

SECTION 1.0

INTRODUCTION

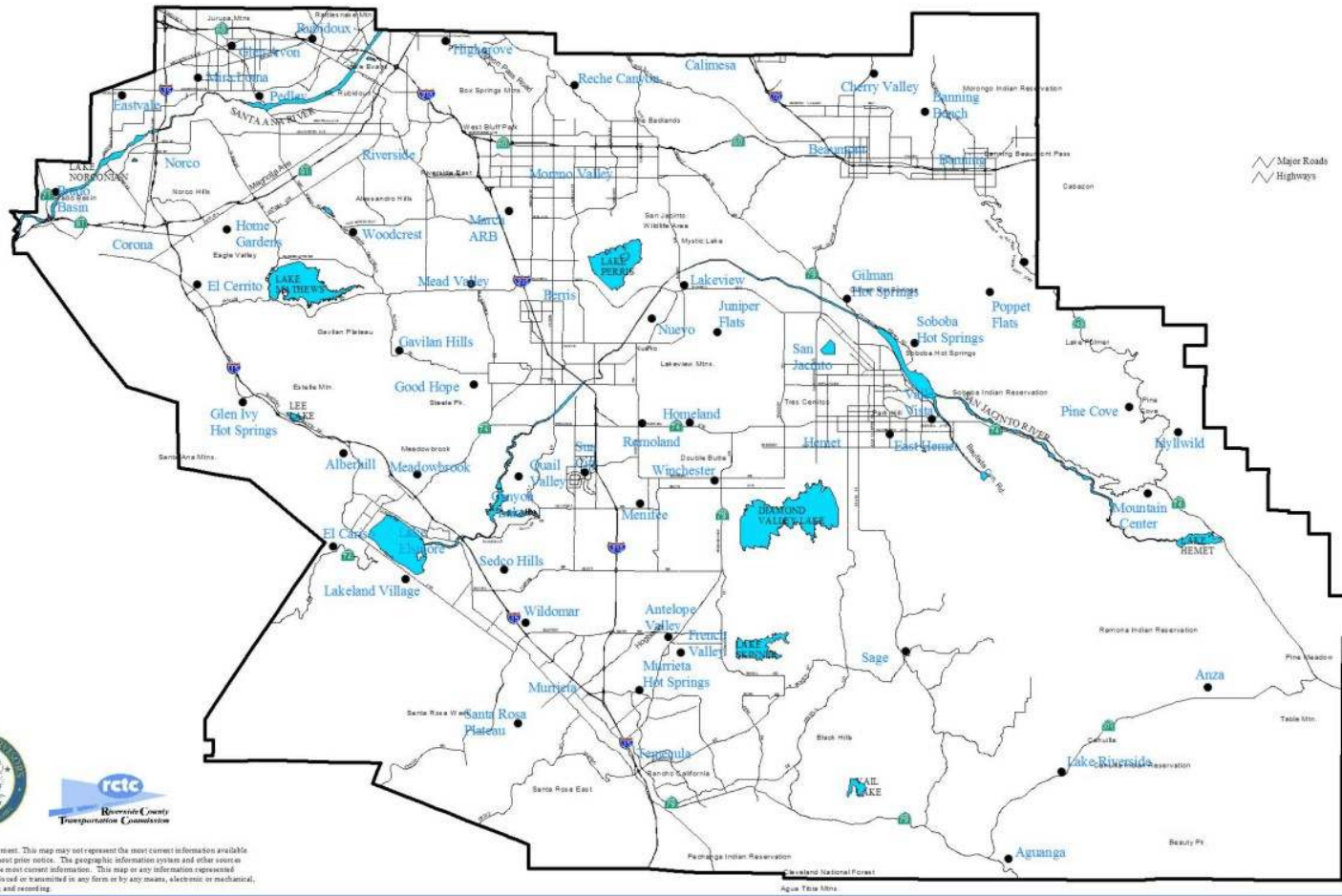
1.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND SCOPE

The Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP or Plan) is a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) focusing on Conservation of species and their associated Habitats in Western Riverside County. This Plan is one of several large, multi-jurisdictional habitat-planning efforts in Southern California with the overall goal of maintaining biological and ecological diversity within a rapidly urbanizing region. Large-scale HCP planning efforts have been completed in San Diego and Orange Counties and a similar effort is underway in the Coachella Valley. The MSHCP will allow Riverside County (hereafter, the County) and its Cities to better control local land-use decisions and maintain a strong economic climate in the region while addressing the requirements of the state and federal Endangered Species Acts.

The MSHCP Plan Area encompasses approximately 1.26 million acres (1,966 square miles); it includes all unincorporated Riverside County land west of the crest of the San Jacinto Mountains to the Orange County line, as well as the jurisdictional areas of the Cities of Temecula, Murrieta, Lake Elsinore, Canyon Lake, Norco, Corona, Riverside, Moreno Valley, Banning, Beaumont, Calimesa, Perris, Hemet, and San Jacinto (see *Figures 1-1 and 1-2*). This HCP is one of the largest plans ever attempted. It covers multiple species and multiple Habitats within a diverse landscape, from urban centers to undeveloped foothills and montane forests, all under multiple jurisdictions. It extends across many Bioregions as well, including the Santa Ana Mountains, Riverside Lowlands, San Jacinto Foothills, San Jacinto Mountains, Agua Tibia Mountains, Desert Transition, and San Bernardino Mountains. It will provide a coordinated MSHCP Conservation Area and implementation program to preserve biological diversity and maintain the region's quality of life.

The MSHCP will serve as an HCP pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (FESA), as well as a Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP) under the NCCP Act of 2001. The MSHCP will be used to allow the participating jurisdictions to authorize "Take" of plant and wildlife species identified within the Plan Area. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) (hereafter "Wildlife Agencies") have authority to regulate the Take of Threatened, Endangered, and rare Species. Under the MSHCP, the Wildlife Agencies will grant "Take Authorization" for otherwise lawful actions -- such as public and private Development that may incidentally Take or harm individual species or their Habitat outside of the MSHCP Conservation Area -- in exchange for the assembly and management of a coordinated MSHCP Conservation Area.

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November 2002

1-3

Figure 1-2



Vicinity Map



1.0 Introduction

The MSHCP's strategy for managing the MSHCP Conservation Area requires a balanced approach. It allocates responsibility for its assembly and long-term management to the County, state, and federal governments, the fourteen Cities in the western County, and private and public entities engaged in construction activities that potentially impact the species covered under the MSHCP. The MSHCP acknowledges the obligation of local projects, both public and private, to mitigate their impacts on species. To encourage Conservation on privately owned lands, the MSHCP's implementation strategy relies heavily on incentives. Where incentives are not sufficient, Conservation will require the purchase of properties from willing sellers.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

1.2.1 Background

Historically, urban Development in Southern California has occurred in the coastal areas of Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties, resulting in a significant loss of important biological resources in the region. The inland valleys and hillsides of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties have, until recently, remained largely rural, agricultural, and relatively undeveloped. Natural Habitats that were once common and extensive in Southern California have rapidly declined due to this historic Development pattern and to increasing Development pressure in the northwestern and southwestern parts of the County over the past 15 years.

The burden of mitigating the effects of urbanization now falls largely on the County, the Cities and private landowners who hold much of the last remaining intact Habitats in the region. As Development pressure has increased, so have conflicts between landowning interests and the state and federal regulatory processes associated with protecting Endangered, Threatened, and rare Species. Conflicts over species Conservation threaten the ability of local jurisdictions to plan for and provide the infrastructure necessary for economic development and a high quality of life in the County.

As urbanization has increased within the County, an increasing number of proponents of public and private Developments have been required to obtain "Take permits" from Wildlife Agencies for impacts to Endangered, Threatened, and rare Species and their Habitats. This process, however, has resulted in costly delays in public and private Development projects and an assemblage of unconnected Habitat areas created on a project-by-project basis. This piecemeal and uncoordinated effort to mitigate the effects of Development does not sustain wildlife mobility, genetic flow, or ecosystem health, which require large, interconnected natural areas.