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# OPEN SPACE ELEMENT





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# I. INTRODUCTION

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The *Open Space Element* identifies the County’s “open space land”, and establishes guiding policies for the preservation and conservation of land within the County that is essentially unimproved and devoted to open space use. This element expands upon the definition provided by statute (G.C. 65560(b)) to include County and Community parks as important open space resources. In many instances, the *Open Space Element* overlaps with several other elements where discussions involve natural resources, processing and production of resources, outdoor recreation, public health and safety, and military installation surroundings.

Kings County open space resources are comprised of natural areas and other lands devoted primarily for outdoor human use. Natural open space areas may include natural watershed terrain, riparian habitat, vernal pools, flood zones, and natural water courses. Other open spaces used primarily for human use include agricultural lands, recreation oriented park lands, existing and proposed community open space buffers, aquifer recharge areas, and areas zoned for mineral and aggregate extraction. There is overlap between many natural and other open space use areas.

The purpose of the *Open Space Element* is to promote the preservation of natural and other open space land which contributes to the economy, general welfare, and quality of life of the residents of Kings County.

## A. Consistency with Other Elements

The *Open Space Element* is consistent with other elements of the General Plan. Elements such as *Land Use, Health and Safety, and Resource Conservation* are consistent and reinforce Goals, Objectives and Policies of the *Open Space Element*. Some overlapping issues with the *Land Use Element* include open space buffers in maintaining community identity, public open space facilities, and separation of land uses to reduce conflicts. Overlaps with the *Health and Safety Element* include flood protection, airport safety, natural hazard safety, fire hazards, and community health. The *Resource Conservation Element* also addresses agricultural land, habitat, soil, mineral and other resources.

## B. Scope and Organization

The *Open Space Element* includes policies for the preservation of open space land. Section II identifies open space resources within the County, while Section III contains the *Open Space Element* Goals, Objectives and Policies. Section IV covers the implementation programs related to this element.

This element is organized into the following sections:

- II. **Open Space Inventory** – Agricultural Resources, Scenic Resources, Community Character, Outdoor Recreation, Military Compatibility, and Access to Light and Air in Developed Areas.



**III. Open Space Policies** – Agricultural Resources, Scenic Resources, Community Character, Outdoor Recreation, Military Compatibility, and Access to Light and Air in Developed Areas.

**IV. Implementation** – Implementation Programs



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## II. OPEN SPACE INVENTORY

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The Open Space Inventory provides discussion of six categories of open space resources. These areas include Agricultural Resources, Scenic Resources, Community Character, Outdoor Recreation, Military Compatibility, and Access to Light and Air in Developed Areas.

### A. Agricultural Resources

Agricultural land within Kings County is the predominant open space landscape throughout the unincorporated territory of the County. This resource represents approximately 91 percent of all unincorporated land within the County, and produced approximately \$1.76 billion in agricultural production for the County in 2007. As one of the agricultural Counties in the Central San Joaquin Valley, Kings County agricultural land serves a significant role in the County's agricultural based economy, and production of food and fiber for the rest of the Country. In addition to their economic value and commodity production, the vast stretches of green field crops, orchards and vineyards are also valued for their scenic beauty and representation of Kings County's identity. As a valued resource within the County, agricultural land resource preservation and sustainability are priorities addressed in greater detail in other General Plan Elements. Also addressed within these elements are secondary beneficial uses associated with agricultural open space land that are deemed compatible with agriculture.

Kings County is dedicated to preserving agricultural open space, and a number of policies throughout the other General Plan Elements integrate programs and other implementation measures aimed at preserving farmland throughout Kings County. *Land Use Element* policies divide up the agricultural designated land into four categories depending upon the nature of the surroundings. Limited Agriculture is used around Cities and Community Districts to reduce urban and agricultural conflicts, while the Exclusive Agriculture designation is used as a safety buffer around Naval Air Station Lemoore (see Section E. Military Compatibility). Policies within the *Land Use Element* and *Natural Resource*

Figure OS - 1 Orchard Blossoms



*Conservation Element* establish preservation efforts aimed at sustaining agricultural open space as a valued resource. The County has implemented a "Right to Farm Ordinance" to recognize the right of farming operations to conduct necessary farming practices and activities throughout the County. The County General Plan also continues to maintain a priority for directing urban growth to existing Cities and Community Districts where urban type development is better suited and can receive municipal type services. This directive helps to promote coordinated orderly urban growth within the County, and reduces the potential for premature conversion of agricultural land to other uses.

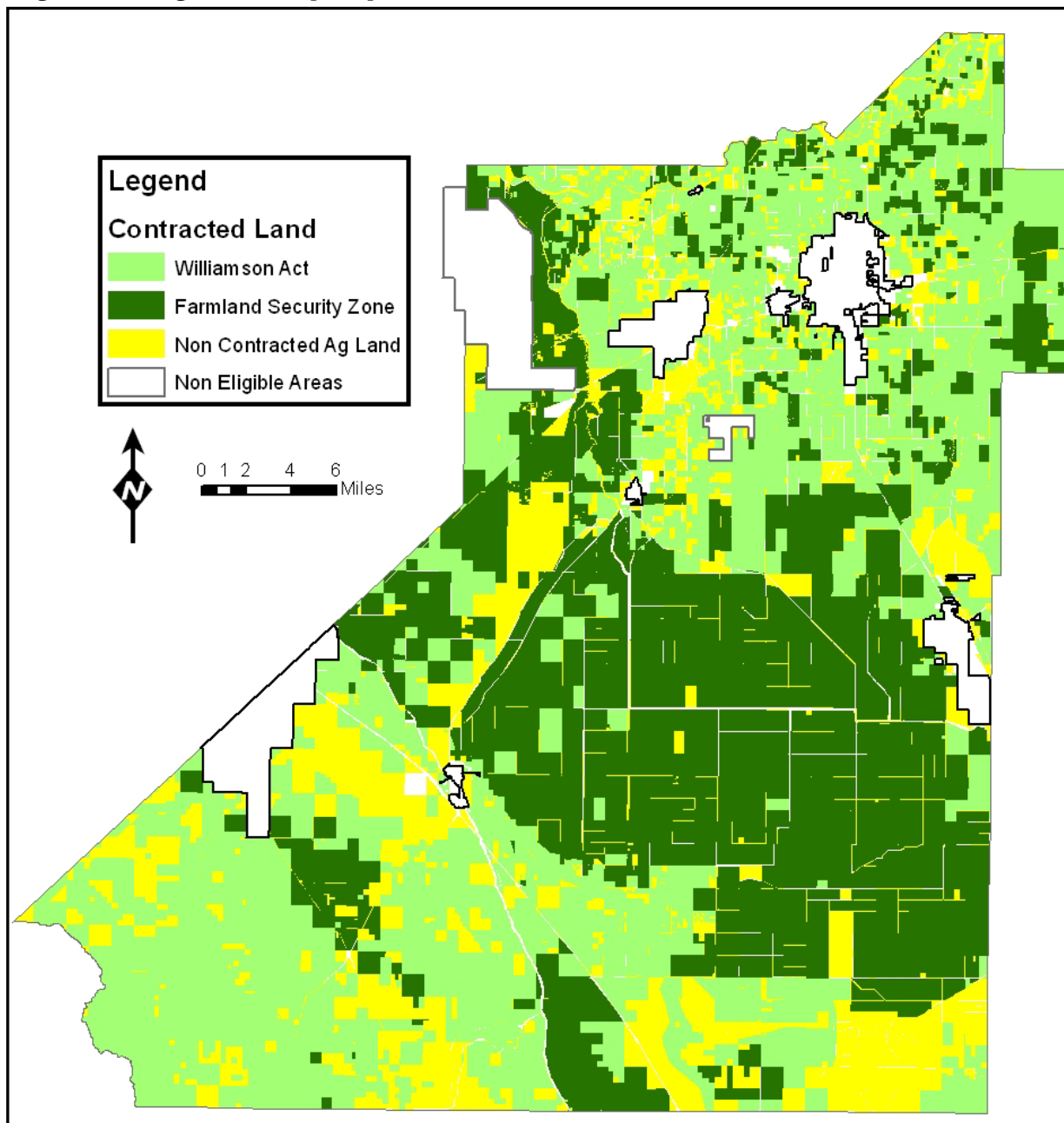
The *Resource Conservation Element* addresses the sustainability of agricultural land in greater detail and outlines policies for the long term preservation of agricultural resources. The County's Land Conservation Program, that implements the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, enables the establishment of Williamson Act and Farmland Security Zone Contracts on privately owned agricultural land. The program provides tax benefits to land owners who place their farmland under contract with the County and devote their land to commercial agricultural use. Contracts are self renewing unless a "Notice of Non-Renewal" is filed, and establishes a 10 year contract for Williamson



## Open Space Element

Act and 20 year contract for Farmland Security Zone. This program is heavily relied upon as a primary means by which the County ensures long term preservation of agricultural land resources. In addition, the County has developed a Priority Agricultural Land Model to identify key agricultural land resources that tie to soils, production, crop value and water availability. An accompanying "Agricultural Land Conversion Study" was also performed to evaluate which agricultural areas are more at risk to possible conversion to other uses. Together, these resources help to inform decision makers and guide growth away from significant agricultural resources throughout the County.

Figure OS - 2 Agricultural Open Space under Contract



**B. Scenic Resources**

Kings County’s agricultural environment provides the predominant open space backdrop for the County. However, other natural scenic resources exist that also serve to represent the aesthetic visual character of the County. Kings River and Cross Creek represent natural waterway channels that traverse the northern half of the County, and once flowed south to the historic Tulare Lake. The creation of canals, ditches, levees and other water facilities by local farming interests have since diverted water that once flowed to the Tulare Lake. This led to the draining of the Tulare Lake and conversion of the land to a vast agricultural growing region. The Kings River flows along the northern edges of the County, where water flows seasonally as it is released from the Pine Flat Reservoir. This key landscape feature is one of the most identifiable features of the County and is the source from which the County derived its namesake. Originally named “El Rio de los Santos Reyes” (the River of Holy Kings) by Spanish soldiers in 1805, the name was later shortened to what is commonly referred to as the Kings River. Today, the Kings River provides outdoor recreation, scenic beauty, agricultural and municipal water, mineral resources and riparian habitat. Cross Creek has less seasonal flows as the channel has less capacity and water is diverted upstream in adjacent Tulare County.

*Figure OS - 3 Kings River*



The foothill and mountain terrain of the County’s southwest edges also provide a distinctive visual backdrop of higher elevations. With the vast majority of the county existing along the San Joaquin Valley floor, the Kettleman Hills are the first elevated foothills that greet travelers along the western edge of the County. The Kettleman City Community is the only unincorporated community located along these foothills, and has the only higher elevation vista looking across the San Joaquin Valley floor. The City of Avenal is also located along the edges of the Kettleman Hills, but faces west and has views of the higher mountain terrain Coast Ranges. Figure OS – 5 shows Coast Ranges with snow in March of 2009.

*Figure OS - 4 Kettleman Hills Vista Looking East*



*Figure OS - 5 Coast Ranges From Avenal*



## Open Space Element

The scenic resources of these natural features are further defined and captured as the “Natural Lands” environment category of the *Land Use Element*. Corresponding Natural Resource Conservation land use designation is also used along the Kings River, Cross Creek and Coast Range that establish guiding policies that take into consideration the scenic value of these natural resources. Higher protection is also established through the *Health and Safety Element* as these resources also serve as the County’s main natural watershed and waterway channels that are addressed through flood protection policies.

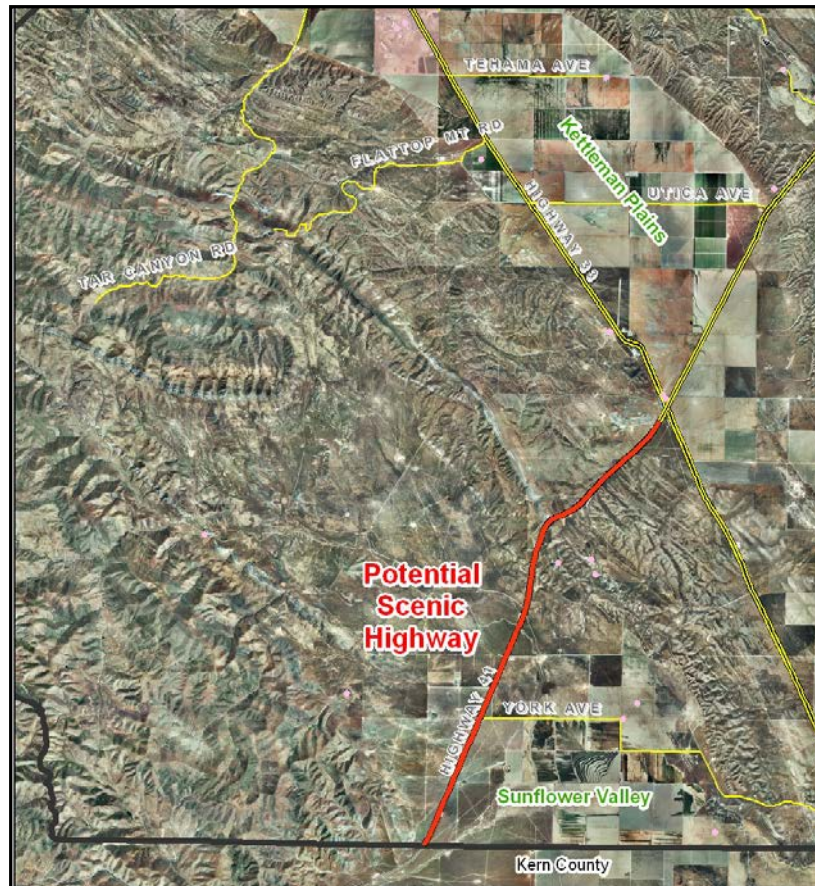
Figure OS - 6 State Route 41 South of State Route 33

State Routes, Interstate 5 and other County roadways enable outside and local travelers the opportunity to travel through the County within view of the regions natural scenic areas. The Kings County portion of the scenic highways map published by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) shows a portion of State Route 41, commencing at the intersection of State Route 33 and proceeding south to the county line, where it continues into San Luis Obispo County, as eligible for designation as a Scenic Highway.



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Figure OS - 7 Potential Scenic Highway





State Route 41 improvements were constructed from February 2007 to the fall of 2008, which moved and raised the road alignment above the existing floodplain. New road construction provided enhanced road surfaces and integrated modern roadway safety standards. With an elevated roadway surface, this highway now provides secondary visual benefits to travelers with greater views across Sunflower Valley. This stretch of State Route 41 is identified as a “Potential Scenic Highway”, although it is not currently designated a “Scenic Highway” by Caltrans. Official designation of State Scenic Highways is accomplished through local request to Caltrans’ Transportation Advisory Committee, which forwards its recommended designations to the department director for action. Benefits of receiving an official Scenic Highway Designation include Caltrans signs with a logo selected by the County, description of the route in Caltrans promotional literature and maps, and posting on the Caltrans website. The State Scenic Highway designation also increases eligibility for some forms of highway maintenance and improvement funding from the Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program.

*Figure OS - 8 Utica Avenue Heading West*



Valley oak trees exist in small clusters or intermittently near the Kings River channel. These naturally occurring oaks add to the visual character and distinction of the river corridor along the northern edges of the County. These oak trees primarily exist on private land that is predominantly used for agricultural production. Oak trees are considered valued resources within the County and the agricultural community has served as good stewards in maintaining these visual resources throughout the County. The *Resource Conservation Element* identifies and reinforces the County and resident’s value for these resources and sets policies that encourage the continued maintenance and upkeep of these trees. This will ensure that future generations are afforded the opportunity to appreciate and preserve this natural heritage of the County.

*Figure OS - 9 Oak Tree*



*Figure OS - 10 Sunset from State Route 41 near Stratford*



**C. Community Character**

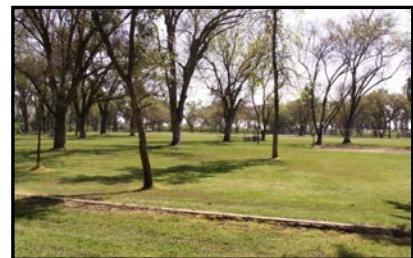
Community separation from other communities is essential to maintaining a community sense of identity and sense of place among residents and visitors. These features then serve as building blocks for community resident involvement and interest within their communities. In order to maintain the identity of communities, specific boundaries or open space corridors are recommended to provide a clear distinction of community separation. Agricultural land is most common open space separator between communities, and provides visual breaks between urbanized areas. Communities along the State Route 198 corridor are the most likely to grow closer together since other Cities and Communities have much greater separation between one another. In order to reinforce community identity and reinvestment, preservation of open space buffers between communities is directly beneficial to individual community visual and geographic identity.

The City of Hanford’s westerly growth to 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the Community of Armona’s growth east to 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue have already linked these two areas along 13<sup>th</sup> Road north of State Route 198. This will create a visual blending of urban areas to travelers along State Route 198, and additional growth in Hanford will intensify this blending. Therefore, an open space buffer in some areas between Hanford and Armona would serve to maintain separate community distinction and identity. The separation between Armona and the City of Lemoore still encompasses a couple of miles of agricultural land. However, as the City of Lemoore redefines its urban growth direction after addressing encroachment concerns with the Naval Air Station Lemoore, growth pressures may expand the City more east toward Armona. Consideration of open space buffers along the western edges of Armona will therefore help maintain separate long term distinction from the City of Lemoore.

**D. Outdoor Recreation**

Outdoor recreational open space, which includes parks and fishing access areas, provide pleasure and enjoyment for Kings County residents and visitors (See Figure OS – 14). These spaces may be used by residents and visitors for recreation and general health maintenance activities. Kings County presently owns and maintains three parks (Burriss, Hickey, and Kingston) which are located in the north portions of the County and surrounded by agricultural areas. Burriss Park is located south of Clinton Avenue between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues. Hickey Park is located north of Flint Avenue at 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Kingston Park is located north of Douglas Avenue between 12 ¾ Avenue and 13 ¼ Avenue. Both Hickey Park and Kingston Park are primarily open space with grass and trees. Burriss Park has more recreational amenities and a museum. Hickey and Kingston Parks are within about a 5 minute drive from Cities and Communities located in the north half of the County and Burriss Park is about a 15 minute drive from Hanford. Two community parks also exist within the County, but are supported and maintained by the Community Services Districts of Kettleman City and Armona for each respective individual park.

*Figure OS – 11 Burriss Park*



The Kings County Museum, located at Burriss Park, is the only public museum located within the unincorporated County. The Burriss Park Foundation maintains the 57 acre Burriss Park grounds that include the museum, wagon barn, picnic area, and general recreation areas. During the 2007-08 school year, 2,590 grade school students toured the facility and learned about the history of the County as well as the local flora and fauna.

*Figure OS – 12 Kings County Museum*



# Open Space Element

Figure OS - 13 Recreational Areas

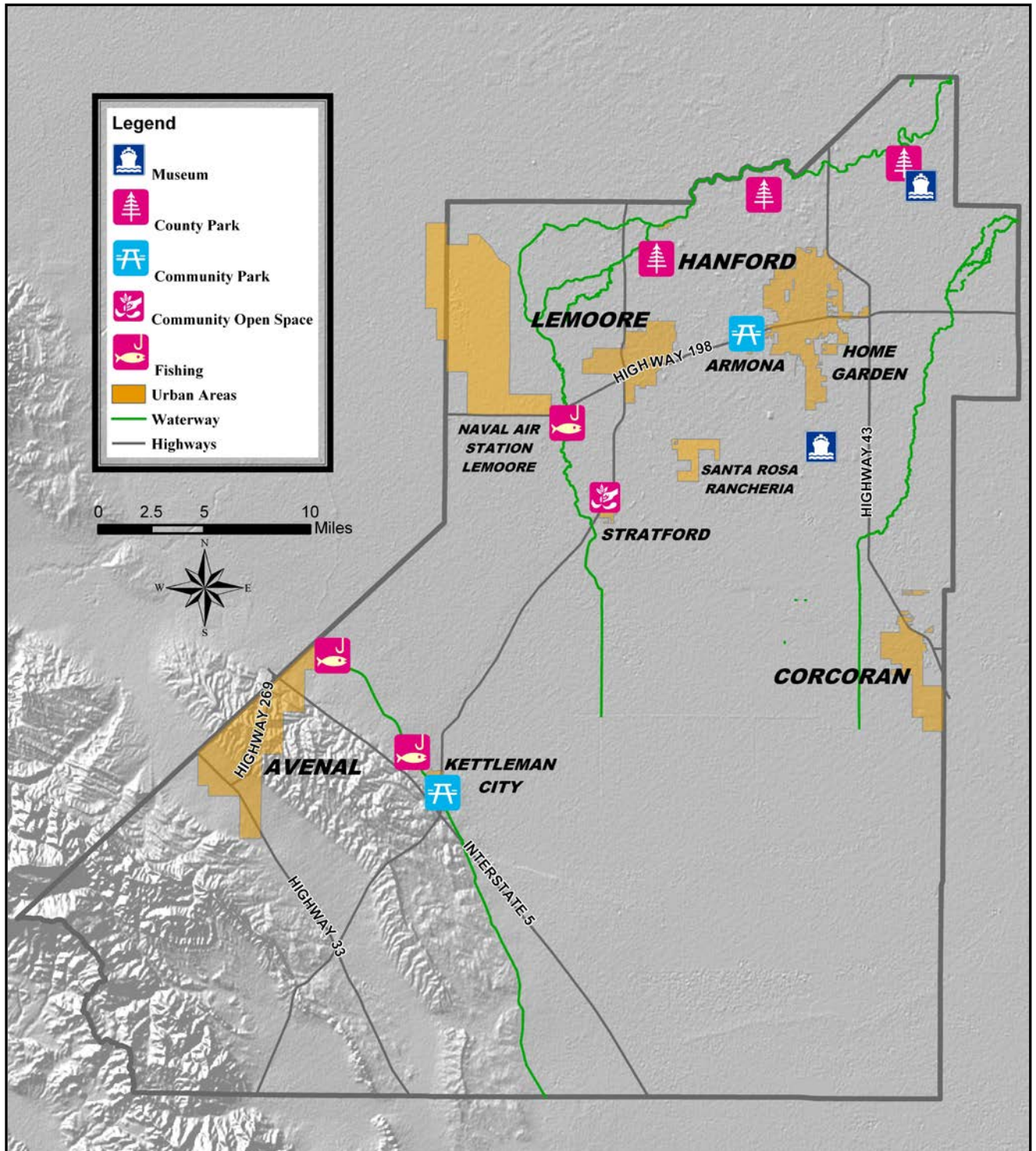
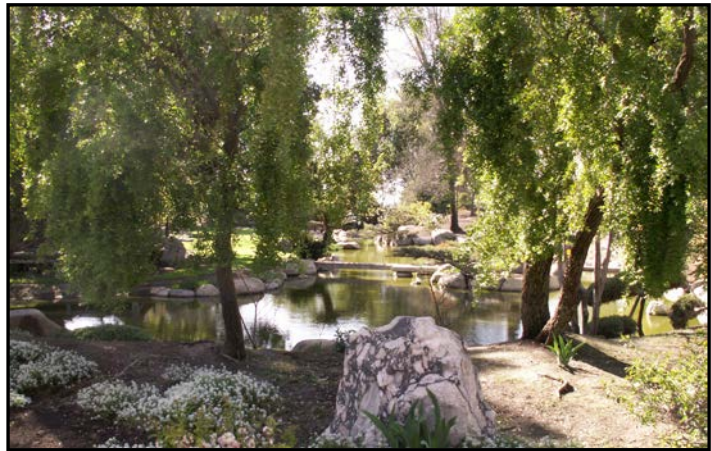


Figure OS – 14 Clark Japanese Center

The Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture is a private museum located in the County, and known internationally for exquisite collection of historic Japanese artifacts and art pieces. Open since 1995, the center's collection includes about 1,250 paintings, sculptures, prints, ceramics and bamboo works spanning 1,200 years of Japanese artistic history. The center is located on the west side of 10th Avenue between Jackson Avenue and Jersey Avenue. The museum is open to the public, but by appointment only. The Clark Center is only one of two museums in the United States that focuses exclusively on historic Japanese art. The Clark Center is also distinctively known for its large collection of bonsai trees (100 sculpted trees), and is the third largest collection in California.



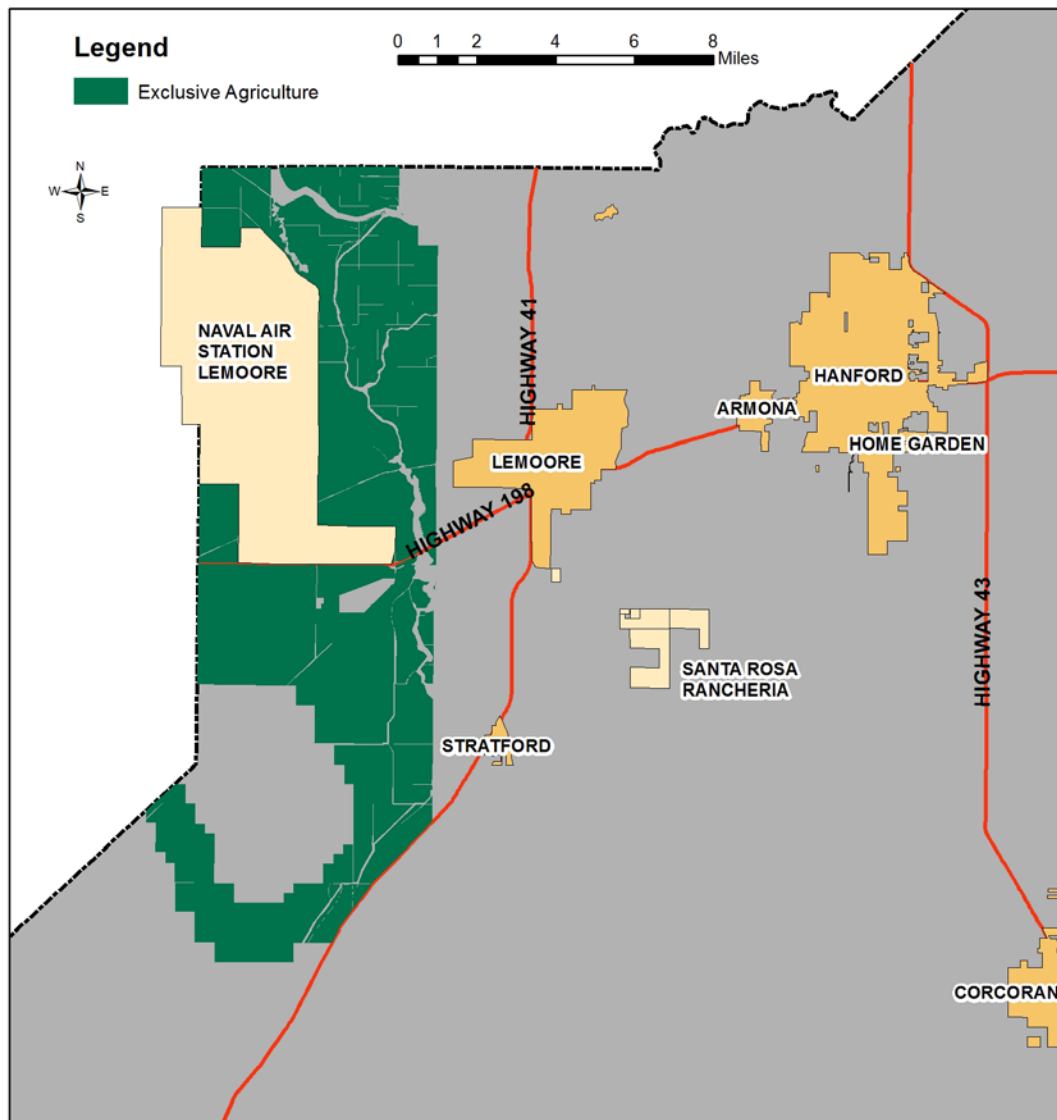
Other local commercial recreational activities also exist throughout the County and include golf courses, exercise clubs, gun clubs, various forms of racing, and airplane flying. Swimming, boating, fishing, and picnicking are publicly, privately, and commercially available on the Kings River. Recreational facilities are an integral part of a community and the lives of its residents. Maintaining open space and recreational facilities is an important part of providing a healthy environment for residents to live, work and play. The establishment of adequate funding for the development and maintenance of public recreational facilities is necessary to preserve open space opportunities for future generations. Private funding and new developments may also provide recreational facilities for the residents of Kings County.

### **E. Military Compatibility**

Kings County is home to the United States Naval Air Station Lemoore (NASL), a navy base that supports consolidated navy jet squadrons in the western United States as a master jet air station. The naval operations generate potentially significant sources of noise that may interfere with the residential and other occupied land uses, due to the low flying jet aircraft that operate in airspace corridors above the County. Therefore, it is essential to establish compatible land uses surrounding the base to ensure resident safety and continue operational effectiveness of the base. Agricultural land surrounding NASL is factored into the priority criteria in the County's Priority Agricultural Land Model. The Exclusive Agriculture land use designation, which serves as a safety buffer around the base, was expanded from the 1993 General Plan to integrate updated NASL flight and noise contours. The Exclusive Agriculture designation limits potential conflicts between County land uses and base operations by limiting types of structures and operations that may be allowed within this safety buffer. The County's commitment to maintaining an agricultural safety buffer around NASL ensures the continuance of agricultural production, while also preserving the operational integrity of a strategic military installation in the western United States that serves a critical role in national security.



Figure OS – 15 Exclusive Agriculture Safety Buffer



**F. Open Space in Developed Areas**

Open space areas within the County unincorporated communities also serve to provide opportunities that support the health and well being of residents living within a community. Open space linkages and other areas can serve as recreational areas, walking trails, or visual space separations from other incompatible land uses.

Incompatible land uses are often separated to reduce the potential for conflicts, and open space buffers can serve a beneficial function of increasing the visual and geographic separation between them. Community District waste water treatment areas can pose unpleasant odors and other safety concerns to community residents. Open space buffers can be effectively used around these types of facilities and allow agricultural uses to continue so that the land is maintained, productive and yet affords separation from residents. Industrial uses can also be incompatible around residential areas, and open space separation between these types of uses can increase their integration within a small rural community.

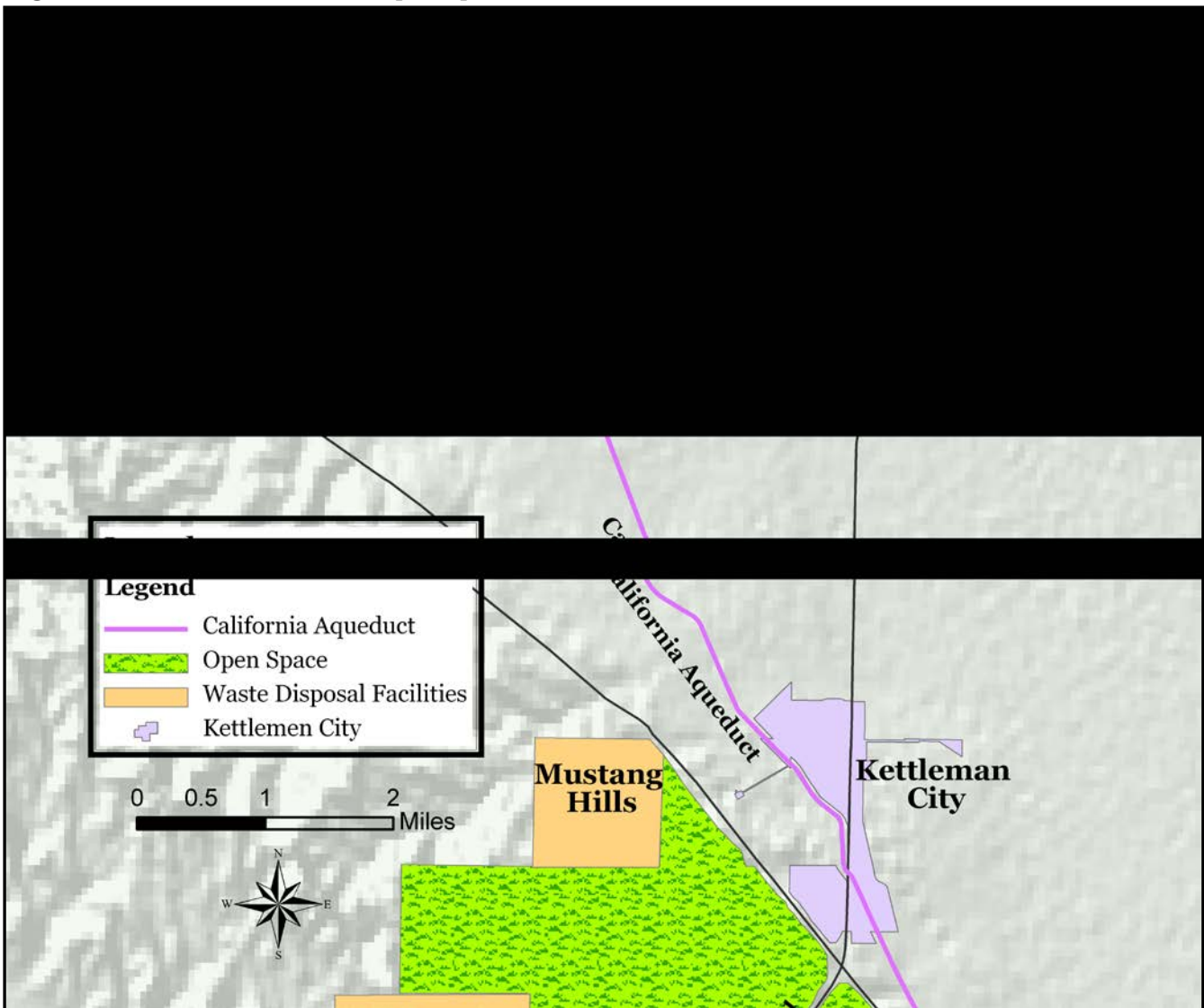


## Open Space Element

Other options for integrating open space may include community buffers between residential areas and agricultural operations, or trails and walking paths that increase connectivity to community parks. These types of features within a community can increase accessible open space that residents can use to enhance their health and well being. New residential development within the County's Community Districts should integrate open space as a key component in developing more compact urban environments.

Open space land has been designated on 7,678 acres in the Kettleman Hills as a means to prevent encroachment of urban development towards the Waste Management and Mustang Hills waste disposal facilities. Figure OS – 16 identifies the land designated as open space. This designation will not inhibit the sites farming or ranching operations.

Figure OS – 16 Kettleman Hills Open Space



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## **III. OPEN SPACE POLICIES**

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### **A. Agricultural Resources**

**OS GOAL A1**      **Preserve agricultural land as open space.**

**OS OBJECTIVE A1.1**

***Protect agricultural land as an important, sustainable component of the Kings County economy.***

**OS Policy A1.1.1:**      **Preserve agricultural land in open and economically sustainable sized parcels for farming and establishment of agricultural processing facilities.**

**OS Policy A1.1.2:**      **Recognize agricultural land as a valued open space feature within the County that promotes the economy, public welfare, and quality of life for Kings County residents.**

**OS Policy A1.1.3:**      **Designate the area within three miles of the Naval Air Station Lemoore as well as its defined flight paths for Exclusive Agricultural use, at a minimum parcel size of 40 acres, in order to limit the potential effect of jet aircraft noise on nearby land uses, and to ensure the preservation of large and sparsely developed parcels for public safety purposes.**

### **B. Scenic Resources**

**OS GOAL B1**      **Maintain and protect the scenic beauty of Kings County.**

**OS OBJECTIVE B1.1**

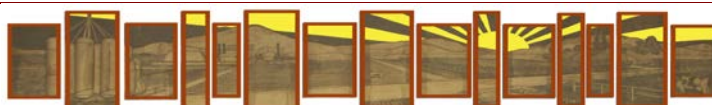
***Protect and enhance views from roadways which cross scenic areas or serve as scenic entranceways to cities and communities.***

**OS Policy B1.1.1:**      **Coordinate with the Kings County Association of Governments to explore designation of State Route 41, between State Route 33 and the Kern County line, as an Official State Scenic Highway through the Caltrans Transportation Enhancement program.**

**OS OBJECTIVE B1.2**

***Preserve roadside landscapes which have high visual quality and contribute to the local environment.***

**OS Policy B1.2.1:**      **Review new development and utility projects for compatibility and potential for impacting scenic view sheds along highly traveled scenic routes.**



**OS OBJECTIVE B1.3**

***Protect the scenic qualities of human-made and natural landscapes and prominent view sheds.***

**OS Policy B1.3.1:**      **Require new development to be designed so that it does not significantly impact or block views of Kings County’s natural landscape or other important scenic features. Discretionary permit applications will be evaluated against this requirement as part of the development review process. New developments may be required, as appropriate to:**

- **Minimize obstruction of views from public lands and rights-of-way.**
- **Reduce visual prominence by keeping development and structures below ridgelines.**
- **Limit the impact of new roadways and grading on natural settings. Such limits shall be within design safety guidelines.**

**OS Policy B1.3.2:**      **Protect the visual access to Kings River and other prominent watercourses by locating and designing new development to minimize visual impacts and obstruction of views of scenic watercourses from public lands and rights-of-way.**

**C. Community Character**

**OS GOAL C1**      **Preserve the visual identities of Community Districts by maintaining open space separations between urban areas.**

**OS OBJECTIVE C1.1**

***Preserve open space, maintain rural character, and limit development in community separator areas.***

**OS Policy C1.1.1:**      **Preserve the agricultural open space buffer between the Community of Armona and City of Hanford to maintain community separation between Lacey Boulevard and Front Street along the west side of 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue.**

**OS Policy C1.1.2:**      **Preserve the Open Space land use buffer around the Armona Community Services District waste water treatment facility to include territory between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Avenues, and north of Houston Avenue.**

**OS Policy C1.1.3:**      **Preserve the agricultural open space buffer between the Community of Armona and City of Lemoore to maintain community separation between State Route 198 and Hanford Armona Road along the east side of 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue.**





## D. Outdoor Recreation

**OS GOAL D1** Provide for parks, recreation and open space that will serve the current and future needs of County residents and visitors.

### OS OBJECTIVE D1.1

*Maintain and enhance the existing County park system within available funding constraints.*

**OS Policy D1.1.1:** Apply the "Public/Quasi-Public" land use designation to County parks.

**OS Policy D1.1.2:** Community Plans should facilitate the development and maintenance of community park(s) within Community District areas to expand recreational resources available to residents.

**OS Policy D1.1.3:** Support community involvement that builds capacity for the long term maintenance and upkeep of open space and community park space within Community Districts.

### OS OBJECTIVE D1.2

*Encourage the development of private recreational facilities compatible with the rural character of Kings County.*

**OS Policy D1.2.1:** Support the establishment of new commercial recreational development, provided it is compatible with surrounding land uses and the intensity of such development does not exceed the ability of the natural environment of the site and the surrounding area to accommodate it. Such facilities may include, but are not limited to campgrounds, recreational camps, hotels and destination resorts, ball courts and ball fields, skeet clubs and facilities, hunting and fishing clubs, and equestrian facilities.

## E. Military Compatibility

**OS GOAL E1** Maintain open space areas near Naval Air Station Lemoore and underlying low level military airspace corridors and ranges.

### RC OBJECTIVE E1.1

*Identify lands potentially impacted by military training operations and provide appropriate land use designations to prevent significant impacts to residents.*



- OS Policy E1.1.1:** The county will work with the Naval Air Station Lemoore (NASL) to protect current and future mission requirements by maintaining or designating open space, agricultural uses, or similar low intensity land uses in areas within, adjacent to, or proximate to military installations and low flying airspace corridors.
- OS Policy E1.1.2:** Participate in a Joint Land Use Study with Naval Air Station Lemoore and other local jurisdictions to cooperatively address land use planning issues within the vicinity of the base.
- OS Policy E1.1.3:** The County shall designate compatible land uses in areas exposed to high noise levels to ensure noise impacts to residents are minimized.

**F. Open Space in Developed Areas**

**OS GOAL F1** Ensure that Community Districts integrate adequate open space as part of their Community Plans.

**OS OBJECTIVE F1.1**

*Engage each Community District to evaluate the open space needs that are unique and specific to each community.*

**OS Policy F1.1.1:** Community Plans shall inventory existing open space resources and determine future needs for additional open space.

**OS OBJECTIVE F1.2**

*Establish open space buffers between community districts and waste management facilities to reduce potential land use conflicts.*

**OS Policy F1.2.1:** The State Route 41 corridor from Interstate 5 to Utica Avenue shall be designated Open Space in order to maintain a buffer between the Kettleman City community and nearby active or proposed waste management facilities.



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## IV. IMPLEMENTATION

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### A. Open Space Program 1:

Continue implementation of Williamson Act and Farmland Security Zone Contracts to maintain long term preservation of agricultural land.

### B. Open Space Program 2:

Participate in a Joint Land Use Study with the Naval Air Station Lemoore and other local stakeholders to cooperatively plan surrounding land uses.

### C. Open Space Program 3:

Adopt an "Open Space" Zone District Overlay on community buffer areas, and other designated open space buffers that serve to separate incompatible land uses.

