



## Sonoma County Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan

### Public Advisory Committee Charter

March 2025

#### **Background**

Sonoma County is committed to protecting and preserving its rich natural resources, including its sensitive species and the habitats that support them, while supporting the County's future growth and agricultural economy. As of 2024, the County of Sonoma Permit Sonoma, in collaboration with other interested local governments and agencies, has initiated the process of planning and developing a county-wide habitat conservation plan (HCP) under Section 10 of the ESA and a Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) under California Fish & Game Code Section 2835 (NCCP Act). This program to develop the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP (or Plan) is called Conservation Sonoma.

The overall objectives of the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP are to develop and implement a regional approach to habitat conservation within Sonoma County; partner with landowners, Tribes, conservation organizations, and other interested parties to protect and enhance habitat for a variety of listed and sensitive species across a network of natural lands and working agricultural lands; provide a programmatic process for the mitigation of impacts to biological resources from development activities within Sonoma County; authorize the use of incidental take permits for development and other projects that potentially affect covered species and their habitat; and provide local control to the County of Sonoma and participating jurisdictions (as future permittees) to implement a streamlined endangered species permitting process for covered activities that will be described in the Plan. The plan area includes areas slated for future development, as well as areas that may provide important conservation opportunities to support conservation and recovery of the covered species at a landscape level.

The County of Sonoma, in collaboration with the Cities of Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Cotati, and Town of Windsor (permit applicants) is leading development of the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP and will be ultimately responsible for development of the Plan, including making final decisions regarding the Plan. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMCS), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) are the three wildlife agencies providing technical guidance to the County and co-applicants to ensure their respective permit issuance criteria may be met and permits successfully issued. The wildlife

agencies will participate in development of the Plan to provide information on procedures, respective statutory requirements, and other technical information. Ultimately, USFWS, NMFS, and CDFW will be the agencies responsible for determining if all permit application requirements are met and, if so, approving the HCP and NCCP, and issuing incidental take permits. A Core Planning Team consisting of key individuals from the co-applicants and the project consultants, will provide direction, guidance, advice, strategic decision making, and assistance in developing the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP. In general, the Core Planning Team will oversee and support the general course of development and organization of the Plan.

To ensure broad community participation throughout development of the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP, the co-applicants are forming a Public Advisory Committee (PAC) with members representing the County's diverse interests including agriculture, business, conservation advocacy, housing development, landowners, local government, public agencies, recreation, transportation, Tribes, and the community-at-large. The co-applicants intend to utilize the PAC as a forum to discuss and inform development of the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP. All PAC meetings will be open to the public to attend and provide comment.

#### **Public Advisory Committee Role**

The PAC's purpose is to serve as a sounding board with the specific charge to review, consider, and comment upon the components that make up the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP document as they are developed and as presented to the PAC for review. PAC members are motivated by their desire to collaborate in an environment of mutual respect and shall strive in their recommendations to be objective, balanced, and constructive. The overarching goal of the PAC is to help inform the development of a quality Plan that meets Sonoma County's biological conservation goals while supporting planned development with a streamlined endangered species permitting process, and that reflects the broadest possible set of community interests and concerns. PAC members are expected to offer constructive input from the interest areas they represent, and to provide an interest-based level of insight on draft working documents, policies, and programs generated by the project team developing the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP. Core Planning Team members may participate in PAC meetings to help assure coordination among all parties involved with development of the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP.

The PAC operates by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, the various positions will be reported to the Core Planning Team and will be taken under consideration.

PAC Member responsibilities include the following.

- Thoroughly review working draft chapters and memos prepared during the planning process regarding covered activities, biological resources, conservation strategies, costs to implement the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP, and funding strategies.
- Seek to understand the issues presented and the perspectives and interests of other PAC members and their constituencies.

- Inform, educate, and involve their constituencies on a regular basis, including providing notification of upcoming PAC meetings and information on how to attend such meetings.
- Synthesize input from their constituencies and effectively represent their viewpoints, interests, and concerns.
- Work cooperatively with other PAC members.
- Commit to attending PAC meetings for a minimum term of two years or until completion of the Plan.

Members of the public from a variety of interest groups will be invited to make known their interest in joining the PAC. Admission to the PAC as a member will be at the discretion of the Core Planning Team to ensure balanced representation of a diverse constituency, and PAC members will serve at the pleasure of the Core Planning Team. The number of PAC members is not fixed, and the Core Planning Team may choose to expand the PAC at any time to ensure the broadest representation of interests.

### **Public Advisory Committee Meetings**

PAC meetings will be led by the project consultant's facilitator who is responsible for convening and presiding over meetings and ensuring meeting agendas are followed. The project consultant's facilitator will guide meeting discussions and ensure that all PAC members have an equal opportunity to speak, ensure that PAC members communicate respectfully and collaboratively, and will help PAC members reach consensus when possible, or detail perspectives when consensus cannot be reached.

Communication and collaboration amongst PAC members, the project consultant's facilitator, Core Planning Team staff, and wildlife agency staff is most effective when participants use the same medium (e.g., on video via Zoom) or are physically together in the same venue. PAC meetings will be held either in-person at a Sonoma County meeting place, or entirely remotely, via Zoom (and/or phone). In-person meetings will be determined by the Core Planning Team, in collaboration with the PAC to encourage maximum participation. PAC members are strongly encouraged to attend in-person meetings in-person; however, the Core Planning Team recognizes that PAC members may not be able attend all in-person meetings in person and will not deny participation to members because of an inability to attend in person. The Core Planning Team also recognizes that interested members of the public may not be able to attend all in-person meetings in person. Therefore, the Core Planning Team will make all PAC meetings accessible remotely, via Zoom or phone.

PAC meetings will involve presentations by the project consultant, Core Planning Team staff, and/or wildlife agency staff, and discussions among these parties and PAC members. When participating remotely via Zoom, participants will use the Zoom "raise-hand" feature when they would like to speak. The facilitator will call on participants to speak in the order that they raise their hands. PAC members are encouraged to communicate succinctly to allow others time to

speak. Similarly, when meeting in person, PAC members will raise their hand when they wish to speak. The facilitator will call on participants to speak in the order that they raise their hands. Members of the public in attendance at PAC meetings will be given opportunities to comment during public comment periods. The Core Planning Team will consider comments from the public when developing the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP.

PAC members are expected to serve for a minimum term of two years and encouraged to serve for the duration of Sonoma County HCP/NCCP development which is currently anticipated to be a 4-5-year process. Participation is voluntary and members will not be financially compensated. PAC meetings will occur approximately quarterly, though the PAC may meet more frequently when there are a number of substantive issues in need of discussion. PAC members who miss three or more consecutive meetings may be asked to resign. PAC members are expected to communicate respectfully with fellow PAC members, Core Planning Team staff, wildlife agency staff, and the project consultant, and to follow meeting ground rules formulated by the facilitator. PAC members who are disruptive to the meeting process, who will not communicate respectfully, or who will not adhere to meeting ground rules will be asked to leave the meeting. PAC members who repeatedly engage in disruptive behavior in subsequent PAC meetings may be asked to resign. If a member is asked to resign, Core Planning Team staff will consider whether to fill the vacancy with another interested party representing the same constituency; this party will be identified through a self-nomination process. The intent of this policy is to encourage attendance and the ability of the PAC to engage meaningfully on Sonoma County HCP/NCCP development.

Core Planning Team staff may at any time change the powers, functions, and duties of the PAC in any manner and to any extent as in its judgement is desirable and consistent with its goals for establishment of the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP. The life of the PAC is finite and will conclude its formal purpose once the Sonoma County HCP/NCCP has been finalized and approved by the co-applicants' governing bodies.