

## VISION STATEMENT

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The Santa Cruz Valley is a fascinating area of our nation where long-term relationships between people and nature have produced a landscape with high ecological, cultural, and aesthetic values. Here, rich biological diversity coincides with cultural diversity in a way that helps define the character of our nation. Valley residents have always appreciated the unique natural beauty of their region. Now, there is also a growing awareness of the values of local cultural traditions, vernacular architecture, and working landscapes, as well as an increasing recognition of sustainable land uses that have been practiced for centuries. However, the pressure of a rapidly growing population is creating a need to strengthen local communities and successfully plan for the environmental, cultural, and economic future of this region. This Feasibility Study shows how a National Heritage Area designation will help residents of the Santa Cruz Valley manage change by preserving a sense of place.

As in other parts of the country, a broad spectrum of local stakeholders have coalesced around the National Heritage Area concept because it represents a significant shift from the traditional national park model with regulatory boundaries, top-down management, and objectives centered on mandatory resource protection and interpretation in limited areas. In contrast, the National Heritage Area concept is based on large landscapes with multiple owners and management entities, and objectives centered on communities, voluntary resource conservation, and interpretation of related resources in larger contexts. The concept is built on the principle that conservation efforts cannot be successful without the participation and leadership of those people closest to the resources. It is an approach to resource management based on decision-making at a local level, with the people living here setting the agenda and implementing it themselves. Rather than relying on regulation, heritage education and environmental education are used to build a stewardship ethic, and conservation is voluntary.

Many advantages to a National Heritage Area approach are apparent. It is an opportunity to make conservation more inclusive by broadening the participation of different kinds of people. It provides a way to link related resources and coordinate conservation efforts over a large area. It helps build bridges between diverse local organizations where none existed before, and it also provides a framework within which privately and publicly owned resources can be managed together through voluntary partnerships. It provides a mechanism to combine public and private funding to increase effectiveness toward local goals.

A National Heritage Area is a way for community-based, voluntary conservation to integrate with sustainable economic land uses and community development. National Heritage Areas are compatible with economic activity because they recognize the importance of private lands; they further recognize that property owners are the primary planners of land use. The proven effectiveness of National Heritage Areas as a conservation approach derives from their providing funding and other assistance, not regulations and red tape, to help communities and private landowners achieve their own stewardship goals. Their effectiveness as an economic development strategy is demonstrated by the significant increases in heritage tourism and nature tourism in existing National Heritage Areas, and related increases in jobs, business incomes, and tax revenues. Rehabilitation of historic buildings supported by grants and loans



### *Principles of National Heritage Areas*

- ◆ *Voluntary participation*
- ◆ *Created by grass-roots, broad coalitions*
- ◆ *Recognize values of distinctive landscapes and cultural traditions*
- ◆ *Economic development based on heritage and nature tourism*
- ◆ *Security of property rights*
- ◆ *Partnerships to achieve shared goals*
- ◆ *Assist stakeholders to achieve their own goals*
- ◆ *Local management by stakeholder representatives*

from a National Heritage Area, in combination with federal and state tax credits, will create new housing, help revive historic neighborhoods and downtowns, stimulate growth of a rehabilitation industry, and open up new investment opportunities. Conservation and restoration of important natural areas will improve the quality of life in the region.

In summary, the concept of a Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area envisions preservation-based community development that protects important resources, promotes a sense of place, and provides new economic opportunities. The concept recognizes that preservation efforts cannot be successful without the participation and leadership of those people closest to the resources, and it encourages the stewardship roles of local communities and private landowners. It is an approach to resource management based on decision-making at a local level, with residents of the region setting the agenda and implementing it themselves. Most importantly, it provides a way for the people who live here to create a future that includes the cultural traditions, historic places, working landscapes, and natural treasures that make this region unique and special.