



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-21-169
Meeting 21-35
December 15, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 7

AGENDA ITEM

Agricultural Policy Development

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *deur*

Receive a presentation from staff and partners on collaborative and joint agricultural conservation actions occurring on the San Mateo County coastside, including the role, contributions, and expertise that each partner brings to this work, and based on this information, provide direction on the elements of the Agricultural Policy to clarify the role of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District in furthering its expanded mission on the San Mateo Coast, which states:

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

No Board action required.

SUMMARY

This agenda item will provide the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Board of Directors (Board) with an overview of the main elements of agricultural conservation and the roles and expertise of the District and partners in collaborating to deliver this conservation work. Following this presentation, the Board will have the opportunity to provide direction on the role of the District and relative emphasis of each of the identified elements of this existing agricultural conservation model. This information will be used to consolidate, refine, and develop the District's Agricultural Policy (Ag Policy). The Ag Policy will outline the District's role in agriculture within the region and provide guidance on the management of District-owned and/or managed lands.

BACKGROUND

The District first began evaluating its role and actions in agricultural conservation in 2019. A series of workshops, meetings and land tours were held to aid in understanding the complex partnerships that balance the private economic interests and viability of agricultural producers and businesses with the resource conservation, agricultural preservation, and open space goals of public agencies and non-profit organizations. Grazing properties are by far the largest component of agricultural lands owned and managed by the District. To date the District has

acquired approximately 12,000 acres that are managed under the Conservation Grazing program of which approximately 8,600 are currently under active grazing leases. The total acreage of land in the conservation grazing program is approximately 40% of the total grazing land in San Mateo County. Therefore, the District first focused its work on amending and updating its Conservation Grazing Policy as part of the Ag Policy review. The amendment of the grazing policy garnered substantial public interest that required additional outreach and an expanded deployment of staffing resources. The expanded focus on the grazing policy, which affects the District's most substantial contribution to agriculture on the San Mateo Coast, required pausing the larger Ag Policy development work. The Ag Policy was then further delayed by restrictions associated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the lapse in time since the Ag Policy was under active Board review in 2020, a workshop was held on September 22, 2021 to restart the policy development process and inform the Board and public on the new timeline and key remaining steps and receive additional input on the potential topics to develop the Ag Policy ([R-21-127](#), [minutes](#)). During this workshop, several Board members expressed a more expansive breadth of interest in the District's potential role in agricultural conservation than previously discussed and anticipated. Work on the policy up until this time had focused on clarifying and further defining the District's role in agricultural preservation consistent with its San Mateo Coastal Service Plan (Service Plan), approved in 2004 and governing the types of actions and activities the District carries out in the San Mateo coastal region. Before District staff continue to develop draft Ag Policy language for Board consideration and public review, clear direction from a majority of the Board is needed on whether the Board desires to continue the current scope of involvement in agriculture, desires a wider scope of involvement beyond that in the Service Plan, or wishes to narrow the scope of involvement for the District. It is important to note that the District's involvement in agriculture preservation has remained primarily focused on activities and areas with natural resource co-benefits, such as is found with conservation grazing lands; a program that continues to grow in both acreage and complexity.

DISCUSSION

The objective for this meeting is for the Board to provide direction on the role of the District in conserving agriculture on the San Mateo coastside and relative emphasis of the District's role within each of the identified elements of agricultural conservation listed further below. This information will be used to consolidate, refine, and develop the draft Ag Policy for Board consideration. The Ag Policy will outline the District's role in agriculture within the region and provide guidance on the management of District-owned and/or managed lands.

San Mateo Coastal Service Plan

The District's mission statement was modified with the adoption of the Coastal Service Plan in 2004 specifically for the Coastside Protection Area. This modification includes the addition of language specific to agricultural land conservation (**bold** denotes additions to the District's basic Mission Statement):

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

The Service Plan provides key guardrails and directives; in particular it distinguishes between agricultural lands that have significant habitat or recreational value, typically rangelands managed through the conservation grazing program, and “intensive agriculture”, typically row crops or small animal farming with no significant habitat or recreational value.

Agricultural lands with significant habitat and recreation are preserved through fee title purchase or easement and managed for habitat value and ecologically sensitive recreational access, and to encourage viable agriculture use, which to date has been primarily through the conservation grazing program.

Per the Service Plan, regarding lands with intensive agricultural uses, the District may assist in keeping these lands undeveloped and in active agriculture (i.e., preventing loss of open space values via future development and/or change in use) through initial acquisition and then subsequent resale to a farmer with a protective agricultural conservation easement. In this way, the District participates in the preservation of agricultural lands without assuming longer-term management of intensive agricultural operations. Intensive agricultural operations (i.e., row crops or small animal farming) do not typically have significant recreation or habitat values. The Service Plan states that the District will generally offer those lands for sale. Service Plan policy PA.1 states in part, “*Lands that do not have significant recreation or sensitive habitat values and which can clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale while other agricultural lands will generally be offered for lease.*”

In practice, because of the success of Peninsula Open Space Trust’s (POST) Farmland Futures Initiative Program, the District has not engaged in acquiring and reselling intensive agricultural lands or purchasing agricultural conservation easements because POST has taken the lead in performing this important work. POST has been a particularly critical and essential partner in this regard due to the laws regarding the sale of surplus lands by a public agency that require an extensive process whereby other public agencies must first be provided the opportunity to acquire the land. Because POST has been highly active in acquiring, protecting through agricultural easements, and reselling lands with intensive agricultural use, they have also gained extensive expertise and networks to support this work – something that the District does not currently possess. The placement of an agricultural easement on a property permanently limits the uses of the property and therefore limits the assessed value of the land. In the short term, this makes the property more affordable to a farmer for resale, resulting in a monetary loss/environmental gain to the conservation partner who puts the easement in place. POST also purchases rights to agricultural conservation easements directly from farmers who own their property, thereby preserving the land for agricultural use while providing capital to the farmer. In the long term, these easements limit land value escalation and makes agriculture use more financially sustainable.

A critical decision point for the Ag Policy development is whether the Board wishes to expand the District’s role beyond managing agricultural lands that have a co-benefit for natural resources and recreation. Within the Service Plan guidelines, the District could still function as a backstop if POST or other partners were unable to continue to preserve lands with intensive agricultural use either through funding contributions or the more complex process of purchase, potential subdivision and resale. As part of this decision, it is important to consider the formation and public intent of the District, including the intent and expectations created in expanding the

District to the coastside. In addition, the most recent 2020 benchmark survey conducted to solicit public sentiment about the District, its mission, functions, and services, may be an important data point for Board consideration.

A representative sample of District constituents were asked to rank the importance of 30 goals the District has set for itself:

- The goals related to agricultural lands received a significantly lower level of support than goals related to natural resource protection, land preservation and public recreation.
- Survey respondents clearly prioritized resource protection goals, with 80-90 percent of respondents rating them as very or extremely important.
- Goals related to land preservation were rated as very/extremely important by 70-79% of respondents.
- Recreation-related goals were prioritized by fewer constituents, with 55-73% rating them as very or extremely important.
- The goal of supporting local agriculture was rated very or extremely important by 62% of respondents.
- The survey also asked which of the six components of the District's mission was most important. Support was split equally at 18% for land preservation, natural environment restoration, public education about conservation and nature and all of the goals. Providing ecologically sensitive public recreation was most important to 14% of respondents, while preserving rural character and encouraging viable agricultural land use were each ranked as the most important part of the District's mission by 4% of respondents (6% chose none, other or refused to answer).

Another key decision point for the Board is the appropriate level of District investment in agricultural infrastructure. The District has made significant investments in agricultural infrastructure for agricultural lands that provide co-benefits to nature and recreation, primarily conservation grazing lands. These are long term investments in water systems, ponds, fencing, corrals, and agricultural workforce housing to support the viability and ongoing operation of the District's conservation grazing program. The Service Plan does not call for direct District investment in infrastructure. Instead, it states that the District will facilitate farm labor housing by providing technical assistance, seek grant funding for continuing or establishing viable agriculture, and provide technical assistance on water rights (Service Plan PA.2). The infrastructure investments the District has made to the conservation grazing program rangelands go beyond the technical support called for in the Service Plan because of the enormous co-benefits that conservation grazing provides for the protection of biodiversity, preservation of grassland health, reduction of wildland fire risk, and its compatibility with low-intensity, ecologically sensitive public recreation. To date, the District has not invested in agriculture infrastructure that solely benefits and supports intensive agriculture (i.e., row crops and small animal production); these investments have instead come from POST and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD). If the Board seeks to invest in agricultural infrastructure that specifically supports intensive agriculture, this change will significantly affect the development of the Ag Policy and require substantial new staffing and financial support to further this type of program.

Agricultural Elements that Define Current District Operations

The following nine elements of agricultural conservation and management practices define the District's work over the last 15 years. These also capture the main agricultural elements encountered in the San Mateo County coastal region. Board discussion about the District's role within some of these elements will help clarify staff work in developing draft language for the Ag Policy. Definitions for these elements are presented below to introduce and frame the attached Agricultural Conservation Actions and Policy Elements Table (Attachment 1), which presents the roles and actions currently provided by the District and partners on the San Mateo County coast.

Land Conservation

Land conservation encompasses the purchase of real property through fee title and/or easement. This element and the *Resource Management and Restoration* element together encompass the largest agricultural conservation contributions from the District, both financially and through staff time. Two Permanent Policies (PA.1 and PA.3) within the Service Plan refer directly to agricultural land protection.

- Service Plan Permanent Policy PA.1 states:
“When acquiring lands in agricultural use, the acquisition shall be subject to continued use by the owner or operator until such time as it is sold or leased pursuant to the use and management plan adopted for the property. All agricultural land which is not needed for recreation or for the protection and vital functioning of a sensitive habitat will be permanently protected for agriculture and, whenever legally feasible, the District will offer for sale or lease the maximum amount of agricultural land to active farm operators on terms compatible with the recreational and habitat use. Lands that do not have significant recreation or sensitive habitat values and which can clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale while other agricultural lands will generally be offered for lease.”
- Service Plan Permanent Policy PA.3 states:
“The District shall actively pursue opportunities to enter agricultural easements and leases with interested farmers and ranchers. All agricultural easements and agricultural leases in the Coastal Annexation Area shall: a) Be tailored to meet individual farmers and ranchers needs while respecting the unique characteristics of the property; b) Specify uses that are unconditionally permitted pursuant to the easement or lease to provide certainty to the farmer or rancher entering the lease or easement with the District; c) Include terms that allow farmers and ranchers to adapt and expand their operations and farming practices to adjust to changing economic conditions; d) Include terms that ensure farmers or ranchers may provide farm labor housing as defined and approved by San Mateo County; e) Ensure compatibility of resource protection and management, low-intensity public recreation and viable agricultural operations; and f) In the case of leases, be for a sufficient period of time to gain a return on the investment in the agricultural operation.”

Resource Management and Restoration

Resource management generally consists of protecting, restoring, enhancing, and monitoring native vegetation and wildlife, and monitoring and protecting the quality of geological and hydrological conditions and also includes identifying, evaluating and protecting archeological sites and cultural landscapes. Service Plan Permanent Policy PA.3 identifies that District agricultural conservation activities “ensure compatibility of resource protection and management...”

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The District is committed to supporting diversity, equity and inclusion of all facets of society, the principles of which include fairness of treatment, recognition of rights, acceptance of responsibilities, commitment to equality, and dedication to expanding opportunities for all. Diversity is expressed by the psychological, physical and social differences that occur among any and all individuals, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles. Equity is focused on the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of certain groups. Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued to fully participate.

The District has recently added rating criteria for proposals for agricultural and other leases for elements of the proposal that support District diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. The Service Plan contains guidelines for representation (Guideline G.5.B-1(i) & G.5.C(i)) and partnerships (Guideline G.8) that require outreach and working with both governmental entities and community interest groups. This outreach includes Spanish translation when necessary to reach non-English speaking constituents.

Workforce Housing

Housing for agricultural workers is limited in the coastside region and the affordability of all housing is a concern throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The Service Plan recognizes that housing for agricultural labor is essential for the viability of agriculture in Permanent Policy PA.2 which specifies actions the District may take in supporting agriculture.

- Service Plan Permanent Policy PA.2 states:
“The District shall actively work with lessees of District lands and with the owners of land in which the District has an agricultural easement interest to: a) Facilitate the provision of farm worker housing on District owned lands by providing technical assistance in obtaining permits for such housing from the County of San Mateo.”

Agricultural Infrastructure

Agricultural production often requires extensive infrastructure such as water supply systems (discussed below), other utilities, including power, sanitary sewer and septic, structures (such as barns and other outbuildings, greenhouses), roads and materials handling areas and equipment storage areas.

Water Supply, Water Use

Water is one of the most critical (and limited) resources for agricultural operations. Provision of water, sustainability of water supply, efficiency of water use, and storage of water are all elements of this topic.

Recreation

Recreation and public access on District lands in the coastal area consists of low-intensity and ecologically sensitive activities such as hiking, bird watching, biking, equestrian, and environmental education uses. The Service Plan includes numerous policies and guidelines related to recreational facilities (Permanent Policy PA.3, Guidelines G.3.2, G.3.4 through G.3.9, and Guidelines G.6.4 through G.6.28) that establish guidelines to site, design and construct trail alignments to limit the impact of trails on neighbors, surrounding landscape settings, agricultural uses, operations and the environment. To protect and support viable agricultural lands, Service Plan Guideline G.3.5 specifically states, “Ranger office/maintenance facilities and staging areas may not be located on prime agricultural lands or on Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency.”

Agricultural Use Types

Agriculture includes many different activities ranging from conservation grazing, to the raising of small animals and livestock, as well as row crop production, vineyards, orchards, and greenhouses. The type and intensity of agricultural uses can greatly affect the compatibility with the District’s other mission goals to “protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education”.

Marketing and Promotion

The marketing of locally produced agricultural products is often an important component of the business model of an agricultural producer. Marketing can include signs and advertising as well as events hosted on site by the tenant. Per Service Plan Guideline G.6.3, promoting agricultural production on District-owned land would be included as part of an agricultural production plan that describes the crop and/or livestock potential for the property together with the management activities required to protect existing agricultural production and the agricultural potential of the land.

The Service Plan Policies and Guidelines discussed above, as well as other relevant existing policies are included as an attachment to this report for reference (Attachment 2).

Partnership Based Agricultural Conservation Model

Since the approval of the Service Plan, a complex partnership has developed that balances the private economic interests and viability of agricultural producers with the resource conservation, agricultural preservation, and open space goals of public agencies and non-profit organizations. On the San Mateo County coast, this agricultural conservation delivery model is based on the District’s partnership with two organizations – Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD). The District also works with many other groups and a diverse array of private farmers and ranchers that represent the San Mateo agricultural community and hopes to grow connections and partnerships through the development of the Ag Policy.

Staff and representatives from our two partner organizations will present the current agricultural conservation framework that has developed organically, consistent with the Service Plan Policies and Guidelines, over the last 15 years (since the approval of the Service Plan). This delivery model leverages our individual expertise, capacity, funding, networks, policies, and focus areas to sustain agriculture on the coast. Each organization has built its capacity, resources, networks, and funding based on these different roles.

FISCAL IMPACT

This update on the process and timeline of the District's Ag Policy development has no immediate fiscal impact. Depending on the specific components adopted in the final policy, further financial impact analysis may be needed.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

The District began working on the Ag Policy in 2019 with a Board study session focused on summarizing existing District policy and guidelines; summarizing existing agricultural uses on District lands; and identifying gaps in policies and guidelines that the Board may wish to address ([R-19-36, minutes](#)).

Closely following this study session, the Grazing Management Policy Amendment also began with a Planning and Natural Resources Committee meeting on April 9, 2019 ([R-19-40, minutes](#)).

Another Planning and Natural Resources Committee meeting was held on October 22, 2019 ([R-19-139, minutes](#)). This was followed by a final Planning and Natural Resources Committee meeting on December 15, 2020 ([R-20-149, minutes](#)).

On November 6, 2019, staff led a day of field tours, providing the Board an opportunity to see firsthand examples of the different types of agricultural uses that currently occur on District lands and to meet with some of the producers who are operating on these lands.

On November 20, 2019, the District hosted a peer-agency workshop at the Mountain View Community Center, allowing staff and Board members to gain insights from other regional agencies and organizations that are involved at the intersection of agricultural and open space preservation.

On December 17, 2019, the District hosted a public workshop for the Grazing Management Policy Amendment. The meeting content focused on the District's dual mission statement and commitment to agriculture as part of the Coastside Service Plan that specifies the District's role and practices within the San Mateo County Coast. Presenters gave detailed information on conservation grazing practices and the benefits of well-managed conservation grazing and received feedback from attendees.

On January 23, 2020, the District held a wildlife advocacy stakeholder workshop to receive feedback from regional wildlife advocacy groups regarding the Grazing Management Policy Amendment.

The Science Advisory Panel presented the Grazing Report to the full Board on November 4, 2020 ([R-20-129](#), [minutes](#)). The PNR Committee reviewed and forwarded a recommendation for approval of the proposed GMPA on December 15, 2020 ([R-20-149](#), [minutes](#)).

The Board approved the Conservation Grazing Management Policy Amendment ([R-21-22](#), [minutes](#)) on February 10, 2021. The Board adopted amendments to the Conservation Grazing Management Policy focused on management actions for mitigating and reducing livestock and predator conflicts that are protective of native wildlife, including mountain lions and coyotes.

A workshop was held on September 22, 2021 to restart the Ag Policy development process and receive input on the timeline, key remaining steps, and potential topics to develop the Ag Policy ([R-21-127](#), [minutes](#)).

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Following this study session, staff will collate input from the Board on the scope of the District's role within each of the identified policy elements. If significant areas are identified where the District's role is expanded beyond the current delivery model, then staff will need to evaluate what additional resources and staffing would be needed to meet this expanded role.

The *tentative* timeline for the remaining key steps in the process is as follows:

- February - March 2022 - Agricultural Producer Workshop
- April - May 2022 - Board Study Session: Review Existing Agricultural Policies, Guidelines, and Practices
- June 2022 - Board Study Session of proposed new policy language
- July-August 2022 - Board consideration for approval of new policy language

Attachment

1. Agricultural Conservation Actions and Policy Elements Table
2. Summary of Agricultural Policies

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Attachment 1: Agricultural Conservation Actions and Policy Elements Table

	Partner Role		
	District	POST	RCD
<i>Land Protection</i>	<p>Consistent with Coastal Service Plan, majority of purchases have been conducted in partnership with POST, with the District focused on upland/rangeland and aquatic habitats, and POST holding cultivated lands for transfer to a farmer subject to an easement (Service Plan envisioned the District transferring cultivated lands to farmers, minimizing public ownership).</p> <p>Lands are managed for continued agricultural use with tenant, preservation, restoration of natural resources and compatible public recreation. Majority of agricultural lands purchased and in District ownership are conservation rangelands (grazing).</p>	<p>Farmland and conservation easement acquisitions have been conducted independently from the District, focused on preservation of productive agricultural lands and conservation of natural resources. POST has also protected several large rangeland properties through fee or conservation easement acquisitions and, in several cases, has coordinated closely with the District on identifying priorities and subsequent land transfers.</p> <p>POST has been protecting cultivated lands (row crop) with affirmative conservation agricultural easements and has a long history of and expertise in selling protected farmland to farmers.</p>	<p>Supports landowners and/or easement purchasers in acquisition of conservation easements and dedication of water rights. Can hold easement if needed or beneficial.</p>
<i>Resource Management and Restoration</i>	<p>Conduct detailed resource inventories and monitoring.</p> <p>Design and implement habitat restoration and sensitive species recovery actions.</p> <p>Construct infrastructure upgrades to protect sensitive species and habitats from impacts resulting from agricultural uses.</p>	<p>Conduct detailed resource inventories and annual monitoring.</p> <p>Manage ranch infrastructure: roads, ponds, vegetation for protection and enhancement of natural resources, including preventing sedimentation in streams, reducing fire risk, and controlling invasive species.</p> <p>Design and implement, often in partnership with RCD and others,</p>	<p>Conduct property, watershed, and regional scale resource inventories and monitoring, including soil health and soil carbon, water quality, water resources, biological resources and more.</p> <p>Facilitate at-scale resource management planning efforts across multiple landownerships and jurisdictions.</p>

	Partner Role		
	District	POST	RCD
	<p>Control invasive species by consistent implementation of IPM principles to protect and restore the natural environment.</p> <p>Take appropriate actions to prevent the introduction of new pest species to District preserves, especially new invasive plants in natural areas, rangelands, and agricultural properties.</p>	<p>habitat restoration of grassland and aquatic systems.</p>	<p>Design and implement regenerative agriculture, carbon sequestration, habitat restoration, pollinator enhancement, weed management, water quality protection, fuel load reduction, soil health, and sensitive species recovery projects in partnership with private and public landowners primarily using grant funding,</p> <p>Plan, design and construct agricultural infrastructure upgrades to enhance or protect natural resources.</p>
<i>Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</i>	<p>Recently added evaluation criteria for all District Requests for proposals, including for agricultural leases to further District policy goals on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.</p> <p>Outreach expanded to agriculture workforce groups, and organic and agrotourism producers in addition to traditional agricultural producers.</p> <p>Maintain leases with existing tenants per Service Plan. Typically award long term leases to existing tenants in good standing after the development of an Agriculture Production Plan or Rangeland Management Plan. This practice preserves the sustainability and diversity of long-time agricultural families and operations on the coast yet</p>	<p>Hired a Director of DEI in September 2021 to facilitate cultural and operational change to build an environment where people representing diverse backgrounds can thrive and also contribute to POST’s mission.</p> <p>Adopted DEI strategic plan in 2020.</p> <p>Updated RFP process to increase accessibility and equity in opportunities to lease and own farmland.</p>	<p>The vision of the RCD is for San Mateo County to be environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable. These efforts include supporting indigenous/tribal stewardship and agriculture, supporting access to safe clean water, changing how the district recruits and hires new staff and directors to better reflect the community served, workshops in multiple languages, and more.</p>

	Partner Role		
	District	POST	RCD
	limits the inclusion of new agriculture operators who have not had the opportunity to own or lease agricultural land on the coast.		
<i>Workforce Housing</i>	Invest in housing improvements to meet habitability standards and ongoing maintenance of structures owned by the District. Provide low or no cost agriculture labor housing when housing is needed to support agricultural operations on District land. Provide housing to onsite agricultural lessees/operators at market rates.	In partnership with San Mateo County and tenants, invest in repairs to existing agricultural workforce housing and construction of new workforce housing to address significant housing shortfall in the County.	Assist with farm labor housing improvements and access to safe clean water.
<i>Agricultural Infrastructure</i>	Infrastructure upgrades have focused on measures to protect natural resources and support agricultural operations that provide co-benefit of resource management (conservation grazing) -- fences, water lines, road improvements, gates, etc. Significant investments have not been made for intensive agriculture, row crops or small animal production.	Invest in infrastructure upgrades to maintain viable agricultural production operations. Focus on essential, foundational improvements (water, septic, building preservation and stabilization) from which producers can make further investments for their operations.	Assist agricultural operators and/or private and public landowners with funding, designing, implementing, and/or accessing agricultural infrastructure upgrades.
<i>Water Supply, Water Use</i>	Protect and enhance natural watershed processes that provide high quality water to downstream habitats and uses. Water supply upgrades to protect natural resources and support agricultural operations that provide co-benefit of resource management (conservation grazing) or create aquatic	Protect and enhance natural watershed processes that provide high quality water to downstream habitats and uses. Partner with agricultural operators, RCD, and others to conserve, store, and strategically manage water for mutual benefit of creek health for	Work with landowners, agricultural operators, and other partners to to conserve, store, and strategically manage water for the mutual benefit of creek health for aquatic species and water security for agricultural viability. Examples include auditing and upgrading irrigation systems, building water

	Partner Role		
	District	POST	RCD
	<p>habitat (stockponds and storage reservoirs for California red-legged frog, San Francisco garter snake and western pond turtle).</p> <p>Consumptive water use monitored with meters for compliance with laws/regulations (primarily adjudicated watersheds) and to aid in determining sustainable quantities.</p>	<p>aquatic species and water security for agricultural viability.</p>	<p>storage capacity, technical assistance to change water use and management, restoring watershed processes, changing water rights and dedications to streamflow.</p> <p>Assist landowners, water users, and partners with regulatory compliance, monitoring and reporting water use.</p>
Recreation	<p>Provide ecologically sensitive recreation that is compatible with agricultural land and uses.</p> <p>Basic Policy allows for low-intensity recreational uses through limited facility improvements such as parking areas, trails and patrol roads, restrooms, map boards and signs. Basic Policy also states, “agricultural, residential and other limited revenue producing uses of the land may limit public access in certain area. Where appropriate, access may be provided on a permit basis.”</p>	<p>Planned, developed, and operated Cowell-Purissima Coastal Trail and Wilbur’s Watch Trail.</p> <p>Otherwise, long-term operation and maintenance of public recreation is implemented through transfer of properties to public entities (District, State Parks).</p>	
Agricultural Use Types	<p>Basic Policy states, “The District supports the continued agricultural use of land acquired for open space as an economic and cultural resource, including, but not limited to, grazing, orchards, row crops, and vineyards. The District does not consider commercial logging as agriculture. The District requires sound agricultural management</p>	<p>Leases and agricultural conservation easements require agricultural management plans. Uses may include raising of crops, horticulture, viticulture, small livestock farming, animal husbandry, raising bees for honey production and pollination, forestry, and other practices that comply with agricultural definitions</p>	

	Partner Role		
	District	POST	RCD
	<p>practices on land it manages or monitors, in accordance with its Resource Management Policies.”</p> <p>Types of Uses could include grazing, row crops, small livestock and poultry, greenhouses, processing plants, cannabis, vineyards, tree farms, horse breeding, dairy, native plant harvesting, orchards, and apiaries.</p>	<p>under applicable law. Recreational equestrian use is not considered an agricultural use. POST has separate template documents for conservation easements on agricultural and timber-producing properties.</p>	
<i>Marketing and Promotion</i>	<p>Currently permit farm dinners, tours, environmental education and signage on District property when requested by lessees. Limited District promotion through District channels.</p>	<p>Permit farm dinners, tours, local food guide, blog posts, sponsor farmer’s market.</p>	<p>Provide technical assistance, informational resources, workshops, and facilitate initiatives regarding permitting and licensing, agricultural markets, meat processing facilities, farm stands, diversified farm operations, etc.</p>

Summary of Agricultural Policies

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) agricultural policies are covered in several different documents and policies. The value of agricultural lands are addressed in both the Basic Policy and the District's coastal mission statement. More specific policies are included in the Coastal Service Plan (and associated EIR), Resource Management Policies, Housing Policy, Improvements on District Lands, Integrated Pest Management Program Guidance Manual, and Agricultural Use Policy Statements. Relevant policy statements and implementation measures from each of the following documents are excerpted below.

- Agricultural Use Policy Statements (1978)
- Basic Policy (1999)
- Service Plan for the Coastal Annexation Area and accompanying Environmental Impact Report (2003)
- Resource Management Policies (2021)

Agricultural Use Policy Statement (1978) (See attached)

- Sets authority for approving leases

Basic Policy (2008)

- **OPEN SPACE:** • Is land area that is allowed to remain in or return to its natural state. Open space lands may include compatible agricultural uses
- **Agriculture and Revenue-Producing Use**
Section f. The District supports the continued agricultural use of land acquired for open space as an economic and cultural resource, including, but not limited to, grazing, orchards, row crops, and vineyards. The District does not consider commercial logging as agriculture. The District requires sound agricultural management practices on land it manages or monitors, in accordance with its Resource Management Policies.

Coastal Service Plan (2004)

Coastal Mission Statement

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

Role & Objectives

- "...protect both the agricultural and natural resources of the Coastal Annexation Area. Although the District is not an agricultural preservation district, and does not propose any

agricultural subsidy programs, its Service Plan does recognize the importance of agriculture to the economy and heritage of the Coastal Annexation Area.”

- “As the District extends its services to the Coast, agricultural preservation will play a larger role in the District’s activities than it has within existing District boundaries.”

Agriculture

Agriculture is a very important rural land use and open space resource within the Coastal Annexation Area. Consistent with the purpose of San Mateo County's policies and regulations related to agriculture, the Guidelines and Implementation Actions below are directed at:

1. preserving and fostering existing and potential agricultural operations in San Mateo County in order to keep the maximum amount of prime agricultural land and all other lands suitable for agriculture in agricultural production, and
2. minimizing conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses that may occur on District owned or managed lands.

Permanent Policy PA.1: When acquiring lands in agricultural use, the acquisition shall be subject to continued use by the owner or operator until such time as it is sold or leased pursuant to the use and management plan adopted for the property. All agricultural land which is not needed for recreation or for the protection and vital functioning of a sensitive habitat will be permanently protected for agriculture and, whenever legally feasible, the District will offer for sale or lease the maximum amount of agricultural land to active farm operators on terms compatible with the recreational and habitat use. Lands that do not have significant recreation or sensitive habitat values and which can clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale while other agricultural lands will generally be offered for lease. (Reference: Mitigation Measure AGR-3g)

Permanent Policy PA.2: The District shall actively work with lessees of District lands and with the owners of land in which the District has an agricultural easement interest to:

- a. Facilitate the provision of farm worker housing on District- owned lands by providing technical assistance in obtaining permits for such housing from the County of San Mateo.
- b. Seek grant funding for the continuation or establishment of viable agriculture through the California Farmland Conservancy Program and other agriculture grant programs.
- c. Provide technical assistance to secure water rights for the continuation or establishment of viable agriculture consistent with protection of sensitive habitats.

(Reference: Mitigation Measure AGR-3j)

Permanent Policy PA.3: The District shall actively pursue opportunities to enter agricultural easements and leases with interested farmers and ranchers. All agricultural easements and agricultural leases in the Coastal Annexation Area shall:

- a. Be tailored to meet individual farmers and ranchers needs while respecting the unique characteristics of the property;

- b. Specify uses that are unconditionally permitted pursuant to the easement or lease to provide certainty to the farmer or rancher entering the lease or easement with the District;
- c. Include terms that allow farmers and ranchers to adapt and expand their operations and farming practices to adjust to changing economic conditions;
- d. Include terms that ensure farmers or ranchers may provide farm labor housing as defined and approved by San Mateo County;
- e. Ensure compatibility of resource protection and management, low-intensity public recreation and viable agricultural operations; and
- f. In the case of leases, be for a sufficient period of time to gain a return on the investment in the agricultural operation.

(Reference: Mitigation Measure AGR-3k)

Guideline G.3.1: The District shall conduct its land management practices such that they do not have an adverse significant impact on the physical and economic integrity of prime agricultural lands on or contiguous to properties owned or managed by the District (e.g. establishing appropriate buffers on District lands, etc.).

Guideline G.3.2: Improvements or public uses located upon open space lands other than agriculture shall be located away from existing prime agricultural lands and Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency. All trails and other public facilities should be located so as not to fragment agricultural operations unless no feasible alternative is available. While trails that bisect grazing lands would not be likely to fragment grazing operations, trails that bisect cultivated crops could adversely affect the vitality of agricultural operations and should be avoided. If trails must traverse cultivated lands then they shall be permitted only if adequate buffers, signs, and other measures necessary to ensure that trail use does not interfere with the agricultural operations are implemented." (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3a)

Guideline G.3.3: All lands acquired by the District within the Coastal Annexation Area will be inventoried to identify and prioritize resource management issues. Where there are critical issues, such as the presence of non-native invasive species which threaten the habitat of endangered species or the economic viability of an adjacent agricultural operation, resource management plans will be prepared for these areas even if they remain closed to the public.

The use and management plan shall include an agricultural production plan for District-owned agricultural lands or District lands adjacent to agricultural lands. For district-owned lands, the plan shall describe the crop and/or livestock potential for the property together with the management actions required to protect existing agricultural production (e.g., growing seasons, water requirements, pesticide, manure, and waste management) and the agricultural potential of the land. The plan shall consider the following factors:

- a. Availability of labor, including farm labor housing;
- b. Availability of farm support services and goods;
- c. Necessary capital improvements (e.g. water storage, fencing, land leveling)
- d. Farm operations, including erosion control, the season(s) and times of pesticide or herbicide usage, manure and waste management;

- e. Water use and availability;
- f. Access to transportation and markets; and
- g. Promoting agricultural production on District-owned land.

In the case of District lands adjacent to agricultural production, the agricultural production plan shall develop site-specific measures to prevent activities on District lands from interfering with adjacent agricultural production.

The development of use and management plans will include consultation with the current owner or operator of any agricultural operations on the land, adjoining landowners, the San Mateo County Environmental Services Agency in addition to other opportunities for public involvement (Reference Mitigation AGR-3h and BI0-3)

Guideline G.3.4: In areas where trails would pass potentially hazardous adjacent land uses (e.g., timber operations), trail structures such as fences, barriers, and signs shall be used to deter trail users from leaving the trail and encountering unsafe conditions. Temporary trail closures shall be employed during intermittent operations, such as agricultural spraying, that would jeopardize the safety of an otherwise safe trail. (Reference: Mitigation LU-1a)

Guideline G.3.5: No new buildings or staging areas shall be located on prime agricultural lands or on Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency. Ranger office/maintenance facilities and staging areas may not be located on prime agricultural lands or on Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-1a)

Guideline G.3.6: Trails and habitat preservation areas shall either be located to avoid prime agricultural lands and Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency or traverse such lands in a manner that does not result in interference with agricultural activities or substantially reduce the agricultural potential of those lands. Owners and operators of agricultural lands shall be consulted to identify appropriate routes on those lands. The agricultural activities and the agricultural potential of traversed lands shall be protected and buffered from trail user impacts by means of distance, physical barriers (i.e., sturdy fences), or other non-disruptive methods. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-1b)

Guideline G.3.7: The District shall provide private property signs where appropriate and provide trail users information regarding private property rights to minimize public/private use conflicts and trespassing. The District shall clearly sign trails adjacent to active agriculture and provide trail users with information regarding property rights to minimize trespassing and conflicts with agricultural users. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3b)

Guideline G.3.8: Trails shall either be located to avoid prime agricultural lands and Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency or traverse such lands in a manner that does not result in interference with agricultural activities or substantially reduce the agricultural potential of those lands. Operators of active agricultural activities on lands owned by or under easement to the District shall be consulted to identify appropriate routes on lands they cultivate. Owners and operators of agricultural lands adjacent to District lands used for non-agricultural purposes shall be consulted to identify routes that will avoid adverse effects on agricultural operations. The agricultural activities and the agricultural potential of traversed lands shall be protected and buffered from trail user impacts by means of distance, physical barriers (i.e., sturdy fences), or other non-disruptive methods. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3c)

Guideline G.3.9: The District lands or easements upon which trails are sited shall provide width sufficient for management and/or buffer space from adjacent uses so as not to preclude the viability of those uses. Buffers established to separate recreation and other open space uses from agricultural operations shall be designed and managed in accordance with the following standards:

- a. Buffers shall be designed in relation to the nature of the adjoining land use, potential land uses, and proposed public access;
- b. Buffers shall be designed in relation to the topography and other physical characteristics of the buffer area;
- c. Buffers shall be designed with consideration of biological, soil, and other site conditions in order to limit the potential spread of non-native invasive species or pathogens onto agricultural lands;
- d. Buffers shall be of sufficient width to allow agricultural use of adjoining agricultural lands including application of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals taking into account the likelihood and extent of potential pesticide drift;
- e. All lands used for buffers should be on land or interests in land owned by the District; adjoining landowners shall not be required to provide land for buffers.
- f. The District shall be responsible for the management and maintenance of all lands used as buffers.
- g. If a specific buffer fails to resolve conflicts between a recreational use and adjacent agricultural uses the recreational use shall be moved to a different location.
- h. All buffers shall be developed in consultation with the owners and operators of adjoining agricultural lands

(Reference: Mitigation AGR-3d)

Guideline G.3.10: Where pesticides are used, including pesticides for control of noxious weeds, they must be handled, applied, and disposed of in such a manner that they do not adversely affect adjacent agriculture including organic agriculture. Pesticide use shall be guided by label restrictions and any advisories published by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR) or the County Agricultural Commission. These chemicals shall only be applied by a person who is properly trained in their application. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3e)

Implementation Action G.3.A(i): In acquiring lands and preparing site assessments, the District shall recognize that agriculture in the marketplace is dynamic and that agricultural use practices must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, relative to current marketplace conditions. On a case-by-case basis, the District shall determine how best to continue agricultural uses consistent with protection of rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species and their habitat.

See also Guideline G.6.3

Implementation Action G.3.B(i) The development of agricultural policies, preparation of site assessments and preparation of access plans for low-intensity public recreation by the District affecting prime agricultural lands shall include consultation with local agricultural interests such as the San Mateo County Agricultural Advisory Committee, the Resource Conservation District, and the local Farm Bureau, and will be subject to public review.

See also Guidelines G.6.3

Implementation Action G.3.C(i) Where the District acquires conservation easements on agricultural lands, the District will consider as a term of the easement on a case-by-case basis allowing all agricultural uses permitted by San Mateo County.

Forestry

The intent of the following guidelines is to recognize that the District is not in the commercial forestry business but that in limited circumstances the removal of trees is in the best interest of managing the ecological health and public safety conditions of the site.

Guideline G.4.1: The District shall not propose commercial harvest of timber on District-owned property except in the limited cases described in Guideline G.4.3 below.

Guideline G.4.2: On a case-by-case basis, the District may purchase property or an easement that includes approved timber harvest plans.

Guideline G.4.3: On rare occasions, the District may permit limited tree removal on District-owned property where a timber harvest plan does not previously exist, if such actions are shown to be in the best interest of managing the ecological values, protecting public safety, or controlling disease within the property or watershed. In such cases, the timber may be sold.

Guideline G.4.4: The District shall conduct its land management practices such that they do not have an adverse significant impact on the physical and economic integrity of timberland preserves on or contiguous to properties owned or managed by the District and so that the safety of visitors to District preserves is not compromised by timber harvesting (e.g., establishing appropriate buffers on District lands). (Reference Mitigation AGR-3f)

Resource Management Policies (2021) - Conservation Grazing Management Policy Key Points

- **Policy GM-1** Ensure that conservation grazing is compatible with and supports wildlife and wildlife habitats.
 - Inventory and assess sensitive habitats to identify areas requiring special management practices. The conservation of these areas will take precedence over other uses and management practices that are determined to have an adverse effect on these resources.
 - Prepare site-specific grazing management plans by a certified rangeland manager including best management practices (BMPs) for preserves where grazing will be utilized as a resource management tool. The site-specific grazing management plan will be a component of the agricultural production plan developed through the Use and Management Planning process. The Use and Management Planning process provides for public input and Board approval of site-specific grazing management plans.
 - Manage agricultural leases and easements to protect and enhance riparian areas and to maximize the protection or enhancement of water quality. (See WR-4)
 - Per the District’s long-standing policy of protecting native predators, continue to prohibit the lethal take of predators in response to livestock depredation.

- **Policy GM-2** Provide necessary infrastructure to support and improve grazing management where appropriate.
 - Utilize fencing that allows wildlife movement and fosters habitat connectivity (See WM-3:Measure 3).
 - Manage access to existing water features and where needed supply supplemental drinking water through stock ponds and water troughs to preserve clean water for livestock, protect water quality, and enhance habitat for wildlife.
 - Encourage and assist grazing tenants on District land to provide range improvements to restore or conserve wildland resources and to enhance range condition.
 - Inventory and assess roads and trails on District lands to identify significant erosion and sediment sources – abandon and where feasible restore to a natural condition poorly designed or sited roads (See WR-4).

- **Policy GM-3** Monitor environmental response to grazing on District lands.
 - Monitor forage utilization and distribution by grazing animals to assure appropriate amounts of residual dry matter (RDM) remain on the ground to achieve desired resource management objectives. In the course of RDM monitoring, evaluate and report on wildland fire fuel levels that may result in an increased risk of wildland fire (See WF policies).
 - Monitor livestock use levels and agricultural infrastructure condition to insure conformity with lease provisions to contribute to improved management.

- Monitor wildland conditions with an emphasis on documenting the location, distribution and abundance of native grasses, wildflowers, and other native flora and fauna.
 - Monitor water quality in ponds, wetlands, and watercourses with unrestricted livestock access.
 - Monitor non-native vegetation response to grazing with an emphasis on documenting the location, distribution and abundance of target, invasive species.
 - Use information collected from monitoring to annually review rangeland conditions and response to livestock grazing. Use adaptive resource management decision making framework within grazing management plans.
- **Policy GM-4** Utilize different livestock species to accomplish vegetation management objectives.
 - Research the effective use of cattle, goats, sheep, and horses to manage vegetation on District lands.
 - Utilize appropriate species depending on management needs.
 - **Policy GM-5** Preserve and foster existing and potential conservation grazing operations to help sustain the local agricultural economy.
 - Establish longer term grazing leases to promote financial viability for the operators and efficient land stewardship for the District.
 - Seek grants or other economic support for agricultural infrastructure maintenance and improvements.
 - Ensure site-specific grazing management plans are economically feasible and practical for conservation grazing operators.
 - **Policy GM-6** Provide information to the public about the region's rural agricultural heritage. (See PI-1)
 - Install display boards and give presentations highlighting historical and educational facts about ranching families and industry at appropriate sites.
 - **Policy GM-7** Provide public access in a manner that minimizes impacts on the conservation grazing operation. (See PI-1)
 - Conservation Grazing operators on District lands or lands under easement to the District shall be consulted when public access is being planned and considered for the property to minimize conflicts between the public and the conservation grazing operation.
 - Prepare and distribute a brochure to educate visitors about etiquette for use of open space property with livestock animals.
 - Install signage where appropriate to educate the public about the resource benefits of conservation grazing and to educate visitors about approaching animals, closing gates, and other etiquette appropriate for moving through lands with livestock animals.

- **Policy GM-8** Conservation Grazing operations on District lands in San Mateo County will be managed in accordance with the policies established in the Service Plan for the San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area.
 - Consult with appropriate agencies and interest groups, including the San Mateo County Farm Bureau and San Mateo County Agricultural Advisory Committee in the development of site-specific Use and Management plans and agricultural production plan components in the Coastside Protection Area.
- **Policy GM-9** Safeguard native plants and wildlife while promoting the economic sustainability of conservation cattle grazing as a resource management tool and reducing predation of livestock.
 - Consider the economic impact of predation in setting lease rates for conservation grazing tenants.
 - Provide economic relief for conservation grazing tenants who, as required per conditions of a Board of Directors approved lease, are performing resource management services and are in good standing with the District, in response to confirmed cattle losses from predation to sustain conservation grazing as a viable tool for natural resource management. Require cattle grazing tenants to document annual livestock losses due to both predation and non-predation-related causes.
 - Support and promote scientific research on the effectiveness of wildlife and livestock protection methods, and their influence on wildlife behavior, grazing productivity, and livestock health. Periodically review research results and consider findings in future policy development.

Resource Management Policies (2021) – Integrated Pest Management Policy Key Points

Policy IPM-1 Develop specific pest management strategies and priorities that address each of the five work categories.

- Manage pests in rangelands and on agricultural properties to support existing uses, while also protecting human health and surrounding natural resources.

Policy IPM-2 Take appropriate actions to prevent the introduction of new pest species to District preserves, especially new invasive plants in natural areas, rangelands, and agricultural properties.

Housing Policy (2017)

- 2. Agricultural.
 - a. Agricultural Lease Holder. District housing offered for agricultural lease holder will either be negotiated in conjunction with an agricultural lease or be market rate.
 - b. Agricultural Labor. District housing offered for agricultural labor is generally governed by a District lease or license. Agricultural housing rents and associated discounts are negotiated on a case-by-case basis and brought to

the Board consistent with the policy regarding *Improvements on District Lands* (Policy 4.02). If District housing is made available to agricultural labor outside of a District Lease or License, the agricultural labor tenant is required to work for a District agricultural tenant on District Lands. Rent will either be negotiated in the agricultural lease, market rate, or an affordable housing rate.

- 2. Agricultural. The selection of agricultural residential sites shall be based on their proximity to the District agricultural leases on District Lands. Due to the need for an on-site presence for some agricultural lands, this use may take priority over employees that provide direct services in some cases.

Improvements on District Lands (2017)

- C (1) As the District acquires agricultural properties, housing is needed for agricultural lease holders and their agricultural workers. Residences on District agricultural properties should be evaluated as potential housing for agricultural labor.
- C (3) Improvements which Contribute to the Character of the Site:
(e.g., Buildings with Unique Historical or Architectural merit, Barns, Sheds and Fences)
Some structures associated with agriculture or other former uses of the site can contribute significantly to the site without detracting from its open space character. When economically feasible within the constraints of the land management budget, examples of these structures will be retained, maintained, and when possible put to use.
- C (4) Improvements for Agriculture and Other Special Uses:
Agricultural use which is consistent with the open space use of a site is encouraged by the District. Improvements for agriculture or other special uses will be retained or constructed as approved by the Board and stated in the site planning documents. In the Coastside Protection Area; leases, use, and improvements shall be consistent with the District's Service Plan Policies

Integrated Pest Management Program Guidance Manual (2014)

9 IPM FOR RANGELANDS AND AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES

9.1 DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

Some District lands encompass rangelands, crop fields, and orchards that are actively managed as grazing or agricultural operations. Rangeland and agriculture activities on District preserves are primarily managed by lessees who typically operate under a Rangeland Management Plan or Agricultural Management Plan that is attached to their lease. These site-specific management plans guide the rangeland and agricultural activities to ensure compatibility with natural resource protection and low-intensity public recreation. This IPMP does not replace the requirements of the individual range or agricultural management plans, nor does it present the full range of

agricultural or range management options. Rather, it seeks to provide staff with tools that are consistent with IPM principles to select the safest, least harmful, and most effective treatment options for rangeland and agricultural pests.

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