

## **Salinas River Habitat Conservation Plan Stakeholder Planning Group: Statement of Purpose**

### **Background**

Building on the Long-Term Management Plan (LTMP), the Salinas River Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP or Plan) is a comprehensive plan that is intended to provide an effective framework to protect, enhance, and restore natural resources within the portions of Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties where activities carried out by Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) occur. The HCP is also the mechanism by which MCWRA will obtain federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) permits for the activities associated with the agency's water operations and management activities including facility maintenance, water supply operations, floodwater management, capital projects, and, in the long-term, implementation of the HCP. This HCP provides the basis for issuance of incidental take permits under the ESA that provide legal protection for the impact to federally listed species from the public and private activities carried out by MCWRA, including activities that are essential to the ongoing viability of Monterey County's agricultural and urban economies. To develop the HCP, MCWRA applied and received Conservation Planning Assistance Grant funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund as well as the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Grant Program.

### **Objectives**

The overall objectives of the Salinas River HCP are to restore the balance between natural resource conservation and water resources management by improving habitat conservation efforts in the Salinas River watershed; encouraging sustainable water resources operations; and maintaining and enhancing riverine processes while meeting the needs of agricultural and urban water users in the watershed. The Salinas River HCP will provide for the protection and enhancement of aquatic and terrestrial species and their habitats in the Salinas River watershed; provide incidental take permits for the agency's water operations and management activities that potentially affect covered species and their habitat; and provide local control to MCWRA (as a future permittee) to implement a streamlined endangered species permitting process for covered activities that will be described in the Plan.

### **Agency Roles and Responsibilities**

MCWRA (permit applicant) is leading development of the Salinas River HCP and will be ultimately responsible for development of the Plan, including making final decisions regarding the content of the Plan. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) are the two federal wildlife agencies providing guidance to MCWRA to ensure their respective permit issuance criteria may be met and permits successfully issued. The wildlife agencies will participate in

development of the Plan to provide information on procedures, respective statutory requirements, and other technical information. Ultimately, USFWS and NMFS will be the agencies responsible for determining if all permit application requirements are met and, if so, approving the HCP, and issuing incidental take permits. A team consisting of key individuals from the two wildlife agencies, MCWRA, and the project consultants, will provide direction, guidance, advice, strategic decision making, and assistance in developing the Salinas River HCP. In general, this team will oversee and support the general course of development and organization of the Plan.

### **Stakeholder Planning Group Purpose and Role**

To ensure broad community participation throughout development of the Salinas River HCP, MCWRA will form and begin convening a Stakeholder Planning Group (Group) in the summer of 2023 with members representing the County's diverse interests. The County intends to utilize the Stakeholder Planning Group as a forum to discuss and inform development of the Salinas River HCP. All Stakeholder Planning Group meetings will be open to the public to attend and provide comment.

The Stakeholder Planning Group's purpose is to serve as a sounding board with the specific charge to review, consider, and comment upon the components that make up the Salinas River HCP document as they are developed and presented to the Group for review. Group members are motivated by their desire to collaborate in an environment of mutual respect and shall strive in their recommendations to be objective, balanced, and constructive. The overarching goal of the Stakeholder Planning Group is to help inform the development of a quality Plan that meets MCWRA's biological conservation goals while supporting operations and maintenance of the agency's water operations with a streamlined endangered species permitting process that reflects the broadest possible set of community interests and concerns. Stakeholder Planning Group members are expected to offer constructive input from the interest areas they represent, and to provide an interest-based level of insight on draft working documents, policies, and programs generated by MCWRA staff and the project team developing the Salinas River HCP.

### **Decision Rule**

The Stakeholder Planning Group is an advisory body that seeks consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, the various views will be reported to MCWRA staff and will be taken under consideration by the project team. Within the context of the Stakeholder Planning Group, consensus ranges from full support of a proposal to being willing to "live with it."

### **Responsibilities**

Stakeholder Planning Group Member responsibilities include the following.

- Thoroughly review working draft materials prepared during the planning process regarding covered activities, biological resources, conservation strategies, costs to implement the Salinas River HCP, and funding strategies.
- Offer perspectives and communicate interests while seeking to understand the issues presented and the perspectives and interests of other Stakeholder Planning Group members.

- Inform, educate, and involve their constituencies on a regular basis, including providing notification of upcoming meetings and information on how to attend such meetings.
- Work cooperatively with other Stakeholder Planning Group members.
- Commit to attending Stakeholder Planning Group meetings until completion of the Plan.

Initial Stakeholder Planning Group members were identified by MCWRA staff involved in early formation of the planning effort. Members of the public from a variety of stakeholder groups are also invited to make known their interest in joining the Group. Admission to the Stakeholder Planning Group as a member will be at the discretion of MCWRA staff to ensure balanced representation of a diverse constituency, and Stakeholder Planning Group members will serve at the pleasure of MCWRA. The number of Group members is not fixed, and MCWRA may choose to adjust the size of the Group at any time to ensure the broadest representation of stakeholder interests while maintaining a manageable number that is conducive to productive discussion.

### **Stakeholder Planning Group Meetings**

Stakeholder Planning Group meetings will be led by the project consultant’s facilitator who is responsible for convening and presiding over meetings and ensuring meeting agendas are followed. The project consultant’s facilitator will guide meeting discussions and ensure that all Group members have an opportunity to speak, ensure that Group members communicate respectfully and collaboratively, and will help Group members reach consensus when possible, or detail perspectives when consensus cannot be reached.

Communication and collaboration amongst Stakeholder Planning Group members, the project consultant’s facilitator, MCWRA staff, and wildlife agency staff is most effective when participants use the same medium (e.g., on video via Zoom) or are physically together in the same venue. Stakeholder Planning Group meetings will be held in-person at a County meeting place and Group members are strongly encouraged to attend meetings in person. However, MCWRA recognizes that Stakeholder Planning Group members may not be able attend all meetings in person and will not deny participation to members because of an inability to attend in person. MCWRA also recognizes that interested members of the public may not be able to attend all meetings in person . Therefore, MCWRA will make all Stakeholder Planning Group meetings accessible remotely, via Zoom or phone.

Stakeholder Planning Group meetings will involve presentations by the project consultant and/or MCWRA staff, and discussions among these parties and Group members. When participating remotely via Zoom, participants will use the Zoom “raise-hand” feature when they would like to speak. The facilitator will maintain the queue. Stakeholder Planning Group members are encouraged to communicate succinctly to allow others time to speak. Similarly, when meeting in person, Group members will raise their hand when they wish to speak. Members of the public in attendance at Stakeholder Planning Group meetings will be given opportunities to comment during public comment periods. MCWRA will consider comments from the public when developing the Salinas River HCP.

### **Duration of Participation**

Stakeholder Planning Group members are expected to serve for a minimum term of two years and encouraged to serve for the duration of Salinas River HCP development which is currently anticipated to be a 4-5-year process. Participation is voluntary and members will not be financially compensated.

Stakeholder Planning Group meetings will occur periodically when there are a number of substantive issues in need of discussion, which is expected to be no more than quarterly. Members who miss three or more consecutive meetings may be asked to resign. The Technical Advisory Committee will meet more frequently between larger Stakeholder Planning Group meetings.

### **Working Agreements**

Group members are expected to communicate respectfully with fellow members, MCWRA staff, wildlife agency staff, and the project consultant, and to follow meeting ground rules formulated by the facilitator. Group members who are disruptive to the meeting process, who will not communicate respectfully, or who will not adhere to meeting ground rules will be asked to leave the meeting. Stakeholder Planning Group members who repeatedly engage in disruptive behavior in subsequent meetings may be asked to resign. If a member is asked to resign, MCWRA staff will consider whether to fill the vacancy with another interested party representing the same constituency; this party will be identified through a self-nomination process. The intent of this policy is to encourage attendance and the ability of the Stakeholder Planning Group to engage constructively on Salinas River HCP development.

MCWRA may at any time change the powers, functions, and duties of the Stakeholder Planning Group in any manner and to any extent at its discretion consistent with its goals for establishment of the Salinas River HCP. The life of the Stakeholder Planning Group is finite and will conclude its formal purpose once the Salinas River HCP has been finalized and approved by the Monterey County Water Resources Agency Board of Supervisors.