



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

PUBLIC NOTICE

Applicant:
Jeff O'Connor
HomeFed Fanita Rancho LLC

Published: July 14, 2025
Expires: **July 29, 2025**

**Los Angeles District
Permit Application No. SPL-2016-00574-AJW**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: The Los Angeles District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) has received an application for a Department of the Army permit pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. §1344). The purpose of this public notice is to solicit comments from the public regarding the work described below:

APPLICANT: Jeff O'Connor
HomeFed Fanita Rancho LLC
1903 Wright Place, Suite 220
Carlsbad, CA 92008

AGENT: Megan Enright
Dudek
605 Third Street
Encinitas, CA 92024

WATERWAY AND LOCATION: The project would affect waters of the United States, specifically tributaries to Sycamore Canyon Creek. The project/review area is located in the city of Santee, San Diego County, California (Latitude 32.884783, Longitude - 116.98352).

EXISTING CONDITIONS: The proposed project would be a development within Fanita Ranch to accommodate housing needs in the Santee community. The land is currently zoned for planned development. The proposed project is vacant land supporting both disturbed and undisturbed natural plant communities. The site also contains a system of dirt roads and trails, most of which are unauthorized and made by off-road vehicles and other recreational uses. The terrain consists of a series of northeast- to southwest-trending hills and valleys that form a transition between the relatively low, flat Sycamore Canyon on the western end and the foothills of the Peninsular Range to the east. The majority of the site contains Redding cobbly loam soils, with most of the vegetation communities consisting of coastal sage scrub, grassland, chaparral, coast live oak woodland, and various wetland plant communities. Most aquatic resources onsite drain towards Sycamore Canyon Creek, which flows north to south along the western edge of Fanita Ranch.

PROJECT PURPOSE:

Basic: The basic project purpose comprises the fundamental, essential, or irreducible purpose of the proposed project, and is used by the Corps to determine whether the applicant's project is water dependent (i.e., requires access or proximity to or siting within the special aquatic site to fulfill its basic purpose). Establishment of the basic project purpose is necessary only when the proposed activity would discharge dredged or fill material into a special aquatic site (e.g., wetlands, pool and riffle complex, mudflats, coral reefs). The project is not water dependent. The basic project purpose is residential and commercial development.

Overall: The overall project purpose serves as the basis for the Corps' 404(b)(1) alternatives analysis and is determined by further defining the basic project purpose in a manner that more specifically describes the applicant's goals for the project, and which allows a reasonable range of alternatives to be analyzed. The applicant's stated purpose and need is: To construct a mixed-use development that would include approximately 3,000 residential units (not less than 2,500) for public purchase and use with intended retail, agriculture, and recreation opportunities within the City and, more broadly, western San Diego County. This would require an average size of 0.2 acre for each residential unit (500 acres) and a minimum of 300 acres for the intended retail, agriculture, parks and other recreation opportunities, and all other infrastructure requirements for the development (e.g., roads, stormwater basins, fire management zones, manufactured slopes, etc.). Further, the implementation of the project must comply with the Fanita Ranch Development Plan (City of Santee 2022), which a previous version referred to as the Fanita Ranch Specific Plan is described in the City of Santee General Plan, and the adopted 1998 MSCP Plan (City of San Diego 1998).

PROPOSED WORK: The applicant requests authorization to impact 4.11 acres of non-wetland waters, and 0.62 acre of wetland waters (wetlands). All impacts would be permanent. The applicant proposes to develop a new community of approximately 3,000 residential units with associated parks, commercial development, and planned school site. The proposed project would include 1,650 acres (63% of total site) of open space preserve. See the attached figures for the details of what structures would be built over the impacted waters and wetlands. Most of the impacts to waters of the U.S. are due to the construction of the development, impacts on the southwest and southeastern ends of the project would be due to construction of the roads into and out of the development. All permanent fill within waters and wetlands would be with clean earthen fill and/or concrete.

AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION: The applicant has provided the following information in support of efforts to avoid and/or minimize impacts to the aquatic environment, to the maximum extent practicable:

Avoidance: 6.56 acres of non-wetland waters and 3.21 acres of wetland waters would be avoided, which equates to avoidance of 67% of the on-site jurisdictional aquatic resources.

Minimization: Minimization measures during construction consist of Best Management Practices to address erosion, runoff, and pollutants. The applicant has also designed the project to minimize habitat fragmentation, altered hydrology, and non-native invasive species.

Note, per 404(b)(1) guidelines and in accordance with 40 CFR Part 230, the Corps would conduct an alternatives analysis and make a determination on the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative, taking into account cost, logistics, and existing technology in light of the overall project purpose. The number and types of alternatives evaluated would be commensurate with the size and complexity of the proposed project.

The applicant has also taken into consideration wildfire, traffic, and other project related environmental elements through the state California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process. Details on these environmental elements may be accessed within the project draft and final Environmental Impact Report documents, as provided through the city of Santee (<https://www.cityofsanteeca.gov/planning/fanita-ranch>) and through the state CEQA Web Portal (<https://ceqanet.lci.ca.gov/Project/2005061118>).

COMPENSATORY MITIGATION: The applicant offered the following compensatory mitigation plan to offset unavoidable functional loss to the aquatic environment:

The applicant has proposed to conduct permittee-responsible mitigation (PRM) onsite, as the project area is not within the service area of a Corps-approved mitigation bank or in-lieu fee program entity for federal aquatic resources. The proposed onsite mitigation includes vernal pool establishment (4.12 acres), rehabilitation (0.43 acre), and preservation (0.17 acre), as well as preservation of existing wetland (2.55 acres) and non-wetland (3.55 acres) waters. Vernal pool mitigation would occur in twelve locations within disturbed upland and degraded vernal pool habitat within a Habitat Preserve (total watershed of 33.30 acres). Preserved areas would include a 50-foot upland buffer (51.45 acres) surrounding waters. At this time the Corps has not finalized potential compensatory mitigation ratio requirements for the proposed project. Per the 2008 Mitigation Rule (33 CFR Parts 325 and 332), and the South Pacific Division Final 2015 Regional Compensatory Mitigation and Monitoring Guidelines, a final Corps-approved mitigation plan is required that contains all applicable elements listed in 33 CFR 332.4(c)(2)-(14).

Additionally, the proposed project would result in the dedication of a Habitat Preserve, subject to in-perpetuity management and designed in accordance with the Multiple Species Conservation Sub-area Plan preserve design criteria as informed by the San Diego Management and Monitoring Program.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

The Corps is evaluating the undertaking for effects to historic properties as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This public notice serves to inform the public of the proposed undertaking and invites comments including those from local, State, and Federal government Agencies with respect to historic resources. Our final determination relative to historic resource impacts may be subject to additional coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer, federally recognized tribes and other interested parties.

The District Engineer's final eligibility and effect determination will be based upon coordination with the SHPO and/or THPO, as appropriate and required, and with full consideration given to the proposed undertaking's potential direct and indirect effects on historic properties within the Corps-identified permit area.

ENDANGERED SPECIES: The Corps has performed an initial review of the application to determine if any federally-listed threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, as well as the proposed and final designated critical habitat may occur in the vicinity of the proposed project. Based on this initial review, the Corps has made a preliminary determination that the proposed project may affect the federally-listed species and critical habitat listed below. No other federally-listed species or critical habitat listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) would be affected by the proposed action: San Diego Fairy Shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*), Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*), Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), Willowy Monardella (*Monardella viminea*); and designated critical habitat for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher, Willowy Monardella, and Hermes copper butterfly (*Lycaena hermes*).

Pursuant to Section 7 ESA, any required consultation with the Service(s) would be conducted in accordance with 50 CFR part 402. The Corps is the lead Federal agency for ESA consultation for the proposed action. Any required ESA consultation would be completed by the Corps.

This notice serves as request to the USFWS for any additional information on whether any listed or proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or critical habitat may be present in the area which would be affected by the proposed activity.

Note, state species of concern are under the purview of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board.

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT: Pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act 1996, the Corps reviewed the project area, examined information provided by the applicant, and consulted available species information. The Corps has determined the proposal would have no effect on any Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), as EFH does not occur within the project area. Therefore, no consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service on EFH as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act 1996 is required.

NAVIGATION: The proposed structure or activity is not located in the vicinity of a federal navigation channel.

SECTION 408: The applicant will not require permission under Section 14 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 USC 408) because the activity, in whole or in part, would not alter, occupy, or use a Corps Civil Works project.

WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION: The applicant is required to obtain Water Quality Certification or waiver, under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, from the California Regional Water Quality Control Board. The applicant has indicated they have applied for Section 401 certification. Section 401 requires any applicant for an individual Section 404 permit provide proof of Water Quality Certification to the Corps prior to permit issuance. Per Section 401(a)(2), the Corps is requesting neighboring jurisdiction determination from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the proposed project.

NOTE: This public notice is being issued based on information furnished by the applicant. This information has not been verified or evaluated to ensure compliance with laws and regulation governing the regulatory program. The geographic extent of aquatic resources within the proposed project area that either are, or are presumed to be, within the Corps jurisdiction has been verified by Corps personnel.

EVALUATION: The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact including cumulative impacts of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefits, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal, must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered including cumulative impacts thereof; among these are conservation, economics, esthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historical properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, floodplain values, land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food, and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership, and in general, the needs and welfare of the people. Evaluation of the impact of the activity on the public interest will also include application of the guidelines promulgated by the Administrator, EPA, under authority of Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act or the criteria established under authority of Section 102(a) of the Marine Protection Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972. A permit will be granted unless its issuance is found to be contrary to the public interest.

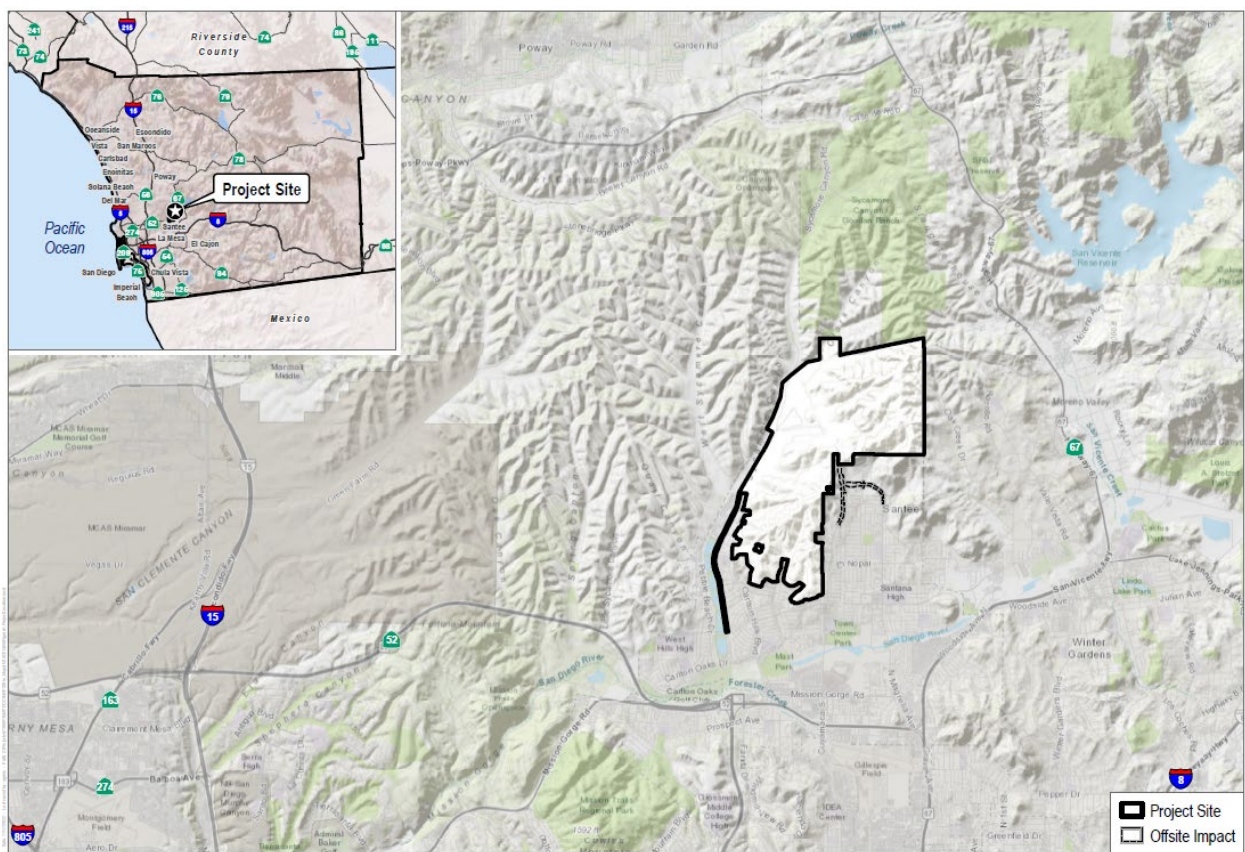
COMMENTS: The Corps is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Indian Tribes; and other Interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps to determine whether to issue, modify, condition, or deny a permit for this proposal. To make this determination, comments are used to assess impacts to endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental

effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) and/or an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

The Los Angeles District will receive written comments on the proposed work, as outlined above, until **July 29, 2025**. Comments should be submitted electronically via the Regulatory Request System (RRS) at <https://rrs.usace.army.mil/rrs> or to Shannon Pankratz at Shannon.L.Pankratz@usace.army.mil. Additional project figures may be provided upon request.

Please refer to the permit application number in your comments.

Any person may request, in writing, within the comment period specified in this notice, that a public hearing be held to consider the application. Requests for public hearings shall state, with particularity, the reasons for holding a public hearing. Requests for a public hearing will be granted, unless the District Engineer determines that the issues raised are insubstantial or there is otherwise no valid interest to be served by a hearing.

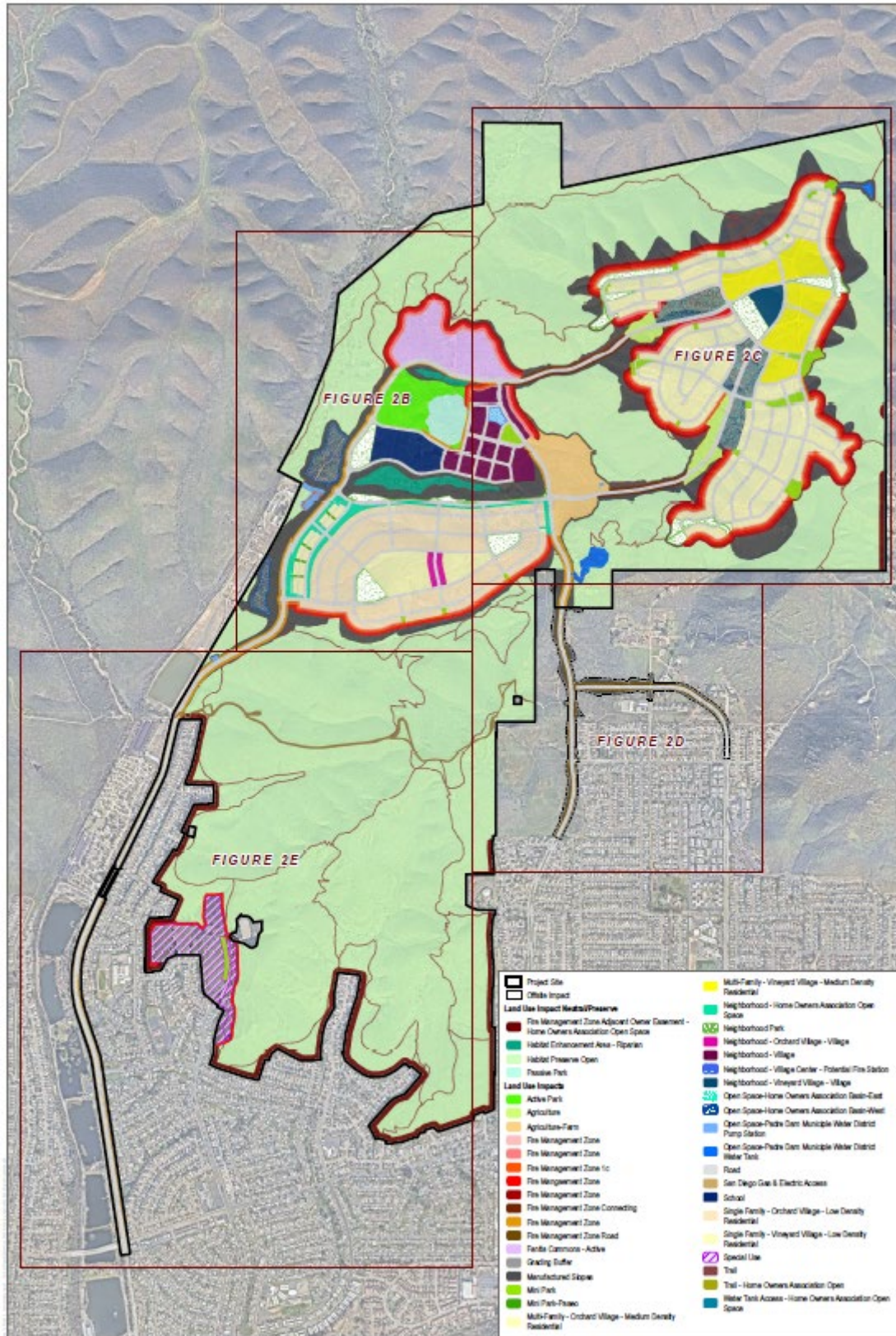


SOURCE: USGS Topographic World Map, SANGIS 2022



FIGURE 1
Project Location

Application for Section 404 Individual Permit for the Fanita Ranch Project



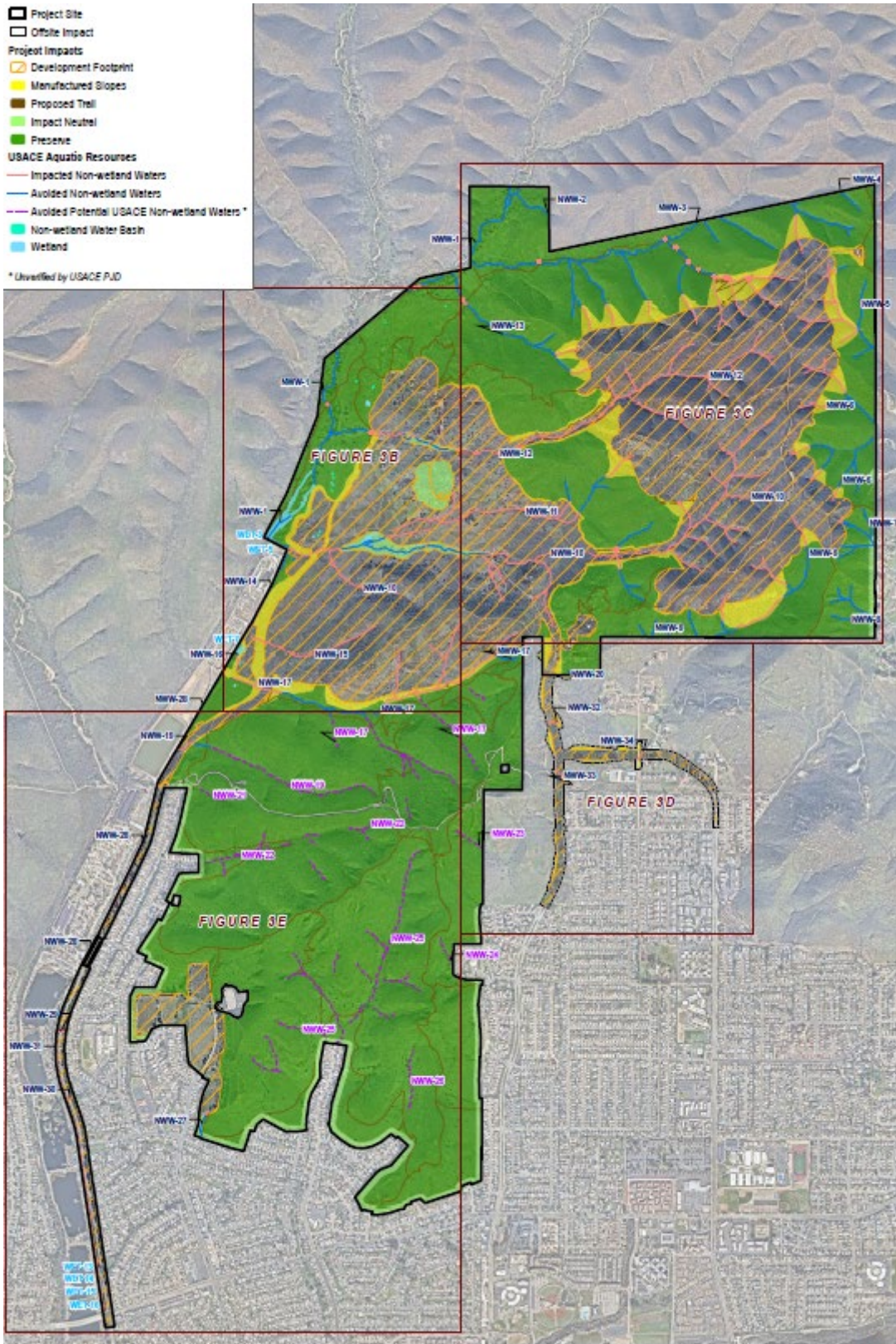
SOURCE: Humboldt 2020; CDFW 2024; SANAGS 2023, 2024

DUDEK 0 1,000 2,000 Feet

FIGURE 2

Land Uses

Application for Section 404 Individual Permit for the Fierle Ranch Project



SOURCE: Hummel 2020; CDFW 2024; SANJCS 2023, 2024

DUDEK

0 1,000 2,000 Feet

FIGURE 3

Project Impact

Application for Section 404 Individual Permit for the Fante Ranch Project