



**San Benito County Conservation Plan Public Advisory Committee:
Statement of Purpose
August 15, 2022**

Background

San Benito County is committed to protecting and preserving its rich natural resources, including its sensitive species and the habitats that support them, while supporting the County’s agricultural economy and future growth. Toward this end and as recommended in its General Plan, the County has initiated development of a combined Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) called the San Benito County Conservation Plan (SBCCP or Plan) to accompany applications for federal and state incidental take permits for listed species.

The overall objectives of the SBCCP are to develop and implement a regional approach to habitat conservation within San Benito County; partner with landowners, Tribes, conservation organizations, and other interested parties to protect and enhance habitat for a variety of listed and sensitive species across a network of natural lands and working agricultural lands; provide a programmatic process for the mitigation of impacts to biological resources from development activities within San Benito County; authorize the use of incidental take permits for development and other projects that potentially affect covered species and their habitat; and provide local control to the County of San Benito (as a future permittee) to implement a streamlined endangered species permitting process for covered activities that will be described in the Plan. The plan area includes areas slated for future development, as well as areas that may provide important conservation opportunities to support conservation and recovery of the covered species at a landscape level.

The County of San Benito (permit applicant), acting by and through the San Benito County Resource Management Agency, is leading development of the SBCCP and will be ultimately responsible for development of the Plan, including making final decisions regarding the Plan. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) are the two wildlife agencies providing guidance to the County to ensure their respective permit issuance criteria may be met and

permits successfully issued. The wildlife agencies will participate in development of the Plan to provide information on procedures, respective statutory requirements, and other technical information. Ultimately, USFWS and CDFW will be the agencies responsible for determining if all permit application requirements are met and, if so, approving the HCP and NCCP, and issuing incidental take permits. A Planning Team consisting of key individuals from the two wildlife agencies, the San Benito County Resource Management Agency, and the project consultants, will provide direction, guidance, advice, strategic decision making, and assistance in developing the SBCCP. In general, the Planning Team will oversee and support the general course of development and organization of the Plan.

To ensure broad community participation throughout development of the SBCCP, the County formed and began convening a Public Advisory Committee (PAC) in the summer of 2021¹ with members representing the County's diverse interests including agriculture, business, conservation advocacy, housing development, landowners, local government, public agencies, recreation, transportation, Tribes, and the community-at-large. The County intends to utilize the PAC as a forum to discuss and inform development of the SBCCP. All PAC meetings will be open to the public to attend and provide comment.

Public Advisory Committee Role

The PAC's purpose is to serve as a sounding board with the specific charge to review, consider, and comment upon the components that make up the SBCCP document as they are developed and as presented to the PAC for review. PAC members are motivated by their desire to collaborate in an environment of mutual respect and shall strive in their recommendations to be objective, balanced, and constructive. The overarching goal of the PAC is to help inform the development of a quality Plan that meets San Benito County's biological conservation goals while supporting planned development with a streamlined endangered species permitting process, and that reflects the broadest possible set of community interests and concerns. PAC members are expected to offer constructive input from the interest areas they represent, and to provide an interest-based level of insight on draft working documents, policies, and programs generated by San Benito County staff and the project team developing the SBCCP. Planning Team members may participate in PAC meetings to help assure coordination among all parties involved with development of the SBCCP.

The PAC operates by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, the various positions will be reported to County staff and will be taken under consideration by the Planning Team.

PAC Member responsibilities include the following.

- Thoroughly review working draft chapters and memos prepared during the planning process regarding covered activities, biological resources, conservation strategies, costs to implement the SBCCP, and funding strategies.
- Seek to understand the issues presented and the perspectives and interests of other PAC members and their constituencies.
- Inform, educate, and involve their constituencies on a regular basis, including providing notification of upcoming PAC meetings and information on how to attend such meetings.
- Synthesize input from their constituencies and effectively represent their viewpoints, interests, and concerns.
- Work cooperatively with other PAC members.
- Commit to attending PAC meetings until completion of the Plan.

¹ The PAC was originally called the SBCCP ADHOC Committee and later the Citizens Advisory Committee. The County changed the name of the group in early 2022 to the Public Advisory Committee.

Initial PAC members were selected by County Staff involved in early formation of the planning effort. Members of the public from a variety of stakeholder groups were also invited to make known their interest in joining the PAC and were accepted for membership. Admission to the PAC as a member will be at the discretion of County Staff to ensure balanced representation of a diverse constituency, and PAC members will serve at the pleasure of the County. The number of PAC members is not fixed, and the County may choose to expand the PAC at any time to ensure the broadest representation of stakeholder interests.

Public Advisory Committee Meetings

PAC meetings will be led by the project consultant's facilitator who is responsible for convening and presiding over meetings and ensuring meeting agendas are followed. The project consultant's facilitator will guide meeting discussions and ensure that all PAC members have an equal opportunity to speak, ensure that PAC members communicate respectfully and collaboratively, and will help PAC members reach consensus when possible, or detail perspectives when consensus cannot be reached.

Communication and collaboration amongst PAC members, the project consultant's facilitator, County staff, and wildlife agency staff is most effective when participants use the same medium (e.g., on video via Zoom) or are physically together in the same venue. PAC meetings will be held either in-person at a County meeting place, or entirely remotely, via Zoom (and/or phone). In-person meetings will be determined by the County, in collaboration with the PAC to encourage maximum participation. PAC members are strongly encouraged to attend in-person meetings in-person; however, the County recognizes that PAC members may not be able attend all in-person meetings in person and will not deny participation to members because of an inability to attend in person. The County also recognizes that interested members of the public may not be able to attend all in-person meetings in person. Therefore, the County will make all PAC meetings accessible remotely, via Zoom or phone.

PAC meetings will involve presentations by the project consultant, County staff, or wildlife agency staff, and discussions among these three parties and PAC members. When participating remotely via Zoom, participants will use the Zoom "raise-hand" feature when they would like to speak. The facilitator will call on participants to speak in the order that they raise their hands. PAC members are encouraged to communicate succinctly to allow others time to speak. Similarly, when meeting in person, PAC members will raise their hand when they wish to speak. The facilitator will call on participants to speak in the order that they raise their hands. Members of the public in attendance at PAC meetings will be given opportunities to comment during public comment periods. The County will consider comments from the public when developing the SBCCP.

PAC members are expected to serve for a minimum term of two years and encouraged to serve for the duration of SBCCP development which is currently anticipated to be a 4-5-year process. Participation is voluntary and members will not be financially compensated. PAC meetings will occur approximately quarterly, though the PAC may meet more frequently when there are a number of substantive issues in need of discussion. PAC members who miss three or more consecutive meetings may be asked to resign. PAC members are expected to communicate respectfully with fellow PAC members, County staff, wildlife agency staff, and the project consultant, and to follow meeting ground rules formulated by the facilitator. PAC members who are disruptive to the meeting process, who will not communicate respectfully, or who will not adhere to meeting ground rules will be asked to leave the meeting. PAC members who repeatedly engage in disruptive behavior in subsequent PAC meetings may be asked to resign. If a member is asked to resign, County staff will consider whether to fill the vacancy with another

interested party representing the same constituency; this party will be identified through a self-nomination process. The intent of this policy is to encourage attendance and the ability of the PAC to engage meaningfully on SBCCP development.

County staff may at any time change the powers, functions, and duties of the PAC in any manner and to any extent as in its judgement is desirable and consistent with its goals for establishment of the SBCCP. The life of the PAC is finite and will conclude its formal purpose once the SBCCP has been finalized and approved by the San Benito County Board of Supervisors.

Adopted: _____ (Date)

