

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION LEAGUE'S  
2024 CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL ASSEMBLY

# Life Beyond 1.5 Degrees

Lessons from Lahaina: *Have we learned anything?*

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**TERRY WATT**

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2024

12.7 M ACRES

lost to wildfire in the  
last 10 years

22 DEATHS

resulted from the  
2022-23 CA 100 IS

60% GROWTH

IN THE WUI

in CA, OR, & WA

# California

BY 4.6 M  
HOMES

in the WUI

THE NUMBERS

1 IN 10 PEOPLE  
living in the WUI

An aerial photograph of a suburban neighborhood. The houses have brown roofs and are interspersed with green trees and lawns. Some houses have swimming pools. In the background, there is a dry, brown hillside with sparse vegetation. The text is overlaid on the image.

Intersectional Crises:

HOUSING, CLIMATE (WILDFIRE),  
AND BIODIVERSITY



2.5

MILLION

more housing units  
needed by 2030



URBAN  
SPRAWL

into the WUI  
increases  
exposure to  
climate risks



BIODIVERSITY

LOSS

from sprawl  
threatens  
ecosystems &  
their services

# Costs of URBAN SPRAWL

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## Economic & Social

- Loss of life
- Insurance accessibility concerns for homes in high risk areas
- Exorbitant costs to rebuild following disaster
- High long-term operational and maintenance costs
- Social isolation and health issues

## Environmental

- Reduction of carbon sinks
- Displacement of working lands (agriculture, natural resources)
- Wildlife and habitat loss
- Increased emissions from higher VMT

# Major Issues: ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

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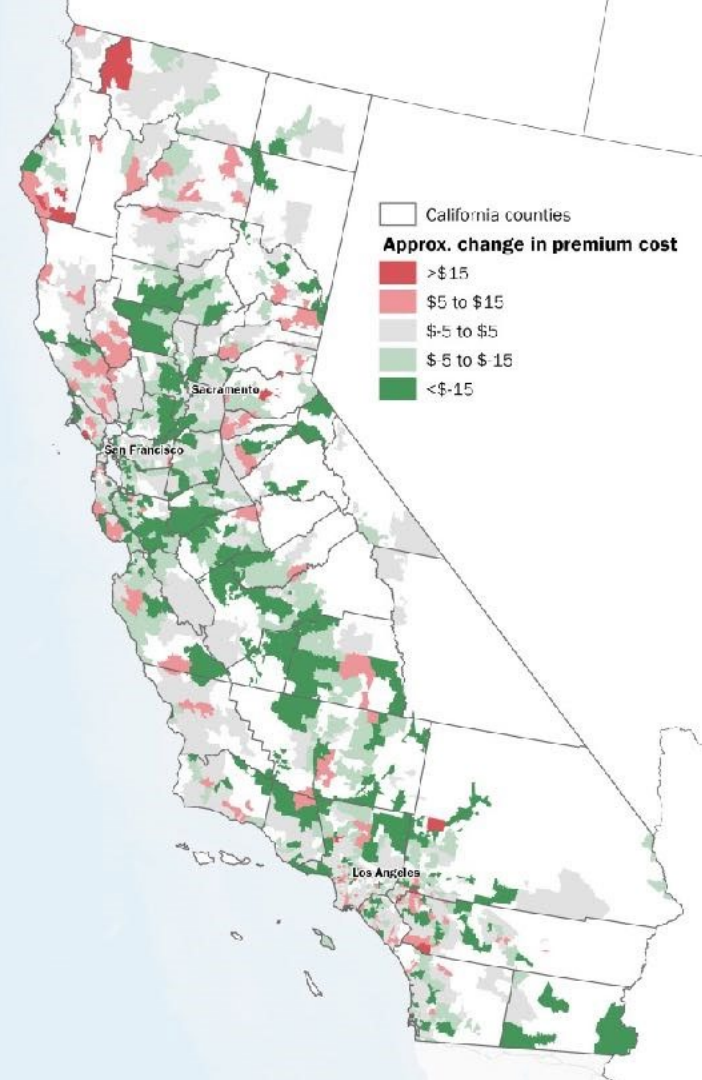
1. Fiscally unsustainable land use
2. True cost of insurance
3. True cost of catastrophe










So, what do we do?

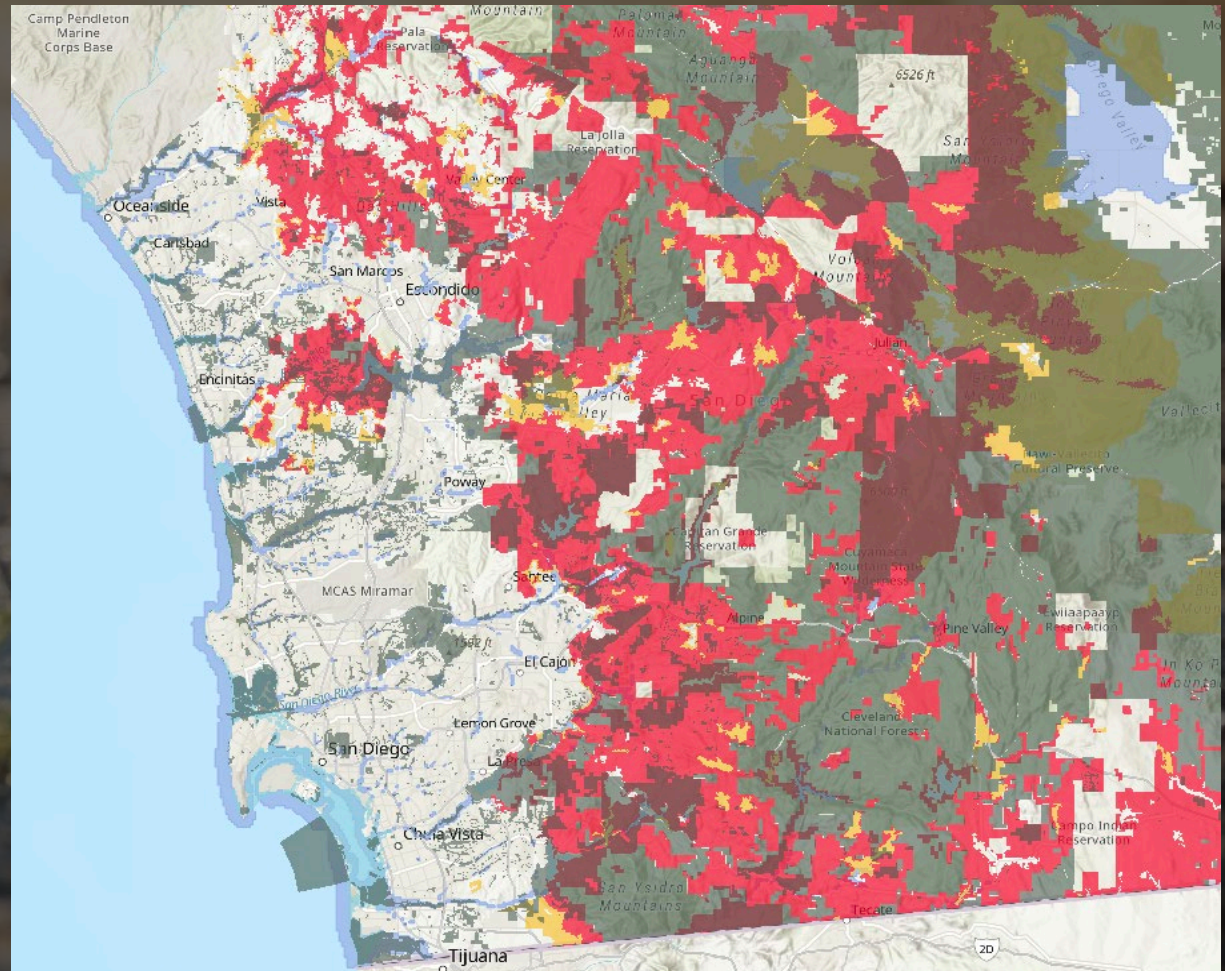
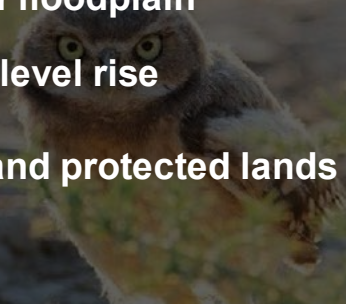
Mapping can help to inform the important dialogue about how and where to build responsibly





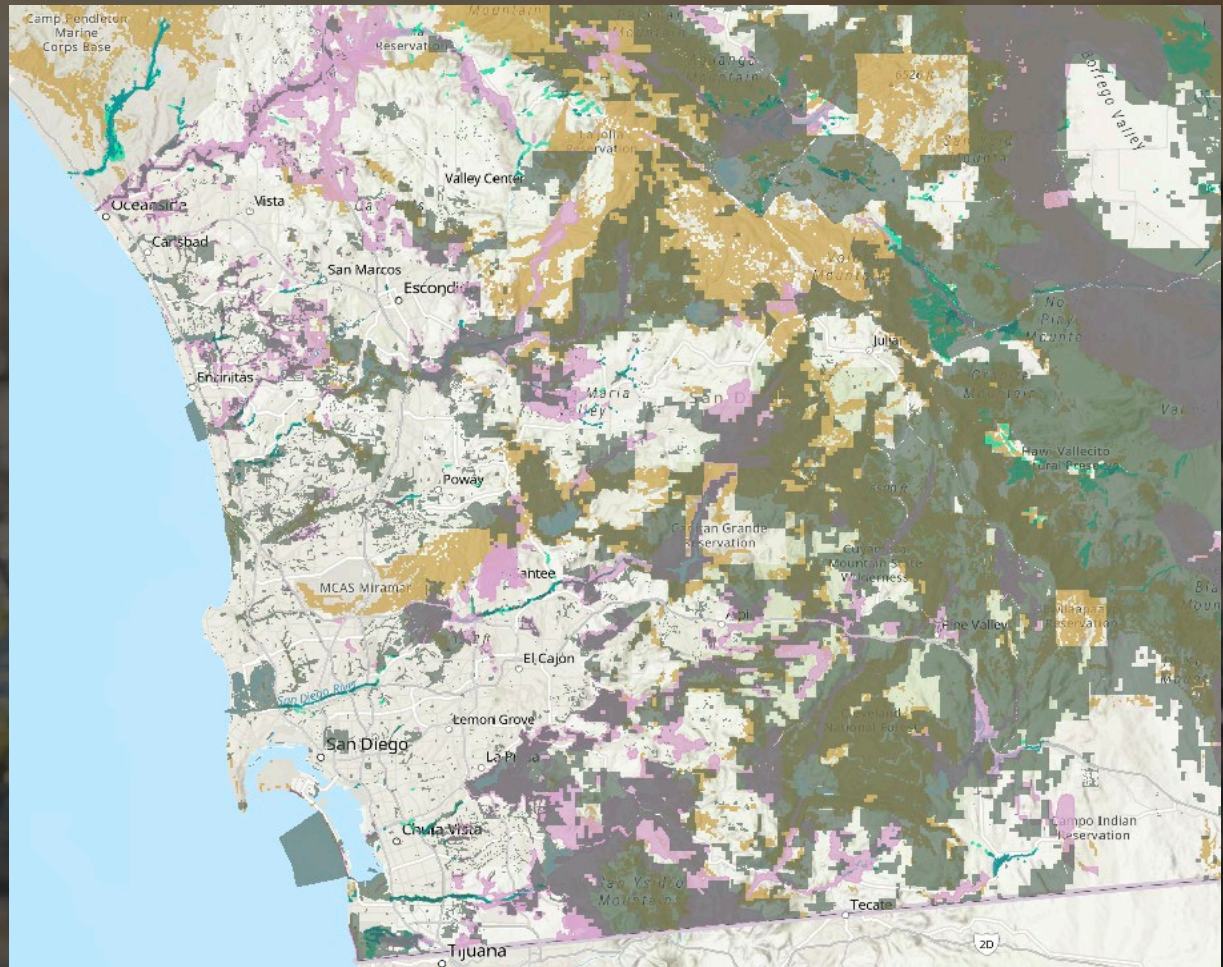
# Climate Risk

-  Very high fire hazard
-  High fire hazard
-  100-year floodplain
-  5-ft sea level rise
-  Public and protected lands



# Biodiversity

- Protected species habitat
- Wildlife & climate linkages
- Wetlands
- Groundwater dependent vegetation
- Vernal pools
- Public and protected lands





Working to solve all crises at once:

# HOUSING & CLIMATE

# BROAD SOLUTIONS

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- More efficient use of existing development footprints instead of growing outward
- Climate-friendly growth in infill areas
- Policies to prevent development in high risk areas (local, regional, State)



# Case Study: LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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Updated General Plan to:

- Prohibit subdivisions and density in VHFHSZ
- Identify evacuation routes
- Up-zone some urban areas

# Case Study: SAN JOSE



# Case Study: SAN JOSE

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Devastating Coyote Valley flooding in 2017 led to policy changes:

- Updated General Plan, shifting industrial zones to agricultural/open space
- Up-zoned areas within the city

Does the State have a bolder role to limit dangerous and fiscally unsustainable growth? **Maybe**

- SB 571: would create statewide standards for evacuation routes in new developments



An aerial photograph of a vast, rolling landscape. The foreground and middle ground are dominated by vibrant green, undulating hills. A large, calm lake is situated in a valley, reflecting the sky. In the distance, a range of mountains is visible, with their peaks covered in snow. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

# Questions & Discussion

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