

*Regional Conservation Authority***CORE 2 CRITERIA REFINEMENT  
WORK PLAN AND BUDGET****Staff Contact:****Joe Richards, Deputy Executive Director  
(951) 955-9700****Background:**

The County of Riverside and the City of Murrieta have requested that the RCA undertake on their behalf a "Criteria Refinement" in Core 2 of the Plan. Assembling a reserve in this particular area is problematic due to existing and approved development and the high cost of land. The County, City and RCA believe that the cell criteria should be reexamined and refined to accommodate a more realistic reserve configuration. Central to the refinement process is an analysis of the criteria and an evaluation of replacement habitat of equal or better biological value.

The following is a summary of the procedure:

- Biological / equivalency analysis
- RCA submits Equivalency Findings to Wildlife Agencies
- 60-day Review of Equivalency Findings by Wildlife Agencies
- Wildlife Agencies concur with Equivalency Findings
- *Send Notification Package to Wildlife Agencies, RCA Board, Permittees, and Property Owners*
- 60-day Review and Comment on Notification
- Meet and Confer (30 days after close of comment period) (if applicable)
- Appeal to the RCA Board of Directors (if applicable)

We anticipate that the process will take about 12-18 months to complete. The estimated cost is \$150,000 generally allocated as follows:

Biological / equivalency analysis - \$100,000  
Mapping Support - \$25,000  
RCA Staff / Counsel support - \$25,000

Criteria refinements are intended to be initiated and funded by a permittee. However, because this refinement will likely result in reduced land acquisition costs Plan-wide, staff believes that RCA funding sources can be used. Our sources could be development fees, tipping fees, and/or portions of our infrastructure mitigation funds.

Attached is a comprehensive work plan that outlines the tasks necessary to perform the analysis and carry it forward to resolution.

**Staff Recommendation:**

1. Authorize staff to agendize this matter for the March 6, 2006 meeting of the RCA Board of Directors.
2. Approve the proposed budget and work plan.
3. Approve the use of RCA funds to undertake the refinement process, based on the finding that the process will result in a reduction of land acquisition costs.

**Attachments:**

Letters from County of Riverside and City of Murrieta  
Criteria Refinement Work Plan

**AGENDA ITEM 9  
ATTACHMENT 1**

**Items will be available in  
agenda packets**

## **CRITERIA REFINEMENT PROCESS (CRP)**

### **KEY ELEMENTS TO “QUALIFY” FOR CRP**

1. Cannot result in net reduction of Criteria Area.
2. Refinement must be Biologically Equivalent or Superior.
3. Refinement can include a Core but must clearly benefit Covered Species and be consistent with species conservation goals.
4. Consistent with Reserve Assembly Accounting process.

### **SUMMARY OF PROCEDURE (SECTION 6.5 OF PLAN)**

#### **1) Concurrence from Wildlife Agencies**

Because the Core 2 CRP will likely incorporate Conservation outside of the Criteria Area, concurrence on equivalency findings from Wildlife Agencies (California Department of Fish and Game [CDFG] and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [FWS]) is required. The Wildlife Agencies have 60-days to review equivalency findings and concur. If the Wildlife Agencies do not concur, the Core 2 refinement will require a Plan amendment.

#### **2) Notification Process**

RCA must notify the following in writing that a CRP has been prepared prior to approval:

- Wildlife agencies;
- RCA Board (agenda item);
- Other affected Permittees (all); and
- Affected property owners.

The Notification should include: **(1)** Project Description; **(2)** Maps; and **(3)** Findings (discussed in detail below).

These parties have 60-days to review and comment. If any of these parties disagree with the Criteria Refinement Notification, then the RCA should schedule a meet and confer 30 days after the close of the 60-day review period. If there is no resolution following the meet and confer, then an appeal is submitted to the RCA Board of Directors for final determination. The appeal process must be a noticed public hearing.

### **3) Summary of Procedure**

The procedure can be summarized as follows.

- 1) RCA submits Equivalency Findings to Wildlife Agencies
- 2) 60-day Review of Equivalency Findings by Wildlife Agencies
- 3) Wildlife Agencies concur with Equivalency Findings
- 4) Send Notification Package to Wildlife Agencies, RCA Board, Permittees, and Property Owners
- 5) 60-day Review and Comment on Notification
- 6) Meet and Confer (30 days after close of comment period) (if applicable)
- 7) Appeal to the RCA Board of Directors (if applicable)

## **EQUIVALENCY ANALYSIS**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- Briefly introduce the general process
- Reason for Core 2 CRP and rationale of why consistency with existing Criteria is not feasible
  - Land Use: **(1)** Existing Development; **(2)** Entitled Development; **(3)** General Plan; **(4)** Zoning.
- NCCP Tenets
  - Summarize the NCCP Tenets, highlighting those most relevant to Proposed Core 2.
- Goals/Objectives of Proposed Core 2
  - Summarize the goals/objectives of Proposed Core 2, including the definition of a core and the biological objectives outlined in the description of proposed Core 2 in Section 3.2.3 of the MSHCP.

### **2.0 Project Description and Location**

- Definition of Planning Area – Core 2 Cell Criteria
- Narrative and graphic description of Project (a reduction in Core 2 acreage)

### **3.0 Methods**

- Literature and Data Review
  - MSHCP (Bioregions, Soils, Species 8)
  - Recovery Plans
  - Critical Habitat

- Species Data (California Natural Diversity Data Base [CNDDDB], FWS, and U.C. Riverside [UCR])
- Development Projects
- Project-specific vegetation mapping, if available
- Species surveys, if available

#### **4.0 Biological Information/Data Collection and Evaluation of Existing Conditions**

In order to evaluate effects of a reduction in Core 2, analysis of the existing conditions of Core 2 will be conducted as follows.

##### **4.1 Vegetation Mapping**

- Project-Specific Vegetation Mapping (if available)
- Changes in Vegetation
  - a. Review and compare vegetation map (which utilizes the “Vegetation Rapid Assessment Protocol” [CNPS 2002] and “Releve Protocol” [CNPS 1998]) and project-specific vegetation mapping to determine if the baseline vegetation has changed.

##### **4.2 Bioregions**

The importance of bioregion with respect to the MSHCP will be provided and the Riverside Lowlands Bioregion (Proposed Core 2 is within this Bioregion) will be defined.

##### **4.3 FWS Plans/Designations**

- *Recovery Plans*
  - Review Draft QCB Recovery Plan (used in MSCHP)
  - Review Final QCB Recovery Plan
  - Note any changes in these plans

(Note no Recovery Plan for CAGN.)

- ***Critical Habitat***
  - Quino checkerspot butterfly - Discuss relationship to Core 2
  - California gnatcatcher- Discuss relationship to Core 2

#### **4.4 Species Data**

- a. Relevant MSCHP species objectives and conservation analyses for species relating to Proposed Core 2 (see below for a list of species to be addressed).
- b. Species occurrence data used in the MSHCP will be reviewed and summarized. This data is referred to as “Species 8” data and consists of FWS data, UCR data, and California Natural Diversity Database.
- c. Summarize important soil conditions required for each species, especially plants. Soils will be discussed and a summary of soils present in Core 2 will be provided.
- d. Compare “Species 8” occurrence data from the MSHCP/RCIP data base and used in development of the MSHCP Plan with the following data sets:
  - i. FWS species occurrence data base used for MSHCP application review and permit issuance.
  - ii. Species occurrence data from June 2004 to current from the USFWS and CNDDDB
- e. Current species survey data, if available

The following are species that could be affected by the Core 2 CRP and will be analyzed in the equivalency findings. These species are either Planning Species in Proposed Core 2 or the two subunits that make-up Proposed Core 2:

- Bell's sage sparrow
- burrowing owl
- California horned lark
- California gnatcatcher
- ferruginous hawk
- grasshopper sparrow
- Swainson's hawk
- Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow
- quino checkerspot butterfly
- bobcat

- Los Angeles pocket mouse
- western pond turtle
- California orcutt grass
- Coulter's goldfields
- Davidson's saltscale
- little mousetail
- long-spined spineflower
- Munz's onion
- Palmer's grapplinghook
- Parish's brittlescale
- round-leaved filaree
- San Diego ambrosia
- smooth tarplant
- spreading Navarretia
- thread-leaved brodiaea
- Wright's trichocoronis

Here are two examples for the Species Data (a work in progress....)

**Munz's Onion** - This species has a scattered distribution and is associated with clay and cobbly clay soils, which include the following series: Altamont, Auld, Bosanko, Claypit, and Porterville. This species is found within the Riverside Lowlands and Santa Ana Mountains Bioregions (MSCHP 2003). Conservation for Munz's onion within the MSHCP Plan Area will be achieved by inclusion of at least 21,260 acres of suitable Conserved Habitat, 2,070 acres of clay soils, and 15 known localities within large blocks of habitat in the MSHCP Conservation Area.

Suitable habitat for Munz's onion within Proposed Core 2 includes approximately 2,530 acres, which is approximately 25 percent of the total suitable habitat within all Criteria Area<sup>1</sup> in the MSCHP Plan Area. Within Proposed Core 2, there are approximately 240 acres of Altamont, Auld, Bosanko, and Porterville soils, excluding soils underlying unsuitable habitat (e.g., disturbed/developed lands, water), and 680 acres in all the Criteria Area in the MSCHP. Therefore, 35 percent of soils suitable for Munz's onion within the Criteria Area are located within Proposed Core 2. One of the conserved localities, (i.e., Scott Road) is located within Proposed Core 2.

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<sup>1</sup> This excludes PQP lands.

(Note: additional GIS analysis would be necessary to verify numbers)

**Southern California Rufous-Crowned Sparrow** - This species is widely distributed throughout the MSHCP Plan Area within suitable habitat in the Riverside Lowlands, Santa Ana Mountains and San Jacinto Foothills Bioregions. It is absent from higher elevation bioregions and the desert transition bioregion. This species is a Group 2 species meaning that it is generally widely distributed but specific Core Areas need to be conserved in order to provide coverage. Species-specific objective #1 states that the MSHCP Conservation Area would include 82,640 acres of suitable habitat are conserved including coastal sage scrub, Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub and desert scrubs in the Riverside Lowland, Santa Ana Mountains and San Jacinto Foothills Bioregions. Species-specific objective #2 states that within the MSHCP Conservation Area, at least nine core areas and interconnecting linkages need to be conserved. One of these nine core areas includes the Hogbacks (5,050 acres) which are located in Proposed Core 2. The species also will need large blocks of intact habitat in order to survive fire impacts. In summary, conservation for this species will be achieved by inclusion of at least 82,640 acres of suitable primary conserved habitat, 174,620 acres of suitable secondary conserved habitat and nine of the twelve core areas within large blocks of habitat in the MSHCP conservation area (MSHCP Species Account 2003).

Within Proposed Core 2, the MSHCP Plan assumed \_\_\_\_\_ point locations. These locations include \_\_\_\_\_ of the 50 point localities within areas described for conservation. These 50 point localities equate to 34% of the 149 point localities that were determined to have a high precision code during development of the MSHCP (Final MSHCP Plan, Volume IIB Species Accounts, June 2003).

(**Note:** This text is presented to provide a general idea of the discussion, additional GIS analysis would be necessary to fill in the blanks).

#### **4.5 Existing Constraints on Core 2 Assembly/Development Projects**

- Review and analyze existing development or approved development since approval of the MSHCP and issuance of the permits.
  - Review grading permits (final discretionary action) since June 2004 and July 2005 within Proposed Core 2.
- Clinton Keith Road Final EIR

- Review EIR to determine if any new biological data or existing condition data provide any evidence of changes in baseline conditions since issuance of the MSHCP permits.
- The biological information will also be summarized in Section 4.2 and 4.4 above
- Other JPRs –
  - Review other JPRs in Core 2 to determine if any new biological data or existing condition data provides any evidence of changes in baseline conditions since issuance of the MSHCP permits.
  - The biological information obtained by reviewing JPRs will also be summarized in Section 4.2 and 4.4 above

## 5.0 Analysis of Proposed CRP

Based on the assembled project information, an equivalency analysis must be prepared in narrative and graphic form comparing the effects/benefits of the proposed CRP. The equivalency analysis shall address the following categories.

### 5.1 Effects on Habitat

Quantify the loss of Habitat by using vegetation mapping provided in the MSHCP and the Updated Vegetation Mapping (CNPS) as well as any current data collected by others.

### 5.2 Effects on Covered Species

Quantify the loss of suitable habitat for each species listed above (See Table X). Note: Table X is an example only and does not provide acreages.

**TABLE X  
SUMMARY OF HABITAT CONSERVATION  
MUNZ'S ONION WITHIN CORE 2**

Vegetation Type	Plan Area (Acres) <sup>1</sup>	Within MSHCP Conservation Area			Effects of Core 2 CRP		
		Criteria Area (Acres) <sup>2</sup>	Public/Quasi-Public (Acres)	Total Within MSHCP Conservation Area (Acres)	Area Within Core 2 Criteria Area Before CRP (Acres) <sup>2</sup>	Area Within Core 2 Criteria Area After CRP (Acres) <sup>2</sup>	Total Loss Within Core 2 (Acres) <sup>2</sup>
Grassland (between 300 and 1000 m)	8,480	2,060	2,590	4,650	XXX	XXX	XXX
Coastal Sage Scrub (between 300 and 1000 m)	15,985	5,555	5,790	11,345	XXX	XXX	XXX

Chaparral (between 300 and 1000 m)	12,075	2,605	2,450	5,055	XXX	XXX	XXX
Peninsular Juniper Woodland (between 300 and 1000 m)	545	80	130	210	XXX	XXX	XXX
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37,085</b>	<b>10,300 (28%)</b>	<b>10,960 (30%)</b>	<b>21,260 (58%)</b>	<b>XXX (xxx%)</b>	<b>XXX (xxx%)</b>	<b>XXX (xxx%)</b>

<sup>1</sup> Vegetation includes the vegetation that occurs on clay soils within the Riverside Lowlands and Santa Ana Mountains Bioregions only.  
<sup>2</sup> Acres refer to Additional Reserve Lands to be assembled from within the Criteria Area.

Quantify the loss of known localities that were assumed to be Conserved.

Determine which Covered Species may be affected by the reduction of Core 2.

### 5.3 Effects on Reserve Design

- *Effects on Core 2*

Summarize changes in dimensional data to Core 2 including:

- 1) Total acreage;
- 2) Approximate edge;
- 3) Approximate interior;
- 4) Approximate edge perimeter/area ratio; and
- 5) Approximate distance to nearest connected core (miles) - Core J (Lake Skinner/Diamond Valley Lake).

- *Effects on Linkage and Constrained Linkages*

Connections from the Core 2 are made through Proposed Constrained Linkages 15 (Lower Warm Springs Creek), 16, 17 (Paloma Valley), 18, and Existing Constrained Linkage A and E.

Discuss effects of CRP on these linkages. Discussion will be centered on how linkages will be maintained despite the reduction of Core 2.

- **Effects on Non-Contiguous Habitat Blocks**

There should be no effect on Non-Contiguous Habitat Blocks.

### 5.4 Effects on MSHCP Area Configuration and Management

Edge effects will likely increase by the reduction of Core 2. Increased management will be needed, which will be discussed below in Section 6.0.

## **5.5 Effects on Ecotones**

Discuss conditions affecting species diversity in adjacent vegetation communities (i.e., invasion of exotics).

## **5.6 Effects on Reserve Accounting**

Analyze total acres developed and total acres conserved and compare those numbers to (most up-to-date information available will be utilized):

- 1) Proposed Core 2 acre target;
- 2) Sun City/Menifee Area Plan SU1 – Warm Springs Creek/French Valley Area low, mid and high point target;
- 3) Southwest Area Plan SU5 – French Valley/Lower Sedco Hills, low, mid and high point target; and
- 4) Rough Step Unit #6 habitat acreage targets.

## **5.7 Summary of Effects**

Summarize the effects in each category outlined above. This will provide the basis for determining whether the replacement habitat (additional Conservation areas) is adequate.

## **6.0 Equivalent of Greater Acreage of Contributed MSHCP Conservation Area**

The equivalency analysis will draw conclusions regarding the degree to which the Core 2 CRP is considered to be biologically equivalent or superior. If the CRP for Core 2 is determined to be biologically equivalent or superior an amendment to the MSHCP is not required prior to approval. If the CRP is not determined to be biologically equivalent or superior, an amendment to the MSHCP would be required prior to approval of such projects.

## **6.1 Existing Biological Conditions of Replacement Habitat**

### **Vegetation Mapping**

- Project-Specific Vegetation Mapping
- MSHCP Vegetation Mapping

Summarize the vegetation present within the replacement habitat and relate to Core 2.

### **Bioregions**

Summarize the Bioregion of the replacement habitat and relate to Core 2.

**Species Data**

- Summarize species occurrence data in replacement habitat including Species 8, FWS occurrence data, and CNDDDB.
- Summarize the important soil conditions required for each species, particularly plants
- Current species survey data, if available.

**6.2 Benefit to Habitat**

Quantity the gain of Habitat by using vegetation mapping and soils.

**6.3 Benefit to Covered Species**

Quantity the gain of suitable habitat for each species that was affected by the reduction of Core 2 (see Table X). Note: Table X is an example only and does not provide actual acreages.

**TABLE X  
SUMMARY OF HABITAT CONSERVATION  
MUNZ'S ONION WITHIN REPLACEMENT HABITAT**

Vegetation Type	Plan Area (Acres)	Within MSHCP Conservation Area			Benefit of Replacement Habitat	
		Criteria Area (Acres) <sup>2</sup>	Public/Quasi-Public (Acres)	Total Within MSHCP Conservation Area (Acres)	Total Loss Within Core 2 (Acres) <sup>2</sup>	Total Gain with Replacement Habitat (Acres) <sup>2</sup>
Grassland (between 300 and 1000 m)	8,480	2,060	2,590	4,650	XXX	XXX
Coastal Sage Scrub (between 300 and 1000 m)	15,985	5,555	5,790	11,345	XXX	XXX
Chaparral (between 300 and 1000 m)	12,075	2,605	2,450	5,055	XXX	XXX
Peninsular Juniper Woodland (between 300 and 1000 m)	545	80	130	210	XXX	XXX
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37,085</b>	<b>10,300 (28%)</b>	<b>10,960 (30%)</b>	<b>21,260 (58%)</b>	<b>XXX (xxx%)</b>	<b>XXX (xxx%)</b>

<sup>1</sup> Vegetation includes the vegetation that occurs on clay soils within the Riverside Lowlands and Santa Ana Mountains Bioregions only.  
<sup>2</sup> Acres refer to Additional Reserve Lands to be assembled from within the Criteria Area.

Quantify known localities of each species that would be Conserved by Conserving replacement habitat.

## 6.4 Benefit to Reserve Design

- *Benefit to Cores*

Discuss the benefit of adding a Core or increasing a Core and quantify using dimensional data.

- 1) Total acreage;
- 2) Approximate edge
- 3) Approximate interior
- 4) Approximate edge perimeter/area ratio
- 5) Approximate distance to nearest connected core (miles)

- *Benefit to Linkages and Constrained Linkages*

Discuss how adding a Core or increasing a Core affects adjacent linkages.

- *Benefit to Non-Contiguous Habitat Blocks*

This may not be applicable depending on Replacement Habitat.

## 6.5 MSHCP Management

Edge effects will increase by the reduction of Core 2. Core 2 and replacement habitat will likely be managed. This section will include a discussion of how focused management will maintain the biological function and value of Core 2 as well adjacent ecotones.

## 6.6 Changes to Reserve Accounting

Analyze the changes to Reserve Accounting by adding replacement habitat including:

- 1) Core target acreages
- 2) Sub-unit target acreages
- 3) Rough Step Unit habitat acreage targets

## 6.7 Summary of Equivalency Findings

## 7.0 Assurances

Summarize that RCA has agreements in place or control over replacement habitat and that there is assurance that this habitat will be conserved.