



Memorandum

To: Board of Directors
From: Michael Zeller, Principal Transportation Planner
Meeting Date: October 24, 2018
Subject: Regional Conservation Investment Strategy Best Practice

On October 2, 2018, I attended the Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) Best Practice Workshop in Sacramento, California hosted by the Nature Conservancy. With the Transportation Agency recently being awarded a Caltrans Adaptation Planning Grant to prepare a Monterey County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy, this workshop provided an excellent opportunity to meet and learn from representatives of other agencies that have already prepared an RCIS, hear the perspectives from the State regulatory agencies, and become more familiar with the latest issues related to the best practices for developing an RCIS.

During the opening presentation, Rick Macedo and Ron Unger from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife provided a brief overview of the RCIS program and discussed the strategic vision and desired outcomes for the program. They discussed that this as an important new tool for conservation planning and land use planning in general. The program was established with the passage of Assembly Bill 2087 in the fall of 2016 and has garnished a great deal of interest thus far.

An important outcome that was discussed is that a RCIS enables advance mitigation credits in the form of mitigation credit agreements (MCA) that are intended to enable the sale and exchange of credits for conservation and habitat enhancement actions that are grounded in the ecologically-based assessments and regional conservation strategy, and that provide advance mitigation credits for project impacts.

After the opening presentations, I participated in group exercises to review and discuss best practices for developing a RCIS. The topics discussed included:

- Multi-Agency Engagement: How do RCIS proponents encourage engagement with and enable interplay among different agencies with different primary missions so that the RCIS can incorporate multiple agencies' priorities and perspectives?
- Interplay between Regulatory tools: How do all the tools in the marketplace work together with an RCIS? For example: Habitat Conservation Plans, Mitigation Banks, and In Lieu Fee Programs.
- Transition from an RCIS to an MCA stage: How to ensure that the RCIS is set up to easily transition into/facilitate MCA investments
- RCIS Design: How to design an RCIS for effective implementation.

Several key takeaways from these discussions that will be directly applicable to the development of a Monterey County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy include:

- Establishing a broad coalition of stakeholders and engaging with them early in the process to ensure coordination and the incorporation of priorities from agencies with distinct roles, such as Caltrans and the California Department of Fish and Game;
- Identifying ways to utilize mitigation credit agreements with other regulatory tools, such as in lieu fees and mitigation banks, to broaden the applicability to different permitting agencies; and
- Defining the RCIS area boundary broadly enough for ecological reasons and in consideration of where potential mitigation credit agreements will be to facilitate implementation.