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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WILDLIFE HABITAT PLAN RECEIVES FINAL OKAY

Coachella Valley, CA, October 1 – The Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) announced today that after more than a decade of planning, the historic Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) received final approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) had previously signed the permit for the CVMSHCP on Sept. 9. The approval from state and federal wildlife agencies is the final step in this valley-wide plan which balances future development and protection of our environment for the next 75 years.

“I am delighted that the state and federal wildlife agencies have joined the Coachella Valley in a commitment to long-term environmental protection by issuing the final permit,” said Richard Kite, Rancho Mirage City Councilman and Chairman of the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission. “After many years of planning, we look forward to putting this plan into effect - to ensure the prosperity for our region and the conservation of our rich natural heritage for residents and visitors alike.”

The Plan permanently conserves 240,000 acres of natural desert open space and protects 27 sensitive plant and animal species. The Plan safeguards habitat for desert wildlife in an interconnected system of reserves, while promoting enhanced opportunities for recreation, tourism and job growth, essential to improving quality of life in the Coachella Valley. The CVMSHCP provides comprehensive compliance with all existing federal and state endangered species laws under one permit

"This is another significant milestone in the efforts of southern Californians to achieve regional wildlife conservation by working with a broad array of partners from all levels of government," said Jim Bartel, Field Supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Carlsbad Office. California Department of Fish and Game Director Donald Koch said, "This is a great example of how effective species conservation and planned development can be achieved together. These types of planning efforts are important to the future of our state and its fish and wildlife resources."

With issuance of the final state and federal permits, the CVMSHCP will be implemented by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, elected officials representing local agencies participating in the Plan. "This visionary plan is the result of a lot of hard work and compromise by CVAG, all our member jurisdictions and our state and federal partners," said CVAG Chairman and Mayor of Coachella Eduardo Garcia.

Both public and private infrastructure and development projects benefit from the regional permit. On October 2, collection of a habitat mitigation fee of \$5,730 per acre from new development projects to support acquisition of conservation lands will begin. The CVMSHCP also incorporates protection for the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard and replaces the "lizard fee" which has been used to acquire habitat for the endangered lizard since 1986.

The benefits of the CVMSHCP are well recognized by local elected officials seeking to assure critical freeway and freeway interchange projects can be built without endangered species conflicts. The CVMSHCP also offers certainty for the business community ultimately making the Coachella Valley a more attractive place for businesses to relocate or expand

"The plan approved today will ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for our region, and will benefit generations to come" said Supervisor Roy Wilson, "We are all looking forward to finally getting to the important work of infrastructure improvements."