MEMO

DATE: **April 14, 2005**

TO: **Energy and Environment Committee**

FROM: Ashwani Vasishth, vasishth@scag.ca.gov, (213) 236-1908

RE: **Habitat and Open Space Chapter of the Regional Comprehensive Plan**

Summary:

Based on SCAG's Compass Growth Visioning document, the 2004 RTP Environmental Impact Report, and the 1996 Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide, a number of policies recommendations, and actions which SCAG has put forth for the region have been compiled. A table of these policies, recommendations and actions is appended below. These will be integrated into the Habitat and Open Space Chapter of the 2005 RCP, and will inform the proposed Action Plan component of the Chapter.

A stakeholder meeting to further analyze these policies, recommendations and actions, using Concept Mapping ranking and sorting protocols will be arranged over the next month.

Background:

The SCAG region is a complex ecological space, with considerable variations in land use and character. A systems approach is proposed, which conceptualizes nature as being organized in a nested hierarchy, forming levels of organization, in which each level emerges out of the interactions between component sub-systems, and where these sub-systems are seen to be nested within their wider system. So, for instance, local jurisdictions can be seen to be nested as sub-systems within the system that is Southern California, which in turn is nested, along with other such regional systems, within the supra-system that is the State of California. Such a nested ecosystem approach would best serve to organize the ways in which regional, sub-regional and supra-regional plans and programs are seen to be integrated, and known to form and shape one another, across levels of organization.

Conventional approaches to habitat conservation have relied centrally on the designation of reserves to support various endangered and threatened plant and animal species, in an effort to assure their long-term survival and recovery. A key model to consider, in assessing the diverse ways in which the region deals with Habitat and Open Space issues is the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) process, and also the Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) process. Such HCPs and NCCPs are a vital component of regional ecological planning. However, recent developments in ecosystem ecology—such as patch dynamics and perturbation ecology—are showing that there are other sorts of interventions that can be used to support and reinforce the establishment of the more traditional set-aside reserves approach to conservation planning. In one sense, the call from contemporary ecosystem

ecology *is to better integrate humans as components of ecosystems*, rather than relying on the separation of land uses for human and natural communities.

This approach is referred to as ecosystem management, and focuses on establishing protocols to assure the integrity of ecological processes and functions vital to the health and well-being of organisms and entities, including humans, within the region. Such an approach is most appropriate to support the four goals of the Southern California Compass Growth Visioning process—namely, mobility, livability, prosperity and sustainability. Recognizing the inherent inter-dependence amongst components of the web of life and processes that is nature, and then it becomes vital that we use just such a way of recognizing this nested inter-dependence in how we plan.

A central element to such an approach to ecosystem management is the percolation of native habitats into urban and sub-urban cores. An emphasis on ecologically appropriate community forestry, coupled with efforts to promote and establish the widespread use of native vegetation (xeriscape, in the case of Southern California), would go a long way to restoring the ecological mosaic that would support the health of areas set aside for nature, while at the same time increasing the resilience of regional ecosystems. Relatedly, the propagation of pervious surfaces, to replace the vast and sprawling tracts of impervious surfaces that human habitation is accustomed to laying down, would puncture the land, permitting improved ground-water recharge, better storm-water management, enhanced health in soils, and better integration across land uses in how natural habitats are integrated at the microbial and process-function levels.

As such, SCAG's proposed Habitat and Open Space chapter will present SCAG's existing policies in this regard as supportive of such an ecosystem approach to nature management. Conventional concerns with set-aside open space and habitat will be shown to be most effective when integrated with the percolation of natural habitat elements such as native landscaping and tree plantation efforts, and puncturing the acres of impervious pavements we conventionally rest our settlements upon.

One or more subsequent strategic stakeholder-based workshops will be used to shape the Action Plan component of this chapter. A protocol called Concept Mapping, will be used to rank-order and sort the various policies, recommendations and action into a meaningful and integrated whole. Staff will summarize best-practices associated with SCAG policies and recommendations, and will use the Action Plan component to derive the indicators of progress that will punctuate the Habitat and Open Space Chapter.

SCAG Policies that Pertain to Habitat and Open Space Planning

Enhance Recreation and Tourism Opportunities Provide adequate land resources to meet the outdoor recreation needs of the present and future residents in the region and to promote tourism in the region. [1996 RCPG]	**Maintain Economic Productivity of Regional Lands** Maintain adequate viable resource production lands, particularly lands devoted to commercial agriculture and mining operations. [1996 RCPG]
Utilize Growth Forecasts In Open Space Planning The population, housing, and jobs forecasts, which are adopted by SCAG's Regional Council and that reflect local plans and policies, shall be used by SCAG in all phases of implementation and review. [1996 RCPG]	**Use Proactive Participatory Systems Approach for Open Space and Recreation Planning** Future impacts to open space and recreation lands shall be avoided through cooperation, information sharing, and program development during the update of the Open Space and Conservation chapter of SCAG's Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide and through SCAG's Energy and Environment Committee. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Encourage Adaptive Reuse for Growth Encourage patterns of urban development and land use, which reduce costs on infrastructure construction and make better use of existing facilities. [1996 RCPG]	**Use Proactive Participatory Systems Approach for Ecological Conservation Planning** Minimize future impacts to biological resources through cooperation, information sharing, and program development during the update of the Habitat and Open Space chapter of SCAG's Regional Comprehensive Plan, through SCAG's Energy and Environment Committee and in consultation with resource agencies. [2004 RTP-EIR]

Encourage Planning for Environmentally Sensitive Lands Encourage planned development in locations least likely to cause environmental impact. [1996 RCPG]	**Use Proactive Participatory Systems Approach for Cultural Resource Planning** Minimize future impacts to cultural resources through cooperation, information sharing, and program development of SCAG's Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide, through SCAG's Energy and Environment Committee and in consultation with other resource agencies (such as the Office of Historic Preservation), during this update process. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Preserve Forests and Designated Open Spaces National Forests shall remain permanently preserved and used as open space. SCAG shall support policies and actions that preserve open space areas identified in local, state, and federal plans. [1996 RCPG]	**Promote Low-impact Development Techniques** Promote water-efficient land use development. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Protect Ecologically Productive Lands Support the protection of vital resources such as wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, woodlands, production lands, and land containing unique and endangered plants and animals. [1996 RCPG]	**Promote Fire-wise Land Management** Encourage the use of fire-resistant vegetation and the elimination of brush and chaparral in the immediate vicinity of development in areas with high fire threat. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Preserve Cultural and Archeological Lands Encourage the implementation of measures aimed at the preservation and protection of recorded and unrecorded cultural resources and archaeological sites. [1996 RCPG]	**Promote Fire Management Planning** Help reduce fire threats in the region as part of the Growth Visioning process and as policies in the update of SCAG's Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide. [2004 RTP-EIR]

Avoid Hazardous Lands Discourage development, or encourage the use of special design requirements, in areas with steep slopes, high fire, flood, and seismic hazards. [1996 RCPG]	**Coordinate Recreational Planning Within and Across Region** Encourage member jurisdictions to work as partners to address regional outdoor recreation needs and to acquire the necessary funding for the implementation of their plans and programs. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Support Sustainability Planning for Communities Support local jurisdictions and other service providers in their efforts to develop sustainable communities and provide, equally to all members of society, accessible and effective services such as: public education, housing, health care, social services, recreational facilities, law enforcement, and fire protection. [1996 RCPG]	**Encourage Conservation of Agricultural Lands** Encourage implementation agencies to obtain assistance from the American Farmland Trust in developing and implementing farmland conservation measures. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Improve Access to Open Space Increase the accessibility to open space lands for outdoor recreation. [1996 RCPG]	**Encourage Preservation of Agricultural Lands** Encourage implementation agencies to avoid the premature conversion of farmlands by promoting infill development and the continuation of agricultural uses until urban development is imminent; if development of agricultural lands is necessary, growth should be directed to those lands on which the continued viability of agricultural production has been compromised by surrounding urban development or the loss of local markets. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Enhance Sustainable Recreation Resource Managment Promote self-sustaining regional recreation resources and facilities. [1996 RCPG]	**Encourage Protection of Agricultural Lands** Encourage implementation agencies to establish transfer of development rights (TDR) programs to direct growth to less agriculturally valuable lands (while considering the potential effects at the sites receiving the transfer) and ensure the continued protection of the most agriculturally valuable land within each county through the purchase of the development rights for these lands. [2004 RTP-EIR]

Maintain Buffer Zones Maintain open space for adequate protection of lives and properties against natural and man-made hazards. [1996 RCPG]	**Promote Multiple-Use Approach To Development** Encourage that multiple use of spaces be allowed as feasible and practical, and encourage redevelopment activities to focus some investment on recreation uses so as to provide more opportunities for access to open space close to the urban core. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Avoid Hazardous Areas Minimize potentially hazardous developments in hillsides, canyons, areas susceptible to flooding, earthquakes, wildfire and other known hazards, and areas with limited access for emergency equipment. [1996 RCPG]	**Support Cooperative Planning Across Levels of Organization (Systems Approach)** Encourage member jurisdictions that have trails and trail segments determined to be regionally significant to work together to support regional trail networks. SCAG shall encourage joint use of utility, transportation and other rights-of-way, greenbelts, and biodiversity areas. [2004 RTP-EIR]
Avoid Areas that Risk Health and Safety Minimize public expenditure for infrastructure and facilities to support urban type land uses in areas where public health and safety could not be guaranteed. [1996 RCPG]	**Support Livability and Integrate Natural and Human Uses of the Land** Foster livability in all communities. [Growth Vision]
Utilize Effective Ecosystem Management Planning Develop well-managed viable ecosystems or known habitats of rare, threatened and endangered species, including wetlands. [1996 RCPG]	**Preserve Environmentally Sensitive Areas** Preserve rural, agricultural, recreational, and environmentally sensitive areas. [Growth Vision]

Use An Ecosystem Approach To Regional Planning Encourage "watershed management" programs and strategies, recognizing the primary role of local governments in such efforts. [1996 RCPG]	**Protect Environmentally Sensitive Areas** Protect sensitive environmental features such as steep slopes, wetlands, and stream corridors from development. [Growth Vision]
Support Flow of Data and Information for Systems Approach to Planning Coordinate watershed management planning at the subregional level by (1) providing consistent regional data; (2) serving as a liaison between affected local, state, and federal watershed management agencies; and (3) ensuring that watershed planning is consistent with other planning objectives (e. g., transportation, air quality, water supply). [1996 RCPG]	**Support Sustainability Planning and Design** Utilize "green" development techniques. [Growth Vision]
Support Wetland Conservation Support regional efforts to identify and cooperatively plan for wetlands to facilitate both sustaining the amount and quality of wetlands in the region and expediting the process for obtaining wetlands permits. [1996 RCPG]	**Promote Smart Growth** Promote infill development and redevelopment to revitalize existing communities. [Growth Vision]
Encourage Integrative Planning Encourage mitigation measures that reduce noise in certain locations, measures aimed at preservation of biological and ecological resources, measures that would reduce exposure to seismic hazards, minimize earthquake damage, and to develop emergency response and recovery plans [1996 RCPG]	**Ensure adequate access to open space** [Growth Vision]