

1.0 INTRODUCTION & VISION STATEMENT

Open space, whether public or private, is one of Yolo County's most precious commodities. Once an opportunity to acquire parks and open space is lost, a second chance is seldom possible. Open Space in Yolo County is closely tied to the future of agriculture. Although other forms of open space are extremely important, without the continuation of agricultural enterprise, open space resources will be greatly diminished. The future of open space in Yolo County, therefore, is closely tied to directions and initiatives undertaken to preserve land for agriculture. At the same time, growth pressures will increase demand for open space and recreational lands accessible to an expanding regional population.

If the correct decisions are made, regional growth will be an economic incentive to preserve Yolo County's open space resources. Key to the preservation of open space lands held in private ownership will be creation of non-traditional activities, especially those associated with eco-tourism and agricultural tourism. Any existing policies that would impede these forms of recreation should be reexamined and the County should actively support the development of visitor-serving businesses that complement eco- and agricultural tourism.

If properly marketed and promoted, Yolo County has the potential to become a destination for short vacations and day trips from within the Sacramento/Bay Area region. Visitors will enjoy a variety of outdoor recreational activities utilizing a wide range of natural resources, as well as agriculturally- and educationally-related activities. To establish Yolo County as a destination choice will, however, require development of additional traveler-related infrastructure.

Non-agriculturally-related open space and recreation facilities will be expanded as resources permit. This will continue to include implementation of plans for Lower Cache Creek, the Yolo Bypass, the Blue Ridge Mountains, Lower Putah Creek, the Sacramento River and existing County parks lands and facilities. Implementation will be aided by public/private partnerships and joint activities with other government agencies. The pace of activity and level of County involvement will, however, be limited unless the resource base is expanded. Government and foundation grants will be an important source of funding encouraging the growth of private open space and recreational amenities, which in turn will provide tax revenues that can be used to expand and improve publicly held land and facilities.

In summary, any successful program for open space and recreation lands and facilities in Yolo County must recognize the need to create a strong economic incentive for preservation of farmland, as well as open space for scenic and wildlife purposes. These incentives are embodied both in the development of eco- and agricultural tourism and in the creation of new markets and opportunities for agriculture.

1.1 Purpose of the Open Space and Recreation Element

The primary purpose of the Open Space and Recreation Element is to be a foundation policy document enabling the County to further establish and preserve open space areas, develop further opportunities for recreation tourism, and active and passive open space and recreation areas.

The Open Space Element is one of the seven mandatory elements (which also include land use, circulation, safety, noise, conservation and housing). Consistent with Section 65560 of the Government Code, the Open Space and Recreation Element will address open space for:

- The preservation of natural resources
- The managed production of resources (as related to the Agricultural Element and aggregate mining)
- Outdoor recreation areas having scenic, historic, habitat and cultural value, with and without recreation tourism potential
- Park and recreation areas
- Possible habitat conservation areas
- For health and safety reasons.

This update of the adopted Open Space Element as an Open Space and Recreation Element includes refinement of existing General Plan goals, objectives and policies. New open space, recreation and tourism goals, objectives and policies have also been created. The Open Space and Recreation Element expresses policies, implementing measures and potential programs that will promote and protect the current and future needs for open space areas and related recreation activities. The Element provides clear guidelines for land use decisions in open space and recreation areas.

The Recreation Element is an optional General Plan Element, and not one of the seven mandatory elements. State law offers counties and cities considerable flexibility to adopt “any other elements or address any other subjects, which, in the judgment of the legislative body, relate to the physical development of the county or city.” Adopting a Recreation Element is a public acknowledgment of the importance of recreation to Yolo County. According to the *State General Plan Guidelines* (1998), about one-third of the cities and 40 percent of the counties in California have adopted a parks and recreation element. This number illustrates the importance placed upon parks and recreation facilities by local jurisdictions.

As stated in the *General Plan Guidelines*, public parks, and the passive and active recreation opportunities they provide, are important contributors to a community’s quality of life. Recreation consists of both active and passive use of unimproved open space lands or developed recreational areas. Examples of open space as a passive use include wildlife areas, lakeshores, rivers, streams, and areas of scenic, cultural or historical significance. Recreational areas designed for more active uses include parks, playgrounds, and golf courses.

Yolo County has long been viewed as a special open space and recreation destination: an area of creeks, rivers, and mountains where hiking, rafting, horseback riding, fishing and bicycling are popular pastimes. Yolo County, like all California counties, is faced with population pressures and increased demand for traditional park and recreation services. Adoption of an Open Space and Recreation Element will assist the County in addressing these issues and services in a comprehensive manner.

1.2 Open Space and Recreation Element Definitions

Open Space Diagram

Figure 1-1 is the Open Space Diagram, depicting areas designated for open space and parks and recreation. Definitions are provided in this section for the “Open Space and Public Open Space” and “Parks and Recreation” land use designations.

Open Space and Public Open Space: Open Space and Public Open Space land is any parcel or area of land or water that is devoted to an open space use as listed below:

- Banks of lakes, streams, rivers or lakeshores;
- Flood control bypass or channel;
- Fish, wildlife, and plant habitat;
- Areas prescribed for ecologic or other scientific study purposes, including archaeological sites;
- Areas used for managed resource production, including:
 - Agricultural lands
 - Groundwater recharge areas,
 - Marshes, rivers, lakes, and streams important for fisheries, and
 - Areas containing major mineral deposits, including sand and gravel clays, ores, metals, and oil or gas
- Areas within Scenic Highway Corridors; and
- Areas needed for Public Health and Safety, including:
 - Areas needing special management, mitigation, or avoidance because of hazardous or special conditions such as:
 - Earthquake fault zones
 - Unstable soil areas
 - Floodplains
 - Watersheds
 - Areas of high wildfire risks
 - Areas for protection of water quality
 - Areas for water reservoirs
 - Areas required for protection and enhancement of air quality.

“Public Open Space” is open space land owned by a public agency.

Parks and Recreation: Areas designated Parks and Recreation are used or needed for outdoor recreation, including:

- Areas of outstanding scenic, historic, or cultural value
- Areas currently used for or particularly suited for park and recreation purposes
- Areas for access to lakeshores, rivers, and streams
- Areas linking major recreation and open space reservations, including:
 - Utility easements
 - Banks of rivers and streams

- Multi-Use Trails
- Boat Launching Facilities

1.3 Regional and Local Context

Yolo County includes the cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Woodland and Winters, as well as the unincorporated area of the county. Yolo County also includes the unincorporated communities of Capay, Clarksburg, Dunnigan, Esparto, Guinda, Knights Landing, Madison, Rumsey, Yolo and Zamora. This Open Space and Recreation Element, as an element of the Yolo County General Plan, applies only to the unincorporated area. However, Yolo County and its cities have a history of working cooperatively to protect and preserve open space as one of the most important resources in the County.

Yolo County and its cities are part of the six-county region, which is encompassed by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), also including the counties of El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, and Yuba. In the larger geographic sense, the valley portion of Yolo County is part of the Sacramento Valley, which with the San Joaquin Valley makes up the Central Valley of California. Yolo County is also part of the “I-80 Corridor” which extends between Sacramento and the Bay Area.

1.4 Demographics

Population projections for the period 2000 through 2022 prepared by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) in February 1999 for the six-county region including El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties anticipate a population increase of 872,808, an increase of almost 47 percent. Sacramento and Sutter counties, which are adjacent to Yolo County, have projected growth of 442,383 persons (37 percent) and 44,875 persons (55 percent), respectively. Placer County is also growing rapidly, with a projected population increase for the same period of 177,490 (44 percent).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Yolo County had a resident population of 168,660 as of April 2000. Population projections for the county are 236,110 in 2020 and 242,510 in 2022 (SACOG, 1999). According to the State Employment Development Department (EDD), Yolo County is expected to experience a steady increase in population over this period. The gain in new residents will be approximately 61,300 by 2020, or a little over 37 percent. Based on County land use policies and zoning and Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) policies, it is evident that most of that population increase will occur in the cities, with limited growth in the unincorporated communities. According to information provided by SACOG (2001), only 51 housing units were constructed in the Yolo County unincorporated area in 1999, compared to a total of 1,301 in the incorporated cities. However, approximately 450 parcels in the unincorporated area of Yolo County have been tentatively approved for development of single-family homes. While SACOG anticipates only 12.4 percent growth in the Yolo County unincorporated area, growth in the Sacramento County unincorporated area is projected at over 56 percent, and over 42 percent in Sutter County. With such high rates of growth in the six-county region, increased pressure will be placed on Yolo County. It may be increasingly difficult to maintain the comparatively low growth rate of 12.4 percent.

1.5 Relationship to Other General Plan Elements

Concurrent with adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Element, the County is preparing an Agricultural Element. The Agricultural Element is not one of the seven mandatory General Plan elements, but it is an optional element.

The General Plan and its elements must, by law, be internally consistent. The concept of internal consistency means that no policy conflicts exist, either in the text or diagrams, between the components of the General Plan. All of the elements of a General Plan, including optional elements, must be consistent with one another. Additionally, all elements of the General Plan have equal legal status; that is, Open Space and Recreation Element policies are not superior to the policies of the Agricultural Element.

As stated in the *State of California General Plan Guidelines* (Office of Planning and Research, 1998):

The statutory requirements for the elements overlap and intertwine. For example, conservation of open-space and agricultural land are topics under the open-space and conservation elements as well as the land use element...The important thing is that the elements and issues form an integrated, internally consistent plan of which all parts are equally weighed in their application.

1.6 Document Organization

The Yolo County Open Space and Recreation Element consists of two documents: the Background Report, published under separate cover, and this Policy Document. The Background Report provides a comprehensive overview of the existing data available that addresses open space and recreational resources and issues for Yolo County. Information from the Background Report is summarized in the discussion of issues and incorporated into the goals, objectives and policies, which comprise this Open Space and Recreation Element.

This Policy Document is organized into four chapters. Chapter One, Introduction, provides the context for the Open Space and Recreation Element. It also provides an Open Space Diagram that identifies geographic areas of the county designated for open space and recreation use, and provides definitions for designations used on the Diagram. Chapter Two, Yolo County Open Space & Recreation Resources, provides a brief overview of existing open space resources, recreational facilities and opportunities in Yolo County. Chapter Three, Open Space & Recreation Issues, provides a discussion of facts and findings for a series of open space and recreation issues identified in the course of preparing this Open Space and Recreation Element. Chapter Four, the Open Space and Recreation Element, is the heart of this document. It presents the goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures that comprise the Open Space and Recreation Element.

Appendix A includes all the figures referenced in this Element, with the exception of Figure 1-1, the Open Space Diagram. The figures in Appendix A are all contained in the Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report. Appendix B presents the calculation of park standards.

1.7 How to Use the Open Space and Recreation Element

The general public, Board of Supervisors, County Planning Commission and County staff will use the Open Space and Recreation Element to determine County policy on issues affecting, or affected by, open space and recreation. This is useful when reviewing applications for changes in land use (zoning, conditional use permit, subdivision, etc.) or when deciding whether to submit such an application. More significantly, this document is useful to gain perspective on the importance of open space and recreation in Yolo County, not only to the local and regional economy, but also to Yolo County's identity. It provides a vision for Yolo County's future, and how the County and its residents plan to attain that future vision.

**FIGURE 1-1
OPEN SPACE DIAGRAM**