REPORT

DATE: January 4, 2007

TO: Energy and Environment Committee

FROM: Jessica Kirchner, Associate Regional Planner, (213) 236-1983, kirchner@scag.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Regional Comprehensive Plan Open Space and Habitat Chapter

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S APPROVAL:

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
Release the preliminary outcomes for the Open Space and Habitat Chapter of the RCP for review and input, and direct staff to perform technical refinements.

BACKGROUND:
The development of the RCP has proceeded through several stages, including process design and approach, policy compilation and review and development of preliminary action plans. The process calls for the crafting of specific quantified performance outcomes as a central feature in each chapter. Subsequent to defining the outcomes, the planning process will focus on developing strategies to assure that the outcomes are achieved.

The RCP Task Force at its December meeting recommended approval for the preliminary outcomes described in the attachment. Pending action from the EEC, staff will seek further input from cities, counties, subregions and other regions, and various other stakeholders and experts on whether these outcomes are appropriate, achievable, and a good representation of the policy priorities of the region.

Outcomes at this stage should be viewed as preliminary, and refinements will continue to be made based on input from stakeholders and based on technical considerations. Further, at the point when outcomes are developed for all chapters, staff will work with the Task Force to integrate outcomes and strategies across multiple plan topics.

Staff will present refinements to the outcomes and strategy along with the final draft of the chapter in approximately six months. The final RCP is scheduled to be adopted along with the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) in December 2007.

FISCAL IMPACT:
Work performed for the RCP is included in the current year Overall Work Program (07-035.SCGS1). Additional work on the open space chapter is being performed by a consultant (07-035.SCGC1).

Attachment: Performance outcomes and strategy

Reviewed by: _____
Division Manager

Reviewed by: _____
Department Director

Reviewed by: _____
Chief Financial Officer

REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Open Space and Habitat Chapter
December 2006

Performance Outcomes and Strategy – Initial Proposal

DESCRIPTION: The overall purpose of the Open Space and Habitat Chapter is to establish performance outcomes and an action plan – including measurable performance criteria for the protection of open space and habitat resources in Southern California. For purposes of this report "open space" is divided into three focus areas:

Natural open space - areas with regionally unique or threatened biological resources, large contiguous blocks of natural open space and areas that link large blocks of natural open space.

Community open space – recreation areas that function as regional facilities, open space that serves the daily needs or defines the character of local neighborhoods, and open space that connects or buffers land used in developed areas.

Agricultural lands – prime farmlands, lands covered by the Williamson Act, agricultural lands that function as buffers or linkages to natural open space and agricultural lands that are important components of community open space. Also all lands that currently have a General Plan Agricultural designation or have a designation that allows specific types of agricultural activities

SCAG will identify and categorize lands within the SCAG region according to the following types listed above. As part of the Land Use and Housing chapter additional lands will be designated as various types of "urban."

PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

1. **Outcome:** Protection of natural open space areas identified as regionally important.

   a) Description: Inventory existing open space plans and programs to determine amount of natural open space under protection. Prioritize areas for protection.
   b) Initial Proposed Quantified Outcome: reduction in the rate of loss of natural open space, percentage of regionally important areas preserved
   c) Data considerations: will utilize a combination of SCAG data sets and data acquired by the consultant, requires identification of baseline, measures the rate at which open space loss occurs. Factors for the prioritization of natural open space include biological value (type and condition). Factors for prioritization of community open space include accessibility, regional importance, population served and uniqueness. The study will also evaluate habitat connectivity, ecosystem viability and potential risks and opportunities.

2. **Outcome:** Increase community open space in urban areas.

   a) Description: Requires designation of "urban" parts of the region, cataloguing of infill areas and community open space
   b) Initial Proposed Quantified Outcome: Increase in acres of community open space per 1,000 residents, increase in number of Compass partner cities using proposed design standards for open space to be included in infill/urban development
   c) Data Consideration: need to develop baseline for ratio, determine the types of community open space to include.

3. **Outcome:** Preservation of agricultural lands

   a) Description: Identify agricultural lands as defined above; evaluate existing conservation programs and incentives
   b) Initial Proposed Quantified Outcome: Reduction in rate at which agricultural acres are converted to non agricultural uses (with particular consideration of urban development), percentage of Williamson Act acres in renewal/nonrenewal.
   c) Data considerations: need to determine rate of agricultural conversion and percentage rate reduction.

PROPOSED STRATEGIES:

Activities/Plan provisions – The above-proposed outcomes will be achieved by the application of a strategy involving the following actions. Through the development of the chapter, SCAG will establish the necessary levels of implementation action to achieve the specified outcomes.

Provide programmatic incentives for implementation, including finance
SCAG's open space program will seek to find mechanism for incorporating open space generally, and mitigation considerations specifically, into SCAG's ongoing planning work. In addition, SCAG will identify resources to direct toward local agencies that choose to implement the provisions of this plan. Programmatic incentives include strengthened Intergovernmental Review (IGR), CEQA reform and/or General Plan consistency. Resources will include funds identified in the current state infrastructure bonds for regional planning incentives. In addition, SCAG will propose various new innovative finance mechanisms for this purpose such as benefit assessment districts, conservation tax credits, SAFETEA-LU (and other federal fund sources), Purchase-of-development rights, public private partnerships. Additional local funding mechanisms will be explored.

Land use and urban design standards (for community/infill development)
SCAG will develop a set of simple, broadly applicable standards for various types of urban development consistent with the 2% strategy. These standards will focus on

walkability, pedestrian friendliness, multi-modal systems and access to and inclusion of open space in urban areas. Strategies for including and increasing community open space will be a component of these design standards.

Implement 2% Strategy
SCAG will continue working with individual jurisdictions to collaborate on planning and development of key strategic growth areas identified in the 2% strategy.

Interconnections
It is important to note that the open space program is related to many subjects in the RCP. Below is a preliminary list of possible interconnections staff plans to pursue:

- Water – multi benefit, prop funding opportunities
- Land Use/Housing – smart growth, green buildings
- Energy – green roofs, community gardens, food security
- Air Quality – urban forestry
- Environmental Justice – park access in low income areas
- Solid Waste – green waste, agricultural waste, forestry waste