

Sonoma County General Plan 2020

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ELEMENT

Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department

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Santa Rosa, California 95403

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Sonoma County is a healthy and clean place to live and work, with opportunities for outdoor recreation, access to fresh local food from community farmers markets, and support from a network of social services and community organizations. County leaders and community members often work cooperatively on efforts to make Sonoma County a more productive, healthy place to live and improve the quality of our environment. Due to a variety of factors, including but not limited to historic institutionalized underinvestment and land use patterns, some communities experience disproportionately higher pollution exposure and negative health impacts, and have less access to health-promoting resources.

In 2016, the Planning for Healthy Communities Act of 2016 (Senate Bill 1000) expanded the mandatory requirements of the General Plan by updating California Government Code Section 65302 to require cities and counties to address the role of environmental justice (EJ) in local and regional planning. Senate Bill 1000 requires jurisdictions to identify disadvantaged communities (termed “Environmental Justice (EJ) Communities” in Sonoma County) within their planning area and incorporate EJ into their general plans through targeted policies. Sonoma County has opted to use the term “EJ Communities” as it is in line with recommendations from the California Environmental Justice Alliance in recognition that, in addition to identifying the problems and areas that are unfairly impacted (i.e., “disadvantaged”) by cumulative burdens, gaining equitable access to environmental benefits, investments, and other resources for low-income communities and communities of color is also an important aspect of EJ.

Consistent with State requirements, the County’s Environmental Justice Element addresses needs related to reducing pollution exposure and improving air quality; providing equitable public facilities; expanding access to healthy food and physical activity; improving civic engagement; and prioritizing improvements and programs that meet the needs of EJ Communities. This Element builds upon prior and ongoing efforts to identify inequities – such as the Portrait of Sonoma County’s human development index – and to take meaningful action to eliminate disparate outcomes – like through the creation of the Sonoma County Office of Equity and its initiatives on racial equity, language access and justice, and community engagement.

1.2 Statutory Requirements

Environmental justice (EJ) is a concept focused on addressing the systemic, unjust environmental burdens placed on historically disadvantaged communities, especially low-income households and people of color. California law defines EJ as “the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (Government Code Section 65040.12). Efforts towards EJ have aimed to improve the status of historically disadvantaged communities through equitable planning and policy decisions. Government Code Section 65302(h) requires the County’s General Plan to do the following:

- Identify objectives and policies to **reduce the unique or compounded health risks in disadvantaged communities** by means that include, but are not limited to, the reduction of pollution exposure (including the improvement of air quality), and the expansion of public facilities, food access, safe and sanitary homes, and opportunities for physical activity;
- Identify objectives and policies **to enable civic engagement in the public decision-making process**; and
- Identify objectives and policies that **prioritize improvements and programs** that address the needs of disadvantaged communities.

Historically, negative environmental impacts have disproportionately affected marginalized populations, including low-income communities and people of color. These communities often face a range of environmental burdens including increased exposure to air pollutants, unsafe drinking water, and contaminated resources/structures, and commonly have limited access to public resources. This disparity can be traced to inequitably designed and applied governmental policies and actions, land-use planning trends, enforcement deficiencies, and lack of equitable community engagement, among other factors.

This Element aims to improve public health and increase access to environmental benefits across Sonoma County and responds to the unique needs of identified EJ Communities by including policies and programs prioritizing improvements in those communities. Over time, the built environment and socioeconomic landscape changes, and it's important that Sonoma County make informed investments at the community scale using appropriate data. To allow for periodic review of community improvement, Policy EJ-5e in this Element directs the County to review and update the boundaries of identified EJ Communities with each update to the General Plan Housing Element, which occurs on an eight-year cycle.

1.3 Relationship to Other General Plan Elements and Planning Documents

The Environmental Justice (EJ) Element aligns with the goals, objectives, and policies of the other elements of the General Plan. The General Plan remains internally consistent because the policies in the EJ Element both support and are reinforced by policies in the other elements. For example, the Land Use Element governs the location and intensities of land uses that may contribute to pollution as well as uses that are more sensitive to pollution exposure. The Public Facilities Element and Circulation and Transit Element direct the provision of County services, infrastructure, and facilities that influence community access to resources. The Land Use Element and Agricultural Resources Element support local agricultural production and determine where healthy food can be grown and sold. The Housing Element guides the affordability and availability of housing options. And the Open Space and Resource Conservation Element ensures the preservation of natural resources that contribute to clean air, water, and soil for all. The relationship between the environmental justice issues addressed in this element and other elements of the General Plan are discussed further in each section. This Element together with the other Elements of the General Plan provide a complete, targeted, and committed approach to reduce environmental burdens on EJ Communities and invest in improvements in those areas.

Other related Sonoma County planning documents were also reviewed for content on EJ issue areas and the topical relationships between those documents and the EJ Element are listed in Table EJ-1 below by EJ issue area.

Table EJ-1 Related County Planning Documents by Environmental Justice Issue Area

	Healthy Environments	Healthy Public Facilities and Physical Activity	Community Health	Healthy Food Access	Safe and Sanitary Housing	Community Engagement and Language Access
Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan	✓					
Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan	✓					
Sonoma County Transit Authority Comprehensive Transportation Plan		✓				
Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan		✓				
Sonoma County Vision Zero Action Plan		✓				
Sonoma County Regional Parks Strategic Priorities 2023-2025		✓				
Tolay Lake Regional Park Master Plan		✓				
Maxwell Farms Regional Park Master Plan		✓				
Sonoma County Integrated Parks Plan		✓				
Portrait of Sonoma County 2021			✓			
Sonoma County Strategic Plan 2021-2026			✓			
Sonoma County Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan				✓		
Annual Sonoma County Hunger Index Reports				✓		
Public Housing Authority Five-Year Plan					✓	
2012 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing					✓	
Sonoma County 2024-2025 One Year Action Plan					✓	
Sonoma County Fund for Housing Policy					✓	
County of Sonoma 2022 Point-In-Time Count Results					✓	
Sonoma County 5-Year Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness					✓	
Sonoma County Residential Antidisplacement and Relocation Assistance Plan					✓	
Sonoma County Community Development Commission Citizen Participation Plan						✓
Sonoma County Community Engagement Plan						✓
Sonoma County Racial Equity Action Plan						✓
Sonoma County Language Access Plan						✓

1.4 Scope and Organization

The Environmental Justice Element addresses six issue areas, in accordance with Government Code Section 65302(h):

- **Healthy Environments.** This section addresses pollution exposure to reduce health impacts from contaminated air, soil, or water.
- **Healthy Public Facilities and Promoting Physical Activity.** This section addresses disparities in access to safe, affordable, and comfortable public places to exercise and play and access to opportunities for active and public transportation.
- **Community Health.** This section focuses on reducing inequitable health outcomes through targeted investments and recognition of systemic factors.
- **Healthy Food Access.** This section emphasizes the importance of a resilient local food system and ensuring all community members have access to appropriate food options.
- **Safe and Sanitary Housing.** This section addresses substandard living conditions and prioritizes home safety.
- **Civic Engagement and Language Access.** This section centers community engagement in public decision-making processes.

Each section includes a summary of the concerns and goals and policies to minimize impact. An implementation program is also included at the end to provide an action plan for carrying out the policies included in this Element.

2 Environmental Justice Planning Process

2.1 Environmental Justice (EJ) Community Identification

To identify EJ Communities within Sonoma County, the County of Sonoma first utilized the California Environmental Protection Agency's (CalEPA) tool called CalEnviroScreen 4.0 to identify all geographical areas classified by the CalEPA as "disadvantaged." The tool uses a formula-based system to assign all California census tracts a metric that represents a community's environmental burden, incorporating 21 indicators of pollution exposure and population characteristics. This metric is known as the CalEnviroScreen *Overall Score*. The State designates communities with a CalEnviroScreen *Overall Score* within or above the 75th percentile as disadvantaged communities. No communities in the unincorporated county are within or above the 75th percentile in CalEPA's CalEnviroScreen 4.0 tool.

CalEPA also considers the following areas to be disadvantaged communities: census tracts lacking overall scores in CalEnviroScreen 4.0 due to data gaps but receiving the highest 5 percent of CalEnviroScreen 4.0 cumulative pollution burden scores; census tracts identified in the 2017 DAC designation as disadvantaged, regardless of their scores in CalEnviroScreen 4.0; and lands under the control of federally recognized Tribes. In Sonoma County, one census tract in the unincorporated county was designated disadvantaged by CalEPA in 2017 and therefore still considered by CalEPA as disadvantaged (census tract 6097153200 in south Santa Rosa). The following lands under the control of federally recognized tribes are also considered disadvantaged by CalEPA: Stewarts Point Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria, and the Kashia Coastal Reserve. These areas are considered EJ Communities for purpose of this element.

After using CalEnviroScreen and reviewing CalEPA's designations, the County evaluated census tracts with significant pollution and housing burdens. In addition to the areas discussed above, census tracts that met either of the two criteria below were also identified as EJ Communities:

- Any census tract within the unincorporated county that scored at or above the 50th percentile for the CalEnviroScreen 4.0 *Overall Pollution Burden* metric
- Any unincorporated county census tract that is low-income and has one of the following accompanying conditions:
 - The census tract has any individual pollutant indicator at or above the 75th percentile
 - The census tract has a housing burden score at or above the 75th percentile

This methodology was developed with input from the County's Equity Working Committee (EWC), an advisory group composed of community members assembled by the County planning team to guide the planning process for the EJ and Safety Element updates to the County's General Plan 2020. Three potential methodologies were presented to the EWC for feedback and selection. The EWC also reviewed other tools and reports that evaluate vulnerability and health to vet the chosen methodology, including the Center for Disease Control Social Vulnerability Index, the California Healthy Places Index, and the 2021 update to the Portrait of Sonoma County Human Development Index.

Housing burden was identified by the EWC as one of the most important determinants of well-being. Housing-burdened households spend a greater proportion of their income on housing, which has cascading impacts on health. Housing-burdened households have fewer financial and time resources available for health care, healthy food, and healthy activities such as exercise. High housing costs relative to income often force individuals and families into unhealthy living conditions, including overcrowded or unsafe housing (e.g. mold and lead exposure, water intrusion, pest infestation, etc.). The risk for and experience of displacement can also impact mental, emotional, and physical health, which can exacerbate health impacts. Because access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is inherently linked to other environmental inequities, housing burden was included as a factor in determining which census tracts in Sonoma County should be considered EJ Communities. EJ Communities present in Sonoma County are shown in Figure 1 below.

Table EJ-2 identifies the EJ Communities in unincorporated Sonoma County by census tract number and name as used in the Portrait of Sonoma County, and contains the various indicators from CalEnviroScreen used to qualify each identified EJ Community. Table EJ-3 contains a brief description of each EJ Community. Table EJ-2 and Table EJ-3 also specify which EJ Community census tracts have been identified by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) as Equity Priority Communities, which are census tracts that are or have historically been underserved.

Figure 1 Sonoma County EJ Communities

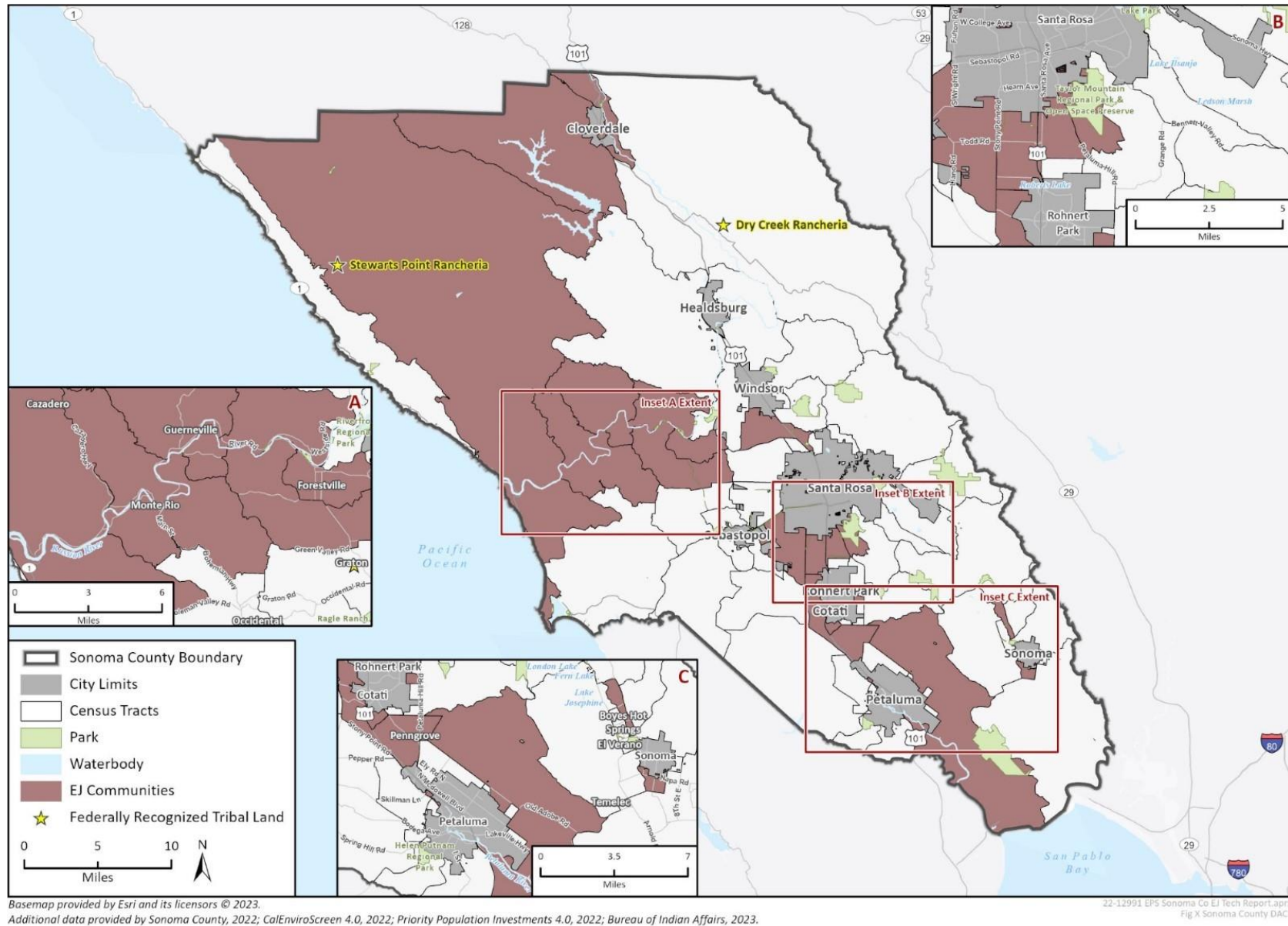


Table EJ-2 Environmental Justice Communities Criteria

Census Tract	Low Income	Housing Burden Score	Overall Pollution Score	Pollutant Indicators (Percentiles)												
				Ozone	PM 2.5	Diesel PM	Pesticide	Toxic Release	Traffic	Drinking Water	Lead	Cleanup Sites	Groundwater Threats	Hazardous Waste	Impaired Water Bodies	Solid Waste
Sonoma County	N/A	N/A	25	10	9	35	46	9	41	30	36	17	61	39	50	43
Northwestern																
East Cloverdale	Yes	51	50	17	5	25	70	<1	8	25	85	86	86	36	59	80
West Cloverdale	Yes	24	18	17	3	2	50	<1	4	24	24	86	61	17	67	68
Jenner/Cazadero	Yes	32	34	12	2	<1	45	<1	1	68	51	82	70	17	7	90
Central West																
Guerneville	Yes	81	10	12	2	2	58	1	9	9	70	0	35	4	59	87
Forestville/Rio Nido	Yes	36	27	12	3	5	73	1	22	49	39	0	76	36	72	72
Russian River Valley	Yes	45	32	12	3	15	77	1	11	68	41	0	68	17	77	95
Monte Rio**	Yes	90	15	12	3	2	55	<1	5	41	58	0	52	17	59	83
Central																
Middle Rincon South*	Yes	63	8	11	9	61	2	1	52	5	36	0	81	17	51	3
Brush Creek*	Yes	54	8	11	9	66	0	1	49	5	32	0	81	19	51	3
Kawana Springs	Yes	47	23	8	8	34	53	3	41	38	46	4	82	54	51	12
Olivet Road*	Yes	6	19	8	8	18	60	2	39	5	28	6	70	46	51	76
Taylor Mountain	Yes	68	78	8	9	77	52	4	85	64	36	64	97	76	51	87
Wright**	Yes	47	51	6	7	17	60	2	34	18	51	62	96	85	67	90
Bellevue**	Yes	83	58	6	8	31	26	5	73	69	47	46	89	76	44	98
West End*	Yes	40	47	11	9	66	0	2	77	5	62	38	98	58	44	91
Shiloh South	No	36	67	11	7	50	78	1	77	23	33	97	60	93	33	98
Southern																
McKinley	Yes	39	64	11	13	68	26	23	85	18	74	58	88	63	51	59

Census Tract	Low Income	Housing Burden Score	Overall Pollution Score	Pollutant Indicators (Percentiles)												
				Ozone	PM 2.5	Diesel PM	Pesticide	Toxic Release	Traffic	Drinking Water	Lead	Cleanup Sites	Groundwater Threats	Hazardous Waste	Impaired Water Bodies	Solid Waste
Downtown Cotati	Yes	14	27	6	10	69	43	6	70	24	24	0	41	17	77	64
West Cotati/ Penngrove	Yes	84	65	8	9	29	55	13	60	50	38	64	83	80	77	89
Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West**	Yes	86	17	14	12	37	62	40	32	19	72	0	60	4	24	0
Petaluma Airport/ Arroyo Park	No	13	63	12	12	11	68	32	64	37	7	43	93	78	97	98
Sonoma City South/ Vineburg	Yes	61	10	14	16	39	76	45	9	36	7	0	32	27	24	0

Note: Cells highlighted in green denote indicators that meet criteria for EJ Communities

* Unincorporated island in City of Santa Rosa

** Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Equity Priority Community

Sources: CalEnviroScreen 4.0; Center for Disease Control Social Vulnerability Index; California Healthy Places Index; Portrait of Sonoma County Human Development Index

Table EJ-3 Overview of Environmental Justice Communities

Census Tract Number	Name	Population	Portrait of Sonoma County Human Development Index Score	Description
Northwestern				
1542.01	East Cloverdale	3,959	4.37	The East Cloverdale EJ Community includes the unincorporated area east of Cloverdale city limits to River Road and Geysers Road, extending north to the County boundary and south to Asti. The area largely hosts agricultural lands with some industrial land near the Cloverdale Municipal Airport and the Highway 101/Highway 128 connection, and a few rural residential neighborhoods northeast of the City of Cloverdale. Highway 101 runs north to south through the Community, and the Russian River runs parallel to the Highway along the east side of the City. The Community includes the Cloverdale River Park, which offers Russian River access.
1542.02	West Cloverdale	6,050	5.93	The West Cloverdale EJ Community includes the unincorporated area west of Cloverdale city limits and Dutcher Creek Road, south to Stewarts Point Skaggs Springs Road and west to Rockpile Road, including the northern half of Lake Sonoma. The area including and abutting Lake Sonoma is publicly owned with agricultural and resource lands encompassing the majority of the Community. Small rural residential neighborhoods and industrial areas are located near the southern and northern city limits of Cloverdale.
1543.04	Jenner/Cazadero	2,455	5.30	The Jenner/Cazadero EJ Community is the largest in acreage spanning as far south as Bodega Bay to the northern boundary of the County, and to the east to include Cazadero, Annapolis, and the lower half of Lake Sonoma. The Community includes the coastal communities along Highway 1 until shortly past Jenner, where the borders narrow east and continue to extend north. The Community includes the Sereno Del Mar, Carmet, and Jenner by the Sea subdivisions among others. Most of the Community is agricultural and resource land on mountainous terrain, with the exception of the southern half of Lake Sonoma and other publicly owned lands and parks along the coast. Jenner and Bodega Bay have small commercial areas along Highway 1.
Central West				
1537.04	Guerneville	4,071	4.80	The Guerneville EJ Community abuts the Monte Rio EJ Community to the northeast, and includes the unincorporated communities of Guerneville and Rio Nido, the latter of which consists mainly of summer homes and cabins as well as a bar/restaurant, public pool, small resort hotel, and theatre. The Community also contains Armstrong Redwoods State Park. The town of Guerneville has a commercial core surrounded by visitor serving commercial uses near the Russian River. Outside of the core commercial and visitor serving areas are single family residential neighborhoods, and small pockets of rural residential development, and agricultural and natural resource lands.
1537.05	Forestville/Rio Nido	3,936	5.90	The Forestville EJ Community is east of Guerneville along River Road and near Highway 116. The Community includes the town of Forestville north of Front Street, as well as the Mirabel Heights and Rio Dell neighborhoods, the Forestville School Academy and Laguna High School. The Community is home to popular parks such as Steelhead Beach Regional Park and the Forestville Youth Park. The commercial core of Forestville along Front Street has local serving retail and restaurants.

Census Tract Number	Name	Population	Portrait of Sonoma County Human Development Index Score	Description
1537.06	Russian River Valley	4,440	6.30	The Russian River Valley EJ Community is situated between Forestville and Guerneville, south of the Russian River and north of Green Valley Road, and includes the Summerhome Park neighborhood and other nearby rural residential subdivisions. South of the River are agricultural and resource lands with a few pockets of limited commercial properties, and rural residential neighborhoods near Forestville and Ross.
1537.03	Monte Rio**	3,506	4.91	The Monte Rio EJ Community is located along the Russian River in West Sonoma County, and includes the Villa Grande, Guerneville, and Monte Rio neighborhoods. The Community borders are south of Cazadero and north of Camp Meeker, bordered roughly to the west by Cazadero Highway and to the east by Green Valley Road and Old Cazadero Road. The Community has many visitor serving opportunities including the Northwood Golf Club, Vacation Beach, and other beaches and outdoor recreation opportunities along the Russian River. Land uses in Monte Rio consist of small rural residential subdivisions off State Highway 116 and off Moscow and River Roads across the river; recreation and visitor-serving and local commercial development interspersed with rural residential parcels along both sides of State Highway 116 in the center of town, and across the river along Main Street; and natural resource land or timberland beyond the subdivisions. The larger commercial area along State Highway 116 consists of a small resort with cabins, convenience store/deli, small market, restaurant, small movie theatre, community hall/theatre, and church. The smaller commercial area along Main Street consists of a small market and bar.
Central				
1525.01	Middle Rincon South*	4,352	6.06	The Middle Rincon South EJ Community is comprised of several unincorporated islands north and south of Highway 12 within northeast Santa Rosa. The community is near Howarth Park, Spring Lake Regional Park, and several neighborhood parks. Nearby schools include Douglas Whited Elementary, Binkley Elementary, Maria Carrillo High School, and Rincon Valley Middle School. All properties within this community have rural residential land use designations.
1522.02	Brush Creek*	6,510	5.94	The Brush Creek EJ Community consists of several unincorporated islands within northeast Santa Rosa, near Montecito Boulevard. This community is close to grocery stores and restaurants, and Rincon Valley Regional Library, and nearby schools include Brush Creek Montessori School, Rincon Valley Middle School, Maria Carrillo High School and Madrone Elementary School. All properties within this community have rural residential land use designations.
1514.01	Kawana Springs	8,050	4.45	The Kawana Springs EJ Community is north of Rohnert Park, bordered by Warrington Road to the south, Petaluma Hill Road to the west, Kawana Terrace to the north, and extending into Taylor Mountain Regional Park to the east. The community largely comprises land extensive agriculture and diverse agriculture land use designations, with a small limited industrial area along the northern section of Petaluma Hill Road.
1530.06	Olivet Road	8,199	5.25	The Olivet Road EJ Community is a pair of rural residential pockets west of Santa Rosa off of Guerneville Road. The community is nearby neighborhood serving retail including grocery stores and several restaurants.

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Census Tract Number	Name	Population	Portrait of Sonoma County Human Development Index Score	Description
1514.02	Taylor Mountain	9,853	4.20	The Taylor Mountain EJ Community is in the unincorporated area of southwest Santa Rosa, bordered by Mountain View Avenue to the south, Highway 101 to the west, and Petaluma Hill Road to the east. The community includes the southern segment of Santa Rosa Avenue and the Bellevue neighborhood. There is a mix of land use designations along Santa Rosa Avenue, including medium and high density residential, industrial, and commercial. The western side of this community is designated for diverse agriculture. There is some access to stores and restaurants, and the community is home to Taylor Mountain School. This community is subject to the South Santa Rosa Area Plan.
1533	Wright**	12,385	4.68	The Wright EJ Community includes the unincorporated area west of Roseland, south of Highway 12, east of the Laguna de Santa Rosa and the City of Sebastopol, and west of Stony Point Road. Llano Road, Todd Road, and South Wright Road run through the Community. Wright Charter School, the Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail and Wetlands Preserve, and retail and restaurant options in Sebastopol are nearby. The Community's core in agricultural land with low density residential and rural and agricultural residential neighborhoods near Highway 12 and along Stony Point Road.
1532	Bellevue**	8,327	4.16	The Bellevue EJ Community borders the City of Santa Rosa to the north and roughly comprises the area south of Bellevue Avenue, west of Highway 101, north of Wilfred Avenue, and east of Stony Point Road, and includes the Moorland neighborhood and Andy Lopez Unity Park. Nearby schools include Elsie Allen High School and Bellevue Elementary School. A majority of the Community is designated for rural residential land uses, with heavy and limited rural industrial uses concentrated along Standish Avenue, Todd Road, West Robles Avenue, and South Moorland Avenue. There is also a residential neighborhood with low to high densities along Highway 101 and Moorland Avenue. The Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) system travels north and south through the Community. There are few neighborhood serving retail opportunities within the Community.
1530.02	West End*	6,864	4.22	The West End EJ Community is an unincorporated island in west Santa Rosa off of West College Avenue in the Clover Drive neighborhood. This community is nearby Finley Community Park, Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, and various retail stores and restaurants. This community receives sewer and water service from the City of Santa Rosa.
1527.02	Shiloh South	5,342	5.44	The majority of the Shiloh South EJ Community is west of Highway 101 between the City of Santa Rosa and the Town of Windsor, bordered to the north and south by Shiloh and River Roads respectively. Significant roadways in this community include Airport Boulevard, North Laughlin Road, Shiloh Road, and Old Redwood Highway. This community comprises the Sonoma County Airport, the airport SMART station, the Sutter Santa Rosa Regional Hospital, the boundaries of the Airport Industrial Area Specific Plan, and the southern end of the Mark West neighborhood, east of Highway 101. The core of this community is designated for industrial land uses surrounded by agricultural lands, with urban residential and commercial areas in Larkfield to the east. There are few schools and stores nearby.
Southern				
1509.01	McKinley	5,053	5.67	The McKinley EJ Community is an approximately 70-acre portion of a census tract that is largely within Petaluma city limits. The community includes the properties just north and south of the Petaluma Village Premium Outlets, situated between Petaluma Boulevard and Highway 101, with parcels that have diverse agriculture and general commercial land use designations. High levels of pollution burden qualified this census tract as an EJ Community.

Census Tract Number	Name	Population	Portrait of Sonoma County Human Development Index Score	Description
1512.04	Downtown Cotati	2,987	N/A	This EJ Community includes a cluster of unincorporated rural residential properties south of Downtown Cotati and the southern Cotati city limits. It is bordered by Old Redwood Highway North to the west, East Railroad Avenue to the south, and the SMART railroad tracks to the east. Zoning in this community is Agricultural and Residential. The Downtown Cotati area is home to a variety of businesses, including restaurants, shops, and art galleries. Nearby schools and parks include Rainbow Bridge Montessori, Mixed Greens Preschool, Helen Putnam Park, and Lady Bug Park.
1512.01	West Cotati/Penngrove	7,069	5.23	The West Cotati/Penngrove EJ Community wraps around the east side of Rohnert Park and Cotati along Stony Point Road, stretches west through Penngrove, and south to Petaluma city limits. Stony Point Road, Petaluma Hill Road, Old Redwood Highway North, the SMART railroad, and Highways 116 and 101 run through this community. This community includes most of Penngrove's commercial core along Main Street, Penngrove Elementary School, Bright Skies Montessori, and Graton Resort and Casino. Land uses include rural residential and agricultural designations near Rohnert Park and Cotati, and a mix of low density residential, commercial, industrial, and public facilities designations in Penngrove.
1503.05	Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West**	6,183	4.44	The Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West community is bordered to the east by Sonoma Creek, to the north by Madrone Road, to the west by Highway 12, and to the south by Agua Caliente Creek just north of Verano Avenue. Boyes Boulevard and West Agua Caliente Road cross the community from east to west. There are several wineries and tasting rooms in the area, as well as a number of hiking and biking trails. The area is home to Larson Park, Flowery Elementary, Sonoma Charter School, and a number of businesses along the Highway 12 corridor. This EJ Community intersects with the Springs Specific Plan boundary. While the abutting census tracts to the east and west were not identified as EJ Communities under the County's methodology, it should be noted that those census tracts share similar social and economic characteristics.
1506.12	Petaluma Airport/Arroyo Park	4,676	6.71	This EJ Community abuts the eastern edge of the City of Petaluma and runs north to Lichau Creek near Penngrove and south to the County border at San Pablo Bay. The Petaluma Airport is located at the western edge of this EJ Community, and its major roadways include Adobe Road, Lakeville Highway, Petaluma Boulevard South, Highway 101, and Highway 116. The community is largely composed of land extensive agriculture, diverse agriculture, and public facilities land uses, and is home to Old Adobe Elementary School, the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park, Tolay Lake Regional Park, and Sears Point.
1502.03	Sonoma City South/ Vineburg	4,561	5.45	The Sonoma City/Vineburg EJ Community borders are Fifth Street East to the east, East Watmaugh Road to the south, Sonoma Creek to the west, and the southern edges of the City of Sonoma to the north. Highway 12 bisects the community from north to south. The community is largely composed of rural residential land use, with a handful of limited commercial and agricultural parcels. There are a few businesses along Highway 12, including a wine shop, Sonoma TrainTown, a plant nursery, as well as a church and private school.

* Unincorporated island in City of Santa Rosa

** Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Equity Priority Community

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2021 Portrait of Sonoma County

2.2 Existing Conditions

The County of Sonoma prepared a data-based assessment of the environmental justice context in unincorporated Sonoma County to inform a baseline understanding of the environmental justice issues facing Sonoma County in concert with community engagement. The Environmental Justice Technical Report (Appendix A) identifies Sonoma County's Environmental Justice Communities and explores metrics and existing conditions within those areas. This Element draws upon the Technical Report at the beginning of each section addressing the six environmental justice policy issue areas.

2.3 Community Engagement

A key principle of environmental justice is engaging with communities on the development, adoption, and implementation of environmental policies and regulations that impact them. As part of the development of this Element, the County planning team implemented an engagement strategy that included a range of activities intended to meet people where they are and elevate underrepresented voices. Live Spanish translation or translated materials were provided where feasible. Summaries of engagement activities and feedback are included as Appendix B.

- **Equity Working Committee (EWC).** Planning staff convened an advisory group composed of community members assembled by the County planning team to guide the planning process for the EJ and Safety Element updates to the County's General Plan 2020. The EWC had representation from all five supervisorial districts, the state-designated disadvantaged community in south Santa Rosa, and individuals from various embedded, trusted community-based organizations and groups, such as the North Bay Organizing Project, the Graton Day Labor Center, Los Cien, Sonoma COAD, the Sonoma County Black Form, the Disability Services and Legal Center, and Generation Housing. Staff held multiple meetings with the EWC at key points throughout the planning effort and the EWC provided critical feedback on the methodology for identifying EJ Communities and early input on policy concepts.
- **Stakeholder Interviews.** The Planning team held focus group interviews with individuals from community-based organizations to hear from them about the most significant environmental burdens impacting those communities, what prevents those communities from accessing public services or resources, the gaps in County services that community-based organizations fill, and how the County can work better with those organizations to serve our communities. The team also interviewed County staff from various departments and agencies that provide services to low-income communities to identify barriers in their work to supporting those communities.
- **Pop-Up Events.** Planning staff set up booths at various community events including farmer's markets, emergency preparedness fairs, and townhalls to share information about the planning process and ways to engage and get input on policy concepts. Staff sought to join community events in or near identified Environmental Justice Communities.

- **Neighborhood/Interest Group Meetings.** Planning staff joined the regular meetings of various neighborhood groups and interest groups that advocate for and directly work on community improvement actions. Staff shared information about the planning process and asked questions about the needs and desired goals of those communities, or asked for feedback on policy concepts. Staff met with the Moorland Neighborhood Action Committee, the Russian River Promotoras (meeting held in Spanish), the Russian River Area Resources and Advocates (RRARA), the Sonoma County Food System Alliance, the Sonoma County General Plan Update community group, the Sonoma Valley Collaborative, and the Sonoma County COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster).
- **Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) and Community Advisory Council (CAC) Meetings.** Planning staff also participated in MAC and CAC meetings to provide information about the planning process and ways to engage, and primarily to get feedback on policy concepts developed based on community engagement and the findings of the Environmental Justice Technical Background Report. The MACs and CACs provide forums for distribution of information about actions and happenings affecting the subject communities and collaborative discussion between community members. The planning team joined the live meetings of all MACs and CACs in the County, except for the Sonoma County Coast MAC, in which staff provided a virtual engagement option.

3 Environmental Justice Issue Areas and Policies

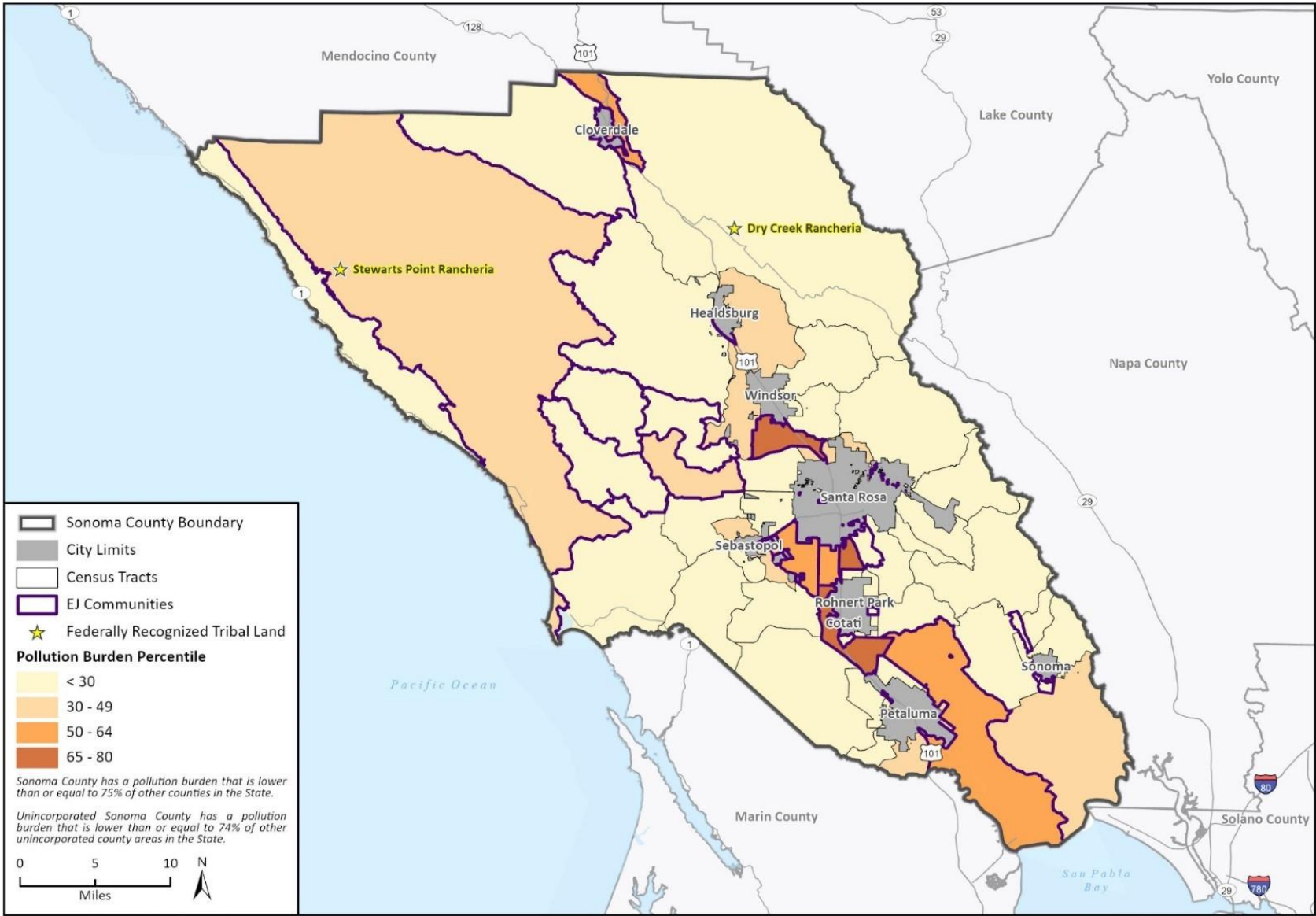
3.1 Healthy Environments

Pollution exposure is common in most communities, although some communities are exposed to disproportionately greater degrees of toxins that may impact their health and well-being. This is often a result of incompatible land uses sited near each other. Pollution can impact anyone, although those with higher risk factors, such as children, seniors, or those with underlying health conditions, may be more vulnerable to health impacts from pollution. Socioeconomic factors can compound these health impacts due to limited access to healthcare or resources for healthy living. The consequences of unequal exposure to pollution are notable. Communities with greater exposure suffer from higher rates of respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and other health issues linked to pollution.

As shown in Figure 2, pollution burden scores vary between the different EJ Communities in the county, with the highest concentration of high-scoring EJ Communities between Petaluma and Windsor. Table EJ-2 in Section 2 of this Element also provides the pollution scores for individual pollutant indicators, showing that some EJ Communities may be affected more significantly from certain pollutants than others. Pollution exposure for EJ Communities in Sonoma County is mostly associated with cleanup sites that are contaminated with harmful chemicals and require remediation, groundwater threats from leaking underground storage tanks, hazardous waste created by industrial or commercial activity, impaired water bodies, solid waste sites such as landfills and transfer stations, and traffic emissions. Most EJ Communities are impacted by solid waste sites. The Taylor Mountain EJ Community has significant levels of Diesel Particulate Matter compared to other EJ Communities in the county although other EJ Communities along Highway 101 experience high exposure to vehicle emissions that can contain toxic chemicals. The Russian River Valley, Shiloh South, and Sonoma City South/Vineburg communities have moderately elevated levels of pesticides. EJ Communities in southern Sonoma County have moderate to high impacts from impaired surface water bodies. Impaired water bodies, such as creeks and rivers, may expose communities to contamination primarily through recreation. Based on drinking water contamination data from the State Water Resources Control Board and other sources incorporated into the CalEnviroScreen tool, drinking water contamination is relatively low in most of the county's EJ Communities (see Table EJ-2). The Petaluma Airport/Arroyo Park census tract has high levels of groundwater threats due to underground leaking storage tanks. Additional information and maps regarding the distribution of pollution burden in the county is presented in Appendix A.

The goals, policies, and implementation measures in this section address the most common sources of pollution exposure in Sonoma County's EJ Communities, including solid waste sites, impaired water bodies, and pesticides. Exposures to hazardous waste and contamination from cleanup sites or leaking underground storage tanks and poor air quality from wildfires are addressed in the General Plan Safety Element. The Open Space and Resource Conservation Element and Water Resources Element include additional goals, objectives, and policies that seek to prevent contamination of air, water, and soil and subsequently reduce pollution exposure across Sonoma County.

Figure 2 Overall Pollution Burden Scores by Census Tract



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Additional data provided by CalEnviroScreen 4.0, 2021; Priority Population Investments 4.0, 2021; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2023.

Goals and Policies

Goal EJ-1: Reduce pollution exposure and eliminate disproportionate health impacts on Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy EJ-1a: Use land use strategies to ensure sources of air, water, or soil pollution, such as solid waste sites, highly trafficked roadways creating diesel particulate matter, and lands treated by pesticides, are reduced and located away from Environmental Justice Communities and vulnerable populations such as children, seniors, and those susceptible to respiratory diseases.

Policy EJ-1b: In the review of development projects and development of land use policy and regulations, evaluate and avoid the siting of new facilities that may significantly increase pollution, especially near Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy EJ-1c: Consider requiring health risk assessments for projects where construction or operation of the project exposes sensitive land uses to toxic air contaminants.

Policy EJ-1d: Require health impact assessments for nonresidential projects of 100,000 square feet or more in Environmental Justice Communities to identify and address potential negative health impacts from the project.

Policy EJ-1e: Continue to reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides on County-owned parks and other county-owned landscaped areas such as medians and parkways, publicly accessible open spaces, and facility grounds. Support the use of safe alternatives and best management practices.

Policy EJ-1f: Continue to support and lead efforts to increase solid waste diversion through policy, incentives, and outreach to protect community members and the environment from health-threatening pollutants and reduce emissions.

Policy EJ-1g: Work cooperatively with local, regional, and State agencies to support the cleanup of contaminated surface water, groundwater, or soils.

Goal EJ-2: Maintain the safety of groundwater and surface water resources through resources and partnerships to protect vulnerable water users.

Policy EJ-2a: Through partnerships with community organizations that focus on water conservation and preservation, work collaboratively to promote water resource stewardship and pollution prevention activities with outreach, assistance, and incentives, particularly in Environmental Justice Communities and areas with impaired surface and groundwater.

Policy EJ-2b: Minimize agricultural pollution spray and runoff by supporting implementation of reduced-risk pesticide use, bioswale and groundcover vegetation plans, and agricultural field location and orientation, particularly in Environmental Justice Communities and in areas with high levels of pesticide exposure.

Policy EJ-2c: Seek funding for a well water testing program to test and remediate private wells to remove toxins when pollutants are identified.

Policy EJ-2d: Provide technical assistance and guidance to rental property owners on well water quality and require that rental property owners maintain well water quality standards while reducing risks of displacement.

3.2 Healthy Public Facilities and Promoting Physical Activity

Access to safe and affordable public facilities and resources that support healthy living and physical activity, such as parks, open spaces, and active transportation infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks and dedicated bikeways), is a critical component of environmental justice. People who are physically active tend to have better health outcomes than those who are less active. The built environment can promote opportunities for physical activity by providing dedicated places and patterns of development that support active transportation and exercise. A fundamental component of environmental justice is creating an equitable distribution of opportunities for active transportation and open, green spaces and parks to play and exercise.

The EJ Communities located in the West Cotati/Penngrove, Taylor Mountain, Downtown Cotati, and Fethers Spring/Agua Caliente West census tracts are all considered to be lacking sufficient publicly available open space. Privately owned land may restrict access to current surrounding open space areas and a lack of open space areas with facilities to host visitors may create parking, trail access, and safety challenges. Barriers to accessing parks and open space include lack of transportation options, poor outdoor air quality, and limited free time due to travel, work, or other personal responsibilities. As shown in Figure 3, park availability is lowest in the southern portion of the county.

The Sonoma County Vision Zero Action Plan reports that rural areas, Equity Priority Communities identified by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (i.e. census tracts that have likely been disadvantaged and faced historic underinvestment), and areas of concentrated low-income households are disproportionately affected by traffic safety concerns. These areas represent a lower percentage of the County's roadway mileage but a higher percentage of the County's fatal and injury crashes. Equity Priority Communities also have a disproportionately high number of the County's high injury intersections, defined as intersections with an elevated risk of crashes resulting in an injury or fatality. Risk can often be elevated due to a lack of safety infrastructure, such as stop signs, crossing lights, street lights, and other necessary infrastructure.

As of 2018, approximately 2.1 percent of Sonoma County residents used public transit and 9.7 percent used carpool or ridesharing programs, as compared to 5 percent of residents statewide utilizing public transportation and 10 percent statewide using carpooling or other rideshare. Figure 4 shows the existing transit routes in the county. Low rates of commute via active transportation, such as biking or walking, in the unincorporated county may be an indicator of inadequate infrastructure, including sidewalks and bikeways. Active transportation is human-powered mobility, which directly replaces motor vehicle miles traveled. Additionally, due to the spread out and rural nature of unincorporated Sonoma County, the area is not adequately served by much of the existing bicycle infrastructure. Figure 5 shows the existing and proposed bicycle lanes in the county.

The goals, policies, and implementation measures in this section seek to focus investments on additional opportunities or improved access to safe, affordable, and comfortable spaces for physical activity and active and public transportation for EJ Communities. The Public Facilities Element, Open Space and Resource Conservation Element, and Circulation and Transit Element provide additional goals, objectives, and policies to improve access to public facilities including and beyond active transportation infrastructure, public transit, and open spaces and parks. The Land Use and Housing Elements, and Circulation and Transit Element, further direct the development of complete neighborhoods where daily needs are met within a short distance, decreasing reliance on vehicles, incentivizing physical activity, and ensuring access to essential services. At the time of this writing, the County of Sonoma is in the

process of a comprehensive update to the Sonoma County General Plan. Improved access to public facilities and resources will be an integral part of the update process.

Figure 3 California Statewide Park “Critically Underserved” Communities

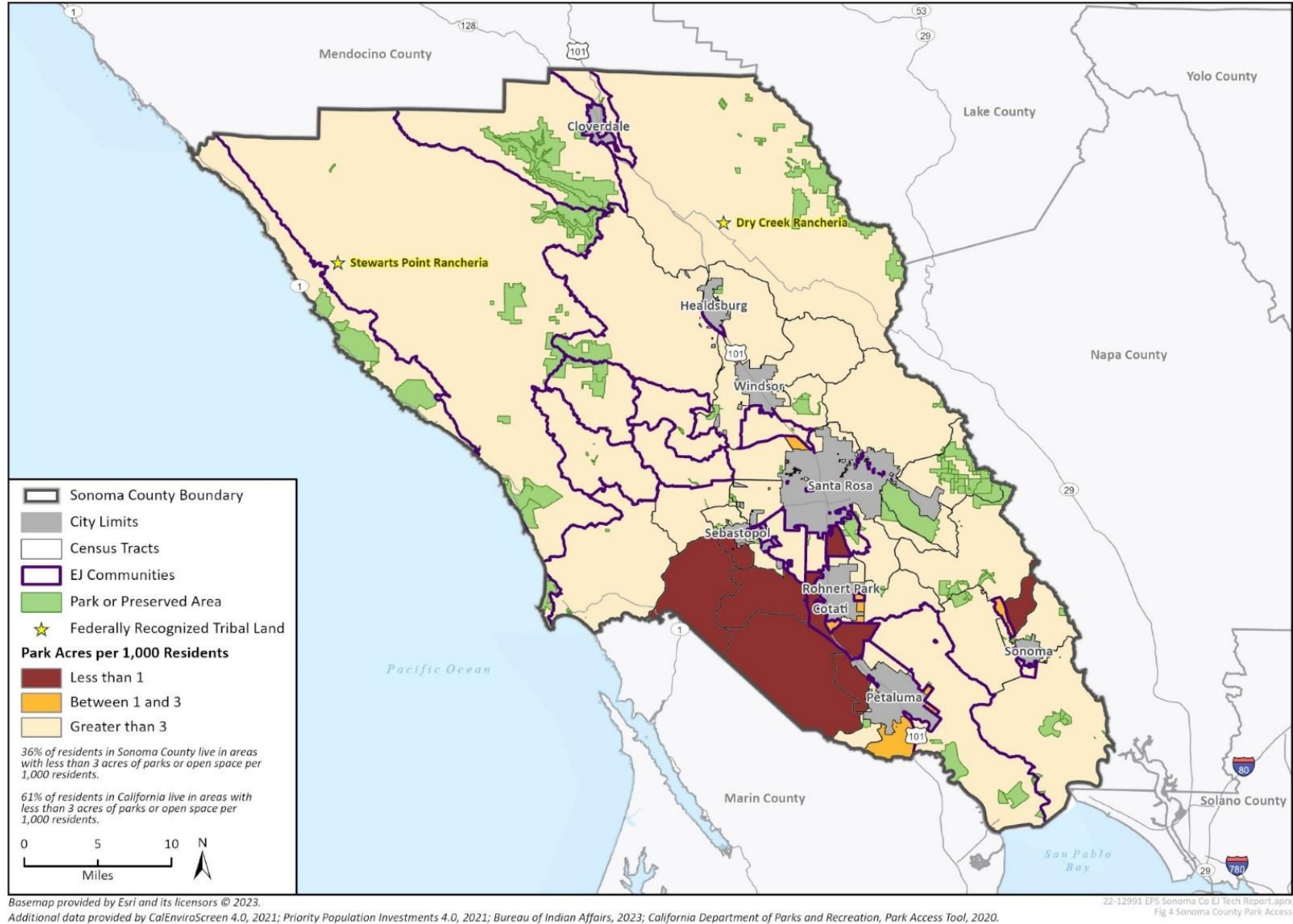
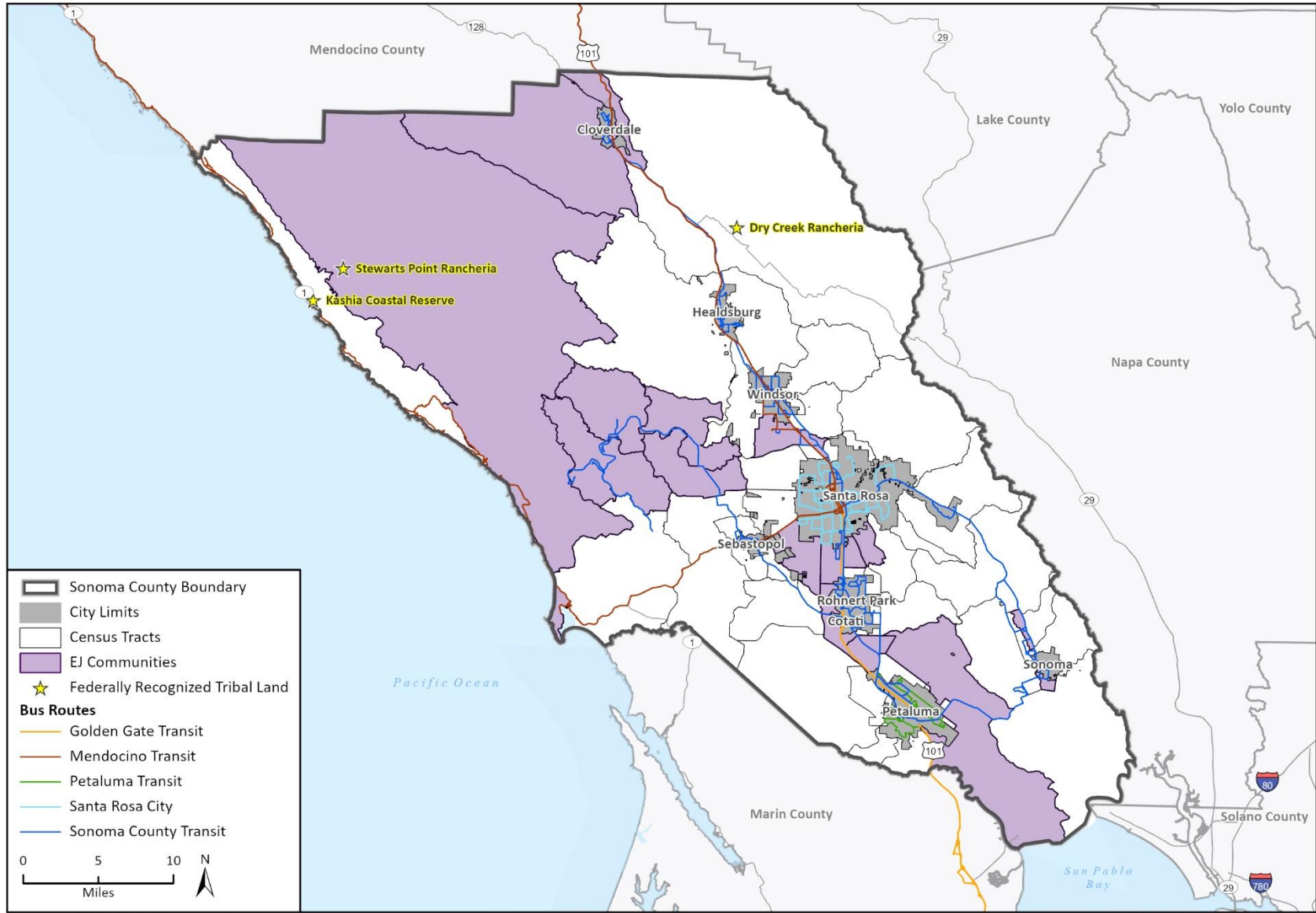


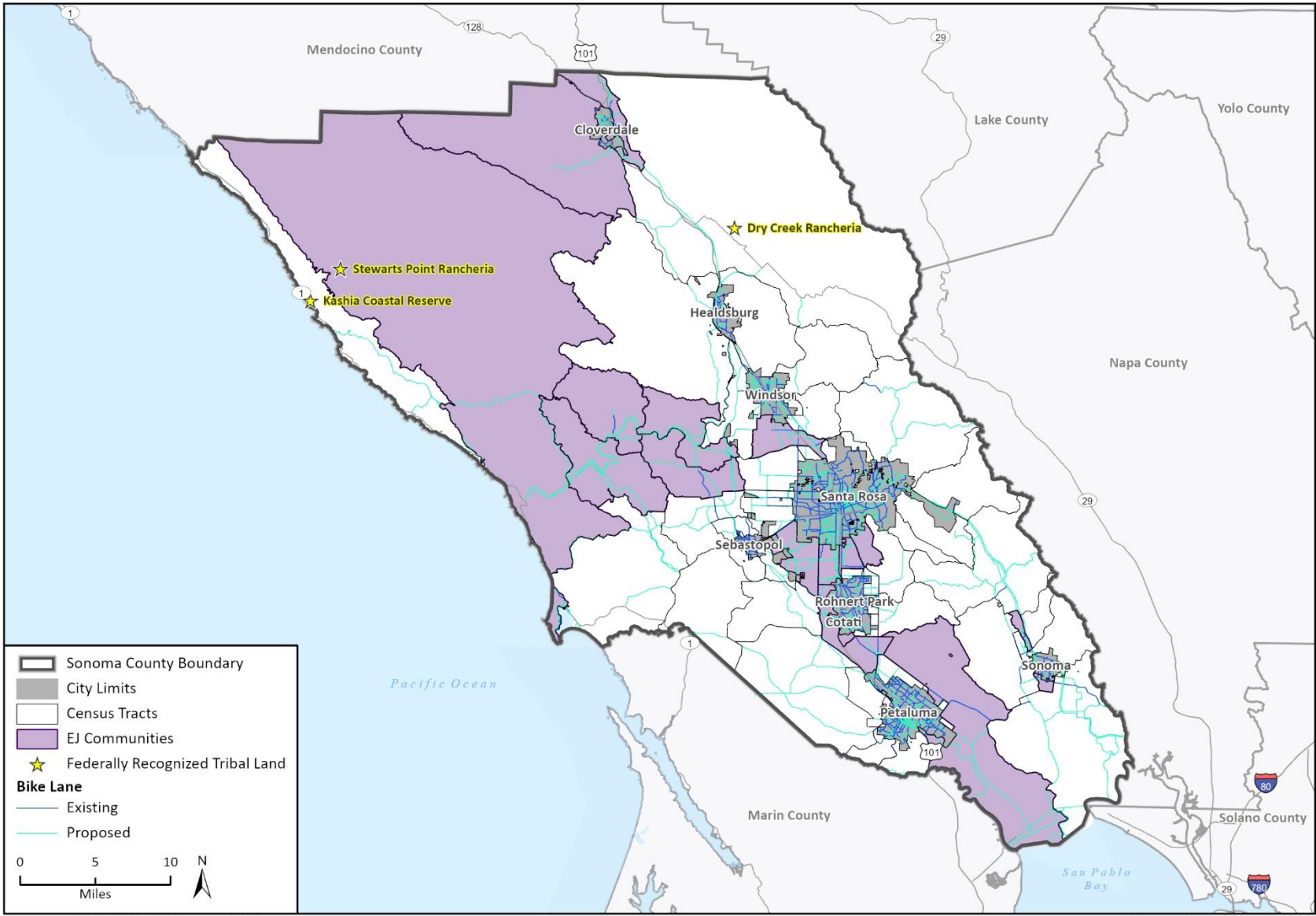
Figure 4 Transit Routes in the County



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 Additional data provided by Sonoma County Transportation Authority Countywide Bicycle Plan, 2017; CalEnviroScreen 4.0, 2021; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2023.

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 Fig 13 Sonoma County Bus Routes

Figure 5 **Bicycle Lanes in the County**



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Additional data provided by Sonoma County Transportation Authority Countywide Bicycle Plan, 2017; CalEnviroScreen 4.0, 2021; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2023.

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Fig 12 Sonoma County Bike Access

Goals and Policies

Goal EJ-3: Ensure all community members have access to safe, affordable, and comfortable parks and open space and opportunities for physical activity.

Policy EJ-3a: Through engaging the community in planning processes for the development and implementation of park master plans, continue to improve existing county park facilities and public places and add new park facilities or amenities, such as seating, shade structures, or trees for public health and enjoyment.

Policy EJ-3b: Coordinate among Regional Parks, the Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District, community members, and other stakeholders in evaluating and addressing park and open space needs.

Policy EJ-3c: Continue to offer and promote low- and no-cost opportunities for low-income community members and other user groups to visit the County's regional parks. Work with Environmental Justice Communities to identify financial barriers and explore opportunities for improved financial access to parks within Sonoma County.

Policy EJ-3d: Continue to encourage residents, local businesses, community organizations, and schools to use park spaces for community events and activities as permitted.

Policy EJ-3e: Encourage the conversion of underutilized property or rights-of-way into parklets or other recreational facilities where it is appropriate, meets a community need, and is consistent with other General Plan policies.

Policy EJ-3f: Coordinate with the cities, school districts, and community members to provide community access to outdoor recreation facilities during non-school hours. Encourage partnerships between park and open space providers and community groups.

Policy EJ-3g: Continue to improve and diversify opportunities for play in parks and other public spaces for people of all age groups and abilities based on demonstrated need.

Policy EJ-3h: Provide ongoing opportunities for community input on the parks and recreation planning process, including priorities for amenities, facilities, programming, and improvements.

Goal EJ-4: Improve safe and affordable active and public transportation opportunities, centering the needs and priorities of Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy EJ-4a: Collaborate with the Sonoma County Transportation Authority to implement plans to expand in-county and inter-county services and facilities in Sonoma County, particularly to improve connections to parks and open space. Prioritize service expansion in Environmental Justice Communities, and for community members with limited access to cars or those in need of accessible transportation assistance.

Policy EJ-4b: Promote active transportation and transit opportunities, such as new bike lanes, bike sharing, and discounted bus tickets, by increasing community awareness of these resources through multi-lingual and culturally appropriate communications coordinated across service providers.

- Policy EJ-4c: Improve the safety and connectivity of active transportation networks, particularly in Environmental Justice Communities and neighborhoods that have experienced underinvestment in safe street and transportation infrastructure. Implement improvements based on barriers and solutions identified by Environmental Justice Communities and work to incorporate those solutions into updates of the Sonoma County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and successor plans.
- Policy EJ-4d: Support coordinated efforts to reach the Sonoma County Vision Zero Action Plan goals to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries through implementation of the Sonoma County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and successor plans.
- Policy EJ-4e: Improve active transportation safety education for drivers and non-drivers through multi-lingual and ADA-accessible educational materials and communications.
- Policy EJ-4f: Promote complete neighborhoods that have safe and convenient access to needed goods and services and that support physical activity, including walking, bicycling, and recreational opportunities.

3.3 Community Health

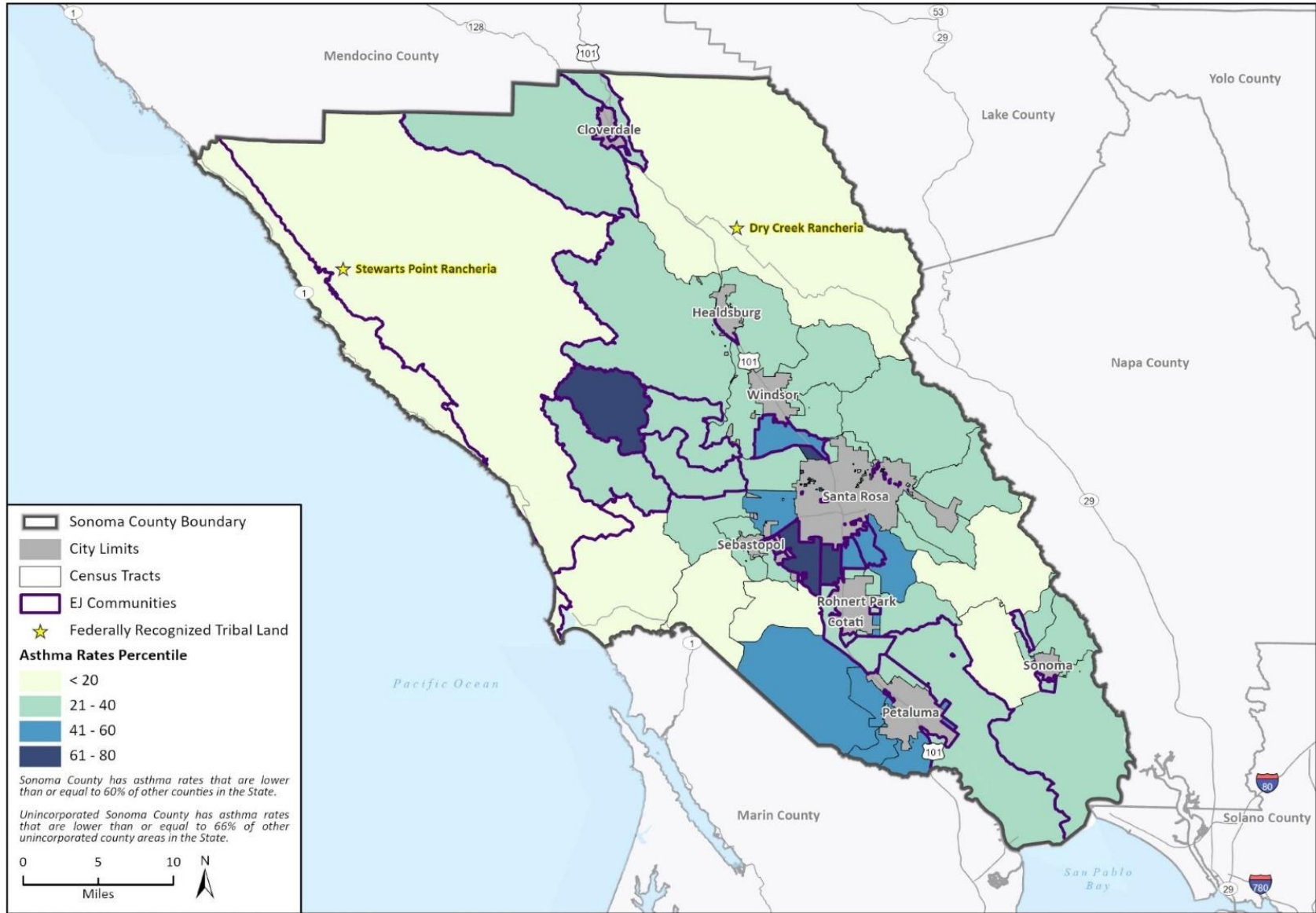
Unequal exposure to environmental hazards and limited access to healthcare or healthy environments, directly contribute to health disparities. EJ Communities are often located in areas with higher levels of environmental hazards, such as industrial facilities, waste disposal sites, or contaminated water sources. These hazards can lead to various health problems, including asthma, cardiovascular diseases, low birth weight, cancer, and other illnesses, adversely affecting EJ Communities more significantly than other areas due to proximity.

Areas with poor air quality due to the presence of Diesel Particulate Matter (DPM), vehicle emissions, toxic releases, pesticides, or wildfire smoke may increase the risk of respiratory diseases such as asthma and can limit outdoor activity due to poor air quality leading to other health risks. Asthma rates in Sonoma County, shown in Figure 6, are relatively low compared to rates across California. However, areas such as Wright and Bellevue EJ Communities are observed to have the highest rates of asthma within the county and higher records of hospitalizations due to asthma. Rates of cardiovascular disease related hospitalizations, shown in Figure 7, are also higher in both the Wright and Bellevue communities relative to other Sonoma County communities.

Lead exposure from housing also varies across EJ Communities, with the East Cloverdale EJ Community having notably high rates. There are no known safe levels of lead exposure. Young children are especially susceptible to the effects of lead exposure and can suffer adverse health effects, particularly in the brain and nervous system. This increased susceptibility is due to children's unique exposure pathways, developing brains, and differences in the absorption of ingested lead.

The goals, policies, and implementation measures in this section emphasize the critical role of institutions, systems, data, and resources in improving community health overall and particularly in EJ Communities with inequitable health outcomes. The other sections of the Element also contribute to community health through reduced exposure to toxins and environmental hazards, improved access to health-promoting resources and environments, safer communities, and equitable involvement in public decision-making processes.

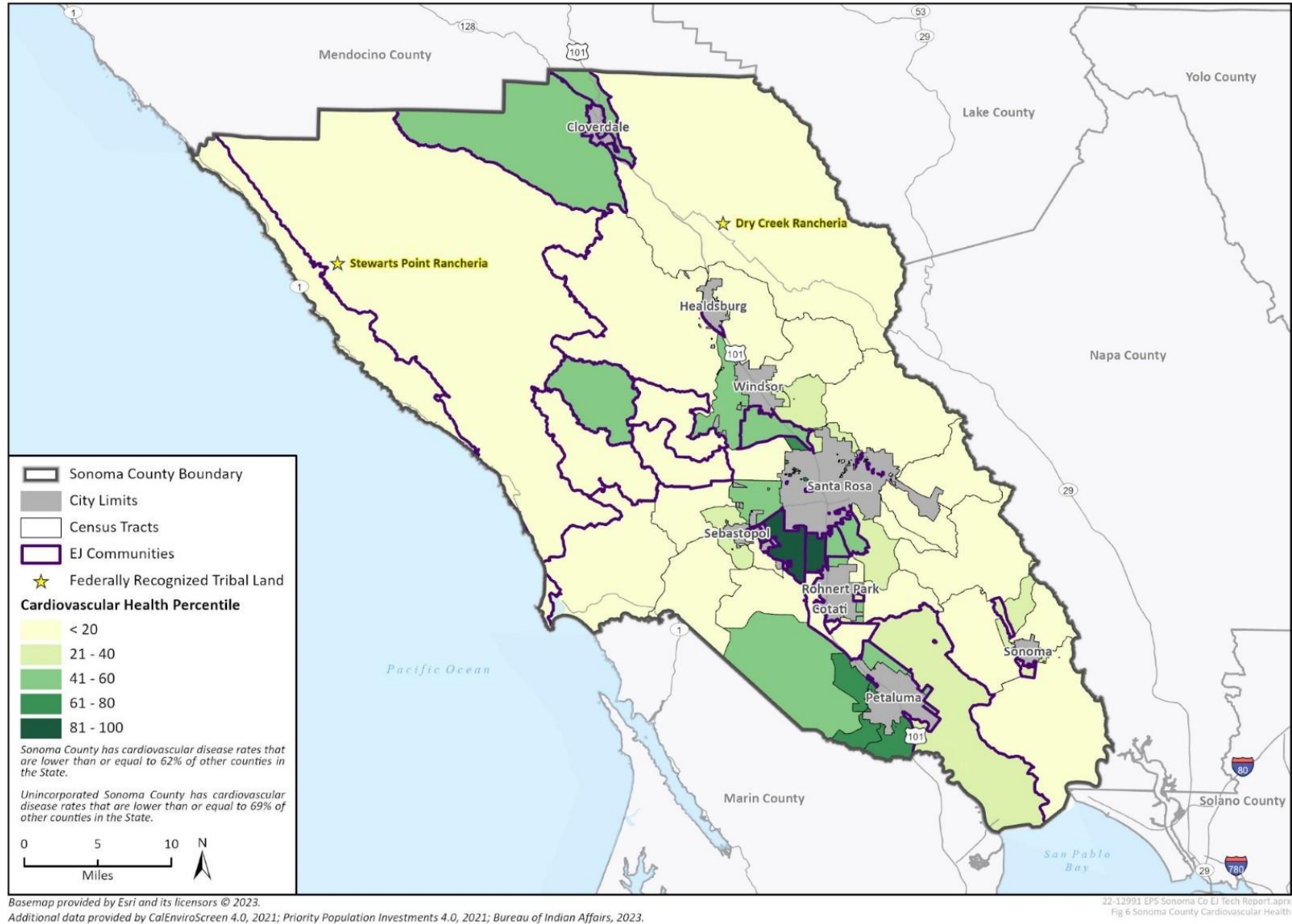
Figure 6 Asthma Rates by Census Tract



Additional data provided by CalEnviroScreen 4.0, 2021; Priority Population Investments 4.0, 2021; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2023.

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 Fig 5 Sonoma County Asthma Rates

Figure 7 Cardiovascular Disease Rate by Census Tract



Goals and Policies

Goal EJ-5: Improve public health outcomes and well-being in Environmental Justice Communities and across Sonoma County by recognizing health inequities, reducing environmental health hazards, and investing in community health.

Policy EJ-5a: Promote awareness of the role of social determinants of health and systemic inequities in determining health outcomes.

Policy EJ-5b: Assess the County's existing and proposed policies, programs, and services affecting community health for equity and sustainability using data and community input. Consider community-specific needs in the development of policy, programs, and investments.

Policy EJ-5c: Reduce asthma risk amongst residents through land use strategies and community programs to reduce adverse air quality conditions.

Policy EJ-5d: Continue to reduce exposure to lead in housing through identification and remediation programs.

Policy EJ-5e: Periodically review the boundaries of Environmental Justice Communities and update as appropriate based on data and community input.

Policy EJ-5f: Continue to develop an integrated system of health services across the County organization working collaboratively across departments. Partner with the cities and private, non-profit, and community-based stakeholders on programs and services that seek to improve health outcomes and well-being.

Policy EJ-5g: Continue to build institutional skills and commitment throughout the County organization to advance racial equity.

Policy EJ-5h: Support data-gathering on key health metrics to guide decision making. Use data to inform the County's Community Health Dashboard.

Policy EJ-5i: Where appropriate, incorporate health-promoting features into new County facilities intended for public use. Encourage private developments to include opportunities for physical activity and recreation, healthy food, and sustainable design.

Policy EJ-5j: Prioritize local funding and leverage outside funding for programs and projects that improve community health outcomes and eliminate health inequities.

Policy EJ-5k: Continue existing programs and services to prevent and abate environmental health hazards in the built and natural environment.

3.4 Healthy Food Access

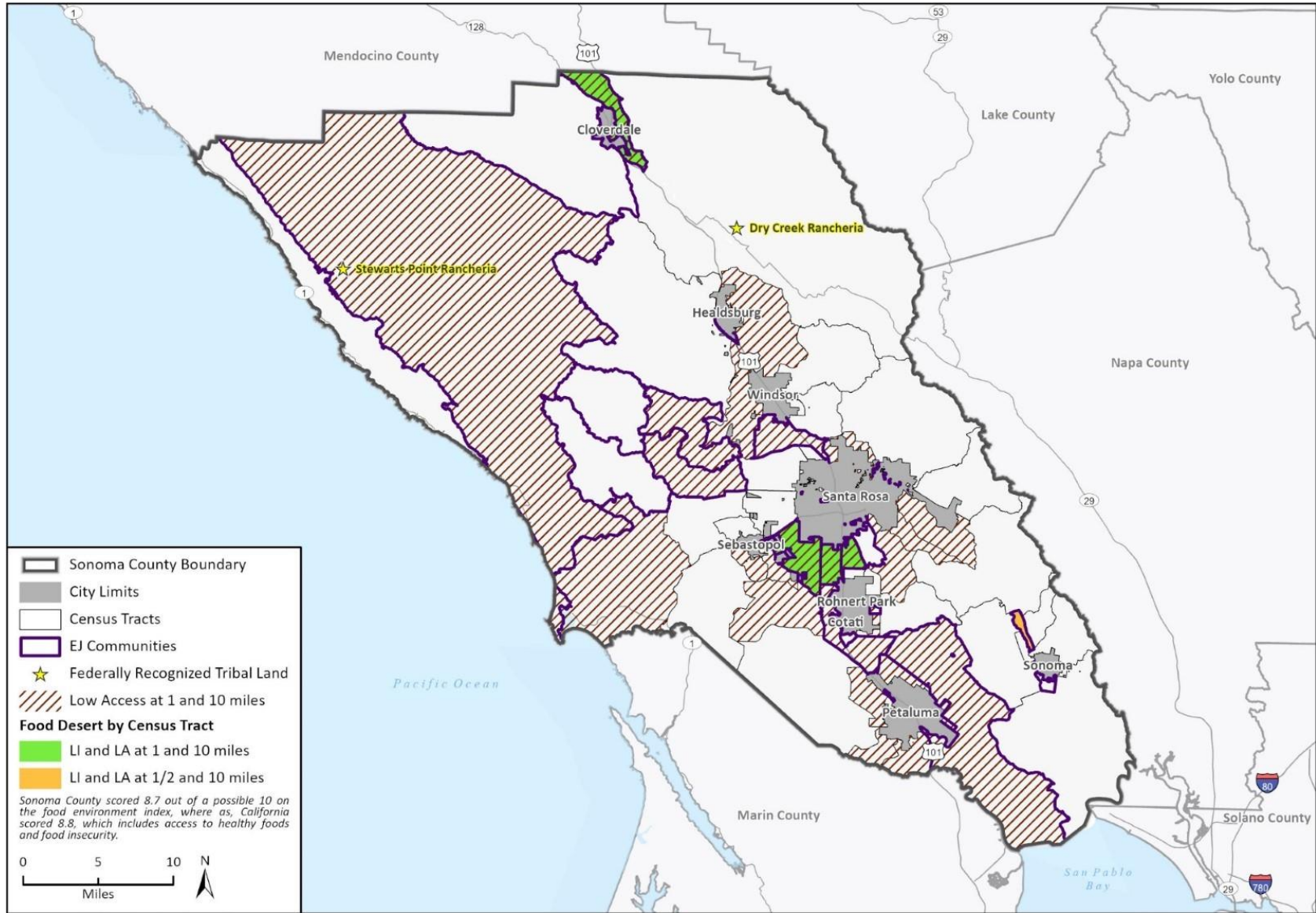
Access to healthy food is a basic human need and critical determinant of positive health outcomes and quality of life. Adequate food access means that food is affordable, nutritious, and within an accessible distance from home. Limited access to healthy food options can lead to negative health outcomes, such as higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases. Lack of adequate food access is often more prevalent in EJ Communities and exacerbates existing inequalities.

Food access can be measured by two indicators: food insecurity and the presence of food deserts. Food insecurity within Sonoma County is at a slightly lower rate than that of California. However, over 40,000 people are still considered food insecure. In 2018, there was a shortfall of 14 million meals between what low-income residents could afford and the assistance provided by non-profit organizations, government programs like CalFresh, school meals, group meals for seniors, and home-delivered meals.

EJ Communities also have more difficulty accessing healthy and affordable food due to a lack of grocery or healthy food providers within or nearby those communities. Low-income communities with low access to grocery stores or healthy, affordable food retail outlets are considered “food deserts” by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Other areas that are not considered low-income may also have low access to healthy food retailers. As shown in Figure 8, food deserts are prevalent in unincorporated south Santa Rosa, the Sonoma Valley Springs, and near the City of Cloverdale and all designated food deserts are also EJ Communities. More information on food access can be found in Appendix A.

The goal, policies, and implementation measures in this section aim to complement and build upon existing systems, services, and initiatives focused on improving food access across the county and increasing the resilience of our local food system. This section was developed to align with the Sonoma County Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan, developed through a partnership with local organizations and the Sonoma County Department of Health Services. Policies focus on the importance of accurately measuring food access, improving the effectiveness of existing food programs, local and regional coordination, incentivizing locally sourced healthy food options, and public education. In addition to the policies in this section, the Land Use Element and Agricultural Resources Element include goals, policies, and objectives to improve food access and support local agricultural production for a more resilient and effective local food system.

Figure 8 Food Deserts Across the Unincorporated County



Goals and Policies

- Goal EJ-6: Build a resilient local food system and ensure that all community members have access to nutritional, affordable, and culturally appropriate food options.*
- Policy EJ-6a: Identify opportunities to encourage and incentivize the addition of grocery stores and other fresh food retailers in Environmental Justice Communities and areas with low food access.
- Policy EJ-6b: Encourage convenience stores, liquor stores, and neighborhood markets to carry fresh produce and participate in food assistance programs such as CalFresh.
- Policy EJ-6c: Facilitate and support community-level opportunities for food production including urban agriculture such as community gardens, edible landscaping and school yards, and farmers' markets. Support the use of County lands for food production where appropriate.
- Policy EJ-6d: Explore, establish, and sustain partnerships with local and regional entities to expand emergency food resource programs and prepare for emergency food provision.
- Policy EJ-6e: Continue to connect food-insecure persons with food and nutrition assistance programs. Improve public awareness of and increase enrollment in existing programs.
- Policy EJ-6f: Promote locally sourced food, including farm-to-school programs, partnerships between local farms and stores, and seasonal farm stands. Prioritize local food procurement in County purchasing when feasible.
- Policy EJ-6g: Ensure that food program operators have resources to provide and serve culturally and religiously diverse communities.
- Policy EJ-6h: Work with communities to understand which types of food programs are most supportive and seek to implement those programs.
- Policy EJ-6i: Secure funding to systematically measure food insecurity and need in Sonoma County and identify gaps in service to inform policy and action. Explore public-private partnerships for data collection and sharing.
- Policy EJ-6j: Explore opportunities to facilitate diversified local farming to protect the local food system from supply and distribution issues during large-scale disaster events and to support the economic viability of the County's agricultural industry.
- Policy EJ-6k: Support public and private partners in providing education about the nutritional, social, economic, and environmental benefits of locally produced food and food security.

3.5 Safe and Sanitary Housing

Safe and sanitary homes contribute to the health and well-being of individuals and families. Adequate housing conditions, including access to proper sanitation and ventilation, reduce the risk of diseases and exposure to toxins. Environmental justice recognizes that everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or background, deserves to live in a safe and healthy home environment. Marginalized communities, often including low-income neighborhoods and minority communities, are more likely to experience substandard housing conditions. These communities may face challenges such as overcrowding, inadequate maintenance, limited access to sanitation facilities, pest infestations, lead-

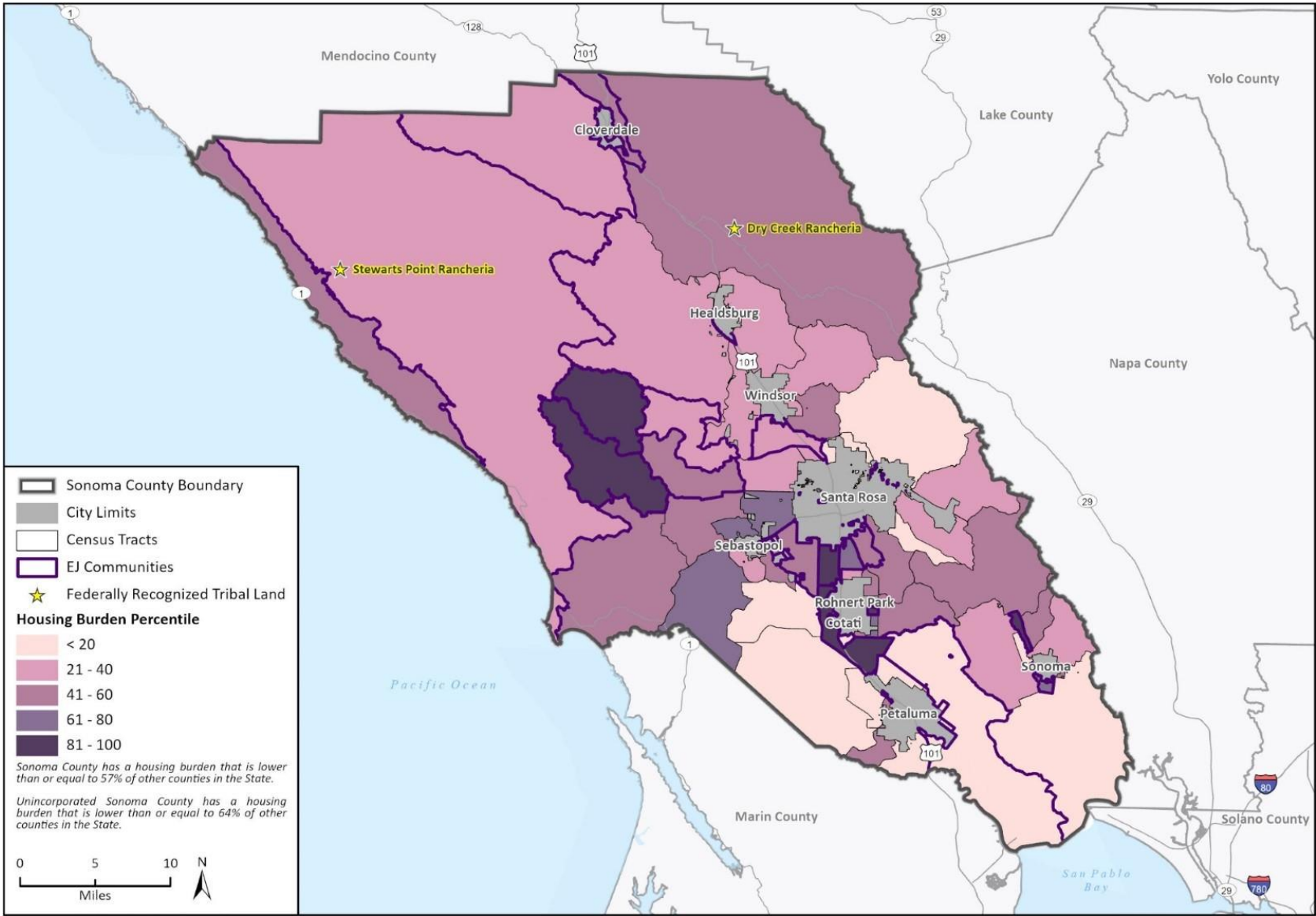
based paint, mold, and other indoor pollutants. These unsafe housing conditions can have adverse health effects, exacerbating existing health disparities.

Many neighborhoods and households throughout Sonoma County have substandard or unsafe housing conditions. EJ Communities in the County face greater exposure to toxins in the home, such as lead and pesticides, due to the age and location of homes. EJ Communities are also more challenged by maintenance needs and overcrowding conditions because these communities often have limited financial resources or, as renters, they fear displacement when requesting fixes or upgrades. The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) defines an overcrowded unit as one occupied by 1.01 persons or more per room (excluding bathrooms and kitchens). The presence of major overcrowding is a significant risk factor for poor health outcomes. Nearly 30 percent of homes within the Fetters Springs/Agua Caliente West EJ Community and 16 percent of homes within the Jenner/Cazadero EJ Community are overcrowded by this measure.

A lack of affordable housing is directly related to housing conditions. Housing-burdened low-income households are households that are both low income and highly burdened by housing costs. Households with lower incomes often spend a larger proportion of their income on housing and may suffer from housing-induced poverty. As shown in Figure 9, housing burden is highest in several of the county's EJ Communities. The number of people experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County increased five percent between 2021 and 2022 according to the annual Point-in-Time Counts. Around five percent of the unhoused community were in the unincorporated communities, with many living in West County and Sonoma Valley EJ Communities.

The goal, policies, and implementation measures in this section specifically focus on reducing the harmful impacts of poor living conditions to make homes in EJ Communities safer. While housing affordability and availability are critical factors in safe living conditions, these issues are comprehensively addressed in the Housing Element. The Housing Element further includes policies that encourage equitable, sustainable, and fair housing. The Safety Element and Land Use Element include goals, objectives, and policies that guide the safe location and construction of housing.

Figure 9 Housing Burden Across the Unincorporated County



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Additional data provided by CalEnviroScreen 4.0, 2021; Priority Population Investments 4.0, 2021; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2023.

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Fig 8 Sonoma County Housing Burden

Goals and Policies

Goal EJ- 7: Prioritize resources in Environmental Justice Communities and housing-burdened communities to improve living conditions and home safety.

Policy EJ-7a: Support the maintenance and development of housing that is structurally sound, comfortable, and prepared for changing climatic conditions.

Policy EJ-7b: Support residents in equipping homes with smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, air filters, or fire suppression equipment including fire extinguishers.

Policy EJ-7c: Continue existing funding and loan programs that support home retrofits and rehabilitation and provide residents with program information and technical assistance.

Policy EJ-7d: Prioritize identifying supplemental funding sources, including grants, and resources for the retrofit, rehabilitation, and repair of housing units occupied by low-income renters or property owners.

Policy EJ-7e: Continue to partner with legal aid and tenant rights' organizations to protect residents from displacement or adverse living conditions by disseminating information and resources regarding tenants' rights.

Policy EJ-7f: Promote safe and sanitary housing by providing owners and occupants accessible information and resources about home health and households hazards or toxins such as lead, mold, or other pollutants. Prioritize dissemination of information in Environmental Justice Communities and those most impacted by household toxin exposure.

Policy EJ-7g: Reduce health impacts from overcrowding or substandard living conditions through culturally sensitive code enforcement focused on health and safety issues and funding options for rehabilitation and repair. Link Code Enforcement efforts with rehabilitation programs.

Policy EJ-7h: Evaluate options for data collection on rental housing units to inform policy and action to better protect Environmental Justice Communities and housing-burdened communities.

Goal EJ-8: Prevent homelessness and support individuals experiencing homelessness through a variety of accessible and coordinated supportive measures.

Policy EJ-8a: Invest in programs that treat underlying causes of homelessness, such as substance abuse, mental illness, and poverty, along with housing solutions that address affordability, supply, and diversity of unit types as directed by the Housing Element.

Policy EJ-8b: Continue efforts to strengthen the capacity of supportive services to ease the strain on providers and better meet the needs of those in a housing crisis.

Policy EJ-8c: Collaborate with homeless service providers, cities, and other cross-sector stakeholders to assess challenges and develop shared priorities, aligned investments, strategic coordination, and equitable solutions to homelessness.

Policy EJ-8d: Ensure that existing unsheltered families and individuals receive and can access information on supportive services and remove barriers to participation in supportive programs that may improve their current living conditions.

Policy EJ-8e: Center the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness by providing opportunities for input through standing committees and boards and community engagement on policy, programs, and service delivery.

3.6 Civic Engagement and Language Access

Actively involving the communities in the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations that affect those communities is the foundation of environmental justice. EJ Communities face a variety of systemic challenges when it comes to participating in civic engagement and the government decision-making process. Community members who are elderly with limited mobility, non-English speaking, low-income, without documentation, or who lack sufficient broadband internet access may not be able to readily engage with government due to language, transportation, cultural, or technological barriers. The County has a responsibility to create fair opportunities for systemically excluded populations to engage in decision-making processes that affect them and ensure access to crucial government services. When the government has gaps in or barriers to its services, community members often rely on trusted community-based organizations (CBOs) to receive support and assistance. CBOs in Sonoma County may be taxed by requests for assistance that exceed their capacity. In engaging with CBOs and community members in the planning process for this Element, the County heard about the importance of the County establishing meaningful relationships with CBOs and community-based leaders and meaningful and transparent feedback loops with underrepresented communities, and acting on the priorities of those communities to bridge the gaps in communication, build trust with community members, and remove barriers to increased participation.

The Board of Supervisors approved a Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan in 2024 to ensure all County residents can communicate with their local government in the languages in which they prefer to communicate. Goals, policies, and implementation measures in this section relating to language access align with, complement, and support implementation of the County Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan. This section further aims to improve opportunities for equitable and meaningful community engagement on environmental policies and programs.

Goals and Policies

Goal EJ-9: Provide equitable and meaningful opportunities for community engagement in the development, adoption, and implementation of environmental policies and programs.

Policy EJ-9a: Consider various scheduling options, locations, methods, and incentives when planning County engagement opportunities.

Policy EJ-9b: Utilize the Community Engagement Toolkit prepared by the Office of Equity to guide planning of community engagement activities.

Policy EJ-9c: Remove barriers to participation by offering incentives, such as stipends or childcare and food, for participants in engagement opportunities. Pursue funding sources to provide stipends and other incentives.

Policy EJ-9d: Use discretion when determining if police or emergency service officers are needed at public meetings to improve the comfort of residents.

- Policy EJ-9e: Create engagement opportunities that provide for co-creation of policy and program design so that Environmental Justice Communities are a part of the decision-making process in policies and practices that impact their neighborhoods, their lives, and the community as a whole.
- Policy EJ-9f: Provide adequate language services in all civic engagement activities. Utilize the County's Language Access Policy and Plan in identifying language needs, providing translation and interpretation services, and producing documents in the County's priority languages.
- Policy EJ-9g: Provide adequate notice of community events and engagement opportunities in various mediums to reach different age groups and consider accessibility in designing engagement opportunities.
- Policy EJ-9h: Foster meaningful relationships with community-based organizations to increase engagement of Environmental Justice Communities and other underrepresented community members in public decision-making processes. Explore the establishment of formal partnerships with community-based organizations, through mechanisms such as Memorandums of Understanding, to support community engagement on key County priorities.
- Policy EJ-9i: Work with community members to identify community leaders to participate in community meetings and engagement opportunities to ensure that residents are being represented by people that reflect their priorities and have their trust.
- Goal EJ-10: Actively acknowledge and respect the sovereignty of Tribal Nations within the county and strive to build lasting governmental relationships with Tribal Nations.*
- Policy EJ-10a: Publicly acknowledge the mistreatment, violence, and neglect of local Tribal Nations.
- Policy EJ-10b: Involve Tribal communities in planning and resource allocation discussions regularly to build trust and partnership.
- Policy EJ-10c: Pursue funding for and increase investment in intergovernmental relationship cultivation.
- Policy EJ-10d: Consult with Native American Tribes early in the process on issues that could affect culturally significant areas.
- Policy EJ-10e: Document and train staff on protocol for Tribal communication and cross-nation coordination with Tribal leaders.

4 Implementation Plan

The following table includes specific actions called “Implementation Programs” that address the County’s environmental justice issues as discussed in the prior sections. Each of the actions identifies “Lead Department/Agency”, which indicates departments or agencies that will lead or coordinate on implementing the action, “Supporting Department/Agency”, which indicates departments or agencies that may support implementing the action, and a “Timeframe”, which indicates the timing in which the action is targeted for completion. The “Metric” is the measurement of success for each program.

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Program #	Program	Lead Department/ Agency	Supporting Department/ Agency	Timeframe	Implementing Policy(ies)	Metric
Multi-Goal Program						
Healthy Environments						
Goal EJ-1: Reduce pollution exposure and eliminate disproportionate health impacts on Environmental Justice Communities.						
1	Review and evaluate Sonoma County Code Chapter 26 (Zoning Ordinance) and relevant development design guidelines to identify potential code updates to reduce pollution exposure for EJ Communities and sensitive land uses and facilitate health-promoting features in the built environment. Consider code updates to require health risk assessments for projects that could create health impacts from toxic air contaminants.	Permit Sonoma	N/A	2028	EJ-1a, EJ-1c	Zoning Ordinance reviewed
2	Develop technical guidance for development applicants on the preparation of health impact assessments for nonresidential projects of 100,000 square feet or more in Environmental Justice Communities to identify and address potential negative health impacts from the project. Update application submittal checklists and instructions.	Permit Sonoma	N/A	2026	EJ-1d	Guidance prepared and checklists updated
3	Identify funding opportunities to establish pesticide and herbicide use standards aimed at reducing pollution in sensitive areas, such as Environmental Justice (EJ) communities and County roadways, to minimize harmful exposure. These standards should target pesticide use near EJ communities and other sensitive receptors, be published on the County’s website, and distributed to agricultural producers.	Department of Agriculture/ Weights and Measures	Permit Sonoma, Sonoma Public Infrastructure	2028	EJ-1e	Funding identified; Pesticide standards established
4	With Board direction and dedicated funding, implement Zero Waste Sector County Operations measures identified in the Sonoma County Climate Resilience Comprehensive Action Plan (CR-CAP) to make all County facilities zero waste, decreasing the volume of waste going into local landfills.	County Administrator’s Office	All	Ongoing	EJ-1f	Zero Waste measures implemented
Goal EJ-2: Maintain the safety of groundwater and surface water resources through resources and partnerships to protect vulnerable water users.						
5	Identify funding sources to develop a well water testing program that could aid tenants and property owners in identifying toxins in private well water and remediating where feasible.	Department of Health Services	Permit Sonoma	2028	EJ-2c	Funding sources identified
6	Maintain information on the County website about well water quality, including standards for safe drinking water and how to test well water. Update the County website to expand on information about options to treat contaminated water.	Department of Health Services	Permit Sonoma	2026 then ongoing	EJ-2d	County website updated
Healthy Public Facilities and Promoting Physical Activity						
Goal EJ-3: Ensure all community members have access to safe, affordable, and comfortable parks and open space and opportunities for physical activity.						
7	Develop an online parks gap analysis tool to provide baseline information on the distribution and classification of parks in order to inform planning for Sonoma County Regional Parks and the Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District to better serve community needs and address access barriers.	Sonoma County Regional Parks	Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District	2027	EJ-3b	Online tool developed
8	During the comprehensive update to the Sonoma County General Plan, consider developing park access ratios for local parks such as neighborhood and community parks that account for a service area with a dense population to provide better access.	Permit Sonoma	Regional Parks	2029	EJ-3b, EJ-3g	General Plan updated
9	Coordinate with State Parks to identify financial barriers to park access by engaging with community members and explore expansion of fee waivers, free access days, and other financial support to improve park access for County residents.	Sonoma County Regional Parks	N/A	Ongoing	EJ-3c	Expanded access programs
10	Continue to review and evaluate ways to improve the Sonoma County Regional Parks’ reservation system for ease of use for diverse populations.	Sonoma County Regional Parks	N/A	Ongoing	EJ-3d	Reservation system updated
11	During the comprehensive update to the Sonoma County General Plan, consider policies that will provide for a broader range of community events at County regional parks.	Permit Sonoma	Regional Parks	2029	EJ-3d	General Plan updated
12	Complete an evaluation of access to and amenities in existing parks and open space facilities. Prioritize funding where improvements to amenity and accessibility features are needed or gaps in access are identified.	Sonoma County Regional Parks	Permit Sonoma	2028	EJ-3g	Evaluation completed
Goal EJ-4: Improve safe and affordable active and public transportation opportunities, centering the needs and priorities of Environmental Justice Communities.						
13	In long range planning efforts on active transportation, transit, and circulation, including but not limited to the comprehensive update to the Sonoma County General Plan and updates to the Sonoma County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and Sonoma County Comprehensive Transportation Plan, prioritize safety, connectivity, equity, accessibility, and community-based needs, particularly the needs of Environmental Justice Communities. Use data and community input to evaluate and prioritize improvements.	Permit Sonoma, Sonoma Public Infrastructure	Sonoma County Transportation Authority	Ongoing	EJ-4a, EJ-4c, EJ-4d	Updated plans
14	Update the Sonoma County Transit website to make all route, schedule, and fare information available in English and Spanish. Create a multi-lingual public information guide providing residents with easily accessible information regarding existing public transit services and available discounts. Distribute the information guide in public facilities and locations.	Sonoma Public Infrastructure / Sonoma County Transit	N/A	2028	EJ-4b	County website updated; information guide created

Program #	Program	Lead Department/ Agency	Supporting Department/ Agency	Timeframe	Implementing Policy(ies)	Metric
Community Health						
Goal EJ-5: Improve public health outcomes and well-being in Environmental Justice Communities and across Sonoma County by recognizing health inequities, reducing environmental health hazards, and investing in community health.						
15	Continue to prepare racial equity analyses for significant items reviewed by the Board of Supervisors. Consider expanding the required analysis to specifically address potential impacts of the item on community health.	All	Office of Equity, County Administrator’s Office, Health Services	Ongoing	EJ-5b, EJ-5g	Racial equity analyses completed and expanded
16	During the comprehensive update to the Sonoma County General Plan, evaluate community-specific needs and consider policies and implementation measures for the provision of public facilities, services, and amenities that improve health and well-being and are tailored to community needs, prioritizing improvements for Environmental Justice Communities.	Permit Sonoma	N/A	2029	EJ-5b	General Plan updated
17	Identify funding sources to partner with cities and local health organizations to create a countywide public education program to raise awareness on local outdoor and indoor asthma risks, including providing information on how to detect signs of asthma or other respiratory diseases and mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of developing asthma. Publish materials on the County website and distribute in EJ Communities and other areas with high concentrations of asthma.	Department of Health Services	N/A	2028	EJ-5c	Funding identified
18	Identify funding to create a program to provide portable indoor air filtration units to low-income households to reduce asthma risk and improve indoor air quality. Explore funding opportunities through the Bay Area Air District, the California Air Resources Board, or other regional or State entities.	Department of Health Services	N/A	2028	EJ-5c	Funding identified
19	Upon every update to the General Plan Housing Element, review and update as necessary the boundaries of Environmental Justice Communities. In addition to using available data, engage the community to identify environmental burdens and factors contributing to disproportionate health outcomes to inform the identification of EJ Communities.	Permit Sonoma	N/A	Upon every Housing Element update	EJ-5e	EJ Communities boundaries updated
20	Continue to maintain and update the Community Health Dashboard with new data.	Department of Health Services	N/A	Ongoing	EJ-5h	Dashboard updated
21	Continue to maintain and update information on the County website about environmental health hazards, including lead, mold, water quality, solid waste, and other hazards.	Department of Health Services	N/A	Ongoing	EJ-5k	County website updated
Healthy Food Access						
Goal EJ-6: Build a resilient local food system and ensure that all community members have access to nutritional, affordable, and culturally appropriate food options.						
22	Evaluate zoning regulations and explore opportunities to incentivize and streamline the permitting process for development of healthy food-providing facilities such as farmers markets, corner stores, grocery markets, and local produce stalls, especially in areas underserved by healthy food retail. If the evaluation indicates barriers to development or opportunities to incentivize healthy food retailers, propose code amendments for consideration.	Permit Sonoma	N/A	2026	EJ-6a, EJ-6b, EJ-6c, EJ-6f	Evaluated zoning and permitting requirements
23	Identify community organizations that regularly provide food resources to Sonoma County communities and enter into Memorandums of Understanding to establish a formal food emergency operation and distribution plan to provide emergency food supplies to residents during a disaster.	Department of Emergency Management	Department of Human Services	2028	EJ-6d	MOUs established
24	Continue partnerships with public and private entities to enhance community awareness, engagement, and education about local food resources, nutrition assistance programs, and emergency food services. Maintain user-friendly, multi-lingual information on the County website, distribute newsletters, and host educational sessions on available resources and financial support.	Department of Human Services	N/A	Ongoing	EJ-6e, EJ-6i, EJ-6k	County website updated; Number of engagement/education activities
25	Host County-led application support sessions, offered in English and Spanish at minimum, where residents may work directly with Sonoma County Department of Human Services to apply for CalFresh (also known as SNAP) benefits.	Department of Human Services	N/A	Annually	EJ-6e	Sessions held
26	Seek funding to develop a program to systematically measure food insecurity and need in Sonoma County and publish data for public use, working with cities, local food resource providers, and other stakeholder partners.	Department of Human Services	N/A	2030	EJ-6i	Funding identified
27	With the comprehensive General Plan update, engage with the community and agricultural producers on how to facilitate diversified local farming to improve the resilience of our local food system and support local farmers.	Permit Sonoma	N/A	2029	EJ-6j	Engagement conducted

Program #	Program	Lead Department/ Agency	Supporting Department/ Agency	Timeframe	Implementing Policy(ies)	Metric
Safe and Sanitary Homes						
Goal EJ-7: Prioritize resources in Environmental Justice Communities and housing-burdened communities to improve living conditions and home safety.						
28	Identify funding opportunities to develop an incentive program for housing repair, weatherization, or energy efficiency, assisting homeowners and rental property owners with improvements that contribute to safer living conditions.	Community Development Commission	Permit Sonoma	2030	EJ-7a	Funding identified
29	Continue existing funding and loan programs that support home retrofits and rehabilitation, providing guidance and technical assistance. Actively search for and pursue supplemental funding sources for home retrofit, rehabilitation, or repair for units occupied by low-income renters. Continue to partner with organizations to support tenants’ rights, prevent displacement, and resolve unhealthy living conditions.	Community Development Commission	Permit Sonoma	Ongoing	EJ-7c, EJ-7d, EJ-7e	Continued programs; new funding sources identified; continued partnerships
30	Direct residents to utilize the California Department of Real Estate’s Guide to Residential Tenants’ and Landlords’ Rights and Responsibilities, published in multiple languages, for additional information regarding housing law and potential rights violations.	Community Development Commission	Permit Sonoma	Ongoing	EJ-7e	Referrals made
31	Evaluate and update, as needed, the Sonoma County Residential Tenancy Protections Ordinance to protect vulnerable residents from eviction.	County Administrator’s Office	County Counsel	2027	EJ-7e	Ordinance reviewed or updated
32	Develop a Home Safety Guidebook in multiple languages that informs residents about common household exposures, such as lead and mold, and resources available to help resolve related issues.	Department of Health Services	Permit Sonoma	2027	EJ-7f	Guidebook prepared and dispersed
33	During the Code Enforcement process, refer eligible property owners to the Community Development Commission for information on the Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program.	Permit Sonoma	Community Development Commission	Ongoing	EJ-7g	Referrals made
Goal EJ-8: Prevent homelessness and support individuals experiencing homelessness through a variety of accessible and coordinated supportive measures.						
34	Work within the County organization and with the cities, service providers, and community to implement the County’s Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, and successor plans.	Department of Health Services	Community Development Commission, Permit Sonoma, County Administrator’s Office	Ongoing	EJ-8a through EJ-8e	Plan implementation
Civic Engagement and Language Access						
Goal EJ-9: Provide equitable and meaningful opportunities for community engagement in the development, adoption, and implementation of environmental policies and programs.						
35	Design a community engagement checklist consistent with and complementary to the County’s Community Engagement Toolkit prepared by the Office of Equity that acts as a guide containing best practices and options for choosing outreach and engagement opportunity locations, times, incentives, and accessibility features.	Permit Sonoma	Office of Equity	2027	EJ-9a, EJ-9b	Checklist developed
36	Establish guidelines for use by County departments and agencies for providing childcare and stipends for participants of community engagement events, and compensation guidance for community-based organizations supporting County engagement opportunities by incentivizing attendance and compensating participants for their time.	Office of Equity	All	2027	EJ-9c, EJ-9h	Guidelines established
37	Supported by the Office of Equity, County departments implement the County’s Language Access Policy by providing interpretation and translation services for their clients, among other actions identified in the Implementation Plan, to improve access to County services and programs and increase engagement with non-English speaking community members.	Office of Equity, County Administrator’s Office	All	Ongoing	EJ-9f	Translated materials and interpretation provided
38	All departments and agencies will provide as much notice as feasible in advance of community engagement opportunities and distribute notices through various mediums (e.g. email, mailers, posted notices in community locations, radio, social media, etc.). The Office of Equity will provide technical assistance to and consult with departments and agencies on how to reach desired communities of focus.	All	Office of Equity, County Administrator’s Office	Ongoing	EJ-9g	Public notices available through multiple mediums
39	Ensure that community engagement events provide community members with accessibility features such as adequate seating; livestreaming, remote participations, and video recordings for those unable to attend in-person; and alternative language services upon request and other similar measures. The Office of Equity will provide technical assistance to and consult with departments and agencies on best practices for community engagement.	All	Office of Equity, County Administrator’s Office	Ongoing	EJ-9g	Accessibility features available
Goal EJ-10: Actively acknowledge and respect the sovereignty of Tribal Nations within the county and strive to build lasting governmental relationships with Tribal Nations.						
40	Identify interested Tribal leaders to meet regularly with County leaders for the purpose of information sharing, project updates, and opportunities to cultivate trust between Tribal governments, the County, and the Sonoma County community. Ensure that all activities are intentional, transparent, and demonstrate the value of reciprocity.	County Administrator’s Office, County Counsel	All	Ongoing	EJ-10b, EJ-10d	Meetings held
41	Work with County departments and agencies to document and train staff on protocol for Tribal communication and coordination.	County Administrator’s Office	Permit Sonoma	Ongoing	EJ-10e	Procedures documented

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