

Area Plans – South County

Vision Statement

The South County Planning Area is the largest and least populated of the Planning Areas in Monterey County. Approximately 1,281 square miles in size, its borders are the Santa Lucia Range to the west, Highway 198/Oasis Road on the north, Fresno County to the east, and San Luis Obispo County is its southern boundary. It consists of the rolling hillsides of the Upper Salinas Valley, the Diablo and Santa Lucia Ranges, and several creeks and rivers, including the Salinas River. The area is used primarily for agriculture, including dryland farming of grains, legumes, cattle, and some production of vegetable crops. In recent years, many of these acres have been converted to vineyards. Additionally, oil fields are located within the Salinas Valley south of San Ardo.

Rural character, agriculture, and community are the predominant themes in the South County Planning Area. The assets residents treasure about their area include: privacy, a sense of freedom and autonomy, trust in neighbors, the aesthetic quality of the area, and recognition of its long-standing agricultural and ranching heritage. The sense of community is also very important to residents in this large geographic area. Miles of country road and perhaps a cluster of homes and a small store signify a central location for the surrounding rural area. Community ties and even closer ties to the land characterize a way of life that has endured for generations.

Overall, the future vision for the South County Area will be to maintain its rural character and expand the agriculturally based economy for the South County, while enhancing infrastructure and community services for the small, unincorporated communities. The vision includes the development of the proposed Jolon Road winery corridor, providing revenue and jobs in the area. However, the development of this corridor is dependent upon concurrent improvement of the Planning Area's infrastructure.

Much of this Planning Area is held in public lands, including historic sites, key wildlife and natural areas and recreational areas. Fort Hunter Liggett, located in the western portion, encompasses almost a quarter of the Planning Area and includes the historic resources of San Antonio Mission and the "Old Hacienda." A portion of the Camp Roberts Military Reservation is located at the southern boundary of the Planning Area and extends into San Luis Obispo County. Lake San Antonio, a county owned and operated water resource, supplies water to agricultural and urban users, provides flood control and is a popular recreational area.

The rural areas of Lockwood, Jolon and Bryson-Hesperia, located near the lakes, and Parkfield in the southeastern portion of this Planning Area, have begun to attract families and retirees. The small communities of San Ardo and Bradley, located along

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the Highway 101 corridor, provide residences for workers in this area. Housing availability is extremely limited in these communities and single family homes are often used by multiple households. Many housing units are mobile homes or older single family homes in poor or extremely poor condition, and are rented to workers for living quarters in close proximity to their agricultural jobs. All of these small communities offer basic services to the residents.

South County property owners, particularly those residing in the southeastern area of the South County Planning Area, have expressed concern regarding previous subdivisions of large land parcels that have resulted in many legal, but non-conforming, lots of record. Smaller parcels become attractive for development that, in turn, creates potential conflicts with surrounding grazing and farming operations. While the increasing number of residences has been identified as an issue, property owners also have indicated that they do not want additional restrictions on their land or limitations on their ability to construct a residence. Private property rights are a strong and recurring theme in South County, and long time residents envision passing their property to future generations. The vision for the South County will be to achieve a balance between the two perspectives of restricting additional subdivisions while maintaining property rights.

The South County Planning area, as in the rest of Monterey County, has workforce housing shortages. Current zoning would allow housing units on existing legal lots of record. While construction of these new units could occur without additional subdivision, careful planning and design are needed to assure that future development will help to achieve a healthy, balanced community where families will want to live and raise their children. Although these communities also have areas zoned for additional commercial expansion, such expansion will need to be coordinated with development of additional housing and infrastructure.

The future for the South County area can be shaped by the utilization of the natural and scenic qualities of this area. Creative agricultural businesses, including agri-tourism, offers the potential for job creation for local residents as well as potential revenue to improve poor infrastructure and services within the South County Planning Area.

Lake San Antonio, in tandem with its sister lake, Nacimiento in San Luis Obispo County, offer opportunity for economic development and compelling attraction for additional visitor serving commercial uses. The Lake San Antonio County Park could add to its current successes and focus on the development of areas to serve a broader range of users. Concepts such as family and youth camps, as well as revenue generating visitor accommodations can be explored in the North Shore area. Planning efforts for the park should address how to co-locate uses such as hunting, hiking, water sports and fishing in the San Antonio/Fort Hunter Liggett Area 29.

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Planning for future use of land in close proximity to the Hunter Liggett boundary will need to be compatible with the Fort Hunter Liggett's force training and readiness mission. Although closure may be unlikely, should Fort Hunter Liggett be closed and made available to local agencies in the future, the County should study the acquisition of Area 29 and join the North Shore area with the South Shore area to make the park contiguous. The concept for a South County river park on property owned by Camp Roberts could provide another important recreational amenity in South County. However, development of these recreational resources should not occur at the expense of needed infrastructure improvements.

Although other more remote rural areas of South County may be considered a viable option for increased housing in the County, much of this Planning Area has little to no public services or infrastructure. While fire, emergency, and sheriff services are available, the capacity of these services and the impact on response times from additional growth must be considered. The County shall consider utilization of the existing legal lots of record for residential use without active agriculture. Clustering of housing that does not increase overall density should be considered.

To the extent that it is feasible, future public service improvements in the South County should be directed to the existing small communities where a concentration of housing already exists and existing parcels allow for potential new housing development. Improved public services, parks, and recreation activities are needed in these areas and such uses could provide additional opportunities for the communities as well as needed revenue from related business development.

Special Policies For South County Area

South County Policy #1 – Development Setback

Recognizing that residential development is generally incompatible with Fort Hunter Liggett and Camp Roberts, a 500-foot setback for residential construction shall be established on privately owned lands adjacent to the military tank road easement connecting Fort Hunter Liggett and Camp Roberts. Such a setback shall not cause existing structures to become nonconforming, nor is it intended that this setback requirement will render existing lots of record unbuildable. If imposition of the 500-foot setback would, in fact, make an existing lot of record unbuildable, a variance shall be granted, providing that the maximum possible setback is maintained.

South County Policy #2 – Public Trails

No public trails shall be constructed on private lands within the South County Planning Area without the permission of the property owner.

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South County Policy #3 – Rivers

The main channels of the Nacimiento, San Antonio, and Salinas Rivers shall not be encroached on by development due to the necessity to protect and maintain these areas for groundwater recharge, preservation of riparian habitats, and flood flow capacity.

South County Policy #4 – Scenic Corridors

Additional scenic routes are not appropriate and shall not be designated in the South County Planning Area. Interlake Road/Lake Nacimiento Drive from Jolon Road to Chimney Rock Road in San Luis Obispo County is a State Designated Scenic Highway that may require additional Scenic Corridor Protection Planning.

South County Policy #5 – Salinas River Park

The County shall work with Camp Roberts to obtain a park site on the Salinas River.