



# Pathways to Climate Resilience in California's Central Coast

Trust for Public Land engaged community members and conducted deep research to guide strategic, equitable investment in the outdoors

## Shaping tomorrow's landscape today

Nestled between the bustling San Francisco Bay Area and sunny communities of Southern California lies a beautiful but overlooked region: California's Central Coast. As climate change tightens its grip on the state, charting a sustainable future for the Central Coast is critical to ensure the wellbeing of communities and meet California's climate resilience goals.

## As temperatures rise and weather patterns shift, protecting the Central Coast is more important than ever

California's 30x30 initiative commits to protecting at least 30 percent of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030. In this historic moment of

conservation investment, Trust for Public Land (TPL®) is using cutting-edge mapping, ecological data, and community insights to help generate and guide enduring investments in the Central Coast. In the first project of its kind in the region, TPL is committed to helping partners, conservationists, neighbors, and policymakers become better prepared to meet this urgent need.

**In a region where access to the outdoors is starkly divided between the haves and the have nots, we have an opportunity to dramatically expand equitable access to the outdoors while meeting the state's climate goals.**

# Nature-based solutions will make the Central Coast resilient in the face of climate change

The Central Coast's diverse habitats are the source of its resilience. Coastal dunes protect against sea-level rise, forests and grasslands sequester carbon, and wetlands absorb excess water. Protecting, connecting, and restoring the Central Coast's habitats through multi-scale and multi-benefit approaches are powerful strategies for making California more resilient to climate change. TPL analyzed the locations of protected lands, under-protected habitat communities, and areas lacking accessible open space to identify areas of great need and opportunity.



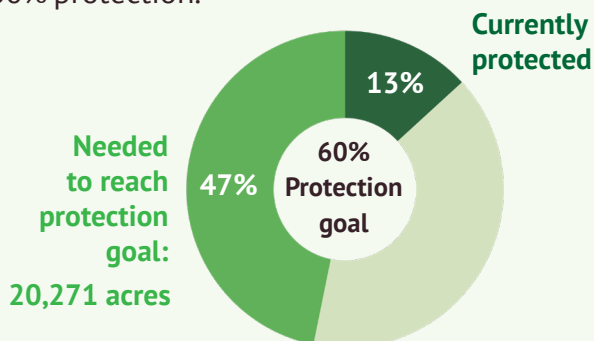
## These three habitats promote climate resilience and biodiversity –and are also the most at risk

The Central Coast has a long and impressive history of past land conservation investments, especially along the coast.

At the same time, there has long been underinvestment in other, more undervalued habitats. We urgently need to invest in the Central Coast's riparian, grassland, and blue oak woodland habitats, along with wetland habitats wherever they are found.

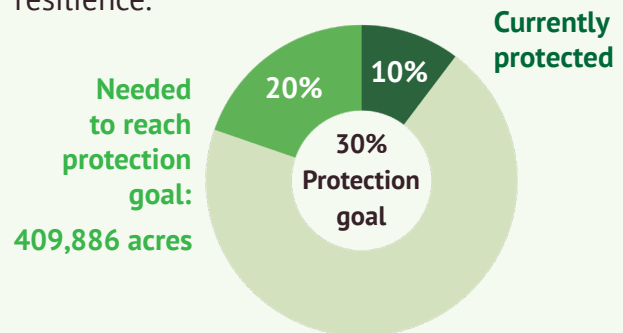
### Riparian

Riparian corridors along streams link upland and aquatic habitats and are essential to climate resilience for people and nature. Reflecting its importance, TPL has set a goal of 60% protection.



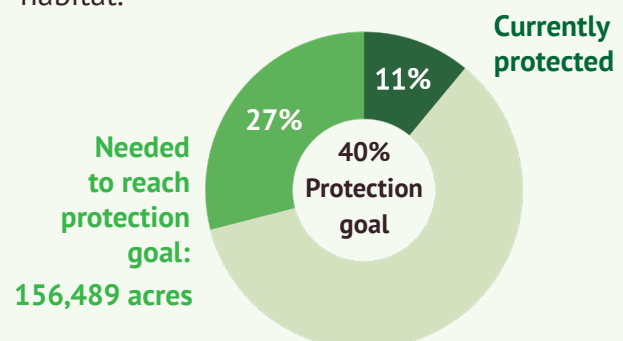
### Grasslands

Grasslands have an outsized effect on sustaining groundwater, protecting biodiversity, sequestering carbon, and ensuring climate resilience.



### Blue Oak Woodlands

Blue oak woodlands protect watersheds and air quality, reduce heat impacts, sequester carbon, and support a wide array of wildlife. TPL's goal is 40% protection of this rare habitat.



# Connecting Everyone to the Outdoors

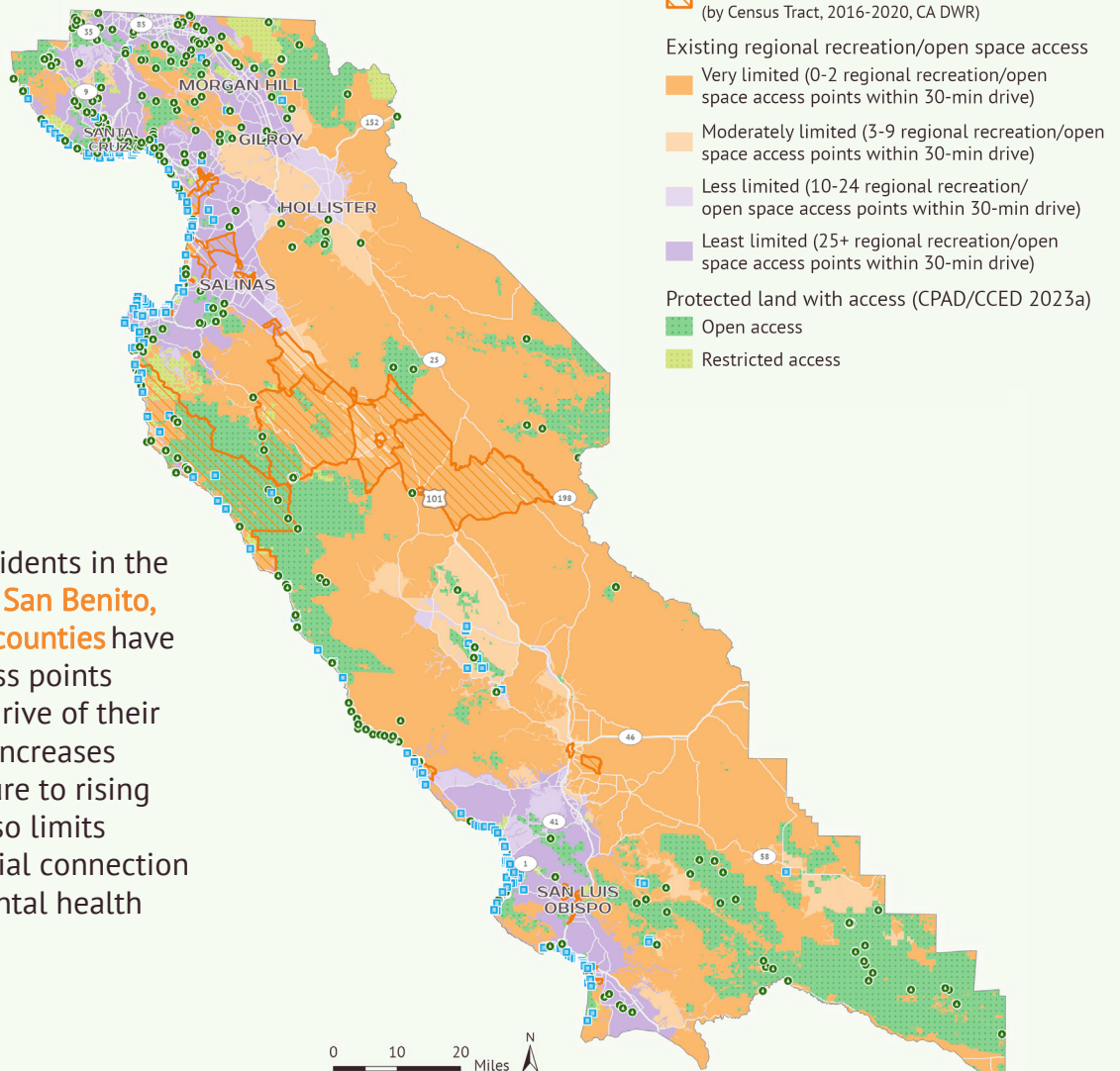
Close to home parks make communities more resilient to flooding, extreme heat, and other impacts of the climate crisis. Communities with parks are cooler in summer, have better air quality, and are more resilient to catastrophic weather. Nature deprivation is associated with lower quality of life, worse health, and constrained life opportunities. In the Central Coast, rural and inland communities suffer from a scarcity of access to public parks and open space.

## Our research paints a clear picture of severe inequities in outdoor recreation access across the Central Coast region .

The hues of **purple** on the map below represent an abundance of outdoor access points within a 30-minute drive. **Orange** shades indicate limited access options within 30 minutes. It's hard to miss the pattern: areas with many points of access to the outdoors are mostly clustered along the coast.

Some residents in **Santa Cruz County** have over 100 trailheads within a 30-minute drive of most homes. Residents could hike every weekend for over two years and never explore the same trail twice.

Meanwhile, many residents in the interior of **Monterey, San Benito, and San Luis Obispo counties** have no more than 2 access points within a 30-minute drive of their home. This not only increases communities' exposure to rising temperatures, but also limits opportunities for social connection and physical and mental health benefits.



**Indigenous, rural, and underserved communities have visionary conservation plans in need of enduring support. Supporting community-led efforts that serve historically marginalized groups and offer them sustained financial and institutional backing will ensure every person in the Central Coast can access to the joys of the outdoors.**

**Here's how we arrived at our findings:**

**50+**

regional and state initiatives reviewed and integrated

**2**

in-person roundtable meetings across the Central Coast

**200+**

residents who volunteered their time and knowledge

**206**

community-sourced data points added to our analyses

**Here's the good news:** Everything that TPL has experienced on the ground in the communities where we work shows that we can make a difference in addressing climate change.

**And it tells us where to start, the place where people interact most directly with our climate-outdoors.**

Our work in the Central Coast shows the importance of integrating regional perspectives into local conservation planning. We hope that partners and policymakers will use our findings to guide strategic, equitable land conservation and create a more climate resilient Central Coast. We also welcome people to bring more data, more stories, and more insights to the table. **To dig into our full research visit [tpl.org/CentralCoastResearch](https://tpl.org/CentralCoastResearch).**

**This work is already happening.** Here are some recent TPL projects that exemplify how we can create a climate resilient Central Coast.

### **Harvey and Gladys Nyland Property**

TPL along with San Benito Agricultural Land Trust, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, and the Amah Mutsun Land Trust announced the permanent protection and conservation of the historic ranch in 2023. One of the unique and intentional outcomes of this multi-benefit conservation project is not only protecting natural lands but establishing an Indigenous Cultural Easement for the Amah Mutsun people to regain permanent access to a key portion of their ancestral homelands.

### **Rancho Cañada**

By purchasing a 32-hole golf course and granting it to the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District as a new park, TPL simultaneously advanced equitable access, biodiversity protection, and climate resilience. The park ensures protection and public access to over a mile of Carmel River and adjacent wildlife habitat, while setting the stage for extensive floodplain restoration which will improve biodiversity and reduce flooding risks for nearby residents.

### **Brazil Ranch**

This iconic project located adjacent to the famous Bixby Bridge permanently protected one of the most scenic and photographed stretches of coastline along Big Sur. It provides recreational opportunities and increases the resilience of this highly biodiverse landscape.