

Mariposa County General Plan

*Best General Plan in the Sierra includes
many model land use policies*



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

Keeping light in the range.

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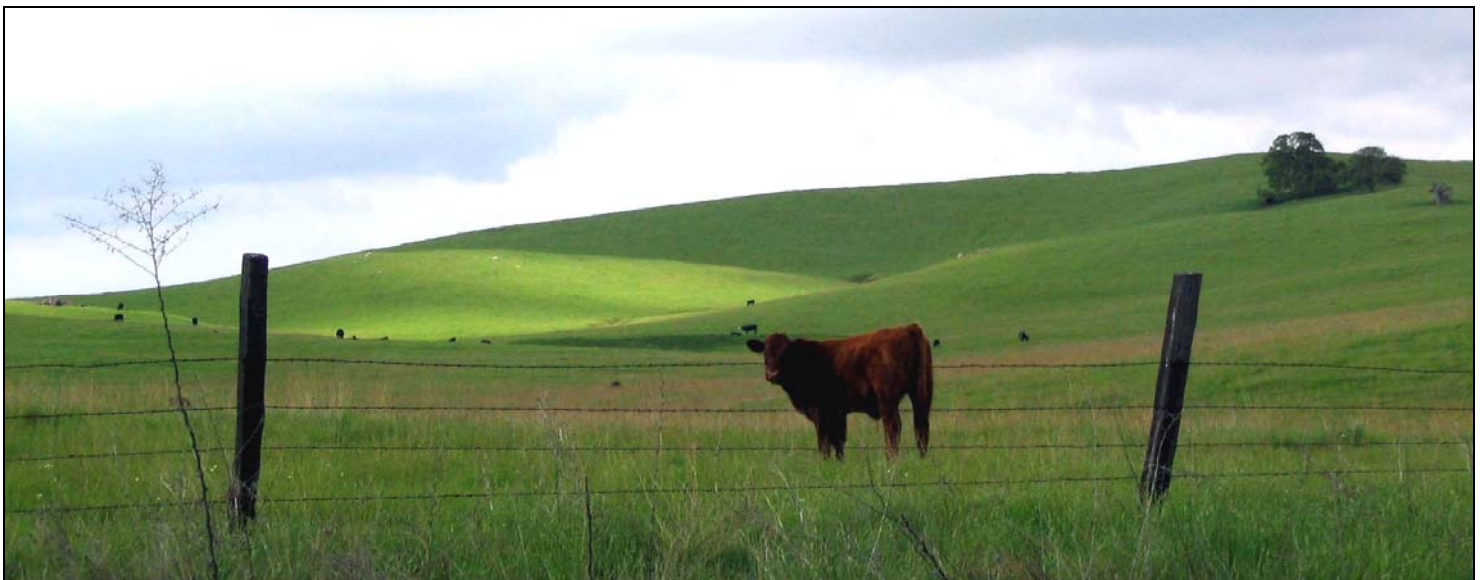
In December 2006 Mariposa County adopted a new General Plan which surpasses other Sierra plans for protecting open space and agriculture, preventing sprawl, and preserving rural community character. While there is still room for improvement, Mariposa's new plan represents a major step forward for sustainable land use planning in the region.

Protection of agricultural lands: Mariposa County's new General Plan is the best in the Sierra for the preservation of agriculture. Under the plan, 61% of the County (426,000 acres) is set aside for agriculture -- mostly cattle grazing. By comparison, land designated for Residential Development is just 13% of the County (86,700 acres), and it is clustered around existing towns. In areas set aside for agriculture, the maximum density allowed is one house per 160 acres. If a developer or landowner wants to change the land use designation to residential – to build a subdivision – the General Plan lays out a series of mandatory findings which must be met before the land can be converted to residential. These findings are the most protective of any county in the Sierra, and they are among the best in the state.

➤ *Implementation Measure 10-2a1: Areas of the General Plan classified as Agriculture/Working Landscape and proposed for reclassification to a Residential, Planning Area, or Natural Resource land use classification will be reviewed against the following criteria. No land within the Agriculture/Working Landscape land use classification shall be changed to a Residential, Planning Area or Natural Resource land use classification unless the Board of Supervisors adopts all of the following findings:*

- *The subject property is not within an area in which the majority of the surrounding parcels are currently being used or historically have been used for agriculture, timber, or mineral purposes.*

(continued on next page)



Some of the 425,000 acres protected as Agriculture/Working Landscape under Mariposa County's New General Plan

- *The soils, water rights, topography, terrain, and location are not suitable as an economic production unit of sufficient quality for commercial agricultural production.*
- *There are no other lands within the proposed land use classification available for the proposed or similar project.*
- *The characteristics and size of the subject properties make it unsuitable for open space, conservation easements, or other preservation opportunities which further implement the goals and policies of the General Plan.*
- *The subject property has not been identified in the County General Plan or any area plan as a location with characteristics worthy of preservation within the Agriculture/Working Landscape land use classification.*

Protection of wildlife and sensitive natural areas: The plan mandates the creation of a new environmental conservation program that includes development standards and proactive conservation programs for sensitive wildlife and plant communities.

- *Implementation Measure 11-4a1: The County will implement a Mariposa County Environmental Conservation Program. The program shall include development standards and programs conserving, protecting and mitigating the impacts on:*



Blue oaks and Collinsia, Mariposa County

- *Significant and sensitive habitat including wildlife migration corridors;*
- *Breeding and nesting areas (as seasonally appropriate);*
- *Known occurrences of special status animal species;*
- *Riparian habitat around bodies of water and along watercourses and seasonal drainages;*
- *Known occurrences of special status plant species; and*
- *Significant and sensitive plant communities.*

Discouraging big-box sprawl: The plan mandates that commercial, financial, healthcare and other service businesses above a certain size must be located within towns.

- *Implementation Measure 5-4a1: Commercial, healthcare, financial and other service businesses intended to serve the greater County population shall be located only within Town Planning Areas.*

Empowering communities to plan for growth: The General Plan calls for the creation of ‘area plans’ for every community within the County. Each area will develop an area plan to ensure that new development in the community reflects local values and needs. Each community will form a planning advisory committee composed of local residents, property owners, and business owners, and that advisory committee will be responsible for preparing, reviewing and revising their area plan.

- *Page 5-19: “The General Plan creates the land use classification ‘planning area.’ Planning areas are implemented by area plans adopted by the Board of Supervisors. Area plans are mini-General Plans adopted to meet the needs of each town, community, or uniquely identified special area of the County.”*
- *Page 5-22: “To ensure area plans reflect local values, planning advisory committees are formed of local residents, property owners, and business owners, to advise the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors on local issues. The preparation, review, and revision of area plans are a responsibility of the committee.”*
- *Implementation Measure 5-2a3: “The County shall prevent premature urbanization of all planning study areas.”*

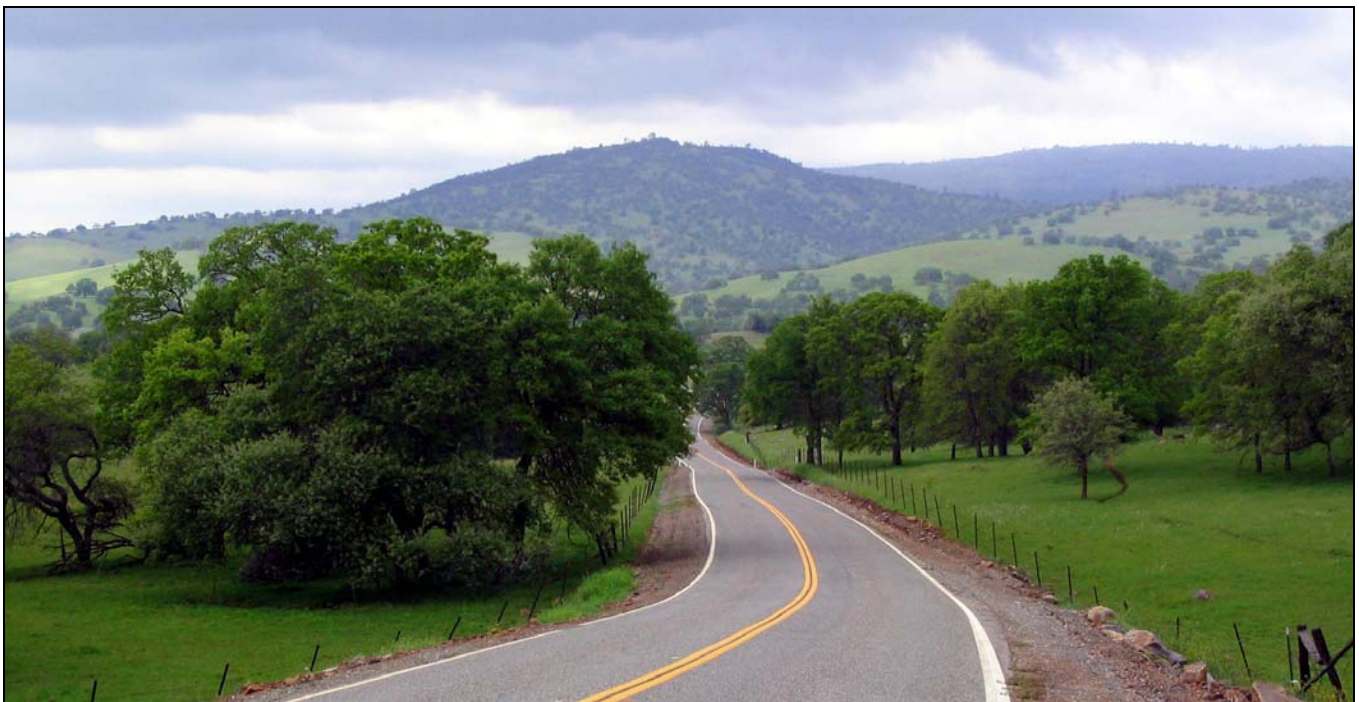


All communities, including historic Hornitos, will develop community plans to ensure that future growth protects community character.

Preventing leapfrog sprawl: Mariposa County’s new General Plan also contains groundbreaking mandatory policies to avoid sprawl and ensure that growth happens in and around existing communities. The plan states that “development shall grow outward from planning areas and residential areas with available services” and goes on to establish mandatory regulations for ensuring that new development occurs close to existing services. For land to be reclassified as residential, the County must make a series of findings that the land is contiguous to existing urban development on two sides, and there is a need for additional residential land within the County.

- *Implementation Measure 5-2a1: Development shall grow outward from planning areas and residential areas with available services.*

- *Implementation Measure 5-2a2: Establish land development regulations defining permitted uses and establishing standards for close-to-services development.*
- *Implementation Measure 5-2a3: The County shall make findings that development will not result in premature urbanization of the Planning Study Areas.*
- *Implementation Measure 5-2a4: No urban expansion shall occur within the Mariposa Town Planning Study Area unless water and sewage disposal are available from a centrally coordinated and managed system.*
- *Residential Land Use Classification: For land to be considered for inclusion into the Residential land use classification of the General Plan, the application will include a specific project and the County will substantiate the findings below.*
 1. *One of the following:*
 - a) *the subject property is not under a Williamson Act contract or zoned as a Timber Preserve; or*
 - b) *if the subject property is under a Williamson Act contract for which a Notice of Non-renewal has been recorded, there must be less than two years remaining on the contract or as otherwise specified in the contract or state law; or*
 - c) *if the subject property is zoned as a Timber Preserve, there must be less than five years remaining on the contract or as otherwise specified in contract or state law.*
 2. *There is a need for additional residential land to meet General Plan goals, respond to changes in County policy, or to meet the Regional Housing Needs Allocation.*
 3. *The subject property will be contiguous on at least two sides to lands within the Residential, Rural Economic, or Planning Area land use classifications.*
 4. *The subject property has access from a maintained road or the proposed project incorporates maintained road access as part of the project description.*



Foothill oak woodland protected as Agriculture/Working Landscape near Cathey's Valley, Mariposa County