

Multiple Species Conservation Program

What is the purpose of the Multiple Species Conservation Program?

The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) is a comprehensive, long-term habitat conservation planning program that covers approximately 900 square miles (582,243 acres) in southwestern San Diego County pursuant to the federal and California Endangered Species Acts and the California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act. It has been developed cooperatively by participating jurisdictions/special districts in partnership with federal/state wildlife agencies, property owners and representatives of the development industry and environmental groups.

The MSCP is designed to preserve habitat for multiple species rather than focusing efforts on one species at a time. This is accomplished by identifying areas for directed development and areas to be conserved in perpetuity (referred to as Multi-Habitat Planning Area) to achieve a workable balance between smart growth and species protection. This approach allows for preservation of entire ecosystems (e.g., coastal sage scrub) on a large scale, rather than a single species, project-by-project basis as under the original state and federal species protection laws. The Natural Community Conservation Plan / Multiple Species Conservation Program approach is often likened to a "preventive care" versus an "emergency room" strategy for species protection in San Diego.

Within the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA), development will be limited to ensure the long-term viability and recovery of 85 "covered" species. Through this strategy, the MSCP will preserve a network of habitat and open space, protecting biodiversity and enhancing the region's quality of life, while at the same time providing an economic benefit by streamlining compliance with federal and state wildlife laws. Signatory agencies/districts administer their portions of the MSCP through subarea plans and implementing agreements. The City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan and Implementing Agreements were adopted by the City Council and approved by the wildlife agencies in 1997.

What is the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA)?

How big is the MHPA, and who manages it?

Does the public have access to areas within the MHPA?

The Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) is the City's planned habitat preserve within the MSCP Subarea. The MSCP is the regional program through which the MHPA will be assembled as each participating jurisdiction implements their portion of the MSCP. The planned MSCP regional preserve for southwestern San Diego County is targeted at 172,000 acres.

The City's [MSCP study area](#) includes 206,124 acres within the City's jurisdiction. The City's planned MHPA totals 56,831 acres, with 52,012 acres (90 percent) targeted for preservation (approximately 30 percent of the planned regional preserve).

Public access is allowed in many areas of the MHPA consistent with species protection and habitat management. Trails (biking, hiking and/or equestrian uses), passive recreation, bird watching, scientific research and nature walks are examples of allowable uses in the MHPA that provide opportunities for the public to access and enjoy the MHPA. Mission Trails Regional Park, Mission Bay, Tecolote Canyon and Los Peñasquitos Canyon are a few major recreational areas within the MHPA that are available for public access in designated areas. More information on public access to City lands can be found at the [Parks and Recreation Department website](#).

How do I know if my property site is within the MHPA?

SanGIS can generate site-specific maps with the MHPA overlay. Visit its website at sangis.org to determine if your property is within or adjacent to the MHPA.

My property site is adjacent to the MHPA. Now what?

For premises that are located within or adjacent the City's MHPA, the project must demonstrate compliance with the [MHPA land use adjacency guidelines](#) to address potential indirect effects to the MHPA through features incorporated into the project and/or permit conditions. These guidelines are in Section 1.4.3 of the City's MSCP Subarea Plan (March 1997) and include the following issue areas: 1) drainage, 2) toxics, 3) lighting, 4) noise, 5) barriers, 6) invasive species, 7) brush management and 8) grading/land development.

My property site is partially within the MHPA. Now what?

For sites partially within the MHPA, the allowable development area under the MSCP includes all the land outside the MHPA. If less than 25 percent is outside the MHPA, you would be allowed the required area to achieve a 25 percent development area. In defining the 25 percent developable area, the least sensitive portion of the site must be used and would include avoidance/minimization of wetlands and MSCP narrow endemics.

My property site is entirely within the MHPA. Now what?

For sites entirely within the MHPA, the allowable development is limited to 25 percent of the premises on the least sensitive portion of the site. In defining the 25 percent developable area, the least sensitive portion would include avoidance/minimization of wetland and MSCP narrow endemics. Up to an additional 5 percent development area may be allowed if the project is required to accommodate an essential public facility (e.g., community plan circulation element roadway, school, fire station).

If more than the 25 percent development area is desired, a MHPA boundary line adjustment will be required for that portion. MHPA adjustments require approval from the wildlife agencies (i.e., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife) in accordance with the six functional equivalency criteria set forth in Section 5.4.2 of the Regional MSCP Plan (August 1998).

Can the MHPA be altered on a site to accommodate a project?

Yes, subject to approval by the City and wildlife agencies in accordance with meeting the six MHPA boundary line adjustment functional criteria (see Section 5.4.2 of the Regional MSCP Plan - August 1998). These criteria include: 1) effects on significantly and sufficiently conserved habitats, 2) effects to covered species, 3) effects on habitat linkages and function of preserve areas, 4) effects on preserve configuration and management, 5) effects on ecotones of other conditions affecting species diversity and 6) effects to species of concern not on the covered species list.

The analysis for any proposed MHPA adjustment should be included in the project biology report (if required) and include: 1) an exhibit clearly showing the proposed removal and addition areas with the proposed grading, 2) a table showing, by habitat type, area within the existing MHPA, area to be removed, area to be added and the proposed net change to the preserve, and 3) a written analysis of how the proposed MHPA adjustment meets the six required functional equivalency criteria.

*Three full sets of the MHPA adjustment materials will be required for any proposed MHPA adjustment.

What are the MHPA Land Use Adjacency Guidelines?

The MHPA Land Use Adjacency Guidelines are guidelines that will be addressed, on a project by project basis, during either the planning (new development) or management (new and existing development) stages to minimize land use impacts and maintain the function of the MHPA. These guidelines are in Section 1.4.3 of the City's MSCP Subarea Plan (March 1997) and include the following issues areas: 1) drainage, 2) toxics, 3) lighting, 4) noise, 5) barriers, 6) invasive species, 7) brush management and 8) grading/land development. For premises that are located within or adjacent to the City's MHPA, the project must demonstrate compliance with the MHPA land use adjacency guidelines to address potential indirect effects to the MHPA through features incorporated into the project and/or permit conditions.

How are areas within the MHPA preserved?

Lands within the City of San Diego MHPA are proposed to be conserved by one of the following five methods: 1) conservation of existing public lands, 2) land use restrictions of property within the MHPA through zoning regulations, 3) open space exactions directed toward building the MHPA imposed on new development outside the MHPA, 4) open space previously set aside on private lands for conservation as part of the development process and 5) public acquisition of private lands.

Where can I find information about dedication in fee title, conservation easements and covenants of easements?

See Section 10.8 of the [MSCP Implementing Agreement](#), Section 143.0152 of the Municipal Code, and page 26 of the City's online [Biology Guidelines](#).

Where can I get a copy of the San Diego MSCP Final Plan?

View the County of San Diego MSCP Final Plan at sandiegocounty.gov/pds/mscp.

Where can I get a copy of the City of San Diego MSCP Subarea Plan?

View the [City of San Diego Subarea Plan](#).

Where can I get a copy of the Implementing Agreement for the City of San Diego MSCP?

View the [MSCP Implementing Agreement](#)

What kind of biological resources are on my property?

General vegetation maps are available from the interactive maps at sangis.org. For a complete inventory of biological resources present on site, a biologist familiar with local flora and fauna should be consulted.

Where can I get a copy of the City of San Diego Biology Guidelines?

View the City of San Diego [Biology Guidelines](#)

What species of flora should not be located adjacent to the MHPA?

MSCP staff have worked with local plant scientists and the San Diego chapters of the American Society of Landscape Architects and California Native Plant Society to develop an invasive plant guide for San Diego. If you would like a copy of the guide, please request a copy at American Society of Landscape Architects, San Diego chapter, P.O. Box 81521, San Diego, CA 92138-1521.

How many acres of the MHPA have been preserved?

The City of San Diego provides an [MSCP annual report](#) that details the amount of the MHPA that has been preserved.

What species are covered?

Eighty-five species have been covered by the MSCP. View the list at the County of San Diego MSCP website at sandiegocounty.gov/pds/mscp.

What habitat communities are present within the MHPA?

These habitat communities can be viewed at the sandiegocounty.gov/pds/mscp.

What is a narrow endemic?

A narrow endemic is a species that is confined to a specific geographic region, soil type and/or habitat. The following species are listed narrow endemics in the City of San Diego [Biology Guidelines](#):

- Acanthomintha ilicifolia
- Agave shawii
- Ambrosia pumila
- Aphanisma blitoides
- Astragalus tener var. titi
- Baccharis vanessae
- Dudleya blochmaniae ssp. brevifolia
- Dudleya variegata
- Eryngium aristulatum var. parishii
- Hemizonia conjugens
- Navarretia fossalis
- Opuntia parryi var. Serpentine
- Orcuttia californica
- Pogogyne abramsii
- Pogogyne nudiuscula
- San Diego thornmint
- Shaw's agave
- San Diego ambrosia
- Aphanisma
- Coastal dunes milk vetch
- Encinitas baccharis
- Short-leaved dudleya
- Variegated dudleya
- San Diego button-celery
- Otay tarplant
- Prostrate navarretia
- Snake cholla
- Orcutt grass
- San Diego mesa mint
- Otay Mesa mint

What are wetlands?

Wetlands are defined in the [Environmentally Sensitive Lands Municipal Code](#) as:

1. All areas persistently or periodically containing naturally occurring wetland vegetation communities characteristically dominated by hydrophytic vegetation, including but not limited to salt marsh, brackish marsh, freshwater marsh, riparian forest, oak riparian forest, riparian woodlands, riparian scrub and vernal pools;
2. Areas that have hydric soils or wetland hydrology and lack naturally occurring wetland vegetation communities because human activities have removed the historic wetland vegetation, or catastrophic or recurring natural events or processes have acted to preclude the establishment of wetland vegetation as in the case of salt pannes and mudflats;
3. Areas lacking wetland vegetation communities, hydric soils and wetland hydrology due to non-permitted filling of previously existing wetlands;
4. Areas mapped as wetlands on Map No. C-713 as shown in Chapter 13, Article 2, Division 6 (Sensitive Coastal Overlay Zone).

It is intended for this definition to differentiate for the purposes of delineating wetlands, between naturally occurring wetlands and wetlands intentionally created by human actions, from areas with wetlands characteristics unintentionally resulting from human activities in historically non-wetland areas. Except for wetlands created for the purpose of providing wetland

habitat or resulting from human actions to create open waters or from the alteration of natural stream courses, areas demonstrating wetland characteristics, which are artificially created are not considered wetlands by this definition. Considering regional precipitation cycles, all adopted scientific, regulator and technological information available from the state and federal resource agencies shall be used for guidance on the identification of hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soils and wetland hydrology.

What is a vernal pool?

Vernal pools are seasonal, depression-type wetlands that result from a unique set of physical parameters and support a specific biological assemblage. Vernal pools form in shallow basins in impermeable soils during the rainy season. The basins are dry during the summer months, creating a unique wet-and-dry ecosystem where many typical wetland species cannot survive. Vernal pools are defined by the specially-adapted plant and animal species that thrive under these conditions. Unfortunately, these ecosystems have been greatly reduced in southern California due to development and other anthropogenic factors. Because vernal pools provide habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species, they are considered critical environmental resources by local, state and federal agencies.

Where can I find information on Environmentally Sensitive Lands?

View the City of San Diego [Municipal Code section on Environmentally Sensitive Lands](#).

Where can I find information on brush management?

The City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department has [information on brush management](#) on its website.

Who can I contact for more information?

For information on MSCP regulations and project review, contact:

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For more information about the Multiple Species Conservation Program, visit the City of San Diego Planning Department website at: sandiego.gov/planning/programs/mscp.

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