

4.1.12 RECREATION

There are numerous recreational facilities within the SAMP Study Area. They include federal, state, county, and city facilities, as well as private recreational venues. Local and neighborhood parks exist within developed areas. Existing local and neighborhood facilities would not be affected by the SAMP because they are generally located in disturbed areas and would not be subject to the SAMP (not requiring USACE approvals) and because state and local park codes provide for provision of parkland in conjunction with new development. Therefore, this analysis focuses on larger recreational facilities; facilities that have the potential to affect aquatic resources, and those facilities in areas proposed for development. Figure 4.1.12-1 depicts the location of the larger facilities, including facilities in surrounding areas.

4.1.12.1 Federal Recreational Facilities

Cleveland National Forest

The Cleveland National Forest is 460,000 acres, of which 40,000 acres are within the SAMP Study Area. The Cleveland National Forest encompasses three mountain ranges: the Santa Ana, Palomar, and Laguna Mountains. Only a portion of the Santa Ana Mountains, within the Trabuco Ranger District, is within the SAMP Study Area. Recreational opportunities in the SAMP Study Area include numerous trails for riding, hiking, and bicycles; picnicking; and camping. Within the SAMP Study Area, the Blue Jay Campground provides year-round camping opportunities.

4.1.12.2 State Recreational Facilities

Doheny State Beach

Doheny State Beach is an 86-acre facility located in the City of Dana Point. It is generally bound by Pacific Coast Highway and Coast Highway on the northeast and the Pacific Ocean on the southwest; Dana Point Harbor is located on the northwest and Capistrano Beach County Park on the southeast. San Juan Creek flows through Capistrano Beach County Park to a small estuary and empties into the ocean. The park provides over a mile of beachfront. Activities at the park include surfing, volleyball, swimming, sunbathing, fishing, biking, picnicking, camping, and campfires.

Doheny State Beach is divided into three use areas. The area northwest of San Juan Creek is designated as a day use picnic area. Parking is provided in this area for approximately 700 vehicles. Other features include a large turf area, picnic tables, restrooms, showers, and the beach. A lifeguard tower and Visitors Center is located in this area. The Visitor Center includes aquariums and a simulated tide pool, administrative offices, and maintenance area. The second area is the campground area. Located southeast of San Juan Creek, this area provides 120 spaces for tent or recreational vehicle camping. The third area, a day use beach area, is located south of the campgrounds. This area has approximately 567 parking spaces, restroom buildings with chemical toilets, showers, fire rings, and seasonal lifeguard towers. (Doheny State Beach Preliminary General Plan and Draft EIR, December 2003)

4.1.12.3 Regional Parks

The countywide system of regional parks provides about 16,000 acres of land dedicated to park and recreation uses in Orange County. Three regional parks, General Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park, Caspers Wilderness Park, and O'Neill Regional Park, are located within the SAMP Study Area. Each of these parks is part of the County's overall park system and provides

large expanses for active and passive recreational uses. Although facilities are planned as part of the County of Orange Master Plan of Riding and Hiking Trails, there are no existing trails that link these regional parks. These parks are discussed below.

General Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park

The General Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park is located in unincorporated Orange County south and west of the community of Coto de Caza and east of the communities of Rancho Santa Margarita, Las Flores, and Wagon Wheel Canyon. The entrance of the Riley Wilderness Park is located at the corner of Oso Parkway and Coto de Caza Drive. The park is contiguous to the RMV Planning Area.

In January 1983, 524 acres for the park were irrevocably offered by the Coto de Caza Development Corporation to the County of Orange and accepted the same day. The property was offered for public park and recreational purposes and was named Wagon Wheel Canyon Wilderness Park. This park is a regional wilderness park that is defined in the Recreation Element of the Orange County General Plan as:

“A regional park in which the land retains its primeval character with minimal improvements and which is managed and protected to preserve natural processes. The park (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude of a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) is sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value.” (Section VII)

Wagon Wheel Canyon Wilderness Park, which was renamed the General Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park, was formally opened to the public and dedicated to Supervisor Riley on December 10, 1994. The park covers an area of mostly rolling hills and major oak groves. There is no General Development Plan for the park; however, the Orange County Board of Supervisors approved an interim operations plan on September 27, 1994. This interim operations plan currently remains in place (personal communication, H. Huggins). As part of the interim phase, the park offers low impact recreational activities including hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. There are also two vista points within the park. The County also offers a variety of programs to the public including, but not limited to, junior ranger, college internships, programs for school classes, nature/educational hikes, and stargazing. The park is used by the Boy Scouts for completing work associated with earning their badges. Informal picnicking is available.

The natural setting of the park is an important component of this resource. Plant communities known to occur at this park include scrub, grassland, riparian, and woodland. The plant communities present provide suitable habitat for a variety of plant and wildlife species, some of which are considered sensitive by state and federal resource agencies. Sensitive species known to occur within the General Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park include the orange-throated whiptail, San Diego horned lizard, red diamond rattlesnake, coastal California gnatcatcher, and southern California rufous-crowned sparrow.

The General Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; however, it should be noted that urban views and noise are experienced along portions of the trails and vista points. In an effort to preserve natural resources as this park, the County has imposed access restrictions to certain areas of

the park that have high quality coastal sage scrub supporting California gnatcatchers (primarily in the north/northwestern portion of the park).

Ronald W. Caspers Wilderness Park

The Ronald W. Caspers Wilderness Park encompasses approximately 8,500 acres. It is immediately adjacent to the RMV Proposed Project's Planning Area 3. Existing facilities at the park include various multi-use, pedestrian, and equestrian trails; an equestrian day use area; Starr Mesa Equestrian Campground; Live Oak Flats Campground; and a Visitors Center. Existing development at Caspers Wilderness Park is primarily west of Ortega Highway, which bisects the park. Access is provided via Ortega Highway.

In 1973, the Starr Foundation deeded the northern 3,779 acres of the Starr Ranch to the National Audubon Society for use as a wildlife sanctuary. In late 1973 and early 1974, the Orange County Board of Supervisors, under the direction of Chairman Ronald W. Caspers voted to purchase the southern 5,500 acres of Starr Ranch for use as a public recreation facility. On April 12, 1974, Starr Viejo Regional Park was opened as a primitive, wilderness day use and camping facility. On August 20, 1974, the Orange County Board of Supervisors changed the name of the park to Ronald W. Caspers Wilderness Park in honor and recognition of his foresight in acquiring and preserving this area of quality wilderness. In 1984, an additional 2,100 acres was dedicated by Rancho Mission Viejo bringing the park's total acreage to 8,500. Not all the park is currently accessible to the public.

Caspers Wilderness Park provides recreational uses such as camping, picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, photography, nature study, and astronomy. The park has campgrounds, restrooms with showers, picnic areas, an equestrian campground, and hiking and equestrian trails. Activities include guided nature walks, naturalist programs, and telescope observations.

O'Neill Regional Park

O'Neill Regional Park encompasses over 3,358 acres of oak/sycamore woodlands, grassy meadows, riparian, chaparral, and coastal sage scrub habitats. Located in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains, O'Neill Park offers picnic facilities, and overnight camping. At its closest point the park is located approximately one mile west of Planning Area 2 within the RMV Planning Area.

In 1948, the O'Neill family donated the initial 278 acres of Trabuco Canyon to the County of Orange for use as a regional park. Throughout the years, the O'Neill family donated additional acreage. Other neighboring owners, such as the Ramakrishna Monastery, wishing to preserve native habitat, donated property to the park. In 1982, Rancho Mission Viejo dedicated an additional 935 acres in the Arroyo Trabuco. An additional 735 acres in Tijeras Canyon was dedicated in 1996, and 258 acres were dedicated as mitigation for the Arroyo Trabuco Golf Course. O'Neill Regional Park is currently over 3,358 acres.

Recreation opportunities at the park include wildlife observation, bird watching, hiking, and mountain biking and horseback riding on park trails. The park is heavily wooded with coast live oak and sycamore trees. The hillsides surrounding the park are filled with cactus, wild buckwheat, sagebrush and chaparral of scrub oak, buckthorn and mountain mahogany.

O'Neill Park offers both day use and overnight camping facilities. The Oak Grove offers a shaded area, a turf area, and a playground for children. The Featherly area stretches along

Trabuco Creek, a seasonal waterway that flows from the Trabuco Peak to the Pacific Ocean. The mile long Mesa area includes viewpoints of Trabuco Canyon. The West area presents scenic trails. In each area, facilities include picnic tables, barbecues, water, and restrooms. Individual tent and recreational vehicle camping is available year round along Trabuco Creek in the main campground. Interpretive programs are frequently conducted Saturdays and Sundays. Ranger led nature hikes present local history and instruction on native wildlife. Campfires programs are hosted at the amphitheater after sunset throughout the year.

4.1.12.4 Trails and Bikeways

Riding and Hiking Trails

The County's regional riding and hiking trails link the harbors, beaches, parks, open space, and recreational areas. The Countywide regional trail network includes 348 miles of existing and proposed trails, including areas regulated by governmental agencies other than the County of Orange. The General Plans for the cities within the SAMP Study Area do not have separate riding and hiking trail plans. This system is designed to service the area within the SAMP boundary. These riding and hiking trails include equestrian, pedestrian, and mountain biking use. Many of the trails are developed and dedicated in conjunction with the surrounding development. In an effort to minimize impacts, ranch roads and fire roads have often been used to accommodate the trails with minimal additional impacts. Figure 4.1.12-2 illustrates the trails within the SAMP Study Area that are on the Regional Riding and Hiking Trails Map. It should be noted that the alignments are conceptual. Precise alignments are determined when the trail is actually developed and factors such as public safety, environmental impacts, and development cost are considered.

Staging areas are also shown on the figure. Staging areas typically provide parking and amenities such as watering troughs, drinking fountains, horse tie-ups, benches, and shade trees. The intent is that each staging area be studied for trail route implementation once planning is accomplished and adjacent land is developed.

Bikeways

The Orange County Transportation Authority adopted the Commuter Bikeway Strategic Plan in August 2001. The Commuter Bikeway Strategic Plan is a regional planning document that identifies existing and proposed bikeways in Orange County. Developed through the cooperation of the cities and the County, the Commuter Bikeway Strategic Plan provides a comprehensive network of bikeways to serve the County's needs.

The Commuter Bikeway Strategic Plan identifies three types of bikeways. A Class I bicycle trail is a paved facility, which is physically separated from a roadway and designated primarily for the use of bicycles. Crossflows by pedestrians and motorists are to be minimized. A Class II Bicycle lane is a facility featuring a striped lane on the paved area of a road for preferential use by bicycles. It is located along the edge of the paved area outside the motor vehicle travel lanes. Parking is restricted within a Class II bike lane. Where sufficient pavement width exists, it may be located between a parking lane and the outside motor vehicle travel lane. A Class III bicycle route is a facility typically identified by green and white (Type "G93") "Bike Route" guide signing only. There are usually no special lane designations, and parking may be permitted. Bicycle traffic may share either the roadway with motor vehicles or a sidewalk with pedestrians and, in either case, bicycle usage is considered secondary. Bike routes are a means to connect otherwise discontinuous segments of Class I or Class II bikeways. The Commuter Bikeway Strategic Plan bikeways in the SAMP Study Area are depicted on Figure 4.1.12-3. These

bikeways also are included on the County of Orange Master Plan of Bikeways. The Master Plan of Bikeways is a component of the Recreation Element of the General Plan.