

Conservation and Open Space Policy Framework

Introduction

The City of Palmdale has embarked on a comprehensive update to its General Plan, called “Envision Palmdale 2045: A Complete Community,” to create a forward-looking document that will serve as the blueprint for the City’s vision through the year 2045. The goals, policies, and actions in Palmdale 2045 will serve as a compass for decision-makers and will shape future plans and actions of the City. This revised policy document will replace the 1993 General Plan.

This conservation and open space policy framework is an interim step in the General Plan Update process prior to drafting the elements (or chapters). This framework highlights key outcomes and performance metrics related to conservation and open space and includes a draft policy framework that includes goals, policies, and implementation activities. This policy framework was developed by compiling feedback from community members, General Plan Advisory Committee members, Planning Commission, and City Council. This framework synthesizes critical issues and policy approaches by describing key strengths and opportunities, challenges, and threats, and what we heard from the community.

What are Conservation and Open Space Elements?

The purpose of a general plan conservation element is to protect, maintain, and enhance natural resources in the City, while open space aims to protect, maintain, and enhance open spaces. The conservation element must address natural resources such as water, forests, soils, wildlife, and minerals, and prevent wasteful resource exploitation, degradation, and destruction. In addition, the open space element must address management of open space areas including undeveloped lands.

Where We Are Now

Earlier steps in the planning process have identified community strengths and opportunities, and challenges and threats related to conservation and open space. These are summarized on the following pages.

Strengths and Opportunities

- **Palmdale has opportunities to expand and continue protection of its natural resource areas.** The City has identified natural resources and existing programs that can inform land use decisions and identify new open spaces and/or conservation easements.
 - The City has an existing Native Vegetation Ordinance that protects the western Joshua Tree and California Juniper with a more than 95% survival rate in relocating trees.
 - The western Joshua Tree was recently granted temporary status as an endangered species under the California Endangered Species Act on the basis of climate change impacts to the species. The California Fish and Game Commission (FGC) approved FGC Section 749.11 that allows the City to process permits on behalf of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for very minor projects that could impact western Joshua Trees.
 - Additional ecological considerations include the species protected under the West Mojave Habitat Conservation Plan, which acts as a comprehensive strategy to protect the desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, and over 100 sensitive plants, animals, and natural communities.
 - Several Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs), a County of Los Angeles designation, are present in the City and nearby, including the Antelope Valley SEA to the northeast, San Andreas SEA west of the City center, and the Santa Clara River SEA to the south of the City and east of State Route 14. In the eastern portions of the City, there is a large community of western Joshua Trees in and around the Antelope Valley SEA. The San Andreas SEA includes communities of Sagebrush and Juniper providing habitat for select protected species like the Ferruginous Hawk and the Short-joint Beavertail.
- **There is an abundance of mineral deposits around Palmdale.** Palmdale is in the Palmdale Production-Consumption region, which has rich mineral deposits of sand and gravel. The existing mineral deposits within a Mineral Resource Extraction (MRE) Zone, which include the Little Rock Fan and the Big Rock Creek Fan. Existing active sand and gravel mining operations are widely found throughout the Little Rock Wash, the floodplain within the Little Rock Fan and there are additional opportunities to expand mining

operations in this area. These not yet extracted resources may require new conservation easements to preserve land and resources buffering the mining operations from sensitive receptors like residences.

- **Palmdale has substantial potential for solar power generation.** With its abundant solar access and open space, Palmdale has substantial potential to generate solar power, through either rooftop photovoltaic solar facilities on individual sites or development of community solar facilities on vacant lands. Conversion to the use of solar power could reduce energy costs as well as air pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy use.
- **The City has substantial vacant land that can be used for a variety of open space purposes.** In identified significant ecological areas, there is the opportunity to designate new open space through transfer of development rights (TDR). Open spaces established in the eastern portion of the City along Palmdale Boulevard can provide space for recreational activities as well as flood control.
- **The City has the potential to increase accessibility to its open spaces.** The City prepared a draft Active Transportation Plan outlining methods to connect key open space and recreation destinations. Though not formally adopted, this draft plan provides a good starting point for a Citywide plan and indicates that connecting public spaces is a priority for the City.

Challenges and Threats

- **An expanding urban environment may encroach on existing natural resources.** Additional development of the City's periphery may further encroach on SEAs and western Joshua Tree communities, fragment plant and animal habitats, and increase human impact on natural resources. The current Land Use Element includes residential designations in the isolated pocket of the San Andreas SEA to the south of the City that includes Lake Palmdale. Nearly half of the Antelope Valley SEA is currently designated for industrial and residential uses. This SEA also includes portions of the Little Rock Fan mineral deposits.
- **New development may increase flood risk and reduce water quality.** Portions of the City are at risk to floods from the Antelope Valley flood plain when weather conditions are conducive to such an event. High flood risk areas, as discussed in the Safety Policy Framework, are present in the central part of the City crossing State Routes 14 and 138 and in the eastern portion of the City in the Antelope Valley SEA. Past development of impervious surfaces on undeveloped land has resulted in a decrease of natural water retention or draining areas prone to flooding. The City has an existing Floodplain Management Ordinance with which new developments must comply when building in and

around these zones as well as current NPDES and Low Impact Development (LID) standards.

- **Increasing land costs provide a challenge for acquiring land for open space purposes.** Land values will inevitably rise, so acquiring the funding for purchasing land for open space purposes will become more challenging as time goes on. Identifying opportunities to win grants and set up partnerships with other organizations will be important for the acquisition of vacant land to create new open spaces for the City.

What We Heard About This Topic

The General Plan Update (GPU) incorporates stakeholder input and feedback from the residents and property owners of Palmdale. At various points, comments were made regarding conservation, including:

- Include more natural, open settings in heavily populated areas; add more trees and green spaces
- Keep the desert atmosphere and natural attractions
- Designate an area to have Joshua trees preserved
- Conserve space for the natural environment
- Connect neighborhoods and public spaces to open space, trails, and parks
- Consider environmental tourism in Palmdale
- The City should consider creating a conservancy district and/or conservation committee
- Balance conservation of natural areas with needed new development
- Incorporate more walking trails and bike
- Provide more community garden areas

Where we want to be in the future

Applicable Vision themes and Guiding Principles

Through the first phase of community engagement, the General Plan team explored how individuals envision the future of Palmdale, what makes it unique and special, and what things residents and businesses would like to change. Summarized into a stand-alone document, the General Plan Vision and Guiding Principles illustrate the future of Palmdale, capturing key values and aspirations, and providing a framework for future decision-making.

The list below represents vision themes and guiding principles that are most relevant to conservation and open space. Visit the Palmdale 2045 website at

<https://www.palmdale2045.org/resources> for the complete vision and guiding principles document.

Safe, healthy place to live and work

- Improve access to parks and open space
- Foster active living with improvements to the pedestrian environment
- Prioritize walking, biking, and access to local and regional transit

Housing options for residents at different stages of life and ability

- Connect new development to public transit and open space or public parks

Palmdale’s beautiful natural setting

- Maintain safe and convenient access to open space and trails
- Improve connectivity and beautify trails and open space
- Expand and improve public parks to meet the needs of current and future residents
- Preserve existing mountain views
- Preserve access to a dark night sky
- Maintain high air quality

Key outcomes (related to topic)

- **Significant Ecological Area Conservation:** Coordinate with the State to protect protected species of plants and animals under the West Mojave Habitat Conservation Plan, within which most of the City lies.
- **Joshua Tree Protection:** Protect in place—or successfully relocate—western Joshua Trees to specified areas in Palmdale.
- **Watershed Conservation:** Adhere to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requirements and low impact development (LID) principles to minimize changes to surface runoff patterns and maintain water quality.
- **Renewable Energy:** Convert to use of renewable energy resources to meet the community’s energy needs.
- **New Open Spaces:** Work with local, state, and federal partners to identify and acquire optimal areas for new open spaces.
- **Open Space Access and Connectivity:** Prioritize connecting new and existing open spaces and parks with active transportation routes.
- **Multiple-use Open Spaces:** Create open spaces that can act as flood plains or water catchments and still support recreational activities when dry.

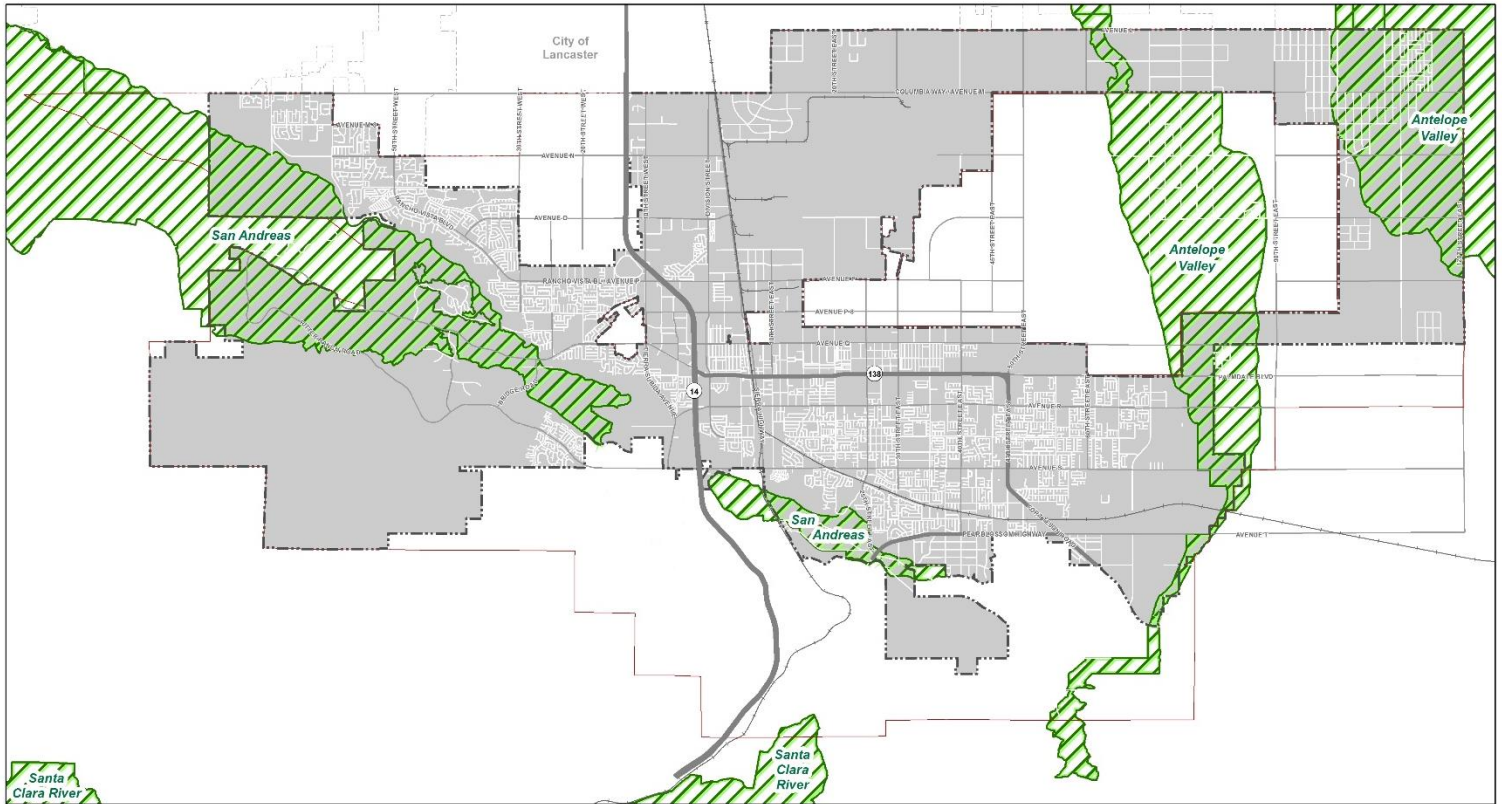
Key performance indicators

- **Key Performance Indicator:** Preservation of scenic and natural features of importance to the community
 - **Target:** Acquisition of lands for open space preservation
- **Key Performance Indicator:** Protection of sensitive ecological areas from new development.
 - **Target:** Establish and implement appropriate buffers between new development and sensitive ecological areas.
 - **Key Performance Indicator:** Reclamation funding for mining operations.
 - **Target:** Development of a reclamation fund for mining operators to contribute to annually to be used after operations cease.
- **Key Performance Indicator:** Preservation of water runoff patterns and water quality.
 - **Target:** Require all new development to meet applicable NPDES standards, including no net increase in peak surface runoff.
 - **Target:** Meet applicable water quality standards for impaired water bodies in and near the City.
- **Key Performance Indicator:** Use of renewable energy resources.
 - **Target:** Transition to a 100% renewable energy system by 2045 (SB100).

Draft Goals and Policies

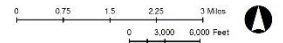
The following section includes draft goals and policies under consideration for the Palmdale General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element Update. Many of the goals and policies from the existing Environmental Resources Element have been retained, but in certain cases goals and policies have been reorganized, rephrased, and or simplified while the objectives from the current element have been reframed as either goals or policies.

Figure 1: Significant Ecological Areas



Significant Ecological Areas

- Significant Ecological Area
- City of Palmdale Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Other City Boundary
- Major Highway/Arterial
- Railroad



Data Sources: City of Palmdale GIS data; Los Angeles County, 2018.

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- **Goal 1: Protect Significant Ecological Areas in and around the City, including, but not limited to, sensitive flora and fauna habitat areas.**
 - Ensure local compliance with the California Endangered Species Act and the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).
 - Continue enforcing the City’s Native Vegetation Ordinance to protect western Joshua Trees.
 - Comply with the required preparation and implementation of the West Mojave Coordinated Management Plan for protection of desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel.
 - Identify and preserve to the greatest extent feasible significant ecological areas (SEA’s) as shown in Figure 1.
 - Preserve natural drainage courses and riparian areas where ecological resources exist in significant concentrations.
 - Coordinate with state agencies to help achieve the goals of 30x30 to protect 30% of California’s land by 2030 by identifying optimal sites for land conservation.

- Solicit and utilize all available sources of local, regional, state and federal funds to acquire significant wetland areas and floodplains to minimize disturbance and prevent damage from erosion, turbidity, siltation, a loss of wildlife and vegetation, or the destruction of the natural habitat.
- **Goal 2: Preserve designated natural hillsides and ridgelines in the Planning Area, to maintain the aesthetic character of the Antelope Valley.**
 - Establish a systematic approach to the management of land uses and development in hillside areas.
 - Retain the integrity of the natural ridgelines of Ritter Ridge, Portal Ridge, Verde Ridge, the Ana Verde Hills, the Sierra Pelona Mountains, and the lower foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.
 - Encourage density transfers where appropriate so that the density of development respects and is reflective of the natural terrain.
 - Facilitate development in more suitable locations while retaining significant natural slopes and areas of environmental sensitivity as natural open space.
- **Goal 3: Plan for safe operations of mineral resource extraction areas and reduce unreasonable impacts.**
 - Reduce impacts to human and environmental health caused by mineral resource extraction including:
 - Ground water contamination
 - Removal or demise of sensitive Ecological Areas of flora and fauna
 - Excessive noise or dust
 - Maintain buffers between mineral resource extraction areas and other sensitive land uses (i.e., residential, public, institutional, open space and parks, among others) to reduce unnecessary impacts while in operation.
- **Goal 4: Plan for mineral resource extraction site remediation and end users.**
 - Require mining operators to establish a reclamation plan that indicates what the various properties will be used for when mining operations cease, what the target land use designation and zoning shall be for the reclaimed lands, and how the transition to new uses shall be implemented.
 - Establish a use-based mechanism for mining operators to begin contributing to a reclamation fund annually to be used after operations cease.
 - Plan for remediation and restoration of extraction sites after operations cease, including adequate areas for groundwater recharge.

- **Goal 5: Promote and support the growth of solar power as an alternative energy source while protecting natural resources.**
 - Permit small-scale solar energy systems as of right within any zone as mandated by State law.
 - Identify zones that minimize land use conflicts between existing and potential uses and utility-scale solar power generating facilities.
 - Require all utility-scale solar power generating facilities to implement a decommissioning plan that will restore the site to its natural state upon discontinuance of operations.
 - Ensure that there is no potential conflict between the operational mission of United States Air Force (USAF) Plant 42 or other airport related uses and proposed solar facilities.
 - Evaluate opportunities for solar power production on sites with reclaimed mining operations.

- **Goal 6: Protect the quality and quantity of local water resources.**
 - Ensure that ground water supplies are recharged and protect natural recharge areas such as the Little Rock and Big Rock Washes, and Amargosa and Anaverde Creeks from pollutants or other materials, which might degrade groundwater supplies.
 - Ensure that no mineral resources recovery activities extend below the groundwater table.
 - Cooperate with Los Angeles County Health Department and the Regional Water Quality Control Board in monitoring industrial and commercial uses utilizing hazardous or potentially polluting materials and fluids, to prevent their discharge into the groundwater aquifer.
 - Maximize groundwater recharge capabilities through the use of flood control measures.

- **Goal 7: Minimize the impacts of urban development on groundwater supplies.**
 - Restrict building coverage and total impervious area in the vicinity of natural recharge areas.
 - Require the use of water conserving native or drought resistant plants and drip irrigation systems where feasible.
 - Require water conserving appliances and plumbing fixtures in all new construction.
 - Coordinate with local water agencies to monitor ground water levels, State water allocations and development approvals, to assure that development does not

outpace long-term water availability. In the event applicable water agencies notify the City that ground water levels and State water allocations are insufficient to serve existing development or projected development, the City will determine whether it is appropriate to reevaluate this General Plan and take other appropriate actions, as permitted by law.

- **Goal 8: Maintain and further the City’s commitment to long-term water management within the Antelope Valley by planning for the conservation and managed use of water resources, including groundwater, imported water, and reclaimed water.**
 - Assess and implement, when feasible, reclaimed water for landscape irrigation on a City-wide basis.
 - Work with local water purveyors to assess the potential for capturing local run-off and utilization of imported water (water banking) for groundwater recharge within the Planning Area.
 - Through the land use planning process, ensure that important recharge areas are retained for this use.
 - Continue to seek out long-range water management techniques as new technology is developed.
 - Promote implementation of systems that are feasible and appropriate to the Planning Area.
 - Encourage residents and businesses to recycle water where feasible, and where water recycling does not result in health and safety concerns, within residences and/or businesses.
 - Participate in regional efforts to retain imported water allocations and seek out other sources as they become available.

- **Goal 9: Preserve significant natural and man-made open space areas that give Palmdale its distinct form and identity.**
 - Create and maintain an open space network throughout the City.
 - Establish a greenbelt program to create a network of open spaces on the City’s periphery.
 - Utilize a variety of features, including entry points to the City, landscaped arterial roadways, bikeways, equestrian paths, hiking trails, and park sites, to create an open space network.
 - Create a network of open space by creating linkages wherever possible, especially to and from residential neighborhoods.

- Incorporate the Citywide multi-purpose trail network adopted under the future Parks, Recreation and Trail Element (note: the name of this element is not finalized) of the General Plan into the regional trail system.
- Implement the standards adopted under the City's Hillside Management Ordinance for new development including clustering and density transfer of housing units, in order to maintain areas of scenic and other open space within hillside areas.
- Utilize the City's discretionary land use approval process to locate and retain areas for use as open space through dedication or other legal means. Develop criteria and guidelines to identify areas that should be protected.
- Integrate natural hazard areas, such as floodways, seismic fault zones, and unstable soils, among others into the open space network to ensure public health, safety and welfare while preserving open space.
- Identify and utilize all available funding sources for acquisition and maintenance of open space areas for public benefit.
- Cooperate with private and public entities whose goals are to preserve natural and man-made open space. Develop criteria and guidelines to identify how to establish land trust open space locations.