

**Santa Barbara County
Regional Conservation Strategy**

Conservation Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
Board of Supervisors Hearing Room, Santa Maria
Wednesday, May 23, 2007
Approved Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Jerry Bunin – Home Builders Association
Katie Drexhage – Fish and Wildlife Service
Tom Maloney – The Nature Conservancy
Martin Potter – CA Dept. of Fish and Game
Bill Shipsey – Local Jurisdictions, (City of Santa Maria – Community Development)
Susan Petrovich – Ranching Community, (Hatch & Parent)
Sam Sweet – Environmental Community, (PhD Biologist UCSB)
Ronda Lucas - Farm Bureau

Alternate Committee Members Present:

Willy Chamberlin – Ranching Community, (S.B. County Cattlemen Association)
Wendy Stockton – Local Jurisdictions (City of Santa Maria – Attorney)
Suneil Thomas – The Nature Conservancy

Project Staff Present:

Joy Hufschmid – Project Manager, Santa Barbara County
Peggy Burbank- Senior Planner, Santa Barbara County
Whitney Wilkinson – Assistant Planner, Santa Barbara County
Mike Ghizzoni- Chief Deputy County Counsel
Cintia Mendoza – Board Assistant, Supervisor
Yesenia Valero, Board Assistant

Other Participants:

Kevin Merrill – Central Coast Wine Growers Association
Andy Caldwell – Coalition on Labor Agriculture & Business

Meeting was called to order by Joy Hufschmid, at 10:09 a.m.

- 1. Public Comment on non-agenda items. (none)**
- 2. Presentation of Biological Resources by biologist Larry Hunt.**

Larry Hunt, project biologist, presented a power point presentation regarding biological resources of the California Tiger Salamander. A discussion and question and answer session was provided to the Committee after Mr. Hunt's presentation.

- 3. Administrative Items.**

3.1 Upcoming Meetings: Susan Petrovich informed the Committee that she will be absent at the June 27, 2007 meeting.

June 27, 2007: There was a proposal to discuss Habitat Conservation Plans and the relevant points of the Endangered Species Act.. Discussion will include the regulatory background and relevant provisions of the ESA that the RCS will need to be take into account. Discussion may include a comparison of the Section 7 MOU process and a HCP and the benefits of habitat conservation plans. Special focus will be placed on the components of HCPs and the issues in which the committee will be involved in the decision making process.

July 2007: Will include a companion discussion and overview of agriculture and land uses. Will bring a discussion of current and future land use. Discussion will consist of where the urban areas are, proposed annexations, ownership of federal land versus private properties, areas for existing species to occur and agricultural expansions. The Ag Commissioner will present information for the committee on past, current, and future trends in agriculture and help with any questions and information that the Committee may have.

August 2007: Will consist of a more focused discussion of the details of the plan such as the list of covered species and activities.

3.2 Consultants/Technical or Legal Assistance for Development of Plan:

Outside counsel for the regional conservation strategy was discussed among County Counsel and committee members. A consensus was reached that if County Counsel finds it necessary to seek outside counsel, it will disclose and discuss who they intend to hire, after first discussing any potential conflicts of interest.

3.3 Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grant Approval:

Grant application was submitted last fall for a federal Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance grant. \$267,000 will be awarded over the life of the project and can be used to fund a habitat conservation plan.

4. Discussion of Stakeholder/Constituent List of Goals, Concerns, and Desired Outcome of the Plan.

Stakeholders expressed their goals and concerns one by one while in session. All were listed on a whiteboard and later compiled into a single document. The document is attached.

5. Draft Communication Plan.

Discussion of the communication plan included suggestions for improvement of noticing landowners and organizations with an interest in the plan. Another suggestion was that presentations, documents, and other pertinent materials discussed at meetings should be made available through the website. Emphasis was placed on making every effort possible to involve the public in order to avoid surprises and defuse apprehension as to the contents of the plan. Suggestions included having public information meetings and workshops at night when the public can attend and provide information on the web. Also, the use of various resources for noticing such as legal ads in the Santa Barbara Independent and the Daily Nexus and County Santa Barbara Television (CSBTV). These suggestions were incorporated into the final document, which is attached.

6. **Meeting Minutes:** Meeting minutes of April 25, 2007 were approved as amended

7. **Adjournment.** There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned until 10:00 a.m. on June 27, 2007, in the Santa Maria Betteravia Government Center, 511 East Lakeside Parkway, Santa Maria, California 93454.

Meeting adjourned at 2:39 p.m.

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

Agriculture/Ranching:

- 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 forms and cropping patterns, viable in Santa Barbara County.
- The plan needs to adhere to protections and recognize afforded agricultural land and water resources under NEPA, CEQA, local zoning and land- use ordinances, and general plans
- There is concern that historically agriculture's role is viewed only as future development or future habitat.
- The goal is to create a regional conservation strategy that will benefit the species and agriculture.
- Goal of utilizing adaptive management strategies to guarantee flexibility in farming practices.
- No change in current grazing or 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, soil conservation methods, dams, controlled burns, brush removal for ag purposes, planting and replacing orchards and vineyards, hunting, spraying beyond the current regulatory system enforced by County, wood cutting, reservoirs, legitimate ag buildings, water well drilling, water troughs, and waterline and utilities trenching.
- Retain viable farming while providing for mitigation credits on lands suitable for habitat banking

Regulatory/Scientific/Environmental:

- Goal of the CSC adhering to the “best available science,” and not debating the science per se.
- Urge USFWS to reactivate the Santa Barbara County California Tiger Salamander (CTS) Recovery Team and produce (at the least) a draft Recovery Plan that would serve as a guide for decisions made by the CSC. Concerns exist for HCP policies that do not coincide with those of the Recovery Plan.
- Goal that the plan be oriented toward “recovery,” not stasis or loss of CTS populations within Santa Barbara County.
- Goal that the final plan be subject to scientific peer review.
- Goal should be to promptly decide between an MOU or HCP oriented approach.
- Desire to see project benchmarks with timelines and criteria, and to have a proactive assessment by the county or regional jurisdictions of reasonably anticipated land conversion pressures or projects within the project footprint.
- Concern that the County will apply lesser interim permitting standards before the project is complete.
- Goal to work with the agriculture community to help preserve their industry and way of life.
- Goal to maintain local biodiversity
- Concern of the plan being insufficient in accommodating conflicting land uses.

- Goal of streamlining the permitting process and providing a plan that will protect the CTS.

Jurisdictions and Development:

- Predictability and consistency when dealing with different agencies for the same processes.
- Concern of different interpretations of laws and regulations depending on the political climate.
- Goal is to pursue viable options for growth.
- Goal to streamline permitting and regulatory processes including CEQA, NEPA, federal and state ESA, etc.



**FINAL COMMUNICATION PLAN
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
REGIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY
May 23, 2007**

Purpose: The purpose of the communication plan is to ensure the process of developing the Regional Conservation Strategy is open and transparent. This communication plan goes well beyond the minimum legal requirements for public noticing with the intent of ensuring timely communication of everything that is happening with any potentially interested parties.

The purpose of going beyond that which is required is to:

- Ensure there are no surprises
- Defuse apprehension about the process
- Provide amplified channels of access to the process
- Respond to the diverse needs of the public, stakeholders, interest groups, and the cities and communities within Santa Barbara County.

Staff and the Conservation Steering Committee (CSC) will use this communications plan as a framework for determining how information is developed and disseminated.

Community-wide Communications

Web Site: Presently there is a web site,

<http://www.countyofsb.org/plandev/comp/programs/RegionalConservation/default.asp>. The web site should be the central point of access for all information, notices, meeting minutes, publications, studies, etc. that concern the project. An alias will be established to allow people to log on easily without having to navigate the County's website. The site is conveniently referenced as a "Featured Site" on the County's home page, but would be easier to access with a simpler alias. The alias will be sbcountyplanning.org/rcs and will be accessible soon.

Publications, videos, brochures, etc.: These may be created as specific needs arise.

Newspaper Ads: Display ads should be placed in all major newspapers in advance of community meetings and any decision-maker meetings.

Media Contacts: Media contacts will be handled by staff in a manner consistent with current County practice and rules.

Periodic Informational Meetings

Community Meetings: Staff and the CSC should evaluate the need to hold periodic specially noticed informational meetings for the public. As the plan progresses and receives attention, general public meetings may be held at locations convenient for citizens throughout the County. Locations and meeting times should be chosen to maximize attendance.

Community meetings could be held concurrently with CSC meetings and focus on disseminating information or answering questions. As topics arise that will be of particular interest to certain groups, CSC meetings or subcommittee meetings can be held that are designed to accommodate additional public input. This will ensure policies developed for the plan will take into account the input and concerns of the affected stakeholders and the general public.

Special Meetings: Staff and the CSC should evaluate the need to offer informational presentations to community planning groups, stakeholder groups (farmers, ranchers, builders, landowners), and citizen interest groups (environmental groups and others).

The purpose of these special meetings is to present factual information to special interest groups and give them a chance to understand and evaluate exactly how the plan may affect them, and in turn, give them a chance to ask questions and engage the CSC and staff in constructive dialogue.

It is not expected that any of these meetings will eliminate controversy from the process. The hope is they will reduce misinformation and misinterpretation, and give people the chance to ask as many questions as they wish about the plan and the process to develop it.

Stakeholder and Interest Group Liaison

As the plan progresses and after it is adopted, it will be necessary to provide special channels of communications for stakeholders and interest groups to obtain specific information about very specific issues. It will be the responsibility of the CSC member to keep their organization and the constituents they represent well informed with correct information pertaining to the development of the plan.

The RCS plan should include designation of specific staff to be the point(s) of contact once the plan is adopted and is being implemented. Landowners, farmers and builders should be given a point of contact to ask questions about the application of the plan to specific projects and properties. The point or points of contact for these inquiries must be knowledgeable about the plan and the process.

General Public Notice

At least once during the process of developing the plan, notice should be mailed to all property owners within the area of the plan. These are necessary for owners who do not reside in the county, and owners who, for one reason or another, will not see other notices of the work on the plan. Preferably, notices will be sent inviting landowners to attend the community meetings described above.

In addition, notices will be sent prior to the Board's consideration of adoption of the draft plan.

