

4.4 Biological Resources

This section of the EIR describes the existing biological resources, including vegetation communities, sensitive plants and wildlife, and wildlife corridors in the proposed project area and analyzes the potential physical environmental impacts resulting from land uses and development under the proposed General Plan Update. The information provided in this section was based on the Draft Escondido Multiple Habitat Conservation Program (MHCP) Subarea Plan (City 2001), the Final ~~Multiple Habitat Conservation Program~~ MHCP (SANDAG 2003), the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) County of San Diego Subarea Plan (County 1997), the Draft North County ~~Multiple Species Conservation Program~~ (MSCP) Subarea Plan (County 2009), and the EIR prepared for the previous Escondido General Plan (City 2000).

A summary of the biological resources impacts identified in Section 4.4.3, Analysis of Project Impacts and Determination of Significance, is provided below.

Biological Resources Summary of Impacts

Issue Number	Issue Topic	Project Direct Impact	Project Cumulative Impact	Impact After Mitigation
1	Special Status Species	Less than Significant	Potentially Significant	Significant and Unavoidable
2	Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities	Less than Significant	Potentially Significant	Significant and Unavoidable
3	Federally Protected Wetlands	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant
4	Wildlife Movement Corridors	Less than Significant	Potentially Significant	Significant and Unavoidable
5	Local Policies and Ordinances	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant
6	Habitat Conservation Plans and Natural Community Conservation Plans	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant

4.4.1 Existing Conditions

The City of Escondido is located within the boundary of the MHCP for the Cities of Carlsbad, Encinitas, Escondido, Oceanside, San Marcos, Solana Beach, and Vista, adopted in 2003 (SANDAG 2003). The General Plan Update planning area outside of the City's boundaries is located within the boundary of County of San Diego's South County and North County MSCP areas, and adjacent to the City of San Diego's MSCP Cornerstone Lands at Hodges Reservoir and San Pasqual Valley.

The MHCP is a comprehensive, multiple jurisdictional planning program designed to create, manage, and monitor an ecosystem preserve in northwestern San Diego County. Each jurisdiction is responsible for preparing a subarea plan to implement the MHCP in its jurisdiction. A draft subarea plan has been prepared for the City, but has not been adopted. A public review draft of the subarea plan was released in 2001. The subarea plan covers the entire City boundary and approximately 3,000 acres of unincorporated County land within the City's sphere of influence (SOI). The areas within the General Plan Update boundary that are located outside of the subarea plan are addressed in the South County MSCP Subarea Plan, adopted in 1998, and the Draft North County MSCP ~~Subarea Plan~~, which has not

been adopted, but was released for public review in February 2009. The following discussions summarize the biological resources identified in the project area based on these plans.

4.4.1.1 General Biological Setting

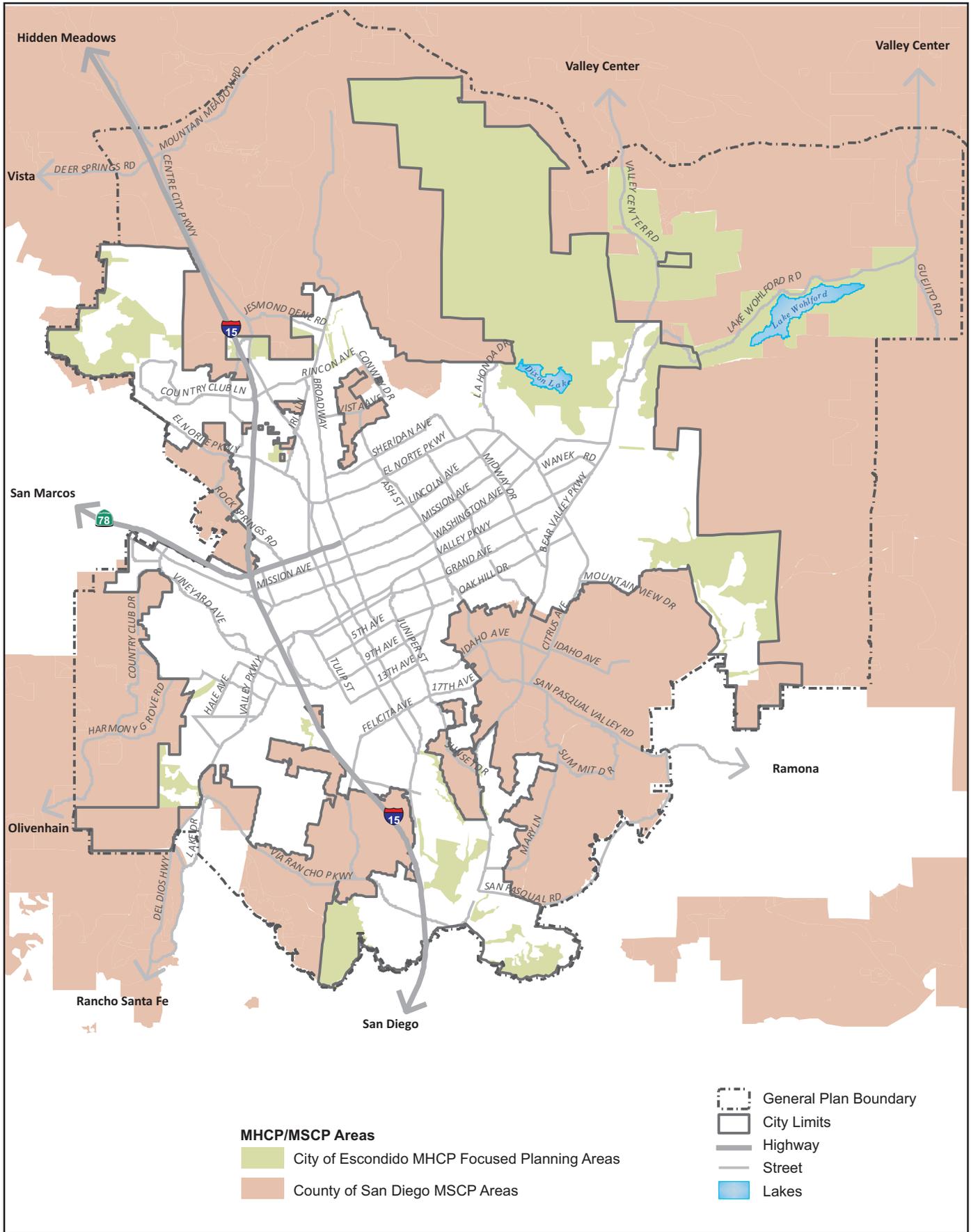
The General Plan Update area supports regionally important biological resources in its foothills, native scrub habitats, and wetlands and woodlands. Because the City is mostly built out, remaining larger blocks of native habitat are restricted to the City's periphery, adjacent to undeveloped portions of the unincorporated County. Located approximately 12 miles from the coast in northern San Diego County, the City is a biologically unique area where inland flora and fauna integrate with more coastal forms (City 2001). Five large areas of natural habitats, located in the northeastern, eastern, southern, southwestern, and northwestern portions of the City, contain the vast majority of the City's remaining open space. The five habitat areas (also referred to as core areas) are described below, along with focused planning areas identified in the MHCP, and are shown in Figure 4.4-1, MHCP and MSCP Vegetation Classes.

Northeastern Habitat Area

The northeastern portion of the project planning area contains the largest, most contiguous block of natural habitats. The northeastern habitat area is immediately adjacent to the North County subarea of the MSCP. The majority of the natural land is within Daley Ranch, a City-owned water district property at Lake Wohlford and along Valley Center Road. Dominant vegetation communities in the northeastern portion of the City include chaparral, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, and grassland. Other natural habitats include open water and riparian communities. The northeastern habitat area's large size and connection to even larger areas of undeveloped land in the unincorporated area east of the City make this one of the few areas in the MHCP area capable of supporting such wide-ranging species as southern mule deer, mountain lion, and golden eagle. Other key resources associated with the northeastern habitat area include permanent water sources, such as Lake Dixon and Lake Wohlford, and oak woodlands. Although coastal California gnatcatcher (bird) has occasionally been sighted in this area, coastal sage scrub habitats in the northeastern core are generally not considered optimal for the gnatcatcher because they are situated at the edge of the species typical distribution and above the typical elevation range of the species in San Diego County. The resulting lower temperatures constrain the gnatcatcher's ability to utilize these areas throughout the year (City 2001).

Eastern Habitat Area

The eastern habitat area is comprised largely of the partially developed Rancho San Pasqual area and open space area to the west, owned by the Rancho San Pasqual Homeowners Association. Coastal sage scrub is the dominant vegetation community in the eastern portion of the planning area. Large patches of coastal sage scrub extend beyond the City's boundary and into the planning areas for the City of San Diego and County of San Diego MSCP subarea plans. Other important resources in this area include patches of oak woodland and riparian habitats associated with Cloverdale Creek, a north-south drainage that provides wildlife movement. The cactus wren and least Bell's vireo (bird) are priority species documented in this area, and multiple coastal California gnatcatcher sightings have occurred outside the City boundaries to the south and east. Due to the close proximity of breeding gnatcatchers and the ongoing recovery of coastal sage scrub in portions of the eastern core, this area likely contains potential breeding and dispersal value for the species (City 2001). The eastern habitat area is west of and adjacent to the North County MSCP subarea boundary and the South County MSCP subarea boundary.



Source: City of Escondido 2011



ATKINS

**MHCP AND MSCP AREAS
FIGURE 4.4-1**

Southern Habitat Area

The southern habitat area is comprised of Kit Carson Park, Vineyard at Escondido Golf Course, Bernardo Mountain and various privately owned parcels including Tract 514 and parcels in the Sonata area. Natural habitats in the southern portion of the planning area are distributed in patches along the western end of San Pasqual Valley, the northern shore of Lake-Hodges Reservoir, and in the vicinity of Kit Carson Park. Coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian habitats, and oak woodland are the dominant communities. The natural habitats bordering Lake-Hodges Reservoir and San Pasqual Valley contribute to one of the largest, continuous blocks of habitat in San Diego County, providing a major east-west regional corridor along San Dieguito River, much of which is conserved through the MSCP in the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan and the South County MSCP Subarea Plan. These habitats also support a major population of wart-stemmed ceanothus (plant) and important California gnatcatcher and cactus wren (bird) populations that contribute significantly to regional population centers. The naturally vegetated slopes above the western portion of San Pasqual Valley buffer the floodplain and riparian communities associated with San Dieguito River. The riparian and floodplain communities provide important habitat for bird species including raptors such as burrowing owl, golden eagle, and northern harrier; shorebirds, such as long-billed curlew and mountain plover; and riparian woodland specialists, such as least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher. Some of the coastal sage scrub in Kit Carson Park is occupied by California gnatcatcher. Three small creeks run south along Bear Valley Parkway, through Kit Carson Park and the golf course. There are several large patches of riparian forest along these creeks in this area (City 2001).

Southwestern Habitat Area

The southwestern habitat area encompasses the County-owned Montreux parcel and parcels in the Del Dios area. Chaparral and coastal sage scrub dominate the southwestern portion of the planning area, with small amounts of oak woodland and riparian habitat. Escondido Creek is constrained by existing development in this habitat area, although there is one relatively short segment of riparian forest. Habitats found in this area are not well connected to regionally important core populations or linkages, especially within the Quail Hills Specific Plan Area. Encinitas baccharis, a MHCP narrow endemic and a federally and state listed species, occurs within the Mount Israel/Del Dios area in the southwestern portion of the planning area. Portions of the North County MSCP and South County MSCP subareas are to the south and west of the southwestern habitat area (City 2001).

Northwestern Habitat Area

The northwestern habitat area is made up of privately owned parcels including Escondido Emerald Heights, Country Club, and parcels around North Centre City Parkway/Nutmeg Street, as well as the City-owned Jesmond Dene Park and MacLeod Park. Several sections of Reidy Creek still retain a moderate amount of riparian scrub habitat. Natural habitats in the northwestern portion of the planning area are dominated by chaparral and coastal sage scrub. Because the northwestern core area is by urban development to the south and agricultural lands to the north and west, the opportunity for this area to function as a regional wildlife movement corridor has been constrained. Priority species occurring in the northwestern core include California gnatcatcher and San Diego thorn-mint (plant) (City 2001). The North County MSCP subarea is located to the north of this habitat area, and the City of San Marcos MHCP subarea is to the west.

Focused Planning Areas

The MHCP identifies focused planning areas (FPAs) within which some lands will be dedicated for open space and habitat conservation. According to the MHCP, conservation within FPAs may be achieved by implementing measures documented in the City's subarea plan, when adopted, that include land use regulations, minimization of impacts, mitigation, and acquisition of parcels from willing sellers. FPAs were designed to conserve as much of the Biological Core and Linkage Area (BCLA) as possible (described below), minimize preserve fragmentation, maximize use of existing public lands and open space, and maintain private property rights and economic viability. They include "hard-line" areas (lands to be conserved and managed primarily for biological resources) and "soft-line" planning areas, within which hard-line preserve areas will ultimately be delineated based on further data and planning. Although the City's subarea plan has not been adopted, many of the FPAs within the proposed project area are planned for preservation through other agreements, such as conservation easements and mitigation agreements, regardless of adoption of the MHCP subarea plan. Major FPAs include Daley Ranch, Rancho San Pasqual, Kit Carson Park, San Pasqual Valley, Lake Wohlford, and Bernardo Mountain. A discussion of each of these FPAs is provided below.

Daley Ranch is located in the northeastern portion of the City, north of ~~Lake Dixon Lake~~ and west of Valley Center Road. The Daley Ranch Conservation Bank is an approved mitigation bank to satisfy the environmental mitigation requirements of development projects throughout all of western San Diego County. This 3,058-acre property is heavily covered with a variety of threatened and endangered species. There are thousands of acres of chaparral and coastal sage scrub, several large stands of coast live oak and Englemann oak woodland, wetlands and non-native grasslands. Within the Daley Ranch Conservation Bank there are 2,842 conservation credits approved for use as mitigation for five categories of species and habitat: chaparral and unoccupied coastal sage scrub, coast live oak woodland, Englemann oak woodland, and non-native grassland (City 2012). The Rancho San Pasqual Specific Plan Area (SPA), amended in 1997, is located at the southeastern edge of the City and includes approximately 447 acres of natural open space. Natural vegetation communities include coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodland and riparian areas. The SPA also includes the dedication of a 32-acre parcel to the City along Cloverdale Creek immediately south of Rockwood Road for revegetation and enhancement. Approximately 185 acres in Kit Carson Park, located in the southeastern area of the City on Bear Valley Parkway, have been preserved as natural habitat. Open space areas include a riparian area and hillsides dominated by coastal sage scrub. The portion of San Pasqual Valley in the planning area is located just north of San Dieguito River Valley Regional Open Space Park, also known as the San Dieguito River Park, in the City of San Diego, which occurs on land owned and managed by the City of San Diego Public Utilities Department. Three properties in the City in the southern portion of the FPA are located on slopes above San Pasqual Valley and are proposed for conservation due to the presence of quality coastal sage scrub and cactus scrub habitat. Lake Wohlford and its surrounding land are one of two FPA areas large enough to support deer and mountain lions. The second area is Daley Ranch, as described above. The area contains coastal sage scrub, chaparral, coast live oak woodland, and riparian vegetation communities. Bernardo Mountain is a prominent mountain overlooking ~~Lake~~-Hodges Reservoir. This area was an SPA that allowed development under Escondido's General Plan, but has since been purchased by the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority as open space and integrated into the park system. The General Plan Update proposes to redesignate the SPA to an Open Space land use designation. Natural vegetation communities consist of coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and riparian habitats. The south-facing slopes contain coastal sage scrub and grassland habitat.

Other FPA areas to be privately managed by homeowners associations include Dorn, Escondido Emerald Heights, and Sonata. The natural habitats in the Montreux SPA consist primarily of coastal sage scrub and chaparral. This SPA allowed development under Escondido's General Plan but has since been purchased by the County of San Diego for open space preservation purposes. The General Plan Update proposes to redesignate the SPA to an Open Space land use designation. The Dorn Development subdivision map (which has expired) is an 80-acre property located northwest of the Montreux SPA that consists primarily of coastal sage scrub and chaparral. Approximately 46 percent of existing natural habitat area was proposed in the originally approved Dorn Development. That subdivision map has since expired and is partially contiguous to the open space in the Montreux SPA. The Escondido Emerald Heights includes approximately 289 acres of open space and a 63-acre parcel dedicated to the City for park and open space purposes. Natural habitats in these areas include chaparral and coastal sage scrub. Sonata is a low density, planned residential development overlooking Lake-Hodges Reservoir. An area to be preserved as permanent open space consists of coastal sage scrub. Additionally, the Vineyard at Escondido Golf Course is jointly owned by the cities of Escondido and San Diego. The golf course design included the preservation and enhancement of existing riparian areas.

Outside of the City's MHCP subarea boundary, the area surrounding Lake-Hodges Reservoir is public land designated for preservation under the County of San Diego South County MSCP Subarea Plan and the City of San Diego MSCP Subarea Plan. A portion of the South County MSCP Subarea Plan preserve is within the General Plan Update boundary. Development would be allowed in some natural areas within the General Plan Update planning area boundary, particularly west of Lake-Hodges Reservoir, provided development complies with MSCP and other requirements. The southeastern area of the General Plan Update planning boundary near San Pasqual Valley includes an adopted pre-approved mitigation area (PAMA) for County of San Diego public works projects (County of San Diego 1997). Areas north of San Pasqual Valley are not included in a preserve but are subject to mitigation ratios. The areas surrounding Lake-Hodges Reservoir and along the southern boundary of the General Plan Update planning area within the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan are identified as Cornerstone Lands, a core biological area ~~targeted for conservation~~ protected in perpetuity (City of San Diego 1997). The unincorporated areas north and northeast of the City within the General Plan Update planning area boundary are located within the North County MSCP ~~Subarea Plan~~. The portion of the North County MSCP ~~subarea~~ within the General Plan Update planning boundary is mostly included within hard-line preserve areas and a soft-line PAMA within the Escondido Creek Watershed including the areas to the east of the City boundary and most of the land surrounding Daley Ranch and along I-15 (San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy 2005). The PAMA in the North County MSCP ~~subarea~~ is part of the draft subarea plan and has not yet been adopted. These areas are considered to be part of the biological core. The area north of Daley Ranch is also considered a linkage area (County of San Diego 2009).

4.4.1.2 Vegetation Communities

The Escondido MHCP subarea, which includes the City and approximately 3,000 acres of unincorporated land, is a largely urban environment of approximately 24,624 acres, of which approximately 9,206 acres support natural habitats. A variety of factors, including local climate, soils and topography interact to produce distinct vegetation communities. As shown in Figure 4.4-1, MHCP and MSCP Vegetation Classes, the majority of the City is designated as Urban/Developed, including the City's entire urban core. As discussed above, natural habitat in the General Plan Update planning area is located on the outskirts of the planning area, particularly in Daley Ranch and the surrounding area. The most abundant vegetation community in Escondido is chaparral, followed in order of decreasing abundance by coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, grassland, and riparian habitat (City 2001). Small areas of eucalyptus

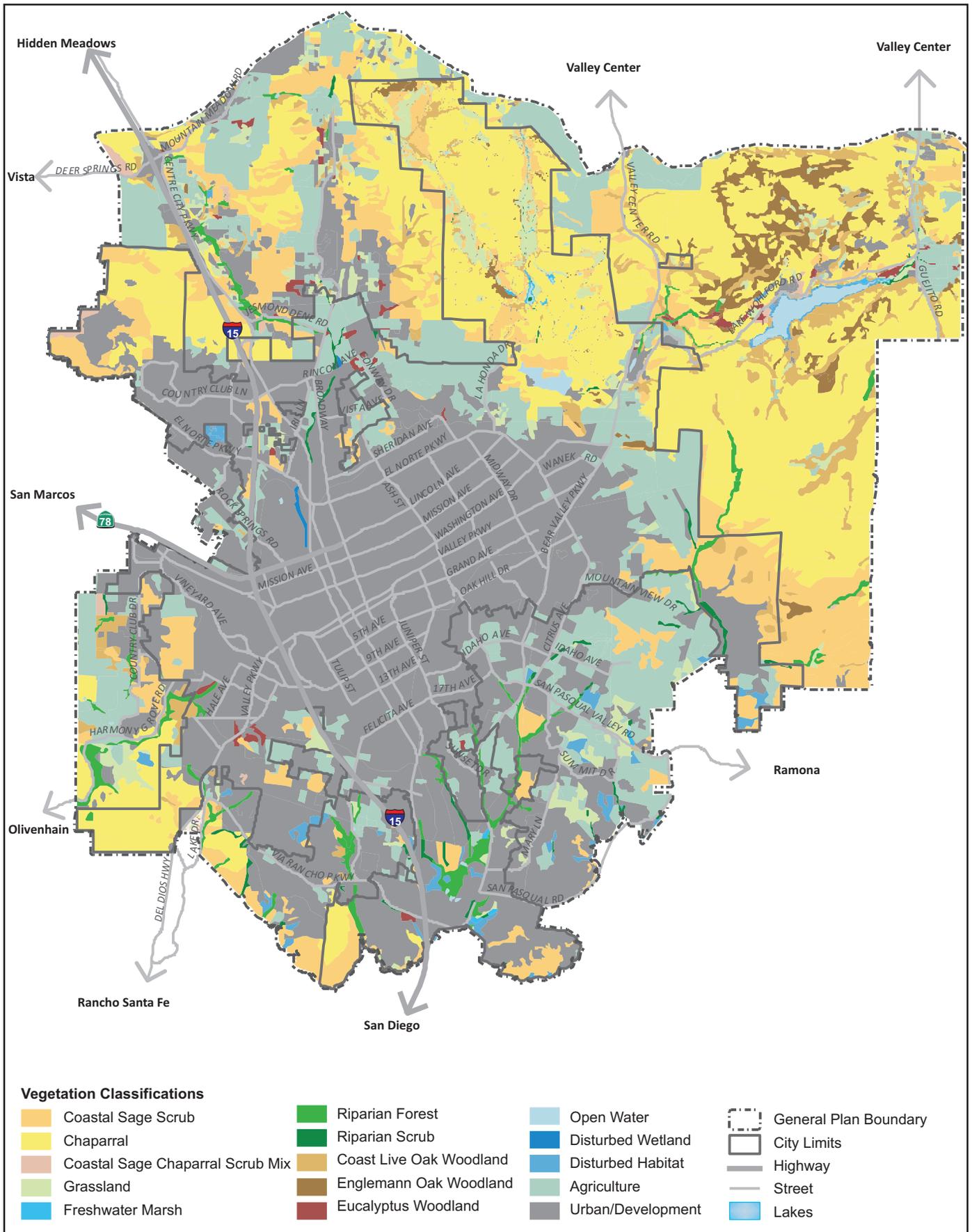
woodland, freshwater marsh, open water, and disturbed wetland habitat have also been identified in the City's MSCP Subarea (City 2001). According to the MSCP South County Subarea Plan and Draft North County MSCP ~~Subarea Plan~~, the dominant vegetation types in the unincorporated areas within the General Plan Update boundary include grassland, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodland, and riparian habitat (County of San Diego 1997, 2009). The habitats that may be found in the project planning area are described below and shown in Figure 4.4-2, Vegetation Categories.

Chaparral

Chaparral communities, particularly southern mixed chaparral and chamise chaparral, dominate on higher and steeper slopes in northern Escondido (SANDAG 2003). Chaparral frequently forms a stretch of nearly impenetrable vegetation with little or no understory. This vegetation type typically occupies steep north-facing slopes with little soil. Tall, broad-leaved shrubs form dense vegetation dominated by chamise, scrub oak, toyon, and thick-leaf ceanothus. Additional plant species found within southern mixed chaparral include black sage, wild cucumber, morning glory, saw-toothed goldenbush, and non-native grasses. Residents of dense chaparral are frequently hard to detect; however, a number of reptiles, birds and small mammals are known to reside within the chaparral of this region. The distribution of rock outcrops within the vegetation is a determining factor for a number of reptile species. The dense cover afforded within many stands of southern mixed chaparral provides habitat for larger mammals including the mountain lion (City 2000).

Coastal Sage Scrub

Coastal sage scrub is a habitat regulated by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). In total, there are about 2,300 acres of coastal sage scrub and coastal sage/chaparral mix in the Escondido MHCP subarea. Sage scrub on higher, steeper slopes, especially in more inland locales, tends to be dominated by black or white sages. Chaparral communities tend to replace coastal sage scrub on still higher and more inland sites, particularly on moist north-facing slopes. Significant stands of coastal sage scrub in the project study area are found around the outskirts of the City, including San Pasqual Valley and the southern and northern portions of the General Plan Update planning area (SANDAG 2003). Coastal sage scrub is described as low, soft-woody subshrubs that are most active in winter and early spring. In the San Diego region, coastal sage scrub is a more or less open community composed of low, drought deciduous shrubs, with a sparse understory of annual and perennial grasses and forbs. Coastal sage scrub is typically found on steep, xeric slopes or clay-rich soils. The local coastal sage scrub community in the planning area is dominated by California sagebrush, flat-top buckwheat, white sage, and occasional laurel sumac. Characteristic species of coastal sage scrub also include black sage, California encelia, San Diego County viguiera, goldenbush, and coast prickly-pear. Shrubs such as lemonadeberry and sugarbush are often irregularly distributed in coastal sage scrub. Species such as rattlesnake weed, nievitas, narrow-leaffilago, and other herbaceous annuals typically comprise the understory. Coastal sage scrub is considered a sensitive habitat within San Diego County. In addition, depending upon the elevation, it provides habitat for sensitive species such as the California gnatcatcher. High quality coastal sage scrub supports a number of invertebrates, reptiles, and small mammals (City 2000).



Oak Woodlands

Coast live oak woodland is dominated by a single tree species, coast live oak; however, it may also contain Engelmann oak. Shrub species within oak woodland habitats include toyon, currants, or blue elderberry. Oak woodlands are highly variable with regard to density and understory composition. In more open woodlands, the understory is grassland; in other instances it is composed of a dense shrub layer. Oak woodlands provide excellent habitat for a variety of species. In addition to a diverse group of resident fauna (animals) these woodlands are used by wintering or migrating birds.

Engelmann oak woodland is an evergreen woodland community dominated by Engelmann oak. Dense Engelmann oak woodland may also contain a significant amount of coast live oak, with which it commonly integrates. The wildlife value of Engelmann oak woodland is similar to that of coast live oak woodland; however, Engelmann oak woodlands are frequently used by species typically associated with other habitats. They may not support some species which require a more extensive, dense woodland situation (City 2000).

Grasslands

Grassland habitats in the study area are primarily dominated by annual non-native grasses, although scattered areas of native perennial grasslands remain, often as small inclusions within scrub habitats. Grasslands are scattered throughout the General Plan Update area, with large stands in the valleys of Daley Ranch. Annual grasslands are important to preserve design in helping to create linkages between other areas of native vegetation. They also provide foraging habitat for raptors and other MHCP animal species and support a number of MHCP plant species. Non-native grasslands are described as a dense to sparse cover of annual grasses, often associated with numerous species of wildflowers, especially in years of favorable rainfall. These grasslands are dominated by grasses such as bromes, wild oats, and barley, as well as non-native forbs such as short-pod mustard and red-stem filaree, and native species including doveweed and telegraph weed. These grasslands are particularly well developed in the inland valley eco-region, where historical grazing of livestock has been supplemented with dry-land farming to create blocks of land devoid of most native vegetation. Grassland habitats attract ground foragers ranging from small passerines to a variety of migrant and resident raptors. Raptors are particularly attracted to grasslands, which support a highly visible prey base (City 2000).

Riparian Vegetation

Habitats regulated by the CDFG, USFWS, and USACE within the planning area include freshwater marsh and riparian habitats. In total, there are about 460 acres of wetland habitats in Escondido (plus approximately 41 acres of natural flood channel/streambed and 239 acres of open water) (City 2001). The study area supports a variety of riparian, marsh, and other wetland communities. However, in general, wetland vegetation has been greatly reduced in extent and altered in quality by development and associated changes in hydrology. Riparian forests, woodlands, and scrub communities are found along many of the drainages in the proposed project study area, with the most significant stands associated with Kit Carson Park (SANDAG 2003).

Southern coast live oak riparian forest consists of open to locally dense evergreen riparian woodlands dominated by coast live oak. This type of riparian forest habitat tends to support a greater amount of herbaceous vegetation and fewer understory shrubs than other riparian communities. This vegetation community can be found in the outlying portions of the City and is primarily associated with Reidy and Escondido Creeks. Southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest is dominated by Fremont cottonwood

and several tree willows. These species form a tall, open, broad-leafed, winter-deciduous riparian forest on frequently overflowed lands along rivers and streams. Riparian forest habitats support a high diversity of resident and migratory fauna, including several sensitive bird species such as southwestern willow flycatcher, Cooper's hawk, yellow-breasted chat, and yellow warbler. Riparian areas are variable but frequently consist of willow/mule fat scrub along intermittent and perennial lowland streams. Southern willow scrub consists of dense, broad-leaved, winter-deciduous thickets dominated by several species of willow plants with scattered emergent Fremont cottonwood. Typically, the understory is more fragile due to the narrowness of the riparian corridor, and it is more readily degraded and invaded by weeds. Consequently, weedy species such as giant reed, pampas grass, and tamarisk may be well established in southern willow scrub habitat (City 2000).

Eucalyptus Woodland

Eucalyptus woodland is a non-native habitat that has been identified in the southwestern area of the City and near Lake Wohlford (City 2003). Eucalyptus woodlands range from single-species thickets to scattered trees. Most eucalyptus woodlands have been artificially established and they are generally confined to areas with some development. The woodlands provide cover and perch sites for raptors and are also utilized for nesting by raptors such as the red-shouldered hawk, red-tailed hawk, Cooper's hawk, white-tailed kite, and American kestrel (City 2000).

Freshwater Marsh and Open Water

Open water within the planning area includes Lake Dixon and Lake Wohlford. Freshwater marsh areas are identified in Kit Carson Park. These bodies of water are not expected to support any native fish species; however, they are utilized by both native and non-native amphibians and wildlife. Lake Dixon is a recreational and biological open space area and its open water habitat is not known to host any resident sensitive species. Lake Wohlford is known to support the southwestern pond turtle (City 2000). Species associated with the habitats surrounding these water bodies are discussed in the habitat descriptions above. Habitat areas surrounding Lake Dixon include chaparral and coastal sage scrub. Habitat areas surrounding Lake Wohlford include oak woodland, eucalyptus woodland, coastal sage scrub, and chaparral. Habitat areas surrounding freshwater marshes in Kit Carson Park include riparian habitat and coastal sage scrub (City 2003).

Disturbed Wetland

Disturbed wetland is a non-native habitat that has been identified in Daley Ranch and near Lake Wohlford (City 2003). Typically, disturbed wetlands support a greater number of non-native weedy species than pristine wetlands. Tamarisk, giant reed, and castor-bean plants may be present within disturbed wetlands and are frequently the dominant species (City 2000).

4.4.1.3 Sensitive Resources

Sensitive biological resources are defined as the following: 1) vegetation communities that are unique, of relatively limited distribution, or of particular value to wildlife; and 2) species that have been given special recognition by federal or state agencies, or are included in regional conservation plans due to limited, declining, or threatened populations. The MHCP identifies 47 sensitive species (32 animals and 15 plants) that occur or potentially occur in Escondido. Appendix C, Biological Sensitive Species List,

provides a list of these species, as well as sensitive species identified by the CDFG and USFWS that may occur within the General Plan Update planning area.

Sensitivity Designations

Federal listing of endangered and threatened wildlife and plant species is administered by the USFWS for terrestrial and freshwater species and by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for marine and anadromous species. The USFWS and NMFS also recognize species of special concern that are candidates for listing. Before a plant or animal species can receive protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), it must first be placed on the federal list. The program follows a strict legal process to determine whether to list a species. An “endangered” species is defined as one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A “threatened” species is one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. The USFWS also maintains a list of plants and animals native to the U.S. that are species of special concern for possible addition to the federal list but that are not currently regulated.

CDFG implements the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), which is a program that is similar in structure to, but different in detail from, the USFWS program implementing the federal ESA. CDFG maintains a list of designated endangered, threatened, and rare plant and animal species. CDFG also maintains a list of “Species of Special Concern,” most of which are species whose breeding populations in California faces extirpation. Although these species have no legal status, CDFG recommends consideration of them during the analysis of impacts of proposed projects to protect declining populations and avoid the need to list them as endangered in the future. The CESA also protects plant species, which the federal ESA does not.

Under the provisions of Section 15380(d) of the CEQA Guidelines, the lead agency, in making a determination of significance, must treat rare non-listed plant and animal species as equivalent to listed species if such species satisfy the minimum biological criteria for listing. In general, CDFG considers species on California Native Plant Society (CNPS) Lists 1A, 1B, or 2 as identified in the *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California* (Skinner 1994) as qualifying for consideration under this CEQA provision. Species on the CNPS List 3 or 4 may, but generally do not, qualify for protection under this provision. Species on CNPS List 1A are “presumed extinct in California.” Species on List 1B are “rare or endangered in California and elsewhere.” Species on List 2 are “rare or endangered in California and are more common elsewhere.” Species on Lists 3 and 4 are those which require more information to determine status and plants of limited distribution, respectively.

The primary information source on the distribution of special status species in the state is the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) inventory, which is maintained by the Wildlife and Habitat Data Analysis Branch of CDFG. The CNDDDB inventory provides the most comprehensive statewide information on the location and distribution of special status species and sensitive natural communities. Occurrence data are obtained from a variety of scientific, academic, and professional organizations; private consulting firms; and knowledgeable individuals; and is entered into the inventory as expeditiously as possible. The occurrence of a species of concern in a particular region is an indication that an additional population would have the potential to occur at another location if habitat conditions are suitable. However, the absence of an occurrence in a particular location does not necessarily mean that special status species are absent from the area in question, only that no data has been entered into the CNDDDB inventory. Appendix C, Biological Sensitive Species List, of this EIR provides additional detailed biological resource data in tabular form. Tables C-1 and C-2 in Appendix C, Biological Sensitive

Species List, identify the plants and wildlife species listed in the CNDDDB for the General Plan Update planning area.

Special Status Plants

As shown in Table C-1, 42 sensitive plant species potentially occur within the General Plan Update boundary, including several MHCP narrow endemic species: San Diego goldenstar, Del Mar Manzanita, Del Mar Mesa sand aster, San Diego ambrosia, little mousetail, Orcutt's hazardia, Orcutt's spineflower, San Diego button-celery, San Diego thornmint, Encinitas baccharis, variegated dudleya, and thread-leaved brodiaea. Major populations of four MHCP plant species occur in Escondido: San Diego thornmint, wart-stemmed ceanothus, and summer holly in the southern and southwestern areas of the City and Engelmann oak woodland on Daley Ranch and other locations in the northeastern areas of the City (City 2001).

Special Status Wildlife

As shown in Table C-3, 64 special status wildlife species potentially occur within the General Plan Update planning area. Escondido supports critical locations for six wildlife species: Harbison's dun skipper, southwestern pond turtle, coastal cactus wren, Cooper's hawk, golden eagle, and burrowing owl. Escondido supports the only major population of cactus wren and the only critical locations for this species' conservation in the MHCP planning area, mostly on the south-facing slopes of the San Dieguito River Valley (San Pasqual Valley). The cactus wren in the project planning area and the coastal sage scrub habitats that support them contribute significantly to the ~~Lake-Hodges Reservoir~~/San Pasqual Valley population of cactus wren, one of the largest and most important core populations for the species remaining in San Diego County (City 2001). California gnatcatcher is distributed in remnant patches of coastal sage scrub in Escondido. Although no critical locations or major populations of California gnatcatcher have been identified in Escondido, gnatcatcher on the south-facing slopes of the San Dieguito River Valley contribute to the regional core population of this species in the ~~Lake-Hodges Reservoir~~/San Pasqual Valley area.

Critical Habitat Locations

Within the regional MHCP area, areas that contain major populations of sensitive species or are considered essential to the MHCP preserve design are designated as critical locations for specific species. Critical locations are defined as areas that must be substantially conserved for a species to be considered adequately conserved by the MHCP. Examples of critical locations include population sites expected to contribute significant genetic diversity for a species; areas that provide essential nesting, roosting, or wintering sites or structures; essential wildlife movement corridors; or currently unoccupied habitat needed to accommodate population expansion. Critical locations within Escondido, ~~As~~ ~~as~~ identified in the regional MHCP, ~~critical locations within Escondido~~ are the northwest habitat area for San Diego thorn-mint, Mt. Israel for Encinitas baccharis, Daley Ranch and east Escondido for Harbison's dun skipper; the northeast core for golden eagle foraging; the Engelmann oak and coast live oak woodlands in the northeast area for Cooper's hawk populations; and San Pasqual Valley, ~~Lake-Hodges Reservoir~~, and southern Escondido for coastal cactus wren. Stands of chaparral, coastal sage scrub, grassland, and wetland habitats that occur north of Dixon Reservoir have been identified as major stands in the MHCP. Stands of oak woodland, both north and south of Dixon Reservoir and at Lake Wohlford, are considered critical locations for conservation of this vegetation community in the MHCP (City 2001).

4.4.1.4 Wildlife Movement Corridors and Habitat Linkages

The MHCP identifies a BCLA that includes all large contiguous areas of habitat, all areas supporting major and critical species populations or habitat areas, and all important functional linkages and movement corridors between them. The five large areas of natural habitats, located in the northeastern, eastern, southern, southwestern, and northwestern portions of the City, contain the vast majority of the City's remaining open space and have been identified as part of the BCLA for the MHCP. These core areas provide two primary landscape linkages: 1) east-west across the northern portion of the City, including Daley Ranch, between the County of San Diego and northern San Marcos; and 2) east-west across the southern portion of the City, as part of the San Pasqual River Valley corridor. The southern habitat linkage, in particular, is considered essential for maintaining natural genetic exchange and population connectivity for the California gnatcatcher and coastal cactus wren populations in the San Pasqual River Valley. The areas north of Daley Ranch are considered a core linkage in the Draft North County MHCP, and the areas surrounding ~~Lake~~ Hodges Reservoir and San Pasqual Valley are considered a core linkage in the South County MHCP Subarea Plan.

4.4.2 Regulatory Framework

4.4.2.1 Federal

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act

Enacted in 1940, this Act prohibits the take, transport, sale, barter, trade, import, export, and possession of bald eagles, making it illegal for anyone to collect bald eagles and eagle parts, nests, or eggs without authorization from the Secretary of the Interior. The Act was amended in 1962 to extend the prohibitions to the golden eagle.

Federal Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Congress passed the federal ESA in 1973 to provide a means for conserving the ecosystems that endangered and threatened species require in order to prevent species extinctions. The federal ESA has four major components: 1) Section 4, which provides for listing species and designating critical habitat; 2) Section 7, which requires federal agencies, in consultation with the USFWS, to ensure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of species or result in the modification or destruction of critical habitat; 3) Section 9, which prohibits against "taking" listed species; and 4) Section 10, which provides for permitting incidental take of listed species. Under the federal ESA, the term "take" is defined as "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct."

Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) (1972)

The Water Pollution Control Act, passed by Congress in 1948, authorized the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service to prepare comprehensive programs for eliminating or reducing the pollution of interstate waters and tributaries and improving the sanitary condition of surface and underground waters. The Act was later amended to become the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972, commonly known as the Clean Water Act (CWA). The CWA was designed to restore and maintain

the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the waters of the U.S. and gave the EPA the authority to implement pollution control programs, including setting wastewater standards for industry and water quality standards for contaminants in surface waters. The EPA has delegated responsibility for implementation of portions of the CWA in California to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), including water quality control planning and control programs.

The CWA also prohibits the discharge of any pollutants from a point source into navigable waters, except as allowed by permits issued under certain sections of the CWA. Specifically, Section 404 authorizes the USACE to issue permits for and regulate the discharge of dredged or fill materials into wetlands or other “waters of the U.S.” Under the CWA and its implementing regulations, “waters of the U.S.” are broadly defined as rivers, creeks, streams, and lakes extending to their headwaters, including adjacent wetlands. Further, Section 401 allows states to certify or deny federal permits or licenses that might result in a discharge to state waters, including wetlands. Section 401 certifications are issued by the RWQCB for activities requiring a federal permit or license that may result in the discharge of pollutants into waters of the U.S.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 (16 U.S. Code 703-711) implements an international treaty for the conservation and management of bird species that may migrate through more than one country. Enforced in the U.S. by the USFWS, the MBTA makes it unlawful to take, possess, buy, sell, purchase, or barter any migratory bird listed in 50 CFR Part 10, including feathers or other parts, nests, eggs, or products, except as allowed by implementing regulations (50 CFR 21). Disturbance that causes nest abandonment and/or loss of reproductive effort (e.g., killing or abandonment of eggs or young) may be considered a “take” and is potentially punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. In 1972, the MBTA was amended to include protection for migratory birds of prey (raptors). Generally, applicants who obtain an ESA Section 10(a) permit simultaneously receive a three-year MBTA permit for ESA-listed migratory birds.

4.4.2.2 State

California Endangered Species Act

CESA, administered by CDFG, is similar in many ways to the federal ESA. CESA provides a process for CDFG to list species as threatened or endangered in response to a citizen petition or by its own initiative (CDFG Code Section 2070 et seq.). Section 2080 of the CESA prohibits the take of species listed as threatened or endangered pursuant to the Act. Section 2081 allows CDFG to authorize take prohibited under Section 2080 provided that: 1) the taking is incidental to an otherwise lawful activity; 2) the taking will be minimized and fully mitigated; 3) the applicant ensures adequate funding for minimization and mitigation; and 4) the authorization will not jeopardize the continued existence of the listed species.

California Department of Fish and Game Code

The CDFG Code regulates the taking or possession of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles, and natural resources such as wetlands and waters of the state. It includes the CESA (Sections 2050-2115) and Streambed Alteration Agreement regulations (Sections 1600-1616), which are both discussed in more detail below, as well as provisions for legal hunting and fishing, and tribal agreements for activities

involving take of native wildlife. The CDFG Code also includes the California Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA) of 1977 (Sections 1900-1913), which directed CDFG to carry out the Legislature's intent to "preserve, protect and enhance rare and endangered plants in this state."

Lake and Streambed Alteration Program

Section 1602 of the CDFG Code requires any person, state, or local governmental agency to provide advance written notification to CDFG prior to initiating any activity that would: 1) divert or obstruct the natural flow of, or substantially change or remove material from the bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake; or 2) result in the disposal or deposition of debris, waste, or other material into any river, stream, or lake. The state definition of "lakes, rivers, and streams" includes all rivers or streams that flow at least periodically or permanently through a bed or channel with banks that support fish or other aquatic life, and watercourses with surface or subsurface flows that support or have supported riparian vegetation.

Natural Community Conservation Planning Act of 1991

The Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program is an effort initiated by the CDFG to develop a broad-based approach for sustaining biological diversity. The primary objective of the NCCP program is to identify and provide for the regional protection of plants, animals, and their habitats, while allowing compatible and appropriate economic activity. Escondido is one of seven cities in northwestern San Diego County comprising an NCCP subregion involved in the subregional MHCP that addresses the NCCP objectives.

4.4.2.3 Regional/Local

City of Escondido Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space

The Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space serves as a guide to developing a comprehensive and integrated open space system to achieve the quality of life standards set forth in the General Plan. A conceptual "wildlife corridor" is identified in the plan that connects key habitat areas in a continuous link around the perimeter of the City. Tributary corridors also link undeveloped, unincorporated County areas north and east of the City. The Master Plan proposes to work with property owners in these areas to set aside sufficient land for wildlife corridors when development plans are proposed. The Master Plan describes the information needed to assess a request to modify the width or location of a wildlife corridor, which includes the preparation of detailed biological data from a qualified biologist. The City is responsible for monitoring the overall alignment of the corridor to ensure that development proposals maintain effective corridor connections (City 2001).

City of Escondido Zoning Ordinance

The City's Zoning Ordinance (Article 3, Sections 33-40 through 33-43) identifies an Open Space (OS) Zone, which provides permanent open space within the community consistent with goals and objectives of the Community Open Space/Conservation Element of the existing General Plan and the Public Lands/Parks land use designation. The OS Zone allows limited use of land while conserving open space as a limited and valuable resource. Uses permitted in the OS Zone include agriculture, common open space, land bank and mitigation sites, schools, public recreational uses, and public utilities. Conditional

uses include radio and television towers, retreat centers and camps, equestrian centers, firearms and archery ranges, and private recreational uses.

The Flood Plain (FP) Overlay Zone identified in Article 4, Sections 33-50 through 33-56, provides land use regulations for property situated in the designated floodplain of a river, creek, stream, or water course and is applied as a supplement to the basic underlying land use zone. Development in the FP Zone that would cause stream channel alteration, affect the capacity of a floodway, or unduly increase flood heights is restricted.

The City's Open Space Development Standards (Article 5, Sections 33-70 through 33-77) provide regulations for development of land identified by the Community Open Space/Conservation Element as having open space value. Such land may contain slopes, vegetated conservation areas, and/or natural drainage courses not otherwise defined as floodways. Like the FP regulations, the requirements of this section are in addition to the property development standards of the underlying zone. Among other things, the section requires that natural features shall be protected and natural vegetation shall remain undisturbed except as necessary for approved construction. Prior to any disturbance or development, a development permit must be approved. The development permit must demonstrate that the project conforms to the goals and objectives of the Community Open Space/Conservation Element of the existing General Plan. Decisions may be appealed to the Planning Commission and City Council.

The Excavation and Grading Ordinance (Article 55) ensures that development projects protect the natural topographic character and integrity of the environment. Submittal and review requirements detail the need to identify biological habitats, areas of disturbance, setbacks, and mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts. The article establishes a Hillside and Ridgeline Overlay (HRO) District, generally encompassing parcels with a slope of 15 percent or greater on any portion of the parcel, or those that are located in proximity to an identified intermediate or skyline ridge, and located in an area that has not been developed to its full potential. Development proposals in the HRO must identify sensitive species or habitats (indicating retention, relocation, or removal). Specific findings must be made prior to approval of projects in the HRO, including findings that the development respects and preserves the natural landform, vegetation, and wildlife of the project site. For a vegetation removal permit, findings must be made that the clearing is in conformance with applicable state and federal requirements, that proper environmental review has been completed, and that the proposed clearing or grading is not premature with regard to future discretionary actions and preservation options. The City may attach conditions to the vegetation removal permit. Protection and replacement standards include making every feasible effort to preserve sensitive biological habitat and species, recording deed restrictions to notify future property owners of responsibility for continued maintenance, and onsite or offsite mitigation at a ratio of 1:1 or higher.

The Environmental Quality Regulations (Article 47) implement the CEQA Guidelines for development projects in the City. Article 47 lists specific activities that fall within certain classes of exemption, such as ministerial projects and categorical exemption projects. The article also states that even though a project may otherwise be eligible for an exemption, no exemption will be granted in the following circumstances:

1. Grading or clearing activities that disturb, fragment, or remove habitats of state or federally listed species and archaeological and cultural resources.

2. Parcel maps, plot plans, and all other discretionary development projects that affect sensitive, threatened, or endangered species and their habitats; archaeological and cultural resources; wetlands; designated stream courses; unstable soils; and other factors requiring special review.

Article 47 requires reporting programs to ensure that all required mitigation measures for development projects are properly and fully implemented.

Article 75 of the Zoning Ordinance establishes design guidelines and provides for comprehensive planning within the San Dieguito River Valley Focused Planning Area with regard to General Plan policies for visual impacts and preservation of significant natural resources. The objective is to protect habitat and water resource values of the area by allowing development compatible with natural resources, including biological habitat. Guidelines address grading, design, accessory structures, landscaping, and fencing. Findings must be made that development is in conformance with the goals and objectives of the San Dieguito River Valley Regional Park and the HRO District. In particular, grading must be kept to a minimum and development must respect and preserve the natural landform, geologic features, existing streambeds, vegetation, significant tree cover, and wildlife of the area (City 2001).

Escondido Creek and San Elijo Lagoon Watershed Preservation Area

In 2002, the Cities of Escondido, Solana Beach, and Encinitas, the County of San Diego, the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, and the Escondido Creek Conservancy entered into the Escondido Creek and San Elijo Lagoon Watershed Preservation Area Cooperative Agreement.

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to develop watershed-wide conservation strategies that can be implemented voluntarily by the agreement participants. The participants adopted the Escondido Creek Watershed Alliance (ECWA) as an abbreviated name for the group. ECWA participants meet on a quarterly basis to discuss general watershed issues, restoration and enhancement projects within the watershed, new policies that will affect the watershed, etc. The group developed an Escondido Creek Watershed Restoration Action Strategy, which prioritizes stream reaches within the watershed for potential riparian restoration along Escondido Creek and provides a list of projects for the enhancement and restoration of the Escondido Creek Watershed. Within the City of Escondido, the strategy proposes to naturalize the concrete flood channels in Escondido Creek and reduce sewage spills into the creek.

Multiple Habitat Conservation Program

The MHCP plan, adopted by SANDAG in March 2003, is a comprehensive, multiple jurisdictional planning program designed to create, manage, and monitor an ecosystem preserve in northwestern San Diego County. It is one of several large, multiple jurisdictional habitat planning efforts in San Diego County, each of which constitutes a subregional plan under the State of California's NCCP Act of 1991. The MHCP preserve system is intended to protect viable populations of native plant and animal species and their habitats in perpetuity, while accommodating continued economic development and quality of life for residents of northern San Diego County. The MHCP subregion encompasses the seven incorporated cities of northwestern San Diego County (Carlsbad, Encinitas, Escondido, Oceanside, San Marcos, Solana Beach, and Vista). These jurisdictions are required to implement their portions of the MHCP plan through citywide subarea plans, which describe the specific policies each city will institute for the MHCP.

The MHCP replaces the traditional project-by-project approach to gaining approvals with a coordinated, comprehensive program that ensures that project mitigations are directed to those areas most critical to

biological conservation, while allowing expedited development of less important habitat areas. MHCP implementation will also include perpetual monitoring and management of the preserve system. In exchange for these conservation actions, participating cities will receive “take authorization” from the USFWS and CDFG. Take authorization allows for otherwise lawful actions that may incidentally harm individuals of a species or its habitat (generally outside of the preserve system) in exchange for conserving the species inside the preserve system. Jurisdictions granted take authorization may share their benefits by using them to permit take by public or private projects that comply with the city’s subarea plan.

The City of Escondido is the easternmost incorporated city within the MHCP. The Draft Escondido Subarea Plan (2001) includes the incorporated city limits plus approximately 3,000 acres owned by the city in the unincorporated areas surrounding Lake Wohlford, Valley Center Road, and isolated parcels with existing or planned utility improvements. The subarea plan boundary abuts the approved South County MSCP preserve area and the North County MSCP planning area within the unincorporated areas. The Draft Escondido Subarea Plan currently encompasses an area of approximately 24,624 acres. The MHCP identifies 47 species (32 animals and 15 plants) that occur or potentially occur in Escondido and therefore are evaluated for coverage under the Draft Subarea Plan. The plan addresses the potential impacts to natural habitats and potential species endangerment due to projects within the City. The plan also institutes a strategy to proactively mitigate these impacts to the City’s biological resources. Approval and adoption of the plan would result in federal and state authorization for incidental take of sensitive species caused by implementation of public and private projects within the City. The intent of the plan is to provide regulatory certainty to landowners within the city and aid in conserving the region’s biodiversity and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents. At full implementation, the Draft Escondido Subarea Plan would conserve a total of 6,570 acres of natural habitats within the proposed preserve area. An additional 332 acres of wetlands and 39 acres of natural habitat constrained by steep slopes would be expected to remain undeveloped outside the preserve area. The preserve is designed to protect important portions of sensitive vegetation communities, including 65 percent of the coastal sage scrub and 100 percent of wetlands in the Escondido subarea.

Multiple Species Conservation Program

Similar to the MHCP, the MSCP is a conservation planning program designed to establish connected preserve systems that ensure the long-term survival of sensitive plant and animal species and protect the native vegetation found throughout the program area. The MSCP addresses the potential impacts of urban growth, natural habitat loss, and species endangerment and creates plans to mitigate for the potential loss of sensitive species and their habitats. The MSCP covers 582,243 acres over 12 jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction has its own Subarea Plan and each differs in how it implements the MSCP.

The County has developed and adopted a plan for the unincorporated areas in the southern part of the County (South County MSCP Subarea Plan). The Subarea Plan, adopted on October 22, 1997, covers 252,132 acres in the southwestern portion of the unincorporated area, including portions of the proposed Escondido General Plan Update area located outside the City boundary in the southwest portion of the planning area.

The County is currently developing additional MSCP Plans for the North County and East County areas, including the unincorporated areas east of the City within the General Plan Update boundary. A Draft North County MSCP ~~Subarea Plan~~ was released for public review on February 19, 2009, but has not yet

been adopted. The draft plan covers 63 plant and animal species in a 294,849-acre area in North County stretching from Camp Pendleton and the Riverside County line to the community of Ramona (County 2009).

The MSCP aids in the preservation of sensitive plant and animal species, helping to eliminate the need for future listings of species as endangered under the federal and state ESAs and reduces the costly permit process for private landowners and public agencies. The overall goal of the MSCP is a large, connected preserve system that addresses a number of species at the habitat level rather than species-by-species and area-by-area. The intent of the program is to create a more effective preserve system and better protect rare, threatened, and endangered species.

4.4.3 Analysis of Project Impacts and Determination of Significance

4.4.3.1 Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and existing City policies and regulations, the proposed project would result in a significant impact if it would substantially and adversely effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFG or USFWS (including any flora or fauna of rare and/or endangered status, depleted or declining species, species and habitat types of unique or limited distribution, and/or visually prominent vegetation).

Impact Analysis

Growth under the proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update would be consistent with the growth identified for the General Plan Update; therefore, the following analysis pertains to both the General Plan Update and the Downtown Specific Plan Update. Due to its existing urban setting and highly developed condition, the Downtown SPA offers limited opportunities for biological resources to occur. Impacts related to implementation of the E-CAP are discussed separately below.

General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update

The General Plan Update would result in impacts to candidate, sensitive and special status species if it would result in direct or indirect impacts to sensitive species' habitat. Candidate species are species that are eligible for listing as a federal or state threatened or endangered species. Sensitive species are species that have been given special recognition by federal or state agencies, or are included in regional plans due to limited, declining, or threatened populations. Special status species are designated as threatened or endangered by the CDFG or USFWS.

Potential direct impacts to biological resources from implementation of the General Plan Update would include removal of habitat for new development and infrastructure. New buildings and infrastructure in previously undeveloped areas would have the potential to result in the removal of habitats that support sensitive species. As discussed above in Section 4.4.1, Existing Conditions, most of the City, including the entire urban core, consists of urban/developed land that does not support sensitive species. The vast

majority of development that would be accommodated by the General Plan Update would occur within the 15 study areas located within the developed core of the City. Redevelopment and new development in the currently urbanized area would result in fewer impacts to habitat areas because these areas have been previously disturbed and are less able to support sensitive species. However, some study areas currently provide open space or are located adjacent to open space along the outskirts of the City boundary which has the potential to support some of the sensitive species listed in Tables C-2 and C-3 in Appendix C, Biological Sensitive Species List. These study areas include, but are not limited to: 1) the Nutmeg Street Study Area and Imperial Oaks SPA, both of which are located along I-15 in the northern part of the City; and 2) Escondido Research and Technology Center (ERTC) South SPA located west of I-15 and south of SR-78 in the southwestern area of the City. New development in these study areas would have the potential to result in the direct removal of habitat. Habitats with the potential to support sensitive species near the I-15 in the northern area of the General Plan Update planning area include coastal sage scrub and chaparral. Oak woodland, eucalyptus woodland, and riparian habitat are identified in the southwestern area of the City within the ERTC South SPA (City 2001). As shown in Tables C-1 and C-2 in Appendix C, Biological Sensitive Species List, chaparral habitat and coastal sage scrub habitat have the potential support sensitive species, including narrow endemic species. Narrow endemic species are identified in the regional MHCP and include species considered so restricted in distribution and abundance that substantial loss of their populations or habitat might jeopardize the species' continued existence or recovery. Narrow endemic plant species that may occur in chaparral habitat include San Diego goldenstar, Del Mar manzanita, and Encinitas baccharis. Coastal cactus wren is a narrow endemic animal species that may occur in coastal sage scrub. Narrow endemic plant species that may occur in either of these habitats include, but are not limited to, Del Mar Mesa sand aster, San Diego ambrosia, Orcutt's hazardia, Orcutt's spineflower, San Diego thorn-mint and variegated dudleya. No narrow endemic species are identified in the regional MHCP for oak woodland and riparian habitat; however, sensitive plants that may be found in these habitats include, but are not limited to, Engelmann oak in oak woodland habitat, and San Diego sagewort and smooth tarplant in riparian habitat. Sensitive animal species that are identified in the CNDDDB and regional MHCP that may occur in either chaparral or coastal sage scrub habitat include orange-throated whiptail, Bell's sage sparrow, southern California rufous-crowned sparrow, mountain lion, and northwestern San Diego pocket mouse. Wildlife identified in the CNDDDB and the regional MHCP includes, but is not limited to, the western bluebird and Harbison's dun skipper in oak woodland habitat, and least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-breasted chat, and mountain lion in riparian habitat. The sensitive monarch butterfly has been identified in eucalyptus woodland habitat. Therefore, development within the General Plan Update study areas would result in potentially significant direct impacts to sensitive plant and wildlife species.

Additionally, some development would occur outside of the designated General Plan Update study areas. Approximately 3,250 residential units and 1,400,000 square feet (sf) of non-residential development would be accommodated within the City, outside of the study areas. Approximately 500 residential units and 150,000 sf of non-residential development would be accommodated within the City's SOI, when and if those areas are annexed into the City. Some development would potentially occur outside of the City's urban core and in the City's SOI, which would have the potential to remove habitat that supports sensitive species. As discussed above in Section 4.4.1.2, Vegetation Communities, the habitats located in the City's SOI include chaparral, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, grassland, and riparian habitat. Sensitive species with the potential to occur in chaparral, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, and riparian habitats are discussed in the previous paragraph. Grassland habitat also has the potential to support sensitive species. Narrow endemic species that may be found in grassland habitat include San Diego goldenstar, thread-leaved brodiaea, San Diego ambrosia, San Diego button-celery, San

Diego thorn-mint and variegated dudleya. Wildlife identified in the CNDDDB and the regional MHCP in grassland habitat includes, but is not limited to, the western bluebird, western spadefoot toad, and northwestern San Diego pocket mouse. Therefore, development occurring outside of the General Plan Update study areas would result in potentially significant direct impacts to sensitive plant and wildlife species.

Temporary or indirect impacts to a sensitive species could occur during the construction or operation of development projects consistent with the General Plan Update. Examples of indirect impacts include excessive noise or night lighting that could result in animal behavioral changes, particularly during nesting or breeding season; degradation of water quality from runoff; introduction of non-native species; fugitive dust from construction; and predation by domestic pets. As discussed above, most development under the General Plan Update would occur within the City's urban core and would not be located next to habitat that supports sensitive species. However, some study areas currently include open space, such as the Nutmeg Street Study Area and the Imperial Oakes SPA. Other study areas are located adjacent to open space areas. Development along the edges of these study areas would potentially result in indirect impacts to habitat. These study areas include the ERTC North and South SPA, located along the western edge of the City; the I-15/Felicita Road Corporate Office Target Area located along I-15 in the southern area of the City; and the Westfield Shoppingtown Target Area located adjacent to I-15 to the west and Kit Carson Park to the east. Additionally, development that would occur outside of the study areas and the City's developed downtown core would have the potential to be located adjacent to habitat supporting sensitive species. Therefore, the General Plan Update would result in potentially significant indirect impacts to sensitive plant and wildlife species.

Escondido Climate Action Plan

Some reduction measures identified in the E-CAP encourage the construction or expansion of roadway or transit facilities, including Measure R2-T2, Bicycle Master Plan, and Measure R2-T3, Transit Improvements. These facilities would be focused in the urban core to serve existing and future development under the General Plan Update. However, construction of these facilities on the edge or outside of the urban core would have the potential to result in the direct removal of habitat or indirect impacts to habitat from edge effects, noise and new lighting at transit facilities. Therefore, impacts related to implementation of the proposed E-CAP measures would be potentially significant.

Federal, State, and Local Regulations and Existing Regulatory Processes

As identified above in Section 4.4.2, Regulatory Framework, there are a number of federal, state, and local regulations in place to protect special status species. The federal MBTA prohibits the disturbance of migratory birds including raptors. In addition, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act limits impacts to golden eagles, which are identified in the CNDDDB as potentially occurring in the General Plan Update planning area. The federal ESA requires a Section 7 or Section 10 process be undertaken with the USFWS if a project would result in take of a federally listed species, while the CESA prohibits take of state-listed species without securing a Section 2081 permit. For example, Section 7 or Section 10 consultation with the USFWS would be required for potential impacts to coastal sage scrub habitat that is occupied by the coastal California gnatcatcher. These permits may also be achieved through NCCP plans such as the MHCP or MSCP. The County's adopted South County MSCP Subarea Plan covers the small portion of unincorporated area within the southwestern region of the General Plan Update boundary. It serves to protect designated sensitive plant and animal species and their habitats depending on location and site characteristics. The City's Draft MHCP Subarea Plan and the Draft

County's North County MSCP Subarea Plan have not been adopted; however, when adopted, these plans would meet NCCP requirements.

The City's Zoning Ordinance includes protections for biological resources. The OS Zone provides permanent open space, including land bank and mitigation sites. The Open Space Development Standards provide regulations for development of lands with open space value, including protections for natural vegetation. The Excavation and Grading Ordinance ensures that development projects protect the natural topographic character and integrity of the environment, including vegetation. To obtain a vegetation removal permit, findings must be made that the clearing is in conformance with applicable state and federal requirements, that proper environmental review has been completed, and that the proposed clearing or grading is not premature with regard to future discretionary actions and preservation options. Protection and replacement standards include making every feasible effort to preserve sensitive biological habitat and species and onsite or offsite mitigation at a ratio of 1:1 or higher.

Proposed General Plan Update Policies

The General Plan Update includes quality of life standard #6, Parks Systems, which commits the City to providing 5.9 acres of passive park land and/or open space for habitat preservation per 1,000 dwelling units. The Community Health and Services Element includes Parks and Recreation Policy 2.3, which implements this standard.

The General Plan Update also includes quality of life standard 8, Open Space System, which requires a system of open space corridors, easements, acquisition programs and trails to be established in the Resource Conservation and Community Health and Services Elements. Further, quality of life standard #8 states that significant wetlands, riparian or woodland habitat, and habitat for rare or endangered species shall be protected in coordination with state and/or federal agencies having jurisdiction over such areas. The Resource Conservation Element includes the Biological and Open Space goal and policies to support this quality of life standard related to sensitive species. The goal is to preserve and enhance Escondido's open spaces and significant biological resources as components of a sustainable community. This goal is supported by Biological and Open Space Resources Policies 1.2, 1.6 through 1.9, 1.11, and 1.13 which require the City to maintain open space and rural residential uses around the perimeter of the City; preserve and protect significant wetlands, riparian, and woodland habitats and rare, threatened or endangered plants and animals and their habitats; require mitigation of resources either onsite or offsite at ratios consistent with state and federal regulations; require surveys be prepared for proposed development projects located in areas potentially containing significant biological resources; prohibit the removal of significant stands of trees unless needed to protect public safety; require appropriate barriers to be constructed to restrict access to areas containing sensitive biological resources; and promote the use of native plants for public and private landscaping purposes within the City.

The Land Use and Community Form Element includes Goal 12, which protects open space land that provide an attractive environmental setting for Escondido, visual relief from development, protects the viability of natural resources and habitat, offers recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and protects the public from the risks of natural hazards. This goal is supported by Open Space Land Use Policy 12.1, which is to establish the Open Space / Park land use designation to identify properties reserved for active and passive parks, habitat preservation, and public safety purposes. Additionally, Residential Development Policy 3.6 requires avoidance of panhandle lots and unusual lot slopes except

to preserve slopes, ridgelines, habitat areas, and other resources identified in the Resource Conservation Element. This element also includes Residential Clustering Policies 5.2 and 5.6, which encourage utilization of clustering as tool to preserve slopes, ridgelines and sensitive habitats, and require the City to limit density transfers from areas containing sensitive biological resources. Planned Development Policy 6.3 identifies requirements for planned development proposals such as minimization of grading and removal of native vegetation; preservation of the creeks and their adjoining vegetation; and the protection and management of areas supporting rare and endangered plant and animal species. Additionally, within the Land Use and Community Form Element, Environmental Review Policies 18.1 through 18.4 require project conformance with CEQA, the General Plan, facilities plans, and quality of life standards; mitigation of environmental impacts; and an update of environmental thresholds in sensitive areas.

Finally, the Community Protection Element includes Fire Protection Policy 2.17, which requires the City to maintain programs to minimize impacts on sensitive biological habitat and species when suppressing wildland fires, when feasible.

Proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update Policies

The proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update does not include any policies related to special status plant and wildlife species.

Proposed Escondido Climate Action Plan Reduction Measures

The proposed E-CAP does not include any reduction measures related to special status plant and wildlife species.

Summary

Implementation of the proposed project would have the potential to result in direct and indirect impacts to special status plant and wildlife species and their habitat. However, existing federal and state regulations prohibit the take of sensitive species without permitting from wildlife agencies. Existing City regulations limit the amount of habitat that can be impacted by new development. Additionally, the goals and policies of the proposed General Plan Update require projects with the potential to impact sensitive species to prepare a biological survey and mitigate any impacts that would occur, including impacts from implementation of E-CAP measures. Appropriate mitigation is required to be determined through consultation with the wildlife agencies. Therefore, compliance with existing regulations and proposed General Plan Update goals and policies would reduce impacts to sensitive species to a less than significant level.

4.4.3.2 Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and existing City policies and regulations, the proposed project would result in a significant impact if it would result in a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations, or by CDFG or USFWS.

Impact Analysis

Growth under the proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update would be consistent with the growth identified for the General Plan Update; therefore, the following analysis pertains to both the General Plan Update and the Downtown Specific Plan Update. Due to its existing urban setting and highly developed condition, the Downtown SPA offers limited opportunities for biological resources to occur. Impacts related to implementation of the E-CAP are discussed separately below.

General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update

Riparian habitat has been identified in the south, northeast, east, southwest, and northwest habitat areas. No other vegetation communities that are considered sensitive in the regional MHCP have been identified in the City's MHCP subarea. However, the North County MSCP ~~Subarea Plan~~ identifies oak woodland, coastal sage scrub, grassland, and chaparral as sensitive communities within the General Plan Update boundary. Coastal sage scrub is considered sensitive in the South County MSCP Subarea Plan in the ~~Lake-Hodges Reservoir~~ area. Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, above describes the proposed project's impact to natural habitats in the unincorporated County, including the sensitive natural communities discussed above. As stated in this section, most new development under the General Plan Update would occur within the City's urban core, which does not contain sensitive natural communities. Riparian habitats are generally limited to the outskirts of the General Plan Update area, and impacts to sensitive communities identified in the County's MSCP subarea plans would be limited to the SOI. These areas are planned for nominal growth under the proposed General Plan Update. Additionally, as discussed above in Section 4.4.1.1, General Biological Setting, the largest areas of natural habitat within the General Plan Update boundary are currently designated for preservation as parks, have been dedicated for open space preservation through private agreements, are protected under the South County MSCP Subarea Plan, or are included in a PAMA for the County of San Diego. These areas include Daley Ranch and its surrounding area, Kit Carson Park, Lake Wohlford, Bernardo Mountain, and the area surrounding ~~Lake-Hodges Reservoir~~. However, some new development on the edge of the urban core would have the potential to result in the removal of natural vegetation. For example, the ERTC South SPA would have the potential to impact riparian habitat associated with Escondido Creek. Additionally, under the General Plan Update, some growth would be accommodated in areas outside the urban core and in the City's SOI, if future annexation of these areas occurs. Therefore, impacts related to sensitive natural communities would be potentially significant. In addition, future development would have the potential to result in indirect impacts to riparian habitat as a result of increased runoff that would adversely water quality. Impacts to water quality are addressed in Section 4.9, Hydrology and Water Quality. As discussed in that section, impacts related to water quality would be less than significant due to required compliance with existing regulations and proposed General Plan Update goals and policies.

Escondido Climate Action Plan

Some reduction measures identified in the E-CAP encourage the construction or expansion of roadway or transit facilities, including Measure R2-T2, Bicycle Master Plan, and Measure R2-T3, Transit Improvements. These facilities would be focused in the urban core to serve existing and future development under the General Plan Update. However, construction of these facilities on the edge or outside of the urban core would have the potential to result in the direct removal of habitat or indirect impacts to habitat from edge effects, noise and new lighting at transit facilities. Therefore, impacts related to implementation of the proposed E-CAP measures would be potentially significant.

Federal, State, and Local Regulations and Existing Regulatory Processes

As noted above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, numerous federal, state and local regulations exist to protect sensitive species that would also protect sensitive natural communities identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations, or by CDFG or USFWS. In addition, there are a number of federal, state, and local regulations in place to protect riparian habitat. The CWA regulates certain impacts to federally protected wetlands as well as non-wetland waters of the U.S. The California Lake and Streambed Alteration Program (Section 1602 of the CDFG Code) requires written notification to CDFG prior to altering a riparian area supported by a lake, river, or stream.

In addition to the Zoning Ordinance regulations listed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, the City's Zoning Ordinance contains the following regulations to protect riparian and other sensitive habitats. The FP Overlay Zone provides land use regulations for properties situated in the designated floodplain of a river, creek, stream, or water course and is applied as a supplement to the basic underlying land use zone. Development in the FP Zone that would cause stream channel alteration, affect the capacity of the floodway, or unduly increase flood heights is restricted. The Environmental Quality Regulations (EQRs) require reporting programs to ensure that all required mitigation measures for development projects are properly and fully implemented, including impacts to natural habitats. Article 75 of the Zoning Ordinance establishes design guidelines and provide for comprehensive planning within the San Dieguito River Valley Focused Planning Area. The objective of this section of the code is to protect habitat and water resource values of the area by allowing development that is compatible with natural resources, including biological habitat.

Proposed General Plan Update Policies

In addition to the goals and policies listed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, the proposed Resource Conservation Element of the General Plan Update includes Biological and Open Space Resources Policy 1.10, which prohibits any activities in riparian areas, other than those permitted by appropriate agencies, and Water Resources and Quality Policy 6.10, which requires that drainage channels be designed to accommodate riparian vegetation growth.

In addition, the General Plan Update includes requirements for the ERTC South SPA in the Land Use and Community Form Element. The ERTC South SPA must include provisions for the enhancement of riparian areas and for the incorporation of the Escondido Creek Trail into the ultimate development plans for the SPA while minimizing impacts to these resources. Additionally, this element includes Planned Development Policy 6.3, which requires that planned development proposals be located and designed to preserve creeks and their adjoining vegetation in a natural state. Open Space Land Use Policies 12.3 and 12.4 encourage the preservation of land within the planning area and require the City to explore options to purchase land for recreation or open space purposes that is owned by other public agencies and available for acquisition, as appropriate.

Proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update Policies

The proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update does not include any policies related to riparian habitat and other sensitive natural communities.

Proposed Escondido Climate Action Plan Reduction Measures

The proposed E-CAP does not include any reduction measures related to riparian habitat and other sensitive natural communities.

Summary

Implementation of the proposed project would have the potential to result in direct and indirect impacts to riparian habitat and other sensitive natural communities. However, existing federal and state regulations protect natural communities, including riparian habitats. Existing City regulations and land use agreements preserve large areas of open space. Additionally, the goals and policies of the proposed General Plan Update require projects with the potential to impact sensitive biological resources to prepare a biological survey and mitigate any impacts that would occur. Appropriate mitigation is required to be determined through consultation with the wildlife agencies. Therefore, compliance with existing regulations and the proposed General Plan Update goals policies would reduce impacts to riparian habitats and sensitive natural communities to a less than significant level.

4.4.3.3 Issue 3: Federally Protected Wetlands

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and existing City policies and regulations, the proposed project would result in a significant impact if it would result in a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means. The term “wetlands” means those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and under normal circumstances do support, vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Three criteria must be satisfied to classify an area as a jurisdictional wetland: 1) a predominance of plant life that is adapted to life in wet conditions (hydrophytic vegetation); 2) soils that saturate, flood, or pond long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions in the upper part (hydric soils); and 3) permanent or periodic inundation or soils saturation, at least seasonally (wetland hydrology).

Impact Analysis

Growth under the proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update would be consistent with the growth identified for the General Plan Update; therefore, the following analysis pertains to both the General Plan Update and the Downtown Specific Plan Update. Due to its existing urban setting and highly developed condition, the Downtown Specific Plan area offers limited opportunities for biological resources to occur. Impacts related to implementation of the E-CAP are discussed separately below.

General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update

Direct impacts to federally protected wetlands would occur if development under the General Plan Update would result in the removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other disturbance to these resources. For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that federally protected wetlands may occur along any of the creeks that traverse the General Plan Update area, except where these creeks are channelized. As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, and Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, the majority of development under the General Plan Update would occur within the City’s developed urban core. Escondido Creek and Reidy Creek traverse this area. The creeks are channelized through most of the planning area, but include a few unchannelized areas. Portions of Escondido Creek are unchannelized in the Downtown SPA and the ERTC South SPA. Portions of Reidy Creek are unchannelized in the Transit

Station Target Area. Development is proposed in these study areas which could directly or indirectly impact federally protected wetlands associated with the unchannelized creek areas.

Development along the unchannelized portions of the creeks would have the potential to impact wetland areas. Additionally, natural creek systems flow outside of the urban core, including Cloverdale Creek in the eastern habitat area; three small creeks that run south along Bear Valley Parkway, through Kit Carson Park and the Vineyard at Escondido golf course; Escondido Creek in the southwestern habitat area; and Reidy Creek in the northwestern habitat area (City 2001). As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, large areas of open space have already been designated for preservation in the habitat areas on the outskirts of the planning area. However, some development would occur outside of the study areas and developed downtown core. If development would be located on or near a wetland area, direct or indirect impacts to federally protected wetlands may occur. Therefore, impacts to federally protected wetlands would be potentially significant.

Escondido Climate Action Plan

Some reduction measures identified in the E-CAP encourage the construction or expansion of roadway or transit facilities, including Measure R2-T2, Bicycle Master Plan, and Measure R2-T3, Transit Improvements. These facilities would be focused in the urban core to serve existing and future development under the proposed General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update. Some unchannelized creek areas are present within the urban core. Trails near these creeks may be encouraged in the Bicycle Master Plan. Additionally, construction of these facilities on the edge or outside of the urban core would have the potential to result in direct or indirect impacts to wetlands. For example, construction of new trails may require riparian vegetation removal near a creek. Therefore, impacts related to the implementation of E-CAP measures would be potentially significant.

Federal, State, and Local Regulations and Existing Regulatory Processes

As identified above in the Section 4.4.2, Regulatory Framework, and further discussed above in Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, there are a number of federal, state, and local regulations in place to limit impacts to federally protected wetlands in the City. At the federal level the CWA prohibits the discharge of pollutants or fill materials in waters of the U.S. without obtaining a Section 404 permit from the USACE and a Section 401 certification from the RWQCB. At the state level the Lake and Streambed Alteration Program requires written notification to CDFG prior to altering a riparian area supported by a lake, river, or stream, including federally protected wetlands. At the local level, the FP Overlay Zone in the Zoning Ordinance provides land use regulations for property situated in the designated floodplains of rivers, creeks, streams, and water courses. The City of Escondido is part of the ECWA to protect and restore Escondido Creek, which supports projects such as the naturalization of concrete flood channels in Escondido Creek.

Proposed General Plan Update Policies

In addition to the General Plan Update policies listed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, and in Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, the proposed Resource Conservation Element includes Water Resources and Quality Policies 6.5, 6.6, 6.8, 6.9, and 6.14, which require the City to maintain natural and improved drainages as permanent open space; control encroachments into wetlands and designated floodways to protect water resources; maintain Escondido's natural creek system in an undisturbed state; conserve and

restore creeks to their natural states whenever possible; allow areas where channelization has occurred for flood control purposes to serve as urban open space; and require new development to protect water resources and natural drainage systems.

Proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update Policies

The proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update does not include any policies related to federally protected wetlands.

Proposed Escondido Climate Action Plan Reduction Measures

The proposed E-CAP does not include any reduction measures related to federally protected wetlands.

Summary

Implementation of the proposed project would have the potential to result in impacts to federal wetlands from future development. However, future development that would potentially impact a wetland would be required to obtain permitting from federal and/or state agencies. Additionally, proposed General Plan Update policies require the protection of wetland habitats and require biological surveys and mitigation for potential impacts to biological resources. Therefore, compliance with existing permitting requirements and proposed General Plan Update policies would reduce impacts to a less than significant level.

4.4.3.4 Issue 4: Wildlife Movement Corridors and Nursery Sites

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and existing City policies and regulations, the proposed project would result in a significant impact if it would: 1) interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors; 2) impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites; or 3) encroach on important habitat which would block the movements of wildlife within their natural range.

Impact Analysis

Growth under the proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update would be consistent with the growth identified for the General Plan Update; therefore, the following analysis pertains to both the General Plan Update and the Downtown Specific Plan Update. Due to its existing urban setting and highly developed condition, the Downtown Specific Plan area offers limited opportunities for biological resources, including wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites. Impacts related to implementation of the E-CAP are discussed separately below.

General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update

The wildlife areas on the outskirts of the General Plan Update planning area boundary provide habitat movement corridors between the planning area and surrounding areas, and connect habitats east and west of the planning area. All five areas of natural habitats, located in the northeastern, eastern, southern, southwestern, and northwestern portions of the City, have been identified as part of the BCLA

for the MHCP. Figure 3-2 of the City's Draft MHCP Subarea Plan, City of Escondido Subarea Plan Vegetation Communities inside the BCLA, identifies the wildlife linkage areas within the City's MHCP subarea boundary. These core areas provide two specific regionally important landscape linkages: 1) east-west across the northern portion of the planning area, including Daley Ranch, and 2) east-west across the southern portion of the planning area, as part of the San Pasqual River Valley corridor. The area north of Daley Ranch is shown as a wildlife linkage corridor in Figure 7-1, Planning Units, in the Draft North County MSCP ~~Subarea Plan~~. The areas surrounding Lake-Hodges Reservoir and San Pasqual River Valley are identified as linkages in Section 2, Lake-Hodges Reservoir Segment, of the South County MSCP Subarea Plan. Additionally, the City's Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space includes a conceptual wildlife corridor. Three sections of the open space corridor system are identified in the plan, which are also encompassed in the BCLA: 1) Lake-Hodges Reservoir to San Pasqual Valley; 2) San Pasqual Valley to Lake Wohlford; and 3) Lake Dixon/Daley Ranch and North Community Open Space Preserve.

The five large habitat areas are also the primary locations of nursery sites within the General Plan Update boundary. Nursery sites are areas that provide the resources necessary for the reproduction of a species, including foraging habitat, breeding habitat, and water sources. Some isolated nursery sites, particularly for bird species, may exist outside of these large wildlife areas, such as stands of trees on undeveloped lots within the urban core.

As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, the largest areas of natural vegetation within the General Plan Update boundary, which also serve as wildlife corridors, are currently designated for preservation as parks, have been dedicated for open space preservation through private agreements, are protected under the South County MSCP Subarea plan, or are included in a PAMA for the County of San Diego. These areas include Daley Ranch and its surrounding area, Kit Carson Park, Lake Wohlford, Bernardo Mountain, and the area surrounding Lake-Hodges Reservoir. These existing preservation agreements and designations would ensure that significant encroachment into wildlife movement corridors would not occur as a result of development under the General Plan Update. Additionally, new development within the City's urban core or on the edge of the urban core, such as the Nutmeg Street Study Area, Imperial Oaks SPA, and ERTC South SPA, would not block any significant wildlife movement corridors because no corridors are currently available through the City, and the habitat areas in close proximity to the City's urban core are not designated a linkage areas. These areas are isolated from the large areas of open space that provide for regional wildlife movement and are exposed to greater edge effects from existing development. However, although development outside of the City's urban core would be limited, some new development would be expected to occur. In addition, the proposed circulation network does propose new roadways in undeveloped areas that would have the potential to impede wildlife movement. The proposed extension of Mountain Meadow Road crosses through the northern habitat area, just north of Daley Ranch. The extensions of Citracado Parkway and Lariat Drive would cross a small portion of the southwestern habitat area. Biological resource impacts related to the Citracado Parkway extension have been addressed in the Draft EIR for the Citracado Parkway Extension Project (SCH # 2007041061) which was released for public review in September 2011. This EIR identified that implementation of the Citracado Parkway extension would result in significant impacts to biological resources and identified mitigation measures that would be implemented to reduce these biological resource impacts to a level below significant. Construction of new roadways would potentially result in direct impacts to wildlife movement corridors by blocking a connection between two habitats. Therefore, implementation of the General Plan Update would result in a potentially significant impact to wildlife movement corridors.

Habitats that support sensitive species include habitats that provide nursery sites. For the purposes of this programmatic analysis, it is assumed that habitats with the potential to support sensitive species provide nursery sites for these species. As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, development under the General Plan Update would have the potential to directly and indirectly impact natural habitat that supports sensitive species. Although development within the urban core would generally not result in the removal of natural habitat, this development would have the potential to remove stands of trees or other vegetation that provides nursery sites to wildlife, particularly birds. Therefore, impacts related to nursery sites would be potentially significant.

Escondido Climate Action Plan

Some reduction measures identified in the E-CAP encourage the construction or expansion of roadway or transit facilities, including Measure R2-T2, Bicycle Master Plan, and Measure R2-T3, Transit Improvements. These facilities would be focused in the urban core to serve existing and future development under the General Plan Update. However, construction of these facilities on the edge or outside of the urban core would have the potential to result in impacts to wildlife corridors. If new trails, roadways or transit facilities would include fencing or another type of physical barrier that prevents wildlife movement, impacts to wildlife corridors may result. Therefore, impacts related to the implementation of the E-CAP measures would be potentially significant.

Federal, State, and Local Regulations and Existing Regulatory Processes

At the state level, the NCCP Act facilitates region-wide conservation efforts. As part of the process in determining natural community conservation areas, wildlife movement corridors are considered. The City has prepared a Draft MHCP Subarea Plan for land within its jurisdiction. Additionally, the County has adopted a South County MSCP Subarea Plan and has prepared a Draft North County MSCP Plan that covers the unincorporated areas within the General Plan Update planning area boundary. However, with the exception of the southern areas of the General Plan Update area covered by the South County MSCP Subarea Plan, the BCLA will not be formally designated until the draft plans are adopted. The City's Zoning Ordinance includes the regulations listed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, and in Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, that would help to protect wildlife movement corridors by requiring large areas of open space to be maintained. Additionally, the City's EQRs require reporting programs to ensure that all required mitigation measures for development projects are properly and fully implemented with regards to impacts to biological impacts, including habitat fragmentation and habitat that supports sensitive species.

Proposed General Plan Update Policies

In addition to the General Plan Update goals and policies listed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, and in Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, the Resource Conservation Element includes Biological and Open Space Resources Policy 1.1, which requires the City to establish and maintain an interconnected system of open space corridors, easements, trails, public/quasi-public land, and natural areas that preserve sensitive lands, permanent bodies of water, floodways, and slopes over 35 percent and provides for wildlife movement.

Proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update Policies

The proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update does not include any policies related to biological resources.

Proposed Escondido Climate Action Plan Reduction Measures

The proposed E-CAP does not include any reduction measures related to biological resources.

Summary

Implementation of the proposed project would have the potential to result in impacts to wildlife movement corridors and the use of native wildlife nursery sites from future development. Existing regulations and proposed General Plan Update goals and policies are intended to protect wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites by protecting large areas of habitat. Additionally, the proposed General Plan Update policies would require biological resource surveys and mitigation for impacts to sensitive biological resources, including nursery sites for special status species. Additionally, the City's EQRs require implementation of mitigation measures for impacts to biological resources, which would protect nursery sites and fragmentation of wildlife movement corridors. Therefore, impacts to wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites would be less than significant.

4.4.3.5 Issue 5: Local Policies and Ordinances

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and existing City policies and regulations, the proposed project would result in a significant impact if it would conflict with any local plans, policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as the City's Zoning Ordinance or the City's Parks, Trails and Open Space Plan.

Impact Analysis

Growth under the proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update would be consistent with the growth identified for the General Plan Update; therefore, the following analysis pertains to both the General Plan Update and the Downtown Specific Plan Update. Impacts related to implementation of the E-CAP are discussed separately below.

General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update

The local policies and ordinances that protect biological resources include the City's Zoning Ordinance, which establishes the OS Zone requirements, FP Overlay Zone requirements, Open Space Development Standards, Excavation and Grading Ordinance, San Dieguito River Valley Focused Planning Area requirements, and EQRs; and the City's Parks, Trails and Open Space Plan. As described above in Section 4.4.2, Regulatory Framework, all of these policies and ordinances address the protection of biological resources, such as requirements for new development to maintain natural vegetation. The General Plan Update does not propose any changes to the Zoning Ordinance requirements related to biological resources. The General Plan Update establishes land use designations for the various areas in the plan. The Land Use and Community Form Element establishes the zoning designations that correspond with the land use designations. New development would be required to comply with the zoning requirements that apply to the specific land use proposed and regulations that apply to all development, regardless of zone, such as the Excavation and Grading Ordinance. Development would be intensified in the urban core of the City; however, the General Plan Update would generally maintain the open space and low density land use designations of the previous General Plan outside of the urban core. Therefore, development under the General Plan Update would not conflict with resource protections in

the Zoning Ordinance, including the OS Zone requirements, FP Overlay Zone requirements, Open Space Development Standards, Excavation and Grading Ordinance, San Dieguito River Valley Focused Planning Area requirements, and EQRs. Future development under the General Plan Update would be required to comply with existing Zoning Ordinance regulations that protect biological resources; therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Additionally, the City would continue to implement the Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space. The open space requirements of the Master Plan pertain to biological resources. The primary intent of the open space component of the Master Plan is to establish a conceptual program aimed at preserving natural areas. As stated in the Master Plan, existing regulations limit development on steep slopes, ridgelines, and floodplains. The development restricted areas, along with the high sensitivity habitats and conceptual wildlife corridor identified in the plan, form the basis for a functional reserve system within which the City can focus mitigation, preservation, restoration, or enhancement to maintain a contiguous habitat system. The habitat areas are Daley Ranch, Deer Park County Reserve, Lake Dixon, Lake Wohlford, and the San Dieguito River Valley Regional Open Space Park. As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.4, Issue 4: Wildlife Movement Corridors and Nursery Sites, three sections of the open space corridor systems are identified: 1) ~~Lake-Hodges Reservoir~~ to San Pasqual Valley; 2) San Pasqual Valley to Lake Wohlford; and 3) Lake Dixon/Daley Ranch and North Community Open Space Preserve. As discussed under Issues 1 through 4 above, these key habitat areas would continue to be protected by existing regulations; preservation agreements; the EQRs which require mitigation for all biological impacts; and the General Plan Update land use plan, which concentrates new development in the urban core and designates the areas surrounding Lake Wohlford, Daley Ranch/Lake Dixon, Kit Carson Park, and ~~Lake-Hodges Reservoir~~ for open space. Since the last update of the Master Plan (1999), the Deer Park County Reserve was sold and is no longer proposed to be retained for open space. This land is currently under the jurisdiction of the County of San Diego and the City did not have control over this land use decision. However, the General Plan Update proposes low density rural residential land uses for this area, consistent with the County's land use decision. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not conflict with the City's Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space because it would continue to protect the open space resources identified in the Master Plan.

Escondido Climate Action Plan

Implementation of the E-CAP would not result in development within the proposed project boundary beyond the scope of land uses that would be accommodated under the General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update. The E-CAP measures would be implemented as part of development consistent with the General Plan Update. Therefore, E-CAP would not result in any conflicts with local policies or ordinances beyond those identified for physical development under the General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update. Impacts related to the E-CAP would be less than significant.

Federal, State, and Local Regulations and Existing Regulatory Processes

There are no state and/or federal regulations that apply to this issue. The local ordinances relevant to this issue were discussed above in the analysis of impacts of the General Plan Update and include the City's Zoning Ordinance, including the EQRs, and the Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space.

Proposed General Plan Update Policies

The Land Use and Community Form Element includes Community Character Policy 1.3, which requires the City to focus development into areas where land use changes achieve the community's long-term

goals. Additionally, this element includes requirements for specific areas addressed in the General Plan Update to comply with the City's Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space. Trail connections from the Sager Ranch SPA to Daley Ranch are required to be coordinated with the City's Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space and to avoid creating new trails within Daley Ranch. The Community Health and Services Element also includes Parks and Recreation Policy 2.1, which requires the City to regularly review and update park standards, facility plans and improvements, recreation services, funding programs, and other pertinent components of the Master Plan. Additionally, the goals and policies listed under Issue 1 through Issue 4 protect biological resources and support the open space goals of the City's Master Plan Parks, Trails, and Open Space. Additionally, within the Land Use and Community Form Element, Environmental Review Policies 18.1 through 18.4 require project conformance with CEQA, the General Plan, facilities plans, and quality of life standards; mitigation of environmental impacts; and an update of environmental thresholds in sensitive areas.

Proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update Policies

The proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update does not include any policies related to local biological resources policies and ordinances.

Proposed Escondido Climate Action Plan Reduction Measures

The proposed E-CAP does not include any reduction measures related to local biological resources policies and ordinances.

Summary

Future projects proposed under the General Plan Update would be required to comply with applicable sections of the City's Zoning Ordinance. Regulatory processes to ensure compliance are already in place and would not be impacted by the General Plan Update. Compliance with the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, existing regulations, preservation agreements, and the proposed General Plan Update would protect the open space resources identified in the City's Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space. Therefore, a potentially significant impact associated with conflicts with local policies and ordinances would not occur.

4.4.3.6 Issue 6: Habitat Conservation Plans and NCCPs

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and existing City policies and regulations, the proposed project would result in a significant impact if it would conflict with the provisions of an adopted habitat conservation plan, NCCP, other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan such as the County of San Diego MSCP.

Impact Analysis

Growth under the proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update would be consistent with the growth identified for the General Plan Update; therefore, the following analysis pertains to both the General Plan Update and the Downtown Specific Plan Update. Impacts related to implementation of the E-CAP are discussed separately below.

General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update

An MHCP or MSCP Plan is a combined habitat conservation plan and NCCP. The MSCP South County Subarea Plan is the only adopted plan that applies to areas within the General Plan Update planning area. Future development in the southwestern portion of the General Plan Update planning area within the boundary of the MSCP South County Subarea Plan would be required to comply with the mitigation requirements of the subarea plan. An MHCP has been adopted by SANDAG for the northern incorporated cities, including Escondido; however, the City has not adopted its subarea plan. Additionally, a Draft North County MSCP Subarea Plan has been developed that applies to portions of the General Plan Update planning area, but this plan has not been adopted. Future development under the General Plan Update would be required to comply with the applicable MHCP or MSCP plans that have been adopted at the time the development is proposed. Therefore, when the draft plans are adopted, development under the General Plan Update would be required to comply with the MHCP or MSCP subarea plan mitigation ratios. Until adopted, existing habitat conservation agreements and required permitting from the CDFG and USFWS, as discussed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, would ensure that future implementation of the MHCP and MSCP would not be precluded by new development. A development project that is inconsistent with an adopted plan would not be approved by the City. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Escondido Climate Action Plan

Implementation of the E-CAP would not result in development within the proposed project boundary beyond the land uses that would be accommodated under the General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update. The E-CAP measures would be implemented as part of development consistent with the General Plan Update. Development would be required to comply with the applicable MSCP or MHCP, if adopted. Therefore, the E-CAP would not result in any conflicts with habitat conservation plans and NCCPs beyond those identified for physical development under the General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update. Impacts as a result of the E-CAP related to habitat conservation plans and NCCPs would be less than significant.

Federal, State, and Local Regulations and Existing Regulatory Processes

There are no state and/or federal regulations that apply to this issue. The local MHCP and MSCP that are relevant to this issue are discussed above. Additionally, the City's EQRs require that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented for projects that would potentially impact sensitive biological resources. Once adopted, MHCP or MSCP subarea plan mitigation ratios would apply.

Proposed General Plan Update Policies

The General Plan Update Resource Conservation Element includes Biological and Open Space Resources Policies 1.7 and 1.8. These policies require the preparation of a biological survey for development projects that would potentially impact significant biological resources. In the event that significant biological resources are adversely affected, appropriate state and federal agencies must be consulted to determine adequate mitigation for replacement of the resource. Additionally, within the Land Use and Community Form Element, Environmental Review Policies 18.1 through 18.4 require project conformance with CEQA, the General Plan, facilities plans, and quality of life standards; mitigation of environmental impacts; and an update of environmental thresholds in sensitive areas.

Proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update Policies

The proposed Downtown Specific Plan Update does not include any policies related to habitat conservation plans and NCCPs.

Proposed Escondido Climate Action Plan Reduction Measures

The proposed E-CAP does not include any reduction measures related to habitat conservation plans and NCCPs.

Summary

Future projects proposed under the General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update would be required to comply with applicable habitat conservation plans and NCCPs. Existing regulations and the proposed General Plan Update policies would ensure future compliance of projects proposed under the General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan Update. Implementation of E-CAP measures would be required to comply with the applicable MSCP or MHCP, if adopted. Therefore, a potentially significant impact associated with conflicts with habitat conservation plans and NCCPs would not occur.

4.4.4 Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative analysis for biological resources first identifies the geographic area within which the resource has the potential to occur. The geographic scope for the biological resources cumulative analysis is the San Diego region.

Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species

Cumulative projects located in the San Diego region would have the potential to result in impacts to special status plant and wildlife species, including loss of habitat. Adjacent jurisdictions, including incorporated cities, the County of San Diego, and tribal governments, would be required to comply with applicable federal and/or state regulations that provide protections for special status plant and wildlife species such as the Federal ESA, the CESA, and the California NCCP Act. If significant impacts occur from particular cumulative projects, then mitigation measures are usually implemented to reduce impacts to the extent feasible. However, without a comprehensive NCCP in place for the long-term protection of special status plant and wildlife species for the entire San Diego region, a cumulative loss of habitat supporting special status plant and wildlife species would occur, even after mitigation has been implemented for individual projects. Therefore, a significant cumulative impact associated with special status plant and wildlife species would occur.

As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.1, Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species, development and redevelopment under the proposed project would have the potential to impact special status species. An MHCP has been developed for the northwest incorporated cities, but the City of Escondido is still developing its MHCP Subarea Plan. Adoption of the City's subarea plan would establish the City's contribution to the regional protection of biological resources and establish an implementation program to protect the resources identified in the plan, including requirements for new development. Therefore, until the City has adopted the MHCP Subarea Plan, the proposed project's contribution, in combination with other cumulative projects, would be cumulatively considerable.

Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities

Cumulative projects located in the San Diego region have the potential to result in impacts associated with riparian habitat and other sensitive natural communities through direct and indirect loss or degradation. Adjacent jurisdictions, including incorporated cities, the County of San Diego, and tribal governments, would be required to comply with applicable federal and/or state regulations such as the California NCCP Act. These programs provide protections for riparian and other sensitive habitats. In addition, many projects that affect riparian or other protected habitat types require approval from the USFWS and the CDFG. If potentially significant impacts would occur from particular cumulative projects, then mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce impacts to the extent feasible. However, without a comprehensive NCCP in place for the long-term protection of sensitive natural communities for the entire San Diego region, a cumulative loss of riparian and other sensitive habitat would occur, even after mitigation has been implemented for individual projects. Therefore, a significant cumulative impact associated with sensitive natural communities ~~special status plant and wildlife species~~ would occur.

As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.2, Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities, development and redevelopment under the proposed project would have the potential to impact sensitive natural communities. An MHCP has been developed for the northwest incorporated cities in San Diego County, but the City of Escondido is still developing its MHCP Subarea Plan. Adoption of the City's subarea plan would establish the City's contribution to the regional protection of biological resources and establish an implementation program to protect the resources identified in the plan, including requirements for new development. Therefore, until the City has adopted the MHCP Subarea Plan, the proposed project's contribution, in combination with other cumulative projects, would be cumulatively considerable.

Issue 3: Federally Protected Wetlands

Cumulative projects located in the San Diego region would have the potential to result in a cumulative impact associated with federally protected wetlands. Adjacent jurisdictions, including incorporated cities, the County of San Diego, and tribal lands, would be required to comply with applicable federal and/or state regulations such as Section 401 and 404 of the CWA and Section 1600 of the CDFG Code. If potentially significant impacts would occur from particular cumulative projects, then mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce impacts to meet the no-net-loss standard. Existing regulations would ensure that a significant cumulative impact associated with federally protected wetlands would not occur. Therefore, the proposed project, in combination with the other cumulative projects, would not contribute to a significant cumulative impact.

Issue 4: Wildlife Movement Corridors and Nursery Sites

Cumulative projects located in the San Diego region would have the potential to result in a cumulative impact associated with wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites. Adjacent jurisdictions, including incorporated cities, the County of San Diego, and tribal lands, would be required to comply with applicable federal and/or state regulations such as the California NCCP Act. If potentially significant impacts would occur from particular cumulative projects, then mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce impacts to the extent feasible. However, without a comprehensive NCCP in place for the long-term protection of wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites for the entire San Diego region, a cumulative loss of wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites would occur, even after

mitigation has been implemented for individual projects. Therefore, a significant cumulative impact associated with wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites would occur.

As discussed above in Section 4.4.3.4, Issue 4: Wildlife Movement Corridors and Nursery Sites, development and redevelopment under the proposed General Plan Update would have the potential to impact not result in potentially significant impact to wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites. An MHCP has been developed for the northwest incorporated cities in San Diego County, but the City is still developing its MHCP Subarea Plan. Adoption of the City's subarea plan would establish the City's contribution to the regional protection of biological resources and establish an implementation program to protect the resources identified in the plan, including requirements for new development. Therefore, until the City has adopted the MHCP Subarea Plan, the proposed project's contribution would be cumulatively considerable.

Issue 5: Local Policies and Ordinances

Cumulative growth under the County and adjacent jurisdiction's general plans would be required to comply with applicable local policies and ordinances, such as zoning ordinances or adopted MHCP or MSCP subarea plans. Similar to growth under the proposed project, mitigation measures would be required to bring the project into compliance with existing policies and ordinances, or else the project would not be approved. Even if local policies and ordinances similar to the City's EQRs have not been adopted in adjacent jurisdictions, compliance with CEQA would require mitigation for biological impacts. Therefore, the proposed project, in combination with the other cumulative projects, would result in a less than significant cumulative impact associated with local policies and ordinances.

Issue 6: Habitat Conservation Plans and NCCPs

Similar to the proposed project, cumulative projects in the San Diego region are required to comply with applicable adopted habitat conservation plans or NCCPs, such as the County's South County MSCP Subarea Plan. As discussed in 4.4.3.6 above, compliance with existing regulations and proposed General Plan Update policies would require future development, depending on its location, to comply with the mitigation ratios in the adopted South County MSCP Subarea Plan, and the Draft Escondido MHCP Subarea Plan and Draft North County MSCP ~~Subarea Plan~~ once adopted. Therefore, the proposed project, in combination with the other cumulative projects, would result in a less than significant cumulative impact.

4.4.5 Significance of Impact Prior to Mitigation

The proposed project would result in potentially significant cumulative impacts associated with biological resources including special status species, sensitive natural communities, and wildlife movement corridors. The proposed project would not result in potentially significant direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to federally protected wetlands, local policies or ordinance, or to habitat conservation plans and NCCPs.

4.4.6 Mitigation

Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species

Compliance with existing regulations and the General Plan Update goals and policies would reduce direct and indirect impacts to special status species to a less than significant level. However, until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted, the proposed project would result in a cumulatively considerable impact to species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species. Adoption of the MHCP Subarea Plan would reduce the project's contribution of potential cumulative impact to a less than significant level; however, this conservation plan requires approval at the federal and state levels, which the City cannot guarantee ahead of time. In addition, the timing of the MHCP Subarea Plan adoption may not coincide with General Plan Update impacts in these areas. Therefore, requiring adoption of the MHCP Subarea Plan cannot be considered feasible mitigation for the proposed project. Until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted, the project's cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact to sensitive species would be significant and unavoidable.

Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities

Compliance with existing regulations and the General Plan Update goals and policies would reduce direct and indirect impacts to riparian habitats and other sensitive natural communities to a less than significant level. However, until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted, the proposed project would result in a cumulatively considerable impact to riparian habitats and other sensitive natural communities. Adoption of the MHCP Subarea Plan would reduce the project's contribution of potential cumulative impact to a less than significant level; however, this conservation plan requires approval at the federal and state levels, which the City cannot guarantee ahead of time. In addition, the timing of MHCP Subarea Plan adoption may not coincide with General Plan Update impacts. Therefore, requiring adoption of the MHCP Subarea Plan cannot be considered feasible mitigation for the proposed project. Until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted, the project's cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact to sensitive habitats would be significant and unavoidable.

Issue 3: Federally Protected Wetlands

The proposed project would not result in a significant direct or cumulative impact associated with federally protected wetlands. Therefore, no mitigation is necessary.

Issue 4: Wildlife Movement Corridors and Nursery Sites

Compliance with existing regulations and the General Plan Update goals and policies would reduce impacts to wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites to a less than significant level. However, until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted, the proposed project would result in a cumulatively considerable impact to wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites. Adoption of the MHCP Subarea Plan would reduce the project's contribution of potential cumulative impact to a less than significant level; however, this conservation plan requires approval at the federal and state levels, which the City cannot guarantee ahead of time. In addition, the timing of MHCP Subarea Plan adoption may not coincide with General Plan Update impacts. Therefore, requiring adoption of the City's MHCP Subarea Plan cannot be considered feasible mitigation for the proposed project. Until the MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted, the project's cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact to wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites would be significant and unavoidable.

Issue 5: Local Policies and Ordinances

Implementation of the General Plan Update would have the potential to conflict with the City's Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space as a result of future development that would potentially obstruct wildlife movement corridors. Implementation of mitigation measure Bio-1, discussed above, would reduce this impact to a less than significant level. The cumulative impact related to local policies and ordinances would be less than significant.

Issue 6: Habitat Conservation Plans and NCCPs

Impacts associated with conflicts with habitat conservation plans and NCCPs would be less than significant; therefore, mitigation is not required.

4.4.7 Conclusion

The discussion below provides a synopsis of the conclusion reached in each of the above impact analyses.

Issue 1: Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species

Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would result in less than significant direct and indirect impacts to special status species. However, the proposed project would result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact associated with special status species and their habitats until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted. Impacts would be cumulatively considerable and unavoidable until the plan is adopted.

Issue 2: Riparian Habitat and Other Sensitive Natural Communities

Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would result in less than significant direct and indirect impacts to riparian habitat and other sensitive natural communities. However, the proposed project would result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact associated with sensitive natural communities until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted. Impacts would be cumulatively considerable and unavoidable until the plan is adopted.

Issue 3: Federally Protected Wetlands

Existing regulations and General Plan Update policies would ensure that significant impacts to federally protected wetlands would not occur. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant. Additionally, the proposed project would not contribute to a significant cumulative impact.

Issue 4: Wildlife Movement Corridors and Nursery Sites

Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would result in less than significant direct and indirect impacts to wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites. The proposed project would result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact associated with wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites until the City's MHCP Subarea Plan is adopted. Impacts would be cumulatively considerable and unavoidable until the plan is adopted.

Issue 5: Local Policies and Ordinances

Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would not result in significant direct and indirect impacts to local policies and ordinances. Additionally, the proposed project would not contribute to a significant cumulative impact.

Issue 6: Habitat Conservation Plans and NCCPs

Implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would not conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or NCCP. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant impact. Additionally, the proposed project would not contribute to a significant cumulative impact.