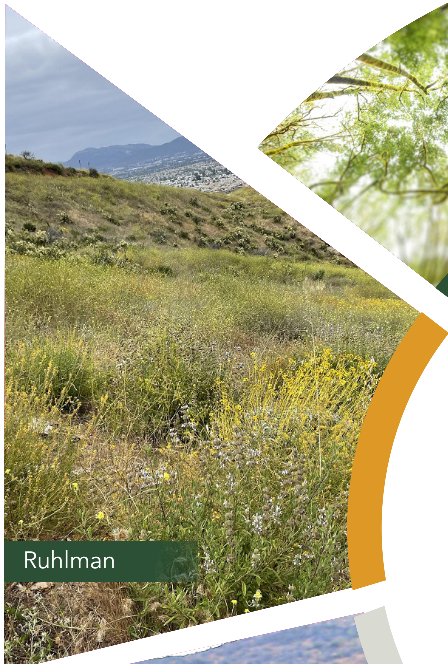
Hadley Holdings



Ruhlman

FY 2026/27

BUDGET

Coulter's Goldfield

Bobcat

Regional Conservation Authority
Western Riverside County

Regional
Conservation
Authority
Western Riverside County

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FY 2026/27 Budget Executive Summary

Appendix A

Appendix B

Regional
Conservation
Authority
Western Riverside County

FY 2026/27 Budget Executive Summary

Mission

The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA) was formed in 2004 as a joint powers authority to achieve one of America's most ambitious environmental efforts, the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP or Plan). The MSHCP is a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional habitat conservation plan focusing on the permanent conservation of 500,000 acres and the protection of 146 covered species, including 35 that are currently listed as threatened or endangered. The 500,000-acre reserve is comprised of 347,000 acres of Public/Quasi-Public (PQP) lands and 153,000 acres of Additional Reserve Lands (ARL). RCA completed the PQP lands at the inception of the Plan and will assemble the ARL acres over the land acquisition period of the permits.

The MSHCP was developed in response to the need for future growth opportunities in western Riverside County while addressing the requirements of the state of California (State) and federal Endangered Species Acts. Working in partnership, local, state, and federal leaders developed the MSHCP under the authority of the California Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act of 2001 and Section 10 of the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. The MSHCP streamlines environmental permitting processes by allowing the participating jurisdictions to authorize "take" of plant and wildlife species identified within the Plan area. Accordingly, under permits for critical wildlife areas, the MSHCP has expedited construction of numerous major freeway and road improvements in western Riverside County, while reducing project costs. At the same time, MSHCP implementation provides a coordinated MSHCP conservation area and implementation program to preserve biological diversity and maintain the region's quality of life.

Under the authority of the RCA Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JPA) and the MSHCP Implementing Agreement (IA), RCA oversees and administers the MSHCP in support of its Member Agencies, which include the 18 western cities and the County of Riverside (County). Other local, regional, state, and federal partner agencies work together with the RCA to ensure the protection of the 146 species covered by the MSHCP. In accordance with the MSHCP, RCA's core responsibilities consist of:

- Habitat acquisition;
- Reserve management and monitoring; and
- Program administration.

As the nation's largest habitat conservation plan, the MSHCP strengthens the sustainability and quality of life in western Riverside County by nurturing economic development opportunities, alleviating traffic congestion, protecting natural resources, and improving air quality.

Introduction

In November 2020, RCA and the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) entered into an Implementation and Management Services Agreement (Management Agreement) effective January 1, 2021. Under the Management Agreement, RCTC administers, coordinates, and supervises the activities of RCA as set forth in the JPA and acts for RCA in accomplishing its mission. Prior to January 1, 2021, the County served as RCA's managing agency.

The RCA budget for FY 2026/27 is presented to the Board of Directors (Board) and the citizens of western Riverside County. The budget outlines the habitat acquisition, reserve management and monitoring, program administration, and endowment activities RCA plans to undertake during the year. Source and use appropriations along with fund balance projections are included to fund these tasks and provide an indicator of RCA's estimated financial condition. This document serves as RCA's monetary guideline for the fiscal year. To provide the reader with a better understanding of RCA's operations and activities, staff has included descriptive information regarding each function in this Executive Summary.

The local, regional, state, and federal economies continue to recover from recent inflationary pressures. While the local economy is stable, a recent slowdown in local development activity support conservative revenue projections. This budget is presented based on the best available economic information. The Board and staff will continuously monitor, assess, and adjust the budgeted revenues and expenditures as necessary during the fiscal year.

Budget Policies

RCA maintains budget policies that promote fiduciary responsibility and organizational excellence.

ENDOWMENT	
Endowment Funding	Fifteen percent of local development mitigation fees (LDMF) collected will be allocated to the endowment for future preservation in alignment with the Recommended Fee Level – 15 Year Extension (Table 28) in the 2020 Nexus Study adopted by the Board in December 2020. Ten percent of Participating Special Entities (PSE) revenue will be allocated to the endowment for future preservation.
HABITAT ACQUISITION	
Non-Development HANS Funding Level	The MSHCP allows property owners who do not intend to file a development application to submit their properties for evaluation and possible acquisition under the Habitat Evaluation and Acquisition Negotiation Strategy (HANS) process. Section 6.1.1 of the MSHCP requires separate accounting and a priority list be established for properties that fall within this category. Land Acquisition Policy 1.13 requires that the level of funding to be set aside for the purchase of Non-Development HANS properties be reviewed annually and set by the Board. The percentage set aside has varied between 1 percent and 5 percent. Since inception, RCA has set aside approximately $11.6 million in LDMF revenues and interest in the Non-Development HANS fund. RCA has acquired 16 properties totaling 2,190 acres eligible for this program for about $8.6 million in costs. RCA has a balance of approximately $2.4 million in the fund for eligible properties. There are currently two properties on the list, and staff is in the process of negotiating various other Non-Development HANS properties. Five percent of LDMF collected in FY 2026/27 will be allocated for acquisition of Non-Development HANS lands.
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION	
Economic Stability Policy	A minimum cash level of $9 million will be maintained to continue operations for at least 18 months in accordance with Resolution No. 10-005 adopted by the Board in June 2010. If the balance declines below the minimum level, RCA will curtail new RCA-funded land acquisitions for that fiscal year until the minimum cash balance is restored. Multi-year purchase and sale agreements for which RCA is obligated to fund are exempt from the policy. RCA will continue to accept land donations, pursue opportunities for grant funding, and continue to negotiate purchases and sale agreements with closing dates extended to a future fiscal year in which the cash flow can adequately fund the purchase while preserving the minimum cash balance.
Funding Allocations	LDMF revenues will be allocated to program needs related to habitat acquisition, reserve management and monitoring, program administration, and endowment funding in accordance with the 2020 Nexus Study. Costs will be charged to the appropriate program, and LDMF revenues will be used to the extent that other funding sources are not sufficient to fund these programs.
Fund Balance Policy	The general fund should have a minimum unrestricted fund balance of 100 percent of the next fiscal year's general fund annual budgeted operating expenditures in accordance with Resolution No. 2016-010. This target amount has been established to provide a reasonable level of assurance that the RCA's day-to-day operations will be able to continue even if circumstances occur where revenues are insufficient to cover expenditures.

RCTC Deposit	RCTC provides staffing and facilitates payments for RCA services not provided by the County. Therefore, RCA must maintain an adequate deposit with RCTC to allow for these payments by RCTC before reimbursement occurs. The amount of the deposit will be reviewed and increased as needed to maintain an amount equal to two anticipated monthly invoices in the upcoming year.

Budget Goals and Objectives

To meet the RCA Board's expectations related to its approval of the RCTC Management Agreement, the FY 2026/27 budget remains focused on three key priorities:

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MSHCP	
Funding	RCA will work with Member Agencies to ensure the collection of fees to support RCA core functions, as well as seeking other opportunities for funding.
Grants	RCA will focus on seeking and retaining state and federal grant funding to support habitat acquisition while complying with grant requirements.
Reserve Management	RCA will focus on managing and monitoring its reserve lands to meet the objectives stated in the MSHCP.
Fiscal Prudence	Maintain necessary cash and fund balance ensuring ongoing operations will continue in the event of an economic downturn.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE	
Management	RCA will operate in an efficient, professional, consistent, and productive manner under the management of RCTC.

PARTNERSHIPS	
Communication	RCA will strengthen communications to stakeholders, members of the public, and elected officials to be transparent about RCA's conservation efforts, funding, and collaboration opportunities.

Budget Overview

Riverside County, along with the state and federal economies, continue to recover from the recent high levels of inflation. Lingering challenges impacting RCA include the high cost of land in the region and an apparent slowdown in development activity in western Riverside County. Therefore, fiscal prudence was the guiding light behind budget development for FY 2026/27.

The challenges outlined above support a conservative FY 2026/27 LDMF projection consistent with the amended FY 2025/26 budget despite an automatic annual LDMF adjustment on July 1st in accordance with the Member Agency ordinances, resolutions, and the MSHCP Mitigation Fee Implementation Manual.

If revenues or expenditures appear to be trending higher in FY 2026/27, staff will propose adjustments to the budget projections for Board approval, as necessary.

The tables in this Executive Summary include actual amounts for FY 2024/25, the amended FY 2025/26 budget, projected year-end amounts for FY 2025/26, and the budget for FY 2026/27. The amended FY 2025/26 budget represents the sum of the Board adopted budget and Board approved budgetary adjustments. A summary of the approved adjustments are included below.

- In the second quarter, RCA amended the FY 2025/26 budget to increase appropriations for contracts in the general fund's reserve management and monitoring budget for professional services associated with amending the MSHCP for Crotch's bumble bee.

- In the fourth quarter, RCA amended the FY 2025/26 budget to decrease appropriations for LDMF and Transportation Uniform Mitigation Fee (TUMF) revenue following an apparent slowdown in development-based revenue collections in FY 2025/26. Other Fee Revenue appropriations were increased to reflect FY 2025/26 collections. In addition, staff processed an increase in contract appropriations to account for RCTC staffing additions (i.e. MSHCP Compliance Manager and Senior Management Analyst-RCA) and other program needs including species monitoring and environmental consulting. Assessments and Fees appropriations were increased related to recently purchased properties. An appropriation transfer for legal services was processed from the capital projects fund to the general fund. Such transfer did not increase the overall legal services budget.

Projections for FY 2025/26 sources and uses are provided as both a look forward for the current fiscal year and as a comparison point in developing the FY 2026/27 sources and uses.

Sources

Sources are comprised of revenues and operating transfers in. Total sources (Table 1) are budgeted at $39,760,000, an increase of 6% from FY 2025/26 projected sources.

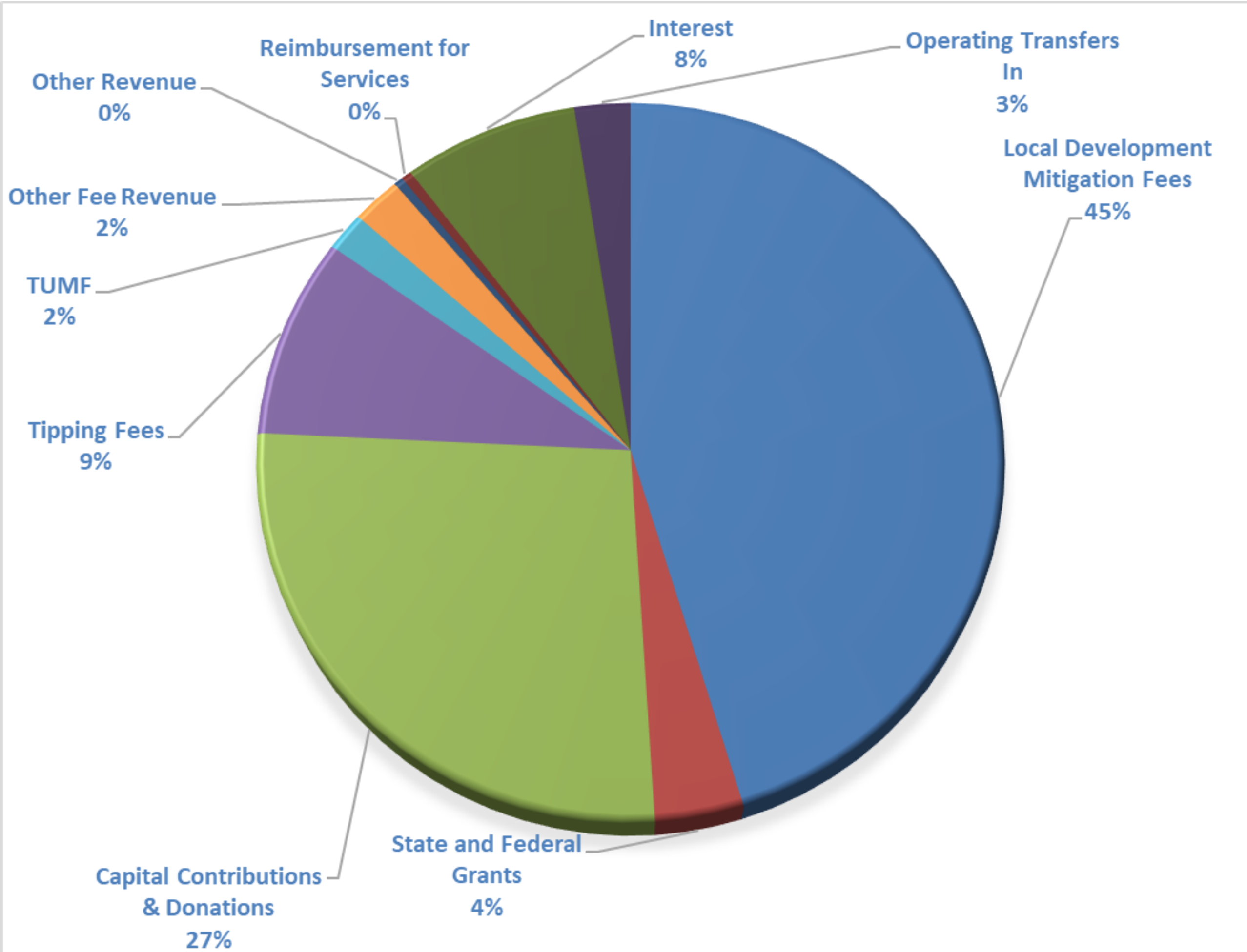
Table 1 – Sources FY 2026-2027

	FY 2025 Actuals	FY 2026 Amended Budget	FY 2026 Projected Actuals	FY 2027 Budget	Dollar Change*	Percentage Change*
Local Development Mitigation Fees	$ 33,138,257	$ 18,000,000	$ 18,000,000	$ 18,000,000	$ -	0%
State and Federal Grants	21,382,378	6,788,000	1,766,400	1,478,600	(287,800)	-16%
Capital Contributions & Donations	19,100,321	10,856,500	3,270,300	10,643,000	7,372,700	225%
Tipping Fees	3,754,535	3,600,000	3,750,000	3,600,000	(150,000)	-4%
TUMF	1,122,759	700,000	700,000	700,000	-	0%
Other Fee Revenue	1,532,049	1,407,900	3,627,000	870,000	(2,757,000)	-76%
Other Revenue	418,676	181,300	151,000	161,500	10,500	7%
Reimbursement for Services	228,110	197,100	130,000	182,300	52,300	40%
Interest	5,356,621	2,750,600	4,546,000	3,124,600	(1,421,400)	-31%
Operating Transfers In	2,200,000	1,503,200	1,503,200	1,000,000	(503,200)	-33%
Total	$ 88,233,706	$ 45,984,600	$ 37,443,900	$ 39,760,000	$ 2,316,100	6%

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 budget and the FY 2025/26 projected sources.

RCA's sources for FY 2026/27 are illustrated in Chart 1.

Chart 1 – Major Sources Categories FY 2026-2027



Local development mitigation fees are RCA's primary revenue source. The LDMF is required to be imposed and calculated, collected, and remitted by the Member Agencies to RCA in accordance with their obligations under the MSHCP. From FY 2020/21 through FY 2024/25, RCA experienced steady LDMF collections. However, as previously discussed, RCA amended FY 2025/26 budget to decrease appropriations for LDMF from $25,600,000 to $18,000,000 following an apparent slowdown in development-based revenue collections. Due to continued uncertainties related to the apparent slowdown in local development activity, the budget for LDMF revenues for FY 2026/27 will be maintained at $18,000,000, consistent with the FY 2025/26 amended budget and projected actuals. The FY 2026/27 budget and FY 2025/26 projected actuals are approximately 46% less than FY 2024/25 actual LDMF revenues of $33,138,257. In July 2026, Member Agencies will again implement an automatic annual LDMF adjustment in accordance with the Member Agency ordinances, resolutions, and the MSHCP Mitigation Fee Implementation Manual. In FY 2026/27, 15% of the LDMF revenues will be placed in an endowment fund for use for reserve management and monitoring and program administration after the completion of the land acquisition period. This is in accordance with the 2020 Nexus Study.

State and federal grants represent 4% of total revenues for FY 2026/27; such grants for habitat acquisition vary annually based on availability, amount, term, and eligible costs. Some grants require matching funds. Grants and contributions for FY 2026/27 are $1,478,600, a 16% decrease from the FY 2025/26 projected grants revenue. Funding is anticipated from the following grant:

- $1,478,600 from a cooperative agreement with Caltrans to purchase Arroyo Toad inhabited properties.

Staff is actively pursuing other grant opportunities including federal non-traditional Section 6 grants, funding from the California Natural Resources Agency related to the Governor's 30x30 initiative, and other funding opportunities through the Wildlife Conservation Board. If successful, staff will return to the Board with budget adjustments as needed when other grant opportunities are secured.

Capital contributions and donations arise from the donation of lands to the RCA. RCA works with multiple private developers and individuals to accept various reserve land donations. For FY 2026/27, RCA anticipates receiving approximately 311 acres of ARL with an estimated value of nearly $10,643,000 as capital contributions and donations.

Tipping fees are contributed to the RCA by the County on out-of-county waste tonnage collected at County landfills. For FY 2026/27, tipping fees for an estimated 2.13 million out-of-county waste tonnage are $3,200,000. A set amount of $400,000 is also contributed from in-county tonnage for a total budget amount of $3,600,000. Together, tipping fees are anticipated to be in line with FY 2025/26 projected revenues of $3,750,000.

Transportation Uniform Mitigation Fee revenues are based on an amended Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG). RCA receives 1.47% of TUMF assessments on new residential and commercial development in western Riverside County. As previously discussed, RCA amended the FY 2025/26 budget to decrease appropriations for TUMF from $1,100,000 to $700,000 following an apparent slowdown in development-based revenue collections. In coordination with WRCOG, the FY 2026/27 budget for TUMF fees will be maintained at $700,000, consistent with the FY 2025/26 amended budget and projected actuals. The FY 2026/27 budget and FY 2025/26 projected actuals are approximately 38% less than FY 2024/25 actual TUMF fees of $1,122,759.

Other fee revenue relates to governmental civic and infrastructure mitigation contributions and PSE contributions that need take coverage for their projects. Revenues from these sources are traditionally hard to predict. Most of the budget of $870,000 is related to Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District projects. The FY 2026/27 budget is a 38% decrease compared to the FY 2025/26 amended budget, and 76% decrease compared to FY 2025/26 projected revenues.

Other revenue of $161,500 includes rental income on reserve lands.

Reimbursement for services of $182,300 represents less than 1% of total budgeted revenues and relates to reimbursements for work on joint project reviews as well as reimbursements from developers for specific projects.

Interest revenues from the County pool of $3,124,600 reflect a conservative investment yield of 3.5% as the average monthly yield for FY 2025/26 through February 2026 is at approximately 3.9%. Interest revenue comprises approximately 8% of total budget sources and exceeds the FY 2025/26 amended budget by 14%. The FY 2025/26 amended budget was based on a 3% investment yield.

Operating transfers in of $1,000,000 consist of LDMF revenues received in the capital projects fund (i.e. habitat acquisition) and transferred into the general fund to fund program administration and reserve management and monitoring uses. The 2020 Nexus Study permits the use of LDMF revenues to fund all RCA functions, including program administration and reserve management and monitoring. The operating transfers in are directly offset by the operating transfers out in the capital projects fund.

Uses

Uses consist of expenditures and operating transfers out. Total uses (Table 2) for RCA's programs are budgeted at $49,986,000, a decrease of 1% from FY 2025/26 projected uses and a 34% decrease from the FY 2025/26 amended budget.

Table 2 – Uses FY 2026-2027

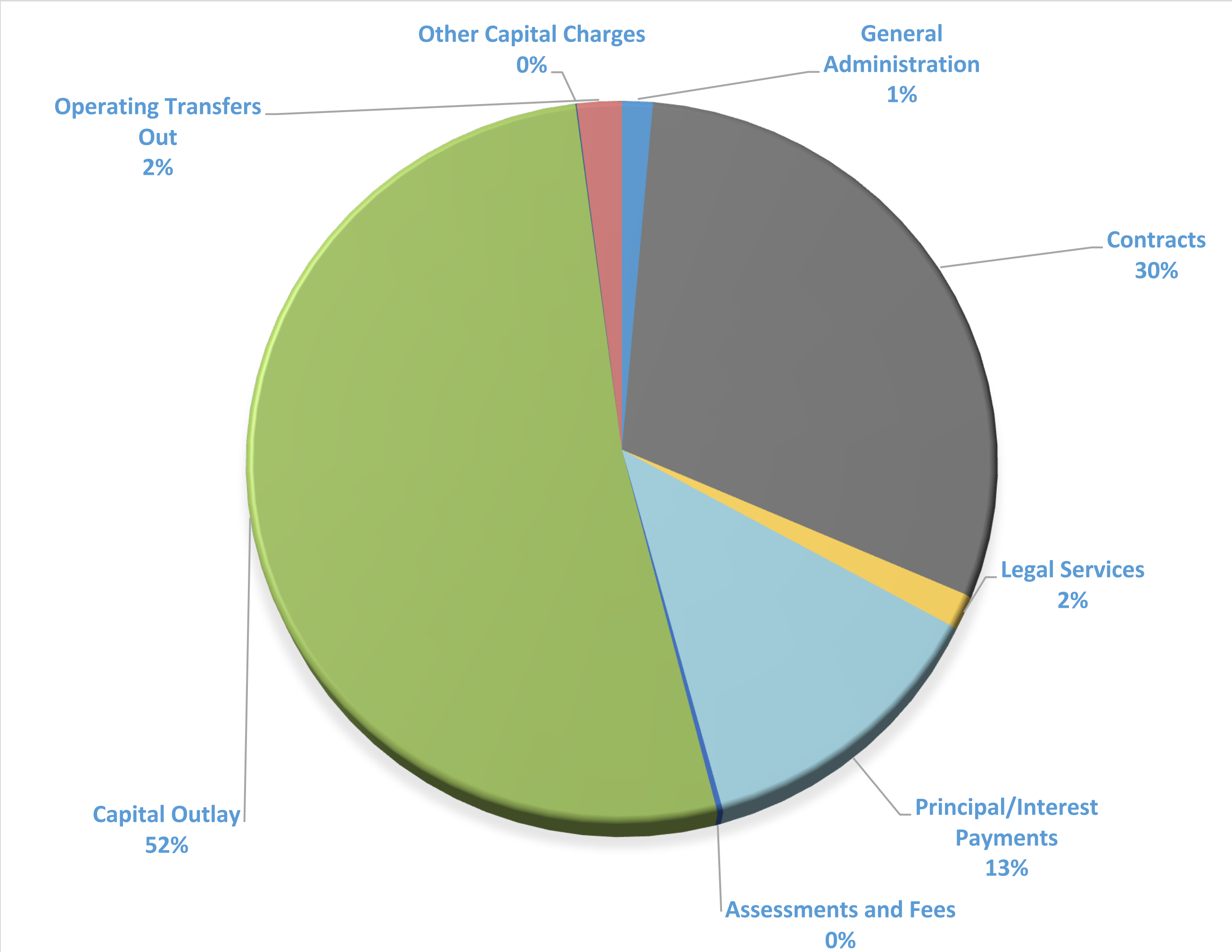
	FY 2025 Actuals	FY 2026 Amended Budget	FY 2026 Projected Actuals	FY 2027 Budget	Dollar Change*	Percentage Change*
General Administration	$ 459,985	$ 570,700	$ 528,200	$ 687,100	$ 158,900	30%
Contracts	10,667,041	14,335,400	11,164,600	15,087,900	3,923,300	35%
Legal Services	297,601	650,000	527,300	750,000	222,700	42%
Rent/Lease Building	178,763	-	-	-	-	0%
Principal Payment	5,825,426	5,956,500	5,956,500	6,090,700	134,200	2%
Interest Payment	542,250	411,200	411,200	277,200	(134,000)	-33%
Assessments and Fees	86,182	110,000	110,000	120,000	10,000	9%
Capital Outlay	51,373,179	52,733,500	30,060,800	25,948,100	(4,112,700)	-14%
Other Capital Charges	-	25,000	16,400	25,000	8,600	52%
Operating Transfers Out	2,200,000	1,503,200	1,503,200	1,000,000	(503,200)	-33%
Total	$ 71,630,426	$ 76,295,500	$ 50,278,200	$ 49,986,000	$ (292,200)	-1%

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 budget and the FY 2025/26 projected uses.


Bobcat

RCA's uses for FY 2026/27 are illustrated in Chart 2.

Chart 2 – FY 2026-2027 Uses by Major Category



General administration expenditures of $687,100 in the FY 2026/27 budget reflect a 30% increase over FY 2025/26 projected expenditures and 20% increase over the FY 2025/26 amended budget. The increase is largely attributed to an anticipated increase in insurance costs. General administration expenditures include insurance, external auditors, and other office costs. The RCA continues to receive some services from the County, including use of the County's financial system and other information technology solutions. The County Auditor-Controller and Treasurer-Tax Collector continue to serve those roles for RCA.

Contract expenditures include costs paid by RCTC and reimbursed by RCA through the management services agreement and amounts paid to Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District (Parks) for land management services. RCA pays all contracts through RCTC except for County provided services. The FY 2026/27 contract budget of $15,087,900 reflects a 35% increase over FY 2025/26 projected expenditures and 5% increase from the FY 2025/26 amended budget. Contract expenditures are comprised of the RCTC management services agreement and the contract with Parks. Approximately 87% of the management services agreement and nearly the entire Parks contract are included in the contracts budget. The remainder of the RCTC management services agreement is split among other use categories (e.g. general administration, legal services, assessments and fees, and capital outlay) based on the costs. Contract details by use category are presented in Table 3 and for the management services agreement in Table 11; significant contracts are highlighted below.

- *Management services*. RCTC management services costs are estimated at $14,669,600 (Table 11), a 36% increase over FY 2025/26 projected expenditures and a 6% increase from the FY 2025/26 amended budget. This increase is largely attributed to increases in salaries and benefits, administrative allocation, and other contracted services. As previously mentioned, RCTC staffing additions for an MSHCP Compliance Manager and Senior Management Analyst-RCA were approved during FY 2025/26. The management services amount is split across multiple use categories, including general administration, contracts, legal services, assessment and fees, and capital outlay. These management services include RCTC staff salaries and benefits of $4,779,300; $5,576,300 related to an estimated administrative cost allocation and Board stipends, facilities maintenance, legal services, insurance, other contracts, and miscellaneous costs; real property services of $477,000 related to capital outlay; public outreach costs of $80,000; audit costs of $132,800 for Member Agency attestation services as well as the financial and single audits; reserve management and monitoring contracts of $3,309,600, and legislative advocacy costs of $314,600. While most of the expenses are allocated as contract costs, legal services, insurance costs, Board stipends, real property services, auditor costs, and taxes and assessments are classified in other use categories.

Table 3 – FY 2026/27 Management Services and Other Expenditures by Use Category

Description	FY 2026 AMENDED BUDGET	FY 2027 BUDGET	DOLLAR CHANGE	PERCENTAGE CHANGE	Legal Services	Contracts	Capital Outlay	Others
Management Services								
Salaries and Benefits	$ 3,908,700	$ 4,779,300	$ 870,600	22%	$ -	$ 4,779,300	$ -	$ -
Administrative Cost Allocation	3,163,500	3,510,100	346,600	11%	-	3,510,100	-	-
Real Property Services	848,400	477,000	(371,400)	-44%	-	237,000	240,000	-
Public Outreach	59,100	80,000	20,900	35%	-	80,000	-	-
General Administration	59,000	54,200	(4,800)	-8%	-	24,200	-	30,000
Legal Services	750,000	850,000	100,000	13%	750,000	-	100,000	-
Legislative Contracts	284,400	314,600	30,200	11%	-	314,600	-	-
Auditor Costs	109,000	132,800	23,800	22%	-	-	-	132,800
Plan Implementation	500,000	520,000	20,000	4%	-	520,000	-	-
MSHCP Strategic Assessment	85,900	-	(85,900)	-100%	-	-	-	-
Crotch's Bumble Bee Permitting	355,000	225,000	(130,000)	-37%	-	225,000	-	-
Various Consultants	748,400	570,000	(178,400)	-24%	-	570,000	-	-
Taxes and Assessments	110,000	120,000	10,000	9%	-	-	-	120,000
Other Costs								
Facilities Maintenance	28,800	29,100	300	1%	-	29,100	-	-
Insurance Costs	400,000	490,000	90,000	23%	-	-	-	490,000
Office Costs	26,600	33,800	7,200	27%	-	33,800	-	-
Miscellaneous Costs	161,500	159,100	(2,400)	-1%	-	159,100	-	-
SAWA								
Biological Monitoring Program	2,255,800	2,299,600	43,800	2%	-	2,299,600	-	-
Biological Monitoring (Reimbursable)	25,000	25,000	-	0%	-	25,000	-	-
Parks								
Land Management	2,136,500	2,125,800	(10,700)	-1%	-	2,100,800	25,000	-
Land Management (Reimbursable)	72,100	51,000	(21,100)	-29%	-	51,000	-	-
Land Management (Endowments)	44,400	42,000	(2,400)	-5%	-	42,000	-	-
Superbloom	87,300	87,300	-	0%	-	87,300	-	-
Escrow Costs	100,000	100,000	-	0%	-	-	100,000	-
Total	**$16,319,400**	**$ 17,075,700**	**$ 756,300**	**5%**	**$750,000**	**$ 15,087,900**	**$ 465,000**	**$772,800**

* *$14,669,600 represents the expenditures to be paid by RCTC and reimbursed by RCA through the management services agreement. The management services costs can be found separated in Table 11. The remaining $2,406,100 reflect expenditures to be paid through the County for a total of $17,075,700 in contract and other expenditures category items.*

- *Biological monitoring*. For FY 2026/27, biological monitoring costs are estimated at $2,324,600, a 2% increase over the FY 2025/26 amended budget and projected expenditures. The increase in FY 2026/27 compared to the FY 2025/26 amended budget is related to an increase for Santa Ana Watershed Association monitoring services. The contract activities are described in the FY 2026/27 Work Plan and Cost Estimate in Appendix B.

Land management services are disbursed outside the Management Services Agreement.

- *Land management*. For FY 2026/27, land management costs are estimated at $2,306,100, a 1% decrease over the FY 2025/26 amended budget. Parks provides land management services including, but not limited to, administering, coordinating, and supervising reserve management activities of the RCA reserve land. The FY 2026/27 contract anticipates $2,100,800 for 11 Parks staff and other costs entirely dedicated to managing the RCA MSHCP reserve land and $205,300 to complete tasks not part of the day-to-day operations of managing the reserve land. These other tasks can be reimbursed from deposit agreements or interest from endowments or are related to additional work resulting from a super bloom. Work related to deposit agreements and endowment properties continue to be worked on as time permits. A portion of the land management budget ($25,000) is included in capital outlay expenditures for the portion directly attributable to habitat acquired in FY 2026/27.

  Certain habitat donations from property owners require significant land management during the first few years after a mitigation site has been successfully restored or uplifted. Accordingly, the property owners are required to pay an initial land management fee to maintain the habitat at a high-level until the habitat naturalizes. These non-traditional MSHCP maintenance activities include aggressive weeding, native seeding, and mowing. Additional resources will also perform oversight duties at the Riverpark Mitigation Bank.

  Since inception of the MSHCP, RCA received project-related mitigation reserve land from property owners required to contribute an endowment fee for long-term land management above the level of effort mandated by the MSHCP. The endowments are used to maintain the habitat in perpetuity above baseline conditions.

  - *Super bloom*. The FY 2026/27 land management budget includes $87,300 to support critical and timely actions to be taken for an unanticipated super bloom phenomenon, such as the experience in springs of 2019 and 2022. Critical land management resources were redirected to a super bloom area to support the intense effort needed there.

Legal services of $750,000 in the FY 2026/27 budget reflects a 15% increase from the FY 2025/26 amended budget amount. Legal expenditures consist of general legal counsel services related to program administration, reserve management and monitoring, and other matters not directly attributable to habitat acquisition. Additional legal expenditures of $100,000 are included in capital outlay expenditures as they are directly attributable to habitat acquired in FY 2026/27.

Principal and interest payments are associated with the $24,100,000 notes payable issued for the FY 2023/24 Toscana Marketplace acquisition. The FY 2026/27 budget includes the third of four annual payments concluding in FY 2027/28.

Capital outlay expenditures in the FY 2026/27 budget reflects a 51% decrease from the FY 2025/26 amended budget and an approximately 14% decrease from the FY 2025/26 projected uses. As of April 2026, RCA has acquired a total of 71,415 of the 153,000, or 47%, of the ARL acres to be acquired under the MSHCP. Of the total reserve of 500,000 acres, RCA has conserved 418,415 acres, or 83.7% of the total acres to be conserved. The FY 2026/27 capital outlay budget anticipates costs related to the acquisition and improvements of habitat acquired, including:

- $13,851,500 for 1,014 acres of possible ARL;
- $10,643,000 in donated lands for approximately 311 acres; and
- $1,478,600 in other potential acquisitions of approximately 164 acres related to federal and state grant funds.

Such costs include the purchase price of property acquired, appraisals, title reports, real estate services, legal services, environmental reviews, surveying, and other costs associated with the acquisition of habitat. Of the approximately 1,178 ARL acres to be acquired using local funds and grants, the RCA Board previously approved, as of April 6, 2026, the purchase of properties totaling approximately 471 acres expected to close escrow in FY 2026/27. Approximately 707 ARL acres will be brought to the Board for approval at a future date and approximately 311 ARL acres are anticipated for donation. The FY 2026/27 budget anticipates federal and state grant funds of approximately $1,478,600 to fund the habitat acquisitions.

Operating transfers out of $1,000,000 relate to the transfer of LDMF revenues from the capital projects fund to the general fund to meet the budget needs for reserve management and monitoring and program administration. The 2020 Nexus Study permits the use of LDMF revenues for all functions of the RCA.

FY 2026/27 Program Initiatives

Staff prepared each program's budget based on key assumptions, accomplishments in FY 2025/26, major initiatives for FY 2026/27, and program goals and related objectives. The key initiatives are listed and a summary of expenditures for each program are presented in Tables 4-7.

Habitat Acquisition

The Habitat Acquisition Program supports implementation of the MSHCP by securing the necessary land to build the 500,000-acre conservation reserve and protect 146 covered species. Through strategic acquisition, grant pursuit, and inter-agency coordination, RCA advances long term conservation goals while supporting regional development and infrastructure planning.

- Actively seek and prioritize federal and state land acquisition grant opportunities. RCA will continue to pursue competitive funding from federal and state partners to maximize acquisition capacity and leverage local resources.
- Evaluate and refine the current habitat acquisition framework to improve efficiency and better support MSHCP objectives. Efforts will focus on improving prioritization tools, strengthening biological linkage strategies, and enhancing analysis of Criteria Cells to support targeted acquisitions.
- Strengthen partnerships with Member Agencies and key federal and state stakeholders to sustain long-term conservation efforts. RCA will continue to collaborate with local jurisdictions, wildlife agencies, and regional partners to support MSHCP implementation and ensure consistent application of conservation requirements.
- Strategically acquire properties based on available funding and projected financial resources. RCA will pursue acquisitions that advance reserve assembly goals, improve species connectivity, and align with long term financial planning.
- Update the Right of Way Policies and Procedures Manual. RCA will initiate a comprehensive update of the Right of Way Policies and Procedures Manual to reflect five years of RCTC serving as the Management Agency. This update will incorporate lessons learned, enhanced workflows, and evolved acquisition practices developed under RCTC's management. This effort will modernize internal procedures, improve clarity for staff and partner agencies, and ensure alignment with current RCA organizational structure, regulatory obligations, and long term MSHCP implementation needs.

- Enhance Public Access to Habitat Acquisition Data on the RCA Website. RCA will develop and maintain up-to-date public facing information on the number of active projects, acquisition types, and progress toward reserve assembly goals. This initiative will reduce reliance on outdated Board agenda items for status tracking and improve transparency for Member Agencies, stakeholders, and the public. Enhanced online reporting will support informed decision making, increase accessibility of program data, and align with RCA's commitment to clear and timely communication.

Together, these initiatives reflect RCA's continued commitment to responsible growth and conservation. This structured approach ensures continued investment in habitat and species conservation, reinforcing RCA's mission to preserve western Riverside County's natural resources.

Table 4 – Habitat Acquisition

	FY 2025 Actuals	FY 2026 Amended Budget	FY 2026 Projected Actuals	FY 2027 Budget	Dollar Change*	Percentage Change*
General Supplies and Services	$ 533,248	$ 773,700	$ 620,500	$ 910,000	$ 289,500	47%
Contracts	2,058,200	3,343,600	2,200,100	3,536,900	1,336,800	61%
Debt Service	6,367,676	6,367,700	6,367,700	6,367,900	200	0%
Capital Outlay	51,373,179	52,758,500	30,077,200	25,973,100	(4,104,100)	-14%
Operating Transfers Out	2,200,000	1,503,200	1,503,200	1,000,000	(503,200)	-33%
Total	$ 62,532,304	$ 64,746,700	$ 40,768,700	$ 37,787,900	$ (2,980,800)	-7%

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 budget and the FY 2025/26 projected uses.

Reserve Management and Monitoring

Requirements and key components of the MSHCP are the biological management and monitoring programs, which collect data on the MSHCP's 146 covered species and their associated habitats throughout the MSHCP reserve as well as protect and manage lands within the RCA portion of the reserve. Monitoring results are used to assess the MSHCP's effectiveness at meeting conservation objectives and to provide information to the management team described in Section 5.0 of the MSHCP. Below are the key reserve management and monitoring budget initiatives in FY 2026/27.

- Conduct invertebrate surveys for the Quino Checkerspot Butterfly, Delhi Sands Flower-Loving Fly, and Fairy Shrimp.
- Conduct avian surveys for birds including the Burrowing Owl, Golden Eagle, Coastal California gnatcatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, Northern Harrier, Riparian Birds, Turkey Vulture, and White-Tailed Kite.
- Conduct herpetofauna surveys, including Arroyo Toad, Western Pond Turtle, and Western Spade-Foot Toad; as well as conduct artificial cover board surveys and drift fence camera trap surveys for species such as Belding's Orange-Throated Whiptail, Coastal Western Whiptail, Granite Spiny Lizard, Granite Night Lizard, Northern Red-Diamond Rattlesnake, Rubber Boa, San Bernardino Mountain Kingsnake, San Diego Banded Gecko, San Diego Horned Lizard, and San Diego Mountain Kingsnake.
- Conduct surveys for mammals including Aguanga Kangaroo Rat, San Bernardino Kangaroo Rat, and San Diego Black-tailed Jackrabbit.
- Conduct rare plant surveys.
- Conduct critical monitoring of artificial Burrowing Owl burrows.
- Continue carnivore surveys to detect Bobcats, Coyotes, Long-Tailed Weasels, and Mountain Lions in linkages and corridors.
- Continue to support collaboration with the Santa Ana Mountain to Palomar Mountain Linkage Coalition and California Department of Transportation District 8.

- Protect RCA lands from illegal dumping, encroachment, marijuana grows, and trail creation by mountain bikers and off-highway vehicles.
- Continue the ongoing development of a Master Wildfire Management Plan.
- Conduct fuels management.
- Based on the direction of the Board continue work to improve MSHCP implementation based on the findings of the Strategic Improvement Assessment and Action Plan.
- Continue work on interim and permanent permitting solutions for the Crotch's Bumble Bee.

Table 5 – Reserve Management and Monitoring

	FY 2025 Actuals	FY 2026 Amended Budget	FY 2026 Projected Actuals	FY 2027 Budget	Dollar Change*	Percentage Change*
General Supplies and Services	$ 99,426	$ 71,300	$ 71,300	$ 130,000	$ 58,700	82%
Contracts	4,899,877	5,846,200	5,110,300	5,659,100	548,800	11%
Assessments and Fees	86,182	110,000	110,000	120,000	10,000	9%
Total	$ 5,085,485	$ 6,027,500	$ 5,291,600	$ 5,909,100	$ 617,500	12%

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 budget and the FY 2025/26 projected uses.

Program Administration

Program administration provides the administrative, Clerk of the Board, geographic information system (GIS), external affairs, and financial services support to RCA. Staff administer the LDMF collection program and assist Member Agencies with questions regarding the fee. RCA maintains robust GIS capabilities, and provides public outreach and external affairs services. Clerk of the Board services have been streamlined and follow RCTC practices. RCA continues to seek efficiencies and contract savings related to the management services agreement. Tenets of RCA's program administration are as follows:

- Provide high quality support services to the RCA Board, including timely communications.
- Continue to process joint project reviews, participating special entity projects, and criteria refinements in a timely, effective, and professional manner.
- Continue to support the Member Agencies in their implementation of the Development Habitat Evaluation and Negotiation Strategy process.
- Continue to maintain the GIS viewer and dashboard capabilities.
- Regularly engage state and federal lawmakers and agency administrators to advocate for more funding and for program efficiencies to more fully implement the MSHCP.
- Build awareness and support for RCA and the implementation of the MSHCP by expanding outreach efforts to Member Agencies, resource partners, news media, schools, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and the public at large.
- Monitor and report quarterly progress toward public outreach plan goals.
- Continue to provide local development mitigation fee training to Member Agencies as requested
- Provide timely and accurate financial information and projections.

Table 6 – Program Administration

	FY 2025 Actuals	FY 2026 Amended Budget	FY 2026 Projected Actuals	FY 2027 Budget	Dollar Change*	Percentage Change*
General Supplies and Services	$ 303,674	$ 375,700	$ 363,700	$ 397,100	$ 33,400	9%
Contracts	3,708,964	5,101,200	3,854,200	5,849,900	1,995,700	52%
Total	$ 4,012,638	$ 5,476,900	$ 4,217,900	$ 6,247,000	$ 2,029,100	48%

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 budget and the FY 2025/26 projected uses.

Endowment

RCA maintains two types of endowments – donor endowments and RCA endowments. The donor endowments relate to funds set aside related to the management and monitoring of certain properties. The principal is permanently restricted, and work on the properties is funded by interest earnings. The RCA endowments consists of funds set aside by the RCA Board from PSE contributions, a one-time set aside of tipping fees, and 15% of LDMF revenues.

- Set aside 15% of LDMF revenues into the RCA LDMF endowment.
- Set aside 10% of PSE revenues into the RCA endowment.

Table 7 – Endowment

	FY2025 Actuals	FY2026 Amended Budget	FY 2026 Projected Actuals	FY2027 Budget	Dollar Change*	Percentage Change*
Contracts	$ -	$ 44,400	$ -	$ 42,000	$ 42,000	100%
Total	$ -	$ 44,400	$ -	$ 42,000	$ 42,000	100%

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 budget and the FY 2025/26 projected uses.


Mountain Lion

Fund Balances

RCA maintains three types of funds: a general fund for program administration and reserve management and monitoring, capital projects fund for habitat acquisition, and endowments fund for both donor endowments and the RCA endowments. The general fund and the endowments fund comprise the operating budget; the capital projects fund represents the capital budget.

The projected total fund balance as of June 30, 2026, is $99,060,677. RCA expects the FY 2026/27 budgeted activities will result in a total fund balance of $88,834,677 as of June 30, 2027. Table 8 presents the projected changes in fund balance by fund and classification as of June 30, 2027.

Table 8 – Projected Fund Balances by Fund and Classification at June 30, 2027

Fund Balance	General Fund	Capital Projects Fund	Subtotal General and Capital Project Funds	Endowments Fund	Grand Total Agency Wide
Estimated Fund Balance June 30, 2026	$ 25,417,986	$ 39,815,042	$ 65,233,028	$ 33,827,649	$ 99,060,677
Estimated Sources	6,575,000	29,254,500	35,829,500	3,930,500	39,760,000
Estimated Uses	(12,156,100)	(37,787,900)	(49,944,000)	(42,000)	(49,986,000)
Excess (Deficiency)	(5,581,100)	(8,533,400)	(14,114,500)	3,888,500	(10,226,000)
Estimated Ending Fund Balance:					
Nonspendable	-	-	-	6,124,814	6,124,814
Restricted	87,552	31,281,642	31,369,194	29,503,491	60,872,685
Committed	-	-	-	2,087,844	2,087,844
Assigned	-	-	-	-	-
Unassigned	19,749,334	-	19,749,334	-	19,749,334
Estimated Fund Balance June 30, 2027	**$ 19,836,886**	**$ 31,281,642**	**$ 51,118,528**	**$ 37,716,149**	**$ 88,834,677**

RCA's Fund Balance Policy requires a minimum of 12 months of next year's general fund annual budgeted expenditures in unrestricted fund balance. The projected unrestricted general fund balance of $25,330,434 as of June 30, 2026, exceeds the FY 2026/27 budgeted general fund expenditures of $12,156,100. The capital projects fund's projected fund balance of $39,815,042 as of June 30, 2026, is restricted for habitat acquisition and other expenditures allowed by the 2020 Nexus Study. The endowment fund's projected fund balance of $33,827,649 as of June 30, 2026, is predominantly restricted for donor and RCA endowments.

Budget Summary

The overall budget for FY 2026/27 is presented in Table 9 by summarized line items and Table 10 by fund. RCA management services expenditures by use category are summarized in Table 11.

Table 9 – Budget Comparative Summary FY 2026 – FY 2027

SOURCES	FY 2024/25 ACTUAL	FY 2025/26 AMENDED BUDGET	FY 2025/26 PROJECTED ACTUALS	FY 2026/27 BUDGET	DOLLAR CHANGE*	PERCENTAGE CHANGE*
Local Development Mitigation Fees	$ 33,138,257	$ 18,000,000	$ 18,000,000	$ 18,000,000	$ -	0%
Other Fee Revenue	1,532,049	1,407,900	3,627,000	870,000	(2,757,000)	-76%
Interest	5,356,621	2,750,600	4,546,000	3,124,600	(1,421,400)	-31%
State and Federal Grants	21,382,378	6,788,000	1,766,400	1,478,600	(287,800)	-16%
TUMF	1,122,759	700,000	700,000	700,000	-	0%
Capital Contributions and Donations	19,100,321	10,856,500	3,270,300	10,643,000	7,372,700	225%
Tipping Fees	3,754,535	3,600,000	3,750,000	3,600,000	(150,000)	-4%
Reimbursement for Services	228,110	197,100	130,000	182,300	52,300	40%
Other Miscellaneous Revenue	418,676	181,300	151,000	161,500	10,500	7%
Operating Transfers In	2,200,000	1,503,200	1,503,200	1,000,000	(503,200)	-33%
TOTAL SOURCES	**$ 88,233,706**	**$ 45,984,600**	**$ 37,443,900**	**$ 39,760,000**	**$ 2,316,100**	**6%**
USES						
Services and Supplies						
General Administration	459,985	570,700	528,200	687,100	158,900	30%
Legal Services	297,601	650,000	527,300	750,000	222,700	42%
Rent/Lease Building	178,763	-	-	-	-	0%
Contracts	10,667,041	14,335,400	11,164,600	15,087,900	3,923,300	35%
Total Services and Supplies	11,603,390	15,556,100	12,220,100	16,525,000	4,304,900	35%
Other Charges						
Principal Payment	5,825,426	5,956,500	5,956,500	6,090,700	134,200	2%
Interest Payment	542,250	411,200	411,200	277,200	(134,000)	-33%
Assessments and Fees	86,182	110,000	110,000	120,000	10,000	9%
Total Other Charges	6,453,858	6,477,700	6,477,700	6,487,900	10,200	0%
Capital Outlay						
Habitat Acquisition and Maintenance	51,373,179	52,733,500	30,060,800	25,948,100	(4,112,700)	-14%
Other Capital Charges	-	25,000	16,400	25,000	8,600	52%
Total Capital Outlay	51,373,179	52,758,500	30,077,200	25,973,100	(4,104,100)	-14%
Other Financing Uses						
Operating Transfers Out	2,200,000	1,503,200	1,503,200	1,000,000	(503,200)	-33%
Total Other Financing Uses	2,200,000	1,503,200	1,503,200	1,000,000	(503,200)	-33%
TOTAL USES	**$ 71,630,427**	**$ 76,295,500**	**$ 50,278,200**	**$ 49,986,000**	**$ (292,200)**	**-1%**
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY)	**16,603,279**	**(30,310,900)**	**(12,834,300)**	**(10,226,000)**		
BEGINNING FUND BALANCE	95,291,698	111,894,977	111,894,977	99,060,677		
ENDING FUND BALANCE	**$ 111,894,977**	**$ 81,584,077**	**$ 99,060,677**	**$ 88,834,677**		

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 Budget and the FY 2025/26 Projected Actuals.

Table 10 – FY 2026/27 Budget by Fund and Program

	General Fund			Capital Projects Fund	Endowments Fund	
SOURCES	Program Administration	Reserve Management & Monitoring	Total General Fund	Habitat Acquisition	Endowments	FY 2026/27 BUDGET
Local Development Mitigation Fees	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ 15,300,000	$ 2,700,000	$ 18,000,000
Other Fee Revenue	435,000	435,000	870,000		-	870,000
Interest	380,600	380,600	761,200	1,132,900	1,230,500	3,124,600
State and Federal Grants	-	-	-	1,478,600	-	1,478,600
TUMF	-	-	-	700,000	-	700,000
Capital Contributions and Donations	-	-	-	10,643,000	-	10,643,000
Tipping Fees	400,000	3,200,000	3,600,000	-	-	3,600,000
Reimbursement for Services	100,000	82,300	182,300	-	-	182,300
Other Miscellaneous Revenue	-	161,500	161,500	-	-	161,500
Operating Transfers In	100,000	900,000	1,000,000	-	-	1,000,000
TOTAL SOURCES	**$ 1,415,600**	**$ 5,159,400**	**$ 6,575,000**	**$ 29,254,500**	**$ 3,930,500**	**$ 39,760,000**
USES						
Services and Supplies						
General Administration	$ 87,100	$ -	$ 87,100	$ 600,000	$ -	$ 687,100
Legal Services	310,000	130,000	440,000	310,000	-	750,000
Rent/Lease Building	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contracts	5,849,900	5,659,100	11,509,000	3,536,900	42,000	15,087,900
Total Services and Supplies	6,247,000	5,789,100	12,036,100	4,446,900	42,000	16,525,000
Other Charges						
Principal Payment	-	-	-	6,090,700	-	6,090,700
Interest Payment	-	-	-	277,200	-	277,200
Assessments and Fees	-	120,000	120,000	-	-	120,000
Total Other Charges	-	120,000	120,000	6,367,900	-	6,487,900
Capital Outlay						
Habitat Acquisition and Maintenance	-	-	-	25,948,100	-	25,948,100
Other Capital Charges	-	-	-	25,000	-	25,000
Total Capital Outlay	-	-	-	25,973,100	-	25,973,100
Other Financing Uses						
Operating Transfers Out	-	-	-	1,000,000	-	1,000,000
Total Other Financing Uses	-	-	-	1,000,000	-	1,000,000
TOTAL USES	**$ 6,247,000**	**$ 5,909,100**	**$ 12,156,100**	**$ 37,787,900**	**$ 42,000**	**$ 49,986,000**
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY)	**(4,831,400)**	**(749,700)**	**(5,581,100)**	**(8,533,400)**	**3,888,500**	**(10,226,000)**
BEGINNING FUND BALANCE			25,417,986	39,815,042	33,827,649	99,060,677
ENDING FUND BALANCE			**$ 19,836,886**	**$ 31,281,642**	**$ 37,716,149**	**$ 88,834,677**

Table 11 – Management Services**

	FY 2026 Amended Budget	FY 2026 Projected Actuals	FY 2027 Budget	Dollar Change*	Percentage Change*
Salaries and Benefits	$ 3,908,700	$ 3,099,600	$ 4,779,300	$ 1,679,700	54%
Administrative Allocation	3,163,500	2,360,400	3,510,100	1,149,700	49%
Real Property Services	848,400	388,400	477,000	88,600	23%
Public Outreach	59,100	22,100	80,000	57,900	262%
Auditor Costs	109,000	84,000	132,800	48,800	58%
Board Stipends	30,000	25,000	30,000	5,000	20%
Facilities Costs	28,800	5,000	29,100	24,100	482%
Legal Costs (BBK)	750,000	608,400	850,000	241,600	40%
Legislative Contracts	284,400	285,400	314,600	29,200	10%
Management & Monitoring Contracts	3,630,100	3,381,700	3,309,600	(72,100)	-2%
Insurance Costs	400,000	388,000	490,000	102,000	26%
Other Contracts	450,000	-	450,000	450,000	100%
Refunds	10,000	10,000	10,000	-	0%
Misc Costs	207,100	101,300	207,100	105,800	104%
Total	$ 13,879,100	$ 10,759,300	$ 14,669,600	$ 3,910,300	36%

*Dollar and percentage change are between the FY 2026/27 budget and the FY 2025/26 projected uses.
**Expenditures anticipated to be paid by RCTC and reimbursed by RCA under the management services agreement. Contract details by use category are presented in Table 3.


Sand Diego Button Celery.


APPENDIX A

Regional Conservation Authority
Western Riverside County

Regional Conservation Authority
Western Riverside County

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

ARL	–	Additional Reserve Lands
BBK	–	Best Best & Krieger LLP
Board	–	Board of Directors for the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority
CDFW	–	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
County	–	County of Riverside
CPI	–	Consumer Price Index
FY	–	Fiscal Year
GIS	–	Geographic Information System
HANS	–	Habitat Evaluation and Acquisition Negotiation Strategy
IA	–	Implementing Agreement for the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan, included as Volume 3 to the MSHCP
JPA	–	Joint Powers Agreement
LDMF	–	Local Development Mitigation Fee
Management Agreement	–	Implementation and Management Services Agreement approved in November 2020 between the RCA and RCTC that became effective January 1, 2021
Member Agency	–	18 cities in western Riverside County and Riverside County that are part of the JPA
MOU	–	Memorandum of Understanding
MSHCP	–	Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan
Non-Development HANS	–	Process under the MSHCP that allows property owners who do not intend to file a development application to submit their properties for evaluation and possible acquisition under the HANS process; requires separate accounting and a priority list be established for properties that fall within this category
Parks	–	Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District
Plan	–	Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan
PQP	–	Public/Quasi-Public
PSE	–	Participating Special Entities
RCA	–	Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority, a joint powers authority formed in 2004
RCTC	–	Riverside County Transportation Commission, the managing agency for RCA
RCTD	–	Riverside County Transportation Department
SAWA	–	Santa Ana Watershed Association
State	–	State of California
TUMF	–	Transportation Uniform Mitigation Fee
WRCOG	–	Western Riverside Council of Governments

Wildlife Agencies	–	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife
2020 Nexus Study	–	The latest study adopted by the Board in December 2020 that updates the LDMF to reflect current costs and processes to implement and finance the MSHCP; the study is consistent with the requirements of California Government Code Section 66000 et seq. (Mitigation Fee Act) that requires specific findings as well as administration and implementation procedures for "any action establishing, increasing, or imposing a fee as a condition of approval of a development project by a local agency"

Burrowing Owl


Ferruginous Hawk

APPENDIX B

Regional Conservation Authority
Western Riverside County

Regional
Conservation
Authority
Western Riverside County

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MSHCP
BIOLOGICAL MONITORING PROGRAM
FY 2026-27 WORK PLAN AND COST ESTIMATE

1 INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of the Biological Monitoring Program is to collect data on the 146 Covered Species and associated habitats for the purpose of assessing the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan's (MSHCP) effectiveness at meeting conservation objectives and to provide information for adaptive management. The activities described in this work plan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-27 continue the activities commenced in the previous fiscal year and follow the framework outlined in Section 5.3 of the MSHCP.

2 RESPONSIBILITIES

Biological Monitoring Program activities are implemented within the MSHCP Conservation Area on lands that are owned and managed by the various MSHCP participants. The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA) has primary responsibility for funding the Biological Monitoring Program. To ensure consistency in monitoring efforts throughout the Conservation Area, the Biological Monitoring Program is overseen and implemented by a Monitoring Program Administrator. The duties and responsibilities of the Monitoring Program Administrator are described in Volume 1, (Part 2) Section 6.6.6 of the MSHCP.

As per the MSHCP, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW, formerly Department of Fish and Game) was to be the Monitoring Program Administrator for the first eight years of the permit (June 2004 – June 2012). In 2007 the CDFW received a federal State Wildlife Grant to support its role as the Monitoring Program Administrator and develop a long-term monitoring strategy. The grant expired in June 2012 with the primary deliverable being the long-term monitoring strategy document briefly described below. CDFW continues to provide resources to support the Biological Monitoring Program in the form of one dedicated monitoring staff member and vehicle. These resources are expected to continue moving forward.

The Monitoring Program Administrator works closely with the RCA to develop and implement the annual work plan and budget. The annual work plan is carried out by the Santa Ana Watershed Association (SAWA), under contract to the RCA, and CDFW staff.

3 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Biological Monitoring Program is responsible for monitoring the status and trend of the 146 Covered Species and associated vegetation communities and wildlife habitats over a 500,000-acre Conservation Area. Because there was little existing scientifically based data for the majority of Covered Species, the first eight years of the Biological Monitoring Program were devoted to an Initial Inventory and Assessment Phase. The purpose of the Inventory Phase was to determine where Covered Species occur within the Conservation Area, to gather more information on their activity patterns, and to develop efficient protocols for detecting them. The development of protocols was necessary to standardize data collection, to test the reliability of survey methods, to determine feasible and useful monitoring metrics, and to provide a confidence level that unobserved species are truly absent at the survey location, rather than overlooked.

The gradual transition from Inventory Phase to Long-term Monitoring Phase has been underway since 2012. For species with short reporting requirements such as Quino Checkerspot Butterfly (annual) or Coastal California Gnatcatcher (every three years) long-term monitoring is already in place. Multiple surveys for species with short reporting requirements have been conducted, providing the initial data points for population trend assessment. For species with longer reporting requirements such as Los Angeles Pocket Mouse (every eight years) and with species-specific monitoring objectives requiring significant development and testing, the transition from Inventory Phase to Long-term Monitoring Phase is ongoing.

The transition into long-term monitoring involves developing monitoring metrics that are efficient to collect and robust measures of species status and population trend. The baseline monitoring objective for all Covered Species requires at least 75% of listed Core Areas or known locations to be documented as occupied at least once every eight years. As described in the Long-term Monitoring Strategy document developed by the Monitoring Program, monitoring protocols that provide additional information such as relative abundance of populations at occupied locations, reproductive success, or health of observed individuals will be employed whenever possible, to provide the most useful representations of species status.

One of the explicit goals of the Biological Monitoring Program is to develop efficient long-term monitoring protocols that reduce redundancies by collecting information on multiple species where possible. For example, bird species co-occurring in similar habitats (e.g., riparian vegetation) during the breeding season can be detected using the same survey protocols. There will always be some Covered Species that occur in isolated pockets within the Conservation Area or that are difficult to detect using standard survey protocols; for these species a focused survey effort will be required.

The Long-term Monitoring Strategy describes a two-level design that gives priority to assessing the status of Covered Species as stated in the species-specific conservation objectives of the Plan, which emphasize the continued occupancy of MSHCP-defined

Core Areas or other areas of known occurrence. For some species, the objectives require that reproduction and/or minimum densities of individuals within species Core Areas be verified. The second level extends sampling for terrestrial vertebrates to the entire Conservation Area in a cost-efficient manner. The Long-term Monitoring Strategy document also includes chapters describing monitoring goals and objectives, sample design considerations, proper protocol development, data and information management strategies, collaboration and communication with other organizations, and describes the organizational framework of the Monitoring Program.

4 STAFF COMPOSITION

Biological Monitoring Program staff work as a team to coordinate, develop, and implement required monitoring activities for the MSHCP. The Biological Monitoring Program is composed of the following staff positions, which are filled based on availability of funding:

- Monitoring Program Manager (Administrator)
- Biologist Supervisor
- Data Manager
- GIS Analyst (part-time)
- Administrative Assistant (part-time)
- Taxa Leads
- Field Biologists

Currently, the majority of staff are funded by the RCA through a contract with SAWA, a local non-profit organization. In FY 2026-27, one Taxa Lead is currently provided by the CDFW, with endowment funding from Caltrans.

5 SPECIFIC TASKS OF THE BIOLOGICAL MONITORING PROGRAM

5.1 Administration & Coordination

Administering and coordinating the Biological Monitoring Program requires a significant amount of effort. Sufficient staff and resources must be acquired, fieldwork must be scheduled, land access must be coordinated with other agencies, and survey activities must take place. The Monitoring Program Manager, Biologist Supervisor, and Office Assistant carry out the following tasks:

- Develop annual work plans and budgets
- Identify contract needs, write scopes of work, manage contracts
- Advertise, interview, and hire Monitoring Program staff; conduct performance reviews
- Develop and maintain training manuals and training programs for staff

- Direct and schedule staff activities
- Identify field supply and equipment needs
- Identify land access needs and coordinate with the RCA or agencies on access agreements
- Facilitate monthly reserve management/monitoring coordination meeting
- Attend monthly RCA team meetings and other agency meetings
- Give requested presentations to the RCA Board
- Coordinate with Wildlife Agencies (CDFW and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) on survey methodology and monitoring activities
- Develop and maintain Monitoring Program operations manual
- Oversee writing of annual survey reports
- Distribute Monitoring Program data as appropriate

5.2 Biological Surveys

Conducting biological surveys is the most visible part of the Biological Monitoring Program. It is also the component that requires the most staff. Prior to collecting data, all aspects of a survey must be developed. This includes identifying the purpose of the survey, choosing the data collection methods and sampling locations, selecting data analysis methods, and determining what answers the data are expected to provide. The following tasks are carried out by the Monitoring Program Administrator, Biologist Supervisor, GIS Analyst, Data Manager, Taxa Leads, and Field Biologists:

- Develop field survey protocols and sampling designs
- Conduct field surveys using multi-species protocols when possible, and specific species protocols when necessary
- Conduct vegetation condition analyses

5.3 Training

The Biological Monitoring Program is required to have a training program approved by the Wildlife Agencies to ensure consistent data collection, uniform implementation of protocols, animal handling procedures, plant specimen collection, and appropriate experience with Covered Species (MSHCP, Vol. 1, Sec. 7.0). The type of species training needed in any given year is dependent on the types of survey activities planned. Training is provided both by experienced Monitoring Program staff and by qualified outside entities (e.g., U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Safety training (e.g., wilderness first aid, CPR) is provided to all incoming staff, and as often as needed to existing staff to keep American Red Cross certifications up to date. The following training is required of Monitoring Program field staff:

- Endangered species identification and handling if necessary
- Species or habitat-specific protocol training
- Local flora and fauna identification
- Wilderness first aid and CPR training

- Defensive driver training
- Sexual harassment training

5.4 Data Management & Reports

All the data collected by the Biological Monitoring Program must be carefully managed. Prior to field work, data forms are developed, and survey locations are mapped. Field data is collected both on paper datasheets and on digital data collection devices. As data returns from the field, they are entered into a database, checked for accuracy, and certified by the Data Manager. After data are certified, they are proofed by the taxa leads, analyzed and interpreted and a report is written describing survey results. The results of each year's monitoring efforts are provided in the Annual Report submitted to the RCA. The Monitoring Program Administrator, Biologist Supervisor, Data Manager, and GIS Analyst support and oversee the Taxa Leads and Monitoring Program staff in the completion of the following tasks:

- Field form and protocol development
- GIS mapping to support surveys, analysis, and reports
- Database development and maintenance
- Data entry and quality control
- Data analysis using statistics where appropriate
- Annual survey report writing
- Maintaining computer equipment and digital data collection devices

The Biological Monitoring Program has an internal database, developed and managed by the Data Manager. Monitoring Program datasets that have been thoroughly proofed and certified complete by the Data Manager are submitted to CDFW's Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS), as well as to local partnering agencies and Reserve Managers at least once per year.

6 MONITORING EFFORTS IN FY 2026-27

Biological Monitoring Program activities planned for FY 2026-27 are largely based on the requirements of the MSHCP species objectives found in Volume 2. Most species objectives specify time intervals for detecting and reporting on each of the Covered Species in the Conservation Area. When species objectives do not specify a time interval, the status of the Covered Species must be reported at least once every eight years per General Management Measure 7 (Vol. 1 Sec. 5.0). In addition to species objectives, survey priorities are influenced by the quantity and quality of information available for each species (little or poor information triggers more survey effort sooner), whether another agency is already conducting surveys (less effort required by the Biological Monitoring Program), relative ease of gathering information (e.g., Yellow Warbler surveys during Least Bell's Vireo surveys), and the priority of the species to the RCA and Wildlife Agencies (e.g., Burrowing Owl is a high priority species). Funding, staff availability, and the extent of effort required are also considered when determining monitoring activity priorities. Biological Monitoring Program biologists assist ongoing MSHCP Management Program activities that benefit Covered Species (e.g., aquatic invasive species removal/control) to the fullest extent possible.

An overview of the monitoring efforts planned for FY 2026-27, along with a brief rationale for surveys, is provided below. Some surveys (e.g. Vernal Pool) are dependent on current weather conditions and may not be performed if optimal conditions do not exist. Detailed survey methods can be found in the survey protocols available at the Biological Monitoring Program office in Riverside, CA and on the RCA website at https://www.wrc-rca.org/survey_protocols/. The Monitoring Program's ability to complete these tasks is dependent upon continued funding from the RCA and the amount of support provided by the CDFW.

6.1 Birds

Burrowing Owl Burrow Artificial Burrow Monitoring and Pair Counts

The species objectives for Burrowing Owl require the conservation of five Core Areas plus interconnecting linkages, containing a total breeding population of approximately 120 owls with no fewer than five pairs in any one Core Area. Several land managers within the Conservation Area have installed artificial burrows and are managing vegetation for the Burrowing Owl. In FY 2026-27, artificial burrows installed across the Conservation Area will be conducted three times per year as specified by the Western Riverside County MSHCP Burrowing Owl Management Plan. Additional surveys to obtain an accurate count of breeding pairs within Core Areas will be conducted as needed by Monitoring Program biologists with the use of trail cameras in FY 2026-27 to document distribution and reproduction at artificial or natural burrow locations. Biological Monitoring Program biologists will coordinate with Reserve Managers to avoid duplication of effort.

Golden Eagle Survey and Nest Searching

The species objective for the Golden Eagle requires the continued use of and successful reproduction at known nesting locations every eight years. Biological Monitoring Program biologists conducted Golden Eagle surveys in 2017 as part of a regional USGS Golden Eagle survey effort in southern California. However, the objective was not met. In the first part of FY 2026-27, biologists will regularly visit known nest locations during the nesting season, pending staff availability or the securing of funding to hire a contracted biologist.

Riparian Bird Surveys and Nest Monitoring

The species objectives for Least Bell's Vireo, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, and Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo require continued use and successful reproduction within Core Areas once every three years. Surveys in accessible riparian habitat within designated Core Areas began in FY 2025-26 and will continue into FY 2026-27. Nest searching to demonstrate successful reproduction will occur in conjunction with detection surveys. Distribution and reproduction data for all other covered riparian bird species with longer reporting intervals will also be recorded as observed.

Loggerhead Shrike

The species objectives for Loggerhead Shrike require surveys every eight years to demonstrate continued use and successful reproduction within 75% of designated Core Areas. Loggerhead Shrikes were last surveyed in 2018, when surveyors detected shrikes in seven Core Areas (87.5%) with successful reproduction in four (50%) of their Core Areas. Biological Monitoring Program biologists will continue repeat-visit line-transect surveys in suitable Core Area habitat beginning in FY 2026-27 to monitor any detected nests and confirm successful fledging.

Tricolored Blackbird

Due to a precipitous population decline and widespread habitat loss, the Tricolored Blackbird was listed as Threatened by the California Fish and Game Commission in April 2018. The species objectives require documenting continued use and successful reproduction in at least one of five Core Areas every five years. Targeted surveys in 2015 confirmed that the objective is currently being met at a minimum threshold. However, populations remain near historic lows regionally and statewide. Management actions and public outreach activities are underway to enhance breeding and foraging habitat on conserved land and to avoid take of the species on private land. Tricolored Blackbirds concentrate their breeding effort at only a few sites in any given year, making each colony critical and relatively easy to monitor.

Breeding activity during the 2022 season was documented primarily within the Mystic Lake/San Jacinto Wildlife Area Core Area, where multiple nesting colonies were detected and at least one colony successfully fledged young. Detections outside of this area were limited, consistent with recent monitoring results, which reflects the species' highly localized and variable breeding distribution. Continued targeted surveys and coordination with land managers will be necessary to track occupancy and reproductive success at known and potential breeding sites and to inform adaptive management actions intended to support the persistence of Tricolored Blackbirds within the Plan Area.

Turkey Vulture Survey and Nest Monitoring

The species objective for the Turkey Vulture requires continued use of and successful reproduction at two known nesting locations, and any subsequently documented nesting locations, every three years. Targeted surveys were last conducted in 2022. Due to limited staff, surveys were not completed in FY 2025-26; therefore, biologists will regularly visit known nest locations during the FY 2026-27 nesting season.

White-tailed Kite

The species objectives for White-tailed Kite require surveys every three years to demonstrate continued use and successful reproduction within 75% of designated Core Areas. White-tailed Kites were last surveyed in 2023, at which time surveyors detected kites in four Core Areas (40%), but successful reproduction was detected in none (0%). Monitoring Program biologists began repeat-visit line-transect surveys in suitable Core Area habitat in FY 2025-26, and these efforts will continue into FY 2026-27 with monitoring of detected nests to confirm successful fledging.

6.2 Mammals

San Bernardino Kangaroo Rat Occupancy Surveys

San Bernardino kangaroo rat is narrowly distributed within the Plan Area. Species-specific objectives require that at least 75% of the assumed 4,440 acres of suitable habitat be occupied and that at least 20% of the occupied area maintain a density of at least five animals per hectare. In FY 2026-27, occupancy surveys across the same grids will be conducted to determine trends and satisfy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requirements.

Aguanga Kangaroo Rat Occupancy and Habitat Surveys

Aguanga kangaroo rat is endemic to Southern California and narrowly distributed within the Plan Area. The species-specific objectives require that at least 75% of the assumed 5,484 acres of suitable habitat be occupied and that at least 20% of the occupied area have a density of at least five animals per hectare. The FY 2026-27 effort will focus on documenting AKR distribution via live-trapping surveys, with habitat surveys conducted concurrently.

Carnivore Surveys (Moreno Valley Wildlife Undercrossings and Anza Knolls)

Species objectives for Bobcat, Coyote, Long-tailed Weasel, and Mountain Lion require the conservation of contiguous habitat blocks and the maintenance of corridors for dispersal. Surveys to detect the above listed mammals in contiguous habitat blocks, linkages, and movement corridors identified by the MSHCP have been ongoing since 2007, but have not taken place in recent years, with the exception of camera monitoring at the Moreno Valley Wildlife Crossings. Surveys resumed in FY 2025-26, primarily using motion-triggered cameras to record images of target species, and will continue into FY 2026-27. In addition to motion-triggered cameras, biologists will visit habitat blocks, linkages, and corridors to perform area search surveys focusing on signs (discernible tracks and scat) of these carnivore species.

San Diego Black-tailed Jackrabbit

The San Diego Black-tailed Jackrabbit is recognized as a California Species of Special Concern and considered a conservation priority due to habitat loss and fragmentation at the periphery of its range. Within the MSHCP, the jackrabbit is included among upland species for which habitat conservation and long-term persistence are intended to benefit from reserve assembly and targeted management of grassland and shrubland areas. Species objectives require the monitoring of distribution to demonstrate occupancy across a minimum of 75% of known locations across the Plan Area every eight years. While the Jackrabbit has been documented intermittently as incidental detections from small mammal trapping and other monitoring efforts, these occurrences have been low frequency, and there has been no targeted survey since the baseline survey was conducted. For FY 2026-27, targeted surveys will be conducted using transect surveys for density estimation, provided sufficient sample size is obtained.

6.3 Amphibians and Reptiles

Amphibian Stream Surveys (Arroyo Toad)

Species objectives for Arroyo Toad, Mountain Yellow-legged Frog, California Red-legged Frog, and Coast Range Newt require documentation of successful breeding populations within their respective Core Areas at least every five or eight years. California Red-legged Frog was extirpated from the Plan Area, with no individuals observed by Biological Monitoring Program biologists or reliably reported to the Monitoring Program since 2004. The U.S. Geological Survey is currently conducting a translocation study of California Red-legged Frogs to re-introduce them to Santa Rosa Plateau within the Plan Area. Ongoing efforts carried out by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Geological Survey largely account for Mountain Yellow-legged Frog survey needs. Therefore, recent survey priority has been given to streams within Core Areas with appropriate habitat for Arroyo Toad (species objective was not met during Inventory Phase) and Coast Range Newt (objective met in 2020). Biological Monitoring Program surveys for Arroyo Toads began in FY 2023-24 and are expected to continue in FY 2026-27 if conditions (i.e., adequate rainfall) allow. Surveys for stream-dependent amphibians are ongoing when conditions are appropriate, often in conjunction with efforts carried out by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Geological Survey.

Drift-fence Camera Trap Surveys

Traditional drift fence surveys for amphibians and reptiles use pitfall, funnel, and/or box traps to capture live animals. Instead of live trapping methods, the Program will use commercial trail cameras with adjusted focal lengths to capture images of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. Using drift fence surveys with camera traps instead of traditional traps decreases the chances of mortality of animals from exposure, drowning, or predation while in the trap. Additionally, drift fence camera traps reduce survey effort, as cameras only need to be checked once a month, whereas pitfall, funnel, and box traps require daily checks. We plan to use drift fence camera traps in locations within the Plan Area that receive minimal survey effort and for Covered Species that are difficult to observe with traditional survey efforts. For FY 2025-26, we employed two drift fence camera trap arrays, and these arrays will be monitored again in FY 2026-27. Covered Species of interest include San Diego Mountain Kingsnake, San Bernardino Mountain Kingsnake, Northern Red Diamond Rattlesnake, Southern Rubber Boa, Belding's Orange Throated Whiptail, and San Diego Banded Gecko.

Artificial Cover Surveys

Many amphibian and reptile species use microhabitats under natural objects such as rocks and logs to regulate body temperature and prevent desiccation. Using artificial cover objects allows surveyors an increased opportunity for species detection without disturbing natural habitat and help bolster the number of species occurrences in Core Areas for species that have been difficult to detect, such as San Diego Mountain Kingsnake, San Bernardino Mountain Kingsnake, Northern Red Diamond Rattlesnake, and San Diego Banded Gecko. Since the objectives for these species require documentation of the continued use of 75% of their respective Core Areas at least once every eight years, survey efforts will continue using artificial cover for these covered species in FY 2026-27, along with incidental observations from Biological Monitoring Program biologists and partnering agencies. Visual encounter surveys of nearby areas will also be conducted during artificial cover surveys to detect other Covered Species, such as Belding's Orange-Throated Whiptail, Coastal Western Whiptail, Granite Spiny Lizard, Granite Night Lizard, and San Diego Horned Lizard.

Western Pond Turtle Surveys

The species-specific Monitoring Objective for Western Pond Turtles within the MSHCP requires maintaining occupancy within at least 75% of the eight listed Core Areas as measured once every three years. The Core Areas include a two-kilometer (km) buffer of upland habitat and tributaries around the water bodies. To survey for Western Pond Turtles, biologists primarily use baited hoop traps, however, at remote locations or locations too shallow for hoop traps (water < 0.5 m deep) biologists will use visual surveys. We plan to continue surveys in FY 2026-27 to detect Western Pond Turtles within Core Areas and on Conserved Land within the Plan Area.

Western Spadefoot Surveys (Vernal Pool)

The species objectives for Western Spadefoot require maintaining successful reproduction at 75% of conserved breeding locations once every eight years. Biological Monitoring Program surveys for Western Spadefoot are conducted as part of the Vernal Pool monitoring program in conjunction with covered Fairy Shrimp surveys. To help meet species objectives in FY 2026-27, additional surveys for Western Spadefoot will occur outside of vernal pool areas in Core Areas and conserved breeding locations to determine presence and breeding activity. With adequate rainfall, isolated pools, road ruts, and creeks that do not strictly meet the definition of vernal pools will be surveyed to capture additional potential habitat.

Nocturnal Herpetofauna Surveys

Because the San Diego Banded Gecko, San Diego and San Bernardino Mountain Kingsnakes, and Southern Rubber Boa are primarily nocturnal and elusive, surveys conducted during standard business hours are largely unproductive. Implementing nocturnal surveys will optimize detection during peak activity periods and allow for continued monitoring throughout the warmer months when these species shift their behavior to avoid extreme daytime heat. Biologists will employ traditional survey techniques, including visual encounter surveys (VES), road cruising, and systematic searches of natural cover.

6.4 Plants

Rare Plant Surveys

There are 63 covered plant species with species objectives that require conserving and monitoring known populations within the Conservation Area. Surveys for rare plants in FY 2026-27 will continue efforts to update the status of Covered Species on conserved lands. The focal species in any given year are dependent on weather conditions and accessibility of survey sites. Nearly all historic locations of covered plant species within the Conservation Area have been visited in previous years. Thus, rare plant monitoring efforts in FY 2026-27 will focus on recently acquired properties, documenting required localities for species not adequately conserved, and revisiting locations previously determined to be occupied by covered plant species in a long-term monitoring context. Additionally, annual monitoring of Brand's Phacelia, a narrowly endemic Covered Species, will continue in an area along the Santa Ana River near Rancho Jurupa. Population and phenology checks will occur throughout the growing season to ensure population stability and monitor for threats from invasive species (namely stinknet).

Vegetation Community Surveys

The MSHCP requires long-term vegetation monitoring and habitat condition assessment monitoring at a minimum of every eight years to document changes in the distribution, acreage, and condition of Vegetation Communities. In FY 2026-27, Program biologists will implement a hybrid approach combining ground-truthing field surveys with remote sensing satellite data. The primary objective will be to detect type conversion across the major vegetation types spanning the Plan Area, which will inform Conserved Species dynamics and necessary management interventions.

6.5 Invertebrates

Quino Checkerspot Butterfly Surveys

The species objectives for Quino Checkerspot Butterfly (Quino) require annual documentation of its distribution. In FY 2026-27, survey efforts will focus on monitoring locations in designated Core Areas and Satellite Occurrence Complex Areas. Biological Monitoring Program biologists will coordinate with Reserve Managers conducting surveys for Quino to avoid duplication of effort.

Delhi Sands Flower-Loving Fly Surveys

The species objectives for Delhi Sands Flower-Loving Fly (Delhi Fly) require documenting successful reproduction at all three Core Areas identified in the MSHCP annually for the first five years of the permit and then as determined appropriate. There is currently just one Core Area of conserved land within the Plan Area containing suitable habitat for the species. Because Delhi Fly is an endangered species with an extremely limited distribution within the Plan Area, Biological Monitoring Program biologists have surveyed for Delhi Fly within the only accessible Core Area annually during the last 20 years.

Surveys designed to collect data that could be used to calculate density estimates of Delhi Fly were conducted from 2005-2010. In 2011, these efforts were reduced to simply documenting successful reproduction, greatly reducing necessary resources. However, the Land Management Program has been conducting ongoing management actions to control the spread of non-native vegetation within occupied habitat and to create suitable habitat at the edges of the recently occupied area. In order to properly assess the effectiveness of these actions, the more intensive study design allowing for density estimates of Delhi Fly to be calculated was reestablished in FY 2014-15 and will continue in FY 2026-27.

Fairy Shrimp Survey (Vernal Pool)

The species objectives for the three species of fairy shrimp (i.e., Santa Rosa Plateau, Riverside, and Vernal Pool) require the continued use of listed Core Areas at least once every eight years. Fairy shrimp surveys will be conducted in vernal pools within Core Areas if there is adequate rainfall in FY 2026-27.

7 SCHEDULE OF MONITORING EFFORTS FOR FY 2026-27

Below is a tentative calendar of when surveys are planned for FY 2026-27. Some surveys (e.g. Vernal Pool) are dependent on current weather conditions and may not be performed if optimal conditions do not exist. The "biological year" or "survey season" does not match the fiscal year, thus the calendar represents two different survey seasons. The first half of the calendar continues many of the activities commenced in FY 2025-26.

FY 2026/2027													
Program	Survey	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Birds	Burrowing Owl pair count surveys												
	Burrowing Owl burrow monitoring surveys												
	Coastal CA Gnatcatcher surveys and nest monitoring												
	Golden Eagle surveys and nest monitoring												
	Riparian bird surveys and nest monitoring												
	Loggerhead Shrike surveys and nest monitoring												
	Tricolored Blackbird surveys and colony monitoring												
	Turkey Vulture surveys and nest monitoring												
	White-tailed Kite surveys and nest monitoring												
Mammals	Moreno Valley UC Cameras												
	Anza Knolls Camera												
	San Bernardino Kangaroo rat Occupancy Survey												
	San Diego Black-tailed Jackrabbit												
	Aguanga Kangaroo rat Occupancy Survey												
	Aguanga Kangaroo rat Habitat Survey												
Herps	Drift Fence Camera Trap												
	Artificial Cover												
	Western Spadefoot*												
	Southwestern Pond Turtle*												
	Nocturnal herp surveys												
	Arroyo Toad*												
Plants	Rare Plant Surveys												
	Vegetation Communities												
Fairy Shrimp	Vernal Pool*												
Quino	QCB Surveys												
Fly	DSF Surveys												
	DSF Vegetation Surveys												

*Surveys are highly dependent on precipitation rates and may not occur during drought conditions.

8 BIOLOGICAL MONITORING PROGRAM COST ESTIMATE FOR FY 2026-27

The RCA has primary responsibility for funding the MSHCP Biological Monitoring Program. However, the CDFW funds a small portion of the MSHCP Biological Monitoring Program based on the availability of the State's budget. The proposed FY 2026-27 Biological Monitoring Program budget is similar to the previous budget submitted to and approved by the RCA Board of Directors. The majority of funding is allocated to a contract with the Santa Ana Watershed Association for staff.

ALLOCATION	COST
CDFW Funded Labor & Supplies	
Biologist	$210,115
Vehicle Usage (Fuel & Maintenance)	$3,500
Subtotal CDFW Funded Labor & Vehicles	$213,615
SAWA Labor & Supplies	
Routine Biological Monitoring Tasks	$2,324,595
Total Program Cost	$2,538,210
Minus Total CDFW Cost	$213,615
Total RCA Cost	**$ 2,324,595**

9 CONTACT INFO

The FY 2026-27 Work Plan and Cost Estimate was prepared by the Monitoring Program Administrator and was submitted to the Regional Conservation Authority for approval. For more information, contact:

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Coyote


Santa Ana River


Downy Woodpecker

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