

SECTION 2

DESCRIPTION OF THE ESCONDIDO SUBAREA

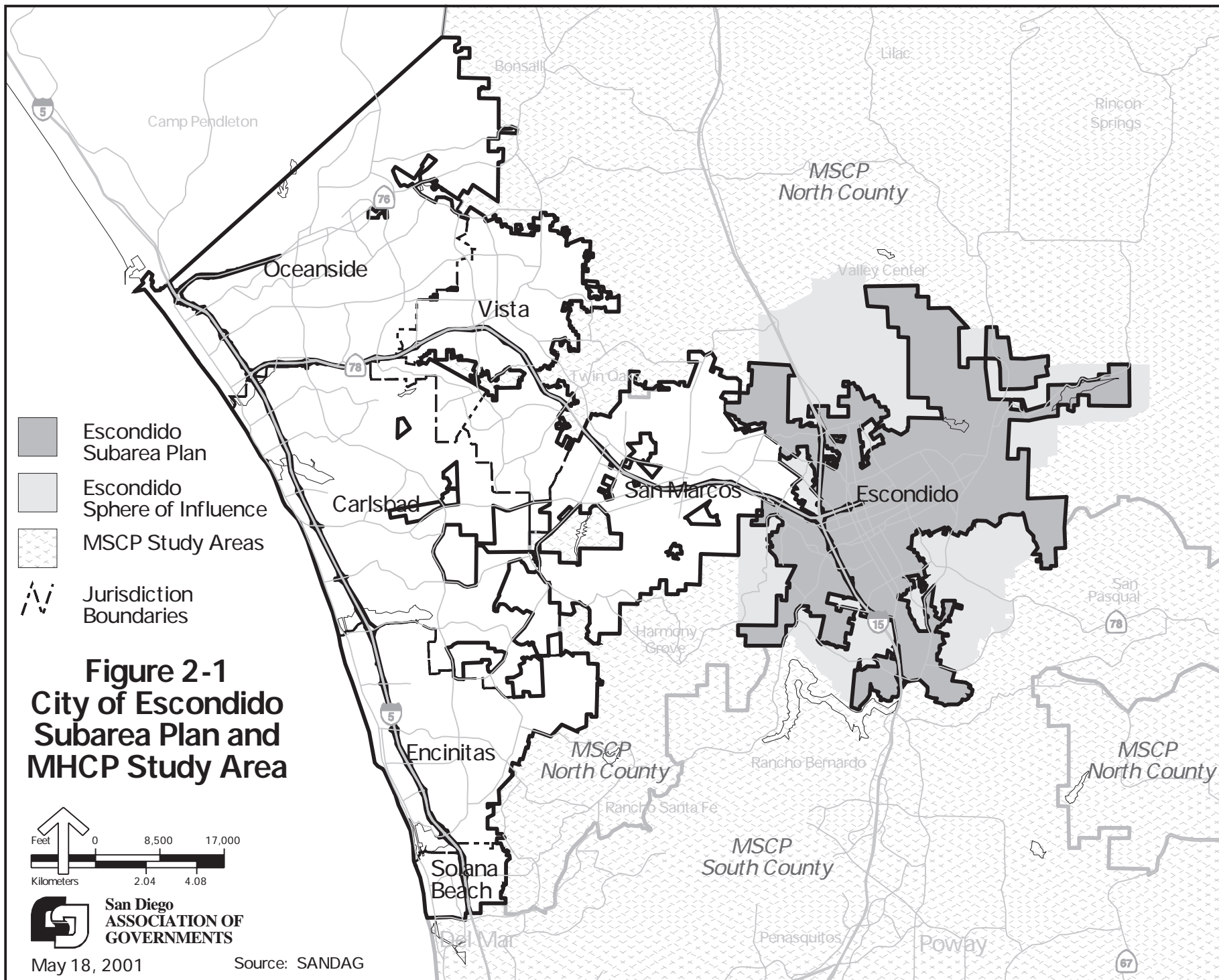
2.1 REGIONAL LOCATION

The city of Escondido is the easternmost incorporated city within the MHCP subregion (Figure 2-1). Escondido is bounded on the north by the community of Valley Center and unincorporated areas of San Diego County, on the east by unincorporated areas of San Diego County, on the south by the San Pasqual Valley (including Lake Hodges) and the MSCP planning area, and on the west by the city of San Marcos within the MHCP subregion. The Escondido Subarea Plan includes the incorporated city limits plus approximately 3,000 acres owned by the city in the unincorporated areas (i.e., Lake Wohlford, Valley Center Road area, and isolated parcels with existing or planned utility improvements). The subarea plan abuts the approved Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) preserve area and the North County MSCP planning area within the unincorporated areas.

The city was incorporated in 1880. The Escondido Subarea Plan currently encompasses an area of approximately 24,624 acres. Within its city limits, Escondido has an estimated population of 120,000 people and 44,254 households. The expected population at full buildout is approximately 150,000 to 165,000 people (SANDAG 1996; City of Escondido General Plan 1990).

The city supports regionally important biological resources in its foothill, native scrub habitats (e.g., coastal sage scrub and chaparral) and in its wetlands and woodlands (e.g., oak and riparian forests). Because the city is mostly built out, remaining larger blocks of native habitat are restricted to the city's periphery, adjacent to undeveloped portions of the unincorporated county land.

Remaining habitats in the city provide two primary landscape linkages: (1) east-west across the northern portion of the city, between the county of San Diego and north San Marcos and (2) east-west across the southern portion of the city, as part of the San Pasqual River Valley corridor. The southern habitat linkage, in particular, is considered essential for maintaining natural genetic exchange and population connectivity for the California gnatcatcher and coastal cactus wren populations in the



San Pasqual River Valley. These east-west linkages in the northern and southern portions of the city, and other biological resources, are described in Section 3.

2.2 LAND OWNERSHIP AND LAND USES

The majority of land in Escondido is privately owned and currently used or zoned for residential, commercial, or agricultural land uses. The following sections detail patterns of land ownership and use relevant to conservation planning in the city.

2.2.1 Land Ownership

Figure 2-2 illustrates land ownership patterns throughout the city. Of the 24,624 acres of land in the Escondido Subarea Plan area, approximately 60 percent (14,685 acres) are privately owned. The remaining 40 percent (9,939 acres) of the city's land area is public, administered primarily by the City of Escondido (Table 2-1). Of the 9,206 acres of natural habitats remaining in Escondido, 60 percent is publicly administered, including portions of Kit Carson Park and the 3,058-acre Daley Ranch.

2.2.2 Major Land Uses

Existing (1995) land uses (Figure 2-3) in Escondido are dominated by residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural areas. A significant portion of the city subarea plan (34 percent) is categorized as vacant, undeveloped lands. A portion of the undeveloped lands are designated as conservation area. Daley Ranch, for example, will be managed in perpetuity by the city for the preservation of biological resources while allowing for recreation and educational opportunities (Daley Ranch Master Plan 1998).

Planned (1995) land uses (Table 2-2; Figure 2-4) in Escondido are dominated by residential, transportation, agricultural, park and open space, industrial, and commercial areas. Of the remaining natural habitats, 2,160 acres are designated parks and open space, and an additional 3,058 acres are part of the Daley Ranch.

Table 2-1
GENERALIZED LAND OWNERSHIP

Ownership Classification	Total Acres	Acres of Natural Habitat
City	6,202	5,338
County	22	0
School district	451	18
Water and other special districts ¹	97	32
Subtotal Local	6,772	5,387
State	16	0
Subtotal State	16	0
Bureau of Land Management	125	125
Other federal	10	0
Subtotal Federal	135	125
Private	14,685	3,432
Subtotal Private	14,685	3,432
Road rights-of-way ²	3,016	233
Subtotal Road Rights-of-way²	3,016	233
TOTAL	24,624	9,177

¹Other special districts include several sanitation and fire districts.

²Includes Caltrans state lands.

Source: SANDAG Land Layers 1998

Note: Totals for land layers may not match totals for vegetation layers due to differences in data layers and methods of calculation.

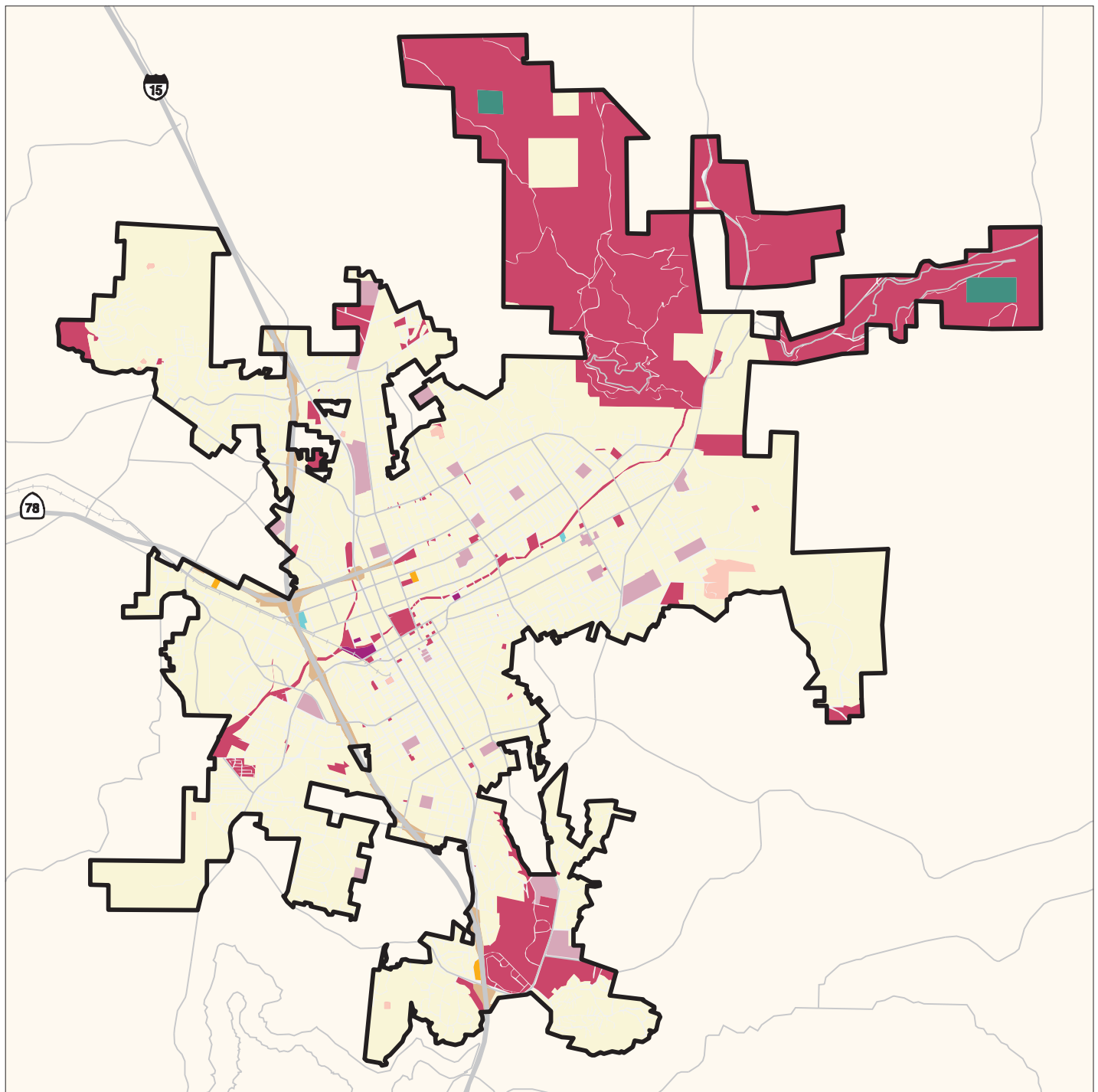
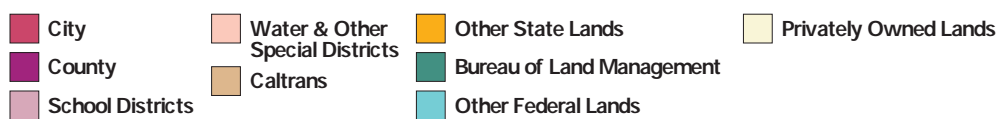
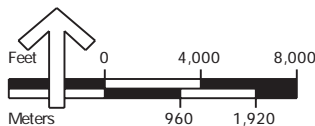


Figure 2-2
City of Escondido Subarea Plan
Generalized Land Ownership



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Source: SANDAG Land Layers, 1998

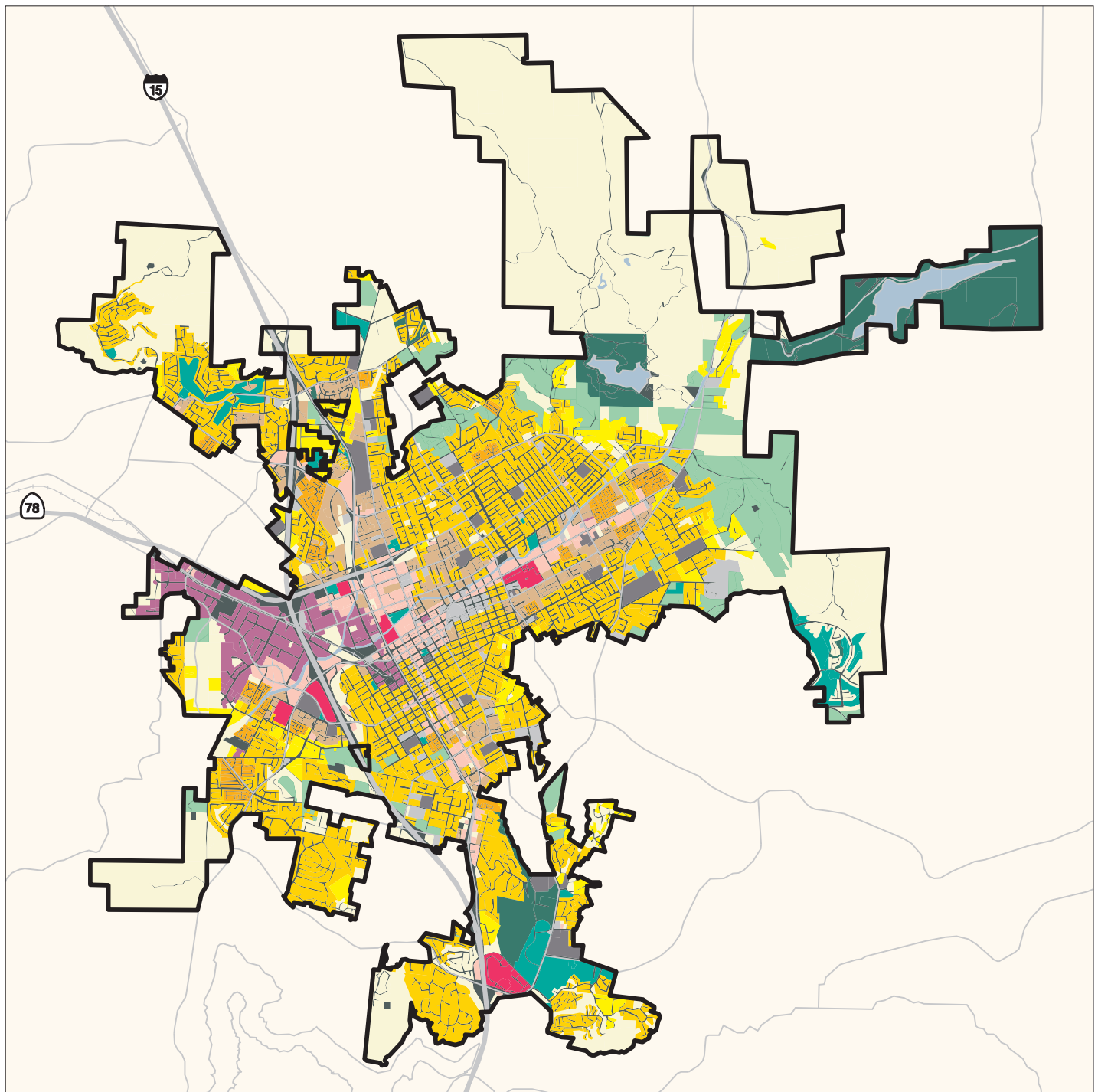
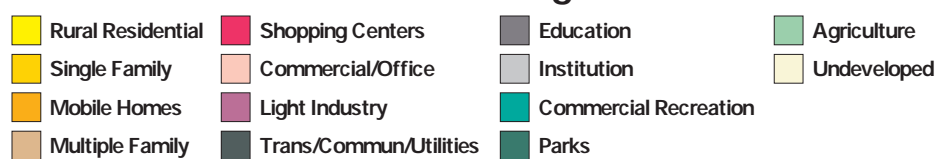
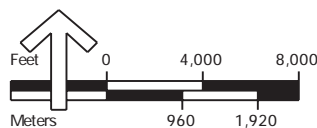


Figure 2-3
City of Escondido Subarea Plan
Generalized Existing Land Use



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Source: SANDAG Land Layers, 1995

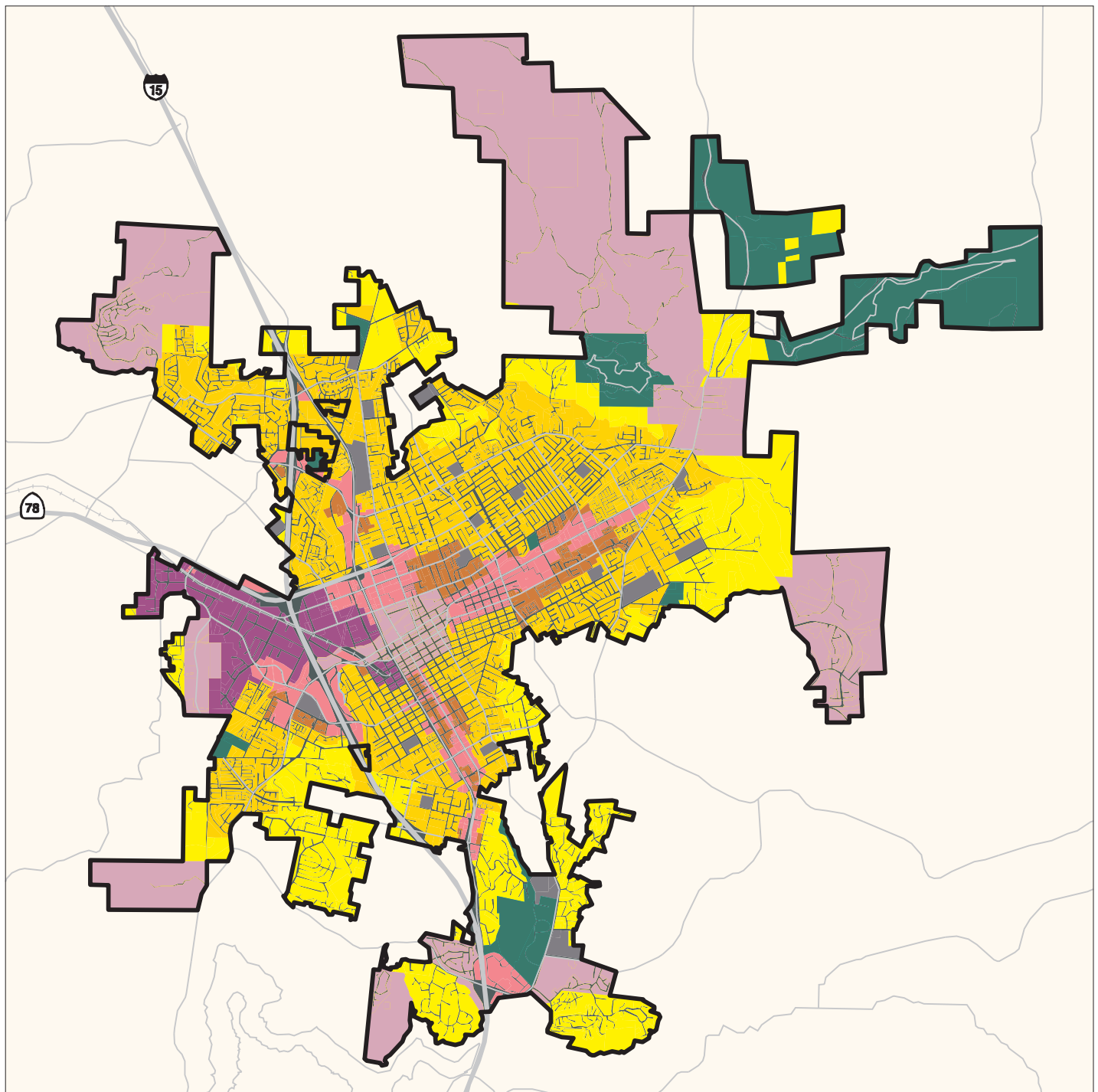
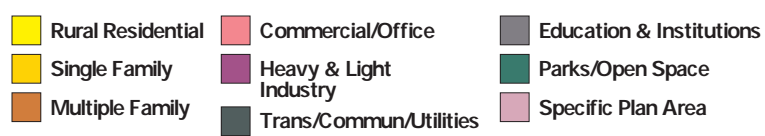
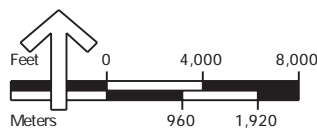


Figure 2-4
City of Escondido Subarea Plan
Generalized Planned Land Use



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Source: SANDAG Land Layers, 1995

Table 2-2
GENERALIZED PLANNED LAND USE

General Land Use	Total Acres	Acres of Natural Habitat
Rural residential (Rural 1, Rural 2, Estate 1, Estate 2)	4,490	1,093
Single family (Suburban, Urban 1)	5,158	166
Multiple family (Urban 2, Urban 3, Urban 4)	506	6
Commercial and office (Planned Commercial, General Commercial, Office, Mixed Use)	1,050	16
Industrial (Light Industrial, General Industrial, Industrial Office)	800	26
Transportation, communications, utilities ¹	3,047	230
Educational and institutional	416	15
Parks and open space ² (Public Lands/Parks)	2,432	2,160
Specific plan area ³	6,720	5,468
Water ²	5	0
TOTAL	24,624	9,179

¹Includes 3,016 acres of road rights-of-way.

²Water acreage for Lake Dixon and Lake Wohlford included in parks and open space totals.

³Includes 3,058-acre Daley Ranch, which is now dedicated open space. Land use calculation is out of date.

Source: SANDAG Land Layers 1995

Note: Numbers may not sum to total as shown, due to rounding. Totals for land layers may not match totals for vegetation layers due to differences in data layers and methods of calculation.

2.2.3 Transportation and Utility Corridors

Primary transportation corridors traversing north and south include Interstate 15, Del Dios Highway, Centre City Parkway, and Bear Valley Parkway/Valley Center Road. Primary transportation corridors traversing east and west include Highway 78, El Norte Parkway, Mission Road, Valley Parkway, and Via Rancho Parkway (Figure 2-5).

The proposed new roads and utilities within or adjacent to the preserve areas to be constructed as city improvement projects are listed in Appendix A. Other roads within specific plan areas are described in Section 4, and would be constructed by the property developer pursuant to approved specific plans and tentative maps. The Daley Ranch Master Plan describes roads through that property.

2.3 GENERAL PLAN, ZONING, AND LOCAL LAND USE REGULATION

Existing city documents, codes, and policies contain numerous references to conservation of open space in the City of Escondido. Most notable are the City of Escondido General Plan; Zoning Ordinance, including the Excavation and Grading Ordinance, and the Environmental Quality Regulations; and the Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space. Implementation of the goals, objectives, and policies contained in these documents may occur through discretionary or ministerial permit review or through realization of city public works projects. The following sections describe the various documents or procedures and the city's ability to apply them in implementing an NCCP subarea plan. The city can use or amend the basic public laws and regulations described below in order to implement the plan. The actions the city will take to ensure plan implementation are described in Section 6.3.2 of this plan.

2.3.1 City of Escondido General Plan

The City of Escondido General Plan, adopted June 1990, is the long-range public policy document guiding private and public development of lands within Escondido. The document is internally consistent and contains vision statements, goals, objectives, and policies for various issues affecting the natural and built environment. A series of 10 Quality of Life Standards is also written into the General Plan to establish minimum thresholds for service levels. Specific goals and objectives, as well as quality of life

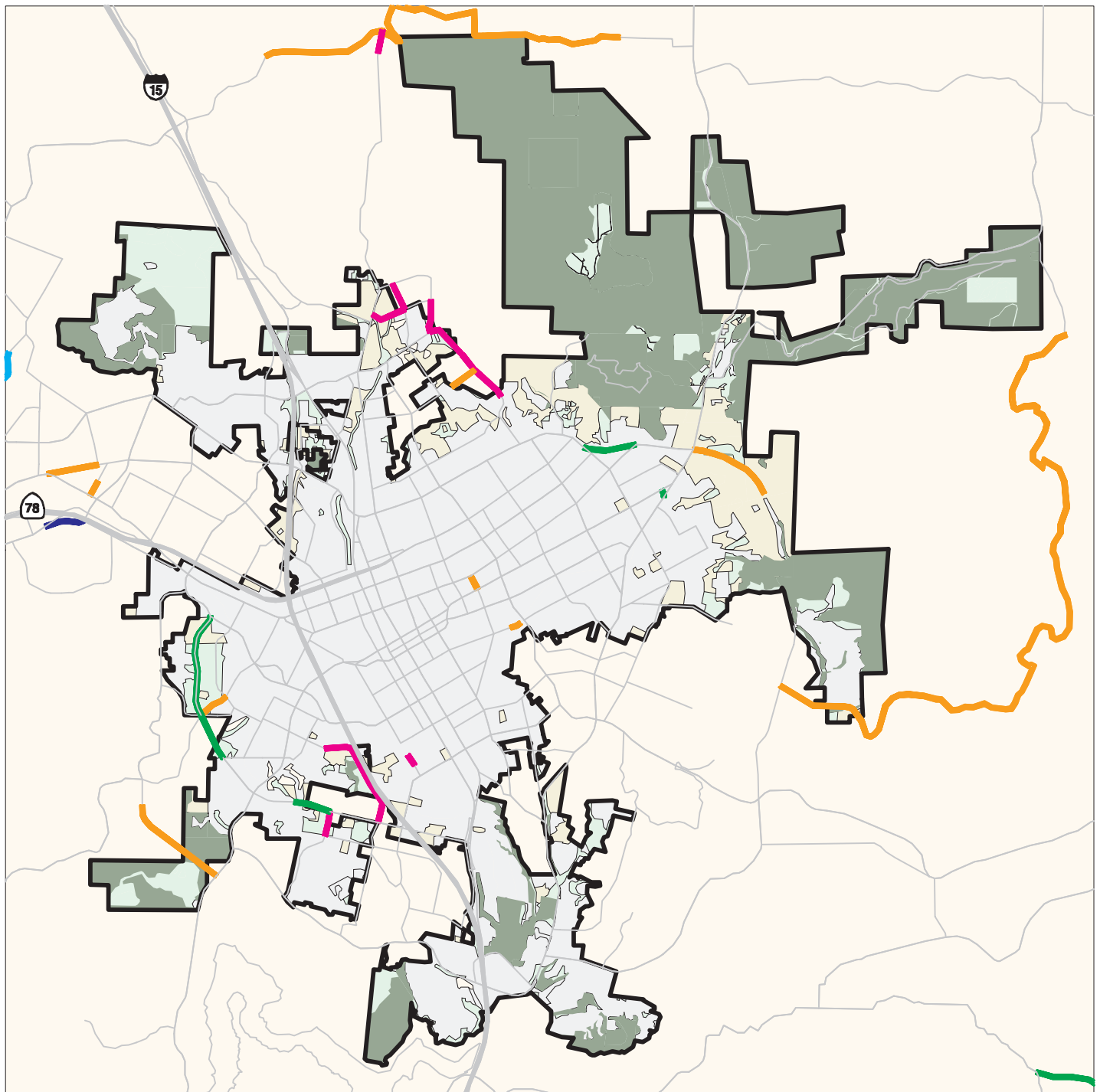


Figure 2-5
City of Escondido Subarea Plan
Circulation Element

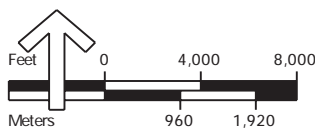
- Natural Habitats
- Agricultural Land
- Developed and Disturbed Land
- Focused Planning Area

- ↗ Freeway
- ↗ Prime Arterial
- ↗ Major
- ↗ Collector
- ↗ Local Collector
- ↗ Rural Collector
- ↗ Local

Existing roads shown in grey



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Source: SANDAG Regional
 Transportation Files, 2000

statements, provide a framework necessary for the city to develop and enforce subsequent ordinances and project-specific conditions regarding resource management. Policies affecting land use, community open space/conservation, and growth management also refer to conservation of sensitive resources.

2.3.2 Escondido Zoning Ordinance

The Open Space (OS) Zone (Article 3, Sections 33-40 through 33-43) provides permanent open space within the community consistent with goals and objectives of the Open Space/Conservation Element of the General Plan and the Public Lands/Parks land use designation. The OS Zone allows limited use of land while conserving open space as a limited and valuable resource. Uses permitted in the OS Zone include agriculture, common open space, land bank and mitigation sites, schools, public recreational uses, and public utilities. Conditional uses include radio and television towers, retreat centers and camps, equestrian centers, firearms and archery ranges, and private recreational uses.

The Flood Plain (FP) Overlay Zone (Article 4, Sections 33-50 through 33-56) provides land use regulations for property situated in designated floodplains of rivers, creeks, streams, and water courses and is applied as a supplement to the basic underlying land use zone. Development in the FP Zone that would cause stream channel alteration, affect the capacity of the floodway, or unduly increase flood heights is restricted.

Open Space Development Standards (Article 5, Sections 33-70 through 33-77) provide regulations for development of lands identified by the Open Space/Conservation Element as having open space value. Such lands may contain slopes, vegetated conservation areas, and/or natural drainage courses not otherwise defined as floodways. Like the FP regulations, the requirements of this section are in addition to the property development standards of the underlying zone. Among other things, the section provides that natural features are protected and natural vegetation shall remain undisturbed except as necessary for approved construction. Prior to any disturbance or development, a development permit must be approved. The development permit must demonstrate that the project conforms with the goals and objectives of the Open Space/Conservation Element of the General Plan. Decisions may be appealed to the Planning Commission and City Council.

2.3.3 Excavation and Grading Ordinance

The Excavation and Grading Ordinance (Article 55 of the Zoning Ordinance) ensures that development projects protect the natural topographic character and integrity of the environment. Grading, defined as any excavating or filling, must be in conformance with a grading permit issued by the building official. Clearing, defined as the modification, trimming, pruning, destruction, or removal of vegetation, must be in conformance with a vegetation removal permit unless the project is otherwise addressed in a valid discretionary approval. Submittal and review requirements detail the need to identify biological habitats, areas of disturbance, setbacks, and mitigation measures.

The article establishes a Hillside and Ridgeline Overlay (HRO) District, generally encompassing parcels with a slope of 15 percent or greater on any portion of the parcel, and/or located in proximity to an identified intermediate or skyline ridge, and located in an area that has not been developed to its full potential. Development proposals in the HRO must submit slope analyses, identify sensitive species or habitats (indicating retention, relocation, or removal), and identify possible visual impacts. Specific findings must be made prior to approval of projects in the HRO, including findings that the project is in scale with and compatible with surrounding scenic and open space resources, and that the development respects and preserves the natural landform, vegetation, and wildlife of the project site.

For the vegetation removal permit, findings must be made that the clearing is in conformance with applicable state and federal requirements, that proper environmental review has been completed, and that the proposed clearing or grading is not premature with regard to future discretionary actions and preservation options. The city may attach conditions to the vegetation removal permit. Protection and replacement standards include making every feasible effort to preserve sensitive biological habitat and species, recording deed restrictions to notify future property owners of responsibility for continued maintenance, and onsite or offsite mitigation at a ratio of 1:1 or higher. Violations of the Excavation and Grading Ordinance are punishable by a fine of \$1,000 per day and a 5-year period during which the city may deny grading or clearing permits on the property.

2.3.4 Environmental Quality Regulations

The Environmental Quality Regulations (Article 47 of the Zoning Ordinance) implement the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for development projects in the City of Escondido. As required by CEQA, Article 47 lists specific activities that fall within certain classes of exemption, such as ministerial projects and categorical exemption projects. The article also states that even though a project may otherwise be eligible for an exemption, no exemption will be granted in the following circumstances:

1. Grading or clearing activities that disturb, fragment, or remove habitats of state or federally listed species and archaeological and cultural resources.
2. Parcel maps, plot plans, and all other discretionary development projects that affect sensitive, threatened, or endangered species and their habitats; archaeological and cultural resources; wetlands; designated stream courses; unstable soils; and other factors requiring special review.

Article 47 requires reporting programs to ensure that all required mitigation measures for development projects are properly and fully implemented. The growth management element of the General Plan also contains quality of life standards to be considered in comprehensive planning efforts as well as individual project review. The degree to which a project, and the area in which it is located, conforms with the quality of life standards is an issue in determining thresholds of significance under the Environmental Quality Regulations.

2.3.5 San Dieguito River Valley Focused Planning Area

Article 75 of the Zoning Ordinance establishes design guidelines and provides for comprehensive planning within the San Dieguito River Valley Focused Planning Area with regard to General Plan policies for visual impacts and preservation of significant natural resources. The objective is to protect habitat and water resource values of the area by allowing development compatible with natural resources, including ridgelines, hillsides, biological habitat, cultural resources, and visual quality. The provisions of the article act as an overlay zone applicable to all public and private developments located within the Focused Planning Area, defined as areas visible to the Lake Hodges

watershed. All requests for building permits, plot plans, business licenses, and discretionary permits must be reviewed for compliance with the overlay zone. Guidelines address grading, design, accessory structures, landscaping, and fencing. Findings must be made that development is in conformance with the goals and objectives of the San Dieguito River Valley Regional Park Focused Planning Area and the Hillside/Ridgeline Overlay Districts. In particular, the grading must be kept to a minimum and development must respect and preserve the natural landform, geologic features, existing streambeds, vegetation, significant tree cover, and wildlife of the area.

2.3.6 City of Escondido Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space

The Master Plan for Parks, Trails, and Open Space was initiated as part of the General Plan Community Facilities Element in the early 1990s and was adopted by the City Council in June 1994. The Master Plan serves as a guide to developing a comprehensive and integrated open space system to achieve quality of life standards set forth in the General Plan. A conceptual “wildlife corridor” is identified in the plan that connects key habitat areas in a continuous link around the perimeter of the city. These habitat areas include the Deer Park County Reserve, Lake Dixon, Daley Ranch, Lake Wohlford, and San Dieguito River Valley Regional Open Space Park. Tributary corridors also link undeveloped county areas north and east of the city. The Master Plan proposes to work with the property owners in these areas to set aside sufficient lands when development plans are proposed. The plan also recognizes ongoing regional open space planning efforts such as the NCCP, MHCP, and the North County Subarea Plan for the MSCP being prepared by the County.

Five types of open space categories are identified for aggregation into the conceptual system, resulting in a wildlife corridor with associated preserve areas: Wildlife Corridors, Natural Resource Preserves, Regulatory Protected Open Space, Biological Mitigation Areas, and Park and Trail Related Open Space.

The Master Plan also describes the information needed to assess a request to modify the width or location of a wildlife corridor: Detailed biological data are required from a qualified biologist, and the city is responsible for monitoring the overall alignment of the corridor to ensure that development proposals maintain effective corridor connections.

2.4 ANTICIPATED MAJOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

A number of anticipated major Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) have been identified by the city. These projects, which may occur over the next 20-year planning horizon, include Circulation Element improvements, public facilities, and utilities. The primary Circulation Element improvements include Citracado Parkway extensions and Bear Valley Parkway/Valley Center Road widening. The primary public facility projects include Daley Ranch Master Plan improvements, Ryan Park Master Plan improvements, and Kit Carson Master Plan improvements. The primary utility improvements include the Hale Avenue Resource Recovery Facility (HARRF) Water Reclamation Distribution System Conveyance System and Northern and Southern Reservoirs, HARRF Water Reclamation Plant Improvements, and related creek enhancement and flood proofing improvements along Escondido Creek. A list of anticipated major CIP projects is included in Appendix A.

Impacts resulting from these projects will be mitigated in accordance with guidelines in this subarea plan (see Section 5.2). Impacts to many upland habitats, excluding occupied coastal sage scrub and cactus scrub, will be mitigated using Daley Ranch credits. CIP impacts to occupied coastal sage scrub and cactus scrub will be mitigated through onsite conservation in the focused planning area (FPA) and/or acquisition or conservation easements of occupied coastal sage scrub and cactus scrub. In order of priority, conservation will be accomplished within (1) the city's FPA, (2) the unincorporated core area defined by the MHCP plan, or (3) unincorporated lands within the city's General Plan area. Impacts to wetlands will be mitigated through creation and enhancement of wetland habitats, such that there is no net loss of wetland function and value.

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