

3.16 RECREATION

This section of the 2024 PEIR describes the existing recreational resources within the SCAG region, sets forth the regulatory framework that affects recreation resources, and analyzes the potential impacts of Connect SoCal 2024. In addition, this 2024 PEIR provides regional-scale mitigation measures as well as project-level mitigation measures that can and should be considered and implemented by lead agencies for subsequent, site-specific environmental review to reduce identified impacts as appropriate and feasible. This section also addresses public services related to parks along with recreation.

3.16.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

DEFINITIONS

Definitions of terms used in the regulatory framework, characterization of baseline conditions, and impact analysis for recreation follow:

- *Recreation Level of Service (LOS)*: In the context of recreation of recreational service, LOS refers to the amount of “service” each park, open land, trail, or other facility provides to its constituents (National Recreation and Park Association [NRPA] 2023). Conventional recreation and park LOS analysis—often called the “NRPA park metrics” method because it is published by the NRPA—identifies typical per capita demand for facilities in jurisdictions of various population sizes. NRPA park metrics provide empirical data from parks and recreation agencies across the country to allow individual agencies to identify the appropriate number of facilities or acres of parkland per 1,000 inhabitants within their jurisdiction. The County of Los Angeles 2035 General Plan (CLADPR 2022a) and Orange County General Plan (COPWDS 2015) have established a standard for parklands of four acres of local parkland and six acres of regional parkland per 1,000 county residents in unincorporated areas. The Imperial County General Plan (CIPDS 2008) has established a standard of five net acres of overall parkland per 1,000 county residents in unincorporated areas. The San Bernardino County General Plan (CSBLUSD 2007) has established a standard of 14.5 acres of undeveloped lands and/or trails per 1,000 county residents and 2.5 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 county residents. Ventura County has not established numeric parkland standards.

Because park needs and definitions vary among jurisdictions, the following descriptions are provided for informational purposes. The definitions below are not intended to define all parkland in the region, but rather, are intended to provide general guidance about different types of parks that can be found in the region.

- *Local Park*: According to the Los Angeles County General Plan, a park that is considered to serve the local community (within a two-mile service radius of the park) is generally 20 acres or less in size (CLADPR 2022a), (COPWDS 2015). Further, the Los Angeles County General Plan has refined local parks into the following categories (CLADPR 2022a):
 - *Park Node*: Park nodes are small pieces of open space that serve as public destinations, connections, and community defining spaces. Examples include plazas, rest areas, playgrounds, landmarks, public art installations, etc.
 - Size: One-quarter acre or less
 - Service Area: No service radius area

- *Pocket Park*: Pocket parks are less than three acres in size and serve residential or business areas within a quarter mile radius or within walking distance. Passive park amenities include picnic areas and seating areas. Active park amenities include children’s play apparatus.
 - Size: Less than three acres
 - Service Area: Up to one-quarter mile radius of the park
- *City Park*: A park having a wide range of improvements not usually found in neighborhood and community parks and designed to meet the recreational needs of the entire city population. Recreational facilities might include a nature area, golf course, zoo, pool, skateboarding parks, playing fields, or structures like gymnasiums, community centers, and public or private educational institutions. Parks may also be themed, such as a park dedicated to the agricultural heritage of the area. City Parks do not have a defined size or service area threshold.
- *Neighborhood Park*: A park or playground developed primarily to serve the recreational needs of citizens living within a 0.5-mile radius of the park. These facilities include pocket parks and neighborhood playgrounds (CLADPR 2022a). The common objective of all neighborhood parks is to bring people together to recreate and socialize close to home. Passive park amenities include informal open play areas, children’s play apparatus, group picnic areas with overhead shelters, and barbecues. Active park amenities include practice sports fields, basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts. Park facilities typically include public restrooms and onsite parking and information kiosks.
 - Size: Three to 10 acres
 - Service Area: One-half mile radius of the park
- *Community Park*: A larger park or facility developed to meet the park and recreational needs of those living or working within a one to two-mile radius. Community parks may have a variety of playing fields and community recreation facilities (CLADPR 2022a). Community parks that are located in residential neighborhoods serve both the needs of the community park service radius and neighborhood park service radius. The amenities programmed into a community park are focused on meeting the needs of several neighborhoods or large sections of the community. Passive park amenities include informal open play areas, children’s play apparatus, family and group picnic areas with overhead shelters, and barbecues; active sports activities including light sports fields, basketball courts and tennis courts, aquatics complexes, skate parks, soccer arenas, roller hockey, community gardens, and dog parks; and park facilities including public restrooms, concession buildings, community buildings, maintenance buildings, and on-site parking and information kiosks.
 - Size: 10 to 20 acres
 - Service Area: 1- to 2-mile radius around the park
- *Parklet*: A parklet is an expansion of the sidewalk into one or more on-street parking spaces to create people-oriented places. Parklets introduce new streetscape features such as seating, planting, bicycle parking, or elements of play (City of Los Angeles 2019).
- *Regional Park*: A park greater than 20 acres in size is generally considered a regional park. A regional park may have a service radius of over 25 miles (CLADPR 2022a; COPWDS 2015). For instance, the Los Angeles County General Plan has refined regional parks into the following categories (CLADPR 2022a):
 - *Community Regional Park*: Community regional parks protect and conserve natural resources, preserve open spaces, and provide recreational facilities that are not available in neighborhood or community parks. Passive park amenities include open play areas, children’s play apparatus, group picnic areas with

overhead shelters, and barbecues. Active sports activities include lighted sports fields, basketball courts, and tennis courts. Additional amenities include multiple sports facilities, aquatics centers, fishing lakes, community buildings, gymnasiums, and scenic views and vistas. Park facilities typically include public restrooms, concession buildings, community buildings, maintenance buildings, and on-site parking and information kiosks.

- Size: 20 to 100 acres
- Service Area: Up to 20-mile radius around the park
- *Regional Park*: Regional Parks include unique areas such as lakes, wetlands, auditoriums, water bodies, and campgrounds, in addition to the active recreational facilities offered in community and community regional parks. Many of the recreation activities are associated with experiencing the natural environment. A regional park may also perform important ecological and environmental functions, including serving as wildlife habitats. Passive park amenities include group picnic areas with overhead shelters and barbecues. Additional park amenities include lakes, wetlands, auditoriums, water bodies for swimming, fishing and boating, and sports fields.
 - Size: Greater than 100 acres
 - Service Area: 25-mile or greater radius around the park
- *Special-Use Facility*: Special-use facilities are generally single purpose facilities that serve greater regional recreational or cultural needs. Passive features include wilderness parks, nature preserves, botanical gardens, and nature centers. Active uses include performing arts, water parks, golf driving ranges, and golf courses.
 - Size: No size criteria
 - Service Area: No assigned service radius area
- *Trails/Linear Parks*: SCAG (SCAG 2020a), Los Angeles County (CLADPR 2022a), and San Bernardino County (CSBLUSD 2007) define trails as linear parks that provide community access to increased health and fitness activities in the increasingly urbanized region.
- *Multi-Benefit Parks*: According to the Los Angeles County General Plan, multi-benefit parks and open spaces are created through collaborative efforts among city, county, state, and federal agencies; private organizations; schools; private landowners; and industries. These parks are characterized as having more than one function and contributing to multiple program goals. There are a number of applications of multi-benefit parks including: utility corridors and flood protection basins that can serve as areas for active or passive recreation; school sites located adjacent to parks that can share facilities, such as parking and park amenities; watershed areas that can protect critical wildlife habitats, preserve open space, provide trails for recreation, and contribute to water conservation objectives; and water districts, where trails can be located adjacent to flood protection channels and trailhead parks (CSBLUSD 2015a).
- *School Sites*: According to the Los Angeles County General Plan, the County works with school districts to organize, promote, and conduct joint recreational and educational programs. These community recreation agreements are a form of joint-use agreement, where either a school or park facility may be put to some recreational use by the other party in exchange for some facility improvement and/or maintenance. A park does not have to be adjacent to a school (i.e., share a common boundary) for an agreement to be viable (CSBLUSD 2015a).
- *City Parks and Facilities*: According to the Los Angeles County General Plan, city parks and facilities that are located close to the borders of the unincorporated areas are enjoyed by city and County residents alike.

Similarly, local County parks that are located within or close to the borders of cities provide recreational amenities for both populations (CSBLUSD 2015a).

- *Private Recreational Facilities:* According to the Los Angeles County General Plan, private recreational facilities play an important role in meeting recreational needs. The network of private recreational facilities consists of churches, health and fitness clubs, and other organizations that offer a variety of programs and facilities (CSBLUSD 2015a).
- *Greenways:* According to the Los Angeles County General Plan, greenways provide a linear area along natural corridors, and often follow features such as rivers, man-made waterways, drainage channels, and utility easements. Greenways can accommodate various modes of uninterrupted pedestrian travel on pathways, including walking, jogging, and bicycling, and can include recreation areas and natural landscape features (CSBLUSD 2015a).

Within the SCAG region, parks are classified into several subgroups: neighborhood, community, city, as well as specialized recreation areas, regional recreational areas, state and federal recreation areas, and open space areas (CDPR 2023a).

- *Specialized Recreation Area:* A recreation area or facility devoted to a very specific activity or use, such as a linear park, golf courses, or soccer parks.
- *Regional Recreation Area:* Regional recreation areas provide access to significant ecological, cultural, or historical features or unique facilities that attract visitors from throughout the entire region (including incorporated and unincorporated areas). Regional recreation areas may be composed of one large site or several sites located in proximity that together provide a significant recreation area for the region. These parks may include areas of significant natural resources, as well as more developed activity sites. Regional recreation areas may be supported by a wide variety of specialized facilities such as indoor recreation centers, large group picnic areas, special event facilities/festival space, and campgrounds.
- *State and Federal Recreation Areas:* A park maintained by state or federal agencies and typically providing recreational opportunities like camping, hiking, bird watching, rafting, boating, and fishing. Many parts of the region have vast areas covered by state or federal parkland.
- *Open Space Areas:* Open space refers to lands that are generally unimproved and used for resource conservation and/or the managed production of resources. Open space is comprised of both designated open space and “de facto” open space. Designated open space is land that has been left undeveloped by design. Other land is deemed open space not by design, but because the land is not involved in a productive use, or in the case of agricultural lands, the land is consumed by a productive use that contributes to the visual quality of the land or provides wildlife habitat.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The diverse natural resources located in the six counties within SCAG’s jurisdiction provide a wide range of recreational opportunities for residents and tourists alike. Resources range from small neighborhood parks featuring playground equipment and sports fields to vast expanses of wilderness with hiking trails, rafting, and camping. In addition to parks for active recreation, the SCAG region also has a diversity of open space areas. The SCAG region contains approximately 150 miles of coastline, four national forests, two national parks, and several national wildlife refuges. There are 48 California state parks, 383 county parks, and over 4,020 city parks and open space areas in the SCAG region (CDPR 2023a; CPAD 2022). These lands are governed by a variety of

agencies, including municipal park departments, independent park districts, counties, cities, community service districts, and federal and state agencies.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION LANDS IN THE SCAG REGION

Public parks and open space serve the residents in the SCAG region, as well as tourists and visitors. The variety of landscapes within the SCAG region allows for a broad range of parks and recreational facilities, many of which are quite unique. The multitude of parks and associated facilities make the SCAG region an ideal area for outdoor exploration and draw tourists and visitors to the area. **Table 3.16-1, Recreational Areas and Protected Open Space by County (Acres)**, shows California Protected Areas (CPAs), lands owned in fee, from small parks to large wilderness areas, in each SCAG county by acreage.

TABLE 3.16-1 Recreational Areas and Protected Open Space by County (Acres)

COUNTY	TOTAL ACRES
Imperial	1,564,947
Los Angeles	916,205
Orange	151,471
Riverside	2,974,783
San Bernardino	8,519,966
Ventura	657,399
Total	14,784,771

Source: CPAD 2022

Each city and county within the SCAG region have a general plan containing an open space and/or parks and recreation element. Each element describes specific rules, regulations, and current conditions of various local parks and recreation facilities to maximize recreational benefits within each jurisdiction. Based on the information found in the various county plans, Los Angeles County has a deficiency in local parkland. Los Angeles, Orange, and San Bernardino counties have established regional parkland standards, which they currently meet. Imperial County also meets its combined local and regional parkland standard. Riverside and Ventura Counties do not specify parkland and open space standards. Further detail regarding the condition of parks, recreation, and open space in counties within the SCAG region is described below.

IMPERIAL COUNTY

Imperial County is a predominantly agricultural area and approximately 50 percent of County lands are undeveloped and under federal jurisdiction. A recreation designation covers the largest area of any land use in the County (CIPDS 2015). The County maintains approximately 1,564,947 acres of regional parkland and protected open space, 97 percent of which is open access land. Two and a half percent of protected land has no public access and less than one percent has restricted access, where the public can only enter with a permit. This total includes parkland owned by the federal, state, county, and city as well as special district, nonprofit, private, and joint parkland (CIPDS 2015). The Imperial County General Plan has established a standard of five net acres of overall parkland per 1,000 residents in unincorporated areas (CIPDS 2008). With a total population of

approximately 181,000 in 2019, there are 8,646 regional parkland and protected open space acres per 1,000 inhabitants, which is significantly higher than the set overall standard (SCAG 2023).

Imperial County contains the Ocotillo Wells (California State Parks 2023a) and Heber Dunes State Parks (California State Parks 2023b) as well as eight County parks (CIPDS 2023). County parks maintain sports courts and recreational facilities, trails, barbecues, and playgrounds and space for activities such as camping, boating, and fishing. The Heber Community Center is also operated by the County and includes a library, event area, kitchen, and sports courts. Ocotillo Wells is a State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) and contains more than 85,000 acres of desert open for off-road exploration, recreation, and camping. The Heber Dunes State Park is also a SVRA; it is mostly utilized by all-terrain vehicle riders. The 323 acres of parkland are exclusively for day utilization and no camping, shooting or hunting is allowed.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Los Angeles County has 916,205 acres of parkland, a majority of which is under the jurisdiction of the federal government (CPAD 2022). This total includes parkland owned by the federal, state, county, and city as well as special district, nonprofit, private, and joint parkland (CPAD 2022). The County maintains approximately 73,000 acres of parklands, including 182 parks (CLADPR 2023a). Over 92 percent of the total parkland is open access and less than one percent allows no public access. The Los Angeles County General Plan has established a standard of 4 acres of local parkland per 1,000 residents in the unincorporated areas and 6 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents of the total population in Los Angeles County. According to the County Department of Parks and Recreation Five-Year (2023-2028) Strategic Plan, the County averages 3.3 park acres per 1,000 residents; however nearly 80 percent of County parks have less than 3.3 acres available to their surrounding communities, indicating that parks likely experience heavy usage due to population burden (CLADPR 2023a). With a total population of approximately 10,046,000 in 2019, there are 91.2 recreational park and protected open space acres per 1,000 inhabitants, which is higher than the set overall standard (SCAG 2023).

Los Angeles County has 182 County parks and 23 state parks, the most of any county in the SCAG region (CLADPR 2023a; CPAD 2022). Parks in Los Angeles include beaches, picnic areas, sports fields and courts, and hiking and camping opportunities. There are also multiple special use facilities, single purpose facilities serving greater regional recreational or cultural needs, such as the Hollywood Bowl (CLADPR 2023b). Prominent parks in Los Angeles County include Santa Catalina Island Regional Park, Griffith Park, Topanga State Park, and the Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve.

ORANGE COUNTY

Orange County contains 151,471 acres of protected parkland, the majority of which is controlled on a federal or county level (CPAD 2022). This total includes parkland owned by the federal, state, county, and city as well as special district, nonprofit, private, and joint parkland (CPAD 2022). Orange County General Plan (2014) established parkland standards of 2.5 acres of local parkland per 1,000 residents in unincorporated areas and 6 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents (COPWDS 2015). With a total population of approximately 3,191,000 people, the County provides about 47.5 acres of recreational park and protected open space acres per 1,000 residents, far surpassing regional parkland standards (SCAG 2023).

Orange County maintains 25 urban and wilderness parks, comprised of 60,000 acres including historical sites, beaches and harbors, and 150 miles of paved regional trails and 350 miles of off-road trails. Additionally, there

are a host of local parks, beaches, and nature preserves (County of Orange Parks 2018). Prominent parks include Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, Carbon Canyon Regional Park and Irvine Regional Park.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

Riverside County has 2,974,783 acres of protected parkland, over 2.8 million of which are open access (CPAD 2022). This total includes parkland owned by the federal, state, county, and city as well as special district, nonprofit, private, and joint parkland (CPAD 2022). Seven regional parks in the area cover approximately 23,317 acres (CRPD 2015a). The County does not have set standards regarding parklands but the vast amount of open space, the second-most in the SCAG region, allow for approximately 1,247 acres of recreational park and protected open space acres per 1,000 residents based on a 2019 population of 2,386,000 people (SCAG 2023). Riverside County parks include Joshua Tree National Park, Anza-Borrego State Park, and the Salton Sea State Recreation Area.

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

San Bernardino has the most open space and protected parkland out of all the counties in the SCAG region. It maintains a total of 8,519,966 acres of protected parkland, nearly 99 percent of which are open access (CPAD 2022). This total includes parkland owned by the federal, state, county, and city as well as special district, nonprofit, private, and joint parkland (CPAD 2022). The 2007 General Plan denotes a standard of 2.5 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents (CSBLUSD 2007). The 2020 General Plan does not provide an update to this standard (CSBLUSD 2020). With a population of approximately 2,175,000 people, the County provides about 3,917 acres of recreational park and protected open space acres per 1,000 residents, far surpassing regional parkland standards (SCAG 2023).

The San Bernardino Regional Parks Department operates 11 regional parks. Numerous County special districts operate local parks in many unincorporated communities of the County. These districts operate independently from the County government and are financed by local taxes within each respective district boundary. The County also includes wilderness areas that are mostly under the jurisdiction of the BLM, including the Sand to Snow National Monument and the Mojave Trails National Monument (CSBLUSD 2020).

VENTURA COUNTY

Ventura County is home to 657,399 acres of protected parkland and open space (CPAD 2022). This total includes parkland owned by the federal, state, county, and city as well as special district, nonprofit, private, and joint parkland (CPAD 2022). The County maintains 13 regional parks, 23 county parks, and a multitude of beach front parks and marinas, and community parks. The County also operates the Hungry Valley SVRA, 18,780 acres between Los Angeles and Ventura counties that are open to vehicular use, trail use, and camping (California State Parks 2023c). Ventura County does not specify parkland and open space standards but with a population of approximately 849,000 persons, the County provides roughly 774 acres of recreational park and protected open space acres per 1,000 residents (SCAG 2023).

3.16.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The federal government sets public recreation standards for protection of publicly owned recreation areas; scenic, historic, and recreational trails; national forests, and recreational fisheries from conversion to non-compatible land uses that may include transportation projects through the recreational resource. The state sets

recreation standards for protection of public parkland and establishment of new parkland to meet the needs of a growing population as a result of development projects. The provision of new parkland and recreational facilities is generally subject to local general plan policies.

FEDERAL

SECTION 4(F) OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 1966

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act (Public Law 89-670) was enacted as a means of protecting publicly owned public parks, recreation areas, and wildlife/waterfowl refuges as well as historic sites of local, state, or national significance, from conversion to transportation uses.

The provision states that the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation may approve a transportation project requiring the use of publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge, or land from an historic site of national, state, or local significance (as determined by the federal, state, or local officials having jurisdiction over the park, recreation area, refuge, or site) only if (FHA 2023):

- There is no feasible and prudent avoidance alternative to the use of land; and the action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from such use; or
- The Administration determines that the use of the property will have a de minimis impact.

NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT

The National Trails System Act (Public Law 90-543) was established by Congress in 1968 to establish a network of scenic, historic, and recreational trails. The act defined four categories of national trails: recreation trails, scenic trails, historic trails, and connecting or side trails. Trails within park, forest, and other recreation areas administered by the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture or in other federally administered areas may be established and designated as "National Recreation Trails" by the appropriate Secretary. Since the National Trails System Act was enacted, the list of qualifying national scenic trails and national historic trails has grown from the initial two trails (the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail) to the current list, which includes 11 national scenic trails and 19 historic trails. In addition, more than 1,000 national recreation trails have been designated nationwide, 91 of which are in California (USINRPS 2019; American Trails 2023).

NATIONAL FORESTS LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Each of the four Southern California national forests (Cleveland National Forest, Los Angeles National Forest, San Bernardino National Forest, and Los Padres National Forest) is included in the Southern California National Forests Vision. The Southern California National Forests Vision (forest plans) has created individual land management plans for each of the four Southern California national forests. The land management plans include strategic programmatic direction for managing the land in each national forest and its resources for the next 10 to 15 years. The plans include sections on resource management, public use and enjoyment, facilities operation and maintenance, commodity and commercial uses, and fire management (USDA 2005).

EXECUTIVE ORDER 12962—RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

The objective of Executive Order 12962, dated June 7, 1995, is the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of aquatic systems to provide for increased recreational fishing. Under the executive order, federal agencies shall improve the quantity function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for recreational fishing opportunities by:

- Developing and encouraging government-private sector partnerships
- Identifying recreational fishing opportunities
- Implementing sound aquatic conservation and restoration practices
- Providing access and promoting awareness
- Supporting outreach programs
- Implementing laws
- Establishing cost-share programs
- Evaluating the effects of federally funded, permitted, or authorized actions on aquatic resources and recreational fishing
- Assisting private landowners to conserve and enhance aquatic resources

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND ACT, SECTION 6(F)(3)

Section 6(f)(3) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF Act) of 1965 (16 U.S. Code Section 460l et seq.) contains provisions to protect federal investments in park and recreation resources and the quality of those assisted resources. The law recognizes the likelihood that changes in land use or development may make park use of some areas purchased with LWCF Act funds obsolete over time, particularly in rapidly changing urban areas, and provides for conversion to other use pursuant to certain specific conditions.

Section 6(f)(3) states that no property acquired or developed with assistance under Section 6(f)(3) shall, without the approval of the Secretary, be converted to other than public outdoor recreation uses. The Secretary shall approve such conversion only if he or she finds it to be in accordance with the then existing comprehensive statewide outdoor recreation plan and only upon such conditions as he or she deems necessary to assure the substitution of other recreation properties of at least equal fair market value and of reasonably equivalent usefulness and location.

This requirement applies to all parks and other sites that have been the subject of LWCF Act grants of any type and includes acquisition of park land and development or rehabilitation of park facilities. If a transportation project would have an effect upon a park or site that has received LWCF Act funds, the requirements of Section 6(f)(3) would apply (National Park Service 2023).

STATE

QUIMBY ACT

The Quimby Act was established by the California State Legislature in 1965 and codified as California Government Code Section 66477. The Quimby Act allows the legislative body of a city or county, by ordinance,

to require the dedication of land or impose a requirement of the payment of fees in lieu thereof, or a combination of both, for park or recreational purposes as a condition to the approval of a tentative tract map or parcel map. Under the Quimby Act, requirements for parkland dedications are not to exceed three acres of parkland per 1,000 persons residing within a subdivision, and in-lieu fee payments shall not exceed the proportionate amount necessary to provide three acres of parkland, unless the amount of existing neighborhood and community parkland exceeds that limit.

CALIFORNIA PUBLIC PARK PRESERVATION ACT

The primary instrument for protecting and preserving parkland is the State Public Park Preservation Act of 1971 (Public Resources Code Sections 5400–5409). Under the Act, cities and counties may not acquire any real property that is in use as a public park for any non-park use unless compensation or land, or both, are provided to replace the parkland acquired. This provides no net loss of parkland and facilities.

CALIFORNIA RECREATIONAL TRAILS PLAN OF 2002

The California Department of State Parks (California State Parks) is a trustee agency that owns and operates all state parks and participates in land use planning that affects state parklands. Pursuant to California Public Resources Code Section 5070, the California Recreational Trails Act, California State Parks has prepared the California Recreational Trails Plan in 1978, which was updated in 2002, with reports highlighting progress on the plan that are submitted to the State Legislature every two years (CDPR 2011). The California Recreational Trails Plan establishes 12 designated trail corridors that pass through the SCAG region with the intent of forming a statewide trail system that links mountain, valley, and coastal communities to recreational, cultural, and natural resources throughout the state (CDPR 2023b).

STATE OPEN SPACE STANDARDS

State planning law (Government Code Section 65560) provides a structure for the preservation of open space by requiring every city and county in the State to prepare, adopt, and submit to the Secretary of the Resources Agency a "local open-space plan for the comprehensive and long-range preservation and conservation of open space land within its jurisdiction." The following open space categories are identified for preservation:

- **Open space for public health and safety**, including but not limited to areas that require special management or regulation due to hazardous or special conditions.
- **Open space for the preservation of natural resources**, including but not limited to natural vegetation, fish and wildlife, and water resources.
- **Open space for resource management and production**, including but not limited to agricultural and mineral resources, forests, rangeland, and areas required for the recharge of groundwater basins.
- **Open space for outdoor recreation**, including but not limited to parks and recreational facilities, areas that serve as links between major recreation and open space reservations (such as trails, easements, and scenic roadways), and areas of outstanding scenic and cultural value.
- **Open space for the protection of Native American sites**, including but not limited to places, features, and objects of historical, cultural, or sacred significance such as Native American sanctified cemeteries, places of worship, religious or ceremonial sites, or sacred shrines located on public property (further defined in California Public Resources Code Sections 5097.9 and 5097.993).

MITIGATION FEE ACT

The California Mitigation Fee Act, Government Code Sections 66000 et seq. allows cities to establish fees to be imposed on development projects for the purpose of mitigating the impact of development on a city's ability to provide specified public facilities. In order to comply with the Mitigation Fee Act a City must follow the following primary requirements: (1) Make certain determinations regarding the purpose and use of a fee and establish a nexus or connection between a development project or class of project and the public improvement being financed with the fee; (2) Segregate fee revenue from the General Fund in order to avoid commingling of capital facilities fees and general funds; (3) For fees that have been in the possession of a City for five years or more and for which the dollars have not been spent or committed to a project, the City must make findings each fiscal year.

LOCAL

LOS ANGELES COUNTY SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AREAS

The Hillside Management and Significant Ecological Areas Ordinance was originally adopted in 1982 and most recently amended in 2019 (CLADPR 2023c). Significant Ecological Areas (or SEA) in LA County are designated as such due to their biological resources. These areas include undisturbed (or lightly disturbed) habitat of threatened or valuable species, or areas that support species movement, and are appropriately sized to support sustainable populations of the local species. The program is designed to conserve the diversity of biological resources in LA County through conservation and more stringent development rules. The SEA Ordinance outlines the review process and development standards for these areas to ensure biodiversity and ecosystems will not be negatively impacted by development. There are 21 SEAs in LA County per the 2035 General Plan published in 2015.

ORANGE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION MEASURE M2

Also known as "OC Go," Measure M2 is a voter-approved sales tax extension of Measure M, which was approved in 1990 (OCTA 2023). This program is the funding source for county transportation projects as well as the Freeway Environmental Mitigation Program in Orange County. The Freeway Environmental Mitigation Program funds natural lands acquisitions and in turn, qualifying transportation projects undergo a streamlined California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review process. Thirty million dollars for approximately 1,300 acres of land and \$10 million on 350 acres of habitat restorations have been funded through Measure M2.

VENTURA COUNTY HABITAT CONNECTIVITY AND WILDLIFE CORRIDOR ORDINANCE

Formally adopted in May 2019, this ordinance establishes regulations for development on lands where animals travel between the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the Los Padres National Forest. The ordinance includes restrictions on elements detrimental to species movement, such as fencing, certain types of lighting and development in riparian areas. To provide flexibility for compliance, exemptions are allowed for agricultural activities.

VENTURA COUNTY SAVE OPEN SPACE AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES (SOAR)

SOAR is a collection of voter initiatives to create City Urban Restriction Boundaries (CURB) in eight of the county's cities (CVRMA 1998). With these initiatives, re-zoning natural or agricultural lands for development

outside of a city's sphere of influence requires a majority vote approval from residents. In 2016, voters approved all of the initiatives for renewal, which extends the expiration date until 2050.

COUNTY AND CITY GENERAL PLANS

The most comprehensive land use planning, including that for recreational facilities, in the SCAG region is provided by county and city general plans, which local governments are required by state law to prepare as a guide for future development. The SCAG region spans six counties and 191 cities, all of which have general plans containing policies related to provision of recreational resources. Open space and recreation resources are normally addressed in two mandatory elements of the general plan: land use and open space. The land use element normally focuses on the distribution of recreation facilities and programs and an inventory of open space land, including those lands that provide opportunities for recreational activities. In contrast, the open space element focuses on open space for outdoor recreation, including but not limited to:

- Areas of outstanding scenic, historical, and cultural value
- Areas particularly suited for park and recreational purposes, including access to lakeshores, beaches, and rivers and streams
- Areas that serve as links between major recreational and open-space reservations, including utility easements, banks of rivers and streams, trails, and scenic highway corridors

The six county general plans address the majority of the regional open space, beyond that provided by the national forest, national parks, and wildlife refuges:

- **Imperial County:** Parks and Recreation Element (CIPDS 2008) and Conservation and Open Space Element (CIPDS 2016) of County General Plan
- **Los Angeles County:** Chapter 9: Conservation and Natural Resources Element (CLADPR 2022b) and Chapter 10: Parks and Recreation Element (CLADPR 2022a) of County General Plan
- **Orange County:** Chapter VI. Resources Element (COPWDS 2012) and Chapter VII. Recreation Element (COPWDS 2015) of County General Plan
- **Riverside County:** Chapter 5: Multipurpose Open Space Element and Chapter 10: Healthy Communities Element (CRPD 2015b) of County General Plan
- **San Bernardino County:** Natural Resources Element (CSBLUSD 2020) of County General Plan
- **Ventura County:** Conservation and Open Space Element (CVRMAPD 2020a) and Public Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure Element (CVRMAPD 2020b) of County General Plan

Each city in the SCAG region has its own respective general plan that helps provide guidance for the growth and development of the city and contains measures to maintain and/or enhance open space within each of the city's jurisdictions. Each city's general plan varies in level of detail and necessary measures to preserve open space. Although city general plans are not required to contain parks and recreation sections, cities often choose to include this section to provide measures to maintain and/or enhance city parks and recreation areas.

Additional plans and ordinances at the master plan level, city-level, and specific plan level may also apply within the SCAG region.

ZONING

City and county zoning codes provide the set of detailed requirements that implement general plan policies at the level of the individual parcel. Zoning codes present standards for different uses and identifies which uses are allowed in the various zoning districts of the jurisdiction. Since 1971, state law has required the city or county zoning code to be consistent with the jurisdiction's general plan (OPR 2017).

3.16.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

For the purposes of this 2024 PEIR, SCAG has determined that implementation of Connect SoCal 2024 could result in significant impacts related to recreation if the Plan would exceed the following significance criteria, in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Appendix G:

- Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated;
- Include recreational facilities or require construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment;

In addition, the following criterion from Section 3.15, *Public Services*, is addressed along with recreation:

- IMPACT PS-5: Result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered park facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, or other performance objective.

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2, *Project Description*, describes the Plan's vision, goals, policies, forecasted regional development pattern, policies and strategies, and individual transportation projects and investments. The Plan aims to increase mobility, promote sustainability, and improve the regional economy. Although land use development is anticipated to occur within the region even without the Plan, the Plan could influence growth, including distribution patterns. To address this, the 2024 PEIR includes an analysis on the implementation of policies and strategies as well as potential projects and evaluates how conditions in 2050 under the Plan would differ from existing conditions. The analysis of recreation considered public comments received on the NOP and feedback and discussions at the various public and stakeholder outreach meetings.

The need for or deficiency in adequate park facilities to serve residents in the SCAG region is not in and of itself a CEQA impact, but a social or economic impact (*City of Hayward v. Board of Trustees* [2015] 242 Cal.App.4th 833, 843). However, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, the determination of whether there is a significant impact related to parks or other recreational facilities is based on whether a significant impact could result from the construction and subsequent operation of new or altered parks and/or recreational facilities or where existing park and recreational facilities would be substantially physically deteriorated as a result of the implementation of the Plan.

The methodology for determining the significance of recreation impacts compares the existing conditions (2022) to future (2050) conditions, as required in CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(a). Baseline conditions were

established for the acreage of local and regional parkland per 1,000 population in each county to determine existing park LOS, and the 2050 anticipated population growth forecast was used to calculate the quantity of parkland needed to meet future recreation needs.

Impacts were evaluated qualitatively based on implementation of the Plan, which generally encourages growth in PDAs and minimizes growth in GRRAs. Plan impacts were evaluated in the context of assumptions that protected recreational areas (such as national forests) would remain protected.

As discussed in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, and Section 3.0, *Introduction to the Analysis*, Connect SoCal 2024 includes Regional Planning Policies and Implementation Strategies some of which will effectively reduce impacts in the various resource areas. Furthermore, compliance with all applicable laws and regulations (as set forth in Section 3.16.2, *Regulatory Framework*) would be reasonably expected to reduce impacts of the Plan (see CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4(a)(1)(B)). As discussed in Section 3.0, *Introduction to the Analysis*, where remaining potentially significant impacts are identified, SCAG mitigation measures are incorporated to reduce these impacts. If SCAG cannot mitigate impacts of the Plan to less than significant, project-level mitigation measures are identified which can and should be considered and implemented by lead agencies as applicable and feasible.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

IMPACT REC-1 Potential to increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated.

Significant and Unavoidable Impact – Mitigation Required

Plan implementation would have the potential to increase use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration would occur, constituting a potentially significant impact. Specifically, the Plan's transportation improvements and policies aim to accommodate the anticipated population increase of nearly 2.1 million persons over the lifetime of the Plan. The Plan also encourages infill development and redevelopment primarily in PDAs located within urbanized areas. Therefore, it is possible that existing neighborhood parks and other recreational facilities would see an increase in usage, which, in turn, may result in substantial physical deterioration of facilities. It is also possible that as population in urban centers increases, there may be more demand for parks outside of PDAs, particularly for PDAs in suburban and rural areas that are not well served by existing local parks and recreational facilities. As such, the Plan's overall improvement of the transportation network could also result in increased accessibility and use of regional parks.

Local parks and recreational facilities are often overburdened in part because they are smaller and serve more densely populated areas. As the Plan generally emphasizes compact development, local parks may become increasingly overburdened. Such impacts may be somewhat reduced as individual projects are frequently required to include small private open space as well as larger community open space. However, such spaces do not replace local parks. Accessibility to parks is also a public health and equity concern and is addressed under the Equity Analysis Technical Report in the Plan. Urbanized areas, such as the low-income communities of Westlake and Southeast Los Angeles in the City of Los Angeles, are significantly park poor, with less than half an acre of park space per 1,000 residents (LADCP 2015). Construction of transportation projects, as well as

development in underutilized urban (opportunity) areas, would have the potential to impact recreational facilities both directly and indirectly. Direct impacts would occur through the acquisition of recreational and parklands to accommodate transportation projects and development, or through an increase in the population resulting in an exceedance of a park acre per 1,000 residents threshold resulting in increased use of existing parks. Indirect impacts would occur through development of transportation projects in proximity to recreational facilities, which would increase access to park facilities and concentrate development within PDAs, which would increase demand for and the use of existing parks.

For some areas there may be sufficient parkland available in 2050, while other areas may see a substantial increase in population that substantially impacts existing parks/recreational. As a result, by 2050 some areas and parks could have a lower LOS as a result of increasing population with little to no associated increase in park area. While it is unlikely that existing parks would be developed with urban uses, in some cases this could occur as communities seek to provide homeless shelters and low-income housing on government-owned land. Such reuse of park space would exacerbate impacts on other remaining parks. These impacts are expected to disproportionately affect urban centers where land prices are high. All of these factors are expected to result in existing parks and recreational facilities experiencing increased use and associated physical deterioration or accelerated physical deterioration.

Many of the transportation projects included in the Plan are located in urbanized areas, and therefore, are not likely to result in direct significant impacts to undisturbed lands or large tracts of land designated as open space. Additionally, as described in Section 3.16.2, *Regulatory Framework*, designated parklands are well protected at the local, state, and federal level.

The Plan would encourage growth in PDAs that generally have greater access to multiple modes of transportation or where trip origins and destinations are closer together, allowing for shorter trips. According to SPM data, the Plan's PDAs are projected to accommodate the majority of the region's future households and jobs in 2050 under the Plan (SCAG 2023). Many of the areas where density would be expected to increase are areas with less local park space, resulting in increased use and the potential for accelerated deterioration of existing local parks and recreational facilities.

The Plan includes Regional Policies and Implementation Strategies for active transportation, including expansion of the regional greenway network, regional and local bikeway network, and short-trip strategies to improve sidewalk quality and use of complete streets when making roadway improvements. These strategies are integrated with land use patterns such as livable corridors, neighborhood mobility areas, as well as with innovative technologies such as neighborhood electric micro-mobility vehicles through scooter and bike share programs. While the Plan has the potential to result in a significant impact on existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities, implementation of such strategies can facilitate the creation of new neighborhood and regional recreational facilities and opportunities.

Overall, the Plan would have the potential to increase the use of existing local and regional parks and other recreational facilities; therefore, the impact with respect to physical deterioration of existing parks and recreational facilities is considered significant and mitigation measures are required.

MITIGATION MEASURES

SCAG MITIGATION MEASURE

See SMM-LU-1 through SMM-LU-3, SMM-POP-1, and SMM-POP-2.

SMM-REC-1 SCAG shall continue to encourage and recommend approaches to help local jurisdictions improve residential access to, and use of, existing neighborhood and regional parks through information sharing and regional forums for collaboration, such as the Equity Working Group.

PROJECT-LEVEL MITIGATION MEASURES

PMM-REC-1 In accordance with provisions of CEQA Guidelines Sections 15091(a)(2) and 15126.4(a)(1)(B), a lead agency for a project can and should consider mitigation measures to reduce substantial adverse effects on the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities, as applicable and feasible. Such measures may include the following or other comparable measures identified by the lead agency:

- a) Prior to the issuance of permits, where projects require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities or the payment of equivalent Quimby fees, consider increasing the accessibility to natural areas and lands for outdoor recreation from the proposed project area, in coordination with local and regional open space planning and/or responsible management agencies.
- b) Prior to the issuance of permits, where projects require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities or the payment of equivalent Quimby fees, encourage patterns of urban development and land use which reduce costs on infrastructure and make better use of existing facilities, using strategies such as:
 - i. Increasing the accessibility to natural areas for outdoor recreation
 - ii. Utilizing "green" development techniques
 - iii. Promoting water-efficient land use and development
 - iv. Encouraging multiple uses, such as the joint use of schools
 - v. Including trail systems and trail segments in General Plan recreation standards

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

As previously discussed, the Plan's Regional Planning Policies and Implementation Strategies (see Chapter 2, *Project Description*, and Section 3.0, *Introduction to the Analysis*) and compliance with existing laws and regulations would reduce impacts, but given the regional scale of the analysis in this 2024 PEIR, it is not possible or feasible to determine if all impacts would be fully mitigated. Therefore, this 2024 PEIR identifies SCAG and project-level mitigation measures. At the project level, lead agencies can and should consider the identified project-level mitigation measures during subsequent review of transportation and land use projects as appropriate and feasible. While the mitigation measures will reduce the impacts related to the increased use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration would occur or be accelerated, provision of or need for new or expanded recreational facilities, due to the regional nature of the analysis, unknown site conditions and project-specific details, and SCAG's lack of

land use authority over individual projects, SCAG finds that the impact could be **significant and unavoidable** even with mitigation.

IMPACT REC-2 **Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment.**

IMPACT PS-5 **Result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered park facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios or other performance objectives.**

Significant and Unavoidable Impact – Mitigation Required

As discussed in Section 3.0, *Introduction to the Analysis*, due to the similarities of the topic areas, Impact REC-2 and Impact PS-5 are addressed together.

Implementation of the Plan would result in the construction and expansion of recreational facilities, including parks and trails (linear parks), a regional greenway network, a regional bikeway network, and local bikeway networks, which could result in adverse physical effects on the environment. According to SPM data, the Plan anticipates that the majority of the population growth would occur within PDAs by 2050, which would increase the demand for and use of recreational facilities within these areas. To maintain acceptable recreation service ratios, the provision of new or physically altered park and recreational facilities would be required, which would result in significant impacts. An effective regional transportation system would increase accessibility to such destinations, for tourists and residents alike. Improved access to outdoor spaces would benefit the overall health and well-being of residents, as well as public education and environmental awareness. Recreational facilities and programs can also promote public health. For example, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, in joint partnership with the Los Angeles County Parks Foundation, enacted the Power of Play program, which is centered round ensuring equitable, accessible, and affordable play and learning programs for youth (CLADPR 2022c).

As discussed in Section 3.14, *Population and Housing*, the total population in the SCAG region is expected to increase by nearly 2.1 million people by 2050, independent of the Plan. The Plan assumes the majority of new households would be constructed within PDAs, which are generally located in suburban and urban environments which have access to multiple modes of transportation and/or where trip origins and destinations are closer together, allowing for shorter trips. This increased density in urban and suburban areas will increase demand for parks and recreational facilities in these areas. New and/or expansion of existing parks become increasingly difficult to provide as space is limited and land is expensive. When park development and expansion in urban areas occurs, it is beneficial but can also result in environmental impacts associated with construction and operation. For example, park/trail construction can result in noise and air quality impacts as well as long-term noise and night lighting impacts. See Section 3.3, *Air Quality*, and Section 3.13, *Noise*, for a discussion of air quality and noise impacts from construction and mitigation measures to reduce these impacts. See Section 3.1, *Aesthetics*, for a discussion of nighttime lighting impacts and mitigation measures to reduce these impacts. Therefore, the impact of potential construction of new and/or expanded park and recreational facilities in order

to maintain acceptable service ratios or other performance objectives is considered significant and mitigation measures are required.

MITIGATION MEASURES

SCAG MITIGATION MEASURE

See SMM-LU-1 through SMM-LU-3, SMM-POP-1 and SMM-POP-2, and SMM-REC-1.

PROJECT-LEVEL MITIGATION MEASURES

See PMM-REC-1, PMM-AQ-2, and PMM-NOI-1.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

As previously discussed, the Plan's Regional Planning Policies and Implementation Strategies (see Chapter 2, *Project Description*, and Section 3.0, *Introduction to the Analysis*) and compliance with existing laws and regulations would reduce impacts, but given the regional scale of the analysis in this 2024 PEIR, it is not possible or feasible to determine if all impacts would be fully mitigated. Therefore, this 2024 PEIR identifies SCAG and project-level mitigation measures. At the project level, lead agencies can and should consider the identified project-level mitigation measures during subsequent review of transportation and land use projects as appropriate and feasible. While the mitigation measures will reduce the impacts related to the provision of or need for new or expanded parks and recreational facilities in order to maintain acceptable service ratios or other performance objectives, due to the regional nature of the analysis, unknown site conditions and project-specific details, and SCAG's lack of land use authority over individual projects, SCAG finds that the impact could be **significant and unavoidable** even with mitigation.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Connect SoCal 2024 is a regional-scale Plan comprised of policies and strategies, a regional growth forecast and land use pattern, and individual projects and investments. At this regional-scale, a cumulative or related project to the Plan is another regional-scale plan (such as air quality management plans within the region) and similar regional plans for adjacent regions. Because the Plan, in and of itself, would result in significant adverse environmental impacts with respect to recreation, these impacts would add to the environmental impacts of other cumulative or related projects. Mitigation measures that reduce the Plan's impacts would similarly reduce the Plan's contribution to cumulative impacts.

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