# 9. OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

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9. OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Contra Costa County is bestowed with a wide variety of natural and cultural resources which are currently held publicly or privately as open space. Natural open space areas include woods, mountains, lakes, streams, wetlands, and agricultural land. Scenic resources, parks, and recreation land are also considered open space lands. Furthermore, the county has important historic and archaeological sites which qualify as resources and which should be preserved.

The Open Space Element of the General Plan has three major components: (1) a policy framework for preservation of open space lands, (2) open space maps identifying lands and facilities subject to the policies contained herein, and (3) an implementation program.

Natural resources, including agricultural resources, are discussed in the Conservation Element of this General Plan. The Open Space Element analyzes open space categorized as Scenic Resources, Historic/Cultural Resources, and Park and Recreational Facilities.

As in the case with preservation of natural resources and agricultural resources, the Open Space Element is significantly affected by policies reflected in Measure C-1990. These policies, found throughout this General Plan, include the 65/35 Land Preservation Standard (the “65/35 Standard” or “65/35 Plan”), Urban Limit Line (ULL), hillside protection policies, preservation agreements, and the policy to advise LAFCO to respect and support the 65/35 Standard, ULL, and growth management standards when considering requests for incorporation or annexation to cities or service districts.

The ULL works together with the 65/35 Standard to protect open space. Criteria for considering the location of the ULL include open space, parks and other recreation areas, lands with slopes of 26 percent grade or greater, wetlands, and certain other areas not appropriate for urban growth. Even if land is developed within the ULL, a substantial portion is to be retained for open space, parks, and recreational uses.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

The legal requirements for the Open Space Element are stated in Sections 65560-65570 of the California Government Code. The chapter covers the topics required by State law and encompasses many diverse issues dealing with preservation and management of open space areas in the county. The Open Space Element is a plan for the comprehensive and long-range preservation and conservation of "open space land," which is defined in the statutes as any area of land or water which is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open space use, and which is designated on a local, regional, or State open space plan as open space for the preservation of natural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, or for public health and safety.
In adopting the requirement that all jurisdictions must prepare an Open Space Element, the Legislature found that preservation of open space land is necessary not only for maintenance of the economy of the state, but also for the continued availability of land for the production of food and fiber, enjoyment of scenic beauty, recreation, and the use of natural resources. The Legislature further found that discouraging premature and unnecessary conversion of open space land to urban uses is in the public interest because it discourages non-contiguous development patterns which tend to increase the costs of community services to residents. Finally, the legislature found that the anticipated increase in the population of the state demands that cities, counties, and the State make plans at the earliest possible date for the preservation of valuable open space land and take positive action to carry out such plans by the adoption and strict administration of laws, ordinances, rules, and regulations.

Government Code Section 65564 requires that every local open space plan contain an action program consisting of the specific programs which the legislative body intends to pursue in implementing its open space plan. That action program is described in the implementation measures contained in this chapter, the Conservation Element, and the CEQA mitigation monitoring program adopted concurrently with this General Plan.

9.2 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS

The Open Space Element is closely related to other elements of the General Plan. It is coordinated with the Conservation Element. The Open Space Element is primarily expected to impact land use policies, and in view of the interplay with the ULL and 65/35 Standard, the element is coordinated with the Land Use Element. In addition, the Open Space Element is related to the Safety Element in that open space areas are designated based partly on seismic and landslide risk.

With reference to the Land Use Element Map, the following designations and their respective map symbols are considered to be open space designations within the definition contained in the State statute:

- Open Space (OS)
- Delta Recreation and Resources (DR)
- Parks and Recreation (PR)
- Watershed (WS)
- Agricultural Lands (AL)
- Water (Water)
- Agricultural Core (AC)

Lands outside the ULL may be designated for landfills with the LF designation. LF is not an open space designation pursuant to the State open space planning statute, although LF lands may be surrounded by open space lands. Landfills are public purpose facilities, which are defined as non-urban uses in the Board of Supervisors’ 65/35 Land Preservation Plan, adopted by county voters as Measure C in November 1990. Facilities for public purposes are allowed outside the ULL. The LF designation is consistent with, and implements, this provision of the 65/35 Plan.
9.3 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER GENERAL PLAN DOCUMENTS

The goals, policies, and implementation measures contained in this element are intended to guide planning for public and private projects that are subject either to approval of the County Planning Agency, or to review by County staff, although they may be under the jurisdiction of other public agencies operating in the county. Such goals, policies, and implementation measures are intended to accord with the other elements of the General Plan, and have equal legal status with all other sections of the Plan.

9.4 OPEN SPACE ELEMENT ORGANIZATION

This chapter of the General Plan is divided into three sections that present background information, policies, maps, and implementation measures regarding:

- Scenic resources, including scenic ridges, hillsides, and rock outcroppings; and the San Francisco Bay/Delta estuary system;
- Historic and cultural resources; and
- Parks and recreational facilities, including parks, trails and paths, and private recreational facilities.

9.5 OVERALL GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies are overall statements regarding the need to preserve and efficiently manage open space within the county. More detailed goals and policies particular to each type of natural resource are discussed under separate topic sections in the Conservation Element.

OVERALL OPEN SPACE GOALS

9-A. To preserve and protect the ecological, scenic, cultural/historic, and recreational resource lands of the county.

9-B. To conserve the open space and natural resources of the county through control of the direction, extent, and timing of urban growth.

9-C. To achieve a balance of open space and urban areas to meet the social, environmental, and economic needs of the county now and for the future.

OVERALL OPEN SPACE POLICIES

9-1. Permanent open space shall be provided within the county for a variety of open space uses.

9-2. Historic and scenic features, watersheds, natural waterways, and areas important for the maintenance of natural vegetation and wildlife populations shall be preserved and enhanced.

9-3. Areas designated for open space shall not be considered as a reserve for urban land uses. In accordance with Measure C-1990, at least 65 percent of
all land in the county shall be preserved for agriculture, open space, wetlands, parks, and non-urban uses.

9-4. Where feasible and desirable, major open space components shall be combined and linked to form a visual and physical system in the county.

9-5. The visual identities of urban communities shall be preserved through the maintenance of existing open space areas between cities and/or communities.

9-6. Open space acquisition shall be planned and funded, in concert with the region's staged transportation, landfill, and water and sewage plant programs.

9-7. Open space shall be utilized for public safety, resource conservation, and appropriate recreation activities for all segments of the community.

9-8. Development project environmental review will consider the effect of the project on the county's open space resources, whenever the project proposes to convert substantial amounts of land from an open space designation to an urban development designation.

9-9. The County shall preserve open space lands located outside the ULL by declining to authorize requests for General Plan Amendment studies which would result in redesignation of such lands to urban land use designations. The County shall not designate any open space land located outside the ULL for an urban use. A substantial portion of land developed within the ULL shall be retained for open space, parks, and recreational uses.

9.6 SCENIC RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Contra Costa County is perceived by many as a desirable place to live and work. A major component in that perception is the scenic vistas which are available throughout the county. While there are many localized scenic features in the county, there are two main resources which are treated in this section: (1) scenic ridges, hillsides, and rock outcroppings; and (2) the San Francisco Bay/Delta estuary system.

Throughout much of Contra Costa County, there are significant topographic variations in the landscape. The largest and most prominent of these hills form the backdrop for much of the developed portions of the area. Views of these major ridgelines help to reinforce the rural feeling of the county's rapidly growing communities. These major ridges provide an important balance to current and planned development.

Individual home sites or housing tracts are sometimes constructed on ridge tops in such a way that the scenic views from the site are superb, but the view of the ridge to all others, including other property owners, is adversely affected. This can occur if the proposed structures are poorly placed or if the accompanying landscaping is
completely unrelated to the natural setting of the surrounding properties. In addition, other features of the development such as roads, power lines, and storage tanks can degrade the scenic quality of an area if they are not carefully designed, located, and landscaped.

Properties with scenic resources which are already designated for open space use should be protected through strict land regulations and, on occasion, through acquisition.

For scenic areas that are planned for some amount of development, the application review process shall consider the feasibility of preserving or protecting the scenic qualities of the site. The County Planning Agency shall be responsible for determining the extent and practicality of preserving such resources. The preparation of environmental impact reports can often help to analyze the significance of previously unidentified opportunities. Whenever it is determined to be feasible, scenic features should be protected and maintained, either through land dedication to a public agency or granting of scenic easements.

On the other hand, there are man-made facilities, such as non-conforming signs and overhead utility lines, which are unattractive and should be eliminated or abated to enhance the scenic qualities of specific areas in the county.

The other major scenic resource of Contra Costa County is the extensive water and delta system of San Francisco, San Pablo, and Suisun Bays. The bays extend along the entire western and northern perimeter of the county. This waterway system provides a pleasant contrast to the land forms of the area. Where the water reaches the shoreline, a mix of land uses occur: salt marshes, railroad tracks, industrial activities, housing and parkland. All add to the diversity and interest of the shoreline.

Appropriate land uses for the shoreline areas are indicated on the Land Use Element Map. All new uses along the shoreline should be reviewed for their impact on the visual and scenic aspects of the bays. Efforts should be made to require quality design. The Scenic Waterways designation on the Scenic Resources Map below applies to the waterway and its shoreline; the intent of the designation is to draw attention to its scenic character for consideration when reviewing projects.

**SCENIC RESOURCES MAP**

Figure 9-1 identifies the major scenic resources in the county, including major ridges and scenic waterways, which should be considered when evaluating nearby development proposals.

The county has many smaller, localized scenic resources such as isolated hilltops, rock outcroppings, mature stands of trees, lakes, reservoirs, and other natural features. These smaller resource areas are not identified on the map, but they should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine their visual quality. All of these scenic resources should be treated as aesthetic opportunities which should be incorporated into the design of any new development.
Figure 9-1  Scenic Ridges and Waterways
SCENIC RESOURCES GOALS

9-D. To preserve and protect areas of identified high scenic value, where practical, and in accordance with the Land Use Element Map.

9-E. To protect major scenic ridges, to the extent practical, from structures, roadways, and other activities which would harm their scenic qualities.

9-F. To preserve the scenic qualities of the San Francisco Bay/Delta estuary system and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River/Delta shoreline.

SCENIC RESOURCES POLICIES

9-10. In areas designated for urban development, the principles outlined below shall be applied in the review of development proposals.

9-11. High-quality engineering of slopes shall be required to avoid soil erosion, downstream flooding, slope failure, loss of vegetative cover, high maintenance costs, property damage, and damage to visual quality. Particularly vulnerable areas should be avoided for urban development. Slopes of 26 percent or more should generally be protected and are generally not desirable for conventional cut-and-fill pad development. Development on open hillsides and significant ridgelines shall be restricted.

9-12. In order to conserve the scenic beauty of the county, developers shall generally be required to restore the natural contours and vegetation of the land after grading and other land disturbances. Public and private projects shall be designed to minimize damage to significant trees and other visual landmarks.

9-13. Providing public facilities for outdoor recreation should remain an important land use objective in the county, as a method of promoting high scenic quality, for air quality maintenance, and to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities of all residents.

9-14. Extreme topographic modification, such as filling in canyons or removing hilltops, shall be avoided. Clustering and planned unit development approaches to development shall be encouraged. All future development plans, whether large- or small-scale, shall be based on identifying safe and suitable sites for buildings, roads, and driveways. Exemptions to this policy are appropriate for mining, landfill, and public projects in open space areas.

9-15. In areas along major scenic ridges which are designated for open space use, the principles outlined in Policy 9-16 through Policy 9-23 shall apply.

9-16. New water tanks that would harm the visual quality of a scenic ridge shall be buried, camouflaged, or screened to mitigate their impacts.

9-17. New power lines shall be located parallel to existing lines in order to minimize their visual impact.
9-18. Construction of new structures on the top of major scenic ridges or within 50 feet of the ridgeline shall be discouraged.

9-19. When development is permitted to occur on hillsides, structures shall be located in a manner which is sensitive to available natural resources and constraints.

9-20. Hilltops, ridges, rock outcroppings, mature stands of trees, and other natural features shall be considered for preservation, at the time that any development applications are reviewed.

9-21. Any new development shall be encouraged to generally conform with natural contours to avoid excessive grading.

9-22. All new land uses which are to be located below a major scenic ridge shall be reviewed with an emphasis on protecting the visual qualities of the ridge.

9-23. Involvement of public interest groups shall be encouraged when identifying, acquiring, and maintaining those areas of unique visual quality in the county.

9-24. The appearance of the county shall be improved by eliminating negative features such as non-conforming signs and overhead utility lines, and by encouraging aesthetically-designed facilities with adequate setbacks and landscaping.

9-25. Maintenance of the scenic waterways of the county shall be ensured through public protection of the marshes and riparian vegetation along the shorelines and delta levees, as otherwise specified in this Plan.

9-26. Tule islands and levee remnants within the county shall be restricted from new development.

9-27. Physical and visual public access to established scenic routes shall be protected.

SCENIC RESOURCES IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

9-a. Prepare specific plans and/or adopt an ordinance which would delineate the boundaries of and protect the major scenic ridgelines not already under public ownership.

9-b. Carefully study and review any development projects which would have the potential to degrade the scenic qualities of major significant ridges in the county or the bay and delta shoreline.

9-c. Develop hillside and ridgeline design guidelines to provide better guidance for development, particularly as it relates to grading, massing, and relationship of structures to ridgelines.

9-d. Where possible, structures shall not be built on the top of any designated scenic ridgeline.
9-e. Develop and enforce guidelines for development along scenic waterways to maintain the visual quality of these areas.

9-f. Prepare a corridor study in which an appropriate scenic corridor width will be defined along all proposed scenic routes.

9-g. Prepare a visual analysis of proposed scenic routes to identify views of significant visual or cultural value.

9-h. Identify and designate "gateways" within the scenic routes which are located at unique transition points in topography or land use and serve as entrances to regions of the county.

9.7 HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Northern California has been occupied for at least the last 10,000 years. The early inhabitants have been identified as the Paleo Indians who were nomadic, using primarily large pointed tools for hunting and collecting seafood. It is assumed that the Bay Area was inhabited from 5,000 to 10,000 years ago; however, no sites have been identified.

With the sea level stabilizing, the Bay and Delta were substantially formed. The subsistence pattern of the early inhabitants shifted with emphasis placed on acorn processing and hunting. Trade increased and tools and ornaments were more abundant as well as more refined. Between 2,000 and 5,000 years ago, cultural patterns were established in large villages along the shoreline and inland permanent streams throughout the Bay Area. The population grew rapidly and a complex society developed.

The beginning of the cultures that were in place at contact with the Spanish was approximately 1,500 years ago. This period saw continuation of the growth of economic specialization and the introduction of the bow and arrow. The three groups that inhabited Contra Costa County, the Coastanoan (Ohlone), Bay Miwok, and Northern Valley Yokuts, established their territorial boundaries. Prehistoric evidence indicates that perhaps the Yokuts were the last to arrive in the Bay Area.

The Coastanoans inhabited the western hills, plains, and Bay shore from Carquinez south to Salinas. All of the village sites were associated with a permanent source of fresh water. Many were at the mouth of streams along the Bay shore, but a number of villages were established inland along permanent streams at the base of the hills at the 50 to 150 meter elevation, as evidenced by the many sites which have been identified. Special use and seasonal use sites were established throughout the Coastanoan territory, often in association with rock outcrops or abundant food sources.

The Bay Miwok settled along the western slopes of the Diablo range, the inland valleys, and on the northern coastal plains. Their largest villages were located in the San Ramon Valley. The Northern Valley Yokuts settled along the eastern slopes of the Diablo range to the San Joaquin River. Their primary villages were along the
San Joaquin River with only scattered use of the eastern plains and smaller secondary villages in the inland valleys.

In 1776 Mission Dolores was established in San Francisco. Cultural subjugation, plagues, and subdivision of the area into ranches largely destroyed Native American lifestyles.

Historical sites and landmarks are unique reminders of the social, economic, and political history of Contra Costa County and may serve as sources of private investment and places of public recreational and educational activities. There are many local historical societies and organizations within the county which have been organized to preserve sites, structures, and natural features which exemplify aspects of the history of a particular area of the county as a whole. These groups play an active role in increasing the level of appreciation and awareness of the county’s many historical resources.

Many historical structures in the county are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as with the State of California Office of Historic Preservation. Many communities have also established architectural standards or forms of regulation or controls, such as zoning, which require preservation of historical structures and landmarks during the development process.

**HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES AREAS**

**Archaeological Resources**

A systematic archaeological survey has not been conducted for Contra Costa County. There are, however, approximately 600 archaeological sites within the county which have been recorded with the Northwest Information Center at Sonoma State University. Identification of these archaeological sites is largely the result of sporadic surveys conducted in association with development proposals. Large areas of the county that have been retained in agriculture have never been surveyed and may yield prehistoric settlement patterns.

Figure 9-2 is a map of archaeologically sensitive areas. This map conceptually illustrates areas of varying sensitivity within the county and is intended to be used as a planning tool for determining future survey requirements imposed upon development applications.

The sensitivity map is divided into five categories: (1) extremely sensitive areas (known sites); (2) highly sensitive areas (high probability for potential sites); (3) medium sensitivity areas (possible sites); (4) moderately sensitive areas (higher probability of subsurface resources, due to deposition); and (5) low sensitivity areas (mainly the ridgetops). These categories and the reasons for designation are described below.

As indicated above, over 600 sites have been identified in the county and wherever these sites have been located, an extremely sensitive designation has been applied. Areas near water are considered most likely to contain an archaeological site(s) and have been designated as highly sensitive. This designation includes
Figure 9-2  Archaeological Sensitivity Map

Extremely sensitive areas (Known archaeological sites)
Highly sensitive areas
Areas of medium sensitivity
Moderately sensitive areas
Areas of low sensitivity

Largely urbanized areas and publicly owned lands excluded from archaeological sensitivity survey. However, there are also significant archaeological resources within this area.
stream courses because the native groups would have established settlements or seasonal sites along permanent and seasonal streams. Thus, the streams provide potential prehistoric and historic resources.

Accessible areas near water were designated to have medium sensitivity. This includes the plains areas between two stream corridors. These areas were used for hunting, butchering camps, hunting blinds, or food processing sites. The next level of sensitivity, identified as moderately sensitive, generally encompasses the plains and Delta area. This category is divided into two areas: an area showing surface manifestation of use and an area where indications of prehistoric use would most likely be buried. Because of the deposition that has occurred in this part of the county, subsurface monitoring should be conducted as a condition of project approval.

The areas designated as low sensitivity may contain special use sites and would not require as intense an archaeological reconnaissance as required with the above categories. However, as a condition of project approval for projects proposed in this designated area, a reconnaissance should be conducted. This would entail an archaeologist to scan a site for outcrops, caves, quarries, etc., which may have the potential to yield further information.

Substantial areas within Southeast County have been identified by various governmental agencies and knowledgeable individuals as containing unique biological habitats, scenic values, and significant archeological resources. Specifically, on land west of Vasco Road, wind has created caves in sandstone cliffs overlooking the San Joaquin Valley. These caves were used by some of the county's earliest inhabitants, and valuable Native American artifacts have been discovered. In particular, well-preserved pictographs (Native American paintings) have been discovered in the caves, as well as numerous middens in the adjacent area.

Both public and private stewardship of the resources on-site shall be considered as long as the protection is long-term and guaranteed in some manner. The acquisition of lands in these areas by East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD), and acquisition of watershed lands by Contra Costa Water District (CCWD), will aid in the permanent protection of some of these archeological resources.

Due to the fragile nature of some of these resources, public access to the areas should be limited or restricted in some cases. To facilitate a better understanding of the unique archeological and natural resources in the area, a detailed inventory should be prepared. Efforts to secure financing for such an effort should be explored upon adoption of this Plan.

**Historic Resources**

An historic resources inventory was compiled in 1976 by the County in coordination with the local historical societies. While the historic resources inventory is not considered to be a comprehensive listing of the county's historic resources, it is a major starting point for the protection of these resources.
HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES GOALS

9-G. To identify and preserve important archaeological and historic resources within the county.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES POLICIES

9-28. Areas which have identifiable and important archaeological or historic significance shall be preserved for such uses, preferably in public ownership.

9-29. Buildings or structures that have visual merit and historic value shall be protected.

9-30. Development surrounding areas of historic significance shall have compatible and high-quality design in order to protect and enhance the historic quality of the area.

9-31. Within the Southeast County area, applicants for subdivision or land use permits to allow non-residential uses shall provide information to the County on the nature and extent of the archeological resources that exist in the area. The County Planning Agency shall be responsible for determining the balance between multiple use of the land and protection of resources.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Development Review Process

9-i. Develop an archaeological sensitivity map to be used by staff in the environmental review process for discretionary permits to determine potential impacts upon cultural resources.

9-j. As a condition of approval of discretionary permits, include a procedure to be followed in the event that archaeological resources are encountered during development or construction.

Ordinance Revisions

9-k. Review existing County ordinances and guidelines and make amendments as necessary to ensure that they provide adequate safeguards for archaeological and historic resources.

9-l. Develop design guidelines for areas adjacent to or within scenic corridors or historic sites.

Other Programs

9-m. Promote the use of the State of California Historic Building Code to protect historic sites in the county.

9-n. Encourage owners of eligible historic properties to apply for State and federal registration of these sites and to participate in tax incentive programs for historic restoration.
9-o. Seek coordination and cooperation with federal, State, and local governments, and with private and non-profit organizations, to establish funding sources to preserve, restore, and enhance unique historic sites. Such funding sources may be used to acquire and preserve sites or to acquire easements over sites and building facades.

9-p. Identify funding mechanisms, including funding from the County to the extent possible, to support programs to preserve, restore, and enhance unique historic sites.

9.8 PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION

A recreation component of the General Plan is required to plan for the recreational lands and facilities necessary to meet the needs and desires of the community, while coordinating these plans with the other elements. State law requires that a recreation component be adopted for a jurisdiction to be able to exercise a subdivision parkland dedication ordinance.

Maps and Descriptions of Parks and Recreation Facilities

This parks and recreation plan is divided into separate sections addressing major parks and open space areas, local parks, and trails and paths.

Major Parks and Open Space Areas. The provision of major parks to serve the urbanized areas is essential to the physical and mental well-being of all segments of their populations, as these parks form alternatives to the often intense pace of urban life. Major parks provide areas where people can enjoy active and passive recreation not otherwise available, such as nature studies, camping, or just observing the natural landscape.

Preservation of lands for outdoor recreation also assists in conservation of the county's unique natural, scenic, or cultural resources. Such preservation provides for recreational opportunities while helping to maintain the quality of life for county residents and visitors. Major park facilities in the county are owned by the federal and State governments, along with an extensive system owned and operated by EBRPD. Additionally, there are some municipal facilities which are major parks as well as water district watershed recreation facilities. For the purpose of this portion of the General Plan, the following definitions shall apply:

- **Major Parks** are intended to provide a broad range of recreational opportunities, which may include hiking, bicycling, equestrian use, fishing, swimming, camping, group sports, etc. Preservation of historical structures also is included within this grouping.

- **Major Open Space Areas** are significant undeveloped areas within public or land trust ownership. The major purpose of these areas is to protect the uniqueness of these lands through passive recreational activities and habitat uses that do not require substantial facilities or improvements. Agriculture is an appropriate secondary use.
Existing and proposed Major Parks and Major Open Space Areas are shown on Figure 9-3. While major parks usually cover areas over 100 acres, shoreline and marsh areas may be much smaller, reflecting the unique areas they protect. With recent voter approval of State and regional park bonds, this Plan anticipates the expansion of existing major park and open space facilities.

The two primary agencies administering Major Parks in the county are the State Department of Parks and Recreation and the EBRPD. The State Department of Parks and Recreation owns three parks: Mt. Diablo State Park, Cowell Ranch State Historic Park, and Franks Tract State Recreation Area. These parks are intended to serve the population of the State as a whole, not just residents of Contra Costa County. A small portion of the East Shore State Park extends into the county.

EBRPD encompasses all of Contra Costa County and Alameda County, and is a California special district. EBRPD currently maintains numerous parks with internal trail systems in addition to regional trails within or partially within the county, performing the function of providing major park and trail facilities which is normally undertaken by County government. EBRPD maintain parks of differing types which are classified as Regional Parks, Regional Trails, Regional Preserves, Regional Recreation Areas, Regional Shorelines, Regional Wilderness Areas, and Regional Open Spaces. These facilities are included within the Major Parks definition.

There are other agencies which operate Major Park facilities within the county. The U.S. National Park Service operates the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez and the Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site (Tao House) in Danville. The East Bay Municipal Utility District owns substantial acreage of open space lands, some of which has a secondary recreation function (e.g., Lafayette and San Pablo Reservoirs). CCWD operates recreational facilities on its Los Vaqueros Reservoir watershed lands. Additionally, the cities of Pittsburg, Walnut Creek, and Concord operate facilities which serve a Major Park function.

While no County standard is included for Major Parks or Open Space areas, there are numerous areas within the county which deserve to be placed in new parks or added to those already existing. This Plan endorses the expansion of Major Park and Open Space Areas to protect the unique resources of the county.

There are other locations within the Southeast County area which have potential for development of major new recreational facilities; however, plans for their acquisition are just now being realized. At the time that EBRPD or another public agency is prepared to consider seriously the establishment of such facilities, these proposed facilities should be reviewed by the County to ensure compatibility with the concepts found in this Plan and with adjacent existing land uses.

**Local Parks.** Local parks are areas of open space set aside for recreational use and are located within an acceptable distance from the people they serve. They serve as the focal points for neighborhoods and communities where people can meet and enjoy their leisure time together. Local parks provide a visual counterpoint to the often intense developed areas in which they are located. The more intense the development, the greater the need for adequate parks.
Figure 9-3  Major Parks and Open Space Areas
This plan for local parks specifies the County's standards and general locations of existing and proposed facilities. While the map of local park facilities (Figure 9-4) shows a countywide distribution, its enforceable effect is for the unincorporated area only. Where differences exist between this plan and those of a city, the city plans will take precedence within incorporated areas.

For the purpose of this plan, local parks are differentiated into neighborhood and community parks. Neighborhood parks generally have service areas equivalent to elementary schools, while community parks more commonly are equivalent to high school service areas. The size and location of local parks will vary depending on the population and population density of the area to be served. The greater the proposed population, the greater the size of the park necessary to serve a given area.

County park standards for local and community parks and types of play areas are shown on Table 9-1.

Most local parks are currently located within incorporated areas. The County requires that special units of government, e.g., County Service Areas, be established to maintain these local facilities in the unincorporated areas. County Service Areas are preferred over autonomous units of government, due to the ease with which their boundaries can be modified or eliminated during incorporation. In areas planned for development, efforts should be made to encourage new County Service Areas to provide for maintenance of local parks.

Trails and Paths. Trails provide a linear corridor that is primarily for non-motorized use (pedestrian, equestrian, bicycle, etc.). Most trails in the county are established for recreational use, though increasingly some are utilized for commute and transportation purposes. As such this plan is functionally also a part of the General Plan’s Transportation and Circulation Element. Note that there are additional policies relating to the transportation aspect of on-street bikeways and trails in the Transportation and Circulation Element.

This discussion is divided into three separate components dealing with bicycle, pedestrian, and equestrian facilities. In many cases, trails can be utilized for more than one purpose. For ease of presentation, these three trail plan components are discussed and mapped separately. While the trails plan is countywide and relies heavily on municipal plans in these areas, not all trails within those areas are shown; only the regional links are included. This plan encourages development of local feeder trails and paths to provide an interconnected system which can work as a circulation component as well as provide recreational opportunities. The County Trail Plan focuses on non-motorized facilities in order to maintain peace and tranquility for its users. Some trails are shown on all three maps to imply multi-use trails. Readers should note that internal trail facilities within EBRPD parklands are not shown in detail on figures in this element. Information regarding both Regional Trails and internal parkland trail facilities may be obtained directly from EBRPD. These maps are also consistent with the Association of Bay Area Government’s Ridge Trail Map.
Figure 9-4  Local Parks

- Community Park
- Proposed Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Proposed Neighborhood Park

NOTE:
Locations are schematic

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
Map Created September 23, 2004
Contra Costa County Community Development
100 H Street, Martinez, CA 94553
9-18
### 9. Open Space Element

#### TABLE 9-1
**COUNTY PARK CRITERIA**

1. **Playlots**
   a. Site Area: 2,000-5,000 square feet for either an independent site or that portion of a playground developed as a playlot.
   b. Location: Independent sites located in the centers of apartment projects or planned unit developments which they are intended to serve.
   c. Facilities: Basic facilities include playground equipment for preschool children (swings, slides, climbing apparatus) and shaded bench areas for parents. Additional facilities include sandboxes, spray pools, and grass and hard-surface areas.

2. **Playgrounds**
   a. Site Area: Independent site, 3-7 acres; in conjunction with park or school, 3-5 acres.
   b. Location: Central to neighborhood served, preferably accessible without having to cross traffic arterials or railroads.
   c. Facilities: Basic facilities include playground equipment for elementary school children plus both grass and hard-surface play areas. Additional facilities include playlots, shelters, and sports and game areas (baseball diamonds, tennis courts, and wading and swimming pools).
   d. Service Radius: One-half mile; lower in areas of low population density or unusual topography.
   e. Association: Playgrounds should be developed in conjunction with elementary schools and parks for maximum effectiveness. Location within independently-situated playfields and parks is also desirable.

3. **Playfields**
   a. Site Area: 10 acres minimum, 15 acres desirable; 12 acres minimum, 17 acres desirable for sites with playground facilities.
   b. Location: Central to four or five neighborhoods (roughly four or five elementary school service areas).
   c. Facilities: Primary facilities include game courts, sports fields, and lawn game areas. Secondary facilities include swimming pools, shelter houses or recreation buildings, and parking.
   d. Association: Playfields adjoining high school sites or community parks are particularly appropriate. Playlots and playgrounds should also be included.

4. **Neighborhood Parks**
   a. Acreage/Population: 2.50 acres per 1,000 population.
   b. Site Area: Without playground, 3-7 acres; with playground, 6-8 acres; with playfield, 12-17 acres.
   c. Location: Identical to playgrounds (center of neighborhood).
   d. Facilities: (Park area only) landscaped open space (trees, grass, shrubbery), benches and tables, and walks.
   e. Service Radius: One-half mile.
   f. Association: Neighborhood parks are best located adjacent to playgrounds, playfields, and elementary schools. They may also contain a neighborhood recreation center.

5. **Community Parks**
   a. Acreage/Population: 1.50 per 1,000 population.
   c. Location: In the center of a group of neighborhoods. The site should have some natural features of interest such as water frontage or rough topography if possible.
   d. Service Radius: Two miles.
   e. Facilities: Both landscaped and natural open space, playgrounds and playfields, parking, special facilities such as golf, boating and swimming, and a community center.
The Bicycle Trails Plan is shown on Figure 9-5. The following definitions are to be used in this plan:

**Bicycle Trails.** These types of trail facilities are designed for bicyclists and are intended to provide a safe connection between residential neighborhoods, parks, schools, and other facilities. They will normally accommodate high volumes of short distance bicycle traffic as well as inter-community movement. When feasible, bicycle paths between communities are encouraged to be developed on their own pathways that are physically separated from vehicular traffic.

The Pedestrian Trails Plan is shown on Figure 9-6. The following definitions are used in the plan:

**Pedestrian Trails.** All trails included in this plan are major, or primary, trails. These are intended for travel by individuals or groups of varying skills and ages. They typically connect important trail use destinations such as major parks and points of special interest. Pedestrian trails may be paved or, preferably, surfaced with resilient materials to keep down dust and permit travel in all weather.

The Riding (Equestrian) Trails Plan is shown on Figure 9-7. The following definitions are used in the plan:

**Riding Trail.** All trails included in this plan are major, or primary, trails. These are intended for extended travel by riders of varying skills and age groups. They typically connect important trail use destinations such as major parks and points of special interest. Riding trails usually are not paved, but preferably are surfaced with resilient material to keep down dust and permit travel in all weather.

**Staging Areas.** Staging areas are facilities for the assembly of trail user groups and parking of vehicles and accessory vehicles such as horse trailers. They need to be located adjacent to both trails and access roads. These areas also should be considered to be trail features and installed by either trail-providing agencies or the user groups. This is not a complete mapping of appropriate areas but an initial listing. Specific locations are not shown on Figure 9-7 but will be resolved as part of the trail planning process.

**Private Recreational Facilities.** Increasingly, private development projects are being considered which provide on-site recreational facilities to serve project residents. These facilities provide amenities and are effective sales tools. They may limit the effect of new homes on existing public park facilities; but, generally, they provide compatible facilities to those of the public parks. For this reason, credit from the park dedication ordinance requirements should only be given where it is clear that private developments provide facilities which are open to and serve the public.

This plan encourages placement of such facilities in private developments and encourages development of pathways that are integrated in location and design with those of adjacent projects.
Figure 9-6   Pedestrian Trails

NOTE:
Trail alignments are schematic; detailed alignment studies will be required for new trails.
Figure 9-7  Riding (Equestrian) Trails

NOTE:
Trail alignments are schematic in nature. Detailed alignment studies will be required for new trails.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
Additionally, there are current uses, such as sanitary landfills or quarries, which upon completion of their active lives, would enable all or part of the site to revert to recreational and open space uses. Where the public health can be guaranteed, preservation of these areas for recreational and open space purposes should be considered.

In appropriate locations, the provision of outdoor recreational facilities, e.g., private campgrounds, could add to the recreational diversity of the county. Design of such facilities needs to be of a high standard to be compatible with the adjacent rural environment.

There are resource areas within the county, e.g., the San Pablo Bay and throughout the Delta, where substantial potential exists for private recreational development. These should be encouraged if the projects include programs for environmental enhancements to their immediate areas and are limited to extensive recreational facilities.

Additional marinas to serve the Delta and the Bay may be permitted in select areas if they meet the criteria included in the "Implementation Measures" section below.

Joint use of recreational facilities is encouraged. For example, significant potential exists for trails to be developed along PG&E and utility pipeline rights-of-way.

The County's role in park and trail planning covers a broad spectrum of concerns. The County prepares plans for recreational facilities that serve the county population as a whole and work toward coordination of park and recreation efforts of federal, State, regional and local agencies. At the same time, the County is directly responsible for recreational planning for the unincorporated communities.

In order to ensure that the recreational needs of present and future residents of the county are provided for during the planning period, the following goals, policies, and implementation measures were developed.

**PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES GOALS**

9-H. To develop a sufficient amount of conveniently located, properly designed, park and recreational facilities to serve the needs of all residents.

9-I. To develop a system of interconnected bicycle, pedestrian, and riding trails and paths suitable for both active recreational use and transportation/circulation.

9-J. To promote active and passive recreational enjoyment of the county's physical amenities for the continued health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the county.

9-K. To achieve a level of park facilities of four acres per 1,000 population.

**PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES POLICIES**

9-32. Major park lands shall be reserved to ensure that the present and future needs of the county's residents will be met and to preserve areas of natural
beauty or historical interest for future generations. Apply the parks and recreation performance standards in the Growth Management Element.

9-33. A well-balanced distribution of local parks, based on character and intensity of present and planned residential development and future recreation needs, shall be preserved.

9-34. Park design shall be appropriate to the recreational needs and access capabilities of all residents in each locality.

9-35. Regional-scale public access to scenic areas on the waterfront shall be protected and developed, and water-related recreation, such as fishing, boating, and picnicking, shall be provided.

9-36. As a unique resource of statewide importance, the Delta shall be developed for recreation use in accordance with the State environmental goals and policies. The recreational value of the Delta shall be protected and enhanced.

9-37. Public funds from agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife shall be utilized to purchase levees and acquire easements.

9-38. Public trail facilities shall be integrated into the design of flood control facilities and other public works whenever possible.

9-39. Recreational development shall be allowed only in a manner which complements the natural features of the area, including the topography, waterways, vegetation, and soil characteristics.

9-40. Recreational activity shall be distributed and managed according to an area's carrying capacity, with special emphasis on controlling adverse environmental impacts, such as conflict between uses and trespass. At the same time, the regional importance of each area's recreation resources shall be recognized.

PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Ordinances and Programs

9-q. Complete a comprehensive study of all open space lands in the county to determine the areas that are most suitable for future park acquisition.

Development Review Process

9-r. Require that new development meet the park standards and criteria included in the Growth Management Program and set forth in Table 9-1. Ensure that credit for the park dedication ordinance requirements be given for private recreation facilities only after a finding has been adopted that the facilities will be open to and serve the public.

9-s. Permit additional marinas to serve the Delta and the Bay in select areas if they meet the following criteria:
1) Where projects can be clustered and located adjacent to similar uses;
2) Along waterways having an adequate channel width as defined by the State Harbors and Navigation Code;
3) In areas having adequate public vehicular access;
4) Where off-site improvements, such as required access roads, can be assigned to development;
5) Where adequate on-site sewage disposal can be provided;
6) Where located in an area served by a public fire protection district; and
7) When such uses will not conflict with adjacent agricultural uses.

**Intergovernmental Coordination**

9-t. Coordinate with the various school districts in the county to provide for the joint use of recreation facilities.

9-u. Coordinate funds and programs administered by County government and other agencies, such as the East Bay Regional Park District, to obtain optimum recreation facilities development.

9-v. Develop a comprehensive and interconnected series of bicycle, pedestrian, and riding trails in conjunction with cities, special districts, public utilities, and County Service Areas.

**Funding**

9-w. Form a countywide committee to explore funding sources for recreation and open space to support regional, community, and local parks and trails on a countywide basis.

9-x. Work with local unincorporated communities to determine the means of providing local park services where the need presently exists, as well as when development occurs.

9-y. Increase the park dedication fee to a level which approaches the local park dedication standards called for in this Plan.