

Healthy Lands & Healthy Economies

THE HEALTHY LANDS AND HEALTHY ECONOMIES INITIATIVE

OVERVIEW



**AG +
OPEN
SPACE**
SONOMA COUNTY

NATURAL CAPITAL: VALUING OUR WORKING & NATURAL LANDS

The Sonoma County community is deeply committed to maintaining its rural landscape – including local farms, wildlife habitat, parks and trails, scenic mountaintops and vistas, and greenbelts that define and sustain each town's unique character. Citizens have consistently taken action to protect these open spaces – by thoughtful land use policies and legislation, private and public investments in conservation, and a commitment to good stewardship and sustainability. Although our working and natural lands have immeasurable intrinsic value, these open space lands also provide services that have real, quantifiable economic values – values that are often ignored by markets and can easily be taken for granted.

The goods and services provided by nature that benefit human communities are referred to as **natural capital**. Sonoma County is rich in natural capital – ranging from watersheds that naturally and cost effectively filter our drinking water, agricultural lands that provide local food, jobs and income, trails that protect and enhance the health of our population, to our beautiful undeveloped coastline, vineyards, farms and ranches that draw visitors from around the world and contribute substantially to our local economy.

Unlike built infrastructure, such as a floodwall or a wastewater treatment plant, natural capital doesn't wear out or need to be upgraded. Another key difference: while built capital is typically designed to serve a single purpose, open

space landscapes provide multiple valuable services and benefits. The diversity and resilience of natural systems will become more important as the climate changes in the coming decades, likely altering precipitation, temperature, flooding and fire events. Protecting Sonoma County's working and natural lands will continue to provide valuable benefits and services to our community and help us to adapt to a changing climate, thereby providing significant returns on our conservation investments for generations to come.

“Natural Capital Value in Sonoma County: \$2.2 to \$6.6 billion per year”

HOW IS NATURAL CAPITAL VALUED?

There are a wide variety of methods used to estimate the value of natural capital. Researchers analyze the cost to replace the services provided by working and natural lands, survey people's willingness to pay for those services, and calculate the costs avoided by having properly functioning ecosystem services. For our countywide study, economists researched the value of natural capital services provided by landscapes similar to Sonoma County, and applied these values to the local landscapes, a method known as the “benefit transfer method.” For a detailed description of the methods used in the countywide study and the case studies, please see the technical reports, available at www.sonomaopenspace.org/HLHE.

WHAT IS THE HEALTHY LANDS & HEALTHY ECONOMIES INITIATIVE?

The Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies Initiative is a regional collaboration led by Sonoma County Ag + Open Space, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, and the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority to quantify the benefits and economic values that are provided to the community by working lands and natural areas. Funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation, and the California State Coastal Conservancy, the Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies Initiative is working with economists to demonstrate how community investments in protecting agricultural land and other open spaces enhance the local economy and provide cost effective ways to achieve community benefits like clean drinking water, flood control, and local food security.

In Sonoma County, the Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies Initiative documents the many economic benefits of our working and natural lands, and the return on decades of local conservation investments by tribes, landowners, public agencies and non-profits. A recent countywide study, *The Multiple Benefits of Sonoma County Working and Natural Lands*, offers a broad estimate of the value of natural and working lands in Sonoma County. Complementing this screening level evaluation of natural capital, a suite of local case studies detail these services for particular themes or places in Sonoma County. For more information and to access the economic reports, please visit www.sonomaopenspace.org/HLHE.



CASE STUDIES

As part of the Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies Initiative, Ag + Open Space developed a suite of case studies that delved further into the values provided by specific themes or places in Sonoma County. These case studies include valuations of:

- Grasslands & Rangelands
- Riparian Corridors
- Urban Open Space
- Carbon Sequestration
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Watersheds
- Drinking Water
- Public Health
- Nature-Based Education
- Artisanal Cheese Production
- Groundwater
- Community Resilience
- Coastal Areas

Visit our website to read the full reports and download summary handouts for each of the case studies.

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Even well maintained built infrastructure will depreciate over time. Properly cared for natural capital appreciates in value, year after year.



**AG +
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SONOMA COUNTY

Sonoma County Ag + Open Space permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. We are responsible for the perpetual protection of over 116,000 acres of land throughout our region. These agricultural and open space lands are protected through a quarter-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1990 and reauthorized in 2006. For more information, please visit www.sonomaopenspace.org.



THE HEALTHY LANDS AND HEALTHY ECONOMIES INITIATIVE

The Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies Initiative documents the economic value and community benefits of natural and working landscapes. This research helps to show that Sonoma County's investments in land conservation pay real dividends, now and into the future. This Initiative would not have been possible without contributions from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, and the California State Coastal Conservancy.

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 **S. D. BECHTEL, JR.
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STEPHEN BECHTEL FUND


**Coastal
Conservancy**

Inside photo by **Robert Janover** (www.robertjanover.com). All other photos provided by **Ag + Open Space**.

VISIT WWW.SONOMAOPENSACE.ORG/HLHE TO DOWNLOAD THE FULL REPORT