

Section

9



Open Space and Conservation

Open Space and Conservation

GOAL OC-1

Maintain and enhance the area's natural resources by balancing protection, conservation, replenishment and sustainable use.

GOAL OC-2

Conserve open space, hillsides, and indigenous habitats for the enjoyment of future generations.

GOAL OC-3

Preserve and enhance agricultural areas to protect the economic vitality and rural identity of the Ukiah Valley.

Development in the inland portion of Mendocino County is generally concentrated into nodes surrounded by open space and agriculture. This development pattern contributes to the rural "small town" character of the Ukiah Valley. Preserving this character is essential to the community vision for the future and is reflected in the goals and policies of this chapter. Setting the appropriate limits and guidelines for future development within the UVAP planning area will better protect the resources that make this area unique.

Ukiah Valley residents are proud of their rich and diverse environmental setting. Rivers, creeks, hills, valleys and farmland create a striking landscape which is home to a wide variety of plants and animals. These natural gifts form a distinctive city/urban backdrop and help maintain the overall quality of life for all to enjoy. Unlike many other developed areas throughout California, a significant portion of the Ukiah Valley's environmental character and diversity remains. By making careful choices in the location and scope of future development, the open space resources discussed in this section can be protected or enhanced.



The Russian River system, along with the forested hillsides, oak woodlands and cultivated agricultural lands, create a vast system of open spaces and natural resources in the Ukiah Valley. Combined they provide habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna, cleanse and transport our water, and support a vibrant resource-based economy. Natural resource issues covered in this section include riparian ecosystems, biological habitats, and agricultural resources.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

The Russian River and Its Tributaries

One of the greatest natural assets in the Ukiah Valley is the interconnected system of waterways and riparian areas that comprise the Russian River system. These corridors are an essential part of the Ukiah Valley's environmental and cultural landscape. The river and its tributaries support a diverse riparian plant community and provide habitat corridors for wildlife and fish. The Russian River provides for recreational use, groundwater recharge, and domestic and agricultural water supplies. Additionally, the watershed is a spiritual and aesthetic asset to valley residents.

The area's many creeks provide sheltered corridors that allow wildlife to move between habitats and open space areas. To help preserve natural communities, it is important to protect, improve and where appropriate and feasible, protect and re-establish these corridors.

Riparian Plant Community

The tree and shrub community which commonly grows along the Russian River and its tributaries is referred to as the riparian woodland or riparian forest. The tree canopy is commonly composed of cottonwood, alder, willow and valley oak, and naturally occurs with an associated shrub layer containing box elder, button willow, blackberry, wild rose, wild grape and coyote bush. This provides necessary shade, keeping water temperatures

Note:

Unless noted otherwise, this Chapter uses the term "open space" to refer to any land or water feature that remains in a predominantly natural or undeveloped state and which is generally free of structures. Open Space lands protect and preserve the community's natural and historical resources, define the urban boundary, and provide visual and physical relief from urban development. These spaces can range in size from a small portion of a parcel to a large tract of land and could include: prime agricultural soils, range and farmland; creeks, marshes, watershed and foodplains; scenic resources; plant and animal habitat; historic and archaeological resources; and passive recreation areas. The Open Space and Conservation Chapter is a tool to protect and preserve these unique community resources.



Portion of the Russian River.

low and improving the valuable fish habitat. Riparian plants growing in the river foodplain enhance soil retention and food flow attenuation. The vegetative buffer also helps to stabilize river banks and maintain water quality by providing a sediment filtering zone to minimize runoff impurities. This plant community also provides essential habitat for numerous birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

The riparian plant life associated with rivers and streams drew Native Americans and other original settlers to the area.



Historic example of Native American basket weaving.

Willows and sedges growing along the stream banks were essential for weaving baskets. Among the Pomo Tribes, basketry evolved into an art form that became world renowned for its beauty, utility, and strength. Contemporary Native Americans still gather basketry materials from the riparian corridors of Mendocino County. Keeping sensitive riparian areas intact is vital to the protection of important cultural and biological resources within the Valley, as well as to the maintenance of water quality and flood control.

Fisheries

The Russian River and its tributaries are home to Chinook salmon and steelhead and other species of fish. The National Marine Fisheries Service has listed both species as “threatened” within the six-county Central California Environmentally Significant Unit. Several groups and individuals have worked collaboratively over

the years on strategies to protect these species and their habitats. In the interim, the County’s Salmon and Steelhead Management Plan, in conjunction with California Environmental Quality Act review, is the guiding document for assessing project impacts on fisheries.

The Russian River, as it runs through the Ukiah Valley, is essential to threatened salmon and steelhead species. A goal of State and Federal significance is to protect and enhance the unique fisheries in the Russian River and its tributaries.

Riverbed

The Russian River’s historic course has shifted over time due to major floods, nearby human activities, and other natural processes. Mining and associated processing in and along the Russian River creates impacts related to the depth of the riverbed, disruption of river flows, and shifts in the banks or course of the channel. These changes can be detrimental to flood protection and water supply. In some areas agricultural development has led to removal of riparian vegetation on the river bank. This has led to bank erosion and increased sedimentation of the riverbed. In other areas, residential development has increased runoff which can amplify the erosive power of the stream.

Flooding, mining, development and other nearby human activities can change the depth of the river and degrade the condition of the river banks. These impacts can be detrimental not only to habitat, but also to flood protection, ground water recharge and domestic and agricultural water supply. Establish a minimum vital riverbed elevation above mean sea level within the Ukiah Valley in cooperation with property owners, the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District, trustee agencies and other responsible agencies.



Mineral processing adjacent to the Russian River.

Development Impacts

Development patterns within the Valley, particularly within the more urbanized portions, have resulted in increased paved or impermeable surfaces and the channelization of streams and creeks. These activities disrupt natural drainage patterns, and can result in increased flooding and deterioration or destruction of natural riparian habitats and fisheries. There is a need to provide mitigation that will balance development with resource protection and enhancement of the critical functions that the Russian River and its tributaries provide.

Development should preserve open lands that absorb water to the maximum extent possible. Natural resources such as wetlands, food plains, recharge zones, riparian areas, open space, and native habitats should be identified, preserved, and restored as

valued assets for food protection, water quality improvement, groundwater recharge, habitat, and overall long-term water resource sustainability.

A Riparian System Management Plan will help achieve a healthy balance to both accommodate development in a responsible way, and protect river resources. A Riparian System Management Plan will assess river conditions, identify critical segments of the riparian plant community for preservation and restoration, and propose strategies for maintenance. With participation from key agencies, performance standards, stream setbacks, and design guidelines can be developed for projects proposed within the defined river corridor planning area.

Land use and development codes can protect natural resources while providing opportunities for compatible development. Codes can support open space and conservation goals by requiring open space as part of new discretionary development, and concentrating development in strategic areas. Hillside views can be preserved by allowing transfer of development rights. Design review guidelines and performance standards will aid in identification of projects appropriate for these actions and ensure responsible, non-damaging construction practices.

Mining

Naturally occurring minerals in the planning area have or could have economic value to the local economy and the owners of the mineral rights. The most frequently mined products are sand, gravel, and stone which are used in construction. State guidelines and rules under the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) aim for continued accessibility to mineral resources while avoiding significant harm to the environment or human health from their extraction.



For decades, instream mining operations occurred in a number of locations along the Russian River, resulting in significant changes to channel elevation, configuration and vegetation. These changes negatively impacted the aquatic habitat that salmonid species depend on for their annual migration. These changes also alter water tables and erode bridge supports, adding significant expense to the operations of both water providers and road agencies.

Granite Construction continues to hold vested mining rights to multiple sand bars in the Ukiah Reach of the Russian River. Due to the listing of Pacific Salmonids under the Endangered Species Act, mining activity has declined to the point where extraction

does not occur in most years. It is highly unlikely that any new instream mining operations will commence in the future. Apart from the Russian River Channel, Granite also holds a permit for a pair of off channel terrace mines one mile north of Talmage Road. These sites are located within the floodplain and are substantially depleted. To replace these sites, Granite has submitted an application for a use permit for a new mining operation at the Kunzler Terrace site, located due east of the former railroad tracks, just south of Ackerman Creek. If approved, this operation would excavate up to 250,000 tons of alluvial matter from the flood plain west of the Russian River. No other active mining operations exist or have been proposed, as of 2010, in the Ukiah Valley. The nearest mines to the UVAP area are a pair of quarries along U.S. 101 and CA 20, north and east of the Valley respectively.

Upland Areas

The hilly portions of the planning area vegetated primarily with native species of trees, shrubs, as well as native and non-native grasses and herbaceous plants, that rely on particular topographic and microclimatic conditions, such as slope steepness and orientation, and the presence of water. Because of this, the Valley's hillsides play an especially important role in supporting diverse biological communities. Ukiah Valley's eastern hills support an extensive and nearly contiguous oak woodland habitat. The afternoon sun exposure in conjunction with drainage channels and small canyons create prime conditions for oak woodland habitat. In addition to the biological diversity they provide, the western and eastern hills frame the Valley, creating an aesthetic resource for residents and visitors. Many developed portions of the Valley enjoy sweeping views of open space and the hillsides, adding character and economic value to property throughout the Valley.

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Biological Communities

“Biological Communities” refers to the web of organisms, other than people, that live in an area. Many of the physical requirements for natural communities are provided through open space areas. Healthy plant communities, and the wildlife and fish that they sustain, are essential to the quality of life in the Ukiah Valley. Fertile and stable soils are critical to agriculture and forestry, and indirectly, to all other economic activities in the county. Vegetation, both living and dormant, protects the soils and decrease the rate of erosion. Healthy plant communities help to filter stormwater contaminants and limit the severity of flooding through flow attenuation.

Indigenous plant species provide particularly important functions to the community. They are best suited to the local climate and soil conditions and tend to be drought-tolerant and often have greater pest and disease resistance. Some native species are also fire resistant. In addition, native plants support valuable fish and wildlife habitat. Conversely, certain non-native plants can be detrimental to the local ecology and economy. Some proliferate rapidly and can displace native plants or economically important species, consume groundwater at higher rates than native species, and increase fire danger. Thus it is important to prevent native species from displacing native species and preserve native biological communities.

Land use decisions should balance development with preservation of the Valley’s dominant native plant communities, including the mixed evergreen forest, grasslands, and oak woodlands. These diverse communities promote soil development and slope stability and support a wide variety of wildlife. Steps should be taken to protect, restore, and enhance these native plants systems and to prevent the spread of non-native invasive species.

Today, the Ukiah Valley supports four dominant plant communities: oak woodlands, mixed evergreen forest, non-native grasslands, and agricultural lands.

Oak Woodlands

Oak woodlands are one of the most diverse and productive habitats, supporting many species of amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds and insects. Due to climate and geography, the Ukiah Valley supports a rich diversity of oak communities. As reported by the Department of Fish and Game, oak forests and woodlands support more diverse wildlife species than any other California habitat. Migratory avian species, including the Black-headed Grosbeak, the Lazuli Bunting, the Northern Oriole, and the Orange-crowned Warbler, visit oak woodlands from their Central and South American



winter grounds to nest and raise their young during the summer breeding season. Species such as the Rufous-sided Towhee, crown sparrows, western bluebirds, and meadowlarks live in oak woodlands throughout the year. Mammals like the deer mouse, dusky-footed woodrat, black-tailed deer, the western gray squirrel, raccoon, black bear, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, mountain lion and numerous species of bats also live in the valley's oak woodlands.

In addition to providing habitat, oaks stabilize soils on sloping ground, minimize flooding, and help maintain water quality. They abate noise, deflect wind, and filter dust and pollutants from the air while absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. On rangelands, research has shown that livestock forage production is greater under blue oaks, has greater nutritional value, and remains greener into the dry season longer than pastures that have been cleared of oaks; the trees modify the microclimate by helping retain moisture and improve rangeland soils. In addition, acorns provide a high valued, seasonal protein food source for domestic livestock and wildlife species.

The Ukiah Valley was once dominated by upland and riparian oak forests. This fact is memorialized in that the valley oak is the official emblem of the City of Ukiah, and oaks are frequently used in commercial advertising as representing the regional identity. Oak forests and woodlands have also historically had economic and cultural importance for native peoples. Upslope from the creeks and river, but where the water table was sufficiently high, valley oaks grew in more open woodlands and savannas. Blue and black oaks (the preferred acorn source for Native Americans) grew on drier ground, and mixed oak woodlands, including live (evergreen) oaks covered the western hills. Collectively the oak species associated within the planning area include valley, blue, black,

interior and Shreve's live, Oregon white, canyon live, scrub, and serpentine oaks.

Today, fragmented patches of individual trees and groves of valley oak remain, with highly altered, remnant riparian valley oak woodlands remaining as thin stringers of habitat along the Russian River and its tributaries. Interior live oak woodlands remain relatively intact on the eastern hills of the valley. The westerly portions of the City of Ukiah and the western hills still contain viable stands of black and blue oak woodlands with scrub oak woodlands dominating the higher elevations of the watershed. Extensive and contiguous blue oak woodlands can be found east of Highway 101 from Ukiah to the Sonoma County line where slope conditions are dry and rocky.

Protection of oaks, and particularly the remaining valley oaks, is of particular interest to residents of the Valley. The long-term survival of the area's oak woodlands depends on assuring that human activities such as residential and commercial development, agriculture, and fuel harvesting do not impact the ecological functioning of this habitat. Regeneration of seedlings and saplings is paramount to the long-term sustainability of the valley's woodlands.

Forest and oak woodland conversions (deforestation) are contributing to the net loss of oak woodland acreage throughout the state, as well as in the Ukiah Valley. Parcelization of land and development decisions that fail to take into account the survival and regeneration of woodlands result in fragmented stands that can negatively affect native wildlife diversity. Stands and trees that are indiscriminately thinned or pruned can attract unwanted pests and disease. Trees can be damaged or killed by indiscriminate

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irrigation, paving, trenching, and grade changes causing both aesthetic concerns and adding safety fears. Invasive species and pathogens such as Golden-spotted oak borer and Sudden Oak Death Syndrome (*Phytophthora ramorum*), continue to serve as a reminder of the negative impacts of unwanted and exotic pests. Alterations of native habitats with non-native species have been shown through research to negatively affect some aspects of native biological diversity.

For all of the reasons stated above oaks are important to the local environment, culture and community of the Ukiah Valley and need to be protected. This plan recognizes the value and importance of the area's oak resources and is included as a testament to the County's desire to insure that oak resources will be a valued part of the Ukiah Valley for years to come.

Ukiah's remaining oak woodlands and unique specimen oaks should be preserved to the extent possible, and healthy contiguous woodland stands (such as in the Valley's eastern hills) should be protected. An inventory of natural resources (OC2.1a) will provide critical information to target preservation or restoration efforts and guide future development decisions.

Mixed Evergreen Forest

The Mixed Evergreen Forest community is typically located on slopes at elevations ranging from 200 to 3,000 feet. Common species in this plant community include: Douglas fir, coast redwood, California bay, Oregon white oak, California black oak, madrone, tan oak and knobcone pine. Associated with this habitat type are various shrub species of manzanita, chamise, mountain mahogany, ceanothus and poison oak. The Mixed Evergreen Forest provides habitat for a range of reptiles, amphibians, and birds that in turn

provide food for the many predatory species including Mountain Lion, Bobcat, Grey Fox, Black Bear and the Ringtail.

Grasslands

While grassland communities occur throughout the UVAP planning area, the predominant grassland areas are located to the north of Orr Springs Road, south of Calpella, and west of Highway 101. Grasslands also occur in the band of lower slopes between agriculturally developed parts of the Valley and the upper slopes vegetated with mixed evergreen forest.

Most native grassland in Mendocino County has been replaced by non-native invasive plants, though there are some pockets of native grassland in the Plan area. Areas that are heavily grazed or



Grapevines, one of the primary crops grown in the Valley.

otherwise disturbed are characterized by annual grasses and forbs. In areas where there is little disturbance, and on slopes with a high serpentine content, perennial grasses are dominant. Both annual and perennial grasses support insect life and produce seeds to provide food for a wide variety of birds. The abundant populations of small to medium-sized birds and mammals also attract predatory birds and mammals.

Agriculture

Formalized agricultural endeavors in the Ukiah Valley began around 1850. Early efforts included the raising of livestock, and the growing of various grains, hay, alfalfa, and hops. Some tobacco was grown during this period, but soon disappeared as a viable crop in this region. The Coyote Valley Flourmill was built in 1860 and processed up to an estimated four tons of wheat per day during the harvest. With limited ways to transport fresh produce to the San Francisco markets without perishing, agricultural products were generally confined to the local market. However, when the Northwestern Pacific Railroad was completed in 1889; prunes, potatoes, pears, and hops could be grown and sent to San Francisco and other regional markets. Wine grapes were planted, and irrigation was practiced on a small scale. Through the 1950's; hops, pears, prunes and grapes were the most widely planted crops in the Ukiah Valley. After the railroad was completed, lumber mills sprang up in the Ukiah Valley. Lumbering became the major industry in Mendocino County as trains took redwood logs and processed boards south to the San Francisco region.

Mendocino County is home to a number of productive agricultural parcels, and hosts one of the largest concentrations of organic farmers in the State. Much of the active agricultural land in the UVAP planning area is located on the Valley floor and lower

elevations along the Russian River system. The Ukiah Valley floor consists of prime, fertile soils for growing a variety of crops, and many of the bench lands are highly productive for grapes. Agricultural land in the plan area is predominately comprised of vineyards and fruit orchards (primarily pear and apple) but also includes other row crops and pasture. Agricultural production has been an important part of the Ukiah Valley economy for generations.

Previously, the Valley Agricultural lands were usually comprised of grasslands and oak woodlands. Because of their high degree of disturbance, agricultural areas typically have a low habitat value for wildlife, although there are a number of wildlife species adapted for these disturbed conditions. Cover crops are frequently planted between rows in vineyards and orchards, creating microhabitat for insects and other wildlife. Fruit orchards, vineyards, and pasture can provide food and cover for squirrels, numerous birds, raccoons, deer, and other small mammals.

In addition to the economic benefits, agricultural lands provide a pastoral quality that helps define the character of the Ukiah Valley. There is widespread public interest in preserving agricultural lands. Only a limited percentage of the Valley's agricultural lands are currently protected under Williamson Act Agricultural Preserve contracts. There are some active agricultural lands currently in production that are not zoned for agricultural or rangeland uses. Allowing the transfer of development rights with existing agriculturally zoned properties that are of lower value for cultivation could help keep higher value land in agricultural production. With increasing development pressure, more comprehensive measures are needed to preserve agriculturally suitable areas, and ensure economic stability and longevity of the rural quality of life that residents enjoy. Encouraging, expanding and diversifying farming

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will maximize local economic benefits and food supply.

There are currently a range of mechanisms in place to protect agricultural lands and operations. The California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) utilizes special tax incentives to retain productive agricultural land in “Agricultural Preserves” for periods of ten to twenty years through County and landowner contracts. Protective programs with public and private financing or incentives, including land trusts, open space easements or transfer of development rights, can further the conservation of agricultural land.

Land use can also be regulated to maintain compatibility with existing agricultural uses, such as with adjoining use restrictions, new commercial and industrial land use restrictions and rigorous discretionary project conditions of approval and compatibility requirements. Development of public facilities should equally be monitored to minimize the use of, and impact on, agricultural lands. The Agricultural Nuisances and Consumer Disclosures ordinance (“right-to-farm” regulations) protects existing commercial agriculture from encroaching residential development, ensuring that proposed shifts in adjacent land use remain compatible with farming needs.

Note:

For additional policies that may apply, please see the County of Mendocino General Plan, adopted August 2009.

GOAL OC1

Maintain and enhance the area’s natural resources by balancing protection, conservation, replenishment and sustainable use.

Policy OC 1.1 Protect the river corridor and riparian habitat while accommodating responsible development.

OC1.1a River Corridor Planning Area Definition

Define the river planning corridor and extent of surrounding riparian areas within which proposed development will trigger design review, performance standard requirements and use of river design guidelines. Classify “Riparian Corridors” designated in the Open Space and Conservation Section as follows:

- “Russian River Riparian Corridor” is the corridor adjacent to the main stem of the Russian River, excluding lands located within the urban land use categories or within the jurisdiction of a city. The corridor is 200 feet from the top of the higher bank on each side of the stream as determined by the County Department of Planning and Building Services.
- “Other Riparian Corridors” are the corridors within other land use categories along the Russian River and the designated corridors along other rivers and streams. The corridor will be 50 feet from the top of the higher bank on each side of the stream as determined by the County Department of Planning and Building Services.
- Establish a River Corridor Combining Zoning District. Rezone all lands within the River Corridor areas to this combining district.

OC1.1b Stream Setbacks

Determine appropriate development setback distances from all perennial and intermittent streams, as shown on USGS topographic maps as of January 2011 (utilizing current ecological and scientific data) and specify setback requirements in the zoning code.

OC1.1c Riparian System Management Plan

Develop, implement and maintain a Riparian System Management Plan and companion design guidelines that will include:

- Assessment of river conditions (in reach-by-reach segments);
- Identification of critical areas for preservation (through limited or prohibited development) and priority segments for restoration;
- Strategies for restoration, maintenance and preservation;
- Description of the specific functions for which each stream or stream reach will be managed (aquatic habitat preservation/enhancement, flood control, storm water management, groundwater recharge, recreation, etc.);
- Identification of opportunities to cultivate and use native plant species that are culturally significant to local Native American Tribes in planned restoration projects;
- Identification of potential projects and locations for public access and recreational greenways; and
- Design guidelines for projects proposed within the defined river corridor planning area.

OC1.1d Management Plan Implementation

Decide how implementation of these functions will occur. Either:

- Retain access to riparian corridors; or
- Assign the responsibility for implementing the Riparian Systems Management Plan, perhaps by way of use permits, to private landowners seeking to develop within or adjacent to designated riparian corridors; and
- In either case, identify a permanent source of funding in the Riparian Systems Management Plan.

OC1.1e Zoning Code

Update the zoning code to reflect findings, goals and guidelines specified in the river restoration and preservation plan and design guidelines.

OC1.1f Identify Potential Funding Sources

Identify potential funding sources, public and private, to implement river restoration and preservation goals and potential projects outlined in the Riparian System Management Plan.

OC1.1g River and Stream Maintenance Education

Collaborate with the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District to develop public education materials and programs that balance invasive species removal with native plant restoration. Develop effective post-planting maintenance and retention of large woody debris to maintain floodwater carrying capacity and critical habitat.

OC1.1h River Corridor Uses

Develop and adopt regulations establishing standards applicable to River Corridors. Until the regulations and the final Stream Setbacks are adopted, require that land use and development comply with the following principles. Allow or consider allowing the following uses within any River Corridor area:

- Streamside maintenance, fire fuel management, and restoration.
- Livestock grazing.
- Agricultural cultivation, but not within 100 feet of top of bank for the Russian River and 25 feet for Other Riparian Corridors.
- Public projects, including water-dependent public recreational facilities.
- Timber operations conducted in accordance with an approved timber harvest plan.
- Mining operations conducted in accordance with the County Surface Mining regulations.
- Road, street, and utility crossings
- Streamside maintenance, fire fuel management, and restoration.
- Permitted summer dams.
- Equipment turnaround and access roads associated with agricultural cultivation, provided that the affected area is the minimum necessary for these turnaround and access roads and that a minimum 25' vegetative filter strip is provided and

maintained between the affected area and the top of the bank.

- Vegetation removal as part of an integrated pest management program administered by the Agricultural Commissioner.

Prohibit, except as otherwise listed above, grading, vegetation removal, agricultural cultivation, structures, roads, utility lines and parking lots within any streamside conservation area. Consider an exception to this prohibition if:

- It makes a lot unbuildable and if vegetation removal is minimized, or
- The use involves only the maintenance, restoration, or minor expansion of an existing structure or other existing use, or
- It can be clearly demonstrated through photographs or other information that the affected area has no substantial value for riparian functions, or
- A conservation plan is approved that provides for the appropriate protection of the biotic resources, water quality, fire management, bank stability, groundwater recharge, and other applicable riparian functions.

Policy OC1.2: Protect and maintain the Russian River Corridor channel elevation and banks.

OC1.2a Performance Standards

Change applicable County Codes to require that new development follow performance standards to protect the river and tributaries from erosion, decrease sedimentation and degradation of water quality, increase water carrying capacity, and protect native vegetation and wildlife habitat.

OC1.2b Minimum Riverbed Elevation

Establish a minimum vital riverbed elevation above mean sea level in the Ukiah Valley in cooperation with property owners, the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District, trustee agencies and other responsible agencies.

OC1.2c Riverbed and Bank Maintenance Programs

Collaborate with the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District to develop and support programs to maintain the riverbed and banks in cooperation with property owners, the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District, trustee agencies and other responsible agencies.

OC1.2d Design Review

Require a detailed plan design review process for projects proposed within the defined river corridor planning area to ensure that the channel elevation is maintained and river banks are protected.

Policy OC1.3: Enhance the fisheries in the Russian River and its tributaries within the Ukiah Valley.

OC1.3a Indigenous Fish Population Protection and Recovery.

Coordinate with State and Federal agencies to implement existing strategies for the protection and recovery of protected species of fish in the Russian River.

Policy OC1.4: Managing and maintaining gravel levels in the Russian River is essential to prevent bed down cutting and lowering of the water table.

OC1.4a Resupply of River Gravel Levels

Work with property owners, Department of Fish and Game and the California Division of Mines and Geology to determine the resupply levels of river gravel.

OC1.4b Gravel Harvesting Limits

Limit gravel harvesting to levels that do not exceed resupply of Russian River gravel.

Condition project approvals for in-stream mineral extraction on a maximum annual harvest volume that will not, when combined with other extraction permits, exceed the resupply levels for river gravel.

GOAL OC2

Conserve open space, hillsides, and indigenous habitats for the enjoyment of future generations.

Policy OC2.1: Prioritize open space resources with targeted conservation and restoration efforts.

OC2.1a Natural Resources Inventory

Catalogue natural resources within the Ukiah Valley. Identify types of resources, locations and characteristics to guide future planning decisions.

OC2.1b Natural Resources Review Guidelines

Use the Natural Resources Inventory (OC2.1a) to identify critical resources, then develop and adopt comprehensive design review guidelines to protect priority natural resource areas.

OC2.1c Prioritize Conservation Area

Use the Natural Resources Inventory (OC2.1a) and Tribal Consultation information to identify priority areas for open space conservation efforts that will protect, enhance, and restore native plant associations.

OC2.1d Wildlife Preserves

Identify areas of importance for acquisition or dedication as easements for wildlife preserves.

Policy OC2.2: Protect natural resources while providing opportunities for compatible development.

OC2.2a Requirements for New Development

Revise the zoning code to include requirements for preserving, restoring and maintaining open space as part of new discretionary residential, commercial and industrial development.

OC2.2b Open Space Acquisition and Private Property Rights

Educate decision-makers and the public about acquisition of open space lands and private property rights on lands designated for open space or open space uses. Develop educational resources for distribution at governmental offices.

OC2.2c Transfer of Development Rights

Update the zoning code to allow the transfer of development rights from undeveloped (but developable) land to underutilized urban in fill sites.

Identify resources areas that currently allow development but warrant protection, such as range lands or rural residential

hillside areas. Identify areas either in the City of Ukiah or in unincorporated developed portions of the Valley that could accommodate the transferred development rights.

OC2.2d Cluster Housing Incentives

Develop and apply incentives to encourage clustering residential development as a means of maintaining open space.

Policy OC2.3: Preserve and restore native oak woodland and hillside habitats.

OC2.3a Oak Woodland Habitat Inventory and Preservation Plan

Using the map of contiguous oak woodland (defined as a site where oaks provide at least 10% canopy cover), develop a preservation plan to bring focus to conservation efforts. Use the GIS database to record critical information about the resources. Assess current protection of these woodlands.

Designate critical resource areas for conservation and priority restoration projects based on woodlands that are most significantly intact and those that offer the highest potential for successful restoration. Work with the U.C. Extension Office, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Inland Ukiah Valley Land Trust to develop this program. Identify unique “heritage” specimen trees for special protection.

OC2.3b Land Use and Development Codes

Update land use plans and development codes to reflect inventory findings and mitigate development in critical resource areas as defined in the preservation plan.

OC2.3c Development Proposal Criteria and Performance Standards

Develop criteria to evaluate development proposals and develop performance standards as part of the zoning code to specify:

- appropriate set-back distances;
- tree/woodland protection practices during construction;
- maximum grading in the vicinity of specimen/heritage trees and woodlands; and
- monitoring programs and potential mitigations.

Criteria and performance standards should be based on current environmental science pertaining to maintaining healthy woodland communities.

OC2.3d Zoning Code: Hillside

Revise the zoning code to include standards for locating hillside roads and structures to minimize damage to natural hillside resources. Clearings for roads, buildings and fire protection purposes should be sited in the least visible and least ecologically damaging locations and screened with native vegetation where feasible.

Encourage development to design and locate projects to minimize impacts on views of the hills from the Valley.

New development should be subordinate to the natural setting and minimize the use of reflective surfaces.

Buildings and building groups shall be sited, when feasible, near the toe of a slope and below a ridge.

New structures should be designed to fit hillside sites rather than requiring the alteration of natural landforms to accommodate buildings typically designed for level sites.

OC2.3e Oak Preservation and Mitigation

Require the identification, conservation and protection of native true oaks in the design of discretionary projects. To the maximum extent practicable (through clustering development or avoiding development in areas containing oaks), minimize the removal of oaks and other native trees and fragmentation of woodlands, require any trees removed to be replaced, preferably on the site, and provide permanent protection of other existing woodlands where replacement planting does not provide adequate mitigation. Replacement planting will be done at a ratio of at least 3:1, and planted trees will be maintained for at least 5 years with trees not surviving being replaced and maintained for 5 years.

Where oak woodland conversion or fragmentation would occur, require the applicant to pay an in lieu fee equivalent to the conservation values of the site, which would require an appraisal of the site. These fees shall be used to fund the restoration projects listed in Implementation Measure OC2.3a.

GOAL OC3

Preserve and enhance agricultural areas to protect the economic vitality and rural identity of the Ukiah Valley.

Policy OC3.1: Maintain viable Agricultural Land classifications

OC3.1a State-Defined Important Farmlands

Review and adopt the State of California’s “important farmlands” definition and mapping through the County’s mapping and monitoring program.

OC3.1b Agricultural Land Conversion Criteria

Proposals to convert Agricultural Lands to non-agricultural classification will be considered only after satisfying the following requirements:

- The project shall not result in a need for premature expansion of infrastructure in conflict with other Area Plan policies.
- The project shall not have a significant adverse effect on agricultural uses in the area.
- The project site is substantially unusable for agricultural purposes due to encroaching adjacent nonagricultural uses.
- The proposal must achieve the long-range goals of the General Plan and Area Plan for the area as it exists prior to the proposal.

Policy OC3.2: Expand, encourage and diversify farming for local benefits and food supply.

OC3.2a Zoning Review

Review the zoning code for impediments to allowing small-scale intensive farming operations and necessary accessory uses.

OC3.2b Organic Farming

Provide ongoing support to programs that encourage organic farming as an economic and educational resource.

OC3.2c Integrated Pest Management

Promote and encourage farmers to use integrated pest management programs as recommended by the University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisors office.

Policy OC3.3: Conserve agricultural lands and reduce development pressure.

OC3.3a Williamson Act

Encourage creation and renewal of Williamson Act contracts on agricultural lands including implementation of Farmland Security Act.

OC3.3b Land Trusts

Use land trusts to conserve agricultural lands.

OC3.3c Transfer of Development Rights

Update the zoning code to allow the transfer of development rights from active agriculture land to underutilized urban infill sites.

Policy OC3.4: Regulate land use to maintain compatibility with existing agricultural uses.

OC3.4a Adjoining Use Restrictions

Amend the Mendocino County Zoning Code to require study of adjoining proposed development’s potential impact on agricultural properties and disallow projects where substantiated findings indicate unmitigated adverse impacts on existing agricultural uses and businesses.

OC3.4b New Commercial and Industrial Land Use Restrictions

Revise the Mendocino County Zoning Code to prohibit new commercial or industrial development on lands classified as Agricultural Lands outside urban areas unless directly related to on-site agricultural uses or conducted secondarily to an agricultural operation.

OC3.4c Public Facility Development Monitoring

Collaborate with organizations and citizens to ensure that siting and design of schools, local, State and Federal facilities minimize the use of, and impact on, agricultural lands.

OC3.4d Discretionary Project Compatibility Requirements

Require that discretionary projects and parcels created by new subdivisions are designed and scaled to be compatible with contiguous lands classified as Agricultural or Range Lands. Requirements include:

- Residential uses and subdivisions shall maintain a five (5) acre minimum adjacent to lands classified Agricultural or a ten (10) acre minimum adjacent to lands classified Range Lands. Parcels classified with a smaller minimum parcel size, or zoned Planned Development or for clustering, may exceed these densities, provided that the criteria below are employed to reduce impacts;
- Building envelopes, clustered development, and commercial, industrial, civic, and sensitive uses shall be designed with buffers or setbacks from lands classified Agricultural or Range Lands. Buffers shall generally be defined as a physical separation of 100 feet from pasture or range lands, 400 feet

from pear and apple orchards, and 200 feet from vineyards or other crops with the potential for a reduced separation when a topographic feature, substantial tree-stand, landscaped berm, watercourse or similar existing or constructed feature is provided and maintained.

- Projects shall be designed to reduce growth-inducing impacts and maintain a stable limit to urban development; and
- Potential conflicts related to noise, dust, odor, pesticide use, spraying, burning, lighting, late or early hour activities, security from vandalism and trespass, and other issues associated with agricultural operations shall be mitigated by the new discretionary project.

OC3.4e Discretionary Project Conditions of Approval

Conditional approval of discretionary projects (including subdivisions and use permits) that conflict with the protection of agricultural land or operations and are located on or within 300 feet of land zoned Agricultural or Range Land may be granted upon an acknowledgement that the Agricultural Nuisances and Consumer Disclosure (right-to-farm) statement (set forth in the Mendocino County Code) is recorded with the office of the County Recorder.

The recorded statement may be discontinued upon verification by Mendocino County that the encumbered property is no longer subject to the Agricultural Nuisances and Consumer Disclosure Ordinance.

Section 9 Open Space and Conservation

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