



Project Proposal and Scope of Work Saddle Club Preservation Property Site Use Plan Implementation Project

The Foothill/Eastern Transportation Corridor Agency (F/ETCA) is pleased to transmit this letter of project proposal for the Saddle Club Preservation Property Site Use Plan Implementation Project located within Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan in Trabuco Canyon, California.

Owner/Applicant: Foothill/Eastern Transportation Corridor Agency
Project Name: Saddle Club Preservation Property Site Use Plan Implementation Project
Project Location: 31101 Live Oak Canyon Road, Trabuco Canyon
California APNs: 125-035-34
General Plan Designation: Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan
Zoning: TCR – Trabuco Canyon Residential District

Striving to have a site that balances habitat conservation, wildlife refuge and connectivity, and public recreational uses. The F/ETCA will restore the site and enhance habitats onsite for mitigation purposes, protect open space areas, while providing opportunity for recreational (trail) access to an existing fire road that traverses the property in a generally north-south direction, and follows the same alignment as the County-planned Coyote Connection Trail. Any future connections to the Coyote Connection Trail will be submitted to the County for review and approval.

California Environmental Quality Act Determination

An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) (SCH #2019099042) and accompanying Mitigation Monitoring Reporting Program (MMRP) were prepared analyzing all phases and potential impacts of the Project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and Appendix H of the F/ETCA's Administrative Code of Procedures. The MMRP and referenced technical studies are attached to the Final MND approved by the F/ETCA Board of Directors on March 10, 2022, and available at the Agency website: <https://thetollroads.com/about-tca/environment/current-initiatives/> as well as at the County Planning Department. A Notice of Determination (Document Number 202285000210) was filed on March 14, 2022, pursuant to Public Resources Code 21092.3.

At the time that the MND for the Project was prepared it was contemplated that the site would be used to partially fulfil the coastal sage scrub (CSS) mitigation needs for the State Route (SR) 241/ SR-91 Express Lane Connector (ELC) Project. However, during final design of the SR 241/91 ELC Project it was determined that all CSS mitigation needs would be fulfilled without the need to use the Saddle Club property. While there is no immediate need to prepare a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for Saddle Club to address the SR 241/91 ELC Project mitigation and to complete the proposed demolition activities, a RMP will be prepared in summer 2024 and will be provided to the County for review. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) recommended during its review of the MND that the Agency wait to determine whether open-self guided public access is compatible with the conservation purposes of the property until after a RMP is completed and approved by the applicable resource agencies. CDFW; however, acknowledged the need to remove existing structures and expressed no objections to that task.



As agreed with CDFW, until the RMP is completed, the Agency will only provide limited managed (documented) public access on the property. The access program will be managed through partnerships with the community and user groups and will allow for public access during the Agency's Spring tour event (conducted in March/April each year) and up to six designated hiking and riding days led by Agency staff or Agency technical experts.

Project Background

The F/ETCA takes pride in its environmental stewardship and unparalleled 25-year record of meeting its mitigation obligations as prescribed by the resource and wildlife permitting agencies. Currently, the F/ETCA in conjunction with its sister agency, the San Joaquin Hills Transportation Corridor Agency, has completed 405 lane-miles of roadway and to minimize and mitigate these projects, it has conserved approximately 2,200 acres of valuable open space in Orange County. Consistent with the Agency's historical practices, and to meet anticipated mitigation needs for existing and future capital projects, the Agency purchased the approximately 33-acre Saddle Club Preservation Property (hereafter referred to as "SCPP," property, or site) in December 2017.

The F/ETCA completed the SCPP Draft Site Use Plan (hereafter referred to as "Site Use Plan") as a tool to guide the use and long-term management of the property. The Site Use Plan includes the Agency's vision to have a site that balances habitat conservation, wildlife refuge and connectivity, and a pilot public recreational use program. The Agency intends to restore and enhance habitats onsite for mitigation, protect open space areas, while providing opportunity for recreational pursuits that foster physical activity and contemplative experiences for the community. Access to the multiuse trail promotes adventure while also encouraging stewardship for the site and area wildlife.

The Site Use Plan vision contains goals for the site's management and identifies specific objectives, including proposed implementation of habitat restoration and conservation, wildlife refuge and connectivity, and a pilot public recreational program.

Project Location

The SCPP is located at 31101 Live Oak Canyon Road in Trabuco Canyon, in unincorporated Orange County (Figure 1.3-1). The site is located in Section 11 of Township 6 South, Range 7 West, of the San Bernardino Baseline and Meridian. Topographic map coverage of the site and surrounding vicinity is provided by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) "Santiago Peak" (2012) Quadrangle. The elevation of the site ranges from approximately 950 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to 1080 feet MSL. The topographic gradient at the site is variable along ridgelines and valleys; however, the overall site topography generally slopes to the west towards Live Oak Canyon Road. The topography in the vicinity of the site is variable; however, it generally slopes southward towards Arroyo Trabuco (Trabuco Creek). Trabuco Creek flows southwest towards the Pacific Ocean.

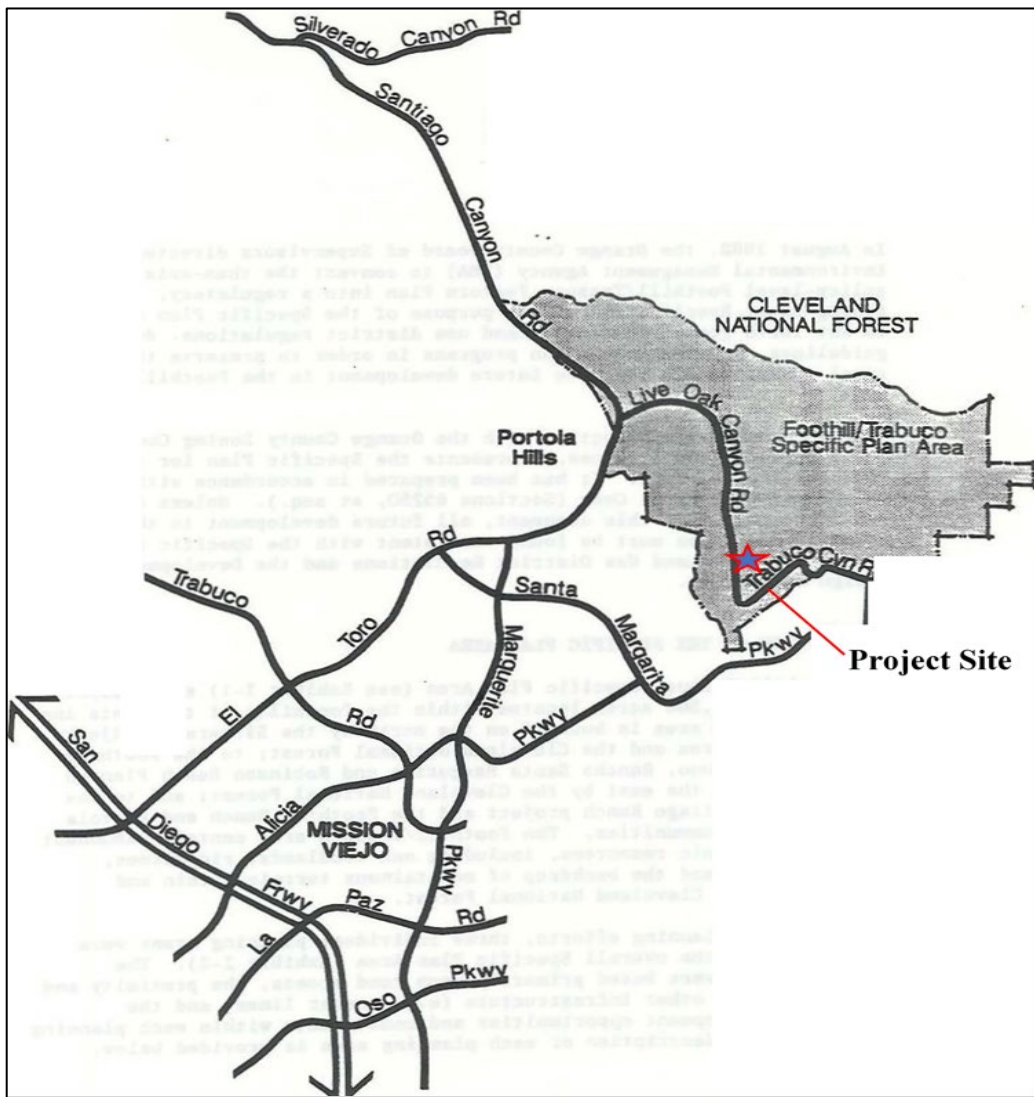
The project site is regionally accessible by State Route 241, El Toro Road, and Santiago Canyon Road. It is bordered by the Live Oak Canyon Road/Trabuco Canyon Road and O'Neill Regional Park to the West and South, and the Orange County Transportation Authority's Wren's View Preserve to the North



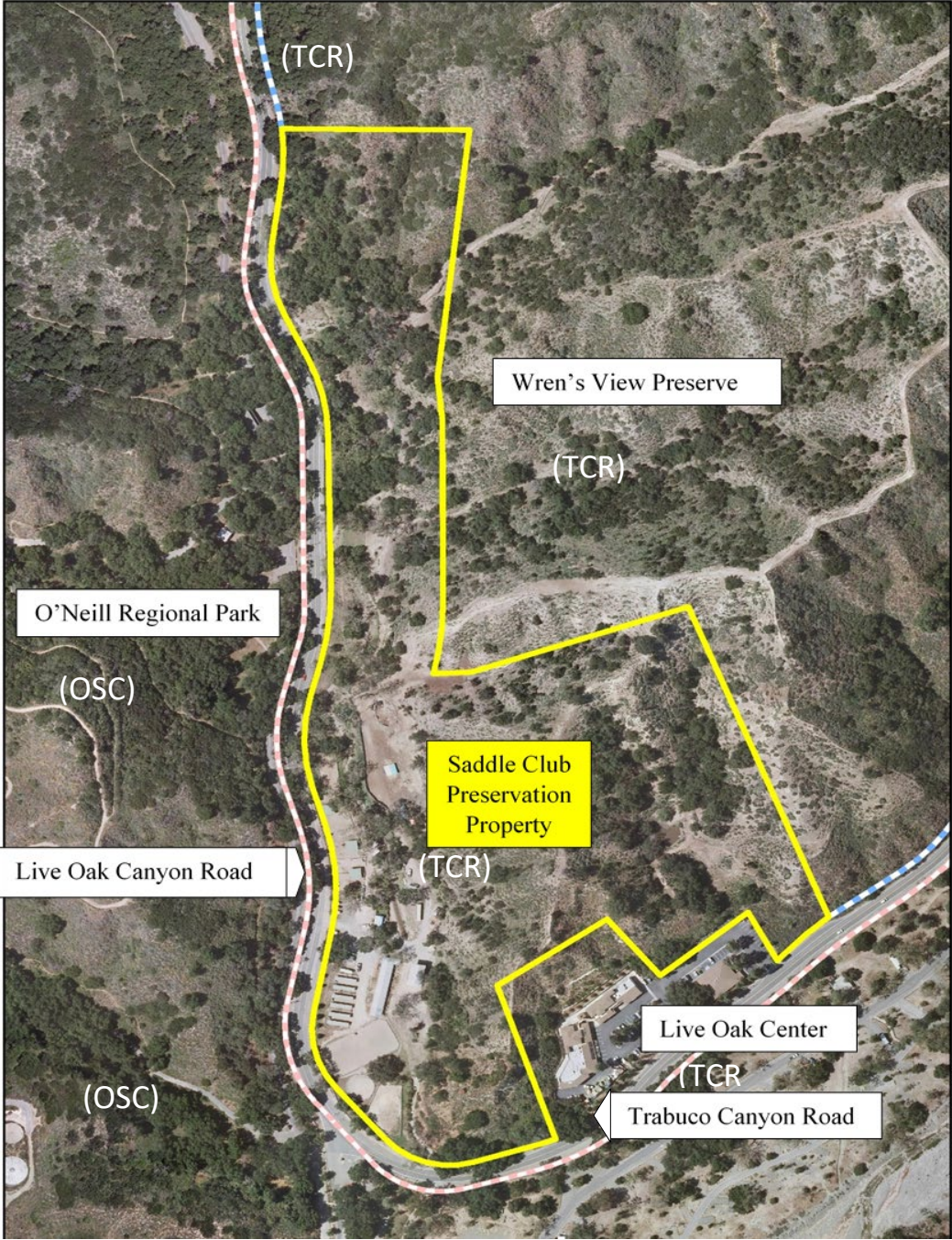
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and East.

The SCPP is located on an inside elbow where Trabuco Canyon Road turns north and becomes Live Oak Canyon Road. Access is provided via a private driveway from Trabuco Canyon Road and a smaller gated access further north on Live Oak Canyon Road. The subject site is served by municipal power and water. Southern California Edison provides electricity, to the property while Trabuco Canyon Water District provides water.



Project Location



Site Location: OSC- Open Space Conservation; TCR-Trabuco Canyon Residential; TCC- Trabuco Canyon Commercial

Project Proposal/Scope of Work

The proposed project involves demolition, removal, salvage and/or disposal of materials associated with previous equestrian uses of the site; removal of ornamental vegetation; installation of multi-trail signage and appurtenant structures including rest benches, kiosk; restoration activities including establishment and/or enhancement of native vegetation and streambeds onsite; and ongoing operations and maintenance activities including fuel load modification, maintaining access roads/trails, and conducting annual surveys, as may be necessary. There are three primary components to the proposed project:

- (1) *Demolition of existing facilities and ornamental vegetation* including but not limited to unused equestrian structures, an office building with toilets, a caretaker residence, associated utilities; and any other items left on the SCPP site. The ornamental Texas Privet hedge along Live Oak/Trabuco Canyon Road will be removed to reduce the use of potable water on site and as part of restoring the site to its natural state. Work will be completed through a Performance Specification Contract. Demotion is anticipated to start in Fall 2024 with a duration of up to six weeks.
- (2) *Restoration and enhancement of appropriate habitats.* The Agency will allow the site to self-restore to its natural state and only at the biologist's recommendation, and in accordance with the RMP, will restore and/or enhance specific areas, as needed, including but not limited to, riparian, wetland, scrub, and oak woodland habitats, in heavily disturbed areas to increase the native plant species' diversity and structure as well as provide breeding territories for the regional target species for conservation, including California gnatcatcher. This work will commence once the RMP is completed and will be an ongoing effort implemented by the Agency's On-Call Contractors in coordination with staff pending budget approval by the Agency Board. The Agency is committed to maintaining, protecting, and managing the natural landscape of the site comprising of canyons, ridgelines; thereby, providing a natural sanctuary for the diverse wildlife including mule deer, mountain lions, bobcats, and coyotes.
- (3) *Pilot public recreational use* focusing on limited low impact recreational activities consistent with the Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan, i.e., hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding, to minimize conflict between recreation, resource protection and conservation efforts, and wildlife use of the property. Once the proposed demolition, RMP, and installation of recreational ancillary facilities are completed [anticipated completion date, June 31, 2026], the public will be allowed open self-guided access to the property pursuant to the RMP public access guidelines. In the meantime, only limited managed-access program that allows for public access during limited, designated docent-led hiking and riding days on the designated riding and hiking trails will be conducted on the Site at Agency's discretion.

Proposed Schedule Summary

Activity	Implementation Date
1. Demolish Structures ¹	Complete by December 31 2024
2. Preparation of Resource Management Plan	Jul 1, 2024 – Jun 31, 2025 (FY 25)
3. Design and implement multi-use recreational trail	Jul 1, 2025 – Jun 31, 2026 (FY26)
a. Complete design and installation of ancillary structures ¹	
b. Construct ancillary recreational facilities- educational kiosks, buffer rail fence etc.	
4. Open-self guided public access	Fall 2026 ²

1. Pending approval of County Site Development Permit and procurement of demolition contractor by Agency.
2. Pending completion and approval of RMP and TCA Board approval

Demolition and Site Preparation Activities

Construction Access Routes and Laydown Areas

Construction vehicles would access the project site from Live Oak Canyon Road. Temporary fencing would be placed around the demolition site. During construction, all activities will be kept within the project site. All materials will be within secured, always fenced areas to prevent theft or vandalism. One or more temporary storage containers may be used as a construction office to house tools and other construction equipment. In addition, security guards would regularly monitor the site. Portable toilet facilities will be installed for use by construction workers. The site has potable water that may be used by employees.

The Contractor will provide a completed project with the earthen material within the construction area free of debris, with all trenches backfilled. There is no import or export of soil, no cut and fill, and no mass grading proposed onsite given the relatively flat terrain of the site and the absence of heavy groundcover. All ground disturbing activities are expected to have minimal impact on existing drainage patterns and overall topography of the site. Also, during the site preparation phase, staging areas and onsite access routes would be prepared. A worker crew of 10 would be onsite during this phase, which is anticipated to last up to six weeks.

¹ The trail system will utilize the existing access roads onsite, no additional design or grading anticipated.

Construction Equipment

The demolition operations would utilize equipment that would facilitate removal of existing structures and transporting the demolished materials to a storage site and/or dumping facility. Construction equipment for demolition, would include but is not limited to:

- One (1) pavement breaker or concrete saw
- Three (3) backhoes or small excavators
- Two (2) delivery trucks/dumpers (peak single-day delivery, maximum 15 miles transport)
- Two (2) rubber-tired dozers (for demolition activities and site preparation)
- One (1) water truck for dust control

Operation

Post construction, activities at the site would include a pilot public recreational use program focusing on low impact recreational activities that are compatible with the protection of biological resources. Pursuant to the Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan the recreational activities would be limited to hiking, bicycling and horseback riding on riding and hiking trails. Until a RMP is completed and approved, only limited management access will be allowed. It is anticipated that once open access is allowed public access will be conducted in accordance with the Site Plan and RMP and will be actively and adaptively managed by changing the frequency, form, numbers, times of day, days of week and month, to minimize conflicts with the principal purpose for which the property was acquired by the Agency – habitat conservation and wildlife use. The main entrance gate will be closed at dawn, by Patrol personnel or Agency staff, and there will be no after-hours activities permitted as this would result in conflicts with the intended wildlife usage of the site; no patrols will be conducted at night. Wildlife cameras are utilized on the Site to monitor wildlife usage. Any trespassing activities caught on camera will be addressed accordingly with the appropriate authorities.

The Final Site Use Plan, Table ES-1, *Measuring Success*, summarizes the proposed activities, goals, objectives, monitoring and evaluation criteria and action plan, including triggers for partial or full closures of the public access. For example, if the annual assessments show conflicts between the public access and the other higher priority activities, habitat conservation and wildlife usage of the site. Section 4 of the Final Site Use Plan details the proposed property maintenance and management as well as the monitoring and maintenance schedule. Appendix 1 to the Site Use Plan provides samples of Annual Reporting Forms that will be used to adaptively monitor and manage the Property. In addition, as stated in the Final MND, page 3-30 and Table 7 of the Site Use Plan, p37, the Agency's private patrol will be utilized to actively manage public access, to protect against theft, vandalism, trespassing on protected areas as well as adjacent properties, controlling access, as may be required, and responding to incidents. Consistent with the Agency's standard operation and maintenance of its open space areas as well as the site specific RMP, general site maintenance, including, but not limited to, trash pick-up and as-necessary graffiti clean-up will be conducted by the Agency's on-call habitat maintenance contractors to keep the site in good repair. In addition, Agency staff, in coordination with its contractors and patrol officers will be responsible for daily opening and closing the main access gate to the site at dawn and dusk.

Since the proposed trail within the site is only approximately one-half mile long, it is anticipated that it will be used by residents and some visitors to the O'Neill Regional Park but would not, by itself,



generate regional traffic beyond what's already in the area. In addition, staff and Agency contractors would visit the site to conduct surveys and restoration activities, provide fuel load maintenance, general maintenance services, security and ensure site's proper operation. Agency staff will continue to visit the site every month and, as needed, based on reports from the patrol personnel and the public. In addition, patrol officers will continue to visit the site up to two days a week. Patrol officers conduct necessary roving patrol needed to deter potential crimes and various types of trespassing. Patrol officers also conduct checks of entry gates and perimeter fence lines for any breaches. Site patrol activity logs are prepared and submitted to the agency monthly or upon request. In case of urgent incidents, the patrol officers immediately contact Agency staff, who in turn coordinate and schedule a contractor to complete any necessary general or specific maintenance needed all site activities. In the future, the Agency could scale-up patrols on the site as may be required in the Site specific RMP.

During demolition activities, regular patrols and site assessments will continue, but also the demolition contractor will be expected to have total control of the work area to ensure that the site is secure and appropriately maintained for the duration of the demolition activities.

Existing Site Conditions and Existing Uses

Land Use

The approximately 33-acre site allows for very low-density home sites which must average two acres per dwelling unit. The site was previously used as an equestrian center for approximately 50 years. As such, the site has various structures related to this use, including fences, corrals, an open hay storage barn, a small office and restrooms. There is a natural creek that runs north and south on the property. Improvements have been made to the creek, which placed the flow underground near the parking and equestrian area. The undeveloped site includes local native vegetation, non-native vegetation, ornamental vegetation, and an ephemeral stream and pond.

Hydrology/Drainage

Most of the property is located in Flood Zone X and not in a Special Flood Hazard Zone per FEMA Panel 060212 - 06059C 0336J and 0338J dated 12/03/2009. Zone X is an area that is determined to be outside the 100- and 500-year floodplains. The area along the street, which includes the equestrian improvements, is in Zone A. These area areas are subject to inundation by a one percent-annual-chance flood event determined by detailed methods.

Soil and Topography

The site topography consists of gently rolling terrain along the street and rugged hills along the east side of the property. On-site elevations range from approximately 925 feet near the intersection of Live Oak Canyon and Trabuco Canyon Roads to 1,015 feet near the easterly property line. Soils mapped by the USDA/NRCS within the parcels primarily consist of Cieneba sandy loam (eroded) on 30 to 75 percent slopes, with Soboba cobbly loamy sand on 0 to 15 percent slopes mapped along the western and southern portions of the survey area and Botella clay loam on 9 to 15 percent slopes in the northwestern portion of the survey area. Soil textures observed on-site were generally consistent with those mapped by the Soil Survey, with the streambed of the Live Oak Canyon Drainage primarily consisting of sediment

deposition as fine to gravelly sand.

Vegetation Communities

A biological survey conducted on the property observed one special-status vegetation community on-site – Southern Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest, and five other relatively distinct vegetation communities: Coast Live Oak Woodland, Coastal Sage Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, Mule Fat Scrub, ornamental vegetation, and disturbed habitat. A total of nineteen wildlife species were observed including those common to woodland and scrub habitats such as California scrub jay, red-tailed hawk, American crow, acorn woodpecker, California towhee, and California ground squirrel. The entire property is within an area mapped as USFWS-designated Critical Habitat for coastal California gnatcatcher, with only portions mapped as coastal sage scrub suitable to support the species. The southern portions of the property, located adjacent to Arroyo Trabuco, are mapped as USFWS-designated Critical Habitat (Sub Unit 10b) for arroyo toad.

Oak Woodlands

The site contains areas mapped as oak woodlands areas in the Foothill/ Trabuco Specific Plan Area Oak Woodlands Map, Exhibit II-4). A tree inventory was completed by a Certified Arborist as part of the 2019 site-specific Biological Technical Study for the project. The tree inventory determined the location, quantity, and health of the trees present onsite. Data recorded for each tree included tree species, number of trunks, diameter at breast height (dbh), tree height, canopy width, and qualitative ratings on aesthetics and health. Trees were tagged, mapped on an aerial photograph, recorded with a GPS unit, and evaluated. The results of the tree survey included 3.3 acres of Coast live oak riparian woodland and 9.4 acres of Coast live oak woodland. There are 733 trees located on the Property. The species with the highest number of trees on the Property is coast live oak with 459 trees. On average, the coast live oak trees have 1.4 trunks per tree with a main trunk dbh of approximately 15 inches. The average height is 31 feet, and the average canopy is 27 feet in diameter. Live Oak Canyon Creek, which conveys flows from north to south along the western boundary of the Property, is comprised of a relatively broad riparian corridor primarily consisting of coast live oak riparian woodland vegetation. The riparian canopy is primarily comprised of mature coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) trees. Coast live oak woodland vegetation is mapped primarily on the northern and southeastern portions of the Property. Isolated stands also occur in between developed portions of the Property. The vegetation is predominantly comprised of mature coast live oak trees. This vegetation was mapped separately from the riparian corridor based on distance from the Live Oak Canyon Creek. The proposed site is a mitigation site and none of the oak woodlands mapped on the site will be disturbed, no trees will be removed as part of the project.

Recreation/Trails

The Project is within the Trabuco Canyon Specific Plan (Specific Plan) Area. The Specific Plan has designated a trail, the Coyote Connection trail, running west to east through the northern portion of the site. Additionally, the Orange County Major Riding and Hiking Trails and Off-Road Paved Bikeways Map proposes a riding and hiking trail through the entire west side of the property heading north from the O'Neill Regional Park Main Entrance.



Jurisdictional Resources

The project is located within the San Juan Creek Watershed. The average annual precipitation within the watershed ranges from 13 inches near the coast to 18 inches in the mountains. The FEMA maps indicate that the survey area along the western boundary (associated with the Live Oak Canyon Drainage floodplain) is within the 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard Zone (Zone A), with a small portion at the southern end within the 0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard Zone (Zone X), and the remainder of the survey area in an Area of Minimal Flood Hazard (Zone X). All jurisdictional features on-site are ephemeral and convey storm flows generally north to south through the property. Only non-wetland waters of the U.S. were observed onsite during the preliminary biological survey in 2017. Tributary to Arroyo Trabuco, flows from the Live Oak Canyon Drainage eventually discharge into San Juan Creek near San Juan Capistrano approximately eight miles to the southwest, and ultimately to the Pacific Ocean. The Unnamed Drainage in the southeastern portion of the property does not convey flows to downstream waters.

Wildlife Corridors

A wildlife corridor is designated on the site (Foothill/ Trabuco Specific Plan Area, Exhibit II-3) along western boundary of the site along Live Oak Canyon Road and generally following the Live Oak Creek. Prior to conducting the wildlife movement study on the Property, as part of the site-specific Biological Resources Study (2019), wildlife biologists inspected aerial photography and topographic maps to identify potential wildlife corridors across the Property. In addition, the site was further inspected for potential corridor routes and a walkover survey was conducted to locate any evidence of wildlife movement (e.g., tracks, scat, trails, etc.). Motion-activated wildlife cameras were also installed at locations with potential to facilitate wildlife movement across the Property and into or away from O'Neill Regional Park and the Wren's View Preserve. Open space on the Property is contiguous with larger areas of open space in the region. The landscape matrix around the Property is generally undeveloped, broken primarily by Live Oak Canyon Road and rural residential and commercial development primarily along Trabuco Canyon Road and Live Oak Canyon Road. The Property is bound to the west and south by these two roadways but large culverts beneath both roads offer passage opportunities for wildlife to travel to and from O'Neill Regional Park which is located opposite both roadways from the Property. The Property directly abuts the Wren's View Preserve open space area managed as a mitigation property by the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA). Collectively, the relatively undeveloped nature of the landscape is highly conducive to regional wildlife movement. Opportunities for movement within the Property are also abundant as the Property contains several open pathways lined with vegetation including firebreaks along ridgelines, streambeds with minimal understory vegetation and tall tree canopy, and minimally used dirt roadways beneath the oak understory. The following species were documented utilizing the Property likely as part of their regional travel routes: mountain lion, southern mule deer, coyote, striped skunk, and common gray fox. Other wildlife species with large home ranges are also likely to travel through the site but were not specifically documented. There is no development proposed on the site that would impede the movement of wildlife on the site. In fact, the proposed demolition of remnant equestrian facilities would remove existing barriers to wildlife movement on the site.

Justifications

There are no requests for deviations from development standards being made as part of this Site Development Permit application.

The Project site is within the Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan and zoned as Trabuco Canyon Residential (TCR) District, which provides for the development and maintenance of low density, single-family residential development in a manner that is rural in character and compatible with areas of steep to gently sloping terrain and biological resources. The SCPP will be a less intense use than the General Plan zoning allows. The proposed project involves demolition of existing remnant equestrian structures, restoration of the site to its natural (open space) condition and providing access to a portion of the County-proposed Coyote Connector Trail that traverses the property. The project does not cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect conflict. The proposed project would not require any change to the General Plan land use designation or zoning assigned by the County. The land would continue to be used as part of the Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan's Trabuco Canyon Residential (TCR) District. No structures are being proposed as part of this project, as such, no impact would occur. In addition, the portion of the Coyote Connector Trail that traverses the property is included in the County Master Plan of Regional Riding and Hiking Trails as well as the Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan Exhibit II-8: Recreational Plan for the Specific Plan Area. Riding and hiking trails are permitted accessory uses under the TCR District. The project does not involve any building construction or mass grading.

Requested Approvals

Site Development Permit

To allow for the demolition of existing remnant equestrian structures and restoration of the site to its natural (open space) condition.