

## 4.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

This section evaluates the potential biological resources impacts associated with implementation of the proposed *Sustainable Santee Plan: The City's Roadmap to Greenhouse Gas Reductions* ("Sustainable Santee Plan" or "proposed project") This analysis evaluates the proposed project's consistency with provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP), or other approved local, regional, or State habitat conservation plan.

### 4.3.1 Scope Process

The City distributed the NOP for the EIR from August 17 to October 2, 2017. Fifteen comment letters were received in response to the NOP. Two issues related to biological resources were raised in those comment letters. The first letter recommended consistency in regard to how the significance of impacts will be evaluated as well as site-specific biological technical reporting for subsequent CEQA environmental documentation for projects that tier from the PEIR. The second letter requested that the City consider the existing Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) including the adopted South County Plan, preliminary draft North County Plan, and preliminary draft map for the East County Study Area as part of the PEIR analysis.

The Initial Study (IS) prepared for the proposed project indicated that implementation of energy production facilities could conflict with the provisions of an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or State habitat conservation plan. The IS also determined that the following impacts would be less than significant 1) an adverse effect on any candidate, sensitive, or special status species; 2) an adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community; 3) an adverse effect on any state or federally protected wetlands; 4) interfere with the movement of any native resident of migratory fish or species; and 5) conflict with local policies protecting biological resources. Please refer to Appendix A, IS/NOP, for additional discussion

Later activities identified in the Sustainable Santee Plan subject to CEQA review will be examined to determine whether their potential effects to biological resources were analyzed in the PEIR. .

### 4.3.2 Methodology

As noted above, the only potentially significant issue related to biological resources and implementation of the Sustainable Santee Plan is potential conflicts with an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or State habitat conservation plans. Therefore, the programs and measures contained in the Sustainable Santee Plan were compared to adopted HCPs, NCCPs, and other approved local, regional, or State HCP provisions to determine if any conflicts exist. These HCPs include the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program and respective Subarea plans.

### 4.3.3 Existing Environmental Setting

The proposed project would apply to the entire 16.5 square miles within the limits of the City of Santee. Two main topographic features exist within the City of Santee - the coastal plain of the Coastal Province, and the foothills of the Peninsular Range Province (Santee 2003). The narrow coastal plain, which is dominated by terraces or mesas and dissected by the San Diego River, occupies the majority of the City. This area, which is found in the center of the City, is characterized

by relatively flat topography. Within the north and southeastern portions of the City are the foothills of the Peninsular Range. Topography is generally steeper in the far northern areas of the City, including the Carlton Hills and Fanita Ranch areas, and in the south including the Rattlesnake Mountain, Mission Trails and Grossmont Mesa areas. Topographic elevations range from approximately 300 to 1,200 feet within the City.

Biological resources (plants and wildlife) are often distributed based on the topographic characteristics. The most predominate natural habitat is Coast Sage Scrub followed by Chaparral, Grassland, and Riparian.

The City of Santee is working on their portion of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subregional Plan (City of San Diego 1998) Area. The MSCP 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 ten other jurisdictions (cities of San Diego, Chula Vista, Coronado, Del Mar, El Cajon, Imperial Beach, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, National City, and Poway). The MSCP is a comprehensive program designed to create, manage, and monitor an ecosystem preserve and is intended to protect viable populations of native plant and animal species and their habitats in perpetuity, while accommodating continued economic development and quality of life amenities such as open space and hiking opportunities for residents within the area. The MSCP Subregional Plan is implemented through local Subarea Plans.

#### **4.3.4 Regulatory Setting**

##### *4.3.4.1 Federal Policies and Regulations*

The MSCP serves as an Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Endangered Species Act.

##### *4.3.4.2 State Policies and Regulations*

The MSCP serves as a Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) under the State of California, Fish and Game Code, Section 2800.

##### *4.3.4.3 Local Policies and Regulations*

**San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program.** The San Diego MSCP was approved in 1998 and covers the southwestern portion of San Diego County. The City of Santee, unincorporated portions of the County, and ten additional city jurisdictions make up the MSCP Plan Area. The San Diego MSCP is a comprehensive conservation program that works to create a balance between preservation of natural resources and biodiversity, and future economic growth. The MSCP covers 900 square miles and focuses on conservation of 85 species (City of San Diego 1998). The San Diego MSCP allows local jurisdictions to maintain land use control and implement their respective portions of the MSCP through Subarea Plans. The City is drafting its Subarea Plan that would preserve more than 2,600 acres of the City as permanent open space and would aim to balance development needs with habitat conservation (City of Santee 2003).

**San Diego River Park Master Plan.** The San Diego River Park Master Plan provides a vision and guidance for development within a half-mile for a 17.5-mile section of the San Diego River starting

within the boundaries of the City of San Diego extending from the Pacific Ocean and into the City of Santee. The plan provides guidance on how to restore the relationship between the river and surrounding communities making it an asset through the added environmental, social, cultural, and economic value added to a community. The Master Plan is a policy document and includes visions, principles, recommendations, and implementation strategies (City of San Diego 2013).

**Conservation Element of the Santee General Plan.** Adopted in 2003, the purpose of the Conservation Element is to identify the community's natural and man-made resources and to encourage their wise management in order to assure their continued availability for use, appreciation and enjoyment.

**Santee Municipal Code.** Chapter 17.16 of the Santee Municipal Code describes the Park/Open Space District which indicates areas of permanent open spaces, biological resource protection and/or areas precluded from major development and encourage recreational activities and preservation of natural resources.

#### 4.3.5 Proposed Sustainable Santee Plan - Goals and Measures

The following proposed Goals and supporting Measures are applicable to the analysis of biological resources:

- *Community GHG Reduction Strategies and Emission Reductions*
  - Goal 5 : Increase Energy Efficiency through Water Efficiency
    - 5.1: Water Efficiency through Enhance Implementation of SBX7-7
  - Goal 6: Decrease Energy Demand through Reducing Urban Heat Island Effect
    - 6.1: Tree Planting for Shading and Energy Efficiency
    - 6.3: Carbon Sequestration through Preservation of Natural Lands
- *Municipal GHG Reduction Strategies and Emission Reductions.*
  - Goal M-3: Increase Energy Efficiency in Community Buildings and Infrastructure
    - M-3.2: Upgrade or Incorporate Water-Conserving Landscape
    - M-3.3: Plant Trees for Shade and Carbon Sequestration

#### Potential Impacts

One of the action items under Goal 5 (Measure 5.1) would be to develop and Urban Forest Management Plan. Goal 6 is to decrease energy demand by reducing the urban heat island effect. The is supported by Measure 6.1 to plant more trees consistent with the Urban Forest Management Plan and Measure 6.3 which involves Carbon sequestration through preservation of natural lands. Municipal Measures M-3.2 and M-3.3 call for water efficient landscapes and the planting of more trees. Physical changes to the environment expected to occur as a result of these Goals and Measures would be the addition of more water efficient landscape and the addition of more trees in Santee.

#### 4.3.6 Impact Significance Criteria

The thresholds for biological resources used in this analysis are consistent with Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*. The effects of the proposed project on biological resources are considered to be significant if the proposed project would result in:

- Threshold 4.3.1:** Substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS.
- Threshold 4.3.2:** Substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS.
- Threshold 4.3.3:** Substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands, including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc., through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means.
- Threshold 4.3.4:** Substantial interference with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impedes the use of native wildlife nursery sites.
- Threshold 4.3.5:** Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance.
- Threshold 4.3.6:** Conflict with the provisions of an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or State HCP.

The IS, provided in Appendix A, substantiates the determination that the proposed project would not result in impacts associated with Thresholds 4.3.1 through 4.3.5. As a result, these thresholds are not considered any further in the analyses of the potential impacts of the proposed project related to biological resources. A comment letter from The California Department of Fish and Wildlife requested that clarity be added for projects that tier off the Sustainable Santee Plan. Later activities identified in the Sustainable Santee Plan subject to CEQA review will be examined to determine whether their potential effects to biological resources were analyzed in the PEIR, and if not a new initial study would need to be prepared leading to either an EIR or a negative declaration. That later analysis may tier from the PEIR.

#### 4.3.7 Project Impacts

**Threshold 4.3.6:** *Conflict with the provisions of an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or State HCP.*

The MSCP is the NCCP for San Diego County (City of San Diego 1998). The MSCP allows local jurisdictions to maintain land use control and implement their respective portions of the MSCP through Subarea Plans. The City is drafting its Subarea Plan, which will act as an HCP in combination with the MSCP. The City's MSCP Subarea Plan aims to balance development needs with habitat conservation and would ultimately protect approximately one-fourth of the City as permanent open space (City of Santee 2003). The City's MSCP Subarea Plan will also specify where future

development and habitat preservation are expected to occur and what biological mitigation is required of future development. Once the Sustainable Santee Plan is adopted, any future development projects that would implement Sustainable Santee Plan measures and actions would be subject to all applicable City regulations and requirements, including the City's MSCP Subarea Plan. In addition, future projects would be required to comply with CEQA.

The San Diego River Park Master Plan provides a vision and guidance for development within a half-mile for a 17.5-mile section of the San Diego River, which includes portions of the City of Santee. Future development projects that would implement Sustainable Santee Plan measures and actions would be subject to all applicable visions, principles, recommendations and implementation strategies within the San Diego River Park Master Plan.

Therefore, implementation of the Sustainable Santee Plan would not result in any conflict with approved habitat conservation plans. Impacts would be less than significant.

#### **4.3.8 Level of Significance Prior to Mitigation**

All potential impacts related to biological resources would be less than significant.

#### **4.3.9 Mitigation Measures**

The proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts related to biological resources. No mitigation is required.

#### **4.3.10 Level of Significance after Mitigation**

There would be no significant unavoidable adverse impacts of the proposed project related to biological resources.

#### **4.3.11 Cumulative Impacts**

The geographic context for this cumulative analysis is the City of Santee, which assumes implementation of the existing and future HCPs located within the City's limits. All development in this geographic context is required to be consistent with the applicable HCPs, and any inconsistencies with the HCPs must be identified as impacts in the environmental analysis.

All future development would be required to comply with the Subarea Plan once it is adopted as well as all applicable City regulations and requirements. Additionally, all development or redevelopment projects would also undergo further environmental and development review on a project-by-project basis to ensure that the surrounding environment is not substantially compromised. Therefore, on a cumulative level, implementation of the proposed project would not conflict with the provisions of an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or State HCP. Therefore, the cumulative impact would be less than significant.