



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: July 11, 2018, revised July 18 REPORT NO. 201

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board
Agenda of July 19, 2018

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 or Master Plan) is multi-faceted as discussed below and an essential component of the management and operation by the City Parks & Recreation Department for MTRP.

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 and Scripps Ranch to the west and northwest, respectively; Navajo to the south; and East Elliott to the north. Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar is also located north of SR 52 and MTRP. The Cities of Santee, El Cajon, and La Mesa are east of and adjacent to various portions of MTRP.

Two specific areas of land are being included into MTRP. The first, the East Elliott area located in the northwest portion of the park, will add approximately 2,600 acres to MTRP. This includes almost the entire East Elliott community plan area, excluding an area currently under development along its eastern edge. Active land

management and monitoring activities occur on publicly owned lands and privately held lands with existing conservation easements dedicated to the City.

The other, the West Sycamore area located in the northeast reaches of MTRP, will add approximately 1,350 acres to the park. This area includes 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.

DISCUSSION

Project History

The origin of MTRP dates 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, and the park was renamed Mission Trails Regional Park. Between 1979 and 1981, the Task Force and CAC assessed and revised the Master Development Plan based in part on information contained within the EIR. In 1985, the CAC and Task Force amendments were incorporated into a revised Master Development Plan approved by the CAC, Task Force, City Council, and County of San Diego Board of Supervisors.

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 less environmentally sensitive areas or removed 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.

At present, most of the major development elements identified in the 1985 Master Development 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 Boulevard.

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. Many of the major concepts of the 1985 planning process continue to be important and are included within the proposed MTRP MPU. 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 MPU 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.

The proposed MTRP MPU is designed, implemented, and managed in a manner to continue to achieve the goals and concepts in a balanced and sustainable manner. With the addition of the East Elliott and West Sycamore Areas, Mission Trails Regional Park will be approximately 9,780 acres. 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.

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.

In addition to the Master Plan, a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) has been prepared for MTRP. 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 can be maintained 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 hiking, biking, and equestrian trail alignments; staging areas; rest and picnic areas; and other recreational and park 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 (Attachment 1: Lake Murray Area Map)

Lake Murray has historically been the most accessible, developed and highly used area of the Park. The existing developed and water-oriented recreational uses, which include a golf course, ballfields, community park, boat ramp, and concessions, will continue to be the primary focus of this area. The proposed MPU includes recommendations to improve the developed components of the park. Among these are 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 prior to discharge into Alvarado Creek and the San Diego River; the closure or re-routing of unauthorized trails; and the addition of a new trail connection to the Del Cerro community (Attachment 1).

Cowles Mountain (Attachment 2: Cowles Mountain Area Map)

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. An existing utility/emergency access road to the communications facilities 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 heavily used access point utilizing only on-street parking, trash/recycling receptacles, and contains limited signage. The proposed staging area improvements would impact up to one acre of land and create an off-street staging area with parking, portable toilets, trash/recycling receptacles, and improved signage.

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 for the area near Big Rock Park would utilize the currently disturbed shoulder of the road from Big Rock Park to just past Mesa Heights Road. The proposed site improvements will increase parking, add a small bicycle pump-track with beginner to intermediate bike

skills features, and other related amenities. Restrooms are currently 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. Proposed improvements to this area include parking, portable toilets, trash/recycling receptacles, and other related amenities to the park, while maintaining access to SDCWA facilities.

Mission Gorge (Attachment 3: Mission Gorge Area Map)

Mission Gorge 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 annually. 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, proposed to be renamed the Deerfield Bike Skills area, and Deerfield Canyon Nature park of approximately 2 acres are proposed, as well as a bridge connection over the San Diego River at the bottom of Jackson Drive.

The additional parking area for the Visitor and Interpretive Center 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 (Attachment 4: Fortuna Mountain Area Map)

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 the Tierrasanta community 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 (Attachment 5: East Elliott Area Map)

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 unauthorized trails. Proposed actions include closing of previously constructed trails, re-routing trails, and constructing new trails, including providing connectivity from the Mast Staging area to the Stowe Trail and the Santee Boulders in the eastern and northeastern reaches of the park. A recreational linkage is proposed for future review and alignment along the northern perimeter of the landfill following the closure of the landfill to provide a second connection with the 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 and part of the active landfill operations. 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, a rock climbing area that is used currently.

West Sycamore (Attachment 6: West Sycamore Area Map)

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 southwest to the northeast. The developers of Stonebridge transferred 1,098 acres to the City of San Diego in 2012, as a condition of the development agreement for the project.

West Sycamore currently contains about 17 miles of recreational trails. The proposed MTRP MPU includes closing of unnecessary roads and trails, 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 provides additional time and opportunities for the public to review, vote, and comment.

On June 9, 2011, the third 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 U.S. 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 met with the Wildlife Agency representatives on these issues over the course of several years. Multiple efforts have been made to seek compromises over trail realignments to balance recreational user needs and safety, while concurrently accounting for the preservation of wildlife habitats and protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

Issues to Be Considered by the Decision-Making Body

East Elliott is an area of note to both recreational trail users and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Wildlife Agencies), as it is proposed as a new recreational area to MTRP. The Draft MPU and PEIR initially contained several proposed trail alignments that were developed with recreational user groups; however, these trails were not supported by the Wildlife Agencies due to existing wildlife habitat and potential environmental impacts. The City and County of San Diego, together with recreational user groups and environmental stakeholders, worked together for over a year to reach a compromise in an effort to balance recreational use and wildlife habitat preservation in areas throughout East Elliott (Attachment 7: Revised Conceptual Trail Alignments). This compromise included closing numerous existing trail alignments to avoid wildlife habit areas, re-routing trails to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, and proposal for the construction of new trail alignments in less sensitive areas. The following details the specific trail alignments that were developed and realigned based on additional wildlife studies that were completed with new or preferred alignments recommended. These alignments are reflected in the Final MTRP MPU and the focused follow up studies are included in the MTRP MPU Final PEIR.

The first subject area reviewed with the recreational user groups and the Wildlife Agencies was identified in the Draft MPU and PEIR in Oak Canyon within the westernmost area of East Elliott (Attachment 8: Revised Trail Alignment - Oak Canyon). The proposed Oak Canyon trail connection was comprised of a combination of existing (1.23-miles) and proposed (2.09 miles) trails to create a 3.33-mile Hike/Bike trail from the SR-52 Overpass, within the canyon along the western boundary of MTRP connecting at the north end to the utility access road along the ridgeline. The revised alignment incorporated into the Final MPU and Final PEIR, has been relocated outside of the bottom of Oak Canyon and positioned adjacent to the ridgeline utility road. This newly revised alignment includes a combination of existing (0.62-miles) and proposed (1.60 miles) trails to create a 2.22-mile Hike/Bike trail.

The second subject area and alignment connected the Mast Boulevard parking and staging area, through Spring Canyon to the Boulders area east of the existing Sycamore Landfill (Attachment 9: Revised Trail Alignment - Spring Canyon). This

connection included a proposed 2.13 miles of Multi-use trail from the utility access road in Spring Canyon eastward, traversing the terrain between the existing landfill and SR-52. As documented in the Draft PEIR for the MTRP MPU, as well as the prior environmental documents for the landfill expansion and the extension of the SR-52, this area is an existing wildlife corridor that is disrupted by the existing Sycamore Landfill access road that generally runs north to south. Further, the area is bounded by the operating landfill to the north, and SR-52 to the south. The revised trail alignment relocates a portion of trail that extended around areas identified for mitigation for the expansion of the landfill, creating a more direct connection parallel, but outside of the Caltrans SR-52 Right-of-Way. Further, this realignment reduces not only the bisecting of the wildlife corridor, but also the proposed trail length by over 0.5 mile, to 1.50 miles. The revised alignment is reflected in the Final MPU and the Final PEIR.

The MSCP's MHPA includes regional wildlife corridors and core biological areas that are targeted for conservation including areas within MTRP. Conditionally, compatible uses within the MHPA include passive recreation, utility lines and roads, limited water facilities and essential public facilities, limited low-density residential use, brush management zone 2, and limited agriculture (MSCP Subarea Plan Section 1.4.1). Section 1.5 of the MSCP Subarea Plan provides additional guidance and management directives on trail design and siting which were taken into consideration as a part of the MTRP MPU process and incorporated into the recommendations accordingly. The majority of lands at MTRP are located within the MHPA.

Planning for the expansion of MTRP in East Elliott is of critical importance to the MTRP MPU and PEIR. This planning effort seeks compromise and balances recreational user needs and safety, while maintaining areas of wildlife corridors and protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

Advisory Body Recommendation

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 on August 30, 2018. It is anticipated that the project and certification of the PEIR will be before the Public Safety and Livable Neighborhood Council Committee and to City Council in Fall 2018.

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. 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 response to comments received during public review of the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) the project scope was refined to address specific concerns raised regarding trail locations in the East Elliott area of MTRP. The final PEIR reflects the revisions made to the MPU specific to East Elliott, as well as other minor revisions/clarifications in the document, and includes additional information which does not change the conclusions of the Final PEIR regarding the project's potential environmental impacts and required mitigation. As defined in CEQA Section 15088.5, these revisions, clarifications or additions to the document - which are shown in ~~strikeout~~/underline format, do not represent "significant new information" and therefore, recirculation of the Draft PEIR was not warranted. No new significant environmental impacts would occur from these modifications, and similarly, no substantial increase in the severity of environmental impacts would occur.

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 Final Mission Trails Regional Park Master Plan Update, Natural Resource Management Plan, Community Plan Amendments, and Final Program Environmental Impact Report are available at <https://mtrp.org/master-plan/>.

Respectfully submitted,

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Division

Prepared by: Bethany Windle
Park Designer

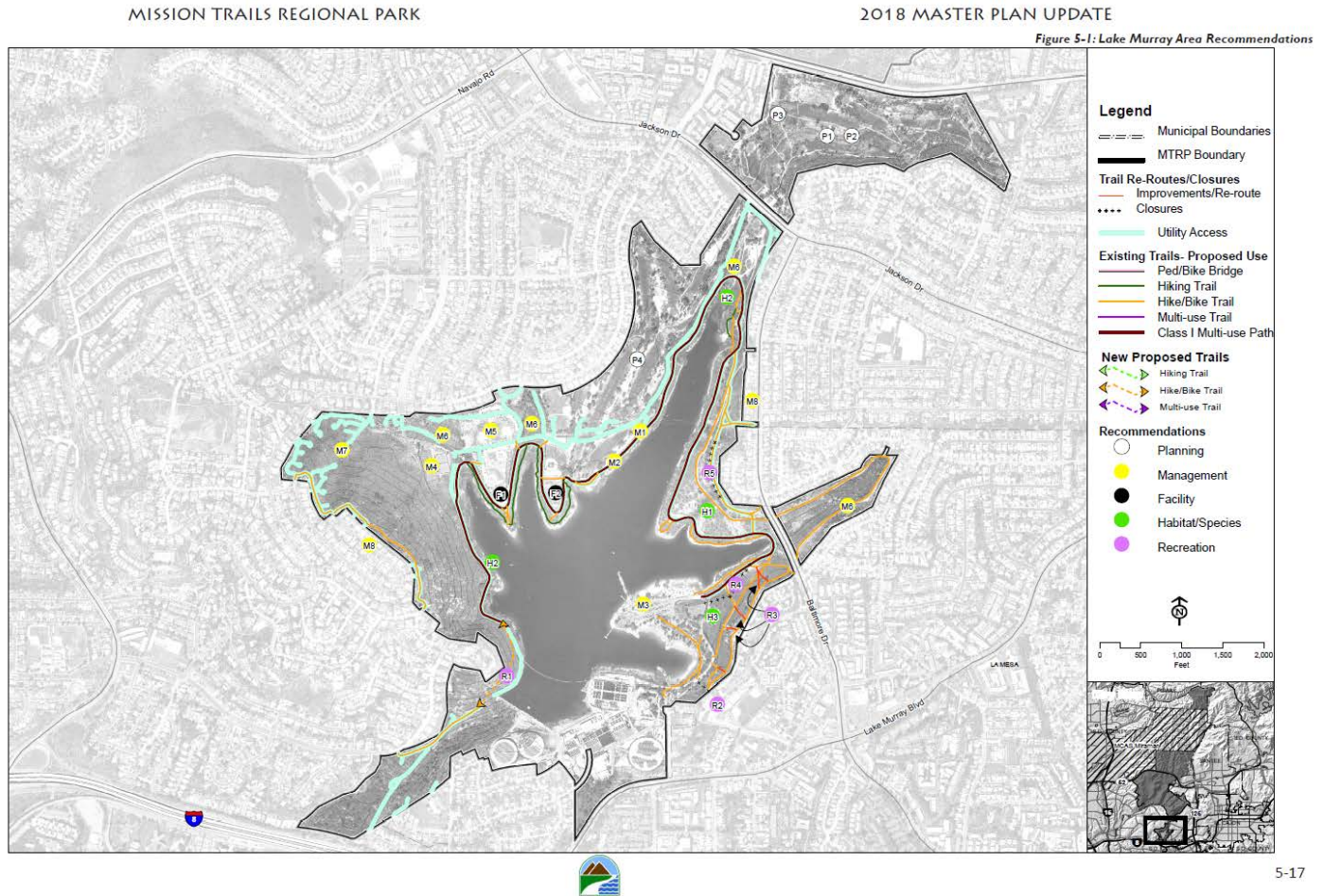
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Attachments:

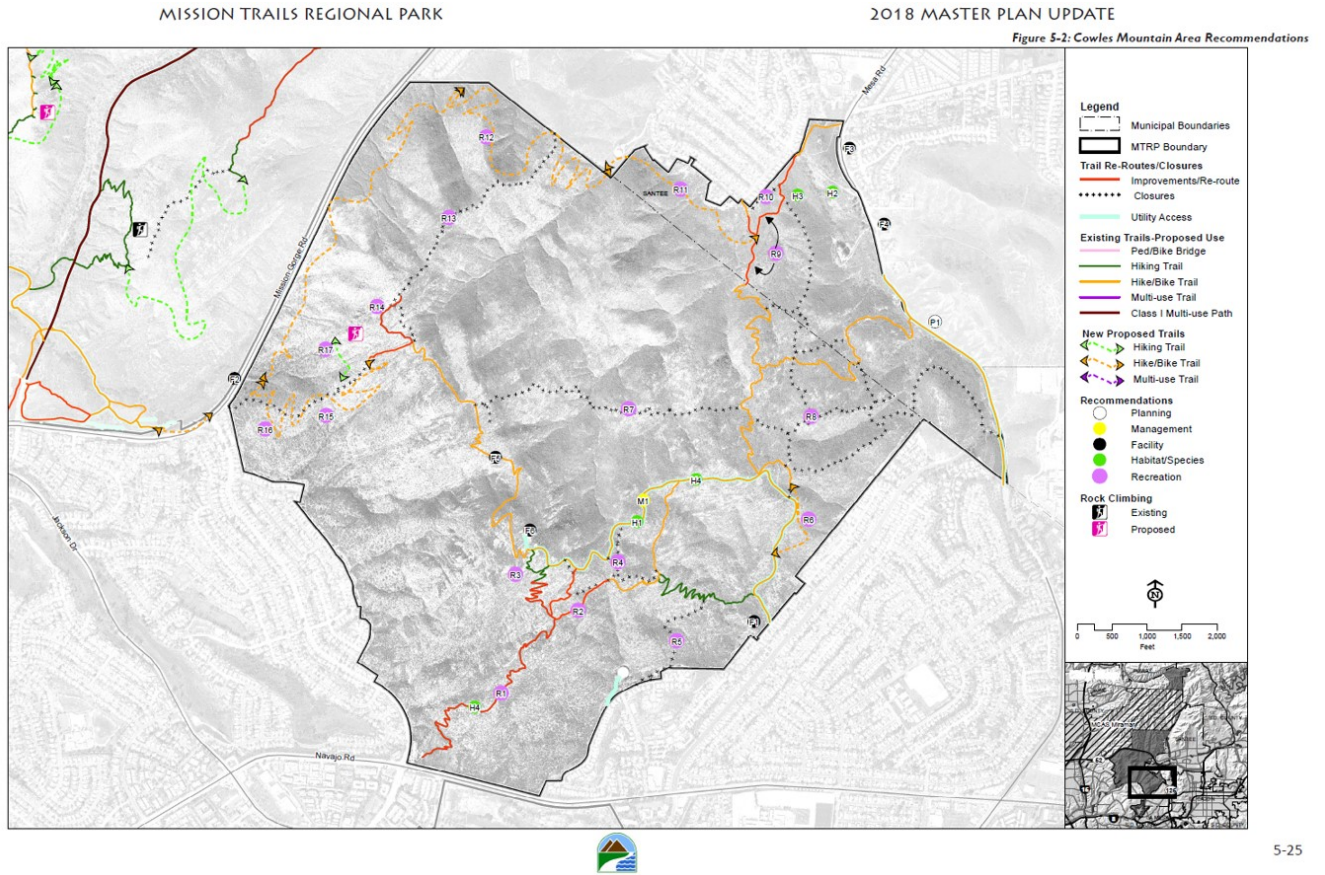
- Attachment 1: Lake Murray Area Map
- Attachment 2: Cowles Mountain Area Map
- Attachment 3: Mission Gorge Area Map
- Attachment 4: Fortuna Mountain Area Map
- Attachment 5: East Elliott Area Map
- Attachment 6: West Sycamore Area Map
- Attachment 7: Revised Conceptual Trail Alignments
- Attachment 8: Revised Trail Alignment - Oak Canyon
- Attachment 9: Revised Trail Alignment - Spring Canyon

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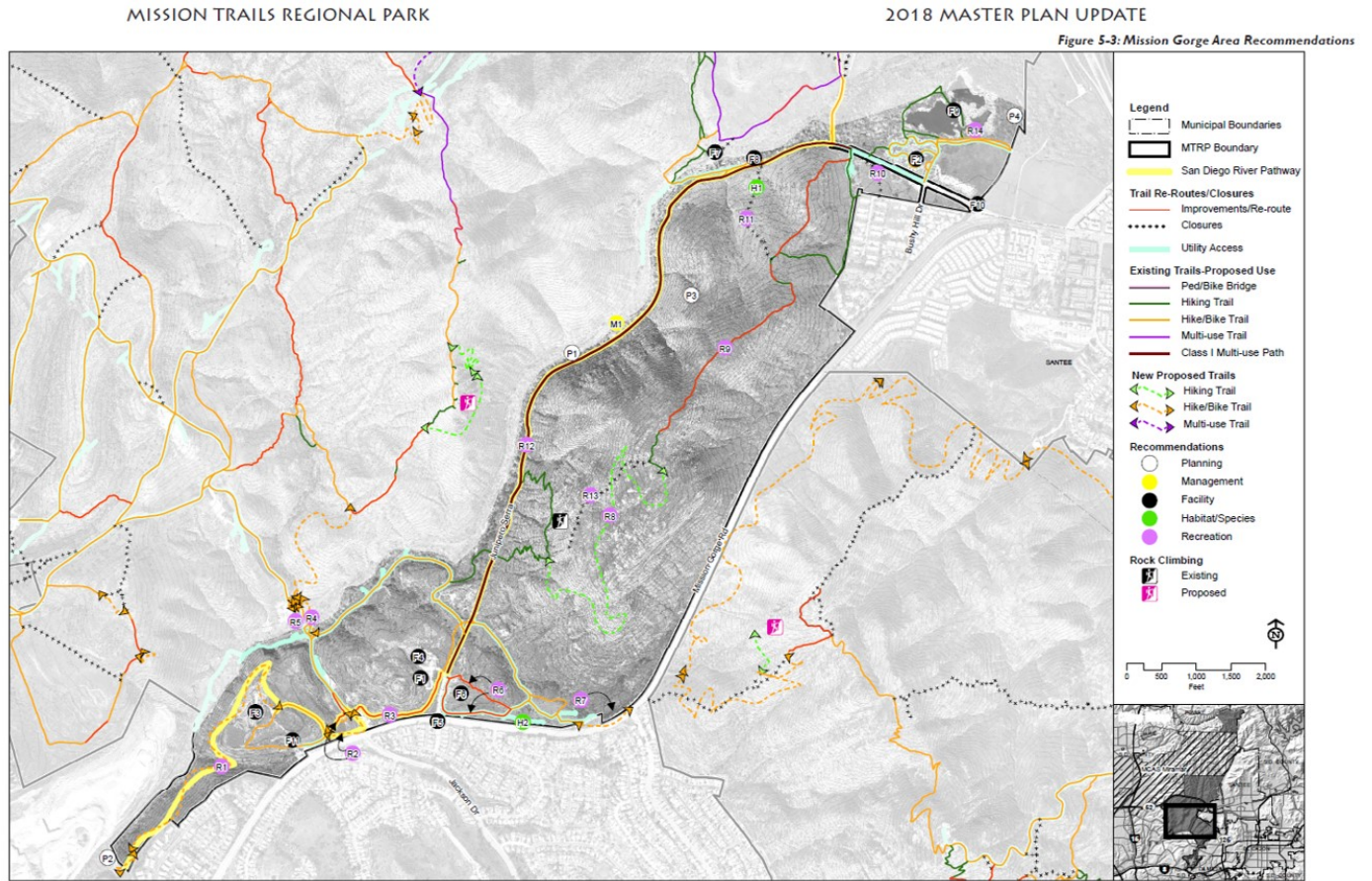
Attachment 1: Lake Murray Area Map



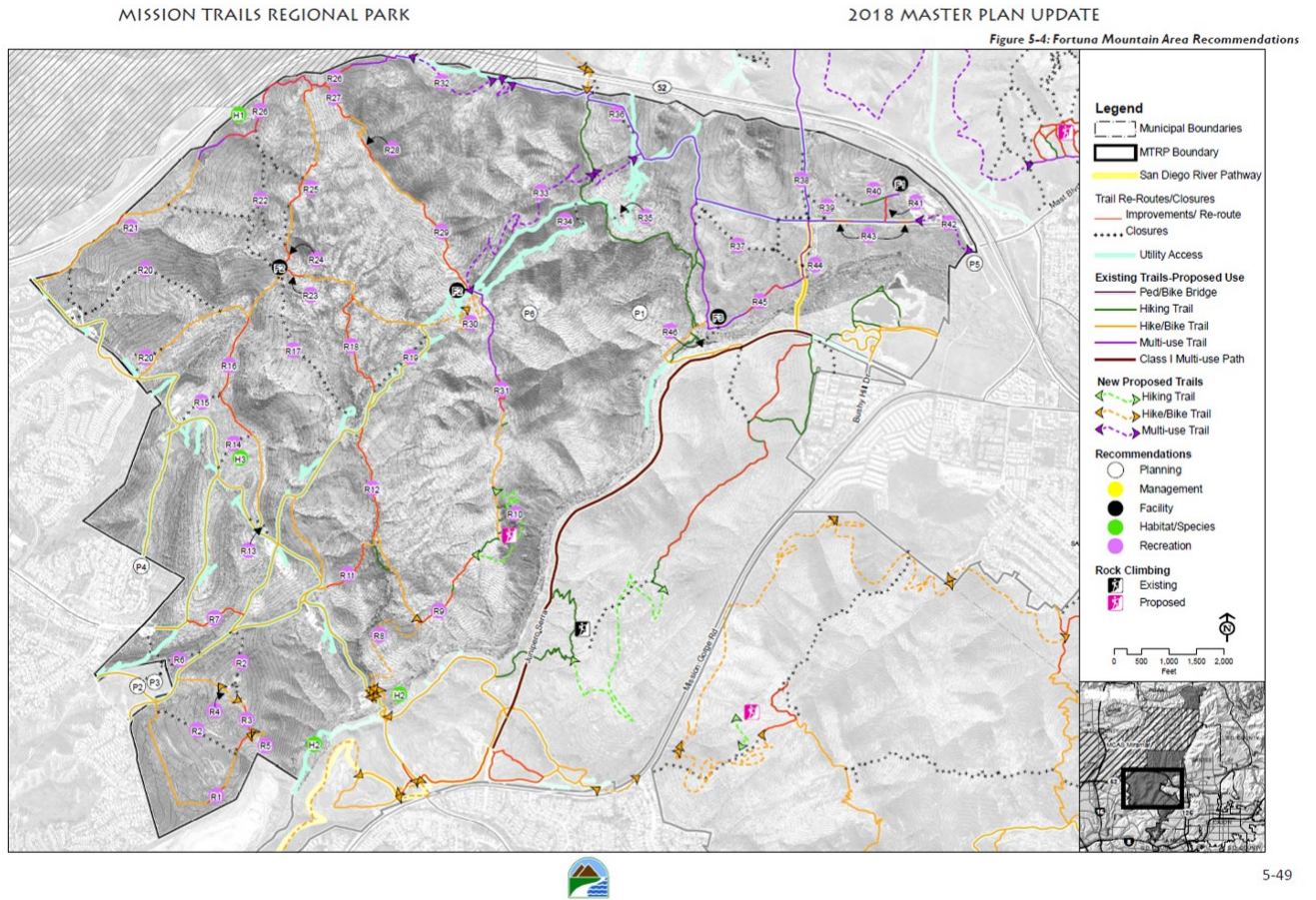
Attachment 2: Cowles Mountain Area Map



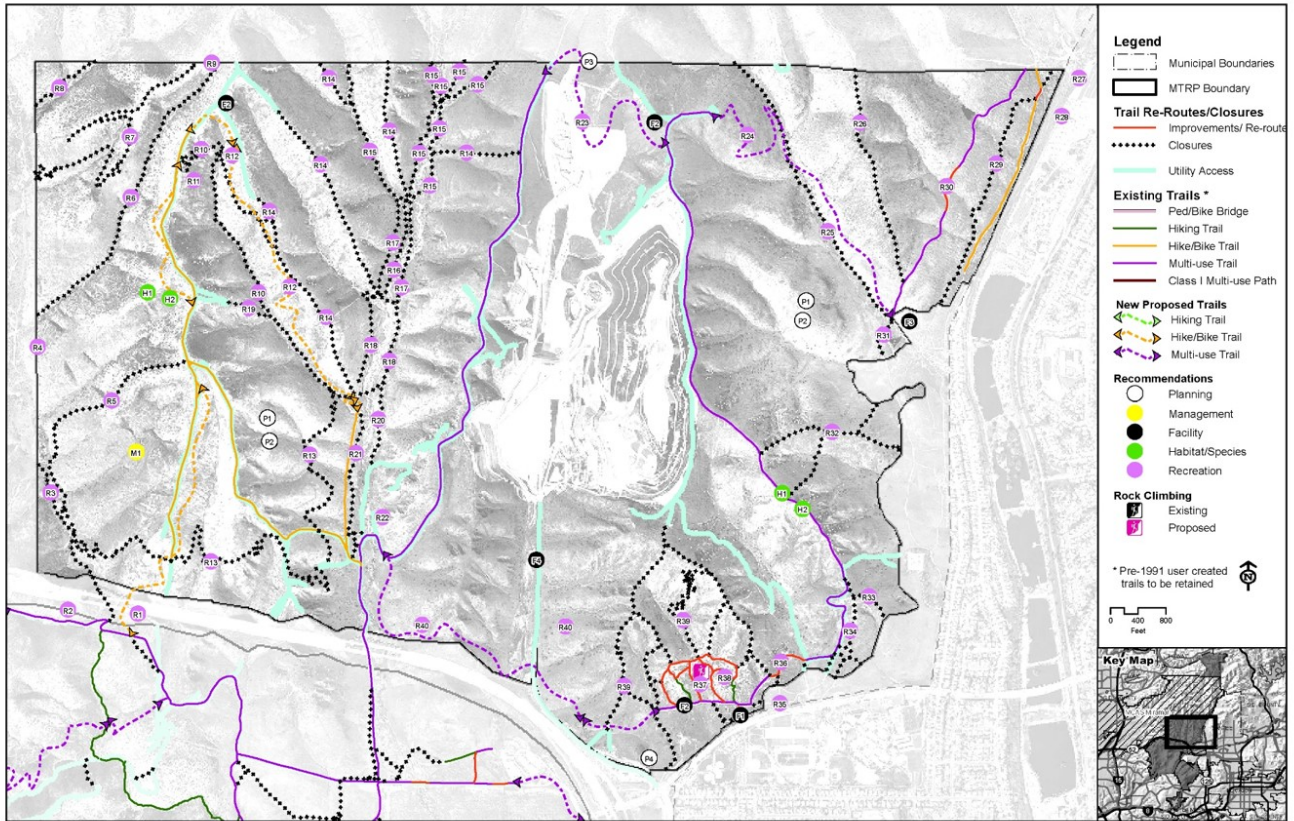
Attachment 3: Mission Gorge Area Map



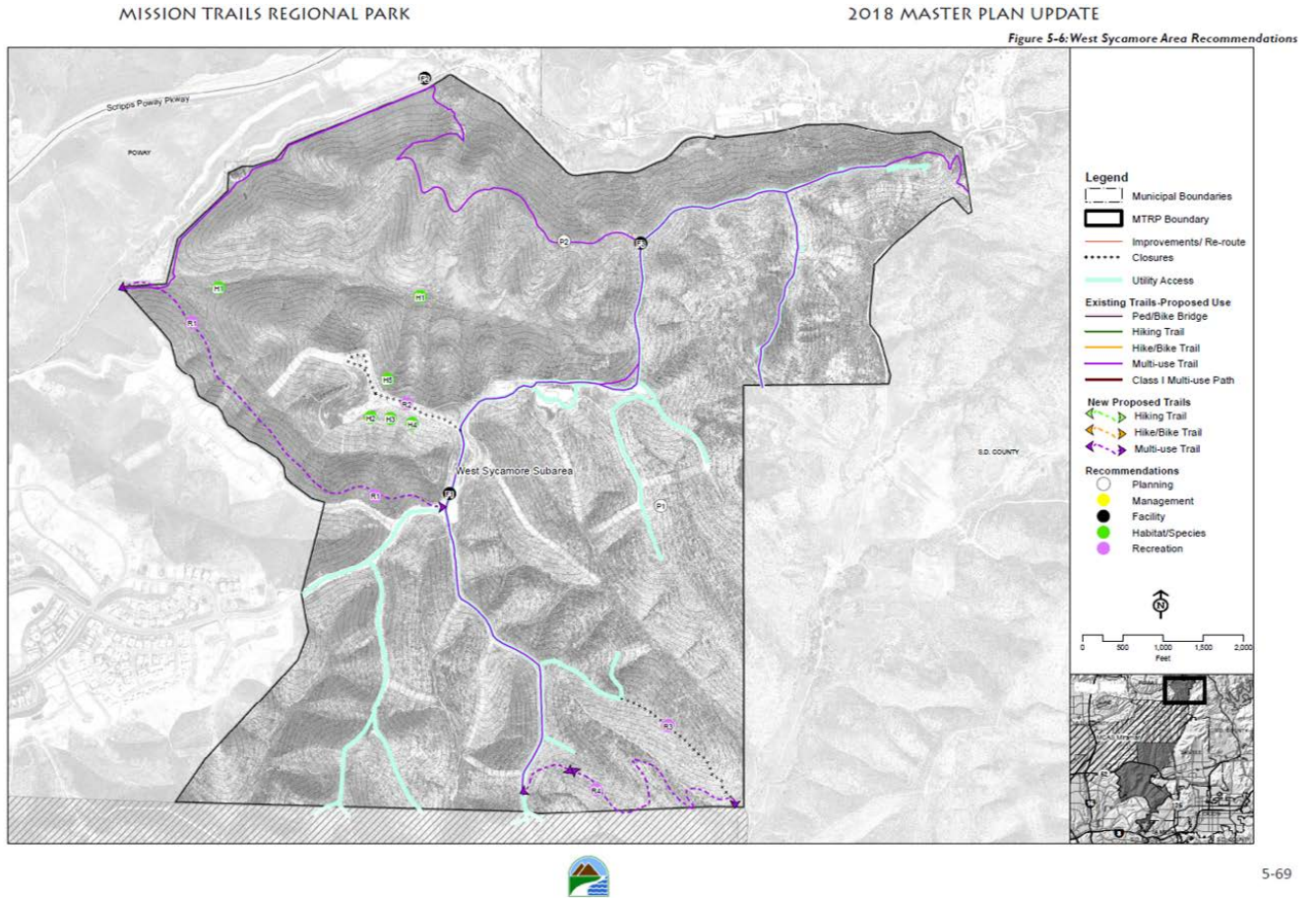
Attachment 4: Fortuna Mountain Area Map



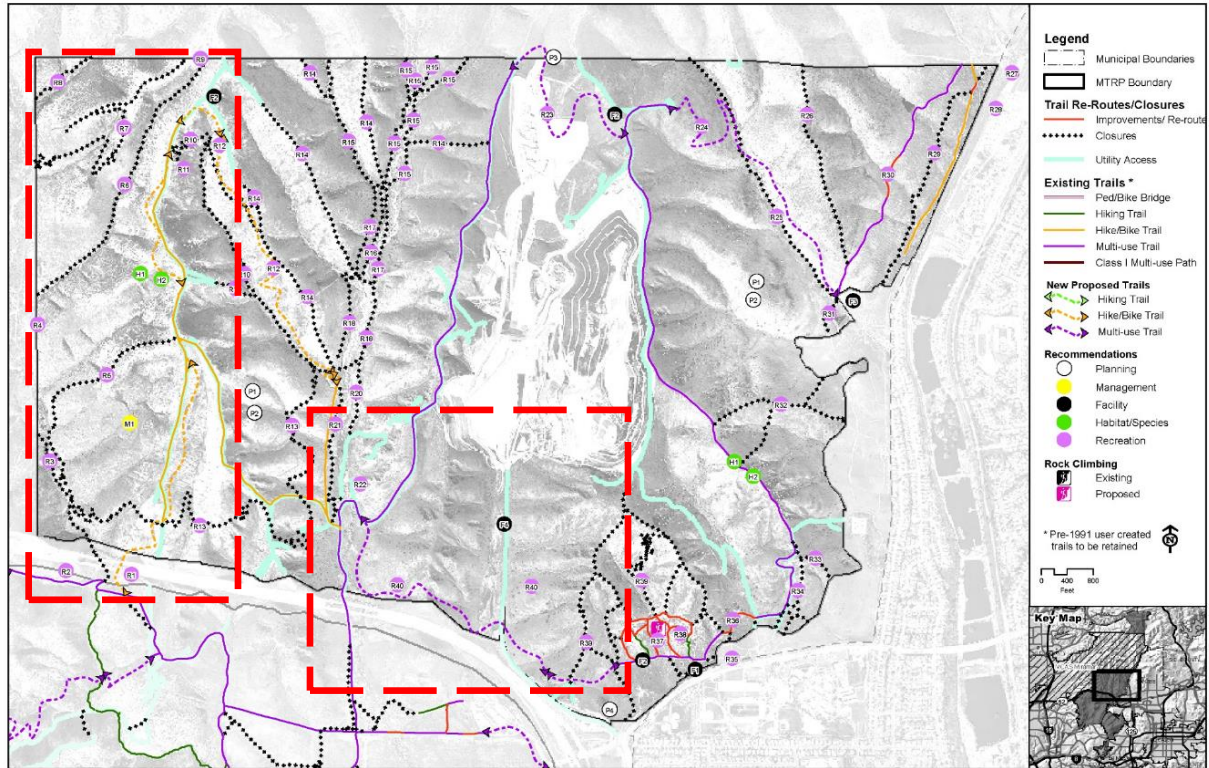
Attachment 5: East Elliott Area Map



Attachment 6: West Sycamore Area Map

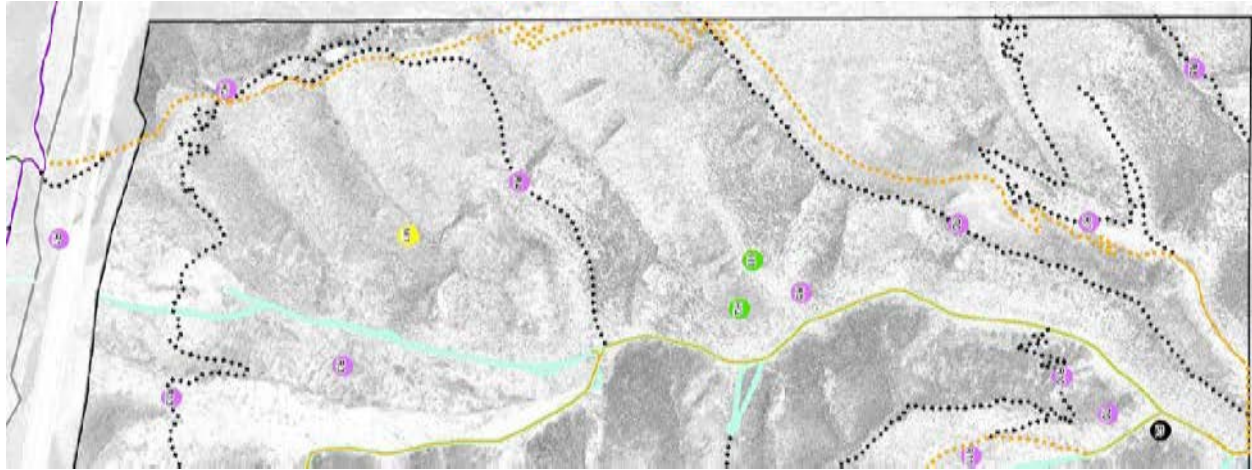


Attachment 7: Revised Conceptual Trail Alignments

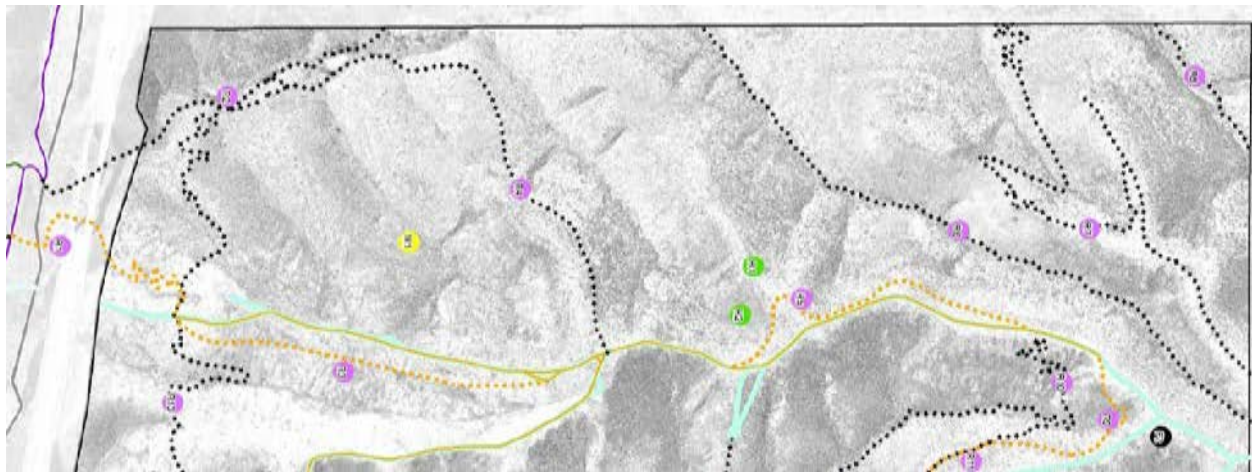


Attachment 8: Revised Trail Alignment - Oak Canyon

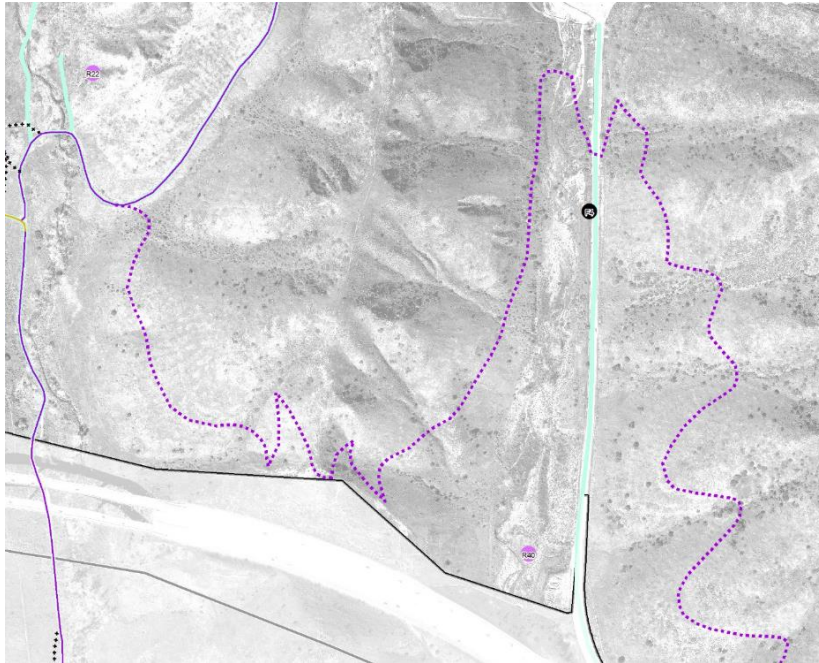
2016



2018



Attachment 9: Revised Trail Alignment - Spring Canyon



2016



2018