CHAPTER 2.0
ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

2.1 PROJECT LOCATION

San Dieguito Lagoon is located at the terminus of the San Dieguito river valley in northern San Diego County, as shown in Figure 2-1, Regional Map. The San Dieguito River drains an approximately 345-square-mile watershed, which is much larger than the watersheds of other regional lagoons. The lagoon currently covers about 500 acres, the majority of which is salt marsh (SFEI 2014), but which also includes transitional and upland buffer areas. The lagoon is bordered to the west by the Pacific Ocean, to the south by gradual hillsides and residential neighborhoods in the cities of San Diego and Del Mar, and to the north by commercial and residential development in the cities of San Diego and Del Mar. The San Dieguito river valley, which includes a mix of agricultural uses, residential uses, golf courses, and undeveloped land, extends east from the lagoon.

While San Dieguito Lagoon spans the east and west sides of I-5, the proposed project site is located entirely east of I-5, as shown in Figure 2-2, Vicinity Map. The site is currently composed of disturbed riparian and upland areas adjacent to lagoon wetlands and the San Dieguito River. There are two elements of the proposed project as shown in the figure; the W-19 restoration site (approximately 141 acres) and the disposal site located south of the W-19 site (approximately 30 acres). These elements would be joined by temporary haul routes. Intermittent maintenance within the W-19 restoration site would also occur as part of the proposed project, and sandy material placed on the beach west of the lagoon, as shown in Figure 2-2. The overall proposed project area is located east of I-5, south of Via de la Valle, and west/northwest of El Camino Real, with the exception of these beach maintenance placement sites. The W-19 site is located adjacent to the San Dieguito River and within areas that were historically part of the larger wetland system within San Dieguito Lagoon, but until fairly recently had been farmed. The site is bisected by a San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) utility corridor that crosses the site in a northwest/southeast alignment. Additionally, a 10-foot-wide easement for a 10-inch pipeline is located through the middle of the proposed project site. This easement was granted in 1915 and has since been abandoned.

The W-19 site is located within the City of San Diego jurisdiction and is primarily owned by the JPA, while CDFW and 22nd District Agricultural Association each own a parcel in the northern area. The westernmost parcels are currently owned by the City of San Diego, who has an agreement to sell the land to the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) once the W-19 site has received all necessary federal and state permits. SANDAG will transfer the property to the JPA after the site meets its success criteria. The City of San Diego owns the disposal site. Temporary offroad haul routes used to transport materials from the restoration site to the disposal site would traverse lands owned by the JPA and the City of San Diego. Figure 2-3, Ownership, shows the ownership of each entity.
Regional Map

Project Location
San Dieguito Lagoon W-19 Restoration Project Final EIR
P:\2012\60274999_SD_W19\05Graphics\5.4_Proj_Graphics\Figures\Fig1regmap.ai dbrady 7/15/15
* The proposed materials placement sites are the same as those used for maintenance dredging required by the SCE Restoration Project (DS-40).
"The westernmost parcels are currently owned by the City of San Diego, who has an agreement to sell the land to SANDAG once the W-19 site has received all necessary federal and state permits. SANDAG will transfer the property to the JPA after the site meets its success criteria.
The JPA is an independent local government agency established by the County of San Diego and the cities of Del Mar, Escondido, Poway, San Diego, and Solana Beach for the purpose of creating a greenway and natural open space park system in the San Dieguito river valley. The JPA manages the portions of the lagoon and river valley under their ownership, the trail network, and the SCE restoration project area.

Maintenance of established wetland areas within W-19 would also be included in the proposed project. Deposited sediment would be removed from the W-19 site after severe storm events and placed on area beaches adjacent to the lagoon inlet (maintenance placement sites). These beaches are currently used as placement sites for the SCE restoration project inlet maintenance, and are located within the City of Del Mar west of the Del Mar Fairgrounds.

2.2 REGIONAL CONTEXT OF LAGOONS AND COASTAL WETLANDS IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

A recent study conducted by the San Francisco Estuarine Institute (SFEI 2014) examined the historical conditions of six regional lagoons/estuaries along the northern San Diego coast, including San Dieguito Lagoon. Each of the northern San Diego lagoons has experienced substantial transformations over the past centuries due to human development and influence. Since about 1850, an overall loss has occurred of 48 percent of historical estuarine habitat types along the southern California coast (generally Ventura to the United States-Mexico border). Estuarine wetlands in the area (including both vegetated and unvegetated habitat types) have experienced a 75 to 78 percent loss of acreage (Stein 2014). As a result, the composition of estuaries in the counties has shifted. In San Diego, there has been a substantial increase in water-filled bodies (subtidal systems) while both intertidal and vegetated wetlands have decreased (although this is due primarily to Mission Bay and San Diego Bay).

Coastal lagoons in San Diego provide critical functions in support of wildlife and plant species. Although the specific range of functions provided by each lagoon depends on the site’s hydrology, salinity level, and resultant habitat types, together these systems provide a number of ecological benefits, including migratory shorebird habitat, habitat for various federal- and state-listed species, nursery and refugia for fish species, erosion protection for shorelines, and littoral sand delivery to the coast (Zedler 1996).

2.3 HISTORICAL HABITAT AND LAGOON MODIFICATIONS AT SAN DIEGUITO

Similar to the other northern San Diego lagoons, San Dieguito Lagoon historically supported a range of habitats including vegetated salt and brackish marsh, associated tidal embayments, sloughs, and mudflats. Beginning in the early 20th century, large portions of the San Dieguito Lagoon marsh plain were filled for construction of roads, an airfield, the Del Mar Fairgrounds, and a shopping center. During the same period the lagoon and marshland were being filled, the surrounding area was developed for a variety of commercial and residential uses. Today, less than half of the historical wetlands remain intact and the estuary’s area is greatly reduced from its historical extent, although restoration efforts in recent years have compensated for this loss to some degree.

Changes within the lagoon and its watershed has historically resulted in changes to the hydrologic function of the lagoon system. The construction of Lake Hodges Dam in 1918
decreased freshwater input into the lagoon and altered salinity gradients within the system. This reduction may have also resulted in a reduced frequency and/or duration of an open inlet lagoon. Consequently, the ecological function of the tidal marsh ecosystem components and the regular influence of the ocean tidal waters have been substantially diminished. A large portion of the San Dieguito Lagoon complex, including the W-19 restoration site, was converted from wetland to upland as a result of these local and upstream human activities, particularly the filling-in of the river valley for agriculture and construction of the dam and subsequent decrease in freshwater inputs to the lagoon. However, recent lagoon restoration has improved these conditions.

Between 2006 and 2011, the San Dieguito Wetlands Restoration Project (SCH No. 98061010), created large areas of salt marsh within San Dieguito Lagoon, south and east of the historical lagoon (referred to as the SCE restoration project). The project, which was undertaken by SCE as mitigation for operational impacts of SONGS, restored approximately 440 acres within the lagoon, including the creation of tidally influenced wetlands (Figure 2-2). The SCE restoration project also resulted in restoration of much of the agricultural land within the lagoon complex to coastal sage scrub/native grassland vegetation. Continued SCE work within the lagoon includes a 1-acre wetland site referenced as W6A, also shown in Figure 2-2.

The proposed W-19 restoration site was historically within the freshwater/brackish wetland area of the lagoon (SFEI 2014), and more recently was used for tomato farming. Since the purchase of the site by the JPA in 2004, agricultural uses have been halted and habitat transition has occurred. Currently, the site primarily consists of nonnative grasslands, dense coyote bush scrub, and nonnative riparian areas. A portion of the area proposed for materials disposal is used as a disposal site (DS-36) for the SCE restoration project, as further described in Section 3.3. The DS-36 area continues to be intermittently used by SCE and is currently unvegetated (Nordby, personal communication, 2016a). The remainder of the proposed disposal site currently contains coyote bush scrub.

The Del Mar Fairgrounds South Overflow Lot Project (owned and used by the 22nd District Agricultural Association), shown in Figure 2-2, recently restored approximately 3.2 acres of tidal wetlands along the northern bank of the river channel adjacent to the fairgrounds. A second phase, which will restore the remaining 11.2 acres of the South Overflow lot, began construction in the fall of 2016.

2.4 GENERAL PLANNING CONTEXT

A summary of applicable regulations and jurisdictions for the proposed project is provided below. A more extensive discussion of regulatory environment is provided in Section 5.1, Land Use and Recreation.

**City of San Diego North City Urbanizing Area**

The City of San Diego North City Future Urbanizing Area (NCFUA) extends east from I-5 almost to Interstate 15. Santa Fe Valley serves as the NCFUA’s northern boundary, and Los Peñasquitos Canyon borders the NCFUA to the south. The project site is located in Subarea II of
2.0 Environmental Setting

the NCFUA and is designated as Environmental Tier. Planning and land use policies for this area are contained in the North City Future Urbanizing Area Framework Plan (Framework Plan).

San Dieguito River Park Concept Plan

The project site is located within the Focused Planning Area of the JPA’s San Dieguito River Park, as reflected in the San Dieguito River Park Concept Plan (Concept Plan), adopted in 1994 (San Dieguito River Park JPA 2002). To achieve its goal, the Concept Plan proposed preparation of individual master plans for the various landscape units included in the River Park boundary. In 2000, the JPA adopted the Park Master Plan for the Coastal Area, which includes the San Dieguito Lagoon area and is described below.

San Dieguito River Park Master Plan for the Coastal Area

The Park Master Plan provides a framework for implementing community goals for the restoration of the San Dieguito Lagoon ecosystem, both tidal and nontidal, and for the provision of public access trails and amenities for public enjoyment and nature study (San Dieguito River Park JPA 2000). Boundaries established by the Park Master Plan encompass publicly owned land in and around San Dieguito Lagoon and the San Dieguito River on the west side of I-5 as well as the east side of the interstate, but include only the western portion of the W-19 site as the rest was in private ownership at the time the Plan was prepared. The Park Master Plan also provides designations for specific areas within these larger boundaries as potential restoration opportunities, including tidal wetland restoration and nontidal habitat restoration. Only the western portion of the proposed project site is included within the present Park Master Plan boundaries; in that area, restoration plans show a variety of wetland and upland habitat types such as grasslands, seasonal salt marsh, high marsh, and exposed mud flats. The proposed project would update the Park Master Plan boundary to include the entire W-19 restoration site, as described in Chapter 3. Existing and proposed recreational opportunities, including trails, are also identified in the Park Master Plan, including within and around the project site.

Coastal Zone

The W-19 site and disposal site are located within the Coastal Zone as designated by the CCC. Various Coastal Zone classifications throughout the project area allow for local jurisdiction authority under the North City Local Coastal Program (LCP) as well as some deferred certification zones with permit authority retained by the CCC. Beach maintenance placement sites are also located in the coastal zone, within the City of Del Mar LCP jurisdictional area. Due to the multiple jurisdictions overlaying the project site, a Consolidated Coastal Development Permit (CDP) may be requested from the CCC, streamlining permitting processes.

I-5 North Coast Corridor Public Works Plan/Transportation and Resource Enhancement Program

The proposed project is identified as a mitigation opportunity within the I-5 North Coast Corridor Public Works Plan/Transportation and Resource Enhancement Program (PWP/TREP), which describes transit, environmental, and coastal access improvements along the I-5 North
Coast Corridor over the next 30 years. Caltrans worked with SANDAG, transit agencies, and local jurisdictions to develop the improvements along the corridor and obtain CCC agreement. Specifically, the PWP/TREP considers the San Dieguito W-19 Restoration Project as a mitigation opportunity for the establishment of 47.3 acres of coastal wetland and 9.6 acres of upland habitat, as well as the restoration of 19.8 additional acres of upland.
2.0 Environmental Setting

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