Appendix M
SETTING ACQUISITION PRIORITIES

This document outlines the criteria and procedures that have been developed to guide Placer Legacy acquisitions in the initial implementation stages of the Program. Placer Legacy acquisition efforts will first be focused on high priority resource types, as indicated in Table 3-5, **Prioritization of Resource Types**, which may be modified as the Program develops. Lower priority resource types will be conserved on a case-by-case basis, as opportunities arise, and may be protected as secondary conservation objectives in land acquisitions for other purposes. The preliminary acreage targets established in Chapter III, Section C (explained in detail in Appendix J), represent alternative acquisition scenarios at various levels of investment, and are based primarily on the conservation of these priority resources. The targets represent order-of-magnitude conservation scenarios, rather than upper or lower limits on acquisition. Inasmuch as the success of the Placer Legacy Program is ultimately determined by its funding level, the acquisition targets represent hypothetical distributions of land management under various funding scenarios.

Figure 1 outlines a general decision-making framework for land acquisition and easement purchases, indicating the key decision-making points, as well as staff-level activities for prioritizing and pursuing land acquisitions. In general, two types of easements and acquisitions will be pursued—those that are landowner initiated and those that are initiated by the Placer Legacy Program, based on objective resource criteria. The relative importance of each of these acquisition routes will be determined, in part, by the level of funding available.

The analysis of resource values represents a two-tiered approach, involving a "coarse-filter" analysis of available GIS data, followed by a "fine-filter" analysis of site-level information, once acquisition/easement opportunities have been identified. The coarse-filter GIS analysis will be applied to high priority **agricultural** and **biological** resources, for which County-wide inventories exist. Existing **recreational, cultural/historic, scenic, urban separator** and **public safety** resources (to the extent they are represented by GIS data) will be treated as ancillary resource values in this analysis (see Table 1). Analyses will be guided by input from scientific experts and agency staff, as well as public feedback regarding resource priorities.

Other acquisition priorities for **recreational, cultural, scenic,** and **urban separator** resources will be identified largely from adopted goals of the Placer County General Plan, existing community plan or city general plan policies and programs, and the expertise of staff, other agencies and consultants. GIS datasets will aid this process by providing spatial visualization and analysis of opportunities, but will not be relied upon to generate priorities, until such time as more comprehensive datasets are available. In the future, efforts to comprehensively inventory and map existing recreational trails, as well as historic and archeological sites, may result in new opportunities for GIS analysis.

Coarse-filter analyses will result in a set of ***priority resource areas***, which must then be evaluated with respect to cost and landowner interest to determine where opportunities for acquisition of fee title or conservation easements exist. Real estate multiple listings will be used

to identify for-sale properties, which, of the ***priority resource areas*** emerging from the coarse-filter analysis, will be investigated first. Properties offered by landowners independently of this process, provided they meet the minimum size criteria (to be established) and contain potentially valuable open space resources (as determined by cursory air photo evaluation), will be added to the pool of ***potential properties for acquisition***. As funding becomes available, acquisition opportunities will be assessed individually, using the criteria outlined in Table 2.

These ***candidate properties for acquisition*** will be presented by staff to the Placer Legacy Open Space Advisory Commission for review at regular intervals (frequency to be determined). For each property, the advisory commission, with staff input, will make a determination of public benefit and reject, approve or postpone the initiation of negotiations with the landowner for a conservation easement or acquisition of fee title. Once a property has been approved, acquisition activities will proceed according to the guidelines provided in Appendix H. The final expenditure of public funds will require approval by the Advisory Commission and Governing Board of the Placer Legacy Program.

As willing sellers come forward, many types of resources will be protected on a largely opportunistic basis. This applies primarily to cultural/historic and scenic resources, which are not well inventoried, as well as recreational resources, which have specific management and facilities requirements. In most cases, the Placer Legacy Program will partner with other agencies and jurisdictions to conserve land specifically for these objectives (e.g., various park departments and special districts for recreational resources, and County Department of Museums for cultural resources).

With respect to biological resources, small-patch ecosystems (e.g., native grasslands and ephemeral aquatic habitats) will also need to be conserved on a largely opportunistic basis, as they are discovered and mapped. Many of these ecosystems may be identified in the site-level evaluation of properties brought forward by willing sellers, emphasizing the need to rely on landowner-identified resource values, not just those derived by methodical GIS analyses. Future biological research efforts (described in greater detail in Appendix E), developed as part of comprehensive regulatory permitting for endangered species (HCP/NCCP), will improve the knowledge and understanding of small patch ecosystems.

To the extent that sensitive species habitat requirements can be defined and mapped, biological resource acquisitions will emphasize the incorporation of areas with the necessary habitat characteristics for sensitive species, especially those species for which significant impacts are anticipated under the HCP/NCCP. The configuration of habitat, as it relates to the preservation of metapopulation dynamics and species' range requirements, will also be considered to the extent possible under a system of voluntary landowner participation.

Geographic Information System (GIS) Analysis of Acquisition Priorities

For each of the high priority resource types, two additional factors will be considered: the scale(s) of the required conservation effort (site, watershed or landscape/regional) and the type(s) of conservation action required (preservation, enhancement or creation of new resources). The scale of conservation determines the scale of analysis. Site-scale resources will be evaluated only according to the conditions at the particular locations in which the resources occur. For watershed-scale resources, upstream and upslope (i.e., watershed) conditions will also be evaluated. Landscape- and regional-scale resources will be evaluated across the appropriate ecoregion, into other counties if necessary. For each resource type, priorities for preservation, enhancement and creation will be determined separately (if applicable).

Terms are defined as follows:

- ***Site-scale*** conservation is most appropriate for resources that are patchily distributed and restricted to small areas, and for which local conservation opportunities are largely independent of conditions in the surrounding watershed, landscape or region. One example is cultural and historic resources, with fixed locations and primarily local values. With respect to biological resources, small, unique habitats, such as native grasslands and ephemeral aquatic habitats, are examples of resources with site-scale conservation needs.

- ***Watershed-scale*** conservation is important for creek, river and lake resources, which are affected by upstream conditions, as well as upland land uses within the watershed. Downstream conditions are also important for fish passage. This scale of analysis/conservation is only relevant for biological resources and public safety resources (floodplains).

- ***Landscape-scale*** conservation is important for most terrestrial biological resources, especially where landscape linkages are required for wildlife migration, dispersal and other movements, or wildlife inhabitants have large range requirements. Resources for which landscape connectivity is vital include vernal pool and other valley grasslands, foothill oak woodlands, and Sierra Nevada conifers. Landscape-scale conservation is also important for intensive agriculture and timber activities, because large connected areas are important for economic viability, and these activities are largely incompatible with certain urban land uses.

- ***Regional-scale*** conservation is important in instances where Placer County lands are important to the overall regional integrity and persistence of a resource, e.g., migratory waterfowl or carnivore habitat. In such cases, large, multi-county areas are needed, and inter-county cooperation is important.

- ***Preservation*** applies to resources that can/should be preserved as-is, and managed to maintain existing conditions, with minor improvements/alterations in some cases. Most agricultural resources fall into this category, as do most biological resources.

- ***Enhancement*** applies to several resources, including biological resources that have been severely degraded and may be enhanced by physical manipulation, including creeks, riparian corridors, wetlands and vernal pool grasslands. Recreational resources may also be enhanced, by clearing, marking and linking trails and other recreational facilities. Cultural and historic structures in need of repair are also candidates for enhancement.

- ***Creation*** is relevant where significant construction of new habitat or facilities are proposed, primarily with respect to biological resources (e.g., wetlands and vernal pool grasslands) and recreational resources (e.g., new parks, trails and trailheads).

Each priority resource type will be evaluated and mapped, at the appropriate scale, according to the criteria listed in Table 1. A parcel-level analysis will then be conducted to determine the locations of priority resource areas.

Each parcel will be evaluated according to four general sets of criteria:

- Primary resource value (rank with respect to resource in question, see Table 1)
- Secondary resource value (rank with respect to scenic, urban separator, public safety, historic/cultural and recreation resources, see Table 1)
- Combined vegetation/landcover score (based on priorities in Table 3-5)
- Acquisition/easement suitability, consisting of the following factors:
    - Parcel size
    - Adjacency to existing protected areas
    - Subdivision potential
    - Development pressures (e.g., proximity to new highways)
    - Development status (improved or not)
    - Roadedness
    - Land value/cost
    - Market status (i.e., higher priority given to for-sale properties)

Figure 1. Diagram of Placer Legacy Property Acquisition Procedure

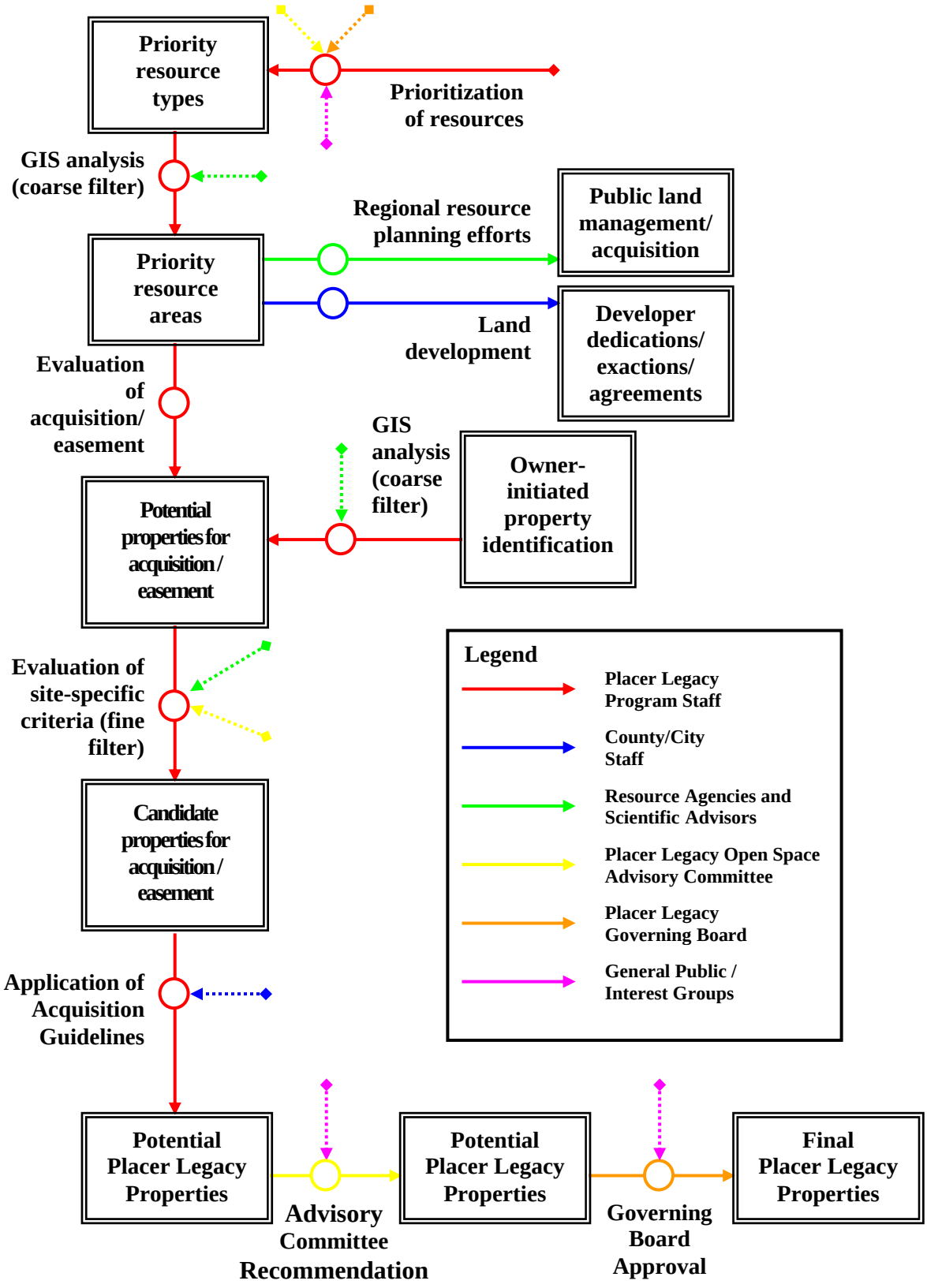

Table 1. GIS Criteria for Setting Biological and Agricultural Acquisition Priorities

Open Space Resource Types	Action ***	Conservation Scale	Primary Resource Criteria	Compatible Secondary Resources **
Agriculture				
Intensive agriculture (rice, row crops, orchards)	Preservation / Programs	Landscape (Valley, Foothills)	• Soil capability class • Potential water availability • Compatibility of surrounding land uses (agricultural or rural residential) • Current productivity *	• Floodplains • Riparian/aquatic • Wetlands • Historic sites
Rangelands	Preservation / Programs	Landscape (Valley, Foothills)	N/A (Secondary Resource)	• Floodplains • Vernal pools • Oak woodlands • Riparian/aquatic • Historic sites
Western Sierra timber	Programs	Landscape (Sierra Nevada)	N/A	
Biological				
Small patch ecosystems	Preservation	Site	See site criteria for biological resources	Variable
Mehrten vernal pools	Preservation/ Enhancement	Site	See site criteria for biological resources	• Urban-agriculture buffers • Community separators • Rangelands • Outdoor recreation/education • Historic sites
Hardpan vernal pools	Preservation / Enhancement	Landscape (Valley)	• Size of vernal pool complex • Pool size and depth diversity * • Pool density * • Position in watershed * • Proximity to other vernal pool complexes • Natural condition / extent of disturbance • Landuse compatibility within surrounding area (more natural, less urban)	• Urban-agriculture buffers • Community separators • Rangelands • Outdoor recreation/education • Historic sites
Valley grasslands (non vernal pool)	Preservation / Enhancement	Landscape (Valley)	• Area of interconnected habitat / level of fragmentation • Natural condition / extent of disturbance * • Landuse compatibility within surrounding area (more natural, less urban)	• Urban-agriculture buffers • Community separators • Rangelands • Outdoor recreation/education • Historic sites

Open Space Resource Types	**Action ****	**Conservation Scale**	**Primary Resource Criteria**	**Compatible Secondary Resources**
Valley riparian/aquatic Foothill riparian/aquatic	Enhancement	Watershed	• Presence of reoccurring anadromous fish populations • Natural (non-urban) condition of surrounding sub-watershed • Natural (non-cultivated and non-urban) conditions within 100-200ft of centerline • Gap in canopy connectivity (no woody or emergent vegetation)	• Urban-agriculture buffers • Community separators • Rangelands • Intensive Agriculture • Floodplains • Historic sites • Outdoor recreation/education
Valley riparian/aquatic Foothill riparian/aquatic	Preservation	Watershed	• Area and structural complexity of riparian vegetation • Urban encroachment potential	See previous
Valley wetlands	Enhancement / Creation	Landscape (Valley)	• Hydric soils • Proximity to other wetlands, flooded agriculture	• Urban-agriculture buffers • Community separators • Rangelands • Intensive Agriculture • Floodplains
Valley wetlands	Preservation	Site	See site criteria for biological resources	See previous
Oak woodland (Blue Oak / Live Oak)	Preservation / Programs	Landscape (Foothills)	• Area of interconnected habitat / level of fragmentation • Age structure • Presence of riparian corridor • Level of human disturbance * • Road density • Landuse and parcel sizes within surrounding area	• Urban-agriculture buffers • Community separators • Rangelands • Outdoor recreation/education • High fire risk areas
Chaparral & Montane hardwoods (Black Oak / Live Oak) & West slope conifers	Preservation	Landscape (Sierra Nevada)	• Area of interconnected habitat / level of fragmentation * • Age structure • Level of human disturbance * • Road density • Landuse and parcel sizes within surrounding area	• Historic resources • High fire risk areas • Outdoor recreation/education

Open Space Resource Types	Action **	Conservation Scale	Primary Resource Criteria	Compatible Secondary Resources
Major rivers	Preservation / Enhancement	Watershed	• Natural (non-urban) condition of surrounding sub-watershed • Upstream position	• Historic resources • Outdoor recreation/education
Sagebrush / east slope conifers	Preservation	Landscape	• Area of interconnected habitat / level of fragmentation • Extent of human disturbance * • Road density • Landuse and parcel sizes within surrounding area	• Historic resources • Outdoor recreation/education • High fire risk areas • Community separators
Montane riparian	Preservation	Watershed	• Area and structural complexity of riparian vegetation • Natural (non-urban) condition of surrounding sub-watershed • Presence of reoccurring anadromous fish populations *	• Outdoor recreation/education
Wet meadow	Preservation	Site	See site criteria for biological resources	• Outdoor recreation/education
Outdoor Recreation				
Environmental education	Creation	Site	See site criteria for outdoor recreation	• All biological resources
Passive recreation in valley/foothill region (hiking, biking, horseback riding)	Creation	Landscape	• Proximity to urban population * • Accessibility * • Topographic diversity • Scenic quality *	• Urban-agriculture buffers • Community separators • Valley/foothill riparian • Grasslands • Floodplains
Back-country passive recreation	Creation	Landscape	• Gaps in existing trail network or trail segments without formal public access * • Access points without developed trailheads *	• High fire hazard areas • Sage brush / east slope conifers • West slope conifers • Montane riparian • Wet meadows • Historic sites
River and lake recreation (boating, rafting, swimming)	Programs	Watershed	N/A	
Cultural Resources				
Historic landmarks, buildings and roads	Preservation	Site	See site criteria for cultural resources	
Native American artifacts, petroglyphs and paleontological sites	Preservation	Site	See site criteria for cultural resources	

Open Space Resource Types	Action **	Conservation Scale	Primary Resource Criteria	Compatible Secondary Resources
Scenic Resources / Urban Separators				
Scenic transportation corridors	Preservation	Site	N/A (Secondary Resource)	
Scenic vista points	Preservation	Site	N/A (Secondary Resource)	
Community separators / greenbelts	Preservation	Landscape	N/A (Secondary Resource)	
Buffers between agricultural and urban activities	Preservation	Landscape	N/A (Secondary Resource)	
Public Safety				
Floodplains	Preservation	Watershed	N/A (Secondary Resource)	
High fire hazard areas	Preservation	Landscape	N/A (Secondary Resource)	
Avalanche zones	Preservation	Site	N/A (Secondary Resource)	

*** ***Preservation***, ***Enhancement*** and ***Creation*** are acquisition/easement-oriented. ***Programs*** indicate non-acquisition-oriented conservation strategies.
** Scenic resources are generally compatible with all other resource types
* Data not currently available

Table 2. Site-specific Criteria by Resource Element*

Site must possess at least one of the following primary resource criteria:	…or two of the following secondary resource criteria:	…and must meet all of the following constraints:
Biological resources • Field-verified high priority resource values, as determined by GIS analysis (see Table 1) • Known populations of special status species present • High quality habitat for special status species present (as determined by biological experts) • Particularly high species diversity (as determined by biological experts) • Presence of unique and/or undisturbed vegetation communities (e.g., native grasslands, old growth tree stands) • Presence of unique and/or undisturbed geophysical characteristics (e.g., serpentine soils) • Presence of unique and/or undisturbed aquatic habitats (wetlands, seeps, springs, ephemeral creeks)	• Presence of historical structures/artifacts • High scenic value • Presence of recreational trails (or potential to develop) • Part of property in agricultural production • Within floodplain, high fire hazard or avalanche zone • Imminent threat to resources	• Compatible surrounding land uses • Not already protected in perpetuity
Agricultural Resources • Field-verified high priority resource values, as determined by GIS analysis (see Table 1) • Irrigation water available on-site • Particularly deep or fertile soil conditions (as determined by agricultural experts) • Particularly high productivity / economic value • High value waterfowl habitat (rice fields)	• Presence of historical structures/artifacts • Particularly high scenic value • Imminent threat to resources • High biological resource values (see primary biological resources criteria)	• Compatible surrounding land uses • Not already protected in perpetuity
Recreational Resources: • Opportunity to connect existing trails, thereby providing recreational greater recreational access • Presence of existing informal trails • Presence of unique scenic vistas	• Particularly high scenic value • Presence of recreational trails (or potential to develop) • Part of property in agricultural production	• Compatible surrounding land uses • No other agencies/organizations with available resources to develop • No particularly sensitive habitats/species present, or ability to avoid impacts • Publicly accessible with potential available parking

Site must possess at least one of the following primary resource criteria:	**…or two of the following secondary resource criteria:**	**…and must meet all of the following constraints:**
Cultural Resources: • Presence of historical structures or landmarks (especially State, Federal or County listed sites) • Presence of Native American artifacts • Presence of petroglyphs	• Imminent threat to resources • Resources in a state of disrepair (with potential to restore) • Particularly high scenic value • Presence of recreational trails (or potential to develop) • Part of property in agricultural production • High biological resource values (see primary biological resources criteria)	• Existing protection limited or lacking • No other agencies/organizations with available resources to protect
Scenic Resources / Urban Separators: • Unique scenic vista • Unique scenic transportation corridor • High conflict between agricultural and urban landuse	• Presence of recreational trails (or potential to develop) • Part of property in agricultural production • Imminent threat to resources • High public accessibility (via roads or trails) • High biological resource values (see primary biological resources criteria)	• Not already protected in perpetuity • No other agencies/organizations with available resources to protect
Public Safety Resources: • Extreme public safety hazard	• Particularly high scenic value • Presence of recreational trails (or potential to develop) • Part of property in agricultural production • High biological resource values (see primary biological resources criteria)	• No other agencies/organizations with available resources to protect

* Table does not include geographic criteria, which are analyzed at an earlier phase of property evaluation. The criteria listed will be evaluated in conjunction with the cost of the property's encumbrance, and the terms of the easements, if applicable.