



STAFF REPORT 2/12/2025

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Gabriel Perez, Development Services Director

SUBJECT: Approval of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) Like Exchange for the KPC Coachella Specific Plan

SPECIFICS: Resolution No. 2025-05 approving the Coachella Valley Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan Like Exchange for the KPC Coachella Specific Plan

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council take the following action:

- Adopt Resolution No. 2025-05 approving the Coachella Valley Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan Like Exchange for the KPC Coachella Specific Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

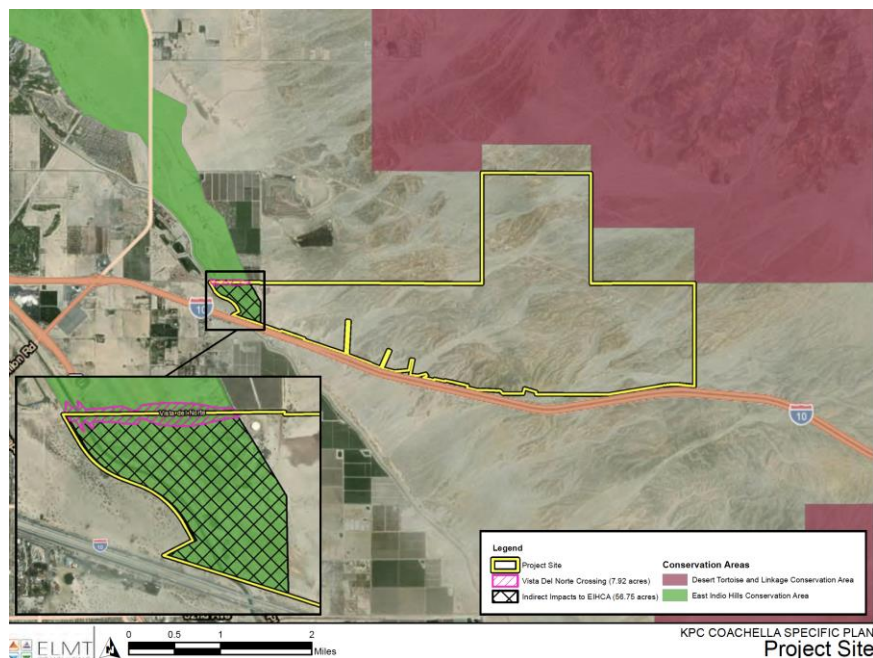
The KPC Coachella Specific Plan proposes the development of a 2800-acre project in the northeast area of the City of Coachella as shown on Figure 1 below. The Draft Environmental Impact Report should be released for public review within the next few months. Public hearings at the Planning Commission and City Council will occur sometime following completion of the Final Environmental Impact Report.

Figure 1



The entire project site is located within the boundaries of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Plan (CVMSHCP). To provide westerly access to the project site, the project proposes the extension of Vista Del Norte across the All-American canal through the East Indio Hills Conservation Area (EIHCA) as shown on Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

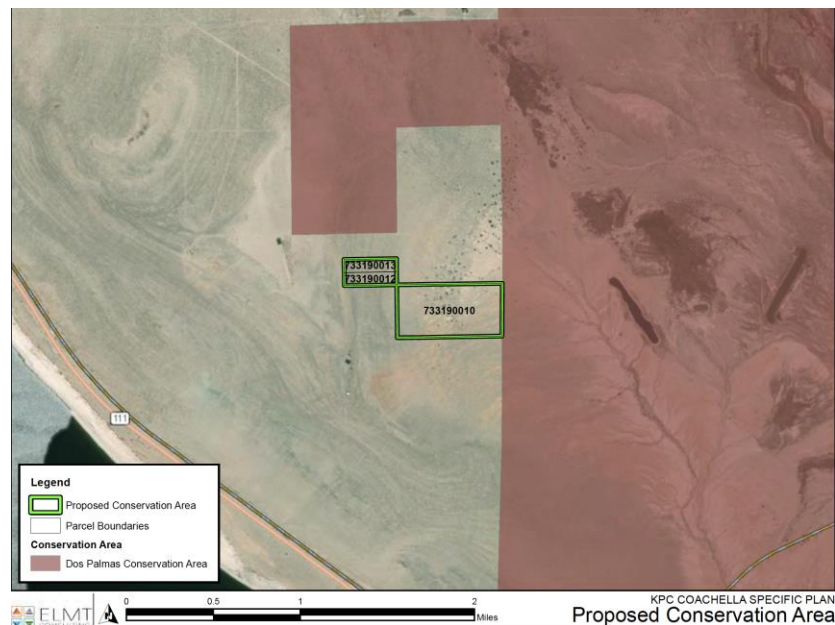


The land proposed for the Vista Del Norte Crossing occurs within the southern terminus of the EIHCA as shown on the exhibit above. Since the Vista Del Norte Crossing, as planned, is wider than the maximum road width considered a Covered Activity under the CVMSHCP, the Like Exchange has been prepared to compensate for the loss of habitats within the EIHCA. Development of the project would result in both positive and negative impacts to habitat and natural communities. The Vista Del Norte Crossing is not located within a CVMSHCP designated sand transport/sand source area or mapped biological corridor/linkage. Therefore, no impacts to CVMSHCP mapped biological corridors or essential ecological processes (i.e., sand transport/sand source areas) are expected to occur. It should be noted that all impacts to the EIHCA will be mitigated.

The proposed development of the Vista Del Norte Crossing will result in a total of approximately 64.67 acres of impact to the EIHCA (refer to Exhibit 2 above). The physical development of the Vista Del Norte Crossing within the EIHCA will result in 3.42 acres of permanent impacts and 4.5 acres of temporary impacts, totaling 7.92 acres of impacts. Additionally, approximately 56.75 acres of indirect impacts will occur to the southern terminus of the EIHCA from the development of the crossing. The area of impact associated with the physical development of the crossing within the EIHCA has been minimized to the maximum extent practicable.

To offset impacts related to biological resources (64.67 acres) within the EIHCA, KPC has acquired and proposes to dedicate 100 acres of land, under private ownership by the Applicant, to be included in the Dos Palmas Conservation Area (DPCA) within unincorporated Riverside County. The 100 acres is located adjacent to the DPCA as shown on Figure 3 below. The 100 acres will be used to offset the 64.67 acres of impacts to land within the City of Coachella's portion of the EIHCA from implementation of the proposed project, resulting in a net increase of 35.33 acres of land being added to the DPCA (refer to Figure 3). The 100 acres of land that will be added to the DPCA is surrounded by undeveloped/vacant land that is under a mix of both private and government/non-profit organization management.

Figure 3

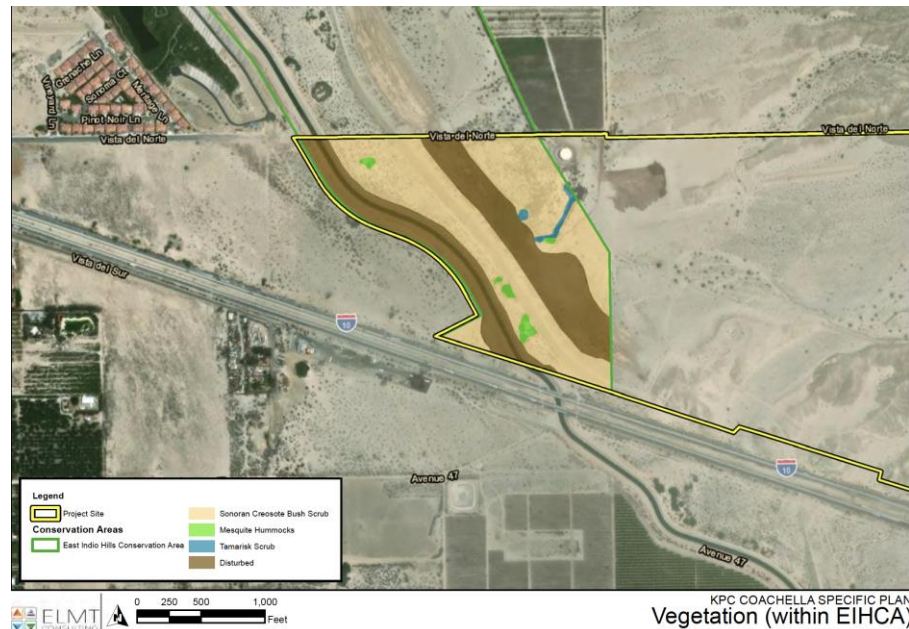


BACKGROUND:

The Like Exchange process, referred to within the CVMSHCP allows for Permittees to request a reduction of a Conservation Area in one locale in exchange for expanding a Conservation Area in another locale. To request such a boundary modification, a Permittee must seek wildlife agency concurrence on an equivalency analysis documenting that the proposed Conservation Area expansion is of equal or greater conservation value than the Conservation Area reduction. Like exchanges are generally requested when a proposed development is inherently inconsistent with Conservation Area Conservation Objectives. For example, insufficient take may be available within the Conservation Area, or infrastructure required to support the development may exceed the limits of what can be considered a Covered Activity.

Based on the CVMSHCP, on-site portions of the EIHCA are located within the core habitat for flat-tailed horned lizard, Le Conte's thrasher, Coachella Valley round-tailed ground squirrel, and Palm Springs pocket mouse. On-site portions of the EIHCA support two natural plant communities, Sonoran creosote bush scrub and mesquite hummocks, one non-native plant community, Tamarisk Scrub, and disturbed and developed land associated with the All-American Canal and adjacent areas as shown on Figure 4.

Figure 4



Discussion/Analysis

This proposed modification to CVMSHCP conservation within the EIHCA (reduction) and DPCA (addition) will result in biologically superior conservation acreage and value using the mandatory categories for equivalency analysis listed in the CVMSHCP Section 6.12.2, summarized as follows:

- The conservation of suitable habitat and level of take of MSHCP covered species with the proposed modifications to the EIHCA and DPCA would be biologically superior to what would otherwise occur;
- The proposed modification would result in greater benefits to natural communities as compared to those benefits analyzed under the MSHCP;
- The function and values of existing biological corridors and essential ecological processes are not expected to be reduced by the proposed modification;
- The proposed modification would result in biologically superior conservation configuration, and management requirements are not expected to significantly differ compared to what would have occurred under the MSHCP;

- Ecotones and overall species diversity are expected to be increased by the proposed modification;
- The additional conservation parcels are greater in size, resulting in a greater acreage in MSHCP Conservation Areas; and
- The three parcels that constitute the additional conservation land have been acquired by the Applicant and, therefore, will be under the direct ownership of the applicant before being deeded to CVCC.

Based on this analysis, the proposed modification of conservation within the EIHCA and DPCA will result in biologically superior conservation value compared with implementation of the CVMSHCP without the proposed project and additional conservation that will be added as a result of the Like Exchange.

The proposed Like Exchange was submitted to the California Department Fish and Wildlife and the US Fish and Wildlife (Wildlife Agencies) for a 60-day review period on October 16, 2024. On January 14, 2025, the Wildlife Agencies transmitted their concurrence that the Like Exchange would result in equal or greater benefits to Covered Species and conserved natural communities as compared to those benefits analyzed in the CVMSHCP. (See Exhibit A). The Wildlife Agencies did identify a concern regarding the conservation area design for the land proposed for addition to the DPCA. The Agencies stated that the design will result in a donut-shaped configuration of the DPCA with unconserved land in the center. The Wildlife Agencies are concerned about the potential for increased edge effects associated with potential future development within the center area. To address this issue, the Wildlife Agencies request that CVCC incorporate the conservation of parcels within this center area into the acquisition strategy for the DPCA. Since the DPCA is located entirely within Riverside County, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors will need to approve the Like Exchange. The points raised by the Wildlife Agencies can be incorporated within the acquisition strategy for the DPCA.

Environmental Analysis

The proposed Like Exchange is exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15325 (a).

CLASS 25: TRANSFERS OF OWNERSHIP OF INTEREST IN LAND TO PRESERVE EXISTING NATURAL CONDITIONS

Class 25 consists of the transfers of ownership of interests in land in order to preserve open space, habitat, or historical resources. Examples include but are not limited to: (a) Acquisition, sale, or other transfer of areas to preserve the existing natural conditions, including plant or animal habitats.

Correspondence

A letter dated January 14, 2025, from the Wildlife Agencies was received and is included in Attachment No. 2.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There are no costs to the City for the Coachella Valley Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan Like Exchange effort and these costs are assumed by the KPC Specific Plan applicant.

Alternatives

- 1) Approve Resolution No. 2025-05 approving the Coachella Valley Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan Like Exchange for the KPC Coachella Specific Plan
- 2) Deny Resolution No. 2025-05 and not approve the Coachella Valley Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan Like Exchange for the KPC Coachella Specific Plan
- 3) Continue this item and provide staff with direction.

Recommended Alternative

Staff recommends that the City Council approve Alternative #1.

Attachments:

1. Resolution No. 2025-05 - Approval of Coachella Valley Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan Like Exchange for the KPC Coachella Specific Plan
Exhibit A: Like Exchange Analysis prepared by ELMT Consulting
2. Correspondence from Wildlife Agencies