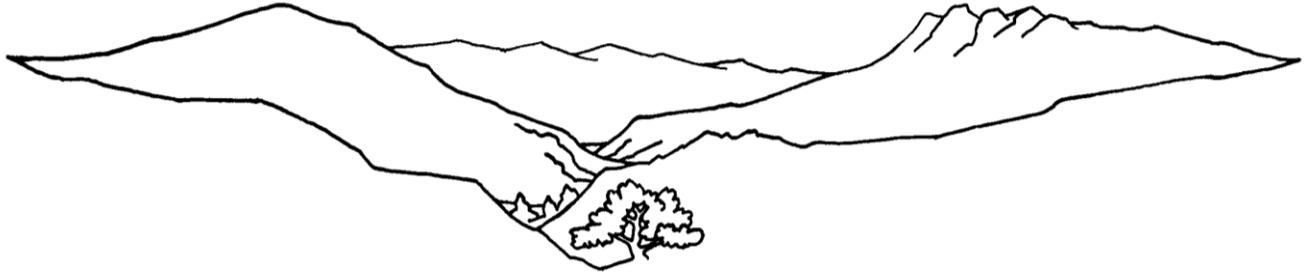


CONEJO OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION AGENCY



MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

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JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY:

City of Thousand Oaks
and
Conejo Recreation and Park District

CONTENTS

Title	
Contents	
Introduction.....	1
I. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	1
II. CONSERVATION POLICIES	2
III. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES	3
IV. OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLANS	4
Conservation of Natural Resources.....	4
Public Participation	5
Visitor Facilities.....	5
Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Programs	5
Trail Improvements.....	6
Signs	6
Campsites.....	7
Temporary Structures.....	7
Emergency Facilities	7
Historic Landmarks and Features.....	7
Buffer Zones.....	8
Access Easements	8
Brush Clearance Fuel Modification Zones.....	8
Mineral Management.....	8
V. VISITOR USES AND ACCOMMODATIONS	9
Permitted Uses.....	9
Prohibited Uses	10
Non-conforming Uses.....	10
Dogs and Other Pets	10
Visitor Information and Education.....	11
Use of Motorized Equipment	11
Field Surveys/Research Projects.....	11
Commercial Services.....	12
Fees	12
VI. CULTURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION.....	13
Planning and Management Procedures	13
Scientific Research.....	13
Testing and Salvage Activities.....	13
Resource Stabilization and Protection.....	14
Discovery of Human Remains	14

CONEJO OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION AGENCY

MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Introduction

The following policies and guidelines have been adopted by the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency (COSCA) Board of Directors and are intended to inform the public of the nature of the Agency's goals and objectives. This document is also intended to provide general direction to administrative staff and field personnel regarding the management of open space under COSCA's jurisdiction.

I. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

COSCA'S primary responsibility is to manage open space so as to preserve its natural characteristics while providing opportunities for passive recreational enjoyment of the diverse vegetation, wildlife and cultural resources it contains. Equally important is policy to administer these lands in a cooperative manner in order to augment the conservation efforts of adjoining City, County, State and Federal jurisdictions. This includes, but is not solely limited to, actions in support of preservation and protection of the following resources or uses:

- Existing or proposed parklands, recreation areas and other designated open space lands.
- Scenic highway corridors and greenbelt systems, flanking the Conejo Valley or COSCA open space.
- Regional trail systems or easements that provide public access to adjacent open space or parklands.
- Scenic protection zones containing natural watershed and vegetation components (Lake Sherwood and Hidden Valley Area).
- Plant and animal communities, habitats or species which are considered to be either unique, rare, endangered or threatened in any manner.
- Historic structures, places, archaeological sites or native American cultural activities.

II. CONSERVATION POLICIES

Natural open space areas shall be managed by COSCA so as to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of human modifications or presence substantially unnoticeable in order to preserve and protect any ecologic, geologic, scenic, historic, cultural, scientific or educational values which the area may contain. These actions shall include but not be solely limited to the following:

- Fostering a natural distribution of native plant and animal species throughout the open space system by ensuring that suitable habitat conditions are maintained and that existing ecological processes continue to function naturally.
- Taking appropriate action necessary to minimize adverse impacts associated with human disturbance or the introduction of exotic non-native plants and animals in order to prevent the displacement, loss or extinction of naturally occurring species.
- Allowing fire, insect activity, non-pathogenic disease and decay to play a natural role in the open space ecosystem. Exceptions to this specific policy include conditions which pose a threat to human life, private property or natural resources of high value or limited distribution, or where the resultant change would create an undesirable or adverse long-term effect on adjacent non-open space lands.
- Preserving watershed vegetation, soils and drainage courses in as natural condition as possible in order to maintain water quality and allow associated hydrologic processes previously altered by human influences to become re-established wherever they do not pose a significant hazard or nuisance to the public or downstream property.
- Linking isolated open space parcels and acquiring natural undeveloped lands containing significant topographic, plant and animal resources. Where feasible, purchase programs and cooperative land use agreement strategies shall be implemented in order to complete the "ring" concept of open space surrounding the Conejo Valley as envisioned by the Thousand Oaks General Plan.

III. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

In order to successfully implement these policies and guidelines, COSCA recognizes the need to develop a broad base of community support that extends to adjacent City and County, State and Federal levels as well. To this end, the Board of Directors shall endeavor to:

- Encourage both public and private sector participation in the open space planning, management and decision-making process.
- Promote the understanding of open space problems and solutions through educational and interpretive programs.
- Obtain legislative and public support to fund necessary open space acquisition programs and initiate cooperative land use agreements.
- Manage open space lands in a manner that maintains a high quality visitor experience in keeping with preservation of the natural character and openness of the Valley and surrounding Santa Monica Mountains.
- Enforce open space rules and regulations as well as other municipal codes and ordinances, state and federal laws and statutes pertaining to the conservation and protection of natural resources.

IV. OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Where deemed appropriate, a management plan shall be prepared for each open space area administered by COSCA. The plan should be tailored to local conditions including the environmental setting, established patterns of use, and resource sensitivity. The plan should also describe the means by which COSCA open space policies are to be implemented as well as the specific activity objectives prescribed for the area. These plans should also be updated periodically to reflect changes in conditions and use.

The concept of stratification or "zoning" between, or within, individual open space areas should also be considered as a means of achieving management objectives or providing different experiences and opportunities. For example, it may be desirable to manage a portion of a very large area for protection of plant and animal species. In other more sensitive locations, managers may want to designate different zones of open space experience, ranging from high concentrations of use to more natural, pristine areas, which contain no trails or improvements at all. Acceptable to accomplish these goals include, but are not solely limited to:

- Sensitive design and placement of trail-heads, access roads and parking areas in order to prevent congestion and resource degradation.
- Identification of needed or desirable public access improvements to lightly utilized or tributary open space areas.
- Providing guided field trips in open space areas containing rare endangered species or habitats.
- Requiring permits, registration, or prearranged permission to use open space areas containing sensitive resources.
- Total or partial closure of degraded wildlife and plant habitats including the removal of existing access roads or trails.
- Limiting the number of visitors and periods of access.

Conservation of Natural Resources

Conservation of natural resources shall be the dominant theme in all management decisions where a choice must be made between preservation of the natural environment and visitor use. The highest priority among various kinds of use will be accorded activities which are most dependent upon maintaining a natural open space experience and cannot be reasonably accommodated outside of that environment, and (2) have the least adverse effect upon the viability of existing biological and cultural resources. Consideration shall also be given to the ability of natural ecosystems to sustain visitor use, since carrying capacity or sensitivity to disturbance may vary widely

between geographic areas. The Open Space Management Plan shall in turn describe the level of use and measures needed to protect these intrinsic values.

Public Participation

Public involvement is desirable and should be encouraged in the preparation of each Open Space Management Plan. Several public meetings or workshops open to the general public should be held. Issues, questions and concerns raised by the public should in turn be addressed in the development of the Open Space Management Plan. Upon completion of a draft report, these management proposals and recommendations shall receive final approval of the Board of Directors. Depending on the scope of the project, additional review under the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) may also be required.

Visitor Facilities

Visitor facilities and improvements such as signs, trails, bridges, and campsites should be provided for the protection of natural resources as well as to ensure the health and safety of the public. All such improvements should be confined to specific activity areas which are intended to support visitor use and constructed in a manner that minimizes any physical impact to adjacent open space resources. The need for such facilities shall be identified in the Open Space Management Plan. Permanent structures shall also be designed to harmonize and blend with the natural environment.

Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Programs

Conservation related activities involving the selective restoration and enhancement of plant and animal habitats should be pursued in an effort to restore damaged or impacted open space resources where determined to be beneficial. Specific actions that may be identified by the Open Space Management Plan should include, but not be solely limited to:

Acquisition of land containing sensitive, unique, rare or endangered plant and animal habitats in order to augment the diversity of existing open space resources.

Biological surveys of newly acquired or existing open space in order to prepare species lists of plant and animal communities as well as evaluate general habitat conditions.

Identification of surface water sources, nesting and breeding site locations, wildlife movement corridors and foraging areas in order to develop planning and resource management strategies.

Installation of drinking stations or construction of permanent impoundments for wildlife in open space areas where lack of water is determined to be a limiting factor in species diversity or population size.

Control of off-road vehicle activities, illegal hunting or dumping of trash, in order to avoid or minimize adverse impacts to plant and animal resources.

Recontouring and revegetating highly disturbed landform features with native groundcovers, shrubs and trees in order to stabilize and restore abandoned access roads and trails, grading scars, geologic trenches, eroded soils, etc.

Trail Improvements

Wherever feasible, trails should be constructed in a manner that can accommodate hikers, joggers, equestrians, bicyclists as well as handicapped persons, but still preserve open space values and natural resources. In order to minimize vegetation removal and topographic impacts, trail alignments should follow existing paths and natural landform contours as much as possible. Trailheads should also be selected to provide varied scenic experiences and degrees of difficulty. In order to meet these objectives, existing trails may have to be expanded, relocated, restored or closed to certain types of uses.

Fencing and barrier materials should also be designed to harmonize with natural landscape features and utilized to direct entry into open space at specific entry points, control off-road vehicle access, and provide safe separation of visitors and horses from hazards.

Bridges should be designed and constructed to harmonize with the environment and be the minimum size and structural integrity in order to allow unrestricted public use. Bridges shall only be provided when no alternate route is available and the trail crossing cannot be negotiated safely, or where less formal crossing devices tend to be damaged or washed out during periods of high runoff.

Hitchracks or other improvements to facilitate equestrian use shall be utilized to prevent resource damage. These structures shall be located away from camping areas and focal points of interest so as not to obstruct access or cause a nuisance or hazard when in use.

Signs

A minimum of signs shall be installed in order to control and direct visitor uses along with trail maps, route descriptions, brochures, etc. Signs should only be provided for visitor information, safety and resource protection. They should range in size and complexity from small, simple arrow directional posts at trail junctions, to regulatory signs posting open space rules as well as signs denoting resource features and points of interest. To protect the natural scenic quality of natural open space areas, visitor information kiosks and signs should utilize natural, earthtone colors and building

materials. The preferred location of such facilities should be at trailheads or the main entrance to open space.

Campsites

Overnight camping and fires are allowed only in designated areas and shall be utilized by permit only.

Campsites or camping areas should be located sufficiently distant from surface water resources and other natural scenic features to allow appropriate use without degradation of water quality or focal point of interest.

Trash collection facilities shall not be provided in interior open space areas in order to encourage a "pack-it-in, pack-it-out" practice by visitors.

Temporary Structures

Temporary structures which are intended to serve the community at large, or are necessary for special events or activities may be constructed within open space areas providing the proposed design, location and use is compatible with COSCA policies and guidelines and receives approval by the Board of Directors and other agencies having permit authority over such projects. Structures which are not considered necessary for either management or maintenance purposes and have no historic value should be removed.

Emergency Facilities

The following emergency facilities shall be conditionally allowed and managed within open space areas under COSCA's jurisdiction: emergency access roads, fire breaks, fuel modification zones and helipads. Maintenance of these facilities should in turn be coordinated on a regular basis with the Fire Protection District and management personnel in order to minimize potential impacts to natural landscape features, as well as sensitive biological and cultural resources.

Historic Landmarks and Features

A survey of all historic landmarks shall be undertaken in order to determine the location and significance of these features. Where appropriate, markers, plaques or other identification should be installed as a means of informing the public of their place in history or cultural importance. Features which have not been formally nominated as "County Landmarks", but deserve such recognition, should be properly documented and submitted for review and approval first by the COSCA Board of Directors, then the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board.

Buffer Zones

Wherever possible, buffer zones of varying size should be established in order to create a transition between natural open space areas and afford protection from incompatible uses that may exist or be proposed on adjacent property. Wherever such activities impact sensitive resources or the use of public open space, these issues should be thoroughly addressed in the Open Space Management Plan with recommendations to eliminate or significantly reduce any potentially adverse or undesirable effects.

Access Easements

Access across COSCA open space shall be allowed only in compliance with a recorded easement. In the event an existing access route is determined to be impractical or unreasonable, an alternative easement may be granted by COSCA which results in the least physical impact to natural resources while still serving the original purpose for which the land under private ownership is used.

Brush Clearance/Fuel Modification Zones

Unless previously permitted or approved by the Board of Directors, annual brush clearance required for fire control purposes shall be restricted to non-open space areas under private ownership. Correspondingly, new developments adjoining existing permanent open space or proposing such public land dedications, shall incorporate adequate fuel modification zones within the project boundaries so as not to encumber COSCA in any way with annual maintenance operations or responsibilities.

Mineral Management

All existing mineral rights on COSCA lands shall be honored according to Federal and State Laws and regulations. However, new mining claims or leases filed for the purpose of mineral extraction shall be subject to review and approval by the Board of Directors and the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

V. VISITOR USES AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Visitor uses should be accommodated by limited facilities which are intended to protect the public's health and safety as well as provide other necessary conveniences where deemed appropriate. In order to avoid the degradation of sensitive or unique resources and as a means to implement effective management strategies to offset or minimize, other potentially adverse impacts, the carrying capacity of open space areas to be developed for visitor facilities, shall be depending upon the anticipated type and intensity of use.

If visitor use threatens to adversely impact an area's natural characteristics, appropriate actions shall be taken to prevent any further decline and allow natural regeneration processes to occur. In most cases, indirect methods of reducing impacts such as limiting parking capacity, access points, trail design and public education efforts shall be referred over initiating direct regulatory procedures. However, where these methods prove to be unsuccessful or are considered inadequate, further restrictions may be necessary. Depending on the situation, these may include either partial or complete closure, restricting periods of use and the number of visitors permitted access.

It must also be recognized that visitor use of open space involves certain risks as a consequence of isolation from urban services and the unpredictability of the natural environment. Although the visitor must accept these risks, in response to a need for assistance, COSCA personnel shall take appropriate and timely action to coordinate necessary law enforcement and medical emergency services.

Permitted Uses

COSCA open space shall be managed to provide for passive recreational use and enjoyment by the public in ways that are consistent with the preservation of its natural characteristics. The following public uses are permitted:

- Passive recreational activities such as hiking, jogging, bicycling, horseback riding, photography and picnicking, etc.
- Conservation projects, student research or other educational programs involving the study of nature, ecology, earth sciences, etc.
- Outdoor programs, lectures, musical events and organized community activities.

Prohibited Uses

Except where subject to existing private rights, or where necessary for the management of open space resources, or as specifically provided for elsewhere in COSCA policies, the following uses shall be strictly prohibited:

- Any action on the behalf of a person or persons that creates a nuisance, poses a real or immediate threat, results in damage to, or destruction of open space resources or public property.
- All forms of hunting, trapping or use of poisonous baits within any open space area.
- Removal or the intentional destruction of existing vegetation for any reason including arson or the illegal harvesting or collection of native plant materials for personal use or sale.
- Off-road motor vehicle use beyond the limits of established public access roads and designated parking areas.
- Littering or dumping of trash and debris or disposal of hazardous waste materials within open space.
- The unrestricted activities of pets such as dogs or cats and/or exotic animals.
- Grazing of livestock including utilization of natural forage for commercial purposes shall be prohibited in open space areas unless specifically authorized by the Board of Directors.

Non-conforming Uses

As deemed appropriate by the Board of Directors, certain rights or uses may be retained by a property owner under the terms of either a cooperative land use agreement or title transfer. Subsequent Open Space Management Plans pertaining to all, or any part of said property, shall in turn seek to minimize potential conflicts with any vested rights or uses that may be retained.

Dogs and other pets

Upon entering any open space area, dogs and other pets shall be kept on leashes at all times in order to minimize conflicts with other visitors and prevent disturbances to wildlife and plant resources.

Visitor Information and Education

Visitor education should be utilized whenever feasible to achieve management objectives. Only the minimum amount of regulation necessary to achieve desired objectives should be used. In some cases informational materials or regulatory signs may be placed as a management tool to correct specific problems, protect the natural resource, or inform the public of health and safety risks.

Informational and educational materials pertaining to open space resources, trails, special programs and conservation activities should be made available to the public by ranger personnel in the field and at the offices of the City of Thousand Oaks and the Recreation and Park District. Such materials should also inform visitors of the responsibilities and risks involved in visiting and using open space areas.

Use of Motorized Equipment

Travel within COSCA open space will be by non-motorized means consistent with the control of noise and preservation of natural open space characteristics. The Open Space Management Plan shall specify the times and places in which the use of vehicular transport is appropriate for resource protection and emergency access. Vehicle use may also be allowed for:

- Ranger patrol, emergency fire access, rescue or law enforcement purposes.
- Pre-arranged group activities or conservation projects.
- Monitoring or scientific research by private individuals, educational institutions or public utilities as necessary.
- Control of insects, disease or pathogens that may adversely affect natural resources when in compliance with the Open Space Management Plan.

Field Projects/Research Projects

Any activity, for the purpose of gathering information about natural resources may be permitted by COSCA provided it is carried out in a prescribed manner compatible with conservation policies established by COSCA. Vehicular access in connection with this research must, however, be approved by COSCA in advance of any such research activities. In no case shall degradation of natural resources or values be allowed.

Commercial Services

Commercial services such as those provided by concessionaires during special events or equestrian outfitters and guides, etc., may be provided in open space areas to the extent necessary and proper for utilization of the recreational resource, subject to the terms of any agreements, licenses or permits approved by the Board of Directors.

Fees

As deemed to be appropriate, the Board of Directors shall be empowered to charge, collect and/or waive user fees in order to reimburse the Agency for costs associated with supervision of special events including the restoration and maintenance of Open Space prior to, or following, such activities. Such activities shall include, but not be solely limited to: filming or movie production, the operations of licensed concessionaires, overnight group camping and trail use, etc.

VI. CULTURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION

Management of cultural resources such as archaeological sites, historic structures or places shall emphasize resource protection and preservation. Open Space Management Plans shall in turn consider appropriate means to maintain historic, interpretive, ceremonial, or religious values. Decisions pertaining to the disposition of such resources shall be made in concert with input from recognized public agencies, groups or individuals having jurisdiction, expertise or interests in these matters, including but not solely limited to the State Office of Historic Preservation, Thousand Oaks Cultural Heritage Board and Local Native American Indian Councils or representatives. Specific resource conservation and management actions are recommended as follows:

Planning and Management Procedures

All trails, user facilities, access roads, firebreaks, fuel modification zones and helipads shall be designed to avoid any direct physical impact to known historic or archaeological resources.

All historic structures, features and places located within COSCA lands shall be registered with the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board in order to qualify for "Landmark" status and obtain the legislative protection and public recognition this designation affords.

COSCA shall undertake cooperative planning and resource management efforts with the local Cultural Heritage Board in order to denote the significance of historic landmark structures, features or places through the design and placement of appropriate markers, signs or other interpretive improvements.

Scientific Research, Testing and Salvage Activities

Any proposed scientific research, testing or salvage proposal involving historic or archaeological resources shall be conducted under the strict provisions of a research design submitted to, and approved by the Board of Directors.

The services of an approved Native American Indian Monitor shall be retained by a COSCA authorized representative (principal investigator) prior to conducting any field work involving archaeological resources.

Systematic, historic and archaeological field surveys and record searches shall be undertaken and completed for each open space area in order to determine the exact location and nature of all existing cultural resources for planning and management purposes.

In order to preserve internal site integrity, archaeological research involving sub-surface testing shall undertake only the minimal sampling techniques and procedures necessary to accurately determine its boundaries, period of occupation, type of use, relationship to local resources settlement patterns, regional significance, or other previously identified research objectives.

Salvage excavation should only be undertaken in areas where no project alternative is considered to be feasible or where impacts associated with existing uses, vandalism or natural forces such as erosion cannot be reasonably controlled and threaten destruction of the resource.

Following field collection and laboratory analysis, all historic and artifactual materials recovered from COSCA open space shall be returned for appropriate storage and preservation locally within the Conejo Valley.

Resource Stabilization and Protection

The preferred method of stabilization and protection of sensitive open-air archaeological resources which are exposed to potential degradation by visitor use or vandalism is total surface collection and capping with a contrasting soil mantle. In addition, no load bearing fills or permanent irrigation systems should be allowed within established site boundaries.

Where normal resource management procedures prove to be of limited value in controlling impacts to native American cemeteries, rock shelters or other fragile features deemed to be of religious or ceremonial significance, area closure and strict enforcement action may be required.

Discovery of Human Remains

In the event of the discovery of any human remains in any open space, there shall be no further disturbance of the immediate site or any nearby area reasonably suspected to contain human remains in compliance with Section 7050.5 of the State Health and Safety Code until the following conditions have been satisfied:

- The county coroner has been contacted regarding the discovery of the remains and it has been determined that no investigation of the cause of death is required; and
- Where they are determined to be of native American origin, that representatives of local tribal council(s) have been contacted in order to recommend a preferred means of treating or disposing with appropriate dignity, the human remains and any associated grave goods as provided under Public Resource Code Section 5097.98.

- In the event the local Native American Indian Council fails to make a recommendation or if COSCA or its authorized representative rejects the recommendation for any reason, and if requested mediation by the Native American Heritage Commission fails to provide an acceptable alternative, COSCA or its authorized representative shall rebury the remains and associated grave goods with appropriate dignity at a suitable nearby location not subject to further disturbance.

COSCA/GS:mh

7.5

CONEJO OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION AGENCY MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Amendment Number 1

Adopted by the COSCA Board of Directors on July 12, 2000

Wireless Communications Facilities

Wireless communications facilities may be permitted by the Board in open space areas owned by COSCA if it is necessary to locate such facilities there for technical reasons, and if the facility is attached to an existing structure and does not materially diminish the open space character or attractiveness of the site. Where permitted on open space land, all wireless communications facilities shall closely adhere to the City of Thousand Oaks' policy regarding such facilities in open space zones due to the sensitive scenic and recreational value of the natural open space system. Appurtenant structures such as equipment housing and power supplies shall be located underground, unless, due to extenuating circumstances such as geological conditions, the location of such facilities in an underground vault is not technically feasible.

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