



Facts about the East Alameda County Conservation Strategy

1. What is the East Alameda County Conservation Strategy (EACCS)?

The EACCS is a collaborative effort to preserve endangered species by developing and adopting a shared vision to guide long-term habitat protection. The EACCS will assess areas across east Alameda County for their habitat conservation value and establish guiding biological principles for conducting conservation in this part of the County. Part of that guidance will include working with willing landowners to implement long-term conservation in the form of permanent conservation easements that would offset impacts from local land use, transportation, or other infrastructure projects.

2. Is the EACCS the same as Habitat Conservation Plan?

No, a Conservation Strategy is not the same as a formal Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). An HCP is a planning document that identifies regionally-coordinated mitigation strategies aimed at conserving endangered or threatened species, under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), certain non-listed species, and habitat in order to offset specific anticipated development, transportation, and infrastructure projects. An HCP often requires local agencies to conserve species and habitats prior to approving projects that impact either listed endangered or threatened species and/or its habitat.

An HCP results in a programmatic incidental take permit¹ from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for certain species, it identifies specific types of projects to be covered under the programmatic permit, requires a governance and funding program to ensure that the terms and conditions of the HCP are met. Unlike and HCP, the primary focus of EACCS is to develop a coordinated and biologically sound approach to mitigation that will both support conservation and/or recovery of listed species and streamline state and federal permitting by providing guidance on avoidance, minimization, and mitigation for projects.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and local governments and agencies agreed that preparing an HCP for east Alameda County is unnecessary because of the relatively low level of planned development that would typically justify the need for and adequately fund an HCP. As such, the EACCS will not automatically allow local agencies to approve permits for projects that could adversely impact threatened or endangered species. Instead, it will provide guidance during the project planning and permitting process to ensure that impacts are offset in a biologically effective manner. It should be noted that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has offered to develop a programmatic biological opinion (i.e. permit) to further streamline permitting and mitigation through EACCS.

¹ A permit that allows the permit-holder(s) to legally proceed with activities that would otherwise result in unlawful take of listed species under the federal ESA.

3. Who is pursuing the EACCS and why?

Undoubtedly there will be development and infrastructure projects which occur in the eastern part of Alameda County in the coming years. Those projects will benefit from a reliable biological framework to guide environmental mitigation, which is already required but is currently done on a piecemeal basis. The EACCS should help to improve mitigation programs, increase the benefit to local endangered species, and involve willing landowners more directly in regional conservation efforts. A primary goal of this strategy is to reduce project delays and consequently, project costs, while facilitating conservation of biological resources.

The EACCS is funded by Alameda County Community Development Agency, Alameda County Congestion Management Agency, Alameda County Waste Management Authority, the Cities of Dublin, Livermore and Pleasanton, East Bay Regional Parks District, Zone 7 Water Agency, and by a CalFed grant obtained by the Alameda County Resource Conservation District.

4. What type of outreach and review is occurring throughout the EACCS process?

The goal of the Steering Committee, composed of the funders and regulatory agencies, is to develop the EACCS through a transparent and interactive planning process that involves participation of a wide range of stakeholders. The Users Advisory Group (UAG) was convened to review and provide real-time feedback to the Steering Committee on work products. The UAG is comprised of designated representatives that include landowners, developers, environmental and conservation groups. The UAG meetings are open to the public. The UAG meeting dates and times, agenda, meeting minutes from previous meetings and other handouts are posted on the EACCS website (www.eastalco-conservation.org).

Three technical workshops were held in May 2009. The purpose of these workshops was to obtain feedback from species and local experts on the direction of the conservation strategy for specific natural communities and the focal species that predominantly reside in it. In addition to the technical workshops, there is ongoing technical review from species and local experts to ensure accuracy in land cover designations and identify data gaps. This information will help shape the conservation goals and objectives for each focal species and identify conservation priority areas.

Two community meetings will be held during the planning process to give project updates to the general public. All information that is gathered or generated as part of the EACCS planning process will be available on the EACCS project website (www.eastalco-conservation.org) and available for review at any time during the development of the EACCS.

5. Will the EACCS restrict my land use?

No; the purpose of the EACCS is to provide guidance to local agencies and private developers about favorable mitigation strategies that can be used to offset the impacts of their projects. EACCS is not intended to be a land-use tool that would affect individual land use or property rights. Private land owners will never be forced to participate in mitigation programs on their property. All conservation on private lands will be voluntary.

6. Will you be conducting land surveys on my property?

No; we will use publicly available existing data, obtained from state and local sources as well as interpretation of aerial photographs. We do not foresee a need to conduct new surveys. Landowners who would like to have surveys conducted on their property to assess conservation potential or value

should contact the Alameda County Resource Conservation District or Natural Resource Conservation Service to negotiate access through their private landowner programs.

7. Will the EACCS disclose habitat or species related information about my property?

No; while the EACCS will provide general information about biological values across the eastern part of the County, the conservation strategy will not provide information on a parcel-by-parcel basis or direct conservation toward specific properties.

8. How will the EACCS benefit me?

The EACCS will benefit willing landowners by helping to create an accessible and equitable market for land with conservation value for threatened and endangered species habitat. EACCS can also help to preserve working landscapes in east Alameda County by supporting conservation transactions on private lands and acknowledging the importance of grazing and other land uses that support the preservation of species and their habitats. Although the Conservation Strategy will be primarily focused on preserving endangered species and habitats, if implemented through permanent conservation easements with willing, private landowners, the Strategy could also directly contribute to the preservation of working landscapes in east Alameda County.

9. How will you pursue acquisition of land for conservation purposes?

The acquisition of land for conservation purposes through fee title or permanent conservation easements will be accomplished by working only with interested and willing sellers. All conservation transactions that occur on private property will be negotiated by the local jurisdiction (e.g., city, county, etc.) that needs mitigation for a project and the landowner, rather than being pursued by the EACCS as a whole.

10. How will the EACCS affect or benefit vineyards and other croplands?

The plan is focused on conservation of species and habitats. There may be some crop lands that could contribute to species conservation; however these parcels are not likely to provide the same level of biological conservation benefit as other, more natural landscapes.

11. What is the EACCS schedule?

The EACCS began in 2007 and is expected to be complete in 2009. Although parts of the Conservation Strategy will be available for review on-line throughout 2009, a complete draft Conservation Strategy will be available for a formal public review and comment in fall 2009. A second community meeting will be held at that time. The final Conservation Strategy will be completed following public review and accepted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, the Regional Water Quality control Board, and local agencies in winter 2009-2010.

12. How can interested parties get involved?

The latest information and draft documents are available through the EACCS website at www.eastalco-conservation.org. Interested parties are encouraged to review and comment on available documents. In addition, interested parties are invited to attend Users Advisory Group meetings and community meetings.

For more information or questions about the East Alameda County Conservation Strategy, please contact Mary Lim, EACCS Coordinator, at 925-454-5036 or at mlim@zone7water.com. You can also visit the EACCS website at www.eastalco-conservation.org.