SANTA CRUZ COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Public Meeting - January 21, 2021

Grace Blakeslee, Regional Transportation Commission
Lisa Lurie, Resource Conservation District
1. BACKGROUND
2. RCIS PROGRAM
3. Santa Cruz County RCIS
4. ASSESSING MITIGATION NEEDS
5. RCIS IMPLEMENTATION
6. PUBLIC & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
7. Q & A
• RTC
  o Transportation Planning Agency
  o Early Mitigation/Advanced Mitigation
  o Measure D – Transportation Projects

• RCD
  o Integrated Watershed Restoration Program - Technical Advisory Committee
  o Conservation Planning
RCIS Program Goals

- Established under AB 2087
- Achieve more strategic, effective conservation
- Protect vulnerable and declining species
- Enhance resiliency to climate change
- Provide efficient mitigation delivery
- Be consistent with NCCPs, HCPs, Banks
- Conserve working lands
- Enhance public lands
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Conservation Assessment (RCA)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Assess conservation opportunities at an ecoregional scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Develop a voluntary conservation strategy to inform conservation investments and advance mitigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mitigation Credit Agreement (MCA)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Provide an advance mitigation tool for use on public and private lands, to offset CESA, CEQA, LSA, &amp; other impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Regional Conservation Investment Strategy Isn’t….

• An effort to re-invent the wheel
• An effort to collect new data
• A new set of laws or regulations governing local land-use
• A new set of land-use restrictions imposed by CDFW and/or other wildlife agencies.
• A permit enabling development or restoration projects that supplants existing state, federal or local environmental regulations
RCIS Components

• Environmental Setting

• Ecological assessment of conservation elements
  • Pressures/stressors (e.g. climate change, invasives)
  • Goals and objectives

• Identify conservation & enhancement actions

• Consistent with NCCP, HCP, RCA, and recovery plans

• Consider existing and foreseeable land uses including major infrastructure

• Opportunities for working lands conservation
Key Approaches

- **Science Based**: uses best available information
- **Integrative**: builds on prior processes and plans for the region
- **Seamless**: links strategies for Santa Clara and Monterey
- **Locally Developed**: developed by experts in the region
- **Accessible**: contents are widely accessible and usable
- **Efficient**: developed using existing content from approved RCIS
- **Strategic**: prioritizes actions of greatest benefit (protection and restoration/enhancement)
- **Implementable**: identifies actions of high direct conservation value
- **Forward Looking**: links to current state initiatives
Santa Cruz County RCIS will be UNIQUE because...

Building on tons of existing data and rich history of conservation planning:

- 9+ Watershed Plans,
- Integrated Watershed Restoration Program
- Conservation Blueprint
- Transportation Advance Mitigation MOU,
- SC Co Steelhead and Coho Conservation Strategy,
- Conceptual Area Protection Plans,
- City of Santa Cruz’s draft HCPs,
- County Steelhead Monitoring Program,
- Depth and breadth of local biological knowledge
Santa Cruz County RCIS will be UNIQUE because...

Linked to:
- Santa Clara RCIS (completed)
- Monterey RCIS (in process)

Greater focus on ecological restoration/uplift on already protected lands vs simply acquiring more land
Greater focus on natural communities
RCIS Participants
Schedule Overview

1. Characterize Existing Conditions and Identify Conservation Elements (September 2020-February 2021)
3. Develop Admin Draft RCIS (August 2021-February 2022)
4. Revise RCIS Public Workshop and Review (March-June 2022)
5. Finalize RCIS (August 2022)
Where we are now

- **Characterize Existing Conditions and Identify Conservation Elements**
  (September 2020 - February 2021)

- **Assess Pressures and Stressors**
  Draft Conservation Goals, Objectives and Actions
  (April 2021 - July 2021)

- **Develop Admin Draft RCIS**
  (August - February 2022)

- **Revise RCIS**
  Public Workshop and Review
  (March - June 2022)

- **Finalize RCIS**
  (August 2022)
Environmental Setting
Environmental Setting

- Set the stage for conservation planning
- Synthesize existing information (data, plans, etc.)
- Available for review and feedback
  - SCCRCIS Website [https://sccrtc.org/funding-planning/environmental/rcis/](https://sccrtc.org/funding-planning/environmental/rcis/)
Environmental Setting Report

- Overview
- Land Use
- Existing Conservation Plans
- Natural Environment
  - Ecoregions
  - Aquatic Systems
  - Natural Communities
- Conservation Elements
  - Selection approach and criteria
  - Lists and brief descriptions
Existing Plans

Local
- Conservation Blueprint for Santa Cruz County
- Sandhills Conservation and Management Plan
- Conceptual Area Protection Plans (CAPPS)
  - Santa Cruz Mountains Redwoods, Santa Cruz Mountains Linkages, Sandhills, Long-Toed Salamander, Watsonville Wetlands
- Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies
- Watershed Enhancement Plans
  - Aptos Creek, Arana Gulch, San Lorenzo River, San Vicente Creek, Pinto Lake, Lower Pajaro River, Soquel Creek, Scotts Creek, Watsonville Sloughs

HCPs (no NCCPs)
- Draft City of Santa Cruz Aquatic HCP
- Draft City of Santa Cruz Terrestrial HCP
- Interim Programmatic HCP for Mount Hermon June beetle and Ben Lomond spineflower
- Integrated Regional Water Management Plan
- PG&E Vegetation Management HCP
- Project specific HCPs
  - 13 Mount Hermon June beetle
  - 4 California red-legged frog
  - 1 Santa Cruz tarplant
  - 1 Santa Cruz long-toed salamander

Regional/Statewide
- State Wildlife Action Plan
- Conservation Lands Network (2.0)
- 20 Recovery Plans for Federally listed species
Spatial Data Themes

- Vegetation and Landcover
- Soils
- Aquatic Resources
- Working Lands
- Existing Infrastructure

- Planned Land Use
- Climate change
- Sea-level Rise
- Invasive Species

- Occurrences
- Critical Habitat
- Range/Distribution
- Habitat Connectivity

- Ecoregions
- Protected Areas
- Land Use
- Mitigation Areas
- New Infrastructure

- Planned Land Use
- Climate change
- Sea-level Rise
- Invasive Species
- Fish Passage Barriers

Existing Conditions
Planning

Focal Species and other Conservation Elements
Pressures and Stressors
Existing Protected Lands
Natural Communities and other Land Cover
Conservation Elements
RCIS Conservation Element Definitions

• **Focal Species**: Sensitive species that are identified and analyzed in an RCIS and will benefit from conservation actions and habitat enhancement actions set forth in the RCIS.

• **Other Conservation Elements**: other elements needing conservation within the RCIS area, and that would help achieve a comprehensive, cohesive, and connected regional conservation outcome. Examples
  – major and unique natural communities
  – Biodiversity
  – habitat connectivity
  – ecosystem functions
  – water resources

• **Non-Focal Species**: Species associated with a focal species or other conservation element and will benefit from conservation actions and habitat enhancement actions set forth in the RCIS.
Conservation Elements

- Focal Species
- Other Conservation Elements
- Non-Focal Species
  - Aquatic Systems
  - Cobenefits
  - Unique Plant Communities
  - Other Bio or Eco Conservation Values
SCC RCIS
Approach to Conservation Elements

• Create an **efficient but comprehensive** conservation strategy to ‘cover’ all of the conservation values
  – Account for **all endemic species**
  – Select regional species for which Santa Cruz County is important and where **actions can be impactful**
  – Avoid redundancy/ **focus planning**
  – Anticipate **mitigation needs** and ensure mitigation species eligible for MCAs
  – Make ties to other RCISs, where appropriate

• **Iterative analysis of all three categories collectively**
  – Look for ‘gaps’
  – Not conducive to simple scoring system
In a nutshell:
RCIS is regional – opportunity to move well beyond species focused conservation and think about the entire landscape, the natural communities within the landscape AND the ecological processes that sustain the landscape.

Conservation of species is wholly dependent on the integrity of natural communities and the ecological processes that sustain them.

Consider using OCEs as the lens through which to develop meaningful and enduring conservation.
Conservation Elements – Santa Cruz County RCIS approach

Other Conservation Elements

- Focal, Focal Species
- Non-Focal Species
- Native Plant Communities
- Ecosystem Processes & Climate Resilience
- Cobenefits
- Other Ecological Conservation Values
**OCE Focus**

**RCIS - Why?**

**Foundational:** Ecosystems or natural communities are the foundation upon which proposed focal, non-focal, and other species conservation depends.

**Resilient:** Understanding climate change and the impact of other disturbances (i.e. floods, fires, drought, debris flows, etc.) on species is really about understanding how ecosystems/natural communities respond to change.

**Action Oriented:** When we do mitigation or implement conservation actions for a species or suite of species, in real terms we are protecting, restoring, connecting, and enhancing ecosystems, ecosystem processes, and/or natural communities.

**Meaningful:** Long-term conservation for species of interest (focal or non-focal) is contingent upon conserving the ecosystems, landscapes, corridors, and processes that sustain them.

**Consistent:** This approach is consistent with

- the existing concepts embedded in CDFW’s Natural Communities Conservation Plans,
- the statewide and federal approach toward mitigation (connectivity, processes, redundancy)
- other state agency mandates including SWRCB/RWQCB’s protection of waters of the state and wetlands & Commission’s concept of ESHA
Natural Communities and Other Conservation Elements

Criteria:

- Sensitive community/habitat
- Supports rare or listed species
- Widespread type that can contribute to a cohesive strategy (e.g., conserve common species, sustain ecosystem functions/services)
- Address other conservation values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Conservation Element</th>
<th>Rare/Listed Species</th>
<th>Widespread</th>
<th>Other Conservation Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grasslands</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime Chaparral/Knobcone Pine</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandhills/Sand Parkland</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz Cypress Forest</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey Pine Forest</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Woodland/Forest</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redwood/Douglas-fir Forest</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach, Dunes, and Rocky Cliffs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karst Caves</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Outcroppings</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian and Riverine</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estuarine (lagoons)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetlands</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponds, Lakes and Reservoirs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Lands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Natural Communities Selected as Conservation Elements
Working Lands

Santa Cruz County RCIS

Jodi McGraw Consulting
Habitat Connectivity
### Focal Species

Considerations for Selection:
- State-listed under CESA or Federally listed under ESA
- Potential subject of mitigation credit agreements
- Taxonomic representation
- Locally unique or range limited
- Climate vulnerable
- Utilizes multiple community types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz tarplant (grassland)</td>
<td>FT, SE, CRPR 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Hermon June beetle (sandhills)</td>
<td>FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC coho salmon (riparian/riverine)</td>
<td>FE, SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz long-toed salamander (ponds, oak woodlands)</td>
<td>FE, SE, SFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western pond turtle (riparian/riverine and adjacent uplands)</td>
<td>FSC, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marbled murrelet (redwood forest)</td>
<td>FT, SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mountain lion (connectivity, most upland)</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2-13**
**Non-Focal Species**

**Criteria:**
- Listed (or candidate/proposed) under FESA, CESA, or Fully Protected (FGC § 3511, 4700, 5050 and 5515)
- Not a focal species

**Conservation Context:**
- **Not** “less important” than focal-species from a conservation perspective
- Can be included in a future MCA
- Conservation needs are addressed by strategies for focal species and/or natural communities (or other OCEs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben Lomond spineflower</td>
<td>FE, CRPR 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey spineflower</td>
<td>FT, CRPR 1B.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotts Valley spineflower</td>
<td>FE, CRPR 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>robust spineflower</td>
<td>FE, CRPR 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz cypress</td>
<td>FT, SE, CRPR 1B.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz wallflower</td>
<td>FE, SE, CRPR 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white-rayed pentachaeta</td>
<td>FE, SE, CRPR 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotts Valley polygonum</td>
<td>FE, SE, CRPR 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Grove clover</td>
<td>SR, 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Francisco popcorn flower</td>
<td>SE, 1B.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarch butterfly</td>
<td>Proposed FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohlone tiger beetle</td>
<td>FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zayante band-winged grasshopper</td>
<td>FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western bumble bee</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tidewater goby</td>
<td>FE, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC/SCCC steelhead - central California coast DPS</td>
<td>FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California tiger salamander</td>
<td>FT, ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foothill yellow-legged frog</td>
<td>ST, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California red-legged frog</td>
<td>FT, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco garter snake</td>
<td>FE, SE, FP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tricolored blackbird</td>
<td>ST, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden eagle</td>
<td>FP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swainson's hawk</td>
<td>ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western snowy plover</td>
<td>FT, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-tailed kite</td>
<td>FP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American peregrine falcon</td>
<td>FD, SD, FP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bald eagle</td>
<td>FD, SE, FP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California brown pelican</td>
<td>FD, SE, FP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ringed-tailed cat</td>
<td>FP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2-14**
Co-Benefited Species

156 Species
- 75 plants
- 25 invertebrates
- 5 fish
- 3 amphibians
- 5 reptiles
- 29 birds
- 15 mammals

Criteria:
- Special status or rare species
- Not listed (under CESA or ESA)
- Not a focal or a non-focal species
- Unlikely to require compensatory mitigation or be covered under a future MCA

See Table 2-15 of Environmental Setting
## Conservation Element Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservation Element</th>
<th>What is it?</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Can MCA Credits be Developed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Conservation Element</td>
<td>Sensitive or widespread communities + connectivity and working lands</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Yes, (CDFW) regulated systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Wetlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focal Species</td>
<td>ESA or CESA protection, representative of taxonomic groups and communities, are likely to require MCAs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes; all 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Focal Species</td>
<td>Listed (or candidate) under CESA/FP and/or ESA that are not focal species</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Yes, provided ecological needs met by strategies for focal species and/or OCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Benefited Species</td>
<td>Special-status or rare species that are not focal or non-focal species</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning Framework for Other Conservation Elements

1. Distribution and habitat
2. Key aspects of life history/ecology
3. Stressors and pressures (incl. Climate Change Vulnerability)
4. Conservation Investment Strategy
   - Goals
   - Objectives (at least one quantitative)
   - Actions
   - Conservation Priorities
Potential Conservation & Enhancement Actions

- **Acquire and protect**
  - Acquire and protect land

- **Protect**
  - Protect wildlife/habitat corridors

- **Restore**
  - Restore creeks and rivers

- **Restore**
  - Restore habitat on existing protected land

- **Install**
  - Install wildlife crossings

- **Remove**
  - Remove fish barriers

- **Create/restore**
  - Create/restore rearing habitat
Advanced Mitigation

- Compensatory mitigation for multiple projects
- Improve project delivery
- Prior to programming or environmental process and does replace environmental review or permitting requirements
- Early coordination with stakeholders
Mitigation Needs Assessment

- Potential planned transportation project mitigation needs
- 2020-2045
- Measure D – Regional Projects
- Cities and County Transportation Projects
GIS Analysis

- GIS Analysis Step 1: Map Sensitive Resources Areas/Vegetation Layers
  - Step 2: Overlay Transportation Projects
    - New development-undistributed areas
    - Near waterways
    - Apply buffer
  - Step 3: Calculate potential disturbance to habitats
    - Modeled after Caltrans Statewide Mitigation Needs Assessment
Implementation Overview

RCIS can inform strategic conservation as part of

• Government and private grants
• Other philanthropic endeavors
• Mitigation, including advance mitigation
Mitigation Credit Agreements

- Based on conservation & habitat enhancement actions in an approved RCIS
- Anyone may apply for an MCA
- Habitat protection, restoration and enhancement
- On public or private land
- Offset impacts under CESA, CEQA, LSA
- Offset permanent and temporary impacts
- Advance mitigation
- Excess project mitigation available as credits, which are transferable
- Consistent with CDFW’s Banking Program
Schedule Overview

- **Characterize Existing Conditions and Identify Conservation Elements**
  (September - November 2021)

- **Assess Pressures and Stressors**
  Draft Conservation Goals, Objectives and Actions
  (April - July 2021)

- **Develop Admin Draft RCIS**
  (August 2021– February 2022)

- **Revise RCIS Public Workshop and Review**
  (March – June 2022)

- **Finalize RCIS**
  (August 2022)
RCIS Online Workshop

Station 1: Environmental Setting

Station 2: Conservation Elements

Station 3: Goals, Objectives, & Actions
More Information

For more information about the Santa Cruz RCIS, please contact:

• Online public workshop January 11-February 19
• rcis_santacruzcounty@sccrtc.org
• www.sccrtc.org/rcis

For more information about the RCIS Program, go to
https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/Regional-Conservation