

Regional Conservation Authority

REPORT REGARDING ROUGH STEP AND RELATED ISSUES

Staff Contact:

**Joe Richards, Deputy Executive Director
(951) 955-9700**

Background:

We have been in discussions with DFG and USFWS regarding two important matters that will set the baseline for how our progress is measured from now on: the validity of the rough step formula and accounting of reserve lands. These issues will be the subject our first minor amendment to the Plan. We intend to bring the amendment package to the Board in November.

Rough Step Formula:

As you know, our collective progress in meeting the goals of the Plan is monitored by the wildlife agencies. They evaluate how much land is developed compared to how much is conserved over the course of a year. It is not an acre for acre measurement, but the result of a formula developed by the wildlife agencies. It is referred to as "Rough Step". The idea is to ensure that "development" does not outpace conservation, i.e. they remain in "rough step". The formula is run within nine geographic units known as rough step areas and the rough step status is reported to the wildlife agencies in our annual report. The formula was intended to give the permittees a 10% cushion, to accommodate development already approved or in the process. As we have indicated to you in the past, we have been out of rough step – allowed development is overtaking required conservation – in some of the geographic units. According to the Plan, when this happens, the County or cities within the rough step area are supposed to rein in development.

A few months ago we discovered that the original formula contained in the Plan had been changed and that some time in 2005 staff was directed to use the changed formula to run the rough step numbers. We immediately met with USFWS and DFG to discuss the problem. As we investigated the matter, we learned that even the original formula was flawed. Working with the agencies and with the help of the RAND group, we settled on a formula that provides the intended buffer.

The minor amendment will memorialize the rough step formula in the Plan. The numbers will be re-run based on the corrected formula and we will ask the Board to adopt the corrected annual reports for 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Accounting of Reserve Lands:

As you are aware, staff meticulously tracks our acquisitions to insure there is a proper accounting of land transactions. We keep track of acreage, funding sources and a variety of descriptive items. The agencies had raised some questions regarding the accounting and crediting of the County's early acquisitions toward 153,000 acres of "additional reserve lands". When we reviewed our records, we found some properties (approximately 3,700 acres) that were credited to "additional reserve lands" but were also identified as PQP (existing reserve lands) in the Plan. We also found some lands that were never counted for either. Working with the agencies, we reconciled the accounting and drafted a baseline PQP map.

The minor amendment will replace the PQP map that appears in the Plan text with the corrected baseline.

Staff Recommendations:

That the RCA Board of Directors receive and file the report regarding rough step and relating issues.