FINANCING LAND PROTECTION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF AN OPEN SPACE DISTRICT IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.

By

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ABSTRACT

Financing Land Protection in Rural Communities: Assessing the Feasibility of an Open Space District in Humboldt County, California

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As communities in the western United States with high amenity values experience rapid population growth, the conservation and protection of resource lands has become increasingly important. Humboldt County is experiencing the effects of a growing population in California, as more and more local resource lands are converted to other uses such as housing and hobby farms. Budget or funding cuts in funding from state and federal governments have left counties with few options with which to address threats to resource lands. In response, other communities in the Western United States have decided to fund open space protection by placing bonds or tax increases on the ballot. These local conservation tax measures have been successful at generating money for agricultural preservation, trails, and habitat protection.

My research first investigated the success and failure of conservation ballot measure campaigns in four rural western counties. Secondly, qualitative interviews were used to assess whether or not the citizens of Humboldt County, California, a non-metropolitan western county with high amenity values, are willing to support the creation of an open space district. Thirdly, a statistical analysis of voting data from prior
environmental ballot measures was performed to assess the likelihood of a measure succeeding at the polls.

Results indicate that for the formation of an open space district to be successful, proponents need to form a broad non-partisan coalition, find a tax measure that is fair, and have enabling legislation passed by the State of California. Currently, such a coalition is not present in Humboldt County and a number of concerns exist which could prevent its formation. Analysis of voting on previous environmental ballot measures suggests that there may be more support for a district in areas such as Arcata than in the rest of the county. Attitudes for and against the establishment of an open space district are also examined, and recommendations are made for how to start down the path towards creating an open space district.
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INTRODUCTION

Across the Western United States, communities known for their attractive landscapes and moderate climates have been struggling with the consequences of in-migration. Increases in population combined with poor planning have resulted in the loss of agricultural and timber lands, the fragmentation of critical habitat, and the loss of recreational opportunities (Bank of America 1996, Benfield et al. 1999, California Environmental Dialogue 1999, Stein et al. 2005). The loss of these ‘open space’ lands has the potential to disproportionately affect the economy and quality of life in rural communities. Poorly planned development directly impacts the natural resources communities are dependent on and decreases the attractiveness of the area for tourism (Campoli et al. 2002).

Humboldt County, California, while not currently experiencing a dramatic increase in population, is nevertheless feeling the impacts of in-migration. Several recent studies have documented the steady loss of agricultural land and a concern over future losses (Smith and Giraud 2000, Gibson 2004, Morehead 2004). Of particular concern is the increase in land values, making it more profitable to develop the land for housing than to continue using the land for agriculture or timber production. Humboldt County does participate in statewide farmland protection programs, such as the Williamson Act, and has benefited from statewide bond measures that raised money for the purchase of parkland. Despite the existence of these programs, development consistently outpaces efforts to protect land (Press 2002).
Instead of relying on insufficient outside sources of funding from state or federal programs, many communities are deciding to fund the protection of open space with local revenues (Land Trust Alliance 2006). In 2004, 219 communities in the United States placed new tax measures on the ballot and 164 passed, generating an estimated four billion dollars for conservation (Trust for Public Land 2006). Voters in California have approved 31 of 54 state and local initiatives placed on the ballot since 1994. Measures to protect open space are motivated by the desire to protect open space, alter growth patterns, protect endangered species, preserve farmland, protect drinking water and provide areas for outdoor recreation (Williams 1969, California Environmental Dialogue 1999, Hollis and Fulton 2002, Trust for Public Land 2006).

The willingness to protect open space exists despite the fact that both county and city governments have traditionally been pro-development (Press 2002). Molotch’s growth machine hypothesis states that groups that benefit from development maintain a sufficient influence over government to ensure beneficial policies and programs. Developers, local newspapers and some financial institutions see government as a means by which they can make money through intensifying land use (Molotch 1993). The passage of California’s Proposition 13 in 1978 has also caused growth. It severely limited property taxes and in response communities have engaged in ‘fiscal zoning,’ which attempts to generate additional sales tax by encouraging auto-malls and other retail developments (Fulton 1999).

Despite the growth machine, Californians are managing to protect land throughout the state. Press (2002) documented that a wide range of communities in
California are protecting open space and the conditions that contribute to successful programs. Some of the most successful counties such as Marin, Sonoma, and Santa Clara have created special districts dedicated to the protection of open space. This thesis builds on Press’s research into open space protection in California and draws from the expertise of land protection advocates (such as the Trust for Public Land), to assess the feasibility of creating a special district in Humboldt County for the protection of parks and open space.

The idea of protecting ‘open space’ was initially a reaction to the rapid suburban development following World War II. The combination of a post-war housing shortage, new production techniques, and federal subsidies promoting home ownership resulted in a boom in housing starts in the 1950s and 1960s (Rome 2001, Hayden 2003). Residents near the new subdivisions, and those who had purchased homes in those subdivisions soon found themselves surrounded by even more homes and became concerned with the loss of open land. Activists during the 1950 and 1960s focused on the loss of productive farmland, missing recreation resources, and the conservation of land. During the 1960s, scientists also became aware of the environmental consequences of the rapidly growing urban sprawl, including the filling of wetlands, home construction in flood plains, and water pollution from inadequate septic systems. These factors combined to drive a movement for the protection of open space. Urban growth and land use became visible issues of national concern culminating in the early 1970s with attempts to pass a national land use act (Rome 2001).
Today, open space protection still encompasses a broad range of issues from greenways, urban parks, and habitat conservation, to agricultural preservation (American Farmland Trust 2006, Trust for Public Land 2006, Greenbelt Alliance 2006). In California, special districts formed to protect open space have been tailored to the needs of their communities. In Sonoma County the focus is on agricultural preservation, while in Riverside County the preference is for ball fields and picnic areas, as well as habitat conservation (Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District 2006, Riverside County Parks and Open Space District 2006). For this research, the term open space is used in its broadest sense to encompass all of the varieties from agricultural preservation to ball fields so as to identify all of the positions for and against the protection of open space.

The remainder of this section provides the background and conceptual tools needed to assess the feasibility of an open space district in Humboldt County. It starts with a brief history of land preservation in California and Humboldt County and then describes the wide range of contemporary techniques for protecting land. This information provides the context needed to understand why Humboldt County might choose to pursue the creation of an open space district and what other efforts have already been attempted. Since this research focuses on the possibility of creating a district, the legal requirements for forming and funding a district are also described. Then, determinants of open space ballot measures are examined for their ability to predict the success of a local measure in Humboldt County. The final portion describes how
voters in previous elections have felt about environmental ballot measures, as this is often an indicator of how they may vote on similar measures in the future.

California’s preservation efforts since 1900 form four distinct periods (Press 2002). The first period 1900-1960 is characterized by top-down preservation. The state of California first required local governments to create comprehensive plans in 1937, and, starting in the 1950s, laws were passed that enabled local governments to be more effective at preserving land through the purchase of parks (Fulton 1999. Press 2002). California State Parks, the Sempervirens Club, and Save the Redwoods League purchased property to protect the shrinking number of old-growth redwoods (Schrepfer 1983).

During the second period, the 1960-1970s, a new concern emerged, the rapid growth of urban areas in the state. While open space protection was still important, much of the focus shifted to slowing growth (Williams 1969, Press 2002). The Trust for Public Land (TPL) formed after the battle over the proposed city of Marincello just north of the Golden Gate Bridge on what is now National Park Service Land. TPL played a critical role in promoting the formation of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, dedicated in 1972 (Brewer 2003). In 1965, the Planning and Conservation League formed to fight plans to fill in much of San Francisco Bay and today continues as an advocacy organization working at the state level. In the early 1970s, Petaluma, a small town north of the San Francisco Bay Area, imposed the first growth control measure in the state, and three different open space districts were created in other Bay Area communities (Fulton 1999, Bay Area Open Space Council 2003).
In 1978, Proposition 13 heralded the end of the initial slow growth movement. The proposition severely restricted the ability of local and state government to raise property taxes, causing revenues to decrease and dramatically hampering the efforts to purchase additional open space lands (Bay Area Open Space Council 2003). The strategies of slow growth advocates changed and groups started to rely more on the referendum and initiative in their efforts to limit or control development (Press 2002).

In the 1980s-1990s the planned growth movement emerged and communities started to focus on ballot measures, such as the passage of urban growth limits, to counter rapid growth (Fulton 1999). There was also a shift in the focus for open space protection. Until the late 1970s, most of the lands were set aside for recreation. Starting in the 1980s, ballot measures started to emphasize habitat preservation. The statewide park bond measures of the 1990s combined both recreation and habitat preservation goals. Activist organizations that were started in during the first slow growth period refined their techniques and became more sophisticated at pursuing these goals (Press 2002).

Throughout all four periods there was an increase in the importance of non-governmental actors in preserving open space. As the state and federal governments reduced the amount of money available, starting in the 1980s, local groups started to change tactics. Land preservation organizations such as land trusts were no longer able to rely as heavily on state and federal grants and shifted their fundraising to the local level (Press 2002, Brewer 2003).

The history of land protection in Humboldt County generally follows a similar pattern as that found statewide. External forces primarily supported early parks and open
space preservation efforts and over time local non-governmental actors became more and more important. Without the concerted effort of Save the Redwoods League, many of the State Parks and Redwood National Park would not have been established. Because the National and State Parks represent the most significant pieces of property protected, a brief summary of the efforts at redwood preservation in Humboldt County follows.

Using money from the 1928 statewide Park Bond Act, the State of California in partnership with Save-The-Redwoods League made the first attempts at land preservation possible (Schrepfer 1983). Save the Redwoods League was founded in San Francisco in 1918 and has worked since then to purchase significant groves of redwoods (Schrepfer 1983, Save the Redwoods League 2006). The first four state parks in Humboldt County were created during the 1920s and focused exclusively on preserving redwoods. The local chapter of the Women’s League led citizen support within the county and in the 1920s the County Board of Supervisors twice voted to contribute money for the protection of redwoods (Amodie 1980).

By the time the Redwood National Park was established in 1968, and expanded in 1978, the county was much less enthusiastic about protecting additional redwoods. Those favoring its establishment were cautious in voicing their support for fear of harassment and those opposed were particularly concerned with the potential loss of timber jobs (Schrepfer 1983). The Sierra Club and Save the Redwoods League spearheaded the nationwide campaign to establish the new National Park and took leading roles in its expansion in 1978 (Dickinson 1979, Schrepfer 1983).
The campaign to establish the Headwaters Preserve involved new actors and tactics, with Earth First! playing a strong role. However, the money for the purchase of Headwaters still came from the state and federal Governments. Efforts to protect Headwaters illustrated a shift in preservation efforts towards the local level. The Sierra Club, the Planning and Conservation League, and Save The Redwoods League, who were all extremely active in the formation and expansion of Redwood National Park, did not participate at all in the efforts to protect Headwaters. Instead, the initial driving force to protect the grove came from residents of Humboldt County (Harris 1996, Devall 1999).

Local environmental organizations started to play a larger role in land protection during the 1970s. The Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC) was established in 1971 and the Environmental Protection and Information Center (EPIC) in 1977. The first land trust, the Humboldt North Coast Land Trust, was established in 1978 to protect coastal resources in and around Trinidad. Sanctuary Forest, a land trust focused on southern Humboldt County, was established in 1987 and since then every few years has seen the creation of a new land trust in the county. The Jacoby Creek Land Trust was established in 1992 to protect the Jacoby Creek Watershed, southeast of Arcata. Two years later the McKinleyville Land Trust was established, and in 1999, the Buckeye Conservancy was founded to come up with strategies for the preservation of working landscapes (agriculture and timber lands) in Humboldt County. In 2000, Save the Dunes was established to protect are coastal dune ecosystems, and the same year, the Northcoast Regional Land Trust was established to coordinate work in Del Norte, Trinity, and Humboldt Counties (Land Trust Alliance 2006). The number of environmental
organizations has also increased dramatically since the 1970s, with groups now working on habitat restoration, water quality, dune preservation and many other topics. The state and federal governments still play a prominent role in funding projects, but are no longer as active in setting the agenda as during the creation of the National and State Parks. (Table 1)

The rapid loss of open space to housing first became a widespread concern in the United States during the 1950s (Jackson 1985, Rome 2001). New building techniques as well as pent up demand for housing after World War Two resulted in the rapid construction of new homes (Rome 2001, Hayden 2003). In addition, the relative affordability of the automobile, federal subsidies, and land use regulations, as well as an antipathy towards density resulted in our now familiar pattern of sprawling growth (Nelson and Duncan 1995).

A wide range of techniques and programs have been developed to manage growth. Techniques that include a specific focus on protecting open space include county and city general plans, urban growth boundaries, zoning, preferential tax assessments, conservation easements, transfer of development rights programs (TDR), right-to-farm laws, economic development programs, special districts, and a number of different state and federal agencies and programs (Nelson 1995, Daniels 1999, Guenzler 2003, Sokolow and Bennett 2004).

Cities and counties in California are required to have a general plan, a policy document that governs how growth is to occur within a community.
Table 1. Timeline of the establishment of parks, wilderness and environmental organizations in Humboldt County 1918-2000

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of Park, Wilderness or Organization</th>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Save the Redwoods League formed in San Francisco</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919-1925</td>
<td>Humboldt Women’s League, Chamber of Commerce, and County Board of Supervisors along with Save the Redwoods League mobilize for establishment of the first Redwood parks in Humboldt County.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park, Humboldt Redwoods State Park (All formed due to partnership between Save the Redwoods League &amp; California Department of Parks and Recreation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Patrick’s Point State Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Little River State Park and Dry Lagoon State Parks, Save the Redwoods League acquires Rockefeller Forest (9,410 acres of Old Growth) from Pacific Lumber.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Trinidad State Beach</td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td>Azalea State Preserve</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Six Rivers National Forest created from portions of Siskiyou, Klamath, and Trinity National Forests</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Arcata Community Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Yolla Bolly – Middle Eel Wilderness</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Redwood National Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>King Range National Conservation Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>NEC (Northcoast Environmental Center- general advocacy)</td>
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Table 1 Timeline of the establishment of parks, wilderness and environmental organizations in Humboldt County 1918-2000 (Continued)

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1974-1978</td>
<td>Conflict over the expansion of Redwood National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC – advocacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Redwood National Park expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Humboldt North Coast Land Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>conflict over the Headwater’s Forest starts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Trinity, Eel, and Klamath Rivers designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Trinity Alps, North Fork, and Siskiyou Wilderness Areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Sanctuary Forest, Inc. (Land Trust focused on the Mattole Watershed)</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>Jacoby Creek Land Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>McKinleyville Land Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Headwaters Preserve</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Buckeye Conservancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Friends of the Dunes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Northcoast Regional Land Trust</td>
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California law further requires that each general plan include 7 elements, including one that specifically addresses open space (Fulton 1999). The goals established within the general plan are then implemented by zoning and subdivision ordinances that spell out the allowable uses for private property (Fulton 1999). California law does not require that open space be preserved, merely that the issue be addressed within the general plan.

Zoning allows a community to regulate land use over large areas for relatively little cost. If a general plan states that certain ridges or all marsh areas should be preserved, development on those areas can be severely restricted through zoning (Guenzler 2003). Examples of this type of zoning include streamside management areas, which limit the types of development within a certain distance of streams, or agricultural-exclusive zoning, which limits the extent to which agricultural land can be developed. Humboldt County uses Agricultural Exclusive zoning, which restricts the allowable uses on the land, in an effort to protect agricultural lands (Morehead 2004). However, the difficulty with zoning is that it is relatively easily altered by political pressure (Daniels 1999, Guenzler 2003).

An urban growth boundary establishes a boundary between land that can and cannot be developed. It is implemented through a local initiative or by a legislative body such as a city council. For instance voters in Ventura County passed an initiative in 1999 that required the establishment of an urban growth boundary for each community within the county. How well an urban growth boundary protects open space depends on where the boundary is established and on continued political support to enforce the urban growth boundary (Warner and Molotch 2000, Guenzler 2003).
Other techniques that have been used include right-to-farm ordinances, preferential property tax assessment, and economic development programs. Right-to-farm ordinances help secure the right to engage in normal agricultural operations and can limit the ability of neighbors to complain about nuisances such as noise and dust (Daniels 1999, Guenzler 2003). Preferential property tax assessment programs such as California’s Williamson Act program allow for tax reductions on agricultural land provided that the land remains in agricultural use. This type of a program can offer a significant tax reduction to farmers whose land is the path of development. Humboldt County has a similar tax incentive program for forest lands. Lands enrolled in a Timber Protection Zone gain the benefit of reduced property taxes (Humboldt County Department of Community Development Services 2003). Economic development programs seek to help resource lands stay economically viable so that there will be less incentive to convert the land to other uses (Nelson and Duncan 1995, Daniels 1999).

The most permanent method for protecting open space is to acquire full rights to the property. This can be accomplished by purchasing the property, having the property donated, or by requiring the donation of property in exchange for the ability to develop other land (exactions). The property owner then decides, within the limits of the law, what the property is used for. Federal, State and local Parks as well as conservation organizations such as the Trust for Public Land and the Nature Conservancy all rely on the acquisition of property for conservation purposes (Daniels 1999, Guenzler 2003, Press 2002).
A less expensive alternative to purchasing the property is to acquire just the development rights. The landowner donates or sells the development rights to a second party who is then responsible for ensuring that the landowner does not violate terms of the agreement (Daniels 1999). Conservation easements are similar to the purchase of development rights, however they are negotiated between the two parties and can encompass more issues such as how the property will be managed. The easement holder, often a local land trust, is responsible for working with the landowner to ensure that the terms of the easement are followed (Brewer 2003). Sonoma County’s Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District was established in 1990 as a purchase of development rights program. It is funded by a quarter cent sales tax and has protected over 68,000 acres of open space through purchasing development rights and conservation easements (Sonoma County Open Space District 2006).

Transfer of development rights is a potentially lower cost alternative to a purchase of development rights program. A local government designates a sending area from which landowners can sell off their development rights, and a receiving area where landowners can purchase the development rights. The receiving area can then use those development rights to construct more homes while the sending area remains less densely settled. The advantage of this type of a program is that it concentrates growth in areas selected by the community and costs the public very little because the transactions are between private citizens (Daniels 1999, Pruetz 2003).

If the acquisition of property and easements are the only tools used, it is unlikely that there will ever be a sufficient amount of money to protect all of the land at risk (Press
A report issued in 1999 estimated that $12.3 billion would be needed by 2010 to meet the land acquisition goals already established by government and private organizations (California Environmental Dialogue 1999). Therefore most recommendations for successful open space protection programs emphasize the need to incorporate a mix of land use controls, tax incentives such as California’s Williamson Act program or Colorado’s income tax benefits for donating conservation easements, and the outright purchase of property (American Farmland Trust 1997, Daniels 1999, McQueen and McMahon 2003).

Funding for protection of open space comes from a wide range of sources including state and federal grants, private donations, and local taxes (Guenzler 2003, McQueen and McMahon 2003). The state of California has provided generous but inconsistent funding for the acquisitions of easements and property. During the 1970s and 1980s, voters in California approved 90 percent of all conservation related bond measures, while during 1990s not a single conservation bond measure was approved. More recently, the statewide park bond measures in 2000 and 2002 provided over $3.76 billion for conservation. In 2000, California passed the Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program which allowed private landowners to donate water or land rights to qualified state agencies and non profit organizations. In return, participants received a state income tax credit for 55 percent of the value of the donation (California Public Resources Code 37000 et seq). The California State Wildlife Conservation Board administered the program and awarded over $40 million in credits during the first years of the program. However, due to budget constraints the tax credit was suspended in 2003.
and a modified version was established in 2005 with the requirement that agencies must reimburse the general fund for any loss of revenue from the tax credits. (McQueen and McMahon 2003, California Wildlife Conservation Board 2006). In total, the State of California has over 50 environmentally related special funds ranging from regional conservancies, such as the Tahoe and Bay Area Conservancies, which provide state grants for land acquisition and conservation, to the environmental license plate fund which generates money from the sale of personalized license plates (McQueen and McMahon 2003).

The federal government also provides money both directly through congressional programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Forest Legacy Program. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, established in 1964, relies on money generated from off shore oil and gas leases and on paper is authorized to provide up to $900 million a year to support the purchase of land by federal, state, and local government. While it has helped with the purchase of over 7 million acres, the program has never been fully funded (McQueen and McMahon 2003). The Forest Legacy Program focuses on keeping working forestlands from being converted to non-forest uses. It does so by providing the states money for conservation easements that emphasize the continued use of the property for sustainable forestry (United States Forest Service 2006). Stiff competition exists for these grants as well as uncertainty from year to year as to how well they will be funded (Trust for Public Land 2004).

The Trust for Public Land has been actively promoting the development of local sources of funding for conservation. Potential sources at the local level include bonds,
property tax, sales tax, development fees, real-estate transfer taxes, and benefit assessment districts (Guenzler 2003, Trust for Public Land 2006). Which funding sources are used depends primarily on what is acceptable to voters in a particular community (Hopper and Cook 2004). Cities and counties in Colorado, New Jersey, and Massachusetts have been the most active in establishing local forms of funding. This is in part due to the incentive of state matching funds (McQueen and McMahon 2003). The Great Outdoors Colorado program, which provides grants for open space acquisition and park improvements, is funded through Colorado’s lottery and requires a 50 percent match from the local community for each grant (Great Outdoors Colorado 2006). While California does have legislation allowing counties and cities to establish special districts dedicated to protecting open space (California Public Resources Code section 5500), it does not have any financial incentive programs to encourage the development of local funds (Price 1995). However, a number of communities in California have been active in creating and approving increases in taxes to protect local open space.

Across the western United States, once conservation finance measures are placed on the ballot they are highly likely to succeed. From 1994-2004, 349 conservation finance measures were attempted. Voters approved 246 of the measures for an average approval rate of 70.49 percent. These measures raised over 33 billion dollars for parks and conservation (Trust for Public Land Landvote Database 2006). In the west, residents of Colorado have been the most active at putting measures on the ballot and have attempted 127 with an approval rate of 74 percent. California has placed the next highest number of measures on the ballot, 54 measures, with an approval rate of 54.7 percent. In
comparison nationwide, conservation finance measures have an average success rate of 77.25 percent (Trust for Public Land Landvote Database 2006).

California authorized the formation of regional parks districts in 1933 (Statutes 1933, c. 1043 p 2664) citing the need for communities to be able to provide additional parkland for the health and well being their residents. The first special district in California, the East Bay Regional Park District, was formed to preserve open space and parkland in the hills behind Berkeley and Oakland. The East Bay Municipal Utility District was preparing to sell off portions of its property in the East Bay Hills, and residents, concerned about the land being used for development, organized and managed to preserve the property by establishing the East Bay Regional Park District (Margolin and Curry 1974).

No other districts were created until 1972 when districts were created in Santa Clara, Monterey, and Marin Counties. In Santa Clara County, voters did not want to see the city of Palo Alto expand all the way up to Skyline Boulevard. The City had commissioned a report to determine how much it would cost to expand, and found that the cost to extend government services up the hillsides would exceed the cost of acquiring the property. The report on the cost of government services along with the public’s interest in protecting the open space provided the necessary incentives for voters to approve the district (Press 2002).

The next open space districts were approved by voters in the early 1990s. The Sonoma, Riverside, and Los Angeles districts were approved in 1991 and the Santa Clara Regional Open Space Authority in 1994. The district in Sonoma County is the first
district in California to rely almost exclusively on the purchase of easements and to focus on the preservation of agricultural lands. In contrast, south of San Francisco, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District has started to use easements to protect agricultural lands. However, the majority of its property is still owned completely by the district (Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District 2006).

Since the formation of the Santa Clara Regional Open Space Authority, two districts have been on the ballot. Voters in Ventura County did not approve creation of an open space district in 2004 (Smart Voter 2006). The Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District was approved by voters on November 7, 2006 (Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District 2006). Efforts are also currently underway to establish a regional parks district in Solano County (Greenbelt Alliance 2006). Five additional open space districts have been authorized by the State of California but have either not been voted on or were not approved by the voters (California Public Resources Code Section 5500).

There are two slightly different paths to forming an open space district in California. A region can convince the state legislature to pass legislation allowing for the formation of an OSD with specific geographic boundaries, or the voters can bypass the legislature and form the district through the initiative process. For example, Assembly Bill 3630 authorized the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District in 1990. This legislation authorized the Board of Supervisors in Sonoma County to hold a hearing and vote to put the special district on an upcoming ballot. Voters then approved the district in 1991. The Monterey Regional Park District, established in 1972,
is the only parks and open space district that has been established by gathering signatures. Citizens in Monterey County collected the required 5,000 signatures to bring the issue to the Board of Supervisors who in turn placed the proposal on the ballot. In both cases, a majority of the voters within the geographic boundaries of the proposed district approved the new agency (Monterey Regional Park District 2005).

The following is a summary of the steps to forming a district as outlined by California Public Resources Code Section 5500:

1. A petition signed by 5000 residents from within the area of the proposed special district.
2. This petition goes to the board of supervisors.
   a. First to the minority county (land area) for approval
   b. Majority county then needs to approve
3. This approval then gets forwarded on to the Local Agency Formation Committee for analysis. The Local Agency Formation Committee does not vote, it just provides an official analysis.
4. Board of supervisors determines districts for the board of directors
5. Board of supervisors establishes a time for the election. Elections for the Board of Directors of the district are held simultaneously as the election for the district.
6. Election is held. If the measure passes (simple majority) the Board of Supervisors declares the agency formed.
The majority of the districts formed through special enabling legislation, such as the district in Sonoma County, bypassed the first and third steps of this process. They were not required to collect signatures and were specifically exempted from The Local Agency Formation Committee during the creation of the district (California Public Resources Code Section 5500). However, if the district wants to annex additional land, as the Midpeninsula Open Space District has recently done, it must still go through the The Local Agency Formation Committee process (Midpeninsula Open Space District 2006).

The Santa Clara Open Space Authority, established in 1994, is an exception to the requirement for direct voter approval of a district. It was created by legislation (California Public Resources Code Section 35101 et seq) that authorized the formation of the district. The Board of Supervisors for Santa Clara County and each City Council within Santa Clara County then decided if they would like to be included within the district. While there was no direct voter approval required, backers of the Open Space Authority still held an advisory vote that passed with 57 percent in favor of the district (Press 2002). Santa Clara County is also unique in that it has two open space districts: the Santa Clara Open Space Authority is limited to lands not already part of the Midpeninsula Open Space District.

While the legal steps to forming an open space district are relatively clear, one of the biggest challenges is often establishing a source of funding. There are three different types of taxes that have been used by open space districts in California: property tax, sales tax, and benefit assessment (Marin County Open Space District 2006, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District 2006, Santa Clara Open Space
Authority 2006). Propositions 13 and 218, state constitutional amendments passed by the voters, set the requirements for creating or raising new taxes. Any sales tax funding for an open space district is considered a ‘special tax’ under Proposition 218 and therefore must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the voters. Levying a property tax faces a similar challenge, as Proposition 13 also requires approval by a two-thirds majority of the voters. The majority of open space districts in California were established before the passage of Proposition 13 and are funded through property tax which at the time only required a simple majority to pass. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District is an exception, as it is funded entirely by a quarter cent sales tax. However, it was passed before the passage of Proposition 218 and therefore only required a simple majority for approval.

The Santa Clara Open Space Authority decided to bypass the supermajority requirements of Propositions 13 and 218 through the creation of a benefit assessment district. The idea behind a benefit assessment is that property values will rise within the district because of the service provided by the district, in this case the acquisition and maintenance of additional open space lands. The district essentially recovers a portion of that increase in property value through a tax. The Planning and Conservation League (Meral 2003, Knox, 1996) outlines the steps to creating an assessment district:

1. First the district decides what goals it has in mind, how much it would cost, and what areas within its boundaries would benefit from those goals.
2. It is then recommended that the district conduct a survey within that area to see how much property owners would be willing to pay for these additional benefits.
A property owner pays a certain amount per parcel, independent of the overall value of the parcel.

3. A registered civil engineer then determines what the benefits would be for each type of property and assigns an assessment in proportion to the benefits.

4. Proposition 218 requires that the property owners vote on the assessment. Each property owner gets one vote for each dollar they are assessed. A simple majority is required for passage of the assessment. (Before the passage of proposition 218, a district was only required to hold a public hearing, and if there was no significant opposition during the hearing the benefit assessment would have been declared.)

Although the use of special assessments has been somewhat controversial, the Santa Clara Open Space Authority has successfully employed this strategy and the California Appeals Court has upheld its use to fund the purchase of open space. Currently the Silicon Valley Taxpayers Association is still in opposition to the assessment and has an appeal pending with the California Supreme Court (Santa Clara Open Space Authority 2006). A number of other open space districts in California use benefit assessment districts to generate additional revenue. The East Bay Regional Park District attempted to levy a special assessment in Contra Costa County in July of 2004, but it was not approved (Contra Costa Open Space Funding Authority Parks and Open Space Protection & Preservation District 2006). The Marin County Open Space District, however, has
been successful at implementing two different benefit assessment districts, each tied to a particular open space preserve (Marin County Open Space District 2006).

While it is challenging to get the supermajority needed for a property tax increase, it is not impossible. Voters in Alameda County approved an increase in property tax in November of 2004, and residents in Riverside County passed a property tax measure to support the Regional Parks and Open Space District in 1991. The property tax in Alameda County will fund a variety of maintenance projects and improvements for the East Bay Regional Park District (League of Women Voters 2006, East Bay Regional Park District 2006, Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District 2006, Trust for Public Land 2006).

Parks and open space districts in California generally maintain a diverse funding base and do not rely exclusively on taxes for their revenue. For example, the Riverside Regional Park and Open Space District uses both property tax and fees collected for using its parks and recreation facilities (Riverside Regional Park and Open Space District 2006). The East Bay Regional Parks District and Midpeninsula Open Space District have established non-profit organizations through which they raise money for everything from operations to the purchase of property (Press 2002). Notably the Peninsula Open Space Trust works with the Midpeninsula Open Space District specifically to facilitate fundraising for the purchase of property. The Peninsula Open Space Trust can accept tax-deductible donations of money, use this money to purchase property, and then conduct a bargain sale to the District (Peninsula Open Space Trust 2006). Similarly, The Regional Parks Foundation supports the efforts of the East Bay Regional Parks.
There are two approaches to the study of environmental ballot initiatives. The first examines environmental ballot initiatives to better understand public preferences for the environment (Bowler et al. 1998, Branton 2003). California is often the focus of these studies because of its long history of ballot initiatives (Branton 2003). The second approach views the recent increase in open space ballot measures, a type of environmental ballot initiative, as a new policy instrument used by communities to control growth and conserve natural resources (Hollis and Fulton 2002, Kline 2006). They seek to understand why these ballot measures emerge, which communities are willing to use this new strategy, and its effectiveness. While a number of counties in California have passed an open space ballot measure, these latter studies encompass the broad range of communities in the United States that have employed this approach. The following section will first address the issue of who votes for environmental ballot initiatives and then examine the literature specifically focused on open space ballot measures.

In the most comprehensive study of environmental ballot measures in California, Press (2003) examined the outcomes of 19 ballot measures from the 1970s-1990s. Press analyzed voting returns at the county, city, and census block level as well as used survey data to explore who voted for the ballot measures. Partisanship, measured by party affiliation, and place, measured by prior voting history of a community, were found to be the most significant predictors of how a community would vote. Partisanship was the most important with Democrats tending to favor spending on the environment and increased regulation. The importance of partisanship is consistent with a number of other
studies (Kahn and Matsusaka 1997, Bowler and Donovan 1998, Gruber 2001, Salka 2001, Branton 2003). Press’s attention to place is unique. He found that counties and cities that have historically demonstrated little support for environmental ballot measures remain consistent in their opposition (Press 2003).

In other studies, education and income level have also been found to explain environmental voting (Deacon and Shapiro 1975, Kahn and Matsusaka 1997; Kahn 2002). Kahn (2002) used voting and demographic information at the level of the census tract to examine patterns of support for six California ballot initiatives in the mid 1990s. He found that areas with high levels of college graduates tended to vote pro-environment, while wealthier areas tended to exhibit a decrease in support for environmental ballot initiatives. Kahn (2002) argues that wealthier areas may feel that they have sufficient wealth to access nature without the need for public spending. In an earlier study of environmental ballot measures in California that focused on counties, Kahn and Matsusaka (1997) found that counties closer to the mean level of income tended to favor spending on the environment while those with high incomes did not. As in Press’s study counties with higher levels of education supported increased spending on the environment. Overall, within the literature studying environmental ballot measures partisanship, place, income, and education are the most consistently correlated with the passage of ballot measures.

The subset of the literature on growth controls focuses on the determinants of open space ballot measures. One study focuses on counties and cities in suburban Philadelphia, another on a statewide measure in New Jersey, while two look at the
success of city and county open space ballot measures nationwide. (Romero & Liserio 2002, Howell-Moroney 2004a, Howell-Moroney 2004b, Solecki et al 2004, Kline 2006). They set out to evaluate which attributes of the communities are predictors of the presence or passage of open space ballot measures. They argue that this technique for controlling growth is fundamentally different from previous strategies that rely on local government’s police powers in the form of zoning or urban growth boundaries. Open space ballot measures seek to generate new tax revenue, enabling communities to protect property by purchasing it (Howell-Moroney 2004a). Another difference between the research on open space ballot measures and much of the literature on growth controls is that these studies are examining the actual policy outcomes as opposed to focusing on individual attitudes/preferences towards growth control.

All of the studies that build from the work already done on attitudes towards growth control rely on the premise that governments are inherently biased towards growth. Logan and Molotch’s (1987) growth machine hypothesis argues that local elites, often landowners or others who profit from development, control the decision-making process within communities and steer communities towards decisions which are profitable to them. The restrictions of California’s Propositions 13 and 218 have created additional incentives for communities themselves to pursue growth as a means of increasing tax revenue (Fulton 1999). Therefore, one of the basic questions within the literature is under what circumstances are growth control measures passed? What attributes enable communities, to at least momentarily, overcome the growth machine (Press 2002)?
Four studies on the determinants of open space ballot measures evaluated the amount of growth, community socio-economic status, density, recentness of the formation of the community, and the extent to which sprawl was present. All agreed that the more wealthy and white a community was, the more likely it was for the community to have voted for an open space initiative. There were mixed conclusions as to whether or not sprawl had an effect. Howell-Moroney (2004a) and Solecki et al. (2004) found that sprawl had an effect while Romero and Liserio in their nationwide study did not find sprawl to be significantly related to the passage of open space measures. However, Romero and Liserio relied only on population density as their measure of sprawl and admittedly do not look more closely at the local conditions which might have had an impact (Romero 2004). Howell-Moroney measured sprawl through aerial photographs. Solecki et al. examined a combination of growth over the previous ten years and the increase in the number of housing units over the same time period. Kline (2006) took a slightly different approach to measuring sprawl and instead examined the scarcity of open space land in a county by looking at population density and growth over the previous ten years. He found that the scarcity of open space land is significantly related to the presence of open space ballot measures.

In general there is agreement that race, community socio-economic status, and the degree of sprawl are all correlated with the passage of open space measures. However, the actual relationship between sprawl and the passage of an open space measure remains unclear because of the “extensive literature challenging a straightforward cause-and-effect mechanism as the guiding force behind policy adoption” (Romero & Liserio 2002.
In addition, all four studies acknowledged the important role that local political groups may play in influencing voting behavior.

Only one study exists that focuses exclusively on conservation finance ballot measures in the Western United States. Shanahan (2005) examined geographic and social attributes of western counties that had placed measures on the ballot. She found that counties with higher levels of social and civic engagement and wealthier counties were more likely to support the ballot measures while the presence of recent migrants and the amount of environmental social capital were not predictive. Counties with two federal agencies managing a large amount of land, and those counties with a large urban population were found to be less supportive. The impact of sprawl, or the type of development occurring was not examined.

A number of attributes have been found to correlate with the passage of environmental and open space ballot measures: partisanship, place, education and income levels, and race. Higher education levels are usually positively correlated while the roll of income is not consistent. The assumption that wealthier better-educated communities vote for the environment is generally supported with the caution that the very wealthy within a community may not be vote for the environment. The issue of partisanship is not examined in the literature on growth controls but is often one of the strongest predictors within the literature on environmental ballot initiatives and therefore would most likely also be useful for predicting the success of open space ballot measures. That place plays an important roll is clear however the actual connection between on the ground conditions such as sprawl and the passage of environmental ballot measures remains
unclear. Differences between studies examining census tracts, cities, or counties do not appear to be due to the unit of analysis.

The literature on land conservation from the advocacy and non-profit sectors is written from a different perspective. These organizations are focused on techniques for protecting additional land rather than explaining why certain communities are more able to engage in conservation than others.

The most comprehensive guide to local funding for conservation is the Trust for Public Land’s *Conservation Finance Handbook* (Hopper and Cook 2004). It outlines the steps a community needs to take in order to pass a conservation finance measure. Conservation finance measures are bond measures and increases in taxes that are dedicated to the purchase of property or easements. Essentially the handbook takes strategies used in passing initiatives and tailors them specifically to passing a measure to fund conservation (Guzzetta 2000, Greenbelt Alliance 2001). The Trust for Public Land outlines four major steps in the process: First, conduct background research on the community to gain better understanding of the context, and decide if there is sufficient support to move forward. Second, measure public opinion to see what issues resonate most with voters and if enough support exists to run a campaign. Is the public interested in purchasing easements on agricultural land, or is it more interested in providing a steady stream of funding to tackle the maintenance problems on existing recreation lands? The third step involves designing the measure. In this step an additional poll is conducted to evaluate different versions of the ballot language and to learn which campaign strategies may be most effective. The fourth and final step, provided there is
sufficient interest and funding and the timing is right, is to run the campaign. The Trust for Public Land does not provide any specific advice on what themes to stress or how to tailor a campaign to fit an urban or rural context.

Rather than attributing the success or failure of the measure to factors such as education level, or affluence of a community, the Trust for Public Land and others who are involved with advising political campaigns look at how thoroughly the background research and polling was done, and how effectively the campaign was managed (Guzzetta 2000, Greenbelt Alliance 2001, Shaw 2004). Press’s Policy Capacity Model fits more cleanly with this perspective than does the literature evaluating the success and failure of growth control measures. Press argues that many different factors such as the voting history and attitudes of a community, skills and abilities of local policy entrepreneurs (local activists and elected officials), how inspiring the natural lands are and to what extent they are threatened by development, and a number of other factors come together to determine how successful a community is at preserving land.

Over the last ten years, Humboldt County voters have consistently rejected statewide initiatives related to the environment. Voters did not approve the five statewide bond measures related to the environment, two that focused on clean water (Propositions 50, 13), two park bond measures (Propositions 12, 40), and the most recent park and water bond (Proposition 84). Statewide, California voters approved all five of the bond measures (California Secretary of State 2006). Additionally, since the first park bond measures in the early 1920s, Humboldt County has consistently approved less than 45 percent of these measures (Press 2002). Over the last ten years only one countywide
initiative related to the environment made it onto the ballot. The constitutionality of this countywide anti-genetically modified organisms ordinance was deemed questionable before the election, causing even the proponents of the measure to call for a ‘no’ vote (Doran 2004).

Humboldt County has placed tax increases on the ballot four times in the last ten years. In 2004, three tax measures were on the ballot. A transient occupancy tax increase of 2 percent was approved, but a parcel assessment intended to fund a veterans memorial building failed as did a proposed countywide 1 percent increase in sale tax. In 1999, a quarter cent tax increase to fund libraries received over 50 percent of the vote, but did achieve the super majority needed to approve the special tax. Only one countywide bond measure has been on the ballot in the last ten years, a funding measure for College of the Redwoods which voters approved in fall of 2004 (California Secretary of State 2006, Humboldt County Office of Elections 2006). (Table 2)

While the proposed 1 percent increase in sales tax in 2004 was not earmarked specifically to fund parks and open space, the arguments surrounding the sales tax increase do offer some insight into overall attitudes in the county towards tax increases. The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors unanimously placed Measure L, the countywide 1 percent increase in the transaction (sales) and use tax on the ballot in an effort to cope with an impending budget shortfall. The State of California had not been returning all of the sales tax traditionally allocated to local governments and the county predicted an $8 million deficit for the next year (Bird 2004a).
Table 2. Election results for environmental or tax related ballot measures Humboldt County 1996-2005

Statewide Ballot Measures results for Humboldt County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent approval</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43.34</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>84 Clean Water and Park Improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.59</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>50 Safe Drinking Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.65</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>40 Park Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.84</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12 Park Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.41</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>13 Safe Drinking Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.99</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4 Prohibit trapping of fur bearing animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.22</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>7 Tax credits for firms working to improve air quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.00</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>204 SF Bay Delta Restoration Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.00</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>197 Allow hunting of mountain lions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

County ballot measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent approval</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ballot Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35.32</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>M- AntiGMO, Humboldt County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.88</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>L- 1 Cent Sales Tax for general revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.16</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>A 1/4 Cent Sales Tax for Libraries &amp; Parks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Humboldt County Office of Elections 2007
Proponents argued that the sales tax increase, which was to be split 53 percent for the county and 43 percent for cities, was needed to maintain essential services such as police, libraries, and parks. All of the cities in the county supported measure L although Fortuna only did so reluctantly (Bird 2004b). Opponents, lead by the Humboldt County Taxpayer’s League, waged a concerted effort against the tax measure, arguing that it was unfair and unneeded (Sims 2004). The Time-Standard newspaper came out against the measure in its editorial on October 14th, 2004, emphasizing potential negative impacts to the struggling local economy. The North Coast Journal weekly newspaper only reluctantly endorsed the measure (North Coast Journal, 28 October 2004). Voters rejected the measure 70 percent against and 30 percent in favor.

In contrast to the active debate surrounding Measure L, statewide park and water bond measures tend to receive little attention in Humboldt County. This, in part because Humboldt County represents such a small portion of the electorate in California and therefore is less likely to see television, print, or radio commercials regarding statewide propositions. The lack of a concerted local campaign for California Proposition 84, *Water Quality, Safety and Supply. Flood Control. Natural Resource Protection. Park Improvements* can be seen as representative of prior environmental bond measures. It was placed on the ballot by a coalition of conservation groups, led in part by the Peninsula Open Space Trust with the goal of ensuring continued funding for open space protection. It authorized the sale of general obligation bonds and generated an estimated $5.4 billion in revenue. Proposition 84 received little attention from the Humboldt County media. While the Eureka Reporter newspaper did oppose the proposition, neither the Times-
Standard newspaper nor the North Coast Journal weekly newspaper supported or opposed the proposition (Eureka Reporter, 3 November 2006). A search of the archives of the North Coast Journal weekly newspaper, Eureka Reporter newspaper, and the Times-Standard newspaper revealed no articles that had been written about the proposition.

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors and a number of elected officials from the cities of Arcata and Eureka endorsed Proposition 84 and the Northcoast Environmental Center held a press conference to promote the measure (Yes on 84 2006). Otherwise there was little local campaigning for or against the measure. The Statewide Yes on 84 coalition concentrated its advertising in markets in Southern California and the Bay Area (Yes on 84 2006). The measure passed statewide with 53.7 percent voting in favor and 46.3 percent opposed. The majority of Humboldt County voters did not support the measure with only 43.34 percent in favor and 56.66 percent opposed.

Only one study has been completed that investigated whether or not registered voters in Humboldt County would vote for the creation of an open space district. Morehead’s 2004 thesis included a survey that examined support for an open space district that would focus on the protection of agricultural land. He proposed a hypothetical district modeled after the existing Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. Ten questions were asked that covered issues such as funding, management, and whether or not a district would be appropriate for Humboldt County. Overall, 71 percent of the respondents supported the idea of creating a district. When asked how much respondents were willing to spend, 67 percent indicated their willingness to pay $25 a year per household. This exceeds the simple majority needed to
create a Benefit Assessment District and meets the two-thirds requirement for an increase in sales or property tax. However, respondents were split evenly with regard to which form of tax would be most appropriate. Sales tax, property tax, voluntary donations, and direct government funding all received support from approximately 20 percent of the respondents (Morehead 2004).

Morehead (2004) also identified who would be likely to vote for a district. Respondents were placed in three different groups based on their level of support for the district. Support was strongest in more urban portions of Humboldt County and among voters with a college education or more. Seventy-four percent of the respondents who expressed a high level of support were college graduates, while only 33 percent of those who expressed a low level of support had graduated from college. Differences based on age, sex, and income level were less clear. Overall, based on the results of Morehead (2004) there appears to be support for the creation of an open space district.

Many different factors are involved in predicting whether or not it is feasible to create a parks and open space district in Humboldt County. This research draws from both the experience of those who have studied open space and natural resource protection efforts as well as the literature on environmental and open space ballot measures. As Press (2002) and Hopper and Cook (2004) argue, the passage of open space ballot measures is a complex political process that depends on factors such as local attitudes, perceptions, and the skills of those running the campaign. However, as Press (2003), Kline (2006), and Romero and Liserio (2002) have demonstrated in their research on environmental ballot measures, there are also socioeconomic attributes that often
correlate with the successful passage of a ballot measure. This study investigates both the political feasibility of creating a parks and open space district and assesses the potential success of a new district at the polls. The political feasibility of a district will be explored through qualitative research and the potential success of a new district will be examined through a quantitative analysis of how Humboldt County has voted on previous environmental ballot measures.

This research makes the following three predictions: First, based on the failure of every park bond measure since 2000 and the overwhelming defeat of the proposed sales tax measure in 2004, the passage of a ballot measure to create a countywide open space district is unlikely. Secondly, that support for an open space district varies geographically within the county. And thirdly, that there is widespread recognition of the need for additional measures to protect resource lands in Humboldt County.
METHODS

In order to gain deeper understanding of conservation finance ballot measure campaigns, interviews were conducted with residents in four non-metropolitan counties in the western United States that had already placed conservation finance measures on the ballot. Secondly, interviews and archival research were used to explore the support for conservation finance measure and the formation of a park and open space district in Humboldt County. Third, the election results from previous ballot measures (2000 – 2006), were combined with data from the 2000 census to assess the likelihood of parks and open space district succeeding at the polls. The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research approval number for the interviews is: 05-08.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in this research to better understand the complex picture of why people do, or do not support a conservation ballot measure. The statistical work offers insight into which geographic portions of the county are likely to support the ballot initiative as well as quantitative measures of those communities. The interviews and archival research enable a better understanding of the context and a deeper look into how attitudes might be shifted to support or oppose the measure. The two approaches together are useful because the interviews provide a context for interpreting the statistical analysis and the statistical analysis, allows for
testing of hypotheses developed from the interviews. These comparisons improve the accuracy of the conclusions that can be drawn from the research.

Investigating Successes and Failures in Other Western Counties

Interviews were conducted with residents in four rural western counties in order to provide a better understanding of conservation finance campaigns. The counties were identified based on their population, distance from a major metropolitan area, and on whether or not they had been successful in passing a conservation finance measure. The goal was to match Humboldt County’s population and isolation, based on the assumption that the experiences of other rural counties would provide more parallels to Humboldt County than would a comparison with geographically closer, but more urban, areas in California. The Trust for Public Land in partnership with the Land Trust Alliance maintains the LandVote database, a database of communities that have attempted to pass conservation finance measures (Trust for Public Land 2006). The list only included measures that have attempted to raise money to purchase property or easements and that were on the ballot since 1996. Missing from the data were ballot measures that exclusively fund operations and maintenance and those that may have not been reported to the Trust for Public Land.

Using the Landvote database and the United States Census, 24 counties were identified from Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Wyoming, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah that both had 2004 populations of less than 150,000 and had placed
conservation finance measures on the ballot. No rural counties within Oregon, Arizona, and California passed conservation finance measures within that time period. The 24 counties were further screened for their proximity to major urban areas and those within a two-hour (225 kilometer) drive of a metropolitan area were removed. This step eliminated communities that are essentially suburbs or bedroom communities of larger metropolitan areas. Finally four counties were selected, two with successful conservation finance measures, two with measures that failed, and each one from a different state. Only one county from each state was selected in order to account for the influence of incentive programs such as Great Outdoors Colorado, which provides matching funds to communities that are willing to raise local taxes to support open space (Great Outdoors Colorado 2006). Of the four counties, Gallatin County (Montana) and Teton County (Wyoming) successfully passed conservation finance measures, while Blaine County (Idaho) and La Plata County (Colorado) saw their measures defeated at the polls.

Within each of the counties three to four people were interviewed. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to identify respondents. Purposive sampling is a technique where the choice of interviewees is based on the purpose of the research (Bernard 1995). In this case, respondents were selected based on their involvement in or knowledge of a particular ballot measure campaign. In snowball sampling, key individuals are asked to identify other individuals who would be appropriate to interview. This can be particularly effective in groups of people who are likely to know each other regardless of which side of the issue they might be on (Bernard 1995). The first people contacted in each community were land use planners and the staff of local land trusts. These individuals
were able to identify other members of the community who played an important role campaigning for or against the ballot measure. The aim of this portion of the research was not to generate data which is representative of the experience of all Western Counties that have attempted conservation finance measures, but instead to identify the issues influencing successful and unsuccessful campaign strategies. This information was then used to help develop a more effective interview guide for the interviews in Humboldt County.

Humboldt County

The research within Humboldt County generally followed a model developed by the Trust for Public Land based on their experience in conducting feasibility studies for conservation finance measures (Hopper and Cook 2004). The Trust for Public Land’s methods are similar to those commonly employed by candidates seeking elected office on the local or state levels (Guzetta 2000, Shaw 2004). According to the Trust for Public Land the essential components of feasibility study are to first to understand the local context by conducting archival research and examining secondary sources, determine what financing options are available by looking at the relevant statutes and codes, and analyze past voting behavior. The second step is to measure public opinion by interviewing community leaders and others involved in land use issues. The third step is conducting a poll (Hopper and Cook 2004).
To assess the feasibility of creating an open space district and passing a funding measure to support it I followed the first two steps suggested by the Trust for Public Land. I first conducted archival research to understand prior voting behavior as well as the context of land use and environmental issues in Humboldt County. The current Humboldt County General Plan Update provided a wealth of information on current land use in the county. To better understand the history of conservation and land preservation within the county, I relied on materials from the Humboldt Room at the Humboldt State University Library. It provides a rich source of material on the controversy over the establishment and expansion of Redwood National Park as well as the more recent creation of the Headwaters preserve (McMurtry 1972, Dickinson 1979, Devall 1999). In addition a series of reports by the Nature Conservancy (2001), Save the Redwoods League (2001), The California Legacy Project (2003), describe the needs for and threats to land conservation within the county. Past election results were available at the Humboldt County Office of Elections.

In the second step, to assess public opinion, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with elected officials and residents of Humboldt County involved in land use issues. As with the previous interviews purposive and snowball sampling was used to identify whom to interview. The goal of the interviews was to assess attitudes towards the creation and financing of an open space district, both among elected officials as well as members of the public who are actively involved and knowledgeable about local land use issues. I started with the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors and local conservation organizations who in turn recommended a wide range of people including realtors,
developers, ranchers, conservationists, tax payer advocates, local elected officials, forestry consultants, the Farm Bureau, financial consultants, and planners. (Table 3)

In step three, The Trust for Public Land recommends conducting a poll of likely voters to assess whether or not the public supports a conservation finance measure. Ben Morehead (2004) already conducted a poll that evaluated voter’s attitudes towards the creation of an open space district in Humboldt County. His research addressed both whether or not there is support for the creation of a district as well as what type of funding measure would receive the most support. This is the type of polling recommended by TPL (Hopper and Cook 2004) and therefore was incorporated in this analysis of the feasibility of an open space district.

This research departs from the model advocated by Hopper and Cook (2004) by conducting an additional analysis of the outcomes of previous environmental ballot measures in Humboldt County between 2000 and 2006. This approach strengthened the research as the outcomes from previous elections reflect concrete policy choices made by voters, and not just attitudes towards the environment that are reflected in survey research (Press 2002). When combined with data from the 2000 census, the election results also reveal what geographic areas in the county tend to vote for the environment and the demographic characteristics of those areas. Geographic areas tend to vote consistently for or against environmental ballot measures (Press 2003). Following a strategy employed by Press (2003), the election results were also compared with the previous survey (Morehead 2004) to assess the likelihood of an open space district succeeding at the polls.
Table 3. Respondents from Humboldt County interviewed for this project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Realtors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Owners of real-estate development companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Members of local agricultural organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a taxpayer’s organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board member of a local land trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member of a land trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of a community services district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 members of the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Directors of a local environmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 county planners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Council member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviewing and Analysis of Qualitative Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during both part I and II of the research. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage both of allowing the interviewer to follow leads while the written interview questions help focus the interview and to provide a consistent agenda (Schensul et al. 1999). Russell Bernard (1995) argued that semi-structured interviews are well suited to interviewing people such as public officials who expect efficient use of their time. In addition this type of interviewing shows that the researcher is prepared and competent, yet not trying to unduly control the interviewee (Bernard 1995).

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee, and notes were taken both during and after the interview. The recordings were used to check the accuracy of the notes and selected portions of the interviews were transcribed. This research focuses on successful and unsuccessful strategies for passing conservation finance measures. It is not intended to be a close analysis of language or differences in the cultural meanings of conservation in rural western counties, which would necessitate full transcription of the interviews.

Data analysis started with the coding and summarizing of the first interviews and continued as each interview was completed. The research was designed with a number of different themes that served as the initial structure for coding the interview notes and the
interview transcripts. As the research progressed and new themes emerged the coding scheme was altered to take this into account and the first interviews were recoded with the new scheme. The advantage of this approach is that the interview guides and the coding are adjusted as the researcher learns more about the setting, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the research (Miles and Huberman 1994)

Evaluating support for Environmental Ballot Measures

Precinct level returns from 5 statewide environmental ballot measures and 1 countywide ballot measure were used to evaluate voting patterns in Humboldt County. From 2000 to 2006, 5 environmental bond measures were on the ballot: Statewide Propositions 12, 13, 40, 50 and 84 (Table 3). In 2004, a proposed 1 cent increase in the sales tax was voted on in Humboldt County. Election returns and party registration data for all 135 precincts were available from the Humboldt County Office of Elections and the Institute for Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley. Socio-economic data were available from the 2000 United States Census at the census tract level. Census tracts are the smallest unit that the United States Census collects socio-economic data for, and typically contain about 4,000 people. There are 27 census tracts in Humboldt County. This resulted in 162 observations when combined with the returns from 6 ballot measures.
Table 4. Environmental and Tax Measures in Humboldt County 2000 - 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Title and description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure L. County of Humboldt Transaction and Use Tax. (Proposed 1 Cent increase in the Countywide sales tax) November 2, 2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: Humboldt County Office of Elections 2007
The first step combined the precinct level returns and the census tract data. ArcGIS was used to convert from precincts to census tracts following the model outlined by the Institute for Governmental Studies (IGS) at UC Berkeley (Institute for Governmental Studies 2007). The Institute for Governmental Studies has been converting precincts into census tracts and census blocks for each election since 1990 to provide the State of California with information needed for redistricting (Institute for Governmental Studies 2007). A map of census tracts in Humboldt County was combined with a precinct map to determine the percentage of each precinct that was within a census tract. Voting and party registration data were assumed to be evenly distributed across each precinct and were therefore allocated to the appropriate census tract simply based on the proportion of the precinct within that tract. This process was performed for each election independently as precincts changed over time due to precinct consolidations and changes in the number of registered voters. The data were double-checked to make sure that the total number of voters in each category remained the same. In addition, the 2002 general election was compared with a conversion performed by the Institute for Governmental Studies to ensure the process had been performed correctly.

In the second step, the data were evaluated for the impact of place on voting outcomes. Standard regression was used to assess which of the following independent variables - income level (median income), education level (percentage with a college degree of higher), or partisanship (percentage Republican, percentage Democrat) were predictors of the dependent variable percentage yes vote. The data were screened and found to meet the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity needed to
perform a regression. Descriptive statistics and tolerance statistics were also generated and found to be within the necessary limits. Tolerance statistics were particularly important in screening for multi-collinearity (Mertler and Vannatta 2005). The following hypotheses were evaluated:

**Partisanship:**
- There is no association between the percentage of voters who were registered as Republican, and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot initiatives. Alternatively, there was an association between the percentage of voters who were registered as Republican and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot initiatives.

- There is no association between the percentage of voters who were registered as Democrat, and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot initiatives. Alternatively, there was an association between the percentage of voters who were registered as Democrat and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot initiatives.

**Income:**
- There is no association between median household income and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot measures. Alternatively, there was an association between the median household income and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot measures.

**Education:**
- There is no association between the level of educational attainment and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot measures. Alternatively, there was an association between the level of educational attainment and the level of support for environmental and tax ballot measures.

The importance of place was examined by determining how consistently a census tract votes for or against ballot measures over time. A map was created to display these results. The statistical model developed was also used to test hypotheses developed during the interview portion of the research. For instance, Hopper and Cook (2004), as well as respondents from other western counties, emphasized that successful conservation
ballot measure campaigns were non-partisan. Therefore, if the null hypothesis that partisanship is not correlated with voting for environmental ballot measures in Humboldt County was rejected, this would indicate that it may be more difficult to cross party lines in order to mount a successful campaign.

The third and final step compared the model that explained the variation in census tracts with the models developed by Morehead (2004) to identify which types of voters support the creation of an open space district. Press (2003) combined voting returns with survey data both to test the results of the analysis of the election returns as well as to gain additional insight into who votes for ballot measures.
RESULTS

Interviews with Stakeholders in La Plata, Blaine, Teton, and Gallatin Counties.

Three people were interviewed in both La Plata County (Colorado) and Blaine County (Idaho) while four people were interviewed in both Teton County (Wyoming) and Gallatin County (Montana). Four themes emerged from an analysis of the telephone interviews: (1), that a considerable amount of political work is required before the decision is made to place a measure on the ballot; (2), the importance of finding out what the public really wants (polling); (3), the need to develop a broad nonpartisan coalition; and (4), the need for the tax to be seen as fair and directly related to the issue.

In Gallatin County, Montana voters approved bond measures to fund open space protection in 2000 and 2004. Ten million dollars was generated by the first bond for the acquisition of easements on agricultural land. In 2001 Teton County, Wyoming voters approved sales tax increases to support two separate measures, capital improvements for parks and recreation facilities as well as new bicycle/pedestrian pathways. The sales tax was only for capital improvements and was limited to four years. The use tax on the La Plata County Colorado ballot in 2001 would have funded affordable housing and open space, but was not approved by the voters. Blaine County Idaho’s 1999 bond measure to fund the acquisition of conservation easements on agricultural land was also not approved by the voters.
In three of the four counties, respondents described efforts to find a solution to the loss of open space that started well before the actual campaign. In Gallatin County, Montana the county commissioners started by establishing an open space task force to look into solutions to preserving ranch and agricultural lands. This task force worked for eight months before recommending to the county commissioners that they pursue a bond measure. A Gallatin County rancher and member of open space task force described the process this way:

What the commissioners wanted was to get the support of the rural people because they're the ones who are going to have to participate in the program. So they set up an open space task force to find tools to use incentives to encourage open space rather than regulations. And on that board of 17 were seven to eight farmers and ranchers. That group met for about eight months and one of the recommendations was the creation of the Open Lands Board and a PDR [Purchase of Development Rights] program.

Staff at Friends of Pathways, a Jackson Hole Wyoming bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organization, helped campaign for a sales tax measure but emphasized the value of building support well before placing the measure on the ballot:

We work very hard with the public and have really gotten the public excited and involved and it sort of turns its own wheels now. On the last SPET [Special Purpose Excise Tax] proposal we did a lot of outreach with our members and elected officials prior to the issue going forth to the public.

They also commented on the need to take time to build relationships with the elected officials:

I think a lot of it is nurturing those relationships with your elected officials. I bug my elected officials every day and they will call me and say "hey what do you think of this?" Relationship building is one of the bigger aspects.
In Blaine County, Idaho efforts also started well before the ballot measure campaign, as they needed to get state legislation passed authorizing the sale of local bonds for open space.

The role of Polling

The second theme of the interviews was the need for polling. Polling was cited as one of the key elements of running an effective campaign. Respondents from all four counties emphasized the value of conducting a poll to better understand the wants and needs of the community. The executive director of a land trust in Blaine County, Idaho, a community that did not do a poll, gave this advice:

Spend the money and do a good poll. We didn't and it ended up biting us because we did it privately and people tell you what you want to hear and the ones you don't talk to are the ones that end up biting you. It is well worth doing a good nonbiased poll.

A parks planner in Teton County, Wyoming explained that they do a poll every five years to evaluate their services and to see if the community’s needs are being met. The planner emphasized the need to get an idea of what the community wants before pursuing additional funding:

Get a good feel from the community - what they want and the value of your services, the Parks and Rec services to the community. Because you have to know you have the support before you go out and then say, “this is the method in which we want to fund.” There is obviously a lot of expense involved to get these things going, and you want to be sure you're going to be successful. We try to do it about every five years, we do a community wide survey.

Results from well-conducted polls influence not only the decision of whether or not to move forward with the campaign but how much to ask for and what themes to stress. The
campaign manager for the bond measure campaign in Gallatin County, Montana summarized how they used some of the polling information:

> Basically the polling identified how much people were willing to pay for. It also identified what are the things that are really driving, what are the values on which people are basing their willingness to pay. Things like clean water were really important, recreation maybe wasn't as important. That sort of information that was embedded in the survey instrument was later used in our campaign language.

The themes highlighted in the campaign came directly from the polling and reflected the issues that the public felt was most important. The themes were, in order of importance: protecting our quality-of-life, protecting our rivers and streams, protecting wildlife habitat, and preserving working farms and ranches. The preservation of working landscapes in Gallatin County, Montana was the main motivation behind creating a purchase of development rights program. However, as an issue it only ranked fourth to the voters.

Poll results were also used to demonstrate to elected officials that there was strong support for the ballot measure. In Gallatin and Teton Counties, respondents felt that the poll results helped the elected officials feel that it was safe politically to place the measure on the ballot. A staff member at a local land trust explained:

> The polling was key for the commissioners to feel like this was something that was safe to do politically. And it certainly has been borne out.

Coalition Building

The third theme emphasized in the interviews was coalition building. In three out of the four counties broad nonpartisan coalitions helped develop the ballot measure and campaign for it. In Blaine County, Idaho the director of a local land trust formed an
advisory committee and in Gallatin and Teton Counties local governments created task forces. The land trust director described the advisory committee:

Essentially it was just a working group of people who are interested in trying to be representative of all the people in all communities in the valley to add their weight and to add their ideas in considerations to it.

County commissioners in Gallatin County, Montana started by creating an open space task force. After looking into techniques for open space preservation they turned into the Open Lands Board which helped campaign for the bond measure. The Open Lands Board is still active as a committee that recommends to the commissioners which properties should be considered for easements. The commissioners specifically set up the committee so that it would represent the agriculture and ranching community as well as all of the local governments. A rancher described the work of the Open Space Task Force:

We looked at 36 different tools that other communities had used around the country to preserve open space. About 16 to 17 we could legally use in Montana and the easiest and fastest to use was a PDR program using bond money to do that.

He also explained that in order to build trust the Open Space Task Force decided to operate by consensus:

Initially we said everything had to be unanimous consent so we moved very slowly. We had to educate the board members. I had to be educated. There were people on the board who had more experience with this sort of thing and so they were very patient.

Once the decision was made to place the measure on the ballot the campaign manager for Gallatin County’s Vote Yes on Open Space, described how they carefully picked a diverse group of people to represent the campaign:
What we identified was really wanting a diverse representation of supporters that could sort of be the face of the campaign. We did not want it to be an environmental group effort. We handpicked business leaders, Republicans, Democrats, retired senators from the area who were proponents, realtors developers. A really diverse campaign committee, as we called them.

In Teton County, Idaho, parks and recreation advocates also built a coalition by partnering with the conservation community on their ballot measure. A respondent stated that conservation is often more popular than parks and recreation in Teton County and that partnering their proposal for additional tennis courts and ball fields with a conservation project was key to their success:

The most important thing we did was coalition building. We put our measure together with a conservation measure.

A representative from a bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organization in Teton County also emphasized the need for broad public support if a measure is going to pass:

It is garnering that public support. But really having deep public support, not just the cyclists but everyone who is going to enjoy it. Right down to the kids who can hopefully bike to school, to the elderly who enjoy nice walk along this piece of land.

Respondents from Teton, Blaine, and Gallatin Counties all described that broad coalitions and public support were important and that those coalitions were possible because the open space ballot measures were primarily nonpartisan issues.

**Taxes**

The fourth theme to emerge from the interviews was the need to have a clear relationship between those who are paying for the tax and those who are benefitting from the tax. In La Plata County, commissioners placed a use tax on the ballot to fund both affordable housing and open space. The elected officials felt that by combining these
popular issues they would generate more support. A respondent who works for La Plata County, Colorado government described the reason behind combining the two issues:

The cost of housing is a very, very expensive here compared to the low wages that are paid. So there is perceived to be a need for that. A couple of our elected officials wanted to address the affordable housing issue and thought by having two issues that never have been voted on before, affordable housing and open space, that they would capture a large group of more politically active people.

The county staff member went on to explain that despite this effort to build a coalition the measure failed because of the tax itself:

I have worked here for 16 years and it has been on the ballot three times and it failed every time. Not I think because of the issue of open space but it is more because of the tax itself.

The use tax would have applied to building materials and automobiles purchased outside of La Plata County. A member of a local land trust said that they did not endorse the measure because they felt that it was unfair to have only those purchasing automobiles and building materials support an open space program which benefits everyone: “The problem was fairness, everyone needs to pitch in.” The county staff member also explained that it was both in issue of fairness as well as the public’s perception that the tax was really just an attempt by local automobile dealers to level the playing field with other counties.

In Blaine County, Idaho, the bond measure failed because the public wanted to know specifically what benefits it would receive from the increase in taxes. The director of a local land trust did a post election analysis and came to this conclusion:

One of the questions we asked, obviously, was, did we ask for too much or did we ask for too little? And it wasn't the money, it was the fact that we’re in a small
county, relatively small population base. People want to know what we were going to buy. That was the overriding question.

He said that they had avoided identifying each piece of property because it usually raises the price, as the owner knows that you want the property. Also, money that is not earmarked for a specific property can be leveraged through state and federal grants potentially doubling or tripling the amount of money available. However as he summarized:

There wasn't any opposition. People just want to know where their tax dollars are going to.

Gallatin County, Montana also took steps to make sure that it was clear what the money would be spent for, who would be making the decision as to which properties would receive easements, and to make sure that the tax would not unduly burden agricultural producers. Instead of selecting specific properties proponents emphasized the method by which the properties would be selected, and that elected officials, the Gallatin County Commissioners, would have the final say. In order to make sure that all of the money would go directly to protecting open space, the tax measure was written so that none of the money can be used for overhead. The one staff member who manages the Open Lands Board is paid for through a special ‘Open Lands’ license plate available to residents of the county. In addition, the tax was tailored so that agriculture would not have to pay an unequal amount. As a rancher explained:

At the time we had eight the 15 members of the board were from agriculture, and they were willing to tax themselves some. They were willing to tax their homes like every other homeowner in the County. They just didn't want their property, equipment, and livestock taxed too.
Once the bond measure was approved, Gallatin County successfully lobbied for state legislation that created an exemption for agricultural producers. In general the bond is funded through an increase in property taxes. While members of the agricultural community were willing to pay some tax, this would have required the state tax board to create a new category, which they were unwilling to do. So the compromise that allowed the legislation to proceed was that agricultural producers would simply be exempt from the tax.

In summary each county had a unique set of circumstances influencing their decision to pursue a conservation finance measure. Despite these differences all of the respondents emphasized the time it takes to develop a broad coalition of support, the importance of polling, and the need for the public to understand the relationship between the tax and how the money will be spent.

Results from Interviews with Humboldt County Stakeholders

While the results of the interviews with Humboldt County stakeholders point to some differences between groups, such as those between developers and conservationists, the interviews were designed to enable a synthesis of the issues/concerns surrounding the potential creation of an open space district. 23 people were interviewed in Humboldt County.
Attitudes Towards the Need to Protect Additional Land

There was no clear consensus on the need to protect additional land in Humboldt County. All nine respondents involved in professions related to conservation and forestry, as well as two elected officials, felt that there is a clear need to protect additional land in the county. They cited increasing growth in the county, land speculation, and the need to support landowners who are providing open space through working the land. In addition two respondents felt that it is important to preserve land now as the prices are cheap in comparison to land prices in the rest of California. As an elected official described it, we need to act in a timely fashion:

 Especially now that all of the counties in California are looking at the issue of growth and everyone is struggling with what your community is going to look like in the future. And it is good to have options. I think that if you don’t have options you are too late by the time you see what is actually going to happen it is happening, it is too late.

A member of a local land trust commented:

 It should be a high priority. Because there is a lot of opportunity. Because threats are increasing. And, because of the substantial ecological, economic, and cultural benefits that they provide. I would add to that it is a real bargain. If you look at the price of real-estate across California working lands in this part of northern California are a bargain.

In contrast four other respondents did not see a clear need to protect additional land. They argued either that much of Humboldt County is currently open space and we don’t need additional protection for that land, or that financially successful ranching and timber is sufficient at keeping the land as open space. One developer commented:

 Humboldt County already has a lot of open space in comparison to other places such as Walnut Creek, or the Central Valley. The need for open space is overplayed.
A member of a local farming organization added:

Generally we think that agriculture, a viable agricultural community, will protect it in its own right because it will keep it in agriculture, it will keep it in open space. It will preserve it the way it has preserved it over the years. So, generally we don’t find [an open space district] as something of need in Humboldt County.

The remaining eight respondents reframed the question and wanted to first engage in a broader discussion about what the priorities should be in Humboldt County and then explore the question of whether or not we need to protect additional land. In addition four respondents felt that the public does not have a clear idea of what open space is and what they want to protect. As a realtor commented:

You have all of the other things that people confuse in my opinion, with open space which is viewsheds, parks, and sanctuaries. I think the thing that is really missing to me in the community, in the conversation is: what is it that we are talking about? And when you look at the fact that about 2 percent of our county, out of 2.3 million (acres) is actually developed. That sheds some perspective on the conversation. We have to look at what is the quality of that and what is the access to people, which again has not really been looked at.

It is unfortunate that much of the conversation seems development vs. open space or preservation, because really in a lot of ways we could agree if we ever could get a clear definition of what lands it is that we want to protect. And we never get to that level of conversation.

Staff from a foundation commented on the public's lack of understanding:

I don't think that people understand that when they drive between Arcata and Eureka that the only reason why that open land is there is because people graze cattle on it for dairy and beef. And if those people go out of business those become houses very quickly.

Attitudes Towards Forming an Open Space District

The idea of creating an open space district received only qualified support. All the respondents expressed that they wanted to develop a more concrete understanding of
what an open space district is and how it would function before deciding whether or not to support it. A member of a local land trust explained:

If the idea is that the open space district should buy a piece of property and create a park I am not sure that is the way we should go. I think there needs to be some discussion on what an open space district roles would be based on who we have playing right now. Because we have a lot of players and I don’t know if we need one more player.

A member of a local farming organization commented:

I think the idea of searching for more tools, more ways of doing things, preserving open space, those are all good things. But there are some snags in this one I would say.

**Arguments For and Against Creating an Open Space District**

Regardless of their support for the idea, all of the respondents were asked to outline what they felt the strongest arguments for and against creating an open space district were. Four themes emerged from the arguments in support of a district each focusing on a current need within the county that a new district could address: (1) The need to protect working landscapes, (2) the need to fund the operations and maintenance of our existing parks and open spaces, (3) the need to finish our incomplete county trail system and then maintain it, and (4) as a source of funding to implement existing plans. A majority of respondents (16 of 23) felt that the strongest arguments would be for agricultural preservation and trails. The five respondents currently working for conservation organizations also repeatedly stressed the critical need to fund operations and maintenance on existing lands. Arguments against forming a district were more varied and included issues such as the additional burden to the taxpayers, potential
negative interactions of an agency or trail users with agriculture, the effort needed to
form a district, and the fear of what new powers a district might have.

One of the most common arguments for creating a district was the need to protect
Humboldt County’s dairy, ranching, and timber lands. Twelve respondents emphasized
that landowners have a strong incentive to sell the land for development and that the cost
of managing the land is increasing.

As a forestry consultant explained:

There is an 800 acre parcel in Trinidad/Westhaven that is Site I Redwood land
(the most productive category of land for growing redwoods). It is on the market
for $4 million, and 800 acres of Site I Redwood land is probably worth from a
timber management standpoint no more than $2 million.

He further described how the pressures are creating incentives to fragment large holdings:

It is probably a little bit more prevalent in Southern Humboldt than it is in
northern Humboldt County. We were looking just the other day at land in the
middle of nowhere on the Mattole. The landowners are selling off at $7,000 an
acre. Save one agricultural crop there are no other agricultural crops that can
justify that kind of land value. Either they are selling it as pot land or they are
selling it for development purposes.

A rancher commented on the relationship between viability of agriculture and the
pressure to convert to housing:

There are some ranches that are economically viable and others that struggle.
And those are the ones that are the most vulnerable to conversion to some other
use.

He also emphasized the cost of managing the land:

It is not necessarily just about making a living but having the ranch cash flow.
Can you pay the taxes, insurance, the cost of removing trees, milking cows, or
whatever? It has to be cash flow. If the airplane is slowly losing altitude
eventually it is going to hit the ground. Maybe you can't see the ground from
where you are, but if you don't bring the nose up your going to hit the ground.
Maybe not next year maybe not 10 years from now but your going down so the wheels grind slowly.

The second most commonly emphasized issue was the future of trails in Humboldt County. Most (16 of 23) see the further development of trails in Humboldt County as positive, that we have a real need for additional trails. However the agricultural community is less receptive to the idea of trails as they see potential conflicts between trail users and agricultural operations. Many of the supporters of additional trails cited the unfinished Hammond Trail in McKinleyville as an example of both the work that needs to be done as well as the strong public support for the existing portions of the trail.

As a real estate professional explained it:

Well, people like to be able to get out and go someplace close rather than driving an hour or an hour and a half north or south or whatever. And so I think that there is a lot of support for the trails.

One of the stumbling blocks to developing the trail system is the need for long-term funding for the organization that manages the trail and the current economic difficulties at the county. As a county staff member described:

The county, which would be the organization that makes the most sense to take on trails as they are developed for a county trail system is completely not wanting to do that and you know it is the operations and maintenance thing. It is like we don't want to take on another facility. We can't even keep up with our roads, why would we want to take on another trail? … so, you can’t move forward if you can't identify who would actually be the entity holding the trail.

And a real-estate professional commented on trails in Humboldt County: “The county's problem has always been implementation.” Despite the current support for the Hammond Trail and the many comments in support of a larger trail system for the county five respondents commented on how controversial trails can be. A respondent who had
helped establish the initial stretches of the Hammond Trail described the changing attitudes about the trail and how initial opposition to the trail changed once it was built.

With the Hammond Trail often in the past you get landowners, people really upset about it. It is a Communist plot. And then by the time it is all done and finished they are really happy about it. Real estate magazines are advertising ‘on the Hammond Trail’ and people love it because it is part of building neighborhoods, community, and all that good stuff.

One of the stumbling blocks to creating more trails, setting aside more land, or coping with the lands already under public management is the current lack of money for operations and maintenance. Only six of the twenty-three respondents mentioned the need to fund existing operations and maintenance. However, those who did raise this as an issue strongly emphasized the need to find additional sources of funding. They cited the chronic underfunding of the state park system, the lack of money for any enforcement staff at county parks, and that land trusts often do not have the means to manage property that they acquire. The need for enforcement staff was explained by a county staff member with regard to the common problem of illegal camping in area parks:

What happens is a lot of the time from the management perspective if you don't have the enforcement people it seems like you start closing things off and gating things up and making more rules because it is the only way that you can control usage if you don't have an enforcement presence. For example if you have open space and you have people who are going in there and camping there are two ways to deal with it. You have somebody who patrols and kicks them out. The other one is that you put a barbed-wire fence up and keep everybody out.

Another respondent argued that local land trusts are also in need of money for operations and maintenance. For instance, a land trust had been about to donate property to enlarge a local state park when State Parks decided that it could no longer accept new property without additional funding to support management of the land. This left the land trust
with the property and the need to cover insurance and maintenance costs for that property. Other land trusts own property that is actively used by the public yet do not have the funding to maintain it. As the board member of a land trust described:

And then it is like McKinleyville. You have Hiller Park and so that is a facility and that is part of the CSD (Community Services District) fees. But then you have open space right next to it which belongs to the McKinleyville Land Trust yet nobody even knows that it is land trust property so most people walking onto the bluffs just assume that it is the CSD. The McKinleyville Land Trust is a volunteer organization trying to manage a large chunk of land and they need signage, and they need better trail access down off the bluffs, they need erosion control, invasives, it's huge.

Another land trust would like to expand its ability to promote local agriculture, and fulfill its mission, but can't find resources to do so. A board member of that land trust explained:

We have plenty of things we could do to make our farm more of a community center where people can really come and interact with agriculture and the land but we need to work on our facilities first and trying to find money to work on facilities is really rough.

The fourth issue that an open space district could address is the need to fund already existing plans. The seven interview respondents involved in fundraising for capital improvements, conservation easements, restoration projects, and trails, all mentioned that it is getting more difficult to secure state and federal funding. They argued that many private foundations as well as public agencies are requiring local matching funds which a district could provide. In addition, a local source of funding would allow the community to decide what its priorities are instead of needing to work on projects that fit state or federal criteria. A staff member of a local foundation commented:
I like the idea of being in charge of our own future. That we as the community have the ability to use that money to obtain goals that we set for ourselves.

Several respondents also explained that some grantmaking organizations will only fund projects that are fully designed and permitted making it difficult to even apply for funds. This has been an issue locally. For instance a board member of a land trust commented:

Look we have a lot of things that are already identified and people really support. But the problematic thing is that all the state bond funding is for implementation. And so all of the agencies like the Coastal Conservancy and Parks and Recreation and Resources Agency - all of them are like, you have to come to us with a project that is fully designed and permitted before we will spend money on. And yet a big chunk of the money is design and permitting because you are talking about engineered designs you're talking about coastal permitting it is a huge endeavor to do all that.

Respondents were also asked to list the strongest arguments against forming a district. Those arguments included: the additional burden to the taxpayers, potential negative interactions of an agency or trail users with agriculture, the effort needed to form a district, fear of what new powers a district might have, the lack of need for a district, the loss of tax revenue from creating new public land, the potential decrease of land available for development or agriculture, and other more pressing priorities for the county. The most commonly cited argument against forming a new district was the increase in taxes, the second most common argument was that there are needs in the county that are of higher priority, and the third most common argument against a district is the feeling that it just isn’t possible here.

A member of a local farming organization echoed many of the concerns held by those who both support the idea of a new district and those who do not, when he stated:
There is a concern just from another layer of government. Regardless of how positive that might be it is another chink out of the armor of the taxpayer. It is another district that has to be funded, staffed, etc...

Attitudes towards taxes, including which type of tax is the most appropriate for funding the district and respondents’ overall attitudes toward taxes, will be covered more in depth in the final portion of the results section.

Eight of the twenty-three respondents felt that there were more important priorities than creating a parks and open space district. Among the other priorities mentioned were affordable housing, job development, the backlog of road maintenance, the sewer system upgrades needed in Eureka, and the general infrastructure limits to development in Cutten. Two developers who were interviewed felt that affordable housing and the economy were the highest priority followed by the infrastructure needs in the county. As one developer put it:

Before I would ever look at a program like this, if it were to cost, I would definitely be looking at how we're going to pay the $31 million fix - which by the time we get to that dollar amount, how are we going to get the $45 million fix for the sewer in Eureka and Cutten. And every other city, and the county, just about has a sewer problem and/or water problem not to mention roads.

A real-estate agent commented on the importance of the economy:

It is tough I mean we would all like to live in a nice place and keep our beautiful surroundings and I don't think there's anybody who would want to destroy what we have. It is just a matter of economics and how do we get back to a place where we can afford to support some of this stuff, and to support ourselves in this economy.

The remaining six respondents simply stated that they were not convinced of a need to protect additional lands and therefore felt that the county should be working on more important issues.
Three members of the agricultural community expressed their concern over the creation of new trails and with the creation of a new agency that may not be responsive to the agricultural community. The difficulty with trails is the interaction between dogs that are often out-of-control and agricultural operations. In addition hikers don’t understand agriculture and often leave gates open allowing animals to escape. A member of a local farming organization described the difficulty with trails:

The trails are an agricultural nightmare. Everyone that walks on a trail has a dog they adore and they don't want it on a leash. They want to let him run free. As soon as the dog gets out of that environment they want to chase something. It is so much fun to chase a cow with a calf. And they run her through the fence, but it wasn't their fault because the cow was running and the dog was chasing, but the cow ran first. Then they leave and we have a cow the needs a vet call, we have a fence torn up because the cow has run through it.

Another respondent focused more on the make-up of the new district and commented that landowners would be wary of any new district that might affect their operations. It would be of particular concern if the ranching community were not heavily represented on the board of the district as they don’t feel that other boards and districts in the county are very responsive to agricultural issues. A rancher stated:

From my perspective, and the perspective of a lot of ranchers, landowners, it has all to do with the people who staff it. There are a lot of well-meaning districts, organizations, boards, that have gone wacky because of who is running it. I think there would be a concern, once something like that is established there's not a lot of control over what would happen to it after that. Another set of meetings to go to.

Of additional concern to the ranching community is whether or not the district would acquire ranching or agricultural property for additional parks or trails. This would be seen as decreasing the amount of land available for agriculture, timber, or ranching and is
viewed as a very negative aspect of a potential new district. How the district might acquire that land and if it might use eminent domain is also of concern. A county staff member stated:

> If the goal were to set up a district and increase taxes in order to procure more parkland I think you would have been even worse outcome because people would wonder if in fact the district would then start condemning people's property.

None of the respondents felt that the creation of a new district could succeed if the district held the power of eminent domain. A rancher explained:

> The eminent domain thing is huge. There would be a fear of misuse of those powers and authority.

A member of a local land trust also commented:

> If word gets out that an open space district would have the rights of eminent domain - politically up here that is a crusher.

**Political Support**

Respondents were asked to identify groups or individuals in the county who would come out for or against the creation of an open space district. Before listing specific groups that would support or oppose a new district the majority of the respondents (18 of 23) emphasized the need to create a broad coalition. They felt that the ranching and agricultural community as well as conservationists and trails advocates should make up the coalition. Most (18 of 23) felt that the environmental/conservation organizations would naturally be in support of a parks and open space district and that the ranching/Ag communities should be in support of any tool that would help them protect their livelihoods. The three Humboldt County Supervisors interviewed all emphasized their willingness to support what the public wants.
A board member from a local land trust summarized whom he felt would be for and against:

For it should be dairyman, since they need a critical mass to stay in business. Each person is given some security although they are very leery of government. Against, old families whose kids want to be able to sell off property. Against homebuilders, realtors, developers, so they can keep making money. Against Libertarians, taxpayers league. For it: conservation groups, traditional liberal groups as well as many of the working landowners, and most regular citizens who are not involved in land use for their quality-of-life.

Most of the respondents echoed these views.

Three specific themes also emerged: (1) support will depend on how the district is structured and what type of tax is funding the district; (2) the group or persons spearheading efforts as well as how they go about building a coalition will influence who else comes out in support of it; and (3) support will depend on what type of vision can be created and how well that is communicated.

The relationship between how the district should be structured and who might support it came up repeatedly during the interviews. For instance, one respondent commented on the issue of public access:

You can lose a lot of support on either side if you say you're going to purchase a piece of land and preserve it and kind of keep the public off of it versus you're going to purchase this land and open it up for recreation but preserve it as open space. That is almost a 50 percent split depending on how the whole thing was written up and people perceived whether this was going to give them more recreation or more preservation.

Two members of the agriculture/ranching community were somewhat leery of creating a new district also based on how it might be structured. The issue of concern to the agricultural and ranching community was exactly how the district would help them
maintain their property. They assumed to the district would use conservation easements with which they are not entirely comfortable. A member of a farming organization outlined some of the difficulty with conservation easements:

They are very hesitant to tie up the property. Mainly because they have waited their whole life to retire and that is the huge thing for people were getting to the age when they're ready to retire. Putting an easement on the property will give them a small amount of cash. Selling the property outright will give them a large amount of cash. So that is the choice. After working for 60 years on the piece of property and you're in your eighties do you want to cash out big or some people can afford to cash out small. They may have other investments. But the people who've worked the land all of their life that is all that they have financially is their piece of property. And if they were to get ill?

The restrictions involved with conservation easements are also of concern. A rancher explained:

Conservation easements are a very individual and personal decision. It depends very much on the situation the families in and what the landowner is in. And the devil is in the details. A person has to be very careful and how the easement is structured to make sure that it works for them. I think the biggest fear about easements is nobody can really predict the future and forever is a long time. If it is the only way the family can keep the ranch then go for it. I think the most popular type with ranchers is basically selling development rights without having any management prescriptions written into the easement so it gives you flexibility for the business of ranching. Again just locking yourself into something for management prescriptions is a pretty risky deal.

Aside from respondents’ concerns over how a district would accomplish its goals the type of tax used to support the district also has the potential to influence who is for or against the district. This will be covered in the section of the results that describes attitudes towards funding for the district.
Seven respondents mentioned that who is seen as promoting the new district has the potential to quickly alienate or generate support from different portions of the community. As a county supervisor commented:

Success will depend on who is carrying the agenda. If it is perceived as another growth control measure then people get all uptight in terms of property rights. But then if it is proposed by the Farm Bureau and the Cattlemen's Association as a way to protect their productive land from outside speculators they will get in line.

A board member of a local land trust also emphasized the importance of dairymen and ranchers in overcoming opposition from the Taxpayer’s League: “They would have trouble arguing against guys with cowboy hats on.” Along with the issue of who is spearheading the district several respondents discussed the importance of creating a vision of the future. Creating a vision needs to be collaborative process involving as many different groups as possible. The board member of a land trust commented:

I am just saying for an open space district, the work out there to do is to develop that kind of vision. A vision of what we want and what we are looking for, for the future. And getting to that is very difficult because everyone has a different vision of what they want their public open space to be. Because the ORV people, their mission is dune buggies on the beach.

A county supervisor emphasized the need to develop a collaborative vision:

It is important to couch it to maximize the support for it from the very beginning. Sometimes that can mean offering education to groups like the Cattlemen and the Farm Bureau to see if they are on board for asking them to adopt policies within their organizations that would mirror what they are proposing to have happen in the county.

Many of the respondents (18 of 23) felt that there was a great deal of work to be done in defining Humboldt County’s vision for open space. Questions that were mentioned were: what role would a parks and open space district play? Should we
emphasize working landscapes, recreation, or simply funding our existing parks? One member of a land trust listed some of the questions that she felt were most important:

Do we want all of our places open an accessible to people, or do we want conductivity of wildlife habitat corridors, or do we want a bunch of working forest and landscapes? Can we have it all? Is it possible? I think there's quite a bit of work to do there.

Overall community members interviewed for this project felt that ranching and agriculture communities should be in favor of this type of the district and that it would receive strong support from the conservation community. However, as described above some in the ranching in agriculture community are concerned about conservation easements. The vision presented to the public and how one goes about creating that vision were also emphasized in the discussion over who would support the creation of a parks and open space district.

**Attitudes Toward Humboldt County’s Efforts to Protect Land.**

Attitudes towards how well the county is currently protecting open space were mixed. Many of the respondents (14 of 23) did not have a strong opinion but felt that the county was doing a fine job of protecting open space. The five respondents who are involved in land preservation professionally and the four who currently make their living off of the land were more critical. They felt that the county wants to protect agriculture and timberlands but that it is not always accomplishing that goal.

A member of the Farm Bureau was the most supportive of the county's current approach to protecting working landscapes. This respondent praised the efforts of the county planning staff and their consistent efforts to reach out to the Farm Bureau when
projects arise that involve agricultural land. The planning commission has been less consistent when it comes to preserving agricultural land, while the Board of Supervisors has been more supportive. As the member of the Farm Bureau commented:

So the planning commission on a scale of one to ten, they are a five. The Board of Supervisors are a bit better they are probably an eight. The planning department they are a ten. I mean they are right on it.

This respondent’s criticism of the planning commission came in part from a recent decision in which they allowed a landowner in Kneeland to split an 80 acre parcel on which he constructed two homes, one of which was constructed without a building permit. The area is zoned for agriculture (160 acre parcels) and the parcel was already nonconforming. Another member of a farming organization acknowledged the difficulty the county faces when trying to enforce zoning that would protect working lands:

Growth should be in the growth induced areas where there are services. And the agricultural land and the resource lands should remain agriculture and resource lands. That is what we need more than anything. But when you tell someone that they have 5 acres and it is in an area that is not zoned for development, and they want to sell 1/5 acre lots to the tune of a couple hundred thousand per lot, boy, people get real angry.

The problem of unpermitted development was raised by six respondents. A staff member at a local land trust commented that the county is doing a good job of protecting bottom land agriculture but that there is a good deal of unpermitted development taking place elsewhere in the county:

They are doing pretty good at bottoms lands agriculture and not so good with anything else. And I think the county's intent in the way they administer zoning policy is good but I think that the results are not good. That is to say somebody who tries to subdivide land is going to run into all sorts of roadblocks with the county, but because of the way they administer it will we end up with a lot of bad unpermitted development.
The six respondents who raised the issue of unpermitted development criticized the county for failing to influence rural development in a manner that protects our natural resources. They felt that while the county may have good intentions policy alone is not working. As one respondent summarized: “County policy is definitely not sufficient to alleviate the current threats to our working landscapes and open space landscapes.”

**Attitudes Towards Taxes**

Voters must approve the creation of an open space district as well as vote on a tax to support the district. During the interviews respondents were asked if they thought a tax increase could be successfully passed in Humboldt County and what type of tax would be fairest and most appropriate. A majority of the respondents (18 of 23) expressed little belief that any type of funding measure could be passed in Humboldt County. Eleven respondents emphasized the unsuccessful countywide sales tax measure that would have funded libraries and parks, as well as the initial defeat of the Arcata Fire Protection District assessment in 2005. The five who felt it would be possible to pass a funding measure emphasized the need to create a strong nexus between a tax and the benefit to the taxpayer.

There was little consensus on which type of tax i.e. property, sales, or benefit assessment, would be the most appropriate funding source for the district. The creation of a benefit assessment district received the most support, followed by an increase in sales tax, and very little support for an increase in property taxes. Two respondents favored a real estate transfer tax. Each type of tax was seen as potentially alienating a portion of the
community. Land owners would be opposed to an increase in property tax, the business community and individual citizens would oppose an increase in sales tax, and the real estate community would be reluctant to support a benefit assessment as it is seen as increasing the overall price of homes.

Respondents identified several reasons why it would be difficult to raise taxes in Humboldt County included that voters have been reluctant to in the past, many people feel the taxes are high enough already, people don't feel that open space/trails are a high enough priority, and many people oppose any type of tax. One respondent commented on the chances of passing a tax increase in light the fact that even in Arcata residents were not willing to support an increased assessment for fire protection:

I think that it would be really tough. I mean a fire district in Arcata they couldn't get it. I was shocked by that because you think we all benefit from having fire protection. It says to me that it is going to be a really hard-sell. It's going to be really difficult and I think a property tax even more difficult.

A realtor felt that Parks and Open Space are not high enough priority to most people:

I think that it is really way down the food chain on most people's concerns right now. Right now people are concerned about fire safety, about police, just basic protection and whether or not this community would support some like that I seriously doubt it.

A developer expressed his opposition to any type of tax increase:

Any tax would be negative. Nobody want to pay more taxes. Many people are already complaining about how much they pay.

A county supervisor commented on the difficulty of increasing taxes:

It would be iffy. We put a half cent sales tax on the ballot for the library because there are 11 branches. The taxpayer said no. So it is always a bit iffy.
When asked what the most appropriate type tax would be the creation of a benefit assessment district received the most support among the respondents (7 of 23). Two reasons were given: first the benefit assessment district requires only a 50 percent majority for approval and second an assessment district forces you to draw clear connection between the tax and what projects it would be funding. A land use planner commented:

The nondiscretionary nature of the tax is a potential advantage. People will understand exactly what they will be getting for their money. For instance $20 per household where specific needs are addressed.

Six respondents felt that a sales tax would be fairer. They argued that since everyone would benefit from the open space district everyone should help pay for it. With a benefit assessment only property owners would be paying while the rest of the community still benefits. One developer did a quick calculation as to how much a quarter cent sales tax increase would cost the average person per year and felt that it really wouldn't be noticeable. Although a county supervisor felt otherwise:

I think that an assessment on property taxes would be better than the sales tax. The library wasn't able to do a sales tax but the community services District was able to do an assessment for their Parks and Recreation. Maybe the people who own property are more likely to vote for it, or people that know they don't have to pay for it. The sales tax seems more in-your-face.

Property tax was seen as the least desirable form of tax, particularly from respondents in agricultural community. One member of a local farming organization expressed that it would be unfair because they own more land and are in need of less open space:

Tax on land is horrible to the agricultural community because they own the land. Now, you want to make it a sales tax which makes everybody pay. Make it a user tax or something. But not a property tax, because property owners don't want to
use your open space because they have their own open space. It is called their property. So passing a property tax is so easy because more people will vote for it because large landowners only get one vote. And then 25 people who live in small apartment condos think they won’t be taxed, although their rent will go up at some point. But the land owner that gets one vote for 500 acres isn't really in favor of a tax on land for open space for the public.

Two out of the twenty-three respondents felt that real estate transfer tax was the most appropriate both because it links real estate transactions to conservation and because it would not be terribly visible. They also argued that any potential impact developers would be offset by the increase in quality-of-life in the area. As a financial advisor explained:

Most people only feel the transfer tax a couple of times in their life. For the average person it would not be a great deal. Developers would get hit with it. But theoretically speaking those transactions will benefit the developer because that means a subdivision is going in somewhere and the quality-of-life is important to having to sell those.

While there was little consensus as to which type of tax would be most likely to pass, there was agreement on the importance of a strong nexus between a tax and the benefits from the tax. For instance, a list of projects, such as trails to be completed or law enforcement staff to be hired, would make it clear to the voter what they were paying for. In addition to creating a nexus, an effective outreach and education campaign would be very important. A county supervisor highlighted the need to explain what benefits would accrue from this increase in taxes:

Those things that go on the ballot that are not specific are often not supported, you have to be really specific. Secondly, you also have to demonstrate what the long-term benefits are from those protection areas. Is it just habitat protected? Would it be just keeping it as a working landscape? Would it be for public access? I think that by and large you would have more people supported if you had all of those three components somehow tied to it.
A board member of a local land trust also emphasized the need to make the benefits of any new tax clear while outlining what some of those benefits might be:

Making sure that there are enough of these benefits that enough people say that I would support it if I know it is going to protect agricultural land, I know it is going to protect working forestlands if I know it is going to give me a trail. If I know that I'm going to have a park for my kids that is maintained. If I know that I'm going to have more coastal access.

Five respondents commented that successfully passing a tax will depend on how effective public education is. A county supervisor explained:

So it depends on who supports it, the use, and how good the campaign is at educating people. So it has to be a campaign that starts with education, with people supporting that, with a concept in the land-use plans, and then translating that into how you are going to do that.

Overall there was a great deal of skepticism that voters in Humboldt County would approve any type of tax. The agricultural community and realtors would not be in favor of a tax on land and there's doubt that the general public would be in support of a sales tax increase. A benefit assessment district was seen as a possible answer because it requires a detailed explanation of the benefits that would be accruing to the taxpayer.

Despite the lack of consensus as to what the most feasible tax is, most respondents (21 of 23) agreed that education and a detailed list of projects would be important to successfully pass any type of tax measure.
Quantitative Results

Environmental and Tax Ballot Measures

Standard regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (percentage of voters registered Republican, percentage of voters registered Democrat, median household income, and percentage of population over 25 who have completed college or an advanced degree) were predictors of the percentage of yes votes for both environmental ballot measures and the tax initiative. Evaluation of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity did not lead to any transformations and there were no multivariate outliers. As shown in Table 5, colinearity is not a problem. The highest Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.540, which does not exceed the threshold of 0.80 used to infer colinearity among variables (Mertler and Vannatta 2005). The variation inflation factors range from 6.794 to 2.684 satisfying the assumption of no severe multicollinearity (Mertler and Vannatta 2005).

Regression results indicated that three predictors (percent Democrat, median household income, and education level) significantly predicted the percentage yes vote on environmental and tax ballot measures, $(R^2=0.793, R^2_{adj}=0.620, F(4, 157)=66.588, p<0.001.)$ This model accounted for 79.3 percent of variance in percentage yes vote (Table 6).
### Table 5. Correlations for the environmental and tax ballot measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>percent yes vote</th>
<th>percent Republican</th>
<th>percent Democrat</th>
<th>education level</th>
<th>median household income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>percent yes vote</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percent Republican</td>
<td>-0.688**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>median household income</td>
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<td>-0.145</td>
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</table>

N=162
*p<0.01; **p<0.001
Table 6. Coefficients for the environmental and tax ballot measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>$P$</th>
<th>Bivariate r</th>
<th>Partial r</th>
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<td>percent Republican education level</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.169</td>
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<td>percent Democrat median household income</td>
<td>0.794</td>
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<td>median household income</td>
<td>1.294</td>
<td>0.551</td>
<td>6.934</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td>0.336</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

N=162

B = unstandardized regression coefficient
$\beta$ = standardized regression coefficient
T = t-value
$P$ = p-value indicating level of significance
Bivariate r = bivariate correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable
Partial r = correlation between the independent and dependent variable after partiailling out all other independent variables.
Based on the regression model, education level was the strongest predictor of the percentage of votes for the environmental and tax ballot measures. As the education level increased by one percent, the percentage of yes votes increased by 0.712 (p<0.001). The percentage of voters registered as Democrat was also positively correlated with the percentage of votes for the ballot measures. As the percentage of Democrats increased by one percent, the percentage of yes votes increased by 0.546 (p<0.001). However, as the income level rose, support for the ballot measures decreased. With every percent increase in the median household income, the percentage of yes votes decreased by 0.512 (p<0.001). The percentage of voters registered Republican did not significantly contribute to the model.

Environmental Ballot Measures

Evaluation of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity did not lead to any transformations. As shown in Table 7 colinearity is not a problem. The highest Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.556, which does not exceed the threshold of 0.80 used to infer colinearity among variables (Mertler and Vannatta 2005). The variation inflation factors range from 4.181 to 8.292, which satisfies the assumption of no severe multicollinearity. Regression results indicate an overall model of two predictors (percentage Republicans, percentage college grad) that significantly predict percentage yes vote ($R^2=0.893$, $R^2_{adj}=0.79$, $F_{4, 130}=127.359$, p<0.001). This model accounted for 89.3 percent of variance in percentage yes vote. (Table 8)
Table 7. Correlations for the environmental ballot measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>percent Republican</th>
<th>percent Democrat</th>
<th>education level</th>
<th>median household income</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>percent yes vote</td>
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<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Democrat</td>
<td>0.420**</td>
<td>-0.566**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>-0.554**</td>
<td>-0.416**</td>
<td>-0.107</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>0.372**</td>
<td>0.533*</td>
<td>-0.157</td>
<td>0.255*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=135
*p<0.01; *p<0.001
### Table 8. Coefficients for environmental ballot measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>$P$</th>
<th>Bivariate r</th>
<th>Partial r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>percent Republican</td>
<td>-0.652</td>
<td>-0.548</td>
<td>-4.810</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-0.862</td>
<td>-0.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percent Democrat</td>
<td>0.285</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>1.823</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.420</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education level</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>4.616</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.554</td>
<td>0.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>median household income</td>
<td>-0.0000225</td>
<td>-0.157</td>
<td>-1.936</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>-0.372</td>
<td>-0.167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=135


$B =$ unstandardized regression coefficient
$\beta =$ standardized regression coefficient
$T =$ t-value
$P =$ p-value indicating level of significance
**Bivariate r** = bivariate correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable
**Partial r** = correlation between the independent and dependent variable after partialling out all other independent variables.
Based on the regression model the strongest predictor of the percentage of yes votes was the percentage of voters registered as Republican. As the percentage of Republicans increased by one percent, the level of support for the environmental ballot measures decreased by 0.548 (p<0.001). In contrast, education level was positively correlated with the percentage of yes votes for the environmental ballot measures. With every percent increase in education level the percentage of yes votes for the environmental ballot measures increased by 0.380 (p<0.001). The percentage of registered Democrats and the median household income were evaluated, and rejected, because they did not significantly contribute to the model.

In summary, Census tracts that were more wealthy and Republican were predicted to vote against the environmental ballot measures. In contrast, census tracts with more Democrats, a higher level of education, and a lower median income were predicted to vote for both tax and environmental ballot measures.

Spatial Voting Patterns

Support for the ballot measures in Humboldt County was mapped at the level of the census tract. A majority of census tracts in Humboldt County voted consistently for or against the ballot measures studied. Sixteen of the census tracts had a majority of voters who rejected all of the ballot measures and 6 census tracts had a majority who endorsed nearly all of the measures. Only 5 of the 27 tracts endorsed between 1 and 4 of the measures. The only measure to receive a unanimous approval or disapproval was Measure L, the countywide sales tax increase which was rejected by each tract.
Areas that consistently voted for the environmental ballot measures include census tracts that encompass the following communities: Arcata, Jacoby Creek, Manila, Old Town Eureka, Hoopa, and a large section of southern Humboldt County which includes Garberville. Tracts whose position changes from election to election include Trinidad, McKinleyville, Fieldbrook, and Blue Lake. Many of the unincorporated portions of the county as well as the communities of Fortuna, Ferndale, and Rio-Dell opposed all of the ballot measures. (Figure 1)

The median household income for areas that consistently vote for the ballot measures is $26,627, and $34,346 in areas that voted against a majority of the measures. On average, 29 percent of the residents in supportive areas have a college degree or greater, compared to 20 percent in the less supportive areas. Party affiliation is also consistent with the results of the regression models. The average ratio in supportive areas is 48 percent Democrat to 20 percent Republican, and in the less supportive areas it is 40 percent Democrat to 42 percent Republican.

An examination of precinct level returns can reveal a somewhat more detailed picture. Arcata is still consistently in support of the environmental ballot measures, while support changes from precinct to precinct within the Eureka and the surrounding unincorporated areas. It was not possible to do a quantitative analysis of voting patterns by precinct (2000 to 2006) for the entire county because in the more rural areas of the county several new precincts were created and the boundaries of some of the precincts changed during that time period (Humboldt County Office of Elections 2007). Precinct boundaries in Arcata and Eureka did not change.
Figure 1. Map of voting by census tract on environmental ballot measures from 2000 – 2006 in Humboldt County, California. With inset of Humboldt Bay (Humboldt County Office of Elections 2007)
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Past research into the success and failure of conservation finance ballot measures has focused primarily on the demographic, social, and economic attributes of a community (Solecki et al. 2004, Callahan 2005, Kline 2006). However, based on this project and the work of Press (2002) and Romero and Liserio (2002), whether or not a conservation finance ballot measures succeeds is a much more complex question. The interviews conducted in other counties as well as those conducted in Humboldt County reveal common patterns that cannot simply be reduced to the presence of sprawl or the education level of voters. Instead, an examination of the strategies employed by actors involved in placing the measures on the ballot in rural western counties, and how those strategies might work in Humboldt County, illustrates the how difficult it can be to assess the feasibility of creating an open space district. Common strategies and patterns can be identified quickly, yet how the strategies are employed is as important as the strategies themselves.

The campaigns in Gallatin County Montana, La Plata County Colorado, Teton County Idaho, and Blaine County Idaho followed a pattern that closely matches that described in the literature on campaigns (e.g. Hopper and Cook 2004, Hopkins 2005) and by Press (2002). Each effort to place a finance measure on the ballot could be roughly divided into two parts. The first step included developing a broad non-partisan coalition, assessing public values through polling, and educating voters through outreach and public
debate. The second part included placing the measure on the ballot and actually running the campaign.

However, the importance of public outreach and education throughout the entire process received more emphasis from the interview respondents than it does in the literature on campaigns. Hopper and Cook (2004), Shaw (2004) and Guzetta (2000) focus on the technical aspects, such as what information needs to be collected before pursuing a campaign, and the importance of effective polling, but they do not spend much time discussing how to build support before placing a measure on the ballot. This information may be missing in part because the campaign literature tends to focus primarily on the period running from immediately before the campaign starts through election day. In contrast respondents who were active in the efforts to promote local conservation finance measures felt that the groundwork leading up to the campaign, which includes public education and coalition building, was as important as the campaign itself.

There were clear differences between the counties that were successful at passing measures that those whose ballot measures failed. In La Plata County Colorado, the proponents attempted, but failed to build a broad coalition. Land trusts often play a significant role in conservation ballot measure campaigns but the land trust in La Plata County decided not to join the coalition because they saw the tax as unfair. In Blaine County Idaho, while the tax itself was seen as fair, a post election analysis conducted by the proponents concluded that the public wanted to know exactly what the tax would be paying for. Proponents failed to make the nexus between the tax and what land would be protected sufficiently clear to the public. Neither county conducted the recommended
polling (Guzetta 2000, Hopper and Cook 2004, Shaw 2004), which could have revealed voter’s attitudes towards the proposed taxes and potentially avoided these pitfalls.

At first glance it appears as though voters in Humboldt County would support the creation of a parks and open space district and a conservation finance measure to support the district. The county has a number of the attributes identified by Press (2002) that contribute to successful land protection efforts: landscapes that inspire protection, a history of preserving land, leaders that are successful at employing innovative strategies to protect land, and threats to land due to sprawl. Residents pride themselves on the quality of life, which stems in part from the beautiful natural surroundings. The Humboldt County Supervisors have endorsed the formation of parks and wildlife refuges in the county, and since the early 1990s a growing number of Land Trusts have been active in protecting critical habitat and agricultural resources (Amodie 1981, Schrepfer 1983, Land Trust Alliance 2005). Recent studies have demonstrated the threats to agriculture and the impact of rural sprawl (Morehead 2004, Smith and Giraud 2006). Yet the county has never voted for a statewide bond measure that would have raised money for parks, habitat restoration, or water quality improvements (Humboldt County Office of Elections 2006).

Results of the interviews do not indicate broad support for the creation of a district and there is even less support for an increase in taxes. The reason for this lack of support could be because there is very little public awareness of what open space districts are and how they might address current needs in the county. Only three of the respondents knew what an open space district was before it was explained at the start of
the interview. In each of the other counties, a considerable amount of time was spent defining the issue, building public support through education and outreach and building a broad coalition in favor of the ballot measure. Since no one has started this process in Humboldt County, and there is little awareness of what open space districts are, evaluating current support for a district may not be the most accurate method for determining the feasibility of a district. Instead the question becomes, is it feasible to follow the strategies suggested by Hopper and Cook (2004) and the successful campaigns in Gallatin and Teton Counties? Is it possible to build a broad coalition, who would that include, and what issues are important to the public?

A coalition between the environmental community and the agricultural community would offer the best chances of success in promoting a new district. Critical, many respondents argued, would be endorsements and support from the Farm Bureau, Cattlemen’s Association, and the Buckeye Conservancy. These groups are seen as representing the many large landowners in the county who still earn a significant portion of their income from farming and ranching. Given the uniform response by most respondents, these groups are also well respected for their opinion on agriculture and ranching. Interestingly, missing from the interviews was any mention of the importance of the real estate and developer communities, who often hold a great deal of influence over local land use decisions (Logan and Molotch 1987, Warner and Molotch 2000). The timber companies, who in the past have been politically very powerful, were also rarely mentioned as important for building a coalition. Why the timber companies who are the
largest land-owners in Humboldt County, were not immediately included in any
discussion of forming a broad coalition was unclear from these interviews.

To build a successful coalition involving members of the agricultural community
a number of concerns would need to be addressed. First, they don’t want people who are
unfamiliar with agriculture, or have other priorities than supporting agriculture, to control
what they can do. Second, they already feel financially overburdened and do not want
have to pay more taxes, particularly any additional property tax. Third, they feel that
trails generally conflict with agricultural operations, and fourth, there is general unease
with regard to any new government entity. The literature on campaigns does not provide
any guidance on how to build a coalition with partners who have strong differences. The
experience in Gallatin County, Montana suggests that it is possible to overcome these
differences through a slow consensus building process. It also suggests that it is important
to have experienced leaders who are able to guide the process.

The issues that a campaign in Humboldt County could focus on are creating trails
and preserving our working lands (timber and agriculture). Trails received the widest
support, including from developers, real estate professionals, and the environmental
community. Aside from the concerns of the agricultural community, trails are seen as an
almost universally positive addition to the county. Many of the respondents pointed to the
success of the Hammond Trail as an example. Support for the preservation of agriculture
and timberlands was somewhat less widespread although it was the primary issue that
concerned the County Supervisors. Public support for the protection of agriculture and
ranching land has also been documented by a survey of the general public (Morehead 2004).

There was a general lack of awareness of the need for additional funding for operations and maintenance of parks and open space areas. This could be because no group or organization has made the public aware of the issue. Unlike Teton County, where a “friends of the parks” organization was instrumental in helping campaign for a parks financing measure, and a bicycle advocacy organization spearheaded the campaign for a trails financing measure, only very recently has this type of an organization been formed in Humboldt County. Trails advocates recently formed the Humboldt Trails Trust as an organization to promote a countywide trails system, but they have yet to engage in any broad public campaigns to educate the public (Humboldt Trails Trust 2006). There is no ‘friends of county parks’ to raise money and awareness of the needs of the Humboldt County Park system.

It was unclear from the interviews if there was enough common ground in Humboldt County between trails, agricultural preservation, and funding land management to develop a sufficient coalition. Judging by open space districts elsewhere in California, and a tax measure passed in Teton County in 2001, it is possible to combine the issues. The Midpeninsula Open Space District, located just south of San Francisco, works actively on all three of these issues. They started with a mandate to protect and manage open space with a focus on trails and passive recreation, and then grew to incorporate agricultural preservation. (Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District 2006) The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District started by
working just on Agricultural Preservation. The district now has both a grant program to acquire land for public access, and has increasingly been directly purchasing property that will be used for parks (Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District 2006).

Both the literature on campaigns and the interviews with other counties provided little evidence for how to address opposition to a conservation finance ballot measure. Apparently, in Gallatin and Teton Counties there was little opposition. Opposition in Humboldt County is likely to come from concerns about other priorities, eminent domain, and taxes to fund the district. The Taxpayer’s League is likely to come out in opposition to a district simply because it will raise taxes, and because they feel that there are more pressing needs in Humboldt County such as police, fire, and road maintenance. Many of the developers, while recognizing the positive elements of trails, felt that the issues of the affordability of housing, the economy, and the County’s backlog on road maintenance are more important than the creation of a new district. While it may be necessary to address the concerns of developers to involve them in a coalition in support of a district, it is difficult to judge the impact of these competing needs on voter support. In Gallatin County voters approved a bond measure for open space preservation and did not approve the construction of a new county jail that was on the same ballot. In Teton County, parks and trails received the highest support during the election and voters choose not to fund additional roads. There does not appear to be a clear pattern indicating when the public will choose to support open space over other needs. In Humboldt County polling would
likely be the most effective method of measuring which issues voters feel is of highest importance (Hopper and Cook 2004).

The potentially most challenging issue that any effort to promote an open space district eventually needs to tackle is taxes. The results from the out of county interviews emphasized the need to create a tax that is seen as fair and clearly provides benefits to those paying the tax. Within Humboldt County there was no consensus as to what the fairest tax would be, or that the public would be in favor of raising taxes. This is not surprising as rural communities in the Western United States tend to be fiscally conservative (Callahan 2005). During the interviews, the question of which tax has the lowest threshold for approval quickly eclipsed any discussion of fairness. Most respondents felt that the creation of a Benefit Assessment District would be the best alternative because it only requires the approval of a simple majority. The supermajority required to approve either a sales or property tax was seen as virtually insurmountable.

Judging by the experiences of Blaine and La Plata Counties, it is difficult to evaluate support for new taxes without first being clear about what needs the new revenue would address. In both counties the measures failed in part because there was no obvious relationship between who would be paying the tax and what exactly it would be paying for. In Gallatin and Teton Counties, advocates also repeatedly stressed the importance of educating the public and making that connection absolutely clear. The lack of support in Humboldt County may be in part because the respondents did not have a thorough understanding of what the tax would be paying for. Results might have been different had the respondents been presented with a clear set of needs and a concrete
proposal for how an open space district would address those needs. Other fiscally conservative communities in the western United States have approved increases in taxes for open space protection despite their general antipathy towards taxes (Callahan 2005, Trust for Public Land 2006).

The only tax measures discussed during the interviews were sales tax, property tax, and a benefit assessment. It is possible that other types of taxes, such as an occupancy tax, or a real estate transfer tax would be more palatable to the voters. The newly formed Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District is funded by a hotel tax (Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District 2006). Furthermore, this research focused on a countywide measure that would be needed to support a countywide open space district. Respondents in Gallatin and Blaine County commented that support for their tax measures was less strong in the rural areas in their counties. A funding measure in Humboldt County may also have more success if it targets only a portion of the county.

The quantitative results from this study provide a picture of how residents of Humboldt County would be likely to vote if no campaign were conducted. As discussed in the introduction, there has been little or no campaigning for or against statewide environmental ballot measures in Humboldt County, which limits the explanatory power of these results. Any local ballot measure to establish and open space district is likely to involve a lengthy campaign and a concerted effort to educate the public. The quantitative results do reveal that Republicans and those with higher incomes are less likely to support environmental ballot measures, while Democrats and people who have graduated from
college are likely to support tax and environmental ballot measures. These results are consistent with Press (2003), Morehead (2004) and Kline (2006).

The influence of partisanship on prior election outcomes suggests that it may be more difficult to form a non-partisan coalition. At a minimum, it will be important for proponents to find issues that appeal to both Democrats and Republicans. Morehead’s (2004) assessment of support for a Purchase of Development Rights Program in Humboldt County also reported differences in approval between Republicans and Democrats. Republicans tended to indicate low to medium levels of support while the majority of Democrats expressed medium to high levels of support. However, it would not be sufficient to simply rely on support from Democrats. Although Democrats are the majority party in Humboldt County, none of the environmental ballot measures has achieved a majority of votes in the county (Humboldt County Office of Elections 2007). The analysis of voting conducted in this study is not detailed enough to explain why Democrats may not have supported previous environmental ballot measures.

The impact of education level and income were also consistent with the literature. Kline (2006) found that support for open space ballot measures peaks when per capita income reaches $35,000 and then declines as incomes increase. The same pattern was also found by Morehead (2004). In his study support was highest when household incomes were between $25,000 and $50,000 and decreased with households that were earning more than $75,000. The relative income of an area could be useful for a future campaign that is deciding which parts of the county to target for outreach and advertising.
Both the education level and income together suggest that there may be strong support for the environment among recent college graduates.

Support varied geographically within Humboldt County and portions of the county consistently supported or opposed environmental ballot measures. Support was strongest in Arcata, Manila, Hoopa, and southern Humboldt where the communities consistently voted for park and water bond measures that were on the ballot from 2000 to 2006. Strong geographic differences in support are consistent with Press’s (2003) study of voting on environmental ballot measures in California and suggest that it may be feasible to create a district that covers only a portion of the county. However, when voters were directly asked if they were willing to raise taxes to maintain government services and fund county parks, the entire county rejected the proposed 1 percent increase in sales tax (Measure L). The difference in support between the environmental and taxes was also found during the qualitative interviews and by Morehead (2004). Together, these results suggest that while there is support for the environment in specific geographic areas, these voters must still be convinced of the necessity of any increase in taxes.

Together, the qualitative interviews and the quantitative analysis paint a picture of what sections of the county would be likely to vote for an open space district, many of the questions that would need to be addressed, and some of the challenges that a campaign would encounter. If it were voted on today, it is unlikely that an open space district would succeed. There is no consensus on the need for a district and very little agreement as to what type of tax would be appropriate. In addition, voters have demonstrated their
unwillingness to support tax increases when that increase is not sufficiently justified. Many questions also remain about the powers a new district would have and who would be represented on its board or in its staff. The reluctance to pay for new taxes and many of the questions surrounding the creation of a new agency are not unique to Humboldt County. Other rural, somewhat conservative counties in the western United States have overcome similar obstacles and successfully passed open space ballot measures. Support was not consistent throughout Gallatin County and Teton County, nevertheless, a majority of residents understood the importance of open space conservation.

Recommen
dations

Creating an open space district in Humboldt County involves three important components: (1) forming a broad non-partisan coalition; (2) educating the public; (3) understanding what issues resonate most with the public. This research suggests that coalition building is the first step that needs to be taken. Ideally, the Humboldt County Supervisors or a local land trust would create a public task force that would discuss how best to address the three issues of trails, preservation of our working lands, and developing a reliable source of funding for land management. Ideally the task force would be made up of respected individuals drawn from a wide spectrum of Humboldt County. This would hopefully build trust between groups that are traditionally wary of each other and grant the process more legitimacy. Each of the other counties contacted for this research emphasized the importance of keeping their ballot measures non-partisan and involving as many different groups as possible.
During this process it would also be very useful to conduct a poll and hold focus groups to evaluate what issues the public feels most strongly about and which type of tax they might be likely to support. The three issues of trails, protection of working lands, and funding the management of our public lands may not be the most important issues to the voters. In Gallatin County preserving the quality of life and protecting water quality turned out to be the most important issues. That county’s bond measure funds agricultural preservation, however agricultural preservation was understood by the voters primarily as a way to protect water quality and preserve their quality of life. Polling conducted by the Trust for Public Land also suggests that water quality is one of the most important issues nationwide (Trust for Public Land 2006). A poll, as well as focus groups, would reveal the concerns, attitudes, and how well the public understands the issues (Guzzetta 2000, Hopper and Cook 2004). Groups like the Trust for Public Land, and The Nature Conservancy are sometimes also willing to fund polling if they see that it also meets their objectives.

Public education is also critical. A public task force is one part of that and helps by drawing attention to the issues being discussed. Local interest groups can also play an important role in educating their membership as well as the general public. The trails funding measure in Teton County relied almost entirely on support already developed by a local advocacy organization. In other counties it took several years to generate sufficient public awareness and support. Having a public that understands the issues is also important for generating the needed political support. Two of the Humboldt County
Supervisors openly commented that if their constituencies are in support of an open space district that they would be as well.

Humboldt County’s General Plan update process presents both an opportunity to raise the issue of creating an open space district and a danger that a proposed district will be pulled into the currently polarized debate over how to guide development. Open space districts have no regulatory authority and open space districts in California, such as the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, are careful to work with willing landowners. Nevertheless, many of the respondents from the other counties emphasized how many misperceptions existed even about a straightforward bond measure. Some voters in Gallatin County assumed that the county would gain additional regulatory power even though they were only voting on a bond measure.

Involving national groups such as the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, or the American Farmland Trust would also be beneficial. These groups all have extensive experience with polling and running campaigns. The Trust for Public Land provided advice and assistance to three of the four counties. They even dedicated a staff person to help run the campaign in Gallatin County and designed many of the campaign materials. Many of the respondents spoke highly of the assistance that they were given by the Trust for Public Land.

This research has identified that the basic conditions are present to create an open space district in Humboldt County, how one might start going about doing so, and a number of issues that need to be resolved. Judging by the successes and failures in the other rural counties in this study, it is possible to build sufficient consensus to raise
money for land protection. However, it may take a great deal of effort to do so.

Ultimately, whether or not it is possible to create an open space district depends on the energy and skill of those interested in promoting the idea and whether or not a district is seen as helping ensure our quality of life in Humboldt County.


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