

DRAFT Measure Q Vision Plan

Appendices



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
MEASURE Q

Santa Cruz County

PlaceWorks

Matt Freeman Consulting

DRAFT Measure Q Vision Plan

Appendix A: Community Engagement Summary and Synthesis



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
MEASURE Q



Santa Cruz County Measure Q Citizens Oversight Advisory Board

Item 8



701 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
MeasureQ@santacruzcountyca.gov
www.santacruzcountyca.gov/MeasureQ

MEASURE Q COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SYNTHESIS SUMMARY

Recommended Action

1. Receive and file the Community Engagement Synthesis for the Measure Q Vision Plan.

Executive Summary

From May through July 2025, Santa Cruz County Parks and the Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience conducted community engagement to inform the Measure Q Vision Plan. Engagement included four in-person meetings, one virtual meeting, and an online survey that collected 944 responses. Participants prioritized Water Resource Management and Wildfire Risk Reduction as top themes. The analysis revealed regional variations in priority themes and emphasized the need for multi-benefit projects. While participation was broad, lower-income, Latino, and South County communities were underrepresented. Findings highlight opportunities to strengthen equity-centered engagement and inform future funding strategies.

Discussion

The community engagement strategy included: four in-person open house meetings, one virtual meeting, and an online survey available in English and Spanish. Meetings were hosted in Watsonville, Ben Lomond, Bonny Doon, and Live Oak. Despite significant efforts, participation skewed toward English-speaking, higher-income, and North and Mid-County residents. Participation in the in-person and virtual meetings never exceeded 12 residents in attendance and ranged from 3-12 with the virtual meeting having the lowest attendance.

Participants ranked the Measure Q's six theme areas from most important (1) to lowest importance (6) in order of priority:

1. Water Resource Management
2. Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health
3. Wildlife and Habitat Protection
4. Parks, Recreation, and Equitable Access
5. Agriculture and Working Lands Protection
6. Coastal Protection and Adaptation

Regional variations in priorities emerged:

- Santa Cruz Mountains prioritized Wildfire, Habitat, and Water.
- Mid-County prioritized Coastal Protection and Parks.
- South County prioritized Agriculture, Water, and Parks.

This regional theme variation demonstrates how unique the needs and desires are for Measure Q funding priorities based on your relative geographic residential environment. It may also correlate to risk/hazard vulnerabilities.

When asked in the survey and in person meetings about long-term Measure Q investment goals, respondents ranked the following from most important (1) to lowest importance (6):

1. Public health and safety
2. Habitat and wildlife protection
3. Long-term climate resilience
4. Support for disaster-impacted communities
5. Local agriculture protection
6. Equity in park access

Geographic preferences of project theme areas generally aligned with where people live, suggesting the importance of local context in shaping funding priorities. This also highlights the need to ensure geographic distribution of grant funds outside of the designated Cities, and geographic carve out areas of the San Vicente Redwoods and Pajaro Valley.

In the open-ended questions, wildfire, water, environmental protection, and park access were the most common themes expressed for prioritization.

A demographic analysis of the survey results revealed some important themes around the data collected and the context it should be reviewed in.

- While over 900 responses is good engagement by most outreach standards for the County, it represents less than 1% of the total population of the County.
- Only 9% of responses came from households earning under \$50,000.
- Only 5 responses were submitted in Spanish.
- South County, particularly Watsonville, was underrepresented by 12.5% relative to its population share.

Implications for Measure Q implementation include the need for stronger partnerships with trusted South County messengers and culturally relevant engagement methods. The analysis recommends prioritizing inclusive outreach and representation in future grantmaking, especially during project proposal phases. This will be particularly important when it comes time to solicit grant applications for the South County carve out funds as well as the larger grant program funds.

Next Steps

Parks, OR3 and the consultant team will be working on integrating the stakeholder and community engagement efforts into the DRAFT of the Vision Plan. We expect to be providing a preliminary draft for COAB review at the September 3 meeting.

Submitted By:

David Reid, Director, Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience
Jeff Gaffney, Director, Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services

Attachments

- a. Measure Q Community Engagement Synthesis – July 2025

Measure Q - Community Engagement Synthesis

1. Executive Summary & Synthesis

Santa Cruz County Parks and the Office of Response, Resiliency, and Recovery conducted the community engagement portion of the Measure Q Vision Plan development from May to July 2025. The engagement took the form of four in-person community meetings, and one virtual meeting, as well as an online survey, which was open to all residents of Santa Cruz County for over a month. A total of 944 unique responses were gathered through the various engagement formats. This represents less than 1% of the County's total population. As such, the results should be interpreted with that level of representation in mind. The first part of the survey asked several questions to help identify the community's priority geographies and thematic areas for investment of Measure Q. Residents ranked the six thematic areas associated with Measure Q in the following order:

1. Water Resource Management
2. Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health
3. Wildlife and Habitat Protection
4. Parks, Recreation, and Equitable Public Access
5. Agriculture and Working Lands Protection
6. Coastal Protection and Adaptation

This ranking of Measure Q thematic areas was relatively consistent across most categories analyzed, including low-income respondents (annual incomes less than \$50,000), non-white respondents, and across geographic areas.

Respondents ranked the long-term funding priorities of Measure Q in the following order:

1. Public health and safety including wildfire risk reduction and flood risk reduction
2. Habitat and wildlife protection
3. Long-term climate resilience
4. Supporting areas most impacted by disasters
5. Protection of local agriculture and working lands
6. Equity and park access for all communities

The third question in the survey asked respondents to identify up to three priority locations for implementing Measure Q funded projects in each of the six thematic areas.

In the Santa Cruz Mountains communities, Wildfire and Forest Health consistently ranked as the highest priority, with Wildlife and Habitat second, and Water Resources third.

In the urban areas of mid-county, Coastal Protection ranked first, Parks and Access second, and Water Resources third.

In South County, Agriculture and Working Lands ranked first, Water Resources second, and Parks and Access third.

The final question was open-ended and asked respondents to identify threats and challenges that they hoped Measure Q could address. Responses to this question were widely varied, but most responses focused on wildfire and emergency preparedness, water quality and supply, environmental protection, and parks and open space.

An analysis of responses showed that residents consistently voted to prioritize locations near to where they live, for example, residents in the Santa Cruz Mountains identified locations in the Santa Cruz Mountains as high priority for wildfire and forest health and habitat and wildlife, and residents in the Pajaro Valley or South County identified locations around Watsonville as priorities for all themes.

Similarly, identification of geographic priorities for each of the six Measure Q areas tended to align with basic land cover and geographic characteristics of each community. For example, coastal protection and adaptation was prioritized in coastal communities, whereas wildfire and forest health was prioritized for forested areas in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Urban areas were prioritized for parks and public access, and South County was prioritized for agriculture and working lands protection.

These results show that there is a consistent desire across the community for early investment in projects that prioritize water resource management and wildfire risk reduction and forest health.

However, the breadth of responses provided in the threats and challenges section, and the number of locations identified as priority for all Measure Q themes indicate that there is a wide variety of needs to be addressed with Measure Q, and suggests that projects that address multiple benefits and can address multiple thematic areas should be prioritized for early investment.

2. Methodology

Community engagement was conducted via three methods: in-person community meetings, a virtual community meeting, and an online survey. The In-person community meetings were held for 90 minutes in the evenings at four locations spread across the county to ensure equitable geographic access (South County, Mid-County, San Lorenzo Valley, and North County). The meetings were open-house format, so that people could

drop in at any point during the meeting duration. The date, location, and number of attendees of the in-person meetings are noted below:

- June 9th, Watsonville, Civic Plaza Community Room. 12 attendees
- June 10th, Ben Lomond, Highlands County Park. 10 attendees.
- June 16th, Bonny Doon, Bonny Doon Elementary. 9 attendees
- June 17th, Live Oak, Live Oak Community Center. 8 attendees

The virtual meeting was held on the evening of June 26th via Zoom with six people in attendance.

An online survey was also created to mirror the content and feedback opportunities provided via the in-person and virtual community meetings and aligned with similar stakeholder feedback survey content. The virtual survey was open from May 30 to July 3. The survey was available in both English and Spanish. 903 people took the survey in English. 5 people took the survey in Spanish. Approximately 96% of responses came from the online survey. Of the online survey responses, 99% were in English.

Community engagement opportunities including the survey, virtual, and in-person community meetings were advertised widely via social media, press releases, notifications to local news publications, and via the Measure Q website. In addition, notifications were sent to all Measure Q stakeholders to help advertise the events through their communication channels. This included non-profits, the four incorporated cities, community-based organizations, and other land-managing agencies.

To promote equitable participation in Measure Q planning, the County conducted targeted outreach to South County communities, particularly Watsonville, where climate change vulnerability is high but past investments and engagement opportunities have been limited. This effort aligns with County goals for inclusive governance and climate justice. Outreach was conducted through the County's Climate Resilience Contact List, South County-focused networks like the South County Triage Group and the Monterey Bay Area Climate Justice Collaborative, and local media including *The Pajaronian*. These channels were chosen to engage trusted messengers and multilingual, community-rooted organizations. Because of the Measure Q geographic south county regional focus ensuring Watsonville and south county unincorporated communities, with many Spanish-speaking and middle-class families, were included is vital to achieving Measure Q's equity and climate resilience objectives.

3. Results – Measure Q Priorities

Participants in the engagement efforts were asked four questions related to Measure Q priorities. In the first question, participants were asked to rank the six thematic areas of Measure Q (water, wildfire, wildlife, parks, farms, coastal) in order of importance. The second question asked participants to rank six potential long-term priorities for Measure Q investment based on their importance. In the third question, participants were asked to identify up to three communities that should be a priority for investment for each Measure Q theme (water, wildfire, wildlife, parks, farms, coastal). The fourth question asked participants to write in specific threats or challenges in Santa Cruz County that they hope Measure Q can address.

944 people provided feedback via the different engagement methods. While this is a good turnout for any kind of project-related engagement, respondents represent less than 1% of the County’s population (262,000), so these results must be understood in that context.

Who Took the Survey: Demographic and Equity Analysis

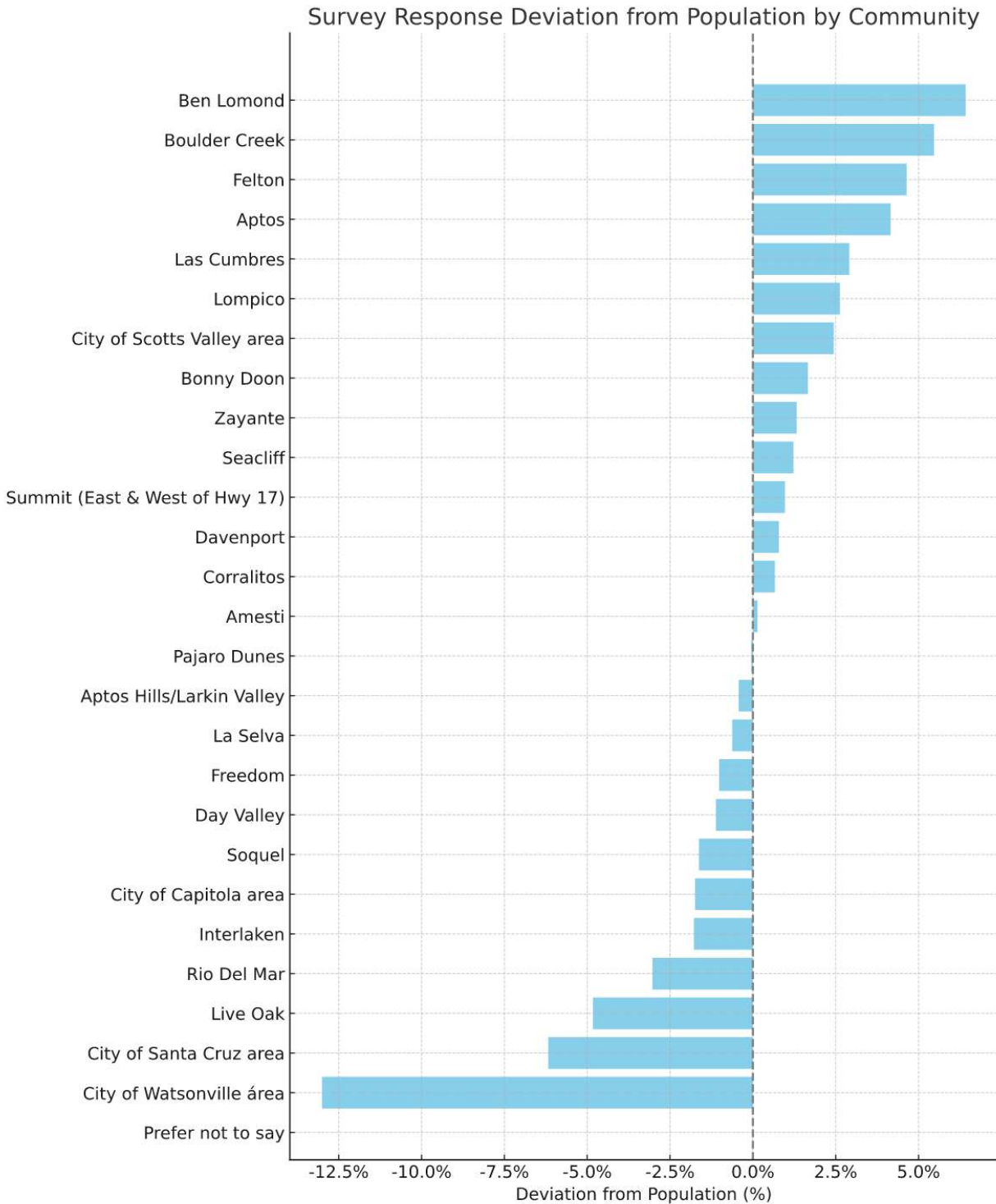
To evaluate the equity and representativeness of the Measure Q community engagement process, participants were invited to voluntarily share demographic information through the online survey. This included community of residence and ZIP code, race/ethnicity, income level, age, and primary language spoken at home. An additional Spanish-language version of the survey was provided and collected five total responses. The following analysis provides a summary of who participated and identifies key gaps to inform future outreach and funding decisions.

Geographic Representation

Survey responses came from a wide range of ZIP codes across Santa Cruz County, with particularly high relative participation from Santa Cruz mountain communities. The ZIP codes with the highest number of absolute responses were:

- 95060 & 95062 (Santa Cruz & Live Oak) 123 & 86 responses
- 95076 (Watsonville and surrounding South County) – 96 responses
- 95003 (Aptos) – 80 responses
- 95018 (Felton) – 80 responses
- 95005 (Ben Lomond) – 74 responses
- 95006 (Boulder Creek) – 52 responses
- 95066 (Scotts Valley) 49 responses

When adjusted for population size, the geographic distribution of responses does not reflect actual population distribution across the county. The graph below shows the survey results deviation from population numbers for respondents who identified the community in which they lived. Areas to the left of the center line are underrepresented in the survey data, whereas areas to the right of the center line are overrepresented.



In general, communities in the Santa Cruz Mountains were overrepresented in the survey, whereas communities in South County and the urban areas of mid-county were underrepresented. Notably, the City of Watsonville was the most underrepresented at -12.5%, the City of Santa Cruz was next at -6%, followed by Live Oak at -4.8%.

Because residents were asked to prioritize project types and geographic investment areas, the uneven geographic distribution of responses likely influenced the outcomes.

Communities with higher response rates—particularly in the Santa Cruz Mountains—are more heavily reflected in the priority rankings. Conversely, communities with fewer responses, particularly in South County and urban areas of mid-county, may be underrepresented in the aggregate results. These patterns should be considered when interpreting community-identified investment priorities and developing implementation strategies.

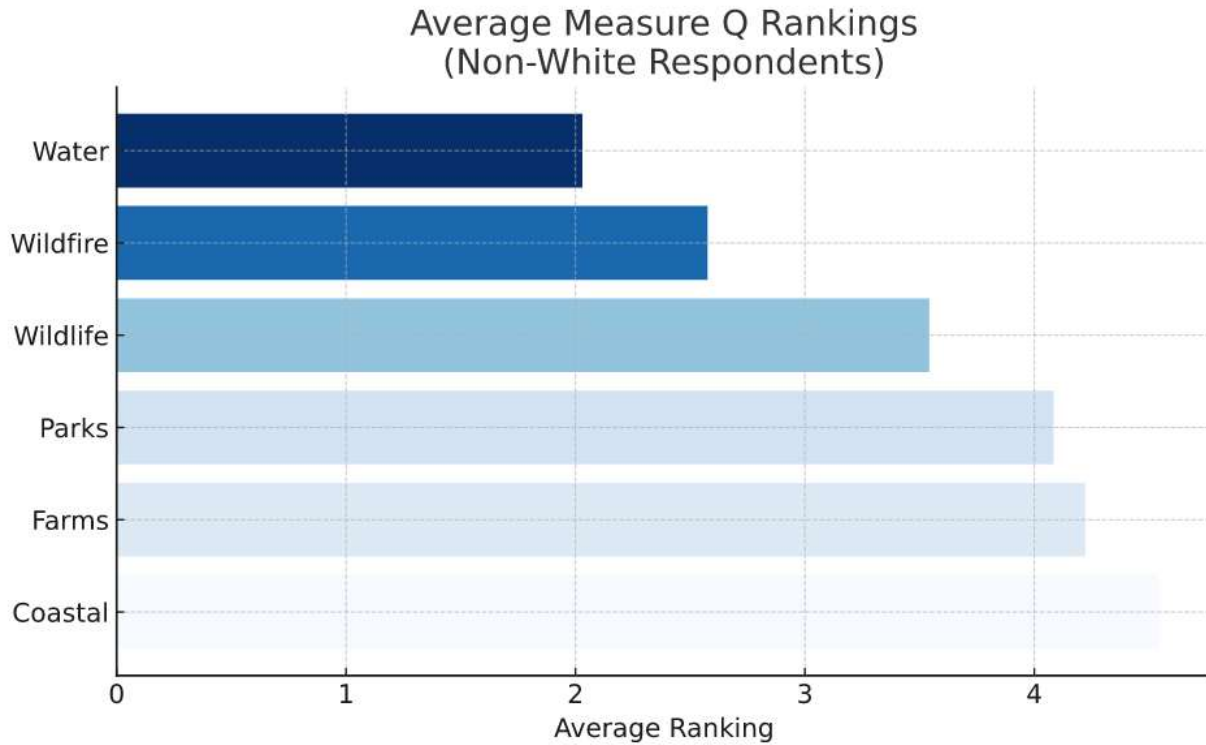
Language and Race

Only **five respondents completed the Spanish-language survey**, despite Measure Q's strong relevance to Spanish-speaking communities, particularly in South County. Of those five:

- Three respondents identified as **Latino/a/x**.
- Three indicated **Spanish** as their primary home language.
- All respondents from the Spanish-language survey expressed interest in improved **park access, beach transportation, and safety for South County residents**, including one respondent who named inequitable beach access as a form of environmental racism.

Among respondents to the English survey, self-identified racial and ethnic identities skewed heavily white. While detailed data on racial breakdowns is limited, the absence of high participation from communities of color—especially in South County ZIPs—suggests a need for deeper investment in culturally grounded engagement strategies moving forward.

An analysis of respondents who identified as non-white showed similar ranking of the six Measure Q thematic areas compared to the population as a whole.



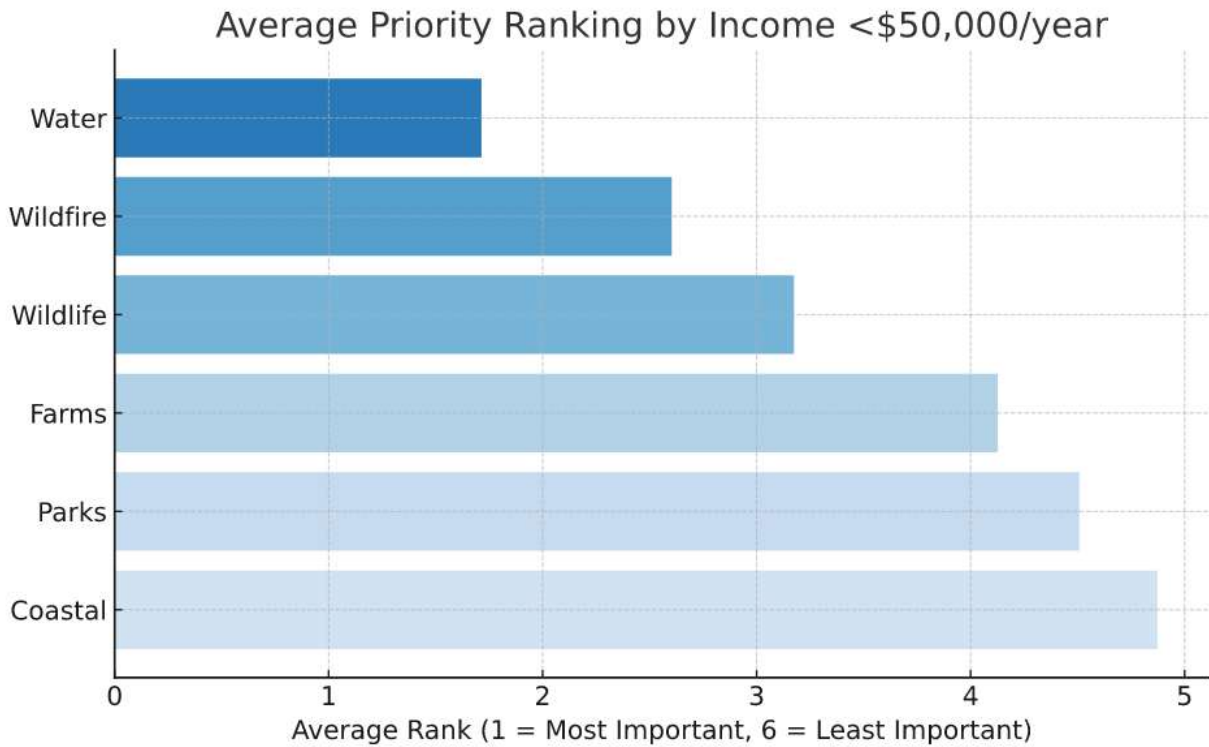
Income

Income data from survey respondents shows a pronounced skew toward middle- and upper-income households:

- 65% of respondents reported **household incomes above \$100,000**.
- Only 9% reported incomes **below \$50,000**, despite over a third of County households falling into this income bracket.

Low-income households were underrepresented in the survey data, especially when compared to the County's income distribution and Measure Q's stated intent to prioritize disadvantaged communities.

An analysis of respondents with incomes under \$50,000 showed similar ranking of the six Measure Q thematic areas compared with the population as whole.



Implications for Measure Q Grant Program Planning

While participation in the Measure Q survey and meetings was relatively strong as compared to other outreach efforts, the demographic data reveals important limitations in representativeness. In particular:

- **Lower-income, Latino, and Spanish-speaking communities in South County were significantly underrepresented.**
- **Survey participation skewed toward higher-income, white residents in mountain and mid-county areas.**
- **Despite translation, Spanish-language engagement yielded only five responses, pointing to a gap in trust, access, or culturally appropriate outreach.**

For Measure Q Grant Program implementation these findings suggest the following:

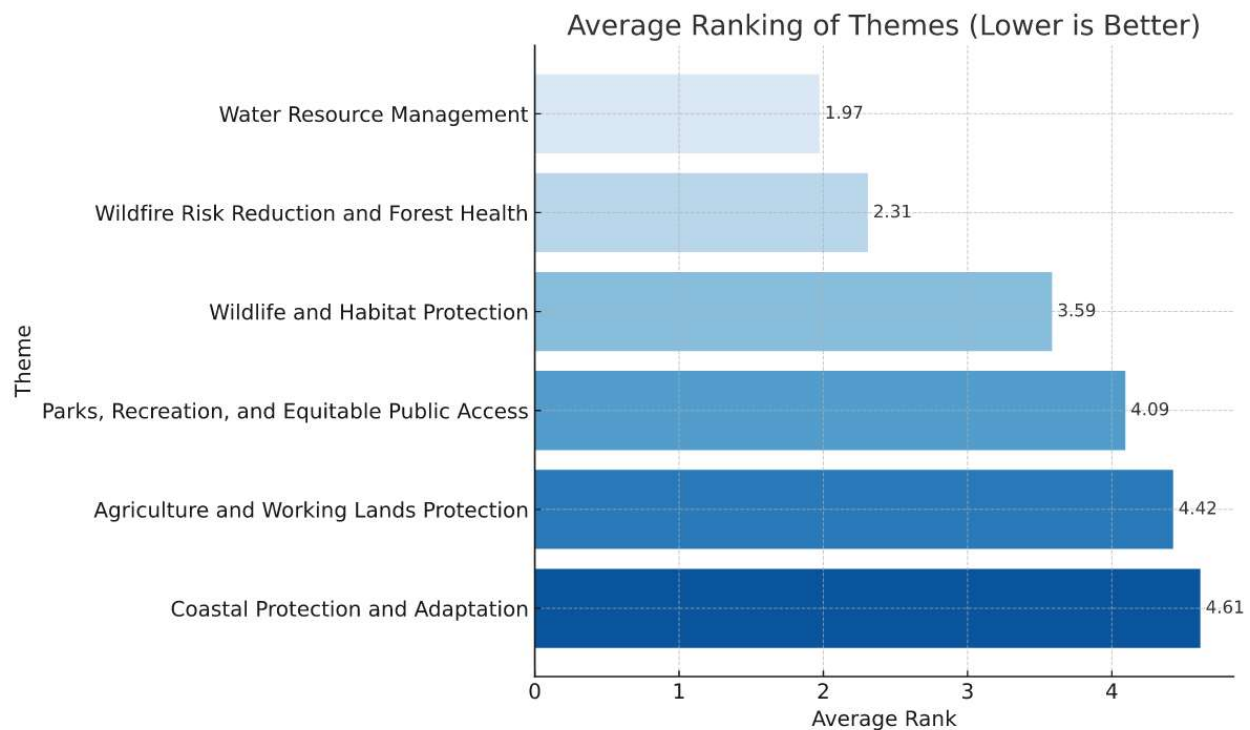
- **For the South County funding allocation project selection should account for the disproportionate lack of representation from South County communities, particularly Watsonville, Freedom, and Interlaken.**

- **Future outreach should build stronger, sustained relationships with trusted South County leaders and organizations**, including those with cultural and linguistic competency **such as youth ambassadors, or promotoras to ensure inclusive participation**, especially during project proposal phases.

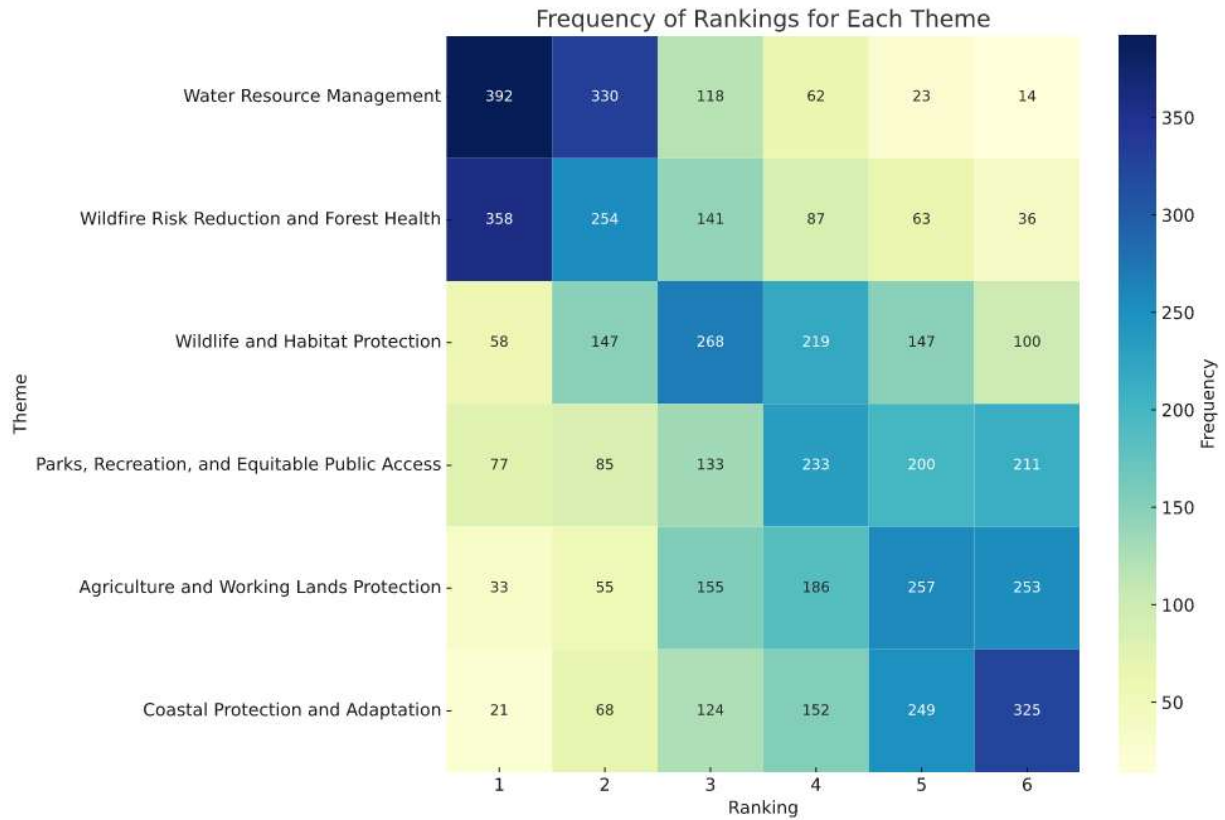
This analysis reinforces the need for **ongoing equity-centered engagement** throughout Measure Q's lifecycle, ensuring that the targeted South County funding allocation responds to the needs of those historically excluded from environmental planning processes.

Question 1 Results: Respondents ranked the Measure Q thematic areas as follows:

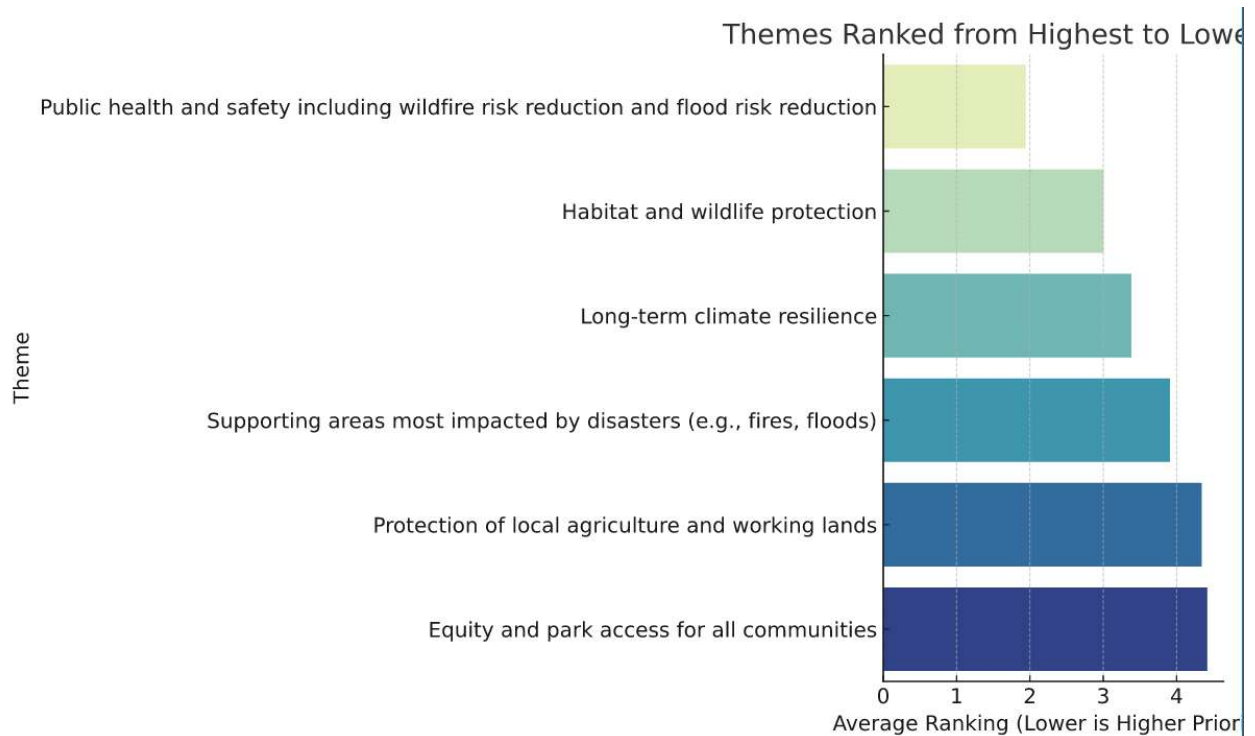
1) Water, 2) Wildfire, 3) Wildlife, 4) Parks, 5) Farms, and 6) Coastal, as shown below in the bar chart.



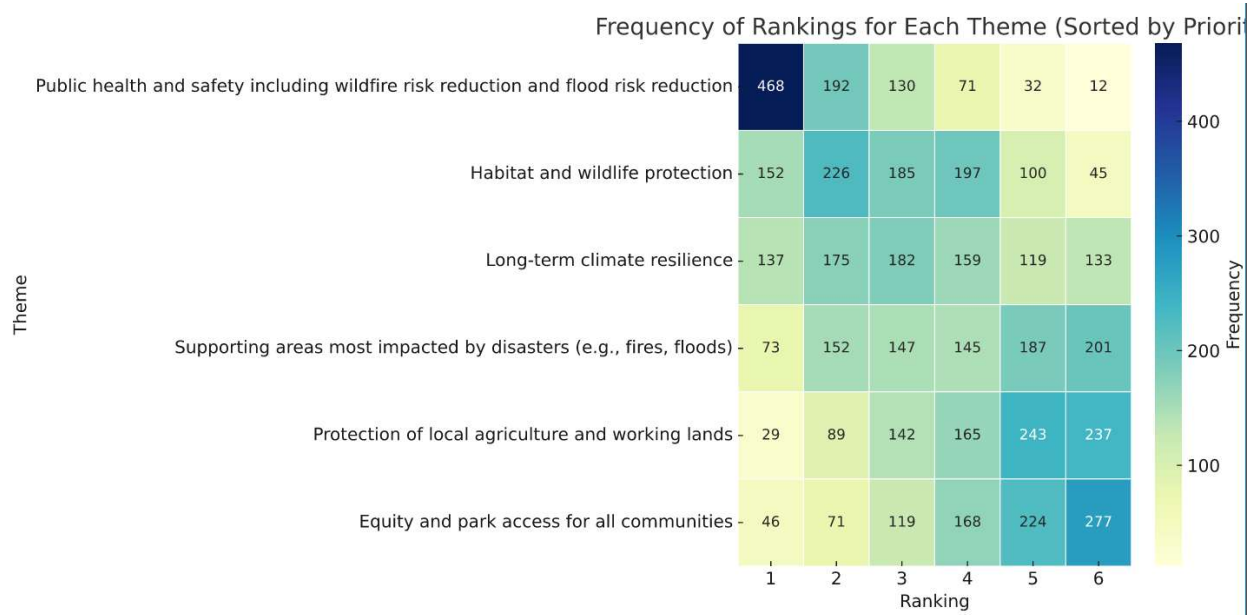
A Heatmap of the rankings provides more detail into how respondents ranked each theme. The heatmap shows thematic areas in the Y-axis and the ranking of each thematic area in the X-axis. The number in each cell is the frequency of votes received.



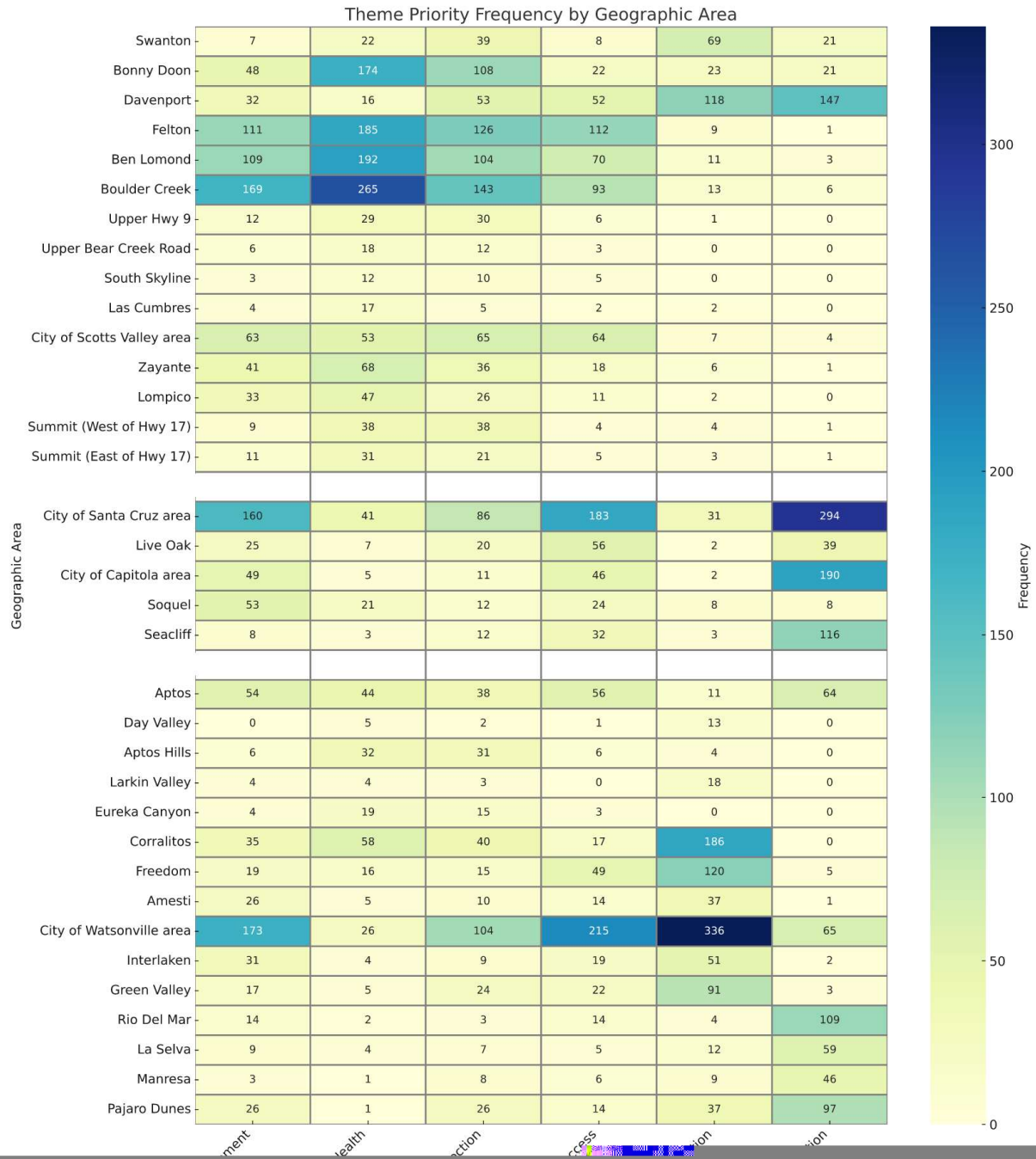
Question 2 Results: Respondents ranked the long-term priority area for Measure Q investment as follows:



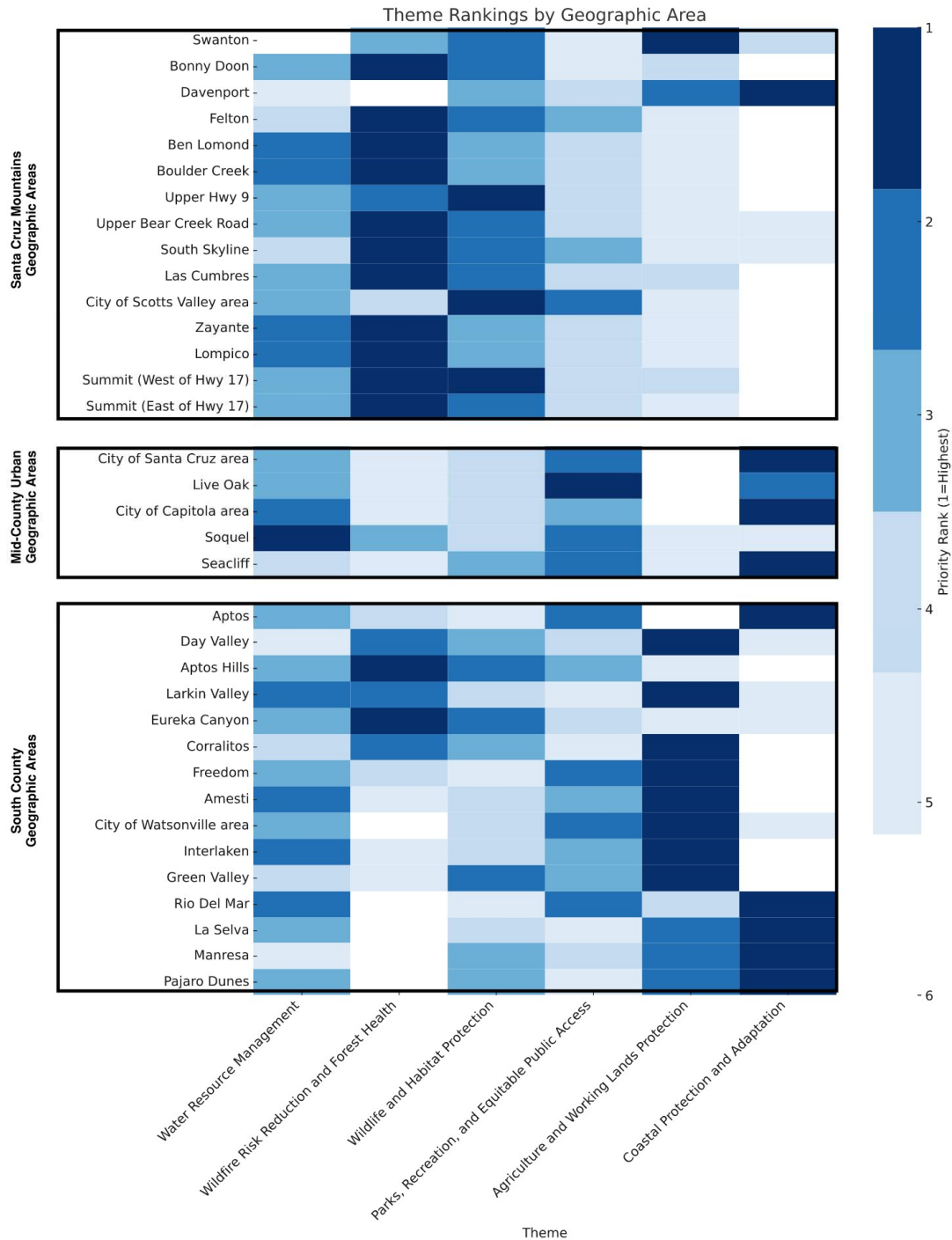
A Heatmap of the rankings provides more detail into how respondents ranked each theme:



Question 3 Results: Respondents selected up to three priority locations for investment in Measure Q funding for each of the six thematic areas. The heatmap below shows the frequency of locations respondents identified for each theme. Geographic areas are shown roughly from north to south, and broken into 3 categories (Santa Cruz Mountains, Mid-County Urban Areas, and South County), which helps to illustrate patterns in the data between geographically similar areas.



From this data, it is possible to determine which themes were prioritized for each



Analysis of the geographic prioritization results revealed that respondents tended to prioritize areas close to where they live. For example, respondents from 95005 (Ben Lomond area) consistently ranked Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek as top priorities for habitat and wildfire thematic areas. Respondents from 95062 (Eastside of Santa Cruz City and Live Oak) ranked Santa Cruz and Live Oak as top priorities for coastal protection and

parks access. Similarly, residents of 95076 (South County) emphasized Freedom, Interlaken, and the City of Watsonville area across all themes.

In the Santa Cruz Mountains communities, Wildfire and Forest Health consistently ranked as the highest priority, with Wildlife and Habitat second, Water Resources third, Parks and Access fourth, Agriculture and Working Lands fifth, and Coastal Protection sixth.

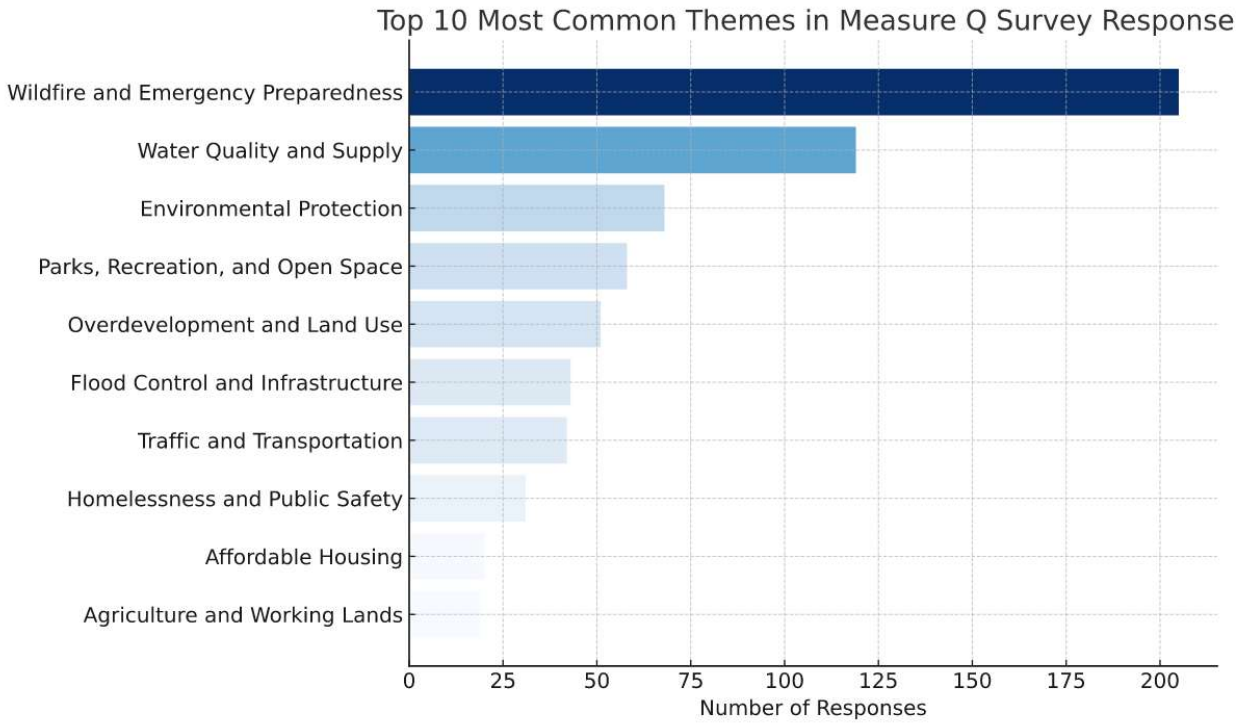
In the urban areas of mid-county, Coastal Protection ranked first, Parks and Access second, Water Resources third, Wildlife and Habitat fourth, Wildfire and Forest Health fifth, and Agriculture and Working Land sixth.

In South County, Agriculture and Working Lands ranked first, Water Resources second, Parks and Access third, Wildlife and Habitat fourth, Coastal Protection fifth, and Wildfire and Forest Health sixth.

For each thematic area, the following areas were ranked high priority most often by respondents. Note that because most respondents prioritized areas near where they live, the proportionally unrepresentative geographic participation across areas of the County likely influenced some of this prioritization, skewing results toward communities in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

- Water Resources: City of Watsonville area, City of Santa Cruz area, Boulder Creek, Felton, and Ben Lomond
- Wildfire and Forest Health: Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Felton, Bonny Doon
- Wildlife and Habitat: Boulder Creek, Felton, Bonny Doon, Ben Lomond
- Parks and Access: City of Watsonville area, City of Santa Cruz area, Felton, Boulder Creek
- Agriculture and Working Lands: City of Watsonville area, Corralitos, Freedom, Davenport
- Coastal Protection: City of Santa Cruz area, City of Capitola area, Davenport, Seacliff, Rio Del Mar

Question 4 Results: responses to this open-ended question, “Are there specific threats or challenges in Santa Cruz County that you hope Measure Q can address?”, were wide-ranging. Some responses were short and specific, while others were broader or multifaceted. The top ten most common themes identified by respondents to this question are shown by the chart below.



DRAFT Measure Q Vision Plan

Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement Summary and Synthesis



Measure Q Vision Plan

Appendix: Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

DRAFT – August 18, 2025



Santa Cruz County

PlaceWorks

Matt Freeman Consulting

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INTRODUCTION

This document is an appendix to the Measure Q Vision Plan (Vision Plan). The Vision Plan was published by the County of Santa Cruz with support from consultants PlaceWorks and Matt Freeman Consulting in August 2025. The Vision Plan was developed to guide the implementation of funds resulting in the passage of Measure Q by Santa Cruz County voters in November 2024. This Appendix provides an in depth summary of **the stakeholder engagement process** that took place as part of the Measure Q visioning process. This document has four sections.

- **Section A** is an executive summary of the stakeholder engagement process.
- **Section B** is a summary and synthesis of the Stakeholder Survey, which took place from April to May 2025.
- **Section C** is a summary and synthesis of the first round of Stakeholder Meetings, which took place in June 2025.
- **Section D** is a summary and synthesis of the second round of Stakeholder Meetings, which took place in July 2025.

SECTION A: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Santa Cruz County Measure Q Vision Plan

Stakeholder Engagement Executive Summary

August 17, 2025

Introduction

From April to July 2025, PlaceWorks and Matt Freeman Consulting assisted Santa Cruz County staff in a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process to help inform the development of the Measure Q Vision Plan. The engagement effort sought insights from a diverse range of professionals, experts, and leaders across six project themes: Coastal Protection and Adaption; Water Resources Management; Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health; Parks, Recreation, and Public Access & Equity; and Agricultural and Working Lands. Individual stakeholders represented numerous public agencies, non-profits, community organizations, local government offices, educational institutions, and other groups working throughout Santa Cruz County.

This Executive Summary has two main sections. The first section concerns recommendations and insights from the stakeholder engagement process that are relevant in the development of the Vision Plan. The second section concerns additional feedback and insights relevant to the development of the Measure Q grant application process and the future implementation of the Vision Plan.

Stakeholder Insights Relevant to the Vision Plan

Over the course of four months of engagement efforts that included a stakeholder survey and two rounds of stakeholder engagement meetings, several high-level insights emerged with relevance to the development of the Vision Plan.

Overlapping Measure Q Project Themes and Multi-Benefit Approach

A key insight from stakeholders was that the six project themes identified in the Measure – Coastal Protection and Adaption, Water Resources Management, Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health, Parks, Recreation, and Public Access Equity, Wildlife and Habitat, and Agricultural and Working Lands – have considerable overlap and should be planned as such. One strategy supported by many stakeholders that was prominently discussed throughout the engagement process was the identification of projects with benefits to multiple project themes identified in Measure Q. Such projects could provide immense environmental and social benefits across a wide range of geographies, engage diverse

communities, and likely attract and leverage additional outside funding. While all of the project themes overlap to some extent and are important for the county writ large, stakeholders displayed strong interest in the potential synergy of the following projects: Protection and restoration of habitat for rare, threatened, and unique / endemic species and natural communities; Multi-benefit wildfire risk reduction; Park, green infrastructure, and access improvements in Watsonville and South County; Nature-based solutions for coastal and environmental resilience; Lower Pajaro River floodplain restoration; and Landowner outreach, education, and technical support.

Addressing Historic Disinvestment

A cross-cutting insight was the need for Measure Q funds to **address historic disinvestment** and **underserved communities**, particularly in the context of South Santa Cruz County. Stakeholders identified the disparities in historic funding between South County communities such as Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley with wealthier communities in North County. Stakeholders emphasized how a legacy of disinvestment has contributed to disparate environmental burden, climate vulnerability, and health outcomes across the County, with a clear divide between the northern and southern halves of the County. Measure Q funds were seen as crucial to fund a variety of projects at different scales within South County, such as watershed restoration, urban reforestation, and agricultural lands viability.

Alignment with Existing Plans and Dedicated Funding Efforts

Stakeholders emphasized the benefits of aligning the Vision Plan with existing local and regional plans. Stakeholders identified a variety of plan scopes and plan types in effect in Santa Cruz County, such as Master Plans, Repurposing Plans, Greening Plans, and more. Aligning the goals and identified projects of the Vision Plan with those identified in existing plans is strategic as it can help projects fulfill common state or federal requirements that grant-seeking projects be identified in locally adopted plans. Additionally, stakeholders emphasized that the goals, project types, and project areas identified in the Vision Plan should highlight opportunities for alignment with existing and future grant funding proposals and dedicating funding allocated to cities, Resource Conservation District, or the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to pool synergize resources and maximize potential benefits. However, the Measure Q Vision Plan should not be limited to projects included in existing plans, as the unpredictable nature of climate disasters and infrastructure failures may necessitate redirecting funds to address these unplanned events. Balancing alignment with plans and a flexible list of eligible project types will be important in the development of the Vision Plan.

Communication and Transparency in the Vision Plan

Stakeholders overwhelmingly emphasized the desire for a transparent visioning process that clearly communicates the outcomes of the Vision Plan and how insights from stakeholder and community engagement were incorporated into the Vision Plan. Furthermore, stakeholders advocated for transparency in project funding and the criteria by which funding decisions will be made. The desire for clear criteria and robust communication with stakeholders goes hand-in-hand with the desire for demonstrated accountability in the early stages of the implementation, by acting responsively and immediately putting dollars to work.

Work With Communities and Organizations on the Frontlines

Stakeholders emphasized the need for the Measure Q Vision Plan to support and identify groups working on the frontline of communities, particularly those facing environmental burdens and historical disinvestment. These groups include nonprofit organizations, community foundations, and other small organizations with local knowledge and expertise that can quickly identify community needs and implement Measure Q funds. Furthermore, such organizations are likely to have stronger trust and buy-in from local communities (particularly for those organizations that serve minority or underserved groups) which can help establish a foundation for future implementation of Measure Q funds.

Stakeholder Insights Relevant to the Grant Application Process and Future Implementation

Over the course of four months of engagement efforts that included a stakeholder survey and two rounds of stakeholder engagement meetings, several high-level insights emerged with relevance to the development of the grant application process and implementation of Measure Q funding.

Robust Community Engagement

Stakeholders strongly emphasized the need for a robust community engagement and outreach process to support both the development of the Vision Plan and the grant application process. Community Engagement is critical for identifying high priority areas for Measure Q funds and implementation, and importantly, the kinds and types of projects that are both highly beneficial to and desired by the community. Such outreach can both inform the development of grant criteria and future implementation of funds.

Transparent and Accountable Stewardship of Funds

Stakeholders stressed the importance of the transparent and accountable stewardship of Measure Q funds throughout its lifespan. Stakeholders identified the reporting process as especially crucial in promoting transparency in the deployment and outcomes of Measure Q funds. Stakeholders recommended the County develop a project reporting framework to facilitate the annual review by the Citizens Oversight Advisory Board (COAB) and streamline the reporting process for grant recipients. This framework would facilitate the collection of quantitative and qualitative metrics to assist in the reporting of Measure Q impacts and outcomes. These metrics could then be communicated to the public at large to demonstrate accountability responsible stewardship.

Accessible and Streamlined Grant Process

Stakeholders frequently expressed the need for the grant application process to be accessible and streamlined to reduce unnecessary barriers to project funds and support a diverse range of project types. Among the many recommendations from stakeholders, several overlapping insights emerged. Stakeholders expressed a commitment to supporting impactful projects at varying scales, which demands a grant process that can provide funds for both small scale projects in addition to larger, more complex capital improvement projects. While stakeholders diverged on the best way to develop the grant process to achieve this goal, recommendations broadly fell into several categories.

Remove Unnecessary ‘Green Tape’

Throughout the engagement process, stakeholders, particularly those with experience in processing climate-related grants, recommended limiting unnecessary ‘green tape’, i.e. unnecessarily restrictive environmental regulations, where possible to promote efficient and timely use of funds. Stakeholders clarified that the grant application process needs to balance regulation with the urgency of putting dollars to work.

Waive Match Requirements for Small Scale Projects

Some stakeholders suggested waiving matching requirements for small scale projects as such requirements may prove to be a barrier for otherwise impactful projects. Projects at the hyper-local level can have outsized impact, though they are often not competitive in securing state or federal matching funds.

Develop Two Distinct Tracks for Small Scale and Large Scale Projects

In a similar vein to removing match requirements, several stakeholders emphasized the value of creating two distinct tracks in the grant process that separated projects based on the funding amount (small vs. large) or the recipient type (e.g. non-profit,

school, community based organization, etc.). Stakeholders shared that this approach could ensure competitiveness between projects and rapid deployment of funds. Additionally, creating a distinct category for large scale projects could be supplemented with additional strategies such as a phased deployment of project funds to support large scale projects with different implementation timelines.

Support Multi-Benefit Projects and Long-Term Impact

Stakeholders supported a grant application process that funds multi-benefit projects with. Multi-benefit projects are valued by stakeholders for their ability to provide simultaneous benefits such as restoration *and* access or climate resilience *and* wildlife protection. Additionally, stakeholders valued projects that could demonstrate sustained long-term outcomes. Stakeholders were aware of the challenges related to ongoing maintenance and project or program support, thus grant application criteria related to long-term viability was supported. Such criteria is not meant to restrict access to small scale projects, but rather ensure long term efficacy of larger projects.

Improving Shovel Readiness

While stakeholders identified the importance of leveraging project funds to secure additional funding from state or federal sources, in the same breath, many stakeholders emphasized the need to utilize Measure Q funds to fund small-scale local projects that would otherwise be challenged to secure state or federal dollars. For example, Measure Q could help fund project's invaluable planning and pre-construction stages, helping them to be shovel-ready, thus increasing their competitiveness for larger grants. Additionally, small-scale grants (e.g. less than \$15k) are likely to have outsized impact for neighborhoods and local community organizations that are positioned to deploy funds in a rapid and responsive manner. These local efforts would otherwise be ineligible or uncompetitive for federal or state dollars, and Measure Q could provide critical and immediate capacity building.

SECTION B: STAKEHOLDER SURVEY SUMMARY

Santa Cruz County Measure Q Vision Plan Stakeholder Survey Summary

July 22, 2025

Introduction

In the months of April and May 2025, PlaceWorks and Matt Freeman Consulting assisted Santa Cruz County staff in developing, publicizing, and conducting an in-depth Survey for Measure Q Stakeholders. The survey ran from April 29th to May 15th and was sent to a list of approximately 120 stakeholders. The survey collected responses from more than 60 participants, who represent a diverse range of organizations and public agencies. This introduction briefly contextualizes the survey's development and high-level findings that emerged from the responses.

Invited stakeholders were a diverse set of non-profit organizations, educational institutions, local government agencies, state and federal government agencies, special districts, and community based organizations with expertise and experience in one or more of the stakeholder theme areas, listed below:

- Coastal Protection and Adaptation
- Water Resources Management
- Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health
- Parks, Recreation and Public Access & Equity
- Wildlife and Habitat Protection
- Agricultural and Working Lands Protection

What emerged was a list of over 120 individuals representing dozens of groups actively working across the Measure Q theme areas across different geographies in Santa Cruz County. These geographies included communities in high-hazard areas (e.g. flood-prone or low lying areas, wildland-urban interface, or fire-prone areas, etc.) as well as the county's major cities and population centers (e.g. Santa Cruz, Watsonville, etc.).

Once stakeholders were identified, multiple emails were sent to the stakeholders soliciting their responses to the survey. It was communicated to stakeholders that part 1 of the survey was estimated to take approximately 10-15 mins to complete and the optional part 2 of the survey was estimated to take 15-20 minutes to complete. In addition to notifications via email, the Project Team organized a Virtual Kickoff Meeting on Friday, May 9th, 2025 that, among other things, further promoted the survey.

Summary of Stakeholder Survey

More than 60 participants completed at least Part 1 of the Stakeholder Survey. A high-level summary of the survey results are provided by multiple figures across the following pages. Figures 1-3 summarize information about the stakeholders and their focus areas, including information on the type of organization the stakeholder represents, the sectors or industries the stakeholder's organization is typically engages in, the communities stakeholder's organizations typically serve. Figure 4-6 summarize feedback and preferences related to the development and scope of the Measure Q Vision Plan. These figures illustrate stakeholder preferences and rankings of different project types and theme areas identified in Measure Q (Figures 4 & 5) as well as key takeaways from the initial stakeholder kickoff on May 9th, 2025 relating to content of the Vision Plan and the direction of stakeholder engagement.

Note on Stakeholder Survey Results

Attached to this memo is a PDF of the full survey responses. A more comprehensive synthesis of the survey results will be conducted after the completion of the second round of Stakeholder meetings (taking place the week of July 21, 2025). This is to ensure that insights from the survey can be contextualized and synthesized with findings from the two rounds of stakeholder meetings to arrive at a complete set of meaningful and holistic insights across all stakeholder engagement activities.

Figure 1: Stakeholder Organization Types

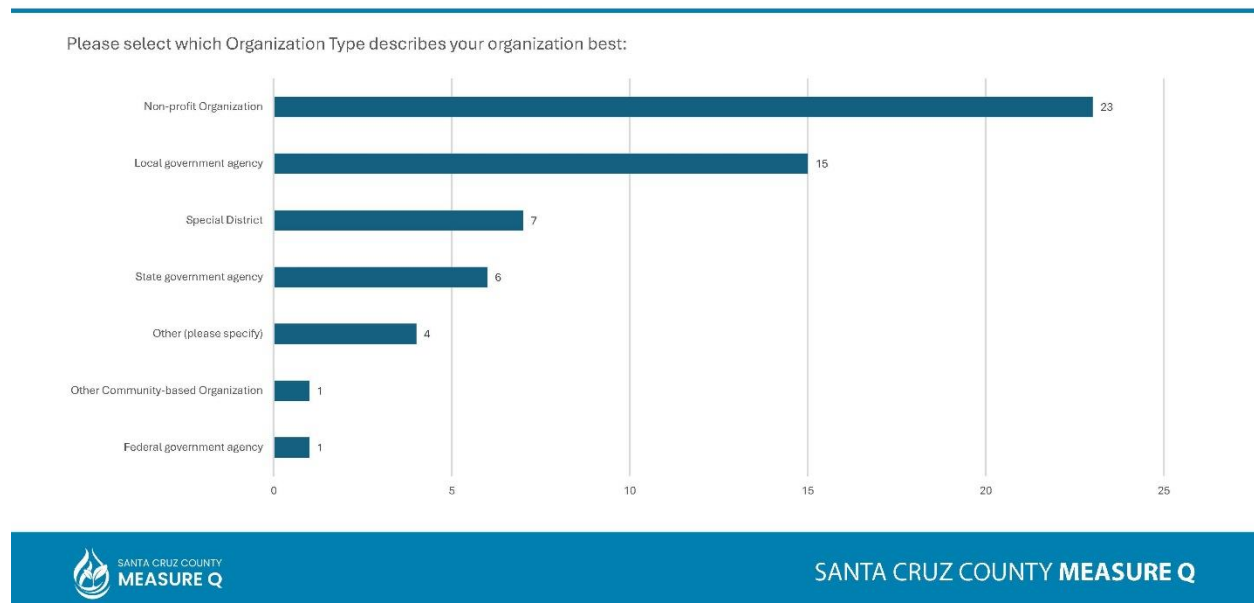


Figure 2: Stakeholder Organization Project Sector

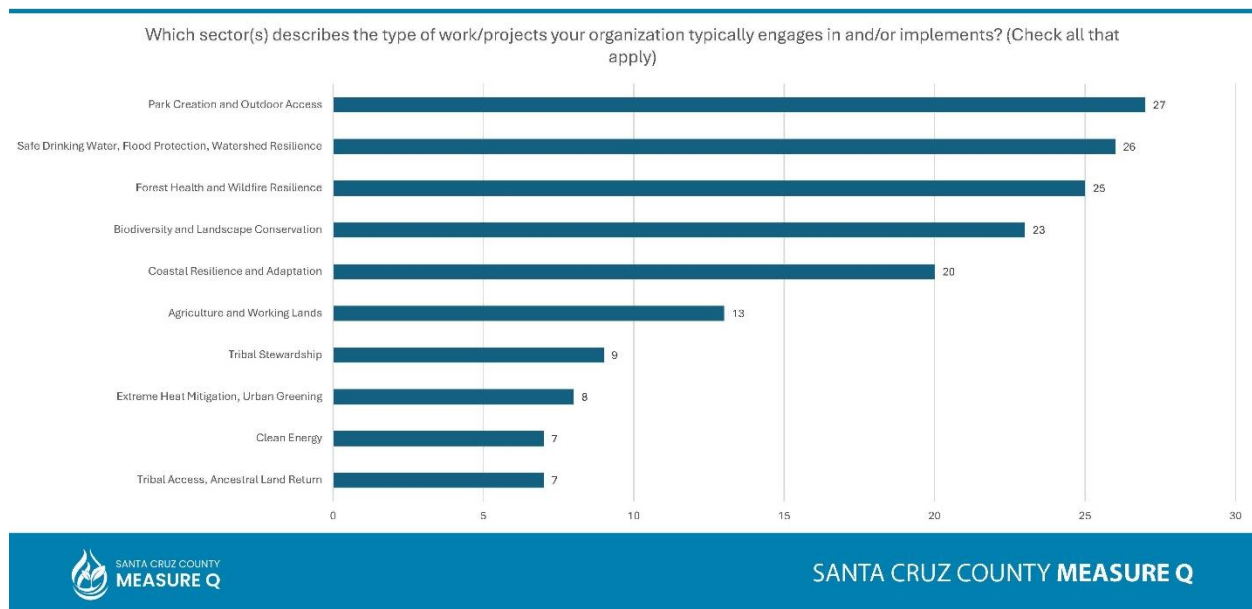


Figure 3: Communities Served by Stakeholder Organization

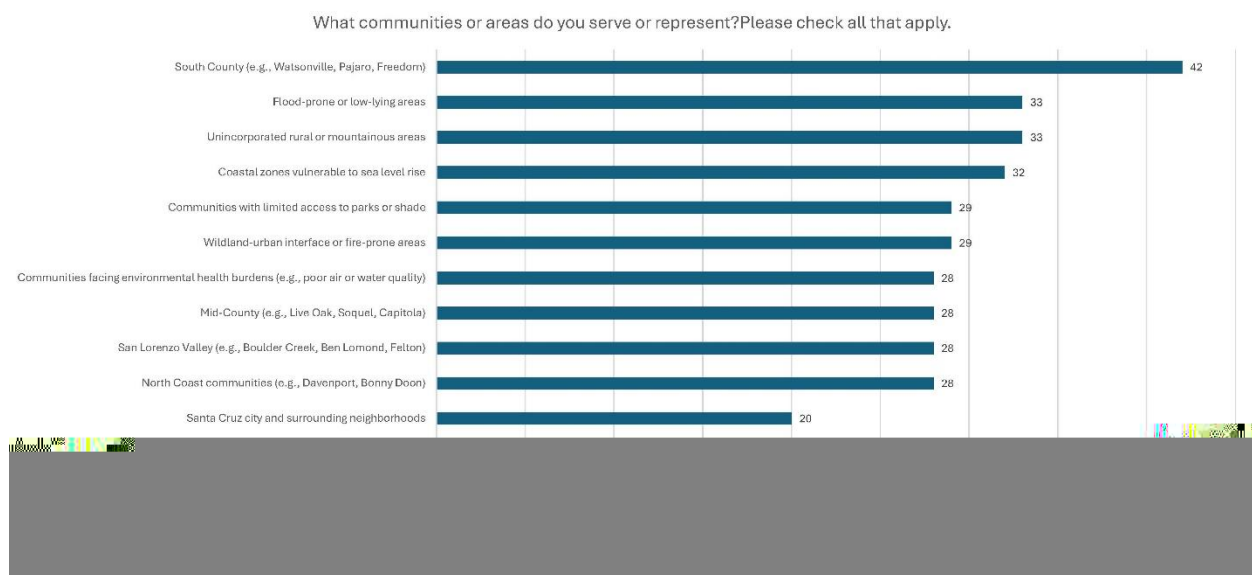


Figure 4: Most Selected and Least Selected Project Types

Figure 5: Frequency of Rankings for Measure Q Themes

To help inform the Vision Plan's first five years of implementation, please rank the following themes from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important) from your organization's perspective.

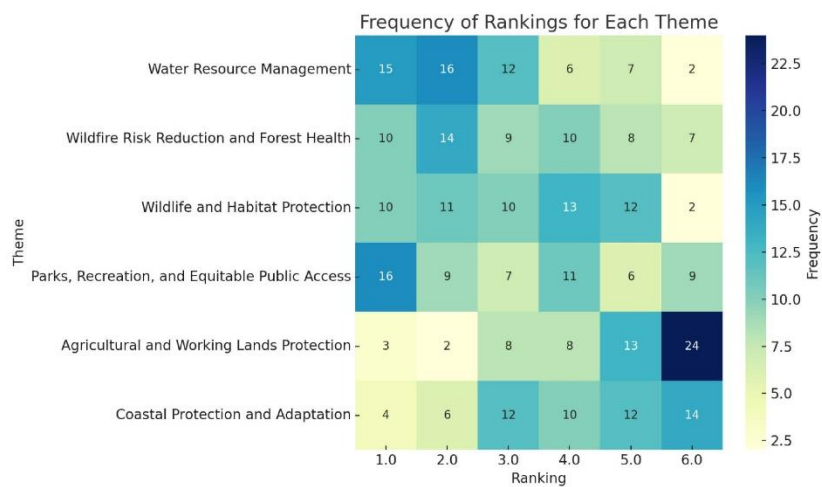


Figure 6: Narrative Summary of Key Takeaways From Stakeholder Kickoff Meeting

- **What success looks like for stakeholders/organizations:** Beyond funding, stakeholders want clear, trackable goals, the ability to articulate collective/system-wide efforts (metrics on acres treated, miles maintained), and a plan that is a useful tool accelerating their work and facilitating funding.
- **Community Benefit vs. Tourism:** Prioritization of projects directly benefiting local residents over those solely focused on attracting tourism for economic gain.
- **Permitting/Green Tape:** Desire to outline the permit process within the plan and identify strategies/fund projects that streamline permitting or get projects closer to "shovel ready."
- **Cross-cutting questions to ask across all meetings:** How to define and address disadvantaged communities beyond census data (concentrations and dispersed vulnerable residents). Identify how this will inform project prioritization and grant guidelines.



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY MEASURE Q

Synthesis and Insights

This section provides a synthesis of insights of the Measure Q Stakeholder Survey Open Ended Responses. The survey asked eight total open-ended questions that participants were able to freely answer. This section will synthesize insights by question.

Question 1: Supporting All Communities. Are there communities facing historical disinvestment that would benefit from investments in parks, urban greening, or other climate-resilience activities? Please describe any needs or opportunities.

Total number of responses: 29

South County and the Cities of Pajaro Valley: Almost all respondents to this question identified the geographic region of South Santa Cruz County or its subareas (e.g. cities, unincorporated communities, etc.) as areas facing historical disinvestment and in urgent need of climate resilience investment.

Mountain and Low-Lying Regions: Communities in certain areas of the County's mountain and low-lying regions were identified as having faced historical disinvestment. Mountain communities identified included the census designated places of Lompico and Zayante. Low-lying communities and other communities near the ocean identified include Beach Flats, Davenport, and Live Oak.

Underserved Groups: In addition to identifying underserved geographic regions, many respondents identified specific groups that have faced historical disinvestment. Among the groups mentioned most frequently were Spanish-speaking communities, immigrant communities, and lower income communities of color. Other groups that were identified by one or more respondents were students, youth, and agricultural workers. These groups were commonly identified in the context of South County and its various cities.

Insufficient Green Infrastructure Respondents identified the downstream consequences of underinvestment in the communities and regions above as manifesting in a lack of green infrastructure, including open space, parks, and urban forestry. Respondents identified that this lack of green infrastructure culminates in insufficient access to parks, heat stress, the urban heat island effect, and more.

Grey Infrastructure and Stormwater Management: Several respondents identified insufficient grey infrastructure as an important issue facing low-lying beach communities. Respondents cited the need to protect communities from increased flood risk and increasing pressure on stormwater systems.

Question 2: Multi-Benefit Projects. Measure Q is designed to support projects that provide multiple environmental and community benefits. For example, a restoration project might improve habitat and climate resilience while also creating new opportunities for public access or community engagement). Are there any existing or potential multi-benefit conservation projects or partnerships that Measure Q should consider funding? Please briefly describe the project type and locations.

Total number of responses: 31

Pinto Lake Restoration: The most frequently mentioned multi-benefit project was the restoration of Pinto Lake. It was frequently identified as an important project to improve the overall health of the surrounding ecosystem and simultaneously provide residents with safe recreational waters.

Wetlands and Watershed Restoration: Several respondents identified existing and ongoing work in and around the wetlands and watershed of Santa Cruz County as high priority multi-benefit projects. Respondents mentioned an extensive list of agencies, organizations, and communities involved in such projects.

Watsonville Slough and Valle del Pajaro County Park: There was extensive mention of the multi-benefit potential of improvements to the Watsonville Sloughs and the newly opened Valle del Pajaro County Park.

Environmental Education and Expanded Public Access: Several responses emphasized the potential of aligning projects with environmental education opportunities. Examples of such projects that provide

environmental education services as part of multi-benefit stewardship work were described, such as the Coastal Watershed Council's River Stewards Program. Respondents also identified the importance of aligning resilience and stewardship projects with the goals of expanded public access to parks and open space.

Plan Alignment: Respondents from numerous agencies and organizations identified existing and in-development plans that may benefit from alignment with the Measure Q Vision Plan. These included plans for cities (e.g. Watsonville Area Master Trails Plan, City of Watsonville Urban Forestry Master Plan, City of Watsonville Urban Greening Plan), Regional Plans (e.g. Mult benefit Land Repurposing Plan), and county-wide plans (e.g. Trails Master Plan).

Question 3: Threats and Challenges. Are there specific threats or challenges in Santa Cruz County that you hope Measure Q can address? (write-in)

Total Number of Responses: 30

Wildfire: The threat of wildfire was frequently identified by respondents who cited its destructive potential to forests, wildlife, property, and life. Several respondents emphasized the urgency of wildfire prevention and resilience given the interconnected impacts of wildfire on other resource systems such as water.

Coastal Access: Several respondents expressed concern over decreasing coastal access due to sea level rise, coastal erosion, and the political influence of a small number of wealthy private landowners. Relatedly, existing coastal access areas were called out for insufficient infrastructure given increasing public usage.

Sustainable Funding: The issue of sustainable long-term funding was a prominent concern expressed by respondents. Respondents are worried about the viability of Measure Q as a source of matching funds amidst a changing federal landscape and declining federal investment in conservation and climate resilience projects more broadly. Several respondents also identified the challenge of directing sustainable long-term funding to ensure equitable outcomes for historically disadvantaged communities and geographies.

Water Quality and Health: A major concern for respondents was the effects of sea level rise and wildfire on both groundwater and surface water quality across the county. Several respondents emphasized the challenge of both mitigate and increase resilience while expanding access to clean drinking water for all.

Regulatory Compliance: A handful of respondents expressed concern over the potential of regulatory compliance (ie. 'green tape') to slow down the planning and approval of important projects. Respondents encouraged the Measure Q Team to minimize green tape in the Measure Q funding and grantmaking process.

Question 4: Please list any other potential grant programs or other substantial sources of external funding that can advance potential priority Vision Plan projects or use the space below to call out specific grant programs listed above that should be prioritized.

Total Number of Responses: 13

Mixed Responses: The responses to the preliminary list of grant programs and sources of external funding reflected mixed attitudes, with some respondents viewing the list as comprehensive while others noted several important omissions.

Grant Programs: Survey respondents contributed a number of grant programs for consideration, including

- **CDFA SWEEP Block Grant** (administered by RCDSCC)
- **DOC Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program and Implementation Block Grants** (administered by the Coastal Conservancy)
- **DOC Multi Benefit Land Repurposing Program** (administered by California Department of Conservation)
- **DOC Working Lands and Riparian Restoration Program** (administered by California Department of Conservation)
- **CNRA Whale Tail Grant** (administered by the California Natural Resource Agency)
- **DWR Coastal Watershed Flood Risk Reduction Grant** (administered by Department of Water Resources)
- **DWR Flood Control Subventions Program** (administered by Department of Water Resources)
- **NGO Grants** (administered by various)

Future Funds: One respondent identified that several important agencies that secured funding via Proposition 4 are yet to be released and should be closely monitored as grant programs are developed and released. Such agencies include: State Parks, OOFALS, SWRCB/Regional Water Quality Control Boards, and DWR. Additional future GGRF funding (Green House Gas Reduction Fund) may be made available depending on the outcome of the state's newly negotiated cap and trade program.

Individual and Private Donors: Several respondents stated a need to supplement existing and matching funds via capital improvement campaigns funded by private and individual donors.

Question 5: Additional Criteria. Besides activities that benefit disadvantaged communities, support multi-benefit projects, and where matching funds are available, are there other criteria that should be considered to identify priority project types and location?

Total Number of Respondents: 24

Existing Plans: Several respondents identified the need to ensure Measure Q criteria aligns with criteria supported or aligned within existing plans.

Addressing Funding Gaps via Small-Scale/Local Projects: Several respondents argued for the importance of filling existing gaps in funding particularly within small-scale and local geographies. Within this group, potential criteria included designated funding for ‘small grants’ (e.g. less than \$10k), designating funding for projects unlikely to receive match funds but provide intense local/neighborhood benefit, and more.

Responsible Stewardship of Public Funds: The responsible stewardship of public funds was a criteria identified or implied by several respondents, each of whom articulated the concept in similar but unique ways. Some respondents favored a procedural focus with emphasis on community support and community-identified needs. Some respondents favored criteria that was most closely aligned with the original language in the ballot measure. Similarly, some respondents suggested value-based criteria that can reflect public interest and needs.

Competing Criteria: In addition to the criteria mentioned above, respondents articulated additional criteria to be considered. Some favored criteria that maximize a project’s benefit to cost ratio or demonstrate significant impact per dollar. Other respondents support criteria that can identify greatest need or essential projects. Lastly, several respondents emphasized criteria that favors projects with demonstrable long-term efficacy and financial viability to ensure long-term positive outcomes. These criteria were in addition to criteria centered around familiar outcomes such as native habitat protection and water supply protection.

Question 6: Stakeholder Meeting Outcomes. What outcomes would you like to see from the stakeholder engagement process, and are there specific topics or information you'd like us to include in the stakeholder meeting agendas?

Number of Responses: 24

Transparent Process: Almost all stakeholders expressed a desire for a transparent process and transparent outcomes that clearly state how insights from stakeholder engagement will influence the Vision Plan.

Responsive: Stakeholders desired the stakeholder engagement to support responsive outcomes, emphasizing the importance of immediately putting dollars to use that responds to community input and demonstrates accountability.

Funding Criteria and Project Prioritization: Many stakeholders identified funding criteria as an important outcome they'd like to see developed as part of or informed from the stakeholder engagement process. Respondents also consistently identified the desire to work towards an effective project prioritization scheme.

Multi-Jurisdictional and Alignment With Existing Plans: Several stakeholders identified alignment with existing plans and multi-jurisdictional efforts as key outcomes of the stakeholder engagement process. This was important to stakeholders for various reasons, with respondents citing increased jurisdictional buy-in, leveraging of existing funds, and more.

Synergy Across Organizations of Different Sizes and Scopes: One outcome that a handful of respondents identified was the desire promote access to Measure Q funding organizations of different sizes and focus areas. Respondents desired for Measure Q to support the diverse organizations reflected in the stakeholder lists.

Question 7: Community Engagement. Do you have suggestions for engagement approaches that will help the County better serve disadvantaged communities in the Vision Plan process? Are there specific community-based organizations, non-profits, or other groups we should partner with to help identify and prioritize investments?

Number of responses: 27

School Districts: A significant number of respondents identified school districts as important partners in identifying and prioritizing investments from Measure Q. Santa Cruz County has ten school districts, though Pajaro Valley Unified and San Lorenzo Valley Unified were the most frequently identified school districts.

Bi-Lingual Groups with Spanish Services: Many respondents emphasized the importance of working with Spanish speaking groups to better serve and engage the Spanish-speaking communities within Santa Cruz County, particularly in South County. Specific organizations singled out for this service included Regeneracion, Nueva Vista Community Resources, Barrios Unidos, and more.

Park Districts and Park Organizations: A high volume of respondents identified park organizations as important in the engagement process given their high approval rating (in the case of the County Parks Department) and experience with engaging the public as standard practice in park projects.

Outside the Box Strategies: A handful of respondents expressed a desire to see unconventional and creative engagement strategies that go beyond engaging with established players and organizations. These included maintaining a strong social media presence and surveying responses to online forums.

Meet Communities Where They Are At: A common sentiment expressed by the respondents was the need to meet communities where they are at and to be responsive to existing community needs and sentiment. For example, one respondent identified existing resentment from previous County responses to environmental disasters (e.g. the CZU fire) as a potential hinderance to engagement from affected communities. In a similar manner, going to communities rather than expecting them to come to the County is more likely to result in higher engagement levels.

On the Ground Groups: In addition to those mentioned above, the following organizations received votes of confidence by respondents in their ability to engage with disadvantaged communities: Pajaro Valley Collaborative, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, Black Surf Santa Cruz, Community Bridges, Community Foundation Santa Cruz, County Park Friends, Center for Farmworker Families, Homeless Garden Project, Food, What?!, and more.

Question 8: Additional Comments. Please share any other feedback to help inform development of the Vision Plan or how to support a transparent and inclusive engagement process.

Number of Responses: 20

Feedback on Survey Content and Ongoing Communication: Some responses concerned feedback addressed to the Project Team on content and promotion of the survey. Additional comments reiterated the need for frequent and broad communication with the public and stakeholders.

Call to Work With on the Ground Communities: Several responses reaffirmed the call to work alongside and in collaboration with local groups and organizations that are well connected with disadvantaged communities that may otherwise not participate in the engagement process.

Public Transparency: Several responses reiterated the need for a transparent process and encouraged the project team to utilize communication strategies and elements to improve public understanding.

Accessible and Supportive Meetings: A few responses identified barriers to participation to engagement meetings and encouraged the project team to reduce barriers to participation by, e.g. holding meetings during non-working hours, including stipends for public transportation, and more.

SECTION C: ROUND 1 STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS SUMMARY

Santa Cruz County Measure Q Vision Plan

Stakeholder Meetings Summary: Round One

July 10, 2025

Introduction

From June 17-25, 2025, Placeworks and Matt Freeman Consulting assisted Santa Cruz County staff in facilitating six thematic stakeholder meetings to inform the Measure Q Vision Plan. These sessions—focused on Coastal Protection and Adaptation; Water Resources Management; Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health; Parks, Recreation and Public Access & Equity; Wildlife and Habitat Protection; and Agricultural and Working Lands Protection—were designed to gather targeted input from subject matter experts, community leaders, and implementation partners. The goal was to identify Measure Q funding priorities and opportunities to invest in projects that address critical needs, provide significant impacts—including projects that provide multiple benefits or serve disadvantaged or justice communities—and where funding can achieve significant leverage from external sources. This document summarizes the main themes and takeaways from each thematic stakeholder meeting, followed by a summary synthesis of stakeholder recommendations and considerations for Vision Plan implementation.

Stakeholder Meeting Summaries

Coastal Protection and Adaptation

The Measure Q ballot language addresses the importance of coastal protection and adaptation. It references protecting water quality and habitat for anadromous fish and other species that travel from the coast through lagoons and estuaries upstream, the importance of safe, clean, and accessible beaches for recreation and equitable access, and threats from coastal erosion and sea level rise. Examples of eligible projects and activities include protecting beaches and marine life from pollution, and planning and implementing green infrastructure solutions to protect coastal areas and estuaries from erosion and sea level rise.

I. Need for Measure Q Funding

Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q is essential for addressing significant coastal challenges and needs:

- **Reducing barriers to coastal access.** Coastal access remains limited for many South County communities. Key challenges include:
 - Lack of public transportation, bike lanes, and other pedestrian and ADA-accessible pathways—especially along Beach Road, which is the primary route to the beach.
 - Barriers due to privatization—the gated Pajaro Dunes community blocks convenient access to the coast and Pajaro River mouth.
 - Lack of culturally welcoming beach spaces, with interpretive signage, coastal-themed public art, and recreational amenities (e.g., fitness equipment, nature centers).
- **Community education and stewardship.** Stakeholders expressed broad support for climate and coastal education, particularly for youth and underserved communities. This includes:
 - Support for AB 285 implementation in K–12 schools (mandated climate science curriculum).
 - Community education on coastal adaptation (e.g., impacts of armoring vs. living shorelines), watershed processes, and education through hands-on stewardship and volunteer projects.
 - Programs like the Amah Mutsun Land Trust’s Native Stewardship Corps, which combines cultural education, restoration, and job training.
- **Nature-based adaptation and resilience.** Stakeholders emphasized Measure Q’s alignment with nature-based solutions and emphasized the need for multi-benefit green infrastructure projects like living shorelines while shifting away from gray infrastructure (e.g., seawalls and armoring). High-priority needs along the coast and in coastal watersheds include:
 - Coastal wetland, dune, and estuary restoration.
 - Reconnecting and daylighting creeks blocked by culverts (e.g., Laguna, San Vicente, and Scott Creeks).

- Addressing flooding threats from sea level rise, especially in mid-county lagoons and low-lying communities located within floodplains.
- Utilize Coastal Commission plans as resources to advance projects that promote adaptation and resilience: the City of Pacifica's Local Coastal Plan update is a good example.

II. Impactful Projects and Activities

Translating need to action, stakeholders identified a range of potential impactful and multi-benefit projects:

- **Living shorelines:** Stakeholders suggested that Measure Q funds should be directed to green infrastructure and nature-based solutions versus gray infrastructure projects like seawalls or armoring. Cardiff State Beach in San Diego County was offered as a model that combines dune restoration, coastal protection, habitat improvement, and public access.
- **Restored creek connections under Hwy 1:** Restoring aquatic habitat connectivity by replacing culverts and daylighting streams like Laguna, San Vicente, and Scott Creeks supports anadromous fish migration, improves water quality, and enhances coastal ecosystems. These projects provide outstanding opportunities for environmental education and interpretive signage.
- **Levee trails and beach amenities:** A trail(s) connecting Watsonville to the coast atop the Pajaro River levee could offer recreational access, climate resilience, and habitat connectivity. Suggested improvements for beaches include nature centers, outdoor fitness equipment, bilingual signage, and public art—especially in underserved areas like Palm Beach in Watsonville.
- **Monitoring, learning, and adaptive management:** Regional monitoring programs can help track both ecological and social outcomes, support adaptive management, and guide future investments. Consider including pre- and post-project monitoring for major projects funded by Measure Q themes to enable adaptive management, improve coordination among funders, and generate data to support future funding applications and impact assessments.

III. Priority Locations for Measure Q Investment

Stakeholders recommended the following locations over the first five years of Measure Q implementation. Many of these locations are identified in other plans and program materials including Climate Adaptation Plans and the Local Coastal Program.

- **Pajaro River Watershed and South County:**
 - Trails, levee-top access, and pedestrian / bike improvements connecting Watsonville to the coast.
 - Integrated floodplain and habitat restoration projects—both the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency’s Pajaro Valley Multi-Benefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Program and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County’s restoration project at Beach Ranch were shared as good examples of projects that provide significant climate resilience and adaptation benefits.
 - Address privatized barriers at Pajaro Dunes.
 - Improve facilities and programs at Palm Beach (kiosks, fishing info, education, signage).
- **Mid-County Lagoons (Live Oak):** Restoration and flood mitigation at Moran, Corcoran, and Schwan Lagoons. These lagoons are threatened by sea-level rise and offer significant opportunities to implement multi-benefit projects to address flooding, improve transportation resilience, restore habitat, and meaningfully connect people to nature.
- **North Coast Creeks:** Target culvert removal and stream restoration in Laguna, San Vicente, and Scott Creeks. Projects here can demonstrate resilience and adaptation elements and include access and education.
- **San Vicente Redwoods:** Recognizing the connections from the upper headwaters to the coast, this location is a funding priority for cultural burning, protection of Indigenous village sites, and to ensure long-term stewardship.

IV. Other Considerations

- **Provide capacity and programmatic support for coastal resilience and education.** Local nonprofits and CBOs often lack the bandwidth and resources to sustain vital programs or pursue complex grants. Stakeholders emphasized the need for Measure Q to provide dedicated program funding (not just capital projects). Consider a dual grant program with a simplified application process and minimal barriers for smaller projects and programs, and a separate grant track for capital projects for regional impact. Grant criteria should favor projects that prioritize equity, education, and cultural relevance including indigenous stewardship practices.
- **Equity considerations.** Stakeholders consistently stressed that equity should be a central principle in Measure Q implementation:
 - **Prioritize investments in disadvantaged areas** and park-poor communities like Watsonville, Pajaro, and Live Oak where access and infrastructure are lacking.
 - **Support tribal and cultural partners:** integrate Indigenous knowledge and cultural resource protection in all relevant projects. Focus restoration and coastal resilience projects where there are important cultural resources and opportunities for education.
 - **Physical and cultural accessibility:** Projects should offer ADA-compliant access, multilingual signage, and culturally relevant amenities to ensure inclusive coastal experiences.
 - **Maximize public benefit along the coast:** Do not fund projects that promote coastal armoring or primarily benefit private property unless there is a substantial public good.
 - **Design the Measure Q grant program to support non-profits:** ensure that match requirements don't make it too difficult for non-profits to access funding. Keep the grant guidelines and application simple and straightforward and with enough flexibility that it could align w/ external grant funding requirements like Prop 4.

V. Summary

Coastal stakeholders emphasized the need for Measure Q to fund nature-based coastal protection solutions while improving access and education for underserved communities. Priority projects include living shorelines, creek restoration, and beach access & amenity improvements, particularly in Watsonville. Measure Q funding, including from the grant program, should accommodate both small community organizations' programs and larger multi-benefit capital infrastructure projects. Success metrics should include both environmental and social impacts through regional monitoring programs.

Water Resources Management

Measure Q focuses on safeguarding the county's drinking water sources given that almost all the County's drinking water comes from local streams that are vulnerable to pollution and erosion, and from groundwater aquifers that are also vulnerable to pollution and susceptible to overdraft and saltwater intrusion. Other water resource management issues include the need to provide sustainable agricultural water supplies, ensure water quality and aquatic habitat protection, and provide floodplain restoration and management to reduce stormwater runoff and potentially capture it through recharge.

I. Need for Measure Q Funding

Stakeholders identified pressing needs for Measure Q funding to address large-scale, complex and interrelated water resource issues:

- **Watershed and riparian health:** For erosion control, sediment management, riparian restoration, and watershed-scale planning.
- **Water quality protection:** Address post-fire erosion, stormwater pollution, and nutrient runoff in agricultural and urbanizing landscapes.
- **Aquatic and floodplain habitat:** Improve instream flows, support steelhead and coho recovery, and restore hydrologic function, especially in key watersheds like the San Lorenzo and Pajaro.
- **Groundwater recharge:** Invest in stormwater capture and infiltration projects, especially in overdrafted basins.
- **Capacity-building and pre-project development:** Support technical assistance, site assessments, landowner engagement, and planning needed to develop shovel-ready projects.

II. Impactful Projects and Activities

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of multi-benefit projects that deliver measurable, cross-cutting outcomes:

- **Green over gray:** Favor natural infrastructure and nature-based solutions, such as fish-passable stream crossings or use of large woody debris (“stream wood”) to improve habitat, over purely engineered solutions. Explore opportunities to retrofit existing gray infrastructure to unlock broader ecological benefits (e.g., improvements at the Harkins Slough Recharge facility or Coast Pump Station).
- **Private land stewardship with public benefit:** Projects on private lands (e.g., erosion control or recharge) can provide substantial public benefits and should be priorities for funding.
- **Multi-jurisdictional coordination:** Foster collaboration across agencies and watersheds—leveraging efforts like the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP), Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS), and Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM).
- **Project planning and implementation readiness:** While stakeholders support shovel-ready projects, they stressed the need for Measure Q to fund earlier stages of project development to build a healthy project pipeline. Pre-planning activities are often difficult to fund with existing grant programs.
- **Disaster risk reduction:** Use Measure Q funds to reduce fire risk and flood vulnerability on water supply lands and floodplains.

III. Priority Locations

While cautioning against over-prescriptive geographies, stakeholders highlighted several high-priority locations where multi-benefit projects can be implemented to improve groundwater supply reliability, support ecosystem services, and reduce flood risk:

- **San Lorenzo River watershed:** Identified as a critical location for water quality, coho and steelhead recovery, forest health, and urban runoff management.
- **Pajaro River watershed:** Emphasized as historically underfunded, with high potential for multi-benefit floodplain restoration, recharge, and habitat enhancement. PVWMA's Pajaro Valley Multi-benefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Program will have its own extensive stakeholder engagement process and will identify specific high-priority projects.
- **Watsonville Slough:** Implement Managed Aquifer Recharge projects to capture and infiltrate stormwater for water quality and supply benefits.
- **College Lake:** Implement the Integrated Resources Management Project to capture seasonal runoff to reduce pumping and recharge aquifers.
- **South County disadvantaged communities:** Including those around Watsonville, **Pinto Lake**, and Paulsen Road, where flood exposure and water quality issues persist.
- **Lower San Lorenzo / Beach Flats / Lower Ocean neighborhoods:** Not flagged by state disadvantaged community mapping tools but identified locally as underserved communities needing flood protection, water access, and habitat improvements.
- **Water supply watersheds:** Watershed lands owned by the City of Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and the San Lorenzo Valley Water District could benefit from integrated fuel management and watershed restoration project to ensure water supply resilience and water quality.

IV. Other Considerations

- **Supplement statewide Disadvantaged Communities data with local data and knowledge.** Stakeholders noted that state-level disadvantaged communities mapping tools like CalEnviroScreen and DWR's DAC mapper often overlook critical local needs.

They recommending supplementing these tools with local subject matter expertise and community knowledge to focus investments in priority areas even if they are not formally designated by the state as disadvantaged. Suggested criteria include flood vulnerability, water affordability, and/or lack of access to green infrastructure. Explore use of [CensusReporter.org](https://censusreporter.org) to summarize demographic information from the ACS 5-Year Survey.

- **Funding leverage & strategic alignment.** Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q’s greatest value may be as flexible, early-stage investment that can unlock larger funding sources, particularly for nature-based projects that are not as easily funded by state/federal infrastructure programs. Recommendations include:
 - Support early-phase work (site assessment, landowner engagement, design, CEQA/permitting)
 - Build capacity for collaborative grant writing
 - Recognize that “leverage” is broader than “match”—avoid rigid match requirements
 - Use Measure Q dollars to support planning and coordination processes (e.g., stakeholder forums, technical advisory panels)
 - Given the scale and significant cost of water supply infrastructure, Measure Q funding may be better suited as match for smaller-scale nature-based solutions such as managed aquifer recharge projects.
- **Ensure strategic and equitable deployment of Measure Q funds.**
 - Consider creating a stakeholder advisory or technical vetting process to guide project selection, perhaps similar to the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program
 - Prioritize projects for funding that are included in peer-reviewed and vetted plans (e.g., IWRP, GSPs, HCPs, TMDLs)
 - For transparency and accountability, have funding recipients track and report outcomes annually, using both qualitative and quantitative indicators
 - Support watershed-scale governance: fund coordination, shared planning, and priority-setting efforts

Summary

Stakeholders stressed the need for integrated watershed management, multi-benefit projects, and collaborative planning & implementation. Many existing plans and on-going processes identify high-priority locations for multi-benefit water resource management projects, and on-going coordination and collaboration is necessary to pool resources and technical expertise to successfully implement watershed-scale projects. Priority areas included the San Lorenzo and Pajaro River watersheds, and project types range from small-scale nature-based flood protection and recharge projects to large-scale watershed health and fire resilience projects. Stakeholders emphasized that investments should prioritize disadvantaged communities, especially those in groundwater-reliant areas. Projects that reduce nitrate contamination and protect drinking water quality are critical. Because these locations are not always captured in disadvantaged communities mapping tools, it will be important to develop a local definition of disadvantaged communities and/or to supplement state DAC mapping tools with local expertise.

Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health

Measure Q calls out the significant wildfire risks faced by Santa Cruz County, particularly after the devastating 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire. Measure Q funding is intended to reduce wildfire risk by promoting projects that enhance forest health, create defensible spaces, and improve community preparedness. Specific project types include developing shaded fuel breaks and defensible spaces, implementing forest management practices to lower dangerous fuel loads, and providing stewardship support for private lands to improve fire resiliency.

I. Need for Measure Q Funding

Stakeholders offered that Community Wildfire Protection Planning efforts have done a good job in identifying priorities for wildfire risk reduction projects and programs. Measure Q can support their implementation with project funding, support for on-going interagency coordination and collaboration, and for landowner Firewise education and technical assistance. Other needs:

- **Sustained funding for vegetation management.** The current patchwork of grant funding is highly competitive and project-based, making it unsustainable for proactive fire prevention, landscape-scale treatments, and on-going maintenance within treatment locations beyond initial project implementation. Stakeholders emphasized the urgent need for ongoing, stable funding to support community protection from wildfire. Priority needs include:
 - Support for existing programs like chipping services and green waste disposal
 - Resources for home hardening and defensible space creation
 - Support for coordinated, multi-jurisdictional projects to scale-up fuel reduction efforts (e.g., shaded fuel breaks, prescribed burns)
 - Staffing and training for fire management planning (including nonprofits and the RCD)
 - Equipment and administrative support to implement long-term wildfire resilience strategies

- **Close gaps in planning, permitting, and project delivery.** Projects often stall between planning and implementation due to lack of intermediary resources, especially for collaborative efforts that require cross-jurisdictional coordination. Many projects require on-going maintenance which can be difficult to fund. There is a significant need for:
 - Interagency coordination and planning to develop shovel-ready projects through planning, permitting, and CEQA
 - Maintenance funds to ensure previously treated areas do not become liabilities again
 - Outreach and technical assistance programs for landowners to engage them in project planning and implementation

- **Workforce development and local capacity.** Participants identified a shortage of trained personnel and crews capable of performing ecological vegetation management, particularly with cultural sensitivity and ecological goals in mind. There is strong support for:
 - Developing culturally and geographically rooted workforce pipelines

- Supporting community-based fire stewardship models and Indigenous leadership in land stewardship

II. Impactful Projects and Activities

- **Support interagency and interjurisdictional collaboration and coordination.** Given the County’s many overlapping jurisdictions and land ownerships—each with differing land management goals—stakeholders highlighted the importance of Measure Q funding to support collaboration and coordination. Recommendations include:
 - Fund backbone support and local and regional coordination (e.g., for Fire Safe Councils, Prescribed Burn Associations)
 - Promote collaboration and resource sharing among agencies, nonprofits, tribal partners, and communities
 - Support regional hubs or “anchor organizations” that can lead landscape-scale projects
- **Focus planning and implementation activities to advance:**
 - **Infrastructure and community protection:**
 - Create shaded fuel breaks around clusters of homes
 - Improve evacuation routes
 - Protect critical infrastructure (911 dispatch, water treatment plants)
 - Fund home hardening for low-income homeowners
 - **Forest Health and Fire Management:**
 - Expand prescribed fire programs
 - Support biomass utilization solutions including in San Vicente Redwoods
 - Fund equipment loaner programs for residents
 - Explore feasibility of air curtain burner programs
 - **Education and Capacity Building:**
 - Support Firewise communities (currently 98 communities)
 - Expand Home Ignition Zone assessments (140+ homes participating)
 - Fund storytelling/documentation of successful projects

- **Integrate ecological and community needs into multi-benefit projects.** Examples include:
 - Fuel breaks that double as trails, wildlife corridors, or restored native grasslands
 - Prescribed burns that support oak woodland restoration and carbon storage
 - Cultural burns that integrate traditional ecological knowledge into land management
 - Projects in Wildland Urban Interface areas that reduce risk and improve access or emergency response

III. Priority Locations

Stakeholders outlined several locations where Measure Q can make the greatest impact to reduce wildfire risk to communities in the wildland-urban interface and/or to implement multi-benefit projects that improve forest health and landscape-scale ecological resilience. These locations may provide good opportunities for community engagement, to build on active fuel reduction and planning efforts, promote partnerships with tribes to utilize cultural burns, and to achieve other co-benefits.

- Empire Grade corridor
- Wilder Ranch to Henry Cowell State Park corridor
- Upper Nisene Marks watershed
- Las Cumbres community
- Zayante/Lompico area
- Highway 9 corridor
- Urban-wildland interface areas around Santa Cruz
- Corralitos, Day Valley, and Summit Areas
- North Coast and San Vicente Redwoods
- South County / Pajaro Valley (recognizes low historic investment in forest stewardship)

IV. Other Considerations

- **Permitting reform and “Green Tape” solutions.** Measure Q could fund demonstration projects that streamline permitting processes. These can serve as templates for replication countywide and reduce future bottlenecks.
- **Performance metrics and evaluation.** Stakeholders suggest developing project evaluation criteria and shared outcome metrics that go beyond acreage treated and include equity measures, biodiversity outcomes, workforce development indicators, and other community engagement benchmarks.
- **Leverage state and federal funding.** Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q’s flexible, local dollars can be catalytic when used to provide match for state/federal grants (e.g., CalFire, FEMA BRIC), to fund staff or consultants to apply for larger-scale funding, or prepare long-term stewardship agreements and cost-sharing models.
- **Target disadvantaged and underserved communities.** Several stakeholders pointed out that South County communities, especially those near Corralitos and Pajaro Valley, are often at high risk but overlooked in funding. They offered several suggestions for addressing disadvantaged communities when planning for wildfire risk reduction and forest health projects:
 - Directing resources to low-income rural communities and farmworker housing areas at risk
 - Engaging with local CBOs who know the needs of their constituents and who can promote engagement in community wildfire protection planning
 - Ensuring that community education, capacity building, and recovery support are accessible

V. Summary

Wildfire stakeholders view Measure Q as a transformative opportunity to address persistent gaps in planning, funding, and coordination. They emphasized the need for scalable, community-centered strategies that protect communities while enhancing forest health and biodiversity. Key recommendations included supporting prescribed fire, shaded fuel breaks, and defensible space; exploring permit streamlining and cutting the green tape

pilot projects; funding long-term stewardship; and coordinating project priorities with local fire chiefs. Participants discussed the rising cost of insurance, the importance of home hardening, and the increasing public acceptance of prescribed fire as an essential management tool. Stakeholders recommended leveraging existing partnerships, such as with organized communities like Las Cumbres, using the Regional Priority Plan to guide investments, and exploring air quality exemptions when appropriate. Education and outreach were also highlighted as critical for building public understanding of fire resilience and engaging private landowners in planning and implementation projects.

Parks, Recreation and Public Access & Equity

Measure Q places a strong focus on parks, recreation, and providing equitable access to open spaces and beaches. Specific project examples within this category include establishment of new parks and open space areas, enhancing public access to parks and beaches; and enhancing visitor experiences by developing, restoring, and maintaining safe and clean parks and public recreation facilities. The Measure also promotes increased mobility and public transportation services to facilitate safe access to parks, and providing after-school and recreation programs, senior citizen programs, and environmental education programs.

I. Need for Measure Q Funding

Stakeholders emphasized the critical role of Measure Q in addressing longstanding gaps in parks, recreation, access to nature, and environmental equity. Much of the conversation around need focused on Watsonville and other Pajaro Valley communities—which have historically benefited far less than wealthier communities in North County.

- **Core needs in Watsonville and South County.** Stakeholders emphasized the need for Measure Q funding to deliver early, visible wins to build public trust, especially in communities that have historically not seen benefits from similar funding initiatives. The Measure provides an outstanding opportunity to advance early-stage planning, design, and permitting to move community-prioritized projects closer to implementation and shovel-ready status.

- **Park equity:** There is a persistent lack of equitable access to parks, trails, and beaches. Park acreage in Watsonville is only 25% of standard requirements.
- **School site access:** School sites can be enhanced to provide recreational facilities and programming to serve local communities. This may be a cost-effective way to promote access especially where build-out and existing development may preclude establishment of new parks.
- **Deferred maintenance:** Watsonville alone has \$60M in deferred maintenance for existing parks and green infrastructure.
- **Urban greening & beautification:** Watsonville has 9% tree canopy cover vs 40% in Santa Cruz and will benefit from tree planting and related green infrastructure improvements for shade, urban biodiversity, and to beautify transportation corridors and public spaces.
- **Transportation infrastructure and access:** There are few pedestrian, bicycle, and ADA pathways connecting to parks and beaches (e.g. along Freedom Boulevard and Green Valley Road). Watsonville has only one beach access point (West Beach Road) that needs significant pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements.

II. Impactful Projects and Activities

Stakeholders identified a wide range of project types and activities to promote parks and greenspaces across the County. They noted that development of park and open space projects are inherently multi-benefit in nature by delivering ecological, social, and climate-related outcomes, and they promote community involvement and partnerships.

Recommended high-impact activities:

- **Urban greening, forestry, and climate-resilient infrastructure projects.** Especially on school grounds and in underserved neighborhoods, addressing heat, air quality, stormwater, and mental health. Integrate designs that reduce long-term maintenance

(e.g., native landscaping, sustainable trail designs) and improve ecological resilience. Watsonville's Urban Greening Plan is a good resource.

- **Beach and trail access improvements.** West Beach corridor upgrades, levee pathway improvements, and implementation of the Slough Trail Master Plan.
- **Parks, gardens, and open space investments.** Including small-scale community parks, school playgrounds, and community gardens as equitable local access points. Expanding community gardens can engage the community in hands-on stewardship, address local food security issues, and establish connections to the broader agricultural economy and heritage.
- **Community stewardship & programming.** Support for volunteer stewardship, environmental education, youth engagement, cultural programming that fosters park use and pride, and programs & activities that connect people to nature who may not be able to readily access trails
- **School partnerships.** Funding joint-use agreements with school districts to open and maintain campuses as public green spaces.

Priority Locations

- **South County/Watsonville.** Stakeholders emphasized this area as underinvested and requiring priority action. Suggestions include:
 - Need for new county park in District 4
 - West Beach Road transit, ped/bike, and ADA improvements
 - Pinto Lake (both City and County sides) where enhancements can also benefit water quality and biodiversity
 - School sites throughout Pajaro Valley Unified School District
 - Slough trails system completion
 - Greenbelt development around Watsonville

- **Unincorporated Communities.** (e.g., Freedom, Live Oak, Corralitos). Often misclassified or misunderstood jurisdictionally but with clear needs for park access and connectivity.

IV. Other Considerations

- **Build support and capacity for local non-profits and CBOs.** These organizations can support project planning and development, community engagement, and can help develop long-term stewardship and maintenance support for parks and open spaces.
- **Use local data to inform investments in equitable projects.** Expand on tools like CalEnviroScreen using local knowledge and reports like the Pajaro Valley Park Equity Assessment—which developed Equity Scoring Criteria—to guide funding.
- **Do not limit Measure Q funding solely to multi-benefit projects.** Due to historic underinvestment in parks and open space, this “single purpose” provides widespread community, health, and social benefits. Consider including criteria in the Measure Q Grant Program to encourage projects that provide access to nature. Consider not requiring local match as criteria for securing Measure Q funding—disadvantaged communities may not have the resources to provide that.
- **Use the Vision Plan to unlock grant funding.** Ensure the plan helps agencies qualify for future funding by aligning projects with adopted plans and metrics. Use funds to for planning and outreach to develop “shovel-ready” projects that can then attract state/federal grants. Invest in innovative projects and designs that reduce long-term maintenance costs.

V. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized the urgent need for equitable investment in South County—particularly in Watsonville—to address historic inequities, significant park access disparities, and limited urban tree canopy. They highlighted the importance of funding

shovel-ready projects that achieve early wins and build community trust in supporting Measure Q and future funding initiatives. Priority projects include enhancing beach access, greening school sites, completing pedestrian and bike connections, and expanding community gardens and stewardship programs. Stakeholders recommended developing funding criteria for investments in disadvantaged communities that go beyond CalEnviroScreen to reflect local realities and needs. In South County, the Pajaro Valley Park Assessment report can help guide equitable funding decisions. Stakeholders distinguished between match and leverage: projects that result in external funding or leverage are should be priorities for Measure Q investment, but the ability to match Measure Q with existing funding should not be a prerequisite for every project.

Wildlife and Habitat Protection

Measure Q aims to support protection of the County's diverse ecosystems through land acquisition, strategic habitat restoration, and stewardship. Examples of eligible activities include restoring critical habitats and wildlife corridors, protecting wetlands, aiding in the recovery of anadromous fish species, and creating wildlife-friendly transportation infrastructure.

I. Need for Measure Q Funding

Stakeholders identified several areas where Measure Q funding is needed to protect the County's rarest and most biodiverse ecosystems from loss due to development or habitat fragmentation; or to promote habitat restoration and long-term stewardship to preserve biodiversity, ecosystem health, and community resilience. Priority needs include:

- **Protection of unique habitats and rare & endemic species:** Santa Cruz County encompasses unique habitats like Santa Cruz Cypress and the Santa Cruz Sandhills which host endemic species found nowhere else—such as the Santa Cruz kangaroo rat, and unique plant communities like sand parkland and sand chaparral. Other communities like coastal terrace prairies have been extensively developed, with remaining patches serving as vital refugia for now endangered species like the Santa Cruz tarplant. These and other rare and sensitive habitats and species require focused conservation action and on-going stewardship. Local habitat conservation

plans and the Resource Conservation Investment Strategy are good resources to identify priority species recovery activities.

- **Habitat connectivity:** Landscape fragmentation poses a serious challenge to species movement and climate adaptation. Enhancing habitat connectivity, both within the county and connecting to neighboring counties, is critical to sustain healthy populations of puma, kangaroo rat, and other species. Safe wildlife crossings, habitat restoration within wildlife movement corridors, and related green infrastructure projects that bridge isolated habitat patches are vital for long-term biodiversity conservation.
- **Fire-adapted vegetation management:** Many fire-adapted ecosystems (e.g., sandhills, oak woodlands, maritime chaparral) are degrading due to fire suppression and invasive species. Stakeholders stressed the importance of ecologically sensitive fire resilience projects that serve dual purposes: protecting communities from wildfire while restoring natural disturbance regimes that support biodiversity.
- **Wetland and riparian restoration:** The county's wetlands, coastal marshes, and river corridors were repeatedly identified as needing investment. These habitats are crucial for anadromous fish species, amphibians, resident and migrating birds, and provide co-benefits like flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, and water quality.
- **Urban biodiversity and forestry:** Stakeholders urged investment in urban canopy restoration to promote urban biodiversity, address heat vulnerability and environmental inequities. Maintaining mature trees, addressing invasive ivy, and planning for species-appropriate planting are all priorities. In cities like Watsonville, urban trees and green spaces are under-maintained or lacking entirely.
- **Long-term maintenance and stewardship:** Recognizing that grant funding typically covers project implementation and that habitat restoration gains can easily be lost after a project's initial phase, stakeholders advocated for Measure Q to fund not only capital projects, but also the long-term stewardship, maintenance, and monitoring needed to ensure long-term success. Priority examples include ongoing

maintenance for fuel breaks, post-restoration site maintenance to prevent weed reinvasion, and support for community programs like chipping services to assist landowners with private lands stewardship.

II. Impactful Projects and Activities

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of multiple-benefit projects that align ecological restoration with social equity and climate resilience. They shared several examples:

- **Wetland and coastal restoration:** Projects in the Watsonville / Struve Slough area and throughout the lower Pajaro River (especially “Reach 1”) that deliver flood protection, habitat restoration, and water quality improvements. Restoration of marginal agricultural land to wetland uses aligns with broader state initiatives such as the Department of Conservation’s Land Repurposing Program and related work that is underway by the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County.
- **Integrated fire resilience and habitat restoration projects:** Promote ecologically-sensitive vegetation management projects that integrate invasive species removal, prescribed burns, and native vegetation enhancement—particularly around fire-adapted communities like the sandhills, oak woodlands, and maritime chaparral—to reduce wildfire risk while improving habitat quality.
- **Urban greening and health equity:** Expanding and caring for the urban tree canopy in Watsonville and other South County communities offers benefits for human health (cooling, air quality), neighborhood aesthetics and quality of life, biodiversity, and public engagement.

III. Priority Locations for Investment

Stakeholders shared that the Santa Cruz Mountains encompass incredibly biodiverse habitats such as redwoods, oak woodlands, and grasslands and that the mountains and their coastal watersheds broadly represent a high-priority landscape for habitat conservation, climate resilience and fire mitigation. Restoration here can protect

headwaters, reduce erosion, and buffer communities from extreme wildfire events. Stakeholders highlighted specific geographic areas where Measure Q funding can achieve the most meaningful and measurable impact in the next five years:

- **Lower Pajaro River.** Reach 1—from Highway 1 to the river mouth—is a top priority. This segment lacks federal levy protection and is vulnerable to sea level rise and storm flooding. Restoring the floodplain here could provide vital habitat for fish and wildlife, reduce flood risk, and offer new recreational and park space for underserved South County communities.
- **Watsonville Slough System.** Restoration and stewardship here support multiple benefits: protection of biodiverse wetlands, fish passage, nutrient reduction and water quality protection, and coastal resilience. Taking marginal farmland out of production reduces grower’s risks and supports the long-term economic viability of local agriculture. Enhanced trail access could also connect residents more directly to natural areas and the coast.
- **Pinto Lake.** Currently plagued by toxic algal blooms, habitat restoration and enhanced stewardship benefits both people and wildlife. Cleaning up this lake could revitalize habitat for birds and fish—and reduce downstream impacts from cyanobacteria that can severely harm sea otters and other marine life in Monterey Bay—while providing safer recreation for the Watsonville community.
- **Santa Cruz Sandhills.** These geologically unique landscapes provide habitat for rare and sensitive endemic species found nowhere else. These habitats are especially vulnerable to erosion and impacts from heavy recreation. Strategic investments in fire-sensitive vegetation management, weed management, and sustainable trail design are needed to preserve this one-of-a-kind ecosystem.
- **Coho salmon streams.** While San Vicente, Laguna, and Bean Creeks were called out as specific examples, stakeholders suggested that all streams that provide habitat for coho and steelhead are priorities for habitat restoration and recovery efforts. In addition to aquatic habitat and fish passage benefits, restoration in these and other watersheds can improve habitat for birds and amphibians like red-legged frog, improve water quality, and support sustainable water flows and drinking water supplies.

- **Regional habitat corridors.** Protection and restoration of landscape-scale linkages and habitat corridors is necessary to connect the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Gabilan and Diablo Ranges for long-term ecological resilience, to enable species and habitat migration under climate change, and to ensure a healthy and stable puma population.
- **Urban neighborhoods in Watsonville.** Projects that restore tree canopy, clean up and restore degraded habitats (like those along Struve Slough), and engage community members directly in stewardship offer immediate and long-term benefits for community health and quality of life.

IV. Other Considerations

- **Leveraging outside funding.** Measure Q's flexibility makes it a vital tool for unlocking larger state and federal funding sources by making projects shovel-ready through pre-construction planning, design, permitting and environmental clearance. This can position projects competitively for major grants (e.g., Prop 4, NOAA). Examples:
 - North Coast coho salmon recovery projects could leverage funding from City of Santa Cruz mitigation funds (e.g., Non-Flow Conservation Fund) and state bond measures including Prop 4
 - Pajaro River – Salsipuedes Creek Confluence Restoration Project could serve as a flagship example of climate adaptation, public access, and habitat restoration in one project with multiple funding opportunities
 - Projects that are prioritized through the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program, Regional Prioritization Plans, Integrated Watershed Restoration Program, Integrated Water Resources Management plans, Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program, and other stakeholder-engaged processes
- **Equity and justice considerations.** Equity emerged as a recurring theme. Stakeholders recommended that Measure Q prioritize investments in:
 - **Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley**, where disadvantaged communities face the brunt of flood risks, limited green access, and degraded ecosystems.

- **Projects co-developed with Indigenous tribes**, especially in culturally significant areas like the Pajaro River Watershed and San Vicente Redwoods, ensuring integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and historical stewardship.

V. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized conservation of habitats and rare & endemic species unique to Santa Cruz County, while advancing multi-benefit projects that serve both ecological and community needs. Priority examples include wetland restoration along the lower Pajaro River and in the Watsonville Sloughs area that combine flood management with habitat restoration and public access; coho salmon restoration and recovery; and vegetation management projects that enhance both fire safety and biodiversity. The group identified the need for pre-planning activities to make projects shovel-ready to attract significant external grant funding, as well as stewardship and maintenance funding that other grant programs typically don't cover. Opportunities to advance projects that serve disadvantaged communities abound throughout the lower Pajaro watershed, at Pinto Lake, and in the Watsonville / Struve Sloughs. In these locations, habitat restoration and integrated floodplain restoration projects can reduce risk, reduce nutrient loads, and help establish safe trails and other access points to nature.

Agricultural and Working Lands

Measure Q recognizes the ecological and economic importance of the county's working lands and describes a wide range of eligible projects and activities on farms, rangelands, timberlands and other rural & forested properties. It highlights the need for proactive outreach & technical assistance to landowners to promote natural resources planning, stewardship, and restoration to improve soil health and water quality, provide drought and flood resilience, reduce wildfire risk, and sequester carbon.

I. Need for Measure Q Funding

Stakeholders emphasized that agricultural lands in Santa Cruz County are vital not only for food production, but also for climate resilience, habitat connectivity, and community well-being. Stakeholders emphasized the need to support local marketing and branding and related ag-support services like cooling, packing and storage that are necessary elements

of the ag economy. While stakeholders advocated for keeping all viable working lands in production, they recognized that sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, and increasingly variable weather are urgent threats. Converting vulnerable land in the Pajaro Valley to floodplains or habitat and strengthening remaining operations is a major need. Other Measure Q funding needs include:

- **Land Access for Small and Beginning Farmers:** High land costs and limited availability restrict access for small-scale, often BIPOC and immigrant farmers. Stakeholders pointed to the need for support with lease agreements, infrastructure improvements, and land acquisition.
- **Ongoing Stewardship and Technical Assistance:** Grant-funded projects often lack long-term maintenance support. Measure Q should fund stewardship (e.g., erosion control, invasive species management) to ensure restoration efforts endure. Disadvantaged and small-scale farmers in particular face barriers in accessing land and accessing grant-funded programs due to permitting complexity, cost, and lack of technical support.
- **Workforce and Local Food System Infrastructure:** Local meat processing and CSA aggregation were highlighted as underdeveloped but high-potential sectors. Stakeholders noted the need to build capacity in local supply chains and storage/distribution systems.
- **Filling gaps in funding to sustain programs for climate-smart ag stewardship.** Measure Q can provide essential funding to match state programs that are currently oversubscribed and to provide local capacity and program continuity. Stewardship in general is underfunded and reliant on short-term grants. Measure Q could ensure the long-term impact of investments. Priority examples:
 - **Water Conservation:** Record participation in local water-saving programs underscores both need and effectiveness. However, funding is at risk with the end of CDFA's Water Efficiency Technical Assistance Program. Stakeholders strongly support stable, long-term Measure Q investment to maintain capacity.
 - **Cover Cropping:** Benefits include nitrogen management, water quality protection, and improved soil health. Yet funding is sporadic, and consistent Measure Q support for annual cost-share and technical assistance is needed.

II. Impactful Projects and Activities

Measure Q is seen as a critical opportunity to fund multi-benefit and climate-smart agricultural projects. Recommended priorities include:

- **Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing:** Repurposing marginal farmland for habitat reduces demand for oversubscribed access to recycled water and supports sustainable food production on more viable ag land inland. Examples:
 - The PVWMA College Lake Project restores lakebed lands seasonally to support steelhead while contributing to water supply goals.
 - The Land Trust's Beach Ranch Project restores marginal, flood-prone farmland to marshes for quality habitat and sea-level rise adaptation.
- **Groundwater Recharge Projects:** Recharge net metering programs, such as those led by the PVWMA and RCD, create ecological and agricultural benefits while improving regional water sustainability. Managed Aquifer Recharge efforts led by the RCD to develop a network of small recharge basins in the Pajaro Valley could offset 10–20% of the region's overdraft. Measure Q funds could support additional basins and match state investment (e.g., DWR, DOC).
- **Community Supported Agriculture and Education-Based Farms:** Esperanza Community Farms was cited as a model for food justice, youth engagement, and farmworker empowerment through small-scale production and aggregation. Small-scale operations could benefit from cooler infrastructure, land security, and educational programming support.
- **Biomass Utilization and Forest Management:** There is a surplus of accumulated fuels and post-wildfire biomass across the County's forests and timberlands. Some stakeholders recommended exploring clean, small-scale biomass energy solutions that could reduce wildfire risk, generate local energy, and complement sustainable forestry practices.

- **Soil Health Initiatives.** Support for compost application, reduced/no-till practices, and crop residue management improves infiltration, soil carbon, and water retention. These are cost-effective, shovel-ready practices that offer strong co-benefits for climate resilience.
- **Flood Mitigation Infrastructure.** On-farm projects like tile drains, swales, and catchment basins reduce flooding, improve water quality, and can often leverage NRCS technical assistance. Measure Q can provide essential match funding.
- **Composting Infrastructure.** With state mandates for municipal composting and limited local capacity, there is a need to establish a local composting facility. This would reduce hauling costs to Monterey County, create local jobs, and enable use of compost on local ag lands, enhancing carbon storage and soil health.

Other project ideas included establishment of a local cooperative for beef cattle marketing and processing to support rangeland conservation; and a dedicated Spanish language engagement program with local farmers; and planning to expand Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs.

III. Priority Locations for Investment

South County is a priority for broad investment in agricultural viability, requiring landowner & grower outreach and technical assistance programs for small farms and disadvantaged growers. Stakeholders identified several high-priority areas for immediate Measure Q investment:

- **Pajaro River and Watsonville Sloughs:** High-need areas due to sea level rise, groundwater overdraft, and flood risk. Multi-benefit projects here can support habitat, groundwater recharge, farmland preservation, and climate adaptation. PVWMA and Land Trust-led projects that retire and restore marginal farmland can help growers reduce risks by directing sustainable operations away from flood-prone properties onto more viable ground inland.

- **West Beach Street & Coastal Farmlands:** Opportunity to decommission vulnerable farmland and reallocate resources to more resilient ag zones inland, reduce seawater intrusion, expand recycled water availability, and create estuarine habitat near Watsonville.
- **Interlaken and Corralitos Creek Watershed:** Areas prone to severe flooding; investments here can reduce flood risk, restore habitat, and protect retirement and residential communities.
- **San Vicente Redwoods & North Coast Working Forests:** Recognized for fire post-fire recovery needs, critical biomass reduction to reduce long-term fire risk hazard, and potential to pilot durable stewardship models across working timberlands.

IV. Other Considerations

- **Equity-focused investment.** Stakeholders recommended that Measure Q funding should be directed to support historically disadvantaged farmers, with special emphasis on one-on-one field support to help growers access funds, equipment, and technical assistance. Other suggestions include:
 - Funding trusted **community-based organizations** like the RCD, FarmLink, Kitchen Table Advisors, and CAFF that can provide business planning, land access, and credit support services to disadvantaged farmers.
 - Supporting projects in **flood-prone areas like Pajaro and Interlaken**, where benefits of nature-based solutions would be most impactful.
 - Offering funding for **youth education and farm-to-school programs** to promote intergenerational climate and food system resilience.
- **Leveraging & Capacity Building.** Measure Q is ideally positioned to serve as local match for grant programs like the Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program, Healthy Soils Initiative, and SWEEP. Stakeholders suggested a balanced approach: initiating

planning, design, permitting, and CEQA clearance to make new projects shovel-ready to unlock millions in funding for future ag-related projects, while making immediate impacts and demonstrating early wins by investing Measure Q funding in high-profile projects that are already underway.

V. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized the need to protect agricultural viability through hands-on outreach and technical support to landowners and growers—placing a special emphasis on programs that can aid small South County farms and historically disadvantaged farmers. Measure Q funding can serve as critical match to attract significant external funding for farmland conservation and multi-benefit projects that address flooding, habitat restoration, and groundwater recharge while promoting ag viability. The lower Pajaro River Watershed—at the river mouth, in and around the Watsonville Sloughs, along West Beach Street, and College Lake—were all suggested as priority locations for multi-benefit projects. On the North Coast and throughout the forested Santa Cruz Mountains, timber operations can be aligned with forest health and fire-risk reduction projects. Addressing heavy fuel loads and post-fire biomass accumulation is a high-priority activity that will require extensive coordination and innovation.

SECTION D: ROUND 2 STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS SUMMARY

Santa Cruz County Measure Q Vision Plan

Stakeholder Meetings Summary: Round Two

July 31, 2025

Introduction

From July 22-25, Placeworks and Matt Freeman Consulting assisted Santa Cruz County staff in facilitating a second round of interviews with subject matter experts to inform the Measure Q Vision Plan. These sessions focused on Coastal Protection and Adaptation; Water Resources Management; Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health; Parks, Recreation and Public Access & Equity; Wildlife and Habitat Protection; and Agricultural and Working Lands Protection. The purpose of the second round of stakeholder meetings was to refine and add to key takeaways from the first round; receive feedback on an initial list of thematic project types, examples, and priority locations; and to solicit ideas about how Measure Q implementation can be most successful in its first five years—and how to measure that success. The summary of stakeholder feedback and suggestions from the second round of stakeholder meetings is organized by theme, followed by an integrated synthesis from both rounds of engagement with stakeholder recommendations and considerations for successful Measure Q Vision Plan implementation.

Stakeholder Meeting Summaries, Round Two

Coastal Protection and Adaptation

I. Refinements and Additions to Round One Stakeholder Meeting Takeaways

- **Integration of Existing Local Plans:** Stakeholders recommend referencing additional adopted or in-progress plans in the Vision Plan: Local Coastal Program updates, coastal lagoon restoration planning projects, North Coast Facilities Management Plan, and Regional Climate Project Working Group funding roadmap. Including these plans in the Vision Plan could help secure external funding and guide project prioritization.
- **Critical Infrastructure Funding Gaps:** The potential loss of half a billion dollars in federal infrastructure funding creates an urgent need for alternative funding sources

for critical coastal infrastructure. Measure Q may need to help fill unexpected funding gaps for basic community resilience and deferred capital maintenance needs like infrastructure for stormwater management, erosion control, and water quality.

- **North Coast Safety and Access:** Stakeholders suggested improving facilities at high-use but under-served North Coast beaches (Laguna Creek, Panther Beach, others) and to address highway crossing safety hazards, illegal dumping, and lack of sanitation.
- **Local Compost Infrastructure:** New local facilities and services may be a long-term climate resilience opportunity to reduce diesel fuel consumption associated with compost hauling to Monterey County and to create circular economic benefits for local agriculture.
- **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):** New suggestion to consider projects supporting kelp forest protection, living shoreline functions, and potential planning for new MPAs (e.g., proposed Pleasure Point designation).

II. Impactful Project Types, Activities, and Locations

Overall, stakeholders felt Attachment B was a useful starting point but required revisions to better reflect nature-based approaches and to better align with existing local plans.

Stakeholders provided the following feedback:

- **Avoid Over-Emphasis on Coastal Armoring:** The draft list included “coastal armoring” as an example under coastal infrastructure resilience, which conflicted with previous discussions favoring nature-based solutions, green infrastructure, and living shorelines. They asked for revisions to clarify that armoring should only be considered when absolutely necessary and where there are clear public co-benefits.
- **Legally Mandated Operations:** The draft list referenced projects like the Marina sewage pump-out station, which participants felt were already required by law and should not be supported by Measure Q. Stakeholders emphasized prioritizing projects that would not otherwise happen without Measure Q funding.
- **Pollution Prevention Measures:** Stakeholders supported project type examples like storm drain filters and illegal dumping prevention, noting these were impactful, community-driven solutions that reduce coastal pollution.
- **Access and Safety Infrastructure:** Stakeholders reiterated the need for trash receptacles, bathrooms, and maintenance at high-use North Coast beaches to reduce

litter and improve visitor safety in alignment with the North Coast Facilities Management Plan.

- **Alignment with Existing Plans:** Stakeholders recommended cross-referencing numerous coastal resilience and climate action plans developed over the last decade to ensure the Vision Plan reflects well-established community priorities and vetted project types.
- **Priority Locations:** Stakeholders suggested many priority locations for coastal resilience projects:
 - **South County Focus Areas**
 - Pajaro River mouth and watershed area with multiple planned projects
 - Beach Ranch Road to Pajaro Dunes trail connectivity
 - West Beach Road corridor requiring multi-agency coordination
 - Beach Flats area for equity and infrastructure improvements
 - **North Coast**
 - Panther Beach receiving new parking and bathroom facilities
 - Laguna Creek area requiring safety improvements due to dangerous highway crossing
 - Pebble Beach and Bean Hollow Complex areas along North Coast Rail Trail alignment
 - Multiple pocket beaches needing basic facilities and improved access
 - **Mid County**
 - Moran, Corcoran, and Schwann lagoons sea level rise vulnerability
 - UC Santa Cruz coastal science campus infrastructure needs
 - Younger Lagoon research and public access balance
 - **Homeless Garden Project**
 - Highlighted as an example of regenerative agriculture on the coast with significant social benefits (job training for unhoused residents). Suggested as a candidate project for multi-benefit funding consideration.

III. Maximizing Measure Q Impact and Measuring Benefits

Stakeholders envisioned success as a combination of visible early wins, long-term resilience gains, and strong regional collaboration.

- **Catalyzing Larger Funding:** Measure Q acts as seed money for planning and partnerships that attract state and federal grants for large-scale coastal resilience projects.
- **Equitable Benefits:** Investments reach underserved South County and urban communities, improving coastal access and addressing environmental justice concerns.
- **Ecological Outcomes:**
 - Restored dune, wetland, and kelp habitats.
 - Improved water quality and reduced marine debris.
 - Expanded marine protected areas and healthier wildlife populations.
- **Infrastructure and Safety:** Reduced hazards at informal beach access sites, improved sanitation and parking, and safer crossings along Highway 1.
- **Community Engagement and Workforce:** Visible, small-scale stewardship and cleanup projects that build public trust and provide jobs and training for residents.
- **Metrics Suggested:**
 - Acres of coastal habitat restored or protected.
 - Number of people served by access and safety improvements.
 - Pollution reduction measures installed (e.g., storm drain filters, trash facilities).
 - Number of planning collaborations initiated and leveraged funds secured.
 - Number of volunteers and trainees engaged in coastal projects.

IV. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q investments should include balanced funding for longer-range coastal resilience and habitat restoration planning projects with visible, near-term investments in public access, safety, and stewardship. Success depends on leveraging external funds for large-scale projects, closing critical infrastructure gaps, improving equity in South County and North Coast beach access, and engaging local communities and workforce programs in coastal protection efforts. Nature-based

solutions, pollution prevention, and marine habitat protection (including potential new MPAs) emerged as important considerations, with clear metrics and transparent reporting needed to demonstrate Measure Q's impact over time.

Water Resources Management

I. Refinements and Additions to Round One Stakeholder Meeting Takeaways

- **Stormwater and Flood Management Needs Underrepresented:** Stakeholders highlighted that Round One notes understated the need to replace or upgrade aging stormwater infrastructure to prevent failures, improve water quality, and reduce flood risks. There are many neighborhood-scale stormwater projects needed in South County that fall outside of Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency's jurisdiction where additional funding is needed.
- **Private lands stewardship:** Since watershed planning and stewardship activities are already eligible per Measure Q language, clarify language in Round One notes and the Vision Plan to reflect that private lands stewardship "should be prioritized for funding" rather than "eligible for funding."
- **Definition of Water Supply Watersheds:** Clarification requested that priority watersheds include all lands contributing to surface water supplies, not just those owned by water agencies. This would also better reflect septic system impacts on water quality throughout the San Lorenzo River Watershed.
- **Existing Plan References:** Stakeholders cautioned against limiting eligibility to projects already listed in adopted plans, since emerging challenges (climate extremes, infrastructure failures) may require rapid responses for activities outside of existing plans.
- **Gray vs. Green Infrastructure Nuance:** Round One highlighted several stakeholders' preferences for "green over gray" infrastructure, but this was seen as too rigid. Stakeholders emphasized that gray solutions may be necessary to unlock or complement nature-based projects (e.g., fixing pipes to enable groundwater recharge). Examples of important grey infrastructure fixes include the Live Oak stormwater system, which is too degraded to handle additional flows, and elevating roadways in the Watsonville Slough area, which can help reconnect waterways to their natural floodplain areas.

- **Add the Mid- County Groundwater Basin as a geographic priority.** This basin is a major water supply and groundwater management challenge. The Pure Water Soquel project alone won't solve problems like on-going seawater intrusion, and Measure Q funding may be needed to support complementary efforts.
- **Emphasize the importance of the Watsonville Sloughs.** Round One notes downplayed the importance of investing in Watsonville Sloughs, which provide unique opportunities to deliver projects with multiple benefits for habitat, flood risk reduction, disadvantaged community support, and water supply.

II. Impactful Project Types, Activities, and Locations

Stakeholders suggested that the Vision Plan will benefit from very clear definitions and terminology. The initial list of projects conflated *types* of projects with *activities* that are universal across all project types: outreach, education, early-stage coordination, project planning, cost-share and leveraging funds, monitoring, and ongoing maintenance. Listing activities under some project type categories but not others may create the impression that education is only needed for parks, for example, but not other themes.

- **Build flexibility into the Vision Plan to support eligible Projects:** Stakeholders cautioned against developing on overly prescriptive list of priority project types or restricting funding only to projects that are described in adopted plans. They suggested clarifying that Vision Plan project lists are non-exhaustive and should accommodate other impactful water-related projects not mentioned explicitly. They stressed that emerging needs and urgent projects (e.g., rapid responses to infrastructure failures or new stormwater challenges) should not be excluded simply because they weren't previously documented.
- **Additional recommended Project Types to include in the Vision Plan:**
 - **Stormwater Infrastructure Upgrades:** Replacement or repair of failing culverts, storm drains, and flood control channels to prevent water quality degradation and protect fish passage.
 - **Groundwater Recharge Projects:** Urban and agricultural infiltration basins, managed aquifer recharge projects.
 - **Water Recycling and Non-Potable Offset Systems:** Reducing potable water demand through treated wastewater reuse.

- **Neighborhood-Scale Stormwater Retrofits:** Green streets, localized retention basins, and water quality treatment features for urban runoff.
 - **Flood Hazard Mitigation:** Projects that combine levee improvements, elevated roadways, or floodplain restoration and reconnection efforts.
 - **Private Land Stewardship for Public Benefit:** Incentives for landowners to implement water conservation, erosion control, and riparian restoration practices.
 - **Monitoring and Reporting Elements:** Should be included in all Measure Q-funded projects to document outcomes and public benefits such as water quality, supply, or flood protection.
 - **Water Recycling and Offset Projects:** Water recycling projects and non-potable offset systems were missing from the example list. They emphasized their importance for long-term water supply **resilience and suggested adding them explicitly in the Vision Plan.**
- **Priority Locations for Measure Q investment:** Stakeholders reiterated important areas where water resources projects and stewardship activities are needed:
 - **Mid-County Groundwater Basin:** Chronic overdraft and limited stormwater capacity hinder water supply projects.
 - **Watsonville Slough System:** Multi-benefit opportunities for flood risk reduction, water quality improvement, and disadvantaged community resilience.
 - **Live Oak and other urban areas:** Failing stormwater systems limiting water recharge and increasing pollution loads.
 - **San Lorenzo Watershed:** Septic system upgrades and wastewater management to protect drinking water and downstream habitat.

III. Maximizing Measure Q Impact and Measuring Benefits

Stakeholders defined Measure Q implementation success as delivering:

- **Tangible, Early Wins:** Quick-response funding for small-scale infrastructure fixes or preparedness programs that benefit large numbers of residents.

- **Leverage and Match Funding:** Measure Q investments unlocking major state/federal grants for regional water projects.
- **Compelling stories:** Measure Q benefits are clearly expressed to the public through stories, maps, and other communications, e.g. “Each dollar for this project was leveraged 30 to 1 through match funding” or signs “This project was made possible by Measure Q.” This applies not just to the grant program, but to investments made by the County, Cities, Resource Conservation District, and Land Trust.
- **Resilient, Multi-Benefit Outcomes:** Projects addressing water supply, flood safety, water quality, habitat, and disadvantaged community needs simultaneously.
- **Equitable Deployment:** Visible benefits in South County and other underserved areas, with transparent tracking of where funds are spent.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Investments designed to reduce future maintenance burdens and avoid repeated failures.
- **Potential Metrics:**
 - Miles of stormwater/flood infrastructure repaired or replaced.
 - Acre-feet of new groundwater recharge or potable water offset.
 - Number of culverts improved for fish passage.
 - Number of residents or disadvantaged households benefiting from reduced flood risk or improved water quality.
 - Dollars of external funding leveraged per Measure Q dollar.
 - Number of projects mapped and reported to the public.

IV. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q must address critical water infrastructure vulnerabilities while advancing multi-benefit projects that support water supply reliability, flood risk reduction, habitat, and equity goals. Early, visible wins such as replacing failing stormwater structure are essential for building public trust, while planning and seed funding should prepare larger projects for future implementation. Success will be measured by tangible on-the-ground outcomes, leveraged funding, equitable distribution of benefits, and clear public reporting on where Measure Q dollars are making an impact.

Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health

I. Refinements and Additions to Round One Stakeholder Meeting Takeaways

Stakeholders highlighted several issues that deserve special attention in the Vision Plan.

- **Priority needs:** Stakeholders reiterated the importance of maintaining and improving fire road networks and public evacuation routes for emergency access, noting this work has co-benefits for sediment reduction and water quality. At-risk communities and schools in Wildland-Urban Interface Areas are priorities for shaded fuel breaks and other fuels management reduction efforts; as are critical water supply, electric utility, telecommunication, and other public infrastructure.
- **Integrating operational and management needs with Measure Q.** Stakeholders highlighted the critical need for equipment, on-going management and maintenance, and community programs. Shaded fuel breaks for example typically need maintenance every 3-7 years, which can be less costly than failing to maintain a site and having to substantially re-treat it in the future. Because Measure Q is not intended to fund operations, future discussion may be needed to determine if and how maintenance needs, vehicles or equipment, or chipping and green waste programs can be integrated into the cost of developing and implementing specific Measure Q projects.
- **Need for sustained planning, permitting and collaborative project implementation:** Partnerships between agencies and organizations (e.g., CalFire, State Parks, UCSC, RCD, and land trusts) are essential for long-term wildfire resilience planning and implementation across ownerships. With so many routes prone to seasonal closures and washouts, developing and maintaining a robust network of regional truck trails and access routes is key. They emphasized that collaborative vegetation management planning results in better outcomes, e.g. both fire suppression and other habitat and watershed health benefits. Planning for biomass removal & utilization will also require collaboration across jurisdictions and land ownerships to yield the greatest benefit.

- **Capacity building for community-led efforts:** Building on earlier feedback, participants stressed that empowering neighborhoods and Firewise communities with micro- or small-scale grants and technical assistance remains a key gap to address. This grassroots involvement can exponentially increase the impact of vegetation management and defensible space programs.
- **Project monitoring:** Post-treatment monitoring is necessary to ensure project success and inform planning and priorities for future work. Like UCSC's approach, monitoring programs represent important workforce development opportunities. Monitoring costs and programs should be considered part of fuels management work funded by Measure Q.
- **Biomass reduction.** Stakeholders reiterated the importance of reducing accumulated biomass across land ownerships in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Funding from Measure Q could help with feasibility studies, planning, and implementation. Biomass utilization opportunities could support biochar creation for water quality applications, electricity generation, or regional composting. Ongoing biomass removal could potentially result in a local revenue source that could match Measure Q funding for vegetation and fuels management.

II. Impactful Project Types, Activities, and Locations

- **Include prescribed burning in examples:** While prescribed burning was mentioned in the description under "Fuel Management/Vegetation Treatment," stakeholders noted that it was missing from the example list. They suggested adding it explicitly, even if redundant, to ensure clarity and visibility as a critical project activity.
- **Highlight Capacity-Building and Training Programs:** Participants observed that workforce development and training (e.g., programs like "Brush Busters" or Day Worker Center training crews for fuel reduction work) were not clearly included in the project types. They recommended adding these or other examples to reflect real needs for local labor and expertise in wildfire resilience efforts.

- **Other recommended Project Types and Examples:**
 - **Truck trail maintenance and fire road upgrades:** Projects like those on the Aptos Creek truck trail and Chalks Mountain were cited as critical for rapid fire response and early-stage suppression.
 - **Shaded fuel breaks:** A proposal was made for 200-foot-wide shaded fuel breaks along high-risk roads in areas such as Las Cumbres to protect communities and create defensible space.
 - **Community micro-grants for Firewise and related programs:** Stakeholders supported small-scale funding to enable residents and underserved communities to undertake their own vegetation management and preparedness projects, reducing reliance on large agencies. On-going work by local communities would likely reduce treatment costs over time.
 - **Education:** K-12 curriculum and other education programs are needed to increase community awareness about the role of fire on ecosystems and to increase support ongoing vegetation management.
 - **Regional wildfire vegetation management planning examples:** Consider development of a focused Regional Prioritization Plan (RPP) downscaled to Santa Cruz County. Continued implementation of UCSC's vegetation management plan, building on the initial Forest Health grant.
 - **Data collection, analysis, and monitoring:** Integrated, data-driven approaches would help prioritize fuel reduction efforts to better protect communities and watershed resources. Stakeholders suggested using LiDAR-based mapping and modeling to prioritize areas for thinning treatments. LiDAR and fine-scale vegetation data will need to be updated every 5-10 years.

III. Maximizing Measure Q Impact and Measuring Benefits

Stakeholders envisioned success for Measure Q over the first five years as:

- **Demonstrable wildfire risk reduction:** Visible completion of shaded fuel breaks, well-maintained fire roads, and increased defensible space around high-risk communities.
- **Community empowerment:** A robust network of funded and active Firewise communities performing their own vegetation management and preparedness activities.
- **Ecological and water quality co-benefits:** Projects that not only reduce fire risk but also prevent erosion, protect streams, and enhance habitat.

- **Sustained funding and partnerships:** Measure Q leveraged with other grants to scale up wildfire resilience efforts across multiple jurisdictions. Funding for UCSC’s Fire Management Plan was highlighted as an example.

Potential **metrics** include:

- Miles of shaded fuel breaks created or maintained.
- Number of communities receiving micro-grants or achieving Firewise certification.
- Number of fire road/truck trail miles improved and maintained for emergency access.
- Reductions in sedimentation or post-fire debris flow risk in sensitive watersheds.
- Overall reduction in treatment cost per acre by vegetation type (after areas are initially treated and then better maintained in future)
- External funding secured /leverage by Measure Q as local match

IV. Summary

The second wildfire stakeholder session reinforced the urgent need for strategic investments in vegetation management, fire road and evacuation route maintenance, and community-driven preparedness initiatives. Participants highlighted that Measure Q can fill long-standing funding gaps for on-the-ground projects like shaded fuel breaks and truck trail upgrades, while simultaneously empowering residents through small-scale grants for local Firewise activities. Success will be measured not just in acres treated or roads cleared, but in improved community safety, ecological co-benefits, strengthened interagency partnerships that sustain wildfire resilience over time, and an overall reduction in treatment costs per acre over time as areas are treated and maintained.

Parks, Recreation and Public Access & Equity

I. Refinements and Additions to Round One Stakeholder Meeting Takeaways

Stakeholders reiterated the importance of several themes in the Vision Plan.

- **Deferred and Ongoing Maintenance Needs:** Participants reiterated the \$60M backlog of deferred maintenance in Watsonville and broader maintenance gaps across County Parks. They emphasized that maintenance itself is an essential park equity issue and

cited the relatively poor condition of many South County parks due to lack of funding. Measure Q can play a critical role in addressing this issue by funding capital improvements and facility upgrades that reduce long-term maintenance burdens.

- **Geographic Equity:** South County remains a high priority for Measure Q funding due to historic underinvestment. Additional underserved areas include Live Oak, which has limited access to quality parks despite being third largest population center in the County, and other rural pockets without proximity to parks and open space. Access to County Parks is especially important for residents who live outside city limits.
- **Integration of Existing Plans:** Stakeholders referenced existing plans including the Pajaro Valley Parks Assessment (provides helpful prioritization metrics based on equity and community input) and the County Parks Strategic Plan. Integrating these into the Vision Plan ensures alignment and may strengthen future grant applications.
- **Community Trust and Engagement:** Stakeholders highlighted the need for visible, early wins and meaningful public engagement to build trust that Measure Q benefits will be delivered. They requested clear communications on how project priorities are determined and opportunities for community members and CBOs to co-design projects.

II. Impactful Project Types, Activities, and Locations

Stakeholders provided several recommendations to bolster the initial list of Project Types and Examples:

- **Missing Project Types and Examples:**
 - **Volunteer and Community Stewardship Programs:** Stakeholders asked for inclusion of programs and process-oriented activities that build environmental identity, youth leadership, and foster local stewardship—not just “end product” projects like new facilities or trails. They noted that volunteer stewardship is a key part of park and open space operations but was not explicitly listed. They recommended adding examples of volunteer programs such as tree planting, trail work, erosion control, or other stewardship.

- **Urban Greening Initiatives:** Stakeholders suggested that the initial Project Types list focuses too narrowly on traditional parks and recommended adding examples that encompass other natural spaces, trail connections, and greening in urban areas or along transportation corridors where parkland is scarce. Other examples include tree planting, shade structures, and small-scale greening projects to enhance nature access and mitigate heat in neighborhoods that lack parks.
- **School Partnerships:** Identified schools as critical spaces for public green infrastructure and recreation in built-out urban areas. They recommended adding schoolyard greening and shared-use facilities to the project types list.
- **Clarity on Maintenance Projects:** Participants highlighted that maintenance-related upgrades were not clearly represented. While ongoing operations can't be funded by Measure Q, capital improvements designed to reduce future maintenance needs (e.g., replacing unsafe or failing infrastructure) should be explicitly listed. The lack of clear examples might discourage applicants from proposing projects that elevate poor-quality parks and reduce long-term maintenance burdens.
- **Accessibility, Environmental Education, and Cultural Relevance:** Stakeholders suggested broadening accessibility examples beyond ADA routes to include all-abilities playgrounds, adult changing tables, multilingual signage, water fountains, and culturally relevant design elements. Stakeholder highlighted the need for programs and facilities (e.g., Ramsey Park Nature Center) that reflect local culture, languages, and history while fostering stewardship and environmental identity.
- **Micro-Grants for CBOs:** Enable small, trusted organizations to lead short-term youth engagement, outdoor activities, and community events that expand access to parks and nature.
- **Priority Locations:** Stakeholders reiterated several priority locations for Measure Q investment:
 - West Beach Road corridor access: multi-jurisdictional challenge requiring coordination and planning
 - Ramsey Park completion

- River Park improvements (Watsonville’s #1 priority after Ramsey)
- Pinto Lake master planning (city-county partnership)
- Valle del Pajaro Park completion and build-out
- Live Oak: Closing gaps in park infrastructure and tree canopy
- Countywide: Trail safety, new regional trails, facility upgrades, and environmental improvements in high-use areas

III. Maximizing Measure Q Impact and Measuring Benefits

Stakeholders defined success over five years as:

- **Visible improvements especially in park-poor communities:**
 - Noticeable upgrades in South County park conditions (playgrounds, trails, facilities).
 - New or expanded park and green spaces accessible to underserved communities.
 - Safe, ADA-compliant, culturally relevant amenities.
- **Catalyzing larger projects:**
 - Measure Q funding used for planning, partnerships, and concept designs that unlock state/federal grants for major access projects (e.g., West Beach Road).
 - Ability to fund interjurisdictional planning and collaboration to advance new projects and programs
- **Community Engagement and Trust:**
 - Projects co-designed with residents and CBOs, with visible signage or communications attributing improvements to Measure Q.
 - Micro-grants enabling grassroots programming in parks immediately while capital projects are planned.

- **Capacity and Stewardship:**
 - Expansion of volunteer and youth workforce programs for long-term upkeep.
 - Completion and reopening of Ramsey Park Nature Center as a hub for education and engagement.

- **Suggested Metrics:**
 - Dollar value of deferred maintenance reduced, number of parks upgraded.
 - Acres of new or improved parks and tree canopy cover added.
 - Number of residents served by park access improvements.
 - Amount of matching funds or grants leveraged.
 - Number of youth and community members engaged in stewardship or programming.
 - Number of inter-agency collaborations initiated.

IV. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q should deliver tangible, equitable park improvements in historically underfunded areas, particularly South County and Live Oak, while investing in planning and partnerships to unlock future projects like safe coastal access corridors in Watsonville and regional trails. Success will be defined by visible early wins, new and revitalized park facilities, micro-grants empowering local organizations, culturally relevant amenities, and park stewardship and access programs. Measure Q funding should catalyze collaboration, leverage additional resources, and build community trust through transparency, engagement, and projects that clearly demonstrate and report public benefit.

Wildlife and Habitat Protection

I. Refinements and Additions to Round One Stakeholder Meeting Takeaways

Stakeholders requested that the Vision Plan elaborate on several issues that were just briefly touched on during the first round of engagement:

- **San Lorenzo River Watershed:** Has high value for fish passage and salmonid recovery, riparian and floodplain enhancement, and urban biodiversity.
- **Urban Biodiversity:** Stakeholders called for explicit recognition of urban biodiversity projects in the Vision Plan. These projects provide habitat in developed areas, mitigate heat islands, support pollinators and birds, improve water infiltration, and strengthen community connections to nature. Examples include tree canopy expansion, wildlife crossings, light pollution reduction, and habitat patches in parks and neighborhoods.
- **Cultural Resource Integration.** Land management projects located in natural and urban settings should incorporate cultural resources and indigenous stewardship perspectives during project planning, design, and implementation. Opportunities include Tribal archeological monitoring in urban development areas as well as natural settings; interpretive signage highlighting indigenous land history and food and medicinal species; and broader inclusion of indigenous stewardship beyond cultural burns, such as native seed propagation and meadow restoration.
- **Invasive Species:** Stakeholders stressed the importance of invasive species control as a Measure Q funding priority, noting the challenge of invasive ivy and other species dominating riparian corridors and others that prevent successful native plant restoration. Funding is needed for labor-intensive removal before habitat restoration projects can proceed.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Highlighted need for cross-boundary planning where habitats, watersheds, and wildlife corridors span jurisdictions (e.g., UCSC lands, private property, city and state parks). Multi-owner coordination is essential for effective connectivity and species recovery.
- **Planning Support:** Participants reiterated that many high-priority projects stall at early phases due to lack of design, CEQA, permitting, and partnership development funding. Measure Q should explicitly cover these pre-implementation activities to tee up large-scale multi-benefit projects.

II. Impactful Project Types, Activities, and Locations

Stakeholders shared several recommendations about impactful Project Types and Examples:

- **Need to Address Cross-Cutting Projects:** Stakeholders noted that the draft list segmented project types too strictly (e.g., separating trail access from wildlife and habitat protection). They recommended acknowledging overlap between categories, especially where projects combine habitat restoration with public access or trail planning. Integrating these elements could support Measure Q's intent to deliver multi-benefit projects.
- **Cultural Resources and Indigenous Stewardship:** Stakeholders highlighted the need to integrate cultural and ecological considerations across all project types instead of treating them separately. Examples of this work include protection of cultural artifacts and native plant resources or integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge into planning, implementation, and project communications.
- **Regional Planning, Collaboration, and Partnerships:** Because many landscape- and watershed-scale wildlife projects often require extensive coordination, this work should be included in the list of project types or examples to reflect real-world implementation needs.
- **Clarity on How the List Will Evolve:** Multiple participants asked how the list of projects included in Attachment B would be refined and used in the final Vision Plan, seeking assurance that stakeholder feedback would be integrated and that project examples would become more representative and complete.
- **High-Impact Project Types:** Stakeholders elaborated on importance project types to address biodiversity:
 - **Habitat Connectivity:** Removing barriers (dams, culverts) and daylighting streams to support fish passage and wildlife movement.

- **Wetland and Riparian Restoration:** Floodplain reconnection, woody debris installation, invasive species removal, and native plantings to improve habitat, water quality and salmonid recovery.
 - **Urban Biodiversity Initiatives:** Tree canopy expansion, small habitat patches, wildlife-friendly lighting, community education, and safe wildlife crossings.
 - **Indigenous Stewardship:** Projects enabling tribal leadership in ecological restoration, seed propagation, and cultural site protection.
 - **Trail and Access Management:** Planning trails to avoid sensitive habitats and cultural sites, mitigating recreation impacts on wildlife.
 - **Workforce and Volunteer Development:** Programs for students, local youth, underemployed residents, and volunteers to gain restoration skills while advancing biodiversity projects.
- **Priority Locations:** Stakeholders shared examples where these projects might touch down on the ground:
 - **San Lorenzo River Watershed:** From headwaters to the estuary for salmonid recovery and urban river restoration.
 - **Soquel Creek Corridor:** Focus on invasive ivy removal and steelhead habitat improvement.
 - **Pajaro Valley Wetlands:** Enhancing biodiversity near underserved communities with dual environmental and public health benefits.
 - **Coastal Prairies:** opportunities for regional planning to protect these sensitive habitats.
 - **Urban Nodes in Watsonville and Santa Cruz:** Targeted biodiversity and coexistence projects in densely developed areas.

III. Maximizing Measure Q Impact and Measuring Benefits

Stakeholders described success as:

- **Ecological Outcomes:**
 - Increased acres of restored, enhanced, or connected habitat.
 - Improved salmonid and pollinator populations.

- Successful invasive species removal and native plant establishment.
- Increased safe wildlife movement through crossings and corridor protection.
- **Cultural and Community Benefits:**
 - Integration of indigenous stewardship and cultural heritage protection.
 - Increased public access to restored areas, with interpretive education.
 - Projects visible to the community, showing tax dollars at work.
 - Engagement of underserved populations in planning and restoration activities.
- **Capacity Building through Project Implementation:**
 - Expanded local workforce trained in habitat restoration and stewardship.
 - Strengthened volunteer networks for long-term project maintenance.
- **Transparency and Leverage:**
 - Public dashboard or story map tracking project locations, benefits, and progress.
 - Ability to use Measure Q as a local match to secure larger state/federal grants without rigid requirements for smaller nonprofits.
- **Metrics Proposed:**
 - Acres restored, enhanced, or conserved.
 - Number of fish passage barriers removed or stream miles opened.
 - Number of workforce participants and volunteer hours engaged.
 - Cultural resource protection actions taken.
 - Percentage increase in tree canopy or pollinator habitat in urban areas.

IV. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q should fund projects that improve wildlife habitat, integrate cultural perspectives into this work, and provide benefits to local

communities through urban biodiversity initiatives. Success requires balancing implementation of visible, high-impact projects with investments in planning, workforce development, and regional collaboration to build a strong pipeline of future restoration and habitat protection efforts. Priority opportunities include watershed-scale salmonid recovery, invasive species management, cross-jurisdictional habitat connectivity, and indigenous-led stewardship projects. Transparent reporting and flexibility in funding small organizations were highlighted as critical for long-term trust and success.

Agricultural and Working Lands

I. Refinements and Additions to Round One Stakeholder Meeting Takeaways

- **Farmland Preservation Priority:** Stakeholders reiterated the importance of preserving highly productive agricultural lands due to their critical economic and ecological contributions. Protection of farmland should be prioritized alongside broader land-use planning strategies to avoid conversion to non-ag uses on productive farmland or development in forest settings in the wildland-urban interface.
- **Integration of Ecosystem Services:** Building on Round One, participants highlighted the need to recognize agriculture's broader ecosystem service benefits, including pollinator habitat, erosion control, and wildfire risk mitigation. The recent Ag Economic Contributions Report was cited as a resource demonstrating these benefits.
- **Marginal Land Reclamation:** Stakeholders supported retiring marginal or flood-prone farmland and restoring wetlands, while emphasizing the importance of grower involvement in determining feasibility and economic impacts of these projects.
- **Emerging Threats to Ag Viability:** Additional issues not fully captured in Round One include labor shortages and lack of farmworker housing and generational transfer challenges for family farms leading to consolidation or loss of farmland. Invasive pests

represent an on-going threat (e.g., Greater Shot Hole Borer infestation in Felton), also threatening riparian corridors and increasing fire risk from dead trees.

- **Ag Innovation and Leadership:** Santa Cruz County is recognized as a national leader in organic and sustainable agriculture. Stakeholders encouraged Measure Q to amplify this legacy through support for pilot projects, research, and innovative farm practices that can be replicated regionally.

II. Impactful Project Types, Activities, and Locations

- **Farm and Working Lands Preservation:** Stakeholders strongly supported including farmland preservation as a top project type, emphasizing Santa Cruz County's unique and highly productive soils. They saw this as fundamental to sustaining the agricultural economy and preventing further land loss to development. Examples of working lands preservation activities include conservation easements, long-term leases, and innovative financing tools to maintain viable farmland and prevent conversion
- **Infrastructure and Equipment for Agricultural Viability:** Stakeholders recommended expanding examples to include food hubs, cold storage facilities, co-op infrastructure to improve farm viability and market access, and specialized equipment (e.g., irrigation monitoring, variable frequency drives, electrification upgrades, cover crop equipment) that lowers costs, emissions, and supports conservation practices but is often unaffordable for small growers.
- **Workforce Development:** Participants highlighted the need for youth conservation corps or agricultural workforce programs, noting an unmet need for training pathways for youth and underemployed workers to engage in stewardship and sustainable farm work. Workforce development needs and opportunities include training for equipment operators, irrigation efficiency, integrated pest management, drone use, and sustainable forestry.
- **Invasive Species Removal:** Planning and rapid response funding is needed to monitor and manage emerging pests and diseases threatening agricultural and riparian lands.

- **Timberland Management:** Support for small timberland owners to continue sustainable management practices that reduce fuel loads, maintain forest health, and avoid conversion to unsafe development. If smaller timber operations cease, there is a risk that these lands could be developed or, in the absence of management, that fire risk will increase.
- **Research and Demonstration Projects:** Field-scale trials of climate-smart and economically viable farming practices (cover crops, nitrogen management, new crop varieties).
- **Clarification on RCD's Existing Funding:** Some participants questioned whether several project types (e.g., soil conservation, water quality improvements) might duplicate work already funded through the Resource Conservation District's guaranteed Measure Q allocation. They suggested refining the list to clarify leverage points and/or avoid redundancy with RCD-led activities.
- **Priority Locations:**
 - **South County:** High-value agricultural soils in Watsonville and Pajaro Valley; wetlands and flood-prone farmlands for targeted retirement/restoration projects.
 - **Timberlands:** Small parcels (20–200 acres) above Boulder Creek and other areas affected by CZU fires where viable timber operations support fire resilience and prevent conversion to residential use.
 - **Riparian Corridors:** Felton and Zayante Creek areas impacted by invasive pests, needing rapid intervention to protect ecosystem health and reduce fire hazards.

III. Maximizing Measure Q Impact and Measuring Benefits

Stakeholders defined success in two timeframes:

- **Short-Term (Years 1–5):**
 - Visible, community-recognizable projects (e.g., farmland preservation deals, trail access with farm stewardship signage).
 - Early wins in workforce development programs linking Cabrillo College, UCSC, and farmworker families to stable ag careers.

- Measurable on-the-ground actions (acres treated, easements secured, invasive infestations removed).
- **Long-Term (5+ Years):**
 - Sustained economic viability of small and family farms, reducing consolidation and out-migration of operations.
 - Expanded organic and regenerative acreage beyond current statewide leading levels.
 - Healthy, managed timberlands reducing catastrophic fire risk and preventing unplanned development.
 - Improved water quality, reduced nitrate runoff, and enhanced riparian habitat.
 - A clear, public-facing record of Measure Q impacts (dashboard, maps, annual reports) to maintain trust, especially with historically underserved South County communities.
- **Suggested Metrics:**
 - Acres of farmland preserved and timberland managed sustainably.
 - Number of workforce trainees placed in agricultural and forestry jobs.
 - Acres restored to wetland or riparian habitat from marginal farmland.
 - Reduction in nitrogen use and pesticide application rates.
 - Number of small growers accessing infrastructure or financial support.
 - Number of invasive species sites treated and hazard acres mitigated.

IV. Summary

Stakeholders emphasized that Measure Q can make its greatest impact by strategically preserving Santa Cruz County’s productive farmlands, sustaining small-scale farming and timber operations, and building the workforce and infrastructure needed for long-term agricultural viability and ecosystem resilience. Investments should balance near-term, visible projects that demonstrate tangible benefits to the community with planning and pilot initiatives that address systemic challenges such as labor shortages, farm succession, and emerging pest threats. Success will be measured by preserved farmland and timberlands, improved water quality and habitat, viable family farms, skilled local

workers, and transparent reporting of outcomes that build public trust in Measure Q's promise for sustainable agriculture and working lands.

Stakeholder Meetings Synthesis and Considerations for Vision Plan Implementation

Over the course of twelve thematic meetings, with participation from 87 stakeholders, several common takeaways emerged.

Funding Need

In addition to closing funding gaps for high-profile shovel-ready projects, Measure Q can provide nimble and flexible funding for activities that can be very difficult to pay for through most state and federal grant programs. Critical funding needs include project planning and pre-construction activities such as partner and community engagement, conceptual design, permitting, and CEQA clearance. Other essential pre-implementation activities include landowner outreach and technical assistance, project coordination meetings and workshops, and preparation of grant proposals. Making projects shovel-ready in this way allows them to become eligible and competitive to secure substantial external funding to pay for implementation. Once projects are complete, Measure Q funding can play a critical role on the back end by funding necessary maintenance, management, and monitoring activities. These difficult-to-fund activities ensure that project implementation benefits—whether a habitat restoration project, shaded fuel break, or a new trail—are not lost over time. The County's partners may benefit from guidance about how best to integrate these costs into Measure Q funding proposals.

Equity Considerations

Measure Q emphasizes the importance of projects that serve park-poor neighborhoods and disadvantaged communities. In each of the six thematic meetings, Watsonville and other South County communities were called out as historically underfunded compared to North County communities. Stakeholders view Measure Q as a critical opportunity to focus early investments in high-profile projects and programs in South County that are

underway or shovel-ready. Doing so results in immediate benefits and “early wins” and may build trust in the community to support similar funding measures in the future. At the same time, Measure Q funding is needed to support planning, feasibility studies, and conceptual design to ready future projects for implementation. Stakeholders suggested that Measure Q should prioritize projects that include community engagement, education and, where appropriate, opportunities to connect with nature.

Stakeholders uniformly agreed that common tools like CalEnviroScreen and DWR’s Disadvantaged Communities Mapping (DAC) Tool, while often essential to attract state funds, do not always capture local conditions and may be too coarse to fully take advantage of Measure Q’s flexibility. Suggestions included development of a local DAC definition using local data and subject matter expertise; utilizing equity criteria in the 2024 Watsonville Parks Assessment Report; and/or forming a technical advisory committee to assist with Measure Q Grant Program project selection criteria and equity scoring considerations.

While Measure Q isn’t designed to fund on-going operations, stakeholders urged the County to explore ways where funding can build capacity among local nonprofit and community-based organizations. Suggestions included prioritizing projects that directly engage CBOs and non-profits in project planning and implementation or supporting projects where these organizations engage community members in stewardship and land management activities.

Measure Q Grant Program

Stakeholders are excited for the launch of the Measure Q grant cycle. While development of the Grant Program will be subject to separate outreach and engagement, stakeholders offered several suggestions to inform the program:

- Make the application process as simple as possible to reduce barriers for non-profits and CBOs to access funding. This could include waiving local match requirements, or having match be a scoring bonus but not a prerequisite.

- Consider a two-track cycle, enabling easy-to-access annual funding for small projects and programs designed with non-profits, schools, CBOs, and tribal partners in mind; and a separate cycle dedicated to larger and more complex capital improvement and restoration projects.
- The latter program could be phased to allow funds to accumulate over time to increase their impact or, if necessary, to serve as match to secure substantial external funding.
- Explore opportunities to align grant funding proposals with dedicated funding allocated to the Cities, Resource Conservation District, or the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to pool resources and increase project impacts and outcomes.

Stakeholders offered the perspective that at the end of the day, project impacts and leverage may be more important than match. The Grant Program could waive local match requirements, allow for in-kind services to qualify, or have any match be considered a bonus—not a prerequisite—to secure Measure Q funds. This equity approach better serves many non-profits and CBOs for whom extensive match requirements would be a barrier.

Because investment in multi-benefit projects can provide a wide range of positive environmental and social impacts—and can often attract funding from multiple sources—stakeholders across themes supported the use of Measure Q funds to deliver multi-benefit programs and projects. It was noted in the Parks, Recreation, and Access & Equity stakeholder meeting, however, that some “single-purpose” projects provide superlative or unique benefits (West Beach Road pedestrian, bicycle, and ADA beach access improvements, e.g.). Stakeholders suggested that multi-benefit projects be considered a bonus for Measure Q funding, not a prerequisite.

Funding Transparency and Accountability

Across all themes, stakeholders urged the County to prepare clear criteria to inform funding recommendations and grant project selection decisions. For overall transparency and accountability regarding use of all Measure Q funds, and to facilitate annual COAB review of Measure Q expenditures, stakeholders suggest that the County consider developing a project reporting framework to assist its partners and grantees in identifying and tracking typical quantitative and qualitative project benefits. In this way, the annual

and cumulative benefits of the Measure can be tracked over time (e.g. acres of habitat restored, tons of carbon sequestered, dollars leveraged, number of volunteers engaged).

Communicating Success

Measure Q benefits should be clearly expressed to the public through signs, reports, stories, maps, and other communications such as an interactive website or GIS storymaps. This applies not just to the grant program, but to investments made by the County, Cities, Resource Conservation District, and Land Trust. Collecting metrics and communicating success for all projects and activities funded by Measure Q will help residents across the County appreciate the benefits of the Measure. Stakeholders suggested collecting hard data to quantify project benefits as well as qualitative data that can lead to compelling & engaging stories that highlight project partnerships and community engagement.

Referencing Locally-adopted Plans

A typical condition of a state or federal grant is that a project or activity seeking funding be included in a locally adopted plan. Stakeholders recommended that the Vision Plan can help tee up projects for funding by referencing high-priority projects or examples included in other local plans, or perhaps by adopting those plans by reference. Measure Q funding, however, should not be limited to projects that are included in local, regional, and state plans. Flexible funding may be needed for emergencies or project opportunities that are not referenced in these plans, since emerging challenges (climate extremes, infrastructure failures) may require rapid responses for activities outside of existing plans.

Cultural Resources Integration

Representatives from the Amah Mutsun Land Trust highlighted the importance of addressing cultural resources on projects in both natural and urban settings. Cultural resources and indigenous stewardship perspectives should be addressed during project planning, design, and implementation. Opportunities and needs include Tribal archeological; interpretive signage highlighting indigenous land history, foods and medicinal species; and broader inclusion of indigenous stewardship and Traditional Ecological Knowledge beyond cultural burns.

Emerging Priority Locations and Priority Types

With such broad overlap between Measure Q themes—and with so much potential for multi-benefit projects—several common locations and examples of priority projects were shared across the stakeholder meetings. Potential projects and activities in these locations address critical needs, provide multiple environmental or social benefits, involve numerous partners that can bring resources and expertise, can meaningfully engage community members, and are likely to attract or leverage substantial external funding.

- **Protection and restoration of habitat for rare, threatened, and unique / endemic species and natural communities.** This includes species and systems such as the Santa Cruz Sandhills, coastal terrace prairies, coho and steelhead streams, and ponds and wetlands among others. Recognizing the impacts of habitat fragmentation, habitat connectivity projects such as protection and restoration of landscape linkages and construction of wildlife crossing infrastructure are also a critical need.
- **Multi-benefit wildfire risk reduction.** Funding is needed for on-going partner coordination and planning; project implementation like prescribed fire and cultural burns (in partnership with the Amah Mutsun), home hardening, and shaded fuel breaks; for on-going community support services such as chipping and green waste removal; and for on-going stewardship and maintenance within treated areas so that benefits are not lost over time. While North Coast forests were called out for post-CZU Fire biomass reduction and utilization, stakeholders listed fuel treatment priorities across the County. Virtually all of them have potential to be designed and implemented with ecological goals in mind to deliver habitat, water quality, climate resilience or other benefits beyond community safety. They also provide outstanding opportunities for community engagement and education to increase understanding and acceptance about the need for more prescribed fire across the landscape.
- **Park, green infrastructure, and access improvements in Watsonville and South County.** Across all themes, stakeholders recognized that South County communities

have experienced significant underinvestment compared to North County communities. High priority needs include expanding parks, urban forests, community gardens, and developing school sites with public access amenities and community green infrastructure. Specific examples that were frequently mentioned: improving Beach Road for pedestrian and bicycle safety to provide safe access to the beach; activating Palm Beach and other South County locations with culturally-appropriate public access amenities and recreation programming; establishing safe levee trails; and restoring Pinto Lake—considered a regional priority—to improve habitat and water quality.

- **Nature-based solutions for coastal and environmental resilience.** Stakeholders suggested that Measure Q could be most impactful in delivering nature-based solutions to promote long-term adaptation to climate change. On the coast this could include living shorelines rather than coastal armoring. Many stakeholders shared that Measure Q should not fund grey infrastructure at all unless there is substantial public benefit—new public access to the coast, for example—or if the project is necessary to unlock substantial new environmental benefits.
- **Lower Pajaro River floodplain restoration.** Comprehensive and integrated projects like the PVWMA Pajaro Valley Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County’s Beach Ranch restoration project combine habitat restoration, flood protection, and increased resilience to climate change. Taking marginal or flood prone ag land out of production reduces water use and directs long-term production onto more viable ag lands. These projects along with other multi-benefit projects for habitat restoration and flood protection in the Watsonville Slough systems, in College Lake, and throughout the lower watershed including Reach 1 provide substantial environmental and community benefits and are likely to attract substantial funding from Prop 4 and other sources.
- **Landowner outreach, education, and technical support.** Many of Santa Cruz County’s most important natural and working lands are in private ownership. Across themes and in so many different words, stakeholders offered that we all live downstream of someone else and that ecosystems do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries. Engaging private landowners as partners in conservation planning is essential to protect and restore ecological integrity at the landscape and watershed

scale. Measure Q can provide essential funding for public agencies to engage landowners in planning processes, involve them as partners in regional projects, and empower them through education and technical support to become excellent stewards. South County again emerged as a critical landscape for this work, with tremendous opportunity and need to support small farms and disadvantaged farmers through programs that build soil health, reduce water use, and improve water quality—while reducing their long-term operating costs.

Stakeholder Participants

The County wishes to express its appreciation to the following individuals who participated in or both rounds of the thematic stakeholder engagement meetings:

Coastal Protection and Adaptation

Rob Tidmore, Principal Planner, County Parks

Tracy Weiss, Executive Director, O'Neill Sea Odyssey & California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Jesse Trallar Ojeda, Climate Resilient Grant Manager, California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Jacob Sacken, Grants Manager, Amah Mutsun Land Trust

Nolan Clark, Coastal Planner, California Coastal Commission Central Coast District

Krista Rogers, Program Manager, Save Our Shores

Richard Castillo, Climate Resilience and Adaptation Manager, Regeneración Pajaro Valley Climate Action

Yesenia Jimenez, Conservation Programs Manager, Watsonville Wetlands Watch

Ellen Vaughan, Assistant Director, UCSC Sustainability Office

Dave Reid, Director, County Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience, County of Santa Cruz

Water Resources Management

Dave Reid, Director, County Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience, County of Santa Cruz

Sierra Ryan, Water Resources Program Manager, County of Santa Cruz

Laurie Egan, Executive Director, Coastal Watershed Council

Brendan Bollinger, Director of Community Advocacy, Community Water Center

Forrest Revere, Environmental Program Manager, Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency

Chris Berry, Watershed Manager, City of Santa Cruz Water Department; Representative to the Fish and Wildlife Commission

Brian Lockwood, General Manager, Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency

Brian Largay, Conservation Director, Land Trust of Santa Cruz County; Board Member, San Lorenzo Valley Water District

Roxanne Grillo, Deputy Executive Director, Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency

Chris Coburn, Deputy Director, City of Santa Cruz Water Department

Chris Collier, Environmental Programs Manager, San Lorenzo Valley Water District

Lisa Lurie, Executive Director, Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County

Tim Carson, Program Director, Regional Water Management Foundation

David McNair, General Manager, Scotts Valley Water District

Nate Gillespie, Operations Manager, Scotts Valley Water District

Zeke Bean, Water Resource Planner, City of Santa Cruz

Mark Strudley, Executive Director, Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency

Casey Meusel, Hydrologist, Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency

Courtney Trask, Stormwater Programs Manager, UC Santa Cruz

Chris Klier, Environmental Programs Manager, San Lorenzo Valley Water District

Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health

Dave Reed, Director, Office of Response Recovery and Resilience, Santa Cruz County

Arnie Wernick, Fire Department Advisory Group, former volunteer captain South Skyline

Beatrix Jiminez-Helsley, Natural Resource Manager, Sempervirens Fund

Matt Abernathy, Forest Health Program Manager, RCD Santa Cruz

Jared Childress, Program Manager, Central Coast Prescribe Burn Association

Spencer Kleinfelter, Program Coordinator, Central Coast Prescribe Burn Association

Joe Christy, Board Member, Bonnie Union Fire Safe Council

David Cowman, Director of Stewardship, Sempervirens Fund

Rachel Pausch, Ecologist, Coastal Commission

Tim Shields, Division Chief/Fire Marshal, City of Santa Cruz Fire Department

Lauren Moody, Fire Safe Council

Megan Nutt, Principal Management Analyst, City of Santa Cruz Fire Department

Jed Wilson, Unit Chief, San Mateo Santa Cruz CalFire/County Chief Santa Cruz County FIRE

Zeke Bean, Water Resources Planner, City of Santa Cruz Water Department

Lindsay Speth, Fire Safe Santa Cruz County

Brian Homberger, Forest Health Program Manager, Peninsula Open Space Trust

Alex Jones, Natural Reserve Manager, UC Santa Cruz

Chris Klier, Environmental Programs Manager, San Lorenzo Valley Water District

Parks, Recreation and Public Access & Equity

Rob Tidmore, Principal Planner, County Parks

Celeste DeWald, Board member COAB and Commissioner, Watsonville Parks & Recreation Commission

Mariah Roberts, Executive Director, County Park Friends

Tony Elliott, Director of Parks & Recreation, City of Santa Cruz

Sergio Andres, Assistant Director Maintenance/Operations, Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Nick Calubaquib, Deputy City Manager & Park Community Services Director, City of Watsonville

Murray Fontes, Assistant Director, Public Works & Utilities, City of Watsonville

Jonathan Pilch, Executive Director, Watsonville Wetlands Watch

Nolan Clark, Coastal Planner, Coastal Commission

Lydia Gonzalez, Senior Finance Manager, Santa Cruz Mountains Trail Stewardship

Bernie Gomez, Program & Leadership Coordinator, MILPA

Brenda Rubio, Project Associate, Trust for Public Land

Daryl Wong, Executive Director, UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology

Karina Moreno, Program and Leadership Coordinator, MILPA

Wildlife and Habitat

Jody McGraw, Conservation Planner and Ecologist, Jodi McGraw Consulting

Daniel Ilan, Watershed Restoration Program Manager, Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County

Kirk Lennington, Natural Resources Manager, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Forrest Revere, Environmental Program Manager, Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency

Antonella Gentile, Resource Planner, County of Santa Cruz Stormwater and Flood Control

Zeke Bean, Water Resources Planner, City of Santa Cruz Water Department

Yesenia Jimenez, Conservation Programs Manager, Watsonville Wetlands Watch

Tatiana Brennan, Sustainability Manager, Santa Cruz County OR3

Rob Tidmore, Principal Planner, Santa Cruz County Parks Department

Tatiana Brennan, Sustainability Manager, County of Santa Cruz OR3

Alex Jones, Natural Reserve Manager, UC Santa Cruz

Laurie Egan, Executive Director, Coastal Watershed Council

Alyson Tom, Civil Engineer, Santa Cruz County Public Works

Jacob Sacken, Grants Manager, Amah Mutsun Land Trust

Erika Senyk, Environmental Projects Manager, City of Capitola

Agricultural and Working Lands

Tatiana Brennan, Sustainability Manager, County of Santa Cruz OR3

Pauline Seals, Educator/Organizer, Santa Cruz Climate Action Network

Marcus Mendiola, Water Conservation Specialist, Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency

Mark Swisher, Director, Cal Poly Swan Pacific Ranch

Janet Webb, President, Big Creek Lumber Company

Mireya Gomez-Contreras, Executive Director, Esperanza Community Farms

Sacha Lozano, Ag Stewardship Senior Project Manager, RCD Santa Cruz (interviewed separately)

David Sanford, Agricultural Commission, Santa Cruz County

Daryl Wong, Executive Director, UC Santa Cruz Center for Agrecology

Rich Sampson, Forester and Division Chief, CalFire

DRAFT Measure Q Vision Plan

Appendix C: Cross Tabulated Literature Review Synthesis



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
MEASURE Q

Measure Q Literature Review Synthesis

Synthesis of Relevant Local, Regional, and State Planning Documents

The following AI-assisted synthesis was prepared to condense several hundred topic-based citations from 19 local, regional, and state planning documents into a brief memo that can provide the Santa Cruz County Measure Q Citizens Oversight Advisory Board (COAB) with a digestible overview of the existing planning landscape that may be relevant to Measure Q. This document will also help inform the Measure Q Vision Document

The plans included in this synthesis are:

- Capitola Climate Action Plan
- City of Santa Cruz Climate Action Plan
- Watsonville Climate Action Plan
- Regional Project Prioritization
- Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan
- 2021 Santa Cruz County Climate Action and Adaptation Plan
- 2014 Santa Cruz County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan
- 2019 Pajaro River Watershed Integrated Regional Water Management Plan
- 2021 Santa Cruz County San Mateo County Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- 2022 Santa Cruz County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy
- 2018 Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plan
- 2023 Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plan Update
- 2021 Santa Cruz County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan
- 2020 California Adaptation Planning Guide
- 2023 California Water Plan Update
- 2021 California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan
- 2023 California Outdoors for All Strategy
- 2022 Pathways to 30x30 California
- 2021 Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy

The following synthesis distills the major themes, strategies, and points of divergence across **twelve topical lenses:**

1. Water Resource Protection
2. Wildfire Risk Reduction & Forest Health
3. Wildlife & Habitat Protection
4. Parks, Recreation & Public Access
5. Working Lands & Agricultural Stewardship
6. Coastal Protection

7. Climate Resilience & Adaptation
8. Match Funding
9. Multi-Benefit Approaches
10. Disadvantaged Communities
11. Geographic Scope
12. Community Engagement

Each section summarizes how the 19 source documents converge—or differ—on objectives, priority actions, and implementation mechanisms, highlighting innovative practices, equity considerations, and opportunities for stronger cross-jurisdictional alignment. Taken together, the syntheses offer a concise reference for integrating policies, coordinating investments, tracking progress, and considering project type priorities for Measure Q funding.

Water Resource Protection

Across all reviewed plans, water resource protection consistently emerges as a high priority, with common themes emphasizing groundwater recharge, conservation, water quality enhancement, and integrated watershed management. Strategies typically align around increasing efficiency, promoting nature-based solutions, and enhancing resilience against climate-related stressors like drought and flooding.

Local Climate Action Plans—including **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville**—focus significantly on water conservation measures and green infrastructure. **Capitola** emphasizes municipal and residential water conservation through ordinances mandating water-efficient fixtures and landscaping, encouraging rainwater harvesting, greywater systems, and drought-tolerant landscaping. Similarly, **Santa Cruz** prioritizes water efficiency programs targeting frontline communities and infrastructure enhancements such as urban forestry initiatives and green stormwater management practices. The plan also seeks innovative approaches like methane capture from wastewater treatment. **Watsonville** highlights watershed health improvements, stormwater management, and green infrastructure plans, alongside specific actions addressing groundwater overdraft and saltwater intrusion through climate-smart agricultural practices.

Regional water management plans, notably the **2014 Santa Cruz County IRWM Plan** and **2019 Pajaro River Watershed IRWM Plan**, adopt comprehensive strategies encompassing conservation, supply diversification, and pollution prevention. Both plans underscore the importance of protecting and enhancing riparian zones, groundwater recharge areas, and addressing seawater intrusion. The Pajaro River Plan uniquely emphasizes conjunctive groundwater management and coordinated watershed strategies, stressing interconnectedness for flood management, drought resilience, and water quality.

Wildfire-focused documents like the **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** and **Santa Cruz County San Mateo County CWPP** integrate water protection from wildfire risks, advocating protective measures around critical water infrastructure and acknowledging post-wildfire erosion

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and sedimentation impacts on water quality. These plans specifically recommend maintaining mature vegetation near waterways and careful vegetation management to safeguard aquatic habitats.

County-level strategies, including the **Santa Cruz County Climate Action and Adaptation Plan**, **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP)**, and the **Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS)**, emphasize groundwater recharge projects, stormwater infiltration, recycled water usage, and regional collaboration. Notably, the LHMP explicitly supports infrastructure projects such as the Pure Water Soquel Project and encourages regulations that sustain groundwater recharge rates.

At the state level, the **California Adaptation Planning Guide** and the **California Water Plan Update 2023** advocate for integrated watershed management approaches, highlighting managed aquifer recharge, low-impact development, and enhanced groundwater monitoring. These documents strongly promote nature-based solutions and ecological restoration to enhance water quality and ecosystem resilience. The **Pathways to 30x30** and **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy** further complement these efforts, with an explicit focus on restoring mountain meadows, riparian habitats, and ecological forestry to sustain and improve water storage, groundwater-surface interactions, and carbon sequestration.

While the emergency-focused **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan** provides fewer detailed strategies regarding proactive water resource management, it emphasizes water as a critical utility, highlighting coordination among agencies during emergencies and utility restoration.

Overall, the synthesis highlights a convergence around sustainable water management, enhanced collaboration across jurisdictions, and proactive strategies integrating ecological and infrastructural solutions. Further alignment among these documents could streamline implementation, leverage combined funding opportunities, and strengthen regional resilience.

Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health

Across all reviewed plans, there is broad alignment on the urgent need to address wildfire risk, though the level of detail and the strategies proposed vary based on the plan's scope and jurisdiction. The collective focus spans both ecological stewardship and emergency preparedness, with growing attention to climate change as a key driver of wildfire threats in Santa Cruz County and the broader region.

Several local climate action plans — including those from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** — integrate wildfire into broader environmental resilience goals. Capitola emphasizes urban forest enhancement as a carbon sequestration and cooling strategy, acknowledging the link between drought and increased fire risk but stopping short of detailing wildfire-specific actions. In contrast, Santa Cruz identifies wildfire reduction as a co-benefit of forest management and reforestation, proposing the development of an Urban Forest Master Plan. Watsonville's CAAP directly addresses

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wildfire risk through emergency preparedness strategies and public education, reflecting a people-centered approach that complements landscape-focused actions.

The **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** is the most technically detailed source. It outlines strategies such as shaded fuel breaks, defensible space, forest thinning, and prescribed burning. It also prioritizes interagency coordination and maps high-risk zones to guide fuel treatment and community outreach. These operational tools are echoed in the **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan**, which reinforces defensible space standards, early warning systems, and hazard mapping.

The **Santa Cruz County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)** and **General Plan Public Safety Element** provide a complementary governance lens. The EOP emphasizes the logistical and communication infrastructure needed for wildfire response, while the General Plan supports pre-fire planning through zoning, building codes, and land use regulations that discourage new development in high fire hazard zones.

Regional and state-level strategies — such as the **County Climate Action Strategy, Natural & Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy**, and the **CA Forest Carbon Plan** — place wildfire within a broader context of land stewardship and carbon resilience. These plans prioritize forest health through sustainable management, restoration, and the reduction of accumulated fuels. The **CA State Hazard Mitigation Plan** adds another layer, emphasizing statewide coordination and funding streams for local projects, and identifying wildfire as one of California’s most significant and recurring hazards.

Plans like the **Regional Project Prioritization, Every Body’s Ocean**, and the **LCP Climate Adaptation Strategy** touch only lightly on wildfire. However, they sometimes acknowledge its impact on related systems, such as watersheds, biodiversity, or coastal erosion following burns.

A unifying thread across most plans is the shift toward integrated, cross-jurisdictional approaches that combine forest restoration, emergency planning, and community engagement. There is growing recognition that urban, peri-urban, and wildland areas must be managed as interconnected systems. Plans increasingly call for aligning land use, conservation, and infrastructure strategies to reduce risk while preserving ecological function.

In sum, wildfire is treated as both a climate change symptom and a land management challenge. The County and its partners are moving toward holistic solutions that pair ecological resilience with public safety — though the degree of specificity and actionable commitments varies. Greater cross-referencing between planning documents and coordinated implementation could further enhance regional readiness and ecological health.

Wildlife and Habitat Protection

Across the reviewed plans, wildlife and habitat protection emerge as integral elements, with common themes including conservation of intact ecosystems, habitat restoration, biodiversity enhancement, and connectivity improvements to mitigate climate change impacts. Strategies frequently combine ecological restoration, invasive species management, sustainable land use, and collaboration with local communities and Indigenous groups.

Local climate plans such as those from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** emphasize enhancing biodiversity through urban green spaces, tree planting, and habitat restoration. **Capitola** particularly stresses the role of urban forests, community gardens, and green infrastructure in providing urban wildlife habitats. **Santa Cruz** highlights urban forestry through its Urban Forest Master Plan, and ecological enhancement via regenerative agricultural practices and strengthened open space policies. **Watsonville** integrates specific habitat preservation and restoration measures, such as expanding greenspace buffers around sloughs and enhancing watershed habitats, along with collaborations with Indigenous communities for restoration best practices.

Regional strategies offer more specialized approaches. The **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** and the **Santa Cruz County San Mateo County CWPP** advocate habitat protection concurrent with wildfire risk mitigation. These plans outline detailed recommendations for sensitive species and habitats, emphasizing minimal disturbance, native vegetation retention, invasive species control, and careful timing of activities to protect wildlife during vulnerable periods. They further advocate for maintaining ecological integrity through vegetation buffers along riparian areas and the careful management of chaparral, sandhill habitats, and oak woodlands.

The **2014 Santa Cruz County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan** and **2019 Pajaro River Watershed Integrated Regional Water Management Plan** adopt aquatic ecosystem-focused strategies, emphasizing streamflow restoration, sediment control, riparian management, fish passage improvements, and wetland restoration. Both plans recognize the importance of enhancing aquatic habitats and biodiversity through specific restoration practices, such as removing invasive species, restoring natural hydrological functions, and improving fish passage infrastructure.

The **Santa Cruz County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS)** provides a comprehensive framework that includes land acquisition, habitat restoration, and wildlife-friendly infrastructure. Key actions include restoring riparian corridors, wetlands, and instream habitats; implementing wildlife crossings to address fragmentation; and focusing on adaptive management to enhance ecosystem resilience against climate threats.

State-level plans, including the **California Adaptation Planning Guide**, the **California Water Plan Update 2023**, the **California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**, **Pathways to 30x30**, and **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy**, expand on these approaches, advocating

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for integrated ecosystem restoration, habitat connectivity, and biodiversity conservation through statewide policy alignment and large-scale restoration projects. Notably, these strategies underline the integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, emphasizing collaboration with Tribal communities in ecosystem management.

Parks-focused strategies from **Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plans** identify resource protection through partnerships, interpretive programming, and volunteer engagement but are less detailed in specific ecological restoration activities compared to other plans.

In summary, plans universally recognize habitat and biodiversity as critical resources that necessitate holistic, integrated management strategies combining restoration, conservation, and community collaboration. Continued cross-jurisdictional alignment and coordinated implementation will be essential to effectively protecting regional biodiversity and enhancing ecological resilience.

Parks, Recreation, and Public Access

Across reviewed plans, parks, recreation, and public access emerge as significant priorities, with common strategies including enhancing urban green spaces, promoting accessible and safe park facilities, integrating ecological considerations with recreational infrastructure, and emphasizing community engagement and equitable access.

Local climate action plans from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** highlight improving parks and recreational amenities alongside sustainability goals. **Capitola** focuses on increasing open spaces and promoting safe pedestrian and bicycle access to parks, alongside community garden initiatives. **Santa Cruz** emphasizes enhancing urban forests, prioritizing tree planting in frontline communities, and expanding environmental education through watershed stewardship programs. **Watsonville** aligns recreation goals with active transportation infrastructure, trail improvements, expanded green spaces, and educational eco-literacy programs.

Wildfire and emergency management documents like the **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** and **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan** indirectly support park protection through wildfire risk mitigation strategies and emergency use coordination, respectively, though they offer limited specific recreational infrastructure guidance.

County strategic plans provide detailed management frameworks. The **Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plan** and its **2023 update** detail specific operational improvements including maintenance standards, accessibility enhancements, safety improvements, diverse recreational programming (e.g., bilingual and age-specific programs), and community engagement through volunteer opportunities and environmental stewardship. Both documents underscore community input, addressing concerns such as safety, cleanliness, and increased interpretive and educational programs.

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The **2022 Santa Cruz County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy** focuses on recreation management within sensitive ecological areas, recommending infrastructure improvements such as wildlife-friendly signage and trails, as well as public education efforts to minimize ecological disturbances.

At the regional watershed management level, the **2019 Pajaro River Watershed Integrated Regional Water Management Plan** advocates for incorporating recreational elements into water management projects, emphasizing public education and environmental stewardship.

State-level documents like the **California Adaptation Planning Guide**, **Outdoors for All Strategy**, **Pathways to 30x30**, and **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy** broadly reinforce equitable access to recreation spaces, particularly in underserved communities. These strategies emphasize expanding parks, green infrastructure, and accessible outdoor experiences. They also highlight infrastructure adaptation to climate impacts, educational outreach, and integrating recreational use with conservation and biodiversity goals.

The **California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan** further aligns recreational access improvements with wildfire resilience and equitable accessibility, while the **California Outdoors for All Strategy** specifically addresses deferred maintenance, improved accessibility, and multi-benefit approaches connecting trails with natural habitats.

Overall, reviewed plans consistently promote enhanced accessibility, safety, ecological integration, and educational programming as key components of robust parks and recreation systems. Greater cross-jurisdictional coordination, particularly regarding equitable access and ecological resilience, could optimize the collective impact of these diverse recreational and environmental strategies.

Working Lands and Agricultural Stewardship

Across reviewed documents, working lands and agricultural stewardship strategies consistently emphasize soil health, sustainable farming practices, water conservation, ecosystem function enhancement, and technical assistance for private landowners, with varying specificity and scope.

Local climate action plans from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** highlight distinct, community-focused agricultural strategies. **Capitola** promotes local food production through community gardens, urban agriculture, and support for locally sourced foods, reflecting a localized urban agriculture approach. **Santa Cruz** targets compost application and regenerative agricultural practices, collaborating with community and educational institutions like UCSC and the Homeless Garden Project. **Watsonville** strongly advocates climate-smart agriculture through regional agricultural planning, local farmer technical assistance, and pilot regenerative agriculture projects on city-owned land.

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Regional watershed management plans (**2014 Santa Cruz County IRWM Plan** and **2019 Pajaro River Watershed IRWM Plan**) detail broader stewardship practices, emphasizing sustainable agriculture through improved irrigation, nutrient management, erosion control, and groundwater recharge. The Pajaro River Plan specifically promotes land conservation practices, conservation tillage, and stormwater capture infrastructure, underscoring technical assistance to private agricultural landowners.

County-level documents such as the **2021 Santa Cruz County Climate Action and Adaptation Plan** and the **2022 Santa Cruz County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS)** further develop these themes. The Climate Action Plan highlights carbon sequestration through sustainable agriculture, organic waste utilization, and partnerships with agricultural organizations. The RCIS prioritizes preserving working lands from development, enhancing management practices for biodiversity, and improving water conservation measures on farms, notably through collaboration, technical assistance, and financial incentives.

Wildfire-focused strategies, such as the **Community Wildfire Protection Plan** and the **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan**, predominantly address agricultural lands indirectly, through wildfire risk mitigation and emergency preparedness. Although these documents recognize agricultural lands as valuable assets, they provide less detail on specific agricultural stewardship practices.

At the state level, comprehensive guidance emerges from documents like the **California Adaptation Planning Guide**, **California Water Plan Update 2023**, **California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**, **Pathways to 30x30**, and **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy**. These sources emphasize climate-smart agriculture practices, improved soil management, land-use planning, incentives for sustainable management, and robust outreach and technical support programs. The Natural and Working Lands Strategy is notably specific in advocating practices like cover cropping, composting, integrated pest management, managed aquifer recharge, and farmland protection via conservation easements.

The **California Outdoors for All Strategy** uniquely highlights converting former agricultural landscapes for broader environmental and recreational use, promoting multi-benefit approaches that blend conservation, cultural values, and public access.

In summary, reviewed documents collectively advocate for holistic agricultural stewardship encompassing sustainable land-use practices, ecosystem function, soil health, water conservation, and robust technical assistance programs. Increased integration of these strategies across jurisdictional levels and sustained support for farmer outreach and education are essential for optimizing agricultural resilience and environmental health regionally.

Coastal Protection

Across the reviewed documents, coastal protection strategies consistently emphasize adapting to sea-level rise, protecting marine biodiversity, reducing pollution, and enhancing coastal resilience through both engineered and nature-based solutions.

Local climate action plans from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** highlight distinct coastal management approaches. **Capitola** underscores conservation and sustainable resource use through water conservation and green building strategies to indirectly protect coastal water quality. **Santa Cruz** actively addresses vulnerability to sea-level rise through ongoing coastal monitoring and climate adaptation plans. The city also leverages legal actions against fossil fuel companies to address climate impacts on coastal areas. **Watsonville** primarily addresses coastal agricultural vulnerabilities and pollution reduction through regional planning and plastic reduction initiatives.

Regional strategies such as the **2019 Pajaro River Watershed Integrated Regional Water Management Plan** advocate for shoreline realignment, marsh and mudflat monitoring, and demonstration projects employing "living shorelines" to enhance coastal resilience and marine habitat protection. The plan emphasizes integrating regional ecological responses into adaptation efforts.

The **2022 Santa Cruz County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy** explicitly targets the protection and management of coastal habitats, advocating for increased acreage protection and adaptive management strategies to address sea-level rise. Meanwhile, the **Santa Cruz County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan** proposes a range of structural and non-structural coastal protection methods, including seawalls, managed retreat, stringent development regulations, and coastal restoration initiatives.

Emergency-focused documents like the **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan** recognize coastal vulnerabilities from sea-level rise and tsunamis, outlining emergency response mechanisms for pollution events and infrastructure security, although specific proactive coastal enhancement strategies are less detailed.

At the state level, the **2020 California Adaptation Planning Guide**, **2023 California Water Plan Update**, and **2022 Pathways to 30x30 California** provide comprehensive frameworks for coastal resilience. These documents emphasize long-term vulnerability assessments, nature-based adaptation methods like wetlands restoration and living shorelines, and protection of critical ecosystems such as kelp forests and seagrass beds. They also advocate for innovative land-use planning tools, including transfer of development rights, to manage coastal risks effectively.

The **2023 California Outdoors for All Strategy** uniquely highlights equitable coastal access through initiatives to increase affordable accommodation and reduce barriers to recreational opportunities. Conversely, the **2021 Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy** underscores ecological restoration, focusing on seagrass and kelp ecosystems, sustainable aquaculture, and effective management of marine protected areas.

Overall, reviewed plans collectively emphasize the importance of comprehensive coastal management strategies, integrating ecological restoration, adaptive infrastructure, pollution mitigation, and equitable public access. Enhancing coordination among local, regional, and state-level initiatives will be crucial for effective coastal resilience and marine biodiversity protection.

Climate Resilience and Adaption

Across the reviewed documents, climate resilience and adaptation strategies consistently focus on addressing vulnerabilities to extreme weather, sea-level rise, wildfire, drought, and other climate-driven impacts. Strategies emphasize infrastructure resilience, ecosystem-based solutions, community preparedness, proactive hazard mitigation, and equitable adaptation.

Local climate action plans from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** each integrate resilience strategies tailored to local needs. **Capitola** emphasizes open space enhancement, urban forestry, and water conservation to mitigate climate impacts, while highlighting regional collaboration. **Santa Cruz** details extensive adaptation planning efforts, such as coastal monitoring, green infrastructure projects, and legal actions against fossil fuel companies to finance resilience initiatives. **Watsonville** focuses on community energy resilience, urban agriculture for food security, and leveraging its Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) to enhance preparedness.

Regional strategies, notably the **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)**, explicitly link wildfire mitigation to climate resilience, emphasizing fuels reduction projects and protection of water resources. Similarly, the **Pajaro River Watershed IRWM Plan** underscores water use efficiency, groundwater optimization, and climate-responsive water management practices as essential components of resilience.

The **2021 Santa Cruz County Climate Action and Adaptation Plan** provides a broad framework, addressing climate risks to infrastructure, vulnerable communities, and natural resources. It emphasizes community shelters, infrastructure rehabilitation, and comprehensive monitoring. Similarly, the **Santa Cruz County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan** advocates proactive mitigation strategies, infrastructure resilience, managed retreat, and multi-hazard planning integration to effectively reduce climate vulnerabilities.

The **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan** explicitly integrates climate adaptation into emergency management, highlighting the role of the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience (OR3), equity guardrails, critical infrastructure improvements, and aligning hazard mitigation with broader climate resilience efforts.

At the state level, comprehensive guidance emerges from documents such as the **California Adaptation Planning Guide**, **California Water Plan Update**, **Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**, **Pathways to 30x30 California**, and the **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy**. These plans collectively emphasize integrating climate considerations into planning frameworks, leveraging nature-based solutions, and employing adaptive management strategies.

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Specific actions include climate-smart forestry, prescribed fire, ecosystem restoration, infrastructure hardening, and climate-smart agriculture practices to bolster resilience across natural and built landscapes.

The **Outdoors for All Strategy** uniquely integrates climate resilience into recreational space management, emphasizing restoration and repurposing lands as natural buffers and promoting post-fire recovery recreational opportunities.

Overall, the documents consistently stress proactive, collaborative, and integrated strategies, leveraging both built and natural infrastructure to manage climate risks. Enhanced alignment and coordination across local, regional, and state-level efforts will be crucial for achieving comprehensive and equitable climate resilience throughout the region.

Match

Across the reviewed documents, leveraging additional funding emerges as a pivotal strategy for successfully implementing climate action, resilience, conservation, and infrastructure projects. Plans consistently highlight the importance of accessing diverse funding sources including federal, state, regional grants, local measures, public-private partnerships, and dedicated funding mechanisms.

Local climate action plans from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** all prioritize strategic pursuit of external funding. **Capitola** emphasizes aligning its Climate Action Plan with state goals to qualify for transportation and land use grants, seeking rebates and incentives for water conservation and energy efficiency projects, and leveraging partnerships to access grant opportunities. **Santa Cruz** actively seeks multi-source grant funding to advance electrification, forest management, and building decarbonization initiatives, emphasizing regional collaborations and developing a funding pathways matrix. **Watsonville** highlights its reliance on state and federal grants for key projects like electric vehicle infrastructure, building retrofits, and community resilience hubs, prioritizing grant identification and collaborative funding mechanisms.

Regional plans such as the **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** explicitly link planning efforts with priority access to state and federal funding, particularly emphasizing community-driven wildfire mitigation projects. The CWPP underlines the importance of establishing clear community Wildland-Urban Interface boundaries to enhance funding eligibility.

Emergency and hazard-focused plans, including the **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan** and **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP)**, stress the role of comprehensive documentation and strategic alignment in maximizing funding opportunities. They highlight utilizing clearly defined hazard mitigation and resilience projects to leverage federal disaster recovery grants, alongside streamlined county processes to enhance cost recovery and funding efficiency.

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Water management plans (**2014 Santa Cruz County IRWM Plan** and **2019 Pajaro River Watershed IRWM Plan**) focus on diversifying funding sources to ensure sustainability. Both plans advocate for collaboration among agencies and stakeholders to secure funding from state grants, federal programs, user rates, and philanthropic contributions, emphasizing robust financial planning and resource sharing.

The **2022 Santa Cruz County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS)** suggests using its strategic framework to attract diverse investments, recommending the pursuit of public and private grants, dedicated local funding programs, and matching funds from various governmental levels and foundations.

State-level strategies in documents such as the **California Adaptation Planning Guide**, **California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**, **California Outdoors for All Strategy**, and **Pathways to 30x30 California** advocate securing federal and state grant funds, promoting public-private partnerships, standardizing easement processes, and enhancing financial incentives. These documents emphasize coordinated approaches to align and attract multi-sector investments.

In summary, reviewed documents collectively underscore the necessity and strategic advantage of leveraging diversified and coordinated funding sources. Enhanced cross-sector collaboration, strategic planning, and clear project prioritization emerge as critical components for effectively accessing and maximizing additional funding opportunities.

Multi Benefit

Across the reviewed plans, multi-benefit strategies are a recurring theme, with a strong emphasis on maximizing ecological, social, and economic outcomes through integrated project design and implementation. Plans consistently highlight how projects can simultaneously address climate goals, community well-being, public health, habitat conservation, economic development, and environmental justice.

Local climate action plans from **Capitola**, **Santa Cruz**, and **Watsonville** robustly promote co-beneficial approaches. **Capitola** emphasizes strategies that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while improving air quality, public health, and urban livability, such as energy efficiency upgrades, green infrastructure, and sustainable transportation. **Santa Cruz** aligns its climate measures with its Health in All Policies initiative, linking climate action with health, equity, and job creation, particularly in frontline communities. **Watsonville** provides explicit co-benefit listings for each measure, highlighting gains such as improved habitat, cost savings, enhanced recreation, and green job creation through solar deployment and green infrastructure.

The **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** reinforces the value of multi-benefit wildfire risk reduction strategies like prescribed burns, herbivory, and shaded fuel breaks, which also restore habitats and enhance firefighter access. The **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan** integrates

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resilience, emergency response, and climate action through initiatives like Community Resilience Centers and collaborative planning via the Readiness Working Group.

County-level climate and water planning documents—such as the **Santa Cruz County CAAP, LHMP, 2014 and 2019 IRWM Plans**, and the **RCIS**—promote multi-benefit projects that advance flood risk reduction, habitat restoration, water quality improvements, and recreation. These plans advocate for floodplain reconnection, riparian restoration, and smart site selection for habitat projects that enhance ecological function while protecting communities. The **RCIS** also underscores the importance of spatial planning to optimize project siting for cost-effectiveness and impact.

The **Parks Strategic Plans** highlight how park improvements can simultaneously increase accessibility, climate resilience, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. Enhanced interpretive programs, inclusivity upgrades, and stewardship initiatives illustrate this integrated approach.

At the state level, documents such as the **California Adaptation Planning Guide, Water Plan Update, 30x30 Pathways, Natural and Working Lands Strategy**, and the **Outdoors for All Strategy** elevate multi-benefit principles as foundational. They champion nature-based solutions, landscape-scale restoration, equitable access to open space, and multi-sectoral collaboration. These strategies seek to deliver combined benefits including carbon sequestration, biodiversity support, heat mitigation, water supply reliability, and social equity.

In sum, the reviewed documents demonstrate a widespread commitment to multi-benefit strategies, recognizing their role in fostering resilient ecosystems, healthy communities, and efficient resource use. Future implementation will benefit from sustained cross-sector coordination, strategic site prioritization, and inclusive community engagement to ensure the broadest and most equitable distribution of these benefits.

Disadvantaged Communities

Across all reviewed plans, equity and the prioritization of disadvantaged communities emerge as critical components of climate action, emergency planning, and conservation efforts. Most documents define disadvantaged communities (DACs) as those experiencing systemic inequities, including lower income, limited access to resources, and heightened vulnerability to environmental hazards.

At the local level, plans from **Capitola, Santa Cruz, and Watsonville** incorporate robust equity-focused strategies. **Capitola** emphasizes improving access to weatherization programs and aligning affordable housing with transit, recognizing the additional burdens faced by low-income households. **Santa Cruz** integrates equity throughout its Climate Action Plan, using an equity screening tool, compensating frontline groups for participation, and targeting investments such as EV chargers and electrification strategies in frontline neighborhoods. Similarly, **Watsonville**

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prioritizes energy and food justice, advocates for equitable investment from Central Coast Community Energy, and supports EV infrastructure and local food access in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Emergency preparedness and resilience planning, as seen in the **Santa Cruz Emergency Operation Plan**, **County CAAP**, and **LHMP**, also foreground equity. These documents highlight the need for culturally competent services, targeted outreach, and structural reforms to overcome barriers that limit access to preparedness and recovery resources. The establishment of Community Resilience Centers and DAFN (Disability, Access, and Functional Needs) working groups reflect efforts to center social vulnerability in emergency response.

Water and hazard mitigation plans, including the **IRWM Plans** and **CWPP**, prioritize projects in disadvantaged communities and incorporate metrics to identify areas of need. The **2014 and 2019 IRWM Plans** provide technical assistance and community engagement support for DACs, particularly in Watsonville and Davenport, and advocate for equitable flood protection and water quality access. The **CWPP** further prioritizes wildfire risk reduction in high-density, socially vulnerable WUI communities.

The **Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plans**—both 2018 and 2023—address disparities in access to parks and recreational services. These plans recommend strategic resource allocation guided by equity metrics, expanded outreach and bilingual programming, and partnerships with trusted local organizations to improve inclusivity and engagement.

State-level plans deepen these equity commitments. The **California Adaptation Planning Guide**, **Water Plan Update**, and **Pathways to 30x30** each emphasize inclusive engagement, targeted investments, and systems-level reforms to ensure vulnerable populations benefit from and participate in climate solutions. The **Outdoors for All Strategy** and **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy** also promote access to parks, jobs, and environmental programming for historically marginalized groups, along with support for Tribes and small-scale farmers.

In summary, the reviewed plans consistently recognize that climate action and resilience cannot be achieved without intentional, equity-driven approaches. Addressing the unique needs of disadvantaged communities—through targeted funding, inclusive planning processes, and integrated service delivery—will be essential to achieving both climate and social justice goals.

Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of the reviewed plans ranges from hyper-local city-level efforts to broader regional, countywide, and statewide frameworks. The **Capitola Climate Action Plan** focuses on community-wide activities within Capitola's boundaries and municipal operations, while coordinating with regional agencies like SCCRTC and AMBAG to address cross-jurisdictional transportation and sustainability goals. Similarly, the **City of Santa Cruz Climate Action Plan** emphasizes city-level action, particularly within frontline neighborhoods, but integrates regional

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partnerships with entities like CCCE and SCCRTC and considers watershed-level implications for water conservation and carbon sequestration.

The **Watsonville Climate Action Plan** also focuses primarily on strategies within city limits—especially Downtown Watsonville—while supporting regional efforts on transportation, agriculture, and energy with partners such as AMBAG and 3CE. The **Regional Project Prioritization** effort, through the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), spans both Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties and is organized into localized planning areas to reflect varied ecological and community contexts.

At the county level, the **Santa Cruz Emergency Operations Plan**, **Santa Cruz County CAAP**, **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan**, and the **Regional Conservation Investment Strategy** all adopt a countywide approach, with the EOP and CAAP specifically addressing the full operational area including diverse geographies like coastal zones, mountains, and farmland. The **Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plan** covers unincorporated areas, while its 2023 update expands to include cities within the county, acknowledging regional disparities—particularly in South County.

Integrated regional water management plans show variation in scope: the **2014 Santa Cruz IRWM Plan** covers most of Santa Cruz County, coordinating with the Pajaro IRWM region in overlapping areas, while the **2019 Pajaro River Watershed IRWM Plan** spans multiple counties, including Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito, and Monterey. Similarly, the **Santa Cruz-San Mateo CWPP** segments Santa Cruz County into five sub-regions for planning and implementation.

Statewide frameworks, including the **California Adaptation Planning Guide**, **California Water Plan**, **Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**, **Outdoors for All Strategy**, **Pathways to 30x30**, and the **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy**, apply a broader geographic lens. These plans emphasize the importance of tailoring strategies to California’s diverse ecosystems, watersheds, and socio-political contexts, often featuring regional profiles or guidance adaptable to local needs.

Community Engagement

Every plan reviewed positions robust, inclusive community engagement as the bedrock of effective climate, hazard-mitigation, conservation, and parks planning. Local climate plans set the tone. The **Capitola Climate Action Plan** built on a decade-long General Plan process, convening community workshops and a resident-led General Plan Advisory Committee to vet greenhouse-gas (GHG) measures and retain Capitola’s “small-town” identity. The **Santa Cruz CAP 2030** ran a two-year “Resilient Together” campaign: 29 public events, bilingual surveys, pop-ups, focus groups, youth and unsheltered workshops, and equity advisors ensured frontline voices shaped final actions. In **Watsonville**, a 16-member Community Advisory Committee, web app, and two city-wide surveys framed strategy ranking, while a formal Public Engagement Plan locked transparency and ongoing feedback into implementation.

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Regional collaborations mirror that intensity. The bi-county **Community Wildfire Protection Plan** (CWPP) opened with stakeholder charrettes, agency roundtables, and geographically split breakout sessions; a blog and 30-day public review refined priorities such as roadside fuel reduction. IRWM programs adopt tiered outreach: the **Santa Cruz IRWM** mixes county-wide workshops, listserv updates, and focused sessions for Tribal governments and disadvantaged communities; the four-county **Pajaro River IRWM** relies on a Stakeholder Steering Committee, project-level meetings, and watershed-wide progress briefings. The **Regional Conservation Investment Strategy** adds a steering committee, technical advisory team, and open houses to weave scientific, agency, and Tribal knowledge into project pipelines.

County-scale frameworks reinforce a “whole-community” ethos. The **Santa Cruz Emergency Operations Plan** creates a Readiness Working Group spanning public, private, nonprofit, and academic sectors, plus DAFN and Cultural-Competency teams to embed equity in preparedness. The **County CAAP** mobilizes cross-department staff and a youth Climate Policy Internship, while the **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan** formalizes recurring public meetings, social-media campaigns, and future council briefings. Parks planning follows suit: the 2018 **Parks Strategic Plan** and its 2023 update gathered surveys at fairs, held North-, Mid-, and South-County meetings, and formed a stakeholder working group that inserted a new equity goal focused on underserved neighborhoods.

Statewide guides elevate participatory principles into policy. The **California Adaptation Planning Guide** and **Water Plan 2023** call for watershed networks, EJ summits, and community-science programs; both insist Tribes and under-represented groups share decision-making power. The **Wildfire & Forest Resilience Action Plan** funds Regional Fire & Forestry Capacity collaboratives to seed local project pipelines and workforce training. Recreation-focused strategies—**Outdoors for All** and **Pathways to 30×30**—document statewide listening tours, Tribal sessions, and advisory panels, and commit to co-creating and co-managing parks with community-based organizations. The **Natural & Working Lands Climate-Smart Strategy** echoes that stance, pairing funding with community-led, nature-based solutions.

Taken together, these documents treat community development not as a box-checking exercise but as a continuous, co-creative cycle: early visioning shapes goals; diverse advisory bodies refine actions; iterative public review improves equity; and durable partnerships steward implementation. Embedding this engagement infrastructure across scales—and resourcing it adequately—emerges as the common formula for plans that are trusted, equitable, and built to last.