

# Resources & Conservation Section

## Natural Resources Element

The county's abundant natural resources are integral to our quality of life, community identities, and economic success. Natural resources include agricultural/grazing lands, watersheds, minerals, native plants and wildlife, and plant and wildlife habitat areas. Appropriately managed, they provide safe air and water for our people and the environment, improve the health of our residents and workers, attract visitors from around the world, and sustain the productivity of our local and national economies.

The County maintains a regional system of parks and trails for the entire county. In the unincorporated areas, the County maintains some local park facilities with special district funding, and self-governing community service districts maintain other local park facilities. The County also sets standards and applies designations to preserve the varied scenic resources across the unincorporated lands.

While air and water quality are largely regulated by regional, state, and federal agencies, the County applies standards set by and coordinates with such agencies, manages small public water systems, and provides permits for wells and septic systems. Similarly, the protection and conservation of biological resources is primarily regulated and controlled by state and federal agencies, with the County enforcing state and federal laws and participating in local and countywide efforts to promote biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

The County is the lead agency for mining activity on all private and public lands in unincorporated areas and facilitates the extraction of mineral resources while minimizing adverse effects on the environment and communities. Although the rich agricultural lands of the Valley region were long ago urbanized, the County promotes the preservation and continued viability of remaining agricultural resources and farming operations.

### Purpose

The Natural Resources Element:

- Establishes policies that preserve and enhance the beauty and resiliency of our natural resources.
- Provides guidance on coordinating with others to manage, conserve, and protect natural resources such as watersheds, wildlife habitat areas and corridors, and other natural and open space areas.
- Promotes clean air and a supply of water for human consumption and the natural environment.
- Supports the maintenance and enhancement of a countywide system of open space, parks, and recreation assets.
- Provides guidance and support for mining operations and the preservation of viable agricultural and grazing lands.
- Provides guidance on the location and distribution of new development to protect natural resources.

## Principles

We believe:

- Effective preservation, management, and enhancement of natural resources will ensure their environmental and economical sustainability and resiliency.
- Access to open space and vibrant natural resources improves public health and contributes significantly to the county's overall economic vitality.
- Improving air quality and ensuring access to clean and affordable drinking water will enhance the quality of life for our residents and attract continuing investment in residences and businesses.
- The County's primary role is to govern land use and establish development standards to ensure that new development has minimal impact on the natural environment in the unincorporated areas of the county.
- The County has a responsibility to maintain and make available information on natural resources to enable property owners to be better stewards of the land and natural resources.

## Goals & Policies

### Goal NR-1 Air Quality

**Air quality that promotes health and wellness of residents in San Bernardino County through improvements in locally-generated emissions.**

- Policy NR-1.1 **Land use.** We promote compact and transit-oriented development countywide and regulate the types and locations of development in unincorporated areas to minimize vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Policy NR-1.2 **Indoor air quality.** We promote the improvement of indoor air quality through the California Building and Energy Codes and through the provision of public health programs and services.
- Policy NR-1.3 **Coordination on air pollution.** We collaborate with air quality management districts and other local agencies to monitor and reduce major pollutants affecting the county at the emission source.
- Policy NR-1.4 **Military coordination on air quality.** We collaborate with the military to avoid or minimize impacts on military training and operations from air pollution and haze.
- Policy NR-1.5 **Sensitive land uses.** We consider recommendations from the California Air Resources Board on the siting of new sensitive land uses and exposure to specific source categories.
- Policy NR-1.6 **Fugitive dust emissions.** We coordinate with air quality management districts on requirements for dust control plans, revegetation, and soil compaction to prevent fugitive dust emissions.

- Policy NR-1.7 **Greenhouse gas reduction targets.** We strive to meet the 2040 and 2050 greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in accordance with state law.
- Policy NR-1.8 **Construction and operations.** We invest in County facilities and fleet vehicles to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions. We encourage County contractors and other builders and developers to use low-emission construction vehicles and equipment to improve air quality and reduce emissions.
- Policy NR-1.9 **Building design and upgrades.** We use the CALGreen Code to meet energy efficiency standards for new buildings and encourage the upgrading of existing buildings to incorporate design elements, building materials, and fixtures that improve environmental sustainability and reduce emissions.

## **Goal NR-2 Water Quality**

### **Clean and safe water for human consumption and the natural environment.**

- Policy NR-2.1 **Coordination on water quality.** We collaborate with the state, regional water quality control boards, watermasters, water purveyors, and government agencies at all levels to ensure a safe supply of drinking water and a healthy environment.
- Policy NR-2.2 **Water management plans.** We support the development, update, and implementation of ground and surface water quality management plans emphasizing the protection of water quality from point and non-point source pollution.
- Policy NR-2.3 **Military coordination on water quality.** We collaborate with the military to avoid or minimize impacts on military training and operations from groundwater contamination and inadequate groundwater supply.
- Policy NR-2.4 **Wastewater discharge.** We apply federal and state water quality standards for wastewater discharge requirements in the review of development proposals that relate to type, location, and size of the proposed project in order to safeguard public health and shared water resources.
- Policy NR-2.5 **Stormwater discharge.** We ensure compliance with the County's Municipal Stormwater NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) Permit by requiring new development and significant redevelopment to protect the quality of water and drainage systems through site design, source controls, stormwater treatment, runoff reduction measures, best management practices, low impact development strategies, and technological advances. For existing development, we monitor businesses and coordinate with municipalities.
- Policy NR-2.6 **Agricultural waste and biosolids.** We coordinate with regional water quality control boards and other responsible agencies to regulate and control animal waste and biosolids in order to protect groundwater and the natural environment.

**Goal NR-3 Open Space, Parks, and Recreation**

**A system of well-planned and maintained parks, trails, and open space that provides recreation opportunities for residents, attracts visitors from across the region and around the country, and preserves the natural environment.**

- Policy NR-3.1 **Open space preservation.** We regulate land use and coordinate with public and nongovernmental agencies to preserve open space areas that protect natural resources, function as a buffer against natural hazards or between land uses, serve as a recreation or tourist destination, or are central to the identity of an unincorporated community.
- Policy NR-3.2 **Residential clustering.** We allow residential development to cluster housing units in order to reduce the consumption of undeveloped land, maximize the amount of open space, preserve natural resources, conform to natural topography/grade, and/or reduce exposure of structures to natural hazards.
- Policy NR-3.3 **Management of designated areas.** We coordinate with public and nongovernmental agencies to sustainably manage and conserve land within or adjacent to locally-, state-, or federally-designated open space or resource conservation areas.
- Policy NR-3.4 **Land exchange.** We coordinate with state and federal agencies to exchange publicly owned lands in order to provide additional areas for open space, recreation, and resource protection. We also request the right of first refusal on publicly owned lands made available for purchase to the public.
- Policy NR-3.5 **Private conservation efforts.** We support nongovernmental organizations and private entities who purchase, own, maintain, and expand areas for conservation and preservation. We also support the voluntary transition of privately held lands within a larger boundary designated by the state or federal government for open space and resource conservation to public ownership.
- Policy NR-3.6 **Regional park land.** We coordinate with other jurisdictions and agencies to provide regional park land. We prioritize the maintenance and improvement of existing County parks and trails over their expansion or creation of new facilities.
- Policy NR-3.7 **Regional park revenue.** We generate revenues from County-owned parks and facilities to offset the costs of operation and maintenance. We may also coordinate with local jurisdictions and leverage other resources to support the maintenance and improvement of park and trail facilities.
- Policy NR-3.8 **Regional trail system.** We coordinate with incorporated jurisdictions, state and federal agencies, and other regional and not-for-profit entities to maintain and improve a regional trail system. We prioritize the maintenance and improvement of the Santa Ana River Trail, followed by the creation of trails in unincorporated areas that connect to existing trails in incorporated areas and to state- and federally-maintained trails.

- Policy NR-3.9 **Local parks, trails, and recreation.** We support the provision of local and community parks, trails, and recreational programs and facilities in unincorporated areas when a locally-approved funding and financing mechanism is established to pay for acquisition, construction, maintenance, and operations. We encourage unincorporated communities to apply for funding and cooperate with them in their funding applications for local trails that are identified in a non-motorized transportation plan that is accepted or adopted by the County. We also encourage, where feasible, local trails to be separated from vehicular traffic to improve the safety of trail users.
- Policy NR-3.10 **Joint use facilities.** We promote the creation of joint use facilities for local parks and recreation programs through coordination with the County Flood Control District, local school districts, utilities, and other public agencies.
- Policy NR-3.11 **Off-highway vehicle areas.** In areas under the County's land use authority, we require new or expansion of existing commercial off-highway vehicle (OHV) areas to be situated and buffered to minimize effects on nearby residential uses, military activity, and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Policy NR-3.12 **Rights-of-way and easements.** We consider reserving portions of rights-of-way and easements found to be unnecessary for the ultimate buildout of roadways or flood control facilities for use as local pedestrian, bicycle, and/or equestrian trails.

#### **Goal NR-4 Scenic Resources**

**Scenic resources that highlight the natural environment and reinforce the identity of local communities and the county.**

- Policy NR-4.1 **Preservation of scenic resources.** We consider the location and scale of development to preserve regionally significant scenic vistas and natural features, including prominent hillsides, ridgelines, dominant landforms, and reservoirs.
- Policy NR-4.2 **Coordination with agencies.** We coordinate with adjacent federal, state, local, and tribal agencies to protect scenic resources that extend beyond the County's land use authority and are important to countywide residents, businesses, and tourists.
- Policy NR-4.3 **Off-site signage.** We prohibit new off-site signage and encourage the removal of existing off-site signage along or within view of County Scenic Routes and State Scenic Highways.

#### **Goal NR-5 Biological Resources**

**An interconnected landscape of open spaces and habitat areas that promotes biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, both for their intrinsic value and for the value placed on them by residents and visitors.**

- Policy NR-5.1 **Coordinated habitat planning.** We participate in landscape-scale habitat conservation planning and coordinate with existing or proposed habitat conservation and natural resource management plans for private and public lands to increase certainty for both the conservation of species, habitats, wildlife corridors, and other important biological resources and functions; and for land development and infrastructure permitting.

- Policy NR-5.2 **Capacity for resource protection and management.** We coordinate with public and nongovernmental agencies to seek funding and other resources to protect, restore, and maintain open space, habitat, and wildlife corridors for threatened, endangered, and other sensitive species.
- Policy NR-5.3 **Multiple-resource benefits.** We prioritize conservation actions that demonstrate multiple resource preservation benefits, such as biology, climate change adaptation and resiliency, hydrology, cultural, scenic, and community character.
- Policy NR-5.4 **Off-base recovery efforts.** We coordinate with military installations to facilitate off-base recovery of threatened and endangered species and landscape-scale conservation.
- Policy NR-5.5 **Mitigation and future responsibilities.** We require that new development satisfy habitat conservation responsibilities without shifting conservation responsibilities onto military property.
- Policy NR-5.6 **Mitigation banking.** We support the proactive assemblage of lands to protect biological resources and facilitate development through private or public mitigation banking. We require public and private conservation lands or mitigation banks to ensure that easement and fee title agreements provide funding methods sufficient to manage the land in perpetuity.
- Policy NR-5.7 **Development review, entitlement, and mitigation.** We comply with state and federal regulations regarding protected species of animals and vegetation through the development review, entitlement, and environmental clearance processes.
- Policy NR-5.8 **Invasive species.** We require the use of non-invasive plant species with new development and encourage the management of existing invasive plant species that degrade ecological function.

#### **Goal NR-6 Mineral Resources**

**Mineral resource zones that allow extraction industries to continue supporting the regional and national economy while minimizing negative impacts on the public and natural environment.**

- Policy NR-6.1 **Mineral resource areas.** We prioritize the conservation of land area with mineral resources by prohibiting or discouraging development of land that would substantially preclude the future development of mining facilities in areas classified as Mineral Resource Zone (MRZ) 2a, 2b, or 3a.
- Policy NR-6.2 **Mining operations and reclamation.** We require and monitor mineral extraction activities to ensure that the operation and reclamation of mined lands is consistent with the State Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (SMARA).
- Policy NR-6.3 **Conservation of construction aggregate.** We encourage the continued operation of existing mining facilities and streamline the permitting of new mining facilities (consistent with the Policy Plan and other local, state, and federal regulations) to establish aggregate resources that are sufficient to satisfy 50 years of county demand.

**Goal NR-7 Agriculture and Soils**

**The ability of property owners, farmers, and ranchers to conduct sustainable and economically viable agricultural operations.**

- Policy NR-7.1 **Protection of agricultural land.** We protect economically viable and productive agricultural lands from the adverse effects of urban encroachment, particularly increased erosion and sedimentation, trespass, and non-agricultural land development.
- Policy NR-7.2 **Preservation of important farmlands.** We require project applicants seeking to develop 20 or more acres of farmland (classified as prime, of statewide importance, or unique farmland) to non-agricultural uses to prepare an agricultural resource evaluation prior to project approval. The evaluation shall use generally accepted methodologies to identify the potentially significant impact of the loss of agricultural land as well as the economic viability and sustainability of future agricultural use of the property, including long-term sustainability and economic viability of water resources. If the conversion is deemed significant, the County shall require mitigation at a 1:1 ratio of converted to preserved acreage through conservation easements, payment of its valuation equivalent if a fee mitigation program is established, or inclusion in a regional agricultural preservation program.
- Policy NR-7.3 **Conservation and preservation incentives.** We support programs and policies that provide tax and economic incentives to conserve existing productive agricultural lands or preserve farmland classified as prime, of statewide importance, unique, or of local importance. We support land owners in establishing new and maintaining existing California Land Conservation (Williamson Act) contracts.
- Policy NR-7.4 **Economic diversity of farm operations.** We encourage farm operations to strengthen their economic viability through diversifying potential sources of farm income and activity, including value added products, agricultural tourism, roadside stands, organic farming, and farmers markets.
- Policy NR-7.5 **Agriculture on Rural Living and Open Space properties.** We permit small-scale, non-water-intensive, and incidental agricultural on properties designated for Rural Living. In the Oak Glen and Mentone community planning areas, we also permit commercial-scale agriculture on properties designated for Rural Living. In the Oak Glen and Mentone community planning areas and in the Crafton Hills, we also permit commercial-scale agriculture on privately-owned properties designated for Open Space.
- Policy NR-7.6 **Sustainable grazing practices.** We require all grazing on open rangelands to be compatible with the conservation of threatened and endangered species.