

# Envisioning the Road Ahead: POST's New Strategic Plan

August 29, 2022



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We took much of the last year to step back, reflect, listen and plan for the years ahead by completing a new strategic plan. Using external facilitators, we interviewed over 40 local conservation-based partners, developed a [State of Conservation Report](#) that set the contextual backdrop for envisioning our future and held multiple brainstorming sessions with our staff and Board.

## WHY NOW?

The last time we held a large planning process was about seven years ago and it resulted in the four-program focus we have today: redwoods, wildlife linkages, public access and farmland. It also identified the protection of Coyote Valley as a critical landscape for our regional long-term environmental health.

At the same time, POST helped draft the [California Council of Land Trust's California Horizon Report](#) which outlined the need for conservation organizations like POST to diversify our staff, Board and community connections. In fact, it challenged us to recognize that humans are a part of nature — that our social and ecological systems are all part of the same, socio-ecological network.

The experiences we have all shared over the last three years have also served to boldly underscore the need for POST to approach our work more holistically. This, combined with our approaching 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2027, has inspired us to think audaciously about what we do, how we do it, and how we can better measure the benefits to the communities we serve.

## STAYING TRUE TO OUR PURPOSE

### **Mission**

*POST protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay for the benefit of all.*

### **Vision**

*We're creating a network of protected lands where people and nature connect and thrive. These*

*lands are preserved forever so present and future generations benefit from the careful balance of rural and urban landscapes that makes our region extraordinary.*

These are — and will continue to be — POST’s purpose and vision. Our strategic planning process examined *how* to best implement these foundational intentions going forward.



It’s gratifying that our mission and vision have served us well over the last 45+ years resulting in a protected land base of 30% of our operating area. In fact, it put us in a position of leadership when it comes to the [30×30 initiatives](#). We now have governmental policy validation that our work is vital, and with it the promise of governmental support and funding to achieve our goals.

## Addressing Imperiled Biodiversity & Climate Change

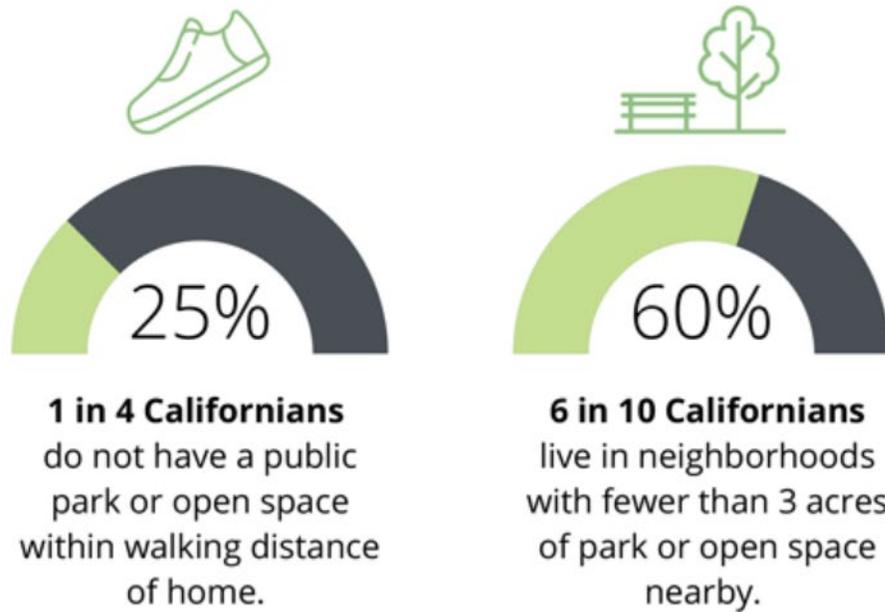
The Bay Area is one of the most [biodiverse regions](#) in the world (in the top 25!) making the work we do of global importance. But climate change poses a threat to our local lands and wildlife. Our efforts to protect biodiversity can be the greatest gift we give to future generations as they struggle with all of the impacts of climate change.

Recent years have dramatically reset the context for our work. Many of us will never forget 2020’s [CZU Lightning Complex fire](#), which burned over 80,000 acres right in the heart of POST’s working area. That fire emphasized the importance of land acquisition and increased stewardship and restoration in order to build regional climate change resilience through protected biodiversity.

Where biodiversity thrives, the land and species of all types can better adapt to climate change. And if we act now, we can help turn hopelessness into something positive.

## Advancing Equitable Access to the Outdoors

Just as healthy biodiversity is intertwined with climate resilience, so too is the need for everyone to have access to the benefits of the outdoors. According to [California's Outdoor for All initiative](#), in California, one in four people lack a public park or open space within walking distance of their home, and six in 10 live in neighborhoods with fewer than three acres of park or open space.



Source: [California Outdoor for All Initiative](#)

While our origin story lies with the environmental movement of the 1970s, our future lies with those who have been historically underrepresented like the low-income, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disabled and non-native English-speaking communities. Since 64% of the nine-county Bay Area is Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), the future of land conservation depends on maintaining the strong support of the vast majority of our people.

Outdoor for All advances California's vision of a prosperous and equitable state by investing in access-related infrastructure and programs in underserved communities. It is complemented by the state's 30×30 Initiative to protect 30% of our lands and waters by 2030. Together, these two programs will work to make the benefits of protected open spaces available to all, equitably. The time is now for us to do the same.

To thrive in the future, we must expand and deepen connections to communities we have not reached yet and garner the support of all people in our region. To do this we will further increase our efforts to cultivate and expand our audience of donors, volunteers, and conservation champions.

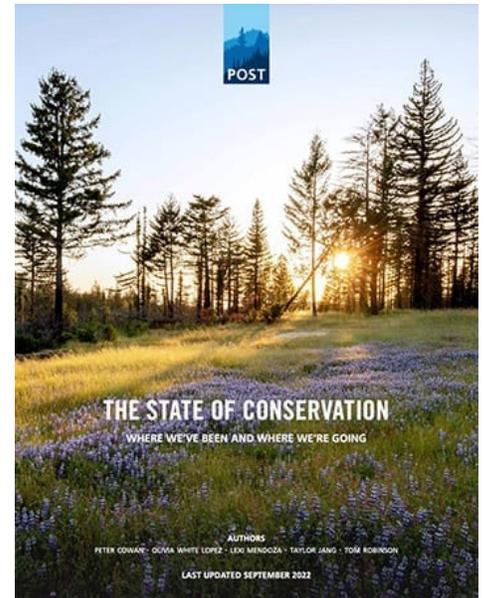
# Our Planning Process

## Step One – Define the Context

To figure out where we want to go, we first had to analyze where we were — making two important strides that set the context for our strategic plan. First, POST staff researched and wrote the [State of Conservation Report](#) — an analysis that fully understands the conservation “lay of the land.” The report recognizes the critical themes of biodiversity, climate and socio-ecological systems, as well as the regional leadership needed to address them.

Here are some of the highlights:

- Expanding stewardship to ecologically relevant scales, such as full watersheds and landscape-scale linkages, using our ability to work across jurisdictional and ownership boundaries.
- Addressing the threats of climate change by demonstrating leadership on restoration projects throughout our area, especially those associated with forest health and associated wildfire risk.
- Transitioning toward a socio-ecological — or “people and nature” — approach to our regional work in recognition of the interconnectedness of our natural and social worlds.
- Improving ecosystem health in order to withstand climate change disturbances and meet the needs of our increasingly urban communities.



Second, we comprehensively surveyed our partners to better understand their views on POST’s strengths and weaknesses and where we might provide regional leadership. We interviewed 48 different organizations ranging from emerging tribal land trusts to large organizations like the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The feedback was invaluable with many partners grappling with similar challenges and expressing appreciation for POST’s strengths, contributions, and the opportunity to provide feedback.

## Step Two – Face the Code Red Moment

All of our research, analysis and dialogue led us to acknowledge that we’re living in an era of heightened alertness, with an imminent need to prepare and safeguard our landscapes and communities. We came up with what we called a “code red” list of assumptions, and here they are:

- The realities of climate, biodiversity and equity are intertwined and trending badly.
- There are huge opportunities for landscape-level planning.
- The region is looking for leadership, and we are positioned to help.

- There is a growing awareness of who is most impacted.
- Governmental attention is high — as illustrated through plans like the [30×30 initiative](#) — which will help elevate our shared work and offer resources.
- We can help turn hopelessness into collective, positive change.

### Step Three – Moving Ahead

After many working sessions and deep conversations about our future, we determined that we must center climate change resilience, biodiversity and equity at the core of everything we do. We elaborate on these values below.



### PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY

We will protect, restore, steward and functionally connect a mosaic of habitats and land uses across our region that preserve our unique biodiversity.



### BUILD CLIMATE RESILIENCE

We will implement land protection and management strategies that build adaptive capacity and resilience to climate change impacts—including drought, fire and increased temperatures.



## CREATE EQUITABLE ACCESS

We will nurture sustainable long-term connections between people and nature, addressing current inequities by centering underserved and historically excluded communities in our work.

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With the financial strength of our supporter community, our expertise, and our ability to leverage a regional network of conservation talent – we believe we can execute these audacious priorities.

### Step Four – Accept What's Working and Where to Evolve

POST has been successful in protecting the landscapes of our region for over 45 years — and that's not changing.

- We'll continue to acquire, steward and restore lands, working with partners to ensure the best possible outcome.
- Our key [redwoods](#), [public access](#), [wildlife linkages](#) and [farmland](#) programs remain. And, we'll take a fresh look at each program to make sure they align with our strategic plan priorities.
- We will continue our leadership in [Coyote Valley](#). This involves ongoing land protection, wildlife connectivity infrastructure, supporting the [Santa Clara County Open Space Authority](#)'s planning process for the valley's future, and leading the creation of a credits program as a long-term funding source.



In the days ahead, POST will increase:

**Our investment in habitat restoration and long-term stewardship and management with a regional perspective.** To do so, we will: convene and collaborate with partners more often; lead project planning and implementation when appropriate; share science and project learnings; provide or help to secure funding; and lead in public engagement and policy development.

**Work that actively connects the Santa Cruz Mountains to the rest of the state.** This is essential to the long-term viability of local land protection which relies on the genetic flow of species across the land as climate changes. This means we will increase our focus on the linkage areas that lie further south of Coyote Valley.

**A focus on our Redwoods Program.** This includes restoration projects, fuel management and returning lands to historical fire intervals via cultural and prescribed burning. This involves on-the-ground projects on our [San Vicente Redwoods](#) property, as well as regional activities promoting management practices that protect biodiversity and foster climate resilience. These management practices will extend to working lands, including farmland, grazing land, and working forests to protect watershed health and groundwater recharge; and planning for ecologically sensitive recreation.

**Our work to improve and create spaces for people to connect with nature closer to urban areas.** We will identify projects that *specifically* increase [equitable public access](#), and we'll directly engage with local Indigenous and BIPOC-serving organizations more. To do so, we'll foster a participatory public by listening and learning from communities, establishing more practices that engage communities, and by increasingly our dialogue with diverse audiences through our marketing and fundraising efforts.

**Our regional leadership on the 30×30 vision.** The State and Federal goals to protect 30% of lands and waters by the year 2030 (30×30) align well with both our past and future work. We have an exciting opportunity to lead regionally on this 30×30 vision with a caveat: we want 50% of our local lands protected — some of the most biodiverse in the nation — restored and functionally connected for long-term ecosystem health.

## The Road Ahead

As POST welcomed a new fiscal year on July 1st, we considered how to journey down this somewhat uncharted trail. We identified a variety of projects that include further research, exploration, collaborations and assessment. We plan to take the care we need to move thoughtfully, intentionally and boldly.

As you can tell from this piece, POST is not afraid to think big. We know that fighting for local biodiversity, helping to build climate resilience for our communities, and expanding our community of support are enormous undertakings. But in true POST fashion, we will start, one day at a time to move ahead. We are grateful to have our community by our side, and I

encourage you, if you have any questions about what I have presented here, to [please reach out](#) to anyone on the POST staff. We look forward to a newly imagined future with you.

## About POST

Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay for the benefit of all. Since its founding in 1977, POST has been responsible for saving more than 80,000 acres as permanently protected land in San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties. [Learn more](#)