



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Terri Kasinga

Phone: (909) 383-4631

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CALTRANS TO INVEST \$7 MILLION INTO LAND CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN COACHELLA VALLEY

SAN BERNARDINO – The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is committing \$7 million from the 2016 State Highway Operation Protection Program to fulfill a major obligation outlined in the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP).

The amount is more than double what was initially expected to be included in the upcoming budget. The commitment was announced Thursday during a meeting of the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), which implements and oversees the *Plan*.

“Caltrans strongly supports the objectives outlined in the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. By working together, Caltrans and leaders in the Coachella Valley have been able to maintain and improve roads while preserving the desert’s natural environment,” said John Bulinski, Director of Caltrans District 8. “This funding commitment also is a reflection of Caltrans’ new mission statement and our commitment to sustainability, partnership and accountability.”

The CVCC is a sister agency to the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG). The Plan, which was approved in 2008, outlines a 75-year vision to conserve nearly 240,000 acres of land valley-wide and protect 27 plants and animals, including Peninsular bighorn sheep, desert tortoises and the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard. The CVCC is ahead of schedule in terms of land acquisition, and has already secured more than 87,000 acres of core habitat and sand transport areas.

Similar to other agencies, Caltrans has agreed to acquire or fund the acquisition of land as well as provide contributions for the monitoring, management and adaptive management. The funding outlined in the State Highway Operation Protection Program nearly covers the financial payment that is outlined in the CVMSHCP Implementing Agreement.

The 2016 State Highway Operation Protection Program (SHOPP) includes a listing of projects proposed for allocation from Fiscal Year 2016-17 through FY 2019-20. Caltrans District 8 had requested \$3 million for the CVMSHCP. But after learning of money still available within the statewide budget, the Director Bulinski and District 8 staff advocated for additional funding.

The Final Draft of the SHOPP budget will be presented to the California Transportation Commission this month and adopted by April 1, 2016.

“The CVCC greatly appreciates the commitment by the Director and District 8 staff to ensuring we have funding to implement the Plan,” said Rancho Mirage Councilman Richard Kite, who is chairman of the CVCC. “We have a bold vision for balancing growth and development with conservation and it will take partnerships like these to *achieve our goals*.”

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