

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and Need

The globally significant biodiversity of the San Diego region has been in continuous decline for decades, primarily from project-by-project development impacts to natural lands and species, the lack of a bioregional context, and the lack of a progressive and visionary conservation strategy.

The regional habitat plans (MSCP, MHCP) have created the structure and standards by which land use decisions pass through a biologically derived regulatory context so as to contribute to the creation of an ecosystem preserve system. Beyond regulation, it is essential to also acquire land outright, develop and integrate a sophisticated species-monitoring program, and implement a coordinated adaptive management regime. The cost to implement such a program is estimated at over \$1.5 billion.

The essential elements necessary to implement this conservation strategy are contained in the TransNet Ordinance. Much is at stake.

Objectives

A primary environmental conservation objective has been to link the reauthorization of TransNet to significant regional habitat funding and to institutionalize environmental non-profit involvement and independent science into habitat plan implementation.

The estimated regional need for habitat acquisition, monitoring, and management is at least \$1.5 billion. The initial environmental funding goal for TransNet negotiations was \$1.2 billion. The TransNet ordinance and post-ordinance agreement conservation funding total has been finalized at \$880 million. Funding would be phased to complete acquisitions, at a minimum, within the first 15 years of the 40-year program.

Additionally, as a result of environmental negotiations, SANDAG has agreed to act on an additional habitat funding measure that would close the gap on the remainder of the ~\$1.5 billion in regional habitat need.

The development and adoption of the TransNet Environmental Mitigation Ordinance, the “Net Environmental Benefit” highway standard, and post-ordinance agreements is the product of a long environmental community investment in the process.

TransNet Conservation Content

TransNet is the local 1/2-cent sales tax used to leverage federal and state transportation dollars to build and operate the regional transportation infrastructure. The reauthorization of the existing TransNet Ordinance would generate ~\$14 billion in local revenue over a 40 year period.

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For more than five years, the conservation community has worked continuously with SANDAG, various agencies, and key partners to link funding for regional habitat plan implementation with the TransNet program. The core elements representing the product of that effort are:

- \$850 million in funding for habitat acquisition, management, restoration, and monitoring. An additional \$30 million added through post ordinance negotiation has brought the conservation total to \$880 million.
- \$82 million intra-program interest-free loan to help “front load” habitat acquisition.
- An early financing plan that will utilize \$230 million (of the \$880 m) to acquire habitat lands within the first 10-15 years of the 40-year program.
- A commitment by SANDAG to act on a “phase two” funding strategy to cover the remaining regional habitat financing need within four years of the passage of TransNet.
- An early financing strategy that will allow acquisition and management to begin in 2005, even though TransNet tax revenue is not generated until FY 2009.
- Adoption of precedent setting “net environmental benefit” standards for three critical highway segments to insure *improvement* to wildlife movement along those corridors from existing, pre-improvement conditions.
- Integration of the non-profit conservation community (*Conservation Resources Network*) into the decision-making process for determining which lands will be acquired with TransNet funding.
- Adoption of the non-profit conservation community’s’ priority habitat acquisition list as eligible for TransNet funding, even for projects outside an approved NCCP subarea plan.
- Agreement to establish a regional species monitoring program and the integration of independent science into that program and process.