COVER PAGE

CHAPTER 7: Open Space, Conservation and Recreation

Chapter 7—Open Space, Conservation and Recreation

What is meant by open space? What open space features exist in the planning area? What are the values of various physical features such as agricultural lands, sensitive biological resources, and area water features? What City park types are planned for the area, and how will these interface with the areas natural open space features and urban environment? This chapter addresses these and related questions.

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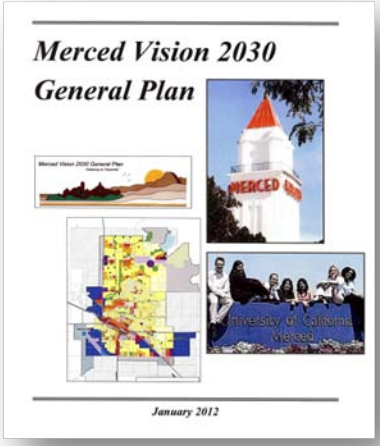
INTRODUCTION



To assure that the Bellevue Community Plan was crafted in a manner consistent with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, this section describes how General Plan policies and implementing actions were utilized to develop and implement the "Open Space, Conservation and Recreation" Chapter of the BCP.

For ease of reference, many applicable Open Space, Conservation and Recreation-related General Plan polices and implementing actions are listed in this section of the BCP. These may be applicable for various reasons:

- guided the crafting of the Bellevue Community Plan (BCP);
- guide design of future development projects; and
- formed the foundation upon which new policies were written to apply specifically to the BCP. Where used to develop policies for the BCP, a brief discussion is added to explain the relevance of the BCP planning area to the policy.

Use of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* goals and policies in this manner assures that the Community Plan is consistent with the City's General Plan.

Subject areas include:

- Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources
- Open Space for Outdoor Recreation
- Open Space for Public Health and Safety
- Open Space for Water Resources

7.4.1 Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-1.1

The Merced SUDP/SOI is known to contain potential habitat for several sensitive wildlife species. Much of this potential habitat is located along riparian corridors of the community's creek system in vernal pools found in the northern part of the City's SUDP/SOI area, and on some agricultural lands throughout the planning area. As a matter of law, the City is required to review development proposals that threaten to impact known sensitive species. As a matter of policy, the City is committed to integrating potential wildlife habitat into the regional park and recreation system to enhance community awareness of the region's wildlife resources and to provide shelter for native plant and animal life of the area. For these reasons, the **Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Policy *OS-1.1*.**of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Identify and Preserve Wildlife Habitats Which Support Rare, Endangered, or Threatened Species."***

Identify Sensitive Habitat

Implementing Action OS-1.1.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Identify, and recognize as significant wetlands and critical habitat areas which meet the appropriate legal definition under Federal and State law."** Development applications will be reviewed to determine if potential wetland habitats exist on-site, and wetland delineation may be required in accordance with current U.S. Army Corps of Engineers guidelines. "Wetlands" containing sensitive plant and/or animal species should be protected according to law. Vernal pool preserves may be incorporated into other open space preserves (i.e. parks and trails) that would not be directly impacted by urban development.

Avoidance of Sensitive Habitats

Implementing Action OS-1.1.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Urban development should occur away from identified sensitive species critical habitats areas unless specific provisions to ensure adequate protection and monitoring exist."** When, as a result of specific site studies, it is determined that "potential" habitats actually contain sensitive or endangered species, development rules, policies and standards should be applied to assure that further degradation of these species does not occur. These policies should emphasize "avoidance" as a desirable mitigation alternative.

Link Habitat Areas with Open Space Corridors

Implementing Action OS-1.1.d of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Design parks and open space corridors to provide linkages between potential habitat areas."** It is important to develop linkages between open space areas to facilitate wildlife movement between designated habitat areas. This can be accomplished by connecting the east-west trending urban stream corridors with a north-south corridor provided by power lines, railroad rights-of-way and the regional irrigation canal network. Whenever possible, park open space areas should be connected to one or more of these designated open space corridors.

Implement the USFWS Memorandum of Understanding

Implementing Action OS-1.1.g of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Implement the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Merced and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), dated June 16, 2008, regarding the processing of development applications to ensure compliance with the Federal Endangered Species Act relating to Projects to be Served by the Wastewater Treatment Plant Water Quality**

Upgrade and Expansion Project." The MOU also outlines the procedures and comment period for notifying the U.S.F.W.S. of qualifying development projects and requires that applications for development projects shall demonstrate compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as a pre-condition to having their application scheduled for public hearing.

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-1.2

The urban creek system of Merced provides an important open space element within the City and provides important wildlife habitat. This creek system is also an integral part of the City's drainage system. The City is committed to a policy of preserving and protecting these important open space resources and assuring their continued viability as open space and drainage corridors. For these reasons, the **Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Policy *OS-1.2.***of the *Merced Vision 203 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Preserve and Enhance Creeks in Their Natural State Throughout the Planning Area*.**"

Create Open Space Corridors along Creeks and Other Areas

Implementing Action OS-1.2.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Designate major creeks, streams, woodlands, and other appropriate areas in the City's SUDP/SOI as Open Space corridors."** Major creeks, riparian habitat, significant woodlands, and other sensitive environmental features should be conserved as open space amenities, when feasible. Fencing and piping of creeks should be avoided. Open Merced Irrigation District channels should not be considered as Open Space corridors, but where MID canals have been undergrounded, MID is open to working with the City on establishing open space corridors (with limited landscaping). Channelization of non-MID improvements should be naturalized. Whenever possible, in keeping with City standards and CEQA required mitigation measures, major creeks, riparian habitat, significant woodlands and other environmental features should be incorporated into the design of development.

Implementing Action OS-1.2.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Continue to acquire a minimum 50-foot dedication from the centerline (or 25 feet from the crown, whichever is greater) of all creeks within the planning area in order to maintain these open space areas as natural riparian preserves and recreation areas."** Public access should be permitted, while important natural features and sensitive habitats are preserved.

Balance Drainage and Open Space Needs

Implementing Action OS-1.2.c of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Encourage alternatives to concrete channeling of existing creeks and streams as part of any flood control project and support more natural flood control methods."** Stream improvement plans must attempt to strike a compromise between drainage needs and open space needs on a case by case basis.

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-1.3

Historically, the City of Merced has developed along routes and corridors which have come to be part of the City's identity. The City has designated many of these scenic routes for special development review regulation in the past. This practice has served the City well and will be continued into the future. For these reasons, the

Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Policy *OS-1.3*.of the *Merced Vision 203 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Promote the Protection and Enhancement of Designated Scenic Routes."***

Preserve Scenic Corridors in the Bellevue Community Plan Area

Implementing Action OS-1.3.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Preserve the designated Scenic Corridors."** The Scenic Corridors are as follows:

- Lake Road from Yosemite Avenue to Lake Yosemite.
- Bellevue Road from Lake Road to "G" Street.

Note: Only corridors within the Bellevue Community Plan area are listed above.

Apply Scenic Corridor Design Guidelines to Lake Road and Bellevue Road

Implementing Action OS-1.3.c of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Utilize established guidelines for the review of projects proposed within a designated Scenic Corridor."** The following guidelines apply to the review of applications for development in vicinity of a designated Scenic Corridor:

a) Utility lines should be placed underground whenever feasible.
b) Signing should be carefully controlled to insure that it does not detract from the scenic beauty of the corridor. Specific guidelines for signing along these corridors should be established.
c) Limit the intrusion of future land uses which may detract from the scenic quality of the corridor.
d) Unsightly mechanical and utility structures shall be screened from view by use of planting, grading, and fencing.
e) Heights and setbacks of buildings should be regulated to avoid obstructing important scenic views.
f) Every effort should be made to preserve and properly maintain existing stands of trees and other plant materials of outstanding value.
g) Structures on private and public properties visible from the corridor should be maintained in good condition (free of trash, weeds, etc.).
h) Architectural and landscape design should result in an attractive appearance and a harmonious relationship with the surrounding environment.

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-1.4

Early in the development of Merced, trees were planted to provide shelter from wind and summer heat. As a result, the City has a large number of mature trees along its streets, in public places and in private yards and has been designated a "Tree City USA" for over 30 years. The City's urban forest provides valuable wildlife habitat and creates an attractive atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. Additionally, the City's trees have substantially reduced summer heat and glare around paved areas, thereby helping the City maintain a cooler summer average temperature and reduce energy usage. In continuing this tradition, the City of Merced has established policies and programs to protect, maintain and expand its urban forests. For these reasons, the **Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Policy *OS-1.4***.of the *Merced Vision 203 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Improve and Expand the City's Urban Forest."***

Require New Development to Plant Street Trees

Implementing Action OS-1.4.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Continue to require new development to plant street trees approximately 40 feet apart, at a maximum, along City streets."** Tree

planting policies have been established by the City for new development projects. These practices are to be continued.

7.4.2 Open Space for Outdoor Recreation

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-3.1

The City of Merced has benefited from the foresight of early leaders in the City's development with respect to parks and open space. The City's growth has historically incorporated its natural open space resources along Bear Creek and other lesser drainage courses into an overall open space network which has become a major source of civic pride. The City is committed to continuing this high standard of park and open space development in the expansion areas of the existing City. For these reasons, the **Urban Expansion Policy *OS-3.1***.of the *Merced Vision 203 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Provide High-Quality Park and Open Space Facilities to Serve the Needs of a Growing Population."***

Acquire Park Sites in Advance of Development

Implementing Action OS-3.1.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Continue efforts to acquire new park sites within future growth areas in advance of development to meet the recreation open space needs of an expanding population."** Overall, a total of five (5) acres of parkland should be provided per 1,000 residents in the City, of which 1.5 acres should be in community park and 3.5 acres should be in various forms of neighborhood parks, including village greens, school parks and other neighborhood parks. "Greenway" trails should provide bicycle and pedestrian access throughout the City and its growth areas.

Implement the 2004 Parks and Open Space Master Plan

Implementing Action OS-3.1.c of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Continue to implement the City's 2004 Parks and Open Space Master Plan and any subsequent updates."** The City's Parks and Open Space Master Plan (2004) provides specific system design and implementation standards for the development of the City's park system. This plan serves as a basis for requiring development recreation dedications as well as a guide for public facilities expenditures in the parks and recreation category. This plan requires periodic update and will need to be revised to reflect the City's proposed SUDP/SOI and the parks and open space opportunities and needs resulting from development.

Apply Park Location Criteria

Implementing Action OS-3.1.e of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Use the City's Park Dedication Ordinance to develop the City's park system.** A strong effort should be made to use the following criteria to locate parks:

a) No household should have to walk more than approximately one-half to three-quarters of a mile to a park site.
b) Parks should be located adjacent to schools as much as feasible.
c) Provide visual, pedestrian and vehicular access to all parks by requiring them to front on public streets on as many sides as possible and not be surrounded by privately owned property. Adequate parking facilities should be provided where needed.

d) Neighborhood park sites should front on at least one side on a collector street with the remaining sides on local streets. Community or Regional parks may front on arterials
e) Park sites should be located so as to incorporate naturally-occurring open space features, such as significant stands of trees, riparian and wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, and creeks and drainage canals.
f) Park sites should be located adjacent to bikeway facilities.
g) Park sites should be located near higher-density residential areas as much as possible.
h) Parks should have access to nearby subdivision and greenways by means of cul-de-sacs, access easements, etc.

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-3.2

Merced's bikeway and urban trail system has become a model for the region and an important element of the character of Merced. The system's use of the natural open space resources of the community has benefited the public and helped to preserve important open space lands in addition to providing recreation and all transportation to residents. Bikeways and urban trails are an important element of the greenway system and provide linkages between other elements of the park system, public transportation, and residential and commercial areas throughout the City. The City is committed to building upon this system and expanding it into the growth areas within the resource constraints of the City. The 2004 Park and Open Space Master Plan provides a detailed needs assessment, along with policies and design standards for the acquisition, development and maintenance of new park and recreation facilities. The City's Bicycle Master Plan also addresses bikeway and trail systems. For these reasons, the **Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Policy *OS-3.2***.of the *Merced Vision 203 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Maintain and Expand the City's Bikeway and Trail System."***

Develop Bikeways and Trails Along Open Space Corridors

Implementing Action OS-3.2.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Utilize the urban stream system in the planning and design of bikeways and trails."** Development of bikeways and trails in these open space areas can enhance the open space value of the urban stream system provided that the trails do not unnecessarily interfere with other open space goals and policies.

Site Bikeways Along Canal Easements

Implementing Action OS-3.2.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Make use of creekside areas, utility line easements, abandoned railroad rights-of-way, and canal easements for bikeway purposes."** These areas are generally set aside as open space areas, and their use for bikeway and trail systems would enhance the public value of open space in addition to providing an important amenity to neighborhood residents.

Connect Bikeways within Greenways Connecting Parks and Schools

Implementing Action OS-3.2.c of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Provide links between parks, schools, and open space areas via the bikeway system."** The bikeway system can also be part of a greenway linking parks, schools, and other important open space areas.

Link the City Bikeway System to the Lake Road bike path.

Implementing Action OS-3.2.d of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Provide a link between the City and County bikeway systems by establishing a connector to the Lake Road Bikeway Corridor out to Lake**

Yosemite." This area will become an important bikeway link to the new U.C. Campus area and its surrounding development. Plans may be integrated with future development of the Campus Parkway and linear open space plans along drainage courses and irrigation canals.

Explore Provision of Unpaved Trails in Rural Residential Areas

Implementing Action OS-3.2.g of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Explore the possibility of providing unpaved trails for equestrian and mountain bike use as part of the overall trail system."** These types of trail systems may be appropriate along the eastern fringe of the City where lower density Rural Residential development permits the keeping of horses and other livestock on large lots.

Design Bike Paths with Crime Prevention through Design in Mind

Implementing Action OS-3.2.h of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Bike path designs should reflect security and other needs of the surrounding community."** If feasible, bikeways should be designed with multiple access points from surrounding neighborhoods so there is sufficient visibility from public roadways to facilitate surveillance by residents and police patrols. Where feasible, bike paths should be designed so that at least one side is open to a public street. Situations where bike paths are located along the back sides of homes with limited visibility should be avoided as much as possible. Open fencing along bike paths should be considered, especially adjacent to multi-family developments.

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-3.4

Throughout the City, a system of park and open space facilities should exist which include neighborhood parks, community parks, and greenways. This park system should be developed to serve all age, social, and economic groups in every geographic area of the City. Refer to the City's 2004 Park and Open Space Master Plan for design and development policies for new parks. For these reasons, the **Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Policy *OS-3.4***.of the *Merced Vision 203 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Develop a Diverse and Integrated System of Park Facilities Throughout Merced."***

Plan for Community Parks

Implementing Action OS -3.4.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Community parks should be distributed throughout the City."** There should be at least 1.5 acres of community park provided per 1,000 residents. Community parks are usually 15 acres in size or greater, and must be located along a greenway and should be at the junction of two greenways when possible. Greenways, streets and landscaping should be used to minimize and buffer residences from the noise and nighttime lighting associated with ball fields.

Identify Additional Space and Facility Needs of Lake Yosemite Regional Park

Implementing Action OS -3.4.d of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**In cooperation with Merced County and the Merced Irrigation District, evaluate the Lake Yosemite regional park to identify how it might adequately meet the needs of the City of Merced and the new growth areas in the region including the U.C. Merced campus."** Lake Yosemite will likely become more heavily used by City residents as Merced grows and the U.C. Merced campus expands and grows. As a result, additional space and facilities may be required to accommodate future growth. Some of the area around the park contains potential wildlife habitat which limits

development options for land owners. Consideration should be given to providing expanded public access and additional roadway entrances into the Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

7.4.3 Open Space for Public Health and Safety

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Policy OS-4.1

Areas within the City which may represent a substantial risk to public health and safety have historically been designated for open space uses which may permit limited public or private use but generally reduce potential exposure of the public to potential health hazards. The City is committed to continuing to protect public health, where practical, by limiting the potential for public exposure through the sound application of open space practices and policies. For these reasons, the **Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Policy *OS-4.1***.of the *Merced Vision 203 General Plan* spotlights the need to "***Preserve Open Space Areas Which Are Necessary to Maintaining Public Health and Safety."***

7.5 Bellevue Community Plan Goals, Policies and Actions

INTRODUCTION

Consistent with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, the goals of this BCP chapter are grouped into three areas as follows. This approach fosters consistency and builds on the City's broader General Plan guidance; these subjects include:

- ***Goal Area OS-1:*** Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources;
- ***Goal Area OS-2:*** Open Space for Outdoor Recreation;
- ***Goal Area OS 3:*** Open Space for Public Health and Safety; and,

Policies and Implementing Actions specific to the BCP planning area are set forth in the Tables below:

Goal Area OS-1: Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources

GOAL

- C_____

POLICIES

UE-1.1 E_____

UE-1.2 P_____

Policy UE-1.1
E_____

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a P-----

1.1.b T------

1.1.c A--------

1.1.d W-------

Goal Area OS-2: Open Space for Outdoor Recreation

GOAL

- C_____

POLICIES

UE-1.1 E_____

UE-1.2 P_____

Policy UE-1.1
E_____

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a

1.1.b

1.1.c .

1.1.d W-------

Goal Area OS-3: Open Space for Public Health and Safety

GOAL

- C_____

POLICIES

UE-1.1 E_____

UE-1.2 P_____

Policy UE-1.1
E_____

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a P-----

1.1.b T------

1.1.c A-------

1.1.d W-------

7.6 Bibliography

1. *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*,
2.
3.
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