

## **NOTICE OF PREPARATION of a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report, Notice of Public Scoping Meeting**

- Project:** Santee Multiple Species Conservation Program Subarea Plan
- Project Case Files:** Environmental Impact Report AEIS2014-16
- Project Proponent:** City of Santee
- Project Location:** Citywide and two conservation areas outside of the City (refer to Figure 1)

**Environmental Impact Report:** The City of Santee is preparing a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the adoption and implementation of the City of Santee (City) Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan (Santee Subarea Plan or Plan). The Santee Subarea Plan implements the MSCP Subregional Plan that was developed in August 1998. The Plan Area includes property within the jurisdictional boundary of the City of Santee and two conservation areas outside of the City of Santee (Figure 1). The City will be the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the project. This Notice of Preparation (NOP) describes the Santee Subarea Plan (proposed project) that will be analyzed in the EIR and identifies areas of probable environmental effects of the proposed project.

As specified in the CEQA Guidelines, the NOP will be circulated for a 30-day review and comment period. Agencies, organizations, and interested members of the public are invited to provide input on the scope of the environmental analysis. If you are a responsible or trustee agency, the views of your agency are requested as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. In the event that no response or well justified request for additional time is received by any responsible agency or trustee agency by the end of the review period, we presume that these agencies have no response. Comments may be submitted in writing during the review period and addressed to:

**Michael Coyne, Principal Planner**  
**City of Santee Department of Planning and Building**  
**10601 Magnolia Avenue**  
**Santee, CA 92071**  
**Telephone: (619) 258-4100 ext. 160**  
**Email: [mcoyne@cityofsanteca.gov](mailto:mcoyne@cityofsanteca.gov)**

The NOP comment period begins on **March 17, 2023** and closes at 5:00 p.m. on **April 17, 2023**. All comments concerning the scope of the Program EIR must be submitted in writing to Michael Coyne, Principal Planner, prior to the close of the public comment period as noted above. Please indicate a contact person in your comment. The City will consider all written comments received during the noticed public review period in the preparation of the Program EIR.

## **Public Scoping Meeting**

The City will hold a scoping meeting to provide an opportunity for agency staff and interested members of the public to submit comments, either written or verbal, on the scope of the environmental issues to be addressed in the Program EIR. The scoping meeting will be held on Thursday, March 30, 2023 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the City of Santee Council Chambers, 10601 Magnolia Avenue, Santee, CA 92071. The scoping meeting will have an “open house” format, so participants can attend at any point during this window. Written comments regarding relevant issues may be submitted at the meeting.

## **Project Background**

The MSCP Subregional Plan Area is located in the southwestern portion of the San Diego region and includes the City of Santee, portions of the unincorporated County of San Diego, and the cities of San Diego, Chula Vista, Coronado, Del Mar, El Cajon, Imperial Beach, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, National City, and Poway. The MSCP Subregional Plan is a comprehensive long-term program designed to create, manage, and monitor an ecosystem preserve that will support viable populations of native plant and animal species and their habitats in perpetuity in accordance with the State Natural Community Conservation Planning Act (NCCPA) and the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The MSCP Subregional Plan also accommodates continued economic development and quality of life amenities such as open space and passive recreational opportunities for residents within the appropriate areas.

The MSCP Subregional Plan is implemented through local Subarea Plans. The City of Santee has prepared a draft Subarea Plan to address the implementation of the MSCP Subregional Plan within the jurisdictional boundary of Santee, which is located east of the City of San Diego and north of El Cajon. As of 2023, five jurisdictions included in the MSCP Subregional Plan have prepared and implemented MSCP Subarea Plans, including the County of San Diego and cities of San Diego, Chula Vista, La Mesa, and Poway. The draft Santee Subarea Plan has been prepared pursuant to the requirements of the MSCP Subregional Plan, the State Natural Community Conservation Planning Act, and section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Endangered Species Act.

The MSCP Subregional planning effort was initiated in the early 1990s. The *1997 Final EIR/EIS: Issuance of Take Authorizations for Threatened and Endangered Species due to Urban Growth within the Multiple Species Conservation Program Planning Area* (MSCP Final EIR/EIS), analyzed several alternative MSCP Subregional Plan Preserve designs, all of which included the Preserve design incorporated into the proposed Santee Subarea Plan. The environmental impacts associated with the establishment of the Santee Subarea Plan Preserve were studied within the range of alternatives analyzed in the MSCP Final EIR/EIS.

The Santee Subarea Plan forms the basis for obtaining a Federal section 10(a)(1)(B) permit and State Section 2835 permit. In addition, an Implementing Agreement (IA) will be prepared. The IA is an agreement between the City, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) that identifies roles and responsibilities and ensures implementation of the Santee Subarea Plan. The Santee Subarea Plan and its associated IA establish the conditions under which the City, for the benefit of itself, public and private landowners, and other land development proponents within the Santee Subarea Plan boundaries, requests take authorization from the USFWS and CDFW. The take authorizations would allow the take of Covered Species resulting from lawful land development and other land uses in the Plan Area. Take authorization will be provided through approval of the Santee Subarea Plan by the Wildlife Agencies, execution of the IA, and issuance of the Federal and State permits.

The Santee Subarea Plan is proposed to implement all relevant sections of the MSCP Subregional Plan, including the habitat and species conservation goals and requirements of the Subregional Plan. The provisions of the Santee Subarea Plan and IA would supersede those of the overall MSCP Subregional Plan in the event of conflicts between the two plans.

### **Proposed Project**

The Santee Subarea Plan is a subregional, comprehensive program that would provide a framework to protect, enhance, and restore the habitat for specifically identified plant and animal species (Covered Species), while also streamlining permitting for Covered Activities. The term *proposed project*, is the adoption and implementation of the Santee Subarea Plan and associated Take Permits for the Permittee (the City). Evaluation of the proposed project in the Program EIR will be focused on the potential direct and indirect impacts that could result from the implementation of conservation actions and the issuance of Take Permits for Covered Activities.

Discretionary actions anticipated for the proposed project include adoption of the Santee Subarea Plan and corresponding amendments to the General Plan, Town Center Specific Plan and Santee Municipal Code.

CEQA requires an EIR to contain a statement of the objectives of the project, including the underlying purpose of the project (State CEQA Guidelines §15124 (b)). The overarching goal of the Subarea Plan is to support the MSCP Subregional ecosystem preserve. To meet this goal, the draft Santee Subarea Plan includes a Conservation Strategy that provides for the conservation and management of Covered Species within the City of Santee. The proposed project would streamline endangered species authorizations for Covered Activities by protecting, enhancing, and restoring the habitat for Covered Species in the Planning Area.

To achieve the following objectives, the draft Santee Subarea Plan calls for a combination of habitat conservation strategies, impact avoidance and minimization measures, and land use restrictions.

- Ensure the City will conserve adequate natural communities and Covered Species and habitat pursuant to the State NCCPA and the Federal ESA.
- Assemble a habitat preserve system that conserves Covered Species and their habitats and results in the conservation of biological core resource areas and habitat linkages/corridors.
- Provide a proactive and adaptive habitat management strategy for the Santee Subarea Plan Preserve System.
- Provide regulatory certainty to landowners within the City regarding land uses that could impact biological resources protected under the Santee Subarea Plan.
- Assist in the region's effort to sustain and enhance habitat for wetland-dependent species.
- Receive take authorizations for Covered Activities under section 10(a) of the Federal ESA from the USFWS for the Covered Species and a NCCP permit under the NCCPA Fish and Game Code Section 2835.
- Maintain functional wildlife corridors and habitat linkages between core biological resource areas within the MSCP Preserve System to aid in conserving the region's biodiversity, thereby enhancing the overall quality of life for the residents of Santee.
- Streamline the endangered species consultation process under Section 7 of the ESA and the lake

and streambed alteration agreements under Section 1602 of the California Fish and Game Code.

- Institute a strategy for future projects that mitigates impacts on the City’s biological resources such that impacts are appropriately mitigated.
- Achieve the goals identified in the City’s amended General Plan, by balancing the conservation of Covered Species and natural vegetation communities with housing, property rights, recreation, transportation, economic development, and other community and regional goals.

The City of Santee will be the sole permittee under the proposed Subarea Plan, which will have a term of up to 50 years.

**Covered Species** are defined as a set of sensitive species selected for coverage and are generally the species currently listed as threatened or endangered, or that may reasonably become listed during the proposed permit term, that may be impacted by Covered Activities and may benefit from Subarea Plan-related conservation and management. The Santee Subarea Plan addresses up to 23 Covered Species.

**Covered Activities** under the Santee Subarea Plan include all habitat or ground-disturbing activities identified in Santee Subarea Plan, which are known and anticipated projects (hardline projects) and future development within Santee, as well as preserve management activities.

The Santee Subarea Plan **conservation strategy** provides for the conservation of Covered Species by protecting, enhancing, restoring, and managing natural communities, Covered Species habitats, and occurrences of Covered Species. The conservation strategy identifies portions of the City where future conservation protections and habitat enhancements will be focused (see Figure 1: Preserve Map). The Preserve Map sets forth the following conservation strategy categories:

- **Hardline Conservation Lands.** These are the portions of the hardline development project areas that will be established as habitat preserves and integrated in with the Santee Subarea Plan open space network.
- **Upland Standards Areas.** The Upland Standards Areas establishes policies that will ensure the overall conservation within this portion of the City will remain at least 70% and habitat connectivity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Future mitigation and conservation actions to protect upland habitats should be directed toward these areas.
- **San Diego River Conservation Opportunities Areas.** There are portions of the San Diego River where there are opportunities for future mitigation and conservation. The riparian and aquatic habitat along the river is mostly protected as part of the 100-year floodway and other regulatory protections. The Santee Subarea Plan recognizes that there may be some future Covered Activities within the floodway (trails, pedestrian bridges, road crossings) that could be approved and would be mitigated through habitat protection, enhancement, and creation within the San Diego River Conservation Opportunities Areas.
- **City-Owned Preserve Lands –** There are existing lands owned by the City that are part of the open space network. As part of the Santee Subarea Plan, the City will provide biological management and monitoring of City properties to meet the Plan requirements.
- **Existing Protected Open Space –** There are a number of properties within the City that are currently protected as open space and are part of the baseline conditions. While the Santee Subarea Plan does not add additional management and monitoring requirements on these baseline areas, the overall goal of the Santee Subarea Plan is to integrate and connect with the existing protected open space to create a connected open space network across the Plan Area.

- Habitats Subject to Subarea Plan Conditions – For lands outside of the Preserve Map categories described above, the Santee Subarea Plan defines requirements for the avoidance, minimization and mitigation requirements for any project that impacts natural habitats.
- Conservation Areas Outside of Plan Area - Two offsite conservation areas are included in the Subarea Plan Area. These include 127 acres of acquisition and/or restoration of habitat for the Quino checkerspot butterfly in the East Elliott area west of the City of Santee and acquisition of 80 acres of occupied Hermes copper butterfly habitat in east San Diego County (see Figure 1).
- Not a Part – Certain lands owned within the Plan Area that are not under the jurisdiction of the City (e.g. the Padre Dam Municipal Water District) and properties that have selected to be excluded are considered Not a Part (NAP) of the Plan. The take authorization under the Santee Subarea Plan is not available for projects occurring within the NAP areas.

For discretionary projects covered under the Santee Subarea Plan, any project-specific environmental review will be conducted as required under CEQA. Any future CEQA analysis for specific projects will consider consistency with the Santee Subarea Plan as part of the CEQA process.

### **Project Alternatives**

The EIR will evaluate a reasonable range of project alternatives, including the required No Project Alternative.

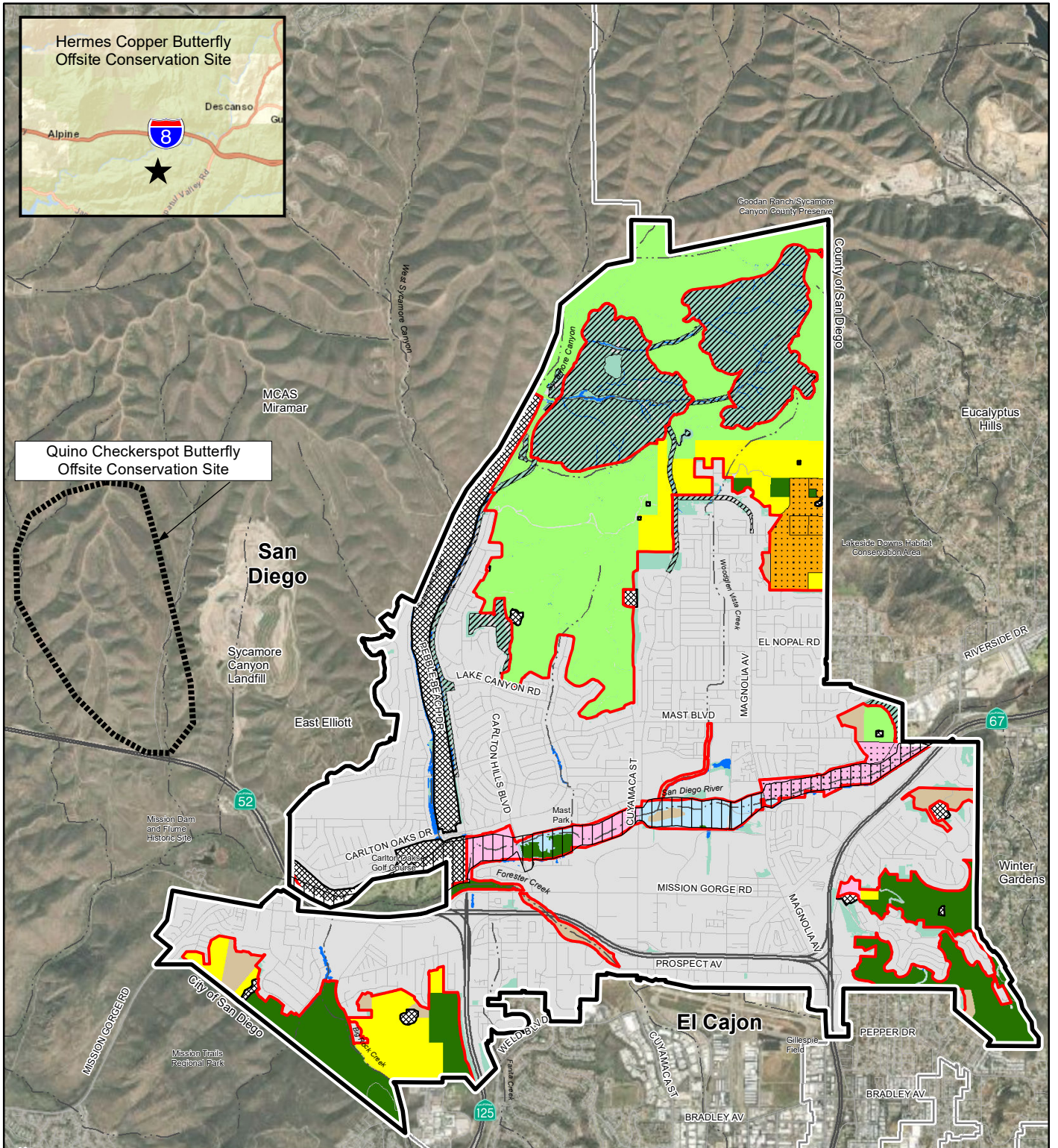
### **Potential Environmental Effect Areas**

The EIR will describe the reasonably foreseeable and potentially significant impacts of the proposed project (both direct and indirect). The EIR also will evaluate the cumulative impacts of the project when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. The EIR will evaluate the following environmental topic areas:

- |                                   |                                  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ▪ Aesthetics/Visual               | ▪ Noise                          |
| ▪ Air Quality                     | ▪ Population and Housing         |
| ▪ Biological Resources            | ▪ Public Services and Recreation |
| ▪ Cultural Resources              | ▪ Transportation                 |
| ▪ Energy                          | ▪ Tribal Cultural Resources      |
| ▪ Geology and Soils               | ▪ Utilities and Service Systems  |
| ▪ Greenhouse Gas Emissions        | ▪ Wildfire                       |
| ▪ Hazards and Hazardous Materials | ▪ Cumulative Effects             |
| ▪ Hydrology and Water Quality     | ▪ Growth Inducing Effects        |
| ▪ Land Use and Planning           |                                  |

When environmental documentation for this project is completed, it will be available for review at the City’s Department of Development Services located in Building 4 at Santee City Hall, 10601 Magnolia Avenue, Santee, CA 92071, and online at:

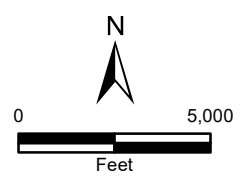
**<https://www.cityofsanteeca.gov/services/project-environmental-review>**



- Subarea Plan Managed Preserve**
- Subarea Plan Mitigation Lands**
- Hardline Conservation Lands
  - Upland Standards Areas
  - San Diego River Conservation Opportunities Areas
- Subarea Plan Protected Open Space**
- City-Owned Preserve Lands

- Existing Protected Open Space**
- Fully Conserved Existing Conservation Lands
  - Partially Conserved Existing Conservation Lands
  - Other Protected Open Space

- City Boundary
- Open Space Network
- Acquired Through State/Federal Funding
- Hardline Development Areas
- Not a Part
- 100-Year Floodway
- Riparian/Aquatic Habitats Subject to Subarea Plan Conditions, including Wetlands Protection
- Upland Habitats Subject to Subarea Plan Conditions
- Developed/Disturbed/Agriculture



**Figure 1**  
**Preserve Map**  
**Santee MSCP Subarea Plan**

