

# Natural Environment and Public Spaces



*Walnut Creek Open Space Acorn Planters*

Walnut Creek offers a variety of open spaces, creeks, trails, parks, and plazas. In them, the community can enjoy and appreciate active and passive outdoor recreational opportunities from hiking to organized sports to people watching.

The 1989 General Plan followed the National Recreation and Park Association standards for park acreage per resident. That association, recognizing the difficulty of applying a single set of standards to a wide variety of parks and community needs across the country, no longer provides a national guideline for recommended park spaces. No other entity has offered standards, and the City uses no rigid definitions of types of parks.

Nevertheless, the numbers used in the 1989 General Plan are helpful in presenting a general picture of the amount of parkland available. Walnut Creek in 2005 had an estimated 66,500 residents and approximately 400 acres of parks and special use areas, or just over 6

acres for each 1,000 residents. The park standard in the subdivision ordinance – established by the 1989 General Plan – is 5 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents. With more than 2,700 acres of open space land, Walnut Creek has over 45 acres of parks and open spaces for each of its 1,000 residents

For a listing of city parks and open spaces, see Figure 5 at the end of this chapter.

This chapter comprises four sections – Open Space, Creeks, Trails, and Parks and Plazas. The sections overlap on some issues. For example, creeks and trails are present in the open spaces and in the parks and plazas.

## OPEN SPACE

Walnut Creek has one of the largest aggregations of city-owned open space in the United States – over 2,700 acres of oak woodland, savannah, and chaparral.<sup>1</sup> With proceeds of a bond issue authorized by the citizens in 1974, the City bought and preserved the undeveloped Acalanes Ridge, Lime Ridge, Shell Ridge, and Sugarloaf Open Spaces. The largest of the four – Shell Ridge – has roughly 1,420 acres of oak woodlands and grassland savannah and 31 miles of trails.

Figure 1 on page 3-4 shows Walnut Creek’s open space areas in 2005. Open spaces serve a variety of functions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Open space land is any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open space use for the purposes of the preservation of natural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, or public health and safety. (California Government Code §65560(b))

- Preserve natural resources
- Provide wildlife habitat and corridors
- Provide outdoor recreation
- Supply an important visual and aesthetic resource to those who live and work in the city
- Contribute to overall public safety (e.g., steeply sloped hillsides susceptible to landslides are kept open and free of development)
- Allow for limited educational and recreational activities

To preserve and enhance the open spaces, the City works with a number of nonprofit and quasi-public organizations. To ensure that city open spaces are not isolated, the City works cooperatively with other cities and government agencies to promote connectivity between adjacent open space areas.

## OPEN SPACE DESCRIPTIONS

### **Acalanes Ridge Open Space**

Located in the northwest area of the city between Walnut Creek and Lafayette, this open space area comprises a series of ridges that trend northwest and southeast and terminate at the junction of Highway 24 and Interstate 680. Acalanes Ridge Open Space is easily accessible for recreational uses.

### **Lime Ridge Open Space**

Lime Ridge is the dominant saddle leading to Mount Diablo. This open space area is rich in plants and animals and hosts some of the last remaining chaparral in the area. Lime Ridge is a natural greenbelt between Walnut Creek and Concord/Clayton to the east.

### **Shell Ridge Open Space**

Shell Ridge Open Space comprises a series of parallel ridges running from northwest to southeast through Walnut Creek to Mt. Diablo. The ridges and valleys constitute a major watershed for the Walnut Creek and Ygnacio Valley basins. Runoff from these lands contributes

substantially to underground aquifers. Shell Ridge Open Space includes the historic Borges Ranch, a working ranch established in 1899 and on the National Registry of Historic Places.

### **Sugarloaf Open Space**

A major ridge and a number of smaller ridges paralleling Interstate 680 between Rudgear Road and Livorna Road make up the Sugarloaf Open Space. The area provides easily accessible recreation among some of the last walnut orchards in the city.

### **Other Open Space Areas**

Other open space areas in the Walnut Creek area are Castle Rock Regional Recreational Area, Diablo Foothills Regional Park, and Mt. Diablo State Park.

Although they do not qualify as open space, three golf courses are shown in Figure 1 because they are large, open, and generally green areas. Boundary Oak Golf Course is owned by the City but is privately operated. The Rossmoor and Diablo Hills courses are privately owned and operated. Figure 5 at the end of this chapter lists the parks and open space areas in the city in 2006.



*Acalanes Ridge Open Space*

**GOAL 1**

**Maintain and enhance open space lands.**

- Policy 1.1. Protect, manage and improve open space lands.**
- Action 1.1.1. Prepare and adopt a plan for the protection and management of the City’s open space lands.
- Action 1.1.2. Work with other public agencies (such as water districts, adjacent cities, and park districts) in managing, operating, linking and providing access to open space.
- Policy 1.2. Protect and enhance the natural environment.**
- Action 1.2.1. Identify, protect, restore, and enhance sensitive biological and wetland resources and areas critical for habitat and habitat connectivity. (See Action 2.1.3.)
- Action 1.2.2. Strive to eliminate non-native plant species and expand areas with native plants.
- Action 1.2.3. Monitor and control the factors affecting the habitat value of open space, including trail use and grazing.
- Action 1.2.4. Support resource conservation opportunities on private land.
- Policy 1.3. Promote a variety of appropriate activities on open space lands.**
- Action 1.3.1. Assess user demand and impacts on open space and natural resources.

- Action 1.3.2. Allow on open space lands, only facilities, structures, and activities compatible with conservation, preservation, and education.
- Action 1.3.3. Review and update existing policies for open space activities and monitor their effectiveness.
- Policy 1.4. Provide convenient public access to open space lands and trails.**
- Action 1.4.1. Secure public access, where possible, to private open space lands.
- Action 1.4.2. Provide trailheads, parking areas, gates, and trails that meet generally accepted access standards and are sensitive to neighborhood interests.



*Family of hikers enjoying the Open Space*

This page intentionally left blank.

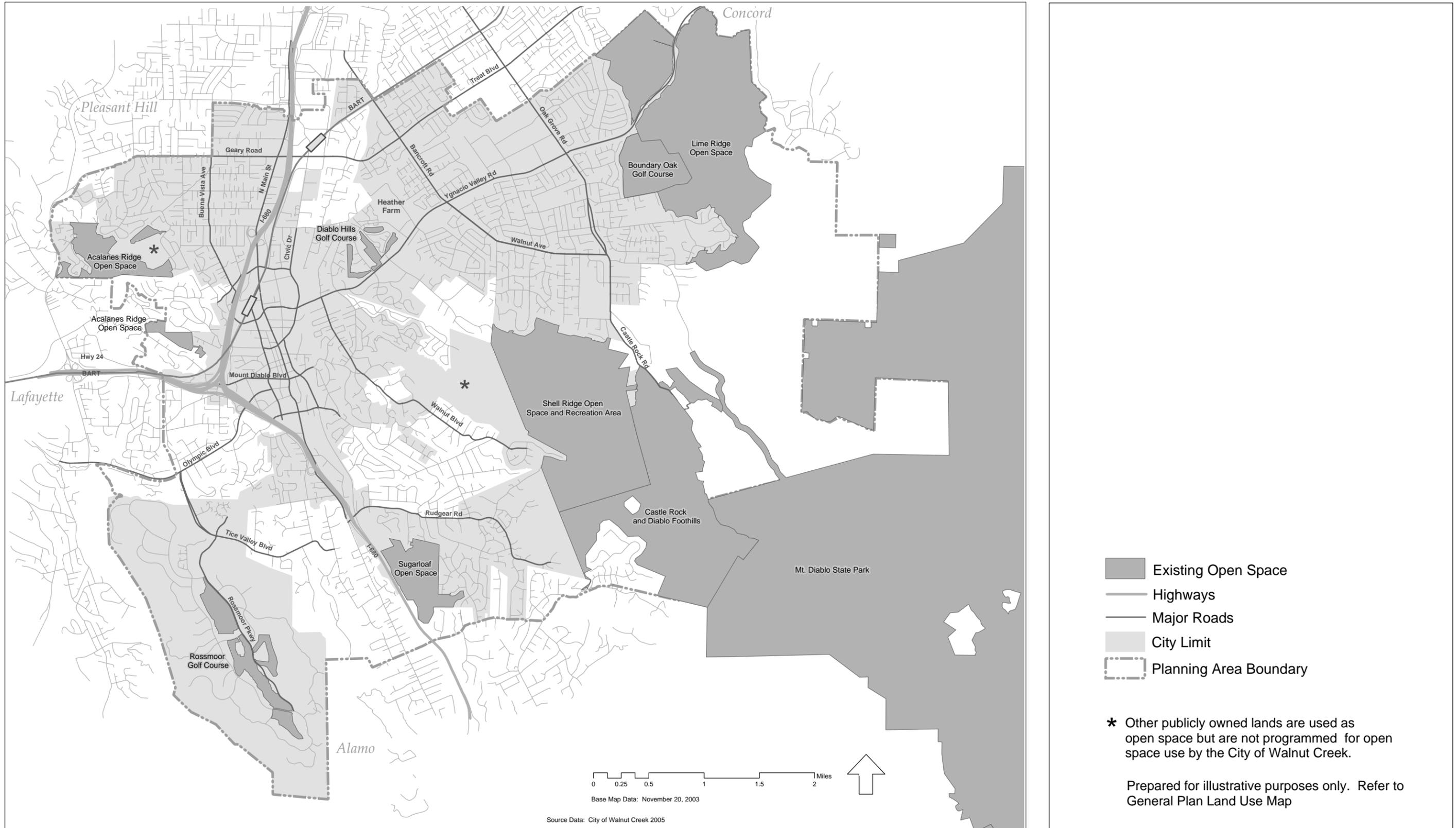


Figure 1. Existing Open Space, 2005

This page intentionally left blank.

---

**GOAL 2**

**Acquire additional open space lands or conservation easements.**

---

**Policy 2.1. Develop a plan for acquiring additional open space lands or conservation easements.**

Action 2.1.1. Develop criteria for possible acquisitions of open space lands important to the City.

Action 2.1.2. Identify and maintain a list and map of properties where open space acquisition should be considered.

Action 2.1.3. Give priority to acquiring lands that provide connections for animals between open spaces and/or important habitat.

**Policy 2.2. Plan for funding for open space acquisition or conservation easements.**

Action 2.2.1. Establish mechanisms for funding and maintaining new acquisitions and easements.

Action 2.2.2. Seek grants and other funds for acquisition and development.

**Policy 2.3. Support retention as open space of the private open space ranch lands adjoining Mount Diablo State Park.**

Action 2.3.1. Work cooperatively with property owners toward retention of open space lands adjacent to Mount Diablo State Park.

**Policy 2.4. As development projects arise, strive to preserve existing private open space lands under private ownership, and to provide public access to these private open spaces.**

Action 2.4.1. Develop and maintain an inventory of private open spaces and conservation easements.

Action 2.4.2. Encourage conservation easements that provide public access over private lands.

Action 2.4.3. Work cooperatively with developers in securing public access where desirable, without requiring the City to maintain private trails.

**Policy 2.5. Acquire private open space lands within development projects only when and where public ownership or access is desirable or necessary.**



*Shell Ridge Open Space*

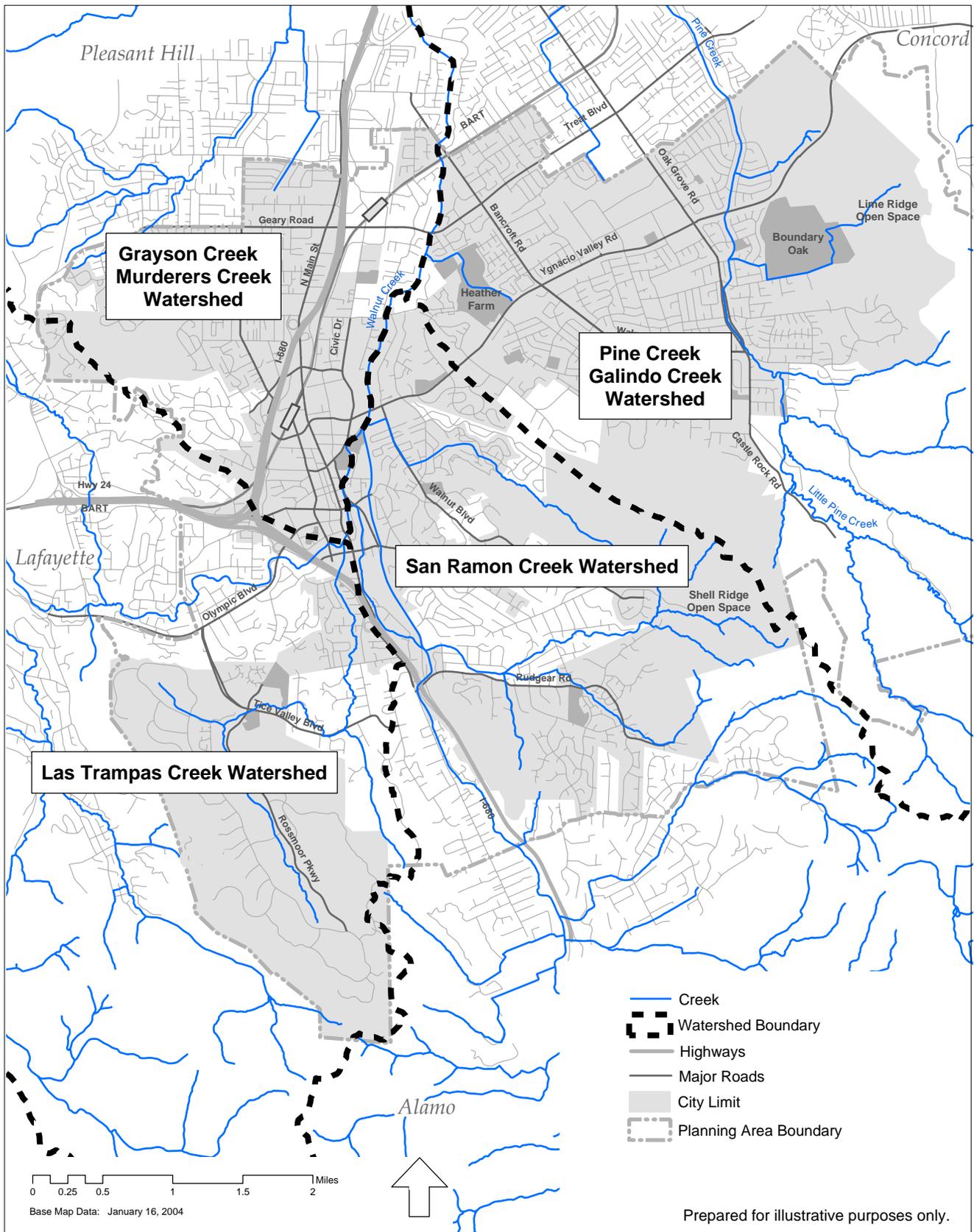


Figure 2. Watersheds and Creeks

## CREEKS

The city's creeks are important community assets to be protected and enhanced. They also are factors in flooding and are critical to flood control.

The Planning Area occupies the southern part of the broad Walnut Creek Valley. The Walnut Creek watershed drains the central region of Contra Costa County northward to Suisun Bay. Within it are the Grayson, Pine, San Ramon, and Las Trampas sub-watersheds through which flow the Walnut, Pine, San Ramon, Tice, and Las Trampas Creeks. San Ramon and Las Trampas Creeks join under the fountain in Liberty Bell Plaza to form the north-flowing Walnut Creek. See Figure 2, Watersheds and Creeks, page 3-6.

Natural creeks traverse the open space areas and a few of the city's developed areas. However, almost every creek in the city has been significantly altered from its natural condition and either channelized or undergrounded to control flooding and to allow development.



*San Ramon Creek at Near Court*

Within the network of creeks in the Planning Area, Walnut Creek has the opportunity to:

- Make the creeks more accessible by deconstructing channels and exposing covered creeks
- Restore or enhance habitat
- Improve linkages to the large open space areas and to the undeveloped lands remaining at the fringe of the Planning Area
- Create new trail links to and between neighborhoods

The 1993 *Creeks Restoration and Trails Master Plan* presents a hydraulic understanding of the major watersheds in the city and offers a plan for restoring each creek in the city's Core Area. The plan seeks to use creek corridors as a natural green edge to the predominantly urban core, thereby providing visual relief to, and enhancing the image of, the city and the downtown. Residents already enjoy the Walnut Creek channel via a creek walk and a scenic overlook at Broadway and Lincoln Avenue.

---

### GOAL 3

**Maintain and enhance the area's creek systems, their riparian environments, and their recreational amenities.**

---

- Policy 3.1. Restore riparian corridors and waterways throughout the city.**
- Action 3.1.1. Conduct an evaluation of existing creek conditions and restoration opportunities.
- Action 3.1.2. Through land acquisition and/or conservation easements, create or improve riparian corridors, riparian lands within parks, wetlands, and buffer zones.

- Action 3.1.3. Develop a coordinated set of creek policies covering setbacks from creeks, damage prevention, creek stewardship, nuisance abatement, public access, pathways, and similar public and environmental concerns. Policies may differ for creeks in open space lands and for creeks on private lands.
- Action 3.1.4. Cooperate with landowners, the public, regulatory and trustee agencies, and local and State agencies to expand creek restoration efforts and programs.
- Action 3.1.5. Seek local, county, regional, State, and federal funds for creek studies and improvement efforts.
- Policy 3.2. Make downtown creeks a central feature in new development.**
- Action 3.2.1. Implement the 1993 Creeks Restoration and Trails Master Plan.
- Action 3.2.2. Incorporate the downtown creeks in project designs for new development and redevelopment in the Core Area.
- Action 3.2.3. Expose covered creeks and incorporate open creeks in new development and redevelopment wherever possible.
- Action 3.2.4. Encourage the use of volunteers to implement the 1993 Creeks Restoration and Trails Master Plan.

## TRAILS

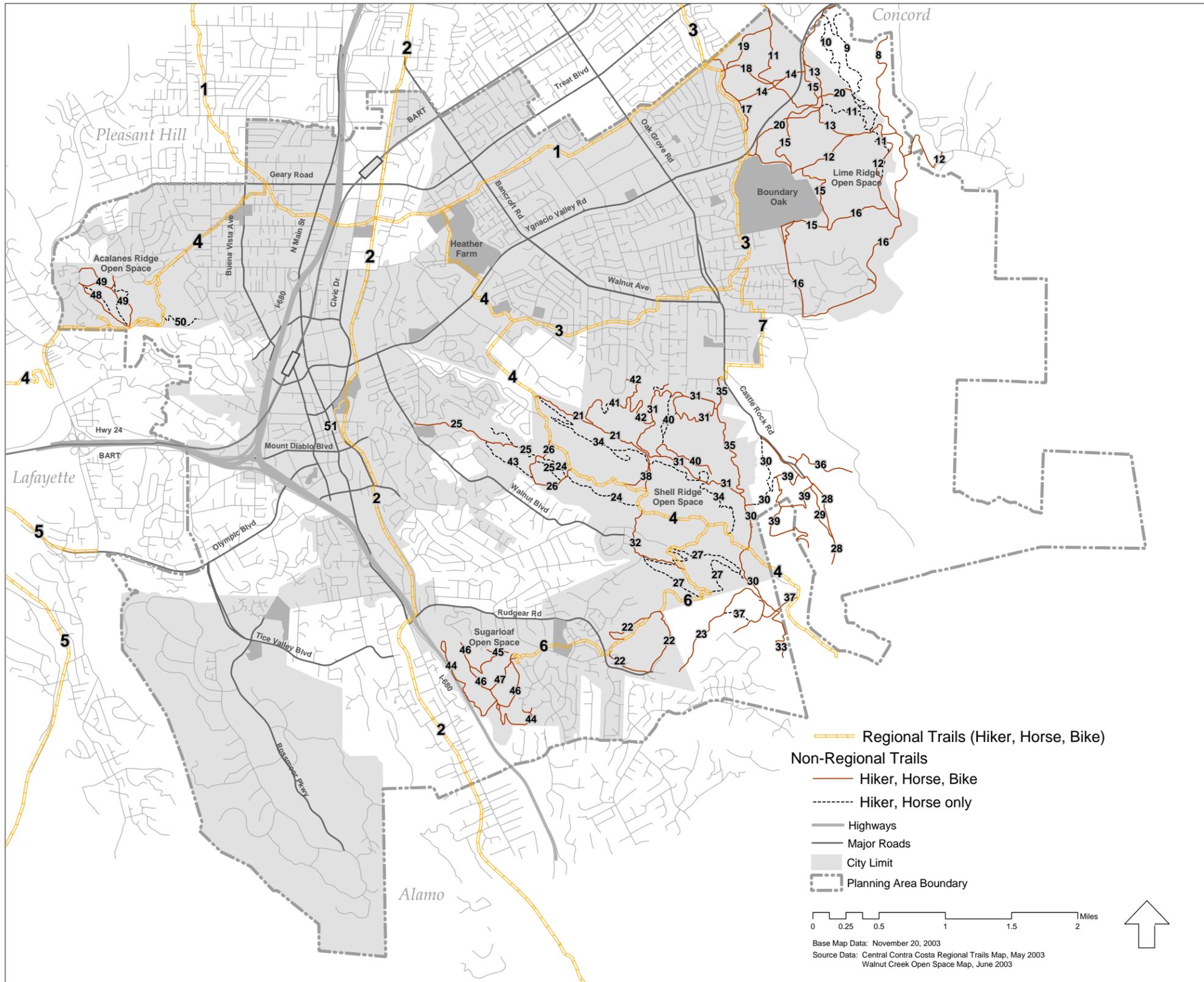
Walnut Creek has many miles of pedestrian and equestrian trails and bike routes along canals, former railroad rights-of-way, and within parks and open space areas. Many of the trails connect to the regional Contra Costa County trails system. See Figure 3, Trails, page 3-9.

The trail network adds immeasurably to the quality of life. It provides opportunities for residents and visitors to be outside and enjoy the climate and the views of Mount Diablo and surrounding hills. The trails provide respite from the built environment, bring the surrounding open space into the city, and facilitate access to diverse recreational amenities. Trails of various length and character connect the east and west sides of the city, its neighborhoods and community facilities, and access points to regional trails. The trails are an important component of the city's circulation system.



*Contra Costa Canal Trail at Oak Road*

The Walnut Creek section of the Contra Costa Canal regional trail – from Citrus Avenue to Putnam Boulevard – is maintained by the East Bay Regional Park District and provides for pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians along its entire length. The trail connects Lime Ridge Open Space with Heather Farm Community Park, Walden Park, the Mokelumne Aqueduct Trail, and the Iron Horse Trail.



**Central Contra Costa County Regional Trails**

1. Contra Costa Canal Trail
2. Iron Horse Regional Trail
3. Ygnacio Canal Trail
4. Briones to Mt. Diablo Regional Trail
5. Lafayette - Moraga Regional Trail
6. Sugarloaf - Shell Ridge Trail
7. Shell - Lime Ridge Trail

**Lime Ridge Open Space**

8. Crystal Ranch Trail
9. Paradise Valley Trail
10. Ridge Trail
11. Lime Ridge Trail
12. Manzanita Trail
13. Buckeye Trail
14. Woodlands South Trail
15. Ohlone Trail
16. Paraiso Trail
17. Cottonwood Trail
18. Woodlands West Trail
19. Woodlands North Trail
20. Blue Oak Trail

**Shell Ridge Open Space**

21. Corral Spring Trail
22. Franco Ranch Loop Trail
23. Foothills Trail
24. Indian Creek Trail
25. Kovar Trail
26. Fossil Hill Trail
27. Twin Ponds Loop Trail
28. Stage Road Trail
29. Castle Rock Trail
30. Borges Ranch Trail
31. Costanoan Trail
32. Joaquin Ranch Trail
33. Hanging Valley Trail
34. Ridge Top Trail
35. Hanna Lane Trail
36. North Gate Trail
37. Stonegate Trail
38. Ginder Gap Loop Trail
39. Shell Ridge Trail
40. Sulfur Creek Trail
41. Deer Lake Trail
42. Lower Buck Trail
43. Summit Ridge Trail

**Sugarloaf Open Space**

44. Bottom Spring Trail
45. Orchard Trail
46. Ridge Top Center Trail
47. Center Trail

**Acalanes Ridge Open Space**

48. Ridge Top Trail
49. Camino - Verde Trail
50. Sousa Trail

**Other**

51. Creek Trail

**\*\*Refer to Chapter 5, Figure 2 for Bicycle Facilities**

Note: This map is prepared for illustrative purposes and is not inclusive of all trails within the City of Walnut Creek. For more detailed information, consult the maps produced by the East Bay Regional Park District and Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation.

**Figure 3. Trails**

This page intentionally left blank.

The Ygnacio Canal pedestrian and bicycle trail forms a loop with the Contra Costa Canal Trail. It links the Lime Ridge Open Space, Boundary Oak Golf Course, Arbolado Park, San Miguel Park, and Heather Farm Community Park. Recently an over-crossing was added over Ygnacio Valley Road to connect the Iron Horse Regional Trail.

---

**G O A L 4**

**Provide a system of safe, well-developed, well-connected, and well-maintained trails.**

---

**Policy 4.1. Plan for a full complement of interconnected trails and paths for walkers, joggers, bicyclists, and equestrians, from the regional trails to downtown trails and paths.** (See Transportation Action 6.1.1.)

Action 4.1.1. Work with the County, the East Bay Regional Park District, and other agencies to develop trail links between residential areas and parks, creeks, transportation, schools, open space, shopping, and various public facilities.

Action 4.1.2. Link adjacent urban or open space trails and nearby open spaces owned by various agencies.

Action 4.1.3. Complete bicycle and pedestrian trail linkages, including the following:

- In the Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek BART areas
- From Heather Farm Park to John Muir Medical Center
- Along the Iron Horse Regional Trail near the Sugarloaf Open Space, downtown, Las Lomas High School and Walden Park.

Action 4.1.4. Use existing easements and creeks for trail links to neighborhoods.

Action 4.1.5. Encourage easements in residential neighborhoods for pedestrian connections to trails.

**Policy 4.2. Maintain and improve the trails system, including to and within the open space lands.**

Action 4.2.1 Provide consistent, clear signage for all trails and at all trailheads.

Action 4.2.2. Promote rancher-friendly conservation and recreational trail easements over key agricultural lands.

Action 4.2.3. Monitor trails for signs of environmental degradation and repair the ecosystem along trails where necessary.

Action 4.2.4. Identify equestrian staging areas and add or improve as needed. (See the North Gate Specific Plan.)

**Policy 4.3. Promote safety on all trails and on the roads leading to them.**

Action 4.3.1. Track safety complaints on trails and, where patterns are identified, work with user groups on solutions.

Action 4.3.2. Working with residents and equestrians, respond to identified road/trail (auto/horse) conflicts, including providing improved signage where needed.

Action 4.3.3. In areas where horses frequently are ridden, evaluate the need to develop equestrian trails adjacent to paved roads.

Action 4.3.4 With Contra Costa County, require construction rather than deferral of road improvements (including equestrian trails) in

the North Gate Specific Plan area.

## PARKS AND PLAZAS

The City owns and operates 19 parks with a variety of amenities and uses, plus a number of special-use areas including a golf course, historic museum, historic residence, and one urban plaza.

The City has worked with the school districts to allow public use of elementary and middle school recreation areas, when not being used by the schools.

See Figure 4, Parks and Recreation Facilities, following this page, and Figure 5 at the end of this chapter.



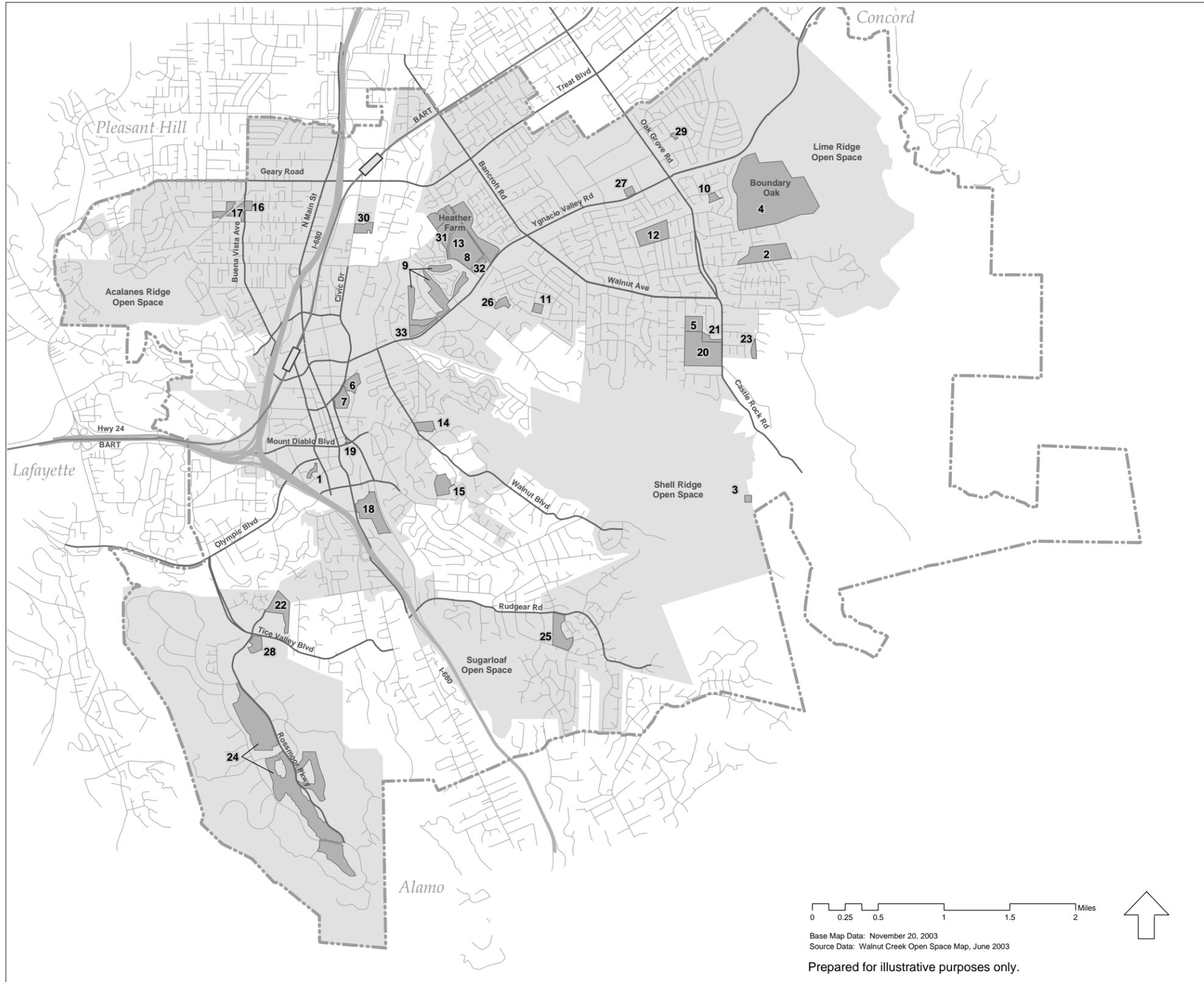
*Larkey Park*

In 2005, the City initiated a Parks Master Plan for City parks and open spaces. The City also began looking at providing plazas in the Core Area for resting, people watching and public gatherings.

### GOAL 5

#### Maintain and enhance the park system.

- Policy 5.1. Support both active and passive recreation uses in the park system.**
- Action 5.1.1. Partner with schools and businesses to offer active use areas.
  - Action 5.1.2. Coordinate local sports organizations' use of sports fields, courts, gyms, and swimming pools.
  - Action 5.1.3. Adopt standards for size, number and placement of sports fields and courts.
  - Action 5.1.4. Provide for multiple uses within the same park space, where practical and safe.
- Policy 5.2. Regularly assess specific user groups' needs and abilities.**
- Action 5.2.1. Determine park uses based on community need and the size and nature of each facility.
  - Action 5.2.2. Plan for accessible parks, playgrounds, and trails.
- Policy 5.3. Ensure that the City's parks are appropriately developed and well maintained.**
- Action 5.3.1. Establish minimum maintenance and service levels in the Parks Master Plan.
  - Action 5.3.2. Seek grants and other funds for park development and maintenance.
  - Action 5.3.3. Organize volunteer days for park cleanup and maintenance.



**Parks and Recreational Facilities**

1. Alma Park
2. Arbolado Park
3. Borges Ranch
4. Boundary Oak Golf Course
5. Castle Rock Youth Sports Park
6. Civic Park
7. Civic Park Community Center
8. Clarke Memorial Swim Center
9. Diablo Hills Golf Course (Private)
10. Diablo Shadows Park
11. El Divisadero Park
12. Foothill Community Gymnasium
13. Heather Farm Park & Heather Farm Community Center
14. Howe Homestead Park
15. Lar Rieu Property
16. Larkey Community Park
17. Larkey Park Swim Center
18. Las Lomas High School
19. Liberty Bell Plaza
20. Northgate High School
21. Northgate Park
22. Old Oak Park
23. Pine Creek Park & Greenway
24. Rossmoor Golf Course (Private)
25. Rudgear Park
26. San Miguel Park
27. Shadelands Museum
28. Tice Valley Community Park & Tice Valley Community Gymnasium
29. Valle Verde Park
30. Walden Park
31. Walnut Creek Equestrian Center
32. Walnut Creek Skate Park
33. Ygnacio Heights Park

- Highways
- Major Roads
- City Limit
- ⋯ Planning Area Boundary

**Figure 4. Parks and Recreational Facilities**

This page intentionally left blank.

---

**GOAL 6**

**Acquire additional parklands.**

---

**Policy 6.1. Plan park acquisitions and provide parkland and facilities adequate to support the city’s recreational needs, activities, and programs.**

- Action 6.1.1. Maintain 5 acres of parkland per 1,000 people.
- Action 6.1.2. Work with the community to identify underserved groups.
- Action 6.1.3. Evaluate the need for additional parks. (See Action 6.2.1)
- Action 6.1.4. Study and establish mechanisms for funding and maintaining new park acquisitions.
- Action 6.1.5. Develop and maintain an acquisition plan that includes a list and map of existing and potential park properties.
- Action 6.1.6. Consider acquisition of parkland under any of the following conditions:
- Where community need or use demands
  - Where the acquisition can provide greenbelt connections between open spaces
  - When acquisition opportunities arise
  - Where an opportunity arises for an urban wildlife preservation area

**Policy 6.2. Require that new development address park needs generated by a project.**

Action 6.2.1. Assess the park and recreation needs created by new Core Area housing development and changing populations. (See Action 6.1.3.)

Action 6.2.2. Consider establishing an impact fee on commercial development to be used to develop new or enhance existing parks or public plazas.

---

**GOAL 7**

**Provide publicly accessible outdoor spaces in the Core Area.**

---

**Policy 7.1. Create a large civic plaza in the Traditional Downtown.**

Action 7.1.1. Develop a plan that analyzes sites, feasibility and funding sources for a civic plaza in the Traditional Downtown.

**Policy 7.2. Encourage the development of, maintenance of, and connectivity between high-quality public spaces in the Core Area.**

Action 7.2.1. Define, design, and complete a network of public walkways and small public spaces in the Core Area.

**Policy 7.3. In conjunction with Core Area commercial and residential development and redevelopment, offer incentives for creating and maintaining public spaces, including pocket parks and plazas. (See Chapter 4, Action 6.2.3.)**

Action 7.3.1. Identify potential pocket park and plaza locations when reviewing precise and specific plans.

**Figure 5  
Parks and Open Spaces**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Amenities</b>
<b>CITY PARKS AND SPECIAL USE AREAS</b>		
Alma Park	2 acres	Picnic areas, benches, views
Arbolado Park	26 acres	Playground, sports fields and courts, picnic areas, restrooms, trail connections
Boundary Oak Golf Course	160 acres	18-hole golf course, pro shop, driving range, practice greens, restaurant
Castle Rock Youth Sports Park	6 acres	Sports fields
Civic Park	17 acres	Playground, sports courts, community center, library, gazebo, picnic area, native plant/butterfly habitat garden, restrooms, and trail connections
Diablo Shadows Park	3 acres	Playground, picnic areas, trail connections
El Divisadero Park	3 acres	Sports fields
Heather Farm Community Park	91 acres	Clarke Swim Center, playground, sports fields and courts, community center, equestrian center, bike paths, fishing pond, picnic areas, nature pond, restrooms, trail connections, limited off-leash dog area
Howe Homestead Park	7 acres	1930s-era residence, community gardens, trail connections
Lancaster	> 1 acre	Viewshed
Larkey Park	12 acres	Larkey Swim Center, playground, sports courts, Lindsay Wildlife Museum, Model Railroad Society, picnic areas, restrooms
Lar Rieu	10 acres	Undeveloped park land; use to be determined
Liberty Bell Plaza	> 1 acre	Downtown plaza with fountain and seating
Northgate Park	4 acres	Lawn and benches bordered by Northgate High School and Eagle Peak Elementary School
Old Oak Park	16 acres	Undeveloped park land; to be developed as passive recreation

<b>Name</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Amenities</b>
Pine Creek Park and Greenway	5 acres	Undeveloped park land; views, trail connections
Rudgear Park	12 acres	Playground, sports fields and courts, picnic areas, restrooms, trail connections
San Miguel Park	5 acres	Playground, sports, trail connections, limited off-leash dog area
Shadelands Museum	1 acre	Historical museum
Tice Valley Park	8 acres	Playground, gymnasium, sports fields, picnic areas, restrooms
Valle Verde Park	1 acre	Picnic areas
Walden Park	5 acres	Playground, basketball courts, picnic area, restrooms, trail connections
Ygnacio Heights Park	6 acres	Views
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>400 acres</b>

**OPEN SPACES**

Acalanes Ridge Open Space	179 acres	Trails, views
Lime Ridge Open Space	924 acres	Trails, views, interpretive tours
Shell Ridge Open Space	1,421 acres	Historic working Borges Ranch, trails, views
Sugarloaf Open Space	177 acres	Trails, views, picnic areas, restrooms
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,701 acres</b>

**TOTAL CITY-OWNED  
PARKS/OPEN SPACE**      **3,101 acres**  
<sup>a</sup> acres are rounded

**NON-CITY OWNED  
PARKS/OPEN SPACE**

The City has agreements with local school districts that allow the City to share the use of the school sports fields and playgrounds. In return, the City provides some maintenance services. Covered under this agreement are Walnut Acres, Valle Verde, Eagle Peak Montessori (Castle Rock), Bancroft, Buena Vista, Parkmead, Walnut Heights, Indian Valley and Murwood elementary schools, Foothill Middle School and Walnut Creek Intermediate School.

East Bay Regional Parks owns and manages Castle Rock Regional Recreation Area and Diablo Foothills Regional Park, located in the Walnut Creek Planning Area. Both areas provide additional recreational opportunities.

Source: City of Walnut Creek, Public Works Department

This page intentionally left blank.