

Attachment 6
Progress Update: CAR Goal 5
Climate Mitigation & Adaptation in County Policies & Plans

Climate Action and Resiliency Goal 5 “Maximize opportunities for mitigation of climate change and adaptation through land conservation work and land use policies” has two objectives:

1. By 2025, update the County General Plan and other county/special district planning documents to incorporate policy language and identify areas within the County that have the potential to maximize carbon sequestration and provide opportunities for climate change adaptation. The focus of these actions will be to increase overall landscape and species resiliency, reduce the risk of fire and floods, and address sea level rise and biodiversity loss.
2. Develop policies to maximize carbon sequestration and minimize loss of natural carbon sinks including old growth forests, the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and rangelands. Encourage agricultural and open space land management to maximize sequestration. Develop a framework and policies to incentivize collaboration with private and public landowners.

Objective 1: Update Planning Documents:

In 2021, the Board of Directors of Sonoma Water approved the Climate Adaptation Plan to guide the assessment of climate risks to water supply, flood management, wastewater systems infrastructure and operations, and to serve as a roadmap for developing, evaluating, and implementing adaptation strategies to improve the resilience of its systems. The Plan evaluates the historical climate trends and a range of future climate projections to develop scenarios of climate threats in the region: increasing temperature, rising sea levels, increases in extreme precipitation and river flooding, and changes in drought and wildfire frequency and severity. The Plan evaluates how those threats would impact specific water systems in the County and provides five major strategies to mitigate climate risks or improve system resiliency.

In 2022, your Board approved the Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy, designed to provide structure and guidance to climate-related efforts throughout the county, with a focus on natural and working lands. The Strategy provides high level (landscape-scale and watershed scale) guidance for resilience in different land types and across the nine recognized ecoregions in the County. It reviews climate hazards that are impacting Sonoma County’s lands and how the different land types and ecoregions are affected. The Strategy also provides 17 model projects that are suitable for specific land types and ecoregions.

In 2023, your Board awarded Climate Resilience Funds for the development of a Regional Parks Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan to further priorities to reduce GHG emissions and increase resiliency and adaptation to climate change. The Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Plan will focus on mitigating the effects of climate change to park facilities while prioritizing economic opportunities for clean energy, water retention and storage, and infrastructure adaptation for the department.

In 2023, the Board of Directors of Sonoma Water also approved the Energy and Climate Resiliency Policy. The new policy updates the 2011 Energy Policy (Carbon Free Water) and directs Sonoma Water to maintain its energy program with the new directive to continue to prepare its systems for climate change through continued investment in climate science and innovation; develop and implement climate resiliency strategies; and pursue energy and climate resiliency projects of regional benefit.

In addition, your Board approved resources to support the update to the General Plan, which will include specific consideration of climate change, mitigation, and adaptation.

Objective 2: Maximize Carbon Sequestration:

In 2021, the Ag + Open Space Board of Directors adopted the Vital Lands Initiative—a long-range comprehensive plan for land conservation—which calls for the protection of areas important for climate change and extreme event resiliency and adaption, including projects that promote carbon sequestration and avoided emissions. Since adoption of the Vital Lands Initiative, Ag + Open Space has updated its property evaluation process to prioritize conservation of lands with high existing aboveground carbon and where land managers are engaged in or interested in engaging in practices to promote soil health and above- and below-ground carbon sequestration. Additionally, Ag + Open Space prioritizes properties at the greatest risk of development or conversion out of open space which would result in carbon losses. Staff will use the pending Carbon Sequestration Study to identify areas where, and at what scale, restoration and management practices need to be employed to increase the carbon sequestration capacity of the land and to evaluate the role of land conservation projects in supporting the County’s carbon neutrality goals. Ag + Open Space is currently investigating additional funding sources to help facilitate restoration and enhanced land management and agricultural production on easement-protected lands. Through easement stewardship and relationships with easement landowners, Ag + Open Space is helping to connect landowners with resources and to identify funding and additional incentives for these practices.

In 2022 your Board awarded Climate Resilience Funds to Ag + Open Space and the Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA), for a Compost Application Pilot Program which aims to increase carbon sequestration through the application of compost in agricultural and community settings throughout Sonoma County. Awardees will be granted rebates of up to 85% or up to \$25,000 of costs for compost materials and associated freight costs. The Pilot Program is being overseen by the RCPA in collaboration with Ag + Open Space, Zero Waste Sonoma, Carbon Cycle Institute, Daily Acts, and several additional community partners.

In 2023, your Board approved a contract with Rincon Consultants to produce a Carbon Sequestration study that includes a quantitative estimate of the existing above- and below-ground carbon stored in the county's land base and an analysis of how this has changed in the last decade. The Study also evaluates of the stability of such carbon stocks, and projections and estimates of how different scenarios, such as active land restoration, potential land use

changes, and wild and prescribed fires, would affect carbon sequestration storage and stability in the county. The methods utilized in this study make use of fine-scale topographic data and alternative, less expensive, datasets to conduct a cutting-edge comparison that will inform future studies. The evaluation addresses incorporated and unincorporated lands, with a dedicated discussion of County-owned lands. Results will be presented to your Board in the Fall, and will inform conservation planning, land management, and land use policy aimed at achieving carbon neutrality.

Lastly, your Board recently accepted the award of a \$10 million Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities grant to fund the estimated \$12.35 million project, which over the course of five years will provide carbon farming support to up to 73 producers, covering approximately 13,686 acres of agricultural land. The program is overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and engages a series of nationally recognized conservation practices to achieve carbon sequestration goals. This project will create and support a regional supply chain of diverse climate-smart agricultural commodities and catalyze the development of a regional carbon finance program to sustain and scale implementation and implementation support over the long term. This project will support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities by providing voluntary incentives to producers and landowners to plan, design, and implement climate-smart agricultural production practices on working lands. This project, titled the Sonoma-Marin Ag and County Climate Coalition, represents a large partnership effort across ten organizations from both Sonoma and Marin counties, with the County of Sonoma acting as the lead entity.