

The Nature Conservancy and Ventura County Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business

Memo to the Ventura County Planning Division 5-26-17

Habitat Connectivity Overlay Zone

Group Discussion Summary and Recommendations

General Overview:

Land use within the proposed Habitat Connectivity Overlay Zone (HCOZ) is varied. As mapped in the south half of the County, the zone includes 172,000 acres of unincorporated lands and 16,000 acres within the cities. The majority of this land is open space and agricultural (ranching and farming) which is relatively permeable by wildlife and may have low density residential and commercial uses. There is also a large portion that is set aside for public recreation (Rancho Simi Parks and Recreation and COSCA). Most of the chokepoints are in the cities as a result of residential subdivisions.

Current land use regulations restrict urban uses and discourage development on the majority of County unincorporated lands and thereby promote wildlife movement. These restrictions include land use designations with minimum lot size requirements and maximum 5% lot coverage, Guidelines for Orderly Development, Greenbelt agreements, Initial Study Assessment Guidelines, and the SOAR Ordinance.

New discretionary developments are already required to mitigate significant impacts to habitat connectivity throughout the unincorporated lands per the 2011 Biological Resources section of the Initial Study Assessment Guidelines (ISAG). The ISAG references the South Coast Missing Linkages (SCML) report as existing GIS data to be reviewed by a qualified biologist when reviewing projects with the potential for environmental impacts to habitat connectivity.

The proposed HCOZ utilizes the SCML linkage designs for Ventura County. The County is proposing to adopt new standards for ministerial development on unincorporated lands to provide a regulatory framework to protect the functionality of the existing wildlife movement corridors.

Discussions centered on mutually beneficial ways to establish permanent connectivity without unnecessarily burdening landowners. Higher priority areas (chokepoints) may need more detailed standards with direct input from stakeholders. Most of the key chokepoint areas are within the cities and would not be subject to County standards. Areas that are within County general plan designated existing communities could require no additional standards.

The following are the recommendations of the group of stakeholders:

Fencing:

Ranchers utilize 5 foot high 4 and 5 strand barbed wire fencing for perimeter and cross pasture fencing (see diagram below) as specified by the USDA National Resources Conservation District. This allows more flexible herd management and keeps cattle from entering adjacent properties. This type of fencing does not significantly hinder wildlife movement and thus does not need special standards when occurring within the HCOZ. Although not critical, having

barbless wire at the bottom strand should be encouraged. This helps small animals move under the fence.

Chain link and other types of fencing along public roads and recreational trails is often desired by farmers and landowners to prevent trespassing, vandalism and theft. A notable example of agricultural lands along a major highway is Highway 126. Public trespassing onto cultivated agricultural lands can conflict with federal food safety laws. In addition, public trails that allow access to private property may need fencing for protection. This fencing could avert wildlife from crossing roads at grade and divert them to safer passage under road crossings, such as bridges and culverts.

Conservation ecologists recognize that roads are a significant source of mortality for wildlife. Therefore, fencing along public roads that deters trespassing and prevents animals from accessing the road is desirable. However, it is important that the fencing not inhibit wildlife from accessing under road crossings such as agricultural equipment tunnels, creeks, drainage culverts, bridges etc. If needed, simple pipe gates could prevent vehicle access to these areas as they allow animals to easily pass. Installation of one-way animal escape doors in fencing should be encouraged but not required.

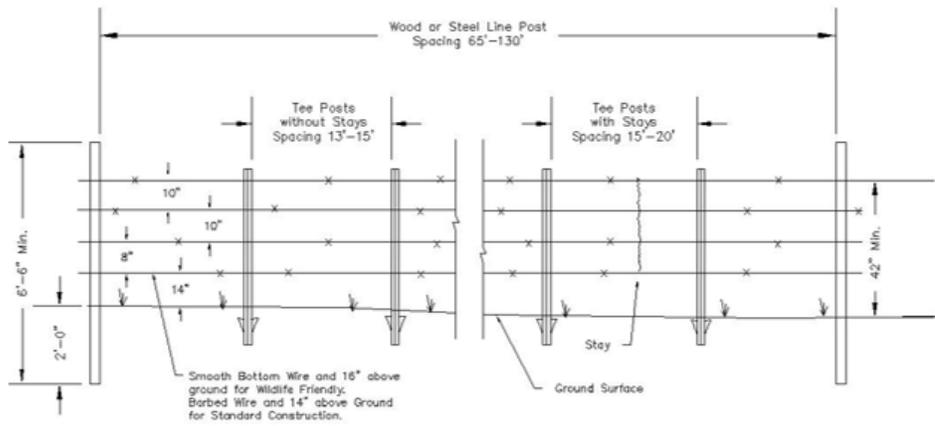
Lighting:

Basic practices such as directing lighting toward homes and work areas to avoid unnecessary light spillover is recommended. In general, lighting for large facilities such as parks, ball fields, golf ranges, equipment yards, etc. is acceptable if is not used between 10PM and dawn.

Choke Points:

Choke points in the HCOZ such as Tierra Rejada between Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks, may be best addressed by more detailed standards that would encourage protection of wildlife movement in these narrow areas. This might be implemented by designing standards for “clustering” of ministerial structures into compact areas rather than having them spread out.

When several parcels are under single ownership, the County should allow deed restrictions and the transfer of development rights to encourage owners to cluster structures on a single lot while still meeting the overall 5% lot coverage allowed for the combined lots. This would incentivize conservation easements that would preserve larger tracts of land for wildlife movement in perpetuity.



Stays only needed if line posts are greater than 15'
Wildlife option is smooth wire on the bottom