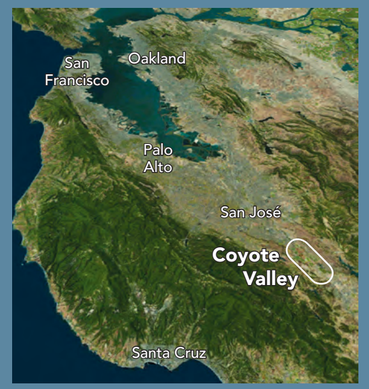
## COYOTE VALLEY

UNPARALLELED CONSERVATION VALUES

- Includes 2,500 acres of floodplain
- Provides and protects local water supplies through aquifer recharge
- Secures a critical ecological connection for wildlife habitat
- Supports our local agricultural economy
- Offers a unique and beautiful sense of place

Coyote Valley is a **top conservation priority** for the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority.




**Conservation and restoration in Coyote Valley** can reduce greenhouse gases, store carbon, and buffer effects of increased temperatures and flood events.

With a network of protected open space, restored wetlands and floodplains, and wildlife-friendly working lands, we can be prepared for a different climate future.

## CONSERVATION FOR OUR FUTURE

With significant growth projected in Santa Clara County over the next 30 years, and climate change threatening more severe extremes in temperature and rainfall patterns, now is the time to plan our communities and landscapes to provide resilience in the face of these changes.

Here in Silicon Valley, the center of innovation, the Open Space Authority is demonstrating how strategic investments in conservation, smart land use policies, and urban design can support nature as infrastructure.

Coyote Valley, a last-chance landscape, offers an unparalleled opportunity to provide cost-effective, efficient nature-based resilience to climate change, while also providing a number of other ecological, economic, and quality of life benefits – now and in the future.

**www.OpenSpaceAuthority.org/coyotevalley**

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**The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority** conserves the natural environment, supports agriculture, and connects people to nature, by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations. The Authority has protected over 22,000 acres of open space, natural areas, watersheds, and wildlife habitat.

Photos: Bill Adams, Tom Grey, Cait Hutnik, Bob Johnson, Stephen Joseph, Tyler MacNiven, Ahiga Snyder, Stuart Weiss, Authority staff

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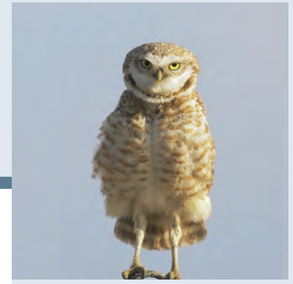
# Nature as Infrastructure for Climate Resilience

## PROTECTING COYOTE VALLEY

Long before the microchip was invented, the Santa Clara Valley was known as the ***Valley of Heart's Delight***, home to some of the nation's most productive farmland. As Silicon Valley developed into the epicenter of innovation, the beautiful valley floor just south of San Jose repeatedly, and narrowly, avoided development.



Today, Coyote Valley is an agricultural and ecological treasure. It is a **last-chance landscape** – it contains critical floodplains and aquifers, productive agricultural lands, and the last remaining wildlife linkage between the Santa Cruz Mountains and Diablo Range. Its conservation also presents a unique opportunity to **increase climate resilience**.

Protecting Coyote Valley as a large, interconnected landscape, with a focus on water resources, can build resilience that will allow both natural and human communities to **reduce and adapt to the impacts of a changing climate**. Thoughtful conservation and restoration of the valley can benefit both human and natural communities.

## LINKING HABITATS

RESILIENCE FOR NATURAL COMMUNITIES

Maintaining the ability for species and habitats to shift their ranges in response to climate change is critical for providing resilience in natural communities. Located in a biodiversity hotspot, Coyote Valley provides important habitat for a number of rare, endangered, and regionally significant plants and animals. Protecting and restoring this habitat facilitates short- and long-term movement that **allows species and natural communities to adapt** to changing temperatures, water patterns, and fire.

The Authority's *Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage* report is a bold vision calling for protecting and restoring wildlife connectivity across the valley. Linking Coyote Valley to more than 500,000 acres of already-protected open space in the adjacent Santa Cruz Mountains and Diablo Range would create an interconnected system of natural and working lands and provide climate resilience as part of **a spectrum of ecological and community benefits.**

This linkage would protect and enhance a critical wildlife corridor, supporting current and future populations of wide-ranging mammals such as mountain lion, American badger, bobcat, and more. This vast landscape would accommodate range shifts for plants and animals responding to a changing climate.

The Landscape Linkage focuses on northern Coyote Valley, where the two mountain ranges are the closest, as the most important crossing point for wildlife and with the largest intact floodplain area and important opportunities for habitat restoration.

Restoration of Laguna Seca, the County's largest freshwater wetland, will increase ecological resilience along the Pacific Flyway, one of the most threatened wildlife migration corridors in the Bay Area, while also storing stormwater and reducing downstream flood impacts.

## PROTECTING AGRICULTURAL LANDS

REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES, INCREASE CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND FOOD SECURITY

Although nearly half of Santa Clara Valley's most productive farmlands have been lost to development in the past 30 years, Coyote Valley still has some 5,600 acres of prime farmland soils – right on the edge of the nation's tenth-largest city.

Protecting these economically and culturally important working lands can **prevent their conversion to urban uses and the corresponding production of greenhouse gas emissions**. By serving as an agricultural greenbelt, these lands will also help curb sprawl and associated vehicle miles traveled and automobile emissions.

Agricultural lands **sequester atmospheric carbon** in the form of below-ground carbon, roots, and other organic matter. Climate-smart management practices such as composting and no-till or low-till farming can increase the carbon stored in soils, keeping it out of the atmosphere and reducing the impact of greenhouse gases.

The Santa Clara Valley's rich soils support high-value row crops, orchards, and rangelands, generating 8,100 jobs and $830 million in 2017 alone. Preservation of farms and ranchlands protects their contribution to the economy, provides the region with access to healthy food, and **buffers us from food insecurity** threatened by changes due to warming, drought, flooding, other climate extremes, and loss of agricultural land elsewhere.

In 2018, Santa Clara County adopted the *Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan*, an innovative partnership with the Open Space Authority to preserve agricultural lands from the Coyote Valley south to Gilroy. The goal is to reduce future conversion of local farmland and the associated increase in greenhouse gas emissions while growing a vibrant local food economy that contributes to our quality of life.

As part of this plan, the Open Space Authority mapped agricultural lands at risk, identifying those that are most economically valuable and those that offer the most co-benefits (habitat linkages, floodplains, groundwater recharge) – helping to set conservation priorities.

The County and the Open Space Authority are working to develop a regional agricultural program to secure conservation easements with willing landowners and provide other incentives to farmers and ranchers who practice conservation stewardship. Through marketing and branding, promotion of local conservation practices, and streamlined permitting for agricultural industries, we can support the farming and ranching activities that are vital to our region's economy, food security, and cultural heritage – while also mitigating the impact of climate change.

## RESTORING HISTORIC FLOODPLAINS

NATURE AS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR FLOOD PROTECTION

Drought and flood have hit California hard. Water supplies and groundwater aquifers have been depleted. In 2017, communities along Coyote Creek in San José experienced record flooding that caused $100 million in property damage. Climate projections indicate that we can expect more intense droughts and floods, extreme events to which our current built infrastructure cannot adequately respond.

**Floodplain restoration in Coyote Valley can buffer San José** from future extreme events by allowing water to spread over large, undeveloped areas upstream of urban development. Nature as infrastructure can be **more efficient, more resilient, and less expensive** than single-purpose built infrastructure.

Recent flood modeling shows the potential for Coyote Valley to capture and absorb floodwater before it flows downstream to urbanized areas. For example, protection and restoration of natural floodplains along Fisher Creek and Coyote Creek will allow water to once again flow over historic courses and aquifer recharge areas, allowing additional **stormwater capture and mitigation of flooding in downtown San José.**

Coyote Valley offers the potential to restore four miles of streams, more than 1,000 acres of wetlands, and hundreds of acres of riparian woodlands. This would **improve water quality and habitat** in Fisher Creek and Coyote Creek.

To quantify the benefits of investment in large-scale natural infrastructure projects, and integrate them into long-range resource conservation and capital improvement planning, the Open Space Authority is working closely with other public agencies and nonprofit partners.

The Authority and the Santa Clara Valley Water District have begun the *Coyote Valley Water Resource Investment Strategy*, a scientific assessment of large-scale green infrastructure project opportunities in the Coyote Valley.

In addition, the Authority is working closely with the City of San José on the city's *Climate Smart San José Plan*, a technical analysis of the benefits of investing in open space and working lands, including Coyote Valley, to achieving the city's Climate Smart and environmental goals.