

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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DATE: June 1, 2010
TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Peter N. Maurer, Principal Planner
SUBJECT: Initial Inventory Mapping – INRMP Subtask 1.b

General Plan Policy 7.4.2.8 (Attachment B) sets forth the requirement to map five components of important habitat as the first step in the process. These components are:

1. Habitats that support special status species;
2. Aquatic environments including streams, rivers, and lakes;
3. Wetland and riparian habitat;
4. Important habitat for migratory deer herds; and
5. Large expanses of native vegetation.

On April 1, 2008, the Board approved a map depicting these five components covering the entire County, using data that was readily available at that time (Attachment D). The series of maps provided with this report is an update to that information, covering the project study area of the County below the 4000' elevation. A detailed report, prepared by SEA, describes the methodology used to develop the draft map (Attachment C). A summary of that methodology is provided below.

1. Habitats that support special status species (Attachment E) – The consultant team updated the map using the most recent and accurate data available from Federal and State sources. SEA used the most recent versions of the same data sources used in the 2008 initial inventory. These include the California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB) and data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In addition, data was gathered from the U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service.
2. Aquatic environments including streams, rivers, and lakes (Attachment F) – The data source used for this layer was the National Hydrography Dataset from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). It includes perennial and intermittent streams, and other permanent bodies of water. It does not include ephemeral streams.
3. Wetland and riparian habitat (Attachment G) – This map is based on the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory dataset. This is derived from topographic data and aerial interpretation, but

does not include many seasonal wetlands due to the difficulty in mapping these features without extensive field work.

4. Important habitat for migratory deer herds (Attachment H) – No new information is available regarding migratory deer herds so no adjustments were done to the map for that component. The data is based on reports prepared in the 1970s and 1980s.

5. Large expanses of native vegetation (Attachment K) – There is no clear scientific definition or description of what this term means, and it is subject to many interpretations. For example, ISAC could not agree on whether it only means “native” plants in the sense that they existed prior to European settlement or it should include naturalized plants that have established a self-sustaining environment to which animals have adapted, as recommended by PAWTAC. “Large expanses” is also troublesome, because it is a relative term. Large to a small animal could be as little as a couple acres. Staff and the consultants have created a draft map depicting what, based on commonly accepted scientific methods and use of terms, represents large expanses of native vegetation.

SEA used the most recent vegetation data from Calfire and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) to identify different vegetation classifications. These were then consolidated into nine general vegetation types, such as chaparral, annual grassland, valley oak woodland, and mixed conifer. This base was then overlaid with already existing developed areas, using Assessors Office use codes to eliminate those parts of the County. The use codes included those for commercial and industrial uses, and residential parcels of 2.5 acres or less (Attachment I).

The next step was to take into consideration the effect of roads, both as barriers to wildlife movement and as a component of the landscape that already fragments habitat and creates less desirable conditions for wildlife. The roads were ranked by traffic volume, and a buffer created along those meeting certain thresholds (Attachment J). This was a very conservative approach which is clearly shown by comparing the two inset maps on Figure 5 (Attachment K). Some rural roads pose a limited threat or deterrent to wildlife, so SEA went back, after discussion with PAWTAC and ISAC, and identified some of those roads that do not really bifurcate the habitat. To maintain consistency with the methodology, the area along the roads that do not create much of a barrier are shown in yellow. Other roads could be included in this category as well. Attachment K shows the areas of largely intact natural areas, broken down by generalized habitat types, such as chaparral, grassland, woodlands, and forest communities. Finally, Attachment L is the composite map, that shows all five of the components of the initial inventory on a single map.

The April and May PAWTAC meetings did not have a quorum, so no formal recommendation could be made regarding the map. In general, however, those in attendance felt that the map generally reflected the large expanses. At the ISAC meetings, there was substantial discussion about the maps, with concerns expressed over the inclusion of annual grasslands and whether the maps were expanding areas already considered as large expanses and rejected through the adoption of the Oak Woodland Management Plan (OWMP). However, no majority vote could be reached on several motions, including one to rename the map, so no recommendation can be forwarded to the Board. Meeting minutes and notes are attached (Attachments N through Q).

A number of exhibits are provided as attachments to the report. These include individual maps of each of the five categories listed above as intermediary steps in arriving at the initial inventory (Attachments E through J). Also provided, at the request of some of the advisory committee

members is a map that overlays the draft habitat inventory with existing public land and land that have some type of regulatory constraint (Attachment M). This map was created for informational purposes, as it relates more to Phase 2 and the conservation strategy. It includes state and federal land, land designated as Open Space or Natural Resources on the General Plan land use map, and lands identified as Priority Conservation Areas in the OWMP.

Summary and Recommendation:

The decisions and direction requested of the Board with regard to this map are as follows:

1. The data used to map components 1-4 is accurate as currently possible. Staff believes that the data used by the consultants is the best currently available, and accurately represents important wildlife resources in the western part of El Dorado County. Staff recommends the Board accept these components of the revised initial inventory map.
2. The methodology used to create the map is acceptable to represent large expanses of native vegetation for the purposes of an “initial inventory.” As discussed above, the consultants took a conservative approach to identifying less-developed areas of the county that serve as wildlife habitat. Removing existing developed land and areas close to roads is consistent with accepted scientific approaches to habitat mapping. Staff recommends that the Board accept the methodology used to identify large expanses.
3. The habitat types represented on the map reflect assemblages of vegetation and habitat necessary to support the various plant and animal communities intended to be addressed in the INRMP, as set forth in the General Plan EIR. There are three issues raised by the advisory committee members regarding the identification of different vegetation assemblages as types of native vegetation important to wildlife. These are listed and briefly discussed below:
 - a. Should grasslands be included? Although native grasslands have largely been replaced by introduced grasses following the gold rush, these lands continue to provide habitat value for wildlife and many native grass species are still present. These lands also serve to connect smaller patches of other habitats. Taken as a whole (the mixture of grassland, chaparral, and woodland) provide some of the best habitat serving wildlife that require diverse habitat types. For these reasons, staff recommends that grasslands be included on the large expanses map.
 - b. Should land supporting gabbro soils rare plants be included? Although resolution of the rare plant issue is being worked on through negotiation with federal and state wildlife agencies and using a separate contract, gabbro soil chaparral constitutes a part of the chaparral plant community, and is a part of existing open space in the County that provides habitat. As an initial inventory, identification of rare plant habitat on this map does not affect on-going negotiations, the Ecological Preserve boundary, or the rare plant recovery plan boundary. It may assist in coming to resolution of that issue. Policy 7.4.2.8 requires identification of habitats that support special status species. Therefore, staff recommends that the habitat supporting gabbro soils rare plants be included on the map.
 - c. Do the Priority Conservation Areas of the OWMP constitute the large expanses of oak woodland? In adopting the OWMP, the Board established that the Priority Conservation Areas (PCA) were those areas established for acquisition of conservation easements from willing sellers for the purposes of mitigation banking for the loss of oak woodlands elsewhere. These are not the only areas for which

oak woodlands exist. Smaller patches of oak woodlands also connect with chaparral, grasslands, and other plant communities that together make up larger tracts of land that serve wildlife habitat needs. Staff recommends, for the purposes of this revised initial inventory, that oak woodland not be limited to the PCAs.

4. A different name for this map could minimize confusion between this phase of the INRMP and the conservation strategy of Phase 2 and the protection and mitigation requirements of Policy 7.4.1.6. This step in the process is information gathering, and sets no regulatory or policy directive. As with the OWMP, the first step is to identify what exists. Then, in Phase 2 of the INRMP, the County will make policy decisions, identify what areas need to be protected, and determine how to mitigate for the loss of habitat not protected. The term “important habitat” is used for regulatory purposes in General Plan Policy 7.4.1.6 and in implementation strategy of 7.4.2.8. In this phase of the INRMP, "important habitat" is used for informational purposes. Staff recommends that it is important to clarify that this map is an initial inventory only, is subject to change, and provides no regulatory requirements. Staff recommends the Board make this clarification, either by passing a Motion to that effect, or by developing an alternative name for the map, such as the “INRMP Phase 1.b Map,” or “Areas of Less-Disturbed Land Serving Habitat Needs in Western El Dorado County.”

Future Tasks:

Subtask 1.c – Indicator Species – An administrative draft report with recommended species for different habitat types has been prepared and is in the process of being reviewed by PAWTAC and ISAC members. Pending their review and recommendations, this will be presented to the Board when that is complete. Decisions regarding the inventory and the extent of habitat to be reviewed could have a bearing on which species are selected. Therefore, it is important that Subtask 1.b be completed in order to continue with Subtask 1.c. A more thorough discussion of this report will be provided in July or August when it is presented to the Board, and recommendations will be made regarding the selection of indicator species.

Subtask 1.d – Evaluate Wildlife Movement Corridors – This is the last task of Phase 1, which will begin during the next couple of months. The topic will be introduced to ISAC and PAWTAC at either the July or August meetings, with discussion and feedback on the work product at subsequent meetings.