

**Association of Bay Area Governments
ABAG Administrative Committee**

September 12, 2025

Agenda Item 10b

**ABAG Resolution No. 11-2025. Adoption of Revised and New Priority Conservation Areas:
Geography Designation**

Subject:

Approval of proposed amendments to 173 existing Priority Conservation Area (PCAs) and approval of 69 proposed PCA nominations.

Background:

PCAs are a set of geographies nominated through a voluntary, locally-driven process by cities, counties, and park/open space districts, and then designated by ABAG. Although PCAs identify opportunities for land preservation and enhancement, PCA designation does not affect land use rights or override local zoning.

The PCA planning framework was first developed in 2007, but it underwent a significant update between 2022 and 2024. In May 2024, the ABAG Executive Board approved the [PCA Refresh Final Report \(Refresh\)](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>), finalizing two years of work with regional partners and stakeholders. The Refresh addressed deficiencies in the prior framework that hindered PCA analysis, planning, and advocacy. The Executive Board also directed staff to work with local governments to evaluate and amend non-conforming PCAs and to accept new nominations.

From summer 2024 to summer 2025, MTC/ABAG staff engaged with local government staff, sharing evaluations of existing PCAs and recommendations to bring them into compliance with the updated framework. During this period, 100% of PCAs needing amendments were amended. On February 13, 2025, a call for new PCA nominations was announced, resulting in 15 jurisdictions nominating 69 new PCAs. For more information on PCAs nominations, refer to Attachments B and C. Adoption of the resolution will maintain the eligibility of these PCAs for future rounds of the PCA Grant Program, while allowing new PCAs to be eligible as well.

PCA Designations:

The PCA designation process creates a map of areas that have the potential for conservation, enhancement, restoration and public access. Specific projects within designated PCAs may be eligible for future funding from the [PCA Grant Program](https://mtc.ca.gov/funding/funding-opportunities/priority-conservation-area-pca-grants) (<https://mtc.ca.gov/funding/funding-opportunities/priority-conservation-area-pca-grants>), which helps local governments, park districts, utility districts and other agencies protect or enhance properties designated as PCAs. PCAs are defined by two elements: (1) a mapped polygon geography, and (2) a designation as one or more of the five PCA types:

- Natural Lands
- Working Lands
- Urban Greening
- Recreation
- Climate Adaptation (*must be paired with a second PCA type*)

Distinctions are made between PCAs inside and outside community limits (defined as city limits or urban growth boundaries). Urban Greening PCAs are reserved for areas within community limits, while Working and most Natural Lands are reserved for areas outside them.

Existing PCA Amendments:

Upon completion of the Refresh, amendments were required to conform existing PCAs to the updated Refresh criteria over the past year. PCAs were required to eliminate any overlap between existing PCAs and conform to new data-informed requirements for PCA type designations. Amendments improved clarity in data management, supported consistent regional analysis, and ensured that PCAs designated under specific types met minimum, data-supported eligibility criteria. During the amendment process, MTC/ABAG staff held office hours with local staff to discuss amendments one-on-one and identify mapping changes. PCA amendments included revising mapped boundaries, changing PCA types, or a combination of both. All existing PCAs were amended to align with the new standards.

Amendments to Regional Trail PCAs:

The amendments include changes to four long-standing PCAs associated with the Bay Trail, Ridge Trail, Water Trail, and Coastal Trail. These regional trails were originally nominated in earlier rounds by the San Francisco Bay Trail Project in 2008 and San Mateo County on behalf of the State Coastal Conservancy in 2015. Amendments made in 2025 adjust the Bay and Ridge Trail designation from Natural Land to Recreation and reduce mapped coverage to eliminate overlaps with other PCAs, in order to ensure consistency with the updated planning framework. The Water Trail and Coastal Trail PCAs were similarly adjusted to remove overlaps.

Given the unique scale of these trail systems, the jurisdiction associated with these amendments has been classified as “Regional”, as each trail spans multiple counties and jurisdictions and therefore does not belong to any single nominating agency. For example, the Coastal Trail was originally nominated by San Mateo County but extends into Marin and other counties.

Although these PCA amendments are classified as “Regional”, it is important to note that jurisdictions and agencies would still be eligible to submit grant proposals for any PCA projects that may be located along relevant trail segments located within their boundaries. The amendment maintains PCA grant eligibility established by the original designation.

New PCA Nominations:

The 2025 call for new PCA nominations, the first call since 2019, opened from February 13 to May 2, 2025. An update was provided to the ABAG Administrative Committee on January 10, 2025, before the call was released. The nomination process included the following steps:

- **A town, city, county, or local special district** (e.g. parks or open space authority) used an online mapping tool to submit a nomination request by May 2, 2025.
- **ABAG/MTC staff reviewed submissions for eligibility** in alignment with the PCA Refresh framework, provided feedback within 3 to 10 business days, and coordinated directly with local governments to resolve any issues.
- **Local boards and councils adopted resolutions formally nominating the PCA** by July 25, 2025.

A suite of resources and targeted outreach supported local jurisdiction nomination process. An online mapping tool acted as a one-stop-shop for drawing, submitting, and editing PCA nominations, displaying a range of key datasets to inform where jurisdiction staff drew new boundaries. ABAG/MTC staff also developed a suite of resources to support local nominations, including a nomination briefier, a draft presentation template, a draft memo template, and a sample local resolution. These materials were available on the ABAG PCA webpage (<https://abag.ca.gov/PCA>). A webinar was held on March 4, 2025, at 11:00 am to share the nomination process and resources with local staff and answer initial questions; a recording of the webinar was posted to the website. Finally, ABAG/MTC staff sent individualized emails to Bay Area cities with Equity Priority Communities (EPCs) that had not previously nominated PCAs to offer additional support with the nomination process, if desired.

A total of 69 PCAs from 15 jurisdictions, covering a total of 133,000 acres, were nominated during the PCA nomination window.

Jurisdiction Feedback on PCA Amendment and Nomination Process

Local governments generally responded positively to the PCA mapping tool and associated resources. Most used the tool to submit nominations, citing its convenience and minimal information requirements. A primary motivation for most jurisdictions that nominated PCAs was to become eligible for the PCA grant program.

Some local staff did experience coordination challenges during the amendment process, particularly those who were contending with other competing local priorities or staff turnover. Staff also sought further clarification on the broad spectrum of PCA types, including how they apply in urban, suburban, and rural contexts. In response to jurisdiction feedback, staff developed enhanced mapping resources between the amendment process in 2024 and 2025 and clarified that PCA designation does not affect land use rights or override local zoning.

Recommendation:

Staff requests that the ABAG Administrative Committee approve and refer ABAG Resolution No. 11-2025 amending 173 PCAs and nominating 69 PCAs to the ABAG Executive Board for approval.

Next Steps:

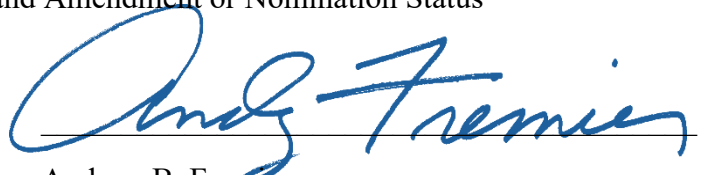
ABAG/MTC staff will maintain the PCA Mapping Viewer and data resources to ensure public access to PCA data. In both Plan Bay Area 2050+ and Plan Bay Area 2060, staff will further explore how PCAs can support both near-term implementation and long-range planning priorities.

Issues:

None identified.

Attachment:

- Attachment A: ABAG Resolution No. 11-2025
- Attachment B: Table of All PCAs and Amendment or Nomination Status
- Attachment C: Map of All PCAs and Amendment or Nomination Status



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