

October 15, 2015

Subject: Integrated Regional Conservation and Development

Quarter: 3rd Quarter 2015

Reporting Period: July 2015-October 2015

Staff Lead: Dennis Grossman

Recommended Action:

For information only – no action required.

Background:

The Strategic Growth Council passed a resolution on Oct 6, 2014 to “coordinate state agencies for the development and implementation of an Integrated Regional Planning approach to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of regional development and natural resource conservation in California”. This initiative is called the Integrated Regional Conservation and Development (IRCAD) program. A number of activities have significantly advanced this initiative over this past year. The California Biodiversity Council (CBC) then passed a resolution to partner with the Strategic Growth Council in support of this initiative. The CBC has defined its initial roles and responsibilities as including:

1. Participation in the development of regional conservation planning framework and methods.
2. Sharing relevant datasets, analytical tools, and other information needed to carry out regional conservation assessments.
3. Engagement in regional conservation planning demonstration projects to demonstrate the process and value of the IRCAD approach.
4. Advance a long term partnership agreement with the SGC for program development and implementation.

Update:

As part of this effort, a multi-agency Methodology Working Group has been formed to develop a framework and standardized implementation approach for regional conservation assessments. This group includes representatives from Caltrans, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, CA Department of Conservation, CA Department of Water Resources, California Energy Commission, California Department of Food and Agriculture, US Fish and Wildlife Service, UC-Davis, and The Nature Conservancy. This group will also document how regional conservation assessments can be used to ensure that development activities avoid, minimize and strategically mitigate impacts.

The group is currently reviewing regional conservation assessment methods that have been developed and applied, looking at the availability of statewide data that is needed to implement these methods, and will be proposing an efficient approach for this work in California. A high level methods framework report will be completed this fall.

Creation of a Spatial Inventory

A significant amount of conservation planning work has already been carried out across California, which is currently being used to guide development. The IRCAD program is committed to building on these past efforts to standardize regional conservation and development assessments. To support this approach, the SGC is also coordinating a CA Conservation Lands Study to provide a spatial inventory that demonstrates where conservation projects have occurred across the state, what types of information were included in each study, what products were created, and how these products have been used. This information will inform the development of implementation strategies that will result in standardized regional conservation assessments. The initial results from the Conservation Lands Study will be completed this fall.

Demonstration Projects

Demonstration projects are being advanced to demonstrate the importance of regional scale assessments, and the increased efficiency of the IRCAD approach for the implementation of priority development projects through the advancement of priority conservation outcomes. The most advanced demonstration project includes multiple Southern California sections of the High Speed Rail program between the future stations of Bakersfield, Palmdale and Burbank. Additional demonstration projects have been identified, and will be integrated into IRCAD program implementation over the next year.

Technology Support

The SGC has been working with the CA Office of Technology to acquire technology services that will support the implementation of the IRCAD program. The Conservation Biology Institute was selected to support this initiative using their web based technology platform, Data Basin (www.databasin.org). Program partners and demonstration projects are now using Data Basin to integrate, manage, analyze and report their spatial information. Over 200 spatial datasets have now been integrated into the system to date, which are broadly available for viewing, analysis and download. Additional information, functions and application tools are being identified to ensure broad implementation of this program by all stakeholders.