

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: February 25, 2019

From :   
Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 10(c): Consideration of resolution authorizing sponsorship of the Antelope Valley Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (AV RCIS) in accordance with California Fish and Game Code Section 1852(a) and requesting the California Department of Fish and Wildlife approve the AV RCIS.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing sponsorship of the Antelope Valley Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (AV RCIS) in accordance with California Fish and Game Code Section 1852(a) and requesting the California Department of Fish and Wildlife approve the AV RCIS.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33211(c) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: Pursuant to California Fish and Game Code Section 1852(a), the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) may approve a regional conservation investment strategy proposed by CDFW, or any other public agency, provided the proposed regional conservation investment strategy would contribute towards both state goals of: (1) conservation and (2) public infrastructure or forest management.

The Conservancy is the most appropriate State agency to sponsor the Antelope Valley Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (AV RCIS) because of the Conservancy's participation in the Desert and Mountain Conservation Authority (DMCA) and the overlap of Conservancy jurisdictional area within the AV RCIS area.

The 707,076-acre AV RCIS area is of statewide importance for conservation as it supports numerous rare, endangered and desert endemic species in the largest remaining undisturbed natural and rural lands left in Los Angeles County; contains important habitat within the Pacific Flyway for tens of thousands of migratory birds during spring and fall migratory seasons; and features critical areas for wildlife connectivity including the nexus between the South Coast Wildlands identified Tehachapi Connection and Sierra Madre-Castaic Connection and a desert floor connection through the Los Angeles County designated Antelope Valley Significant Ecological Area.

The AV RCIS would facilitate current efforts to safeguard these and other conservation values

by contributing to smart growth principles including informed planning for conservation, urbanization, and public infrastructure that are important to the Conservancy. The AV RCIS will also help target acquisition, restoration, or enhancement where it will have the largest benefit for focal species and other conservation elements.

The AV RCIS was developed by ICF in coordination with the DMCA, Conservation Strategy Group, Los Angeles County Planning Department, California Energy Commission, SoCal Edison, Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Transition Habitat Conservancy, Sierra Club, and The Nature Conservancy with an additional 30-plus member active Advisory Committee.

The AV RCIS is based on the collaborative, science-based approach of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, Los Angeles County's Antelope Valley Area Plan, and public stakeholder meetings to identify areas of high conservation value in the region.

Staff expects several transportation and infrastructure projects will be designed and proposed for construction in the next three to ten years with the AV RCIS area. The AV RCIS will inform mitigation needs of other projects occurring in the AV RCIS area including ongoing development in the western portion near Gorman, the north-south State Route 14 corridor, the east-west State Route 138 corridor, and other sensitive areas within the AV RCIS area.

ICF has a dedicated planning team that has produced all of the draft documentation and mapping to date and has run Steering Committee and Advisory Committee meetings. The ICF team includes experienced biologists and a GIS specialist that has worked extensively on the compilation and creation of data layers for the subject area. The ICF team has done an incredible job to date and continues to work on the project using the best available science and substantial public stakeholder input.

ICF is currently in the process of submitting the first draft AV RCIS to CDFW which will be followed by a minimum 30-day public comment period. Following that period, ICF and CDFW will work to improve the AV RCIS—a science-based planning document with no regulatory authority. The AV RCIS will be a guide to both development and mitigation efforts. Participation is one hundred percent voluntary and any individual or entity can participate or not. The first step—CDFW approval of the AV RCIS—does not involve any mitigation agreements, credits, deals, or anything of that nature. After the AV RCIS is approved, any entity can work with CDFW on Mitigation Credit Agreements that must be consistent with the AV RCIS.

Having reviewed the most recent administrative draft, Staff is confident that the document submitted to CDFW will be of high caliber and reflective of the Conservancy's mission.