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### **Title**

Transportation + Habitat Conservation Plans: Improving Project Delivery and Preserving Endangered Species

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# Transportation + Habitat Conservation Plans

Improving Project Delivery and Preserving Endangered Species

Jaimee Lederman and Martin Wachs - 2014

Brief By: Nathan Holmes



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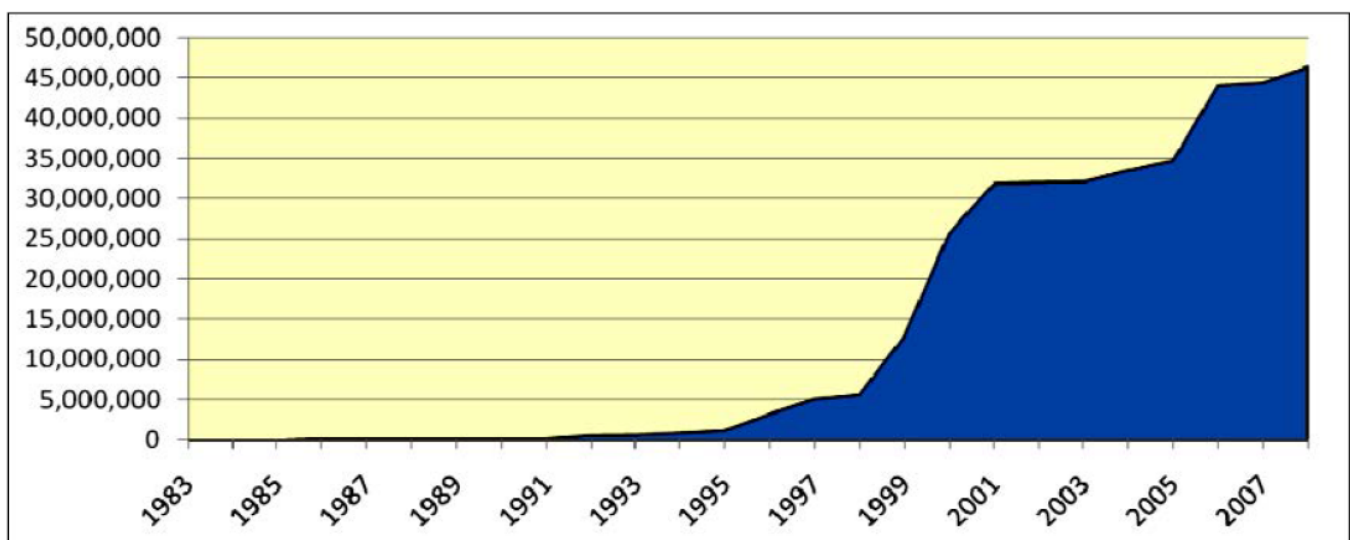
## RESEARCH TOPIC

Mitigating the environmental impacts of transportation projects is among the most complex issues facing transportation agencies. Addressing impacts on endangered species and their habitat is critically important, but it costs agencies a great deal of staff time and money. Since 1994, a more comprehensive strategic model known as a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) has become an increasingly popular alternative. Where previous environmental planning efforts in this area occurred late in the transportation planning process, the HCP approach consists of early regional mitigation needs assessment and advance planning for impacts from multiple infrastructure projects. This report reviews the current status of landscape-level or area-wide HCPs and assesses their overall influence on both transportation infrastructure development and habitat preservation.

## RECOMMENDATION

Transportation agencies can gain significant benefits through active participation in HCPs. The planning process may be lengthy and finding adequate funding is an ongoing challenge, but HCPs provide a flexible model that can expedite the delivery of transportation projects, reduce the overall costs of mitigation, and increase the wellbeing of endangered species.

*Total Acres of HCPs Covered by Year*



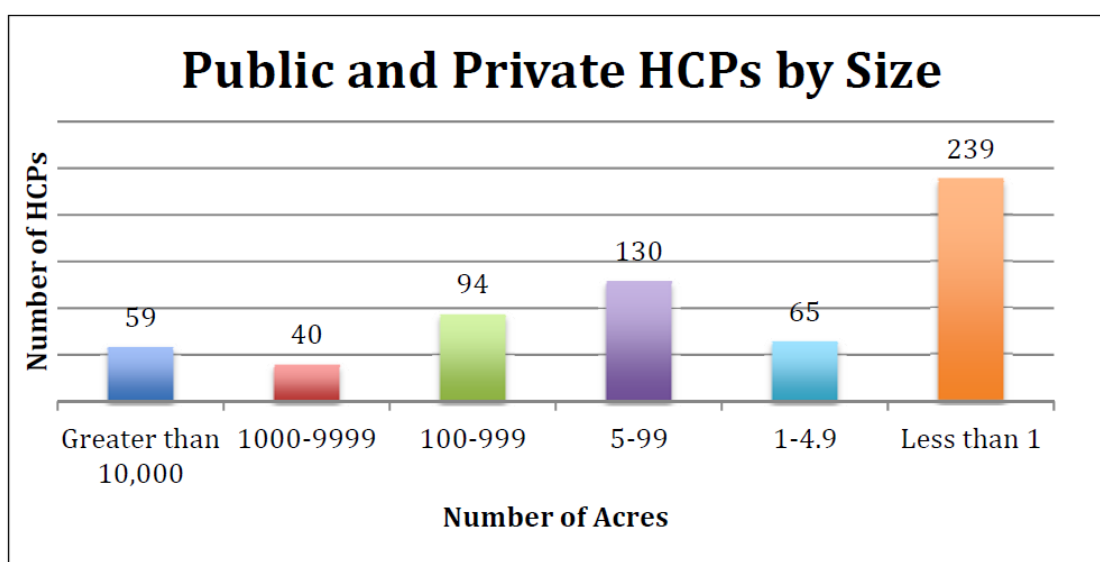
Source: Management Systems International, 2009

## STUDY

The authors used multiple sources of information, focusing on interviews with three types of stakeholders: transportation agencies, HCP representatives, and staff from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). In total, over 30 people with extensive involvement in HCPs were interviewed, concentrating on states having the most experience with HCPs: California, Wisconsin, Texas and Nevada.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- **Transportation agencies that mitigated the impacts of their projects using HCPs experienced significant benefits:** streamlined permitting, economies of scale in mitigation, increased regulatory certainty, reduced frequency of lawsuits, and a shift of some of the mitigation planning burden from transportation agencies to other HCP implementing authorities
- **The inclusion of transportation projects in HCPs often greatly decreases the burden of transportation agencies under NEPA.** Information contained in HCP documents can provide most of the indirect and cumulative effects analysis required under NEPA.
- **The HCP planning process was often found to be lengthy and costly.** Major costs generally fell into three categories: planning, land acquisition, and the ongoing management of land. However, agencies can employ innovative funding solutions that involve leveraging transportation funding for the benefit of both the transportation agency and the HCP.
- **Both permit applicants and resource agencies should view planning and management of HCPs as a collaborative process.** The use of facilitators, consultants and other professionals with experience in HCPs or collaborative planning is recommended as a valuable asset given frequent personnel turnover in government agencies.



Source: Bergstein and Mo (UCTC), 2012

Lederman, Jaimee and Martin Wachs. 2014. "Transportation and Habitat Conservation Plans: Improving Planning and Project Delivery While Preserving Endangered Species," University of California Transportation Center.