



County Strategic Priority: Healthy Watersheds

Lead Departments

Regional Parks, Agriculture Preservation and Open Space District, Water Agency, Agricultural Commissioner, UC Cooperative Extension, Fire and Emergency Services, Permit Sonoma, County Counsel.

Vision

We are advancing resource conservation efforts throughout the County by establishing a framework for coordination of existing initiatives and leveraging resources to produce new efforts. Our efforts are aimed at removing water ways from the list of impaired streams, sustainable park funding to allow protection of natural land and connect people to their watersheds, sustainable management of groundwater, and educating the public on the importance of stewardship to the future of our community.

Priority Summary

The last hundred years in Sonoma County has witnessed substantial growth and development. While this has led to vibrant communities with high quality of life, this has altered our natural environment and adversely impacted rivers, streams, air quality, wildlife, and water quality. This has also restricted public access to nature, which is one of the aspects that make our County so desirable. More importantly, many of our County's streams have been federally listed as impaired. Further the State has named three groundwater basins in the County as priority basins under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, requiring development of groundwater management plans. While park acreage has increased over recent decades, funding challenges remain that risk park closures, increased fees, and depletion of natural resources within the parklands.

The County has been working for several decades to address these impacts. Driven by the Agriculture and Natural Resources element of the General Plan, the County has passed multiple ordinances designed to protect our watersheds (e.g. riparian corridor ordinance, Vineyard Erosion and Soil Control Ordinance); voters have approved and funded the County's Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to protect land and resources, and approved the creation of community separators. Further the County has provided funding to local Resource Conservation Districts to improve watersheds throughout the County; the County and related agencies have restored and improved habitats in the Russian River and its tributaries for endangered salmonid species; and coordinated closely with local agricultural producers to maintain appropriate flows for fisheries during critical periods.

While each of these efforts has been successful, they have not always been coordinated in a way that maximizes collaboration and cooperation within the County and with stakeholders, including other local government agencies and non-profits. Further, these substantial efforts have not always been well

communicated to stakeholders and the general public. The Healthy Watersheds Initiative will provide a framework for this coordination, incorporating existing efforts with emerging initiatives, to better leverage existing efforts and gain support for new efforts.

Specific goals for this priority are to:

1. Coordinate the collective efforts of our governmental, non-profit and other partners to improve conditions of our watershed for humans and the environment.
2. Collaborate to secure funding that addresses priority threats related to habitat, water supply, water quality, flood control and climate change.
3. Communicate the natural resource goals, activities and accomplishments of the county to the public through a seamless portal.

Potential outcome measures to track progress toward these goals could include:

1. All rivers and streams in the county are off the 303D list.
2. All threatened and endangered plant and animal species are recovered.
3. All county investments in natural resources are matched 1:1 by external sources: state, federal, private.
4. Voters approve parks measure, reauthorization of SCAPOSD funding, and other measures to improve natural resource conditions.
5. Residents and partners regularly visit the Natural Resources website to access information on natural resources.
6. Complete conservation plans on 70,000 acres and resource conservation efforts on 10,000 acres to implement Sonoma County Venture Conservation.

Priority Projects

The County has identified numerous initiatives and existing projects that are currently underway, such as implementing the Biological Opinion to monitor salmonids in the Russian River water system, development and implementation of Best Management Practices for agriculture and open space monitoring, and the Russian River Sustainability Initiative and “Confluence” launched in 2016. In this sense, much of what is proposed in this priority is a greater integration of disparate resource conservation efforts to both help educate the public about the County’s efforts as well as to enhance the delivery of services to the public and the County’s effectiveness of stewardship activities.

Based on the County’s current assessment, given adequate resources the following projects will help the County accomplish the goals of this priority.

1. Re-organize selected County departments and agencies into a new functional group entitled “Natural Resources and Agriculture” that meets quarterly to ensure effective coordination and communication.
2. Establish centralized web page for Natural Resources Agencies and Departments.
3. Launch a cooperative effort to ensure long-term funding for Regional Parks.
4. Initiate inspections of all permitted Cannabis farms in the unincorporated area for compliance with Best Management Practices designed to protect natural resources.
5. Implement riparian corridor and wetland protections/setbacks to preserve the continuity of watersheds, provide migration corridors and habitat connectivity, protect water quality and aquatic habitats and maintain critical groundwater recharge areas.
6. Implement Groundwater Management Agencies and Management Plans and ongoing monitoring program provides critical data for sustainable groundwater management and informed decisions on land use proposals.

7. Implement the Sonoma County Integrated Parks Plan to connect communities with parks and interpret natural resources throughout the county.
8. Complete resource protection policies, and apply such policies on an ongoing basis as development permits are reviewed, to protect timber, riparian and wetlands.
9. Transfer Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District fee lands to Regional Parks for long-term management and opening to public access.
10. Align Vineyard Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance (VESCO) standards with North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's "Waste Discharge Requirements" for vineyard and orchard by spring 2019.

Stakeholders

- Sonoma and Goldridge Resource Conservation Districts
- LandPaths
- Regional Parks Foundation
- Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
- Russian Riverkeeper
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Laguna Foundation
- County residents and businesses
- Environmental advocates
- Agriculture organizations
- Conservation organizations