

### Introduction

Natural features and resources have shaped both the growth and form of San Rafael and provide many of the attractive characteristics of the area. San Rafael has a significant diversity of natural features and assets that are important to preserve through land use planning. Those important resources include bay lands and water, canal frontage, streams, a ridgeline edge for the community, clean air and valuable wildlife habitat. A central concern of the General Plan, therefore, in considering the location, design, intensity and type of land uses in the City, is to continue to protect natural resource areas.

In 1972, voters approved a tax levy and the formation of the Marin County Open Space District to acquire and maintain open space, park and recreational lands. In that same year there was also a San Rafael voter-approved bond measure, where individual neighborhoods passed bonds to purchase open space in the area. With these events taking place, emphasis was given to the importance of purchasing open space for the community. Since then tremendous progress has been made in securing and protecting open space throughout the County. San Rafael has largely met its initial objectives by securing 3,285 acres of open space within the City limits and almost 7,300 acres in the Planning Area. The Marin County Open Space District has also secured considerable land in San Rafael's Planning Area. One-quarter of the land in San Rafael's Planning Area is secured open space.



Oak trees and grasslands are valuable open space habitat.

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## GOAL 32: PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

**It is the goal of San Rafael to preserve and protect open space and the natural environment for all to enjoy.** *Preservation of open space and the natural environment have been a priority for San Rafael residents for many years. Whenever possible, the natural terrain and vegetation of the community should be preserved and maintained.*

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### OS-1. Open Space Preservation.

Preserve, through a variety of methods, the open space areas identified in the Inventory of Potential Open Space Sites (See Appendix I). Retain and protect open space areas that serve as delineators between neighborhoods and between adjacent communities, as wildlife habitat, and as visual assets for the community. Open space areas can also function as connections between neighborhoods, for example with the creation of pathways in environmentally appropriate areas.

**OS-1a. Open Space Inventory.** Update the Inventory of Potential Open Space Sites. Identify and prioritize open space parcels for future protection. Maximize the use of available resources when assessing City involvement in securing open space by applying the following non-prioritized evaluation criteria:

- a. Environmental health and safety issues (specifically geology and hydrology), and potential geoseismic hazards.
- b. Resource Areas and Aesthetics (visual backdrop or edge, unique site features, shorelines/ridgelines, wetlands, wildlife habitat including wildlife movement corridors and habitat for endangered species).
- c. Importance to the community as a whole or adjoining neighborhoods.
- d. Merits of alternative uses.
- e. Proximity to other open space areas.
- f. Recreation potential.
- g. Accessibility.
- h. Availability of outside financial assistance.
- i. Potential maintenance and management costs and liability exposure for the City.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time, Grants

**OS-1b. Preservation Opportunities.** Through the development review process, preserve open space areas identified on the Open Space Inventory. Encourage the dedication of open space areas that are adjacent to public open space. Possibilities also include acquisition of fee title or acquiring easements for preserving open space. When potential open space is not contiguous to existing public open space, the preference is to retain the open space in private ownership. When portions of a site are retained as private open space, ensure the preservation and management of that open space through appropriate means, including required maintenance, as determined through development review. Work with other public and non-profit agencies to identify sources for acquisition and maintenance of open space.

Responsibility: Community Development, Public Works, City Manager

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees, Grants, Donations, Bonds

**OS-1c. Cluster Development.** As part of the development review process, encourage the clustering of development to preserve desired open space.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees



## OS-2. Open Space Management.

Maintain and manage City Open Space lands. Designate appropriate uses to specific sites. Determine maintenance needs to address uses and the preservation of natural amenities. Address illegal camping and campfires, disease control, erosion control, urban/wildlife interface, recreation and other activities harmful to open space environment, as well as vegetation management and wildlife habitat protection issues.

**OS-2a. Open Space Management Plan(s).** Establish a committee with representatives from neighborhood associations, environmental organizations, user groups and other stakeholders to prepare an Open Space Management Plan(s). The plan should address use and ongoing maintenance of open space areas. The management plan should address appropriate access points, parking areas, public information signage, trail extensions, restoration of erosion and other degraded areas, and guidelines for the location of amenities such as picnic tables and benches. Amend zoning provisions as needed. Funding options should be explored and identified for open space management such as open space maintenance assessment districts, agreements with other public agencies for maintenance, neighborhood "adoption," volunteer programs, private funding and other means.

Responsibility: Public Works, Police Department, Fire Department, Community Services, Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time, Grants, Volunteers, Donations

**OS-2b. Removal of Invasive Species.** Use volunteer and other types of work crews to remove selected invasive vegetation from open space areas.

Responsibility: Public Works

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Staff Time, Volunteers

**OS-2c. Diseased Vegetation.** Work with County and regional experts in finding solutions for the prevention and disposal of diseased vegetation, such as vegetation affected by Sudden Oak Death Syndrome.

Responsibility: Public Works

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: General Fund

**OS-2d. Illegal Encampments.** Continue to work with private and public property owners to identify and remove illegal encampments in open space areas.

Responsibility: Police, Fire, Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

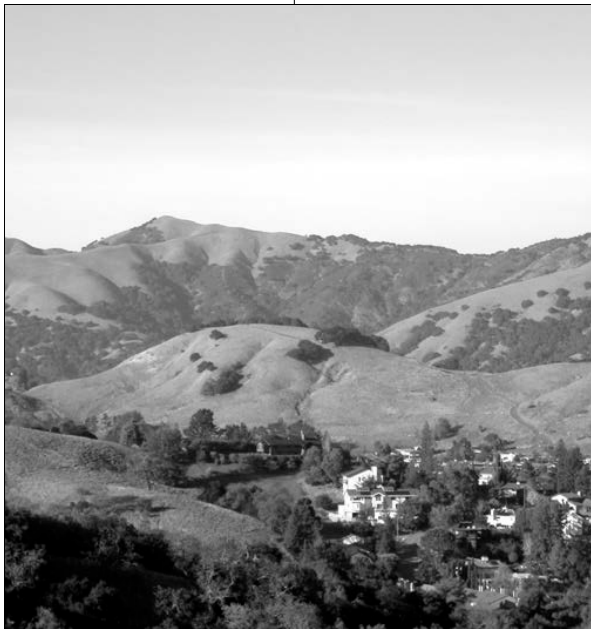
Resources: Staff Time, Fines

See CON-15a (Invasive Plant Ordinance), CON-15b (Removal of Invasive Species on Public Property).

## OS-3. Open Space Use.

Protect and preserve the natural value of open space and wildlife habitat areas while permitting educational and recreational uses compatible with these resources. Specific use objectives include:

- a. Open space areas should be maintained in a natural state.
- b. Open space areas are a community resource for use and enjoyment by the residents of San Rafael.
- c. Uses of open space areas shall be secondary to open space preservation, and limited to those uses with a minimal impact on the environment.



San Rafael hillsides were purchased in the 1970s and preserved as open space for perpetuity.

**OS-3a. Management of Private Open Space.** In designating open space as part of a development project or with the dedication of land for open space, identify limitations to uses in those areas, such as restrictions on ornamental landscaping, structures and fences.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees

See OS-2a (Open Space Management Plans).

#### OS-4. Access to Open Space.

Encourage provision of access to open space areas in the design of adjacent development. Secure access paths shown on Exhibit 34 as part of subdivision approvals and design access paths to avoid or minimize neighborhood and user conflicts with sensitive wildlife habitat areas.

**OS-4a. Access Points.** Through the development review process, identify access points and parking areas to be retained and required improvements.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees

#### OS-5. Coordination with Other Jurisdictions.

Coordinate San Rafael's open space system with adjacent cities, Marin County, the State, and regional and private open space systems.

**OS-5a. Coordination with Other Jurisdictions.** Continue to work with public agencies managing open space within the San Rafael Planning Area to ensure a coordinated system.

Responsibility: City Manager, Public Works

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Staff Time

#### OS-6. Utilities in Open Space.

Discourage utilities in open space areas. Necessary utilities in open space should be located and designed to minimize harm to the area's environmental and visual quality.

**OS-6a. Utilities in Open Space.** Use zoning ordinance provisions and the design and environmental review processes to evaluate the location and design of public utilities.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees

#### OS-7. Public Education.

Provide education programs to residents about wildlife, fire hazard, watershed protection and open space habitat.

**OS-7a. Public Education.** Continue outreach and public education. Examples include the dissemination of educational materials and programs related to wildland fire prevention, feral cats, and Marin County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (MCSTOPPP) requirements.

Responsibility: Fire, Public Works

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Staff Time, Grants

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