

# *Visual Impact Analysis*

## *Rancho Cielo Subdivision (TM 5456RPL2)*



*County of San Diego*

*October 31, 2013*

# *Rancho Cielo Subdivision Visual Impact Analysis*

TM 5456RPL2  
PDS2005-3100

Prepared For:

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***S H A P O U R I & A S S O C I A T E S***

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# *County of San Diego*

*October 22, 2013*

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# Introduction

In response to the County of San Diego's request to prepare a Visual Resources Study for a portion of the Rancho Cielo Subdivision, TM 5456RPL2 (Project), the following analysis has been prepared to evaluate the potential visual impacts of the project. However, 15-lot subdivision to the east will not be visible because it is obscured by steep slopes and intervening topography. Therefore, the report shall focus on the three-lot subdivision and 19-unit condominium area. (Figure 1, Proposed Project). The approved Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for this project and the original grading concept originally proposed a multitude of split pads due to the 15' height limit of the proposed slopes. The current design has eliminated the split pads and achieved the desired results by contour grading and placement of retaining walls in areas that will be less visible when viewed from the scenic corridor of Del Dios Highway and San Dieguito River Regional Park, in addition extensive landscaping is proposed to blend the existing views with the proposed grading (see Appendix "A" Concept Landscape Plans).

The proposed project includes grading and landform modifications that are visible from the surrounding communities as well as Del Dios Highway (a Scenic Highway) and San Dieguito River Regional Park's Coast to Crest Trail (a public regional park). County of San Diego Department of Planning and Development Services (PDS) has determined that a Visual Resources Study needs to be prepared to assess the impacts that will result from the construction of the project. The intent of the study is to identify potential visual impacts of the proposed grading modifications as viewed from Del Dios Highway and San Dieguito River Park Plan area to determine if there is new significant information compared to what was analyzed in the previously certified Environmental Impact Report for Rancho Cielo Specific Plan

## Site Characteristics

The proposed project site is located within the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan Area, which is located north of Del Dios Highway, the San Dieguito River, approximately four miles west of Interstate I-15 within the southern portions of the Specific Plan Area (Figure 2, Project Location). The properties around the project are either developed or undergoing residential construction. Onsite visual resources include prominent slopes and ridges that are relatively undisturbed with the exception of residential access roads. There are no visually prominent rock outcroppings that would be impacted by the proposed development. A significant portion or 71.7% (193.8 acres) of the property has been proposed as permanent open space. Existing topography includes relatively steep southwest trending slopes that are bisected by minor drainage courses. Elevations onsite range from 580' above mean sea level at the southern boundary of the project to over 1,100' at the northernmost portion of the site (Figure 3, Project Topography).

## **Project Characteristics**

The project is an application for a Tentative Map to subdivide 270 acres into 18 single family residential lots and one condominium lot with 19 air space units. The single family lots range in size from 1+ acre to 72+ acres. The project includes a major use permit for the condominium lot, which will be a Planned Development (PD) as identified in the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan (Figure 4, Project Elements Subject to Visual Analysis).

## **Site/Project Setting**

The proposed project site is located within the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan Area (Figure 5, Rancho Cielo Specific Plan Area). This approved Specific Plan has provided for the development of several estate lots and homes adjacent to this project. Typical developments adjacent to and including this project include large hillside lots with flat graded pads; other projects in the SPA include significant retaining walls exceeding 30' in height. The current design on this project has revised majority of retaining walls with contour graded pads, the remaining retaining walls have been placed in areas that would not be visible from the major scenic corridors (see Appendix "B" Retaining Wall Location Exhibit). The three-lot subdivision in the west will conduct contour grading and therefore, retaining walls are unnecessary. Similarly, the most visually prominent retaining walls for the condominium project will not exceed 19 feet, and will average 6 feet in height. These walls will be barely noticeable from Del Dios Hwy and the Trail head. The walls will be approximately 7,700 feet away from Del Dios Highway (the nearest distance) and they would be 5,700 feet away from the nearest Trail head. Finally, as discussed earlier, the 15-lot residential subdivision to the east will not be noticeable from any public vantage points.

The surrounding development is located at a lower elevation than this project, resulting in lower project visibility toward these existing homes. There are other developments within the SPA that are at higher elevations, however due to the topography and location of this site the visual impact of this development would not be significant to these higher elevated developments. The proposed project can be viewed from mobile observers and stationary observers. The mobile sources are commuters on Del Dios Highway. Stationary observers are the users of San Dieguito River Park and residents of existing surrounding residential neighborhoods.

# Impact Analysis

The existing visual resources as discussed above include the mobile observation points on a Scenic Highway and stationary sources within the river park and adjoining homes. These resources will be visually impacted by the proposed project; however, based on the fact that a majority of the proposed project will be retained as open space and the existence of several homes within the visual setting, as well as the proposed landscaping, the impact added by this project will be minimized, allowing the completed project to be visually compatible with the surrounding properties. "Figure 1 demonstrates that the proposed Condominium project and three lot subdivision is similar in size and appearance to nearby residences. The three-lot subdivision shows for illustrative purposes three single-family residences approximately 10,000 to 13,000 square feet in size and two-story in arrangement. The graded pads are approximately 83,500 sq.ft. for Lot 1, 41,500 sq.ft. for Lot 2, and 107,000 sq.ft for Lot 3. Landscaping each pad area is 25,000 sq.ft. for Lot 1, 14,000 sq.ft. for Lot 2 and 45,800 sq.ft. for Lot 3. The single-family homes would be similar to the single family homes along Via Dora. Figure 1 also shows nine residential structures (containing 19 condo units). These units would be sited on a 9-acre lot off of Cerra del Sol. There are 7 vacant building pads in the immediate area that could support single-family residences ranging from 4,000 to 15,000 square feet. The condominium structures would range from 7,318 sq.ft. to 12,113 square feet, which would be of similar size and appearance to the single-family residential units in the area."

Pre and post project visual impacts of the subject property have been evaluated, based on the location of the proposed project and potential visual impacts on the public highway and the river park, and exiting residents. A photographic survey of the project has been conducted and two public viewing locations has been selected (most visible locations) to conduct photographic simulations of the finished project, including buildings, grading, walls, landscaping, etc. to determine the potential visual impacts (Figure 6, Photo Simulation Key Map). The location and characteristics of all proposed structures (including residential structures, retaining walls, graded slopes, and accessory structures and have been carefully modeled and identified on the project site and evaluated for this impact analysis (Figure 7 to Figure 11)

Visual simulations, representing the proposed condominium project as well as sample homes, ranging in livable area of 10,000 to 13,000 square feet in size, two story homes on single level pads (for the three subject estate lots) have also been prepared and included in this analysis. Based on the distance of the proposed project site from sensitive visual receptors as discussed above, the level of visual impacts associated with the proposed project is relatively insignificant in comparison with the existing visual landscape.

As mentioned, a photographic survey of the project has been conducted identifying two public viewing locations (most visible locations) to prepare photographic simulations of the finished project, including buildings, grading, walls, landscaping, etc. to determine the potential visual impacts (See Figure 6, Photo Simulation Key Map). Camera location #1 is approximately 7,700 feet from the condominium site and approximately 5,000 feet from the 3-lot subdivision. As evidenced by Figures 8 and 10 the views of the project from both vantage points would include limited views of the residential uses; however, proposed landscaping, contour grading and onsite topography would substantially reduce such views of the project. In addition, the project has designed to distance the higher-density residential uses from the roadway and there are no elements of significant height or scale proposed by the project architecture that would increase the visibility of the site from viewing locations. The large amount of open space that the project includes would also contribute to the visual sense of natural terrain that the project intends to preserve.

The condominium project has been designed in a manner that minimizes grading and preserves the natural contours of the land by inclusion of contour grading techniques to round off the tops and toes of slopes to mimic the land's natural appearance. The proposed retaining walls have been carefully designed to allow landscape screening to minimize the visual prominence of these walls (see Appendix "A" Conceptual Landscape Plans). Coast live oak 15 gallon planted 7-8 feet high spread 2-3 feet wide grows 1 foot per year max height and spread 50'x50' coast live oak 24" box 8-10 feet high spread 3-4 feet wide grows 1 foot per year max height and spread 50'x50' Australian willow 24" box 9-10 feet high spread 4-5 feet wide grows 1 1/2 feet per year max height 30' spread 20' Toyon shrub 5 gallon planted 4'x4' grows 2 feet a year up to 15-20 feet. The internal retaining walls include appropriate architectural features enhancing the overall design theme of this portion of the project. The proposed retaining walls as shown on the attached exhibit (see Appendix "B" Retaining Wall Location Exhibit) have a maximum height of 19' with an average height of 6'.

Visual simulations have also been prepared that compare the proposed condominium structures to that within the existing neighborhood. This comparison illustrates that the bulk, size and scale of the condominium structures are comparable to existing structures throughout the neighborhood. (See Figures 12-17). Three existing vacant pads within the immediate area have been selected for comparison purposes. They include Lot #70 (vacant lot surrounded by occupied lots) which is located on Via Ambiente; Lot #101 (larger lot) on Cerro Del Sol; and Lot #105 on Cerro Del Sol (across the street from the proposed condo site). See "Alternative Sites Key Map" for locations.

Figure 12 illustrates existing site conditions for one of the lots on Cerro Del Sol. Figure 13 was created using this existing pad and superimposing a 3-Plex of the proposed condominium portion of the project to compare bulk, size and scale of the condominium structure with surrounding residences. The 3-Plex was selected due to its overall footprint and compliance with setback requirements. As shown, the 3-Plex is comparable in size and scale with an existing residence found in the immediate area.

Figure 14 illustrates existing site conditions for the lot selected on the southern extension of Cerro Del Sol. Figure 15 was created using this existing pad and superimposing a 2-Plex of the proposed condominium project to compare bulk, size and scale of the condominium structure with surrounding residences. In addition, this site is adjacent to the proposed condominium site. The 2-Plex was selected due to its overall footprint and compliance with setback requirements. As illustrated, the 2-Plex is comparable in size and scale with an existing residence found in the immediate area.

Figure 16 illustrates existing site conditions for the lot selected on Via Ambiente. The site is surrounded by existing single family residences. Figure 17 was created using this existing pad and superimposing a 2-Plex of the proposed condominium project to compare bulk, size and scale of the condominium structure with surrounding residences. The 2-Plex was selected due to its overall footprint and compliance with setback requirements. As illustrated by the exhibit the 2-Plex is comparable in size and scale with the existing residences found in the immediate area.

The proposed grading for the 3-lot subdivision also includes contour grading techniques; the only visible cut slope on Lot 18 will be screened by the proposed structures and landscaping. The fill slopes vary in heights from a maximum height of 70 feet on Lot 16; 35 feet on Lot 17; and 60 feet on Lot 18. However, these slopes include 6 foot terraces which will also help minimize the overall visual effect. These slopes will include adequate and compatible groundcover and approved landscape materials that will mitigate the visual impacts of this portion of the project. Due to larger pad sizes associated with these lots, the proposed structures can be located away from the edge of the pad to allow for less visibility of the future homes on these lots.

As illustrated on the "Retaining Wall Exhibit" found in Appendix B, walls #6, #7, and #8 will be visible, however, a substantial amount of landscaping will be planted to minimize the visual impact of the wall. This additional landscaping will generally consist of Coast live oak 15 gallon planted 7-8 feet high spread 2-3 feet wide grows 1 foot per year max height and spread 50'x50' coast live oak 24" box 8-10 feet high spread 3-4 feet wide grows 1 foot per year max height and spread 50'x50' Australian willow 24" box 9-10 feet high spread 4-5 feet wide grows 1 1/2 feet per year max height 30' spread 20' Toyon shrub 5 gallon planted 4'x4' grows 2 feet a year up to 15-20 feet. Coupled with its distance from Del Dios Highway and San Dieguito River Park visibility of these walls will be substantially reduced.

## Significance Findings

The proposed project, as demonstrated by the attached visual simulations is consistent with the existing Specific Plan and associated EIR and does not conflict with the San Dieguito Community Plan policies and existing development. This finding is based on the fact that the proposed project density is consistent with Rancho Cielo Specific Plan both in number of units and lot sizes. Through such design features as contour grading, enhanced landscaping, planted retaining walls, structure placement, site planning, and architectural design, the proposed project's potential visual impact on the designated Scenic Highway (Del Dios Highway) and San Dieguito River Park, can be mitigated below a significant level.

This determination is consistent with the Aesthetic Determinations made as part of the Rancho Cielo Supplemental EIR that was certified in 1984. The 1984 Rancho Cielo SEIR concluded that aesthetic impacts created by the project were mitigated by project design. The SEIR states that "many aspects of the project design serve as mitigation for potential impacts: preservation of steep slopes, major drainages and woodland areas, and clustering of units. Aesthetic impacts associated with grading disturbance are considered mitigated by revegetation and landscaping."

Section 15162 of the CEQA Guidelines provides that where an EIR or Negative Declaration has been certified or adopted for a project, no additional EIR need be prepared for the same project unless there is substantial evidence before the agency that any of the following have occurred:

1. Subsequent changes are proposed in the project which will require important revisions of the previous EIR or Negative Declaration due to new significant effects not considered in the previous EIR or Negative Declaration.

The Cielo de Lusardi project does not include any changes that would result in new significant affects not considered in the previous EIR. The previous EIR analyzed the potential impacts of 57 dwelling unit (e.g. 19 unit condominium project, 14 single-family residential lots off of Via Dora and 24 single family residential lots off of Avenida Barranca). The project is 37 dwelling units (e.g. 19 unit condominium, 3 single-family residential lots off of Via Dor and 15 single-family residential lots off of Avenida Baranca, which is 20 units less than what was previously analyzed.

2. Substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is undertaken which will require important revisions in the previous EIR or Negative Declaration due to the involvement of new significant effects not considered in the previous EIR or Negative Declaration.

The Cielo de Lusardi project does not include any changes that would result in new significant affects not considered in the previous EIR. The the original EIR analyzed 38 planned development units, including the 19-unit planned development at the project site. The SEIR also considered visual impacts from Del Dios Hwy and concluded that the visual impact could be mitigated to a less than significant level with design features.

3. New information relating to the significant effects of the project and means of reducing or avoiding those effects, which was not known and could not have been known at the time the previous EIR or Negative Declaration was certified or adopted, becomes available. "New information" is further defined in Guidelines Section 15162(a)(3).

The Cielo de Lusardi project does not include any changes that would result in new significant affects not considered in the previous EIR. Although the General Plan Update included Del Dios Highway as part of its Scenic Highway System in 2011, the 1984 Ranch Cielo SEIR considered Del Dios Highway as a Scenic Highway Corrdior. The 1984 SEIR concluded that "the large lot sizes and open space areas will greatly reduce the visual impact of developed area on the ridges and slopes within the scenic highway corridors. Overall, visual impacts to the scenic highways are not considered significant because of substantial open space preservation and large lot development."

The Rancho Cielo Specific Plan was first approved in 1981, and it was revised with a Supplemental EIR in 1984. Throughout the years, various projects have prepared addendums to rely on this previously certified EIR. Similarly, in accordance with CEQA Section 15162 to 15164, the Cielo de Lusardi project will also be preparing an addendum to rely on the 1984 Supplemental EIR. The Cielo De Lusardi project is an integral part of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan that was first approved by the County of San Diego in 1984 and was subsequently updated and amended in 1998. The project is consistent with the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan and its EIR and has incorporated several enhanced features to accommodate new fire, transportation and open space regulations. The project has doubled the fire setback regulations as well as widened the interior streets to accommodate on street parking on one side of the street, this will enhance circulation and fire access along with reducing the distance between fire hydrants by half. Additionally the project has reduced the number of lots from 57 to 37 and has expanded the open preserved space component of the developed site. The 57-unit project proposed approximately 193.2 acres of open space. And the proposed 37-unit subdivision has increased this open space by .586 of an acre. However, more importantly the 37-unit subdivision has significantly reduced the "edge effect" by nearly two miles or 10,934 linear feet. (See Figures 18 & 19)

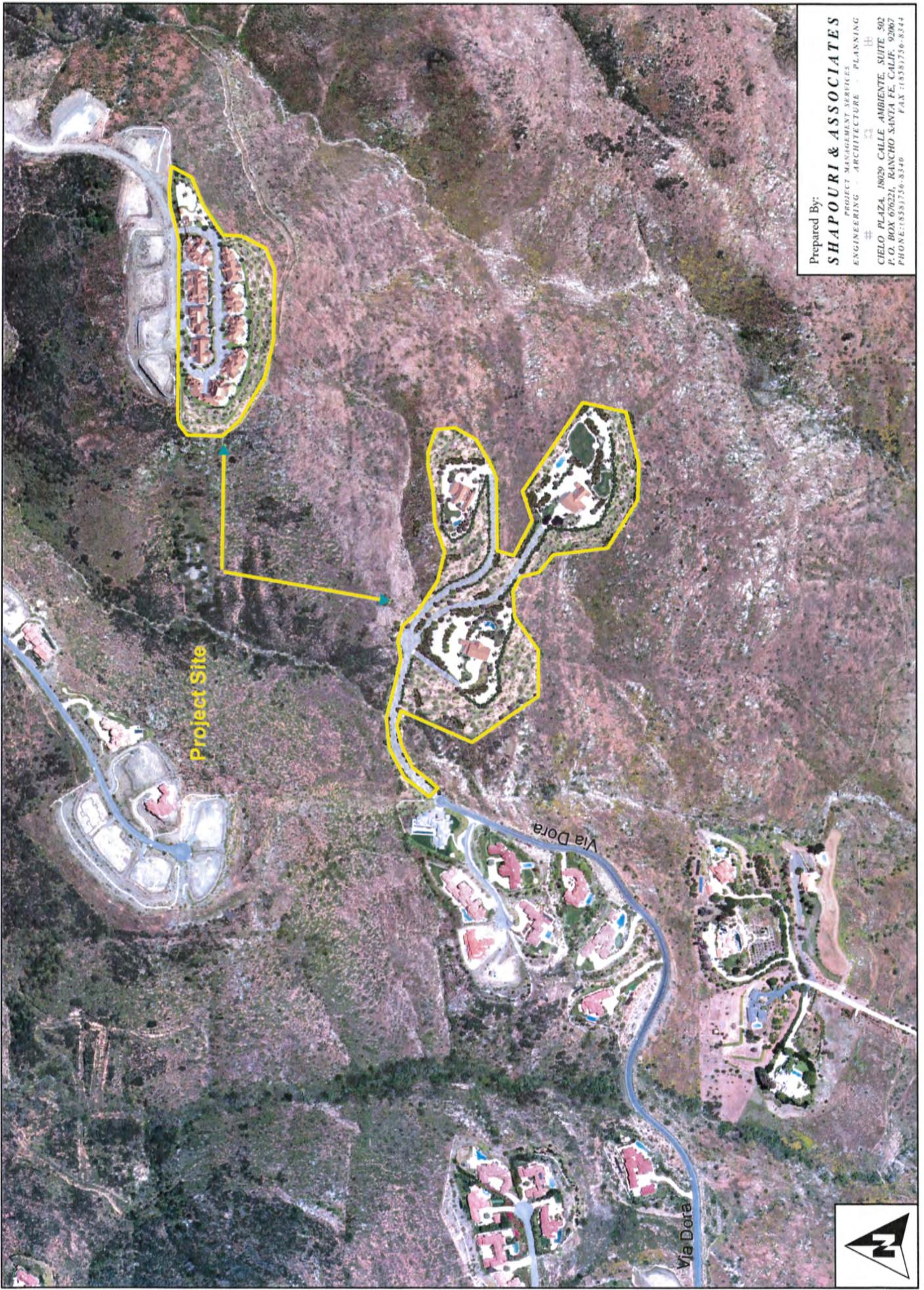
The original grading concept, considered under the approved Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project, proposed a multitude of split pads due to a 15' height limit for newly created slopes. The current design has eliminated the split pads, however the project has achieved the same results by contour grading and placement of retaining walls in areas that will be less visible when viewed from the scenic corridor of Del Dios Highway and San Dieguito River Park (Refer to Figure 8 and Figure 10). Camera location #1 is approximately 7,700 feet from the condominium site and approximately 5,000 feet from the 3-lot subdivision. Camera #2 is approximately 5,700 feet from the condominium site and approximately 3,400 feet from the 3-lot subdivision. As the distance between the viewer and object increases, the ability to see the details decreases, which reduces the importance of the object in view. Furthermore, these simulations demonstrate that the proposed project is visually compatible with the surrounding area because there are other large, single family residential structures and associated landscaping that can be seen within both viewsheds". The project will be graded in such a fashion that it will minimize retaining walls to create pads as is not the case in many of the surrounding developed neighborhoods within the Specific Plan. This design feature will significantly reduce the visual impact to the ridge line and minimize the exposure of cut slopes and allow for buffer plantings on the exposed fill slopes. The grading concept also minimizes the total cubic yards moved and will be sensitive to the surrounding lot configurations intended to reduce any impacts to the ridge line. Project grading is designed to either balance in place the cut and fill it creates or provide within the boundary of the map a place to use any excess fill. The ultimate result is a balanced plan.

In accordance with the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan the TM includes a 19 unit condominium attached site to be developed on a 9 acre lot located on the northern edge of the westerly parcel. The condominium project complies with all County of San Diego underlying zoning as well as the intent of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The project is consistent and compatible with the size, mass and scale of the adjacent single family lots to the north of the site and is consistent with the density of the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. The condominium project is designed to be sensitive to reducing the visual impacts to the neighborhood and the ridgeline. In addition, the project as currently designed will reduce the impacts to the wildlife corridor and has virtually eliminated the potential edge effect of the previous design.

There are no subsequent changes proposed in the project nor are there circumstances which will require important revisions of the previously certified EIR for the Rancho Cielo Specific Plan. In addition, there is no new information relating to the significant effects of the project and means of reducing or avoiding those effects, which was not known and could not have been known at the time the previous EIR was certified or adopted. As such, Section 15162 of the CEQA Guidelines can be made.

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Figure 1: Proposed Project



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Rancho Cielo Subdivision (TM5456RPL2)

Date: 8/12/2013

Figure 2: Location Map

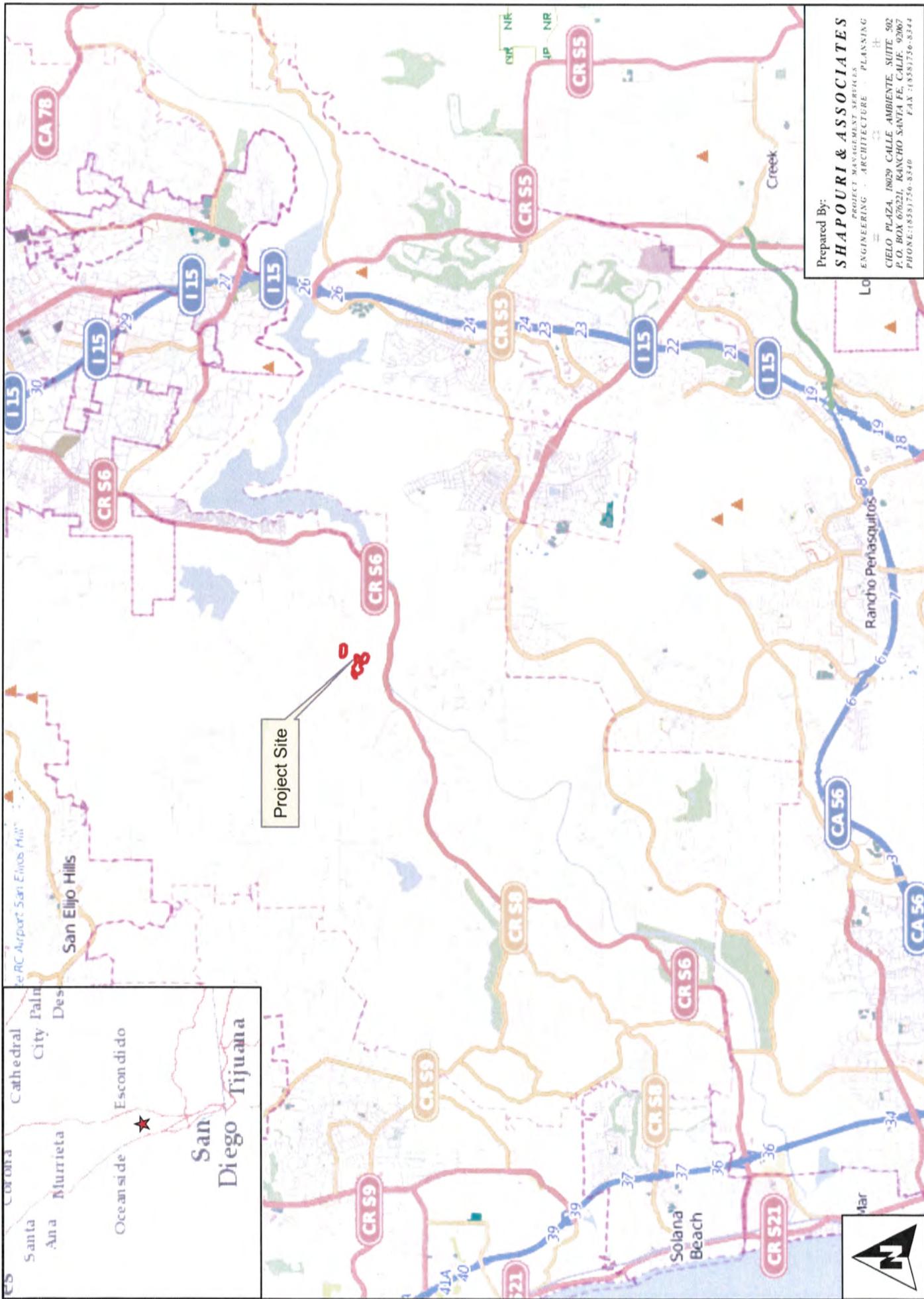


Figure 3: Project Topography Map

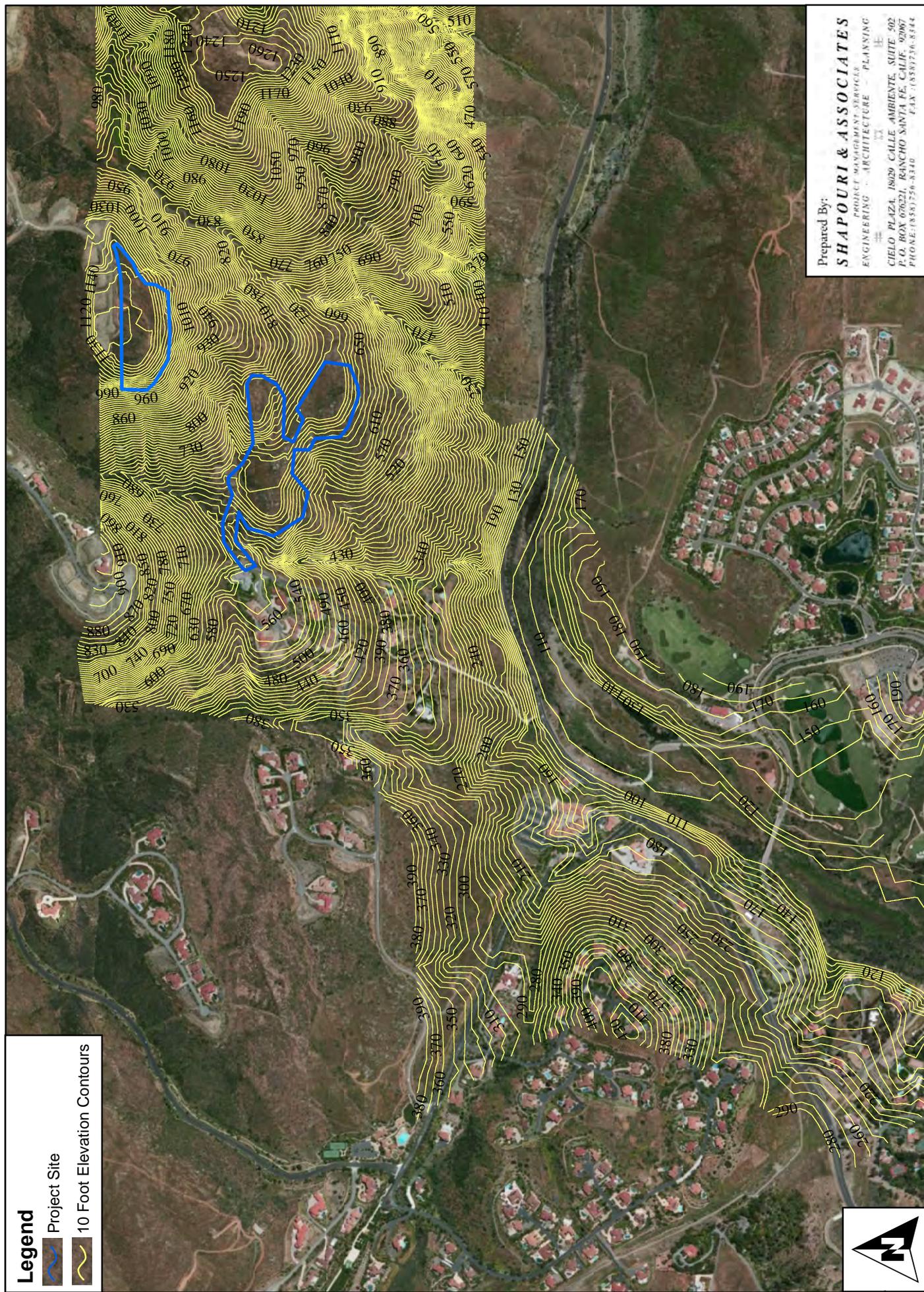




Figure 5: Rancho Cielo Specific Plan Area

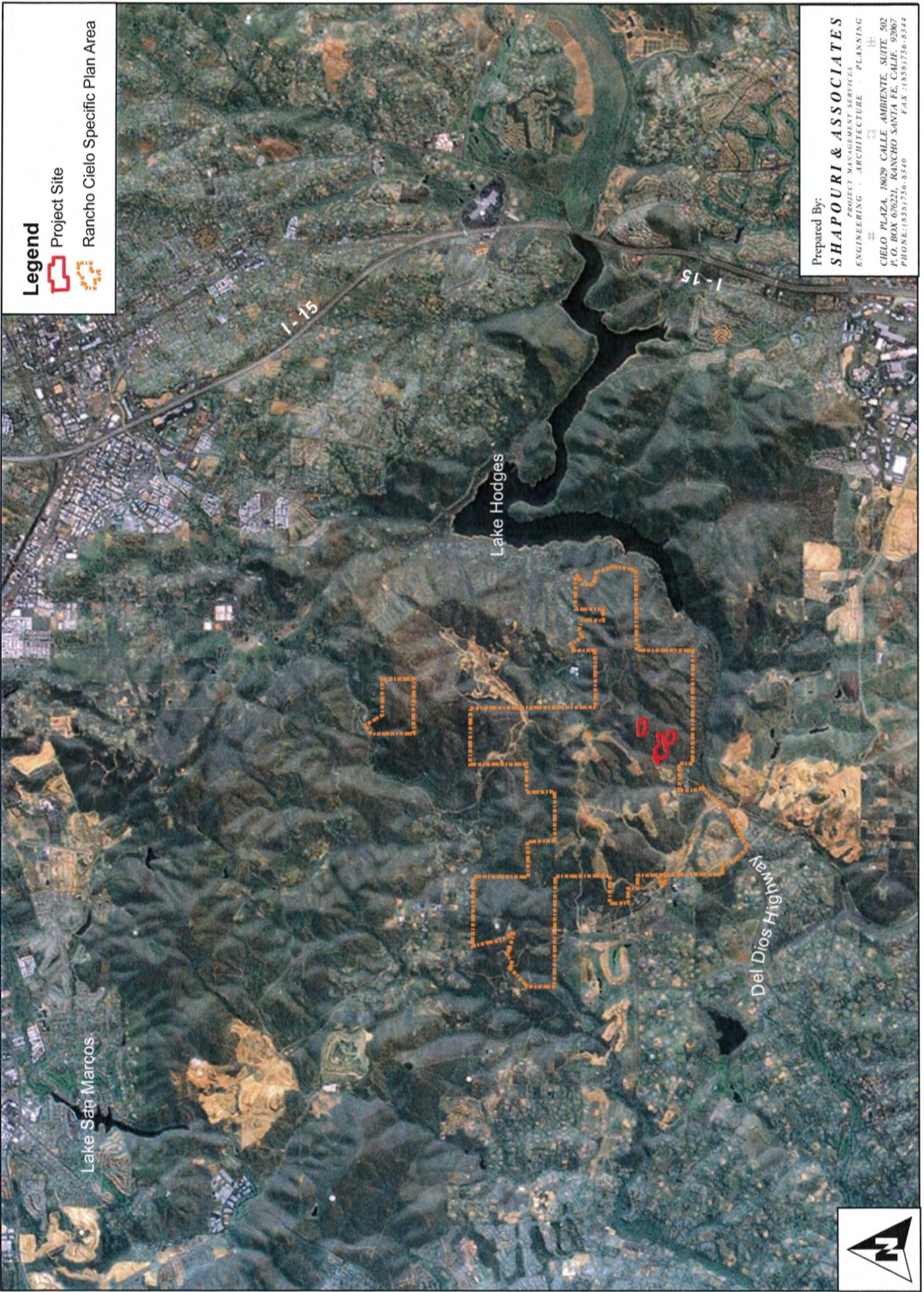


Figure 6: Photo Simulation Key Map

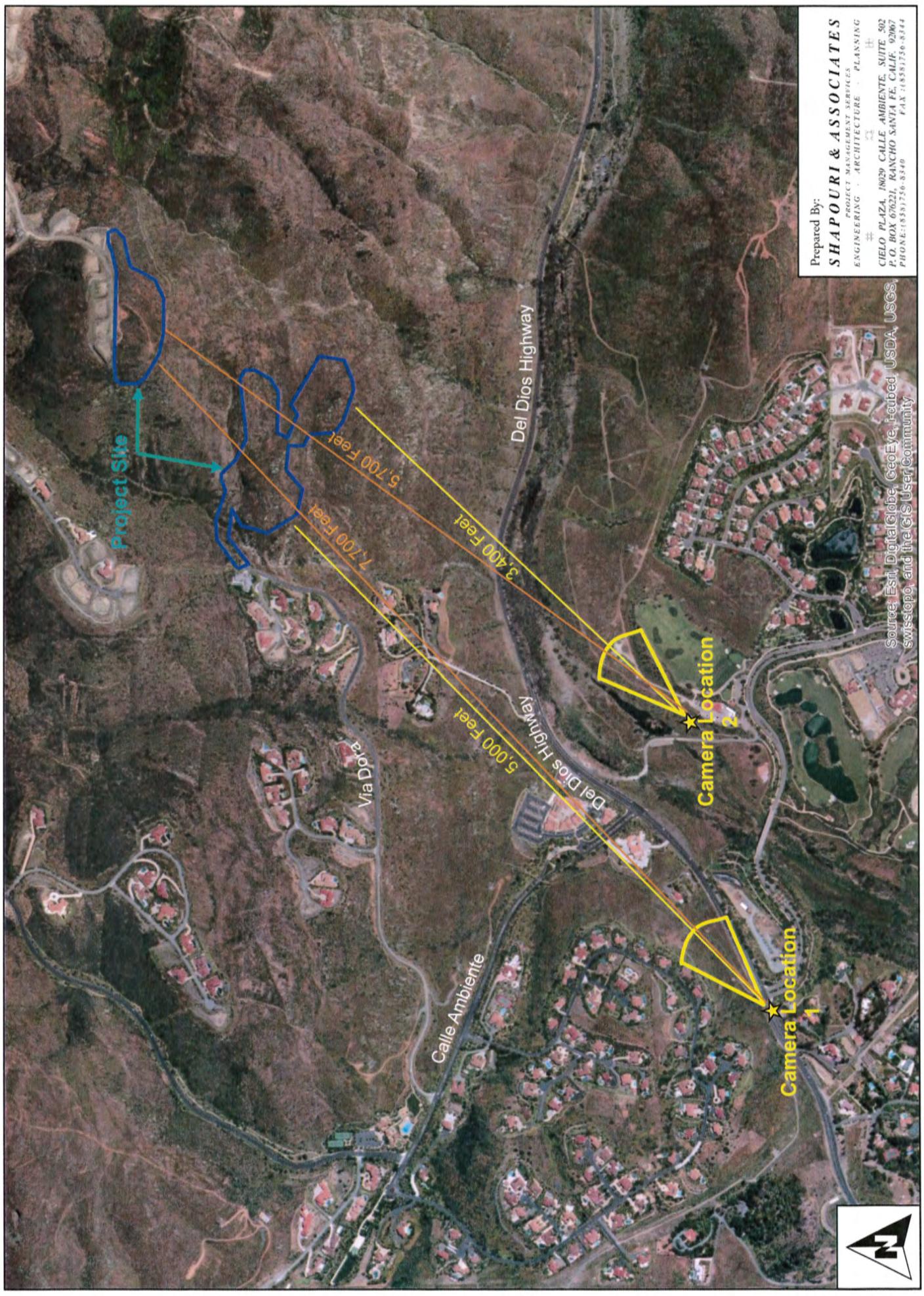
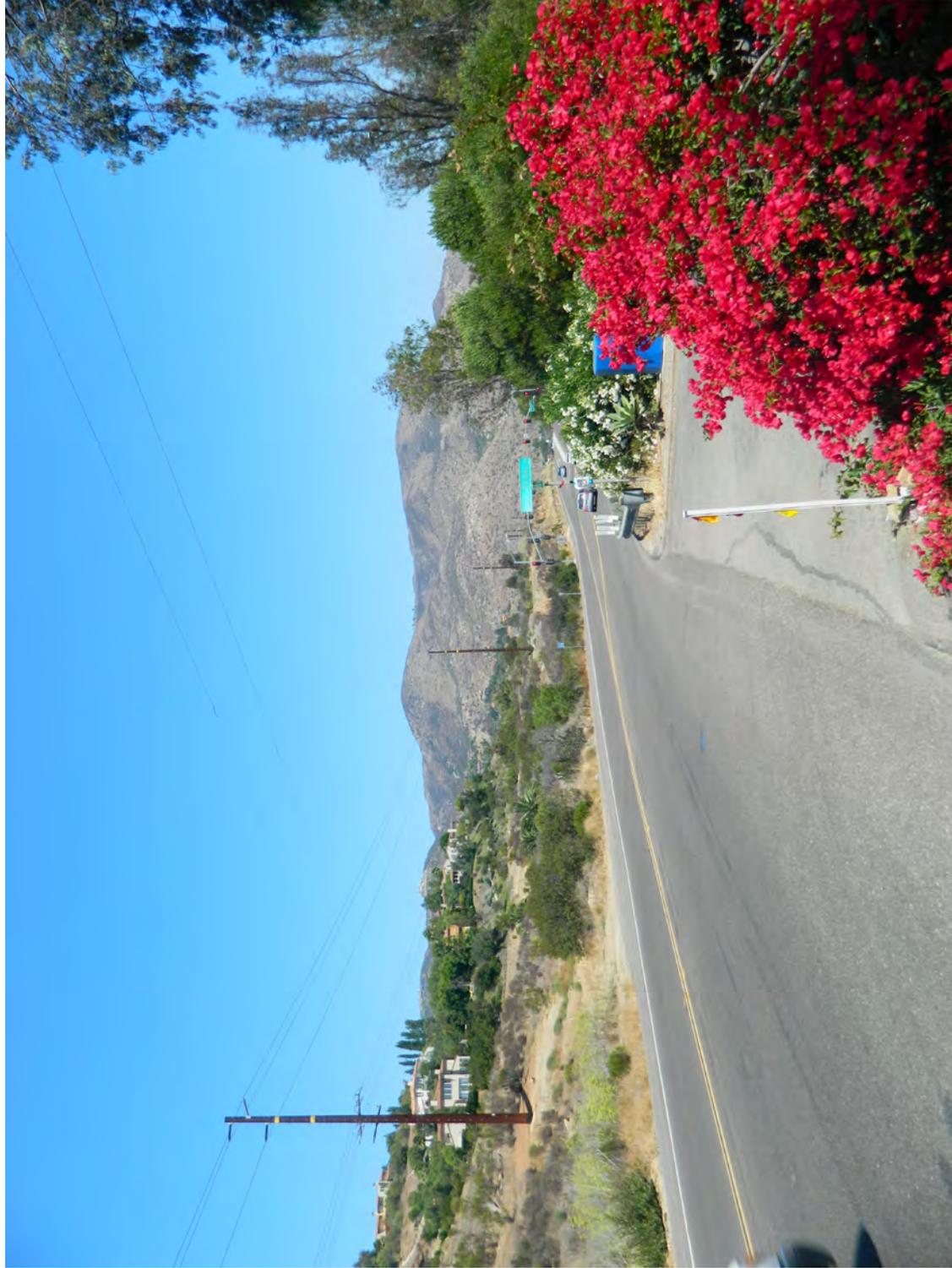
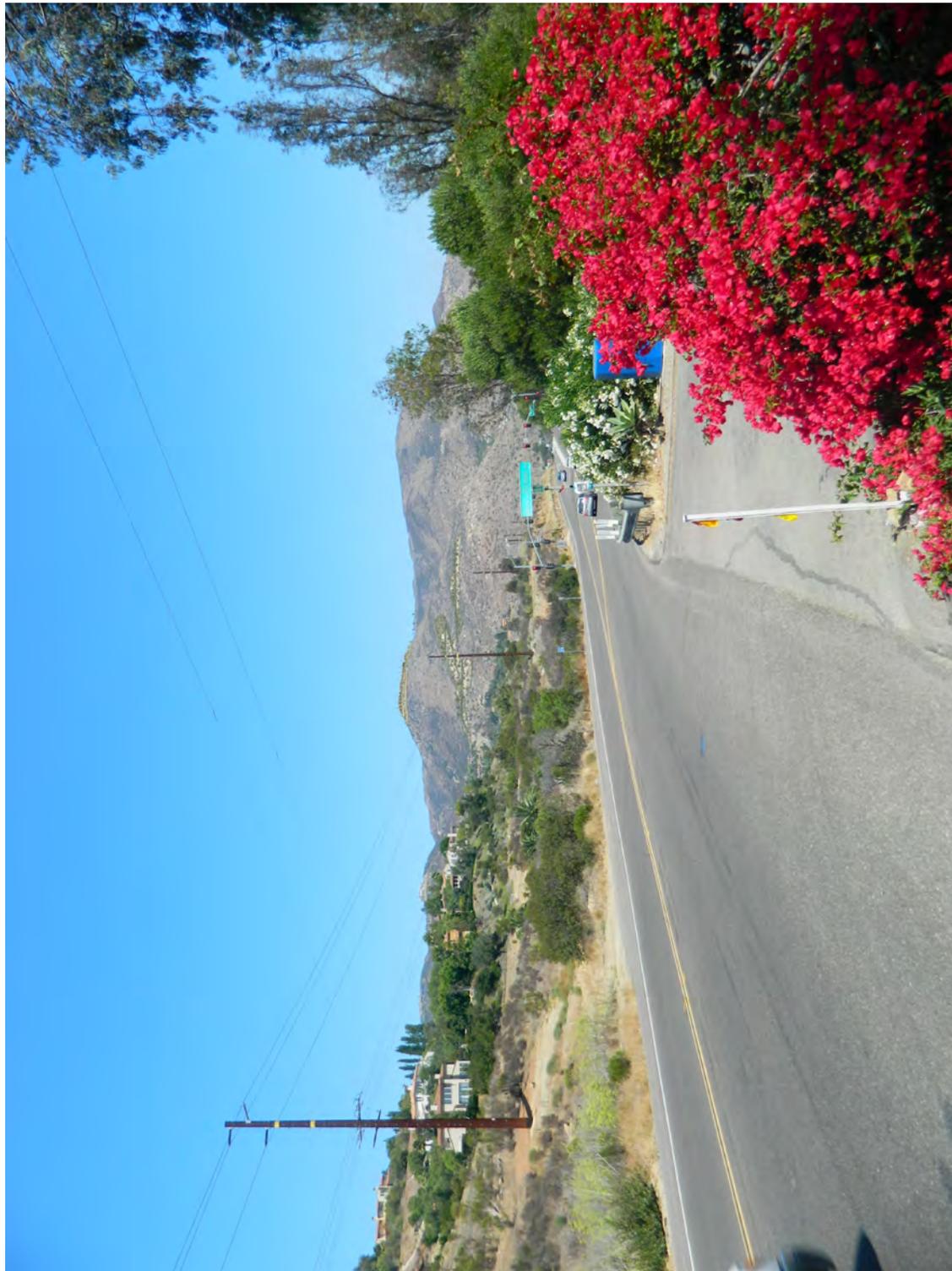


Figure 7: Camera Location 1 - Existing Condition



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Figure 8: Camera Location 1 - Visual Simulation



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Figure 9: Camera Location 2, Existing Condition



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Figure 10: Camera Location 2, Visual Simulation



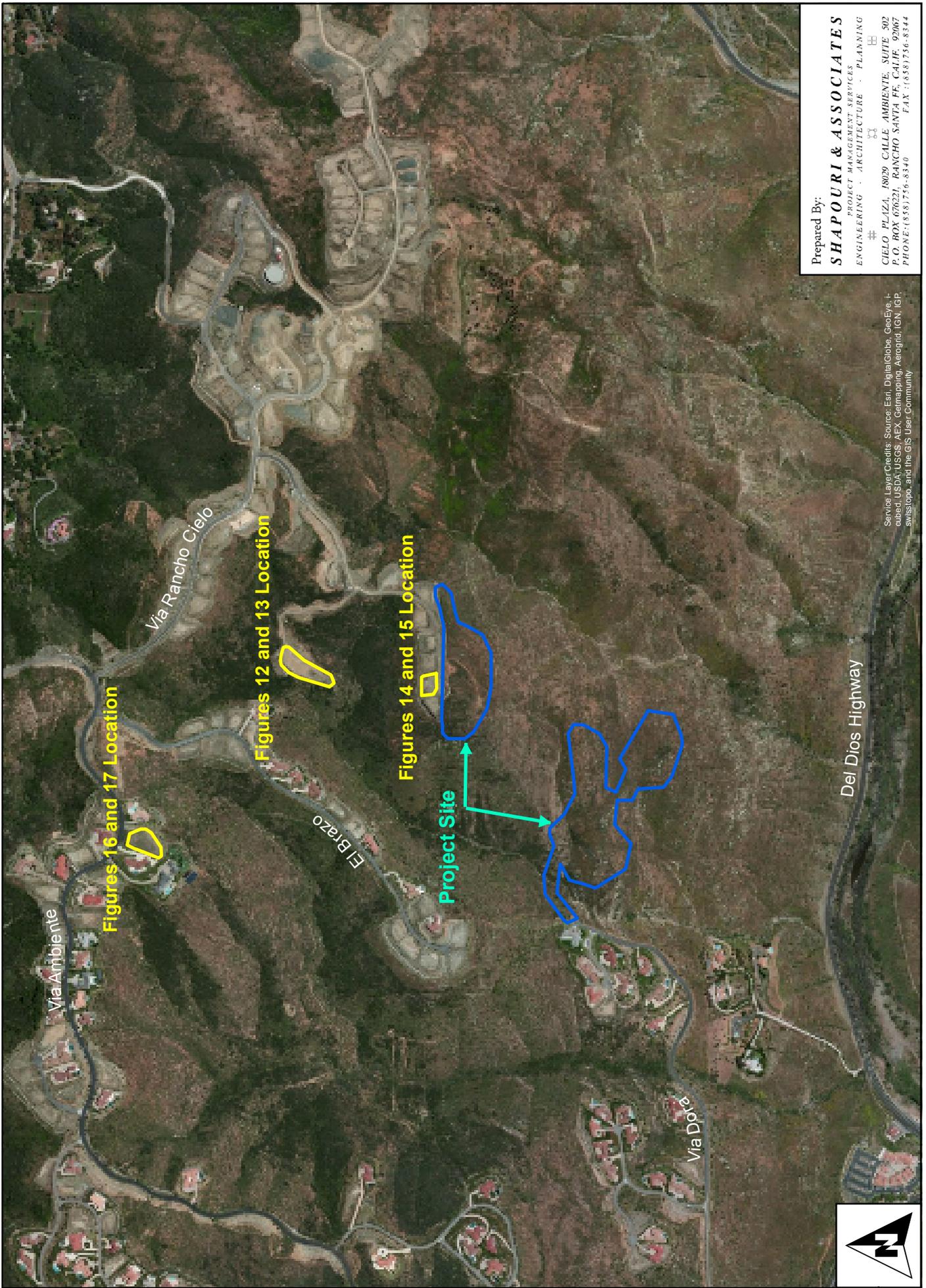
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Figure 11: Project One-way Loop Exit - Visual Simulation



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# Alternative Sites Key Map



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Services Layer Credits: Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-  
satellite, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, iGP,  
swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Figure 12: Building Size Comparison on Alternative Lots - 3 Plex Unit 5a, 5b and 5c - Existing



Figure 13: Building Size Comparison on Alternative Lots - 3 Plex Unit 5a, 5b and 5c - Simulation



0 130 260 520 Feet

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Date: 9/12/2013

Figure 14: Building Size Comparison on Alternative Lots - 2 Plex Unit 4a and 4b - Existing





Figure 16: Building Size Comparison on Alternative Lots - 2 Plex Unit 2a and 2b - Existing



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

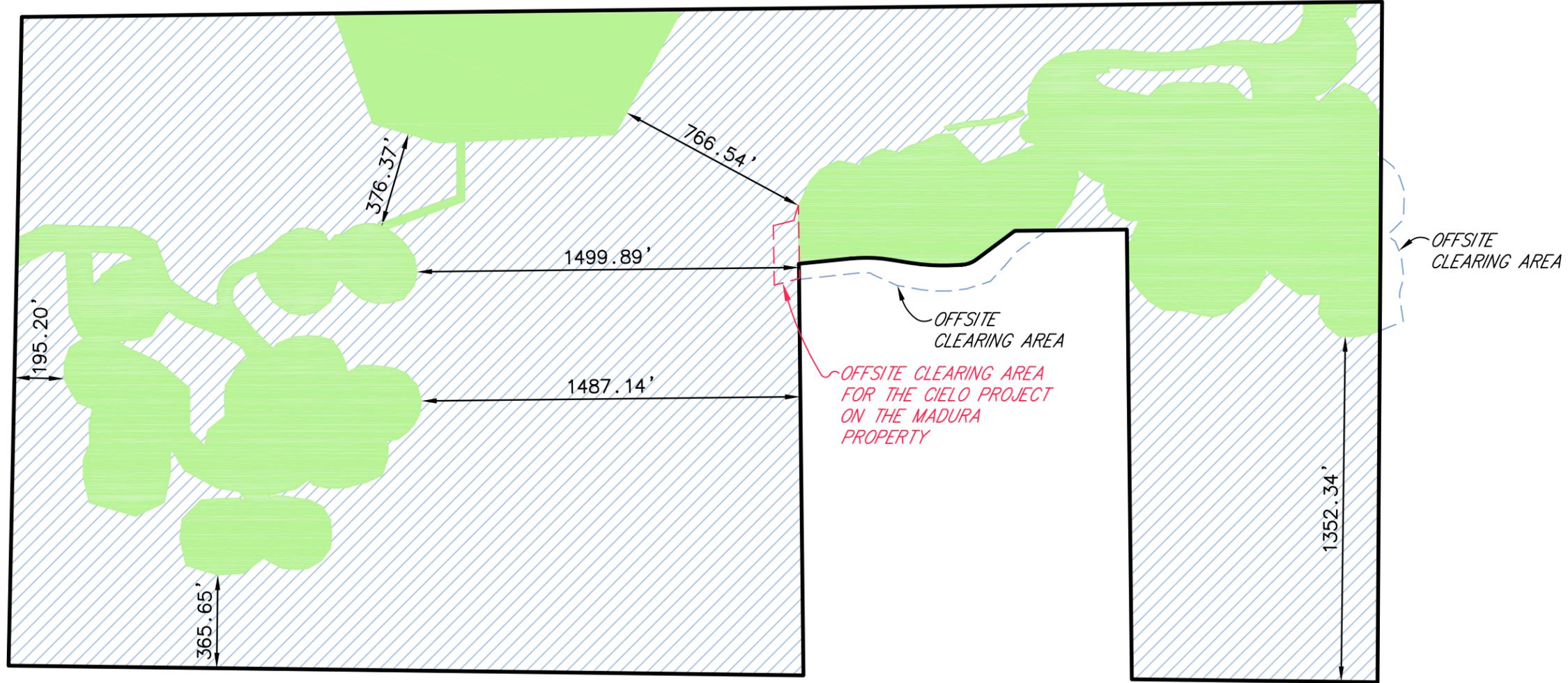
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Date: 9/12/2013

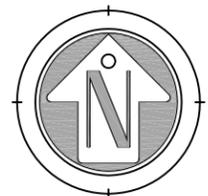
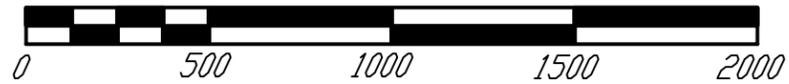
Figure 17: Building Size Comparison on Alternative Lots - 2 Plex Unit 2a and 2b - Simulation



# EXHIBIT SHOWING THE EXISTING EDGE & CORRIDORS



- TOTAL LENGTH OF OPEN SPACE EDGE = 26,590 LF
- ▨ TOTAL ON-SITE EXISTING OPEN SPACE = 193.20 AC  
(PLEASE NOTE THAT THE 193.20 ACRES INCLUDES A 0.907 ACRES OF GRADED OPEN SPACE AREA NECESSARY TO BUILD A PORTION OF CONNEMARA ROAD AS SHOWN IN THE APPROVED TM 5058)

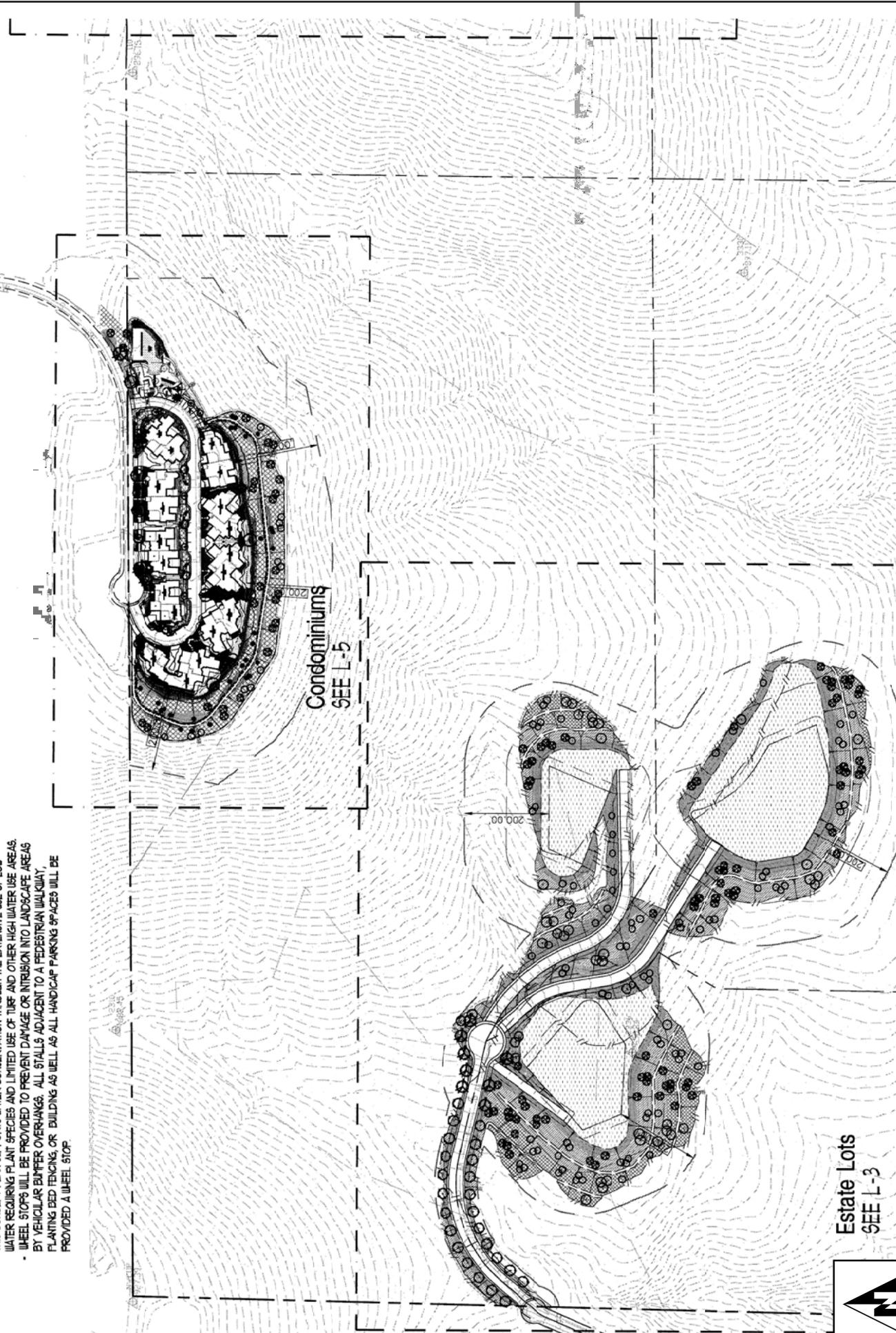


SCALE 1" : 500'



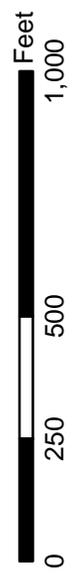
# Appendix "A" Concept Landscape Plans

CONFORMANCE WITH THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO'S WATER EFFICIENT LANDSCAPE DESIGN MANUAL  
 THIS CONCEPT PLAN SUPPORTS WATER CONSERVATION THROUGH THE EXTENSIVE USE OF LOW  
 WATER REQUIRING PLANT SPECIES AND LIMITED USE OF TURF AND OTHER HIGH WATER USE AREAS.  
 - WHEEL STOPS WILL BE PROVIDED TO PREVENT DAMAGE OR INTRUSION INTO LANDSCAPE AREAS  
 BY VEHICULAR BUMPER OVERHANGS. ALL STALLS ADJACENT TO A PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY  
 PLANTING BED FENCING, OR BUILDING AS WELL AS ALL HANDICAP PARKING SPACES WILL BE  
 PROVIDED A WHEEL STOP.



Condominiums  
 SEE L-5

Estate Lots  
 SEE L-3

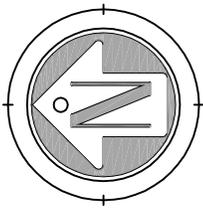


Rancho Cielo Subdivision (TM5456RPL2)

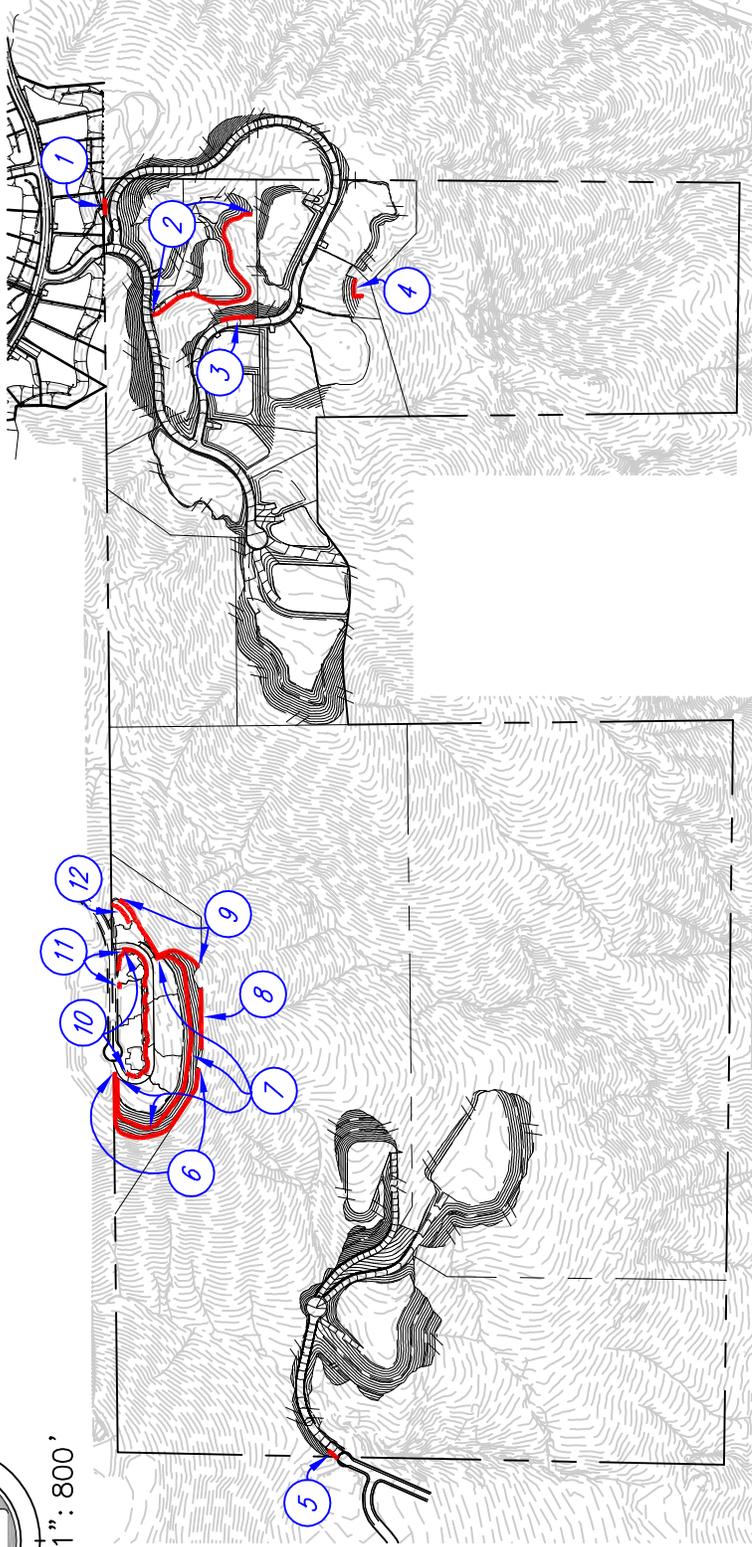
Date: 8/15/2013

**Appendix "B" Retaining Wall Location Exhibit**

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO TRACT NO. 5456-RPL3  
RETAINING WALL LOCATION EXHIBIT**



SCALE 1" = 800'



RETAINING WALL DESIGNATION	MAXIMUM WALL HEIGHT (FT)	AVERAGE WALL HEIGHT (FT)
1	12	7
2	20	12
3	15	11
4	19	15
5	10	9
6	10	5

RETAINING WALL DESIGNATION	MAXIMUM WALL HEIGHT (FT)	AVERAGE WALL HEIGHT (FT)
7	7	5
8	5	4
9	19	6
10	6	3
11	7	5
12	4	3.5