



County of Santa Cruz

Department of Community Development and Infrastructure

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SANDHILLS HABITAT INFORMATION



The Santa Cruz Sandhills are a unique community of plants and animals found only on outcrops of Zayante sands in the central portion of Santa Cruz County. Due to their limited geographic range (Santa Cruz County) and narrow habitat specificity (Zayante Soils), the endemic communities and species of the Sandhills are naturally extraordinarily rare. Estimated to cover 6,000 acres originally, approximately 40% of Sandhills habitat has been lost, primarily due to sand quarrying and development.

The Santa Cruz Sandhills are home to a number of *plant* and *animal* species that are endemic to (found only in) the Sandhills. Named after the towns and neighborhoods in the region, they are:

- Ben Lomond Spineflower
- Ben Lomond Buckwheat
- Bonny Doon Silverleaf manzanita
- Santa Cruz Wallflower
- Santa Cruz Cypress
- Santa Cruz Monkeyflower
- Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat
- Mount Hermon June Beetle
- Zayante Band-Winged Grasshopper

Last updated: 12.14.2022

The Mount Hermon June Beetle (*Polyphylla barbata*) is endemic to the Santa Cruz Sandhills, where it inhabits both the sand parkland and sand chaparral communities. This cryptic animal lives underground as a larva, feeding on the roots of plants for approximately two years. Males can be observed flying around searching for mates at twilight during the summer (May through September), earning them the name "June Beetle".

The Zayante Band-Winged Grasshopper is a small grasshopper endemic to open habitat characteristic of sand parkland within the Santa Cruz Sandhills. During days with warm to hot temperatures between May and September, this well-camouflaged grasshopper can be found basking or feeding on plants.

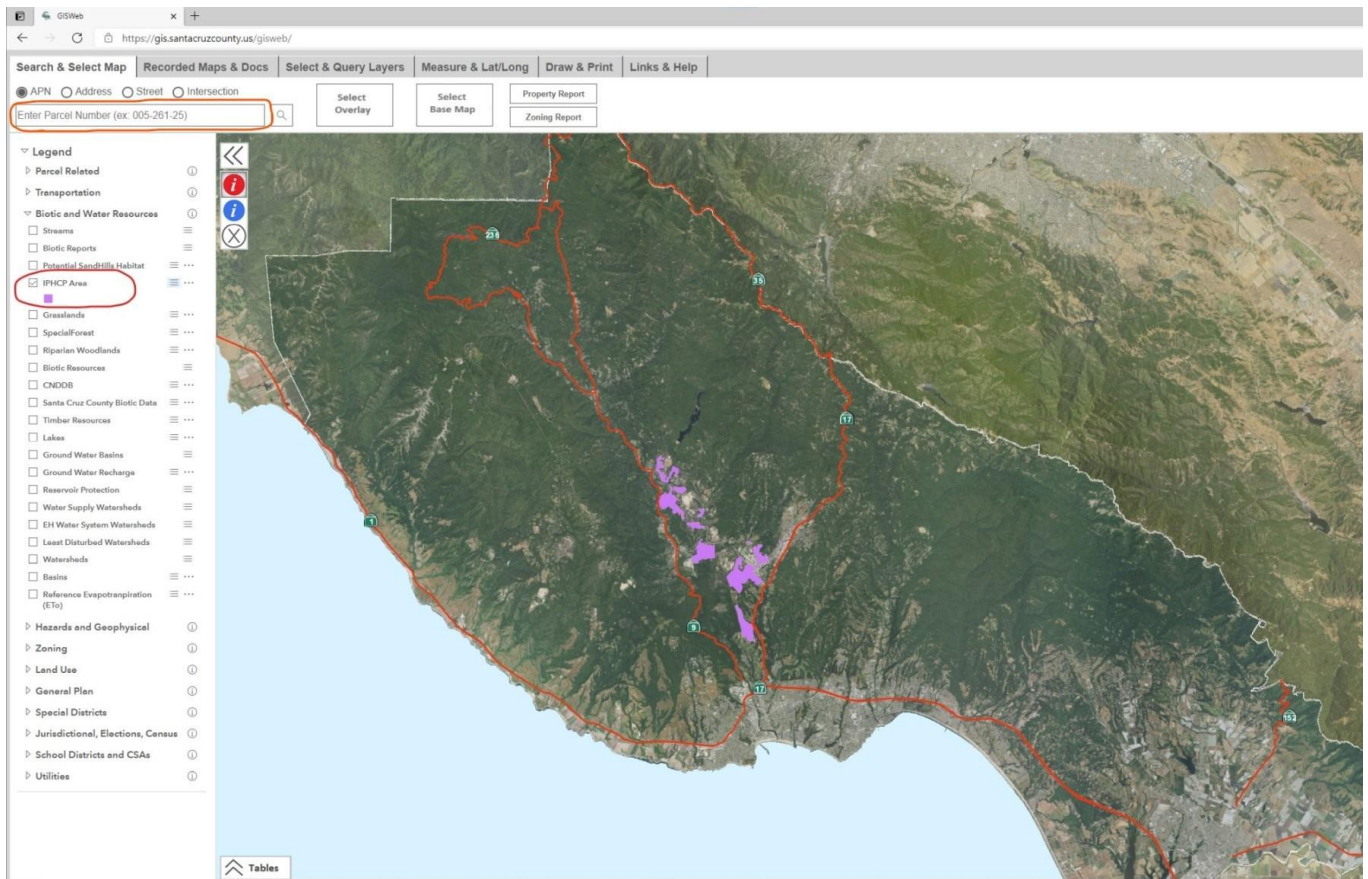
As a result of habitat loss, the Mount Hermon June Beetle and Zayante Band-Winged Grasshopper were listed as *endangered* by the **United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)** in 1997.

PERMIT PROCESS

The permitting process for projects located in Sandhills depends upon whether your property is located within the Interim Programmatic Habitat Conservation Plan (IPHCP) area or not¹.

To determine if you are within the IPHCP area go to the County's GIS by clicking on "Parcel Maps (GIS)" under the quick find on the Planning Department's main webpage. Once there, select "Apps" and then select the "GIS Web option". From here select the "IPHCP Area" from the Legend (circled in **red** below), then enter your Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) in the search box (circled in **orange** below), and click the search button.

¹ Refer to sections below for exceptions.

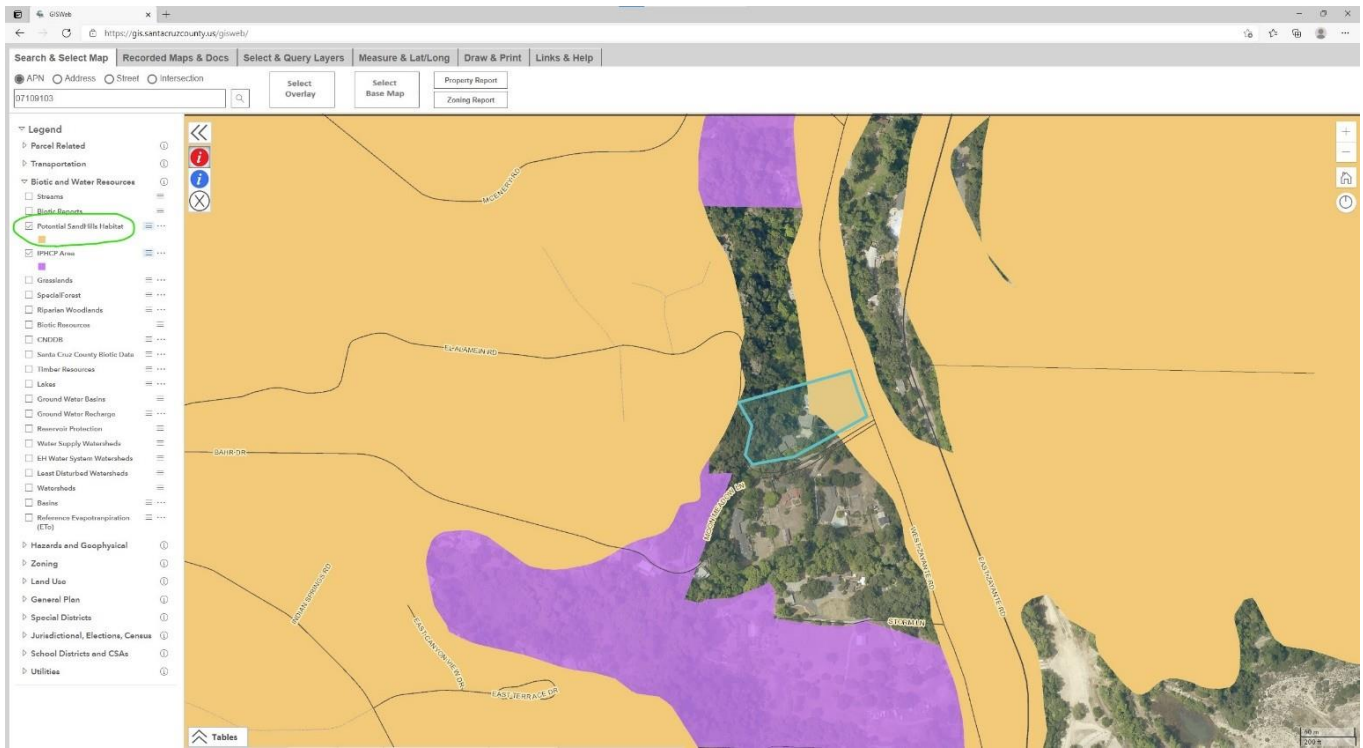


If your parcel is in the IPHCP Area, it will show up on the GIS with a purple overlay (an example is shown below).



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If your parcel is not located in the IPHCP Area, you can check to see whether your parcel potentially contains Sandhills habitat by also selecting “Potential Sandhills Habitat” (circled in **green** below) from the Legend and clicking the search button again. If your parcel is potentially located in Sandhills habitat, there will be a tan-ish colored overlay on the parcel.



Properties Located within IPHCP Area

Parcels within potential Sandhills Habitat have different procedures for obtaining building permits and may incur serious restrictions. The location within the habitat means that the parcel may contain County, State or Federally protected or threatened plants, animals or insects, or their habitat. If your property is located within the IPHCP area, impacts to endangered species are allowed to be mitigated through the purchase of conservation credits from the Zayante Sandhills Conservation Bank (ZSCB), only if the project meets the following eligibility requirements:

- The parcel size is no larger than 1.5 acres (larger parcels may be included based on the proposed project)
- The disturbance is minimized to the maximum extent to avoid and/or reduce impacts to Sandhills habitat
- The proposed project is residential in nature
- The proposed project disturbs no more than 15,000 square feet per existing parcel

Refer to [IPHCP Processing Chart](#) below for more information.

Properties Located in Sandhills Habitat but are Outside² the IPHCP Area or project Doesn't Meet all Eligibility Requirements

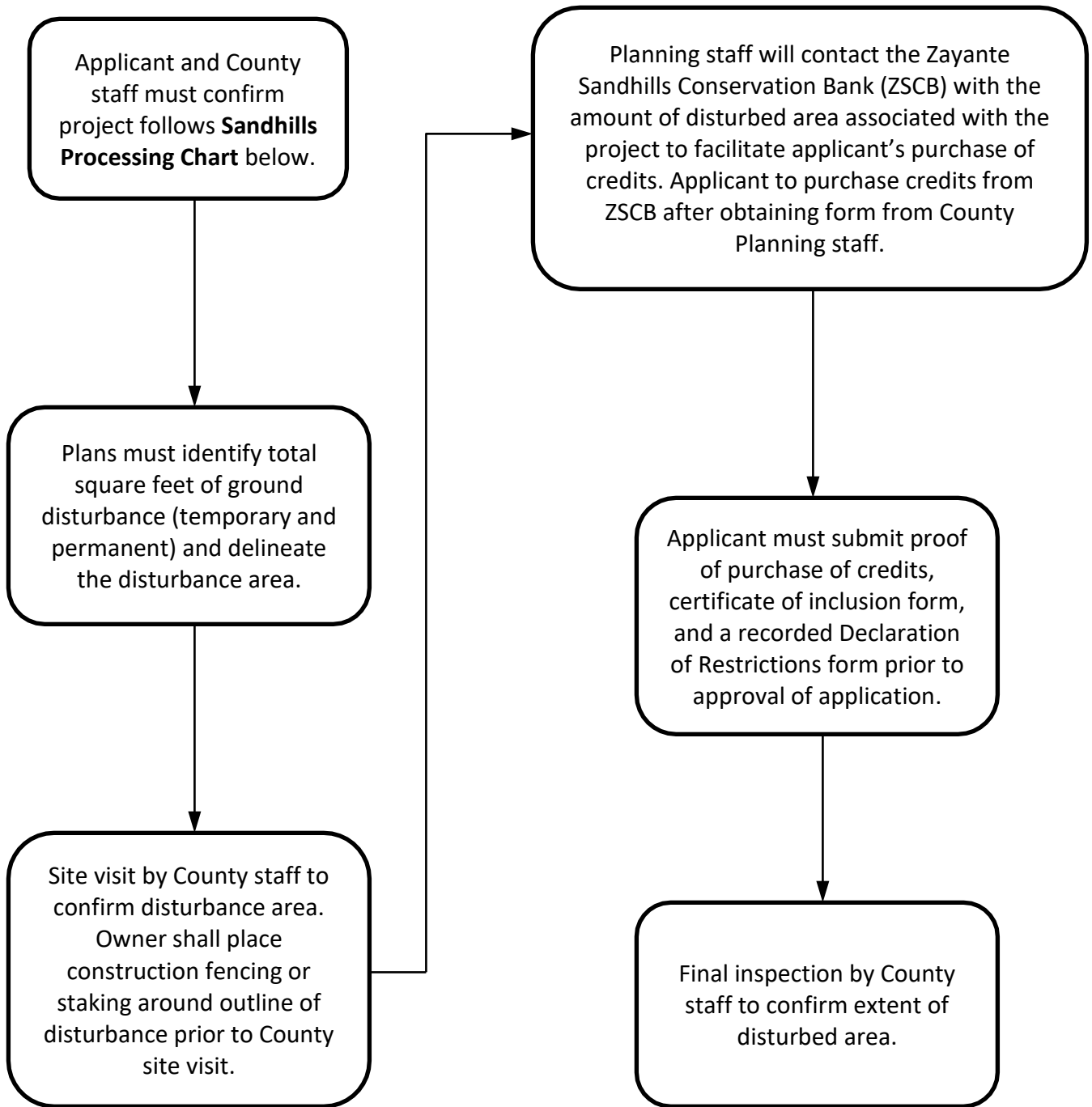
If your property is located outside the IPHCP area or if the project doesn't meet all eligibility requirements, you may still be able to develop on your parcel, however there are more steps involved. Any impacts to endangered species are allowed to be mitigated through purchase of conservation credits from the Zayante Sandhills Conservation Bank only upon approval from the County Board of Supervisors and, if applicable, through environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Planning Department staff will still review the project to determine if disturbance is minimized and is reasonable for the site. In order for staff to support a project in Sandhills, the applicant must show that all efforts to avoid and minimize impacts have been considered and implemented to the maximum extent feasible. Once plans are received that staff feel are approvable, a short staff report is prepared and put on a Board of Supervisors meeting as a "consent" item. If the Board of Supervisors approves of the purchase of conservation credits, planning staff can approve the plans. *In some cases, where the proposed project meets all eligibility criteria (listed above) except for the size of the parcel (the parcel is over 1.5 acres), the parcel may be included within the IPHCP. These projects may be processed according to the IPHCP Processing Chart below.* For all other projects refer to the Sandhills Processing Chart below.

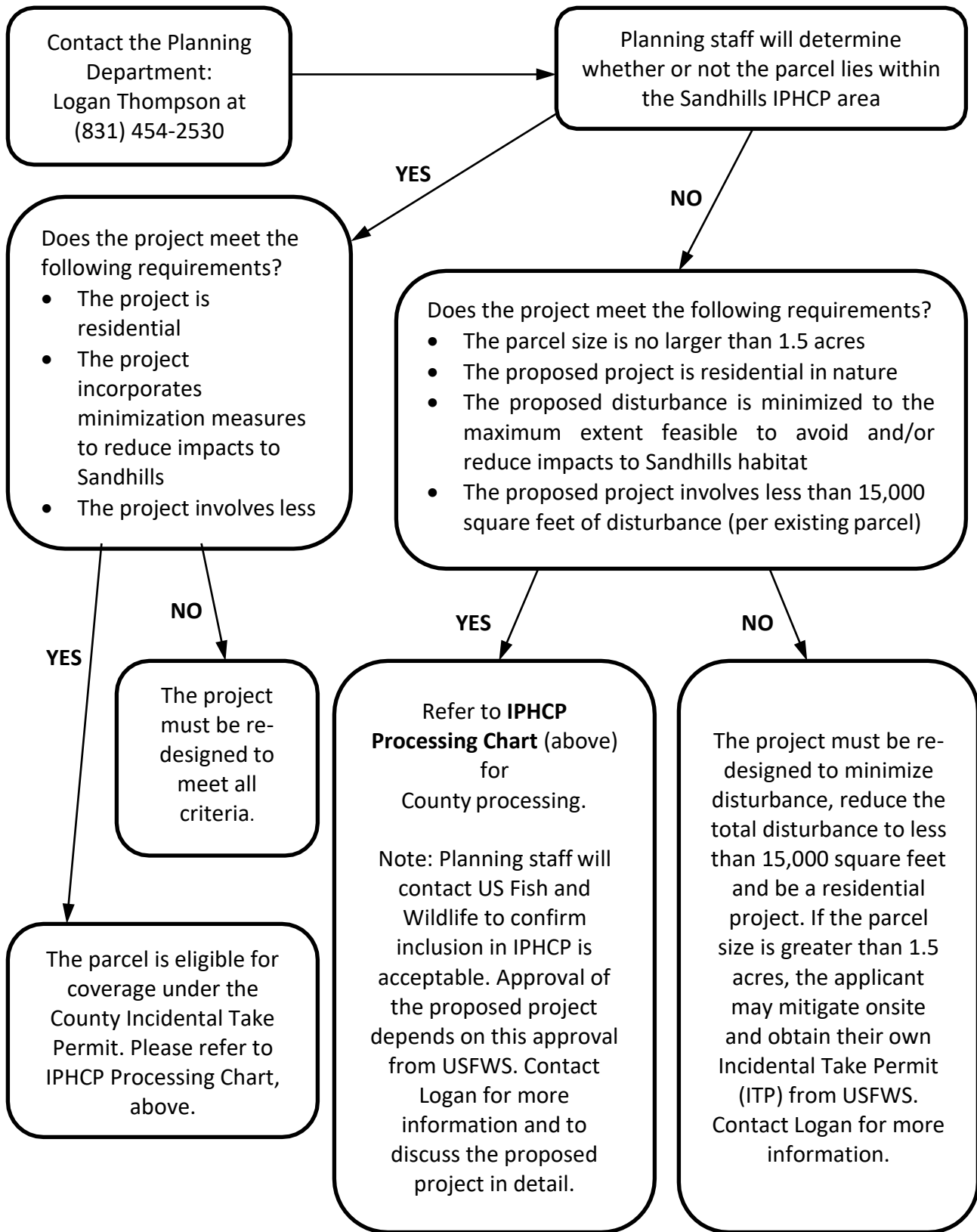
Once the application has been approved by the Planning Department **the applicant is still required to obtain an individual take permit (ITP) from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) prior to any site disturbance.** The ITP applications are prepared by a USFWS approved biologist (Jodi McGraw is currently the only USFWS approved biologist for Sandhills ITPs). Contact USFWS at (805) 644-1766 for more information.

² Parcels located outside the IPHCP area may be included within the IPHCP based on the location and scope of the project. Please contact Environmental Planning staff for more information.

IPHCP Processing Chart



Sandhills Processing Chart



Santa Cruz Sandhills References

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Local Representative

Chad Mitcham
1100 Fiesta Way
Watsonville, CA 95076
(805) 677-3328

Main Office

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The Zayante Sandhills Conservation Bank

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US Fish and Wildlife Approved Biologists

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Sandhills Alliance for Natural Diversity (www.santacruzsandhills.com)