

CHAPTER 6 Recreation and Education

Goal and Guiding Principles

GOAL: Protect and manage a network of open space lands that provide opportunities for nature-based recreation and education for all residents.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- Close gaps in the network of regional parks, open spaces, and trails.
- Enhance the Authority’s Urban Open Space Program to promote greater access to safe and well-managed open spaces.
- Enhance the Authority’s education and outreach programs to increase understanding and appreciation of the cultural, economic, environmental, and community benefits of open space.



Lory Kline

Providing public access to parks and trails is an important part of the Authority’s mission. Outdoor recreation improves physical and mental health and contributes to people’s sense of well-being.

Santa Clara County residents and visitors alike enjoy an extensive and diverse network of rural and urban parks, open spaces, and regional and local trails. Together, these lands offer an array of recreational opportunities, provide places to learn about nature, and support healthy individuals and communities. Protected open space contributes immensely to our quality of life by preserving views of the area’s iconic ridges and hillsides. Numerous studies show direct connections between the availability of and access to open space and improved health. The Health Element of the *Santa Clara County General Plan* (County of Santa Clara 1994) specifically recognizes the importance of open space in supporting physical activity and overall health. Access to parks and trails helps reduce obesity, diminish risk of chronic disease (for example, heart, diabetes, osteoporosis, and cancer), enhance immune systems, and increase life expectancy. Access to natural open space also has been shown to significantly improve people’s mental health, reducing depression, relieving stress, and contributing to people’s sense of well-being (Gies 2006).

In its first 20 years, the Open Space Authority contributed to the protection of over 16,000 acres of open space. Continued protection of open space is more important now than ever, as a rapidly growing population will increase the demand for safe, clean and accessible parks and open spaces. Our population is aging and diversifying, resulting in the need for new recreational programs and amenities. In an increasingly technology-based world, open space providers will need to develop new programs that attract youth to the out-of-the-doors and that inspire them to become the next generation of land stewards and environmental leaders. We will need to better serve urban residents who are not benefiting from nature because they live in communities that lack convenient access to parks and open space.

Moving forward, the Authority will continue working with conservation partners to expand and connect regional and urban open space and park networks, placing emphasis on those lands with significant environmental values and unique recreational opportunities. Through an enhanced Urban Open Space Program, the Authority will help protect vital natural areas within urban communities and will work to close gaps in trails. The Authority will develop new partnerships and educational programs to promote outdoor activity, healthy lifestyles, and to foster an appreciation of the Santa Clara Valley's environmental values.

Parks and Open Space for Recreation and Education

Public Access and Recreation

Providing recreational access to open space is a top priority for the Authority. **Figure 11** highlights examples of areas that are most suitable to expand the existing system of parks and trails to enhance public access and recreation. Largely derived from the *Countywide Trails Master Plan* (Santa Clara County 1995) and the *Parkland Acquisition Plan* (Santa Clara County Parks 2012), this represents a shared vision of the Authority and the County of Santa Clara Parks and Recreation Department to establish and manage a seamless and integrated network of parks and trails that link the Valley's urban residents to the surrounding regional parks and open space preserves. This vision is not intended to identify specific acquisition or trail priorities; rather it depicts general areas for potential park, open space, and trail projects within the County's unincorporated areas that may be park-deficient, that are located at the urban edge or near "urban islands" at risk of development, or that have unique ecological or recreational values. The Authority will work closely with County Parks and other partners to assess park and open space acquisition opportunities as they arise, providing information on key resource values, pursuing opportunities to secure grant funding, and taking on responsibility for managing new open space areas as appropriate.



Kathy Korbholz

Connecting people to the land is one of the Authority's priorities.

Trail Connections

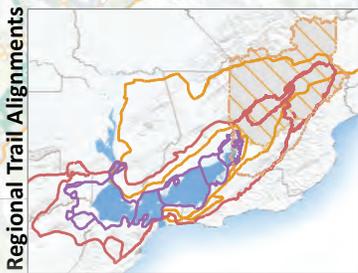
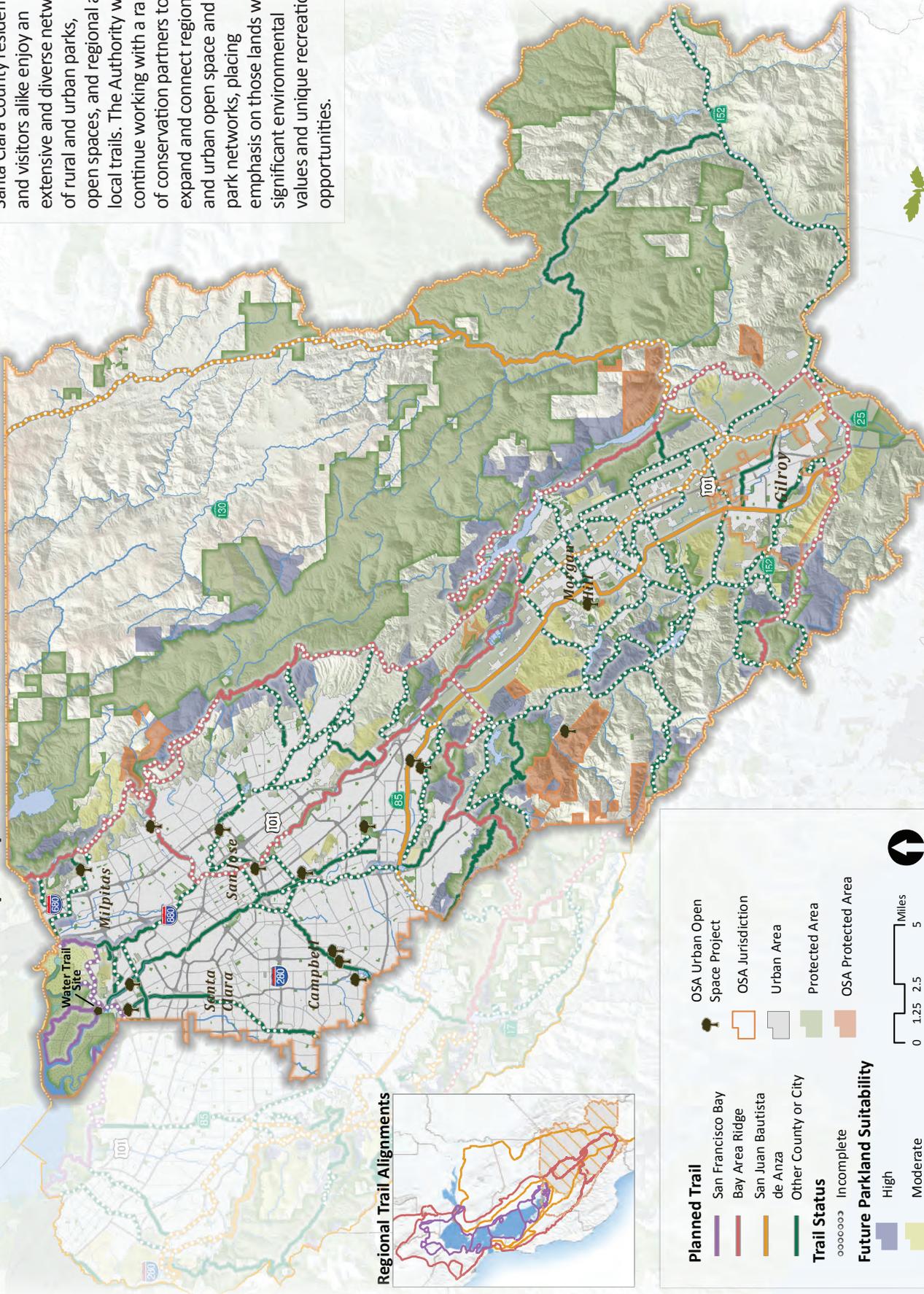
Residents of the Santa Clara Valley benefit from an extensive system of regional and local trails, although significant gaps remain. Four regional trails – the San Francisco Bay Trail, Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, and the San Francisco Bay Water Trail – extend throughout and beyond the Open Space Authority's jurisdiction, and showcase special ecological and cultural assets of the region. Many local trails are included in county and city general plans; when complete, they will provide safe connections between local communities, schools, and nearby parks and open spaces. They will also provide much-needed transportation alternatives that reduce reliance on cars.

Figure 11 highlights significant trail corridors that are included in adopted regional and local trails plans, including the *Countywide Trails Master Plan*. These trails are intended to:

- Connect urban areas to parks, open spaces, and schools
- Provide park-deficient communities with new trails and links to transit centers
- Facilitate wildlife movement and provide riparian habitat along streams
- Provide viable alternatives to motor vehicle transportation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution
- Provide unique recreational and educational opportunities

Figure 11: Current and Future Planned Open Space and Trails

Santa Clara County residents and visitors alike enjoy an extensive and diverse network of rural and urban parks, open spaces, and regional and local trails. The Authority will continue working with a range of conservation partners to expand and connect regional and urban open space and park networks, placing emphasis on those lands with significant environmental values and unique recreational opportunities.



Planned Trail

- San Francisco Bay
- Bay Area Ridge
- San Juan Bautista
- de Anza
- Other County or City

Trail Status

- Incomplete

Future Parkland Suitability

- High
- Moderate

OSA Urban Open Space Project

OSA Jurisdiction

Urban Area

Protected Area

OSA Protected Area

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles

Data sources: SCC CWTMP, San Jose, Gilroy, Morgan Hill, US NPS, SCCRPD Parklands Acquisition Plan, FMMP 2010, CPAD 2013, SCC Parklands Database.

Transit & Trails

One of the core programs of the Bay Area Open Space Council is Transit & Trails, which connects people to Bay Area parks and open spaces by making it easy to find open space and get there via public transit, bike, walking, or car. The program's website (www.transitandtrails.org) and mobile apps allow users to find the information and share it with others. A proud member of the Bay Area Open Space Council, the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority supports this and other programs to increase accessibility of open space.

The Authority will continue working closely with partners to close gaps in key trail systems, and to establish new public access opportunities in response to successful land protection efforts. Implementation will require close coordination with other park and open space providers, not only to secure the land necessary for trails, but also to construct and manage them in a manner that results in a seamless experience for visitors even when they cross park boundaries. Promoting access to open space and trails will require new programs, including the Bay Area Open Space Council's Transit & Trails

Program (see sidebar), as well as partnerships with the Valley Transportation Authority and other agencies that seek to link transit access to parks and open space.

Several areas stand out as priorities for park and open space protection that can provide new opportunities for public access and recreation. These areas are generally in close proximity to cities and urban areas and are at considered at moderate or high risk of development within the next 30 years. While these areas have many other outstanding values, including wildlife habitat, water resources, and scenic views, their protection is essential to meet the County's recreational needs and objectives:

- **Upper Penitencia Creek / East Foothills.** Expanding outward from the Authority's Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve, additional land protection here will protect critical views of the foothills and help close gaps in parkland and trails between Ed Levin and Grant Ranch County Parks. This area includes the park-deficient Alum Rock neighborhood, as well as several major gaps in the Bay Area Ridge Trail.
- **Coyote Ridge.** Highly scenic and accessible from south San Jose, this area is a priority to link Joseph D. Grant Ranch County Park to Anderson and Coyote Lake County Parks. Publicly accessible open space on Coyote Ridge would provide unparalleled opportunities for visitors to experience a sense of remoteness just minutes from the city.



Cait Hutnik

Public access to the stunning Coyote Ridge would provide important open space connections and unparalleled recreational opportunities.

- **Las Uvas / El Toro.** Just west of Morgan Hill is the iconic El Toro Peak. The Authority is working to provide public access to this prominent landmark. The lands to the west are also a priority for park and open space protection to link protected lands around Uvas and Chesbro Reservoirs. Several planned trails lead east from Morgan Hill and connect parkland in the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Diablo Range.
- **Santa Teresa Foothills.** This area comprises an approximately 1500-acre peninsula of open space extending from Santa Teresa County Park into the surrounding neighborhoods. The prominent ridgeline, which forms a highly visible scenic backdrop to south San Jose, includes serpentine grassland habitat that supports Bay Checkerspot Butterfly and rare plants such as Santa Clara Valley Dudleya and Mt. Hamilton thistle. The Santa Teresa Foothills are a priority for establishing a network of parks, open spaces, and trails that link Calero, Santa Teresa, and Almaden Quicksilver County Parks with the Authority's Rancho Cañada del Oro and Coyote Valley Open Space Preserves.
- **Mt. Madonna/Upper Uvas Creek.** This area is a priority to expand Mt. Madonna and Chitactac-Adams County Parks, and for closing gaps in the Bay Area Ridge Trail.



Derek Neumann

The Santa Teresa Foothills offer great opportunity for public access adjacent to surrounding neighborhoods, and the Open Space Authority – in partnership with the City of San Jose, Santa Clara County Parks Department, Santa Clara Valley Water District, and groups like the Santa Teresa Foothills Neighborhood Association – will continue to pursue opportunities for open space protection, trail connections, and public access.

Urban Open Space Program: Connecting Communities to Nature

The Open Space Authority has long recognized the value that preserves, parks, natural areas, trails, and community gardens bring to our cities and urban areas by protecting water supplies and other natural resources, restoring wildlife habitat, and supporting community health and safety. Since 1996, the Authority has allocated more than \$10 million to 15 urban projects in the cities of San Jose, Santa Clara, Morgan Hill, Milpitas, Campbell, and unincorporated Santa Clara County.

Today, it is abundantly clear that having access to open space is essential not only for maintaining a high quality of life, but also for basic human health and well-being. The Open Space Authority is committed to continuing and enhancing its Urban Open Space Program in order to respond to the emerging needs of communities and the residents within them. Recent studies conducted by The Trust for Public Land demonstrate tremendous potential for parks and open space to help keep our communities healthy, economically viable, and

protected from natural disasters. For example, easy access to outdoor recreation such as parks and trails has a dramatic positive impact on reducing obesity, depression, and high blood pressure for both children and adults. Living less than a mile from a park can increase the likelihood of a child having a normal body weight fivefold (McConnell and Walls 2005).

The presence of open space and parks can increase the value of homes up to 16% and open lots by 35%. In addition, the quality of life afforded by ample open space, parks, and trails attracts businesses and highly qualified workers, contributing to a vibrant local economy (McConnell and Walls 2005).

The Authority will partner with others to identify opportunities and funding for urban open space, trails, and agriculture.

As climate change results in increased instances of natural disasters such as storms, fires, and floods, open space lands can serve as buffers that protect built infrastructure,

homes and buildings. Natural lands also offer groundwater recharge and protection against flooding, which is especially relevant in the Bay Area – one of the most flood-prone areas in California.

Perhaps less tangible, but equally compelling, are social benefits offered by parks and open spaces. Outdoor public gathering places in our cities help foster interactions among various groups and serve to help communities in defining a shared sense of permanence and place, and creating pathways of connection to nature and our neighbors.

Representative Urban Open Space Projects

Martial Cottle Park – Santa Clara County Department of Parks and Recreation and California State Parks



Ron Horii

Martial Cottle encompasses 287 acres in South San Jose and celebrates the agricultural heritage of Santa Clara Valley through interpretive programs and exhibits. Additional amenities include trails, picnic areas, plus agriculture and community gardens. The Authority contributed \$450,000 to help fund the award-winning master plan and recreational improvements for this urban farm project.

Three Creeks Trail – City of San Jose

The Three Creeks Trail is a vital multi-use trail corridor in the City of San Jose’s urban trail system with east-west connections to regional trails. The trail offers enhanced options for non-motorized transportation and recreation within the urban core.



Liv Ames

The Open Space Authority contributed \$3.24 million towards the land purchase of the former Union Pacific right-of-way.

Ulistac Natural Area – City of Santa Clara



Liv Ames

This 40-acre reserve, originally a seasonal encampment for the Ohlone Indians and formerly a golf course, was restored as a refuge for native plants, birds, butterflies, and now is characterized by restored oak and grassland habitats. The Authority contributed \$458,000 towards development and restoration of the site near Guadalupe River. Today, Ulistac is the only large nature reserve in the City of Santa Clara and is a favorite recreational amenity for residents of nearby subdivisions and apartments.

Urban Open Space and Livable Communities for the 21st Century

In preparing the *Valley Greenprint*, the Authority reached out to many stakeholder groups to learn about their priorities for the Authority's Urban Open Space Program. What emerged was a strong passion for protecting and maintaining nature in our cities, along with an urgent need to make open space accessible to the entire community. Common areas of interest included projects that: (1) engage a span of age groups, from young children to seniors; (2) increase access for underserved communities; (3) provide opportunities for environmental education; (4) enhance partnerships and leverage funding; and (5) are located near public transportation.



The Authority's goal in strengthening its Urban Open Space Program is to contribute substantively to vibrant and livable communities in the Santa Clara Valley. A successful Urban Open Space Program will help redefine nature and open space in our communities as integral to our everyday lives – and ensure that the whole community has access to open space and its numerous health, social, and economic benefits. We expect this program will be integral in designing and building more sustainable communities for the future that are compact, climate-smart, and livable.

Moving forward, the Authority will engage the County, cities, and nonprofit organizations to identify opportunities to increase and leverage limited funding to enhance investments in urban open space, parks, trails, and urban-edge agriculture.

In urban areas, the Authority will partner with the cities, the County, and nonprofit organizations to complete open space projects that support vibrant, livable communities.

The Authority will work with these partners and the community to develop new guiding principles for its Urban Open Space Program and to identify and promote projects that include one or more of the following elements:

- Expand outreach and education and **engage the urban community** in creating neighborhood-based open space projects
- Achieve **multiple conservation goals**, for example, a streamside restoration project that integrates wildlife habitat protection and connectivity with water quality, groundwater recharge, and flood control benefits
- Result in **trails and greenways connecting communities** with nearby schools, parks, and open spaces, especially in or near underserved or transit-oriented communities
- Include **climate-smart and wildlife-friendly** elements such as urban forestry, tree planting, and other natural resource stewardship projects
- Expand **access to fresh foods** and open space through urban-edge agriculture, urban farms, and community gardens
- Engage both traditional and nontraditional partners to **collaborate** and generate new ideas and solutions for urban open spaces
- Provide **park and open space amenities** that are responsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse and aging population
- **Align with Plan Bay Area** and other regional plans that offer sustainable blueprints for the cities of the 21st century

Scenic Views

The Santa Clara Valley and surrounding mountain ranges provide residents and visitors with outstanding views of agriculture and nature. The Valley's farms and orchards, rolling grasslands and oak savannas, and dramatic ridges that rise abruptly from the Valley floor, give unique definition to the region and help establish its sense of place. The combination of compact urban areas surrounded by scenic rural areas supports a vibrant economy by attracting new residents, businesses, and tourists to this beautiful setting. Over the course of the *Valley Greenprint* planning process, residents cited the Valley's beautiful scenery as one of the most important contributions to their quality of life, and expressed strong support for open space protection to maintain iconic views and vistas.



Derek Neumann

The Valley's outstanding views attract residents, businesses, and tourists.

Figure 12 shows important scenic viewsheds – natural and agricultural landscapes that are highly visible from cities, major highways, and designated scenic roads. Examples of landscapes with especially prominent views include the East Berryessa Foothills, Coyote Ridge, Coyote Valley, and the rural areas surrounding Morgan Hill, including the dramatic El Toro Peak on the city's western edge. While some communities have established urban growth boundaries and policies that limit development above a certain elevation on hillsides, many incredibly scenic areas within the Authority's jurisdiction remain at risk of development.

The Open Space Authority will continue to protect the prominent hills and ridges that ring the Santa Clara Valley and serve as a scenic backdrop for local communities, the undeveloped farms and ranches that separate cities and help maintain their unique sense of place, and other areas with unique or especially prominent natural features. In partnership with communities, the Authority will support efforts by the County and cities to promote effective land use planning and strong hillside protection measures. Protecting scenic greenbelts between cities provides opportunities for local agriculture and recreation, and is an effective means to achieve compact and efficient growth. In this way, the Authority can help the region meet the environmental objectives outlined in *Plan Bay Area* (see sidebar).

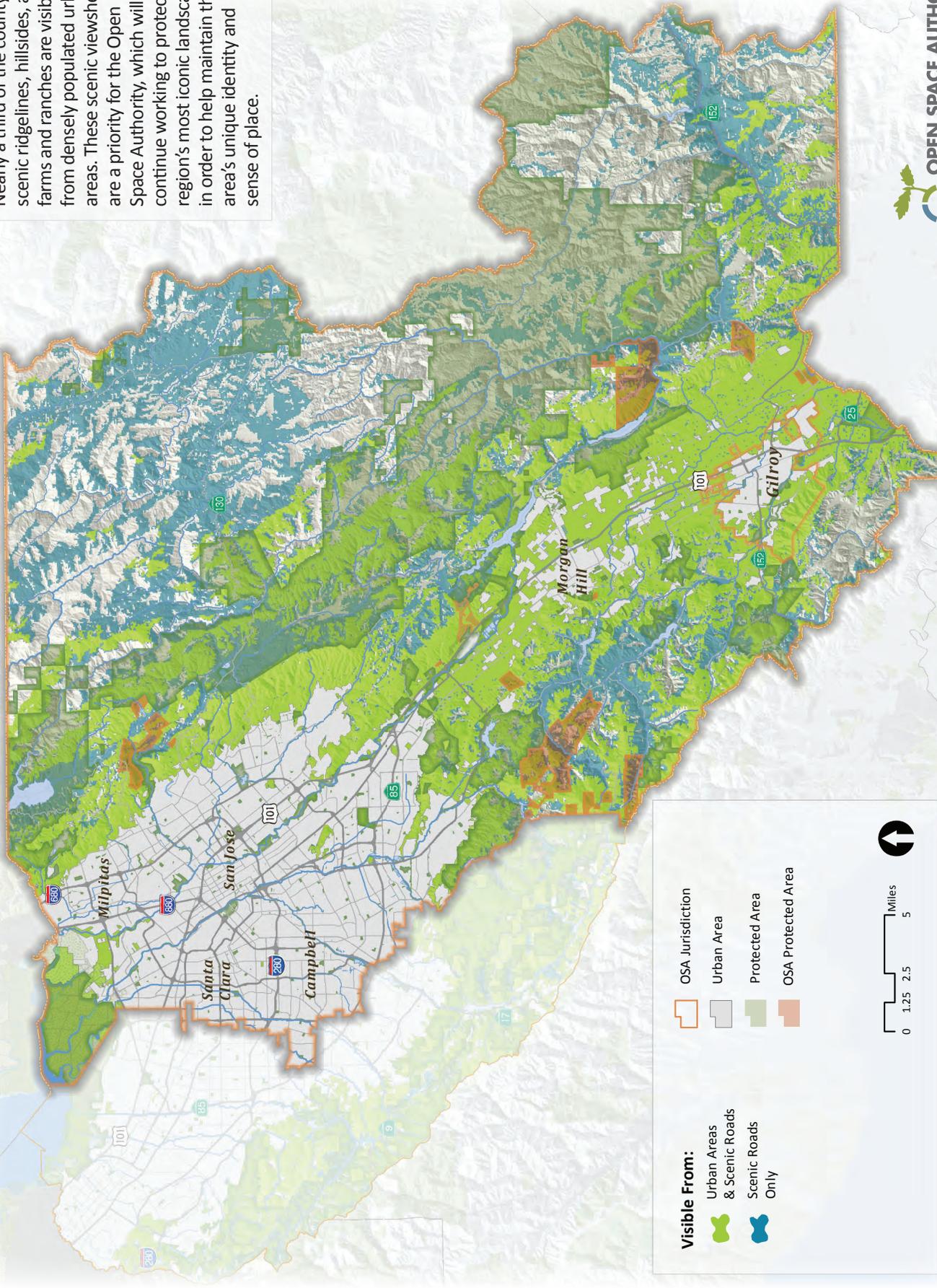
Plan Bay Area

Plan Bay Area aims to curb greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the impacts of climate change by concentrating new growth into existing urban areas close to transit, housing, and services. Adopted by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in 2013, the plan outlines an integrated transportation and land-use strategy for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Implementation by cities is voluntary and offers substantial financial incentives.

Plan Bay Area also emphasizes protection of the region's most significant open space, agricultural, scenic, and natural resource areas. It identifies more than 100 Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) across the Bay Area, including several important landscapes within the Authority's jurisdiction. The Authority will work to protect key habitats, viewsheds, and agricultural lands within PCAs – especially those that are located near cities where open space and greenbelt protection will result in compact, efficient, and climate-smart communities.

Figure 12: Scenic Viewsheds

Nearly a third of the county's scenic ridgelines, hillsides, and farms and ranches are visible from densely populated urban areas. These scenic viewsheds are a priority for the Open Space Authority, which will continue working to protect the region's most iconic landscapes in order to help maintain the area's unique identity and sense of place.



Data sources: FMIMP 2010, SCC Scenic Roads, USGS 90m DEM, CLN Rural Residential, CPAD 2013, SCC Parklands Database, the Open Space Authority.

Environmental Education and Outreach Programs

Parks and open space preserves provide unique learning environments where outdoor education and interpretive activities can help foster hands-on learning and help build support for conservation. Enhancing enjoyment and appreciation of open space through environmental education, interpretation, and outreach is a core part of the Authority's mission. Authority staff and volunteers reach thousands of area residents at events, fairs,

and through science-based schools programs throughout the region, sharing information about open space, native plants and animals, and the opportunities available for the public to connect to and enjoy open space.

With trained staff and volunteers, the Authority is uniquely positioned to expand its role in environmental education on its own lands as well as on others'. The Authority will continue to offer docent-led interpretive hikes for people of all ages, using its landholdings as classrooms where the public can enjoy a scenic hike while learning about local ecology and experiencing natural resources first-hand.

Authority staff will continue to develop educational programming and train volunteers to enrich nature-based recreational experiences, and will work with schools to involve students with the natural environment both in classrooms and on Authority preserves. The Authority will also explore partnerships with the health and agricultural communities to promote healthy lifestyles and access to healthy food. As a member of *Healthy Parks Healthy People Bay Area*, a collective of parks and health

organizations aimed at improving the health of Bay Area residents by promoting regular use and enjoyment of parks, the Authority will continue to organize easy, docent-led hikes that provide a way for people to get started with outdoor exercise.



Teri Rogoway

Staff and volunteers from the Open Space Authority connect with thousands of residents each year at events, fairs, and science-based school programs.



Patty Eaton

By collaborating on acquisition and management of connected and accessible open space lands and trails, the Open Space Authority can expand access to nature and promote healthy lifestyles.

Strategies for Promoting Recreation, Education, and Public Health

1. Promote healthy lifestyles through education, outreach, and improved access to parks, open spaces, trails, and local farms.

- a. Work with the County Planning Department and other partners to improve community health consistent with the Santa Clara County Health Element, including support for:
 - Physical activity
 - Parks and open spaces accessible via walking and transit
 - Access to fresh and locally grown foods
- b. Seek partnerships with the County Public Health Department, the Health Trust, and other local health providers to promote access to open space and natural areas for physical and mental health.
- c. Provide urban open space amenities to promote community health and quality of life.
- d. Promote the creation of community gardens and urban agriculture as a means to increase knowledge of and access to fresh and healthy food, build community, and provide opportunities for physical activity.
- e. Maintain Authority preserves and recreational facilities to a high standard to provide visitors with a safe and enjoyable experience and to encourage increased use.
- f. Work with regional and state funding sources linked to SB 375 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve regional air quality goals.



Kathy Switky

Community gardens can increase access to fresh, healthy food.

2. Work with partners to identify, prioritize, and fund the acquisition and management of connected and accessible open space lands and trails.

- a. Develop and implement funding strategies for land acquisition and management in coordination with conservation partners.
- b. Promote use of transit to access parks, open space, and trails, such as through the Bay Area Open Space Council's Transit & Trails program.
- c. Develop and expand the Authority's Urban Open Space Program to implement projects that connect urban residents to local trails and open spaces.
- d. Prioritize local trail projects that link to transit-oriented development or close gaps in established trail networks.
- e. Partner with the County and cities in their efforts to build out their network of planned parks and trail systems.

3. Provide and support a diverse range of resource-based educational programs.

- a. Work with schools and youth organizations to develop recreational and interpretive programs that expand young peoples' understanding of nature, conservation, and the effects of a changing climate.
- b. Identify opportunities for unique recreational amenities or experiences (such as backcountry camping) on Authority preserves. Work with local historians and archaeologists to identify cultural resources that can be included in educational and interpretive programs.
- c. Secure funding to develop a nature facility in partnership with other organizations.
- d. Develop educational materials to be available online and at preserve entrances describing the variety of conservation values and ecosystem services provided by the Authority's wildlands and natural areas, including native species and habitats, climate change, connectivity, clean drinking water, crop pollination, flood control, and carbon sequestration.

- e. Provide ongoing training to Authority volunteers and docents about critical environmental issues relevant to interpretive programs.
- f. Explore opportunities to expand the Authority’s iNaturalist program using smartphone technology to foster citizen science on Authority preserves; promote research projects at all educational levels on Authority properties.
- g. Explore partnerships and funding opportunities with schools and local universities to increase environmental education programs and facilitate science-based education and research projects on Authority properties, including partnerships with the Youth Science Institute, Camp Galileo, and other programs.

4. Expand outreach and education programs about the value of open space and natural resources.

- a. Collaborate with the private sector to build an understanding of the critical role open space plays in ensuring that Santa Clara County remains a welcoming place to live and do business.
- b. Develop strategies for expanding the role of volunteers in educational and land stewardship programs.
- c. Reach out to diverse populations to enhance awareness of open space resources and promote their use and enjoyment.
- d. Continue participation in community events to promote awareness of local native species and habitats.
- e. Provide workshops and visits to Open Space Authority properties for public officials, policymakers, and other leaders to support informed decisions regarding funding and policies that affect open space protection and natural resource stewardship in Santa Clara County.
- f. Support regional and state efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet regional air quality goals.
- g. Develop partnerships to support healthy, active living for all populations within the Authority’s jurisdiction.



Stephen Joseph

Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve includes trails open to hikers, bikers and equestrians, including a section of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.