Trends in Preparing and Implementing Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs): Challenges and Opportunities

Habitat Conservation Planning and Invasive Plant Management
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Where are the latest trends in HCP/NCCPs pointing?

Will the HCP/NCCPs of the future be more standardized and systematic in California?

When will all of the state be covered?
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When will all of the state be covered?
Introduction: A Look at the Present
Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Act

California Fish and Game Code
Chapter 10, Sections 2800-2835

Alternative is Incidental Take Permit (Section 2080 et seq.)
NCCP Goals

- Protect and recover biological diversity
- Prevent future species listings
- Allow compatible and appropriate use
Characteristics of Regional Conservation Plans

- Locally-driven collaborative partnerships
- Broad geographic scope
- Ecosystem-based approach
- Conservation, management, and monitoring in perpetuity
NCCP Standards

- Independent Scientific Input
- Species Recovery Within the Plan Area
- Conservation Commitment Independent of Impacts
22 active NCCP/HCPs covering over 9.5 million acres

9 are approved and permitted; 13 are in the planning phase
## Number of Species\(^1\) in California Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs)\(^2\)

**August 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species Covered by NCCPs</th>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Invertebrate</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Amphibian</th>
<th>Reptile</th>
<th>Bird</th>
<th>Mammal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total FE, FT, SE, ST</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total FE, FT, FC, FPT, SE, ST, SCE, SCT, SR</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total FE, FE, FC, FPT, SE, ST, SCE, SCT, SR, CSSC, CFP, CNPS</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total With and Without Special Status</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species With a Portion of Their Range in an NCCP Plan Area</th>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Invertebrate</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Amphibian</th>
<th>Reptile</th>
<th>Bird</th>
<th>Mammal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total FE, FT, SE, ST</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total FE, FT, FC, FPT, SE, ST, SCE, SCT, SR</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total FE, FE, FC, FPT, SE, ST, SCE, SCT, SR, CSSC, CFP, CNPS</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vertebrate Species With and Without Special Status</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>856</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Legend

- **FE** = Federal Endangered
- **FT** = Federal Threatened
- **FC** = Federal Candidate
- **FPT** = Federal Proposed Threatened
- **SE** = State Endangered
- **ST** = State Threatened
- **SCE** = State Candidate Endangered
- **SCT** = State Candidate Threatened
- **SR** = State Rare
- **CSSC** = California Species of Special Concern
- **CFP** = California Fully Protected
- **CNPS** = California Native Plant Society List 1 and 2

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\(^1\) The term species is used throughout this document, although special status may be at the level of species, subspecies, variety, or Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU).

\(^2\) NCCPs in both preparation and implementation phases are included. To date, there are 22 NCCPs statewide – 13 in preparation and 9 in implementation.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities
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Funding Challenge:

Decrease in federal funding for land acquisition related to HCPs and NCCPs

2010 - $40.9 million
2011 - 28.6
2012 - 15.0
2013 - 14.2
2014 - 17.9
2015 - 20.3

Perception that need is unique to California
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Funding Opportunity:

Formation of a National HCP Coalition that includes other states similar to California
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Funding Challenge:

State bond sources such as Proposition 84 funds are now limited.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Funding Opportunities:

New sources of funds such as Proposition 1 Restoration Grants are compatible with NCCPs - $285 million over a 10 year period, plus $87.5 million in projects that benefit the Delta.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Funding Challenge:

NCCPs have traditionally relied on land development impact fees.

Some NCCPs will experience minimal development within their planning areas.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Funding Opportunities:

Creative solutions are tied to impacts other than land development.

Voter Approved Sales Tax Increases for Transportation (Orange County, San Diego County)

Nitrogen Deposition Fees (Santa Clara County)
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

New Planning and Management Challenges Such as the Effects of Climate Change
Climate Change Challenge:

Uncertainties in how species ranges may shift or natural communities assemble and disassemble.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Climate Change Opportunity:

Large connected reserve systems required of NCCPs are still the primary strategy for mediating the effects of climate change on species distributions.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Climate Change Opportunity:

We now know that future NCCPs need to include a more robust analysis of climate change and a more explicit adaptive management and monitoring strategy to respond to its effects.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Climate Change Opportunity:

An increasing amount of data is available to incorporate into planning and management.

Climate change vulnerability assessments are one example:

https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/NCCP/Climate-Change
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Data and Technology

- Topography
- Parcels
- T & E Species
- Water Bodies
- Wetlands
- Soils
- Jurisdiction
- Vegetation
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Data and Technology Challenge:

Regional conservation planning requires a lot of data!
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Data and Technology Opportunities:

Legislative support for meeting data needs (Section 1930.5 Fish and Game Code now includes direction to identify essential wildlife corridors and linkages and to prioritize vegetative data development.)
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Data and Technology Opportunities:

Technology such as cloud computing facilitates data sharing across agencies.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Structure of the Plans and Permits Themselves
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Plan and Permit Structure
Challenge:

Trend is to integrate all regional permits into an NCCP or HCP.

Increasing complexity adds to time needed to prepare plans.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Plan and Permit Structure
Opportunity:

Stakeholders and public to benefit from real permit streamlining, which increases the support for regional conservation plans.
Latest Trends: Challenges and Opportunities

Plan and Permit Structure

Opportunity:

Agencies also creating planning process flowcharts and planning document templates, which leads to …
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Yes, we hope so. That is the plan.
Will the HCP/NCCPs of the future be more standardized and systematic in California?

Two surveys were conducted in 2014 (HCP Coalition, CDFW, USFWS) on how to maximize efficiency in preparing regional habitat conservation plans.

Respondents suggested a number of templates would be useful for process flow, timelines, plan chapters, and Implementing Agreements.

https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/NCCP/CDFW-Guidance
Will the HCP/NCCPs of the future be more standardized and systematic in California?

Each new proposed plan presents new challenges.
Proposed Unconventional NCCPs

Aquatic based

Single Fully Protected species

Overlapping multiple land use jurisdictions, some of which have NCCPs underway

Working landscapes (timber harvest, agriculture) remaining in private ownership
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Not all proposals or areas of the state may be appropriate for an NCCP.
Concluding Thought:

Despite challenges and uncertainties …

NCCP Act (2003) remains one of the most powerful tools for biodiversity conservation in California.