

Attachment 2  
**Detailed Project Description**

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# Otay Trails and Mitigation Bank Expansion – Project Description

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## Terms

**2016 Otay River Restoration Project Habitat Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) (2016 Restoration Project):** Consists of the Pre-Bank and Original Mitigation Bank approved in May 2016 by the City of Chula Vista City Council along with the adoption of the associated 2016 initial study/mitigated negative declaration (IS/MND).

**Bank Enabling Instrument (BEI):** A legally binding document that details the responsibilities of each party and includes the establishment of the mitigation bank, a management plan, endowment funding agreement, and other documents detailing the operations of the mitigation bank.

**City Parcel:** Land owned by the City of Chula Vista (City) within the Otay River floodplain that was identified as an appropriate location to focus restoration efforts within the Lower Otay River watershed.

**Development Plan:** Addresses the same criteria as an HMMP. The Development Plan will be the document attached to the BEI as **Exhibit C-1** that is the overall plan governing construction and habitat establishment, as well as restoration and enhancement activities required to be conducted on the mitigation bank property to establish credits.

**Expanded Mitigation Bank:** Part of the proposed project. An expansion of Original Mitigation Bank farther downstream to maximize the mitigation opportunities for the larger development community while also providing added security for the currently planned projects.

**Habitat Mitigation and Monitoring Pan (HMMP):** The document that was completed for the Pre-Bank in order to describe the specific and detailed mitigation activities and plans, performance criteria to measure success, initial monitoring and management actions, and long-term management activities.

**HomeFed:** HomeFed Corporation (HomeFed) is a real estate development company that specializes in mixed-use master-planned communities. HomeFed was incorporated in 1988 and is headquartered in Carlsbad, California. HomeFed is one of the primary developers working in Otay Village at this time. An agreement was made to allow HomeFed to proceed with mitigation design and implementation to meet its immediate permitting needs for Village 3 and Village 8 in addition to a portion of Village 2 on behalf of another developer.

**HomeFed Parcel:** Land within the Otay Trails and Mitigation Bank Expansion Project (proposed project) site that would be restored as part of the proposed project. This land is owned by Otay Land Company, LLC.

**Mitigation Bank:** The preservation, enhancement, restoration, or creation of a wetland, stream, or habitat conservation area that offsets, or compensates for, expected adverse impacts on similar nearby ecosystems. For purposes of this report, the Mitigation Bank includes the Original Mitigation Bank and the Otay Trails and Mitigation Bank Expansion Project.

**Multi-Use Trails:** Primary trail providing full access for all trail users while also serving as agency and utility vehicular access throughout the proposed project site, including for San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. These trails would be a minimum of 14 feet wide but still be designed to project a trail-like atmosphere.

**Original Mitigation Bank:** Part of the 2016 Restoration Project focused on restoration for future development and mitigation needs for HomeFed and the City. The Original Mitigation Bank encompasses the remaining floodplain within the City Parcel that was not part of the Pre-Bank.

**Otay Land Company, LLC:** subsidiary of HomeFed, a development company.

**Otay River:** The Otay River is in southern San Diego County, California. The 25-mile-long river begins at San Miguel Mountain, flows through the Upper and Lower Otay Reservoirs, and continues between the southern part of the Chula Vista and the Otay Mesa West district of San Diego, entering into the San Diego Bay.

**Otay Villages:** A design approach to a master-planned community composed of mixed-use centers that focuses on shops, plazas, and parks, with housing arranged strategically; encourages walking and biking; and provides a wide variety of housing types to meet the diverse community needs. Each Village has well-defined edges such as the Chula Vista Greenbelt, open spaces, or wildlife corridors.

**Pre-Bank:** Part of the 2016 Restoration Project, totaling more than 38 acres of permittee-responsible mitigation to satisfy mitigation requirements for aquatic resource impacts associated with Village 3, Village 8W, and Village 2. It was implemented in 2018 and included river, floodplain, and upland restoration.

**Proposed Project:** Consists of two primary components: the expansion of the Original Mitigation Bank and the creation, modification, and expansion of trails within the entire proposed project limits. The proposed trails are consistent with the City's approved Greenbelt Master Plan and Otay Valley Regional Park Concept Plan. The expansion includes enhancement, rehabilitation, and re-establishment of hydrological processes, vegetation communities, and wildlife habitats associated with the Lower Otay River watershed that will be self-sustaining and can adjust to dynamic natural processes.

**Prospectus:** An abbreviated Development Plan that outlines the mitigation activities to occur in enough detail for the agencies to review and for the public to provide comments. **Secondary Trails:** Smaller trails (3 to 5 feet wide) precluding vehicular use while still allowing for mountain biking, equestrian uses, and hiking. Often facilitates unique routes and loops to enhance the user experience.

## Introduction

The City of Chula Vista is one of the fastest-growing cities in San Diego County. Part of the rapid growth over the last decade has been in the Otay Ranch area, where the Otay Ranch General Development Plan (GDP) covers almost 10,000 acres in the City and provides guidelines for the buildout of its various phases, identified as "Villages" (City of Chula Vista 2018). As indicated in the GDP, the Otay Villages are intended to have well-defined boundaries such as the Chula Vista Greenbelt, open spaces, or wildlife corridors; be composed of mixed-use centers focused on shops, plazas, and parks, with housing arranged strategically; encourage walking and biking; and provide

a wide variety of housing types to meet the diverse community needs. The most recent Village development phase has been led by HomeFed, one of the primary developers working in Otay Village at this time.

In 2014 at the request of the project proponent (HomeFed), ICF conducted a survey of the Lower Otay River watershed to identify restoration opportunities to serve as compensatory mitigation for impacts on jurisdictional waters and wetlands associated with one of the Otay Villages being developed by HomeFed. This ultimately led to a discussion between HomeFed and the City of Chula Vista (lead agency) about mitigation on public lands, specifically the City's land in the Lower Otay River watershed approximately a mile downstream of Savage Dam. The watershed survey brought ICF to the City Parcel in the floodplain where remnants of the historical sand mining activities and subsequent invasive species had reduced riverine functions substantially, making the location an ideal opportunity for mitigation.

The City and HomeFed entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to allow HomeFed to proceed with mitigation design and implementation to meet its immediate permitting needs for Village 3, Village 8 West, and a portion of Village 2. This immediate mitigation need resulted in completion of the 2016 Restoration Project (Pre-Bank), which included more than 38 acres of river, floodplain, and upland restoration. In addition to the immediate needs (Pre-Bank), the 2016 Restoration Project included the design, environmental review, and permitting for a mitigation bank (Original Mitigation Bank) to meet the maximum mitigation required for HomeFed and the City's future projects including various Otay Village projects and planned City projects as described in the Otay Ranch GDP. These development projects included the Otay Ranch Village 3, Village 8 West, Village 2, Village 8 East, and Villages 9 and 10. The mitigation needs of the Otay River Valley Regional Park (OVRP) and the City of Chula Vista University Project were also considered. Part of the agreement to allow HomeFed to mitigate on City land included the design and installation of trails within the proposed project limits including the City of Chula Vista Greenbelt and the OVRP Trails. Since initiating the construction of the Pre-Bank and the development of the prospectus for the Original Mitigation Bank, additional future City projects have been identified, which may exhaust the excess acreage generated in the Original Mitigation Bank, leaving little to no "credits" available for unexpected needs or to support other projects in the watershed. In 2018, the City and HomeFed determined that it would be appropriate and worthwhile to expand the Original Mitigation Bank farther downstream to maximize the mitigation opportunities for the larger development community while also providing added security for the currently planned projects (Expanded Mitigation Bank). An approximate breakdown of credits for the Pre-Bank, Original Mitigation Bank and Expanded Mitigation Bank is outlined below.

<b>Pre-Bank</b>	<b>Size/Credits (acres)</b>
Buffer	7.4
Non-wetland Enhancement	0.5
Wetland enhancement	0.3
Non-wetland re-establishment	9.7
Wetland re-establishment	2.2
Non-wetland rehabilitation	0.1
Wetland rehabilitation	0.8
Easements (no credits)	0.8
<i>Sub-total</i>	22

<b>Original Mitigation Bank</b>	<b>Size/Credits (acres)</b>
Buffer	40.2
Non-wetland enhancement	0.1
Wetland enhancement	0.2
Non-wetland re-establishment	3.4
Wetland re-establishment	8.4
Non-wetland rehabilitation	1.9
Wetland rehabilitation	15.9
Easements (no credits)	1.8
<i>Sub-total</i>	72
<b>Mitigation Bank Expansion</b>	<b>Size/Credits (acres)</b>
Buffer	87
Non-wetland enhancement	0.3
Wetland enhancement	0.02
Non-wetland establishment	5.3
Wetland establishment	0.3
Non-wetland re-establishment	2.8
Wetland re-establishment	9
Non-wetland rehabilitation	3.7
Wetland rehabilitation	29.6
Easements (no credits)	8.4
<i>Sub-total</i>	147
<b>Total</b>	<b>240.5</b>

In addition, the expansion allows for connection to Salt Creek, one of the largest tributaries to the Lower Otay River watershed. The restoration of Salt Creek has also been evaluated in this report; however, this aspect is not committed to undergoing construction at this time and will require a refined design and supplemental analysis if implemented in the future. The trail alignment has been refined and includes improvements to the multi-use and secondary trails for public use, fencing to protect sensitive resources and minimize trespassing, and educational kiosks not previously identified in the 2016 Restoration Project.

The initial step in agency approval of the Original and Expanded Mitigation Bank, the Prospectus, was determined to be complete on August 26, 2019 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and July 10, 2019 by CDFW. The USACE issued a Public Notice and sent the Prospectus to the members of the Interagency Review Team (IRT) on August 21, 2019. The public had 30 days to review and provide comments to the USACE. All public comments received as well as those provided by the members of the IRT have been incorporated into the draft Bank Enabling Instrument (BEI). The draft BEI is composed of many individual documents (i.e., exhibits) including the Development Plan, which is similar in nature to a Habitat Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (HMMP). The draft BEI was submitted to the USACE and CDFW in September 2021 and is being reviewed by all members of the IRT, including USACE, CDFW, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), San Diego Regional Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The final Development Plan will be available to the public following agency review, comments, and

completion of the BEI process. The expanded mitigation bank and expanded trail system are the basic elements of the proposed project evaluated in this document. See Figure 1, Project Overview.

## Previous Environmental Documentation

In May 2016, the City approved the 2016 Otay River Restoration Project HMMP and adopted the IS/MND (City of Chula Vista 2016). These documents evaluated implementation of the Otay River Restoration Project HMMP on approximately 100 acres within the 300-acre City Parcel (2016 Restoration Project). The 2016 Restoration Project include three primary components: (1) upstream enhancement, (2) permittee responsible mitigation, and (3) establishment of a mitigation bank. Restoration implementation was initiated in January 2018 with the installation of the 35-acre permittee-responsible mitigation for Village 3, Village 8 West, and Village 2. The mitigation bank component of the 2016 Restoration Project (Original Mitigation Bank) is now being expanded under the proposed project. The upstream enhancement has also been implemented and crosses the City Parcel and seven additional parcels adjacent to Savage Dam. The parcels are owned by the County of San Diego, City of San Diego, and federal agencies. Figure 1 shows the 2016 Restoration Project limits as well as the proposed project limits.

## Proposed Project Overview

The proposed project consists of the expansion of the Original Mitigation Bank and the creation, modification, and expansion of trails within the entire proposed project limits (Figure 1).

## Mitigation Bank Expansion

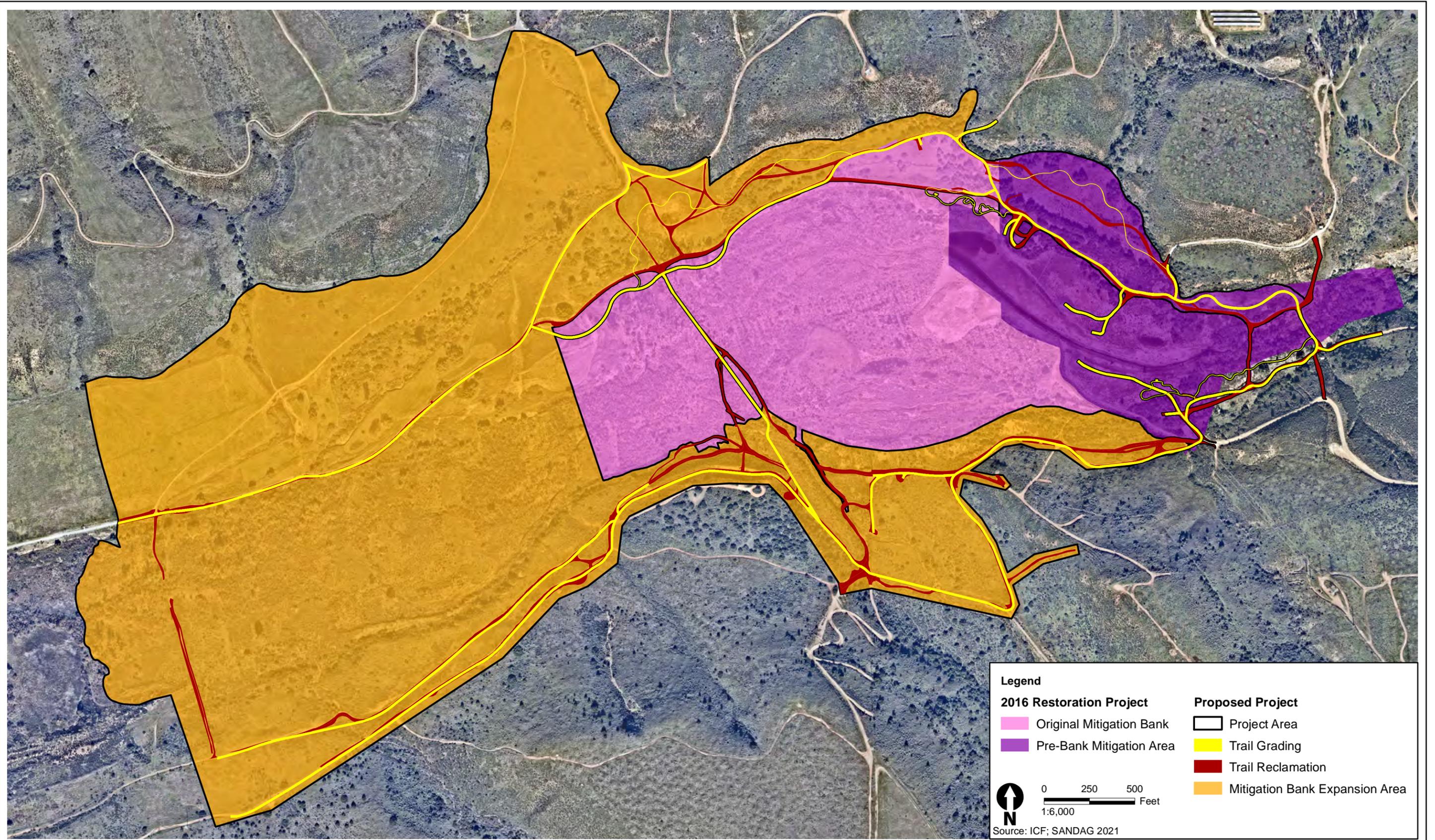
The mitigation bank expansion is located on land owned by HomeFed and includes enhancement, rehabilitation, and re-establishment of hydrological processes, vegetation communities, and wildlife habitats associated with the Lower Otay River watershed that will be self-sustaining and can adjust to dynamic natural processes. The proposed project would also re-establish primary and secondary flow channels, low and high floodplains, and native transitional habitat as well as remove nonnative invasive species and restore native vegetation. This will serve to improve hydrologic conditions, significantly reduce the upstream invasive species seed sources, preserve connectivity between adjacent areas of preserved land and natural habitats, and preserve wildlife movement corridors, and would result in a net gain in functions and services following restoration activities.

The proposed project would provide mitigation opportunities to offset impacts on waters of the U.S. and state, including wetlands, and CDFW jurisdiction within a designated service area, currently proposed to include the Otay River watershed, Tijuana watershed, and portions of the San Diego River watershed. As stated above, the 2016 Restoration Project was designed to meet the compensatory mitigation needs associated with unavoidable impacts on jurisdictional waters of the U.S., waters of the state, and associated habitats due to the implementation of the Otay Ranch University Villages and future City projects.

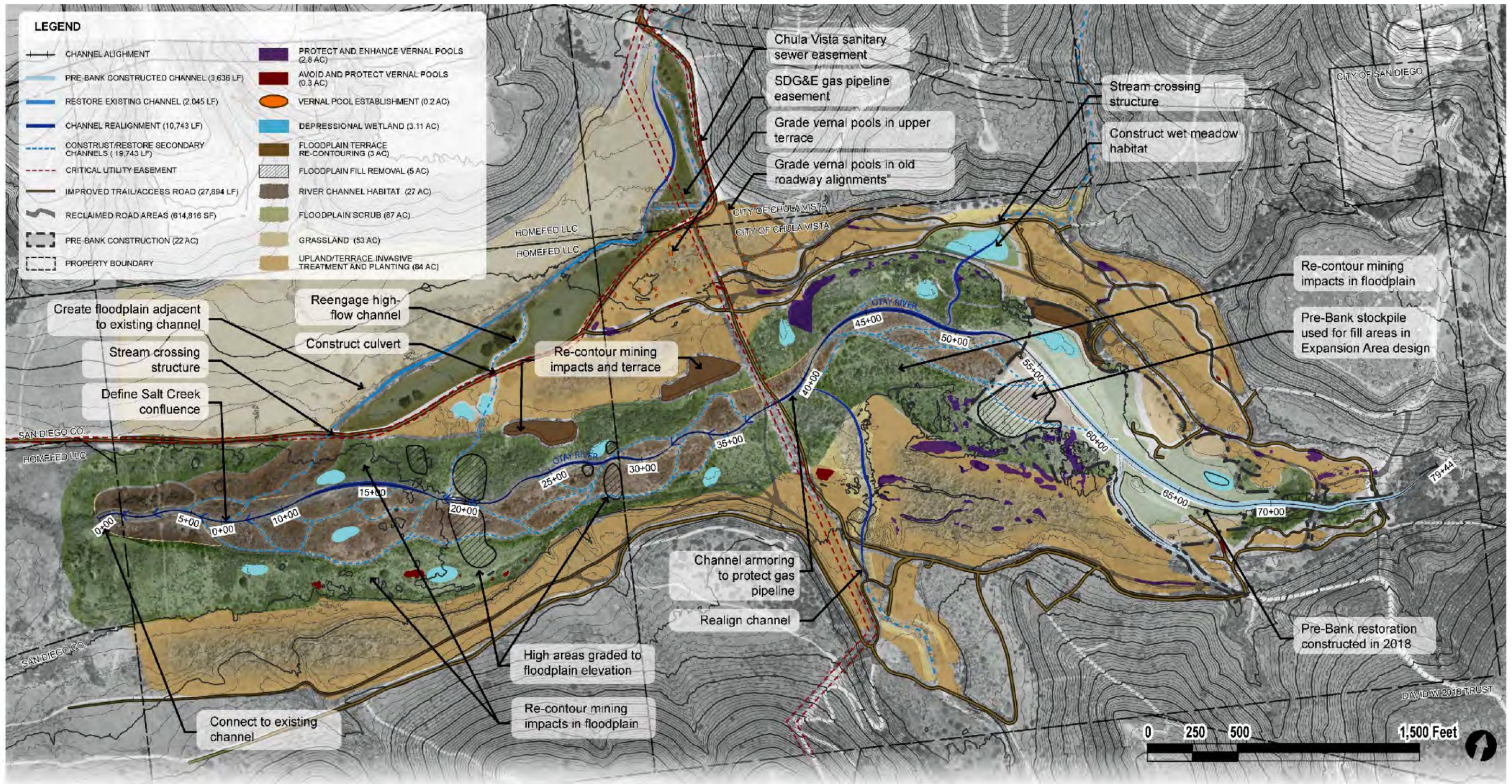
The expansion will provide flexibility, as project designs and permitting for the Villages and City projects are still in progress with the possibility of additional mitigation acreage requirements. In addition, over the last two years, multiple local agencies and private entities have inquired about

mitigation credit availability, stressing their need for opportunities now and in the future. When evaluating the extent to which the Original Mitigation Bank should be expanded, consideration was given to cost effectiveness and maximum ecological benefit. This resulted in the recommendation to connect the mainstem of Otay River to the confluence of Salt Creek. This location is ecologically significant, as it represents a major input of water in the river valley and the first true connection point for the river. In addition, this key connection point would facilitate future restoration opportunities downstream. See Figure 2a, Proposed Project, Mitigation Bank Expansion Component Concept Plan.

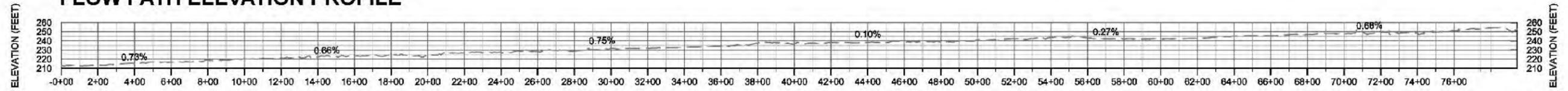
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**FLOW PATH ELEVATION PROFILE**



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**Figure 2a**  
**Proposed Project, Mitigation Bank Expansion Component Concept Plan**

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## Trails

The 2016 Restoration Project included trail improvements as part of the project with a focus on fencing, signage, and crossing improvements. As these informal trails are part of the City of Chula Vista Greenbelt Master Plan (City of Chula Vista 2003) and the OVRP Concept Plan (County of San Diego et al. 2016), both high-level planning documents, additional stakeholder outreach was required in addition to Resource and Wildlife Agency input. As a result of a series of multi-agency meetings that included the City of Chula Vista, County of San Diego, CDFW, USFWS, California Department of Transportation, Border Patrol, Otay Water District (OWD), and OVRP Citizens Advisory Committee, including both committee meetings and field visits, it was determined that the activities required to finalize the installation of the trail network within the proposed project limits would require additional environmental review and permitting. The proposed project includes modifications to existing trail routes beyond those described as part of the 2016 Restoration Project. These proposed modifications include trail improvements (grading and contouring) to facilitate drainage and reduce ponding and water damage; new trail alignments to avoid sensitive resources and improve the trail experience for the users; select fencing and placement of natural barriers (boulders and logs) to keep pedestrian and vehicles on trail routes; and trail reclamation and road width reduction. See Figure 2b, Proposed Project, Trails Component Concept Plan.

## Project Setting

The proposed project is within five parcels in the Otay River Valley, including an approximately 300-acre parcel owned by HomeFed. All parcels are in southwestern San Diego County, California, in the City of Chula Vista and encompass the floodplain area immediately downstream of Savage Dam and Lower Otay Reservoir. See Figure 3, Regional Vicinity, and Figure 4, Local Vicinity.

The proposed project occurs within the upper portion of the Lower Otay River watershed, approximately 1.2 miles downstream from Savage Dam. It is generally south and west of the Lower Otay Reservoir and surrounded by open space largely within the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) preserve system managed in partnership by the City of Chula Vista, City of San Diego, and County of San Diego. Specifically, the City Parcels are owned in fee title by the City of Chula Vista and are designated as Open Space Preserve in the City's General Plan (City of Chula Vista 2017). Fee title was transferred to the City as open space mitigation for a previous Otay Ranch development project. Additionally, the City and HomeFed Parcels, where the proposed project is located, are part of the City's MSCP Subarea Plan, which designates the parcel as a 100 percent Conservation Area, and protects the habitat on site from development and impacts. The City of Chula Vista and the County of San Diego together, via a Joint Powers Agreement, are the Otay Ranch Preserve Owner/Manager. The Preserve Owner/Manager is responsible for the long-term management of lands conveyed to it as mitigation for Otay Ranch Development projects. Land management activities are guided by the Otay Ranch Resource Management Plan and funded through a Community Facility District. The existing land uses surrounding the site are as follows:

- North:** Chula Vista Water Treatment Plant, County Park, and Open Space
- East:** Open Space including County MSCP, Bureau of Land Management, and CDFW lands
- South:** Open Space with the exception of a cluster of development (OWD Roll Reservoir, George F. Bailey Detention Facility, City of San Diego’s Otay Treatment Plant, and Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility)
- West:** Open Space and the Otay River Valley, both publicly and privately owned

The proposed project site is undeveloped land with utility corridors (electric, gas, and water) along the northern, eastern, southern, and western boundaries. Several undesignated informal trails and dirt roads traverse the proposed project site. The roads and informal trails are utilized by unauthorized recreational users (hikers, cyclists, equestrians, and off-road vehicles; use of off-road vehicles are prohibited within open space preserve areas) and by U.S. Customs and Border Protection for routine patrols and by SDG&E, OWD, the City of San Diego, and the City of Chula Vista for utility inspection and maintenance (see Figure 2b).

## Relationships with Other Plans

Guidance and policies pertaining to open space planning and protection of sensitive resources on the proposed project site and surrounding area are provided through an MOA between the City of Chula Vista and HomeFed, and planning documents adopted by the County of San Diego and Cities of Chula Vista and San Diego. The relevant guidance and policies of the MOA and planning documents are provided in the following paragraphs.

### General Plan(s)

The City has established economic development initiatives focused on infrastructure, developing a strong consumer base and attracting a well-educated and experienced workforce. Over the past few decades, the City has acquired a large volume of commercial/industrial development lands, pursued a progressive business and employment investment policy, and completed acquisition of the 375-acre University Park and Innovation District site.

A variety of documents have been prepared to facilitate redevelopment and growth within the City. In 2005, the Chula Vista City Council approved an updated General Plan that guides the City’s future growth and development through 2030. This plan, last amended in 2017, is complemented by more detailed planning documents for discrete elements and regions within the City. Of particular relevance is the Otay Ranch GDP (City of Chula Vista 2018), which was approved by the City of Chula Vista and County of San Diego as part of the Sub-Regional Plan in 1993 and updated through 2018. The Otay Ranch GDP planning area covers three separate land parcels including almost 10,000 acres in the City. The Otay Ranch GDP is an integrated policy document, combining the requirements of the City of Chula Vista and the County of San Diego. It identifies the land use pattern and intensities for the Otay Ranch community (including the Villages) as well as environmental, economic, and social goals, objectives, and policies. The proposed project is designated as a scenic resource and Open Space Preserve by the City of Chula Vista General Plan (City of Chula Vista 2017).

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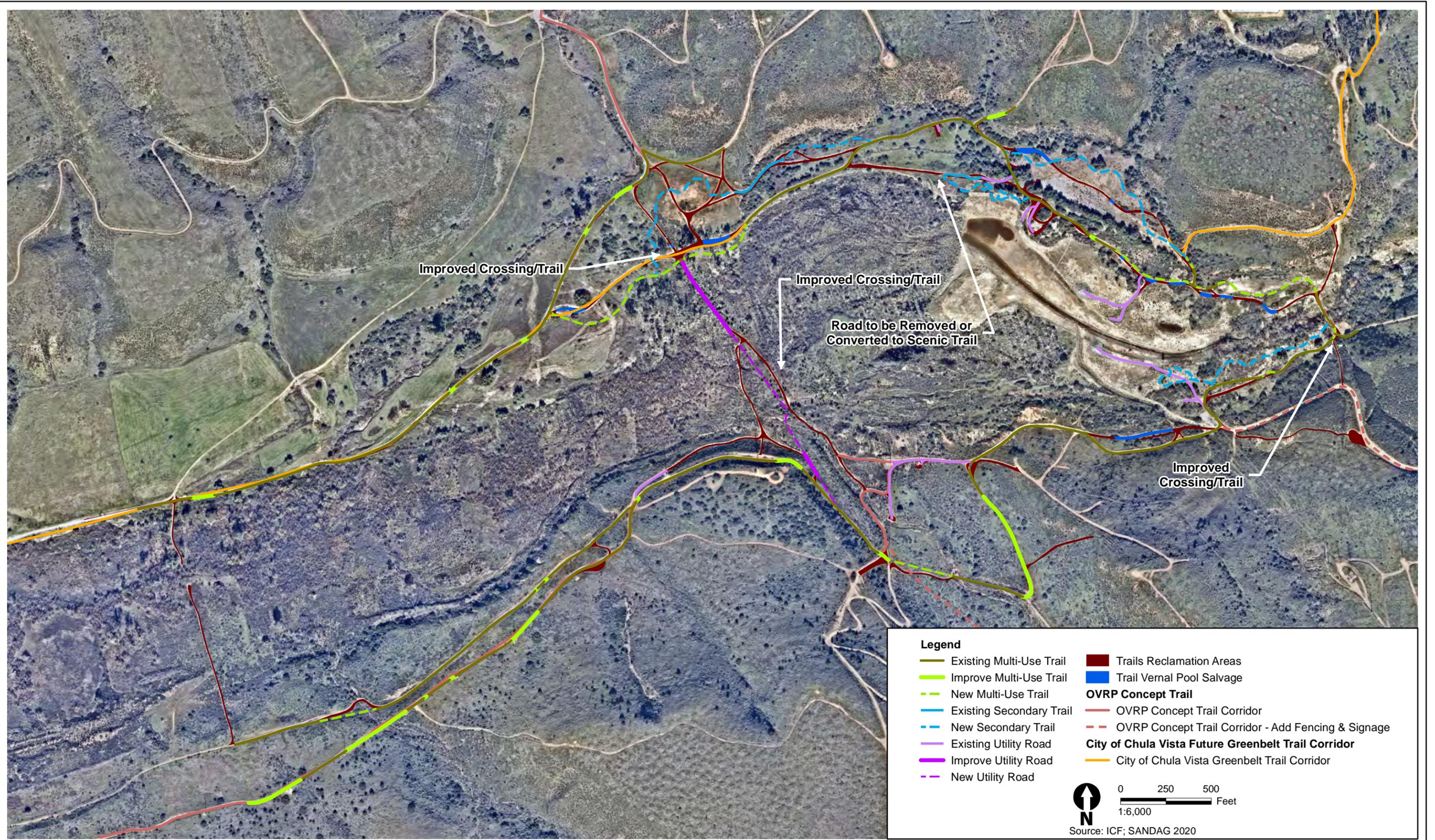
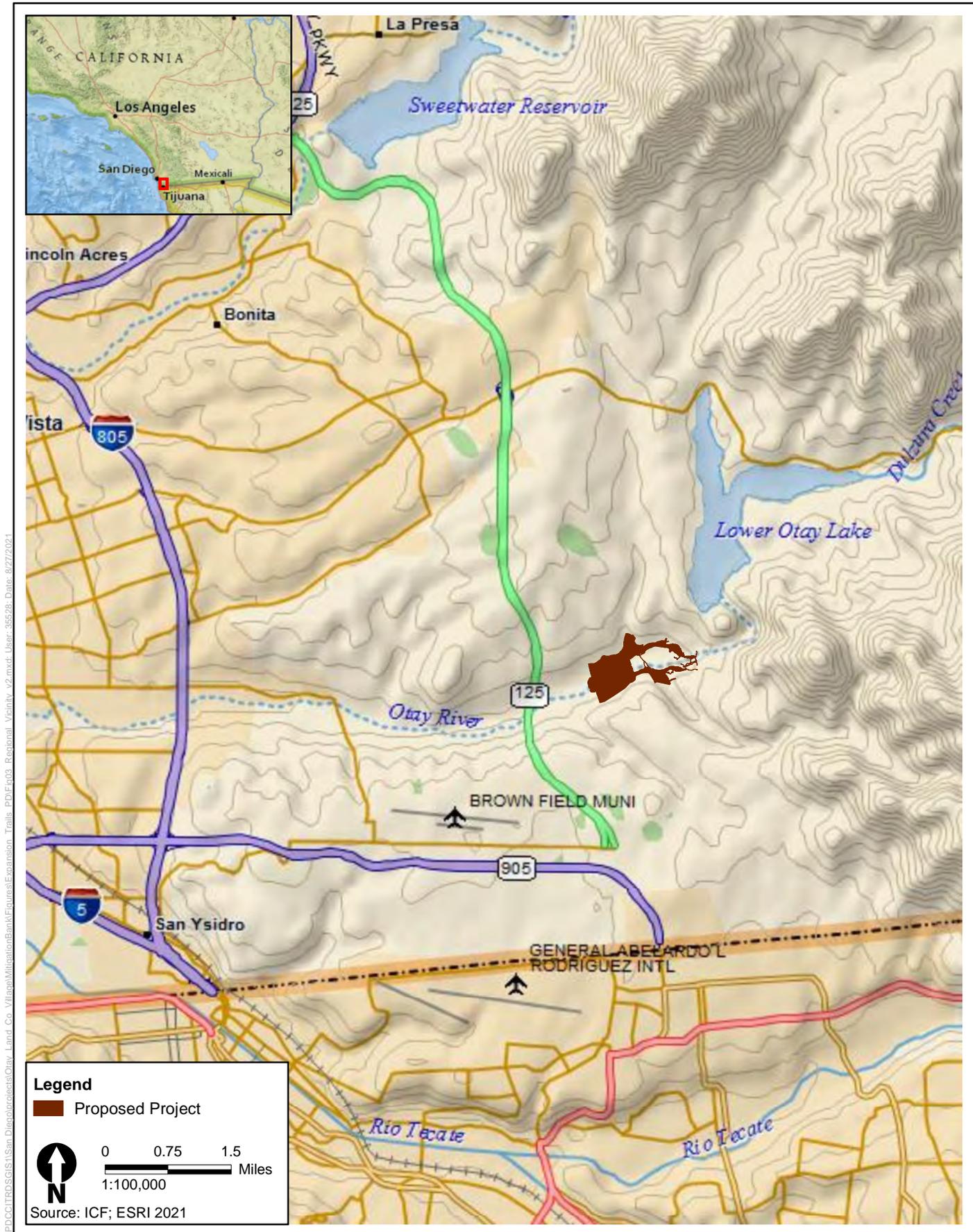


Figure 2b  
Proposed Project, Trails Component Concept Plan

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**Legend**

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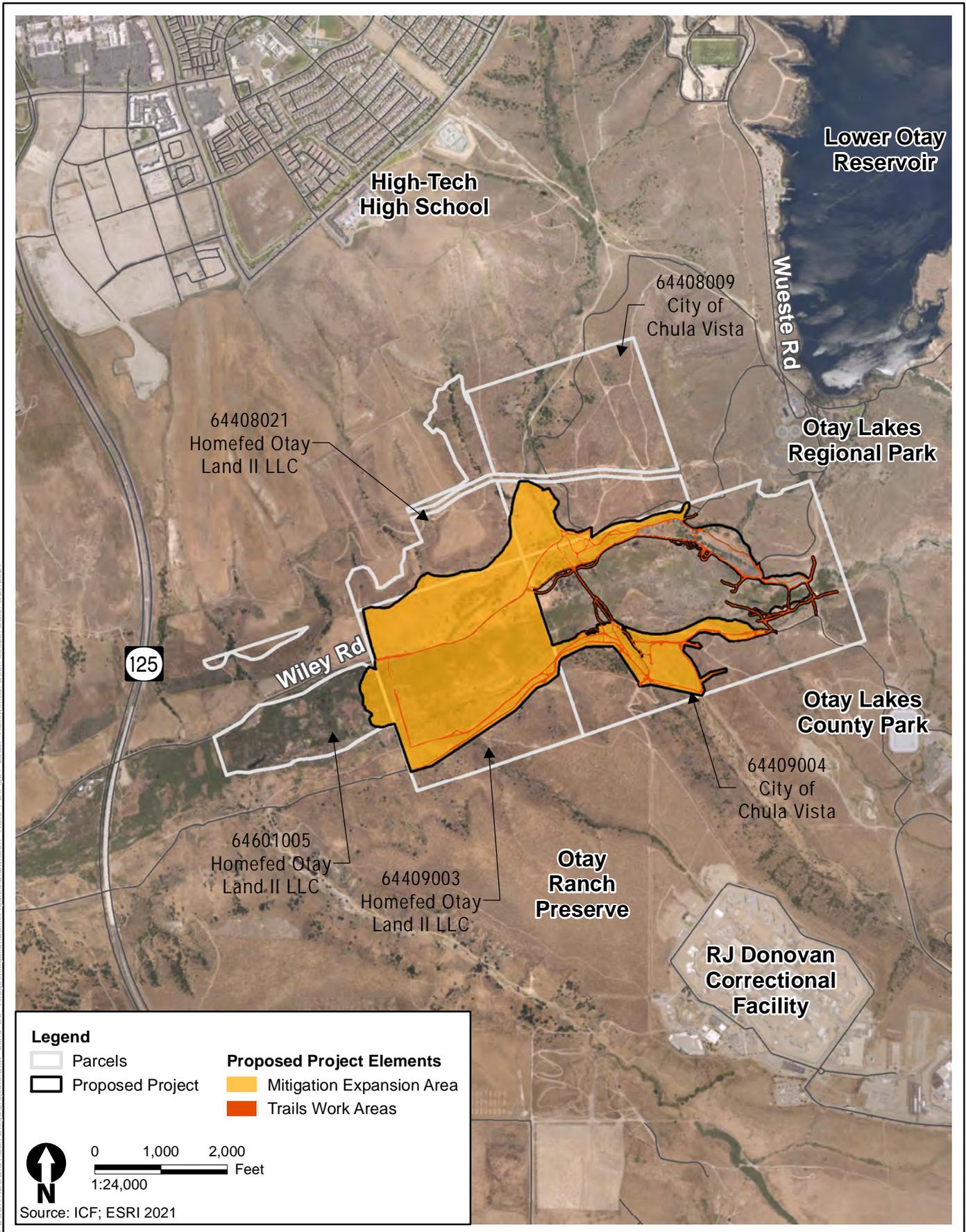
Source: ICF; ESRI 2021

**Figure 3**  
**Regional Vicinity**



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**Figure 4**  
**Local Vicinity**



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## Memorandum of Agreement, HomeFed and City of Chula Vista

A portion of the proposed project site is on land owned by the City and is designated as Current or Future Open Space under the City's General Plan (City of Chula Vista 2017) and Otay Ranch Resource Management Plan (County of San Diego and City of Chula Vista 2018), and is within the City's MSCP hardline preserve area. Although much of the proposed project site is on publicly owned land and/or is intended for open space and habitat preservation, the existing vegetation and soils are highly disturbed at the upper reach of the lower watershed boundary, making it an ideal location for ecological restoration.

Securing funding for a project of this magnitude is challenging for a local municipality; therefore, the proposed project presents a unique opportunity for a public (City of Chula Vista) and private (HomeFed) partnership. To this end, HomeFed and the City entered into an MOA, which was approved by the City of Chula Vista City Council in 2016. The MOA outlines the commitments of and benefits to each party, sets milestones, and guides funding decisions. The MOA is also currently being revised to update timelines and formally document the decision and associated trade-offs to expand the mitigation project onto HomeFed property and intersect Salt Creek.

## Otay Valley Regional Park Concept Plan

The OVRP Concept Plan was prepared in 1997 and last updated in 2016 as part of a multi-jurisdictional planning effort between the County of San Diego, City of Chula Vista, and City of San Diego (County of San Diego et al. 2016). An amendment to the OVRP Concept Plan was approved by City Council in 2018. The proposed project lies within the boundary of the OVRP Concept Plan, which provides recommendations for open space/core preserve areas, recreation areas, trail corridors, staging areas, viewpoint and overlook areas, and interpretive centers. The proposed project would establish trail corridors consistent with the OVRP Concept Plan and would implement trail improvements to a portion of the existing dirt roads and undocumented trails within the City Parcel. Trails would also be designated through and adjacent to the 2016 Restoration Project site. Wooden split-rail fencing, trail signage, and educational kiosks would be installed as part of the proposed project to more clearly delineate roads and trails, protect the public from unsafe locations, and protect sensitive resources from trail/road uses.

## City of Chula Vista Greenbelt Master Plan

The City of Chula Vista Greenbelt Master Plan provides guidance and continuity for planning open space and constructing and maintaining trails in the City (City of Chula Vista 2003). The primary purpose of the Greenbelt Master Plan is to provide goals and policies, trail design standards, and implementation tools that guide the creation of the Greenbelt system. The Greenbelt system is a series of open space segments connected by a multi-use trail extending through each segment from the channelized Sweetwater River, along golf courses and banks of the Otay Lakes, following the Otay River valley to the Chula Vista Bayfront.

The proposed project would implement improvements to a portion of the existing dirt roads and trails identified within the OVRP East/Otay Ranch Village Greenway Segments. The trail improvement elements of the proposed project would be consistent with goals and policies of the Greenbelt Master Plan that aim to provide connected open space areas around the City and to enhance and protect native biological and sensitive habitats. The proposed project would also support establishment of a Greenbelt system that ensures public access utilizing existing fire roads,

access roads, and/or utility easements for the trail system when possible and limiting the use of multi-use trails to non-motorized uses except for motorized wheelchairs and utility, maintenance, and emergency vehicles. The intent of the proposed project is to ensure the Greenbelt trail is accommodated through identification of a realistic corridor and installation of trail signage, split-rail fencing, and educational kiosks while avoiding any sensitive resources. The existing roads and trails would be moved or modified as needed to avoid road ponds and protect the San Diego fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*) and the proposed project's restoration areas. The proposed project would also focus solely on those trails that interact with the restoration effort and would not preclude the future implementation of other new or upgraded trail facilities identified in the City of Chula Vista Greenbelt Master Plan.

## City of Chula Vista Multiple Species Conservation Plan

The proposed project site is within the City's 2003 MSCP Subarea Plan, which provides a blueprint for conservation of covered species and their associated habitats and forms the basis for federal and state incidental take permits for 86 plant and animal species within the City. Lands that are managed under the MSCP are designated as 100 percent Conservation Areas, where the habitat is protected on site from development and impacts. The City of Chula Vista and the County of San Diego manage these Conservation Areas together.

The proposed project is considered a "Covered Project" under the Chula Vista MSCP Subarea Plan. The 100 percent Conservation Areas are either already in public ownership or will be dedicated to the MSCP Preserve as part of the development approval process for Covered Projects. Any portions of Covered Projects that are within 100 percent Conservation Areas must be consistent with conditions allowing specific land uses within the MSCP Preserve, as outlined in Chapter 6.0 of the Subarea Plan, and are subject to the narrow endemic species policy (avoidance and minimization) as outlined in Section 5.2.3, and the Wetlands Protection Program as outlined in Section 5.2.4 of the Subarea Plan.

In compliance with the County of San Diego MSCP Subarea Plan (County of San Diego 1997), the City of Chula Vista Subarea Plan, and as a condition of issuance of take authorization by the wildlife agencies, the City established a development standard and an implementing ordinance, the Habitat Loss and Incidental Take Ordinance. The Habitat Loss and Incidental Take Ordinance is consistent with the conservation and mitigation goals of the MSCP Subregional Plan and the City Subarea Plan, which require impacts on sensitive vegetation communities to be avoided and minimized to the maximum extent practicable. The proposed project is within the 100 percent Conservation Areas of Covered Projects (i.e., within the MSCP Preserve) and is therefore limited to the compatible uses described in Section 6.2 of the Subarea Plan, which include habitat restoration and enhancement activities. The proposed project is also subject to approval by the City and/or Appropriate Managing Entity, as applicable, and the underlying landowner, including obtaining any necessary permits. All activities must be consistent with the Subarea Plan including any conditions associated with Regional Water Quality Control Board 401 certifications, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permits, CDFW 1600 permits, or other resource conservation permits. All of the above activities would be carried out under a regional program implemented by the CDFW, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, City of Chula Vista, or Preserve Owner/Manager.

## Otay River Watershed Management Plan and Special Area Management Plan

Over the past decade, two key documents have been created for the Otay River watershed: the Otay River Watershed Management Plan (WMP) (County of San Diego et al. 2006) and the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). In 2006, the County of San Diego, with partial funding from a Proposition 13 grant, prepared the WMP in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Regional Water Quality Control Board, CDFW, City of Chula Vista, City of Imperial Beach, and Port of San Diego. That same year, a SAMP for the Otay River watershed in San Diego County was initiated with the County of San Diego as a facet of the County's broader watershed management program and following a species conservation planning effort. Although no final SAMP framework was developed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers compiled the extensive data and analyses in a geospatial database and summary report (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 2016) that are available resources to inform decision-making processes, i.e., permitting and mitigation.

The WMP includes implementation strategies to ensure the protection of existing beneficial uses and natural resources, including methods to monitor, maintain, and/or enhance existing water quality levels using non-structural and structural best management practices. In addition, recommendations for appropriate aquatic resource enhancement and monitoring programs are provided in the WMP. SAMPs are intended to strike a balance between aquatic resources and reasonable economic development and uses in the watershed or region in which they are developed. Together, these two documents provide a framework program that is consistent with the local general plans (County and City), the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit, and the County of San Diego MSCP. They also represent a proactive watershed planning and permitting approach that identified the areas within the watershed of "low value" that are more suitable for development and areas of "high value" that should be protected.

## Proposed Project Objectives

The primary objective of the proposed project is to create an ecologically functional, self-sustaining riverine wetland system that is resilient to a range of natural disturbances (e.g., drought, flood) and to enhance, rehabilitate, and re-establish hydrological processes, vegetation communities, and wildlife habitats, including vernal pools, associated with the Lower Otay River watershed that can adjust to dynamic natural processes.

A list of more detailed objectives for the proposed project is provided below. These goals were developed based on historical conditions, existing resources (aquatic and sensitive species), current and future constraints, and the various watershed planning documents including the Otay River WMP and SAMP and the MSCP Subarea Plan. The goals have been further informed by input obtained through engagement with the various users, stakeholders, and regulatory agencies.

## Hydrogeomorphologic Goals

1. Restore proper hydrology and sediment processes to maximize function based on existing conditions and facilitate a dynamic system.
2. Re-establish primary and secondary flow channels, low and high floodplains, and native transitional habitat.
3. Create complex channel morphology including primary and secondary channels.
4. Remove flow obstructions including berms, rows of cobble piles, and sediment and spoil piles.
5. Re-establish the intermittent Otay River mainstem.
6. Re-establish secondary ephemeral channels throughout the floodplain.
7. Re-establish the connection of tributaries to the floodplain.
8. Rehabilitate the connection of Salt Creek and the Otay River and re-establish the historical delta at the confluence, thereby allowing Salt Creek more movement potential.
9. Recreate a floodplain with low and high terraces capable of conveying various flood events.
10. Enhance and create seasonal ponds in the northern high floodplain.

## Invasive Species Goals

1. Remove nonnative, invasive species and restore native vegetation appropriate for current conditions.
2. Reduce the significant upstream invasive species seed source beginning at Savage Dam.
3. Treat all large, woody trees within the proposed project limits including tamarisk (*Tamarix spp.*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus spp.*), Brazilian pepper trees (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), and date and fan palms.
  - a. Treatment must be done in a manner to avoid impacts on sensitive birds and raptors.

## Buffer Goals

1. Maximize buffer condition and wetland protection by restoring and enhancing the adjacent transitional and upland habitat including sage scrub and grassland habitat as well as maritime succulent scrub.
2. Where possible, extend the restored buffer to the toe of the hills but at minimum include a buffer of approximately 100 feet.
3. Remove and restore redundant trails.
4. Reduce trails to the minimum width required for vehicular use and regrade to improve drainage and future rutting and associated trail widening.

## Trails and Access Goals

1. Protect existing and proposed native riparian habitat by focusing users (i.e., U.S. Customs and Border Protection) to key access roads and closing others permanently.
2. Design trails to maximize the user experience while avoiding sensitive resources and ensuring access as needed for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, SDG&E, OWD, and the County.
3. Establish OVRP Concept Plan and City of Chula Vista Greenbelt Master Plan trail corridors to minimize the potential impacts on the restoration area from existing and potential future uses.
4. Avoid impacts on all road ponds that support San Diego fairy shrimp.
5. Install split-rail fencing, trail signage, and educational kiosks at select locations to keep users on the trails and outside of the restoration area and to avoid dangerous locations and sensitive species/habitats.
6. Maintain vehicular use of the site by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, SDG&E, OWD, and rangers while limiting the impact on future trail users and natural resources.
7. Upgrade one permanent at-grade channel crossing at the downstream end of the proposed project using rock and other natural, hard material and protect the existing SDG&E gas transmission line.
8. Reconnect tributaries to the mainstem river floodplain while also maintaining vehicle and trail user access. This includes the confluence with Salt Creek and O'Neil Canyon as well as the smaller, unnamed tributaries to the north.

## Habitat and Other Ecology Goals

1. Create and maximize habitat diversity and structural complexity.
2. Preserve connectivity between adjacent areas of preserved land and natural habitats.
3. Preserve wildlife movement corridors.
4. Maximize wildlife use opportunities including local listed species.
5. Seek opportunities to restore and re-establish vernal pools in areas where redundant roads containing road ruts, with the potential to support fairy shrimp and indicator species, are able to be reclaimed.

## Detailed Description of Project Elements

As previously discussed, the proposed project is an expansion of the 2016 Restoration Project and includes rechanneling the mainstem channel and tributaries, grading and restoring the lower and upper floodplains, and restoring and enhancing upland, transitional, and riparian habitats. The proposed project also incorporates improvements to the multi-use and secondary trails for public use, adds fencing to protect sensitive resources and minimize trespassing, and includes educational kiosks to inform recreationalists on the restoration efforts and sensitive resources inhabiting the Otay River. These project components are further described below.

## Mitigation Bank Expansion

Mitigation bank expansion and ecological restoration activities associated with the proposed project would begin with removal and management of nonnative, invasive species within the Otay River followed by the re-establishment of the Otay River mainstem and a secondary channel and floodplain terrace to maximize the hydrologic function of the overall floodplain. The transitional areas and upland habitat buffering the site would then be rehabilitated through the recontouring of slopes, removal of invasive plant species, and revegetation with appropriate native species.

Before it was disturbed, the Otay River through the proposed project area consisted of a braided river channel and associated floodplain; therefore, the intent of the restoration phase of the proposed project is to re-establish and rehabilitate the main channel and secondary channels to re-establish these conditions. The re-established channels would connect to the up- and downstream existing mainstem and would include a low and high terrace along with sandy bar complexes and would be designed to accommodate flood events. In particular, the active low floodplain is intended to accommodate a 10-year flood event, while the high floodplain would likely correspond to a 25-year event, with larger events inundating the entire valley floor with water rising into the upland areas as needed.

Rehabilitation activities would include removing flow-impeding features left behind by the sand mining operation, including existing berms, cobble rows, and sediment piles, and recontouring the transitional upland area to mirror adjacent natural slopes and accommodate rising floodwaters. This area would also be treated for nonnative species and revegetated with native species such as sage scrub and cactus scrub. These improvements to the vegetative cover are expected to result in improved hydrology and flood capacity, bio-filtration, and sediment and toxicant trapping.

Enhancement activities would include removing and managing nonnative, invasive species such as arundo, dense tamarisk stands, and eucalyptus. Removal of nonnative, invasive plant species would help lower the overall distribution of nonnative seed and propagules within the watershed area and protect the proposed project.

## Potential Future Restoration of Salt Creek

Salt Creek is a major tributary to the Otay River. The lower reach of Salt Creek bounded by Wiley Road to the north and south has significant potential for channel and floodplain restoration. Salt Creek is currently incised with low sinuosity. Its floodplain is disconnected with only a few breakout areas. The proposed restoration will be implemented if approved as a future phase and focuses on creating a more sinuous main channel that can access its floodplain more frequently. Future restoration activities include:

- Creating a two-stage channel with added low flow sinuosity to match conditions of representative reaches upstream. This creates a broader riparian corridor, adds channel length and complexity at low flows and allows the channel to access the floodplain more frequently.
- Creating multiple breakout or overflow channels that connect flow across the floodplain from Salt Creek to the Otay River floodplain.

- Realigning 3,560 linear feet of Wiley Road and sewer owned by City of Chula Vista from the lower floodplain (left bank) to upland (north bank). This realignment of utility access and sewer allows for extensive floodplain inundation. It also allows for the removal of two culverts along Wiley Road, which allows for increased floodplain inundation.
- Reconnecting significant tributaries along Salt Creek including Kumeyaay Creek which flows into Salt Creek to the north and Corral Creek with flows into the Otay River floodplain to the south. Both tributaries will meander through wet meadows and Corral Creek will flow around the historic Otay Rancho Corral.
- Re-habilitating and enhancing areas surrounding the re-established primary channel and Salt Creek with a focus on removal of invasive species such as tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp.) and Arundo (*Arundo donax*).

The Salt Creek restoration area is adjacent to the proposed vernal pool restoration, which is included in the Otay River Mainstem Restoration activities. Shallow overflow from the Salt Creek floodplain, will only enhance vernal pool form and function over time.

## Trails

The trail network within the proposed project site would consist of two trail types (multi-use trails and secondary trails) to serve both recreational resources and routine maintenance access to the site. In addition, a series of existing roads and road shoulders would be reclaimed as part of proposed project implementation.

Certain segments of roads have been identified as redundant and unnecessary and would be graded where appropriate and revegetated to blend into the surrounding landscape. In some instances, large rocks or woody material would also be used to close entry points to trails, allowing the natural regrowth of native plant species. In addition, existing roads would be narrowed (either entirely or in specific segments) by reclaiming portions of the shoulders to be more accommodating to pedestrians (see Figure 5, Trails Detail, Plan View, and Figure 6, Trails Detail, Cross Section).

Trail improvements would include wayfinding signs and interpretive opportunities along scenic points of the river and riparian areas. The Mitigation Bank Expansion would include at least two stream crossings with the trails. For these locations, a semi-hardened crossing is proposed to meet the creek at grade to allow water to flow. The crossings on the proposed project would be constructed with interlocking, permeable, concrete surface bedding in the river bottom. The voids in the concrete bedding would be filled with gravel to both stabilize the surface from storm flow events and provide a stable surface for trail users to walk or ride across. The gravel would consist of crushed, 0.75-inch, compacted rock and smaller material. The trail surface would transition back to a compacted, decomposed, granite, crushed-rock surface or the existing natural material above the creek bed (see Figure 2b).

Currently utility access across the Otay River for SDG&E follows the centerline of O'Neal Canyon. In order to improve ecological function to O'Neal Canyon as well as improve long-term utility access to the SDG&E gas line, the access route will be rerouted away from the centerline of O'Neal Canyon.

## Multi-Use Trails

Multi-use trails would provide full access for all trail users and serve as agency and utility vehicular access throughout the proposed project site. The multi-use trail system is designed along both existing dirt road alignments and new alignments that work with the site topography and wildlife sensitive areas. Multi-use trails would be wider than secondary trails and serve as a utility corridor throughout the Otay Valley River corridor. The multi-use trail system would be designed to a width of 12 to 14 feet of gravel surface with 2-foot-wide clear, earthen areas on each side of the trail surface for fire safety during vehicle use. The multi-use trails would serve as the main trail system through the Otay River area and extend the Otay Valley River Trail network to the region. The multi-use trails would allow vehicular access from existing roadways at the edge of the proposed project site to utility power poles and existing sewer lines in the proposed project site. The multi-use trails would also provide utility access for U.S. Customs and Border Protection vehicular surveillance, routine maintenance access, and sustainable access to monitor river and wildlife along the river corridor and trail system.

New multi-use trails have been added to some areas of the site. These trails will provide opportunities for pedestrians, mountain bikers, and equestrians to leave the larger roads and travel at a more intimate scale, and to visit viewpoints that overlook the larger site. The trails will be designed to be sinuous, gently undulating over mounds, curving around boulders and trees, and crossing shallow ephemeral creek swales. To provide additional interest to all users and technical challenges to mountain bikers, these trails will include features such as banked berm turns, boulders to wind through, and semi-buried logs to travel over in places. The technical elements of the mountain bike trails will be designed in conjunction with local mountain bike groups.

## Secondary Trails

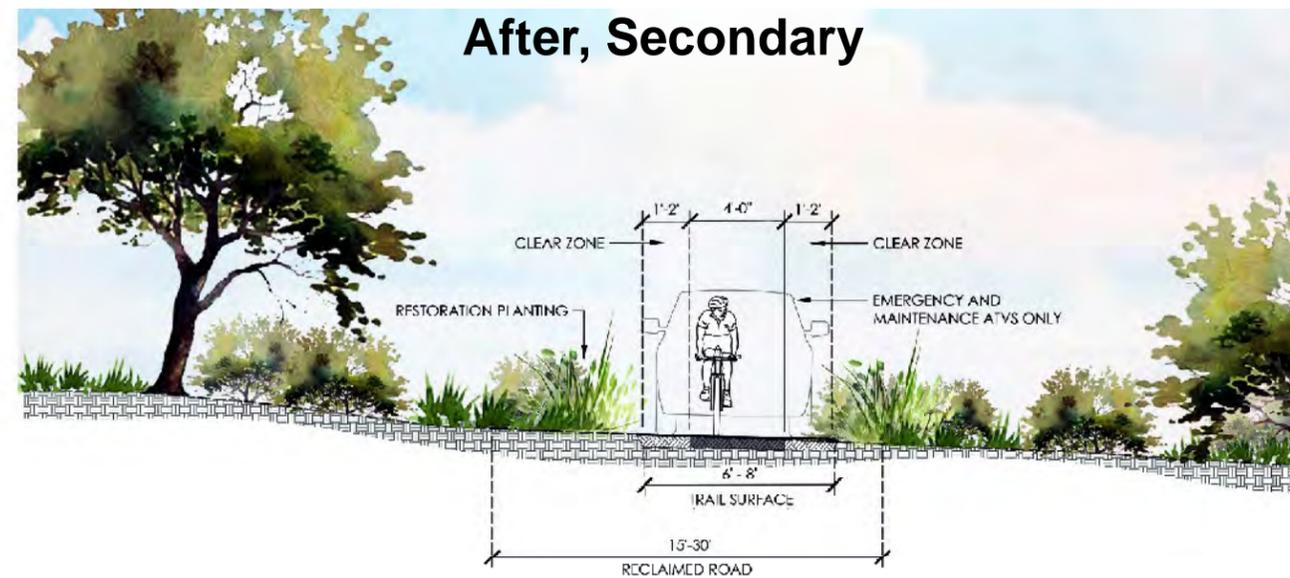
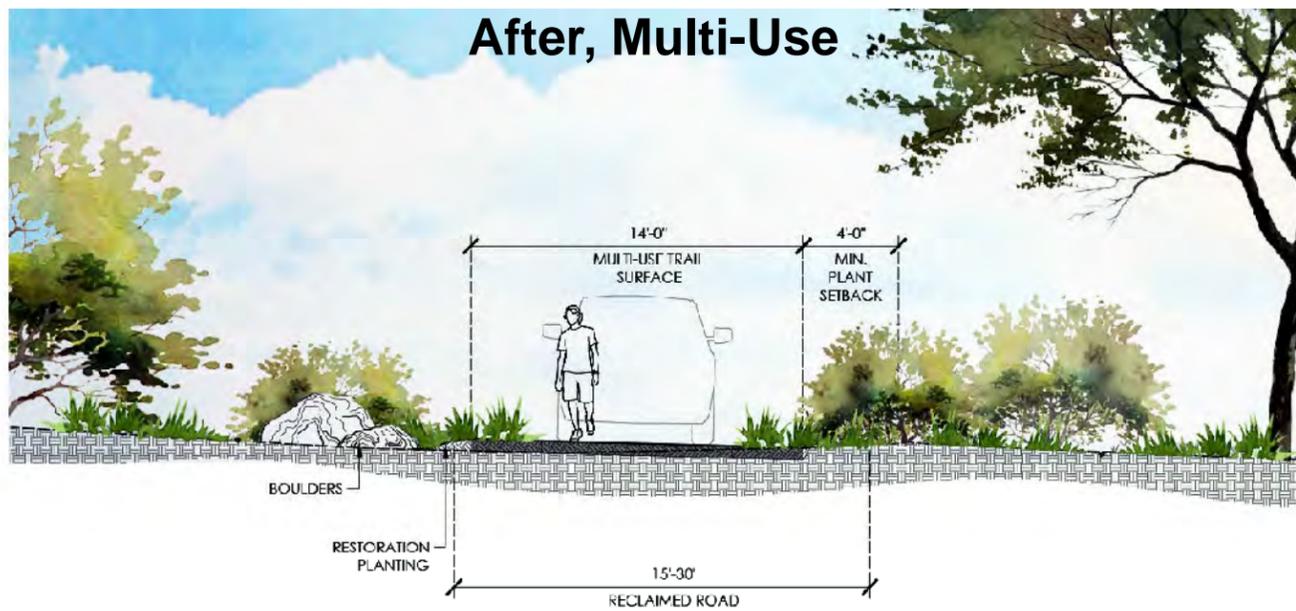
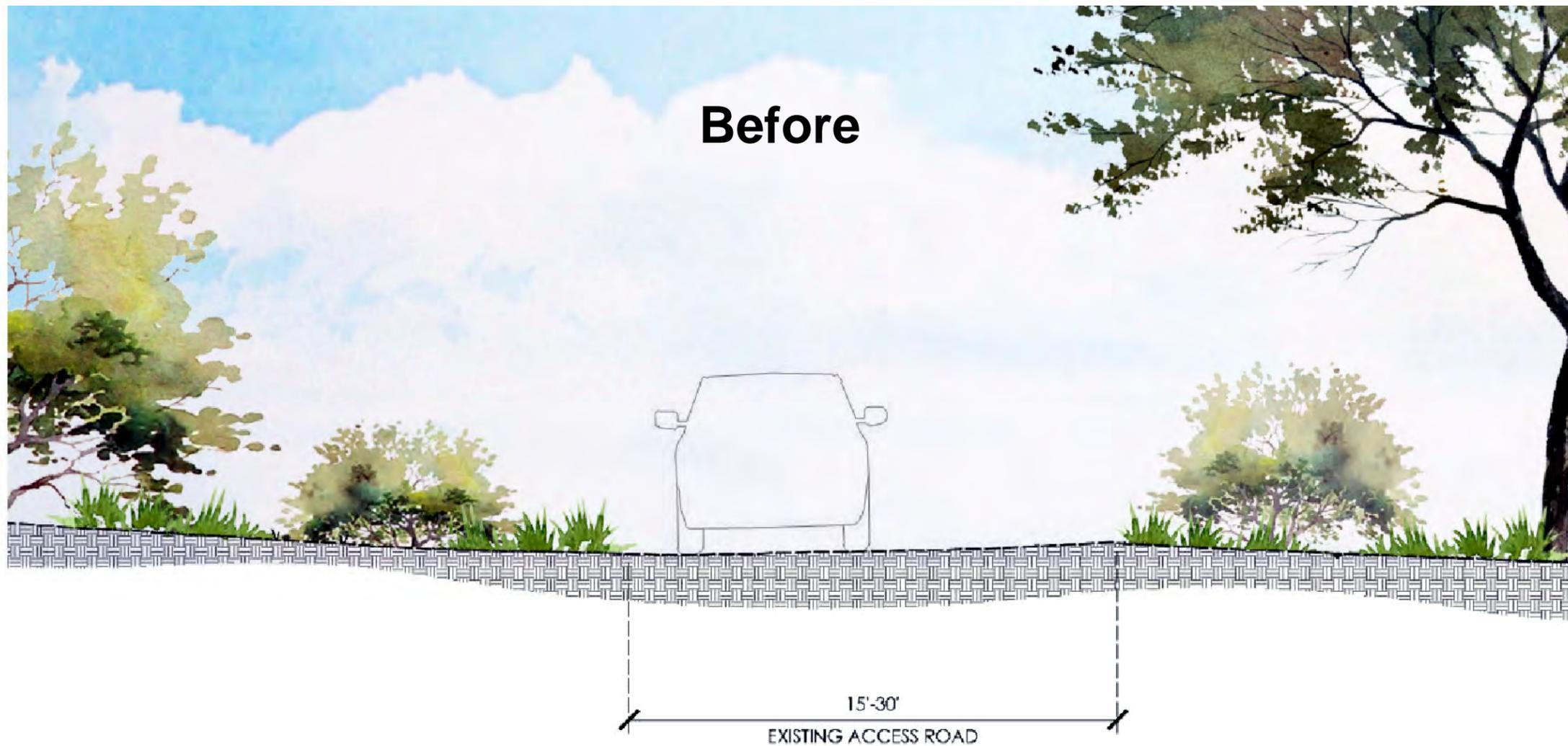
Secondary trails would include a narrower trail for mountain biking and hiking with limited or no vehicle access. The secondary trail system would be designed with a smaller footprint, limiting use to mountain bikes and hiking with additional safety features in place (e.g., signage regarding speed or direction, step asides). The secondary trails would be 3 to 5 feet wide with 3 to 4 feet of clear areas on each side of the natural surface trail. The secondary trails would be designed with small fence segments and other safety features to limit vehicle access to emergency use only.

## Fencing

The multiuse trails would be designed with small fence segments to limit vehicle access to emergency use only, protect sensitive resources, and ensure public safety. The fencing would be constructed using treated wood posts and dowels. Most of the small sections of fence would be proposed at transition points in the trail network where the multi-use trails intersect with the secondary trails. Fence locations would be determined in the field in order to best fit the landscape setting, and gates intended to restrict vehicular access would be designed to allow unrestricted access for pedestrians and cyclists.



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## Educational Elements (Signage, Wayfinding, and Kiosks)

The proposed project would also comply with the OVRP Trail Guidelines (County of San Diego et al. 2003) and Greenbelt Master Plan design standards for signage and educational kiosks (City of Chula Vista 2003). Educational kiosks would be installed at key viewing locations within the disturbed areas to help inform the readers of the importance of the restoration site as well as to keep users on the trails and outside of the restoration area. Additional design elements would include wayfinding signs and interpretive opportunities along scenic points of the river and riparian areas. There are several viewpoints and other nodes along the trail corridor for interpretive opportunities that would be further identified following trail construction. Wayfinding signs would be limited to the trail intersections to minimize the number of signs in the open space. The wayfinding signs would follow the OVRP Trail Guidelines for sign post, sign face, fonts, and color. The number of wayfinding signs for the proposed project site could range from 35 to 50 signs distributed across the proposed project site at primary trail intersections. This would also help to minimize incursions by trail users into the restored habitat and ecologically sensitive areas of the proposed project site. Coordination regarding funding management, County Ranger patrols of the trail, and specific educational design elements of the proposed project will occur with OVRP Joint Staff and the County Ranger prior to implementation.

## Restoration Activities

As an expansion of the 2016 Restoration Project, the proposed project would include restoration activities within the proposed project limits. Restoration activities would range among heavy, moderate, and light (see Figure 7, Restoration Activity Levels). Heavy restoration activities include grading of the mainstem Otay River and floodplain areas; grading and restoration of tributaries; grading and establishment of mounds, depressions, and vernal pools; grading of the trails and crossings; and placing soil for slope repair. Moderate restoration activities include trail reclamation, dethatching, mechanical weeding (more intense weeding), grow/kill cycle, planting and seeding, and stock pile areas. Light restoration activities include habitat enhancement and minimal weeding (hand removal and low herbicide application).

**Table 1. Restoration Activity Types**

<b>Activity Ranking</b>	<b>Restoration Activity Types*</b>
Heavy	All grading activities Permanent trails and crossings
Moderate	Dethatching Mechanical Weeding Grow/kill cycles Planting/Seeding Stock pile areas
Light	Enhancement Minimal weeding As needed management Monitoring

\*Rankings are classified based on the highest intensity restoration activity that would occur in that specific area.

## Project Construction

### Construction Overview

Construction of the proposed project is anticipated to occur in a single phase. While a single-phase development approach would be most cost effective and ecologically preferred, the proposed project could be constructed in phases if necessitated by resource permitting requirements, field conditions, or other constraints. Construction activities would include the removal of invasive, nonnative tree, shrub, and herbaceous species followed by grading of the channel and floodplain areas to remove spoil piles, berms, and pits to restore the desired hydrologic functions of the channel. Excess soil material would be redistributed on site rather than exported. In addition to the proposed restoration activities, at least two trail crossings would be improved to facilitate the connection of tributaries to the mainstem Otay River, including an unnamed drainage north of the river as well as Salt Creek.

The trails would be developed as part of the restoration effort but are expected to be completed after the major earthwork in the river has concluded. Trail construction would include recontouring of existing trails for proper drainage, select material placement, focused rock sills, strategic fencing and boulder placement, and signage and educational kiosk implementation. In addition, almost 2 miles of trails are planned to be closed and reclaimed, including redundant trails as well as shoulders of wider trails. Reclamation would include two primary options: replanting to match adjacent native habitat or select recontouring for vernal pool establishment.

### Construction Sequencing

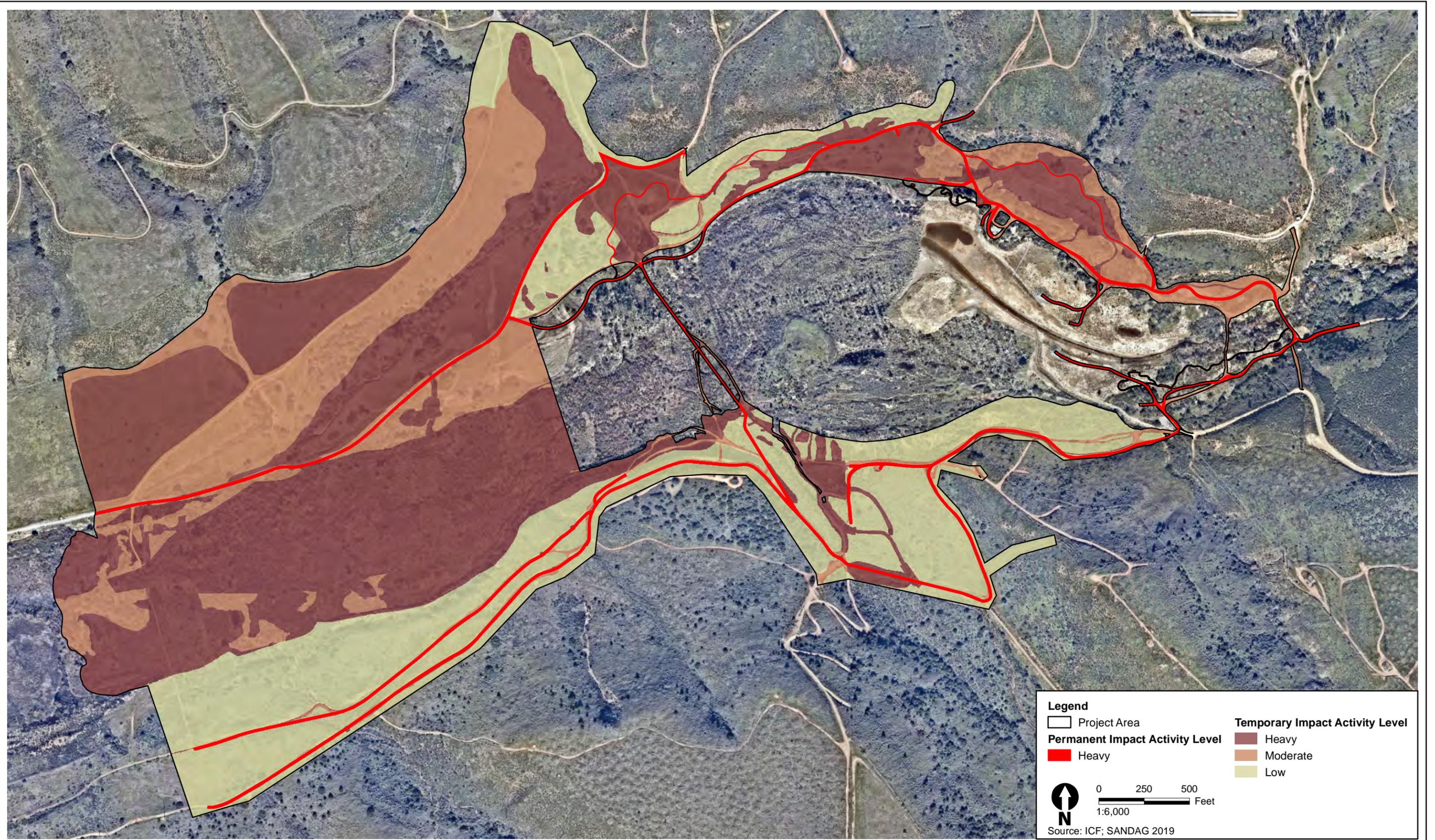
Equipment and labor force would begin by clearing the proposed project site of any vegetation, trash, and other debris before grading can take place. All debris would be removed off site or mulched for use as erosion control at a later time. Special considerations would be taken while clearing in riverine and sensitive environments, including biological monitoring to determine invasive versus native vegetation and emphasis on tree trimming over complete tree removal.

In order to minimize unwanted ecological impacts, site grading and earthwork activities would be limited to smaller (rubber-tire or small-tracked) equipment and a greater reliance on hand tools in waterways and ecologically sensitive areas. Larger equipment would be used in areas with less ecological sensitivity, such as the larger upper and lower floodplain areas, and in order to construct seasonal ponds. Limited dewatering may be required for construction during periods of higher flows in the river channel, or in areas with a high groundwater table. Dewatering activities, if needed, would be minimal and conducted in a manner that allows for completion of the proposed channel improvements without adversely affecting adjacent plant communities.

Earthwork activities would include construction of the proposed river channel, floodplain areas, seasonal ponds, trails, and crossings. Placement of materials such as riprap, landscape boulders, and other aggregate products throughout the site would occur after all major earthwork is complete, ensuring that all products meet the proposed project plans and specifications. Final site walks would be performed with engineers, developers, and jurisdictional authorities for acceptance of work completed. As-built plans would be generated and submitted for closure of grading scope of the proposed project. If any final erosion-control devices are needed, they would be installed at that point and interim grading best management practices would be removed.

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**Figure 7**  
**Restoration Activity Levels**

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**Table 2. Proposed Construction Equipment Type and Quantity**

<b>Site Preparation/Clearing</b>	<b>Grading and Site Finish</b>
One John Deere 350G Track Excavator or equivalent	One John Deere 350G Track Excavator
Two John Deere 644 Wheel Loaders	One John Deere 470 Track Excavator
One John Deere 60D Mini Track Excavator (Sensitive Areas)	One John Deere 60D Mini Track Excavator (Sensitive Areas)
Two CAT D8T Track Dozers	One CAT D6 Track Dozer
One Rubber Track Skid Steer (Sensitive Areas)	One CAT D8T Track Dozer
Two Water Trucks	One CAT D9T Track Dozer
One Volvo A40 Articulated Haul Truck	One John Deere 644 Wheel Loader
Miscellaneous clearing equipment (chain saw, tree chipper, sump pump, etc.)	One Rubber Track Skid Steer ( Sensitive Areas )
	One CAT 140M Motor Grader
	Two Water Trucks
	Three Volvo A40 Articulated Haul Trucks
	Miscellaneous equipment (sump pump, water tower, vibratory hand compactor, 5x5 sheep foot)

## Routine Monitoring and Maintenance

Routine monitoring and maintenance would be performed following construction throughout the proposed project site until all project performance criteria are met and for a minimum of 5 years. Qualitative and quantitative monitoring efforts will be conducted and any problems documented, such as trash, vandalism, isolated instances of plant mortality, or small-scale weed or pest infestations, which would be rectified as they are discovered during routine site monitoring and maintenance and included in annual reporting. Monitoring results would also be used to determine native and nonnative cover and riverine functionality and processes across each of the restoration areas during the 5-year maintenance and monitoring program. Monitoring would improve the ability to detect positive or negative trends in the restoration area and would allow the project biologist and HomeFed to make prompt adaptive management decisions. If the project site has not met the performance criteria the maintenance and monitoring obligations would continue until performance criteria are achieved or alternative contingency measures would be negotiated with regulatory agencies

## Long-Term Management

Following the 5-year maintenance and monitoring period and the site meeting all performance criteria, the site would undergo long-term management by a long-term habitat manager pursuant to a site-specific long-term management plan (LTMP). Long-term management would be required to ensure that target goals and maintenance of the site are maintained. The purpose of the LTMP is to maintain control over factors that could adversely affect the site, such as invasive species, trespassing, and urban encroachment. The long-term habitat manager would evaluate the potential factors that could adversely affect the proposed project site in light of the location and the condition of riparian/wetland areas surrounding the proposed project site. The LTMP would be a “living” document and would include a provision to be updated every 5 years so that changes in the physical or anthropogenic environments can be adequately addressed.

## Operational Activities

Due to the nature of the proposed project, long-term operational activities are expected to be minimal and would include maintaining vegetation overgrowth on the multi-use and secondary trails, erosion control, and fencing, signage and education kiosk maintenance.

## Required Discretionary Approvals

The City of Chula Vista is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act and responsible for permitting the proposed project; the USACE, CDFW, and RWQCB have some approval and/or discretionary authority over the proposed project. Table 3, below, indicates the discretionary approvals that would be required to implement the proposed project.

**Table 3. Discretionary Approvals Required**

Agency	Role	Permit/Approval
City of Chula Vista	Lead agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigated Negative Declaration adoption               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program adoption</li> <li>○ Prospectus and BEI approval</li> <li>○ Finance Plan approval (including retaining the appropriate qualified personnel, as described in the BEI [e.g., landscape installation/ maintenance contractor, restoration ecologist]).</li> <li>○ Habitat Loss and Incidental Take permit</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Grading permit</li> </ul>
San Diego Gas and Electric	Responsible agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grading permit and Letter of Authorization</li> </ul>
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Federal agency with permitting authority and National Environmental Policy Act Lead Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 404 permit</li> <li>• Prospectus and BEI approval</li> </ul>
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Federal agency with permitting authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 7 consultation</li> <li>• Prospectus and BEI review/approval</li> </ul>
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Trustee/responsible agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 1602 Streambed Alteration Agreement</li> <li>• California Endangered Species Act consultation</li> <li>• Prospectus and BEI approval</li> </ul>
Regional Water Quality Control Board	Responsible agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 401 Water Quality Certification</li> <li>• Construction General Permit/Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan</li> <li>• Prospectus and BEI review/approval</li> </ul>

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