

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the Escondido Subarea Plan is to contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity and ecosystem health in the region while maintaining quality of life and economic growth opportunities. The objective of this subarea plan is to describe the specific implementing mechanisms the city of Escondido will institute to attain the following MHCP goals:

- **Biological Goals:** Maintain the range of natural biological communities and species native to the region and conserve viable populations of endangered, threatened, and key sensitive species and their habitats.
- **Economic Goals:** Create greater certainty for economic and urban development by identifying where new development should and should not occur and encourage investment by establishing a legal and procedural framework that streamlines the permitting process and provides a reliable basis for economic decision making.
- **Social Goals:** Protect the quality of life for local residents by maintaining the area's scenic beauty, natural biological diversity, and recreational opportunities.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The Escondido Subarea Plan comprehensively addresses how the city of Escondido, California (city), will conserve natural biotic communities and sensitive plant and wildlife species 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). Thus, approval and adoption of this plan will result in issuance of federal and state authorizations for the take of listed rare, threatened, or endangered species. These authorizations will be

granted to the city by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), collectively referred to as the wildlife agencies. The city, in turn, may then authorize the taking of natural habitats or associated species by public or private projects within its jurisdiction, so long as those biological resources are adequately conserved by the plan and the projects resulting in their taking are consistent with and covered by the provisions of this plan. Table 1-1 presents the list of species proposed for coverage under this plan.

Permits issued pursuant to this plan do not include U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) 404 or CDFG 1601 permits for impacts to wetlands. However, this plan shall largely fulfill the requirements for endangered species consultation relative to wetlands permitting. This plan provides a basis for Section 7 consultation and issuance of a Biological Opinion by the USFWS for ACOE 404 permits within the plan area. Thus, approval of this plan should streamline the endangered species consultation process for wetland permits.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), Vista Irrigation District, and other agencies that administer property or easements within the area encompassed by this subarea plan are responsible for their own permit needs and are not covered by this plan.

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 addresses the potential impacts to natural habitats and potential species endangerment due to projects within the city and institutes a strategy to proactively mitigate these impacts on 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.

Table 1-1

PROPOSED COVERED SPECIES FOR THE ESCONDIDO SUBAREA PLAN

Species	Coverage in the Escondido Subarea Contingent upon approved Subarea Plan in¹:
Plants	
San Diego thornmint	
San Diego ambrosia	Oceanside
Del Mar manzanita	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Encinitas baccharis	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Thread-leaved brodiaea	Carlsbad, San Marcos*
Wart-stemmed ceanothus	
Orcutt's spineflower	Encinitas
Summer holly	
Del Mar Mesa sand aster	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Blochman's dudleya	Carlsbad, Oceanside
Short-leaved dudleya	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Sticky dudleya	Oceanside
San Diego button-celery	Carlsbad, San Marcos*
Cliff spurge	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
San Diego barrel cactus	Encinitas, Oceanside
Orcutt's hazardia	Encinitas
San Diego marsh-elder	Encinitas, San Marcos
Nuttall's lotus	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
Little mouseltail	Carlsbad
Prostrate navarretia	Carlsbad, San Marcos*
California Orcutt grass	Carlsbad
Torrey pine	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Nuttall's scrub oak	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Engelmann oak	
Parry's tetracoccus	
Animals	
Riverside fairy shrimp	Carlsbad, San Marcos*
San Diego fairy shrimp	Carlsbad, San Marcos*
Harbison's dun skipper	
Salt marsh skipper	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Quino checkerspot	
Western spadefoot toad	
Arroyo southwestern toad	Oceanside
Southwestern pond turtle	
Orange-throated whiptail	
California brown pelican	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
White-faced ibis	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Cooper's hawk	
Osprey	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
Golden eagle	

Table 1-1 (Continued)**PROPOSED COVERED SPECIES FOR THE ESCONDIDO SUBAREA PLAN**

Species	Coverage in the Escondido Subarea Contingent upon approved Subarea Plan in¹:
Animals (continued)	
Peregrine falcon	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
Light-footed clapper rail	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
Western snowy plover	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
Elegant tern	Carlsbad, Encinitas
California least tern	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
Southwestern willow flycatcher	Oceanside
Coastal cactus wren	
Coastal California gnatcatcher	Carlsbad, Oceanside
Western bluebird	
Least Bell's vireo	Oceanside
Yellow-breasted chat	Oceanside
Rufous-crowned sparrow	
Belding's savannah sparrow	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Large-billed savannah sparrow	Carlsbad, Encinitas
Bell's sage sparrow	
Pacific pocket mouse	Carlsbad, Encinitas, Oceanside
Northwestern San Diego pocket mouse	
Stephen's kangaroo rat	Oceanside
San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit	
Mountain lion	
Southern mule deer	

¹ Coverage for the species within the Escondido Subarea may be contingent on other MHCP cities that control major/critical locations or the majority of the species or its habitat. The controlling MHCP cities (listed here in the contingency column) must meet all Section 10(a), NCCP, and MHCP criteria within their boundaries in order for the species to be covered within the Escondido Subarea. If no city is listed as a contingency, then the species will be covered within the Escondido Subarea when Escondido meets all Section 10(a), NCCP, and MHCP criteria within its boundaries.

*Assumes conservation of critical locations in major amendment area

1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

Escondido is one of seven cities in northwestern San Diego County which together comprise an NCCP subregion. As such, the city has been involved in the subregional Multiple Habitat Conservation Program (MHCP) from its inception in 1991. This subarea plan represents the City of Escondido's contribution to the MHCP and to regional NCCP conservation goals. The planning process for Escondido (Section 2.3) is an outgrowth of the evolving subregional plan and is completely integrated with and consistent with the MHCP.

During 1995 and 1996, preliminary biological analyses and attempts to define regional core areas and linkage areas for the MHCP set the stage for more refined planning within Escondido. Specifically, MHCP planning suggested that remaining natural areas and open spaces in Escondido were important to the conservation of some MHCP species, particularly the federally threatened California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) and the coastal cactus wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*). Consequently, the city began subarea planning during 1998 to better define conservation priorities within the city and complete a subarea conservation plan under the subregional umbrella of the MHCP. The approach was to identify a citywide preserve system that would meet local and regional biological goals, while minimizing fiscal and economic impacts to the city and adverse effects on private property rights or property values. The following general steps were included in the planning process:

1. A Geographic Information System (GIS) database was created for the city. The database included geographic information on biological resources, as well as existing and planned land uses, land management and land ownership status, and other digital information pertinent to conservation planning and implementation.
2. Biological core areas and linkage areas (BCLAs) were defined based on existing biological information in the subregional MHCP database.
3. Existing and planned land use maps were used to identify areas currently protected or proposed for protection as "parks and open space." Gap analyses were performed to identify those biologically important areas currently having

insufficient protection of biological resources to meet NCCP and MHCP conservation goals.

4. Important biological resource areas were evaluated relative to opportunities and constraints for increased conservation. Effects of existing city general plan policies, zoning ordinances and guidelines, legal entitlements (such as development agreements), and existing constraints on development (such as wetlands, floodplains, or steep slopes) were considered in identifying opportunities for conservation.
5. The results of these planning studies—which were performed in an iterative fashion with input from property owners, the city, the wildlife agencies, and other interested parties—were used to define a preserve planning area and preserve assembly mechanisms that would meet NCCP conservation goals while minimizing adverse effects of preserve implementation on property owners and the public.

These general steps in the planning process are detailed in appropriate sections below.

1.4 REGULATORY COMPLIANCE OF THE PLAN

This plan was crafted to meet requirements of various state and federal regulations and to be consistent with local planning and zoning requirements of the city, as described below.

1.4.1 Federal Requirements

This subarea plan, in concert with the subregional MHCP Plan, completely fulfills the mandatory requirements of an HCP pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the federal ESA, as amended in 1982. Section 10(a) allows the issuance of permits for the incidental take of threatened or endangered species and allows the inclusion of nonlisted species in the permit so long as conservation actions for these species treat them as if they were listed. The mandatory requirements of an HCP are listed in Table 1-2, along with information on where these requirements are specifically addressed.

Table 1-2
MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS OF AN HCP

Requirement:	Where Addressed:
1. Impacts likely to result from the proposed taking of one or more listed wildlife species.	NEPA/CEQA* document
2. Measures the applicant will undertake to monitor, minimize, and mitigate such impacts.	NEPA/CEQA* document and Sections 4, 5, 6, and 7 of this subarea plan
3. Funding that will be made available to undertake such measures.	Section 7 of MHCP Plan and Section 5 of this subarea plan
4. Procedures to deal with unforeseen circumstances.	Implementing Agreement and Section 6 of this subarea plan
5. Alternative actions the applicant considered that would not result in take, and the reasons why such alternatives are not being utilized.	NEPA/CEQA* document
6. Additional measures the USFWS may require as necessary or appropriate for purposes of the plan.	Implementing Agreement

*NEPA/CEQA = National Environmental Policy Act/California Environmental Quality Act

1.4.2 State Requirements

This plan is a subarea plan under the subregional umbrella of the MHCP for northern San Diego County. As such, its objectives and policies are fully consistent with those of the MHCP and the NCCP Act of 1991. This subarea plan was also prepared in full compliance with all applicable standards and guidelines of the NCCP Act, including the NCCP Process and Conservation Guidelines (November 1993) for the southern California coastal sage scrub NCCP region.

Take authorizations for state-listed species can be granted by the CDFG under Section 2081 of the State Fish and Game Code for listed species and under Section 2835 for listed and nonlisted species conserved under an NCCP plan. The city can be issued take authorizations under Section 2835 for those species considered adequately conserved by this NCCP plan.

1.4.3 Subarea Plan Requirements

In addition to requirements described above, the Escondido Subarea Plan incorporates the following elements:

1. Description and mapping of the subarea (Sections 2 and 3) and subarea plan's preserve, and demonstration of how the subarea plan's preserve achieves the biological conservation goals of the MHCP (Section 4);
2. Proposed covered species list (Table 1-1);
3. Description of conservation actions to assemble the preserve (Section 5);
4. Commitment to participate in developing a funding source for MHCP implementation (Section 5.4);
5. Description of how local regulations will implement the subarea plan, including an interim and permanent protection strategy and a process for updating the General Plan (Section 6); and
6. A framework habitat management plan (Section 7).