

# 7 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

## Introduction

Parks and open space are essential to the quality of life in San Rafael. Open space defines neighborhood edges, provides a necessary complement to the built environment, and adds beauty to the city. It provides vital recreational amenities and sustains plant and animal life. It is intrinsically valuable for mental health and contributes to the spiritual wellness of the city's residents. Open space is celebrated as one of San Rafael's greatest assets and is a visible reminder of the efforts of multiple generations to conserve and protect the environment.

Open space also supports a multi-layered park system comprised of City, County, and State facilities. These facilities range from playgrounds, ballfields, and community centers to hiking trails, beaches, and historic sites. The City's parks accommodate recreational programs that help create a sense of community, enabling residents to learn, stay healthy, have fun, connect, and fulfill their creative potential.

Public open space is the single largest land use in San Rafael, representing nearly 40 percent of the City's land area. As noted in Chapter 6 (Conservation and Climate Change), these areas support biological resources, sequester carbon, and help the City maintain its air and water quality. And as noted in Chapter 8 (Safety and Resilience Element), most of the City's open space is susceptible to wildfire and can contribute to natural hazards when not properly maintained. The General Plan provides a starting point for open space policy, but more detailed management prescriptions are needed for individual properties and the specific activities that open space supports. An important function of this Element is to outline future steps that must be taken to ensure that our open spaces remain essential assets and do not become liabilities.

The 2020 global pandemic highlighted the importance of parks as places to play or exercise, and space to safely gather. Parks became our collective backyard, particularly for residents living in multi-family housing. While the pandemic reinforced the essential nature of parks, it also made it evident that parks are not evenly distributed, and that needs are greater in lower income neighborhoods.

Interagency coordination is a critical part of park and open space management in San Rafael. As noted above, the City is one of several service providers. Others include the County of Marin/Marin Open Space District, the State of California, the Marinwood Community Service District, San Rafael City Schools, and the Miller Creek School District. Public park services are further supplemented by private facilities such as swim and racquet clubs, the YMCA and Osher JCC, private golf courses, and community-run pools and play areas. Long-range planning for parks and open spaces must recognize the relationship between different open space stewards, and the role that each property plays in the overall network.

## Legal Foundation for the Open Space Element

State law requires local general plans to recognize four types of open space:

- **Open Space for Recreation.** This category includes the local park system, as well as school athletic facilities, golf courses, and other outdoor spaces that are primarily used for recreation. This is covered by Goal PROS-1, while programming of these facilities is covered by Goal PROS-2.
- **Open Space for the Protection of Natural Resources.** This is the primary focus of the Conservation and Climate Change Element (Chapter 6), although Goal PROS-3 addresses the connection between open space and natural areas such as wetlands and hillsides.
- **Open Space for the Managed Production of Resources.** This acknowledges the role of open space in food production, as well as timber and mineral extraction. Policies for urban agriculture and community gardening are included in the General Plan.
- **Open Space for Public Health and Safety.** This includes areas where urban uses could create a potential hazard due to the potential for fire, landslides, flooding, and other natural hazards. Many of these areas are retained as open space to mitigate the potential for loss of life and property. This is addressed in Goal PROS-3, and throughout Chapter 8 (Safety and Resilience Element).



## Park Classification

The 2040 General Plan introduces a classification system for San Rafael's parks. The intent of this system is to ensure the efficient and equitable allocation of resources and guide long-range planning decisions. The classifications are based on categories used by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and are as follows:

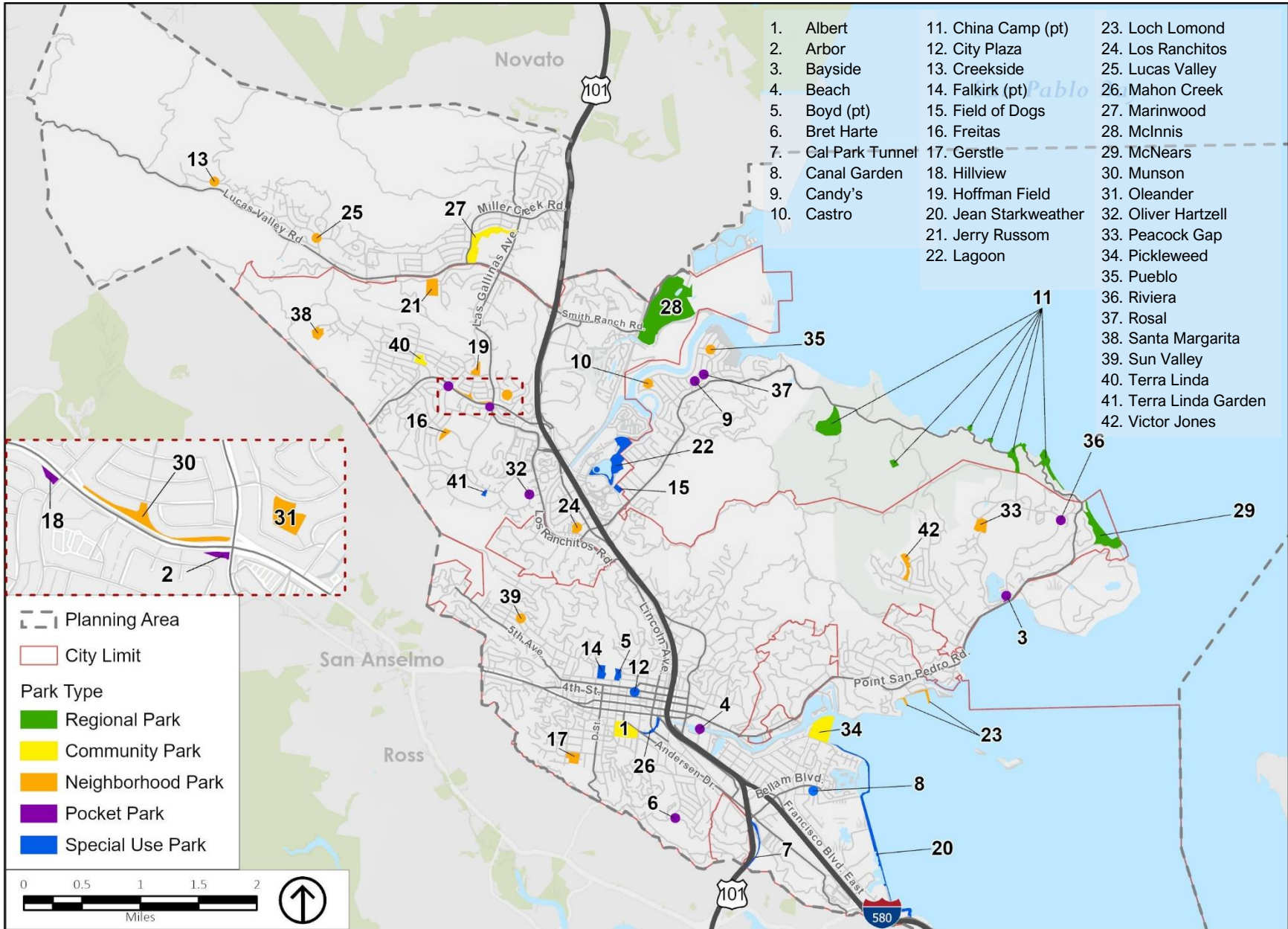
- **Region-Serving Parks** draw visitors from throughout Marin County and the Bay Area. There are three region-serving parks in San Rafael: McInnis Park and Golf Center (County of Marin), McNear's Beach (County of Marin), and China Camp State Park (State of California). Most of the acreage in these parks is unimproved open space but each park also includes active recreational areas and amenities that serve a regional market.
- **Community Parks** primarily serve residents from San Rafael and attract users from multiple neighborhoods. They are typically 10 acres or larger and include a variety of facilities such as recreation centers, swimming pools, tennis courts, restrooms, and multi-use athletic fields. There are three community parks in the city limits (Albert Park, Pickleweed Park, and Terra Linda Recreation Area) and one in the unincorporated area (Marinwood Park). For analysis purposes, the service area radius for a community park is approximately one mile and the service area population is 10,000 to 20,000 residents.<sup>1</sup>
- **Neighborhood Parks** serve a more limited geographic area than community parks. They are within walking distance of many users, with a service area radius of one-half mile and a service area population of 2,000 to 5,000 residents. Neighborhood parks are typically between one and ten acres in size and include a range of facilities such as softball fields, playgrounds and tot lots, lawn areas, picnic areas, and basketball courts. Examples include Santa Margarita Park and Sun Valley Park.
- **Pocket Parks** are less than an acre in size and draw from a smaller service area than neighborhood parks, such as a quarter-mile radius. Facilities in these parks are usually limited to children's play structures, lawn areas, and places to sit or enjoy nature. Examples include Riviera Park in Peacock Gap and Oliver Hartzel Park on Golden Hinde Boulevard. A few pocket parks have no facilities and were designed as landscaped open spaces along major roads.
- **Special Use Parks** include parks that serve a unique purpose or activity. These include shoreline trails (such as Starkweather Park along the Bay), the "Field of Dogs" County Dog Park, and the historic homes at Boyd Park and the Falkirk Mansion. These parks play an important role in meeting community-wide cultural and recreational needs or showcasing special community features.

In addition to the categories listed above, **public schools** include open spaces that are owned and operated by San Rafael City Schools and the Miller Creek School District. Although there are limitations on access, the school campuses satisfy a portion of the City's recreational needs by providing additional sports fields, hard court areas, playgrounds, and other facilities.

Figure 7-1 shows the City's park system, exclusive of open space lands, which are mapped on Figure 7-2 later in this chapter. Although undeveloped open space (sometimes called "passive open space") supports important recreational activities, the metrics for evaluating service levels and gaps are based on improved open space (e.g., "active open space"). Typical improvements in City parks include sports fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, tennis courts, running tracks, recreation centers, restrooms, lawns, gardens, swimming pools, and basketball courts.

<sup>1</sup> Terra Linda Recreation Area is counted as a Community Park because it includes a recreation center, swimming pool, and other community-serving facilities, and because of its long-standing role as a community gathering place for North San Rafael. However, at 2.9 acres, the park falls short of the acreage requirement for a Community Park.





**Figure 7-1:  
San Rafael Parks**

Table 7-1 shows the parks in each category, including their acreage (exclusive of unimproved open space). The table is organized to show parks within the City limits in the first three columns and parks in the unincorporated area in the next columns. Table 7-2 shows school facilities, with the acreage reflecting only the portion of each campus dedicated to recreation and sports activities. Table 7-3, which appears later in this Element (see P. 7-20) shows the additional acreage associated with unimproved open space.

**Table 7-1: San Rafael Improved Parkland Acreage Totals (\*)**

City of San Rafael			Unincorporated Planning Area		
Park Type/Name	Operator	Acres	Park Type/Name	Operator	Acres
<b>Region-Serving Parks</b>					
McInnis Park (part)	County	72.50	China Camp (part)	State	30.00
McNears Beach	County	19.00			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>91.50</b>			<b>30.00</b>
<b>Community Parks</b>					
Albert	City	13.34	Marinwood	Marinwood CSD	14.12
Pickleweed	City	17.60			
Terra Linda	City	2.87			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>33.81</b>			<b>14.12</b>
<b>Neighborhood Parks</b>					
Freitas	City	2.69	Castro	County CSA 18	1.48
Gerstle	City	6.00	Creekside	Marinwood CSD	1.22
Hoffman Field	City	3.80	Lucas Valley	Lucas Valley HOA	1.52
Jerry Russom Memorial	City	7.00	Pueblo	County CSA 18	1.07
Loch Lomond	City	3.00			
Los Ranchitos	City	3.00			
Munson	City	1.46			
Oleander	City	2.28			
Peacock Gap	City	4.14			
Santa Margarita	City	5.00			
Sun Valley	City	2.20			
Victor Jones	City	5.96			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>46.53</b>			<b>5.29</b>
<b>Pocket Parks</b>					
Arbor	City	0.30	Bayside	County	.72
Beach	City	0.44	Candy's	County CSA 18	.14
Bret Harte	City	0.46	Rosal	County CSA 18	.74
Hillview	City	0.26			
Oliver Hartzell	City	0.54			
Riviera	City	0.27			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2.27</b>			<b>1.60</b>

Table 7-1, continued

City of San Rafael			Unincorporated Planning Area		
Park Type/Name	Operator	Acres	Park Type/Name	Operator	Acres
<b>Special Use Parks</b>					
Boyd (part)	City	1.75	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cal Park Pathway	County	0			
Canal Community Garden	San Rafael Sanit. District	0.35			
City Plaza	City	0.32			
Falkirk (part)	City	3.60			
Field of Dogs	County	0.71			
Lagoon	County	10.00			
Mahon Creek Pathway	City	2.54			
Jean Starkweather	City	21.30			
Terra Linda Community Garden	City	1.0			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>41.57</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>215.68</b>			<b>51.01</b>

(\*) Table excludes unimproved open space

Source: City of San Rafael, 2020

Table 7-2: Improved Open Space on Public School Properties

City of San Rafael			Unincorporated Planning Area		
School	Operator	Acres	School	Operator	Acres
Bahia Vista	SR City Schools	1.62	Gallinas Children's Ctr	Miller Creek SD	1.94
Coleman	SR City Schools	0.93	Lucas Valley	Miller Creek SD	3.57
Davidson	SR City Schools	7.20	Mary Silveira	Miller Creek SD	3.83
Miller Creek District Offices	Miller Creek SD	3.85	Miller Creek Middle	Miller Creek SD	4.41
Glenwood	SR City Schools	4.26	Venetia Valley	Miller Creek SD	3.10
Laurel Dell	SR City Schools	0.37	Waldorf	Miller Creek SD	3.65
Mark Day	Miller Creek SD	3.82			
San Pedro	SR City Schools	1.88			
San Rafael High	SR City Schools	15.92			
Short	SR City Schools	0.32			
Sun Valley	SR City Schools	1.46			
Terra Linda High	SR City Schools	16.6			
Vallecito	Miller Creek SD	15.9			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>74.13</b>			<b>20.50</b>

Source: City of San Rafael, 2020





## Service Area Standards and Gaps

One measure of the adequacy of a city's park system is the number of acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Many California cities have adopted a standard of 3 to 5 acres of improved open space per 1,000 residents. School open space may be included in this standard, but it is typically "discounted" to reflect the fact that it is not available for public use when school is in session.

Based on Tables 7-1 and 7-2, and counting school open space at only 50 percent, there are approximately 314 acres of improved parkland in the San Rafael Planning Area. This acreage serves 73,300 residents, meaning there are currently 4.28 acres per 1,000 residents. General Plan 2040 proposes a standard of 4 acres per 1,000 residents moving forward. The Quimby Act (see P 7-12) allows the City to require parkland dedication in new residential subdivisions at this ratio, or to pay an equivalent ("in-lieu") fee in order to maintain this standard as the city grows. The addition of roughly 10,000 residents, as anticipated by General Plan 2040, would require another 40 acres of improved parkland.

The per capita standard is one of several metrics used for park planning. Another relates to the distance a resident has to travel to reach their nearest park. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has calculated that 81 percent of San Rafael residents have a park within 10 minutes of their home—19 percent do not. Areas that do not meet the 10-minute standard include Montecito and Dominican, the West End and Fairhills neighborhoods, Lincoln/San Rafael Hill, Contempo/ Deer Park, and the Northbridge/Marin Lagoon area.

Even if acreage and proximity standards are met, parks may not completely meet local needs. The physical condition and range of facilities in each park varies greatly—and some parts of the city have much higher needs than others. For example, the Canal neighborhood consists almost entirely of multi-family housing without backyards. Many residents are young children, there are few places to play, and families may lack the resources to pay for private recreation. While Pickleweed Park is large and a short walk away for many families, it is usually crowded with visitors. There is a need for additional neighborhood open space in the Canal, as well as a need for maintenance and replacement of well-used and well-worn facilities. As San Rafael evaluates its park needs, it should consider new ways of determining where shortfalls may exist, as well as new solutions for closing the gaps.

### **Goal PROS-1: Quality Parks for All to Enjoy**

Sustain high quality parks that meet the recreational needs of all those who live and work in San Rafael.

*San Rafael recognizes the essential nature of parks and recreation to its residents. Parks support health and wellness, protect the environment, add beauty to San Rafael neighborhoods, and are integral to life in the city. They should be maintained for all to enjoy.*

The City of San Rafael faces the challenge of adapting and improving its parks to meet the changing needs and priorities of the community. Well-planned, maintained parks can transform neighborhoods and provide positive experiences for children and families. But these outcomes require action, and new approaches to funding, operating, and programming.

One of the most important recommendations of this Element is to adopt a Parks Master Plan. San Rafael has never had one, and as a result lacks a strategic framework for long-term decisions around acquisition, land management, facilities, programs, maintenance, and financing. The Master Plan will also provide an opportunity for San Rafael residents from all parts of the City to articulate their needs and aspirations for the park system. It will also provide a platform for collaboration with other service providers and stewards, and partnerships with the private and non-profit sectors to fill unmet needs in the city.

#### **Policy PROS-1.1: Park Classification**

Maintain a system of community, neighborhood, pocket, and special use parks (see Page 7-3). These parks should be complemented by larger region-serving parks and open spaces, and by school recreation areas.

**Program PROS-1.1A: Parks and Recreation Master Plan.** *Prepare a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, including citywide recommendations for park management, operations, facility development, potential acquisition, and recreation service delivery, as well as recommendations for each City-owned park.*

**Program PROS 1.1B: Capital Improvement Program.** *Use the Capital Improvement Program to identify funding sources and timing of parks and recreation capital projects.*

*See also Program PROS-3.3A on an Open Space Management Plan*

#### **Policy PROS-1.2: Per Capita Acreage Standard**

Maintain a citywide standard of 4.0 acres of improved park and recreation land per 1,000 residents.

**Program PROS-1.2A: Municipal Code Amendment.** *Modify Chapter 15.09 of the Municipal Code to establish a general standard of 4.0 acres of improved parkland per 1,000. Adjust the formulas for dedication of land to reflect this standard.*

**Program PROS-1.2B: Park In Lieu Fees.** *Periodically adjust park in-lieu fees to reflect the prevailing costs of land and facilities. Any increases to existing fees should be developed through a public process in which potential cost impacts on development feasibility are disclosed and measures to offset impacts on housing costs are considered.*



**Program PROS-1.2C: Exemptions.** *To reduce further increases in housing costs, exempt accessory dwelling units and affordable housing units from park in-lieu and dedication requirements. Consider eliminating the existing exemption for market-rate rental housing or adopting a modified fee schedule which considers factors such as unit size and total project size.*

**Policy PROS 1.3: Distribution of Parks**

Strive for a balanced distribution of neighborhood and community parks across the city. When planning new parks, prioritize areas that lack existing parkland or outdoor space, and have higher needs due to higher housing densities and social and economic conditions.

**Program PROS-1.3A: New Parks.** *Develop additional parks and playgrounds in areas with unmet needs and in areas experiencing growth. Opportunities to create new parks within new development and on underutilized public land should be pursued.*

**Program PROS-1.3B: Parks on Former School Sites.** *Work with San Rafael City Schools and the Miller Creek School District to identify ways to acquire on-site recreational facilities in the event that school properties are closed, leased, or offered for sale. (see also Policy LU-1.16 on school site reuse)*

**Program PROS-1.3C: Adaptation Projects.** *Incorporate shoreline access and new recreational amenities in sea level rise adaptation and flood risk reduction projects where feasible.*

**Policy PROS 1.4 Park Design**

Design parks so that they are comfortable, attractive, inviting, and easily maintained. Park design should balance recreation, environmental, safety, and aesthetic considerations while avoiding conflicts with surrounding neighborhoods.

**Program PROS 1.4A: Park Plan Review.** *Work with qualified landscape architects, the Design Review Board, the Park and Recreation Commission, and the Planning Commission when preparing and reviewing park master plans and designing park improvements.*

**Program PROS 1.4B: Community Engagement.** *Engage the community in park planning and facility development, including all groups and individuals who would be affected by such improvements.*



Photo Credit: San Rafael Girls Softball, 2017

**Naylor Act**

The Naylor Act allows other agencies of government (defined in Education Code Section 17489) to acquire surplus school grounds and keep them available for playground, playing field or other outdoor recreational and open space purposes. Pursuant to the Act, the City can acquire up to 30% of the surplus property for 25% of its fair market value. Bernard Hoffman Park in North San Rafael was acquired by the City through Naylor Act provisions. In 2014, the Act was amended to allow School Districts to also sell the sites to charter schools and other government agencies. Appendix G includes a list of local Naylor Act priorities.

**Policy PROS-1.5: Park Image and Identity**

Create a positive image of the City’s park and open space system.

***Program PROS-1.5A: Branding and Signage.** Develop and implement consistent branding, wayfinding, and interpretive signage for San Rafael’s parks that identify park and open space properties and help the public locate, navigate, and understand them. Park signage should be attractive, durable, and contribute to civic pride and identity.*

**Policy PROS-1.6: Park Improvements**

Regularly upgrade and modernize San Rafael’s parks to meet the recreational needs of the community and replace aging or deficient facilities.

***Program PROS-1.6A: Needs Assessment.** Conduct a needs assessment as part of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Recreational facility needs should be periodically reevaluated in response to trends, demographics, and changing conditions.*

***Program PROS-1.6B Park Improvements.** As part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, prepare plans to improve neighborhood and community park facilities. Seek funding to implement these plans.*

**Policy PROS-1.7: Athletic Field Design**

Encourage athletic field design which maximizes versatility, cost-efficiency, and the ability to use fields year-round.

***Program PROS-1.7A: Field Improvements.** Evaluate local athletic fields as part of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Develop design and capital facility recommendations for athletic fields based on the findings.*

Photo Credit: Frank Johnson



**Policy PROS-1.8: Linear Parks and Trails**

Encourage linear parks and trails along the Bay shoreline, the San Rafael Canal, local creeks, and transportation corridors such as the SMART right-of-way. Where feasible, spur trails should connect linear parks to nearby neighborhoods, parks, and open spaces.

*See Action PROS-3.8A on a Trails Master Plan*

**Policy PROS-1.9: Role of Open Space**

Recognize San Rafael's open space network as an essential component of the park system, including its potential to provide for hiking, picnicking, wildlife observation, environmental education, and enjoyment of nature. Passive recreational activities such as hiking, birdwatching, and picnicking, should be encouraged in these areas where consistent with habitat protection and hazard reduction goals.

*See Action PROS-3.3A on an Open Space Management Plan and Action PROS-3.7 on coordinated open space planning.*

**Policy PROS-1.10: Historic Preservation and Parks**

Incorporate historic and cultural resources into the City park system, including publicly-owned historic homes and the grounds around them. Where public operation of such properties is infeasible, encourage their management, operation, and programming by non-profit organizations.

**Policy PROS-1.11: Urban Parks and Plazas**

Encourage the creation of small gathering places open to the public in Downtown San Rafael and other business districts, including plazas, green spaces, activated alleys, and similar features.

**Program PROS-1.11A: Design for All Users.** *Engage park users, businesses, residents, and social service providers in the design and management of urban parks to safely accommodate all users, provide universal access, and minimize conflicts.*

**Program PROS-1.11B: Activating Public Space.** *Work with cafes, restaurants, and other businesses to activate and maintain urban parks and plazas. This can provide 'eyes on the space,' create a sense of ownership, and facilitate economic vitality by providing space for outdoor dining and vending.*

**Policy PROS-1.12: Joint Use**

Encourage formal agreements with the School Districts that allow for the joint development, maintenance and use of school facilities for recreational use when schools are not in session. Agreements should also address access to school parking lots for sporting events and other measures to minimize the impacts of joint use on nearby neighborhoods.

**Program PROS-1.12A: Joint Use Agreements.** *Work with San Rafael City Schools and the Miller Creek School District to formalize joint use agreements for parks, playgrounds, sports fields, and other school facilities.*

*See also Program CSI-1.2A on joint use agreements*





### Quimby Act

Section 66477 of the California Government Code provides local jurisdictions with the authority to acquire parkland in association with new residential subdivisions. Commonly referred to as the Quimby Act, this provision allows a city, by ordinance, to require the dedication of land, payment of an in-lieu fee, or combination of both, for park and recreational purposes as a condition of approval. Funds may also be used to rehabilitate existing park facilities.

### Policy PROS-1.13: Recreational Facilities in Development Projects

Encourage, and where appropriate require, the construction of on-site recreational facilities in multi-family, mixed use, and office projects to supplement the facilities available in City parks.

**Program PROS-1.13A: Onsite Recreation Facilities.** Continue to implement zoning regulations that require appropriate recreational facilities for residents in new development.

**Program PROS-1.13B: Rooftop Open Space.** Encourage the development of rooftop open space in higher density residential, mixed use, and commercial projects. Such spaces should be designed to minimize the potential for noise, privacy, and light impacts on nearby properties.

### Policy PROS-1.14: Commercial Recreation

Encourage private sector development of complementary recreational facilities to serve community needs, such as commercial recreation and athletic field facilities, swim clubs, tennis clubs, marinas, and gyms and health clubs.

**Program PROS-1.14A: Commercial Recreation.** Consider amending the zoning ordinance to allow a floor area ratio exemption for on-site recreational facilities open to the public.

### Policy PROS-1.15: Park Maintenance

Provide a high level of maintenance that allows San Rafael’s parks and open spaces to fully meet recreational needs and serve as valued community assets.

**Program PROS-1.15A: Cost Considerations in New Projects.** Consider maintenance and long-term operating costs when developing any new facility or modernizing an existing facility. Funding mechanisms for maintenance should be identified for every capital project.

**Program PROS-1.15B: Park Stewardship.** Encourage “adopt a park” programs and other stewardship initiatives that engage volunteers in park clean-up, maintenance, invasive plant removal, and other improvements. Explore agreements with the Downtown Streets Team and similar organizations to maintain park and open space areas.



**Policy PROS-1.16: Funding**

Pursue diverse funding sources for park improvement and maintenance.

**Program PROS-1.16A: Park Funding Strategy.** *Seek new and ongoing sources of funds for park development and maintenance, including grants, foundations, bonds, taxes and assessment districts, impact fees, contributions from “Friends” organizations, renewal of Measure A, private donations and land dedications, public/private joint ventures, the Capital Improvement Program, and all other available means.*

**Program PROS-1.16B: Naming Rights and Sponsorships.** *Explore opportunities to generate revenue through naming rights, sponsorships, and charitable giving.*

**Program PROS-1.6C: Sale, Lease, or Contractual Agreements.** *In the event City-owned park or open space land is sold or leased in the future, require that the proceeds are appropriately used to support park improvements, maintenance, or operating costs.*

**Policy PROS-1.17: Public-Private Partnerships**

Consider the use of public-private partnerships to rehabilitate, activate, and expand parks and community facility space. Where appropriate and consistent with the community’s vision, this could include more intensive and varied uses of parkland, provided that the integrity of the open space is retained.

**Policy PROS-1.18 Sustainable Park Operations**

Encourage sustainable park management and operations that enhance the role of parks as green infrastructure and part of the City’s climate resilience strategy. Parks should be managed to enhance their value as biological resources, natural habitat, and part of San Rafael’s urban forest.



Photo Credit (Terrapin Crossings): Frank Johnson

**Paying for Parks**

Park improvements and maintenance are funded through multiple sources. These include Measure A, a countywide one-quarter cent sales tax passed in 2012. The Measure has a nine-year term and is used to care for existing parks and open spaces, restore and protect farmland, and support regional and community parks. About 15% of the revenue stream is directed to Marin County’s cities.

Some of the City’s General Fund is set aside in a Building Maintenance account, which supports parks and City buildings. The City’s budget includes a bedroom tax fund, with money for park maintenance and development, as well as a park capital projects fund. State gas tax revenues provide a supplemental funding source, although these funds are primarily intended for transportation. The City also collects park in-lieu fees from development.

San Rafael periodically considers more reliable long-term sources for capital projects, including bond financing, grant funding, voter-approved taxes, and public-private partnerships, such as the unique arrangement between the City and Terrapin Crossroads at Beach Park. The park remains in public ownership, although it was leased to a restaurant/entertainment venue in exchange for \$100,000 in improvements and ongoing programming for community events, as well as activities such as bocce, volleyball, and a children’s play area.

**Program PROS-1.18A: Sustainable Design.** *Incorporate sustainability principles such as reduced water and energy, use of recycled and non-toxic materials, stormwater capture, and carbon sequestration, in the design and construction of park facilities and grounds. Where feasible, parks should also support the City’s wildfire prevention and sea level rise adaptation strategies, and be designed to maximize accessibility by pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.*

See the Safety and Resilience Element for policies on parks and sea level rise adaptation. See the Conservation/Climate Change Element for policies on landscaping and habitat restoration in parks and open spaces.

## Preliminary Priorities

A complete assessment of neighborhood and community park improvement needs should be included in the Parks Master Plan. In the interim, the findings in the two text boxes below may be used. These findings reflect community input on park-related issues over the last two decades. The public has expressed strong demand for new sports fields, a community pool south of Puerto Suello Hill, and upgrades and new facilities in existing parks. There is also a need for more formalized joint use agreements for school recreation areas.

In addition to the priorities listed below, there are several capital improvement projects already programmed for City parks, along with unfunded capital projects to be added in future funding cycles. Currently funded projects include ADA compliance upgrades, HVAC replacement, restroom repairs, playground upgrades, tennis court resurfacing, and other improvements at various parks. Unfunded projects include turf replacement in Pickleweed Park, updating the Terra Linda Community Center, improvements to Starkweather Shoreline Park, and other miscellaneous replacement and repair projects.

### Potential Community and Neighborhood Park Improvements

- Update (or prepare) site master plans for all neighborhood and community parks.
- **Albert Park/San Rafael Community Center.** Continue park revitalization consistent with recent efforts—explore opportunities for public-private partnerships to refurbish existing community center and athletic fields, develop new Main Library, develop new recreational facilities, and improve habitat and bike/ped facilities along Mahon Creek.
- **Terra Linda Park/Community Center.** Refurbish community center.
- **Pickleweed Park/Al Boro Community Center.** Improve branch library, refurbish fields, shoreline path improvements, sea level rise adaptation strategies.
- **Boyd Park.** Pursue new uses for Boyd Gatehouse and park/trail improvements on site and continuing up San Rafael Hill.
- **Starkweather Shoreline Park.** Continue to expand and improve shoreline path network and implement interpretative signage plans.
- Complete **North San Rafael promenade** improvements, including plans for Munson Park and restoration of Gallinas Creek.
- Improve access from **Gerstle Park, Bret Harte Park, Russom Park** and other parks adjacent to open space areas for hiking.
- Consider additional opportunities for a public pool south of Puerto Suello Hill.
- Extensions of trail network, consistent with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, including a continuous north-south greenway.



### Potential Locations for New Parks

For nearly two decades, the areas identified below have been identified as having either the potential for new parks or the need for new parks based on their distance from existing parks and demographic characteristics.

- Canal Neighborhood. The City-owned site at the southeast corner of Bellam Boulevard and Windward Way has the potential to support a neighborhood park, as well as non-recreational uses and private development. The site is adjacent to the Canal neighborhood, an area with high recreational demand, high densities, and significant unmet needs for parks and recreation. Other sites in the Canal area also should receive high priority, given the neighborhood's high densities and large population of youth and young children.
- Montecito/Happy Valley. Montecito/Happy Valley lacks a neighborhood park. San Rafael City Schools operates two high school campuses and a corporation yard at the southern edge of the neighborhood, presenting the potential for a neighborhood park on school district property or joint use agreements to improve neighborhood access to school open space and recreational facilities.
- Dominican. There may be opportunities to partner with Dominican University to provide a small park serving the Dominican/Black Canyon area, which currently lacks a neighborhood park.
- Lincoln/San Rafael Hill lacks a neighborhood park facility.

The list above should be updated through a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, as recommended by General Plan 2040.





### **Goal PROS-2: Excellence in Recreational Programming**

**Provide accessible, affordable recreation programming that is responsive to public needs, activates parks for safe and inclusive community use, and promotes fitness, health, knowledge, and cultural understanding.**

*San Rafael provides quality programming for residents of all ages, building a sense of community and providing opportunities for sports, leisure, and personal growth.*

Recreational services are provided to San Rafael residents by the City’s Library and Recreation Department. The Department’s role is to promote health and wellness, increase cultural unity, and facilitate community interaction and personal development. The Department has a Recreational Services and Child Care Division that provides classes and programs, manages facilities and rentals, and operates the Falkirk Cultural Center. A separate Division manages the library and arts programs. The Library and Recreation Department also provides staff support to the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Pickleweed Advisory Board, and special focus committees.

A full array of recreational programs is offered, including those targeted to specific age groups such as older adults, preschoolers, and youth, and those oriented around specific activities such as aquatics. Classes and programs include arts and crafts, athletics, computers, dance, fitness, games, language, martial arts, music, personal growth, and theater. Athletic programs include soccer, pickleball, bocce, basketball, and volleyball, among others.

The Department offers state-licensed year-round child care to children in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, operating programs from elementary schools. It also offers exercise, bingo, and other programs for seniors at the three community centers. The City also organizes and hosts special events throughout the year, oversees two community gardens, and manages facility rentals.



**Policy PROS-2.1: Meeting Diverse Needs**

Ensure that recreational programs and facilities meet the needs of all San Rafael residents, but most particularly young children, youth, and older adults.

**Program PROS-2.1A: Age-Specific Programs.**  
Provide facilities and programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of children, teens, and older adults, as well as those designed for intergenerational participants.

**Program PROS-2.1B: Cultural Competency.**  
Provide culturally competent and inclusive programming that reflects the diversity of San Rafael's population.



**Policy PROS-2.2: Responding to Changing Community Needs.**

Continually adapt recreational programs to meet changing community needs and interests.

**Program PROS-2.2A: Program Evaluations.** Monitor and evaluate participation in the City's recreational programs and use this information when developing new programs.



**Program PROS-2.2B: Surveys.** Conduct periodic surveys in multiple languages to evaluate recreational needs in neighborhoods and the city as a whole (see also Program EDI-1.3B on multi-lingual, culturally competent surveys).

**Policy PROS-2.3: Coordinated Programming**

Work with local public schools, the County of Marin, sports leagues and athletic associations, community service organizations, and other agencies to provide complementary and mutually supportive programming. Joint ventures with other service providers should be encouraged where appropriate.

**Program PROS-2.3A: Summer Programs.**  
Provide increased programming during periods when children are out of school, including summer youth programs at locations convenient to each neighborhood.

**Policy PROS-2.4: Social Services**

Enhance, and where feasible expand, child care and social services for older adults through the City’s parks, schools, and community centers.

**Program PROS-2.4A: Operating Hours.** *Maintain operating hours that meet public needs and accommodate activities such as child care and after school care.*



**Policy PROS-2.5: Recreation and Health**

Provide programs and activities that contribute to physical and mental health, personal growth, and the leisure time needs of San Rafael residents.

**Policy PROS-2.6: Local Partners**

Engage local artists, athletes, craftspeople, health and fitness workers, creative professionals, and others in the delivery of recreational classes and programs.

**Program PROS-2.6A: User Fees.** *Recover a portion of recreational program costs through user fees, facility rentals, and other direct charges for public use. Provisions to reduce fees for non-profit organizations and low income and special needs patrons should be included.*



**Policy PROS-2.7: Community Events**

Encourage special events, festivals, street fairs, and community programs that build civic unity and bring residents of different backgrounds together

*See also Policies LU-3.11 and AC-1.7 and Program EV-2.5C on special events*

**Policy PROS-2.8: Community Gardens**

Continue to support and maintain community gardens and look for ways to sustain such gardens such as providing recycled water, compost, tools, and storage sheds.



### Policy PROS-2.9: Environmental Education

Pursue opportunities for environmental education in parks and open spaces, including classes and programs, interpretive trails and boardwalks, and plaques and markers that raise awareness of nature and climate change.

*See also Conservation Element Policies 1.8, 2.6, 3.7, and 5.7 for additional guidance on environmental education*

### Policy PROS-2.10: Community Centers

Recognize the role of parks and community centers in supporting community resilience and emergency preparedness.

**Program PROS-2.10A: Back-Up Power.** *Maintain back-up power sources at the City's community centers so they remain operational during power outages. Community centers should serve as community gathering places in the event of an emergency or disaster.*

*See also Policies S-6.4 and CSI-4.13 on emergency preparedness and energy reliability*



## Open Space

Marin County has a long legacy of open space preservation. Early efforts focused on saving beloved landmarks such as Mt. Tamalpais, Point Reyes, the Marin Headlands, and Richardson Bay. In 1972, voters approved the Marin Open Space District as a way to preserve about 25,000 acres from development. Much of this acreage was located in the San Rafael Planning Area, including the Terra Linda-Sleepy Hollow Open Space and San Pedro Mountain. Similarly, China Camp State Park was initially acquired by a non-profit foundation and then by the State of California in the mid-1970s to preclude development of the north shore of the San Pedro Peninsula with thousands of homes. The City of San Rafael itself has acquired open space—or accepted open space acquired by non-profits or donated by others.

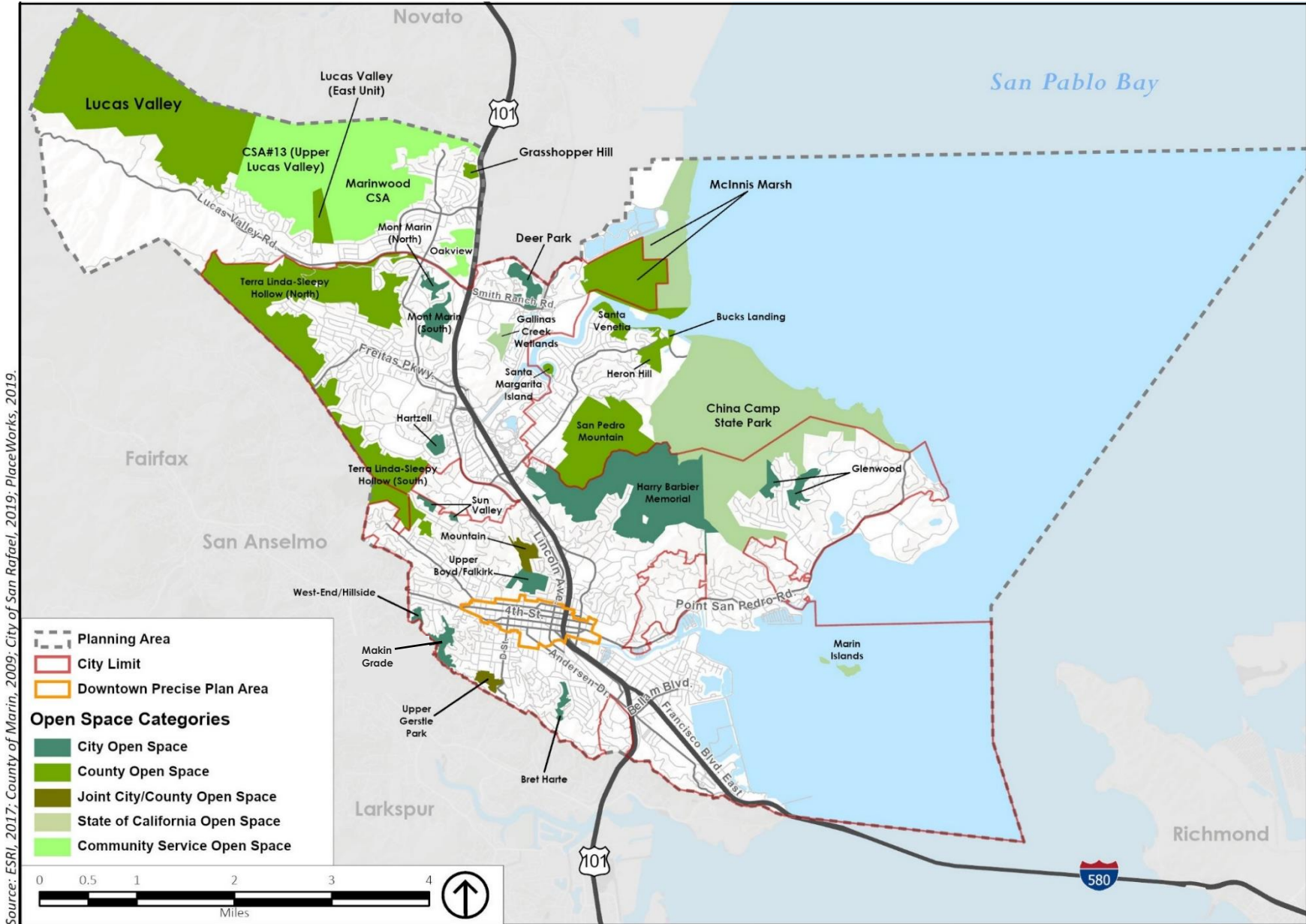
A few open space sites remain for potential acquisition—these are listed in Appendix H. Over the last two decades, priorities have shifted from land acquisition to stewardship and management. Most larger and once-vulnerable properties in the San Rafael area are now public land or are zoned in a way that ensures very low densities, scenic easements, or long-term use for agriculture or ranching. The challenge today is how to care for a substantial inventory of public open space and how to coordinate the efforts of the multiple agencies who own and manage the land. Long-range planning is needed to balance recreation, conservation, and hazard mitigation activities. More reliable sources of long-term funding are also needed.

Table 7-3 provides an inventory of the larger open spaces in the San Rafael Planning Area. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a summary of the most substantial landholdings. These areas are shown graphically on Figure 7-2.

**Table 7-3: Major Open Spaces in the San Rafael Planning Area**

Incorporated Area			Unincorporated Planning Area		
Name	Operator	Acres	Name	Operator	Acres
Bay Way	City	6.4	China Camp	State	850.0
Boyd Park (upper part)	City	16.0	Grasshopper Hill	Marinwood	13.7
China Camp	State	440.3	Heron Hill-Bucks Landing	Marin OS	39.6
Deer Valley	City	43.0	Lucas Valley	Marin OS	1,229.0
Falkirk (upper part)	City	7.5	Lucas Valley East Unit	Marin OS	46.0
Gallinas Creek	State	30.0	Lucas Valley HOA	LV CSD	385.0
Glenwood	City	56.3	Marinwood CSA	Marinwood	758.0
Harry Barbier Memorial	City	582.0	Oakview (Daphne)	Marin OS	69.9
Hartzell	City	18.1	San Pedro Mountain	Marin OS	373.0
Hillside Avenue	City	8.0	Santa Margarita Island	Marin OS	4.6
Mont Marin	City/County	68.0	Santa Venetia Marsh	Marin OS	32.7
Mountain	City/County	51.4			
Picnic Hill-Bret Harte	City	13.2			
Terra Linda-Sleepy Hollow	Marin OS	1,172.0			
Upper Gerstle Park	City/County	22.0			
Upper Toyon/Makin Grade	City	36.0			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,570.2</b>			<b>3,801.5</b>





**Figure 7-2:  
Major Open Spaces**

## Goal PROS-3: Protected, Well Managed Open Space

Manage San Rafael's open spaces for all to enjoy.

*Preservation of open space and the natural environment have been priorities for San Rafael residents for many years. Open space should be carefully managed to conserve and enhance its intrinsic value for recreation, habitat, hazard mitigation, climate change resilience, scenic beauty, and community character. Whenever possible, the natural terrain and vegetation of the community should be preserved, maintained, and enhanced.*

Policies and programs under Goal PROS-3 recommend measures to improve open space management so that these properties may continue to enhance the quality of life in San Rafael.

### Policy PROS-3.1: Open Space Frame

Retain and protect San Rafael's open space frame, including open space on the city's perimeter and the network of open spaces that define and connect the city's neighborhoods. Open space should be recognized as essential to wildlife, environmental and human health, psychological well-being, and as a natural means of separating communities, preventing sprawl, and providing visual relief.

**Program PROS-3.1A: Criteria for Open Space Protection.** Use the following criteria for identifying and prioritizing open space parcels for future protection (the criteria are not listed in any particular order):

- a) Environmental health and safety issues and potential geologic and seismic hazards.
- b) Aesthetics (visual backdrop or edge, unique site features, shoreline, ridgelines).
- c) Wildlife resource value (wetlands, creeks and riparian areas, wildlife habitat and movement corridors, and habitat for special status species).
- d) Ability to sequester carbon and mitigate potential climate-related impacts, including reduction of wildfire hazard, drought resilience, protection from sea-level rise.
- e) Importance to the community as a whole and/or adjoining neighborhoods.
- f) Merits of alternative uses.
- g) Ability to connect existing open spaces.
- h) Potential for recreational uses and/or environmental education, especially for economically disadvantaged communities.
- i) Availability of outside (non-City) financial assistance.
- j) Potential maintenance and management costs and liability exposure for the City.
- k) Feasibility of protection through zoning, easements, development agreements, and other tools rather than through acquisition.



**Program PROS-3.1B: Open Space Opportunities in New Development.** Pursue opportunities to expand the City’s open space network when new development is proposed. This can be achieved through such strategies as clustering development, providing buffers and fuel breaks along site perimeters, dedicating on-site parkland, and mitigating project impacts through wetlands restoration or other measures. When potential open space is not contiguous to existing public open space, the preference is to retain it in private ownership. Maintenance agreements for such areas should include a permanent funding mechanism for maintenance and rehabilitation, follow sound ecological principles, and be enforceable by the City in the future.

**Program PROS-3.1C: Priority Conservation Areas.** Explore the feasibility of Priority Conservation Areas (PCA) designations for large areas of contiguous private open space in the San Rafael Planning Area. The PCA designation recognizes the significance of these areas as open space and provides support for their long-term conservation. Owner consent shall be obtained before an application for a PCA is submitted to ABAG.

**Program PROS-3.1D: Aquatic Open Space.** Consider formal designation of a San Rafael Bay Aquatic Open Space in the waters off the city’s shoreline. Compatible conservation and recreational uses such as fishing, kayaking, and paddle boarding should be encouraged in this area.



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

### Priority Conservation Areas

**Priority Conservation Areas**, or PCAs, are regionally significant open spaces that are widely recognized as warranting long-term protection. These are typically lands that are threatened by urban development or subject to other pressures (such as sea level rise) that make them vulnerable. The designation has been developed by ABAG to provide an incentive for protecting these areas. Only cities, counties, and park/open space districts are eligible to apply for a PCA designation. Once a designation is made, grants are available to implement conservation initiatives.

### Policy PROS-3.2: Balancing the Uses of Open Space

Protect and preserve the natural resource value of open space while permitting compatible recreational and educational uses. Open space areas should be maintained in a natural state and regarded as a resource for enjoyment by all residents of San Rafael. Recreational and educational uses, where permitted, should be limited to activities with minimal impacts on the environment and locations where such activities will not create hazards or have adverse effects on sensitive natural resources.

**Program PROS-3.2A: Management Prescriptions.** Develop management prescriptions for different types of open space that recognize their capacity for improvements, access limitations, natural hazard levels, biological resources, and other physical characteristics (Note: this should be done as part of Program PROS-3.3A, listed below).



### Policy PROS-3.3: Open Space Management

Maintain and manage City-owned open space lands to reduce natural hazards and wildfire risks, enhance recreational opportunities, maximize ecological value, support climate resilience, and preserve aesthetics. Work with other public open space owners to support similar objectives on their properties within the San Rafael Planning Area. It is recognized that these objectives may conflict as management decisions are made; solutions should strive for balance and reflect objective data, wildfire science, and community input.

**Program PROS-3.3A: Open Space Management Plan.** *Work collaboratively with residents, environmental organizations, fire departments, and land management agencies such as Marin Municipal Water District, Marin County Parks and Open Space District, and California State Parks to develop an Open Space Management Plan. The Plan should address appropriate uses of open space in the Planning Area, along with provisions for ongoing maintenance and improvement. It should include six areas of focus:*

- a) *Recreation, including appropriate access points, parking and staging areas, wayfinding and interpretive signage, existing and future trail alignments, and guidelines for the location of amenities such as picnic tables and benches.*
- b) *Habitat Protection, including enhancing natural habitats, mitigating the impacts of human activities and climate change on plant and animal life, and preserving natural ecological functions.*
- c) *Hazard reduction, in accordance with ecologically sound practices and wildfire science, including removal of highly flammable invasive species, emergency access, and erosion control. This should be closely coordinated with ongoing efforts by the San Rafael and Marin County Fire Departments, Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority, CalFIRE, and non-profit organizations such as FireSafe Marin.*
- d) *Green infrastructure, including the capacity of open space areas to sequester carbon, absorb runoff, maintain water quality, mitigate climate change impacts, protect and enhance native biodiversity, and improve resilience.*
- e) *Public education, including interpretive facilities*
- f) *Funding, including operating costs and capital projects, and options for covering those costs such as assessment districts, interagency agreements, volunteer programs, and private funding, in addition to City funds.*

### Policy PROS-3.4: Open Space Impediments

Address activities that impair the value of open space or create hazardous conditions on open space, including illegal camping and campfires, erosion and landslides, plant pathogens or diseases, invasive plants and animals, disruption of special status species, and unauthorized activities that can cause environmental harm.

**Program PROS-3.4A: Diseased Vegetation.** *Work with resource agency experts to address tree pathogens and to remove hazardous vegetation and harmful invasive plants.*

**Program PROS-3.4B: Illegal Encampments.** *Continue to work with private and public property owners to identify and remove illegal encampments in open space areas. Provide a clear method for the public to report encampments when they are observed and work with Marin County Health and Human Services to help those in encampments find housing.*



**Policy PROS-3.5: Private Open Space**

Ensure the long-term stewardship of privately-owned open space in a manner that conserves natural resource and aesthetic values, sustains wildlife, and reduces hazards to life and property. Opportunities to better integrate common open space in private development with public open space space (via trails, etc.) should be encouraged.

***Program PROS-3.5A: Appropriate Use of Private Open Space.** When land is set aside as permanent open space in a private development or is dedicated to a public agency as open space, specify enforceable use limitations such as restrictions on structures, plant materials, and fences.*

**Policy PROS-3.6: Access to Open Space**

Encourage public access to open space areas in the design of development on adjacent sites and in existing developed areas. Access should be secured as part of subdivision approval and through coordination with affected property owners. Access paths should be designed to minimize neighborhood and user conflicts and avoid conflicts with sensitive wildlife habitat.

***Program PROS-3.6A: Access Points.** Use the development review process to identify open space access points and required features such as signage, trailheads, and parking.*



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

### Policy PROS-3.7: Coordinated Open Space Planning

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

**Program PROS-3.7A: Coordination with Other Jurisdictions.** Continue to work with the public agencies managing open space within the San Rafael Planning Area to coordinate and implement City and County wildfire action plans, habitat conservation programs, and recreation improvements.

### Policy PROS-3.8: Trails

Encourage the development and maintenance of trails within and between open space areas. Trails should be designed and maintained in an environmentally sensitive manner and should provide safe and secure routes for a variety of users.

**Program PROS-3.8A: Citywide Trails Map.** Develop—or assist volunteers with developing—a citywide trail map, building on work that has already been done by local advocacy groups.

**Program PROS-3.8B: Trails Master Plan.** Pursue grant funding and develop a Trails Master Plan, including provisions to improve access and signage to park and open space areas from San Rafael neighborhoods and balance the needs of different trail user groups. The Master Plan should include recommendations for new and enhanced trails, minimizing wildlife and habitat impacts, use guidelines for a variety of users, signage, surface materials, maintenance, compliance with trail rules, and staging areas. The Plan should incorporate the “greenway” improvements from the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, as well as plans for the Bay Trail, Canal walkway, North San Rafael promenade, and “water” trails for kayaks in San Francisco Bay. San Rafael's network of neighborhood paths, stairways, and mid-block walkways also should be included.

See also Mobility Element Program M-6.4A regarding an Urban Trails Master Plan

### Policy PROS-3.9: Utilities in Open Space

Discourage large-scale utility infrastructure such as electric transmission lines, large wind turbines, and cellular phone towers in local open space areas. Where such facilities already exist, or where there are no other siting options, utilities should be located and designed to minimize harm to avian life and the area's environmental and visual quality.

### Policy PROS-3.10: Public Education

Provide education programs to residents about the importance of open space to wildlife, wildfire prevention, watershed protection and water quality, climate resilience and carbon sequestration, habitat conservation, and human well-being.

**Program PROS-3.10A: Public Education.** Continue outreach and public education on open space management, including wildfire prevention, stormwater management requirements, predatory animal control, climate change, and coordination between public and private property owners. Also, conduct periodic user surveys to better understand the needs and interests of open space visitors and determine which areas may require further attention.

**Program PROS-3.10B: Interpretive Facilities.** Encourage the development of interpretive trails, nature centers, signage, and similar features that educate San Rafael youth and adults about the natural environment, best practices in conservation, and the value of open space. This should include information about the historic value of open space, including past uses of individual sites (such as mining, logging, military defense, farming, and hunting).