

wildlife and encourage agricultural use of land resources, the ecological function of coastal lands is also preserved. Numerous District-owned agricultural lands outside the Coastal Protection Area are similarly leased to various agricultural operators.

Although the majority of the District's agricultural acreage is in grazing (ranching), the District leases out 130 acres of row crops, vineyards, Christmas tree farms, and orchards to farmers. On the coastside, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, the District offers a lease option to tenants/farmers who are conducting agricultural uses on newly acquired coastal lands until the property is sold or a request for proposals for a long-term lease is solicited and a new lease awarded.

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

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

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

San Mateo County has a diverse assemblage of agricultural production crops that includes indoor (greenhouse 72 acres) and outdoor (420 acres) grown floral and nursery products (the largest economic sector 60%), vegetables, fruits and nuts (1,272 acres, livestock and apiary products and field crops (27,338 acres including 26,258 acres of pasture). [2022 San Mateo County Agricultural Report] Listed in the report but not covered in this policy are forest products, fish catch and cannabis.

Rural character is difficult to define but the coastal service plan describes what needs protection. "The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board of Directors agrees the agricultural and open space resources along approximately 40 miles of the San Mateo County coast are of national significance and deserve the highest level of stewardship possible. Through these Agricultural Policies, the District endeavors to expand its central mission of natural protection to include agricultural practices that protect the land, its rural agriculture landscapes and way of life.

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

AGRICULTURAL GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Approved by the District Board of Directors in 2003 and by the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission in 2004, the Coastal Service Plan established the District’s mission of agricultural conservation in the San Mateo County Coastside region as well as the entire suite of open space protection and management services the District provides in the coastal protection area.

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

Policy AG-1 In the Coastside Protection Area, the fee purchase and protection of agricultural lands will focus on properties that also provide benefits for sensitive **habitat** and natural resource values and/or compatible low intensity recreational opportunities. In the coastside protection area, the preservation of significant agricultural lands without significant natural resource or public access benefits access benefits, such as row crops, should be supported through partnerships and led by partners.

- a) Lands that do not have open space, sensitive habitat, or public access values and which clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale, subject to affirmative agricultural and/or **conservation easements**, while other

agricultural lands, typically rangelands, will generally be offered for lease. (Service Plan³ PA.1)

- b) Offer for sale or lease the maximum amount of productive agricultural land to farmers/ranchers who will actively operate agricultural uses on the land subject to the protection of habitat values and current or planned recreational uses. (Service Plan PA.1)
- c) Focus on purchasing in fee and managing rangelands in perpetuity.
- d) In the coastside protection area, work in partnership with organizations like Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to prevent the conversion or loss of agricultural lands and their natural resource values through funding contributions with the ultimate goal of transferring these lands to private farmers subject to land protections such as agricultural conservation easements.
- e) To the extent practical and if aligned with District policies, keep agricultural uses within the same or contiguous properties together when the agricultural uses are run by the same operator.
- f) When applicable and appropriate, structure agricultural conservation easements to protect the environmental quality, **historic** significance, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and/or open space values of agricultural lands.

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

- a) Evaluate the compatibility of low-intensity public access on District-owned agricultural lands to facilitate access and trail connections. (Service Plan PA.3)

*Ensuring compatibility of low-intensity recreation with agricultural activities is a strong focus for the District's management of agricultural open space lands. District public access facilities are typically limited to parking and hiking, bicycling, equestrian trails and limited dog access. Design guidelines consider and minimize the **potential impacts** of trail use to agricultural operations.*

³ [San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area \(CAA\) Service Plan](#)

Conservation grazing differs from conventional grazing by considering and minimizing the negative impacts to natural resources and utilizing grazing activity to enhance natural resources. The specific policies defining how the District manages open space through conservation grazing principles are described in the District's Resource Management Policies, Conservation Grazing Management chapter (Chapter XI).

- b) Work closely with agricultural tenants to identify appropriate levels of public access through or adjacent to agricultural lands, and the infrastructure, signage, setbacks, buffers, and other measures that improve compatibility and minimize/avoid potential recreational impacts to agricultural uses and vice versa.
- c) Solicit input from landowners, farmers, ranchers and other operators of adjacent agricultural lands to inform the development of use and management plans for District lands. (Service Plan Guidelines G.3.8 and G.6.3)
- d) Locate trails, trailhead access points, parking and other visitor-serving facilities on District lands in harmony with the surrounding agricultural uses, where the siting of facilities and buffers in the coastal protection area are consistent with the Coastal Service Plan and EIR mitigation measures, while complying with current regulatory requirements. (Service Plan Guideline G.3.9)
- e) Solicit input from other local public agencies, conservation organizations, non-profit entities, and community groups to inform the placement of public trails and other low-intensity public access facilities that traverse or are located adjacent to agricultural lands. (Service Plan Guideline G.8)
- f) Implement temporary closures of specific trails that are located on agricultural lands to facilitate intermittent agricultural activities and protect visitor safety, as may be necessary (e.g., calving season, transportation of livestock, crop harvest, chemical applications, etc.). (Service Plan Guideline G.3.4)

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

- a) Consider opportunities to partner with and support local organizations that provide affordable regional agricultural workforce housing when such partnerships help further District goals.
- b) Consider partnerships to develop and manage agricultural workforce housing on District lands in appropriate locations that

do not conflict with natural resource protection and/or ecologically sensitive public access goals. In general, open space lands do not provide sustainable housing development locations and new housing would be limited to specific circumstances in disturbed areas with existing infrastructure.

- c) Prioritize the leasing of District residences that are needed to support an agricultural operation located on District lands to the grazing operator/lessee or farm/ranch worker who is actively farming or grazing on the land unless otherwise essential for operational needs as District employee housing. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy⁴)
- d) Farm Worker Housing- Provide discounted rates for District housing that is occupied by a non-lease holding farm/ranch employee/s who supports an agricultural operation on District land.
- e) Agricultural Operator (Lease Holder) Housing- Rent District housing at prevailing rental market rates for lease holders. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy)

***Agricultural infrastructure** is critical to sustainable and environmentally responsible agricultural production and land management. Water infrastructure and supply is a critical limiting factor, fencing is essential, and structures such as corrals and barns are necessary. Historically, the high cost of constructing and maintaining these facilities, led to an under investment in infrastructure. Upgrading infrastructure for current use often benefits both the agricultural business and the natural resources through efficiency improvements and reduced footprint.*

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

Identify future investments in fencing infrastructure on District agricultural lands to establish property boundaries and protect natural resources and neighboring lands. (Resource Management Policies⁵ CGM-2, CGM-5)

- a) Develop water infrastructure to support agricultural operations that also maintains and protects natural resources. (Resource Management Policies CGM-2)

⁴ [Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy](#)

⁵ [Resource Management Policies](#)

Tenant-in-good-standing is an assessment of how well a tenant complies with lease terms and specified land management objectives laid out in rangeland management plans or agriculture production plans.

- b) Improve water supply, efficiency, and resiliency to drought for District-owned residences on agricultural lands. (Resource Management Policies WR-5)
- c) Work with tenants to maintain or improve agricultural structures such as barns and corrals.
- d) Allow tenant-funded infrastructure improvements that support **intensive agriculture** if they do not have significant impacts on natural resources, rural character or public access.
- e) Prioritize investment in water infrastructure with direct natural resource benefit, such as distributing water to improve grazing management and livestock rotation in grassland habitats, investing in water storage to reduce in-stream water use, and improving or creating stock ponds that also provide critical habitat.

Policy AG-5 Structure agricultural leases to accomplish land management objectives and establish leases that promote conservation goals balanced with economically viable agricultural uses.

- a) In the coastside protection area, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, after the purchase of active agricultural lands, the land shall be subject to continued use by the existing agricultural operator until such time as the District either sells the property or issues a request for proposals and awards a new long-term agricultural lease. (Service Plan PA.1)
- b) After the acquisition of a property and the development of an agriculture production plan or rangeland management plan, solicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease for agricultural lands.
- c) At the end of a lease, resolicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease.

- d) Long term leases shall be structured with periodic options to allow renewal or ending the lease and provisions for terminating leases for poor performance or violations of lease terms.
- e) Enter into agricultural leases with term durations that support the financial viability of agricultural operations so as to promote tenant investments that are beneficial for the land and the agricultural production; the lease term length should be based on the type of agricultural operation. (Resource Management Policies CGM-5)
- f) Work with local organizations to ensure that agricultural lease opportunities are well publicized, including to new/early-career producers and agricultural workers.
- g) When soliciting for new agricultural tenants, include selection criteria pertaining to local preference, Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI), tenant in-good-standing, and environmental sustainability as well as the ability to manage and operate the agricultural operation.
- h) When awarding leases, the District shall factor in the performance of existing/prior agricultural tenants, including their stewardship practices, implementation of Board-approved resource management plans/actions, accommodation of low intensity public access, and use of sustainability practices in their agricultural operations.
- i) Consider setting aside appropriate leases for the purpose of providing an opportunity for farm workers and communities that have not typically had opportunities to lease and operate agricultural operations.

Agritourism links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors to the San Mateo County Coastside and/or individual agricultural properties in the region. Examples are local sales of agricultural products on site or through farmers markets, u-pick sites, and fairs or festivals celebrating agriculture such as the pumpkin festival.

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

The District manages its water resources for ecological biological, and agricultural uses. Climate change impacts and increased consumptive uses will strain supplies, and careful management will be needed to meet the competing needs of agriculture and wildlife during drought conditions. Agricultural management prescriptions such as stocking rates on grazed lands are variable dependent on seasonal rainfall. In addition, investment in off-stream storage or utilization of wells and springs rather than stream diversions can enhance fish and wildlife habitat viability by reducing impacts on in-stream water flow in the summer.

education opportunities that raise awareness of environmental benefits related to agricultural land protection and management.

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

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

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

- a) Manage agricultural leases and easements to optimize the protection and **enhancement** of riparian areas, water quality, and quantity of water available for natural resources. (Resource Management Policies WR-2).

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

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

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

Farmers utilize many different agricultural practices when deciding how to produce crops. Regenerative agriculture is one approach that has been adopted by several ranchers and farmers on the coastside, which is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems that has many practices consistent with the District's land management mission. Through these practices, farmers and ranchers focus on the soil ecosystems to increase biodiversity and enhance ecosystem services.

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

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

- a) Support soil health improvement practices and cultivation of climatically appropriate crops on District lands that are also protective of the surrounding natural resources.
- b) Promote practices that enhance carbon storage where these practices are compatible with other natural resource protection.
- c) Offer and/or sponsor educational opportunities for tenant farmers/ranchers and farmworkers/ranch workers regarding sustainable farm and conservation grazing operational practices that are protective of the natural resources.

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

- a) Invest in research of new techniques that improve resource use efficiencies to further expand the protection of natural resources, reduce **non-target** natural resource impacts of agricultural practices, and enhance habitat value on agricultural land.
- b) Support technology advancements and research that improve the environmental sustainability of agricultural management techniques.

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

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

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

Policy AG-12 Implement strategies and actions to further the District's diversity, equity and inclusion ("DEI") goals

Valuing equity, diversity and inclusion is a core District principle that will be practiced and communicated at all levels of the organization. The District's investment in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices encompasses the conservation of agricultural lands and intentionally includes agricultural workers as partners in the work to preserve agricultural lands.

that align with the mission, Board policy, and annual strategic goals and objectives.

- a) Build relationships with community-based organizations that are rooted in and serve the farmworker community.
- b) Incorporate DEI strategies in the solicitation process for agricultural leases.
- c) Provide opportunities to lease District agricultural properties to people who have not traditionally owned or operated ranches and farmlands.
- d) Work with partners to provide training opportunities on (1) environmentally sustainable and resource protective farming and ranching operations and (2) navigating the request for proposals process, both for the purpose of enhancing equitable access to lease opportunities.
- e) Provide non-English translations when appropriate or requested.
- f) Ensure community-based organizations are notified when District leases are up for renewal or when accepting new applications.
- g) Ensure that the broad diversity of agricultural interests have a meaningful opportunity to provide their input in the development of District projects/plans.
- h) Support efforts by Native American tribes to cultivate contemporary and past indigenous ethnobotanical practices and plant uses and reconnect indigenous peoples with cultural land management, natural resource production, and natural stewardship practices.

Policy AG-13 Expand partnerships with local and regional organizations to expand the scale of agricultural land conservation to further protect the surrounding natural resource values.

- a) Cultivate existing partnerships and enter into new partnerships with organizations that support the protection of local agricultural lands to achieve mutual goals and leverage resources.

- b) In the coastside protection area, support partners in efforts to preserve agricultural lands of regional significance through agricultural conservation easements for lands in private ownership and through land trust ownership. (Service Plan PA.3)
- c) Support efforts by partners to implement agriculture sustainability and natural resource conservation projects on private lands that provide a net benefit for the surrounding natural resources. (Service Plan PA.3)

GLOSSARY

Agriculture - encompasses crop and livestock production, aquaculture, and fisheries for food and non-food products.

Agricultural Infrastructure – Improvements made to a property to support an agricultural operation such as fencing, roads, water supply systems and structures.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) – District developed standard practices that identify the preferred manner in which an activity is to be performed in order to be protective of both human health and the environment.

Biodiversity – Describes the natural variety and abundance of plants and animals and the environments in which they live. U.S. Congressional Biodiversity Act, 1990 HR1268, defines biodiversity as “The full range of variety and variability within and among living organisms, and the ecological complexes in which they occur, and encompass ecosystem or community diversity, species diversity and genetic diversity.”

Conservation easement – a voluntary, legal agreement that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. A conservation easement is one option to protect a property for future generations absent of having fee title to that land.

Conservation Grazing - is the intentional use of grazing management to meet resource management objectives including protecting and enhancing habitat for **native** plants and animals that occur in grassland habitat and moderating the negative effects of invasive **exotic** plants on these species.

Ecosystem – An area within the natural environment in which physical (abiotic) factors of the environment, such as rocks and soil,

function together along with interdependent (biotic) organisms, such as plants and animals, within the same habitat.

Enhance – To increase or improve a habitat in value or quality.

Enhancement - the process of altering a habitat to improve one or more specific ecosystem condition(s) and/or function(s).

Environmental Education – A learning process that increases people’s knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action.

Exotic – Species that were not present in the Santa Cruz Mountains region of California prior to the large-scale development of the American continent by European humans prior to 1769.

Habitat – the combination of living and non-living factors that surround and potentially influence an organism, or species’ typical environment.

Historic – Dating from periods post-dating the use of written historical documents. In the American West, the historic period is generally considered to refer to all periods after European exploration and colonization of the region.

Intensive Agriculture - generally refers to maximizing agricultural production on a given area of land with inputs such as labor, fertilizer and machinery. Native plants and animals are typically entirely replaced by row crops, field crops, orchards, or animal production.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – A long-term strategy that specifically reviews alternatives and monitors conditions to effectively control a target pest with minimum impact to human health, the environment, and non-target organisms.

Invasive Species – animal or plant species that take over sufficiently large areas to reduce biodiversity.

Livestock – The horses, cattle, sheep, and other useful animals kept or raised on a farm or ranch.

Native – Those elements of the natural world occurring within an ecosystem prior to disturbance from an outside event.

Natural – Plant, animal, and microorganism life, native materials, and ecosystem processes that make up the physical world.

Non-Target Organisms – those plants and animals that are not intentionally targeted by a pest management strategy in order to spare benign and often beneficial species.

Open Space – Land and water areas that remain in a natural state and are minimally developed and may include compatible agriculture uses.

Pests – Animals or plants that proliferate beyond natural control and interfere with the natural processes which would otherwise occur on open space lands.

Potential impacts - impacts that cannot be ruled out or confirmed definitively until some future assessment is completed or the work is implemented.

Programming – The regularly scheduled organized, topic-specific presentations or other delivery of information, including community outreach, education, interpretation, and docent led activities, or other special events.

Resource Management – Management of both natural and cultural resources. Natural 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. Cultural resource management consists of identifying and evaluating archeological sites and cultural landscapes.

Resources – Plants, animals, water, soil, terrain, geologic formations, historic, scenic, and cultural features.

Restoration – The process of returning land that has been degraded and disturbed into functional habitat.

Riparian – Terrestrial environments adjacent to lakes, streams, springs and estuaries where transported surface and subsurface fresh water provides soil moisture for vegetation.

San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area Service Plan - summarizes the services provided by the District and the policies that apply to District activities in the Coastal Annexation Area, which encompasses the lands of coastal San Mateo County generally defined as follows:

- on the east by the existing District boundary and San Francisco **watershed** lands
- on the west by the Pacific Ocean
- on the north by the southern boundary of the City of Pacifica
- on the south by the San Mateo County / Santa Cruz County boundary

Soil – Natural material that covers much of the earth's surface; consisting of rock and mineral particles often mixed with organic matter.

Special Status – Species that are state or federally listed as threatened, rare, endangered, species of special concern, candidate species or those plant species listed by the California Native Plant Society.

Water Quality – The chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of water. Important issues related to forest management include water temperature, nutrients, and sediment inputs.

Watershed – A bounded hydrologic system, where all of the precipitation that falls drains into a single water feature, often a creek or stream.

Wildlife Corridors – Avenues along which wide-ranging animals can travel, plants can propagate, genetic interchange can occur, populations can move in response to environmental changes and natural disasters, and threatened species can be replenished from other areas.