



THE RIVERSIDE COUNTY INTEGRATED PROJECT (RCIP)

The essence of RCIP is in the integration of land use, transportation and conservation planning, and implementation, to develop a consensus for the future development of Riverside County. As a first-of-its-kind endeavor, the RCIP is intended to be model for streamlining the environmental process while providing for the long-term development and economic growth of the County. The RCIP offers an innovative model for a comprehensive regional approach to addressing NEPA and the ESA as part of an integrated program. While not without significant challenges and risks, it offers advantages to local, state, and federal agencies in implementing their land use, infrastructure, development and regulatory responsibilities

The Plan is composed of four integrated elements; a new General Plan, four new transportation corridors under the Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP), a Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) and a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP).

The project will significantly reduce and in some cases eliminate the lengthy environmental review processes under the Endangered Species Act. For the ESA issues this could reduce review and consultation times by up to three years. Following implementation, this plan provides mitigation for all projects outside of an established criteria area (within which the species reserve system will be constructed).

Riverside County is one of the largest counties in the nation. It covers 7,300 square miles. By way of comparison, the states of New Jersey and Massachusetts cover approximately 7,400 square miles and 8,200 square miles, respectively.

Riverside County is also one of the fastest growing counties in California and the United States. Its population will double from 1.5 million to 3 million in the next 15 to 20 years. The bulk of the population and growth is in the Western part of the county. This growth collides directly with species and habitat as the vast majority of species are in the Western county.

According to Southern California economist John Husing, more people will move to Riverside County over the next 20 years than to seven other states, including Arizona, Washington and North Carolina.

In 1999, the county launched the Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP). The RCIP is a stakeholder driven process that unites builders, property owners, farmers and government behind a long-range planning effort that incorporates three distinctive elements – conservation, transportation and land-use.

What makes the RCIP environmental streamlining approach unique is the premise that the environment must be addressed the same as any other piece of critical infrastructure.

This plan avoids the normal approach to development, to plan the project first, and then attempt to mitigate. The RCIP begins with the development of new General Plan, a multi-species habitat conservation plan (MSHCP) and a watershed special area management plan (SAMP), to integrate land use and transportation elements that minimize the environmental impacts while still addressing housing demands, job creation, and congestion relief. The RCIP includes:

- An updated General Plan for the unincorporated portion of the County, which includes land use, transportation circulation, housing, open space, conservation and other mandatory elements of the general plan in conformance with state statute.
- A Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) that forms the nucleus of an open space plan for the western part of the County. The goal of the plan is to address up to 146 species. County staff, a consultant team, wildlife agencies (California Department of Fish and Game and the Fish and Wildlife Service) and stakeholders are working closely together to create a conservation and implementation strategy that allows the maximum coverage of species while respecting individual property rights. The end state of this plan provides mitigation for all planned transportation projects, and public works projects while providing protection of species through the establishment of a Western County reserve system.
- The Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP), which identifies four future transportation corridors in the western part of the county (two internal corridors, two external - one each to San Bernardino and Orange Counties). CETAP will provide NEPA clearance, while working closely with the Federal and State Resource agencies under a pre-existing NEPA MOU, to allow early reservation of the necessary right-of-way to develop the transportation corridors under a two-tiered process. These corridors will be designed to meet future mobility needs and will provide the ability to move goods, information and products well into the next century. The CETAP forms an essential component of the County's circulation element and its arterial highway plan, associated with the General Plan. The goal of the program is to improve mobility both within Riverside County and the Southern California region.
- A Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) to achieve a balance between aquatic resource protection and economic development. It is a comprehensive planning effort that will be used to assist federal, state and local agencies in their decision making permitting process to protect, restore and enhance aquatic resources while accommodating various types of development activities. The final product will be the establishment of an expedited regulatory permit program by the Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. In addition, working with the California Department of Fish and Game, a Programmatic 1600 Streambed Alteration Agreement will be developed.