

NEW TOOLS FOR LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION PLANNING: LOCAL CONSERVATION PLANNING THAT COMPLEMENTS STATE AND FEDERAL CONSERVATION PLANS

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1 ABSTRACT

To achieve sustainable nature conservation across regional landscapes there is a great need for incorporating comprehensive systematic conservation planning at the local level in city and county general plans. In the USA land use is controlled at the local level and conservation lands need to be identified at the local level by addressing all natural communities and native species. Locally-based conservation planning is needed to complement federal Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and state-level plans that typically focus conservation efforts only on a small set of special-status species. General plans for most municipalities lack modern systematic conservation strategies in the mandated “elements” for conservation or open space. These conservation strategies should be scientifically based using ecological principles. HCPs, as prescribed in the federal Endangered Species Act, typically employ these strategies, however, they only focus on conserving listed or likely to be listed species. The state of California’s Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Program partially addresses the need for more comprehensive conservation and is oftentimes integrated into an HCP planning process. A case study in Yolo County, California is used to explore these conservation planning issues. A novel planning process is described to create a voluntary, non-regulatory “local conservation plan” (LCP) to complement a federal HCP and a state NCCP for the county. The LCP subsequently was integrated into a new conservation planning tool in California called a Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) that facilitates advanced mitigation. The research objectives for this article are to: (1) describe the relationship between municipal general plans and conservation planning using a case study, (2) contrast two types of conservation planning, one at the federal level (the HCP) and one at a state level (the NCCP), (3) present two new concepts, or “tools,” for local conservation planning (the LCP and RCIS) that complement the federal and state tools, and (4) discuss approaches for the future of sustainable landscape conservation.

1.1 Keywords

Habitat conservation plan, natural community conservation plan, regional conservation investment strategy, local conservation, general plans