

## BACKGROUND:

In 2019, the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation purchased 98 acres of land in Alpine. Goals were three-fold; to create the community's first public park, to protect native species, and to prevent future development from infringing on existing open space trails and wildlife corridors.

A small portion of the acreage will be dedicated to active recreation amenities to suit the current and future needs of residents of all ages, interest and abilities – information gleaned from various surveys and industry research. A much larger portion of the land will be preserved as park land in perpetuity, with continuous efforts to protect and restore native habitats. While this area has been popular among trail users for decades, it has never been wholly public; the County's purchase provides legal access to these trails – with funds to improve and maintain them over time.

We recognize this changes the landscape for some residents of the Alpine community. Active recreation amenities are planned to be built near the road, including on land that has been disturbed by human use. This mitigates impacts to native plants and wildlife and reduces build costs so more resources can be put toward habitat rehabilitation. Feedback has been collected throughout the planning process, and many efforts are in play to address citizen concerns by developing a design plan that minimizes noise, traffic, wildlife and safety risks – even aesthetics and obstructions to views.

The County will continue to work with residents, Alpine Fire District, Back Country Land Trust, schools, community groups and wildlife agencies, to build a park that will grant *all residents* access to park land, while protecting the biodiversity and natural resources that are unique to the region.

This document addresses some of the most common questions and misconceptions about the project, organized by category.

## ALPINE COMMUNITY PARK – MISCONCEPTIONS AND FACTS

### DESIGN/ENVIRONMENTAL

**M: The community doesn't need a park this large. Why won't the County consider something smaller, with fewer amenities?**

F: The Alpine community needs a public park as there are currently no County-managed public parks for Alpine residents. Early conversations about the search for park land may have referenced smaller acreage due to consistent challenges with topography, road access and willing sellers; however, the goal has always been to open a recreation space that can benefit the full community. More acreage allows for more options, especially those without green spaces of their own.

Quality of life improves when all residents have equal access to open space, safe places to play, and amenities and opportunities that support physical, emotional and mental health. As such, the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has a goal of providing 10 acres of public park land for every 1,000 residents in every community it serves, including Alpine.

While there are some privately managed recreational spaces in Alpine, which are operated under joint use agreements or as non-profit facilities, these parks are not fully public. Additionally, places like schools that have fields and courts are only accessible to the public outside of school hours, or when they are not booked by the school for other activities.

Of the 98 acres, roughly 25 will be dedicated to active recreation, offering enough space to provide a diverse mix of opportunities for residents of all ages, abilities, and interests. The remaining approximately 70 acres will be protected habitat – maintaining some of the existing trails and closing off others for nature rehabilitation.

**M: The project will increase fire danger and put Wright’s Field at risk.**

F: This project will improve fire safety on-site and in the community of Alpine. The County has completed a Fire Assessment with the Alpine Fire District to protect the property from wildfire risks. From a build perspective, fire clearance buffers will be added to safeguard the active recreation area of the park, the preserve land and Wright’s Field, and the neighboring community – should a fire occur from roadside ignition. From an operations and maintenance perspective, DPR staff will work closely with Back Country Land Trust to prioritize the removal of non-native species and lower light flashy fuel sources throughout the property. Additionally, the County completed a fire Evacuation Analysis with Alpine Fire District and traffic specialists, determining there will be no significant impact for fire evacuation of residents throughout the surrounding area, even if the park is at full capacity. So, from a safety perspective, the park can be used as a temporary shelter for Alpine residents, localizing firefighting personnel at the site to protect it and surrounding areas from fires in the vicinity.

**M: The project will remove native grasslands.**

F: This project will improve the health of existing grasslands while revegetating disturbed areas allowing new grassland to grow. DPR staff have been coordinating with the wildlife agencies, as well as Back Country Land Trust, to mitigate impacts to native grasslands. A Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Plan is being prepared, which will detail native grassland restoration and improvements to adjacent native habitats through the removal of non-native, invasive species and growth of native plant species, in addition to improving habitats for wildlife species.

**M: The project will negatively impact Wright's Field.**

F: Protecting Wright’s Field and the surrounding area is integral to the County’s land preservation efforts and a primary reason a majority of the park land will remain open space. The County is coordinating with Back Country Land Trust to prevent negative impacts to Wright's Field preserve, in addition to restoring native grasslands to protect plants and wildlife. Trails will be clearly marked to keep people on path, and signs will be posted to educate trail users about trail etiquette and leave-no-trace principles. Park rangers and volunteers will host interpretive programs relaying the importance of responsible trail use, while sharing information about the region’s rich biodiversity and opportunities for park ambassadorship. Rangers will also patrol the County portion of the preserve and will work with a live-on volunteer site host to clear brush and non-native vegetation to reduce fire risk.

**M: The project will remove the existing preserve.**

F: The County-owned parcel of open space land is not currently a preserve; however, through the implementation of this project, the County is creating a preserve by permanently protecting approximately 70 acres of wildland habitat. Private land is becoming public preserve land, with dedicated resources to support the health and vitality of its habitats.

**Q: Will the project comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)?**

R: Yes, the project will comply with CEQA and all applicable environmental regulations, including the Federal and State Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the State Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, and the South County Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP).

The type of CEQA document is an Environmental Impact Report that provides a thorough analysis of any potential impacts from the project and mitigation that will occur as part of the project, if any impacts should occur. Technical studies within this document include biological, cultural, noise, local mobility analysis and air quality/Greenhouse Gas.

DPR will continue to coordinate with agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to identify suitable mitigation options and to ensure full regulatory compliance.

**Q: Does the project comply with the MSCP?**

R: The project complies with the MSCP or Multiple Species Conservation Program. Approximately 25 acres of the 98-acre property will be used for an active recreation area, freeing the rest of the acreage for open space. The development footprint for the active recreation area was strategically placed in a location that is close to existing development to minimize environmental impacts.

The roughly 70-acre open space portion of the property edges up to Wright's Field Preserve, which allows for a larger contiguous block of wildlife habit between both properties. County land will be preserved for the future, protecting the land and local wildlife from future development.

**Q: How will MSCP lands be impacted by increased foot, bike and horse traffic on trails, and what are the strategies to mitigate these impacts?**

R: Trails and trail use are allowed within MSCP Preserve lands. The trail system within the open space portion of the property will be largely crafted from existing trails. However, some existing trails will be closed and allowed to revegetate. Trails and trail boundaries will be clearly labeled. Free, ranger-led interpretive programs and other communication tactics, such as electronic newsletters, flyers and community meetings will extend messages of protection, preservation, and the importance of staying on trails.

As with all MSCP properties, DPR will monitor trail use. A Resource Management Plan (RMP) will be prepared for the open space portion of the property. The RMP will guide the management of open space lands. DPR uses an adaptive management model to manage its preserves. Adaptive management allows DPR to quickly and effectively identify and address any threats, stressors or changing conditions that could potentially impact sensitive resources, which could include remedies such as trail closures and trail reroutes.

**Q: Are there any sensitive species in the area?**

R: Biological surveys of sensitive species on local, state and federal lists identified the presence of Quino checkerspot butterfly within both the County acreage and that of nearby Wright's Field. Staff are

working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to address this, and to design the park and trails in a manner that minimize impacts to butterfly habitat and restore habitat within the proposed preserve portion of the project. DPR staff work every day to balance recreation opportunities with efforts to protect and preserve land and local wildlife.

Other sensitive species that were reviewed but not detected include San Diego Fairy Shrimp, Hermes Copper Butterfly, and Coastal California Gnatcatcher.

**M: The project could affect the health and existence of the western spadefoot toad.**

F: The western spadefoot toad is one of several species that will benefit from the revitalization and revegetation efforts in the newly acquired preserve. As background, the County completed surveys for the western spadefoot toad during the 2022 rainy season, and, using this data, staff are coordinating with wildlife agencies to create basins within preserved land to the west of the proposed park, which will allow the species to expand its breeding population there and on Wright's Field. This is one of many efforts to protect native species on-site, and it will be outlined in the Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Plan for the park and preserve.

**M: The project could affect the health and existence of bats.**

F: Bats are another native species that will be protected thanks to revitalization and revegetation efforts within the proposed preserve portion of the project. County staff completed surveys for bats during their breeding season in 2022 and were able to confirm that bats are foraging within the proposed preserve. This data is being used to create buffers, as needed, for the bats to protect them from construction activities and avoid any potential impacts within suitable bat breeding habitat during the pup season. The County will also be implementing the mitigation measure listed for bats in the Draft Environmental Impact Report to provide additional places for bats to roost, while restoring native habitat too improve the bats' ability to forage.

**Q: How will you protect the Engelmann Oaks?**

R: Alpine Community Park is being designed around the existing Engelmann oaks. We will work with our staff agricultural scientist and biologists to avoid direct and minimize indirect impacts. We're doing what we can to protect our trees and to be forward-thinking when it comes to ways to save them. Our county-wide Heritage Tree Preservation Program was initiated to catalog existing mature trees and to establish requirements for maintaining tree diversity and density in all County Parks.

**Q: If plants and trees are added, will they be native?**

R: Native and drought-tolerant plants consistent with the surrounding landscape and native vegetation will be part of the project.

**Q: How is building this park supporting the reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions?**

R: By building a park within a community, residents have reason to stay and play local—versus driving far distances to enjoy the same amenities at other parks. This will help the County meet goals associated with the reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions generated from activities within the unincorporated County.

The County has parks in other communities that would meet their needs and Alpine Park is designed to meet the needs of the Alpine community. The features of the Alpine Park are similar to other local County parks.

**Q: Have you studied the potential traffic impact of the park?**

R: The County retained a traffic engineer to review the project and provide recommendations to minimize any potential traffic issues in and near the park – information that will be incorporated into the final design plan. Many factors are being taken into consideration, such as safe access, sidewalks, stop signs, traffic lights and speed limits. This study is being prepared by a consultant and will be reviewed by the Department of Public Works.

The park will include a decomposed granite path along the northern portion of South Grade Road where it is adjacent to the County property, as well as a 4-way stop where pedestrians can cross.

The County also coordinated with the Alpine Fire District and traffic engineer to complete a fire evacuation analysis and potential impacts on traffic and the result was a less than significant impact to traffic during a fire event through implementation of the project.

**OPERATIONS**

**M: The Park won't be maintained properly/who will maintain the park?**

F: This park will be maintained by DPR. DPR park staff work before, during and after park hours, and they receive additional support from live-on volunteer hosts. Maintenance projects include but are not limited to: Emptying trash, cleaning restrooms, mowing and irrigating lawns, conducting tree and shrub maintenance, stormwater management and erosion control, debris removal, graffiti abatement, protection of natural and cultural resources, and the enforcement of all DPR codes and policies.

**Q: How will the live-on volunteers help?**

R: DPR live-on volunteer hosts hold many responsibilities, including assisting with general park maintenance and after-hours support, should any incidents occur after dark. Live-on volunteers live on-site at the park, in a designated area designed for an RV or larger trailer. Volunteers in these roles are required to perform a certain number of hours of work per week.

**Q: How will you keep the park safe after hours?**

R: DPR's live-on volunteer will be available on-site to help with any incidents that happen after hours. Additionally, DPR maintains close relationships with local law enforcement. After hours, law enforcement may patrol the area and respond to reported incidents. It is important for all residents to say something if they see something suspicious, so staff and law enforcement agencies can respond in a timely and appropriate manner.

**Q: What are the hours of the park?/Will people be allowed at the park after hours?**

R: Alpine Community Park will be open sunrise to sunset, seven days a week. There will be two gates, and both will be locked when the park is closed. Vehicle traffic will not be allowed in the park after hours.

**Q: Will there be BBQ pits? Will the BBQ pits be a fire hazard?**

R: BBQs have been proposed for the park, but the total is not yet determined, and trash cans will also be provided. If the National Weather Service issues a Red Flag Warning for the area, BBQ use would be temporarily halted until that warning has been lifted, with areas closed, signs posted and increased ranger patrols to relay fire safety information.

**Q: How will the sports fields be programmed at the park?**

R: The baseball field and multi-use sports field can be used for team practices, but they are not large enough for tournaments. DPR staff will be putting together a field allocation process for organized sports groups to assist with scheduling.

**M: This park is going to bring in people from all over the County and create more traffic and noise pollution in the area.**

F: Alpine Park is being designed to serve the needs of the local community. Because of its inland and relatively remote location, the park will likely be used by local residents and residents of neighboring rural communities. In addition, park amenities are similar to those existing in other communities, thereby reducing the need for use by those outside of Alpine. DPR does not anticipate the park will draw hundreds of people daily; however, there will be ample room for local families to spread out, and for groups to play games on the fields or to host small gatherings in designated picnic areas.

Natural vegetation and geographic features will assist with noise buffering and the park will only be open during daylight hours. The entrance to the park will be clearly labeled and easy to access, preventing vehicle traffic near the gate. A walking path along the north Side of South Grade Road in front of the County property and a 4-way stop with crosswalk will help accommodate foot traffic while alleviating related safety concerns.

**Q: Why is the passive park alternative not the proposed project?**

F: The passive park alternative would only meet one of the eight project objectives, as it would still provide for long-term natural and cultural resource management at the project site, albeit at a lower level of benefit compared to the project. Unlike the proposed project, the passive park alternative would not have a live on-site volunteer for both the park and preserve, trash cans emptied daily to prevent trash accumulation, park rangers on-site daily to prevent the public from parking on preserved land and patrolling the area, a walking path along the north side of South Grade Road along County property, and a four-way stop with crosswalks that would allow the public to access the trails through designated routes. In addition, the passive park alternative would not include native grassland restoration that would benefit Quino checkerspot butterfly habitat through the removal of non-native invasive species, nor would it create breeding pools for western spadefoots, which would expand the existing breeding population from Wright's Field. The passive park alternative would also not create a community gathering place, enhancing the quality of life and public health of the community, or accommodate a variety of active and passive recreational uses.