

RCA and RCIS Guidelines – February 2018 Revisions to June 2017 Version – Highlights

The RCIS Program Guidelines may be revised periodically to provide clarifications or other changes intended to improve the process for preparing Regional Conservation Assessments (RCA), Regional Conservation Investment Strategies (RCIS), and Mitigation Credit Agreements (MCA). The MCA guidelines are in the process of being developed and are not yet available. The following are highlights of the changes made in the February 2018 update to the RCA and RCIS Guidelines which, in turn, were revisions to the June 2017 RCA and RCIS Guidelines. These highlights do not encompass all the changes made to the guidelines. Please refer to the revised guidelines to see all the changes that were made. If you have any interests, comments, questions, or concerns regarding the RCIS Program and the RCIS Program Guidelines, please submit them to the RCIS Program team at rcis@wildlife.ca.gov. Thank you for your interest in the RCIS Program.

Introduction:

- 1) RCIS Program Introduction – to help users understand the purpose of the RCIS Program conservation tools, added language to indicate the tools are to determine strategies for achieving conservation priorities, assist in land use planning efforts, help minimize impacts to resources and maximize conservation investments, and reduce project mitigation costs.
- 2) Clarified and added or deleted some definitions (e.g., conservation action, habitat enhancement action), acronyms, and abbreviations.
- 3) Added language to emphasize the non-binding nature of RCAs and RCISs on land use authorities.
- 4) Provided more guidance on how local land use authorities shall be consulted.

RCA Guidelines:

- 5) Merged the species and natural communities information sections in the RCA guidelines. Clarified the emphasis on using ACE as a key resource in developing an RCA, and adding or emphasizing species or taxonomic groups and their distribution information only if those species add additional conservation value in the RCA area that is not already considered in the ACE datasets.
- 6) Added, as resources, the Fish Passage Assessment Database and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) fish passage resources to the RCA Guidelines, Section 3.2.4 - Habitat Connectivity Values.
- 7) Clarified what metrics the RCA should identify in terms of existing protected areas, in Section 3.2.5 – Existing Conservation Areas.
- 8) Provided guidance in Section 3.2.8 – Consistency and Compliance, that the RCA proponent shall consider local general plans in developing the RCA.
- 9) Provided additional guidance in Section 3.3 – Data Sharing and Access.

RCIS Guidelines:

- 10) Indicated, in Section 4.1 - Introduction, that the RCIS should use existing information to develop a comprehensive strategy to enable protecting focal species and other conservation elements, and promote resilience to foreseeable pressures and stressors. The RCIS may be used to assist in land use planning in conjunction with other land use considerations, such as physical geography, social, economic, and risk-reduction analyses.

- 11) Added language to Section 4.1 – Introduction, regarding the public agency requirements to consult with local land use agencies.
- 12) Provided guidance on maps in Section 4.2 – Required Components of an RCIS.
- 13) Provided guidance in Section 4.2.4 – Consistency and Compliance, regarding consideration of existing and foreseeable land uses.
- 14) Provided additional guidance in Section 4.2.4.2 – Consistency with NCCPs and HCPs. Also provided a sample of consistency letter language.
- 15) Modified guidance in Section 4.2.5 (and subsections) – Focal Species and Other Species Information and Analysis, to use existing information and efficiently determine focal species and organize information in groups of habitats, taxonomic groups, ecosystem functions, or other appropriate groups, to efficiently develop a comprehensive RCIS.
- 16) Provided guidance in Section 4.2.5.3 – Other Species Information, on how other, non-focal species may be considered for MCA credits.
- 17) Indicated in Section 4.2.7 – Conservation Goals and Measurable Objectives, that goals and objectives must describe how they provide for adaptation opportunities against the negative effects of climate change on the focal species and other conservation elements. Goals and objectives may be grouped by habitats, taxonomic groups, ecosystem functions, and other appropriate groups if a goal or objective largely addresses the ecological needs of the group and pressures affecting the group. Added “maintaining and enhancing ecological functions and ecosystem services” to the list of potential conservation goals. Added language regarding conservation objectives and metrics.
- 18) Indicated in Section 4.2.8 – Conservation Actions and Habitat Enhancement Actions, that the actions may be grouped, similar to the goals and objectives, and that conservation priorities shall be indicated among those actions.
- 19) Added language in Section 4.2.9.2 – Aquatic Resources and other sections of the Guidelines, to include marine area resources.
- 20) Reorganized, added, and/or clarified language in various sections in Section 4.2.9 – Best Available Scientific Information.
- 21) Added clarifying language to Section 4.3 – Additional Requirements to Create MCAs, to indicate RCIS proponent and MCA proponent responsibilities with regard to monitoring, updating an RCIS, data collection, and reporting. Language was also added to indicate that the RCIS 10-year report must summarize MCA progress reports and, where feasible, should summarize progress due to other conservation and habitat enhancement actions not related to an MCA.
- 22) Added Section 4.5 – Accessibility, to comply with Web accessibility requirements.
- 23) Updated Section 4.6 – Review and Approval Process, including subsections, with a revised Figure 1 review process flowchart and new or modified text. Provided State agency support letter sample text.
- 24) Added clarifying language to Section 4.6.1.1 – State Agency Letter, to clarify that a State agency is not making a commitment to consult on or implement any part of the RCIS.
- 25) Added clarifying language to Section 4.6.1.2 – Consultation with Other Agencies, to indicate RCIS proponent responsibilities to consult with local public agencies with land use authority and HCP and NCCP Implementing Entities.
- 26) Clarified notification steps and responsibilities in Section 4.5.1.4 – Public Involvement.