

**Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Coalition (WHCC)**  
**Position Statement on a Regional Funding Source for Conservation**  
**Revised October 6, 2017**

**I. Objective**

The objective is to secure funds to address the identified gap in conservation funding necessary to support the adopted/planned regional conservation plans for the San Diego region. This includes additional land acquisition and conserved lands management/monitoring. Currently, two of four plans have been completed. In 2010, the funding gap for all four plans was estimated by the EMP (Environmental Mitigation Program) Working Group of SANDAG to be \$2B over the assumed 40 years of a tax measure (or \$ 3B to fund management and monitoring in perpetuity).

**II. Long Term Considerations/Actions Needed to Secure Full Funding**

**There are several potential funding mechanisms.**

There are several potential ways a sufficient county-wide funding source could be established. The primary candidates are another county-wide sales tax, parcel tax, parcel transfer tax, or an earmark of existing funds. Each of these has advantages and disadvantages. It is unclear what impact the new CA Supreme Court decision that only a simple majority is needed for citizen-sponsored initiatives might have on the viability of any new tax measure. We are not aware of any polling that has adequately tested funding options or elements of a new tax measure that would increase the chances for success. Pieces of this have been polled - SANDAG first decided on a funding mechanism and then polled components; water quality polls well. A recent poll for the Newland Sierra development found good support for alternative transportation but didn't poll costs. More polling is needed before proceeding with a new ballot measure. See the attachment for summary of several potential funding sources.

**More coalition building needed.**

The conservation community alone does not have the capacity to mount a successful measure on its own. Successful measures (particularly, the 2016 Measure A in LA) to date relied on broad coalitions that built consensus on core community concerns, a broader more inclusive funding package (i.e., developed parks and conservation open space funding), and an approach for how to address them. The San Diego region has several such coalitions that could strategize collectively to meet the funding needs. The October Eco Summit is an opportunity to explore how this might work in our region. Substantial effort is needed to build effective coalitions – especially broad-based ones incorporating several community issues. Affordable housing, parks, urban forests, water quality, and transportation alternatives are issues that might provide a framework for successful coalition building. Broadening the focus builds more political support, community support, and can integrate social justice concerns. We are committed to participating in and fostering such coalition work.

**Need a stable and reliable lead agency/entity to sponsor ballot measure(s).**

SANDAG is currently facing scrutiny over mismanagement of the transportation program and Public Records Act requests and therefore may not be positioned to lead this effort. This may be true for years, even if there is the political will for a SANDAG-led ballot measure and the measure is not tied to other issues that many of us would object to (like the climate damaging

components of Measure A on San Diego's 2016 ballot). The County Board of Supervisors could sponsor such a ballot measure. But, there is the same problem with lack of political will and what else they would include in a funding package. County Parks was the lead agency in LA. We need a strategic lead agency/entity and have yet to identify who that might be.

As to SANDAG, the WHCC should not dismiss it as a possible lead agency. If other funding mechanisms show over time to offer insufficient projected revenues for conserved lands or prove to be too difficult to get political support or public approval for, then SANDAG may ultimately prove to be essential to effecting a long-term regional funding source. With this in mind, we recommend that the WHCC and allies reach out to SANDAG's new executive director to inform him/her of WHCC's interest in the EMP. This may be an appropriate opportunity to start to collaborate with SANDAG on an extension of the Transnet long-term regional funding source, while endeavoring to address the concerns of all the WHCC members.

Further, if there is significant reform of SANDAG under AB 805, then new opportunities may emerge.

### **Need for public education.**

We have not developed a compelling story for why our region needs billions of dollars in conservation funding. That is one key component of success that we can really take the lead on. We need a comprehensive plan to come up with the resources to make this happen.

### **Timing is everything.**

The successful 2016 LA ballot measure followed a 2014 measure that failed. They learned from their mistakes and took the time needed to build coalitions, political support, and community engagement (3,000 community meetings). We are just getting started and several other funding measures are already likely on the 2018 ballot. There are compelling reasons for planning a conservation lands ballot measure for 2020 instead of 2018. If a ballot measure arises that is conducive to a coalition effort, we should consider that as well.

## **III. Short Term Considerations/Actions**

### **Several actions can be taken to help reduce the regional funding gap.**

Foremost is to make sure the to-be-completed Natural Communities Conservation Plans (NCCPs) include full funding and do not contribute further to the gap. We have learned the lesson that deferring funding provides no certainty, though future NCCP/HCP take permits may still be issued without a guarantee of adequate regional funding. The concept of "rough step" preserve assembly happening concurrently and proportionate to habitat loss needs to also apply to providing full funding needed to implement the conservation plans.

Efforts to secure funds in ways that do not require voter approval all need to continue to be developed. For example, securing application of Cap and Trade funds to habitat conservation; having the potential 2018 housing ballot measure include proportionate share of funding for parks and open space for all housing units added; exploring California Coastal Commission/Coastal Conservancy funding for conserved lands within the coastal zone; and evaluating and pursuing other land acquisition funding through governmental and private donors, supporting the 2018 park bond, etc.

### **Prepare better foundational research.**

LA's tax measure was seen as reasonable because their Strategic Plan had identified funding need as 10x higher than what they requested – making their proposed tax a modest step in solving a recognized larger problem. We know the costs for the minimum conservation funding to meet the objectives of the NCCPs - but those costs do not include the full costs of needed enhancements, adaptive management, or any response to climate change. The San Diego Foundation has done some foundational research on inequities in access to parks and green space, but no costs were associated with that. The Trust for Public Land has a comparison scorecard on parks for the 100 largest cities in the U.S. which covers part of our region [www.parkscore.tpl.org](http://www.parkscore.tpl.org). More foundational research is needed that includes the full amount of funds required to address known problems. Such research should address key components of a broader strategy than just natural lands.

### **Find ways to engage active recreationists.**

Because there is increasing demand on ever-decreasing acres of open space, the conservation community often finds itself at odds with the advocates for the active recreation stakeholder groups. The conservation community's history of confronting these advocates over reducing the damage from mountain biking and other active recreational uses on conserved lands has adversely affected the conservation community's ability to gain these advocates' support over mutual interests. The WHCC seeks opportunities to work and dialog with active recreationists on our mutual interests. Together, we could forge a powerful advocacy group for funding more land acquisition and management/monitoring as the key way for recreationists and conservationists to gain respectively access to more active recreation areas and conservation and effective management of more ecologically sensitive acreage.

### **Find and Cultivate One or More Local Champions.**

This was another key to LA's success. We need to find and cultivate those aspiring or existing elected officials who are connected to our issues in a way that will motivate them to become effective political champions – for our issues and for those of a broader coalition.

## **IV. Other Related Issues**

### **Historic Differences Over How to Address this Issue**

In 2004, with the last Transnet sales tax measure and again in 2016 with Measure A, splits in the environmental community significantly impacted the results. If the lack of unity continues, it will compromise the ability of a future measure to succeed. We need to better understand each other's priorities and concerns and then work to unite us in achieving those priorities through compatible overarching goals.