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Introduction

The uniqueness of Rancho Santa Margarita is due, in large part, to its many natural and open space resources including creeks, parks, vegetation and scenic vistas. The Conservation/Open Space Element focuses on the preservation and enhancement of these resources to ensure a high quality living environment in future years.

Purpose of the Conservation/Open Space Element

The Rancho Santa Margarita Conservation/Open Space Element meets the State requirements for Conservation and Open Space elements as defined in Sections 65302(d) and 65302(e) of the Government Code. According to these requirements, the Conservation element must contain goals and policies to protect and maintain natural resources such as water, soils, wildlife, and minerals, and prevent wasteful resource exploitation and destruction. The Open Space element must address several open space categories, such as those used for the preservation of natural resources, outdoor recreation, as well as open space maintained for public health and safety. This last category of open space is addressed in the Safety Element. Additionally, while air quality is not a State-mandated element, air quality is included in the Conservation/Open Space Element to address reducing pollutant levels through stationary source, mobile source, transportation and land use control, and energy conservation measures. Because the subjects required to be addressed under the Conservation element and Open Space element overlap substantially, the two elements have been combined for this Plan.



Scope and Content of the Conservation/Open Space Element

The Conservation/Open Space Element expresses community goals to protect environmental resources and open space. Resources addressed in this Element include: a) ecological and biological resources; b) scenic resources; c) water supply and conservation; d) water quality; and e) and energy conservation. Because daily

activities in Rancho Santa Margarita affect air quality outside City boundaries, regional air quality issues are also addressed in this Element.

The Conservation/Open Space Element is comprised of three sections: 1) this Introduction; 2) Issues, Goals and Policies; and 3) the Conservation/Open Space Plan. In the Issues, Goals and Policies section, community open space needs and resource management issues are identified and corresponding goals and policies are established. The goals, which are overall statements of the City's desires, are comprised of broad statements of purpose and direction. The policies serve as guidelines for planning and maintaining recreational facilities, enhancing the natural amenities of Rancho Santa Margarita and minimizing the environmental effects of planned development.

***Related Plans
and Programs***

The plans and programs described below relate to resources addressed in the Conservation/Open Space Element.

Federal Endangered Species Act

The Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, applies to federally listed species and habitat occupied by federally listed species. Federally listed species are most likely to occur within riparian habitat areas in the City's floodplains, canyons and hillsides. ESA Section 9 forbids specified acts that directly or indirectly harm listed species. Section 9 also prohibits "taking" any species of wildlife or fish listed as endangered. These restrictions apply to all federal agencies and all persons subject to United States jurisdiction.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of Fish and Game Regulations

Both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game have regulations to protect wildlife resources. Special permits are required for the alteration, dredging, or any activity in a lake or stream, as well as other activities that may affect fish and game habitat. Both agencies also regulate impacts to sensitive plant and animal species as described above. Future development in Rancho Santa Margarita that has the potential to affect wildlife habitat will be subject to the regulations of these federal and state agencies.

Federal Clean Water Act

The Federal Clean Water Act (CWA), administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), employs a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory tools to sharply reduce direct pollutant discharges into waterways, finance municipal wastewater treatment facilities, and manage polluted runoff. These tools are employed to achieve the broader goal of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters so that they can support the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife.

For many years following the passage of CWA in 1972, efforts focused on regulating discharges from traditional point source facilities, such as sewage plants and industrial facilities, with little attention paid to runoff from streets, construction sites, farms, and other wet-weather sources. Starting in the late 1980s, efforts to address polluted runoff have increased significantly, primarily through voluntary programs, including cost-sharing with landowners who must manage runoff. Also, there has been a slight shift from a pollutant-by-pollutant and source-by-source approach to holistic watershed-based strategies.

California Environmental Quality Act

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) was adopted by the State legislature in response to a public mandate for thorough environmental analysis of projects impacting the environment. The provisions of the law and environmental review procedures are described in the CEQA statutes and CEQA Guidelines. CEQA will continue to be instrumental in ensuring that the environmental impacts associated with local development projects are appropriately assessed and mitigated.

California Endangered Species Act

The California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & Game Code §§2050, et. seq.) generally parallels the main provisions of the Federal Endangered Species Act and is administered by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). CESA prohibits the “taking” of listed species except as otherwise provided in State law. Any future development or redevelopment in Rancho Santa Margarita that has the potential to affect wildlife will be subject to the restrictions contained in CESA.

National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)

Rancho Santa Margarita is under the jurisdiction of the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (SDRWQCB), which implements the NPDES permit for the San Diego area (including southern Orange County). The NPDES permit, a requirement under the Clean Water Act, addresses pollution from urban runoff that impacts water quality of receiving waters (such as streams and lakes). Under the NPDES permit, each jurisdiction must implement measures to reduce urban runoff during all phases of development: planning, construction and existing uses. Requirements include incorporating Best Management Practices to reduce runoff from construction and existing uses, reporting any violations to the SDRWQCB and education regarding the negative water quality impacts from urban runoff.

South Coast Air Quality Management Plan

The South Coast Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) mandates a variety of measures to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. These measures include the requirement that each jurisdiction develop an air quality component within its General Plan.

County of Orange General Plan Resources Element

The County of Orange General Plan Resources Element includes an inventory of the Countywide resources, such as wildlife, energy, water, air and open space. The Element also includes goals, policies and programs for development, management, preservation and conservation of the County resources. This Element provides sources of regional information affecting Rancho Santa Margarita and identifies resource policies and programs that apply to the unincorporated northeast portion of the Rancho Santa Margarita planning area.

National Recreation and Park Association



The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a membership organization that focuses on advancing parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people. The NRPA provides many services related to parks and recreation, including the development of youth programs, parks and recreation career information, safety and education. The NRPA also publishes national guidelines for parks and recreation development and conservation.

California Subdivision Map Act

Section 66477 of the Government Code provides local jurisdictions with the authority to acquire parklands in association with new land divisions. This provision of State law allows a city, by ordinance, to require the dedication of land, dedication of improvements, payment of an in-lieu fee, or any combination of these items, for park and recreational purposes as a condition on approving a subdivision map.

Master Plan of Local Parks

The County of Orange Master Plan of Local Parks is designed to meet the local recreation needs of the unincorporated county area. In conjunction with the Local Park Code, the Master Plan of Local Parks is intended to provide for comprehensive local park planning and programming.

Master Plan of Regional Riding and Hiking Trails

The County of Orange Master Plan of Regional Riding and Hiking Trails includes an inventory of existing and proposed trails, and standards and criteria for the provision of new trails. This plan also provides policies and programs to implement the future development and operation of the Countywide trails system to which Rancho Santa Margarita links.

Master Plan of Regional Recreation Facilities

The County of Orange Master Plan of Regional Recreational Facilities includes an inventory of existing and proposed regional parks, County harbors, marine life refuges, County beaches and historical sites. The purpose of the plan is to provide a countywide

regional recreation network to meet the needs of present and future residents of Orange County.

County of Orange Recreation Element

The Recreation Element of the County of Orange General Plan provides an inventory of existing and proposed parks and open space, and includes the Local Parks, Regional Trails and Regional Recreation Facilities Master Plans. O'Neill Regional Park is located within Rancho Santa Margarita and is subject to the County Recreation Element.

Planned Communities

Rancho Santa Margarita has been developed as a series of Planned Communities prior to incorporation. The Planned Communities comprising the incorporated City include Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community, Rancho Trabuco Planned Community, Robinson Ranch Planned Community, and Dove Canyon Planned Community. In addition, the planning area includes the Northeast Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community located outside of the existing City boundaries. This future Planned Community designation includes provisions for recreational and open space resources.

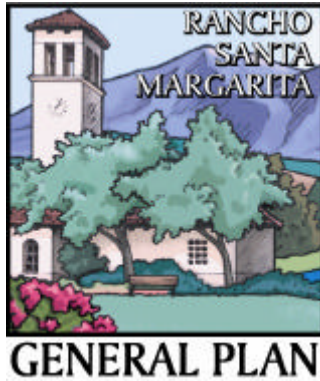
Relationship to Other General Plan Elements

The Conservation/Open Space Element must be consistent with the other General Plan elements and all elements of the General Plan are interrelated to a degree. Certain goals and policies of one element may also address issues that are the primary subjects of other elements. Table COS-1 located in the following section identifies related goals and policies by General Plan element. The integration of overlapping issues throughout the General Plan elements provides a strong basis for the implementation of plans and programs and achievement of community goals. The Conservation/Open Space Element most closely relates to the Land Use and Safety Elements.

The Land Use Element provides a planned land use pattern with the following general land use designations: Residential; Commercial and Business; Public/Quasi Public; Open Space and Other land use designations. The more specific Parks, Open Space, Open Space Golf and Regional Open Space designations are applied to public and private lands that are intended for conservation, open space, and recreational uses. These designations apply to areas that have an abundance of natural resources, visual resources, recreational value, and/or public safety concerns.

The Safety Element relates to the Conservation/Open Space Element by identifying hazard-prone areas such as floodplains, potentially unstable hillside areas and seismic hazard areas that should be conserved as open space.





Issues, Goals and Policies

Rancho Santa Margarita possesses valuable assets in the form of its open space and natural resources. Conservation and enhancement of these assets can be accomplished by addressing certain issues affecting the City. The goals, policies, and plan in the Conservation/Open Space Element address six major issues including: 1) ecological and biological resources; 2) scenic resources; 3) water supply and conservation; 4) water quality; 5) air quality; and 6) energy conservation. Each issue and the related goals and policies are included in this section of the Conservation/Open Space Element.

Ecological and Biological Resources

Rancho Santa Margarita contains important ecological and biological resources such as Tijeras and Trabuco Creeks, O'Neill Regional Park, and the natural plants and wildlife that inhabit them. In a region of growth and urbanization, these resources are threatened by the encroachment of urban development. To conserve these important resources for future generations and to preserve the quality of life in the community, these important ecological and biological resources need to be protected.

Goal 1: Protect and enhance the significant ecological and biological resources within and surrounding the community.

Policy 1.1: Preserve ecological and biological resources by maintaining these resources as open space.

Policy 1.2: Continue to preserve the coast live oak woodlands in the City by retaining the habitat as open space.

Policy 1.3: Protect and enhance the creeks, lakes and adjacent wetlands for their value in providing visual amenity, habitat for wildlife and recreational opportunities.

Policy 1.4: Through land use planning, environmental review, and conditions placed on development projects, reduce the impact of urban development on important ecological and biological resources, including the beneficial uses of receiving waters.

Policy 1.5: Coordinate with local, regional, state and federal agencies with jurisdiction over parks and open space in the community to secure permanent access easements

for passive recreational and trail purposes where needed.

Policy 1.6: Coordinate with park owners and operators to convert existing passive parkland to active recreational space.

Policy 1.7: Establish and ensure maintenance of a standard of 3 acres of active park land per 1,000 population.

Scenic Resources

Rancho Santa Margarita is rich with scenic resources such as Lake Santa Margarita, its ridgelines, creeks, open space and views of the surrounding hillsides. These resources provide open vistas and variety in the scenic quality of the City. The preservation of these resources is key to maintaining the community's character and identity.

Goal 2: Maintain community character and identity by protecting the City's scenic resources and vistas.

Policy 2.1: Maintain scenic resources, such as the City's hillsides, ridgelines and surface water resources as open space.

Policy 2.2: Encourage and maintain high-quality architectural and landscaping design to preserve the community's visual character.

Water Supply and Conservation

The City depends on imported water for its urban activities. Urban development depends on adequate supplies of water. The City must promote the conservation of water resources in order to sustain existing and future economic and population growth.

Goal 3: Promote an adequate supply of water through the conservation of water resources.

Policy 3.1: Coordinate water supply programs with responsible local, regional state and federal agencies.

Policy 3.2: Encourage the production, distribution, and use of recycled water.

Policy 3.3: Participate in and implement local and regional programs that promote water conservation.

Policy 3.4: Promote water conservation in residential and non-residential uses.

Water Quality

The City contains ground and surface water resources (Lake Santa Margarita, the Upper Oso Reservoir, Tijeras Canyon Creek, and Trabuco Creek) that are subject to various sources of pollution associated with urban runoff. To protect public safety and these water resources the quality of our water resources needs to be monitored and protected.

Goal 4: Promote a safe supply of potable water for community uses.

Policy 4.1: Coordinate water quality programs with responsible local, regional, state and federal agencies.

Policy 4.2: Participate in applicable and enforceable local, regional, state, and federal efforts to protect and enhance potable water quality.

Policy 4.3: Encourage the development of new water sources, and encourage efforts for development of new water sources by the Santa Margarita and Trabuco Canyon Water Districts.

Goal 5: Protect the beneficial uses of ground and surface waters.

Policy 5.1: To the maximum extent practicable, adopt and enforce regulations and engage in educational efforts to eliminate pollution from urban runoff.

Policy 5.2: Preserve, and where possible, create or restore areas that provide important water quality benefits, such as riparian corridors, wetlands, and buffer zones.

Policy 5.3: Limit disturbances of natural water bodies and natural drainage systems caused by development including roads, highways and bridges.

Air Quality

Air quality within the South Coast Air Basin does not presently meet state and federal standards. Cooperation among all agencies in the basin is necessary to achieve desired improvements to air quality. Rancho Santa Margarita can participate and contribute its share to those efforts by proper planning and participation in regional air quality management programs.

Goal 6: Cooperate with local and regional agencies to improve air quality.

Policy 6.1: Cooperate with the South Coast Air Quality Management District and Southern California Association of Governments in their efforts to implement the regional Air Quality Management Plan.

Policy 6.2: Integrate air quality planning with land use, economic development, and transportation planning.

Policy 6.3: Encourage the expansion and retention of local serving retail businesses (e.g., restaurants, family medical offices, drug stores) to reduce the number and length of automobile trips to comparable services located in other jurisdictions.

Policy 6.4: Encourage alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, and public transportation to reduce emissions associated with automobile use.

Energy Conservation

Urban development depends on adequate supplies and distribution of energy. The City must promote the conservation of energy in order to sustain existing and future economic and population growth.

Goal 7: Encourage energy conservation.

Policy 7.1: Participate in local, regional, and state programs that promote energy conservation and alternative energy sources.

Policy 7.2: Collaborate with energy suppliers and distributors to institute energy conservation programs, and inform the public of these programs.

Policy 7.3: Enforce building code requirements and apply standards that promote energy conservation.

Cultural Resources

Rancho Santa Margarita contains important archeological and paleontological sites. In a region of growth and urbanization, these resources are threatened by the encroachment of urban development.

Goal 8: Preserve and protect historical, archaeological, and paleontological resources.

Policy 8.1: Balance the benefits of development with a project’s potential impacts to existing cultural resources.

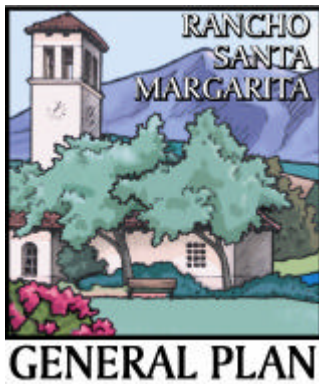
Policy 8.2: Identify, designate, and protect sites of historic importance.

Related Goals and Policies

The goals and policies in the Conservation/Open Space Element are directly related to and support subjects included in other General Plan elements. In turn, many goals and policies from other elements directly support the goals and policies of the Conservation/Open Space Element. These supporting goals and policies are identified in Table COS-1.

**Table COS-1
Conservation/Open Space Related
Goals and Policies by Element**

General Plan Element	Conservation/Open Space Element Issue Areas					
	Ecological and Biological Resources	Scenic Resources	Water Supply and Conservation	Water Quality	Air Quality	Energy Conservation
Land Use	1.3, 1.5, 2.4, 12.1, 12.2, 12.4, 12.5	2.1, 2.3, 2.6	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.4	3.3	
Housing	1.7	2.1				
Circulation	4.1, 4.2, 4.3	4.3		2.4	2.3, 3.1, 3.3, 3.5	
Economic Development		2.7, 2.8				
Conservation /Open Space						
Safety	3.5	1.3	1.2	1.6	2.1	
Noise		1.2, 3.2				1.3



Conservation/Open Space Plan

The combination of unique environmental amenities and modern development gives Rancho Santa Margarita a positive, enduring identity. The Conservation/Open Space Plan establishes an approach to protect and enhance these assets. The Plan addresses the issues and related goals and policies identified in the previous section. The goals and policies, serving as the basis for the Plan, are supported by several approaches to protect and enhance these valuable resources. The Conservation/Open Space Implementation Program contained in Appendix A of this General Plan is an extension of this plan and contains specific programs to achieve the goal of the protection and enhancement of these resources.

Ecological and Biological Resources

The setting of Rancho Santa Margarita is unique among urban communities due to the many open space areas around and within the City. Figure COS-1 illustrates the open space resources that add to the natural beauty of the area. Approximately 66% of the land area within the City is designated for some form of passive open space or active park use. The Land Use Element has four separate open space land use designations: P (Parks), OS (Open Space), OSG (Open Space Golf), and ROS (Regional Open Space). These designations provide for a variety of passive and active recreational opportunities as well as preserving natural resources that add to the character of the community.

Sensitive Resources

The City of Rancho Santa Margarita contains a combination of developed areas dominated by residential and commercial buildings, roads, golf courses and other human made features, and designated open space areas containing undeveloped native vegetation. Within the developed areas are extensive non-native landscape plantings. Areas of native vegetation located within the City include: O'Neill Regional Park, both sides of the Foothill Transportation Corridor in the southern portion of the City, and portions of open space located east/northeast of Dove Canyon and northeast of Robinson Ranch.

Seven vegetation communities are located in the City of Rancho Santa Margarita: urban/developed, agriculture, chaparral, non-native

grasslands, marsh habitat, riparian habitat, scrub habitat (including coastal sage scrub), and woodland habitat. Figure COS-2 depicts the location of these vegetation communities.

While the urban/development and disturbed vegetation communities are located within developed areas of the City, non-native grasslands are located along the upper edges of Trabuco Canyon in the O'Neill Regional Park area and within areas of Tijeras Canyon. This plant community is commonly found adjacent to coastal sage scrub, oak woodlands, and urban/developed areas within the City. Native coastal sage scrub vegetation occurs in the open space and regional open space areas of the City. The Southern coast live oak riparian forest vegetation community is generally located along the edges of the southern sycamore-alder riparian forest. Southern sycamore-alder riparian forest is dominated by large western sycamores, and as depicted in Figure COS-2, this vegetation community is located in the two riparian areas in the City: Trabuco Creek and Tijeras Creek.

Due to the number of different vegetation communities located within the City, a large number of different plant species are also present. Common tree species found throughout the developed portions of the City include sycamore, eucalyptus, pine, date palm, magnolia, alder, and Peruvian pepper trees. Sensitive plant communities that occur within the City include coastal sage scrub, southern coast live oak riparian forest, and southern sycamore-alder riparian forest. These plant communities can be found in two main locations within the City limits, O'Neill Regional Park and Tijeras Canyon. The sensitive plant communities are located in designated open space areas and are not contained within any developed areas. Sensitive plant species with a high potential for occurring in the City include intermediate mariposa lily, many-stemmed dudleya and southern tarplant.

Within the planning area, four wildlife species that are federally listed as endangered and one federally listed threatened species are present: the arroyo toad, San Diego fairy shrimp, Riverside fairy shrimp, least Bell's vireo and coastal California gnatcatcher. The California gnatcatcher is the only federally listed species known to occur within the City. Three special status species are considered to be present within the City based on known, recorded occurrences: the California gnatcatcher, coastal cactus wren, and northern harrier.

Two main areas in the City are considered to be regional wildlife movement corridors: Trabuco Canyon and the coastal sage scrub habitat located in the eastern portion of the City. Wildlife movement on a regional basis has continued in these corridors following development of the City.

The City preserves important biological resources with the large open space areas within the community. This open space will be left in a natural state to support habitat for plant and animal species. During development of the planned communities now incorporated into the City, the preservation of oak woodlands was encouraged. Since the Southern coast live oak riparian forest is ranked by the California Natural Diversity Data Base as a “secure” habitat, this Plan supports continued protection of oak woodlands in the City. Additionally, the City assesses development proposals for potential impacts to sensitive resources pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and requires consultation with natural resource regulatory agencies when necessary. The Land Use Element has established development guidelines for the Northeast Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community. These guidelines include a requirement that 35 percent of the land is designated as open space, including preservation of bluffs located southeast of Trabuco Creek and north and east of the Porter Ranch area.

Parks and Recreation

The private park and recreation system located in Rancho Santa Margarita consists of neighborhood parks, community parks, O’Neill Regional Park, joint use parks, community services and facilities, along with the extensive open space system described earlier.

The establishment of parkland within Rancho Santa Margarita occurred during the development of the Planned Communities that have been incorporated into the City. Figure COS-3 shows the location of parks within the City. All local parks in the City are



privately owned and operated by homeowner associations and can be characterized as primarily neighborhood-serving. Most of the neighborhoods in the City are within walking distance from an existing park. Rancho Santa Margarita currently has 22 developed

parcs that range in size from the 0.5 acre Dove Canyon Trail Rest Area to the 21.4 acre Central Park in Trabuco Highlands. Several of the smaller parks function only as passive parks. Active recreational parkland is provided in the City at 17 of the 22 parks. Table COS-2 summarizes the existing parks and recreational facilities in the City.

The provision and availability of parks in Rancho Santa Margarita is of particular importance to the community given the community's youthful population. Approximately 40% of the population in Rancho Santa Margarita consists of persons under 24 years of age. This segment of the population presents an increased demand for active recreational facilities and services, including playgrounds, ball fields and organized sporting events.



A survey of park managers conducted in April 2000 by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) generally defined active recreational facilities as areas where competitive, organized team sports are played, or areas that may require specially built facilities for such competition. In contrast, facilities for passive activities were defined as unstructured and unscheduled, comprising hiking/walking trails, picnic/sitting areas, general open space, and "people watching" areas. No national standards are advocated by NRPA pertaining to passive versus active park space.

Of the approximately 152 acres of parkland located in the City, approximately 85 acres (56 percent) are devoted to active recreational use. Approximately 68 acres (44 percent) are devoted to passive uses. This does not include the O'Neill Regional Park, which is 1,206 acres in size, and runs along the western portion of the City. This regional park is maintained and operated by the County of Orange. Table COS-3 approximates the acreages within each park dedicated to active and passive uses.

Applying the definitions of active and passive neighborhood park space from the NRPA to the existing recreational facilities in Rancho Santa Margarita (refer to Table COS-2), the City has approximately 3.22 park acres per 1,000 persons and 1.79 active park acres per 1,000 persons.

**Table COS-2
Existing Parks and Facilities
in Rancho Santa Margarita**

	Organized Sports Fields	Baseball	Basketball	Children's Play Area/Tot lot	Community Center/Club House	Hiking Trails	Performance Stage	Picnic Tables	Spa	Swimming Pool	Tennis	Volleyball	Roller Hockey Rink	Other Uses
Dove Canyon														
3 Swim and Racquet Complex/Golf Clubhouse			†		†			†	†	†	†	†		
2 Sycamore Canyon Drive			†					†						
1 Trail Rest Area						†		†						
Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community														
18 Arroyo Vista	†	†		†				†		†	†	†		
14 Vista Verde Park		†						†						
16 Cañada Vista	†	†	†					†						†
13 Central Park (RSM)				†	†		†	†					†	
11 Cielo Vista				†				†			†			
10 Lago Santa Margarita					†	†	†	†		†		†		†
17 Mesa Linda			†	†				†			†	†		
12 Monte Vista	†	†	†	†				†		†				
15 Tijeras Creek	†	†		†		†		†						
9 Trabuco Mesa	†	†	†	†				†			†			
Rancho Trabuco														
22 Altisima Park	†	†	†	†				†		†	†			
19 San Benito Park			†	†				†		†	†	†		
20 Estrella Vista Park	†					†		†						
21 Solano Park	†	†	†	†				†		†		†		
Robinson Ranch, Trabuco Highlands, Walden, and Rancho Cielo														
5 Central Park (Trabuco Highlands)	†		†	†				†		†				
8 Country Hollow Lane		†	†	†						†				
6 Heritage Drive Trailhead						†		†						
7 Ike Arnold	†	†	†	†				†						
4 Walden					†	†			†	†				

Corresponds to legend on Figure COS-3, Park Sites.

Source: CBA site visits; RSM Facility Inventory from "Final Report on Programs and Services Developed by the IGCC Committee," May 2001.

**Table COS-3
Active and Passive Parkland
in Rancho Santa Margarita**

	Total Acres ¹	NRPA Active ²	NRPA Passive ²	OC Park Code Requirements
Dove Canyon				
3 Swim and Racquet Complex/Golf Clubhouse ³	6.5	6	.5	
2 Sycamore Canyon Drive	2.5	--	2.5	
1 Trail Rest Area	0.5	--	.5	
<i>Community Total</i>	9.5	6	3.5	12.4
Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community				
18 Arroyo Vista	8.4	5.5	2.9	
14 Vista Verde Park	3.5	3.2	.3	
16 Cañada Vista	6	5.5	.5	
13 Central Park (RSM)	8.5	1.8	6.7	
11 Cielo Vista	2.5	1	1.5	
10 Lago Santa Margarita	16	--	16	
17 Mesa Linda	2.1	1.3	.8	
12 Monte Vista	6.9	6.2	.7	
15 Tijeras Creek	4	3.5	.5	
9 Trabuco Mesa	11.9	9.5	2.4	
<i>Community Total</i>	69.8	37.5	32.3	71.3
Rancho Trabuco				
22 Altisima Park	11.3	9.3	2	
19 San Benito Park	4.6	.7	3.9	
20 Estrella Vista Park	2.1	--	2.1	
21 Solano Park	11.9	9.8	2.1	
<i>Community Total</i>	29.9	19.8	10.1	26.8
Robinson Ranch, Trabuco Highlands, Walden, and Rancho Cielo				
5 Central Park (Trabuco Highlands)	21.4	8.0	13.4	
8 Country Hollow Lane	2.4	1.4	1	
6 Heritage Drive Trailhead	1	--	1	
7 Ike Arnold	13.6	9	4.6	
4 Walden	4.6	2.8	1.8	
<i>Community Total</i>	43	21.2	21.8	14.3
City of Rancho Santa Margarita	152.2	84.5	67.7	124.8

Source: CBA, Inc., 2001.

Notes:

1. Total acreage derived from Orange County GIS Land Base.
 2. CBA park inspections to determine active and passive acreage in the City. Active areas do not include areas characterized by steep slopes. These are included as passive areas.
 3. Acreage does not include golf course.
- # Corresponds to the legend on Figure COS-3, Park Sites.

In accordance with the California Subdivision Map Act, a standard of 3 acres of parkland space per 1,000 persons at a minimum should be established in Rancho Santa Margarita. This Plan establishes a parkland standard of 3 acres of active parkland space per 1,000 persons. New development in the City and the Northeast Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community will be subject to the 3 acres of active parkland per 1,000 persons requirement.

This Plan supports the increase of active recreational facilities in existing parks and improving the utilization of these facilities. A full range of recreational opportunities to serve the community can be achieved by:

- ? Promoting a high level of public outreach by coordinating with community organizations, special interest groups and private businesses to provide recreational program opportunities, and distributing newsletters or brochures to inform the community of available recreation programs and facilities;
- ? Coordinating with the park owners/operators and other organizations such as the School Districts, private schools and other appropriate agencies to achieve maximum utilization of recreation programs and facilities in the community;
- ? Exploring means to provide programs to those who cannot afford to pay by utilizing corporate sponsorships, volunteers and joint use of school facilities and services; and
- ? Working with the park owners/operators to develop new recreation programs to reflect new needs and interests of the Rancho Santa Margarita community.

Scenic Resources

Rancho Santa Margarita is located within a natural setting that provides a unique visual character. Along with slopes and ridgelines and bluffs, several surface water resources are located in and near the City. The City has built on this natural character with high-quality architecture and design standards.

Natural Scenic Qualities

The visual character of the City includes the following features:

- ? Ridgelines
- ? Native vegetation (described under *Ecological and Biological Resources*)
- ? Natural watercourses

- ? Viewpoints from within the area and scenic roadways

Several ridgelines and vista points are located in Rancho Santa Margarita. These include Trabuco Canyon, Live Oak Canyon, Plano Trabuco, Ashbury Canyon, Cochise Canyon and Bell Canyon, among others.

Surface watercourses in the City include Lake Santa Margarita, the Upper Oso Reservoir, Tijeras Canyon Creek and Trabuco Creek. Several small tributaries are also located within the open space areas of the City.

The County of Orange has a Scenic Highways Plan included in the General Plan Transportation Element. The County's designated scenic highways have been divided into two categories: Viewscape Corridors and Landscape Corridors.

- ? **Viewscape Corridor:** A route that traverses a corridor within which unique or unusual scenic resources and aesthetic values are found. This designation is intended to minimize the impact of the highway and land development upon the significant scenic resources along the route.

- ? **Landscape Corridor:** A corridor that traverses developed or developing areas and has been designated for special treatment to provide a pleasant driving environment as well as community enhancement.

As depicted on Figure COS-4, Scenic Highways, the planning area has viewscape corridors and landscape corridors designated on the County Scenic Highways Plan. These corridors include:

Viewscape Corridors:

- ? Santa Margarita Parkway: west of City boundary; between Avenida Empresa and Plano Trabuco Road
- ? Plano Trabuco Road: south of Santa Margarita Parkway; north of Robinson Ranch Road
- ? Trabuco Canyon Road between Live Oak Canyon Road and Plano Trabuco Road
- ? Live Oak Canyon Road between El Toro Road and Trabuco Canyon Road
- ? El Toro Road throughout planning area

Landscape Corridors:

- ? Santa Margarita Parkway between Melinda Road and Avenida Empresa
- ? Antonio Parkway between Oso Parkway and Avenida Empresa
- ? Avenida Empresa between Santa Margarita Parkway and Antonio Parkway
- ? Oso Parkway throughout planning area

Within these corridors, buffering and scenic preservation easements adjacent to the roadway may be required, consistent with current County General Plan policy.

During development of the Planned Communities that are now the City of Rancho Santa Margarita, the Feature Plans, Area Plans Specific Plans, Site Plans, and corresponding environmental documentation evaluated the visual resources within and around each plan area. Each plan was designed to complement the natural landscape and preserve the vistas and ridgelines to the extent feasible. These visual resources will continue to be maintained throughout the City, as any new development or redevelopment will require review of a site plan and environmental review by City staff. The Northeast Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community will meet requirements for natural resource preservation as outlined in the Land Use Element. This includes the preservation of bluffs located southeast of Trabuco Creek and north and east of the Porter Ranch area.

Architecture and Landscape Design Standards

The development of commercial and residential uses in Rancho Santa Margarita have included high-quality architecture and landscape design standards to complement the natural setting that surrounds the City. Development of the Planned Communities that now comprise the City included landscape and design standards in the Feature Plans, Area Plans and Specific Plans. Standards established for each planned community will continue to apply to all new development and redevelopment in the City. The Northeast Future Planned Community documents will address design standards for development in this area.

***Water Supply
and Conservation***

Two water districts provide the City's water supply: the Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD) and the Trabuco Canyon Water District (TCWD). Figure COS-5 shows the boundaries of the two district service areas. As shown in this figure, SMWD serves the

majority of the City, while TCWD serves the eastern portion of the City and the Northeast Rancho Santa Margarita Planned Community.

The following discussion focuses on the water supplies for the two districts and conservation measures currently used.

Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD)

Almost all of the SMWD drinking water is purchased from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) and comes from the Colorado River Project and the State Water Project. Due to sparse rainfall and limited potential for groundwater development, reliance on imported water is a necessity. SMWD operates a dual water distribution system providing both domestic (potable) water and nondomestic (non-potable) water. The Chiquita Wastewater Reclamation System is a phased District project that will provide up to 16-18 million gallons per day of reclaimed irrigation water to its service area. The Chiquita System presently serves Rancho Santa Margarita, Coto de Caza, and portions of the Trabuco Canyon and Irvine Ranch Water Districts.



Trabuco Canyon Water District (TCWD)

Trabuco Canyon Water District has a variety of water sources, including ground water, imported water, local surface water, and recycled water. The local surface water is a small amount of urban runoff/return flow co-mingled with storm runoff captured in Dove Lake that the District has recently started pumping back to its reclaimed water seasonal storage reservoir for distribution to irrigation users. Wastewater is collected and reclaimed at the Robinson Ranch Wastewater Treatment Plant. All reclaimed water from the treatment plant is used for irrigation purposes. The Water, Wastewater, and Reclaimed Water Master Plan undertaken by the District stresses the need to implement significant recycled and reclaimed water programs to reduce reliance on imported domestic water.

Conservation in Rancho Santa Margarita

The supply of imported water is limited and conservation efforts are needed to ensure adequate emergency storage and future supply. In addition to the water conservation measures at the SMWD and TCWD, water conservation will be encouraged by the City in the following ways:

- ? Encouraging SMWD and TCWD to expand the production of reclaimed water and working with the districts to develop new uses for reclaimed water;
- ? Requiring new projects to install and maintain a dual system when reclaimed water is available;
- ? Requiring the use of drought resistant plant species (native species where possible) in landscaping for private and public areas, including parks;
- ? Coordinating with the water districts and major users to establish water conservation education programs; and
- ? Requiring the incorporation of water conservation devices, including low-flush toilets, flow restriction devices and water conserving appliances, in new development, public projects and rehabilitation projects.

The City will also continue to coordinate with SMWD and TCWD for the construction of needed infrastructure improvements.

Both local and regional water sources are important to the City. The surface water sources in the City are Lake Santa Margarita, the Upper Oso Reservoir, Tijeras Canyon Creek and Trabuco Creek. Several tributaries are also located in the City's open space areas. Figure COS-6 shows the location of these water sources.

Water Quality

Two general planning issues are associated with hydrologic patterns: water quality and flooding. The City's water quality plan for surface water is identified below while flood prevention is addressed in the Safety Element. Surface water sources are subject to pollutants and sediment carried in runoff. Pollutants such as heavy metals, petroleum products, animal waste and trash can be carried through the storm drain system into receiving waters, such as Trabuco and Tijeras Canyon creek. These pollutants affect the beneficial uses of these receiving waters including recreation, aesthetic enjoyment and preservation of fish and wildlife habitat.



To address the problem of urban runoff, the Clean Water Act was amended in 1987. One of the amendments included the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Permit (NPDES). This permit, implemented in south Orange County by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (SDRWQCB), requires jurisdictions to enforce requirements reducing polluted urban runoff during all phases of development. Rancho Santa Margarita is a copermittee of the NPDES permit and will

continue to implement the most recent provisions adopted by the SDRWQCB.

The City can also address surface water quality by coordinating with homeowner associations, the owners/operator of the parks and open space areas in the City. Working with these organizations helps to ensure that proper methods to reduce urban runoff are in place.

Rancho Santa Margarita also supports and promotes safe water supplies for the community through program coordination with the Santa Margarita and Trabuco Canyon Water Districts and responsible regional, state and federal agencies.

Air Quality

The City of Rancho Santa Margarita is located within the South Coast Air Basin, a non-attainment area for federal and state air quality standards for ozone and state standards for particulate matter less than ten microns in diameter (PM10). The City is split between two South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) Source Receptor Areas: #19 - Saddleback Valley Air Monitoring Subregion and #21 Capistrano Valley Air Monitoring Subregion. However, no active monitoring station is located in the Capistrano Valley subregion.

Motor vehicles are the major source of regional emissions throughout the air basin and within Rancho Santa Margarita. No major point source emitters, such as heavy industrial uses, are located within the City. The City will work with SCAQMD and the most recent Air Quality Management Plan to improve the regional transportation system and regional air quality.

Energy conservation is another strategy for improving air quality. Pollutants are generated by the combustion of fossil fuels to produce electricity, and by the combustion of natural gas. Reducing energy usage decreases the amount of pollutants generated. The next section in this Element, *Energy Conservation*, provides a discussion of measures to address energy conservation.

Energy Conservation

Energy requirements and pollutants associated with the generation of energy can be reduced through innovative architectural design, building construction, structural orientation, and landscaping. The City will promote energy conservation by implementing State Title 24 energy performance requirements through building codes. In addition, the relationship between project design and future energy requirements will be considered when reviewing proposals for new development. Promotion of utility company incentive programs to retrofit existing development with energy efficient lighting, air conditioning and heating systems can be beneficial. Energy will be conserved in public buildings and the provision of electric charging vehicle areas will be encouraged in new public and private developments.

Cultural Resources

Rancho Santa Margarita contains many cultural and historic resources within its boundaries. Many of the City's most important archaeological resources are located in O'Neill Park where they are managed by the County. One of these resources includes the old Trabuco Adobe site which regarded by many as the single most important historical location within the City of Rancho Santa Margarita. Other important cultural resources within the City include prehistoric archaeological sites relating to aboriginal peoples and Native American Indians, many of which appear to date from 6,000 B.C. to 500 A.D.

The City will review future development proposals to ensure that cultural and historic resources are conserved in compliance with this Element and the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.

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