

WILDLIFE CORRIDOR CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

Date: July 15, 2015

To: The Governing Board Members

From:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

Subject: **Agenda Item X: Update and discussion regarding Los Angeles County General Plan Update, including Significant Ecological Areas and Significant Ecological Areas Ordinance.**

Background: The Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority has been following closely and wrote numerous comment letters on the County of Los Angeles General Plan Update, Significant Ecological Areas Ordinance update, and the proposed Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs) boundaries, over a period of almost 14 years. The following provides a status on the County efforts based on WCCA staff's communication with County staff and through other research. One disclaimer is that this is WCCA staff's understanding of the complicated issues from multiple sources and staff tried to be as accurate as possible.

On March 24, 2015, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors indicated its intent to approve the General Plan Update. According to County of Los Angeles Planning staff, for all intents and purposes the Board closed the public hearing and essentially approved the Update. The Board directed staff to bring back within 90 days proposed amendments (if necessary) related to equitable development tools and concepts. County staff described examples such as affordable housing tools, such as value capture, and local hiring policies.

According to County of Los Angeles Planning staff, it is expected that the new General Plan will go into effect in August 2015. A project with a complete application submitted prior to the adoption of the General Plan is subject to the old General Plan.

Conceptual SEAs and Area Plan Efforts

"Conceptual SEAs" were included in the documents that the Board approved. Over many years, the County had studied, developed, and considered changes to the boundaries of the Existing SEAs; those changes were incorporated into what were known as Proposed SEAs. In late 2014, the Regional Planning Commission had directed County staff to address Proposed SEAs within existing community plans

as part of future planning efforts. This would be instead of addressing them as part of the General Plan Update. For the Puente Hills SEA, in Rowland Heights Community General Plan and Hacienda Heights Community Plan, the Proposed SEAs (that were not dedicated open space or Existing SEAs) were then shown as Conceptual SEAs. See attached map. (Similarly, Conceptual SEA boundaries were shown in Altadena where the Proposed SEA overlapped with the Altadena Community Plan.)

Once the area plans are developed by the County in the future, the boundaries on the Conceptual SEAs may change at that time and the revised SEAs may be adopted. It is WCCA staff's understanding that protections of the existing SEA Ordinance would not apply to Conceptual SEAs (once the General Plan Update is in effect), unless and until they become SEAs once the area plans are developed/adopted. Since Proposed SEAs were analyzed in the Environmental Impact Report for the General Plan Update, those can provide a foundation for refining SEA boundaries in the area plan process.

It is WCCA staff's understanding that the County's reasoning was as follows. Land use designations for the existing community plans were not being changed as part of the General Plan Update process. In another area (Antelope Valley Area Plan), SEAs were used to inform changes to land use designations. In the General Plan Update, there is a policy that the Resource Constraints Map (which incorporates SEAs) would be used to develop the land use policy map during the area plan process. County staff also believes the area plan effort will be faster (than updating community plans) and is a good process to coordinate with stakeholders, including cities.

Area plans will be developed and as part of that process, the Conceptual SEAs will be reviewed and revised and perhaps adopted as part of the area plans. The Puente Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor is part of the following planning areas: East San Gabriel Valley Planning Area, Gateway Planning Area, and West San Gabriel Valley Planning Area. WCCA staff requested to the County to be added to the contact list for those planning efforts. According to policy LU-1 in the Implementation Program of the General Plan, there is a timeframe of 1-2 years for the area plans. According to County of Los Angeles Planning staff, a project with a completed application submitted before the new Area Plan is in effect will not be subject to the new SEA boundaries in the Area Plan.

SEA Ordinance

Per County of Los Angeles Planning staff, the SEA Ordinance update was separated from the General Plan Update. In late 2014, the Regional Planning Commission removed the SEA Ordinance from the calendar. The Board of Supervisors did not consider the SEA Ordinance at its March 24, 2015 hearing. According to communications with County staff, this is so the County can address opposition and do more outreach. A new County staff team will continue to develop the SEA Ordinance. According to County of Los Angeles

WCCA Agenda Item X
Los Angeles County General Plan Update
July 15, 2015
Page 3

Planning staff, a project with a completed application submitted prior to the adoption of the new SEA Ordinance is subject to the old SEA Ordinance.