

BEYOND “URBAN” PLANNING:
AN OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGES UNIQUE TO RURAL CALIFORNIA

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Abstract

Traditionally, the State of California has focused its planning efforts on urban areas, though as much as 5% of the State's population and 95% of its land area is rural. Upon closer inspection, California's rural areas are quite diverse, and each face unique challenges and opportunities. By developing a clear vision for rural planning, exploring more holistic and equitable indicators than the current reliance on population, and seeking the ongoing advice of a rural working group, the State of California can strengthen both its rural and urban communities.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Statement of Problem

Land use, housing, community and transportation planners often broadly characterize their role as “city planning”, dividing people and places into a false dichotomy of urban and rural. In fact, urban and rural places are economically, environmentally, and socially linked, and California’s greater sustainability goals depend on the resilience of rural areas. Thoughtful rural planning supports positive local and state outcomes.

This document is written in collaboration with the California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, advising its preparation of the 2013 Environmental Goals and Policy Report, with the goal of improving planning outcomes in rural California.

1.2 Methodology

This report begins with a literature review to establish a clear understanding of what the word “rural” means, developing a definition suitable to guide planning policy. A mapping exercise illustrates how rural characteristics are tightly interwoven into the metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area.

Next, three representative rural regions of California are introduced as case studies: the Central Valley, the Lake Tahoe Region, and the Eastern Coachella Valley. These areas were chosen for study because they represent the geographic diversity of California, and each individually illustrates a combination of competing challenges typical of rural areas. The cases were studied through policy research and dozens of interviews. The challenges of these cases are discussed, followed by an inventory of specific interventions the State of California could make to extend economic, environmental, and social sustainability. This report concludes with six broad policy recommendations for the State of California to improve rural planning.

1.3 Why is Rural Planning Important?

Planning exclusively for urban development does not prevent rural areas from being developed: it allows rural areas to develop without planning.

Consider California’s future High Speed Rail stations, where several stations will open in relatively small cities surrounded by farmland throughout the Central Valley. Station area planning is underway, but no process is underway to fortify the rural edge and prevent this new development from filling prime farmland with automobile-dependent suburban sprawl. To succeed, these communities will need both urban and rural planning.

For areas without impending economic development, it can be easy to assume these rural communities will maintain a status quo. Unfortunately, underinvestment doesn’t enable a status quo – it causes deterioration. Communities with fewer resources require public investment to be even more efficient.

To meet California’s larger sustainability goals, rural economies, environments, and communities require thoughtful planning. Increased understanding of rural planning challenges will support more effective goals and policies statewide.

2 Quantifying “Rural”

2.1 Rural Definitions

To guide rural policy, there must be consensus around what is or is not actually “rural”. Several definitions of rural exist. For general understanding, the Oxford English Dictionary:

rural (adj.):

early 15c., from O.Fr. *rural* (14c.), from L. *ruralis* "of the countryside," from *rus* (gen. *ruris*) "open land, country," from PIE **rur-* "open space" (cf. O.C.S. *ravinu* "level," O.Ir. *roi, roe* "plain field," O.E. *rum* "space;" see room). (Online Etymology Dictionary n.d.)

Policymaking and analysis require a more specific and quantitative definition. Unfortunately, existing Federal and California definitions are ambiguous, overlap, and rely on metrics poorly suited to planning.

United States Federal Definitions

Three Federal agencies apply three different definitions of rural.

- Census: any Census-designated place with less than 2,500 people, plus all undesignated areas (U.S. Census Geography Division 2010)
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB): any county not included in a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). MSAs have combined populations of 50,000 or more, and outlying counties are included if 25% or more of their workers are employed in the core urban counties (Federal Register 2010)
- The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) ranks counties on a Rural-Urban Continuum from 1-9, “1” being the most urban, and “9” being “completely rural” (Economic Research Service 2012). These rankings are based on MSA designation, population, and proximity to an OMB metro area, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 California’s counties and population by the ERS Rural-Urban Continuum Code, 2010

	California Counties	California Population	According to the OMB:	According to the ERS:
1	Counties in metro areas of 1 million people or more	26.3%	75.4%	Metro Urban
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population	19.3%	17.4%	Metro Urban
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population	17.5%	4.8%	Metro Urban
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area	8.8%	1.0%	Nonmetro Urban
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area	1.8%	0.4%	Nonmetro Urban
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area	10.1%	0.5%	Nonmetro Urban
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area	8.7%	0.4%	Nonmetro Urban
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area	7.0%	0.1%	Nonmetro Rural
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area	0.0%	0.0%	Nonmetro Rural

These definitions differ in significant ways, sometimes leading to a place being classified as rural under one but urban by another.

- The Census classifies places (such as cities and towns), while OMB and ERS classify at the county level. These definitions are ambiguous towards urban places in rural counties and unincorporated areas in urban counties.
- The ERS considers counties a “4” or greater to be rural, but the OMB considers anything “5” or greater to be rural. These definitions are ambiguous on the five California counties ranked exactly a “4”.

As shown in Figure 1, these definitions infer very different impressions of the prominence of rural in California.

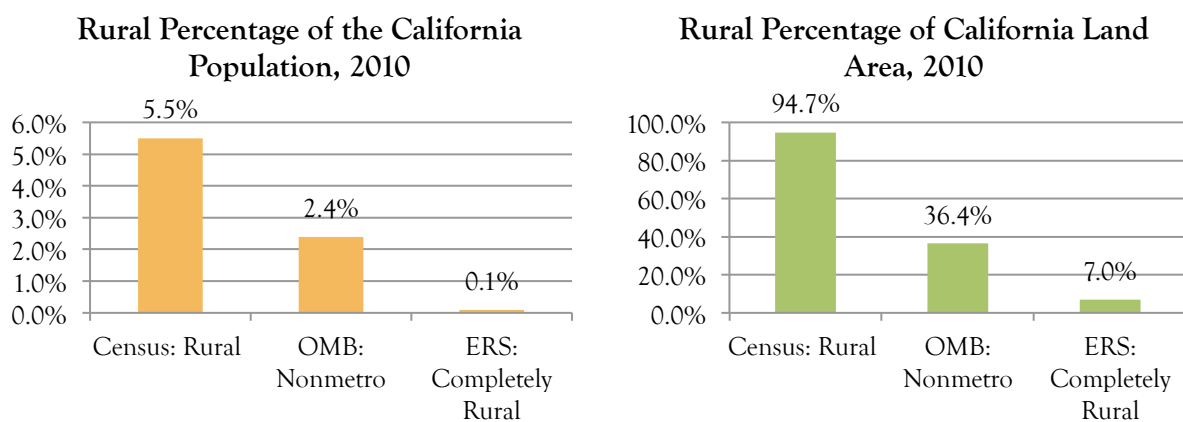


Figure 1 Percentages of California population and land deemed rural by Federal definitions

Determining rural- or urban-ness at the county level is difficult in California’s large counties. For example, Riverside County spans over 200 miles from Los Angeles to the desert Arizona border, but is considered a “1” by the ERS and “metro” by the OMB, even though over half of the county is ranches, farmland, and wilderness.

The place-level Census definition is more precise, but relies on population total, not density, and politically defined boundaries. The City of Portola has 2,104 people on 5.41 square miles, while the City of Belvedere has 2,068 people on 0.52 miles, so the Census considers these places equally rural, even though one is over 10 times more dense than the other.

The Census definition is further weakened by its practice of “rounding up” fringe to the nearest urban area (U.S. Census Bureau, Geography Division 2010), including:

- “Indentations” of up to 3.5 square miles.
- “Enclaves” that are surrounded by urban areas.
- Noncontiguous territory via “hops” and “jumps” of less than 0.5 and 2.5 miles, respectively. No hops are allowed after jumps.
- Census blocks with a high degree of impervious surface within 0.25 miles of an urban area.

Examples of these mismatched borders are illustrated in Coachella Valley in Figure 2. The black lines border areas considered developed by the California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, and correspond with what appears developed in aerial photography. Census designated Places, corresponding with municipal boundaries, are shown in opaque gray. Census designated Urban Areas are covered with a transparent green. Neither of the Census products correctly describes the situation on the ground.

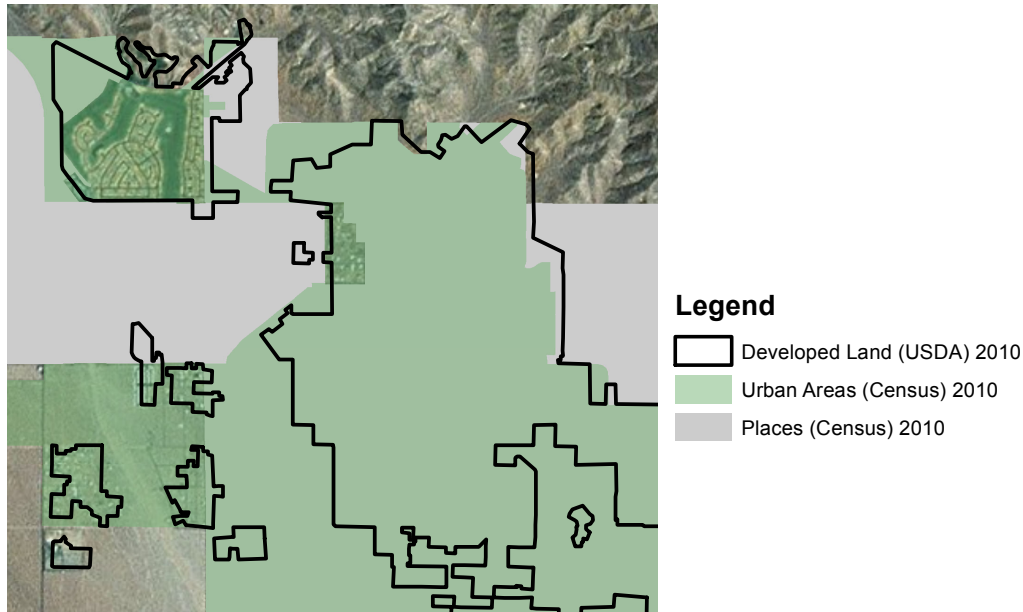


Figure 2 Overlapping urban boundaries in Coachella Valley

The rural fringe is important to planners. Border areas, like Indentations, are the most likely to transition from open space to sprawl-type development (Thompson 2012). Enclaves are also known as disadvantaged urban communities (DUC). DUCs were the subject of the recent Senate Bill 244, which requires cities to incorporate these places and extend to them the same municipal services and infrastructure as their relatively affluent neighbors (California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. 2012). A planner’s definition of rural should be able to distinguish these areas.

State of California Definitions

Several agencies of the State of California have defined “rural” to meet their various policy needs (Legislative Counsel of California n.d.), and these definitions apply a wide range of criteria. The California State Code’s 11 working definitions of rural include:

- Business and Professions Code §13651[b][2]: An area with an average daily traffic count below 2,500
- Education Code §8277.6[e][1][B]: Any county with fewer than 400 residents per square mile
- Government Code §22877[4]: An area with no board-approved health maintenance organization plan available for state employees
- Government Code §8589.10[f]: Territory outside an urban area as defined by the 1980 Census
- Government Code §51010.5[e]: The area beyond all incorporated areas, unincorporated communities, subdivision, and commercial areas

- Health and Safety §50101: A place that with its associated neighbors has a population less than 10,000. If the place and its neighbors are in an OMB-defined nonmetropolitan county, the maximum population for the area is 20,000, as long as the area “is rural in character”
- Streets and Highway §2503: Areas not considered urban

Some of these criteria, such as density and traffic, are more specific than the Federal definitions, but each definition is critically flawed for use by planners. Planning requires policy-based indicators, able to inform land use, housing, transportation, and other economic policies.

Alternative Definitions of Rural

How should planners define rural? What definition would inform policy specific to planning outcomes? What are the characteristics of a place relevant to planning that make it rural?

Minnesota’s Center for Rural Policy and Development proposed a dichotomy of “metroplex” and “ruralplex”. If city, urban, and metropolitan are all defined by the qualities that make them centers of commerce (such as population and employment linkages), then rural should be defined by the qualities that connect rural areas, such as soil type, geology, and climate (Gillaspy 2006).

Prime farmland in the Central Valley directs people to create specific development patterns – these attributes form one ruralplex. The vineyards of Napa Valley cover areas with specific soil and climate conditions, forming another ruralplex. A state as diverse as California potentially supports dozens of such rural place types. What specific place types would be meaningful to planners?

The literature review identified three rural classification frameworks, as discussed below.

A. National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP)

Written in 2007, NCHRP Report 582 *Best Practices to Enhance the Transportation–Land Use Connection in the Rural United States*, identifies three overlapping rural place types (Twaddell and Emerine, *Best Practices to Enhance the Transportation-Land Use Connection in the Rural United States* 2007).

- Exurban – a bedroom community peripheral to an urban center
- Destination – natural or cultural amenities attracting seasonal residents, tourists, and retirees
- Production – dependent on a single industries, such as farming, mining, or manufacturing

The report estimates that in 2007, the United States’ rural land was split 25% exurban, 23% destination and 53% production. California’s counties are classified as shown in Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5.



Figure 3 Exurban Counties



Figure 4 Destination Counties



Figure 5 Production Counties

In an interview, the lead author of the report noted that the county-based classification system failed in California (Twaddell, President at Twaddell Associates 2012). The analysis relied on the OMB definition, which designates a county “metro” if it contains any significant urban area. Several large and mostly rural counties are noticeably excluded from this analysis, including San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, which are considered metro but only 2.1 and 5.3% urbanized, respectively (Landis and Reilly 2003).

B. Smart Growth America

For *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities*, Smart Growth America developed five typologies “through discussions with a range of Smart Growth Network member organizations, including the National Association of Counties, the National Main Street Center and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as organizations outside the network.” Smart Growth America claims their classification framework is “now viewed as generally accepted terms within the smart growth community” (Smart Growth America 2009).

- Gateway communities – Adjacent to high-amenity recreational areas such as National Parks, National Forests, and coastlines. They provide food, lodging, and associated services, and are increasingly becoming popular places to live and work.
- Resource-dependent communities – Dependent on single industries, such as farming or manufacturing.
- Edge communities – At the fringe of metropolitan areas, and typically connected by interstate highways.
- Traditional Main Street communities – These enjoy a compact street design that is often accessible to a transportation hub. Historically significant architecture and public spaces are typical.
- Second home and retirement communities – May overlap with the other groups, particularly edge communities.

C. Carsey Institute (University of New Hampshire)

The Carsey Institute took a social approach, classifying communities by household characteristics. Carsey identified four rural place types in its 2008 report *Place Matters: Challenges and Opportunities in Four Rural Americas*.

- Amenity-rich – New, growing populations. Residents were attracted by the natural environment, and are generally more employed, educated, and earn higher incomes than other rural areas, though finding “good jobs” was still a problem. These residents are very concerned about the effects of urban sprawl and rapid development.
- Declining resource-dependent – Most are long-term residents, with parents that also grew up in the area. Out-migration of young adults is driving down the population. People in these areas are more likely to be Church-going, married, and veterans. Outdoor recreation and hunting is more important to these residents than natural beauty. Residents expect these areas to stay the same, rather than decline or improve.
- Chronically poor – High birth rates offset out-migration. Most are long-term residents, whose parents also grew up in the area. More respondents described themselves as unemployed or disabled than other areas. These residents are less likely to have a high school education, belong to a religious or community group, or be married. Like the declining resource-dependent, these

residents are unlikely to see sprawl or climate change as problems, and hunting is the most popular form of outdoor recreation.

- Amenity/decline rural – This is an “in-between” category. Out-migration of the young seeking employment is roughly offset by new “amenity migrants” moving in. Employment is relatively high, but employment is still a priority for residents.

A New Framework for Planners

What lessons can be learned from the rural frameworks above, and how can they be adapted to create a rural definition for California planners?

Each individual framework describes the whole range of rural communities, so the three frameworks inevitably overlap. Certain place types, such as Destinations and Gateways, are generally describing the same places. The distinction between Declining Resource Dependent, Chronically Poor, and Main Streets is less clear. The general overlaps are illustrated in Figure 6.

These frameworks are driven by parameters: NCHRP 582 and Smart Growth focus on land use and economic connectivity, and Carsey focused on demographics. Ideally, a planners’ definition would move away from demographics and towards parameters that planners can control, such as land use. This discussion will focus on NCHRP 582 and Smart Growth.

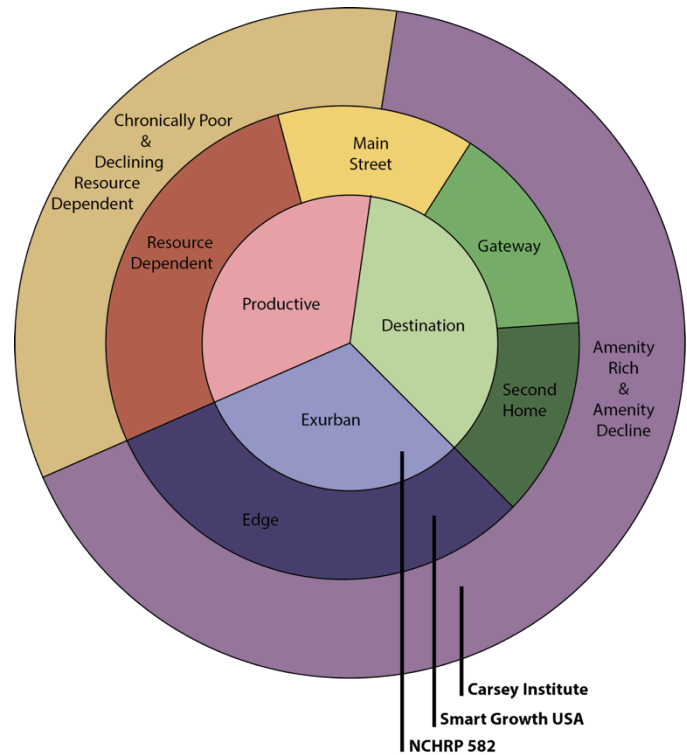


Figure 6 Visualized overlaps among the literature frameworks

Which of these place types are relevant for a planning framework?

Productive and Resource-Dependent: Both describe the idyllic working farm often associated with rural life. Agriculture, forests, and ranches are undoubtedly a key aspect of rural California, and one of these place types should be included. “Productive” is the more positive term.

Main Street: A planners’ framework should differentiate between communities dependent and independent of farming. Some Main Streets serve only the surrounding agricultural community, such as tiny and isolated downtown Coachella. Point Reyes Station is a Main Street, but serves regional tourists visiting the nearby Point Reyes National Seashore, and is a cultural destination onto itself. This new framework expands the Productive place type to acknowledge the small commercial centers that serve local markets. Main Streets related to regional destinations will be regarded as Destinations.

Destinations, Gateways, and Second Homes: Gateways and Second Homes are both subsets of Destinations. Lake Tahoe, for instance, is surrounded by Gateways (serving tourists of a variety of incomes) and Second Homes (serving wealthier residents). Not every Destination has both a significant

Gateway and Second Home presence: Joshua Tree National Park is more remote and less populated than Lake Tahoe. “Destination” is broadened to acknowledge the multiple roles of regional attractions.

Edge and Exurban: As explained by these frameworks, these place types describe the same areas. Some suburban areas are already captured by urban policies, so these place types may feel redundant. Some suburbs are indeed quite urban, but others can be as sparsely populated as a Productive or Destination area. Even if a community relies on another for employment, as suburbs and exurbs do, extremely low-density development can pose transportation challenges.

The word “Exurban” is a popular term for the area beyond suburbia, but was originally used to describe more prosperous communities. To apply more broadly, the new framework will use the term “Edge”.

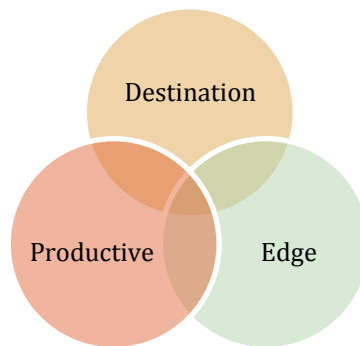


Figure 7 A new rural framework for planners.

These place types capture most of the diversity of rural, and create a tool for articulating the general opportunities and challenges of a specific rural place. This report will discuss rural in terms of these place types.

The NCHRP and Smart Growth frameworks allow overlaps. Overlaps do not diminish the usefulness of these place types, because overlaps allow the place types to describe a more nuanced reality. For example, Napa Valley is both a Destination and Productive in various places, and it inherits the challenges of both place types. Competition between these identities drives conflicts, such as noisy farming equipment near vineyard resorts, and should be acknowledged.

This literature review produces three key conclusions:

- Rural places are diverse and difficult to describe in general terms
- There is more than one kind of “rural”, each as complex as “urban”
- It is possible to categorize rural place types by their natural features and economic use

Prepared with a more complete understanding of what kinds of areas are rural, one can demonstrate the prevalence of rural within a metropolitan region. Section 2.2 will develop more specific quantitative definitions for each place type and map their locations and overlaps throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

2.2 Mapping Rural in the Bay Area

The three place types (Production, Destination, Edge) developed in Section 2.1 provide a language for describing rural areas applying characteristics within the realm of planning policy. In this section, these place types will be refined and given quantitative meaning. This section will answer the question: how does rural fit within the San Francisco Bay Area?

A Methodology For Rural Mapping

What requirements must this mapping methodology fulfill to be replicatable and useful to policymakers?

- Low-cost: The analysis should avoid private sources of data that may be costly to obtain.
- Comprehensive: Some cities and counties collect more information than others. The analysis should be replicatable for the entire State of California.
- Simple: Certain data is available for every city and county, such as zoning, LAFCo boundaries, and General Plans, but is not available for multiple jurisdictions from a single source. In the future, local governments could maintain this data in a statewide clearinghouse, but until then, these data would be labor-intensive to aggregate.
- Transparent: Each place type should be easily understood by a layperson.

Any veteran Bay Area resident could roughly classify at least a few popular destinations. Table 2 provides several examples as a check for the classification methodology.

Table 2 Example Place Types

Approximate Location	Productive	Destination	Edge
Farmland south of Gilroy (far side from San Francisco)	●	○	○
Downtown Sonoma	○	●	○
Western Contra Costa County	○	○	●
Tomales Bay	●	●	○
Point Reyes	○	●	●
Farmland north of Fairfield (the side nearest Sacramento)	●	○	●
Vineyards between Napa and Sonoma	●	●	●

Some places are clearly a combination of place types. Some vineyards in Sonoma may be both Production and Destination areas, while others closer to downtown would be a combination of Production, Destination, and Edge areas. Related policies must allow overlaps.

What indicators and data would enable the mapping of California’s rural places?

Productive

What defines productive land: its use, the people that use it, or its potential for use? The uses included in this definition of Productive are all location dependent – some land is better suited to farming, timber or mining than others. Fortunately, the characteristics that make land productive are well documented.

The California Department of Conservation monitors agricultural lands through the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). This program classifies and distributes spatial data on land suitability every two years. Every county has data available for 2008, though most also have 2010 data. The classifications of land suitability are described in Table 3 (California Department of Conservation 2007).

Table 3 Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Classifications

Name	Description	“Productive”
Prime Farmland (P)	Irrigated land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops. Must have produced crops four years prior to the mapping date.	Yes
Farmland of Local or Statewide Importance (L or S)	Similar to Prime Farmland, with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or lower soil moisture. Must have produced crops four years prior to the mapping date.	Yes
Unique Farmland (U)	Lesser quality soil. May include non-irrigated orchards and vineyards. Must have produced crops four years prior to the mapping date.	Yes
Grazing Land (G)	Suited to livestock.	Yes
Urban and Built-Up Land (D)	Occupied by structures with at least 1 unit per 1 or 1.5 acres.	No
Other Land (X)	Includes low density rural development, heavily forested land, mined land, and land with government restrictions on use.	Uncertain/Yes
Water (W)	Bodies of water greater than 40 acres.	No
Rural Residential Land (R)	Residential areas with 1-5 structures per ten acres.	No
Vacant or Disturbed Land (V)	Open fields that do not qualify for agriculture, mineral and oil extraction areas, rural freeway interchanges.	Uncertain/Yes
Confined Animal Agriculture (CI)	Dairies, feedlots, poultry facilities.	Yes
Nonagricultural and Natural Vegetation (nv)	Heavily wooded, rocky or barren areas, and both natural and constructed wetlands.	Uncertain/Yes
Semi-Agricultural and Rural (sAC)	Farmsteads, agricultural storage, packing sheds, unpaved parking areas, equine facilities, and campgrounds.	No

Several of these classifications are obviously related to agriculturally productive land, and some should obviously be excluded. Three classifications are less clear because Productive is meant to represent more than agriculturally productive land. Heavily forested land is ill suited for agriculture but the core of the timber industry, and falls within “Other Land, Nonagricultural”. Similarly, mineral and oil extraction (within “Vacant”) is the core of the mining industry. To be as inclusive as possible, this analysis will include these three uncertain classifications.

For this purpose, it is not enough for a Productive area to have productive uses – it must rely on those productive uses. An area reliant on productive uses would also have relatively low population density and low population growth. This analysis considered the maximum density of 100 people per square mile (California’s average was 237 in 2010), and a 5% maximum increase in population from 2000.

These population figures are borrowed from the U.S. Census, and are available at the tract level. Many tracts, particularly in rural areas, changed boundaries between 2000 and 2010. To account for this, a high-resolution raster was created from both 2000 and 2010 tracts to show a gradient of population across the Bay Area. Due to this process, the final product retains some of the tract boundaries.

Note that in the Bay Area, most of the Productive land is for grazing.

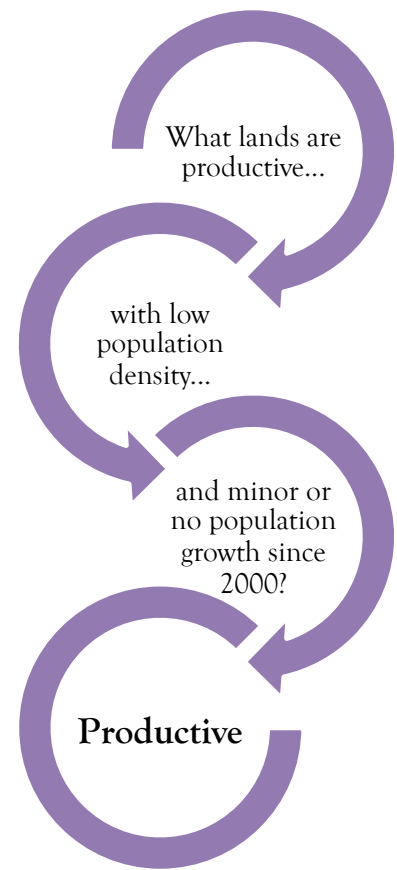


Figure 8 Productive Map Logic

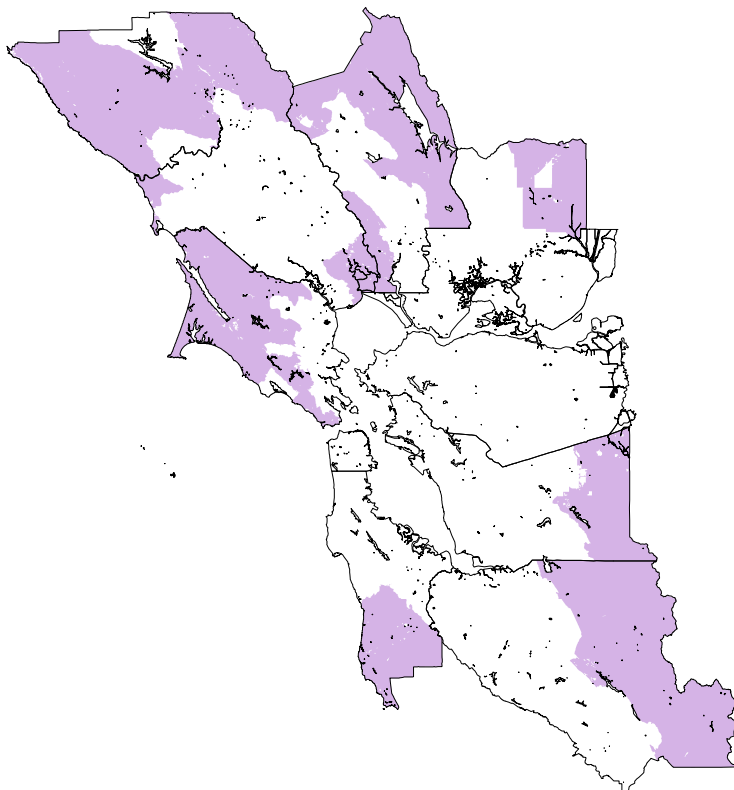


Figure 9 Rural Productive Areas in the San Francisco Bay Area

Destination

Unlike Productive areas, which are located according to qualities intrinsic to the land, such as soil and slope, Destinations are also somewhat subjective. People deem some parts of some lakes more attractive than others. Therefore Destinations require both natural and cultural indicators.

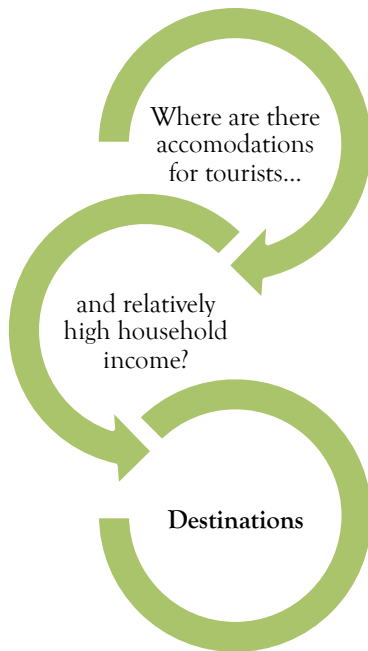


Figure 10 Destination map logic

The standard deviation of median household income by tract is 30,383. Repeating the logic applied to seasonal occupancy creates a minimum household income of \$95,970.

Note that this analysis assumes people live as close to their neighboring Destination as possible, and property values uniformly increase towards the attraction. Lake Tahoe provides a counter example, where strict environmental regulations make development adjacent to the lake nearly impossible. As a result, the closest residential communities are quite poor. Demand for higher quality housing and services have pushed development to Truckee, 30 miles away.

Destination areas in the Bay Area are highlighted and described in Figure 11.

What characteristics define a Destination? The NCHRP report relied on the percentage of seasonally occupied housing, so what is an acceptable threshold? The median percentage of seasonally occupied housing by tract in California is 12.3%, with a standard deviation of 16.7. One standard deviation above the mean – 29% – is a relatively high threshold. Applying this threshold to the Bay Area identifies the popular tourist destinations one would generally expect.

Once an area establishes itself as a Destination, it typically sees an increase in property values. There are private data sources for property values, but to keep this analysis repeatable, median household income by tract is free and a sufficient substitute.

The average median household income by tract is \$65,587 across all of California. The average across only tracts with more than 29% seasonal occupancy is \$71,178. This validates our assumption that Destinations are relatively wealthier than other rural areas. But how wealthy should an area be to qualify as a Destination?

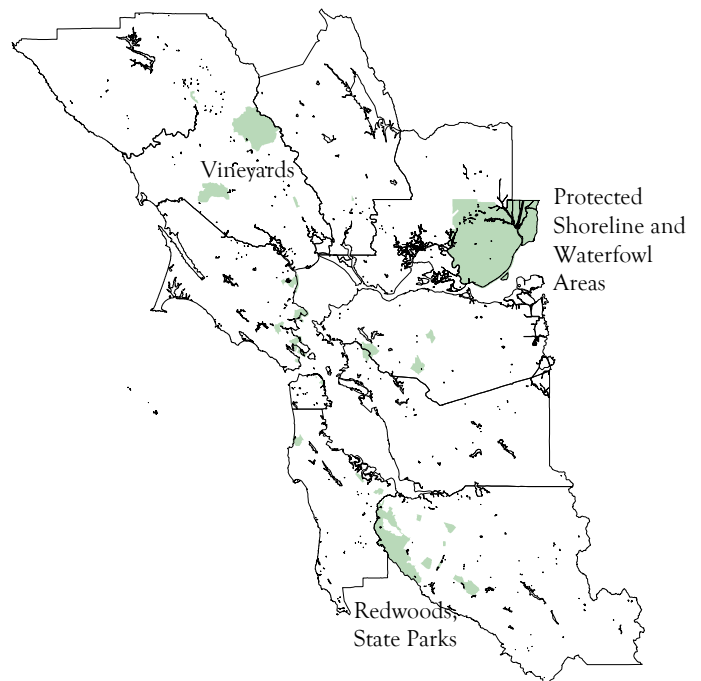


Figure 11 Rural Destinations in the Bay Area

Edge

Three different phenomena exemplify the rural/urban edge:

1. Rural areas can be “rounded up” and included in urban boundaries. This inclusion disposes the rural areas to develop into an urban or edge community, such as the outer edges of Stockton.
2. Urban development seeps beyond its official boundaries, spilling into more rural areas. This seepage draws more growth outward. This phenomenon occurred outside Elk Grove.
3. Once an area develops at a very low density, infill or returning to active agriculture are both nearly impossible. This describes the growth on the western edge of Vallejo.

Each type of Edge community can be mapped separately.

1. “Rounded up” rural areas. Urban Areas and Places, as defined by the Census, generously depict municipal boundaries. The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) designates the areas that are actually developed “Urban and Built-Up Land”. Any area considered an Urban Area or Place but not Built Up is considered at risk for sprawl and an Edge.
2. Density beyond urban boundaries. Aggregating zoning or General Plans across the entire state would be prohibitively labor intensive. Instead, the Census gives an understanding of population density. One hundred people per square mile was the maximum density allowable for the Productive areas, so unincorporated areas over that threshold are an Edge.
3. Very Low Density Development. The FMMP also reports “Rural Residential Land” at a density of 2 to 0.5 units per acre. Converting these areas into any other density will be difficult.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the following areas qualify as Edge communities by this method, as shown in Figure 13.

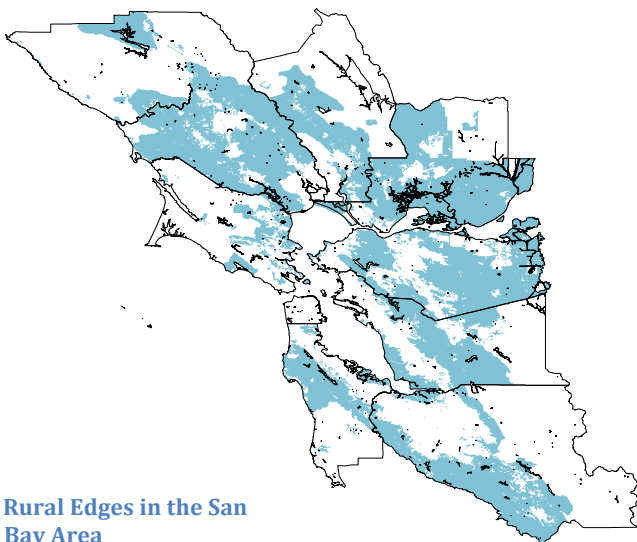


Figure 13 Rural Edges in the San Francisco Bay Area

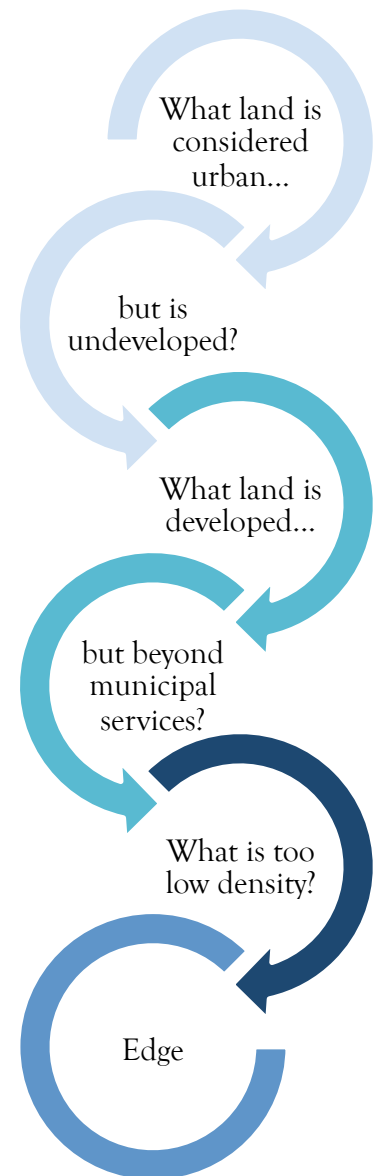


Figure 12 Edge map logic

Reviewing the Map Logic

The analysis correctly placed all six examples from Table 2. All three place types are shown mapped together in Figure 14, which makes clear the following lessons from this exercise.

- Metropolitan areas contain large regions of rural character, in addition to urban cores
- Rural areas may express more than one place type
- A considerable portion of land is already developed at low-density or is at risk to do so

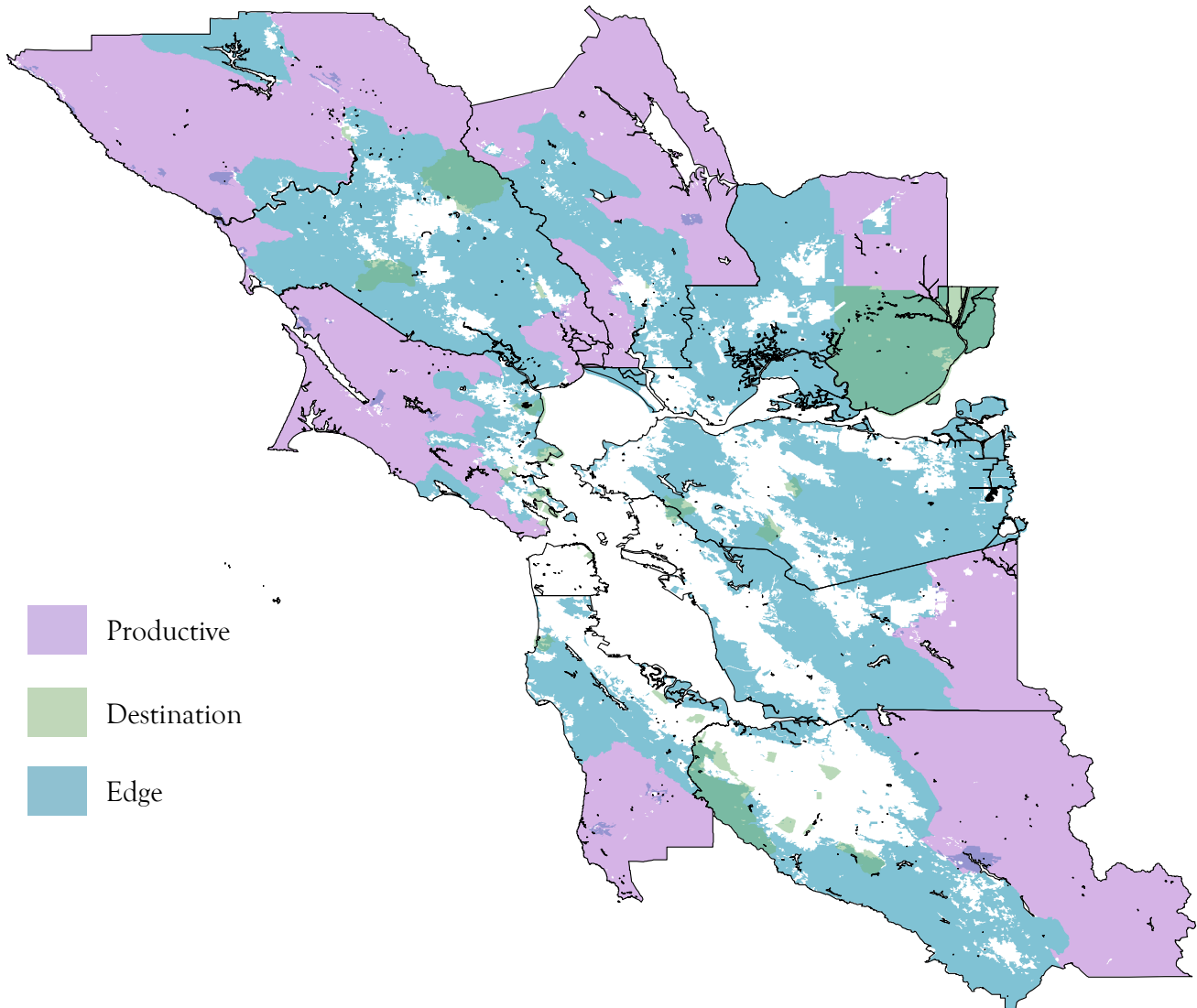


Figure 14 All three rural place types in the Bay Area

Next, Section 3 identifies three rural areas in California that represent these place types in various combinations, and explores the planning challenges and opportunities that arise in each.

3 Rural Planning Challenges and Opportunities

Prepared with an understanding of how to describe and identify rural areas from Section 2, Section 3.1 explores three case studies of rural California. Section 3.2 discusses the challenges and opportunities observed in each case study, categorized by rural place type (Production, Destination, Edge).

3.1 Overview of Case Study Regions

Three representative cases were identified for study through an initial round of interviews with organizations working across the state, such as California Fire Department and or Safe Routes to Schools. The selected regions (Central Valley, Coachella Valley, Lake Tahoe) represent the range of rural landscapes and economies in California, but each represents multiple place types and the resulting conflicts.

The cases were studied in depth through a second round of interviews focused on the specific communities, such as the Sierra Business Council or the Riverside County Planning Department.

The findings of the case study research are discussed in the following sections:

- Section 3.2: An inventory of planning challenges and opportunities specific to each place type
- Section 3.3: A summary of actions the State of California could take to address each challenge
- Section 4: Broad recommendations to support rural planning across California

The case study regions are depicted in Figure 15.

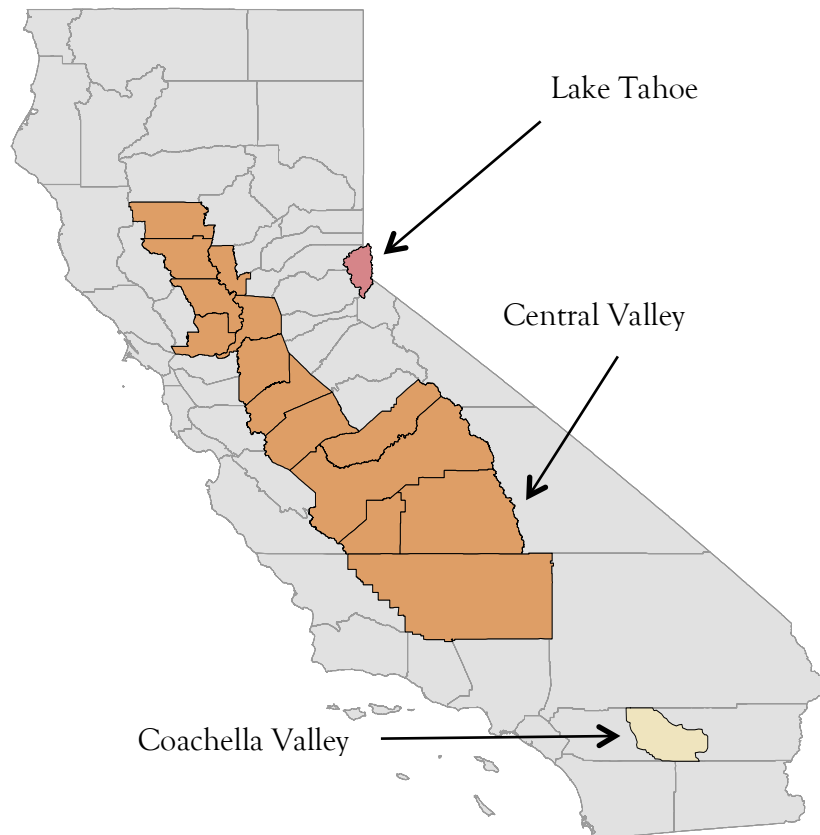


Figure 15 Case Study Regions

The Central Valley -The Central Valley stretches across 18 counties and 450 miles between Redding and Bakersfield. The Central Valley is most known for its Productive areas, but several large cities are scattered along the I-5 corridor, including the cities Stockton, Modesto, and Merced that will soon see High Speed Rail stations. Fringes of Edge-style development already surround many of these cities. The critical land use conflict in the Central Valley is the balance between Productive agricultural land and the pressure to build new Edge communities, and the arrival of High Speed Rail will increase this pressure. Small Destination towns are sprinkled throughout the Central Valley, mostly around bodies of water and along the National Parks and Forests that form the Valley's eastern edge. The Central Valley's rural place types are illustrated in Figure 16. For illustrations of the region's soil quality and natural features, see Figure 17 and Figure 18.

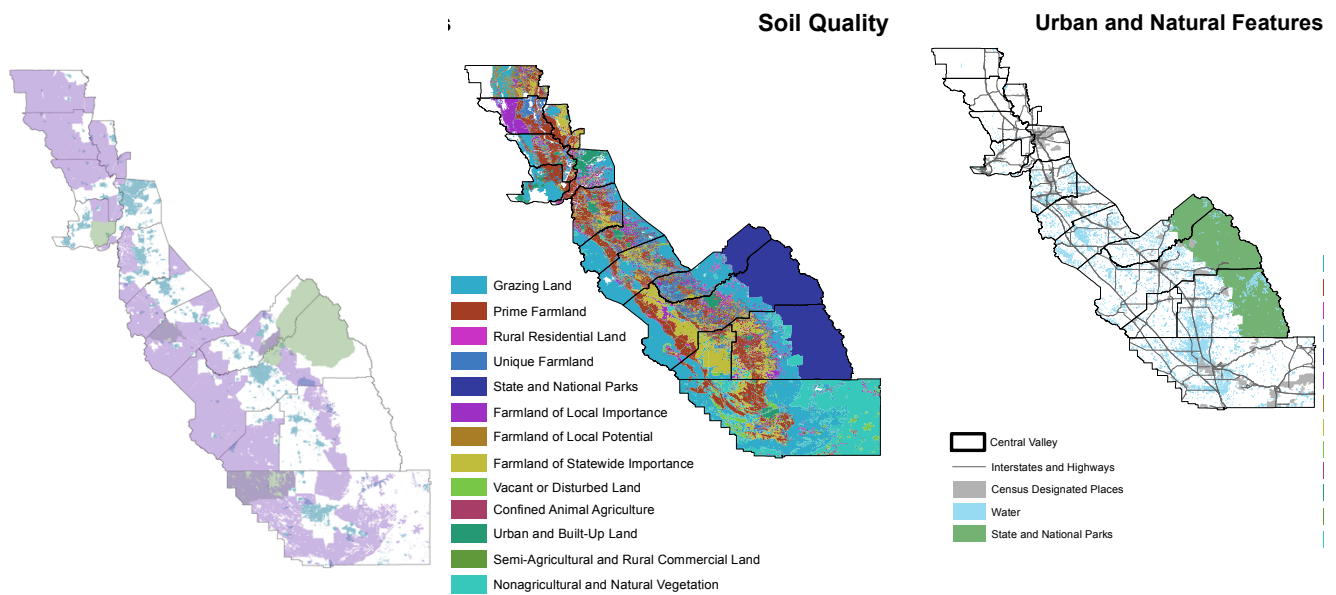


Figure 16 Central Valley Rural Types

Figure 17 Farmland Soil Quality

Figure 18 Urban and Natural Features

Coachella Valley – Riverside County extends 220 miles from the edge of Los Angeles east to Arizona. Surrounded by Joshua Tree National Park and San Jacinto State Park, the Coachella Valley straddles I-10. Coachella Valley’s population is just under half a million. In the eastern Coachella Valley, Productive communities grow almost all of the United States’ dates, in addition to dozens of other crops. To the west, Palm Springs is a world-famous resort Destination. In the middle, the sprawling City of Indio serves as an Edge to Palm Springs and the nearby city of Riverside. For illustrations of the rural place types for Coachella Valley and the surrounding Riverside County, see Figure 22. Urban and natural features and soil quality are shown in Figure 23 and Figure 24.

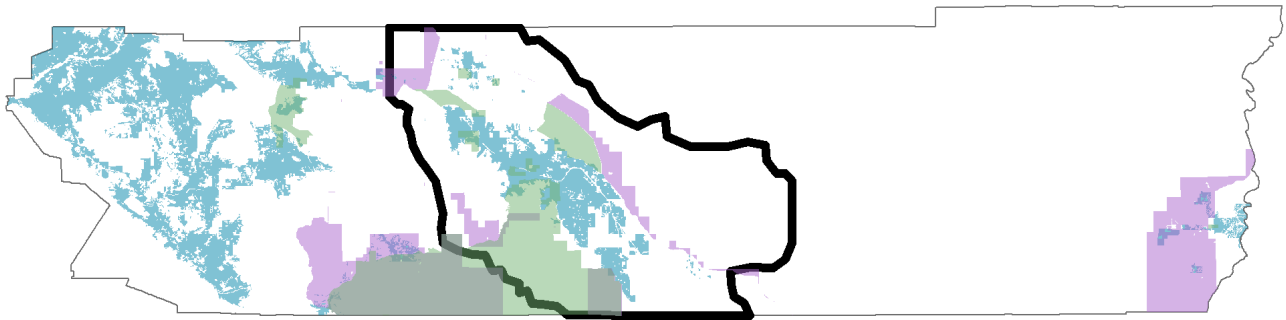


Figure 19 Rural Typologies in Riverside County and the Coachella Valley

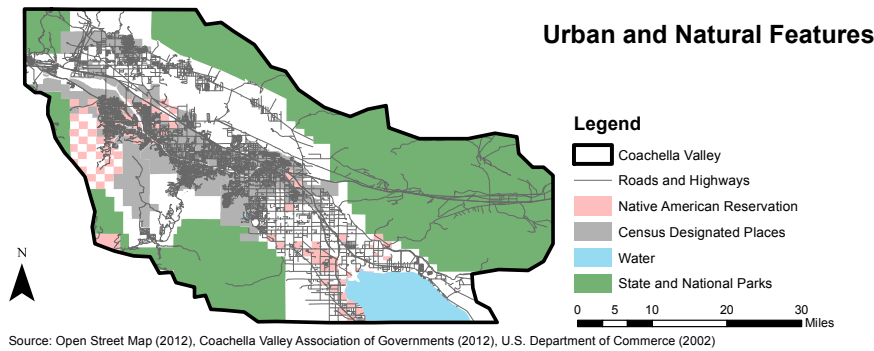


Figure 20 Urban and Natural Features in Coachella Valley

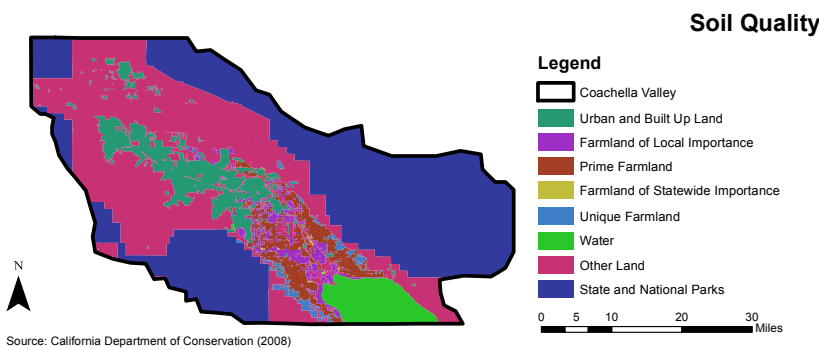


Figure 21 Soil Quality in Coachella Valley

Lake Tahoe – Straddling the California-Nevada state line, the Lake Tahoe region has a year-round population of 34,000. The area is a global Destination, providing skiing and snowboarding in the winter and hiking and water sports in the summer. Nearby, the relatively affluent town of Truckee attracts tourists year-round. Tahoe’s struggle to reduce human impacts and a strong demand for second homes combine to drive up property values and push employees into the distant cities of Reno and other new Edge developments. Though experienced by most tourists as a visual amenity, the thick forests surrounding the Tahoe community are part of the large timber industry that drives the surrounding Productive Sierra Mountain region. The three rural place types are illustrated for the Lake Tahoe region and surrounding Placer and El Dorado counties in Figure 22. For illustrations of the urbanized areas, water features, and public land, see Figure 23 and Figure 24.

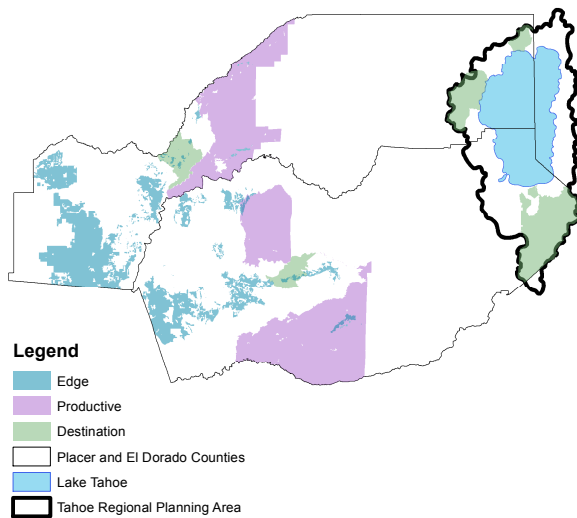


Figure 22 The Lake Tahoe Region within Placer and El Dorado Counties

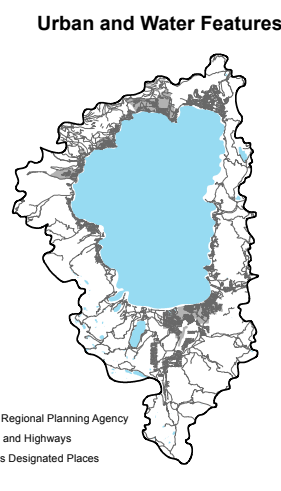


Figure 23 Lake Tahoe's Urban and Natural Features

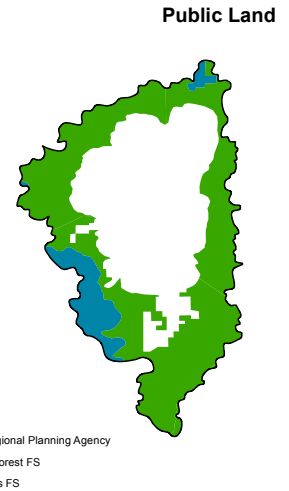


Figure 24 Lake Tahoe's Public Land

These case studies contain a wide range of economic, environmental, and social challenges, as well as opportunities for planned intervention into land use, transportation, housing, and development. These challenges and opportunities are described by place type in Section 3.2.

3.2 Inventory of Challenges and Opportunities

The interviews spanned the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and traced the complex narrative of rural planning. The simplest way to convey this information is by place type, grouped around topics common to the various stakeholders. Common rural challenges are explained below, underlined, and highlighted to the right. When available, corresponding solutions recommend by the literature or the interviews follow each challenge and are listed with bullets.

For example:

This sentence describes a challenge.

challenge

- This is a solution.

A. Productive

The largest challenge for Productive communities is low-density development, with relatively lower household incomes than urban or other rural areas. These key challenges areas are efficient infrastructure planning, the environmental justice of land use, and low-density transportation.

A.1. Infrastructure: Doing More With Less

Productive areas suffer all the difficulties of sparse populations, but with the lowest household income of the three place types. A smaller tax base is available in rural communities for public infrastructure like schools, libraries, broadband, and roads. The efficient allocation of public investment is important, especially in rural and unincorporated areas. As an example, school siting is often driven by low land acquisition costs, pushing construction away from developed areas. Adding construction and transportation to those relatively remote locations drives up the true cost of remote sites (Vincent 2012).

*efficient
investment*

school siting

- The EPA published new voluntary guidelines for school siting in 2011 (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2011). The guidelines discuss the importance of weighing the full cost of acquiring, constructing, maintaining, and operating sites before site selection. These siting guidelines could apply to any public building.
- “Fix-it-First” policies, which prioritize road maintenance over expansion, are gaining traction in the transportation community (Smart Growth America 2012). Where infrastructure resources are particularly limited, such as Productive communities, this approach could be applied and succeed more broadly.

Over 1.4 million Californians lack broadband access (Gillaspy 2006), including the entirety of Inyo and Mono counties (Jones 2012). Wayne Schell, CEO of the California Association for Local Economic Development, noted that this lack of access is understated because even the current definition of “broadband” does not

*broadband
access*

allow rural businesses to compete globally. The true technology deficient is much greater (Gillaspy 2006).

- The State can play an important role by both funding and coordinating broadband expansion projects.
- Additional State financial support could keep subscription rates affordable, so residents and businesses served by rural broadband can afford to participate.
- The State can advocate the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and National Telecommunication Information Administration (NTIA) to revise the current definition of “underserved”, while applying a lower threshold State-distributed support.

Lack of access to the civic process effectively disenfranchises remote and unincorporated areas. For example, Riverside County is over 200 miles long, but most of the residents live along the far western edge. The unincorporated community of Mecca has 8,577 residents and a median household income of \$26,207 (\$36,000 less than the national average) in 2010 (American Community Survey 2010). These residents live over 90 miles from their only representative government in Riverside, with no connecting public transportation (Sun Line Transit Agency 2012).

*geographic
barriers to
civic
participation*

- Technology can provide a supplement to the planning outreach process. The Bay Area’s Sustainable Communities Strategy was developed with community feedback from a website, You Choose Bay Area (Miller 2011).
- When new civic buildings are built in remote areas, they could be designed to serve as remote community engagement spaces. Workshops facilitated by teleconference would enable rural residents to join regional planning efforts without driving long distances to participate.

Planning language and policies often contain an urban bias (Humiston 2010). OPR’s Annual Planners Survey asks several urban-specific questions, with no “not applicable” option or alternative questions for rural areas. In an extreme example, during Eastern Coachella Valley’s only SB 375 outreach, the planners brought maps that only extended east to Indio, 15 miles to the west of the meeting. At one point, a planner stated: “We didn’t even know you were here!” (Mendez 2012).

*urban bias
in planning*

- OPR could provide guidance for planning in rural areas to prepare planners with less urban-centric terms and concepts.
- Consider topography and terrain when describing distance. California’s many mountainous and coastal areas, as well as sparse road networks, further isolate rural areas. Distance described in terms of road miles or travel time is more meaningful.

Population-based assistance criteria reduce the opportunity for rural communities to explain their need for external support. In 2011, Riverside County produced

*population-
based
assistance
criteria*

agricultural crops and livestock worth \$1.2 billion, contributing over \$4.3 billion to the region's economy (Snyder 2011). These dates, grapes, cows, and peppers were harvested in the largely unincorporated Eastern Coachella Valley, which is so sparsely populated the validity of its Census reports are debated (GOOD 2011). Highly productive communities like the Eastern Coachella Valley have difficulty competing for grants. The Strategic Growth Council has awarded 96.8% of its planning and urban greening assistance grants to metropolitan counties with 97.6% of California's population. Though spending per person is consistent across rural and urban areas, the 95% of California's land area that could be characterized as rural shared 3 of 183 grants (Strategic Growth Council 2012). Population size as the sole indicator of importance distorts the role of Productive communities.

- More flexible metrics would allow rural communities to compete against urban areas for resources. Riverside County, above, could benefit from "economic output per capita". Some resources only benefit lower income households, so "likely users" would more fairly compare need among candidate communities.

A.2. Land Use: Economic Resilience and Environmental Justice

Many Productive communities were formed around a predominant natural resource and still rely on those single industries today. As an example, many communities in the heavily wooded Sierras region rely on timber harvesting. As a result, the region's economy declined with the rest of the construction industry during the Great Recession (Jones 2012).

- The Sierras are well suited for several complementary industries, including biomass renewables, carbon sequestration, carbon offset credits, and other ecological services. Diversifying these economies can improve financial security, as well as create new and varied jobs to stabilize shrinking populations (Sierra Business Council 2012).
- Regions with unique natural or cultural resources can develop heritage-based economies, which encourage residents and visitors to "Buy Local" and promote goods and services from the region (Sierra Business Council 2012). Governments and community partners can create these inventories and branding campaigns, and can commit to the purchase of local goods themselves. Proponents of "Buy Local" campaigns contend that government incentives given to attract national retailers do wider and longer lasting economic good when directed towards local businesses (Smart Growth America 2009).

Not all Productive areas have such environmentally friendly, viable, and lucrative industries. Native American reservations are granted tribal sovereignty from many State and Federal laws, but are under the universal pressure to put land to its highest and most productive use. Exemptions from California's stringent environmental protections provide opportunities for private businesses to process or store hazardous substances on these sites (Yeung 2012).

*undiversified
economies*

*cumbersome
environmental
review*

- Tribal lands are also exempt from California’s generous renewable and green industry incentives. Extending these incentives to sovereign land would make environmentally responsible industries more economically competitive.
- Most of the hazardous materials processed on sovereign land within California come from California, and their treatment is often sponsored by State and Federal grants for remediation. These grant making agencies could introduce protections to ensure their recipients do not use public funds to support environmentally irresponsible reclamation processes.

A.3. Transportation: Few and Far Between

Impressively, 57 of 58 counties in the State of California have some form of public transportation (American Public Transportation Association 2012). With lower density development and relatively low-income populations, operating public transportation is especially challenging in Productive areas.

Rural fixed route service is generally infrequent, often 40-minute intervals or greater during peak periods (Sun Line Transit Agency 2012). Residents in these communities have low access to cell phones, arrival alert systems like NextBus that flourish in urban areas are of little use in remote rural areas. Rural bus stops can be very simple, often no more than just a signpost. Where temperatures regularly surpass 100°F, a late bus can require a long wait at an unshaded bus stop, posing a serious health risk (Mendez 2012).

infrequent transit service

cellular service and adoption

potential exposure to elements

On-call transit services are available in many urban and rural communities, offering door-to-door service to seniors over the age of 55 and people with disabilities. In rural areas, service is prohibited in unincorporated areas and unpaved roads. In Eastern Coachella Valley, California Rural Legal Assistance estimates this excludes over 30,000 residents (Mendez 2012).

unincorporated areas

- The State could provide technical assistance, training, or software to improve scheduling (Shoup and Homa 2010). Sun Dial drivers in Coachella Valley do not use radios, and users complain of several other inefficiencies (Mendez 2012).
- Simple and inexpensive bus shelters could provide much needed shelter from the elements. The State could encourage collaboration between communities to create and install these structures.

Restrictions on coverage reduce operating costs. Caltrans requires a minimum farebox recovery ratio in rural areas: the greater of either 10% or the agency’s ratio from 1979 (Caltrans 2010). Even with farebox recovery requirements lower than urban areas, Caltrans reports that “Frontier” counties have the most difficulty meeting their farebox recovery requirements (Caltrans 2005).

minimum farebox recovery

- Caltrans could apply a different measure of performance to encourage efficiencies, such as riders served, or low-income riders served.

B. Destination

The biggest challenge for Destination areas is protecting the natural or cultural resource that attractions residents and visitors. This challenge manifests in environmental, economic, and equity issues.

B.1. Environmental Preservation: Protecting the Destination Itself

Communities centered on natural resources rely on the preservation of that natural resource.

environmental preservation

- Development regulations can limit runoff, scenic impacts, particulate matter, and other environmental impacts. For example, improving Lake Tahoe’s clarity is the guiding principle behind most planning discussion in the basin (Stockham 2012).

Automobile vehicles produce particulate matter, runoff, noise and visual pollution, and rural counties produce over twice the VMT per vehicle as urban counties (Caltrans 2010, U.S. Census Bureau 2010, American Community Survey 2010).

high VMT per capita

- The dynamic of fewer people driving longer distances is an opportunity for electric vehicles (EV). Of the three rural place types, Destination communities have the advantage of a relatively wealthier population that can afford these lower impact vehicles. A comprehensive network must be in place to address range anxiety, but allowing expansion of the EV network into Destination communities could increase GHG-savings per vehicle.
- SB 375 requires California’s regions to develop strategies to reduce their GHG based on per capita calculations. For Destination communities, tourists and non-residents produce a sizeable share of VMT and GHG, but they are excluded from these calculations. This exclusion discourages Destination communities from providing overnight or shuttle accommodations for tourists, actually producing more total GHG. A revised criterion could more accurately portray trip origins and destinations.

inflexible per capita GHG-metrics

Though resource protection is desirable, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. The Tahoe area’s Bi-State Compact adopted aggressive policies to limit new construction and impervious surfaces (U.S. Congress 1980). In some instances, these inflexible, process-driven regulations impede desirable outcomes. A new bike lane was recently built around Lake Tahoe at a cost of millions of dollars per mile. Much of the expense was impact studies and litigation – TRPA required the scenic impacts and runoff of the new bike lane to be modeled, documented, and defended in multiple public meetings. Though bike lanes are themselves a method of reducing vehicle use and particulate matter, there was no opportunity for a procedural exemption. As the TRPA Regional Coordinator explains, “impact avoidance prohibits comprehensive planning” (Stockham 2012).

process-driven regulations

- Comprehensive planning and outcome-oriented goals can help communities balance their natural resources with economic health.

B.2. Economic Development: Cultivating Economic Security

Destinations based on cultural assets also require preservation. Downtown Truckee, for example, relies on historic preservation to maintain its tourist-attracting charm (Jones 2012). The businesses inside these historic buildings can also be delicate. Downtown retail and offices have difficulty competing with highway-oriented developments, such as office parks and “big box” stores. Cities and counties often provide incentives to big box retailers, inadvertently threatening their own small businesses and Main Streets (Smart Growth America 2009).

historic preservation

institutional biases for “big box” stores

- Encourage historic preservation through recognition, technical assistance, and investment.
- Support retail strategies that evaluate long-term outcomes.



Though agriculture, particularly vineyards, is a popular destination, tourism can conflict directly with the industry it depends upon. Though vineyards are generally an attractive destination and amenity, they are essentially farming. New neighbors and visitors complain about the noise and smells of farms as nuisance, though the farm was the amenity that attracted the complainant (Smart Growth America 2009).

complaints about agricultural nuisances

- Right to Farm ordinances protect agricultural operations from newer uses, by clearly defining what are normal farm operations, and what should be exempt from nuisance complaints.

B.3. Affordable Housing: Giving Locals a Place to Call Home

Though rural areas are generally more affordable than cities, Destinations are small pockets of exception. Local property values are inflated by demand for second homes, pushing out the local workforce into longer commutes. Second, tight environmental regulations can impede private redevelopment. Tahoe is such an extreme example that the “uncertain regulatory environment” discourages banks from investing in the TRPA region (Stockham 2012).

lack of local affordable housing

- Extend the discussion of affordable housing beyond major cities. Prepare rural planners to seek opportunities for small town infill with technical guidance and training, if necessary.

prohibitive regulatory environment

A recent infill development at Kings Beach, in North Lake Tahoe, demonstrated many of the hurdles facing rural affordable housing. Though the area was relatively dense (86 units per acre), and was within walking distance of many goods and services, the project did not qualify for a CEQA exemption as infill under Class 32 because it took place in an unincorporated area (Kang 2012). Trip generation, a key

indicator in the Environmental Impact Report, did not distinguish between trips by foot and car, though relatively few Kings Beach residents drive to work (American Community Survey 2010). Inflexible parking requirements required six parking spaces per two-bedroom unit (Kang 2012), which increased the cost of the units and decreased the density of the site (D. Shoup 2005).

*limitations of
CEQA
exemptions*

Infill projects generally bear a burden of improving the site's infrastructure, such as sewer, water, roads, and other utilities in the immediate vicinity. In rural infill, these distanced-based developer costs can extend over a much larger area. A rural infill project can represent a more significant population increase, broadening the obligation of the developer to include new water treatment facilities, fire trucks, or even basic infrastructure such as sidewalks (Kang 2012). All of these costs increase the price of housing.

*"one-size fits all"
development
requirements*

- OPR adopted guidelines in January 2013 to streamline the CEQA process for infill under Senate Bill 226 (California Natural Resources Agency n.d.). As defined, infill should include appropriate rural areas.
- The developer and TRPA eventually created a new infill overlay to allow the much-needed workforce housing. OPR could provide sample overlays to help rural communities create infill.
- Extend Class 32 exemptions to cover unincorporated areas. If necessary, base qualifications on unit/acre density.
- Provide guidance for local planners to tailor parking requirements most closely to demand, including lowered requirements in walkable neighborhoods.

C. Edge

Balancing rural industries with urban housing markets, Edge communities are most challenged by economic pressure to develop agricultural land. As small towns grow into larger communities, they are limited to the planning staff of their original small town. Defining the boundaries and strengthening the cores of these communities will create stronger rural communities. High Speed Rail in the Central Valley will present a challenge to California's rural planning ability.

C.1. *Farmland: Keeping Agriculture Competitive*

From 1990 to 2000, over 233,000 acres of high quality farmland in the Central Valley were lost to urbanization: either paved or taken out of production for large lot residential development. At this rate, the Central Valley will lose another 900,000 productive acres by 2040, or 14% of today's irrigated farmland (American Farmland Trust n.d.). This phenomenon is consistent across California and the United States¹ (Morill 2010).

loss of farmland

Though this trend is alarming, the individual farmers, property owners, and planners involved are behaving rationally. The age of the average farmer in California is approaching 60. Many retiring farmers are unable to convince their children to take over the family business, and young people today are less interested in farming than in previous generations (Finz 2011). When farmland is within commuting distance of an urban area, it becomes more valuable as residential development. Selling off land for development is much more lucrative than relying on farming for income, and many retiring or struggling farmers don't have a better option than taking their farms out of production (American Farmland Trust 1995).

aging farmers

Local governments, approached with the option of converting less lucrative farmland into residential development, generally accommodate this trend with General Plan amendments and updates, zoning changes, and Local Area Formation Committees (LAFCo) annexations (American Farmland Trust n.d.). All California cities have spheres of influence, municipal service limit lines, or other de facto urbanization boundaries. In counties with pro-growth philosophies, such as Riverside, this provides no real obstacle to the urbanization of farmland (Nathavongdouangsy 2012).

*aggressively
pro-development
counties*

Communities throughout California already do a great deal to keep farming an economically competitive choice. The State of California could expand its support for each of the following by offering technical guidance, training, or other resources.

- In exchange for a 10-year commitment to keep farmland active, the Williamson Act allows property owners to pay property taxes at the value of the farm, rather than the higher potential value were it developed to a residential use. The Williamson Act was introduced in 1965, and extended

¹ Riverside County lost 15% of its prime farmland to urbanization from 2000 to 2006. The United States lost over 41 million acres of farmland from 1982 to 2007, roughly the size of Illinois and New Jersey combined.

in 1998 to allow counties to offer an extra 35% tax deduction for 20-year commitments (California Farm Bureau 2012). Over 16 million acres are currently in Williamson Act commitments, and a third of surveyed farmers claimed that without the Act, they would not be actively farming (California Farm Bureau 2012).

- Many communities have voted to create restrictive Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB). In each case, expansions of the urbanized areas must be approved by the city council, board of supervisors, LAFCo, or voters (Greenbelt Alliance n.d.).
- Several UGBs include transferable development right (TDR) programs. TDR programs allow farmers to separate the development rights from their land and sell it to developers in designated urban areas. The result is a conservation easement on the farmland, ensuring it is always used for agriculture or open space, and greater density in the urbanized area (Smart Growth America 2009).
- Conservation easements, more generally, eliminate the risk of losing farmland to urbanization. In addition to local and non-profit land trusts, the California Department of Conservation has conserved over 54,250 acres of prime farmland (California Farmland Conservancy Program 2007).
- Right-to-Farm ordinances, as discussed in the *Destination* section above, protect agricultural uses from complaints and lawsuits that accompany new residential development.
- Priority funding and planning areas help rural communities focus urban development where it is most sustainable, while alleviating the pressure to develop agricultural and open space. The Bay Area has urban Priority Development Areas and Rural Community Investment Areas. Like their urban counterparts, each RCIA undergoes a specific area planning process, and many will adopt overlays for additional density, green buildings, mixed-use development, and traditional neighborhood designs (Kirkey 2012).

The most fertile land in the Central Valley is being developed faster than less productive land (American Farmland Trust n.d.). The California Department of Conservation grades farmland: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland are considered “high quality”. Farmland of Local Importance and Grazing Land follow. These categories exclude brush, low-density rural development, land unsuitable for grazing, and land surrounded on all sides by development (Farmland Mapping & Monitoring Program 2007).

*indiscriminate
development of all
farmland qualities*

In areas with limited or uncertain water rights, solar and wind generation are attractive alternatives to farming (Nathavongdouangsy 2012). Senate Bill 618, which went into effect January 1, 2012, is a compromise between renewable and agricultural uses. SB 618 allows property owners to trade their Williamson Act commitments for Solar-Use Easements if the land is marginally productive or

*loss of prime
farmland to
renewable
production*

physically impaired (Senate Governance and Finance Committee 2011). Agricultural advocates hailed the compromise for distinguishing between high and low quality farmland and reducing pressure on the former (California Farm Bureau 2012).

- OPR should encourage local governments to apply these farmland quality distinctions to General Plans, and divert development to land of lower agricultural potential.

C.2. Strong Cities Support Strong Towns: The Rural/Urban Relationship

Why do people leave cities for suburbs and rural areas? Anecdotal evidence suggests a litany of factors: failing schools, high taxes, constrictive regulations (Kotkin 2011), cramped living conditions, traffic, crime, noise, air quality, light pollution, and a high cost of living (O'Sullivan 2012). Any of these could make rural development more attractive. These factors encourage people to leave cities and push rural areas to develop. Improving cities, and relieving this pressure, serves California's environmental goals.

failing urban centers

It would be impractical to guarantee every urban California a yard, but planners have influence over some of these factors.

- California has a systemic lack of Affordable Housing and housing that is affordable. When housing demand outstrips supply, low- and moderate-income households are pushed further from the city to find a place to call home. (Cohen 2011).
- For decades, transportation policies have subsidized the cost of suburban development by separating users from the marginal social costs of low-density, automobile-dependent development (Muller 2004, Hall 1988). Pricing mechanisms, such as congestion pricing, parking charges, or VMT- or emissions-based fees, shift the burden of low-density development and highway use onto suburban residents and highway users (Deakin, et al. 1996), thus making urban living more competitive. Strong transportation policies can influence land use (Cervero and Landis 1995).
- Traditional restrictions on development, such as zoning or municipal service areas, fall to the local jurisdiction to decide and enforce. Without regional coordination, these planning efforts fail to withstand local preferences for more or less growth (Wachs and Dill 1997). Market-based development impact fees can redistribute the external costs of suburban development (Delafons 1990), and when applied at the regional level, make urban living more competitive.
- When existing residents refuse to allow new development in their community, planners describe this phenomenon as “Not In My Back Yard”, or NIMBYism. These complaints are generally based on noise, traffic, or safety, and can productively lead to better projects. Unfortunately,

regional lack of affordable housing

entrenched subsidies for unhealthy development patterns

lack of regional coordination

NIMBYism can also be “self-interested, turf-protectionist behavior” (Dear 1992). Improved community engagement and higher building standards can overcome NIMBYism and bring affordable density to urban and suburban areas. “The only way suburban communities are going to accept more housing is if it is also better housing (J. Landis 2004).”

- Infill development, or new construction in vacant or otherwise underutilized parcels, is popular among advocates of compact land use. Infill is “less expensive and resource-consuming than suburban” and rural development, and the Bay Area, as an example, has “plenty of land available for more compact, infill development forms” (Sandoval and Landis 2000). Senate Bill 226 will allow CEQA streamlining for infill projects (California Natural Resources Agency n.d.). Where possible, California and its regions should encourage infill development.
- Level of Service (LOS) is the standard measure of transportation system effectiveness. Because LOS grades are based on congestion, transportation agencies often respond by adding lanes to expand capacity, which discourages biking, walking and more sustainable alternatives. Many transportation departments are experimenting with multi-modal LOS to balance outcomes among these road users. These metrics still prioritize “free flow” conditions, encouraging users to travel (Ryus, et al. 2010). As an alternative, VMT actually correlates to GHG emission. Shifting project evaluation from LOS conditions to VMT production would better reflect California’s goals for climate change.
- Flexible work schedules and telecommuting allow workers to spend less time commuting and more time being productive. Amenities such as free Wi-Fi access on the Capitol Corridor certainly make a 2-hour commute more pleasant. Scholars disagree if these options actually exacerbate sprawl by allowing people to make longer but less frequent commutes, though the positive impacts generally outweigh the negative (Ory and Mokhtarian 2005).

*over-reliance on
LOS*

*emerging
commute patterns*

C.3. Spotlight on High Speed Rail

The Merced to Bakersfield section of the California High Speed Rail (HSR) is scheduled to open in 2017 (Jaffe 2011). This corridor and its stations pass through the heart of the Central Valley, as shown in Figure 25. This enormous investment in transportation through California’s agricultural center is expected to stir many of the development/agriculture conflicts discussed in this section (San Francisco Planning + Urban Research Association 2010).

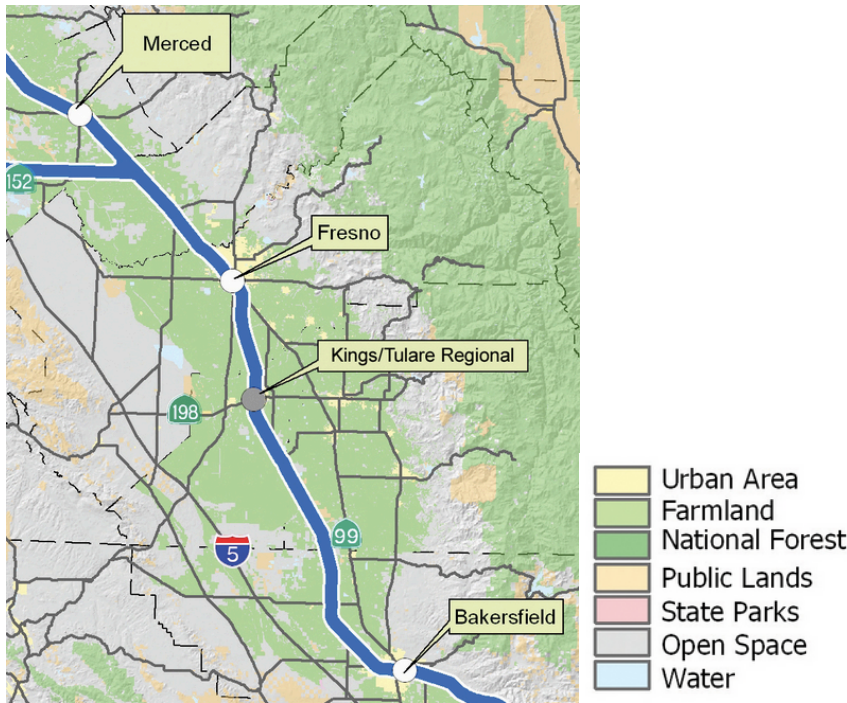


Figure 25 California High Speed Rail's First Segment (California High Speed Rail Authority 2010)

Proponents of HSR describe how the new stations will spur private redevelopment and revitalize the neighboring downtowns. Without deliberate controls to confine this development to the station area, these outcomes will be diminished.

Vision California, funded by the California High Speed Rail Authority and the Strategic Growth Council, initiated station area planning, but no serious conversation is taking place about strengthening the related growth boundaries. Merced, for example, has an Urban Growth Boundary, but it has been regularly expanded to allow new residential development to continue at a consistent density (City of Merced 2012).

easily expanded growth boundaries

Riverside County will have two stations, and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), which provides most of Riverside County's planning funds, will not fund planning until "demand exists" (Nathavongdouangsy 2012). Allowing speculation and status quo development patterns to deepen will preclude HSR from meeting its positive development-shaping potential.

lack of funding for wider station area planning

- To quote one member of the Strategic Growth Council: "Infill is about the center and the edge. You have to strengthen the center, but also fortify the edge so the urban doesn't leak out onto agricultural lands. It's about keeping cities contained". These station areas will need density to support local transit and reach the state's climate goals. To accomplish this density and protect the surrounding lands, HSR needs to fortify urban edges.
- Planning agencies must make funding available to begin planning around HSR station communities immediately.

3.3 Summary of Opportunities

Many of the opportunities listed in the previous section would benefit more than one rural place type, and some would even directly benefit urban areas. The opportunities are summarized here, by place type.

Productive	Destination	Edge	Urban	
				Productive
1.1 Infrastructure				
✓	✓	✓	✓	Apply the EPA’s recommended School Siting guidelines to schools and other community spaces
✓	✓	✓	✓	Adopt a “Fix-it-First” Policy for roads and other infrastructure
✓				Fund and coordinate rural broadband access
✓				Encourage subsidies to keep rural broadband subscriptions affordable
✓				Advocate the RUS and NTIA for updated rural broadband definitions
✓	✓	✓	✓	Use technology to supplement the public outreach process
✓	✓	✓	✓	Plan multiple uses for new public buildings, such as workshop teleconference spaces
✓				Provide guidance for planning in rural areas to prepare planners with less urban-centric terms
✓				Consider topography and terrain when describing distance
✓	✓	✓	✓	Develop flexible metrics that allow rural communities to compete for resources, such as economic impact, economic impact per capita, likely project users, or future population
1.2 Land Use				
✓	✓	✓	✓	Support economic diversification where communities rely on a single industry
✓	✓	✓	✓	Encourage “Buy Local” and heritage-based economies
✓				Extend California’s incentives for renewable energy production to sovereign tribal land
✓				Discourage state-funded brownfield projects from using remediation sites that fail to meet certain environmental standards
1.3 Transportation				
✓	✓	✓	✓	Provide technical assistance, training, or software to improve on-call transit operations
✓	✓	✓	✓	Require shade structures and seats by bus stops in areas with extreme weather
✓	✓	✓	✓	Apply performance measures to transit operations that better capture the service provided to residents and impact on economic development
✓				Expand the electric vehicle network into rural areas, where VMT per household is higher
	✓			Adjust SB 375’s per capita metrics to accommodate areas with substantial visitors activity

Productive	Destination	Edge	Urban	
				Productive
2.1 Environmental Preservation				
✓	✓	✓	✓	Encourage outcome-based regulations to limit runoff, scenic impacts, particulate matter, and other environmental impacts
2.2 Economic Development				
	✓	✓	✓	Encourage historic preservation through recognition programs, technical assistance, and investment
	✓	✓	✓	Support retail strategies that consider long-term economic sustainability
	✓	✓		Encourage right-to-farm ordinances in agricultural areas that are welcoming potentially conflicting uses
2.3 Affordable Housing				
✓	✓	✓		Extend the dialogue about affordable housing and infill to walkable rural communities, and use metrics such as destinations or units per acre
				Ensure OPR's infill criteria for SB 226 apply to reasonable rural areas
	✓			Develop and share an example overlay for rural infill development
	✓			Extend CEQA Class 32 to include walkable unincorporated communities
	✓	✓	✓	Provide guidance for city and county planners to reduce parking requirements in walkable neighborhoods

Productive	Destination	Edge	Urban	Edge
3.1 Farmland				
		✓		Continue and expand support for the Williamson Act, urban growth boundaries, transferable development rights, conservation easements, and rural priority funding areas
		✓		Encourage local governments to distinguish between farmland of high and low quality, diverting growth to lower quality land when necessary
		✓		Anticipate which rural areas will receive development pressure, using regional housing allocations and other tools, and divert planning resources in advance
3.2 Human Factors				
		✓		Encourage clustered development patterns in new greenfield development
		✓		Promote or revise OPR's wildfire planning guidelines to increase awareness and public acceptance
		✓		Ensure wildfire safety requirements distinguish between residential development and renewable industries
3.3 Strong Cities Support Strong Towns				
		✓	✓	Increase urban housing opportunities, especially affordable housing
		✓	✓	Price transportation such that users shoulder more of the indirect costs
		✓	✓	Encourage regional coordination of market-based pricing programs
		✓	✓	Promote better community engagement and building standards to overcome NIMBYism
		✓	✓	Encourage infill development, streamlining permit requirements where feasible
		✓	✓	Shift project evaluation from LOS to VMT
		✓	✓	Encourage flexible work schedules and telecommuting
3.4 Spotlight on High Speed Rail				
✓		✓		Extend infill discussion to fortify urban boundaries
✓		✓		Begin funding HSR community planning immediately

4 Recommendations

Comprehensive statewide planning requires policies that work for the entire state, both urban and rural. In addition to the specific recommendations listed in the previous section, this report makes the following recommendations to make the state's planning process more meaningful and supportive of rural areas:

1. Adopt a definition of "rural" that meets California's planning needs. A simple, standard definition would improve public understanding of rural areas, and would help rural communities better understand the resources available to them.
2. Establish a vision for how rural areas should grow. Small towns and rural communities are not static. They can shrink, but many will grow. Accepting that growth may be inevitable frees communities to decide how they want their home to look, operate, and feel in the future. OPR should support planning, conservation, and sustainable development in areas with small populations before they develop into larger, unplanned and unsustainable communities. This is especially urgent for communities around future high-speed rail stations.
3. Consider human settlement without boundaries. As the conflicting federal definitions show, because urban areas don't end abruptly at the county line, population size per county is a poor measure of rural or urban identity. State policies that apply different standards in rural/urban counties or unincorporated/incorporated cities create artificial obstacles to implementation. That CEQA limits its infill exemption to incorporated areas is an unnecessary and counterproductive policy. A requirement for units per acre would be more flexible.
4. Create an advisory Rural Working Group. Many of California's planning instruments are unintentionally urban-centric. A small group of planners and community workers from rural areas could convene by email or conference call to review draft documents and OPR address unknown urban bias. These reviewers could also work with OPR staff to develop more proactive rural guidelines. The organizers of this Working Group should consider inviting staff from the following organizations:
 - Sierra Business Council
 - California Rural Legal Assistance
 - American Farmland Trust, California Farm Bureau
5. Incorporate growth boundaries in the High Speed Rail station planning dialogue. Downtown planning is only half of the infill planning conversation. Funds should be made available now to support growth boundaries around cities that will open High Speed Rail stations.
6. Reduce the reliance on per capita indicators. Residential population is an inadequate indicator of economic contribution, because it diminishes the economic contributions of rural communities. More flexible metrics, such as economic output per capita, would allow communities to describe their unique circumstances and compete more fairly for planning assistance, grants, and other resources.

5 Conclusion

California contains a range of urban and rural, but those areas are intermixed, interdependent, and constantly changing. With such ambitious sustainability goals, it is important that California's planners develop a language and skillset to address communities on the entire spectrum of development.

Of the six major recommendations in the report, the first four focus on the intangible goal of increased understanding and rural literacy. When planners limit themselves to urban interventions, they absolve themselves of responsibility for urbanizing areas, creating a future demand for retrofit. Developing a common definition of rural, establishing a vision of how rural areas should grow, considering the spectrum of urban and rural without political boundaries, and creating an advisory Rural Working Group all enhance awareness and adept policy intervention.

The final two recommendations (growth boundaries around High Speed Rail and reduced reliance on per capita indicators) are more specific and practical recommendations, intended to spur immediate action. The current political climate in Sacramento poses a unique opportunity to move the state in a sustainable and forward-thinking direction.

The original Environmental Goals and Policy Report published in 1978, titled an "Urban Strategy for California", codified California's thinking about sustainable urban development and is still a meaningful guide today. Now 35 years later, the new Environmental Goals and Policy Report is in a position to support planning for another generation. Through the opportunities addressed in report, the entire state of California will continue leading the nation economically, environmentally, and with a high quality of life for all of its residents.

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