

**Endangered Species Act  
Non-Traditional Section 6 Grant Program  
Habitat Conservation Plan Planning Assistance  
FY2021**

**PROJECT TITLE: San Benito County Conservation Plan  
Project Narrative**

**PROJECT CONTACTS**

**California Department of Fish & Wildlife:**

Craig Bailey  
Senior Environmental Scientist  
Central Region (Region 4)  
(559) 243-4014 ext.227  
Craig.Bailey@wildlife.ca.gov

Renee Robison  
Senior Environmental Scientist  
Central Region (Region 4)  
(559) 243-4014 ext.274  
Renee.Robison@wildlife.ca.gov

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:**

Mark Ogonowski  
Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist  
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office  
(805) 677-3350  
mark\_ogonowski@fws.gov

Rachel Henry  
Habitat Conservation Plan Coordinator  
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office  
(805) 677-3312  
rachel\_henry@fws.gov

**Local:**

Taven Kinison Brown  
Principal Planner  
County of San Benito  
Planning & Building Department  
(831) 902-2294  
tkinisonbrown@cosb.us

Arielle Goodspeed  
Senior Planner  
County of San Benito  
Planning & Building Department  
(831) 902-2547  
agoodspeed@cosb.us

Michael Kelly  
Associate Planner  
County of San Benito  
Planning & Building Department  
(831) 902-2287  
mkelly@cosb.us

**PROJECT COST:**

**Federal Share** - \$976,100

**Non-Federal Share** - \$342,954 (26% match)

**Total Cost** - \$1,319,054

**STATEMENT OF NEED**

This proposal requests \$976,100 in federal grant funds from the Fiscal Year 2021 Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grant Program (Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act) Non-traditional Habitat Conservation Plan Planning Assistance Program. This funding will support the planning and development of a county-wide Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) called the San Benito County Conservation Plan (SBCCP) in San Benito County, central California. The plan area of the proposed SBCCP will be defined by the County boundary (see Figure 1) and encompasses over 890,000 acres. The plan area includes areas slated for future development as well as areas identified as important conservation opportunities expected to support conservation and recovery of the covered species at a landscape level.

San Benito County has recently been experiencing extensive growth unlike the region has experienced in the past. Over the last several years, San Benito County population growth was recently recorded to be 47.16% with the cities of Hollister and San Juan Batista experiencing notable increases in annexation and development activities (County of San Benito 2015a). San Benito County's proximity to Silicon Valley creates unique development pressures. The County also anticipates a need for construction, operation, and maintenance of public infrastructure, including a county landfill and road widening and realignment. Much of this ongoing development is occurring in and around sensitive habitat that supports populations of several special status species and is degrading and fragmenting these areas, reducing their value for native plants and animals. In addition, large areas currently in agriculture and rangelands in northern San Benito County have been identified as New Community Study Areas intended to accommodate future growth by providing housing, urban infrastructure and services, economic opportunity, and facilities such as schools and fire stations. While New Community Study Areas are intended to minimize agricultural and environmental impacts, they encompass significant areas of suitable habitat and known occurrences of Federally and State-listed species.

In response to the 2035 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (San Benito County 2015b) and the Statements of Overriding Consideration made for impacts to agriculture, open space, and biology, the County included a policy and intent to adopt a County-wide Habitat Conservation Plan in its General Plan: "NCR-A: Habitat Conservation Plan: The County shall consider working with the State and federal agencies to prepare and adopt a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for listed and candidate species in San Benito County. The County shall collect fees to finance the preparation of the plan through the provisions of Ordinances 532 or 541 or any amendments." This policy motivates development of the SBCCP. The SBCCP will provide improved protection and conservation of the region's biodiversity while creating a streamlined process for accommodating development and growth. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) encourage the development of multi-species, ecosystem-based plans that provide for the conservation and recovery of both listed and unlisted species within San Benito County.

Through the SBCCP, San Benito County will permanently protect habitat, establish preserves, and develop management guidelines for the conservation and recovery of the thirteen (13) sensitive species listed below. Ten (10) of the species are Federally -- and in most cases, also State -- listed as endangered or threatened, and two of these are also State Fully Protected. Three (3) of the species are considered "At-risk species" as defined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity because they are currently under review for Federal listing.

## San Benito County Conservation Plan Covered Species

FEDERALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES		
Animals		
Common name	Scientific name	Status
Blunt-nosed leopard lizard	<i>Gambelia sila</i>	FE, SE, SFP
California condor	<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>	FE, SE, SFP
California red-legged frog	<i>Rana draytonii</i>	FT, SSC
California tiger salamander, Central California Distinct Population Segment	<i>Ambystoma californiense</i>	FT, ST
Least Bell's vireo	<i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i>	FE, SE
Giant kangaroo rat	<i>Dipodomys ingens</i>	FE, SE
San Joaquin kit fox	<i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i>	FE, ST
Vernal pool fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta lynchi</i>	FT
Vernal pool tadpole shrimp	<i>Lepidurus packardii</i>	FE
Plants		
Common name	Scientific name	Status
San Joaquin woolly-threads	<i>Monolopia congdonii</i>	FE
AT-RISK SPECIES		
Animals		
Common name	Scientific name	Status
Foothill yellow-legged frog, West/Central Coast clade	<i>Rana boylei</i>	FR, SE
Southwestern pond turtle	<i>Actinemys pallida</i>	FR, SSC
Western spadefoot toad	<i>Spea hammondi</i>	FR, SSC

**Abbreviations:** FE = Federally endangered; FT = Federally threatened; FR = Under Federal review; SE = State endangered; ST = State threatened; SFP = State fully protected; SSC = State species of special concern

These species depend upon agricultural, annual grassland savanna, managed and non-managed marsh, seasonal spring seep, riverine, emergent wetland, chaparral, oak woodland, riparian, vernal pool, and other habitats which support breeding, foraging and shelter. While the causes for the decline of each species varies, their respective recovery plans and status assessments indicate that all are threatened by ongoing loss and alteration of their habitat and other negative effects of development (references provided in Literature Cited). The habitats required by these species are unlikely to withstand the growth pressures outlined above in many areas of the County unless a comprehensive landscape-level program to protect, conserve, and manage them is developed and implemented. Consequently, the County is committed to preparing and implementing an HCP and NCCP that will anticipate future development and other land uses that are likely to occur in the County and ensure conservation of sensitive and listed species.

The State of California is the only state to enact a law that closely complements the habitat conservation planning process of the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The NCCP Act encourages the development of multi-species, ecosystem-based plans that provide for the conservation and recovery of both listed and unlisted species within the plan area. The NCCP Act requires a plan to provide for the conservation of covered species and includes independent scientific input and significant public participation. When applied together, the ESA and NCCP Act bring their complementary strengths to conservation planning to provide greater

conservation benefits than either Act alone. Information on the NCCP program can be found at <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/NCCP>.

In recent years San Benito County has implemented several initiatives laying the groundwork for developing and gaining community support for a County-wide HCP/NCCP:

1. Development of a General Plan (County of San Benito 2015a) which identifies the value of the County's natural habitats and native species and prioritizes their protection, including a policy to develop a Habitat Conservation Plan and Natural Community Conservation Plan;
2. Development of an EIR for the General Plan (San Benito County 2015b) which includes a biological resource analysis of the County's sensitive species and habitats;
3. Establishment of Ordinance 541 designed to collect a Habitat Conservation Impact Fee to support development of an HCP and associated conservation land acquisition; and
4. Participation in community stakeholder groups which will provide venues for gaining community input and support for the development of the SBCCP

San Benito County's General Plan 2035 was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2015 and provides a vision and guiding principles for the future growth of the County and preservation of its natural resources (County of San Benito 2015a). The General Plan established goals and policies that recommended development of an HCP and NCCP by partnering with federal and state agencies to develop and adopt a County-wide HCP and NCCP for listed and candidate species in order to manage their habitats and ensure their long-term protection. Building on these foundational efforts, planning staff from San Benito County's Resource Management Agency have initiated collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a County-wide HCP and NCCP, the San Benito County Conservation Plan.

#### **PURPOSE**

The San Benito County Conservation Plan will ensure the long-term protection of the County's listed and sensitive species and its broader array of native species and habitats. At the same time the SBCCP will support the long-term viability of the County's agricultural economy, promote smart, sensible economic growth and housing development, provide regulatory streamlining, protect natural landscapes that help define the character of the County, and preserve open space areas and opportunities for recreation.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

San Benito County is requesting \$976,100 in funding from the Fiscal Year 2021 Section 6 Non-traditional Habitat Conservation Plan Planning Assistance Grant program to support development of the San Benito County Conservation Plan. The overall objective of this grant proposal is to develop and implement a regional approach to habitat conservation within San Benito County; partner with landowners, conservation organizations, and other stakeholders 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 process for the mitigation of impacts to biological resources from development activities within San Benito County; and authorize the use of incidental take permits for development and other projects that potentially affect covered species and their habitat. The objective is broken into three main tasks: (1) Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan scoping and strategy development, (2) community and stakeholder outreach, and (3) drafting the SBCCP. The deliverables and milestones associated with each task are elaborated below:

Task Summary	Outcome/Deliverable	Milestones
Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan Scoping and Strategy Development/Science Advisory Panel/Planning Agreement for NCCP	<p><u>Outcome</u>            This task calls for identifying covered activities, confirming covered species, developing draft methods for the take estimates and effects analysis, developing species conservation strategies sufficient to meet both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife permit issuance criteria, and developing draft biological goals and objectives. These components represent the initial key steps in SBCCP development and once completed, will form the basic parameters of the SBCCP. The County with assistance from the agencies will form a Technical Advisory Committee of recognized experts knowledgeable in the region's species and habitats and with experience in landscape-scale conservation planning to guide scoping of the SBCCP.</p> <p><u>Deliverables include memoranda confirming the following tasks:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Execute Planning Agreement between CDFW</li> <li>• Identify a preliminary list of natural communities and species known or reasonably expected to be found in those communities</li> <li>• Design and implementation of the science advisory process</li> <li>• Identify covered activities</li> <li>• Confirm covered species</li> <li>• Develop draft method for impact assessment</li> <li>• Develop draft biological goals and objectives</li> <li>• Prepare for public outreach meetings</li> </ul>	Within one year of receipt of funds, the science advisory process will be implemented and the core information needed for development of the SBCCP (identify covered activities, confirm the list of covered species, develop a method of estimating take of covered species) will be completed.
Public and Stakeholder Outreach	We believe open and frequent communication is key to developing a successful plan and generating broad	At least 3 public outreach events will be hosted by San Benito County, which will include informational

	<p>community support. The County will identify, coordinate, and communicate with local stakeholders, landowners, and members of the community. The County will develop informational brochures, press releases, and update webpages and materials for engaging and receiving input from the public during public workshops about the SBCCP development process. The intent of the outreach material is to educate the local community on the benefits of pursuing the SBCCP and providing a means for members of the community to take part in the planning process.</p> <p><u>Deliverables include development or implementation of the following:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Workshops</li> <li>• Public Presentations</li> <li>• Press Releases</li> <li>• Informational Brochures</li> </ul>	<p>presentations aimed to provide the public with information about the process of developing the SBCCP. Press releases and informational brochures will also be developed as outreach materials. There will be continued public participation throughout plan development which will occur over the length of the grant.</p>
<p>Drafting the SBCCP</p>	<p>This task calls for administrative drafts of chapters 1-7 of the SBCCP document. Tools used to develop the SBCCP will utilize available technologies including aerial imagery, spatial mapping, and information collected during the scoping period. The draft and final deliverables for this objective will be in the form of draft SBCCP chapters. These documents will draw from the work completed under the first two objectives in this project narrative.</p> <p><u>Deliverables include developing the following draft SBCCP chapters:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 1. Introduction</li> <li>• Chapter 2. Land Use and Covered Activities</li> <li>• Chapter 3. Existing Conditions</li> <li>• Chapter 4. Assessment of Take</li> <li>• Chapter 5. Conservation Strategy</li> </ul>	<p>Within 3 years of receipt of funds, first administrative drafts of chapters 1-7 of the SBCCP will be drafted and ready for review and comment by the USFWS and CDFW.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 6. Conditions on Covered Activities</li> <li>• Chapter 7. Monitoring and Adaptive Management Framework</li> </ul>	
<p>Scoping Environmental Compliance Documents (CEQA/NEPA)</p>	<p>This task calls for initial internal scoping for the CEQA/NEPA documents to begin gathering information related to environmental and human resources and begin to identify significant environmental impacts that may occur and significant adverse impacts that cannot be eliminated by making changes in the project.</p> <p><u>Deliverables include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin identifying potential effects of the proposed actions.</li> <li>• An initial list of human and environmental resource areas that the proposed project may have significant impacts on.</li> </ul>	<p>During year 3 of the grant cycle, the County will take an in-depth look at the potential significant effects that may occur as a result of implementation of the SBCCP. Work is expected to begin in year 3 but will not be completed as part of this application.</p>

**INITIATION OR COMPLETION OF A HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN**

This proposal will initiate development of a joint HCP/NCCP document for San Benito County and include three general objectives of scoping, outreach, and drafting of SBCCP chapters.

**METHODS/APPROACH/TIMETABLE**

The objectives of this proposal are broken into three main tasks: (1) Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan scoping and strategy development, (2) community and stakeholder outreach, and (3) drafting the SBCCP.

**Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan Scoping and Strategy Development**

This objective calls for executing the NCCP Planning Agreement and initiating the Science Advisory process, identifying covered activities, confirming covered species, and developing draft biological goals and objectives. These components represent the initial key steps in SBCCP development and once completed, will form the basic parameters of the SBCCP.

San Benito County’s General Plan 2035 (County of San Benito 2015a) and the associated EIR (County of San Benito 2015b) will provide information specific to the County’s foreseeable development needs, which will help to inform the covered activities included in the SBCCP. Information used to confirm the suite of covered species covered by the SBCCP and development of the goals and objectives for the covered species will be collected from multiple sources, such as the California Natural Diversity Database, the General Plan and EIR, USFWS species Recovery Plans and 5-year reviews, and other relevant information. These components of the

SBCCP will be developed in close coordination with species experts, the scientific community, CDFW, and USFWS.

In general, this objective will focus on gathering baseline information for development of the SBCCP. This objective may require site visits to see resources that may be addressed in the SBCCP, collecting biological data, and reviewing existing scientific literature, meetings with Federal, State, and local agencies and experts, public meetings, and outreach events. This objective also calls for preparing for and attending public meetings. Agendas and meeting notes for meetings open to the public will also be posted to the San Benito County website.

**Timetable for this task:** This objective will commence upon notification of the grant award and will be complete within 1 year of receipt of funds.

#### Public and Stakeholder Outreach

For the SBCCP to be successful, coordination and cooperation among regulatory agencies will be essential. San Benito County must also engage a broad range of stakeholders including the public and the scientific community. It is critical to form a firm foundation for the SBCCP planning process that includes numerous committees and groups that provide opportunities for diverse interests, including the public, to be involved in the development of the SBCCP. These committees and groups are integral to the development of the plan and will ensure a balanced and thorough review of the Plan.

This objective will require public outreach events, public meetings, and meetings with Federal, State, and local agencies. Development of press releases, brochures, and informational presentations will support successful community and stakeholder outreach.

**Timetable for this task:** This objective will commence upon notification of the grant award and will be complete within 2 years of receipt of funds.

#### Drafting the administrative draft of the SBCCP

A key component to this objective is a bid solicitation process and selection of a suitable consultant with demonstrable HCP/NCCP experience to guide development and drafting of the SBCCP. The selected consultant will work with San Benito County staff, USFWS and CDFW to prepare administrative drafts of the first seven (7) chapters of the SBCCP document. Tools used to develop the SBCCP document will utilize multiple resources and technologies including spatial mapping and modeling using GIS, County data, the 2035 General Plan (County of San Benito 2015a) and associated EIR (County of San Benito 2015b), and other relevant documents. The draft and final deliverables for this objective will be in the form of draft SBCCP chapters. These documents will draw from the work completed under the first two objectives in this project narrative. Deliverables will be provided to CDFW and USFWS in Word format to facilitate comment and response to comments using the comment bubble feature in Microsoft Word. This will also allow the use of track changes so that agency staff



can readily see how the chapter text changes between versions. Figures, graphics, and model outputs will likely only be available as PDF files.

This objective will require consistent communication and coordination meetings with San Benito County staff, the selected consultant, USFWS, and CDFW, as well as circulating drafts of the SBCCP chapters for comment and review.

**Timetable for this task:** This objective will commence once County staff are notified of awarded fund and prior to the availability of funds and extend until the end of the grant.

*Scoping for the Environmental Compliance Document (CEQA/NEPA)*

This objective calls for initial internal scoping for the CEQA/NEPA documents to begin gathering information related to environmental and human resources and begin to identify significant environmental impacts that may occur and significant adverse impacts that cannot be eliminated by making changes in the project.

This objective will require an initial scoping meeting with San Benito County staff, the selected consultant, USFWS, and CDFW. During that meeting, general human and environmental resource areas will be discussed in relation to implementation of the SBCCP and the likelihood for significant impacts to occur to those various resources.

**Timetable for this task:** This objective will commence during year 3 of the grant cycle, but will not be completed as part of this application

**DESCRIPTION OF ENTITIES UNDERTAKING THE PROJECT**

<b>Stakeholder/Partner Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Contribution (cash or in-kind) to Plan Preparation</b>
City of Hollister	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Participation on steering committee
City of San Juan Bautista	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Participation on steering committee
Council of San Benito County Governments	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Participation on steering committee
Santa Clara County Habitat Agency	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Species input
San Benito County Water District	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Participation on steering committee
Sunnyslope Water District	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Participation on steering committee
Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
San Benito Resource Conservation District	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
Pajaro Compass Network	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input

San Benito Working Landscapes Group	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
San Benito County Farm Bureau	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
California FarmLink	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
San Benito Agricultural Land Trust	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
California Rangeland Trust	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
Caltrans	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Scientific input
Pinnacles National Park	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
U.S. Bureau of Land Management	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Scientific input
Natural Resource Conservation Service	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Species input
Trust of Public Land	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
The Nature Conservancy	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Scientific input
Point Blue Conservation Science	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Species input
California Native Plant Society	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Species input
REACH San Benito Parks Foundation	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
Sparling Ranch Conservation Bank	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
PORC	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Stakeholder input
Economic Development Council	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Participation on steering committee
San Benito Chamber of Commerce	Serve on Stakeholder Committee	Participation on steering committee
Private developers	Stakeholder	Stakeholder input
Private landowners	Stakeholder	Stakeholder input
County Residents	Stakeholder	Stakeholder input

#### **ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES/ EXPECTED BENEFITS**

The expected benefits of this grant proposal include: implementation of a regional approach to habitat conservation planning within San Benito County; partnering with landowners, conservation organizations, and other stakeholders to protect and enhance habitat for a variety of species across a network of natural lands and working agricultural lands; providing a process for the mitigation of impacts to biological resources from development activities within San Benito County; and providing regulatory streamlining opportunities while

promoting species conservation. The result will be a management strategy for the County of San Benito that balances the needs of multiple listed species as well as development and expansion need within the County. Development of the SBCCP will provide benefits to the community, species, and ecosystems and support priorities established by the Department of the Interior (see Program Priorities section below).

Public benefits include carbon sequestration, enhanced water quality, protection of viewsheds, biodiversity conservation, and protection of pollinator habitat which benefits surrounding farming communities. Passive recreation that is compatible with sensitive resources may also be permitted where consistent with the Plan. As expressed in San Benito County's General Plan (County of San Benito 2015a), a principal goal is to balance business and residential growth with maintaining the County's rich natural resources, valuable agricultural assets, active county character and historical heritage. The County is committed to protecting and preserving its natural resources which contribute to the local economy and are key elements in the quality of life for San Benito County residents. This element supports the balanced management and conservation of the County's open space, working landscapes, wildlife habitat, minerals, water, energy, scenic amenities, recreational resources, and cultural and historical heritage.

### **SPECIES BENEFITS**

The SBCCP is a comprehensive strategy to promote the long-term conservation and recovery of rare and special status plant and animal species in San Benito County. The SBCCP will contain specific and measurable biological goals and objectives, as well as conservation measures that will mitigate the impacts of covered activities and provide for the conservation of covered species. Development of the SBCCP will provide a more holistic analysis of impacts to listed species from future development than would be possible through a project-by-project approach. We expect the landscape level planning and conservation approach of the plan to benefit most species that occur in the County by identifying and protecting areas large enough to encompass a variety of habitat types and provide connectivity. This holistic analysis will afford a more meaningful reserve design to support conservation and recovery of listed species. Per the County's General Plan, the SBCCP will identify and protect wildlife movement corridors and critical habitat linkages to habitats within and outside the Plan Area, resulting in a network of protected lands large enough to support sustainable animal and plant populations while providing resilience if habitats shift in response to future climate change. This integrated reserve design will increase habitat value and lower land management costs on protected areas.

The SBCCP focuses on a total of thirteen species, including ten species that are Federally (and in most cases also State) listed, and three species considered "At-risk species" because they are currently under review for Federal listing. These species were chosen due to their rarity, current conservation status, and likelihood of impacts from future development. The following table lists the species and the expected benefits the SBCCP is expected to provide them:

<b>Covered Species</b>	<b>Expected Benefits</b>	<b>Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>California red-legged frog (Federally threatened; State Species of Special Concern)</b>	Preservation, restoration and enhancement of essential aquatic, upland, and dispersal habitat in the Diablo Range and Salinas Valley recovery	Medium	The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat contributing to the core area-based habitat recovery criterion.

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	<p>unit, including significant portions of three core recovery units and three critical habitat units.</p> <p>Protection and enhancement of sustainable, connected populations through implementation of management plans that remove nonnative predators, reduce disease risk, and other actions and may promote population expansion.</p> <p>Verification of population stability by monitoring protected populations for at least 15 years.</p>		<p>The SBCCP will protect multiple populations contributing to the range wide population recovery criterion and including monitoring to verify population stability.</p> <p>The SBCCP will increase connectivity between existing protected areas and help maintain viable metapopulations.</p> <p>The SBCCP will reduce multiple threats to known populations.</p>
<p><b>Foothill yellow-legged frog, West/Central Coast clade (Under Federal Review; State endangered)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration and enhancement of essential occupied and suitable perennial and intermittent stream, riparian, and upland habitat in southern and central San Benito County.</p> <p>Protection and enhancement of sustainable populations of the West-Central Coast clade of the species and enhancement of connectivity between known protected populations.</p> <p>The SBCCP may create opportunities for population reestablishment and</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat that may help preclude Federal listing or contribute to recovery if the species is Federally listed.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect existing populations that may help preclude Federal listing or contribute to recovery and will increase connectivity between existing occupied protected areas.</p> <p>The SBCCP may help expand and restore populations by improving habitat quality.</p> <p>The SBCCP will reduce multiple threats to known populations.</p>

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	<p>expansion by improving management of riparian habitats and flow regimes of historically occupied streams.</p> <p>Implementation of management plans that remove nonnative predators, reduce disease risk, and other actions.</p>		
<p><b>California tiger salamander, Central CA DPS (Federally Threatened; State Threatened)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration and enhancement of essential aquatic (stock ponds, vernal pools), upland, and dispersal habitat in substantial portion of the East Bay and smaller area of the Central Coast recovery units, including significant portions of four management units and four critical habitat units.</p> <p>Protect unique and connected vernal pool and sag pond breeding habitat along the San Andreas Fault system in southern San Benito County.</p> <p>Protection and possible expansion of existing populations and metapopulations with little or no current evidence of hybridization that preserve essential genetic and habitat diversity and in the range of the Central DPS.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat, including multiple areas meeting the definition of CTS Preserves contributing to the management area-based habitat recovery criterion.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance existing populations and metapopulations.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect multiple source populations that provide individuals for future emigration.</p> <p>The SBCCP will reduce multiple threats to known populations.</p>

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	Implementation of management plans that sustain fossorial mammal populations, remove nonnative predators, prevent, and reduce hybridization with nonnative tiger salamanders, and provide long-term monitoring.		
<b>Western spadefoot toad (Under Federal Review; State Species of Special Concern)</b>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of large blocks of western spadefoot toad aquatic (vernal pool, artificial pond) and upland habitat spatially distributed to provide landscape-level connectivity among protected habitats.</p> <p>Protection of unique vernal pool and sag pond habitat in San Benito County including a portion of the San Benito Core Area along the San Andreas Fault system in southern San Benito County and other areas of the Central Coast vernal pool region.</p> <p>Protection and enhancement of sustainable populations and metapopulations and enhancement of connectivity between protected populations.</p> <p>Implementation of management plans that preserve vernal pool hydrology, remove</p>	Medium	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat in the Central Coast vernal pool region that may help preclude Federal listing or contribute to recovery if the species is Federally listed.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect existing populations and metapopulations that may help preclude Federal listing or contribute to recovery and will increase connectivity between existing occupied areas.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect populations that are geographically unique and may help expand and restore populations by improving habitat quality.</p> <p>The SBCCP will reduce multiple threats to known populations.</p>

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	nonnative predators, and provide long-term monitoring.		
<b>Blunt-nosed leopard lizard (Federally Endangered; State Endangered and Fully Protected)</b>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of essential foothill grassland and shrub habitat in the foothills of the Ciervo-Panoche area spatially distributed to provide landscape-level connectivity.</p> <p>Protection of unique areas of occupied and suitable habitat at the western limit of the species' range in the Panoche and New Idria Valleys in eastern San Benito County.</p> <p>Protection of populations in the Ciervo-Panoche area that may be disjunct from Central Valley occurrences and represent important genetic diversity and local adaptation.</p> <p>Implementation of management plans that include monitoring and that will ensure a mean population density of one lizard per acre.</p>	Medium	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat contributing to the Ciervo-Panoche habitat protection recovery criterion.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance multiple populations meeting the 1 lizard/acre population density recovery criterion for protected habitats.</p> <p>The SBCCP will contribute to recovery by creating management and monitoring plans for all protected areas that will ensure compatible land use practices and maintain stable populations with target lizard densities.</p>
<b>Southwestern pond turtle (Under Federal Review; State Species of Special Concern)</b>	Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of large blocks of essential occupied and suitable aquatic (riverine, pond), upland, and intervening	Medium	The SBCCP will protect substantial areas of occupied and suitable habitat that may help preclude Federal listing or contribute to recovery if the species is Federally listed.

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	<p>linkage habitat across San Benito County.</p> <p>Protection of sustainable populations, enhancement of habitat quality, and improved connectivity between known protected populations and areas suitable for population expansion.</p> <p>Create a connected system of conservation lands that can accommodate future shifts in distribution in response to environmental changes, e.g. effects of climate change on the future distribution of western pond turtle aquatic and upland habitat.</p> <p>Implementation of land management plans that help protect and enhance upland nesting sites and linkage habitats, increase recruitment by removing nonnative predators, and reduce disease risk and other threats.</p>		<p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance existing populations that may help preclude Federal listing or contribute to recovery and will increase connectivity between existing occupied protected areas.</p> <p>The SBCCP may help expand and restore populations and population connectivity by improving habitat quality.</p> <p>The SBCCP will reduce threats to known populations.</p>
<p><b>San Joaquin kit fox (Federally Endangered; State Threatened)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of essential occupied and suitable unoccupied foothill grassland habitat in eastern San Benito County within the Ciervo-Panoche core area, spatially distributed to provide landscape-level</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat contributing to the Ciervo-Panoche habitat protection recovery criterion.</p> <p>The SBCCP will enhance habitat connectivity in the Ciervo-Panoche core area that may</p>



Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	<p>connectivity that may allow expansion of populations into unoccupied habitat.</p> <p>Preservation and restoration of suitable unoccupied historical foothill grassland habitat in other areas of the County that may support future occupancy.</p> <p>Create a connected system of conservation lands that can accommodate future shifts in distribution in response to environmental changes (e.g., effects of climate change on future distribution of San Joaquin kit fox habitat).</p> <p>Implementation of management and monitoring plans to maintain stable or increasing populations in the Ciervo-Panoche core area, promote population interchange with satellite populations, and reduce threats from rodenticides and other sources.</p>		<p>improve population interchange with satellite populations.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance existing populations contributing to recovery in the Ciervo-Panoche core area.</p> <p>The SBCCP will contribute to recovery by creating management and monitoring plans for protected areas that will help maintain stable or increasing populations and reduce threats.</p>
<p><b>Giant kangaroo rat (Federally Endangered; State Endangered)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of essential occupied and suitable unoccupied foothill grassland habitat and fallowed croplands in eastern San Benito County within the Panoche Region recovery</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat contributing to the 80-90 percent overall Panoche Region habitat protection recovery criterion.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance existing populations</p>

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	<p>area, spatially distributed to provide landscape-level connectivity that may allow expansion of populations into unoccupied habitat in the species' genetically distinct northern range.</p> <p>Create a connected system of conservation lands that can accommodate future shifts in distribution in response to environmental changes (e.g., effects of climate change on future distribution of giant kangaroo rat habitat).</p> <p>Implementation of management and monitoring plans to maintain stable or increasing populations in the Panoche Region, promote grazing regimes favorable to giant kangaroo rat habitat quality, and reduce threats from incompatible land uses, rodenticides, and other sources.</p>		<p>contributing to recovery in the Panoche Region.</p> <p>The SBCCP will contribute to recovery by creating management and monitoring plans for protected areas that will help maintain stable or increasing populations, promote population interchange, and reduce threats.</p>
<p><b>California Condor (Federally Endangered; State Endangered and Fully Protected)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of critical foraging, roosting, and nesting habitat essential to condor recovery in the region around the Pinnacles National Park condor release site.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance essential recovery areas providing verified foraging, roosting, and potential nesting habitat in the vicinity of the Pinnacles NP release site.</p> <p>The SBCCP will promote the stability and future expansion of the Pinnacles-based condor flock.</p>

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	<p>Promote the stability and future expansion of the Pinnacles-based condor population.</p> <p>Development of management plans in collaboration with rural landowners and other partners to enhance condor foraging opportunities, reduce threats from lead contamination, and support ongoing monitoring.</p>		<p>The SBCCP will promote compatible land use practices and reduce threats in an area critical to the species' recovery.</p>
<p><b>Least Bell's Vireo (Federally Endangered, State Endangered)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of suitable riparian breeding habitat along the Pajaro, San Benito, and other stream systems that may promote recolonization of historically occupied least Bell's vireo range in the future.</p> <p>Development of management plans in areas recolonized by the species in the future that will reduce threats from cowbird parasitism, invasive plants, and other sources and include monitoring to verify and support population stability and expansion.</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance significant riparian habitats that may promote future reestablishment of breeding populations in historically occupied areas.</p> <p>The SBCCP will contribute to recovery if least Bell's vireos recolonize unoccupied protected areas by establishing management and monitoring plans to reduce threats and maintain stable and increasing populations.</p>
<p><b>Vernal pool fairy shrimp (Federally threatened)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of essential vernal pool habitat spatially distributed to provide</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of occupied and suitable habitat contributing to the core area-based 85% habitat recovery criterion.</p>

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
	<p>landscape-level connectivity.</p> <p>Protection of significant areas of occupied and suitable vernal pool and sag pond habitat in San Benito County, including a portion of the San Benito Core Area along the San Andreas Fault system in southern San Benito County and other areas of the Central Coast vernal pool region.</p> <p>Protection of populations that are disjunct from Great Central Valley occurrences as specified in the critical habitat rule.</p> <p>Ameliorate the threat of habitat loss in a region that has experienced historic loss of large vernal pool complexes as specified in the final critical habitat rule.</p>		<p>The SBCCP will protect and enhance multiple populations contributing to the range wide 80% population recovery criterion.</p> <p>The SBCCP will protect populations that are geographically unique in the species' range.</p> <p>The SBCCP will reduce threats of habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation.</p>
<p><b>Vernal Pool Tadpole Shrimp (Federally Endangered)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of essential vernal pool habitat spatially distributed to provide landscape-level connectivity and support potential range expansion if new occurrences are found.</p> <p>Ameliorate the threat of habitat loss in a region that has experienced historic loss of large vernal pool complexes.</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect significant areas of suitable vernal pool habitat that may contribute to the 80% range wide occurrence protection recovery criterion if additional occurrences are discovered.</p> <p>The SBCCP will reduce threats of habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation if additional occurrences are discovered.</p>

Covered Species	Expected Benefits	Degree of Benefit (low, medium, high)	Justification
<p><b>San Joaquin Woolly-Threads (Federally Endangered)</b></p>	<p>Preservation, restoration, and enhancement of essential foothill grassland and scrub habitat in southeastern San Benito County spatially distributed to provide landscape-level connectivity and support metapopulations.</p> <p>Protection of populations at the northwestern limit of the species' range that may represent important genetic diversity and local adaptation.</p> <p>Create a connected system of conservation lands that can accommodate future shifts in distribution in response to environmental changes, e.g. effects of climate change on the future distribution of suitable habitat.</p> <p>Implementation of land management plans that promote stable and increasing populations through compatible grazing and invasive plant removal.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The SBCCP will protect occupied habitat contributing to the site-specific recovery criterion of protecting 95% of occupied habitat on protected lands in the Panoche Hills recovery area.</p> <p>The SBCCP will implement management and monitoring plans for protected areas to ensure stable and increasing populations and reduction of threats.</p>

**TIMETABLE** – Provided above in “METHODS/APPROACH/TIMETABLE” section.

**LOCATION/MAPS**

San Benito County encompasses over 890,000 acres in the inner Coast Range Mountains of central coastal California, south of San Jose and west of the Central Valley (see Figure 1). The County is surrounded by Monterey County to the west, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties to the north, and Merced and Fresno

Counties to the east and south. The County is largely rural with approximately 98 percent unincorporated lands, the majority of which are in cropland, rangeland, forest, or protected open space.

The County is topographically diverse, encompassing mountains, gently sloping foothills, rich agricultural valleys, and urban areas. Elevations range from 80 feet near Aromas in the northern part of the County to 5,241 feet at the top of San Benito Mountain to the south. The majority of the Plan Area lies within the Pajaro River watershed, which covers approximately 1,300 square miles and is bound by the Santa Cruz Mountains to the North and Gabilan Range to the South. The Pajaro River drains into Monterey Bay and its main tributaries are Corralitos, Uvas, Llagas, San Benito, Pacheco, and Santa Ana creeks.

Habitat types in the Plan Area include large areas of annual grassland and grassland savannah, shrublands including chaparral and coastal sage scrub, blue oak and other woodlands, agricultural croplands, and riparian and aquatic habitats including rivers and creeks, marshes, vernal pools and seeps, and other wetlands. These habitat types support a diverse range of native plants and animals, including providing essential habitat for the covered species.

### **INFORMATION TO SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE REVIEW REQUIREMENTS**

The USFWS is responsible for making the final determination regarding compliance with other Federal laws including: National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act. Throughout the process of developing the SBCCP, the USFWS will work with San Benito County to develop documents that will comply with these other Federal laws.

#### **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**

After completion of the SBCCP, the County and USFWS will work together to develop an appropriate level document to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act.

#### **Endangered Species Act (ESA)**

One objective of developing the joint HCP/NCCP is issuance of an incidental take permit that would comply with both the Federal and State Endangered Species Acts. As required by both Endangered Species Acts, as well as other species protection laws, the SBCCP will include several conditions on covered activities that are designed to avoid or minimize take. These conditions on covered activities (also called avoidance and minimization measures) will be developed based on existing conditions throughout the plan area and the best available science.

#### **National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)**

While only three percent of the land area of San Benito County has been surveyed for cultural resources, over 1,300 cultural sites have been documented, including over 500 prehistoric and historic archeological sites and over 850 historic buildings. Preserving these resources is important and their protection needs to be considered during the planning, permitting, and construction of any new development. The San Benito County General Plan and associated EIR has identified various ways to protect, preserve, and enhance the cultural and historic resources within the County. USFWS will work with San Benito County RMA staff to ensure compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act.

### **DATA MANAGEMENT AND SHARING**

Project data and files will be housed on OneDrive that will facilitate sharing of project data and resources, as well as draft documents for review. Deliverables will be provided to CDFW and USFWS in Word format to facilitate commenting and response to comments using the comment bubble feature in Microsoft Word. This

will also allow the use of track changes so that agency staff can readily see how the chapter text changes between versions. Figures, graphics, and model outputs will likely only be available as PDF files.

Project data will be analyzed by all parties involved in the process in a group format. This information will also be shared with stakeholders to help with project scoping and to keep the local community apprised of the progress of SBCCP development. Project data will be made available through existing San Benito County webpages.

### **PROGRAM PRIORITIES**

The 2021 HCPPA Notice of Funding Opportunity Application provides the following guidelines:

“The Section 6 cooperative agreements entered into by the States and Service reflect a common commitment to actively advance the purpose and policies of the ESA, including providing a means to foster relationships with public and private partners, reduce conflicts between listed species and economic development activities, and promote long-term conservation of listed species and the ecosystems on which they depend. The grants authorized through Section 6 encourage the cooperative implementation of the ESA by leveraging Federal investment in species recovery and demonstrate the Service’s commitment to cooperative conservation at the local level.”

The Notice also calls out two Department of Interior Priorities for Federal Financial Assistance that the San Benito County HCPPA Project addresses, as described below:

Priority 1: Restoring trust with local communities - Expand the lines of communication with Governors, state natural resource offices, Fish and Wildlife offices, water authorities, county commissioners, Tribes, and local communities.

- Development of a countywide HCP/NCCP document will yield an exceptional conservation outcome and will also aid in partnerships with the local community which will lead to opportunities (funding, supporting working lands) that incentivize conservation in an environment built on trust.
- The San Benito County Conservation Plan is one of many efforts within the region to coordinate conservation efforts with scientific and land management partners.
- A successful conservation project of this kind would demonstrate the existence of practical, effective ways to deal with the difficult conservation challenges of imperiled species.
- Development of the SBCCP will provide a clear regulatory process that will ensure public and private actions are governed equally and consistently.

Priority 2: Striking a regulatory balance - Ensure that Endangered Species Act decisions are based on strong science and thorough analysis.

- The San Benito County HCPPA Project would facilitate conservation transactions that proactively deal with the challenges of achieving recovery of listed species in a landscape where many remaining high-quality habitats are under private ownership. The Project represents creative thinking and collaborative cooperation between State and Federal wildlife agencies, to develop new, practical solutions that accomplish regulatory goals through strong incentives.
- Development of the SBCCP will provide a more efficient and effective permitting process by streamlining regulatory processes, which will provide clear expectations and regulatory predictability for land users and conservation efforts related to the covered species and associated natural communities within San Benito County.

- Providing a streamlined regulatory process will reduce delays, expenses, and regulatory duplication.

### **BUDGET NARRATIVE**

The total projected cost to develop the joint HCP/NCCP (referred to as the San Benito County Conservation Plan [SBCCP]) and begin drafting the environmental compliance document is \$1,319,054 which includes funding for a third-party contractor to develop the draft chapters of the documents.

- *External Contracts (\$): \$976,100*

An external contract will be extended to the County of San Benito, and the County will subcontract to one or more consultants.

- *In-Kind Match (\$): \$342,954*

The San Benito County Planning Department is proposing to expend up to \$342,954 in match funding during the time from when award recipients are announced to the receipt of award funds, and request that these funds be accepted as non-Federal match for Objectives 1 and 2 listed herein and in the attached Budget Worksheet. Ideally, the tasks associated with these Objectives would be paid for during the grant term, but it is a priority of County staff to commence scoping and public outreach immediately to inform the SBCCP analysis and enable public support of the plan. Thus, we request that up to \$260,000 expended prior to the grant award and contract in Year 1 serve as pre-award non-Federal match for the proposed San Benito County HCP Planning Assistance proposal.

The non-Federal match funding source is San Benito County adopted County Ordinance number 541. The County developed and implemented this ordinance for the purpose of providing financial support for development and implementation of a county-wide Habitat Conservation Plan. The non-Federal match is not generated from Federally required mitigation. If full funding is not available, partial funding would still contribute toward achieving the overall objectives associated with the development of the SBCCP.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE**

This application does not contain any actual or potential conflict of interest at the time of submission. This includes any relationship or matter that might place the recipient, direct or indirect financial interests, circumstances real or perceived that would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question the impartiality.

### **SINGLE AUDIT REPORTING STATEMENT**

CDFW submitted a Single Audit Report to the California Department of Finance (DOF) for the most recently closed Fiscal Year. DOF compiles and submits a single Audit Report on behalf of the State of California. The report (#719482) is available on the DOF website, located here:

[http://www.dof.ca.gov/Programs/OSAE/Audit\\_Reports/California\\_Audits\\_and\\_Accountability\\_Reports/](http://www.dof.ca.gov/Programs/OSAE/Audit_Reports/California_Audits_and_Accountability_Reports/)

### **INDIRECT COST STATEMENT**

CDFW is a U.S. State government entity receiving more than \$35 million in direct Federal funding each year. The indirect cost rate proposals are submitted to the U.S. Department of the Interior. Currently, the approved FY19/20 rate is 27.16%. The FY21/22 rate proposal will be submitted for approval and is subject to change.

### **OVERLAP OR DUPLICATION OF EFFORT STATEMENT**

There are no overlaps or duplication between this application and any other Federal applications or funded projects, including regarding activities, costs, or time commitment of key personnel.



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**PREPARED BY: Arielle Goodspeed, Rachel Henry, Mark Ogonowski**

**DATE: February 12, 2021**

Figure 1: San Benito County Conservation Plan, Plan Area



Figure 2: New Community Study Areas

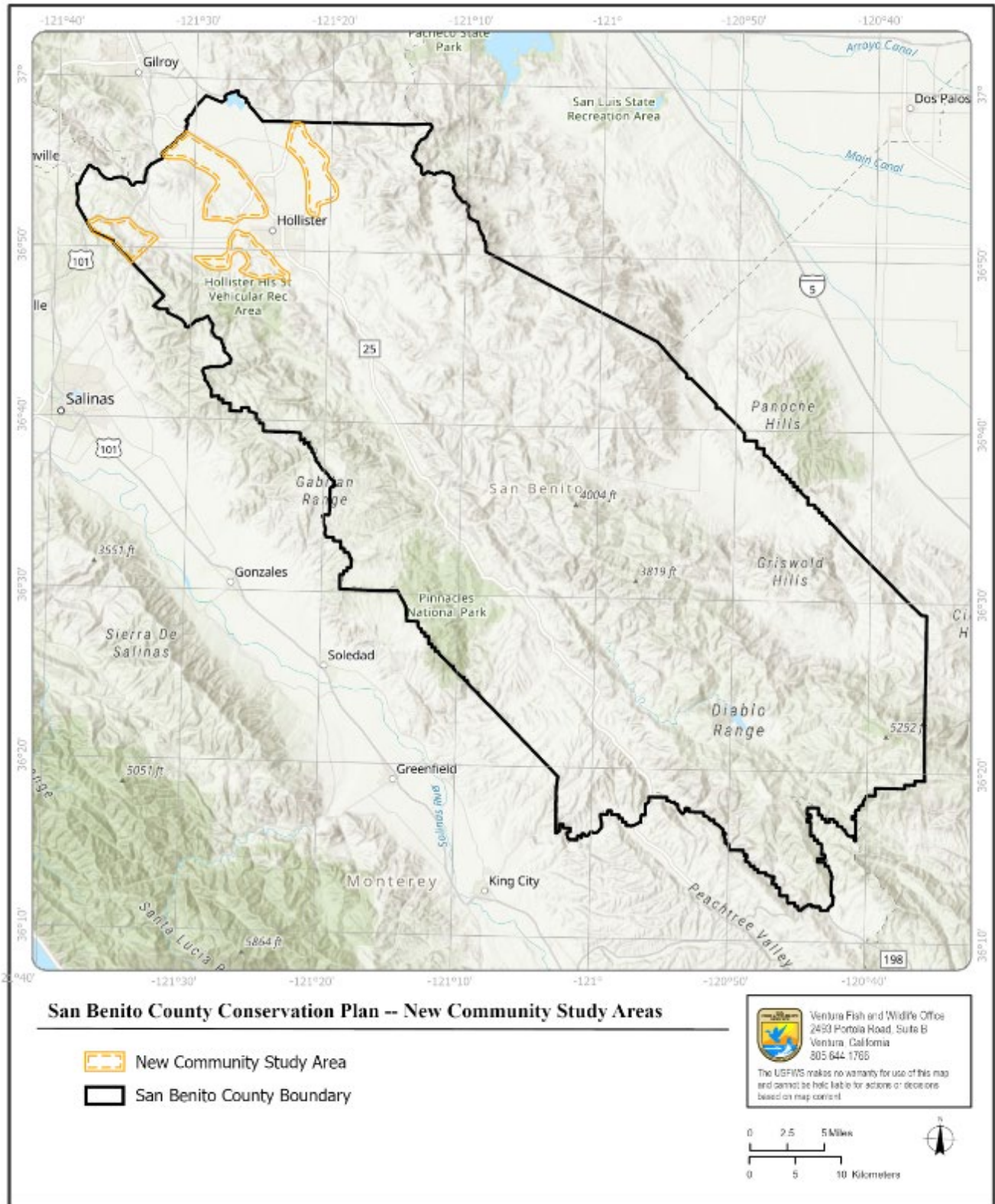


Figure 3: CNDDB Covered Species

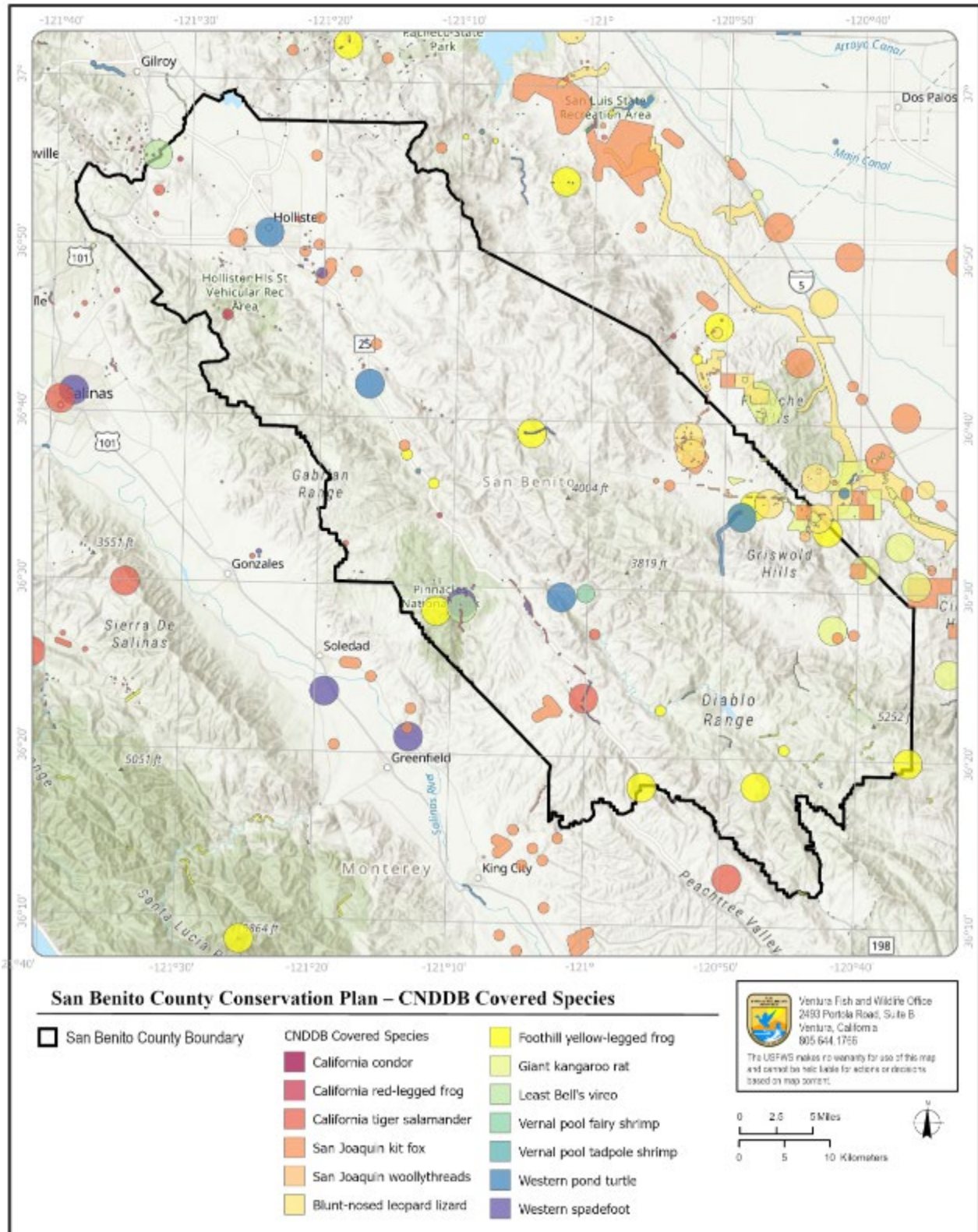


Figure 4: Habitat Types

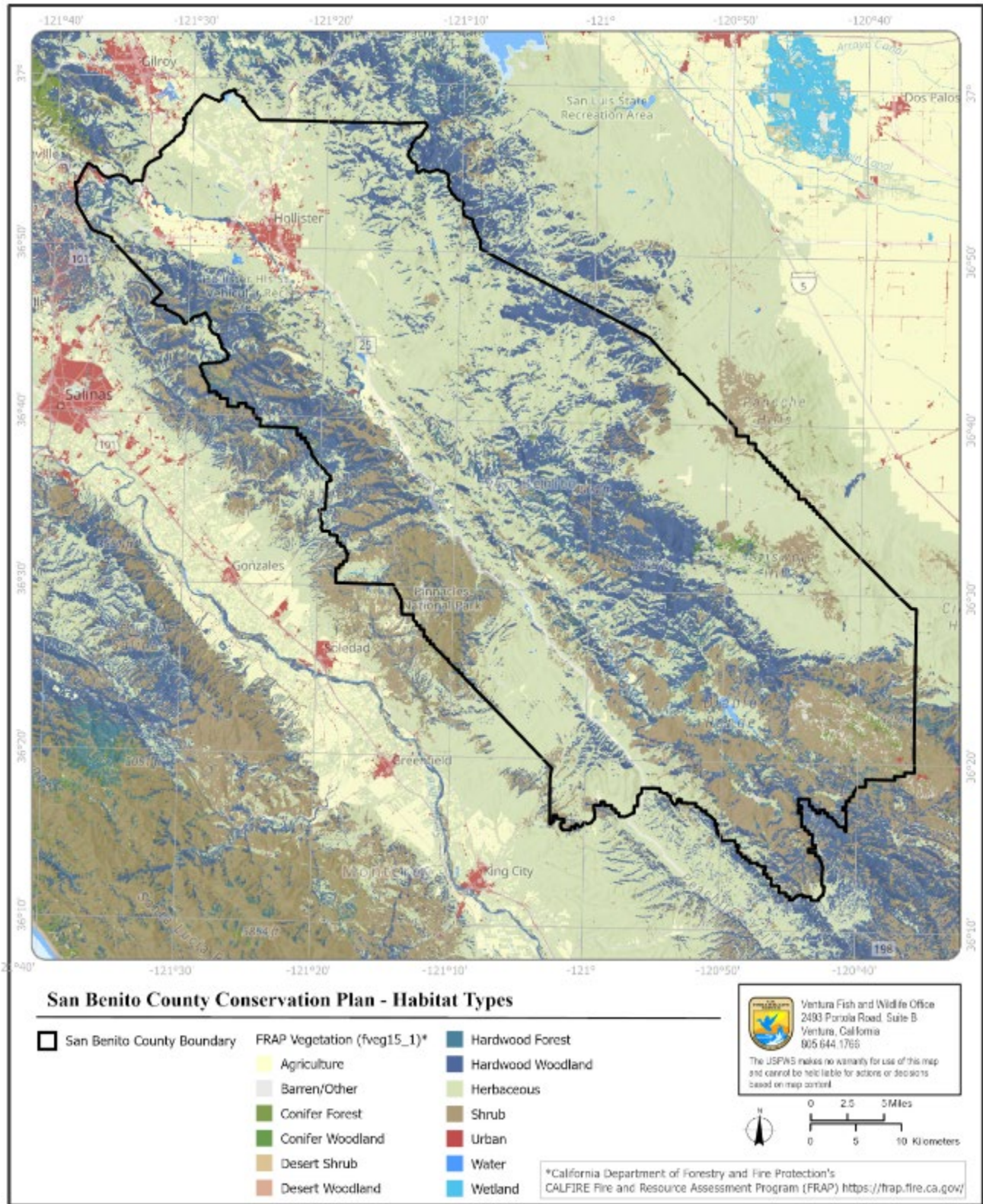


Figure 5: Habitat Connectivity

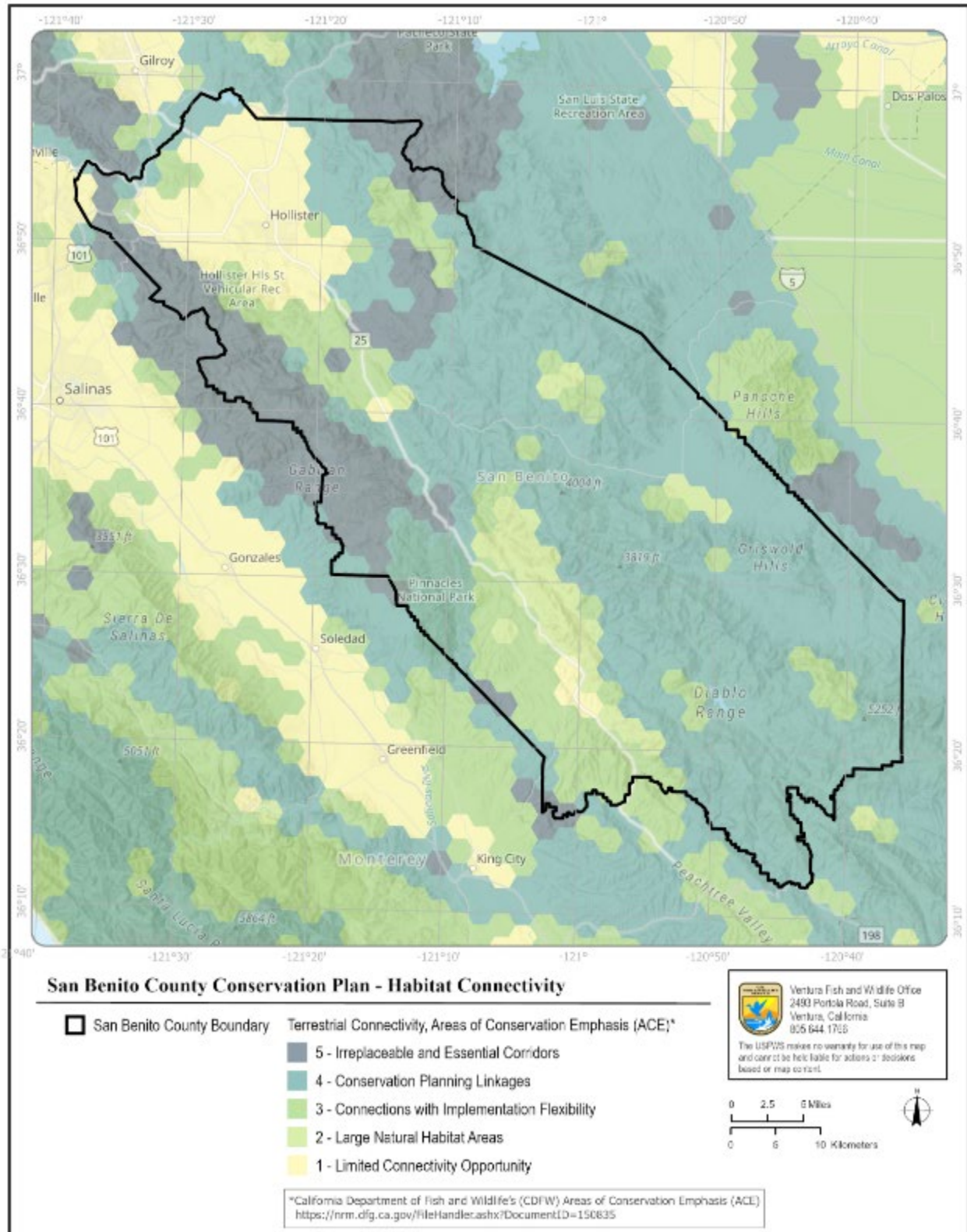


Figure 6: Climate Resilience

