

Compilation of Oak Woodland Policy Inventory

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Goal

The goal of this project was to compile and inventory all county-based policies to protect oak woodlands adopted by the 41 California Counties with oak woodlands.

Background

This project was developed by UC's Oak Conservation Workgroup and Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program (IHRMP) of the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR). This information was considered to be a top priority in the development of educational programs addressing local conservation strategies to conserve oak woodland resources.

Methods

Policy documents were gathered primarily in electronic format. County general plans, zoning, grading and subdivision ordinances were downloaded from county websites and from CERES, the California Environmental Resources Evaluation System, when available. Electronic versions of policy documents were also e-mailed directly by county staff in several counties. Hard copy versions of policies were collected by mail in a few instances. Additional policies such as General Plan Background Reports or EIRs were reviewed when easily available.

Collection of every policy and general plan element from every county, regardless of relevance to oak woodland conservation, was not attempted due to the scale of the inventory effort. Area and specific plans were not reviewed due to their great quantity. Phone calls and e-mails were made to staff in most counties where very few policies were found in order to confirm that the search had not missed important information. A copy of each county's policy inventory was sent to each planning department. Responses either confirming the accuracy of the inventory or suggesting changes were received from about half the counties. Suggested changes, if applicable, were incorporated into the inventory.

County Specific Policy Summaries

All policy documents collected were read to identify language that might conserve or protect oak resources and a county specific summary was developed for each of the 41 counties. Relevant language from each collected policy document was summarized in a table. Policies were classified according to content with note made when policies required oak tree retention or replacement during development or protection during construction. A small number of counties required conservation of the areal extent of oak woodland canopies. Requirements for protection of heritage trees and riparian vegetation were also noted. Several counties had policies that required an oak woodland conservation program on the part of the county. This categorization scheme is an expansion on previous work reported in Harris and Kocher, 2002.

These policies were then summarized by type to identify whether the policy was contained in general plan language, as a specific ordinance, or as guidelines to be followed voluntarily by landowners. The type of policy (general plan, ordinance or guideline) has serious implications on the ability of county

planning staff to enforce it. For an evaluation of effectiveness of policies according to policy type see Harris and Kocher, 2002.

Each county summary also contains a listing of each policy reviewed and date of review in order to assist with future updating of the information. Contact information and along with a categorization of the amount of interaction with county planning staff occurring during this inventory is also included.

Statewide Policy Matrix

A matrix was developed to summarize the status of oak woodland conservation policy implementation statewide. Counties were stratified according to their adoption of general plan, ordinance, or guidelines to conserve oaks.

No legally enforceable policies were found in about a quarter of oak woodland counties. No countywide conservation policies were identified in four counties, including Kern, Merced, Orange and Solano Counties. Voluntary guidelines applying primarily to agricultural areas only were found in six counties, including Calaveras, Colusa, Glenn, Mariposa, Shasta, and Tehama.

Legally enforceable policies applicable in some locations were found for another twelve counties that have either general plan language or implementing ordinances, but not both. Protective general plan language only was found in seven counties, including Alameda, Amador, Mendocino, Stanislaus, Tulare, Yolo, and Yuba Counties. In most of these, protections apply in specific locations only such as scenic areas or only for landmark or valley oak trees. Stanislaus County was an exception with protections applying to all discretionary projects. Two counties, Fresno and Madera, have both voluntary guidelines for agriculture and general plan protections for scenic areas or landmark trees. Two counties were found with protections only within specific ordinances, Los Angeles within a specific tree protection ordinance and Butte applicable only during subdivisions. One county, Lake, has both voluntary guidelines and an implementation ordinance that applies only to waterway zoning.

A total of nineteen counties were found to have both general plan language and implementing ordinances. Of these, fifteen counties have both general plan language and implementation ordinances that protect oaks to some extent and four also have voluntary guidelines. Contra Costa, Riverside, San Benito, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara, Sonoma, and Tuolumne County have general plan protections in areas limited by slope, parcel size, zone, species, or have protections that apply only to very large heritage trees. Protections apply in all zones in El Dorado, Marin, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, and Ventura Counties. Policies in Monterey and Santa Barbara also apply to agricultural areas. Implementation ordinances in these nineteen counties included tree protection and woodland management ordinances as well as zoning and grading ordinances and mitigations and standards contained within land use codes.

References

Harris, Richard R. and Susan D. Kocher. 2002. [*Oak Management by County Jurisdictions in the Central Sierra Nevada, California.*](#) In: [*Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium on Oak Woodlands, Oaks in California's Changing Landscape*](#), October 22-25, 2001, San Diego, California. USDA Forest Service General Technical Report PSW-GTR-184. pp 463-472.