



State of California – Natural Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
South Coast Region  
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**GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor**  
**CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director**



Governor's Office of Planning & Research

**March 6 2023**

## STATE CLEARING HOUSE

March 6, 2023

Kirsten Uchitel, Associate Planner  
SANDAG  
401 B Street, Suite 800  
San Diego, CA 92101  
[Kirsten.Uchitel@sandag.org](mailto:Kirsten.Uchitel@sandag.org)

### **Subject: Response to the Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2025 Regional Plan, San Diego County, California, SCH No. 2023010039**

Dear Ms. Uchitel:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has received the above referenced Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) from the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) for the 2025 Regional Plan (Plan) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines<sup>1</sup>.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the NOP. CDFW previously commented on the DEIR for the 2021 Regional Plan in a letter dated October 11, 2021.

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, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (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 fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also a Responsible Agency under CEQA. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381.) CDFW may also need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, projects tiering off the Plan may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority. (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.) Likewise, to the extent implementation of projects as proposed under the Plan 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.), the project proponent may seek related take authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code. CDFW also administers the Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program.

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<sup>1</sup> CEQA is codified in the California Public Resources Code in section 21000 et seq. The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

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The 2025 Plan location includes the 18 cities and unincorporated areas of San Diego County. The area encompassed by the Plan is located within planning areas for several Subregional NCCPs within San Diego County (County), including the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) and Multiple Habitat Conservation Program (MHCP), as well as the draft North County (NC) MSCP and East County (EC) MSCP.

The 2025 Plan will consist of a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) that identify the future of the San Diego region's transportation investments and growth, and is an update to San Diego Forward: The 2015 Regional Plan adopted in October 2015, as well as the 2019 Federal Regional Transportation Plan adopted in October 2019. Every four years, in accordance with state and federal guidelines, SANDAG prepares and updates a Regional Plan in collaboration with the 18 cities and County of San Diego, along with regional, state, and federal partners. The RTP and SCS updates must include at least a 20-year planning horizon. SANDAG is currently implementing the 2021 Regional Plan, which was adopted by the SANDAG Board of Directors on December 10, 2021. Preparation of the next four-year cycle began in late 2022, with the 2025 Regional Plan anticipated to be adopted by December 2025.

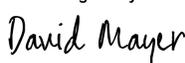
CDFW's policy is to promote and foster the development of planning strategies at the ecosystem level through active participation in local development of regional NCCPs, which often include innovative multiple species habitat conservation planning efforts. The success of these plans is reliant on maintaining core biological resource areas and habitat linkages that are essential to the long-term biological viability of associated flora and fauna. Many of those projects defined within the 2025 Plan extend through diverse and biologically valuable habitats; consequently the need for comprehensive planning and creative design solutions will be essential to ensure goals and objectives articulated in current and draft NCCP/Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) efforts are not undermined. This includes compliance with CESA and the Federal Endangered Species Act, approved NCCP/HCPs (e.g., the County and City of San Diego's approved MSCP) and the in-process NC MSCP.

CDFW has been closely engaged with SANDAG, local jurisdictions, special districts, and other interested parties regarding regional conservation processes and objectives for the past 30 years. We look forward to working closely with SANDAG on the forthcoming planning effort. We believe the 2025 Plan provides a unique opportunity to develop and refine SANDAG's policies and strategies that could lead to more effective implementation of resource conservation and species protection, while complimenting the transportation needs and quality of life for residents of the County.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the NOP for the 2025 Plan and to assist SANDAG in further minimizing and mitigating project impacts to biological resources.

Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Karen Drewe, Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory), at [Karen.Drewe@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Karen.Drewe@wildlife.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
  
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David Mayer  
Environmental Program Manager  
South Coast Region

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San Diego Association of Governments  
March 6, 2023  
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cc: CDFW

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