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Chapter 5: Multipurpose Open Space Element

Introduction

> *"The open space system and methods for its acquisition, maintenance and operation are calibrated to its many functions: visual relief, natural resource protection, habitat preservation, passive and active recreation, protection from natural hazards, and various combinations of these purposes. This is what is meant by a multi-purpose open space system."*
>
> *– RCIP Vision Statement*

MULTIPURPOSE OPEN SPACE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The County of Riverside's environmental setting is a critical component of its Vision for the future and its quality of life. The Vision speaks to the importance of the many forms of open space in the County: scenic, habitat, recreation, and their importance in defining the edges for our communities. The Vision also addresses the importance of agriculture to the economy and culture of the County.

In response to the RCIP Vision and the California government code, this element addresses protecting and preserving natural resources, agriculture and open space areas, managing mineral resources, preserving and enhancing cultural resources, and providing recreational opportunities for the citizens of Riverside County.

The California Government Code describes the General Plan as a collection of seven mandatory elements that include: conservation, addressing the conservation, development and use of natural resources; and open space, detailing plans and measures for preserving open-space for natural resources, the managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, public health and safety, and the identification of agricultural land. The policy direction required in these two elements is provided in this single Multipurpose Open Space Element.

This element categorizes issues and policies into those that seek to ***conserve***, or manage the use of, resources and those that seek to ***preserve*** resources for the purpose of sustaining their stocks in perpetuity. Additionally, the resource conservation section of the element is subdivided into ***renewable resources*** and ***non-renewable resources***. Renewable resources, such as forests, are those that can reproduce, grow, and ultimately perish. Non-renewable resources as those that have a finite stock relative to human consumption over time, and that are not alive in the sense of having an ability to grow. Mineral resources, for example, are non-renewable.

Conserve-to protect from loss or harm by using carefully or sparingly.
Preserve-To keep in perfect or unaltered condition; maintain unchanged.
Reserve-A reservation of land or an amount of mineral, fossil fuel or other resource known to exist in a particular location.

SETTING

It is appropriate that the County of Riverside boasts of a "remarkable environmental setting" in the summary statement of its Vision. Within its roughly 7,400 square miles, the County incorporates a wide range of natural features, including mountain ranges, desert areas, riparian areas and rivers, vernal pools, and oak woodlands and forests.
The Colorado Desert bio-region encompasses the southeastern portion of Riverside County, extending from the Colorado River west to the Joshua Tree

National Park, and from San Bernardino County to San Diego County. This bio-region is rich in agriculture, though it is considered semi-arid. The Colorado Desert is the western extension of the Sonoran desert, which is of much lower elevation than the northern Mojave Desert. Common habitat includes sandy desert, scrub, palm oasis, and desert wash. Summers are hot and dry, and winters are cool and moist.

A portion of north-central Riverside County is part of the Mojave bio-region. This is one of the largest bio-regions in the state, encompassing seven counties in California. The Mojave bio-region is the western extension of a vast desert that covers southern Nevada, the southwestern tip of Utah, and 25% of southern California. The climate is hot and dry in the summer, and winters are cool to cold depending upon elevation. Palm oases, streams and springs are water sources for much of the wildlife. Some of the common habitats are the desert wash Joshua Tree Scrub, palm oasis, willow riparian forest, and open sandy dunes.

The South Coast bio-region covers most of western Riverside County. This bio-region is home to the towering San Gorgonio Peak at 11,500 feet, the watersheds of the San Jacinto and Santa Ana Rivers, the Cleveland and Angeles National Forests, and federal wilderness and wildlife areas. Some of the following habitats are found here: chaparral, juniper-pinyon woodland, grasslands, hardwood forests, southern oak, and yellow pine. The climate is considered mild year-round, with hot dry summers inducing wildfires and wet winters that can cause mudslides.

Further, the plant and animal life of the County is diverse, and numerous animal species and narrow endemic plants (species with very limited geographic ranges) found in the County have special status under the Federal Endangered Species Act and/or the California Endangered Species Act. In response to this, the County has participated in two Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Planning processes, one covering western Riverside County, and a second in the Coachella Valley. Implications for County land use and open space planning are briefly described in this element.

Additional information on the physical setting of Riverside County can be found in the Existing Setting Report, which is part of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the General Plan.

The County of Riverside is in a unique position in southern California in that it has experienced, and is poised to continue experiencing in the next 20 years, enormous population growth. At the same time, much of the County's land area remains undeveloped. Unincorporated lands with land use designations under the umbrella of the County's Open Space and Agriculture Foundation Components (refer to the Land Use Element for a description of the Foundation Component system) total roughly 80% of the County's land area. Rural designations that include mountainous and desert areas add about 13% of the County's lands to that total. Therefore, the vast majority of the County of Riverside is affected by policies contained within this element of the General Plan.

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A sample of the range of Riverside County's natural resources must include: California's largest inland sea, the 360-square mile Salton Sea in the southern most portion of the Coachella Valley; the Joshua Tree National Park; portions of the San Bernardino and Cleveland National Forests; the Santa Ana, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountain Ranges, among others; and portions of the Colorado, Santa Ana and San Jacinto Rivers.

"The true nature lover learns that nature is worth knowing in all her aspects, that the only deserts there are [,are] the deserts of the soul. The best pleasures cost us nothing."

– From a handwritten note by Riverside Naturalist Edmund Jaeger circa 1921

Conservation

Policies within the Conservation section of this element seek to guide decision-making related to renewable and non-renewable County resources. These types of resources require conservation—a conscious effort to consume less of scarce resources so that their stock can be sustained for the future. Conservation of natural resources applies to water, agricultural resources, forests, vegetation, mineral, and energy resources. By conserving resources we prevent degradation of the environment through pollution or loss of productive capacity within our environment.

RENEWABLE RESOURCES

Population growth and development continually require the use of natural resources, including those that are renewable. Following are Vision Statements that represent the guiding principles established by Riverside County to conserve and protect renewable resources for economic, cultural, and aesthetic purposes.

> *"We acknowledge the inter-relatedness of the economic, environmental, cultural and institutional realms of our community life as we continue to plan and build our communities in a manner that enables us to achieve mutually beneficial results."*

> *"We acknowledge and respect the long heritage of economic endeavors that have shaped portions of our environment through mining, agriculture, renewable energy development and similar enterprises and continue to take their value into consideration in shaping our environmental management."*

Additionally, the Vision addresses the need to protect Riverside County's environmental sustainability for future generations:

> *"We are beneficiaries of the past and we value that. We seek the same for our heirs. We declare that they should have an expectation that they will inherit communities and a natural environment that offer them a reasonable range of choices."*

Water Resources

Riverside County incorporates four major watershed areas in which river systems, numerous lakes and reservoirs, and natural drainage areas are located. Water resources are mapped in Figure OS-1. The County's supply of water is limited by its arid climate, agricultural practices, projected population growth and its associated demand and development, and the dependence on low quality imported water. Further, the availability of imported surface water has been reduced due to changing regulations, despite an ever-increasing water demand.

In some areas within Riverside County, contamination from natural or manufactured sources has reduced groundwater quality such that its use requires treatment. Management of the amount of water available (local and imported)

and its quality, is an important response to the gap between supply and demand in Riverside County.

Policies in this section seek to protect and enhance the water resources in the county. These policies address broad water planning issues, and the relationship of land use decisions to water issues.

Water Supply

The economy of the developed portions of western Riverside County—the inland valley—is sustained primarily by water imported from northern California and the Colorado River, and secondarily by production of local groundwater. The eastern portion of the County—the majority of which is desert—also relies on water from the Colorado River, northern California, and local groundwater. This portion of the County is largely undeveloped, with uncertain increases in the water resource available to meet increases in water demand being a major factor that might constrain future development.

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The Metropolitan Water District, which serves water agencies in the western part of the County, projects at least a doubling of water demand between 2000 and 2020. This agrees with the Department of Water Resources projections for the same period.

Riverside County's water supply is uncertain for two reasons: recent water apportionments from northern California have been reduced as part of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, as well as decreased supplies to California from the Colorado River. Additionally, most of the County's sources of water are currently at capacity. Water storage to meet peak demand, or a two-day to one-day supply, is provided by many local water agencies within Riverside County. However, long-term storage of large quantities of water is provided only in the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) and California Department of Water Resources (DWR) facilities. Total storage capacity in the existing reservoir system is 871,000 acre-feet (a.f.). Three of these storage facilities are located in Riverside County: Lake Mathews, Lake Skinner, and Lake Perris. Together, these storage facilities have a total of 342,300 a.f. of storage capacity. Diamond Valley Lake triples this capacity with an additional 800,000 a.f. of storage, bringing the total storage capacity available within Riverside County to 1,142,300 a.f. Even though the creation of Diamond Valley Lake has allowed for three times the current storage of water, there is no increase in the total amount of water available to the County that can be identified. This increase in water storage will benefit the whole South Coast region, which includes other significant jurisdictional water users such as San Diego County, as well as Riverside County. Currently, approximately 3/8ths of existing storage capacity may be used to meet seasonal demand. The remaining 5/8ths is reserved for emergency need such as severe droughts and/or use when a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, makes it impossible to meet demand through usual supply facilities.

An acre-foot of water is the volume of water represented by a 1-foot depth of water over a one-acre area (43,560 cubic feet of water or approximately 326,000 gallons), and is enough to supply the water needs of 2 families for 1 year.

Projected 2020 water use and population levels indicate an expected water shortage for the two hydrologic regions that comprise Riverside County: the South Coast and Colorado River regions. Though these regions include most of southern California, and not just Riverside County, they are each representative of the types of supply and demand within the County. The two regions are defined as follows:

- South Coast: Basins draining into the Pacific Ocean from the southeastern boundary of Rincon Creek Basin in western Ventura County to the Mexican border.

Figure OS- 1 Water Resources

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- Colorado River: Basins south and east of the South Coast and South Lahontan regions; areas that drain into the Colorado River, the Salton Sea, and other closed basins north of the Mexican border.

The DWR produces a California Water Plan every five years that not only includes a statewide water budget but also regional watershed water budgets. These water budgets are based on California Department of Finance population projections, and indicate clearly that demand for water will exceed supply in 2020 whether or not a drought condition exists at that time. Most of the State's regions, except for the North Coast and San Francisco Bay Regions, experience average-year and drought-year shortages now, and are forecasted to experience increased shortages in 2020. The largest average-year shortages are forecasted for the South Coast Region, which heavily relies on imported water. Future average-year shortages in the South Coast Region reflect forecasted population growth plus lower Colorado River supplies as California reduces its use of Colorado River water to the State's basic apportionment. Following are the descriptions of the two hydrologic regions as well as regional water budgets (Tables OS-1 & OS-2):

Table OS-1
South Coast Region Water Budget with Existing Facilities and Programs

	1995		2020	
Water Use	**Average**	**Drought**	**Average**	**Drought**
Urban	4,340	4,382	5,519	5,612
Agricultural	784	820	462	484
Environmental	100	82	104	86
Total	**5,224**	**5,283**	**6,084**	**6,181**
Supplies				
Surface Water	3,839	3,196	3,625	3,130
Groundwater	1,177	1,371	1,243	1,462
Recycled and Desalted	207	207	273	273
Total	**5,224**	**4,775**	**5,141**	**4,865**
Shortage	***0***	***508***	***944***	***1,317***

Note: Figures in thousands of acre-feet of water.

Table OS-2

Colorado River Region Water Budget with Existing Facilities and Programs

	1995		2020	
Water Use	**Average**	**Drought**	**Average**	**Drought**
Urban	418	418	740	740
Agricultural	4,118	4,118	3,583	3,583
Environmental	39	38	44	43
Total	**4,575**	**4,574**	**4,367**	**4,366**
Supplies				
Surface Water	4,154	4,128	3,920	3,909
Groundwater	337	337	285	284
Recycled and Desalted	15	15	15	15
Total	**4,506**	**4,479**	**4,221**	**4,208**
Shortage	***69***	***95***	***147***	***158***

Note: Figures in thousands of acre-feet of water.

Of the two Hydrologic Units of the State, the Colorado River Region is of particular concern because it encompasses the Coachella Valley in the West Basin and the desert in the East Basin (Refer to Figure OS-1, Water Resources). Irrigation needs in the Coachella Valley are met almost exclusively by water imported from the Colorado River. Historical extraction of groundwater in the Coachella Valley has caused overdraft. Currently, an extensive groundwater recharge project is being undertaken by the Coachella Valley Water District that recharges Colorado River Water into spreading basins. Within the East Basin, irrigation and domestic water is provided by the Colorado River with only approximately 1% groundwater use and little direct reclamation. Agricultural runoff and some domestic wastewater do get returned to the Colorado River. Therefore, the water source at the southern end of the watershed is actually a mixture of Colorado River water, agricultural runoff, and reclaimed water.

The following policies are intended to address the County's water supply issues:

Policies:

OS 1.1 Balance consideration of water supply requirements between urban, agricultural, and environmental needs so that sufficient supply is available to meet each of these different demands. (AI 3)

OS 1.2 Develop a repository for the collection of County water resource information. (AI 11, 55)

OS 1.3 Provide active leadership in the regional coordination of water resource management and sustainability efforts affecting Riverside County and continue to monitor and participate in, as appropriate, regional activities, addressing water resources, groundwater, and water quality, such as a Groundwater Management Plan, to prevent overdraft caused by population growth. (AI 4, 55, 58)

The General Plan policy and implementation item reference system:

Identifies which element contains the Policy, in this case the Land Use Element, and the sequential number.

LU 1.3

Neighborhood Commercial uses should be located near residential uses.

(AI 1 and AI 4)

Reference to the relevant Action Items contained in the implementation Program

Water Conservation

In order to help bridge the projected gap between water supply and demand in Riverside County in 2020, water conservation must be a priority. Following are water conservation policies that seek to manage existing supplies, by promoting the efficient use of water to the maximum extent possible, so that they can be maintained for future use.

Policies:

OS 2.1 Encourage the installation of water-conserving systems such as dry wells and graywater systems, where feasible, especially in new developments. The installation of cisterns or infiltrators shall also be encouraged to capture rainwater from roofs for irrigation in the dry season and flood control during heavy storms. (AI 57, 62)

OS 2.2 Where feasible, decrease stormwater runoff by reducing pavement in development areas, and by design practices such as permeable parking bays and porous parking lots with bermed storage areas for rainwater detention. (AI 57, 62)

OS 2.3 Encourage native, drought-resistant landscape planting. (AI 3, 57, 62)

OS 2.4 Support and engage in educational outreach programs with other agencies that promote water conservation and wide-spread use of water-saving technologies. (AI 58)

OS 2.5 Encourage continued agricultural water conservation and recommend the following practices where appropriate and feasible: lining canals, recovering tail water at the end of irrigated fields, and appropriate scheduling of water deliveries. (AI 57)

A watershed is the entire region drained by a waterway that drains into a lake or reservoir. It is the total area above a given point on a stream that contributes water to the flow at that point, and the topographic dividing line from which surface streams flow in two different directions. Clearly, watersheds are not just water. A single watershed may include combinations of forests, glaciers, deserts, and/or grasslands.

Watershed Management

Four distinct watershed areas are incorporated in Riverside County and are mapped in Figure OS-1. These are the Santa Ana River Basin, which drains into the Pacific Ocean; San Diego Basin, the West Basin of the Colorado River, and the East Basin of the Colorado River. The East Basin of the Colorado River drains into the Colorado River and the West Basin of the Colorado River drains primarily into the Salton Sea Trough. The Santa Ana River Basin drains into the Pacific Ocean in Orange County while the San Diego Basin drains into the Pacific Ocean in San Diego County. These large watersheds are further divided into smaller sections by internal surface water drainage areas and groundwater basins.

Watershed management relates to sustaining watersheds at an acceptable level of quality, contributing to resource quality, and maintaining groundwater supplies.

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The Watershed Approach
According to the U.S. EPA, effective watershed management results in a focus on priority problems; community building wherein stakeholder partners collaborate to seek local solutions; cost savings for regulators, and predictability for those regulated.

Water Quality

Water quality problems that have occurred in Riverside County have related to inadequate subsurface sewage disposal, waste disposal management of the Santa Ana River, agriculturally-related problems such as citricultural runoff in the western County and increasing salinity of the desert groundwater basins, sediment buildup of water bodies from construction-related erosion, lake water quality problems, and pollution due to urban stormwater system runoff. Regional Water Quality Control Boards for Regions 7, 8, and 9 provide state-level water quality policy for the County. Further, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination system mandates Best Management Practices in order to effectively minimize the adverse effects of pollution and protect water quality. The following policies are intended to provide local guidance for the protection and maintenance of water quality in Riverside County.

Policies:

OS 3.1 Encourage innovative and creative techniques for wastewater treatment, including the use of local water treatment plants.

OS 3.2 Encourage wastewater treatment innovations in rural areas.

OS 3.3 Minimize pollutant discharge into storm drainage systems and natural drainage and aquifers. (AI 3)

Groundwater Recharge

Groundwater resources in the County are defined by their quality as well as quantity. Most groundwater basins within Riverside County store local and imported water for later use to meet seasonal and drought-year demands. Under these groundwater recharge programs, groundwater is artificially replenished in wet years with surplus imported water. Water is then extracted during drought years or during emergency situations. Groundwater recharge that may also involve the recharge of reclaimed water, enhances the region's ability to meet water demand during years of short supply, and increases overall local supply reliability. In order to facilitate groundwater recharge, the following policies may apply:

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Water banking is a key factor for meeting future water supply needs in southern California. Historically, groundwater extractions have exceeded natural recharge in this region, resulting in declining water levels and water quality. Using groundwater basins for water banking during wet periods will help alleviate southern California's water supply problems.

Policies:

OS 4.1 Support efforts to create additional water storage where needed, in cooperation with federal, state, and local water authorities. Additionally, support and/or engage in water banking in conjunction with these agencies where appropriate, as needed. (AI 56, 57)

OS 4.2 Participate in the development, implementation, and maintenance of a program to recharge the aquifers underlying the County. The program shall make use of flood and other waters to offset existing and future groundwater pumping, except where:

a. groundwater quality would be reduced;
b. available groundwater aquifers are full; or
c. rising water tables threaten the stability of existing structures. (AI 56, 57)

OS 4.3 Ensure that adequate aquifer water recharge areas are preserved and protected. (AI 3, 56, 57)

OS 4.4 Incorporate natural drainage systems into developments where appropriate and feasible. (AI 3)

OS 4.5 Retain storm water at or near the site of generation for percolation into the groundwater to conserve it for future uses and to mitigate adjacent flooding. (AI 57)

OS 4.6 Use natural approaches to managing streams, to the maximum extent possible, where groundwater recharge is likely to occur. (AI 57)

OS 4.7 Offer incentives to landowners whose property is prohibited from development due to its retention as a natural ground water recharge area. These incentives shall be provided to encourage the preservation of natural water courses without creating undue hardship on the owner of properties, and might include density transfer mechanisms. (AI 9)

Also see the Flood and Inundation Hazard Abatement section of the Safety Element.

Floodplains are comprised of the floodway and the floodway fringe. They are the low, flat, periodically flooded lands adjacent to rivers, lakes and oceans inundated by 100-year flood.

The floodway is the channel of a river or other watercourse and the adjacent land areas that must be reserved in order to discharge the 100-year flood without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation more than one foot.

The floodway fringe is that portion of the floodplain between the floodway and the limits of the existing 100-year floodplain.

★ *The County of Riverside has adopted the USGS "blue line stream" overlay as its major form of mapping the watercourses in Riverside County (see figure OS-1, the Land Use Element, and Area Plan Maps). Though this overlay is not necessarily the most accurate description of a water course or of the actual running water within the County, it is a general indicator of existing or potential moving water resources, floodways and floodplains.*

Floodplain and Riparian Area Management

Floodplains are subject to geomorphic (land-shaping) and hydrologic (water flow) processes. The watercourse and its floodway are usually the focus of construction and control; while fertile, flat and "reclaimed" floodplain lands are usually the focal points for other activities such as agriculture, commerce, and residential development. These areas form a complex physical and biological system that not only supports a variety of natural resources, but also provides natural flood and erosion control. In addition, the floodplain represents a natural filtering system, with water percolating back into the ground and replenishing groundwater. When a watercourse is divorced from its floodplain with levees and other flood control facilities, then natural, built-in benefits are either lost, altered, or significantly reduced.

The conventional assumption that flooding can be completely eliminated has meant not only an unrealistic reliance on manufactured flood protection, but also the development of a flood control system that squeezes rivers into artificially narrow channels, adds steeply sloped levees (devoid of riparian vegetation), and eliminates historic floodplains, all in the name of reclamation, flood protection and urban growth. Unfortunately, this highlights the fact that floods have been viewed for far too long as everything except part of the natural life cycle of rivers and floodplains. Flooding is part of the dynamic nature of healthy rivers and ecosystems. High flows and flood waters are needed to cleanse the channels of accumulated debris, build stream banks, import gravels for aquatic life, thin riparian forests and create riparian habitat. The open space of floodplains adjacent to rivers and streams helps store and slowly release floodwaters, thus reducing flood flow and peaks and their subsequent impacts during small and frequent flood events.

Further, riparian habitat within floodplains is of great value to resident and migratory animal species, as it provides corridors and linkages to and from the biotic regions of the County. The numerous essential habitat elements provided by the remaining riparian corridors of Riverside County make them a significant contributor to wildlife habitat throughout the County. The intent of the County is to sustain "living" riparian habitats to the maximum extent possible.

Also see the Flood and Inundation Hazard Abatement section of the Safety Element.

***Development** is defined as the division of a parcel of land into two or more parcels; the construction, reconstruction, conversion, structural alteration, relocation or enlargement of any structure that would require a discretionary permit from the County; any mining, excavation, landfill or land disturbance, and any use or extension of the use of land that would require a discretionary permit from the County. Development does not include non-motorized trails, agriculture or other uses for which a discretionary permit is not required. For purposes of this definition, the term, discretionary permit, shall have the same meaning as that set forth in the California Environmental Quality Act and Guidelines.*

***Watercourse** is defined as any natural stream, river, creek, waterway, gully, ravine or wash in which water flows in a definite direction or course, either continuously or intermittently, and has a definite channel, bed and banks. A watercourse also includes any vegetation along the banks as well as any adjacent areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions including swamps, marshes, and bogs.*

The following set of policies address floodways, the floodplain fringe, and riparian areas in the County.

Policies:

OS 5.1 Substantially alter floodways or implement other channelization only as a "last resort," and limit the alteration to:
a. that necessary for the protection of public health and safety only after all other options are exhausted;
b. essential public service projects where no other feasible construction method or alternative project location exists; or
c. projects where the primary function is improvement of fish and wildlife habitat. (AI 25, 59, 60)

OS 5.2 If substantial modification to a floodway is proposed, design it to reduce adverse environmental effects to the maximum extent feasible, considering the following factors:
a. stream scour;
b. erosion protection and sedimentation;
c. wildlife habitat and linkages;
d. groundwater recharge capability;
e. adjacent property; and
f. design (a natural effect, examples could include soft riparian bottoms and gentle bank slopes, wide and shallow floodways, minimization of visible use of concrete, and landscaping with native plants to the maximum extent possible).
A site specific hydrologic study may be required. (AI 25, 59, 60)

OS 5.3 Based upon site, specific study, all development shall be set back from the floodway boundary a distance adequate to address the following issues:
a. public safety;
b. erosion;
c. riparian or wetland buffer;
d. wildlife movement corridor or linkage; and
e. slopes. (AI 59, 60)

OS 5.4 Consider designating floodway setbacks for greenways, trails, and recreation opportunities on a case-by-case basis. (AI 25, 59, 60)

OS 5.5 New development shall preserve and enhance existing native riparian habitat and prevent obstruction of natural watercourses. Incentives shall be utilized to the maximum extent possible. (AI 25, 60)

OS 5.6 Identify and, to the maximum extent possible, conserve remaining upland habitat areas adjacent to wetland and riparian areas that are critical to the feeding, hibernation, or nesting of wildlife species associated with these wetland and riparian areas. (AI 60, 61)

OS 5.7 Where land is prohibited from development due to its retention as natural floodways, floodplains and water courses, incentives should be available to the owner of the land including density transfer and other mechanisms as may be adopted. These incentives will be provided for the purpose of encouraging the preservation of natural

water courses without creating undue hardship on the owner of properties following these policies. (AI 60)

Wetlands

Wetlands in Riverside County might typically occur in low-lying areas that receive fresh water at the edges of lakes, ponds, streams, and rivers. Wetlands provide habitat for a wide variety of plants, invertebrates, fish, and larger animals, including many rare, threatened, or endangered species. The plants and animals found in wetlands include both those that are able to live on dry land or in the water and those that can live only in a wet environment. Wetlands in Riverside County may include vernal pools, palm oases or desert washes.

The term "riparian area" is defined as a wetland which occurs along a watercourse. "Upland habitat" is elevated above lowlands occurring along or within a river, stream, lake etc. Upland habitat is that which does not meet the criteria of federal-and-state jurisdictional wetlands.

Policies:

OS 6.1 During the development review process, ensure compliance with the Clean Water Act's Section 404 in terms of wetlands mitigation policies and policies concerning fill material in jurisdictional wetlands. (AI 3)

OS 6.2 Preserve buffer zones around wetlands where feasible and biologically appropriate. (AI 61)

OS 6.3 Consider wetlands for use as natural water treatment areas that will result in improvement of water quality. (AI 56)

Wetlands are the link between water and land, or the collective term for areas between dry land and bodies of water. In wetlands, the surface of the water, called the water table, is usually at, above, or just below the land surface for enough time to restrict the growth of plants to those that are adapted to wet conditions and promote the development of soils characteristic of a wet environment. Wetlands also act as natural filters, thereby enhancing overall water quality and protecting sources of drinking water.

A wetland buffer is land that provides a buffer area of an appropriate size to protect the environmental and functional habitat values of the wetland, which are integrally important in supporting the full range of the wetland and adjacent biological community. In wetland buffer areas, permitted uses can include access paths, improvements necessary to protect adjacent wetlands, and all uses permitted in wetland areas.

Agricultural Resources

Agriculture is given special recognition as a Foundation Component of the General Plan because of its high socioeconomic value to Riverside County. The two major conservation rationales are to maintain the viability of the agricultural industry, a critical component of the County's economy, and to preserve the resource represented by farmland—its productive soils and its secondary role as an open space amenity. Soil classifications and the Williamson Act are described below because of their importance in defining agricultural resources.

Soil Classifications

The Countywide Agricultural Resources Map (see Figure OS-2) identifies several classifications of important agricultural lands, as established by state and federal agencies. The four mapped classifications of important farmland are based on criteria for soil characteristics, climatic conditions, and water supply. The criteria include soil type, moisture content, water supply, soil temperature, acidity, salinity, depth, drainage, water table, flooding, slope, erodibility, permeability, rock content, rooting depth, growing season, crop type and value, and other economic factors. The four classifications of important farmlands shown on the Agricultural Resources Map are described as follows.

Prime Farmlands

Prime Farmland is land best suited for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is available for these uses: cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land, or other land, but not urban land or water. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained

high yields of crops when treated and managed (including water management) according to modern farming methods.

"Long a major foundation of our economy and our culture, agriculture remains a thriving part of Riverside County. While we have lost some agriculture to other forms of development, other lands have been converted to agriculture. We remain a major agricultural force in California and in the global agricultural market."

– RCIP Vision Statement

Statewide Important Farmlands

Farmland of Statewide Importance is land other than Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and biological characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is available for these uses (the land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land or other land, but not urban land or water).

Unique Farmlands

Unique Farmland is land other than Prime and Statewide Important Farmland, that is currently used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality of a specific crop when treated and managed according to modern farming methods. Examples of such economically important crops are citrus, olives, and avocados.

Local Important Farmlands

These farmlands are not covered by the above categories but are of locally significant economic importance. They include the following:

- Lands with soils that would be classified as Prime or Statewide Important Farmlands but lack available irrigation water.
- Lands planted in 1980 or 1981 in dry land grain crops such as barley, oats, and wheat.
- Lands producing major crops for Riverside County but that are not listed as Unique Farmland crops. Such crops are permanent pasture (irrigated), summer squash, okra, eggplant, radishes, and watermelon.
- Dairylands including corrals, pasture, milking facilities, hay and manure storage areas if accompanied with permanent pasture or hayland of 10 acres or more.
- Lands identified by the County with Agriculture land use designations or contracts.
- Lands planted with jojoba that are under cultivation and are of producing age.

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act, better known as the Williamson Act, has been the state's premier agricultural land protection program since its enactment in 1965. This program allows owners of agricultural land to have their properties assessed for tax purposes on the basis of agricultural production rather than current market value. Participation in this program is voluntary, and requires 100 contiguous acres of agricultural land under one or more ownerships to file an application for agricultural preserve status with the Riverside County Planning Department.

Figure OS- 2 Agricultural Resources

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After an agricultural preserve has been established, the land within the preserve is automatically restricted to agricultural and compatible uses. In order to have land within an agricultural preserve assessed on the basis of agricultural production rather than full market value, the property owner(s) and the County of Riverside must enter into a Land Conservation Contract. Either party may file a Notice of Non-Renewal, which will cause the contract to expire in 10 years. After the contract has expired, a landowner may apply to remove that property from an agricultural preserve. The landowner also has the option of petitioning the Board of Supervisors for the cancellation of the contract. Cancellation of the contract involves payment of substantial cancellation fees. Land use decisions related to the use of agricultural lands after cancellation of Williamson Act contracts are subject to the provisions of the Certainty System described in Chapter 1 of this General Plan.

Since 1998, another option within the Williamson Act Program is the rescission process to cancel a Williamson Act contract and simultaneously dedicate a permanent agricultural conservation easement on other land.

This section focuses on policies for the protection of agricultural lands as historical, cultural, and scenic resources. These are the valuable qualities that economic transactions do not account for; therefore, they require special protection.

Also refer to the Agriculture section of the Land Use Element.

Policies:

OS 7.1 Work with state and federal agencies to periodically update the Agricultural Resources map to reflect current conditions. (AI 11)

OS 7.2 In cooperation with individual farmers, farming organizations, and farmland conservation organizations, the County shall employ a variety of agricultural land conservation programs to improve the viability of farms and ranches and thereby ensure the long-term conservation of viable agricultural operations within Riverside County. The County shall seek out available funding for farmland conservation. Examples of programs which may be employed include: land trusts; conservation easements (under certain circumstances, these may also provide Federal and estate tax benefits to farmers); dedication incentives; Land Conservation Contracts; Farmland Security Act contracts; the Agricultural Land Stewardship Program Fund; agricultural education programs; transfer and purchase of development rights; providing adequate incentives (e.g. clustering and density bonuses) to encourage conservation of productive agricultural land in the County's Incentive Program; and providing various resource incentives to landowners (e.g. establish a reliable and/or less costly supply of irrigation water.) (AI 78)

The County of Riverside shall establish a Farmland Protection and Stewardship Committee and the Board of Supervisors shall appoint its members. The Committee shall include members of the farming community as well as other individuals and organizations committed to farmland protections and stewardship. The Committee shall develop a strategy to preserve agricultural land within Riverside County and shall identify and prioritize agricultural lands for conservation. This strategy shall not only address the preservation of

agricultural land but shall also promote sustainable agriculture within Riverside County. In developing its strategy, the Committee shall consider an array of proven techniques and, where necessary, adapt these techniques to address the unique conditions faced by the farming community within Riverside County. County staff shall assist the Committee in accomplishing its task. County Departments, that may be called upon to assist the Committee, include, but are not limited to the following: the Agricultural Commissioner, Planning Department, Assessor's Office and County Counsel. In developing its strategy, the Committee shall consult government and private organizations with expertise in farmland protection. These organizations may include, but are not limited to, the following: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; State Department of Conservation and its Division of Land Resource Protection; University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program; the University of California Cooperative Extension; The Nature Conservancy; American Farmland Trust; The Conservation Fund; the Trust for Public Land; and the Land Trust Alliance.

The Committee shall, from time to time, recommend to the Board of Supervisors the adoption of policies and/or regulation that it finds will further the goals of the farmland protection and stewardship. The Committee shall also advise the Board of Supervisors regarding proposed policies that curb urban sprawl and the accompanying conversion of agricultural land to urban development, and that support and sustain continued agriculture. Planning policies that may benefit farmland conservation and fall within the purview of the Committee for review include measures to promote efficient development in and around existing communities including clustering, incentive programs, transfer of development rights, and other planning tools.

OS 7.3 Encourage conservation of productive agricultural lands and preservation of prime agricultural lands. (AI 3, 78)

OS 7.4 Encourage landowners to participate in programs that reduce soil erosion, improve soil quality, and address issues that relate to pest management. To this end, the County shall promote coordination between the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Resource Conservation Districts, UC Cooperative Extension, and other agencies and organizations.

OS 7.5 Encourage the combination of agriculture with other compatible open space uses in order to provide an economic advantage to agriculture. Allow by right, in areas designated Agriculture, activities related to the production of food and fiber, and support uses incidental and secondary to the on-site agricultural operation. (AI 1)

Forest Resources

The montane forest is the most complex bio-region in North America, though they can be found all over the world. Parts of Riverside County are within the Sierran Montane bio-region. These bio-regions are characterized by winter snows and summer fires, conifer species, and a great diversity of animal species.

Both of the major forests in Riverside County, the Cleveland and San Bernardino National Forests, are part of the Sierran montane range (see Figure OS-3 Parks, Forests and Recreation Areas). These forests occur on all of the higher mountain ranges of the Pacific Coast region, from southern Oregon to northern Baja California. At lower elevations, these forests commonly border mixed evergreen forest, oak woodland, and chaparral.

Policies in this section seek to protect forest resources in the Cleveland and San Bernardino National Forests. This can be accomplished through careful management of the forest ecosystem, protection of forest resources, and discouragement of the development of land uses that conflict with valuable conservation of forest land.

Policies:

OS 8.1 Cooperate with federal and state agencies to achieve the sustainable conservation of forest land as a means of providing open space and protecting natural resources and habitat lands included within the MSHCPs. (AI 3)

OS 8.2 Support conservation programs to reforest privately held forest lands.

Vegetation

"Native habitat for plants and animals endemic to this area that make up such important part of our natural heritage now have interconnected spaces in a number of locations that allow these natural communities to prosper and be sustained."

– RCIP Vision Statement

The vegetation/flora of Riverside County is exceedingly diverse in its size, shape and form, yet various species share a common unity in their adaptation to climate and environmental conditions. Further, habitat areas are strongly characterized by flora, in addition to the fauna/animal life, that thrives within the vegetation. Although ecological conditions may fluctuate and affect various plant communities, these natural changes occur gradually, with most species adapting by changing their physical form and structure. Over thousands of years, both the landscape and the plants upon it have slowly evolved together, so that those plant species with the best record of survival in a specific setting have usually become the most prominent identifying characteristics of that setting.

As development continues in the County, the natural succession and evolution of vegetation is altered. This disturbance of vegetation results in changes that are often drastic in wildlife habitats, microclimates, water absorption and purification, soil erosion, fires, and aesthetic quality. The management of vegetation will assure the continued viability of habitat communities within the County for present and future generations. See Figure OS-4, Western Riverside County Vegetation, for a map of those vegetation types in the western portion of the County.

Native vegetation must be managed in order to maintain the ecological diversity of the County. The policies that follow are intended to protect superior examples of native vegetation resources in conjunction with permitted uses.

Policies:

OS 9.1 Update the Vegetation Map for Western Riverside County in consultation with the California Department of Fish and Game, the Natural Diversity Data Base, the United States Forest Service, and other knowledgeable agencies. The County shall also provide these agencies with data as needed. (AI 11)

OS 9.2 Expand Vegetation mapping to include the eastern portion of the County of Riverside. (AI 11)

OS 9.3 Maintain and conserve superior examples of native trees, natural vegetation, stands of established trees, and other features for ecosystem, aesthetic, and water conservation purposes. (AI 3, 79)

OS 9.4 Conserve the oak tree resources in the County. (AI 3, 78)

OS 9.5 Encourage research and education on the effects of smog and other forms of pollution on human health and on natural vegetation.

Renewable Energy

Conservation policies in this element direct the protection of the County's physical resources as well as its energy resources, including renewable energy. This category of energy resources includes wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass resources. Although the current use of these resources is not wide-spread, they have considerable potential. Renewable energy can be developed as a substitute for oil, natural gas, and other limited energy supplies used for electricity generation, and to reduce consumption of these supplies. Also refer to the Energy Conservation policies in the Energy Resources section of this element.

Wind Energy

Wind energy generation installation, known also as Wind Energy Conversion Systems (WECS), are a well established industry in the San Gorgonio Pass and Coachella Valley areas of the County. General regulatory issues to be considered in relation to wind energy are aesthetics, safety, noise, air navigation interferences, land use, wildlife and general ecology, slopes and erosion, PM_{10} and dust control, wind access and equity.

Policies:

OS 10.1 Provide for orderly and efficient wind energy development in a manner that maximizes beneficial uses of the wind resource and minimizes detrimental effects to the residents and the environment of the County.

OS 10.2 Continue the County's Wind Implementation Monitoring Program (WIMP) in order to study the evolution of wind energy technology, identify means to solve environmental and community impacts, and provide for an ability to respond with changes in the County's regulatory structure.(AI 72)

Figure OS- 3 Parks, Forests, and Recreation Areas

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Figure OS- 4 Western Riverside County Vegetation

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Solar Energy

Solar radiation in the form of sunlight can be utilized for energy production in two ways. Active solar systems involve the use of mechanical devices to convert solar energy to heat or electricity. Passive solar systems utilize natural heating and cooling from the sun through building orientation and building design techniques.

Policies:

OS 11.1 Enforce the state Solar Shade Control Act, which promotes all feasible means of energy conservation and all feasible uses of alternative energy supply sources. (AI 62, 65, 66, 70)

OS 11.2 Support and encourage voluntary efforts to provide active and passive solar access opportunities in new developments. (AI 63, 64)

OS 11.3 Permit and encourage the use of passive solar devices and other state-of-the-art energy resources. (AI 62, 63, 64)

Geothermal Resources

"Geothermal resources" mean the natural heat of the earth, the energy, in whatever form, below the surface of the earth present in, resulting from, or created by, or that may be extracted from, such natural heat, and all minerals in solution or other products obtained from naturally heated fluids, brines, associated gases, and steam, in whatever form, found below the surface of the earth, but excluding oil, hydrocarbon gas or other hydrocarbon substances.

Geothermal resources can be used for electricity production as geothermal steam can be used to run turbines. The exploitation of these resources, however, is frequently accompanied by detrimental impacts on the environment. Among these are the emission of toxic gases and chemical substances that result in the degradation of air quality, the threat of water pollution, damage to living organisms, and hazards to public health. Additional problems arise from the heavily industrial character of geothermal operations for electrical generation; the frequent occurrence of exceptional natural, scenic, and archaeological values in geothermal resource areas; and the adverse effects that geothermal fluid removal may have on nearby hot springs and other natural thermal features. Currently there is no active geothermal energy production in the County, though geothermal resources are known to exist in the County.

Policies:

OS 12.1 Allow for the development of non-electrical, direct heat uses of geothermal heat and fluids for space, agricultural, and industrial heating in situations and localities where naturally occurring hydrothermal features will not be degraded. (AI 71)

The following policies direct the use of present technologies and the extraction and conversion of energy from geothermal fluid and steam reservoirs:

OS 12.2 Base all geothermal decisions on appropriate data relating to anticipated environmental, cultural, aesthetic, archaeological and social impacts.

OS 12.3 Weigh the benefits of geothermal as a viable energy source against the protection of hot springs, geysers, thermal pools, and other thermal features for their ecological, educational, and recreational values.

OS 12.4 Permit geothermal heat utilization for space heating in buildings.

Biomass Resources

Biomass resources refer to organic materials, either wastes, residues, or specific crops, that can be converted to an energy fuel to replace conventional sources or directly used in combustion processes. Due to agricultural production in the County, resources exist that enable this technology to be more widely employed.

Policies:

OS 13.1 Encourage economic biomass conversion under sensible environmental controls. (AI 71)

NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCES

The non-renewable resources discussed in this element are mineral resources and energy resources. The Mineral Resources section of this element addresses those resources that are classified under the State Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (SMARA). The Energy Resources section addresses petroleum resources as well as energy conservation.

SMARA mandates the classification of valuable lands in order to protect mineral resources within the State of California subject to urban expansion or other irreversible actions. SMARA also allows the state to designate lands containing mineral deposits of regional or statewide significance. The California Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG) has identified a number of significant aggregate resource areas throughout Riverside County.

Mineral Resources

In addition to agricultural production, mineral extraction is an important component of Riverside County's economy. The County has extensive deposits of clay, limestone, iron, sand, and aggregates. Classification of land within California takes place according to a priority list that was established by the State Mining and Geology Board (SMGB) in 1982, or when the SMGB is petitioned to classify a specific area. The SMGB has also established Mineral Resources Zones (MRZ) to designate lands that contain mineral deposits. The State of California has also designated Aggregate Mineral Resource areas within the County. These mineral resource zones are mapped in Figure OS-5.

The classifications used by the state to define MRZs are as follows:

- **MRZ-1**: Areas where the available geologic information indicates no significant mineral deposits or a minimal likelihood of significant mineral deposits.
- **MRZ-2a**: Areas where the available geologic information indicates that there are significant mineral deposits.
- **MRZ-2b**: Areas where the available geologic information indicates that there is a likelihood of significant mineral deposits.
- **MRZ-3a**: Areas where the available geologic information indicates that mineral deposits are likely to exist, however, the significance of the deposit is undetermined.
- **MRZ-4**: Areas where there is not enough information available to determine the presence or absence of mineral deposits.

Figure OS- 5 Mineral Resource Areas

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Mineral deposits in the County are important to many industries, including construction, transportation and chemical processing. The value of mineral deposits within the County is enhanced by their close proximity to urban areas. However, these mineral deposits are endangered by the same urbanization that enhances their value.

The non-renewable characteristic of mineral deposits necessitates the careful and efficient development of mineral resources, in order to prevent the unnecessary waste of these deposits due to careless exploitation and uncontrolled urbanization. Management of these mineral resources will protect not only future development of mineral deposit areas, but will also guide the exploitation of mineral deposits so that adverse impacts caused by mineral extraction will be reduced or eliminated.

Policies in this section seek to conserve areas identified as containing significant mineral deposits and oil and gas resources for potential future use, while promoting the reasonable, safe, and orderly operation of mining and extraction activities within areas designated for such use, where environmental, aesthetic, and adjacent land use compatibility impacts can be adequately mitigated.

Also refer to the Open Space-Mineral Resource Land Use Designation policies in the Land Use Element.

Policies:

OS 14.1 Require that the operation and reclamation of surface mines be consistent with the State Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) and County Development Code provisions.

OS 14.2 Restrict incompatible land uses within the impact area of existing or potential surface mining areas.

OS 14.3 Restrict land uses incompatible with mineral resource recovery within areas designated Open Space-Mineral Resources. (AI 11)

OS 14.4 Impose conditions as necessary on mining operations to minimize or eliminate the potential adverse impact of mining operations on surrounding properties, and environmental resources.

OS 14.5 Require that new non-mining land uses adjacent to existing mining operations be designed to provide a buffer between the new development and the mining operations. The buffer distance shall be based on an evaluation of noise, aesthetics, drainage, operating conditions, biological resources, topography, lighting, traffic, operating hours, and air quality.

OS 14.6 Accept California Land Conservation (Williamson Act) contracts on land identified by the state as containing significant mineral deposits subject to the use and acreage limitations established by the County.

Energy Resources

Energy resources provide the power necessary to maintain the quality of life enjoyed by most Riverside County residents. Many of the energy resources used within the County are non-renewable. Electricity and natural gas are the primary sources of household energy, while fossil fuels are the primary source of energy

Oil and gas seeps are natural springs where liquid and gaseous hydrocarbons (hydrogen-carbon compounds) leak out of the ground.

for most modes of transportation. Energy conservation and the substitution of renewable resources should be encouraged if these resources are to be preserved for the County's future generations.

Petroleum Resources

Riverside County's petroleum resources are deposited in the form of oil and gas seeps. The State Division of Oil and Gas does not report significant or active petroleum extraction in the County. Should extraction activities be undertaken in the future, the following policy provides direction for the siting of oil and gas facilities.

Policies:

OS 15.1 Enforce California Division of Oil and Gas policies that direct the siting of oil and gas facilities in urban and non-urban areas.

OS 15.2 Development of renewable resources should be encouraged.

Energy Conservation

Conservation is an important component of using energy resources in an efficient manner. Lowering energy demand by conserving both renewable and non-renewable energy is critical. Sensible energy conservation and design practices can also mitigate the "heat island" effects of urban development that increase local temperatures and result in increased energy demand.

In conjunction with the tactics proposed by the Southern California Association of Government's Regional Air Quality Management Plan, the following policies address energy conservation in Riverside County.

Policies:

OS 16.1 Continue to implement Title 24 of the State Building Code. Establish mechanisms and incentives to encourage architects and builders to exceed the energy efficiency standards of Title 24. (AI 62)

OS 16.2 Specify energy efficient materials and systems, including shade design technologies, for County buildings. (AI 68, 70)

OS 16.3 Implement public transportation systems that utilize alternative fuels when possible, as well as associated urban design measures that support alternatives to private automobile use.

OS 16.4 Undertake proper maintenance of County physical facilities to ensure that optimum energy conservation is achieved.

OS 16.5 Utilize federal, state, and utility company programs that encourage energy conservation. (AI 63, 64)

OS 16.6 Assist public buildings and institutions in converting asphalt to greenspace to address the heat island effect.

OS 16.7 Promote purchasing of energy-efficient equipment based on a fair return on investment, and use energy-savings estimates as one basis for purchasing decisions for major energy-using devices. (AI 68, 69)

OS 16.8 Promote coordination of new public facilities with mass transit service and other alternative transportation services, including bicycles, and design structures to enhance mass transit, bicycle, and pedestrian use.

OS 16.9 Encourage increased use of passive, solar design and day-lighting in existing and new structures. (AI 62, 63, 64, 65, 70)

OS 16.10 Encourage installation and use of cogenerating systems where they are cost-effective and appropriate. (AI 62, 70)

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Preservation

The RCIP Vision directs that,

> *"Preserved multi-purpose open space is viewed as a critical part of the County's system of public facilities and services required to improve the existing quality of life and accommodate new development. Strategies and incentives for voluntary preservation on private land are an integral part of the County's policy/regulatory system and are referred to nationwide as model approaches."*

The following set of policies seeks to preserve natural resources that are sensitive, rare, threatened, endangered and irreplaceable. These resources deserve special protection in order to ensure their continued viability and to improve the quality of life for citizens of Riverside County. Open space preservation can serve many purposes, including the preservation and enhancement of environmental resources for both ecological and recreational purposes, as well as the proper management of environmental hazards.

MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLANS

HCP-Habitat Conservation Plan
NEPA-National Environmental Policy Act
NCCP-Natural Communities Conservation Plan
CEQA-California Environmental Quality Act
CESA-California Endangered Species Act
FESA-Federal Endangered Species Act

As urbanization has spread into Riverside County, community development has not only involved the local land use planning process, but coordination with state and federal wildlife agencies in order to obtain "take permits" for impacts to threatened and endangered species. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game, hereafter "Wildlife Agencies", have authority to regulate the "take" of threatened and endangered species. The process of issuing "take permits," however, has resulted in costly delays for development interests in addition to the assemblage of piecemeal reserve systems addressing only the needs of single species. Mitigation lands have been preserved, but these have generally been small, unconnected habitat areas in which it is more difficult to sustain wildlife mobility, genetic flow, or ecosystem health. Instead, large interconnected natural areas are preferred in order to assure that the County's entire ecosystem has the potential to remain healthy.

To address the issues of wildlife health and sustainability, the County has participated in or directed the development of two Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plans (MSHCP's). These proposed MSHCP's are stake-holder driven, comprehensive, and multi-jurisdictional, and focus on the conservation of both species and associated habitats, in order to address biological and ecological diversity conservation needs and provide mitigation for the impacts of development in Riverside County. These plans are two of several large multi jurisdictional habitat planning efforts within southern California which have been developed under the overall goal of maintaining biological diversity within a rapidly urbanizing region. The Western Riverside County MSHCP has been adopted by the County and, as of October 7, 2003, awaits approval by other jurisdictions and the Wildlife Agencies. The Coachella Valley Association of Governments' MSHCP is under preparation.

The proposed MSHCPs will allow the County and other local jurisdictions the ability to manage local land use decisions and maintain economic development flexibility, while providing a coordinated reserve system and implementation program that will facilitate the preservation of biological diversity as well as maintain the region's quality of life. Should these MSHCP's not be adopted, it will be necessary to assess development related impacts and develop associated mitigation measures on a project by project basis.

Coachella Valley Association of Governments MSHCP Program Description

The Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) is preparing, on behalf of its member agencies, a proposed Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan that is intended to cover 28 species of plants and animals in the Coachella Valley. Currently, this plan proposes to conserve between 200,000 and 250,000 acres of privately owned land through general plan land use designations, zoning/development standards and an aggressive acquisition program, for a total conservation area of between 700,000 to 750,000 acres.

Relationship to Area Plans

The Pass, Eastern Coachella Valley, Western Coachella Valley and REMAP Area Plans would be affected by the CVAG MSHCP, if it is adopted. These area plans contain maps and general information about the proposed MSHCP. Consult the area plans for further information.

Western Riverside County MSHCP Program Description

"In western Riverside, a high density of rare species coincides with one of the most swiftly urbanizing areas of the country,"

– Scott Ferguson, Trust for Public Land Senior Project Manager

The proposed Western Riverside County MSHCP encompasses approximately 1.26 million acres (approximately 1,997 square miles). This proposed MSHCP includes unincorporated and incorporated County land (excluding Indian land) west of the crest of the San Jacinto Mountains to the Orange County line. The planis the largest HCP ever attempted and covers multiple species and multiple habitats within multiple jurisdictions. The proposed MSHCP covers a diverse landscape from urban cities to undeveloped foothills and montane forests. In addition to the presence of multiple habitats, the plan stretches across the Santa Ana Mountains, Riverside Lowlands, San Jacinto Foothills, San Jacinto Mountains, Aqua Tibia Mountains, Desert Transition and San Bernardino Mountain bio-regions.

This proposed MSHCP is intended to serve as a Habitat Conservation Plan pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, as well as a Natural Communities Conservation Plan under the NCCP Act of 1991. If adopted, it will be used to allow incidental "take" of plant and animal species identified within the proposed MSHCP. The purpose of the proposed MSHCP is for the Wildlife Agencies to grant "take authorization" for otherwise lawful actions that may incidentally take or harm individuals of a species outside of preserve areas, in exchange for supporting assembly of a coordinated reserve system. Conservation and management duties, as well as implementation assurances, will be provided by the County and other signatory agencies or jurisdictions identified as permittees through a corresponding Implementation Agreement.

A Stakeholder Driven Process

To complement the conservation and management responsibilities assigned to the County, a property owner-initiated habitat evaluation and acquisition negotiation process has also been developed for the proposed Western Riverside County MSHCP. The Habitat Evaluation and Acquisition Negotiation Process applies to property which maybe needed for inclusion in the MSHCP Reserve or subjected to other MSHCP criteria. Under the proposed incentive-based MSHCP program, the County may obtain interests in property needed to implement the MSHCP over time. If it is determined that all or a portion of a property is needed for the MSHCP Reserve, various incentives or monetary compensation may be available to the property owner in exchange for the conveyance of property. Incentives are intended to provide a form of compensation to property owners who convey their property. As a property interest is obtained, it will become part of the MSHCP Reserve.

Relationship to Area Plans

Each area plan that is affected by the proposed Western Riverside County MSHCP contains maps that identify the areas potentially affected by the MSHCP, if it is adopted, and identification of plant and animal species to be covered by the plan. Consult the area plans for further information.

The Western Riverside County MSHCP affects the following area plans:

- *Eastvale*
- *Elsinore*
- *Harvest Valley/Winchester*
- *Highgrove*
- *Jurupa*
- *Lake Mathews/Woodcrest Lakeview/Nuevo*
- *Mead Valley*
- *Reche Canyon/Badlands*
- *REMAP*
- *San Jacinto Valley*
- *Southwest (SWAP)*
- *Sun City/Menifee Valley*
- *Temescal Canyon*
- *The Pass*

Policies:

OS 17.1 Enforce the provisions of applicable MSHCP's, if adopted, when conducting review of development applications. (AI 10)

OS 17.2 Enforce the provisions of applicable MSHCP's, if adopted when developing transportation or other infrastructure projects that have been designated as covered activities in the applicable MSHCP. (AI 10)

OS 17.3 Enforce the provisions of applicable MSHCP's, if adopted when conducting review of possible general plan amendments and/or zoning changes. (AI 10)

OS 17.4 Require the preparation of biological reports in compliance with Riverside County Planning Department Biological Report Guidelines for development related uses that require discretionary approval to assess the impacts of such development and provide mitigation for impacts to biological resources until such time as the CVAG MSHCP and/or Western Riverside County MSHCP are adopted or should one or both MSHCP's not be adopted.

OS 17.5 Establish baseline ratios for mitigating the impacts of development related uses to rare, threatened and endangered species and their associated habitats to be used until such time as the CVAG MSHCP and/or Western Riverside County MSHCP are adopted or should one or both MSHCP's not be adopted.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS

The County's multipurpose open space system will be created and maintained using several different techniques, all related to preservation of significant environmental resources. By preserving multi-species habitat; by creating and maintaining active and passive parks, recreation areas and trail systems; by conserving natural and scenic resources; and avoiding natural hazard areas; a complete system of open space will be achieved that ensures the County's "remarkable environmental setting" remains intact for future generations of citizens to enjoy. This section identifies policies for the preservation of environmentally sensitive land within the County of Riverside, including, but not limited to, the land to be preserved through the MSHCPs.

Also refer to the Open Space, Habitat and Natural Resource Protection policies in the Land Use Element and the policies in the Safety Element that seek to preserve environmentally sensitive lands subject to natural hazards.

Policies:

OS 18.1 Preserve multi-species habitat resources in the County of Riverside through the enforcement of the provisions of applicable MSHCP's, if adopted. (AI 10)

OS 18.2 Provide incentives to landowners that will encourage the protection of significant resources in the County beyond the preservation and/or conservation required to mitigate project impacts. (AI 9)

The California Historic Resources Information System (CHRIS) contains information from surveys of archaeological and cultural resources as well as the built environments. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) coordinates a statewide network of Information Centers that manage and make available survey information for environmental review, planning, and research needs.

"A major thrust of the multipurpose open space system is the preservation of components of the ecosystem and landscape that embody the historic character and habitat of the County, even though some areas have been impacted by man-made changes."

– RCIP Vision Statement

CULTURAL AND PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Cultural resources consist of places (historic and prehistoric archaeological sites), structures or objects that provide evidence of past human activity. They are important for scientific, historic, and/or religious reasons to cultures, communities, groups or individuals. The cultural history of Riverside County is divided chronologically into three periods: prehistory, ethnohistory and history. Native American cultures predominate in the prehistorical and ethnohistorical periods of County history. The Relative Archaeological Sensitivity of Diverse Landscapes in the County has been mapped and is shown in Figure OS-6. Three classifications have been used: high, undetermined, and low. Properties with high potential include those listed or determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The historical period includes settlement from 1774, with the expedition of Juan Bautista de Anza into the region, to 45 years before the present as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). An inventory of Historical Resources in the County has been completed and mapped, as shown in Figure OS-7.

Riverside County has also been inventoried for geologic formations known to potentially contain paleontological resources. Paleontological resources are the fossilized biotic remains of ancient environments. They are valued for the information they yield about the history of the earth and its past ecological settings. Lands with low, undetermined or high potential for finding paleontological resources are mapped on Figure OS-8, the Paleontological Sensitivity Resources map. This map is used in the environmental assessment of development proposals and the determination of required impact mitigation. Riverside County has an extensive record of fossil life starting in Jurassic time, 150 million years ago.

Figure OS- 6 Relative Archaeological Sensitivity of Diverse Landscapes

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Figure OS- 7 Historical Resources

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Figure OS- 8 Paleontological Sensitivity

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Policies follow that are intended to ensure the preservation of cultural, historical, archaeological, paleontological, geological, and educational resources in the County.

Policies:

OS 19.1 Make available programs that educate students about the rich natural and manmade environment of the County, and offer them to local schools. (AI 3, 75, 76)

The following policies address cultural resources:

OS 19.2 Review all proposed development for the possibility of archaeological sensitivity.

OS 19.3 Employ procedures to protect the confidentiality and prevent inappropriate public exposure of sensitive archaeological resources when soliciting the assistance of public and volunteer organizations.

OS 19.4 Require a Native American Statement as part of the environmental review process on development projects with identified cultural resources.

The following policies pertain to historical resources:

OS 19.5 Transmit significant development proposals to the History Division of the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District for evaluation in relation to the destruction/preservation of potential historical sites. Prior to approval of any development proposal, feasible mitigation shall be incorporated into the design of the project and its conditions of approval.

OS 19.6 Enforce the Historic Building Code so that historical buildings can be preserved and used without posing a hazard to public safety.

OS 19.7 When possible, allocate resources and/or tax credits to prioritize retrofit of County historic structures, which are irreplaceable.

The following policies provide direction for paleontological resources:

OS 19.8 Whenever existing information indicates that a site proposed for development may contain biological, paleontological, or other scientific resources, a report shall be filed stating the extent and potential significance of the resources that may exist within the proposed development and appropriate measures through which the impacts of development may be mitigated.

OS 19.9 This policy requires that when existing information indicates that a site proposed for development may contain paleontological resources, a paleontologist shall monitor site grading activities, with the authority to halt grading to collect uncovered paleontological resources, curate any resources collected with an appropriate repository, and file a report with the Planning Department

★

Three million years ago, the white sand beach at the edge of the Pacific Ocean was located near the present Interstate 15/State Route 91 interchange. The Ice Ages left fossils of giant sloths, elephants, camels, and bison that were preyed upon by giant bear, American lion and sabercats. Their remains lie waiting a few feet below the surface to be unearthed by construction excavation.

documenting any paleontological resources that are found during the course of site grading.

OS 19.10 Transmit significant development applications subject to CEQA to the San Bernardino County Museum for review, comment, and/or preparation of recommended conditions of approval with regard to paleontological resources.

OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND RECREATION

"We value the unusually rich and diverse natural environment with which we are blessed and are committed to maintaining sufficient areas of natural open space to afford the human experience of natural environments as well as sustaining the permanent viability of the unique landforms and ecosystems that define this environment."

– RCIP Vision Statement

Riverside County incorporates a wide range of open space, parks and recreational areas, including Joshua Tree National Park, and major state parks such as Anza-Borrego, the Salton Sea State Recreation Area, and Chino Hills State Park. A variety of County parks also serve residents and visitors in the western portion of the County, as well as in the desert, mountain and Colorado River regions. Riverside County maintains 35 Regional Parks, encompassing roughly 23,317 acres. Other local parks fall under the jurisdiction of County Recreation and Park Districts and serve the following areas: the Beaumont-Cherry Valley area; the Coachella Valley; the Jurupa area; the Valleywide area incorporating the San Jacinto Valley, the Winchester area, the Menifee Valley, and the Anza Valley. Parks and Recreation Areas in Riverside County have been mapped earlier in this element on Figure OS-3.

Open space and recreation areas offer residents and visitors myriad recreational opportunities while providing a valuable buffer between urbanized areas. The protection and preservation of open space areas from urbanization is an increasingly important issue for the County.

The following policies relate to the preservation, use and development of a comprehensive open space system consisting of passive open space areas, and parks and recreation areas that have recreational, ecological and scenic value.

Policies:

The following policies pertain to open space:

OS 20.1 Preserve and maintain open space that protects County environmental resources and maximizes public health and safety in areas where significant environmental hazards and resources exist.

OS 20.2 Prevent unnecessary extension of public facilities, services, and utilities, for urban uses, into Open Space-Conservation designated areas. (AI 74)

The following policies pertain to parks and recreation:

OS 20.3 Discourage the absorption of dedicated park lands by non-recreational uses, public or private. Where absorption is unavoidable, replace park lands that are absorbed by other uses with similar or improved facilities and programs. (AI 74)

OS 20.4 Provide for the needs of all people in the system of County recreation sites and facilities, regardless of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, physical capabilities or age.

OS 20.5 Require that development of recreation facilities occurs concurrent with other development in an area. (AI 3)

OS 20.6 Require new development to provide implementation strategies for the funding of both active and passive parks and recreational sites. (AI 3)

SCENIC RESOURCES

Scenic resources are an important quality of life component for residents of the County. In general, scenic resources include areas that are visible to the general public and considered visually attractive. In addition to scenic corridors, described below, scenic resources include natural landmarks and prominent or unusual features of the landscape. For example, the Santa Rosa National Monument includes mountains or other natural features with high scenic value. Scenic backdrops include hillsides and ridges that rise above urban or rural areas or highways. Scenic vistas are points, accessible to the general public, that provide a view of the countryside. Following are policies to protect these resources and ensure that future development enhances them.

Policies:

OS 21.1 Identify and conserve the skylines, view corridors, and outstanding scenic vistas within Riverside County. (AI 79)

SCENIC CORRIDORS

Many roadway corridors in Riverside County traverse its scenic resources. Enhancing aesthetic experiences for residents and visitors to the County promotes tourism, which is important to the County's overall economic future. Enhancement and preservation of the County's scenic resources will require careful application of scenic highway standards along Official Scenic Routes.

Policies that seek to protect and maintain resources in corridors along scenic highways are incorporated into this section. State and county eligible and designated scenic highways are included and mapped in the Circulation Element of the General Plan, as well as in the Circulation section of those area plans where scenic corridors are located

Also refer to the Scenic Corridor Sections of the Circulation and Land Use Elements.

Policies:

OS 22.1 Design developments within designated scenic highway corridors to balance the objectives of maintaining scenic resources with accommodating compatible land uses. (AI 3)

OS 22.2 Study potential scenic highway corridors for possible inclusion in the Caltrans Scenic Highways Plan.

OS 22.3 Encourage joint efforts among federal, state, and County agencies, and citizen groups to ensure compatible development within scenic corridors.

OS 22.4 Impose conditions on development within scenic highway corridors requiring dedication of scenic easements consistent with the Scenic Highways Plan, when it is necessary to preserve unique or special visual features. (AI 3)

OS 22.5 Utilize contour grading and slope rounding to gradually transition graded road slopes into a natural configuration consistent with the topography of the areas within scenic highway corridors. (AI 3)