

Planning Update #1

Proposed El Toro National Wildlife Refuge

GREETINGS!

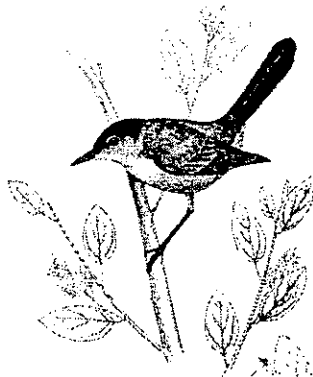
This is the first in a series of updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designed to keep you informed and involved in planning for the proposed El Toro National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

The proposed El Toro NWR is located in Orange County on open space that has been part of the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station (see map). Encompassing approximately 975 acres, the proposed El Toro NWR would protect rare Southern California habitats, including coastal sage scrub, riparian woodlands, and stands of native grasses. These habitats are home to federally listed endangered and threatened species as well as a number of other species of conservation concern.

These planning updates will inform you of our progress on wildlife habitat protection plans for the proposed refuge and announce opportunities for you to get involved in the planning process.

HELP US PLAN THE PROPOSED EL TORO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Planning has just begun. The size and configuration of the proposed wildlife refuge were determined through the Natural Community Conservation Planning program. Our next step is an opportunity for you to help us identify issues and concerns and for us to answer your questions. Your participation is an integral part of the development of this proposed refuge. Please take one of the following opportunities to ask questions or to express your concerns.



California Gnatcatcher
Kendal Morris, USFWS

COME TO OUR OPEN HOUSE ON SEPTEMBER 30

We would like to meet you and get acquainted at the first open house for the proposed El Toro National Wildlife Refuge.

Date: Wednesday, September 30, 1998
Time: 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Place: Rancho San Joaquin Middle School
Multipurpose room
4861 Michelson Drive
Irvine

Rancho San Joaquin Middle School is located at the intersection of Michelson Drive and Yale Avenue. Michelson Drive is on the south side of I-405 (San Diego Freeway) between the Culver Drive and Jeffrey Road/University Drive exits.

The purpose of this meeting is to gather your ideas and comments and to answer questions about the refuge.

Following a brief orientation, participants will be able to meet with key Refuge management, planning, and environmental compliance staff. Your comments will be noted so that they can be addressed in future planning documents.

WE'D LIKE YOUR COMMENTS

If you have questions or concerns, you can bring them to the open house, call one of the people listed on page 3, or send us a letter or an e-mail message.

If you would like to receive future planning updates, as well as notices of planning activities, please contact us and ask to be added to our mailing list.

WHAT COMES AFTER THE OPEN HOUSE?

A schedule of the key planning steps is included on this page. Based on the issues and concerns raised at the public meeting and in letters, we will develop alternative proposals for management of protected habitat. These proposals will be presented and analyzed in several planning documents.

An *Environmental Assessment* will assess the potential positive and negative effects each alternative proposal will have on wildlife, habitats, and local communities.

A *Conceptual Management Plan* will describe management approaches being considered for the El Toro NWR.

You will have the opportunity to review and comment on both of these documents. We will announce the availability of these documents in future planning updates.

HABITAT AT EL TORO MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MAY BECOME EL TORO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The proposed El Toro NWR would consist of approximately 975 acres of land currently managed as open space at the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station. Marine Corps conservation efforts have left much of the native habitat and wildlife at the site intact. The Department of Defense intends to close the base by July 1999 pursuant to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Marine Corps are working together to coordinate the transfer of this wildlife habitat to the Service.

PROPOSED PLANNING SCHEDULE

Planning Update #1 Issued	9/16/98
Public Open House	9/30/98
Issue Identification Period Ends	10/30/98
Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Conceptual Management Plan (CMP)	1/99
Comment Period Ends	2/99
Final EA and CMP and Notice of Decision	5/99
Property Transfer from U.S. Marine Corps to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	6/99

SUPPORTING HABITAT CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN ORANGE COUNTY

In one of Southern California's fastest growing counties, the proposed El Toro Refuge would protect disappearing habitats and wildlife.

The proposed El Toro NWR is located on lands that are part of a 37,000-acre habitat reserve created through the Orange County Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP). This plan is an innovative agreement intended to protect wildlife while allowing local governments flexibility and certainty in planning for growth and economic expansion. Establishment and management of the El Toro NWR would support the Orange County NCCP.

Habitat and wildlife at El Toro include:

Coastal sage scrub: The low-growing shrubs that make up coastal sage scrub include coastal sagebrush, California buckwheat, and black sage. Originally widespread in coastal Southern California, much of this habitat has been lost to development. Coastal sage scrub is home to the threatened Coastal California gnatcatcher as well as other native birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians that are declining in Southern California. The proposed El Toro NWR contains healthy stands of coastal sage scrub and supports an important population of the California gnatcatcher.

Riparian: Just over 10 percent of riparian or stream-side woodlands remains in California. Riparian woodlands support migratory songbirds and provide flood and erosion protection. While much of the riparian woodland at El Toro has been lost, these areas can be replanted and restored so that they again provide wildlife habitat and watershed protection.

Grassland: Almost all of the needlegrass prairie in California has been lost. The grasslands at the proposed El Toro NWR contain stands of native purple needlegrass in need of protection.

Wildlife: In addition to endangered gnatcatchers, eleven other birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians of conservation concern have been recorded at El Toro.

PRELIMINARY GOALS FOR THE PROPOSED EL TORO REFUGE

Following are goals for the proposed El Toro NWR:

Endangered Species/Essential Habitats: Protect, restore, and enhance native habitats to aid in the recovery of federally endangered and threatened species and to prevent the listing of additional species.

Biodiversity: Protect, manage, and restore the rare coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian woodland, vernal pools, and grassland habitats representative of the biological diversity of the Orange County region.

Cooperative Programs: Create partnerships and provide leadership in coordinating the land management activities of Federal, Tribal, State, and local governments and agencies, and with academia, private conservation organizations, and citizens in support of the Natural Community Conservation Program.

Migratory Birds: Provide breeding, migration, and wintering habitat for migratory songbirds.

Public Use: Provide safe and high quality opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent educational and recreational activities that foster public appreciation of the unique natural heritage of the Orange County region.

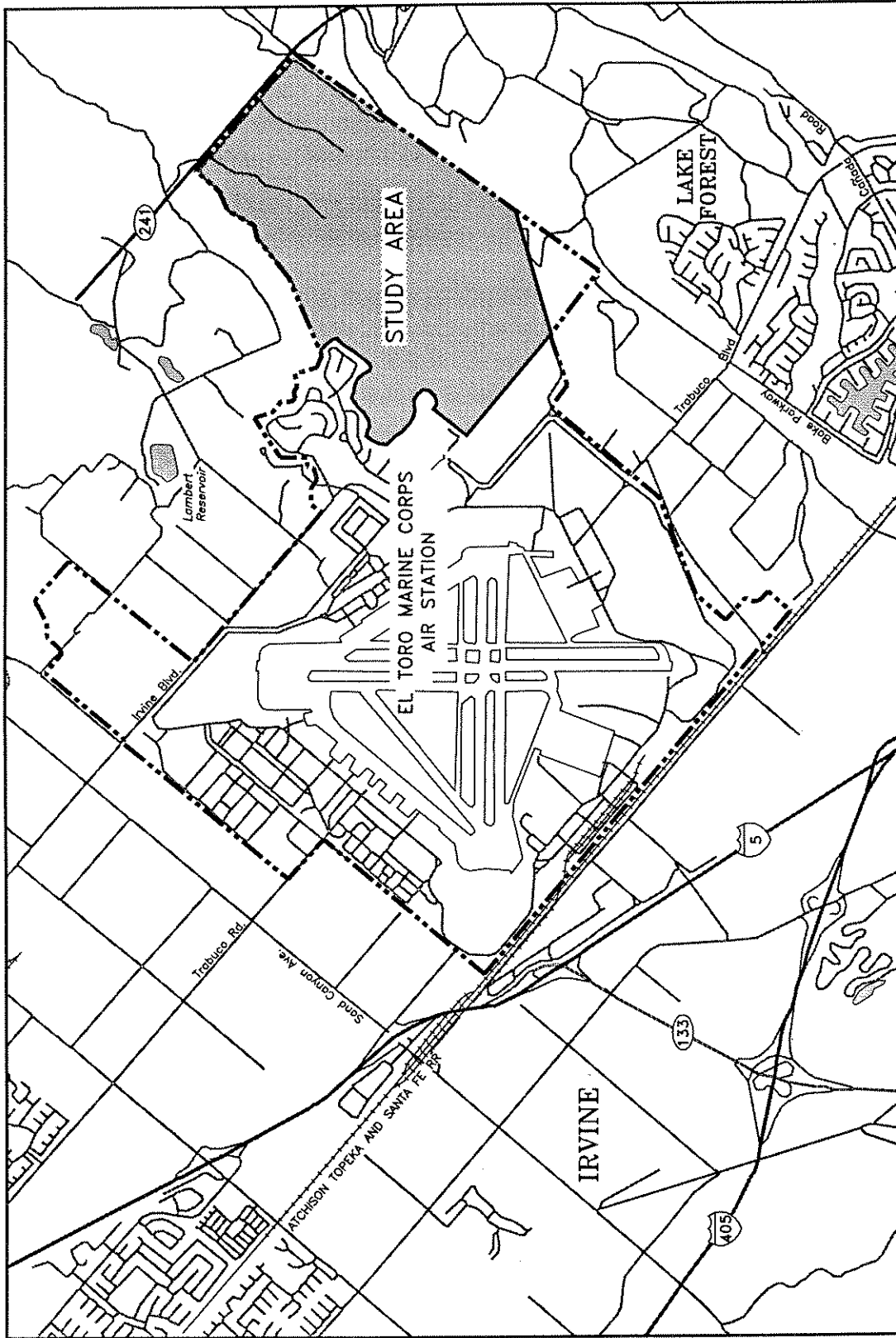
WHO TO CONTACT

Information on the Proposed El Toro National Wildlife Refuge

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Information on Refuge Planning and Compliance

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FAX (503) 231-6161
e-mail: r1planning_guest@fws.gov
(Please type "El Toro" in the subject line)



Proposed El Toro National Wildlife Refuge

- - - - - El Toro Marine Corps Air Station
 [Shaded Box] Study Area

0 500 1,000 1,500 METERS
 0 2,000 4,000 FEET

