



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

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DATE: May 24, 2023

06

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**2022 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, community stakeholders, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and 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).

The South County Subarea MSCP Preserve goal of 98,379 acres was determined by the area needed to successfully conserve populations of MSCP covered species, associated high-quality habitats, and wildlife linkages between large, conserved areas. Habitat that is mostly intact or has not been degraded by impacts such as from development activities or a high frequency of fires is generally considered to be high-quality. 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 habitat would not be impacted.

In addition to the adopted South County Subarea Plan, there are two additional MSCP plan areas in the unincorporated area: the draft North County Plan and future East County Plan. 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. The County's partnership with the Wildlife Agencies, through the MSCP, ensures the unincorporated area's rich biodiversity is conserved while allowing

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development to occur through the County's permitting process. Through the MSCP, 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.

The South County Subarea Plan Implementing Agreement (IA) between the County and Wildlife Agencies became effective on March 17, 1998. Per the IA, the County prepares an annual report that includes information about habitat gained through acquisitions or dedications of preserve lands, habitat lost due to development, and the management and monitoring efforts performed to ensure the assembled MSCP Preserve is functioning successfully. The 2022 MSCP South County Subarea Plan Annual Report (Annual Report) summarizes habitat gains and losses as well as County management and monitoring programs within the South County Subarea Plan boundaries for the period of January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022.

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) implements the MSCP in all three MSCP planning areas through land acquisition, management, and monitoring of preserve lands to ensure preservation of sensitive species and habitat. The acquisition criteria for County preserve land includes high-quality habitat and biodiversity, biological connectivity, access, and value. DPR works closely with an enterprise-wide acquisition roundtable team to analyze potential acquisitions from a multi-faceted perspective to ensure alignment with the County's sustainability programs including the Climate Action Plan (CAP) update, water quality protection, and Regional Decarbonization Framework (RDF). County departments participating in the acquisition roundtable include Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Public Works, Department of Environmental Health and Quality, Planning & Development Services, Agriculture, Weights and Measures, Department of General Services, and Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice.

In 2022, 132 acres of land were added to the MSCP Preserve through County and local non-profit partner acquisitions and private development mitigation. The County has successfully implemented the South County Subarea Plan for 25 years, with the assembled 80,108 acres of the MSCP Preserve, which represents 81% of the 98,379-acre conservation goal. Federal, State, County, and local non-profit partner acquisitions, as well as private development mitigation all contribute to the assemblage of the MSCP Preserve.

As stated in the Annual Report, since 1998 and through December 31, 2022, the County has acquired approximately 26,670 acres of preserve lands within the County's adopted MSCP South County Subarea, the draft North County, and future East County Plan Areas. During this time, approximately \$233 million has been spent on County acquisitions in all three MSCP Plan areas, of which approximately \$136 million is from County funding and \$96 million is from partnering organizations and grants. Since 1998 through December 31, 2022, the County's contribution towards the MSCP Preserve is approximately 13,380 acres and includes baseline acquisitions made prior to 1998 and acquisitions after 1998 through December 31, 2022.

The South County Subarea Plan has 85 covered species within the MSCP Plan area that must be protected. The County is obligated to meet certain management and monitoring requirements for

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the protection of these MSCP covered species. MSCP Preserve monitoring assesses the success of the South County Subarea Plan and ensures that the habitats and species conserved on the preserve lands are successfully maintained and enhanced. The MSCP monitoring program on County Preserves includes various monitoring efforts, including implementation of the Targeted Monitoring Plan (TMP), baseline inventory surveys, research partnerships, and special-status species monitoring. DPR manages and monitors vegetation communities within County preserve lands that provide habitat for these special-status species and MSCP covered species. In addition, DPR manages and monitors MSCP covered species at the species level. MSCP covered species monitoring focuses on species for which population-level monitoring is considered critical for effective management. In addition to the monitoring on County Preserves, DPR is working with its federal, State, and local partners to assess the overall MSCP preserve goals and objectives. This includes analyzing, from a regional perspective, habitat and species monitoring data across the 80,108 acres. This effort will be ongoing through the term of the permit.

Today's requested action is to receive the 2022 Annual Report. The Annual Report highlights the monitoring efforts conducted for sensitive plant and animal species within the South County Subarea Plan boundaries that ensures long-term viability of habitat and species. In addition, the Annual Report highlights land stewardship activities for preserve lands, such as installing fencing and signage, patrolling preserve lands, managing public access areas, treating invasive species, and planting trees and vegetation. Through implementation of the County's 2018 Climate Action Plan measures, conservation of preserve lands from 2015-2022 has reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 9,457 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. This reduction is comparable to eliminating the GHG emissions produced by about 2,038 gasoline powered vehicles driven over one year, representing over 23,474,218 million miles driven.

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 2022 Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Subarea Plan Annual Report (Year 25) (Attachment A).

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Implementation of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) South County Subarea Plan will ensure 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 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

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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 2022 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

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

The San Diego County Parks Advisory Committee heard, as an informational item, the 2022 Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Subarea Plan Annual Report on April 14, 2023.

BACKGROUND

MSCP History

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. In the early 1990s, urbanization of the region's natural lands threatened the biodiversity and long-term biological viability of this unique area. In 1997, the County of San Diego (County) partnered with 11 other jurisdictions, community stakeholders, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Wildlife Agencies) to develop the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) within the southwestern portion of our region. The MSCP serves to conserve the native habitats, plants, and animals for the enjoyment of future generations; protect the vast diversity of native plants and animals (including threatened and endangered species described in more detail below in the Preserve Management and Monitoring section); and ensure opportunities for passive recreation. This unique regional conservation program, one of only 13 completed in California and with one of the largest covered species lists, works across jurisdictional boundaries, protects watersheds and water quality, and accommodates future growth by simplifying building regulations. It also ensures compliance with federal and state regulations including the Federal Endangered Species Act, California Endangered Species Act, and State Natural Community Conservation Planning Act and associated permits.

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 received final permit approval from the Wildlife Agencies in 1998. The 50-year permit requires the preservation, protection, and creation of connections between biologically valuable habitats while encouraging development in less sensitive areas. The County's partnership with the Wildlife Agencies through the MSCP ensures that the unincorporated area's rich biodiversity is conserved while allowing development to occur through the County's permitting process. The MSCP provides the basis for the County to receive an incidental take permit from the Wildlife Agencies. An incidental take permit is a permit that can be issued under the Federal and State Endangered Species Acts for lawful projects that might

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result in impacts to endangered or threatened species or the species' habitat. The incidental take permit the County receives through the MSCP can be extended to future development projects that comply with the MSCP so that those projects do not have to secure their own separate incidental take permits from the Wildlife Agencies. Through this permitting mechanism, the MSCP helps streamline permitting, provide regional conservation of natural habitats, and facilitate economic growth in the unincorporated area.

The South County Subarea Plan protects habitat and species through the acquisition, management, and monitoring of dedicated preserve lands and MSCP covered plant and animal species. Acquisitions of preserve lands are focused within the South County Subarea Plan's Pre-Approved Mitigation Area (PAMA) and hardline preserve areas. These are lands that have been identified as having high-quality habitat or as contributing to regional habitat linkages that connect large tracts of habitat. These regional habitat linkages are critical for the long-term conservation of MSCP covered species as they allow for movement of species between large, conserved areas of high-quality habitat. Habitat that is mostly intact or has not been degraded by impacts from development activities or a high frequency of fires is generally considered to be high quality.

Additionally, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) works closely with a cross-functional acquisition roundtable team of County staff to analyze potential acquisitions from a multi-faceted perspective to ensure alignment with the County's sustainability programs including a cross-departmental roundtable team consisting of staff from of Department of Public Works, Department of Environmental Health and Quality, Planning & Development Services, Agriculture, Weights and Measures, Department of General Services, and Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice.

In addition to the adopted South County Subarea Plan, there are two additional MSCP Plan areas in the unincorporated area: the draft North County Plan and future East County Plan. On October 28, 2020 (6), the Board directed staff to develop a plan for the draft North County Plan Area, like the plan that is currently in place for the South County Subarea Plan. The draft North County Plan will cover the northwestern portion of the unincorporated area. The draft North County MSCP Plan is anticipated to be completed by Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26. The eastern portion of the unincorporated area will be covered by the future East County Plan. Each MSCP Plan has been or will be designed to meet the needs of the habitats and species located within its respective Plan Area's unique geography. All three MSCP Plans comprise the County's MSCP.

The MSCP protects the region's biodiversity and facilitates species adaptation in the face of climate change. Conserving existing habitat, restoring habitat to high-quality habitat, and minimizing threats from invasive, non-native species ensures native species can successfully adapt and shift their distributions in response to changing climate conditions. Successful implementation of the MSCP supports the County's dedication to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by acquiring preserve lands that could otherwise be developed. Through implementation of the County's 2018 Climate Action Plan, conservation of preserve lands reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 9,457 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. This number reflects greenhouse gas emissions reductions during the reporting period of 2015-2022 established in the 2018 Climate Action Plan

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and is comparable to eliminating the GHG emissions produced by about 2,038 gasoline powered vehicles driven over one year, totaling over 23,474,218 million miles driven.

The South County Subarea Plan's Implementing Agreement (IA) between the County and the Wildlife Agencies requires the County to prepare an annual report that includes information about habitat gained through acquisitions or dedications of preserve lands, habitat lost due to development projects, and the management and monitoring efforts performed to ensure success of the South County Subarea Plan. The 2022 MSCP South County Subarea Plan Annual Report (Annual Report) covers the period of January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022 (Attachment A). The Annual Report addresses conservation and development of lands, management and monitoring of preserve lands, and private mitigation within the South County Subarea Plan's boundaries. The Annual Report also includes a summary of County acquisitions of preserve lands in the draft North County and future East County MSCP Plan Areas. The reporting period for the Annual Report and past annual reports has been based on the calendar year. Future reporting periods may be adjusted to align with the County's fiscal year from July 1 through June 30.

MSCP South County Subarea Plan Preserve Assemblage

The goal of the South County Subarea Plan is to assemble a 98,379-acre South County Subarea Plan Preserve (MSCP Preserve). The MSCP Preserve is assembled through preserve lands acquired prior to 1998 (baseline conserved lands), lands acquired since 1998 by the County and its federal, state, and local non-profit partners (conserved lands), and lands added to the MSCP Preserve through mitigation from private development projects (private mitigation). In the first 25 years of the 50-year South County Subarea Plan implementation, the County and its public agency and local non-profit partners have assembled 80,108 acres (81%) of the proposed 98,739-acre MSCP Preserve. County preserve lands contribute approximately 13,000 acres (17%) to the assembled MSCP Preserve. Federal and State conserved lands contribute approximately 61% (approximately 50,000 acres) of the assembled MSCP Preserve, while local non-profit acquisitions have contributed approximately 4% (approximately 3,000 acres), and private mitigation has contributed approximately 18% (approximately 14,000 acres) to the conserved 80,108 acres. To ensure that the assembled MSCP Preserve is functioning successfully and fully supporting the MSCP covered species, additional lands beyond the original 98,379-acre goal may need to be acquired.

MSCP South County Subarea Plan Habitat Gains and Losses

In the Annual Report, lands added to the Preserve are described as a "gain," and development within the South County Subarea Plan boundaries are described as a "loss." During the 2022 reporting period, January 1 through December 31, 2022, 132 acres of habitat were added to the MSCP Preserve (conserved within the PAMA and hardline preserve areas). The County acquired a total of 227 acres with an addition to the Ramona Grasslands Preserve. Of the 227 acres, a total of one acre was added to the MSCP Preserve as 216 acres had previously been added to the MSCP Preserve as part of private mitigation. An additional 10 acres of the acquisition were located outside of PAMA and not counted towards the MSCP Preserve, with five acres previously having been accounted for in HabiTrak. All habitat gains and losses to the MSCP Preserve are reported annually to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and tracked in the HabiTrak database. A local, non-profit partner acquired 287 acres, of which 83 acres were located within

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PAMA and added to the MSCP Preserve and 204 acres were located outside of PAMA. Private land dedication required as a County condition of private development added 48 acres inside the hardline preserve area and 49 acres outside the hardline preserve area. County preserve lands contribute approximately 13,380 acres to the County conserved lands within the South County Subarea Plan Area. Since 1998 through December 31, 2022, approximately \$86 million has been spent on County acquisitions, of which approximately \$51 million is from County funding and \$35 million is from grants to acquire or assist with the acquisition of approximately 8,480 acres within the South County Subarea Plan Area.

Following the sustainability report presented to the Board, DPR's preserve land program expanded the analysis of potential acquisitions to include a multi-faceted sustainability perspective with a cross-departmental Acquisition Roundtable team. This coordination will ensure alignment with the County's sustainability efforts including the Climate Action Plan (CAP) update, water quality protection, and Regional Decarbonization Framework (RDF). The County evaluates multiple factors when considering preserve lands for potential acquisition and inclusion into County preserve lands, including biology, connectivity, accessibility, and value. Foremost is an evaluation of wildlife biology. The land should include quality habitat and/or opportunities to restore habitat that supports regional biodiversity. Connectivity is another factor the County considers. The County seeks land that supports wildlife corridors and connectivity for sustainable wildlife movement. Connectivity to County preserve lands makes long-term management and stewardship more efficient because the same operational team can perform those functions. A contiguous property preserves not only the habitat but also the financial resources that help extend the County's reach and maximize resource utilization. Accessibility to potential acquisitions is another factor considered. The County must be able to access all its lands to meet stewardship and monitoring requirements as well as potential access to the public for passive recreation and environmental education where appropriate. Limited and sustainable public access that does not negatively impact sensitive resources is an integral part of the MSCP. Lastly, the County considers financial and economic value to ensure that public resources are wisely invested. The County only considers land with willing sellers who agree to sell at appraised value or less.

The South County Subarea Plan states that the rate of development and associated habitat impacts within the South County Subarea Plan boundaries must not exceed the rate of conservation of preserve lands. The goal is to ensure that impacts or reduction of habitat occurs at a similar rate to the conservation of habitat. This requirement is referred to as "rough step" as the two actions need to occur within "step" of each other and are balanced. The acreage of habitat impacted by development and the acreage of conserved preserve lands are compared in the Annual Report to determine if the County is in compliance with the rough step requirement.

As with all previous Annual Reports, the County is in compliance with the South County Subarea Plan's rough step requirement. In addition to the 132 acres of preserve lands conserved in the PAMA and hardline preserve areas in 2022, 263 acres were conserved outside PAMA and the hardline preserve areas, but within the South County Subarea Plan's boundaries. The additional conserved land includes a variety of habitat types, including southern mixed chaparral, coastal scrub, open water, and southern arroyo willow riparian forest habitat. These types of habitat support species such as coastal California gnatcatcher and Cooper's hawk and facilitate the

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movement of wildlife species such as deer. During the same reporting period, 15 acres within PAMA were impacted by development and another 89 acres of habitat were impacted by development within the South County Subarea Plan's boundaries. Since the adoption of the South County Subarea Plan, the rate of conservation continues to be greater than the rate of development. Most habitat losses occur outside PAMA and hardline preserve areas, and most habitat gains occur inside PAMA and hardline preserve areas.

MSCP South County Subarea Plan Preserve Management and Monitoring

The South County Subarea Plan has 85 covered species within the MSCP Plan area (Attachment B) that must be protected. As outlined in the South County Subarea Plan, the County is obligated to meet certain management and monitoring requirements for the protection of these MSCP covered species. MSCP Preserve monitoring assesses the success of the South County Subarea Plan and ensures that the habitats and species conserved on the preserve lands are successfully maintained and enhanced. DPR implements the MSCP in all three MSCP planning areas through land acquisition, management, and monitoring of preserve lands (County Preserves) to ensure preservation of significant natural resources and enhancing the quality of life of our residents and visitors. DPR maintains its commitment to its parks and preserve lands conservation program by continuing to allocate funding for the management and monitoring of County Preserves.

The MSCP monitoring program on County Preserves includes various monitoring efforts, including implementation of the Targeted Monitoring Plan (TMP), baseline inventory surveys, research partnerships, and special-status species monitoring. DPR manages and monitors vegetation communities within County preserve lands that provide habitat for these special-status species and MSCP covered species. In addition, DPR manages and monitors MSCP covered species at the species level. MSCP covered species monitoring focuses on species for which population-level monitoring is considered critical for effective management. DPR conducts biological monitoring of sensitive plants, animals, and habitats by conducting baseline surveys and implementation of the TMP. The TMP includes focused goals and objectives as well as detailed monitoring protocols for specific plants and animal species and habitat types. The TMP is implemented annually and provides important data to measure success of meeting the MSCP species specific goals and objectives. Baseline surveys are used to document all plant and animal species and habitats (including sensitive species and habitats), identify and address habitat stressors/threats, and map invasive plants and animals. Baseline surveys are conducted on properties after acquisition. During 2022, baseline surveys were completed for Peutz Valley Preserve in Alpine and Skyline Preserve in Jamul.

In addition to baseline surveys, additional special-status species monitoring is conducted at certain County Preserves to further protect the sensitive resources that are specific to certain County Preserves. For example, raptor foraging monitoring is conducted annually at Ramona Grasslands Preserve. Raptor foraging monitoring ensures that raptors (including hawks and eagles) are successfully thriving within the Ramona Grasslands Preserve as there are numerous raptor nests in and around the preserve. Successful raptor use of the preserve is a result of properly managed habitat that supports prey populations. Additionally, peak forage production and residual dry matter (RDM) surveys are conducted annually at Ramona Grasslands Preserve and Santa Ysabel Preserve. Annual peak forage production monitoring was initiated in spring 2022 and measures

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annual forage production. It allows for detection of year-to-year fluctuations in forage production. Peak forage production and RDM monitoring (performed annually in the Fall) ensures that the grassland habitat is being managed appropriately for special status species. Various plant and animal species, such as the federal listed threatened Stephens' kangaroo rat, thrive with low amounts of grass coverage on the ground.

Through management and monitoring activities, DPR has identified approximately 186 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. Special-status species are species that have been assessed and their population status has been found to be in decline or non-sustainable without conservation measures being implemented. These species are listed or are candidates to be listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act, California Endangered Species Act, State Species of Special Concern or are found on other watch lists. Not all special-status species are MSCP covered species. MSCP covered species include species that, if present, indicate that the habitat and other species living in that same habitat should be doing well or were species that could have been impacted by County or private development activities.

Over 47 of the 186 special-status species found on County Preserves are covered by the MSCP and include San Diego thornmint, San Diego fairy shrimp, coast horned lizard, least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, peregrine falcon, and western bluebird (Attachment C). As shown in Attachment C, the monitoring data demonstrates that species populations on County Preserves are successfully conserved, and that DPR's continuous management of habitat provides an ongoing benefit to species survival. The monitoring data also demonstrates that conservation goals of at least five MSCP covered species, all of which can be found on County Preserves, have been successfully met. The conservation status of these species, which include felt-leaved monardella, Lakeside ceanothus, Orcutt's bird's beak, snake cholla, Tecate cypress, and Thorne's hairstreak butterfly, is categorized as "achieved" by the Wildlife Agencies. For example, approximately 100% of all known felt-leaved monardella locations within the South County Subarea Plan boundaries have been conserved. Felt-leaved monardella is rare throughout its range in southern California and Baja California. This perennial herb is found on the County's Boulder Oaks, El Capitan, and Otay Ranch Preserves. MSCP habitat conservation goals, which help ensure native plant and animal species populations can flourish and move freely throughout the region, are successfully being met. Additionally, several MSCP habitat conservation goals have been met or exceeded through County Preserves, including goals for riparian woodland and southern maritime chaparral habitat types.

All monitoring is used to determine the functionality of the South County Subarea Plan MSCP Preserve and to make data-based management decisions to further protect species. For example, monitoring data has shown that throughout the San Diego region there are threats to cactus wren from invasive plant species that take over cactus habitat, which is required for cactus wren to successfully nest. As a result of this data, between 2019 and 2021, the County restored seven acres of cactus habitat within the Lakeside Linkage Preserve. Monitoring data has confirmed that cactus wren utilize the restored cactus habitat for foraging and nesting. The County also works with its partners to support monitoring on a regional scale. For example, in 2021 and continuing into 2022,

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the County partnered with the United States Geological Survey on regional monitoring efforts for arroyo toad and southwestern pond turtle with adult arroyo toads observed.

DPR conducts species and habitat monitoring on County Preserves to ensure that not only are the species and habitats are conserved properly, but that appropriate adaptive management strategies are identified and implemented as quickly as possible when needed. As the monitoring data is collected each year, species trends are more deeply understood and assist DPR with successful conservation and sustaining of the species. TMP survey results not only assist in determining when adaptive management strategies need to be implemented for species threatened from identified stressors, such as invasive, non-native plant species, but also identifies species that are stable or increasing in numbers. Between 2021 and 2022, Otay tarplant population estimates increased at Furby North Preserve due to management actions, including invasive plant species treatment, performed in 2021. Between 2015 and 2022, other species populations, such as willow monardella at Sycamore Canyon and Goodan Ranch Preserve, were stable and are successfully conserved. Species population numbers or presence/absence on County Preserves are greatly influenced by winter storms and will vary each year based on winter and spring rainfall amounts and air temperatures. When drought conditions are present and below average or late rainstorms occur, fewer plants in a population are expected the following spring. One such scenario has been observed for San Diego thornmint at Sycamore Canyon and Goodan Ranch Preserve. Annual monitoring results have shown that perfect conditions (including air temperatures and above-average rainfall amounts) resulted in an incredibly abundant growing season in 2017 with an estimated population size of over 700,000 individuals. In 2021, after below average rainfall amounts, the population was estimated at approximately 13,000 individuals. In 2022, an estimated population of approximately 42,000 individuals was observed due to more rainfall amounts than the previous winter. Such trends are expected, but when the populations numbers decline during optimal rainfall years and growing conditions, monitoring results alert DPR that adaptive management strategies need to be implemented. DPR's monitoring efforts on County Preserves are critical to ensuring that MSCP covered species and habitats are successfully conserved and sustained on DPR preserve lands, but do not show the status of the MSCP covered species and habitats for the entirety of the MSCP Preserve, as County Preserves contribute 17% (approximately 13,380 acres) to the total area within the MSCP Preserve. DPR monitoring efforts and results are provided in detail in the Annual Report.

During the course of the 50-year MSCP permit, the County and MSCP partners understood that once the MSCP Preserve had reached a large size, the focus on the MSCP Preserve would shift from assemblage of preserve lands to ensuring that the MSCP Preserve is successfully functioning and meeting its goals and objectives. As the MSCP Preserve is now 80,108 acres (81% of the preservation goal), DPR is working with its federal, State, and local partners to assess the overall MSCP preserve goals and objectives. This includes analyzing, from a regional perspective, habitat and species monitoring data across the 80,108 acres. This effort has recently been initiated and will be ongoing through the term of the permit.

In addition, the County's MSCP-related acquisitions focus on buying lands that contain high-quality habitat with the intent of conserving species in perpetuity. Since 1998, the County has purchased properties that support 20 MSCP covered species that were not previously found on

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other County Preserves. These acquisitions provide long-term protection for the species and ensure that they will not be impacted by other land uses such as development. One example is the acquisition of Lusardi Creek Preserve, which supports a stable population of Del Mar manzanita. Del Mar manzanita is a federally endangered shrub found in the region and into Baja California. By purchasing this property, the County has ensured that the population of Del Mar manzanita will be protected in perpetuity.

The County provides land stewardship of County Preserves through habitat restoration, invasive plant and animal control, replacement tree planting and inventory, access control, fire management, and environmental education. Land stewardship activities are guided by preserve-specific Resource Management Plans (RMPs), annual work plans, and monitoring activities. RMPs provide guidance for the continued management and protection of biological and cultural resources. Management and maintenance of County Preserves are conducted by staff and volunteers that implement stewardship activities such as installing fencing and signage, patrolling preserve lands, managing public access areas, removing invasive plant species, and planting trees and native vegetation.

Public access to the County Preserves and educational efforts through the MSCP is critical for the region's residents and visitors to learn about the vital role of conservation through passive recreational opportunities in County Preserves. Public access occurs in areas of the County Preserves that will not impact sensitive biological and cultural resources, while maximizing visitor enjoyment and balancing the needs of stakeholders. Passive recreation opportunities are determined during the development of preserve-specific Resource Management Plans. Visitors are encouraged to connect with nature by accessing the County Preserves on approved trails and through environmental education programs, such as ranger or docent (DPR trained volunteers) led hikes, as well as interpretative signs placed along the trails. Environmental education programs include classes on the natural flora and fauna found in the San Diego region. DPR field staff and volunteers implement education and interpretation programs to connect people to nature, thereby allowing residents and visitors to understand the importance of conserving natural resources and helping to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards. The land stewardship activities implemented and MSCP covered species and habitats benefited are detailed in the Annual Report.

MSCP South County Subarea Plan Private Mitigation Lands

As a condition of approval, private development projects that impact biological resources are required to prepare RMPs when project mitigation exceeds 50 acres or if a particularly sensitive resource requires active management. The private RMPs are approved by the County of San Diego's Planning & Development Services (PDS). Private RMP annual reports focus on the sensitive resources at each mitigation site and detail the monitoring and habitat management activities implemented during the reporting period. Management activities may include controlling unauthorized access to the mitigation site through fencing, signage, and patrolling. In 2022, 13 of the 18 (72%) private mitigation land RMP annual reports were submitted to PDS and documented 16 MSCP covered species. The County continues to evaluate options to improve private RMP annual report submissions from private development, including additional correspondence and meeting requests with responsible entities and individuals, engagement with the land management

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community for assistance, or reliance on the easement or management agreement to remedy a lack of reporting.

Draft North County and Future East County MSCP Preserves

In addition to South County Subarea Plan acquisitions, the County acquires important preserve lands for conservation in the draft North County and future East County Plan areas. In 2022, the County acquired 794 acres in the draft North County Plan with no acquisitions in the proposed East County MSCP Plan Areas. From 1998 through December 31, 2022, the County has acquired approximately 26,670 acres of preserve lands in all three plan areas. Approximately 15,370 acres in the draft North County and another 2,817 acres within the proposed East County Plan Areas contribute to the 26,670 acres of conserved preserve lands acquired in the unincorporated area since 1998. These acreage allocations reflect the updated draft North County Plan boundaries.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Today's action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15061(b)(3) and 15378(b)(5) of the State CEQA Guidelines. The action before the Board of Supervisors is to receive the 2022 Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Subarea Plan Annual Report, which is a governmental administrative activity. Therefore, the action is not a project as defined by Section 15378(b)(5) of the State CEQA Guidelines. Additionally, today's action to receive the 2022 Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Plan Annual Report is covered by the commonsense exemption which states that CEQA only applies to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. It can be seen with certainty that today's action will not result in a significant effect on the environment because it is administrative in nature.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action to receive the 2022 Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Subarea Plan Annual Report supports the Sustainable Environments/Thriving Initiative in the County of San Diego's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan by promoting natural resource management strategies that ensure environmental preservation and cultivate a natural environment for residents, visitors, and future generations to enjoy.

Respectfully submitted,



SARAH E. AGHASSI
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

SUBJECT: 2022 MULTIPLE SPECIES CONSERVATION PROGRAM SOUTH
COUNTY SUBAREA PLAN ANNUAL REPORT AND RELATED CEQA
EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)

ATTACHMENT(S)

Note: Due to the size of the attachments, the documents are available online through the Clerk of the Board's website at www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/cob/bosa.html.

Attachment A – Multiple Species Conservation Program South County Subarea Plan Annual Report (Year 25)

Attachment B – MSCP Covered Species List

Attachment C – MSCP Covered Species on County Preserves and Current Status