



SANTA CLARA VALLEY
HABITAT AGENCY

Habitat Plan to Add Fees, Hasten Permitting

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By [Michael Moore](#)

Gilroy Dispatch

A four-volume, 2,000-page strategy to protect endangered species throughout the county from future development - labelled the first draft of the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Conservation Plan and the Natural Community Conservation Plan - is out for review and comment.

The public comment period started Friday, and residents have 120 days - until April 18, 2011- to submit input and ask questions about the strategy to implement an imagined contiguous 500,000-acre swath, mostly in South County, to preserve and protect 21 endangered and threatened species. The plan is expected to be implemented in 2012 and continue for 50 years.

Gilroy, Morgan Hill, San Jose, Santa Clara County, the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the Valley Transportation Authority are participating in the plan which covers about 62 percent of the county's acreage.

If approved, the habitat plan will sell permits to allow developers and home builders to build on the covered species' habitat. Species covered under the plan include the Bay checkerspot butterfly, California red-legged frog and California tiger salamander.

Now such permits are required on projects that affect the species, but can only be obtained at the state and federal level, and developers typically are required to purchase comparable nearby land to mitigate any disturbance to the plant or animal in question. That process can take years due to the need for expert inspections, and keep projects in a regulatory purgatory that often leaves the builder guessing as to a construction schedule, according to SCVHCP program manager Ken Schreiber.

"The habitat plan would move the permitting down to the local level," Schreiber said. "Project proponents would no longer have to go through a long process. That will save a lot of time, and what it provides is some certainty because you will know what conditions you will have to meet before a project even starts."

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