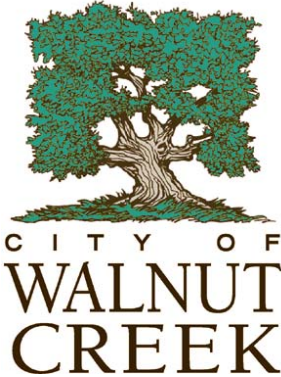


OPEN SPACE VISION PROJECT BACKGROUND REPORT



October 2007

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Open Space Vision Project Background Report

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1.0 Introduction

Background and Purpose of the Report. This report provides information to support a process of review, public input and planning for the City of Walnut Creek Open Space System – termed the “Open Space Vision Project.” This unique 2700 acre City owned and operated open space system was established starting with a citizen’s initiative in 1974. Over the past 32 years it has both fulfilled and departed from the vision established in the original guiding plan and policy documents (*Parks, Trail, Conservation and Open Space Plan*, prepared in 1974, and the *Operational Plan and Policy Guideline for the Walnut Creek Open Space*, prepared in 1978, discussed in Section 9.0 of the report).

While the open space system generally realizes the vision of the founders, many public access and recreation uses and facilities that were originally planned were never implemented, resulting in a greater emphasis on resource protection. The original policy documents called for detailed resource-based master plans for the open spaces that have not been prepared. Many ideas for new projects and programs and needs for maintenance and upgrade of existing facilities have arisen over the years, as well as issues about how the Open Space should be used and managed. The Open Space Vision Project is intended to help address these and other questions of use and management planning.

Recently the City adopted a new General Plan that includes goals, policies and actions for the Open Space. These goals, policies and actions provide a clearer overall vision for the future Open Space. They also call for the preparation of new plans and studies, and adoption of management practices, to resolve the details of the future Open Space System, particularly how to protect natural resources while accommodating public use, and how to acquire and protect additional open space. Clarifying how the steps to implement the direction of the General Plan is an important part of the Vision project.

Public Participation Process. At its November 6, 2006 meeting the City’s Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Commission authorized the formation of an Open Space Review Task Force, to include two members of the PROS Commission, as well as public members who would represent a range of open space users or Walnut Creek citizens. The group was charged with leading a public discussion to address basic questions about the 30 year old open space program – what’s working, what’s not – to frame a vision of what the open space should be like in another 30 years.

The anticipated 7 member Task Force participated in meetings over the course of approximately a year, including a three workshops where special efforts were made to get public comments. All interested parties were encouraged to weigh in on general and specific ideas for the future of the Open Space System. The preparation of new studies, plans and management practices as called for in the General Plan was considered based on a thorough dialogue with citizens and stakeholder groups. Input for planning a new detailed Vision for the Open Space should be based on a complete

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understanding of the current Open Space System; its lands, facilities, users, supporters, financing and administration as described in this Background Report.

The information and opinions obtained through the public review process were recorded in a separate Open Space Vision Report. This report provides guidance for a potential future Open Space Master Plan, and/or the detailed plans and studies called for in the General Plan. Actual detailed studies and planning would be a future phase, requiring determination of the appropriate scope, confirmation of the priority among competing City objectives, and allocation of funding. This background report, the associated GIS maps, and the documentation of public, staff, stakeholder, and decision-maker input from the Visioning process are all resources to guide future detailed planning.

Report Organization. In addition to this introduction, the Background Report includes relevant General Plan policies (Section 2.0), current issues and questions that face the open space system (Section 3.0), the history of the open space system (Section 4.0), the features and key issues and opportunities of the individual open space areas (Section 5.0), the administrative organization of the open space (Section 6.0), open space user and support groups (Section 7.0), current Open Space environmental education programs (Section 8.0), review of the policy and planning documents that guided the creation of the system, and the current plans and planning efforts that relate to the open space (Section 9.0), and current open space program finances (Section 10.0).

A separate Appendix document provides more detailed information:

Appendix A – Current Actions, Projects and Proposals

Appendix B – Annotated Bibliography of Policy and Background Documents

Appendix C – Analysis of *Parks, Trail, Conservation and Open Space Plan and Operational Plan and Policy Guideline*

Appendix D – General Plan 2025 Open Space-Related Policies

Appendix E – Current Open Space Use Regulations and Policies

About the Maps. The maps of the Open Space System in this report were created using ArcView Geographic Information System (GIS) software. The GIS includes map layers with high-resolution photography, jurisdictions, land use, parcel lines, streets, trails, and site features. They are tied to information databases, and can be expanded, updated, analyzed, and presented in countless ways. They are as complete and geographically accurate as possible, and are compatible with the City's current citywide GIS. In addition to the map figures for this report, and a new public map brochure of the open spaces and trails, these computer-generated maps provide important base information for future detailed planning, land or resource management and public communication. Use of or coordination with this map and database system should be required for all significant future studies and plans for the Open Space.

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2.0 General Plan 2025 Open Space Policies

On April 4, 2006, the Walnut Creek City Council formally adopted General Plan 2025, the blueprint for development and conservation for Walnut Creek. This document replaces the previous General Plan that was adopted in 1989. The new General Plan addresses the open space system in Chapter 3, Natural Environment and Public Spaces. The Chapter contains four sections: Open Space, Creeks, Trails, and Parks and Plazas. The first three sections are directly or indirectly related to the Open Space System. They include four goals and a series of implementing policies and actions for each goal. These are reproduced in their entirety in Appendix C, and excerpted and summarized below.

The Chapter describes the functions of open space:

Open spaces serve a variety of functions.

- Preserve natural resources
- Provide wildlife habitat and corridors
- Provide outdoor recreation
- Supply an important visual and aesthetic resource to those who live and work in the city
- Contribute to overall public safety (e.g., steeply sloped hillsides susceptible to landslides are kept open and free of development)
- Allow for limited educational and recreational activities

These function statements could comprise, or provide the basis for, a mission statement for the Open Space System.

The Chapter includes a legal definition of open space:

Open space land is any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open space use for the purposes of the preservation of natural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, or public health and safety. (California Government Code §65560(b))

Policies and actions under Goal 1 clarify that protection of natural resources is a key objective for the Open Space System:

GOAL 1 Maintain and enhance open space lands.

Policy 1.1. Protect, manage and improve open space lands.

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Policy 1.2. Protect and enhance the natural environment.

Action 1.2.1. Identify, protect, restore, and enhance sensitive biological resources and areas critical for habitat and habitat connectivity. (See Action 2.1.3.)

(calls for specific biological studies)

Action 1.2.2. Strive to eliminate non-native plant species and expand areas with native plants.

Action 1.2.3. Monitor and control the factors affecting the habitat value of open space, including trail use and grazing.

One action clarifies that natural resources should have priority over accommodation of public access and development of related facilities:

Action 1.3.2. Allow on open space lands, only facilities, structures, and activities compatible with conservation, preservation, and education.

Other policies and actions are clear that public use should be accommodated:

Policy 1.3. Promote a variety of appropriate activities on open space lands.

Policy 1.4. Provide convenient public access to open space lands and trails.

Action 1.4.2. Provide trailheads, parking areas, gates, and trails that meet generally accepted access standards and are sensitive to neighborhood interests.

Many of the policies and actions call for preparation of plans and studies for the management, use and improvement of the open space, and acquisition of additional open space:

(Use and management plan and policies)

Action 1.1.1. Prepare and adopt a plan for the protection and management of the City's open space lands.

Action 1.3.3. Review and update existing policies for open space activities and monitor their effectiveness.

(Acquisition of new land)

Policy 2.1. Develop a plan for acquiring additional open space lands or conservation easements.

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Action 2.1.1. Develop criteria for possible acquisitions of open space lands important to the City.

Action 2.1.2. Identify and maintain a list and map of properties where open space acquisition should be considered.

Policy 2.2. Plan for funding for space acquisition or conservation easements.

Action 2.2.1. Establish mechanisms for funding and maintaining new acquisitions and easements.

(Studies of creeks - could be combined or separate)

Action 3.1.1. Conduct an evaluation of existing creek conditions and restoration opportunities.

Action 3.1.3. Develop a coordinated set of creek policies covering setbacks from creeks, damage prevention, creek stewardship, nuisance abatement, public access, pathways, and similar public and environmental concerns. Policies may differ for creeks in open space lands and for creeks on private lands.

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3.0 Current Projects, Proposals and Issues

The first objective of the Open Space Vision Project is to hear the public's ideas and preferences for the City's Open Space System. Ideally this input will reflect an understanding of current issues, adopted actions and projects, and proposals and ideas that have been raised previously.

Current Projects and Proposals. In addition to guiding General Plan policies, there are specific adopted actions in the General Plan, and a number of projects and proposals "on the books" in the Open Space Department budget and work program, or suggested by members of the Open Space Foundation, the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Commission, Open Space staff, other City departments, and the public. These specific actions, projects and proposals are listed in Appendix A. Site-specific projects and proposals are listed in the "Key Issues and Opportunities" under each Open Space Area in Section 5.0.

Over-arching or key issues and questions to resolve are listed below.:

Current Issues

1. The open space system is at a decision point for determining how to respond to competing demands for public use and programs versus resource protection.
2. Current use demands and costs exceed the limits of current open space staffing and funding. Additional staff and funding will be needed to maintain the existing level of access, programs, and resource protection as Walnut Creek and regional population grows. Significantly more funding would be needed to expand current levels.
3. There is a significant backlog of deferred maintenance projects for the existing historic ranch and public use facilities in the open space. A list of projects and a cost estimate has been prepared by staff as part of the City's overall Maintenance Master Plan.
4. There is growing public demand for environmental and historic interpretation programs conducted by the Open Space Ranger staff. A goal has been established to improve and expand these programs to comply with curriculum standards so they will fully support the environmental education efforts of local schools. Open Space staffing would need to be increased to keep pace with these program goals, to avoid taking time away from other ranger duties such as patrol, maintenance, and resource management.
5. Resource protection and restoration has always been the primary reason for the existence of the open space system. This is reinforced in the current General Plan Open Space Element. However, the original planning documents for the Open Space System contain many policies for low-intensity recreation and public access improvements that have not been

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implemented, and are not consistent with the vision of the current draft General Plan Open Space Element. The General Plan calls for an update of current policies.

6. The original Open Space Plan and the new General Plan have policies calling for thorough natural resource inventories and management plans that have not been implemented or funded.
7. The open space acquisition and protection programs called for in the General Plan are not currently funded or staffed.
8. Existing major facilities in the open space, such as a Borges Ranch, experience significant use and corresponding need/demand for better access and infrastructure improvements. Yet such improvements may conflict with resource values.
9. There are many prior plans, and current ideas on the part of staff and users, for additions or improvements to public facilities such as trails, parking, restrooms, water systems, access roads, historic structure restoration, and an indoor structure for environmental education. The General Plan, and the original planning and policy documents do not provide clear guidelines on how much improvement is enough, or too much.
10. The objectives of cattle grazing on the open space lands are to maintain a traditional agricultural practice, reduce fuel loads for fire protection, provide some revenue to offset other costs, and, with proper controls, manage natural resources. However, some people who are active in open space restoration see cattle as harmful to resources. More specific studies are needed to evaluate the impacts, resolve best management practices, and inform a public process to decide whether the practice should continue.
11. Some types of open space users have more use restrictions and present greater management challenges than others, particularly mountain bicyclists and dog owners. Yet there is growing demand for these types of access.
 - There have been complaints about the amount of dog waste close to trailheads. Waste pick-up bags are provided, but are not always used. There is some inconsistency in dog access regulations, e.g. at Lime Ridge Open Space, where one area allows dogs on-leash, another off-leash, and another excludes dogs.
 - Mountain bikes are restricted to fire road trails (except for the Kovar Trail connecting to Howe Homestead Park), but are often seen on single track trails such as the Indian Creek and Ridge Top trails at Shell Ridge, or the Paradise Valley or Ridge trails at Lime Ridge. Bikes exceeding the 15mph speed limit have also elicited complaints.

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Key Questions

1. What specific actions and projects will help coordinate Walnut Creek's open space system objectives with the other regional open space efforts (Mt. Diablo State Park, East Bay Regional Parks, East Bay MUD, other cities, etc.)?
2. What is the relationship of the open space plan to the General Plan, the Creeks Master Plan, the planned Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and other Walnut Creek studies and plans?
3. How should the competing demands for resource protection, public access and facilities, open space acquisition, and environmental education programs be balanced?
4. What are specific needs, objectives, and priorities for acquisition of additional open space land?
5. What are the most important specific projects and steps for protection and restoration of natural resources, and improving facilities, programs, user access and enjoyment?
6. What is the appropriate relationship between recreational programs conducted by the Parks Department and the programs conducted by the Open Space Rangers?
7. How can the "funding gap" between current conditions and the General Plan's future vision for open space be addressed, in the near term and in perpetuity?
8. What steps should be taken to address management issues associated with dogs, mountain bikes, and other management-intensive types of use?
9. Based on the discussion of issues and answers to these and other questions – what is the appropriate scope, order, and priority for future open space studies and plans?

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4.0 Background of the Open Space System

History of the Open Space System. The open space system is the result of a controversy about a proposed development of the foothills around Mount Diablo in the late 1960s. This led to formation of a citizen's movement in the early 1970s, a voter initiative that overturned City Council approval of a major development proposal, and finally a formally-designated committee that formed a plan to purchase and protect open space. The recommendations of the plan resulted in the formation of Contra Costa County Service Area R-8, approved by the voters in June 1974, providing \$6,750,000 to acquire open space in and around Walnut Creek. The original plan identified approximately 2500 acres of parks, open space and trail easements to be protected. Later purchases and dedications in the Lime Ridge area have brought the total open space acreage to 2704. The history of the open space system is covered in detail in a master's thesis completed in 1997.¹

The Value of Open Space. The City of Walnut Creek's open space system is unique among U.S. cities. It is clearly one of the City's most important assets and central to its environment and image. Walnut Creek's commitment to open space is consistent with the Bay Area's leadership in the field, which started with the movement to protect state and national parks such as Big Basin and Yosemite in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the formation of the East Bay Regional Park District, the nation's first such district, in 1934.



In addition to the subjective values of image and environment, the open space system has measurable values in terms of natural area recreation opportunities that would otherwise require additional time, travel expense, and user fees to access. The open space system is a destination for residents from the surrounding area, not just for Walnut Creek residents. Open space areas play a role within the larger context of increasing opportunities for improved health and fitness within the population. Finally, the open space adds specific, measurable property value, especially to adjacent properties, but also to property throughout the City, given the extent and distribution of the City's open space. An economic

¹ *The Roots of a Legacy: A History of Walnut Creek, California's Open Space*, Sande DeSalles, 1997.

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study prepared for the East Bay Regional Park District in 2000 estimated the value for residential properties within a distance of up to 1000 feet from open space, to be from 7.5% to 30% greater.²



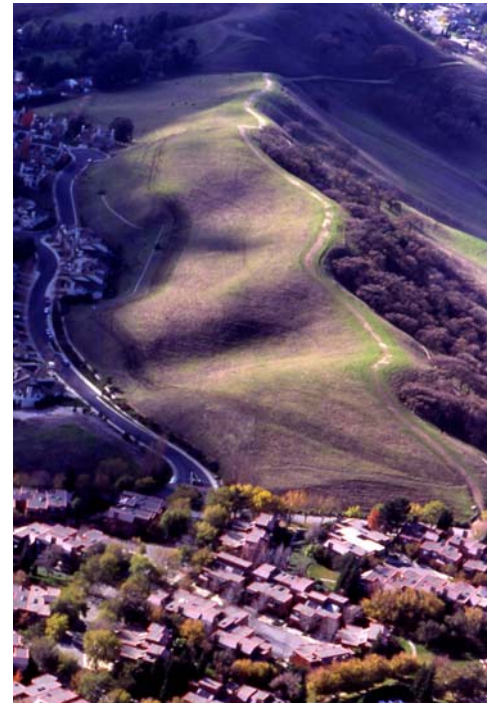
² *Final Report, Regional Economic Analysis, East Bay Regional Park District*, Economic and Planning Systems, November 2000.

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5.0 Current Open Space and Trails

The City's current open space system, shown in Figure 5-1, includes 2700 acres of open space in 4 major preserves. There are 7 miles of regional trails, plus approximately 47 miles of local trails. Cattle graze throughout most of the open space areas, not only to preserve the area's agricultural heritage, but as a means of fire hazard suppression by reducing the height and quantity of dry grass. Properly managed, grazing can also reduce the extent of invasive weeds.



Regional Trails

The Open Space Division is responsible for nearly 7 miles of trails connecting to other parts of the City:

Lime Ridge to Shell Ridge Trail – This 1.17 mile trail is mostly decomposed granite, though sections are asphalt paved.

Sugarloaf – Shell Ridge Trail – This 3.07 mile trail is natural or decomposed granite in some areas and asphalt paved in others. It runs through Rudgear Park and the private open space of Rudgear Estates.

Ygnacio Canal Trail – This 4.17 mile route is a Class I trailway (paved, road-width path), a separated route which runs next to the Contra Costa Water District canal for irrigation water. It is asphalt paved and passes behind homes with numerous street crossings. Maintained in conjunction with Contra Costa Water District.

Mokelumne Trail – This is a paved .5 mile long Class I trailway (Caltrans standard paved bike/pedestrian trail). It crosses over the EBMUD water pipeline with one bridge crossing.

Open Space staff maintenance responsibilities for these trails include signage, weed abatement, patrol, and gate and surface repairs.

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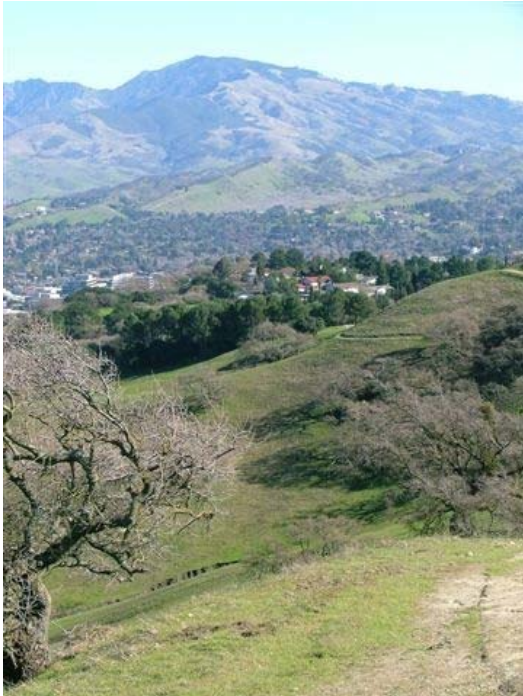
Figure 5-1: Overview of Walnut Creek Open Space System

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Open Space Areas



Acalanes Ridge Open Space (see Figure 5-2)

Acres: 179

Habitat: oak woodland, grassland, riparian

Trails: 3 miles of unsigned trails

Facilities: None

Access: Above the Highway 680/24 intersection. There are trailheads with parking on Ramsay Circle and on Sousa Drive. There are several other trailheads but they have limited or no parking and therefore are primarily for neighborhood use (general use is *not* prohibited).

Serving as a greenbelt between Walnut Creek and Lafayette, Acalanes Ridge Open Space is a relatively small natural area providing sweeping vistas of Mount Diablo, particularly Castle Rocks and Rock City. From the ridgeline you can see Mount Diablo as well as the Carquinez Strait and the delta to the north. The Briones - Mt. Diablo Trail passes through the park. The area also has hidden sylvan creekside settings and provides short

hiking opportunities. Acalanes Ridge is primarily a neighborhood open space area, rather than a destination for visitors from other parts of the larger community.

Key Issues and Opportunities

The permanent protection of a piece of property to the south, within the City of Lafayette, known as the Acalanes Heights property. This site is the #1 acquisition priority of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Commission. This steep 22.5 acre parcel is part of the viewshed and habitat area of the Acalanes Preserve. It features an EBMUD water tank. It is the subject of a proposal to build a large house that would impact the view and the habitat of the preserve. The City is working with City of Lafayette staff to encourage that the house not be built in this location.



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Figure 5-2: Acalanes Ridge Open Space

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Lime Ridge Open Space (see Figure 5-3)

Acres: 924 (+302 acres in Concord)

Habitat: grassland, oak woodland, chaparral, riparian

Trails: 25 miles of multi-use trails

Facilities: A restroom is available at the adjacent Boundary Oak Golf Course

Access: Off Valley Vista Road near Boundary Oak Golf Course.

Lime Ridge Open Space encompasses the dominant ridge leading to Mt. Diablo and forms an important visual backdrop to the urbanized portions of Ygnacio Valley. It includes land within the City of Concord that is managed by the Walnut Creek Open Space Division under an agreement between the two cities. It is a natural greenbelt connector between Walnut Creek and the Concord and Clayton areas to the east. Hiking and grazing are the dominant uses. The preserve contains some of the last remaining chaparral vegetation in the Walnut Creek Open Space. Due to the rich diversity of plant and animals, the preserve is protected more than other areas. For example, the Lime Ridge Wildlife Preserve (center section, south of Ygnacio) is off-limits to dogs.

The approximately 302 acres of Lime Ridge Open Space within the City of Concord is managed by City of Walnut Creek Open Space staff because Concord does not have other open space to manage, and because the land is contiguous to the Lime Ridge Open Space, with no intervening fences.



Key Issues and Opportunities:

- The inconsistency of dog access policies. Dogs are allowed off-leash north of Ygnacio Valley Road. Due to sensitive chaparral habitat, no dogs are allowed in the central portion of the preserve, north of the southern boundary of the Boundary Oaks Golf Course. In the south end of the Open Space, dogs are allowed on-leash to accommodate the interests of residents of the adjacent Rancho Paraiso Development.
- The future management of the portion of the preserve in Concord may change if the City of Concord takes on its management as part of significant open space management responsibilities associated with the former Concord Naval Weapons Station.
- The habitat relationship, and potentially the recreation relationship, between the Open Space and the Cal State University East Bay campus to the east should be studied. The properties are separated only by Crystal Ranch Drive, and share the same grazing tenant.
- East Bay Regional Park District is working on acquisitions that would link Lime Ridge to Mt. Diablo State Park. This will offer new trail opportunities.

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- The potential impact of the existing pistol range, located just east of the Boundary Oak Golf Course. This range is used by the City Police Department and U.S. Postal Service agents. The concern is that stray bullets could hit trail users to the east of the facility.



Lime Ridge Open Space habitat area, looking north

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Figure 5-3: Lime Ridge Open Space

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Shell Ridge Open Space (see Figure 5-4)



Acres: 1420

Habitat: Oak woodland, grassland, riparian, coastal sage scrub

Trails: Approximately 31 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails.

Facilities: Borges Ranch, a working cattle ranch with facilities available for group picnicking and camping; maintenance facility and restroom.

Access: Shell Ridge Open Space and Borges Ranch are located at 1035 Castle Rock Road.

Shell Ridge comprises a series of parallel ridges which cut diagonally into the heart of Walnut Creek, forming a wedge of open space running all the way to Mt. Diablo. It provides a significant visual and aesthetic benefit to the community. As the City of Walnut Creek's largest open space unit, it has trails for biking, hiking and horseback riding through oak woodlands and grassland savannah. Shell Ridge gets its name from the marine fossils left behind when the ocean waters that once covered the area receded and the marine sediment layers were folded upward to their current position. Today you can hike or ride on horseback on the trails or picnic under 300 year old oaks near one of the many ponds.

A major feature of Shell Ridge is the historic Borges Ranch (see Figure 5-5), which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. Established in 1899, this cattle ranch complex features weathered barns and ranch buildings, corrals and the restored Borges family home. The ranch serves as a ranger station, maintenance facility and ranger residence. The Ranch is also home to numerous animals cared for by the Pleasant Hill 4H Club, including goats, pigs, sheep, and chickens. The Patrick Hanna Grove Picnic Area offers drinking water, restrooms, picnic tables, barbeques, a playing field, horseshoe pits, a children's fishing pond and an amphitheater with stage. The Ranch also offers group camping on a reservation basis.



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Key Issues and Opportunities:

- The development of a trail staging parking area at Marshall Drive to accommodate visitor demand.
- Shell Ridge is the focus of most of the habitat enhancement and restoration efforts of the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation, including native grassland restoration, quail habitat restoration, and oak woodland restoration, and bluebird nesting boxes.
- At the Borges Ranch activity area, the construction of a one-way loop access road would address congestion and safety on the existing narrow driveway;
- The Hay Barn structure is deteriorated and needs restoration;
- A general electrical service upgrade is needed for the current antiquated system;
- Septic and water system upgrades are needed at the Bob Pond picnic area;
- Undergrounding of utilities would provide a more historically accurate setting;
- A permanent water supply (well) is desirable to maintain the water level in Bob Pond;
- Restoration of the riparian corridor.



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Howe Homestead (see Figure 5-4)

Acres: 7

Habitat: Community park with urban landscaping, fruit and nut trees, gardens.

Trails: Trail head for the Kovar Trail connecting Howe to Shell Ridge.

Facilities: Picnic area, antique farm equipment, community gardens, portable toilet, maintenance facility, ranger residence.

Access: Howe Homestead Park is located at 2950 Walnut Boulevard, less than a mile south of Ygnacio Valley Road.



Howe Homestead, adjacent to Shell Ridge Open Space, is the former home of James Howe, a foreign news correspondent for the Associated Press. This park recreates the historic urban farm with a collection of fruit trees, grape vines, beehives, and outbuildings. The homestead is the location for the Community Gardens, an area of 48 garden plots rented by residents for the growing of vegetables and ornamental plants. The Howe Harvest Festival is a yearly fall festival enjoyed by the local community celebrating the activities of an urban farm and the Howe family history. A popular Shell Ridge trailhead begins at Howe Homestead.



Key Issues and Opportunities

- Construction of a restroom to serve present visitors and allow additional group activities (e.g. garden club tours and small weddings and receptions).
- Revision of Community Garden policy to deny multiple plots to a single individual gardener and allow more members of the public to participate.
- Restoration of outbuildings and other structures (smokehouse, oven, water tower, fencing around farm equipment, removal of inappropriate equipment).
- Potential restoration of the orchard.
- An interpretive pathway, e.g. a self-guided walk covering urban farming and local history.

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Figure 5-4: Shell Ridge Open Space and Sugarloaf Open Space

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Figure 5-5: Borges Ranch Area, Shell Ridge Open Space

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Sugarloaf Open Space (see Figure 5-4)

Acres: 177

Habitat: riparian, grassland, oak woodland

Trails: 3 miles

Facilities: Picnic and group barbecue areas; rest rooms; group camping by reservation; Sugarloaf ranger residence; maintenance facility; amphitheater.

Access: Located at 2161 Youngs Valley Road (off Rudgear Road).



Sugarloaf Open Space Area has a system of hiking and equestrian trails, with a trail connection to Rudgear Park and Shell Ridge Open Space. The area also provides picnic and camping opportunities. Along the upper ridgeline, there are views of Mt. Diablo, Shell Ridge, Las Trampas Ridge and the Briones Hills. A 15 acre black walnut orchard is located on the preserve. This orchard, one of the last in the City, also provides a shaded wildlife habitat area. The Open Space also features a creekway, providing a dense cover of riparian vegetation for wildlife and nature study.



Key Issues and Opportunities:

- The development of a new barn structure for interpretive activities (similar to the Wagon Barn at Borges Ranch).
- Development of a trail connection to the Iron Horse Trail at Rudgear Road in conjunction with a proposed EBMUD water tank on property between Rudgear and the Open Space.
- Determine the viability of restoration of the walnut orchard.

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6.0 Administration and Support

Organization. The open space system and multi-use trails are managed by the Open Space and Trails Division within the Public Services Department. The Division is under the direction of the Public Services Manager for Park Maintenance and Open Space. County Service Area R-8, the assessment district that helps fund the Open Space, is administered by the County Service Area Coordinator in the Contra Costa County Public Works Department. This is a tax collection function only; the City operates the Open Space.

Policy Oversight. The seven member Park, Recreation and Open Space Commission is appointed by the City Council to advise them regarding the park, open space and recreation needs of the City. This includes providing advice on standards and policies for open space facilities development, program services, facility usage and the design and plans for park, open space and recreation facilities. The Commission holds monthly public meetings and is staffed by the Arts, Recreation and Community Services Department.

Staff. Under the direction of the Public Services Manager, the Division staff currently includes seven positions: an Open Space Supervising Ranger, three Open Space Rangers and three Landscape Maintenance Workers. There is part-time interpretive staff for educational programs at Borges Ranch. City Open Space Rangers have limited law enforcement and citation writing authority (pursuant to Penal Code 832 certification). The rangers do not carry arms.

One half of an Open Space Ranger position is funded by and allocated to the City of Concord for management of part of the Lime Ridge Open Space Area that is within Concord. This arrangement exists because Concord does not have other open space lands to manage, and it was efficient to contract with Walnut Creek for the management of this contiguous land.

Staff Responsibilities. The staff is responsible for patrol, maintenance, resource management, management of public use, and provision of public programs, including ranger-led hikes, walks and talks. Major capital improvement projects are the responsibility of the Engineering Division, which coordinates with the Open Space Division on planning and implementation.

Staff is responsible for the management of natural resources and sets and implements administrative-level policy that affects those resources.

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7.0 Non-Profit Organizations

Many non-profit organizations and community groups participate in activities that support the protection and management of the open space. Many more are regular open space users.

Open Space Foundation. In 1979 the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation was incorporated as a nonprofit 501-C-3 organization to promote the enhancement and protection of the open space lands, and to inform the public of the educational and recreational opportunities in the open space areas. In 1991 the Foundation began an active ongoing program to restore natural vegetation and habitats, beginning with the Oak Habitat Restoration Project. Since then, the Foundation has performed other restoration projects, including the Quail Habitat Restoration Project, a less formal native grass restoration effort, and an invasive-exotic-plant-suppression effort. Foundation members lead numerous volunteer workdays each year for restoration projects, lead interpretive hikes, and assist in City-sponsored events such as Heritage Day at Borges Ranch, the Harvest Festival at Howe Homestead and the annual Trail Day event to restore open space trails. The Foundation Board holds monthly meetings and often comments to the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Commission and the City Council.



While the ongoing resource management activity is a staff responsibility, the efforts of the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation have been the primary resource rehabilitation program in the Open Space.



Save Mount Diablo. Organized as a non-profit in 1971, Save Mount Diablo's mission is to protect Mount Diablo and the surrounding foothills' natural beauty, integrity, and biological diversity, to enhance local quality of life, and to provide recreational opportunities consistent with protection of natural resources, through land acquisition and preservation strategies

Other User Groups. The Mount Diablo Audubon Society, the Lindsay Wildlife Museum, the Walnut Creek 4-H Club, the Sierra Club, Rotary and the Boy Scouts have all participated in events and projects that support habitat restoration and maintenance of trails and facilities. These and many other groups regularly use the

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open space, including High school cross country teams, orienteering clubs, competitive running organizations, painting classes, search and rescue organizations and mountain bike clubs.

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8.0 Programs

Public Programs. Open Space Rangers and Open Space Foundation members lead regular and specially scheduled hikes, tours and talks. Staff is responsible for organizing annual events in the open space, such as Heritage Day at Borges Ranch, the Harvest Festival at Howe Homestead Park, and the Trail Day event



Programs have expanded greatly over the life span of the Open Space Division with additional programs each year to meet increased public demand. Staff intends to further expand programs, but the availability of additional staff and interpretive supplies and equipment for these programs may be limiting factors.

A list of programs conducted by Open Space staff over the past 5 years is presented in Table 8-1. In addition to programs run by Open Space staff, programs are offered in the Open Space areas by many local and nationally affiliated groups throughout the year. These groups include local scout and community organizations, Lindsay Wildlife Museum, the Sierra Club and Audubon Society and specific user groups such as hiking and biking clubs.

Grazing Program. Cattle have grazed the land that now comprises the City Open Space areas since the time of the Spanish land grants. Cattle are still present on all four Open Space areas, though not in the same extent or numbers as before City acquisition. The primary goal of grazing is to reduce the height and quantity of dry grass that could contribute to wildfires, while maintaining natural diversity and appearance. When properly managed, grazing is beneficial in managing invasive exotic plants. It also helps to maintain open meadows that in pre-European times were maintained by native peoples by regular burning. The presence of cattle is also part of the identity of the community. In this increasingly urban environment, the cattle represent the historic roots of the community; something that many citizens would like to see continued.



The Open Space Division has instituted a number of measures to make grazing more effective and to lessen the impact of cattle on the natural environment. Generally, resources are managed through

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grazing adjustments based on the needs of the resource. For example, a molasses and water mixture has been applied with a 100 gallon spray rig in remote locations along the open space boundary with private property. This causes the cattle to focus on eating this grass and quickly reduces the hazard of fuel buildup along the boundary line. Interior fencing is used to confine cattle to specific areas for specific periods of time to minimize overgrazing. Through these methods both wildflowers and riparian areas are protected. Staff are currently working with the timing of grazing to reduce the amount of yellowstar thistle in certain locations.



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Table 8-1: Public Programs Offered by Open Space Staff

On-going Programs

Frequency	Established	Activity	Location
Once a month	since 2002	Tour	Howe Homestead
Once a month	since 2003	Hike	Lime Ridge
Once a month	since 2003	Tour	Old Borges Ranch
Sept to December		Educational ranch tours	Old Borges Ranch
March to June		Educational ranch tours	Old Borges Ranch
March to June		Living history program	Old Borges Ranch

Yearly Programs

Established	Activity	Location
Since 2001	Super Bowl bird walk/hike/activity	Sugarloaf
Since 2001	Earthly Edibles, plant walk/ethnobotany	Sugarloaf
Since 2001	Spring Family Campout	Sugarloaf
Since 2003	Plants of Acalanes Preserve	Acalanes
Since 2002	Useful Plants of Lime Ridge	Lime Ridge
Since 2003	Moon Stalkers, night hike	Shell Ridge
Since 2001	Avian Encounters benefit program	Sugarloaf
Since 2001	Abothlon (use of ancient tools)	Sugarloaf
Since 2001	Meteors and Marshmallows Campout	Sugarloaf
Since 2003	Amphitheater Tonight, mixed program	Sugarloaf
Since 2003	The Tao of Atlatl, (create ancient tool)	Sugarloaf
Since 2002	Why is it Called Mt. Diablo, walk	Lime Ridge
Since 2001	Heritage Day	Old Borges Ranch
Since 2001	Harvest Festival	Howe Homestead
Since 2001	Summer Solstice Campfire Program	Sugarloaf
2002 – 2004	Holiday Hoedown	Old Borges Ranch
2002/2003	Walk Through Time at Borges Ranch (Management themed presentation)	Old Borges Ranch
2002/2003	Old Man of the Mountain	Mt. Diablo SP
2001-2003	Huck Fin Fishing Day	Bob Pond/Hanna

Special Programs

Conducted	Activity	Location
2005	In Search of Elvis, nature fact/fiction, hike	Sugarloaf
2005	Life and Times of Quercus, the Oak Tree	Old Borges Ranch
2005	The Oak and the Woodpecker, bird walk	Old Borges Ranch
2004	The View Above Borges Ranch, hike	Shell Ridge
2003	Leaping Legends, nature lore	Sugarloaf
2003	Annual (?) Trail Day, volunteer project	varies
2003	Mother Nature at Her Worst, winter survival	Shell Ridge
2002	Micro Marathon, nature exploration	Sugarloaf

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9.0 Policies and Plans

Original Open Space Plan and Policies. Existing policies and management guidelines for the open space system are contained in the *Parks, Trail, Conservation and Open Space Plan*, prepared in 1974, and the *Operational Plan and Policy Guideline for the Walnut Creek Open Space*, prepared in 1978, which includes the earlier Plan document. Appendix A provides an annotated bibliography of these and other planning, study and policy documents for the open space system. The two key documents are reviewed and analyzed in Appendix B.

These historic policies are clear that the primary purpose of the open space in 1974 was to protect resources and secondarily to accommodate public access. Though they are approximately 30 years old, the original *Plan* and the *Guidelines* are generally consistent with and relevant to the current open space system, with the significant exception that they also cover parks, which is now a separate function, and that the open spaces were designated as “Recreation Areas” that potentially included more formal and extensive facilities for access and use than currently exist or are planned.

The *Plan* and the *Guidelines* are a little hard to follow on some specific subjects such as trail design and use, because they contain similar, parallel policies that expand on the same subject in different sections, e.g. the basic policies in the *Plan* vs. the more detailed policies in the *Guidelines*. This is an issue of clarity and convenience, rather than internal consistency. The *Guidelines* are quite detailed in their direction regarding the planning and management of the open space areas. Consistent with the policy that resources take precedence over public use, the Specific Policies for Parkland Planning specify that the first step in planning after the acquisition of an open space property will be to:

“. . . complete a resource analysis which will identify features of the parkland that have significant resource value as well as provide a potential plan for revegetation and wildlife management. . . . Guidelines will be established to be used in later planning processes to protect significant natural resources which could be adversely affected by parkland use.” (p. 56).

The next step in planning for each preserve is a “Land Use – Development Plan”, followed by a Capital Improvement Plan. These recommended steps have not been fully carried out.

Subsequent Plan and Studies. An Open Space Area Master Plan was prepared for the Shell Ridge “Open Space Area (OSA)” in 1980 and for the Lime Ridge Recreation Area “OSA” in 1985. These master plans focus on public use facilities, including “activity centers” and staging areas that were never implemented, rather than resources.

In 1992, the City adopted a *Creeks Restoration and Trails Master Plan*. This ambitious plan sought to create greenways, with publicly accessible trails and restored riparian habitat, along segments of three creeks in the vicinity of downtown Walnut Creek. Portions of the Plan have been implemented through Civic Park, but implementation along other segments has not proceeded because of the very

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high cost of right-of-way acquisition needed for the project, concerns of private property owners about the impacts of the project, and concern by the California Department of Fish and Game about public access to the creeks. The Plan relates to the Open Space system due to its trail and habitat restoration objectives.

In 1995 a *Report on Management Options for Improving Biodiversity in Shell Ridge, Lime Ridge, Acalanes, and Sugarloaf Open Space Areas* was completed by the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management, of the University of California at Berkeley. This report, funded by the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation, included substantial useful resource information and recommendations for many general and some specific resource management actions. The report establishes transects for monitoring results at 5 year intervals, but stops short of setting out a specific action plan. It provides some useful data for planning restoration activities. The primary efforts at active habitat restoration guided by this report have been the volunteer projects conducted by the Open Space Foundation .

The second five-year follow-up to the original Open Space Biodiversity study is currently being completed by the University of California at Berkeley. This report will provide a ten year evaluation of changes in the natural resource condition in the Walnut Creek Open Space.

Consistency with Current Plans, Policies and Conditions. On April 4, 2006, the Walnut Creek City Council formally adopted *General Plan 2025*, the blueprint for development and conservation for Walnut Creek that replaces the previous General Plan that was adopted in 1989. The new General Plan addresses the open space system in Chapter 3, “Natural Environment and Public Spaces” (see Appendix C). The goals, policies and actions of this chapter clearly state that the emphasis should be on protection and restoration of natural habitat. They call for the City to “prepare and adopt a plan for the protection, management, and improvement of the City’s open space lands.” They call for assessment of user demand and impacts and establishment of rules allowing only facilities and activities that are compatible with conservation and preservation. They also call for a specific plan and program to acquire additional open space lands and easements in the City.

An anticipated planning initiative related to the Open Space system is a proposal to prepare a *Parks Master Plan* that will be coming to the City Council in the near future. This would address park and recreation needs. It would be desirable to coordinate this parks study with parallel study on resource management in the Open Space system.

Summary. The original *Plan* and *Guidelines* are not consistent with the current General Plan or current conditions in that they include more extensive recreation facilities and activities in the open space, and do not place a clear primary emphasis on preservation of natural habitat. The subsequent master plan documents do not fulfill the intent of the original *Guidelines* for revegetation and wildlife management plans, and are inconsistent with current policies and conditions because they include more extensive use and facilities.

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A new resource-based plan for use, management, and improvement of the Open Space System, as called for in the current General Plan, would address these policy and plan inconsistencies and gaps.

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10.0 Finances

Funding. In 1974 voters in County Service Area R-8 approved bonds in the amount of \$6,750,000 to be used for acquisition purposes only. Funds to repay the 30 year bonds were derived from a property tax assessment. Although the voters in 1974 approved a 5 cents per 100 dollar increase in the property tax assessment in the Service Area as an ongoing funding source for operation, maintenance and development, the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 eliminated this funding. The 30 year General Obligation (GO) bond for Assessment District R-8, originally established to fund the open space acquisition, was retired in 2004. Since that time the District no longer appears on property tax bills. District R-8 continues to exist as a City Service District for the purpose of maintaining the open space. The District receives a small portion of the total 1% property tax established by Proposition 13, based on a system of allocation factors that are worked out between the City and the County Assessor. The amount has recently been approximately \$350,000 per year. This revenue is a part of the total property tax allocation the City receives, but the City and the County have agreed to keep track of it separately for reference purposes.³

Current sources of revenue for the open space system include: 1) Rents and Concessions, which include grazing leases and fees for programs and site use; 2) Reimbursement Charges for Services – from the City of Concord for management of open space within that City’s boundary; and 3) Tax Increment – a small amount of property tax from each property in County Service Area R-8, disbursed from the County, as described above. The largest part of the funding is a supplement from the City General Fund. Table 8-1 shows revenue sources per the 2006 – 2007 budget.

Table 10-1: 2006-2007 Proposed Revenue Sources

Rents & Concessions	\$63,000
Reimbursement - Charges for Services	\$35,000
Open Space Tax Increment	\$378,419
Total Program Revenue	\$476,419
Supplement from City General Fund	\$550,837
Total Revenue	\$1,027,256

Expenditures/Budget. The 2006 – 2007 annual budget for the Open Space Division is \$1,027,256. By far the biggest part of the budget, 70%, is for personnel – staff to administer, operate and maintain the system. Table 8-2 shows the overall allocations of the budget. The Capital Outlay budget for 2006 – 2007 was used to install a sealant in Bob Pond in the Shell Ridge Open Space to keep it from leaking water. Other capital expenditures of over \$10,000 are typically carried in the Engineering Division budget and aren’t reflected in this summary.

³ Leslie Frankiewich, Contra Costa County Assessor’s office, personal communication, September, 2005

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Table 10-2: 2006-2007 Adopted Program Budget

Personnel	\$718,153
Services and Supplies	\$289,103
Capital Outlay	\$20,000
Total Program Budget	\$1,027,256
Less: Program Revenue	\$476,419
Net Supplement from City General Fund	\$550,837

As part of a City-wide effort to prepare a Maintenance Master Plan, the Open Space Division has prepared a draft assessment of needs for repair and replacement of facilities and features in the preserves and trails, resulting in a 20 year budgeting plan from 2006 – 2008 through 2024 – 2026. These projects would have to compete with other City projects and priorities. The greatest overall proportion of this cost is for fencing and gates along boundaries and internal fences to support continued cattle grazing.