

ridgelines

The term ridgeline is used to describe a visually prominent and narrow piece of land that includes the highest points of elevation within a watershed. Ridgelines are characterized by the lack of a topographical backdrop, where the sky is visible beyond the ridge or by a backdrop of a nearby higher topographic feature such as a mountain range. Ridgelines are often considered scenic areas and add to the character and visual quality of the communities they surround (Napa County 3 Dec 2004).

In times of rapid growth, the scenic views of these ridgelines may be altered by development. Building on a ridgeline or at the crest of a hill interferes with the natural profile of the land and allows buildings to dominate the skyline. Protecting ridgelines by developing below the ridgeline preserves the natural landform and character of the land. Protection of ridgelines can lead to increased property values and preserve a community's distinctiveness while attracting positive growth (Scenic America 14 Dec. 2004).

The protection of ridgelines may be accomplished in a number of ways. Communities can use overlay zoning, design guidelines, transfer of development rights, and other means to protect ridgelines from development. Zoning laws that limit building heights based on their proximity to scenic areas have proved effective in some areas. Establishing clear design guidelines and design reviews allow communities to decide how development near ridgelines or other scenic areas will look. Transfer of Development Rights, or TDRs, preserve ridgelines by transferring development rights away from sensitive areas such as ridgelines to areas better suited to growth (Scenic America 14 Dec. 2004).



Development below the ridgeline, instead of on top of it, preserves the character of the land.

references and further reading:

Napa County. Dec. 2001. Viewshed Ordinance. 3 Dec. 2004. <<http://www.co.napa.ca.us/gov/apps/viewshed107/>>.

Scenic America. 2003. Scenic Vistas and Viewsheds. 14 Dec. 2004. <<http://www.scenic.org/viewprotection/identify.htm>>.