

Chapter 1: Introduction

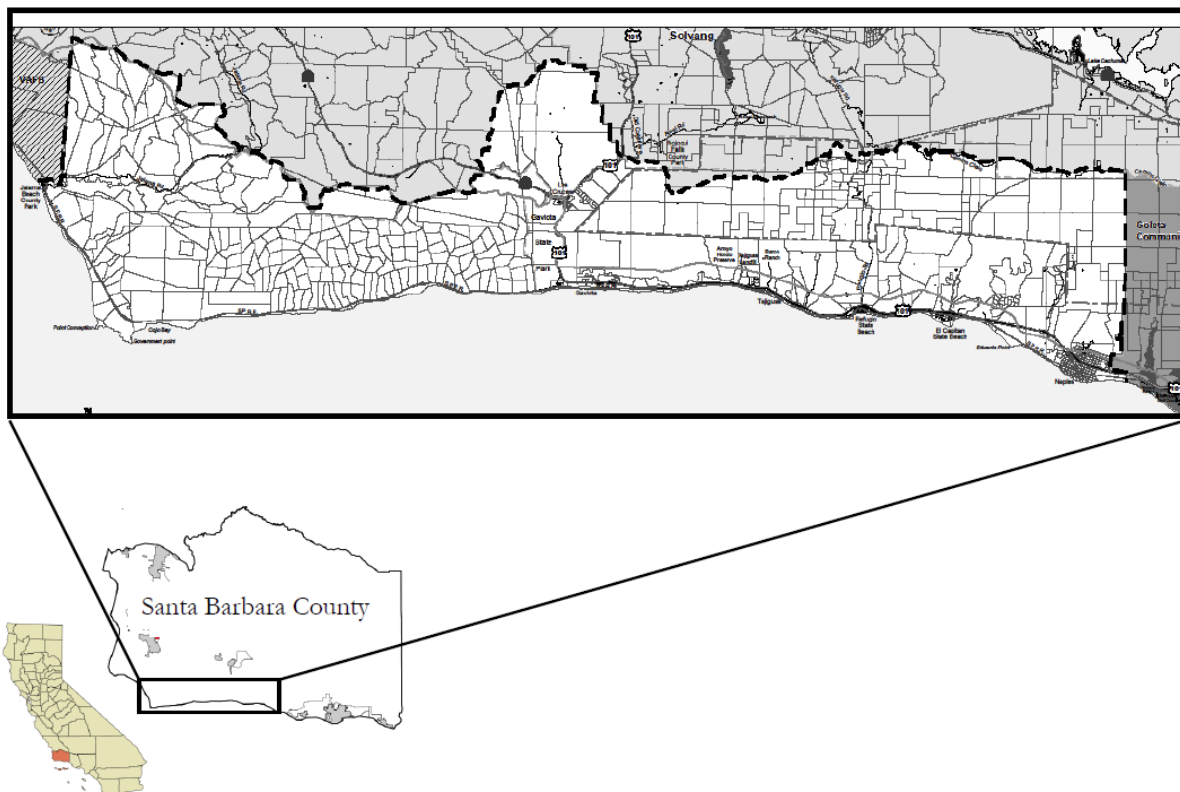
Physical Setting

a. Community Plan Location and Boundaries

Regional

The Gaviota Coast Plan designates and regulates land uses in the Gaviota Coast Plan area (Plan Area). The Plan Area is located in southern Santa Barbara County and is bounded by the western limit line of the Goleta Community Plan boundary to the east, Vandenberg Air Force Base to the west, the ridgeline of the Santa Ynez Mountains and Gaviota Creek watershed to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south (Figure 1-1). The Plan Area is approximately 158 square miles (101,199 acres) and is located entirely within the rural area. Highway 101 is the primary thoroughfare, while Highway 1 provides access to the Lompoc Valley.

Figure 1-1: Gaviota Coast Plan Vicinity Map



Gaviota Coast Plan Area

The Plan Area contains 1,006 assessor’s parcels with an average area of approximately 110 acres, for a total area of 101,199 acres. Agriculture is the predominant land use designation with 77,820 acres, followed by Mountainous Area at 26,051 acres, recreation/open space at 5,562 acres, and other miscellaneous designations for the balance of 2,266 acres. Agriculture is an important source of community identity and an important contributor to the rural character of the Gaviota Coast.



Photo Credit: Bill Dewey

Topography within and around the Plan Area is varied and includes a backdrop of rugged mountainous areas, rolling hills, and lowland coastal areas. The 38-mile rural coastline has striking scenic beauty combined with rich biological and cultural resources that make the Gaviota Coast one of the most unique remaining coastal areas in the western hemisphere. The Gaviota Coast serves as a transition zone between northern and southern California ecological provinces for both terrestrial and marine species which contributes to the area’s extraordinary biotic diversity. Low density development has enabled the retention of important wildlife habitats.

Legal Authority, Purpose and Intent

a. Purpose and Intent

The Gaviota Coast was last reviewed for appropriate land use and zoning designations in 1980-1982 as part of the countywide adoption of the Comprehensive Plan and the original Local Coastal Program (LCP). In the intervening decades, considerable growth in other areas has served to further distinguish the Gaviota Coast as a relatively undeveloped coastline rich in agricultural productivity and natural beauty.

One of the more complex land use issues facing the Gaviota Coast is how best to balance future development potential consistent with continuation of viable agriculture and protection of environmentally sensitive areas. The Gaviota Coast Plan provides a local vision for lasting protection of the Gaviota Coast, in part, through the development of new policies, programs, and planning tools specific to the area that balance resource protection, coastal access, continuation and enhancement of working agriculture and private property use, and which respect and balance the rights and needs of property owners and the community.

The Gaviota Coast Plan updates the Comprehensive Plan and Coastal Land Use Plan, and provides policy direction for land use issues and trends specific to the Plan Area. This update is necessary to manage current conditions, facilitate proper planning, and accurately reflect the prevailing visions and objectives of the community. The Gaviota Coast Plan provides the general public, landowners, and decision makers with a framework for planning future development in the Plan Area.

b. General Plan Requirements

California State law (Government Code sections 65300 et seq.) requires jurisdictions to prepare a comprehensive, long-term general plan with land use diagrams and text to guide development. The General Plan must have at least seven state mandated elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise and Safety. Coastal areas also must have a LCP consistent with the state Coastal Act. (Public Resources Code Section 30500) The Comprehensive Plan of Santa Barbara County includes several optional elements permitted by state law, including the Agricultural, Energy, Scenic Highways, and Environmental Resource Management Elements. General Plans must be amended regularly to remain “current”. General Plans are further defined and implemented through zoning maps and ordinances, which must be consistent with the General Plan.

Local jurisdictions may prepare more focused Community or Area Plans for smaller geographic regions. Previously adopted Community and Area Plans in Santa Barbara County include Summerland, Montecito, Goleta, Los Alamos, Orcutt, Toro Canyon, and Santa Ynez Valley.

c. Area Plans

Area plans focus on general planning issues pertaining to an identified geographical area or community. (Public Resources Code Section 21083.3(e)) Area plans are adopted in the same manner as a general plan amendment and are similarly implemented by local ordinances (e.g., zoning). They are commonly used in counties or large cities that contain a variety of distinct regions. An area plan must be internally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan of which it is a part.

The Gaviota Coast Plan includes by reference relevant policies of the County’s Comprehensive Plan and Coastal Land Use Plan. The Plan also contains new development policies specific to the Gaviota Coast along with measures to implement those policies. These new development policies are generally intended to be applied consistently to the Coastal Zone and Inland Area. The policy direction and development standards of the Gaviota Coast Plan will govern site-specific development proposals; however, site-specific environmental review and planning permit approvals are still required for specific developments. The applicable zoning ordinances in the Plan Area are the Land Use & Development Code (Inland), and Article II (Coastal) of Chapter 35 of the Santa Barbara County Code.

d. The Coastal Act

Historically, land use in the California coastal zone has been regulated by local governments under the provisions of State Planning and Zoning Law. This enabling legislation mandates local governments to prepare general plans and zoning to ensure orderly physical growth and development within their jurisdictions as well as the protection of public health, safety, and welfare.

Traditional local control over regulation of land use in the coastal zone was substantially modified with the passage of the California Coastal Zone Conservation Act (Proposition 20) by the voters of California on November 7, 1972. The forces leading to the passage of this landmark initiative were complex. The key factor, however, was the visible deterioration of the coastal environment due to increasing development pressures from a growing population. On January 1, 1977, the Coastal Act and other legislation came into effect, establishing a permanent coastal management program for California. Since 1977, the original Coastal Act has been amended several times by the Legislature.



Goals, Priorities, and Policies

In enacting the Coastal Act, the legislature established the following goals for future activity in the coastal zone:

- a. Protect, maintain and, where feasible, enhance and restore the overall quality of the coastal zone environment and its natural and artificial resources.
- b. Assure orderly, balanced utilization and conservation of coastal zone resources taking into account the social and economic needs of the people of the state.
- c. Maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone consistent with sound resources conservation principles and constitutionally protected rights of private property owners.
- d. Assure priority for coastal-dependent and coastal-related development over other development on the coast.
- e. Encourage state and local initiatives and cooperation in preparing procedures to implement coordinated planning and development for mutually beneficial, uses, including educational uses, in the coastal zone. (California Coastal Act, Section 30001.5)

The policies established by the Coastal Act focus on the protection of coastal resources and the regulation of development in the coastal zone. Topics covered by coastal policies include: beach access, recreation, marine environment, environmentally sensitive habitat areas, agriculture, visual resources, and coastal dependent energy and industrial development.

Overview of the Gaviota Coast Plan

a. Structure of the Gaviota Coast Plan

The Gaviota Coast Plan addresses trends, needs, services and resources and provides planning goals, policies, and development standards to guide future land use in the Plan Area.

The plan groups each of the planning issues into six sections:

- Natural and Cultural Resources Stewardship
- Agriculture
- Parks, Recreation & Trails
- Land Use
- Visual Resources
- Transportation, Energy and Infrastructure



b. Organization and Definitions

Specific goals, policies, actions, and development standards, as defined below, are incorporated into plan sections or ordinance amendments.

Goal: A goal is an ideal future end, condition or state related to the public health, safety or general welfare toward which planning efforts are directed. A goal is a general expression of community values and therefore is abstract in nature (e.g., “An aesthetically pleasing community,” or “quiet residential streets”).

Policy: A policy is a specific statement that guides decision making that is based on a general plan’s goals and objectives as well as the analysis of data. Policies should be clear and unambiguous (e.g., “Infill development at specified densities shall be encouraged, and scattered urban development shall not be allowed”).

Action: An action is a one-time action, program, procedure or development standard that carries out General Plan policy.

Development Standards: Development standards are measures that will be incorporated into development projects to provide consistency with certain policies of the Plan.

Community Planning Process

In 2009, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors directed the Planning and Development Department (P&D) to proceed with preparation of a long-term land use plan for the Gaviota Coast. The Gaviota Coast Plan was designed to provide focused policy direction addressing issues and development trends specific to the Gaviota Coast. The draft plan is the result of a multi-year effort by the community and County involving targeted research, data collection and analysis, extensive public involvement through Gaviota Coast Planning Advisory Committee (GavPAC) community meetings, the drafting of goals, policies, and development standards, and public hearings with the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. The Gaviota Coast Plan is intended to provide the general public, landowners and decision makers with a directive framework for planning future development in the region.

Existing County Plans and Policies

Summarized below are the existing Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan policies most relevant to the Gaviota Coast planning area. The Gaviota Coast Plan ~~augments~~ supplements the Land Use, Circulation and other Comprehensive Plan elements to provide specific policy direction; however, countywide policies will remain in effect. The summaries presented here are an overview and do not contain actual policy language. These countywide policies provide context for the relationship between the County Comprehensive Plan and Gaviota Coast Plan.



a. Land Use Element

The Land Use Element’s four fundamental goals include:

Environment — Environmental constraints on development shall be respected. Economic and population growth shall proceed at a rate that can be sustained by available resources.

Urbanization — In order for the County to sustain a healthy economy in the urbanized areas and to allow for growth within its resources and within its ability to pay for necessary services, the County shall encourage infill, prevent scattered urban development, and encourage a balance between housing and jobs.

Agriculture — In rural areas, cultivated agriculture shall be preserved and where conditions allow, expansion and intensification should be supported. Lands with both prime and non-prime soils shall be reserved for agricultural uses.

Open Lands — Certain areas may be unsuitable for agricultural uses due to poor or unstable soil conditions, steep slopes, flooding or lack of adequate water. These lands are usually located so that they are not necessary or desirable for urban uses. There is no basis for the proposition that all land, no matter where situated or whatever the need, must be planned for urban purposes if they cannot be put to some other profitable economic use.

The following Land Use Element policies are those most applicable to guiding development in the Gaviota Coast Plan area. Within the Coastal Zone, the Santa Barbara County Coastal Land Use Plan (CLUP) serves as the Land Use Element. Many CLUP policies mirror those of the Land Use Element. These policies are referenced together below; where CLUP policies differ from the Land Use Element, a separate discussion is provided.

Land Use Development Policies — These policies establish guidelines for development in order to respect constraints posed by geology, biology, and other physical environmental characteristics. In addition, these policies require the availability of adequate services and resources to serve a project prior to development.

Streams and Creeks Policies/CLUP Policies — All permitted construction and grading within stream corridors shall be carried out in such a manner as to minimize impacts from increased runoff, sedimentation, biochemical degradation, or thermal pollution. These policies are directed toward regulation of development within stream corridors including the establishment of buffers, limits on grading, runoff and sedimentation, and prohibitions on the installation of septic systems and concrete channelization.

Hillside and Watershed Protection Policies/CLUP Policies — Nine policies intended to guide development on hillsides and within watersheds are specified in the Land Use Element. These policies call for minimizing cut and fill, fitting development to the site topography, soils, geology, hydrology and other natural features, and specifying techniques for minimizing the effects of necessary grading.

Flood Hazard Area Policies/CLUP Policies — The intent of these policies is to avoid exposing new developments to flood hazards and to reduce the need for future flood control protection devices and resulting alteration of streams by regulating development with the 100-year flood plain.

Historical & Archaeological Sites Policies/CLUP Policies — These policies establish criteria for mitigation of potential impacts to historical and archaeological sites.

Parks and Recreation Polices — These policies state that opportunities for hiking and equestrian trails should be preserved, improved, and expanded wherever compatible with the surrounding use. Bikeways shall be provided where appropriate for recreational and commuting uses. Future development of parks should emphasize meeting the needs of local residents.

Visual Resources Policies — These policies require structures to be compatible with the existing community and protect areas of high scenic value and scenic corridors.

Air Quality Supplement Measures — These measures are aimed at reducing the need to commute by automobile (e.g. mixed uses, infill development) and increasing the attractiveness of bicycling, walking, transit and ridesharing.

b. Housing Element

Housing Element policies require the County to plan for an adequate amount of housing based on community needs to provide a range of housing types and prices, provide incentives to developers for the inclusion of affordable housing in residential developments, and allow increases in housing densities to accommodate affordable housing.

Applicability: The Gaviota Coast Plan provides for a range of housing types appropriate to a rural area, including farm employee dwellings. Higher urban densities are not appropriate given the area’s rural character and substantial constraints, including high fire hazards in the area and policies prioritizing the preservation of agriculture.

c. Seismic Safety and Safety Element

The purpose of the Seismic Safety and Safety Element is to reduce potential deaths, injuries and damage to property caused by earthquakes, fires, geologic hazards and other natural disasters. Specific recommendations are given for these subjects.

Applicability: The Gaviota Coast Plan area contains several faults and areas of poor soil, high landslide potential and steep slopes, and has areas located within floodplain and high fire hazard zones. Such hazards are given appropriate attention in the Plan.

d. Noise Element

The purpose of the Noise Element is to protect the public from noise that could jeopardize health and welfare. The Noise Element identifies major noise sources, estimates the extent of their impact and discusses potential methods of noise abatement. Specifically, the Element identifies maximum levels of noise exposure that are considered acceptable for sensitive land uses (e.g. residences, schools, and hospitals).

Applicability: The Gaviota Coast Plan area includes areas located along Highway 101 and the Union Pacific Railroad that could exceed the maximum noise level allowed for sensitive land uses. Development of new noise-sensitive land uses could be affected by these sources.



e. Circulation Element

The Countywide Circulation Element contains specific circulation-related policies and standards that apply within the Gaviota Coast Plan area.

Applicability: The Gaviota Coast Plan is designed to provide a balance between the land use designations and the standards of the Circulation Element.

f. Conservation Element

The Conservation Element describes water resources, agricultural resources, ecological systems, historic and archaeological sites, and mineral resources, and recommends policies and programs designed to protect them.

Applicability: The Gaviota Coast Plan area has water and agricultural resources, ecological systems, and historic and archaeological sites that are addressed in the Plan.

g. Open Space Element

The Open Space Element inventories public and private open space areas and contains recommendations and programs for preserving and managing those lands.

Applicability: The Gaviota Coast Plan area has substantial open space areas, including agricultural and recreational lands that are addressed in the Plan.

h. Agricultural Element

The primary regulations governing agricultural land use development in the Plan area include the Agricultural Element, the Coastal Land Use Plan (CLUP), the Land Use Element and the implementing zoning in Articles II (coastal) and Land Use and Development Code (inland). The County’s Right to Farm Ordinance provides additional protection for farmers primarily through notification to residents located near agricultural lands.

Applicability: Agriculture is the dominant land use in the Plan area. The Agricultural Element provides goals and policies to protect and maintain agriculture. The CLUP and the Land Use Element guide land use designations (e.g. agriculture vs. ranchette), identify minimum parcel sizes allowable for development and, with the zoning ordinances, provide permit requirements and development standards. Minimum parcel size is often a key determinant in long-term agricultural viability; in general, the larger the parcel, the more agricultural options are available.

i. Scenic Highways Element

This element presents the County’s scenic highway goals and evaluates standards, preservation measures and procedures for obtaining official “Scenic Highway” designation for State and County roads. Preservation measures include detailed site planning and structure design, control of outdoor advertising, and regulation of grading and landscaping.



Applicability: The Plan recognizes the suitability of design guidelines for protecting the scenic qualities of the Highway 101 corridor and maintaining its status as a potential Scenic Highway.

j. Environmental Resource Management Element (ERME)

ERME is a compendium and synthesis of the Seismic Safety and Safety, Conservation, Open Space, and Scenic Highways Elements and identifies specific factors that mitigate against urban development, such as prime agricultural lands, steep slopes, biological habitat areas, floodplains and floodways, and geologic hazards.

Applicability: The Gaviota Coast Plan recognizes the existence of various ERME factors through its prevailing pattern of rural land uses and densities.

k. Santa Barbara County Local Coastal Program (LCP)

The LCP includes policies related to beach access, recreation, marine environment, environmentally sensitive habitat areas, agriculture, visual resources, and coastal dependent energy and industrial development, including a separate Zoning Ordinance that implements the land use plan. These policies establish standards for future growth and development in the coastal zone and supersede other policies of the Comprehensive Plan where overlap may occur.

Applicability: Nearly 50% of the Plan area is within the coastal zone and therefore is subject to these policies. The policies, development standards, and land use/zoning designations established in the Plan are consistent with existing Coastal Land Use Plan policies, and the portions of the Gaviota Coast Plan that apply within the coastal zone will become part of the County’s state-certified LCP.

l. Clean Air Plan

The Clean Air Plan (CAP) contains strategies for reducing ozone precursors and particulates, and for achieving and maintaining federal and state air quality standards. These strategies include transportation demand management and indirect source review.

Applicability: Santa Barbara County exceeds federal ambient air quality standards for ozone and fine particulate matter (PM₁₀). Development in the Plan area is subject to the policies of the CAP.

Meaning of Key Terms Used in This Plan

Many of this Plan’s Goals, Policies, Actions, and Development Standards make repeated use of the term “development” and use qualifiers such as, “except where it/this would preclude reasonable use of property.” In order to provide clear guidance and promote consistent application of the Plan, the meanings of these key terms as used within this Plan shall be defined as follows.

“Development” shall be as defined in the applicable Zoning Ordinance: County Code, Chapter 35, Article II (Coastal Zone) or Land Use and Development Code (inland).

“... except where it/this would preclude reasonable use of property” shall mean “except where it/this will take private property for public use without just compensation as required by applicable law.”



The Plan’s policies, actions, and development standards contain various directives that appear in the form of either “shall,” “should,” or “may.” The meaning of these terms is as follows:

“Shall” indicates an unequivocal directive;

“Should” signifies a less rigid directive, to be honored in the absence of compelling or contravening considerations;

“May” indicates a permissive suggestion or guideline.