

Town of Portola Valley General Plan

Conservation Element

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Conservation Element

Introduction

4200 The lands and waters of Portola Valley and its planning area comprise nearly one-half of the headwaters of the San Francisquito Creek watershed and a substantial amount of the natural foothills and hillsides remaining on the Midpeninsula. The town and its residents are the stewards of these natural resources and should cooperate with surrounding jurisdictions on watershed management and regional conservation.

Runoff from many tributaries in the watershed become concentrated in the San Francisquito Creek as it passes through Palo Alto and discharges into the San Francisco Bay. Flooding of these lower lands is an ongoing concern of Palo Alto and neighboring communities. Efforts to minimize flooding problems and preserve the health of the system will continue through actions of federal, state and local agencies. Portola Valley is and will continue to be a participant in these endeavors.

The conservation element concerns four basic categories: water--creeks, ponds, ground water, and imported water; vegetation--both native and exotic; soils and geology; and wildlife. This division is for convenience only; the interrelationships of these resources should be recognized and cherished.

4201 The conservation element provides a programmatic approach for the conservation, restoration, development and utilization of natural resources. Some aspects of conservation programs can be accomplished solely through public efforts while others can only be effectuated by identifying self interests or appealing to the community spirit of the owners of private property within the town. This element is concerned with programs, requiring both public and private action, that will conserve and enhance the natural qualities of the planning area.

- 4202 The effective conservation, restoration, development and utilization of natural resources cannot be accomplished without professional study and evaluation of critical areas or needs. The conservation element generally describes those fragile areas of the ecosystem that must be protected. It provides, in addition, policies that will help ensure that in planning and development of specific land use proposals environmental impact is not overlooked, that conservation actions are considered, and that such evaluations and actions are sufficiently comprehensive in accordance with professionally established guidelines.

Definitions

- 4203 **Public Conservation Programs** are largely carried out by local governments such as cities and counties. The town of Portola Valley can implement conservation measures through its regulatory powers including its zoning, subdivision and site development ordinances. Special districts as well as non-profit organizations also play roles. The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District addresses conservation issues on land it owns in and adjoining the town. In addition, the Peninsula Open Space Trust, a non-profit trust, acquires land that will ultimately be retained as open space and held in a natural condition. Also included are those educational, technical assistance, incentive, acquisition and protective work programs that can be pursued by public agencies.
- 4204 **Private Conservation Programs** include protective work programs sponsored by private organizations and individual efforts for the conservation of natural resources on private sites. Private groups can, through the dissemination of conservation information, educate those unaware of environmental problem areas and, more importantly, values to be conserved. In addition, private dedication of conservation easements and/or financial donations for the protection of the natural processes would enhance all conservation efforts.

Objectives

- 4205 The conservation element includes: objectives, principles and standards; and a description of programs.
- 4206 For the objectives of the conservation element to be implemented, public and private efforts cannot be carried out in isolation of each other. It is the purpose of this element to provide a unified framework for the achievement of the conservation objectives.
- 4207 Water—Creeks, Ponds, Ground Water, and Imported Water
1. To protect the area against excessive storm water runoff, flooding, erosion and other related damage.

2. To protect natural ground water recharge areas.
3. To maintain standards to insure a high water quality.
4. To preserve the natural character of all watershed land.
5. To prevent obstructions to the natural flow of water that would adversely affect natural processes.
6. To maintain a healthy ecological system for plants and animals in and along all bodies of water.
7. To encourage the conservation of water resources.
8. To encourage the recycling of water, both domestic and imported.

4208 Vegetation—Both Native and Exotic

1. To minimize disturbance of the natural terrain and native vegetation.
2. To preserve and protect all native and naturalized plants with special attention to preservation of unique, rare or endangered species and plant communities such as oak woodland and serpentine grasslands.
3. To encourage the planting of native plant species as part of any site development for ecological, aesthetic and water conservation purposes.
4. To ensure that when changes in natural grades or removal of existing vegetation is required on any public or private project, remedial measures call for the restoration or introduction of native vegetative cover for ecological as well as erosion control purposes.
5. To ensure that all thoroughfares and local roads are designed and planned to preserve the natural beauty and character of the corridor to the maximum extent possible.
6. To encourage the planting of native trees and shrubs to provide a substantial buffer between roadways and adjoining properties in harmony with the general character of the town.
7. To encourage the removal and prevention of the spreading of aggressive exotics such as pampas grass, acacia, yellow star thistle, French broom, Scotch broom and eucalyptus.
8. To preserve and maintain an area of native vegetation along creek corridors in order to separate turf and impervious surfaces from the creeks.

9. To protect forests and other vegetation for their roles in helping maintain and improve air quality.

4209 Soils and Geology

1. To prohibit the quarrying of rock, sand and gravel, as such uses are incompatible with basic town objectives.
2. To prevent, control and correct the erosion of soil.
3. To prohibit the dumping of any waste material that may harm or destroy soil quality and character.
4. To encourage wise soil husbandry and soil enrichment with organic wastes and other soil building materials.
5. To limit, and where determined necessary for public safety, prohibit development in hazardous geologic areas.
6. To encourage agricultural uses on soils suited for agricultural purposes when appropriate.

4210 Wildlife

1. To ensure that in the design and construction of public and private developments, the habitat of all wildlife will be protected to the maximum extent feasible, with special emphasis on protecting the habitat of any endangered species.
2. To maintain and protect creek corridors for wildlife who use this resource for food, shelter, migration and breeding.
3. To protect large and small natural systems for the purpose of supporting wildlife.

Principles

4211 Water—Creeks, Ponds and Ground Water

1. Recognizing that we live in a semi-arid area with increasing demand on limited water supplies, water conservation methods must be a guiding principle in all land use planning.

2. Environmental impact reports or studies, prepared professionally, should be required of public and private projects that propose extensive grading or vegetation removal on watershed lands.
3. Dumping of waste materials into creeks or streams or within their established undeveloped drainage basins should be prohibited.
4. Use of agricultural fertilizers and chemicals in areas along creeks should be tightly controlled so as to avoid adverse impacts.
5. The town shall require that there be no significant alterations of stream channels or obstructions to the natural flow of water. Creeks should be maintained in their naturally meandering channels consistent with geomorphic processes. Where channels are damaged or property threatened, bank stabilization by biotechnical methods are preferable to engineered solutions such as concrete walls and similar structures.
6. The natural flow of streams should be maintained and not diverted for other uses.
7. To protect water quality, the town shall encourage development to maintain an undisturbed or enhanced protective buffer between all cut and fill slopes, non-native turf or areas under chemical management or impermeable surfaces, and any creek corridors.
8. To require management practices that will reduce the amount of pollution entering water bodies.
9. Development should be restricted in areas subject to flooding.

4212

Vegetation

1. Removal of native vegetation should be minimized, and replanting required where necessary to maintain soil stability, prevent erosion and maximize reoxygenation.
2. Forest resources should be protected from harvesting.
3. Mature native trees and shrubs should be conserved.
4. Plantings in public trail easements or public road rights of way shall be of native plants and trees and shall not interfere with the use of the easements for public purposes such as equestrians, hikers, pedestrians, bicyclists, runners and vehicles.

5. The town should encourage restoration of unique or rare vegetation and habitats.
6. Along creeks, indigenous vegetation should be protected and, where necessary, restored and enhanced.
7. Management of native vegetation for the purpose of fire safe management practices should be done only to the extent necessary to meet reasonable fire safety objectives while still seeking to protect the biological resources of the environment.

4213 Soils and Geology

1. Zoning and other land use regulations should be used to limit, and in some cases prohibit, development in geologically hazardous areas. The degree of development limitation provided for in such regulations should be commensurate with the degree of hazard involved and the public costs likely to be incurred if emergency or remedial public action becomes necessary in these areas.
2. Land use regulations should allow for and encourage using the best soils for agriculture when appropriate.

4214 Wildlife

1. An environmental impact report or study, prepared by a qualified biologist, should be required to determine if the habitat of wildlife is being impacted, particularly of endangered species, by any proposed public or private project where such encroachment appears likely.
2. All subdivision and site development proposals should be reviewed to ensure that they do not obstruct wildlife access to important water, food and breeding areas.
3. Designate creek corridors as sensitive areas which provide important aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat. Setback requirements should be established by zoning for all new development along creeks. All new subdivisions and site development proposals should contain setback area sufficient to buffer wildlife inhabiting the creek corridor from the impacts of development.
4. Protect lands and habitat that support endangered or protected species wherever possible and consistent with state and federal requirements.
5. Give attention to restoring native habitat for wildlife when reviewing development proposals and initiating town projects.

Standards

- 4215 Specific standards are and will be included within the zoning, subdivision and site development ordinances.

Description

- 4216 Several conservation program areas are proposed. Each program area is based on conservation of the natural processes or ensuring public health and safety. Specific recommendations made are directed at the objectives of the four categories of concern: water (creeks, ponds, groundwater and imported water); vegetation (native and exotic); soils, geology; and wildlife.
- 4217 The program areas proposed are not meant to be the basis for the establishment and implementation of specific conservation programs in isolation of one another as the entire ecosystem is closely interrelated. They provide, rather, a unified framework for inter-relating action programs, projects, and other actions to ensure that conservation efforts will be of maximum efficiency and effectiveness.
- 4218 Each program area proposed could be designated as the responsibility of either the public or private sector; however, it is necessary for program implementation that all programs are understood and supported by both sectors. Further, conservation is dependent upon each individual's realization of his or her intimate relationship with the environment. All the public efforts are of limited value without citizen participation in protecting the environment.

Education

- 4219 Public education and information programs detailing conservation values and problem areas and providing guidance of protective actions should be organized and administered by town staff and elected and appointed officials in cooperation with schools at all levels. This would include, in addition, special public meetings and information sessions with established private clubs or groups. Private conservation groups can also play an important part in citizen education.

Regulation

- 4220 The natural character of Portola Valley can be conserved in large part by ensuring that new and existing development is controlled by suitable regulation – mainly zoning, subdivision and site development regulations. These regulations are applied by the town as part of its “police power,” the right of government to enact laws which are in the public interest and which are directly related to the health, safety and general welfare of the community. Ordinances adopted in 1967 and as subsequently amended seek to preserve the natural setting. The zoning,

subdivision and site development regulations provide much of the framework within which the town will develop and are sufficient to achieve many of the objectives of the conservation element by ensuring that development projects are always considered in the context of conservation of the environment and that conservation easements are dedicated when appropriate. The regulations should include control over development in areas where natural hazards exist. These regulations will only achieve the objectives with careful and imaginative guidance by town staff, elected representatives and citizens.

- 4221 The town has established special setbacks along the major creeks in the town, which are: Los Trancos Creek, Corte Madera Creek and Sausal Creek. The purposes of the setbacks are to improve the quality of creekbank protection measures, reduce risk to property improvements, protect scenic values and protect the riparian habitat important to wildlife. Administration of these provisions by town officials and staff will be a major factor in protection of these important habitats.
- 4222 The town is served by septic systems and sewers. The comparative merits of these two methods of sewage disposal should be studied further.
- 4223 The town's report "Portola Valley Sensitive Biological Resources Assessment and Fuel Hazard Assessment" dated 2008 and 2010, includes GIS maps of vegetation, soils and fire hazard and also provides extensive technical information on native vegetation. Guidelines for protecting habitat are included and should be consulted regularly by planning staff and decision-making bodies in conjunction with the review of development proposals. Furthermore, the report includes guidelines for protecting biological resources when undertaking vegetation management for the purpose of fire hazard mitigation.
- 4224 The implementation of this element with regard to water resources shall be coordinated with any countywide water agency and other agencies that have developed, served or conserved water for any purpose for the town.

Acquisition

- 4225 There are cases where regulation will not provide a basis for achieving conservation objectives. In these situations, a town program for acquisition may be needed. There are two basic types of land ownership – full or fee title, and partial title, such as through a conservation easement or ownership of development rights. For a discussion of acquisition, see Open Space Element Appendix 2: Implementation of the Open Space Element.

Incentives

- 4226 For effective conservation of natural resources, a program of public incentives should be considered. Incentives in the form of tax relief or some other financial

form (e.g., Williamson Act, income tax allowance for gifts, etc.) could be used for the conservation of large areas critically important to natural processes. Changes in this type of incentive would require a higher level of public involvement (state and federal legislation) to increase flexibility at the local level. The town has already adopted policy in favor of such incentives now permitted at the local level. Incentives could also take the form of allowing modification of normal regulations for special conservation considerations by the property owner or developer.

Technical Advice

- 4227 Professional technical advice is essential for full understanding of the natural processes. As noted above, the town's report "Portola Valley Sensitive Biological Resources Assessment and Fuel Hazard Assessment" dated 2008 and 2010 provides detailed mapping of vegetation in the town along with lists of endangered and threatened species associated with such vegetation. A system for applying the information in the planning program and in particular when reviewing development proposals should be developed.
- 4228 The town has adopted a Geologic Map and Ground Movement Potential Map along with an implementing policy statement and zoning ordinance provisions. These documents provide significant guidance in helping ensure the safety of developments in areas subject to landslides and other geologic hazards and also in avoiding damage to the natural environment including erosion and flooding. This information will guide public decision makers and should be available to the private sector for both education and advice.
- 4229 Information on available professional services and sources of professional advice including county, state and federal agencies, professional societies, conservation groups, and appropriate local professionals (e.g., landscape architects, geologists, biologists and hydrologists) should be made available at the Portola Valley town hall and through the town library and public schools within the town as well as at the high school and community college levels.

Remedial Work Programs

- 4230 Remedial work programs directed at specific conservation problem areas can prevent irreversible damage to the environment. Also, programs requiring organized private group efforts, clean up campaigns, etc., can help to improve the environment and bring people together in a common effort. Town sponsored projects such as litter removal and removal of invasive vegetation, as well as other programs, can make a substantial contribution to the conservation of the environment.

Miscellaneous Private Efforts

- 4231 For the conservation program to be effective, individual, organized and unorganized private efforts are necessary. These efforts include individual lot maintenance to high standards based on the preservation of the natural character (e.g., care in controlling site drainage, use and control of exotic plants to prevent widespread weed growth, etc.), dedications of conservation easements and financial donations with the requirement that they be spent for the protection of the natural processes.

Table 1. Guide to Park, Recreation, and Open Space Proposals in the General Plan

Park, Recreation or Open Space	Park and Recreation Element	Open Space Element	Trail & Path Element	Scenic Roads and Highways Element	Land Use Element
Neighborhood Preserve	-	X			
Neighborhood Park	X				
Community Preserve	-	X			
Community Park	X				
Other Community Parks or Preserves	X	X			
Regional Park or Private Regional Facility	X	X			
Open Space Preserve		X			
Scenic Corridor	-	X			
Greenway	-	X			
Open Space Limited Development		X			
Agricultural Lands		X			
Secondarily Park, Recreation, or Open Space*					
Residential Open Space Preserves					X
Trails and Paths			X		
Scenic Roads and Highways				X	
* These land use categories serve primarily for residential or circulation purposes, but have secondary uses as parks, recreation areas, or open spaces.					

Conservation Element Appendix 1: Implementation of the Conservation Element

Actions to date:

1. The town has added to its zoning, subdivision and site development ordinances general provisions that provide a basis for protection of the natural environment, especially with respect to controlling grading and protecting forested areas. In addition, the zoning ordinance allows the clustering of development which can reduce the impact on the natural environment.

Future actions:

1. The town should undertake the studies and actions as specified in Open Space Element Appendix 2: Implementation of the Open Space Element