

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of the Santa Rosa Plain Conservation Strategy (Conservation Strategy) is to create a long-term conservation program sufficient to mitigate potential adverse effects on listed species due to future development on the Santa Rosa Plain (Plain). The program will contribute to the recovery of the Sonoma County distinct population segment of the California tiger salamander (CTS), Burke's goldfield, Sonoma sunshine, Sebastopol meadowfoam and the many-flowered navarretia (listed plants), and to the conservation of their sensitive habitat. The Conservation Strategy accomplishes the above in a manner that protects stakeholders' (both public and private) land use interests, and supports issuance of an authorization for incidental take of CTS and listed plants that may occur in the course of carrying out project activities on the Plain.

The listing of CTS caused uncertainty for local jurisdictions, landowners and developers about how the listing would affect their activities. Private and local public interests met with US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to discuss possible cooperative approaches to protecting the species, while allowing planned land uses to occur within the range of CTS. These discussions led to the formation of the Santa Rosa Plain Conservation Strategy Team (Team), consisting of representatives of the appropriate government agencies and interested parties.

The original goals of the Team were to:

- Develop a habitat conservation strategy that contributes to the recovery of CTS and listed plant species
- Identify proposed areas for conservation
- Develop an implementation framework for the conservation strategy which identifies short- and long-term actions and milestones as needed
- Establish development process predictability

Before developing a Draft Conservation Strategy, the Team held a public meeting to answer questions about the Team process and to ask for input into what should be included in the Conservation Strategy. The Team submitted an administrative draft of the Conservation Strategy to five independent scientists for peer review prior to preparation of the Draft Conservation Strategy that was made available to the public. Prior to finalizing the document, the Team received public comments. These comments were considered, and numerous modifications were made to the document in response to that input.

### **Biological Goals and Objectives, and Assumptions**

The Conservation Strategy is based on biological goals and objectives to achieve conservation of CTS and the listed plants. The goals and objectives are based on available information on the distribution, ecology and genetics of CTS and listed plants. They are also based on existing and planned land use patterns and assumptions about expected development in a ten-year time frame, the effect of that development on the species, how the preserves would offset those impacts, and

the compatibility of existing land uses with CTS and listed species conservation. In addition, there are various other biological factors that were used in developing the conservation areas.

## **Conservation Areas**

The Conservation Strategy identifies eight conservation areas for CTS and listed plants, one CTS and listed plant preserve system, and one listed plant conservation area. The designation of these areas is based on current available information on the occurrence and habitat needs of the listed species. The conservation areas were designated to conserve the species throughout their distribution range. These conservation areas identify lands where mitigation for project-related impacts to listed species will be directed. Designation of an individual property as being within a conservation area does not change that property's land use designation or zoning, or otherwise restrict the use of that property.

### ***Preserve Establishment***

Preserves may be established within the conservation areas by acquiring land in fee title or through conservation easements, and may include wetland restoration/creation and habitat enhancement. Some mitigation may occur outside of conservation areas if the land is contiguous to a conservation area and meets the other provisions of the preserve selection criteria.

### ***Translocation***

Translocation of listed species is allowed through collection and relocation to suitable habitat within the Plain. The Conservation Strategy outlines the conditions under which this can take place and when it may be required.

### ***Habitat Improvement***

Three types of habitat improvement may occur as a part of the Conservation Strategy. They include wetland creation, wetland restoration, and enhancement of wetland and upland habitat. Criteria for lands proposed for habitat improvement are detailed in the Conservation Strategy.

### ***Preserve Management***

Preserve management plans will be required and must detail activities that are necessary to maintain and enhance the wildlife, plant communities and wetland habitats, including management of water, vegetation and predators. Annual work plans will be required and will be submitted to the appropriate authorities. Criteria used for designing management plans are detailed in the Conservation Strategy, along with the funding mechanisms to assure that the preserves can be adequately managed. The preserves also must be monitored to ensure their success; the criteria for this monitoring must be included in the management plan.

An Adaptive Management Team (AMT) will ensure that preserve management is occurring consistent with the Conservation Strategy. Composition of the AMT and its role in long-term preserve management is detailed in the Conservation Strategy.

## **Mitigation**

The goal of mitigation is to reduce, or compensate for, the negative impact an action may have on a listed species or sensitive habitat. The Conservation Strategy addresses the mitigation requirements for CTS, the listed plant species and seasonal wetlands, including vernal pools. Both interim and long-term mitigation ratios for CTS, wetlands and listed plants are detailed. Once the Conservation Strategy is implemented, projects within 1.3 miles of a breeding site, as shown on Figure 3, will be required to provide two acres of conservation to each one acre of impact as CTS mitigation. In the interim period, until the Conservation Strategy is implemented, CTS mitigation will range from one acre to three acres of conservation for each one acre of impact. Mitigation for impacts to wetlands will be determined through State and Federal permitting processes. Mitigation for listed plants will be applied pursuant to the programmatic biological opinion.

The Conservation Strategy provides projects outside of 1.3 miles from a known breeding site, but with potential for presence of CTS, as shown on Figure 3, the option to mitigate by contributing to a species fund. The species fund will provide conservation benefits to the CTS. This will preclude the need to conduct two years of protocol level surveys in areas not known to be occupied, but within the potential range of the CTS.

## **Implementation**

In January 2005, a group referred to as the Implementation Committee was formed to develop a plan to implement the Conservation Strategy. This group is currently comprised of representatives of local jurisdictions, FWS, CA Department of Fish and Game (DFG), and the agricultural, environmental and private landowner communities. The Implementation Committee is preparing a plan that, when adopted by the various agencies, will provide the basis for implementation of the Conservation Strategy.

## **Potential Funding**

There are a variety of potential funding sources to assist in implementation of the Conservation Strategy. Direct mitigation is the most likely and certain source. Other potential sources include land acquisition grants, Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) land acquisition grants, private foundation grants, State revolving funds, Sonoma County Agriculture and Open Space Protection District funds, Legislative and Congressional appropriations, and private stewardship programs.

## **Glossary/Acronyms & Abbreviations**

In Section 11, a glossary is provided to define terms used in the Conservation Strategy that may not be common to all readers; a list of acronyms and abbreviations is available for quick

reference in Section 12. Also, a list of references used by members of the Team in developing the Conservation Strategy is provided in Section 13.