



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

06

DATE: November 16, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**RESOLUTION ADOPTING COUNTYWIDE BIODIVERSITY VISION AND GOALS
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

San Diego County is a biodiversity hotspot, with more animal and plant species than almost any other county in the contiguous United States. San Diego is host to 1,500 native plant species, with over 25 endemic species— species that do not exist anywhere else in the world: providing shelter to more than 200 imperiled species, such as the California gnatcatcher, Stephens' kangaroo rat, quino checkerspot butterfly.

Climate change, more frequent wildfires, and habitat fragmentation caused by development are threatening San Diego's ecosystems. Uncontrollable, large wildfires can often cause long-term or permanent loss of essential native habitat.

Biodiversity is essential to a functioning and sustainable food system, clean water, economic growth, and health. According to the United Nations, more than half of global gross domestic product (GDP) depends on nature. Our land and oceans, and the living species within them, are also essential carbon sinks, as they absorb more than half of all emissions. Yet today the planet faces a biodiversity crisis with over 1 million species threatened with extinction. San Diego has an important role to play in mitigating this problem locally.

Restoring and maintaining robust and interconnected habitats, natural spaces, watersheds, forests, and other ecosystems will play a key role in addressing climate change regionally, making San Diego more resilient for future generations.

Today's request asks the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) to adopt a resolution formally supporting a Countywide biodiversity vision and goals.

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RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR TERRA LAWSON-REMER

1. Find that the proposed Board of Supervisor's action is exempt from provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to the state CEQA guideline 15308 "Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment."
2. Adopt the Resolution titled: "A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO ADOPTING COUNTYWIDE BIODIVERSITY VISION AND GOALS."

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Historically, indigenous communities and women have been critical guardians of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, protecting 80% of the earth's biodiversity within forests, grasslands, and marine environments. Yet communities of color and low-income communities are often first to experience the impacts of climate change and loss of access to natural spaces. It is imperative that all individuals can access our region's native habitats and wildlife through concerted conservation efforts throughout the County, while ensuring high-value areas are protected. Biodiversity and rich ecosystems have both physical and mental health benefits and can help foster sense of place. If passed, this action will guide the County in its efforts to prioritize underserved communities' access to natural spaces and their health benefits.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Implementation of proposed countywide biodiversity goals will help to support the County of San Diego's sustainability objectives. Supporting biological diversity has many social and economic benefits, such as improving our ability to sustain food systems and production, preventing the spread of diseases, and ensuring access to our region's unique landscapes. This policy will contribute to San Diego County's sustainability goals through engagement with community members, as we collaborate in meaningful ways to support environmental awareness and stewardship, equitable access to natural spaces, and protect the health and well-being of everyone in the region. Supporting regional biodiversity will also help protect local water systems, ecosystems, and habitats, which in turn reduces excess pollution and carbon emissions.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today's action. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

San Diego county's natural spaces attract millions of tourists every year. The proposed action will help guide local non-profits, government agencies, and community groups in best practices for conserving the region's precious habitats and ecosystems, allowing continued access and enjoyment.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

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The County of San Diego (County) is considered a global biodiversity hotspot, with more diversity of species than almost any other county in the contiguous United States. It has more than 1,500 native plant and animal species, as well as over 25 endemic species, due to its diverse topography and geography, and its Mediterranean climate. At stake are our coastal sage scrub, chaparral, Engelmann oak woodlands, native grasslands, conifer forests, and vernal pool habitats, which are home for many sensitive and endangered species, such as the burrowing owl, California gnatcatcher, arroyo southwestern toad, Stephens' kangaroo rat, San Diego fairy shrimp, and quino checkerspot butterfly.

Climate change, wildfires, and fragmentation from development threaten San Diego's ecosystems and habitats. Large, uncontrollable wildfires occurring with greater frequency can often cause long-term or permanent loss of essential habitat. Yet biodiversity is essential to a functioning and sustainable food system, clean water, economic growth, and health.

In California, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a Nature Based Solutions Executive Order N-82-20, which elevated the role of natural and working lands in the fight against climate change, advancing biodiversity conservation as a priority. San Francisco's Commission on the Environment adopted citywide biodiversity goals in Resolution 2011-05-COE, becoming one of California's first jurisdictions to model significant commitments to biodiversity.

Locally, the County maintains several community partnerships that work diligently to preserve our region's natural spaces. Several of its programs and initiatives are aligned with the biodiversity goals stated in this policy. We aim to emphasize their importance, uplift the critical work being done, and thread together important goals that are needed to bolster these policies and initiatives.

The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), established by the County in 1997, partners with 11 jurisdictions, stakeholder groups, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to implement a regional habitat conservation program. The program aims to balance the protection of plant and animal species with recreation, development, and agricultural activities. The adopted MSCP South County Subarea Plan goal to preserve 98,379 acres was determined to be necessary to conserve populations of covered species, associated high-quality habitats, and maintain wildlife linkages between conserved areas. Two additional MSCP planning areas exist in north county and east county. On October 28, 2020 (6), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed County staff to develop the plan for the North County Subarea MSCP, with the goal of adopting this plan in fiscal year 2025-2026. Once this plan has been adopted, the East County MSCP will then be established. The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) implements the MSCP through land acquisition, management, and monitoring of preserved lands and species. Through these measures, the County will preserve high quality habitats, biodiversity, and access to these assets.

The Board directed County staff to prepare the County's Native Plant Landscaping Policy on May 5, 2021(7). It will emphasize the importance of landscaping with regionally appropriate native plants that can increase drought tolerance, reduce excess water consumption, boost fire resilience, and buffer our green space, all of which helps our region adapt to climate change. Native plants are a critical piece of the puzzle because they are essential for maintaining our

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federally listed species, such as quino checkerspot butterfly and various songbirds, including least Bell's vireo and California gnatcatcher. Invasive plant species, pathogens, and climate change are threatening the viability of our native ecosystems. Through the comprehensive Native Plant Landscaping Policy, the County seeks to support a more inclusive, democratic, and accessible landscaping program in which indigenous knowledge and tradition are incorporated in local plant industry practices.

The County plays a critical role in ensuring that principles of sustainability are considered in all the work that it does. These values support the need to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, preserve habitats, and advance transformative change within the region's social, economic, and ecological footprint. From workforce development, to health, to land management, the County is working to bring the region into alignment with sustainability-advancing measures. Developing these cross-cutting efforts to mitigate climate change, preserve and protect our coastlines, oceans, and open space, and address ecological crises, are difficult but necessary measures. The guiding biodiversity vision and goals presented today will help ensure that our region's communities are as resilient as possible in the coming decades.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions support the Sustainability and Community initiatives in the County's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan by actively combating climate change through innovative and proven policies and protecting and preserving our natural resources, diverse habitats, and sensitive species. It improves San Diegan's quality of life through supporting services and programs that increase the well-being of our residents and environment.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A: A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO ADOPTING COUNTYWIDE BIODIVERSITY VISION AND GOALS (DISTRICTS: ALL)