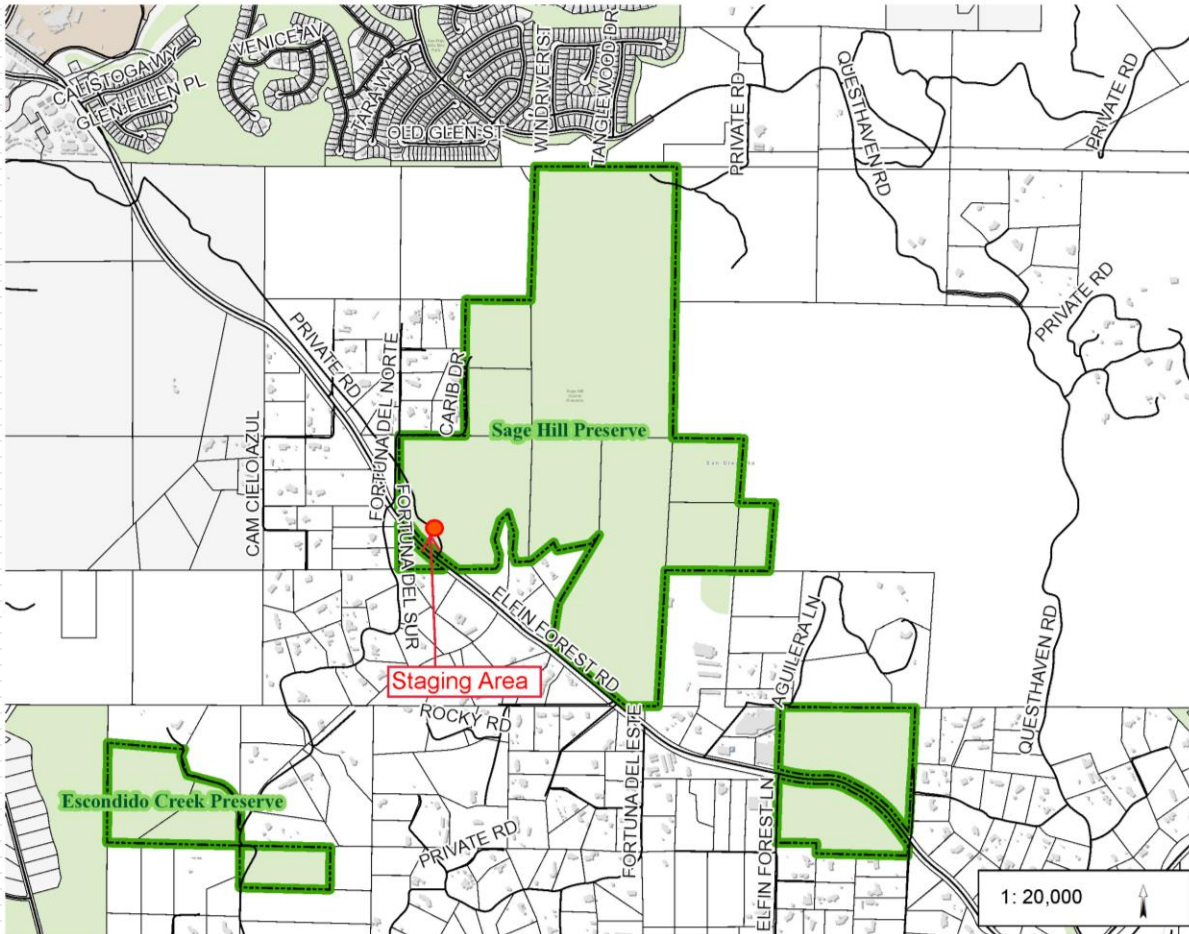




Sage Hill Open Space Preserve

Summary of Sage Hill Staging Area and Trails Public Meeting | Oct. 12, 2021



Currently, the County is advancing a planned project to restore sensitive habitat to enhance preservation of the property and improve community access to the Preserve.

In addition to restoration and maintenance efforts already underway, the County is also working on a project to transform the already disturbed, dirt area used for parking off Elfin Forest Road into a designated staging area which may include up to nine parking stalls (including one accessible stall), fencing to control access, a park monument sign, picnic table, trash receptacle, and information kiosk. This project also includes the construction of a small footbridge to facilitate pedestrian access over a seasonal stream.

The full scope and design of staging area improvements will depend on the results of feasibility studies currently underway (e.g. trail counts) and will be informed by community preferences shared with the County by residents and stakeholders. All proposed improvements are consistent with the approved Resource Management Plan for the Preserve.

Sage Hill Open Space Preserve BACKGROUND

EVENT SUMMARY

On October 12, 2021, DPR held its first virtual public meeting from 6-7pm via Microsoft Teams to update the Sage Hill community on the project and concept plan for the Preserve, in addition to answering questions from meeting participants.

The following topics were discussed:

1. Habitat restoration and trail maintenance of the existing trail system.
2. The construction of a small staging area along Elfin Forest Road

PROMOTION

To notify the community about the event 2,142 flyers were hand delivered to every door within 1 mile of the proposed staging area location. The event was promoted via DPR social media channels and on the DPR Events website prior to the event.

EVENT STATISTICS

- 13 DPR staff members attended the meeting
- 33 public members attended the meeting
- The video generated by the event was posted to sdparks.org on the public meeting page. As of Nov. 18th, the video has been viewed 38 times.

Topic	Stakeholder Question or Comment	Answer(s)
Project Scope	Location of the staging area - why we choose this location and why can't we move it to the North?	<p>Multiple locations were evaluated for the staging area. Multiple factors were considered when selecting the proposed staging area location, including community input, traffic and safety criteria, and the RMP's requirement that any proposed improvements not impact the Preserve's sensitive resources. Any project, including the staging area project, must be consistent with the RMP, Conservation Easement and Land Management Agreement. Of all the potential locations, the Elfin Forest Road access point is the most suitable because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's already owned by the County • is currently used by the community to access the Preserve • is already disturbed • is easily accessible from a County-maintained road • is an approved access point in the RMP. <p>As such, new improvements would comply with the adopted RMP and trail plan (no new impacts to biological or cultural resources) and could be completed at a reduced cost to taxpayers.</p>
Project Scope	Comment about 9 parking spaces being too many	<p>The traffic study that was completed for the proposed project estimated future trail users, vehicle trip generation and parking demand for the Preserve using a standard methodology utilized by DPW at other preserves with a similar size and existing staging area. Early concepts for the staging area included only 5 parking spaces – including one accessible space. The traffic study recommended providing 4 additional parking spaces along the road to accommodate maximum visitor needs.</p>
Parking and Safety	Request that the parking area be closed to the public outside visiting hours	<p>The County is looking at the best options to provide access control to the staging area and the Preserve to maintain safety, while allowing the appropriate amount of passive recreation. There are easements in the area of the staging area dedicated to the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) and Olivenhain Municipal Water District and the County needs to ensure any improvements or access control measures are consistent with the easement requirements. In response to community requests received at the County's virtual public meeting on October 12, 2021, the County is working with San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) and Olivenhain Municipal Water District to explore access control options.</p>
Parking and Safety	Ensure there is a responsible entity for opening and closing the gate, and ensuring that all guests have left in the evening	<p>The Preserve operations team will open and close any gates daily and follow up on any remaining vehicles. The gates open at sunrise each day and are locked at sunset.</p>
Traffic Safety	Prevent spillover parking on Elfin Forest Road	<p>The community currently has the legal right to park along Elfin Forest Road. The intent of the proposed staging area is to provide a safe, formalized alternative to road parking that is sized to meet the maximum anticipated parking demand. Should spillover become an issue, the County will assess the situation and develop appropriate mitigation strategies (e.g. signage, additional enforcement).</p>

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PUBLIC FEEDBACK



Topic	Stakeholder Question or Comment	Answer(s)
Traffic Safety	Vehicle Impact of the Staging Area to the Preserve	As part of the project design, DPR completed a traffic study to assess the viability and safety of a formalized staging area at the Elfin Forest Road location and analyze its potential impacts on the Preserve and local traffic. The traffic study determined that the proposed location for the staging area would not result in traffic or safety impacts and recommend that the County size the staging area to accommodate the maximum parking demand at the Preserve (up to nine spaces). To enhance safety, the traffic study recommended that the County implement the following measures should a staging area be formalized: 1. Install a SFS (Speed Feedback Sign) for Southbound Elfin Forest Road traffic at approximately 700 feet north of the driveway. The SFS will alert cars to their speed and is an effective measure to reduce vehicular speeds. 2. Trim the trees on the east side of Elfin Forest Road between 200 and 300 feet north of the driveway to increase line of sight; and 3. Provide 4 parking spaces along the road in addition to the 5 spaces the trailhead parking lot will accommodate. The traffic study meets all current County traffic standards.
Traffic Safety	Comment about the traffic safety study methodology that we based it upon the speed limit rather than measured actual average speeds of cars driving through this section of Elfin Forest Road	The County received input from residents about speeding, so it was examined in the traffic study. The traffic study recommended the installation of a SFS (Speed Feedback Sign) for southbound Elfin Forest Road traffic to help alert motorists to reduce vehicular speeds. Combined with the new staging area, the installation of the SFS will improve traffic safety in this area.
Ranger Patrols	Include evening patrols to ensure visitors have left	Park rangers will be at the facility each day and they will close any gates at sunset. Our operational plan for patrolling the preserve can be adjusted based on current circumstances and situations, and we can implement night-time patrols if necessary to address issues.
Parking off-site/ Trespassing	Plan to keep hikers from parking cars on adjacent private roads and trespassing private property to enter the preserve	Establishing a designated staging area and enforcement signage is anticipated to reduce illegal parking and trespassing onto private property. The proposed staging area will formalize the entrance to the Preserve and trails will be identified as 'out and back' trails. If parking along private roads continues to be an issue, the County's Parks and Recreation Operations team will work with residents to find appropriate solutions.
Preserve Expansion	Plans to purchase additional adjacent land	The County is always looking for opportunities to purchase additional land for active and passive recreational use.
Impact to Preserve	Increased use typically brings increased degradation. Any plans for increased patrols or monitoring?	Park patrols are adaptive and can be adjusted based on current circumstances and needs. DPR anticipates additional patrols to manage the improvements. Additional signage will be posted to communicate regulations and to educate the public about native vegetation and wildlife. Park staff will continue to revegetate any damaged areas and manage and monitor the Preserve in accordance with the RMP.
Anticipated Use	Anticipated public use now and after the preserve is open to the public	The Preserve is currently open for public use. The County does not anticipate a significant shift in usership once proposed improvements have been implemented. To assess current conditions and help project future trends, trail counts are underway. The County will share the results of the counts at the second virtual public meeting in early 2022 and will use this data to refine the project as appropriate.

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PUBLIC FEEDBACK



Topic	Stakeholder Question or Comment	Answer(s)
E-Bike Usage	Will E-bikes be allowed on trails	Yes, following the State of California AB 1096, Class 1 and 2 e-bikes are allowed on the trails. These classes of e-bikes do not have electric assistance at 20 mph. All trail users must follow DPR trail safety rules and use the trails in a way that respects and is safe for all trail users.
Trail Design	Length, who can use the trails and is it out and back or loop system?	In accordance with the RMP, approximately 2 miles of trails will be open to the public and will accommodate hiking, biking and equestrian uses. The trail system is an out-and-back design & does not facilitate a loop system.
Timeline	Project Schedule	Design for the proposed project is currently underway. From now until the next virtual public meeting in early 2022 the County is responding to resident inquiries and exploring ways to evolve proposed improvements to address community preferences while adhering to the constraints of the RMP and making sure that safe access to nature is secured for all San Diegans at Sage Hill.
Resource Monitoring	Comment about how DPR is monitoring the biological resources of the preserve.	DPR conducts species monitoring through our monitoring program and in partnership with regional monitoring efforts. Monitoring is consistent with the RMP and our land management agreement with SANDAG.
Resource Monitoring	Gnatcatcher Survey	U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has a regional effort underway to track and monitor the coastal California gnatcatcher. USGS conducted annual coastal California gnatcatcher surveys at the Sage Hill Preserve beginning in 2015. CA gnatcatchers need high quality habitat for foraging and nesting, both of which can be found on the Preserve.
Wildfire Safety	Measures for Wildfire safety	As part of the RMP the County identified fuel modification zones within the Preserve with guidance from local fire authorities. These zones are regularly maintained by DPR Operations staff trained in fuel modification best practices to secure defensible space between vegetation and structures and keep roads and trails clear. To ensure that proposed improvements continue to align with the expectations of local fire authorities, the County will review potential concepts and designs with County Fire and the North County Fire Protection District and incorporate any feedback into design revisions. Although not always required, the County regularly coordinates with local fire as a best practice when considering proposed improvements to ensure that access points facilitate rapid emergency response. Additionally, County regulatory ordinances will be identified on signage that prohibits smoking, open flames, off-road vehicles, and weapons. If there is a concern that needs to be addressed immediately outside of park operating hours, please call the County Sheriff's Department at 858-565-5200 or 911 .
Equestrian Crossing	Comment about Equestrian safety as they cross the road to the public trails south of Elfin Forest Road. Would like to reduce conflicts with vehicles.	The County is currently examining this with traffic engineers and design consultants to see if we can reduce any conflicts. In addition, the County is investigating if a horse crossing sign and/or crosswalk can be added.
Equestrian Gate	Comment that the equestrian gate is not large enough for horses	The concept design we are utilizing is from the current trail design standards of the USDA Forest Service. The design consultants feel this size should be adequate and recommend installing and adjusting distances if it becomes an issue.

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PUBLIC FEEDBACK



NEXT STEPS

DPR will use the comments received at the 10/12 meeting to guide the design of the staging area and return to the community for review and feedback in the early spring.