

Summary Notes:

Antelope Valley Regional Conservation Investment Strategy Public Meeting and Open House

March 7, 2017

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Antelope Valley Transit Authority Community Room, Lancaster CA

**AGENDA**

1:00 – Welcome from Paul Edelman, DMCA

1:05 – Introduction (Jeff Olesh)

1:30 – Presentation (Scott Fleury/Graham Chisholm)

2:00 – 4:00 – Open House Stations and Materials

1. Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS)
  - a. What is an RCIS, Attachment 1
  - b. Legislation, Attachment 2
  - c. RCA/RCIS/MCA Process, Attachment 3
  - d. Antelope Valley RCIS and Key Stakeholders within the region, Attachment 4
  
2. Biological Information for the AV RCIS
  - a. Regional Mapping Process & Building Blocks, Attachment 5
  - b. Focal Species, Natural Communities, and Existing Protected Lands within the AV RCIS, Attachment 6
  
3. Comment:
  - a. How to Comment and Stay Engaged in the Process, Attachment 7
  - b. Comment Card, Attachment 8

The Public Meeting was opened by Paul Edelman, Desert and Mountains Conservation Authority. Paul welcomed the nearly 60 participants and the described the purpose of the meeting to inform the public about the status and purpose of the Antelope Valley Regional Conservation Investment Strategy and how they can stay engaged. He emphasized that the meeting is intended for interested parties to receive preliminary information about a non-regulatory planning effort underway to prepare an Antelope Valley Resource Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) and to provide comments at this early stage of the process. Paul underscored that Regional Conservation Investment Strategies are new, voluntary, landscape-

scale conservation planning tools that will identify conservation priorities to guide public and private conservation actions and investment, such as habitat restoration and protection. He noted that the RCIS Process is guided by state legislation signed by the Governor in 2016 (AB 2087), and the effort is being led by a Steering Committee, convened by the Desert and Mountains Conservation Authority (DMCA), and comprised of local, state and federal agency representatives and stakeholders. He concluded by saying that this public meeting is being hosted by the Desert and Mountain Conservation Authority and introduced Jeff Olesh, Chair of the DMCA and on the Board of the Transition Habitat Conservancy.

Jeff Olesh, also welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the Public meeting. He opened by reading the DMCA Mission Statement (below) noting that the Antelope Valley RCIS is consistent with and will help advance that Mission:

DMCA Mission: The DMCA has been established to identify, acquire and manage open space lands within the boundaries of the two founding agencies for long term conservation benefits. It provides a capability to cooperate with local government and developers in creating an offsite mitigation program to offset open space loss and improve habitat for species such as burrowing owls, desert tortoise, alkali mariposa lilies, Joshua-juniper woodlands, and so forth.

Jeff offered that the objective today is to familiarize you with the RCIS and what it does and does not do and noted the Process:

- allows you to provide input into the plan and bring your expert knowledge; your local boots on the ground input to the process; and
- To be sure you are plugged into the planning process to the extent you wish to be engaged.

He gave a local example of conservation by the THC and DMCA that underscores the opportunity to bring additional resources to the area to protect areas of conservation, connectivity and aesthetic value to the community.

He invited the Planning Team members, Steering and Advisory Committee members to stand up and introduce themselves.

Jeff underscored that the RCIS is your planning effort, driven by science and local knowledge. He said the DMCA and THC are actively participating because this effort will inform priority conservation targets and help drive funding for these project. Jeff then introduced Susan Zahnter, Director of Association of Rural Town Councils.

Susan also welcomed the participants, noting the residents in the 16 Town Councils feel the impacts of large infrastructure projects and some of the Town Council Areas have felt impacts of large scale solar that have deeply impacted community and wildlands. She repeated this process allows us to identify areas worthy of conservation and expand areas we already enjoy. The RCIS provides a plan that as we move forward the great opportunity is we can plan now for

mitigation so we do not end up with fragmentation, noting that just as important is this process is stakeholder driven. The fact that people can provide input and that is exemplary part of the program.

Susan added that the Association of Town Councils will be hosting an evening meeting at ARTC likely April 26th.

Susan, introduces Scott Fleury

Scott presents PPT slides (Link).

Scott reinforces that the RCIS process will result in a voluntary, non-regulatory plan noting and reviews the planning context for the RCIS. Scott adds the RCIS is a pilot program within a hierarchy of planning tools including a regional conservation assessment (optional and broader), RCIS (the planning effort underway) and Mitigation Credit Strategies (follow approval of the RCIS by CDFW). In late Spring/early summer there will be a draft for public review and then submittal to CDFW.

Benefits of the RCIS:

- Flexible tool to bring focus and resources for conservation in the area
- Provides regional context for conservation and mitigation funds
- Voluntary
- Supports public infrastructure with efficient mitigation options
- Creates mitigation credits for habitat protection and restoration and enhancement
- Provides assurances that transportation agencies can get credit for regional advanced mitigation as an incentive to provide early funding for conservation

Elements, including study area and focal species, of the RCIS were informed by the Steering and Advisory committees.

Information for the Plan includes:

- Species distribution models based on occurrence data
- Land cover and natural communities
- Protected Areas (CPAD)
- Land use and Roads
- Species occurrences (CNDDDB, Ebird points, Herpmapper points as examples)

Scott notes that the Planning Team wants to understand the biodiversity of the area, recognizing what is already protected so these areas can be expanded as warranted.

RCIS elements boil down to key blocks of information including:

- Current threats
- Future threats

- Biological information
- Priority Conservation areas, high biological value areas to identify Conservation Area Prioritization

The next step will be to identify Priority Conservation Areas with input. He emphasizes that stakeholder/local expertise will be brought in to supplement data and other information (e.g., from models and data bases).

Next immediate steps include:

1. Drafting conservation goals and objectives
2. Selecting priority conservation areas

With the Draft RCIS emerging in late spring/early summer after which there will be a 30-60-day public review period.

Scott then opened it up for questions.

Questions and Answers:

Q: Is there a minimum acreage for a priority conservation area for mitigation?

A: No established minimum acreage requirement.

Q: Can you elaborate on the sponsors for Mit Credit Agreements?

A: Open to anyone who has interest in an agreement. Does not have to be a public agency. Most likely candidates would be Caltrans, LA Metro, DMCA to generate credits and sell them as they are needed, but likely in any case, an agency of some type that needs mitigation.

Q: City of Lancaster has biological mitigation fund and how will you interact with them? Partner with them?

A: The RCIS will discuss and describe those separate mitigation programs. RCIS does not replace but simply intended to be a broader umbrella.

Q: When will the group have opportunity to review RCIS Guidelines?

A: April 3 is when the Guidelines are supposed to be released to the public by DFW and right now intention is no public review, they will just be released. Rationale is guidelines are preliminary and if the legislation is extended then will go through more formal process.

Q: How does the new program relate to NCCPs and HCPs? How can community oriented efforts be competitive with large private banks and sell credits?

A: RCIS not intended to compete with NCCPs or HCPs, but instead would be coordinated.

Q: Is the RCIS effectively the same as an NCCP?

A: RCIS's are very different and intended to fill a gap in the middle between permits and the other end NCCP that are very large and comprehensive. The RCIS effectively guides where mitigation and conservation could be directed.

Q: Land stewardship?

A: The legislation speaks directly to the importance of landscape scale conservation plan for enhancement action as well as acquisition. Maybe not an opportunity to protect, but to enhance through enhancement credits where a property owner is interested.

Q: Is there a preference for working lands versus new land acquisition?

A: No preference is stated in the legislation. Preservation, restoration and enhancement all identified as possible.

Q: Where is the oversight to be sure done with integrity.

A: That would be under DFW, with RCIS ultimately approved by DFW and monitored by DFW.

The Q and A period adjourned and the Open House stations portion of the public meeting began. See Attachments 1 through 8 for Station handouts.