

1999 MSCP Annual Public Workshop - Summary Report

October 6, 1999

BACKGROUND:

On March 18, 1997, the San Diego City Council unanimously adopted the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), collectively referred to as the wildlife agencies, entered into an Implementing Agreement (I.A.) with the City on July 1997. The I.A. requires the City to prepare a report containing an annual accounting of the habitat acreage lost and conserved within the City's MSCP Subarea. In addition, the City and the wildlife agencies are required to jointly conduct a public workshop to disseminate and discuss the annual report.

The City's second MSCP Annual Report was submitted on February 15, 1999 (Attachment 1). The report identifies by project, the habitat loss and conservation from January 1, 1998 through the end of the 1998 calendar year. In August 1999, the wildlife agencies notified the City that they had reviewed and accepted the 1998 MSCP Annual Report.

In 1998, habitat conservation efforts within the City's MSCP, referred to as the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA), were focused on acquiring critical areas of sensitive habitat and securing wildlife corridors within the MHPA. These acquisitions have been accomplished through public purchase and by directing private mitigation to parcels within the MHPA. The City and the Fish and Wildlife Service have also acquired habitat within the MHPA with State and Federal funds. Concurrent with the land acquisition efforts, the City has secured grants for the restoration, monitoring and management of habitat within the MHPA as described further below.

ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY:

Within the reporting period (January 1, 1998 - December 31, 1998), 808 acres of habitat were conserved, compared to a loss of 156 acres of habitat (Table 1). Consistent with the design goals of the program, virtually all of the conserved habitat is located within the City's MHPA, while the majority of habitat loss occurred outside the MHPA. Acres lost represents the acreage impacted by projects approved for construction within the reporting period. Acres conserved include:

- 131 acres conserved through mitigation for project-level impacts;
- 79 acres conserved through exactions of private property during the development entitlement process; and
- 598 acres acquired with public funds.

The habitat loss and conservation for the 1998 annual reporting period is summarized as follows: (Please refer to the Final 1998 MSCP Annual Report for more specific details on project related habitat loss/gain (conservation) and a summary of vegetation communities loss/gain.)

TABLE 1

Habitat Type & Examples of Habitats	Habitat Loss (acres)		Habitat Conserved (acres)	
	1998	Cumulative¹	1998	Cumulative¹
Wetlands: Coastal Wetlands Riparian Habitats Freshwater Marsh Natural Flood Channel Disturbed Wetland Vernal Pools Marine Habitats Eelgrass Beds	11	12	126	1594
TIER 1 (rare uplands): Southern Fore dunes Torrey Pines Forest Coastal Bluff Scrub Maritime Succulent Scrub Maritime Chaparral Native Grassland Oak Woodlands	3	98	47	433
TIER II (uncommon uplands): Coastal Sage Scrub CSS/Chaparral	34	159	356	7244
TIER III A (common uplands): Mixed Chaparral Chamise Chaparral	43	65	151	2856
TIER III B (common uplands): Nonnative Grasslands	64	65	55	1801
TIER IV (other uplands) Disturbed Agriculture Eucalyptus	0	0	73	1041
Total²	156	399	808	14969³

¹ Includes loss/gain from July 1997 through December 1998.

² Acres rounded to the nearest whole number.

³ Due to database constraints, the total conserved acreage does not include all existing open space lands (public and private). Additional acreage will be accounted for in future Annual Reports.

HABITRAK - NEW MSCP ACCOUNTING TOOL:

During 1998, an interagency group of existing and future take authorization holders was assembled to develop a new tool (“Habitrak”) for annual reporting of habitat loss and gain within the MSCP. Funding for the tool was provided through a grant from the California Department of Fish and Game. The grant is being administered by SANDAG. Habitrak is a desktop Geographic Information System (GIS) which will provide a consistent methodology for tracking habitat loss/gains throughout the region and will allow for easier synthesis of the regional data. The tool also incorporates the MSCP’s Habitat Accounting Model to assure that habitat loss is in rough proportion to habitat gain. In mid -1999, a beta test of the Habitrak tool was conducted by the local jurisdictions and participating agencies. Version one of Habitrak is expected to be available for local jurisdictions and agencies to use for next year’s 1999 annual report.

PUBLIC LAND ACQUISITIONS:

As noted in last year’s report, the City of San Diego and U.S. Fish and Wildlife have acquired several key parcels which have been accounted for in the 1998 MSCP Annual Report.

- The City has acquired the 371-acre “Konyn” parcel located in the San Pasqual Valley. This land was acquired jointly with City funds and a State Coastal Conservancy grant.
- The Fish and Wildlife Service has purchased approximately 51 acres of vernal pool habitat on Del Mar Mesa.
- Within the Otay River Valley, an additional 200 acres have been acquired. Of this, 96 acres occur within the City’s MHPA. The lands were secured through an option agreement that was negotiated by the Trust for Public Lands and funded by a Coastal Conservancy grant.

Additional acquisitions, including sites within Del Mar Mesa (approximately 20 acres), San Dieguito (102 acres) and Carmel Mountain (135 acres), are currently being finalized and will be accounted for in next year’s Annual Report. The acquisition of 1400 acres within the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge has also been finalized this calendar year (1999) and will be noted in next year’s Annual Report. The site, known as “The Saltworks,” is primarily wetland and was acquired by the Port of San Diego through negotiations with the Western Salt Company and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Approximately 1300 acres will be maintained and managed by the National Wildlife Refuge for their habitat values.

MAJOR PLANNING EFFORTS:

Several major planning efforts with significant contributions to the City’s MHPA were completed during the 1998 Annual Reporting period. The North City Future Urbanizing Area (NCFUA) Subareas I and III were approved by the City Council in August 1998 and a phase shift

from “future urbanizing” to “planned urbanizing” was approved by the electorate in November 1998. The MHPA within these subareas establishes major wildlife linkages to large patches of habitat and also provides important wildlife connections to the coast. The planning and design efforts for both the development and associated public infrastructure were accomplished with the MHPA providing the framework.

- The land use plan for Carmel Valley Neighborhood 8A was also approved by the City Council in August 1998. The Specific Plan established the final MHPA designation for the area which had been deferred when the City’s Subarea Plan was adopted in 1997. The Neighborhood 8A Plan includes 238 acres within the MHPA on Carmel Mountain.

Significant progress has also been made on several major planning efforts in the southern portion of the City’s MHPA.

- The Otay Valley Regional Park, a collaborative effort between the cities of Chula Vista and San Diego and the County of San Diego, is well on its way to being assembled. Significant acquisitions were completed in 1998 (see previous section - Public Land Acquisitions) and additional state funds have been allotted for this fiscal year which are expected to nearly complete acquisitions from willing sellers in the Otay River Valley.
- The County’s planning effort for the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park is also fully underway. Although the majority of the lands are within the City’s MHPA, the County has taken the lead in planning the area since it is within their Park boundaries. City MSCP staff has been actively involved in the Technical Advisory Committee which has provided input on a conceptual park development plan.

PROJECT REVIEWS:

Since the approval of the City’s MSCP Subarea Plan in July 1997, more than 100 development projects have been reviewed by the MSCP staff for consistency with the adopted MSCP Subarea Plan and implementing regulations. Nearly half of those projects have been approved with the remainder still currently under review. MSCP staff is integral to the review process thereby ensuring that the MSCP policies are fully implemented. Issues such as site design, adjacency measures, mitigation and management directives have been evaluated and, as appropriate, incorporated into project designs. Projects that comply with the policies of the MSCP are afforded “Third Party Beneficiary” status as provided for in the City’s MSCP Implementing Agreement (Section 17.1). For projects that require take authorization, this localized take approval process provides a streamlined alternative to the state and federal process resulting in reduced project time and costs.

CONSERVATION BANKS:

Several conservation banks totaling nearly 4,000 acres have been or will soon be established within the City’s MHPA consistent with the City’s Implementing Agreement. The City and The

Environmental Trust have entered into three conservation bank agreements which will conserve more than 160 acres of sensitive habitat. An 80-acre bank is located in the San Pasqual area and contains primarily Tier II habitat (coastal sage scrub). The bank lies immediately adjacent to the recently acquired 371-acre “Konyn” parcel. Two other banks are located in the Otay Mesa area and comprise more than 80 acres of primarily Tier I habitat (maritime succulent scrub) and Tier II habitat (coastal sage scrub).

The City has also initiated use of its own “Cornerstone Lands Conservation Bank.” The Marron Valley segment which covers 2,600 acres is the first phase and has approximately 1,000 credits available. MSCP staff is also currently working with the owners of the General Dynamics property in Sycamore Canyon area to finalize the conservation of an additional 1,150 acres. The lands consist primarily of Tier II (coastal sage scrub) and Tier III (chaparral) and are located immediately adjacent to the Goodan Ranch and the County’s Sycamore Canyon Open Space Preserve.

GRANTS:

Since January 1, 1998, the City of San Diego in collaboration with San Diego State University, the County of San Diego, the San Dieguito Joint Powers Association and the Conservation Biology Institute, have obtained grants totaling \$1.18 million for the acquisition, management and monitoring of lands within the MSCP. Combined with past grants, the City has obtained more than \$1.4 million in State and Federal funds to assist in the implementation of the MSCP. Below is a summary of the grant projects which are further described in the Management Activities and Monitoring Activities sections of this report.

NCCP Grants - The California Department of Fish and Game awarded eight NCCP implementation grants totaling \$538,897 to the City of San Diego. The grants will fund:

- resource Management Plans for Boden Canyon and western Otay River Valley;
- exotic plant removal in Boden Canyon;
- restoration of 15 acres of fallow agricultural land in San Pasqual to coastal sage scrub;
- monitoring habitat quality through remote sensing;
- monitoring reptiles within the MSCP;
- acquisition of GIS hardware and software for tracking habitat loss and gain; and
- development of a strategic plan for the MSCP biological monitoring program.

The City also obtained an NCCP Planning grant totaling \$150,000 to help conduct a functional assessment and wetland delineation as part of a pilot watershed study of wetlands in the Otay and Los Peñasquitos watersheds. This project is the first step in gathering the necessary data to identify and conserve critical wetlands, and to possibly streamline state and federal wetlands permitting.

EEMP and WCB Grants - As part of the 1999-00 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation

Program (EEMP), the California Transportation Commission (CTC) awarded the City \$250,000 for the acquisition of critical vernal pool habitat within Del Mar Mesa. An additional \$250,000 has been conditionally awarded from the California Wildlife Conservation Board as a match to the CTC grant. The land to be acquired with these funds will occur within or adjacent to the San Diego National Vernal Pool Refuge. It is hoped that the City can partner with the Refuge to jointly acquire a larger parcel.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES:

Management of biological resources in 1998 was focused on maintaining the existing biological values of the habitat land under City control. Area specific management directives will be developed as large areas of land are assembled into the MHPA. In the meantime, specific grant funded management projects are being implemented.

In 1997, the City initiated a project to develop a management plan for a rare plant (San Diego ambrosia) located in Mission Trails Regional Park. Earlier this year, a draft plan was distributed to a wide variety of stakeholders for public review. The draft plan was revised based upon public comments, and a final plan was approved by the Mission Trails Citizens Advisory Committee on October 5, 1999. In 2000, City staff in collaboration with the California Native Plant Society will begin implementation of the management plan.

During 1998, the City acquired three parcels along Otay Mesa Road. Off-road activity, illegal grading and decades of dumping had left the 2.5 acres without mima-mound topography or vernal pool basins. Pursuant to a comprehensive vernal pool restoration plan, re-contouring of the parcels occurred last December creating 17,000 square feet of vernal pool basins. The restored basins successfully held water during the winter and spring, and they will be seeded with native vernal pool inoculum this year.

The City has initiated a project to restore 15 acres of old agricultural fields in the San Pasqual River Valley (Brammer Lease) to coastal sage scrub. A request for proposals has been advertised, and it is expected that restoration activities will commence this winter. The restored fields will connect wetlands within the San Pasqual River Valley to existing uplands containing gnatcatcher and other sensitive species.

Working with the Friends of Los Peñasquitos Canyon and the California Native Plant Society, the City has initiated activities for the protection and re-establishment of willowy monardella (*Monardella linoides ssp. viminea*) populations in Lopez Canyon. Currently City staff and the Friends are collecting seed from various populations occurring on publicly owned land. The seed will eventually be used to establish new populations. Over the next year, the Friends will construct gabion walls to protect existing populations from undercutting of the alluvial benches on which they occur.

Over the last year, the City has set the foundation for the development of resource management plans for Carmel Mountain, Boden Canyon and the Otay River Valley. The City has met with

the Friends of Carmel Mountain to begin discussions on the development of a resource management plan for Carmel Mountain and the identification of management responsibilities. Work on development of resource management plans for Boden Canyon and the Otay River Valley will commence in the next year with the participation of the San Dieguito JPA, the County of San Diego, the City of Chula Vista, the Otay River Valley Park Taskforce, and the California Department of Fish and Game.

MONITORING ACTIVITIES:

The City and its partners from the federal, state and local government agencies, have taken initial steps in implementing biological preserve monitoring programs. The City of San Diego was awarded a State NCCP grant which will:

1. develop a strategic plan for implementation of monitoring, including identification of roles and responsibilities of the monitoring partners (state and federal wildlife agencies and local jurisdictions);
2. develop a database structure and maintenance requirements; and
3. establish pilot study sites and refine data collection protocols. These tasks will be performed, under contract to the City of San Diego, by the Conservation Biology Institute (CBI), a nonprofit organization with expertise in biological management and monitoring.

The City will also be working with San Diego State University (SDSU) to test the application of remote sensing technologies to monitor habitat quality within the MSCP. This work involves the establishment of the first two permanent habitat quality monitoring plots located in Mission Trails Regional Park and the Crestridge Mitigation Bank for field-level sampling, and validation of the results of the remote sensing study. The City will also be concurrently working with the USGS Biological Resource Division to continue the herptofuana monitoring arrays (pitfall traps) started by Drs. Fisher and Case. Several of the herptofuana arrays coincide with the SDSU habitat quality monitoring locations allowing for a more comprehensive analysis to occur. Staff from the City, the USGS and SDSU have met in the field to select the specific monitoring locations.

In early June 1999, City staff conducted the first annual monitoring of short-leaved dudleya (*Dudleya blochmaniae ssp. brevifolia*) on Carmel Mountain. The date of monitoring occurred at the peak of flowering. Three separate occurrences were quantitatively sampled, and a population estimate was derived. Next year City staff will work with the Torrey Pines State Reserve staff and UCSD to jointly sample additional populations located at Torrey Pines, Crest Canyon, and Skeleton Canyon.

TRAINING AND PUBLIC OUTREACH:

Public access to information about the MSCP has become easier this year with the development of an MSCP web page (www.ci.san-diego.ca.us/mscp). Combined with the previously developed SANGIS interactive mapping web site (<http://www.sangis.org/intmaps>), the new web page will allow users to view information on the MSCP, download resources such as the MSCP

Subarea Plan, annual reports and the City's Biology Guidelines, and provide links to other related habitat conservation sites, such as the California State Resources Agency CERES program. City MSCP staff members have participated in citywide workshops that are being conducted as part of the strategic framework of the City's General Plan. These workshops have given the City an opportunity to explain how the MSCP fits into the goals of the General Plan and how it links with the other major issues being evaluated as part of the strategic framework element.

The City was also given the opportunity to provide information on the MSCP at ESRI's International GIS conference held in July. City staff, along with staff from SANDAG and the private consulting firm, EDAW, presented information on the development of the new Habitrak tool described on page 3 of this report. This user friendly tool will simplify the process of tracking habitat loss and gain within individual subareas and is expected to be used as a model for other jurisdictions in the process of preparing similar habitat conservation plans.

In March, City staff was invited to Seattle as a guest speaker at a conference on Salmon Conservation and Growth Management. Held at the University of Washington, the attendees of the conference were interested in San Diego's experience of planning for growth, while simultaneously conserving endangered species.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES:

Local Regional Funding - Efforts to establish a local regional funding source within the 3-year time frame specified in the City's Implementing Agreement have continued throughout the current year. In February 1999, the San Diego City Council approved a spending plan for the City's share of the Tobacco Settlement. Entitled the "Smart and Healthy San Diego Plan," the City Council's action designated more than 20% (\$17.07 million) of the tobacco settlement payments for the improvement of the City's park and open space, including the MSCP. In June 1999 the City Council also approved an additional \$1,000,000 in unanticipated state reimbursements for MSCP land acquisitions.

In early September 1999, the State Legislature passed two pieces of legislation which have significant potential funding implications for regional NCCP's such as the MSCP. The Park Bond (AB 18), if approved by the voters, will provide \$2.1 billion in state bonds for parks and open space related projects. Of this amount, \$100 million is earmarked for NCCP plans approved before Jan. 1, 1999. Also approved for the March 2000 ballot is a Water Bond (\$1.97 billion) which will provide significant funding for water related projects including watershed protection and coastal non-point source pollution prevention. The implications of these bond measures on an anticipated local regional funding measure are now being assessed.

Status of Implementing Regulations - The MSCP Implementing Agreement required the City to adopt implementing regulations within six months of the effective date of the I.A. (July 17, 1997). To ensure compliance with the terms of the I.A., the City amended the Resource Protection Ordinance in February 1998 to incorporate the concepts and details of the draft MSCP implementing regulations. These amendments are currently in effect throughout the City, except for the Coastal Zone.

In November 1997, the City Council adopted the Land Development Code (LDC), which includes the MSCP implementing regulations. Application to the California Coastal Commission (CCC) was made in December 1997 and the application was deemed complete in January 1998. Because of the considerable size and complexity of the application, the CCC hearing was not conducted until October 1998. At the October hearing, action on the LDC was continued to allow City and Coastal Commission staff time to resolve various issues of consistency with the State Coastal Act. In February 1999, the Coastal Commission approved the Local Coastal Program amendment application with suggested modifications. On September 28, 1999, the City Council approved the LDC with the suggested modifications. The Coastal Commission is expected to effectively certify the LDC in November 1999. It is anticipated that the new Land Development Code will become effective citywide January 1, 2000.

CONCLUSION:

Since the adoption of the City's MSCP Subarea Plan in July 1997, significant achievements have occurred which contribute to the successful implementation of the City's MSCP Subarea Plan. In 1998 an additional 800 acres of habitat were conserved. During the same period, 156 acres of habitat were impacted resulting in a ratio of approximately 5 acres of land conserved for each acre impacted. More than 100 projects have been reviewed for consistency with the City's MSCP Subarea Plan and many of these projects have benefitted from the City's streamlined take approval process.

The City continues to be successful in securing state and federal grants, many of which have been instrumental in initiating the management and monitoring activities described in this report. In addition, the City is engaged in numerous training and public outreach programs designed to provide continuing education to City staff and the public on the MSCP. While significant challenges remain to fully implement the City's MSCP Subarea Plan, program objectives within the first two years have been achieved.

Thomas T. Story, Deputy Director
Planning and Development Review

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ATTACHMENTS: 1. Final 1998 MSCP Annual Report
 2. State and Federal Grants Matrix

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