



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*. 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.

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.

The *Flagstaff Area Open Spaces and Greenways Plan (OSGWP)*, an interagency guide adopted in 1998, classifies open space into a hierarchy of five categories below intended to deliver a full range of open space values. Participating agencies included 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.

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Helpful Terms

“Open Space” - undeveloped or minimally developed lands that have been designated to remain undeveloped, be preserved to protect natural resources, serve as a buffer, and provide opportunities for recreation that requires no facilities. Such recreational uses include walking, trail running, biking, photography, and sitting quietly. Open spaces differ from parks in that open spaces do not have the developed facilities that are traditionally associated with city parks, such as stadium-style lighting, bleachers, playground equipment, and competitive sports fields.

Our Vision for the Future

In 2030, the Flagstaff region maintains a healthy system of open lands supporting the natural environment and our quality of life through stewardship by regional stakeholders.



Photo by: Jeremy Ferguson



Photo by: Jeremy Ferguson

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.

Primitive—exhibits natural conditions with little evidence of current human activities.

Semi-primitive—shows some evidence of past human activities, but retains substantially natural-appearing conditions; access is restricted and the area serves as key or high quality wildlife habitat.

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.

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.

Cultural/Historical/Recreational—highly modified by human facilities, including developed recreation sites and a combination of natural and modified landscapes.

Natural Resources and 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.

Maps 6, 7 and 8 provide a comprehensive inventory of open space areas, recreational resources, and designated points of access to open space areas and resources in the Flagstaff region. These maps should be used by the City and County Open Space Commissions when developing their strategic plans. 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. Map 8 indicates water courses and washes as well as 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 actually vacant parcels with 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 for open space planning, acquisition, and conservation.

Open Space Planning

Open space is defined and promoted as a community-wide priority in *A Vision for Our Community: Flagstaff 2020* (1997), and was the main impetus for the *OSGWP*. Public policies implemented through the *Flagstaff Area Regional Land Use and Transportation Plan* (2001) also provide for open space planning. 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 Fort Tuthill for eventual acquisition through the Arizona

Preserve Initiative. In 2010, Coconino County acquired Rogers Lake through this process. In 2012, the City successfully acquired 477.8 acres of land at Picture Canyon for conservation purposes.

Preservation and acquisition efforts have culminated in thousands of acres now conserved as open space: 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 (FUTS Map 27). 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 open space within 15 minutes of any neighborhood, preserve important wildlife linkages and habitat, and protect surface water.

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* (2003) 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. Coordinated open space planning between the County and City is a priority.

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 highlights 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 street ends like most Flagstaff streets still do, in spite of the demands of development, where open space and urban trails begin.”
- Roxanne George, “The View from Here: Contemporary Essays by Flagstaff Authors”

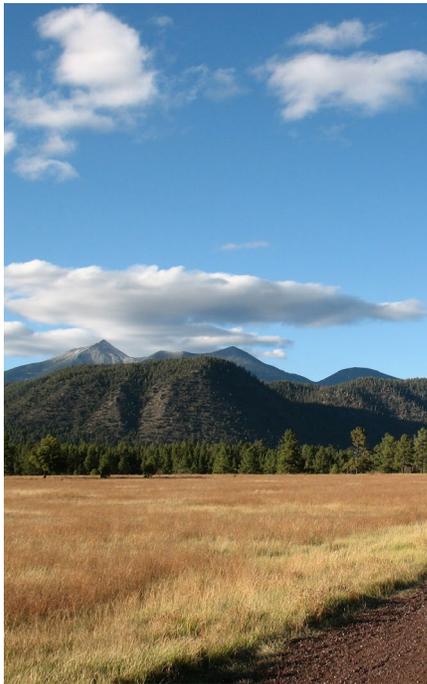


Photo credit: City of Flagstaff



Photo by: Shaobo Zhang

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.

Applying an Open Space Plan

An important task of this Plan is to address where open space should be preserved, regardless of ownership, thus defining where sustainable urban expansion can occur. As described in Chapter IV - Environmental Planning and Conservation, future development should strive to balance the preservation of important open space lands for use as wildlife habitat and corridors, riparian waterways, and floodplains, while allowing appropriate urban development in less sensitive areas.

One of this Plan's goals 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:

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), 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

- 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
- Protect lands with significant historic or cultural resources
- Provide wildlife movement corridors
- Preserve wildlife habitat
- Foster healthy watershed and air quality
- Safeguard people and property through flood control and by limiting development in flood prone areas
- Utilize open space to prevent encroachment into floodplains.
- Preserve significant natural areas characterized by unusual terrain, scenic vistas, unique geologic formations, intact or unique vegetation, or wildlife habitat
- 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 lands.

With the purchase of Picture Canyon by the City of Flagstaff in December 2012 the vision to create the Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve as permanent designated open space will be realized. 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.

89% of residents favor the preservation of open space within the City.

- 2010 Community Values Survey

Open space lands that have been designated for open space purposes are intended for protection through various mechanisms, including but not limited to, conservation easements, conservation financing, zoning designation, and purchase of development rights (refer to “Tools for Open Space Planning, Acquisition, and Conservation”). Lands designated as open space and which have been protected from development may include a complex mosaic of undeveloped or minimally developed lands with a wide variety of qualities, values, and purposes, including natural areas, heritage and cultural areas, parks and recreation areas, agricultural lands, trails, and scenic views, viewsheds, and vistas. Private land may only be included as designated open space at the request of the land owner. Open space lands do not include vacant land that may be publicly- or privately-owned.

OPEN SPACE GOALS AND POLICIES



Goal OS.1. The region has a system of open lands, such as undeveloped natural areas, wildlife corridors and habitat areas, trails, access to public lands, 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. While observing private property rights, preserve natural resources and priority open lands, under the general guidance of the *Flagstaff Area Open Space and Greenways Plan* and the Natural Environment maps.

Policy OS.1.3. Use open spaces as natural environment buffer zones to protect scenic views and cultural resources, separate disparate uses, and separate private development from public lands, scenic byways, and wildlife habitats.

Policy OS.1.4. Use open space as opportunities for non-motorized connectivity, to interact with nature, and to enjoy the views and quiet.

Policy OS.1.5. Integrate open space qualities into the built environment.

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 2012 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 and its associated zoning. These rights include the right to possess, use, modify, develop, lease, or sell the land. The purchase of development rights involves the voluntary 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 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:** Within the City the Public Lands Forest (PLF) Zone applies to areas of the city designated as National Forest while the Public Open Space (POS) Zone may be applied to areas that are appropriate for designation as public open space to allow for resource protection in an essentially undeveloped state. Once a parcel is purchased, traded, or donated for open space in the City, a zoning change to POS status should occur 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:** Map 8 (in Chapter IV - Environmental Planning and Conservation) includes 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 Conservation Lands System is intended to be a combined city/county system that includes the FUTS, City and County parks, natural areas and open space, and the different organizations administering or connecting to those areas (e.g. City and County, Forest Service, Museum of Northern Arizona, etc.). Participation of the City and County in the Conservation Lands System is essential to its success. The purpose of the system is to coordinate the different types of uses and organizations so that they work together for public benefit. Examples of where coordination has been accomplished or is ongoing are the connection of FUTS to the County trail system at Fort Tuthill County Park with connectivity to the Flagstaff Loop Trail and US Forest Service Trails and connecting Thorpe Park to the FUTS which may connect through Observatory Mesa to Forest Service trails.