



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
 DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
 South Coast Region
 3883 Ruffin Road
 San Diego, CA 92123
 (858) 467-4201
www.wildlife.ca.gov

GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



Governor's Office of Planning & Research

Mar 15 2022

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Via Electronic Mail Only

March 15, 2022

Erica Gutierrez
 Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
 320 West Temple Street, Room 1362
 Los Angeles, CA 90012
EGutierrez@planning.lacounty.gov

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Los Angeles County Metro Area Plan, SCH #2022020274, Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, Los Angeles County

Dear Ms. Gutierrez:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has reviewed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) from the Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning (DRP) for the Los Angeles County Metro Area Plan (Project). CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding aspects of the Project that could affect fish and wildlife resources and be subject to CDFW's regulatory authority under the Fish and Game Code.

CDFW's Role

CDFW is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State [Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subdivision (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, § 15386, subdivision (a)]. CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Id., § 1802). Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect State fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a Responsible Agency under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code, including lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 *et seq.*). Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take", as defined by State law, of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 *et seq.*), or CESA-listed rare plant pursuant to the Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA; Fish & G. Code, § 1900 *et seq.*), CDFW recommends the Project proponent obtain appropriate authorization under the Fish and Game Code.

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870

Erica Gutierrez
 Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
 March 15, 2022
 Page 2 of 14

Project Description and Summary

Objective: The proposed Project would be a community-based plan (Metro Area Plan) focusing on land use and policy issues specific to the Metro Planning Area. The Metro Planning Area consists of seven unincorporated communities in Los Angeles County (County), which are East Los Angeles, Florence-Firestone, Willowbrook, West Rancho Dominguez-Victoria, East Rancho Dominguez, Walnut Park, and West Athens-Westmont. The Project anticipates a buildout horizon of 2035; the capacity for additional growth anticipated through the implementation of the Project is anticipated to be fully developed by 2035.

The Project's seven communities are currently subject to numerous and often overlapping plans, policies, and regulations. The Project proposes to consolidate regulations that currently exist across multiple plans to simplify and streamline land use and zoning regulations. The Project would update various community plans, Transit-Oriented Districts Specific Plans, and community standards districts. The Project would serve as the basis for a future Capital Improvement Plan. A primary goal of the Project is to update existing land use policies to address community needs and prioritize issues that are central to the lives of community members. The Project would implement zoning recommendations from the recently approved General Plan's Housing Element Update. The Project would consider environmental justice and equity to set forth land uses and policies that address topics such as affordable housing, transportation improvements, strategies to reduce vehicle miles traveled and improve air quality, economic development, preservation of culturally significant landmarks, and new green/open spaces. The Project would execute these goals through three primary Project components:

- 1) A General Plan Amendment No. RPPL2021011925 would:
 - Add Guiding Principle #6 - Promote Strengths, Community Voice, and Equity Outcomes in Chapter 3: Guiding Principles.
 - Amend Chapter 6: Land Use Element to:
 - Add a new land use designation in the General Plan Land Use Legend to facilitate the development of clean industrial, small manufacturing and life science facilities.
 - Add a new or amend existing land use designations in the General Plan Land Use Legend to allow neighborhood scale retail and commercial in some residential areas.
 - Rescind three existing adopted community/neighborhood plans: East Los Angeles Community Plan, Walnut Park Neighborhood Plan, and West Athens-Westmont Community Plan.
 - Establish the Project, which would include goals and policies for the seven unincorporated communities. The Project would include the following:
 - Areawide goals and policies for the following topics, including but not limited to: Land Use, Public Space and Recreation, Mobility, Environmental Justice, Climate Adaptation and Resiliency, Cultural and Historic Resources, and Economic Development.
 - Areawide Implementation Programs
 - Community chapters, as needed, with additional goals, policies and implementation programs that are community-specific, addressing planning issues that are unique to a particular community and cannot be addressed through areawide goals, policies, and programs. The Florence-Firestone Community Plan will be reorganized and incorporated into the Project as a

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 3 of 14

- community chapter.
 - An updated land use policy map that utilizes the General Plan Land Use Legend, which, at a minimum, will: 1) incorporate the proposed land use policy changes identified in the Housing Element 2021-2029, 2) Re-designate certain industrial areas utilizing the new land use designation to facilitate the development of clean industrial and life science facilities, and 3) Maintain consistency between zoning and land use policy, re-designate any A-1 (Light Agriculture) zoned parcels that are proposed to be rezoned to R-1 (Single-family residence), if the existing land use designation does not allow residential uses.
- 2) A Zone Change No. RPPL2021011985 would update the zoning map, including zoning maps in the Transit-Oriented Districts Specific Plans to maintain consistency with the updated land use policy map and incorporate the proposed rezoning as identified in the Housing Element 2021-2029 to meet the Regional Housing Needs Assessment goals for the County. In addition, the Project would rezone A-1 parcels that are not currently used for agricultural purposes to R-1.
- 3) Amendments to Title 22 (Planning and Zoning) would:
- Reassess and revise six existing Community Standards Districts (CSDs): East Los Angeles CSD, East Rancho Dominguez CSD, Walnut Park CSD, West Athens-Westmont CSD, West Rancho Dominguez-Victoria CSD, and Willowbrook CSD.
 - Establish an Areawide Standards District to streamline and simplify development standards that are applicable to all communities in the Metro Planning Area and include community-specific standards on an as-needed basis.
 - Reorganize the Connect Southwest Los Angeles and Willowbrook Transit-Oriented Districts Specific Plans so regulations and development standards are codified in a numbering system that is consistent with the rest of Title 22.
 - Create a new industrial zone to implement the new land use designation to facilitate the development of clean industrial, small manufacturing and life science facilities.
 - Establish new design and development standards for "missing middle" housing (low to mid-density housing types such as duplexes), which is currently allowed in single-family residential zones pursuant to California State Senate Bill 9 and the Accessory Dwelling Unit law.
 - Revise existing and create new development and/or design standards, including those in the existing Transit-Oriented Districts Specific Plans (East Los Angeles 3rd Street, Connect Southwest Los Angeles, and Willowbrook) to:
 - Minimize the adverse impact of industrial sites on surrounding residential or other sensitive uses.
 - Facilitate well-designed multi-family residential and mixed-use developments with high-quality public and recreational spaces.
 - Preserve existing naturally-occurring affordable housing supply, such as existing apartments.
 - Encourage neighborhood scale retail and commercial, such as corner stores and neighborhood markets within walking distance of residential areas.

Location: The Metro Planning Area covers the following seven unincorporated communities of the County: East Los Angeles, Florence-Firestone, Willowbrook, West Rancho Dominguez-

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 4 of 14

Victoria, East Rancho Dominguez, Walnut Park, and West Athens-Westmont. The Metro Planning Area is in the geographic center of the County.

Comments and Recommendations

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist the DRP in adequately identifying, avoiding, and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct, and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. The PEIR should provide adequate and complete disclosure of the Project's potential impacts on biological resources [Pub. Resources Code, § 21061; CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15003(i), 15151]. CDFW looks forward to commenting on the PEIR when it is available.

Specific Comments

- 1) Stream Delineation and Impact Assessment. The Metro Planning Area contains watercourses and wetland features including, but not limited to, the Los Angeles River and Compton Creek (USFWS 2021).
 - a) Analysis and Disclosure. In preparation of the Project's PEIR, CDFW recommends the PEIR include a stream delineation and evaluation of impacts on any river, stream, or lake¹. The delineation should be conducted pursuant to the USFWS wetland definition adopted by CDFW2 (Cowardin et al. 1979). The PEIR should discuss the Project's potential impact on streams including impacts on associated natural communities. Impacts may include channelizing or diverting streams, impairing a watercourse, and removing or degrading vegetation through habitat modification (e.g., loss of water source, encroachment, and edge effects leading to introduction of non-native plants). Impacts may occur during Project-facilitated development of clean industrial, small manufacturing, and life science facilities, as well as development facilitated by rezoning A-1 zoned parcels to R-1 zoned parcels. The PEIR should include a map of where Project-facilitated development and rezoning could occur overlaid on streams.
 - b) Mitigation. If the Project would impact streams, CDFW recommends the PEIR include measures that require future projects facilitated by the Metro Area Plan to mitigate for impacts on streams and associated natural communities. Mitigation may include avoiding impacts by establishing effective unobstructed vegetated buffers and setbacks adjoining streams and associated natural communities. If DRP proposes buffers and setbacks as mitigation for all subsequent individual projects, the PEIR should include justification for the effectiveness of chosen buffer and setback distances to avoid impacts on the stream and associated natural communities. If avoidance is not feasible, DRP should require individual projects to provide compensatory mitigation for impacts on streams and associated plant communities such that there is no net loss of biological resources. DRP should provide higher mitigation for impacts on sensitive natural

¹ "Any river, stream, or lake" includes those that are dry for periods of time (ephemeral/episodic) as well as those that flow year-round (perennial). This includes ephemeral streams, desert washes, and watercourses with a subsurface flow. It may also apply to work undertaken within the flood plain of a water body.

² Be advised that some wetland and riparian habitats subject to CDFW's authority may extend beyond the jurisdictional limits of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Section 404 permit and Regional Water Quality Control Board Section 401 Certification.

Erica Gutierrez
 Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
 March 15, 2022
 Page 5 of 14

communities (see General Comment #3a) and presence of rare, sensitive, or special status flora and fauna.

- c) Fish and Game Code section 1602. CDFW exercises its regulatory authority as provided by Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. to conserve fish and wildlife resources which includes rivers, streams, or lakes and associated natural communities. As a Responsible Agency under CEQA, CDFW has authority over activities in streams and/or lakes that will divert or obstruct the natural flow, or change the bed, channel, or bank (including vegetation associated with the stream or lake) of a river or stream, or use material from a streambed. For any such activities, the project applicant (or “entity”) must notify CDFW³. Accordingly, if the Project would impact streams, the PEIR should include a measure that requires future projects facilitated by the Metro Area Plan to notify CDFW pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1602 prior to starting activities that may impact streams. Please visit CDFW’s [Lake and Streambed Alteration Program](#) webpage for more information (CDFW 2022a).
- 2) Nesting Birds. The Metro Planning Area contains open space (e.g., golf courses). Trees within open spaces and urbanized landscape could support nesting birds. In the greater Los Angeles, urban forests and street trees both native and some non-native species, provide habitat for a high diversity of birds (Wood and Esaian 2020). Some species of raptors have adapted to and exploited urban areas for breeding and nesting (Cooper et al. 2020). For example, raptors (Accipitridae, Falconidae) such as red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) and Cooper’s hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) can nest successfully in urban sites. Red-tailed hawks commonly nest in ornamental vegetation such as eucalyptus (Cooper et al. 2020).
- a) Protection Status. Migratory nongame native bird species are protected by international treaty under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 50, § 10.13). Sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 of the California Fish and Game Code prohibit take of all birds and their active nests including raptors and other migratory nongame birds (as listed under the Federal MBTA). It is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any raptor.
- b) Analysis and Disclosure. The PEIR should discuss the Project’s potential impact on nesting birds and raptors. A discussion of potential impacts should include impacts that may occur during implementation of future projects facilitated by the Metro Area Plan resulting in ground-disturbing activities and vegetation removal.
- c) Avoidance. CDFW recommends the PEIR include measures that require future projects facilitated by the Metro Area Plan to fully avoid impacts on nesting birds and raptors. To the extent feasible, no construction, ground-disturbing activities (e.g., mobilizing, staging, drilling, and excavating), and vegetation removal should occur during the avian breeding season which generally runs from February 15 through September 15 (as early as

³ CDFW’s issuance of a Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Agreement for a project that is subject to CEQA will require CEQA compliance actions by CDFW as a Responsible Agency. As a Responsible Agency, CDFW may consider the environmental document of the local jurisdiction (lead agency) for the project. To minimize additional requirements by CDFW pursuant to section 1600 et seq. and/or under CEQA, the environmental document should fully identify the potential impacts to the stream or riparian resources and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring, and reporting commitments for issuance of the LSA Agreement.

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 6 of 14

January 1 for some raptors) to avoid take of birds, raptors, or their eggs.

- d) Minimizing Potential Impacts. If impacts on nesting birds and raptors cannot be avoided, CDFW recommends the PEIR include measures that require future projects facilitated by the Metro Area Plan to minimize impacts on nesting birds and raptors. Prior to starting ground-disturbing activities and vegetation removal, a qualified biologist should conduct nesting bird and raptor surveys to identify nests. The qualified biologist should establish no-disturbance buffers to minimize impacts on those nests. CDFW recommends a minimum 300-foot no-disturbance buffer around active bird nests. For raptors, the no-disturbance buffer should be expanded to 500 feet and 0.5 mile for special status species, if feasible. Personnel working on a project, including all contractors working on site, should be instructed on the presence of nesting birds, area sensitivity, and adherence to no-disturbance buffers. Reductions in the buffer distance may be appropriate depending on the avian species involved, ambient levels of human activity, screening vegetation, or possibly other factors determined by a qualified biologist.
- 3) Bats. Numerous bat species are known to roost in trees and structures throughout Los Angeles County (Miner and Stokes 2005). Bats and roosts could be impacted by removal of trees, vegetation, and/or structures supporting roosting bats. This could result in injury and/or mortality of bats, as well as loss of roosting habitat. Bats and roosts could also be impacted by increased noise, human activity, dust, and ground vibrations.
 - a) Protection Status. Bats are considered non-game mammals and are afforded protection by State law from take and/or harassment (Fish & G. Code, § 4150; Cal. Code of Regs., § 251.1). In addition, some bats are considered a California Species of Special Concern (SSC). CEQA provides protection not only for CESA-listed species, but for any species including but not limited to SSC which can be shown to meet the criteria for State listing. These SSC meet the CEQA definition of endangered, rare, or threatened species (CEQA Guidelines, § 15380). Take of SSC could require a mandatory finding of significance (CEQA Guidelines, § 15065).
 - b) Analysis and Disclosure. The PEIR should discuss the Project's potential impact on bats and habitat supporting roosting bats. A discussion of potential impacts should include impacts that may occur during implementation of future projects facilitated by the Metro Area Plan resulting in ground-disturbing activities and vegetation removal.
 - c) Avoidance and Minimization. If the Project would impact bats, CDFW recommends the PEIR include measures that require future projects facilitated by the Metro Area Plan to avoid and minimize impacts on bats, roosts, and maternity roosts. Individual projects should be required to retain a qualified bat specialist identify potential daytime, nighttime, wintering, and hibernation roost sites and conduct bat surveys within these areas (plus a 100-foot buffer as access allows) to identify roosting bats and any maternity roosts. CDFW recommends using acoustic recognition technology to maximize detection of bats. The PEIR should include mitigation measures in accordance with [California Bat Mitigation Measures](#) (Johnston et al. 2004) that would be implemented at a project-level.

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 7 of 14

General Comments

- 1) Disclosure. The PEIR should provide an adequate, complete, and detailed disclosure about the effect which the proposed Project is likely to have on the environment (Pub. Resources Code, § 20161; CEQA Guidelines, § 15151). Adequate disclosure is necessary so CDFW may provide comments on the adequacy of proposed avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures, as well as to assess the significance of the specific impact relative to plant and wildlife species impacted (e.g., current range, distribution, population trends, and connectivity).
- 2) Mitigation Measures. Public agencies have a duty under CEQA to prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment by requiring changes in a project through the use of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures [CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15002(a)(3), 15021]. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15126.4, an environmental document “shall describe feasible measures which could mitigate for impacts below a significant level under CEQA.”
 - a) Level of Detail. Mitigation measures must be feasible, effective, implemented, and fully enforceable/imposed by the lead agency through permit conditions, agreements, or other legally binding instruments (Pub. Resources Code, § 21081.6(b); CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.4). A public agency “shall provide the measures that are fully enforceable through permit conditions, agreements, or other measures” (Pub. Resources Code, § 21081.6). CDFW recommends DRP provide mitigation measures that are specific, detailed (i.e., responsible party, timing, specific actions, location), and clear in order for a measure to be fully enforceable and implemented successfully via a mitigation monitoring and/or reporting program (Pub. Resources Code, § 21081.6; CEQA Guidelines, § 15097).
 - b) Disclosure of Impacts. If a proposed mitigation measure would cause one or more significant effects, in addition to impacts caused by the proposed Project, the PEIR should include a discussion of the effects of proposed mitigation measures [CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.4(a)(1)]. In that regard, the PEIR should provide an adequate, complete, and detailed disclosure about the Project’s proposed mitigation measure(s). Adequate disclosure is necessary so CDFW may assess the potential impacts of proposed mitigation measures.
- 3) Biological Baseline Assessment. An adequate biological resources assessment should provide a complete assessment and impact analysis of the flora and fauna within and adjacent to the Project area and where the Project may result in ground disturbance. The assessment and analysis should place emphasis on identifying endangered, threatened, rare, and sensitive species; regionally and locally unique species; and sensitive habitats. An impact analysis will aid in determining the Project’s potential direct, indirect, and cumulative biological impacts, as well as specific mitigation or avoidance measures necessary to offset those impacts. CDFW also considers impacts to SSC a significant direct and cumulative adverse effect without implementing appropriate avoidance and/or mitigation measures. The PEIR should include the following information:
 - a) Information on the regional setting that is critical to an assessment of environmental impacts, with special emphasis on resources that are rare or unique to the region [CEQA Guidelines, § 15125(c)]. The PEIR should include measures to fully avoid and otherwise

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 8 of 14

protect Sensitive Natural Communities. CDFW considers Sensitive Natural Communities as threatened habitats having both regional and local significance. Natural communities, alliances, and associations with a State-wide rarity ranking of S1, S2, and S3 should be considered sensitive and declining at the local and regional level. These ranks can be obtained by visiting the [Vegetation Classification and Mapping Program - Natural Communities](#) webpage (CDFW 2022b);

- b) A thorough, recent, floristic-based assessment of special status plants and natural communities following CDFW's [Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities](#) (CDFW 2018). Botanical field surveys should be comprehensive over the entire Project area, including areas that could be directly or indirectly impacted by the Project. Adjoining properties should also be surveyed where direct or indirect Project effects could occur, such as those from fuel modification, herbicide application, invasive species, and altered hydrology;
- c) Floristic alliance- and/or association-based mapping and vegetation impact assessments conducted in the Project area and within adjacent areas. The [Manual of California Vegetation](#), second edition, should also be used to inform this mapping and assessment (Sawyer et al. 2009). This assessment should include adjoining habitat areas that could be directly or indirectly impacted by the Project;
- d) A complete and recent assessment of the biological resources associated with each habitat type in the Project area and within adjacent areas. CDFW's [California Natural Diversity Database](#) in Sacramento should be contacted to obtain current information on any previously reported sensitive species and habitat (CDFW 2022c). An assessment should include a minimum nine-quadrangle search of the CNDDDB to determine a list of species potentially present in the Project area. A lack of records in the CNDDDB does not mean that rare, threatened, or endangered plants and wildlife do not occur. Field verification for the presence or absence of sensitive species is necessary to provide a complete biological assessment for adequate CEQA review [CEQA Guidelines, § 15003(i)];
- e) A complete, recent, assessment of endangered, rare, or threatened species and other sensitive species within the Project area and adjacent areas, including SSC and California Fully Protected Species (Fish & G. Code, §§ 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515). Species to be addressed should include all those which meet the CEQA definition of endangered, rare, or threatened species (CEQA Guidelines, § 15380). Seasonal variations in use of the Project area should also be addressed such as wintering, roosting, nesting, and foraging habitat. Focused species-specific surveys, conducted at the appropriate time of year and time of day when the sensitive species are active or otherwise identifiable, may be required if suitable habitat is present. See CDFW's [Survey and Monitoring Protocols and Guidelines](#) for established survey protocol for select species (CDFW 2022d). Acceptable species-specific survey procedures may be developed in consultation with CDFW and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and,
- f) A recent wildlife and rare plant survey. CDFW generally considers biological field assessments for wildlife to be valid for a one-year period and assessments for rare plants may be considered valid for a period of up to three years. Some projects may

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 9 of 14

warrant periodic updated surveys for certain sensitive taxa, particularly if build out and project implementation could occur over a protracted time frame or in phases.

- 4) Biological Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts. The PEIR should provide a thorough discussion of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts expected to adversely affect biological resources with specific measures to offset such impacts. The PEIR should address the following:
 - a) A discussion regarding Project-related indirect impacts on biological resources, including resources in nearby public lands, open space, adjacent natural habitats, riparian ecosystems, and any designated and/or proposed or existing reserve lands [e.g., preserve lands associated with a Natural Community Conservation Plan (Fish & G. Code, § 2800 et. seq.)]. Impacts on, and maintenance of, wildlife corridor/movement areas, including access to undisturbed habitats in areas adjacent to the Project, should be fully analyzed and discussed in the PEIR;
 - b) A discussion of both the short-term and long-term effects of the Project on species population distribution and concentration, as well as alterations of the ecosystem supporting those species impacted [CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.2(a)];
 - c) A discussion of potential adverse impacts from lighting, noise, temporary and permanent human activity, and exotic species, and identification of any mitigation measures;
 - d) A discussion of post-Project fate of drainage patterns, surface flows, and soil erosion and/or sedimentation in streams and water bodies. The discussion should also address the potential water extraction activities and the potential resulting impacts on habitat and natural communities supported by the groundwater. Measures to mitigate such impacts should be included;
 - e) An analysis of impacts from proposed changes to land use designations and zoning, and existing land use designation and zoning located nearby or adjacent to natural areas that may inadvertently contribute to wildlife-human interactions. A discussion of possible conflicts and mitigation measures to reduce these conflicts should be included in the PEIR; and,
 - f) A cumulative effects analysis as described under CEQA Guidelines section 15130. General and specific plans, as well as past, present, and anticipated future projects, should be analyzed relative to their impacts on similar plant and wildlife species, habitat, and natural communities. If DRP determines that the Project would not have a cumulative impact, the PEIR should indicate why the cumulative impact is not significant. DRP's determination should be supported by facts and analyses [CEQA Guidelines, § 15130(a)(2)].
- 5) Project Description and Alternatives. To enable adequate review and comment on the proposed Project from the standpoint of the protection of fish, wildlife, and plants, CDFW recommends the following information be included in the PEIR:
 - a) A complete discussion of the purpose and need for, and description of the proposed Project;

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 10 of 14

- b) Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6(a), an environmental document “shall describe a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives to the Project, or to the location of the Project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the Project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the Project.” CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6(f)(2) states if the lead agency concludes that no feasible alternative locations exist, it must disclose the reasons for this conclusion; and,
- c) A range of feasible alternatives to the Project location to avoid or otherwise minimize direct and indirect impacts on sensitive biological resources and wildlife movement areas. CDFW recommends DRP select Project designs and alternatives that would avoid or otherwise minimize direct and indirect impacts on biological resources. CDFW also recommends DRP consider establishing appropriate setbacks from sensitive and special status biological resources. Setbacks should not be impacted by ground disturbance, fuel modification, or hydrological changes from any future Project-related construction, activities, maintenance, and development. As a general rule, CDFW recommends reducing or clustering a development footprint to retain unobstructed spaces for vegetation and wildlife and provide connections for wildlife between properties and minimize obstacles to open space.

Project alternatives should be thoroughly evaluated, even if an alternative would impede, to some degree, the attainment of the Project objectives or would be more costly (CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.6). The PEIR “shall” include sufficient information about each alternative to allow meaningful evaluation, public participation, analysis, and comparison with the proposed Project (CEQA Guidelines, § 15126.6).

- d) Where the Project may impact aquatic and riparian resources, CDFW recommends DRP select Project designs and alternatives that would fully avoid impacts to such resources. CDFW also recommends an alternative that would not impede, alter, or otherwise modify existing surface flow, watercourse and meander, and water-dependent ecosystems and natural communities. Project designs should consider elevated crossings to avoid channelizing or narrowing of watercourses. Any modifications to a river, creek, or stream may cause or magnify upstream bank erosion, channel incision, and drop in water level and cause the watercourse to alter its course of flow.
- 6) Data. CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations [Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e)]. Accordingly, please report any special status species and sensitive natural communities detected by completing and submitting [CNDDB Field Survey Forms](#) (CDFW 2022e). To submit additional information on sensitive natural communities, the [Combined Rapid Assessment and Releve Form](#) should be completed and submitted to CDFW’s Vegetation Classification and Mapping Program (CDFW 2022f). DRP should ensure data collected for the preparation of the PEIR be properly submitted and with all applicable data fields filled out.
- 7) Use of Native Plants and Trees. CDFW supports the use of native plants for any project proposing revegetation and landscaping. CDFW strongly recommends avoiding non-native, invasive plants for landscaping and restoration, particularly any species listed as ‘Moderate’ or ‘High’ by the [California Invasive Plant Council](#) (Cal-IPC 2022). CDFW supports the use of

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 11 of 14

native species found in naturally occurring plant communities within or adjacent to the Project area. In addition, CDFW supports planting species of trees, such as oaks (*Quercus* genus), and understory vegetation (e.g., ground cover, subshrubs, and shrubs) in order to create habitat and provide a food source for birds. CDFW recommends retaining any standing, dead, or dying tree (snags) where possible because snags provide perching and nesting habitat for birds and raptors. Finally, CDFW supports planting species of vegetation with high insect and pollinator value.

- 8) Translocation/Salvage of Plants and Animal Species. Translocation and transplantation is the process of removing plants and wildlife from one location and permanently moving it to a new location. CDFW generally does not support the use of translocation or transplantation as the primary mitigation strategy for unavoidable impacts to endangered, rare, or threatened plants and animals. Studies have shown that these efforts are experimental and the outcome unreliable. CDFW has found that permanent preservation and management of habitat capable of supporting these species is often a more effective long-term strategy for conserving plants and animals and their habitats.
- 9) Compensatory Mitigation. The PEIR should include compensatory mitigation measures for the Project's significant direct and indirect impacts to sensitive and special status plants, animals, and habitats. Mitigation measures should emphasize avoidance and minimization of Project-related impacts. For unavoidable impacts, on-site habitat restoration or enhancement should be discussed in detail. If on-site mitigation is not feasible or would not be biologically viable and therefore inadequate to mitigate the loss of biological functions and values, off-site mitigation through habitat creation and/or acquisition and preservation in perpetuity should be addressed. Areas proposed as mitigation lands should be protected in perpetuity with a conservation easement and financial assurance and dedicated to a qualified entity for long-term management and monitoring. Under Government Code, section 65967, the Lead Agency must exercise due diligence in reviewing the qualifications of a governmental entity, special district, or nonprofit organization to effectively manage and steward land, water, or natural resources on mitigation lands it approves.
- 10) Long-term Management of Mitigation Lands. For proposed preservation and/or restoration, the PEIR should include measures to protect the targeted habitat values from direct and indirect negative impacts in perpetuity. The objective should be to offset Project-induced qualitative and quantitative losses of wildlife habitat values. Issues that should be addressed include (but are not limited to) restrictions on access, proposed land dedications, monitoring and management programs, control of illegal dumping, water pollution, and increased human intrusion. An appropriate non-wasting endowment should be set aside to provide for long-term management of mitigation lands.
- 11) Wetland Resources. CDFW, as described in Fish and Game Code section 703(a), is guided by the Fish and Game Commission's (Commission) policies. The [Wetlands Resources](#) policy the Commission "...seek[s] to provide for the protection, preservation, restoration, enhancement and expansion of wetland habitat in California" (CFGF 2020). Further, it is the policy of the Fish and Game Commission to strongly discourage development in or conversion of wetlands. It opposes, consistent with its legal authority, any development or conversion that would result in a reduction of wetland acreage or wetland habitat values. To that end, the Commission opposes wetland development proposals unless, at a minimum, project mitigation assures there will be 'no net loss' of either wetland habitat values or

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 12 of 14


acreage. The Commission strongly prefers mitigation which would achieve expansion of wetland acreage and enhancement of wetland habitat values.”

- a) The Wetlands Resources policy provides a framework for maintaining wetland resources and establishes mitigation guidance. CDFW encourages avoidance of wetland resources as a primary mitigation measure and discourages the development or type conversion of wetlands to uplands. CDFW encourages activities that would avoid the reduction of wetland acreage, function, or habitat values. Once avoidance and minimization measures have been exhausted, a project should include mitigation measures to assure a “no net loss” of either wetland habitat values, or acreage, for unavoidable impacts to wetland resources. Conversions include, but are not limited to, conversion to subsurface drains, placement of fill or building of structures within the wetland, and channelization or removal of materials from the streambed. All wetlands and watercourses, whether ephemeral, intermittent, or perennial, should be retained and provided with substantial setbacks, which preserve the riparian and aquatic values and functions benefiting local and transient wildlife populations. CDFW recommends mitigation measures to compensate for unavoidable impacts be included in the PEIR and these measures should compensate for the loss of function and value.
- b) The Fish and Game Commission’s Water policy guides CDFW on the quantity and quality of the waters of this State that should be apportioned and maintained respectively so as to produce and sustain maximum numbers of fish and wildlife; to provide maximum protection and enhancement of fish and wildlife and their habitat; encourage and support programs to maintain or restore a high quality of the waters of this State; prevent the degradation thereof caused by pollution and contamination; and, endeavor to keep as much water as possible open and accessible to the public for the use and enjoyment of fish and wildlife. CDFW recommends avoidance of water practices and structures that use excessive amounts of water, and minimization of impacts that negatively affect water quality, to the extent feasible (Fish & G. Code, § 5650).

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the NOP for the Los Angeles County Metro Area Plan to assist the Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning in preparing the Project’s environmental document and identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources. If you have any questions or comments regarding this letter, please contact Ruby Kwan-Davis, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at Ruby.Kwan-Davis@wildlife.ca.gov or (562) 619-2230.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

5991E19EF8094C3...

Victoria Tang signing for

Erinn Wilson-Olgin
Environmental Program Manager I
South Coast Region

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 13 of 14

ec: CDFW

Erinn Wilson-Olgin, Los Alamitos – Erinn.Wilson-Olgin@wildlife.ca.gov

Victoria Tang, Los Alamitos – Victoria.Tang@wildlife.ca.gov

Ruby Kwan-Davis, Los Alamitos – Ruby.Kwan-Davis@wildlife.ca.gov

Felicia Silva, Los Alamitos – Felicia.Silva@wildlife.ca.gov

Julisa Portugal, Los Alamitos – Julisa.Portugal@wildlife.ca.gov

Cindy Hailey, San Diego – Cindy.Hailey@wildlife.ca.gov

CEQA Program Coordinator, Sacramento – CEQACommentLetters@wildlife.ca.gov

State Clearinghouse, Office of Planning and Research – State.Clearinghouse@opr.ca.gov

References:

- [CDFWa] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2022. Lake and Streambed Alteration Program. Available from: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/LSA>.
- [CDFWb] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2022. Natural Communities. Available from: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/VegCAMP/Natural-Communities>.
- [CDFWc] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2022. California Natural Diversity Database. Available from: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Maps-and-Data#43018408-cnddb-in-bios>
- [CDFWd] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2022. Survey and Monitoring Protocols and Guidelines. Available from: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/conservation/survey-protocols>
- [CDFWe] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2022. Submitting Data to the CNDDDB. Available from: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>
- [CDFWf] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2022. Natural Communities — Submitting Information. Available from: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/VegCAMP/Natural-Communities/Submit>
- [CDFW] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2018. Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities. Available from: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=18959>
- [Cal-IPC] California Invasive Plant Council. 2022. The Cal-IPC Inventory. Available from: <https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/inventory/>
- [CFGJ] California Fish and Game Commission. 2020. Policies. Retention of Wetland Acreage and Habitat Values. Accessed: <https://fgc.ca.gov/About/Policies/Miscellaneous>.
- Cooper D.S., Yeh, P.J., and D.T. Blumstein. 2020. Tolerance and avoidance of urban cover in a southern California suburban raptor community over five decades. Urban Ecosystems. doi.org/10.1007/s11252-020-01035-w
- Cowardin, L.M., V. Carter, F.C. Golet, and E.T. LaRoe. 1979. Classification of wetlands and deepwater habitats of the United States. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. FWS/OBS-79/31. Washington, DC.
- Johnston, D., Tatarian, G., & Pierson, E. 2004. California Bat Mitigation Techniques, Solutions, and Effectiveness. Available from: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=10334>
- Miner, K.L. and D.C. Stokes. 2005. Bats in the South Coast Ecoregion: Status, Conservation Issues, and Research Needs. USDA Forest Service Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-195.
- Sawyer, J. O., Keeler-Wolf, T., and Evens J.M. 2009. A Manual of California Vegetation, 2nd ed. ISBN 978-0-943460-49-9.
- [USFWS] United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 2021. Wetlands Mapper. [Accessed 28 February 2022]. Accessed at: <https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/mapper.html>.

Erica Gutierrez
Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
March 15, 2022
Page 14 of 14

Wood, E.M. and S. Esaian. 2020. The importance of street trees to urban avifauna. *Ecological Applications* 30(7): e02149.