed investment policy for a Stewardship Reserve Fund.
- Increasing public awareness of Ag + Open Space and the importance of land conservation – expanding opportunities for the public to learn about and engage in Ag + Open Space’s mission and work.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OBJECTIVES

FY 2021-22 Accomplishments

- Creation of the Vital Lands Networks and acquisition project evaluation criteria based upon the Vital Lands Initiative that resulted in the presentation of land protection priorities to the Board of Directors for proactive solicitation of future projects.
- Began several processes, upgraded technology, and identified additional staffing needs to streamline land conservation and stewardship actions, including remote conservation easement monitoring, an automated system to evaluate projects based upon the Vital Lands Initiative, and an external review of standard conservation easement language.
- Implementation of pro-active fuels reduction, invasive species management, and roadwork on Ag + Open Space owned properties, including Saddle Mountain Preserve.
- Invited applications to the 2022 Matching Grant Program and initiated review of applications.
- Created and shared informational campaigns including Land for Agriculture and Land for Climate Resilience.
- Strategic Plan Alignment: Climate Action and Resiliency Goal 1, Objectives 2 and 3 – Created a vegetation management grant program to distribute PG&E settlement funds into the community to help mitigate fire risk.
- Strategic Plan Alignment: Climate Action and Resiliency Goal 5, Objective 2 – Initiated the Sonoma County Natural and Working Lands Climate Adaption Strategy in partnership with the Sonoma County Climate Adaptation and Resilience Department.

FY 2022-23 Objectives

- **Strategic Plan Alignment: Climate Action and Resiliency Goal 5, Objective 2** – Increase efforts to protect high priority lands identified by the Vital Lands Initiative through a proactive outreach campaign within high priority areas as identified by Vital Lands.
- **Strategic Plan Alignment: Climate Action and Resiliency Goal 1, Objectives 2 and 3 and Goal 5, Objective 2** – Identify ways to encourage and support land management practices that enhance the health and function of protected lands through stewardship of conservation easements, technical support, and funding.
- Increase protection of agricultural lands and help to facilitate equitable, affordable access to land for diverse farmers and ranchers through the Buy-Protect-Sell and Proactive Solicitation pilot programs.
- Expand opportunities for all members of the community to connect with protected lands.
- Accelerate and streamline land conservation practices.

BUDGET HEARING CHANGES AND ACTIONS

Adopted as recommended with the following changes:

Supplemental Changes

	FTE	Gross Expenditures	Revenue and Reimbursements	Net Cost
Other Funds				
Increase position allocations by 2.5 FTE with the addition of 1.0 Senior Planner, 0.5 Planner, 1.0 Community Relations Assistant, conversion of 1.0 Time Limited Planner to ongoing, and deletion of 1.0 Technician. Costs for the new positions were included in the FY 2022-23 Recommended Budget, no additional adjustments needed.	2.5	\$0	\$0	\$0

DEPARTMENT ADOPTED BUDGET DETAILS

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