

California Native Plant Society

POLICY AND GUIDELINES ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT DOCUMENTS

Revised: September 1993

One of the primary functions of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) is the preservation of our state's native flora. To this end it is vital that CNPS actively participate in the governmental procedures which determine the modification of California's landscape and flora. A significant step in the present procedures involves the creation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for federal actions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for state/county/local actions under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It is critical for the Society to be involved in the evaluation of these statements. All documents and comments submitted as CNPS comments should be consistent with the Policy that CNPS focuses on plants. The Board of Directors has adopted the following guidelines and statements of policy to assist chapters and individuals of the Society in participating in these procedures.

I. CNPS may respond to Notices of Preparation (NOP) of draft documents to identify to the agency concerns which in our opinion need to be addressed in the preparation of the environmental impact document. Of particular interest is notification of unusual plant or plant community values which may not be reported in the open literature or published data bases. Important impacts of the project on plant resources should be identified.

II. CNPS will evaluate Draft Environmental Impact documents, Environmental Assessments (EAs), Wetland Fill Applications, and Negative Declarations to determine that the document:

- Accurately reflects the existing plant cover within the project area.
- Notes the presence or absence of listed or candidate rare or endangered species, or plants considered to be sensitive or important from a local perspective
- Is consistent with the current CNPS Mitigation Guidelines Regarding Impacts To Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants
- States procedures to minimize destruction of plant resources
- Where feasible, proposes re-establishment of appropriate plant cover to maintain aesthetic values and provide site stability
- Accurately considers the cumulative impacts of developments, including recent EIR/EISs and Negative Declarations
- Adequately considers wetlands and other special types of vegetation

1. If rare or unusual plant taxa or communities would be negatively impacted by the project, avoidance of impacts is the best practice. This can be via large, defensible set-asides or preserves that protect existing habitat and rare plants. Where this is impossible, acquisition and protection of comparable intact habitat off-site is preferred over small on-site preserves, and over off-site enhancement or creation of rare plant populations and their habitat. Transplantation, translocation, creation or enhancement of rare plant or plant community populations should be conducted only through carefully controlled scientific experiment, as part of an accepted recovery plan for an endangered plant or plant community, not as de facto mitigation for on-site impacts. In cases where on-site preserves will be small or avoidance of impacts is impossible, it may be acceptable to sacrifice on-site rare plants and use mitigation monies, perhaps pooled from many projects, to acquire larger blocks of existing rare plant or rare plant community habitat off-site.

2. CNPS may, and often should, offer general suggestions for use of native plants in the landscaping of construction projects, but it is not the function of CNPS to suggest individual species for each environmental impact document. Recommendations should be phrased to conform to the following principles:





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a. Trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants should be used which are indigenous to the general project area (as discussed in the CNPS Tree Planting policy and Guidelines for Chapters to Reduce Impacts to Plants document).

b. If non-indigenous natives are desired for purposes of form, floral characteristics, or function (ground covers, etc.), species selected should be those which are unlikely to hybridize with the local flora, in order to preserve genetic integrity.

c. Suggestions for use of exotic plants should be avoided. Where aggressive exotics could threaten native flora, this fact should be recorded.

III. CNPS will not be involved officially or unofficially in research for or writing of EIR or EIS documents for any agency.

1. If an agency requests technical expertise from CNPS prior to preparation of a draft EIR or EIS to determine whether unusual floristic characteristics or rare or endangered plant species occur within the project area, and if an on-ground survey or other research would be required to furnish this information, CNPS usually should limit its participation to furnishing names of qualified botanical consultants within the general geographic area of the project. The agency should make its own selection of the specific consultant and be prepared to provide payment for expert botanical consulting service. Consultant fees should be a matter for settlement between the consultant and agency, and should not involve CNPS. If CNPS is aware of unusual or obscure values (recently described taxa, special plant values which are not widely known), it is appropriate to mention these at the earliest stage possible so that they may be fully considered during the draft EIR/EIS process. CNPS comments should request that surveys comply with the Department of Fish and Game's "Guidelines for Assessing Effects of Proposed Developments on Rare and Endangered Plants and Plant Communities" (Appendix B of the CNPS Mitigation Guidelines).

IV. CNPS should receive for review and further comment the Final Environmental Impact documents. The Final documents should include all comments received on the draft documents, with agency replies. These need to be examined.

V. Procedures of local CNPS chapters: 1. The Chapter President or Conservation Chair should review or select reviewers (preferably members of CNPS) avoiding personal conflict of interest.

2. Comments prepared by a chapter member on behalf of CNPS should be reviewed by another chapter member (preferably an officer or committee chair) familiar with CNPS policies before submittal to the originating agency. All comments need to be consistent with CNPS policies and letters must be in a professional tone.

3. If several Chapters are commenting on the same project documents, it is important to agree on positions supported or opposed by "CNPS".

4. Copies of Chapter comments should be sent to the CNPS Vice President of Conservation.

This policy, adopted September 1993, revises and supersedes the original Policy on Environmental Impact Statements published in Fremontisa (Vol. 2, No. 1, 4/74).

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