



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: November 11, 2011

REPORT NO: 102

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board
Agenda of November 17, 2011

SUBJECT: Carmel Mountain/Del Mar Mesa Natural Resources Management Plan

SUMMARY

Issue – Should the Park and Recreation Board recommend approval of the Carmel Mountain/Del Mar Mesa Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP)?

Director's Recommendation – Recommend approval of the Carmel Mountain/Del Mar Mesa NRMP.

Other Recommendations – On May 26, 2011, the Carmel Valley Community Planning Group (representing Carmel Valley and Pacific Highlands Ranch) recommended approval (12-0-1) of the NRMP and associated Community Plan Amendment with a condition that an east-west trail connection shall be added across the southeastern area of the Del Mar Mesa preserve. The location of this connection was to be determined in conjunction with the Del Mar Mesa Community Planning Board.

On June 1, 2011, the Rancho Peñasquitos Community Planning Group recommended approval (14-2-0) of the NRMP with a condition for an east-west trail connection (location determined by the Del Mar Mesa Community Planning Board). At their June 29th meeting, the Rancho Peñasquitos Community Planning Group recommended approval (13-0-0) of the Torrey Highlands Community Plan Amendment associated with the NRMP with conditions to update street names on the map and to show trail extensions south into the Del Mar Mea area.

On October 13, the Del Mar Mesa Community Planning Board recommended approval (8-1-0) of the NRMP and Community Plan Amendment with conditions to add separate east-west connections for hikers and bikers south of the Deer Canyon trail, revise enforcement actions, and revise additional trails outside of the NRMP boundary (see Attachment A, the November 7, 2011 letter from Board Chair Gary Levitt).

On October 19, the Los Penasquitos Canyon Preserve Citizen's Advisory Committee recommended approval (7-6-0) of the NRMP and encouraged "all interested parties to continue to work toward designating an east-west trail connection across the top of the mesa."

Fiscal Impact – Project implementation costs will be funded by the Open Space Division’s Operations and Maintenance budget. Grants will be pursued where possible.

Water and Energy Conservation Status – Not applicable.

Environmental – The project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15307. Future activities beyond those is identified in the plan would require additional CEQA analysis.

BACKGROUND

In 1997, the San Diego City Council adopted the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) (R-288455). The goal of the MSCP is to maintain regional biodiversity and conserve viable populations of sensitive species and their habitats, thereby minimizing the need for future Endangered Species Act listings, while simultaneously supporting economic growth in the region. One of the actions required by the MSCP is preparation of Area Specific Management Directives (ASMDs), which are management guidelines tailored to individual parks and/or rare species populations within the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA). For example, an ASMD for Del Mar manzanita may include a defined segment of trail to be rerouted around a population, installation of fencing, and monitoring of off-trail use and associated impacts to the plants.

The Carmel Mountain/Del Mar Mesa (Preserve) NRMP provides ASMDs for the Preserve (<ftp://ftp.sannet.gov/OUT/Parks/Carmel%20Mtn%20Del%20Mar%20Mesa%20NRMP/>). The NRMP boundary includes two open space preserves: Carmel Mountain is 302 acres and is located north of the Fairport Way and the Ocean Air Recreation Center and south of SR-56. Del Mar Mesa is 866 acres and is located north of Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve and Park Village Way, south and west of SR-56, and east of Toyon Mesa Court (see figures in plan).

The areas were included in the MHPA and the conserved properties within these preserves were acquired through a combination of land conservation grants, publicly-funded acquisitions, and mitigation for development projects. On Carmel Mountain, all conserved properties are owned by the City of San Diego, while on Del Mar Mesa conserved parcels are owned by the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego, the State of California (California Department of Fish and Game and CalTrans), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service San Diego National Wildlife Refuge.

The NRMP is comprised of multiple sections:

- Introduction contains the stated purpose of the Plan, options for implementation, and Plan history.
- Ownership and Applicable Management Plans includes information on each landowner, the amount of property they hold, and applicable plans and mandates for management.
- Existing Conditions describes baseline environmental data for Carmel Mountain and Del Mar Mesa separately, including soils and geology, topography, hydrology, biological and cultural resources, land use, and recreation. The location and extent of environmental

variables is discussed in-text and depicted on maps.

- Challenges to be Faced lists management issues, many of which arise from the urban location of the preserves.
- Constraints and Opportunities describe historic/current management constraints as well as opportunities for improving natural resource conditions.
- Maintenance, Use and Development Guidelines provides guidance for utility access, preserve maintenance, public use and new development.
- Resource Management, Enhancement and Restoration Guidelines include policies for mitigation within the Preserve, enhancement and restoration opportunities, and management guidelines for natural and cultural resources.
- Fire Management discusses fire management objectives, post-fire BMPs and restoration, and roles and responsibilities for fire management.
- Interpretive and Research Guidelines detail allowed public uses, educational programs, and the proposed trail system.

The NRMP includes a revised trail system based on MSCP, General Plan, and the Department's "Consultant's Guide" trail planning principles and a comprehensive, site-specific trail analysis which included criteria such as habitat sensitivity (e.g. vernal pools), erosion and other maintenance factors ("sustainability"), redundancy, connectivity, and safety metrics such as steepness and sightlines. The resulting trail system proposal for 1) Carmel Mountain (Figure 1) includes 4.13 miles of trails, including 0.64 miles crossing private property which would be opened at a future date, and 2) Del Mar Mesa (Figure 2) includes expanding the limited but currently approved trail system found in the Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan (Figure 3) from 1.06 miles to 7.9 miles, while closing and restoring 13.29 miles of existing paths.

DISCUSSION

Both Carmel Mountain and Del Mar Mesa preserves contain many rare and endangered species such as short-leaved dudleya, wart-stemmed ceanothus, Del Mar manzanita, San Diego golden star, Orcutt's brodiaea, San Diego button celery, San Diego mesa mint, San Diego fairy shrimp, San Diego horned lizard, and California gnatcatcher. The preserves have been identified as core biological areas within the MHPA based on acreage, geography, and habitat diversity, and therefore represent a key conservation area within the regional open space network. In addition, they are an important location for natural out-of-doors education and experiences as well as recreation opportunities for nearby residents and regional users. The NRMP will balance the needs of natural resources and passive human recreation through development and implementation of ASMDs as well as providing an improved recreational trail system while complying with MSCP policies. In addition, an adopted NRMP will improve the competitiveness of grant applications for species management and habitat enhancement.

The NRMP and associated trail system were developed with input from community stakeholders including the San Diego Mountain Biking Association (SDMBA), Multi-Use Trails Coalition, Chaparral Lands Conservancy, Los Peñasquitos Citizens' Advisory Committee, and Del Mar Mesa Community Planning Community Planning Board. A list of public meetings on the plan is attached as Attachment 2. Factors which have complicated the trails planning process on Del

Mar Mesa are: a number of “tunnels” trails have been in existence on the ground for a long time, the tunnels are invisible to aerial photography because they are under a scrub oak canopy (and, as a result, staff was not aware of them until September, 2009), and the tunnels have become popular with recreationalists, particularly mountain bikers. The mountain biking community in particular feels that the plan “closes” these trails instead of considering that current use of the trails is not allowed and that the plan actually increases trail mileage compared to the trails identified in the approved Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan.

As can be inferred from the votes of the CACs, the primary controversy associated with this NRMP is the proposed trail system on Del Mar Mesa, particularly the lack of a proposal for an east-west connecting trail(s) through the easterly portion of the mesa (see Attachment A and Figure 4, the trails system proposed by the SDMBA).

Due to the fact that portions of the community-desired east-west trails are located on State and Federal property, staff has discussed with the Wildlife Agencies their willingness to have staff add these trails (i.e., as lines on the Trails Plan). While the Agencies have declined to allow access or even planned alignments at this point in time, the plan includes language which 1) allows new trails to be added to the plan administratively with the concurrence of all three agencies, 2) recognizes the State and Federal Agencies’ ability to add trails to their land without City approval and 3) documents the CACs’ desire via adding the highlighted paragraph below:

Trails proposed on lands not owned by the City of San Diego (e.g. private, CDFG, USFWS) will not be opened for access until the land is conserved or written permission is obtained from the landowner(s). Trails on USFWS lands will require review a Compatibility Determination as part of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan approval; if approved, they would be designated as part of this process. Trails on CDFG lands would also require official review and approval by the Department prior to being authorized for public use.

For example, during public review of the draft of this plan, several commentors suggested the need for a east-west trail connection(s) through the south/southeast portion of the planning area (i.e., hiking trail through the CDFG Ecological Reserve and biking through a combination of the informally named Mesa Loop, Upper Tunnel 3, and Lower Tunnel 2 use patterns. Portions of the latter cross the CDFG Ecological Reserve and the USFWS Refuge. At the time of this plan was prepared, CDFG and USFWS were unwilling to allow these trails; however, they may do so in the future.

Staff’s goal in the development of the Trails Plan has been to facilitate as many trails as possible while remaining consistent with the City-, State-, and Federally-adopted MSCP. Staff believes that legal, on-trail access discourages illegal, off-trail activities. To the extent that the public is not requesting additional trails that would be wholly on City land, staff feels that its efforts have been successful, as obviously the City has no land use jurisdiction over State and Federal property. The California Department of Fish and Game has indicated that it would consider additional east-west trails across its property when 1) the Vernal Pool Habitat Conservation Plan has been finalized, 2) the design of adjacent private development to the east has been finalized,

and 3) user behavior has been modified/controlled such that off-trail damage no longer occurs. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge staff has indicated that it may entertain additional trails across its property in conjunction with the Refuge planning process.

Wildlife Agency concern about additional east-west trails is driven by environmental concerns. There is no question that trail use impacts wildlife; a study conducted in Antelope Island State Park in Utah (Taylor and Knight, 2003) found trail activity can cause large mammals to flee within 330 feet of a trail when a trail user passed. On site, the Western Tracking Institute has documented an adverse deer bedding response to trail activities. As a result, the Wildlife Agencies have historically indicated a concern with trails in the eastern portion of Del Mar Mesa and have expressed a preference with keeping that area free of trails and trail activity.

The City's planning effort with regard to trails on Del Mar Mesa is consistent with recommended protocols. In his paper "Guidance for Managing Informal Trails" (2008 National Trails Symposium, <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/ManageMaintain/MarionInformal08.html>), Jeff Marion suggests the protocol that staff used: Problem Identification (inventory informal trail network), Evaluate Impact Acceptability (including the reasons for impacts), and Selection of Management Actions. The National Park Service used a comparable approach when, in 1994, Joshua Tree National Monument was changed in status to Joshua Tree National Park. Park Service policies recognize that acceptable impacts depend on the purpose for which the park was established and the Park Service has a mission to leave natural resources unimpaired for future generations. In its January, 2000 Record of Decision for the Joshua Tree Management Plan (<http://www.nps.gov/jotr/parkmgmt/upload/bcmp.pdf>), the Park Service rationalized its new trail plan for Joshua Tree as follows:

Inadequate control over the actions of increasing numbers of visitors has resulted in impacts to resources. The proliferation of trails, created not by thought or design but by passage of people or animals, has created a network of often redundant social trails that impact vegetation. The social trails concentrate use in only a small part of the park while other areas, suitable for similar experiences, are ignored. These social trails cause compaction of the soils and denude areas of vegetation. This Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan designates a trail network to minimize such impacts...

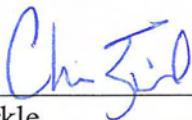
The new proposed action would designate many more miles of trails than were previously official. Casual or social trails not designated as part of the trail system would be restored to a natural condition. No new trail requests from the public would be considered until the trail network, including corridors, proposed in this plan is inventoried, developed, and monitored for several years. Monitoring of the trail network would become an on-going process. If, during the monitoring process, it was determined that resource damage or conflicts between user groups was occurring, the National Park Service would have the authority to either close trails and corridors or to reroute trails to mitigate the damage and prevent future resource and visitor experience degradation.

Following a vote by the Park and Recreation Board, the plan will be presented to City's Planning Commission for recommendations on 1) Community Plan Amendments (initiated June 24, 2010) to revise the Carmel Valley, Pacific Highlands Ranch, Rancho Peñasquitos and Torrey Highlands Community Plans and the Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan to incorporate the new trail system, and 2) plan adoption by the City Council. The NRMP will then be presented at the Natural Resources and Culture Subcommittee before being taken to City Council for approval.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Recommend adoption of the NRMP showing trail alignments across state and federal property on Del Mar Mesa despite Wildlife Agency concerns. This alternative could result in the need to conduct additional CEQA review, at least for the SDMBA's proposed "Hiking Trail" across the Department of Fish and Game's Ecological Reserve due to the fact that staff is unaware of an alignment through this area that would not impact vernal pools.
2. Recommend adoption of the NRMP without the trails plan for Del Mar Mesa, leaving the Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan trail system as-is. This alternative is not recommended because it does not address the basic public request for the additional, proposed trails, many of which have been found acceptable by City staff and the Wildlife Agencies.
3. Recommend denial of the NRMP and direct staff to continue to work with the Wildlife Agencies for trails across their property. This alternative is not recommended for the reason listed in number 2 above regarding public requests and because of the feasibility of this alternative. Staff has been working with the Wildlife Agencies on this issue for the last two years and there is no indication that the Agencies are ready to allow additional trails on their property now.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Zirkle
Deputy Director, Open Space Division

Attachments:

- Attachment A - November 7, 2011 letter from Board Chair Gary Levitt
- Attachment B - List of Public Meetings
- Figure 1 - Carmel Mountain Trails Map
- Figure 2 - Del Mar Mesa Trails Map
- Figure 3 - Existing Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan Trails Map
- Figure 4 - San Diego Mountain Bike Association Trail Proposal for Del Mar Mesa (October, 2011)

cc: Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Task Force
Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Citizens' Advisory Committee

Del Mar Mesa Community Planning Board

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November 7, 2011

Mr. Chris Zirkle
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City of San Diego
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Mr. Bernard Turgeon
Planning & Community Investment
202 C Street, MS 4A
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Subject: Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan Amendment for trails and Final Draft Del Mar Mesa Resource Management Plan—Trails Plan

Dear Bernie and Chris:

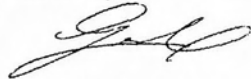
As an elected advisory body to the City of San Diego's Planning Commission and City Council on land use issues within our community, the board has been requested to take action on the proposed Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan Amendment for trails and Final Del Mar Mesa Resource Management Plan. It is important to note that each time we review the trails issue, we are always focused on the current situation (shown in the attached exhibit) as being the harmful result of not having a community acceptable trail system. The board therefore welcomes the community plan amendment to incorporate additional trails as tools to manage the Preserve.

The board approves the Community Plan Amendment subject to the attached map modifications depicted in exhibit 'B' and language changes further described below. The plan modifications shown are necessary to address the March 12, 2010 letter from the board explaining the need for a critical east-west mesa connector, as well as incorporate trails that are either shown in approved development plans or are in frequent use by trail users. The east-west connector added on the depiction represents a level of trails that appears more acceptable to the general trail user with the trails per acre still less than the Carmel Mountain Preserve. Though there is no specific alignment concluded yet for an east-west mesa connector, it is important to incorporate and document the connector in the specific planning document.

Regarding the plan amendment language also shown in exhibit 'B', the board requests revision to clarify that multi-use trails adjacent to circulation element roadways should be a maximum of 10-feet, since in some cases due to real world limitations such as mature trees or hedges, it has been appropriate to have a trail width of less than 10-feet. Also, the board is uncomfortable with the language reading 'trails may be closed (temporarily or permanently) at the discretion of the Park and Recreation Department...'. Though the board recognizes the primary goal of the preserve is to protect habitat, the board would like to be involved in future decisions to add or remove trails, and requests that the language 'in consultation with the Del Mar Mesa Community Planning Board' be added after Park and Recreation Department above.

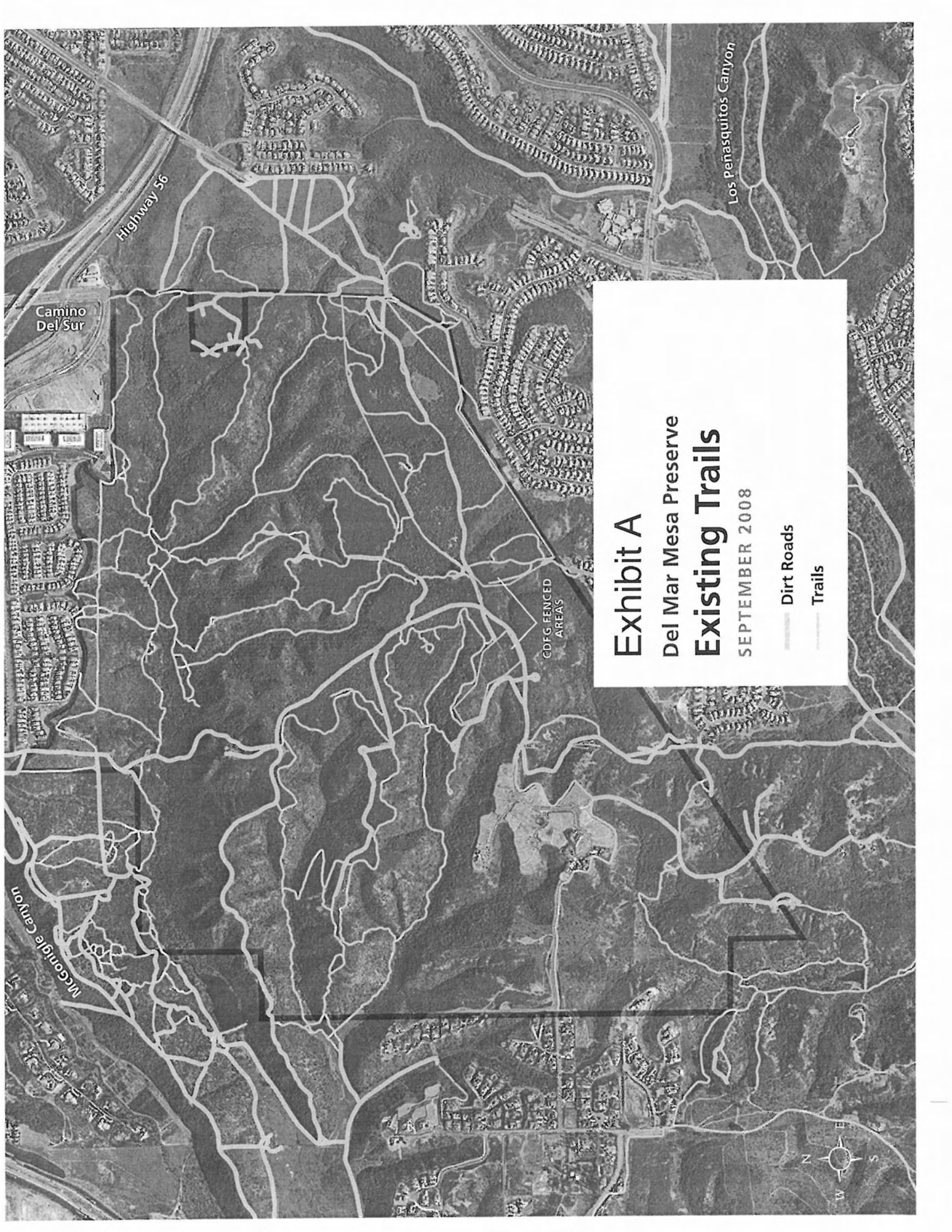
The board supports the final RMP subject to the above modifications. In addition, we specifically request that interpretive signage providing education about biological resources and the need for their protection, and ranger enforcement be implemented in the early stages of the RMP.

Sincerely,



Gary Levitt, Chair

Attachments:- A - Existing Trails
B - Proposed Authorized Trails



Highway 56

Camino Del Sur

Los Penasquitos Canyon

CDFG FENCED AREAS

McGeorge Canyon

Exhibit A

Del Mar Mesa Preserve

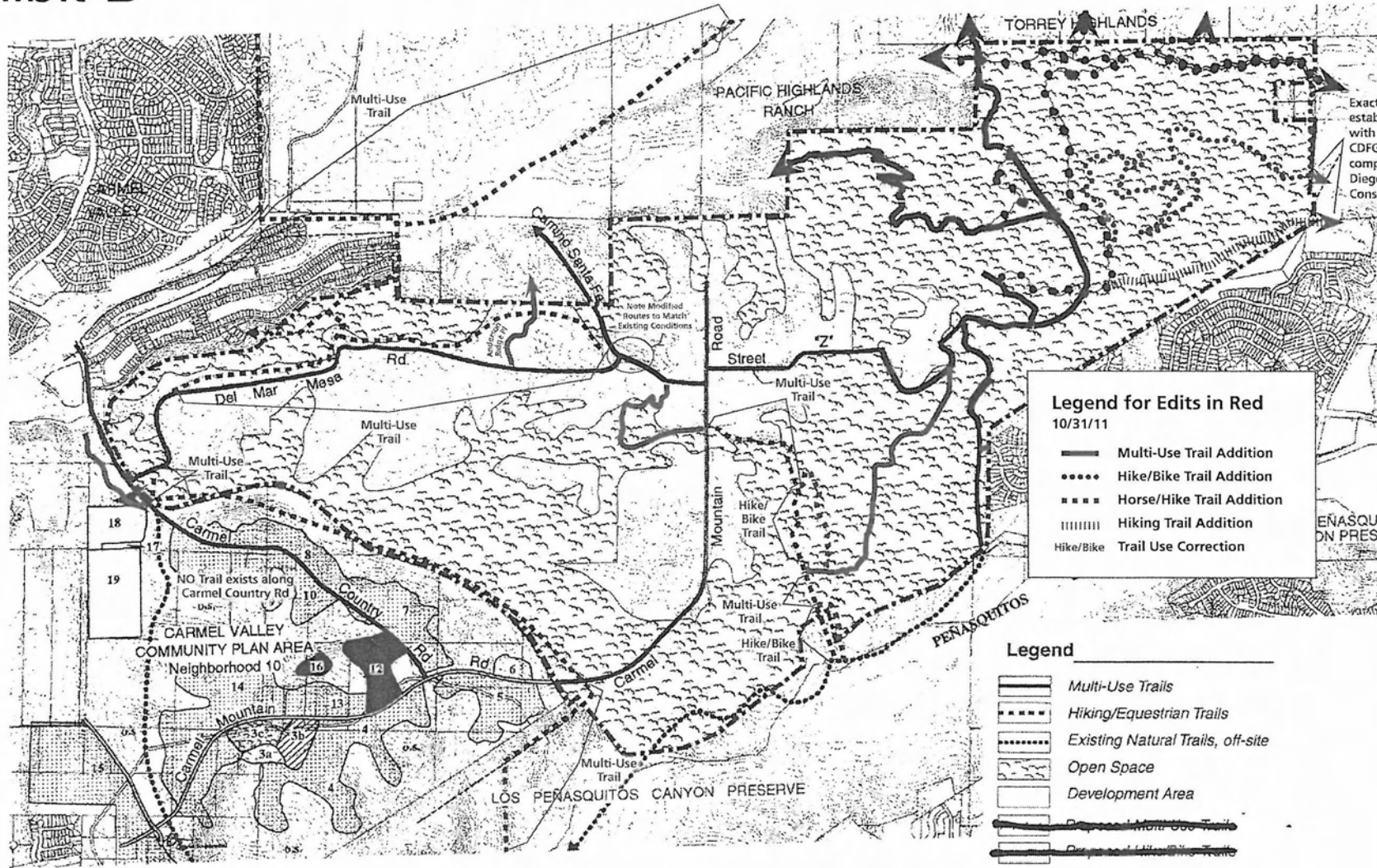
Existing Trails

SEPTEMBER 2008

- Dirt Roads
- Trails



Exhibit B



no scale

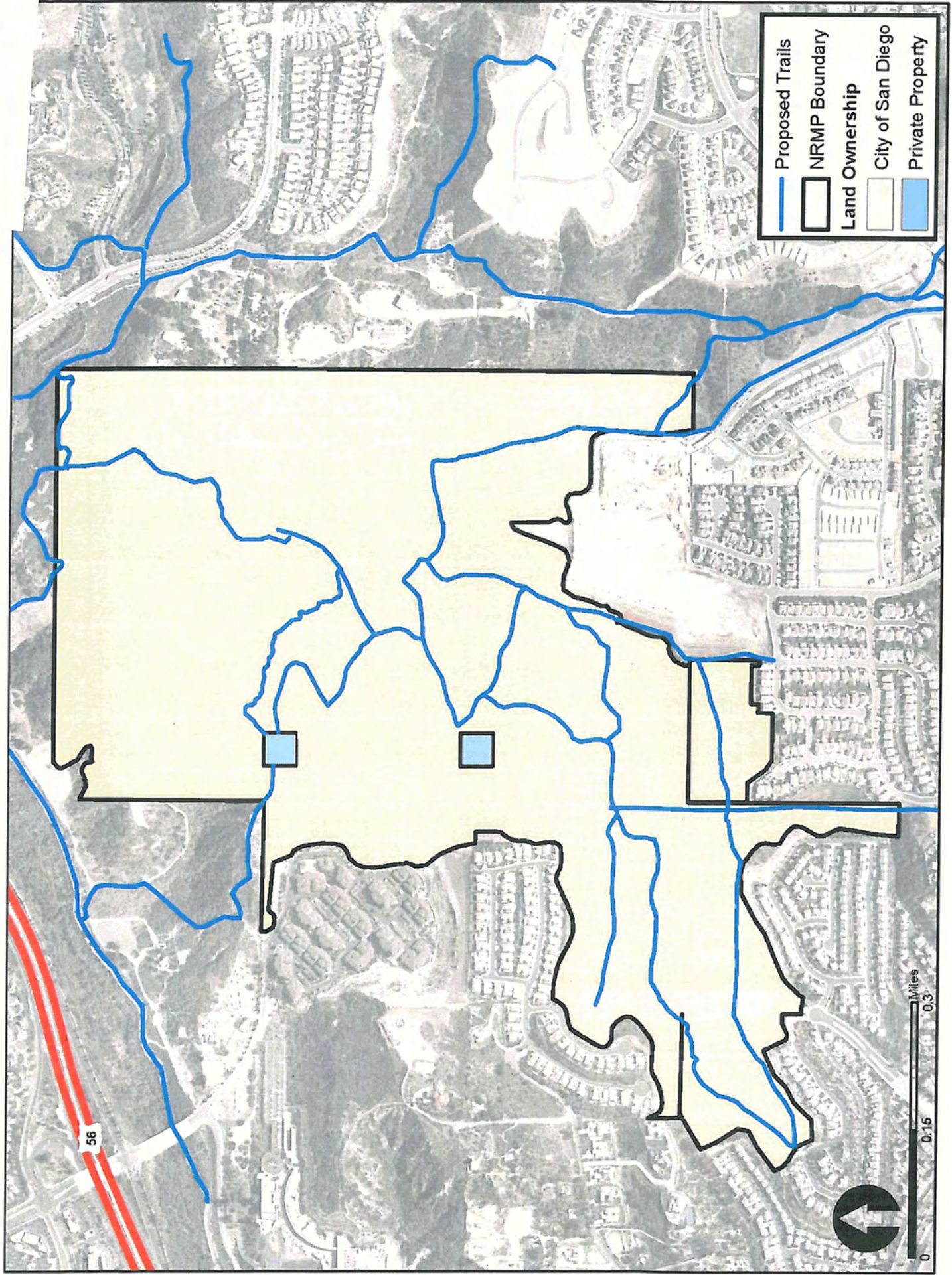
SUBAREA V DEL MAR MESA

Attachment B

Carmel Mountain/Del Mar Mesa Natural Resources Management Plan Public Meeting History				
	Group	Item Type	Meeting Date	Outcome
1	Los Penasquitos CAC	Informational item	9/17/09	N/A
2	Los Penasquitos Cyn Preserve Task Force	Informational item	10/22/09	N/A
3	Los Penasquitos Cyn Preserve Task Force	Informational item	1/28/10	N/A
4	Carmel Valley/Pacific Highlands Ranch CPG	Informational item	2/9/10	N/A
5	Los Penasquitos CAC Special Topic Meeting	Public input	2/25/10	N/A
6	Del Mar Mesa CPB	Informational item	3/11/10	N/A
7	Los Penasquitos CAC	Action item	3/18/10	Continued
8	Torrey Santa Fe HOA	Action item	11/16/10	No Trails on HOA property
9	Los Penasquitos Cyn Preserve Task Force	Informational item	1/27/11	N/A
10	Del Mar Mesa CPB	Informational item	5/12/11	N/A
11	Carmel Valley/Pacific Highlands Ranch CPG	Action item	5/26/11	See attached
12	Rancho Penasquitos/Torrey Highlands CPG - Land Use Subcommittee	Informational item	6/1/11	N/A
13	Rancho Penasquitos/Torrey Highlands CPG	Action item	6/1/11	See attached
14	Los Penasquitos CAC	Informational item	7/21/11	N/A
15	Del Mar Mesa CPB	Action item	10/13/11	See letter, minutes pending
16	Los Penasquitos CAC	Action item	10/19/11	See attached, minutes pending
17	Park and Recreation Board	Action Item	11/17/11	Pending
18	Planning Commission	Action item	Pending	
19	City Council	Action item	Pending	

Proposed Trail System on Carmel Mountain

Figure 1



Proposed Trail System on Del Mar Mesa

Figure 2

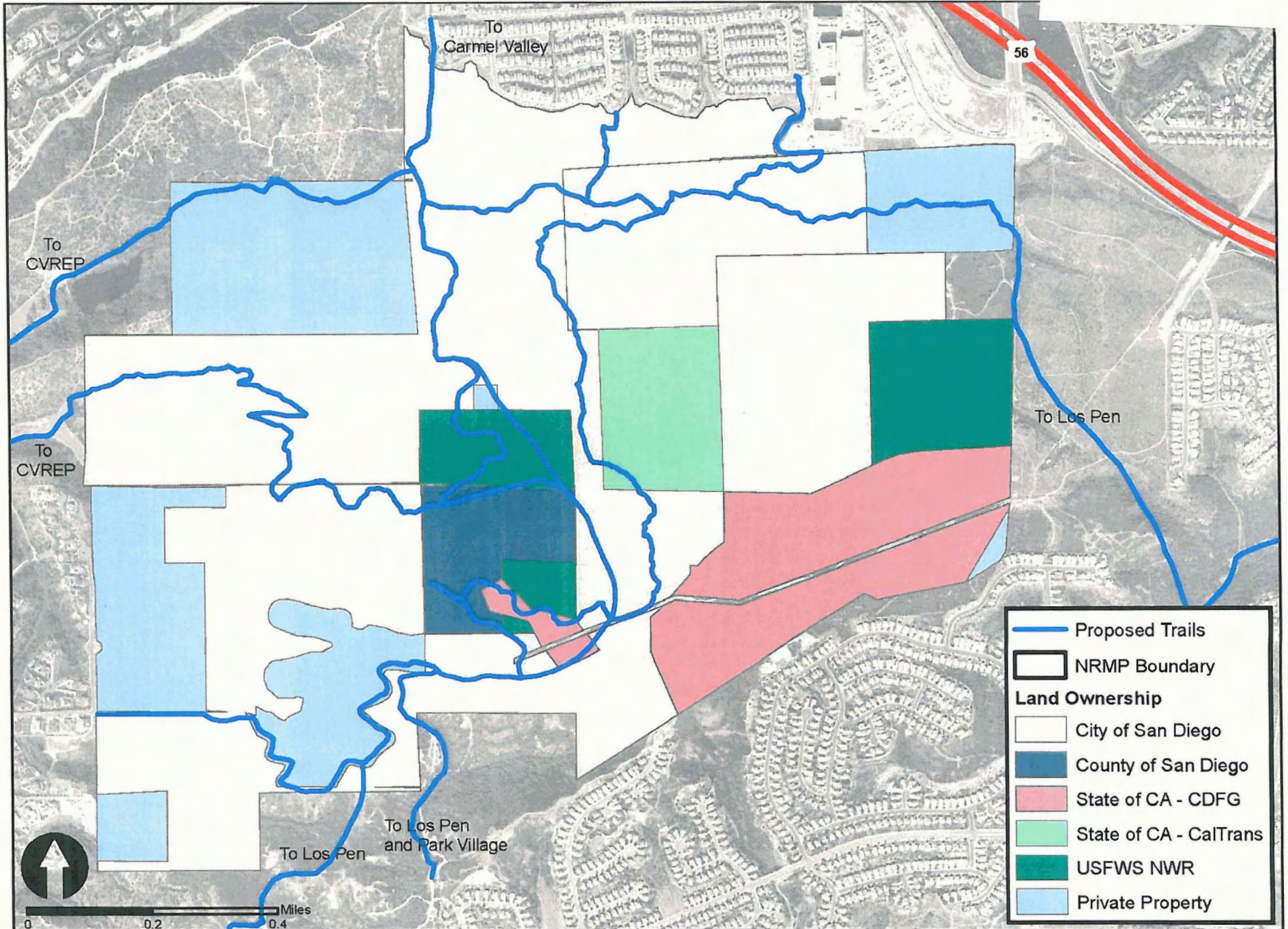


Figure 3

DEL MAR MESA SPECIFIC PLAN

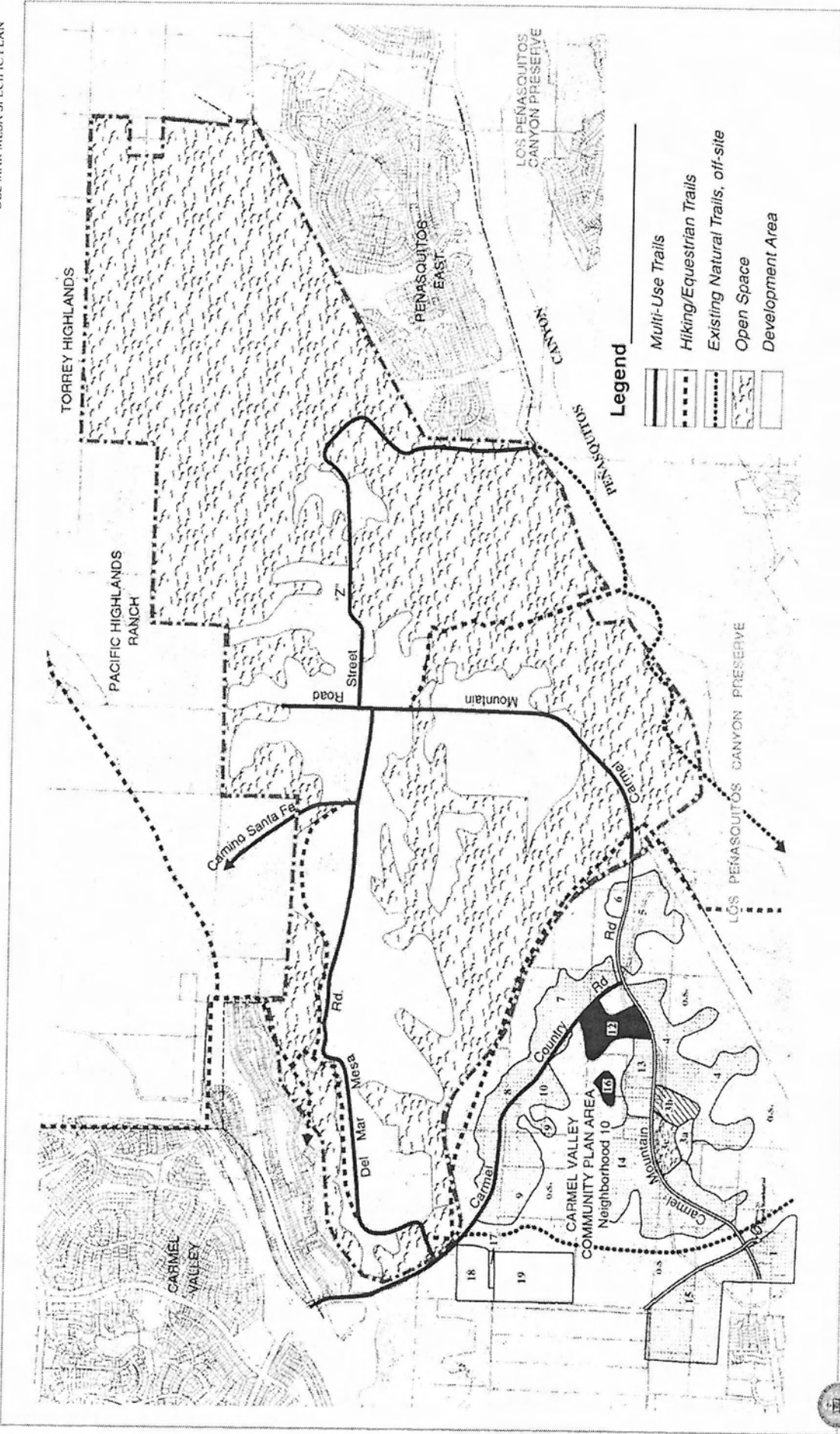


Figure 4

