REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: April 12, 2017 REPORT NO. 202

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board
Agenda of April 20, 2017

SUBJECT: Mission Trails Regional Park Master Plan Update and Natural Resource Management Plan

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATIONAL ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE BOARD.

BACKGROUND

Purpose and Introduction

In 2010, the City of San Diego initiated a project to update the 1985 Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Master Plan, develop a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP), and process a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) to cover the activities outlined in these documents and the associated actions. The purpose for the Master Plan Update (MPU) is multi-faceted as discussed below.

Project Location

Currently, MTRP is about 5,830 acres of land between Interstate 8 to the south and State Route 52 (SR-52) to the north, within the City of San Diego, City of Santee, and unincorporated lands of the County of San Diego. The existing park is split into five planning areas: Lake Murray, Cowles Mountain, Mission Gorge, East Fortuna Mountain and West Fortuna. Surrounding MTRP is the City of San Diego Community Planning Areas of Tierrasanta to the west, Navajo to the south, and East Elliott to the north. MCAS Miramar also occurs north of SR 52. The Cities of Santee, El Cajon and La Mesa are along various portions of the eastern boundary.

The East Elliott area will add approximately 2,600 acres to MTRP. This includes almost the entire East Elliott community plan area, excluding private lands currently being graded for residential development along its eastern edge. Active land management and monitoring activities occur on publicly owned lands or privately held lands with a conservation easement.

The West Sycamore area will add approximately 1,350 acres to MTRP. This area is the eastern half of the Rancho Encantada Precise Plan area of the Scripps Miramar Ranch Community which abuts MCAS Miramar to the south, the City of Poway to the north, and the County of San Diego to the east.

Project History

The origin of MTRP dates back to 1960 when the concept of a 1,765 acre "Fortuna Mountain-Mission Gorge Metropolitan Park" was proposed by the City of San Diego. Over the next 16 years various park development plans were conceptualized. When the County of San Diego acquired Cowles Mountain, a City-County joint regional park planning process managed by a multi-agency Task Force was initiated. In 1976, a draft Master Development Plan was prepared for the "Lake Murray/Cowles Mountain/Fortuna Mountain Regional Park" and a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed in 1977. In 1979, the EIR was certified, the park was renamed Mission Trails Regional Park. Between 1979 and 1981, the Task Force and CAC assessed and revised the 1976 Master Development Plan based in part on information contained within the EIR. In 1984, the CAC and Task Force amendments were incorporated into a revised Master Development Plan which was subsequently approved by the CAC, Task Force, City Council and Board of Supervisors in 1985.

In 1997, the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) was approved. This placed a vast majority of MTRP within the Multiple Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) which has management guidelines adopted by the City of San Diego. With the additional emphasis on resource management and protection placed on MTRP lands, some of the uses originally planned within the park were moved to alternative, less environmentally sensitive sites or dropped from consideration completely. The MSCP also identified two other pertinent areas as MHPA's: the vast majority of the East Elliott Community Plan Area and a large block of open space contained within the Rancho Encantada Precise Plan area, both of which are being incorporated into MTRP upon acquisition for conservation or mitigation purposes.

Since 1985, most of the major development elements identified in the Master Development Plan (Master Plan) have been implemented, such as the Lake Murray Reservoir Rehabilitation, Old Mission Dam staging area, Cowles Mountain staging area, Lake Murray Community Park, Visitor and Interpretive Center, Old Mission Dam Interpretive Pathway and Viewing Terrace, Clairemont Mesa Staging Area, Kumeyaay Lake Campground, and Equestrian (East Fortuna) Staging Area at the end of Mast Blvd.

DISCUSSION

Project Description

The MTRP Master Plan Update is a policy document that establishes the planning framework for the future design, implementation, and management of the Park. The Goals and Policies in the MPU provide specific guidance on critical park

implementation issues, so that all aspects of development and operation will be consistent with the agreed upon park concept.

The goals of the MTRP Master Plan Update are to:

1. Define the Park's setting in terms of physical environment, aesthetics, public plans and policies, surrounding land use and ownership;
2. Identify recreational and other open space potentials within the Park setting;
3. Assess existing and potential relationships (especially edges, roads, and trail linkages) between the Park, its immediate surroundings, and the San Diego region as a whole; and
4. Maintain and update a comprehensive Master Plan in terms of park uses, facility sizes and locations, environmental and architectural design concepts, and strategies to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

Major concepts of the 1985 planning process that continue to be important today are:

1. Multi-purpose role – the Park serves a comprehensive mix of the educational, environmental, recreational, and cultural needs of the San Diego Region. It accommodates active, as well as passive uses on both a regional and community level.
2. Trail and Open Space Linkages – the Park orients outward to the region; and is not viewed as an 'island.' Because its location, size, and aesthetic environment it is a logical destination for hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. The Park relates to major trail linkages with other regional parks, open space corridors, and activity centers. Trail corridors are planned to extend outward into existing and future residential areas wherever compatible.
3. Response to Environment - the Park continues to protect environmental and cultural resources while providing for recreational opportunities.

MTRP is designed, implemented and managed in a manner to continue to achieve the goals and concepts in a balanced and sustainable manner. As future activities and projects for MTRP are proposed, they will be evaluated for compliance with this Master Plan to ensure that the vision of MTRP is maintained. New staging areas, trails, and bridges are proposed as future potential park facilities in the MPU and has been analyzed in a programmatic fashion in the environmental document.

With the addition of the East Elliott and West Sycamore Areas, Mission Trails Regional Park will be approximately 9,780 acres.

While the MTRP MPU guides activities on both private and public land, it does not usurp existing private property rights or disallow existing uses that are permitted under the City's current zoning and land use ordinances, General Plan, and the East Elliott Community Plan. As such, any future private development within East Elliott

will be subject to the policies contained in the Master Plan Update and the City Land Development Code.

As an appendices to the Master Plan, an NRMP has been prepared. The NRMP fulfills a requirement identified in the City's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan to set forth an adaptive management framework in order to ensure long-term, viable populations of sensitive species and habitats within the Park. It also sets forth protocols (e.g., data collection methods, success criteria) to evaluate the effectiveness of these management actions. The NRMP also includes minimization measures that would be followed prior to implementation of any future project in the Park.

MTRP Planning Areas
The future development of the MTRP is provided for each of the six planning areas of the Park, and includes hike, bike and equestrian trail alignments, staging areas, rest areas, and other amenities. It also includes proposed interpretive programs and potential mitigation opportunities for the Park. The following summarizes the proposed improvements to be located within each of the six MTRP planning areas.

Lake Murray
Lake Murray has historically been the most accessible, developed and highly used area of the Park. The existing developed and water-oriented recreational uses (golf course, ballfields, community park, boat ramp and concessions) will continue to be the primary focus of this area. MPU recommendations include sediment and erosion controls related to the unpaved access roads and parking lots; the implementation of water quality improvement best management practices at major storm drain outfalls to improve water quality within this area prior to discharge into Alvarado Creek and the San Diego River; the closure or re-routing of unauthorized trails; and addition of a new trail connection to the Del Cerro community.

Cowles Mountain
Cowles Mountain is a dominant landmark within the San Diego Region rising to a height of 1,591 feet and is the highest point within the City of San Diego. An existing utility/emergency access road to the communications antennae at the top of the Cowles Mountain will remain the only vehicular access within this area. Trails currently originate from the Cowles Mountain staging area, as well as Barker Way, Mesa Road, and Big Rock Road. Additional staging area improvements are proposed at the existing Barker Way and Mesa Road trailheads, and a new small staging area and trailhead is proposed west of Pyles Peak off of Mission Gorge Road. A small bike skills area is proposed for inclusion as part of the Mesa Road staging area improvements. All other proposed improvements are related to recreational trails.

Barker Way is a currently heavily used access point utilizing only on-street parking, trash/recycling receptacles and signage. The proposed staging area would impact up

to one acre of land and create an off-street staging are with parking, portable toilets, trash/recycling receptacles, and other related amenities.

Mesa Road currently has two staging areas, one at the end of the road and the other near Big Rock Park. The one at the end of the road is recommended for closure and consolidation with the one near Big Rock Park. Proposed improvements are for the area near Big Rock Park and would utilize the currently disturbed shoulder of the road from Big Rock Park to just past Mesa Heights Road. The site could support parking, a small bicycle pump-track, beginner to intermediate bike skills features, and other related amenities. Restrooms are provided at the adjacent Big Rock Park.

There is currently no formal access to Pyles Peak from the west, only an unauthorized hiking trail that originates from the residential development along Golfcrest Drive. Approximately 700 feet north of Golfcrest Drive along Mission Gorge Road is a small access road to a San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) facility that is proposed for improvements to support parking, portable toilets, trash/recycling receptacles, and other related amenities while maintaining access to SDCWA facilities. Vehicular access would be right-in/right-out only from/to Mission Gorge Road.

Mission Gorge

Mission Gorge is the heart of MTRP. It encompasses most of the cultural resources, significant sensitive biological resources, the geologic formations of the gorge, the San Diego River and associated habitats, the Visitor and Interpretive Center, and the Kumeyaay Lake Campground. Annual visits to the Visitor Center continue to increase. To help meet the needs of increased patronage, an additional parking area near the Visitor Center and improved trail connectivity between the Jackson Drive staging area would alleviate some of the pressure during times of peak use. The inclusion of additional bicycle skills features at the Deerfield BMX site (being renamed the Deerfield Bike Skills area) and Deerfield Canyon Nature park of approximately 2 acres are recommended, as well as a bridge connection over the San Diego River at the bottom of Jackson Drive

The additional parking area to support the increased patronage of the Visitor and Interpretive Center and the Park is proposed within the western Oak Grove Loop area. A two and one half acre area is being proposed for assessment to develop about one and one half acres. The expanded footprint is intended to provide some flexibility to avoid potential cultural resources within the area. The developed area is intended to support parking, picnic tables, benches, informational kiosks and other amenities. Relocation of existing picnic tables and signage would be required.

The design and construction of additional bicycle skills features at the Deerfield BMX site is proposed to provide facilities for a full range of skill levels. The design and construction of the Deerfield Canyon Nature Park is proposed to provide amenities that include picnic areas, trails, interpretive panels, fitness course, children's play

areas of natural looking play structures, parking, and native landscaping. All proposed improvements will remain within the area that is outside the MSCP/MHPA.

A bridge over the San Diego River at the bottom of Jackson Drive is proposed to improve connectivity between the Mission Gorge and Fortuna Mountain areas of the Park. During a significant portion of the year, water levels within the River prevent most park users from crossing at this area.

A segment of the San Diego River Trail, a regional trail running from the Pacific Ocean to the headwaters of the San Diego River, is proposed within MTRP. The proposed alignment is from the southern MTRP boundary to the northeastern boundary, using a combination of new, upgraded, and existing trails. This proposed alignment is consistent with the proposed San Diego River Park Master Plan.

Fortuna Mountain

Fortuna Mountain is the northern extension of the ridge bisected by the San Diego River and is relatively undeveloped with the exception of two major utility corridors. SDCWA has several pipelines and access roads traversing the western edge of MTRP in the north/south direction. SDG&E has both gas pipelines electrical distribution lines and access roads traversing MTRP. The gas pipeline traverses the Park in the east/west direction just south of SR-52. There are several electrical distribution corridors that traverse MTRP in a southwesterly/northeasterly direction. Two staging areas and a couple of community trail connections from Tierrasanta serve the Fortuna Mountain area. The Clairemont Mesa Boulevard staging area serves the western edge of Fortuna Mountain, whereas the Equestrian staging area serves the eastern edge of Fortuna Mountain. The Fortuna ridgeline saddle separates the area into East and West Fortuna. Due to the steepness of the utility access road and trails crossing over the ridgeline and saddle, most Park users stay on one side of Fortuna or the other. Proposals within the Fortuna Mountain area are focused on trail system improvements. Minor amenity upgrades are recommended at the staging areas.

East Elliott

East Elliott is one of two areas being added to MTRP. It is approximately 2,600 acres in size and is located due north of the eastern portion of Fortuna Mountain on the north side of SR-52. It is linked to Fortuna Mountain via two freeway under crossings for wildlife and recreational users. MCAS Miramar borders East Elliott along the entire western and northern perimeters. The Sycamore Canyon Landfill occupies the central portion of the site and is included within the boundaries of the Park to facilitate long-term reclamation of the closed portions of the landfill to open space and recreational uses.

East Elliott currently contains a series of utility access roads and several miles of user defined trails. Proposed actions include closing of trails, re-routing trails, and constructing new trails, including providing connectivity to the Stowe Trail and the Santee Boulders, where and when ownership/easements allows. A recreational

linkage along the northern perimeter of the landfill is proposed to connect MTRP with the historic Stowe Trail corridor that runs north/south along the eastern edge of the East Elliott area. A significant portion of this area is currently in private ownership. Two SDG&E electrical distribution corridors traverse East Elliott. One north/south corridor is within the western portion of the area, the other splits off along the southern boundary and routes to the northeast along the edge of the landfill. This area also contains the Santee Boulders, identified as a long time rock climbing area used to teach beginner climbers.

West Sycamore

West Sycamore is the second area being added to MTRP. It is approximately 1,350 acres in size and is located about 3 miles north of East Elliott. It is bordered by the Stonebridge development on the west, Beeler Canyon and Sycamore Canyon Road to the north, the County's Goodan Ranch Sycamore Canyon Preserve to the east and MCAS Miramar on the south. An SDG&E electrical distribution corridor traverses the site from the south west to the north east. The developers of Stonebridge transferred 1,098 acres to the City of San Diego in 2012, when conditions of their development agreement had been met. The City already owns an adjacent 252 acres.

West Sycamore currently contains about 17 miles of recreational trails. Proposed actions include closing of unnecessary roads and constructing new trails, including a potential segment of the Trans-County Trail. An existing staging area and Ranger's office (trailer) are within West Sycamore and are on a previously disturbed area outside the MHPA.

Community Process

On January 27, 2011, the first of three public workshops focusing primarily on the MPU was held at the MTRP Visitor and Interpretive Center. Nearly 200 comments were received from the 83 participants. An expanded and more sustainable recreational trail system was the most frequently requested item. Following the workshop, draft alternatives were developed for presentation at the second public workshop.

On March 31, 2011, the second public workshop was held at the MTRP Visitor and Interpretive Center. Participants were asked to vote their level of support for each draft project alternative element. A web-based survey provide additional time and opportunities for the public to review, vote, and comment.

On June 9, 2011, the final public workshop was held at the MTRP Visitor and Center with a presentation and Q & A followed by an open house style review comment period where participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions, voice concerns, and provide written comments on the alternatives.

The comments received from each of the public workshops are included in Appendix B of the Master Plan.

During the summer and fall of 2011, a series of working meetings were held with City staff from the Development Services Department and the Park and Recreation Department, including MTRP park rangers. In 2013, meetings and site visits were held with staff of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and US Fish and Wildlife Service. These meetings focused on the review and discussion of the trail proposals resulting from the public workshops related to day-to-day Park management, habitat protection and fragmentation, sensitive species avoidance and encroachment, and cultural resource protection. City staff has continued to meet with the resource agency representatives on these issues to the present time.

Environmental Analysis
The City has prepared a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to inform public agency decision-makers and the public of the significant environmental effects that could result if the Master Plan and associated actions are approved and implemented, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project. As further described in the PEIR, the City has determined that the project would have significant environmental impacts in the following areas: Land Use (MSCP/MHPA), Biological Resources, Historical and Tribal Cultural Resources, Human Health/Public Safety/Hazardous Materials, Hydrology/Water Quality, Paleontological Resources, Traffic, and Public Utilities. All of these significant environmental impacts can be mitigated below a level of significance. All other impacts analyzed in the PEIR were found to be less than significant.

In and of itself, the Master Plan does not cause a physical change to the environment; however, the Plan would be implemented through subsequent projects, requiring a variety of discretionary and ministerial actions. These subsequent projects (i.e. trails, parking areas, restoration projects) are referred to as future development, or future projects within the Plan.

As such, subsequent projects implemented in accordance with the MPU would be subject to review for compliance with applicable regulations of the Land Development Code, the policies and requirements of the MPU, and subsequent environmental review in accordance with the PEIR.

The Project has received recommendations for approval from both the Mission Trails Regional Park Citizens Advisory Committee (March 7, 2017, 11-0-1) and the Mission Trails Task Force (March 16, 2017, 2017, 5-0-0), and will be moving forward to the Planning Commission for approval of Community Plan Technical Amendments for Navajo, Tierrasanta, East Elliott, and the Rancho Encantada Precise Plan in May. It is anticipated that approval of the project and certification of the PEIR will be before the Environmental Council Committee and to City Council by mid-June of this year.

The Mission Trails Regional Park Master Plan Update, Natural Resource Management Plan, Community Plan Amendments and Draft Program Environmental Impact Report are available at http://www.mtrp.org/master_plan

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachment: Powerpoint Presentation

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