



Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning



Planning for the Challenges Ahead

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION
AND
SCOPING MEETING NOTIFICATION**

Bruce W. McClendon FAICP
Director of Planning

DATE: August 27, 2007

PROJECT TITLE: Tapia Ranch
Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 53822
Conditional Use Permit No. 02-196 for Hillside Management,
Significant Ridgeline Exemption, and Density Controlled
Development
Oak Tree Permit No. 02-196

CEQA LEAD AGENCY: County of Los Angeles
Department of Regional Planning
320 W. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

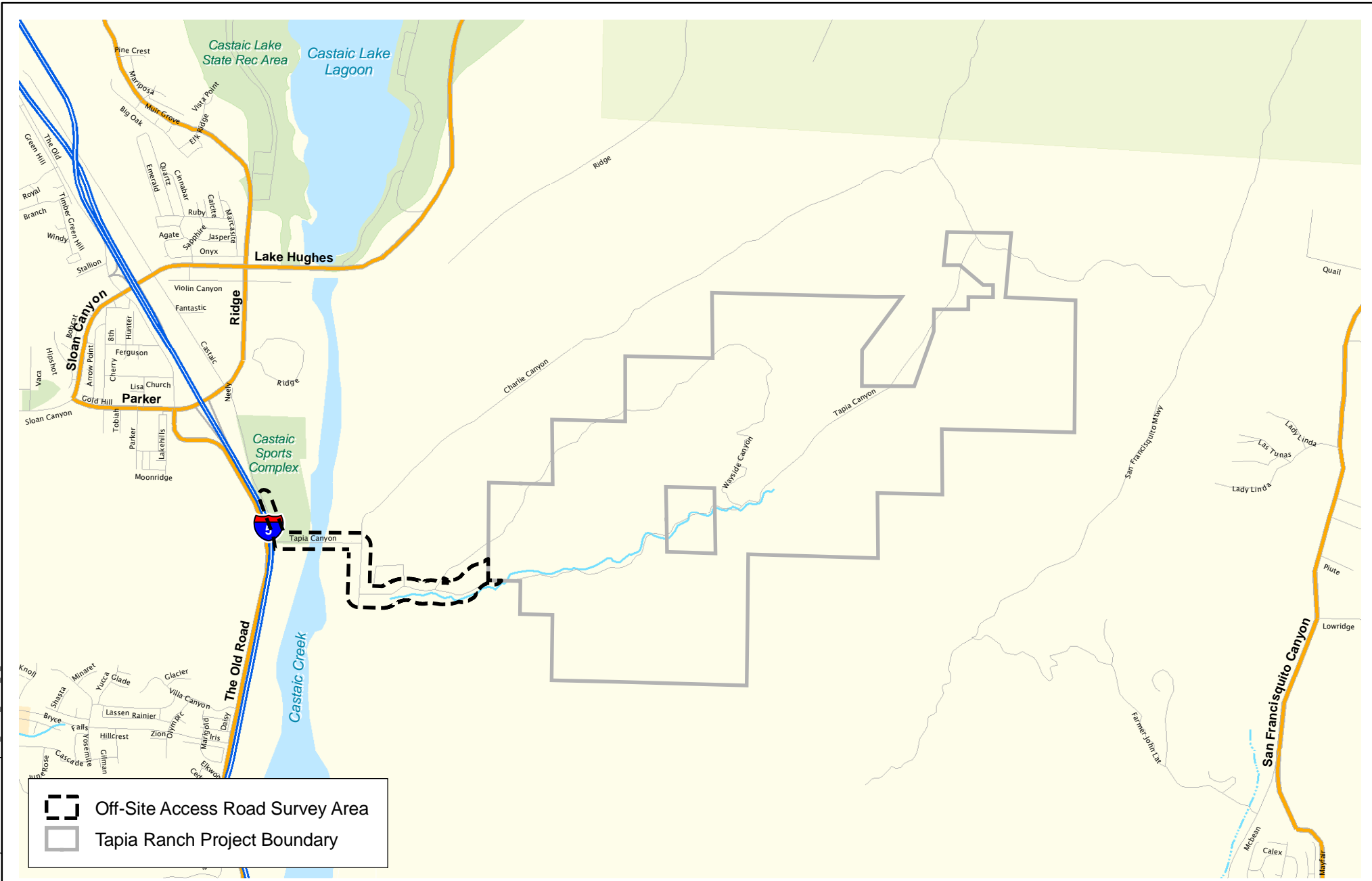
PROJECT APPLICANT: Castaic Partners, LLC.
800 Silverado Street, Suite 301
La Jolla, CA 92037



The County of Los Angeles is the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project described below. In compliance with Section 15082 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the County of Los Angeles is sending this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to responsible agencies, interested parties and federal agencies which may be involved in approving or permitting the project, and to trustee agencies responsible for natural resources affected by the project. Within 30 days after receiving the NOP, each agency is requested to provide the County of Los Angeles with specific details about the scope and content of the environmental information to be contained in the EIR related to that agency's area of statutory responsibility. The purpose of this NOP is to solicit the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project.

PROJECT LOCATION AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The proposed Tapia Ranch project site encompasses approximately 1,167 acres of undeveloped hillside and canyon land approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the community of Castaic, and approximately one mile east of Interstate 5 (I-5) in unincorporated Los Angeles County. The project site is approximately one mile north of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Peter J. Pitchess Detention Center. Offsite areas that would be improved in conjunction with the proposed project are located to the west of the project site and include portions of Castaic Road, Tapia Canyon Road, and the construction of a new bridge spanning Castaic Creek, as well as a small area for the roadway connection to the adjacent Tesoro del Valle project located to the east. The Angeles National Forest is approximately 1.5 miles to the north. The regional and local vicinity are depicted in Figures 1 and 2, respectively.

The proposed Tapia Ranch project is located on the US. Geological Survey's 7.5 Minute Newhall, California quadrangle, within Township 5N, Range 16W, and includes portions of



 Off-Site Access Road Survey Area
 Tapia Ranch Project Boundary

Local Vicinity

Tapia Ranch Project



Figure 2

The proposed Tapia Ranch project is located on the US. Geological Survey's 7.5 Minute Newhall, California quadrangle, within Township 5N, Range 16W, and includes portions of Sections 21, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32. The project site surrounds three existing single-family residences; otherwise the site is directly surrounded by open space or undeveloped land. The project site is zoned by the County of Los Angeles as A-2-2 (Heavy Agriculture, two acre minimum lot size) and is largely undeveloped.

Tapia Canyon Road and other smaller dirt roads traverse the project site and provide access to private properties. The project site has remnants of previous land uses, such as cattle grazing and homesteading. Active oil production occurred on the project site during the 1950's, according to records of the California Department of Mines and Geology. Currently, a total of fifteen abandoned oil wells and one active oil well exist on the project site. These 15 abandoned oil wells were never producing and have been capped in compliance with applicable regulations. Oil well extraction machinery and associated structures are located in the southern portion of the project site. The portion of the project site that contains the active oil well is not proposed for development; however, development activity is proposed around several abandoned oil wells. The remainder of the proposed project site is presently undeveloped and has been utilized for recreational hiking, biking and equestrian trail riding. The proposed development and land uses surrounding the project site are presented on Figure 3.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's (MWD) 150-foot wide underground aqueduct traverses the site in a northwest to southeast direction. The aqueduct transports State Water Project water from Castaic Lake to the Joseph Jensen Filtration Plant in Los Angeles County. MWD has no surface rights to the earth above the aqueduct within the project site footprint, and development is permissible directly above the pipeline.

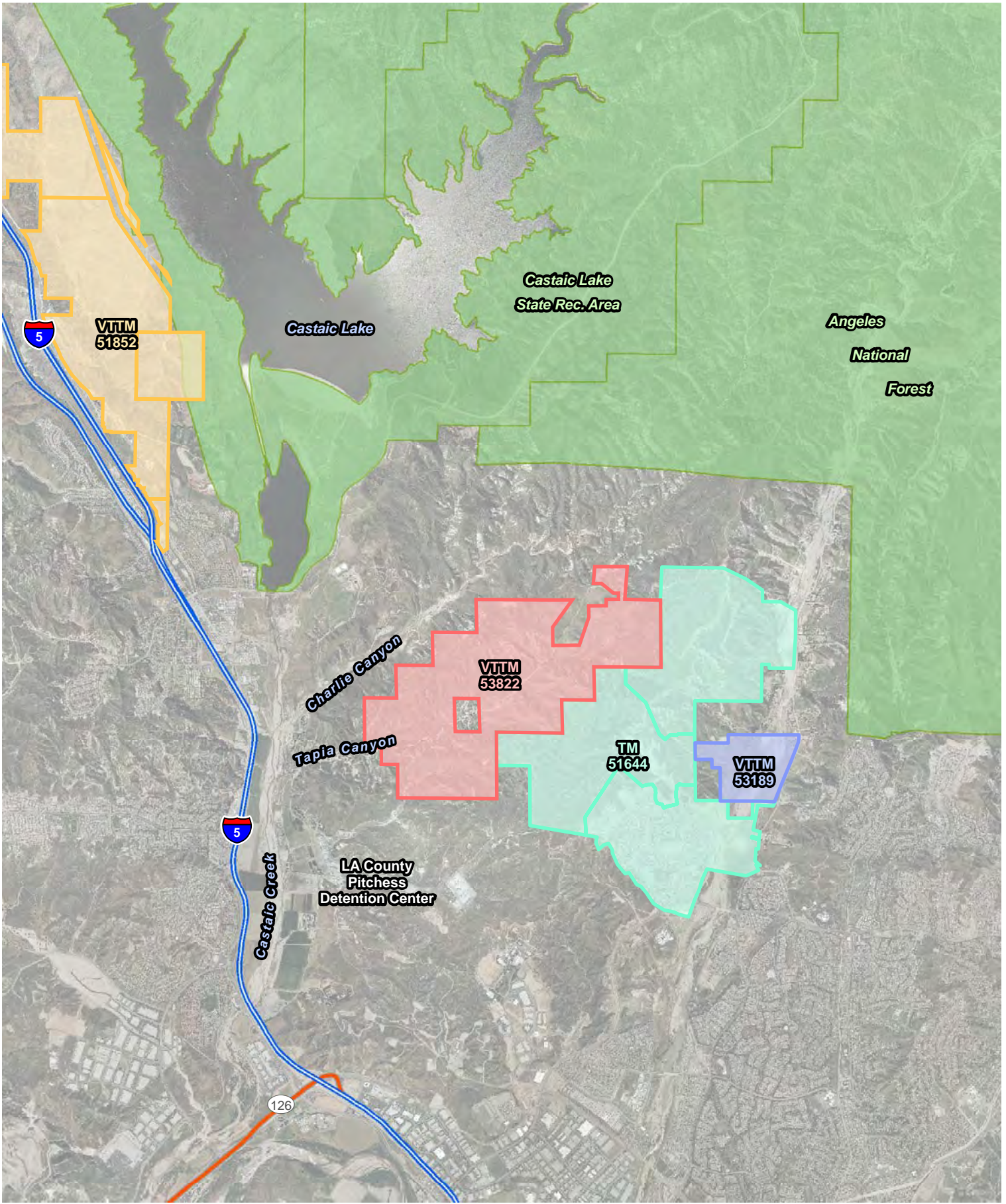
The project site is located within and above Tapia Canyon. Hillsides, ridgelines, and drainage course areas lie to the north and south of the proposed development area on the site and represent the site's most prominent natural features. Topography in the vicinity of the project site is mountainous, with on-site elevations ranging between approximately 1,100 and 1,800 feet above mean sea level (msl); elevations in areas adjacent to the project site vary from approximately 1,100 to 1,900 above msl.

The Tapia Canyon drainage course traverses the southern portion of the project site in a northeast to southwest direction. This intermittent blue line drainage course with a varying width runs the length of Tapia Canyon on the project site, and joins Castaic Creek offsite approximately one mile to the west. Periodic water releases from Castaic Dam, located at the southern end of Castaic Lagoon, flows into Castaic Creek.

Seven vegetation types were mapped on the project site in 2005, and other riparian vegetation types are located in offsite areas that will be improved as part of the project. The site is largely dominated by chaparral vegetation and includes holly-leaf cherry scrub, coastal sage scrub, coastal live oak woodlands, Fremont cottonwood riparian woodlands, California annual grasslands, and ruderal. The coastal sage scrub on the project site is dominated by California sagebrush, purple sage, California buckwheat, and black sage. No threatened or endangered plant species have been identified on the project site.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

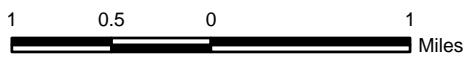
The project proposes to develop 405 detached single-family residential homes within the 1,167-acre site, which would result in a gross project density of 0.35 dwelling units per acre. Approximately 308.5 acres would be disturbed by grading and development of these homes and infrastructure. Of this acreage, approximately 195.4 acres would ultimately be covered by



Surrounding Land Use

Figure 3

Tapia Ranch Project



structures or other impervious cover. The remaining 113.1 acres within the grading footprint would be revegetated manufactured slopes and other landscaped areas. Therefore, a total of approximately 74 percent (858.5 acres) of the project site would be retained as landscaped or natural open space. The total open space after re-landscaping the disturbed areas would be 971.6 acres or 83 percent of the project area. The tract map for the proposed project is depicted in Figure 4.

Development of the proposed project is governed by the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, which is a component of the Los Angeles County General Plan. The current General Plan land use designation for the site is "Non-Urban" on the Land Use Policy Map of the Countywide Land Use Element, where slopes typically exceed 25 percent. The site is designated as "Hillside Management" under the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan. A slope density analysis was completed, and VTTM 53822 has been designed to conform to the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan's maximum density threshold for hillside management areas, which would allow for the development of up to 405 dwelling units.

Grading Footprint

Grading on the project site will require approximately 6,900,000 cubic yards of cut and 6,200,000 million cubic yards of fill. Therefore, the project site would have approximately 700,000 cubic yards of extra on-site fill material that would be accommodated on-site through soil shrinkage during grading operations. Therefore, grading will not require any off-site hauling of fill material. No importation of fill is proposed.

Residential Lots

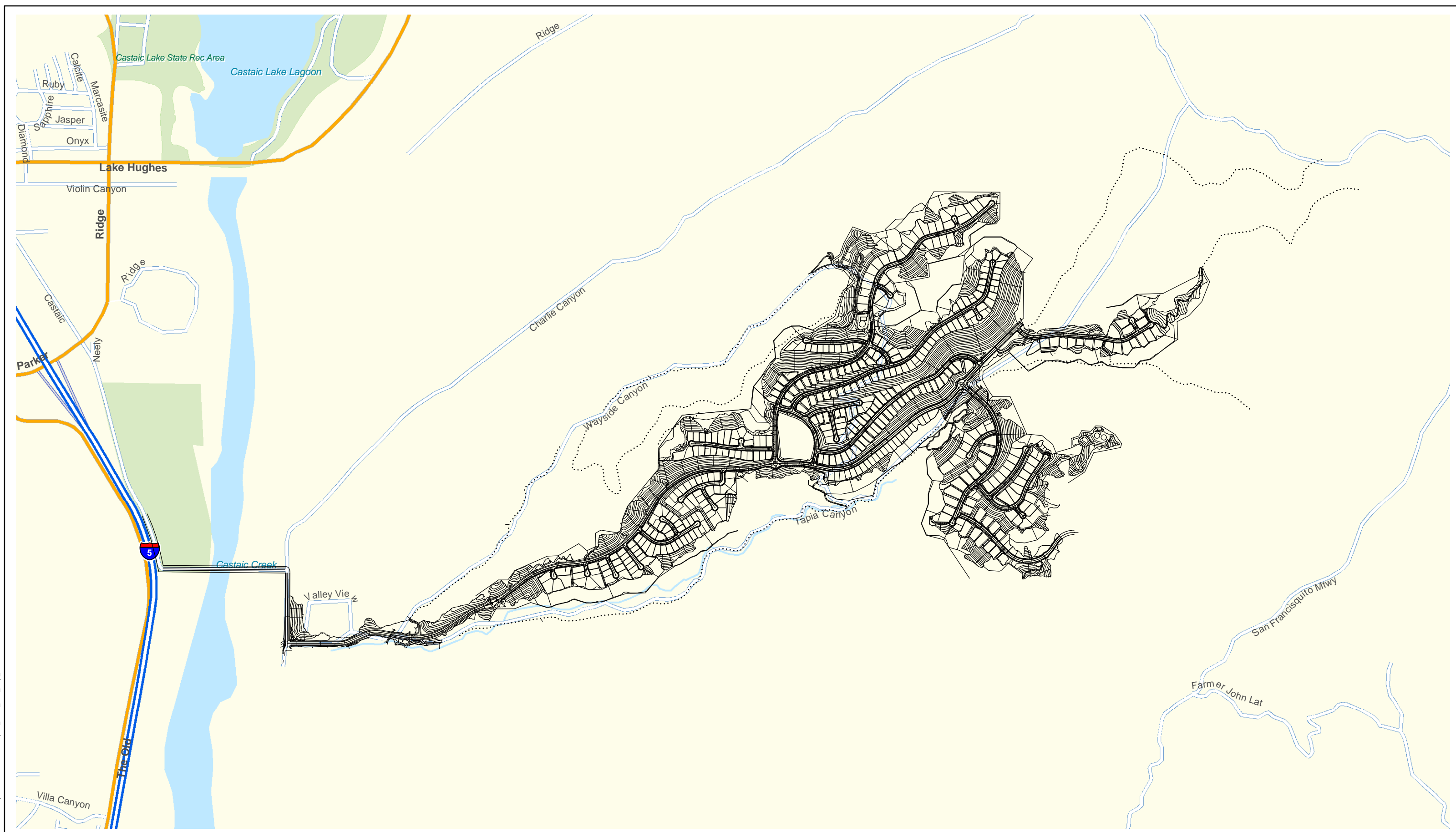
A total of 405 residential lots are planned for the project site. The residential lots range in size from 7,851 square feet (Lot 101) to 36,398 square feet (Lot 350). The average lot size is 15,412 square feet. There are 151 larger sized residential lots proposed, (15,000 square feet or larger) which can accommodate equestrian facilities. The development is proposed to be a gated neighborhood with private streets. Gates would be located at the entrance to the project site on Tapia Canyon Road, as well as on the "emergency access only" roadway connection to the Tesoro del Valle project located to the east of the project site.

Open Space Lots

The project site contains five "Open Space" lots that would not be impacted by the proposed project and would remain as natural open space. These lots equal a total of 724.5 acres, and would be dedicated to the County of Los Angeles to be protected in perpetuity through a conservation easement. In addition to the "Open Space" lots, many of the Home Owner's Association (HOA) lots would also be preserved as naturally vegetated and undisturbed open space, while others would include irrigated manufactured slopes. Fuel modification activities (vegetation thinning) for wildfire protection would also take place within the HOA lots. The "HOA" lots will be owned and maintained by the HOA. The HOA lots are located between the project footprint (roadway, graded pads, manufactured slopes) and the naturally vegetated "Open Space" lots.

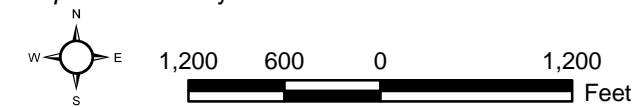
Recreational Facilities

The proposed project includes an approximate 6.8 acre recreation site in the center of the proposed project. This park space, labeled as Lot 469, would be dedicated to the Home Owner's Association (HOA), which would then be responsible for determining the ultimate recreation facilities on the site. The long-term maintenance and operation of this park will be the responsibility of the HOA. The project site currently contains existing unpaved hiking and



Tract Map

Tapia Ranch Project



Note: Project designs are for graphic purposes only and are not intended for site specific use.

Figure 4

D:/Projects/CastPar/J002/Graphics/fix/Ex4_tract_map_081607.ai

equestrian trails. The proposed project would incorporate portions of these existing trails into the larger trail system, which loops around and through the project site.

Site Access and Circulation

Access to the site is currently available only from Castaic Road and Tapia Canyon Road from the 1-5, via the Parker Road exit, which is approximately two miles west of the project site entrance. The proposed project would provide an extension of Tapia Canyon Road to the northeast, with connection to the adjacent approved Tentative Tract Map 51644 (Tesoro del Valle). A small off-site area proposed as an entrance road would also be developed as a part of the proposed project.

Offsite Improvements

The primary access to the project site is from Castaic Road, over Castaic Creek, to Tapia Canyon Road. All of these roadways would be improved as a part of the project. Improvements to Castaic Road would begin just south of the Castaic Sports Complex and would include repaving and widening. Castaic Road then becomes Tapia Canyon Road, which currently crosses Castaic Creek via culvert crossing. This culvert crossing would be removed and replaced with a bridge structure that spans Castaic Creek. Roadway improvements, including repaving and widening of Tapia Canyon Road, would be continued from the bridge crossing to the entrance of the project site.

Preservation of Existing Ridgelines

Los Angeles County Ordinance 2004-0069 amended Title 22- Planning and Zoning Code, by establishing the Castaic Area Community Standards District (CACSD) in November 2004. The CACSD requires the preservation of ‘significant ridgelines’, which includes primary and secondary ridgelines. No development, grading, construction, or improvements are allowed on a significant ridgeline, within a 50-foot radius from every point on the crest of a primary ridgeline, or within a 25-foot radius from every point on the crest of a secondary ridgeline, without significant ridgeline exemption approval.

Although a Conditional Use Permit for a Ridgeline Exemption is required for the proposed project because of an incursion by a proposed access road and a water tank, the proposed project otherwise avoids development of prominent ridgelines to the north and south of the Tapia Canyon Road corridor. Approximately 74 percent of the project site would be retained as permanent open space including ridgelines, interconnected natural open space, water course areas for wildlife movement, manufactured slopes, and areas for vegetation thinning/fuel modification.

Regional Fire Protection

A fuel modification plan is required to increase the defensible space around habitable structures because the project site is located within a ‘Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone’ (VHFHSZ). The fuel modification requirements include a 200-foot buffer zone, consisting of a combination of a 20-foot wet zone (Zone A - landscaped and irrigated), a 30-foot irrigated zone with more native plants (Zone B), and a 150-foot thinning zone (Zone C) over most of the developed portion of the project site. The thinning zone would include the removal of brush and dead plant materials, removal of non-native tree species, and periodic grass and weed cutting. The fuel modification plan will be submitted to the Los Angeles County Fire Department Forestry Division and would need to be approved prior to any construction activities.

Utilities

All drainage facilities would be constructed according to Los Angeles County Department of Public Works standards and requirements. The project site is partially within the Castaic Lake Water Agency’s (CLWA) service area and the project site does not contain any existing potable water infrastructure. Therefore, annexation to CLWA is required for the project site not currently within the service area. The Newhall County Water District (NCWD), one of four retail water purveyors within CLWA, would provide potable water to the project. Due to the elevations of the residential lots, three reservoir tanks and one booster pump station would be constructed on the project site on two separate graded pads. These tanks would provide a total of three million gallons of potable water for the project site and would be adequate for all water supply and fire suppression needs on the site.

The project site does not contain any existing sewage infrastructure. Development of the proposed project site will require the construction of sewer pipelines. The project would need to be annexed into Los Angeles County Sanitation District No. 32. Sewer pipelines from the project site would connect with the existing main sewer trunk lines at Castaic Road and Tapia Canyon Road.

ENTITLEMENT REQUIREMENTS AND DISCRETIONARY APPROVALS

The proposed project will require, but may not be limited to, the approvals and entitlements as indicated in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1
ANTICIPATED ENTITLEMENT APPROVALS AND REQUIREMENTS**

AGENCY	APPROVAL REQUIRED	PURPOSE
County of Los Angeles	>Tentative Tract Map No. 53822	To obtain County approval.
	>Oak Tree Permit	For impacts to oak trees
	>Conditional Use Permit	For development in a hillside management area. ridgeline encroachment, and density controlled development
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	>Section 404 Permit	To authorize impacts to waters of the U.S.” due to construction activities.
CA Department of Fish and Game	>Section 1603 Permit	To authorize impacts to waters of the U.S. due to construction activities.
Regional Water Quality Control Board	>Section 401 Certification	To certify that the 404 permit is adequate for Regional Board purposes.
Los Angeles County Sanitation District No. 32	>Service Agency Annexation	To authorize annexation and connection
Castaic Lake Water Agency	>Service Agency Annexation	To authorize annexation
Newhall County Water District	>Service Agency Annexation	To authorize annexation

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES TO BE ANALYZED IN EIR

The County of Los Angeles has prepared an Initial Study (IS) and determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is required for the proposed project. The IS summarizes the

environmental issues that must be analyzed in the EIR and it is attached for review. A summary of the probable environmental effects of the project is presented in Table 2 below.

**TABLE 2
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS OVERVIEW**

Checklist Issue	Potential Significant Impacts/Issues for Analysis
HAZARDS	
Geotechnical	Landslide and liquefaction hazards; substantial grading and alteration of topography; geotechnical survey required
Flood	Project site contains Tapia Canyon and its tributary, a major drainage course and it's 100-year floodplain; increased erosion from vegetation removal; change in drainage pattern
Fire	Project site within Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone with single access point; adjacent Tesoro del Valle project may not be constructed thereby removing planned additional access; no existing water source on site
Noise	Construction (grading) and increased traffic from development of site could increase ambient noise levels
RESOURCES	
Water Quality	Construction (grading) and increased impermeable surfaces can affect surface water quality
Air Quality	Santa Clarita Valley is an AQMD non-attainment area, construction and increased traffic from development would increase air pollutant emissions
Biota	Project site is vacant open space containing vegetation, oak trees, and potential sensitive species; area provides wildlife movement corridor between Castaic Creek and Angeles National Forest; biota survey required
Cultural	Potential archaeological sensitivity; Phase I Archaeological Survey required
Mineral	No impact — See Environmental Safety
Agricultural	No impact
Visual	Portion of 1-5 is scenic highway from which the project site is visible; development of suburban uses on vacant open space alters visual character and topography; new source of light and glare
SERVICES	
Traffic/Access	Project exceeds County thresholds of 25 dwelling units necessary to consider traffic impacts and 50 dwelling units to consider congestion management program (CMP) analysis; project site not near existing emergency services
Sewer	Project site not currently served by sewer infrastructure
Education	Project would generate additional school-age children; school districts serving project are both currently exceeding their capacity; project site is not close to existing schools
Fire/Sheriff	Fire and police protection is not readily available to project site due to location, access, and undeveloped nature
Utility/Other	Project site does not have existing water supply; limited utility infrastructure currently in place
OTHER ISSUES	
General	Project would alter character of site to suburban
Environmental Safety	Project contains abandoned oil wells from historical activities and one active oil well
Land Use	Project includes density control design. DMS discussion
Population/Recreation	Potential to induce population growth; project would generate the need for additional recreational facilities
Mandatory Findings	Project has the potential to significantly affect biota and water quality and is located in an area with fire and flood hazards

SCOPING MEETING

To assist in local participation in the EIR process, a Scoping Meeting will be held to present the proposed project and to solicit suggestions from the public and responsible agencies on the content of the Draft EIR. This meeting will be held in the Auditorium of the Northlake Hills Elementary School located at 32545 Ridge Route Road, Castaic, California on Thursday, September 6, 2007 from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM.

NOTICE OF PREPARATION REVIEW AND COMMENTS

The 30-day review period for the Notice of Preparation will be from August 30, 2007 to September 30, 2007. Copies of the NOP are available for review at Canyon Country County Library, 18601 Soledad Canyon Road, Santa Clarita, CA 91351; Valencia County Library at 23743 West Valencia Boulevard, Santa Clarita, CA 91355; Newhall County Library at 22704 West 9th Street, Santa Clarita, CA 91321, and the Department of Regional Planning at the address below. The Department of Regional Planning website <http://planning.lacounty.gov> will also have the NOP materials under the 'Case and Hearing Info' for Tract Map No. 53822." The County of Los Angeles is soliciting input based on your views and opinions concerning the scope of the EIR for the proposed project. To facilitate your review, the following materials are attached:

- Los Angeles County Initial Study
- Regional Location Map
- Local Vicinity Map
- 500-foot Radius Land Use Map
- Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 53822

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than September 30, 2007. In your written response, please include the name of a contact person in your agency. Please direct all written comments to the following address:

Rudy Silvas
Impact Analysis Section
Los Angeles County, Department of Regional Planning
320 W. Temple Street, Room 1348
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Telephone: (213) 974-6461
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