

# Exploring the Future of Priority Conservation Areas

Joint MTC Planning with the ABAG Administrative Committee  
June 2022



# Background



- Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) are locations nominated by cities, counties, and park/open space districts and designated by ABAG for natural habitat protection and open space preservation
- The PCA planning framework was **first designed in 2007**, with only minor updates integrated in 2014
- PCAs are categorized under four primary designations: **natural landscapes, agricultural lands, urban greening, and regional recreation**



Rolling hills and ocean views  
Image Source: National Park Service



Grazing sheep  
Image Source: Karl Kroeber



Urban garden  
Image Source: Hayward Public Library



Hiking trail  
Image Source: Ben Botkin

# Background (continued)



- There are over 185 PCAs within the region, representing approximately 2.1 million acres of land
- Existing PCAs are as small as three acres or as large as 400,000+ acres



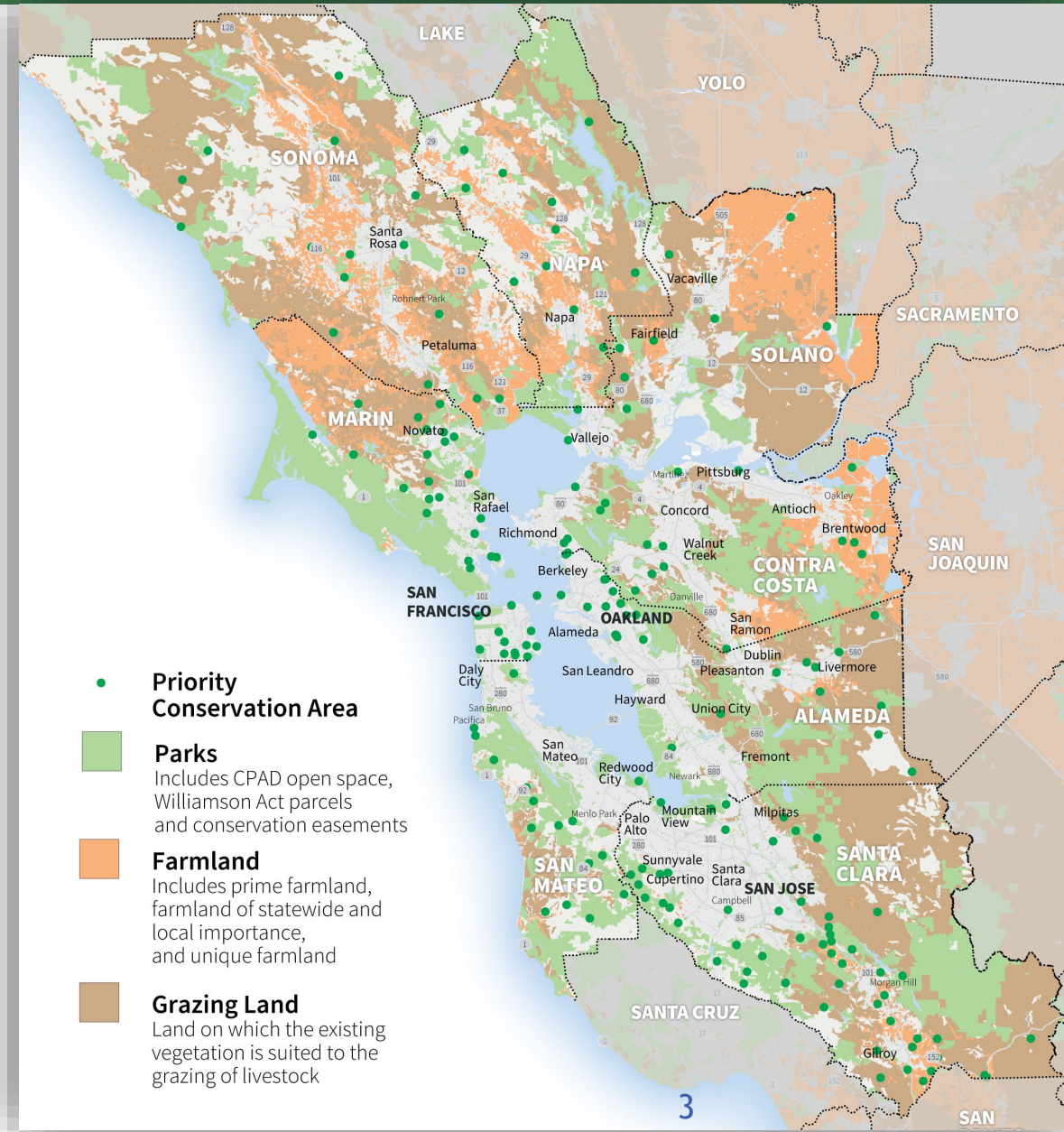
Suscol Headwaters Preserve  
Image Source: Napa County Regional Parks and Open Space District



Niles Canyon  
Image Source: Flickr/John K.



Loma Mar Redwoods  
Image Source: Flickr/Night Owl City



- **Priority Conservation Area**
- **Parks**  
Includes CPAD open space, Williamson Act parcels and conservation easements
- **Farmland**  
Includes prime farmland, farmland of statewide and local importance, and unique farmland
- **Grazing Land**  
Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock

# PCAs and Plan Bay Area



City of Dublin  
Image Source: Karl Nielsen



South Bay  
Image Source: Karl Nielsen

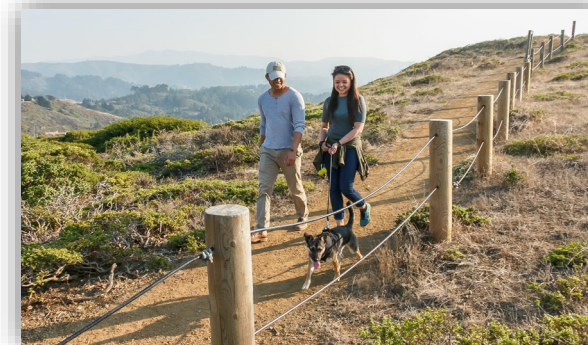
- PCAs have historically complemented Plan Bay Area’s “focused growth” framework, where housing and jobs are focused in transit-served Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and open space is protected
- A revamp of the Plan Bay Area regional growth framework took place in 2018 and 2019, leading to new growth geographies and a broader range of housing and land use strategies in Plan Bay Area 2050
- Although there was interest in modernizing the PCA framework at that time, **priority was given to critical issues related to the Plan’s growth pattern and meeting the Plan’s statutory greenhouse gas emissions reduction target**
- The existing PCA framework was largely left in place with a **commitment to revisit after Plan Bay Area 2050 adoption**

# The PCA Grant Program



- MTC has awarded **\$26 million** in grant funds during One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 programs, in support of **56 total PCA projects**
- Eligible project types have included:
  - Protection of natural resource, open space, or agricultural lands
  - Habitat restoration or enhancements
  - Bicycle and pedestrian access improvements
  - Urban greening
  - Planning activities
- **\$18 million for PCAs has been proposed** for OBAG Cycle 3, with the next call for projects anticipated in 2024 - making this a prime opportunity to revisit the framework

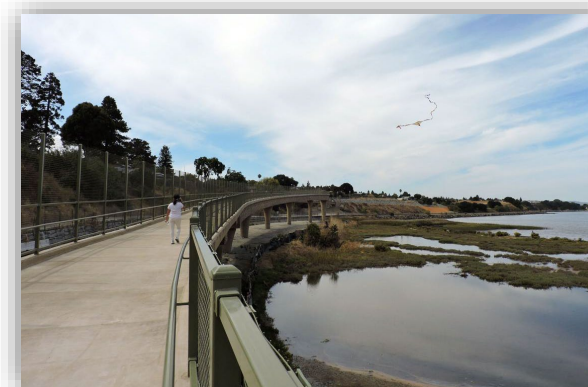
Funding Cycle	MTC Contribution	Coastal Conservancy Contribution	Total PCA Funding
OBAG 1	\$10,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$12,000,000
OBAG 2	\$16,400,000	\$1,800,000	\$18,200,000



Milagra Battery Trail  
Image Source: Vivien Kim Thorp, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy



900 Innes Park Planning  
Image Source: San Francisco Recreation and Parks



Pinole Shores to Bayfront Park  
Image Source: Karin Betts



Dotson Family Marsh  
Image Source: East Bay Regional Parks District

# Refreshing the PCA Planning Framework



- A lot has changed since 2007: climate change risks, equity considerations, conservation data and science, mapping technologies, state and regional policy goals
- Staff believe the PCA framework can act as a **more effective regional policy tool to advance Plan Bay Area 2050's environment strategies**: expanding access to parks and open space and reducing risks from hazards
- Incorporating additional input from partners and stakeholders, refreshing the PCA framework was **included in the adopted Plan Bay Area 2050 Implementation Plan as Action 10c**



# Project Outcomes and Deliverables



- In November 2021, MTC and ABAG were awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Sustainable Agricultural Lands and Conservation (SALC) Program managed by the California Department of Conservation to support the PCA Refresh
- The project will:
  - Evaluate all aspects of the current PCA nomination, evaluation, and designation process
  - Articulate a vision for next-generation PCAs and establish clear goals and objectives
  - Identify the needs of applicants and develop guidelines and resources
  - Result in a final report of major findings, including a recommended suite of options for regional policymakers to consider with respect to planning, policy and funding
  - Include considerations for the companion PCA Grant Program, in advance of OBAG-3 allocations



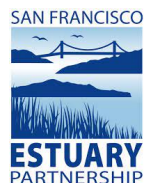
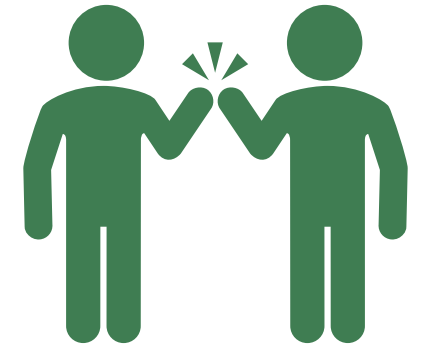
Dairy farm, Marin County  
Image Source: Flickr/Michael Rouphe



# Partnership and Collaboration



- **Key stakeholders will include:**
  - Local jurisdictions
  - Regional park and open space districts
  - State agencies
  - County transportation authorities
  - Environmental and equity advocates/non-profits
  - Researchers/academics
  - Agricultural interests
  - Business interests
- Participation forums will include **ongoing one-on-one and small group meetings, a bi-monthly Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), workshops, and surveys**
- **Alignment with relevant internal and external complementary programs and initiatives will be key**





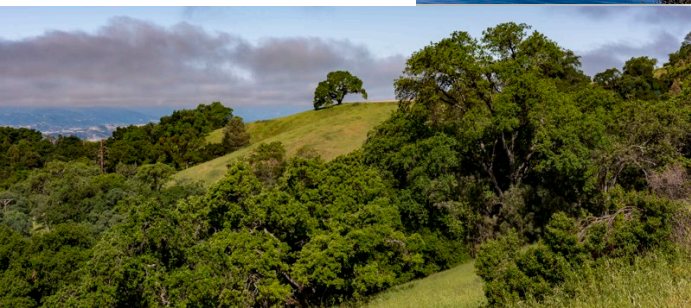
# Key Questions Being Explored



Bair Island State Marine Park  
Image Source: Flickr/Adil B.



Meeker Slough  
Image Source: Flickr/Tom Christensen



Henry Coe State Park  
Image Source: California Department of Parks and Recreation

What is the status of existing PCAs?

How can we improve PCA data?

What resources do PCA project sponsors require?

How can PCAs best further regional policy goals?

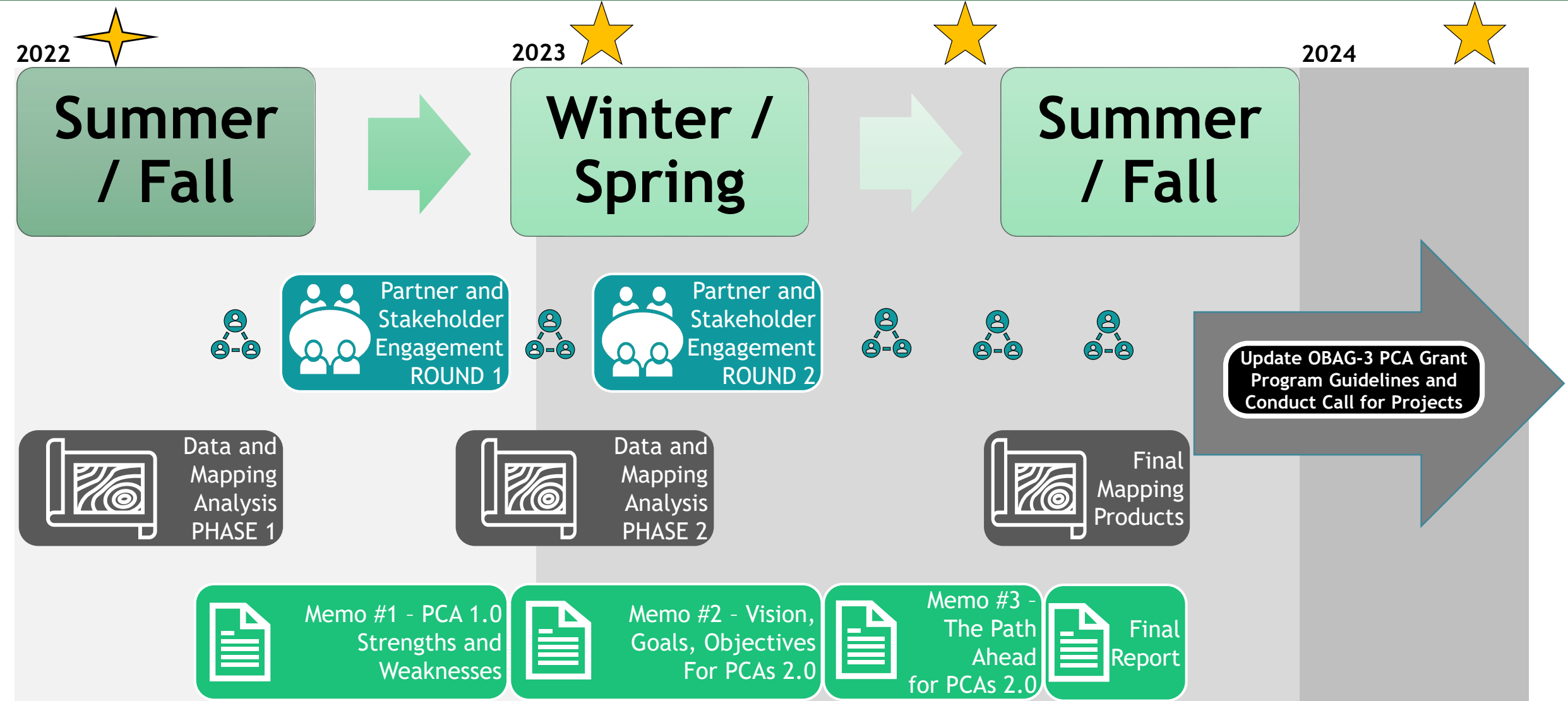
How should the framework balance ecosystem, equity & resilience goals?


How should the framework align with state and regional housing goals?

How can we most effectively expand conservation partnerships?

... and many more important questions!

# Project Scope of Work and Timeline



 = MTC Administration Committee contract approval for consultant services

 = Technical Advisory Committee meeting

 = Board/Commission input



# Questions or Comments?

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ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS  
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