

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS - LAND USE
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 04, 2025**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 2

**SUBJECT: 2024 MULTIPLE SPECIES CONSERVATION PROGRAM SOUTH COUNTY
SUBAREA PLAN ANNUAL REPORT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

San Diego county has one of the most diverse habitats in the United States, with over 200 rare, threatened, or endangered species inhabiting the region. To protect the region's biodiversity, in 1997, the County of San Diego (County) partnered with 11 other jurisdictions (partnering agencies), community stakeholders, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Wildlife Agencies) to develop the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP). The MSCP is a long-term regional habitat conservation program focused on balancing the protection of plant and animal species with recreation, development, and agricultural activities within the San Diego region. On October 22, 1997 (1), the County Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted the 50-year MSCP South County Subarea Plan, which includes the unincorporated areas in the southwestern portion of the region. The South County Subarea Plan requires the County, Wildlife Agencies, and partnering agencies to conserve 98,379 acres (MSCP Preserve) to successfully protect populations of MSCP-covered species, associated high-quality (intact and undisturbed) habitats, and the wildlife linkages between large, preserved areas. To create opportunities for residents and visitors to connect with nature, passive recreation is allowed within County preserve lands in areas where MSCP-covered species and habitats would not be impacted.

Every year, the County prepares an annual report that includes information about habitat conserved through acquisitions or dedications of preserve lands, habitat lost due to development, and the management and monitoring efforts performed to ensure the MSCP Preserve is functioning successfully. Some highlights from the 2024 MSCP Annual Report include:

- The County is ahead of its acquisition goals and is successfully managing and monitoring habitat in accordance with requirements established in the MSCP South County Subarea Plan.
- The County has successfully implemented the South County Subarea Plan for 27 years, adding 1,047 acres in 2024 through County, Federal, and State acquisitions and private development mitigation, which brings the conserved lands in this area to 83% of the 98,379-acre conservation goal (81,566 acres). Federal, State, County, and local non-profit partner acquisitions, as well as private development mitigation, all conserve lands that are included within the MSCP Preserve.
- The County's contribution toward the MSCP Preserve is about 13,729 acres, with 177 acres of County acquisitions adding to the MSCP Preserve in 2024. However, across the MSCP South County Subarea, the draft North County, and future East County Plan Areas, the County has acquired about 28,250 acres of preserve lands between 1998 and December 31, 2024. These County acquisitions have cost approximately \$246 million, of which about \$149 million was from County funding and about \$97 million was from partnering organizations and grants.

- Since the adoption of the South County Subarea Plan, the rate of conservation continues to be greater than the rate of development.
- Through management and monitoring activities, the County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has identified about 188 special-status species living within County preserve lands, demonstrating that conservation efforts have been effective in protecting regionally important species and ensuring a thriving ecosystem. Two special-status species were observed through Target Monitoring Plan (TMP) monitoring efforts in 2024 that had not previously been observed and included Canada goose at Tijuana River Valley Regional Park and San Diego mesa mint at Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve.

As mentioned, in addition to the adopted South County Subarea Plan, there are two additional MSCP plan areas in the unincorporated county: the draft North County Plan and the future East County Plan. These additional plans are being pursued to bring many of the same environmental and economic benefits to the remainder of the County as have been realized through the South County Subarea Plan. Preparation of these additional plans will also fulfill the goals and policies of the County General Plan and mitigation requirements identified in the County General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report. On October 28, 2020 (6), the Board directed staff to develop a plan for the draft North County Plan Area. The draft North County Plan will cover the northwestern portion of the unincorporated area and is anticipated to be brought to the Board for consideration in Fiscal Year 2025-26. The eastern portion of the unincorporated area is covered by the future East County Plan, which will be prepared after the North County Plan is adopted.

DPR implements the MSCP in all three County MSCP planning areas through land acquisition, management, and monitoring of preserve lands to ensure preservation of sensitive species and habitat. DPR evaluates multiple factors when considering open space land for potential acquisition and inclusion into County Preserves, including biology, connectivity, accessibility, and value. The County's partnership with the Wildlife Agencies, through the MSCP, ensures the unincorporated area's rich biodiversity is conserved while allowing development to occur through the County's permitting process. Through Planning & Development Services' implementation of the MSCP, private development applicants can rely on the County's permits under the Federal Endangered Species Act, California Endangered Species Act, and State Natural Community Conservation Planning Act, eliminating the need for individual project-by-project permitting under these regulations.

Today's requested action is for the Board to receive the 2024 Annual Report. The Annual Report highlights management and stewardship of preserve lands and monitoring efforts conducted for sensitive plant and animal species within the South County Subarea Plan boundaries that ensure the long-term viability of habitat and species.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find that the proposed Board of Supervisors action is exempt from provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15061(b)(3) and 15378(b)(5) of the State CEQA Guidelines.
2. Receive the 2024 Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Subarea Plan Annual Report (Year 27) (Attachment A).

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Implementation of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) South County Subarea Plan will ensure the continuation of accessible recreational and educational experiences for residents and visitors related to the natural and cultural resources of the region. It will have a positive impact on all residents and visitors by improving water and air quality and providing opportunities to engage in outdoor recreational experiences in the County of San Diego's parks and preserve lands.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Implementation of the MSCP South County Subarea Plan supports multiple County of San Diego Sustainability Goals including County Sustainability Goal No. 4 by expanding opportunities for community members to access outdoor recreation and nature, County Sustainability Goal No. 5 by protecting rivers and streams, and County Sustainability Goal No. 6 by protecting native ecosystems and habitats.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the Board of Supervisors' acceptance of the 2024 Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Subarea Plan Annual Report. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ACTION:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Montgomery Steppe, seconded by Supervisor Desmond, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended, on Consent.

AYES: Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe, Desmond

ABSENT: (District 1 Seat Vacant)

State of California)
County of San Diego)

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed

by Andrew Potter

