

DRAFT

I. AGRICULTURAL POLICY

BACKGROUND

The public benefits of conserving land as open space are many: clean air, clean water, biodiversity, climate resiliency and the well-being that comes with spending time in nature.

On the San Mateo County Coast, much of the undeveloped open space land has a long history of agricultural use. Active agriculture continues today as an important source of local food and natural products.

In June 2003, the Board adopted the San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area (CAA) Service Plan (Service Plan) to establish the policies, guidelines, and commitments governing District activities and services within coastal San Mateo County, an area known as the Coastside Protection Area. The San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) approved the CAA in September 2004.

Since LAFCo approval, the District has completed numerous projects related to land purchases, conservation grazing, the protection of unique natural and scenic resources, stream habitat restoration, and new public access opportunities. In addition, the District has fostered partnerships and new relationships on the coast and secured grants and other funding to support the preservation and stewardship of coastal properties and working lands. All of this work occurs in recognition of the importance of agriculture in sustaining the local economy and in preserving the rural, open space landscape of the San Mateo County coast. The agricultural policies identified in this document are consistent with the Coastal Service Plan, which controls District activities in the Coastal Service Area. Lands outside the coastal service area are also covered by these policies unless otherwise noted.

This Sidebar will be a description of agricultural acreage and history in San Mateo County

The District's mission for the Coastside Protection Area is as follows (bold denotes additions to the basic Mission Statement):

*“To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land **and agricultural land of regional significance**, protect and restore the natural environment, **preserve rural character**, **encourage viable agricultural use of land resources**, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.”*

This Sidebar will be a discussion of the co-benefits

The District considers viable agricultural use of land resources to be those agricultural activities that do not exceed the capacity of the supporting resources (e.g. water quality and supply, soil nutrients and structure), do not produce waste products that are persistent, hazardous or toxic, and is financial profitable and sustainable for the farmer/rancher. By preserving and supporting agricultural uses on the San Mateo County Coast, the District is working to protect wildlife corridors, scenic open space views, groundwater infiltration, and other ecosystem and open space benefits in addition to supporting sustainable agriculture.

As of this writing (2023), the District has preserved more than 12,000 acres of open space within the Coastside Protection Area. About 75% of that land is leased to small-scale ranchers through the District's conservation grazing program to sustain coastal grasslands, one the most biodiverse and threatened ecosystems in North America. Several endangered, threatened and special-status species, like the San Francisco garter snake, American badger, burrowing owl and California red-legged frog, depend on open grassland habitat and the various stock ponds found within rangeland properties. As the District enhances grassland and pond habitats for the benefit of wildlife and to support local agriculture, the ecological function of coastal lands is also preserved. Numerous District-owned agricultural lands located outside the Coastal Protection Area are similarly leased to various agricultural operators.

Although the majority of the District's agricultural acreage is in grazing, the District leases out 130 acres of row crops, vineyards, Christ-

mas tree farms, and orchards to farmers. On the coastside, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, the District offers a lease option to tenants/farmers who are conducting agricultural uses on newly acquired coastal lands until the property is sold or a request for proposals for a long-term lease is solicited and a new lease awarded.

Each of the District's agricultural properties requires key infrastructure (water systems, fencing, roads, corrals, and barns) to support an onsite agricultural operation and accomplish the District's land management goals. In particular, conservation grazing often requires fencing to protect creeks, as well as reliable water sources (livestock watering) that support the distribution of cattle across the landscape to achieve resource management goals.

In general, newly acquired properties have lacked the infrastructure to run a successful conservation grazing program. The District prepares customized Rangeland Management Plans (RMPs) for each new grazing property that sets grazing parameters based on site conditions and annual rainfall amounts. RMPs include a list of new infrastructure improvements to effectively support the conservation grazing operation.

In addition, the District enters into grazing leases that specify the roles for both the tenant and the District regarding the construction and maintenance of the onsite infrastructure during the lease term. While the District funds most infrastructure improvements, the District depends on tenants to install portions of the infrastructure (e.g., water troughs, sections of fencing) and make maintenance and operational repairs. Additionally, tenants work with the District to eliminate invasive species as directed by the District's Integrated Pest Management program.

These Agricultural Policies are a "living" document that will grow and change regularly, based on new experience and information. Policy language will be reviewed and updated as needed.

This Sidebar will discuss types of ag on San Mateo Coast.

This Sidebar will be a description of the Coastal Service Plan process and accomplishments

AGRICULTURAL GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Goal AG-1 Continue existing and introduce new agricultural operations within the Coastside Protection Area in order to keep prime agricultural land in agricultural production while ensuring the protection of sensitive natural resources. Maintain agricultural uses outside the Coastal Protection Area when they support open space, natural resource, and/or public access goals. Minimize conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses on District owned or managed lands.

This Sidebar will be a discussion of the types of uses on District lands.

This Sidebar will discuss use of conservation easements (including affirmative agricultural easements).

Policy AG-1 In the coastside protection area, the fee purchase and protection of agricultural lands will focus on properties that also provide benefits for sensitive habitat and natural resource values and/or compatible low intensity recreational opportunities. In the coastside protection area, the preservation of significant agricultural lands without significant natural resource or public access benefits, such as row

crops, should be supported through partnerships and led by partners.

- a) Lands that do not have open space, sensitive habitat, or public access values and which clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale, subject to affirmative agricultural and/or conservation easements, while other agricultural lands, typically rangelands, will generally be offered for lease. (Service Plan PA.1)
- b) Offer for sale or lease the maximum amount of productive agricultural land to farmers/ranchers who will actively operate agricultural uses on the land subject to the protection of habitat values and current or planned recreational uses. (Service Plan PA.1)
- c) Focus on purchasing in fee and managing rangelands in perpetuity.

- d) In the coastside protection area work in partnership with organizations like Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to prevent the conversion or loss of intensive agricultural lands through funding contributions with the ultimate goal of transferring these lands to private farmers subject to land protections such as agricultural conservation easements.
- e) To the extent practical and if aligned with District policies, keep agricultural uses within the same or contiguous properties together when the agricultural uses are run by the same operator.
- f) When applicable and appropriate, structure agricultural conservation easements to protect the environmental quality, historic significance, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and/or open space values of agricultural lands.

Policy AG-2 Where compatible with the natural, cultural and agricultural resources located on agricultural lands, provide low-intensity public access and environmental education.

- a) Evaluate the compatibility of low-intensity public access on District-owned agricultural lands to facilitate access and trail connections. (Service Plan PA.3)
- b) Work closely with agricultural tenants to identify appropriate levels of public access through or adjacent to agricultural lands, and the infrastructure, signage, setbacks, buffers, and other measures that improve compatibility and minimize/avoid potential recreational impacts to agricultural uses and vice versa.
- c) Solicit input from landowners, farmers, ranchers and other operators of adjacent agricultural lands to inform the development of use and management plans for District lands. (Service Plan Guidelines G.3.8 and G.6.3)
- d) Locate trails, trailhead access points, parking and other visitor-serving facilities on District lands in harmony with the surrounding agricultural uses, where the siting of facilities and buffers in the coastal protection area is consistent with the Coastal Service Plan and EIR mitigation measures, while complying with current regulatory requirements. (Service Plan Guideline G.3.9)

*Place holder for future
Sidebar discussing what
is compatible public
recreation in context of
ag/working landscapes.*

*Place holder for future
Sidebar discussing
conservation grazing and
referencing CGM Chapter.*

- e) Solicit input from other local public agencies, conservation organizations, non-profit entities, and community groups to inform the placement of public trails and other low-intensity public access facilities that traverse or are located adjacent to agricultural lands. (Service Plan Guideline G.8)
- f) Implement temporary closures of specific trails that are located on agricultural lands to facilitate intermittent agricultural activities and protect visitor safety, as may be necessary (e.g., calving season, transportation of livestock, crop harvest, chemical applications, etc.). (Service Plan Guideline G.3.4)

Policy AG-3 Retain current District agricultural housing and expand agricultural housing opportunities when feasible.

- a) Consider opportunities to partner with and support local organizations that provide affordable regional agricultural workforce housing when such partnerships help further District goals.
- b) Consider partnerships to develop and manage agricultural workforce housing on District lands in appropriate locations that do not conflict with natural resource protection and/or ecologically sensitive public access goals. In general, open space lands do not provide sustainable housing development locations and new housing would be limited to specific circumstances in disturbed areas with existing infrastructure.
- c) Prioritize the leasing of District residences, that are needed to support an agricultural operation, to the grazing operator/lessee or farm/ranch worker who is actively farming or grazing on District land unless essential for operational District employee housing. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy)
- d) Provide discounted rates for District housing that is occupied by a non-lease holding farm/ranch employee.
- e) Rent District housing at prevailing rental market rates for lease holders. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy)

Policy AG-4 Provide necessary infrastructure and incentives to support and improve agricultural operations, where appropriate.

- a) Identify future investments in fencing infrastructure on District agricultural lands to establish property boundaries and protect natural resources and neighboring lands. (Resource Management Policies CGM-2, CGM-5)
- b) Develop water infrastructure to support agricultural operations that also maintains and protects natural resource values. (Resource Management Policies CGM-2)
- c) Improve water security/supply for District-owned residences on agricultural lands. (Resource Management Policies WR-5)
- d) Work with tenants to maintain or improve agricultural structures such as barns and corrals.
- e) Allow tenant-funded infrastructure improvements that support intensive agriculture if they do not impact natural resources or public access.
- f) Prioritize investment in water infrastructure that has direct natural resource benefit, such as distribution of water to improve grazing management and livestock rotation in grassland habitats or investing in storage, distribution to reduce reliance on in-stream water use and the improvement or creation of stock ponds that also provide critical habitat.

This Sidebar will discuss the importance of infrastructure for agricultural operations and sustainable practices

This Sidebar will discuss climate resiliency/drought resiliency as well as wildlife water supply in drought conditions

Policy AG-5 Structure agricultural leases to accomplish land management objectives and establish leases that promote conservation goals and the financial viability of agricultural operations.

- a) In the coastside protection area, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, after the purchase of active agricultural lands, the land shall be subject to continued use by the existing agricultural operator until such time as the District either sells the property or issues a request for proposals and awards a new long-term agricultural lease. (Service Plan PA.1)

- b) After the acquisition of a property and the development of an agriculture production plan or rangeland management plan, solicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease for agricultural lands.
- c) At the end of a lease, resolicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease.
- d) Long term leases shall be structured with periodic options to allow renewal or ending the lease and provisions for terminating leases for poor performance or violations of lease terms.
- e) Enter into agricultural leases with term durations that support the financial viability of agricultural operations and promote tenant investments that are beneficial for the land and the agricultural production; the lease term length should be based on the type of agricultural operation. (Resource Management Policies CGM-5)
- f) Work with local organizations to ensure that agricultural lease opportunities are well publicized, including to new/early-career producers and agricultural workers.
- g) When soliciting for new agricultural tenants, include selection criteria pertaining to local preference, Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI), tenant in-good-standing, and environmental sustainability as well as the ability to manage and operate the agricultural operation.
- h) When awarding leases, the District shall factor in the performance of existing/prior agricultural tenants, including their stewardship practices, implementation of Board-approved resource management plans/actions, accommodation of low intensity public access, and use of sustainability practices in their agricultural operations.

This Sidebar will discuss tenant in good standing determination

Policy AG-6 Ensure that marketing and promotion of agricultural products produced on District lands are compatible with resource protection policies. Allow District tenants to market and promote their products on District lands and support regional efforts that promote local food sources as a sustainable approach to feeding

Bay Area residents. Provide and support regional education opportunities that raise awareness of environmental benefits related to agricultural land protection and management.

- a) Support regional efforts that promote the environmental benefits of local food production and agricultural land uses that are aligned with the District's mission.
- b) Allow marketing of events and appropriate signage by tenants to develop brand identity and promote their products on District lands. Require signage to include identification of the District as the landowner.
- c) Communicate and educate the public on the environmental benefits of agricultural uses on District lands, the District's coastal mission, the history of agriculture on the San Mateo Coast, the grassland management benefits of conservation grazing, and the protection of natural resources on agricultural lands via programming, signing, the website and social media.
- d) Allow appropriate use of pictures of District landscapes by District tenants to promote their products.
- e) Allow District tenants to include mention of their status as an agricultural tenant who operates on District lands as part of their marketing and promotional materials; grazers who are part of the conservation grazing program can also mention their participation in the program and the benefits of grazing in protecting the natural resources.

*This Sidebar will discuss
Agro-tourism*

Goal AG-2 Sustain and promote environmental health and encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agriculture.

Policy AG-7 Encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agricultural practices on District lands that preserve and protect water quality and riparian habitats.

- a) Manage agricultural leases and easements to maximize the protection and enhancement of riparian areas, water quality, and quantity of water available for natural resources. (Resource Management Policies WR-2).
- b) Secure water rights for District agricultural lands to support the viability of agricultural uses while remaining protective of sensitive habitats (Service Plan PA.2).
- c) Phase in the installation of water meters or other measures to monitor annual consumptive water use (Resource Management Policies WR-4) for agricultural activities to balance consumption with healthy ecological function.
- d) Develop, regularly update and implement Best Management Practices for efficient use of water by agricultural tenants.
- e) Identify and replace diversions that strain naturally limited water sources, especially those that significantly impact special status species, with other reliable sources (e.g., wells, retention ponds, etc.) (Resource Management Policies WR-8).
- f) Evaluate and alter, as feasible, water-intensive land management practices during drought conditions to reduce overall District-wide water consumption (Resource Management Policies WR-8).

Policy AG-8 Encourage environmentally sensitive practices on District lands that enhance the benefits and/or reduce negative impacts to the natural resources.

- a) Locate agricultural activities, facility development, and trail construction away from sensitive resource areas to the greatest extent possible and otherwise incorporate measures to reduce potential resource impacts (Resource Management Policies GS-2).
- b) Manage pests on agricultural properties to support existing uses, while also protecting human health and surrounding natural resources, through an integrated pest management program. (Resource Management Policies IPM-1).

- c) Take appropriate actions to prevent the introduction of new pest species to District preserves, especially new invasive plants in natural areas, rangelands, and agricultural properties (Resource Management Policies IPM-2).
- d) Provide technical support and incentives for tenants to implement environmentally sensitive practices on District lands and support regional programs that promote environmentally sensitive agricultural practices.
- e) Promote integrated pest management agricultural production methods.
- f) Prohibit uses incompatible with natural resource protection or the District's mission, including agriculture production primarily contained within structures such as greenhouses or feed lots and cultivation of cannabis.

Policy AG-9 Promote climate resiliency and encourage environmentally sustainable agricultural practices on District lands that store carbon and promote soil and grassland health

- a) Support soil health improvement practices and cultivation of climate appropriate crops.
- b) Promote practices that enhance carbon storage where these practices are compatible with other natural resource protection.
- c) Offer educational opportunities for tenant farmers/ranchers and farmworkers/ranch workers regarding sustainable farm and conservation grazing operational practices.

Policy AG-10 Support research focused on agricultural practices that increase efficient use of land resources, environmental sustainability, climate adaptation, and/or increase habitat values on agricultural lands

- a) Invest in research of new techniques that improve resource use efficiencies, reduce non-target impacts of agricultural practices, and enhance habitat value on agricultural land.

- b) Support technology advancements and research that improve the environmental sustainability of agricultural management techniques.

Goal AG-3 Support and implement practices that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion on District agricultural lands and within the larger agricultural community.

Policy AG-11 Establish strong working relationships with the agricultural workforce community.

- a) Maintain ongoing communication with organizations that are focused on supporting local agricultural workers, providing a District point of contact, and notifying them of District activities, projects, programs, meetings, and consideration of decisions that may be of interest to ensure opportunities for input.
- b) Periodically attend local community meetings that discuss farmworker/agricultural workforce interests to better understand agricultural workforce issues and the intersection with District work to inform future activities.
- c) Actively solicit feedback from organizations that are focused on supporting local agricultural workers on proposed new District projects, policies, and programs that may directly affect the community they serve.

Policy AG-12 Implement strategies and actions to further the District's diversity, equity and inclusion ("DEI") goals that align with the mission, Board policy, and annual strategic goals and objectives.

- a) Build relationships with community-based organizations that are rooted in and serve the farmworker community.
- b) Incorporate DEI strategies in the solicitation process for agricultural leases.

- c) Provide opportunities to lease District agricultural properties to people who have not traditionally owned or operated ranches and farmlands.
- d) Provide non-English translations when appropriate or requested.
- e) Ensure community-based organizations are notified when District leases are up for renewal or when accepting new applications.
- f) Ensure that the broad diversity of agricultural interests have a meaningful opportunity to provide their input in the development of District projects/plans.
- g) Support efforts by Native American tribes to cultivate contemporary and past indigenous ethnobotanical practices and plant uses and reconnect indigenous peoples with cultural land management, natural resource production, and natural stewardship practices.

Policy AG-13 Expand partnerships with local and regional organizations to expand the scale of agricultural conservation.

- a) Cultivate existing partnerships and enter into new partnerships with organizations that support local agriculture to achieve mutual goals and leverage resources.
- b) In the coastside protection area, support partners in efforts to preserve agricultural lands of regional significance through agricultural conservation easements for lands in private ownership and through land trust ownership. (Service Plan PA.3)
- c) Support efforts by partners to implement agriculture sustainability and natural resource conservation projects on private lands. (Service Plan PA.3)

II. GLOSSARY

III. REFERENCES