

Overview of Comments Received and Responses

Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy

Public comment period: June 15th, 2022 – July 15th, 2022

The Sonoma County Climate Resilient Lands Strategy (CRLS) is a non-regulatory strategy to help departments and agencies of the County of Sonoma (the County) to prioritize a range of nature-based actions to build resilience across the landscape of Sonoma County. The County welcomed input from the public on the CRLS during a public comment period from June 13th, 2022 through July 15, 2022. Comments could be made on either the full CRLS document or the shortened Overview and Critical Concepts document. The Overview and Critical Concepts document was translated into Spanish and comments in Spanish were also welcomed. Staff presented the CRLS during a live public webinar on June 27th, 2022, answered questions, and received comments.

In summary, the County received 28 comments from the public via email, in addition to focused input from the CRLS project team and partners, and comments collected during the public webinar. Among the 28 comments received via email (that embodied multiple individual comments) submitted in writing:

- Two comment messages were not comments on the CRLS
- Eleven comment messages focused on the Petaluma River
- Five comment messages focused on Food Security and Regenerative Ag
- Ten comment messages addressed multiple topic areas

Staff appreciates the time and effort by commenters to provide thoughtful and specific input into the CRLS and its implementation. The CRLS is a strategy for coordinating and prioritizing nature-based projects to improve climate resilience across the system of lands in Sonoma County. It isn't regulatory or binding, but it envisions an ongoing engagement between County departments and agencies, city governments, non-profits, private interests, and communities as we seek funding, and plan and implement nature-based projects.

Comments related to the **Petaluma River and its surrounding watershed, flood plain, and riparian habitat**, highlighted the importance of this ecosystem and requested the CRLS more explicitly recognize it. Some commenters sought greater involvement in City of Petaluma planning activities related to the Petaluma River. There were also good points about native grassland habitat, habitat connectivity, the Petaluma Marsh, habitat loss, highlighting that there needs to be a distinction between grassland habitat and grazing lands, and needing more detail in the ultimate conservation goal for conservation locally. Lastly, there were requests to incorporate specific local projects.

Staff would like to express appreciation for the energy and support offered for the Petaluma River and its associated habitat. The level of community engagement on the future of this

watershed will lead to more informed and intentional decision-making in the implementation of the CRLS. While the CRLS doesn't dictate specific actions, we hope it will provide a coherent framework for decisionmakers, including a sound scientific basis supporting climate resilience decisions, and other helpful resources. The City of Petaluma has its own separate jurisdiction, however staff of the County and Ag + Open Space do engage with City staff and are committed to working with them on land-based strategies in the Petaluma River watershed. Staff made changes to the CRLS in response to comments received. Specific local projects were not incorporated, however, because the Strategy provides blueprints for types of projects and guidance on where and how those project types could be most effectively implemented – specific local projects are expected to be part of the implementation, and will likely require additional planning, outreach, funding, and other steps as needed to comply with environmental laws and regulations.

Comments on **food security and regenerative agriculture** called for elevating the importance of both concepts in the CRLS. Specific regenerative agriculture practices were offered and specific recommendations about how the Strategy addresses pesticide use. There were recommendations to build upon existing programs and create new funding sources to expand and enhance their ability to support agriculture, and a strong suggestion that funds support existing farms that can provide examples to and help other farmers learn and modify practices in beneficial ways. Commenters also offered suggestions about the need for prioritizing smaller scale properties, and highlighted the need for more information about the role of infill/urban farming, and supporting small & urban farmers/gardeners with education and other resources. There were also land use comments that may be more effectively considered in the context of the update to the County's General Plan.

Staff appreciates interest and support for issues of food security and regenerative agriculture, and for the constructive suggestions to expand and refine the information about them in the CRLS. Changes were made to the Strategy in response to these comments which expanded and updated discussions of food security and regenerative agriculture. Some of the comments, such as recommendations about the size of properties to prioritize for conservation, are more relevant to the implementation phase and will be considered at that time.

There was also a wide range of comments on a variety of aspects of the CRLS, such as: comments and language suggestions regarding underlying science and specific forest management and other resilience practices throughout the document; recommendations to prioritize projects that further “community defense” and conservation of connected, biodiverse and large-scale natural lands; and the importance of inventorying existing carbon stocks and elevating their preservation. In addition, commenters provided specific recommendations to improve the clarity and readability of the document, and offered studies and reports for consideration by the project team. Lastly, there were also requests that specific projects be included or funded, and that funding be provided to conserve specific tracts of land.

The many comments submitted allowed the project team to improve the scope, clarity, and usefulness of the CRLS, especially regarding future implementation and collaboration with partners. Staff appreciates the time and effort commenters took to review the Strategy and to offer thoughtful concepts, language, and resources to enhance it. Although some comments were outside the scope of the Strategy, many may be relevant during the design and implementation of specific projects, and others should be considered during the update to the General Plan or other programmatic frameworks.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of edits made to the CRLS in response to comments received during the public comment period and from participants throughout the development of the Strategy.

- Added additional citations to Climate Hazard Wildfire section
- Added additional considerations and details specific to the Petaluma River
- Added additional details around the recommendations of prescribed grazing for fuels reduction
- Added details around existing efforts to the Climate Hazard Wildfire section
- Addressed carbon sink stability and tree migration
- Clarified how land types overlap and thus percent of land types could add up to over 100%
- Expanded the explanation and discussion of regenerative agricultural practices
- Included language regarding the potential to consider public-private partnerships and funding opportunities
- Included the protection of existing carbon stocks as priority
- Made distinction between changing conditions of shrubland and chaparral
- Replaced “grazers” with “ranchers”
- Replaced “vintners” with “grape growers”
- Replaced quotes
- Reviewed “The CA Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan” (2021) from the Governor’s Forest Management Task Force and “The CA Forest Carbon Plan” (2018) from the CA Forest Climate Action Team
- Specified how climate change has impacted droughts in California and Sonoma County
- Updated discussion around genetic exchange and native species movement in forests
- Updated discussion of Resource Conservation Districts’ work and role
- Updated language around food security
- Updated language around tribal engagement
- Updated leads and partners for Project Concept B
- Other changes including typographical and stylistic edits and minor language/wording updates