

Bay Area hopes for more than 100 new park projects by 2030

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April 19, 2022



Proposals for the 30 by 30 project would improve the Bay Area Ridge Trail, which is planned to run for 550 miles throughout the region.

Brontë Wittpenn/The Chronicle 2021

The Bay Area could see an unprecedented investment in parks and open space over the next decade, from newly protected redwood groves to freshly restored Native American sanctuary sites, as a sweeping land conservation initiative gathers momentum.

With new sources of state and federal funding becoming available, a coalition of 67 Bay Area nonprofits and public agencies on Tuesday rolled out a \$700 million plan for how they'd like the region to contribute to the effort. The document is [a](#)

wish list of more than 110 projects that supporters say could become reality when the new money is released.

“There’s a lot of political will for 30 by 30,” said Annie Burke, executive director of Together Bay Area, the umbrella group that’s working on behalf of parks, land trusts, cities, counties and Indigenous groups to push the regional projects forward. “Hopefully it will catalyze the action.”

In California, 24% of lands and 16% of coastal water are currently protected, according to the state Natural Resources Agency. Protection can take the form of a marine sanctuary, park or working ranch, per the agency’s terms.

By the state’s math, 6 million acres of California lands and a half million acres of water still need to be conserved to hit the 30% mark.

Financing remains a significant hurdle, even as supporters say the projects are planned and ready to go. The state has allocated \$2 billion in new funds, but that is substantially less than the total sum needed (exactly how much is unclear).

The initiative, known as 30 by 30, aims to conserve 30% of the world’s lands and water by 2030. It’s a bid to not only protect natural areas and biodiversity but to



slow the planet’s warming by ensuring enough plants and soil remain to suck up carbon.

In the Bay Area, some proposals are geared toward wildlife, such as building highway crossings for mountain lions and other animals around San Jose and Gilroy.

Bikers ride trails at Redwood Regional Park in Oakland in 2020. The East Bay Regional Parks District is among the agencies hoping to benefit from investment in the 30 by 30 initiative.

Jessica Christian / The Chronicle 2020

There are plans to acquire new places for people to visit, including purchase of privately owned tracts such as the 6,300-acre Cloverdale Ranch on the San Mateo County coast and 2,000 acres of redwood forest in Sonoma County.

There are also cultural endeavors, such as developing a network of outdoor community hubs on ancestral Lisjan Ohlone lands in the East Bay.

“It’s more than just the numbers,” said Noelle Chambers, vice president of conservation at the Palo Alto-based Peninsula Open Space Trust, a group that supports and stands to benefit from 30 by 30. “It’s about making land equitably accessible and stewarding land and caring for it long-term. It’s a holistic effort.”

To make the project list — and get the coalition’s support in seeking funds — the conservation work must meet at least one of three criteria: protect biodiversity, provide equitable access to nature or boost climate resiliency. Each of the projects is sponsored by an organization or public agency in the region. The scope is the Bay Area and Santa Cruz County.

Both President Biden and Gov. Gavin Newsom have committed to the 30 by 30 cause.

Within weeks of taking office last year, Biden signed an executive order pledging to protect 30% of U.S. lands and water by 2030. Newsom issued a similar directive for the state the prior year. Both cited the need to stave off extinction of plants and animals and confront climate change.

In December, the Newsom administration released a plan for how to comply. It suggested numerous strategies that include acquiring new lands, obtaining conservation easements on private property and restoring impaired natural areas. A final draft of the plan is due out by the end of the month.

“We are excited to be advancing a first-ever strategy to achieve the landmark target,” said Lisa Lien-Mager, spokeswoman for the Natural Resources Agency.