

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING/AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The proposed MSHCP Plan Area encompasses approximately 1.26 million acres (approximately 1,966 square miles) in western Riverside County, California. It includes all incorporated and unincorporated land west of the crest of the San Jacinto Mountains to the Orange County line. The proposed MSHCP is the largest HCP ever attempted and covers multiple species and multiple habitats within multiple jurisdictions. The proposed Plan Area covers a diverse landscape from urban cities to undeveloped foothills and montane forests, and stretches across the Santa Ana Mountains, Riverside Lowlands, San Jacinto Foothills, San Jacinto Mountains, Agua Tibia Mountains, Desert Transition, and San Bernardino Mountains bioregions.

The majority of western Riverside County is characterized by rural and suburban development intermixed with agricultural operations and large blocks of undeveloped lands. Large blocks of land along the south, east, and west boundaries of the proposed Plan Area consist of National Forest holdings. The natural topography can be described as a valley lowland area intersected with rolling hills surrounded by mountainous ranges. Lowland valley areas exist below 2,000 feet in elevation while scrub/chaparral dominated hillsides range from 2,000 to 3,000 feet in elevation. Mountainous areas within the proposed Plan Area range from 3,000 to over 10,000 feet above sea level.

3.1 Biological Resources

This section describes the biological setting in which the goal of assembling a 500,000-acre Conservation Area for conservation of up to 146 plant and wildlife species would be achieved.

3.1.1 Data Sources and Limitations

A comprehensive biological and physical database that includes information on vegetation, species occurrences, wetlands, topography, soils, and aerial photography is available for the proposed MSHCP Plan Area and was used in the development of the Plan. This section describes the various data layers used to develop the proposed MSHCP.

MSHCP Vegetation

The proposed MSHCP vegetation map is depicted in Figure 2.5 (in Section 2.0). This map was prepared by Pacific Southwest Biological Services (PSBS) and KTU+A in 1995. The methodology used to assemble the map is described in detail in the *Western Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan Phase I Information Collection and Evaluation Report* (PSBS and KTU+A, February 1995). Data sources include aerial photography (1 inch = 2,000 feet, 1992-1993), existing generalized vegetation maps (CNDDDB, Weislander Statewide Vegetation Survey, U.C.