County of San Diego

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NOTICE OF PREPARATION DOCUMENTATION AND PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS FOR A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Date: September 15, 2023

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the County of San Diego (County), Planning & Development Services (PDS), will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the project below. PDS is seeking public and agency input on the scope and content of the environmental information to be contained in the EIR. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) document, which contains a description of the probable environmental effects of the project, can be reviewed at the following website link:

http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/pds/ceqa_public_review.html.

SOCIALLY EQUITABLE CANNABIS PROGRAM

Description of the Project:
The County is developing a Socially Equitable Cannabis Program (Cannabis Program) as directed by the Board of Supervisors (Board) on January 27, 2021. The Cannabis Program will allow for and establish a permitting and licensing system for new commercial cannabis activities including retail, cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, testing, microbusinesses, and temporary events. Furthermore, the Cannabis Program will contain and be informed by a Social Equity Program, which will provide greater opportunities for individuals negatively or disproportionately impacted by cannabis criminalization and the War on Drugs. Adoption of the Cannabis Program will require amendments to the San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances and the San Diego County Zoning Ordinance to establish licensing and operational regulations for a range of cannabis cultivation and non-cultivation uses authorized under state law.

The overall purpose of the Cannabis Program is to acknowledge the will of the voters in passing Proposition 64, Marijuana Legalization, in 2016 and allow for a suite of commercial cannabis uses in unincorporated San Diego County including retail, cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, testing, microbusiness, and temporary events. The primary objectives of the Cannabis Program are to:

- Develop a regulated and legal cannabis industry that allows for greater economic opportunity and safe access to cannabis;
- Provide consistency with state law and County regulations associated with commercial cannabis operations;
- Prioritize social equity, economic access, and business opportunities for those who have been impacted by cannabis-related criminalization and the War on Drugs;
- Develop an efficient and user-friendly cannabis licensing and permitting system;
- Develop a regulatory program that will assist in protecting public health, safety, and welfare;
- Minimize the effects of commercial cannabis activities on sensitive populations and land uses; and
- Minimize the potential adverse effects of cannabis activities on the environment.

PROJECT LOCATION:
The County of San Diego is located in the southwestern corner of the state. The County is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west, Orange County to the northwest, Riverside County to the north, Imperial County to the east, and the Republic of Mexico to the south.

The proposed Cannabis Program will apply to the unincorporated areas of the county.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

The County has determined that implementing the Cannabis Program may result in significant environmental impacts; therefore, a Program EIR will be prepared. As allowed under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(d) and 15063(a) (when it has been determined that an EIR will clearly be required), the County has elected not to prepare an initial study and will instead begin work directly on the EIR. The impact analysis in the EIR will be conducted in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines and the County's Guidelines for Determining Significance.

Potential issues and impacts to the existing environment to be analyzed in the Draft EIR include the following environmental topics:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire

The EIR, consistent with CEQA, will include sufficient information to facilitate meaningful public review and informed public decision-making regarding the significant effects on the environment that may be caused by the project. The EIR will include information regarding the environmental baseline, including the past, current, and reasonably foreseeable expected future environmental impacts of implementing the project in the project area. Where needed, the Draft EIR will identify potentially feasible mitigation measures to avoid and/or substantially lessen any significant adverse effects identified in the EIR's impact analysis.

The EIR will also address the cumulative environmental consequences of the proposed project in combination with other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects in the area. This will serve to satisfy CEQA requirements regarding potential regional cumulative effects.

In compliance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, the EIR will describe and evaluate the effects of a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project and will compare the impacts of the alternatives to the impacts of the proposed project. The EIR will also identify any alternatives that were considered but rejected by the lead agency as infeasible and briefly explain their reasoning. The EIR will provide an analysis of the No Project Alternative and will also identify the Environmentally Superior Alternative. The alternatives to be analyzed in the EIR will be developed during the environmental review process and will consider input received during the public scoping period.

Public Scoping Meetings

The County will conduct two virtual public scoping meetings. The scoping meetings will involve a presentation about the proposed project and the environmental review process and schedule. The purpose of the meetings is to facilitate the receipt of verbal comments about the scope and content of the environmental analysis to be addressed in the Draft EIR. The scoping meetings are for information gathering; they are not public hearings, and no public testimony will be taken. No decisions about the project will be made at the public scoping meetings. The meeting dates and times are as follows:

When:

- Thursday, October 12, 2023, at 6:00 PM
- Tuesday, October 17, 2023, at 6:00 PM

Location: Virtual

- Please register using this link: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_InkTYl3sQP2bmb86gPXoLg

Submitting Comments:

At this time, the County is soliciting comments on the NOP regarding your views on how the project may affect the environment. This information will be considered when preparing the Draft EIR's discussion of environmental topics, significant effects, mitigation measures, and alternatives. Because of time limits mandated by state law, comments should be provided no later than October 31, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.

You have several options for submitting comments: (1) verbally during the scoping meeting, (2) by U.S. mail, or (3) by email. Comments provided by email should include "Socially Equitable Cannabis Program – NOP Scoping Comments" in the subject line.

Please send all comments to:

County of San Diego, Planning and Development Services

Attention: Audrey Hamilton

Mailing Address: 5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 310, San Diego, CA 92123

OR via email: PDS.LongRangePlanning@sdcounty.ca.gov; include "Socially Equitable Cannabis Program – NOP Scoping Comments" in the subject line.

Attachments:

Figure 1 – County of San Diego Socially Equitable Cannabis Program Area Map

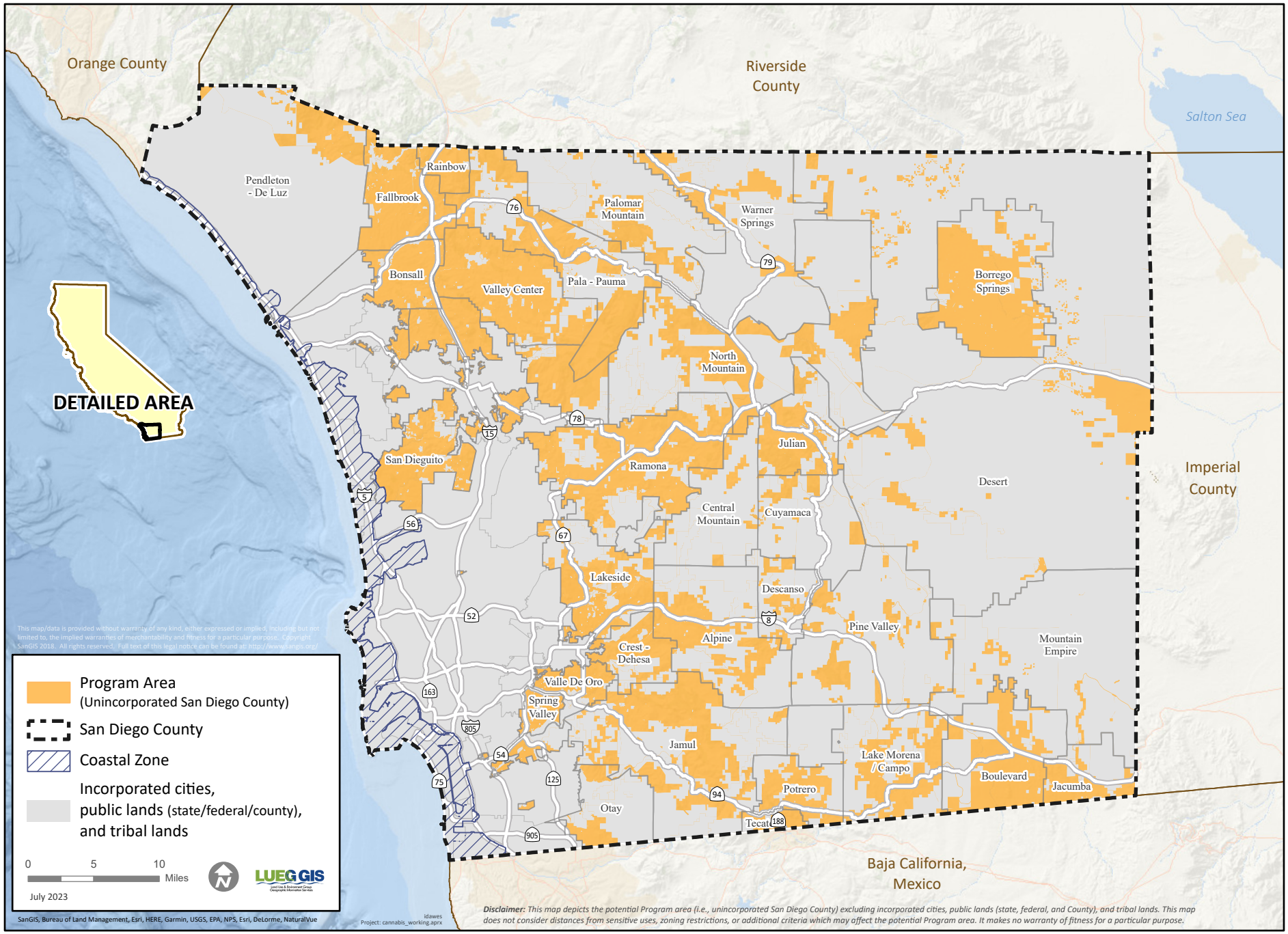

Figure 1 - County of San Diego Socially Equitable Cannabis Program Area

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO