

Habitat Conservation Fund



Background

The Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA), in partnership with the Save San Onofre Coalition (SSOC), have established a \$28 million Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) to preserve and restore areas in Orange County through land acquisitions, habitat restoration projects and/or other environmentally beneficial projects.

A process has been established 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 by December 2025 to qualified smaller, lower-cost projects such as habitat restoration and smaller property acquisitions. The remaining \$20 million will be allocated for larger property acquisitions with higher biological value 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:

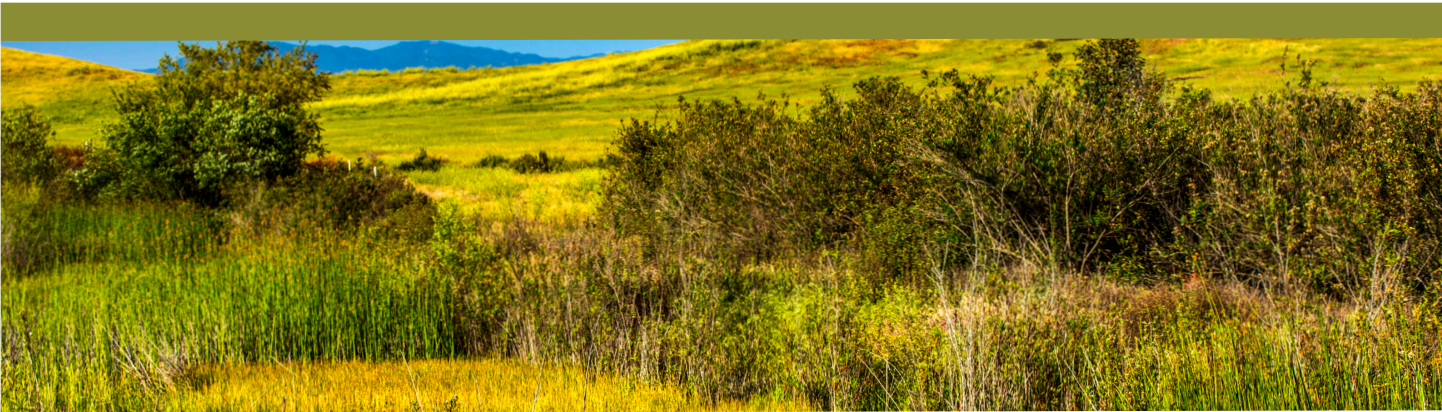
- Selection Criteria Established
- Open Solicitation
- Evaluation of Proposals
- Identification and Approval of Conservation Measures
- Review and Approve Expenditure Plan
- Allocation of the HCF

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



QUICK FACTS

- Fund:** \$28 million
\$8 million: Near Term Expenditure by December 2025
\$20 million: Long Term Expenditure by 2030
- Agency:** Foothill/Eastern Transportation Corridor Agency (F/ETCA)
- Location:** Orange County, California



Timeline

2024	2025		
Fall/Winter 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.	Winter/Spring Proposals will be evaluated by the TCA and SSOC staff based on selection criteria starting in Winter 2024/Spring 2025. Proposals will be ranked from highest to lowest priority. The most qualified proposals will be identified along with HCF award amounts.	Spring 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.	Summer-Winter Approve Habitat Conservation Fund Expenditure Plan and obligate funds. Award of the HCF would be granted to the most qualified project proposals until the first \$8M is entirely obligated.

Selection Criteria

TCA and SSOC have established selection criteria for conservation measures that 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.