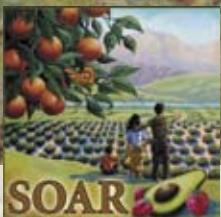




**AT RISK** VENTURA COUNTY'S  
**OPEN SPACE AND FARMLANDS**



SAVE OPEN-SPACE & AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

SOAR would like to thank the many individuals who helped compile and review the information in this report as well as our generous supporters.

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# Executive Summary

Ventura County is a spectacular place to live, with striking wild and rural landscapes, distinctive and inviting cities, rich soils and thriving farms, outstanding recreation, a vibrant economy, and some of the most important remaining natural habitats, river systems, and wetlands in Southern California.

But Ventura County faces a major challenge: how to preserve our region's environment and

However, population growth and inefficient use of land within the SOAR growth boundaries, along with sprawl proposals and large-lot ranchette development outside the boundaries, continue to put intense pressure on Ventura County's working farms and natural areas.

Analysis by the countywide SOAR organization determined that today, one in four acres of open space and agricultural land is at risk of sprawl development within the next 10 to 20

- Fragmentation and conversion of natural areas and agricultural lands by ranchette development
- Rapid development of the remaining farmland and open space within city boundaries

## Strategies for the Future

The good news is that the SOAR initiatives have spurred the beginnings of a paradigm shift in

## ONE IN FOUR ACRES OF PRIVATELY OWNED LAND IN VENTURA COUNTY IS AT RISK OF SPRAWL DEVELOPMENT

high quality of life in the face of mounting regional and global challenges.

Between 1995 and 2000, voters in Ventura County overwhelmingly approved a series of ballot measures – the SOAR initiatives – which effectively created the most comprehensive protection against urban sprawl of any county in the United States.

In contrast to Los Angeles and Orange counties, Ventura County has not turned into a single large urban mass. Our cities remain distinct, each with a unique sense of identity and place, defined in no small measure by the intact expanses of open space and farmland that surround them.

years, and much more will be at risk if the SOAR boundaries are allowed to expire.

### The Challenges

The threats to open space and agricultural land are both old and new:

- Less expensive lands outside city boundaries that make sprawl development attractive to developers
- The persistent myth that accommodating population growth requires sprawl development into our open lands, and that such development will create more affordable housing

our thinking about what makes sustainable and livable communities.

Since outward expansion is no longer the path of least resistance, residents, elected officials, and developers alike are beginning to look inward to our existing cities for answers to the questions of how and where to accommodate population and economic growth.

More people are embracing smart-growth principles of creating walkable downtowns easily accessed by transit, and concentrating development within our existing urban areas – not only to protect greenbelts and farmland, but also to reduce energy consumption and global climate impacts and to create healthier neighborhoods and communities.

Key strategies for the future include:

- Defending the SOAR growth boundaries
- Extending the SOAR boundaries beyond their 2020 expiration date
- Permanently protecting open space and farmland through acquisitions and land protection agreements
- Minimizing development of rural lands
- Supporting a strong local and sustainable agricultural base
- Employing smart growth and sustainability principles to development within existing urban areas
- Investing in better transportation choices
- Maintaining strong grassroots engagement in protecting open space.



The choices Ventura County residents and leaders make over the next ten years will determine whether our region merges into the sprawl of Los Angeles or finds its way toward a healthier and more sustainable future.



## Now More Than Ever

Oil depletion, rising energy costs and the threat of global climate change make the preservation of farmlands and natural ecosystems more critical than ever.

As importing food from thousands of miles away becomes more expensive, local food sources will increasingly become a matter of regional economic and food security. At the same time, changing water and weather patterns may be shifting the places where individual plant, wildlife, and crop species can live. The more open lands we conserve, the better the chances are that these plants and animals will be able to move with the changing climate rather than being squeezed off the map altogether.

To find out how you can help protect open space and farmlands to help create a more sustainable future for Ventura County, contact SOAR at [www.soarusa.org](http://www.soarusa.org).

### About This Report

The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of the open space and farmlands at risk in Ventura County, how they are being threatened, and the actions needed to ensure their long-term preservation for ourselves and future generations.

The information in this report is largely based on geographic data gathered and maintained by the Geographic Information Systems division of the County of Ventura. The geographic data was used in combination with local knowledge of land use trends and political climate to assess development risks to open space and agricultural land throughout the county. We classified these lands using the following risk categories and definitions:

**High Risk:** Undeveloped land within city and/or SOAR boundaries that is developable subject only to city council approval, developable lands requiring a SOAR vote that are the focus of significant developer interest, or rare habitats that are highly sensitive to direct or indirect development impacts.

**Medium Risk:** Developable lands with one or more of the following risk factors: adjacent to or surrounded by urbanized areas; at risk of parcelization and ranchette development; and/or the focus of some developer interest.

**Low Risk:** Lands which, owing to a variety of geographic, political, and regulatory factors, are not likely to be developed in the near future.

**Secure Open Space:** Lands not threatened by development, including most public lands, land trust properties, and easements.

**Urban:** Existing urbanized areas, typically developed at a density of at least one residential unit per 1.5 acres or the equivalent density for commercial or industrial development.

It is important to note that the maps in this report represent a regional perspective and not a parcel-by-parcel level of analysis or precision. We welcome feedback on any errors, oversights, or differences of opinion about the relative threats in and around each community, and will incorporate such feedback into future updates of this report.



### The Road Less Traveled

California's population will continue to grow, as will the development pressures facing Ventura County. How Ventura County residents and elected leaders respond to these pressures will determine whether Ventura County merges into the endless sea of Southern California sprawl, or stays the course to a different, healthier and more sustainable future.

We hope that this report will help citizens in Ventura County assess which kind of future we're heading toward, and inspire the next generation of grassroots leadership and action to create the future we want.

# A Place Worth Protecting

## WHY OPEN SPACE AND FARMLANDS MATTER



**Working farms and ranches contribute billions of dollars to the local economy, provide regional food security, and remind us of our connection with the natural world.**

**P**rotecting open space and farmlands is about more than elbow room and million-dollar vistas. It's about safeguarding natural life support systems, a healthy local food supply, a thriving economy, great recreation, and compact communities with a well-defined sense of place. Perhaps most importantly, it's about leaving behind a world in which our children and grandchildren can thrive.

### **Life Support Systems**

Ventura County is home to a surprising wealth of native wildlife and plant species, including several threatened and endangered species found nowhere else on earth. Natural areas support these wild populations and the gene pools that enable them to adapt to ever-changing environmental conditions.

Natural areas and well-managed farms also support vital ecological processes such as cycling and filtration of air and water, climate and flood control, plant pollination, and the maintenance of healthy soils and clean water supplies. The value of these "free" ecosystem services is incalculable, and usually is only fully appreciated when those services are lost – as when naturally flowing river systems are replaced with concrete channels, floodplains are paved over and levees fail, causing flood damage far more severe than would occur under natural conditions.

### **You CAN Eat the Scenery**

The importance of a reliable local food source is growing along with global food prices, energy prices and food safety concerns. Agriculture in Ventura County supplies food to people around the world as well as here at home, and is a thriving part of our economy, landscape, history and character. The survival of agriculture here depends on safeguarding our rich farmlands from urban sprawl and ensuring their long-term economic and environmental sustainability through the choices we make at the market and at the ballot box.

### **A Vibrant Economy**

Natural areas and farmlands make Ventura County an exceptionally attractive place to live, work and play. The area's natural assets enhance property values and aid employers competing to attract and retain highly skilled workers. The agriculture industry contributes billions of dollars to the local economy directly and through the services it supports. Rural beauty and outstanding recreational opportunities draw urban visitors whose dollars support the tourism trade, local businesses, and local government.



**Natural systems regulate flooding, nourish soils, and maintain clean water supplies.**

## Getting Out

Ventura County's parks and natural areas provide a wide array of outdoor activities, from strolling, running, hiking and picnicking to camping, mountain biking and birdwatching. These recreational opportunities make a critical contribution to the culture, quality of life and economy of Ventura County.

## A Sense of Place

The imperative to preserve open space and farmland has increasingly focused cities in Ventura County on infill, redevelopment, and compact, walkable neighborhood design within the SOAR boundaries. Smart growth principles, in turn, are helping to make our communities more livable and sustainable, and reducing the pressure to sprawl out into open lands. Compact, livable communities surrounded by greenbelts and farmland translate into great places to live. Each requires the other, and together they create a distinctive landscape that is the antithesis of sprawling Los Angeles where one city merges unrecognizably into the next.

## And Yes, the Views Are Spectacular

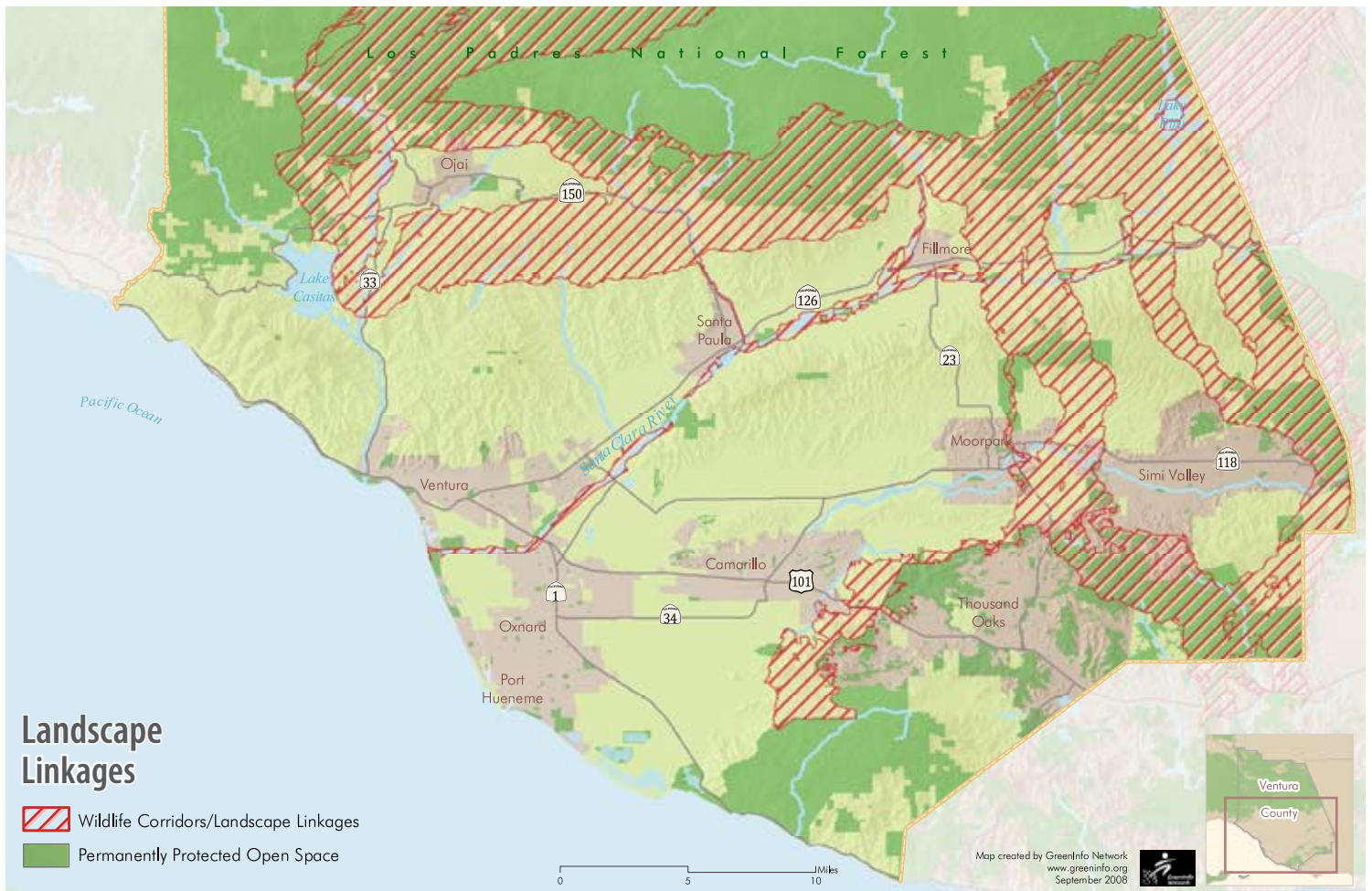
Ventura County residents are rewarded daily – at home, at school, at work, or on the road in between – by the serenity, stimulation, reflection and satisfaction inspired by the beauty of our natural areas and working farms. The sense of breathing room and connection to the land grounds us literally and figuratively, and provides a welcome respite from hectic lives spent largely inside a built environment.

## A Living Legacy

As valuable as all these qualities are to us today, they will assuredly be even more precious to our children and grandchildren as they strive for a sustainable future. Protecting open space and farmland today gives those who come after us a fighting chance at achieving that future. Squandering this legacy is unthinkable.



Ventura County's open spaces provide breathing room and keep nature and recreation within reach of all residents.



Ventura County contains one of the few remaining coastal-to-inland habitat linkages in the region, stretching from the Santa Monica Mountains to the Santa Susannas to the Sierra Madres of the Los Padres National Forest. Only a small fraction of this critical corridor for wildlife and plant movement is permanently protected open space.

Source: *South Coast Wildlands*, [www.scwildlands.org](http://www.scwildlands.org)

# Building a Wall Against Sprawl

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOAR



**SOAR** *n. or adj., abbrev. for Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources*

1. A series of local initiatives passed between 1995 and 2001 protecting open space, rural and agricultural land in the unincorporated Ventura County and establishing voter-controlled urban growth boundaries - known as "SOAR" or "CURB" (City Urban Restriction Boundary) lines - around eight of its ten cities.
2. A grassroots movement to stop urban sprawl and protect open space and farmlands in Ventura County.
3. A non-profit organization that supports local efforts to stop urban sprawl and protect open space.
4. The concept that changes in open space or agricultural zoning should be decided by a vote of the people.

From the 1960s, public policies in Ventura County have reflected a philosophy that urban growth should be focused within the existing urban footprint, and that open space and farmlands between the cities should be protected both for their intrinsic value and as a buffer to preserve our cities' distinct edges and identities and prevent them from merging into an unrelieved expanse of concrete.

The late 1980s, however, saw a rise in growth pressures and growing dissatisfaction among residents with city council and county

can be overridden by government agencies or elected officials. The SOAR initiatives put the power to change urban growth boundaries directly into the hands of the voters.

Success in Ventura led to successful efforts from 1996 through 2002 to pass SOAR initiatives in eight out of 10 cities in the county and on all unincorporated county land.

### Drawing the Boundaries

The first SOAR initiative, passed in 1995 in the City of Ventura, requires a popular vote to rezone land from agriculture to urban

varying degrees on the political effectiveness of the grassroots movement in each community. As a result, some cities have relatively "tight" boundaries while others are quite broad, leaving significant latitude for urban expansion.

### How the Boundaries Work

Development within the SOAR boundaries is, for the most part, under the control of local city councils and planning commissions.

Outside of those urban growth boundaries, lands that are designated as open space, agricultural and rural areas, with few

## THE SOAR INITIATIVES PUT THE POWER TO CHANGE URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARIES DIRECTLY INTO THE HANDS OF THE VOTERS

supervisory decisions that seemed too often to favor developer interests over those of the community. Adherence to long-standing policies, such as the Guidelines for Orderly Development and the Greenbelt Agreements, was unenforceable and eroding, and urban sprawl in the buffers between cities was accelerating.

### Launching the SOAR Movement

Borrowing the concept from a similar effort in Napa Valley, a group of residents in the City of Ventura launched the first SOAR campaign in 1995, aimed at wresting control over major growth and development decisions away from the city's elected officials.

Unlike the Guidelines for Orderly Development or the Greenbelt Agreements, the SOAR boundaries are not handshake agreements that

development. Using the Ventura SOAR template, a Thousand Oaks ordinance was passed in 1996 that requires a vote of the people to rezone the city's parks and open space lands. Likewise, the countywide SOAR ordinance requires a popular vote to rezone farmland, but also protects open space and rural area designations.

SOAR initiatives in seven other cities established urban growth boundaries known as CURB lines (City Urban Restriction Boundaries) that cannot be changed without a popular vote.

In general, the boundaries were drawn to correspond with the footprint of the existing cities, plus their associated spheres of influence and designated "expansion areas." The actual placement of the boundaries depended to

exceptions, cannot be developed without voter approval.

The SOAR ordinances do not change zoning or general plan regulations, nor do they affect the process of buying or selling land.

A ballot measure to change a SOAR boundary - either tightening it to limit development or expanding it to allow more development - can be brought to voters by a city council or by any party that circulates an initiative and gathers sufficient petition signatures from voters within the relevant jurisdiction.

The SOAR initiatives provide exemptions for specific purposes, including the construction of affordable housing and publicly-owned facilities such as water reservoirs.



## What Has Happened Since SOAR

As of September 2008, there have been ten ballot initiatives attempting to expand the SOAR boundaries, and one (in Simi Valley) to tighten a boundary. Of the ten expansion efforts, six were approved by voters and four were rejected.

Four of the six that passed covered relatively small areas, and three of the six were for community, church, or senior facilities. The four defeated measures were for large residential developments on large tracts of open space.

Communities in Ventura County can and have used the initiative and referendum process to bring other development proposals to a popular

vote – such as the 2006 Fagan Canyon referendum in Santa Paula and the 1999 Moorpark Hidden Creek referendum. Although these referenda dealt with a familiar set of issues around growth, traffic, and open space protection, they were not “SOAR votes,” because the lands at issue were not protected by SOAR ordinances.

To date, no developers or cities have sought exemption from a SOAR ordinance for the purpose of building affordable housing. However, Oxnard is currently examining a proposal to utilize this exemption to build affordable housing on 160 acres near the unincorporated community of El Rio.



## THE SOAR INITIATIVES

Between 1995 and 2001 SOAR’s grassroots efforts led to the passage of nine initiatives protecting open space and farmland throughout Ventura County.

Jurisdiction	Year SOAR Approved	Percent Approval	Sunset Year
Ventura (city)	1995	52%	2025
Thousand Oaks	1996*	-	2020
Camarillo	1998	68%	2020
Oxnard	1998	70%	2020
Simi Valley	1998	70%	2020
Thousand Oaks	1998	71%	2030
Ventura County	1998	63%	2020
Moorpark	1999	67%	2020
Santa Paula	2000	55%	2020
Fillmore	2001*	-	-

\*Enacted by city council rather than a popular vote.

## SOAR SCORECARD: Ballot Initiatives to Adjust SOAR Boundaries, 1999-2008

Year	City	Measure	Acres/Units	Voters’ Decision
1999	Ventura	First Assembly Church of God church and athletic fields	25.6 acres	Approved
2000	Ojai	St. Joseph’s Retirement Home facility expansion	15 acres	Approved
2000	Ventura	Community park	93.6 acres	Approved
2002	Ventura	Ventura Hillside*s	3800 acres / 1390 units	Rejected
2002	Santa Paula	Adams Canyon	5413 acres / 2250 Units	Rejected
2002	Simi Valley	Alamos Canyon (boundary tightening)	4900 acres	Rejected
2003	Santa Paula	Boundary Expansion at Peck and Foothill	32.5 acres 82 units	Approved
2006	Santa Paula	Adams Canyon	6500 acres / 495 units	Rejected
2006	Moorpark	North Park Village	3544 acres / 1680 units	Rejected
2006	Santa Paula	Adams Canyon	6500 acres / 495 units	Approved
2008	Santa Paula	Limoneira East Area 1	1500 acres / 1500 units	Approved

\*The Ventura Hillside\*s vote was triggered by a follow-up citizen’s initiative aligned with SOAR principles, rather than by the 1995 City of Ventura SOAR initiative.

# Challenges to Protecting Open Space and Farmlands



**Sprawl development increases car trips and traffic congestion, makes cities less livable and sustainable, and does little to reduce the pressure for expansion beyond growth boundaries.**

**I**n spite of the success of the SOAR initiatives, threats to open space and agricultural land in Ventura County continue as communities and developers adapt to the existence of growth boundaries. The same forces that prompted voters to pass the SOAR initiatives – the ever-increasing demand for space in attractive, temperate coastal areas, the lucrative development market, and the persistent urban sprawl development paradigm – are still at work today. These forces have been joined by a rise in the parcelization and fragmentation of open space and farmland to create large-lot rural estates as well as a rush to pave over remaining open lands inside the SOAR boundaries.

The major challenges to open space fall into five distinct, though interrelated, categories:

## **Market Incentives**

The demand for land in all of coastal California is high and will remain so. The potential profits associated with developing less expensive open space and agricultural land provide powerful motivation for landowners and developers to push for development of these lands instead of infill projects. Sprawl

development in the form of large-scale suburban tract development has provided a relatively expedient, low-cost means for securing those profits.

## **Sprawl Mentality**

The negative consequences of urban sprawl are by now well understood. But the erroneous perception persists that accommodating population growth requires building in the open space buffers between our cities. This faulty thinking is still used by some to justify urban sprawl projects.

## **Misconceptions About Affordable Housing**

Hand in hand with the sprawl mentality is a persistent belief that expansion into agricultural and open spaces will result in the creation of affordable housing. In reality, urban sprawl has done little to provide truly affordable housing, as evidenced by high housing prices in neighboring built-out areas of Los Angeles and Orange counties. In fact, there is reason to believe that development inside existing urban areas is actually more likely to generate affordable housing than is unchecked urban sprawl.

## **10-Acre Ranchettes**

Like many rural areas outside major cities, Ventura County has seen the rise of a growing trend known as “ranchette” or “rural estate” development, whereby open space lands are subdivided down to the smallest parcel permissible – 10 acres – without triggering a SOAR vote. These 10-acre parcels are then sold with the primary purpose of placing a single, large-scale house on each lot.

The proliferation of these developments, also called parcelization or rural sprawl, poses a long-term threat to Ventura County’s open spaces by undermining farming, fragmenting wildlife habitat, and paving the way for still more sprawl development.

Fences, lights, noise and other human incursions into natural open space act as barriers to wildlife movement, isolate populations, and reduce the biological diversity an area can support. Extension of infrastructure and services leads to greater accessibility and greater pressure for additional development in what were once remote areas.

These developments often remove prime agricultural land from production and fragment



**Large-lot ranchette development is a rural form of sprawl that fragments farmland and natural habitats, increases ag/urban conflicts, and paves the way for development of remote areas.**

contiguous acreage into parcels too small to be economically viable for agricultural production. Carving up the landscape also increases the conflict between agricultural and urban uses. New homeowners resent the noises, smells, dust, pesticides, and slow-moving machinery associated with farm operations, while farmers suffer from vandalism and crop theft.

**Sprawling Within the Cities**

Some of the open lands within the city SOAR boundaries are designated for urban expansion, and are appropriate places for good development. But in some communities, particularly where the SOAR boundaries were drawn more broadly, these lands (which include prime agricultural land) are being converted to sprawling housing developments far more rapidly than called for in their general plans.

Sprawl has the same negative effects whether inside or outside a growth boundary. It increases traffic congestion and car-related pollution, makes inefficient use of land and urban services, and reduces neighborhood livability. The inefficient use of land does little to decrease pressure for development outside the boundaries.

It is important to note that, with the exception of the City of Ventura, farmland within the growth boundaries of Ventura County cities is not protected by SOAR. Much of the threatened agricultural land within cities is at the city's edge. When these lands are urbanized, they impact neighboring SOAR-protected agricultural lands that are in the

unincorporated county by removing a valuable buffer between agricultural and urban land uses.

The loss of prime agricultural land, whether in cities or the unincorporated county, impacts the agricultural industry, removes a finite

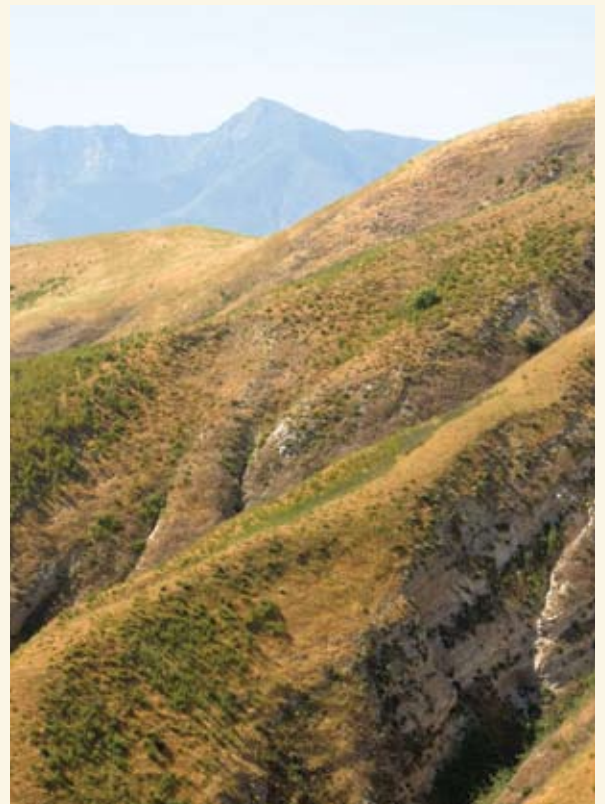
resource, and decreases our long-term regional food security. Agricultural and open-space lands not protected by SOAR that border protected agricultural lands should be the last areas cities develop (if ever), not the first.

**Satellite Sewer Systems:  
*A New Threat***

Until now, a major factor limiting development in our rural, agricultural and open space lands has been the lack of sewer systems. To avoid groundwater and pollution, septic tanks must be spaced well apart. This has limited the density of development in rural areas.

Ventura County is poised to consider new ordinances to allow expanded use of satellite sewer systems. Satellite sewer systems are small systems constructed by one or a few homeowners to allow them to treat their sewage themselves.

If approved, these new policies could add another threat to SOAR's objective of focusing development in existing urban areas and protecting large areas of agricultural and open space lands.



# Housing Prices Not Linked to SOAR



Too often urban sprawl ignores the need for homes that people can afford.

Conventional wisdom holds that SOAR has contributed to, if not been the sole cause of, the rise in housing costs in Ventura County over the past decade. However, according to the Ventura County Star, the facts simply do not support this contention.

The fact is that housing prices throughout coastal Southern California have gone through nearly identical ups and downs over the last several decades irrespective of local growth-management policies. Median home prices and housing affordability in Orange County and Ventura County were virtually neck-and-neck before SOAR, and have remained so over the last decade, even though Orange County converted more than twice as much land as Ventura County to urban development over this period.

Indiscriminate growth clearly does not guarantee the creation of homes that people can afford. On the other hand, the SOAR boundaries have forced cities to focus on infill and redevelopment opportunities, which are more likely to generate smaller, more affordable places to live that maximize efficient use of land and infrastructure.

With or without growth controls, land is a finite resource, and demand in Southern California

will probably always exceed supply because of our desirable climate and strong economy. Nevertheless, it is a fallacy to assert that we must choose between protecting open space and farmland on the one hand, and ensuring

that everyone in our communities has an affordable place to live on the other. We can choose to have both – or we can follow the old urban sprawl model and achieve neither.

VENTURA COUNTY STAR, November 20, 2005:

## ***“Don’t blame SOAR for the county’s high housing prices.”***

“Opponents of the growth-control law often do just that. They recite it like a mantra from Economics 101: ‘By limiting growth boundaries, Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources laws have stifled the supply of housing, driving prices to record highs,’ they say.

“But a computer analysis by The Star of historical real estate costs shows that home prices throughout Southern California have skyrocketed at almost equal rates – including counties without the landmark growth-control law.”

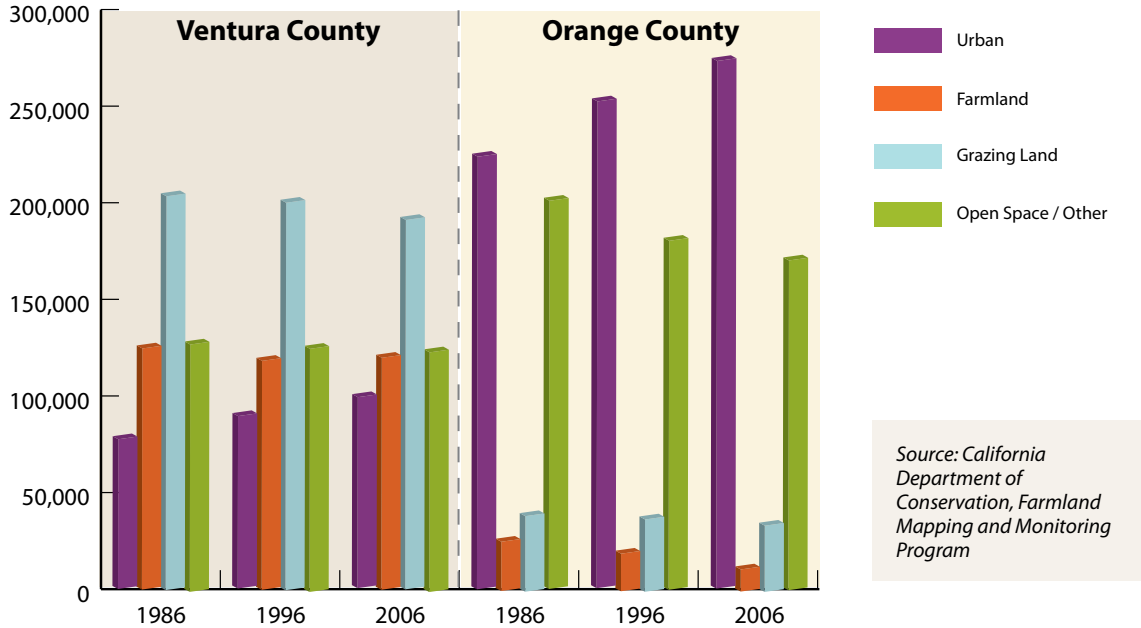
*Ventura County Star, C. Levin, November 20, 2005, “Housing cost study reveals SOAR myths: Rising prices are independent of measure.”*



# Paving the Way for Sprawl...

**Orange County has converted significantly more of its open space and farmland to housing and other urban uses over the last two decades than has Ventura County.**

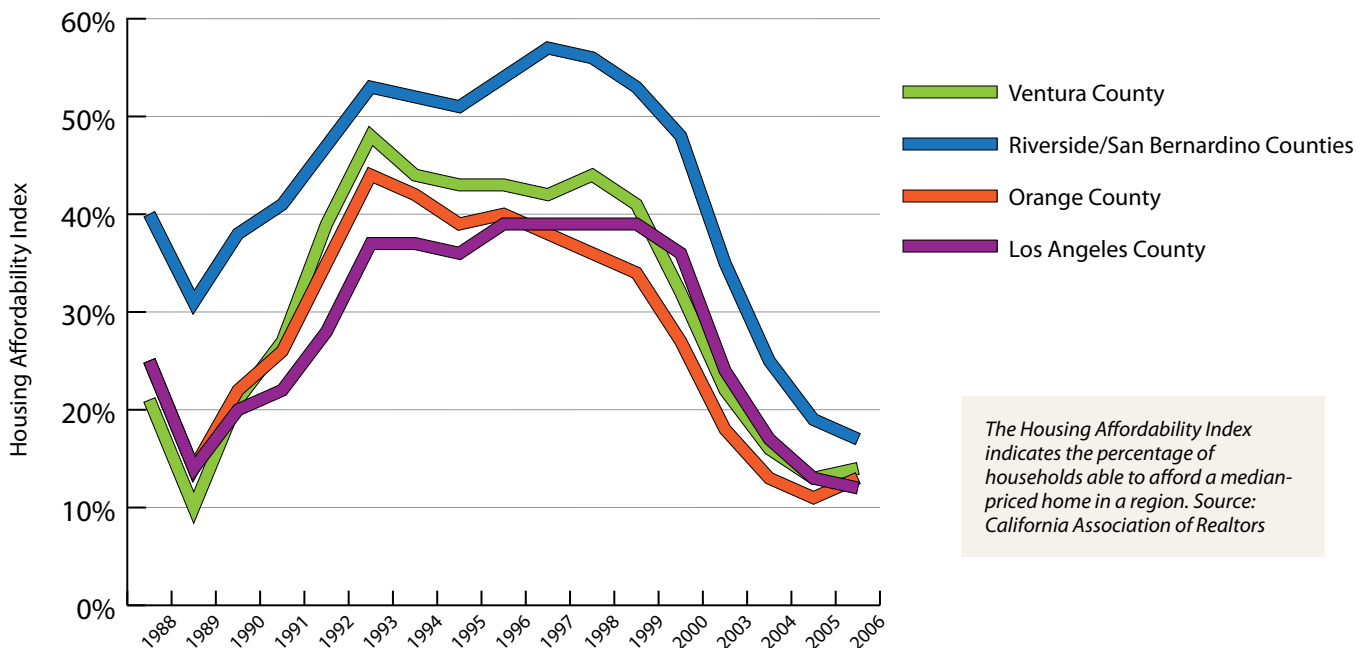
**LAND USE AND CONSERVATION 1986-2006**



## ...Does Not Create More Affordable Places to Live

**But this urbanization has not resulted in the creation of more affordable places to live in Orange County.** On the contrary, even after passage of the SOAR initiatives in the late 1990s, housing values and affordability in Ventura County and Orange County – indeed throughout Southern California – continued to follow nearly identical trajectories.

**HOUSING AFFORDABILITY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA 1988-2005**



# Strategies for Protecting Open Space and Farmlands

## KEEPING SOAR STRONG WILL CONTINUE TO BE CRITICAL TO PROTECTING OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND IN VENTURA COUNTY

Ventura County's ability to maintain and expand its high quality of life, thriving economy, and healthy environment depends on the public policy and planning choices that are made today. Although growth boundaries are critical and effective tools for stopping sprawl, achieving long-term sustainability will require commitment and collaboration across political jurisdictions, agencies, and community organizations along multiple fronts.

Open-space preservation begins with good land-use planning. County- and city-elected officials must demonstrate a political commitment to preserving the integrity of farmland and open space. Voters also have a powerful role to play in electing leaders and approving measures that drive better development, and in rejecting those that fuel sprawl.

The following are eight fundamental strategies for protecting open space and farmlands:

### Defend SOAR Growth Boundaries

Since the passage of the SOAR initiatives, only two major projects have won the approval of Ventura County voters. But developers are becoming more subtle about how they propose and package sprawl projects, making their political campaigns increasingly sophisticated and difficult to combat.

Defending the SOAR boundaries remains for now the most effective tool available for

keeping sprawl at bay. Communities, along with the SOAR organization, will need to exercise continued vigilance and maintain their readiness to mobilize resources as new battles for open space and agricultural land emerge.

### Extend SOAR Deadlines

Most of the SOAR initiatives will expire in 2020. The extension of these initiatives will be essential to continue holding the line on sprawl in Ventura County.

### Permanently Protect Open Space and Farmlands

Several land conservancies have been working for years on key land acquisitions in the county utilizing both private and public funds. A taxpayer-funded countywide open-space district would greatly enhance these efforts. Although voters rejected a ¼-cent sales tax to fund such a district in 2004, the success of similar measures in other regions such as Sonoma County, where an open-space tax has purchased over 70,000 acres, show how voter education can lead to support for an open-space district in the future. Purchasing key open-space lands and conservation easements ensures that these lands will be protected from development in perpetuity.

### Minimize Conversion of Rural and Agricultural Lands

The minimum parcel size for subdivision of lands zoned as open space should be increased

in order to halt the spread of 10-acre mini-mansion lots in the greenbelts between our cities. Ventura County has minimum parcel sizes of 40 acres for agricultural land, but the minimum is only 10 acres for lands zoned as open space.

Other measures for preventing the loss of rural and agricultural lands include 1) ensuring that policies to promote rural tourism and the development of much-needed farm-worker housing cannot be used as a backdoor for subdivision and rural estate development; and 2) tightly limiting new road and infrastructure development in rural areas.

### Sustain Agriculture

The survival of agriculture in Ventura County depends not just on the protection of agricultural lands, but also on the active support and stewardship of local farms by residents, communities, policymakers and farmers alike.

Such support can start with buying produce directly from local farmers or asking for local and organic produce at the market. It can include supporting agricultural buffer policies to provide a space between agriculture and housing tracts, schools and other uses; construction of farm-worker housing; financing for farm-to-school programs, community gardens and agricultural conservation easements; support and incentives for reducing pesticide use and transitioning to organic





From: Transforming Urban Environments for a Post-Peak Oil Future: A Vision for the City of Buena Vista, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2007.

## What Is Sustainable Development?

In communities across the nation, people are recognizing that the last century's sprawl-dominated, fossil-fuel driven development patterns are no longer in the long-term interests of either human or natural communities. A host of interrelated movements – smart growth, green building, livable communities, new urbanism, and new ruralism, to name a few – has arisen to try to chart a more sustainable path for our communities to grow and thrive.

**Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.** How this is defined and realized will vary from one community and one project to the next, and undoubtedly will evolve over time, but any development project that aspires to sustainability should reflect the following principles:

## Principles of Smart Growth and Sustainability

1. **Reduce Consumption** of Water, Energy, Land, and Other Finite Resources
2. Create a **Variety of Housing** Opportunities and Choices
3. Create **Compact**, Walkable, and Bicycle-Friendly Neighborhoods
4. Encourage Community and Stakeholder **Collaboration**
5. Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong **Sense of Place**
6. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and **Cost Effective**
7. **Preserve** Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas
8. Provide a Variety of **Transportation Choices** and Use Renewable and Clean-Burning Fuels
9. Focus Development Within **Existing Communities**
10. Utilize **Green Building** Principles

Adopted from Smart Growth America, [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org)

cultivation practices; and fostering a new generation of farmers and farming knowledge.

### Grow Well Within the Boundaries

Creating the SOAR boundaries addressed one half of the equation for sustainable land use. Growing well within those boundaries is the critical second half of the equation.

Growing well means rigorously and creatively applying good planning principles to open lands designated for development within the boundaries, placing buffers and appropriate transitional land uses in areas that abut protected agricultural lands, and pursuing urban infill and revitalization opportunities.

All of our cities have underutilized or blighted areas, the revitalization of which can provide housing for all income levels, invigorate commercial areas, increase the efficiency and reduce the cost of providing services and transit, and improve the community's quality of life – while at the same time reducing pressure to convert farmland or bust through the SOAR boundaries.

### Invest in Better Transportation

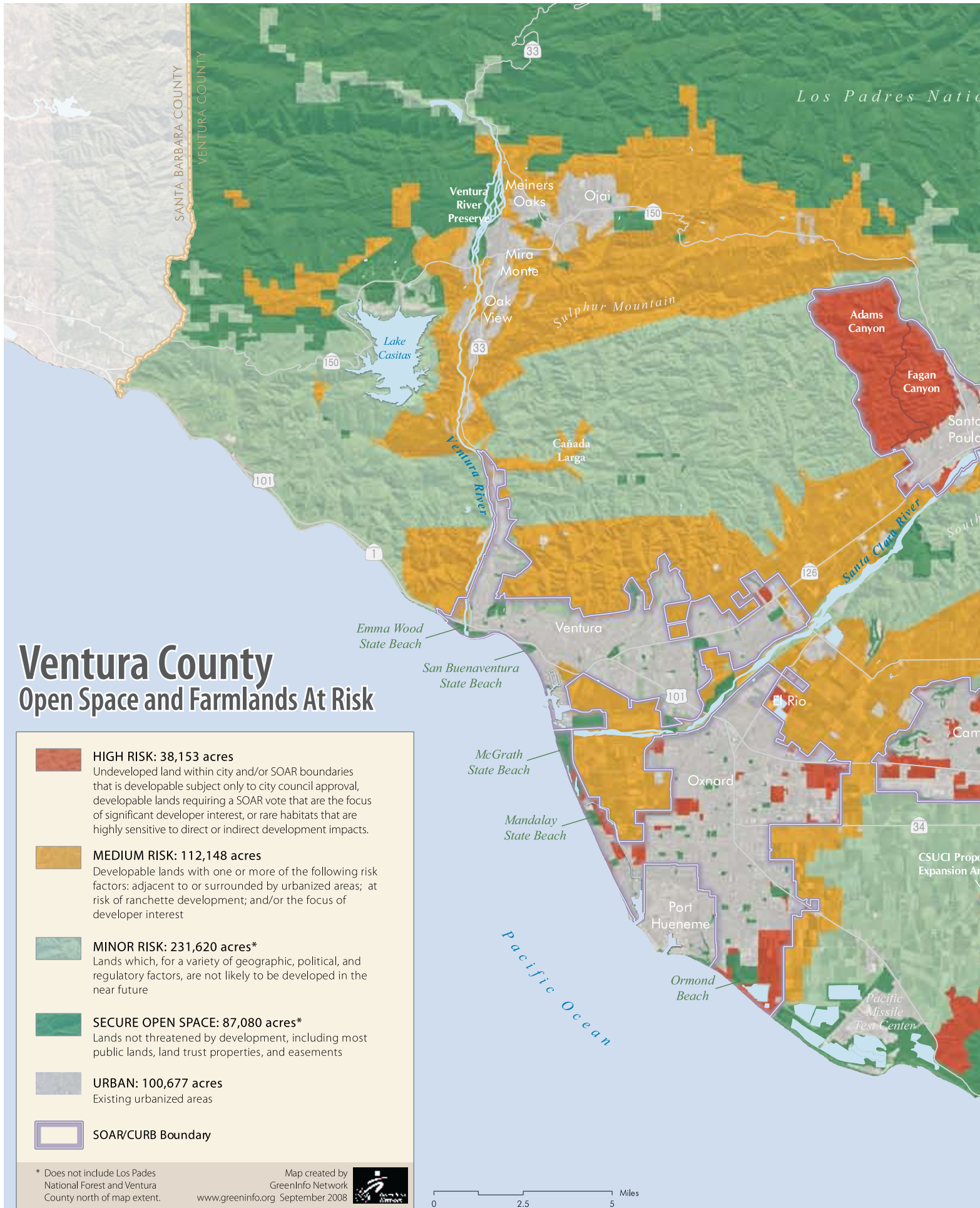
Transportation investments have the potential either to fuel sprawl or to support smart growth. To protect open spaces and provide lasting solutions to traffic congestion, transportation funding should be tied to land use in two ways. The first is to find ways to link smart growth policies to receipt of transportation funds. The second is to increase investment in effective mass-transit systems and enhance existing public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian systems. Such investment makes already-urbanized areas more attractive, healthy and affordable, reduces automobile use and traffic congestion, and protects open space and farmlands.

### Maintain Political Strength

Advancing these strategies will require persistent and effective education, grassroots organizing and advocacy within each of our communities, aided by the countywide support, resources, and expertise of organizations like SOAR. Electing officials who strongly and consistently support SOAR principles is another important component to keeping Ventura County a national leader in stopping urban sprawl and protecting open space and farmland.



**Creating a sustainable future for our region will require much more, from rethinking development patterns and transportation choices in our cities, to supporting viable and sustainable local agriculture.**

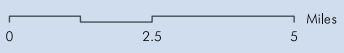


# Ventura County Open Space and Farmlands At Risk

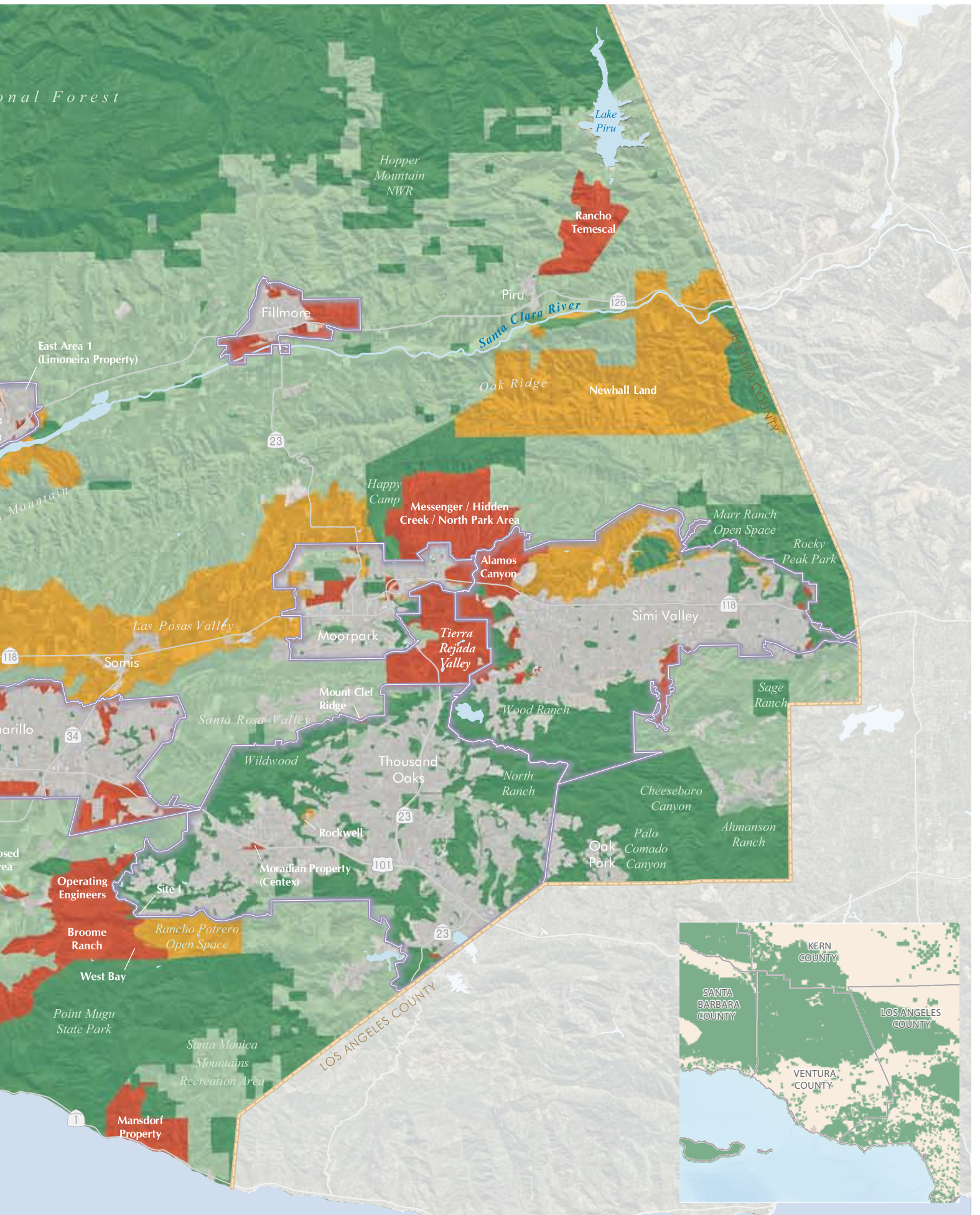
- HIGH RISK: 38,153 acres**  
 Undeveloped land within city and/or SOAR boundaries that is developable subject only to city council approval, developable lands requiring a SOAR vote that are the focus of significant developer interest, or rare habitats that are highly sensitive to direct or indirect development impacts.
- MEDIUM RISK: 112,148 acres**  
 Developable lands with one or more of the following risk factors: adjacent to or surrounded by urbanized areas; at risk of ranchette development; and/or the focus of developer interest
- MINOR RISK: 231,620 acres\***  
 Lands which, for a variety of geographic, political, and regulatory factors, are not likely to be developed in the near future
- SECURE OPEN SPACE: 87,080 acres\***  
 Lands not threatened by development, including most public lands, land trust properties, and easements
- URBAN: 100,677 acres**  
 Existing urbanized areas
- SOAR/CURB Boundary**

\* Does not include Los Padres National Forest and Ventura County north of map extent.

Map created by GreenInfo Network  
[www.greeninfo.org](http://www.greeninfo.org) September 2008







# Lands At Risk



**Even “low risk” or “secure” open lands require some level of ongoing vigilance to ensure their continued protection.**

**V**entura County covers 1,181,440 acres, or 1,846 square-miles. Nearly two-thirds of the county is part of the Los Padres National Forest. The remaining one-third is the focus of this report and is comprised of urban development (about 100,000 acres) and open space and farmland (500,000 acres). Of this open space and farmland, 87,100 acres or 15% is permanently protected as parklands, natures preserves, or through conservation agreements. The remaining 85% of this open space and farmland is vulnerable to urban and rural sprawl development.

Over 150,000 acres of open space and agricultural land – one in four acres in southern Ventura County – are at risk of sprawl development within the next 10 to 20 years. The total area at risk is one-and-a-half times the total currently urbanized area in the county.

## High-Risk Lands

Because of their proximity to existing developed areas and the lack of SOAR protections, the areas at highest risk of development are inside the city SOAR

boundaries, and in many cases these areas are already undergoing rapid conversion to residential and commercial development.

Generally lands within the city SOAR boundaries are the most suitable areas for accommodating growth. Encouragingly a few cities are experimenting with new building and neighborhood designs that incorporate smart growth and livable community principles.

However, in some cases these high risk lands inside the SOAR growth boundaries are prime agricultural lands or open-space areas and they are quickly being paved over. Too often cities are not seriously focusing on more appropriate infill and redevelopment areas and are instead following the path of least resistance by converting large tracts of open space and farmland into conventional suburban subdivisions and strip malls. In so doing, cities may exhaust their supply of land well before the date called for in their general plans or the expiration of their SOAR boundaries.

High-risk lands outside city growth boundaries include areas that have been the subject of intensive lobbying by pro-development

interests. Some have been the subject of ballot initiatives to expand the boundaries to add sprawl development. So far, most of these efforts have failed to break the SOAR boundaries. Other areas are subject to low-density ranchette development that does not trigger a SOAR vote, but that can significantly impact wildlife habitats and farming.

## Medium-Risk Lands

Most of the medium-risk lands are currently protected by SOAR, but are at risk of development within the next 10 to 20 years for a variety of reasons including:

- Proximity to existing urban areas
- Political pressure from pro-development interests
- Rural ranchette development

## Minor-Risk Lands and Secure Open Space

Steeply sloped hillsides, remote or roadless areas, and areas at least partially protected by some kind of regulatory constraint are probably at low risk of development in the near future.

However, modern engineering and grading equipment and technologies like satellite sewer systems mean that, with enough money, practically any land can be developed, as evidenced by hillside construction throughout Southern California.

Even "Secure Open Space" – publicly or privately owned parks, preserves, and easements – may be only temporarily safe from development. Governments may attempt to sell off public lands to meet budget shortfalls, or open protected areas to extractive industries, such as mining or oil and gas exploration. Thus even "low risk" or "secure" open lands require some level of ongoing vigilance to ensure their continued protection.

## HOW MUCH IS AT STAKE?

### VENTURA COUNTY OPEN LANDS AT RISK

	Total Acres	Percent of Total*
<b>Total Acreage At Risk (High + Medium)</b>	<b>150,301</b>	<b>26%</b>
High Risk	38,153	7%
Medium Risk	112,148	20%
Low Risk	231,620	41%
Secure Open Space	87,080	15%
Urban	100,677	18%
Total*	569,678	100%

\*Southern Ventura County only – does not include Los Padres National Forest



**The most threatened areas are those closest to the SOAR boundaries and those that are attractive for large-lot ranchette development.**

# Where We Stand

## WEST COUNTY

### VENTURA

#### General Assessment

Ventura was the first city to pass a SOAR initiative, and in 2002 residents voted overwhelmingly against building on Ventura's hillsides, clearly signaling this electorate's strong support for preserving remaining greenbelts and open space around the city. With its recent general plan update and focus on infill development, the city appears to be taking the lead in Ventura County in promoting smart growth and livable community principles. It remains to be seen if these promising trends will translate consistently into positive action and results.

#### Hot Spots

Pro-development interests continue lobbying efforts to break the SOAR boundary. The area of most intense development interest is the prime agricultural land adjacent to the Ventura Harbor, one section of which, north of the freeway, was removed from the Oxnard/Ventura Greenbelt Agreement. This area constitutes the majority of Ventura's remaining portion of the Oxnard/Ventura Greenbelt Agreement. In addition to its agricultural value, it is the last significant buffer between Ventura and Oxnard, one of the county's fastest-growing cities. Developing this land in the City of Ventura's jurisdiction would significantly reduce the City of Oxnard's incentive to continue honoring their side of the agreement not to develop the greenbelt.

Two other major areas of developer interest are the hillsides above Ventura and the Saticoy/Wells Road area at the city's east end. In spite of the efforts of the Ventura Hillside Conservancy, a variety of proposals are advanced from time to time for hillside development. Significant city planning has taken place for development of the Saticoy/Wells Road area.

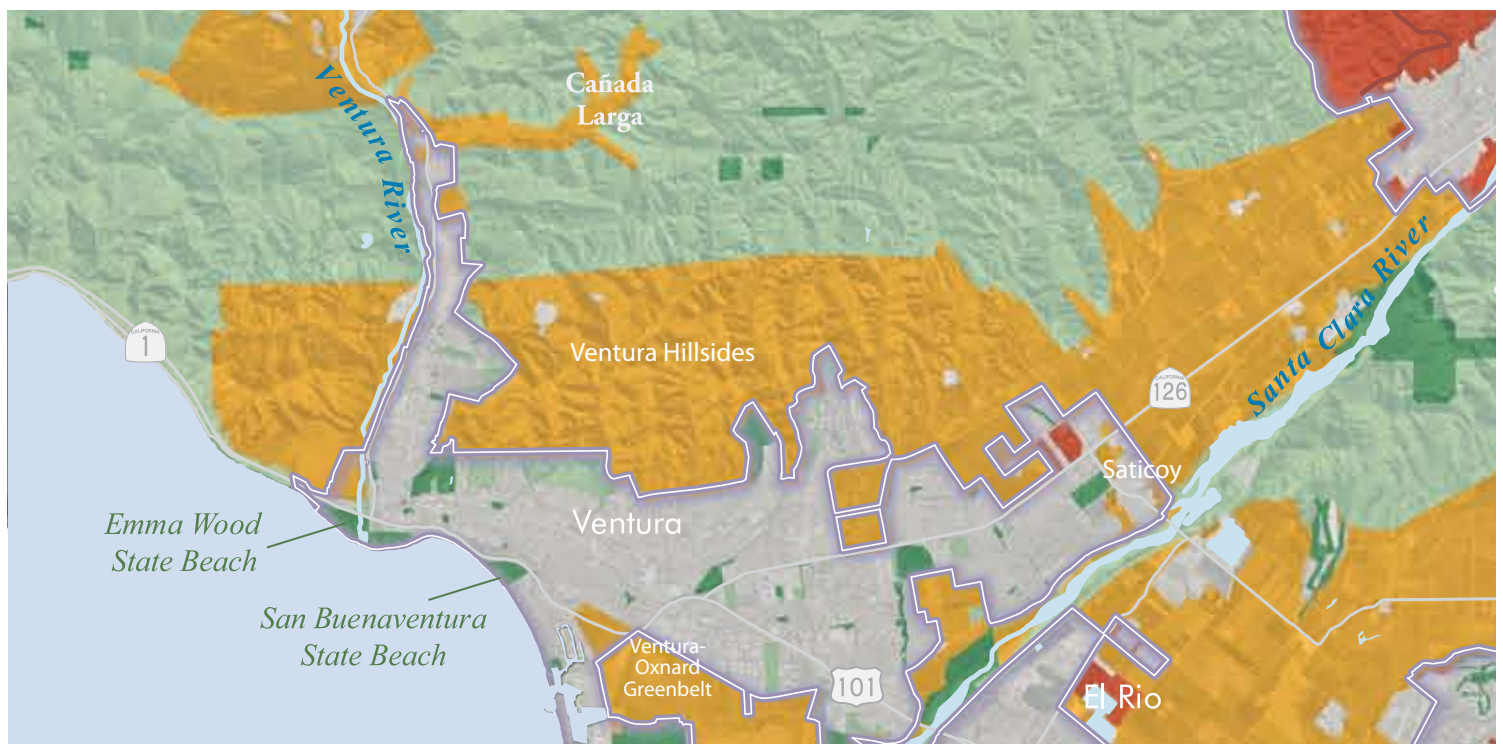
Some lobbying efforts also continue for expansion into Cañada Larga, a remote valley between Ventura and Ojai. This would be major step-out development far from existing urban centers and would detract from the city's current infill and redevelopment efforts.



**Ventura was the first city to pass a SOAR initiative. The newly updated general plan focuses the city on infill and revitalization.**

#### Bright Spots

The city's newly updated general plan genuinely focuses the city on infill and revitalization efforts. Major expansion of the urban boundary is not a component of the new plan. The plan should result in significant downtown, Ventura Avenue, and midtown redevelopment. In addition, the city staff and a growing number of citizens are becoming more educated and supportive of smart growth and livable communities principles.



# OJAI VALLEY

## General Assessment

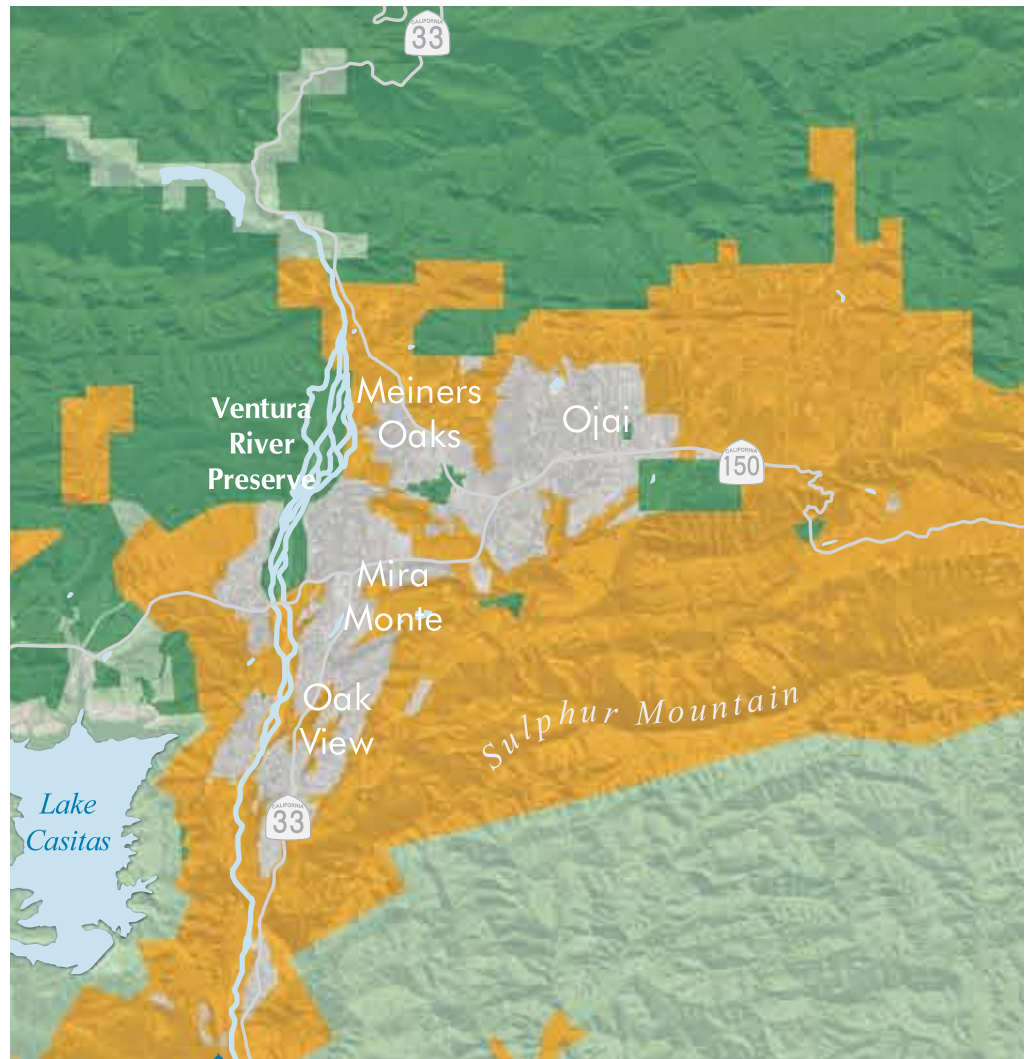
Although Ojai is one of only two cities in Ventura County that have not enacted SOAR initiatives, growth here has been limited both by natural constraints, including traffic- and air-quality challenges, and by consistently strong political opposition to expansion into prime agricultural and open-space lands.

## Hot Spots

Parcelization and ranchette development are eroding open-space zoning around the Ojai Valley. However, the greatest threat to open space in the Ojai Valley comes from outside, in the form of changes in state laws that limit the ability of local governments to stop urbanization of rural and open space areas.

## Bright Spots

The commitment and passion of the citizens of Ojai for slow growth that protects the unique character of the valley is strong, and Ojai is considered one of the cities least at risk of rapid urban sprawl. In addition, the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (see box) has evolved into an effective tool that mobilizes local residents and provides permanent protection to some valuable open-space properties.



## Community Land Trusts:

### *A Vital Conservation Tool*

Private and non-profit land conservancies and land trusts work with communities and landowners to find ways to protect land in the face of ever-growing development pressure. They may protect land by working with landowners who wish to donate or sell conservation easements (permanent deed restrictions that prevent harmful land uses), or by acquiring land outright to maintain working farms or habitats.

The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy ([www.ovlc.org](http://www.ovlc.org)), for example, has marshaled substantial local funds to permanently protect nearly 2,000 acres of open space in the Ojai Valley, through direct ownership and management and a variety of conservation agreements.

Community members in the City of Ventura recently formed the Ventura Hillside Conservancy ([www.venturahillside.org](http://www.venturahillside.org)), to raise funds for the permanent protection of Ventura's hillsides.

Other public and private land conservancies active in Ventura County include the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy ([www.smmc.ca.gov](http://www.smmc.ca.gov)), the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency ([www.conejo-openspace.org](http://www.conejo-openspace.org)), the California Coastal Conservancy ([www.coastalconservancy.ca.gov](http://www.coastalconservancy.ca.gov)) and The Nature Conservancy ([www.tnc.org](http://www.tnc.org)).

For more information on community-based land conservation, visit the Land Trust Alliance at [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org).



The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy has protected nearly 2,000 acres of open space, much of it along the Ventura River.

# SANTA CLARA RIVER VALLEY

## SANTA PAULA



Santa Paula has experienced the greatest pressure for outward expansion since passage of the Santa Paula SOAR initiative in 2000.

### General Assessment

Santa Paula voters deserve credit for first putting in place the city's Urban Restriction Boundary in 2000, holding the boundary in 2002 and yet again in 2006 – despite million-dollar developer-sponsored campaigns to bust the boundary in Adams Canyon.

While these victories did at least temporarily facilitate a shift toward better planning and governance, the city's primary emphasis on

accommodating growth remains outward expansion rather than more sustainable smart growth principles. After rejecting it twice, in 2007 the voters approved expanding the SOAR boundary to include Adams Canyon. In 2008 voters again expanded the boundary to allow development of 1,500 houses on the Limoneira property east of downtown known as East Area 1.

### Hot Spots

Urban sprawl proponents have gained considerable new influence over the Santa Paula city council. Developer-backed candidates are on the ascendancy and more urban sprawl projects are being groomed for presentation.

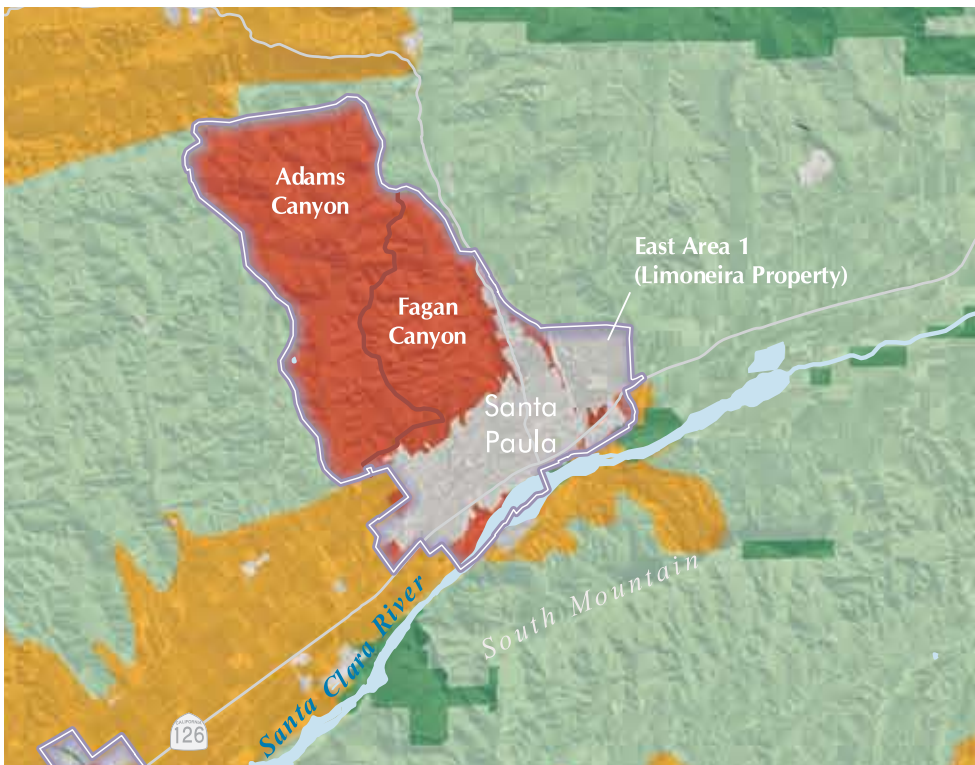
In addition this urban sprawl influence will likely have considerable impact on the specific details regarding development in the new 6,500 acre Adams Canyon expansion area.

There is real concern about the thoroughness of the EIR that will be required of the project, the degree of public input and most importantly whether the developer will be required to deliver all the public benefits promised during the campaign.

These same concerns apply to any development proposals that will come forward for the 2,170-acre Fagan Canyon expansion area that is located within Santa Paula's Sphere of Influence and is not protected by SOAR.

### Bright Spots

Santa Paula's citywide visioning and Fagan Canyon charrette processes showed strong community support for smart-growth planning that includes building compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods that support public transit. However, these processes have not translated into recent city council votes and it remains to be seen if Santa Paula will be able to put these principles into action and support sustainable, smart growth development principles.



# FILLMORE / PIRU

## General Assessment

The city of Fillmore finds itself near one of the largest urban sprawl projects in Southern California, the Newhall Ranch development just across the Ventura County line in Los Angeles County. The SOAR movement in Fillmore was able to establish an urban growth boundary, but it is uncertain whether the city's underlying policies and practices will fully embrace this boundary in the face of heavy development pressure along the Highway 126 corridor.

## Hot Spots

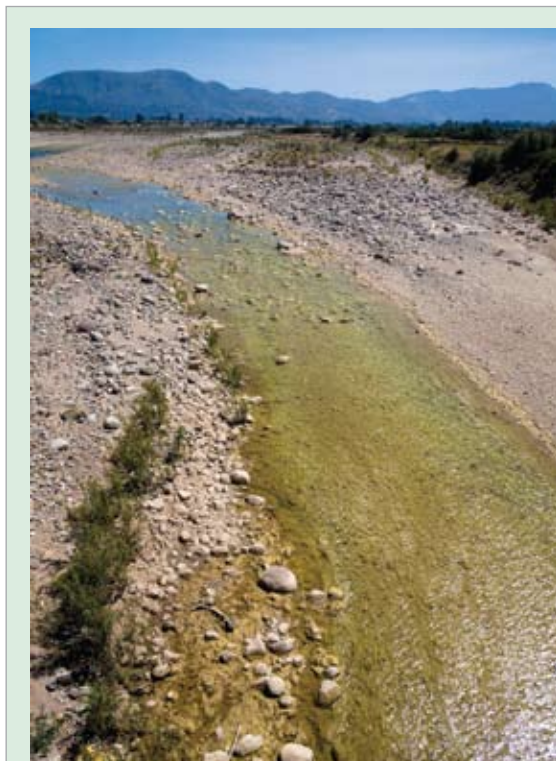
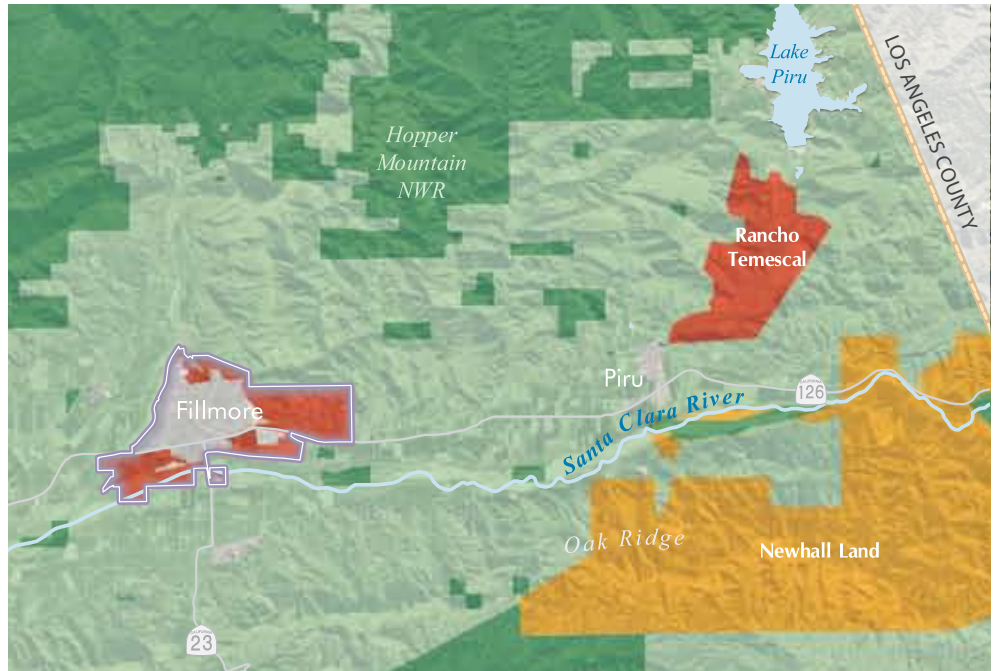
The Griffin Industries development of 750 houses south of the 126 highway is one of the biggest development projects in the history of Fillmore, and brings urban development into the floodplain of the Santa Clara River. It and the North Fillmore Specific Plan have generated a great deal of community debate about how fast to develop within the Fillmore growth boundary.

A proposal to evaluate subdividing nearly 2,500 acres of farmland in Piru Canyon into 127 10-acre-minimum lots was defeated in February 2007, but it and similar proposals are likely to come back to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors in the near future.

## Bright Spots

Most political forces agree that Fillmore should not expand its growth boundaries. In addition, there is recognition that the downtown area should remain the vital center of the city and that historic-preservation projects can continue to stimulate tourism and help the

local economy. If these commitments remain, Fillmore has a good chance to resist the rapid urbanization associated with the Newhall development and support a truly livable Fillmore community.



The last major wild river system in Southern California is being threatened by massive development in Los Angeles County

## Protecting the Santa Clara River

The Santa Clara River watershed is the second largest river system in coastal southern Southern California, and the last to remain in a relatively natural state – in stark contrast to other south coast rivers such as the Los Angeles, Santa Ana, and San Gabriel which are heavily dammed and lined by concrete channels. The watershed spans 1,600 square miles from its headwaters in the San Gabriel Mountains in Los Angeles County to the Pacific Ocean between Ventura and Oxnard.

The watershed supports a complex web of aquatic and terrestrial habitats and is home to 18 listed endangered or threatened species. Though invisible to many residents of Los Angeles and Ventura counties, the Santa Clara River system provides us with a wealth of vital and irreplaceable services, including natural flood control, recharge of groundwater basins, nutrient cycling, and drinking and irrigation water, in addition to expansive scenic vistas and recreational opportunities.

The natural functioning of the river system is being threatened by human activities, most noticeably in the upstream areas in and around the City of Santa Clarita, which is one of the fastest growing cities in Los Angeles County. The proposed Newhall Ranch project would add 21,000 houses and 70,000 people on 12,000 acres along the river just over the Ventura/Los Angeles County border, eliminating 1,500 acres of agricultural land and adversely impacting the quality of life for all residents of the Santa Clara River Valley through habitat degradation, loss of open space, and increased traffic, air and water pollution. Newhall has extensive land holdings on the Ventura County side of the border as well, but these lands are currently protected from development by the countywide SOAR ordinance.

Several groups are actively working to protect sensitive riparian habitats and coordinate watershed conservation efforts along the entire length of the river. For more information, visit Friends of the Santa Clara River ([www.fscr.org](http://www.fscr.org)) and The Nature Conservancy and California Coastal Conservancy's Santa Clara River Parkway Project ([www.santaclarariverparkway.org](http://www.santaclarariverparkway.org)).

# OXNARD PLAIN

## OXNARD / PORT HUENEME

### General Assessment

Oxnard's policies and plans have accommodated a tremendous amount of development. Although there are some signs of change, Oxnard has been marked by leapfrog development and subdivisions that lack the livable-communities principles needed to sustain Ventura County's greenbelts and high quality of life. Additionally, much of Oxnard has recently been designated by FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) as areas of potential flooding in a 100-year storm. If finalized, the new FEMA maps may restrict future development in the Oxnard Plain.

### Hot Spots

For a variety of reasons, Oxnard started with a comparatively large SOAR boundary. Rather than pacing their development and making the most efficient use of their land, they are rapidly sprawling across the remaining undeveloped areas within their boundary. Once all its developable land is depleted, Oxnard will likely be pushing for expansion of its boundary.

The city is currently looking to take advantage of an affordable-housing exemption to the SOAR ordinance to develop the Jones Ranch property north of the city. The exemption allows up to 20 acres per year to be developed for affordable housing outside the SOAR boundary without triggering a SOAR vote.

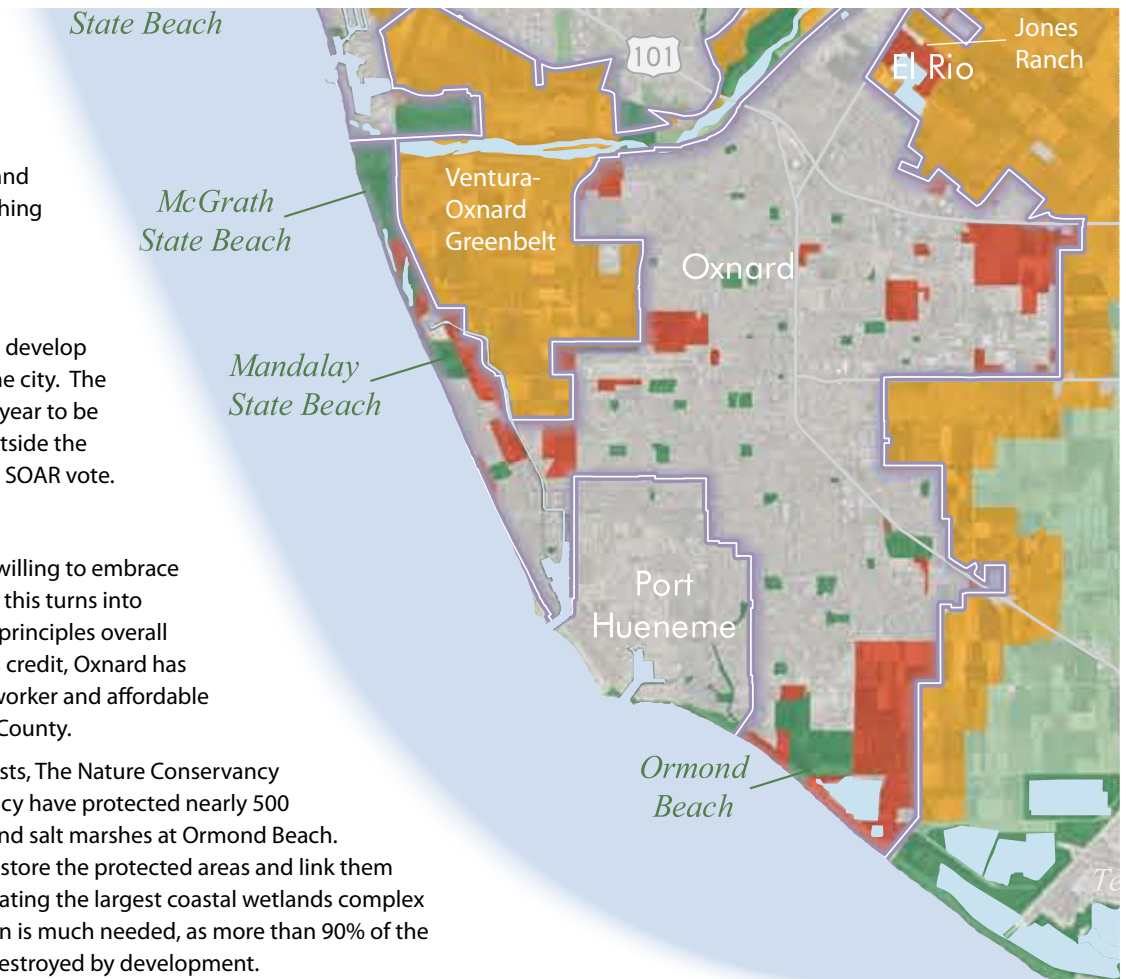
### Bright Spots

There are some signs that Oxnard is willing to embrace downtown redevelopment. Whether this turns into a real commitment to smart-growth principles overall remains to be seen. In addition, to its credit, Oxnard has been willing to approve more farm-worker and affordable housing than other cities in Ventura County.

With strong support from local activists, The Nature Conservancy and the California Coastal Conservancy have protected nearly 500 acres of rare wetlands, sand dunes, and salt marshes at Ormond Beach. Efforts are ongoing to expand and restore the protected areas and link them to nearby Mugu Lagoon, thereby creating the largest coastal wetlands complex in Southern California. The restoration is much needed, as more than 90% of the state's historic wetlands have been destroyed by development.



Efforts to expand and restore the wetlands and salt marshes from Ormond Beach to Mugu Lagoon would create the largest coastal wetlands complex in Southern California.





# CAMARILLO



**Camarillo has aggressively engaged in retail and housing development along the 101 corridor resulting in rapid conversion of prime agricultural land within its SOAR boundary.**

## General Assessment

The pressure for development along the 101 corridor remains very strong and seems to keep Camarillo from focusing on smart growth concepts.

## Hot Spots

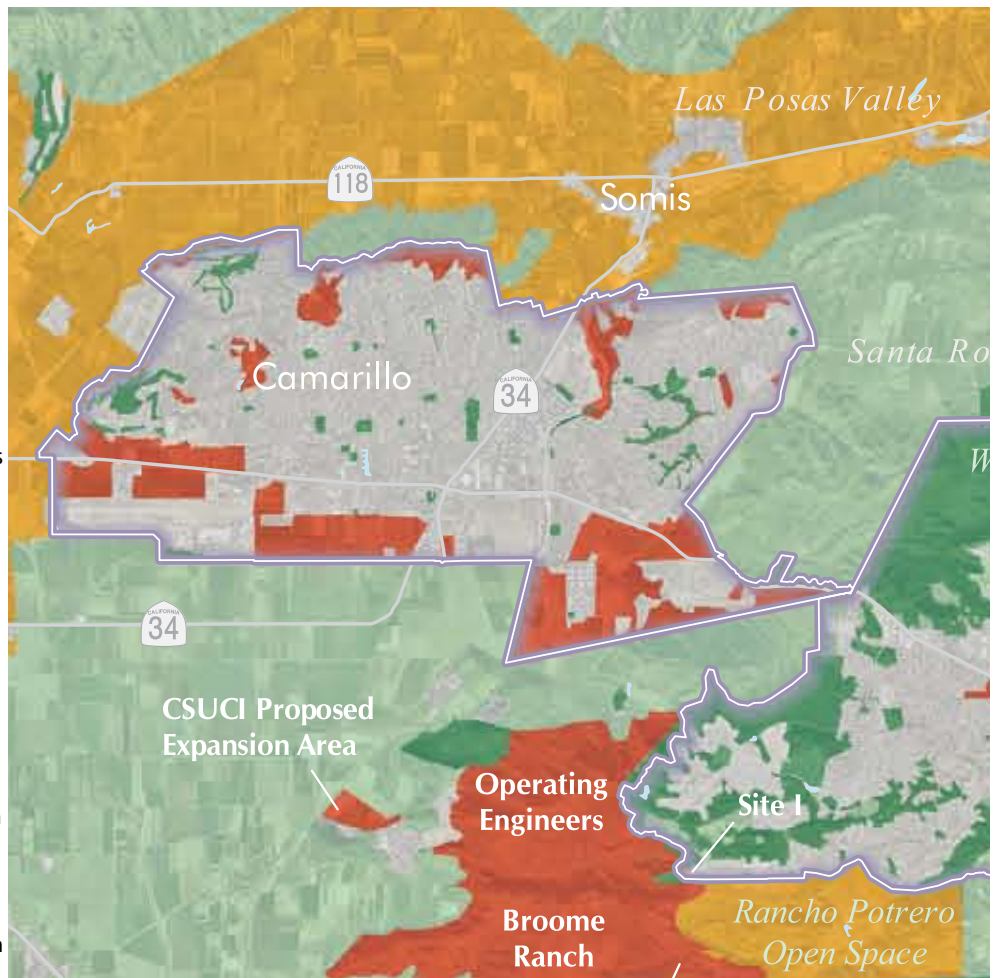
Like Oxnard, Camarillo started with a fairly large SOAR boundary within which to expand. It has aggressively engaged in retail and housing development along the 101 corridor. As a result, there has been a rapid conversion of prime agricultural land near the 101. Camarillo may use up its expansion area and be looking to expand its SOAR boundary well before SOAR expires.

California State University Channel Islands is proposing to pave over at least 75 acres of farmland on Lewis Road. The land is owned by a farmer and has been approved for an approximately 1,000-space parking lot. There is also pressure to develop land east of the CSUCI campus owned by Operating Engineers.

## Bright Spots

Camarillo may be nearing the end of its expansion area without a SOAR vote, and it is hoped that its city council will not be inclined to push for additional expansion of the city's SOAR boundary. This would give Camarillo an opportunity to begin to really focus on infill and revitalization efforts.

SOAR



## CENTRAL VALLEYS

# TIERRA REJADA VALLEY / SANTA ROSA VALLEY / LAS POSAS VALLEY



Farming, ranchette development, and sensitive wildlife corridors intersect in the three valleys in the heart of Ventura County.

### General Assessment

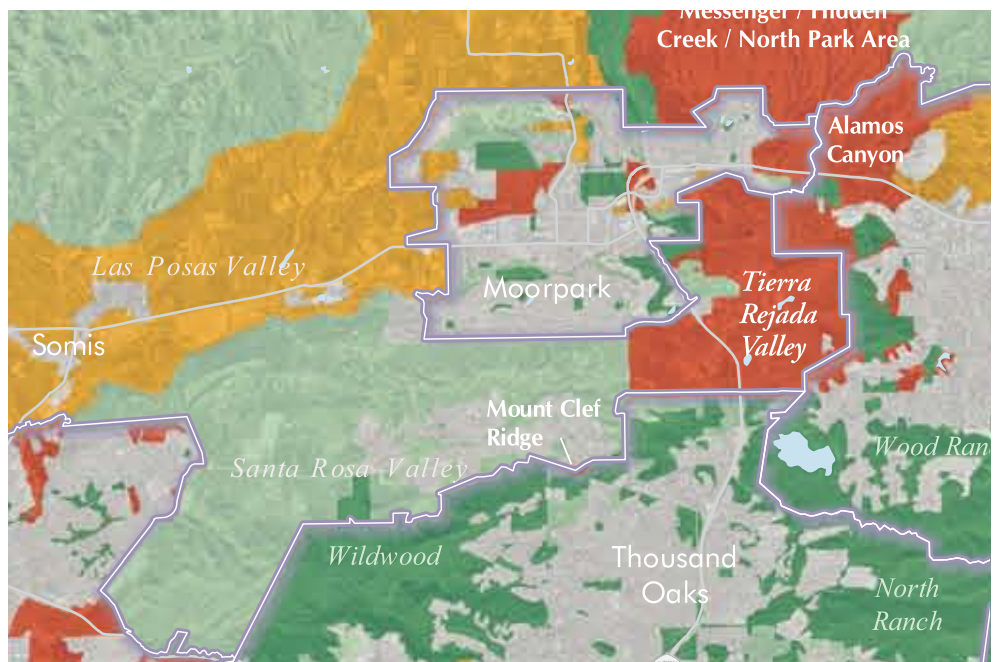
The valleys stretching from Somis on the west to the Reagan Library on the east have a mix of old ranches and farm operations along with recently developed homes, primarily on large lots. The lands are primarily in the unincorporated area of Ventura County, lying between the cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Thousand Oaks and Simi Valley. Large-scale subdivisions and urbanization would not be allowed without a vote of all of the citizens of Ventura County, though this protection will expire in 2020 unless the county SOAR ordinance is renewed.

### Hot Spots

These valleys are under intense pressure for mini-mansion, ranchette development. Developers are eager to exploit their rolling hills, scenic views, and proximity to Los Angeles. Currently much of this land can be subdivided into ten-acre parcels without a SOAR vote. One house could be placed on each parcel. This parcelization of large tracts of open space poses a long-term threat by undermining farming, fragmenting wildlife habitat and paving the way for still more sprawl. A recent vote by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors to eliminate ten-acre zoning and requiring the smallest subdivision of land to be 20 acres was defeated on a 3-2 vote.

The Tierra Rejada Valley greenbelt of horse ranches, farms and open space between Moorpark, Thousand Oaks, and Simi Valley is inadequately protected by a weak greenbelt agreement. Continued subdivision of large lots into 10-acre ranchettes is threatening to turn the greenbelt into a rural suburb. Protecting this beautiful area and rich farmland from rural sprawl will require agreement among the surrounding cities and the county to limit subdivisions and strengthen greenbelt protections. Additionally, the 23 freeway that bisects the Tierra Rejada Valley causes the region's highest incidence of wildlife roadkill. Ensuring animal passage under the freeway is vital to maintaining this important wildlife corridor.

Simi Valley's proposed annexation of the Reagan Library and seven adjacent parcels at the edge of the Tierra Rejada Valley, a proposal for a seven-building church campus



including a 5,000-seat amphitheater and 1,700 parking spaces, and a proposal by developers representing California State University Northridge proposing to build faculty housing in the greenbelt are indicative of development pressure in this crucial buffer zone. The church's request for an exemption to SOAR in an effort to bypass the ballot box warrants careful monitoring, as does what would be a highly questionable attempt to receive a government exception from SOAR for universities, when all that is proposed is urban housing.

### Bright Spots

While their numbers are few, the residents of these valleys are some of SOAR's strongest supporters. In addition the Board of Supervisors has recently begun a project to identify sensitive habitat that could obtain greater protection for open space lands. This may play a key role in preserving some wildlife corridors and areas of critical habitat.



### Nature Needs Room to Roam

Habitat loss and fragmentation are the leading threats to biodiversity worldwide, and nowhere more so than in Southern California. Countering these threats requires protecting connections between existing open space areas to allow natural ecological processes – such as migration and range shifts with climate change – to continue operating as they have for millennia.

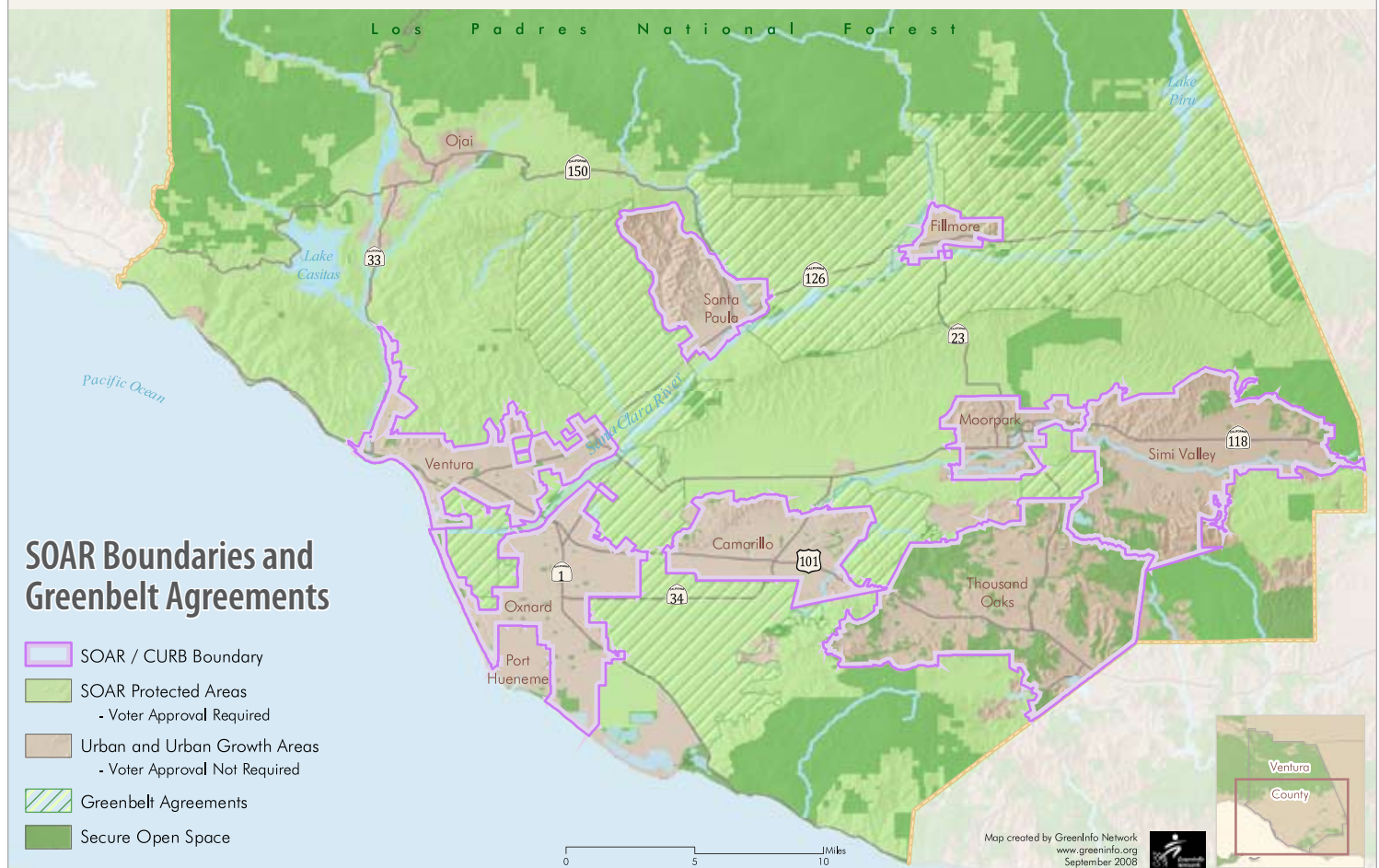
The Tierra Rejada Valley along with Mountclef Ridge, Alamos Canyon, Piru Creek and several other sensitive areas, lie along a critical wildlife corridor connecting the coast with inland ranges (see map on page 7). Protecting the natural and rural character of these areas and facilitating wildlife movement across the 101, 23, 118 and 126 freeways will be essential to preserving our region's indigenous, threatened and endangered wildlife populations.

To learn about efforts to maintain and restore a regional network of critical habitat linkages here and throughout Southern California, visit the South Coast Missing Linkages project at [www.scwildlands.org](http://www.scwildlands.org).

PHOTO: A culvert allows for wildlife passage under the 23 freeway in Tierra Rejada. **Sandy Sauvajot**

## Voter-Controlled SOAR Growth Boundaries Ring the Cities

*Less secure greenbelt agreements play a supporting role*



Eight of the ten cities in Ventura County have urban growth boundaries as a result of SOAR. They play a major role in keeping the cities from sprawling together and losing their unique identities.

Seven Greenbelt agreements play a supporting role in stopping urban sprawl. Greenbelts are agreements between two cities and the County of Ventura that they will not approve urban development in a defined area between the two cities.

Greenbelt agreements can be changed at any time by any one of the elected bodies, whereas SOAR boundaries can only be changed by a vote of the citizens.

# EAST COUNTY SIMI VALLEY

## General Assessment

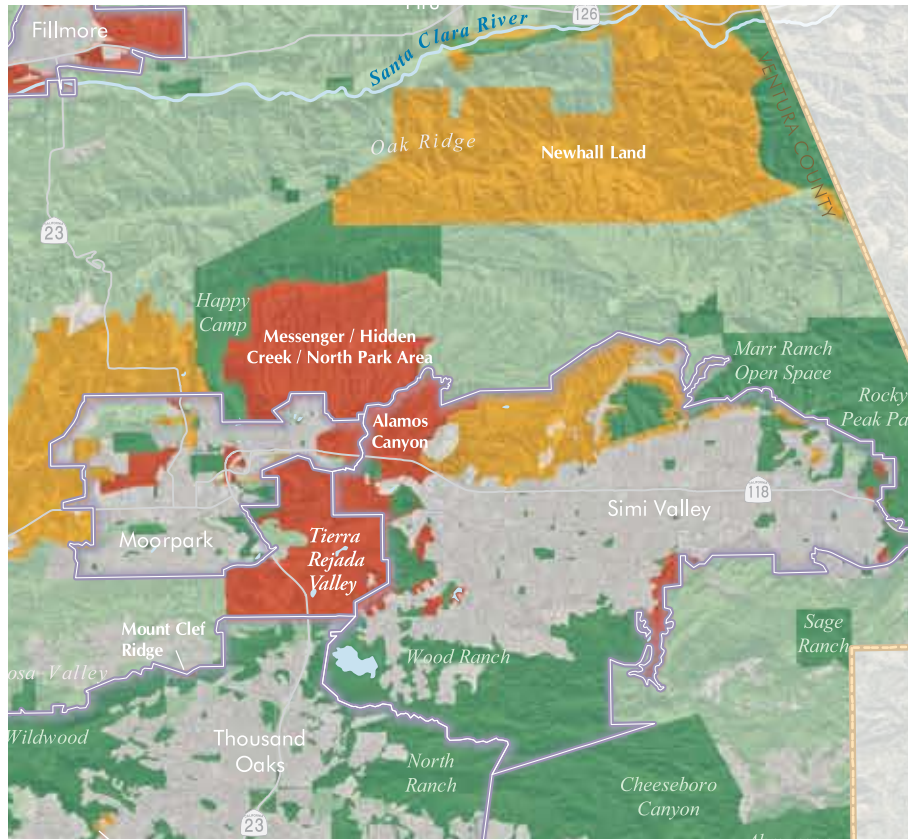
Simi Valley has historically been more inclined to develop areas around the city than protect them. Many approved development projects are presently underway and several have recently been approved. For example, Runkle Ranch has been approved to develop possibly more than 400 houses, and over 800 houses are being built just north of the 118 freeway off of Erringer. However, there are important open spaces still at risk that need to be preserved.

## Hot Spots

The single largest hot spot in Simi Valley is Alamos Canyon. Alamos Canyon is the open space buffer between the cities of Moorpark and Simi Valley. It is a critical wildlife corridor connecting the Santa Susana Mountains and the Simi Hills. The fate of the Tierra Rejada Valley and the area around the Reagan Library (see Moorpark discussion below) are also significant issues for Simi Valley residents.

## Bright Spots

Several organizations are working for the protection of Alamos Canyon. A recent change in ownership from Unocal Oil to Waste Management has raised hope that permanent protection could become a reality.



# MOORPARK

## General Assessment

Incorporated in 1983, Moorpark is the youngest and fastest-growing city in Ventura County. Downtown Moorpark holds significant potential for infill and redevelopment. Currently there are many approved and proposed projects within Moorpark's city boundary and coterminous sphere of influence. As of September 2008, there were 1,905 houses approved for construction, of which over 1,300 have not yet been built. Nearly 950 more units are proposed. If all these houses are approved and built, they will increase the current housing stock of 10,605 by more than 25%. Like many other cities, Moorpark is struggling with infrastructure that cannot keep pace with rapid growth.



## Hot Spots

The Messenger/Hidden Creek/North Park area north of the city limits and east and south of Happy Camp Canyon Regional Park remains threatened since there have been two attempts, although unsuccessful, in the last nine years to urbanize it. This is part of the habitat block, together with Alamos Canyon in Simi Valley and other Waste Management-owned land in Moorpark's east end, that is in a crucial wildlife corridor between the Los Padres National Forest and the Santa Monica Mountains (see page 7 for a map of habitat linkage areas).

Within the City of Moorpark, the city is currently doing a major update to its entire general plan, to include documenting city goals for open space protection, as well as any other land uses, not only within the city, but also in its area of interest. Preliminary discussions suggest a desire by Moorpark to preserve the Tierra Rejada Greenbelt lands (see page 26 for a discussion of the Tierra Rejada Valley) but this general plan update must also be carefully monitored.

## Bright Spots

In 1999 and again in 2006, Moorpark voters resoundingly turned back the well-funded and sophisticated Hidden Creek and North Park campaigns that each asked for a major expansion of Moorpark's growth boundary north of the city. There is strong political opposition to urban sprawl in Moorpark. Moorpark has several promising infill and redevelopment projects in the pipeline for both affordable housing and downtown revitalization. Finally, the City is planning to consider creating, during its general plan update, a land use category for permanent protected open space, that it does not now have.

# THOUSAND OAKS / CONEJO VALLEY / OAK PARK

## General Assessment

The topography of the Conejo Valley has led to development on the valley floor with many of the hillsides left undeveloped. The City of Thousand Oaks, and the communities of Oak Park, Lake Sherwood and Hidden Valley all have some of their surrounding hills in public ownership. Much of this preserved open space is owned by local, state and national park agencies.

In a 2008 county population report, Thousand Oaks is identified as having “fewer constraints than many of the other cities in the county” in its “potential to expand beyond sphere/CURB limits.”

## Hot Spots

Thousands of acres of undeveloped land in the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains are protected as state or national parks. However, there is pressure for high-end housing development in areas adjacent to the parks, most notably the “West Bay” parcel and the Potrero Long Grade between Newbury Park and the Cal State Channel Islands campus.

Open space advocates are concerned about various proposals by the City of Thousand Oaks and the Conejo Recreation and Parks District on the Rancho Potrero Open Space across from Dos Vientos in Newbury Park. The land is treasured for its natural habitat and wildlife resources. The City of Thousand Oaks is looking to annex the land into the city which will have growth-inducing impacts.

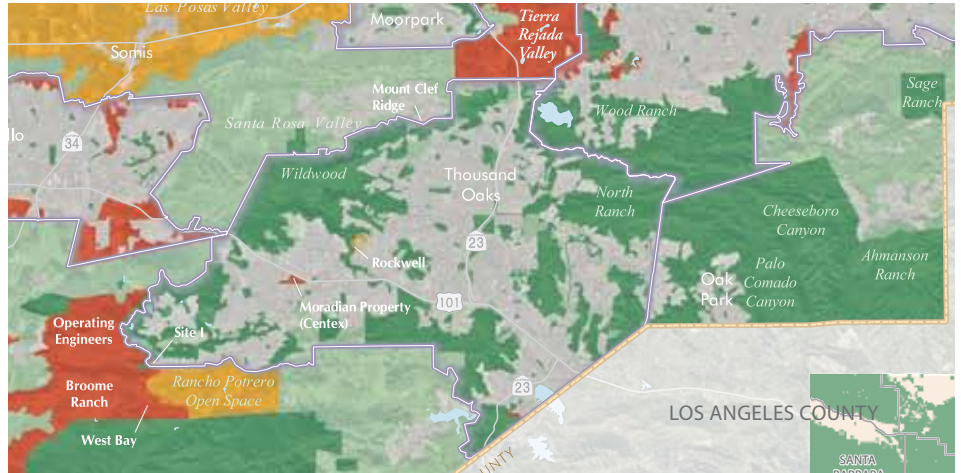
The last remaining wildlife corridor between the Santa Monica Mountains and the Simi Hills, and the greatest chokepoint for wildlife in eastern Ventura County, is being cut off by development along Montclef Ridge between Thousand Oaks and the Santa Rosa Valley. Environmental groups opposed the recent approval by the City of Thousand Oaks of a 7,000 square-foot house on this ridgeline which would reduce this vital regional wildlife connection.

See the Moorpark section for discussion of the Tierra Rejada Valley, also a significant area of interest for Thousand Oaks.

## Bright Spots

Teledyne, new owner of the 25-acre Rockwell Open Space Buffer in Lynn Ranch, has decided not to move forward with a proposed housing development. Additionally, a proposal to build approximately 100 houses on a roughly 30-acre wetland along the 101 freeway in Newbury Park has also been shelved, and efforts are underway to permanently protect the area, which is one of only two significant wetlands remaining in Thousand Oaks.

SOAR



## Ahmanson Ranch:

### *A Lesson in Grassroots Perseverance*

The 15-year battle against a proposal to build Ventura County’s eleventh city at the Ventura/ Los Angeles County line was a lesson in perseverance. If SOAR had been in place when Ventura County approved the massive development in county-designated open space, voters would have had the opportunity to vote the project down. Instead, grassroots groups had to invest in years of lawsuits, demonstrations, leaflets, and letter-writing campaigns before the power of grassroots activism prevailed and the developer, worn down by delays and massive public opposition, finally agreed to sell Ahmanson Ranch to the state for parkland.

The protection of Ahmanson Ranch is another illustration of the different path Ventura County has chosen from neighboring Los Angeles County, where sprawling projects such as the Newhall and Tejon Ranch developments are receiving green lights for tens of thousands of houses.

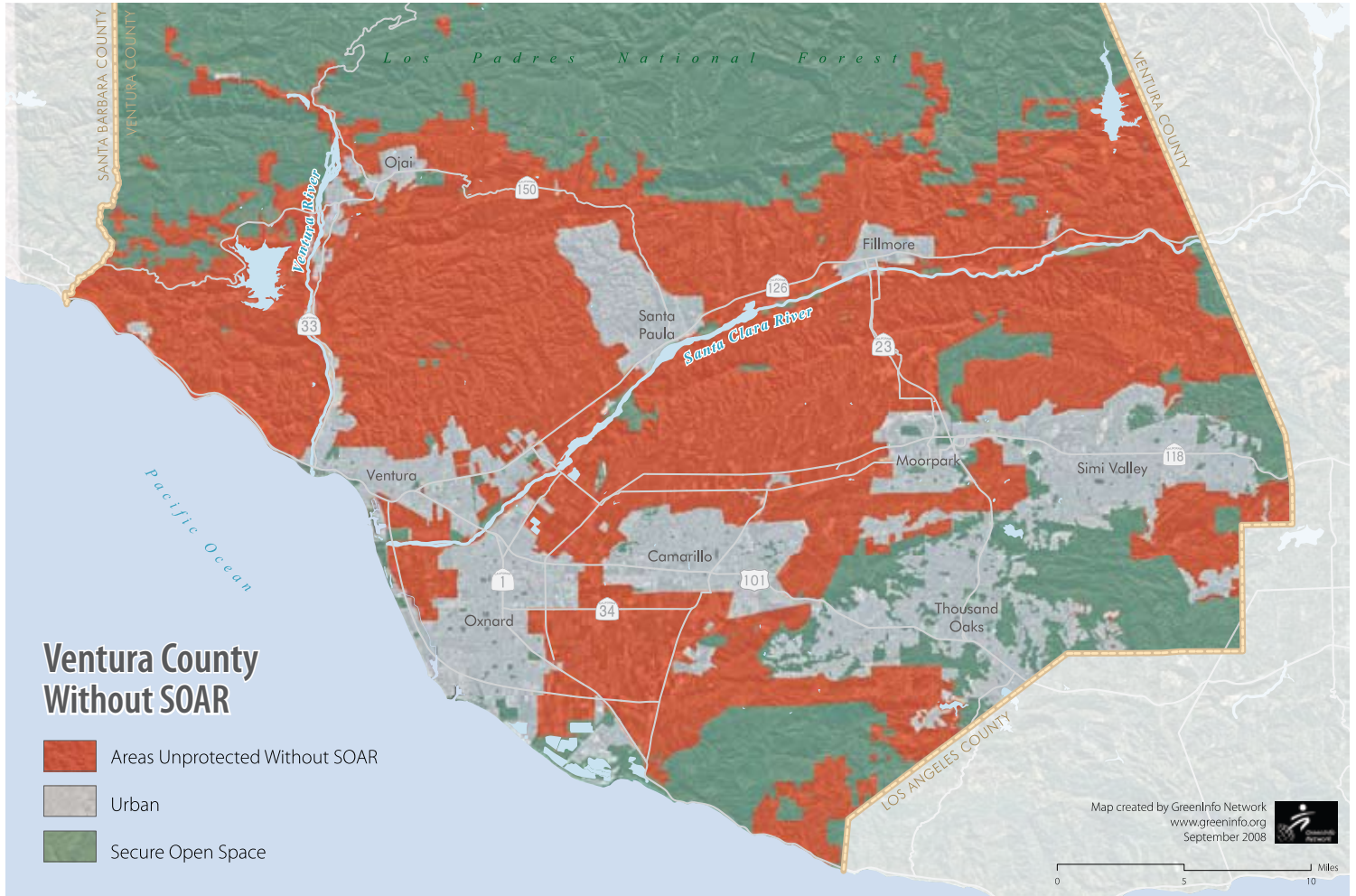


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Now called the Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve, Ahmanson Ranch would have become Ventura County’s eleventh city had it not been for the 15-year battle waged by grassroots groups in the area.

# The Pressure Is On

IF WE LET SOAR EXPIRE IN 2020, MORE THAN 400,000 ACRES OF OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND IN VENTURA COUNTY WILL BE AT RISK



This report focuses on near-term threats to open space and agricultural lands in Ventura County, most of which are currently protected by SOAR boundaries.

If the SOAR boundaries are allowed to expire starting in 2020, the At Risk map will look much different.

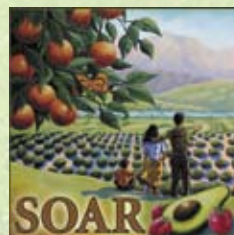
It is our hope that this report will help Ventura County residents take action both to address near-term threats and to **ensure that this map does not become our future.**

# What You Can Do

## TO HELP PROTECT OPEN SPACE AND FARMLANDS IN VENTURA COUNTY



- **Buy** locally grown produce.
- **Support** local land conservancies.
- **Demand** and support green building and smart growth projects.
- **Participate** in community planning and vote with the environment and future generations in mind.
- **Talk** with your neighbors, co-workers and family about the importance of open space and farmland.
- **Visit** a local farm or take a hike!
- **Learn** more about smart growth, sustainable development, and agricultural stewardship by inviting a speaker or showing a video at your home, church, or community group meeting.
- **Join SOAR! Be the next generation of leadership and action. To join, volunteer, or donate, contact us at:**



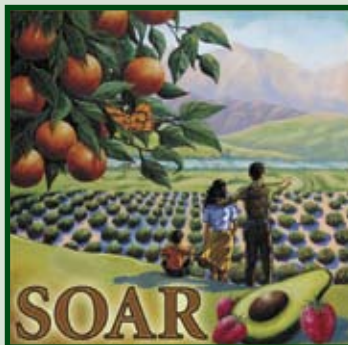
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“A society is defined not just by what it creates,  
but by what it refuses to destroy.”  
– John Sawhill, former president of The Nature Conservancy



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**SOAR's mission** is to make Ventura County a better place to live by limiting urban sprawl, protecting open space and agricultural lands, and promoting livable and sustainable communities in the county and surrounding regions.



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