



Bay Area Lands, People, and Economy:

A Snapshot Report of Green Stimulus Opportunities

TOGETHER Bay Area
May 5, 2020

Land Acknowledgment

For thousands of years, the place now called the Bay Area has been the home of Ohlone, Miwok, Kashia, Pomo, Mishewal Wappo, Amah Mutsun, and Patwins tribes and bands. We acknowledge that for 10,000 years people lived in harmony on these lands. We recognize the impact that the arrival of and colonization by the Spanish and Americans have had on the lands and the Native peoples. We honor the Indigenous people living today as well as their ancestors, and we deeply respect their resilience and connection to the land.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TOGETHER Bay Area stands in partnership with government leaders to create transformational, enduring economic changes that effectively respond to the crises we face today. Green investments in infrastructure, public lands, natural resource management, and agricultural systems can retain tens of thousands of jobs in the San Francisco Bay Area, and support immediate-term jobs growth, while addressing climate change impacts, which many studies have shown would realize long-term cost savings and community resilience statewide.

TOGETHER Bay Area has conducted a simple, targeted survey of our 56 members to understand how our work currently contributes to the regional jobs market, and how retained, strategic investment in the state budget and a potential stimulus bond would support regional jobs growth, while providing multiple benefits to communities and the environment in the form of clean air, clean water, and access to nature.

By the Numbers

10,500 Jobs – A conservative estimate of the number of new jobs created by advancing the TOGETHER Bay Area coalition's ready-to-go projects

620 Projects – A conservative estimate of unique, job-sustaining and job-creating projects that could advance in the next 12 to 18 months, promoting climate resilience and social equity in our region

10 Counties – The nine Bay Area counties, plus Santa Cruz County, in which these projects will take place

7.7 Million People – The population of the Bay Area, who will benefit from the clean air, clean water, and access to nature that these projects provide

As the federal government negotiates future stimulus packages, and state government considers an economic stimulus bond while working to pass a budget, our coalition sees an urgent chance to intentionally develop a more green and just economy. Long-term investment that is focused on addressing the parallel crisis of our time – climate change – will ensure lasting economic rehabilitation, future cost savings for the state, and a healthier, more equitable society.

Knowing that immediate, ongoing economic relief and stabilization are needed at the local, state, and federal levels, our coalition suggests an integrated climate adaptation and economic development approach that prioritizes vulnerable and chronically under-resourced community needs.

BACKGROUND

California's leadership faces difficult choices as they work to pass a state budget that is responsive to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. TOGETHER Bay Area has surveyed its 56 members to understand how our work currently contributes to the regional jobs market. The data collected also shows how our future projects and program delivery can help address looming climate change impacts and socioeconomic vulnerabilities, while supporting the creation of a healthier, more equitable society. The public health and economic crises we face today also provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape how we live together on this planet. A recent global Ipsos poll shows strong support for government actions that prioritize climate change in the context of economic recovery: 65% globally and 57% in the U.S. agree that it is important.[1]

Since March 18, we have been in constant communication with our members to learn from each other and stay coordinated through the complexities of our pandemic crisis response, for the benefit of our region. The COVID-19 crisis has directly impacted the operations and programs of our diverse members, in myriad ways:

Public land managers are experiencing a dramatic increase in demand on trail systems, parks, and open space, from large national units to local pocket parks, drastically complicating the safe delivery of essential physical and mental public health services. Preliminary regional trail counter data shows usage has increased by 200% or more in some places, and some land managers are seeing two to four times more visitors than preserves hosted at this same time last year. As well, physical distancing requirements challenge delivery of critical grey/green infrastructure-related services like water delivery, fire prevention, and natural resource stewardship.

Tribes face compounding impacts to chronically under-resourced tribal public health services, lacking protective equipment to continue safely maintaining ancestral territory natural resources, and per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, face increased risk of serious public health complications from COVID-19.

Farmers and farmworkers continue to produce and deliver food in the face of dire market uncertainty, and lacking safety protocols and protective equipment. And our food systems, from the regional to national levels, are precarious. However, we are seeing signs of resilience in small, locally marketed Bay Area farms.

Nonprofit members, many of which focus program delivery on addressing the needs of socioeconomically underserved and climate vulnerable communities, struggle to adapt program priorities to the pandemic crisis, while working to address broad impacts to their financial sustainability.

Recreation and trail-focused groups are working through competing challenges at the local, regional, statewide, and national scale to ensure safe public access to recreational opportunities, like trails and bike paths, while serving as a critical educator for the public about the importance of physical distancing.

METHODOLOGY

TOGETHER Bay Area is a regional coalition of public agencies, Indigenous Tribes, and nonprofits working for lands, people, and communities. The coalition stands on the shoulders of the Bay Area Open Space Council, which was founded in 1990. There are 56 members across the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area, plus Santa Cruz County, who directly or indirectly serve all 7.7 million residents of this region.

The Policy Committee of TOGETHER Bay Area includes representatives from 30 of its 56 member entities. The TOGETHER Bay Area: Jobs for Member Programs and Projects 2020 – 2021 Survey was designed by the Policy Committee in order to better understand how our members' work currently contributes to the regional jobs market and what additional contributions to the economy could be made by advancing those projects that are ready in the coming year. Designed to be simple and effective as a potential first phase of economic data collection, this survey attempted to capture jobs data from public agencies, Tribes, and nonprofits in all nine counties of the Bay Area, plus Santa Cruz County. Data collection encompassed programs (outdoor education, volunteer-led stewardship) and capital projects (land acquisition, environmental restoration, natural and agricultural infrastructure improvements, and public access projects).

The target population for the survey was the membership of the TOGETHER Bay Area coalition, and the sampling frame included the top two to three contacts for each of the 56 member organizations. Survey respondents were encouraged to coordinate with partners and internal staff to complete the survey. Targeted outreach to members with unique business models, i.e. all-volunteer organizations, and member organizations serving disadvantaged and vulnerable communities was conducted in order to ensure fully representative results. The survey was built using an online survey tool, and included 34 questions which respondents could complete at their own pace. The survey was sent to the sampling frame via email on April 15, 2020, and data collection was completed on April 30.

This is a one-time survey opportunity. However, TOGETHER Bay Area stands ready to commission a more robust study, if deeper analyses of economic impacts and economic value of our coalition's work would be beneficial to government leaders.



RESULTS

The goal of this survey was to collect baseline and limited projected data about our members' projects and programs so that TOGETHER Bay Area can inform and inspire decision-makers to transform our region, our state, and our country. The survey was designed to reveal high-level, preliminary economic information that begins to demonstrate the relevance of TOGETHER Bay Area members' work, now more than ever. Through our collaborative pandemic response and this survey process, we see that the new COVID-19 reality lays bare an acute challenge: the health and accessibility of our lands are of vital importance in the context of the current public health crisis, and our business models, designed to steward and maintain these lands with periodic capital fund sources, are incredibly fragile in the context of the parallel economic crisis.

About the Data

The data below represents conservative estimates, based on the data provided by members who responded to the survey. Member agencies – including water districts, city, county, and regional park districts, national park units, and cities – have a high capacity to sustain and even grow meaningful nature-based job numbers, given the scope and scale of their jurisdictional priorities. The accurate projection of job growth numbers however, especially for these larger government agencies, is challenged by today's complex economic realities. For example, it is assumed tax revenue, which provides base funding for our agency members, will shrink as the economic crisis continues, potentially leading to significant contractor and even staff jobs lost without federal stimulus for state and local governments. And secondary and tertiary impacts to projects, e.g. reduced state and local contracting capacity and limited availability of materials, further complicate projections about projects advancing and thus the number jobs that could be generated. The data shows that with retained, emergency funding in the state budget, and with the infusion of new capital funding sources, critical services – such as ensuring safe public access to nature during shelter in place orders, and vegetation management for wildfire prevention – can sustain and potentially increase regional job opportunities.

About the Projects and Jobs

In general, our analysis uses current project plans, and work is estimated to span a three to five-year project timeframe. Projects range in size and scope, and include creek restoration, acquisition of wildlife corridor lands, trail and natural infrastructure visitor amenities, wildfire resilience and vegetation management, Bay shoreline restoration and public access, and sea level rise and flood protection projects. The green jobs associated with members' projects are most often long-term, career-track jobs. TOGETHER Bay Area member projects achieve many of the state's strategic natural resource and climate change goals: equitable coastal access, safe routes to transit, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, educating the public about climate change, preserved biodiversity, and protected archaeological and ethnobotanical resources, among many other compelling priorities.

Note that more than half of randomly sampled projects would benefit from funding to expedite permitting and get people to work sooner. And most projects within this sample provide multiple benefits, such as improved stormwater retention, reduced wildfire risk, climate smart agricultural practices, reduced vehicle miles traveled, or improved habitat values.

HIGHLIGHTS

24

Number of TOGETHER Bay Area members who completed the survey.

10

San Francisco Bay Area counties represented (all nine counties, plus Santa Cruz County).

83%

Percentage of members who rely on public funding directly or indirectly (e.g. their business models rely on publicly funded partners).

69%

Number of members that rely directly on public funding to advance their missions.

622

Conservative estimate of unique capital projects, providing multiple benefits to communities and the environment, that could be advanced in the next 12 – 18 months with sufficient funding.

10,497

Conservative estimate of the number of new jobs needed to advance these projects.[2] [3]

2,474

Number of staff jobs as of January 1, 2020 members currently support.

328

Of these jobs, the number of staff jobs member organizations currently support that engage in programmatic work, such as environmental education, volunteer-based stewardship, research, or paid internships.

88%

Percentage of members who work on capital projects like land acquisition, environmental restoration, infrastructure improvements, or public access projects.

\$25,000 to \$170 Million

Total capital project cost range of a random sampling of 35 unique, shovel ready projects.[4]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The tapestry of public, private, rural, urban, and working lands that make up the Bay Area sustains our culture, drives our economy, and is part of what makes California a unique, beautiful place to live and visit. Parks, public lands, and resilient working lands are more important than ever in the context of COVID-19, given the mental and physical health benefits they provide, and their relative accessibility during shelter in place orders. We have all seen the news stories about overcrowded beaches and parks.[5] Land managers face jurisdictional complexity, lacking resources, and challenges in keeping staff and the public safe, even as they work to provide essential services like fuels management and to keep nature accessible for all Californians.

Importantly, park closures have a disproportionate impact on under-resourced communities, who often cannot walk to a safe park or natural area. And these communities already face long-standing health disparities (e.g. racial bias leading to inadequate delivery of health interventions, and health-related vulnerabilities caused by environmental impacts like pollution and unsafe drinking water), all of which are exacerbated by the current public health crisis. Due to existing economic insecurity and deep inequity, these communities are also more vulnerable to the impacts of the economic crisis.



Four Guiding Principles

Our recommendations to government leadership for achieving the vision of an integrated climate adaptation and economic development approach are organized around four principles:

Guiding Principle 1 - Equity

Focus on addressing equity in the context of the pandemic and economic crises. By using existing and emerging data on regional climate vulnerabilities, we can support workforce development, leverage capital project financing, and amplify nonprofit and public agency capacity and partnerships to effectively serve people during the crisis, focusing on communities with the greatest need.

Guiding Principle 2 - Investment

We encourage state leaders to identify and retain targeted investments in the state budget to ensure that parks and natural areas are accessible and protected, so they remain safe and available to the public. Knowing that the Legislature will turn its attention to facilitating the state's recovery from the public health and economic effects of COVID-19, consider advancing an economic stimulus bond which would help create a pathway to economic stability.

Guiding Principle 3 - Innovation

Urgent stewardship needs abound across landscapes, cities, and communities, with wildfire resilience actions serving as a critical example. The science is clear that urgency underscores every category of climate change impact we consider. By catalyzing innovative initiatives like Cutting Green Tape,[6] the state can increase momentum towards its climate change goals now, while realizing cost and operational efficiencies. Cutting Green Tape provides clear recommendations for the state to develop new efficiencies and innovative tools in permitting and regulatory compliance for environmentally beneficial projects.

Guiding Principle 4 - Action

Integrate climate adaptation goals with an economic development approach. This can be achieved by advancing the state's vision for climate adaptation, the Safeguarding California Plan,[7] which promotes holistic resilience to climate change through targeted workforce and economic development around climate adaptation solutions, such as green infrastructure projects, forest and habitat restoration, sustainable agriculture, and urban resilience actions.

Statewide Recommendations

Green investments that sustain basic needs for public lands during the COVID-19 crisis, support equity and inclusion, and align with local and state planning to address climate change should be prioritized. TOGETHER Bay Area is also tracking future federal stimulus opportunities, and provides federal-level recommendations in the Appendix below.

We urge state leadership to consider the relevance of working lands, parks, trails, and public lands during the current crisis as described, and include them in the state's effort to address emergency funding needs. In addition, consider the multiple benefits stimulus investment in nature-based solutions would provide for people, nature, and the economy.

1.1 Promote and support regional climate adaptation efforts that provide multiple benefits across sectors.

1.2 Prioritize investment in projects that will immediately generate new jobs, preserve existing jobs, and advance the state's strategic climate change goals.

1.3 Prioritize green infrastructure, outdoor recreation, and natural resource protection and restoration investments in communities of color and low-income communities, which are most disproportionately impacted by climate change threats and the pandemic crisis.

1.4 Focus investment on capital projects that provide visitor centers and park facilities for urban residents and rural residents lacking accessible parks; significantly increase public access to natural lands through trail acquisition and implementation projects; that increase greenhouse gas sequestration capacity of forests and wetlands for ecological benefit; and that protect critical natural resources and working lands.

1.5 Focus investment on capital projects that maintain public safety, promote public health, and protect populations from climate risks, including reducing wildfire threats through vegetation management and ecological restoration; building resiliency into agricultural lands and food systems; and addressing sea level rise through green infrastructure and wetland restoration projects.

1.6 Use the best available science to inform decision-making, and to promote the role that climate smart agriculture and nature-based climate solutions play in meeting the state's climate adaptation and mitigation goals.

1.7 Focus workforce development programs on under-resourced populations and communities of color, coordinating with community leaders, labor organizations, and local agency officials so that the proposals best reflect the needs of communities and available worker pools.

1.8 Maintain momentum on Cutting Green Tape to increase the pace and scale of restoration projects that will lead to more jobs, and a reduction in costs to the state by addressing climate change impacts.

1.9 Leverage capital investment with flexible funding sources, including private capital and Prop 68 Community Access funding, to support planning projects and programming, both of which support jobs across sectors, including nonprofits and agencies.

CONCLUSION

We understand that by accelerating work on climate change, and by ensuring that public and working lands can operate safely during this time, we have a better chance of keeping communities whole and creating a more just, resilient green economy. We urge government investment in the living world that sustains us, over attempts to bolster the industrial economic models that have left entire communities behind and harmed our natural environment.

Within crises we face today, we also see an opportunity to create jobs and build local economies that support climate and food systems resilience and begin to address long-standing socio-economic injustices. By prioritizing the needs of vulnerable and chronically underserved communities, and keeping focused on the state's climate change goals, we can build a green and just path to economic stability together.

TOGETHER Bay Area stands in partnership with government leaders to champion for transformational, enduring economic changes in order to best respond to the crises of the moment. Green investments in infrastructure, public lands, natural resource management, and agricultural systems can support net zero job loss and potentially spur immediate-term jobs growth, while addressing climate change over the longer-term. And voters are supportive of this approach.[8]



ABOUT

This study and report were produced by TOGETHER Bay Area, a regional coalition of public agencies, Indigenous Tribes, and nonprofits working for lands, people, and communities. Funding for this work comes from membership dues. The current list of TOGETHER Bay Area members is at: www.togetherbayarea.org/members

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APPENDIX A

TOGETHER Bay Area Policy Committee Members & Report Co-Authors[9]

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- California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC)
- California Mountain Biking Coalition
- Claremont Canyon Conservancy
- East Bay Regional Park District
- Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT)
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- Pie Ranch
- Rails to Trails Conservancy
- San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
- San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department
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- Sonoma County Agricultural + Open Space District
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- Sonoma Land Trust
- Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE)
- Valley Water
- YES Nature to Neighborhoods



APPENDIX B

Federal Recommendations

The rapidly evolving COVID-19 crisis is creating short and long-term impacts to our membership. Resilience – the ability to effectively adapt to change – will be a critical factor in determining our sector’s success in responding to this crisis. Funding is needed to support the increased demand for services our nonprofit, tribal, and agency members face, which arise because our economy and safety nets were not designed to weather a pandemic crisis at this scale. Supportive policy changes are also needed, so that our members can continue to provide important services during shelter in place, such as safe operation of public lands and parks, fire prevention, and food production, as well as to ensure their ongoing contributions to the regional job market and cross-sectoral economies.

2.1 Expand the COVID-19 Payroll Tax Credit to be inclusive of special districts. Congress’ action to provide an avenue for paid family and sick leave for those impacted with COVID-19 is critical. However, special districts are excluded from the payroll tax credit under the Coronavirus Families First Act. This is resulting in a costly unfunded mandate, given local agencies must provide the time and pay to their employees with no accompanying payroll tax relief.

2.2 Restore advance refunding of tax-exempt bonds, as outlined in H.R. 2772. Doing so would allow flexibility for states, local governments, and other qualifying entities to access billions of dollars to reallocate and spend on other projects, which, in turn, strengthens local infrastructure networks.

2.3 Provide advanced disaster mitigation funding via existing FEMA directives and other sources to support projects that will reduce the likelihood of potential hazards such as catastrophic wildfire, sea level rise impacts on infrastructure and communities, etc.

2.4 Pass the Great American Outdoors Act, which would provide permanent, dedicated funding at \$900 million annually for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and would provide much-needed funding for deferred maintenance activities in our nation’s parks, forests, and recreational areas.

2.5 Include the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition’s policy recommendations in the next emergency relief bill, including ensuring all farmers are included in any broader stimulus or farm relief packages; sustaining demand for farm products and ensure equitable food access and distribution through direct purchase mechanisms and expanded food aid; providing direct financial assistance to critical supply chain businesses, food system workers, and food establishments; and protecting farmworkers by providing PPE and safety protocols.

2.6 Expand broadband service in rural and low-income areas.

APPENDIX C

Endnotes

- [1] Chris Jackson, Most in the U.S. and around the world agree climate change is as serious a crisis as Covid-19, Ipsos, 21 April, 2020
- [2] Larger coalition member entities have developed a factor analysis for quantifying total jobs created, by job class (e.g. FTE) and project type (e.g. construction, vegetation management, etc.) for every \$1 million spent. Further work is needed to ensure that analyses are being conducted consistently across the region.
- [3] The survey was designed to be inclusive of all job classes, e.g. full-time, part-time, contractor, and seasonal. Further study is necessary to develop robust projected job numbers by job class.
- [4] Further detailed analyses would be needed to accurately estimate total project costs for all TOGETHER Bay Area shovel ready projects.
- [5] Wigglesworth, Pineda, Smith, Baxter, Amid year's first heat wave, thousands of Californians pack the beaches, Los Angeles Times, 26 April, 2020
- [6] Cutting Green Tape Initiative, California Landscape Stewardship Network, cited May 2020
- [7] Safeguarding California 2018 Plan Update, California Natural Resources Agency, cited May 2020
- [8] Cha, Cohen, Paul, NoiseCat, Voters Want a Green Stimulus, 24 March, 2020
- [9] National Park Service staff did not participate in the development of this report.

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