



Chapter 5: Multipurpose Open Space Element

Introduction



The open space system and methods for its acquisition, maintenance and operation are calibrated to its many functions: visual relief, natural resource protection, habitat preservation, passive and active recreation, protection from natural hazards, and various combinations of these purposes. This is what is meant by a multi-purpose open space system.



– RCIP Vision Statement

MULTIPURPOSE OPEN SPACE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The County of Riverside’s environmental setting is a critical component of its Vision for the future and its quality of life. The Vision speaks to the importance of the many forms of open space in the County: scenic, habitat, recreation, and their importance in defining the edges for our communities. The Vision also addresses the importance of agriculture to the economy and culture of the County.

In response to the RCIP Vision and the California government code, this element addresses protecting and preserving natural resources, agriculture and open space areas, managing mineral resources, preserving and enhancing cultural resources, and providing recreational opportunities for the citizens of Riverside County.

The California Government Code describes the General Plan as a collection of seven mandatory elements that include: conservation, addressing the conservation, development and use of natural resources; and open space, detailing plans and measures for preserving open-space for natural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, public health and safety, and the identification of agricultural land. The policy direction required in these two elements is provided in this single Multipurpose Open Space Element.

This element categorizes issues and policies into those that seek to *conserve*, or manage the use of, resources and those that seek to *preserve* resources for the purpose of sustaining their stocks in perpetuity. Additionally, the resource conservation section of the element is subdivided into *renewable resources* and *non-renewable resources*. Renewable resources, such as forests, are those that can reproduce, grow, and ultimately perish. Non-renewable resources as those that have a finite stock relative to human consumption over time, and that are not alive in the sense of having an ability to grow. Mineral resources, for example, are non-renewable.

SETTING

It is appropriate that the County of Riverside boasts of a “remarkable environmental setting” in the summary statement of its Vision. Within its roughly 7,400 square miles, the County incorporates a wide range of natural features, including mountain ranges, desert areas, riparian areas and rivers, vernal pools, and oak woodlands and forests.



Conserve-to protect from loss or harm by using carefully or sparingly.

Preserve-To keep in perfect or unaltered condition; maintain unchanged.

Reserve-A reservation of land or an amount of mineral, fossil fuel or other resource known to exist in a particular location.



County of Riverside General Plan - Hearing Draft

Multipurpose Open Space Element



A sample of the range of Riverside County's natural resources must include: California's largest inland sea, the 360-square mile Salton Sea in the southern most portion of the Coachella Valley; the Joshua Tree National Park; portions of the San Bernardino and Cleveland National Forests; the Santa Ana, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountain Ranges, among others; and portions of the Colorado, Santa Ana and San Jacinto Rivers.

The Colorado Desert bio-region encompasses the southeastern portion of Riverside County, extending from the Colorado River west to the Joshua Tree National Park, and from San Bernardino County to San Diego County. This bio-region is rich in agriculture, though it is considered semi-arid. The Colorado Desert is the western extension of the Sonoran desert, which is of much lower elevation than the northern Mojave Desert. Common habitat includes sandy desert, scrub, palm oasis, and desert wash. Summers are hot and dry, and winters are cool and moist.

A portion of north-central Riverside County is part of the Mojave bio-region. This is one of the largest bio-regions in the state, encompassing seven counties in California. The Mojave bio-region is the western extension of a vast desert that covers southern Nevada, the southwestern tip of Utah, and 25% of southern California. The climate is hot and dry in the summer, and winters are cool to cold depending upon elevation. Palm oases, streams and springs are water sources for much of the wildlife. Some of the common habitats are the desert wash Joshua Tree Scrub, palm oasis, willow riparian forest, and open sandy dunes.

The South Coast bio-region covers most of western Riverside County. This bio-region is home to the towering San Gorgonio Peak at 11,500 feet, the watersheds of the San Jacinto and Santa Ana Rivers, the Cleveland and Angeles National Forests, and federal wilderness and wildlife areas. Some of the following habitats are found here: chaparral, juniper-pinyon woodland, grasslands, hardwood forests, southern oak, and yellow pine. The climate is considered mild year-round, with hot dry summers inducing wildfires and wet winters that can cause mudslides.



The true nature lover learns that nature is worth knowing in all her aspects, that the only deserts there are [are] the deserts of the soul. The best pleasures cost us nothing.



– From a handwritten note by Riverside Naturalist Edmund Jaeger circa 1921

Further, the plant and animal life of the County is diverse, and numerous animal species and narrow endemic plants (species with very limited geographic ranges) found in the County have special status under the Federal Endangered Species Act and/or the California Endangered Species Act. In response to this, the County has participated in two Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Planning processes, one covering western Riverside County, and a second in the Coachella Valley. Implications for County land use and open space planning are briefly described in this element.

Additional information on the physical setting of Riverside County can be found in the Existing Setting Report, which is part of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the General Plan.



The County of Riverside is in a unique position in southern California in that it has experienced, and is poised to continue experiencing in the next 20 years, enormous population growth. At the same time, much of the County's land area remains undeveloped. Unincorporated lands with land use designations under the umbrella of the County's Open Space and Agriculture Foundation Components (refer to the Land Use Element for a description of the Foundation Component system) total roughly 80% of the County's land area. Rural designations that include mountainous and desert areas add about 13% of the County's lands to that total. Therefore, the vast majority of the County of Riverside is affected by policies contained within this element of the General Plan.



Conservation

Policies within the Conservation section of this element seek to guide decision-making related to renewable and non-renewable County resources. These types of resources require conservation—a conscious effort to consume less of scarce resources so that their stock can be sustained for the future. Conservation of natural resources applies to water, agricultural resources, forests, vegetation, mineral, and energy resources. By conserving resources we prevent degradation of the environment through pollution or loss of productive capacity within our environment.

RENEWABLE RESOURCES

Population growth and development continually require the use of natural resources, including those that are renewable. Following are Vision Statements that represent the guiding principles established by Riverside County to conserve and protect renewable resources for economic, cultural, and aesthetic purposes.

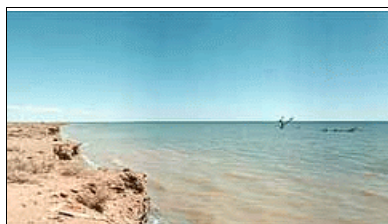
“We acknowledge the inter-relatedness of the economic, environmental, cultural and institutional realms of our community life as we continue to plan and build our communities in a manner that enables us to achieve mutually beneficial results.”

“We acknowledge and respect the long heritage of economic endeavors that have shaped portions of our environment through mining, agriculture, and similar enterprises and continue to take their value into consideration in shaping our environmental management.”

Additionally, the Vision addresses the need to protect Riverside County’s environmental sustainability for future generations:

“We are beneficiaries of the past and we value that. We seek the same for our heirs. We declare that they should have an expectation that they will inherit communities and a natural environment that offer them a reasonable range of choices.”

Water Resources



The Salton Sea

Riverside County incorporates four major watershed areas in which river systems, numerous lakes and reservoirs, and natural drainage areas are located. Water resources are mapped in Figure OS-1. The County’s supply of water is limited by its arid climate, agricultural practices, projected population growth and its associated demand and development, and the dependence on low quality imported water. Further, the availability of imported surface water has been reduced due to changing regulations, despite an ever-increasing water demand.

In some areas within Riverside County, contamination from natural or manufactured sources has reduced groundwater quality such that its use requires