

Area Plans – Central Salinas Valley

Vision Statement

Background Information

Agriculture is the predominant land use in the Central Salinas Valley Planning Area. A prominent feature of this 857 square mile Planning Area is the floor of the Salinas Valley that produces the majority of the \$3 billion annual agricultural income of Monterey County. Agricultural income is also produced by the livestock industry that is located in the rangeland on both sides of the valley floor. The combination of climate, water, and soil in this area is ideal for agricultural production that has made Monterey County world famous. The economy of the Central Salinas Valley Planning Area is heavily dependent on intensive farming of vegetable crops, vineyards and grazing.

The Salinas River runs the entire length of the Salinas Valley and plays a large role for the watershed. The Arroyo Seco River is a major tributary that joins the Salinas River about midway through this Planning Area. Several other large and small canyons drain the higher elevations of the mountain ranges and become tributaries to the Salinas River. This portion of the county is also a prime water recharge area for the groundwater basin of the county. The natural vegetation of the hillsides absorbs, slows and controls storm water, erosion, and siltation of the river. The Gabilan Range and the Sierra de Salinas and Santa Lucia Ranges form the eastern and western walls of the valley, respectively. These mountains and hillsides are covered by a mixture of native oak savannas, sycamore river valleys, grasslands, and scrub chaparral.

The natural resources of scenic viewsheds, wetlands, natural habitats, rivers and creeks, open spaces, and agricultural lands have remained intact and have been protected and maintained by both private and public efforts. These natural and scenic resources should remain protected into the future.

There has been some conversion of land through annexation in the Central Salinas Valley Planning Area over the past twenty years, but this conversion has been moderate when compared to other counties. While other counties in California have converted much of their agricultural lands to residential and other uses, Monterey County is fortunate that the agricultural areas are still largely intact. It is expected however, that pressure to convert lands to other uses will continue.

Because most of the valley floor is intensively farmed and because the bench land areas are being converted to vineyards, lands appropriate for urban development and services is limited. However, this has not deterred growth in Central Salinas Valley Area. The relative affordability of this area, in comparison to other parts of the county, has resulted in a high rate of growth. This rate of growth has also placed a

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greater demand for and use of public facilities and services such as schools, parks, police and fire protection, water systems, sewer treatment facilities, and roads.

With natural population increase and the availability of jobs, the Central Salinas Valley's population will likely continue to grow. The rural lifestyles, relatively low cost of land, and job opportunities in the agricultural and service industries will continue to attract families to settle in the Central Salinas Valley Planning Area.

The incorporated cities of Gonzales, Soledad, Greenfield and King City are located on the valley floor in this Planning Area. According to the 2000 census, the Central Salinas Valley cities have had the greatest percentage increase of population growth within the County during the last ten years. Household sizes are larger in this Planning Area than most of the Planning Areas in Monterey County. Most of the incorporated cities in this Planning Area are currently updating their general plans to accommodate their projected population growth.

City officials have expressed frustration with the county's approval of industrial uses outside of their city boundaries. The siting of these structures have encouraged leapfrog development, weakened the cities' revenue base, and eroded the cities' efforts to improve design and buffer areas.

Unincorporated areas of Chualar, Arroyo Seco, Pine Canyon and San Lucas are also located within this Planning Area. The urban unincorporated areas of Chualar and San Lucas have inadequate urban infrastructure, overcrowded housing, and lack of food stores, banks, and medical offices. Public services such as police protection, fire protection, and park and recreation facilities are limited in both San Lucas and Chualar.

Chualar's population base of approximately 1,400 people is too small to support these types of uses but large enough to have needs. Chualar's county water system is operating at a deficit. Chualar's wastewater collection and treatment system provides only primary level treatment with a series of large percolation ponds located just outside of the town and within the flood plain. This facility was flooded in 1995 and continues to be subject to wash out during intense storm events. The elementary school is at full capacity. There are no recreational facilities, public transportation or social services available. The designation of Chualar as a Community Area within this General Plan is intended to provide a mechanism to address the significant problems of the Chualar Community.

San Lucas has similar problems with limited retail shopping and services. The water system and storage tank are deteriorating and are in need of repair. Residents are reluctant to drink water from the tap. Several unpaved streets have eroded, are inadequate for safe vehicular travel, and cannot be accessed by garbage collection trucks and other vehicles.

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Other unincorporated residential areas within the Planning Area include Pine Canyon near King City and the Arroyo Seco River valley.

Pine Canyon is unique in that it has over 500 residential lots. Pine Canyon also has a Public Utility Commission controlled water and sewage disposal system, a rural fire station, and several parks within the developed subdivisions.

The Arroyo Seco River valley contains dispersed clusters of residential enclaves, some suburban in nature and others that are low-density ranchettes, within the canyon valley floor and on the hillsides. The Arroyo Seco Recreation Area in the Los Padres National Forest is heavily used on weekends by swimmers, picnickers, and campers. Water in a hot weather climate is a strong attraction to the young and adventurous. Other areas within Arroyo Seco are privately held and have been developed with some single-family dwellings.

The areas near the confluence of the Arroyo Seco River and the Salinas River are natural resources and are potential opportunities to provide park and recreational facilities for local residents, either by public agencies or private enterprises.

Flood hazards along the Salinas and Arroyo Seco Rivers are considerations for this Planning Area. Geologic hazards are also of concern. Landslides and the potential for liquefaction will affect development on the hillsides and in the alluvial plain of the rivers. Water pollution, storm water runoff, wetland preservation and endangered species are also considerations for land use and development within both the valley floor and hillsides.

Challenges in The Central Salinas Valley Planning Area

The challenge for Monterey County in the Central Salinas Valley Planning Area will be to maintain the basis for agricultural production, accommodating residential and commercial growth, and protecting natural habitat areas. All of the following will need special attention:

1. To promote a higher level of cooperation between the County, Cities, LAFCO, and owners of private property rights.
2. To protect and preserve the area's current rural way of life.
3. To ensure a diversity of housing types to meet housing needs for all economic segments of the community. Promote density and design concepts that will increase housing opportunities that are affordable for the Monterey County workforce, and strive to achieve a job and housing balance in all areas.
4. To provide for infrastructure including an adequate water supply prior to or at the time of development.

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5. To encourage commercial and industrial development within incorporated cities to enhance their economic base.
6. To promote economic sustainable agriculture through support of value added products, streamlined permit procedures, and agricultural land use protection procedures such as zoning, Williamson Act contracts, right to farm ordinances, buffer zones on developed property, and agricultural conservation easements.
7. To protect and preserve natural habitat areas consistent with state and federal requirements.

The Vision For The Central Salinas Valley Planning Area

Most importantly, planning for anticipated growth should be coordinated with the incorporated cities. The scarcity of land resources, infrastructure, and environmental concerns make cooperation imperative. Joint planning efforts are critical to assure that the county and cities are not working at cross-purposes.

Current private property rights need to be protected. Lots of records on agricultural zoned property need to retain their right to build at least one single family dwelling.

Residential, commercial, and industrial development should be directed to the cities where infrastructure and services can be planned. To address the shortage of workforce housing in this area, the incorporated cities and county will need to work jointly together to define growth areas where housing can be built and to assure that densities will be high enough to yield sufficient units. City expansion outside of their current boundaries needs to minimize the conversion of prime farmland and minimize the impacts on surrounding agricultural operations. FEMA 100-year flood areas should be kept free from future buildings. The cities will need to have support from the county to assure that commercial and industrial development is directed to areas within their city boundaries. These revenue-generating uses will be critical for the cities to provide public services for their residents.

Development in unincorporated areas should be directed to the unincorporated community of Chualar where the community has expressed an interest in community development that improves basic services, provides for new services and expands the affordable housing supply. Future development shall be based on a community planning process to develop a Community Area Plan. Residential areas should be designed to create neighborhoods and balanced livable communities with a diverse and balanced mix of residential land uses, common gathering places and plazas, networks for foot and bicycle traffic, open space and recreation areas. Future residential areas should provide for a diversity of housing types to meet a variety of needs and provide housing opportunities for all economic segments of the population

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and provide a range of housing that is commensurate with employment and wages in the area.

As the agricultural industry grows, there will be a need to support uses such as food processing, suppliers, equipment service, and truck and transportation facilities. Adequate space and road access are essential to getting agricultural goods and products to and from the area. Efficient use of land and safe, well-maintained roads must be planned to serve farmers, workers, visitors, and residents and to minimize the effect on prime agricultural lands.

The growth of vineyards and related development of tasting rooms and bed and breakfast inns within this Planning Area also present opportunities. The wine industry has expressed an interest in further expansion and enhancing the attraction for tourism along River Road. Carefully planned, this could provide further employment and economic growth within this area.

The areas near the confluence of the Arroyo Seco River and the Salinas River are potential opportunities to provide park and recreational facilities, either by public agencies or private enterprises. A system of public or privately owned trails along the rivers linking the Los Coches Adobe, the Soledad Mission, and possibly a new regional park at the confluence of the two rivers could relieve some of the pressure for park and recreational facilities and serve as a centerpiece for the area and be part of an urban design plan buffering the cities from prime agricultural farmland.

In summary, the majority of the residential growth is expected to occur within the jurisdiction of the incorporated valley cities. In the unincorporated areas, residential growth should be directed to existing legal lots of record and the community of Chualar following the completion of a community planning process and adoption of a Community Area Plan. Population growth should be planned to minimize its impact on the area's current rural life style and insure that affordable housing is available for the local workforce, that local roads are able to meet the additional use, and that public services and infrastructure are planned and coordinated with the growth.

The objective of this vision statement is to accommodate projected population growth and provide for needed workforce housing while protecting important agricultural and natural resources.

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Special Policies for Central Salinas Valley Area

Central Salinas Valley Policy #1 – Public Trails

No public trails shall be constructed on private lands within the Central Salinas Valley Planning Area without the permission of the property owner.

Central Salinas Valley Policy #2 – Scenic Corridors

The County shall consider the following county roads for Scenic Corridor Protection Plans and State Scenic Highway designations:

- Highways 146
- Highway 25
- Arroyo Seco Road
- Bitterwater Road
- Old Stage Road
- Metz Road
- Elm Avenue

Central Salinas Valley Policy #3 – Regional Parks

The County shall study areas near the confluence of the Arroyo Seco and Salinas Rivers for opportunities to develop a County Park.

Central Salinas Valley Policy #4 – Greenfield Bridge Park

The County should study the feasibility of obtaining park sites such as the Greenfield Bridge area on the Arroyo Seco River.