

AT RISK:

The Bay Area Greenbelt

2006 Edition

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Executive Summary

One in 10 Bay Area acres at risk of sprawl development

The Bay Area is a great place to live. Its landscapes are spectacular, its cities diverse and vibrant, and its economy strong.

The Bay Area is also facing a major challenge: how to deal with growth in a way that preserves the region's high quality of life.

This region is famous for being a major metropolitan area surrounded by a thriving greenbelt of forests, coastlines, fields, and orchards. In many ways, the Bay Area has done well at navigating the challenges of growth, keeping development off hillsides and protecting the fertile farmlands that surround our cities.

But the Bay Area's greenbelt is at risk. It is threatened by sprawl: low-density suburban development on the region's fringe. This poorly planned development paves open space, worsens air and water quality, and exacerbates housing and transportation problems.

Greenbelt Alliance, the Bay Area's land conservation and urban planning organization, analyzed the state of the region's landscapes in 2005. This landmark study determined that today, there are 401,500 acres of greenbelt lands at risk of sprawl development. That includes 125,200 acres at risk within the next 10 years, classified as high-risk land, and 276,200 acres at risk within the next 30 years, classified as medium-risk land.

The Good News

This is an improvement: the total amount of Bay Area land at risk of sprawl development has declined by 13% since 2000, when it was 464,100 acres. The amount of land at high risk has decreased by 41% since

2000. This progress is largely a result of better planning and land-use policies, especially the widespread use of urban growth boundaries.

Today, 1,007,200 acres of greenbelt lands are permanently protected from development, a 27% increase since 2000. This represents acquisitions by land trusts and state parks, as well as conservation easements (the sale of development rights for conservation purposes).

The Bad News

Though the Bay Area has made real progress, 401,500 acres at risk of sprawl development is still an enormous amount of land: the size of 13 San Franciscos.

Regionally, nearly 1 out of every 10 acres of land in the entire Bay Area is at risk. In Solano and Contra Costa Counties, almost 1 out of every 5 acres is at risk.

If all the lands at risk were developed, Solano, Napa, and Sonoma Counties' urbanized areas would more than double. Overall, the region's urbanized area would balloon to over one and a half times its current size of 761,400 acres, with devastating effects for the Bay Area's environment and economy.

Another troubling trend is that medium-risk land—land at risk of sprawl development in 10 to 30 years—is on the rise. It has increased by 10% since 2000. This is partly due to land parcelization, where land that appears whole has actually already been cut up into small lots. This could allow thousands of new houses to spring up in rural areas.

Challenges for Every County

Around the region, the places at highest risk—the sprawl hot spots—include the I-80 corridor in Solano County, the eastern cities in Contra Costa County, Coyote Valley in southern Santa Clara County, the Tri-Valley area of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, and areas along Highway 101 through Sonoma County.

Solano County now has the most land at risk in the Bay Area. Sonoma, Contra Costa, and Santa Clara also have large amounts of land at risk. Land-use decisions in these four counties will have major consequences for the entire region.

Counties that have less land at risk, especially Marin, San Mateo, and San Francisco, still have a crucial role to play in regional greenbelt protection. If the Bay Area is to accommodate growth sustainably, the region's cities and counties must work together to focus development in existing urbanized areas and to improve transit access and housing affordability. Policymakers, regional and local planning agencies, organizations like Greenbelt Alliance, and Bay Area residents will play a critical role in this process.

Looking Ahead

The Bay Area will continue to grow, and grow rapidly. In recent years, the region has done well at adopting policies to guide better growth. As development pressures increase, so will the challenges. It will be up to Bay Area residents and elected leaders to make the right decisions to ensure a vibrant, healthy region.

Introduction

The Bay Area is growing fast. Since 1980, the population of the nine-county region has increased by almost two million people; the number of jobs has increased by almost one million. By 2030, the region is expected to grow by 1.7 million people and another 1.6 million jobs.

The region also faces a housing crisis. Only 12% of families can afford the median-priced home.

Since the 1950s, growth in the Bay Area has largely meant putting new jobs and homes out on the edges of the region, rather than focusing them in existing cities and towns.

These factors—fast growth, unaffordable housing, and edge development—combine to put intense development pressure on the Bay Area’s working farms and natural areas.

As the greenbelt of hillsides, farmland, and forests around the region’s cities is developed, the region loses the very things that make it special. When sprawl development replaces the region’s spectacular landscapes and inviting cities with subdivisions, strip malls, and freeways, the Bay Area loses the high quality of life that makes it a center of innovation.

This report provides a snapshot of the greenbelt lands facing sprawl development pressure in the nine-county Bay Area. This is Greenbelt Alliance’s fourth *At Risk* report; previous snapshots of the region were taken in 1989, 1994, and 2000.

Greenbelt Alliance collected the data for this report in 2005, assessing the development risk to all the region’s



Photo: Galen Rowell/Mountain Light

Today, over 400,000 acres of the Bay Area’s greenbelt of open space are at risk of sprawl development. Protecting this at-risk land—an expanse the size of 13 San Franciscos—will require strong land protections and a regionwide commitment to planning well for growth.

open space, and classifying the land as one of the following:

High Risk: Greenbelt lands that are likely to be developed in the next 10 years.

Medium Risk: Greenbelt lands that are likely to be developed in the next 30 years.

Low Risk: Greenbelt lands that are not likely to be developed in the next 30 years.

Secure Greenbelt: Greenbelt lands that are permanently protected from development, including most public lands, land trust properties, and conservation easements. This information is largely based on a map created by the Bay Area Open Space Council.

Urban: Lands that are developed at a density of at least one residential unit per 1.5 acres, or the equivalent density for commercial or industrial development. This information is largely based on a map created by the State of California’s Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Project.

The results of this *At Risk* report give citizens and decision-makers a way of assessing whether we’re heading in the right direction: toward a healthier environment and more vibrant communities.

These results present some promising trends and underscore the significant challenges ahead.

Regional Findings

Hundreds of thousands of acres at risk, with some positive trends

The Bay Area's Greenbelt At Risk

The nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area together comprise four and a half million acres of land (Table 1). Of that land, 761,400 acres are urbanized. The rest of the Bay Area's land is its greenbelt of open space: its farms, rolling hills and ranchlands, wildlife habitat, watersheds, and other natural areas.

Just over one-quarter of the greenbelt, 1,007,200 acres, is now permanently protected. The rest is potentially vulnerable to sprawl development.

Today, there are 401,500 acres of greenbelt lands at risk of sprawl development in the Bay Area (Table 1, Figure 1). Nearly 1 out of every 10 acres of land in the entire Bay Area is at risk.

The total area at risk is the size of 13 San Franciscos. This massive swath of the Bay Area is made up of fields, orchards, forests, and hillsides that share one attribute: if sprawl development proceeds at its current pace, they will be paved over.

Most of the lands at risk are on the edges of the nine-county Bay Area, where sprawl development is the dominant pattern of growth.

This at-risk land includes 125,200 acres of high-risk land, or land at risk of development within the next 10 years, and 276,200 acres of medium-risk land, at risk of development within the next 10 to 30 years.

The remaining 2,294,400 acres of greenbelt lands are at low risk of development; for a variety of reasons, including long-term policy protections as well as physical attributes like steepness and inaccessibility, these lands are unlikely to be developed in the next 30 years.

Land At Risk in Each County

Together, four counties—the “sprawlers”—contain almost 85% of the Bay Area's threatened land (Table 1). Solano County now has the most at-risk land of any county: 93,300 acres. Solano County has taken this spot away from Contra Costa County, which is now in third place with 82,200 acres at risk. But in both these fast-growing counties, roughly 1 out of every 5 acres of land in the entire county is at risk. This is a much higher proportion of land at risk than in any other county. Also firmly in the “sprawler” category is the region's largest county, Sonoma County, which has the second most land at risk, 88,300 acres. Not far behind is Santa Clara County, another large county, with 75,300 acres at risk.

At the other end of the spectrum, the region's smallest counties—the “savers”—also have the least land at risk. San Mateo and especially Marin County now have very small amounts of land at risk, with only 10,200 and 3,800 acres respectively. San Francisco effectively has no land at risk, as the county's land is generally already either urbanized or permanently protected.

Table 1: The State of the Greenbelt, 2006

	Total Acres At Risk (High + Medium)	High-Risk Acres	Medium-Risk Acres	Low-Risk Acres	Urban Acres	Protected Acres	Total Acres*
Alameda	26,100	15,000	11,100	203,000	144,000	104,700	477,800
Contra Costa	82,200	29,300	52,900	123,900	145,200	111,000	462,400
Marin	3,800	2,600	1,100	113,200	41,400	178,000	336,300
Napa	22,300	9,700	12,500	340,500	21,400	99,300	483,400
San Francisco	0	0	0	600	24,900	5,100	30,600
San Mateo	10,200	2,000	8,200	100,400	71,100	107,800	289,500
Santa Clara	75,300	21,300	54,000	377,600	185,100	201,800	839,800
Solano	93,300	31,900	61,400	315,900	55,400	66,000	530,600
Sonoma	88,300	13,400	74,900	719,200	72,800	133,600	1,013,900
Total	401,500	125,200	276,200	2,294,400	761,400	1,007,200	4,464,400

Note: Rows and columns may not add up precisely due to rounding.

*Acreage totals exceed actual land area due to slight overlap between the GIS layer of urban lands prepared by the State of California's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Project, the GIS layer of protected lands prepared by the Bay Area Open Space Council, and the GIS layer of water from GreenInfo Network. The total error due to overlap is approximately 0.8%. The GIS layer of lands at risk has no overlap error.

Bay Area Lands At Risk

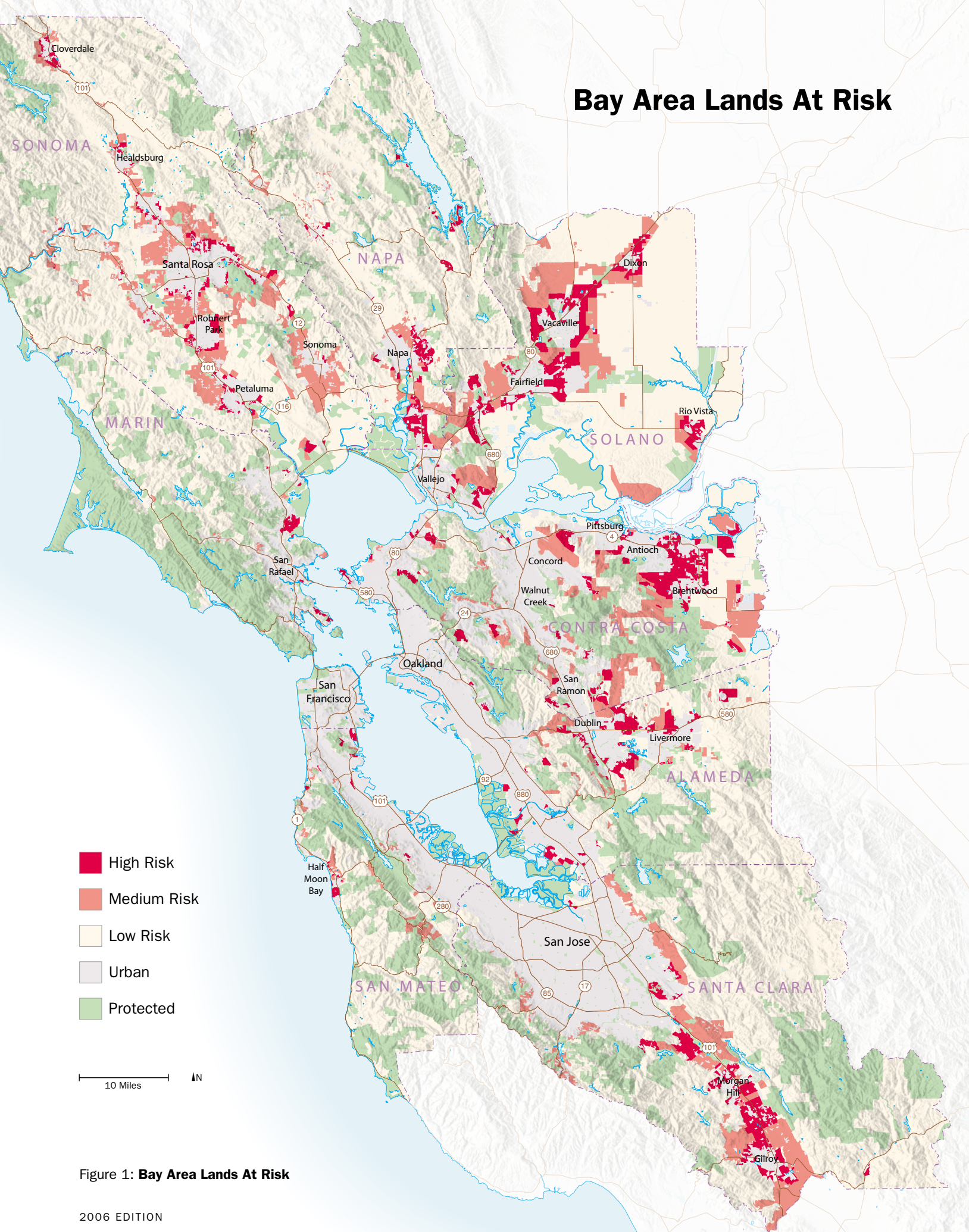


Figure 1: Bay Area Lands At Risk

Alameda and Napa Counties, counties of intermediate size, are also intermediate in terms of risk, with 26,100 and 22,300 greenbelt acres at risk respectively.

Change Since 2000: Less Land At Risk Regionwide

Although there is a great deal of greenbelt land still at risk in the Bay Area, the total acreage has dropped by a considerable amount since Greenbelt Alliance’s last survey of the region. In 2000, throughout the region there were 464,100 acres at risk (Table 2). Since then, the amount of land at risk has dropped by 62,600 acres or 13%.

What happened to the land that was at risk in 2000? Roughly half of that land is at the same level of risk today. About 1 in 10 acres was permanently protected, and about 1 in 20 was urbanized. The remaining land, about one-third of all land that was at risk in 2000, faces a lower level of risk today than it did then. (That is, high-risk land has become medium-risk land, and medium-risk land has become low-risk land.)

Also, about 1 out of every 5 acres of land that was at medium or high risk in 2000 is now at low risk; this land has effectively gone from at-risk to not at-risk.

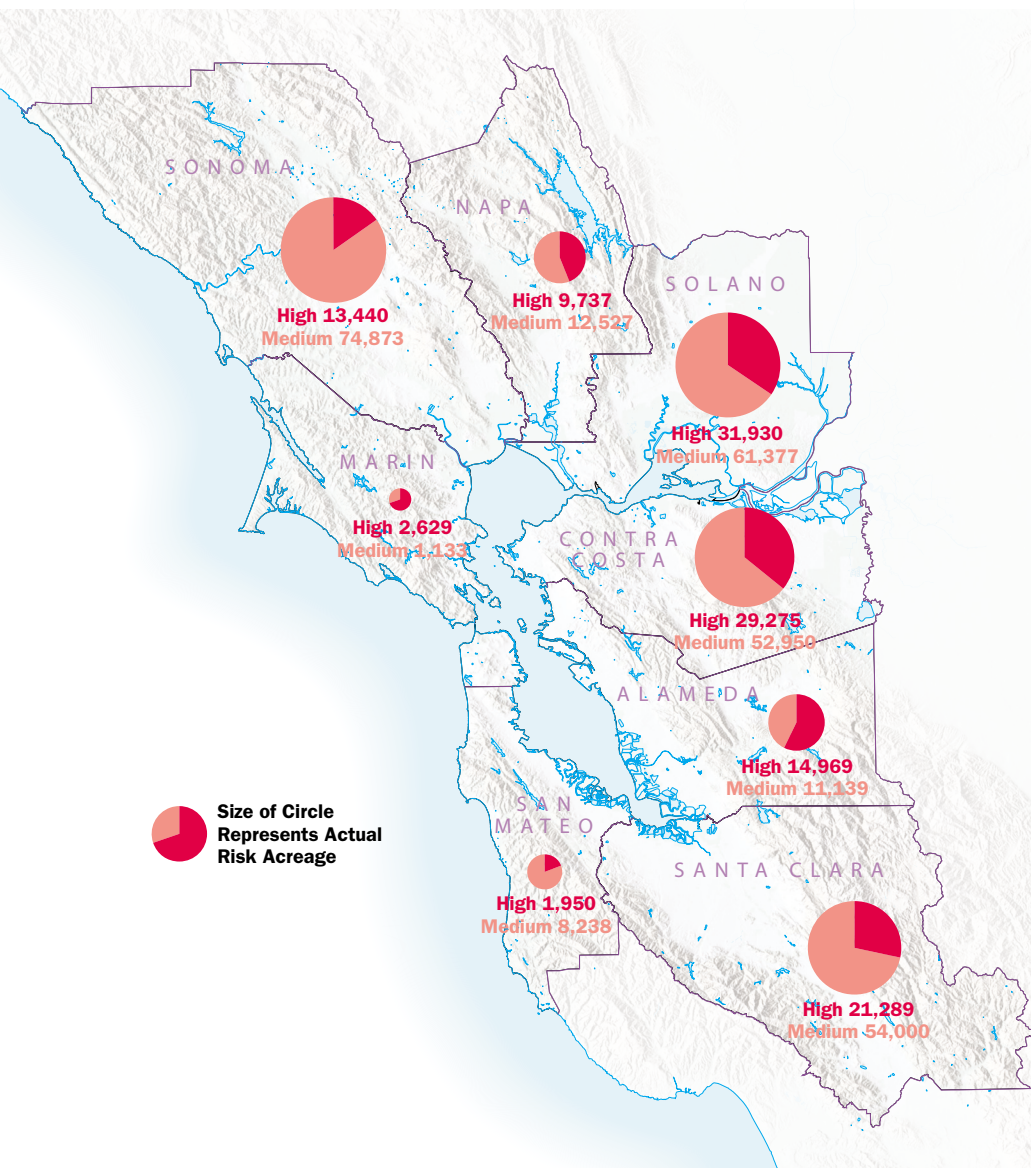


Figure 2: Proportions of Lands At Risk Around the Bay Area

This substantial improvement is largely due to better policies to guide growth toward existing cities, away from the greenbelt. This illustrates the power of policy to protect the

greenbelt. Policy protections like urban growth boundaries can put large areas of the greenbelt off-limits to development, quickly and at relatively low cost. This can then give

Table 2: Greenbelt Changes Since 2000

	Total Acres At Risk (High + Medium)				High-Risk Acres				Medium-Risk Acres			
	2000	2006	CHANGE	% CHANGE	2000	2006	CHANGE	% CHANGE	2000	2006	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Alameda	36,000	26,100	-9,900	-28%	25,000	15,000	-10,000	-40%	11,000	11,100	100	1%
Contra Costa	100,400	82,200	-18,200	-18%	54,300	29,300	-25,000	-46%	46,100	52,900	6,800	15%
Marin	7,800	3,800	-4,000	-51%	5,300	2,600	-2,700	-51%	2,500	1,100	-1,400	-56%
Napa	19,000	22,300	3,300	17%	17,900	9,700	-8,200	-46%	1,100	12,500	11,400	1036%
San Francisco	0	0	0	0%	0	0	0	0%	0	0	0	0%
San Mateo	18,600	10,200	-8,400	-45%	7,900	2,000	-5,900	-75%	10,700	8,200	-2,500	-23%
Santa Clara	95,500	75,300	-20,200	-21%	37,400	21,300	-16,100	-43%	58,100	54,000	-4,100	-7%
Solano	96,400	93,300	-3,100	-3%	39,900	31,900	-8,000	-20%	56,500	61,400	4,900	9%
Sonoma	90,500	88,300	-2,200	-2%	25,700	13,400	-12,300	-48%	64,800	74,900	10,100	16%
Total	464,100	401,500	-62,600	-13%	213,300	125,200	-88,100	-41%	250,800	276,200	25,400	10%

Note: Rows and columns may not add up precisely due to rounding.

*Acreages of all categories, when totaled, exceed actual land area, due to slight overlap between the GIS layer of urban lands prepared by the State of California’s Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Project, the GIS layer of protected lands prepared by the Bay Area Open Space Council, and the GIS layer of water from GreenInfo Network. The GIS layer of 2005 lands at risk has

land trusts and open space districts time to raise funds to buy the most important of these lands for permanent protection. Policies that encourage development within already-urbanized areas also translate into a more secure greenbelt: done correctly, development in existing cities and towns can actually save the greenbelt instead of paving it, as infill development relieves the pressure to sprawl out onto farmlands and natural areas.

Change Since 2000: Less Land At Risk in Each County

As the total amount of land at risk throughout the region declined since 2000, generally, so did the amount in each county (Table 2). The one exception to this was Napa County, whose land at risk increased by 17% or 3,300 acres.

Though Santa Clara County still has a significant amount of land at risk (75,300 acres), this county had the largest decrease in land at risk, with a decrease of 20,200 acres or 21%. A primary reason for this was San Jose’s adoption of an urban growth boundary in 2000, halting its legacy of sprawling development and committing instead to protecting hillsides and baylands. Gilroy’s General Plan, adopted in 2000, also put thousands of acres of land outside its 20-year planning bound-

ary. However, Gilroy’s lack of an urban growth boundary means these lands are still at risk; that risk is simply less imminent than it was.

Contra Costa County, like Santa Clara County, has a large amount of land at risk (82,200 acres), but it had the second-largest decrease in at-risk lands: 18,200 acres or 18%. Much of this decrease was due to the tightening of the county’s urban limit line in 2001; this achievement is now being whittled away by east county cities intent on expansion. Also, some lands that were at high risk of development in 2000 were not included in expansive urban limit lines proposed by developers in 2005; this delayed (but did not eliminate) the risk of sprawl development on these areas.

In Alameda County, the land at risk declined by 9,900 acres or 28%. The main reason for this significant improvement was the passage in 2000 of a countywide urban growth boundary. The same initiative also established minimum parcel sizes for rural land, preventing further subdivision and supporting farming and ranching.

In the other counties, the acreage decreases in land at risk were smaller. San Mateo County saw a decrease in lands at risk of 8,400 acres or 45%

partly due to permanent land protection and as a result of slowing growth throughout the county, with less public support for new development of any kind. Marin’s drop of 4,000 acres of lands at risk or 51% was, as in San Mateo, a result both of permanent protection for lands and decreased support for new development. Solano County’s decrease of 3,100 acres or 3% was largely a result of the passage in 2003 of urban growth boundaries around Fairfield and Benicia. However, the prospect of expansions for Interstate 80 and Highways 12 and 113 still puts over 18,000 acres of land in Solano County at risk. Sonoma County’s decrease of 2,200 acres or 2% was due in part to the adoption of urban growth boundaries in the cities of Sonoma and Rohnert Park, although these improvements were offset by an increase in medium-risk land due to a lack of strong policies to protect county land. San Francisco saw no real change.

In Napa County, the increase of 3,300 acres in land at risk was due to sprawl pressures from the city of American Canyon, potential highway expansions, and parcelization threats on agricultural land.

Low-Risk Acres				Urban Acres				Protected Acres				
2000	2006	CHANGE	% CHANGE	2000	2006	CHANGE	% CHANGE	2000	2006	CHANGE	% CHANGE	
212,500	203,000	-9,500	-5%	141,400	144,000	2,600	2%	95,100	104,700	9,600	10%	Alameda
127,300	123,900	-3,400	-3%	142,200	145,200	3,000	2%	99,100	111,000	11,900	12%	Contra Costa
131,400	113,200	-18,200	-14%	40,500	41,400	900	2%	159,400	178,000	18,600	12%	Marin
369,300	340,500	-28,800	-8%	21,100	21,400	300	1%	76,000	99,300	23,300	31%	Napa
600	600	0	0%	24,400	24,900	500	2%	5,300	5,100	-200	-4%	San Francisco
111,200	100,400	-10,800	-10%	71,100	71,100	0	0%	91,400	107,800	16,400	18%	San Mateo
410,000	377,600	-32,400	-8%	184,100	185,100	1,000	1%	147,800	201,800	54,000	37%	Santa Clara
346,200	315,900	-30,300	-9%	53,800	55,400	1,600	3%	35,100	66,000	30,900	88%	Solano
770,000	719,200	-50,800	-7%	70,700	72,800	2,100	3%	84,800	133,600	48,800	58%	Sonoma
2,478,500	2,294,400	-184,100	-7%	749,300	761,400	12,100	2%	794,000	1,007,200	213,200	27%	Total

no overlap error. Because the overlap was greater in 2000 than in 2005, there are some slight differences in totals where there was no change on the ground, for example in the San Francisco acreages. The total error due to overlap is approximately 1.3%.

Table 3: **Percentage of Greenbelt Permanently Protected**

	2000		2005	
	ACRES	% OF GREENBELT	ACRES	% OF GREENBELT
Alameda	95,100	27%	104,700	31%
Contra Costa	99,100	30%	111,000	35%
Marin	159,400	53%	178,000	60%
Napa	76,000	16%	99,300	21%
San Francisco	5,300	87%	5,100	89%
San Mateo	91,400	41%	107,800	49%
Santa Clara	147,800	22%	201,800	31%
Solano	35,100	7%	66,000	14%
Sonoma	84,800	9%	133,600	14%
Total	794,000	20%	1,007,200	25%

Permanently Protected Land in Each County

The proportion of permanently protected greenbelt varies greatly by county (Table 3). In land preservation leaders Marin and San Mateo Counties, the proportions of greenbelt lands that are permanently protected are an impressive 60% and 49%. In these cases, ongoing protection efforts by land trusts and open space districts complement large public land holdings such as the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the San Francisco State Fish and Game Refuge to form a relatively secure greenbelt.

Contra Costa, Alameda, and Santa Clara Counties also each have large amounts of public land, especially in the hills and bayshores. Thirty-five percent of Contra Costa’s greenbelt is permanently protected, and Alameda and Santa Clara Counties are tied with 31%.

Permanently protected land in Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties includes more high-value agriculture and less public land. Twenty-one percent of Napa County’s greenbelt is permanently protected and Solano and Sonoma Counties are tied with only 14%.

One major reason for Napa and Solano’s smaller amounts of permanently protected land is the fact that they are the only counties in the Bay

Area without open space districts. Open space districts are public agencies (like the well-known East Bay Regional Park District) that use funding from sales or property taxes to purchase and manage open space.

Change Since 2000: More Land Permanently Protected Regionwide

The amount of permanently protected land in the region rose by 27% since 2000, increasing by 213,100 acres for a total of 1,007,200 acres (Table 2).

This impressive increase shows that the Bay Area, long a national leader in regional land conservation, is not resting on its laurels. Permanently protected acreage is now more than one quarter of all non-urbanized land in the Bay Area, and more than one-fifth of all land. Continued commitment to land conservation on the part of elected officials and voters, especially in the funding of open space agencies, is enabling the region to build on past successes and expand its permanent greenbelt.

These permanently protected areas are the keystones of the greenbelt. Their long-range security is a critical complement to the policy-based protection tools like urban growth boundaries.

Change Since 2000: More Land Permanently Protected in Each County

Here again, each county in the region

(excluding San Francisco) improved notably, especially Santa Clara and Sonoma. Santa Clara saw the biggest improvement, with 54,000 acres newly protected, due in part to the massive program to restore wetlands on salt ponds on the southern end of the San Francisco Bay. Sonoma’s 48,800-acre increase in protected lands was helped by the passage in 1990 of a sales tax to fund open space, which has allowed significant land acquisition by the Sonoma County Agricultural Parks and Open Space District, in addition to work by the Sonoma Land Trust. Even the smallest increase, of 9,600 acres in Alameda County, was significant, a 10% expansion of permanently protected acreage since 2000.

This result reflects the vigorous work by open space agencies and land trusts in the last 5 years to acquire and protect land, as well as the continued commitment to open space acquisition on the part of Bay Area residents.

A Closer Look at Risk

In addition to these two major trends since 2000—the decline in overall lands at risk and the increase in permanently protected acreage—a closer look at the results also reveals a decrease in the amount of lands at high risk of development, and an increase in the amount of land at medium risk.

Together, these trends mean that the region is doing well in reducing short-term sprawl threats, but longer-term and more insidious threats remain.

High-Risk Lands: Decreasing but Still Serious

Since 2000, there has been a 41% drop in high-risk lands, lands likely to be developed in the next 10 years (Table 2). In other words, in the last 5 years, 88,100 acres—an area roughly equivalent to three San Franciscos—has been relieved from immediate sprawl pressure. Most of this land saw

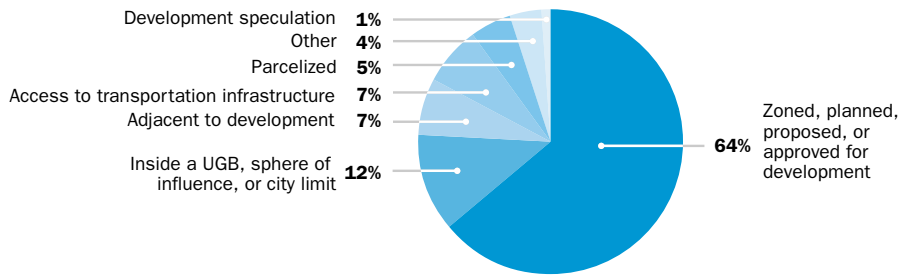


Figure 3: **Dominant Risk Factors on High-Risk Lands**

a reduction in risk due to improved policy protections including urban growth boundaries and new efforts by cities to direct growth inward.

As the *At Risk* map (Figure 1) shows, the remaining regional high-risk sprawl hot spots are predominantly on the outer edges of the region. These are places where land prices are lower and where growth pressures from the Bay Area overlap with those of the Sacramento, Santa Cruz, and Central Valley regions. The hot spots are also places that have few policies to guide growth. These include the northeastern portion of Contra Costa County, the I-80 corridor in Solano County, the Tri-Valley region of Alameda County, the south end of Santa Clara County along Highway 101, and areas along Highway 101 through Sonoma County.

What are the risk factors for high-risk lands? Two-thirds of these lands are at high risk because they are already zoned, planned, proposed, or approved for development (Figure 3). Other key risk factors include being inside a city limit, sphere of influence, or urban growth boundary (where good development should happen, but sprawl development could happen instead); having easy access to transportation networks (usually highways); and being immediately adjacent to existing development.

The dramatic reduction in high-risk land throughout the entire region, in just 5 years, is tremendous progress. It is a testament to the effectiveness of urban growth boundaries and

other rural land-use protections that protect large amounts of land quickly. It is also a testament to efforts around the region to accommodate growth in existing urban areas.

On the other hand, most of the lands that are still at high risk are that way specifically because planners and elected officials have approved them for growth.

In other words, sprawl is not inevitable. Policy-makers and voters hold the keys to stopping sprawl and ensuring more sustainable, equitable growth.

**Medium-Risk Lands:
Longer-Term and Increasing**

Since 2000, the Bay Area experienced a 10% increase in medium-risk lands, lands likely to be developed between 10 and 30 years from now (Table 2). Somewhat less concentrated than high-risk lands, the largest amounts of medium-risk lands are found in Sonoma, Solano, Contra Costa, and Santa Clara Counties, as well as in much of Napa and Alameda Counties (Table 1, Figure 1). Sonoma, Solano, Napa, and Contra Costa Counties all have significantly more medium-risk land now than they did in 2000.

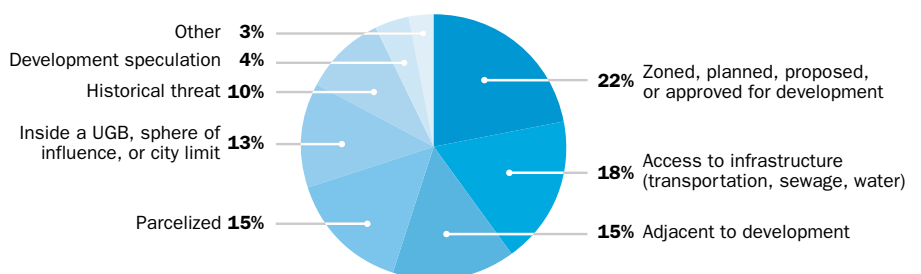
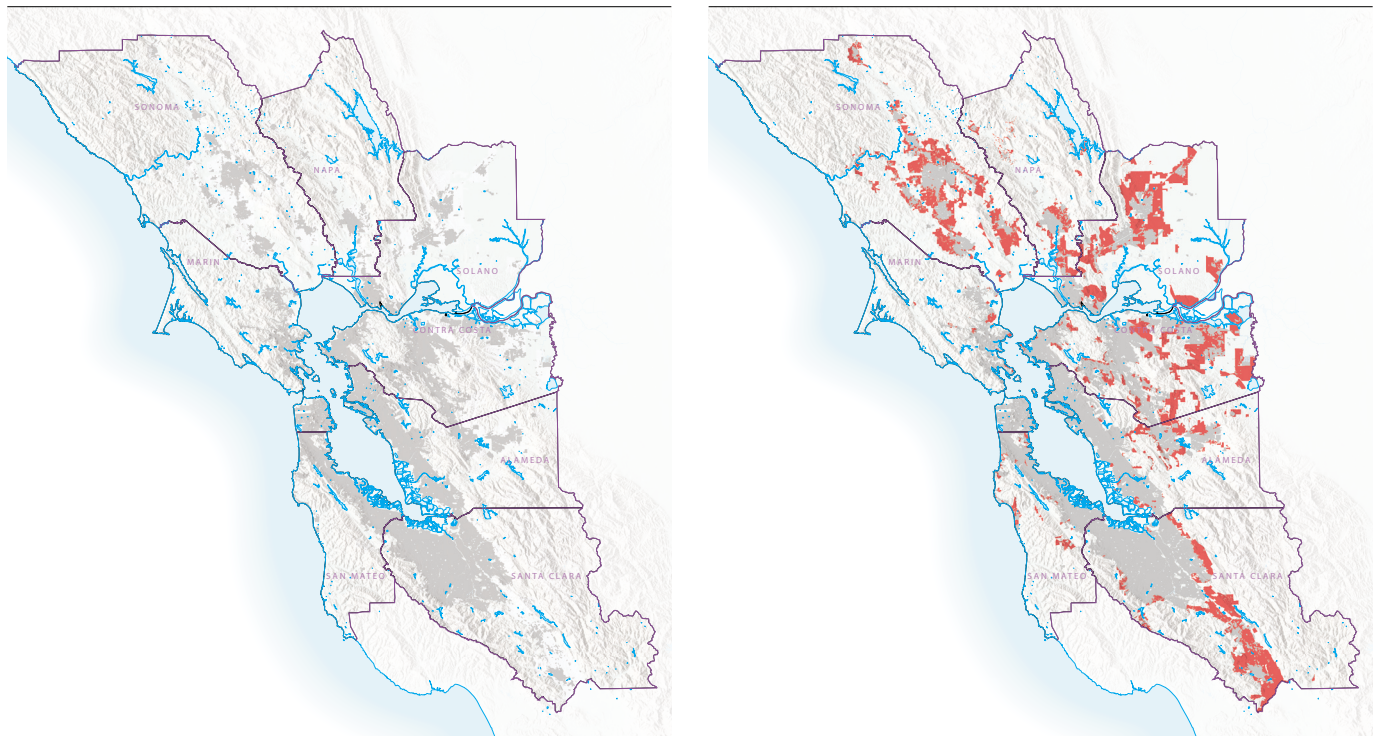


Figure 4: **Dominant Risk Factors on Medium-Risk Lands**

What are the risk factors for medium-risk lands? Throughout the region, 22% of these lands are zoned, planned, proposed, or approved for eventual development (Figure 4). Another 15% are parcelized, meaning they have already been subdivided into smaller parcels of land. This is particularly significant in Sonoma and Santa Clara Counties, where parcelization threatens tens of thousands of acres. Other key risk factors include being adjacent to existing development; having access to infrastructure (transportation, water, or sewage); being inside a city limit, sphere of influence, or urban growth boundary; or having been the object of sprawl threats in the past. These risk factors are largely the same as those facing high-risk lands, but the medium risk lands face them less immediately.

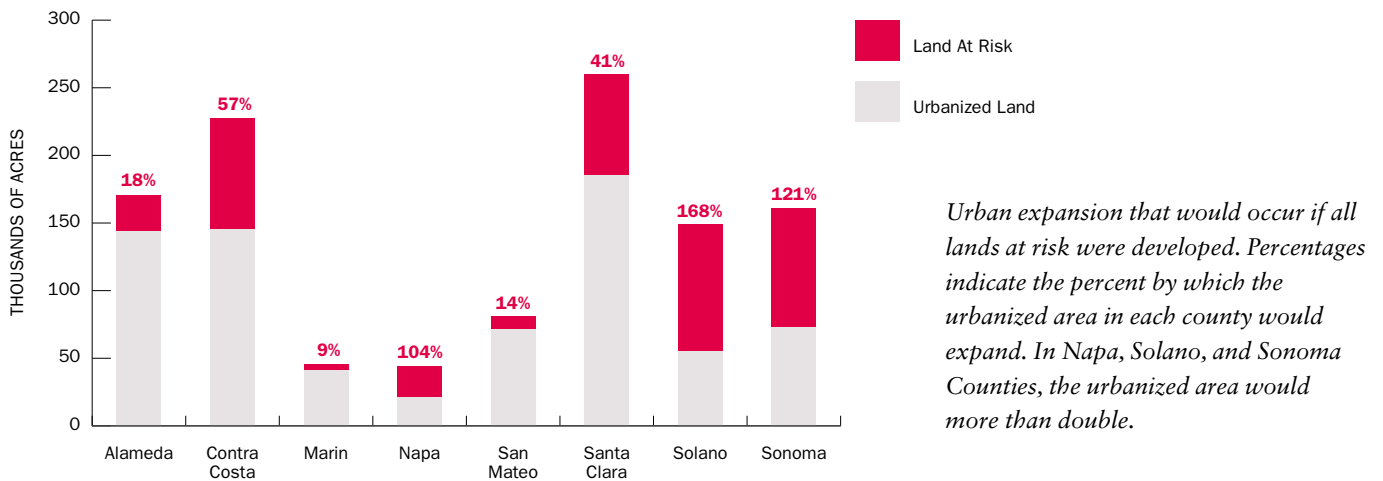
The persistence of medium-risk threats illustrates the necessity of continued vigilance about the future of the greenbelt. Some of the impressive reductions in high-risk land represent only the postponement, not the elimination, of sprawl threat. If the region's counties do not renew and expand their protections for greenbelt lands, these medium-risk lands could come under even more severe threat.

Figure 5: Urban Expansion if At-Risk Land is Developed



Current Bay Area urbanization.

Total land at risk plus current urbanized area.



Remaining Regional Threat

Regionally, nearly 1 out of every 10 acres of land in the entire Bay Area is currently still at risk from sprawl. In the most sprawl-threatened counties, Solano and Contra Costa, almost 1 out of every 5 acres is at risk.

If all land currently at risk were developed in the next 30 years, the urbanized land in the Bay Area would expand to over one and a half times its current size, with Solano, Napa, and Sonoma Counties' urban areas more than doubling in size (Figure 5).

The decrease in land at risk, particularly at high risk, is a significant step forward for the region. But the work is far from over, as sprawl threats loom over more than 400,000 acres of the Bay Area's irreplaceable greenbelt.

The Importance of the Greenbelt

Photo: Bob Walker, collection of the Oakland Museum of California



The Bay Area's fertile soils and mild climate yield an abundance of fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy products, and grains. But the region's working farms are threatened by sprawl development.

The Bay Area's greenbelt has incalculable value for Bay Area residents. The region's success at stopping sprawl and preserving greenbelt lands will determine whether we continue to benefit from thriving agriculture, intact species habitat, clean water, spectacular views, abundant recreation, a vibrant economy, and compact, well-defined urban areas. These values of the greenbelt all contribute to the high quality of life the Bay Area enjoys.

Thriving Agriculture

The Bay Area's agricultural vitality goes far beyond the famous vineyards of Napa and Sonoma Counties, including orchards, ranches, and farms around the region. The region's mild climate and rich soils make it possible to grow a wide array of crops, providing fresh local produce to residents year-round.

This bounty is directly threatened by sprawl in many parts of the region. In eastern Contra Costa County, orchards continue to fall to the bulldozers. In southern Santa Clara County, housing developments have been proposed inside the county's Agricultural Preserve. And across Sonoma County, parcelization and rural residential development threatens highly productive farmlands.

Sprawl threatens farming not only by directly paving farmland, but also by gradually undermining the local agricultural economy. Rising land values can trigger property tax assessments that push farmers to try to sell their land. When farmers start to disappear, the companies that support them with supplies and equipment also disappear, which in turn forces more farmers out of business. Housing developments next to farms can also lead to conflicts with new neighbors who view farming practices as nuisances.

Intact Species Habitat

The Bay Area is a large metropolitan area, but it is also home to an extraordinarily diverse array of plants and wildlife. Hundreds of species make the greenbelt their home, and animals like the golden eagle, bobcat, coyote, tule elk, and mountain lion need large expanses of open land to fly or roam with minimal threat or disturbance from humans.

Nationally, sprawl development is the single greatest threat to species survival. In the Bay Area (and Santa Cruz County), sprawl threatens 257 rare, threatened, and endangered species, more than any other metropolitan area in the continental United States. Sprawl directly destroys plants and soil and fragments the landscape into pieces that are too small and disconnected for animals to use. The survival of local threatened and endangered species like the California tiger salamander, San Joaquin kit fox, Alameda whipsnake, and burrowing owl depends on intact greenbelt lands.



Elk: Galen Rowell/Mountain Light

The tule elk and endangered San Joaquin kit fox rely on the Bay Area's greenbelt for survival.

Clean Water

Greenbelt lands play an essential role in purifying drinking water and protecting the San Francisco Bay. As rain falls onto greenbelt lands, plants and soil act as natural—and free—filters and sponges to keep the water clean and slow its flow, preventing flooding. When land is developed, these free filtration and flood prevention services are lost.

Sprawl development puts the Bay Area at much greater risk of floods and water pollution. The short, intense rainy season already makes the region vulnerable to flooding, and sprawl makes floods more intense, frequent, and dangerous. Polluted runoff that flows into the Bay and the Delta degrades their ecosystems, and endangers valuable fish and shellfish. Pollution in the Delta also affects the drinking water of millions of Californians.

Spectacular Views

The sight of a distant hillside glowing in the sun, dotted with grazing cows or patches of oaks, is familiar to virtually every Bay Area resident. The preservation of these vistas through generations of growth took commitment and foresight by earlier generations. That legacy continues today, as Bay Area communities adopt hillside protection ordinances and urban growth boundaries, helping to preserve these familiar, spectacular views.

Sprawl developments on the region's hillsides mar the landscape without making any meaningful contribution to the region's housing supply. Intact hillsides are an inspiring reminder of the Bay Area's heritage; developed ones are a reminder of how easily that heritage can be wasted.

Recreation

Just as people enjoy looking to the hills, they also enjoy walking, biking, and running in them. The Bay Area's many parks provide a wide range of



Photo: Galen Rowell/Mountain Light

The Bay Area's undeveloped hillsides catch and filter water that runs into the San Francisco Bay and the San Joaquin-Sacramento River Delta, providing clean drinking water and helping to prevent floods.

recreational opportunities, from strolling and picnicking to mountain biking and mushroom hunting. These recreational opportunities make a critical contribution to the culture, lifestyle, and economy of the Bay Area.

Sprawl development threatens the quality of these recreational experiences; a walk in the woods is less satisfying when subdivisions loom just over the fence. Moreover, as the population of the region grows, more park space and recreational opportunities will be needed to ensure that all Bay Area residents have access to the region's great outdoors.

A Vibrant Economy

The Bay Area's economy depends on the region's identity as an attractive place to live and work. Companies use the beauty of the region to attract highly skilled workers; the region's innovation-based economy is rooted in the spectacular landscapes that define the Bay Area. In addition, the region's strong agricultural sector is a significant contributor to the economy.

Sprawl development threatens the scenic landscapes and compact, inviting communities that draw

people to the Bay Area. In addition, the speculative pressures that accompany sprawl development threaten to squeeze farmers out of the Bay Area and undercut a major sector of the economy.

Compact Development

Finally, an intact Bay Area greenbelt generates value by helping to guide good development. With a protected greenbelt surrounding cities and towns, new growth can improve quality of life, instead of creating more traffic and destroying open space. High-quality infill development mixes land uses, putting homes, shops and jobs close to one another, so residents don't have to drive for every errand. Good infill also includes housing options for people of all income levels. This is a crucial part of reducing pressure to develop the greenbelt.

Ultimately, the goals of protecting open space and encouraging compact development in cities are inextricably linked. Each requires the other, and each makes the other possible. If the Bay Area can commit to both, the result will be a thriving greenbelt and a thriving region.

The Importance of Policy in Protecting the Greenbelt

With so much of the Bay Area's greenbelt still at risk, the Bay Area's ability to maintain and expand its high quality of life, thriving economy, and healthy environment depends on the public policy and planning choices that are made today. The Bay Area's greenbelt preservation experience to date has shown that there is no one solution to a problem as complex as stopping sprawl. It takes a combination of policies, and a coordinated team of agencies and organizations, to make broad and lasting change.

On the public policy front, greenbelt preservation begins with good land-use planning. County and city general plans must demonstrate a political commitment both to preserving the integrity of the greenbelt and to growing smarter within developed areas. Voters also have a powerful role to play in approving policies that result in better growth and rejecting those that fuel sprawl.

Preventing Sprawl with Urban Growth Boundaries

Both city and county plans should include well-defined urban growth boundaries (UGBs), which draw a line beyond which development will not go. To be most useful, UGBs should have a long time horizon (at least 20 years) and should include a moderate amount of land to accommodate new high-quality growth. Most importantly, these UGBs should be stable, so that farmers, developers, and elected leaders can make wise decisions, knowing where growth will and will not occur. Voter-

approved UGBs are more stable and stronger than those approved by city councils and county boards of supervisors, as they require a vote of the people for any change.

Protecting Rural Land and Mitigating for Its Loss

To prevent inappropriate development of rural lands, county general plans should include limits on subdivision and parcelization of rural properties, as well as minimum parcel sizes to protect farming. Cities and counties should also have policies requiring mitigation for the development of farmland and environmentally sensitive land.

Permanently Protecting Greenbelt Lands

Independent open space agencies are another key component of greenbelt protection funded by voter-approved sales taxes. These public agencies are critical and effective players in greenbelt conservation. They have now permanently protected tens of thousands of acres throughout the Bay Area, and the pace of their activity is still increasing. These agencies often work in concert with private non-profit land trusts, maximizing the benefit of public open space protection funds.



Urban growth boundaries, like this one in Contra Costa County, draw a boundary to define where growth should and should not go.



Photo: Steven Price, www.urban-advantage.com

Before and after: a street with infill development around transit. This computer-generated image shows how good development can create more vibrant neighborhoods while directing growth away from the greenbelt.

Encouraging Better Growth in Cities

City general plans should encourage good urban infill by mixing land uses, increasing heights and densities where appropriate, and focusing compact development around transit stations. Including affordable housing in cities is also critical to keeping development pressure off the greenbelt. Tools for good growth in cities include mixed-use zoning, to put homes, shops and jobs in close proximity; streets and buildings designed for pedestrians; reduced parking requirements; and affordable housing policies.

Investing in Better Transportation

Voter-approved sales tax increases to fund transportation have the potential to fuel sprawl or to guide better growth. They fuel sprawl if they focus on creating and expanding highways. This fuels sprawl development in remote areas, and does not

lessen traffic congestion for more than a few years. To protect the greenbelt and provide lasting solutions to traffic congestion, transportation funding should be tied to land use in two ways. The first is to require cities to have urban growth boundaries before receiving transportation funds, to prevent sprawl. The second is to require cities to plan for plenty of housing around train stations and bus lines, so that transit is convenient for many people. Transportation investments should also focus on supporting public transit, bicycles, and pedestrians rather than sprawl-inducing highways. This makes already-urbanized areas more attractive and affordable, reduces auto use and traffic congestion, and protects the greenbelt.

Combining Tools for Effective Greenbelt Protection

A key lesson to be drawn from the Bay Area's experience is that both

smart land-use policy and land acquisition are necessary strategies; neither alone will save the greenbelt and create livable communities. The purchase of lands and easements is essential to the long-term security of the greenbelt, but better land-use policies can put many more acres beyond the reach of sprawl more quickly. At the same time, policies require vigilance on the part of the region's voters, both in their enactment and enforcement. Progress in protecting the Bay Area's greenbelt has been best where very strong general plan policies are backed up by complementary city and county policies, sound transportation investment plans, and strong land-acquisition strategies.

Growing Well Within the Boundaries

A key question facing the region is how to use undeveloped lands within urban growth boundaries (UGBs). These lands, which are designated for development, must be managed carefully to keep them from disappearing quickly under an avalanche of sprawl, leaving nothing for the future.

Drawing a UGB is just the first part of land protection. Growing well inside the UGB is the critical second half of the equation. For this reason, lands inside UGBs are still at risk; though they are the appropriate place for good development, they are still threatened by sprawl.

Sprawl inside a UGB has all the same negative effects as sprawl elsewhere: it segregates homes, jobs, and shops; requires more car trips; increases traffic congestion and auto-related pollution; and makes neighborhoods less livable. On the other hand, mixed-use developments with good design, strong transit, and a range of housing types can strengthen an entire city in the near term and be sustainable or re-usable over the long term.

UGBs should be established with these realities in mind. While UGBs must include some room for future urban development, they must not be so large as to threaten the greenbelt itself and impose heavy costs on cities. In the 2005 elections, developers succeeded in establishing excessively large UGBs around Antioch and Pittsburg so that they can proceed with sprawl projects immediately. There is a great danger that others who stand to reap short-term profit from sprawl will imitate this in the future, setting up a cycle of ever-expanding UGBs. To be successful, the boundaries must be set at the point where they are the most stable and sustainable for the community, while also protecting each of the values of the greenbelt.

The question of how to grow within urban growth boundaries is a microcosm of the key issue faced by the region as a whole: how to physically accommodate population and economic growth without destroying the Bay Area's environment and quality of life. Planning policies that protect the greenbelt, encourage appropriate infill development, improve affordability and social equity, and retain decision-making flexibility for future generations are the only way forward.

Current Policies That Generate Sprawl

Unfortunately, many jurisdictions have policies that create sprawl, rather than controlling it. Since World War II, development has tended to sprawl outward in low-density, car-dependent growth on the outskirts of cities, and policies have supported this pattern.

Infrastructure expansions, especially of highways, water supply lines and sewers, are a critical stimulus to sprawl. Not only do they make large-scale residential development physically feasible, they also greatly increase the pressure to develop agricultural lands.

Cities starved for property tax revenue often feel the need to generate sales tax revenues by approving strip malls and big box retail developments. In many cases, they will seek to annex unincorporated county lands, in opposition to county policies, in order to obtain development sites for this purpose.

Finally, permitting or planning for the parcelization, or subdivision, of large blocks of land, especially with single-use residential zoning, is often the fatal step in welcoming sprawl. In a region where housing is scarce, landowners who can subdivide their

land will often do so, reaping large profits from development.

The Bay Area faces significant growth over the coming years; by current predictions it will be home to one million additional people by 2020 and 1.7 million by 2030. With sprawl-producing policies, that growth will translate into lost open space, unaffordable housing, longer commutes, and traffic-choked roads. Accommodating new growth without reducing the region's quality of life will require new policies that leave behind the status quo of sprawl.



Low-density development in remote areas is encouraged by current city and county policies that favor cars over other transportation, encourage sprawling retail development, and allow the subdivision of farmland.

Parcelization

Land parcelization is a hidden—but critical—threat to the long-term integrity of the Bay Area’s greenbelt. Parcelization occurs when undeveloped land is divided up into smaller pieces that can be used as house lots. Parcelized areas are usually built out in a piecemeal fashion, as individual lot owners gradually put up houses. This means sprawl can occur largely outside of public view and with little planning or oversight.

Most parcelized lands are near cities or existing development. Once built upon, they create all the same problems as traditional sprawling subdivisions.

Parcelized lands that are farther away from cities pose significant problems of their own. Parcelization can fragment areas deep within the greenbelt, breaking up contiguous blocks of habitat essential for many wildlife species, or carving up otherwise-intact farming areas. This process also puts large demands on rural roads and other infrastructure, generally in places that are very expensive to service, creating pressure for sprawl-inducing infrastructure expansion. Ultimately, by undermining the values of an intact greenbelt, parcelization makes it more likely that a given area will be converted to full-blown suburban sprawl in the future.

Parcelization is a threat in every Bay Area county except San Francisco, but is especially acute in Sonoma and Santa Clara Counties. Sonoma County has the second-most at-risk land of any county in the Bay Area, despite having urban growth boundaries around eight of its nine cities. One key reason is that parcelization threatens large areas of the county, even on extremely productive farmland (Figure 6). Of all the land at risk in Sonoma County, 24%—a total of 20,810 acres—is threatened primarily by parcelization. It is the most parcelized county in California.

Alameda County has been effective at stopping parcelization through the use of large minimum lot sizes on county land. Napa County and Solano County, on the other hand, have limited parcelization threats with initiatives that restrict residential development on unincorporated county or agricultural land. The latter approach may work better in areas where commercially viable farms can be small, such as in Sonoma’s vineyards. Nonetheless, because parcelization often happens under the radar, it will require continued vigilance on the part of Bay Area counties to prevent it from gradually eroding the region’s greenbelt.

PARCEL SIZE (ACRES)

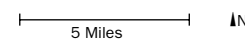
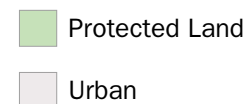
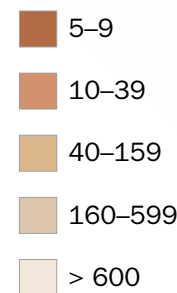
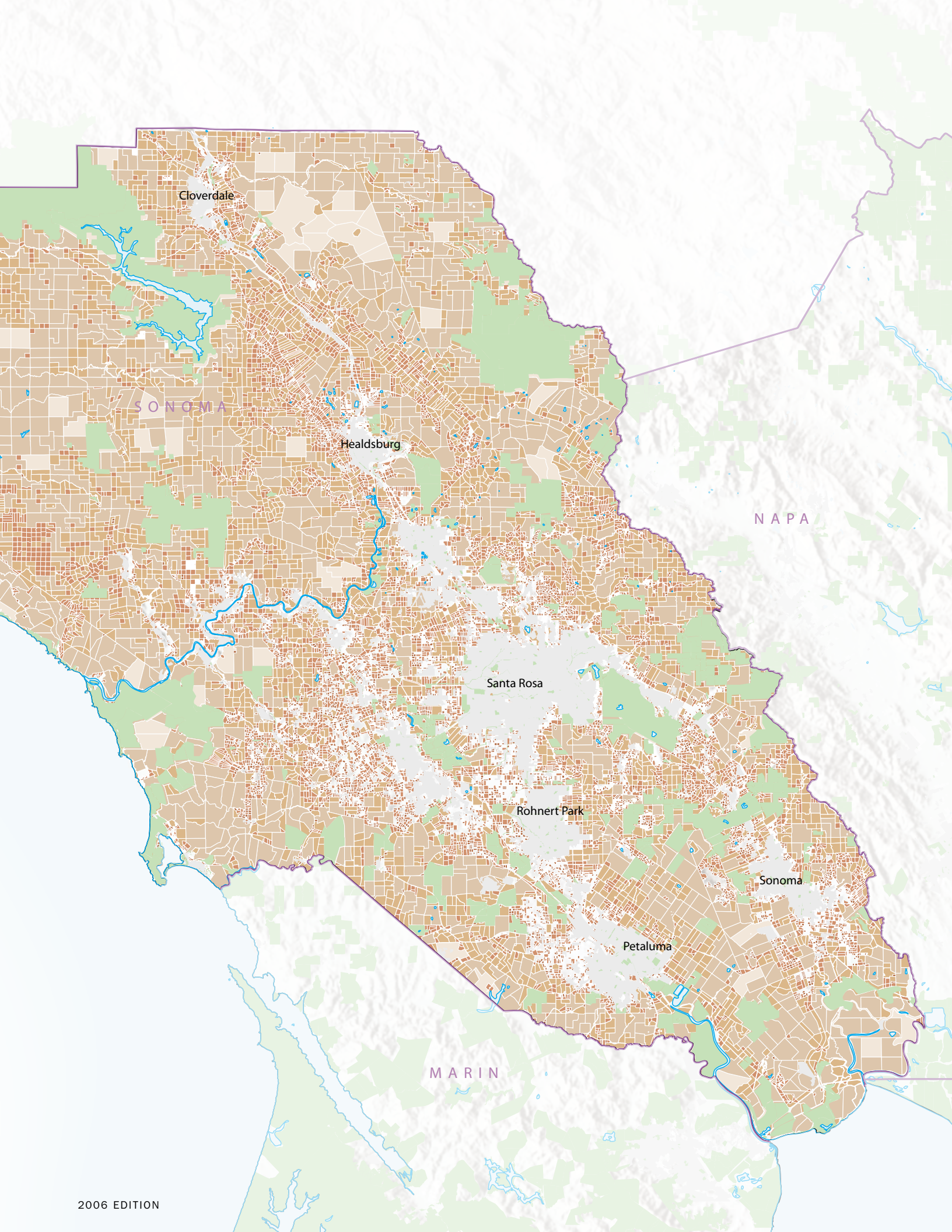


Figure 6: Land Parcelization in Sonoma County



Cloverdale

SONOMA

Healdsburg

NAPA

Santa Rosa

Rohnert Park

Sonoma

Petaluma

MARIN

Alameda County

County progress, Tri-Valley pressure

General Assessment

Alameda County has made significant progress in securing its greenbelt, but challenges remain. The 2000 elections in particular were a landmark in the county's land-use history, with voters passing crucial greenbelt protection measures. Going forward, more responsible city policies will be needed, as well as continued vigilance against developer-backed attempts to roll back growth limits.

Hot Spots

The east county cities of Livermore, Pleasanton, and Dublin remain the focus of land-use controversies in Alameda County. Virtually all of the county's 15,000 acres that remain at high risk are around these cities. The flat ranchlands north of Livermore remain a prime target of developers, despite an urban growth boundary protecting the area. Developer Pardee Homes placed an initiative on the 2005 ballot to allow 2,450 houses on 1,500 acres of the land, but failed thanks to the concerted efforts of local activists. Despite the progress made in recent years, the growth pressures in these Tri-Valley cities could still increase Alameda County's total urbanized area by more than 10% in just the next 10 years.

Bright Spots

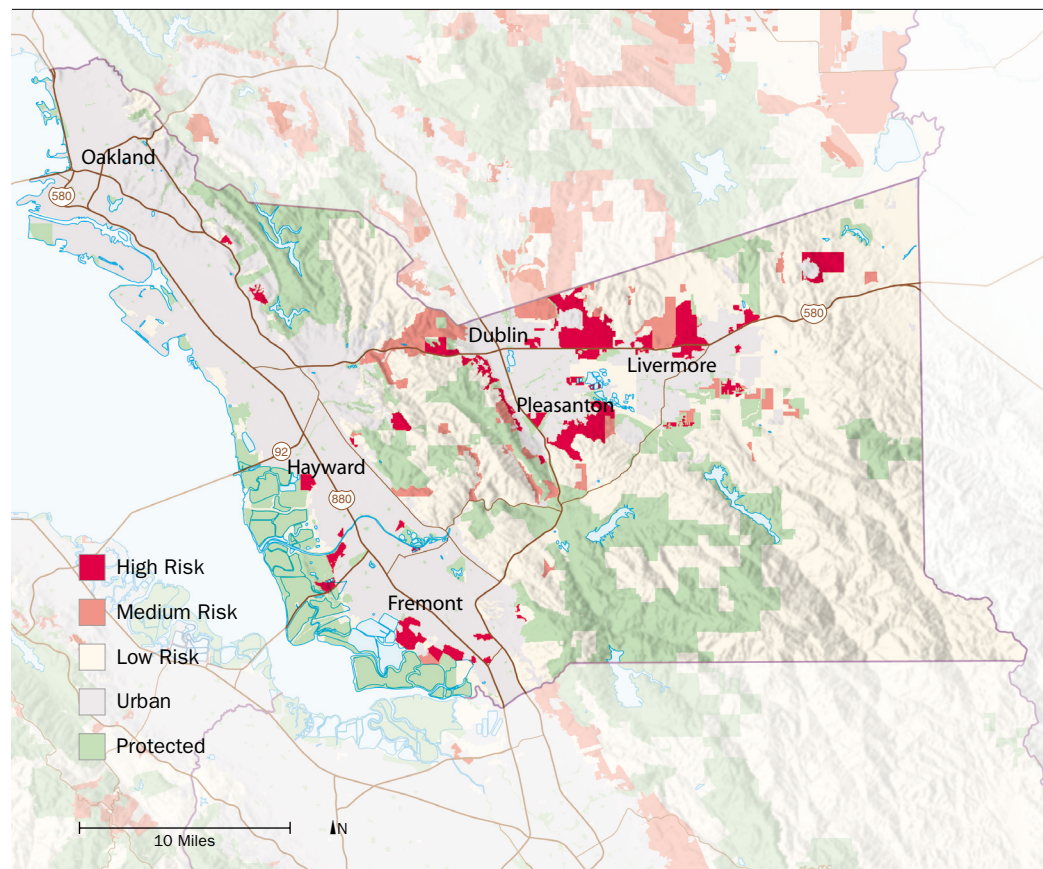
The passage of Measure D by county voters in 2000 laid down a key cornerstone for long-term greenbelt protection in Alameda County. The measure established a county urban growth boundary, prohibited subdivision of ranchlands in the east county, and encouraged investment in existing urbanized areas, extending regulatory protection to as much as 150,000 acres of farm, ranch and habitat lands. In the same election,

Dublin voters passed Measure M to protect 4,000 acres of hill country, and county voters overwhelmingly passed the transit-friendly transportation sales tax Measure B.

Progress continued in 2002, when Fremont also passed a hillside protection ordinance, and the Livermore City Council established the North Livermore Urban Growth Boundary, connecting to the existing South Livermore Urban Growth Boundary to complete the boundary around the city. In 2004, voters in the western parts of Alameda and Contra Costa County bolstered financial support for the western, more heavily used parts of the East Bay Regional Park District, by passing Measure CC in the 2004 elections.

	ACRES
High Risk	15,000
Medium Risk	11,100
Low Risk	203,000
Urban	144,000
Protected	104,700
Total	477,800

The County Board of Supervisors also has maintained its important policy of requiring large minimum lot sizes for rural parcels, helping to preserve the viability of remaining agricultural lands.



Contra Costa County

Defining effective urban growth boundaries

General Assessment

With the third largest area of land at risk (82,200 acres), Contra Costa County remains a central battleground in the fight to save the Bay Area's greenbelt. The last 5 years have seen a mixture of progress and continuing severe threats, as voters and the County Board of Supervisors have made efforts to rein in developers and east county cities bent on sprawl.

Hot Spots

The east county cities of Brentwood, Antioch, and Pittsburg are still among the hottest of sprawl hot spots in the entire Bay Area. Developers in Antioch and Pittsburg gained voter approval in 2005 for expansive urban growth boundaries that allow them to develop thousands of acres of greenbelt land outside the county's existing boundary.

A similar proposal failed in Brentwood, but the City Council continues to plan for massive sprawl to the south and east. Antioch also continues to plan for 2,500 houses in the Sand Creek area, despite strong public opposition.

Other hot spots are flaring up as well, as Oakley is considering a dangerous proposal to construct up to 4,300 houses on a flood-prone island in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Concord is beginning a process to decide how to re-use the recently mothballed Concord Naval Weapons Station, considering up to 13,000 new houses at the 5,100-acre site. Concord is also positioning itself to develop the rest of the base, should the military close the 1,600-acre area adjacent to Suisun Bay.

Bright Spots

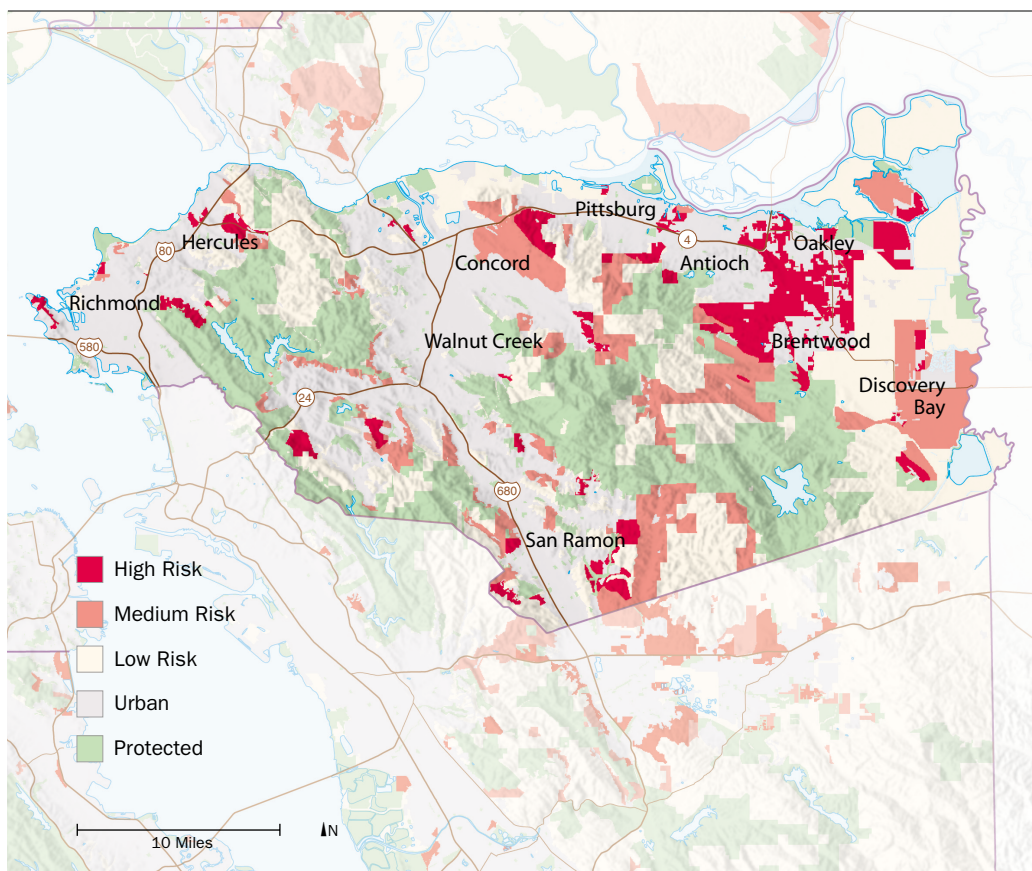
The bogus developer-backed urban growth boundaries in Antioch and Pittsburg come in response to important improvements in the county's growth policies. The most significant occurred in 2001, when the County Board of Supervisors tightened the county's urban limit line, saving 14,000 acres of greenbelt lands from immediate sprawl pressure. In 2004, Contra Costa voters passed Measure J, a transportation sales tax that made transportation funding to cities contingent on their either accepting the county's urban limit line or passing their own before 2009. San Ramon voters approved an urban growth boundary in their city's general plan in 2001. In 2004, voters in Hercules placed Franklin Canyon off-limits to

	ACRES
High Risk	29,300
Medium Risk	52,900
Low Risk	123,900
Urban	145,200
Protected	111,000
Total	462,400

Note: Columns may not add up precisely due to rounding.

development, and 2002 brought the culmination to a long campaign to make 4,400-acre Cowell Ranch into a state park.

The renewal of the county's urban limit line, which may occur in 2006, offers the next opportunity to strengthen greenbelt protections in this fast-growing county.



Marin County

Affordability needed to complete the vision

General Assessment

As it has been for many years, Marin County remains a regional and national leader in greenbelt land protection. The county and its citizens continue to employ a mix of regulation, acquisition, and easement strategies to create a strongly protected and robust greenbelt. For these land preservation victories to be truly complete, however, Marin must take more aggressive steps to improve housing affordability and stimulate infill development so that it can accommodate its fair share of the Bay Area's future growth.

Hot Spots

Marin's total of at-risk lands continues to drop toward zero, with only 2,600 high-risk acres and only 1,100 medium-risk acres. Nonetheless, some growth controversies remain. The St. Vincent's-Silveira site along Highway 101 is the largest piece of developable land in Marin and remains the object of development proposals. Debate also continues about the redevelopment of the San Quentin prison site.

The primary challenge for Marin is to incorporate more compact development within cities with homes affordable to a wider range of incomes, so that people who work in the county can live there as well. This will take pressure off the lands (and the roads) in Marin and beyond.

Bright Spots

Marin voters in 2004 passed a transit-friendly transportation sales tax called Measure A. In 2006, these voters will decide on the fate of a proposed rail line connecting Sonoma and Marin's cities in the Highway 101 corridor. Efficient and

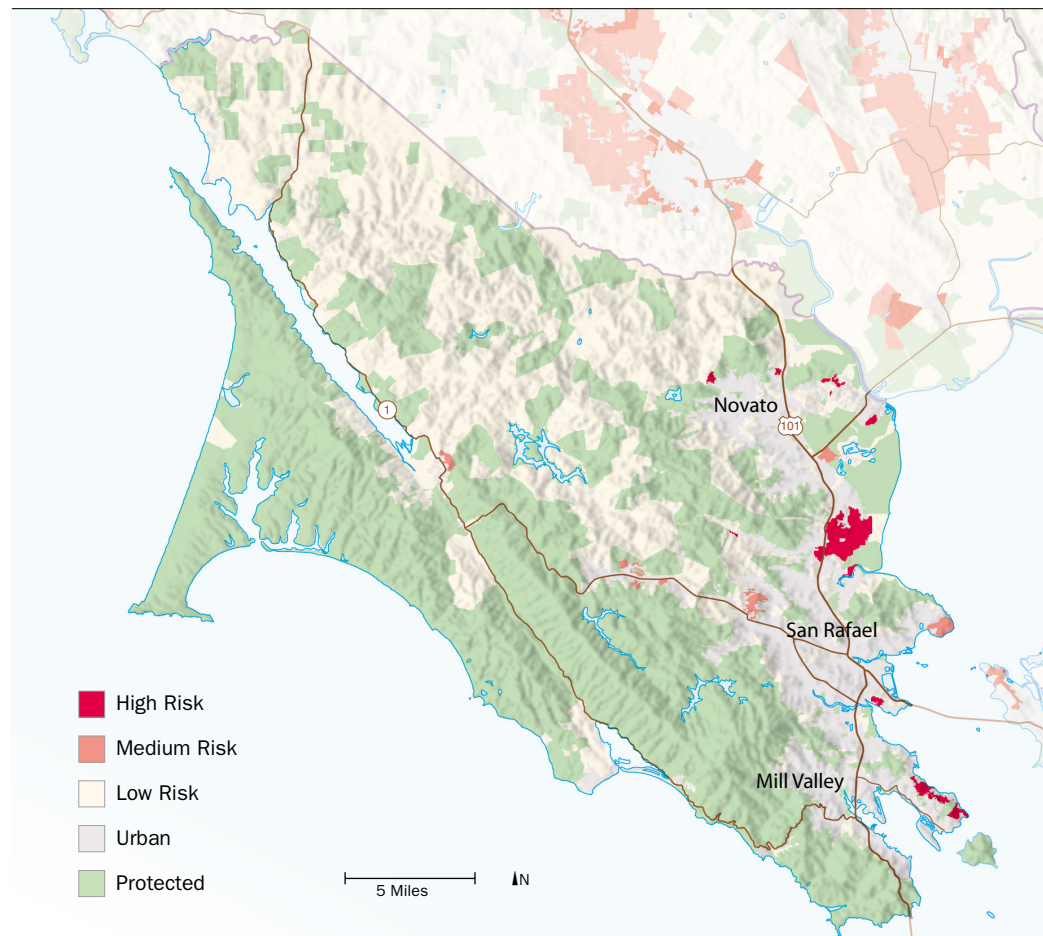
reliable public transit would help to create new opportunities for livable infill growth in Marin. In a positive first step toward this goal, in 2006, Marin County was awarded a federal grant of \$25 million to create a network linking bicycle and walking paths with transportation hubs.

The county has also embarked on a General Plan update that may designate portions of the Bay coast for conservation. The update may also include an affordable housing "overlay zone," which would encourage more compact development in the county's central urban corridor.

The County Open Space District and the non-profit Marin Agricultural

	ACRES
High Risk	2,600
Medium Risk	1,100
Low Risk	113,200
Urban	41,400
Protected	178,000
Total	336,300

Land Trust continue to be national leaders in the purchase of agricultural and conservation easements. Easements now protect over 37,000 acres of Marin countryside, especially in the central portion of the county. This complements the land protected by purchase as the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the state park system.



Napa County

A crucial crossroads

General Assessment

Napa County, with its world-renowned vineyards, has long been a leader in agricultural land preservation thanks to its 1990 countywide land protection ordinance, called Measure J. With the glaring exception of American Canyon, its cities have also generally embraced good growth policies. Napa voters will make another crucial land-use decision, with repercussions far beyond the county, when they vote in June 2006 on Measure A, an extreme private property initiative modeled after Oregon's disastrous Measure 37.

Hot Spots

Passage of Measure A would cripple greenbelt protection efforts throughout Napa and give private property extremists a crucial beachhead in California. The measure would force public agencies to pay landowners for claimed reductions of their property values resulting from new land-use policies (like renewal of Measure J) that protect the public values of the greenbelt. This would place an impossible fiscal burden on the County, effectively freezing land-use regulation and allowing sprawl developers unprecedented access to greenbelt lands.

In the county's existing landscape, the biggest hot spot remains American Canyon, which still lacks land-use controls of any kind and permits widespread sprawl development at the southern gateway to the Valley. Although Napa generally has continued to make progress in reducing high-risk land and has good underlying greenbelt protections, it is the only county in the Bay Area in which the overall extent of threatened land has risen since 2000 (by 14%).

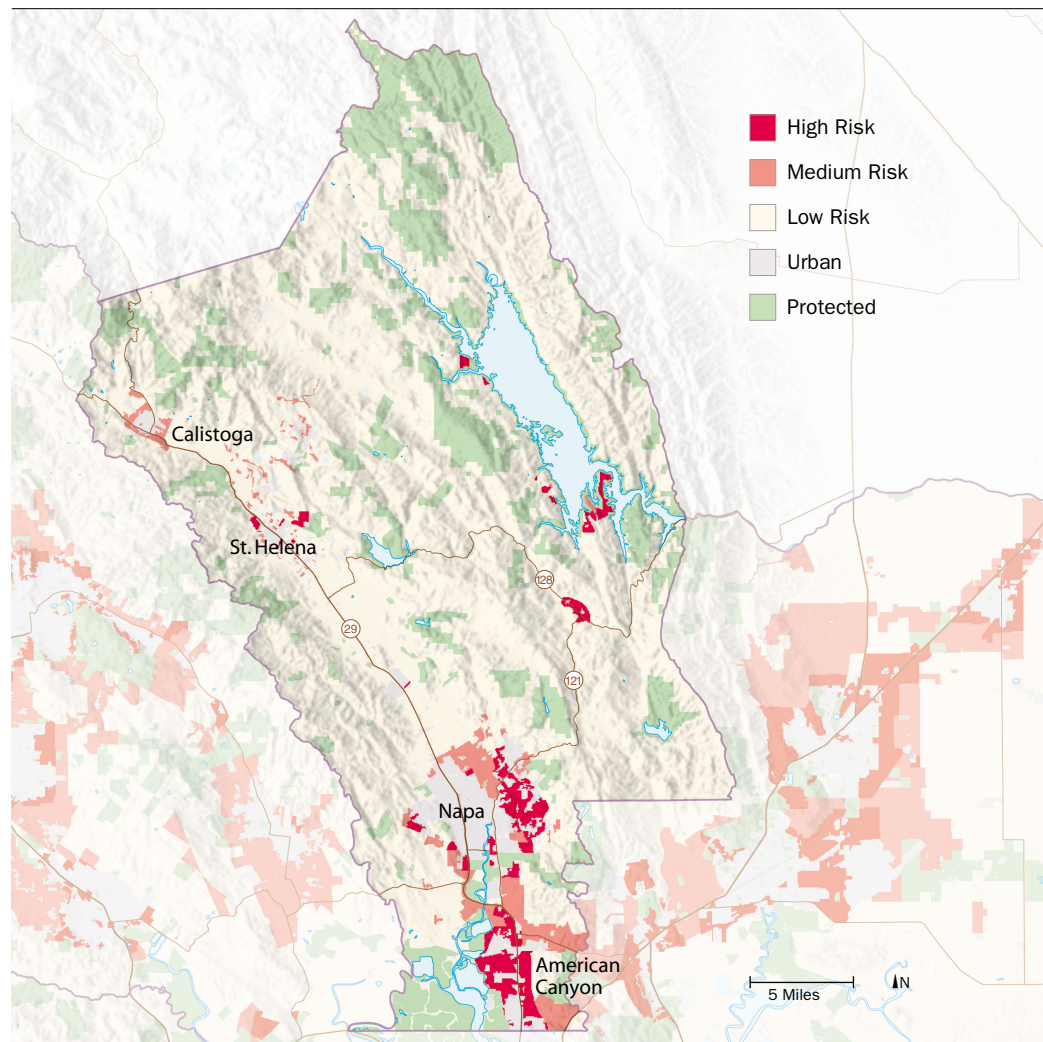
Furthermore, long-considered potential expansions of Highways 12 and 29 could open the door to new development pressures.

Bright Spots

In 2004, developers attempted to erode the mandates of Measure J—the county's strong agricultural land protection policy—by sponsoring three ballot initiatives to create specific exemptions to it and allow new sprawl development. Napa voters rejected all three of these measures, a resounding re-affirmation of support for Measure J. In 2006, a ballot measure to create an

	ACRES
High Risk	9,700
Medium Risk	12,500
Low Risk	340,500
Urban	21,400
Protected	99,300
Total	483,400

open space district will go before voters. Passage of this measure would complement the efforts of the Napa Land Trust, and would relieve Napa of its status as one of only two counties in the Bay Area without an open space district to provide permanent greenbelt protection.



San Francisco County

Planning for infill development

General Assessment

The City and County of San Francisco does not possess any threatened greenbelt land, but it has an important role to play in protecting regional open space and improving the Bay Area's overall growth patterns. To fulfill its role as a center city and a major job center, San Francisco must continue expanding its recent initiatives to encourage livable and affordable infill growth.

Hot Spots

There is no at-risk acreage within the City and County of San Francisco. San Francisco's challenge is in creating homes that local workers can afford. Housing prices are out of reach for many families, who are forced to look for homes in distant areas; this contributes to sprawl development, traffic congestion, and loss of greenbelt lands throughout the Bay Area.

Bright Spots

Since 2000, San Francisco has pursued several important planning initiatives to encourage new construction in particular areas of the city, especially around transit.

Under its Better Neighborhoods 2002 planning process, the Planning Department is working on area plans for Balboa Park, the Market and Octavia Street neighborhood, and the Central Waterfront to increase housing, office and retail construction in these transit-rich districts. In addition, it is undertaking an Eastern Neighborhoods Community Planning Initiative for the Mission, Visitacion Valley, Bayview, South of Market, and Showplace Square/Potrero Hill, which seeks to increase housing construction without fueling gentrifi-

cation. The City has also embarked upon a Downtown Neighborhoods Initiative to house as many as 40,000 new residents downtown. The City has finished the Rincon Hill Plan to bring high-density housing and commercial space to the area just west of the foot of the Bay Bridge, within walking distance of downtown San Francisco. This plan, endorsed by Greenbelt Alliance, is the first new neighborhood plan approved by the Planning Commission in over a decade.

The Mission Bay redevelopment, whose plan was long ago endorsed by Greenbelt Alliance and has now come into fruition as a project, has completed a considerable amount of

	ACRES
High Risk	0
Medium Risk	0
Low Risk	600
Urban	24,900
Protected	5,100
Total	30,600

construction, and will ultimately create 6,000 homes, with 49 acres of open space and parks, and nearly 10 million square feet of office, retail, research and educational space.

Large-scale infill developments like these, near transit and jobs, will help to accommodate significant growth and add to the region's quality of life.



San Mateo County

From greenbelt protection to smart infill

General Assessment

San Mateo County solidified its status as a leader in protecting greenbelt land over the last 5 years. With large public land holdings and active land protection activities by the Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District and the Peninsula Open Space Trust, San Mateo's total acreage of land at risk is relatively small, totaling 10,200 acres.

Hot Spots

As with Marin County, San Mateo's primary challenge lies in making its already urbanized areas more affordable and livable, so that it can continue to accommodate its share of future Bay Area growth and improve social equity. In general, a changing economic and political climate has contributed to a lessening of growth pressures around the coastal cities of Half Moon Bay and Pacifica, although much of the land around those cities remains at medium risk of development.

Bright Spots

The Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District won authorization to expand its jurisdiction all the way to the Pacific Coast in 2004, 6 years after voters recommended the change. This move complements the Peninsula Open Space Trust's "Saving the Endangered Coast" campaign, launched in 2001, which has protected more than 14,000 acres in western San Mateo County. A major effort to restore some of the Bay's lost wetlands by acquiring and restoring salt ponds has also protected baylands on the edge of Menlo Park.

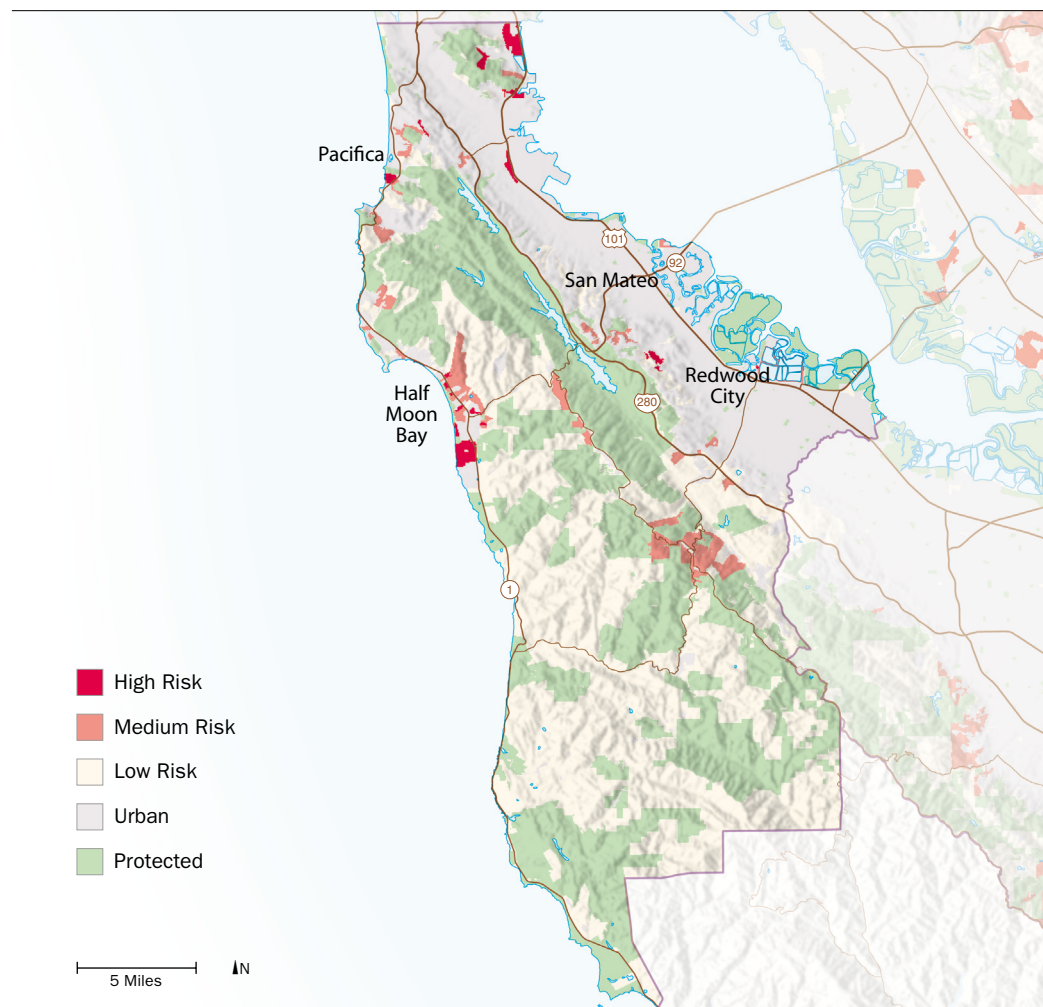
In 2000, Mori Point, a coastal promontory above Pacifica that had

been the focus of many development proposals, was permanently protected as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Since 2000, four new BART stations in the county and the connection of BART to CalTrain at Millbrae have created valuable new opportunities for regional integration and smart growth in San Mateo County. In 2004, Measure A, a transit-friendly transportation sales tax, won voter approval, further enhancing San Mateo County's infill potential. In 2005, the City of San Mateo approved a good example of transit-oriented development, Bay Meadows Phase II,

	ACRES
High Risk	2,000
Medium Risk	8,200
Low Risk	100,400
Urban	71,100
Protected	107,800
Total	289,500

which would replace the aging Bay Meadows racetrack with a new neighborhood next to a CalTrain station. The "Grand Boulevard" effort to revitalize El Camino Real will also help accommodate new growth and better use urbanized land in both San Mateo and Santa Clara County.



Santa Clara County

A sprawling past and changing future

General Assessment

Today, Santa Clara County faces crucial decisions about its future. The proposal to develop housing for up to 80,000 people in Coyote Valley in southeast San Jose, and ongoing sprawl pressure in Morgan Hill and Gilroy, mean that planning actions made in south Santa Clara in the next few years will shape the county for decades to come.

Hot Spots

Ever since the City of San Jose began its latest round of planning for the development of Coyote Valley in 1999, it has been one of the largest development hot spots in the Bay Area. The City's goal is the creation of 25,000 homes and 50,000 jobs on 6,800 acres of land—essentially the creation of an entire new town. Unfortunately, the City's plans for the valley thus far have not lived up to its stated smart growth goals.

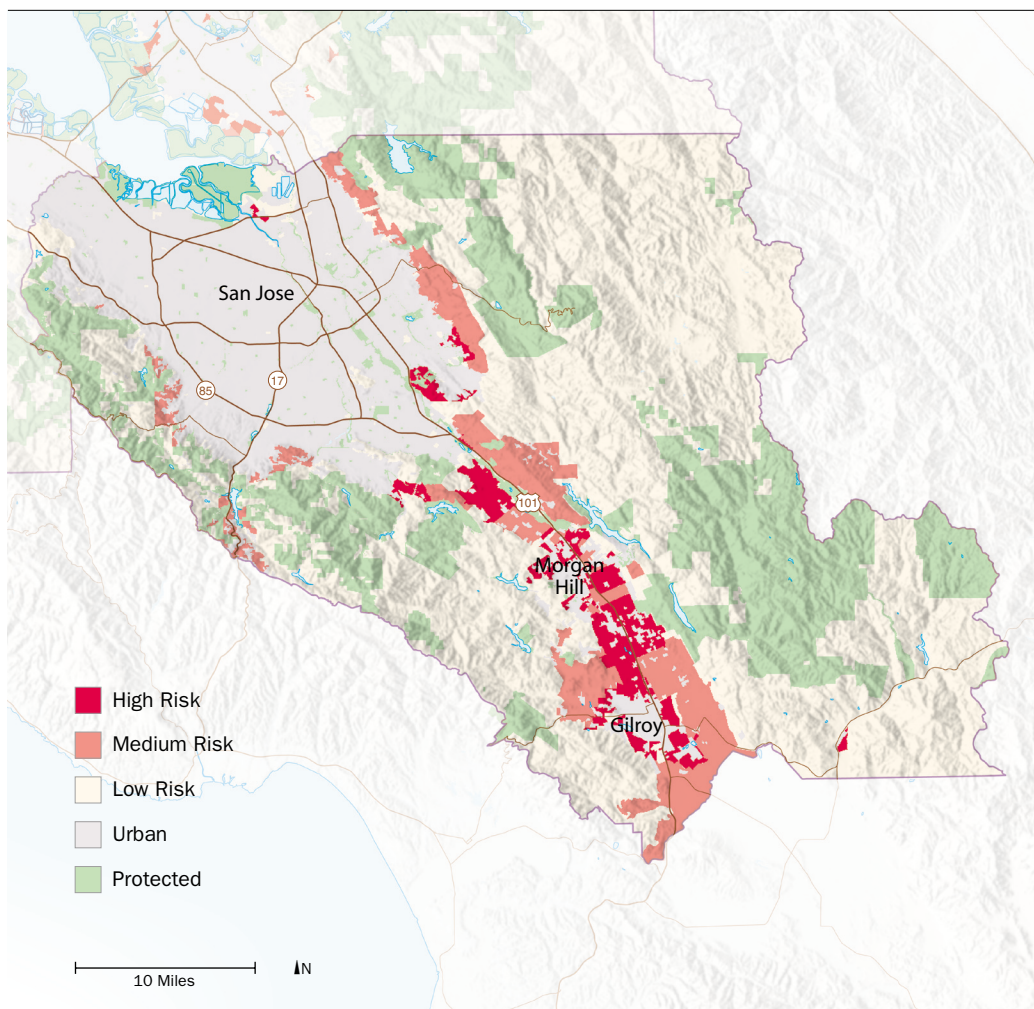
The far southern end of the county also remains a key hot spot, as Morgan Hill and Gilroy grapple with sprawl pressures both from Silicon Valley and the south. Morgan Hill began studying an expansion of its urban growth boundary in 2003; 1,250 acres of farmland outside the boundary are now at risk. Likewise, the Gilroy City Council voted in 2002 to allow development on 660 previously protected acres of the Santa Clara County Agricultural Preserve. In 2005, Gilroy passed up an opportunity to join the county's open space district. South of Gilroy, Sargent Ranch, 6,500 acres of farmland and wildlife habitat, remains under threat in spite of the defeat in 2001 of a major development proposal.

Bright Spots

With these threats, there have also been some important improvements in the county. In 2000, San Jose residents voted to strengthen the City Council's urban growth boundary, protecting more than 20,000 acres. In 2001, the City Council passed 15 general plan amendments encouraging infill and affordable housing, and the City now has large-scale plans to redevelop the industrial North First Street area and add thousands of new homes to the downtown. In 2002, county property owners voted to provide \$80 million over 10 years to fund the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority.

	ACRES
High Risk	21,300
Medium Risk	54,000
Low Risk	377,600
Urban	185,100
Protected	201,800
Total	839,800

In 2006, Santa Clara County voters will decide on an initiative to prevent sprawl development and parcelization on rural county land.



Solano County

Cities should follow county's lead

General Assessment

For the first time, Solano County now has more land at risk than any other Bay Area county, a total of 93,300 acres. As in Contra Costa, Solano County's eastern cities are actively planning for large-scale sprawl development in the face of responsible county policy. Given the county's pivotal position between the Bay Area and the Sacramento region, it is critical that these cities, especially Vacaville, embrace sound greenbelt protection principles.

Hot Spots

With I-80 coursing through the middle of the county and providing commute potential to both Sacramento and the Bay Area, thousands of acres in this county are subject to intense development pressure. This pressure is exacerbated by a lack of growth management policies in the east county cities of Vacaville, Dixon and Rio Vista. In 2002, the city of Vacaville proposed a "vision" to annex and develop over 4,000 acres of open space, but public opposition forced the city to shelve the plan.

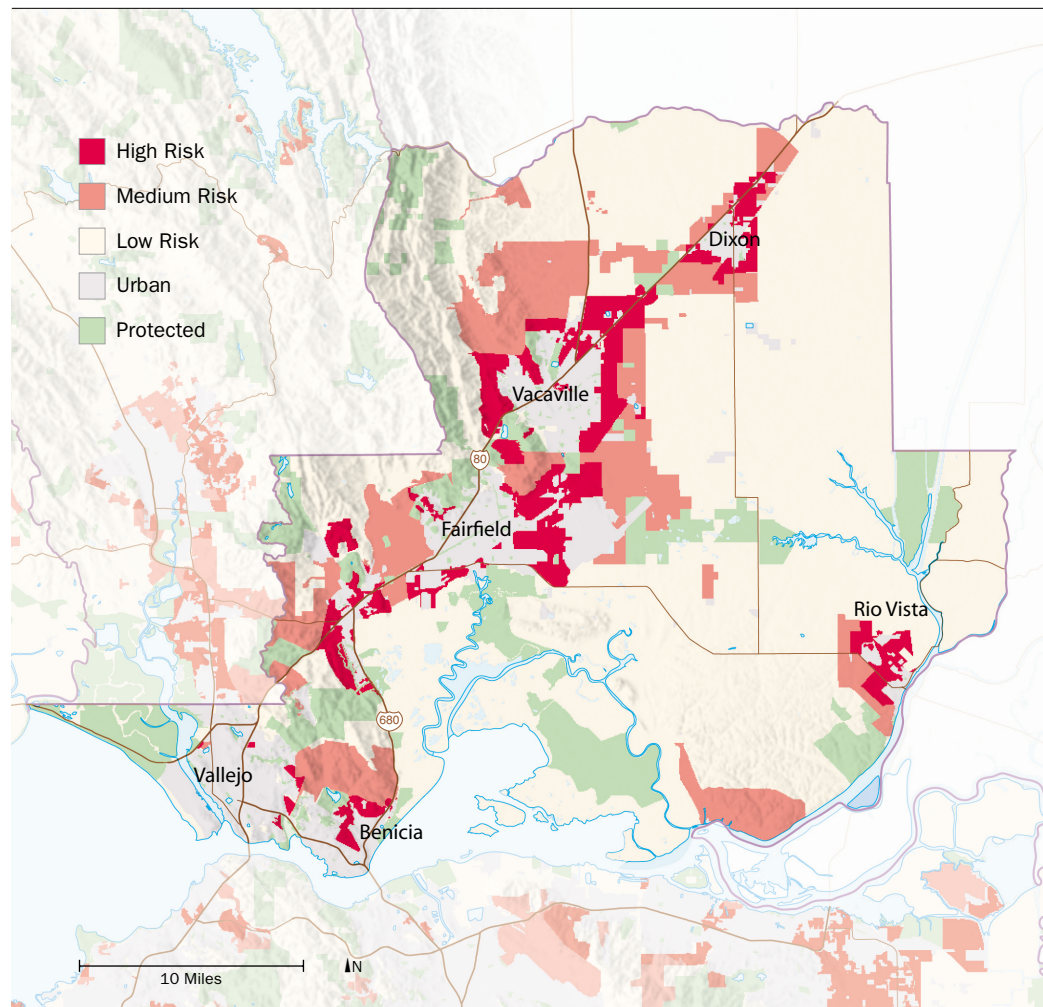
The bedrock of Solano County's greenbelt protection, the Orderly Growth Initiative, prohibits sprawling residential development on county land. The Orderly Growth Initiative must be renewed by 2010 to prevent roughly half a million acres of Solano's greenbelt from coming under sprawl pressure. In 2004, the County Board of Supervisors voted down legislation to begin establishment of a county park system. Solano remains one of only two Bay Area counties (with Napa) without an open space district.

Bright Spots

Cities in the southern and western portion of the county have made significant strides in greenbelt protection. In 2003, Fairfield voters passed Measure L, which both established an urban growth boundary and gave voters approval power over projects outside the boundary. This helped protect 60,000 acres in Green Valley and Suisun Valley, and around Travis Air Force Base. The same year, Benicia voters passed a measure with similar provisions that helped protect 14,000 acres, including Sky Valley. In the 2002 and 2004 elections, county voters rejected highway-heavy transportation sales

	ACRES
High Risk	31,900
Medium Risk	61,400
Low Risk	315,900
Urban	55,400
Protected	66,000
Total	530,600

tax measures, but a transportation measure on the ballot for 2006 contains better support for public transit. The county also appears to be on its way to putting the Orderly Growth Initiative before voters for renewal.



Sonoma County

City boundaries in place, but challenges remain

General Assessment

With urban growth boundaries in place around eight of Sonoma's nine cities, achieving a secure greenbelt in Sonoma County now depends largely on the County. Voters missed their chance to take action at the ballot box in 2000, but the County's General Plan update process presents a new opportunity. Cities can also do their part by encouraging better infill development. Sonoma County now has the second largest area of at-risk land in the Bay Area, 88,300 acres.

Hot Spots

The city of Cloverdale, in the far north of the county, is the county's only city without an urban growth boundary. Its current General Plan update process could address sprawl pressures by including an urban growth boundary and bringing it to a vote of the people.

However, city boundaries are only the first step; Sonoma County's greenbelt will continue to be at risk as long as its General Plan lacks strong policies to prevent sprawl on county land. Largely for this reason, Sonoma County is the most parcelized county in California. Many development proposals have come forward in the absence of clear limits on development on county lands. One proposal would have put a casino on coastal wetlands, and then on a site outside Rohnert Park's urban growth boundary, before the site was finally moved inside the city.

Bright Spots

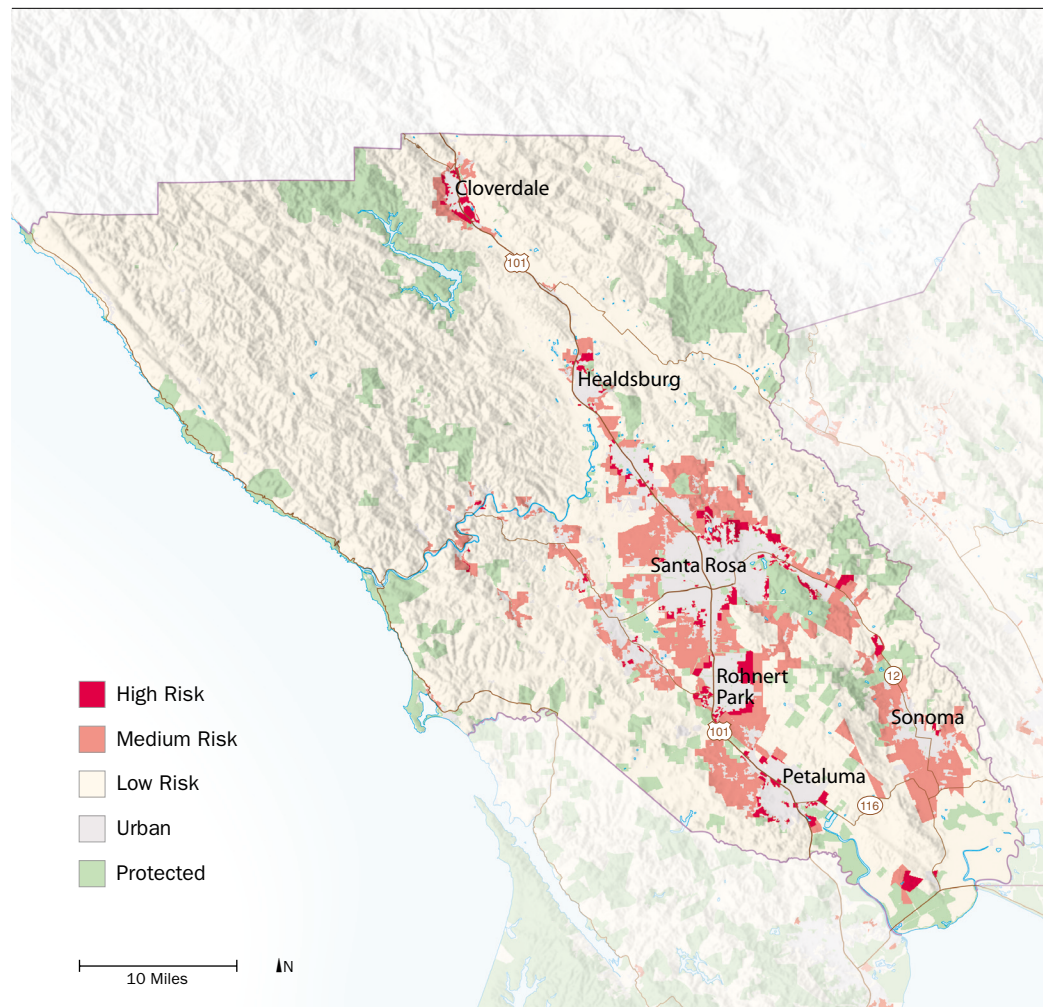
The cities of Sonoma and Rohnert Park established their urban growth boundaries in the 2000 election, protecting almost 30,000 greenbelt acres between them. The Sonoma

County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District has been an active purchaser of land and easements throughout Sonoma County, conserving over 30,000 acres of land since 2000. In 2004, together with the Sonoma Land Trust, the district also permanently protected the 640-acre area of San Pablo Baylands where a casino was proposed.

Sonoma County has also made important progress in supporting infill development and affordability. In 2004, Petaluma approved a jobs-housing linkage fee on new development. Then in 2005, the County Board of Supervisors approved

	ACRES
High Risk	13,400
Medium Risk	74,900
Low Risk	719,200
Urban	72,800
Protected	133,600
Total	1,013,900

policies to encourage affordable housing, including an inclusionary housing ordinance and a jobs-housing linkage fee. In this area, the County's example would be a good one for other counties and for its cities to follow.



Achieving the Vision

With 401,500 acres of greenbelt lands at risk, the Bay Area has a long way to go to reach the goal of a fully protected regional greenbelt.

Continued speculative development pressure on the far edges of the region, disputes over urban growth boundaries, the need to renew key greenbelt protection measures, and the ongoing threat of parcelization all add up to serious risk to greenbelt lands. Contributing to this risk is the need for many parts of the region to

significantly increase their commitment to infill development, affordable housing, and transit.

However, the goal is closer than it has ever been. The tools are all here: the Bay Area has the institutions, the knowledge, and the public support to fully protect its greenbelt of open space.

But full greenbelt protection cannot be achieved all at once; the decisions

that protect this regional asset are local. City by city, county by county, the region's residents and their elected leaders decide the region's future. Those decisions become critical as the region prepares for a million more people by 2020.

That is the promise that brings people to this remarkable region: that the Bay Area's vibrant cities, productive farms, and spectacular natural landscapes will remain intact and inviting for years and generations to come.

It is up to all the Bay Area's residents to fulfill that promise.

The Bay Area is a spectacular place. Will uncontrolled growth dominate the landscape and make this a worse place to live? Or will the region pursue city-centered growth and greenbelt protection to make its future even better? Bay Area residents and their elected leaders must decide.



Photo: Galen Rowell/Mountain Light

Methods

The 2006 *At Risk* report is based on the analysis of data collected in 2005.

Defining Risk

As in previous editions, the 2006 *At Risk* report divides the Bay Area's land into five categories:

- **High risk:** Greenbelt lands that, for a variety of factors cited below, are likely to be developed or taken out of greenbelt uses (such as productive agriculture, open space, wildlife habitat, and recreation areas) in the next 10 years.
- **Medium risk:** Greenbelt lands that are likely to be developed or taken out of greenbelt uses in the next 30 years. Rural lands that are parcelized for rural residential uses are also considered medium-risk lands, since these uses generally preclude productive farming and create conditions that favor eventual suburban sprawl.
- **Low risk:** Greenbelt lands that, for a variety of policy, geographic, or political reasons, are not likely to be developed in the next 30 years.
- **Secure greenbelt:** Greenbelt lands that are permanently protected from development, including most public lands, land trust properties, conservation easements, and private lands that are securely protected by a vote of the people. Most city parks and open spaces are not included in the secure greenbelt because data from some cities was not available at the time the maps were created.
- **Urban:** Lands that are developed at a density of at least one residential dwelling unit per 1.5 acres, or the equivalent structure density for commercial or industrial development.

Risk Factors

- **Approved or proposed development:** Greenbelt lands that have already been approved for development or are the object of a current development proposal, are considered at-risk. A current development proposal means that a landowner has formally applied for relevant development or construction permits, applied for a zoning change, or otherwise made public the intention to develop the land (or sell it to someone who will develop it).
- **Designation in a city or county General Plan or zoning code:** A given land area is considered at-risk if it is zoned or otherwise designated in a General Plan for residential, commercial or industrial development at densities of more than one unit per 1.5 acres, or the equivalent structure density for commercial or industrial development.
- **Historical development threat:** A given land area may be considered at-risk if it has previously been the object of development proposals or applications, or is the subject of ongoing legal or political conflict about its development potential, and no policies are in place to prevent its development.
- **Inside relevant urban limits:** A given land area is considered at-risk if it is within city limits, within an urban growth boundary, or within a city's sphere of influence (i.e., its planned area of future expansion). Good development on these lands is preferable to development outside city boundaries, and can help to protect the region's greenbelt as a whole. However, these lands are still at risk of sprawl development.
- **Adjacent to existing development:** A given land area is considered at risk if it is directly adjacent to land that is already developed, proposed for development, or approved for development at a density of at least one unit per 1.5 acres, and there are no policies in place to prevent its development.

- **Infrastructure services:** given land area is considered at risk if it already has direct access to municipal water and sewer services, and no policies are in place to prevent its development.
- **Regional transportation access:** A given land area is considered at risk if it has access to the regional transportation network (either roads or transit), or is in an area that will be made accessible by adopted local and regional transportation plans, and no policies are in place to prevent its development.
- **Parcelization:** A given land area is considered at risk if parcel sizes are 5 acres or smaller, and no policies are in place to prevent its development.
- **Development speculation:** A given land area is considered at risk if it has been offered at prices commensurate with its development value, as opposed to its agricultural value, and there are no policies in place to prevent its development.
- **Topography:** A given land area's risk appraisal may be altered (in either direction) based on the physical feasibility of development given the slopes and soil stability.
- **Other risk factors:** Some areas are at-risk due to proposals for development projects that are not included in adopted city, county or regional plans. Examples of such development include military bases, casinos, stadiums, educational campuses, and energy plants.

In general, high-risk lands are characterized by buildable terrain, proximity to existing urban areas and transportation infrastructure, designation as developable in a county or city general plan, and/or development speculation. Medium-risk lands share many of these factors, but often to a lesser degree. Medium-risk lands are generally farther away from existing urban areas. Additionally, lands that are at risk of parcelization, but lack any other risk factor, are considered medium-risk lands. Lands that are at risk from any of the above factors, but are protected from development by a given policy, are classified as at-risk if that policy is likely to expire and open those lands to development within the next 10 years (high risk) or 30 years (medium risk).

Risk Assessment

Risk analysis was undertaken in 2005 by Greenbelt Alliance field staff, each of whom is familiar with development issues in two Bay Area counties. The field staff consulted all relevant city and county planning and zoning documents, as well as other maps issued by relevant government

agencies, to precisely identify which land areas are subject to the risk factors identified above. In addition, staff consulted with city and county planners, agency officials, and Greenbelt Alliance associates to gather additional information.

Urban and Permanently Protected Lands

The State of California's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Project provided the base map of urbanized areas, based on satellite images of the San Francisco Bay Area in 2001 and 2002. Secure greenbelt lands were mapped by the Bay Area Open Space Council in early 2005. Greenbelt Alliance field staff made limited updates to both the urban and secure greenbelt map layers to account for notable changes that occurred before October 2005. The lands defined by these two data layers were *not* subjected to risk analysis.

Mapping Methods

For the risk assessment, Greenbelt Alliance staff evaluated and mapped individual "risk zones," geographic units of analysis that vary in size. Some units are as small as a single individual parcel; some are clusters of parcels that are at risk for the same reason.

The risk maps were digitized and tiled together using the Geographic Information System (GIS) software ArcGIS 9.1, to create a regional composite map. From this composite map, regional and county-by-county summary data were calculated. This map also formed the basis of comparison with the 2000 data. The GIS also facilitated calculation of the changes in the geographic extent of various risk categories, the fate of previously at-risk lands, and the proportion of land at risk due to a given risk factor, at both at the regional and county level.

Comparing 2000 and 2006

Significant improvements in mapping techniques over the last 5 years required that the 2000 spatial data be adjusted in order to be exactly comparable with that of 2006. The datasets mapped in the 2000 report for urban land and open space were replaced with more accurate datasets for 2000 issued by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Project and the Bay Area Open Space Council, respectively. After the changes were made, the geographic extent of various risk categories in 2000 was recalculated to allow accurate comparison with 2006. Therefore, the total acreages reported in this document for 2000 differ from those of the 2000 *At Risk* report (Table 4).

Table 4: **Adjusted 2000 At-Risk Findings**

	High-Risk Acres	Medium-Risk Acres	Low-Risk Acres	Urban Acres	Protected Acres	Total Acres*
Alameda	25,000	11,000	212,500	141,400	95,100	485,000
Contra Costa	54,300	46,100	127,300	142,200	99,100	469,100
Marin	5,300	2,500	131,400	40,500	159,400	339,000
Napa	17,900	1,100	369,300	21,100	76,000	485,300
San Francisco	0	0	600	24,400	5,300	30,300
San Mateo	7,900	10,700	111,200	71,100	91,400	292,400
Santa Clara	37,400	58,100	410,000	184,100	147,800	837,300
Solano	39,900	56,500	346,200	53,800	35,100	531,500
Sonoma	25,700	64,800	770,000	70,700	84,800	1,016,000
Total	213,300	250,800	2,478,500	749,300	794,000	4,486,000

Note: Rows and columns may not add up precisely due to rounding.

*Acreage totals exceed actual land area due to slight overlap between the GIS layer of urban lands prepared by the State of California's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Project, the GIS layer of protected lands prepared by the Bay Area Open Space Council, and the GIS layer of water from GreenInfo Network. The total error due to overlap is approximately 1.3%.

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