

SECTION 3.5

LAND USE AND PLANNING

3.5 Land Use and Planning

3.5.1 Discussion of Existing Conditions Relating to Land Use and Planning

Existing On-Site and Surrounding Land Uses

Figure 3.5-1 depicts existing on-site and surrounding land uses. The Merriam Mountains site is currently undeveloped; however, it is crisscrossed by dirt roads and trails that provide access to each of the individual parcels on site and service roads that provide access to existing on-site infrastructure facilities. Over the years, portions of the site have included a rock quarry and an unused private landing strip, generally in the northwestern portion of the site.

Land uses surrounding the project site include large-lot single-family residences and avocado groves to the north, west, and south. Existing uses to the south of the site are separated from the site by Deer Springs Road. South of the site are avocado groves, a nursery, vacant parcels, and the Golden Door Spa and Resort. Existing uses to the east of the site are separated from the site by I-15. Lawrence Welk Village, a 600-acre vacation resort facility that includes senior housing and a golf course, is located east of I-15, and the project site is visible from this location. Other development in the area includes Hidden Meadows and Rim Rock, both planned residential communities with estate-lot development located east of I-15, as discussed in Chapter 1. A large sand and gravel mining operation is located to the north in Gopher Canyon. A gas station and mobile home park are located along Deer Springs Road adjacent to the southeastern portion of the site.

Existing On-Site and Surrounding Land Use Designations

San Diego County General Plan

The goals and policies contained within the San Diego County General Plan Regional Land Use Element (County of San Diego 2003), North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan (Twin Oaks Valley area) (County of San Diego 1990), and Bonsall Community Plan (County of San Diego 1993) provide the overall policy framework for the specific plan (SP) area. Existing on-site regional land use categories designated by the San Diego County General Plan Regional Land Use Element include Estate Development Area (EDA) for the majority of the site and Current Urban Development Area (CUDA) in the southeastern corner of the site (see Figure 1.1-24). Lands within the EDA are intended for low-density residential and agricultural uses. Lands within the CUDA are intended for near-term urban development.

At the time the Draft EIR was prepared, the County was undergoing a comprehensive general plan update, entitled General Plan Update (GP Update Draft Land Use Plan). Started in 1998, its

preparation has been a multiyear effort, although the date of adoption of the plan is anticipated in the fall of 2010.

North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan and Bonsall Community Plan

Land use designations are also applied to the site by the North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan (North County Metro Plan) and the Bonsall Community Plan (see Figure 1.1-26). In both plans, the project site is generally designated for estate residential, rural, or agricultural uses, with densities ranging from one dwelling unit per 1, 2, 4, 8, or 20 acres, generally depending on slope. General commercial and industrial land uses are designated in the southeastern corner of the site, adjacent to the existing gas station. Portions of the project site are located within the spheres of influence of the cities of San Marcos and Escondido (see Figure 1.1-25). Estate residential and agricultural land use designations are also placed on lands to the north, south, and west of the site.

I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan

Policy direction related to community character for the project site includes guidance contained in the applicable community plans and in the I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan (County of San Diego 1994). The project site is located within the study area of the I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan, in addition to being within the North County Metro and Bonsall subregional/community plans. Chapter 2 of the North County Metro Plan calls for the accommodation of urban development in appropriate areas in recognition of the fact that the Plan area is rapidly growing and contains large areas of developable land with many basic urban services available or located nearby. The North County Metro Plan also calls for preservation of scenic features in rugged terrain not suitable for urbanization. The Bonsall Community Plan states that a mix of agricultural and residential land uses should be retained to preserve and enhance the rural character of the area by providing a vegetation buffer between houses. Properties that are in agricultural use and being proposed for development with estate-sized lots are encouraged to retain agriculture as a compatible use. The I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan calls for preservation of the scenic qualities along the corridor and recommends placement of a B designator on properties along the corridor, considering such factors as visibility from I-15, maintenance of the scenic quality and viewsheds along the corridor, preservation of steep topography and rock outcroppings, and integration of development with existing landforms.

The site is also located within the County of San Diego-designated Merriam Mountains Resource Conservation Area (RCA) and has been identified as a pre-approved mitigation area as part of the planning process for the draft North County MSCP amendment to the County's MSCP Subarea Plan (County of San Diego 1997). These aspects of the site are discussed and analyzed in Section 3.2 of this EIR.

San Diego County Resource Protection Ordinance

As noted in Section 1.1.3 of this EIR and in the Resource Protection Study and Resource Protection Plan (RPP) (see Appendices F and T, respectively, of this EIR), a variety of RPO resources are present on the site, including RPO steep slopes, sensitive habitat lands, wetlands, and prehistoric sites.

Spheres of Influence

A sphere of influence (SOI) is the probable physical boundary and service area of an agency. A SOI includes territory that is not within the corporate limits of the agency but is expected to be annexed at some time in the future. As shown on Figure 1.1-25, the proposed project is located within the SOIs of the cities of San Marcos (753.33 acres) and Escondido (59.00 acres).

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance

The County of San Diego's Zoning Ordinance (County of San Diego 2006) regulates provisions on structures located within the unincorporated areas of the County. The project site is currently zoned for A-70 (limited agriculture), C-36 (general commercial), M-52 (limited impact industrial), RR-25 (rural residential, with 4-acre use minimum), RR-5 (rural residential, with 2- to 4-acre use minimum), S-82 (extractive use), and S-92 (general rural use), as shown on Figure 1.1-27.

3.5.2 Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The project will have significant land use plan or policy impacts if it:

- 1) Conflict(s) with the environmental land use goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the San Diego County General Plan, Bonsall Community Plan, and North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan and any other applicable plans, policies, ordinances, guidelines, or regulations
- 2) Conflict(s) with an applicable Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) or Natural Community Conservation Plan
- 3) Creates land uses that are clearly incompatible with existing and planned surrounding land uses
- 4) Physically divides or changes the character of an established community.

Guideline Sources

The identified guidelines for significance are based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines and County of San Diego staff guidance. The development of these guidelines was intended to ensure conformance with existing regional and local planning efforts, as well as to maintain and enhance the character, structure, and dynamics of established communities in the project vicinity.

3.5.3 Analysis of Project Effects and Determination of Significance

Guideline 1: Conflicts with the environmental goals of applicable land use goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the General Plan, Community Plan, or Other Applicable Plans

San Diego County General Plan

The environmental goals of the San Diego County General Plan applicable to the Merriam Mountains project are addressed in issue-specific environmental categories throughout this EIR. This portion of the EIR addresses environmental goals related to land use issues.

The southeasterly 31 acres of the 2,327-acre Merriam property are currently subject to Policy 1.1 CUDA regional category of the Regional Land Use Element. This area is currently within the SOIs of the cities of Escondido or San Marcos. The northern 2,296 acres are subject to Policy 1.3 EDA regional category. The SOIs of the cities of Escondido and San Marcos currently cover portions of this area. The General Plan Amendment (GPA) proposal is to shift the boundary between CUDA and EDA so that the portion of the property within the SOIs of the cities of San Marcos and Escondido is categorized as CUDA (refer to Figures 1.1-24 and 1.1-25). Neither city has pre-zoned the land within its SOI. The 1,952 acres of the project area assigned land use designations by the North County Metro Plan are designated as: (1) residential, (13) general commercial, (15) limited impact industrial, (17) estate residential, (18) multiple rural use, and (19) intensive agricultural.

The 375 acres of the project area assigned land use designations in the Bonsall Community Plan are designated as (18) multiple rural use. The GPA proposes to change the land use designations for the entire site to (21) SPA, depicted on Figure 1.1-26 (see Appendix C to this EIR). The SPA would implement a comprehensive SP with an overall residential density of 1.16 dwelling units per acre for the 2,327-acre site, resulting in a total of 2,700 dwelling units.

The proposed project includes a General Plan Amendment (GPA) that would change existing land use designations on the site, as previously noted. The complete SP for the proposed project

is included in Appendix C to this EIR. The SP includes the following guidelines for development:

General

- 1) All goals, objectives and policies of the North County Metro and Bonsall Community Plans and the County Regional Land Use Element shall apply.
- 2) Land uses within the Specific Plan Area shall be limited to residential, commercial, civic use, recreation and open space uses.
- 3) A Site Plan in accordance to the I-15 Scenic Preservation Guidelines shall be required for development that is within the I-15 Corridor prior to issuance of building permits.
- 4) A Site Plan in accordance with the “D1” Designator is required for the General Commercial and Multi-Family areas in Neighborhood 1 and the “D2” Designator in the Variable Residential areas in Neighborhood 2. The objective of this review is to ensure consistency with the design provision set forth in this Specific Plan.

Residential

- 1) The overall residential density of the SPA shall not exceed 1.16 dwelling units per acre with no more than 2,700 residential dwellings. No more than 10 estate residential lots are allowed within the portion of the Specific Plan Area subject to the Bonsall Community Plan.
- 2) A variety of housing types and lot sizes shall be provided. The minimum residential lot size shall be 4,000 square feet.
- 3) In order to respond to potential visual impacts, the height of structures will vary. Generally, residential development will be limited to 2 stories and 35 feet, however, the multi-family and some of the variable residential areas will be allowed three stories and a maximum height of 40 feet.

Open Space and Recreation

- 1) Significant habitat shall be preserved in open space easements.
- 2) Development shall be clustered on the more level areas to preserve and protect sensitive habitats and steep slopes.
- 3) A variety of recreational opportunities shall be provided for residents.

Circulation

- 1) Transportation improvements shall be phased with development concurrent with need.

- 2) A riding and hiking trails network for public use shall be included as a part of the Merriam Specific Plan. The trail network shall connect to existing and proposed regionally designated trails in the surrounding area.

Public Facilities

- 1) The Specific Plan shall include a public facility element to provide for improvement of facilities and services necessary to implement the proposed project, including: recreation, fire protection, water and sewer.
- 2) Public facilities shall be provided concurrent with need.

Land uses proposed by the Merriam Mountains SP would be consistent with the land use-related environmental goals of the County of San Diego General Plan and would incorporate the goals, policies, and objectives of the Regional Land Use Element and applicable community plans for Bonsall and the North County Metro, as noted above. In addition, the proposed SP would incorporate I-15 Corridor scenic preservation guidelines, 1,192 acres of managed Biological Open Space, and a variety of public services and facilities concurrent with need. In these respects, the proposed project would be consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the County General Plan, and significant conflicts are not anticipated.

North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan

The North County Metro Plan is represented by the Twin Oaks Valley Sponsor Group and the Hidden Meadows Sponsor Group. The North County Metro Plan area provides several goals for growth within this rapidly growing area, including accommodating urban development in appropriate areas and preserving scenic rugged terrain that is not suitable for urbanization, as discussed in the Merriam SP (Appendix C to this EIR). The SP designates the portion of the SPA within the SOIs of the cities of Escondido and San Marcos as CUDA, with the balance of the site remaining as EDA. The proposed project includes the highest-intensity development for lands within the CUDA designation; therefore, the proposed project includes urban development in the appropriate areas consistent with the North County Metro Plan. In addition, scenic resources are being conserved, in a Biological Open Space system encompassing approximately 1,192 acres (51% of the SPA), including a substantial portion of the Merriam Mountains core biological area, a large block of intact habitat.. Therefore, the proposed project would accomplish the goals of accommodating urban development and preserving scenic rugged terrain, and would be consistent with the environmental goals of the North County Metro Plan.

Bonsall Community Plan

The Bonsall community consists of a mixture of agricultural and residential land uses. The Bonsall Community Plan states that land uses should be retained to preserve and enhance the rural character of the area by providing a vegetation buffer between houses. Properties that are in agricultural use and being proposed for development with estate-sized lots should be encouraged to retain agriculture as a compatible use. The project proposes to provide 10 estate residential units on 53.4 acres of land within this planning area, along with Biological Open Space. Therefore, the proposed project would be consistent with the environmental goals of this community plan (see Appendix C to this EIR).

I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan

I-15 forms the eastern boundary of the site, with the master-planned residential communities of Lawrence Welk Village, Rim Rock, and Hidden Meadows east of I-15 in proximity to the site. These existing communities are currently separated from the site by I-15 and experience mid-range views of the site as an undeveloped portion of the Merriam Mountains. With implementation of the proposed project, the character of the site would change from that of an undeveloped assemblage of parcels totaling 2,327 acres to that of a master-planned community with clustered residential development and approximately 1,729 acres of open space (consisting of 1,192 acres of Biological Open Space and 537 acres of other open space areas). Given the existing separation of the site from land uses east of I-15 and the retention of the majority of the project site in open space, implementation of the proposed SP is not anticipated to result in land use incompatibilities with respect to existing land uses to the east. These existing communities are already separated from the site by I-15, and no features of the proposed project would divide these established communities.

Implementation of the proposed project would alter the scenic quality of the I-15 corridor by converting the site from vacant land to a master-planned community with clustered residential and commercial development and managed open space. As discussed in Section 3.1, the proposed project has been designed to minimize visibility of the development from I-15. However, in the absence of specific design treatments addressing visibility, landscape treatments, and architectural details, significant land use impacts would result with respect to the consistency of the proposed project with the I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan (Impact LU-1).

San Diego County Resource Protection Ordinance

As noted in Section 1.1.3 of this EIR, an amendment is proposed to add an exemption to Section 86.605 of the RPO. The exemption would exempt “any project located within the approximately 2,327 acres property known as Merriam Mountains Specific Plan if determined to be consistent

with a comprehensive Resource Protection Plan (RPP) which has been adopted by the Board of Supervisors as the functional equivalent of RPO.” The project includes an RPP in Appendix T to the Merriam Mountains Specific Plan Draft EIR, dated August 2007, as well as an RPO Study included in Appendix F to this EIR. Both the RPP and RPO Study address the resources considered under the RPO, as summarized below:

Biological Resources – Biological resources addressed in the RPP and RPO Study include sensitive habitat lands and wetland resources. With respect to sensitive habitat lands, the proposed project would avoid and minimize impacts to the maximum extent feasible. The project proposes to compensate for impacts that cannot be avoided through on- and off-site habitat preservation and management, as discussed in greater detail in Section 3.2 of this EIR. Avoidance and minimization measures include incorporation of a development and preserve design that consolidates development in the southern portion of the site while providing for an appropriately configured and managed Biological Open Space in the northern portion. Compensation measures include acquisition and management of off-site coastal sage scrub habitat occupied by the California gnatcatcher along the I-15 corridor. On-site preservation lands and off-site mitigation lands would contribute to assembly of an MSCP preserve in North San Diego County, in accordance with the County’s goals for the North County MSCP. In addition, sensitive habitat lands, including coastal sage scrub, coast live oak woodland, and non-native grassland, would be revegetated on site, as discussed in Appendix X to the Merriam Mountains Specific Plan Draft EIR, dated August 2007 (Wetlands and Uplands Conceptual Revegetation Plans).

With respect to on-site wetlands, the project would avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands by utilizing retaining walls, determining and using the least impactful road centerlines, and avoiding all but 2.1 acres of wetlands, mostly due to fire fuel management and wetland restoration impacts that do not remove the wetlands’ value and function. For off-site wetlands associated with the improvements to Deer Springs Road, the project would avoid and minimize impacts by moving the road alignment to the north to avoid the wetlands beyond the southern right of way. Off-site impacts are minimized, except for 0.1 acre of coast live oak woodland associated with construction of Deer Springs Road and 0.1 acre of southern willow scrub associated with Camino Mayor. The 0.2 acre of off-site impacts associated with Deer Springs Road and Camino Mayor is considered unavoidable; impacts have been minimized to the maximum extent feasible, and Deer Springs Road is a circulation element roadway required to be improved with or without implementation of the project. Wetland impacts would be revegetated on site, as discussed in Appendix X to the Merriam Mountains Specific Plan Draft EIR, dated August 2007.

Scenic/Landform Resources – Scenic and landform resources addressed in the RPP and RPO Study include major landforms associated with the Merriam Mountains, as well as Significant

and Insignificant RPO Steep Slopes, as discussed in Section 3.1 of this EIR. The proposed project would conserve all major identified landforms on site, as well as all identified Significant RPO Steep Slopes, including scenic and landform resources within the on-site Biological Open Space. Approximately 177 acres of RPO Steep Slopes that have been deemed “insignificant” based upon visibility would be graded in conjunction with project implementation. Impacts to these resources would be allowed in order to implement MSCP goals to consolidate development in the southern portion of the site, allowing for an appropriately configured Biological Open Space in the northern portion. As discussed in Section 3.1, landform grading is incorporated in the project design to minimize the effects of landform disturbance.

Cultural Resources – Sites CA SDI-4558 and CS-SDI-9822 are identified as RPO significant sites. As discussed in Section 2.5 of this EIR and in the RPO study, significant unavoidable impacts would occur to both cultural sites located within an off-site improvement area (Deer Springs Road improvements). As discussed in the RPO Study, Deer Springs Road is regarded as an essential public facility. The RPP includes measures for long-term management.

In summary, land use conflicts with the RPO have been identified, but an RPO amendment has been proposed that would address RPO resources and provide for avoidance and minimization of impacts to those resources and longterm preservation and management of conserved resources (Impact LU-2).

Spheres of Influence

As discussed above, the SOIs of the cities of Escondido and San Marcos currently cover portions of the project site. Neither city has pre-zoned the land within its respective SOI.

The proposed GPA would shift the boundary between CUDA and EDA so that the CUDA area includes the SOIs of the cities of San Marcos and Escondido (see Figures 1.1-24 and 1.1-25). The southeasterly 31 acres has long been designated for urban development. In addition, the approximately 824 acres that are within the SOIs are potentially suitable for urban uses, according to Policy 1.2 of the Regional Land Use Element.

The CUDA policies encourage overall residential densities of at least four dwelling units per gross acre. As part of the proposed GPA, the Regional Land Use Element is amended to increase the amount of CUDA lands from 31 acres to 824 acres to include the lands currently within the SOIs of the cities of Escondido and San Marcos. Within the CUDA land area, 2,130 dwelling units are planned, resulting in a density of 2.6 dwelling units per gross acre.

The EDA policy provides for a maximum residential density of 0.5 dwelling units per gross acre. This policy also includes development criteria that pertain to clustering; however, the

requirements do not apply to SP projects that are 500 acres or greater in size. Within the area proposed to remain within the EDA, 570 dwelling units are planned, resulting in an overall density of 0.38 dwelling units per gross acre.

Potential impacts due to the proposed increased development within the SOIs due to the change of the regional categories from EDA to CUDA have been addressed in the discussions of air quality (Section 2.1), traffic (Section 2.2), noise (Section 2.4), and aesthetics (Section 3.1). The change in boundary lines for the regional land use categories would not result in significant conflicts with applicable plans and/or policies; therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance

The proposed project would require a zone change from its existing zoned use regulations (S-92, S-82, RR-5, RR-25, M-52, C-36, and A-70) to S-88 (SPA), C-36 (general commercial), and RM-22 (multi-family residential). The purpose of the S-88 use regulations is to allow uses as set forth by the Specific Plan, including residential and open space uses. Detailed development standards for the project site are also set forth in the Specific Plan.

The regulatory provisions of the County Zoning Ordinance apply to all areas of the Merriam SPA and regulate buildings or structures and the construction, reconstruction, alteration, expansion, or relocation of any building, structure, or use in the SPA. The Specific Plan advances the goals and objectives of the General Plan by incorporating the guidelines for development described previously in this section under Guideline 1. The Specific Plan maintains compatibility with the existing surrounding land uses by retaining the northern 1,192 acres of the site in Biological Open Space and by incorporating the D2 Designator in Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3 and the B Designator, as described in Section 1.1.2 of the EIR. Therefore, impacts related to conflicts with the zoning ordinance are considered to be less than significant.

Deer Springs Road – Off-Site Improvements

Land use and planning impacts would be considered significant if the proposed roadway widening and realignment along Deer Springs Road would conflict with any applicable policy that has been adopted with the purpose of protecting the environment, including policies in any adopted habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan. The proposed roadway improvements would be consistent with the Circulation Element Amendment to accommodate vehicle trips from planned land uses and the proposed project along an existing roadway corridor to reduce traffic congestion along Deer Springs Road. In addition, measures are incorporated in the design of the Deer Springs Road improvements to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive environmental resources as previously noted in the RPO discussion and in

Sections 2.5, 3.1, and 3.2 of this EIR. Therefore, the roadway widening is consistent with applicable policies in relation to protecting the environment.

Guideline 2: Conflicts with Habitat or Natural Community Conservation Plans

As discussed in Section 3.2 of this EIR, the project site is located within a Natural Community Conservation Planning Act of 1991 (NCCP) (California Fish and Game Code 2800 to 2840) planning area. The draft North County Multiple Species Conservation Program (NCMSCP) is the proposed subregional plan for this portion of the County of San Diego and is currently being evaluated and negotiated by the public and the Wildlife Agencies.

The project conforms to the general principles of the NCCP based on hardline negotiations with the Wildlife Agencies and the signing of a hardline agreement for the draft NCMSCP (included in Appendix V to the Merriam Mountains Specific Plan Draft EIR, dated August 2007). If the NCMSCP has not been adopted at the time of project approval, the specific findings applicable to NCCP will be made. The hardline agreement establishes that the project footprint is consistent with preserve design principles under the NCCP. Consistent with generally accepted preserve design principles, the project preserves a large block of open space, including the northern and northwestern portions of the site, and provides regional linkages between off-site lands in the San Marcos Mountains to the west and north along Gopher Canyon and to the San Luis Rey River. If the NCMSCP is approved, the project's hardline boundary would eliminate the need for a separate NCCP Habitat Loss Permit (HLP) approval from the County of San Diego and the Wildlife Agencies.

The proposed project site is also located within the Merriam Mountains RCA, a visual landmark containing rare plants including Cleveland sage, southern mountain misery, and summer-holly. Consistent with the resources identified in the Merriam Mountains RCA, the project's cluster design allows for preservation of the majority of the site in open space categories (approximately 51% into permanent Biological Open Space and 23% in fuel treatment open space). The preservation and management of these lands will retain the features that form the visual landmarks of the Merriam Mountains. Preservation of these lands will also preserve a core block of habitat that has connectivity to the north and west, desirable for the preparation of the draft NCMSCP. Therefore, no conflicts with habitat or natural community conservation plans would occur and impacts would be less than significant.

Guideline 3: Incompatible Land Uses

Implementation of the proposed specific plan would introduce a master-planned residential and commercial/retail community into a portion of the currently undeveloped Merriam Mountains and would convert the site from its currently undeveloped state to that of clustered residential

development with commercial uses (approximately 26% of the site), with managed Biological Open Space (approximately 51%), and fuel treatment and other open spaces (23%). This would represent a substantial change to the existing character of the site. The proposed form of clustered development would differ from the existing and planned character of surrounding estate residential and agricultural uses. Such clustered development is proposed to provide opportunities for creation of a meaningful managed open space system and to minimize impacts to surrounding land uses and prominent landforms and minimize the visibility of the development from off-site areas.

The compatibility of the proposed development with the existing on-site land use character and features, and with existing and planned surrounding land uses, is related primarily to the visibility of the proposed development and its sensitivity to existing landforms and other prominent on-site features, such as rock outcrops. As discussed in Section 3.1 of the EIR, the project has been designed to blend with the varied topography of the site and to confine development to the flat areas, valleys, and plateaus generally within the interior of the site, avoiding most of the exterior slopes, major ridgelines, rock outcroppings, and other major natural on-site features.

The commercial and attached residential uses in the southeastern portion of the project site would be visible from I-15, particularly for northbound travelers, and would add an urban element along the I-15 corridor at the Deer Springs Road interchange (see Section 3.1 for further discussion). Elsewhere, the proposed development would generally not be visible from the south, west, and north. The development located generally in flatter valleys in the interior portion of the site would be surrounded by managed open space that would provide a transition and minimize potential incompatibility from the on-site clustered residential development to the existing and planned estate residential and agricultural uses to the south, west, and north. See Section 3.1 of the EIR for a complete visual impact analysis, including visual simulations.

The project site is characterized by rugged topography, and implementation of the proposed specific plan would result in disturbance to existing landforms, including steep slopes. Manufactured slopes would be created and would be visible from the interior of the project site and partially visible from some locations off site. In the absence of appropriate design and landscape treatments, creation of these manufactured slopes would result in significant land use impacts with respect to land use compatibility for future on-site residents and existing and planned surrounding land uses (Impact LU-3).

As identified in Figure 3.5-1, land uses surrounding the proposed project site are generally compatible with the proposed residential, commercial, and open space characteristics. One surrounding land use that is potentially incompatible is the proposed reclamation of an existing mining site located to the northwest of the project boundary. The mining site would be reclaimed

for native habitat restoration. Due to the proposed project design, all residential development would be located in the southern portion of the project site. The closest proposed dwelling unit would be constructed approximately 1.4 miles southeast of the proposed reclaimed mining site. Review of a 2006 aerial photograph indicates the presence of existing residential units adjacent to the active quarry parcels and in the vicinity of the quarry parcels and these existing residential uses are currently exposed to the effects of the existing quarry operation. Reclamation activity of the existing on-site mining associated with the project would not expose existing nearby residents to effects in addition to those already associated with the existing active off-site quarry. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in conflicts due to reclamation of the mining site. Impacts would be less than significant.

Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3 is generally a panhandle in the south-central portion of the site and would include the extension of Meadow Park Lane, as well as about 77 units with variable residential with a density of 10.7 dwelling units per acre. Proposed units could be up to two stories with a maximum height of 35 feet. This panhandle area is generally surrounded by an assortment of land uses (see Figure 3.5-2). As shown, the existing surrounding land uses are not uniform but include estate residential, commercial nursery uses, a church, and a fitness resort. The proposed variable residential land uses would generally be of higher density than the assortment of existing surrounding land uses; the multi-story, attached residential product types anticipated in Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3 would differ from the existing land uses of residential uses in the surrounding area. In the absence of appropriate design guidelines, land use compatibility impacts would result (Impact LU-4).

Guideline 4: Physically Divides or Changes the Character of an Established Community

The existing surrounding community character has a high degree of variability. Surrounding land uses to the north, west, and south of the project site include large-lot, single-family development and avocado groves. Lawrence Welk Village and the community of Hidden Meadows lie to the east of I-15. A mobile home park, the Golden Door Spa and Resort, and estate development lie south of the site along the city/county border of San Marcos. Large-lot, single-family development and agricultural groves abut the site to the north, west, and south, and there is a large sand and gravel mining operation in Gopher Canyon. Existing land uses immediately adjacent to the site include a mixture of single-family estate uses, avocado groves, a mobile home park, a gas station, a mining operation, and a spa. Land uses within 1 mile of the site include planned communities such as Hidden Meadows and planned communities and urban areas within the City of San Marcos to the south. Although not an identified established community, these land uses form the existing community character of the area.

The project would not physically divide a community because it is adjacent to I-15, a large transportation corridor, and is located at the edge of the existing surrounding community. The

project would introduce a new planned community at the I-15/Deer Springs Road interchange with development generally confined to the southern half of the SPA and separated from existing land uses to the west and north by planned on-site open space and existing topography and from existing land uses to the east by I-15. The proposed planned community would be self-contained and oriented to I-15 and to urbanization in the City of San Marcos to the south.

With implementation of the project, the character of the site would change from vacant, vegetated mountains, with some areas of disturbance, to a planned community with manufactured slopes, landscaping, and approximately 1,192 acres of Biological Open Space. A change from a predominantly undeveloped site to a planned community with residential and commercial development would change the existing on-site character of the project site. Introduction of 2,700 homes on the site, with associated population-related effects, could change the character of the immediate project vicinity. Population-related effects are discussed in detail in the Air Quality (Section 2.1), Traffic (Section 2.2), and Utilities and Public Services (Section 4.1.2) sections of this EIR. Effects on community character associated with these population-related effects are not regarded as significant for a variety of reasons. First, the vast majority of the traffic generated by the project would be distributed on I-15 and Deer Springs Road, which are existing roadways that carry urban levels of traffic. In addition, as called for in the Specific Plan and analyzed in this EIR, public services and facilities are proposed to serve project needs and would be provided concurrent with need. The proposed development pattern would have a community character somewhat similar to, though more compact than, nearby planned communities such as Hidden Meadows and the Lawrence Welk Resort and would not be similar to nearby rural estate development. However, the project design has placed the majority of the residential density in an area of the site that is separated from the surrounding community by topographic features, which minimizes the project's potential effects on the surrounding rural character. The project design allows for separation of the majority of the proposed residential uses from the surrounding community by existing topography to the west and proposed Biological Open Space. The project's Biological Open Space provides a rural transition from residential densities proposed in Neighborhoods 3, 4, and 5 and the off-site community. .

However, in Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3, the proposed project would provide a new planned community in an area that is currently primarily rural. It would place the extension of Meadow Park Lane and about 77 units (with a density of 10.7 dwelling units per acre) adjacent to an assortment of existing rural uses (estate lots, greenhouses, and a church) (see discussion under significance Guideline 3). Project design features have been incorporated that address this boundary area. Project proposed structures with a maximum of two stories and height of 35 feet would incorporate a D2 Designator requiring a site plan review, which would require a structural design consistent with the community character in the surrounding area. The D2 Designator

would ensure that the mass, bulk, and scale of the structures of the proposed land uses are consistent with the existing character of land uses.

As depicted in Figure 1.1-21B, the project includes construction of frontage improvements to Circulation Element standards along Twin Oaks Valley Road, a public roadway. The frontage improvements would extend for approximately 2,300' in the western portion of the property where the existing roadway traverses the property. Existing on-site land uses include natural vegetation to the west and an abandoned quarry to the east. The general land use character along this portion of Twin Oaks Valley Road is that of a two-lane roadway in a rural area characterized by a mixture of rural estate and agricultural lands uses as well as the recently completed County Water Authority Water Filtration Plant and the National Quarries mining operation. The proposed frontage improvements would widen the roadway from its existing two lanes to a roadway with an 84' graded width and 40' of pavement curb to curb. In order to make the road meet County roadway standards, an existing 200' radius blind curve would be straightened to provide 500' minimum radius curves. These improvements would accommodate existing truck traffic on the roadway in a safer and less congested manner than currently exists. As discussed in Section 2.2 of this EIR, traffic volumes on the roadway would not substantially change due to the proposed project. No sound walls would be needed or provided as part of the proposed frontage improvements. The improvements would be provided along the existing roadway and would not divide an established community. Any localized community character changes would be confined to currently vacant land within the project site. This area would become part of the Biological Open Space with project implementation. No adverse changes to community character would occur.

In summary, the proposed project would not physically divide the surrounding community based on the location of the project in relation to I-15 and the large area of preserved open space that would be retained. Introduction of a planned community on the site would be different in character than some of the existing nearby rural estate uses; however, the majority of the project is separated from the surrounding community by topographic features and includes compatible uses, such as Biological Open Space, in proximity to the rural estate areas, which would retain the rural character of the surrounding community. Therefore, significant impacts are not anticipated.

Deer Springs Road – Off-Site Improvements: The proposed roadway widening would not physically divide an established community because Deer Springs Road already exists as a heavily travelled two-lane roadway and the proposed roadway alignment would be similar to the existing alignment. Driveways and accessibility would be maintained along Deer Springs Road.

The existing character of Deer Springs Road within the existing community is that of a heavily travelled, congested roadway carrying from 14,900 to 18,400 ADT at LOS F. This reflects

existing use of Deer Springs Road as a through arterial connecting travelers residing in Temecula and other locations in Riverside County to employment centers in San Marcos, Vista, Carlsbad, and other North County coastal communities. Deer Springs Road connects I-15 to SR-78 and other four-lane arterials such as Twin Oaks Valley Road, San Marcos Boulevard, and Mountain Meadow Road and is heavily used as a commuter route. Under the proposed project, traffic on the roadway would increase in the cumulative scenario from 33,000 to 49,000 ADT; the roadway would be widened to four lanes and would be less congested, operating at LOS D. From a congestion and traffic standpoint, the increased traffic and reduced congestion would not result in a substantial change to community character.

As discussed in Sections 2.4, Noise, and 3.1, Aesthetics, widening the road to four lanes and associated increased traffic would require introduction of substantial cut slopes and about 2,825 linear feet of new noise walls (includes 470 feet of noise walls onsite located along the southern limits of Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3) ranging from 6 to 8 feet in height along Deer Springs Road. The major cut slopes would be on the north side of the roadway and would be at the easterly end of the about 2.1-mile improvement area, ranging from 25 to 205 feet in height and extending for approximately 1,400 feet generally west of the Merriam Mountains Parkway/Deer Springs Road intersection. The longest noise wall, approximately 1,040 linear feet, would be on the south side of the roadway adjacent to the existing mobile home park and in proximity to the I-15/Deer Springs Road interchange. Other noise wall segments ranging from 135 to 470 feet would be located between Merriam Mountains Parkway and Meadow Park Lane and adjacent to Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3, with intermittent noise walls totaling 880 feet located along the Sarver curve. The cut slopes and noise walls would introduce more urban elements than currently exist along the existing heavily travelled roadway; however, these increased urban elements would predominantly be located at the easterly end of the approximately 2.1-mile Deer Springs Road improvement area, near the existing I-15/Deer Springs Road interchange and the new Merriam Mountains Parkway and Meadow Park Lane roadways to be constructed as part of the project. Combining the 1,400 linear feet of cut slopes and 2,825 linear feet of roadway, these features would occupy about 37% of one side or the other of the approximately 2.1-mile improvement area, generally east of Meadow Park Lane (the Sarver curve intermittent noise walls would be west of Meadow Park Lane). Landscape and textural treatments would be provided for the cut slopes and noise walls to soften their appearance and blend these features with the existing terrain (see M-AE-3a through M-AE-3e in Section 3.1). These features of the Deer Springs Road improvements would alter the character of the roadway but would not result in substantial changes in community character for several reasons: the features and their effects would be confined to areas immediately adjacent to the existing roadway; the majority of the cut slopes and noise walls would be at the easterly end of the improvement area closer to existing urban features near the interchange (gas station, fire station, and mobile home park); character changes along most of the western portion of the alignment would be limited to increased

pavement width and intermittent noise walls; and landscaping and textural treatments would be provided to soften the visual appearance of introduced urban features.

3.5.4 Cumulative Impact Analysis

The general cumulative impact study area includes an approximate 4-mile radius around the project site. This area was chosen due to the distance of the project site to the I-15 and SR-78 corridors, since projects within this area have the greatest potential to create cumulative impacts to natural resources and roadway infrastructure. The proposed project and cumulative projects in the immediate vicinity are subject to the goals and policies of the San Diego County General Plan, North County Metropolitan Subregional Plan, Bonsall Community Plans, and the I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan for its overall policy framework.

Within this study area, seven cumulative projects (numbers 5, 6, 11, 13, 19, 47, and 63, as identified in Table 1.1-4) have been identified as having land use impacts. Cumulative project number 11, located in the City of San Marcos, would impact steep slopes and is mitigated through enhanced landscaping. Cumulative project number 13 is also located in the City of San Marcos and mitigation measures, such as payment of landscape and inspection fees along with the approval of final landscape and irrigation plans, reduced any potential land use impacts to less than significant. Cumulative project numbers 19, 47, and 63 were reduced to less-than-significant through general plan amendments, zone changes, and open space easements. Therefore land use impacts that were identified for cumulative projects (numbers 5, 6, 11, 13, 19, 47, and 63) would be reduced to a level below significance through proposed mitigation measures identified in the environmental documentation as discussed above.

Sixty-three additional cumulative projects were identified for consideration by commenters during public review of the Draft EIR. These projects are listed in Table 1.1-5. Projects located in cities typically consist of urban projects such as mixed use developments, health center expansions, and commercial developments. Projects located in unincorporated areas in San Diego County generally consist of residential subdivisions, the majority of which are ten units or less. These uses would generally be compatible with the existing land uses in the vicinity of the proposed project.

Of the 63 additional cumulative projects, five projects are proposing General Plan Amendments. It is assumed that the remainder of the projects would be consistent with the applicable land use plans and policies. The five projects proposing General Plan Amendments include two mixed use developments, one health center, one commercial development and one residential development. Of these five projects, four are located in the City of San Marcos and one is located in the County of San Diego. The project proposed in the County – Orchard Hills GPA – proposes the development of twenty seven residential units located approximately two miles to the south of

the project site within an urbanized area between the City of San Marcos and City of Escondido. Each of these projects would be compatible with the existing character of its respective community given the proposed land uses.

The proposed project, taken together with these cumulative projects, represents a pattern of emerging urbanization along the I-15 corridor. These types of land use changes are anticipated in the North County Metro Plan: the plan provides policies (policy numbers 2 and 3) within its land use section supporting growth to occur within the unincorporated areas of the County of San Diego that extend from the surrounding cities of Vista, San Marcos, and Escondido. None of the land-use-related cumulative projects are located within the Bonsall Community Plan area. The project-related cumulative projects are generally scattered along Twin Oaks Valley Road, Deer Springs Road, Buena Creek Road, and Mountain Meadow Road. The pattern of projects increasing land use density along the I-15 corridor, such as those noted in the cumulative project list, is likely to be significant overall. However, the project is within the urbanizing North County Metro Plan, which has anticipated urban levels of growth and reduces the project's contribution to less than cumulatively considerable.

3.5.5 Growth-Inducing Impact

The project would result in a GPA that would yield more residential units and growth on the project site than anticipated in the County's current General Plan for the site. However, the GPA would help alleviate the predicted housing shortages and population influx in San Diego County over the next 25 years (see Section 1.7 of the EIR). The project site is a logical area for a GPA due to existing availability of water infrastructure on the site, proximity to the I-15 transportation corridor, and the site's location within the SOIs of the cities of Escondido and San Marcos. In general, the surrounding areas to the south and east are already developed, and barriers to growth in undeveloped areas to the west and north (e.g., lack of infrastructure) would not be removed as part of the project, with the exception of a few parcels that would benefit from water and sewer connections.

To address growth on surrounding land, the Growth Inducement Technical Report (Appendix S to the Merriam Mountains Specific Plan Draft EIR, dated August 2007) assumes that surrounding landowners may try to develop their land to the maximum extent possible according to the General Plan designation provided for the surrounding land uses. It would be speculative to assume landowners would request a GPA to provide additional growth, since one cannot know the number of landowners that would pursue an amendment and what the amendment would entail (i.e., the amount of increased growth each landowner may wish to obtain). Therefore, this analysis was based on the maximum growth allowable per General Plan designations. Based on this approach, approximately 720 additional residential units may be developed. Existing land uses adjacent to Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3 consist of residential uses, a nursery, a fitness

resort, specialty plant production, and a church (see Figure 3.5-2). Due to the density proposed in this area (10.2 dwelling units per acre), surrounding landowners may pursue developing land to the maximum extent possible or request a GPA. As stated above, it would be speculative to assume GPAs in this area or what each amendment would entail.

In addition, commercial development may be accelerated due to the increased customer base provided by the Merriam project. Commercially designated lands in the area selected for study include areas in the Hidden Meadows and Twin Oaks communities. Some commercial uses already exist in these areas. However, these developed commercial sites could conceivably be intensified as the Merriam project progresses and more customers are brought to the area. It should be noted that this growth is anticipated in the existing General Plan with commercial and industrial land uses designations in the southeastern portion of the site (see Figure 1.1-26), and the amount of commercial proposed by the project (10.1 acres) would actually be less than under current General Plan designations.

Summary of Impacts

- Impact LU-1 In the absence of specific design treatments addressing visibility, landscape treatments, and architectural details, significant land use impacts would result with respect to the consistency of the proposed project with the I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan.
- Impact LU-2 In absence of a detailed resource protection plan and protection of specific resources, significant land use impacts would result with respect to the consistency of the proposed project with the RPO.
- Impact LU-3 Manufactured slopes would result in significant land use impacts with respect to land use compatibility for future on-site residents and existing and planned surrounding land uses.
- Impact LU-4 The multi-story, attached residential product types anticipated in Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3 would differ from the existing character of residential uses in the surrounding area.

3.5.6 Mitigation Measures

The following measures are incorporated in the project to mitigate impacts associated with inconsistencies between proposed land uses and applicable environmental plans and policies.

- M-LU-1 Site Plan review shall occur through application of the “B” Special Area Designator, as called for in the Specific Plan and noted below:

- The I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan designates a portion of the area within the SPA with the B Special Area Designator. The purpose of the B designator is to require a site plan review for any development permit. The intent of the B designator is to address man-made and natural features that affect the scenic quality of the I-15 corridor area, which extends from the northern Escondido city limits to the Riverside County line. All development applications within the B designator are required to submit a comprehensive Site Plan in accordance with the Scenic Preservation Guidelines of the I-15 Corridor Plan. The Specific Plan identifies Neighborhood 1, portions of Neighborhoods 4 and 5, and the Estate Lots within the viewshed of the I-15 corridor. These areas shall retain the B designator within the S-88, C-36 and RM-22 zoning.

M-LU-2 The project includes an RPP that addresses all resources covered by the RPO and is included as the functional equivalent to RPO. Through consolidating open space and management of RPO resources, the RPP provides for a more comprehensive approach to resource protection and management than would occur under the RPO.

M-LU-3 The following grading guidelines shall be implemented to be sensitive to nearby and adjacent land uses:

- General Grading: Grading plans will retain the natural shape of the landform and reflect the topographic features of the terrain. Long, continuous straight slopes that have hard edges and no transition areas at the top and the toe of slope should be avoided.
- Grading in Open Space Areas: Grading will be prohibited in natural open space lots, except for trail placement, placement of utilities, or facilities associated with access and maintenance.
- Contour Grading Techniques: Contour grading techniques reflecting the character of existing significant natural features will be utilized. Techniques to be used include:
 - Using variable slope gradients with smooth, rounded cuts
 - Rounding off toe and crest of slopes
 - Blending graded slope contours with the natural topography
 - Utilizing vegetation to alleviate sharp, angular slopes
 - Designing drainage courses to blend with the natural or manufactured terrain.

Contour grading techniques are proposed, including blending of graded slope contours with the natural topography, use of variable slope gradients with smooth, rounded cuts, and rounding off the toe and crest of slopes. The Vesting Tentative Map (VTM) identifies bench areas approximately every 30 feet in vertical height along proposed cut/fill slopes, which is consistent with the County Grading Ordinance. The placement of bench slopes every thirty feet in height would allow a collection of native and drought-tolerant plantings including small, medium and large-scaled shrubs to screen the slopes in an irregular pattern.

- Maximum Cut and Fill Slopes: Subject to the recommendations of the geotechnical engineer and landscape architect and concurrence from the Department of Public Works, the maximum fill slope ratio allowed shall be 1.5:1, and a maximum 1:1 ratio shall be allowed on cut slopes. Absent specific recommendations, the maximum fill slope ratio shall be 2:1, and the maximum cut slope ratio shall be 1.5:1 for slopes less than 15 feet in height and 2:1 for slopes greater than 15 feet in height.

M-LU-4 Site Plan review shall occur through application of the “D2” Special Area Designator, as called for in the Specific Plan and noted below:

- Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3 shall meet the following requirements prior to the issuance of building permits:
 - The maximum height shall be 35 feet, consisting of two-story structures
 - No more than four units shall be permitted per structure
 - A 100-foot setback for all structures from property line per the requirements of the Fire Protection Plan.

3.5.7 Conclusion

It was determined that the proposed project would result in significant impacts due to the absence of specific design treatments and the project’s inconsistency with the I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan (Impact LU-1). Implementation of mitigation measure M-LU-1 would reduce this impact to less than significant levels because a site plan review would require the development to comply with scenic preservation guidelines of the I-15 corridor through the application of the B Designator, as called for in the Specific Plan.

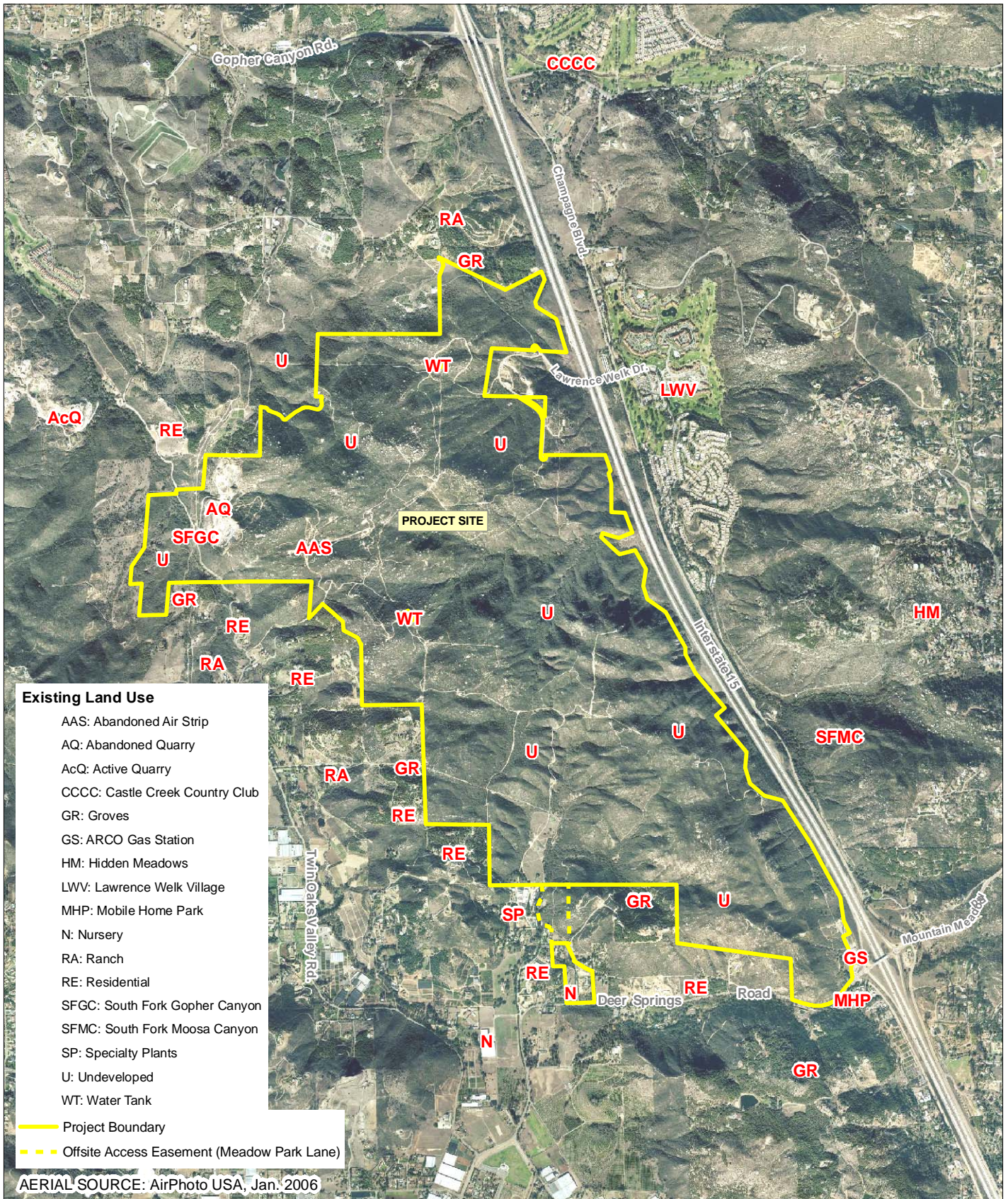
In absence of a detailed resource protection plan and protection of specific resources, including cultural resources and RPO wetlands significant land use impacts would result with respect to consistency of the proposed project with the RPO (Impact LU-2). The proposed project includes

an RPP that addresses all resources covered by the RPO and is included as the functional equivalent to RPO. Through consolidating open space and management of RPO resources, the RPP provides for a more comprehensive approach to resources protection (M-LU-2). Therefore, implementation of the RPP would reduce significant land use impacts with respect to consistency with the RPO to a level below significance.

The creation of manufactured slopes would result in impacts related to incompatible land uses (Impact LU-3). Implementation of grading guidelines (M-LU-3) would reduce these impacts to less than significant levels because contour grading would blend manufactured slopes with existing terrain, and native and drought tolerant landscaping would blend with existing vegetation.

Proposed land uses within Neighborhood 2, Planning Area 3 would result in a significant land use impact, as proposed land uses would differ from the existing character of residential uses in the surrounding area (Impact LU-4). Through implementation of height restrictions, density allotment setbacks, and design review, the mass, bulk, and scale in this planning area would be compatible with surrounding land uses (M-LU-4). Therefore, impacts would be reduced to a level below significance because the bulk and scale of proposed development would be appropriately reduced and softened by landscaping so as not to visually intrude on surrounding land uses.

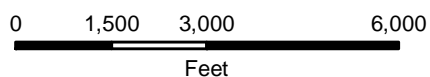
With implementation of proposed mitigation measures stated above, all land use impacts would be reduced to a level below significance.

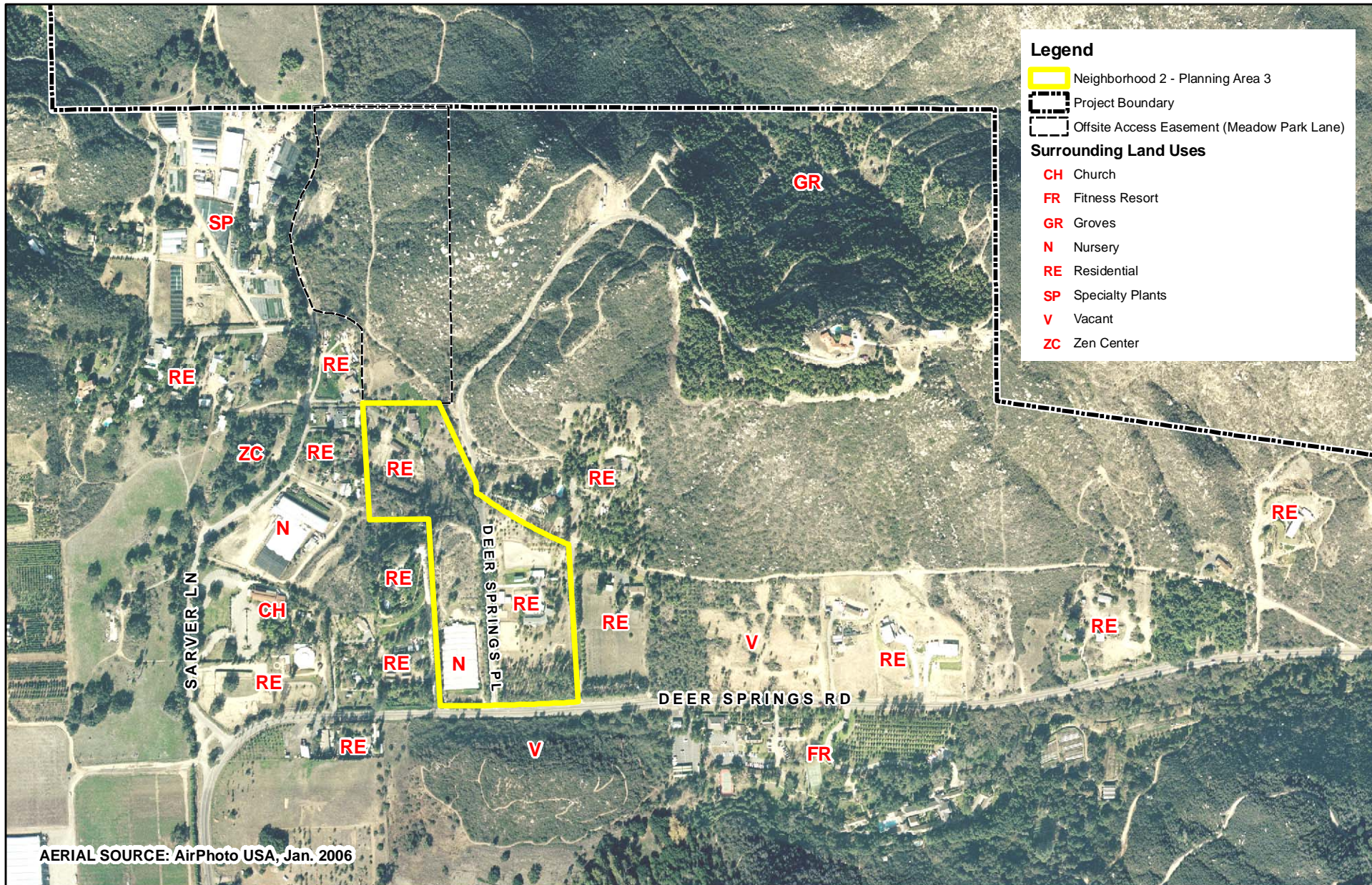


Surrounding Land Uses

FIGURE
3.5-1

**MERRIAM MOUNTAINS
SPECIFIC PLAN EIR**





Neighborhood 2 - Planning Area 3 Surrounding Land Uses

FIGURE 3.5-2