

VALIANO PROJECT

APPENDIX D

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES REPORT

for the

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

PDS2013-SP-13-001, PDS2013-GPA-13-001,
PDS2013-STP-13-003, PDS2013-TM-5575,
PDS2013-REZ-13-001, PDS2013-ER-12-08-002

APRIL 2015

Prepared for:

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
5510 OVERLAND AVENUE, SUITE 310
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92123

Agricultural Resources Report

Valiano Project

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Prepared for:

County of San Diego

Planning & Development Services
5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 310
San Diego, California 92123

Project Proponent:

Eden Hills Project Owner, LLC

2235 Encinitas Boulevard, Suite 216
Encinitas, California 92024

Prepared by:

Dennis Marcin, County-approved Agricultural Resources Report Preparer

HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.

7578 El Cajon Boulevard
La Mesa, California 91942

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Valiano Project Agricultural Resources Report

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Terms

Agricultural Resource

The term Agricultural Resource refers to any of the following: (1) a site with an active agricultural operation; (2) a site designated as, *and that meets the definition of*, an Important Farmland Category (Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) as defined by the California Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP); and (3) a site with a history of agricultural production based on aerial photography or other data sources identifying agricultural land uses. Examples of other data sources that identify agricultural land use include data from the San Diego County Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures (AWM), the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) land use data, and vegetation data from the San Diego County Planning & Development Services (PDS).

Active Agricultural Operations

Active agricultural operations refer to the routine and ongoing commercial operations associated with a farm, orchard/grove, dairy, or other agricultural business and shall include: (1) the cultivation and tillage of soil; crop rotation; fallowing for agricultural purposes; the production, cultivation, growing, replanting and harvesting of any agricultural commodity including viticulture, vermiculture, apiculture, or horticulture; (2) the raising of livestock, fur bearing animals, fish or poultry, and dairying; (3) any practices performed by a farmer on a farm as incident to or in conjunction with farming operations, including the preparation for market, delivery to storage or to market, or delivery to carriers for transportation to market; and (4) ordinary pasture maintenance and renovation and dry land farming operations consistent with rangeland management. All such activities must be consistent with the economics of commercial agricultural operations and other similar agricultural activities.

Row/Field Crops

For purposes of this report, the term row/field crops is defined to include commodities such as grains and silage, as well as cultivated (i.e., non container stock) outdoor vegetable, flower, and berry crops.

Important Agricultural Resource

An agricultural resource determined to be important pursuant to the County LARA Model.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

°F	Degrees Fahrenheit
A-70	Limited Agriculture (zoning)
AMSL	above mean sea level
APN	Assessor's Parcel Number
AWM	Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures (County of San Diego)
CDC	California Department of Conservation
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
County	San Diego County
CWT	Hundredweight
DCSS	Diegan coastal sage scrub
DU	dwelling unit
DWR	California Department of Water Resources
EIR	Environmental Impact Report
ESA	Environmental Site Assessment
FMMP	Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program
GPA	General Plan Amendment
HARRF	Hale Avenue Resource Recovery Facility
HGSPS	Harmony Grove Sewer Pump Station
HGWRP	Harmony Grove Water Reclamation Plant
HOA	Homeowner's Association
I-	Interstate
kV	kilovolt
LAFCO	Local Agency Formation Commission
LARA	Local Agricultural Resource Assessment
LBZ	Limited Building Zone
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service
PACE	Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement
PDR	Purchase of Development Rights
PDS	Planning & Development Services (County of San Diego)

Acronyms and Abbreviations

RA	Residential or Single-family Residential
RDDMWD	Rincon Del Diablo Municipal Water District
SCS	U.S. Soil Conservation Service
SDCWA	San Diego County Water Authority
SDG&E	San Diego Gas & Electric
SF	Square foot (or - feet)
SR	State Route or Semi-Rural (zoning)
TM	Tentative Map
TPM	Tentative Parcel Map
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
VWD	Vallecitos Water District
WTWRF	Wastewater Treatment and Water Reclamation Facility
ZOI	Zone of Influence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed Valiano Project (Proposed Project) includes an approximately 238.67-acre site in an unincorporated portion of San Diego County (County) near the cities of San Marcos and Escondido. The Project site is located approximately 1.7 miles west of Interstate 15 (I-15) and 0.6 mile south of State Route (SR) 78, at its closest points. Principal site access is from SR-78, Nordhal Road, and Country Club Drive, from which a number of smaller surface streets (e.g., Hill Valley Drive, Eden Valley Lane and Mt. Whitney Road) extend along or near the northern and eastern property boundaries.

The Proposed Project consists of a residential community with 326 single-family dwelling units (DU) and related facilities within a total disturbance area of approximately 127 acres (including areas to be initially graded and subsequently landscaped and/or retained as open space). The residential development is divided into five distinct neighborhoods, with a minimum lot size of 5,630 square feet (SF) and an overall average lot size of approximately 15,050 SF. The proposed development also incorporates a number of related amenities and facilities, including a community recreation area, an on-site wastewater treatment and water reclamation facility (WTWRF) and wet weather storage area, three pump (lift) stations, the retention of an existing barn complex in the southeastern portion of the site, and three potential off-site sewer line options. An area within the site that currently includes approximately 36.5 acres of avocado orchards, portions of which were damaged or destroyed by a recent (2014) wildfire, would be retained as a Project design feature and would be dedicated as an agricultural easement. The agricultural easement would be granted to the County of San Diego to protect the viability of the associated agricultural uses, which may include partial retention of the existing viable avocado orchards, as well as additional potential uses such as vineyards and/or other orchards (e.g., citrus, pomegranates, nuts and olives). The 36.5-acre agricultural easement would preclude future development or other uses that could prevent or diminish the availability and viability of this area for continued agricultural use. Specifically, all non-agricultural uses would be prohibited, including: (1) the construction or placement of any residence, garage, or any accessory structures designed or intended for human occupancy; (2) the construction or placement of any recreational amenities, such as tennis courts or swimming pools; and (3) other non-agricultural related grading or construction that would render any portion of the noted easement unavailable or non-viable for agricultural use. Exceptions to the described prohibitions may include grading and construction for wells, water distribution systems or other activities/facilities required to continue the agricultural operation, as well as fuel management activities required by a written order from the Fire Marshall. The Project owner(s) or Project Homeowner's Association (HOA) would retain an agricultural manager to oversee the continued operation of the orchards, with specific requirements to be included as a Project Design Consideration (and outlined below in Sections 1.2 and 2.4).. Irrigation for the ongoing agricultural operation would be provided from an existing on-site well and related facilities used to irrigate the existing avocado orchards. In addition, uses such as small orchards and gardens would be allowable within individual residential lots on the proposed development. Such uses would constitute an opportunity on smaller lots (i.e., lots of less than one-half acre) to provide transitional/buffer areas with off-site agriculture and/or open space. On larger lots, however, portions of these uses could potentially be subject to Limited Building Zone (LBZ) easements used to partially defer off-site mitigation requirements (as discussed below in this Summary and in Section 2.4).

On-site topography is generally characterized by a north-south trending ridge extending through much of the western and northern portions of the property, a large knoll in the southeastern-most area, several larger drainages flanking these upland features, and generally level terrain in other on-site areas. Surface drainage from most of the Project site flows primarily to the east and south and ultimately enters Escondido Creek. The northern-most portion of the site drains north and west through a number of small unnamed drainages, and eventually flows into San Marcos Creek. Much of the western and northern portions of the site are currently used for commercial agriculture, with extensive areas of active avocado orchards (portions of which were damaged or destroyed in a 2014 wildfire event) and four minor apiary (bee keeping) sites. Existing commercial agricultural operations have occurred more or less continuously on-site, since the late 1960s or early 1970s, with historic agricultural uses extending back to the early part of the 20th Century.

The Project site is located within a semi-rural area encompassing a mix of urban development, agriculture, and open space. Local urban development includes high-density residential and commercial uses to the north (San Marcos) and east (Escondido), with nearby areas encompassing agricultural uses, low- to moderate density residential development and open space. Local agricultural sites include relatively large areas of avocado and citrus orchards adjacent to the southern Project site boundary; orchards and nurseries to the west, south and southwest; and minor greenhouse uses, vineyards and (apparent) row/field crop cultivation to the east. The nursery operations include relatively large areas of ornamental landscaping and fruit trees, as well as lesser amounts of herbaceous crops. Several of the nursery sites encompass open-air container plants, in-ground plantings, and/or enclosed structures, with the latter facilities ostensibly used for temperature- and/or drought-sensitive varieties. As seen in Figure 9, Agricultural Preserves and/or Williamson Act Lands in the Project vicinity include: (1) a 12-acre parcel located approximately 700 feet southeast of the Project site (and within the Project Zone of Influence [ZOI]) that includes both a Williamson Act Contract (No. 77-45) and an Agricultural Preserve (No. 95); and (2) a 35.3-acre Agricultural Preserve (No. 89) located approximately 0.3 mile southwest of the project site (and outside of the Project ZOI). Local open space includes large expanses of natural areas to the west and south, including the 784-acre Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve.

Pursuant to applicable County Guidelines, identified agricultural resources within the Project site encompass approximately 137.16 acres. Specifically, on-site agricultural resources include areas used currently/historically for commercial agricultural operations, as well as applicable areas of California Department of Conservation (CDC)-designated (FMMP) Important Farmlands. Portions of the site not identified as agricultural resources generally include areas not available or suitable for agricultural use due to soil quality, environmental, right-of-way, and/or economic concerns, such as previously developed/disturbed sites, sensitive biological habitats, transmission line easements, and eucalyptus forest/woodland. The County has approved a local methodology that is used to determine the importance of agricultural resources in the unincorporated area of San Diego County, known as the Local Agricultural Resource Assessment (LARA) Model. The LARA Model takes into account six factors, including water, climate, soil quality, surrounding land uses, land use consistency, and slope, in determining the importance of agricultural resources. Based on evaluation under the described LARA Model, the Project site was determined to be an “important agricultural resource.”

The Proposed Project would result in significant impacts to approximately 12.98 acres of on-site important agricultural resources, based on the results of the LARA Model analysis described in Section 2.0. Pursuant to County Agricultural Guidelines, the Project applicant would be required to either: (1) preserve 12.98 acres (1:1 mitigation ratio) of applicable on-site areas (i.e., agricultural resources encompassing CDC Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance candidate soils) as “available and viable” for agricultural use through LBZ (or other) easements; (2) provide off-site mitigation for the noted 12.98-acre impact area at a 1:1 ratio, through the acquisition of agricultural mitigation credits via the County Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program; (3) provide off-site mitigation for the noted 12.98-acre impact area at a 1:1 ratio, through the privately-acquired agricultural easements or lands that meet the intent of the County Agricultural CEQA Guidelines; or (4) provide a combination of PACE mitigation credits and establishment of on- or off-site LBZ or agricultural easements, in appropriate areas that meet the intent of the County Agricultural CEQA Guidelines, totaling 12.98 acres (pursuant to County approval). With the described mitigation, direct Project-related impacts to on-site agricultural resources would be reduced below a level of significance. In addition, if the eastern route segment of the off-site VWD sewer option, extending between Hill Valley Drive and the Casitas del Sol Mobile Home Park (refer to Figure 3e), is ultimately implemented, approximately 0.05 acre of impact to CDC candidate soils would result. Under this scenario, 0.05 acre of mitigation would be required in addition to the 12.98 acres of described mitigation for on-site Project impacts, for a total mitigation requirement of 13.03 acres. This additional mitigation could be implemented either through the PACE Program or a combination of PACE mitigation credits and establishment of on- and/or off-site LBZ easements, as noted above for the Proposed Project.

Project implementation would impact approximately 95.02 acres of Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) Prime Agricultural Land, including active avocado orchards and qualifying soils. The Proposed Project is considered consistent with related LAFCO policies regarding effects to Prime Agricultural Land, however, as the Project would provide “orderly growth” and “logical and efficient public services.” Specifically, this conclusion is based on considerations including: (1) the nearby location of existing and ongoing urban development and related water and sewer district boundaries/infrastructure; (2) the inclusion of Project design elements, such as clustered development, appropriate lot sizes, locations and setbacks, to provide a “logical” transition between nearby urban and semi-rural uses; (3) the use of extensive open space and easements, including a 36.5-acre agricultural easement, to minimize the impact footprint and retain existing agricultural uses (including Prime Agricultural Land); and (4) the fact the Proposed Project would maintain consistency with the County General Plan through the adoption of the associated GPA.

The Proposed Project would not result in significant indirect impacts to existing off-site agricultural operations and/or resources including avocado/citrus and mixed-use orchards, nurseries, row/field crops, greenhouses, vineyards, or Williamson Act contract lands. This conclusion is based on considerations including the nature, location and extent of proposed development and off-site agricultural operations/designations; the inclusion of Project site security fencing; the use of setbacks, landscaping and private orchards/gardens on applicable individual lots to provide transitional uses/buffers and screening; and required Project

conformance with regulatory standards including National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) hydrology and water quality criteria.

Project implementation would not result in substantial air contaminant generation, and would conform to applicable NPDES hydrology/water quality standards. These design and regulatory conformance measures would ensure that interface conflicts such as noise, dust, and odor would not result in indirect impacts that could result in the conversion of agriculture.

Implementation of the projects within the identified cumulative study area (including the Proposed Project) would result in potentially significant cumulative impacts to CDC Prime and Statewide candidate soils. The Project contribution to this impact would be less than considerable, however, based on the following considerations: (1) Project-related impacts to candidate soils would represent only approximately 10 percent of the cumulative total (i.e., 35.06 out of 340.83 acres); (2) under the Proposed Project design, nearly 38 percent of the on-site CDC candidate soils would be preserved (i.e., 21.41 out of 56.47 acres); and (3) impacts to CDC candidate soils from the Proposed Project would be partially offset by the required mitigation for direct on-site and (if applicable) off-site impacts, which would total between 12.98 and 13.03 acres, as described above.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of The Report

Based on County scoping requirements (County 2013a) and criteria contained in the County of San Diego *Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements, Agricultural Resources* (Agricultural Guidelines, County 2007), the purpose of this report includes the following specific goals:

- Identify direct Project impacts to agricultural resources, as well as Design Considerations and/or mitigation measures that would avoid or minimize significant adverse effects from implementation of the Proposed Project.
- Determine potential indirect impacts to surrounding active agricultural operations and/or Williamson Act contract lands from implementation of the Proposed Project.
- Determine the significance of cumulative impacts to agricultural resources and active operations from the implementation of identified cumulative projects (including the Proposed Project).
- Determine the importance of agricultural resources and Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) “Prime Agricultural Land” within the Project site, and assess potential impacts to those resources from implementation of the Proposed Project.

1.2 Project Location and Description

Project Location

The proposed Valiano Project (Proposed Project or Project) includes an approximately 238.67-acre site in an unincorporated portion of San Diego County (County) near the cities of San Marcos and Escondido (Figures 1 and 2). The site includes 13 individual parcels, with the following Assessor’s Parcel Numbers (APNs): 228-31-313, 232-01-301 through 232-01-303, 232-02-055, 232-49-201, 232-50-018 through 232-50-023, and 232-50-024 (refer to Figure 2). The project site is located approximately 1.7 miles west of Interstate 15 (I-15) and 0.6 mile south of State Route (SR) 78 at its closest points. Principal site access is from SR-78, Nordhal Road, and Country Club Drive, from which a number of smaller surface streets (e.g., Hill Valley Drive, Eden Valley Lane and Mt. Whitney Road) extend along or near the northern and eastern property boundaries. A number of additional paved and unpaved roads are present in the Project vicinity and may also provide site access, including Barham Drive, East/West Mission Road and La Moree Road (Figure 2).

Project Description

As shown on Figure 3a, the Proposed Project consists of a residential community with 326 single-family dwelling units (DU) and related facilities within a total “disturbance” area of approximately 127 acres (including areas to be initially graded and subsequently landscaped and

retained as open space). The residential development is divided into five distinct neighborhoods, with the neighborhood locations, associated lot configurations, and grading limits shown on Figure 3a. The proposed development also incorporates a number of related amenities and facilities as outlined below, including a community recreation area, an on-site wastewater treatment and water reclamation (sewer) facility (WTWRF) and wet weather storage area, three pump (lift) stations, an existing barn complex in the southeastern portion of the site that would be retained, and a number of off-site roadway improvements (Figures 3b and 3c), as well as three potential off-site sewer options to the noted WTWRF (Figures 3d through 3f).

Community Recreation Areas

The 2.1-acre Neighborhood Park, located in the southeast portion of the Project site within Neighborhood 5 adjacent to Country Club Drive would include turf areas, seating, picnic facilities, a shade structure, a horse hitching station, a small tot-lot or playground, and active learning areas or structures. The public Neighborhood Park would include off-site parking and restroom facilities.

The 1.6-acre private Central Oak Park is located in the central portion of the Project site off Community Parkway. It would be connected to neighborhood walks and the public multi-use trail. The park would maintain existing habitat, and provide picnic areas and walking trails. The park would be privately maintained.

The Community Park and Recreation Center located off of Mt. Whitney Road would be a private facility for residents. The 2.3-acre facility would include a small community building, pool and lawn area, as well as restroom and maintenance facilities. Limited street parking would be provided.

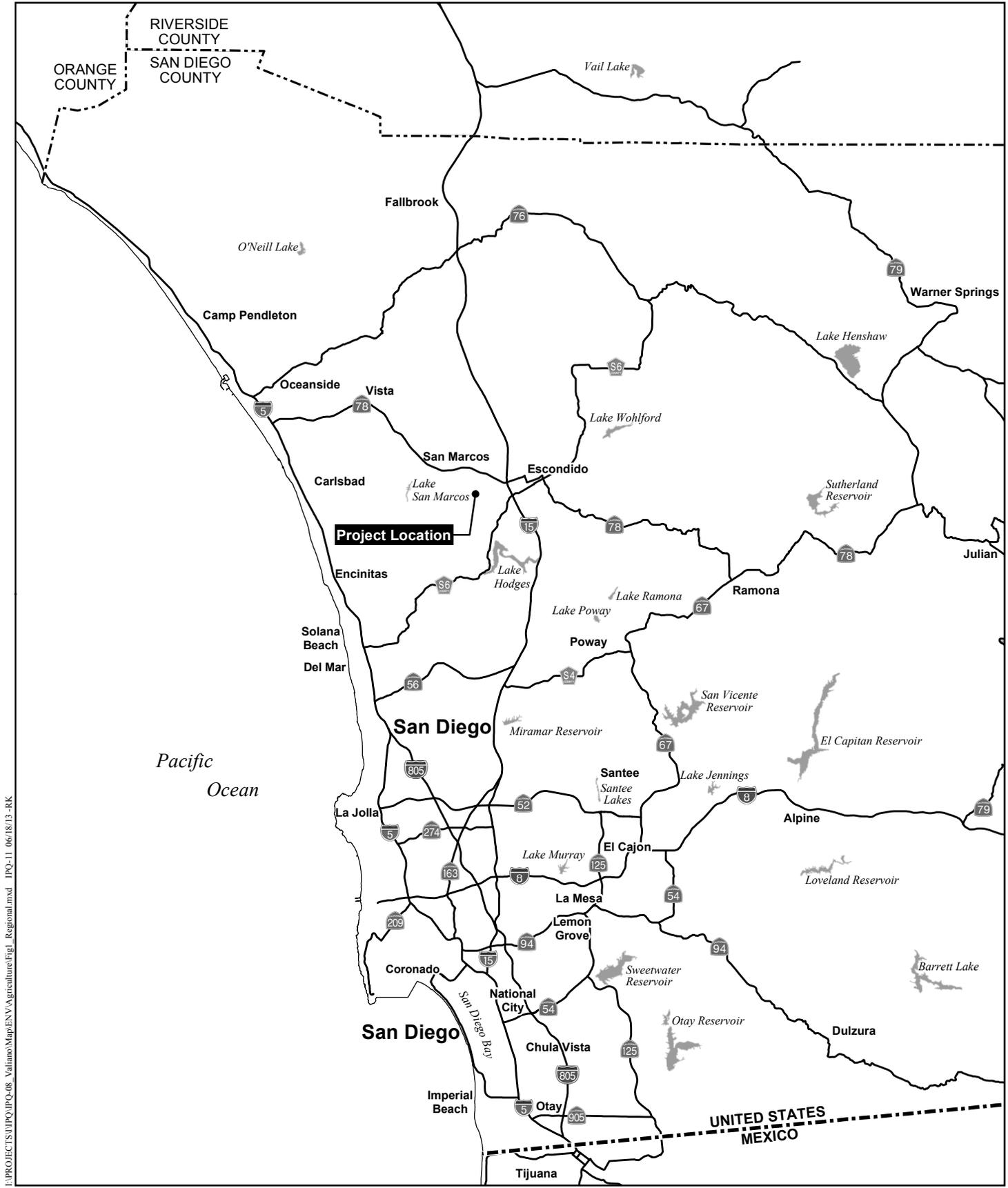
A 0.5-acre Trail Head park is proposed within the eastern portion of the Project site in Neighborhood 2 and would provide the public with convenient access to the trail system to the east of the Project site. The Trail Head Park would also include benches, picnic tables, and a trail map/area information kiosk. The Trail Head Park would be privately maintained.

Water Reclamation Facility/Pump Site and Wet Weather Storage Area

The Project design includes a 0.4-acre on-site WTWRF and pump station located in the southeastern-most portion of the site, near Neighborhood 5. This facility would provide treatment for all wastewater generated on site, and would produce reclaimed effluent per applicable regulatory standards for irrigation of on-site landscaping. In addition, a 2.0-acre wet weather storage area would be located north of Neighborhood 5 to provide storage for excess treated effluent when required (e.g., during winter months when irrigation demand is lower).

Sewer Lift Stations

In addition to the pump station located at the water reclamation facility as noted above, three additional lift (pump) stations would be located in the northern and eastern portions of the site.

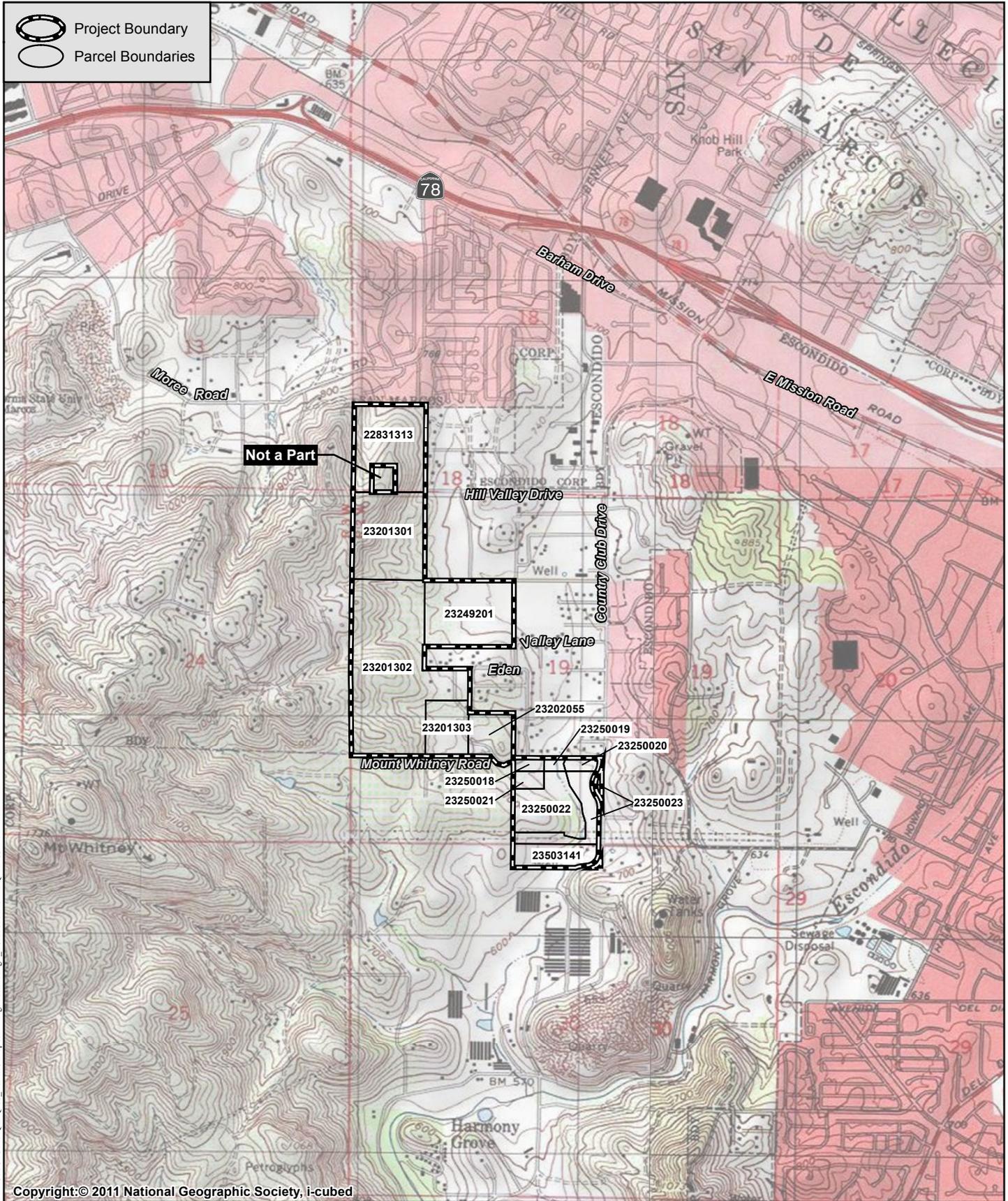


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Regional Location Map

VALIANO

Figure 1



Project Location Map

VALIANO

Figure 2