

## 6 Open Space and Conservation

Natural and cultural resources provide critical social, recreational, educational, and health benefits to the residents of San Pablo. This chapter discusses open space resources, biological resources, water resources, and historical resources in the Planning Area.

### Open Space Resources

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An open space is defined as any parcel of land that is essentially unimproved and undeveloped, including ridges and slopes, creeks, unique natural areas, wildlife habitats, and areas suitable for nature study. The current General Plan refers to State Government Code Section 65560 in establishing the following structure to aid in the preservation of open space, identifying four separate open space categories:

- *Open space for public health and safety*, including areas that require special management or regulation due to hazardous or special conditions. This may include earthquake fault zones, unstable soil areas, floodplains, watersheds, areas presenting high fire risks, and areas required for the protection of water quality and water reservoirs.
- *Open space for the preservation of natural resources*, including areas required for the preservation of plant and animal life, such as habitat for fish and wildlife species.
- *Open space use for the managed production of resources*, including forest lands, rangeland, agricultural lands, and areas of economic importance for the production of food or fiber; areas required for recharge of groundwater basins; and marshes, rivers, or streams that are important for the management of commercial fisheries.
- *Open space for outdoor recreation*, including areas of outstanding scenic, historic, and cultural value; areas particularly suited for park and recreation purposes; and areas that serve as links between major recreation and open space reservations.

Although San Pablo is largely urban and built-out, open space areas do exist in the Planning Area. There are notable areas of open space near creek banks and on hillsides north of San Pablo Dam Road and to the east of Interstate 80. These hillsides have remained as open space due to safety considerations because the steep slopes are susceptible to seismic activity as well as wildfire risks. St. Joseph Cemetery contains 58 acres of open space along Church Lane and El Portal Drive.

Just to the east of the Planning Area is the Wildcat Canyon Regional Park, a significant open space area within the East Bay Regional Park District. This area includes several hiking trails, including Wildcat Creek Trail, which connects to the Bay Area Ridge Trail further to the east, and the San Pablo Ridge Trail. The historic Alvarado Park and Alvarado Canyon is just south of the Planning Area off of McBryde Avenue.

To the west of the city, running north-south along Richmond Parkway, is the San Francisco Bay Trail. The Bay Trail is a planned 500-mile shoreline walking and cycling path around the entire San Francisco Bay

running through all nine Bay Area counties and crossing seven bridges. The Bay Trail currently has over 350 miles in place. The Wildcat Creek Trail, which itself is not contiguous and has multiple connection gaps, is almost connected to the Bay Trail, but there is currently an approximately 0.29-mile gap between the two trails that runs west from Rumrill Boulevard through San Pablo's industrial corridor to the west of the BNSF and Union Pacific railroad tracks.<sup>1</sup>

The Bay Area Ridge Trail is another regional effort to connect the ridges encircling the Bay Area into a continuous park with a 550-mile Ridge Trail. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council continues to work with partners and advocates to reach its goal, with over 400 miles that are open as of December 2021, including dedicated trails through Wildcat Canyon and Sobrante Ridge Preserve.<sup>2</sup> However, there is a gap in the San Pablo vicinity near the Pinole Watershed. Gap closure fundraising efforts for both the San Francisco Bay and Bay Area Ridge trails is currently underway.

## **WILDCAT CREEK RESTORATION AND GREENWAY TRAIL**

Recognizing the importance of Wildcat Creek both as a natural habitat and as open space for the community, the City of San Pablo undertook the Wildcat Creek Restoration and Greenway Trail Project in 2017 to restore 2,200 linear feet of the Creek between Vale Road and Church Lane. Construction was completed and the Greenway Trail opened in spring of 2021. The restored creek includes refuge areas for fish, a modified floodplain to accommodate larger flow volumes and reduce erosion, reduced concrete in the creek, new bioretention facilities to filter storm water and improve water quality, and the re-planting of native plants on the restored bank. In addition to the restored natural habitat, the project also includes a shared-use path for bicyclists and pedestrians. Community access to Wildcat Creek and the new path is promoted through a number of parklets along the creek as well as seating areas and pedestrian-scale lighting. Other segments of creek trail exist to the north of Church Lane adjacent to the Senior Center and former City Hall site and along Davis Park further north and west.

## **Biological Resources**

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The City of San Pablo is located in the Bay Area-Delta bioregion. This bioregion contains the populous San Francisco Bay Area and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. The Bay Delta System is regarded as one of the most important water bodies in California, supporting recreational, commercial, biological, agricultural, and urban uses. The bioregion comprises a variety of ecosystems such as fresh and saline emergent wetlands, perennial and annual grasslands, coastal scrub, coastal and valley oak woodland, estuarine, and chaparral. Although San Pablo is one of the smallest and most urbanized cities in Contra Costa County, valuable biological resources still exist within the Planning Area.

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<sup>1</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Commission, "Bay Trail Interactive Map," <https://mtc.ca.gov/operations/regional-trails-parks/san-francisco-bay-trail>, accessed March 27, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Bay Area Ridge Trail, "About us," <https://ridgetrail.org/>, accessed March 27, 2023.

Figure 6-1:Vegetation



- Vegetation Type**
- Moderate Grasslands
  - Non-Native / Ornamental Grass
  - Non-Native / Ornamental Hardwood
  - Coast Live Oak Forest / Woodland
  - Central Coast Riparian Forests
  - Blue Oak Forest / Woodland
  - Eucalyptus
  - Urban

- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Major Highway
- Major Roads
- Railroads



SOURCE: Coarse Filter Vegetation Map, Conservation Lands Network, 2019 (Data Accessed June, 2021); City of San Pablo, 2021; Contra Costa County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

## VEGETATION AND HABITAT

Figure 6-1 shows the distribution of vegetation habitats throughout the Planning Area. The Planning Area is 90.1 percent urban. The remaining 10 percent is composed of the following vegetation types, as classified by the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System: non-native/ornamental grass (3.2 percent), central coast riparian forests (2.3 percent), moderate grasslands (1.7 percent), non-native/ornamental hardwood (1.6 percent), coast live oak forests/woodland (1.0 percent), eucalyptus (0.1 percent), and blue oak forest/woodland (less than 0.1 percent). To the east, San Pablo extends to Alvarado Park and Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. Small patches of grasslands, coast live oak forest, ornamental hardwood, and eucalyptus, are found on the east end of the Planning Area, which are extensions of the larger grassland and woodland habitat found in the regional parks.

Running along San Pablo Creek is a segment of central coast riparian forest. Riparian refers to the vital habitat connections between aquatic and terrestrial environments. These are areas of great biological productivity because water and nutrient-rich sediments from repeated flooding are abundant. Riparian forests, such as the one along San Pablo Creek, cast shade on streams and creeks, which protects fish from high water temperatures. Birds are especially attracted to riparian forest habitats for nest sites and food supply. Importantly, riparian habitats both absorb large quantities and slow the speed of floodwaters.<sup>3</sup> Although much of the extent of San Pablo, as well as Wildcat and Rheem Creeks, has been disturbed, the waterways include important aquatic habitat areas, providing resources and movement corridors to flora and fauna.

## SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES AND CRITICAL HABITAT

Figure 6-2 shows the distribution of special status species and critical habitats located within and in the vicinity of the Planning Area. Special status species are those plants and animals that, because of their acknowledged rarity or vulnerability to various causes of habitat loss or population decline, are recognized in some fashion by federal, state, or other agencies as deserving special consideration. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) maintains the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB), a database for tracking all species considered to be at-risk, rare, or critical to a particular habitat. The CNDDB only has one record of a special status species significantly occurring in the Planning Area: the San Pablo song sparrow. The San Pablo song sparrow is a unique subspecies of sparrows that can only be found adjacent to San Pablo Bay. The sparrow is currently classified as a Species of Special Concern (SSC) by CDFW due to habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation, though it is not protected under any federal or State endangered species acts. Four other special status species have also been noted to occur in the vicinity of the Planning Area. These five special status species are listed and described along with their designated statuses in Table 6-1.

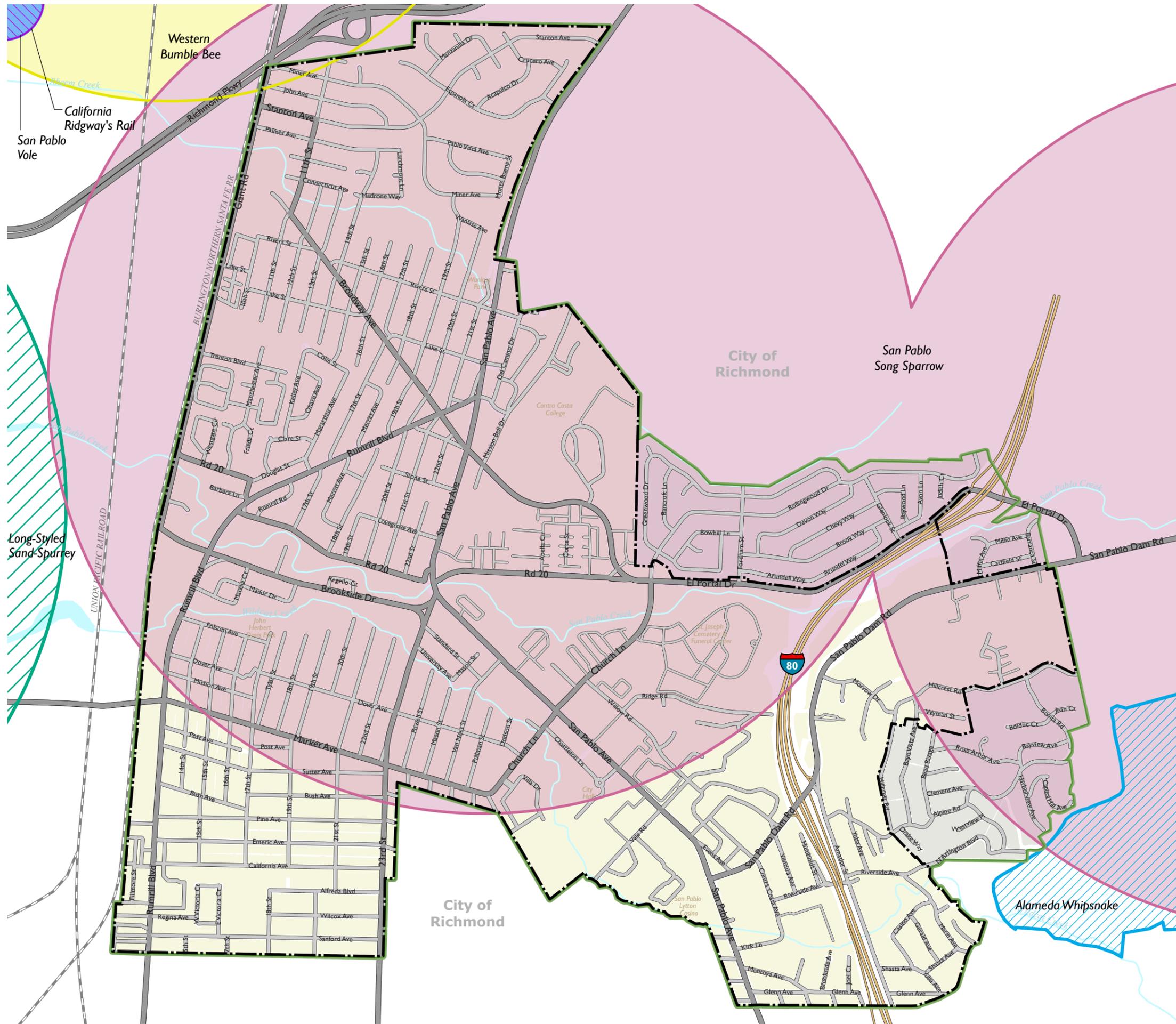
Critical habitat is a geographic area containing features determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to be essential to the conservation of a species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Critical habitat does not have to be occupied by that species at the time it is designated, but it may be considered necessary for the recovery of the species. As seen in Figure 6-2, no critical habitat occurs within the Planning Area. However, critical habitat for the Alameda Whipsnake is located just east of the Planning Area in Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. The Alameda Whipsnake is a reptile (snake) listed as threatened under both federal and state endangered species acts. It lives in northern California's coastal shrublands.

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management, "California Wetlands and Riparian."

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/natural-resources/wetlands-and-riparian/riparian-health/california>

SAN PABLO GENERAL PLAN UPDATE  
 Figure 6-2: Special Status Species and  
 Critical Habitat



**Special Status Species (CNDDDB)**

- San Pablo Song Sparrow
- Western Bumble Bee
- Long-Styled Sand-Spurrey
- California Ridgway's Rail
- San Pablo Vole

**Critical Habitat (USFWS)**

- Alameda Whipsnake (Striped Racer)

City Limits

Sphere of Influence

Major Roads

Local Roads

Railroads



SOURCE: Special Status Species, California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), 2021; Critical Habitat for Threatened & Endangered Species, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), 2021; City of San Pablo, 2021; Contra Costa County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

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**Table 6-1: Special Status Species**

Type	Common Name	Scientific Name	Federal Status	State Status	CDFW <sup>1</sup> Status	California Rare Plant Rank <sup>2</sup>
Bird	San Pablo Song Sparrow	Melospiza melodia samuelis	-	-	SSC <sup>3</sup>	-
Insect	Western Bumble Bee	Bombus occidentalis	-	Candidate Endangered	-	-
Plant (Vascular)	Long-styled Sand-spurrey	Spargularia macrotheca var. longistyla	-	-	-	IB.2 <sup>5</sup>
Bird	California Ridgway's Rail	Rallus obsoletus obsoletus	Endangered	Endangered	FP <sup>4</sup>	-
Mammal	San Pablo Vole	Microtus californicus sanpabloensis	-	-	SSC <sup>3</sup>	-

Notes:

1. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) designates species to its Special Animals List that may or may not be listed under state or federal endangered species acts. Any animals that are actively inventoried, tracked, and mapped by CNDDDB are included.
2. The California Native Plant Society developed the California Rare Plant Rank (ranks include 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, and 4) to describe plants presumed extinct (1A) to limited distribution species now on a watch list (4).
3. SSC = Species of Special Concern.
4. FP = Fully Protected.
5. IB.2 = Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California or elsewhere.

Source: California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021.

## Water Resources

Water resources include surface water and groundwater resources. Surface water refers to water collecting on the Earth's surface such as creeks or ponds. Groundwater refers to water found beneath the water table in the form of saturated soil.

### SURFACE WATERS

Contra Costa County is divided into three major watershed areas (West County, Central County, and East County). San Pablo lies within the West County watershed area. Watersheds within the region are defined by creeks, streams, and other surface water drainages that originate in the upland areas of the East Bay Hills and flow downslope towards the Bay. There are three distinct watersheds—one each associated with the Wildcat, San Pablo, and Rheem creeks—that are at least partially located within the City of San Pablo, as depicted on Figure 6-3. Boundaries between these watersheds are created by the topographic features that shape surface water drainage patterns.

Drainage patterns in San Pablo are shaped by the region's topography, which generally consists of a gradual westward sloping alluvial plain that eventually merges with the flat estuarine deposits along the bay shoreline. The City of San Pablo lies within the West County Major Watershed region. This watershed region is bounded by the East Bay Hills to the east, the San Pablo Bay to the west, and Alameda County to

the south. As seen in Figure 6-3, surface water bodies within the San Pablo Planning Area include Wildcat Creek, San Pablo Creek, and Rheem Creek, as well as an unnamed drainage area sometimes referred to as the Karlson Drainage, which runs from San Pablo Avenue west to Mura Court in the north of the Planning Area.

Rheem Creek is a small, intermittent stream with a watershed under two square miles confined to the northern portion of San Pablo. It is channelized for approximately half of its length in San Pablo. San Pablo Creek is a perennial stream and Wildcat Creek is an intermittent stream. Both streams have their headwaters in the hills east of San Pablo. San Pablo Creek drains an area of approximately 10 square miles and is regulated in the upper watershed by two dams: Briones Dam and Reservoir, and San Pablo Dam and Reservoir. Wildcat Creek is largely natural, with few areas of channelization and no dam, and has a drainage area of approximately 11 square miles.

## **GROUNDWATER BASIN**

A groundwater basin refers to a groundwater flow system that has defined boundaries and may include permeable materials that are capable of storing a significant water supply. A basin includes both the surface area and the permeable materials beneath it. San Pablo is located atop the East Bay Plain Subbasin, which is part of the Santa Clara Valley Groundwater Basin, as defined by the California Department of Water Resources. The East Bay Plain Subbasin is a northwest trending alluvial plain bounded on the north by San Pablo Bay, on the east by the contact with Franciscan Basement rock that make up the area's hillsides, and on the south by the Niles Cone Groundwater Basin. The East Bay Plain Subbasin extends beneath San Francisco Bay to the west. In total, it covers a surface area of 77,800 acres (122 square miles).

Several creeks, including San Pablo Creek and Wildcat Creek in the Planning Area, flow across the subbasin. Average precipitation in the subbasin ranges from about 17 to 25 inches. The East Bay Plain Subbasin has an underground storage capacity of 2,670,000 acre-feet. Groundwater use is limited within the East Bay Plain by several factors, including existing high salts in shallow San Francisco Bay margin groundwater, the potential for saltwater intrusion, and the availability of high-quality imported surface water.

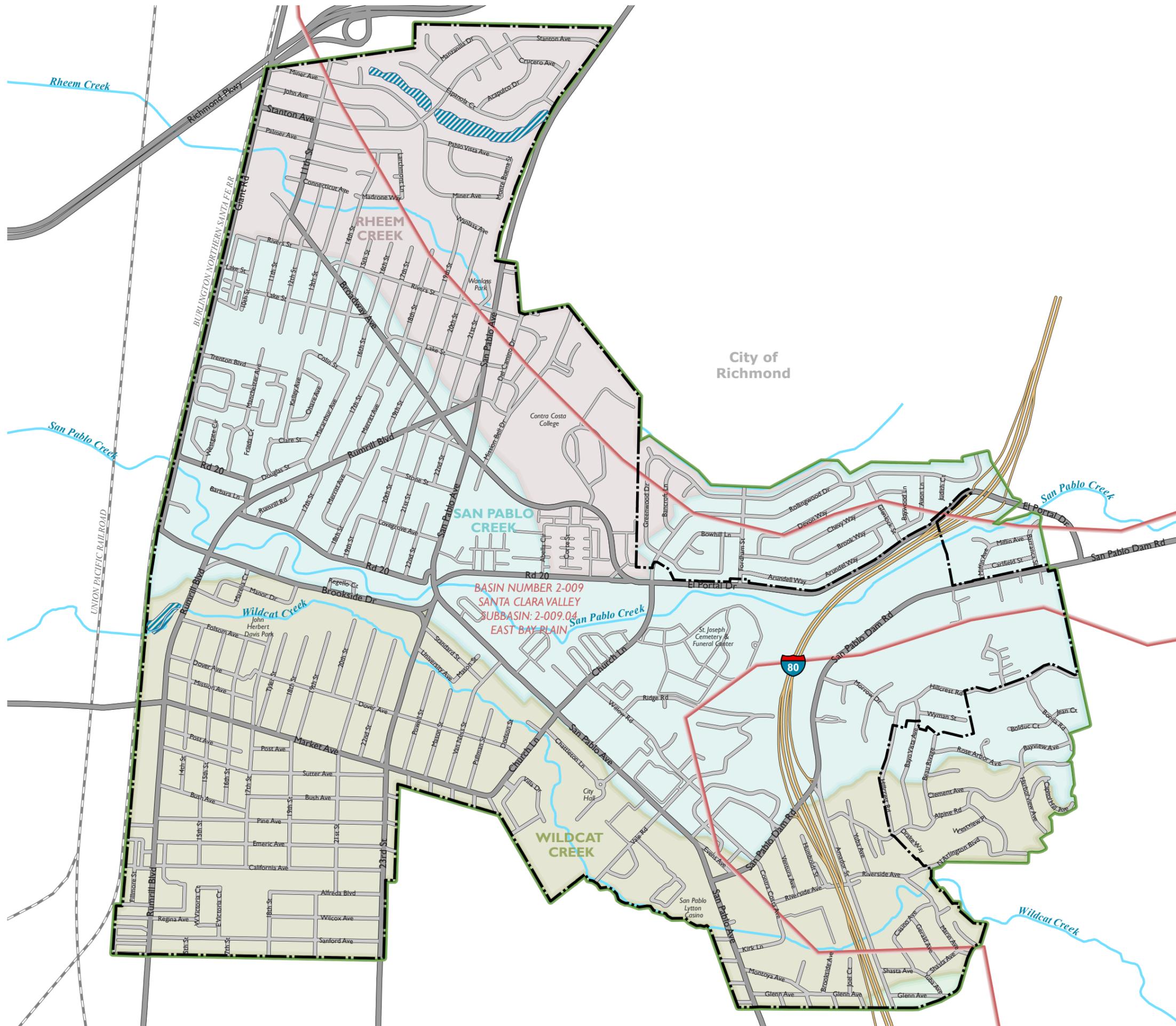
## **Historic Resources**

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Prior to settlement by Spanish colonies, the Ohlone Indigenous Group (also known as the Costanoan) had lived for thousands of years in a village called Huchiun along what is now known as San Pablo Bay. The center of this village was between the two creeks now named Wildcat and San Pablo. This unceded land continues to bear great cultural importance to the Ohlone Indigenous People who continue to thrive in many East Bay communities today. In 1815, the Spanish government in Mexico established Rancho San Pablo in the area where the City of San Pablo now exists to provide food for Mission Dolores in San Francisco. Rancho San Pablo was the first permanent non-Indigenous settlement in all of what is now Contra Costa County.

When Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, the Mexican State began to divide up land occupied by the Spanish missions. In 1823, Don Francisco Maria Castro was granted 19,034 acres of grazing land on the eastern side of San Pablo Bay that included land that is now part of Richmond, El

Figure 6-3: Water Resources



- Creeks
- Wetlands
- Watersheds**
- Wildcat Creek
- San Pablo Creek
- Rheem Creek
- Baxter / Cerrito Richmond Drainages
- Groundwater Basin Boundary**
- Santa Clara Valley - East Bay Plain Subbasin
- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Major Highway
- Major Roads
- Local Roads
- Railroads



SOURCE: National Hydrography Dataset, USGS, 2018; National Wetlands Inventory, USFWS, Data accessed 2021; Contra Costa County Watersheds, Contra Costa Clean Water Program (<https://www.ccleanwater.org/community/watersheds>), 2009; CA Bulletin 118 Groundwater Basins, Department of Water Resources, 2020; City of San Pablo, 2021; Contra Costa County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

Sobrante, Pinole, and San Pablo, and extended all the way out to the bay. Castro built a home on Rancho San Pablo and stocked the land with cattle.

One of Castro's daughters, Martina Castro de Alvarado, married the Mexican Governor of Alta California, Juan Bautista Alvarado, who governed from 1836 to 1842. In 1849, the Alvarados moved into an adobe home in San Pablo, which had been built by the Castro family. This home, known as the Alvarado Adobe, was built in 1842 by Jesús María Castro. The Alvarado Adobe was located at what is now the northwest corner of San Pablo Avenue and Church Lane in the City of San Pablo. For many years, the homestead at the Alvarado Adobe was a center of "rancho" life in California. Gradually, as the Alvarados relinquished some of their land holdings, the village of San Pablo was established near the old adobe. Following the death of Governor Alvarado in 1882, the adobe became an important tourist attraction and a landmark in the area. The original Alvarado Adobe was established as a California Historical Landmark in 1953, prior to its demolition in 1954. However, the City of San Pablo preserved complete blueprints of the structure, as well as many of the original timbers and adobe bricks. A replica of the original Alvarado Adobe was built on the former City Hall campus (13831 San Pablo Avenue) using many of these original materials in 1978 and dedicated as a museum. While no sites in San Pablo are designated on the National Register of Historic Places or the California State Register of Historical Resources, the site of the Alvarado Adobe maintains its status as a California Historical Landmark.

Located just west of the Alvarado Adobe in the Alvarado Square Historic Park, the Blume House (also sometimes referred to as the Bloom House) was once the headquarters for the sprawling Blume Ranch. The house was originally built in 1905 and located off Hilltop Drive at the site now occupied by Hilltop Mall. It was moved to its present site in 1974 and dedicated as a museum. Both the Alvarado Adobe Museum and the Blume House Museum are now overseen and operated by the San Pablo Historical Society. The Blume House and the Blume Bunk House (a two-story agricultural utility building), which were owned and constructed by German immigrants, provides a good example of life in San Pablo during the agricultural era of the Bay Area (generally 1850-1940). While not an officially designated historical site, the Blume House is noted in the current General Plan as a building of historic significance.

The Teixeira House is a late-nineteenth-century home of the Teixeira family, who arrived from Portugal in the early 1900s. Members of the Teixeira family continued to occupy the home until the 1970s, and the house is a representation of immigration and settlement of Portuguese families into western Contra Costa County as agricultural laborers began working for growing industrial employers in the area. The Teixeira House was moved, along with Blume House and Bunk House, to Alvarado Square in 1974. Although not eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources, it is recognized in the 2030 General Plan as a Building of Historical Significance and listed as a Structure of Historical Significance in the Contra Costa County Historic Resources Inventory. The Alvarado Adobe and the group of three other buildings in Alvarado Square are expected to be retained with redevelopment of the old City Hall site.<sup>4</sup> According to the California Office of Historic Preservation's Built Environment Resource Directory, there are 49 buildings of cultural significance within the Planning Area, including the Alvarado Adobe, Blume House, and Teixeira House. Table 6-2 lists these buildings and their year built, and Figure 6-4 shows their location within the Planning Area. The numbers in Table 6-2 correspond to the labels on Figure 6-4.

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<sup>4</sup> San Pablo Historical and Museum Society, "The Teixeira Home," 2021, <https://sites.google.com/sanpablohistoricalsociety.com/museums/historic-buildings/the-teixeira-home>, accessed March 27, 2023.

Figure 6-4: Historical Resources



- # California Historical Landmark
- # Buildings of Historic Significance
- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Major Highway
- Major Roads
- Railroads



SOURCE: California Office of Historic Preservation, Northwest Information Center (Sonoma State University), 2021; City of San Pablo, 2021; Contra Costa County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

**DYETT & BHATIA**  
Urban and Regional Planners

**Table 6-2: Planning Area Buildings of Historic Significance**

<i>No.</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Year Built</i>	<i>Historical Name</i>
1	3200 11th Street	1949	
2	3409 11th Street	1954	
3	1816 14th Street	1924	
4	1614 15th Street	1935	
5	1875 15th Street	1952	
6	2759 15th Street	1951	
7	1740 16th Street	1934	
8	1881 16th Street	1953	
9	1958 16th Street	1946	
10	2721 18th Street	unknown	
11	2972 19th Street	1953	
12	2024 20th Street	1948	
13	2996 20th Street	1954	
14	2331 22nd Street	1929	
15	Alvarado Square	1905	Blume House
16	Alvarado Square	1890	Texiera House
17	2900 Arundel Way	1943	
18	2445 Bancroft Lane	1943	
19	1300 Brookside Avenue	1949	
20	1811 Bush Avenue	1940	
21	1825 Church Lane	1863	St Paul's Catholic Church & Graveyard
22	1901 Church Lane	1875	Old Rectory
23	1501 Colin Street	unknown	
24	930 CR 20	1884	Rumrill Helms House
25	2009 CR 20	1951	
26	2022 CR 20	unknown	Stanley Alter Home
27	1401 Dover Avenue	1948	
28	2418 Dover Avenue	1943	
29	1514 Emeric Avenue	1941	
30	1807 Emeric Avenue	1935	
31	2201 Emeric Avenue	1930	
32	1108 John Avenue	1942	
33	1601 Manor Drive	1943	
34	2650 Market Avenue	1906	1906 Earthquake Camp Site
35	1830 Mason Street	1951	
36	5739 McBryde Avenue	1911	The Bouquet Chateau
37	2634 Ohare Avenue	1943	

**Table 6-2: Planning Area Buildings of Historic Significance**

No.	Address	Year Built	Historical Name
38	1919 Pine Avenue	1951	
39	1841 Pullman Street	1875	Pullman Street Rectory
40	918 Randy Lane	1900	Andrata House
41	2009 Road 20	1950	
42	2778 Rollingwood Drive	1943	
43	2797 Rollingwood Drive	1943	
44	2807 Rollingwood Drive	1943	
45	13831 San Pablo Avenue	1826	Alvarado Abode
46	14006 San Pablo Avenue	1875	Mello Residence
47	1230 Sanford Avenue	1950	
48	1914 Sanford Avenue	1940	
49	1748 Sutter Avenue	1944	

Source: California Office of Historic Preservation, Northwest Information Center (Sonoma State University), 2008; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021.

## Key Findings and Policy Implications

1. **While San Pablo is highly urbanized, it contains and is in close proximity to several important open space and biological resources that provide benefits to human, plant, and animal communities.** Wildcat, San Pablo and Rheem creeks, which run through the city, are important waterways within the greater Bay Area Delta system. The Wildcat Creek Restoration and Greenway Trail Project demonstrates the City's commitment to preserving and enhancing its natural resources. Additionally, Wildcat Canyon Regional Park to the east provides significant open space opportunities and connects to the Bay Area Ridge Trail. To the west of the Planning Area, the Bay Trail runs along Richmond Parkway and almost connects into San Pablo via Wildcat Creek Trail. These resources provide recreational, aesthetic, and environmental benefit for the community and should be recognized as assets to preserve and enhance.
2. **The Alvarado Adobe, Blume House and Bunk House, and Texiera House are an important part of local heritage, providing opportunities for education and enrichment to residents and visitors.** The history of San Pablo is important in the history of California and the Bay Area. The San Pablo Historical Society is a resource to the City, providing educational materials and opportunities. The City should continue to conserve and promote to the public these important sites and learning opportunities, including retaining the Alvarado Adobe and the group of three other buildings in Alvarado Square during redevelopment of the old City Hall site.