



REGIONAL PARK TRAIL GUIDELINES

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Executive Summary

Trail System

The OVRP Trail Guidelines establishes guidelines for development of a multi-use trail system from the San Diego Bay, along the Otay River and around the perimeter of Otay Lake Reservoirs that will:

- provide connections to existing and proposed park and recreation facilities,
- create links to adjacent trail systems, and
- avoid adverse effects on environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.

Trail Plan

This document sets criteria for alignment of a future trail system on both sides of the Otay River that will be comprised of three components:

- a regional trail corridor that provides a looping trail system through the Otay River Valley and around the Reservoirs,
- connector trails that provide access to recreational areas, overlooks, and adjacent trail systems, and
- narrow spur trails that provide access from the regional trail corridor to points of natural, historic or cultural interest.

Trail Guidelines

This document also contains guidelines to aide in selection of the trail route and implementation of the trail system. Guidelines fall into four categories:

1. *Trail alignment guidelines* reflect the goal of the Concept Plan - to develop a continuous trail that highlights a wide variety of recreational and interpretive experiences.
2. *Financial guidelines* are designed to minimize financial impacts to the public.
3. *Development guidelines* underscore the importance of creating a trail which is accessible to the widest possible range of trail users and which is designed to respect the natural or cultural environments through which it passes. Guidelines for environmental and cultural resources are compatible with Federal, State and local environmental regulations.
4. *Management guidelines* define a structure for successful oversight and maintenance of the trail system.

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Section I: Introduction

As shown in Figure 1, below, the Otay Valley Regional Park (OVRP) is located in the southern portion of San Diego County, four miles north of the United States/Mexico International Border. It is a 13 mile linear park with more than 8,000 acres. The Park crosses three jurisdictions: City of San Diego, City of Chula Vista and the County of San Diego. It encompasses the core of Otay River Valley from South San Diego Bay to the Otay Lake Reservoirs. It is under private, semi-private and public land ownership. Existing land uses within the Valley include agriculture, surface mining and recreation. Surrounding the OVRP is an urbanized area with a variety of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. The OVRP provides significant open space and recreational opportunities for citizens of the region.

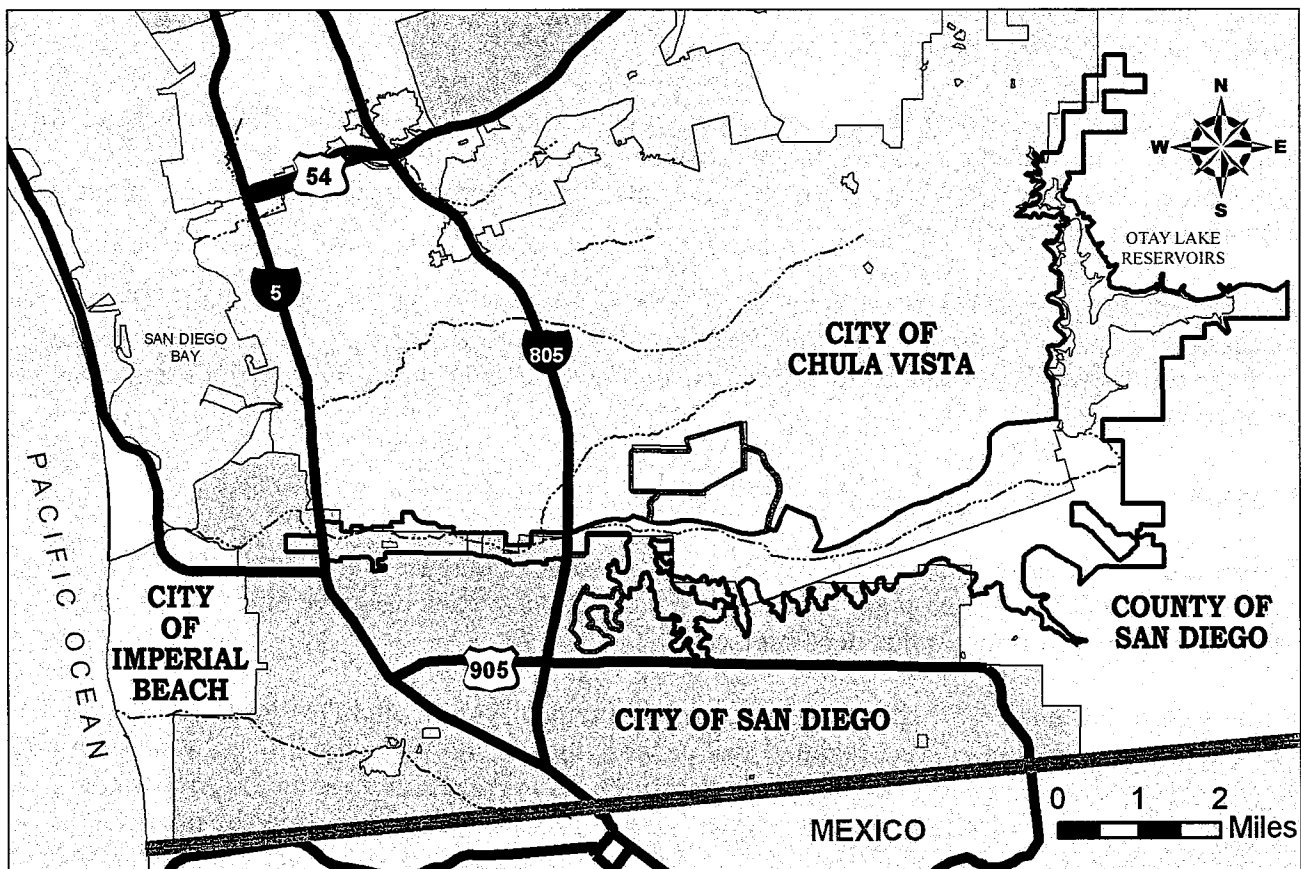


Figure 1: Location Map

Planning Background

Like the other river parks of the region, the Otay Valley area has experienced an increase in development. This has resulted in reduction of open space and destruction of natural and cultural resources. To protect and preserve the Otay River Valley, a multi-jurisdictional planning effort was formed between the City of Chula Vista, the City of San Diego and the County of San Diego. A Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JEPA) was implemented to plan and acquire property for the Regional Park.

The JEPA recognizes a three-member policy committee (PC), consisting of one elected official from each participating jurisdiction. To advise the PC on matters related to planning, the JEPA established a thirty-member Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) comprised of ten individuals from each jurisdiction representing community organizations, property owners, and special interest groups. In order to coordinate and implement this planning effort, staff members from each jurisdiction were appointed to a Joint Staff team.

In 2001 the OVRP Concept Plan¹ was approved by the three jurisdictions. The Plan identified three major goals: 1) protect sensitive cultural and natural resources; 2) provide a mix of active and passive recreational opportunities, including trails, and; 3) provide opportunities for environmental education and/or interpretive programs.

The focus of this proposal is on the development of the trail system in the Regional Park. The success of this system depends on continued support from the participating jurisdictions as well as from the residents, who understand the importance of experiencing nature through trails and open space preservation.

Purpose

Trails offer a wide variety of outdoor experiences for people of all ages and abilities. Trails improve quality of life and increase property value. If designed properly trails can have minimal impact on natural and cultural resources that need protection.

A trail system for the OVRP will not only be a self-contained system within the Regional Park but will be an integral part of a larger regional trail network that extends from the Silver Strand through the Otay Valley, ultimately connecting to the California Riding and Hiking at its eastern boundary. Other existing or proposed trail systems, which are connected to and/or influenced by the OVRP, include the Chula Vista Greenbelt, Sweetwater River Park, Jamul/ Dulzura Trail system, Eastlake Community Trails, and the Otay Ranch Neighborhood Trails.

This document will provide guidelines for development, management and maintenance of the OVRP trail system. It strives to meet trail goals and objectives as established by surrounding communities. These design guidelines are consistent with other planning efforts to provide recreational opportunities while protecting the natural and cultural elements within the park. A list of related planning efforts can be found in Appendix 6.

¹ See Appendix 2 for the Concept Plan.

This document divides the park into five segments² in order to clearly illustrate the geographic and demographic complexities within and around the park. The five segments are:

- South San Diego Bay to Interstate 5,
- Interstate 5 to Interstate 805,
- Interstate 805 to Heritage Road,
- Heritage Road to Lower Otay Lake Reservoir, and
- Otay Lake Reservoirs Vicinity.

The trail system should be aligned and constructed in phases as circumstances permit using the following objectives:

1. Provide a system of safe “non-motorized” trails that meets the needs of hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.
2. Provide connections with important sites, such as parks, transit facilities, access points, adjacent trail systems, and points of interest.
3. Encourage trail routes that highlight the Otay River Valley’s recreational and educational resources, including natural, scenic, cultural, and historic resources without compromising sensitive resources.

² See Figure 2.

Section II: Background Information

Existing Conditions

Existing conditions in the OVRP that may influence trail planning, design, implementation and/or management issues are identified in this section.

Topography

Near the river/bay interface in the western portion of the Park several salt ponds and fresh water ponds have been carved out of the South San Diego Bay and Otay River floodplain for commercial purposes. This area is mainly flat with slopes of less than ten percent. The land climbs gently to the east. To the north are gentle low slopes. To the south are steeper, higher slopes, with some being greater than 25 percent. Thirteen miles to the east and north, the topography reaches an elevation of 600 feet.

Hydrology

The river flows east to west from the Lower Otay Lake Reservoir to South San Diego Bay and was once a perennial stream. Because of the diversion of water within the watershed due to the construction of Savage Dam, it now flows only intermittently during and immediately after rains. However, significant flows have occurred as a result of spills from the Lower Otay Lake Reservoir during heavy rains. Consequently, the overall flow regime is one of little or no flow over long periods, interrupted by larger episodic flows.

Damming, development and in-stream surface mining have created conditions that result in erosion and the movement of sediment along the river.

Biological Resources

Several vegetation communities exist within the OVRP and serve as habitats for a variety of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, including sensitive, rare and endangered species. However, the quality and integrity of biological resources in the valley have been fragmented and disturbed by a variety of human activities, that includes salt mining, sand and gravel extraction, agriculture, surrounding urban development and damming of the river.

Cultural Resources

People have occupied the Otay River Valley and Otay Mesa during for the last 9,000 years. Over 280 cultural resource sites have been identified including prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. Two large prehistoric village complexes provide important information about prehistoric and historic use of the Otay River Valley. The sites also include evidence of the arrival of non-indigenous people in the Valley, beginning with the Spanish missionaries in the late 1700s and continuing until the present day.

Land Use

There are numerous commercial, private recreational, and agricultural operations inside the Park. Therefore, implementing the Design Guidelines will partially depend on working with or around current land uses. Planning will also be influenced to a lesser extent, by commercial, industrial and residential users adjacent to the park but outside its boundaries.

Lands west of Heritage Road have been generally put to more urban uses while east of Heritage Road they retain a more rural, agricultural flavor. In the western region uses include two asphalt and concrete batch plants, plant nurseries, and private recreational facilities such as the Palms Golf Center, Fun Farm Go Karts and Arcade, Knotts Soak City U.S.A. Water Park, and Coors Amphitheater. In addition, ponds and a significant amount of debris remain from past sand and gravel extraction operations.

In the eastern region of the Park uses include Rock Mountain Quarry, recreation boat launches on Lower Otay Lake Reservoir, an airpark and the R.J. Donovan and George Bailey Correctional Facilities.

Opportunities and Constraints

The first phase of this process included a detailed analysis of opportunities and constraints within the OVRP. Opportunities provide direction for planners and influence choice of locations for Park facilities and features such as trails, interpretive centers, viewpoints/overlooks, and recreation areas. Natural, cultural and other trail-related data was collected, converted to an electronic format and analyzed utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) software. Then, all opportunities and constraints were ranked, combined and displayed in two final exhibits, an Opportunity Exhibit (Appendix 3) and a Constraints Exhibit (Appendix 4). These two exhibits directly influenced trail planning methodology, design and alignment. The collected data served as the platform for developing the trail system. As an example, the cultural, historical and archaeological significance of the Park combined with its rich wildlife and vegetation communities supply excellent opportunities for education and interpretation, but can also present a constraint when required preservation of these resources may limit access to them.

Existing land uses on private property can be a constraint. Future trail locations through private property may require cooperation and coordination with the landowners, agreements to use existing utility easements, purchasing land or negotiating new easements.

Physical elements within the OVRP can influence trail planning and alignments. For example, hydrological considerations could impact poorly located trails during flood conditions. Different soil types are subject to erosion. Slope can be an important constraint, especially in areas with highly erosive soils and trail guideline limitations.

