

April 27, 2017

Mr. Mendel Stewart, Field Supervisor  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
2177 Salk Avenue, Suite 250  
Carlsbad, CA 92008

RE: Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan, Orange County, CA; Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement and Habitat Conservation Plan

Dear Mr. Stewart:

We have reviewed the Natural Communities Conservation Plan and Habitat Conservation Plan (Conservation Plans) and associated state and federal environmental review documents (Environmental Impact Report [EIR] and Environmental Impact Statement [EIS]) as outlined in the Federal Register Notice from Friday, March 31, 2017 (Vol. 82, No. 61, pp.16054-6: FWS-R8-ES-2017-N021, FF08ECAR00000-FXES1140800000-178). We are writing to offer our full support for Alternative 2 (the Proposed Plan) of the EIR/EIS.

By way of background, a coalition of environmental and community groups supported the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) Renewed Measure M (M2) in 2006 because of its inclusion of a programmatic mitigation component. The Environmental Coalition remains actively involved in the planning, creation, and implementation of this innovative Environmental Mitigation Program.

We were pleased to see unanimous support and approval by the Environmental Oversight Committee, the OCTA Highways Committee, and the full OCTA Board for the Conservation Plans and environmental documents in November 2016. This letter reaffirms our support the Mitigation Program, Conservation Plans, and environmental documents. We continue to support Alternative 2 (the Proposed Plan) of the EIR/EIS.

The inclusive, transparent, and science-based process is a model for other agencies throughout the state and nation. To this end, the Environmental Coalition remains committed collectively and individually to staying involved, including but not limited to providing feedback on future Resource Management Plans for the stewardship components of the remaining two properties: Hayashi and Aliso Canyon.

Additionally, to OCTA, the Resource Agencies, and Caltrans we applaud your efforts to design a thoughtful, defensible, and flexible Conservation Plan and Implementing Agreement for this Mitigation Program that aligns with the promises made to voters over 10 years ago. This piece of the commitment is nearly complete. We look forward to more landscape level acquisitions once the endowment is built.

We also look forward to continuing our partnership and building the non-wasting endowment for the Preserves for the permanent management of these conservation lands.

Thank you for your commitment to this program and the accomplishments to date. Congratulations on a job well done.

Sincerely,

*[insert group names here]*

cc:     Director Michael Hennessey, OCTA Chair  
         Director Lori Donchak, EOC Chair  
         Darrell Johnson, OCTA  
         Kia Mortazavi, OCTA  
         Mr. Dan Phu, OCTA  
         Monte Ward, Consultant to OCTA  
         Jonathan Snyder, USFWS  
         Dave Mayer, CDFW

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