

Report urges preserving Bay Area outdoors

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February 4, 2009

Thousands of acres in the Bay Area - from redwood forests in Sonoma County to orchards in Contra Costa and a large section of open space on San Francisco's waterfront - should be protected from development, according to a report released Tuesday.

The areas are included in the first comprehensive list of woodlands, trails, orchards, watersheds and parks that more than 100 land-use experts decided should be part of a regionwide green corridor with space for wildlife, human recreation and agriculture.

"Golden Lands, Golden Opportunity" focuses on areas of public benefit in each of the nine Bay Area counties. The report, prepared by San Francisco's Greenbelt Alliance and the Bay Area Open Space Council, is an attempt to coordinate the region's land-use plans and streamline local, state and federal funding for various projects.

"Many of the lands that we take for granted, the hillsides and farmland that we drive by, aren't protected," said Elizabeth Stampe, spokeswoman for the Greenbelt Alliance.

"These lands function as a network for animals and plants to roam and for public recreation, so the more we can knit together, the better they will function. The idea was to identify lands that provide public benefits that aren't protected from development."

Stampe said mountains, forests, watersheds and wildlife in the region draw people to the area and help fuel the region's \$400 billion economy. As many as 1 million more people are expected to move to the Bay Area by 2020, she said, so now is the time to protect the region's green space.

The giant green corridor envisioned in the report would not mean commerce or private business would cease. The 100,000-acre coastal dairy belt in Sonoma County, vineyards in Napa and fertile farmland in Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Solano and Marin counties would be protected.

Trails linking 47 cities in the nine Bay Area counties would also be funded, including the 500-mile Bay Trail and the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop. In San Francisco, a 13-mile corridor along the southeastern waterfront known as the Blue Greenway would bring recreation to an underserved area of the city.

Watersheds along the San Mateo and Santa Clara county coasts, urban parks in Alameda and the 470,000 acres of redwood forests and woodlands in Sonoma County would be protected under the plan.

The goals outlined in the report are to make sure all Bay Area residents have a park within a 10-minute walk of their home, to improve urban parks and to create transit connections.

High-priority lands would either be purchased or placed under conservation easements. Farmers and other land stewards would be given the support and resources needed to take care of the land and sell locally farmed products.

Strong land-use policies would be enacted in every Bay Area city, according to the report. That would mean establishing urban growth boundaries especially in Solano and Contra Costa counties, where suburban sprawl threatens open space.

The report is part of broader attempt to change the region's prevailing pattern of development by focusing growth in developed areas with links to transit. Such "in-fill" growth would allow planners to protect undeveloped areas and create a band of open space.

"We are at a critical point where we need to take the long view and secure our natural heritage," said Jeremy Madsen, Executive Director of the Greenbelt Alliance. "Protecting these lands is an investment in the long-term security and prosperity of our region."

Alameda County

Curb sprawl in outlying areas, including the Livermore groundwater basin, and preserve the habitat of rare and endangered species. **Invest in urban parks and protect aquatic habitat along the Alameda Creek.**

Contra Costa County

Stop development on farms, ranches and Delta watershed lands. Build parks and trails on the North Richmond shoreline and preserve the Concord Naval Weapons Station as open space with access to BART.

Solano County

Provide more economic opportunities for farmers. Create an open space district to preserve farm and grazing land and provide public access to the outdoors.

San Francisco

Create more parks and natural areas in the city, including the completion of the 13-mile-long corridor known as the Blue Greenway along the southeastern waterfront.

San Mateo County

Protect coastal watersheds, maintain parks and restore bay lands and urban creeks. Preserve wildlife areas, complete public trails and stop development threatening 40,000 acres of farm and woodlands.

Santa Clara County

Create a system of open space with trail connections that allow for wildlife migration. Increase public access to open space, protect watershed lands and ensuring job growth.

Marin County

Preserve 15,000 acres of wetlands, wildlife habitat and trails and 60,000 acres of farmland. Control erosion around Lagunitas Creek, one of California's last remaining habitats for endangered coho salmon.

Sonoma County

Protect 470,000 acres of forests and woodlands and maintain the rural character by controlling development. Support farming with agricultural easements and policies that support local food production.

Napa County

Improve access to and provide funding for the county's newly created park district. Tighten rural growth controls, protect agricultural land and develop more trails like the Napa Crest and Napa River trails.

Read the report

See "Golden Lands, Golden Opportunity" at www.golden-lands.org or ask for it by e-mailing info@golden-lands.org.