

# **DRAFT RUFFIN CANYON OPEN SPACE TRAILS PLAN**

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**PREPARED BY**

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO**

**PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT OPEN SPACE DIVISION**

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. PLAN AREA SETTING**

### **Geographic Area**

The Ruffin Canyon Open Space Trails Plan (Plan) area is comprised of City of San Diego Open Space located in the Serra Mesa and Mission Valley communities of the City of San Diego, west of Interstate (I) I-15, east of I-805, and north of I-8, (Figure 1). It is loosely bounded by Gramercy Drive to the north, Friars Road to the south, Mission Village Drive to the East, and Murray Ridge Road to the west. The area is located in un-sectioned land in the Mission San Diego land grant within Townships 15 and 16 South, Range 2 West on the San Bernardino Base and Meridian U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute La Mesa and La Jolla quadrangle maps (Figure 2).

The Plan area consists of an undeveloped open space area north of Mission Valley and west of Murphy Canyon. It includes City-owned open space parcels and an easement across undeveloped privately-owned homeowner's association (HOA) property on the south end to connect to urban amenity trail within the developed are of the HOA. Portions of the trail also include a San Diego Unified School District owned parcel on the northeast (Taft Middle School). Elevations in the study area range from approximately 130 feet (ft) above mean sea level (amsl) to approximately 380- ft amsl. The open space is made up of the main stem (Ruffin) and three finger canyons: Sandroek Canyon on the west, and Taft and Shawn Canyon finger canyons on the east. These are all characterized by low slopes along the bottoms (averaging 3-10 percent), surrounded by steep to very steep slopes (50 to 90 percent) along the canyon walls. One soil type is mapped for the project area: Olivenhain cobbly loam (30 to 50 percent slopes) (Bowman 1973).

### **Background**

The Plan has been prepared in response to Community interest in a trails plan that would connect the communities of Serra Mesa and Mission Valley. The Plan provides upland neighborhood connections for Serra Mesa and Mission Valley residents, connecting on the south end to an Urban Walk that would connect to the San Diego River, and provide improved connections to and within Ruffin Canyon Open Space. The existing Community Plans for Serra Mesa and Mission Valley date to 1977 and 1985, respectively. The Serra Mesa Community Plan Bikeway and Pedestrian Pathways map did not specifically identify trails the Open Space Area, however language does allow for hiking within open space. The Mission Valley Community Plan Pedestrian Circulation System map includes a northern connection to Ruffin Canyon as a

“Major Pedestrian Path.” In 2013 the San Diego River Conservancy and State Coastal Conservancy, in cooperation with the City of San Diego and local community groups conducted an Initial Study and MND for a trail alignment. Early in the environmental analysis and design process at that time, the proposed trail system consisted of two trails: the Ruffin Canyon Trail and the Sandrock Canyon Trail (the finger canyon west of the main Ruffin Canyon Trunk). The two trails would have met at the junction of the two canyon drainages. Severe constraints were identified with the Sandrock Canyon Trails, including steep slopes, and property ownership issues. The Sandrock Canyon Trail is still not considered feasible at this time, and so not included in the Plan. The alignment considered at that time would have also rerouted a significant section of the upper Ruffin trail onto the western side slopes of the Open Space. Instead, this plan uses existing trail alignments and utility access paths in Ruffin, Taft, and Shawn fingers.

Recognizing the demand for an improved trail, in March 2015, City Council approved the use of Developer Construction funds for the purpose of permitting and environmental for the Ruffin Canyon Trail. A reassessment of the existing trail and access path for much of the upper section has led to the current proposal to maintain and permit portions of the existing alignment, including two finger connections in Taft and Shawn finger Canyons. It does not include a connection to Gramercy Drive, west of Taft Middle School, which has historically been used. This connection is not included due to the difficulty of maintaining the path in/near the drainage for the canyon in this segment and avoid wetland impacts. A reroute/new trail alignment (and easement) is proposed only for the main trunk of the trail south of Shawn finger on the eastern side of the canyon to raise the trail from the existing cobble streambed and connect the trail through the HOA open space to the urban trail easements within the developed area of the HOA.

Use of the canyon has been ongoing. A sewer main is located in the canyon, dating back to 1957. Continued access to the main for inspections and maintenance is required by the City’s Public Utilities Department. A number of user-generated trails are also visible in historic aerials of the area. A number of these predate the City’s adoption of a Resource Protection Ordinance in 1991. The current trail plan proposes to use a number of existing alignments and utility access path, and realignment of the southern section to avoid the most difficult pritiion to navigate within the cobble streambed.

The goal was to identify safe and sustainable trails that meet the City’s Trail Policies and Standards (Appendix K of the Park and Recreation Consultant’s Guide to Park Design & Development) and minimize biological impacts. Because a number of the trails have already

been created, and to minimize additional impacts to biological resources, not all trails will meet the standards in all locations.

### **Agency Jurisdiction and Applicable Plans**

The area largely occurs within the City's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan (City 1997a). Approximately 109 of the 140 acres of the city-owned open space area (78 %) are within the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA; the City's MSCP Preserve; Figure 3). The HOA parcels to the south of the City-owned parcels are not in the MHPA. Pursuant to the City's MSCP Implementing Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game (1997; R-28455), these lands must be managed for biological resources. As part of the MSCP Implementing Agreement, two primary MSCP obligations are:

- Preparation of land management plans for preserved lands; and,
- Management of all lands preserved under the MSCP.

In 2008, a City of San Diego Master Preserve Management Plan was developed. It states: "When preserve-specific mapping and management actions have not yet been prepared for an area, this document, along with MSCP 'conditions of species coverage' and MSCP Framework Management Plan Directives for each area shall serve as the guiding management documents."

### **MSCP**

As noted in the Biology Report prepared for the Ruffin Trails Project (Plan), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and City adopted the Implementing Agreement for the MSCP in July 1997. This program allows the incidental take of threatened and endangered species as well as regionally sensitive species that are conserved by it (Covered Species) in exchange for designated regional reserves that are intended to be mostly void of development activities, while allowing development of other areas subject to the requirements of the program. Impacts to biological resources are regulated by the City's Municipal Code Environmentally Sensitive Lands regulations.

The City's MSCP Subarea Plan has been prepared to meet the requirements of the California Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act of 1991 and also meets the requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act Section 1.A Habitat Conservation Plan for take of federally listed species. The MSCP identifies an MHPA that is intended to link all core biological areas into a regional wildlife preserve. The City's MSCP Subarea Plan describes how the City's

portion of the MSCP Preserve, the MHPA, will be implemented.

The study area is located within the eastern portion of the “Urban Areas” of the MHPA (Section 1.2.3 of the Subarea Plan). The “Urban Areas” portion of the MHPA includes areas not incorporated in the major planned areas of the MHPA, and consists primarily of canyons with native habitats in relative proximity to other MHPA areas providing habitat (City 1997). Urban habitat areas include open space in Tecolote Canyon, Marian Bear Memorial Park, Rose Canyon, San Diego River, Carroll Canyon, Florida Canyon, as well as numerous smaller canyon systems dispersed throughout the more urban areas of the City (City 1997). These areas are intended to provide habitat for native species remaining in urban areas of the City, stepping stones for migrating birds and those establishing new territories, and environmental education opportunities for urban dwellers (City 1997). No specific MHPA guidelines from Section 1.2.3 of the Subarea Plan apply to the proposed project. Specific Management Directives for the Eastern Area do not include any specific management policies and directives that pertain to the study area.

#### **MHPA Adjacency Guidelines**

The City’s MSCP Subarea Plan addresses the impacts to preserve areas from adjacent development in Section 1.4.3, Land Use Adjacency Guidelines (City 1997). The Land Use Adjacency Guidelines provide requirements for land uses adjacent to the habitat preserve in order to minimize impacts to the sensitive resources contained therein. As stated previously, much of the study area is located within or adjacent to the MHPA, thus, MHPA adjacency guidelines are applicable to the proposed project.

#### **Ruffin Canyon Open Space**

The city-owned parcels were acquired by the City in 1988, and dedicated as park land by Ordinance O-19137 in 2003. As noted above, the majority of the land is owned by City of San Diego and managed by the City’s Parks and Recreation Department, Open Space Division, San Diego River Park Section. The Plan area is outside of the Coastal Overlay Zone.

### **B. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Plan is to provide a cohesive trail plan for the Ruffin Canyon Open Space and provide connection between the Serra Mesa and Mission Valley Communities. It provides guidance for the present and future use and maintenance of the trails within the Plan Area. Trails in this Plan are open to pedestrian and bicycle users. Due to the urbanized nature of the surrounding community and lack of equestrian facilities, equestrian use of the trails in the

Plan is not allowed. Because a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) has not yet been developed for Ruffin Canyon, the Plan also provides guidance on the treatment (e.g. monitoring and management) of species of concern within the area which would potentially be impacted by the Trails until such a time as a full NRMP for the area can be developed and approved. It details the area-specific directives and general guidelines identified in the Master Preserve Management Plan applicable to the area. In addition, it addresses species and impacts from the Plan that will need to be addressed by a future NRMP and includes specific features such as fencing to protect those resources in the interim. The intent of this Plan and the proposed trail system is to evaluate the consistency with MSCP requirements, to the extent possible, of trail design/realignments, trail closures, and not to inhibit future management options during preparation or implementation of the NRMP.

## **2. THE PLAN**

The Plan, shown in Figure 4, represents the trails for the Ruffin Canyon Open Space.

### **A. Biological Resources**

A Biological Resources report was prepared by City of San Diego Biologist IIIs for Ruffin Trails (Appendix A). The report evaluates impacts and proposes mitigation for impacts to MSCP covered habitats and species. The following are Area Specific Management Directives associated with sensitive species associated with the trails in the Plan.

#### **SPECIFIC MANGEMENT DIRECTIVES**

Not all species occurring within the Open Space are expected to require additional species-specific management. It is expected, rather, that the guidelines provided in the Maintenance, Usage, and Development Guidelines chapter and the guidelines listed earlier in this chapter will provide optimal habitat conditions for most, if not all, species to maintain and/or thrive within the Open Space. There are some species, however, listed as MSCP covered species (listed in Appendix A, table 3-5 of the MSCP Subarea Plan) which may require additional management measures, as funding and staff permits, if monitoring indicates the general guidelines are not sufficient to maintain acceptable population levels.

#### **Sensitive Plants/Vegetation**

No federally or state listed plant species were observed within the study area. A total of three

sensitive plant species were observed in the study area: San Diego barrel cactus (*Ferocactus viridescens*), southwestern spiny rush (*Juncus acutus* ssp. *leopoldii*), and San Diego County viguiera (*Bahiopsis laciniata*). Of these, only San Diego barrel cactus is an MSCP Covered Species. See Figure 4 for the location of sensitive plant species observed in the study area. No narrow endemic, federal or state listed plant species were observed within the proposed trail realignment during the field visits by the City Biologist or mapped by ESA (ESA 2013). Three sensitive plant species were observed during the biological assessment conducted by the City in 2018 within the overall trail study area.

**San Diego barrel cactus (*Ferocactus viridescens*)**

**Status:** --/--; CRPR 2.1, MSCP Covered

**Distribution:** San Diego County and Baja California, Mexico

**Habitat(s):** Dry slopes in coastal sage scrub and chaparral

**Status on site:** San Diego barrel cactus occurs in small numbers scattered along the eastern portion of the Taft Canyon Trail and a single individual was documented near the new south trail alignment in 2019.

Area Specific Management Directives from the MSCP: “Area specific management directives must include measures to protect this species from edge effects, unauthorized collection, and include appropriate fire management/control practices to protect against a too frequent fire cycle.”

MSCP Specific Management Efforts

1. Approved trails should keep an appropriate distance (approximately 5-10 feet) from known populations. The existing Taft Canyon finger trail is directly adjacent to the barrel cactus population. Because movement of the trail to create a greater distance from the population is infeasible, fencing shall be installed to lessen the “appropriate distance” and protect the existing plants. Monthly trail monitoring and annual reporting shall specifically include an assessment of barrel cactus populations adjacent to the trail to determine if trail users are impacting existing populations and to determine if unauthorized collection is occurring. If it is determined that trail use is impacting the viability of populations, or if unauthorized collection is occurring, additional steps should be taken to protect the population such as signage, enforcement, and/or trail closures.
2. The proposed South Ruffin Canyon trail impacts will be designed and constructed to avoid any impacts to the single San Diego barrel cactus that was located during the 2019 surveys. Impacts would be avoided in the field by flagging by project biologist prior to construction and routing of the alignment in the field downslope of the plant.

If a 5–10 buffer cannot be established due to topography, fencing shall be installed to protect the individual plant.

3. Non-native weeds should be kept to a minimum near existing populations.
4. If local populations cannot be adequately protected and unauthorized collection is still occurring regardless of enforcement efforts, the San Diego barrel cactus under threat should be transplanted to a more protected location within the Open Space in appropriate coastal sage scrub habitat. Presence of other native cactus is evidence of suitable habitat. Generally, the cactus must be replanted in the same alignment to the sun as the original site. A technique to ensure this is to mark the plants with paint to show true north prior to transplantation and replanted with the mark in the same alignment. Transplanting this species with a root ball of soil from the original site may also help. After transplantation, the plants should be well watered twice monthly for three months. Note: while unauthorized collection was determined to be a potential threat during planning of the MSCP, it has been noted only infrequently by park rangers and other Open Space land managers during the first 19 years of MSCP implementation so it not considered to be a significant threat at this time; on-going land management activities such as patrols and trail maintenance will provide land managers with knowledge of a change in threat status should this become a serious problem within the Open Space.

**San Diego viguiera (*Bahiopsis laciniata*)**

**Status:** --/--; CRPR 4.2

**Distribution:** San Diego and Orange County; Baja California, Mexico

**Habitat:** Diegan coastal sage scrub. Generally, shrub cover is more open than at mesic, coastal locales supporting sage scrub. Occurs on a variety of soil types.

**Status on site:** San Diego viguiera occurs in small numbers scattered along the Taft Canyon Trail and were documented adjacent to (upslope) of the proposed new trail alignment in 2019.

The trail is existing in the area where the San Diego County viguiera were observed which also coincides with the area of barrel cactus. Fencing along the trail to reduce potential impacts from proximity to the trail would also protect this species. Additionally, potential impacts of fewer than a dozen San Diego County viguiera individuals would not result in substantial adverse effects on this species and are not considered significant due to the relatively large amount of habitat for this species already conserved and preserved in perpetuity within the MSCP Plan Area. The proposed South Ruffin Canyon trail impacts will be designed and constructed to avoid any impacts to the populations. The populations of San Diego viguiera that were located during the 2019 surveys would be avoided in the field by flagging by project biologist prior to construction and routing of the alignment in the field downslope of the plants.

**Southwestern spiny rush (*Juncus acutus* ssp. *leopoldii*)**

**Status:** --/--; CRPR 4.2

**Distribution:** Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Ventura, and San Diego counties; Baja California, Mexico

**Habitat:** Moist, saline, or alkaline soils in coastal salt marshes and riparian marshes

**Status on site:** Southwestern spiny rush occurs as scattered individuals in the marsh areas occurring in the northern portion of Ruffin Canyon. The southwestern spiny rush occurs adjacent to the existing North Ruffin Canyon Trail. No trail improvements are proposed to this section of the trail, therefore no impacts to this species are anticipated from the proposed project, as designed.

**Sensitive Animals**

Coastal California gnatcatcher and orange throated whiptail were the only sensitive animal species detected within the study area during the biological surveys conducted by the City.

**Coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*)**

**Status:** T/SSC; MSCP Covered

**Distribution:** Occurs year-round throughout San Diego County's coastal lowlands.

**Habitat:** Mostly Diegan coastal sage scrub. This species has also been documented using coastal sage-chaparral scrub and chamise chaparral for nesting. Gnatcatcher may also occur in other plant communities during the non-breeding season.

**Status on site:** No protocol surveys were conducted for this project because several pairs were previously documented within Ruffin Canyon and Sandrock Canyon during a protocol survey conducted in 2017 by the City Brush Management Biologist (City 2017). No work will be conducted during the gnatcatcher breeding season (March 1 through August 15).

**Orange throated whiptail (*Aspidoscelis hyperythra*)**

**Status:** --/SSC; MSCP Covered

**Distribution:** Occurs year-round throughout San Diego County's coastal lowlands.

**Habitat:** Semi-arid brushy areas typically with loose soil and rocks, including washes, streamsides, rocky hillsides, and coastal chaparral.

**Status on site:** Commonly occurring within the Ruffin Canyon Open Space. These lizards are highly mobile and will move out of the way of the construction of the trail, therefore no impacts are anticipated from the project as designed.

Orange throated whiptail was observed within the area of the new South Ruffin Canyon trail alignment during the 2019 sensitive species surveys. This species is highly mobile and it is anticipated that they will move out of the construction activity area, therefore no impacts are anticipated to this species as designed.

No other focused surveys for animal species are warranted, as no other listed species has high potential to occur, and mitigation measures would be implemented to avoid impacts to nesting birds.

**MSCP Specific Management Efforts**

1. The trail segments within CSS will be minimized to the least extent practicable based on topography, and land ownership from potential breeding habitat of the California gnatcatcher. Vegetation buffers should be considered to exclude hikers from venturing along unapproved trails in the vicinity of historical gnatcatcher use areas.

Temporary seasonal trail closures may be appropriate to deter park users from involuntarily harassing birds at a known nest site; temporary trail detours may be appropriate if they can be implemented without significant impacts or unauthorized trail development.

2. Surveys in accordance with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protocol should be undertaken to determine presence/absence of the gnatcatcher during the correct season if any coastal sage scrub impacts are proposed for the area. Since these birds are resident (unless dispersing juveniles searching for unoccupied and suitable habitat), they will be present all year. Territories expand and contract during the year based on the prevalence of insect prey and the seasonal need to forage over wider areas to provide nestlings with food.
3. Avoid detrimental edge effects such as noise levels that exceed 60 dBA during the breeding season.
4. Coastal sage scrub should not be cleared during the breeding season (March 1– August 15) unless protocol surveys have determined the area is not occupied by gnatcatchers.
5. Weedy/bulky non-native plant materials should be removed from the periphery of occupied gnatcatcher territories outside the breeding season to reduce the potential and severity of fires.
6. Plant palettes and plans for restoration of high quality California gnatcatcher habitat in appropriate locations should utilize the USFWS regional gnatcatcher surveys to determine preferred habitat qualities.

The project will implement area-specific management directives for the coastal California gnatcatcher by restricting clearing of vegetation to outside of the nesting period (i.e., no clearing between March 1 and August 15) or conducting protocol surveys to establish species absence if work is proposed in the nesting period. Furthermore, payment into the HAF or purchase of Cornerstone Lands or other approved mitigation site for impacts to gnatcatcher habitat would provide funding to acquire gnatcatcher habitat within the MHPA.

## **B. Cultural Resources**

A Cultural Resources Survey has been completed for the Ruffin Canyon Open Space Trails (Appendix B). The study consists of background research, a field survey to determine whether any archaeological resources are present and contacting the Native American Heritage

Commission and the local Native American community. Based on the results of the cultural resources survey program, the project will have no adverse effects to cultural resources. However, due to the poor ground visibility at the time of the survey and at the request of the Native American community, it is recommended that any brushing and grubbing, as well as initial grading in conjunction with trail development or maintenance, be monitored by a qualified archaeologist and a Native American (Kumeyaay) monitor.

### **C. Trail Planning, Design and Construction Guidelines**

The following general guidelines are provided regarding the development and design for proposed new trails in the Plan or for proposed/future trail adjustments to the Plan. Where feasible, all trails shall be constructed according to the most-current Trail Policies and Standards – Open Space, available as Appendix K in the Consultant's Guide to Park Design and Development. Because a number of trails have already been created, and to minimize additional impacts to biological resources, not all trails will meet the standards in all locations.

The following guidelines shall be followed in planning and constructing new trails:

1. Development of new trails requires City of San Diego environmental review per state law California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In the case of a stream crossing, a CDFW streambed alteration agreement and/or ACOE permit may also be required. The trail plan included in this document (Figure 4) will be permitted concurrently with the Plan.
2. The trail system should be sited within or adjacent to existing access roads whenever possible to consolidate uses.
3. Trail width should be minimized to reduce impacts consistent with the type of use on that trail and trail location. Maximum allowable trail width is 4 feet except where necessary for safety and/or disabled access (MSCP Subarea Plan Section 1.5.2, General Management Directives, Public Access, Trails and Recreation).
4. Where possible, new trails should be planned on north-facing slopes in chaparral, away from coastal sage scrub habitat of the threatened gnatcatcher (usually found on south facing slopes) and all other sensitive habitat.
5. Any new trail construction resulting in subsurface disturbance should be monitored by a Native American consultant and/or qualified archaeologist for impacts to prehistoric and historic resources.

6. The design of new trails or rehabilitation of existing trails should avoid or minimize potential impacts to the greatest extent possible. Impacts should be determined through biological and cultural resource assessment survey.
7. Trails from adjacent areas should be limited in number. Possible locations should be studied in advance to avoid sensitive habitats and archaeological sites and minimize erosion, while allowing for reasonable public use.
8. Locate trails, view overlooks, and staging areas in the least sensitive areas of the Open Space.

Locate trails along the edges of urban land uses adjacent to the Open space, or the seam between lands uses (e.g., residential/habitat), and follow existing utility roads as much as possible rather than entering habitat or wildlife movement areas. Avoid locating trails between two different habitat types (ecotones) for longer than necessary due to the typically heightened resource sensitivity in those locations.

9. Not applicable to this Plan, as no paving of trails is proposed: Avoid paving trails unless management and monitoring evidence shows otherwise. An exception may be made for the paving of wheelchair accessible trails. Clearly demarcate and monitor trails for degradation and off-trail access and use. Provide trail repair and maintenance as needed. Undertake measures to counter the effects of trail erosion including the use of stone or wood cross-joints, edge plantings of native grasses, and mulching of the trail.

10. Not applicable to this Plan, trail is not designed to be wheelchair accessible: Wheelchair accessible trails should begin and end at accessible staging areas. These trails should lead to accessible viewpoints and/or nature appreciation areas. ADA compliant signs shall be included in project.

11. Provide trail fences or other barriers at strategic locations when protection of sensitive resources is required.

12. Trails shall be relocated as necessary to avoid, protect and buffer endangered or sensitive species (including MSCP covered species), key wildlife breeding habitats, and archaeology sites with surface artifacts.

13. Alternative trail and access road surfaces should be considered for erosion control. Possible alternatives include: gravel; polymer-based compounds; mulching with organic or non-organic materials; and other measures; such as culverts or logs diagonally crossing the trail, should be used to control erosion. A concrete-treated base may be desirable in some locations for stability but should not be used- unless absolutely necessary. Fiber matting should not be used as it is implicated in reptile mortality.

14. Erosion from construction of trails should be limited by:

- Constructing trails parallel to slope contours with cross-slope toward downhill side of trail;
  - Embedding large rocks or logs perpendicular to trails wherever it must to directly cross a slope;
  - Using pipe culverts with riprap on downstream side of trail where water seems to concentrate; and
  - Embedding a course of large rocks along downhill edge of trail where natural drainage swales must be crossed.
15. Trails should be located to avoid introducing adverse impacts, such as avoidance of slopes from adjacent residential development and of areas with highly erodable soils.

15. Trails shall comply with Section 1.5.2, General Management Directives, Public Access, Trails and Recreation, of the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan.

16. Trails should be rerouted to avoid historic resources, such as prehistoric archaeological sites. The locations of these sites need to remain confidential.

**D. Compliance with Section 1.5.2, General Management Directives, Public Access, Trails and Recreation, of the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan**

This section details the Plan's compliance with the Section 1.5.2, General Management Directives, Public Access, Trails and Recreation, of the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan (#15 above).

**Public Access, Trails, and Recreation**

**Priority 1:**

1. Provide sufficient signage to clearly identify public access to the MHPA. Barriers such as vegetation, rocks/boulders or fencing may be necessary to protect highly sensitive areas. Use appropriate type of barrier based on location, setting and use. For example, use chain link or cattle wire to direct wildlife movement, and natural rocks/boulders or split rail fencing to direct public access away from sensitive areas. Lands acquired through mitigation may preclude public access in order to satisfy mitigation requirements.

Fencing shall be provided where the existing trail is directly adjacent coastal barrel cactus population in Taft Finger Canyon.

Additional fencing/barriers shall be installed in response to site-specific needs as they are identified. See section 3.A.1.

Annual trail assessments by Open Space Staff shall be conducted in compliance with Section 3.A.2. below.

2. Locate trails, view overlooks, and staging areas in the least sensitive areas of the MHPA. Locate trails along the edges of urban land uses adjacent to the MHPA, or the seam between land uses (e.g., agriculture/habitat), and follow existing dirt roads as much as possible rather than entering habitat or

wildlife movement areas. Avoid locating trails between two different habitat types (ecotones) for longer than necessary due to the typically heightened resource sensitivity in those locations.

The following alternative trail alignments were considered, and the least impactful feasible alignments were selected. The proposed trails avoid wetland habitats, and minimize impacts to other sensitive habitats to the greatest extent practicable;

Specific examples of reduction in impacts include:

1. Relocating the southern alignment out of the wetland/riparian habitat and cobble bottom.
2. Not including the Sandrock Canyon finger, thereby reducing the length of the trail and impacts within the western finger.
3. In general, avoid paving trails unless management and monitoring evidence shows otherwise. Clearly demarcate and monitor trails for degradation and off-trail access and use. Provide trail repair/maintenance as needed. Undertake measures to counter the effects of trail erosion including the use of stone or wood cross joints, edge plantings of native grasses, and mulching of the trail.

3. No paved trails are proposed. Monthly trail monitoring and annual assessments/reporting. Assessments and repairs shall be conducted in compliance with Section 3.A.2. below. No pavement is proposed in the Plan.

4. Minimize trail widths to reduce impacts to critical resources. For the most part, do not locate trails wider than four feet in core areas or wildlife corridors. Exceptions are in the San Pasqual Valley where other agreements have been made, in Mission Trails Regional Park, where appropriate, and in other areas where necessary to safely accommodate multiple uses or disabled access. Provide trail fences or other barriers at strategic locations when protection of sensitive resources is required.

All trails are limited to 4 feet or less in width except where they are co-located with utility access paths. See Section 3.A.1 for provisions for barriers and fences.

5. Limit the extent and location of equestrian trails to the less sensitive areas of the MHPA. Locate staging areas for equestrian uses at a sufficient distance (e.g., 300–500 feet) from areas with riparian and coastal sage scrub habitats to ensure that the biological values are not impaired.

Equestrian use is not proposed for the trails in the Plan.

6. Off-road or cross-country vehicle activity is an incompatible use in the MHPA, except for law enforcement, preserve management or emergency purposes. Restore disturbed areas to native habitat where possible or critical, or allow to regenerate.

Off-road or cross-country vehicle activity is an incompatible use in the Open Space, except for law enforcement, preserve management utility maintenance, or emergency purposes (see Section 3.C.14).

7. Limit recreational uses to passive uses such as birdwatching, photography and trail use. Locate developed picnic areas near MHPA edges or specific areas within the MHPA, in order to minimize littering, feeding of wildlife, and attracting or increasing populations of exotic or nuisance wildlife (opossums, raccoons, skunks). Where permitted, restrain pets on leashes.

See Section 3.C.15.

8. Remove homeless and itinerant worker camps in habitat areas as soon as found pursuant to existing enforcement procedures.

See Section 3.C.6.

9. Maintain equestrian trails on a regular basis to remove manure (and other pet feces) from the trails and preserve system in order to control cowbird invasion and predation. Design and maintain trails where possible to drain into a gravel bottom or vegetated (e.g., grass-lined) swale or basin to detain runoff and remove pollutants.

Equestrian trails are not proposed. See Section 3.C.3 regarding pet feces.

#### **E. Indirect Impacts/Compliance with MHPA Adjacency Guidelines**

As stated previously, portions of the study area are within or adjacent to the MHPA. Potential indirect impacts analyzed for this project include drainage/toxins, lighting, noise, invasive plant species, and errant construction impacts.

##### **Drainage/Toxins**

Project implementation would not result in an increase in paved areas draining to the MHPA, or otherwise cause additional runoff or toxins to drain to the MHPA. Existing drainage patterns would be preserved. No fuel-powered machines will be stored or staged within the MHPA. The BMPs would be implemented during project construction to control runoff, erosion, and contaminants, as necessary. As such, the project would comply with MHPA Adjacency Guidelines regarding drainage/toxins, and no indirect impacts resulting from drainage or impaired water quality would occur.

##### **Lighting**

Project implementation would not require the installation of lighting, either temporary or permanent, as trail construction would occur during daylight hours. As such, the project would comply with MHPA Adjacency Guidelines regarding lighting and no significant indirect impacts resulting from lighting would occur.

##### **Construction Noise**

Construction noise could result in significant indirect impacts to nesting coastal California gnatcatchers if construction were to take place during the gnatcatcher breeding season (March 1 through August 15). Mitigation measures are provided in the Biology Report (Appendix A).

## Trail Use

Use of the trails in the Plan is not anticipated to significantly alter noise levels in the canyon, which is in an urban environment, completely surrounded by development. Trail use is likely to be intermittent, and generally occurring at levels similar to the surrounding developed parcels. Additional significant indirect impacts are not anticipated.

## Invasive Plant Species/Landscaping

Non-native plants can colonize sites disturbed by construction and potentially spread into adjacent native habitats. Construction of proposed trails would not result in indirect impacts from the introduction of non-native species into native habitats, as the project would only be clearing the minimum necessary to construct the trails and would not be installing any landscaping. Several non-native species already occur within the study area and additional species are not anticipated to be introduced from the proposed trail construction. Furthermore, any plants installed as erosion control in shoulders of trails will be native species appropriate to the surrounding vegetation communities. As this area is part of the MHPA Preserve, City Parks and Recreation staff would monitor the area for invasive species and target highly invasive species for removal/treatment, particularly any species that is not already documented in the plant species list and no significant indirect impacts from non-native plant species would occur.

## Grading

Project grading would not include the creation of manufactured slopes within the MHPA. No indirect impacts from grading would occur.

## Access/Barriers

Public access would be directed to the proposed trails and abandoned trails would be blocked and labeled as off-limits/closed. No indirect impacts from access would occur.

## Errant Construction Impacts

Unauthorized construction impacts outside the approved limits of work could potentially impact adjacent sensitive habitat, where present. Errant construction impacts are unlikely to occur, as project construction would consist of hand clearing with power tools such as chainsaws and weed whips. A walk-behind chipper may be used within the impact footprint and existing disturbed areas and staging areas. Final trail tread grades would be established

with hand-held tools, including power tools such as jackhammers and hand-held compactors. Since large machinery would not be used for construction, the potential for errant construction impacts is very low, and any impacts that do occur are unlikely to be significant. However, in order to avoid potential impacts from errant construction, mitigation measures have been developed and are provided below under “Mitigation.”

For all management activities (e.g. habitat restoration, exotics removal, etc.), effectiveness analyses should be performed at appropriate time intervals following the action (e.g. 6 months, 1 year). As part of this process, recommendations for further management actions should be made if the management activity is not fully successful.

### **3. TRAILS, PUBLIC USE AND RECREATION GUIDELINES**

Below is a summary of all the public use guidelines that apply to the Open Space Area. Specific guidelines for construction of public use facilities, including trails, are given in Chapter 6, Development, Maintenance and Management Guidelines.

#### **A. TRAILS**

The trail plan proposes a total of approximately 2.2 miles (11,470 feet) of trails that utilizes existing use patterns including 1.3 miles (6,690 feet) of pre-1991 trails, 0.4 miles (2,150 feet) of post-1991 trails, and 0.5 miles (2,630 feet) of newly constructed trails. The Plan consolidates existing use patterns; and replaces one segment of trail that does not meet City trail standards; limits habitat fragmentation and recreational impacts to wildlife, and improves user experience and scenic opportunities. One segment (Sandrock) has been identified for closure based on property issues and sustainability and/or maintenance concerns. Approximately 2150 of existing trails are to be closed in North Ruffin Canyon. The proposed trail plan would help implement the trails identified in the Serra Mesa and Mission Valley Community Plans for the area and comply with the requirements for trails in Section 1.5.2, General Management Directives, Public Access, Trails and Recreation, of the City of San Diego’s MSCP Subarea Plan.

1. Provide clearly marked access areas and well-demarcated trails and post signage to prevent off-trail access and use. Where sensitive or covered species are present, close trails during the breeding and nesting seasons or reroute the trail if necessary. Locate trails, view overlooks, and staging areas in the least sensitive areas of the Open Space. Signs shall, at a minimum, be placed at major entrances to the trail system from public streets, easements and sidewalks.
2. Regularly assess use of open space areas and trails in and surrounding the Open Space (as determined by the Park & Recreation Department). Trails should be checked for erosion, particularly during and after the rainy season, overgrowth of adjacent vegetation, and condition of trail tread. Repair trails, adjust enforcement levels, and/or restore off-trail use areas and areas affected by erosion as soon as feasible. Trail assessments shall be at least monthly. An annual report shall be generated, summarizing the monthly monitoring visits, noting any actions taken, inventorying and prioritizing maintenance needs, identifying unauthorized trails and actions taken for closure, and any sensitive species being impacted. The report shall include photos and GPS points, identifying areas for repair and maintenance as well as recommendations for the steps needed to address deficiencies. The report shall specifically include an assessment of barrel cactus, San Diego viguiera, and juncus acutus populations adjacent to the trails to determine if trail users are impacting existing populations and to determine if unauthorized collection is occurring. If it is determined that trail use is impacting the viability of populations or if unauthorized collection is occurring, additional steps should be taken to protect the population such as signage, enforcement, and/or trail closures.
3. Provide sufficient signage to clearly identify public access to the Open Space. Barriers such as vegetation, rocks/boulders or fencing may be necessary to protect highly sensitive areas. Use appropriate type of barrier based on location, setting and use. For example, use chain link or cattle wire to direct wildlife movement, and natural rocks/boulders or split rail/peeler log fencing to direct public access away from sensitive areas. Lands acquired through mitigation may preclude public access in order to satisfy mitigation requirements.
4. Coordinate trail and Open Space development with growth in the planning area to identify the most appropriate access/staging areas.
5. Integrate open space trails wherever possible to provide a continuous open space network, maximizing the utility with use of layout, fencing, signage, and landscape at access points.

6. Create a trail system which links Ruffin Canyon with the regional trail and open space system to the extent feasible, and that provides reasonable linkage to other trails, loop trails and view points.
7. Provide safe pathways through open spaces and public utility easements, where appropriate, and pathways/sidewalks along roads.
- ~~8. Provide wheelchair accessible trails adjacent to accessible staging for use by wheelchair users and those with mobility difficulties. Note: N/A as this trail does not include wheelchair accessible trails.~~

#### B. TRAIL CLOSURE PLAN

Trails may be closed at the discretion of the Parks and Recreation Department due to the following reasons:

- Unsafe or unsustainable trails
- Trails initiating opportunities for illegal activity
- Trails contributing to resource impacts (i.e. erosion, biological, etc.)
- New environmental concerns
- Other issues under which closure is warranted based on professional staff opinion

Specific trail alignments have not been identified for major closure efforts at the time of the development of this plan. It should be noted that continued utility maintenance access (Public Utilities and SDGE) is still required within lower Ruffin Canyon and the Sandrock finger, so rehabilitation and revegetation of these alignments is not proposed. Rather, public use of these access paths will be discouraged through signs indicating the approved trail routes. Additional trails, as noted above, may be closed at the discretion of the Parks and Recreation Department without requiring an amendment to the Plan. Additional signage will also be installed for other unauthorized trails not designated by the plan.

Proposed changes or additions to the trail alignments included in this document will be evaluated based on the MSCP, additional applicable regulations, if any, and the acquisition of appropriate permits. All changes must be authorized through an amendment to this Plan, or through concurrence of the City, CDFW and USFWS staff.

#### C. PUBLIC USE GUIDELINES

The following guidelines should be enforced by the Park Rangers as designated by the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department:

1. All trail users should remain on designated trails for protection of adjacent sensitive resources and for their personal safety. Signs should be used to direct public use to appropriate, designated trails.
2. Hiking and bicycling are allowed on designated trails only. Signs shall be installed to identify appropriate uses for designated Open Space trails. All undesignated trails are closed to Open Space users.
3. Domestic animals shall be on a leash at all times within the Open Space and will remain on designated trails and in public areas. Clean-up after pets is required per Municipal Code Section 44.0301.1.
4. All litter should be placed in garbage cans placed at trail heads and other locations in the Open Space. Trash receptacles should have appropriate lids to limit entrance by local wildlife and should be emptied on a regular basis.
5. Park rangers shall enforce State law, City ordinances, and Open Space policies.
6. Regular patrols to identify and control vandalism, off-road vehicle activity, poaching, and illegal encampments shall be conducted; these generally take place on a weekly to monthly basis and should occur no less than once a month.
7. Subsequent to completion of a Notice to Vacate and in accordance with applicable codes, any encampments found shall be removed as soon as possible after consideration of biological concerns.
8. No unauthorized motorized vehicles, except emergency vehicles, Open Space managers, or maintenance personnel (i.e., SDG&E, Pacific Bell, AT&T, City of San Diego Public Utilities and Transportation and Stormwater Departments), shall be allowed of their respective easement(s) in the Open Space without first notifying Open Space staff. Vehicle use must be restricted to existing access roads to avoid disturbance and/or destruction of habitat.
9. Graffiti and other effects of vandalism shall be removed/repaired, as soon as possible.
10. Any residential and/or landscape encroachment into the Open Space should be reported to the City of San Diego Code Enforcement Team.
11. Areas where dumping occurs should be checked regularly and barricaded, if deemed necessary, to discourage dumping.

12. Any identified hazardous waste shall be removed as soon as possible following appropriate hazardous waste material disposal guidelines. Areas should be signed within 24 hours of identification of the problem to indicate the presence of hazardous materials and made off-limits to public use.
13. All Parks and Recreation Department BMPs will be followed.
14. Off-road or cross-country vehicle activity is an incompatible use in the Open Space, except for law enforcement, preserve management, utility maintenance or emergency purposes. Restore disturbed areas to native habitat where possible or critical, or allow to regenerate per Section 1.5.2, General Management Directives, Public Access, Trails and Recreation, of the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan.
15. Limit recreational uses to passive uses such as bird watching, photography, trail use and other appropriate uses.
16. Provide passive recreation for all ages and levels of disabilities.

#### D. RECREATIONAL USE GUIDELINES

Below is a list of recreational uses that are approved, conditionally approved, or not approved for the Open Space Area. Since all future recreational uses may not have been anticipated, any additional recreational uses that are not listed below must be approved by the Parks and Recreation Department and receive all applicable permits before being conducted within the Open Space. If a wide variety of uses are being proposed within the Open Space that are not identified in this plan, the Friends of Ruffin Canyon may evaluate the proposed recreational uses and provide recommendations to the Parks and Recreation Department.

#### APPROVED RECREATIONAL USES

Approved recreational uses within the Open Space include the following:

1. Hiking, including walking, jogging, wheel chairing, or running, is allowed within the Open Space on designated trails.
2. Mountain biking is allowed within the Open Space on designated trails. Mountain bikers must maintain a safe speed at all times.

#### RECREATIONAL USES REQUIRING ADVANCE APPROVAL

Recreational uses that require advance approval through the City of San Diego include the

following:

1. Group hiking activities, foot races, or other group events involving the approved recreational uses listed earlier may be allowed with the approval of the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department. In some instances, approval from the Mayor's Office will be required. Groups exceeding 75 in number must obtain a Park Use Permit (PUP). A PUP is also required for weddings, athletic events, special park use activities, voice/music amplification, and any request which may require an additional permit from another City department/agency, regardless of the size of the group. Voice/music amplification during CAGN breeding season shall be prohibited.

#### PROHIBITED RECREATIONAL USES

Active recreation, as well as passive recreational uses that are prohibited per the San Diego Municipal Code, are not allowed in the Open Space. In addition, passive recreational uses that are shown to impact sensitive species and/or habitats may be prohibited as necessary within specific times, seasons and/or areas of the Open Space.

### **4. MITIGATION OPTIONS AND GUIDELINES**

Although the focus of the Open Space is on natural habitat, necessary structures and some maintenance activities will be required which may impact existing natural habitat and/or cultural resources. Biological and archaeological surveys are required prior to obtaining applicable city, state, and federal permits (e.g. CEQA) and any site disturbance. These have been completed for the trails included in Figure 4 of the plan. Any additional projects shall comply with applicable guidelines outlined in this Plan. Approval of project design, implementation and mitigation by City of San Diego San Diego Parks and Recreation Department will be required in conjunction with all required City-issued permits to ensure the guidelines adopted as part of this Plan and the MSCP Subarea Plan are being incorporated.

Impacts should be minimized or eliminated as much as possible during design, planning, and permitting phases. Maintenance activities should be planned in advance using the least physically disturbing methods, avoiding critical bird breeding seasons, using existing access ways, and restricting disturbance to the project area. Prior to any trail addition or other park development, the area to be affected should be surveyed for cultural resources as well as sensitive habitat, plant, and animal species at the appropriate time of year, and trails should be located in the least environmentally sensitive area. Only existing access ways identified in

this plan are to be used for any maintenance activity in the Open Space.

All development and mitigation shall be in accordance with the City of San Diego's Land Development Code, or as required by the lead agency's regulatory requirements.

#### A. HABITAT MITIGATION

All habitat mitigation for projects within the Open Space shall meet the requirements of the required permit process (e.g. CEQA, City of San Diego Land Development Code Biology Guidelines). If possible, preference should be given to mitigation, restoration and/or enhancement of habitats within the Open Space. Specific biological mitigation requirements for the Plan shown in Figure 4 are presented in the biological resources letter report (Appendix A).

#### B. CULTURAL RESOURCE MITIGATION

Based on the results of the cultural resources survey program, the project will have no adverse effects to cultural resources; however, due to the poor ground visibility at the time of the survey and at the request of the Native American community, it is recommended that any brushing and grubbing, as well as initial grading in conjunction with trail development or maintenance, be monitored by a qualified archaeologist and a Native American (Kumeyaay) monitor. Mitigation for this or other projects within the Open Space Areas shall meet the requirements of the required permit process (e.g. City of San Diego Historic Resource Guidelines).

## 5. INTERPRETIVE GUIDELINES

The natural and cultural resources in the Open Space provide interpretive opportunities. Signage throughout the Open Space would provide educational opportunities for visitors to learn about the natural and cultural resources present as well as history of the area. The following measures are designed to utilize these opportunities in a wise, non-disruptive manner.

#### A. INTERPRETIVE AND INFORMATIONAL DISPLAYS AND PROGRAMS

The following guidelines shall be followed for all interpretive and informational displays and programs within the Open Space:

1. The sign program in the Open Space should be in keeping with the rustic nature and

history of the park and consistent with the City Parks and Recreation Department.

2. Signs should be used to identify designated Open Space entries and boundaries.
4. Signs/kiosks at Park entries and major access points should carry the Parks and Recreation logo and provide Open Space rules, regulations, and any other appropriate information.
5. Signs within the Open Space interior shall be limited to those necessary for trail identification, Park regulations, and protection and/or interpretation of natural and cultural resources and sited in locations that avoid negative impacts to resources.
6. Signs shall be strategically placed for maximum benefit and designed or placed to avoid increasing the number of perches already available in surrounding habitat for foraging raptors in sensitive species nesting areas.
7. Standard informational and educational signs/kiosks shall be developed for the Open Space and for its riparian, wetland, coastal sage scrub, and chaparral habitats; sensitive species; and any sites of historical/cultural significance.
8. Development of interpretive signage in safe areas that will not cause a stress on the cultural resources is recommended. Interpretive structures of smaller scale, such as a kiosk-type shelter or free-standing signage could be considered for interpretive displays and/or programs in areas of the Open Space. Prevention of vandalism should be taken into account for all interpretive facilities, signs, and cultural resources.
9. Interpretive displays should be changed periodically and focus on educating the public about natural resources and systems within the Open Space, such as historical resources, water quality, evapo-transpiration, habitat and plant identification, sensitive species, seasonal or migratory species, ecosystems, food chains, animal behaviors, and species adaptation.
10. Before sign placement, final approval from the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department is required. Posting notices on any bulletin boards requires approval of Park Rangers or Open Space/MAD staff.
11. An "Ecowatch" program (like Neighborhood Watch) that encourages public participation in educating, maintaining, and protecting should be considered for the Open Space.
12. Ranger conducted interpretive programs should focus on the unique natural and/or cultural resources found in Ruffin Canyon. Program goals should include educating

park users and fostering public stewardship of the open space park.”

## **6. IMPLEMENTATION**

### **A. FEDERAL AND STATE AGENCY PERMITS AND AGREEMENTS**

Any development projects within the Open Space shall be permitted under the appropriate process (e.g. Site Development Permit).

### **B. DEVELOPMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

This Plan discusses the trail project. It will be the responsibility of the project applicant to plan, obtain required permits, and develop and implement a Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Plan (if required) in accordance with this Plan and any required permits.

### **C. CITY OF SAN DIEGO RESPONSIBILITIES**

The City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the administration of Ruffin Canyon Open Space and the implementation of this Plan.

### **D. TASKS TO BE IMPLEMENTED**

These tasks should be implemented as funding becomes available.

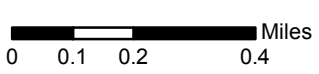
1. Close any new volunteer trails in sensitive areas, unsustainable trails and unsafe trails per the trail plan Maintain and provide where necessary signage and adequate barriers for trail closures.
2. Provide buffers for sensitive areas.
3. Implement construction of new trails and mitigation and restoration in accordance with project permitting.
4. Conduct monthly inspections and annual assessments of overuse of trails and repair or restore damage. Trails should be checked for erosion, particularly during and after the rainy season, overgrowth of adjacent vegetation, and condition of trail tread. Implement maintenance and adaptive management recommendations identified in the assessments.
5. Continue identifying all illegal encroachments and report to City of San Diego Code Enforcement.
6. Update Plan (every ten years) and/or incorporate Plan into future NRMP.

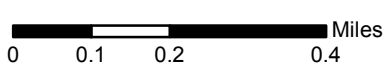
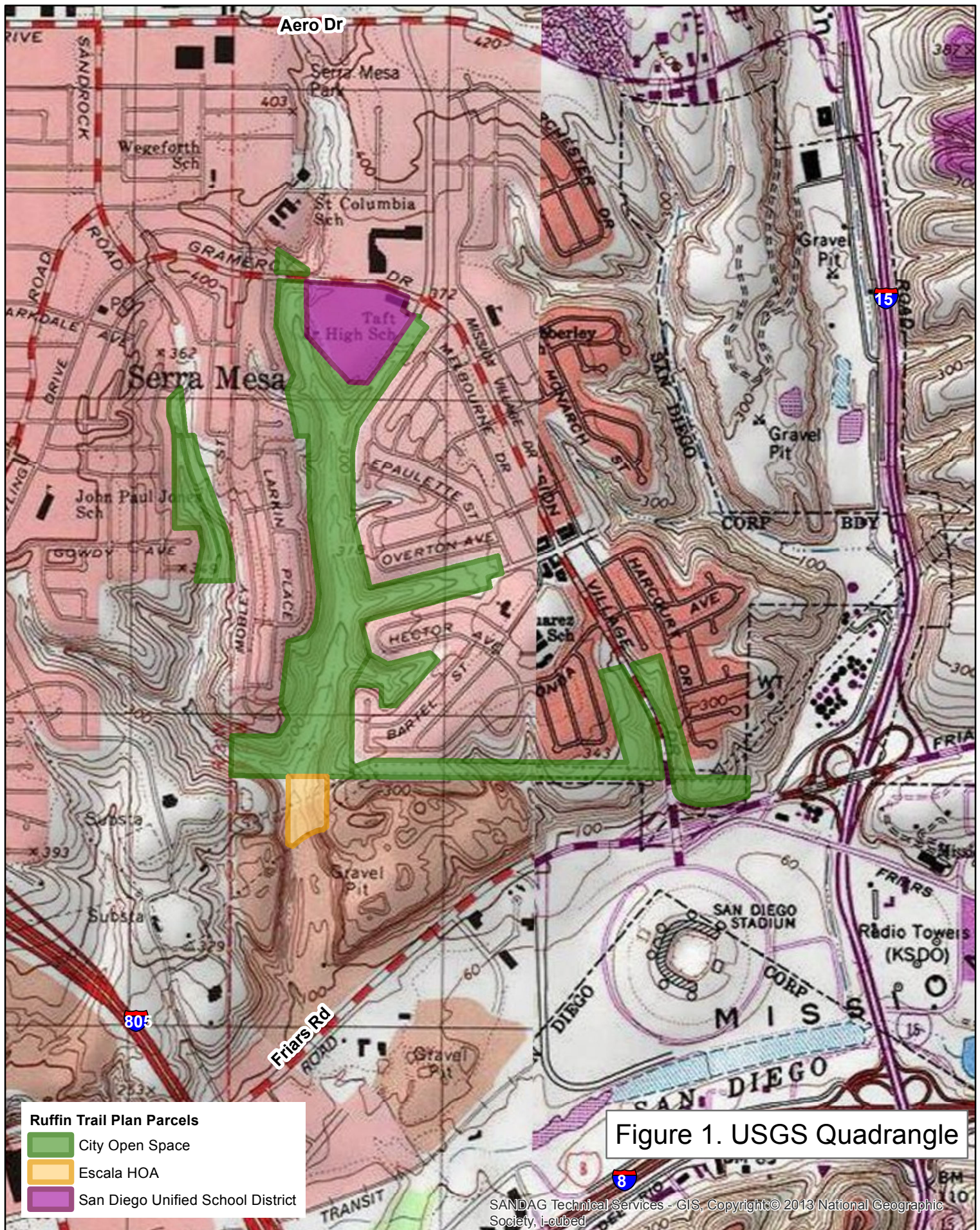
## REFERENCES

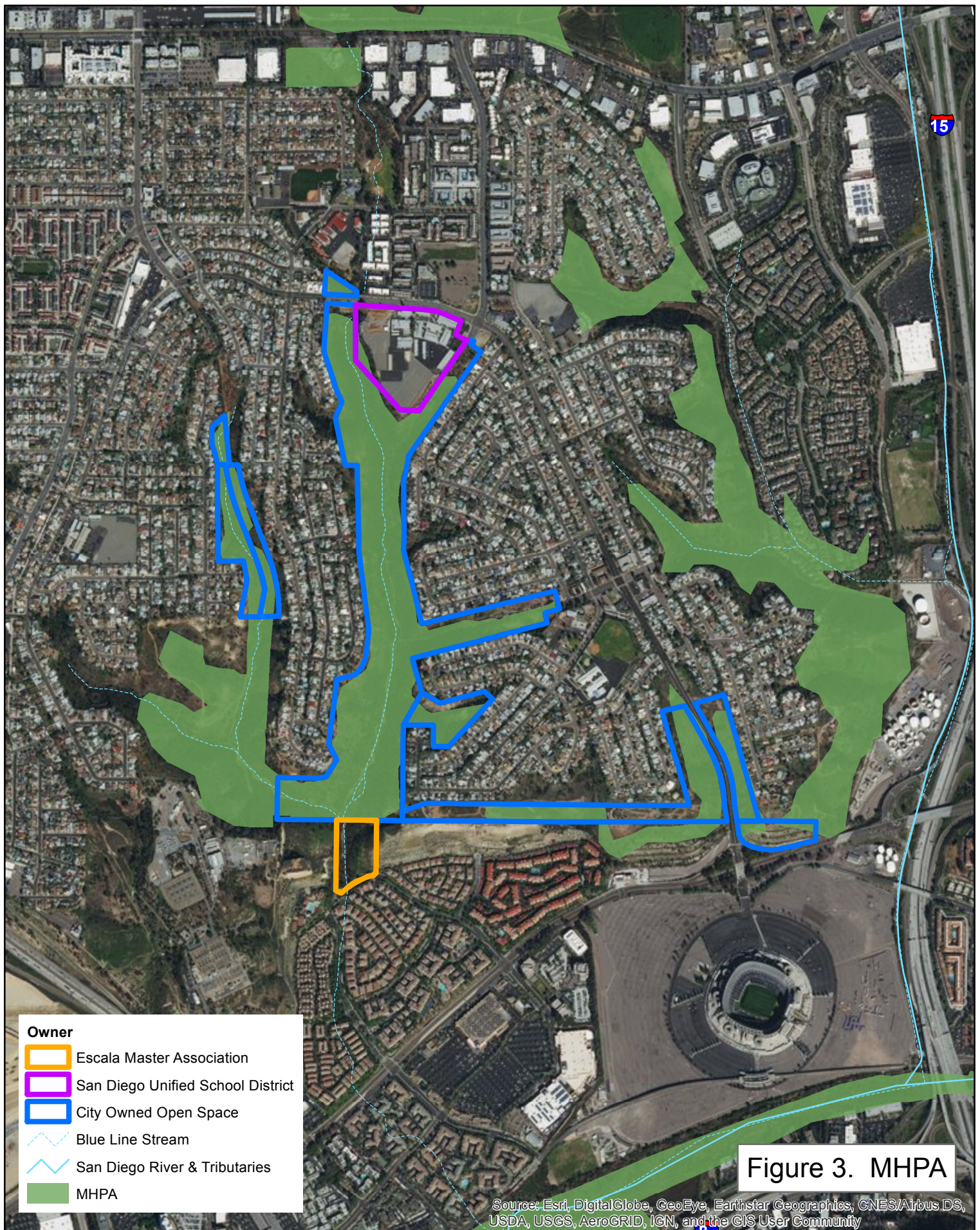
Bowman, R.H. 1973. Soil Survey of the San Diego Area, California, Part I. United States Department of Agriculture.



Figure 1. Project Location







0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles



The City of  
**SAN DIEGO**





