

Chapter 2 Community Profile

2.1 Community Profile

Santa Cruz County is situated on the northern shore of Monterey Bay (Figure 2). The county's coastline borders the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The bay, beaches, and coastline are appreciated by the community as a valuable natural resource as well as a key economic resource. This location along the coast also presents several potential hazards to the community such as coastal erosion, flooding, and tsunami.

The County's mild weather, proximity to several northern California metropolitan centers, and scenic and recreation resources make it a popular day and extended-stay recreation area. As a result, the population is subject to large seasonal variations due to an influx of visitors during summer and other peak recreational periods. Planning for potential hazards in Santa Cruz County must address the safety of its visitor population as well as residents, large student population, and workers within the community.

The County occupies a picturesque location along the coast of the Pacific Ocean, between the Monterey Bay and the Santa Cruz Mountains. It is a land of steep coastal bluffs, deep mountain canyons, redwood, oak and madrone forests, open meadows, and beaches. This picturesque location also contributes to the potential hazards. Parts of Santa Cruz County, such as the communities of downtown Soquel and Felton Grove and other areas, are located within a flood plain. Coastal areas are also subject to flooding and erosion from coastal storms. Many mountainous areas are subject to landslide hazards and wildland fires. The entire County is subject to seismic shaking from several nearby active earthquake faults. These are a few examples of the many natural hazards addressed in this plan.



Figure 2 County of Santa Cruz

The County's Mediterranean climate is characterized by warm, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. Warm temperatures and low precipitation are the norm from approximately April through October. Cooler temperatures and heavy rains dominate November through March. Though winters are typically mild, colder winds from inland regions with more continental climates can result in short-term cold snaps. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the annual mean temperature in Santa Cruz is 57.1 degrees Fahrenheit. The mean high temperature is 61.9 degrees Fahrenheit, and the mean low temperature is 51.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Mean monthly high and low temperatures during winter and summer are shown in Table 2.

Because of this temperate climate, extreme heat is rarely a threat to the community. Both summer and winter temperatures are moderated by the marine influence and summer fog is a common occurrence. Winds are generally northwesterly and seldom reach severe intensities. The Santa Cruz Mountains form a natural barrier to winds from the north and from the hot interior valleys. Rainfall varies throughout the county, from approximately 80 inches per year in Bonny Doon, to approximately 22 inches per year in the Watsonville area. According to NOAA, the mean annual precipitation in Santa Cruz is 29.43 inches. Annual precipitation in Santa Cruz has ranged from just 5.1 inches in 2013 to 59.8 inches in 1983. Mean monthly high and low temperatures during winter and summer are shown in Table 2.

Average High/Low Temperature	Average Rainfall
January 55.6°/41.6° F (13.1°/5.3° C)	January 6.1 inches (155 mm)
August 70.9°/58.8° F (21.6°/14.9° C)	August 0.07 inches (1.8 mm)
Annual 61.9°/51.6° F (16.6°/10.9° C)	Annual 29.43 inches (747 mm)

Table 2 Temperature and rainfall averages for Santa Cruz

Select demographic, economic, and housing information for Santa Cruz County, including the four incorporated cities, was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, and summarized in Table 3 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014-2018 5-year American Community Survey).

Population	Number	Percent
Total Population	273,765	100%
Sex and Age		
Male	135,727	49.6%
Female	138,038	50.4%
Median Age (years)	37.4	
Under 18	53,761	19.6%
65 years and older	41,001	15.0%
Disabled	30,314	11.1%
Households		
Total Households	95,756	100%
Persons per household	2.73	
Median household income	\$78,041	
Percent of population below poverty level		14.3%
Percent of population 25 and over with bachelor's degree or higher		40%

Housing Characteristics		
Total Housing Units	105,894	100%
Occupied Housing Units	95,756	90.4%
Vacant Housing Units	10,138	9.6%
Owner Occupied Housing Units	56,873	59.4%
Renter Occupied Housing Units	38,883	40.6%
Housing Units in 1-unit detached structures	68,170	64.4%

Table 3 County of Santa Cruz population, household, and economic data

Select population and housing information for the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County, not including the four cities, was obtained from the Association of Monterey Bay Governments (AMBAG) 2022 Regional Growth Forecast. Information for the year 2020 is summarized in Table 4.

Population	Number	Percent
Total population	133,493	
Households		
Total Households	52,156	
Persons per household	2.52	
Housing Characteristics		
Total housing units	57,662	
Vacancy rate		9.5%

Table 4 County of Santa Cruz unincorporated area population and household data

As noted in Table 3 above, approximately 11.1% of county residents are disabled. Also, 15% of the county’s population is age 65 or above. In addition, according to the American Community Survey, approximately 26% of the county’s population speaks Spanish at home and approximately 11% do not speak English very well. It is important to consider these special populations in creating a hazard mitigation plan, as they may need extra assistance during emergencies. As an example, during the CZU Lightning Complex Fire all press releases regarding evacuation, shelters, public assistance, and other important information were provided in both English and Spanish. The County’s Emergency Management Plan (EMP) does address special population needs and this hazard plan was written with reference to the EMP.

2.1.1 The University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC)

Santa Cruz County is home to the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC). The main University campus consists of over 2,000 acres on the northwest side of the City of Santa Cruz off High and Bay Streets. Approximately 53 percent of the campus, including most of the developed area, is located within the City of Santa Cruz limits, and the remainder of the campus lies in the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County.

In addition to the main University campus, the University also has a Marine Lab Facility at the north side of the County situated along the coast.

Much of the University infrastructure and services are at least somewhat dependent on the City and County of Santa Cruz. UC Santa Cruz receives water and sewer treatment services from the City of Santa Cruz. In normal and wet years, the water supply system is capable of meeting the needs of the current population, but even without population increases, the system is highly vulnerable to shortages in drought years. The City and the University are also linked through mutual aid agreements in areas such as fire services.

The University has a current enrollment of approximately 19,494 undergraduate and graduate students supported by approximately 4,486 faculty and staff.

The University adopted its own Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2005 and prepared a Hazard Mitigation Progress Report in 2011. It also has an Emergency Response Plan that can be found online at <https://oes.ucsc.edu/emergency-preparedness/eop-11-2015.pdf>. This plan, prepared in 2015, provides details about hazard response, vulnerabilities, and mitigation measures for the University community.

2.1.2 Cabrillo Community College

The County is also home to one of the highest-rated community colleges in the state. Cabrillo Community College sits on 160 acres overlooking Monterey Bay. The main campus is located in Aptos, on the north side of Hwy 1. There are two satellite campuses, one in the City of Watsonville and the other in Scotts Valley. The college also owns seven acres in Bonny Doon for use of anthropology and archeology students.

The College has a current enrollment of approximately 11,300 students supported by approximately 1,000 faculty and staff. The developed area (existing and approved) of the campus consists of 60 buildings with over 746,000 gross square feet.

There is no student housing on campus but there is a newly built student center, which includes a Health Center. The College contracts with the County Sheriff's Department to provide all law enforcement services. It is also dependent on the County of Santa Cruz for fire protection and other services such as water and sewer.

The College has developed an Emergency Operations Plan updated December 2018. This plan clearly delineates areas of responsibility for staff and partner agencies and specifically addresses earthquake, fire, flood, storms, landslide, and other hazards that might occur on campus. This policy also defines when a state of emergency should be declared on campus and the steps necessary to address said emergency.

2.1.3 California Polytechnic University

Swanton Pacific Ranch is a working ranch owned by Cal Poly. It has three distinct operations: Forest Steward Council (FSC) certified selective forestry, natural grass-fed beef, and certified organic crops. Located on 3200 acres, the exceptional diversity of this property, and the greater Scotts Creek watershed, provide remarkable conditions for agriculture production, which support several unique educational programs and research opportunities based on site. The ranch was threatened by the

Lockheed Fire in August 2009, but no damage occurred. However, the CZU Lightning Complex Fire destroyed much of the ranch and its structures.

2.1.4 Household Income and Education

The median household income for Santa Cruz County in 2013 was an estimated \$78,041 compared to \$71,228 for the State of California. Residents of Santa Cruz County are highly educated, with 40 percent of residents over age 25 having achieved a bachelor's degree or higher by 2018 (Table 3).

2.1.5 Residents' Place of Work

The following data is from the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission [Data & Statistics \(sccrtc.org\)](http://sccrtc.org). In addressing potential hazards, it is significant that over 28,000 county residents commute to neighboring counties for work. This represents approximately 23% of the total number of workers in the county. Over 17,000 county residents commute to work in Santa Clara County, which is connected to Santa Cruz County by Highway 17, a winding, four-lane mountain pass prone to traffic accidents and small slides, especially during the rainy season. Nearly 6,000 county residents commute to Monterey County via Highway 1, portions of which are two lanes and prone to accidents, which cause major traffic jams.

There are far fewer commuters into the county. Over 17,000 workers commute from outside Santa Cruz County into the county, the vast majority of which (9,178) come from Monterey County via Highway 1. As previously mentioned, this can be problematic due to accidents, which tie up this main artery to the coast.

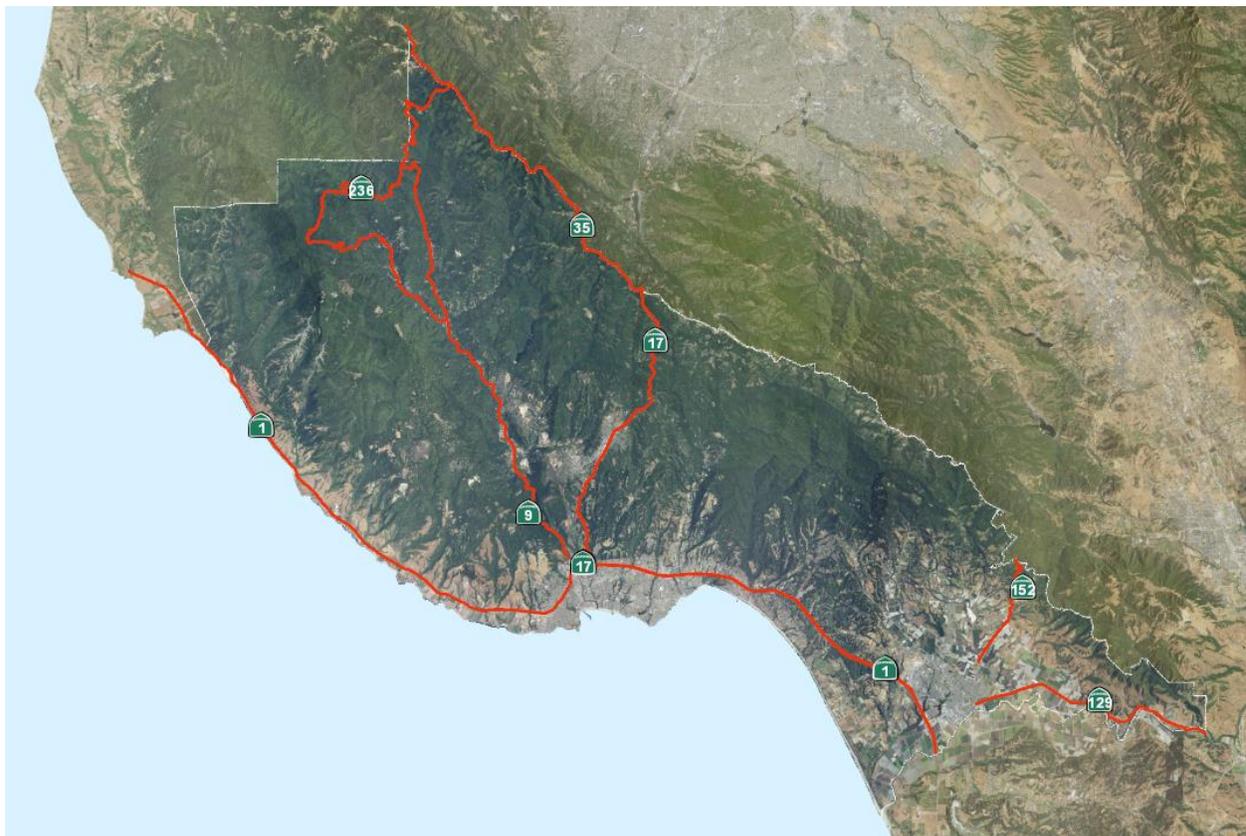


Figure 3 Key transportation routes in Santa Cruz County

Five major state highways connect Santa Cruz County with adjacent counties. Highway 1 leads along the coast from San Francisco south to the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Watsonville and then on to Monterey. Highway 9 traverses the County from the City of Santa Cruz through the unincorporated towns of Felton, Ben Lomond, Brookdale, and Boulder Creek, which are all located in the San Lorenzo Valley. Highway 17 also crosses the Santa Cruz Mountains into Santa Clara County passing through the City of Scotts Valley. Highways 129 and 152 join the City of Watsonville with neighboring Santa Clara County. The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (Metro) provides bus service throughout Santa Cruz County. Metro also operates bus service between Santa Cruz County and Santa Clara County. One municipal airport is located in the City of Watsonville. Several private airports exist in the County in Bonny Doon, Big Creek Lumber on the north coast, and at the Monterey Bay Academy in the Pajaro Valley.

Route 9 is the only viable access to the San Lorenzo Valley, serving the unincorporated communities. Bonny Doon is accessible via either Highway 9 or via Highway 1 and then inland near Davenport. Davenport and Watsonville, and indeed, most other mid county locations are all accessible from Highway 1.

The County maintains a distinction between urban and rural areas through the use of a stable Urban/Rural Boundary, consistent with a local growth management referendum of 1978, known as Measure J. The Urban/Rural Boundary is represented by an Urban Services Line (USL) and a Rural Services Line (RSL) (see Appendix K).

Urban concentrations of development are located within the four incorporated cities of Scotts Valley, Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Watsonville and in the unincorporated areas of Live Oak, Soquel, Aptos, and Freedom as defined by the USL. It is basic county policy to direct a large share of the County's growth into the areas within the USL to facilitate the provision of services for future growth, preservation of the environment and hazard mitigation.

2.1.6 Economic Trends

The following information is from the [2013 Santa Cruz County Economic Vitality Strategy Economic Trends report](#). The key industry sector in Santa Cruz County is centered in agriculture. Other key economic sectors include education and health care, retail trade, leisure and hospitality, and government. As previously noted, there are two major educational institutions in the County: Cabrillo Community College located in mid-county and the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) located in the north county area.

Between 2001 and 2011 Santa Cruz County saw an overall decline in employment by nearly 11,000 jobs, an overall decline of approximately 11%. The greatest job loss occurred in manufacturing (loss of 3,822 jobs), followed by construction (loss of 1,919 jobs), and information (loss of 1,675 jobs) Professional & Technical Services and Leisure & Hospitality also experienced substantial job losses during this period. Job losses in Santa Cruz County were somewhat offset by gains in Health Care & Education (2,667 jobs), Other Services (613 jobs), Agriculture & Mining (538 jobs), and Wholesale Trade (56 jobs). Along with the increase in jobs in the agricultural sector, according to Annual Crop Reports published by the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner, the production value of local crops increased from \$365 million in 2001 to over \$625.3 million in 2019. This is an important consideration in hazard mitigation planning, as much of the unincorporated area of the county is agricultural land, some of which lies in the flood plain. Proper flood mitigation could save millions of dollars in lost crops. According to the [2022 AMBAG](#)

[Regional Growth Forecast](#), the County has seen job growth occur over the last five years, gaining approximately 9,500 jobs countywide, including approximately 3,200 jobs in the unincorporated area.

The following information is from the [2020-2021 County Budget and Financial Reports](#). State and federal revenue is the County's single largest revenue source. Property taxes, sales tax, transient occupancy, and other taxes are the County's second largest revenue source. For every \$1.00 paid in Federal and State taxes, property taxes, sales taxes, and other taxes, charges, and fees, the County receives varying portions of that tax revenue to fund County functions. As a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency and shelter-in-place requirement, the economic downturn has resulted in reduced revenues from sales tax, transient occupancy tax and charges for some services. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a great deal of uncertainty about the County's revenues and budget. The five-year forecast prepared before the COVID-19 pandemic anticipated budget shortfalls. The General Fund met its obligations for 2020-21 through reductions to department operations, position eliminations, and a 7.5% to 10% employee furlough. However, due to declining revenues continuing through 2024-25, the General Fund is unlikely to meet its obligations without new or increased revenues and/or continued cost reductions that will impact programs and services.

2.2 Community Vision

The County of Santa Cruz General Plan includes a Public Safety Element, which addresses many of the potential hazards addressed in this plan. The overall goals guiding the Public Safety Element of the General Plan are as follows:

- To protect human life, private property, and the environment.
- To minimize public expenses by preventing inappropriate use and development or location of public facilities and infrastructures in those areas, which by virtue of natural dynamic processes or proximity to other activities, present a potential threat to the public health, safety, and general welfare.

The Public Safety Element of the General Plan also identifies major hazards that may occur within the county, policies that address each hazard and mitigation factors. It provides information on all pertinent county policies relating to hazard mitigation, as well. The General Plan has informed this LHMP. Working with the Planning Department collaboratively on this LHMP supports a broader vision of what factors need to be considered in order to protect the health and welfare of county residents.

In 2011 the Planning Department obtained funding from the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Disaster Recovery Initiative grant program to implement recommendations of the 2010 LHMP related to flooding, coastal bluffs and beaches, erosion, and fire. This project to amend portions of the General Plan/Local Coastal Program (GP/LCP) and the Santa Cruz County Code (SCCC) that address public safety was initiated to promote goals, policies and regulations that would increase the resilience of the community relative to the expected impacts of climate change in Santa Cruz County, provide for adaptation strategies, and implement several Priority Actions in the County's 2010 LHMP.

In 2013 the County adopted a Climate Action Strategy (CAS) to address the two pillars of community response to climate change: reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and adaptation to the environmental changes that are expected to occur. Many of the proposed General Plan policies and

code amendments implement the adaptation portion of the CAS, minimize impacts from climate change, and increase resilience in unincorporated area.

On September 15, 2020, the Board of Supervisors adopted the proposed amendments to the Public Safety Element of the GP/LCP, the proposed amendments to SCCC Chapter 16.10 Geologic Hazards, Chapter 16.13 Floodplain Regulations, Chapter 16.20 Grading Regulations, and Chapter 16.22 Erosion Control. The updated policies and regulations are in effect outside the Coastal Zone and will become effective inside the Coastal Zone upon certification by the California Coastal Commission. Significant modifications by the Coastal Commission require concurrence by the Board of Supervisors.

General Plan Guiding Principles

The overall goals and guiding principles for the Land Use Element of the General Plan, which need to be considered in the LHMP, are as follows:

- **Population and Residential Growth Goals:** To provide an organized and functional balance of urban, rural, and agricultural land use that maintains environmental quality, enhances economic vitality, protects the public health, safety, and welfare, and preserves the quality of life in the unincorporated areas of the county.
- **Rural Residential Siting and Density:** To achieve patterns of rural residential development that are compatible with the physical limitations of the land, the natural and cultural resources of the County, the availability of public services, and protection of the natural environment.
- **Urban Residential Siting and Density:** To provide urban residential areas within the Urban Services Line which are protected from noise, traffic congestion, natural hazards, and other objectionable influences of nonresidential land use; and to establish a variety of residential land use categories and dwelling unit densities offering a diverse choice of housing opportunities.
- **Commercial and Industrial Siting and Development:** To provide adequate facilities to meet the shopping, service, and employment needs of County residents and area visitors in a manner compatible with adjacent residential development, availability of public facilities, protection of natural resources, and maintenance of environmental quality and high standards of urban design.
- **Public Facility/Institutional Siting and Development:** To ensure adequate present and future availability of land for both public and quasi-public facility uses including schools, hospitals, cemeteries, sanitary landfills, and water supply and sewage treatment facilities.
- **Jobs/Housing Balance:** To develop an efficient land use pattern which improves the area's jobs/housing balance and thereby reduces the total amount of vehicle miles traveled and reduces polluting emissions.
- **Village, Town, Community and Specific Plans:** To continue using village, town, community, and specific plans to provide a planning framework to guide future public and private improvements in town centers and other concentrated urban and rural areas, to provide a higher level of planning detail and involvement.
- **Airport Land Use Compatibility and Safety:** To Require compatibility between the Watsonville Municipal Airport and future land uses in the unincorporated area of the County that surround the Airport, and comply with State of California statutes, and regulations, and other laws governing land uses surrounding and within the airport, including consistency with the California Airport Land Use Planning Handbook which contains the mandatory criteria for safety, land use and density restrictions in the vicinity, and federal aviation regulations.

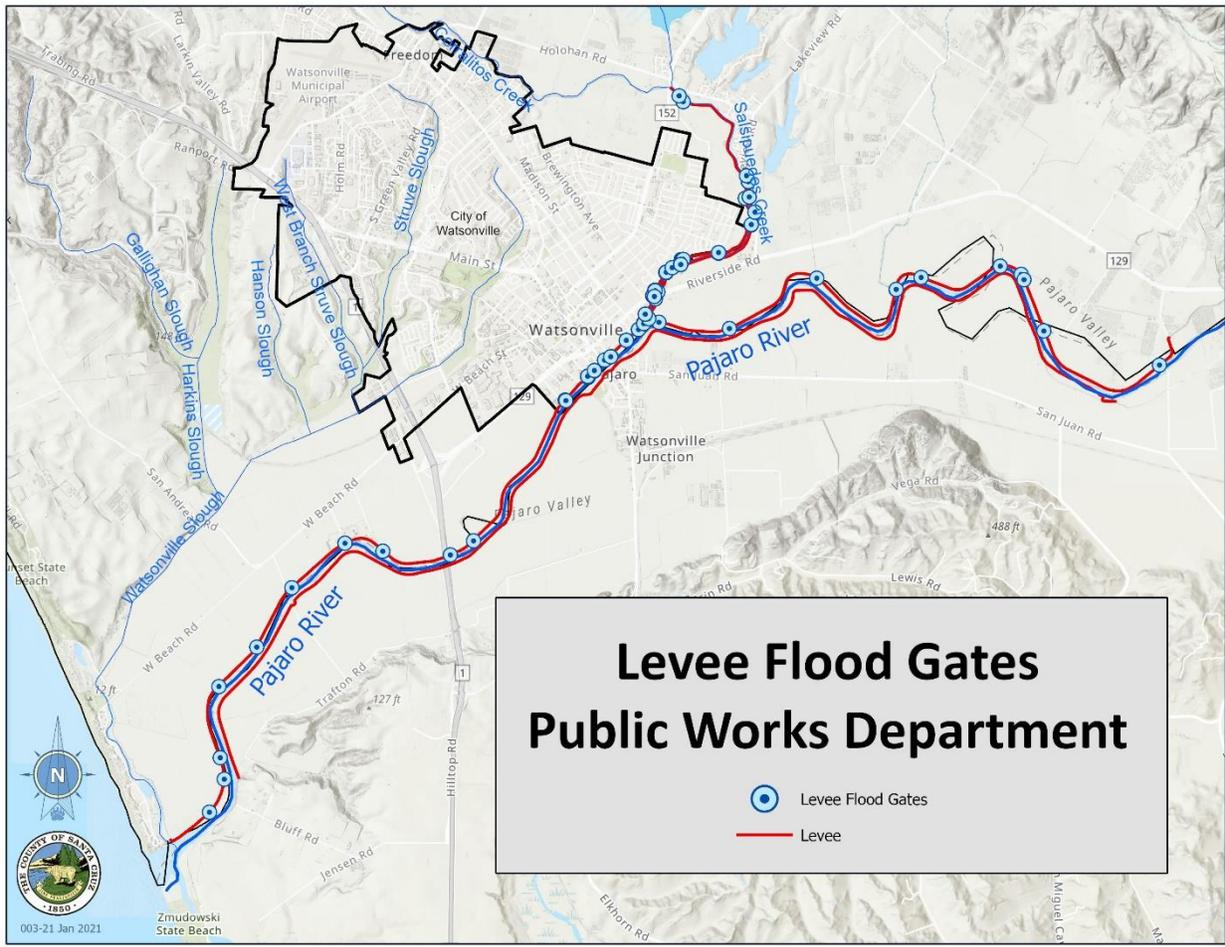


Figure 5 Location of levee flood gates

Other Critical Facilities

Hospitals, designated shelter facilities and schools are some of the critical facilities not owned by the County designated as Disaster Medical Facilities or shelters. Figure 6 is a map of other critical facilities throughout the County and Appendix D contains a list of the critical facilities depicted in Figure 6.

There are three hospitals within the county limits: Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, Watsonville Community Hospital, and Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center. Of the three, only Dominican and Watsonville have emergency rooms. All three hospitals are designated for use during Public Health emergencies. There are also several skilled nursing facilities, rehabilitation centers, medical clinics, and long-term care facilities within the county. A list of these facilities is in Appendix E.

The Santa Cruz County Office of Education (COE) oversees all public schools within the county, some of which have been used in the past as emergency operation centers and emergency shelters. The COE has an Emergency Plan, which is incorporated within this LHMP. A list of all public schools is in Appendix F, and a list of all private schools is in Appendix G.



Figure 6 Critical facilities throughout Santa Cruz County

Historical Structures

The Planning Department keeps an inventory of historic sites and properties within the county. A historic evaluation is provided for each site which provides the basis for classifying the properties. The evaluation and rating of these properties in this inventory is based upon guidelines published by the National Park Service for placement on the National Register of Historic Sites. A review of this list revealed that most of the properties are privately owned. Notable exceptions include Wilder Ranch State Park, which is under the authority of the state government, and Felton Covered Bridge, which is located in a County Park.