

DATE ISSUED: June 23, 2006 **REPORT NO. PC-06-187**

ATTENTION: **Planning Commission, Agenda of June 2 , 2006**

SUBJECT: OTAY VALLEY REGIONAL TRAIL - PROJECT NO. 68601.
PROCESS 4

OWNER: City of San Diego

APPLICANT: City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department/County of San
Diego/City of Chula Vista

SUMMARY

Issue(s): Should the Planning Commission approve a Site Development Permit for the construction of an 8.3-mile trail system within the Otay Valley Regional Park for hikers, bicyclists and equestrians?

Staff Recommendation:

1. CONSIDER Mitigated Negative Declaration SCH NO. 2006041064 and Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Program and
2. APPROVE Site Development Permit No. 208174

Community Planning Group Recommendation: On November 29, 2005, the Otay Mesa-Nestor Planning Committee voted 15-0-0 in favor of the project, with no recommendations.

Environmental Review: A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION SCH No. 2006041064 has been prepared and certified by the County of San Diego on June 14, 2006, for the project in accordance with State of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. A Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) has been prepared and will be implemented, and will reduce any potential impacts identified in the environmental review process to a level of insignificance.

Fiscal Impact Statement: All costs associated with the project will be covered by the applicant.

BACKGROUND

The proposed trail alignment and staging areas are shown in Attachment 10. The trail system would be constructed within the County of San Diego, the City of San Diego and the City of Chula Vista, and would run from Saturn Boulevard on the west, to Interstate 805 on the east. The proposed project implements a portion of the Otay Valley Regional Park Concept Plan adopted by the Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement agencies in 2001. If approved, the 8.3-mile-long trail system would be constructed on the north and south sides of the Otay River, with connecting trails across the river, and would accommodate hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists. The project is located in the AR-1-1 and OF-1-1 Zones within the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan Area.

The County of San Diego and the Cities of San Diego and Chula Vista entered into a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement in 1990 for the coordination of planning, acquisition, and design of Otay Valley Regional Park. On December 14, 2005, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors approved a revised Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement to include operations and maintenance of the park and its facilities. On May 23, 2001, they approved the Otay Valley Regional Park Concept Plan.

DISCUSSION

Project Description:

The project proposes to construct an 8.3 mile trail system within the Otay Valley Regional Park for hikers, bicyclists and equestrians. The proposed project has been divided into two phases: Phase 1 would be constructed by the City of San Diego, and Phase 2, the remaining portions, would be constructed by the County of San Diego with potential assistance from Chula Vista. Construction and associated mitigation for each phase is contingent upon availability of grant funds. Phase 1 of the proposed project consists of the portion of trail segment 1C south of Fenton Pond, segments 5, 1D, and 6B, and staging area 4 located west of Beyer Boulevard. Phase 2 of the proposal includes all remaining project components (see Attachment 10).

This proposed project would improve public access to the Otay River Parkway and provide improvements in the form of a trail system, conservation measures, and interpretive enhancement. Kiosks would be installed to help educate the public about environmental and cultural resources in the area. The trail system would help raise awareness and visibility of this regional park, and serve as a catalyst for future habitat restoration projects along the Otay River.

The would include seven staging areas, four of which would be located in the City of San Diego and allowed by this proposed Site Development Permit. A 1,450-foot, concrete block, six-foot high, adobe-colored retaining wall would also be constructed. The proposal would also construct 12

drainage crossings, a 58-foot by 12-foot, steel prefabricated truss bridge, a 22-foot by 37-foot Park Ranger Station, picnic areas, interpretive signage and a 23-foot by 24-foot bathroom building.

The project has been designed to avoid biological, cultural, and agricultural resources adjacent to the proposed trail alignment. Trails would be surfaced with native soil, decomposed granite, or crushed rock to minimize impacts. Trail widths have been minimized to reduce impacts and yet safely accommodate hikers, bicyclists and equestrians. In addition, an extensive, informal trail system currently exists throughout the Otay River Valley and the proposed project is designed to closely follow portions of the existing trail system. Approximately 35 percent of the proposed trails would be located within San Diego Gas & Electric easement roads used to access their facilities within the Otay Valley Regional Park area. These existing utility access routes are currently graded to a minimum nine-foot width, and that width would not be increased. The remaining existing trails vary from three to 12 feet in width. Additionally, a portion of the existing trails, not designated for future use, would be closed by signage and physical barriers.

The overall trail system consists of the 22 trail segments. In three locations connecting trails do not exist and would be constructed to link existing trail segments. New trails account for approximately eight percent of the proposed trail system. These new trails segments would be no more than eight feet in width and also include a four-foot wide section.

Several alternative trail alignments were evaluated during project design to determine the least environmental impact to biological, cultural, and agricultural resources in the area. Impacts to environmentally sensitive lands would be minimized by following existing dirt paths between habitats, surveying the alignment for sensitive resources and avoiding resources where possible. In addition, the proposal would restrict construction to the non-breeding season in sensitive habitat types, reduce trail width where it traverses environmentally sensitive lands, and fence sensitive areas to further protect sensitive vegetation from potential impacts by trail users.

The alignment of trail segment 11 is constrained by a steep slope area and a dense population of San Diego barrel cactus. This trail width was reduced to four feet to minimize grading and biological impacts and by routing the trail at least 10 feet away from concentrations of San Diego barrel cactus. A peeler log fence would be placed along the trail to prevent hikers from walking off the trail into the area containing the barrel cactus. Where individual plants cannot be avoided, they will be transplanted by a qualified biologist to an area containing appropriate vegetation and orientation.

Trail Segment 6A would be constructed along the northern side of the Otay River in mostly disturbed/ruderal habitat, but crosses a small patch of Diegan coastal sage scrub and non-native grassland. This routing was selected to avoid more extensive impacts to southern willow scrub.

Trail Segment 8 along on the south side of the river would be constructed in the existing slope on both sides of Beyer Boulevard. The slope would be widened slightly to accommodate an eight-foot wide trail with a half-foot wide clear area on each side.

Although trail construction could potentially impact sensitive species, such impacts would be avoided by restricting construction activities to outside the breeding seasons of the least Bell's vireo (March 15 – September 15) and the coastal California gnatcatcher (March 1 – August 15 in San

Diego and February 15 – August 15 in Chula Vista). If removal of any trees within the development area is proposed during the raptor breeding season (February 1 to September 15), the project biologist would ensure that no raptors are nesting in such trees. If construction occurs during the raptor breeding season a preconstruction survey would be conducted and no construction would occur within 500 feet of any identified nest(s) until the young fledge.

Community Plan Analysis:

The proposed project is called for in the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan as part of the Otay Valley Regional Park. The project would not conflict with any other goals or objectives and is, therefore, consistent with the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan.

Environmental Analysis:

The Otay Valley Regional Park (OVRP) is under the land use jurisdiction of the Cities of San Diego and Chula Vista. The County of San Diego, and the Cities of San Diego and Chula Vista entered into a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JEPA) in 1990 to plan, construct and manage the OVRP. The OVRP is a planned regional park that would eventually extend from the Otay Lakes west to Saturn Boulevard. The Trails Project study area is bounded on the west by Saturn Boulevard and on the east by Interstate 805 and is located in the Multiple Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) of the City of San Diego and the Preserve Management Area of the City of Chula Vista under each agency's respective Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan. The proposed trail system will include connections to adjacent trail systems, such as the Bayshore Bikeway and the Chula Vista Greenbelt trail system. Additional proposed facilities consist of development of a ranger station, seven local staging areas, trailheads, picnic areas, and interpretive signage.

The proposed project would be required to comply with the MHPA Land Use Considerations, General Planning Policies and Design Guidelines (Section 1.4) and the Land Use Adjacency Guidelines (Section 1.4.3) of the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan. The proposed project would be consistent with compatible land uses as referenced in Section 1.4.1 and 1.4.2 of the MSCP Subarea Plan. Specific Management Directives are identified for the OVRP in Section 1.5 of the City of San Diego's MSCP Subarea Plan.

In accordance with the JEPA Agreement, and due to timing of City of San Diego grant funding contracts, the County of San Diego acted as the Lead Agency under CEQA for preparation of the OVRP Trails Program environmental document. As such, a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) and associated Mitigation and Monitoring Reporting Program (MMRP) were circulated on April 10, 2006 for a 30-day public review period, which ended May 9, 2006. Ten comment letters were received from the public and responded to by County Staff in the final MND. The County of San Diego Board of Supervisors certified the MND and adopted the MMRP on June 14, 2006.

The majority of the proposed trail system would be constructed in areas already disturbed by existing SDG&E utility easements and informal trails. By locating these trails and staging areas in existing disturbed areas, potential project impacts to biological and cultural resources have

been avoided and/or reduced in accordance with the City of San Diego's Biological Resources and Historical Resources Guidelines. These mitigation measures are identified in the MMRP. In addition, the proposed project's permanent and temporary impacts to Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Fish and Game, and Coastal Commission jurisdictional wetlands or non-wetland waters would be mitigated in accordance with the requirements of the appropriate resource agency.

Additionally, the MND found the proposed project to be compatible with the Otay River Valley environment. Agriculture, rock mining, and recreation are the current land uses within the valley, which includes significant open space as well as active/passive recreational opportunities for the surrounding communities. As part of the proposed Trails Project and the need to improve and protect the Otay Valley, a Habitat Restoration Plan and a Natural Resource Management Plan have been developed and would be implemented after approval of current and future project(s). The Habitat Restoration Plan is scheduled for approval by the OVRP Policy Committee in summer 2006. The Natural Resource Management Plan is planned for adoption by the City of San Diego in summer 2006.

The MMRP includes all the measures needed to reduce project impacts to below a level of significance. These measures include minimizing air quality impacts, closing informal trails that are not included in the Trail Alignment Plan, creation and restoration of wetland habitat, restoration of Diegan coastal sage scrub, removal of non-native species, and the requirement for a cultural resources specialist to monitor construction related activities in order to avoid and minimize potential impacts to both prehistoric and/or historic archaeological resources. In addition, the proposed project requires permits from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Fish and Game, and the Coastal Commission. Permit applications have been submitted by the County of San Diego and are being processed by the applicable resource agencies.

CONCLUSION:

The proposed project would implement a strategy within the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan by providing elements of the Otay Valley Regional Park Concept Plan. The MND prepared for the project has identified some direct impacts and staff has determined that with the implementation of the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program those direct impacts would be mitigated to below a level of significance. The project is consistent with the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan and the Otay Mesa-Nestor Planning Committee supports the project. Therefore, staff is recommending approval of Site Development Permit No. 208174

ALTERNATIVES

- 1. Approve** Site Development Permit No. 208174 with modifications.
- 2. Deny** Site Development Permit No. 208174 if the findings required to approve the project cannot be affirmed.

Respectfully submitted,

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Program Manager
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HALBERT/MED

Attachments:

1. Aerial Photograph
2. Community Plan Land Use Map
3. Project Location Map
4. Project Data Sheet
5. Draft Permit with Conditions
6. Draft Resolution with Findings
7. Ownership Disclosure Statement
8. Project Chronology
9. Project Plans
10. Trail Alignment and Staging Areas

document1