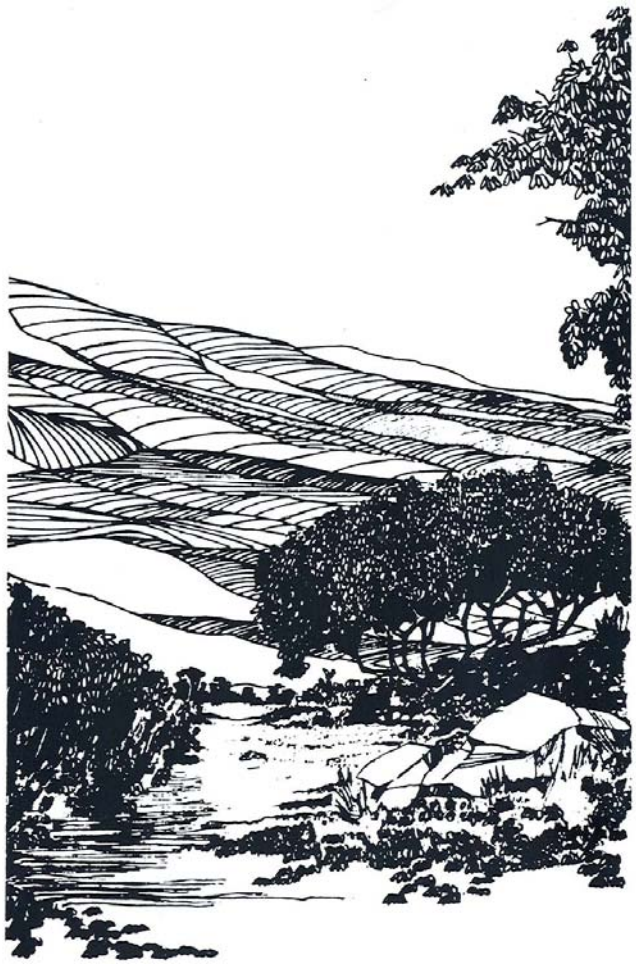
OPEN SPACE RETENTION AND UTILIZATION

INTRODUCTION

In its broadest sense, the term "open space" refers to all land that is not used for buildings or structures. It may be either urban or non-urban. Open spaces affect the character of development and vice versa. Among other things, open space offers aesthetic variety and relief, shapes the environment, stabilizes other land uses, reduces noise and conserves natural resources.

The reasons for retention of open space are many. The more important of these were spelled out by the late President Kennedy in a special message to Congress: "Open space must be reserved to provide parks and recreation, conserve water and other natural resources, prevent buildings in undesirable locations, prevent erosion and floods and avoid the wasteful extension of public services and control the rate and character of community development."[1]



Urbanization is frequently unattractive and ugly. However, it need not be so; if man desires, he can remedy the physical blight and decay within aesthetically offensive areas by strategically introducing openness and greenery, thus providing sorely needed leavening for both visitor and resident.

Open space can serve a most important function by inhibiting that amorphous type of development commonly referred to as "urban sprawl," an affliction visited upon so many large urban areas. Open space also serves to limit concentrations of people and improvements under aircraft flight patterns or on floodplains. It should be used to minimize development in areas subject to geological hazards such as earth slippage and landslides.

1. President John F. Kennedy, "Our Nation's Housing," an address to the first session of the 87th Congress, March 9, 1961.

Open space has economic value and indirect benefits that are not generally recognized. For example some lands within highly urbanized areas may be more expensive to develop from the public standpoint than they are worth. As has been pointed out in a recent study, the "(d)irect public benefits of a regional open space system would include:

- Income from leases on open space lands for agricultural, recreational, or other compatible uses.

- User benefits (in terms of dollar values) accruing to the public.

- The non-recoverable value of the public's investment in open space land."[2]

Indirect benefits deriving from the impact of the open space program on urban development patterns would include a series of non-measurable social, economic, and environmental benefits. In addition, a savings in utility costs might also be realized.

Open space may prove directly profitable in other cases as well. A number of examples have been reported where urban open space, especially in the form of city parks, has enhanced the value of surrounding properties to the point where the tax received from those properties exceeds any tax yield that might have been realized had the area of open space been built upon. A good example in the City of San Diego is the area surrounding Balboa Park.

This Plan is an attempt at fulfilling our obligation of leaving a meaningful legacy to future generations. For the long-range good of the entire community, generous expansions of natural open space must be preserved.

In summary, the case for open space in aggregate is impressive. While specific quantitative standards, like those utilized in determining needs for neighborhood and community park facilities, have not been developed for open space systems, the City of San Diego and the Navajo community have recognized this need.

A unique feature in the Navajo Community Plan is the open space element designed to preserve the river, scenic canyon and hillside areas, and to link elements of the community. The proposed open space areas will become green belts and will provide areas for pedestrian, bicycle or equestrian uses. The open space system conceived for the Navajo community envisions that the canyon and hillside areas could be used for both active and passive recreational uses. The majority of open space, however, will probably remain in its natural state, with pathways and picnic areas.

2. **AN OPEN SPACE SYSTEM** for the San Diego Region, San Diego Comprehensive Planning Organization, Open Space Study: Report No. 1,Livingston & Blayney, Royston, Hanamato, Beck and Beck, April 1972.

The study area contains many outstanding examples of open space as defined above. There are over 700 acres of scenic canyons, including Mission Gorge, which are dominant topographical features of the Navajo community. These canyons contain a natural reserve of trees and wildlife--resources that are quickly vanishing from the San Diego scene.

The San Diego River, another significant feature of the community, traverses Mission Trails Regional Park through Mission Gorge and is responsible for creating much of the existing topography. That portion of the river located in the northeast section of the community has been significantly altered as a result of an ongoing sand and gravel extraction operation. Much of the area in and around the river has already been mined and is currently being used for industrial and contractor storage and operation uses.

A mix of retail, industrial and industrial office park uses have been developed along that portion of the river that forms the western boundary of the Navajo planning area. The existing development has not taken advantage of the aesthetic qualities of the river environment, nor the passive recreation value of the river and wetlands abutting these sites, but has instead turned its back on the river. It is critical that future development proposals along the river be required to incorporate sensitive site design in addition to providing measures for protecting riparian habitat.

OBJECTIVES

Because there is pressure for intense use of land located within the urban complex, the following principal or overriding open space objective was adopted:

DESIGNATE AND PRESERVE OPEN SPACE BEFORE DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE. In this way, it is possible for the best land available for recreation and open space to be preserved to provide a framework for subsequent development. The assignment of a high priority to recreational open space development requires immediate action if preservation is to take place.

The Navajo community recognizes that there is a need to provide adequate and accessible open space for the needs of the population and that without positive action the community may lose this valuable open space through the development of the river area, canyons and hillsides. Therefore, the following additional objectives were adopted:

- Preserve, improve and reconstruct the wetlands and riparian habitat areas in and along both sides of the San Diego River.

- Enhance and maintain the aesthetic and recreational qualities of the San Diego River corridor as part of the open space system.

- Conserve the present amenity of Navajo, Rancho Mission, Mission Gorge and other canyons for the enjoyment of this generation and as a legacy for succeeding generations.

- Establish and preserve a total open space system in perpetuity and guard against its commercialization. Preserve the natural environment including wildlife, vegetation, and terrain.

- Permit only those uses within the system that are compatible with the open space concept.

- Ensure that any public improvements such as roads, drainage channels and utility services and any private lessee developments be compatible with the objectives of the open space system.

- Ensure that development of properties adjoining the open space system is in a manner compatible with the natural environment and in conformance with the Mission Trails Design District and Manual, the San Diego River Wetlands Management Plan, and any subsequently adopted programs which address the San Diego River area.

PROPOSALS

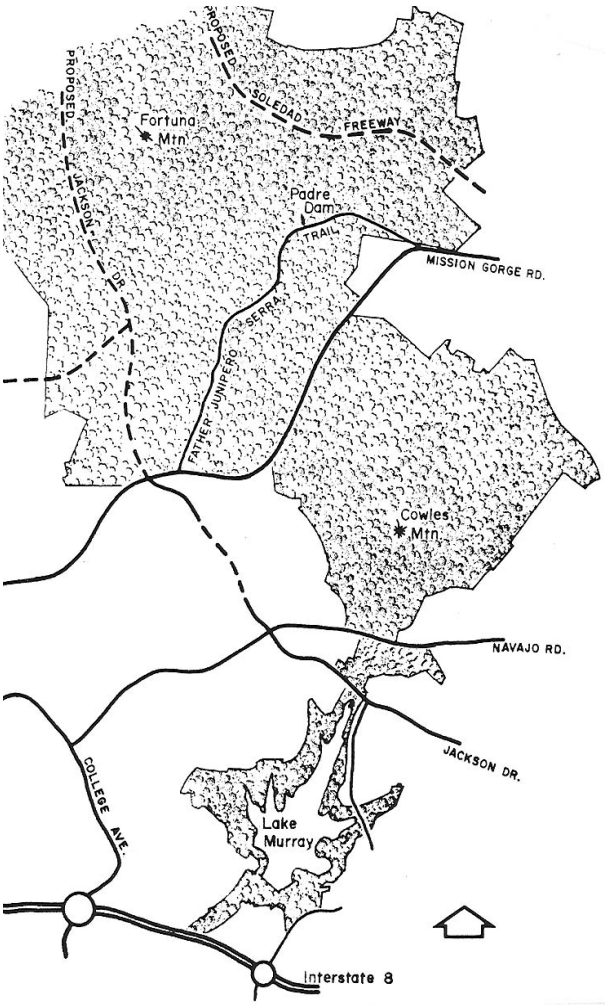
The overall system entails a network of open space belts connecting larger open space areas. These areas for the most part are located in the canyons, along the San Diego River, and on Cowles Mountain as shown on the following map.

- The open space areas, including over 700 acres divided among Navajo Canyon (179 acres), Rancho Mission Canyon (258 acres), and Mission Gorge (300 acres), should be preserved in a substantially open character. Mission Gorge (the San Diego River System) should be given high priority for acquisition as a part of the City's open space system.

- Open space should initially be maintained in its natural condition. Studies, however, should be undertaken to determine uses compatible with the open space concept. Such uses, designed with consideration for topography, vegetation and access, may include archery ranges, hiking, biking trails, picnic facilities, wildlife preserves, and non-vehicular camping facilities.

- Any public improvements such as roads, drainage channels and utility services as well as any private lessee developments should be compatible with the objectives of the open space system. No through roads will be permitted except for the extension of Navajo Road, designed to parkway standards, through Navajo Canyon and the extension of Jackson Drive.

- Safe, convenient access should be established and maintained to all open space areas.

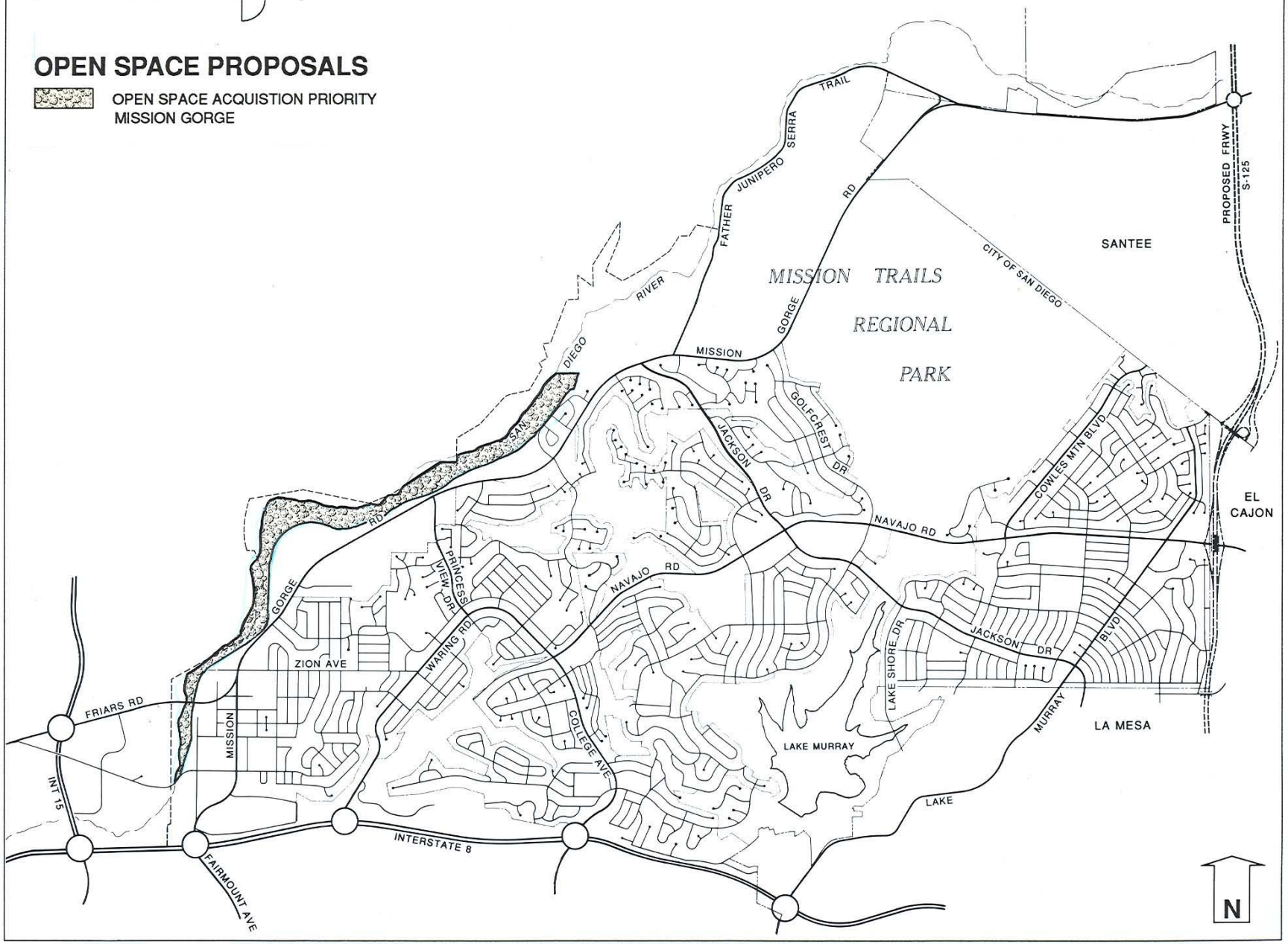


MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK

NAVAJO

OPEN SPACE PROPOSALS

OPEN SPACE ACQUISTION PRIORITY
MISSION GORGE



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In the event that those open space areas illustrated on page 77 are not acquired they should be permitted to develop according to the following guidelines:

- Low residential densities not to exceed one dwelling unit per acre in those areas falling within the Hillside Review (HR) Zone, except as noted below.

- In all cases improvements should implement the intent of the HR Zone, which is to "ensure that development results in minimum disturbance of natural terrain."

  The implication of this requirement is that densities for a given ownership will be transferred and clustered on the flattest and most developable land.

- Development in open space areas, including those in the HR Zone, should be guided by the following additional criteria:

  - Slopes of 0-12 percent should be permitted to develop up to two dwelling units per acre.

  - Slopes of 13-24 percent should be permitted to develop up to two dwelling units per acre.

  - Slopes of 25 percent and greater should be permitted to develop no more than one dwelling unit per acre.

  An exception to the above guidelines is:

  - That portion of the Navajo Canyon westerly of Waring Road, which should be limited to residential use of one dwelling unit per acre due to its location, restricted access and projected traffic conditions. A Planned Commercial Development for this area would be considered to allow for uses compatible with the open space concept, such as plant nurseries, etc.

- Residential development within the canyons should be designed to preserve natural amenities such as topography, trees and streams in an open space linkage system. Further studies would have to be undertaken to minimize problems such as drainage, unattractive hillside cuts, access, and inadequate public facilities resulting from increased population.

- If the canyons adjacent to existing or future school sites are not obtained for open space, a neighborhood park with a minimum of five acres should be reserved next to each school.

- Development along the San Diego River should be regulated to minimize disturbance to wetland habitat areas. A Wetlands Management Plan, completed as an element of the Mission Valley Community Plan, has established guidelines for development of the southernmost portion of the river located in the Navajo community (from Friars Road to Camino Del Rio North). These guidelines have been incorporated into the Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (CPIOZ) supplemental regulations described in the Industrial Element. All development proposals for property within 150 feet of the San

Diego River's 100-year floodplain will be required to comply with the CPIOZ regulations or be processed as a discretionary permit.

The remaining property along the northern portion of the river (between Friars Road and Mission Trails Regional Park) is, for the most part, still in agricultural zones. Future development proposals for these properties should be reviewed to ensure minimum disturbance to the river environment and coordination of open space areas, pedestrian paths and bicycle paths.

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is being prepared by the San Diego Association of Governments for the San Diego River. The HCP is intended to protect the endangered least Bell's vireo, a small migratory songbird which nests in riparian habitat areas in southern California. The population of vireos has been declining over the last 40 years due in part to the loss of riparian habitat to encroaching development. The goals of the HCP are to preserve and expand the riparian habitat upon which the vireo depends and to reconcile the objectives of public and private landowners with the environmental objectives of habitat conservation. Once adopted, the HCP will govern development along the San Diego River.

- Establish regulatory zoning in the form of the Floodway (FV) and Floodplain Fringe (FPF) Zones along the entire length of the river corridor. The City Engineer should prepare the studies leading to the application of these zones.

- Establish hiking trails in the San Diego River Basin through Mission Gorge, which will minimize impacts to the riparian habitat. Trails should be located adjacent to the river within the buffer area in a manner that focuses activity away from sensitive habitat areas. Access to the habitat area should be discouraged through the design of the trails and the use of specialized plantings. Because horses can attract the brown-headed cowbird, a least Bell's vireo nest parasite, it is necessary to mitigate the effects of equestrian activities when they are near vireo habitat. During nesting season the trails should be closed.

- Restoration of the riparian habitat in the floodway should be pursued in lieu of channelization. If potential impacts to public health or safety clearly necessitate channelization, the channel should be soft-bottomed and soft-sided, and should be designed of sufficient width to support riparian vegetation across the width of the channel and to convey the 100-year flood.