

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority was founded over twenty years ago by visionary leaders and citizens for the purpose of balancing rapid growth and urbanization in Santa Clara County and Silicon Valley. The Open Space Authority is one of six open space districts in the nine county San Francisco Bay Area. We acquire and maintain open space lands in order to protect greenbelts, natural resources and agricultural lands.

## ABOUT THE OPEN SPACE AUTHORITY

Since our inception, we have protected over 20,000 acres of beautiful open space, agricultural lands, watersheds, wildlife habitat and operated open space preserves with public trails open 365 days a year. We are funded primarily by two sources: Measure Q, an annual parcel tax, and a benefit assessment. These are augmented by grants secured from federal programs, state bonds, strategic partnerships, and foundations. And while we are a relatively small agency, we take pride in our role as a steward of the health of the region's natural capital — our air, water, and soil which support over 1.8 million people.



**Andrea Mackenzie**  
General Manager



**Matt Freeman**  
Assistant General Manager



Wildlife Cam



Baylands — Derek Neumann



Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve — Andy Burnside



Ulistac Bridge — Liv Ames

### Acknowledgements

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A guide for protecting open space and livable communities

# SANTA CLARA VALLEY GREENPRINT



View of Coyote Valley from Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve — Ron Horii



# SANTA CLARA VALLEY GREENPRINT

## A GUIDE FOR PROTECTING OPEN SPACE AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

The distinctive Santa Clara Valley known by some as “Valley of Heart’s Delight,” was once among the most productive farming areas in the country, with flowering orchards producing plums, apricots, walnuts, and more.

Today, the Santa Clara Valley is home to Silicon Valley, a global technology hotspot for industry leaders such as Cisco, eBay, Yahoo, Google, Apple, and Facebook. The County expects a 36% population increase by 2040 — which will multiply demand for land, housing and water. The Open Space Authority has spearheaded the *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint* to help ensure that our region’s future growth and development is balanced with open space lands to protect our quality of life for generations to come.

The *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint* is a conservation vision that was developed over 18 months with input from scientists, planners, stakeholder groups and local communities. The *Valley Greenprint* identifies the highest priority geographic areas in the region for conservation and provides strategies for land acquisition and natural resource stewardship. We are pleased to share these highlights from this comprehensive vision that will guide the Authority’s work over the next 30 years.

You can access the full report and additional resources at [openspaceauthority.org](http://openspaceauthority.org). Please bookmark the *Valley Greenprint* page and visit often.

### KEY FINDINGS

The *Valley Greenprint* identifies nearly 122,000 acres of natural and agricultural landscapes for conservation, including the top 10 geographic priorities. The vision provides strategies for open space land acquisition and stewardship for the protection of water, wildlife, greenbelts, farms and ranchlands, and for connecting urban residents to nature.

The *Valley Greenprint* concludes that despite a rich legacy of open space protection in Santa Clara County, there is an urgency to conserve the region’s most critical water resources, farmland and wildlife habitat:

**WATER:** Demand for water is expected to exceed supply by 2035 (without significant investments in water supply reliability). More than 228 miles of streams and essential groundwater supplies in the Santa Clara Valley are polluted and 60 percent of recharge areas that absorb rainfall have already been developed.

- The *Valley Greenprint* prioritizes the protection of open space lands near rivers, lakes and streams as a key water conservation strategy, and includes the water-rich areas upstream of the Chesbro and Uvas reservoirs. The highest amount of rainfall in the County occurs here, where it slowly percolates into the soil and is conveyed to streams and downstream reservoirs, replenishing the groundwater that supplies much of the area’s drinking water. Undeveloped areas along the Valley floor are also essential to naturally recharge our groundwater-based drinking water supplies.

**AGRICULTURAL LANDS:** The region’s agricultural and ranching sectors have long supported the local economy and food system, while providing important environmental benefits. However, the County has lost 45 percent of its agricultural land to development in the last 30

years and only 27,000 acres remain in agricultural production. Over half of what remains is at risk of development in the next 30 years.

- The *Valley Greenprint* prioritizes protection of farms and ranchlands in the southern part of the County, including the Coyote Valley, east and south of Gilroy, and the Pacheco Valley to help sustain the economic viability of agriculture in the region. Community gardens and greenbelts will support sustainable, healthy cities.

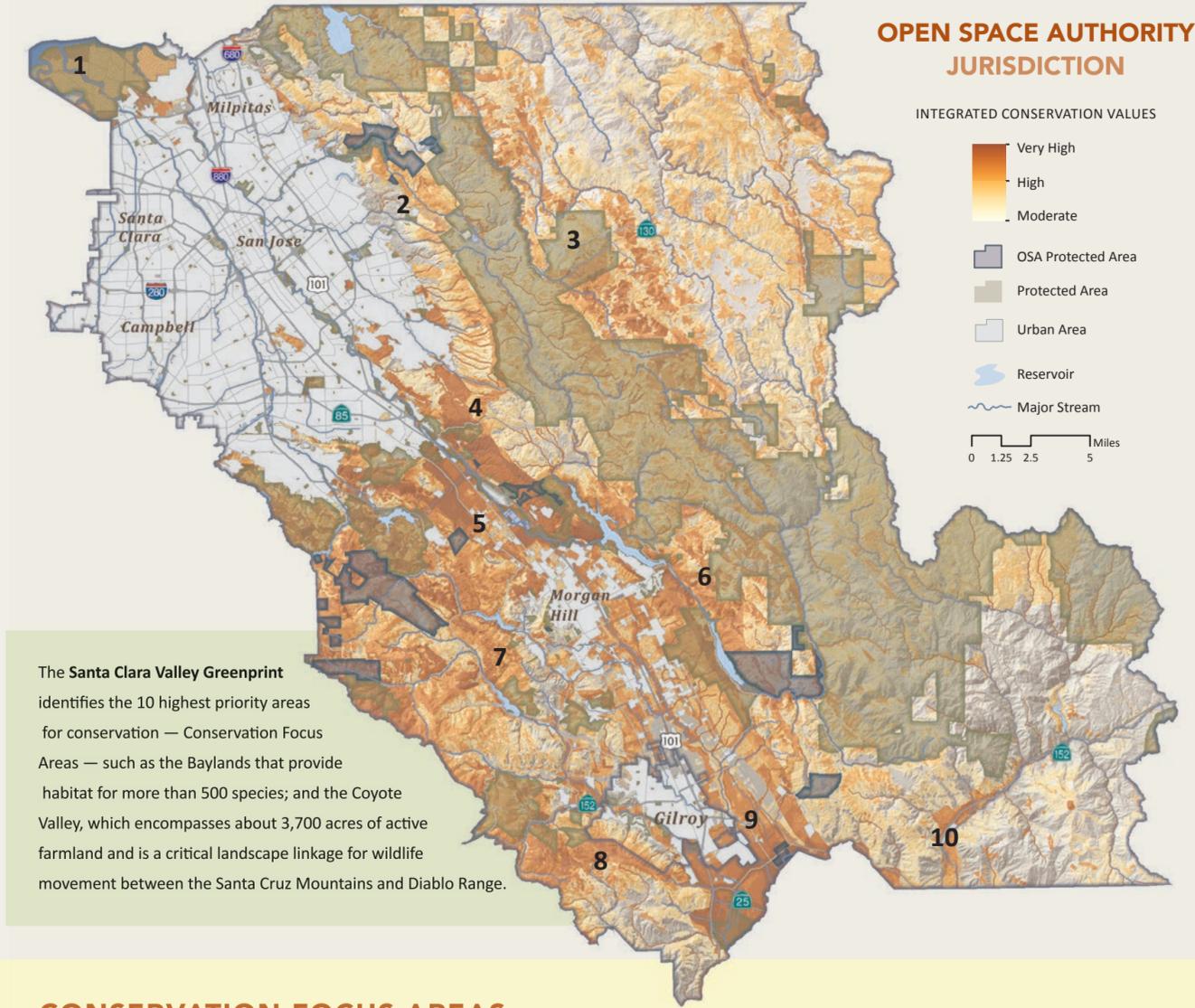
**RECREATION AND EDUCATION:** Despite past investment in parks and trails at the County and local levels, there are significant gaps in regional and local key trail systems and the need for increased recreation close to urban communities.

- The *Valley Greenprint* proposes new open space and trail projects in key locations throughout the county including the Upper Penitencia Creek/East Foothills region, which would increase recreation opportunities in Alum Rock and Berryessa neighborhoods and close gaps in the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

**URBAN OPEN SPACE:** Access to nearby parks and open space supports increased physical activity which results in better overall health and fewer instances of chronic illness and disease such as diabetes, osteoporosis and cancer.

- The *Valley Greenprint* emphasizes a neighborhood-focused approach to projects that supports local needs and interests. Projects may include community gardens, trails and greenways that connect communities to nearby schools and parks and open space in underserved or transit-oriented communities.

*The Valley Greenprint outlines an innovative, 21st Century approach to land conservation. By mapping landscapes and prioritizing those with multiple conservation values such as drinking water supplies, flood protection, natural communities, and biodiversity, we can make well-informed decisions about where to invest our limited funding for the greatest results in achieving our conservation goals.*



The *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint* identifies the 10 highest priority areas for conservation — Conservation Focus Areas — such as the Baylands that provide habitat for more than 500 species; and the Coyote Valley, which encompasses about 3,700 acres of active farmland and is a critical landscape linkage for wildlife movement between the Santa Cruz Mountains and Diablo Range.

## CONSERVATION FOCUS AREAS

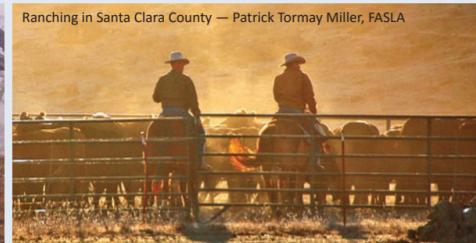
- Baylands provide habitat for more than 500 species and are a critical stop along the Pacific Flyway for migrating and nesting birds.
- Upper Penitencia Creek / East Foothills protect watershed values, and increase recreational opportunities for Milpitas and East San Jose neighborhoods.
- Upper Alameda Creek is the largest watershed in the South Bay and the sole near-wilderness area between Silicon Valley and the Central Valley.
- Coyote Ridge encompasses serpentine grasslands and oak woodlands, which provide habitat to more than 12 rare, threatened, and endangered species including the Bay Checkerspot Butterfly.
- Coyote Valley encompasses 7,400-acres in total from San Jose south to Morgan Hill with some of the last remaining contiguous, prime farmland in a region heralded for its agricultural heritage, as well as a critical linkage between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range.
- Upper Coyote Creek provides habitat for species like Foothill Yellow-legged Frog and is a primary source of local water supplies that flow to Anderson and Coyote Reservoirs.
- Southern Santa Cruz Mountains is a diverse and complex landscape offering refuge for rare plants and animals in the face of a changing climate, extensive recreational opportunities and water supplies.
- Sargent Hills’ streams provide habitat for California Red-legged Frog and steelhead trout. The Sargent Hills are within the critical landscape linkage connecting the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Diablo Range.
- Upper Pajaro River has outstanding water, wildlife, and agricultural conservation values. This area is important for flood control, animal migration, and long-term agricultural viability.
- Pacheco Creek runs through a scenic valley with fertile soils and small farms. This area includes rare sycamore alluvial woodlands, and habitat for the California Tiger Salamander and steelhead trout.



Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve — Stephen Joseph



Wildlife Cam



Ranching in Santa Clara County — Patrick Tornay Miller, FASLA

**NATURE’S RETURN ON INVESTMENT** A recent initiative funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation for the Open Space Authority found that Santa Clara Valley’s beautiful, diverse natural landscapes provide humans with critical environmental services that have significant value to the local economy — such as water supply, clean air, wildlife habitat, local food and pollination. Historically, these natural services have either been undervalued or considered “free.” The findings state that, “Natural capital including open space, natural areas, parks, agriculture, and working lands, provides foundational economic goods and services for Santa Clara County including clean air, water, food, fiber, climate stability, storm and flood protection, and recreational value.” (Earth Economics, 2014) If, as the study finds, we were to value nature and natural landscapes as an ‘asset’, their economic value would surpass the assessed value of all property in the County. Additionally, on an annual basis, natural areas and working landscapes return a minimum of \$1.6 billion and a maximum of \$3.9 billion in economic benefits to the region’s economy. Given the increased pressure on open space lands and natural resources from a growing population and climate change, it is critical to increase our investment in the natural landscapes that provide these environmental services that are the foundation of our quality of life.

**MISSION:** The Open Space Authority conserves the natural environment, supports agriculture and connects people to nature by protecting open spaces, natural areas and working farms and ranches for future generations.

Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve — Derek Neumann