

# FACT SHEET

## Revised Draft Wildlife Ordinance


### Summary

The Department of City Planning has initiated a study to draft potential development regulations for wildlife protection at the direction of the City Council [[Council File motion](#)]. The Wildlife Pilot Study is intended to result in regulations that will help to preserve wildlife and promote habitat connectivity in a pilot study area in the Santa Monica Mountains between the 405 and 101 freeways. A revised draft of proposed regulations was released for public review and feedback in April 2022.

The overall objective of the proposed regulations is to achieve more sustainable outcomes in hillside developments and to promote biodiversity, in addition to other goals such as climate change resilience, fire safety and water conservation. To meet these objectives, the regulations aim to minimize disturbance of biological resources where sensitive habitat may exist particularly around waterways, riparian areas and highly vegetated areas. The regulations are also focused on protecting soil and native vegetation by improving grading and landscaping standards.

### Background

The Wildlife Pilot Study is an effort that the Planning Department began working on in 2016 in response to a motion introduced by City Councilman Paul Koretz of Council District 5. The Planning Department began this study to inform the development of a set of regulations that would protect wildlife connectivity in the city. The City's aim has been to balance wildlife habitat maintenance and enhancement with private property development.



The Pilot Study identified areas that could potentially contain sensitive biotic conditions that are important to protect. These areas are identified as proposed Protected Areas for Wildlife (PAWs). The Pilot Study Area is a smaller subset of the PAWs, with its boundary encompassing the communities between the 405 and 101 freeways in the Santa Monica Mountains, including: Hollywood, Laurel Canyon, Bel-Air, Beverly Crest, Sherman Oaks, and Studio City.

The Pilot Study Area represents a mix of primarily low density residential lots and large undeveloped open spaces and natural areas. Development in this area is intermingled with undeveloped land providing an environment for piloting regulations to enhance biological value while balancing housing development.


The Study recommended that maintaining and enhancing larger, contiguous areas suitable for wildlife and native species would provide greater biological value than preserving only limited or isolated patches and pathways. Therefore, the proposed Ordinance takes a broad approach to maintaining and enhancing ecosystems, biodiversity, and wildlife corridors across the entire Pilot Study area.

Once adopted, it is intended that the regulations being proposed in the Wildlife Ordinance will be extended beyond the [Wildlife Ordinance District pilot area](#) to all proposed Protection Areas for Wildlife (PAWs) throughout the city, which will link important ecological areas together to further enhance wildlife connectivity and biodiversity.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### 1. What is the Wildlife Ordinance and why is it being proposed?

In 2016 a City Council [motion](#) directed the Planning Department to conduct a study and create an ordinance with a set of land use regulations that would protect wildlife connectivity in the city. Addressing climate change and preserving biodiversity have been topics of interest to many over the last several decades. Advancements in research by the scientific community and technology are giving cities and counties more tools to understand nature and its benefits. The City of Los Angeles is advancing planning for the related topics of biodiversity, climate change, resilience and sustainability. Most recent efforts include: [Resilient Los Angeles 2018](#); [Sustainability pLAn 2019](#); LA Sanitation and Environment's [Biodiversity Report 2018](#) and [Biodiversity Report 2020](#); and the [Wildlife Pilot Study](#) and proposed Wildlife Ordinance.



Protecting and maintaining areas for wildlife also serves the purposes of addressing safety and hazard mitigation (specifically wildfire, flooding and erosion) while also addressing water and air quality. The overall intent of the Ordinance is to achieve protection of natural resources, wildlife and open space, thereby advancing sustainability and resilience goals for the City.

## **2. How will the Wildlife Ordinance benefit wildlife and address biodiversity?**

Biodiversity is the variety of plants, animals, and other species interacting with their environment to maintain the balance of nature. In cities, these environments include the natural areas, urban landscapes, and other built environments that these species call home.

The City of Los Angeles is fortunate to be located within a globally recognized hotspot of native biodiversity. This designation also means that the biodiversity here is threatened, and innovative strategies are needed to ensure its resilience and sustainability. The survival and well-being of the City's residents also depend on ecosystem services provided by biodiversity, such as air pollution reduction, adapting to a changing climate, mental health and educational opportunities, water cleansing, and aesthetic benefits.

To maintain biodiversity in LA, it is essential that habitats and open spaces are connected across cities and regions. Maintaining and creating such connections between habitat patches is essential for mixing wildlife genes and DNA, and keeping populations and overall biodiversity healthy. The proposed regulations achieve more sustainable outcomes in hillside developments by including ridgeline preservation, promoting biodiversity, in addition to addressing goals such as climate change resilience, fire safety and water conservation.

More information can be found in the [Biodiversity Fact Sheet](#).

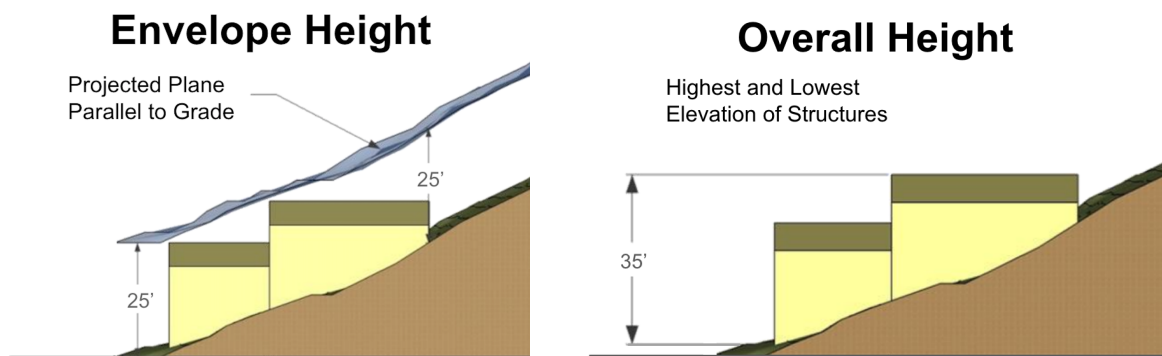
## **3. What is the difference between the 2022 Revised Draft Wildlife Ordinance and the version that was released in 2021?**

The original concepts developed for the draft ordinance released in 2021 have been refined to reduce complexity and ease implementation. The 2022 draft ordinance also incorporates mapping and protection of ridgelines in the Wildlife District based on the proposed Ridgeline Protection Ordinance and public feedback.

- **Ordinance structure:** The 2022 draft is updated to reduce length and complexity, establish the Supplemental Use District and standard process for requesting relief.
- **Boundary:** The 2022 draft boundary is simplified, removes properties that overlapped with the Ventura Specific Plan, removes commercial and multi-family properties at the boundary edges and incorporates single family properties inadvertently omitted at the southern edge.
- **Applicability:** The draft ordinance standards were intended to apply broadly to new construction, additions, remodels, grading, pools, patios, driveways and fences. The standards are intended to apply to projects that have the greatest impacts on wildlife habitat, and landform and vegetation disturbance. The 2022 draft includes the same categories of projects, specifies Major Remodels, additions over 500 square feet, and grading more than 500 cubic yards are considered projects.
- **Site Plan Review:** The previous draft required a Site Plan Review process for projects proposing 10,000 square feet or more of total residential floor area (RFA) development. The 2022 draft triggers the Site Plan Review Process for projects proposing 7,500 square feet of RFA, or 1,000 or more cubic yards of remedial grading, or projects that contain any Wildlife Resource or are within a Resource Buffer.
- **Setbacks:** The 2021 draft proposed flexible rules for setbacks. In the 2022 draft, changes introducing flexibility were removed to reduce complexity. The 2022 draft retained rules for front yard minimum (10') and for prevailing front yard setback. Also added one additional 50% setback requirement on a ridgeline.
- **Lot Coverage:** The 2021 draft proposed lot coverage limits and landscaping minimums based on impermeable surfaces and lot size. The 2022 draft has simplified these standards by limiting lot coverage to 50% of the lot area for any sized lot and removing references to impermeable vs. permeable surfaces. Total lot coverage is capped at 100,000 square feet for any sized lot. The lot coverage definition continues to include basements, and structures such as pools and tennis courts.
- **Fencing:** The 2021 draft required that all fencing in setback areas be Wildlife-Friendly. The 2022 draft has refined the definition of Wildlife-Friendly and provided additional options for compliance.
- **Grading:** The 2022 draft still limits grading and construction on slopes of 100% or greater, however allows applicants to use the Minimum


Guaranteed RFA per the Baseline Hillside Ordinance (BHO). The 2022 draft adds in a requirement for the Site Plan Review process for projects that propose more than 1,000 cubic yards of remedial grading.

- **Resource Buffers:** The 2022 draft ordinance separates ridgelines from Wildlife Resources and creates a new section dedicated to ridgeline standards. Certain public easements (such as sewer lines and utility easements) were also removed from Wildlife Resources. The new draft also introduces a requirement for the Site Plan Review process when Wildlife Resources or Resource buffers are present on a project site.
- **Ridgelines:** The 2022 draft integrates the Ridgeline Protection Ordinance (RPO) with the Wildlife Ordinance, with a number of modifications: The previously proposed RP1 & RP2 Designations were combined to a single set of standards for ridgelines. The RPO's proposed height limit of 18' exceeding the ridgeline was replaced with a proposed envelope height of 25' and overall height of 35' for properties on ridgelines, allowing for two-story homes to continue to be permitted. An extra 50% requirement for one yard setback was added to support wildlife movement.



#### 4. How do I find out if I have a Wildlife Resource buffer or Ridgeline buffer on my site?

An [Interactive Map](https://planning4la.org/wildlife) can be found on the Wildlife website at [planning4la.org/wildlife](https://planning4la.org/wildlife). The interactive map will generally indicate parcels with Wildlife Resource buffers or Ridgeline buffers that may affect properties. Users can search their address and see whether their parcel is located within a wildlife resource buffer or within proximity of a ridgeline. There is a hyperlink to the map on the main page under the “Summary” section. Enter your address in the upper left hand corner search bar. Parcels within or




containing a Wildlife Resource will be highlighted with a color symbol; refer to legend for the resource type.

- ***What is considered a “Resource”?*** Resources are features that provide benefits to wildlife and ecosystem services and contribute to the overall quality of the natural and built environment. These features include: open space (public and private parks and open spaces, or conservation easements), water features (lakes, reservoirs, rivers, streams, wetlands, open channels), and riparian areas.
  - The location and extent of parks, public property, and other public facilities are included in geographic information systems (GIS) data maintained by the City of Los Angeles and available through platforms including Zimas and Navigate LA.
  - The location and extent of conservation areas is provided through the California Protected Areas Database (CPAD) and the California Conservation Easement Database (CCED). Information on vacant property is maintained by the LA County Assessor.
  - Riparian areas are defined by US Fish and Wildlife Service as plant communities contiguous to and affected by surface and subsurface hydrologic features of perennial or intermittent lotic and lentic water bodies (rivers, streams, lakes, or drainage ways).
- ***Where the data is from and how current is it?*** The methodology used to develop the Resource Map considered the best available existing federal, state and local datasets, such as United States Geological Survey (USGS), CA Fish & Wildlife, California Protected Areas, and city and county databases.

## **5. I am concerned about being able to rebuild in the event of a natural disaster. How will that work with the new regulations?**

Existing citywide rules that govern rebuilding will continue to apply. No changes are being proposed to these provisions. Section 12.23.A.5 of the Municipal Code contains the standards by which pre-existing structures may be rehabilitated or rebuilt following damage or destruction in a disaster. If the value of repairs or restoration are under 75% of the total valuation of the home, owners may rebuild the structure, as long as permits for restoration have been obtained within two years of the date of damage. If the value of repairs exceed 75%, structures may still be rebuilt provided the following additional conditions are met: the building will not go in the place where a public street exists or is planned, the building doesn't exceed the current allowable height, and the current yard standards are met. Existing developed properties do not need to comply with the new





regulations unless they are undertaking a new project that falls under the scope of the Wildlife Ordinance.

## **6. Will this affect my ability to remodel?**


Hillside areas are typically zoned for low density/lower impact uses such as single family homes. The Wildlife Ordinance proposes adding regulations that balance the opportunities for housing with recognition that the city's hillsides contain some of the most important and sensitive wildlife habitats and are necessary for habitat preservation essential for wildlife connectivity. New development is the focus of the regulations, but even existing houses – especially when remodeled consistent with wildlife goals – can contribute to wildlife friendly development. The proposed rules have been crafted with that in mind.

In general, structures are allowed to be remodeled. Substantial remodels will be required to comply with applicable provisions of the ordinance. Small remodels such as adding a story to an existing building, adding a room or addition that is less than 500 square feet will not be subject to new regulations unless they are located within a Wildlife Resource Buffer or on a Ridgeline. Remodels on a Ridgeline will be allowed and limited to two stories on the ridgeline. Remodels within a Wildlife Resource Buffer will be subject to Site Plan Review.

The revised draft recognizes the importance of open space and water resources, as such it proposes limitations within 50 feet of such resources, generally prohibiting construction or grading. If development activity within a resource buffer cannot be avoided, an Exception or Adjustment may be requested. Interior remodels, reroofs and repairs will generally not be subject to the ordinance. Non-conforming properties may undergo regular maintenance and repair, however additions and other site modifications must meet the standards and conditions contained within Sec. 12.23.A. of the Municipal Code.

## **7. What is the anticipated timeline for the proposed ordinance?**

The Draft Wildlife Ordinance was originally released to the public for comment in May 2021. Prior to the release of the 2021 Draft Wildlife Ordinance, City Planning held a series of public meetings to gather feedback. Throughout the latter half of 2021, City Planning reviewed and incorporated feedback received from public comment. In early



2022, ridgeline protections were also incorporated into the Draft Wildlife Ordinance, instead of being contained within a separate Ridgeline Ordinance.

The revised draft of the Wildlife Ordinance was released in April 2022. Public comment will continue to be accepted throughout the review and adoption process, including through the formal staff level hearing, City Planning Commission hearing and the City Council hearing. The approval process is anticipated to take place through the remainder of 2022. Notices will be mailed to property owners within the proposed district prior to public hearings in the summer. The public is encouraged to submit comments and questions early in this process so there is time to incorporate and adjust based on concerns or suggestions made. An environmental review is underway, and it will be released before the public hearing.

**8. Where can I find more information about the Wildlife Pilot Study and Draft Wildlife Ordinance and how can I stay informed?**

Please visit [planning4la.org/wildlife](https://planning4la.org/wildlife) for more information and/or click here [City Planning sign-up](#) to receive updates from the Planning Department about this effort. Interested parties simply need to add their email, name, and the newsletter category they are interested in. If you scroll to the bottom of the "Current Planning Initiatives," you'll see "Wildlife Pilot Study" listed as one of the box options to check.