
II. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

A. LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

The proposed Canyon Hills project site is located at 8000 West La Tuna Canyon Road in the City of Los Angeles (the “City”). The project site is entirely within the Verdugo Mountains in the northeastern San Fernando Valley. The Verdugo Mountains are geographically defined by the San Fernando Valley to the west, the Los Angeles Basin to the south, the San Gabriel Valley to the east, and the communities of Sunland and Tujunga to the north (see Figure II-1).

The 887-acre project site is an irregularly-shaped property that extends along a southeast to northwest axis, and is roughly bounded by Verdugo Crestline Drive on the north and La Tuna Canyon Road on the south. The Foothill Freeway (Interstate 210) bisects the project site into northern and southern subareas. The project site is bounded on the north by single-family homes within the Sunland and Tujunga communities. To the northeast and east, the project site borders single-family homes within the community of Tujunga.

B. OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This section provides a brief overview of the project site’s regional and local setting. Additional descriptions of the environmental setting as it relates to each of the environmental issues analyzed in this Draft EIR are included in the environmental setting discussions contained within Sections IV.A through IV.N. Also, a list of related projects used as the basis for the discussion of cumulative impacts in Section IV (Environmental Impact Analysis) is provided below.

Regional Setting

The Canyon Hills project site is located in the northeastern San Fernando Valley in the City, approximately 15 miles north of downtown Los Angeles. As previously discussed, the project site is entirely contained within the Verdugo Mountains. Although surrounded by the urbanization of the greater Los Angeles region, the Verdugo Mountains remain a largely undeveloped island of steep terrain. Much of the higher elevations of the Verdugo Mountains have been preserved as permanent open space through public acquisitions. However, the lower gentler slopes have been subject to development, such as in the communities of Glendale and Sunland-Tujunga. Within the Verdugo Mountains, the project site is located in an undeveloped area in the upper reaches of La Tuna Canyon, a major watershed that drains westerly to the eastern end of the San Fernando Valley.

Figure II-1, Project Location and Regional Vicinity

Local Setting

The project site is largely bounded by undeveloped land and existing residential areas. The project site's northern boundary roughly coincides with the major ridgeline that divides La Tuna Canyon on the south from the communities of Sunland and Tujunga to the north. Most of the steeply descending north-facing slopes north of the project site are undeveloped. There are existing single-family homes and neighborhoods located adjacent to the northeastern portion of the project site. Some of the homes to the northeast overlook the project site.

Undeveloped hillsides comprise much of the land to the south of the project site, some of which have been permanently preserved as open space. In particular, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy owns the 1,100-acre La Tuna Canyon Park located directly to the south of the project site. Wildwood Canyon Park, DeBell Golf Course and residential neighborhoods, and the City of Burbank are also located south of the project site. In addition, there is a small cluster of homes along La Tuna Canyon Road near the southwestern boundary of the project site north of La Tuna Canyon Road. The City of Glendale is located approximately 1.5 miles east of the project site.

West of the project site, residential development is concentrated along La Tuna Canyon Road. Further west, in the vicinity of Sunland Boulevard, there are commercial and industrial land uses. The commercial development primarily consists of small retail business along Sunland Boulevard. A dam and a debris basin are also located to the west of the project site.

The Hansen Dam Recreation Area is located at the western end of the Tujunga Wash, northwest of the project site. The Hansen Dam Recreation Area offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including biking, educational programs, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, and water sports. Just east of the project site, Haines Canyon Park and Verdugo Hills Golf Course provide additional recreational opportunities to nearby residents.

Project Site

The project site is an 887-acre, irregularly-shaped property that extends along a southeast to northwest axis, and is roughly bounded by Verdugo Crestline Drive on the north and La Tuna Canyon Road on the south. The project site is bisected into northern and southern subareas by Interstate 210. The portion of the freeway that passes through the project site was constructed in the early 1970s. Several cut and fill areas with large embankments within the project site were constructed in conjunction with the freeway. Various minor access roads and leveled areas are mainly concentrated in the northern subarea of the project site. Southern California Edison (SCE) regional electrical transmission lines with towers and associated right-of-way (ROW) transect the project site north of the freeway from east to west. Fire roads and breaks meander throughout the project site. In addition, a neighboring resident

recently constructed an equestrian arena, corral fence, rail fence and feed shed that encroach onto the southwest corner of the project site.

Generally, the project site is characterized by steep mountainous terrain with distinctive ridgelines that drop into deep “V” shaped canyons. With local elevation changes up to 904 vertical feet, elevations range from approximately 1,160 feet above sea level (ASL) to 2,064 feet ASL. Natural slope gradients range from 3:1 to as steep as 0.75:1 (horizontal:vertical). The northern subarea of the project site is distinguished by an east-west trending ridgeline with several connecting north-south trending secondary ridgelines. Elevations in the northern subarea of the project site range from approximately 1,416 feet ASL to 2,064 feet ASL. The southern subarea of the project site is dominated by north-south trending ridgelines with intervening canyons. Elevations in the southern subarea of the project site range from approximately 1,160 feet ASL to 1,818 feet ASL. The La Tuna Canyon drainage, which drains westerly to the San Fernando Valley, is the most prominent topographic feature in the southern subarea of the project site.

The majority of the project site is covered by California native vegetation typically found in chaparral and open scrub habitats, and is drought tolerant. Vegetation on the project site generally includes desert sage, trees, scrub and grass. There are approximately 1,307 oak trees (*Quercus agrifolia*)¹ on the project site with diameters at breast height (DBH) at eight inches or greater. There are approximately 148 sycamore trees (*Platanus racemosa*) with DBHs of 12 inches or greater on the project site.

Wildlife in the area includes a number of large and small animal species, including coyotes, mule deer, American badgers, bobcats, gray foxes, woodrats, raccoons, birds, lizards and snakes. While the rugged landscape and dense vegetation that dominate the project site somewhat restricts wildlife movement by larger animals, there are currently four local wildlife movement paths across portions of the project site that utilize existing drainages and unimproved roads. These and other biological resources are discussed in further detail in Section IV.D (Biological Resources).

Applicable Local and Regional Plans

City of Los Angeles General Plan

The project site is governed by the City of Los Angeles Sunland-Tujunga-Lake View Terrace-Shadow Hills-East La Tuna Canyon Community Plan (“Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan”) and the Sun Valley-La Tuna Canyon Community Plan (“Sun Valley Community Plan”), which comprise portions of

¹ *The 1,307 oak trees do not include two trees on the Duke Property that may be impacted as a result of the proposed project (see Section IV.D (Biological Resources)).*

the Land Use Element of the City's General Plan. The western portion of the project site, consisting of approximately 250 acres (28 percent), lies within the Sun Valley Community Plan area. The eastern portion of the project site, consisting of approximately 637 acres (72 percent), is located in the Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan area. In these Community Plan areas, portions of the project site have been designated as Minimum Residential, Very Low I Residential, Very Low II Residential and Open Space.

As shown on Table II-1, the Community Plans currently designate approximately 748 acres (84.3 percent) of the project site as Minimum Residential (up to 1 dwelling unit per acre). The Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan designates smaller areas in the eastern portion of the project site as Very Low I Residential (1 to 3 dwelling units per acre) and Very Low II Residential (3 to 4 dwelling units per acre). The Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan encourages the clustering of development in hillside areas. The proposed project is consistent with the applicable policies of the Sunland-Tujunga and Sun Valley Community Plans. The consistency of the proposed project with Community Plans is discussed in detail in Section IV.G (Land Use).

Table II-1
Existing Community Plan Designations
Canyon Hills Project

Community Plan Designation	Acres
Minimum Residential	748
Very Low I Residential	120
Very Low II Residential	10
Open Space	9
Total	887

San Gabriel/Verdugo Mountains Scenic Preservation Specific Plan

The draft San Gabriel/Verdugo Mountains Scenic Preservation Specific Plan (Draft Specific Plan) includes requirements and restrictions that are generally applicable to the proposed project. The proposed project has been designed for consistency with the Draft Specific Plan. The consistency of the proposed project with the Draft Specific Plan is discussed in detail in Section IV.G (Land Use).

Significant Ecological Areas (County of Los Angeles General Plan)

The project site is within the County of Los Angeles Verdugo Mountains Significant Ecological Area (SEA) No. 40. However, County SEA policies only apply to areas outside of incorporated cities, and the project site is entirely contained within the City (see Section IV.G (Land Use) for additional information).

Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide

Although the project site is within Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) planning area, according to SCAG, the proposed project is not regionally significant per SCAG Intergovernmental Review (IGR) Criteria and CEQA.² Therefore, the SCAG Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide (RCPG) does not include any policies that are applicable to the proposed project. The RCPG is discussed in more detail in Section IV.G (Land Use).

City of Los Angeles Municipal Code

The project site is currently zoned A1 (Agricultural), A1-K (Agricultural-Equestrian) and RE11 (Residential Estate), as shown in Table II-2 and Figure IV.G-4. The consistency of the proposed project with the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) is discussed in detail in Section IV.G (Land Use).

**Table II-2
Existing Zoning Designations
Canyon Hills Project**

Zoning Designation	Acres
A1 Agricultural	860
A1-K Agricultural – Equestrian	24
RE11 Residential Estate	3
Total	887

C. RELATED PROJECTS

Sections 15126 and 15130 of the CEQA Guidelines provide that EIRs consider the significant environmental effects of a proposed project, as well as “cumulative impacts.” Cumulative impacts are two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts (CEQA Guidelines Section 15355).

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15130, cumulative impacts are anticipated impacts of the proposed project along with reasonably foreseeable growth. Reasonably foreseeable growth may be based on:

- A list of past, present, and probably future projects producing related or cumulative impacts, including, if necessary, those projects outside the control of the agency; or

² Correspondence from SCAG, Jeffrey M. Smith, AICP, Senior Regional Planner, September 19, 2002.

- A summary of projections contained in the adopted general plan or related planning document, or in a prior environmental document which has been adopted or certified, which described or evaluated regional or area wide conditions contributing to the cumulative impact.

All proposed, recently approved, under construction, and reasonably foreseeable projects that could produce a related or cumulative impact on the local environment when considered in conjunction with the proposed project are evaluated in this Draft EIR. An analysis of the cumulative impacts associated with these related projects and the proposed project is provided in the cumulative impact discussion under each individual impact category in Section IV (Environmental Impact Analysis) of this Draft EIR.

In coordination with the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation, City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, and the City of Glendale Department of Transportation, a list of 13 related projects was developed. The list of related projects consists of approved or proposed projects within the project area. As shown in Table II-3, the 13 projects include various land uses such as single-family residential, commercial, retail, restaurant and a golf course. The locations of the related projects are shown in Figure II-2.

Cumulative impacts analyzed in this Draft EIR were conservatively assessed. Some of the related projects may not be approved, and some approved projects may not be developed. In addition, many of the related projects have been or will be subject to a variety of mitigation measures that will reduce the potential environmental impacts associated with those projects. However, with limited exceptions, those mitigation measures have not been taken into account in projecting the environmental impact of the related projects. Therefore, the cumulative analyses set forth below are conservative and result in greater impacts than actually anticipated.

**Table II-3
Related Projects^a
Canyon Hills Project**

Map No.	Project	Location	Land Use	Size	Status
1	99-169	6723 Foothill Boulevard	Fast-Food Restaurant	3,050 sf	Proposed
2	00-401	7611 Foothill Boulevard	Mini-Market (expansion)	3,827 sf	Proposed
3	00-3267 ^b	6520 Foothill Boulevard (Tujunga Shopping Center)	Shopping Center	46,814 sf	Under Construction
4	97-0155	7433 Apperson Street	Church (expansion)	8,000 sf	Proposed
5	00-0687	6901 Foothill Boulevard	Auto Repair	6,080 sf	Proposed
6	00-2989	8250 Foothill Boulevard	Auto Repair	25,000 sf	Proposed
7		Duke Development/Hill View Estates	Single-Family Residential	10 DU	Approved
8	01-3434	ARCO Station 7200 Foothill Boulevard	Gas Station Convenience Store Car Wash	20 fuel pos. 3,600 sf	Proposed
9		La Crescenta	Single-Family Residential	125 DU	Proposed
10	^c	Verdugo Hills Family YMCA Project 6840 Foothill Boulevard	YMCA (expansion)	7,508 sf	Proposed
11		Foothill Boulevard between Foothill Place and Wentworth Street	Golf Course	160 acres	Under Construction
12	^d	All Nations Church Foothill Boulevard east of Wheatland Ave. and I-210 Ramps	Sanctuary/Chapel/Sunday School/Administrative Office Gymnasium Tennis Courts	52,000 GSF 8,000 GSF 5 courts	Approved
13		K-Mart Expansion Southwest corner of Foothill Boulevard and Woodward Avenue	Discount Store (expansion)	56,426 GSF	Proposed

^a Source: City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation and Department of Planning.

^b Source: "Traffic Impact Study, Tujunga Shopping Center," prepared by LLG Engineers, February, 2000.

^c Source: "Traffic Impact Study, Verdugo Hills Family YMCA Project," prepared by LLG Engineers, June, 2002.

^d Source: "Traffic Impact Study, All Nations Church," prepared by LLG Engineers, September, 1999.

Figure II-2, Location of Related Projects