

4.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

This section describes existing biological resources within the City, presents the regulatory and planning context for addressing biological issues, and evaluates the potential impacts on biological resources that could result from implementation of the 2012 General Plan.

4.3.1 Existing Environmental Setting

The majority of land within the City is developed. Current and historic land use patterns within La Mesa have generally followed the topographic profile of the area. This development pattern has resulted in a built-up urban core concentrated in the lower-lying areas of the City, reserving steep slopes for post-World War II larger-lot suburban housing tracts and natural areas. La Mesa is similar to other areas of San Diego County, where urbanization has fragmented native habitats, compromising the ability to support viable populations of numerous species. Remaining native habitat is primarily limited to isolated vegetation communities in slope areas, and small riparian and wetland habitats along Alvarado Creek, Chollas Creek, and Spring Valley Creek.

The City, along with most of the urbanized area in San Diego, is located within the range of coastal sage scrub that grows from the coast to approximately 1,500 feet in elevation. Since the majority of the land within La Mesa is developed, only small areas of open space and coastal sage scrub habitat are scattered throughout the City. Disturbances resulting from current and historic land uses have degraded or replaced most of the native biological resources that once occurred within the City. Native vegetation is primarily limited to isolated patches that occur in stream channels or drainages, hillsides paralleling some roadways, and small urban canyons. Some of these remaining native habitat areas are discontinuous and interspersed with nonnative, disturbed (i.e., ruderal or weedy) vegetative cover. Figure 4.3-1 illustrates the vegetation communities within the City.

Significant disturbance to existing biological resources has occurred due to encroachment, accumulation of litter, runoff, and exposure to human activity and domestic pets. Adverse spillover effects from surrounding developments also include nonnative and exotic ornamental plant species. Vehicular traffic, noise, and lighting from surrounding development disturb and degrade existing habitat areas and limit their use by most wildlife species.

Sensitive Vegetation Communities, Sensitive Plant Species, and Wetlands

The following discussion further characterizes vegetation and wildlife conditions within city limits as well as within the immediate vicinity of the the City.



- Legend**
- Urban / Developed
 - Eucalyptus Woodland
 - Disturbed Habitat
 - Extensive Agriculture - Field/Pasture, Row Crops
 - Coastal Sage Scrub
 - Valley and Foothill Grassland
 - Coastal and Valley Freshwater Marsh
 - Southern Riparian Forest
 - Southern Riparian Scrub
 - Lakes
 - Light Rail Transit
 - Roads and Highways
 - City Boundary

VP = Known Vernal Pools

Source: City of La Mesa



Figure 4.3-1
Vegetation

Within the City

Urban/Developed

The majority of land in the City consists of urban/developed properties, as shown in Figure 4.3-1. This type of land includes areas that have been permanently altered due to construction of aboveground developments such as buildings, roads, and ornamental landscaped areas. Urban/developed land is characterized by a high percentage of asphalt and concrete to accommodate surface streets, driveways, parking lots, buildings, and hardscape areas. Limited vegetation exists as small, isolated patches of nonnative ornamental plantings that provide poor habitat conditions and very limited biological function and value due to regular anthropogenic-related disturbances and lack of resources. Urban/developed land dominates the City.

Nonnative and ornamental vegetation within the developed areas of the City include stands of nonnative ornamental plant species that were previously planted for landscaping or have recruited onto the property from adjacent developments. Common nonnative and ornamental tree species that have been observed or are likely to occur in the City include various acacia, ash, coral, Cypress, gum, palm, pepper, and pine trees. Common nonnative and ornamental shrubs include Australian tree fern, bird of paradise, bottlebrush, bougainvillea, clumping giant timber bamboo, corn plant, heavenly bamboo, hibiscus, hopsced, Indian hawthorne, lantana, Madagascar dragon tree, New Zealand flax, poinsettia, and sago “palm” cycad. Ice plant ground cover and turf grasses are also common to La Mesa. Isolated native species scattered throughout nonnative vegetation adjacent to native slope areas include agave varieties, broom baccharis, California buckwheat, ceanothus varieties, laurel sumac, lemonade berry, toyon, and yucca varieties. The areas characterized by nonnative and ornamental vegetation within the City provide limited biological function and value due to exposure to regular disturbances and proximity to surrounding development.

Disturbed Habitats

The vegetation map identifies approximate acres of disturbed habitat for the area surrounding the southeast intersection of SR-125 and SR-94 and an additional 8-acre area north of SR-125 to the west of Spring Street. Along the City’s southern boundaries are two disturbed habitat areas totaling approximately 9 acres; one is located to the north of Waite Drive and Murray Hill Road and the other is located to the northeast of Waite Drive and High Street.

Coastal Sage Scrub

Coastal sage scrub is a uniquely Southern California habitat. It is found from sea level to 1,500 feet in elevation from the coast to the foothills where coastal fog moderates the climate, and in

many inland valleys. This habitat can be described as sparse, low-growing shrubs that are aromatic, soft, and mostly gray-green in color.

The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) vegetation mapping identifies coastal sage scrub habitat as the only significant natural habitat within City limits. MSCP maps identified approximately 208 acres of coastal sage scrub habitat within the City in 1998 when the City's Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) was adopted. These 208 acres constituted 0.2 percent of the total sage scrub mapped in the MSCP area. MSCP vegetation mapping showed that the coastal sage scrub habitat located in La Mesa was divided into three distinct blocks: the western block contained 11 acres, the central block contained 159 acres, and the eastern block contained 38 acres. In 1992, the construction of a Navy housing complex removed 36 of the 38 acres of coastal sage scrub in the eastern block. Two acres were dedicated as open space for preservation of the coastal California gnatcatcher.

Much of the remaining coastal sage scrub was removed with the development of the Serramar subdivision in the mid-2000s. Fifty acres of coastal sage scrub habitat were preserved as permanent open space to be maintained by the private property owner through the granting of an open space easement to the City. The remainder of the coastal sage scrub habitat would be removed in association with residential development over a period of time. The taking of this habitat would result in the acquisition of habitat lands located within the MSCP's "core biological resource areas and linkages" through mitigation requirements of the City's HCP/NCCP.

Southern Riparian Scrub

Approximately 1.5 acres of southern riparian scrub is located in Tungsten Canyon within the Eastridge Open Space Preserve Area in the southern portion of the City. This habitat varies from a dense, broad-leaved, winter-deciduous association dominated by several species of willow to a herbaceous scrub dominated by mulefat.

Vernal Pools

Vernal pools are a wetland-associated habitat type of biological importance. Within the planning area there is one vernal pool located to the northwest of Fletcher Parkway and SR-125. Vernal pools are considered sensitive by CDFW, and provide habitat for several sensitive plant and animal species. Vernal pools support a suite of obligate and facultative wetland and terrestrial plant species. Within La Mesa, the one vernal pool is located in a highly urbanized setting adjacent to a regional-serving freeway (SR-125) and arterial parkway (Fletcher Parkway). The vernal pool was preserved as part of a mitigation requirement related to the construction of SR-125, and is owned and protected by Caltrans.

Immediately Adjacent or Within Close Proximity of City Limits

Disturbed Habitat

Disturbed habitat exists in the City of Lemon Grove, City of San Diego around Lake Murray, and various locations in San Diego County to the southeast of La Mesa. In Lemon Grove, disturbed habitat may be found to the north and south of Central Avenue, near Chateau Way. Disturbed habitat in San Diego County is located along the SR-125 and SR-94 corridors and various other properties to the north and south.

Coastal Sage Scrub

Outside of the City boundary, coastal sage scrub may be found in the City of San Diego, City of El Cajon, and San Diego County. In the City of San Diego, coastal sage scrub is located in various small areas surrounding Lake Murray and a finger canyon on the west side of Patrick Henry High School. Also in San Diego, coastal sage scrub is found in a finger canyon paralleling Alvarado Road and I-8, extending south to 68th Street and to the canyon behind Rolando Park Elementary School. In the City of El Cajon, coastal sage scrub is located in a canyon that is bisected by West Main Street near the Kaiser Permanente medical offices. In San Diego County, coastal sage scrub is located in the finger canyon south of SR-94, west of South Bonita Street.

Extensive Agriculture – Field/Pasture, Row Crops

This vegetation type is located on three sites to the south of the La Mesa municipal boundary in San Diego County. One site is located at 3110 Sweetwater Road comprising approximately 9 acres, another site is located at the westerly terminus of Barbic Lane comprising approximately 9 acres, and the third site consists of the area in and around Monique Lane comprising more than 31 acres.

Eucalyptus Woodland

Approximately 5.5 acres of eucalyptus woodland are located at the eastern edge of the City boundary at Eucalyptus County Park at 9125 Edgewood Drive. Another small area of eucalyptus woodland beyond the City boundary is located to the southwest of the City boundary on the south side of Broadway near Chateau Way in Lemon Grove, comprising approximately 1 acre.

Southern Riparian Forest

Southern riparian forest is located to the southwest of Lake Murray, west of the City's boundary, in the City of San Diego.

Southern Riparian Scrub

Fragments of this habitat type can be found near the City boundaries by Lake Murray, southeast of Eucalyptus County Park and Bancroft Drive, northeast of Vista Del Sol and Conrad Drive in San Diego county, and north of Lemon Avenue east of SR-125. This habitat varies from a dense, broad-leafed, winter-deciduous association dominated by several species of willow to an herbaceous scrub dominated by mulefat.

Coastal and Valley Freshwater Marsh

Coastal and valley freshwater marsh are located along a portion of the northerly edge of Lake Murray in Mission Trails Regional Park to the west of the City's boundary.

Valley and Foothill Grasslands

Valley and foothill grasslands habitat is located along the western edge of Lake Murray in Mission Trails Regional Park to the west of the City's boundary. This habitat type is also located in the City of San Diego on the slopes above Alvarado Road and I-8 behind residential lots on the north side of Cleo Street. The habitat is also located on the west side of South Bonita Street in San Diego County.

Jurisdictional Waters, Wetlands, and Lakes

USACE regulates activities related to jurisdictional "waters of the U.S." CDFW is the lead agency that regulates activities that would substantially alter jurisdictional "waters of the state." Waters of the U.S. encompass both wetland and non-wetland aquatic habitats such as streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, bays, and oceans. Jurisdictional waters of the state include the channel, bed, or bank of a lake, river, or stream to the continuous edge of its riparian canopy extent. Areas under the jurisdiction of CDFW include the areas of USACE jurisdictional waters of the U.S., as well as non-USACE jurisdictional riparian habitat. In practice, CDFW jurisdiction extends to the limits of the riparian canopy or from the top of a bank on one side of a stream to the top of the opposite bank. Riparian and wetland vegetation communities within La Mesa are primarily associated with Alvarado, Chollas, and Spring Valley Creeks, and, to a lesser extent, small drainage features and seeps resulting from municipal separate storm water system facilities, irrigation, and/or roadway runoff.

Figure 4.3-1 identifies two bodies of water as "lakes." The largest is Lake Murray Reservoir on the northwest boundary of La Mesa within the City of San Diego Mission Trails Regional Park. Another is Mount Helix Lake surrounded by Lake Helix Drive, north of Lemon Avenue, near the eastern-most City limits.

General Wildlife

Due to the high degree of urbanization in the City limits, extensive high-quality habitat opportunities for wildlife species do not exist. Observed overall wildlife activity is low. Species that may be observed within or flying over the City includes common mammal, raptor, raven, reptile, and songbird species.

Although the extent of native habitat is limited, various areas in and around residences and parks within the City are characterized by lush landscaping and ornamental plantings, or expanses of nonnative plant species that provide separation between developed areas. Figure LD-7 in the General Plan Land Use and Urban Design Element depicts open space and public park areas within the City.

Special-Status Species

CEQA Guidelines Section 15380 defines “endangered, rare or threatened species” as “species or subspecies of animal or plant or variety of plant” listed under the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Title 50, Part 17.11 or 17.12 or California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 14, Section 670.2 or 670.5, or a species not included in the above listings but that can be shown to meet the criteria in CEQA Guidelines Section 15380(b). In this circumstance, “endangered” means “when its survival and reproduction in the wild are at risk from one or more causes, including loss of habitat, change in habitat, overexploitation, predation, competition, disease, or other factors” or “rare” meaning “although not presently threatened with extinction, the species is existing in such small numbers throughout all or a significant portion of its range that it may become endangered if its environment worsens or the species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range and may be considered ‘threatened’ as that term is used in the Federal Endangered Species Act.” Species that fall under the above criteria are typically referred to as “special status species,” in environmental review.

Special-status species generally include those plants and animals designated as endangered, threatened, candidate, rare, protected, sensitive, or species of special concern according to USFWS; CDFW; the California Native Plant Society (CNPS); or applicable regional or local plan, policy, or regulation.

Identification of special status species in the planning area was completed by a review of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) inventory maintained by the Wildlife and Habitat Data Analysis Branch of CDFW and includes MSCP-covered species identified in the City of La Mesa subarea HCP/NCCP. No field surveys were conducted for this analysis.

Upon review of a CNDDDB three-quad search for all sensitive species detected, 25 special-status species were identified (CNDDDB 2012). Table 4.3-1 provides information about the special-status species that are present or with some potential to occur within the planning area, their sensitivity status, their preferred habitat, and presence or potential for occurrence.

**Table 4.3-1
Special-Status Species Known to Occur Within or in the Vicinity of the Planning Area**

Common Name <i>Scientific Name</i>	Sensitivity Status	General Habitat Description	Presence/Potential for Occurrence
Wildlife Species			
big free-tailed bat <i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i>	CDFW: Species of Special Concern	Needs high cliffs or rocky outcrops for roosting sites, generally found in low-lying arid areas.	Present within planning area.
California rufous-crowned sparrow <i>Aimophila ruficeps canescens</i>	MSCP: Covered CDFW: Watch List	Prefers open shrubby habitat on rocky, dry slopes. Found to breed in sparsely vegetated scrubland on hillsides and canyons.	Potentially present within planning area.
coastal cactus wren <i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus sandiegensis</i>	CDFW: Species of Special Concern	Found in coastal sage scrub. Requires tall opuntia sp. cactus for nesting and roosting.	Potentially present within planning area.
coastal California gnatcatcher <i>Poliopitila californica</i>	USFWS: Threatened MSCP: Covered	Obligate, permanent resident of coastal sage scrub below 2,500 feet. Generally found in low coastal sage scrub in arid washes, on mesas, or on slopes.	Present within planning area.
Cooper's hawk <i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	MSCP: Covered CDFW: Species of Special Concern	Nest sites mainly in riparian growths of deciduous trees, and in canyon bottoms on river floodplains. Also can be found in live oaks.	Potentially present within planning area.
Least Bell's vireo <i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i>	USFWS: Endangered CDFW: Endangered	Summer resident of Southern California in low riparian areas in vicinity of water or in dry river bottoms; below 2,000 feet.	Grossmont.
Mexican long-tongued bat <i>Choeronycteris mexicana</i>	CDFW: Species of Special Concern	Roosts in relatively well-lit caves and in and around buildings. San Diego County is on the periphery of range.	Present within planning area.

**Table 4.3-1
Special-Status Species Known to Occur Within or in the Vicinity of the Planning Area**

Common Name Scientific Name	Sensitivity Status	General Habitat Description	Presence/Potential for Occurrence
orangethroat whiptail <i>Aspidoscelis hyperythra</i>	CDFW: Species of Special Concern MSCP: Covered	Inhabits low-elevation coastal scrub, chaparral, and valley foothill hardwood habitats. Prefers washes and other sandy areas with patches of brush and rocks.	Present within planning area.
pocketed free-tailed bat <i>Nyctinomops femorosaccus</i>	CDFW: Species of Special Concern	Found in arid areas such as pine-juniper woodlands, desert scrub, palm oasis, desert wash, and desert riparian.	Present within planning area.
San Diego fairy shrimp <i>Branchinecta sandiegonensis</i>	USFWS: Endangered	Endemic to vernal pools on San Diego and Orange County mesas.	Potentially present within planning area.
San Diego horned lizard <i>Phrynosoma cornutum blainvillei</i>	MSCP: Covered		Potentially present within planning area.
western yellow bat <i>Lasiurus xanthinus</i>	CDFW: Species of Special Concern	Found in valley foothill riparian, desert riparian, desert wash, and palm oasis habitats. Roosts in trees, particularly palms. Forages over water and among trees.	Present within planning area.
Plant Species			
California adolphia <i>Adolphia californica</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 2.1	Found in sandy/gravelly to clay soils within grassland, coastal sage scrub, or chaparral. Perennial deciduous shrub, blooms December–May.	Alvarado canyon.
long-spined spineflower <i>Chorizanthe polygonoides</i> var. <i>longispina</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.2	Found in chaparral, coastal scrub, meadows and seeps, valley and foothill grassland, and vernal pools. Annual herb, blooms April–July.	Mission Trails Regional Park.
Nuttall's scrub oak <i>Quercus dumosa</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.1	Found on sandy soils near the coast, generally in closed-cone coniferous forest, chaparral, and coastal scrub. Evergreen shrub, blooms February–April.	North of 9439 Alto Drive, Mount Helix Area.

**Table 4.3-1
Special-Status Species Known to Occur Within or in the Vicinity of the Planning Area**

Common Name Scientific Name	Sensitivity Status	General Habitat Description	Presence/Potential for Occurrence
Orcutt's brodiaea <i>Brodiaea orcuttii</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.1	Found in mesic, clay habitats in vernal pools, valley and foothill grassland, closed cone coniferous forest, cismontane woodland, chaparral, and meadows. Perennial bulbiferous herb, blooms May–July.	Present within planning area.
purple stemodia <i>Stemodia durantifolia</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 2.1		Alvarado canyon.
Robinson's pepper-grass <i>Lepidium virginicum</i> var. <i>robinsonii</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.2	Found in dry soils with chaparral and coastal scrub below 950 meters. Annual herb, blooms January–July.	Present within planning area.
San Diego barrel cactus <i>Ferocactus viridescens</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 2.1 MSCP: Covered	Often found on exposed level or south-sloping areas in chaparral and coastal scrub. Perennial stem; succulent, blooms May–June.	Present within planning area.
San Diego button-celery <i>Eryngium aristulatum</i> var. <i>parishii</i>	USFWS: Endangered CDFW: Endangered CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.1	Found in coastal scrub, valley and foothill grasslands, and vernal pools. Annual-perennial herb, blooms April–June.	Potentially present within planning area.
San Diego goldenstar <i>Bloomeria clevelandii</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.1	Found in chaparral, coastal scrub, and valley and foothill grassland. Can be found on mounds between vernal pools. Perennial bulbiferous herb, blooms April–October.	Present within planning area.
San Diego marsh-elder <i>Iva hayesiana</i>	CNPS Rare Plant Rank 2.2	Found in marshes and swamps, playas, and riverwashes. Perennial herb, blooms April–October.	Little Murray Dam, Alvarado Canyon.
San Diego mesa mint <i>Pogogyne abramsii</i>	USFWS: Endangered CDFW: Endangered CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.1	Found in vernal pools within grasslands, chaparral, or coastal sage scrub communities. Annual herb, blooms March–July.	Present within planning area.
San Diego thorn-mint <i>Acanthomintha ilicifolia</i>	USFWS: Threatened CDFW: Endangered CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B.1 MSCP: Covered	Endemic to clay soils within grassland and chaparral communities. Annual herb, blooms April–June.	Potentially present within planning area.

**Table 4.3-1
Special-Status Species Known to Occur Within or in the Vicinity of the Planning Area**

Common Name <i>Scientific Name</i>	Sensitivity Status	General Habitat Description	Presence/Potential for Occurrence
Variegated dudleya <i>Dudleya variegata</i>	MSCP: Covered	Found in rocky or clay soils in chaparral, coastal scrub, cismontane woodland, and valley and foothill grassland. Perennial herb, blooms April–June.	Potentially present within planning area.

Federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

State California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

Other California Native Plant Society (CNPS)

1B.1: Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere; seriously threatened in California

1B.2: Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere; fairly threatened in California

2.1: Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California, but more common elsewhere; seriously threatened in California

2.2: Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California, but more common elsewhere; fairly threatened in California

Sources: CNDDB 2012; City of La Mesa 1998; CNPS 2012

Wildlife Movement Corridors

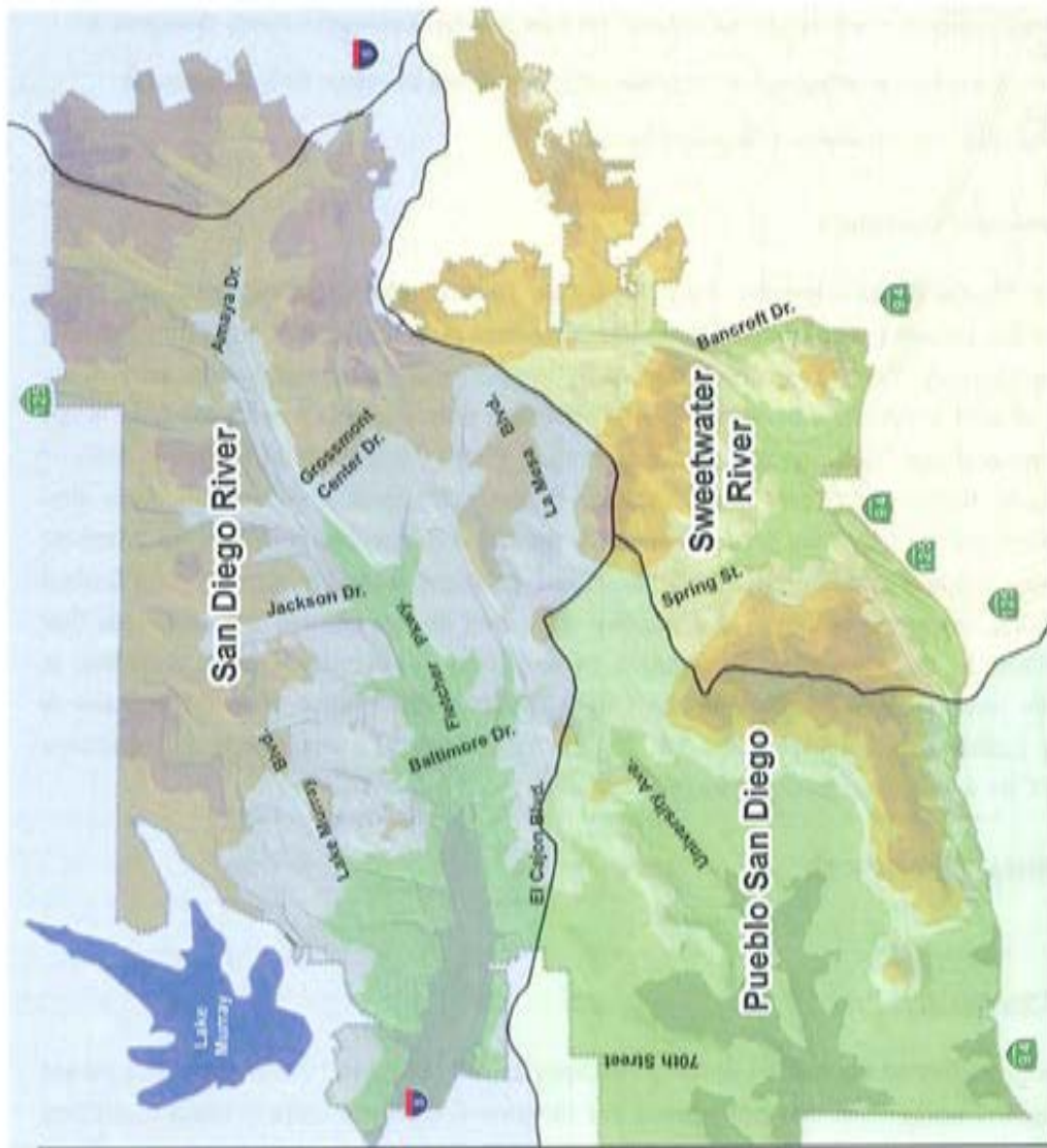
The MSCP's Multi-Habitat Planning Area identifies 16 core biological resource areas and associated habitat linkages. The Multi-Habitat Planning Area does not include any of the habitats located within the City. The City is characterized by isolated and fragmented habitat areas since the majority of land is developed with urban and suburban uses. For this reason, the City is not included in the regional Multiple Species Conservation Plan's Multi-Habitat Planning Area or Core Biological Resources Areas and Linkages. Fragmented creek and riparian areas that traverse portions of the City may serve as limited, truncated movement corridors for common wildlife species adapted to urban environments. However, these drainages provide only limited value as wildlife corridors, linkages, and nursery sites, and do not contain any resources that would contribute to the assembly and function of any local or regional wildlife corridors or linkages. This issue is acknowledged in the City's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), and is discussed in further detail in Section 4.3.4. Figure 4.3-2 identifies watersheds and drainage basins in the City where animals could travel.

4.3.2 Regulatory Framework

Federal

Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Congress passed the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973 to provide a means for conserving the ecosystems that endangered and threatened species require in order to prevent



Legend

- Basin**
- Pueblo San Diego
- San Diego River
- Sweetwater River
- Lakes
- City Boundary
- Roads

Source: City of La Mesa



Figure 4.3-2
Watersheds and Stormwater Drainage Basins

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 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 “take” of 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.” Critical habitat is defined as “the specific areas within the geographic area occupied by a species on which are found those physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species, and that may require special management considerations or protection; and specific areas outside the geographic area occupied by a species at the time it is listed, upon determination that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species.”

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. The MBTA protects all common wild birds found in the U.S. except the house sparrow, starling, feral pigeon, and resident game birds such as pheasant, grouse, quail, and wild turkey. Enforced in the U.S. by USFWS, the MBTA makes it unlawful to take, possess, buy, sell, purchase, or barter any migratory bird listed in Code of Federal Regulations Title 50, Part 10, including feathers or other parts, nests, eggs, or products, except as allowed by implementing regulations. Disturbance that causes nest abandonment and/or loss of reproductive effort (e.g., killing or abandonment of eggs or young) may be considered “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 a federal ESA Section 10(a) permit simultaneously receive a 3-year MBTA permit for ESA-listed migratory birds.

Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act)

The federal 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. This 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 gives USEPA the authority to implement pollution control programs, including setting wastewater standards for industry and water quality standards for

contaminants in surface waters. USEPA has delegated responsibility for implementation of portions of the CWA in California to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCBs), 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 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. Furthermore, 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.

Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands (May 24, 1977)

Executive Order 11990 (May 24, 1977) requires federal agencies to prepare wetland assessments for proposed actions located in or affecting wetlands. This executive order establishes a national policy to avoid adverse impacts on wetlands whenever there is a practicable alternative. On projects with federal actions or approvals, impacts on wetlands must be identified in the environmental document. Alternatives that avoid wetlands must be considered. If wetland impacts cannot be avoided, then all practicable measures to minimize harm to those wetlands must be included. This must be documented in a specific Wetlands Only Practicable Alternative Finding in the final environmental document for the proposed project.

State

California Endangered Species Act

The California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish and Game Code, Section 2050 et seq.) generally parallels the main provisions of the federal ESA and is administered by CDFW. Under CESA, the term “endangered species” is defined as a species of plant, fish, or wildlife that is “in serious danger of becoming extinct throughout all, or a significant portion of, its range” and is limited to species or subspecies native to California. CESA prohibits the taking of listed species, except as provided in state law. Specifically, Section 2053 of CESA prohibits projects that would jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat essential to the continued existence of those species if there are reasonable and prudent alternatives available consistent with conserving the species or its habitat that would prevent jeopardy. Any future development or redevelopment in the City that has the potential to affect wildlife is subject to the restrictions contained in CESA.

California Fish and Game Code

The California Fish and Game (CFG) Code regulates the taking or possession of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles, as well as natural resources such as wetlands and waters of the state. The CFG Code includes the CESA (Sections 2050–2115) and Streambed Alteration Agreement regulations (Sections 1600–1616), which are 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 CFG Code also includes protection of birds (Section 3500 et seq.) and the California Native Plant Protection Act of 1977 (Sections 1900–1913), which directed the California Department of Fish and Game (now CDFW) to carry out the legislature’s intent to “preserve, protect, and enhance rare and endangered plants in this state.” CESA, which is administered by CDFW, is similar in many ways to the federal ESA. CESA provides a process for CDFW to list species as threatened or endangered in response to a citizen petition or by its own initiative (CFG Code Section 2070 et seq.). Section 2080 prohibits the take of species listed as threatened or endangered pursuant to CESA. Section 2081 allows CDFW 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. The Streambed Alteration Agreement regulations require any person, state, or local governmental agency to provide advance written notification to CDFW prior to initiating any activity that would 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 result in the disposal or deposition of debris, waste, or other material into any river, stream, or lake (CFG Code Section 1602). The state definition of “rivers, streams, and lakes” 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 Plan Act

The NCCP Act is designed to conserve natural communities at the ecosystem scale while accommodating compatible land uses. CDFW is the principal state agency implementing the NCCP program. Section 2800 et seq. of the CFG Code addresses NCCPs and a Section 2835 permit is issued by CDFW for all NCCPs. The NCCP Act established a process to allow for comprehensive, regional multi-species planning in a manner that satisfies the requirements of the federal ESA and CESA (through a companion regional HCP). The NCCP program provides the framework for efforts by the state, local governments, and private interests to plan for the protection of regional biodiversity and the ecosystems upon which it depends. NCCPs seek to

ensure the long-term conservation of multiple species, while allowing for compatible and appropriate economic activity.

Native Plant Protection Act (California Fish and Game Code Sections 1900-1913)

California's Native Plant Protection Act requires all California state agencies to establish criteria for determining if a species, subspecies, or variety of native plant is endangered or rare. Provisions of the Native Plant Protection Act prohibit the taking of listed plants from the wild and require notification of CDFW at least 10 days in advance of any change in land use that would adversely impact listed plants. This requirement allows CDFW to salvage listed plant species that would otherwise be destroyed.

Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act

The Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (California Water Code, Division 7) provides for statewide coordination of water quality regulations. The Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act established the SWRCB as the statewide authority and nine separate RWQCBs to oversee smaller regional areas. The Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act authorizes the SWRCB to adopt, review, and revise policies for all waters of the state (including surface and ground waters), and directs the RWQCBs to develop regional basin plans. Section 13170 of the California Water Code also authorizes the SWRCB to adopt water quality control plans on its own initiative. The San Diego Basin Plan is designed to preserve and enhance the quality of water resources in the San Diego region for the benefit of present and future generations. The purpose of the plan is to designate beneficial uses of the region's surface and ground waters, designate water quality objectives for the reasonable protection of those uses, and establish an implementation plan to achieve the objectives.

Local

Regional Water Quality Control Board

Under the CWA, USACE Section 404 permits are subject to RWQCB Section 401 Water Quality Certification. Section 401 of the CWA requires certification from the RWQCB that the proposed project is in compliance with established water quality standards. Projects that have the potential to discharge pollutants are required to comply with established water quality objectives. Section 401 of the CWA provides the SWRCB and RWQCB with the regulatory authority to waive, certify, or deny any proposed federally permitted activity that could result in a discharge to waters of the state. For any projects within the City that have the potential for permanent impacts to jurisdictional waters of the U.S. or state, the RWQCB would likely require a Section

401 permit as a prerequisite to USACE Section 404 permit authorization. No license or permit may be issued by a federal agency until certification required by Section 401 has been granted.

City of La Mesa Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan

The La Mesa Subarea HCP/NCCP (City of La Mesa 1998) is a local habitat conservation plan prepared pursuant to the NCCP Act to supplement the San Diego MSCP Subregional Plan. The MSCP is intended to provide for the protection and conservation of the region's sensitive plant and wildlife species habitat while continuing to allow appropriate levels of development and growth. As a planning tool, the MSCP protects the region's biodiversity while reducing conflicts between development interests and natural resources.

4.3.3 Thresholds for Determining Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a significant impact related to biological resources would occur if implementation of the 2012 General Plan would do any of the following:

- Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by CDFW or USFWS.
- Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by CDFW or USFWS.
- Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the CWA (including marsh, vernal pool, coastal) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means.
- Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites.

Impacts related to conflicts with local policies protecting biological resources and adopted HCP/NCCPs were determined to be less than significant in the Initial Study, and will not be discussed further in this Program EIR. Please refer to the Initial Study in Appendix A for discussion of these issue areas.

4.3.4 Analysis of Environmental Impacts

Impacts to biological resources can be direct, indirect, temporary, and/or permanent. These types of impacts are defined below:

Direct: Any alteration, disturbance, or destruction of biological resources that would result from project-related activities is considered a direct impact. Examples include removal of vegetation for underground pipeline trenching activities and not allowing the natural vegetation to recolonize, actively restoring the natural vegetation, encroaching into wetlands, diverting surface water flows, and destroying individual species and/or their habitats.

Indirect: Sensitive vegetation communities, plant species, and wildlife in the vicinity of a project site have the potential to be indirectly impacted by project-related development and activities. Examples include elevated noise and dust levels, soil compaction, increased human activity, decreased water quality, and introduction of invasive wildlife (domestic cats and dogs) and plants.

Temporary: Any impacts considered to have reversible effects on biological resources can be viewed as temporary. Examples include generation of fugitive dust during construction.

Permanent: All impacts that result in the irreversible removal of biological resources are considered permanent. Examples include constructing a building or permanent road in an area containing biological resources.

Implementation of the 2012 General Plan has the potential to temporarily impact sensitive vegetation communities, plant species, wildlife species, wetlands, and riparian habitat as a result of grading, excavation, and construction activities associated with new development in currently undeveloped areas and redevelopment activities. Permanent direct impacts to sensitive vegetation communities, plant species, and/or wetlands would typically result from the ongoing operation and/or maintenance in support of a project or plan. Potential temporary indirect impacts to sensitive vegetation communities, plant species and, and/or wetlands associated with potential development could include elevated dust levels associated with construction activities. Elevated dust levels could impact photosynthetic rates and thus impact overall plant health. Potential permanent indirect impacts to sensitive vegetation communities, plant species and wetlands can occur as a result of permanent alterations to the hydrology of the area that occurs upstream of sensitive habitats and wetlands. Any impacts such as increased erosion or sedimentation, and changes in water runoff that occur as a result of development would have impacts to habitats downstream.

Sensitive Vegetation Communities, Sensitive Plant Species, Wetlands, and Riparian Habitat

Sensitive vegetation communities, plant species, and wetlands occur and have been documented within the planning area. Implementation of the 2012 General Plan has the greatest potential for impacts to the vegetation communities discussed in the City's Subarea HCP/NCCP. The MSCP vegetation mapping identifies coastal sage scrub as the only significant natural habitat within City limits (City of La Mesa 1998). There are also isolated vernal pools located within the planning area, as discussed in Section 4.3.1. As discussed, other sensitive habitats and plant species within the City are degraded and exist only in small, isolated pockets. The 2012 General Plan proposes new growth primarily near the City's transit stations, within designated mixed-use corridors, and at the Grossmont Shopping Center. The majority of this development would be limited to infill areas and opportunity sites that, due to historical land use and development, are generally void of native or sensitive vegetation communities or sensitive species habitat. Impacts to vegetation and plant communities would be created by development construction in these areas. Currently undeveloped areas may experience development as well; however, these undeveloped areas are primarily comprised of disturbed also void of native or sensitive vegetation communities or sensitive species habitat. The City's existing development review process requires review for potential impacts to biological resources in accordance with CEQA. If development activities would result in the loss of native vegetation or sensitive plant species, project-level mitigation would be required.

Within the planning area there is one vernal pool located to the northwest of Fletcher Parkway and Amaya Drive. Vernal pools are considered sensitive by CDFW, and provide habitat for several sensitive plant and animal species. The vernal pool in the planning area was preserved as part of a mitigation requirement related to the construction of SR-125, and is owned and protected by Caltrans. It is protected by chain-link fencing and is not subject to future development.

Implementation of the 2012 General Plan could affect riparian and other sensitive habitats. For example, development along the Alvarado and Chollas Creek corridors could affect riparian habitat and federally protected waters. However, the City's existing development review and building and grading permit review processes prohibits the clearing and grubbing of habitat within the City prior to project-level environmental review. The City works closely with the USACE, RWQCB, USFWS, and CDFG during the discretionary project permitting and CEQA review of any project that may result in the alteration of a stream bed, involve the removal of vegetation in wetland and riparian habitats, disturb waters of the U.S. or otherwise impacts sensitive biological resources. Wetland impacts would be mitigated through adherence to Section 404 of the CWA. In accordance with the City's HCP/NCCP, mitigation for wetlands would be at

a location and ratio as required by the Section 404 permitting process or through on-site preservation as deemed necessary for the survival of a rare species.

Thus, implementation of the 2012 General Plan is not anticipated to result in direct or indirect impacts to existing sensitive vegetation communities, plant species, or wetlands. Impacts would be **less than significant**.

Sensitive Wildlife Species

The 2012 General Plan proposes new growth primarily within heavily urbanized areas. As shown in Figure 4.3-1, isolated vegetation communities are surrounded by largely developed lands in their immediate vicinity and do not provide extensive high-quality habitat for sensitive species. Given the level of disturbance and unsuitability for sensitive wildlife species in proximity to development, the potential for impacts to sensitive wildlife species to occur is low.

While not classified as a special-status species, migratory birds and raptors are protected under the MBTA. These species use trees to nest and lay eggs; therefore, the removal of trees during the general nesting season (February 1 through August 31) and raptor breeding season (January 15 through July 31) has the potential to adversely impact nesting migratory birds and raptors. The 2012 General Plan proposes development in urban areas, including sites surrounding the City's transit stations, mixed-use corridors, the Grossmont Shopping Center, and additional opportunity sites such as the former Coleman College campus and former police station. Trees that are located on these sites represent an ornamental planting palette of typically nonnative varieties. Redevelopment of these sites provides an opportunity to reevaluate tree species and select species that are appropriate to the setting, including native varieties. On-site preservation of trees may also occur as required for properties within the City's Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone. Development proposals are also subject to review in accordance with the policies and procedures established in the City of La Mesa Tree Policy Manual. Additionally, these sites are located along developed urban corridors that have a reduced likelihood for nesting birds and raptors.

Project-level biological surveys would be required for all future development proposals that could result in the loss of native habitat or the take of covered species in accordance with the City's Subarea HCP/NCCP. Preconstruction surveys and avoidance measures would also reduce potential impacts. For species not covered under the HCP/NCCP, City's existing development review process requires review for potential impacts to biological resources in accordance with CEQA. If development activities would result in impacts to sensitive wildlife species, project-level mitigation would be required. Therefore, impacts by construction activity in accordance with the 2012 General Plan would be **less than significant**.

Wildlife Movement Corridors

Wildlife movement corridors link areas of suitable wildlife habitat that are otherwise separated by rugged terrain, changes in vegetation, or human disturbance. In the absence of habitat linkages, larger and more mobile mammal species will not likely persist over time in fragmented or isolated habitat areas. The isolated and fragmented habitat areas in the City are not included in the MSCP's Multi-Habitat Planning Area or core biological resources areas and linkages, and are not biologically significant to the long-term preservation of species due to their small size and isolated locations. Although the majority of the City is characterized by urbanized areas that have low habitat value for wildlife, fragmented creek and riparian corridors that traverse the City may serve as limited, truncated movement corridors for common wildlife species that are adapted to urban environments. However, these drainages provide only limited value as wildlife corridors because they are surrounded by moderately urbanized areas, occur in small discrete patches, and provide no connectivity to large habitat reserves. New development anticipated under the 2012 General Plan would be primarily infill and redevelopment within or adjacent to urban uses. Implementation of the 2012 General Plan would not interfere with wildlife corridors associated with existing open space within the planning area.

The creek channels represent the only potential resource that could be used to facilitate the movement of wildlife through the City. Common mammals such as coyote may use channels when moving to and from urban and natural habitats. The creek channels may also facilitate dispersal and migration of common amphibians and birds that are resident and migratory to the region. Common amphibians such as the Pacific tree frog rely on seasonal water sources for larval dispersal and refuge, and common birds such as song sparrow, lesser goldfinch, common yellowthroat, snowy egret, and great blue heron may use creek channels as foraging habitat and as a dispersal route. However, due to their channelized nature and lack of continuous native riparian habitat, the local creek channels in the City do not function as corridors or linkages for wildlife species or as temporary or live-in habitat.

Aside from the various hillsides and drainage channels found in La Mesa, the City's land use patterns generally do not function as corridors or linkages for resident or migratory wildlife species. However, the approximately 50-acre Eastridge habitat preserve is under private ownership and is subject to a habitat management plan. It may be considered a wildlife nursery site in that it offers a protected area for native species, despite being surrounded by urban land uses. Also in the City are natural slopes that are part of urban developments, particularly on private properties located south of I-8 in the West Central Specific Plan area. In 1989, the City initiated a zone reclassification (A-02-89) to evaluate policies affecting open space areas within the West Central Plan area. The policies adopted under City Council Resolution 16197 allow a

maximum of 50 percent encroachment into open space areas when projects are found to be consistent with the City's design review process.

In the late 2000s, Caltrans and the California Department of Fish and Game (now CDFW) commissioned the California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project to identify a functional network of connected wildlands in support of California's diverse natural communities in the face of human development and climate change. The Essential Habitat Connectivity Report, issued in 2010, included three primary products: (1) a statewide Essential Habitat Connectivity Map, (2) data characterizing areas delineated on the map, and (3) guidance for mitigating the fragmenting effects of roads and for developing and implementing local and regional connectivity plans. The statewide essential connectivity network consists of 850 relatively intact and well conserved Natural Landscape Blocks (ranging from 2,000 to about 3.7 million acres each) with more than 1,000 potential connections between them. The connectivity map illustrates that numerous riparian corridors contribute to ecological connectivity throughout the state. At regional and local scales, the map is used to inform a wide array of planning efforts. No open space within the City is identified on the Essential Habitat Connectivity Project map, and implementation of the 2012 General Plan would not conflict with the Essential Habitat Connectivity Project's goals or related regional goals to preserve wildlife habitats. For these reasons, potential impacts to wildlife corridors/linkages and nursery sites would be **less than significant**.

4.3.5 Mitigation Measures

No significant impacts were identified and no mitigation is required.

4.3.6 Significance after Mitigation

Sensitive Vegetation Communities, Sensitive Plant Species, and Wetlands

Implementation of the 2012 General Plan would not result in impacts to sensitive vegetation communities, plant species, or wetlands. Impacts would be **less than significant**.

Sensitive Wildlife Species

Implementation of the 2012 General Plan would not result in impacts to sensitive wildlife species. Impacts would be **less than significant**.

Wildlife Movement Corridors

Implementation of the 2012 General Plan would not result in impacts to wildlife movement corridors. Impacts would be **less than significant**.