

# Natural Resource Areas

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## Natural Resource Areas

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# Responses to Community Feedback on Environmental Existing Conditions Reports

The following responses were drafted by the consultant team in response to extensive community feedback on topics that crosscut the seven Environmental Existing Conditions Reports.

**Trees and Urban Canopy:** Maintaining and expanding a robust urban forest is a priority for the City and will be incorporated into the updated General Plan goals, policies, and programs to further develop and maintain the urban forest and protect trees of aesthetic, cultural, and biological value to the community. The General Plan Update will capitalize on ways to build on and expand existing plans and programs through tools like tree inventories and tree preservation ordinances.

**River Enhancement Program:** The River Enhancement Plan will provide an existing foundation for goals, policies, and programs to be implemented as this plan will continue to be in effect and utilized after the General Plan Update. Throughout the General Plan Update process, this plan will be thoroughly reviewed and incorporated into the General Plan.

**Wildlife Corridors:** The information regarding the wildlife corridors discussion were a compiling of local resources that can be used to understand the stakeholders that the City can partner with in supporting efforts to conserve wildlife corridors, especially in support of efforts by the State, to preserve a statewide network of wildlife movement corridors. There will be opportunities in future steps of the General Plan Update process to include more detail of the wildlife corridors surrounding Petaluma using data from CDFW and other available sources.

**Climate Impacts Data:** The State of California requires local jurisdictions to use specified data sources for identified hazards such as FEMA for the flood hazards analysis and the Cal Adapt tool for climate change projections. These are the data sources used to conduct the analysis of climate and flood hazards, which will inform various aspects of the General Plan Update.

**Integration of Environmental Topics:** Environmental issues and considerations will be integrated throughout the General Plan Update process and additional information will be gathered and analyzed during future phases of the project. In particular, environmental analysis will be done during the alternatives and environmental review phases.

# Natural Resource Areas

*This chapter highlights the City of Petaluma’s natural resource areas, including an overview of the regulatory framework from the federal, state, and local levels of government, an overview of the state and regional parks located in and around Petaluma, visual resources, access to natural areas, and conservation easements.*

## Key Findings and Constraints

- The City has parks managed by other agencies such as Sonoma County Regional Parks and the California State Parks Department. The California State Parks Department manages the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park and Sonoma County Regional Parks manages the 256-acre Helen Putnam Regional Park.
- The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District has acquired land in the form of conservation easements to protect agricultural areas and natural resources to establish a greenbelt primarily north of Adobe Road and east of the city limits.
- The City of Petaluma has 953 acres of City-owned and privately owned open space designed for natural resource preservation and recreation. Thirty percent of this open space is privately owned land, such as golf courses, while a significant amount of the remaining land is river and stream corridors and other natural resource areas.
- The City has designated 157 acres (254 proposed) of land as part of an Urban Separator classification, insulating agricultural lands from urban areas with an open space buffer.

## Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide existing conditions information on the natural resource areas in the City of Petaluma. This includes descriptions of relevant federal and State regulations, state and regional parks, and conservation easements.

## Planning and Regulatory Setting

### Quimby Act

The Quimby Act authorizes a city or county to require the dedication of land or to impose fees for park or recreational purposes as a condition of the approval of a tentative or parcel subdivision map if certain conditions are met. In-lieu fees must be used only for the purposes of developing or rehabilitating neighborhood or community park or recreational facilities, and if specified requirements are met, the jurisdiction may use those fees for rehabilitating and building parks in areas outside the neighborhood where the developer’s subdivision is specifically located.

### Petaluma River Access and Enhancement Plan

The Petaluma River Access and Enhancement Plan is a comprehensive restoration and preservation plan adopted in 1996. The plan aimed to create a high density water-related commercial environment along the river, while preserving the existing natural resources. The policies and programs included in the plan are focused on improving access and character across six segments of the Petaluma River, and a

natural habitat program that includes strategies for biological restoration, bank stabilization, flood management, and water quality management. The plan also includes guidelines for habitat management:

- Biological Restoration Plans
- Tree Protection Plans for Development Around Oaks and Mature Riparian Species
- Exotic Vegetation Removal and Control Plans
- Bank Stabilization and Erosion Control Plans
- Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans
- Petaluma General Plan Update Draft Environmental Impact Report Channel Maintenance Guidelines
- Landscape Maintenance of Native Plants
- Native Oak Establishment
- Flood Control Channel Design

## **Adobe Creek Restoration Plan and Management Program**

The Adobe Creek Restoration Plan and Management Program was developed by the City of Petaluma and the Sonoma County Water Agency to enhance, restore, and manage Adobe Creek. The plan focuses on two stream reaches of Adobe Creek, the McDowell Reach, south of Lakeville Highway, and Sartori Reach, north of Sartori Drive. It provides guidelines for channel designs and vegetation management that promote the development of a mature riparian canopy to enhance wildlife function while maintaining adequate capacity for flood control. One of the goals of the management guidelines is to show that careful hand pruning of willows and other in-stream plants during the initial restoration period can lead the way to a more self-sustaining system that will reduce the long-term maintenance costs of flood control channels while improving the habitat for fish and wildlife. The plan also seeks to integrate schools, resource agencies, public agencies, local residents, and community organizations in a focused effort to restore Adobe Creek.

## **Landscape Assessment Districts**

The City of Petaluma maintains public landscaped areas and infrastructure within private subdivisions under a district designation known as Landscape Assessment Districts (LADs). The LADs function as a fund, paid into by the private parcel owners within each designated district. Costs for the provision and maintenance of amenities are spread equally among all the private parcels. There are currently a total of 47 established LADs in Petaluma, four of which are inactive. The City Council sets the annual assessments each July at a noticed public hearing.

## **Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District**

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District is an independent special district. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's Acquisition Plan 2000 describes several different open space designations in Petaluma.



## Natural Resource Areas

- **Agriculture.** The entire Planning Area south of the city’s UGB is designated for coastal agriculture, while all lands north of Adobe Road are designated for greenbelt agriculture. Agricultural areas can include grazing land, active ranches and/or cropland, or community agricultural operations (e.g., farmers market, co-ops).
- **Greenbelts.** All lands north of Adobe Road and east of the city limits are designated as priority greenbelt. Priority greenbelts are defined as highly visible open spaces and agricultural lands, prominent viewsheds, important scenic lands, and greenways along creek channels.
- **Natural Resources.** The Petaluma Marsh Wildlife Area, located south of the UGB along the Petaluma River, is identified as a priority biodiversity area. The Rivermouth is a designated wetland to prevent urban encroachment on sensitive areas home to multiple threatened and endangered species.

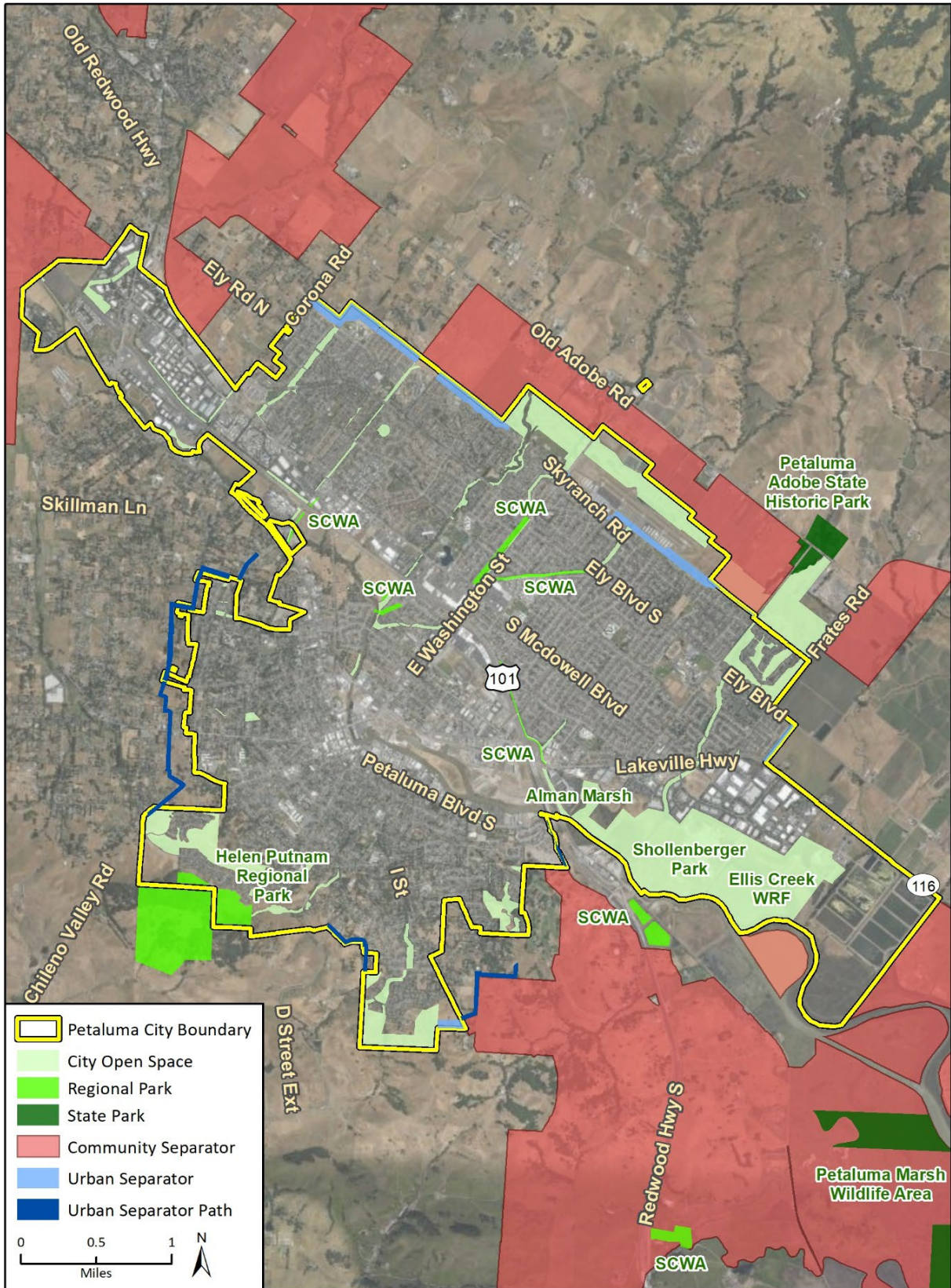
## Open Space

### State and Regional Parks

The City of Petaluma has one regional park within city limits and one state park approximately half a mile away from the City limits in eastern Petaluma. Seen in **Figure 1** below, Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park, east of the Petaluma city limits, is owned and operated by the California State Parks Department. Helen Putnam Regional Park, located at the western edge of the city, is managed by the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department.

- **Helen Putnam Regional Park** is part of the Sonoma County regional open space network. At 256 acres, Helen Putnam Regional Park serves the City of Petaluma with 4.0 acres of regional open space per 1,000 residents. This open space is owned and operated by the County and lies adjacent to the City of Petaluma to the southwest.
- **Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park** is located on Adobe Road in Petaluma between Frates Road and Casa Grande Road. The Petaluma Adobe is the largest adobe building in Northern California and the park includes shaded picnic areas with views of farmland and oak-studded hills.
- **Petaluma Marsh Wildlife Area** is located in the wetland habitat along the Petaluma River south of the City limits and east of Highway 101. This wildlife area totals approximately 4,200 acres of tidal salt marsh, mudflats, coastal oak woodlands, and coastal scrub habitats. It is comprised of several units including Petaluma River, Burdell, Bahia, Black John, Day Island, Green Point, Novato Creek, Point Sonoma, and Rush Creek. Recreational activities provided onsite include wildlife viewing, birdwatching, fishing, and hunting. The Petaluma River Unit is the largest remaining natural tidal brackish marsh in California.
- **Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) Special District** has several locations in and around the City of Petaluma. These include two sites south of the City limits adjacent to Highway 101 on the eastern side of the highway. Additionally, the SCWA has pockets of land in the city that include detention basins and natural creek channels that flow into the Petaluma River. The SCWA sites with facilities are not publicly accessible and provide no recreational opportunities. The detention basins and natural creek channels that flow within the city have some trails, specifically, adjacent to East Washington Street.

**Figure 1: Petaluma Open Space**



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 Additional data provided by CPAD, 2020; City of Petaluma, 2021; Sonoma County, 2021.

Fig. W12 State and Regional Parks

## Local Open Space

The City of Petaluma has 953 acres of City-owned and privately owned open space designed for natural resource preservation and recreation. Thirty percent of this open space is privately owned land, such as golf courses, while a significant amount of the remaining land is river and stream corridors and other natural resource areas. Notable open spaces areas in the city include Shollenberger Park, Lafferty Ranch, and the upcoming 11+ acre Paul Lane Nature Preserve. Shollenberger Park is the largest park in Petaluma, encompassing 165 acres of wetland area that includes both tidal salt marshes and freshwater marshes. The City-owned park is a destination for bird watching due to the variety of species attracted to the wetlands, including over 200 varieties of birds. Docents of the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance offer free public tours of the park on Saturday mornings.

## Urban and Community Separators

Petaluma has designated land along the Urban Growth Boundary intended to preserve the surrounding rural areas and maintain the separation between cities. Urban Separators are designated by the City of Petaluma, while community separators are in unincorporated County land and designated by both the County and the City.

- **Urban Separators** serve as open space areas adjacent to the City's limits to buffer agricultural lands from urban areas as well as supporting recreational activities. The City of Petaluma has obtained title to 157 acres of existing urban separator land and 94 acres of proposed urban separators for a total of 254 acres.
- **Urban Separator Paths** are an alternative easement to an urban separator. When an urban separator is deemed infeasible, an urban separator path provides an option to allow bicycle and pedestrian connections without requiring a fee title dedication.
- **Community Separators** are intended to retain the separation of incorporated cities and prevent corridor-style urbanization. This is done by preserving rural lands between the developed areas to maintain that separation. There are two community separators adjacent to Petaluma: Petaluma/Novato and Petaluma/Rohnert Park, which have been identified by the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Overview Draft. The Petaluma/Novato separator is estimated to be 2,755 acres of foothills south of Petaluma. The Petaluma/Rohnert Park separator is approximately 3,360 acres of farmland and foothills to the north of Petaluma.

## Visual Resources

Visual resources, or scenic/aesthetic resources, are the natural and cultural features of a landscape that can be seen and that contribute the public's appreciation and enjoyment of the surrounding environment. Petaluma enjoys many aesthetic resources due to its location nestled between rolling farmlands at the mouth of the Petaluma River between the Sonoma Mountains to the northeast and scenic hills to the south. Petaluma is a gateway to wine county in Sonoma County and has active farmland within and surrounding the city, with scenic vineyards and open fields visible from many areas throughout the city. The Petaluma River and the city's many creeks provide riparian walkways along attractive waterways, and many of the city's recreational and natural resource areas are unimproved open space that provide views of the natural beauty of Sonoma County.



## Access to Natural Areas

### Trail Access and Connectivity

The City of Petaluma offers a variety of trail access points and connectivity options. Trails in Petaluma can generally be accessed from a variety of locations with few to no restrictions to access. Trails along creeks and riverfronts help define Petaluma’s character and provide the community with important recreation opportunities. Trails along the Petaluma River and several of the city’s creeks provide pedestrian and bicycling corridors that are also used as alternative transportation routes. The Petaluma River Trail, when fully implemented, will link residential and commercial uses along the riverfront, and implementation of the Petaluma River Access and Enhancement Plan will further enhance the riverfront environment and its relationship to the surrounding community.

### Conservation Easements

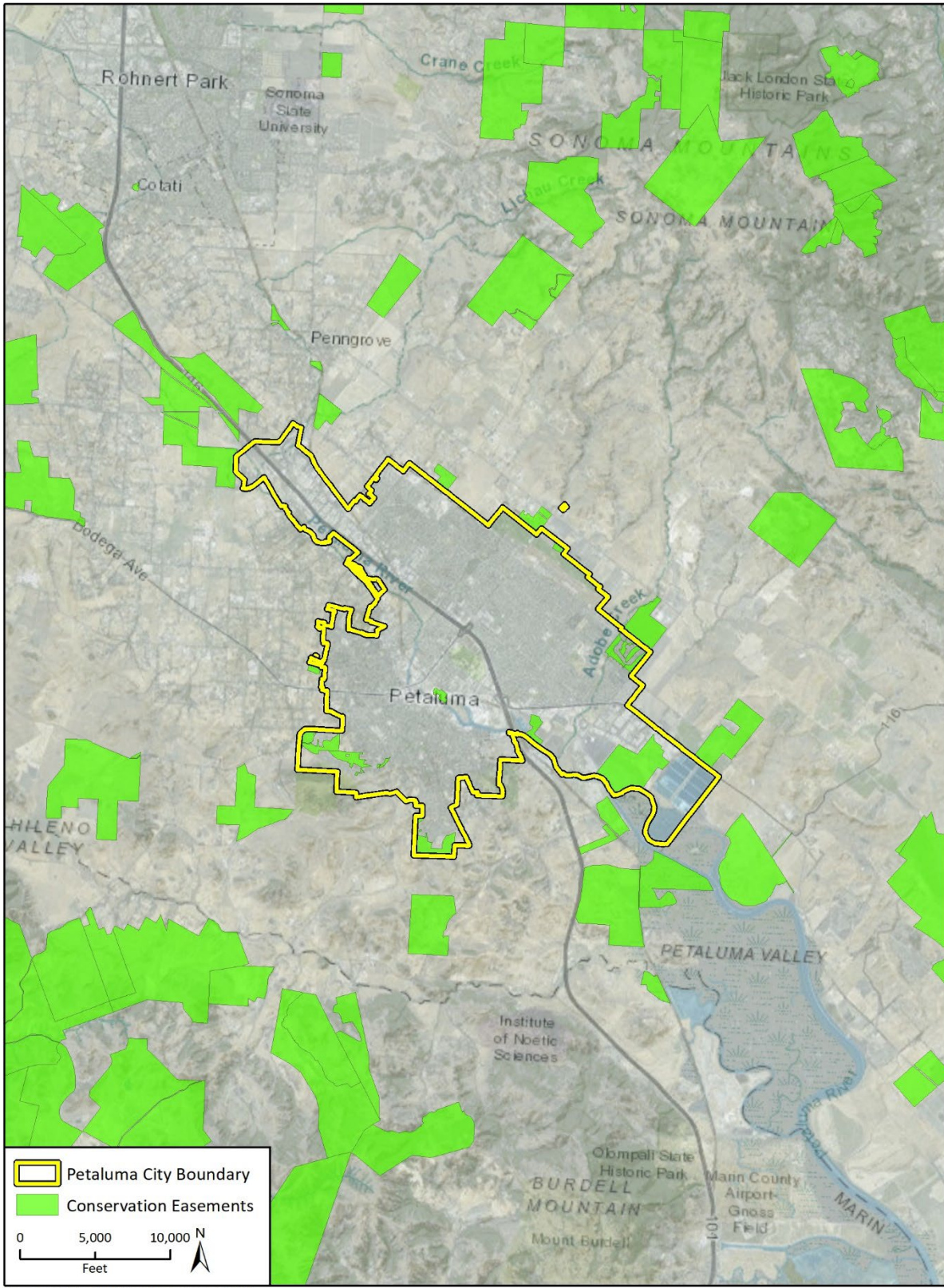
The City of Petaluma has several conservation easements serving various purposes that are managed by various organizations and agencies or partnerships between them. Table 1 lists the conservation easements within the City limits and within proximity to Petaluma. Land managers include the County of Sonoma, Sonoma Land Trust, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, and some joint purchases with the City of Petaluma. These easements provide visual access to nature by preserving the rural surroundings and preserving a greenbelt around the city that will continue to be solidified over time as opportunities are presented.

**Table 1: Conservation Easements in and Around the City of Petaluma**

Conservation Easement	Acreage
Westridge Knolls	76
Watson Ranch	529
Cloudy Bend	367
Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility	270 (facility occupies 25 acres)
McNear Peninsula (Steamer Landing Park)	10
Shollenberger Park -- Alman Marsh and Petaluma Marsh Additions	221
Lane Open Space Preserve	11
Marty Ranch	223

**Figure 2** below shows conservation easements are clustered to the southwest and northeast of the city. In the northeast there are several conservation easements that preserve lands on Sonoma Mountain as part of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor Project. These easements are adjacent to the Jack London State Historic Park on the northeastern side of Sonoma Mountain. Additional conservation easements exist on the outer periphery of the City limits. The Sonoma Land Trust has made it a priority to establish a greenbelt to the north and east of Petaluma to support the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor Project.

**Figure 2: Conservation Easements in and Around Petaluma**



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