

### **III. RECOMMENDED POLICIES**



This chapter on recommended policies establishes a policy framework for this Outdoor Recreation Plan. This framework includes goals, objectives and related policies that are recommended for the successful implementation of this Plan. This policy framework was developed by the Citizens Advisory Committee based on the many discussions that occurred and the analysis that was completed as part of this project. Additional revisions were made based on policy direction provided by the Board of Supervisors and comments received from interested groups and individuals reviewing the Plan.

**NOTE:** The following are recommended policies that may form the basis of a General Plan Amendment. These recommended policies are advisory in nature. Reference to the existing General Plan policies, County Ordinances and State Government Codes within the following text is intended to provide background information for the draft policies.

**GOAL 1: Develop a long-range strategy for acquisition and development of new parks, preserves, trails, public access, and related outdoor recreation facilities. Develop this strategy in a manner that is consistent with the County’s overall commitment to agricultural preservation and its long-term viability, and the County’s respect for private property rights. Ensure that the strategy provides for a balance of recreational opportunities, and recognizes the importance of trails.**

**Objective 1.1: Acquire sufficient land for new parks, preserves, trails and public access, and outdoor recreation facilities, hereafter referred to as outdoor recreation facilities, to meet the needs of County residents of and visitors to Sonoma County. Ensure the plan offers a balance of recreational opportunities; inclusion of trails is an important component of the Draft Plan.**

**Policy 1.1a:** Acquisitions of land for parks, preserves, trails and related outdoor recreation facilities are desirable to occur in advance of growth and development in order to improve the quality of life of the residents of Sonoma County.

**Policy 1.1b:** Encourage partnering with cities and other recreation providers to develop trail opportunities close to urban centers.

**Policy 1.1c:** Recognize that lands acquired for outdoor recreation facilities contribute to the visitor serving businesses of Sonoma County and that lands acquired will enhance the economy of Sonoma County.

**Objective 1.2: Identify locations for outdoor recreation facilities.**

**Policy 1.2a:** The location of proposed parks, preserves, trails and related outdoor recreation facilities on the Outdoor Recreation Plan Map should be considered to be schematic only. In the case of the trail symbols, the intention is to reflect a point of departure and a point of arrival. Recreation facilities may be located on any suitable lands in the general vicinity of the mapped symbols.

**Policy 1.2b:** Notwithstanding the designations depicted on the General Plan’s Land Use and Open Space Maps, outdoor recreation facilities found consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and maps of the General Plan’s Open Space Element shall be deemed consistent with any land use designation of the General Plan’s Land Use Map and deemed a permitted use in any zoning district. No General Plan amendment or rezoning shall be required prior to acquisition.

However, facilities involving public access, either immediately or in the future, shall require approval of a facility management plan (master plan) by the Board of Supervisors, following a public hearing and recommendation by the Planning Commission, prior to facility development and/or use. Pursuant to sections 65302(a) and 65860(a) of the California Government Code, PRMD shall amend the General Plan and zoning to depict the specific location of the approved outdoor recreation facility at the first convenient opportunity following Board of Supervisors approval of the facility management plan (master plan).

**Policy 1.2c:** The Plan generally identifies opportunities to link existing and proposed recreation facilities on publicly owned lands. Appropriate linkages on public property may include parks, maintenance roads along flood control channels in public ownership, navigable rivers, bikeways, existing rights of way, and other public lands.

**Policy 1.2d:** The Plan generally recommends avoiding the use of roads in developing trail alignments. Multi use trail alignments on or along roads are not considered a preferred option, except for Class II and III bikeways that are within the road right-of-way or in areas currently designated LIA, LEA, and DA until or unless there is specific interest or expressed consent expressed by a willing property owner/seller. If no other option is available, a trail may be designated on or beside a road only if the following criteria have been adequately addressed and the alignment approved by the Department of Transportation and Public Works.

- Traffic volumes are sufficiently low (number of cars per day)
- There are adequate sight distances for traveling vehicles
- There is adequate availability of right of way
- There are adequate shoulders for pedestrians and equestrians, and adequate separation of these users from vehicles
- There are adequate signs notifying motorists of pedestrians and equestrians

**Policy 1.2e: Unforeseen Acquisition Opportunities.** In the event that an opportunity arises for acquisition of property that is not depicted on the adopted maps of the Outdoor Recreation Plan, the agency proposing the acquisition shall conduct an analysis covering the following points:

1. The relationship of the unforeseen opportunity to the recreational needs identified in the Plan, including a discussion of how the unforeseen acquisition would meet those needs compared to facilities identified in the Plan.
2. An analysis of the “opportunity costs” of the unforeseen acquisition, including whether the proposed acquisition is intended to replace or supplement a facility identified in the Plan. This analysis may consider how the unforeseen opportunity may impact the acquisition of facilities identified in the Plan.

**Objective 1.3: Provide for flexibility in locating trail corridors.**

**Policy 1.3a:** Proposed trail alignments that connect desired points and generally follow the route shown on the Outdoor Recreation Plan will be considered consistent with the General Plan if the Outdoor Recreation Plan is adopted as a General Plan Amendment.

**Policy 1.3b:** Where a trail alignment is not predetermined by a relationship to established publicly owned corridors such as abandoned railroad rights-of-way, flood control channels, or similar facilities, the Board of Supervisors may direct the preparation of a study or a plan for the trail, taking into account, costs, a preliminary environmental assessment and any other factors it deems relevant to alignment and feasibility.

**Policy 1.3c:** Trail easements to be acquired should be wide enough to allow for creating buffer spaces between neighbors and the trail and to allow trails to provide a positive visitor experience and to minimize environmental damage.

**Objective 1.4: Acquire land for recreation facilities.**

**Policy 1.4:** The Outdoor Recreation Plan Map symbols for outdoor recreation facilities define general areas where it is recommended that the County consider:

- i) Agencies involved in land acquisition shall seek private landowners that are willing to sell land or interests in land for outdoor recreation facilities, when the Plan shows a need for such facilities.
- ii) Generally, where there are subdivisions of land generally in excess of fifty units, acquire land for outdoor recreation facilities in preference to payment of park mitigation fees whenever possible, as a condition of approval. Nothing shall prohibit the dedication and acceptance of

land for park and recreation purposes in subdivisions of fifty (50) parcels or less, where the subdivider proposes such dedication voluntarily and the land is acceptable to the County.

- iii) Consider requiring dedication in-fee or by easement for trails as a condition of approval of subdivisions in the vicinity of a proposed trail. There must be a need identified in the General Plan, as amended over time, or the project must block an existing access or result in the need for additional recreational opportunities.
- iv) The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors may also consider the dedication of land or the granting of easements for outdoor recreation facilities on the site of and as part of a development application in exchange for: a density bonus, clustering of parcels and/or flexibility in other design and improvement standards subject to any needed amendments to the General Plan.

**Objective 1.5:** Use existing infrastructure and minimize impacts on the environment of constructing access road improvements.

**Policy 1.5:** Give priority to proposed outdoor recreation facilities in locations that are accessed by existing or planned publicly maintained roads.

**GOAL 2:** Plan new outdoor recreation facilities to accommodate public recreation needs, while recognizing the rights of private property owners, the need for safety, and the requirements of environmental protection.

**Objective 2.1:** Trail routes will be located, designed and developed with sensitivity to their potential agricultural, environmental, recreational, and other impacts on adjacent lands and private property.

**Policy 2.1a:** During trail design, notify and coordinate with affected landowners to incorporate measures into trail design and related management policies to accommodate, to the extent possible, the privacy and security concerns of the landowner. Such measures could include, but are not limited to, fencing or barrier planting that discourages trespassing; signage; scheduling of maintenance; and patrol scheduling.

**Policy 2.1b:** Develop design guidelines for trails to address safety issues and minimize user conflicts. Prior to developing any new trail route for public use, consider design and management issues to ensure provision of an appropriate level of service necessary to provide for the safety and support of trail users and affected landowners. Design and management issues to be considered include, at a minimum, police and fire protection and the availability of parking and sanitary services in the vicinity.

**Objective 2.2: Avoid significant adverse impacts to agriculture and support the County’s right to farm policy for agriculture.**

**Policy 2.2:** The County will not acquire real property for parks or trails through condemnation where the subject land is in agricultural use or where it is reasonably feasible that the land could be put into agriculture. The County will only acquire property for parks and trails from willing sellers in agricultural land use categories as designated in the General Plan.

Trail routes shown on the Outdoor Recreation Plan Map in areas currently designated on the County General Plan Land Use Maps as “Land Intensive Agriculture”, “Land Extensive Agriculture” or “Diverse Agriculture” (LIA, LEA, and DA) shall not be required (including easements) or developed outside of County road right of way until or unless there is a specific interest or consent expressed by a willing property owner/seller.

The County shall provide a footnote on the Outdoor Recreation Plan Map that repeats the above policies relating to areas currently designated as Agriculture (LEA, LIA, and DA) on the County General Plan Land Use Map.

**Objective 2.3: Indemnify adjacent property owners to provide assurance that they will not be liable for injuries by the public on adjacent trails.**

**Policy 2.3:** The County indemnify all grantors of trail easements and other owners of lands immediately adjoining County trails from liability for injuries suffered by users of the adjoining trails or provide other mutually acceptable relief.

The indemnity will not apply to injuries caused by a landowner’s willful or malicious conduct. The indemnity will include the costs of defending the landowner against all liability claims brought by users of County trails as well as the costs of damage awards and other costs associated with such claims.

**GOAL 3: Ensure coordination and cooperative efforts among public agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management, State Parks, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, Sonoma County Water Agency, and cities involved in public access to and recreational use of public lands.**

**Objective 3.1: Coordinate efforts with other public agencies that provide public access on publicly acquired land to acquire lands in fee or in easement for outdoor recreation facilities.**

**Policy 3.1:** The County will coordinate efforts with other public agencies for the acquisition of new outdoor recreation facilities consistent with adopted plans and policies. Prior to the formal acceptance of property for outdoor

recreation facility purposes by the Board of Supervisors agencies shall coordinate efforts to address and resolve outstanding issues.

**Objective 3.2: Encourage the land-banking of lands acquired for recreation where funds are not immediately available to develop and operate these properties for public use.**

**Policy 3.2:** Properties acquired in-fee by the County or other agency for outdoor recreation may be land-banked and public use may be limited in part or entirely, as necessary, until the park and recreation departments develop management plans (master plans) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and secure funding for development and operation and maintenance of the properties.

**Objective 3.3: Encourage the use of publicly owned property to meet the needs of outdoor recreation.**

**Policy 3.3:** Use existing public lands, such as surplus B.L.M. lands and the Sonoma County Water Agency's access roads along flood control channels, wherever appropriate to implement the recreation facilities proposed in the Plan.

**Objective 3.4: Coordinate in the prioritization of acquisition and development of park and recreation projects.**

**Policy 3.4:** The acquisition, planning and development of County recreation projects will be coordinated in the Sonoma County Five Year Capital Project Plan, which is updated and adopted by the Board on an annual basis.

**Objective 3.5: Coordinate with the Permit and Resource Management Department to ensure that updates of the General Plan occur.**

**Policy 3.5:** Agencies will ensure that the Permit and Resource Management Department is notified of proposed projects that may necessitate a County General Plan Amendment.

**Objective 3.6: Coordinate with the Coastal Commission and the County Permit and Resource Management Department to ensure Outdoor Recreation Plan projects are implemented in a manner that supports the Coastal Plan and its recreation policies for the Sonoma County coastline.**

**Policy 3.6:** Acquire easements for public accessways that otherwise would become unavailable for public use, consistent with the access plan within the Coastal Plan.

**Objective 3.7: Coordinate with the Coastal Commission to accept Outstanding**

**Offers to Dedicate (OTDs) coastal access easements before they expire.**

**Policy 3.7a:** Accept outstanding offers to dedicate coastal access areas in the vicinity of Stillwater Cove Regional Park before they expire.

**Policy 3.7b:** Encourage the State Parks Department to accept the Offers to Dedicate coastal access easements in the vicinity of Fort Ross State Park before they expire.

**GOAL 4: Encourage private non-profit organizations to provide regular public access to, and recreational use of lands acquired with public funds.**

**Objective 4.1: To cooperate with non-profit organizations in managing lands for public access and recreation.**

**Policy 4.1:** The County should cooperate with and seek the support of nonprofit organizations to effectively maximize financial opportunities, land acquisition and grant funding that would not otherwise be available to public agencies.

**GOAL 5: Develop local funding mechanisms for maintenance and management of park facilities.**

**Objective 5.1: Encourage the joint use of recreation facilities in the unincorporated areas of the County with School Districts.**

**Policy 5.1a:** Community and neighborhood parks fulfill specific needs of local communities in the unincorporated areas of the County. The County shall encourage community and neighborhood park development adjacent to elementary, junior and senior high schools to benefit from shared use of land and facilities. Joint-use programs with local school districts will be pursued, where feasible, to develop necessary agreements for cost-sharing arrangements.

**Policy 5.1b:** Recognize that on the edges of existing city boundaries that sufficient lands may exist that may be converted or developed to serve both the city and county residents. The County would entertain joint use agreements with cities to provide park and recreation facilities in these locations.

**Objective 5.2:**      **To ensure that the long-term development and management costs of recreation facilities are supported by new funding.**

**Policy 5.2:**      The County may consider using funding mechanisms such as zones of benefit for the purposes of funding park and recreation development, maintenance and operation costs.