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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this section is to describe the applicant's proposed Project in a manner that will be meaningful to the public, reviewing agencies, and decision makers. The section will describe the proposed Project's purpose, need, and objectives, location, background, and components. It also will be the basis for assessing the significant direct and indirect environmental impacts of the proposed Project. The assessment of environmental impacts in **Section 4.0** is based on the proposed Project components described herein.

This section is comprised of the following subsections:

- **Subsection 2.1** provides an introduction and summary information, and a statement of the purpose, need, and objectives of the proposed Project;
- **Subsection 2.2** describes the location of the proposed Project;
- **Subsection 2.3** describes the applicant's requested Project approvals and the applicable federal and state permitting process;
- **Subsection 2.4** discusses the other permits and approvals required to implement the proposed Project;
- **Subsection 2.5** discusses the background and setting of the proposed Project;
- **Subsection 2.6** describes the elements of the RMDP component of the proposed Project; and
- **Subsection 2.7** describes the elements of the SCP component of the proposed Project, including the associated CCA.

#### 2.1.1 Summary of the Resource Management and Development Plan

The proposed Project consists of two components, the first of which is the Newhall Ranch RMDP. The RMDP component is a conservation, mitigation, and permitting plan for the long-term management of sensitive biological resources within the 11,999-acre Specific Plan area (see RMDP, which is found in **Appendix 1.0** of this EIS/EIR). The RMDP is intended to direct both resource management and development in the Specific Plan area.

As to resource management, the RMDP would implement resource conservation, mitigation, and long-term management of sensitive biological resources within the RMDP area, which would be implemented in conjunction with the development of the Specific Plan. The RMDP is intended to build on the Specific Plan's previously adopted Resource Management Plan, which provided the initial framework for resource management within the Specific Plan area. The previously adopted Resource Management Plan set forth mitigation and monitoring standards for sensitive biological resources located within the Specific Plan area and established standards governing public access, recreational use, management, and ownership of the River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, the High Country SMA/SEA 20, and the Open Area portions of the

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Specific Plan area. The Salt Creek area, adjacent to the westerly boundary of the Specific Plan site, is also to be managed in conjunction with and in the same manner as the High Country SMA/SEA 20. The approved Resource Management Plan provides guidance for managing the transition areas between the development and open space areas, and establishes a mitigation overlay and preserve program for the spineflower. However, the Resource Management Plan was prepared at a conceptual level of detail only; it also expressly acknowledged that future conservation, mitigation, and permitting activities within the Specific Plan area would be subject to federal and state permits, consultations, and agreements which would be implemented through more detailed planning. The RMDP is one of the detailed implementation plans contemplated by the Resource Management Plan.

The RMDP encompasses the same area as the boundary of the Specific Plan site, except that it includes the Salt Creek area in Ventura County, adjacent to the Specific Plan. The sensitive biological areas within the RMDP study area include the Specific Plan's River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, High Country SMA/SEA 20, Salt Creek, Open Areas, and oak resources.

The RMDP also would consist of development-related infrastructure improvements in the Santa Clara River and tributary drainages located in the RMDP study area, which are needed to implement the approved Specific Plan. The applicant's proposed RMDP infrastructure improvements are described in further detail in **Subsection 2.6**, below. The proposed RMDP improvements also are briefly summarized, as follows:

- **Bridges and Road Crossing Culverts.** Three bridges and 15 new road crossing culverts would be installed to serve the Specific Plan, and to accommodate future traffic associated with development of the Specific Plan and the region. There are two proposed bridges, Potrero Canyon Bridge and Long Canyon Road Bridge, and one previously approved bridge, Commerce Center Drive Bridge.<sup>1</sup> The three bridges would be located over the main stem of the Santa Clara River. Fifteen new road crossing culverts would cross six drainages tributary to the Santa Clara River (Chiquito, San Martinez Grande, Lion, Long, Potrero, and Ayers Canyons). The road crossings would be constructed of earthen fill and pre-fabricated arched culverts.
- **Bank Stabilization.** Bank stabilization/protection would be installed along portions of the Santa Clara River Corridor and its tributary drainages within the RMDP site. Bank protection would include buried soil cement, grouted and ungrouted rock riprap, turf reinforcement mats, and limited gunite slope lining in and around bridge abutments. In addition, all applicable development areas would be raised above the FEMA flood hazard elevation to protect land uses from potential flooding.
- **Drainage Facilities.** Drainage facilities would be installed and include open and closed drainage systems, inlets, outlets, bank stabilization, and NPDES water quality basins. The proposed drainage structures focus on minimizing the amount of debris that would enter the drainage system, and maintaining the quality of water within the system.

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<sup>1</sup> The Commerce Center Drive Bridge was previously analyzed in the Final EIS/EIR prepared and approved by the Corps and CDFG in connection with the previously adopted NRMP (SCH No. 1997061090, August 1998).

- **Water Quality Control Facilities.** Pursuant to NPDES requirements, BMPs would be implemented, including the following water quality control facilities: (1) water quality basins; (2) debris basins, located just upstream of the interface between developed and undeveloped areas, primarily to trap debris coming from the upper watersheds; (3) detention basins, which are typically sized to capture the predicted runoff volume and retain the water volume for a period of time (usually 24 to 48 hours); (4) catch basin inserts or screens/filters installed in existing or new storm drains to capture pollutants in the storm water runoff; (5) bioretention, such as vegetated grassy swales, that provide water quality benefits and convey storm water runoff; and (6) solids separator units or in-line structures that reduce or manipulate runoff velocities such that particulate matter falls out of suspension and settles in a collection chamber.
  
- **Tributary Drainages<sup>2</sup>**
  - **Modified Tributary Drainages -- Existing Channels Stabilized.** Due to existing degraded conditions, and in order to accommodate the Specific Plan development, portions of the existing major tributary drainages within the RMDP site (portions of Chiquito Canyon, San Martinez Grande Canyon, and Lion Canyon) would require stabilizing treatments to protect the channel and surrounding development from excessive vertical scour and lateral channel migration. The existing drainages would remain intact, but would sustain permanent and temporary impacts from construction of stabilization elements, including buried bank stabilization and grade stabilization structures.
  
  - **Modified Tributary Drainages -- Regraded Channels.** Due to the existing degraded conditions within portions of some drainages in the RMDP site (Potrero Canyon, Long Canyon, and portions of Chiquito, San Martinez Grande, and Lion canyons), stabilization of the existing drainages is not feasible; and, therefore, in order to meet the County's flood protection objectives, these drainages would be graded, and a new drainage would be constructed in the same or similar location. The new drainages would be designed to incorporate buried bank stabilization and grade stabilization, and would have sufficient hydrologic capacity to pass the Los Angeles County Capital Flood without the need for clearing vegetation from the channels. The new channel banks would be planted with riparian vegetation following construction.
  
  - **Unmodified (Preserved) Drainages.** Among the minor tributary drainages within the RMDP site, some are not in a degraded condition; others are located in areas where no impacts are proposed; and others are distant enough from surrounding development that bank stabilization is not required. These drainages would remain in their existing condition; the RMDP does not propose to impact or enhance these drainages. In most situations, unmodified drainages would be located within future open space areas and maintain their current hydrologic functions, as well as providing linkages for wildlife movement to and from the Santa Clara River.
  
  - **Drainages Converted to Buried Storm Drain.** Some of the drainages within the RMDP site, including many of the smaller drainages, would be graded as part of the grading operations

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed description of drainages can be found in **Section 4.1**, Hydrology, **Subsection 4.1.4.2.2**.

required to facilitate build-out of the Specific Plan. The wet-weather flows in these drainages meet the Los Angeles County flood criteria (less than 2,000 cfs) to be conveyed by storm drain., The RMDP does not propose to create new drainage channels to replace these impacted drainages. Rather, the wet-weather flows that currently occupy the drainages would be routed into the development's storm drain system, and would be discharged to the Santa Clara River via the proposed storm drain outlets.

- **Grade Stabilization Structures.** Grade stabilization structures would be installed on five existing tributaries (Chiquito Canyon, Long Canyon, Potrero Canyon, San Martinez Grande Canyon, and Lion Canyon) to the main stem of the Santa Clara River. The grade stabilization structures are designed to contain the hydraulic "jump" that occurs when there is a significant drop in streambed elevation, so that higher velocities are dissipated within the area; the structures would help control erosion and changes to the configuration of the bed of the stream channel. Such structures would be constructed of soil cement, sheet piles, or reinforced concrete.
- **Utility Corridor and Crossings.** The Corridor alignment generally extends parallel to the south side of SR-126 north of the Santa Clara River. Various electrical, sewer, water, gas, and communications lines would be installed across Chiquito Canyon, San Martinez Canyon and Castaic Creek within an approximately 100-foot wide utility corridor to serve the Specific Plan (see, **Figure 2.0-31**, Utility Corridor, below). Utility lines would be installed in rights-of-way adjacent to bridges where access for installation and maintenance can be easily accommodated. Utilities also would be extended across the Santa Clara River and its tributaries to serve the Specific Plan.
- **Temporary Haul Routes for Grading Equipment.** Temporary haul routes across the Santa Clara River would be used during construction to move equipment and excavated soil to locations in the RMDP in accordance with the Specific Plan Conceptual Grading Plan site
- **WRP Outfall Construction Activities.** An effluent outfall pipeline would be constructed from the Newhall Ranch WRP through the bank stabilization to the bed of the Santa Clara River. An earthen channel and adjacent walkway also would be constructed to reach the actual flow path of the river.
- **Roadway Improvements to SR-126.** Various roadway improvements, including SR-126 widening and a grade-separated crossing at Long Canyon Road/SR-126, would be needed within the vicinity of the RMDP site.
- **Maintenance Activities.** DPW or other entity would conduct regular and ongoing maintenance of flood, drainage, and water quality protection facilities on the RMDP site. Such activities would include periodic inspection of structures and monitoring of vegetation growth and sediment buildup to ensure that the integrity of the structures is maintained and that planned conveyance capacity is present, routine repairs and maintenance of bridges and bank protection, and emergency maintenance activities.
- **Recreation Facilities.** In addition to the comprehensive system of bicycle, pedestrian, and equestrian trails that would be implemented by the adopted Specific Plan Master Trails Plan, the applicant's

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RMDP proposes to construct five nature viewing platforms located in or adjacent to jurisdictional areas in the Santa Clara River.<sup>3</sup>

- **Geotechnical Investigation Activities.** To accommodate the Specific Plan development, geotechnical investigations and associated activities would be undertaken to ensure that the development would be safely constructed in accordance with all applicable geotechnical reports, studies, and standards.
- **Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Activities.** The RMDP incorporates a variety of design features that minimize impacts to riparian and upland resources along and within the Santa Clara River and its tributary drainages, by avoidance, minimization or mitigation including restoration and enhancement activities). In addition, the RMDP includes enhancement design features, such as removal of grazing to enhance riparian habitat, and rehabilitating native habitat areas that have been disturbed by past activities or invaded by non-native plant species.

Consistent with the resource management objectives, the applicant used a multi-disciplinary approach to design the RMDP. The applicant's approach includes factors such as biology, land use, geology, topography, hydrology, soils, and infrastructure. By incorporating design considerations and resource preservation methods, the applicant submits that implementation of the RMDP would result in a conservation strategy to allow for development of the Specific Plan in a way that avoids or minimizes the Specific Plan's significant impacts on waters, jurisdictional streams and drainages, and sensitive biological resources. According to the applicant, RMDP implementation also would continue the preserve assembly process that originated with the Specific Plan's Resource Management Plan. This preserve assembly process involves the dedication of the High Country SMA/SEA 20, River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, Salt Creek, and Open Areas.

The RMDP also proposes mitigation and management activities to address the significant impacts on jurisdictional waters/drainages and sensitive biological resources resulting from the Specific Plan. The impacts and mitigation and management measures identified in the RMDP are discussed in both Section 7.0 of the RMDP and **Section 4.5**, Biological Resources, of this EIS/EIR.

The RMDP includes plans for monitoring and management. In addition, the RMDP provides an adaptive management program and remedial measures for the River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, High Country SMA/SEA 20, Salt Creek, and Open Areas. The RMDP includes reporting requirements associated with the River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, High Country SMA/SEA 20, Salt Creek, Open Area, and oak resources, and it describes the funding mechanisms that would be utilized to implement the plan.

### 2.1.2 Spineflower Conservation Plan

The SCP component of the proposed Project is comprised of the applicant's conservation and management plan to permanently protect and manage a system of preserves designed to maximize the long-term persistence of core occurrences of spineflower, a federal candidate and a state-listed

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<sup>3</sup> Alternatives 3-7 do not propose construction of any nature viewing platforms along the Santa Clara River.

## 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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endangered plant species. The SCP would apply to portions of the RMDP study area and the VCC and Entrada planning areas. The purpose of the SCP is to conduct conservation planning and preserve design on all of the applicant's land holdings in Los Angeles County that contain known spineflower populations.

The information provided in the SCP is to be used by the applicant in requesting authorization to take spineflower in areas located outside designated spineflower preserves. Specifically, the applicant is requesting a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) from USFWS under ESA, and a section 2081(b) Incidental Take Permit from CDFG under CESA.

The spineflower was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1999 on property located in Ventura County, California, in the vicinity of Laskey Mesa in the southeast edge of Simi Hills. Laskey Mesa is located within the former Ahmanson Ranch property in Ventura County.

After rediscovery of the spineflower, the Service designated it as a candidate species in the October 25, 1999 Candidate Notice of Review (CNOR). (64 Fed.Reg. 57534, 57541.) The Service has conducted regular reviews of the status of the spineflower since issuance of the 1999 CNOR.

In 2003, the former Ahmanson Ranch property was acquired by the State of California through the Wildlife Conservation Board and transferred to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for purposes of wildlife habitat preservation, corridor protection, restoration and management, wildlife-oriented education and research, and for compatible public uses, consistent with wildlife habitat preservation and protection of sensitive biological resources. The former Ahmanson Ranch property is now called the Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve.

Based on this acquisition, in 2007, the Service, while still recognizing the susceptibility of spineflower to extinction or extirpation, has acknowledged that threats to the spineflower "from habitat destruction or modification are less than they were four years ago [2003], because one of the two populations (Ahmanson Ranch) is in permanent, public ownership and is being managed by an agency that is working to conserve the plant." (72 Fed.Reg. 69034, 69082.) The other population, located on the applicant's land holdings in Los Angeles County, is under threat of development; however, a CCA is being developed between USFWS and the applicant. Until the CCA is finalized, the threat of development still exists, but the USFWS decided to retain the spineflower's listing priority to reflect threats that are high but non-imminent in the 2007 CNOR, which was published on December 6, 2007. (72 Fed.Reg. 69034, 69082.)

Currently, spineflower is known to exist in the Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space in Ventura County and the applicant's land holdings in Los Angeles County. The two spineflower populations are approximately 17 miles apart.

At the federal level, the spineflower is designated as a candidate species under the ESA. At the state level, the spineflower is listed as endangered under CESA, effective as of September 8, 2002.

In response to the above history and legal status of the spineflower, the applicant has prepared the SCP, which is a component of the proposed Project. The SCP sets forth biological goals and objectives as cornerstones of the adaptive management program for the spineflower within the preserves established within portions of the applicant's land holdings in Los Angeles County where there are known

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spineflower populations. Three main goals for the spineflower preserves are presented in the SCP. For each goal, the SCP describes a set of objectives for attaining the goals, along with a brief explanation or rationale for each objective (see EIS/EIR, **Appendix 1.0** for the SCP).

The distribution of spineflower within the SCP study area has been documented across the entire Project area for six growing seasons (2002-2007). The populations have been aggregated geographically into six general occurrences. The Specific Plan area includes the Airport Mesa, Grapevine Mesa, Potrero Canyon, and San Martinez Grande Canyon occurrences. The other two occurrences are found on portions of the Entrada and the VCC planning areas. Spineflower sites occur predominantly within openings in sparsely vegetated California sagebrush, California buckwheat, and grassland communities. Soils at spineflower sites vary among combinations of sandy and gravelly silt and clay loams.

The environmental setting of the SCP study area is topographically diverse with hillsides, canyons, ridges, and gentle sloping floodplains. It includes native and naturalized habitats that are representative of those found in the region, including upland and riparian habitats. Existing land uses within the SCP study area include ongoing oil and natural gas production, grazing, ranching, and agricultural operations; approved land uses in the Specific Plan area; and planned and approved land uses in the Entrada and VCC planning areas.

In order to identify and design spineflower preserve areas within the study area, a habitat suitability index was used to evaluate the entire study area. The habitat suitability index was developed using the following datasets: vegetation, soils, geology, elevation, slope, and aspect. Each of the six data layers was intersected with the spineflower occurrence data from 2003 to determine the number of spineflower individuals within each individual attribute of each dataset. Unfortunately, the results did not produce the anticipated predictive standards. The results of this effort suggested that either the existing habitat data may be too coarse to resolve the actual habitat features that spineflower selects or that habitat features are not predictive of spineflower occurrence. Nonetheless, given the results of the study, it did not seem prudent to use the datasets to produce a habitat suitability index to assist in the evaluation of the proposed spineflower preserve areas, nor to develop management and monitoring recommendations and techniques within the preserve areas based on the index.

Thus, a representative model was utilized to evaluate the proposed spineflower preserve areas, and compared the distribution of the individual attributes within each dataset for the entire study area and for the proposed preserve areas. The applicant's proposed spineflower preserves would conserve approximately 68.6 percent of the cumulative spineflower occupied area. (SCP, Table 7.)

The proposed spineflower preserve areas contain additional habitat not currently known to be occupied by spineflower. Unoccupied acreage includes buffer and expansion areas. It is not possible at this time to identify suitable habitat for the spineflower, based on the unsatisfactory results of the habitat suitability index. However, where the surrounding habitat is suitable, spineflower expansion can potentially occur. Further analysis is needed to better characterize the spineflower's physical and biological habitat requirements at a finer scale; this analysis would be undertaken pursuant to future data collected as a part of the adaptive management and monitoring requirements set forth in the SCP.

The applicant's proposed spineflower preserve areas include the Airport Mesa, Grapevine Mesa, Potrero, San Martinez Grande within the Specific Plan site, and the Entrada preserve area. These SCP areas would conserve spineflower at five out of six known occurrences within the SCP study area. The preserve areas total approximately 167.6 acres, and include approximately 68.6 percent of the total cumulative area occupied by spineflower. Under the proposed Project, spineflower occurrences in the VCC planning area, which account for approximately 4.2 percent of the total cumulative area occupied by spineflower within the SCP study area, would not be conserved.

### **2.1.3 Project Purpose and Need/Project Objectives**

#### **2.1.3.1 Overall Purpose/Need and Objectives**

The northern Los Angeles County region has experienced and continues to experience significant growth resulting in a high demand for housing and jobs, and the overall regional need for large-scale residential, nonresidential, and commercial development to accommodate approved and planned growth in the region. To facilitate the orderly accommodation of the high demand for housing and jobs, the Specific Plan was approved by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on May 27, 2003.

The County has determined that build-out of the Specific Plan will foster regional economic development and job creation by providing 20,885 homes, including affordable housing, and approximately 20,000 jobs. In addition, the County has required the applicant to set aside significant open space areas for the benefit of its residents and the region. These areas are located in and adjacent to the Specific Plan area, and include the River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, High Country SMA/SEA 20, Salt Creek area, designated Open Areas, spineflower preserve areas, and oak resources. The County has further determined that the Specific Plan will provide a tax base to support public services and will provide approximately 20,000 jobs to the Santa Clarita Valley. By providing residential, commercial, mixed-use and nonresidential uses, and by setting aside significant open space acreage, the County has determined that implementation of the Specific Plan will facilitate a balanced development where residents may both live and work and where sensitive biological resources are conserved, managed, and protected in perpetuity.

The applicant's overall purpose and need for the proposed Project under NEPA, and the objectives of the proposed Project under CEQA, are as follows:

- To practicably and feasibly achieve the basic objectives of the Specific Plan, thereby helping to meet the regional demand for housing and jobs. Specifically, the RMDP component of the proposed Project would address the long-term management of sensitive biological resources in conjunction with the construction and maintenance of RMDP infrastructure needed to implement the approved Specific Plan in a manner that complies with federal and state environmental protection requirements; and
- To develop and implement a practicable and feasible SCP that would permanently protect and manage a system of preserves designed to maximize the long-term persistence of the spineflower within the applicant's land holdings containing known spineflower populations, and to authorize the take of spineflower in areas located outside of designated preserves.

### 2.1.3.2 RMDP Purpose/Objectives

The applicant's proposed RMDP provides additional objectives aimed at the ongoing conservation of sensitive biological resources during and following construction of the RMDP infrastructure, which would facilitate development of the approved Specific Plan.

Therefore, the applicant's overall goal of the RMDP is to provide a coordinated resource management and development plan, which, when implemented, would avoid or mitigate impacts to sensitive biological resources within the approved Specific Plan area, while permitting necessary infrastructure improvements. To implement this goal, the applicant's additional RMDP objectives are to:

- Assemble and manage a multi-component permanent preserve, in conjunction with the existing regional preserve system. This ensures that allowable Specific Plan land uses remain compatible with the long-term conservation and management of sensitive biological, scenic, and other natural resources, that biological diversity is maintained, and that the survival and recovery of sensitive habitats and species are ensured.
- Design and monitor transition areas between approved RMDP development and preserve areas, such that edge effects are minimized during and following construction.
- Design and monitor drainage and transportation facilities, such that direct and indirect impacts to biological and water quality resources (*e.g.*, hydrology and wildlife movement) are minimized.
- Replace impacted resources (*e.g.*, wetlands and oak trees) through the restoration and enhancement of like resources.
- Maintain or increase riparian functions and values within the Santa Clara River and its major tributaries.
- Maintain or enhance important wildlife corridors and habitat corridors.
- Conserve endangered species habitats.
- Provide necessary documentation of RMDP implementation to resource agencies and the County of Los Angeles.
- Provide monitoring and maintenance, adaptive management techniques, and funding for the RMDP infrastructure improvements.

According to the applicant's achievement of these additional RMDP objectives would result in greater resource conservation than currently exists under the approved Specific Plan.

### 2.1.3.3 SCP Purpose/Objectives

The primary goal of the applicant's SCP is to develop a management and monitoring framework to ensure the long-term persistence of spineflower within the SCP study area through establishment of a system of preserves, and to authorize the take of spineflower in areas located outside of the designated preserves. Achievement of the additional SCP objectives indicated below would result in greater resource conservation than currently exists under the two pre-existing CDFG spineflower conservation easement areas, which total approximately 64 acres of spineflower preserve and buffer areas within the approved Specific Plan boundary. To promote comprehensive spineflower conservation planning, all of the applicant's land holdings containing known spineflower populations have been analyzed in the SCP. The applicant's objectives that contribute to achieving the SCP's primary goal include the following:

- Permanently protect and manage a system of preserves designed to maximize long-term persistence of spineflower. Preserves would include habitat for potential pollinators and dispersal agents, and preserve management would allow restoration of degraded and/or damaged habitats and establishment of site-specific buffers to minimize and control adverse edge effects from adjacent changes in land uses.
- Maintain biological connectivity between preserves and permanently protected and managed open space areas (*e.g.*, River Corridor, Open Areas, utility easements, *etc.*). Management in the open space areas would allow restoration of degraded and/or damaged habitats.
- Preserves would include spineflower occurrences that maximize genetic diversity and overall population size, while capturing the range of environmental conditions where the taxon is found.
- Design and implement restoration of damaged and degraded habitats within the preserves in a manner that provides opportunities to enhance spineflower populations, where appropriate.
- Provide suitable habitat within designated preserves to accommodate natural evolutionary and ecological processes for the spineflower, such as spatial fluctuations and colonization events.

### 2.1.3.4 Other Project Purposes/Objectives

The applicant's other Project purposes and objectives would be accomplished with implementation of the proposed Project. Those purposes and objectives are described below.

- An important Project objective and purpose is to manage on-site resources under a single owner or small group of owners; and the size and single ownership of the Project area provide a unique opportunity to develop an overall plan for the conservation and management of sensitive resources in conjunction with previously approved or planned development.
- Issuance of a long-term individual section 404 permit and a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement within the RMDP area would streamline the permitting processes for qualified RMDP infrastructure projects, minimize duplication of effort, ensure consistency with overlapping jurisdiction and responsibilities between the Corps and CDFG, and facilitate long-term region-based planning and

## 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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mitigation, management, monitoring, and maintenance efforts to address impacts to the affected riparian habitats.

- The RMDP and SCP components of the proposed Project would build on the Specific Plan's program for assembling and managing permanent preserves in conjunction with allowable planned and approved development within the Project area. The managed preserve would include the approximately 975-acre River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, the 4,205-acre High Country SMA/SEA 20, the 1,517-acre portion of the Salt Creek watershed and wildlife corridor in Ventura County, adjacent to the Specific Plan, and the grant of a conservation easement to CDFG over approximately 167.6 acres of the applicant's land holdings in Los Angeles County (including portions of the Entrada planning area) with known spineflower populations, along with a management and monitoring framework to ensure the long-term persistence of core spineflower occurrences within the SCP study area. Combined with the other open areas of approximately 3,362.5 acres, the managed preserve area would comprise approximately 10,227.1 acres (10,200 acres within the RMDP boundary and a 27.06 acre proposed spineflower preserve on the Entrada planning area). The assembly and management of an on-site permanent open space preserve represents an important objective of the proposed Project.
- The proposed Project would implement the habitat restoration and enhancement program included in the Specific Plan, and assist in the rehabilitation of areas of native habitat that have been disturbed by past activities. Such disturbances include grazing, roads, oil and natural gas operations, and invasion by non-native species such as giant reed (*Arundo donax*) and tamarisk (*Tamarix spp.*).

### 2.2 PROJECT LOCATION

The proposed Project is located in a portion of the Santa Clara River Valley in north unincorporated Los Angeles County, between the City of Santa Clarita and the Los Angeles County/Ventura County jurisdictional boundary line. **Figure 2.0-1** is a vicinity map depicting the proposed Project. **Figure 2.0-2** illustrates the regional location of the proposed Project.

**Figure 2.0-3** depicts the RMDP study area. The RMDP boundary encompasses sensitive biological resources within the Specific Plan's River Corridor SMA/SEA 23, the High Country SMA/SEA 20, the designated Open Areas, and the Salt Creek area located in Ventura County, adjacent to the Specific Plan's western boundary.

The SCP component of the proposed Project encompasses the RMDP area and the VCC and Entrada planning areas. **Figure 2.0-4** depicts the SCP study area. As stated above, the SCP component would establish permanent open space preserve systems for the spineflower located within the RMDP area and the Entrada planning area.

As shown on **Figure 2.0-4**, the SCP study area includes the RMDP and Specific Plan boundary, located roughly one-half mile west of Interstate 5 (I-5) and largely southwest of the junction of I-5 and State Route 126 (SR-126), with portions of the Specific Plan area located in San Martinez Grande and Chiquito canyons north of SR-126. The VCC planning area lies roughly in the northwest corner of the junction of

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I-5 and SR-126, generally northwest of both the RMDP/Specific Plan area and the Entrada planning area. The Entrada planning area lies west of I-5, south of SR-126, and east of the RMDP/Specific Plan boundary.

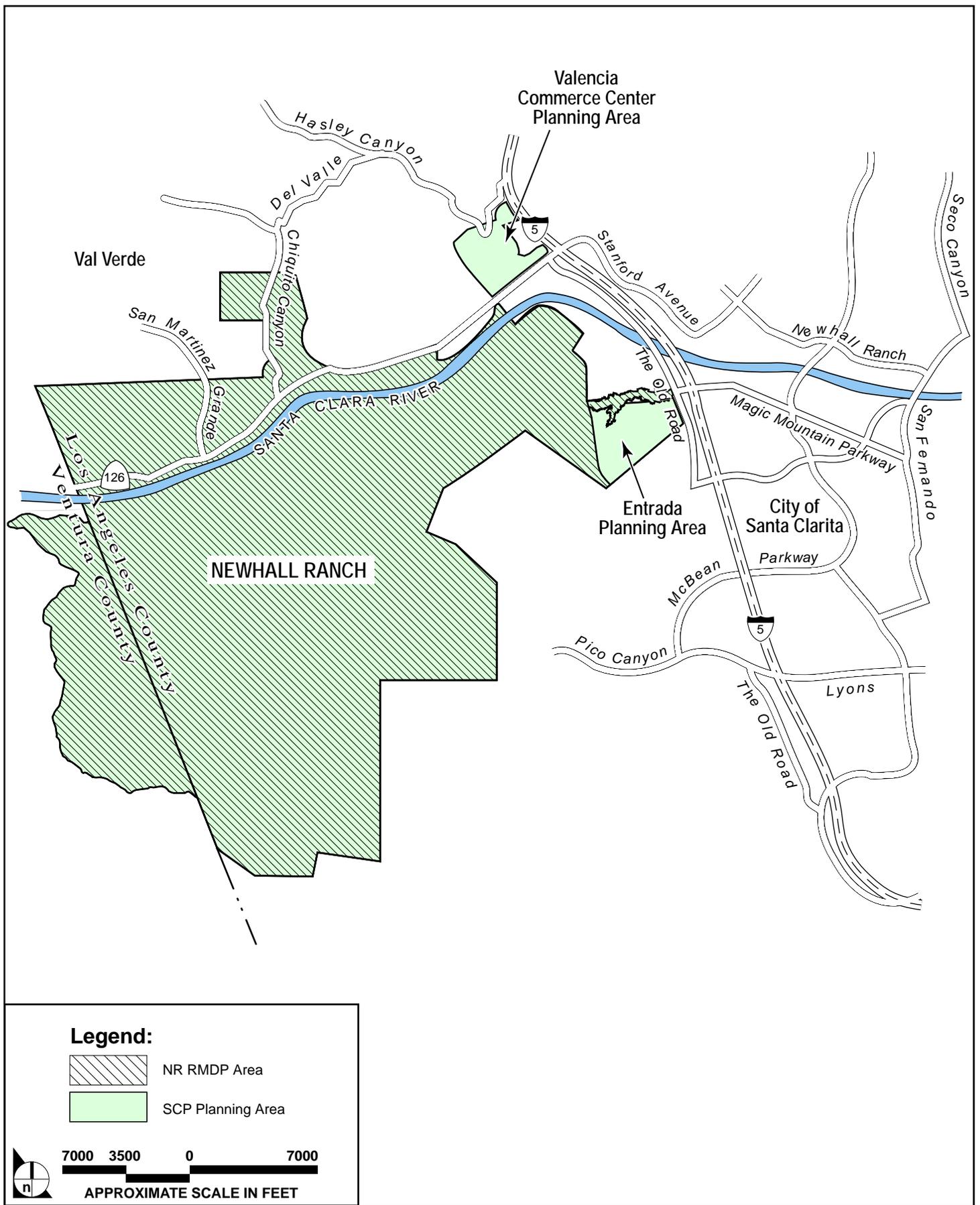
Combined, the RMDP and SCP study areas constitute the Project area for purposes of this EIS/EIR. **Figure 2.0-5** depicts the entire Project area. On a regional level, the City of Santa Clarita is located to the east of the Project area, and the Los Angeles County/Ventura County jurisdictional boundary line is to the west. The Los Padres National Forest is located to the north of the Project area, the Angeles National Forest lies to the north and east, and the Santa Susana Mountains are to the south.

### 2.3 REQUESTED PROJECT APPROVALS

The applicant is requesting that the Corps issue a section 404 permit under the federal Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. §§ 1251-1387) and that CDFG issue a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1600 *et seq.*, and two Incidental Take Permits under CESA issued by CDFG pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081, subdivisions (b) and (c). The requested Project approvals would facilitate the future development of the Specific Plan and portions of the Entrada and VCC planning areas. The requested Project approvals also would:

- streamline the permitting process if there is a need for ongoing authorizations for individual projects or components through the issuance of a single section 404 permit and a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement, rather than case-by-case permitting;
- include in the permitting process mitigation requirements for listed and unlisted species, and incidental take authorizations for species currently listed under CESA;
- standardize the mitigation applicable for Corps and CDFG regulated activities;
- authorize all regulated activities to be carried out by parties other than the applicant, subject to the terms and conditions of the federal and state permits; and
- authorize DPW, and other entities responsible for long-term maintenance, to carry out flood control maintenance activities, subject to the terms and conditions of the federal and state permits.

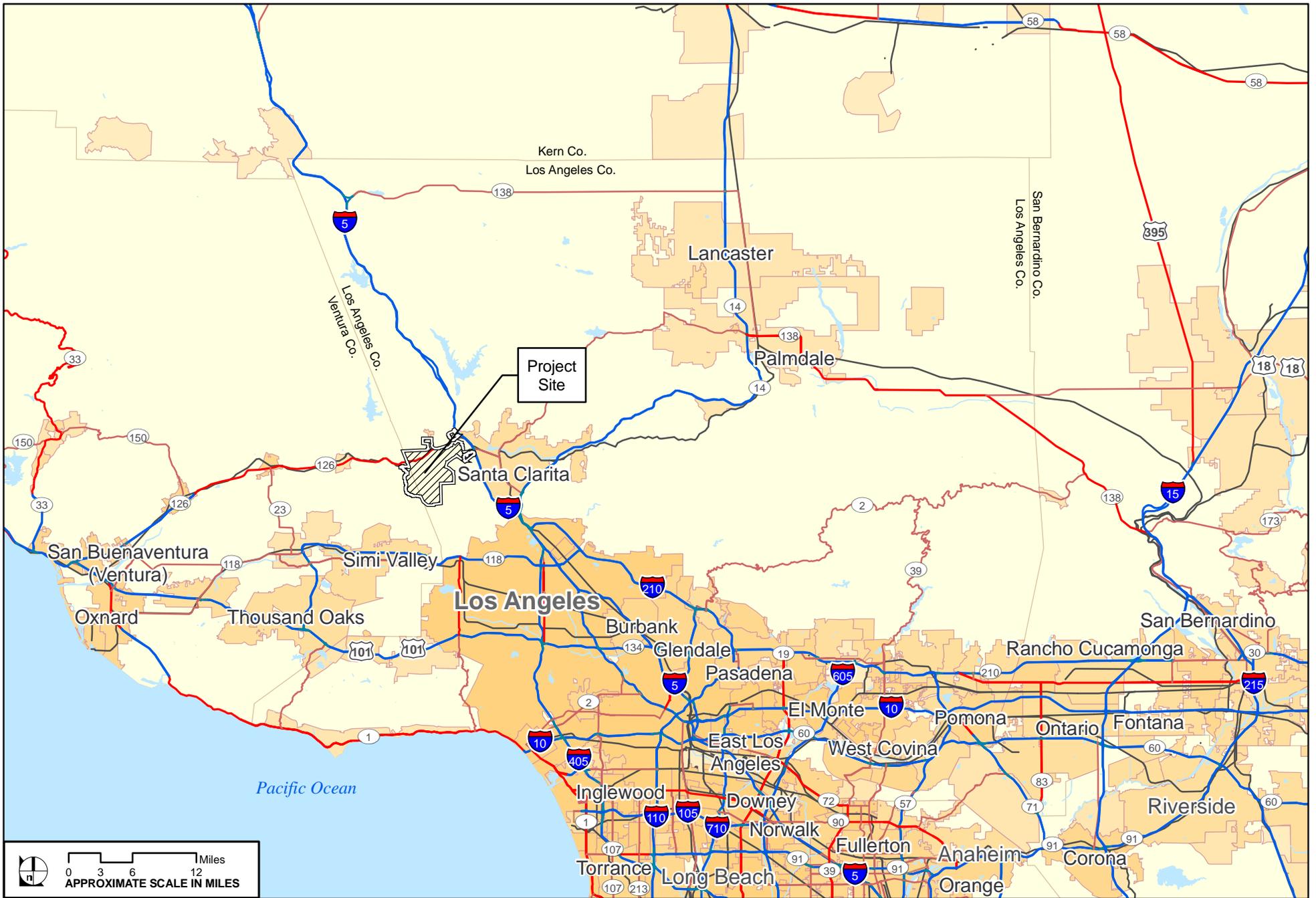
Although the Corps acknowledges the applicant's requested Project approvals as described above, it can only issue a section 404 permit that: (1) authorizes activities that meet the requirements under the section 404(b)(1) guidelines and are not contrary to the public interest; (2) provides assurances that the authorized discharges into waters of the United States would be completed in accordance with the permit conditions and applicable laws and regulations; and (3) provides the Corps with the necessary flexibility and administrative remedies to address changed environmental conditions, modifications in laws and regulations, and compliance problems.



SOURCE: URS Corporation – November 2005, Impact Sciences, Inc. – October 2007

**FIGURE 2.0-1**

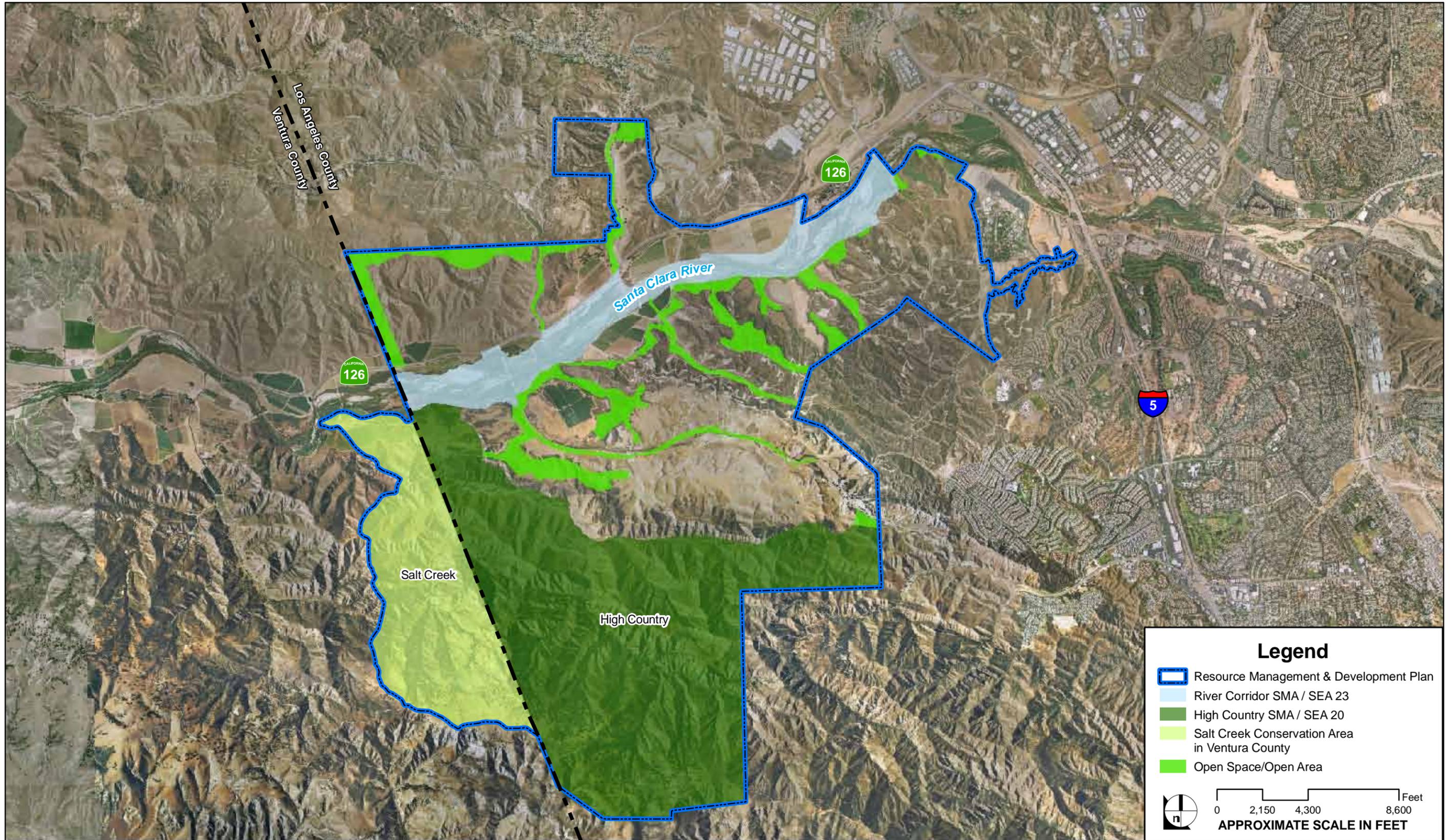
VICINITY MAP



SOURCE: PACE 2008

FIGURE 2.0-2

REGIONAL LOCATION



SOURCE: DUDEK, PACE 2008

FIGURE 2.0-3  
 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RMDP)  
 STUDY AREA