

Habitat Conservation Fund



Background

In November 2016, the Foothill/Eastern Transportation Corridor Agency (F/ETCA) approved a Settlement Agreement with the Save San Onofre Coalition (SSOC) and several other parties regarding the F/ETCA's efforts on the 241 South and Tesoro Extension. Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement, F/ETCA agreed to commit to the expenditure of a \$28 million Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) for the purpose of preserving and restoring the San Mateo Creek and its watershed priority areas through land acquisitions, habitat restoration projects or other environmentally beneficial projects.

In coordination with SSOC, F/ETCA established a process to obligate funds between two categories of conservation measures – habitat restoration and property acquisition. To meet the 2025 HCF near term expenditure, \$8 million will be allocated to qualified smaller, lower cost projects like habitat restoration and smaller property acquisitions. The remaining \$20 million will be allocated for larger property acquisitions with higher biological value to be allocated before 2030.

Habitat Conservation Fund Implementation Process

For the near-term expenditure of \$8 million, a Habitat Conservation Fund Implementation Process (process) has been developed to expend the HCF on conservation measures and establish a process for the timely obligation of funds for qualified projects within Orange County. The process includes the following key activities:

- Establish Selection Criteria
- Open Solicitation
- Evaluation of Proposals
- Identification and Approval of Conservation Measures
- Review and Approve Expenditure Plan
- Allocation of HCF funds

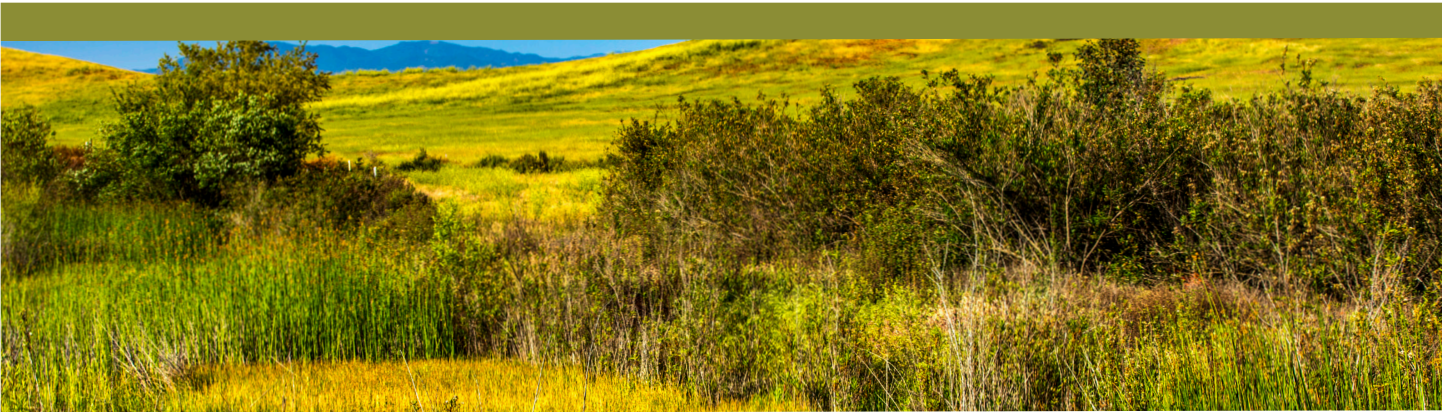
For the long-term expenditure of \$20 million, qualified property acquisitions will be evaluated separately and included in the expenditure plan upon SSOC and F/ETCA approval.



QUICK FACTS

- Fund:** \$28 million
Near term expenditure (by 2025) – \$8 million, long term expenditure (by 2030) – \$20 million
- Agency:** F/ETCA
- Location:** Orange County, California





Timeline

2016	2020	2022	2024	2025		
November	March	April	Fall/Winter	Winter/Spring	Spring	Summer-Winter
Settlement Agreement: F/ETCA to provide \$28M for the Habitat Conservation Fund.	Conclusion of 241 South County Traffic Relief Effort. (SCTRE)	F/ETCA worked with SSOC to develop and approve an amendment to the 2016 Settlement Agreement to reflect the completion of the SCTRE. The amendment provided greater flexibility on the process to develop and fund conservation measures.	Open solicitation slated to begin. The HCF is an open grant opportunity for non-profit organizations and governmental agencies. Proposals will be accepted for a minimum of 60 days.	Proposals will be evaluated by TCA and SSOC staff based on selection criteria starting in Winter/Spring 2025. Proposals will be ranked from highest to lowest priority. The most qualified proposals will be identified along with HCF award amounts.	After evaluation and SSOC concurrence, staff will present the recommended list of projects and award amounts to the F/ETCA Board of Directors for final approval.	Approve Habitat Conservation Fund Expenditure Plan and obligate funds. Award of the HCF would be granted to the most qualified projects proposals until the first \$8M is entirely obligated.

Selection Criteria

Staff has worked with the SSOC to establish selection criteria for conservation measures that would most benefit Orange County's biological environment.

Property Acquisition Selection Criteria:

- High level of review due to the number of factors that can affect the biological benefits and conservation success of the property.
- Biological factors for property acquisition include high habitat diversity, existing high-quality habitat and habitat connectivity. One of the main purposes for property acquisition is to provide direct benefits to improving wildlife species diversity and survivability.
- In addition, non-biological factors such as readiness for acquisition, ownership, future maintenance, funding partners, environmental co-benefits, and state/local agency support will be considered.

Habitat Restoration Selection Criteria:

- Less rigorous criteria than property acquisition because these projects are generally shorter term and lower cost.
- Considers benefits that can enhance fish and wildlife habitats.
- Priority given to projects that protect or restore high quality ecosystems, increase connectivity to improve habitat conditions, maintain species or habitat diversity and/or prevent fragmentation.