



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 2022-0803, **Version:** 1

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**To:** Board of Supervisors of Sonoma County and Board of Directors of Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

**Department or Agency Name(s):** County Administrator's Office and Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Anna Yip 565-2132

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisorial District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy

**Recommended Action:**

Approve Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy

**Executive Summary:**

The County of Sonoma's Climate Action and Resiliency Division within the County Administrator's Office and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District collaborated to create the Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy (Strategy), to provide structure and guidance to climate-resilience efforts in natural and working lands throughout the county. This non-regulatory Strategy identifies the highest priority projects to build resilience across the varied land types and promote system-wide benefits to the county's watersheds and ecosystems. By supporting adaptation in Sonoma County's natural and working lands to adjust to the changing climate, the Strategy mitigates the impacts of climate hazards on our residents - with a focus on residents most vulnerable to those hazards. Approving the Strategy will strategically and proactively position the County of Sonoma to pursue climate adaptation and land conservation/restoration funding from state and federal agencies. It will promote collaboration with tribal partners, other local and regional entities, and communities on nature-based solutions for a more climate resilient Sonoma County. Created with guidance from the County of Sonoma's 5-year Strategic Plan, this Strategy will help the County make critical progress towards its Climate Action and Resiliency goals and objectives.

**Discussion:**

Background

Sonoma County, comprising over 1.1 million acres (1,500 square miles) and with a population of approximately 488,000 people, hosts a diverse landscape with coastal geography, varied topography, and a range of microclimates. Collectively, the landscape supports an array of ecological zones, plant and animal species, working lands, waters, and communities. Sonoma County's natural and working lands provide benefits that support the county's social, ecological, and economic health. These natural and working lands, however, are vulnerable to increasingly dramatic and rapid climate changes.

Extreme droughts, floods, wildfires, and other effects of climate change are already impacting Sonoma County, and larger threats lie ahead. Natural systems have the potential to significantly mitigate and aid in adaptation

to climate change, but the County, its partners, and community members must take focused action to optimize these functions. Sonoma County, situated at the frontlines of some of the most threatening impacts from climate change, has been a leader in climate action and resiliency. Now, the region needs a natural and working lands climate resilience and adaptation strategy to best inform County departments, agencies, local land managers and owners, community organizations, and others on the necessary next steps to adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis effectively and efficiently.

### Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy

The Climate Action and Resiliency Division (CARD) in the County Administrator's Office, in coordination with Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space), requests your Board to approve the Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy (Strategy). The Strategy aims to strengthen the climate resilience of natural and working lands throughout Sonoma County by addressing the following objectives:

- Conserve, manage, and restore as much of the county as possible across public, private, natural, developed, and agricultural lands.
- Focus early actions on areas with the greatest potential for climate risk reduction and biodiversity enhancement, and, where possible, promote carbon sequestration opportunities.
- Provide a forum for coordinated action on climate resilience in Sonoma County.
- Reduce fragmentation of the natural lands system by adding to conserved spaces, increasing connections and corridors, and working with private landowners to develop shared management strategies.
- Partner with local Native American tribes within Sonoma County to advance traditional ecological knowledge and preserve tribal cultural resources and tribal cultural properties.
- Identify funding and financing strategies from the county, state, and federal governments, as well as private funding sources, to advance this innovative and bold plan. Identify new concepts for funding and financing sources as well.
- Prioritize equity and climate justice approaches that are measurable and clear.

County agencies are intended to be the primary user group of the Strategy. However, given the need for tribal governments and public, private, non-profit, and other agencies and organizations to work together to advance climate resilience in the county, the Strategy also contemplates its use by other government entities, private landowners, farmers, grazers, ranchers, non-profits, and others.

The Strategy is organized by the following sections:

#### **Resilience Definition and Strategy Objectives**

In Chapter 1 (*Introduction to the Sonoma County Climate-Resilient Lands Strategy*) and Chapter 2 (*Climate Resilient Lands Strategy Process*), the Strategy provides a definition of climate resilient natural and working lands and Strategy objectives. The Lands Strategy definition and objectives include prioritizing climate justice, sustainability, and biodiversity as well as designing and siting projects at a landscape scale to increase connectivity and provide for redundancy and vertical and horizontal migration corridors to enable climate adaptation.

#### **Project Concepts**

Chapter 3 (*Climate Hazards*) and Chapter 4 (*Climate-Resilient Lands and the Sonoma County Landscape System*) offer context that the Strategy used to develop project concepts at two scales. The first scale is

the countywide or landscape and watershed scale. In this section, principles for both landscape-scale and watershed-scale resilience are defined and those principles are followed by priority landscape-scale or watershed-scale project concepts that apply countywide. The second scale of project concepts is the ecoregion scale. The ecoregions describe the ecological and social characteristics of sub geographies within Sonoma County and provide an opportunity for more specific project concepts designed to address land use, ecological, demographic, and governance characteristics present within each ecoregion. The ecoregions also include a set of indicators to consider when planning, designing, and implementing projects to ensure that projects are locally relevant and responsive within each ecoregion.

Both scales of project concepts respond to Sonoma County's opportunities and challenges as identified by stakeholder and community engagement, the research and assessment conducted for the Strategy, and the County's risks, priorities, assets, and natural and community characteristics. Each project concept outlines the locations where the concept should be implemented, with some being applicable at the landscape or watershed scale and others applying to specific ecoregions. These project concepts can be used as an entry point for a project to be applied in a specific location. As projects are implemented, the Strategy could be updated to add additional project concepts or refine existing concepts to incorporate lessons learned, advance new opportunities, or adapt to changing priorities or conditions.

### **Project Locations**

Chapter 5 (*Sonoma County Ecoregions*) provides details on the ecological, land use, demographic, and governance characteristics within Sonoma County and identifies the critical assets and services within each ecoregion. The Strategy recognizes that balancing countywide recommendations with the reality that the risks, characteristics, conditions, opportunities, and challenges facing Sonoma County's natural and working lands are different depending on their location. The coastal bluffs in the western portion of the county and the mountains in the eastern part of the county include different vegetative communities, habitats, land uses, populations, and demographics, and also face different risks. How climate justice, sustainability, community risks and priorities, and the availability of resources are considered also depends on these different conditions and characteristics. To address these differences, the Strategy uses the EPA's Level IV Ecoregions for Sonoma County. The Strategy also applies other geospatial data to identify the additional characteristics, including County land use designations and Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Equity Priority Communities data, as well as information from Ag + Open Space's Vital Lands Initiative, Sonoma Water's Climate Adaptation Plan, and data on parks and trails from Regional Parks. Collectively, this informs the most significant hazards and consequences within each ecoregion, the predominant habitat types and vegetative communities, the mix of land uses, and the presence of community characteristics that make community members more vulnerable to climate risk. Within each ecoregion, the Strategy offers details on the natural and working lands assets and services, the land use and demographic considerations, and the priority project concepts.

### **Project Planning, Design, and Implementation**

Chapter 6 (*Project Planning, Design, and Implementation*) provides a framework and process for the County and other implementors to plan for, select, design, and implement new resilience-related projects, including recommendations related to project design, funding, and engagement. These

categories are described in more detail below.

Engagement: The Strategy includes a blueprint for successful engagement and partnerships during project development and implementation. The Strategy envisions that County-led projects will incorporate robust engagement and partnerships; they will also be carried out in the context of active and ongoing program-level engagement and partnerships. Effective future engagement and partnerships with communities, landowners, businesses, nonprofits, scientists, and other stakeholders will be critical to the success of individual projects and the Strategy overall. While the Strategy is not a regulatory document or a project as defined by CEQA, projects that are ultimately implemented out of the Strategy should include robust engagement, participatory processes, and may need to comply with any applicable permitting requirements and CEQA review.

Funding: To advance climate resilience throughout the county's natural and working lands, additional funding and financing will be necessary. The Strategy includes local, state, and federal funding and financing sources and approaches, and highlights which ones are the best match for the different project concepts recommended in the Strategy.

Project design: To guide design of projects and promote projects that meet the objectives of the County, the Strategy includes screening criteria that are intended for use early in the project planning and design process. These screening criteria can assist project proponents and designers in considering critical issues such as advancing food security, increasing local jobs that pay a living wage, reducing risk to critical county assets, and increasing climate resilience for disadvantaged communities. These screening criteria, if used to guide project planning and design, will contribute to achieving the climate resilience definition, objectives, and principles identified in the Strategy.

Project monitoring: To ensure that the Strategy is accountable and measurable, the Strategy outlines indicators which are included at several scales. The primary countywide indicators-at a landscape or watershed scale- are designed to provide a way to identify desired outcomes and measure progress toward the resilience of the natural and working lands. Indicators at this scale focus on measurable factors for which data exist or is easy to obtain. There are also indicators in the Strategy for the land types, such as forests and wetlands and for the ecoregions. These indicators are at a more refined scale and refer to specific land types or sub geographies or ecoregions. The data for these indicators are not always available and are more aspirational rather than measurable. The different scales of indicators are intended to provide a way to identify desired outcomes and to measure progress over time. As data and information increases, additional indicators could be added to the countywide indicators to increase the County's ability to measure and communicate progress. Beyond the listed indicators, the Strategy also includes performance criteria that are designed for use toward the end of project design to assess how well each project addresses a more limited and measurable set of key criteria.

### Creating the Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy

After a competitive Request for Proposals process, County staff hired a consultant, the Eastern Research Group, Inc. (ERG), to help prepare the Strategy. The project was led by a team with representatives from Ag + Open Space, CARD, and ERG. This team met weekly to coordinate engagement and outreach, identify data and information sources, and provide input on direction and desired outcomes.

It was critical for the project team to engage a broad range of organizations to ensure the Strategy was informed by a diversity of perspectives and the expertise of local partners from other County agencies and outside organizations. The project team started by forming a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and an Implementation Advisory Group (IAG) to advise the project team on data sources, social and ecological indicators, project types, and existing projects and policies within the county. Over the course of the project, the TAC met five times and the IAG met four times, with two of the meetings being held jointly.

In addition to these advisory groups, the project team initiated engagement with local Native American tribes through an informal consultation. The County invited all five federally recognized, local Native American tribes in Sonoma County to participate, and four tribes participated and provided their insights and priorities for the Strategy-the County and tribes intend to continue to strengthen this partnership. The project team also conducted outreach and engaged with a range of organizations and community and issue-area representatives. Topic areas discussed included climate equity, just transition, worker rights and health, and agroecological farming practices.

Staff released a draft version of the Strategy, alongside a shorter Overview and Critical Concepts document (which was also translated to Spanish), in June 2022. Public input was welcomed in a public workshop in June 2022 and throughout a 30-day non-regulatory public comment period in June and July 2022. Feedback was integrated into this revised Strategy being brought forward for Board Approval. Please refer to Attachment D: Overview of Response to Public Comment for more details on the public comment period and a summary of revisions made in response to comments received.

### Next Steps

Pending Board Approval, County and Ag + Open Space staff will begin strategically implementing recommendations and prioritizing actions and projects consistent with the Strategy. The robust engagement conducted while developing the Strategy created and strengthened relationships within County departments and agencies, and between the County and external organizations. Staff will rely on these relationships, and continue to develop more, to help advance recommendations from the Strategy both within the County's operations and outside of it. Consistent with the Strategy, County staff will take a leadership role in advancing this Strategy, but it will require actions from a range of agencies, organizations, private businesses, private landowners, farmers, ranchers, agricultural organizations, community organizations, and local Native American tribes. County staff will consult with tribal leaders to develop a framework to partner on implementation and explore co-management of resilience projects. Staff will also develop a forum for ongoing coordination and collaboration between public, private, and nonprofit partners in project implementation. The Strategy contemplates greater and more intentional coordination and collaboration in future climate action. This enhanced collaboration, if conducted to be consistent with the Strategy, could result in increased fiscal and staffing capacities for involved parties.

Additionally, staff, alongside partner organizations, will use the Strategy to seek out potential funding opportunities and apply for funds using recommended project concepts. The timing of this is especially critical, as significant funding opportunities for climate action and land conservation and restoration efforts are expected to become available soon in historically large amounts. This Strategy will strategically position and prepare Sonoma County entities to be even greater candidates for these forth-coming related funding opportunities. The Strategy is viewed as a living document that will be updated periodically in the future to incorporate changing conditions into later editions.

**Strategic Plan:**

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

**Pillar:** Climate Action and Resiliency

**Goal:** Goal 5: Maximize opportunities for mitigation of climate change and adaptation through land conservation work and land use policies

**Objective:** Objective 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

The Strategy was created with guidance from the County of Sonoma's 5-year Strategic Plan and will help the County make critical progress towards the abovementioned goal and objective. This Strategy is designed to help guide the County's efforts in adapting natural and working lands to climate change. The findings, recommendations, and project concepts found within it will significantly advance the County's efforts to maximize opportunities for climate change adaptation and mitigation through land conservation and land use work.

**Prior Board Actions:**

October 26, 2021 - Authorized Professional Services Agreement with ERG

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY 22-23 Adopted</b>	<b>FY23-24 Projected</b>	<b>FY 24-25 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>			
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>			

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

<b>Staffing Impacts:</b>			
<b>Position Title (Payroll Classification)</b>	<b>Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)</b>	<b>Additions (Number)</b>	<b>Deletions (Number)</b>


**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

**Attachments:**

Attachment A: Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy

Attachment B: Climate Resilient Lands Strategy - Overview and critical concepts

Attachment C: Estrategia de Tierras Resistentes al Clima - Visión general y conceptos críticos (*Spanish*)

Attachment D: Overview of Response to Public Comment

Attachment E: Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy Presentation / Presentación de la Estrategia de Tierras Resistentes al Clima del Condado de Sonoma

**Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:**