



NEWS RELEASE

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Draft South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan released for public review

*Integration of Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act permitting a first
under current federal regulations*

Sacramento, Calif., June 2, 2017 – A significant Sacramento region planning and conservation milestone was achieved today with the release for public review of the draft South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan (SSHCP).

In the works for several years, the SSHCP streamlines permitting processes for future development and infrastructure projects in much of south Sacramento County while conserving habitat, open space and agricultural land.

Today's release of the draft SSHCP and Implementing Agreement, accompanying joint draft federal Environmental Impact Statement/draft state Environmental Impact Report, and draft Aquatic Resources Program opens a 90-day public comment period that runs until Sept. 5, 2017.

"Release of the draft South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan is a truly important milestone in the many years it has taken to craft a plan with the potential to provide significant benefits as the County grows, and as opportunities for implementing coordinated conservation efforts diminish," said District 5 Sacramento County Supervisor Don Nottoli, who represents much of the south county. "We want to express our appreciation for all the work and support we received from agency partners, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and California Department of Fish & Wildlife."

Under the federal and state Endangered Species Acts, local jurisdictions participating in the SSHCP can extend permit coverage for proposed projects that are covered in the SSHCP, which saves time and money, and includes creation of an interconnected regional-scale preserve system.

"The South Sacramento HCP will streamline the Endangered Species Act permitting process and provide a complementary program that will do the same for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Clean Water Act process. Most importantly, it will provide opportunities for comprehensive landscape-scale conservation, which benefits species and communities,” said Jennifer Norris, Ph.D., field supervisor in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Sacramento office.

The SSHCP and a related Aquatic Resources Program will also enable the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to set up an abbreviated permitting process under Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act. The integration of endangered-species and aquatic-resource permitting into one streamlined local process will be the first of its kind under existing federal regulations.

“We view the SSHCP as a great opportunity to improve both species and aquatic resource protection in a coordinated way on a regional scale, taking into account planned development and infrastructure improvements, and providing greater certainty for the regulated public,” said Michael Jewell, division chief with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Sacramento.

The SSHCP is led by a multi-jurisdiction partnership that includes Sacramento County; the cities of Rancho Cordova and Galt; the Sacramento County Water Agency; the Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District; and the Capital SouthEast Connector Joint Powers Authority.

“The SSHCP moves decision making on development and conservation efforts to the local level, and provides greater certainty about mitigation requirements, timing and cost for project applicants,” said Curt Champion, Galt City Council member.

Sacramento County’s population stood at 1.04 million in 1990, 1.5 million in 2015 and is expected to climb to 2.2 million by 2060. Development to support that growth is subject to multiple federal, state and local environmental regulations. Because current processes for obtaining federal and state permits vary from agency to agency and are handled on a case-by-case basis, they are considered inefficient, costly and unpredictable. They also result in piecemeal mitigation and fragmented conservation efforts.

The SSHCP plan area encompasses 317,656 acres that are bordered by Highway 50 on the north, San Joaquin County on the south, El Dorado County to the east and the Sacramento River to the west, and includes Galt and most of Rancho Cordova. Within the SSHCP plan area, 36,282 acres would become part of an interconnected preserve system, including approximately 1,000 acres of vernal pool habitat. Twenty-eight plant and wildlife species, and their natural habitats, will be conserved under the plan.

The SSHCP will be managed by a joint powers authority called the South Sacramento Conservation Agency (SSCA) that includes Sacramento County, the City of Galt and the City of Rancho Cordova.

The SSCA will hold title to conservation easements and, in limited cases, title to preserved lands. It also will oversee cooperative agreements with other entities that own or manage preserves or conservation easements as part of the SSHCP preserve system, and will contract with organizations for preserve management and monitoring.

When property owners and developers of proposed projects are required to mitigate species and habitat impacts they will either dedicate land to the preserve system or pay fees to support SSHCP implementation under free-market, willing-seller principles. Eminent domain will not be used for property acquisition.

The following community meetings are scheduled to take place during the 90-day public comment period:

- Wednesday, June 21, 7 p.m., Wilton Community Center, 9717 Colony Road, Wilton, CA 95693
- Monday, June 26, 7 p.m., Rancho Cordova City Hall, American River Room North, 2729 Prospect Park Drive, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670
- Thursday, July 6, 7 p.m., Littleton Center, 410 Civic Drive, Galt, CA 95632

Public hearings on proposed adoption of the SSHCP, EIS/EIR, Aquatic Resources Program and Implementing Agreement are anticipated to take place in the fall or winter 2017, with permit issuance expected in the spring 2018.

More information is available at www.southsachcp.com.

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