



City of Irvine 2015 Program Synopsis

Open Space



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The City of Irvine is the largest city area-wise in Orange County at 66 square miles, with a total sphere of influence of 74 square miles. Its lineage dates back to the 1860s when James Irvine became part owner of what would eventually become the Irvine Ranch, a vast expanse of open space devoted to sheep grazing and field crops.

Since incorporation in 1971 when its population was a mere 12,500, the preservation of open space and the provision of abundant parks, recreation and public places has been one of the City of Irvine's top priorities. The City's vision strives to balance community development with the preservation of the natural environment. To this end, Irvine has preserved more than 16,000 acres of total land area through various efforts, including the City's current inventory of 37 local neighborhood public parks and 19 community public parks. More than one-third of the entire city has been or will eventually be preserved as parks, trails and natural wild lands, protecting some of the most important and stunning chaparral landscapes in California.

A key component of Irvine's preservation efforts is the landmark Irvine Open Space Initiative that was overwhelmingly approved by residents in 1988. The historic initiative enables the City to preserve important conservation and open space resources through a program that consolidates large, contiguous open space areas under public ownership as phased, master-planned growth occurs in other areas of the city.

As a result of the 1988 Open Space Initiative and the partnerships it created, the City will set aside approximately 9,000 acres that are preserved natural habitats and wildlands.

Irvine's Open Space is made up of a mosaic of habitats including wetlands, oak woodlands and coastal sage scrub, and houses some of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the world. This scenic land provides both preservation of critically important plants and wildlife, as well as areas for recreation and respite.

An integral component of Irvine's Open Space program is an outstanding trail system. Trails meander throughout the entire city, linking villages and parks and enabling residents to walk or ride bikes—and on some sections, horses—to distant parts of town. Hiking and riding opportunities abound as a result of the city's thoughtfully planned open space network. And more opportunities are on the horizon. As other long-planned villages are built, new parks become available, more links are added to the city's trail system, and other recreational possibilities are explored.

To facilitate public access to the dedicated open space land, a joint venture was initiated in 2006 between the City of Irvine, The Irvine Ranch Conservancy and Irvine Company. As part of that venture, many access and trail opportunities are either under construction or planned.

Several open space restoration projects are ongoing within the City. Portions of Bommer Canyon are being re-vegetated with Coastal Sage Scrub, Oak Woodland, and riparian habitats. Both Bommer and Shady Canyons continue to be treated to remove non-native vegetation to increase the health and biodiversity of the preserve. The City of Irvine works cooperatively with The Nature Conservancy, The Nature Reserve of Orange County and local developers to increase the habitat value of the preserve.

In April 2007, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger designated Irvine's Bommer Canyon, along with over 50,000 acres of Irvine Ranch Conservancy land as a California National Landmark. The designation is the first under a state program that officially recognizes and promotes both private and public stewardship of natural resources for public benefit in the state of California.

The land included in the Landmark designation contains some of the state's most beautiful wilderness and is home to hundreds of species of plants and animals. Conservation scientists have identified the region as one of the world's largest ecological "hot spots" – an area with large concentrations of species found nowhere else.

The City of Irvine is proud to join with all our partners for the honor of having this beautiful open space region distinguished as a natural area of statewide significance. The designation is a testament to the value of these lands and to the vision, partnerships and preservation efforts needed to accomplish it. As we look to the beautiful natural open space that surrounds us, we cannot help but appreciate the efforts of Irvine citizens and city leaders to ensure that preservation of open space would be a key priority within the development of our master plan.

The City's partner in managing and providing public access to Irvine's Open Space Preserve is the Irvine Ranch Conservancy. The Conservancy is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization created in 2005 to help protect the natural open spaces on the historic Irvine Ranch and enhance the public's connection to them, while helping partners and landowners with all aspects of stewardship.

The City and Conservancy work together through a contractual Management Agreement, under which the Conservancy provides specific, measurable land management and public programs objectives to the City and its residents. The Conservancy offers a wide variety of free outdoor programs for all nature enthusiasts including hiking, mountain biking, horse-back riding and much more. The City oversees the work and ensures that the programs and projects provided are of the highest quality. For more information, visit www.irconservancy.org.

The City of Irvine has leveraged its resources, both physical and financial, to create a community that provides a wide range of housing opportunities, an interconnected system of hiking and bike trails, an abundance of community parks and facilities, and the preservation of the area's natural environment.

Irvine’s open space program is reflective of the vision articulated in the City’s General Plan to “permanently protect and preserve designated conservation and open space areas as development of designated commercial, industrial, institutional, and residential areas occurs.” It is the essence of master planning – the integration of the built environment and the natural environment.

For more information on City of Irvine’s open space program, contact:

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