



OPEN SPACE

Final

PURPOSE

This element addresses open spaces for:

- the managed production of resources,
- outdoor recreation,
- public health and safety, and
- the preservation of natural resources.

Amador County's open space areas support recreational uses, vegetation, and wildlife habitat and help to maintain the County's scenic beauty. The purpose of this element is to identify goals, policies, and implementation measures that manage, conserve, and enhance these resources for current and future residents and visitors.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Open Space Element describes the County's goals and policies with respect to open space areas and addresses the following topics:

- preserving and creating community separators and managing existing agricultural, open space, and recreational resources;
- conserving, improving, developing, and maintaining recreational facilities;
- protecting local scenic highway corridors; and
- protecting natural resource habitats and special status species.

The Open Space Element is closely related to the Conservation and Economic Development Elements, and these elements contain additional and more specific information and policies about related topics, including water supply and quality, energy resources, agriculture and agricultural lands, forest lands and forest resources, mineral resources, historic and cultural resources, and air quality.



RECREATION

Parks and Developed Recreation Areas

More than 30 parks and/or recreational facilities are located within Amador County. The incorporated cities and two community service districts in the unincorporated areas own and maintain most of the developed recreational facilities in the county. Amador County and the Amador County Recreation Agency (ACRA) own and maintain five developed parks. Overall, Amador County includes over 700 acres of developed parkland and designated recreational open space owned by the cities, community service districts, the County, and ACRA.

A Recreation Master Plan was prepared by ACRA in 2006. The plan inventoried parks and recreational facilities in the county and identified existing deficiencies and future needs, including park needs for the unincorporated communities of Pine Grove, Volcano, and Camanche Village. The recreation master plan found that in the unincorporated areas, one new 20- to 30-acre rural day-use park would be needed in the northern portion of the county and that Molly Joyce Park in Pioneer should be improved to better serve passive uses.

Trails, used for biking, hiking, walking, and horseback riding, are among the most popular and in-demand recreational facilities. The Amador County Transportation Commission (ACTC) has adopted a Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan, and ACRA seeks to expand recreational trail opportunities.

General Plan policies and programs support continued expansion of developed recreation areas in Amador County to meet the needs of future residents and visitors.

Undeveloped Recreation Areas

In addition to developed parks and recreation areas, the county contains many areas of publicly owned, undeveloped open space land that is available for passive recreation uses. Through General Plan policies and programs, the County seeks to maintain these areas for public recreation and to support increased tourism.

The majority of the land located in the eastern portion of the county (above Dew Drop) is part of the Eldorado National Forest, which extends into Alpine, El Dorado, and Placer Counties. The national forest contains more than 600 miles of fishable streams, nearly 300 lakes (including 11 large reservoirs), miles of trails, campgrounds, and a variety of vegetation



types including chaparral, woodlands, mixed conifer, true fir, and subalpine. Recreational uses include camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, cycling, horseback riding, target shooting, off-road vehicle use, skiing, snowshoeing, snowboarding, and snowmobiling. In addition, numerous rivers and lakes offer water sports like boating, canoeing, kayaking, and swimming.

The Mokelumne Wilderness, a designated wilderness area, is located in the easternmost portion of the county along the crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The wilderness contains over 105,000 acres within the Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Toiyabe National Forests. Wilderness areas are reserved for non-motorized passive recreational uses; the only travel allowed is by foot or on horseback, and a wilderness permit is required for entry.

Amador County also contains lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). BLM lands along the Cosumnes and Mokelumne Rivers provide opportunities for water recreation. These areas are popular for activities such as swimming, boating, canoeing, kayaking, and tubing. In addition, hunting is allowed on most BLM lands.

The County also contains one California State Park, Indian Grinding Rock State Park, near Pine Grove. The park has a museum and cultural sites that can be viewed by the public, but also offers passive recreational opportunities like camping, hiking, and wildlife viewing. Mt. Zion Demonstration State Forest is operated by Cal FIRE and offers hiking and wildlife viewing.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) is a large landowner in the County. EBMUD owns and manages Camanche and Pardee Reservoirs and the Camanche Hills Hunting Preserve in the western portion of the County, as well as miles of trails open for public use near the Mokelumne River. Camanche and Pardee Reservoirs allow both motorized and non-motorized boating, waterskiing, jet-skiing, swimming, and fishing. Lands surrounding the reservoirs provide hiking trails and camping areas. The Camanche Hills Hunting Preserve is located near the north shore of Camanche Reservoir, and provides hunting opportunities, including facilities for hunting education and classes.

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) owns and manages several reservoirs within the Eldorado National Forest. These reservoirs are open for public use. The largest and most popular of PG&E's reservoirs include Bear River, Salt Springs, and Silver Lake Reservoirs.



SCENIC ROADWAYS

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has designated a segment of State Route (SR) 88 from Dew Drop Ranger Station, east of Buckhorn, to the Nevada state line as a State Scenic Highway. The rest of SR 88 in Amador County (west of the Dew Drop Ranger Station), and the entire length of SR 49 traversing the County are eligible for State Scenic Highway listing, but neither is officially designated. The State Scenic Highway Program seeks to protect scenic beauty along particularly picturesque roadways to enhance the experience of travelers along the roadway as well as to support recreation and tourism in those areas. The officially designated segment of SR 88 is located east of Dew Drop, and based on the land use designations in this area, there is little potential for development along this portion of the highway.

NATURAL RESOURCE AND SPECIES PROTECTION

The county's broad range of elevation and topography results in a rich diversity of natural and biological resources. The western half of the county is characterized by rolling hills covered with oak woodland, grassland, and chaparral. The forested upcountry, which is part of the Eldorado National Forest, has a more rugged topography characterized by steep slopes, deep river canyons, and high mountain peaks covered by forests, montane shrublands, and lakes.

The information on biological resources provided in this element focuses on the western foothill region of the county, where the effects of the General Plan and threats to biological diversity and sensitive resources are greatest. Important planning issues in this region include increased urbanization, habitat fragmentation, and water pollution.

Vegetation and Wildlife

The complex array of habitats in Amador County supports many diverse animal species because large tracts of land are covered by habitats known to have outstanding value for wildlife, such as mixed coniferous forests and oak woodlands. The oak woodlands that span the western portion of the county support a high diversity of wildlife species. Other habitats, like the lone chaparral, are unique plant communities found only in western Amador County. Large contiguous blocks containing multiple habitat types have the potential to support the highest wildlife diversity and abundance.

The South Fork Cosumnes River, the North Fork Mokelumne River, Dry Creek, Sutter Creek, Jackson Creek, Lake Camanche, Pardee Reservoir,



and Lake Amador all provide vital fish spawning, rearing, and/or migratory habitat for a diverse range of fish.

Deer migration corridors are also a concern in many foothill counties, including Amador County. The county is home to both resident and migratory deer populations, with critical winter range for deer found at elevations between 2,000 and 4,000 feet above sea level, and summer critical habitat at 4,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level. Because of animal migration needs, both the quantity and the location and connectivity of habitat are important considerations.

Oak Woodland Habitat

Loss of wildlife habitat associated with anticipated future urban growth in western Amador County will be greatest in the county's oak woodlands, which form the dominant habitat type in this half of the county. In addition to being an essential element of the county's rural character, oak woodlands support an unusual diversity of animal species and provide important corridors for wildlife movement. This is a result of the many resources that oak trees provide, including roosting and nesting sites, and an abundant food supply such as large acorn crops.

Wetlands, Riparian Habitats, and Other Sensitive Communities

The vernal pool complexes and lone chaparral of western Amador County, and the riparian habitats along corridors such as the Cosumnes River, the Mokelumne River, and Dry Creek are examples of some of the sensitive communities found throughout the county. These sensitive communities are a part of the county's biological wealth and are home to some of its unique plant and animal species. Future residential, commercial, and infrastructure development and expansion of agricultural or mining activities have the potential to directly remove, degrade, or fragment these sensitive habitats.

Special-Status Species

Amador County is home to several plant and wildlife species listed as endangered, threatened, or rare based on federal and/or state criteria, including but not limited to lone Manzanita, California tiger salamander, and Central Valley steelhead. These species are an important part of the county's biological heritage worth protecting for future generations to experience. Special-status species could be affected by existing and projected land uses if habitat is lost, existing habitat is fragmented, or land use changes on adjacent lands degrade current habitat areas.



RELATED PLANS AND PROGRAMS

Federal Endangered Species Act

The federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) protects certain animal and plant species. Under the ESA, species are put on lists and categorized as endangered, threatened, proposed, or candidate. Endangered species are those that are in imminent danger of extinction while threatened species are those likely to be in danger of extinction. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) maintain the lists and enforces protection of these species. Actions that may result in “take” of a species are monitored and permitted by the USFWS. “Take” is broadly defined and includes actions that would “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect” listed species.

Listed species are often called special-status species. Plants are not as heavily protected as animal species and are only protected when a take occurs on federal land or by federal action.

California Endangered Species Act

The California Endangered Species Act (CESA) prohibits take of any species that the California Fish and Game Commission determines to be an endangered or threatened species. Federal and state lists of threatened and endangered species are generally similar; however, a species present on one list may be absent from the other. The CESA is also somewhat different from the ESA in that the state regulations include threatened and endangered plants on nonfederal lands within the definition of take.

Oak Woodland Conservation

In 2001, the California Legislature passed the California Oak Woodland Conservation Act, establishing a fund to financially support counties’ oak woodland conservation efforts. The act authorizes the Wildlife Conservation Board to purchase oak woodland conservation easements and provide grants for land improvements and restoration efforts. The Wildlife Conservation Board also funds oak woodland preservation outreach and education efforts.

California Public Resources Code Section 21083.4 directs counties to require feasible and proportional habitat mitigation for impacts on oak woodlands as part of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review process. During CEQA review, the County is required to determine



whether proposed projects “may result in a conversion of oak woodlands that will have a significant effect on the environment.” The law applies to all oak woodlands except those dominated by black oak. If the County determines that a proposed project may have a significant effect on oak woodlands, mitigation is required. The law prescribes four mitigation options:

- conserving oak woodlands through the use of conservation easements,
- contributing funds to the Oak Woodlands Conservation Fund to purchase oak woodland conservation easements,
- replanting trees (replanting cannot fulfill more than 50% of the required mitigation), and/or
- implementing other mitigation actions as outlined or developed by the County.

ISSUES, GOALS AND POLICIES

The goals and policies of the Open Space Element present strategies to enhance recreation and natural resource protection in the County. The Open Space Element is closely related to the Conservation Element and the Economic Development Element, which address topics such as agriculture, mineral resources, and visual resources.

Scenic Corridors

The State of California has designated a portion of SR-88 as a Scenic Highway, and the U.S. Forest Service has designated a portion of SR-88 as a National Forest Scenic Byway. SR-49 and the balance of SR-88 are eligible for designation as Scenic Highways by the State of California. In addition, the Circulation and Mobility Element includes goals and policies which address these scenic corridors.

Recreation

Recreational opportunities, including parks, trails, and water recreation areas, are important to residents and visitors alike. ACRA is responsible for meeting the recreation facility needs for the county as a whole, including both unincorporated areas and cities. ACRA’s Recreation Master Plan establishes a blueprint for expansion of recreation facilities and program offerings in the county.



Goal OS-1: Ensure provision of park and recreational facilities serving residents and visitors.

Policy OS-1.1: Support efforts by ACRA to maintain and enhance existing parks.

Policy OS-1.2: Support efforts by ACRA to provide a range of recreational facilities and programming to serve all county residents, including facilities and programs geared toward youth and seniors.

Policy OS-1.3: Identify potential revenue sources to develop and maintain existing facilities, as well as to provide and expand recreational facilities as needed.

Goal OS-2: Encourage the development and use of recreational and transportation trails within Amador County.

Policy OS-2.1: Promote the development of a network of recreational trails for pedestrians, hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists. Where possible, promote the functional use of trails as transportation corridors.

Policy OS-2.2: Link trails to existing infrastructure, including other recreation opportunities, parks, schools, neighborhoods, and commercial areas. Coordinate with surrounding counties and communities to connect trails to regional and statewide systems.

Natural Resource and Species Protection

Conservation and stewardship of the natural environment, including wildlife habitat, is important to the future of the county. The County will work to guide development and use of the land in ways which limit degradation of the natural environment, always seeking to maintain a balance between the community's interests in preservation and the rights of individual property owners.

Goal OS-3: Protect wildlife habitats, including sensitive environments and aquatic habitats, consistent with State and federal law.

Policy OS-3.1: Encourage preservation of oak woodlands in accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21083.4.

Policy OS-3.2: Encourage the conservation of corridors for wildlife movement, particularly in oak woodland areas and along rivers and streams.

Policy OS-3.3: Support voluntary conservation easements to protect wildlife habitat, including oak woodlands.



Policy OS-3.4: Use site planning techniques, including, but not limited to, buffers, setbacks, and clustering of development to protect sensitive environments, including wetlands, riparian corridors, vernal pools, and sensitive species.

Policy OS-3.5: Protect aquatic habitats from the effects of erosion, siltation, and alteration.

Policy OS-3.6: Encourage the use of appropriate native species for reclamation and revegetation components of development projects. Restrict the introduction of invasive exotic species. The County will amend Chapter 15.40 of the County Code (governing grading and erosion control) to include a section addressing the requirement to limit the potential for introduction and spread of invasive species during soil disturbance and construction activities.

Goal OS-4: Protect special status species, including threatened and endangered species, consistent with State and federal law.

Policy OS-4.1: Ensure that new development complies with State and federal laws concerning special status species preservation.



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