

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The City's Plan was prepared to maximize benefits to wildlife and vegetation communities, and to allow appropriate development and growth in Rancho Palos Verdes and the region, pursuant to the requirements of the NCCP Act of 1991 (California Fish and Game Code, Section 2800, et seq.). The resulting planning effort provides for comprehensive management and conservation of multiple species, including but not limited to species protected under the ESA or CESA.

The Subarea Plan identifies the following:

- Habitat to be conserved in the City's proposed Reserve and the mechanism for this conservation (e.g., outright acquisition or easement grants).
- Interim protection measures for habitats not expected to be ultimately conserved through exactions during the development process.

## 2.2 PROJECT LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The 13.6-square-mile coastal community of Rancho Palos Verdes is on the southwest side of Palos Verdes Peninsula (Peninsula). It is bounded to the north by Rolling Hills Estates, Rolling Hills, and Palos Verdes Estates and to the east by San Pedro, with the high-density, urbanized core of South Bay communities farther to the north (see Figure 3-1). The proposed 1,504 acres within the Plan area are generally within the center of the city's boundaries, with smaller patches of habitat throughout the city and along the coastline.

Of the 1,504 acres of the Reserve, 1,435 acres are dominated by naturalized vegetation consisting primarily of habitats of coastal sage scrub (CSS), southern cactus scrub, riparian scrub, grassland, disturbed vegetation, and exotic woodland. Small patches of disturbed and agricultural areas also exist within the Reserve boundaries. Land uses immediately adjacent to the largest portion of the Reserve boundaries consist primarily of low-density residential uses, some high- to medium-density residential uses, and the Pacific Ocean to the south. Smaller portions of the Reserve are adjacent to public facilities and institutions, open space and recreation, and vacant land.

## 2.3 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Subarea Plan divides the Reserve components into public, private, and "Neutral Lands". Additionally, Reserve management, mitigation measures, and the permitting process are described upon establishment of the Subarea Plan.

### 2.3.1 Reserve Components

The Reserve would be composed of public and private biological open-space lands. Following are approximate acreages of these lands (property locations are shown on Figure 3-2).

**2.3.1.1 Existing Public Lands (836.5 acres)**

1. 354.5 acres of City-owned lands already dedicated as biological open space to be included in the Reserve.
2. 322.2 acres of City-owned lands to be dedicated to the Reserve.
3. 90.8 acres of other public/conserved lands.

**2.3.1.2 Private Lands (216.6 acres)**

1. 80 acres of private development projects that would contribute biological open space to the Reserve (subject to approval).
2. 136.6 acres from seven local Homeowners Associations (HOA) are being requested to contribute open space to the Reserve (considered Neutral Lands until agreements are made).

**2.3.1.3 Priority Acquisition Areas to be Purchased (684.5 acres)**

The City, PVPLC, County of Los Angeles (County), CDFG, and USFWS would provide funds for the purchase and dedication of 684.5 acres of privately owned lands considered regionally important to the Reserve.

**2.3.1.4 Neutral Lands**

About 663 acres of Neutral Lands would exist outside the Reserve boundary, but they are unlikely to be developed. PVPLC and the City would work to obtain conservation easements over some of these lands and add as many to the Reserve as practicable. Such Neutral Lands can be placed into the following two categories:

1. *Extreme Slopes on Private Property.* Extreme slopes are slopes with greater than 35 percent grade that occur in undeveloped canyons and slopes scattered throughout the city, although they are mostly concentrated on the city's east side. These slopes are protected from development by City Ordinance.
2. *Lands Zoned Open-Space Hazard.* Unstable geologic conditions or other physical constraints occurring on public and private properties zoned Open-Space Hazard may result in a prohibition against development. Any proposed development must be accompanied by a detailed geotechnical investigation establishing the absence of geologic hazards and an approved City application to remove the land from the Open-Space Hazard designation.

**2.3.2 Reserve Management**

The Subarea Plan establishes actions that the City would perform to obtain ESA Section 10(a) take authorizations for species covered by the Subarea Plan. Additionally, established in the Subarea Plan are current and future management, maintenance, compatible uses (e.g., passive recreation) for conserved lands, and funding for habitat management.

The City would enter into a contract with PVPLC to manage all conserved land in the Reserve and additional lands as acquired. The existing agreement between the City and PVPLC for management of the Forrester Nature Preserve would be a model for the expanded management program.

The City's primary conservation strategy would be to acquire several key, privately owned parcels, contribute selected City-owned lands, and have the PVPLC manage this Reserve network with the assistance of the City, CDFG, and USFWS. A long-term habitat restoration program is also a critical component of the Subarea Plan. The proposed Reserve is designed to be consistent with NCCP standards and guidelines and issuance criteria for ESA Section 10(a) take authorizations for species covered by the Subarea Plan. The resulting Reserve conserves the most practicable amount of regionally important habitat areas and provides adequate habitat linkages between patches of conserved habitat.

Additionally, based on a revegetation plan to be approved by the CDFG and USFWS, the City and PVPLC would enhance/restore the most practicable amount of disturbed habitats within the Reserve, emphasizing areas directly adjacent to conserved habitat to enhance habitat patch size and habitat linkage function (i.e., areas with moderate to high potential for successful restoration).

### **2.3.3 Mitigation Requirements**

The Subarea Plan identifies the process for mitigating development on habitat not conserved and how permits and take authorizations for covered species are to be obtained. These actions form the basis for developing an Implementing Agreement (IA) with the CDFG and USFWS, jointly known as the Wildlife Agencies. In this manner, the authority for infrastructure development and land use decisions on sensitive lands in the Subarea Plan would be retained by the City. Thus, the City would obtain the ability to self-issue endangered species take authorizations as long as they are consistent with the Subarea Plan.

The City has identified 21 City projects and 9 private projects covered by the Subarea Plan. These projects would result in approximately 48.9 acres of unavoidable loss of CSS within or outside the proposed Reserve. Mitigation for CSS losses within the Reserve for which the City would provide mitigation (33.7 acres) would be at a 3:1 ratio of conserved acreage to affected acreage. Additionally, mitigation for impacts of private projects would be at a 3:1 ratio of conserved acreage to affected acreage, provided by the dedication of private land or donation of monies to the habitat restoration fund. Approximately 175.3 acres of non-native grassland will be lost and mitigated at a 0.5:1 ratio. Development activities for proposed projects covered by the Subarea Plan will be required to undergo separate CEQA review but may rely on this EIR/EA for biological analysis and mitigation purposes to the extent allowed under CEQA.

A total of 13.7 acres of CSS habitats not associated with planned development projects detailed in the Subarea Plan are estimated to occur outside the proposed Reserve boundaries and Neutral Lands. Potential unanticipated future project impacts to sage scrub habitats would be mitigated through establishment of conservation easements (additions to the Reserve) or restoration of priority areas within the Reserve at a 3:1 mitigation ratio. Approximately 72 acres of non-native grassland outside of the Reserve and not associated with planned projects would be mitigated at a 0.5:1 ratio if they are proposed for development in the future.

### **2.3.4 Permitting Process Upon Approval of Subarea Plan**

After the City Council and Wildlife Agencies adopt and approve the Subarea Plan and IA, the Wildlife Agencies would issue to the City a 50-year authorization to take species covered by the Subarea Plan. Additionally, the Subarea Plan contains new standards for protection of sensitive species; this potentially would eliminate most USFWS and CDFG involvement in project-specific review and approval.

Impacts to wetlands must continue to be regulated through the federal Clean Water Act (CWA), Section 404 et seq.; California Fish and Game Code, Section 1600 et seq.; and local regulations, although coverage for endangered species through the Subarea Plan should facilitate any consultation required between the USFWS and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE).

Third-party beneficiaries (owners/developers of land covered by the Subarea Plan) would be allowed to take covered species and habitats incidental to project construction, operation, and maintenance based on approvals extended to the Proposed Project through the local project permitting process. Malicious or capricious harm to sensitive species and habitats is still forbidden.

After adoption and approval of the Subarea Plan and IA, any proposed development of land in the city would require consistency with the appropriate provisions of the updated Municipal Code, General Plan, and Local Coastal Program (LCP). Consistency with the Subarea Plan would be a mandatory finding of the CEQA review process and planning process.

## **2.4 SUMMARY OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6, Section 7 of this EIR/EA describes a range of reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Project that could feasibly attain the basic project objectives while evaluating the comparative merits of each alternative. The following summarizes the alternatives described in this EIR/EA.

### **2.4.1 Alternative A - Environmentally Preferred Alternative**

Interested parties from the Peninsula NCCP Working Group met in a workshop setting to develop an environmentally preferred Reserve design alternative. Alternative A minimizes the amount of future development, resulting in 91.0 percent of existing naturalized vegetation being conserved. This alternative includes 13.9 fewer acres of CSS habitat but 36.3 more acres in total compared to the Proposed Project. Alternative A is larger than the Proposed Project in terms of proportion of conserved naturalized habitats (91.0 percent versus 87.4 percent), and the locations of potential future development are different. This alternative conserves all key habitat linkages in the city and linkages to adjacent jurisdictions. Relatively isolated habitat areas of public lands are excluded in Alternative A.

### **2.4.2 Alternative B - Landowner Alternative**

Alternative B was developed by the major landowners and City with modifications made following comments from the Working Group and Wildlife Agencies. This alternative would conserve 78.3 percent of existing naturalized vegetation. Alternative B would greatly fragment the most contiguous habitat areas and constrain habitat linkages between the larger blocks of CSS and the linkage to habitats in Palos Verdes Estates. More privately owned lands would be used as mitigation for development impacts, and less private land would need to be acquired.

### **2.4.3 Alternative C - Proposed Project**

Similar to Alternative A, Alternative C (Proposed Project) minimizes the amount of future development, resulting in 87.4 percent of existing naturalized vegetation being conserved, but the locations of potential future development are different than Alternative A. This alternative includes 13.9 more acres of CSS habitat than Alternative A. In addition, this alternative conserves the most practicable amount of regionally important habitat areas and provides adequate habitat linkages between patches of conserved habitat.

### **2.4.4 Alternative D - No Project / No Action**

Under the No Project/No Action Alternative, the existing land use and environmental regulations process would continue and be required for all public and private projects proposed in Rancho Palos Verdes. Existing regulatory practices require mitigation for impacts to sensitive species and habitats resulting in lands being set aside for open-space preservation. The configuration of preserved lands under the No Project/No Action Alternative would, however, be implemented project-by-project and be characterized, as it is currently, by fragmentation, potentially poor Reserve design or constrained habitat linkages, and isolated island preserves, resulting in increasing the risk of species decline and local extirpation. This project-by-project pattern of planning would likely occur on both public and private lands within the Subarea Plan area under the No Project/No Action Alternative.

## **2.5 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES/MITIGATION SUMMARY**

Table 2-1 provides a summary of the impacts and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project included in Section 5 of this EIR/EA.

## **2.6 TOTAL PROGRAM COST**

The total cost in dollars for the Proposed Project would be approximately 27.3 million. This cost estimate includes management/maintenance and land acquisition costs. Program costs are discussed in more detail within Section 7.0.

**Table 2-1  
Summary of Impacts and  
Mitigation Measures**

EIR/EA Section	Impacts	Mitigation Measures	Significance After Mitigation
<b>Biological Resources</b>			
5.1.2.3	<p>Regionally Important Habitat Areas and Linkages</p> <p>Impacts to regional and local habitat linkages are significant because potential development outside the Reserve could constrain a linkage in the Lower Filiorum. The proposed Reserve design meets all goals of NCCP guidelines established for the Rancho Palos Verdes Program.</p>	<p>A key habitat linkage constrained by the proposed Lower Filiorum project is mitigated by the proposed habitat restoration and active management within the portion of the linkage within the Reserve.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>
5.1.2.4	<p>Vegetation</p> <p>Approximately 49 acres of sage scrub habitats and 175 acres of grassland would be impacted by the Subarea Plan. Impacts to vegetation are considered significant.</p>	<p>All project-specific habitat mitigation would be in the form of providing lands to the Reserve or providing funds toward implementation of habitat restoration within the Reserve. The mitigation ratio for sensitive habitat impacts is 3:1. The City, PVPLC, County, and Wildlife Agencies would provide funds (\$27 million) for purchase and dedication of approximately 684.5 acres of privately owned land considered regionally important to the Reserve. A plan would be developed selecting 5 acres or 20 small sites for plant removal each year. The targeted Exotic Plan Removal Program is in addition to the 5-acre per year Habitat Restoration Program. Surveys for native grasslands would be required. Impacts to native grassland would be mitigated at a 3:1 ratio. Non-native grassland impacts would be mitigated at a 0.5:1 ratio. Project impacts within the coastal zone would be mitigated within the coastal zone where feasible or reasonable.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>

<p>5.1.2.5</p>	<p><b>Sensitive Species</b> Between 93 and 100 percent of the covered species point locations and 96 percent of their potential habitats are being conserved. Direct impacts to sensitive species are considered significant.</p>	<p>The long-term habitat restoration program is likely to increase substantially the availability of suitable habitat for covered species during the permit period; it is expected that the populations of covered species would increase over time proportional to the increase in habitat availability. Direct impacts to sensitive species would be reduced because of the extent and location of conserved habitat, habitat restoration, and habitat management programs within the Reserve included in the Subarea Plan. Disturbance of nesting birds is prohibited by Subarea Plan. The City and PVPLC are responsible for funding the long-term habitat restoration, management, monitoring, and reporting program of the Reserve. Best management practices (BMP) for development activity adjacent to the Reserve are addressed by the Subarea Plan.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>
<p>5.1.2.6</p>	<p><b>Edge Effects</b>  Approximately 32 acres of non-edge affected habitat would become edge affected with proposed reserve design. This impact is considered significant.</p>	<p>Active habitat management and restoration programs included in the Subarea Plan would mitigate edge effects. The City and PVPLC are responsible for funding the long-term habitat restoration, management, monitoring, and reporting program of the Reserve. BMPs for development activity adjacent to the Reserve are addressed by the Subarea Plan.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>
<p><b>Land Use and Relevant Planning</b></p>			
<p>5.2.2.2</p>	<p><b>Established Community</b>  Because the Subarea Plan does not propose development projects, its implementation would preserve the physical setting of the surrounding residential community. Additionally, approximately 1,435 acres of natural habitat would be preserved. Therefore, the Subarea Plan would not result in significant impacts to the established community.</p>	<p>No mitigation measures are required, because significant land use impacts to the established community were not identified.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>

<p>5.2.2.3</p>	<p>Relevant Plans and Policies</p> <p>No significant impacts were identified regarding project consistency with relevant plans and policies. As part of implementation of the Subarea Plan, the City would amend the General Plan and modify several components of its Municipal Code (Coastal Permit process, Overlay Districts performance criteria, Grading Ordinance, Zoning Map, Fire Code, Grading Permit, and Site Plan Review process) to conform to Subarea Plan provisions.</p>	<p>No mitigation measures are required, because significant land use impacts to relevant plans and policies were not identified.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>
<p><b>Recreation</b></p>			
<p>5.3.2.2</p>	<p>Existing Parks/Recreational Facilities</p> <p>The boundaries of the Reserve area were developed to be consistent with existing uses of public recreation facilities. Additionally, establishment of the Reserve area would increase the amount of public land available for passive recreation. Because of these factors, and because the Proposed Project does not include growth-inducing development, no significant adverse impacts to existing recreational facilities would occur.</p>	<p>No mitigation measures are required, because significant impacts to existing parks and recreational facilities were not identified.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>
<p>5.3.2.3</p>	<p>Proposed Recreational Activities/Facilities</p> <p>The Proposed Project identifies existing and future recreational uses compatible with management of the proposed Reserve area but does not propose development of specific recreational activities or facilities. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not include any recreational facilities that could have an adverse physical effect on the environment and result in significant impacts.</p>	<p>No mitigation measures are required, because significant impacts related to recreational activities/facilities were not identified.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>

<p>5.3.2.4</p>	<p><b>Relevant Plans and Policies</b></p> <p>Compatible land uses within the Reserve would include creation and maintenance of a recreational trail system. Because a Reserve Trail Plan would be developed consistent with policies of the Conceptual Trails Plan, no significant impacts related to conflicts with plans and policies regarding the paths and trails network would occur from implementation of the Proposed Project.</p> <p>The Proposed Project would be consistent with all recommendations presented in the Parks Master Plan that are still valid proposals.</p> <p>The Proposed Project would increase the acreage of parklands available for passive recreation and therefore would not result in any significant recreation impacts related to conflicts with City Municipal Code requirements.</p> <p>Sufficient acreage within Point Vicente Park would remain outside the Reserve to provide the active recreational area identified in the Program of Utilization; therefore, no significant recreation impacts would occur.</p>	<p>No mitigation measures are required, because significant impacts related to relevant plans and policies were not identified.</p>	<p>Less than significant.</p>
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