Environmental Quality Act. The MSCP plan covers an approximately 900square-mile area of rapid growth in southwestern San Diego County. The plan addresses numerous sensitive plant and animal species and their habitats. The MSCP creates a process for the issuance of permits and other authorizations under the Federal ESA, California ESA, and the California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act. This notice describes the proposed action and possible alternatives, notifies the public of a scoping meeting, invites public participation in the scoping process for preparing the joint EIS/EIR, solicits written comments, and identifies the Service official to whom questions and comments concerning the proposed action and the joint EIS/EIR may be directed.

DATES: A public scoping meeting will be held from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. on March 15, 1995, at the Scottish Rite Center, 1895 Camino del Rio South, San Diego, California 92108. Oral comments will be received during the scoping meeting. Written comments are encouraged and should be received on or before April 5, 1995, at the address below.

ADDRESSES: Information, comments, or questions related to preparation of the joint EIS/EIR and the NEPA process should be submitted to Mr. Gail Kobetich, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2730 Loker Avenue West, Carlsbad, California 92008. Written comments also may be sent by facsimile to telephone (619) 431–9618.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Nancy Gilbert, Supervisory Fish and Wildlife Biologist, at the above Carlsbad address, telephone (619) 431–9440. Persons wishing to obtain background material should contact the City of San Diego, Development Services Division, Environmental Analysis Section, 1222 First Avenue, 5th Floor, San Diego, California 92101, telephone (619) 236–6268. Documents also will be available for public inspection by appointment during normal business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday) at the above San Diego office.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The MSCP study area occupies portions of the unincorporated County of San Diego and 10 additional city jurisdictions. The southern boundary of the MSCP study area is the international border with Mexico. National forest lands form much of the eastern boundary, the Pacific Ocean lies to the west, and the northern boundary is the

San Dieguito River Valley. Conservation planning to the north of the MSCP study area is being conducted by the San Diego Association of Governments, and a coalition of 8 north county cities and San Diego County. San Diego County is responsible for conservation planning in the eastern portion of the county.

The diversity of topography, soils, and climate in the study area combine to influence vegetative associations, which in turn support a high diversity of plant and animal species. Topographic features in the study area include broad flat valleys, deep canyons, perennially flowing rivers and intermittent creeks, moderately sloped terrain and steep hillsides, rolling foothills and nearly level mesas, coastal bluffs, and a series of coastal bays, inlets, and lagoons. Elevations range from mean sea level (msl) along the coast to approximately 3,738 feet above msl.

The objectives of the MSCP are to:

- 1. Develop a program for the maintenance of biological diversity and the conservation/protection of self-sustaining viable populations of federally-listed endangered, threatened, and key candidate species and their habitats.
- 2. Define a Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) within which preserve planning is focused or within which a preserve is defined, and implement a preserve system which conserves viable habitat and provides for wildlife use and movement.
- 3. Reduce the human-related causes of species' extirpation within the MSCP study area.
- 4. Establish a partnership among State, Federal, and local agencies of government to facilitate mitigation and approval of public and private sector land development and construction projects by expediting acquisition of Federal and State permits. This action would provide a long-term economic benefit.

The biological goal for the preserve design is preservation of as much of the core biological resource areas and linkages as possible. The economic goal is for the ultimate preserve to be affordable and for the costs to be shared equitably among the participants.

The plan proposes a new process for wildlife and habitat conservation, and for implementation of the Federal and State of California ESAs, which relies on existing local agency land use review and approval authority. The new process places conservation responsibilities on local jurisdictions, based on their ability to implement a segment of the MSCP for their jurisdiction. In exchange for these

coordinated conservation plans, local jurisdictions will receive from the Service permits for the taking of federally-listed species and will enter into pre-listing agreements for protection of other species of concern. A list of covered animal and plant species is incorporated in the MSCP Plan, including species that are federally or state-listed, proposed for listing, and candidates for listing.

The lands identified for open space and habitat preservation are located within the MHPA. The MHPA was cooperatively designed by the 12 participating jurisdictions in the MSCP study area, in consultation with the Service and California Department of Fish and Game, major property owners and environmental groups, based on biological, ownership, and land use criteria. Planning staff of the 5 jurisdictions that have the largest amounts of remaining habitat in the MSCP study area (County of San Diego and cities of San Diego, Chula Vista, Poway, and Santee) spent several months developing "soft lines" delineating areas within which specified percentages of land would be preserved and "hard lines" delineating 100% preservation areas. The other local jurisdictions within the MSCP study area were asked to comment on a preserve design based solely on public ownership and general plan open-space designations. The resulting MHPA covers 164,326 acres of habitat.

The habitat conservation described by the MHPA is approximate. The MHPA may be modified during the course of subsequent land use and project planning, as long as the changes are consistent with MSCP objectives. Preserve boundaries, approved through either the MSCP plan or subsequent land use plans, may be adjusted without the need to amend the MSCP plan, or applicable land use plans, when the new preserve boundary results in a preserve area that is equivalent in biological value to the original configuration or is of greater biological value.

value.

Although the City of San Diego will prepare the draft EIS, the Service will be responsible for its content and scope. In

addition, the City of San Diego will act as the lead agency for the preparation of

the EIR

Project level environmental documentation will be included in the joint EIS/EIR for amendments to a variety of planning documents for the cities of San Diego, Chula Vista, and Santee. The proposed amendments would incorporate the preserve boundaries of the MSCP plan into adopted land use plans. Actions