

From commitment to action: State's 30×30 Goal Comes to Life in San Mateo County

By Josh Becker and Kellyx Nelson
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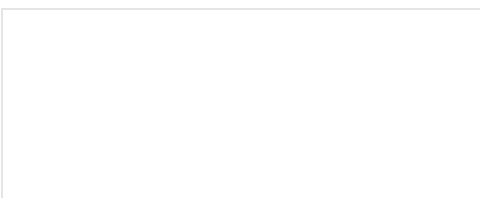


This year marks the halfway point in “30x30,” California’s ambitious commitment to conserve 30% of our lands and waters by the year 2030. Here in San Mateo County, progress is increasingly visible in restored habitat, vibrant open spaces and landscapes better prepared for a changing climate.

California formally committed to 30×30 in 2020, when Gov. Gavin Newsom signed an executive order elevating the role of natural and working lands in addressing climate change and protecting biodiversity. With this order, he aligned the state early with a growing global effort now embraced by nearly every country in the world. As of June 2025, over 26% of California’s land and nearly 22% of its coastal waters were under long term conservation and care. Reaching these targets is about protecting land in ways that endure — through thoughtful conservation, restoration and long-term stewardship.

Last year, the state doubled Proposition 4 funding for coastal resilience and Bayside restoration, totaling \$102 million and moving us closer to our 30x30 goal. The expanded funding will accelerate shoreline resilience projects across the Bay Area, including nature-based solutions. These efforts will protect vulnerable communities, jobs, and infrastructure from the growing threat of sea-level rise. Additionally, Senate Bill 949 is advancing in the legislature to designate the Santa Cruz Mountains as a Resource of Statewide Significance to protect one of California’s most ecological

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vital landscapes and strengthen coordinated conservation, climate resilience and watershed protection efforts statewide.

A core strategy of 30x30 is to accelerate regionally led conservation. Nowhere is that clearer than here in San Mateo County. Local organizations have long worked to strategically protect lands with high ecological value, strengthening habitat connectivity and expanding public access. Land trusts and open space agencies have helped preserve and connect some of the most important remaining natural landscapes in our region.

Resource Conservation Districts also play a critical role. RCDs exist in nearly every county in California with a simple purpose: to help people help the land. They are boots on the ground working across public and private properties, across jurisdictions and across boundaries — wherever they are invited — because water, wildlife and habitat do not follow property lines or political borders. RCDs build trusted partnerships with landowners and translate state goals into practical, locally appropriate solutions that are voluntary.

San Mateo County's wetlands, grasslands, forests and streams are its heart and lungs. Yet more than 40 of its plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, with habitat loss being the number one threat to their survival. Our local RCD delivers results. Working with hundreds of partners they have restored 3,000 acres of habitat — nearly three times the size of Golden Gate Park. They also removed dams to open 120 miles of streams for threatened steelhead trout and endangered coho salmon, protected 150 million gallons of water each year for aquatic wildlife, planted five miles of native plants for pollinators and helped farms remove more than 6,000 tons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere through improved land management practices.

These outcomes are 30x30 in action here in San Mateo County — restoring habitat, stewarding land and water, and supporting the ecological, climate and community benefits these landscapes provide.

As California enters the second half of its 30×30 timeline, the path forward will build on what is already working. Regionally-led conservation, supported by partners on the ground, offers a model for success — one rooted in collaboration, practicality and care for place.

State Sen. Josh Becker chairs the Senate Committee on Natural Resources. Kellyx Nelson is the executive director of the San Mateo Resource Conservation District.

