

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION INVESTMENT STRATEGY:

Administrative Draft Review

*Stakeholder and Technical Advisor Meeting
December 14, 2021*



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Consulting**

- ❖ Update participants on the RCIS planning process
- ❖ Orient participants to the document to facilitate review/comments (January 7, 2022)
- ❖ Discuss initial feedback

Meeting Goals



Meeting Agenda

- I. Introductions and Housekeeping
- II. Project Background Status
- III. Admin Draft Overview
- IV. Discussion of Big-Picture Questions
- V. Outline Next Steps





SANTA CRUZ COUNTY RCIS: Background and Status



RCIS Program Goals

- Achieve more strategic, effective conservation
- Protect vulnerable and declining species
- Enhance resiliency to climate change
- Provide efficient mitigation delivery (Mitigation Credit Agreements)





Implementation

RCIS can inform strategic conservation as part of

- Government and private grants
- Other philanthropic endeavors
- Mitigation, including advance mitigation via mitigation credit agreements

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



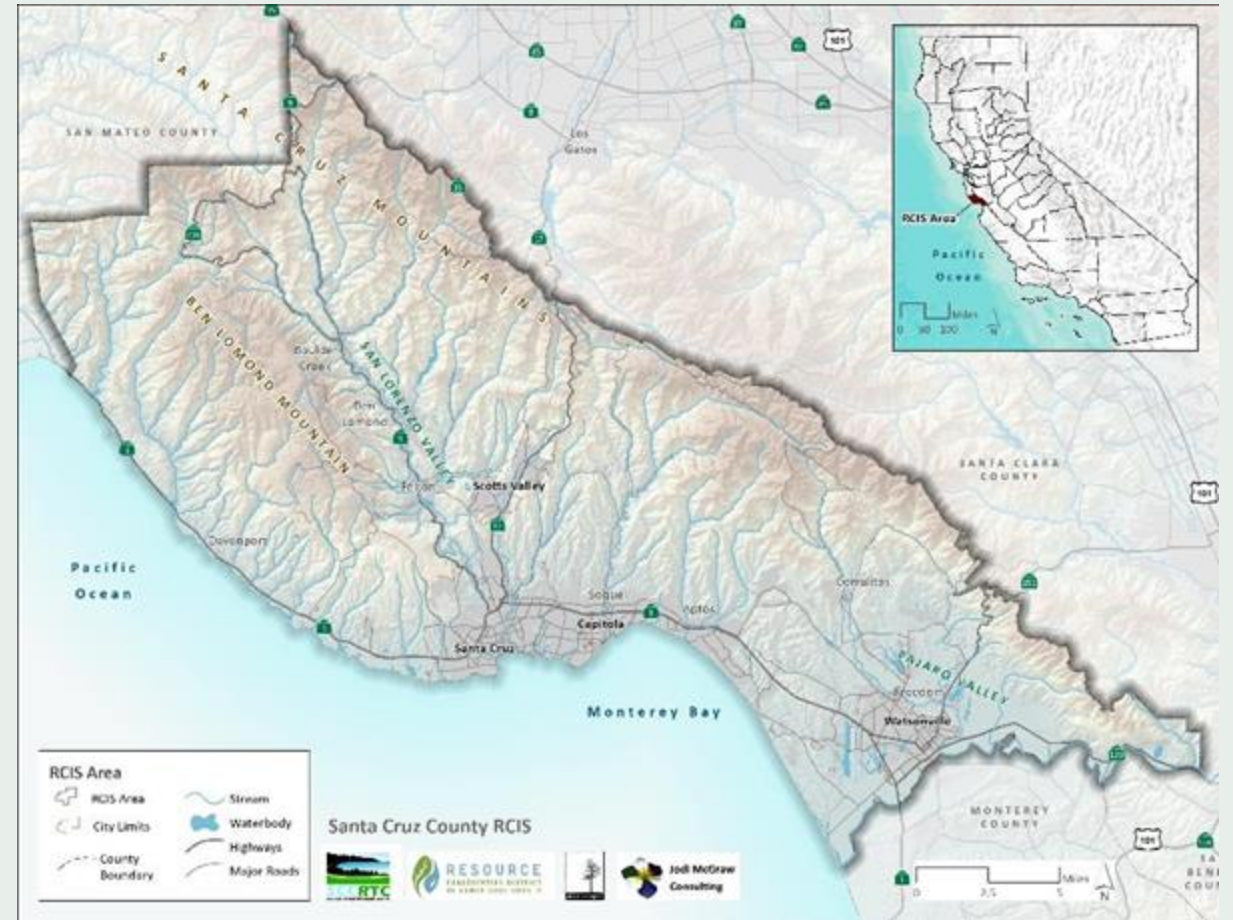
A Regional Conservation Investment Strategy Isn't....

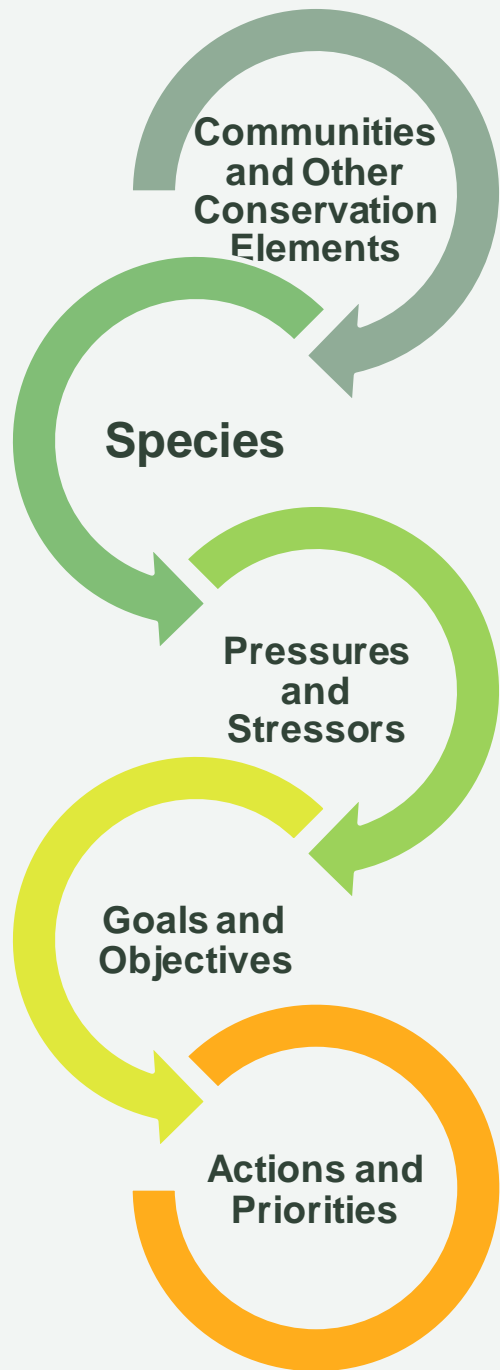
- An effort to re-invent the wheel
- An effort to collect new data
- A new set of laws or regulations governing local land-use
- A new set of land-use restrictions imposed by CDFW and/or other wildlife agencies.
- A permit enabling development or restoration projects that supplants existing state, federal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

Building on Existing Plans

Building rich history of conservation planning and data:

- Conservation Blueprint
- 9+ Watershed Plans
- Integrated Watershed Restoration Program
- 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





Conservation Strategy Framework

- Regional Transportation Commission (RTC)
 - Transportation Planning Agency
 - Early Mitigation/Advanced Mitigation
 - Measure D – Transportation Projects
- Resource Conservation District (RCD)
 - Integrated Watershed Restoration Program-
Technical Advisory Committee
 - Conservation Planning and Implementation

RCIS Project Partners

RCIS Participants



Coordinated Planning Process



Additional Outreach to Agencies, Commissions, and other Experts

- Local (Cities, County)
- State (CDFW, RWQCB, CCC, and Caltrans)
- Federal (NOAA/NMFS, USFWS)
- Commissions (Commission on the Environment, Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission)
- Other scientists and conservation practitioners (incl. consultants)



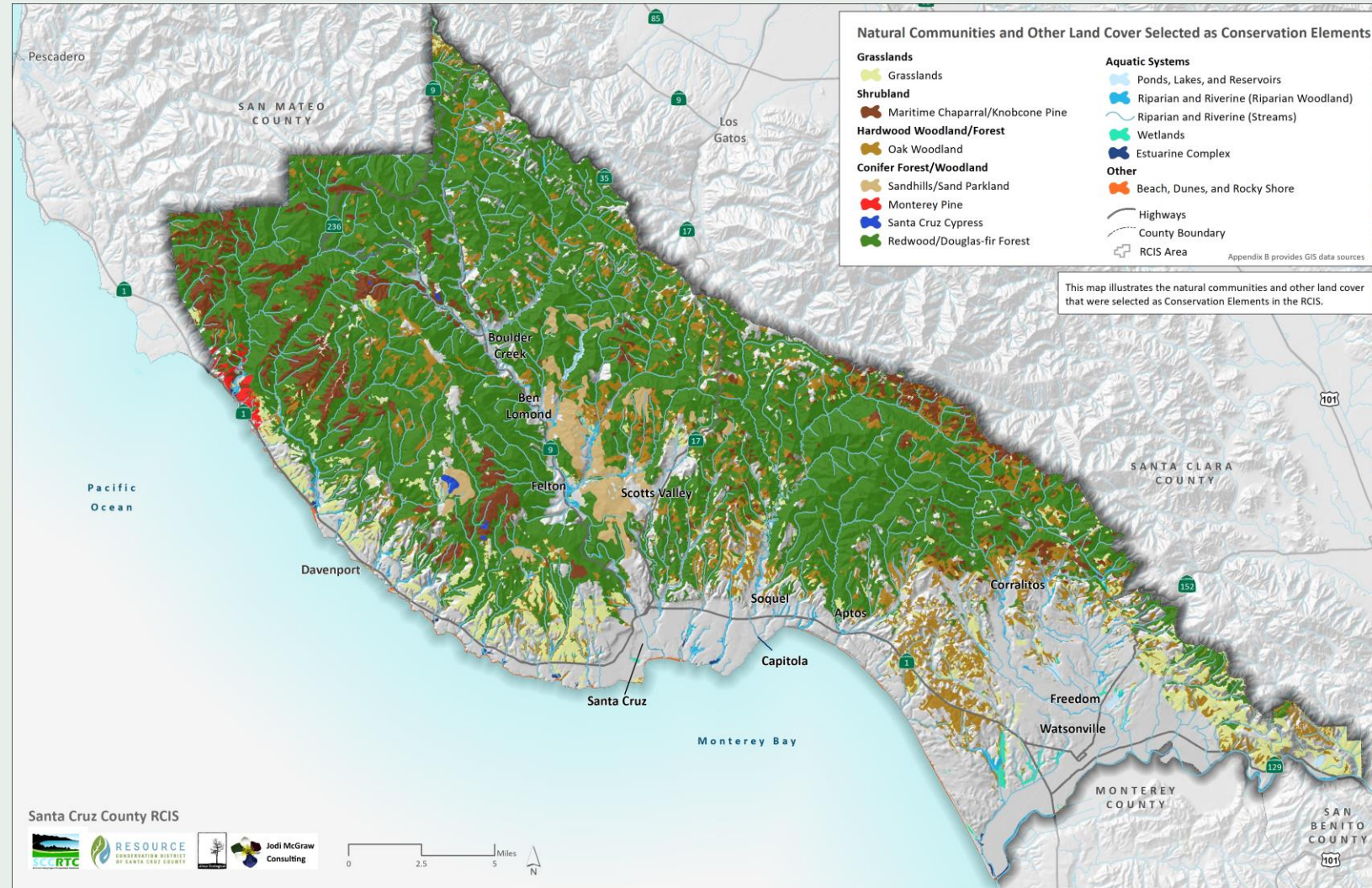
Areas Where we Were on the Right Track



- Addressing
 - working lands
 - habitat connectivity
- Prioritize restoration and stewardship
- Include uplift on existing protected lands including public lands

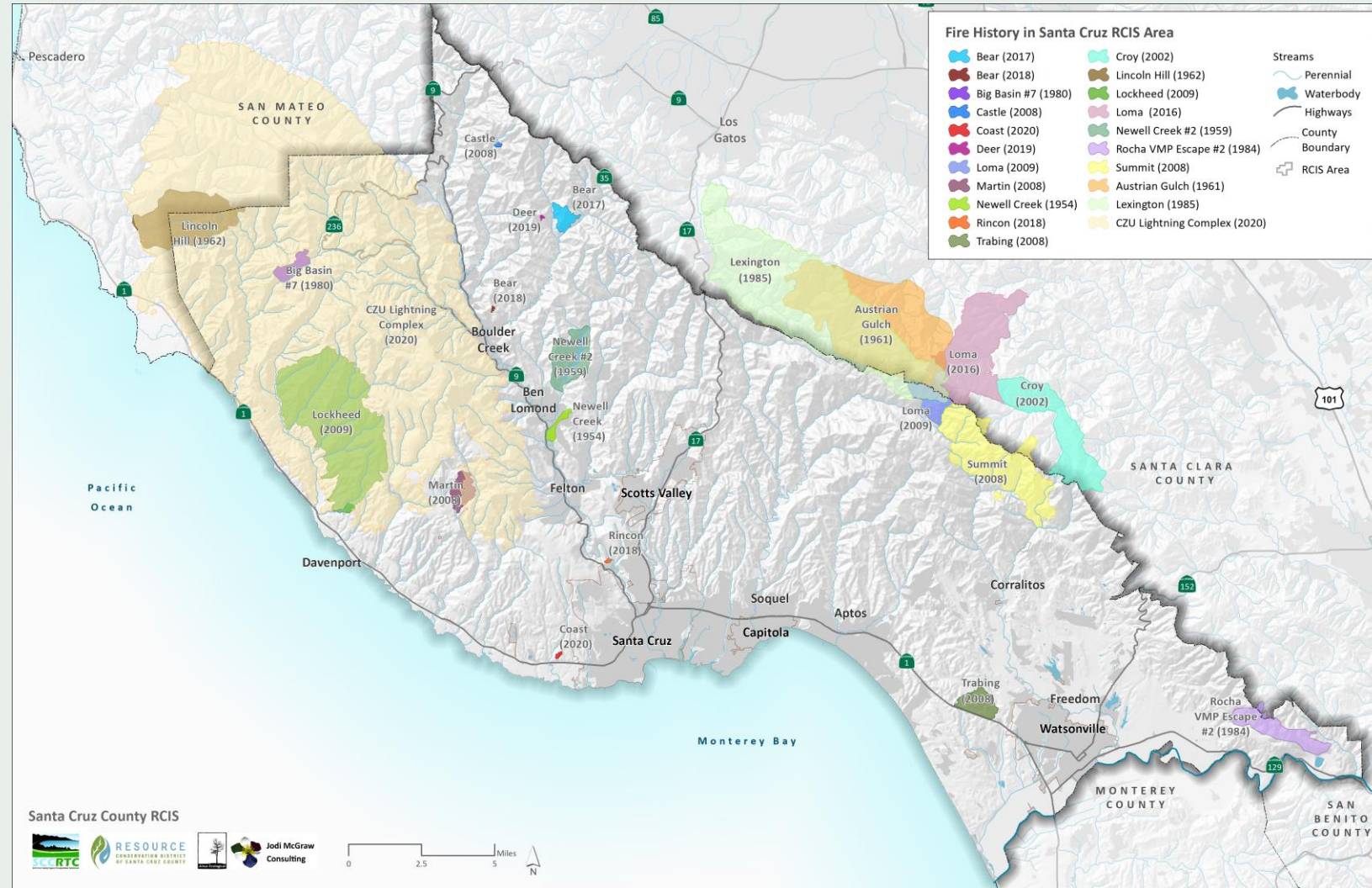
Key Input Received: Plan Around Communities

- Focus strategies on maintaining and enhancing community structure, species composition, and ecosystem functions to conserve all rare species (not just limited number of focal species)
- Conserve sensitive natural communities and biodiversity systems
- Conserve widespread communities to maintain connectivity and promote important ecosystem services
- 13 natural communities



Key Input Received: Address Fire

- Impacts of existing fires
- Manage within disturbance regimes
 - Address fire exclusion
 - Mitigate wildfire risk exacerbated by climate change
 - Integrate cultural burning



Other Key Feedback Integrated to Date

Feedback	Adjustments to the RCIS
Bats are important and have unique conservation needs	"Bat Habitat" included as a conservation element to protect important habitat features and promote bat populations
Rock outcroppings are essential for bryophytes, lichens, many rare plants, as well as some bats	Developed conservation actions to safeguard rock outcroppings in communities that commonly feature them (maritime chaparral, Santa Cruz cypress forest, etc.)
Promote the mitigation hierarchy used by most resource agencies	Identify restoration and enhancement strategies that can be implemented on site, as well as habitat protection priorities
Groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) should be addressed and mapped	Worked with the Groundwater Management Agencies to map additional GDEs
Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) should be addressed	Developed goals, objectives, and actions for water quality, including to address TMDLs



Discussion Questions

How did we do at addressing the feedback you and others provided?

What changes do you think could improve the document?

Do you have any questions about how feedback was addressed?



Administrative Draft Review and Discussion

RCIS Chapters



Introduction (Chapter 1)

Project Goals
Program Background
Planning Process
Plan Participants
Document Overview



Regional Setting (Chapter 2)

Aquatic Systems
Terrestrial Systems
Existing Land Use
Planned
Infrastructure and
Development
Existing Conservation
Lands and Plans



Conservation Elements (Chapter 3)

Communities
Focal Species
Other Conservation
Elements
Non-Focal Species
Co-benefited Species



Pressures and Stressors (Chapter 4)

Habitat Loss
Habitat Degradation
Habitat Fragmentation
Climate Change
Loss of Genetic
Diversity



Conservation Strategies (Chapter 5)

Goals, Objectives,
Actions, and Priorities
Habitat Protection,
Restoration,
Enhancement,
Creation, and
Management, and
Species Conservation



Implementation (Chapter 6)

Mitigation Credit
Agreements
Existing Mitigation
Programs
Grants
Conservation Finance
Programs
Coordination



Conservation Strategies (Chapter 5)

Components of the Conservation Strategies

- ✓ Special-Status Designations and State and Global Rarity Ranks
- ✓ Citation for Detailed Descriptions/Profiles
- ✓ Distribution and Range (in RCIS Area, incl. map)
- ✓ Key Ecological Elements
 - What are the most salient factors to consider in developing a conservation strategy?
 - Ecological niche, disturbance ecology, important cobenefits, etc.
- ✓ Pressures and Stressors Summary/Highlights
- ✓ Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment
 - Assess exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity
 - Identify how strategy will help address climate change impacts
- ✓ Associated focal and non-focal species
- ✓ Conservation actions for other elements that will promote this element
- ✓ Goals, objectives, actions, and priorities (GOAP)



G.O.A.P.

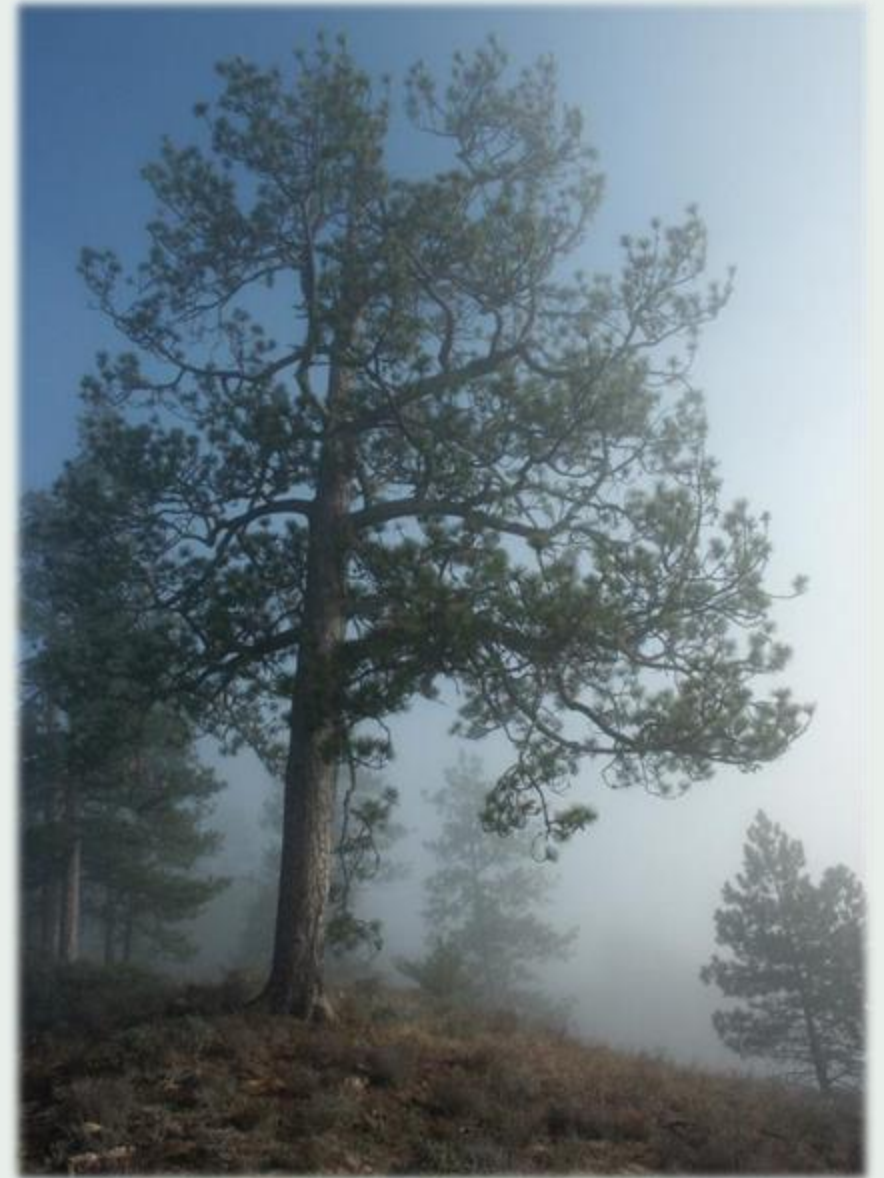
GOALS: What we want to achieve/desired future conditions

OBJECTIVES: Conservation tools and the targets

- Protect habitat
- Restore/Enhance (and Create) Habitat
- Manage Pressures/Stressors (e.g., fire, exotics, recreation, pollution)
- Conduct Species-Specific Conservation (introductions, seed banking, surveys)

ACTIONS: the steps to achieve the objective

PRIORITIES: what actions should be done first (what specific projects, where to work, etc. in the next 10 years)



Orientation to the Draft RCIS



Goals for the Document Review

High Priority

- Provide feedback on our 'big picture' questions
- Identify additional actions and priorities: what is missing from the strategies!
- Highlight content that is confusing or needs further consideration
- Identify what works and what could be improved

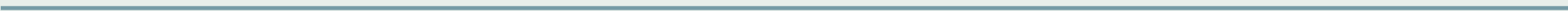
Low Priority

- Copy editing
- Flag formatting anomalies

DRAFT



Initial Feedback on Big-Picture Questions



Effectiveness

Will the RCIS achieve its purposes of:

- Advancing regional conservation of biodiversity in Santa Cruz County;
- Facilitating advance mitigation?

If not, what changes might enhance its effectiveness?



Balance/Robustness



2. Does the RCIS achieve the desired objectives:
- a. Conserving rare species through a framework emphasizing natural communities
 - b. Balance types of conservation actions to create a robust conservation strategy restoring, enhancing, and managing habitat as well as protecting it?
 - c. Facilitating conservation of working lands within the landscape; and
 - d. Promoting conservation through actions on public as well as private lands?

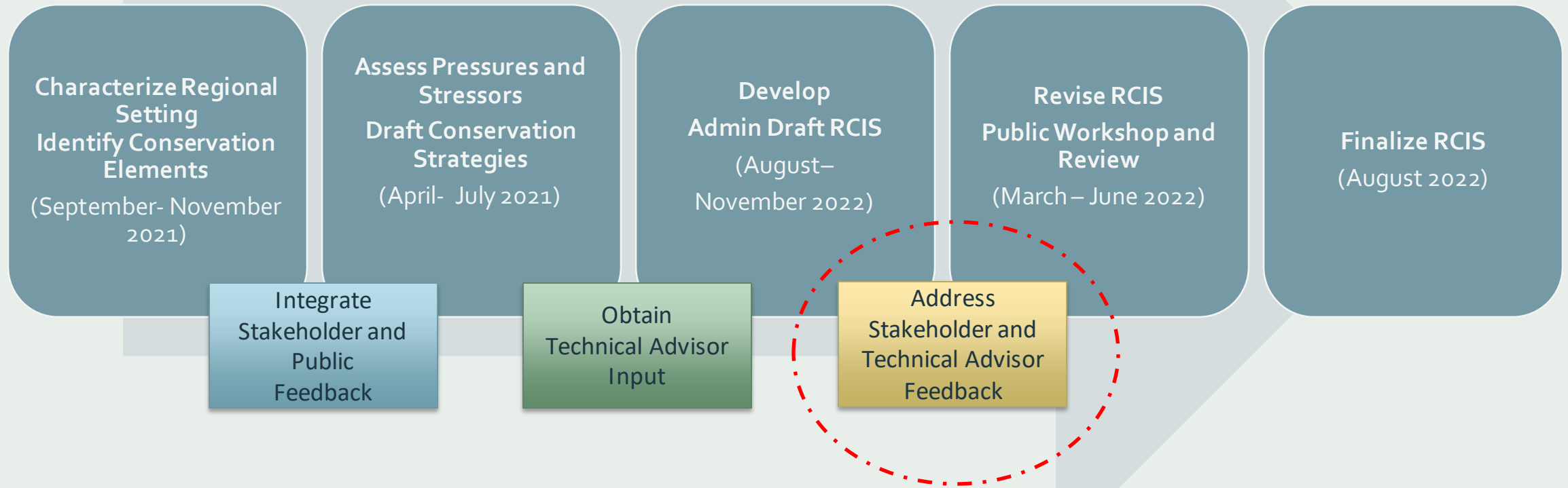
If not, what adjustments would improve the strategy in these areas?

Improve and Implement

3. What other general feedback do you have to help improve the conservation strategy (contents or their presentation) or help promote its implementation over the next 10 years?



Schedule and Next Steps



How to Provide Feedback



- Review the “READ ME” for guidance/resources to
 - access the document
 - focus/aid review
- Provide feedback in markup on SharePoint
 - Provides ‘synergy’ of review by multiple people
 - Creates a ‘one-stop-shop’ for our team to review feedback
- Or email feedback to the RCIS Team at:
rcis_santacruzcounty@sccrtc.org
- **Timeline:** Provide Feedback by January 7th



Accessing Admin Draft on Sharepoint

More RCIS Information

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

- rcis_santacruzcounty@sccrtc.org
- www.sccrtc.org/rcis
 - [Prior presentations](#)

For more information about the RCIS Program, go to

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/Regional-Conservation>



A large, dark silhouette of a tree stands prominently in the center of the frame. The sun is positioned directly behind the tree's trunk, creating a bright, starburst-like glow that illuminates the surrounding branches and the sky. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a warm orange near the horizon. In the foreground, a grassy hillside slopes down from the left, and distant mountains are visible on the horizon. A white circle is visible in the top right corner, and a thin white vertical line is on the left side.

THANK YOU!