

Regional Conservation Strategy Conservation Steering Committee Stakeholder Goals, Concerns, and Desired Outcomes

Agriculture Community:

FARMING COMMUNITY'S GOALS, CONCERNS, & DESIRED OUTCOMES:

The farming community would like to assist in developing a plan that recognizes the unique relationship that exists between agricultural operations and species. Unlike development projects, which typically clear the land down to hard-pan and then cover the area with cement, asphalt, or some other impervious material not suitable for habitat, agricultural operations continue to provide habitat for species. Agricultural operations and species can and do co-exist, and in some instances, species thrive on actively managed agricultural lands. Thus, the end product of this planning process must do more than create a plan where agricultural operations are either earmarked for future development or habitat preserves. Agriculture must be recognized and provided a spot in this plan where agricultural activities are allowed to continue for the sake of keeping production agriculture, in all of its forms and cropping patterns, viable in Santa Barbara County. The plan also needs to adhere to the protections afforded agricultural land and water resources under the National Environmental Protection Act, the California Environmental Quality Act, local zoning and land-use ordinances, and the applicable local General Plans.

At present, the farming community is skeptical of this process due to how other county-driven processes have developed in the past. Our view of this process, either rightly or wrongly, is shaped by the past history agriculture has had with the County over the grading ordinance and the Resource Protection ordinance process. Our view is also shaped by the historic manner in which regional conservation strategies have been developed in other areas. Historically, agriculture's role is viewed only as future development or future habitat. Agriculture is not provided a role for the sake of agriculture. This past approach is unacceptable, and we look forward to both the challenges and opportunities presented in creating a new type of regional conservation strategy that will benefit both the species and agriculture.

Despite our concerns and apprehension, the farming community is willing to participate in this process. Months ago, Supervisor Centano requested that agriculture actively participate in the development of this plan. Although the farming community did not ask for this process and are content to let business as usual continue in the County with respect to the California tiger salamander, we have agreed to Supervisor Centano's request and are active participants in the plan's development.

Ranching Community:

CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION CONCERNS

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY

No change in current grazing restrictions, areas, etc. – i.e., no new regulation
No change in current cultivated agricultural restrictions, areas, etc.
All agricultural roads are exempt from regulation (legitimate ag roads, not roads built to serve residences)
No restrictions on current or new fencing
No restrictions on soil conservation methods
No restrictions on dams
No restrictions on controlled burns
No restrictions on brush removal for ag purposes
No restrictions on planting and replacing orchards and vineyards
No restrictions on hunting
No restrictions on spraying beyond the current regulatory system enforced by County
No restrictions on wood cutting
No restrictions on reservoirs
No restrictions on legitimate ag buildings
No restrictions on water well drilling
No restrictions on water troughs
No restrictions on waterline and utilities trenching
Retain viable farming while providing for mitigation credits on lands suitable for habitat banking

This is a preliminary list compiled from discussion with a limited number of ranchers. We have asked them to spread the word and to continue to think of additional items of concerns as they go about their daily operations. We will report additional items as we receive them.

Scientific Environmental Community:

Constituents' goals as expressed to Sam Sweet (24 May 2007)

I spoke with principals of environmental-interest law firms and representatives of organizations which have historically expressed views about endangered species management in Santa Barbara County. Where necessary I explained the CSC's progress to date. In general these groups regard the CSC as properly constituted and competent to produce an acceptable draft HCP, while having less confidence in the BoS, CDFG and USFWS later in the process, and in eventual implementation by the County.

The most consistent and detailed input I received concerns a perceived need for adherence to 'best available science'. Specifically, respondents urged USFWS to reactivate the Santa Barbara County California Tiger Salamander Recovery Team and produce (at the least) a draft Recovery Plan which could serve as a guiding document for the CSC. Concerns exist for any HCP that does not dovetail with the Recovery Plan.

Among the cautions expressed are (a) that the CSC is a "stakeholder group" that should work with the best available science rather than debating the science per se; (b) that the SBCCTS Recovery Team should be the primary source of scientific recommendations, (c) that the CSC HCP should be oriented toward "recovery", not stasis or loss, of tiger salamander populations in Santa Barbara County, and (d) that the final County product should be subject to scientific peer review.

Other suggestions included a perceived need to decide promptly between an MOU- or HCP-oriented approach, the need for project benchmarks with timelines and criteria, and the need for a proactive assessment by the County or regional jurisdictions of reasonably anticipated land conversion pressures or projects within the CSC footprint. One legal constituent also expressed concern that the County does not preempt or predetermine the CSC process by applying lesser interim standards in the permitting process.

Environmental-Conservation Community:

One goal is to work with the ranching community to help preserve ranching industry and way of life.

Regulatory Agencies:

One goal is to maintain local biodiversity. There is concern of conflicting local land use problems within the context of the plan. Another goal is to streamline permitting process and plan that protects the California Tiger Salamander.

Local Jurisdictions:

The City of Santa Maria would like to pursue options for growth in the conservation strategy process. Another goal is to streamline the CEQA, Federal ESA, and NEPA processes.

Development Community:

One goal is to develop predictability and consistency among different agencies involved in the conservation and development process. Also there is a concern that different political climates will lead to different interpretations of laws and regulations.