

5.0 Issues, Threats and Potential Impacts

7.0 Public Access and Recreation

7.0 PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION MANAGEMENT

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The location of AWCWP within a growing metropolitan area with good highway access and opportunities for use year-round have made it an extremely popular recreation destination for local residents and regional, national, and international visitors alike. The park offers many opportunities for recreation use, including hiking, running, mountain cycling, equestrian use, nature viewing, birding, painting, photography, and wilderness education with an extensive network of trails. Hitching rails located at the park entrance, Wood Canyon at Mathis Trail, and at the Old Sycamore Grove accommodate equestrian uses, and a rest area located under the Sycamore Trees provides for small gatherings in the park.

Among the permitted uses in the park, mountain cycling is the most popular. In fact, mountain cycling had been a common use in Aliso and Wood Canyons prior to the establishment of the AWCWP. Mountain cycling activities, both past and present, are indicative of the high public demands for open natural terrain in the county. The fact that the park site borders on so many different communities has resulted in increased demands on the site as a valuable open space resource. These demands can be expected to increase in future decades as the population in Orange County continues to grow and open space areas continue to diminish.

Given the definition of Wilderness Park, public access and recreation are considered secondary to the primary goal of protecting and restoring the natural and cultural resources of the park. This section provides an overview of existing park uses and summarizes the detailed trail assessment prepared for the Existing Conditions Report (Appendix C).

7.2 EXISTING PUBLIC ACCESS

Visitors enjoy the rugged topography, steep hillsides, and deep canyons accessed through the park's 30-mile network of trails. The Wood Canyon Trail acts as the spine of the trail system with a combination of improved and unimproved trails creating the overall network. Currently, there are 2.0 miles of hiker-only trails, 28.0 miles of multi-use trails, and 3.5 miles of paved bikeway. A complete assessment of existing trails is provided in the Existing Conditions Report in Appendix C.

All trails within the park fall into one of four trail classifications (Figure 17: Existing Trails). The four classifications, authorized, restored, utility access, and unauthorized, represent the County's current policies regarding public access and recreational use as well as physical characteristics identified in the field. The four trail classifications can be described as follows:

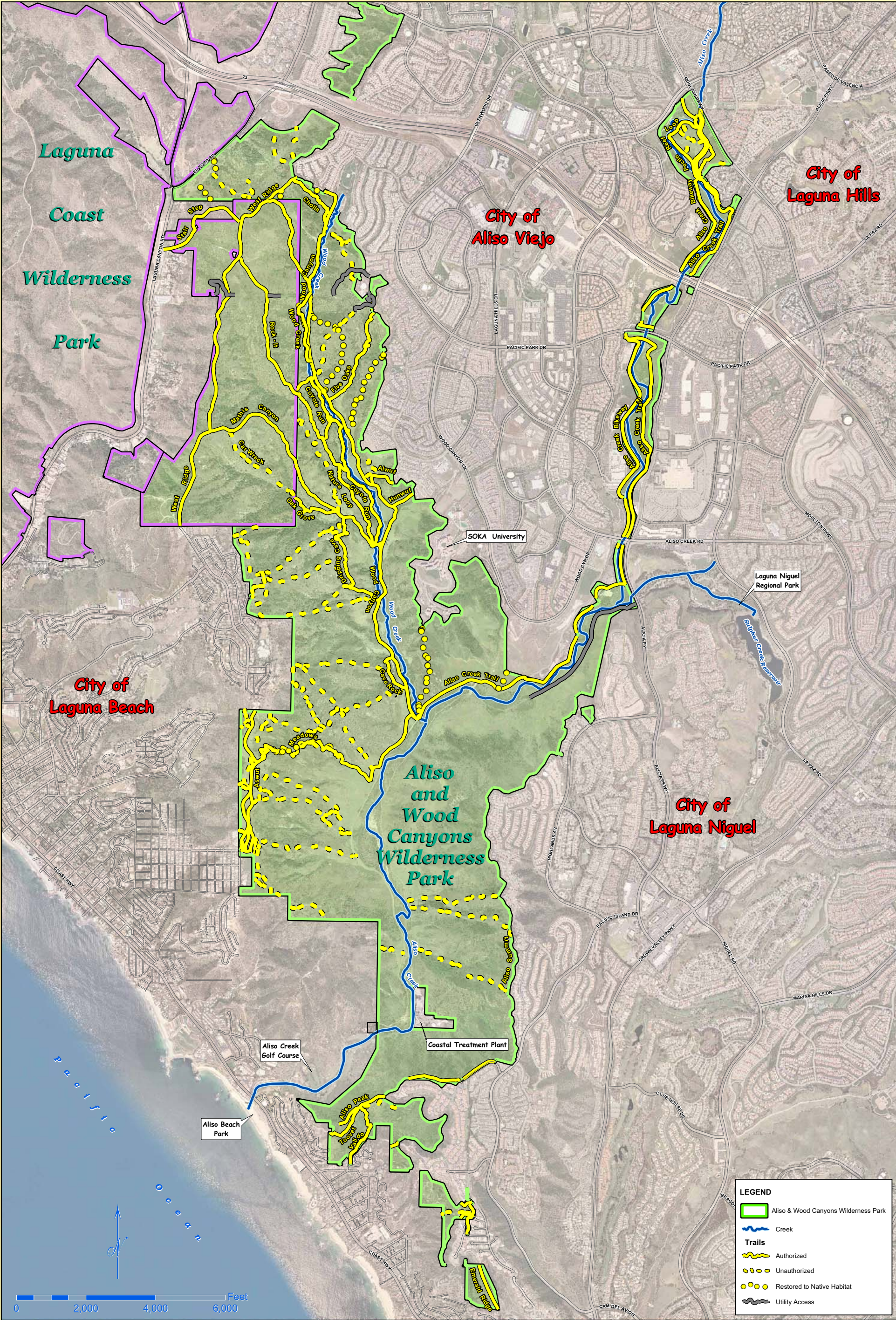
- **Authorized Trails:** The Park's existing practice is to allow pedestrian, equestrian, and bicycle access to most trails. A few trails are designated for pedestrian use only. This category includes trails maintained by OC Parks.
- **Restored Trails (trails restored to natural condition):** This category includes trails and roads that have been closed by the park rangers due to safety concerns and/or to protect park resources. Many of these trails have been revegetated with native species and posted to prevent unwanted access. These trails were identified primarily in discussion with park rangers.
- **Utility Access Roads:** Multiple utility access roads are located in the park; these roads are not maintained by park staff. The SOCWA service road and easement provide access to the Coastal Treatment Plant and pipelines located in lower Aliso Canyon. The Moulton Niguel Water District manages the service roads around the water tanks on Moulton Peak.
- **Unauthorized Trails:** Uncontrolled access and increased recreational use has facilitated the development of visitor-created trails that are potentially damaging to site resources. This category includes these visitor-created or unauthorized trails.

7.2.1 Existing Trails

The Existing Conditions Report (Appendix C) includes an assessment of existing recreation resources, including trails. The trails assessment summarized below is based on the Orange County Regional Parks Unpaved Trail Assessment prepared in 1995 and is supplemented with information from an onsite trail assessment conducted in February and March 2006. Table F describes the relevant detail regarding the individual trails. For clarity, the trails assessment is organized according to four geographic areas that consist of Upper Aliso Canyon, Aliso and Wood Canyons Confluence, Lower Aliso Canyon, and Wood Canyon.

Upper Aliso Canyon. This area forms the northeast arm of the park from Moulton Parkway to the main park entrance that provides the primary access to this area. The parking lot accommodates 48 cars including two spaces for disabled visitors. The Orange Coast Watershed and Environmental Center is establishing offices and programs for interpretation and education at this location. A small picnic area, trash cans and portable restrooms are also located at the main park entrance. Kiosks provide information regarding the rules, regulations, and resources of the park with trail maps. Visitors can also enter this section of the park from the north along Moulton Parkway or from access points along the Aliso Creek Bikeway.

Aliso Creek Trail: The Aliso Creek Trail begins at the base of the Pecten Loop Trail where the Aliso Creek Bikeway crosses Aliso Creek. The Aliso Creek Trail parallels Alicia Parkway and the eastern bank of Aliso Creek. The trail remains distinct from the Aliso Creek Bikeway with the exception of the junction at Pacific Park Drive. Here the trail crosses Aliso Creek north and south of the road before shifting back toward Alicia Parkway. The trail terminates at the junction of the AWMA Road and bikeway just north of the main park entrance.



DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY:
OC Public Works
GIS Mapping Unit
Brian Anderson

DATA SOURCE:
- Geomatics Land Information Systems Division
- USGS 10 meter DEM 1999
- Eagle Aerial Image 1.5 foot resolution, flown July 2003

The County of Orange and Geomatics/LIS/GIS make no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy of the data from which this map was derived. Neither the County nor Geomatics/LIS/GIS shall be liable under any circumstances for any direct, indirect, special, incidental or consequential damages with respect to any claim by any user or any third party on account of or arising from the use of this map.

DATE: May 12, 2009

Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park
Resource Management Plan
Figure 17: Existing Trails



Back of Figure 17

Table F: Trails Assessment

Management Zone and Trail	Trail Classification*	Length	Width	Grade*	Surface*	Condition	Setting	User Group*	Use*	Service Access*	Notes
Upper Aliso Canyon											
Aliso Creek Trail	A, Dual	3 miles	3 feet	Easy	DG	Maintained	Riparian, Landscaped	H, E, MB	L	Yes	
Aliso Creek Bikeway	A, Dual	3 miles	10 feet	Easy	P	Maintained	Riparian, Landscaped	H, MB	H	Yes	
Pecten Reef Loop Trail	A, Single	0.5 miles	3 feet	Easy	C/S	Maintained	Grassland	H, E, MB	M	No	
Aliso and Wood Canyons Confluence											
Aliso Canyon Trail (Lower Aliso Creek Trail)	A, Single	1.5 miles	3-5 feet	Easy	C/S	Minimal rutting and bike shortcuts	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Riparian	H, E, MB	H	Yes	Heavily traveled
Aliso Summit Trail	A, Single	3.5 miles	5 feet	Easy	D/G	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Riparian	H	M	No	Discontinuous trail
SOCWA Service Road	Utility Access	XX	XX	Easy	P	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Riparian	Closed to Public	N/A	Yes	Road closed to public
SOCWA Easement	Utility Access	XX	XX	Easy	CS	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Riparian	Closed to Public	N/A	Yes	Easement closed to public
Aswut Trail	A, Dual	XX	8-10 feet	Easy	P	Maintained	Hillside	H, MB, D	H	Yes	Evidence of goat grazing
The Meadows Trail	A, Single	1.5 miles	2-5 feet	Difficult	C	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Hillside	H, E, MB	M	No	Provides access to Wood Canyon
Lower Aliso Canyon											
Valido Trail	A, Single	1.0 mile	3 feet	Moderate	C/SS	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Hillside	H	M	No	
Aliso Peak Trail	A, Dual	XX	XX	Moderate	C/SS	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Hillside	H	M	No	
Toovet Trail	A, Dual	XX	XX	Moderate	C/SS	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Hillside	H	M	No	
Wood Canyon											
Wood Canyon Trail	A, Dual	3.1 miles	8-12 feet	Easy	L	Creek crossings via planks set on concrete	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Oak Woodland, Riparian	H, E, MB	H	Yes	Most heavily used trail. Cleared by OC Fire Authority
Cave Rock Trail	A, Single	0.25 mile	4-8 feet	Moderate	C/S	Heavily rutted in places	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Oak Woodland	H	H	No	
Dripping Cave Trail	A, Single	2 miles	4-5 feet	Moderate	C/S	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Oak Woodland	H, MB	H	No	
Mathis Canyon Trail	A, Single	2 miles	3-10 feet	Difficult	S/L	Heavy erosion and rutting toward top of hill	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Hillside	H, E, MB	M	Yes	
Oak Grove Trail	A, Single	1.5 miles	3 feet	Moderate	C/S	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Riparian	H, E, MB	M	No	No connection to other trails
Hunwut Trail	A, Single	XX	4-5 feet	Moderate	CS	XX	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Hillside	H, E, MB	L	Yes	Locked gate prevents entry
Alwut Trail	A, Single	XX	4-5 feet	Moderate	CS	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Hillside	H, E, MB	L	Yes	
Coyote Run Trail	A, Single	2.5 miles	3 feet	Moderate	C/L	Rutting and bike shortcuts present	Coastal Sage Scrub, Grassland, Oak Woodland, Riparian	H, MB	M	No	
Five Oaks Trail	A, Single	1.25 miles	3-6 feet	Difficult	C/SS	Heavy erosion and rutting in places	Coastal Sage Scrub, Oak Woodland, Hillside	H, E, MB	M	No	Lacks loop trail
Wood Creek Trail	A, Single	0.5 mile	4-8 feet	Easy	L/O	Maintained	Oak Woodland, Riparian	H	M	No	
Rock-it Trail	A, Single	1 mile	2-8 feet	Difficult	C/SS	Heavy erosion and rutting in places	Coastal Sage Scrub, Hillside, Ridgeline	H, MB	M	No	Trail with most injuries
West Ridge Trail	A, Dual	XX	8-15 feet	Moderate	S/G	Erosion and rutting along trail edges & many unauth. trails present	Coastal Sage Scrub, Ridgeline, Hillside	H, E, MB, D	H	Yes	Unauthorized trails very visible
Nature Loop Trail	A, Single	0.5 mile	2-3 feet	Difficult	C/SS	Heavy rutting at trail base	Coastal Sage Scrub, Ridgeline, Hillside	H	M	No	Cleared by OC Fire Authority
Lynx Trail	A, Single	1.5 miles	3-4 feet	Difficult	C/SS	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Ridgeline, Hillside	H, E, MB	M	No	
Cholla Trail	A, Single	1 mile	4 feet	Difficult	C/SS	Maintained	Coastal Sage Scrub, Ridgeline	H, E, MB	M	No	Unauthorized trail to El Toro Road
Stairstep Trail	A, Single	0.7 mile	XX	Difficult	XX	Some erosion and rutting	Coastal Sage Scrub, Ridgeline	H, E, MB	L	No	Steep, challenging trail

***Trail Classification**

A, Single: Authorized, Single Track Trail
A, Dual: Authorized, Double Track Trail

***Grade**

Easy: <5% sustained slope
Moderate: 5% - 10% slope
Difficult: > 10% slope

***Trail Surfaces**

DG: Decomposed Granite
P: Pavement
C/S: Clay/Sand
D/G: Dirt/Gravel
CS: Compact Soil
C: Clay
C/SS: Clay/Sandstone
L: Loam
S/L: Sand/Loam
C/L: Clay/Loam
L/O: Loam/Oak Duff
S/G: Sand/Gravel

*** User Group**

H: Hiker
E: Equestrian
MB: Mountain Biker
D: Leashed Dogs

*** Use Level**

L: Lightly Used
M: Moderately Used
H: Heavily Used

***Service Access**

These trails are accessible to Fire Department/Emergency vehicles and Park Ranger/Maintenance vehicles.

Aliso Creek Bikeway: The Aliso Creek Bikeway is an Orange County master-planned regional bike path intended to stretch from the mountain foothills to the Pacific Ocean. The three mile section of the bikeway within AWCWP is accessed at Sheep Hills Park in Laguna Niguel from Laguna Hills Drive. Visitors can also access the bikeway from several access points along the route. The dual-lane path follows Aliso Creek south through a narrow green corridor directly adjacent to suburban communities and schoolyards on the west. The bikeway crosses the creek via a bridge south of the Pecten Loop trail and travels underneath Highway 73, Pacific Park Drive, and Aliso Creek Road. It ends at the junction of the creek and AWMA Road just north of the main park entrance.

The Aliso Creek bikeway connects visitors north to many city parks along the way, to Limestone-Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park 12 miles north and to Cleveland National Forest trails in the Santa Ana Mountains.

Pecten Reef Loop Trail: This easy, half-mile interpretive trail loops around Pecten Reef Hill in the northernmost section of the park's eastern arm. The Pecten Reef trail connects with the Aliso Creek Bikeway near Moulton Parkway, and again at the southern end of the loop near the Aliso Creek Bikeway creek crossing. It is suggested that this be expanded to a full loop on both sides of the paved bikeway.

Aliso and Wood Canyons Confluence. This area forms the heart of the park; it extends east-west from the main park entrance to Moulton Meadows. The main park entrance provides the primary access to this area. A trailhead/staging area is also located at the confluence between the two canyons. The trailhead provides a horse watering trough, portable restroom, picnic table, and information kiosk. A gate prevents park visitors from continuing on the AWMA Road to the Coastal Treatment Plant during business hours (i.e., Monday through Friday). Visitors can also enter the park from the west at the City of Laguna Beach Moulton Meadows Park via Nyes Place and/or Blue Bird Canyon Roads in the City of Laguna Beach.

Aliso Canyon Trail (Lower Aliso Creek Trail): Originating from the main park entrance at Alicia Parkway, Aliso Canyon Trail parallels Aliso Creek and the paved AWMA Road. The trail provides the only means of accessing Wood and Mathis Canyons from the eastern portions of the park and the main entrance. The trail has an "open" feel and affords views of vast expanses of grassland, coastal sage scrub, and the riparian habitat along Aliso Creek south of the trail. Aliso Canyon Trail comes to an end at the junction with Meadows and Wood Canyon Trails.

Discovery Trail: Also originating from the main park entrance at Alicia Parkway, the 0.25 mile Discovery Trail is located immediately adjacent to the Orange Coast Watershed and Environmental Center and the park ranger station. From the trail, visitors can view evidence of past human habitation, including sheep/cattle grazing on the slope and part of a corral that dates back to the late 1800's. The 1940's International Harvester or "Windrower" was used to collect barley, oats, and rye and is a connection to past agricultural work in the area. The trail passes through primarily riparian habitat with many native plants in close proximity to the trail. The

Discovery Trail is a combined loop and provides access to a scenic overlook of Aliso Creek.

Aliso Summit Trail: The Aliso Summit Trail follows the eastern ridge of Aliso Canyon in Laguna Niguel and borders residential communities. The northern half-mile portion is accessed in the Hillcrest Estates neighborhood via Lilly Shapell Park on Drakes Bay. The trail breaks at the northern intersection of Highland Ave. and Ridgeview Drive. The second leg picks up again where Ridgeview Drive loops back to Highland Ave. The trail provides expansive views of Aliso and Wood Canyons and the Pacific Ocean along its entire route. Aliso Summit Trail connects with Seaview Park at Talavera Drive and continues to the Aliso Peak Trail overlooking Laguna Beach and the ocean.

AWMA Road: The AWMA Road originates at the main park entrance and parallels Aliso Creek through Aliso Canyon to the Coastal Treatment Plant. The road provides access to the Coastal Treatment Plant located in lower Aliso Canyon above the Aliso Creek Golf Course. This private road is intended for Coastal Treatment Plant personnel and official County vehicular use only. An easement with the County and the Coastal Treatment Plant provides for public access from the park's main entry to Wood Canyon during weekends and holidays only.

Coastal Treatment Plant Easement: Along the east side of Aliso Creek, an on-grade dirt maintenance road runs through Aliso Canyon from Alicia Parkway to the Coastal Treatment Plant. The dirt road provides utility access to the treatment plant pipelines along the east side of Aliso Creek and is presently closed to the public. Several unauthorized trails come down the hillside from the Aliso Summit Trail and connect to this maintenance road.

Aswut Trail (native language trail name): The Aswut Trail is accessed via Moulton Meadows Park at Del Mar and Balboa Avenues in Laguna Beach. This paved, dual track trail follows a level grade north toward Meadows Trail at an elevation of approximately 800 feet. Views abound on either side of the trail: to the west lies the city of Laguna Beach and the Pacific Ocean and on the east sprawls the lower half of AWCWP, dense development east of the park, and the barely discernible San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountain ranges. Past the juncture with Meadows Trail, Aswut terminates at a locked gate within a private residential community at Alta Laguna Boulevard.

The Meadows Trail: Accessed by Moulton Meadows Park (City of Laguna Beach) and Aswut Trail, the Meadows Trail provides direct access to Wood Canyon from Laguna Beach. The trail descends at a steep incline down the hill through grassland and scattered coastal sage scrub habitat with unobstructed views. At the floor of Aliso Canyon the trail veers north through an open meadow toward the beginning of the Wood Canyon Trail.

Lower Aliso Canyon. This area forms the southern boundary of the park from the Aliso and Wood Canyons confluence to the Aliso Creek Golf Course. Several trails are open to the

public, including the Valido, Aliso Peak, and Toovet trails connecting to the Aliso Summit Trail. These trails are accessed via West Street from Laguna Beach.

Valido Trail: Valido Trail (hikers only) is accessed by West Street from the Pacific Coast Highway in Laguna Beach. Users climb stairs, sandstone outcroppings, and check dams to the headland overlook located at the top of Aliso Peak Trail. At 683 feet, the views of the Orange County Coast, Aliso Beach Park, and lower Aliso Canyon are spectacular. Valido Trail connects with Toovet Trail where an additional overlook is available at its terminus.

Aliso Peak Trail: The Aliso Peak Trail (hikers only) connects with the Valido Trail and Seaview Park in Laguna Niguel. Seaview Park is accessed by Talavera Drive. A steep and sometimes slippery hike up the bluff to Aliso Peak reveals a solitary bench positioned to take in views of the Pacific Ocean, Aliso Beach Park, City of Laguna Beach, and Aliso Creek Golf Course.

Toovet Trail (native language trail name): The Toovet Trail (hikers only) is accessed by either the Valido or Aliso Peak trails but does not make a through connection to Laguna Beach. A short hike through coastal sage scrub concludes at a bluff overlook to the Pacific Ocean and Laguna Beach.

Wood Canyon. This area forms the northwest arm of AWCWP from El Toro Road to the Aliso and Wood Canyon confluence. Wood Canyon contains the majority of the park's 30-miles of trails along with the majority of the park's unauthorized trails. Primary access to this area is from the Aliso and Wood Canyons confluence via the main park entrance. Another primary access point to Wood Canyon is from the "Top of the World" (TOW) via City of Laguna Beach Open Space. The TOW trailhead provides parking, restrooms, water, telephone, informational kiosks and interpretive panels. Secondary access points into the park occur along the West Ridge Trail (City of Laguna Beach) at its junctions with Mathis Canyon, Rock-it, Lynx, and Cholla Trails.

Wood Canyon Trail: Wood Canyon Trail serves as the backbone to the 30-mile trail system, providing access points and opportunities for loop trail excursions. The varied vegetation along its length on the canyon floor, easy access to multiple geological and biological interpretive sites, and fairly level grade allow for enjoyment by a diverse group of recreationists. The Cave Rock and Dripping Cave Trails stem from the trail in lower Wood Canyon with the historic Old Corral site past the connection with Mathis Canyon Trail.

The canyon narrows and becomes more densely wooded in the upper reaches. Old Sycamore Grove provides a pleasant shaded spot for a quick lunch or rest. Past Five Oaks Trail the trail tapers, the canyon narrows, and dense riparian, oak woodland, chaparral, and coastal sage scrub provide welcome shade. A second creek crossing just before Lynx Trail (the first was at Dripping Cave) and the trail ends at an elevation of approximately 500 feet at Cholla Trail.

Cave Rock Trail: Cave Rock Trail is a short single-track trail that forms a loop with Wood Canyon Trail in lower Wood Canyon. Only hikers are permitted on this trail. Settled amongst coast live oak trees, Cave Rock is a domed sandstone rock outcropping that features a cavity that was likely created by water erosion resulting from prehistoric ocean wave action. As it circles back toward Wood Canyon, the trail descends and ascends a dry ravine via wooden steps under oak woodland canopy and through grassland and coastal sage scrub vegetation.

Dripping Cave Trail: A distance from the Wood Canyon Trail, Dripping Cave is a popular natural interest point in the park. From the Dripping Cave, the trail leads northwest, crossing the western ridge of Wood Canyon before dropping down to the grassland at the floor of Mathis Canyon. Dripping Cave Trail connects with Mathis Canyon Trail at its base.

Mathis Canyon Trail: At its start at Wood Canyon Trail, Mathis Canyon Trail begins a gentle grade into Mathis Canyon through grassland with scattered elderberry shrubs, sycamores and oak trees. At its junction with Oak Grove Trail the trail begins a challenging ascent up Mathis Canyon. Ascending the trail offers panoramic views of Wood Canyon, Moulton Peak, and the Rock-it Trail snaking down the ridge to the north. Mathis Canyon Trail terminates at West Ridge Trail at an elevation of approximately 700 feet.

Oak Grove Trail: Oak Grove Trail begins at Mathis Canyon Trail just as it is starting the steep ascent up to the West Ridge Trail. The trail trends west along Mathis Canyon crosses Mathis Creek and terminates nearly halfway up Mathis Canyon at an elevation of 300 feet. Users must back-track down the trail as it offers no official connections with other routes.

Hunwut Trail (“Black Bear” in Juaneno): The County has an opening in the fence that allows passage into the park at the end of the Hunwut Trail at the County property line. This access point is a “step over” rail road tie entrance on the south side of the vehicle pipe gate. A concrete utility road, leads from this pipe gate (park access) at the end of the Hunwut Trail to the City (Aliso Viejo) gate at the City street within a gated residential neighborhood. This concrete road is used for emergency access for Fire Dept. and other official vehicles. The concrete road is within the fenced off (CLF) landscape hillside owned by the community HOA.

The City gate is locked and posted with a No Trespassing sign facing the foot traffic coming from AWCWP into the City’s community development. This City gate is bordered by a fence and water service tank to the North, and a short 20-foot long chain link fence up the hill to the South, towards Soka University. Currently, people enter this area by walking uphill and around the chain link fence, and go into and out of the park. Park rangers support this gate as a legitimate access point into the park, and recommend it be included in the RMP as an access point to be negotiated with the City of Aliso Viejo.

Alwut Trail (native language trail name): Accessed midway along Wood Canyon Trail, the Alwut Trail is a short hike up a moderate incline to a locked gate at the ridgeline. The trail provides no connections with other trails, but offers great viewing opportunities. The top of the Alwut Trail is recognized as a scenic overlook, providing impressive views of Corral, Mathis, and Wood Canyons.

Coyote Run Trail: Coyote Run Trail parallels Wood Creek on the west side and connects the Wood Creek hiking trail and the popular Wood Canyon multi-use trail. This trail provides a more scenic and varied alternative to the Wood Canyon Trail because it skirts the lower portion of Wood Canyon's west ridge rather than following the canyon floor. At its northern end, just past the Old Sycamore Grove, the trail crosses Wood Creek and connects with Wood Canyon Trail.

Five Oaks Trail: Five Oaks Trail is the only trail that extends up the eastern ridge of Wood Canyon. Beginning at the junction of Wood Canyon Trail and the Old Sycamore Grove, Five Oaks is an increasingly steep climb through oak woodland at the trail base and coastal sage scrub habitat to an elevation of 890 feet at Moulton Peak. A utility access road serves the water towers located at the peak and public access is prohibited. Lack of a loop trail in this location is a common complaint among trail users.

Wood Creek Trail: This "hikers only" trail follows Wood Creek as it flows south through the park. Accessed by Lynx and Wood Canyon Trails at its northern end, the trail begins a gentle descent to a viewing point at approximately 400 feet. This vantage point provides beautiful views of the canyon, the ridgeline, and the Wood Canyon and Five Oaks Trails. As the trail continues south and rejoins with Wood Creek, oak woodland canopies and chaparral create dense shade. Wood Creek Trail connects with Wood Canyon and Coyote Run Trails just north of the Old Sycamore Grove.

Rock-It Trail: The Rock-It Trail is a highly technical trail that is popular with mountain cyclists. Named for its passage over sandstone rock outcroppings that begin about a third of the way down, the trail originates from the top of Wood Canyon at the West Ridge Trail. A popular loop opportunity commonly utilized by cyclists entering at the main entrance includes a ride north up the Wood Canyon and Cholla Trails, a short ride along the West Ridge Trail, and the steep downhill thrill provided by Rock-It. Rock-It allows for access from the City of Laguna Beach via the Alta Laguna Community Park and the Top of the World trailhead from West Ridge Trail. Rock-It joins with Coyote Run Trail near the base of Wood Canyon.

West Ridge Trail: The West Ridge Trail is a graded fire road that provides access from the Alta Laguna Community Park (City of Laguna Beach) and the Top of the World area. Beginning at an elevation of approximately 1000 feet, the trail traverses the ridge between Wood Canyon and Laguna Canyon. The trail continues north and connects first with Mathis Canyon Trail, then Rock-it Trail at the water tank on El Toro Ridge, followed by Stairstep Trail, and finally Lynx and Cholla Trails. Numerous

unauthorized trails drop down to Laguna Canyon Road from the West Ridge Trail. West Ridge Trail terminates at the Cholla Trail in upper Wood Canyon.

Nature Loop Trail: The Nature Loop Trail connects Wood Canyon and Coyote Run Trail to provide a 0.5 mile “hikers only” loop around the west ridge of Wood Canyon and the east ridge of Mathis Canyon. At its juncture with Coyote Run Trail, the habitat transitions from coastal sage scrub to lush oak woodland and riparian vegetation. Coyote Run Trail parallels Wood Creek and returns the hiker back to the beginning of the Nature Loop just off of Wood Canyon Trail.

Lynx Trail: At its northern end, the Lynx Trail connects with the West Ridge Trail at El Toro Ridge and joins with the Wood Creek Trail at its base. Lynx Trail allows for access from the City of Laguna Beach via the Alta Laguna Community Park or the adjacent Laguna Coast Wilderness Park via the Stairstep Trail as an alternative means of accessing Wood Canyon. In the upper reach of Wood Canyon at about 700 feet, Lynx meanders down at a moderately steep grade through coastal sage scrub habitat. The connection with Wood Creek and West Ridge Trails creates several trail loop opportunities in upper Wood Canyon.

Cholla Trail: The Cholla Trail is a one mile connector trail that links the West Ridge and Wood Canyon Trails in the northernmost region of the park. The Cholla Trail provides users with a steep and winding passage through dense coastal sage scrub and chaparral with magnificent views of Wood Canyon. From the Cholla Trail, several unauthorized trails connect to El Toro Road.

Stairstep Trail: Located in the upper section of Wood Canyon and accessed by West Ridge Trail, the 0.7-mile Stairstep Trail was previously an unauthorized trail that now provides the only authorized route from the park to Laguna Canyon Road and the neighboring Laguna Coast Wilderness Park. The steep descent down this trail is challenging, weaving through dense woody chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation. Stairstep Trail is most commonly used by mountain bikers.

7.2.2 Existing Entries

At present, approximately 36 entry sites provide access into AWCWP with 24 gated entry points meaning that they can be closed, as needed, to prevent unwanted access. The majority of these gates are open during park operating hours. Other access points do not have gates to control access. These entries are shown on Figure 18, Existing Public Access.

- Main Entrance (Gate #1)
- Wood Canyon Trailhead (Gate #2)
- AWMA Road Gate at the Wood Canyon Trailhead (Gate #3)
- Halfway down the Mathis Trail (Gate #4)
- Top of Hunwut Trail (Gate #5)

- Top of Alwut Trail (Gate #6)
- Junction of Canyon View Park and Top of Wood Canyon Trail (Gate #7)
- Access to West Ridge Trail at Hollyleaf (Gate #8)
- Access to Cholla Trail and West Ridge Trails (Gate #9)
- Access Alta Laguna and West Ridge Trails (Gate #10)
- Top of the World and Aswut Trail (Private Gate – Gate #11)
- Moulton Meadows Park and Aswut Trail (Gate #12)
- Aliso Creek Golf Course and bottom of AWMA Road (Gate #13)
- Coastal Treatment Plant and bottom of Aliso Canyon Trail (Gate #14)
- Coastal Treatment Plant access gate (Gate #15)
- South end of Aliso Summit Trail (Gate #16)
- North end of Aliso Creek (east side) off Alicia Parkway (Gate #17)
- South end of Aliso Creek Bikeway (Gate #18)
- South end of Aliso Creek Trail, south of Avila (Gate #19)
- Aliso Creek Trail, north of Avila (Gate #20)
- Aliso Creek Trail, south of Pacific Park (Gate #21)
- South end of Pecten Reef Loop Trail (Gate #22)
- East end of Pecten Reef Loop Trail (Gate #23)
- North end of Pecten Reef Loop Trail at Laguna Hills Drive (Gate #24)

Other access points do not have gates to control access. Open access points include:

- Access via Hummingbird Park at El Toro and Aliso Creek Roads (Access #1)
- (Access #2)
- Access to Five Oaks Trail via the water tank access road (Access #3)
- Top of the World end of street access (Access #4)
- Top of the World and Aswut Trail – Bypass of private gate (Access #5)
- Aliso Beach Park and Aliso Creek Golf Course via Village Lane (Access #6)
- Toovet Trail (Access #7)
- Valido Trail (Access #8)
- Mar Vista Trail (Access #9)
- Aliso Summit Trail, Laguna Niguel (Access #10)
- Aliso Summit Trail, Laguna Niguel (Access #11)
- SOCWA Road entrance (Access #12)



DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY:
OC Public Works
GIS Mapping Unit
Brian Anderson

DATA SOURCE:
- Geomatics Land Information Systems Division
- NOAA 3 meter DEM 2002
- Eagle Aerial Image 1 foot resolution, flown April 2004

The County of Orange and Geomatics/LIS/GIS make no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy of the data from which this map was derived. Neither the County nor Geomatics/LIS/GIS shall be liable under any circumstances for any direct, indirect, special, incidental or consequential damages with respect to any claim by any user or any third party on account of or arising from the use of this map.

DATE: June 3, 2006

Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park
Resource Management Plan
Figure 18: Existing Public Access



Back of Figure 18

Numerous unofficial entry points from community parks and schools along the Aliso Creek Bikeway and from adjacent residential neighborhoods access AWCWP. Some of these entry points are unauthorized, "end of street" points used to gain access to unauthorized trails; others are informal entries meaning there are no developed trailheads at these locations.

7.3 PROPOSED PUBLIC ACCESS

AWCWP will continue to draw visitors from throughout Southern California. Stewardship of the natural and cultural resources is a core responsibility of OC Parks. OC Parks must balance natural and cultural resource protection with appropriate public access and recreation, especially as the population grows. Consistent with this purpose, the County will improve the current network of authorized trails, evaluate the potential for new trail routes, and implement management actions to minimize road and trail impacts to the natural and cultural resources of the site (Figure 19: Public Access and Recreation).

7.3.1 Guiding Principles for Trails Within a Wilderness Park

- Prioritize resource protection.
- Relocate or decommission trails if impacts on native habitat or other resources are discovered.
- Re-align trails away from sensitive habitat areas.
- Minimize riparian crossings to decrease disturbance of sensitive natural areas.
- Eliminate duplication of trails.
- Reconstruct existing trails rather than rerouting the trail to minimize ground disturbance.
- Provide diverse and interesting trail experiences to minimize volunteer trails.
- Use best management practices in the design, construction, and maintenance of trails.
- Implement trails in partnership with other public agencies and non-governmental organizations.
- Consider the possible use of "resting" schedules for sensitive park areas.
- Formulate seasonal trail guidelines including possible rotation of access points to protect sensitive species from significant adverse user impacts during nesting or other sensitive periods.

7.3.2 Guiding Principles for Trails

Several principles are useful in considering additions or improvements to an existing trail system. These principles are also helpful in considering whether existing unauthorized trails provide an important feature of the improved trail system consistent with the primary goal for resource protection.

- Provide trail loops.
- Connect trails to regional trails when appropriate.
- Offer variety of trail type, difficulty and experience such as dirt roads, single track trails, and different environments (shade, exposed slopes, etc.)
- Provide scenic trails and access to destination points.
- Avoid duplicate or parallel trails.

7.3.3 Destinations

Destinations provide an obvious reason for traveling between two points. Trail users often enjoy hiking, cycling, or riding to a specific destination. AWCWP offers several attractive destinations within the park boundaries.

Dripping Cave. Dripping Cave is a popular natural interest point in the park. The sandstone overhang tucked into the narrow canyon was once used by 19th Century stagecoach and livestock thieves as a hide-out. Visitors can climb into the 15 x 40 foot cave for a closer inspection, viewing the holes in the wall that were once fitted with pegs to hold supplies or the blackened ceiling that is mistakenly thought to have been created by campfires. Moisture dripping from the ledges sustains the ferns and other plants that frame the opening of the cave.

Old Sycamore Grove. Large sycamores are among the largest trees in the park providing a distinctive destination and pleasant spot for a quick lunch or rest.

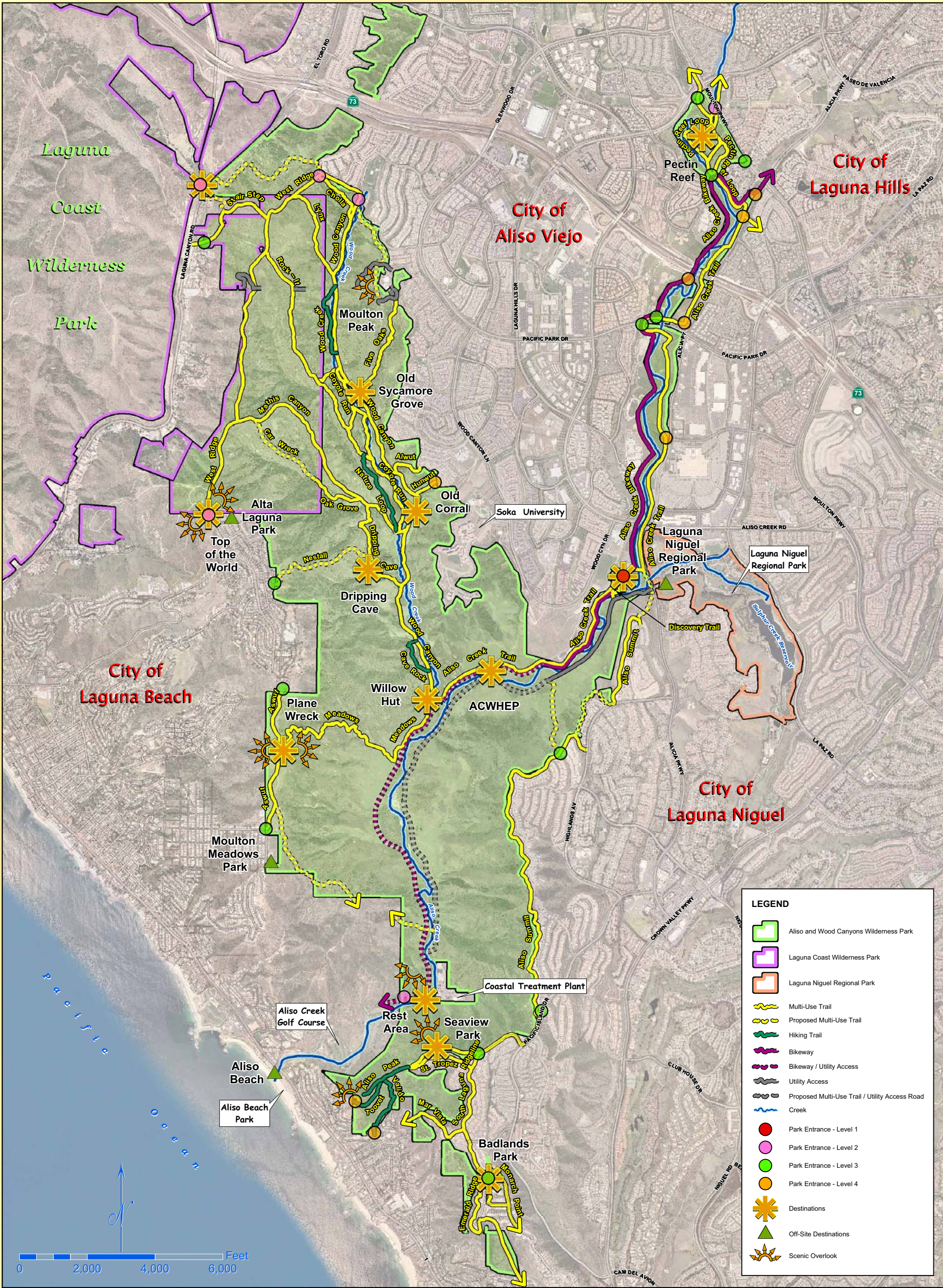
Old Corral. As the trail continues past the connection with Mathis Canyon Trail, the historic Old Corral site is located at the base of Corral Canyon. The corral dates back approximately 100 years and was once used as a pen for keeping sheep, calves, and horses.

Cave Rock. Cave Rock is a sandstone outcropping that features a cavity likely created by water erosion resulting from prehistoric wave action. Cave Rock is an interpretive site that allows for exploration of a unique sandstone rock feature.

Pecten Reef. Rich in paleontological resources, the exposed rock contains fossil impressions of pecten shells and other mollusks, sand dollars, barnacles, and additional marine creatures. The impressions are visible to the casual observer as the trail circles the rock outcrop through annual grassland habitat.

Willow Hut. Once a historical replica built by Domingo Belardes, the willow hut has long outlived itself and is returning to its natural state as a small grove of willow trees.

Plane Wreck. On April 23, 1946, a U.S. Marine Corps aircraft crashed in what is now AWCWP as a result of a mid-air collision. The wreckage of the crash can be found near the top of the Meadows Trail.



DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY:

OC Public Works
GIS Mapping Unit
Brian Anderson

DATA SOURCE:

- Geomatics Land Information Systems Division
- Eagle Aerial Image 1 foot resolution, flown 04/2004

The County of Orange and Geomatics/LIS/GIS make no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy of the data from which this map was derived. Neither the County nor Geomatics/LIS/GIS shall be liable under any circumstances for any direct, indirect, special, incidental or consequential damages with respect to any claim by any user or any third party on account of or arising from the use of this map.

DATE: May 12, 2009



Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park Resource Management Plan Figure 19: Public Access and Recreation



Back of Figure 19

Moulton Peak. At 891 feet, one of the highest viewing point in the park, Moulton Peak offers grand 360° views of Saddleback Valley and of the ridgelines, canyons, and hillsides that define the park. The peak also represents a visible landmark and destination for trail users.

Wood Creek. At Wood Creek, oak woodland canopies and chaparral shrubs create the most shaded trail experience within the park. Wood Creek flows for most of the year along this trail. The sound of the water flowing in the creek, frogs calling, and dry leaves churning in the breeze provides the backdrop to quiet nature appreciation and exploration.

7.3.4 Viewing Locations

Viewing locations (trail routes or overlooks) provide opportunities to appreciate the regional context (e.g., Pacific Ocean or San Gabriel Mountains), the immediate landscape (e.g., chaparral or oak woodland) or the influence of urban development (e.g., residences or utility lines). Several existing trails provide spectacular views.

Aliso Peak Trail. At 683 feet, the views of the Orange County Coast, Aliso Beach Park, and lower Aliso Canyon are spectacular. A steep and sometimes slippery hike up the bluff to Aliso Peak reveals a solitary bench positioned to take in views of the Pacific Ocean, Aliso Beach Park, City of Laguna Beach, and Aliso Creek Golf Course.

Aliso Summit Trail. The Aliso Summit Trail follows the eastern ridge of Aliso Canyon in Laguna Niguel and borders residential communities. The trail provides expansive views of Aliso and Wood Canyons and the Pacific Ocean along its entire route.

Aswut Trail. At 800 feet in elevation the Aswut Trail provides impressive views on either side: to the west lies the city of Laguna Beach and the Pacific Ocean with Santa Catalina Island visible on a clear day; and on the east sprawls the lower half of AWCWP, dense development east of the park, and the barely discernible San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountain ranges.

West Ridge Trail. Beginning at an elevation of approximately 1000 feet, the trail traverses the ridge between Wood Canyon and Laguna Canyon. At this height there are breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean and Santa Catalina Island to the west and the AWCWP with the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains to the east.

Alwut Trail. The top of the Alwut Trail is designated as one of a handful of scenic overlooks in the park, providing impressive views of Corral, Mathis, and Wood Canyons.

Moulton Peak. At 890 feet, Moulton Peak offers expansive views of the ridgelines, canyons, and hillsides that define AWCWP. Single-family residential homes line the ridge immediately east and illustrate the proximity of AWCWP within a densely developed urban environment.

7.3.5 Off-Site Destinations

An important aspect of a regional park system is the ability to travel between desirable destinations without using a vehicle. Aliso Creek Bikeway represents a prime example of successfully linking a regional trail to local schools and neighborhoods. The Aliso Creek Bikeway connects visitors north to many city parks along the way, and to Limestone-Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park 12 miles north and to the Cleveland National Forest trails in the Santa Ana Mountains as well.

Several other off-site destinations have been consistently identified as logical and desirable links to AWCWP. In some cases, if an authorized trail does not provide an existing link, unauthorized trails achieve the connection.

Aliso Beach Park and the Pacific Ocean. Many vantage points in AWCWP provide views of the neighboring Pacific Ocean. Aliso Beach Park is located where Aliso Creek meets the ocean and is surrounded by coastal chaparral at its inland perimeters. The AWMA Road exits AWCWP through the Aliso Creek Golf Course and ends at PCH and the Beach parking lot. At present, this is not an authorized connection from AWCWP to Aliso Beach Park. A connection from AWCWP to Aliso Beach Park would be desirable.

Laguna Coast Wilderness Park. Laguna Coast Wilderness Park (LCWP) is part of the South Coast Wilderness area, which is comprised of AWCWP, Crystal Cove State Park, City of Irvine Open Space and Irvine Ranch Land Reserve, and LCWP. The Wilderness Park consists of approximately 6,500 acres of intact CSS, maritime chaparral, and oak woodland habitat with the only natural lakes (3) in Orange County. The park's great expanses can be viewed by AWCWP visitors hiking the West Ridge Trail. A connection between the two wilderness parks would be desirable.

Laguna Niguel Regional Park. The 236-acre Laguna Niguel Regional Park is located between Alicia Parkway and La Paz Road just east of AWCWP's main entrance. This suburban park features picnic sites; jogging, cycling, and equestrian trails; tennis and volleyball courts; and a 44 acre lake stocked with catfish, bass, blue gill, and trout for fishing.

Seaview Park. Seaview Park, an inconspicuous park located off of Talavera Drive, connects with the Aliso Peak Trail in the southern portion of AWCWP which provides expansive views of Aliso and Wood Canyons and the Pacific Ocean along its entire route.

Alta Laguna Park. Alta Laguna Park is located in Laguna Beach at the top of Alta Laguna Boulevard. This hilltop neighborhood park contains assorted playing fields, picnic sites, and a children's playground. A short trail extending from the park hooks up with the southern end of the West Ridge Trail in AWCWP.

Top of the World (TOW). The TOW vista point, at an elevation of approximately 1,050 feet, places the park within a regional context with its breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean and Catalina Island, AWCWP sprawling to the east, and the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains beyond. TOW is accessed by the West Ridge Trail at Alta Laguna Park.

Badlands Park. Badlands Park sits atop the sandstone oceanside cliffs that border the southeast corner of AWCWP. The park is perched on the oceanfront cliffs near the mouth of Aliso Canyon, 780 feet above South Laguna. Trails weaving through CSS lead to Aliso Peak in AWCWP.

Moulton Meadows Park. Moulton Meadows Park is located at Del Mar and Balboa Avenues in the City of Laguna Beach. The park has tennis and basketball courts, a children's playground, and a grassy playing field. From Moulton Meadows Park, visitors can enter AWCWP at the Aswut Trail.

7.3.6 New Park Trails

Recommendations for new trails respond to recognized destinations, prominent view locations and desirable off-site destinations described above. In some instances, the existing trail network does not provide sufficient opportunities for loop trail experiences. In response, several of the recommendations below formalize an existing unauthorized trail in order to achieve needed loops and/or connections.

- 1. Reroute Corridor Trail.** The County Regional Riding and Hiking Trail Master Plan designates a connection between the northern end of AWCWP and LCWP. At present, users originating within Laguna Canyon at El Toro Road and the San Joaquin Hills Transportation Corridor, access AWCWP at Upper Wood Canyon via two unauthorized trails that lead to the Cholla Trail, these trails are known as the unauthorized Corridor routes. The existing unauthorized trails, along with the existing Stairstep Trail should be evaluated in order to create an accessible route in both an uphill and down hill direction for all trail uses. This rerouted Corridor Trail would become the preferred access to and from LCWP and El Moro. The Stairstep Trail currently provides the only legal option to access these other parks (legal access provided by the City of Laguna Beach). The Stairstep Trail is very steep and rugged and not a safe choice for many trail uses. A feasibility study should be initiated to evaluate several options with a goal to achieve this linkage.
- 2. Aliso Beach Park Class 1 Bikeway.** The Aliso Creek Bikeway is an Orange County master-planned regional bikeway intended to stretch from the mountain foothills to the Pacific Ocean. The paved Class I bikeway begins at the foot of the Santa Ana Mountains, at the intersection of Santiago Canyon, El Toro, and Live Oak Canyon roads (Cook's Corner) and extends south toward AWCWP. The three mile section within AWCWP begins at Sheep Hills Park in Laguna Hills and ends at the junction of the creek and the AWMA Road just north of the main park entrance. The County Regional Riding and Hiking Trail Master Plan shows the regional trail continuing from AWCWP to the Pacific Ocean.

The AWMA Road connects the main park entry to the treatment plant. Currently the agreement between the County and the Coastal Treatment Plant allows for public access Monday through Friday on the dirt trail that parallels the road up to the entry gate. On weekends the public is allowed to use the asphalt road up to the entry gate. Consistent with the County Regional Riding and Hiking Trail Master Plan, the Class 1

Bikeway should extend from the main park entry to the coast. Working with the Coastal Treatment Plant, the bikeway could be on the existing roadway with a parallel riding and hiking trail. At the southern terminus of the trail, this area could be improved as a rest stop for the eastern park boundary to include restrooms, a picnic area and interpretive displays. Equestrian use would terminate at the Coastal Treatment Plant with a corral for horses. From the proposed rest area, a new trail could take trail users upslope to an overlook with views of the Pacific Ocean.

In the future, the bikeway should be connected from the rest area to the Aliso Beach Park. The connection between AWCWP and the Aliso Beach Park would require a secure gate to prevent access to AWCWP at night.

3. **Car Wreck.** The unauthorized Car Wreck Trail, named for the crashed 1947 car protruding from a ravine along the route, snakes its way up a narrow and heavily rutted trail over exposed bedrock and through dense coastal sage scrub and chaparral before joining with Mathis Canyon Trail at the top. The Car Wreck Trail would offer an additional loop opportunity between the Mathis Trail, West Ridge Trail and Wood Canyon. Several sections of Car Wreck would need to be repaired or rerouted to improve drainage and safety. Oak Grove Trail is currently a dead end requiring an out and back trip. Improving Car Wreck as an authorized trail would provide access from the Oak Grove Trail to other areas of AWCWP.
4. **Nestall Trail (Birthday Trail).** Originating at the midpoint of Nestall Road, the Nestall Trail connects Nestall Road/Alta Laguna Boulevard at the Top of the World to the Dripping Cave Trail. This trail is extremely steep (elevation gain of 600 feet) and technical, crossing through the east facing hillside. Current conditions render uphill mountain biking very difficult and switchbacks would need to be added to protect native plants and enhance trail safety. In addition, authorization of this existing unauthorized trail would require signing and maintenance along most of its 1.25-mile length.
5. **East Ridge Trail (Five Oaks Link).** Five Oaks Trail connects Wood Canyon Trail to the water tank hill (Moulton Peak) at the east side of AWCWP. Private property prevents legal access to this trail from the east side of AWCWP. Five Oaks can only be accessed legally via Wood Canyon Trail thus requiring an out and back trail experience. A utility access road serves the water towers located at Moulton Peak and public access is currently prohibited. The utility road connects with several unauthorized trails in order to achieve a loop trail ride (or hike) from Five Oaks Trail. Lack of a loop trail in this location is a common complaint among trail users. A feasibility study should be initiated to work with the utility provider and evaluate the unauthorized routes in order to connect Five Oaks Trail north to Moulton Peak, Chollo Trail and Gate #7.
6. **Aliso Creek (East).** Along the east side of Aliso Creek, an on-grade dirt maintenance road runs through Aliso Canyon from Alicia Parkway to the Coastal Treatment Plant. The dirt road provides access to Coastal Treatment Plant's pipelines along the east side of Aliso Creek, is closed to the public, and is difficult to access from the west side of Aliso Creek. The County could work with the Coastal Treatment Plant to open this area in order to create a loop trail between the

ACWHEP structure (Aliso Creek Wetlands Habitat Enhancement Project) and the proposed trail on the west side of the creek that would come to the treatment plant and eventually connect to the coast. This trail provides an opportunity to connect the Laguna Niguel Regional Park with AWCWP. This trail would require an additional creek crossing for the public at the southern end. This trail may be for equestrian and hiking only.

7. **Aliso Summit Trail to Aliso Creek East.** The Aliso Summit Trail hugs the eastern ridge of Aliso Canyon in Laguna Niguel and borders residential communities. The trail is discontinuous in the existing route requiring users to make connections by leaving AWCWP and walking through a residential neighborhood before re-entering the park. At present the trail does not make a connection to other trails within AWCWP. A proposed connection from the Aliso Summit Trail downslope to the proposed Aliso Creek East Trail could follow an old road alignment and provide this needed connection to other areas of AWCWP.
8. **Moulton Meadows Linkage Trail.** The Moulton Meadows Linkage Trail would be a new trail that would begin northwest of the Coastal Treatment Plant and connect the AWMA Road to the existing Aswut Trail north of Moulton Meadows. From the AWMA Road the trail would extend diagonally northwest and upslope. The Moulton Meadows Linkage Trail would make a needed loop connection and provide access to desirable destinations in this southern area of AWCWP.

7.3.7 Unauthorized Trails (On-Site) to be Restored to Native Habitat

While the RMP recommends the formalization of specified unauthorized trails, the RMP also recommends that most of the unauthorized trails be closed and actively restored to native habitat consistent with the programs outlined in Section 8.0. To assure that impacts are lessened and a balance exists between trails restored to native habitat (closed trails) and trails being formalized (re-opening existing unauthorized trails) this RMP recommends that unauthorized trails slated to be authorized (opened) be opened once habitat restoration is successfully initiated for the unauthorized trails that are to remain closed within that area of the park. These unauthorized trails to be restored to native habitat include:

1. Ibis
2. Paradise
3. Dog Park
4. Smoothies
5. Alpine
6. Schoolyard
7. Red Rider
8. No Way Out
9. JT's

7.3.8 Trail Safety

Most of the trails in AWCWP are multi-use trails meaning that they are open to all types of trail users. Increased demand for trail access has resulted in a growing concern about conflicts between the different kinds of trail users and potentially unsafe trail conditions resulting from joint use. Safety concerns include:

- Collisions and near misses among users and/or their vehicles (bicycles)
- Reckless and irresponsible behavior
- Poor user preparation or judgment
- Unsafe conditions related to trail use (e.g., deep ruts, erosion)
- Poor trail design, construction, maintenance or management
- Other hazards (e.g., rattlesnakes, ticks, poison oak)

To help maintain user safety on trails, the County should:

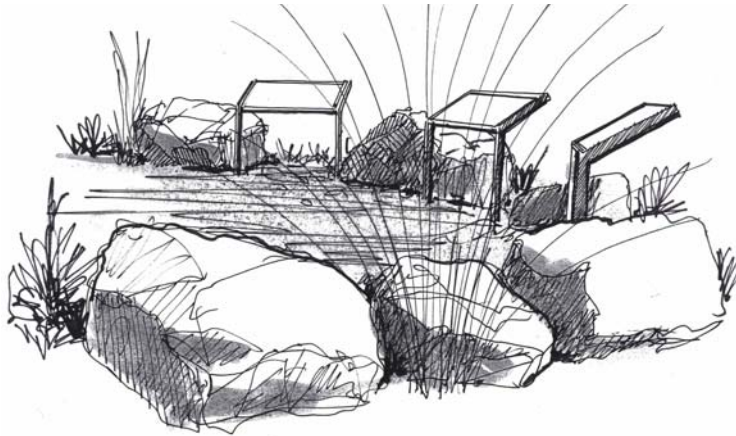
- Implement an education program to promote awareness of trail safety and etiquette as a means of reducing trail conflicts.
- Provide additional ranger staffing to increase enforcement of park rules and regulations.
- Explore the potential for adopting a trail rating system to alert trail users to the level of difficulty of various trails. Post "Trail Rating" markers at the top and bottom of each trail.
- Monitor visitor use to determine trail popularity. On an annual basis, inspect park trails and make appropriate repairs.

7.4 PROPOSED PARK ENTRIES, IDENTITY AND IMAGE

AWCWP needs a clear sense of entry such that visitors immediately recognize that they have entered a County Wilderness Park. At the public meetings, people expressed a need to better define the entries to the park and to create an overall identity for the park: visitors should know that they are in a special place – possible with an entry monument(s).

Communication of this identity begins with creating a clear hierarchy for entries with the design for each entry and continues in evaluating the content of displays, handouts and programs. The RMP presents concepts for park entry points (gateways), suggestions for organizing displays of information, and finally, ideas for themes and designs that will help reinforce a wilderness image for AWCWP.

Defining park gateways and reinforcing a park "image" are also management strategies as they are intended to help gain public respect for the park as well as to provide orientation and navigation to the park's various resources. Accentuating the park's identity defines AWCWP as a special place, contributes to protecting sensitive resources and creates a more attractive and informative place for residents and visitors.



Illustrative Gateway Concept

Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park has a wealth of resources and landscape stories to tell and interpret.

7.4.1 Gateway Concepts

AWCWP is surrounded by urbanized uses with over 35 potential points of entry. This can be confusing to the public in terms of knowing where they might be in relation to the entire park, but it is also a management challenge with regards to protecting resources and ensuring that the public is complying with park regulations and hours of operations. The gateways are critical for setting standards of conduct, directing the public to the various potential destinations and in explaining the purpose of the park and the richness and sensitivities of its resources. In review of the existing trail system, including authorized trails, unauthorized and new desirable trails, the points of entry become a key focus for how to make a successful trail system work – especially with all the existing and potential points of entry into the park.

A hierarchal system of gateways includes four types of park entry – graduated by the extent of available facilities and amenities, the amount of information and signage, and the extent that the gateway will require staffing and management. The following matrix illustrates the range of amenities and facilities combined with the primary purpose for each gateway type. This hierarchal system of entries is shown on Figure 19, Public Access and Recreation.

Table G: Suggested Gateway Hierarchy by Function and Amenities

Level (Type)	A Control Gate and Directional/Regulatory Signage	Interpretive Signage w/ Kiosk	Drinking Fountain & Rest Facility	Parking	Staffing	Comments
1	√	√	√	√	√	Only one primary gateway, could also include expanded interpretive features and venues
2	√	√	√	√		Secondary level entry at major public interface
3	√	√	√			Tertiary entry point: Rest rooms and drinking fountain option if not provided by other
4	√					Typical low profile neighborhood entry point

7.4.2 Gateway Design Considerations

This section addresses some general design considerations for a park-wide system. “Design” in this sense means a consistent image or character or treatment in terms of materials, colors, surfaces, plants; consistency in graphic and text formats; and design in the layout of the developed areas such as the park gateways.

Comprehensive and Consistent Parkwide Image (“Branding”). One purpose of this management plan is to begin to create a park image that people can readily recognize as AWCWP. This “branding” helps define a sense of place that differentiates it from other parks and helps contribute to building pride and ownership by park users. It can also reinforce the stewardship of public lands for their recreation, open space, and conservation values.

A park-wide image includes consistency with written and graphic materials. Wherever it is displayed – on signs, in printed formats, or on the park’s website – information concerning AWCWP should contain a recognizable and consistent style and image, accentuated by a recognizable icon or logo (“brand”). A park-wide “brand” defines and reinforces the unique character of place and accentuates the cohesion of the park’s multiple resources. The process of this “branding” requires time, creativity, and “buy-in” from various parties.

Once an identifiable concept is developed, it can be expected to help in making park-related signs and materials more attractive, cohesive, as well as useful in creating a positive image for public outreach and marketing purposes.

Context-Sensitive Development. Recreation use and environmental conservation or restoration activities should be “context sensitive” and adapted to the intrinsic resource values of the site. A context-sensitive approach develops parks infrastructure and recreational facilities carefully, respecting the natural setting, surrounding land uses, onsite sensitive resources, and existing topographic contours. For example, improvements

associated with active uses – such as parking lots and restrooms – should be located away from sensitive habitat, such as riparian areas.

Recreational facilities or improvements should be developed where they are needed, but in such ways as to blend in and be compatible with the surroundings. When the design is responsive to the existing setting, appropriate recreational uses can be accommodated, and areas with environmental, cultural, and scenic sensitivities will be protected from major adverse effects.

Multiple Uses through Design. Open space and park planning often involves various uses or potential uses sharing a particular land or space. The County should seek to implement designs that promote compatibility for multiple park areas with integrated uses.

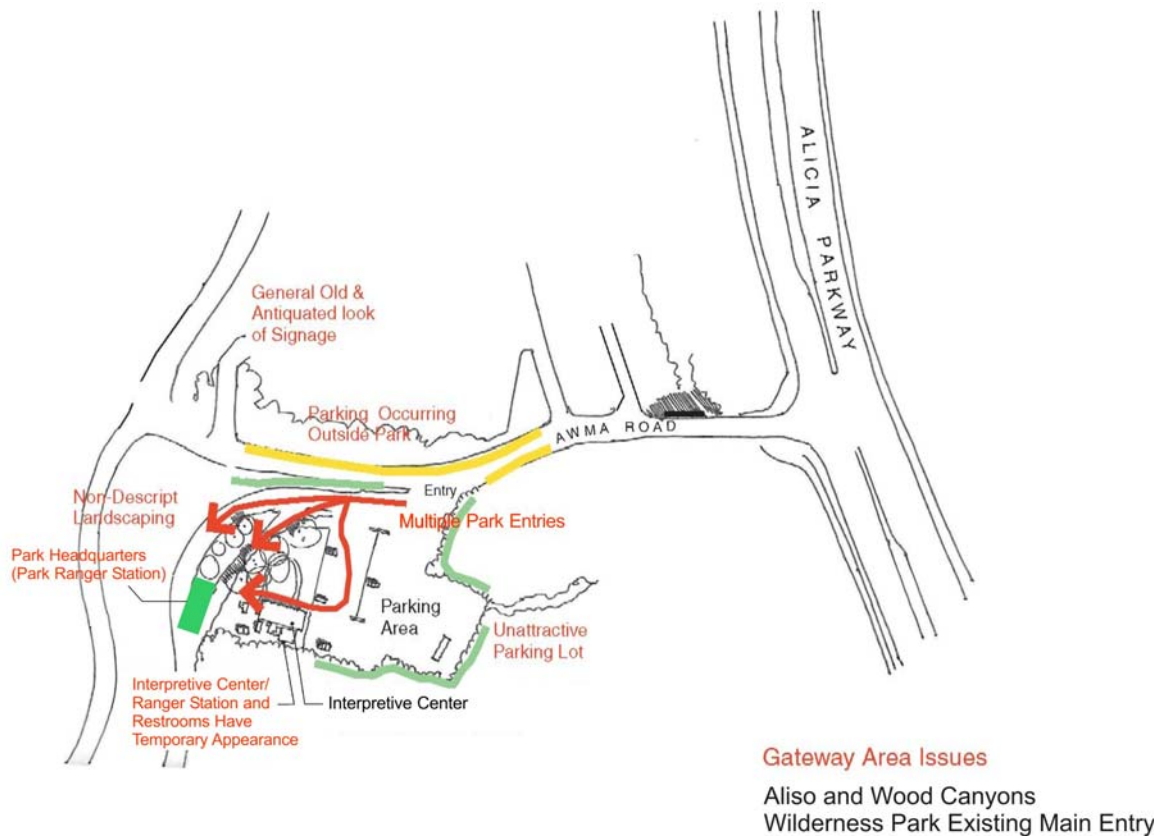
Large public land areas may have value as habitat, recreation sites, flood storage areas, and other uses. Multiple, integrated use is possible through careful designation and control of public access points, designation of uses, and public education.

Low Impact to the Environment. Design, operation, and management of the park system should be conducted in such ways as to have minimal impact on the environment. Park design and uses should conscientiously seek to minimize adverse effects on fish and wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend.

The intent of this plan is to integrate conservation values with recreation values, as much as possible. Park management – while meeting the recreational and safety needs of residents and visitors – should also help to accomplish other goals, such as regional conservation, water supply and replenishment, and floodplain management.

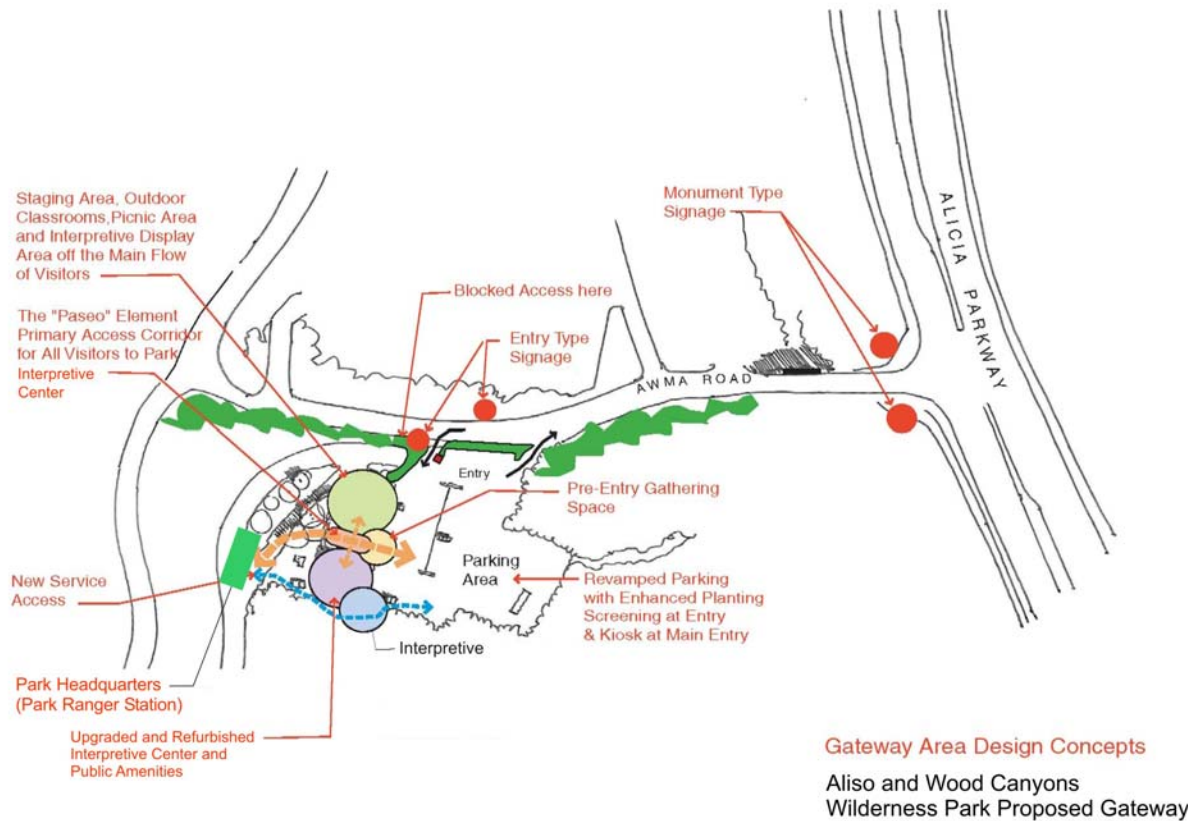
7.4.3 Park Gateway Issues and Design Concepts

Several challenges exist with the primary park gateway and entry facilities. Poor or antiquated signage, the absence of signage at key points near the entry, and the diffused multiple entry routes into the park create confusion and lack of orientation for the park visitor. The lack of a coherent parking lot design creates inefficient use of the space; resulting in excessive unusable space and parking overflow onto the adjoining public street. In addition, the parking lot, as the first public destination to the park is neither attractive nor distinguished with landscaping. Lastly, the temporary appearance and quality of the park headquarters, interpretive center, the restrooms, and other public serving amenities offer little to enhance a sense of place or embellish the recreation and educational potentials of the primary entry to the park.



These challenges can be addressed with the development of a consistent image and well-thought out design. Clear, easy-to-understand directional signage can be key to the visitor's experience. Beginning with Alicia Parkway, monument park signage should be situated to announce the park and alert visitors and passerby of the presence of a high-quality park and facility. Enhancing this entry with native plants typical of the park can also draw attention to this entry. Additional planting of native trees and shrubs along the length of the entry road can further accentuate a sense of arrival and the visitor's transition from an urban space to a natural environment.

An efficiently designed parking lot can reduce visitor confusion and frustration and accentuate the sense of arrival while providing shade, enhancing the natural character of the site and contributing to a sense of place. A clearly marked entry with and informational kiosk will also reinforce a sense of arrival.



Upon approaching the park ranger's station (trailer), a forecourt is suggested to serve as a transition zone from the parking lot to the park as well as a gathering spot or waiting area for visitors including cyclists. The staging areas serve as important pre-trail spaces for activities such as organizing equipment and gear as well as warm up and cool down areas for trail users. Visitors need a place to meet. This staging area can include visitor information such as an introduction to the park, trail access and park orientation information.

The next recommended element is a paseo feature, a centralized access route into the park that will be used by all park visitors, linking the forecourt, the park ranger's station, the interpretive center, outdoor classrooms, and picnic and staging areas. The outdoor classrooms and interpretive area could then be situated like rooms off of this main circulation flow and may include picnic and other amenity features.

Outdoor interpretation could include enhanced native plant exhibits and self-guided tours, wildlife attractors such as butterfly gardens, birdfeeders, paleontological artifacts, and historical features.

Service roads should also be incorporated into the entry design and screened from the main visitor areas through the use of gates and landscape buffers. Removable bollards are suggested where pedestrian use is the primary traffic in the area.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

General Actions

- Develop public access facilities and improvements that blend in and are compatible with the surroundings and in keeping with a wilderness park.
- Create a comprehensive and consistent park-wide image for use in all park signs, promotional materials, and park amenities.
- Implement an education program to promote awareness of trail safety and etiquette as a means of reducing trail conflicts.
- Provide additional park ranger staffing to increase enforcement of park rules and regulations.
- Explore the potential for adopting a trail rating system to alert trail users to the level of difficulty of various trails. Post Trail Rating Markers at the top and bottom of each trail.
- Coordinate with City and private land owners to get/perfect legal access rights for trail entrances into the park, which cross City (Laguna Niguel, Aliso Viejo, or Laguna Beach) owned and management property or with benefit of an easement from any other land owner.
- Conduct routine monitoring and management to prevent construction of unauthorized trails.

As-Needed Actions

- Incorporate the guiding principles as outlined in this RMP for managing existing trails and creating new trails.
- Continue ongoing maintenance of existing authorized trails.

Annual Actions

- Monitor visitor use to determine trail traffic volumes. On an annual basis, inspect park trails and make appropriate repairs. For example, evaluate the need for a bridge at the current Arizona crossing on the Wood Canyon trail to remedy the unsafe, steep trail condition.

Five Year Actions

- Close and actively restore to native habitat the following trails consistent with the programs outlined in this RMP:
 1. Ibis
 2. Paradise
 3. Dog Park
 4. Smoothies

5. Alpine
 6. Schoolyard
 7. Red Rider
 8. No Way Out
 9. JTs
- Reclassify and improve the following existing unauthorized trails to an authorized trail status or create new trails to provide access to key destination points, viewing locations, off-site destinations, and to provide needed loops and connections:
 1. Reroute Corridor Trail
 2. Aliso Beach Park Class I Bikeway
 3. Car Wreck
 4. Nestall (aka Birthday)
 5. East Ridge Trail (Five Oaks Link)
 6. Aliso Creek (East)
 7. Aliso Summit Trail to Aliso Creek East
 8. Moulton Meadows Linkage Trail
 - Implement the following minor improvements to enhance the main entry and parking area:
 1. Place monument park signage on Alicia Parkway to announce the park.
 2. Enhance the entry and entry road with native plants and trees typical to the park.
 3. Reconfigure the parking area to accentuate the sense of arrival.

Ten Year Actions

- Implement the following major improvements to enhance the main park entry:
 1. Create a forecourt or pre-entry to serve as a transition zone from the parking lot to the center as well as a gathering place for visitors.
 2. Create a paseo feature, a centralized access route to the park linking the forecourt, ranger's station, future Orange Coast Watershed and Environmental Center, interpretive exhibits, outdoor classrooms, and picnic and staging areas.

This page intentionally left blank.

6.0 Goals and Strategies

6.0 GOALS AND STRATEGIES

6.1 DEFINITION

Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park (AWCWP) is a regional wilderness park. As defined by the Orange County General Plan Recreation Element, a regional wilderness park is:

A regional park in which the land retains its primeval character with minimal improvements and which is managed and protected to preserve natural processes. The park (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value. In essence, park uses envisioned will result in minimal impact to existing park resources and are compatible with a wilderness experience.

- Orange County General Plan Recreation Element

Proposed management of the AWCWP will remain consistent with the County's definition of a wilderness park. As such, the County will protect and preserve the native habitat in the park for the benefit of its natural resources. In addition, the County will continue to provide opportunities for outdoor education and low-impact recreation consistent with resource protection goals.

The park is located within the Natural Communities Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) central and coastal subregion reserve known as the Nature Reserve of Orange County (NROC); therefore, subject to provisions of the NCCP/HCP Implementation Agreement. Proposed management strategies within the RMP will comply with the requirements of the NCCP/HCP. Per the requirements of the NCCP/HCP Implementation Agreement, the RMP has been reviewed by CDFG, USWS and the NROC.

6.2 PARKWIDE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

In response to the Issues, listed in Section 5.1, the following goals and strategies outline a management framework to protect the resources of AWCWP. Goals and guidelines are necessary to perpetuate the park's important resource values and to respond to threats to those values. This section states resource management intentions and provides general guidance that support the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreation resources. Subsequent sections (e.g., Biological Resources Management) detail objectives and management programs to support these strategies.

The goals and strategies are divided into Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Interpretation and Education, Public Use and Access, and Stewardship. A goal is a statement of intended outcome for management activities. A strategy is a management action for achieving the goals. All goals and strategies are offered for consideration based on the availability of County resources such as personnel and funding to achieve them.

PUBLIC USE AND ACCESS (USE)

Goals

- **Achieve compatibility between protection of the site's natural and cultural resources and human use demands.**
- **Allow for passive recreational uses that contribute to enjoyment of the natural resources and promote healthy lifestyles (recognizing that park uses must have minimal impact on park resources and be compatible with a wilderness experience).**

Strategies

- USE-1:** Provide public use facilities and associated services within the park as needed to facilitate public enjoyment of the natural setting.
- USE-2:** Provide a trail system that provides a broad public benefit by accommodating diverse trail uses and abilities.
- USE-3:** Provide a comprehensive trail system that promotes linkages within the park to the Pacific Ocean and to adjacent communities and to other regional trails and destinations outside the park.
- USE-4:** Provide a trail system that balances recreation demand with the primary purpose to protect the natural and cultural resources within the park.
- USE-5:** Provide sufficient access to the park trail system to adequately serve the public and to discourage the creation of unauthorized and individual access points by adjacent neighbors.
- USE-6:** Accommodate trail amenities that maintain the natural character of the land, enhance resource protection and contribute to the enjoyment of open space.
- USE-7:** Provide a trail system that promotes and enhances public enjoyment and appreciation of the natural, cultural, and scenic resources.
- USE-8:** Identify appropriate passive uses of the park and prohibit inappropriate recreational uses.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES (BIO)

Goals

- **Protect, restore preserve and enhance the natural resources of the park.**
- **Maintain a park that is compatible with the entire San Joaquin Hills ecosystem and the Aliso Creek watershed.**

Strategies

- BIO-1:** Protect and maintain populations of native plant and wildlife with an emphasis on managing NCCP/HCP covered species.
- BIO-2:** Improve biological productivity and diversity through protection, enhancement, and restoration activities consistent with the adaptive management strategy of the NCCP/HCP.
- BIO-3:** Monitor enhancement and restoration activities as part of the adaptive management program to evaluate effectiveness and progress. Through monitoring, seek to identify new enhancement and restoration opportunities and priorities within the park.
- BIO-4:** Implement and coordinate with other adjacent landowners fire management methods that cause the least damage to park resources while providing effective fire control to protect human life and property.

WATER QUALITY (WQ)

Goal

- **Improve the quality of streamwater that flows through the park.**

Strategies

- WQ-1:** Protect water quality within the park. Identify water quality problems and work with regulatory agencies and property owners to correct water quality problems from storm water runoff and other causes in the watershed.
- WQ-2:** Develop and implement a water quality management plan.

CULTURAL RESOURCES (CULT)

Goal

- **Protect and preserve the important cultural/historical resources of the park.**

Strategies

- CULT-1:** Identify and implement a formal procedure for preserving known cultural resources within the park.
- CULT-2:** Maintain a cultural resources interpretive program in coordination with Local Tribal Leaders and the Archeological community.
- CULT-3:** Protect and preserve paleontological resources within the park.
- CULT-4:** Develop a paleontology interpretive program.
- CULT-5:** Follow established protocol if human remains are encountered during ground-disturbing activities in the park.

INTERPRETATION/EDUCATION (INT)

Goal

- **Provide an appropriate interpretive program that increases the public's understanding and appreciation of the significant natural and cultural resources of the park.**

Strategies

- INT-1:** Establish facilities and programs to enhance the public's understanding of park resources and to encourage research about park resources.
- INT-2:** Develop and implement an interpretive master plan.
- INT-3:** Provide high quality interpretive facilities and programs.

VISUAL RESOURCES (VISUAL)

Goal

- **Protect and enhance significant views.**

Strategies

VISUAL-1: Protect and enhance views and distinctive landscape features that contribute to the setting, character, and visitor experience of the park.

STEWARDSHIP (STEW)

Goal

- **Provide effective stewardship of the park.**

Strategies

STEW-1: Maintain park facilities (*i.e.*, trails, kiosks, gates, picnic areas) in the park to ensure that resource values are protected and management activities (*i.e.*, habitat restoration, closure of unauthorized trails) are supported.

STEW -2: Enforce boundaries by establishing site fencing and patrolling park access points.

STEW-3: Maintain trails and roads to prevent erosion.

STEW-4: Patrol public use of the park to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations and to assess level of use by area of the park.

STEW-5: Develop a data management system to incorporate baseline data collected for the preparation of this management plan.

6.3 MANAGEMENT ZONES

Management zones are delineated on a map showing the entire park (Figure 16: Management Zones). These zones are an attempt to define spatially the management scheme for the park. Management zones allow for describing management goals by area or showing relationships between one area and another in terms of land use and management strategies. These areas are based on geographic relationships, resource values, ecological parameters, management issues, goals, or objectives, types and intensities of land use; or visitor use and experiences. Four (4) management areas have been created:

- Upper Aliso Canyon
- Lower Aliso Canyon
- Upper Wood Canyon
- Lower Wood Canyon

The management zones reflect consideration of a number of factors, including existing and potential resource values, type and intensity of recreation use, and the practicalities of

everyday management and operations. The zones generally represent areas of the park that share common physical and use characteristics and should be managed as identifiable components or subareas. The resource management zones will allow for common referencing of geographic locations for all resource management activities (i.e., scientific surveys, exotic plant control, monitoring). The discussion below provides management goals and strategies for the four management areas.

6.3.1 Upper Aliso Canyon (UALISO)

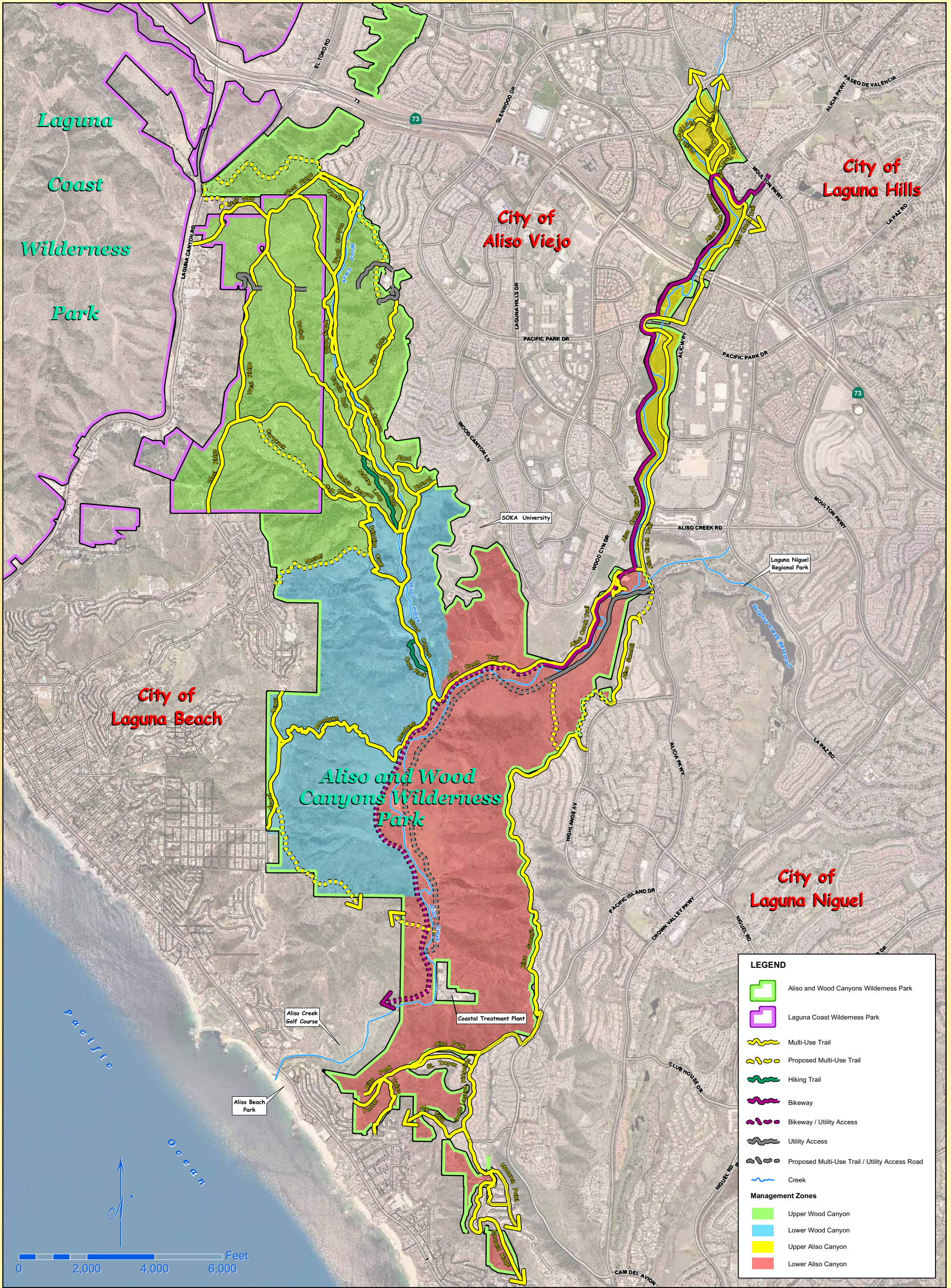
This zone constitutes the northeastern arm of the park and includes a segment of Aliso Creek as well as the paleontological rock outcropping known as the Pecten Reef formation in this northernmost extent of Aliso Canyon. The Pecten Reef formation contains a dense assemblage of fossils and, therefore, possesses extremely high value for paleontological resources. Due to its remote location from the park rangers' office, it has a high threat for illegal collection of resources. This narrow section of the park acts primarily as a transportation corridor connecting people to destinations north, south, and west. Numerous entry points from the many community parks and schools along the Aliso Creek Bikeway in this zone access the park. This area contains significant biological resource value associated with the riparian corridor along Aliso Creek. However, Aliso Creek is also heavily infested with Giant Reed, an invasive exotic weed species. Invasive species will need to be controlled in order to protect the riparian habitat.

Goals

- **Protect and interpret paleontological resources.**
- **Maintain a natural and scenic link for trail users.**
- **Enhance riparian habitat.**

Strategies

- UALISO-1:** Interpret the paleontological resources of Pecten Reef. Interpretation should focus on preserving paleontological resources in situ and notifying park rangers.
- UALISO-2:** Make Pecten Reef a primary park entry. It provides a prime location for displaying/distributing general information about the park.
- UALISO-3:** Create distinctive entries along Aliso Creek that signify the visitor is entering a wilderness park. Improve communication and connections with local communities and schools.
- UALISO-4:** Protect and restore riparian habitat along Aliso Creek through habitat restoration efforts and control of invasive exotic species.
- UALISO-5:** Continue to participate in and support Aliso Creek watershed planning efforts. Implement recommended strategies, as appropriate, to improve water quality.



DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY:
OC Public Works
GIS Mapping Unit
Brian Anderson

DATA SOURCE:
- Geomatics Land Information Systems Division
- Eagle Aerial Image 1 foot resolution, flown 04/2004

The County of Orange and Geomatics/LIS/GIS make no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy of the data from which this map was derived. Neither the County nor Geomatics/LIS/GIS shall be liable under any circumstances for any direct, indirect, special, incidental or consequential damages with respect to any claim by any user or any third party on account of or arising from the use of this map.

DATE: May 11, 2009



Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park Resource Management Plan Figure 16: Management Zones



Back of Figure 16

6.3.2 Lower Aliso Canyon (LALISO)

This area encompasses the main park entry as well as the lower reach of Aliso Creek down to the southernmost extent of the park. The Main Park Entry is the busiest gateway into the park and includes the widest range of developed facilities that currently include a picnic area, parking, park ranger station, park maintenance/operation yard, and portable restrooms. Important cultural sites exist in this area of the park. The lower reach of Aliso Canyon on the east side of Aliso Creek is currently closed to the public. The Coastal Treatment Plant and its access road are located within this area. At the southern end of the park, several disparate parcels are connected by trails. Along the trail is a small vista park named Badlands Park located off of Isla Vista Road. This section of the park may be relatively unknown to all but local users, despite the fact that its steep hillsides offer dramatic and high quality views of the Pacific Ocean.

Goals

- **Provide access into park to communities at southernmost segment of Lower Aliso Canyon.**
- **Enhance recreation use.**
- **Improve riparian habitat and water quality in Aliso Creek.**

Strategies

- LALISO-1:** Improve the main park entry to provide better directional information for access to parking and trails, and park amenities; improved restroom facilities; improved park ranger station and interpretive center.
- LALISO-2:** Provide bikeway to Aliso Beach Park consistent with the regional bikeway plan (OCTA Strategic Bikeways Plan).
- LALISO-3:** Provide a trail on the east side of Aliso Creek from Alicia Parkway to the Coastal Treatment Plant.
- LALISO-4:** Provide trail to overlook at southernmost park boundary.
- LALISO-5:** Provide a rest stop at the southernmost park boundary to include restrooms, picnic area and interpretive displays.
- LALISO-6:** Emphasize the ACWHEP structure as a destination point. Explore the potential for providing a trail connection between the ACWHEP structure and the Aliso Summit Trail.
- LALISO-7:** Enhance Willow Hut as a destination point by providing ADA access and interpretive information.

- LALISO-8:** Protect and restore riparian habitat along Aliso Creek through habitat restoration efforts and control of invasive exotic species.
- LALISO-9:** Continue to participate in and support Aliso Creek Watershed planning efforts. Implement recommended strategies, as appropriate, to improve water quality.
- LALISO-10:** Develop checks and balances criteria for OC Parks to review all future watershed practices within AWCWP.

6.3.3 Upper Wood Canyon (UWOOD)

This area represents the northwestern part of the park and is the primary entry into the park from "Top of the World." Part of this area consists of land that is owned by the City of Laguna Beach and leased to the County of Orange, as such, it represents a unique joint use and management area. This area contains many of the park's most popular and heavily used trails. Facilities and improvements in this area will focus on trails and interpretive opportunities.

Goals

- **Maintain and enhance recreation resources.**
- **Protect natural resources.**

Strategies

- UWOOD-1:** Explore the opportunity to connect the north end of AWCWP to the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park as part of a regional hiking trail. A feasibility study will be required to evaluate alternative alignments.
- UWOOD-2:** Provide connection between the northern end of Five Oaks Trail at Moulton Peak to Wood Canyon Trail
- UWOOD-3:** Change status of "Car Wreck" Trail to "Authorized Trail" to provide a connection between Oak Grove Trail and Mathis Canyon Trail. Implement trail improvements for safety.
- UWOOD-4:** Provide trail connection between Dripping Cave Trail and the ridgeline to enhance trail recreation with a loop and to provide park operations with an improved route to patrol remote park locations. An environmental assessment will be required to evaluate potential biological impacts associated with trail implementation.
- UWOOD-5:** Formalize the Hunwut entry to provide access from eastern neighborhoods and Soka University.

UWOOD-6: Protect and manage native habitat, including coastal scrub, oak woodlands, chaparral, and native grasslands.

UWOOD-7: Provide a composting toilet at Sycamore Grove.

6.3.4 Lower Wood Canyon (LWOOD)

This area encompasses lower Wood Canyon below Mathis Canyon Trail, including Moulton Meadows. Lower Wood Canyon contains many of the park's unique natural and geologic resources, including sensitive plant, bird and wildlife species, as well as Dripping Cave and Cave Rock. Important cultural sites are also located in lower Wood Canyon. It also contains many of the park's unauthorized trails which come down from the ridge separating Wood and Laguna Canyons. A formal trailhead is provided for the Meadows Trail leading down to the Aliso and Wood Canyons confluence and for the Aswut Trail along the ridge to the west. The management intent for this zone is to maintain and protect park resources and improve wildlife corridors while continuing to provide trail access. Expanded opportunities for interpretation and education may also be pursued.

Goals

- **Protect, enhance and interpret biological resources.**
- **Continue to provide trail access.**

Strategies

LWOOD-1: Protect and manage coastal scrub habitat, especially areas that are known habitat for sensitive plant species.

LWOOD-2: Provide loop trail connection from AWMA Road/Aliso Creek trail extension up to Aswut Trail/Moulton Meadows Park.

LWOOD-3: Provide interpretive signage and exhibits to educate park users of the park's valuable resources.

This page intentionally left blank.

5.0 ISSUES, THREATS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Identifying key issues, or established threats and potential impacts clarifies the needed focus for the RMP. Key management challenges for AWCWP stem from the proximity to residential development and increased park use. Other issues, such as invasive plant infestations, stem from historical land uses and are exacerbated by current environmental conditions. Based on the information collected at public meetings and from preparing the Existing Conditions Report (Appendix C), the project team identified key park-wide issues.

5.1 ISSUES

Biological Resources

- Need habitat restoration especially in areas with high resource value
- Failure of past passive resource management: loss of CSS habitat and rare plants due to goat grazing, weed invasions, unauthorized trail use, improper fuel management practices, and over-use of the park
- Lack quality of fish habitat in park creeks
- Heavy infestation of a variety of invasive exotic weed species (i.e., giant reed, thistles, palms, castor bean)
- Spread of invasive exotic weeds from adjacent development
- Presence of nuisance wildlife species (i.e., African clawed frog, bullfrog, cowbird) that are pervasive throughout Southern California
- Lack of wildlife corridor connectivity between adjacent open space lands
- Need additional monitoring/surveys for some sensitive species
- Lack management of existing wildlife corridors
- Potential impacts on aquatic species from infrastructure and creek stabilization projects
- Loss of CSS habitat
- Loss of rare plants
- Impacts on biological resources from over-use of park

Water Quality

- Increased runoff and nuisance flows from surrounding urban development impacts water quality and causes erosion
- Improper management of adjacent fuel modification areas impacts water quality

Fire Management

- Biomass buildup increases fire hazards
- Poor management of adjacent fuel modification areas impacts park resources (e.g., erosion, exotic species, visual impact) and affects operations and maintenance
- Damaged and disturbed park land (e.g., loss of habitat, fencing scars, weed invasions, lack of management and monitoring)

Cultural and Paleontological Resources

- Potential effects on cultural resources by park development such as construction of trails and interpretive facilities
- Potential effects on cultural resources by park maintenance such as restoration activities, and weed removal
- Potential impact on cultural resources from existing utilities, infrastructure maintenance, improvements, realignment, SOCWA access road, and SOCWA and MNWD pipelines
- Potential impact from creek erosion and creek stabilization projects
- Potential effects on cultural resources by park visitors such as unauthorized collection and removal of artifacts or fossils, vandalism, and creation of illegal trails.
- Potential effects on cultural resources by fire management practices such as development and maintenance of fire breaks and damage or destruction of burnable cultural materials during controlled burning
- Need to implement recommended system for cultural resources records management as adopted by the County
- Need to identify Traditional Cultural Areas (burial sites) within the park, including ceremonial and/or procurement sites
- Need to systematically and routinely inventory and document cultural resources
- Need to integrate park management of cultural and paleontological resources with other agencies such as Orange County Natural History Association, Orange County Archaeological/Paleontological Curation Program, and Pacific Coast Archaeological Society
- Need to ensure formal procedure for care of collections within the park or given to the park is implemented
- Need to control access to paleontological resources

Interpretation/Education

- Enhance education program to promote understanding of appropriate park uses (e.g. stay on trails) and park resources (sensitive species, urban edge effects)
- Upgrade/renovate interpretive center to provide a more dynamic learning experience and to improve the appearance of the park's main entry
- Create an information/education hub at creek confluence or at Soka University
- Lack signage, particularly directional and safety information

- Signage clutter – too much signage
- Need park interpretive plan that staff can use to guide interpretation, education, and outreach activities
- Need “Good Neighbor” program to educate residents about living along the wildland interface (i.e., invasive plants, low fire hazard natives, use of herbicides near natural areas)

Visual Resources

- Visual intrusion of urban development along the ridges of both Aliso and Wood Canyons
- Lack of screening of urban development and utility infrastructure (i.e., water tanks, power lines, structures)
- Interruption of scenic landscape by utility lines, illegal trails, and structures
- Landscape scars from goat fencing and grazing
- Denuded slopes resulting from inappropriate fuel medication activities and failure to follow approved landscape plans
- Exposed and collapsing pipe adjacent to creek
- Sea of giant reed along Aliso Creek

Public Use and Access

- Impacts of public use on park resources
- Need access to the coast
- Need better access in lower Aliso Canyon; no trail on the east side of Aliso Creek
- Conflicts between trail users
- Encroachment of adjacent property owners into park
- Underutilized hiking trails
- Creation and ongoing use of unauthorized trails destroys and fragments habitat and causes erosion
- Need education program to improve trail safety and reduce conflicts between users
- Moderate interest to expand existing trail system
- Safety concerns related to steep trails and the frequency of accidents
- Informal end-of-street access points makes enforcement of regulations difficult and facilitates creation of unauthorized trails
- Lack of parking/access, e.g., from Soka University
- Need connection between AWCWP and Laguna Coast Wilderness Park across Laguna Canyon Road
- Need consistent and creative design for park entries and signs to inform and engage the public

- Traffic congestion caused by on-street parking as a result of people trying to avoid park fees
- Improve design at park entries and along trail routes to decrease clutter of signs
- Need trail connection to regional trail from better access to park and trail connectivity to outlying destinations

Operations, Maintenance and Management

- Coordination of management efforts between jurisdictions. Need to build relationships with cities, HOAs, OCFA.
- Need to integrate park resource management practices with NROC programs
- Difficult to close trails and ensure compliance with trail closures
- Need for consistency in enforcement of dog regulations
- Need boundary fences at problem areas.
- Problem with illegal homeless camping (e.g., heavy littering, bike theft, habitat destruction, safety, water quality)
- Enforcement of park hours/potential effects of 24-hour use
- Problems with litter and illegal dumping
- Limited staff resources available to enforce park regulations and manage park resources

5.2 THREATS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Table E identifies the most significant threats for AWCWP and lists the potential impacts that are likely to result from these threats. Habitat fragmentation, invasive plant species, existing fuels and fire hazard conditions, the urban edge effect, public use, and erosion constitute the main threats. The RMP is designed to address these issues and threats and to minimize impacts while supporting the intent of a County wilderness park. Management guidelines and strategies that address these issues are provided in the sections that follow.

5.2.1 Public Use

Human use has the potential to cause extensive degradation of the natural and cultural resource values of open space areas. Overuse and inappropriate uses of the extensive trail network can have negative environmental effects by altering natural drainage patterns, eroding and depositing of soil, introducing exotic vegetation, and increasing human-wildlife conflicts. Degraded trails also diminish the quality of the visitor experience by creating difficult or unsafe trail conditions, promoting trail use conflicts, and impacting the scenic quality of the landscape.

Table E: Analysis of Threats and Potential Impacts for the AWCWP

THREATS	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
<p>5.2.1 PUBLIC USE</p> <p>The existing trail network is heavily used by hikers, runners, and mountain cyclists. Off-trail use has facilitated the development of unauthorized trails and shortcuts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overuse and inappropriate uses of trails causes erosion, alters natural drainage patterns, introduces exotic vegetation, degrades native vegetation, and increases human-wildlife conflicts. • Degraded trails create difficult or unsafe trail conditions for visitors. • Conflicts/safety problems between the highly active (cyclist) trail users and the passive (bird watching, painting, photography)
<p>5.2.2 URBAN EDGE EFFECT</p> <p>AWCWP is surrounded by urban area along most of its boundaries. Because of its size and “Y-shaped” configuration, the park has a lengthy perimeter (approximately 42 miles) that borders several different communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exotic plant and animal species are introduced and degrade the natural environment. • Prevents native wildlife from using habitat along the periphery of the park or puts them at risk for predation by feral or domesticated animals when they do move out into this region. • Contributes to an increase in frequency and severity of wildfires. • Visual intrusion degrades scenic quality of the park. • Unauthorized access from adjacent development contributes to habitat fragmentation. • Ambient lighting, including night lighting from Soka University and sports field, and noise can disturb wildlife and ecosystem functioning. • Inappropriate management of fuel modification zones contribute to soil erosion, poor water quality, degradation of habitat, and landscape blight. • Lack of permanent markers to delineate fuel modification boundaries facilitates infringement (<i>i.e.</i>, goat grazing) on park property. • Variety of landscape plans creates

THREATS	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	confusion and difficulties for enforcement and management.
5.2.3 INVASIVE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES	
Invasive plant and animal species are outcompeting native species in areas of the AWCWP. Invasive species are spreading into the AWCWP from adjacent development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasive species degrade existing native habitat and reduce biodiversity. • Invasive species compete with native plants for resources and habitat, and prevent seedling establishment. • Invasive species may displace native wildlife.
5.2.4 WATER QUALITY	
Land use practices and natural processes throughout the watershed adversely affect water quality within the park. Many of these practices occur outside the purview of park managers. Some threats to water quality within the park boundaries can be controlled by park managers (e.g., invasive vegetation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased runoff causes flooding and erosion damage to habitat, open space, large wastewater lines, and other infrastructure. • Water quality that does not meet public health regulatory requirements. • Degradation of aquatic and terrestrial habitat. • Loss of recreational opportunities.
5.2.5 HABITAT FRAGMENTATION	
Biocorridors become increasingly important for plants and wildlife as human development encroaches upon natural areas, yet even the biocorridors within the AWCWP are threatened by human development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement of wildlife and genetic material is hindered, resulting in the loss of species in the isolated patches. • Habitat fragmentation contributes to the "urban edge effect."
5.2.6 EXISTING FUELS AND FIRE HAZARD CONDITIONS	
Excess fuel loads within AWCWP (e.g. near homes) increase the risk of wildfire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eroded hillsides become invaded by nonnative vegetation and native vegetation is diminished. • Neighboring homes and businesses are at risk when wildfires become unmanageable. • AWCWP is at risk from fires at the urban interface
5.2.7 EROSION	
Steep slopes, historic land use practices, and the construction of unauthorized trails have resulted in erosion. Areas without vegetation on steep slopes are the most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases sedimentation in streams and watercourses. • Degrades water quality (increased turbidity).

THREATS	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
susceptible to erosion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose habitat value in riparian and wetland ecosystems from siltation and type conversion. • Creates hazardous trail conditions from rills and gullies for hikers, bikers, and equestrians. • Reduces soil productivity and water-holding capacity. • Alters natural drainage patterns. • Increases velocity and amount of stormwater runoff. • Barren areas reduce scenic value.

A long history of use, prior to the establishment of AWCWP, has facilitated the development of visitor-created unauthorized trails and shortcuts. Steep trails without adequate ground cover are heavily eroded with cutting and compaction along their edges. In some areas, trails act as drainage ditches carrying water during storm events. In addition, off-trail use tramples native vegetation, degrades habitat, disturbs wildlife, and promotes invasive exotic species.

5.2.2 Urban Edge Effect

Urban areas in proximity to the park may cause negative effects. Some of these effects are urban runoff, light pollution, exotic pests, feral pets, exotic plants, diseases, fire, and pollution. Some are more easily controlled than others. These effects can deter animals from using the habitat along the edge of the park, which in turn reduces the overall usable acreage of the park. Conflicts may occur along the urban edge from animals in AWCWP moving into the urban area to roam and forage.

AWCWP has urban area along most of its boundaries. One of the obvious effects of the urban edge is the fuel modification required along these areas. Most of the fuel modification zones associated with adjacent development lie outside the park boundaries; there are only a few areas for fuel modification within AWCWP. Mismanagement of these fuel modification zones has the potential to adversely affect AWCWP. Over zealous vegetation removal and failure to revegetate with fire-resistant, native plant species contribute to soil erosion, poor water quality and degradation of native habitat. Inappropriate/unauthorized chemical control further degrades water quality and riparian ecosystems. In addition, the large number of fuel modification/landscape plans governing the fuel modification zones and inconsistency in management approaches between the different Homeowners Associations (HOAs) make it difficult for park managers to ensure appropriate management.

Ornamental plants planted in the urban areas may move into AWCWP and if not monitored can become established. Domestic/feral pets enter AWCWP to roam and forage for food. These animals may compete with native animals for food or prey upon the native animals themselves, and may also introduce disease to native populations. The best way to reduce these and other urban edge effects is to educate the public who live adjacent to AWCWP and to explain the ways they can reduce impacts to AWCWP and why they should be concerned. Park staff should work with HOAs, cities, Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) and others to enforce compliance of approved fuel modification landscape plans and promote revegetation of denuded areas with low fire hazard native plants.

5.2.3 Invasive Plant Species

Invasive plants are a threat to open space because they colonize disturbed areas and degrade existing native habitat. The invasive plants are more aggressive than most native plants, will out compete the natives, and prevent certain native species from germinating. The nonnative invasive plants take hold, and since they are colonizers, they are very difficult to get rid of once they have become established. It is much easier to fight invasive weeds in the early stages.

Historic land uses, from cattle and sheep grazing and cultivation to recreation use, has allowed nonnative invasive plants to take hold within the park. In some of these areas the weeds have caused significant damage and are not allowing the disturbed areas to recover and fill in with native vegetation. The management of the invasive plants will be an important component of the continued health and vitality of the habitat at AWCWP.

5.2.4 Water Quality

The proximity of AWCWP to urban development renders it susceptible to water quality problems including urban runoff, non-point source pollution, increased sedimentation, and streambank erosion. The entire Aliso Creek watershed suffers from a number of problems related to water resources. These problems are a result of natural processes as well as human actions and land uses that exacerbate natural conditions such as variation in rainfall, changes in sediment and other occurrences. Problems within the watershed fall into four general categories: creek instability, water quality, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and flooding damage. Creek instability results in channel degradation, erosion damage, loss of habitat, expansion of invasive species and devalued recreation experience.

Many of these problems are a result of processes and practices occurring beyond park boundaries and outside of the purview of park managers. Participation in public outreach and watershed-wide management efforts will be the most effective method for addressing water quality problems within AWCWP.

5.2.5 Habitat Fragmentation

Habitat fragmentation may occur on either a local or regional level. Local fragmentation of habitat can be caused by activities within the area that damage the functionality of the

habitat. Examples of these are trails, roads, invasion by exotic weeds, goat fencing, habitat removal from goat grazing, and development. Regional fragmentation is when large tracts of open space are isolated from other large stretches of land. If corridors are not kept between these lands, then they become isolated and the movement of wildlife and genetic material (seed, spores, and pollen) of plants will be diminished. This in time will reduce the viability and health of the smaller patches of isolated habitat.

Trails that cut across AWCWP, as well as scars from installation of goat fencing, and invasive weeds are decreasing the quality and functionality of the habitat. Other areas of the habitat are doing well but they are fragmented and isolated. Keeping certain areas closed to public use and restoring habitat on the unauthorized trails can preserve areas of intact habitat.

5.2.6 Existing Fuels and Fire Hazard Conditions

The Mediterranean climate of Southern California—characterized by wet, mild winters and dry, hot summers—is conducive to producing an abundance of fire fuel because of the long growing season. Fire suppression, heavy rains, and seasonal or prolonged drought all result in excessive fuel accumulation. When excess fuel loads are not managed properly and fire is suppressed in plant communities (e.g., chaparral) that have fire-based regeneration requirements, wildfires pose a threat to the surrounding homes and communities and the native vegetation itself. Major wildfires adversely impact native habitat because of the increased chance of erosion and subsequent invasion of exotic plant species (Kent 2005).

The southern California fire season typically starts in the fall when the Santa Ana winds bring hot and dry air from the east (Kent 2005). Within AWCWP, the risk of fire is significant in areas where fire has been suppressed, allowing a dense understory to accumulate in areas where vegetation might normally be thin. Hillsides with southern exposure, steep slopes that allow fires to spread rapidly, and unmanaged growth along the residential areas at the periphery of AWCWP are especially fire prone.

In response to the potential threat of fire along the urban edge, the City of Laguna Beach has been conducting fuel management by goat grazing for the past 18 years. In grazed areas fuel is reduced so that fires burning into it can be more readily extinguished. Five of the fuel modification zones (1, 2, 5, 6, and 7) are adjacent to AWCWP.

5.2.7 Erosion

Erosion, the process by which soil particles are displaced and transported by wind or water, occurs naturally from weather or runoff. Human land use practices such as unrestricted construction, agriculture, removal of vegetation or mulch, paving or heavy repeated trampling can cause accelerated erosion beyond natural levels. Erosion reduces soil quality and water-holding capacity by removing the nutrient-rich upper layers of the soil. Erosion can increase sedimentation in wetlands, streams (including riparian habitats) and watercourses, degrade water quality, increase flood hazards and reduce water storage capacity. The extent of erosion depends on a combination of factors including the amount

and intensity of rainfall, soil type, slope length and steepness, and ground cover (vegetation, litter/mulch, rocks). Soil erodibility is a function of texture, organic matter content, structure and permeability. In general, areas with erosive soils on long steep slopes with little or no vegetative cover will be most susceptible to erosion.

The creation of unauthorized trails, particularly downhill, mountain biking trails in steep hillside areas exacerbate conditions that are conducive to erosion because they compact soils, remove ground cover and concentrate runoff flows.