

Introduction to the Local Coastal Plan

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Introduction

I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this Local Coastal Plan Update is to help guide land use planning and development decisions within Sonoma County's Coastal Zone in a manner reflective of current community priorities, responsive to present-day conditions, and consistent with the latest California Coastal Commission policy and guidance. This update also reflects policies related to coastal development that were adopted by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors in General Plan 2020, while generally retaining existing land use designations previously certified by the California Coastal Commission. In addition, this Local Coastal Plan Update adds new information and policy in the following areas: sea level rise (2100 planning horizon), biotic resources, cultural and historic resources, geologic hazards, water resources, and public access. The document has been re-organized to be more consistent with the General Plan 2020 format and includes previously certified Appendices, including the Right-to-Farm Ordinance, Historic Resources Inventory, Scenic Resources, Natural Resources, Shoreline Protection, and Categorical Exclusions.

This updated Local Coastal Plan considers growth on the Sonoma County Coast as projected by historic population growth trends and anticipated increases in visitor-serving uses, and build-out is projected based on the continuation of existing zoning land use, density, and minimum parcel size for the period 2015 to 2035.

BACKGROUND

Native American settlement began on the coast of California about 6,000-10,000 years ago. These populations were primarily hunting and gathering tribes, though more recent populations were involved in complex trading systems. The Kashia band of the Pomo people lived on the Russian River and northern coast. The Coast Miwok lived south of the River; their region included portions of present-day southern Sonoma County and Marin County. Both groups occupied a narrow territory extending from the coast several miles inland. The Pomo appear to have had more contact with Russians who settled at Fort Ross in the early 1800's and became somewhat acculturated to European ways. By the 1870's the Pomo survived in three villages. By 1915 a reservation was granted for their permanent residence. The Miwok were subjected to European influence by the San Francisco and Sonoma Missions.

Historic development and settlement patterns across the Sonoma County Coast were influenced by a variety of groups ranging from Spanish settlers, Mexican residents, Russian traders and various industry activities, such as fishing and logging.

The State of California, Sonoma County, and private organizations such as Sonoma County Land Trust and Wildlands Conservancy have preserved large portions of the coastline for parks, recreation, and protection of environmental resources. Examples include Sonoma Coast State Park (and beaches), Salt Point State Park, Fort Ross State Historic Park, Gualala Point Regional Park, Stillwater Cove Regional Park, and Jenner Headlands Preserve. These parks plus development of private visitor-

serving facilities have attracted more tourists to the coast over the years. Several private residential developments including Timber Cove (1961), The Sea Ranch (1964) and Bodega Harbour (1971) have increased the resident population and options for vacationers. As these communities have grown, the Sonoma County coast has gradually evolved an economy based primarily on recreation and tourism, while traditional resource-based industries, such as logging and commercial fishing have been in decline for several decades.

2. THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL ACT AND LOCAL COASTAL PLANS

The California Coastal Act (Public Resources Code Section 30000 *et seq.*; Coastal Act) was passed by the State Legislature in 1976, became effective on January 1, 1977, and replaced the original Coastal Initiative, Proposition 20, passed in 1972. The California Coastal Act requires each local government with jurisdiction over land within the Coastal Zone to prepare a Local Coastal Program for that portion of the Coastal Zone within its jurisdiction. A Local Coastal Program is a basic planning tool used by local governments, in partnership with the Coastal Commission, to guide development in the Coastal Zone. A Local Coastal Program must include a Land Use Plan, which contains goals and policies for development, and an Implementation Plan that contains measures to implement the plan.

While each Local Coastal Program reflects unique characteristics of individual local coastal communities, the Coastal Commission requires that regional and statewide interests and concerns must also be addressed in conformity with Coastal Act goals and policies. Following adoption by the Board of Supervisors, this Local Coastal Plan Update will be submitted to the Coastal Commission for review and certification that the Local Coastal Plan is consistent with provisions of the California Coastal Act.

LOCAL COASTAL PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATES

Coastal Act Section 30519.5: “Periodic review of certified local programs; recommendations; reports” states:

“(a) The commission shall, from time to time, but at least once every five years after certification, review every certified local coastal program to determine whether such program is being effectively implemented in conformity with the policies of this division. If the commission determines that a certified local coastal program is not being carried out in conformity with any policy of this division it shall submit to the affected local government recommendations of corrective actions that should be taken. Such recommendations may include recommended amendments to the affected local government's local coastal program.

(b) Recommendations submitted pursuant to this section shall be reviewed by the affected local government and, if the recommended action is not taken, the local government shall, within one year of such submission, forward to the commission a report setting forth its reasons for not taking the recommended action. The commission shall review such report and, where appropriate, report to the Legislature and recommend legislative action necessary to assure effective implementation of the relevant policy or policies of this division.”

Consistent with Coastal Act Section 30519.5, Sonoma County shall review the Local Coastal Program and amend as indicated by this review every five years after certification by the California Coastal Commission.

COASTAL ZONE BOUNDARY

The Coastal Zone is defined in Coastal Act section 30103, and its boundaries were further established through maps adopted by the State Legislature in 1976, at the time of Coastal Act enactment. Per the Coastal Act, the Coastal Zone includes land and water of the State of California, from the Oregon border to the U.S.-Mexico border. The Coastal Zone extends seaward to the State's outer limit of jurisdiction, including all offshore islands, and inland generally 1,000 yards. However, in significant coastal estuarine, habitat, and recreational areas it extends inland to the first major ridgeline paralleling the sea or five miles from the mean high tide line of the sea, whichever is less, and in developed urban areas the zone generally extends inland less than 1,000 yards. Along Sonoma County's 55-mile coast, the Coastal Zone extends inland generally between 3,000 and 12,000 feet from the shoreline, except around Duncans Mills, Willow Creek, and Valley Ford, where it extends up to five miles inland along the Russian River corridor and the Estero Americano.

COASTAL ACT LAND USE PRIORITIES

California Coastal Act Section 30001 states:

“The Legislature hereby finds and declares:

- (a) That the California coastal zone is a distinct and valuable natural resource of vital and enduring interest to all the people and exists as a delicately balanced ecosystem.
- (b) That the permanent protection of the state's natural and scenic resources is a paramount concern to present and future residents of the state and nation.
- (c) That to promote the public safety, health, and welfare, and to protect public and private property, wildlife, marine fisheries, and other ocean resources, and the natural environment, it is necessary to protect the ecological balance of the coastal zone and prevent its deterioration and destruction.
- (d) That existing developed uses, and future developments that are carefully planned and developed consistent with the policies of this division, are essential to the economic and social well-being of the people of this state and especially to working persons employed within the coastal zone.”

Thus, the Coastal Act recognizes the importance of both the natural environment and economic development that is dependent upon the resources of the coast.

The Coastal Act places the highest priority on maintaining and increasing public access to the shoreline and protecting environmental resources. Other high-priority uses include maintaining coastal views and community character, agriculture, coastal-dependent uses such as commercial fishing, and lower-cost visitor and recreational facilities designed to provide access to coastal recreational opportunities.

ADMINISTRATION

After a Local Coastal Program has been certified by the Coastal Commission, permitting authority over most new development in the Coastal Zone is transferred to the local government, which reviews proposals for new development for conformance with the Local Coastal Program. The Coastal Commission retains permanent coastal permit jurisdiction over development proposed on tidelands, submerged lands, and public trust lands. The Commission also acts on appeals from certain local government coastal permit decisions.

In the Coastal Zone, the Local Coastal Program supersedes and takes precedence over other local plans, policies, and regulations with respect to development.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANNING AGENCIES AND INITIATIVES

Sonoma County has a particular interest in coordination of land use, infrastructure, and environmental protection with other local, state, federal, and tribal governmental jurisdictions within the County. The County also acknowledges both the presence of federally recognized tribal governments within Sonoma County, and the need for communication and coordination with federal and tribal governments, where development of tribal and non-tribal land is proposed and where tribes seek to acquire new trust land. The Local Coastal Program also considers the policies and concerns of adjacent counties and regional agencies, such as the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution Control District, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Sonoma County Water Agency, the California Coastal Commission, the Coastal Conservancy, and others. The text of the various Elements notes those situations where these agencies have particular responsibilities that affect the physical development of the Sonoma County Coast and approval of permits.

PRIOR COASTAL PLANS

1980 Local Coastal Plan

The process of preparing the Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan began in 1978, with the first adoption of the Local Coastal Plan by Sonoma County Board of Supervisors in May 1980. The Coastal Commission certified the plan in December 1980 and it became effective in January 1981. In 1982, the Coastal Commission certified The Sea Ranch portion of the Local Coastal Plan and the LCP implementation plan that included the Administrative Manual and the Coastal Zoning Ordinance.

1989 General Plan & Local Coastal Plan Amendments

In 1989 the County adopted a new General Plan, which directed the County to update and revise the Local Coastal Plan to be consistent with the new General Plan. In 1993, 1995, 1999, and 2001 the Coastal Commission certified amendments to the LCP, which adopted technical changes to ensure consistency with the General Plan.

Local Coastal Plan Update & 2008 General Plan

In 2001 the County started revising and updating the 1989 General Plan and simultaneously the Local Coastal Plan. The County adopted Sonoma County General Plan 2020 on September 23, 2008. Accordingly, the Local Coastal Plan Update incorporates applicable General Plan 2020 goals, objectives, and policies; and includes objectives and policies unique to the Coastal Zone and the larger Sonoma Coast/Gualala Basin Planning Area. As mentioned above, the Local Coastal Plan Update incorporates relevant General Plan 2020 goals, objectives, and policies; and includes objectives and policies unique to the Coastal Zone and the larger Sonoma Coast/Gualala Basin Planning Area.

3. PLAN ORGANIZATION

LOCAL COASTAL PLAN SUB-AREAS

The Local Coastal Plan covers a significant portion of the Sonoma County General Plan Sonoma Coast/Gualala Basin Planning Area. The Coastal Zone runs the length of the Pacific Coast margin, from the Gualala River to the Estero Americano. To provide clear mapping of policies and resources within this area, the Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan divides the Coastal Zone into the following ten SubAreas for ease of mapping:

1. The Sea Ranch North
2. The Sea Ranch South
3. Stewarts Point/Horseshoe Cove
4. Salt Point
5. Timber Cove/Fort Ross
6. The High Cliffs/Muniz-Jenner
7. Duncans Mills
8. Pacific View/Willow Creek
9. State Beach/Bodega Bay
10. Valley Ford

3.1 GOALS, OBJECTIVES, POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND INITIATIVES

Goals are general guidelines that explain what the County seeks to achieve through Local Coastal Plan implementation.

Objectives set forth strategies or implementation measures to help attain the stated goals.

Policies bind the County's actions and establish the standards of review for determining whether land use and development decisions, zoning changes, or other County actions are consistent with the Local Coastal Plan.

Programs are necessary or potential steps for implementation of the Local Coastal Program; for example, further study and development of plans of ordinances.

Initiatives are non-binding and/or advisory statements of intent, encouragement, or pledges of support for specific endeavors, programs, or outcomes; and which may set guidelines and priorities for County actions.

PLAN ELEMENTS

This Local Coastal Plan is divided into elements, each of which corresponds to a planning theme or resource topic. A summary of each plan element is provided below. The elements are presented in the order of appearance within the Local Coastal Plan.

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element establishes allowed land uses and densities, and presents policies specific to the Coast or particular sub-areas. Policies address outer continental shelf development, new residential and commercial development, affordable housing, and visitor-serving commercial uses.

Agricultural Resources Element

The Agricultural Resources Element presents guidelines and policies that apply to lands with an Agriculture land use designation. Policies address marketing of agricultural products, stabilization of agricultural use at the edge of urban areas, limitations on intrusion of residential uses, location of agricultural-serving and visitor-serving uses, provision of farmworker housing, streamlining of permit procedures for agricultural uses, and recognition of the aquaculture and horse industries as agricultural uses.

Open Space and Resource Conservation Element

The Open Space and Resource Conservation Element addresses scenic resources/design, biotic resources, soils, timber resources, mineral resources, energy resources, air quality, and commercial fishing and support facilities. This element also contains a Scenic Resources / Design section, which identifies designated Scenic Landscape Units, Vista Points, and Scenic Corridors. Along with Coastal Design Guidelines, this section establishes siting and design guidelines to protect coastal views and to minimize other visual impacts of development.

This element also identifies designated Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs), which include Riparian Corridors, and Biotic Habitat Areas, which include Sensitive Natural Communities and Special Status Animal and Plant Occurrences and Habitats. Policies address the protection and preservation of natural resources (including soils, timber resources, mineral resources, energy resources, and air quality) and the protection and improvement of facilities natural resources associated with the commercial fishing industry.

Public Access Element

The California Constitution provides that the public has the right-of-way to navigable waters and the right to maximum access of the shoreline, and that development shall not interfere with that right. Recreation and visitor-serving uses have priority over all other uses except coastal-dependent industry and agriculture.

This element describes in general the public and private parks, trails, and other recreational facilities on the Sonoma County Coast and includes maps showing the locations of these facilities.

The element describes the types of facilities in the Coastal Zone, the methods and priorities for acquisition of facilities, the Public Access Plan, and the allowable uses of public access facilities. This element also contains policies relevant to recreational boating facilities.

Water Resources Element

Water Resources is a new element developed in recognition of the importance of water to the environment, economic stability, agricultural protection, and overall quality of life of Sonoma County Coast residents. Policies address subjects such as surface water, groundwater, water conservation and re-use, public water systems, and water quality.

Public Safety Element

The Public Safety Element establishes special limitations and procedures for review of development projects located in areas subject to natural hazards, including seismic and other geologic hazards, landslide and erosion on unstable slopes, beach erosion and cliff/bluff stability, flooding, sea level rise, tsunami, and wildland fire. Hazardous materials are also addressed.

Circulation and Transit Element

This element presents plans for the Sonoma County Coast's future highway and transit systems are presented, with emphasis on State Route 1. This element emphasizes an increased role for public transit and other alternative transportation modes and the importance of measures which will allocate existing highway capacity more efficiently during peak travel periods.

Public Facilities and Services Element

The various public facilities and services which may affect the future development of land on the Sonoma County Coast are described in this element, including water, wastewater treatment and disposal, parks and recreation, fire protection, law enforcement, and solid waste management. Policies address the lack of basic services on the Coast, which limits development potential in most areas. Policies also address limitations to emergency medical and other health care services for the Coast's small population spread over large distances. Policies related to youth, family, and senior services are also included.

Cultural and Historic Resources Element

The Sonoma County coast is rich in cultural resources tied to the identity, history, and practices of tribal peoples, and their unique relationship to the landscape.

“Cultural resources” refers collectively to archaeological and paleontological resources, including Native American cultural and sacred sites, tribal cultural resources, artifacts, and remains. In addition “Tribal cultural resources” includes but is not limited to viewscapes, vistas, landscape features, living vegetation, and species used for cultural practices and subsistence.

“Historic resources” refers to structures, sites, and artifacts associated with colonization, settlement, and development of the Coastal Zone by non-Native American cultures. Historic resources are generally structures, sites, and artifacts associated with non-Native American cultures during and

after the Russian and Spanish colonial periods, but these sites may also contain Native American cultural and sacred sites, tribal cultural resources, artifacts, and remains.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Sonoma County citizens have played a pivotal role in the establishment of the California Coastal Commission, and have been historical leaders in coastal protection. Accordingly, the Local Coastal Planning process included strong citizen participation from the beginning.

Throughout the Local Coastal Plan Update process, there has been strong public participation. The County held three public workshops in the spring of 2013 as part of the initial plan update process. The Preliminary Draft Local Coastal Plan was published in June 2015, and five additional public workshops were held during the summer of 2015. After integrating community feedback, the Public Review Draft was published in September 2019, with six public workshops to introduce the plan beginning in fall 2019 and finishing in early 2020. Two workshop-style informational updates were presented before the Board of Supervisors and in 2021 four topic-specific workshops were held virtually to discuss some major topics of public comment. These workshops and review periods have generated over 400 comments from hundreds of individuals, interest groups, agencies, and research organizations. Below are some of the key agencies, advocacy groups, and coastal community partners who have been instrumental in the development of the Local Coastal Plan Update.

In 2022 the Board of Supervisors opened a public hearing for adoption of the Local Coastal Plan. Additionally in 2023 meetings were held on the continued public hearing and three additional outreach meetings held with key stakeholders.

Key Organizations that have been actively involved in coastal protection in Sonoma County since 1968 include:

- Sonoma Land Trust
- Coastwalk California
- Bodega Land Trust
- LandPaths
- Save Penny Island
- Sierra Club
- Sonoma County Conservation Action
- Sonoma County Surfriders
- Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
- Wildlands Trust
- Save the Redwoods League

Agencies providing ongoing participation in the update and implementation of the Local Coastal Program:

- California Coastal Commission
- CSAC / Cal Cities Sea Level Rise Working Group
- NOAA, Greater Farallones Coastal Resilience Working Group
- Caltrans
- CalFire
- California State Parks
- State Lands Commission
- Coastal Conservancy
- U.C. Davis Bodega Marine Lab
- Audubon Canyon Ranch
- Wildlands Institute
- Sonoma County Ag Commissioner
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- Sonoma County Ag + Open Space District
- Sonoma County Transit

- SCTA/RCPA
- Sonoma Public Infrastructure
- Sonoma County General Services
- Sonoma Water
- Marin County Planning Department
- ABAG/MTC
- Bodega Bay Fire Protection District
- Monte Rio Fire Protection District
- Timber Cove Fire Protection District
- Valley Ford Fire Protection District
- North Coast Fire Protection District

Home Owners Associations that have been actively involved in the development of the Local Coastal Program:

- The Sea Ranch Association
- Bodega Harbour Homeowners Association
- Timber Cove Home Owners Association
- Sereno del Mar Home Owners Association

Advocacy and Community Groups that have been actively involved in the update process:

- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- Coastwalk
- Surfrider
- Sonoma County Conservation Action
- Greenbelt Alliance
- Sonoma County Land Use and Transportation Coalition
- North Bay Association of Realtors
- Wildlands Institute
- LandPaths
- Sonoma County Land Trust
- Russian River Keeper
- Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
- Save Our Sonoma Coast
- Concerned Citizens for Estero Americano