

Conservancy Work Plan: 2017 Summary and 2018 Work Plan

Task	Actions Taken in 2017	Actions Proposed for 2018
Program Administration (General)		
<p>1</p> <p>Increase public awareness of the Plan and provide opportunities for involvement in the implementation of the Plan by the public, interested agencies, and others.</p>	<p>Public Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings were held quarterly. Conservancy staff conducted individual outreach to increase committee member meeting attendance. The Conservancy continued to publicize activities via its website and email lists.</p> <p>Staff conducted a PAC composition review at the referral of the Governing Board. As a result, in attempts to increase committee engagement a new attendance policy was developed and implemented.</p> <p>Created the 2016 Year in Review document to accompany the 2016 Annual Report which provides a graphical, easy-to-digest summary of Plan status and accomplishments related to project permitting, wetland coordination, land acquisition, habitat restoration and creation, funding, and partners. The document was made available electronically on the Conservancy’s website and noticed by email. Hard copies of the document were provided to local agency planning departments and partner agencies.</p> <p>Staff held 10 Year Anniversary Celebration at Roddy Ranch. There were over 120 attendees including agency partners, stakeholder partners and members of the public.</p> <p>As a part of the Conservancy 10 Year anniversary celebrations, staff coordinated 8 public hikes on Preserve System properties led by partners at Save Mount Diablo, Nomad Ecology, and California Native Plant Society.</p> <p>Staff coordinated with EBRPD to install “Preserved Forever” signs in the Vasco Corridor that are visible from both the north and south-bound directions.</p> <p>The Conservancy was featured in several news articles on land acquisitions and projects in East Contra Costa County including mentions in the East County Today and Regional in Nature.</p>	<p>PAC meetings will continue to be held quarterly with a field trip/site visit in the spring. Staff will continue to monitor PAC attendance and increase communication to enhance committee engagement.</p> <p>Conservancy will continue using the website to communicate with the public. Staff will pursue greater media coverage of Plan activities to improve awareness by the public at-large.</p> <p>A “Year in Review” document will be prepared for 2017 to accompany the 2017 annual report.</p> <p>Conservancy staff will continue to organize resource identification field trips for land managers. Staff will coordinate with Save Mount Diablo on opportunities for docent led hikes on the Conservancy Preserve.</p> <p>Staff and the PAC will review applications for the Conservancy Science and Research Grant Program, award grant funding according to the RFP, and review project progress on a bi-annual basis.</p> <p>Staff will coordinate with partner agencies to develop press releases as opportunities present themselves.</p> <p>Staff will coordinate and collaborate with Save Mount Diablo and East Bay Regional Park District on property hikes, events, and volunteer opportunities.</p>

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		<p>Conservancy PAC and Governing Board successfully released an RFP for the ECCC Habitat Conservancy Science and Research Grant Program in 2016 and received multiple proposals. The decision was made to fund two projects that funding round. Of those awarded, only one project moved forward. The PAC reviewed the RFP and evaluation criteria at its February and August 2017 meetings and developed a revised RFP that was approved at the October Governing Board meeting.</p>	
2	<p>Develop a Conservancy Volunteer Program and Implement Volunteer Activities.</p>	<p>Staff collaborated with Save Mount Diablo staff and volunteers to implement and monitor the Irish Canyon Restoration Project and collect and install plant material for the Ang Riparian Restoration Project.</p>	<p>Staff will continue to coordinate with Save Mount Diablo and other volunteer groups and organizations to implement plant material collection and plant maintenance in restoration sites.</p>
3	<p>Develop and maintain annual budgets and work plans. Prepare and submit an annual report to CDFW and USFWS.</p>	<p>Conservancy Staff prepared the 2018 annual budget and the 2018 Work Plan for Board discussion in December 2017. Conservancy prepared and published the 2016 Annual Report in the spring of 2017.</p>	<p>Conservancy Staff will prepare the 2019 annual budget and 2019 Work Plan for Board discussion in December 2018. The 2019 versions of these documents will be prepared for Board consideration in December 2018. Conservancy will also prepare and publish the 2017 Annual Report.</p>
4	<p>Calculate the amounts of automatic annual fee adjustments and distribute these calculations to Permittees by March 15 of each year, in accordance with Chapter 9 of the HCP/NCCP.</p>	<p>The calculations for the 2017 automatic annual fee adjustments were performed and applied to the Conservancy's fee schedule and the cities/County fee schedule (the schedules are currently different with respect to wetland fees because the Conservancy approved the 2011 Periodic Fee Audit in July 2011 but action by cities and the county on fees is pending). In July 2012, the Conservancy Board determined to commission a second periodic fee audit. That audit was released for public review in December 2012 and was considered by the Board in January 2013 and April 2013. The Board approved the 2012 Audit in July 2013 and made a recommendation to the cities/County on fees.</p> <p>Urban Economics conducted the Year-Ten Fee Audit and Nexus Study, which includes an analysis on funding for post-permit term costs. The Fee Audit will be considered at the December Governing Board meeting.</p>	<p>Perform the calculations for the 2018 automatic annual fee adjustments.</p>

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5	<p>Pursue State, Federal, foundation and other grants to assist in funding preserve acquisition and other implementation tasks.</p>	<p>Conservancy staff continued to research grant funding opportunities throughout 2017. Grants made up a significant portion of the funding for implementation of the HCP/NCCP in 2017. \$2 million in state grants (Prop 84 funds) was awarded on Preserve System acquisition projects in 2017. Conservancy staff also applied for a \$2M federal grant from the FY17 Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund for land acquisition and expects to receive notification soon.</p> <p>Staff applied for funding for restoration and research funding from the State Coastal Conservancy, California Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Delta Conservancy. The Conservancy has not been notified of any awards from these sources.</p>	<p>Conservancy staff will continue to research and apply for grant funding, which will continue to make up a significant portion of the funding for implementation of the HCP/NCCP in 2018. Staff intends to apply for additional land acquisition grant funding from the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund.</p> <p>Staff will continue to follow new State funding opportunities through resource bonds and other local funding sources.</p>
6	<p>Administer grants already awarded.</p>	<p>At the start of 2017, approximately \$5 million in grant funds remained from awarded grants. \$2.7 million in federal grants from the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund ("Section 6" funds) was spent in 2017, bringing our remaining amount in awarded Section 6 funding to approximately \$1.77 million. The Conservancy also spent down some Local Assistance Grant funds for the Special Status and Invasive Plant Management Pilot Project, weed and native grass mapping from aeriels, and Vasco region pond surveys.</p>	<p>Conservancy staff will continue to utilize existing awarded grants in the most efficient manner in 2018.</p>

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7	<p>Coordinate with other Regional HCPs and pursue a legislative program that will aid the Conservancy's implementation of the Plan.</p>	<p>As part of ongoing participation in the coalition of northern California HCPs (NCCPP), staff assisted in hosting its annual conference in Vacaville in October.</p> <p>Continued active participation with the California Habitat Conservation Plan Coalition (CHCPC) which is coordinating efforts across the state to improve funding opportunities for HCPs, promoting coordination of wetlands permitting with HCPs and share lessons learned among HCPs.</p> <p>Implemented the 2017 Legislative Platform and attended annual CHCPC legislative trip to Washington in March and intensively collaborated with CHCPC on efforts to restore funding for the Section 6 program, working with Congressman McNerney who lead efforts in the House. Proposed the 2018 Legislative Platform.</p> <p>Continued to work with the City of Antioch to engage in an HCP/NCCP planning process. Conservancy hired a consultant and provided staff time as match to a Federal grant to explore the development of an Antioch Plan.</p> <p>Contributed to and helped coordinate the third National Habitat Conservation Plan Coalition.</p>	<p>Continue to participate in the CHCPC to pursue common policy objectives and to learn from the experiences of other HCPs.</p> <p>Attend NCCPP conference and CHCPC meetings in 2018.</p> <p>Implement 2018 Legislative Platform, including an emphasis on Section 6 funding levels in Congress, accessing Proposition 84 funds through the Wildlife Conservation Board and coordinating species and wetlands permitting. Work with other HCP's to explore challenges associated with creating effective endowments to fund long term management, including potential obstacles to reasonable rates of investment return.</p> <p>Conservancy staff will continue to assist Antioch with the development of the Antioch HCP/NCCP which could be coordinated with the ECCC HCP/NCCP, leading to more consistent permitting in the region and perhaps in cost efficiencies.</p> <p>Explore new State funding available through Cap and Trade revenues and coordinate with other NCCPs to direct funding to Plan implementation.</p>
8	<p>Provide accounting services for the Conservancy.</p>	<p>Continue to manage Conservancy finances. The Conservancy conducted an audit of the 2016 Financial Statements. The auditor's written statements were presented to the Governing Board and filed with appropriate agencies.</p>	<p>As well as preparing the 2019 Budget and managing finances consistent with the approved Budget for 2018, day to day management of debits and deposits will continue. The Conservancy will conduct an audit of the 2017 Financial Statements. The auditor's written statements will be presented to the Board.</p>

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9	Pursue regional permits and permitting programs for jurisdictional wetlands and waters with the appropriate state and federal agencies to help ensure coordination between implementation of the HCP/NCCP and the implementation of state and federal wetlands regulations.	<p>The Sacramento District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) issued a Regional General Permit (RGP) linked to the HCP/NCCP in May 2012. A total of 14 public and private projects have been permitted under the RGP since it was approved. The USACE also approved a short term mechanism which relies on the Conservancy's existing restoration projects to enable payment of HCP fees by applicants to satisfy Corps regulatory requirements. This interim procedure will continue as approved for use until the adoption of an In-Lieu Fee Instrument by the Corps and Conservancy to formalize the Fee program and procedures.</p> <p>RGP 1 was re-issued by USACE on June 6, 2017. The permit is valid for five years from issuance, and will expire on June 6, 2022.</p> <p>The Conservancy was invited to work with the Water Boards in drafting a programmatic certification of the RGP that would address the state wetland regulatory process and that work is in progress. The State Water Board has also expressed interest in participating in development of the In-Lieu Fee Instrument (ILF). Initial ILF documents have been drafted and a framework was submitted to the Corps.</p>	Pursue as a top Conservancy priority the goal of finalizing regional permitting instruments in 2018 including 401 Water Quality Certification of the RGP (or other equivalent regional permitting device) from the Water Board as well as the development and execution of an In-Lieu Fee Instrument (IFL) to link the Conservancy's fee collection and conservation activities to implementation of the various new permits. Final IFL documents are expected to be submitted to the Corps in 2018. Upon that submittal renewed outreach to the Water Board will commence.
Program Administration (HCP/NCCP Permit Issuance)			
10	Develop and update the template Planning Survey Report (PSR) Application.	Additional review and revision is on-going based on experiences with projects that have used the PSR application template as well as modifications based on new policies and requirements.	Continue to use and update the new template as necessary. Continue to receive feedback from permit seekers.

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11	<p>Provide training to local jurisdictional staff on HCP/NCCP applications. Assist local jurisdictions to ensure that project proponents comply with the provisions of the Plan, including performance of required avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures.</p>	<p>Staff continued to coordinate with local jurisdictions to discuss updates and HCP/NCCP application processing and continued to provide assistance and technical support in 2017.</p> <p>Staff held regular meetings with the Contra Costa County Public Works Department, Environmental Unit Staff, to assist with facilitation of HCP/NCCP applicability to the County's many road and flood control projects.</p>	<p>Coordination, training, and outreach efforts will continue in 2018.</p>
12	<p>Implement Permitting Program: Process applications for coverage under the HCP/NCCP, tracking performance of required avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures.</p>	<p>The Conservancy reviewed and approved four applications by Participating Special Entities (PSEs) for take coverage under the HCP/NCCP and oversaw implementation of agreements. The Conservancy assisted local jurisdictions with their take coverage activities by providing technical input and by reviewing and offering advice on over 37 PSR applications. The Conservancy reviewed and approved Construction Monitoring Reports submitted by covered activities and worked with numerous project proponents on the details of their avoidance and minimization procedures in cases where species were present.</p>	<p>Efforts are on-going and will continue in 2018.</p>
13	<p>Prepare report documenting the expected benefits of the HCP/NCCP to non-covered special-status species to provide streamlining for future CEQA documents.</p>	<p>The report titled "Assessment of Plan Effects on CEQA Species" was reviewed by the Conservancy Governing Board and the Public Advisory Committee. The Governing Board approved the document in April 2015. The Report is available on the Conservancy's website.</p>	<p>This task was completed in 2015.</p>
14	<p>Expand GIS database to track land acquisitions and Permitting Program database to track projects, impacts, and take coverage.</p>	<p>Staff maintained the GIS database and covered project tracking database throughout 2017.</p>	<p>Staff will continue to maintain and improve the GIS and covered project tracking databases. Efforts are on-going and will continue in 2018.</p>

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Preserve Acquisition and Management		
15	<p>Continue to acquire land to assemble Preserve System and meet Stay Ahead requirements as described in Section 8.6.1</p>	<p>Conservancy staff will continue to work with acquisition partners. The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) has been the primary partner and detailed coordination and cost-sharing will continue. The Conservancy will also continue to coordinate with other potential partners such as Save Mount Diablo, State Parks, Contra Costa Water District, Agricultural-Natural Resource Land Trust, Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust, cities such as the Cities of Oakley and Brentwood with potential preserves in their boundaries and private mitigation banks to learn of their current acquisition efforts and explore opportunities for partnering.</p> <p>The Conservancy will continue following general approach to land acquisition used in previous years: (a) seek partners such as EBRPD willing to be responsible for assisting with the fund-raising and willing to be the land owner and land manager or easement holder (or to find another entity to serve that role) so that the Conservancy can avoid actually owning and managing land or easements in perpetuity, (b) maintain an "Open Door Policy" and be willing to consider proposals from a range of partners, (c) once a prospective partner has found a willing landowner and established a price, the Conservancy should evaluate the cost effectiveness of the acquisition in achieving HCP goals, develop a proposed acquisition cost-share and strategy for ensuring management and monitoring, evaluate the pros and cons of the overall package and consider approving or disapproving Conservancy participation in the acquisition.</p>
16	<p>Develop a mutually agreeable programmatic strategy with East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) to collaborate on land acquisition and management in the HCP area.</p>	<p>EBRPD is implementing its Master Plan and is buying land in the inventory area for park and open space purposes. Voters approved EBRPD's Measure WW in 2008, providing significant new capital to support this work. Continuing to partner with EBRPD will help to ensure that the land acquisition and management goals of EBRPD's land program and the similar goals of the HCP/NCCP are implemented in a coordinated manner (this goal is set forth in Section 13.6 of the Implementing Agreement). Conservancy staff and EBRPD staff have been discussing partnership opportunities and believe, for the time-being, that partnership opportunities should be addressed case by case because the details are numerous and specific to the parcel in question. Coordination has been excellent so far and numerous agreements have been completed to address specific acquisition and restoration projects.</p>
17	<p>Conduct pre-acquisition assessments and post-acquisition detailed biological assessments of potential acquisitions to determine their biological value for the HCP.</p>	<p>Conservancy staff and consultants developed protocols and practices for a phased and more streamlined approach to this task that defers the most expensive field work until after property is purchased. In 2017, post-acquisition assessments of Preserve System lands included detailed, thorough surveys for wetlands and covered plants.</p> <p>In 2018, the pre- and post-acquisition assessments and resource inventories will continue. These surveys are essential to ensure HCP/NCCP requirements are being met.</p>

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18	Create template Conservation Easement Deeds and Deed Restrictions and other protective covenants to speed-up addition of land to the Preserve System and to protect the interests of the Conservancy in land it acquires.	<p>The Deed Restriction template was approved in 2015 and have been recorded on all Preserve System acquisitions. A Conservation Easement template was approved by USFWS and CDFW to be used on properties not owned by EBRPD.</p> <p>Neighboring Landowner letters were sent to owners of properties within 1-mile of new Preserve System lands.</p>	<p>Recording of the required deed restrictions on preserved lands (held in fee by EBRPD) will continue in 2018.</p> <p>Staff anticipates beginning to use the Conservation Easement template on an upcoming acquisition property.</p> <p>Neighboring Landowner letters will be sent to owners of properties within 1-mile of new Preserve System lands.</p>
19	Develop and begin to implement a strategy for funding the long term management of the Preserve system before 50% of the authorized take under the maximum urban development area is used or before the end of year 15 of implementation, whichever comes first. Provide progress reports on this matter in the Annual Report.	<p>This is a critically important long term task that must be confronted as early as possible during implementation. To date, some significant steps have been made toward addressing this issue. The Conservancy and EBRPD acquired properties that received lease revenues of approximately \$385,130 in 2017 (year to date, 10/6/17) and agreed that a portion of this lease revenue would be set aside for long-term management. Contributions to Recovery collected from PSEs can also be applied in part to long-term management.</p> <p>Urban Economics conducted the Year-Ten Fee Audit and Nexus Study, which includes and analysis on funding for post-permit term costs.</p> <p>The Conservancy has also contracted with Urban Economics to develop an investment strategy for the Conservancy's endowment.</p>	<p>Work on this effort will continue in 2018 including development of management plans which help us begin to improve the estimates in the HCP/NCCP of long term management costs.</p> <p>The Conservancy will continue to work with EBRPD on a strategy for the reporting and use of lease revenues on Preserve System lands.</p> <p>Conservancy staff will continue to work with consultants to implement the long-term funding strategy, first of which will be to establish an endowment.</p>
20	Develop management plans for the Preserve System and individual preserves.	<p>Conservancy, EBRPD, Wildlife Agencies, and a consultant team worked to complete a full draft of the Vasco Hills Byron Vernal Pools Preserve Management Plan.</p> <p>Staff began work with EBRPD on developing a second management plan that would include acquisitions in the Black Diamond Mines area.</p>	<p>In 2018, the next step on the Preserve Management Plan is to present the plan draft to the PAC and the Conservancy Board. The drafting of a second preserve management plan covering other portions of the Preserve System will continue in 2018.</p>

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21	Implement management plans for the Preserve System and individual preserves.	With preserve management planning in progress and numerous recently-acquired properties to assess, preserve management activities generally continued past practices. EBRPD institutes new grazing leases as lands are acquired. EBRPD and the Conservancy coordinated on an as-needed basis with efforts such as milk thistle eradication, rare plant propagation, fuel management, potential riparian enclosures, livestock watering systems, needed culvert replacements, and failing spring boxes. EBRPD conducted day to day management of the Preserve system, including ranger patrols, fire and law enforcement supervision, supervision of grazing tenants, maintaining and replacing fences and gates and addressing hazards to people and wildlife in the new preserves.	Interim management procedures will continue and expand as management plans are completed. With significant blocks of preserve lands now assembled, management obligations will increasingly need to be addressed, though land contiguity will improve efficiency.
22	Prepare an Exotic Plant Control Plan to address exotic and invasive plants on Preserve System lands.	Exotic plant control activities have been planned and implemented on a project-by-project basis until preserve management plans and the system-wide Exotic Plant Control Program are developed.	The initial Exotic Plant Control Program will be developed as an element within the Vasco Hills - Byron Vernal Pools Preserve Management Plan and subsequently be expanded. This plan will likely be based on and coordinated with existing policies and programs such as the EBRPD's Integrated Pest Management Plan.
23	Prepare a Recreation Plan to address recreational uses on Preserve System lands.	Recreation needs, opportunities and constraints were identified as land has been acquired. The Vasco Hills - Byron Vernal Pools Preserve Management Plan is including comprehensive evaluation of and planning for public access. EBRPD started recreation planning for the Clayton Ranch Area which is contiguous with Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve.	Experience thus far with implemented Plan, suggests that it may not be advisable to have a separate and detailed system-wide recreation plan as the details of recreation are better evaluated and planned for in the context of the more localized preserve management plans.

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Habitat Restoration/Creation		
24	<p>Design habitat restoration and creation projects and perform additional environmental compliance for habitat restoration, if needed.</p>	<p>Habitat restoration and creation continues to be a key program area for the Conservancy. If restoration and creation of jurisdictional wetlands and waters does not keep pace with impacts, the ability to mitigate such impacts by paying a fee will be suspended. Likewise progress on this task is an essential foundation to completion of efforts to coordinate wetlands permitting with the HCP. Staff worked with consultants and other partners to assess acquisitions for restoration opportunities.</p> <p>Staff worked with consultants to develop the Horse Valley Creek and Wetland Restoration Project, Knightsen Wetland Restoration and Flood Protection Project, and the Ang Rangeland and Riparian Habitat Project.</p> <p>Ponds that were damaged during the extreme winter rain events were evaluated and permitting process was initiated.</p>
25	<p>Implement habitat restoration and habitat creation projects.</p>	<p>Staff will work with consultants and other partners to assess new acquisitions for restoration opportunities and to explore and develop restoration concepts for future restoration projects.</p> <p>The Knightsen Wetland Restoration and Flood Protection Project will complete baseline assessments and develop concept designs in 2018.</p>

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Monitoring and Adaptive Management Program		
26	<p>Design Monitoring and Adaptive Management Program.</p> <p>Preserve monitoring and adaptive management measures were designed as part of development of the Vasco Hills - Byron Vernal Pools Preserve Management Plan. In addition, the Conservancy designed adaptive management measures for restoration projects.</p>	<p>Work on this effort will continue through 2018. The components of a comprehensive monitoring strategy are being developed as part of the Vasco Hills - Byron Vernal Pools Preserve Management Plan, which will be released for comment in 2018.</p>
27	<p>Monitoring and adaptive management of restoration projects and new preserves.</p> <p>The previously constructed restoration projects were monitored throughout 2017. Ongoing drought has delayed a number of restoration projects from reaching success criteria from original time frame. The monitoring of these projects continued.</p> <p>A \$110,000 portion of the \$2.25 million grant received from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation was programmed to study the impacts of turbines on bats and methods for reducing these impacts. This work started in late summer 2017.</p> <p>The Conservancy initiated a study that will inform resource managers of the timing of rare plant and invasive weed germination timing. This information will feed into a larger study that will guide the vegetation management where rare plants and weeds share habitat. This project continued in 2017 and will conclude in 2018.</p> <p>The Conservancy initiated a pilot study analyzing high resolution aerial photography to map native bunch grass communities and weeds in the Vasco Region.</p> <p>The Conservancy initiated a comprehensive survey of ponds in the Vasco Region. The survey and final report will be completed in 2018.</p> <p>EBRPD led the effort to secure funding to study long horn fairy shrimp in the Vasco region. The Conservancy is a partner on this effort. This research effort started in late 2016.</p> <p>The Conservancy initiated a research effort to understand the efficacy of wildlife under crossings under Vasco Road. This work, started in December 2016 and will continued into 2017.</p>	<p>Monitoring on all projects will continue (nine projects total). The Souza 1, Souza 2 and Lentzner Spring sites have met success criteria, and monitoring effort will decrease in intensity and focus on invasive species eradication and monitoring of site stabilization. Full monitoring of all other projects will continue.</p> <p>The bat study started in 2017. Data will be evaluated and a report will be produced in 2018.</p> <p>The rare plant/invasive species study will conclude in 2018.</p> <p>The EBRPD-led research effort to study longhorn fairy shrimp will continue in 2018.</p> <p>The Vasco Road undercrossing efficacy study will continue through 2018 and conclude at the end of the rainy season.</p> <p>The pilot study analyzing high resolution aerial photography to map vegetation will continue in 2018.</p> <p>The research projects funded through the Conservancy Science and Research Grant Program will start work in 2017 and continue through 2019 and those funded in 2018 will continue through 2020.</p>