

2.3 Proposed Action - MSHCP

The proposed MSHCP is a comprehensive, multiple-jurisdictional planning program designed to create, manage, and monitor a system of habitat preserves in western Riverside County. The proposed MSHCP establishes a framework for complying with State and federal endangered species regulations while accommodating future growth within the proposed Plan Area. Under existing regulations, the responsibility for conserving habitat for endangered species arises on an ad hoc, random basis as activities affecting declining species and their habitats are proposed. There is no mechanism in place for taking regional approach to habitat conservation. The framework established by the proposed MSHCP will allow the assembly of contiguous parcels of habitat, to provide viable habitat blocks to assist in the conservation of species.

The proposed MSHCP will serve as an HCP pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the FESA, as well as an NCCP under the NCCP Act of 1991, as amended. The proposed MSHCP will be used to allow, through the local land use planning process, the “take” of plant and animal species identified in this plan. The USFWS and the CDFG (Wildlife Agencies) have authority to regulate the “take” of threatened and endangered or otherwise species. The intent of the plan is for the Wildlife Agencies to grant “take authorization” for otherwise lawful actions such as development that may incidentally take or harm individuals for a species or its habitat outside of reserve areas, in exchange for supporting assembly of a coordinated reserve system. Conservation and management responsibilities as well as implementation assurances will be provided as outlined in the Implementing agreement (IA).

The proposed MSHCP contains the overall conservation strategy for the proposed Plan Area and documents the conservation actions that collectively are intended to protect species covered by the proposed MSHCP. The proposed MSHCP also describes the cooperative institutional mechanisms through which Plan participants will coordinate implementation of the proposed MSHCP.

2.3.1 Generalized Reserve Description

Reserve Design

The criteria-based approach assumes conservation within the existing public/quasi-public lands comprising approximately 347,000 acres, and development of criteria to assure additional conservation on private lands of approximately 153,000 acres. The Area Plan boundaries established as part of the County’s proposed General Plan were selected to provide an organizational framework for the criteria areas. While these boundaries are not biologically based, they relate specifically to County Plan Area boundaries and to the jurisdictional boundaries of incorporated cities. Use of the Area Plan framework for the criteria-based approach facilitates structuring implementation strategies around established planning boundaries.

For each of the 14 Area Plans within the proposed MSHCP Plan Area, the following methodology was applied. The first steps in preparation of the criteria-based plan involved identification of: (1) Planning Species; (2) Biological Issues and Consider-