



Prioritization for Greening in the Inland Empire and Fresno



Authors and Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

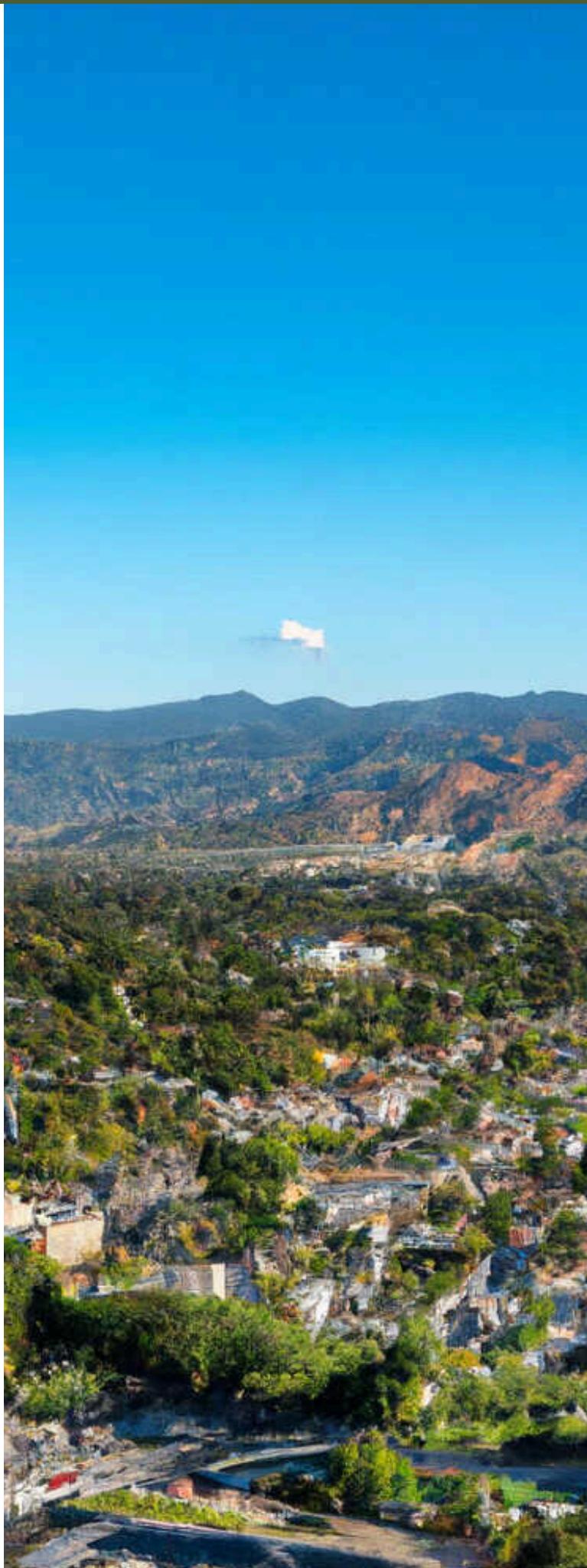
This report outlines information gathered by TreePeople to identify areas in the Inland Empire and Fresno with the greatest need for improved climate-resilient infrastructure through nature-based solutions. The information gathering process was completed through two avenues 1) Stakeholder engagement to understand existing efforts, plans, and priorities, and 2) A mapping analysis that incorporates regional data regarding climate/environmental vulnerabilities and exposures to develop a prioritization.

Inland Empire

The Inland Empire, rich in natural resources, is undergoing significant population and environmental changes that are being reflected in its climate vulnerability. There are concerted efforts to utilize the region's natural resources to offset increasing environmental burdens. These efforts must take a comprehensive approach to ensure the region's most vulnerable communities are being prioritized. To achieve this, there are networks of traditional and nontraditional stakeholders that need to collaborate and build knowledge to bring resources to the Inland Empire.

Fresno

The greater Fresno region is confronted with historical challenges of poor air quality and political apathy that has stilted greening opportunities throughout the San Joaquin Valley. The region must also now grapple with great changes in response to the climate crisis that pose a threat to the region's way of life and economy – chief among them is crippling extreme heat. The lack of environmental equity is not lost on the coalition of organizations implementing nature-based solutions in the region that are charged with addressing all of these challenges with limited fiscal resources and even more limited public agency support.



Inland Empire

Composition

Surrounded by mountain ranges and deserts, the Inland Empire spans over 27,314 square miles, comprised of San Bernardino and Riverside County. Geographically, San Bernardino County is the largest county in California and the contiguous United States and Riverside County is the 4th largest county in California. The region is largely defined by the San Gabriel, the San Bernardino, the Santa Ana, and the San Jacinto Mountains that form a formidable range of mountains encircling valleys. The valleys have rich histories entwined with citrus groves, cultivated and harvested in cities such as Ontario, Fontana, Redlands, San Bernardino, and Riverside. North of the valleys and mountains lies the Mojave Desert, encompassing Victorville, Barstow, and Needles at the California border with Arizona and Nevada. East of the valleys, lay the desert cities including Palm Springs, Palm Desert, Twentynine Palms, and the Coachella Valley.

As of 2022, the Inland Empire is home to 4.6 million residents, roughly 11 percent of California's total population, making it the 12th most populous metropolitan area in the United States; a population size larger than the population of 26 states and a geographic area larger than 10 states. The region is diverse, consisting of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latino-Hispanic groups which make up over half of the population in the Inland Empire, 54% in Riverside County and 60% in San Bernardino County, compared to 45% statewide. Notably, in the urban areas, that rate increases to over 80% of residents being people of color. Roughly 21.4% of the population is foreign-born, with 69% being born in Latin America. Moreover, 44% of residents speak other languages at home, with Spanish speakers making up 36% more than double the rate in the United States. Lastly, educational attainment trails behind national trends, 82% complete high school compared to 90% nationally,

and only 24% complete a bachelor's degree slightly under the 36% nationally, and even less in post-grad at 9% compared to 14% nationally.

During the early 1900s, the region was a center for the agriculture sector producing citrus, dairy, and wine. By the early 2000s, the region's agricultural sector was in decline, however, it was transformed by a growth in population coupled with rapid commercial and industrial development. Its geography and proximity to Southern California's shipping ports, railroads, and interstate transportation corridors significantly influenced the region's development. As a result, the region's leading industries include construction, transportation, and warehousing. Despite that, many of these industry jobs pay below the region's average wage of \$53,600. Studies also show that for every dollar spent in wages by the largest warehousing employers, warehouse workers receive an estimated 24 cents in public assistance benefits. Furthermore, of the region's 15 largest occupations, 12 do not pay a living wage and are filled by workers of color. Regional poverty rates in 2023 were highest among seniors, Latinos, and less educated adults; the senior poverty rate increased to 15%, the Latino poverty rate increased to 17%, and 22% of adults without a high school diploma lived in poverty.

Environment and Climate

Topographically, the Inland Empire is a basin encircled by the several surrounding mountain ranges. This topographic bowl of mountain ranges creates environmental conditions that trap eastern air currents carrying pollutants into the valleys from the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area.

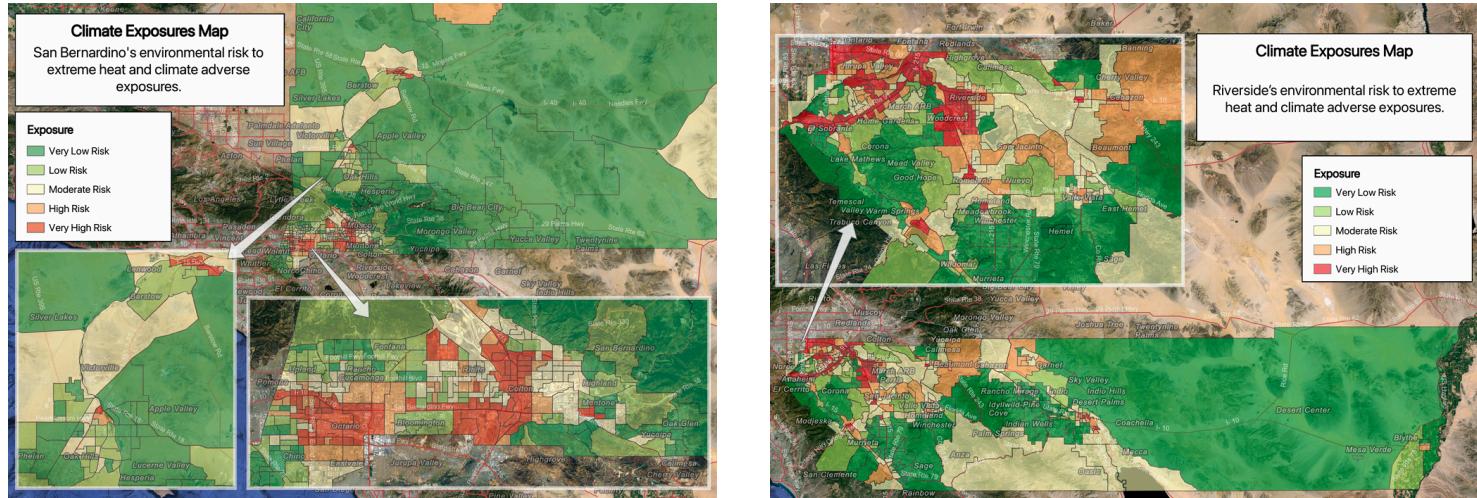


Figure 1. Climate exposure mapping analysis for San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

In the American Lung Association 2024 “State of the Air” report, both San Bernardino and Riverside County received a failing grade for high levels of fine particulate matter (PM) and ozone (smog). These pollutants are often byproducts of factories, power plants, motor vehicles, and the logistics industry.

Moreover, the topographic bowl lends itself to creating a temperature-inversion layer that further traps air pollutants. This means air at the surface becomes trapped under a layer of warmer air behaving as a cap over the valleys, entrapping air pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter. Exposure to these pollutants increase the likelihood of acute respiratory and cardiovascular diseases for sensitive younger and older residents. Further, fine particulate matter can also be carried by air currents over long distances and contaminate topsoil and groundwater, leading to further environmental concerns.

To further understand the environmental conditions in the region, a geospatial analysis of its environmental exposures was conducted. Environmental exposures provide us with a framework to understand the conditions being faced by each region. Namely, extreme heat and pollution, both in the form of water and air,

stand out as particularly important indicators as we look to prioritize areas based on climate impacts. To assess climate exposure, data on extreme heat, air pollution, and water pollution were synthesized to understand the combined climate exposures being felt by communities; together, these exposures shed light on the physical environment.

Figure 1 highlights the concentration of heat and climate-adverse exposures in highly dense and compact communities across the Inland Empire. In the last four decades, the logistic industry transformed the valleys, contributing to the development of warehouse facilities adjacent to transportation corridors (10, 60, 91, and 215 freeway) that overlap with the map's high-risk areas. It is worth noting that currently, these high-risk areas are composed of low-income people of color. Recent changes to expand commercial zoning into residential areas has further exacerbated pollution exposure. In particular, the cities of Ontario, Colton, San Bernardino, Jurupa Valley, Moreno Valley, and Riverside are among the most affected. For example, the City of Ontario is roughly 50 square miles and retains approximately 664 warehouses compared to the City of Los Angeles, 469 square miles, which hosts roughly 950 warehouses. However, Ontario has 40% more warehouse acreage, more

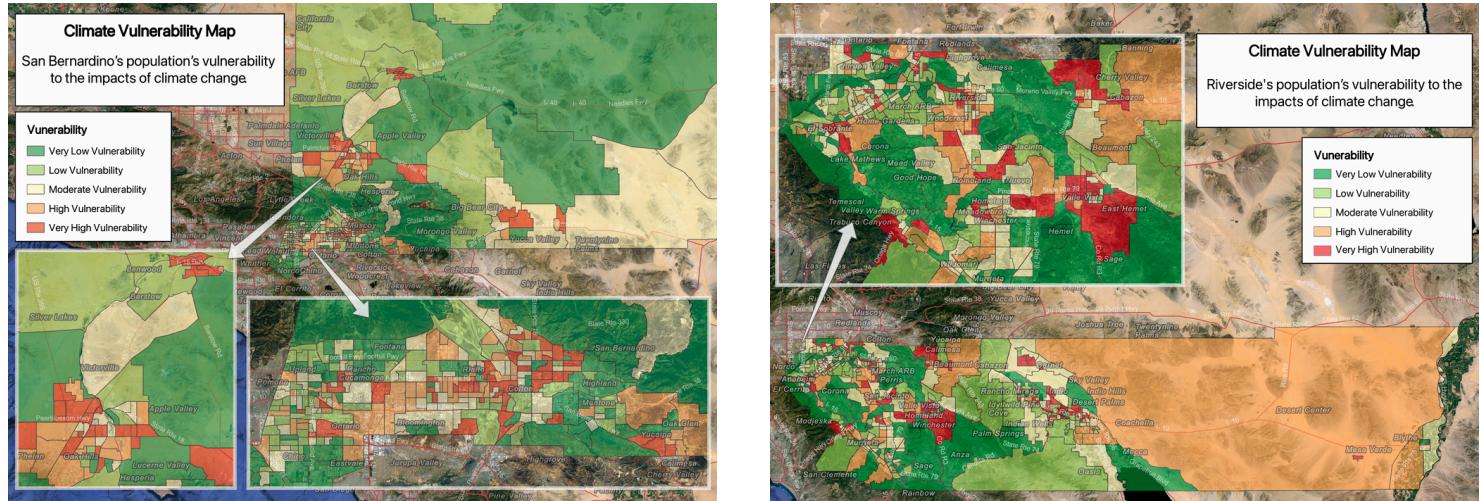


Figure 2. Climate vulnerability mapping analysis for San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

than any other city in Southern California and over 900 warehouses surround 139 schools in the Inland Empire, ranging between 1,000-1,500 feet.

The mapping analysis further emphasizes the C grade given to the region by the America Infrastructure Report. The Report is graded based on eight criteria: capacity, condition, funding, future need, operation and maintenance, public safety, resilience, and innovation. The region received a “mediocre - requiring attention” not only for its industrial infrastructure but its current state of parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities.

In addition to exposures, we must also understand climate vulnerability as a vital component to determine the prioritization of implementing nature based solutions. Climate vulnerability is the degree to which the natural and built infrastructure, and the population, are at risk to the exposures of climate change impacts. Climate vulnerability manifests through various interconnected factors that were assessed, including low tree canopy coverage, demographic disparities, and land use patterns. Areas with sparse tree canopies face heightened risks from extreme heat, as trees provide crucial shade and mitigate urban heat island effects.

Respectively, demographics play a significant role, with historically underserved communities often bearing the brunt of climate impacts due to limited access to resources and infrastructure. Moreover, inequitable land use practices exacerbate vulnerability, with marginalized neighborhoods usually located in areas prone to flooding, pollution, or other environmental hazards.

Figure 2 highlights a recurring theme wherein communities ranging between moderate to very high vulnerability are amongst the most low income communities of color in the Inland Empire. The highly vulnerable communities are largely characterized by urban areas with tree canopy in the range between 4-10% (lowest ranking) and adjacent industrial zones or highways.

Figure 3, produced by Pitzer College and Radical Research LLC, details the current warehouse facilities at the beginning of 2024, and also features future approved facilities (in red) that are to be completed by 2025. As these communities have reduced urban forestry and green spaces over manufactured infrastructure, they will continue to experience higher temperatures contributing to the urban heat island effect. As manufactured structures absorb and re-emit the

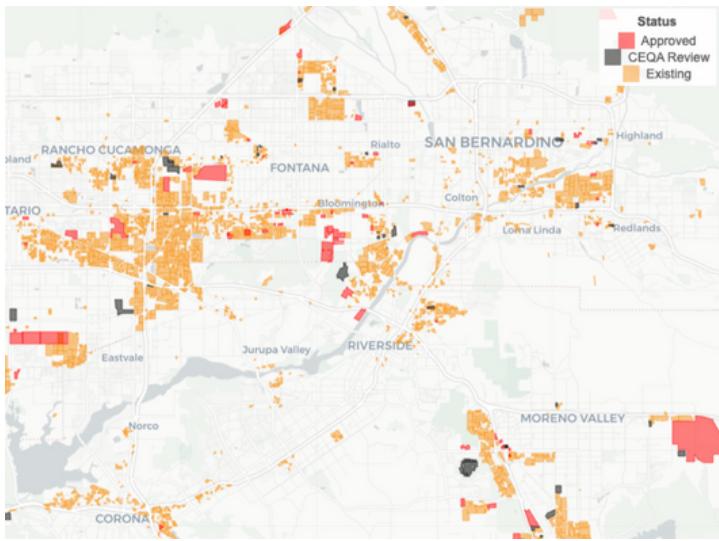


Figure 3. Inland Empire warehouse facility status.

sun's heat more than natural lands like forests or bodies of water, disadvantaged communities across the Inland Empire will disproportionately face the effects of climate change. As a result, due to their current and future usage of unsustainable land-use practices, these factors will negatively impact communities' ability to adapt to future climate challenges.

Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure plays a significant role in advancing the planning and implementation of climate and environmental efforts to address community threats; strong social infrastructure creates the mechanisms needed to obtain resources. Social infrastructure has become a necessity for state and federally designated disadvantaged communities and regions looking to organize around environmental issues. Nonprofit and community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve as social infrastructure create community and place, but most importantly, can play a role in conveying regional concerns and guide future plans.

There are over 14,300 registered nonprofits in the Inland Empire. Nonprofits represent 7% of the Inland Empire's local economy and nearly 6% of its employment, which tends to pay higher than other regional private sector occupations. The largest nonprofit subsectors in the region are

(1) religion-related, (2) human services, (3) public and social benefit organizations, (4) education, and (5) arts, culture, and humanities groups. Consequently, the region's environmental subsector is drastically smaller and not numerically significant to be included in this report. In addition, an assessment of the density of nonprofits and community-based organizations shows that there is far less prevalence in rural and suburban areas. This general pattern also holds a higher density of nonprofits in cities like Riverside, San Bernardino, Victorville, and Coachella Valley than in suburban and exurban areas.

Research shows that investment in the Inland Empire's nonprofit and CBO sector growth has not kept pace with the region's growth nor with other parts of the state. Foundation giving per capita in the Inland Empire is less than 50 percent of the Central Valley's and is one-ninth of what we find in Los Angeles County. According to the Foundation Center, foundation giving per capita for the Inland Empire is \$31, compared to \$68 in the Central Valley, \$275 in Los Angeles County, and \$752 in the Bay Area. Similar claims regarding the lack of public investment from the state have also been shared and felt by the organizations in the region. This lack of historical investment suggests that there is a significant amount of untapped capacity in the region.

TreePeople conducted stakeholder engagement to understand regional environmental vulnerabilities, existing efforts, and priorities for nature-based solutions. Entities engaged for this process included: Akoma Unity Center, Huerta Del Valle, Southern California Mountains Foundation, Inland Empire Resource Conservation District, Headwaters Resiliency Partnership, Inland Empire Waterkeepers, Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice, The People's Collective for Environmental Justice,

The Garcia Center for the Arts, Garden of Health - The Institute for Community Partnerships and Community-Academic Partners in Service - Loma Linda University, Rivers & Lands Conservancy, Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Tribe, STUDIO-MLA, and Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability.

TreePeople hosted virtual and in-person discussion sessions where the aforementioned partners could share their perspectives and priorities. TreePeople also hosted multiple one-on-one meetings to further capture feedback, in conjunction with video calls, telephone interviews, and emails gave supportive results. Through these efforts, we gathered invaluable insights into community needs, resources, and priorities, ensuring our mapping efforts were inclusive and relevant. This collaborative approach not only enhanced the accuracy and comprehensiveness of our maps but also fostered a sense of ownership among local stakeholders. During the discussions, there was a strong emphasis on community engagement to make sure local knowledge and perspectives were involved in the decision-making process.

As TreePeople has learned through its on-the-ground work and information gathering through this effort, the region lacks the environmental social infrastructure of its Los Angeles counterpart but faces many, if not more, social and environmental challenges. Even so, nontraditional partners have helped TreePeople sustain its environmental programs and can be a future catalyst if their knowledge and accessibility around environmental and climate challenges are increased. Increased investment in capacity building and coordination can have a ripple effect, a sentiment felt by many partners.

Regional Climate and Environmental Priorities

The Inland Empire's climate and environmental priorities can be seen by how they are evolving with the changes the region is facing. As mentioned, the population and built environment have transformed drastically over the past decades and continue to change, which has impacted the priorities of the stakeholders and communities. Nevertheless, a key priority that has emerged through this process is to utilize the region's natural resources to combat and mitigate climate change.

The Climate Resilience Prioritization Map, Figure 4, aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the implementation of nature-based solutions in the region can be prioritized. By synthesizing climate exposures and vulnerabilities, a regional-scale approach can be taken to hone in on communities and neighborhoods facing the greatest risks and exposures. This baseline data provides a launching point for engagement, planning, and implementation.

The data and visualization suggest urban designated areas along highway corridors are most vulnerable and exposed to environmental risks. This is in part due to the proximity of industrial and warehouse facilities to highways to allow easier access to transport goods. Still, it should not be overlooked that the data uplifted indicators of the populations living in these areas. Recent development, changes in zoning, and increases in transportation have put stress on these populations that are already less likely to voice concern as historical trends would indicate for low-income communities of color. The importance of supporting high and very

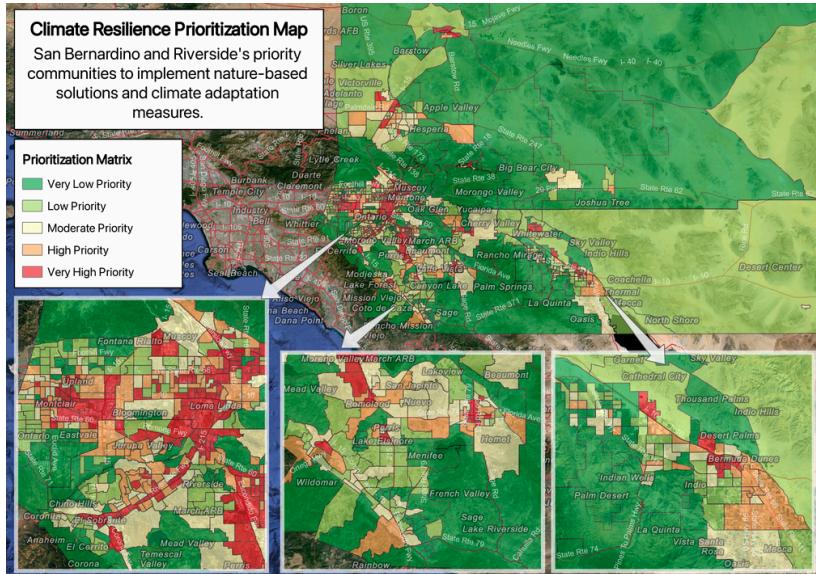


Figure 4. Inland Empire climate resilience prioritization mapping analysis.

high priority neighborhoods is increasingly timely because of the rapid change to the region. Figure 4 can be overlaid with natural resources in the region to identify where implementing nature-based solutions will improve communities and increase their adaptability to climate change. For example, the Santa Ana River Watershed traverses across the majority of the high and very high priority neighborhoods in the Cities of San Bernardino and Riverside. Other forms of overlaying and ground truthing this analysis will be an instrumental mechanism to coordinate and collaborate with partners through an approach that prioritizes vulnerable neighborhoods.

Project Case Study: The Santa Ana River in Riverside

The City of Riverside has over a ten-mile stretch of the Santa Ana River along the city's edge. With its complicated and beneficial history today, Riverside wants to give more of its river to the community. The Riverside Gateway Parks' Master Plan is a forward-looking vision to recover, re-conceive, and re-engage with the River. Two hundred and fifty acres of city-owned property along the river present a phenomenal opportunity to resuscitate older interactional patterns between the city and river while adapting those resources to modern life. Through revitalization efforts, conducted by meticulous analysis of the existing structures, the city stands to deliver ecological, recreational, cultural, social, and economic value.

The river restoration vision seeks to increase recreational opportunities, educational use, public access, water quality protection, enhancement of wildlife habitat, creates a green gateway to the river, creates a recreation destination, and supports economic opportunities. The Park Master Plans has already identified several potential park sites along the Santa Ana River Trail. Already, a half dozen project sites have been identified, such as the site in Figure 5, that promote climate resilience through nature based solutions and provide multiple other community benefits.

Although funding has not been secured for the number of proposed projects, this should serve as a case study for the region's other public agencies and philanthropic entities to support the development of regional plans that leverage their natural resources. The information gathering process from this grant highlight this approach as what stakeholders in the region would like to see.

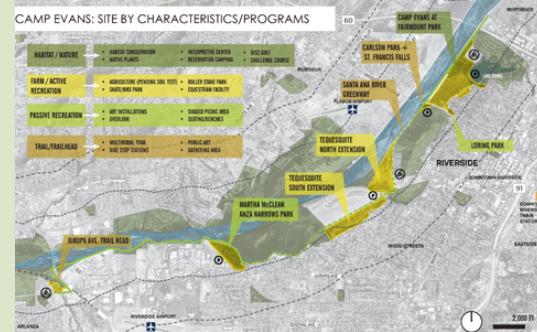


Figure 5. Project concept example.

Fresno

Composition

Fresno, California, nestled within the fertile San Joaquin Valley, experiences a Mediterranean climate marked by hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The urban center's geography, surrounded by mountain ranges, exacerbates air quality issues, particularly during the summer months when high temperatures - a similar scenario to the effect in the Inland Empire. The City of Fresno stands as the fifth-largest city in California by population, with over half a million residents. The county's population is ethnically diverse. Hispanic or Latino individuals make up the largest ethnic group, comprising around 52% of the population. White non-Hispanic individuals account for about 32%, while other ethnic groups such as Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans constitute smaller proportions of the population.

Fresno's economic landscape has been shaped by its agricultural heritage, with emerging challenges posed by water scarcity and air quality issues influencing both its growth and environmental policies. The local economy remains closely tied to agriculture, although it has diversified into education, healthcare, and technology sectors in recent decades. Despite these challenges, efforts to enhance sustainability and combat climate change are underway, including water conservation initiatives and the promotion of renewable energy sources. Fresno's climate and environment reflect the delicate, and increasingly difficult balance, of agricultural, development, and the need for environmental stewardship in a rapidly changing region. Efforts to balance economic development with environmental stewardship continue to shape the city's trajectory as it navigates the complexities of sustainability and urban planning in the 21st century.

Environment and Climate

The Fresno region is known for its agricultural productivity, with fertile soils and irrigation from the Sierra Nevada mountains contributing to extensive farming of crops like grapes, almonds, and citrus fruits. However, its geography in the San Joaquin Valley, surrounded by mountain ranges, also creates a bowl effect that traps pollutants, leading to poor air quality, particularly during the summer months. These natural environment features lend to two of the biggest challenges the region faces, air pollution and water scarcity.

In addition to greenhouse gasses emissions, local air pollution causes significant and immediate adverse effects to the local population. The region experiences high levels of particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and ozone, which pose significant health risks to residents, especially vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. The main sources of air pollution include vehicle emissions, agricultural production (particulate matter), and industrial processing.

Water security is another critical issue facing Fresno and the broader Central Valley. As an agricultural hub, Fresno relies heavily on irrigation to support its vast farmlands, putting pressure on limited water resources. Consequently, climate change exacerbates this challenge, with changing precipitation patterns and prolonged droughts threatening the availability of water for both agriculture and urban use.

Environmental exposures, as previously stated, provide us with a framework to understand the conditions being faced by each region. In addition to regional environmental challenges, these exposures are those directly and indirectly

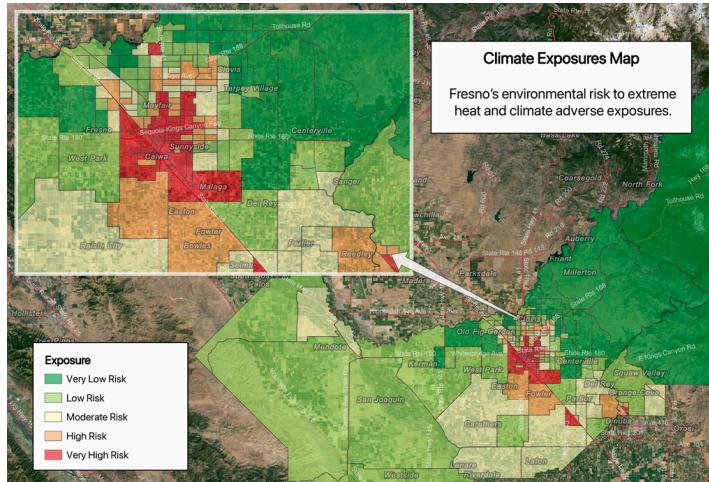


Figure 6. Climate exposure mapping analysis for Fresno.

affecting the population. Namely, these indicators are the previously discussed air pollution and, increasingly, extreme heat. Figure 6 highlights the density of exposures being felt by the urban center of the region. This does not come as a surprise because the region's major thoroughfares and built environment are concentrated in the very high-risk areas. However, this does shed light on extreme heat. As extreme heat indicators such as days over 100 degrees fahrenheit have increased over the past 75 years, there is now another layer of environmental exposures that will compound climate vulnerability and have a ripple effect on the communities and natural environment in the region.

The compounding of environmental exposures is further uncovered through the region's climate vulnerability. Figure 7, the degree to which the natural, built, and population are at risk to the exposures of climate change impacts, track similarly to the exposures but with less density. This points to the fact that although exposures are being felt the strongest in the urban center, there are still areas outside of the urban center that experience a high level of vulnerability to climate change impacts based on social factors and lack of green infrastructure. Nevertheless, the three to five clusters of high vulnerability

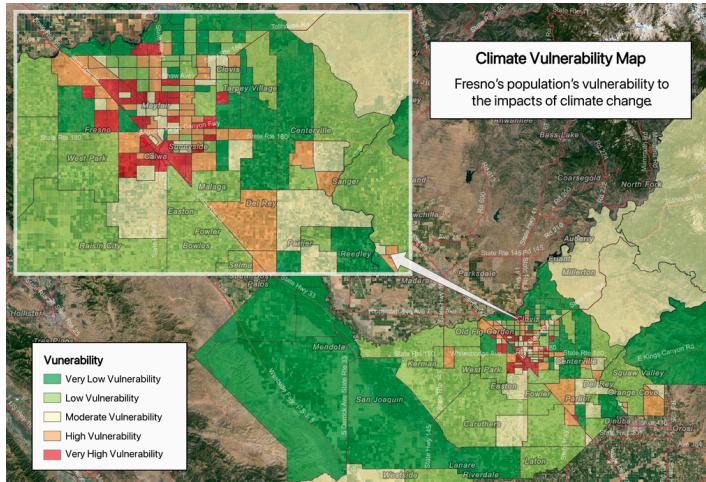


Figure 7. Climate vulnerability mapping analysis for Fresno.

areas should be prioritized for adaptation measures aligned with community values.

Social Infrastructure

Fresno boasts a diverse array of social infrastructure aimed at fostering community engagement, education, and support. Nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups play a vital role in Fresno by addressing social issues, including homelessness, food insecurity, and youth empowerment through outreach, support services, and grassroots initiatives. TreePeople's engagement differed from the Inland Empire – where TreePeople already has a presence and several partnerships. To understand the environmental social infrastructure in Fresno, TreePeople utilized relationships built up through the previous policy, urban forestry, and grant initiatives to pave the way forward for introductions and conversation. TreePeople reached out to eight organizations in the greater Fresno region, with half responding to requests for an introductory group meeting. These organizations were Tree Fresno, Fresno Building Healthy Communities, Central California Environmental Justice Network, and San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust.

Though all organizations desired an in-person

meeting in Fresno, calendars from key Fresno participants could only align for a virtual gathering. Much like the Inland Empire, TreePeople hoped to conduct stakeholder consultation and engagement to further understand Fresno's regional environmental vulnerabilities, existing efforts, and priorities for nature-based solutions. However, our initial group conversation revealed challenges to this endeavor.

TreePeople hosted a collaborative session to meet and hear these local organizations' perspectives and community priorities. After being asked what TreePeople's involvement in Fresno would be, we framed this as an exercise in what we hoped would become a multi-phase effort to move Fresno from the mapping stage through to planning, community engagement, and implementation. While concerns regarding TreePeople's participation largely dissipated in the first quarter of that meeting, the greater concern of "reinventing the wheel" in conducting another regional assessment became a recurring theme during the remaining ninety minute discussion.

These organizations, and their community partners, expressed significant frustration in creating a product that, from their perspective as local leaders, has been created many times over. All participating organizations offered specific examples of mapping exercises that have occurred in the greater Fresno region to identify priority places to plant, conserve, and create more green spaces. From the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan to community prioritization planning, the challenge repeatedly expressed to TreePeople centered around the lack of implementation opportunities largely fueled by local and regional bureaucracy. According to them, the lack of prioritization of urban greening by local government entities has been shown to significantly hinder progress,

affecting even the most basic desires for a community to plant a handful of street trees (in a timely manner) in an "under treed" neighborhood, or adjacent to a busy roadway. Mona Cummings, Executive Director of Tree Fresno, perhaps characterized the situation best:

"Fresno's community organizations are a tight-knit, action-oriented collective that need funders to invest in their work on the ground and help us break through the barriers that are impeding progress. We know what our challenges are. We don't need to revisit them."

Though TreePeople hosted further one-on-one follow-up meetings to capture organizational and community feedback, the central theme of "action not words" resurfaced on every occasion.

Regional Climate and Environmental Priorities

Fresno's public agencies and network of organizations, such as those engaged in this effort, have identified project-level priorities based on regional need; much of which leverages the natural environment to enhance resilience and sustainability through multi-benefit projects. As the region faces the challenges of air pollution, water scarcity, and extreme heat, the use of nature-based solutions are top of mind.

The Climate Resilience Prioritization Map, Figure 8, aims to provide a visual understanding of how the implementation of nature-based solutions in the region can be prioritized. By synthesizing climate exposures and vulnerabilities, a regional-scale approach can be visualized to further make the case to state and federal level agencies regarding the climate resilience needs. Figure 8 acts as another layer to view the compounding effects of climate change with

action through nature based solutions foremost.

It is no surprise that the neighborhoods elevated by the data for prioritization correspond with the urban center of the region as both the exposures and risks leaned inward towards this section of the San Joaquin Valley. This is likely a result of the prevalence of agriculture and open space that surrounds the urban area. The outlining areas that are high and very high priority are also designated urban census areas bringing to light the type of high priority community consistency. The data reinforces what the region already knows, the entire valley is facing warmer temperatures, and these urban areas will continue to absorb heat and will be the most affected. This data hones into the neighborhoods where this is the most prevalent; which the community groups working in the area are well aware of.

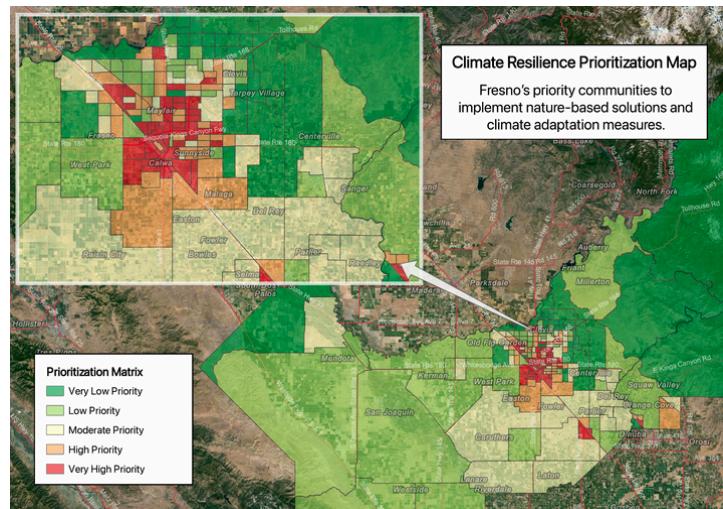


Figure 8. Fresno climate resilience prioritization mapping analysis.

Project Case Study: San Joaquin River Parkway

Fresno community organizations have been working on the Western Reaches Access Activation Plan, which will build on decades of community organizing to implement the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan. The San Joaquin River Parkway will be a planned 22-mile regional natural and recreation area primarily in the river's floodplain extending from Friant Dam to Highway 99, encompassing portions of Fresno and Madera County. The San Joaquin River is the second-largest watershed in California. It serves the Fresno and Madera region's agriculture, recreation, and water supply needs. Its waters provide for agricultural production throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Stakeholders in the region are elevating the important role the urban stretch of the river can play in climate resilience in order to make the plans actionable through securing the funding necessary to make improvements.

The San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan envisions:

- A primary multi-use trail from Friant Dam to Highway 99 (22 +/- river miles);
- Contiguous and continuous wildlife habitat and movement corridors;
- A regional, multifaceted park experience for visitors, consisting of river access, low-impact recreation, and conservation education; and
- Functional regional conservation and restoration of habitat, watershed, and ecosystems.

The San Joaquin River Parkway includes public lands and improvements owned by eight different entities. Currently, the Western Reaches Access Activation Plan is under review by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Key Takeaways

Inland Empire

To gather a holistic understanding of where the Inland Empire could best use resources, the prioritization mapping data must be overlaid with existing plans, projects, and coalitions. TreePeople has conducted the initial information gathering analysis, as demonstrated in Figure 9, to understand where there are vulnerable populations without existing initiatives to address their risks through nature-based solutions.

Notably, the communities within a 1-2 mile radius of the 10 freeway corridor emerge from the geographic analysis as areas that have high prioritization and little to no planned or existing projects. These are also the areas most densely populated with existing and planned warehouse facilities. Still, there is value in prioritizing local policies that dictate green space and climate resilience strategies for the development of industrial zones.

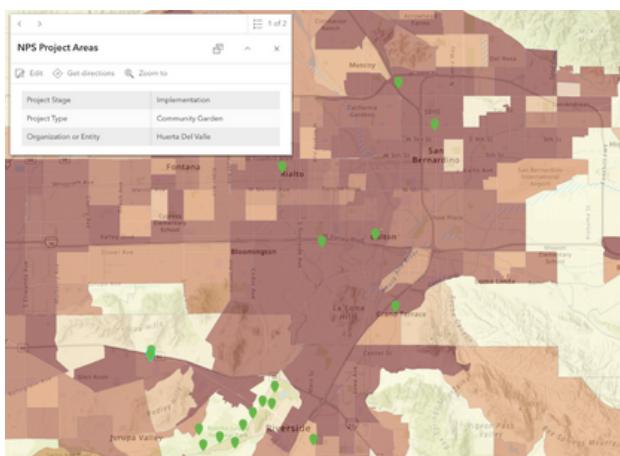


Figure 9. Inland Empire community project mapping.

The second priority that emerges based on the analysis is the upper Santa Ana River Watershed that flows through much of San Bernardino and Colton. Located in an area increasingly vulnerable to climate change, there has been stakeholder interest in implementing proposed plans that leverage this resource to implement a multi-benefit infrastructure. As analogous river revitalization plans have spanned decades in places such as Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley, there is opportunity to learn from these efforts. The upper Santa Ana River has the benefit of being within state and federally prioritized areas for use of natural resources funding such as the Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool and CalEnviroScreen. Additionally, there have been sufficient levels of planning and engagement to be competitive for public dollars. Partners in the region should now turn their attention to implementation.

In order to further develop the priorities identified above and continue to understand the region's priorities for green infrastructure more needs to be done. A next step should be to ground truth in the identification of priorities and vulnerabilities through community outreach and stakeholder engagement. Similarly, collaboration with local public agencies (cities, counties, water agencies) needs to be established to identify priority projects for the community, conduct information sharing regarding funding opportunities, and support the implementation of projects. Lastly, the capacity and knowledge base of nontraditional CBOs and non-profits must be built to foster the collaboration and community engagement the region needs.

Through these steps, we believe the aforementioned priorities will be reinforced and new ideas will emerge from community voices, resulting in the demand and justification to funders needed to enable resources to flow into the Inland Empire's communities.

Over the last five years, TreePeople has become a partner to Inland Empire communities that are well aware of the environmental and climate change impacts outlined in this report. Implementing tree canopy expansion projects in Riverside, Colton, and Rialto, TreePeople has built trust in the communities it is working in and the region as a whole. This information-gathering exercise has helped frame a regional approach to urban greening and nature-based solutions that TreePeople can now leverage to develop a vision, build a case around resilience, and prioritize the organization's resources. As an entity that engages in state-level policy, coalition-building, capacity building with local municipalities, and on-the-ground implementation, this report was a crucial step to advance a strategic approach to how TreePeople can support the Inland Empire through nature-based solutions.

Fresno

The conversations in Fresno and the Inland Empire – though dramatically different in tone and goal-setting – still lead to the same inevitable conclusion that conservation and equity stakeholders have much more work to begin implementing their visions on-the-ground. Specific to Fresno, partners are ready to deploy investments and are becoming fatigued by lack of investment. For TreePeople, these takeaways reinforce our state public policy efforts that aim to secure funds for environmental equity and justice programs.

TreePeople recognized an opportunity to align with environmental justice allies in Sacramento to advance initiatives

that directly address some of the fiscal shortfalls that constrain forward progress on creating transformative landscapes in severely underserved communities. Most visibly, TreePeople partnered with Central Valley champions like Leadership Council and Bay Area advocates like Greenlining Institute and APEN to drive equity funding in a climate bond. Collectively, and in partnership with other allies including California Environmental Justice Alliance and Trust for Public Land, the organizations have occupied a very distinct space in a diverse coalition that centered equity in their bond framework.

Final Thoughts

As a practitioner, convener, and policy advocate in the Inland Empire and on statewide initiatives, this project has incited action in TreePeople to advocate and secure resources that inch towards environmental equity through nature based solutions. TreePeople will implement the following multi-pronged approach to support the outcomes of this project.

POLICY: State policy will continue to be the strongest vehicle to secure resources in both regions. As the extreme heat facilitator within a 180+ member coalition, TreePeople worked with environmental justice allies to support bond investments that would refuel programs including Transformative Climate Collaboratives, urban forestry and urban greening, and climate resiliency centers. The region's priorities need to be centered in order to be competitive in seeking funds from these aforementioned grant programs and more captured in the bond that will go to voters in November.

CAPACITY BUILDING: In the Inland Empire, TreePeople has the capacity to act as a bridge for partners that are positioned to support the implementation of nature based solutions. TreePeople invested directly in The Garcia

Center for the Arts with a \$75,000 award to plant trees in and around the center – beautifying the facility and building a more climate resilient community hub. It is TreePeople's intention to continue offering pass through funding to local partners.

Additionally, TreePeople is committed to securing funding for the region. TreePeople has developed grant applications for the City of San Bernardino, City of Rialto, Inland Empire Community Foundation, and San Bernardino Community College District. Further, we are actively working with the other entities engaged for this project to partner on new funding opportunities such as the SoCal Mountains Foundation, City of Riverside, Inland Empire Waterkeepers, and UC Agriculture and Natural Resources – all of which are grant opportunities to advance nature based solutions in historically underserved neighborhoods.

IMPLEMENTATION: In the Inland Empire, TreePeople has been and will continue to implement on-the-ground projects and programming that advance tree canopy cover, organize community around key issues, provide opportunities for youth, and build partnerships to ensure long-term investment. Through philanthropic and public funds, TreePeople has secured multi-year funding to continue supporting the Inland Empire communities of Rialto, Colton, Eastside Riverside, and the City of San Bernardino. As these communities become increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, we must implement on-the-ground measures with pace.



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