

Association of Bay Area Governments
ABAG Administrative Committee

January 10, 2025

Agenda Item 10a

Priority Conservation Area Amendment Progress and Call for New Nominations

Subject:

Update on amending existing Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) and upcoming call for new PCA nominations.

Background:

PCAs are a set of 185 geographies nominated through a voluntary, locally-driven process by cities, counties, and park/open space districts, and then designated by ABAG. The PCAs identify natural habitats, farms and ranchlands, recreation areas, urban green spaces and locations that can help fight the effects of climate change. The PCA planning framework was originally developed in 2007 and received a minor update in 2014. Between 2022 and 2024, MTC/ABAG staff worked with partners and stakeholders in the region to develop a major update to the PCA planning framework. At the May 16, 2024 ABAG Executive Board, the [Priority Conservation Area Refresh Final Report](https://mtc.ca.gov/digital-library/5030093-priority-conservation-area-refresh-final-report) (<https://mtc.ca.gov/digital-library/5030093-priority-conservation-area-refresh-final-report>) was approved. The Refresh added data and structure to the PCA planning framework to address past deficiencies in the framework that hindered the use of PCAs for analysis, planning, and advocacy. The Refresh also integrated equity and climate change into the framework. These changes will enable PCA geographies to be used as a planning datasets for future iterations of Plan Bay Area and be integrated into the Plan Bay Area 2050+ Implementation Plan. In addition to approving the Refresh Final Report, the Executive Board directed staff to work with local governments to evaluate and amend non-conforming existing PCAs.

Over summer and fall 2024, MTC/ABAG staff have reconnected with local jurisdiction PCA lead staff, sharing evaluations of each PCA and possible approaches to bring existing PCAs into compliance with the updated planning framework. Over that period, local jurisdictions have proposed amendments to 113 of the 180+ existing PCAs. MTC/ABAG staff will continue to work with local jurisdiction staff to amend the remaining PCAs as part of the upcoming call for new PCA nominations.

Typically a call for new PCA geographies is opened every four years, often at the same time as Priority Development Areas and Priority Production Areas. However, given the development of the updated PCA planning framework, that opportunity has been delayed. MTC/ABAG staff plans on opening a window for new PCA nominations this winter, accepting new nominations through spring 2025.

Status of Amending Existing PCAs

The updated planning framework made three key changes that resulted in the need to amend most PCAs:

1. PCAs incorporated data to determine where there were particularly high conservation values and/or where there were significant conservation, recreation, or greening needs. The mapped data was used to create eligibility maps that ensure greater consistency across the region.
2. PCA types were further characterized by whether they fell inside and outside of city limits or urban growth boundaries (UGBs). Urban Greening PCAs were reserved for areas inside community limits (UGBs or city limits where UGBs does not exist) while Working Land and most Natural Land areas were reserved for areas outside community limits. Recreation and Climate Adaptation PCAs can occur anywhere in the region.
3. PCA boundaries could not overlap with one another. The prior framework had resulted in many areas of the region being covered by two and as many as eight PCAs. By consolidating areas of overlap, the amendments will make future data management and analyses clearer, ensuring area-based summaries do not double count the same areas.

Over a two-month period, 21 jurisdictions made amendments to 113 PCAs representing over 60% of all existing PCAs. To amend PCAs, jurisdictions often made one or more of the following changes to a PCA:

- A. Change the boundary to meet the above criteria.
- B. Change the designated types to meet the eligibility criteria.
- C. Split the PCA into two, often associating different PCA types for each section.

16 jurisdictions responsible for a combined 30 PCAs did not submit amendments during the summer 2024 window. The primary reason these jurisdictions did not submit a nomination was related to local capacity. MTC/ABAG staff will continue to work with these jurisdictions in the months ahead with a goal of moving these non-compliant PCAs into consistency with the updated framework.

An additional 5 jurisdictions made some amendments but held back 39 PCAs to incorporate a more strategic approach during the call for new PCA nominations. PCAs that were not amended and that do not meet the PCA planning framework criteria will be labeled as non-conforming PCAs and will be invited to submit an amendment as part of the 2025 call for new PCA nominations.

Call for New PCA Nominations:

ABAG last opened a call for new PCA nominations in 2019. A call for new PCAs had been delayed to allow the PCA Refresh to finalize an updated planning framework and to allow for an initial round of existing PCA amendments. Local governments will be invited to nominate new PCAs this winter and spring that conform to the refreshed planning framework. In addition to the nomination of new PCAs, as noted above non-conforming existing PCAs will have another opportunity to propose amendments to align with the refreshed framework. There are four steps in the PCA nomination process:

1. **Local governments submit a nomination request.** A town, city, county, or local special district (e.g. parks or open space authority) uses an online mapping tool to submit a PCA geography complete with key attribute information: PCA name, PCA type(s), and local contact information.
2. **ABAG/MTC staff review eligibility.** Regional staff will confirm nominations meet the PCA eligibility criteria and that there are no overlapping PCA nominations from multiple agencies (e.g. county and open space authority). Staff will aim to provide feedback within three business days and commit to providing feedback within ten business days.
3. **Local boards/councils adopt nomination resolutions.** A town, city, county, or special district board/council signs a resolution to formalize the nomination.

4. **ABAG Executive Board designates PCAs.** After bringing a recommendation to the ABAG Administrative Committee this summer, staff will bring PCA nominations to the Executive Board for final approval.

Additional resources will be available to support the local jurisdiction nomination process. An online mapping tool will allow jurisdictions to use a range of conservation datasets to inform where PCA boundaries are drawn and the tool will allow for new PCAs to be directly submitted through the tool. In addition to the mapping tool, ABAG/MTC staff will share a nomination briefier, presentation slides, memo materials, and sample local resolution that can be edited by local staff to support the nomination process. These materials will be available on the [ABAG PCA webpage](https://abag.ca.gov/PCA) (<https://abag.ca.gov/PCA>). A webinar at the start of the nomination window is planned and will describe the nomination process and answer questions from local jurisdiction staff, which will be recorded and posted to the PCA webpage as a resource. Finally, ABAG/MTC staff will send individualized emails to Bay Area cities with equity priority communities that have not previously nominated PCAs, offering additional support with the nomination process, if desired.

Next Steps:

ABAG/MTC staff will send emails to local planning directors, the PCA mailing list, and other relevant contacts to announce the call for new PCAs and include a link to the planned webinar. Staff will proactively engage with jurisdictions with Equity Priority Communities without PCAs to increase awareness of this designation opportunity in jurisdictions that may have greater capacity constraints. Staff will also coordinate the timeline of future PCA nominations and amendments with the second round OBAG Cycle 3 PCA Grant Call for Projects to ensure both new and newly amended PCAs are eligible for this funding opportunity.

Issues:

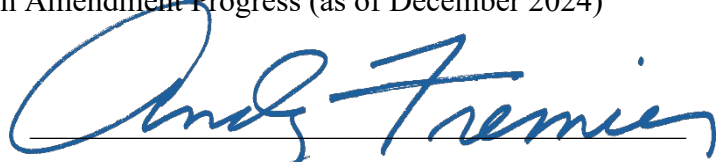
None identified.

Recommendation:

Information.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Table of PCAs Consistent with Amended Framework
- Attachment B: Table of Jurisdictions with Existing PCAs Still in Need of Amendments
- Attachment C: Map of PCA Refresh Amendment Progress (as of December 2024)



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