

MEASURES AND ACTIONS TO INCREASE CARBON SEQUESTRATION

The measures and actions below describe actions that define the specific policies, programs, and steps the County and its partners could implement to assist in reaching the state and County's 2045 carbon neutrality goal and to increase the health of the county's lands and people.

MEASURE 1: Promote Climate Smart Agricultural Practices

Action 1.1: Pursue funding (for example, California Department of Food and Agriculture [CDFA] Climate Smart Agriculture programs) and implement a voluntary agricultural conservation incentive program to encourage more farmers and ranchers to adopt conservation practices that have the potential to contribute to climate mitigation and enhance resilience of agricultural operations.

Action 1.2: Partner with the Contra Costa RCD, Contra Costa County Farm Bureau, UC Cooperative Extension, NRCS, and other stakeholders to provide outreach and education to farmers and ranchers on conservation practices that contribute to climate mitigation and increase resilience, and facilitate incentives to adopt these practices.

Action 1.3: Provide technical assistance to farmers for developing grant applications that support healthy soil practices (e.g., and compost) such as the CDFA Healthy Soils Incentive Program.

Action 1.4: Promote the development of conservation easements on natural and working lands through information sharing on the County's website, strategic partnerships, supporting community engagement efforts, and pursue funding to establish easements.

Action 1.5: Assist farmers and rangeland managers in accessing voluntary carbon markets that pay for carbon sequestration practices. Partner with the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District to explore implementing a program to group rangelands together for more competitive grant applications, similar to the model used by the Cachuma Resource Conservation District.

Action 1.6: Promote incentives and grants (for example, CDFA Climate Smart Agriculture programs) to improve water, fuel, and energy efficiency in agricultural operations.

Action 1.7: Support programs that incentivize replacement of older, polluting farm equipment, for example the Funding Agricultural Replacement Measures for Emission Reductions Program.

Action 1.8: Develop a program to facilitate equipment sharing for the implementation of climate-smart land management practices for small farmers that seek to implement these practices but lack access to necessary equipment such as a no-till drill seeder, tractors, mowers, etc.

MEASURE 2: Promote Conservation, Habitat Restoration, and Sustainable Management of Natural and Working Lands

Action 2.1: Develop a comprehensive conservation plan to include portions of the County not represented in the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan and other conservation efforts, to implement natural land

conservation and habitat restoration projects. Create an equitable outreach and engagement campaign during plan development and implementation.

Action 2.2: Pursue funding to implement natural land conservation restoration projects.

Action 2.3: Increase the production of high-quality, low-contamination compost locally.

Action 2.4: Develop a program to facilitate compost application on burn scars, and applicable natural and working lands, including rangelands in the county.

Action 2.5: Develop and implement a plan for the conservation of sparsely vegetated lands, such as beaches and bare rocks, that includes educating local landholders about the importance of this land type and conservation easements for private landholders on this land type.

Action 2.6: Address policy barriers that prohibit or discourage the voluntary creation or restoration and management of habitats and ecosystems by coordinating with local, State, and federal agencies.

Action 2.7: Explore the creation/expansion of tax incentives to conserve agricultural lands.

Action 2.8: Implement the recommendations in the 2015 Contra Costa County Food System Analysis and Economic Strategy to protect agricultural areas at risk of development. Maintain and enforce the Urban Limit Line, encourage infill and transit oriented development, and adopt and implement policies, programs, and projects to reduce urban sprawl and avoid land conversion.

MEASURE 3: Improve Health of Grasslands, Shrublands, and Woodlands and Mitigate Wildfire Ignition Risk and Fuel Load in the Wildland Urban Interface to Reduce Risk of Wildfire Events and Resulting GHG Emissions

Action 3.1: Engage with the East Bay Regional Parks District, local fire districts, local Fire Safe Councils, RCD, CAL FIRE, local tribal groups, and other regional, local, and state agencies to conduct fuel treatments within their jurisdictions and along highway corridors, restoring ecosystem resilience and protecting communities through updates to the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Action 3.2: Continue community education programs to inform residents of the importance of clearing a defensible space around homes and resources available to residents. This may include tabling at community events, information resources on the County webpage, mailers, and social media.

Action 3.3: Continue to seek funding from CAL FIRE Wildfire Prevention Grants Program to conduct fuel reduction projects, particularly in the wildland-urban interface.

Action 3.4: Implement shaded fuel breaks.

MEASURE 4: Protect the Urban Forest and Increase Urban Tree Cover

Action 4.1: Develop and adopt a County Street Tree Policy which provides guidelines for the replacement of existing trees, designates suitable trees as replacements, and enables the County to partner with community groups to seek grants to sustain and nurture the County's urban forest.

Action 4.2: Maintain and enforce the County Landscape Standards, which set specific standards for planting and maintaining trees in the County, and Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance which provides for the protection of certain protected trees in unincorporated areas of the County and prohibits removing trees on private property without a special permit.

Action 4.3: Develop an Urban Tree Plan to actively plant and maintain trees in unincorporated communities. The plan should aim to preserve and grow the County's urban tree canopy cover, for example through establishing a shade tree requirement for new development, especially in impacted communities. Successful Urban Forest Tree Plan development and implementation will depend on community engagement.

Action 4.4: Plant new drought tolerant and fire-resistant trees at County facilities and parks following adoption of an Urban Tree Plan.

MEASURE 5: Facilitate Mechanisms to Value and Fund Local Carbon Sequestration Projects

Action 5.1: Identify costs and barriers associated with carbon offsets. Develop resources to provide assistance and increase participation from local land managers.

Action 5.2: Partner with the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and other groups to develop and maintain an updated list of funding opportunities, resources, and application dates. Promote the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) Carbon Sequestration and Climate Resiliency Project Registry when it is launched in July of 2023.

Action 5.3: Establish a budget framework for investing in local carbon sequestration projects to offset the balance of communitywide emissions by 2045 in line with County targets set in the County Climate Action Plan and in support of State targets.

MOVING FORWARD

The goal is for Contra Costa County and its partners to use this study as a foundation to successfully fund and implement climate smart practices. Even though challenges exist such as needing improved equipment, regulatory barriers, cost of labor and maintenance, and land ownership, the county has a large network of individuals, community groups, non-profit organizations, and government agencies that are committed to maximizing the well-being of its residents and its natural and working lands. This strong network of dedicated individuals and the unprecedented amount of guidance and financial resources from the State puts Contra Costa in the ideal position for continued investment in maintaining resilient natural and working lands in the county.

