

For many of the plant species being considered for conservation under the proposed MSHCP, the existing available distribution data are limited. If coverage of these species were sought in the selected alternative for the proposed MSHCP, the need to conduct surveys would apply to these species, as well as to the narrow endemic plant species.

The Narrow Endemic Plant Species Alternative conflicts with Project Objectives. Because it covers only 22 species, the Narrow Endemic Plant Species Alternative does not provide the maximum possible certainty that the Take Authorization will cover additional species that may be listed while the Permits are in effect. Also, the Narrow Endemic Plant Species Alternative will not streamline development authorization under FESA and CESA to the maximum extent practicable. Likewise, the Narrow Endemic Plant Species Alternative would not provide assurances that, to the extent legally possible, private parties will not be required to mitigate impacts under FESA and CESA except as required in the Plan. The Narrow Endemic Plant Species Alternative is also infeasible due to economic and other considerations, and it would not reduce or avoid any of the Project's significant environmental impacts. Thus, the Narrow Endemic Species Alternative was screened out from further consideration as an alternative to the Plan. However, elements from this alternative to protect endemic species were incorporated into the Proposed Action as additional survey requirements (Appendix B, Alternative Screening Document, contains a more detailed analysis). By incorporating these features, the Plan takes advantage of the species benefits that would have been provided by the Narrow Endemic Species Alternative.

## **2.8.2 Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative**

This alternative seeks to promote the viability and recovery of western Riverside County ecosystems and habitats, and the species dependent upon them. Additionally, this alternative seeks to reduce the need for the potential listing of species in the future. Like the proposed Plan, this alternative also focuses generally on the following broad-based NCCP biological tenets:

- Conserve focus species and their habitats throughout the proposed Plan Area;
- Conserve large habitat blocks;
- Conserve habitat diversity;
- Keep reserves contiguous and connected; and
- Protect reserves from encroachment and invasion by non-native species.

The Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative provides for the most conservation of the alternatives and the Proposed Action. It seeks to conserve up to 146 species and 218,600 acres of habitat on private lands within the MSHCP Planning Area. The number of species to be conserved remains the same: 32 listed and proposed species, and 115 sensitive species.

Like all of the other alternatives, the Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative conserves 346,530 acres of existing public/quasi-public lands. In addition, the

Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative also would conserve 218,600 acres of private lands. The 218,600 acres include the 153,000 acres proposed for conservation with the Proposed Action plus 65,400 acres of additional conservation on private lands. The additional 65,400 acres of private lands are largely comprised of lands designated as critical habitat for listed, threatened, or endangered species or areas supporting sensitive soils.

After analyzing the potential beneficial and detrimental effects of the alternatives, the Lead Agencies determined that the Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative conflicts with Project Objectives. The Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative would have increased the number of acres to be conserved by 65,400 acres even though the amount of habitat included in the Project is sufficient to adequately conserve all of the Covered Species. Thus, the Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative would have greatly increased the cost of the project (by the fair market value of those 65,400 acres) without significantly increasing the habitat value of the reserve. The Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative would conflict with Project Objectives because it would not be economically efficient and it would not limit the expenditure of public and private funds to the amount necessary to maintain a reserve that can adequately conserve the Covered Species. Moreover, because the Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative would require the purchase of an additional 65,400 acres of private lands, it is economically infeasible and it conflicts with the Project Objective requiring that the preferred alternative include a fee-based funding program that will generate sufficient revenue to contribute to the reserve's funding needs. The Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative also fails to avoid or substantially reduce any of the Project's significant environmental impacts. Based on these considerations, the Modified Reserve Configuration Alternative was screened out from further consideration as an alternative to the proposed Project. (Appendix B, Alternative Screening Document, contains a more detailed analysis of this decision-making process).