I. INTRODUCTION

The CPNA, lying adjacent to the southwest edge of the San Joaquin Valley, is the largest remaining tract of the San Joaquin valley biogeographic province with limited evidence of human alteration. The 253,628 acre area is a diverse complex of habitats with very limited distribution in their former range. It includes the largest remaining contiguous habitats for many endangered, threatened and rare species such as the San Joaquin kit fox, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, giant kangaroo rat, and San Joaquin antelope squirrel and supports some of the healthiest populations of these species. The CPNA also provides habitat for many plant species including the California jewelflower, Hoover's wooly-star and San Joaquin wooly-threads all listed as endangered or threatened. Recently the CPNA has been a focal point identified in Recovery Plans for land acquisition and management of these species. In addition, the CPNA contains habitat California condors as well as pronghorn antelope, tule elk, sandhill cranes and mountain plovers. Separated from the San Joaquin valley floor by the Temblor Range, the size, resource values, isolation, and relatively undisturbed nature of this region distinguish it as ideal for a Natural Area that promotes the long-term conservation of the vanishing San Joaquin flora and fauna.

In addition to its biological wealth, the area has significant archaeological and historical resources as evident by physical remains found dispersed across the landscape. Human prehistory of the Carrizo Plain probably began near the end of the Pleistocene as suggested by nearby Paleo-Indian Period (circa 11,000 - 9,000 B.C.) sites located at Tulare Lake, Buena Vista Lake, and the Tehachapi Mountains. Bedrock mortar milling features and elaborate pictographs

are primary manifestations of prehistoric occupation of the area. Ethnographic information for this region of California is not well defined but research indicates that the Carrizo Plain is near the interface of three different cultural affiliations, the Chumash, the Southern Valley Yokuts, and the Salinan. The historical period (AD 1769) began in this region of California with the arrival of Europeans during the Spanish Colonial era, followed by the Mexican Republic, the California Republic, and the United States eras. The historic past is recognized today by remains associated with livestock operations, dryland farming, and ranching facilities.

The geological structure and the processes that continue to form it are unique and also of great interest. Geomorphic features of the San Andreas Fault are exceptionally well displayed and are often depicted in books, magazines, and newspaper articles. Increasing interest in earthquake activities bring people from around the world; both amateur enthusiasts and research geologists with government agencies and universities come to study the San Andreas Fault.

Efforts to protect these and other resources began in 1984 when the BLM's Coast-Valley RMP established three Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). These included Soda Lake (2,970 acres), the Elkhorn Plain (8,600 acres) and the San Andreas Fault Scarp (1,120 acres). The first two ACECs were primarily established to protect habitat and species. The San Andreas Fault Scarp ACEC was established to protect the surface expressions of the fault. It is recommended within the proposed Caliente BLM RMP and this plan that these three ACECs be included within a larger ACEC encompassing the entire CPNA. This would be referred to as the CPNA Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

The CPNA was established through a cooperative public-private effort to conserve and protect its endangered and indigenous species and their habitats, rare plant and animal communities, and ecosystem structure and function. The BLM, the DFG, TNC, and the USFWS, with guidance from a steering committee comprised of local government representatives, residents, and interest groups, established basic objectives and a common understanding of the intent to form the CPNA. At that time it was agreed:

that the Carrizo Plain area is worthy of long term preservation and restoration to as nearly natural a condition as possible;

to strongly encourage private and other public entities to support the project;

to preserve a representative sample of the historic southern San Joaquin Valley ecosystem;

to promote the conservation of threatened, endangered or special status species;

to establish a mechanism to resolve conflicts resulting from intensive oil and gas development in endangered species habitat; and

to provide potential sites for the reintroduction of extirpated native wildlife species.

Overall, these principles have guided the management of the CPNA, since its inception. During that time considerable change has occurred and our understanding of the area and how best to manage it has increased. Resolving conflicts between oil and gas development and endangered species habitats has not been realized due to a lack of developments and a change in conservation strategies. It is our desire at this time to refine the original principles to reflect these changes and guide future management. Our Mission and Vision statements below are intended to serve this purpose.

This document serves two purposes. The CPNA Plan is an aid that was developed for the managing partners to use as they make decisions. It is not a compendium of information on Carrizo, or a thesis, but is a dynamic tool that may evolve to address emerging concerns. Specific project plans that comply with the CPNA plan may be developed in the future to address site specific proposals. This document also contains an environmental review of the planned actions. The review reflects the opinions of a number of resource professionals, and has been modified in response to public comments.