

Public Review Draft Escondido Subarea Plan

Implementing the Multiple Habitat Conservation Program

City Case File 95-25-GPIP

Prepared for
City of Escondido
Planning Division
201 N. Broadway
Escondido, California 92025
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
	ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	a-1
ES	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ES-1
1	INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1-1
1.1	Goals and Objectives	1-1
1.2	Purpose and Need	1-1
1.3	Overview of the Planning Process	1-5
1.4	Regulatory Compliance of the Plan	1-6
1.4.1	Federal Requirements	1-6
1.4.2	State Requirements	1-7
1.4.3	Subarea Plan Requirements	1-8
2	DESCRIPTION OF THE ESCONDIDO SUBAREA	2-1
2.1	Regional Location	2-1
2.2	Land Ownership and Land Uses	2-3
2.2.1	Land Ownership	2-3
2.2.2	Major Land Uses	2-3
2.2.3	Transportation and Utility Corridors	2-12
2.3	General Plan, Zoning, and Local Land Use Regulation	2-12
2.3.1	City of Escondido General Plan	2-12
2.3.2	Escondido Zoning Ordinance	2-15
2.3.3	Excavation and Grading Ordinance	2-16
2.3.4	Environmental Quality Regulations	2-17
2.3.5	San Dieguito River Valley Focused Planning Area	2-17
2.3.6	City of Escondido Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space	2-18
2.4	Anticipated Major Capital Improvement Projects	2-19
3	BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES	3-1
3.1	Existing Information	3-1
3.2	Distribution of Natural Habitats in Escondido	3-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
3.2.1	Northeastern Habitat Area	3-6
3.2.2	Eastern Habitat Area	3-9
3.2.3	Southern Habitat Area	3-9
3.2.4	Southwestern Habitat Area	3-10
3.2.5	Northwestern Habitat Area	3-11
3.3	Sensitive Species	3-11
3.3.1	Sensitive Plants	3-12
3.3.2	Sensitive Wildlife	3-16
4	PRESERVE DESIGN AND LAND USE CONSIDERATIONS	4-1
4.1	Habitats Conserved	4-2
4.2	Species Conserved	4-7
4.3	Land Uses Within and Adjacent to the Preserve	4-7
4.3.1	Land Uses Planned Within the Preserve	4-8
4.3.2	Land Uses Planned Adjacent to the Preserve (Adjacency Guidelines)	4-15
4.4	Guidelines for Preserve Design (Onsite Conservation) in Softlined Areas	4-18
5	PRESERVE ASSEMBLY AND CONSERVATION ACTIONS	5-1
5.1	Components of Habitat Lands in the FPA	5-1
5.1.1	Conserved Habitat on Public Lands	5-1
5.1.2	Conserved Habitat on Private Lands	5-4
5.1.3	Potential Habitat Acquisition	5-7
5.2	Citywide Conservation Actions	5-7
5.2.1	Mitigation Standards for Vegetation Communities	5-7
5.2.2	Narrow Endemic Species Standards	5-9
5.2.3	Wetlands Mitigation Standards	5-12
5.2.4	Fire and Fuel Management Standards	5-13
5.2.5	Clustering Standards for New Development	5-14
5.3	Funding and Financing of the Plan	5-14
5.3.1	Funding Needs of Plan Implementation	5-14
5.3.2	Sources of Funds	5-15

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
6	SUBAREA PLAN IMPLEMENTATION POLICIES	6-1
6.1	Implementation Policies and Actions	6-1
6.1.1	Cooperative Implementation Structure	6-1
6.1.2	Take Authorizations	6-2
6.1.3	Development Process Assurances	6-3
6.2	Implementing Agreement	6-4
6.2.1	Assurances in the Implementing Agreement	6-4
6.2.2	Changed Circumstances and Unforeseen Circumstances	6-5
6.3	City Implementation Actions and Process	6-8
6.3.1	Conservation Requirements Established in this Plan	6-8
6.3.2	Regulatory Actions	6-9
6.3.3	Interim Resource Protection	6-10
6.3.4	Development Review and Approval Process	6-13
6.3.5	Annual Implementation Coordination Meetings	6-15
6.4	Plan Amendment Process	6-16
6.5	Boundary Adjustments and Equivalency	6-16
6.6	Annexations	6-18
6.7	Process for Adding Species to Covered Species List	6-19
6.8	Permanent Resource Protection	6-20
6.8.1	Local Regulations	6-20
6.8.2	Assurance of Long-Term Biological Integrity	6-20
6.9	Relationship of Subarea Plan Approval to MHCP Core Conservation	6-21
6.10	Cooperative MHCP Implementation Structure	6-22
6.10.1	Introduction and Overview	6-22
6.10.2	MHCP Committee Structure	6-24
6.10.3	MHCP Land Conservancy	6-24
6.10.4	MHCP Preserve Manager	6-25
7	PRESERVE MANAGEMENT	7-1
7.1	Preserve Manager	7-1
7.1.1	Responsibilities on Public Lands	7-2

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
7.1.2	Responsibilities on Private Lands	7-2
7.2	Framework Management Plan Guidelines	7-3
7.3	Area-specific Management Goals and Guidelines	7-11
7.3.1	Northeastern Preserve Area	7-11
7.3.2	Eastern Preserve Area	7-13
7.3.3	Southern Preserve Area	7-16
7.3.4	Southwestern Preserve Area	7-18
7.3.5	Northwestern Reserve Area	7-19
7.4	Habitat Tracking, Reporting, and Monitoring	7-20
8	REFERENCES	8-1

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
2-1	City of Escondido Subarea Plan and MHCP Study Area	2-2
2-2	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Generalized Land Ownership	2-5
2-3	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Generalized Existing Land Use	2-7
2-4	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Generalized Planned Land Use	2-9
2-5	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Circulation Element	2-13
3-1	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Vegetation Communities	3-3
3-2	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Vegetation Communities Inside the Biological Core and Linkage Area (BCLA)	3-7
3-3	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Locations of Gnatcatcher, Cactus Wren, and Narrow Endemics	3-17
4-1	City of Escondido Subarea Plan Focused Planning Area (FPA) and Constrained Lands Outside the FPA	4-3
6-1	Project Review and Approval Process Diagram	6-14
6-2	MHCP Implementation Structure Primary Responsibilities	6-23

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

LIST OF TABLES

<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1-1	Proposed Covered Species for the Escondido Subarea Plan	1-3
1-2	Mandatory Requirements of an HCP	1-7
2-1	Generalized Land Ownership	2-4
2-2	Generalized Planned Land Use	2-11
3-1	Acreage of Escondido SAP Vegetation Communities Within the MHCP Study Area and Biological Core and Linkage Area (BCLA)	3-2
3-2	MHCP Species Occurring or Potentially Occurring in Escondido	3-13
4-1	Acreage Thresholds for Vegetation Communities in the Escondido Preserve	4-5
4-2	Native Landscaping Shrubs Suitable for Use Adjacent to Preserve Areas	4-17
5-1	Target Conservation of Natural Habitat	5-2
5-2	Mitigation Standards for Impacts to Natural Vegetation and Habitat	5-8
5-3	MHCP Narrow Endemic Species List	5-10
7-1	Common Invasive Exotic Plant Species	7-7

LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>LETTER</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
A	List of Anticipated Major Capital Improvement Projects Within, Adjacent, or in Close Proximity to Proposed FPA	A-1
B	Land Use Compatibility Matrix, Daley Ranch Master Plan	B-1

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACOE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
BCLA	biological core and linkage area
BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CBI	Conservation Biology Institute
CDFG	California Department of Fish and Game
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CESA	California Endangered Species Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CIP	Capital Improvement Project
CNDDDB	California Natural Diversity Database
Corps	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
DEFM	Demographic and Economic Forecasting Model
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIR/EIS	Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FAR	floor area ratio
FP	flood plain
FPA	focused planning area
GIS	Geographic Information System
HARRF	Hale Avenue Resource Recovery Facility
HCP	Habitat Conservation Plan
HMP	Habitat Management Plan
HRO	hillside and ridgeline overlay
IA	Implementing Agreement
ISTEA	Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
MHCOSP	Multiple Habitat Conservation and Open Space Program
MHCP	Multiple Habitat Conservation Program
MSCP	Multiple Species Conservation Program
NCCP	Natural Community Conservation Planning
NCWF	North County Wildlife Forum

NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
Ogden	Ogden Environmental and Energy Services Co., Inc.
OS	open space
PSBS	Pacific Southwest Biological Services
PVA	population viability analysis
SANDAG	San Diego Association of Governments
SDG&E	San Diego Gas & Electric
UC	University of California
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Escondido is one of seven cities in northwestern San Diego County which together comprise an NCCP subregion. As such, the city of Escondido (city) has been involved in the subregional Multiple Habitat Conservation Program (MHCP) from its inception in 1991. This subarea plan represents the city's contribution to the MHCP and to regional NCCP conservation goals. The city has prepared this subarea plan to direct the conservation of natural biotic communities and sensitive plant and animal species within the city pursuant to the California Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Act of 1991 and the California and U.S. Endangered Species Acts (CESA and ESA). This plan is an NCCP and a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) pursuant to Section 10(a) of the U.S. Endangered Species Act (as amended in 1982).

Approval and adoption of this plan in conjunction with the drafting and approval of an implementing agreement and an adaptive management and monitoring plan will result in federal and state authorization for incidental take of sensitive species caused by implementation of public and private projects within the city. This plan provides regulatory certainty to landowners within the city and will aid considerably in conserving the region's biodiversity and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents within this region of southern California. The plan was based on the best available scientific data and principles of conservation biology and addresses the potential impacts to natural habitats and potential species endangerment due to projects within the city. The plan also institutes a strategy to proactively mitigate these impacts to the city's biological resources. This comprehensive and proactive approach provides local landowners and agencies greater certainty for economic development and conserves biological resources more effectively than the former, piecemeal approach to species protection and mitigation. The plan provides direct economic benefits by eliminating current restrictions to development that result from the uncoordinated application of federal and state resource protection laws on a project-by-project basis.

Designing an NCCP preserve system involves balancing biological conservation goals and property development, property rights, and economic goals. The approach taken to designing a functional preserve system in the city was to identify those properties where conservation would best achieve biological goals with the least detrimental effects on other land use, property rights, or economic goals. This approach involved careful

examination of opportunities and constraints relevant to the incorporation of biologically valuable lands into the preserve system.

Once fully implemented, the Escondido Subarea Plan will conserve a total of 6,570 acres of natural habitats within the proposed preserve. An additional 332 acres of wetlands and 39 acres of natural habitat constrained by steep slopes are expected to remain undeveloped outside the preserve. The preserve will protect important portions of sensitive vegetation communities, including 65 percent of the coastal sage scrub and 100 percent of the wetlands in the Escondido study area. Approximately 20 species will be included on the city's initial list of covered species subject to incidental take. Once the wildlife agencies have approved this subarea plan, the agencies will issue take authorizations to the city for these 20 species. Take authorization for the city for an additional 40 species is contingent upon conservation of those species in adjacent cities participating in the MHCP. Once other MHCP subarea plans have been approved, the city will ultimately hold take authorizations for all 60 species on the MHCP covered species list.

The MHCP, and component subarea plans, rely on cooperation between local, state, and federal governments for successful implementation. The MHCP and the Escondido Subarea Plan will be implemented by the city through application of local land use authority. Establishment of the subarea plan regulatory framework will enable the city to fully implement the land conservation policies of the subarea plan through the normal project review and approval process. The process will apply to all private and public projects where the city has jurisdictional land use authority. The city will apply this process for both hardline and softline project areas. Hardlined project plans exist for projects that are further along in the planning process and already contain a map showing areas where conservation and development will occur on the site. The softline areas of the city are where it was not possible to prepare project level plans prior to approval of the subarea plan. In softline areas, a minimum percentage of the preserve area (generally 50 to 80 percent of the natural habitat) must be set aside for conservation once specific development plans are drafted. Conservation of these areas will also be required to meet specific standards and criteria for preserve design. In these areas, the city will ensure that the standards and criteria are fully satisfied before any project approvals are issued.

The Escondido Subarea Plan will require some land use restrictions and management practices that give special consideration to the interface between developed lands and open space if the city is to succeed in conserving its unique biodiversity, maintaining its populations of sensitive resources, and providing its residents with recreational and educational opportunities. Existing legal land uses within and adjacent to the preserve may continue and existing ownerships will be maintained unless lands are otherwise obtained by public entities through purchase, dedication, or donation. All new public facilities will be reviewed for consistency with the subarea plan to maximize public safety and minimize management concerns and biological impacts. The Escondido subarea framework management plan describes general guidelines for activities within the preserve and provides a framework for consistent and coordinated monitoring and adaptive management of the preserve.

The framework management plan provides an overview of management guidelines and strategies that are consistent with the MHCP. As lands are added to the preserve, area-specific management guidelines will be developed to ensure the city's preserve goals and objectives are met. Adaptive preserve management operates by experimentally adjusting management activities to reflect changes in the populations or conditions being managed so that experimental results inform future management actions. This requires periodic updating of the information on which management decisions rely. Preserve managers will monitor populations of some covered species on a regular basis to determine their status and trends and to determine whether remedial actions are necessary. In addition, the NCCP process and conservation guidelines require periodic surveys of covered species populations and their habitats. These surveys will supplement existing project-specific monitoring activities. The city will participate in the subregional monitoring plan developed as part of the MHCP process. This monitoring effort is expected to be implemented and funded jointly by the wildlife agencies and regional or subregional funding sources and will be coordinated with other NCCP monitoring efforts.

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