

CONEJO CANYONS OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency
July 14, 2010



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Conejo Canyons Management Plan was prepared by COSCA in order to inventory the resources in the plan area, identify challenges and opportunities in managing these resources and suggest actions to be taken for the long-term management and environmental sustainability of the land and resources within the Conejo Canyons. This management plan is presented in six sections.

Section 1 is an introduction to the management plan with Figure 1-1 exhibiting the plan area boundaries and indicating important place names within the area. It begins with a discussion of the purpose of the plan, which is to provide a comprehensive guide for the long-term management of the Conejo Canyons' unique resources, while providing for compatible passive recreational activities. A summary of the planning process followed in the development of this plan is provided. The vision statement for the area, developed based on feedback received at the public workshops, is included in this section.

Section 2 describes the planning area in detail, including the location, adjacent land uses, property ownership, encumbrances and public utility rights-of-way. Additionally, Section 2 delineates and describes the four open space units (OSUs) into which the overall plan area has been divided. These OSUs are referred to as Arroyo Conejo, Canyons West, Lynnmere and Wildwood and their boundaries are shown in Figure 2-4. Aerial photographs of the individual OSUs are provided in Figures 4-6 through 4-9.

Section 3 presents a comprehensive review of the planning documents and policy framework that guide the management of the land within the plan area. Among these documents are the COSCA Management Policies and Guidelines as well as the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the Thousand Oaks General Plan. The Conejo Canyons Study, completed by the City of Thousand Oaks in 1976 and updated in 1979, is another important planning document that was consulted throughout the development of this management plan.

Section 4 is an inventory of the resources found in the plan area including physical, biological, cultural, historic, paleontological, visual/aesthetic, water and recreational. Topography, geology, hydrology and drainage are discussed in the physical resources section. The biological resources section is quite extensive and covers the seven predominant vegetation types and their distribution throughout the area. Also addressed are non-native plants, wildlife species, habitat types, special status species and wildlife corridors. The cultural and historic resources sections briefly describe past uses and occupants of the land such as Native American Chumash populations and later cattle and sheep ranching operations. The incredibly diverse landscape within the plan area is illustrated in the visual and aesthetic resources section, while the recreational resources section identifies the passive recreation opportunities available to the public. Figures 4-5, 4-10 and 4-11 display the existing and proposed trails and visitor amenities as well as the construction priorities for the proposed trails.

Section 5 identifies the goals and objectives of the management plan and recommends actions to be taken to achieve said goals and objectives. A number of these goals and objectives address the importance of protecting biological resources, such as special status plant species and wildlife, as well as preserving cultural resources and water quality. Providing passive recreational opportunities to the public is an important aspect of managing this area, therefore recreational resources and visitor use make up a significant portion of Section 5, with categories such as facilities, trails, emergency access and public education/signage. The purpose of the recreation-related goals and objectives is to ensure that the

goals and objectives are addressed to a level that provides for an excellent visitor experience in the open space.

Section 6 is a complete list of the documents and studies used during the preparation of this management plan. Appendices A and B are comprehensive lists of the vascular plants and the fauna of the Conejo Canyons.

1 INTRODUCTION



View of Conejo Creek from Wildwood Mesa (Photo: Anne Dove).

The Conejo Canyons is a visually spectacular 3,641-acre open space area (*Figure 1-1: Conejo Canyons Management Plan Area*) that is rich with natural resources and has been identified as a community treasure that should be preserved since the mid-1970's. Located in the northwest portion of the City of Thousand Oaks, the Conejo Canyons area is made up of four distinct open space units which together contain many of the dominant vegetation types found in Southern California's coastal Mediterranean region, including coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodlands and riparian woodlands. This area is home to healthy populations of rare and endangered plants and animals, and was home to the Chumash for thousands of years. A regionally significant wildlife corridor exists in this area which large mammals such as mule deer, mountain lion, bobcat and coyote, live in and migrate across. The Conejo Canyons also provides abundant passive recreational opportunities, with miles of existing multi-purpose trails.

The Conejo Canyons area was protected as permanent open space through a 40-year effort by local residents and government agencies that recognized its unique natural beauty as something that should be protected for future generations. Wildwood Park was the first property protected within this area in 1969. The most recent addition to the Conejo Canyons was the Western Plateau, which was protected in 2002 by the City of Thousand Oaks through a development allotment transfer. With the protection of this area complete, this management plan will serve as a guide to ensure the long-term protection of the land and its natural resources while providing for passive recreational opportunities and public access.

This Conejo Canyons Management Plan (Management Plan) was prepared by the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency (COSCA) with technical assistance from the National Park Service (NPS) Rivers,

Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program. RTCA is a community assistance program of NPS that supports community groups and public agencies in achieving natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation goals. COSCA is a joint powers agency that was formed between the City of Thousand Oaks (City) and the Conejo Recreation and Park District (CRPD) in 1977 in order to implement the adopted goals of the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the City's General Plan. Through the joint powers agreement that created COSCA, both agencies work together to conserve natural open space lands, assure coordination of local land use and resource management decisions and focus community resources toward achievement of General Plan goals. COSCA's mission is to preserve, protect and manage all of the natural resources that exist within the open space system.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The purpose of the Management Plan is to provide a comprehensive guide for the long-term management of the Conejo Canyons' unique natural, cultural and scenic resources while providing for compatible passive multi-use, trail-based recreational activities. Specifically, the Management Plan is intended to:

- Create an inventory of the natural and cultural resources that exist within the plan area, including rare, endangered or sensitive plant and animal species;
- Identify key management issues and strategies needed to protect the area's resources, including habitat restoration, environmental monitoring, sensitive species protection, cultural resource stabilization and wildfire management;
- Create a priority-based list of resource management actions;
- Develop a public access plan that identifies existing and planned multi-use trails and trailheads;
- Develop a visitor improvement plan that identifies the locations of existing and planned improvements such as bridges, restrooms, picnic areas, benches and hitching posts; and
- Establish priorities for implementation of proposed recreational improvements based on public input, available resources, and management capabilities throughout the COSCA open space system.

1.2 PLANNING PROCESS

In January 2005, the COSCA Board of Directors directed staff to initiate the preparation of a management plan for the Conejo Canyons. At that time, all major potential open space areas in the northwest portion of Thousand Oaks had been preserved, so the boundaries of the Conejo Canyons open space would remain relatively unchanged. Additionally, there was significant community interest in the area, particularly with regard to improved trail access. Construction of major improvements at the Hill Canyon Wastewater Treatment Plant had also been completed, including new wetland habitat and removal of giant reed along the Conejo Creek, therefore future construction disturbance would be minimal.

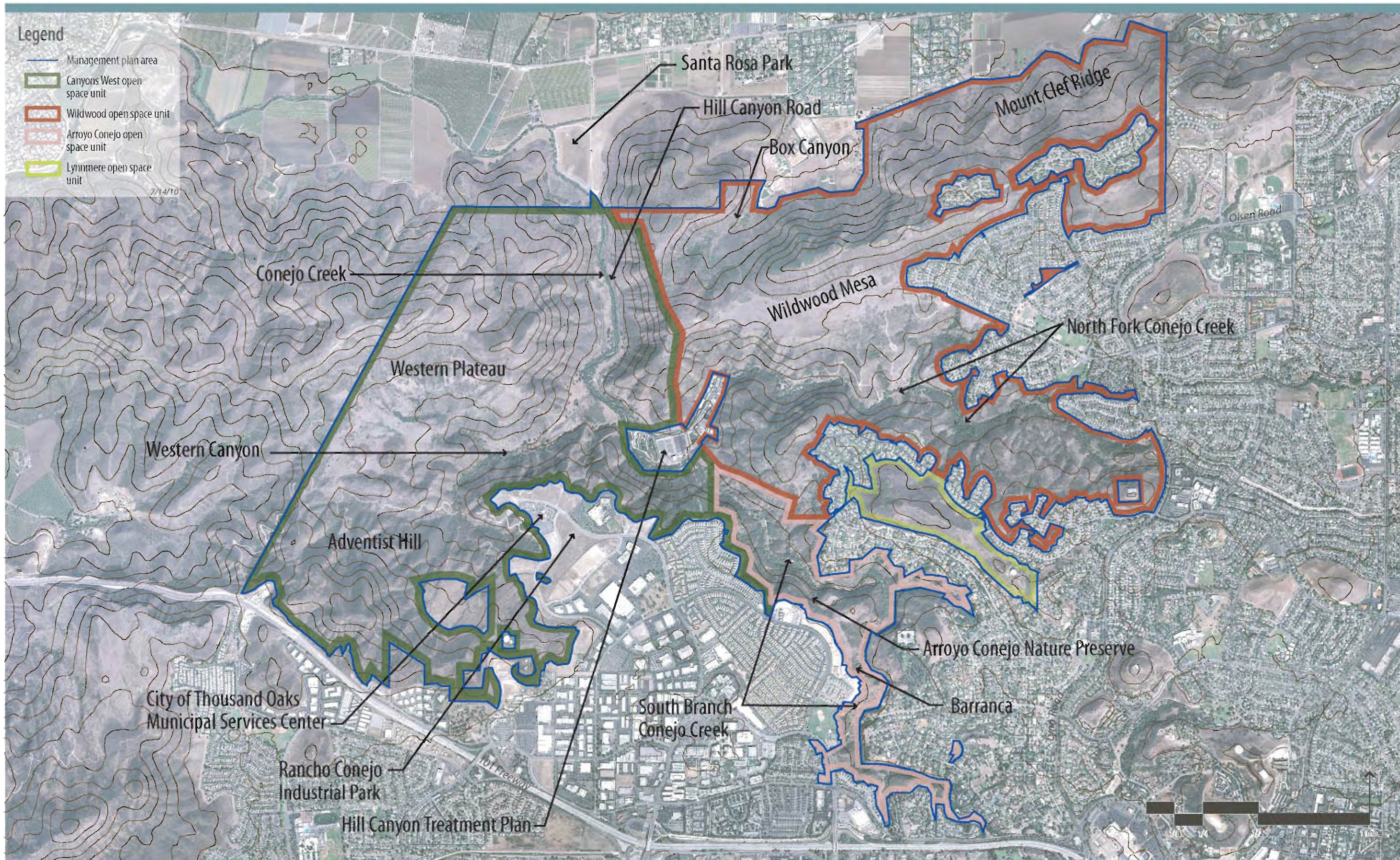
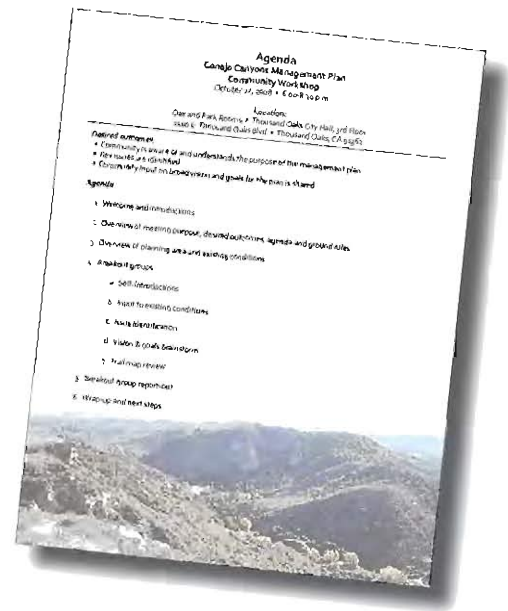


Figure 1-1 Conejo Canyons Management Plan Area



Upon receiving Board authorization to prepare the Management Plan, staff reviewed existing documents and studies related to the Conejo Canyons area and developed an initial list of attributes, natural resources, unique features, recreational uses and opportunities that exist within the area. Field research was conducted to identify sensitive resources to be protected and habitat to be restored.

In August 2007, COSCA applied for technical assistance from the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. Together COSCA and RTCA developed a public engagement process that included a pair of public workshops on October 22, 2008 and September 30, 2009 to identify key management issues, community desires for management outcomes, trail locations, policies, and feedback on the draft Management Plan.



1.3 VISION

During the first workshop, participants were asked to provide ideas about their vision for the long-term future of the Conejo Canyons area. Based on this input, the following vision statement was developed to provide guidance for long-term planning for the area:



Workshop participants review draft trails map.

“The Conejo Canyons area is a spectacular natural treasure that should remain substantially as it is today. It serves as a key linkage in a regional network of open space for habitat connectivity and ecosystem health while also providing scenic vistas and compatible multiple-use trails for future generations.”

The purpose of the vision statement is to describe the desired long-term outcome that will result from the implementation of the Management Plan. The goals, objectives and actions support the eventual realization of this vision.

AMPHIBIANS (cont.)	
Ensatina	<i>Ensatina eschscholtzii</i>
Western Toad	<i>Bufo boreas</i>
California Treefrog	<i>Pseudacris cadaverina</i>
Pacific Treefrog	<i>Pseudacris regilla</i>
California Red-legged Frog	<i>Rana draytonii</i>
American Bullfrog	<i>Rana catesbeiana</i>
FISHES	
Arroyo Chub	<i>Gila orcutti</i>
Santa Anna Mountain Sucker	<i>Pantosteus santaanae</i>
Speckled Dace	<i>Rhynchichthys osculus</i>
Threadfin Shad	<i>Dorosoma pretenense</i>
Bluegill	<i>Lepomis machrochirus</i>
Green Sunfish	<i>Lepomis microlophus</i>
<i>Other introduced species are also possible in this group.</i>	