

## SAGE HILL PRESERVE | FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### LAND, LOCATION + ACCESS

#### Where is the Sage Hill Preserve located? . . . How large is it?

Sage Hill Preserve (Preserve) is located at 20525 Elfin Forest Road in Escondido, CA 92029. It falls within the Elfin Forest community of unincorporated San Diego County and is part of the San Dieguito Community Planning Area. In total, the Preserve spans 232 acres and is contiguous to 500+ acres of conserved lands owned and managed by the Christward Ministry Questhaven Retreat.

#### What's unique about the Preserve? . . . Why did the County purchase it?

The Preserve expands the network of conserved lands that provide public access to nature and establish key wildlife corridors through remaining riparian and coastal sage scrub habitat in North County. By purchasing the Sage Hill property and conserving it as open space, the County of San Diego has ensured that the land will be accessible to all residents, and that native species – some rare, threatened, or endangered – will be protected in perpetuity.

#### How did the County acquire the land?

The County acquired the Preserve in partnership with The Conservation Fund and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) in 2009. Much of the Preserve (168 acres) was purchased specifically to provide mitigation for projects undertaken by SANDAG. The remaining 63 acres were acquired utilizing grant funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Section 6 program and cannot be used as mitigation for projects. The Conservation Fund and SANDAG purchased the property from Elfin Forest, LLC for \$11,000,000 on May 19, 2008, and then worked with the County to facilitate the County's ultimate acquisition of the property for long-term ownership and management in 2009.

#### Can I visit the Preserve? Is it open to the public?

Yes! Visitors are welcome to stop by to hike, ride horses, bike, enjoy scenic vistas, and connect with nature seven days a week. The Preserve is open for walk-in access from sunrise to sunset, with vehicle gates opening by 8:00 am. To ensure the sensitive species and habitat is properly protected, public access is only allowed on approved trails.

#### Is parking available?

Although informal parking is available adjacent to the Preserve along Elfin Forest Road, the County has a planned project to enhance the visitor experience by establishing a formal staging area. See the [CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS](#) section below for more information on improvements under consideration.

### MITIGATION BACKGROUND + PLANNING

#### What is SANDAG mitigating for?

SANDAG has a program in place where land is purchased for mitigation of their transportation projects. This program is called the SANDAG TransNet Environmental Mitigation Program. As part of this program, when land is being used for mitigation, it is common for a conservation easement to be placed over the property to ensure the land is protected and preserved forever. A conservation easement was placed over the entire Preserve as part of the requirement for mitigation. In addition to the Conservation Easement, SANDAG entered into the Land Management Agreement with the County of San Diego regarding management of the Preserve. The County is required to manage the land in a way that is consistent with the language in both the conservation easement and the Land Management Agreement. This includes protecting sensitive habitat and species, such as California gnatcatcher and sage scrub habitat, and maintaining a continuous coastal corridor within the boundaries of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP).

### **Is there a guiding planning document for the Sage Hill Preserve?**

A Resource Management Plan (RMP) is the guiding document that establishes management strategies for the preserve, including monitoring protocols for sensitive species and habitat. After acquiring the land in 2009 the County developed the RMP for the property. As part of the Land Management Agreement, there was a requirement to develop a public access plan. The RMP includes the public access plan that includes a trail plan consisting of ~2 miles of trails that utilize existing roads and single-track footpaths within the Preserve to protect sensitive resources and an access point, where a staging area for parking is proposed. The RMP is consistent with the requirements in the conservation easement and Land Management Agreement. The County is currently managing the property consistent with the RMP and therefore is in compliance with the Conservation Easement and Land Management Agreement requirements.

### **When was the RMP approved?**

The draft RMP went out for public review from May 14 to June 14, 2010. The Wildlife Agencies were sent the Draft RMP for review during this time. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provided their letter of concurrence regarding the RMP on June 19, 2018, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) provided their letter of concurrence regarding the RMP on May 29, 2018. The County signed and finalized the RMP on April 20, 2018. The approved RMP serves as the guiding planning document for the Preserve.

### **Did the County receive any comments on the RMP?**

It is standard process for the County to solicit comments from the public on a draft RMP before it is approved. Stakeholder input is an important aspect of the process to complete the RMP, especially when public access is proposed for the preserve. Consistent with the County's process, the draft RMP was released for a public review period in 2010. During the public review period, the County received comments from the Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove Town Council, San Diego County Archaeological Society, Inc., San Diego Mountain Biking Association, Mr. Eric Anderson, and Alan L. Lasnover, MD. Comments ranged from support of proposed public access, maintenance of on-site fuel modification zones, community involvement in maintenance of the Preserve including patrolling and habitat restoration, management of the hydrology on the Preserve, and trail design.

## **CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

### **What improvements are proposed for the Preserve?**

Currently, the County is advancing a planned project to restore sensitive habitat to enhance preservation of the property and improve community access to the Preserve. The project is consistent with the goals of the RMP and is focused on habitat restoration and maintenance of the existing, approx. 2-mile trail network to improve conditions for hiking, biking, and equestrian use.

In addition to the restoration and maintenance efforts already underway, the County is also working on a project to transform the already disturbed, dirt area used for parking off Elfin Forest Road into a designated staging area which may include up to nine parking stalls (including one accessible stall), fencing to control access, a park monument sign, picnic table, trash receptacle, and information kiosk. This project also includes the construction of a small footbridge to facilitate pedestrian access over a seasonal stream.

The full scope and design of staging area improvements will depend on the results of feasibility studies currently underway (e.g. trail counts) and will be informed by community preferences shared with the County by local residents and stakeholders. All proposed improvements are consistent with the approved RMP, the conservation easement and the land management agreement with SANDAG.

## **STAGING AREA**

### **What locations were considered for the staging area?**

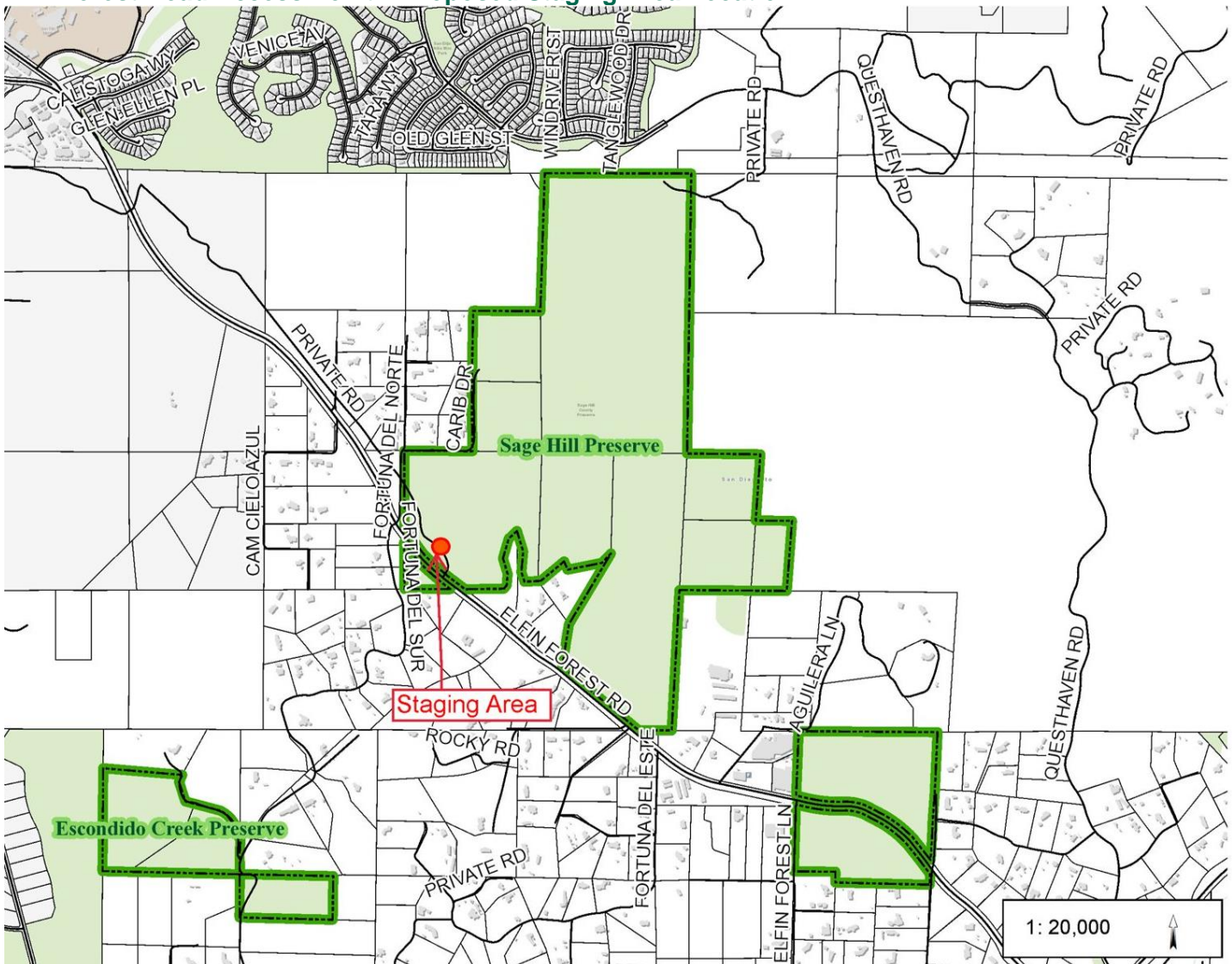
Multiple locations were evaluated for the staging area. Multiple factors were considered when selecting the proposed staging area location, including community input, traffic and safety criteria, and the RMP's requirement that any proposed improvements not impact the Preserve's sensitive resources. Any project, including the staging area project, must be consistent with the RMP, Conservation Easement and Land Management Agreement.

Options considered included:

- locating the staging area on the western side of the parcel (would require access via private roads)
- purchasing additional land specifically for a staging area to the north of the current property; or
- formalizing the existing access point off Elfin Forest Road.

Of all the potential locations, the Elfin Forest Road access point (see map below) is the most suitable because it's already owned by the County, is currently used by the community to access the Preserve, is already disturbed, is easily accessible from a County-maintained road, and is an approved access point in the RMP. As such, new improvements would comply with the adopted RMP and trail plan (no new impacts to biological or cultural resources) and could be completed at a reduced cost to taxpayers.

### Elfin Forest Road Access Point + Proposed Staging Area Location



### Why does the parking/ staging area need to be “formalized?” . . . What would that entail?

Visitors to the Preserve already park in the disturbed, dirt zone as well as along Elfin Forest Road. Formalizing the staging area will provide a *designated* place for trail users to park while visiting the Preserve, assist the County and local Sheriff's Department with enforcement to ensure proper use of the Preserve during posted hours of operation, and help alleviate parking on private roads. Formalizing the staging area will also improve access to opportunities for all San Diegans to experience nature through the addition of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant, accessible parking stall.

To complete this transformation, minor grading would be required to smooth the existing surface and make it suitable for parking. The finished surface would be decomposed granite except for the accessible stall and access lane, which

would both be concrete. Lodge poles and/or wheel stops would delineate the parking stalls and set a carrying capacity for the site. No parking signs would be installed outside the designated parking zone to encourage visitors to park in official stalls, and new lodge pole fencing would run the perimeter of the staging area and connect to existing lodge pole fencing. Compliance with parking regulations would be enforced by Park Rangers.

## **TRAFFIC SAFETY + IMPACTS**

### **Have you studied the potential traffic impacts of a staging area on the Preserve?**

Yes, to assess the viability and safety of a formalized staging area and analyze its potential impacts on the Preserve and local traffic, the County completed a traffic study for the preferred, Elfin Forest Road location. The study determined that the proposed location *would not result in traffic or safety impacts* and recommended that the County size the staging area to accommodate the maximum parking demand at the Preserve (up to nine spaces). To enhance safety, the traffic study recommended that the County implement the following measures should a staging area be formalized:

- Install a SFS (Speed Feedback Sign) for Southbound Elfin Forest Road traffic approximately 700 feet north of the driveway to alert cars to their speed and help reduce vehicular speeds. – *Installation in progress; estimated completion winter 2021/22.*
- Trim the trees on the east side of Elfin Forest Road between 200 and 300 feet north of the driveway to increase line of sight – *Will be completed as part of the proposed improvements.*
- Provide 4 parking spaces along the road in addition to the 5 spaces that could be accommodated by a proposed staging area. – *Final parking space count will be determined after final plan is approved by the County.*

To build upon the insights gained through the existing traffic study, the County is pursuing additional trail counts at Sage Hill Preserve in December 2021. The County will share these findings with the community at the next virtual public meeting in early 2022 and will make any recommended design changes that would be beneficial to public health, safety, or enjoyment of the Preserve, and align with the RMP and existing easement agreements held by the water agencies.

### **How did the traffic study determine that 9 stalls would be the appropriate number for the Preserve?**

The traffic study estimated future trail users, vehicle trip generation, and parking demand for the Preserve by comparing potential use to a similarly sized preserve with an existing staging area. Additional trail counts are underway at Sage Hill to gauge current use. Early concepts for the proposed staging area included just 5 parking spaces (including one accessible space). The traffic study recommended the addition of 4 dedicated spaces along the road to accommodate maximum parking needs.

### **Vehicles often drive above the posted speed limit on Elfin Forest Road – how will the County address this?**

The County received input from local residents about speeding, so it was examined in the traffic study. The traffic study recommended the installation of a SFS (Speed Feedback Sign) for Southbound Elfin Forest Road traffic to help alert motorists to reduce vehicular speeds. This improvement is in the process of being installed and is anticipated to be completed in winter 2021/22. Combined with the new staging area, the installation of the SFS will improve traffic safety in this area.

### **What if vehicles start parking all along Elfin Forest Road?**

The community currently has the legal right to park along Elfin Forest Road. The intent of the proposed staging area is to provide a safe, formalized alternative to road parking that is sized to meet the maximum anticipated parking demand. Should spillover become an issue, the County will assess the situation and develop appropriate mitigation strategies (e.g. signage, additional enforcement).

### **Vehicles currently park on private roads and trespass on private property to access trails – how will proposed improvements help?**

Establishing a designated staging area and enforcement signage is anticipated to reduce illegal parking and trespassing onto private property. The proposed staging area would formalize the entrance to the Preserve and trails will be identified as 'out and back' trails. If parking along private roads continues to be an issue, the County's Parks and Recreation Operations team will work with residents to find appropriate solutions.



## **TRAILS**

### **How many miles of trails will be open to the public in the Preserve?**

In accordance with the RMP, approximately 2 miles of trails will be open to the public and will accommodate hiking, biking and equestrian uses.

### **Are the ~2 miles of trail a loop system or an out-and-back design?**

The trail system is an out-and-back design and does not facilitate a loop.

### **Will e-bikes be allowed on trails?**

Yes: following the State of California AB 1096, Class 1 and 2 e-bikes are allowed on trails at the Preserve. These classes of e-bikes do not have electric assistance at 20 mph. All trail users must follow Department of Parks and Recreation trail safety rules and use the trails in a way that respects and prioritizes the safety of all trail users.

### **Will any new trails be created within the Preserve?**

No, the RMP explicitly restricts the development of *new* trails within the Preserve. Only existing trails that were approved in the adopted RMP will be maintained and open to the public.

### **Will some existing trails be closed?**

Yes, some user-created trails that are not part of the approved 2-mile trail system will be closed and restored to native habitat to support local wildlife.

### **How will habitat restoration of trails be performed?**

The trails proposed for closure and habitat restoration will be actively restored to coastal sage scrub habitat. The ground is heavily impacted from foot traffic and will require loosening the dirt to a depth of 18 inches prior to revegetation. The container plant material will require supplemental watering to become established. The restored habitat is proposed to be watered by a water truck rather than a temporary irrigation system, because temporary and permanent irrigation systems provide ideal habitat for the Argentine ant, which is known to displace native ants. The proposed plant palette includes California sagebrush, deer weed, buckwheat, white sage, black sage, and our Lord's candle.

## **ACCESS CONTROLS**

### **Could the staging area be fenced off and locked after the Preserve is closed?**

The County is looking at the best options to provide access control to the staging area and the Preserve to maintain safety, while allowing the appropriate amount of passive recreation. There are easements in the area of the staging area dedicated to the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) and Olivenhain Municipal Water District and the County needs to ensure any improvements or access control measures are consistent with the easement requirements. In response to community requests received at the County's virtual public meeting on October 12, 2021, the County is working with San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) and Olivenhain Municipal Water District to explore access control options.

### **How would access to the Preserve be affected by the proposed improvements?**

At present, a locked vehicular gate provides maintenance access to the San Diego County Water Authority and Olivenhain Municipal Water District, as well as County Parks and Recreation staff. This gate will remain as is.

In response to community feedback and Ranger experiences with off-road vehicle activity at night, the County is considering a new, unique pedestrian gate that would allow pedestrians, horses and people in wheelchairs to access the Preserve while preventing small, motorized vehicles. The design is from the USDA Forest Service and combines a "kissing gate" with a horse stile. Wheelchairs can enter the gate, turn around and exit the other side. Horses can walk over the two stiles (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Accessible-Gates.pdf>). The pedestrian gate would be lockable to control access to the Preserve after hours.

## **OTHER PROPOSED AMENITIES**

### **Where would the other proposed improvements be located?**

The County is considering the inclusion of an information kiosk adjacent to the staging area to provide opportunities to realize the environmental education and interpretation goals of the RMP and effectively communicate important

information to Preserve visitors. The kiosk would likely include trail maps, information on prohibitive uses, Preserve hours, and contact information for County staff. To help visitors locate the Preserve, a new monument sign is proposed near the staging area within the right of way. No lighting, restroom facilities, or drinking fountains are proposed for the project.

## **FUNDING + COSTS**

### **What is the projected cost of proposed improvements?**

The total cost of improvements under consideration is estimated at \$2.16 million.

### **Where did the funding come for the project?**

Project funding comes from the County's General Fund and was approved in June 2021 by the Board of Supervisors (BOS).

### **How is maintenance for the Preserve funded?**

Maintenance funding comes from Department of Parks and Recreation's Operation Budget.

## **MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS**

### **How is the Preserve maintained?**

Park staff work before, during and after park hours to maintain a high-quality recreation experience for Preserve visitors. Maintenance projects include but are not limited to: emptying trash, tree and shrub maintenance, stormwater management and erosion control, debris removal, graffiti abatement, protection of natural and cultural resources, and the enforcement of all Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) codes and policies. Prohibitive uses and contact information for DPR will be posted on the proposed information kiosk. The County encourages all Preserve users to report concerns to park staff, the County Sheriff and/or 911.

### **Increased use typically brings increased degradation. Any plans for increased patrols or monitoring following completion of the proposed improvements?**

Park patrols are adaptive and can be adjusted based on current circumstances and needs. Additional signage will be posted to communicate regulations and to educate the public about native vegetation and wildlife. Park staff will continue to revegetate any damaged areas and manage and monitor the Preserve in accordance with the RMP.

### **Who is responsible for opening and closing gate(s) and ensuring all guests have left?**

The Park maintenance team will open/close gates and follow-up with any remaining vehicles.

### **How many visitors do you expect at the Preserve each day?**

The Preserve is currently open for public use. The County does not anticipate a significant shift in usership once proposed improvements have been implemented. To assess current conditions and help project future trends, trail counts are underway. The County will share the results of the counts at the second virtual public meeting in early 2022 and will use this data to refine the project as appropriate.

## **EDUCATION + PROGRAMMING**

### **What types of education and outreach will you offer at Sage Hill Preserve?**

DPR will host educational activities and/or hikes to better connect trail users to this unique environment.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW + MONITORING**

### **What environmental analysis was completed for the proposed improvements at the Preserve?**

Proposed improvements were reviewed to determine what level of environmental analysis would be applicable per the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). For this project, the County will be the lead agency under CEQA and is therefore responsible for completing the environmental analysis. For this project and all other County projects, staff analyzes the proposed project to determine its potential to impact the environment, both directly and indirectly. For the Sage Hill project, the project components that were analyzed include: transforming an already disturbed dirt area used for parking off Elfin Forest Road into a designated staging area and implementing the following amenities: fencing to control access, a park monument sign, picnic table, trash receptacle, and information kiosk. The project also includes the construction of a small footbridge to facilitate pedestrian access over a seasonal stream.

Upon review of all proposed project elements, the County determined that the footbridge could potentially impact a local stream. To address this potential impact, the County conducted a Jurisdictional Delineation, which is a technical study that maps sensitive and protected areas within a stream. Information from the Jurisdictional Delineation was used to design the proposed footbridge so that implementation of the bridge would not impact sensitive resources within the stream. As mentioned previously, the County also conducted a traffic study for the proposed Sage Hill improvements. This study was conducted to inform the design for the project, but also verified that the proposed improvements would not result in significant traffic impacts. Parking is not required to be analyzed per CEQA. However, the County completed a technical analysis to determine the adequate level of parking for the Sage Hill Preserve; the results of this analysis are described earlier in this FAQ document.

After taking into consideration all elements of the proposed Sage Hill improvements and the results of the technical studies conducted for the project, the County determined that the project would not result in a significant effect on the environment, and therefore is considered categorically exempt from CEQA. Specifically, the proposed project qualifies for five categorical exemptions (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301, 15303, 15304, 15311 and 15333). Additionally, the County reviewed the project to determine if there might be a potential for cumulative impact(s) or and/if there are unusual circumstances related to the proposed improvements that would render them ineligible for a CEQA categorical exemption. The County determined that there would be no cumulative impacts or unusual circumstances related to the project. Finally, the County also analyzed the project to determine if any exceptions or unique circumstances per CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 would apply to the proposed improvements and determined that no such exceptions would apply, and that the proposed categorical exemptions are appropriate.

Depending on the time of year in which improvements are realized, DPR will hire biological monitors and conduct nesting bird surveys to ensure proposed activities do not disturb nesting birds. Additionally, Native American and archaeological monitors will be present during ground disturbing activities to ensure there are no impacts to underground cultural resources.

Per the requirements of CEQA, categorical exemptions are required to be filed by the lead agency (in this case, the County) at the time that a formal action (also referred to as a discretionary action) is taken on a project. The County will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed Sage Hill improvements after the County Board of Supervisors takes action related to the proposed project. At the time that the Board of Supervisors takes action, the Board Letter and other documentation will include information that details how the project qualifies for the exemptions listed above. This is the standard noticing and disclosure process for any CEQA exemption.

### **Does the project comply with the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP)?**

Yes, Sage Hill Preserve is part of the draft North County Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) plan area. The County is working with the Wildlife Agencies and stakeholders to complete the North County MSCP. Once the North County MSCP is adopted, the Sage Hill Preserve will be incorporated into the overall MSCP Preserve. The County currently conducts regular biological monitoring and management of Sage Hill and will ensure that continued monitoring and management efforts are consistent with the North County MSCP requirements once it is adopted. At present the RMP serves as the guiding plan for the Preserve and all proposed monitoring activities are consistent with the RMP.

### **Will the project impact any protected waterways?**

No, the proposed bridge over the intermittent stream will be designed to avoid impacts to Federal or State jurisdictional waters. The County performed a jurisdictional delineation (JD) of on-site water resources during the analysis of the proposed bridge crossing. The JD determined Federal and State jurisdictions of the location of the proposed bridge crossing.

### **Are there any sensitive species in the area?**

Yes, biological surveys identified the presence of eight vegetation types and 239 species within the Preserve. The species detected included 146 plant species (of which 97 were native), 13 butterfly species, four amphibian species (including one non-native), nine reptile species, 48 bird species (including one non-native) and 20 mammal species (including one non-native). Of these species, there are 11 special status species. Special-status species are species that have been assessed and their population status has been found to be in decline or non-sustainable without conservation measures.

being implemented. These species are listed or are candidates to be listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act, California Endangered Species Act, State Species of Special Concern or are found on other watch lists.

The County has conducted informal and formal biological monitoring on site since the Preserve was acquired. Informal surveys include staff assessment of species and habitat on the Preserve during regular site visits and patrols. Formal biological surveys to identify all species on site were conducted in 2009 and repeated at regular intervals consistent with the County's monitoring program.

One of the most commonly observed bird species found on the Preserve was the federally threatened coastal California gnatcatcher. Coastal California gnatcatchers need high-quality habitat for foraging and nesting, both of which can be found on the Preserve.

Through the biological resource surveys, the County has documented diverse habitat types on the Preserve, including Diegan coastal sage scrub, southern maritime chaparral, freshwater marsh, and southern coast live oak riparian forest. These habitat types support various sensitive plant and animal species, including wart-stemmed ceanothus, summer holly, Palmer's sagewort, western spadefoot, coast horned lizard, California mouse, coastal California gnatcatcher, white tailed kite, southern mule deer, and a sensitive bat species (Yuma myotis).

### **Who conducts biological monitoring of the Preserve?**

Biological resources inventory surveys for the Preserve were completed by the County in 2009 when the Preserve was acquired. They were repeated in 2020-2021 to determine what species continue to use the Preserve and ensure that on-site natural resources are successfully protected and managed. The County will continue to conduct on-going monitoring consistent with its monitoring program, and the Preserve will be added to the County DPR Targeted Monitoring Plan by 2024. The Preserve is part of the draft North County MSCP and as such, is not required to perform regular monitoring until the North County MSCP plan is adopted. However, the County continues to perform biological monitoring as part of its commitment to preservation and protection of the natural resources.

### **Has the County conducted any restoration of the property since acquisition?**

Yes, habitat restoration efforts were initiated in the northern portion of the Preserve in the historic nursery location including site cleanup and treatment of invasive plants from 2008-2010. Additionally, there were coastal sage scrub revegetation efforts in 2014. Restoration of coastal sage scrub benefits coastal California gnatcatcher and other coastal sage scrub dependent species.

### **If plants and trees are added, will they be native?**

Yes, restoration activities will include installation of native vegetation to provide suitable habitat necessary to support species that currently utilize the Preserve. For example, restoration will include improvements to on-site coastal sage scrub habitat to support the coastal California gnatcatcher.

## **SAFETY + SECURITY**

### **How will you ensure safety and security at the Preserve?**

Safety and security are top priorities for the County. We strive to be a good neighbor and work closely with local law enforcement and emergency personnel to address concerns as soon as they arise. Park Rangers patrol the Preserve regularly during open hours and address safety concerns as needed.

The proposed information kiosk adjacent to the staging area will communicate important information about the Preserve such as trail maps, prohibitive uses and Preserve hours as well as contact information for the County and local law enforcement. The County expects Preserve visitors to adhere to posted park guidelines and County policies. Rules are essential to maintain order at the Preserve, promote safety and security, and sustain the land and local wildlife.

Signs identifying the Preserve and denoting relevant County ordinances are also located at trailheads on the west and north sides of the preserve. Gates at those access points will remain locked to restrict vehicle access. Signs will be installed to designate legal parking areas in the proposed staging area. The County is collaborating with Public Works to assess the installation of additional no parking signs and will coordinate with the Sheriff's Department and California Highway Patrol to address enforcement of illegal parking should it occur.



It is the responsibility Park staff to regularly patrol the Preserve, and inspect and maintain fencing, gates, and trails to maintain a safe environment. If illegal activity is noted and trending at certain days and times, staff schedules can be temporarily adjusted to investigate the issue and address it in the appropriate manner. Questions for our park maintenance team can be sent to the nearby **Felicita County Park Office, at (760) 745-4379**. If there is a concern that needs to be addressed immediately outside of park operating hours, please call the County Sheriff's Department at **858-565-5200** or **911**.

### **What steps are being taken to address fire safety?**

As part of the RMP the County identified fuel modification zones within the Preserve with guidance from local fire authorities. These zones are regularly maintained by DPR Operations staff trained in fuel modification best practices to secure defensible space between vegetation and structures and keep roads and trails clear. To ensure that proposed improvements continue to align with the expectations of local fire authorities, the County will review potential concepts and designs with County Fire and the North County Fire Protection District and incorporate any feedback into design revisions. Although not always required, the County regularly coordinates with local fire as a best practice when considering proposed improvements to ensure that access points facilitate rapid emergency response.

Additionally, as part of proposed signage improvements, County regulatory ordinances will be posted prohibiting smoking, open flames, off-road vehicles, and weapons.

### **Will there be a camera surveillance system?**

No, a security camera surveillance system is not proposed as part of forthcoming improvements and is not typical for DPR Staging Areas. Park staff will regularly patrol the Preserve and will work with local law enforcement as necessary to address any operational issues.

### **How will you address potential crime, drugs and graffiti at the Preserve?**

Rangers will patrol the Preserve regularly to prevent crime from occurring, and to remind guests of the policies and guidelines that are in place for their safety and for the safety of the land and local environment. If a situation escalates, local law enforcement will also be dispatched. If a concern arises that needs immediate attention, please call the County Sheriff's Department at **(858) 565-5200** or **911**.

## **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

### **How has the County engaged the community in the development of the Preserve?**

Restoration, access, and monitoring for the Sage Hill Preserve have been shaped by over a decade of public engagement commencing with the development of the Preserve's Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 2010. Community feedback and extensive interagency collaboration among the County, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established a solid baseline understanding of existing conditions, restoration needs, and access opportunities for the Preserve, and led to the formal adoption of the RMP in 2018.

To assess opportunities to continue to enhance habitat and secure safe public access to the Preserve, the County has participated in more than a dozen meetings focused specifically on the proposed project with community advocates and stakeholders including the Elfin Forest Town Council, Elfin Forest Trails Committee, Escondido Creek Conservancy, Olivenhain Municipal Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, and local residents. On October 12, 2021, the County hosted a virtual public meeting to update the community on proposed improvements to the Preserve and to solicit feedback on an initial staging area concept. Input received from that meeting and subsequent conversations with community advocates are directly informing the evolution of proposed improvements and exploration of alternative design concepts that prioritize resident preferences while conforming to all applicable site constraints (e.g. no new disturbance per the RMP, existing easements).

The County is currently coordinating with the water agencies to explore access control opportunities, collecting additional trail counts at the Preserve, and reaching out to local residents and organizations for additional feedback. The County will also present potential concepts to the local Sheriff's Department, County Fire, and the North County Fire Protection District for review and comment.

The results of these current efforts will be shared with the community for review and feedback at a second virtual public meeting in early 2022.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **What are the County's next steps for proposed improvements?**

From now until the next virtual public meeting in early 2022 the County is responding to resident inquiries and exploring ways to evolve proposed improvements to address community preferences while adhering to the constraints of the RMP and making sure that safe access to nature is secured for all San Diegans at Sage Hill.

## **CONTACT US!**

### **We'd love to hear your ideas and insights:**

Comments and questions about the Preserve or proposed improvements can be directed to Sr. Park Project Manager Stephanie Kopplin at [stephanie.kopplin@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:stephanie.kopplin@sdcounty.ca.gov), or **(858) 401-0417**.

Questions for the Park maintenance team can be sent to the nearby **Felicita County Park Office, at (760) 745-4379**.

Additional information about Sage Hill Preserve and other proposed development projects is available on the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) website:

<https://www.sdparks.org/content/sdparks/en/AboutUs/Plans/ParksImprovementPlan.html#sagehill>