





# OPEN SPACE

## What is Open Space?

Open space is a complex mosaic of undeveloped or minimally developed lands with a wide variety of qualities, values, and purposes, which affects all other components of the *Flagstaff Regional Plan*.

To many Flagstaff area residents, open space is a defining feature of Flagstaff's character and attraction. It protects environmental quality and biodiversity, supports tourism, protects historic and cultural resources, and functions as a land resource, recreational destination, and transportation corridor. Open space also controls and spatially defines development patterns. The area encompassed by the *Flagstaff Regional Plan* holds enormously diverse open space from high-elevation wetland meadows to nationally significant geologic formations. Planning for open space can ensure preservation of these important resources.

The *Flagstaff Area Open Spaces and Greenways Plan* (OSGWP), an inter-agency guide adopted in 1998, classifies open space into a hierarchy of five categories intended to deliver a full range of open space values. Participating agencies include the City of Flagstaff, Coconino County, Arizona State Land Department, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Coconino National Forest, and the National Park Service, as well as numerous citizens and local organizations. Open space planning also takes the proximity and edge characteristics of the five categories into consideration because such spatial relationships affect the quality of the more natural open space categories.

1. **Primitive**—exhibits natural conditions with little evidence of current human activities.
2. **Semi-primitive**—shows some evidence of past human activities, but retains substantially natural-appearing conditions; access is restricted and area serves as key or high quality wildlife habitat.
3. **Multiple-use/Conservation**—appears natural but shows some evidence of past human activities; often accessible by two-wheel drive vehicles with moderate to high levels of use..
4. **Neighborwoods**—open spaces near residential areas that are easily accessible for after-work recreational activities such as hiking, biking, or horseback riding; highly accessible with a high level of use.
5. **Cultural/Historical/Recreational**—highly modified by human facilities, including developed recreation sites and a combination of natural and modified landscapes.

Photo at left by: Callie Walters

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

#### ***Sustainability matters.***

Environmental, economic, cultural, and social sustainability ensure that present actions are the basis for future health and prosperity.

#### ***The environment matters.***

Natural environmental health is inherent to individual and community health, and healthy ecosystems should be nurtured.

#### ***A smart and connected community matters.***

Smart land use and design based on cohesive communities are respectful of our environment and create efficiencies that benefit community health, social interaction, commerce, and infrastructure.

#### ***Place matters.***

Regional growth should occur in harmony with the community's historical character, unique cultural resources, and natural environment.

We envision a thriving community and viable economy in harmony with and interdependent on our unique natural environment. Our plan for the region first emphasizes “green infrastructure” — open space, parks, recreation, trails, environmental conservation areas, wildlife corridors, and habitats and water ways — with the urban fabric woven around and through it.

## Where is Our Open Space?

This plan identifies those sensitive ecological resources essential to our community's character and ecosystem health that are to be considered in open space planning. The *Natural Environment* map represents a comprehensive inventory of open space areas, recreational resources, and designated points of access to open space areas and resources in the Flagstaff region. [INSERT MAP]

The *Natural Environment* map illustrates natural resources as well as existing and proposed parks and schools that fit into the overall regional system. Significant slopes and drainages include those of Observatory Mesa (Mars Hill), McMillan Mesa, the base of Mt. Elden and other foothills to the north; and the Rio de Flag, Bow and Arrow, Sinclair, and Switzer Canyon washes. The map indicates the 100-year floodplain, the rural floodplain, and all potential riparian areas. It also highlights wildlife corridors, watchable wildlife opportunities, and Northern Arizona Audubon bird sanctuaries, in addition to plant communities and geological resources.

Much of the perceived open space within the city is only temporary in nature, as many vacant parcels maintain development rights. The City and County will continue to preserve quality open space as much as is feasible but legally, must use the tools identified in this chapter.

## Open Space Planning

Open space is defined and promoted as a community-wide priority in *A Vision for Our Community: Flagstaff 2020* (1997), the main impetus for the OWGWP, as well as in public policies implemented through the *Flagstaff Area Regional Land Use and Transportation Plan* (2001). The City and County have funding mechanisms in place to support acquisition and development of parks, trails, and open space.

In 1996 Arizona adopted the Arizona Preserve Initiative, which encourages preservation of select parcels of State Trust land in and around urban areas as open space to benefit future generations. State Trust lands are sold at public auction. In 2001 and 2002 both the City of Flagstaff and Coconino County petitioned the State Land Department to reclassify certain State Trust lands within the FMPO boundary at Walnut Canyon, Picture Canyon, Observatory Mesa, Old Growth Forest, Rogers Lake, and Ft. Tuthill for eventual acquisition through the Arizona Preserve Initiative. In 2010, the Coconino County Parks and Recreation Department acquired Rogers Lake through this process. In 2012, the City successfully petitioned to reclassify Picture Canyon as suitable for conservation purposes.

Preservation and acquisition efforts have culminated in thousands of acres now conserved as open space: the expansion of Fort Tuthill County Park with an acquisition of State Trust land, preservation of the Dry Lake caldera and conveyance of the land to the Forest Service, County acquisition and preservation of wetlands at Kachina Village, and most recently, the County's acquisition of State Trust lands at Rogers Lake and the City's acquisition of Picture Canyon as described above.

The Flagstaff Urban Trails System (FUTS) provides access to open space and links to rural corridors through trails obtained by acquisitions or easements



Photo by: \_\_\_\_\_ **Ferguson**

(refer to the *Transportation* map for FUTS trails). This plan envisions that National Forest and publicly acquired State Trust lands will form an open space system that, for the most part, surrounds the city geographically and defines county communities. The plan balances the needs of people and ecosystem health to retain and improve pedestrian access to public lands (open space?) within 15 minutes of any neighborhood, preserve important wildlife linkages and habitat, and protect surface water.



Photo by: \_\_\_\_\_ **Ferguson**

The paragraphs below outline environmental and open space planning efforts currently implemented in the Flagstaff region. These plans and implementation tools reveal an inter-agency and institutional framework already at work in planning efforts that includes the City of Flagstaff, Coconino County, Flagstaff Municipal Planning Organization, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona State Land Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and National Park Service, as well as Lowell Observatory, the Naval Observatory, and Camp Navajo. Future planning to identify open space for acquisition and management will benefit from a deliberate collaborative effort between these agencies, private citizens, and non-governmental groups such as Friends of the Rio, Friends of Walnut Canyon, and Habitat Harmony.

The **Coconino County Comprehensive Plan** is a conservation-based planning document built upon a conservation framework and ecological principles. It states that humans are an integral component of the ecosystem, play a crucial role in shaping our environment, and are responsible for proper stewardship of natural areas. The *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan* will be coordinated with the updated Flagstaff Regional Plan policies through an amendment. Coordinated open space planning between the County and City is a priority and will simplify the amendment process.

The **Arizona Game and Fish Department** is proactive in developing and implementing the *Arizona State Wildlife Action Plan (2005-2015)*, *Coconino County Wildlife Linkages Report (March 2011)*, and *Interagency Management Plan for Gunnison's Prairie Dogs*. These plans are based on the premise that the most effective way to conserve rare, declining, or common wildlife is to restore and conserve healthy habitat. Wildlife corridors, habitat areas, and watchable wildlife sites, as established by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, form an important layer within the Flagstaff Regional Plan open space planning maps.

The **Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan** takes into consideration all lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service within the *Flagstaff Regional Plan's* boundaries including the Snowbowl area and the Lake Mary Ecosystem. Among other environmental concerns, the plan high-



Photo by: XXXXXXXX



Photo by: Shaobo Zhang

lights wildlife habitat and riparian waterways. Signed in 1987 and amended many times since, the existing plan is currently undergoing comprehensive revision. The *Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* should be coordinated with *Flagstaff Regional Plan* open space and recreation planning policies.

The U.S. Naval Observatory Flagstaff Station (NOFS) is the Department of Defense dark-sky observing facility for optical and near-infrared astronomy. *The Naval Observatory Station Flagstaff Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan* is therefore a federal plan that requires input and concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The needs of both the Naval and Lowell observatories are highly respected in open space planning.

## How this Plan Addresses Open Space

An important task of this plan is to address where open space should be preserved, thus defining where sustainable urban expansion can occur. Future development should strive to balance preservation of important open space lands for use as wildlife habitat and corridors, riparian waterways, and floodplains, while allowing appropriate urban development.

This plan's primary goal is to maintain Flagstaff's quality of life by balancing development with the retention of open spaces and natural areas. Specific values and objectives include the following:

- Promote an open space green belt that connects rural and urban open spaces
- Link trails
- Contain and direct growth and development
- Develop non-motorized transportation corridors
- Support recreational opportunities
- Protect the area's scenic quality
- Provide wildlife movement corridors
- Preserve wildlife habitat
- Foster healthy watershed and air quality
- Safeguard people and property through flood control
- Preserve significant natural areas characterized by unusual terrain, scenic vistas, unique geologic formations, intact or unique vegetation, or wildlife habitat.
- Utilize open space to prevent encroachment into floodplains.
- Preserve open space for future land use needs.
- Provide urban parks and open space around compact building development.
- Preserve a buffer between urban development and national forest.

In addition, the Picture Canyon Working Group recommends that the vision to create the "Picture Canyon Preserve and Archaeological Park" be implemented as part of the Flagstaff Regional Plan. Picture Canyon fully embodies the values and objectives listed above and will serve as an everlasting tribute to the unique characteristics and qualities of our region.

While open space conservation is a goal set forth in the *Flagstaff Regional Plan*, the intent is not to take away development rights that currently exist. This discussion of our open space resources merely highlights the important

ecological and sensitive features of our community and offers tools that can be used to conserve our unique resources.



Photo by: Sarah Lynn Hamilton

## TOOLS FOR OPEN SPACE PLANNING, ACQUISITION AND CONSERVATION

- 1. Conservation Easements:** These are used throughout the United States to permanently protect land from development by purchasing or donating land for tax benefits. A conservation easement is a voluntary, legally binding agreement that limits certain types of uses while protecting the property's ecological services and open space values. Conservation easements can be held by a private non-profit land trust or a governmental agency.
- 2. Open Space Acquisitions - Coconino County:** In 2002, Coconino County voters approved the Coconino Parks and Open Space Tax (CPOS), which is funded with a 1/8 of 1 cent sales tax (approximately \$1.63 per month per person) for a maximum fund amount of \$33 million. The voters supported this ballot measure to acquire open space, redevelop existing county parks, and develop new parks. Since 2002, over 2,300 acres of open space has been acquired and new park development has been completed. In order to engage in future open space acquisitions, consideration should be given to a reauthorization of the CPOS tax that will require voter approval by 2014.
- 3. Open Space Acquisitions - City of Flagstaff:** In 2004, Flagstaff voters authorized a bond issue up to \$7.6 million for "Neighborhood Open Space and FUTS Land Acquisition" over a 10-year period (2004-2014). To date, \$6.7 million has been allocated by the City for the purposes of acquiring open space, including Picture Canyon, which was purchased in 2011 from State Trust land. Reauthorization of bond financing for open space acquisition would require voter approval in 2014.
- 4. Conservation Financing:** Taxes and bonds are two ways to finance public investment in open space. Other financing mechanisms to consider are Arizona Growing Smarter Grants, Development Impact Fees, and Infrastructure Financing Districts. A number of financing opportunities may need to be combined to acquire, preserve, and manage the desired open space and trail system.
- 5. Purchase of Development Rights:** The ownership of land may be considered to be possession of a "bundle of rights" associated with that land. These rights include the right to possess, use, modify, develop, lease, or sell the land. The purchase of development rights involves the voluntary

### Open Space Community Partners

Cooperation among partners including government agencies and non-profits can result in effective conservation measures and maximum optimization of all conservation options. A Land Trust to manage conservation lands currently does not exist in the northern Arizona region although the Diablo Trust, which protects existing ranch lands and collaborates with the Central Arizona Land Trust ([www.centrallandtrust.org](http://www.centrallandtrust.org)), could possibly be called upon to advise or even act as an interim manager if the community so decides.

### Non-Profit Partners

Grand Canyon Trust  
Central Arizona Land Trust  
Friends of Walnut Canyon  
Picture Canyon Working Group  
Friends of Coconino County Parks  
Friends of the Rio  
Friends of Flagstaff's Future  
Habitat Harmony  
Friends of Northern Arizona Forests  
Nature Conservancy

sale of that right while leaving all the remaining rights as before. The purchase may be made by a non-profit land trust or local government. Once an agreement is made, a permanent deed restriction is placed on the property that restricts the types of activity that may take place on the land in perpetuity. In this way, the parcel remains as agricultural or as open (green) space forever.

6. **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR):** Arizona State law allows developers in urban “receiving” areas to buy development rights to land in rural “sending” areas; the transfer of rights allows the developers to increase the density of their developments on the receiving property. Development of the “sending” land is prohibited through an easement, but the landowner retains ownership, including the right to use the land for such uses as open space, farming, and forestry.
7. **Zoning:** The Public Lands Forest (PLF) Zone applies to areas of the city designated as National Forest, state, county, and municipal permanent open space/preserve lands. Once a parcel is purchased, traded, or donated for open space in the city, a zoning change to PLF status needs to recognize the new designation. The County Zoning Ordinance also includes an Open Space and Conservation Zone for the purpose of zoning open space.
8. **Green Infrastructure:** This map overlays open space, parks, recreation, trails, environmental conservation areas, wildlife corridors and habitats, and water ways in what is known as the region’s “green infrastructure.” This could be the precursor to a “Conservation Land System.”
9. **Conservation Land System (CLS):** A CLS is a set of lands managed or set aside for conservation purposes including areas of biological, cultural, and historical significance. Conservation can be achieved through a variety of means including acquisition, conservation easement, transfer of development rights, conservation-based ordinances and guidelines, and intergovernmental agreements.

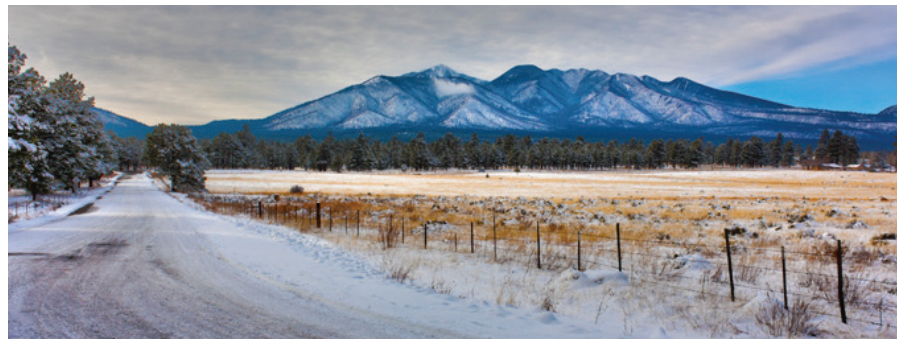


Photo by: \_\_\_\_\_ **Ferguson**

## GOALS AND POLICIES - OPEN SPACE



Goal OS.1. Ensure that the region has a system of open lands, such as natural areas, wildlife corridors and habitat areas, trails, and greenways to support the natural environment that sustains our quality of life, cultural heritage, and ecosystem health.

**POLICY OS.1.1.** Establish a Conservation Land System supported by stakeholders (federal, state, city, county, non-profit, and interested citizens) to inventory, map, update, and manage the region’s “green infrastructure” including open space planning, acquisition, conservation, protection, and long-term management and maintenance.”

**POLICY OS.1.2.** Preserve natural lands and priority open lands as opportunities for non-motorized connectivity and for people to interact with nature.

**POLICY OS.1.3.** Use open spaces as natural environment buffer zones to protect scenic views and roadways, separate disparate uses, and to separate private development from public lands, scenic by-ways, and wildlife habitats.