NATURAL COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLANNING (NCCP) PHASES

California Department of Fish and Game

Planning Agreement
Planning agreements are developed with interested jurisdictions, landowners and other interested parties. The purpose of the planning agreement is to specify the roles and responsibilities of the participants in developing the NCCP plan, identify the scope, natural communities, focus species, processes for scientific and public input, and an interim process for project review.

Committees
The NCCP process is facilitated by the formation of a variety of committees to accomplish all the tasks. There is usually a steering committee made up of the primary negotiators representing all the various interests groups. Often there is a biological technical committee which includes biologists from all the agencies and project consultants. In addition, there may be other committees to deal with specific issues such as funding, mitigation strategies, data management (GIS), land management, etc. The Department usually participates in all committees. Often toward the latter stages of planning, a smaller negotiating team is formed with just the applicants, their consultant, and the wildlife agencies.

Independent Scientific Input
NCCPs must be based on the best science available. NCCPs are developed based on a set of conservation guidelines developed by independent scientific input. The independent scientists use the principles of conservation biology and species conservation to develop the foundation for a habitat conservation system. The scientific advice also helps to identify any data gaps in the current knowledge.

Biological Data Collection
Species specific biological field data is collected, natural community types are mapped and field verified, and habitat evaluation models are developed if needed. The data is input into a geographic information system for further analysis. The data collected in this phase of plan development helps guide all future decisions for development of the plan.

Preserve Design
Preserve design involves the use of conservation biology principles, land ownership patterns and species and habitat distribution information. Preserve design can be contentious as private landowners come to the realization that a portion of their lands may be needed for establishing an adequate preserve. Public involvement in this phase is critical but also can result in significant delays or reanalysis of the preserve design. Guidance from the independent scientists is recommended.

Development of Draft Plan
The draft plan will contain all the conditions and mechanisms to assure the conservation of the species and make the plan work on a daily basis. It will include a preserve map, a preserve implementation strategy (project mitigation requirements, public land set asides, monitoring and adaptive management programs, etc.), funding assurances, a time table for implementation, and a draft Implementing Agreement (the contract).

Public Review of Draft Plan
Although the draft plan is usually developed with significant public input, the draft plan is the first time the public and elected officials see a comprehensive document. Public hearings are conducted by the local plan participants. The draft plan is also accompanied by a draft Environmental Impact Report and draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR/S). The public review draft also has to be reviewed by the local elected officials.

Final Plan Development
Following public review of the plan, the draft plan is revised based on the direction from local elected officials and public comments received during public review. A final Implementation Agreement is developed and the EIR/S is finalized.

Jurisdiction Approval of the Final Plan
The local jurisdiction holds an additional public hearing on the final plan and makes a decision to either adopt it or do further revisions. If the plan is adopted, it is then submitted to the Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and approval.

State and Federal Permit Issuance
The Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service make final reviews of the plan and determine if it meets the standards for issuance of an NCCP Permit and Federal Endangered Species Act 10a Incidental Take permit respectively.

Implementation
Following the issuance of the State and Federal permits, the local jurisdictions may approve individual projects consistent with the plan without further requirements for individual projects to receive state and federal approval (although compliance with other laws such as Streambed Alteration Agreements or Clean Water Act permits may require further consultations). Permit holders must track habitat loss and protection, and monitor for permit compliance and biological effectiveness. Lands put into the preserve system must be protected in perpetuity and managed to benefit the covered species. Biological information collected through monitoring and research is used to modify management activities to ensure conservation success (adaptive management). The permittees provide annual reports to the wildlife agencies and the public.