

Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
2015 Annual Report to the Community

A Watershed Year for Land Conservation

MESSAGE FROM ANDREA MACKENZIE, GENERAL MANAGER

A watershed moment is one that marks a turning point in time after which there is no going back.

The 2014/2015 Fiscal Year was just such a time across the state as we faced the fourth consecutive year of the most severe drought in California history. Governor Brown took the unprecedented step of declaring a statewide emergency and instituting 25% water use cutbacks. Here in Santa Clara County, as imported water deliveries ceased, and local creeks, streams and



percolation ponds went dry, residents became keenly aware of just how reliant we are on local water and particularly groundwater to meet the region's water supply needs.

Santa Clara County's natural areas and working lands are an essential part of our Valley's water supply infrastructure. Yes, *infrastructure*. Our open space, natural areas and agricultural lands act as *green infrastructure* that captures precipitation and like a giant sponge, absorbs water and slowly

releases it to creek systems to support fish, wildlife and our local water supply.

2015 was also the hottest year on Earth since temperature records have been kept, according to data released by NASA and NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. As the effects of human-induced changes to our environment become more pronounced, our management of land and natural resources must adapt to meet these challenges.

As a unique public conservation agency formed to balance our region's growth and development with preservation of open space and stewardship of wildlife, water resources and working lands, the work of the Open Space Authority (OSA) and its conservation partners has never been so important or so resonant. Thankfully voters in Santa Clara County overwhelmingly approved Measure Q on the November 2014 ballot. Measure Q is a \$24 parcel tax that will generate critical funding through 2030 for OSA to continue preserving open space, water resources, wildlife habitat and agricultural lands. Measure Q will also ensure more people can benefit by connecting with nature in their communities - in urban farms, community gardens, on bike and pedestrian trails and through educational programs.

Our Measure Q funds are already hard at work in places like Coyote Valley. In June 2015, the OSA dedicated its newest preserve in the heart of the 7,500-acre Coyote Valley, just minutes from South San Jose and Morgan Hill. Here in Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve, the new 4-mile long Arrowhead Loop Trail meanders through native grasslands and oak tree canopies leading to spectacular views of the Diablo Range, Coyote Ridge,

Mt. Hamilton and the entire Coyote Valley. The Coyote Valley is a greenbelt of natural and agricultural lands that separates San Jose from Morgan Hill. Called a "last chance landscape," the Coyote Valley is the OSA's highest priority for preservation because it contains the last remaining wildlife linkage or pathway for wildlife movement between the Santa Cruz Mountains and Diablo Range, as well as critical surface and groundwater resources and productive local farmland.

State, regional and local action and policies are increasingly aligning to direct public investment, including cap and trade funding, to the protection and management of open space, natural resources and agricultural lands. Toward this end, the OSA and its partners have begun an ambitious and innovative conservation strategy focused on preserving key lands that sustain local water supplies, pathways for wildlife and a viable future for local food and farmers in South County, including in the Coyote Valley. In

2015, the Governor's Cabinet-level *Strategic Growth Council* awarded Santa Clara County and the OSA a grant to create a comprehensive program for agricultural preservation in South County as a climate change strategy. The OSA also worked with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), conservation partners and local governments in 2015 to designate *Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs)* in Santa Clara County, making thousands of acres of open space and farmland eligible for conservation funding through federal and state transportation funding beginning in 2017, again as a strategy for directing growth into existing cities and reducing future greenhouse gas emissions.

In the face of a projected population growth of 36% by 2040, and a "new normal" of continued drought and climate change effects on the environment and economy, we need to take the long view. We need to realize that we are, as Secretary of

the Interior Sally Jewell recently said, in the "forever business." As we make critical land use decisions about how and where our region grows, we have to plan *with* nature, not in spite of her. We need habitat for wildlife AND habitat for humanity.

On behalf of the OSA's dedicated staff, Board of Directors and Citizens Advisory Committee, I'm proud to share this 2015 Annual Report that highlights our important conservation investments in projects, programs, partnerships and policy initiatives. We are grateful for the public's trust and continued support of the Open Space Authority.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Andrea Mackenzie".

Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

Watershed

Noun

- A line of hills or mountains from which rivers drain.
- The area of land that includes a particular river or lake and all the rivers, streams that flow into it.
- A time when an important change happens.

Preserving At-Risk Farmland in South County

View across Coyote Valley's farmland to the Santa Cruz Mountains

The California Strategic Growth Council awarded a \$100,000 Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Strategy Grant to Santa Clara County in partnership with the Open Space Authority. This grant will help create a regional policy framework to protect South County agricultural lands, from Coyote Valley in the north to the Pajaro River in the south, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This endeavor could increase protection for high priority farmland, make growth planning more

efficient, make the region more competitive for land conservation funding (from cap and trade revenues), and reduce speculation by landowners and farmers that threatens urban-edge farmland.



"Projects such as this provide an opportunity for everyone with a stake in the long term viability of the agricultural economy of Santa Clara County to chart a course for our collective future."

Kirk Girard, Director of the County's Department of Planning and Development



19,759
acres of open
space and farm
land protected
by the Authority



6
grazing
leases on
Authority
land



4,500
acres grazed
on Authority
land



12
rare, threatened
and endangered
species whose
habitat is on
protected
Authority land



200
species of
wildflowers that
bloom on open
space preserves
in spring



5,100
tule elk roam
California,
including
the herd on
Coyote Ridge



Partners in Protecting Open Space



"This project is key to providing a range of community benefits, from wildlife protection, to flood management, to supporting the local agricultural economy. It is just the sort of multi-purpose conservation project our communities need."

Michael Mantell, president of
Resources Legacy Fund

Formation of the Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve on Santa Clara County's southern border is a prime example of a collaborative conservation project as outlined in the Authority's *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*. The Authority received grant funding from its partner The Nature Conservancy through the Living Landscape Initiative Challenge Grant Program of Resources Legacy Fund, which is funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. In addition, the California Department of Water Resources and the Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority contributed towards the purchase.





Protecting Water, Wildlife and Working Lands

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority protects open space lands to benefit people and nature, and achieves long-term sustainability for our communities. *The Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*, a 30-year roadmap for the Open Space Authority, guides all of our conservation efforts. The *Greenprint* identifies Ten Priority Conservation Areas — significant landscapes and natural areas that are home to endangered species, prime farmland, and precious natural resources.

The Authority facilitated these acquisitions during 2014-2015, all of which lie within the Greenprint's Priority Conservation Areas:



Little Uvas Creek

This 285-acre property consists of open, rolling grasslands that feature six scenic, spring-fed ponds. This mountainous region provides habitat and refuge for plants and animals in the face of a changing climate. The land is part of an important connection between the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Gabilan Range, and Pinnacles National Park which provides safe passage for animals through critical wildlife corridors.



Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve

This 183-acre parcel is part of a complex of protected, highly productive large farms that create a buffer of more than 1,800 acres of preserved fertile farmland between Gilroy and Hollister and provide locally-grown food to the region. Left undeveloped, this parcel and other lands are able to absorb rainwater and runoff, reducing the need for additional levees and costly stormwater infrastructure downstream. This purchase also protects a critical linkage connecting core wildlife habitat areas in the Santa Cruz, Gabilan, and Mt. Hamilton Ranges. A new section of the Bay Area Ridge Trail along the property's northern border will eventually connect to other trails, connecting the southern loop of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.





Measure Q Open Space, Wildlife Habitat, Clean Water and Increased Public Access

In November 2014, the voters approved Measure Q with more than the required 2/3 majority of the vote. Measure Q is a \$24 parcel tax that will generate approximately \$7.9 million per year for open space protection in the cities of San Jose, Milpitas, Santa Clara, Campbell, Morgan Hill and unincorporated areas of the County. Passage of this parcel tax allows the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority to connect more people with nature by opening more parks, trails and to protect our scenic landscapes and their precious natural resources for present and future generations.

Guided by the priorities of the *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*, Measure Q will:

- Protect scenic hillsides, open space, wildlife, redwood forests, and farmland
- Increase public access to open space and help maintain our parks and trails
- Protect precious water resources, including our creeks, rivers and streams
- Create new urban open spaces and environmental education programs





Measure Q Urban Open Space Program

With the passage of Measure Q, the Open Space Authority is expanding its reach to achieve greater equity among residents in our jurisdiction. Measure Q provides for a new Urban Open Space Grant Program, which will address the needs of urban communities that currently have limited access to preserves and parks. The Open Space Authority will work with the County, cities, schools and community-based organizations to help improve quality of life for urban residents by providing increased access to nature, creating parks, trails, urban farms and community gardens, and engaging children and youth through nature-based education programs.



MEASURE 
INVESTING IN NATURE

Connecting People to Nature

This year, the Open Space Authority significantly increased public access to open space lands in Santa Clara County. Access to nature improves health and quality of life in tangible ways. Parks and preserves offer us relaxation, a chance to restore our spirits and provide places to play, think, and dream.

The Authority improved access and visitor experience in the following ways:

Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve

After months of work from dedicated field staff, the Authority celebrated the grand opening of Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve. Designed for outdoor recreation and the enjoyment of nature, the preserve sports 348-acres of rolling, oak-studded hillsides and features four miles of new trail for hikers, equestrians and bicyclists as well as picnic areas, restrooms, and parking. The preserve's many conservation values include rich cultural history, valuable water resources, exceptional recreational opportunities, farm and ranchland, and anchors a critical wildlife



linkage that spans the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range.

Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve

The Authority also created new access for hikers, cyclists and equestrians at Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve with year-round, free public parking and the new 1.2 mile Aquila Loop Trail, perfect for beginning hikers and families with young children.



Outdoor Educational Programs

Interpretive hikes and outreach events help strengthen our community's connection to nature on open space and natural lands. Whether enjoying a docent-led wildflower hike in Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve or celebrating with music and fun family activities at the Coyote Valley Family Harvest Feast, visitors can engage with staff



and volunteers year-round, and learn about our region's rich cultural and natural histories.

Volunteer Programs

Open Space Authority volunteers use their unique skills and talents to protect and preserve the natural environment. Volunteers are the backbone of the Authority's docent, land stewardship, and trail patrol programs. Volunteer activities range from trail building to educational hikes to patrolling preserves on horseback. Several volunteers are talented photographers and contribute substantially to the Authority's photo library. Whatever the activity, volunteers engage deeply with natural lands and visitors, helping make parks and preserves more enjoyable for all.



In NBC's new series *OpenRoad*, longtime Bay Area *Backroads* star Doug McConnell visited Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve. Looking across the wind-swept vistas, he observed:

"We live in one of the most spectacular places on Earth, with breathtaking views in every direction. You have to realize — that is not by accident. These places, the ones that astound you? They have been saved, repeatedly, by generations of conservationists who knew we would never get it back if we paved it over. Every footfall on every trail is a quiet thank you to those individuals. And now, it's up to you and I to save it, to keep it saved."



208
environmental
education
programs



6,588
participants in
environmental
education
programs



527
participants
in Healthy
Parks,
Healthy
People
activities



150,000
visitors to
open space
preserves



5,500
miles walked
by Open Space
Authority
field staff to
build trails
and maintain
preserves



343
volunteers
with 3,728
total hours



10 to 1
ratio of
volunteers
for each
paid staff
person



Our heartfelt thanks to our generous donors, funders and sponsors for supporting protection of open space land and natural resources:

Donors

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Funders

California Department of Water Resources
Living Landscape Initiative Challenge
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Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention
Peninsula Open Space Trust
Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation
Department
State Coastal Conservancy

Sponsors

Asian Americans for Community
Involvement
Bay Area Parent
Peninsula Open Space Trust
Sound of Hope Radio Network

**Finally, a heartfelt thank you
to Santa Clara County voters.
Your overwhelming support of
Measure Q is making it possible
for the Open Space Authority
to invest in protecting and
stewarding Santa Clara Valley's
irreplaceable open space lands
and natural resources.**



Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Annual Report of Financial Information 2014-2015

The Open Space Authority's 2014-2015 fiscal year was extremely productive and included completing and laying the groundwork for key acquisitions and significantly expanding public access on its open space preserves. Expenditures remained within the annual budget approved by the Santa Clara Valley Board of Directors in June 2015. The Authority was able to leverage budgeted funds with multiple grants used for special projects and land acquisitions.

BEGINNING FUND BALANCES

District 1 - Benefit Assessment Fund	\$ 4,517,365
Reserve Capital Fund	\$ 12,143,118
Reserve Operational Fund	\$ 14,000,000
Total Fund Balances	\$ 30,660,483

REVENUES

Assessments	\$ 4,185,314
Interest Income	\$ 140,731
Land Management Income	\$ 127,397
Land Sales	\$ 1,778,400
Donations	\$ 8,483
Grants	\$ 588,259
Other	\$ 4,028
Total Revenues	\$ 6,832,612
Fund Balances used in FY14/15	\$ 6,313,809
Total Revenues	\$ 13,146,421

EXPENDITURES

Land Acquisitions	\$ 3,354,043
Capital Expenditures	\$ 3,925,152
Administrative	\$ 3,011,993
Field Operations	\$ 1,263,340
Public Affairs	\$ 917,381
Planning	\$ 674,512
Total Expenditures	\$ 13,146,421

Urban Open Space Accounts (20% Funding Program) as of June 30, 2015

The Authority has granted more than \$8.05 million for urban open space projects.

Jurisdiction	Allocated to Date	Invested to Date	Account Balance
Campbell	\$ 387,486	\$ (363,650)	\$ 23,836
Milpitas	\$ 522,086	\$ (356,837)	\$ 165,249
Morgan Hill	\$ 211,703	\$ (184,000)	\$ 27,703
San Jose	\$ 7,754,582	\$ (6,186,946)	\$ 1,567,635
Santa Clara	\$ 938,399	\$ (512,953)	\$ 425,446
County	\$ 761,489	\$ (450,000)	\$ 311,489
Total	\$ 10,575,745	\$ (8,054,386)	\$ 2,521,358





Openspaceauthority.org

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