

# Executive Summary

The mission of the San Diego County Water Authority (Water Authority) is to provide a safe, reliable water supply to its Member Water Agencies serving the San Diego region. Construction of new facilities undertaken through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), facility upgrades, and Operation and Maintenance (O&M) activities are necessary for the Water Authority to fulfill its mission.

The Water Authority has prepared this Subregional Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP, or Plan) pursuant to Section 2800 *et seq* of the Fish and Game Code (NCCPA) and section 10(a) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended. The purpose of this Plan is to fulfill the requirements for issuance of incidental take authorization under Section 2835 of the NCCPA and an incidental take permit under section 10 of ESA. The Plan identifies the types of activities proposed for coverage and an assessment of expected impacts. The Plan would not preclude the Water Authority from processing federal permits and state permits with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), respectively (collectively the Wildlife Agencies), if required for individual future projects that are not covered by this Plan.

This Plan proposes to cover 26 plant species and 37 wildlife species for a total of 63 Covered Species. Three additional species, Orcutt grass (*Orcuttia californica*), vernal pool fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*), and Munz's Onion (*Allium munzii*), are Major Amendment Species. The Plan addresses potential impacts to sensitive resources associated with new construction and typical expansion of existing infrastructure; ongoing installation, use, maintenance, and repair of its aqueduct and water conveyance, treatment, and storage systems; and acquisition of new and management/monitoring of all existing Preserve Area lands throughout the Plan Area.

The Plan Area, approximately 992,000 acres in western San Diego and southwestern Riverside counties, comprises the area within which all incidental take will occur and be permitted. With the exception of implementing the Tijuana River Valley wetland creation project, the Planned Projects and nearly all Covered Activities will occur within the Probable Impact Zone (PIZ), which is identified as 1,000 feet on either side of the pipelines or facilities, or approximately 64,600 acres along the existing pipeline rights-of-way, and other appurtenant water conveyance, storage, and treatment facilities. A larger area, the Survey Area, which comprises the area on one mile of either side of the pipelines and facilities, was analyzed for potential impacts from Covered Activities. Planned and Future Projects and other Covered Activities are estimated to impact up to 373 acres of habitat that will require mitigation over the 55-year term of the Permit. The Permits will encompass all of the Plan Area except that the Riverside County portion will be a Major Amendment Area for all future projects. Projects will be implemented

consistent with the process described in Section 6.0, and Future Projects and/or Activities outside of the Survey Area covered by the Plan will be approved pursuant to the amendment process described in Section 8.0. Planned Projects are expected to permanently impact approximately 71 acres of native vegetation, and Future Projects/Activities and O&M are projected to impact up to 183 acres of native vegetation. In addition, one Existing Project (Pipeline 6), is currently being re-evaluated, and if an alternative alignment is selected an estimated 119 acres of impacts may occur, and would be mitigated per the Plan. Within approximately 1,920 acres of Preserve Area committed to be preserved by the Plan, 1,220 acres have been set aside as compensation for previously permitted projects, and approximately 700 acres are available or will be created to be used as credits to compensate for project impacts to upland and wetland habitats. In addition, the Water Authority has previously conserved 1,147 acres of regionally important habitat lands, the Managed Mitigation Areas (MMAs), that contribute to the baseline of conservation within the Plan Area.

To ensure the protection and conservation of Covered Species, the Plan includes measures designed to avoid or minimize potential impacts to biological resources and to provide appropriate mitigation where impacts are unavoidable. The Water Authority's managed Preserve Area provides important areas for conserving Covered Species, and the MMAs and some rights-of-way provide habitat connectivity in areas where little natural habitat remains. Six Habitat Management Areas (HMA) which make up the Preserve Area have been or will be established from which mitigation credits will be deducted to compensate for impacts from Covered Activities. The Plan identifies approximately 373 acres of impacts to vegetation communities that require mitigation. Impacts from Covered Activities (Planned and Future Projects) would occur over the 55-year permit period.

## **Plan Overview**

The following provides a summary of the NCCP/HCP sections.

### **Section 1.0—Introduction**

This section provides an overview of the Water Authority's mission and identifies the governing documents and policies that dictate how project activities are prioritized and defined. It identifies the purpose and need for the Plan, its goals, and summarizes its regulatory obligations. It also identifies key elements of the Water Authority's environmental policies and state and federal environmental regulations that influence CIP project development and O&M activities. Member Water Agencies are not signatories to this Plan and the Implementing Agreement (IA), nor are impacts by underlying landowners of Water Authority rights-of-way and easements covered by this Plan.

## **Section 2.0—Region of Plan Coverage**

The Plan Area includes the Water Authority's service area, containing the Water Authority's 24 Member Water Agencies. The Plan Area (992,000 acres) covers roughly the western third of San Diego County and the extreme southwestern portion of Riverside County in the vicinity of Lake Skinner. Within the Plan Area, planned and future Covered Activities are expected to occur mostly within one-mile of existing facilities and rights-of-way. The Plan Area includes locations of facilities and projects outside of the Water Authority's service area, such as the Carryover Storage and San Vicente Dam Raise projects.

## **Section 3.0—Relationship to Other Conservation Plans**

This Plan Area overlaps with numerous existing and in-process NCCP/HCPs in San Diego County and several NCCP/HCPs in western Riverside County. The Plan is designed to be compatible with other conservation plans in the region, and the Water Authority will avoid and/or minimize impacts to existing preserve lands to the maximum extent feasible.

## **Section 4.0—Plan Area Biology and Land Use**

The Plan Area encompasses diverse geographic, topographic, and climatic conditions that support a great variety of vegetation communities. Land use and vegetation data bases for San Diego and western Riverside counties were compiled and evaluated to develop the Plan Area vegetation map. Upland and wetland communities have been identified within the Plan Area. Over 500,000 acres of the Plan Area are developed, disturbed, or agricultural areas. The Plan's Preserve Area provides important, managed conservation sites for Covered Species and assists in building and connecting larger, biologically-diverse preserve lands

## **Section 5.0—Covered Activities**

Within the Plan Area, the Water Authority is responsible for developing new water transmission, storage, treatment, supply, and flow management facilities, in addition to conducting O&M Activities and Emergency Actions. In addition, the Water Authority and its Preserve Area managers will be responsible for managing and monitoring the conserved habitat lands. These Covered Activities are organized into four categories: (1) CIP projects covered for construction and expansion, (2) O&M and Rights-of-Way management activities, (3) Emergency Actions, and (4) Preserve Area management activities. Potential incidental take of the Covered Species and anticipated impacts to sensitive habitats are identified and assessed.

## **Section 6.0—Conservation Plan**

The Plan describes a conservation strategy specifying discrete goals and objectives. It identifies the Covered Species and the rationale and process for approving incidental take of Covered Species. Measures designed to avoid and minimize incidental take are described. Mitigation measures are specified through the use of “tiering” by vegetation community types and different mitigation ratios to compensate for identified impacts to Covered Species and sensitive vegetation communities. These measures ensure that conservation/mitigation occurs in rough step proportion with impacts. Conservation and mitigation measures include commitment of the Preserve Area, use of habitat/species credits owned by the Water Authority, possible acquisition of additional habitat, habitat restoration, and avoidance/minimization measures. Monitoring and adaptive management of the Preserve Area are specified. All of these commitments provide the basis for issuance of state and federal take permits.

## **Section 7.0—Funding of the Plan**

This Plan will be funded through existing financial management policies and programs maintained by the Water Authority and by previous contributions provided by the Water Authority. Implementation of this Plan will be funded as a capital cost under the CIP Mitigation Program, individually approved CIP project budgets, and/or the annual operating budget of the Water Resources Department. The Mitigation Program is an element of the CIP; its purpose is to develop and implement short term and long term comprehensive strategies to address sensitive natural resources, including regulatory permitting in support of CIP projects’ construction schedules and budgets. The Water Authority estimates its long-term financial needs based on the CIP, and adopts a two-year budget cycle to address short-term funding and expenditures. The Water Authority’s costs include staff and consultant time. Management and monitoring of the Preserve Area will be conducted by the Preserve Area managers with endowment funds provided by the Water Authority per written agreements.

## **Section 8.0—Amending the Plan and Addressing Changed and Unforeseen Circumstances**

Changes to this Plan are expected to be required during the permit term. Expected modifications to the Plan will be processed as Minor Amendments (no change to Plan commitments and no Permit amendment required) or Major Amendments (substantial change to Plan commitments and Permit amendment required).

The Plan may, under certain circumstances, be modified without amending its associated IA or Permits, provided such amendments are minor in nature, the effect on the Covered Species involved and the levels of take are not greater than those described in this Plan and provided for by the Permits, and the action is otherwise

consistent with the Plan, IA, and associated Permits. Major Amendments to the Plan would be required to increase take of any Covered Species, add a species to the Covered Species list, alter the Plan Area, or add or modify a Covered Activity at a scope and scale that could not be processed as a Minor Amendment.

The permit period is 55 years. Prior to expiration of the initial permit or renewal period, the Water Authority will notify the Wildlife Agencies of its intent to renew the terms of the plan and provide documentation of the compliance status of the permit.

This Plan includes categories of Changed Circumstances and clear definitions of conditions or events that qualify as Changed Circumstances. In defining a Changed Circumstance, the Water Authority must determine what level of impact within a Changed Circumstances category is foreseeable and what level, intensity, or extent is unforeseen. All other conditions or events not defined as Changed Circumstances are by definition Unforeseen Circumstances.

## **Section 9.0—References Cited**

## **Section 10.0—List of Preparers**

## **Appendix A—Implementing Agreement**

The IA outlines the conditions, duties, and responsibilities of the Water Authority and Wildlife Agencies under this Plan.

## **Appendix B—Covered Species Analyses**

Appendix B addresses species-specific conservation and management conditions that must be met for the species to be adequately conserved by the Plan. The evaluation describes conservation goals and strategies, findings and conditions for coverage, background information, a conservation analysis, and management actions for specific plant and animal species. Background species information includes distribution, abundance, and trends, threats and limiting factors, and special considerations. The conservation analyses include conservation and take levels, and effects on population viability and species recovery, if feasible. Attachments to this appendix include the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force (DAPTF) Fieldwork Code of Practice and the Report of Independent Science Advisors, which was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act (NCCPA), as amended 2003.

## **Appendix C—Water Authority Covered Projects Descriptions**

Water Authority Covered Activities include the construction of new CIP facilities, expansion of existing facilities, and O&M of existing CIP facilities. Appendix C identifies Existing and/or Planned Projects proposed for coverage under this Plan.

## **Appendix D—Selected Sections from the Water Authority General Conditions and Standard Specifications**

Appendix D includes relevant sections of the Water Authority's 2005 edition of *General Conditions and Standard Specifications*. Included as an appendix are topics referenced in the Plan, including Section 02110—Clearing and Grubbing, Section 02140—Dewatering, Section 02229—Blasting, Section 02270—Temporary Erosion Control, and Section 02940—Revegetation.

## **Appendix E—Example of Standard Grant of Easement to the San Diego County Water Authority**

Appendix E is an example of a Standard Grant of Easement to the San Diego County Water Authority. It is a documentary transfer that gives the Water Authority the legal right to use the land as described in the Grant.

## **Appendix F—Pre-activity Survey Form**

The Pre-activity Survey Form is used to document the presence or absence of sensitive resources on or in the vicinity of a project area and determine which avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to employ at a Covered Activity site. An Environmental Surveyor will survey the project site, conduct pre-activity studies, flag sensitive zones and habitats prior to the commencement of construction or maintenance activities, confirm/specify avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures, and monitor the site as required.

## **Appendix G—State Water Resources Control Board Fact Sheet for Water Quality Order 2003-0007**

Appendix G includes background information and instructions for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit and submittal requirements for linear underground/overhead projects.

## **Appendix H—California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) Invasive Plant Inventory**

The California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) published a list of *Exotic Pest Plants of Greatest Ecological Concern in California*. First published in 1999, this list is referred to as the Cal-IPC List. In 2006, this list was updated and published as the *Invasive Plant Inventory*. Appendix H contains the updated version which includes more detailed information on invasive species' impacts and distribution, more transparent criteria for the rating system, and more thorough documentation for each assessment.

## **Appendix I—CDFG Lake or Streambed Alteration Conditions**

The Water Authority and CDFG have developed procedures to streamline the process for notifying, submitting, and approving projects that are subject to Fish and Game Code Sections 1602 and 1603 (lake and streambed alteration activities).

## **Appendix J—Conservation Bank Agreement**

Appendix J includes a formal mitigation banking agreement for the San Miguel HMA and Crestridge HMA. This appendix also includes the mitigation credit ledger sheets for the San Miguel HMA and Crestridge HMA.

## **Appendix K—Preserve Area and MMA Locations**

The Water Authority developed a series of figures that indicates the location of each of the HMAs and MMAs.

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