



RCA 2024 State and Federal Legislative Platform

Purpose

The 2024 Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA) State and Federal Legislative Platform is the framework that guides the advocacy efforts of the RCA for state and federal policies and funding that will advance implementation of the western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP).

The 2024 RCA State and Federal Legislative Platform declares the Board’s policy priorities while providing staff and contract lobbyists with the agility to weigh in on critical legislative matters in a time-effective manner on behalf of the Board, as well as providing local, tribal, state, and federal elected officials, their staff, and community stakeholders with foreknowledge of RCA’s priorities and goals.

Regional Control

- Land acquisition and planning authority for projects and programs that utilize state and federal funds should be as local as possible, with oversight from the Board, enable maximum flexibility, and be consistent with the goals and Board responsibilities under the MSHCP.
- State and federal rulemakings, administrative processes, program guidelines, and policy development activities should include meaningful collaboration with Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCP), individually and through the National Habitat Conservation Plan Coalition (NHCP) and California Habitat Conservation Planning Coalition (CHCPC) and should be timely and predictable.
- Policies should recognize and promote the positive and enabling benefits that HCPs and NCCPs bring to species, habitats, ecosystems, climate, air quality, infrastructure and housing development, economic growth, and the health and wellness of surrounding communities.
- Support efforts to preserve, stabilize, leverage, and increase state and federal funding for implementation of the MSHCP.

Protect Authority and Revenue

- Preserve and protect existing statutory authorities for the RCA, in its exercise of oversight responsibility of the MSHCP.
- Oppose efforts to infringe on the RCA’s discretion in collecting and administering its revenue sources including, but not limited to: Local Development Mitigation Fees (LDMF), tipping fees, public projects, and participating special entity fees.

Alignment of Responsibilities

- Support strong collaborative partnerships with local governments, tribes, and state and federal agencies.
- Support state and federal policies and increased funding that enable them to meet their commitment to conserve 56,000 acres, or one-third of the Additional Reserve Lands (ARL), as initially intended by the MSHCP.

- Support provision of sufficient resources for state and federal agency field offices to process grant applications and facilitate land acquisition, species monitoring, and land management to advance the implementation of the MSHCP.
- Pursue opportunities for collaboration with state and federal agencies that allow for RCA to claim full or partial credit for individual ARL acquisitions.
- Support the increased frequency of meetings, including special meetings, as appropriate, to be held by the Wildlife Conservation Board to facilitate more timely grant approvals.

Habitat Conservation

Land Acquisition, Management, and Species Monitoring

- Support policies, programs, and increased funding that protect, expand, or streamline RCA's ability to acquire and manage reserve lands, monitor habitat loss, and review applications for infrastructure or development projects.
- Pursue regulatory and program improvements to enhance timeliness, certainty, and successful transactions in the grant-funded land acquisition process and procedures at the state and federal levels. Recommended improvements would be akin to past efforts to work with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) on Section 6 grant eligibility and criteria scoring to prioritize land acquisition, such as area-based planning, increased flexibility in real estate transactions, and recognition of single species protection and multi-benefit projects that protect habitat values such as connectivity or biodiversity.
- Support, when feasible, a block grant approach for state and federal funding for land acquisition of parcels already included within an approved HCP/NCCP boundary.
- Engage in policy discussions regarding the expanded federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) trust, which now includes Section 6 funding, as authorized by the Great Americans Outdoors Act. Oppose efforts to reduce, redirect, or delay expenditure of this funding.
- Support Congressional action to continue and expand dedicated funding, such as increased annual appropriations to the LWCF for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, particularly Non-Traditional Section 6 grants administered by the USFWS, to help fund local land acquisition and easements critical to the MSHCP.
- Advocate for increased allocations to funding programs associated with "30 by 30," nature-based solutions to climate change, and other state policy priorities, with either dedicated funding to NCCPs, or guidelines that allow for NCCPs to be highly competitive for funds.
- Support policies that incentivize or fund land conservation by HCPs and NCCPs in disadvantaged communities to protect habitats under threat of development while expanding equitable access to open space and recreation.

State and Federal Climate Action and Conservation Goals

- Support state and federal policies that promote HCPs and NCCPs as existing, shelf-ready tools that advance nature-based solutions to bolster the long-term climate resilience of protected habitats and carbon storing landscapes, including shrubland and chaparral, through strategic land acquisition, carbon sequestration, and adaptive management actions that mitigate climate impacts.
- Ensure that the MSHCP is recognized and provided commensurate resources as state and federal agencies implement strategies to use nature-based solutions to fight climate change through land conservation, preserving and increasing biodiversity, and boosting climate resilience via initiatives such as "America the Beautiful," "30 by 30," and Executive Order N-82-20.
- Advocate that California Cap-and-Trade revenues be expended in a manner that enables the RCA to complete the 500,000-acre reserve of the MSHCP, as well as restore and uplift habitats.

Infrastructure

Planning and Delivery

- Support policies that identify the MSHCP as a tool for streamlining delivery of infrastructure projects. Oppose efforts that would impose barriers to the MSHCP as a mitigation tool.
- Support the development and implementation of HCPs and NCCPs, which serve to streamline the ESA permitting process, facilitate public infrastructure and private development, and protect endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems they depend on.
- Support efforts or initiatives that expedite the approval of HCPs and NCCPs statewide or nationwide for the benefit of transportation and infrastructure projects, and reduce redundancy in state and federal permitting requirements.
- Support, on a pilot basis, the inclusion in infrastructure funding programs of the requirement that projects utilizing specified funding must use existing USFWS-permitted HCPs to meet a predetermined share of their ESA-related mitigation requirements, provided that the pilot program allows those projects to pursue biologically equivalent mitigation in any HCP within that state or region.
- Support state and federal policies and funding that incentivize the development of wildlife crossings in HCPs and NCCPs.

Innovative Financing

- Pursue enactment of a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) amendment, to authorize loans for habitat acquisition in conjunction with otherwise eligible infrastructure projects.

Regional and National Partnerships

- Collaborate and continue to play a leadership role with regional, state, and national habitat conservation planning coalitions to impact funding and regulatory policies to support habitat conservation via the expedited and expanded use of HCPs.