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Open Space Authority Unveils its *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*

A 30-year Vision to Protect Open Space, Water, Wildlife and Working Lands

San Jose, CA – March 27, 2014 – The Open Space Authority’s Board of Directors unanimously approved the *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*, a detailed land and resource conservation vision that will guide the Authority’s work over the next 30 years. 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.

“Santa Clara County is the fastest growing county in the Bay Area region,” stated Andrea Mackenzie, the Authority’s General Manager. “The population is projected to increase by 36%, which means adding 700,000 people by 2040. We spearheaded the *Valley Greenprint* to achieve a critical balance between rapid growth and development, in order to preserve our quality of life for generations to come.”

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. It 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 and Diablo Mountains.

“The *Valley Greenprint* outlines an innovative, 21st Century approach to land conservation,” explained Mike Potter, the Authority’s Chairperson of its Board of directors. “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.”

Key Findings in the Valley Greenprint

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 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 area 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, which replenish the groundwater that supplies much of the area’s drinking water.

Agricultural lands: Santa Clara Valley’s history as one of the nation’s greatest agricultural regions has been a boon to the local economy and food system, while providing important environmental benefits. 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 agricultural and ranchlands in the southern part of the County, including the Coyote Valley, east and south of Gilroy and the Pacheco Valley, all of which will help sustain the economic viability of agriculture and ranching in the region.

Recreation and Education: Despite past investment in parks and trails at the County and local levels, there are significant gaps in key trail systems and opportunities for increased recreation.

- The *Valley Greenprint* proposes new open space and trail projects in 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.
- Proposed projects in the Santa Teresa area include a possible network of parks, open spaces and trails that link County parks and the Authority’s open space preserves.

Urban Open Space: Studies show 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, parks and opens spaces in underserved or transit-oriented communities.

“The *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint* provides a roadmap to help navigate a difficult and changing landscape and make informed conservation decisions and wise investments. Our ultimate goal is to achieve healthy, sustainable and livable communities well beyond the 21st Century,” stated Matt Freeman, the Authority’s Assistant General Manager.

The *Valley Greenprint* was prepared with input from scientists, planners, stakeholder groups and the general public. Attached is a map showing the 10 Conservation Focus Areas that represent the areas with the highest potential return on investment in natural resources, recreation, and agriculture. The *Valley Greenprint* is available on the Open Space Authority’s website at www.openspaceauthority.org.

About the Open Space Authority

Founded 20 years ago by visionary leaders and citizens, the Open Space Authority acquires and maintains open space lands, protects natural resources, and provides healthy recreation for residents of the Santa Clara Valley. Since its inception, the Authority has protected more than 16,000 acres of beautiful open space, agricultural lands, natural areas, watersheds, wildlife habitat, and preserves with public trails open 365 days a year.