

Measure M2 Environmental Mitigation Program O'Neill Oaks

Measure M2 Overview

In 2006, Orange County voters approved the renewal of Measure M, effectively extending the half-cent sales tax in the County from April 2011 to March 2041. Renewed Measure M (or Measure M2) will continue to provide funding for transportation projects and programs in the County, including select freeway and roadway improvements, transit programs, and two environmental programs.

OCTA's M2 Freeway Environmental Mitigation Program (EMP) provides comprehensive mitigation to offset the environmental impacts of the 13 Measure M2 freeway improvement projects. The EMP is spearheaded by the Environmental Oversight Committee (EOC), which is made up of OCTA Board members and representatives from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), resource agencies, environmental groups, and the public.



Intermediate Mariposa Lily

Environmental Mitigation Program (EMP)

Instead of mitigating the natural resource impacts of Measure M2 freeway projects on a project-by-project basis, the EMP presents a comprehensive mitigation approach that provides not only replacement habitat, but also provides the opportunity to improve the overall functions and value of sensitive biological resources throughout Orange County. Working collaboratively with the resource and regulatory agencies, it was ultimately decided by OCTA that the creation of a Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP)/Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)/Master Streambed Alteration Agreement (MSAA) would best serve as the main implementation tool for the EMP.

Based on the evaluation of mitigation opportunities in the County, Priority Conservation Areas (PCA) were identified, which included candidate parcels and properties that could be considered for open space purposes. A standardized criteria and prioritization process was also developed to facilitate the property evaluation and assessment. Properties for acquisition and restoration were selected based on:

- Conservation Values
- Policy Considerations
- Mitigation Credits
- Mitigation Plan Review and Adoption and
- Real Estate Value/Economics.



O'Neill Oaks

The O'Neill Oaks property is a 119-acre parcel located northwest of the City of Rancho Santa Margarita in Trabuco Canyon. Access to the property is from Live Oak Canyon Road and Trabuco Canyon Road. The property features rolling terrain with elevations ranging from 920 - 1,250 feet above mean sea level. The property is immediately north of the O'Neill Regional Park and Trabuco Creek. Residential development is located to the south and east of the property. The Cleveland National Forest is located approximately 1.5 miles north of the O'Neill Oaks property.

The O'Neill Oaks property is located within the Trabuco Canyon area of the Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan. The Specific Plan was adopted in 1991 by the Orange County Board of Supervisors to establish regulations for development that would preserve the rural character and protect the natural resources in the area. The Specific Plan identifies a wildlife movement corridor along the western edge of the property. This wildlife movement corridor extends adjacent to Live Oak Canyon Road and provides connectivity to the Cleveland National Forest. According to the Specific Plan, large mammals expected to be using the corridor include mule deer, mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, gray foxes, badgers, raccoons, and ring-tail.

The Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan has a land use designation that would allow the construction of 36 dwelling units on the property. However, OCTA's acquisition of this property will allow this area to be preserved as open space. This will enhance the natural open space value of the O'Neill Regional Park. In addition, it will provide a larger open space buffer adjacent to Trabuco Creek, which is an important wildlife movement corridor.



Chaparral Yucca

The O'Neill Oaks property was identified as a priority conservation area because of the diversity of habitat types found on the property, including coastal sage scrub, southern cactus scrub, riparian, woodlands, and chaparral. The property has nolina chaparral and the sycamore woodland habitat, which the California Natural Diversity Database considers to be rare or worthy of consideration. Other special status species reported on the property include:

- intermediate mariposa lily
- orange-throated whiptail
- Coulter's matilija poppy

In addition, the property includes a blueline stream and is within the designated critical habitat for the arroyo toad and the coastal California gnatcatcher, both endangered species.

