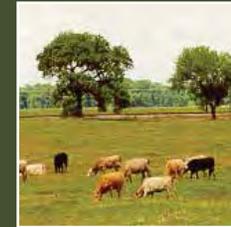


# THE PLACER COUNTY CONSERVATION PLAN

*A Proposal for Balancing Growth and Resource Protection*



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## INTRODUCTION

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**P**lacer County spans some of California's most diverse and scenic landscapes. In fact, Placer County contains 62 percent of all habitat types known to exist in California. From the oak studded savannahs, farms, and fruit orchards of the foothills to the granite peaks and clear mountain lakes of the Sierra Nevada, Placer County features a rich and varied landscape that is home to rich biodiversity including many state and federally listed animals such as the bald eagle, the California red-legged frog, Swainson's hawk, and Central Valley steelhead.

In order to maintain the County's unique character, high quality of life, diverse ecosystems, and rare species, the Placer County Board of Supervisors concluded a vision was needed to plan for and accommodate the area's projected growth while at the same time protecting the County's many resources. This vision has evolved into the proposed Placer County Conservation Plan (PCCP), a proactive, regional planning tool designed to avoid potential conflicts between the county's growing human population and unique ecological assets.

The PCCP is a proactive plan to protect the county's natural areas and scenic landscapes while clearing regulatory obstacles and other inefficiencies on the path toward continued economic growth and development for the region.

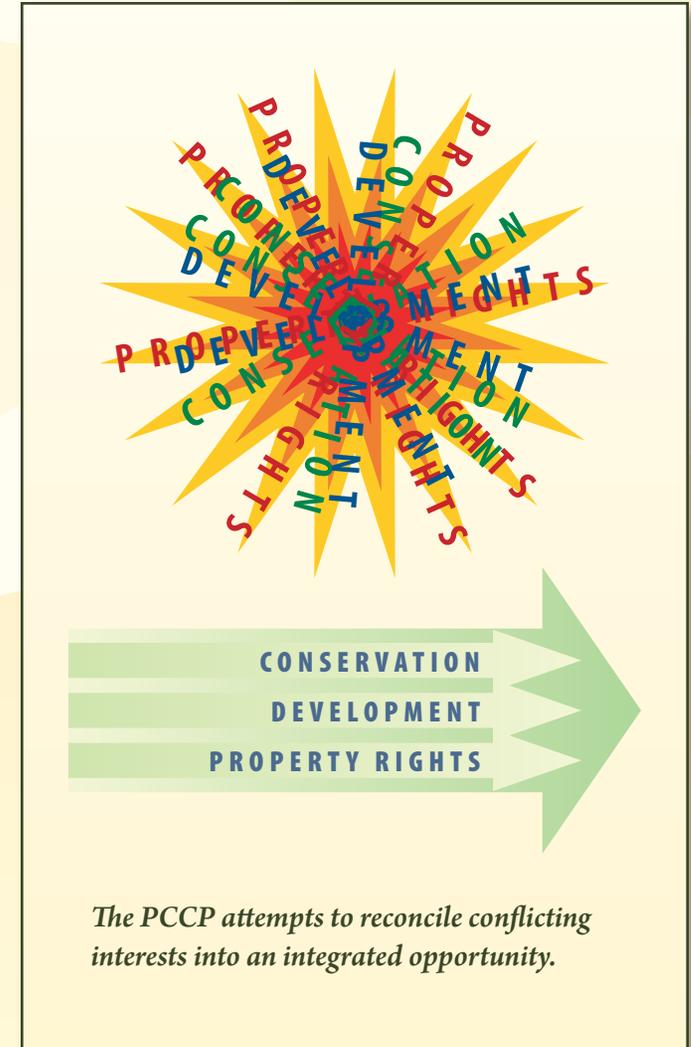


## THE PROBLEM

Its scenic beauty, idyllic climate, proximity to growing metropolitan area, and rich quality of life have made Placer County one of California’s fastest growing counties since 1990, far outpacing the Bay area and the greater Sacramento region. Placer’s population in 1990 was 172,796, and in 2012 the county’s population was estimated at 355,328. This trend is likely to continue with most of the growth occurring in Western Placer County.

This anticipated growth requires a large investment in planning for infrastructure, law enforcement, fire protection, schools, parks and all of the other facilities and services expected by new urban and suburban growth. This growth is also subject to a considerable amount of regulation including Federal regulation related to wetlands, water quality and sensitive species.

The current process of obtaining development permits and implementing habitat mitigation can be costly and inefficient. The permitting processes vary from agency to agency, and navigating the requirements can be cumbersome, redundant and time-consuming. This inefficiency creates costs not only for developers but also for society. Case-by-case review of projects is a piecemeal approach that often results in ineffective development mitigation patterns, and fragmented conservation. With each project taken out of its County-wide context, no single entity is afforded a bird’s eye view to ensure that the development and conservation projects maximize benefits for the County’s human and natural communities across the Placer landscape.

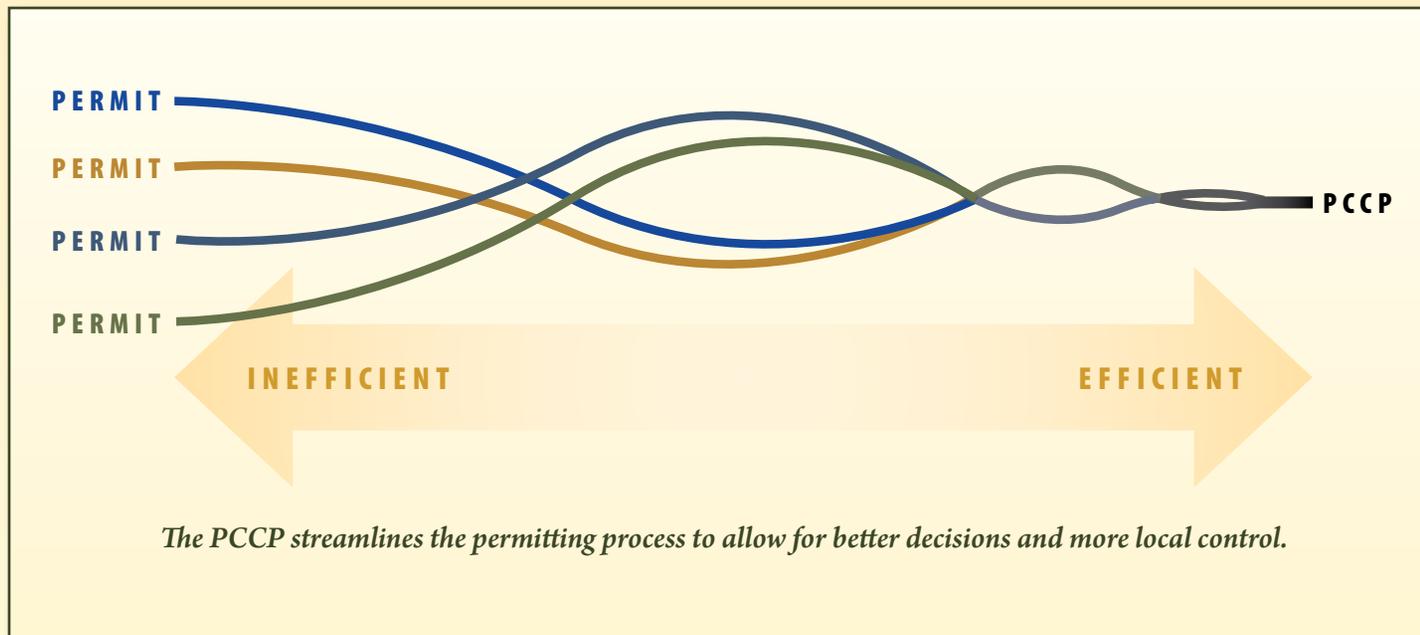


## THE SOLUTION

The proposed PCCP is a County-proposed solution to coordinate and streamline the permitting process by allowing local entities to issue state and federal permits. The proposed PCCP is a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) under the Federal Endangered Species Act and a Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) under the California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act. As proposed, the PCCP would include the County Aquatic Regulatory Program (CARP) to issue permits related to the Federal Clean Water Act and California Fish and Game Code. The CARP

component would distinguish the plan as a nationally unique model of natural resource management.

In proposing this streamlined process, both costs and uncertainties would be reduced substantially, thus ensuring a more efficient use of public dollars. Furthermore, the proposed PCCP is a landscape-level plan so that each project is issued permits based on how it contributes to the County's natural, social, and economic health now and in the future.





## GOALS OF THE PROPOSED PLAN

### 1. PROTECT LAND

Combine and leverage public and private dollars to acquire land to protect habitat, wildlife, and agricultural land and retain the functionality of ecosystems in Placer County. Lands are protected through two means, both of which must include a property owner who identifies him or herself as a willing seller: 1) the purchase of land; or 2) the purchase of a conservation easement which compensates the property owner for their development rights, but does not transfer ownership of the property. The proposed PCCP is intended to directly provide regulatory coverage for special status species and for federally regulated wetlands, as well as indirectly protect the habitat of hundreds of plant and animal species.

### 2. FINANCIAL BENEFIT

Maximize value and minimize conflict by granting local government the environmental regulation authority. Land use planning becomes cohesive and localized. Implementation of the proposed PCCP will result in improved cost predictability; voluntary, participating landowners will know the total cost of mitigation well in advance of the project's environmental review.

### 3. EFFICIENT PERMITTING PROCESS

Connect property owners and developers to one agency with environmental expertise in order to make conscious and efficient decisions in planning and developing. The proposed PCCP will serve as a comprehensive permitting solution for species and natural resource related environmental regulations in Western Placer County allowing land use decisions to be made to maximize local benefits.

### 4. LANDOWNER BENEFIT

Provide property owners with options. On a voluntary basis, land owners may sell or donate their land potentially increasing its value for conservation, or gain permanent protection of resources on their land. Property owners may also choose to develop their land and still are left with many options. The proposed PCCP is intended to respect private property rights now and in the future.

### 5. LANDSCAPE LEVEL CONSERVATION

Improve mitigation through large-scale land conservation and better monitoring. The proposed PCCP will provide regulatory certainty over the next 50 years; mitigation expectations will not change drastically with the proposed PCCP in place and conservation will be implemented at a regional/landscape level.

## TIMELINE

### 1994

Placer County General Plan directs urban residential growth to the cities and provides for the long-term conservation of agricultural lands, open species areas, and habitat of threatened and endangered species

### 2000

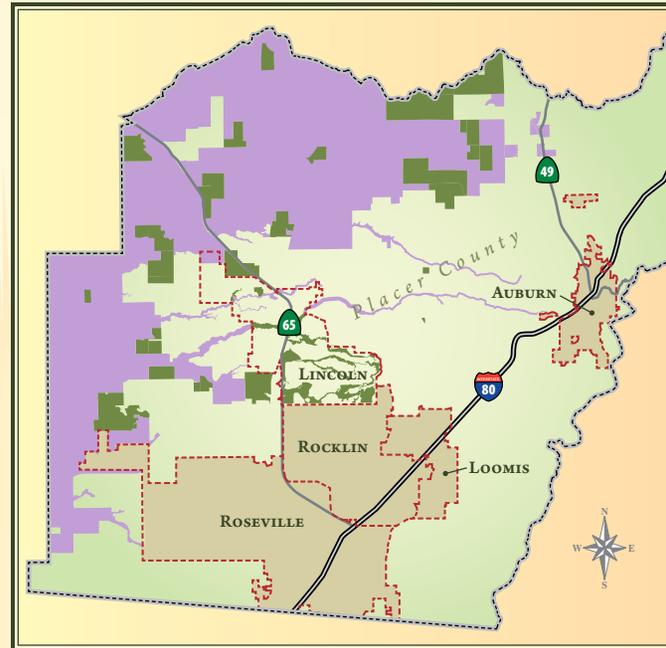
Placer County Board of Supervisors vote unanimously to implement the Placer Legacy Program and to initiate the work program for a conservation plan

### 2004

Completion of supporting studies and background reports for the PCCP

## PLAN OVERVIEW

The Placer County Conservation Plan covers approximately 200,000 acres of western Placer County. The Plan analyzes the biological resources and identifies a conservation strategy reflecting the geography of natural communities and covered species. The Plan also analyzes land use patterns and forecasts the extent and location of urban, suburban, and rural growth and seeks to reconcile potential future growth with the conservation strategy. The results are depicted in the Placer County Conservation Reserve Map which generally shows where the Reserve System (purple color) could be established in the Reserve Acquisition Area and integrated with existing reserves. The Reserve Map also shows the Potential Future Growth Area where land development impacts from urban, suburban, and rural growth are expected to occur. Within the proposed PCCP plan area, 30,000 to 50,000 acres would become part of the Reserve System. This conservation Reserve System would preserve many acres of vernal pool



### LEGEND

- Existing Conservation Reserve Area
- Reserve Acquisition Area
- County Boundary
- City Limits
- Non-participating Cities

### 2007

Formation of the Ad Hoc Committee including representatives from Placer County and the City of Lincoln

### 2008

Decision to initiate preparation of the PCCP

### 2011

Completion of the PCCP Administrative Draft Conservation Plan





## PLAN OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

habitat (approximately 50 percent of the County's remaining stock of these fragile, seasonal ecosystems). The proposed PCCP is designed to ensure that land will be managed to continue to support the survival and well being of the covered species, as well as the survival of hundreds of other species that are dependent on the same habitat.



On September 23, 2008 the Placer County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted recommendations to work with partners (City of Lincoln, Placer County Water Agency, and the South Placer Regional Transportation Authority) and coordinate with the public and the Resources Agencies to finish the work plan to prepare the draft Conservation Plan.

Broad participation is critical to the success of the proposed PCCP. By proactively addressing the long-term conservation and development needs of the county, the Plan will strengthen local control over land use and provide greater flexibility in meeting the County's social and economic needs for the future.

## PLANNING PROCESS

Since initiation of the proposed PCCP, staff has been coordinating with stakeholders and regulatory agencies to prepare an acceptable conservation strategy. Efforts underway include the preparation of the draft PCCP, conservation strategy, reserve map and finance plan. Placer County continues to work on the principles behind the PCCP with the Placer County Board of Supervisors, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (collectively referred to as Resource Agencies).



The Placer County Water Agency (PCWA), the South Placer Regional Transportation Authority (SPRTA), and the City of Lincoln have also partnered with Placer County to prepare the initial conservation plan. The City of Lincoln, Placer County, state and federal organizations, private landowners, and the residents of Placer County have interests at stake in managing the growth of the area. The proposed Plan serves to balance the rapid economic development in Placer County with conservation of important habitat while serving as an environmental legacy. The planning process invites public comment in order to create a transparent approach.

## CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The PCCP focuses on conservation of ecosystems, natural communities and ecological processes. The conservation objectives include; sustain all natural communities that are currently present in the western Placer County landscape, partially restore or enhance certain natural communities and ecosystem processes and functions, ensure population stability and sustainability of covered species and contribute to the species' recovery, maintain connectivity between habitats across the landscape, and, address cumulative impacts of intensive land use and urbanization in Placer County.



The plan proposed to conservation 30,000 to 50,000 acres which will contain oak woodlands, aquatic and wetland ecosystems, valley foothill riparian and vernal pool grasslands. All of these natural communities provide valuable habitat for covered species. The 31 covered species include the vernal pool tadpole shrimp, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, Central Valley Chinook salmon, Central Valley steelhead, California redlegged frog, northwestern pond turtle, and Swainson's hawk. Each of these species plays a unique role in western Placer County's natural ecosystems.

## RESERVE SYSTEM

The reserve system is designed to maximize landscape level, ecosystem conservation. Though important, the proposed PCCP is not being designed for the purposes of saving a single wetland or species, but rather to keep the Placer County ecosystems intact so that they can continue to perform the functions we depend on. The reserve system will include land in the western part of the county across diverse ecosystem types. Today, there are approximately 15,000 acres of existing preserves. A conservation reserve map identifying 30,000 to 50,000 additional acres for the reserve area is estimated to fulfill the conservation objectives. Approximately 85 percent of that land will have to be protected, and the ultimate reserve area will be formed based on the availability and interest of willing sellers. Because not all landowners will be willing to sell, the available area must be greater than the area of the reserve required by the regulatory agencies. Ultimately, the reserve system will be formed by integrating the lands made available by willing sellers with the lands that are already preserved, creating cohesive, interconnected habitat reserves and corridors.

The biggest challenge is finding suitable habitat to mitigate the projected impacts from new growth. The potential exists for the new urban growth in Placer County to occur in vernal pool habitat. The remaining vernal pools on the Placer landscape cover only a fraction of the land that they used to. In addition, the proposed PCCP prioritizes conservation over restoration. Avoiding and protecting enough vernal pool habitats to be granted state and federal approval poses a particular challenge.





## MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT

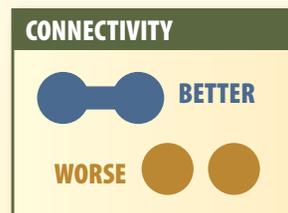
The plan participants (PCWA, SPRTA, Placer County and City of Lincoln), have agreed to embark on an ambitious program of research, management, and monitoring in perpetuity for the proposed PCCP. Active management is critical to maintaining conditions that support the covered species and their habitats. Monitoring is important to ensure that management actions are working. As more land is acquired over time, it will be even more important to have an adaptive management plan in place to ensure that the conservation efforts of the Plan are successful as conditions evolve over time (e.g. land use, climate, fire, and flood).

## PROJECT APPROVALS

Through a streamlined permitting process, the intent of the proposed PCCP is to allow project proponents to obtain state and federal permits at the local planning counter. The project approvals will be subject to the requirements of the PCCP, but authorized and monitored locally. These permits will help make possible the construction of new homes and businesses to accommodate the growth of the area while also providing necessary public infrastructure. Roads, flood protection projects, schools, neighborhood parks, and recreational trails will be among the many projects that could benefit from the implementation of the proposed PCCP.

### BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATION BIOLOGY

*The science of conservation biology has important principles that were used to create the Placer County Conservation Plan.*



## THE FUTURE

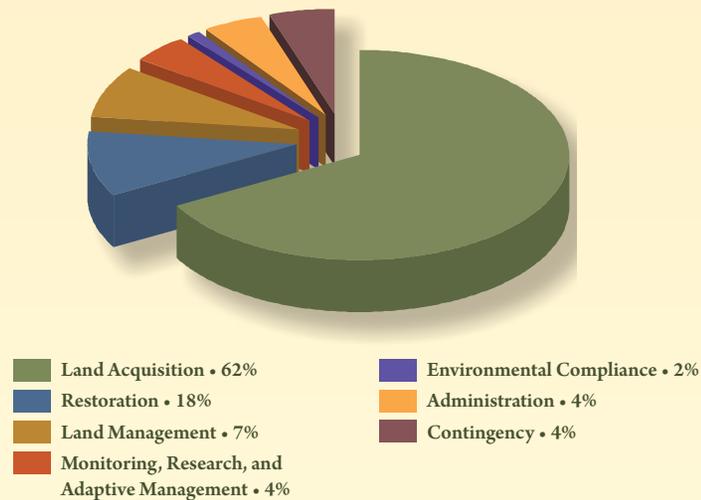
The proposed Placer County Conservation Plan is only one of three regional conservation plans in the United States that is trying to combine regional wetlands permitting with endangered species permits. As a result, the Plan has the potential to stand out from many conservation efforts throughout the nation. The proposed plan is being designed as a regional model for making a concerted effort to protecting the natural resources in our area while leveraging the economic growth that allows the region to remain prosperous and healthy.

## COST AND FUNDING

The proposed cost of the program, including the costs of acquiring and protecting land and managing it over time, will be incurred by those who impact resources as a result of development projects.

Property owners/developers who choose to develop their property (including some public infrastructure projects) will either dedicate land to the reserve or pay in-lieu fees to mitigate impacts to species and habitat. State and federal contributions will also increase the reserve. A finance plan will allocate management and on-going implementation costs, limiting exposure of the Placer County General Fund and ensuring that those who benefit from regulatory coverage under the PCCP permit pay their fair share of PCCP costs.

### DISTRIBUTION OF PCCP COSTS BY ACTIVITY



PCCP cost are based on preliminary estimates that will be further refined with the preparation of a funding plan.

### FUNDING PRINCIPLES

**Developers pay their fair share.** The costs of implementing the Plan will be allocated between future development and the public based on the premise that the costs to future development should be in proportion to the impacts caused by future development.

**Maximize private organization involvement.** Partner with conservation and mitigation banks in addition to private land management partners such as Placer Land Trust.

**Cost-share with state and federal agencies.** State and federal agencies will be encouraged to acquire and manage public conservation lands.

**Generate new funding sources.** New sources of funding earmarked to cover habitat mitigation costs in addition to broad-based revenue sources will fill funding gaps.



Further information and documentation about the Placer County Conservation Plan can be found by visiting [www.placer.ca.gov](http://www.placer.ca.gov). This publication was produced in collaboration with the Sierra Business Council ([www.sbcouncil.org](http://www.sbcouncil.org)).