

SONOMA MOUNTAIN

AREA PLAN

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

SONOMA MOUNTAIN SPECIFIC PLAN

PRANAB CHAKRAWARTI, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

TOBY ROSS, Project Planner

RICHARD RETECHI, Staff - Planning

CAROL WHITMIRE, Report Production

HELEN STEINLAUF, Report Production

IRENE LESLIE, Report Production

RON DERING, Consultant

REVISED SONOMA MOUNTAIN AREA PLAN

KENNETH MILAM, PLANNING DIRECTOR

GREG CARR, Chief, Comprehensive Planning and Project Director

MARIA CIPRIANI, Planner

RICK ROY, Graphics

ELIZABETH ROBERTS, Production

REVISED SONOMA MOUNTAIN AREA PLAN 2008

PETE PARKINSON, PRMD DIRECTOR

JENNIFER BARRETT, PRMD Deputy Director of Planning

GREG CARR, Comprehensive Planning Manager

LISA POSTERNAK, Staff Planner

SUE WAXMAN, Production

SUSAN DAHL, Production

DARCY REINIER, Mapping

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INTRODUCTION

In 1978, the County adopted the Sonoma Mountain Specific Plan, a planning document prepared under specific requirements of State law and intended to provide an intermediate level of detail between the 1978 General Plan and site development plans submitted to the County for approval. The 1978 General Plan focused on policies of countywide significance and utilized generalized graphics to illustrate land use, open space and other elements.

In 1989, the County adopted an update of the 1978 General Plan. The General Plan update provided parcel specific information concerning land use and open space. The General Plan update also included "area policies" in an attempt to focus particular attention on a specific area or parcel. Because of this level of specificity in the General Plan update, the Board of Supervisors determined that several of the specific plans, including the Sonoma Mountain Specific Plan, were either duplicative or conflicting with the updated General Plan. The Board of Supervisors further determined that to the extent the specific plans provided policy guidance beyond that provided by the General Plan update, that such plans should be reviewed and revised to focus on such policies, and re-adapted as "area plans." The General Plan includes a discussion of these specific plans in Land Use Element Section 2.1.1, under Policy LU-1a.

This document was prepared pursuant to General Plan Policy LU-1a.

In keeping with the above intent, the 1993 revisions of the Sonoma Mountain Area Plan did not include exhaustive evaluation or reconsideration of the policies or designations contained in this plan. The scope of the revisions was limited to that necessary to achieve General Plan consistency.

In addition, during this process much of the original background language was deleted. This deletion should not be interpreted as diminishing or reducing the significance of the content of the language to the original plan. Should there be any future questions regarding the intent or basis of the policies in the revised plan, the Planning Department shall keep copies of the original plan on file for reference.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

BACKGROUND

In June of 1975 the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors authorized the Sonoma Mountain Study in response to citizen concern over major land division proposals within the area.

The Sonoma Mountain Study District encompasses a sixty-five square mile land area in south central Sonoma County stretching along a northwest/southeast axis some eighteen miles, from Crane Canyon Road south to Highway 37. The plan area is shown on the Location Map and is characterized by an exceptionally low density of residential development, approximately one dwelling unit per ninety-five acres.

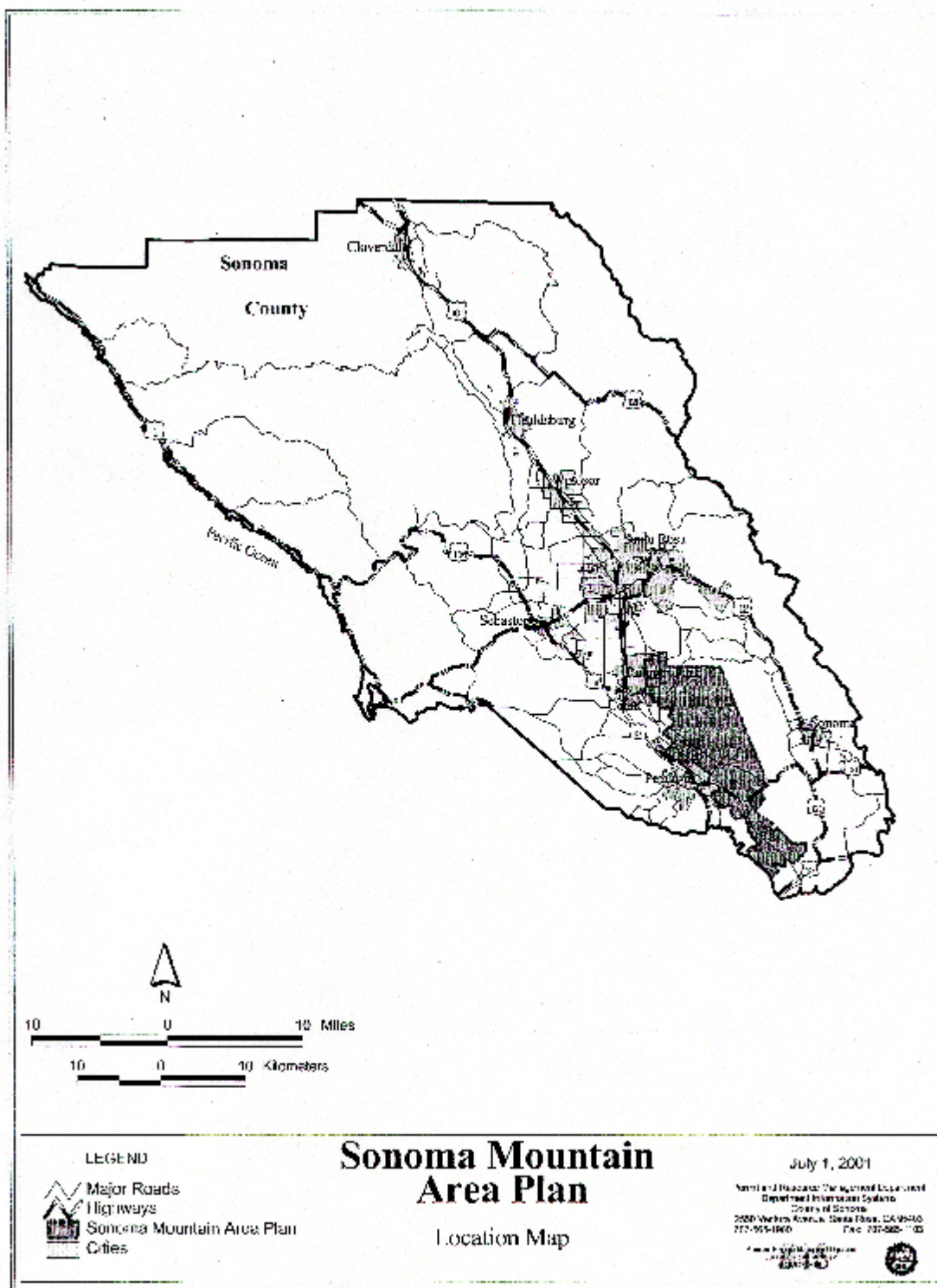
Agriculture is the major land use in the study district, with forty percent of the land in agricultural preserves. Outside of the agricultural preserve areas the agricultural utility of the area's soils is limited to pasture, hay, and some row crop production in the flatland areas where slopes permit mechanized farming. The soil characteristics of the upland areas are limited primarily to range, timber, and watershed use.

Perhaps the greatest agricultural resource potential of the study district lies in wastewater irrigation along the eastern and western flank of Petaluma Hill and Adobe Roads.

REGIONAL SETTING

The 65 square mile Sonoma Mountain Study area is located in the southeasterly quadrant of Sonoma County. Sonoma Mountain provides a continual visual backdrop from Highway 101 along the eastern edge of the Santa Rosa Plain-Petaluma Valley. The dominant mountains form a symbolic gateway for people entering Sonoma County.

Elevations within the study area range from 2295 feet at the summit of Sonoma Mountain to sea level in the Petaluma Marsh. The major land uses throughout the area are dairying, grazing, forage crop production, and residential.



Map 1 Location Map

CONSTRAINTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Soils

- (1) Encourage clustering of residential development to insure the retention of larger residual parcels for potential agricultural utilization.
- (2) Pursuant to General Plan policies, encourage cluster development that preserve the most "farmable" section of the property as the residual parcel.
- (3) Promote the use of Agricultural Preserves as a means of maintaining productive open space.

Wildlife and Vegetation

- (1) Adopt the proposed Sonoma Mountain Land Use Plan.
- (2) Enforce General and Area Plan open space policies to protect the area's riparian corridors from disruption.
- (3) Encourage greater public awareness and participation in wildlife management programs as suggested by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Geologic Hazards

- (1) Continue to implement the Alquist-Priolo Special Studies Zones Act of 1972.
- (2) Require an engineering geologist's report whenever there is an unacceptable level of risk of geologic hazard associated with a proposed land development.

Noise

- (1) Development shall be required to meet the standards and policies of the General Plan Noise Element.

CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Local Roads

Most roads in the study area are classified as Local Roads. This Area Plan recommends the following guidelines for Local Roads:

- (1) Local Roads should receive maintenance and hazard correction as the need arises.
- (2) Local Roads may in some cases need to be upgraded because of safety or structural deficiencies.
- (3) Local Roads should be retained in their basic character.
- (4) Local Roads can be added to the major system only through plan amendment.

Table 1 lists Local Roads in the plan area to which these guidelines apply.

Table 1
Minor System Roads
Sonoma Mountain Study Area

ROAD NAME	LENGTH (MILES)	ROAD NAME	LENGTH (MILES)
Browns Lane	.93	Manor Lane	1.46
Davis Lane	1.80	Manor Lane West	.24
Hardin Lane	2.18	Pressley Road	2.65
Jacobsen Lane	.59	Sonoma Mountain Rd.	5.73
Lichau Road	3.40	South Ely Road	1.25
Lynch Road	3.40	Wagner Lane	.22

The adequacy of the local road network is a major concern in the Sonoma Mountain area. Lichau Road, Sonoma Mountain Road, Lynch Road and Hardin Lane are local roadways of particular concern. All of these roadways originate and terminate within the study area.

Two policies appear feasible to mitigate the adverse impacts shown above:

- (1) Develop and implement standards relating improvements of Local Roads to proposed residential development within these traffic sheds, and form the necessary estimation districts; or,
- (2) Restrict development appropriate to the conditions and capacities of local minor roads.

Fire Services

- (1) Strict adherence to sections 4291-4296 and 4371-4375 as amended of the State Public Resources Code should be maintained.
- (2) Refer all subdivision proposals to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and/or local fire department for design input and to alert the fire district of proposed new residential construction in their area.
- (3) Where water storage facilities such as tanks, pools, or ponds are to be constructed as part of new development proposals, consider requiring public access to these water storage facilities for firefighting use.

Police Services

- (1) Where feasible, encourage the clustering of new residential development in an effort to provide greater security.
- (2) Encourage the use of outside security lighting for homes and yards.

Solid Waste

- (1) Encourage recycling of all recyclable materials.
- (2) Explore potential of public refuse collection sites.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The land use and zoning for the Sonoma Mountain Area Plan represent a parcel specific implementation of the Sonoma County General Plan. It is a precise interpretation of the adopted goals of the County of Sonoma consistent with environmental suitability and recognized projections of population, housing, and employment distribution.

LAND USE GOAL

It shall be the goal of Sonoma County to accommodate both urban and rural lifestyles. This could be accomplished by commitments to: a Community Centered Concept, provision of green belts surrounding and separating urban areas, retention of agricultural resources, adherence to the principle of environmental suitability, and preservation of our natural resources.

Land Use Policies

- (1) Encourage a pattern of growth which maintains the existing range of types of communities: the unincorporated villages and towns and cities.
- (2) Preserve the identities of present communities.
- (3) Develop an ongoing open space program around and within cities to provide visual relief from urban densities.
- (4) Promote compactness of all community boundaries to reduce the cost of providing urban level services within these areas.
- (5) Guide rural residential development so that:
 - a. Such areas do not require urban level public services at a future time.
 - b. Such areas are responsible for providing the public service improvements that are required.
 - c. People of low or moderate income are not excluded from rural living.
 - d. Rural living is a viable alternative between urban and agricultural densities.
 - e. The major subdivision process is favored over the minor subdivision process in rural density development.

PLANNING AREAS

The Sonoma County General Plan divides the county into nine Planning Areas in an effort to better define localized land use issues. The Sonoma Mountain area relates primarily to the Rohnert Park/Cotati and Petaluma Planning Areas. The General Plan issues and recommendations related to these planning areas guide this study.

The Rohnert Park/Cotati Planning Area

The Rohnert Park/Cotati Planning Area is located in the heart of Sonoma County's growth area along the Highway 101 corridor between Petaluma and Santa Rosa. The area is easily accessible to employment in Marin and San Francisco as well as to Santa Rosa and a growing employment base in the Planning Area itself. Directing urban and rural residential development to preserve community separation, agricultural production and its distinct land use patterns is the challenge in this Planning Area.

ISSUES AND POLICIES

Maintenance of Rohnert Park's Eastern Boundary

Until recently, Rohnert Park has resisted pressures to extend urban services east and south primarily because there is sufficient land within the city limits to accommodate growth for many years. Even without the extension of services, there will be pressure for rural residential development at the fringe of the city.

Policies

- (1) Land use determinations east of Petaluma Hill Road should be consistent with the agricultural characteristics of the area.
- (2) LAFCO should not permit special urban service districts beyond the urban boundaries.
- (3) "Paper subdivisions" adjacent to and near the city should be reviewed and methods explored to prevent inappropriate high density development.

Resource Management and Other Environmental Concerns

Retention and encouragement of expanded agricultural production are keys to the success of the Land Use Plan in the Rohnert Park/Cotati Planning Area.

Policies

- (1) Consideration should be given to the concept of wastewater irrigation for this area in order to assist the dairy industry and stabilize rural growth.

Rural Residential Development in Sonoma Mountains

Several areas of proposed rural residential in-fill and expansion are located in the Sonoma Mountains, all predicated upon existing parcelization patterns. Hazards such as fault rupture and landsliding, and septic and water supply limitations exist in this area.

Policies

- (1) The Sonoma Mountains should be considered for re-zoning consistent with agricultural characteristics, except as otherwise indicated in the Sonoma Mountain Area Plan.
- (2) Environmental suitability should be a paramount factor in land use decisions in this area. In addition to hazards, sewage disposal and water supply considerations, the visual impact of development is a potential problem which should be handled by sensitive design control.
- (3) The potential service requirements of this area should be determined in a study of public services and facilities.

The Petaluma Planning Area

The Petaluma Planning Area is located at the southern end of Sonoma County's urbanizing corridor. This location plus lower housing costs relative to Marin County make Petaluma an attractive housing market for commuters to employment in Marin and San Francisco. Petaluma is also in the center of the Marin-Sonoma dairy belt. Balancing growth pressure with agricultural preservation is a priority challenge.

ISSUES AND POLICIES

Maintenance of Petaluma's Eastern Boundary

Petaluma's compact urban area, relatively high density, and growth potential mean there will be pressures to expand the developable area. Pressure for development will be greatest on the City's agricultural eastern edge. City and County policies agree on the desirability of preserving this agricultural land. However, implementation of these policies will require special effort and cooperation.

Policies

- (1) LAFCO should adopt the voter-approved year 2020 Urban Growth Boundary as Petaluma's sphere of influence. The City and County should make a commitment to maintaining agricultural production outside the Urban Growth Boundary.
- (2) Re-zoning of the urban expansion area to parcel sizes consistent with future urban growth potential should be considered. City-County implementation should include the exploration of new intergovernmental devices for the coordination of public policy.

Resource Management and Other Environmental Concerns

Preserving the dairy belt that nearly surrounds Petaluma is a high priority goal of the General Plan. However, some additional low density development is projected to take place, primarily on existing parcels and with special attention to maintenance of the agricultural resource. Another environmentally important resource in this Planning Area is the Bay Marshlands. Flooding is a recurrently serious problem in portions of this area.

Policies

- (1) Adoption of the Land Use Plan will set the limits of urban and rural development. This should be publicized, and further use of Agricultural Preserves in the dairy belt should be encouraged in recognition of the goal to maintain agriculture.
- (2) Resource related zoning ordinance amendments should be considered to protect marshlands. These areas should be eligible for California Land Conservation Act Open Space Preserves.

LAND USE PLAN

As an expression of public policy the primary intent of the plan is to delineate areas where and at what densities residential development should occur and areas where agriculture should remain as the primary use. The Land Use Plan suggests a succession of lower residential densities extending eastward from the urban centers of Rohnert Park, Cotati, Penngrove, and City of Petaluma into the upland areas of Sonoma Mountain. The areas are designated from 10 to 20 acre densities along the eastern flank of the cities as a balance between the potential for agriculture and potential for development. Eastward into the foothills and upland areas of the mountain 30, 40, and 60 acre densities are applied as a means of preserving long term agricultural potential by discouraging the premature conversion of these upland areas from agriculture to residential land use. These designations also recognize the severe public safety hazards evident throughout the areas, and attempt to minimize public service costs.

LAND USE POLICIES

The land use policies below are discussed by land use category. The lands designated in each category are shown on the Land Use Plan Map.

Resources and Rural Development (RRD)

This category is characterized by a low level of human utilization, and includes forests, grasslands, mountainous areas and other open lands not predominantly used for agriculture, except for extensive activities such as grazing. Residential development is primarily related to the use of the land, and is scattered at very low densities throughout the area.

Land Extensive Agriculture (LEA)

This category is characterized by dairies and related agricultural activities, including silage production, dairy grazing and other animal husbandry activities. Residential development is at low densities, is related to the agricultural economy, and includes single family residences, mobile homes, farm family and farm labor housing.

Diverse Agriculture (DA)

This category is intended to enhance and protect those land areas where soil, climate and water conditions support farming, but where small acreage intensive farming and part time farming activities are predominant. In these areas, farming may not be the principle occupation of the farmer. The primary purpose of this category is to protect a full range of agricultural uses and to limit further rural residential intrusion consistent with the policies of the General Plan's Agricultural Resources Element.

Rural Residential (RR)

This category provides for very low density residential development, at densities of 1 to 20 acres per dwelling, on lands which have few, if any, urban services but which have access to county-maintained roads.

Urban Residential (UR)

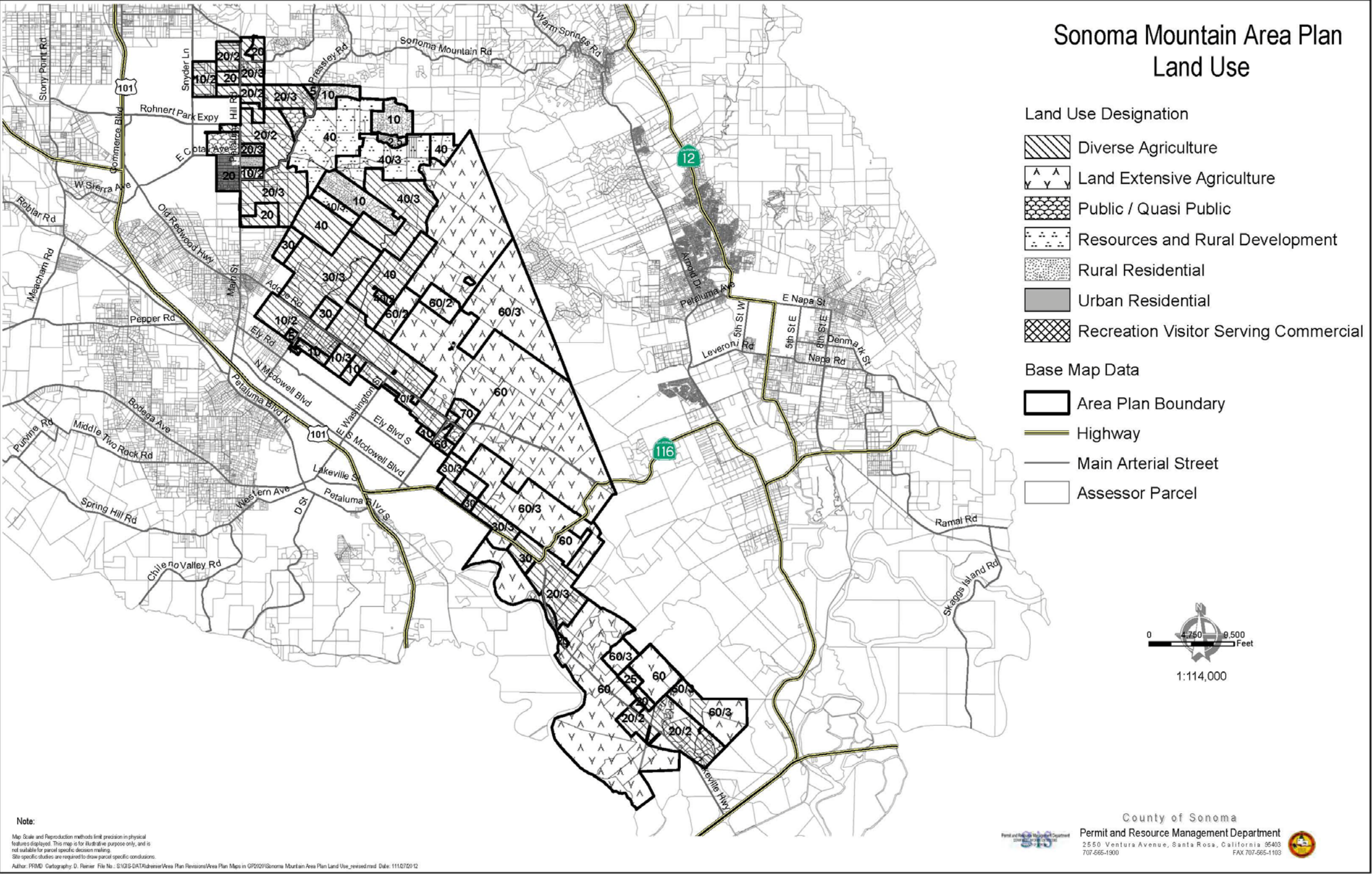
This category provides for low to high density residential development, at densities of 2 to 20 dwelling units per acre on lands which have urban services and access to county-maintained roads. This category is applied only to the Canon Manor West Subdivision.

Recreation and Visitor-Serving Commercial (RVSC)

This category provides sites for both outdoor recreation uses and the commercial service needs of visitors and travelers. In the Sonoma Mountain area, this category has been applied only to the state historical site at Vallejo's Petaluma Adobe. Designation of additional sites in the study area should only occur in a manner consistent with the policies of the General Plan's Land Use, Agricultural Resource and Public Safety Elements.

Public/Quasi-Public (PQP)

This category recognizes sites which serve community or public needs and are owned or operated by government agencies, non-profit entities, or public utilities.



Map 2 Sonoma Mountain Area Plan Land Use

OPEN SPACE PLAN

An Open Space Element identifies the open space values of areas other than those proposed for urban or rural residential development on the Land Use Plan. It complements the Land Use Plan, and provides implementation procedures to insure that resource and other environmental values are maintained.

The Open Space Element for the Sonoma Mountain Area Plan is represented on the Open Space Plan Map. More precisely, the area of policy concern on the map includes the following sub-categories:

- (A) Regional Park Proposals
- (B) Historic Sites and Archaeologically Sensitive Areas
- (C) Scenic Corridor Routes
- (D) Critical Habitat Areas
- (E) Scenic Landscape Units
- (F) Community Separator
- (G) Riparian Corridors

The Open Space Plan Map for the Sonoma Mountain area describes areas of high scenic, recreational, ecological, or cultural value on a countywide or regional scale. These are areas of critical environmental concern that make up a countywide network of priority open space.

REGIONAL PARKLANDS

Goals and Policies

The provision of adequate recreational facilities for both present and future populations is a goal of the Sonoma County General Plan.

The Regional Parklands outlined on the Open Space Plan Map reflect the park proposals contained within the Sonoma County General Plan. These areas should be recognized as recreational resources sensitive to residential encroachment.

Regional Park Site #18: Crane Creek Park

A 128 acre park site has been purchased jointly by Sonoma County and Rohnert Park. The first phase will be developed in Fiscal Year 1977-78 and will consist of picnicking, hiking, and day use facilities.

Regional Park Site #23: Lafferty Ranch

This site is presently owned by the City of Petaluma and utilized as watershed for part of the City of Petaluma's water system. This site has been recognized both by the County and the City of Petaluma as a possible park site. There is no time table for eventual purchase or development of the site, but, in the meantime, the use of the site should be limited to supervised field trips or other educational endeavors which do not infringe on the rights of adjacent property owners.

Policies

- (1) Insure that recreational facilities are compatible with adjacent land uses, the maintenance of environmental quality, and protection of property rights.
- (2) Integrate all park systems (federal, state, county, city) to avoid duplication.
- (3) Improve and maintain a system of regional parks.

HISTORIC SITES AND ARCHAEOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

Goals and Policies

The General Plan cites as a goal of Sonoma County the preservation of significant archaeological and historical sites representing all the ethnic, cultural, and economic groups that have lived and worked in Sonoma County.

Historic Sites

The Petaluma Adobe Historic Monument is the only designated historic site within the Sonoma Mountain Plan area. The State Park is surrounded by 50 acres of open grazing land to preserve the view and atmosphere of the Petaluma Adobe similar to what it once was. The immediate vicinity of this site should be recognized as sensitive to the integrity of the monument.

Archaeologically Sensitive Areas

An inventory of known archaeological sites within the Sonoma Mountain study area has been prepared under the auspices of Professor David A. Fredrickson of the Anthropology Laboratory of Sonoma State College. In an effort to preserve the confidentiality of these sites, general areas of archaeological sensitivity have been identified on the Open Space Plan Map. Future development proposals within these sensitive areas should be compared with the precise location of the known sites to determine potential conflict.

Policies

- (1) Preserve adequate open space around missions, historic settlements and buildings, areas of archaeological significance, and other features important to the human history of the County so that the natural settings of such areas are retained.
- (2) Establish a mechanism for identification, review, evaluation, and protection of archaeological sites.

SCENIC CORRIDORS

Goals and Policies

The General Plan establishes the importance of protecting and maintaining the County of Sonoma's diverse scenic resources.

The Open Space Plan Map identifies Petaluma Hill Road, Adobe Road, and Stage Gulch Road as Scenic Corridors.

Policies

- (1) Structures should be set back from scenic highways to protect uninterrupted views from the road and to maintain the impression of openness in Sonoma Mountains.
- (2) Structure design should be in keeping with the rural character of the area.
- (3) Structures should not be sited in visually vulnerable locations such as on ridgelines and in prominent foregrounds.
- (4) Proposals for structures in potentially vulnerable locations should be reviewed by the Design Review Committee.
- (5) Utilities should be installed underground for new construction when feasible.

Note: Where the above policies are less restrictive than standards required by the General Plan, compliance with General Plan standards is required.

BIOTIC HABITAT AREAS

The Petaluma Marsh and River Estuary is an example of tidal marshland and is recognized here as a sensitive floral and faunal habitat area providing a vital link in the complex food web of San Pablo Bay. It is designated in the General Plan as a Biotic Habitat Area. Development in or adjacent to this Biotic Habitat Area shall comply with the standards and policies of the General Plan Open Space and Resource Conservation Element.

COMMUNITY SEPARATOR

The General Plan designated Petaluma/Rohnert Park Community Separator extends onto a small area at the west corner of the plan area. Development within this area shall comply with the standards and policies of the General Plan.

SCENIC LANDSCAPE UNIT

Much of the south westerly slope of Sonoma Mountain is designated Scenic Landscape Unit in the General Plan. Development in this area shall comply with the standards and policies of the General Plan Open Space Element.

RIPARIAN CORRIDORS

Portions of Lichau, Copeland, and Crane Creeks are designated as Riparian Corridors in the General Plan. Development along these corridors shall comply with the standards and policies of the General Plan Open Space Element. Several additional smaller streams are designated on this Area Plan Open Space Plan Map. Development along these corridors is subject to the following policies.

Policies

- (1) Review all development proposals in the vicinity of Area Plan riparian corridors with regard to their beneficial and adverse impacts.
- (2) Encourage greater public awareness relative to wildlife and wildlife management programs.
- (3) Encourage the use of Area Plan riparian corridors for educational purposes.
- (4) Enforce County Ordinance 1108 which provides criteria for stream maintenance and construction encroachments.

PETALUMA CITY WATERSHED

A part of the City of Petaluma's water delivery systems originates within Sonoma Mountain. The map illustrates the watershed areas above Copeland and Adobe Creeks and the pipeline delivery system that collects and transports the water. Both the watershed areas and pipeline facilities require protection and careful management. Development within this watershed is subject to the following policies.

Policies

- (1) Review all development proposals in the vicinity with regard to their beneficial and adverse impacts.
- (2) Encourage greater public awareness relative to wildlife and wildlife management programs.
- (3) Encourage the use of natural areas for educational purposes.
- (4) Enforce County Ordinance 1108 which provides criteria for stream maintenance and construction encroachments.

RESOURCE AREAS

Goals and Policies

The General Plan recognizes the need to identify natural resources of significant long range social, economic and environmental importance, and to establish a comprehensive resource management program to protect these resources from careless and needless depletion, to promote the replenishment of renewable resources and to encourage the most advanced methods in these activities.

Agriculture is the significant resource of the Sonoma Mountain Area Plan.

Policies

- (1) Encourage the utilization of agricultural preserve zoning as a means of protecting agriculture.
- (2) Support policies and programs that provide tax and economic incentives which will insure the long term retention of agricultural lands.
- (3) Explore methods of assisting the agriculture industry in meeting the economic burden imposed by environmental quality standards.
- (4) Maintain and monitor major agricultural production areas, marginal production areas, and areas where production may be compatible with residential and other land uses.
- (5) Develop programs to assist marketing of Sonoma County's farm products.
- (6) Periodically review agricultural policies to insure that they result in the desired conditions.
- (7) Discourage residential use in agricultural areas unless it can be shown that the residential use will not conflict with agriculture.

- (8) Encourage parcel sizes sufficient to provide for productive economic agricultural use.
- (9) Promote agricultural practices consistent with long term conservation of the County's agricultural capability.
- (10) Consider as resources both liquid and solid wastes derived from agricultural activities.
- (11) Promote agricultural practices that protect environmental quality and conserve resources, such as the Triple Use Plan.

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