

Coyote Valley

A Vital Landscape



Looking west at Bailey Ave. Image: Andrea Laue/POST

Protect What We've Preserved



Coyote Valley, just south of San José, is a “last chance landscape” that is a vital area for preserving wildlife connectivity, regional biodiversity, and providing trails and public open space for everyone. The Valley is home to waterways and floodplains – Coyote Creek, Fisher Creek, and Laguna Seca – that filter groundwater for San José residents and help protect them from flooding and other extreme weather events. With California’s prolonged droughts and more frequent flooding and wildfires, protecting and restoring Coyote Valley’s beneficial landscape is the smartest long-term investment we can make for the health and sustainability of our region.

Coyote Valley also offers a rare opportunity to connect over one million acres of core habitat in the surrounding mountains allowing species to disperse, migrate, and shift ranges in response to climate change.

In recent years, numerous scientific studies support conserving all of Coyote Valley as protected open space to ensure the environmental and economic vitality of the greater San José area. Santa Clara County voters agree and have consistently and overwhelmingly demonstrated their support for conservation of Coyote Valley.

Yet now, these efforts could be undermined by recent proposed developments directly in the Coyote Creek corridor, between Monterey Road and US Highway 101.

More development in this critical area will fragment a crucial wildlife corridor, increase the risk of catastrophic flooding in downstream residential and commercial areas, and undermine years of effort and funding aimed at preserving Coyote Valley’s invaluable ecosystem services. It also runs counter to clear voter preferences, benefiting the few rather than the many, while undermining San José’s own Natural and Working Lands Element of the Climate Smart San José plan.

“What Coyote Valley offers is irreplaceable: vibrant wetlands, an essential wildlife habitat and migratory area, active farmlands, a resource to fight climate change, and open space for all to enjoy.”

State
Assemblymember
Ash Kalra





Protecting Water, Protecting People

Coyote Valley's waterways are regionally important. The Coyote Creek Parkway is the longest publicly-owned continuous riparian landscape in the Bay Area. At over 15 miles long, it is located within the 320-square-mile Coyote Creek watershed right where Fisher and Coyote Creeks converge. This makes it critical to the health and vigor of the entire watershed's fish and wildlife.

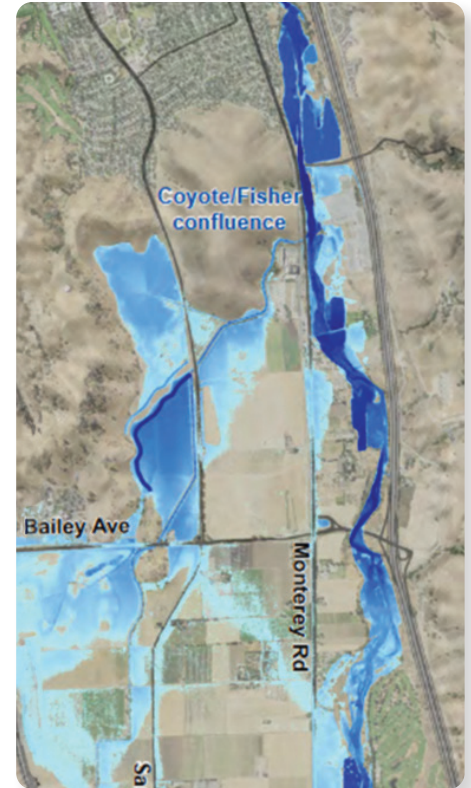
This area serves as a natural flood control system for the City of San José by allowing floodwaters to disperse and be absorbed upstream of urban areas. These wetlands, floodplains, and soils also play a crucial role in storing groundwater and enabling a clean and plentiful water supply for residents of the region.

Historically, frequent small and intermediate floods happen along Coyote Creek every one to three years. Without a properly functioning Coyote Creek, larger floods may result in enormous losses to the City and residents of San José, topping \$100M in 2017 alone.

The Valley's natural wetlands, creeks and other habitat types also support a rich diversity of species including over 224 species of resident and migratory birds. Rare and protected species in the Valley include tri-colored blackbirds, Western pond turtles, and California tiger salamanders.

The Valley's two creek corridors, which converge along Monterey Road just south of Metcalf Avenue, serve as

important movement corridors for safe wildlife passage. Coyote Creek offers extensive habitat and connections for wildlife to move beneath US 101 safely through existing culverts and bridges. Development between Monterey Road and Coyote Creek will have severe negative impacts on the functionality of this wildlife corridor.



Top, left: Williams Street Park, San Jose 2017. Image: Cari Ferraro. Above: Coyote and Fisher Creeks and their flood plains. Image: Open Space Authority. Below: Image: Nick Perry/Open Space Authority.



Wide support for conserving Coyote Valley has resulted in significant policy and conservation actions:

2018

- 71% of San José voters approve Measure T – \$50M for flood protection and climate resilience.

2019

- 937 acres in North Coyote Valley protected by historic public-private partnership
- Assembly Bill 948 (Kalra) establishes the 17,200-acre Coyote Valley as a resource of statewide significance and authorizes the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (the Authority) to oversee conservation efforts there.

2021

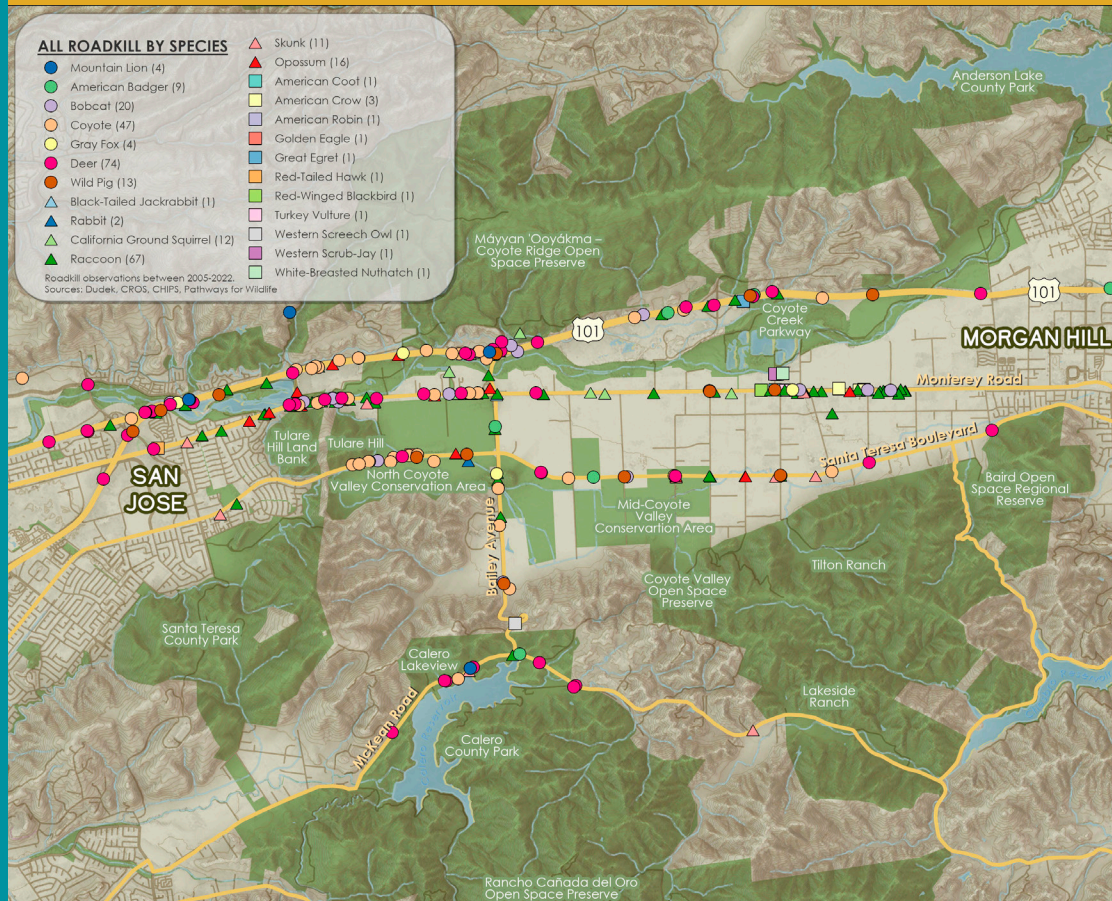
- San José General Plan Update rezones North Coyote Valley from industrial use to agricultural and open space use, limiting development in this critical area.

The Triple Barrier Problem

As detailed in the [2017 Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage Report](#), Coyote Valley's fields and creek corridors provide safe passage for large mammals like mountain lions, bobcats, deer, and badgers to migrate between mountain ranges and territory to find food, water, habitat and mates — movement that becomes even more important as species respond to climate change.

These species currently navigate the dangerous triple barrier of U.S. Highway 101, Monterey Road, and the active rail corridor that bisect the Valley from north to south. Wildlife-vehicle collisions are frequent, resulting in hazardous conditions for both people and wildlife. Creek corridors are important natural movement pathways for wildlife species such as mountain lions, bobcats, and deer. Creek corridors and culverts offer safe passage for wildlife, keep animals off dangerous roads, and help reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Additional commercial and industrial sites, with their associated lighting, noise and vehicular traffic will make Monterey Road even more hazardous for both humans and wildlife. The effectiveness of wildlife crossings depends on the continued functioning of Coyote Creek as a movement corridor and habitat for wildlife.



- Santa Clara County strengthens protections for the mid and south Valley with the Coyote Valley Climate Overlay zoning amendment to preserve natural resources and wildlife connectivity.

2019-Present

- Nearly 8,000 additional acres of natural and working lands in and surrounding Coyote Valley are protected.
- The Authority embarks on a multi-year Coyote Valley Conservation Areas Master Plan public process, funded in part by more than \$2M in state grants.
- City of San José, multiple state agencies and other public and private organizations have invested more than \$120M to protect key habitat on the valley floor and identify locations and crossing types to enable safe wildlife movement across the triple barrier of Monterey Road, Highway 101 and railway.

Progress and Wildlife Passage Can Go Hand in Hand

Recent collaborations among environmental groups, CalTrans, San José Department of Transportation, and the CA High Speed Rail Authority over the last decade have resulted in significant progress identifying ways to meet both transportation and wildlife population needs. Smart, inclusive solutions such as the [Laurel Curve wildlife underpass](#) on Highway 17 and the forthcoming [Wallis Annenberg Crossing](#) across Highway 101 in Southern California show that there's room for both.

Development along the Monterey Road corridor threatens to undo the progress made by major investments from state and local entities to plan and construct wildlife crossings along this hazardous corridor for people and wildlife.



Animals use culverts to safely cross and avoid roadways.

Image: Pathways for Wildlife

Conclusion: Smart Growth is the Way Forward

Preserving Coyote Valley's biodiversity depends on preventing further habitat fragmentation, being smart about where we place human infrastructure, and planning for a future in which people, wildlife, and transportation can all exist within the confines of this small area.

Currently, renewed conversation about locating commercial development between Monterey Road and the Coyote Creek and Parkway threatens to undo the progress of the past 10 years.

Squeezing further development in this narrow, critical slice of land and water will have dramatic, negative impacts across the region. But maintaining this protected corridor, and locating development in urbanized areas rather than the green fields of Coyote Valley, will yield the following benefits to the region:

- **Protect people while saving taxpayer dollars:** Paving over lands that currently absorb flood waters during extreme storms negates the land's natural ability to protect downstream communities. Protecting habitat and wetlands will increase our region's capacity to prepare for, cope with, and bounce back from climate-related threats like floods, wildfire and drought.
- **Protect and enhance wildlife movement and biodiversity while decreasing human-wildlife collisions:** Further development in this area will destroy habitat, impede wildlife movement, and increase the likelihood of dangerous and lethal human-wildlife collisions.
- **Uphold the will of the people:** The voters of San José have consistently and overwhelmingly demonstrated deep support for conservation of Coyote Valley.

The last decade has shown — globally, nationally and locally — that we must all take action to preserve our environment for the future of all species on earth. Small actions have a big impact, and nowhere is this more evident than in Coyote Valley.

We can and must move ahead in a smart, informed, and timely way. The decisions we make today will have impacts on the health and welfare of our region for decades to come.

