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October 23, 2025

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Vince Nicoletti, Director, Planning & Development Services  
Jason Hemmens, Director, Parks and Recreation

## **NORTH COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES CONSERVATION PLAN (NORTH COUNTY PLAN): FALL 2025 PROGRESS & OUTREACH UPDATE**

On October 28, 2020 (6), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed Planning & Development (PDS) and Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) staff to continue the development of the draft North County Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Plan (North County Plan) as a joint Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) based on feedback provided by County staff and an assessment completed by a consultant in regional conservation planning. The goal is to achieve similar environmental, economic, and community benefits realized through the South County Subarea Plan, adopted on October 22, 1997 (1), such as streamlined housing permits and the conservation of wildlife habitat. Staff were also directed to continue working with all stakeholders, especially the Farm Bureau, and analyze development opportunities along the Interstate 15 (I-15) corridor that allow for development and encourage conservation away from the corridor. This memorandum provides an update on the County's development of the North County Plan as of Fall 2025 since providing the Summer 2023 update (Attachment A) through collaboration with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) – collectively referred to as the Wildlife Agencies.

### **UPDATE ON NORTH COUNTY PLAN COMPONENTS**

Since the last update in Summer 2023, staff have made substantial progress on developing several key components of the North County Plan. Staff from PDS, DPR, General Services, Agriculture, Weights and Measures, Environmental Health and Quality, and Public Works, in coordination with the consultant team, have completed the Draft North County Plan and have been working closely with the Wildlife Agencies to discuss their feedback. Staff anticipate this process to be completed winter 2025, with a Public Draft made available in mid-2026 following final review by the Wildlife Agencies. Following public review, necessary revisions will be made before bringing the Final Plan to the Board, which is anticipated for late-2026 or early-2027.

Two major components were developed since our last update, including the North County Plan's Effects Analysis and Conservation Strategy. The Effects Analysis outlines the anticipated impacts to habitat of the 40 species covered under the North County Plan (Covered Species) in alignment with the General Plan and the mitigation (amount of future conservation) that is expected to result from those anticipated impacts. The Conservation Strategy outlines how the County intends to conserve, manage, and monitor natural resources that contribute to the long-term protection of the Covered Species and the habitat they rely upon, focused within the Existing Preserves and Priority Conservation Area (PCA), wherein the future preserve system will be established. Development of the Conservation Strategy included various meetings with species experts from the San Diego Management and Monitoring Program, United States Geological Survey, The Nature Conservancy, San Diego Natural History Museum, Conservation Biology Institute, San Diego State University, University of California, Davis, and Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency to collect best-available information on species suitable habitat, threats and stressors, and management methods.

In accordance with the Board's direction in 2020, the Conservation Strategy also looks to balance conservation and development along the I-15 Corridor. For the purposes of the North County Plan, the I-15 Corridor is defined as a 2-mile buffer on each side of the I-15 within the North County Plan Area. Mitigation policies and project design considerations have been proposed to maintain critical habitat for the federally threatened coastal California gnatcatcher and the north-south connectivity function from the Otay/Mexico Border to Riverside County along the I-15 Corridor they rely upon. These proposed policies are consistent with the County's existing Community Design Review Special Area Regulation in the Zoning Ordinance and steep slopes policy in the Resource Protection Ordinance. Additionally, the North County Plan also includes biological mitigation exemptions for single-family residential development and agricultural operations to further streamline development projects both inside and outside the PCA. In general, these policies will facilitate conservation along the I-15 Corridor inside the PCA while still allowing development to occur.

## **STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT**

Staff have adopted a proactive stakeholder engagement approach for the development of the North County Plan, which includes regular updates during standing industry group meetings with the North County Plan Stakeholder Working Group, which includes a diverse group of stakeholders that represent the environmental, agricultural, recreational, and development communities. These meetings are open to the public and provide communities with the opportunity to submit written and verbal comments.

Since 2021, staff have attended more than 200 standing industry group meetings as well as presented to the SANDAG Regional Habitat Conservation Taskforce and Fallbrook Climate Action Team, hosted seven public workshops, and convened the Stakeholder Working Group five times. Additionally, staff continue to attend quarterly Community Planning and Sponsor Group (CPSG) Chairs' meetings to provide progress updates and meet with Tribal Nations consistent with AB52 requirements in coordination with the County Tribal Liaison. As requested by Tribal members, County and USFWS staff also held a Tribal Coordination Meeting to receive feedback

on the Draft North County Plan and Working Draft Conservation Strategy on April 29, 2024. All Tribes within San Diego County were invited to participate. Feedback received focused on opportunities to collaborate with the County on land stewardship to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge, facilitate wildlife corridors, and allow Tribes to provide educational and cultural opportunities. A subsequent Tribal coordination meeting to discuss opportunities for preserve stewardship collaboration is anticipated for fall 2025.

To increase awareness of the project with the general public, staff attended Hawktober events hosted by DPR at Live Oak County Park in Fallbrook and Ramona Grasslands County Preserve in October 2024. Staff also participated in the MSCP Annual Workshop at the Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor Center on November 3, 2023, and Lakeside Community Center on November 22, 2024, the State of Biodiversity Symposium at the San Diego Natural History Museum on April 18, 2024, and April 8, 2025, and the County's Earth Day Fair on April 22, 2024, and April 18, 2025, as well as other community events. Staff also attended a series of community and industry group meetings in Winter 2023-24 and Winter 2024-25 to provide an update on the progress of the North County Plan and the engagement forecasted for the upcoming year. Staff also provided progress updates at the quarterly Community Planning and Sponsor Group Chairs meetings on December 9, 2023, December 14, 2024, and June 14, 2025.

#### ***Public Workshops & Stakeholder Working Group***

Public workshops and Stakeholder Working Group meetings are promoted through emails to interested subscribers, social media posts, industry group meeting presentations, and direct emails to relevant and interested stakeholders. Simultaneous interpretation is made available for attendees whose primary language is Spanish, with additional threshold languages offered by request. Workshop materials are offered in both English and Spanish on the project website and made available to attendees. Feedback is collected through interactive questions throughout the staff presentation, using the Q&A feature, and verbal discussions. Table 1 outlines the workshops and meetings hosted by the County since Summer 2023, the total number of participating attendees, and the number of comments received.

**Table 1: Summary of Outreach Events Hosted by County Staff**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Stakeholder Working Group</b>	<b>Public Review Period/Workshop</b>	<b>No. of Attendees &amp; Comment Letters</b>
Effects Analysis	October 20, 2023	October 24 & November 1, 2023	61 attendees
Conservation Strategy Approach	November 15, 2023	November 16, 2023	48 attendees
Working Draft Conservation Strategy	July 10, 2024	April 22 – June 6, 2024	45 attendees; 7 comment letters
Environmental Documents	N/A	March 6 – April 5, 2025; April 1, 2025	15 attendees; 10 comment letters

Following Stakeholder Working Group meetings and public workshops, meeting recordings in both English and Spanish and a summary of the input received are available on the project website. A summary of the input received at each outreach event is summarized below, and the input has been incorporated into the Draft North County Plan for additional review by County staff.

#### Effects Analysis & Conservation Strategy Approach

Key requests that arose from the input received include:

- Ensure that the public has reasonable and well-managed access to open spaces and educational activities
- Consider wildlife corridors, recreation areas, wildfire risks, and existing infrastructure when analyzing where future development is likely to occur
- Describe the NCCP Act required science advisor process, indicator species selection, and monitoring requirements for indicator species

#### Working Draft Conservation Strategy

Regarding the Conservation Strategy, comment letters were received from the San Diego Farm Bureau, Endangered Habitats League, Sierra Club, Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Coalition, San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association, and the Rancho Guejito Corporation. Key requests that emerged include:

- Ensure protection for currently listed and future listed species
- Conservation goals should be informed by science advisors' input and regional efforts, result in an interconnected preserve system of conserved lands, and allow for adaptive management
- Avoidance of impacts is the preferred approach before mitigation is necessary
- Policies and education related to recreation, invasive species, and pesticide use should be incorporated

#### Environmental Documents

The feedback during public review of the Environmental Documents include:

- Clarification on the planning process as it relates to timing of CEQA document preparation
- Confirm accuracy of agricultural land mapping
- Policies related to agricultural expansion exemptions and public access within the North County Plan Preserve System, as well as various other topics, should be addressed

### **NEXT STEPS**

Since the spring 2025 workshops, County staff, consultants, and Wildlife Agencies have been developing and reviewing the Draft North County Plan and environmental documents. The collective team, including staff from the various County departments referenced previously, is developing the implementing documents, which will detail the requirements needed to bring forward the North County Plan. A Cost Analysis and Fee Nexus Study is being undertaken to estimate the overall County costs to implement the North County Plan and to evaluate in-lieu fee options for private development projects.

The implementing documents, and Cost Analysis and Fee Nexus Study, will be included with the Public Draft North County Plan and EIR during the public review period next year. Staff are developing a robust outreach strategy for the public review process, which will include the following key messages:

- Streamline development and other Covered Activities, including expansion of agriculture and preserve stewardship
- Establish an interconnected preserve system and a comprehensive monitoring and management plan for the long-term protection of the 40 Covered Species
- Facilitate fire suppression activities without additional requirements
- Provide accessible recreational and educational experiences for residents and visitors related to the natural and cultural resources of the region

As part of this public review process, staff will host a virtual public workshop and a Stakeholder Working Group meeting to provide an overview of the Public Draft North County Plan and how to submit comments. Staff will also coordinate with individual commenters to respond to their concerns and discuss how best to incorporate their feedback into the Final Draft North County Plan anticipated for Board consideration and adoption in 2026.

If you have questions, please contact Tyler Farmer, PDS Assistant Director, at [Tyler.Farmer@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Tyler.Farmer@sdcounty.ca.gov) or (619) 517-5102 or Crystal Benham, DPR Chief – Resource Management Division, at [Crystal.Benham@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Crystal.Benham@sdcounty.ca.gov) or (619) 539-4155.

Respectfully,

VINCE NICOLETTI, Director  
Planning & Development Services

JASON HEMMENS, Director  
Department of Parks and Recreation

cc:

Ebony Shelton, Chief Administrative Officer  
Caroline Smith, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer  
Andrew Potter, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
Dahvia Lynch, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Land Use and Environment Group  
Brian Albright, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Finance and General Government Group  
Marko Medved, Director, Department of General Service

**ATTACHMENT A – SUMMER 2023 UPDATE**



# County of San Diego

LAND USE AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP  
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**DAHVIA LYNCH**  
DIRECTOR  
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

**BRIAN ALBRIGHT**  
DIRECTOR  
PARKS & RECREATION

September 19, 2023

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Dahvia Lynch, Director, Planning & Development Services  
Brian Albright, Director, Parks & Recreation

## **NORTH COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES CONSERVATION PLAN (NORTH COUNTY PLAN): SUMMER 2023 PROGRESS & OUTREACH UPDATE**

### **Overview**

On October 28, 2020 (6), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed Planning & Development (PDS) staff to continue the development of the draft North County Multiple Species Conservation Plan (North County Plan) as a joint Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) based on feedback provided by PDS staff and assessment completed by a consultant in regional conservation planning. The goal is to achieve similar environmental, economic, and community benefits realized through the adopted South County Subarea Plan, October 22, 1997 (1), such as streamlined housing permits and conserved habitat for wildlife. Staff was also directed to “continue working with all the stakeholders, especially the Farm Bureau, and helping to preserve and expand agricultural operations, consistent with the agricultural promotion program, [and] work with property owners”.

This memorandum includes details on how PDS staff has proceeded with this direction through the development of the North County Plan in collaboration with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), collectively referred to as the Wildlife Agencies, general public outreach, and focused stakeholder outreach. Staff meets monthly with the North County Plan Stakeholder Working Group, formed in 2017 which includes a diverse group of stakeholders that represent the environmental, agricultural, recreational, and development communities. These meetings are open to the public and provide communities the opportunity to directly submit verbal comments.

In addition to the stakeholder working group, Staff had focused meetings on the North County Plan with several groups such as the San Diego County Farm Bureau’s Land Use Committee, San Diego Audubon Conservation Committee, Building Industry Association’s North County Legislative Committee, and Parks Advisory Committee.

Additionally, staff attended quarterly Community Planning and Sponsor Group (CPSG) Chairs' meetings to provide progress updates and concurrently met with Tribal Nations in coordination with our County Tribal Liaison.

This update includes a summary of the components that have been developed since receiving Board direction in 2020, as well as an overview of the public workshops that were held in Fall 2021 and Spring 2023 to receive feedback on individual components from stakeholder groups and the public. Feedback is considered and integrated into individual components as the North County Plan is developed.

### **Update on North County Plan Components and Focused Engagement**

Since receiving Board direction in 2020, technical modifications to the Plan Area (i.e., the geographic boundary that defines the extent of the analysis for the development of the North County Plan), Preserve Design (i.e., the area in which mitigation and conservation are anticipated to occur), and Covered Species list (i.e., those species within the Plan Area that will be conserved through the implementation of the North County Plan) were established as outlined in the North County Multiple Species Conservation Plan Status Review and Options Assessment (ICF, December 2019).

Modifications to refine policies and requirements that were part of the options selected by the Board, were also developed through monthly meetings with the Wildlife Agencies and stakeholders. This includes the impact and conservation analysis, which modified the development forecast to account for the revisions to the draft Plan Area and legislation affecting housing forecasts. Tools for assembling the preserve system were researched and presented to the Wildlife Agencies, including a potential in-lieu fee option for private development projects. Sixteen meetings were held with species experts to collect best-available information on species suitable habitat, threats and stressors, and management methods. Drafts of several North County Plan chapters and appendices have also been prepared, such as the Covered Activities (i.e., the private and public land uses, land and public infrastructure development, and conservation activities subject to the County of San Diego's jurisdiction and control that may impact the Covered Species), with subsequent review by the County and Wildlife Agencies.

In advance of public workshops, staff promotes the events through emails to interested subscribers, social media posts, stakeholder meeting presentations, and direct emails to relevant and interested stakeholders. Simultaneous interpretation was made available for attendees whose primary language is Spanish. Registrants could also request the presentation be interpreted in the other threshold languages prior to the workshops. The workshop materials were offered in both English and Spanish on the project website and made available to attendees by providing a link in the chat. Following the workshops, meeting recordings are available on the project website in both English and Spanish. At the virtual public workshops, community members participated in a staff and consultant-led presentation with interactive questions, along with a question and answer (Q&A) session at the end of the workshop. Throughout the workshops, participants are invited to share their perspectives through the interactive questions and Q&A feature. At the end



of the workshops, any remaining questions in the Q&A are answered live and members of the public are provided an opportunity to engage in an open discussion with staff.

### **Fall 2021**

Staff and the consultant team hosted a North County Plan Stakeholder Working Group meeting on October 25, 2021 and two public workshops on November 30 and December 6, 2021 to receive feedback on those technical modifications to the revised Plan Area, Preserve Design, and Covered Species list. Staff met regularly with the San Diego County Farm Bureau, Building Industry Association, recreational and environmental stakeholders during standing stakeholder meetings. Staff attended the quarterly CPSG Chairs meeting on December 4, 2021 to notify all groups of outreach efforts, including the second virtual public workshop.

Considerable feedback was received in Fall 2021 on the Covered Species list, specifically to include additional species called “indicator species” that are not listed or likely to be listed but could serve as an indicator to monitor how well the preserve system is functioning. For the North County Plan, “indicator species” is defined as a species whose presence indicates elements of habitat structure and ecological function. Staff spent much of 2022 working with the Wildlife Agencies and stakeholder groups to develop a scientific methodology to include indicator species, in addition to progressing other key North County Plan components. The revised Covered Species list is included in Appendix A.

### **Winter 2022/2023**

Staff attended a series of community and stakeholder meetings in late 2022 and early 2023 to provide an update on the progress of the North County Plan and the engagement forecasted for 2023. Staff also attended the quarterly CPSG Chairs meeting on December 3, 2022 to provide the progress update. A summary of the work accomplished to date, milestone schedule, and outreach materials are available on the [project website](#).

### **Spring 2023**

Staff and the consultant team hosted a North County Plan Stakeholder Working Group meeting on April 14, 2023 and two public workshops on April 18 and 26, 2023, to receive feedback on the revisions to the Covered Species list to include indicator species based on previous input and the Covered Activities. Covered Activities are those private and public land uses, such as land and public infrastructure development, and conservation activities subject to the County of San Diego’s jurisdiction and control that may result in direct or indirect impacts to Covered Species that may require an Incidental Take Permit from the Wildlife Agencies during the term of the North County Plan. Staff continued to meet regularly with the San Diego County Farm Bureau, Building Industry Association, recreational and environmental stakeholders during standing stakeholder meetings. Staff attended the quarterly CPSG Chairs meeting on March 11, 2023 to notify all groups of outreach efforts, including the second virtual public workshop.

Overall, the information was well received by the Stakeholder Working Group with minor suggestions to ensure all activities that should be covered under the North County Plan are captured. At the virtual public workshops, 21 participants attended representing

environmental, economic, recreation, equity, and community organizations, as well as individual property owners with no declared affiliation.

Major themes that arose from the input received from participants are listed below. Theme order does not reflect importance or frequency.

- Preservation of the natural environment
- Ensuring that the public has reasonable and well-managed access to open spaces and educational activities
- Agriculture and land management practices
- Impacts of wildfire preparedness and mitigation activities

A summary document of the meeting objectives and format, how input was solicited, and what was learned from the participants is posted on the project website.

### **Next Steps**

Since the Spring 2023 workshops, County staff, consultants, and Wildlife Agencies have been developing the Effects Analysis and Conservation Strategy and have reviewed these preliminary draft chapters. The Effects Analysis outlines the anticipated amount of impact to occur from the Covered Activities, including the modified development forecast. The Conservation Strategy outlines the preserve assembly tools and methods, including landscape-level, natural community, and species-specific conservation actions. The collective team, including staff from PDS, Parks & Recreation, and Public Works, is currently outlining the implementation strategy, which includes a criteria-based mitigation approach and in-lieu fee option for private development projects.

Staff continues to engage with the community and stakeholder groups and is identifying options for increasing outreach efforts to individual property owners. The next series of public workshops are anticipated for Fall 2023 to discuss the Effects Analysis and Conservation Strategy. Shortly thereafter, staff and the consultant team will publish the Notice of Preparation for the Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) and hold public scoping meetings to begin developing the environmental documents. Staff anticipates releasing the Public Draft North County Plan and EIR/EIS in late 2024, with the Final Draft North County Plan going to the Board for consideration in Fiscal Year 2025-26.

If you have questions, please contact Dahvia Lynch at [Dahvia.Lynch@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Dahvia.Lynch@sdcounty.ca.gov) or (619) 415-9598 or Brian Albright at [Brian.Albright@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Brian.Albright@sdcounty.ca.gov) or (858) 694-1301.

Respectfully,



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Planning & Development Services

BRIAN ALBRIGHT, Director  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Board of Supervisors – North County Multiple Species Conservation Plan (North County Plan):  
Summer 2023 Progress & Outreach Update  
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cc: Sarah E. Aghassi, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Land Use and Environment Group  
Andrew Potter, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

## Appendix A – North County Plan Draft Covered Species List

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status	
		Federal	State
Plants			
Del Mar manzanita	<i>Arctostaphylos glandulosa</i> ssp. <i>crassifolia</i>	FE	-
Encinitas baccharis	<i>Baccharis vanessae</i>	FT	SE
Engelmann oak	<i>Quercus engelmannii</i>	-	-
Mojave tarplant	<i>Deinandra mohavensis</i>	-	SE
San Diego ambrosia	<i>Ambrosia pumila</i>	FE	-
San Diego button-celery	<i>Eryngium aristulatum</i> var. <i>parishii</i>	FE	SE
San Diego thornmint	<i>Acanthomintha ilicifolia</i>	FT	SE
Spreading navarretia	<i>Navarretia fossalis</i>	FT	-
Thread-leaved brodiaea	<i>Brodiaea filifolia</i>	FT	SE
Invertebrates			
Crotch’s bumblebee	<i>Bombus crotchii</i>	-	SPE
Riverside fairy shrimp	<i>Streptocephalus wootoni</i>	FE	-
San Diego fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta sandiegonensis</i>	FE	-
Fish			
Arroyo chub*	<i>Gila orcuttii</i>	-	SSC
Amphibians			
Arroyo toad	<i>Anaxyrus californicus</i> ( <i>Bufo californicus</i> )	FE	SSC
California red-legged frog	<i>Rana draytonii</i>	FT	SSC
Western spadefoot toad	<i>Spea</i> ( <i>Scaphiopus</i> ) <i>hammondii</i>	-	SSC
Reptiles			
San Diego coast horned lizard	<i>Phrynosoma blainvillii</i>	-	SSC
Southwestern pond turtle	<i>Clemmys marmorata pallida</i>	-	SSC
Two-striped garter snake*	<i>Thamnophis hammondii</i>	-	SSC
Birds			
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	USFWS:BCC	SE
Bell’s (sage) sparrow*	<i>Artemisiospiza belli</i>	USFWS:BCC	-
California spotted owl	<i>Strix occidentalis occidentalis</i>	FPE	SSC
Coastal cactus wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus sandiegensis</i>	-	SSC
Coastal California gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila californica</i>	FT	SSC
Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos canadensis</i>	-	SSC/FP
Grasshopper sparrow*	<i>Ammodramus savannarum perpalladus</i>	-	SSC
Least Bell's vireo	<i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i>	FE	SE
Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	-	SSC
Northern harrier*	<i>Circus (cyaneus) hudsonius</i>	-	SSC
Southwestern willow flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>	FE	SE

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status	
		Federal	State
Tricolored blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>	-	ST
Western Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia hypugaea</i>	-	SSC
Western yellow-billed cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i>	FE	SE
<b>Mammals</b>			
Mountain lion	<i>Puma concolor</i>	-	SP/SPE
Pallid bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	-	SSC
<b>San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit*</b>	<b><i>Lepus californicus bennettii</i></b>	-	SSC
<b>Southern mule deer*</b>	<b><i>Odocoileus hemionus fuliginatus</i></b>	-	-
Southern California ringtail	<i>Bassariscus astutus octavus</i>	-	FP
Stephens' kangaroo rat	<i>Dipodomys stephensi</i>	FE	ST
Townsend's big-eared bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii pallescens</i>	-	SSC

**\*Added as indicator species**

#### **Federal Status**

FE = Federally Listed as Endangered

FT = Federally Listed as Threatened

FPE = Federal Proposed Endangered

USFWS:BCC = Birds of Conservation Concern

#### **State Status**

SE = State Listed as Endangered

ST = State Listed as Threatened

FP = State Fully Protected

SSC = California Species of Special Concern

SPE = State Proposed Endangered