

## 8.14 San Jose Hills Communities

### A. INTRODUCTION

The unincorporated communities of Walnut Islands and West San Dimas—referred to here as the San Jose Hills Communities—share similar geographic features with topographic variation, creeks and drainage channels, hazards, and biological resources. The San Jose Hills Communities have land uses that are made up primarily of pockets of residential development, equestrian uses, undeveloped land, institutional land, and designated open space, located along the wildland/urban interface. Below is a brief description of the characteristics and features of each of the communities.

- Walnut Islands
- West San Dimas

#### San Jose Hills Communities

### Walnut Islands

The Walnut Islands is 3.8 square miles, with a population of 5,150, located in the central part of the Planning Area. It shares boundaries with San Dimas and Covina to the north, Pomona to the east, Walnut to the south, and West Covina to the west. In the early 20th century, land surrounding the Walnut Islands was primarily used for agriculture. The area retains some rural elements, including a prevalence of horsekeeping.

Walnut Islands consists of hilly land with primarily residential uses, some government uses, and institutional uses. It contains no commercially zoned land. The East San Gabriel Valley Significant Ecological Area (SEA) is designated on parts of the community. The SEA contains sensitive and rare habitats and species that necessitate protections, including critical habitat for the federally-threatened coastal gnatcatcher (*Poliioptila californica*), some of the largest remaining stands of native black walnut woodlands, and waterways which contain rare habitat.

### West San Dimas

West San Dimas is a community of 229.2 acres, with a population of approximately 330 people, located in the northern portion of the Planning Area. It is surrounded by San Dimas. Most of the homes were built in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of the land is designated open space, known as the Walnut Creek Park, owned and managed by LA County Parks and Recreation and the Watershed Conservation

Authority. The remainder of the land remains privately-owned and undeveloped or used by an institution.

Walnut Creek Park consists of almost 70 acres of woodlands and coastal sage scrub with one of the only remaining natural waterways in the ESGV flowing through it and one of the best riparian oak woodlands in the County. Large portions of West San Dimas, including Walnut Creek, are in the East San Gabriel Valley SEA.

## B. COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following presents a summary of community challenges and opportunities learned from community feedback and an analysis of existing conditions in the communities (see **Table SJHC-1, San Jose Hills Communities Challenges and Opportunities**). These challenges and opportunities serve to inform the preparation of community-specific land use, zoning, policies, and programs for the San Jose Hills Communities.

**TABLE SJHC-1 San Jose Hills Communities Challenges and Opportunities**

### 1. Wildland/Urban Interface

**Limiting Wildland/Urban Interface.** Recent residential and institutional development in the ESGV has occurred within the wildland/urban interface, with considerable negative impacts to natural resources and wildlife. This growth exacerbates wildfire hazard threats for both the residential populations and habitat and causes further habitat fragmentation.

**Wildlife Movement and Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions.** Development encroaching into habitat areas restricts wildlife movement and increases habitat loss. The increased presence of roads results in collisions and increased endangerment to wildlife.

**Wildfire and Safety Risks.** Walnut Islands has extensive areas in Very High Fire Hazards Severity Zones (VHFHSZs). Development in these areas results in greater risk to communities, wildlife, natural resources, and increased costs for residents and agencies for fire protection. As wildfire risks mount due to climate change, communities that have developed within the wildland/urban interface and VHFHSZs face significant challenges. Further development in these high-risk areas should be avoided.

### 2. Preservation and Biological Resources

**East San Gabriel Valley SEA.** The East San Gabriel Valley SEA contains several ridgelines and hilltops, and the major drainage of Walnut Creek on the north side of the San Jose Hills. The natural riparian section of Walnut Creek County Park is a rare natural resource in an area surrounded by development. Along most of its boundaries, the SEA is bordered by developed properties.

**TABLE SJHC-1 San Jose Hills Communities Challenges and Opportunities**

**Critical Habitat and Sensitive Communities.** Large parts of the East San Gabriel Valley SEA are designated critical habitat for the federally threatened coastal California gnatcatcher. Several plant communities within this SEA are designated by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as highest priority communities due to their restricted distribution in the Southern California region.

**Preservation of Significant Ridgelines.** The area contains several significant ridgelines that are also used for wildlife movement and serve as firebreaks in wildfires. For wildlife, habitat, and safety issues, development along ridgelines should be avoided.

**Preservation of Wildlife Movement Corridors and Linkages.** With increasing threats from climate change, ensuring the ability of wildlife to migrate and maintaining continuity of open space areas is key for species survival. The East San Gabriel Valley SEA represents the only regional wildlife linkage between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Puente Hills and Chino Hills, serving as a migration and habitat connection between them.

**Preservation of Riparian Woodlands, Wetlands, Streams, and Natural Drainage Channels.** The protection of riparian areas, creeks, and natural drainages in their unaltered states provides irreplaceable ecosystem services, habitat, and water quality protections. A portion of Walnut Creek has maintained a natural creek bed, a rare remnant as many creeks have been lined with concrete and rerouted. It also has one of the best examples of riparian oak woodlands in the County. It is one of the few remaining natural riparian areas in an area surrounded by development.

**Multi-jurisdiction Collaboration on Protection of SEAs, Habitat Conservation, and Wildlife Linkages.** The East San Gabriel SEA, designated on parts of unincorporated Walnut Islands and West San Dimas, continues into adjacent jurisdictions, including West Covina, Walnut, San Dimas, and Covina, which may not yet have a comparable program for protection of biological resources. This provides an opportunity for regional collaboration on protection of natural and biological resources that spread across jurisdictional boundaries.

### 3. Land Use Needs and Hazards

**Hazards.** Areas within the San Jose Hills Communities present wildfire, dam inundation, landslide, and liquefaction hazards. The upper elevation areas and slopes of Walnut Islands are designated VHFHSZs. The northern parts of Walnut Islands and the northern edge of West San Dimas are designated as dam inundation areas. The hills and canyon areas of both communities are designated as landslide hazard areas, and liquefaction hazard areas overlap with residential neighborhoods. Further development in these areas should be avoided.

**Freeway Adjacency and Industrial Proximity.** I-10 cuts through Walnut Islands, segregating residential uses in the north from commercial services and other amenities to the south and potentially causing air quality concerns.

**Parks and Open Space.** Based on the 2016 Park Needs Assessment, the communities generally have low park needs. However, there are issues with park proximity, as only 14% of the population lives with a ½ mile of a park.

## Land Use

The **Walnut Islands and West San Dimas Land Use Maps**, found in Appendix E, *Land Use Maps*, present land use designations and establish the general location and diversity of each land use in these San Jose Hills Communities.

## C. COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC POLICIES

The following provides the policies for the San Jose Hills Communities, organized to implement each of the six elements of the Area Plan and address the community-specific issues and opportunities presented above. Each policy is linked to a relevant vision statement (referenced as “VS”), as presented in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, of this Area Plan.

All policies in the ESGVAP Elements are applicable at the community-specific level. Refer to Chapter 2, *Land Use Element*, Chapter 5, *Natural Resources, Conservation, and Open Space Element*, and Chapter 6, *Parks and Recreation Element*, for policies particularly relevant to Walnut Islands and West San Dimas communities. Refer to Chapter 9, *Implementation Programs and Actions*, for actions and programs that serve to implement the plan’s policies.

### VS 1 – Sustainable Growth Patterns

See Land Use Policy LU-1.2.

#### Policy SJH-1

**Policy SJH-1: Complete Communities.** Enhance community access, connectivity, services, and amenities within walking distance of schools and residential neighborhoods with multi-use pathways. Focus amenities and services within the major transit area, near Puente Street and Grand Avenue, in the flatter area and south of the San Bernardino Freeway, where fire risk is reduced.

### VS 4 – Shared Community Identity and Character

**Policy SJH-2: Equestrian District Designation.** Engage community members and explore support for designating a Walnut Islands Equestrian District in the area.



## VS 6 – Sustainable Built and Natural Environment

**Policy SJH-3: Biological Resources.** Ensure the protection of biological resources and critical habitats for endangered species that occur on private lands. Support collaborations with Forest Lawn Cemetery, other institutions, businesses, and property owners in the area to preserve the biological resources located on privately held lands.

**Policy SJH-4: Natural Environment.** Direct development away from natural resource areas, including those identified in the East San Gabriel Valley SEA and those found on lands outside of the designated SEA, to preserve the continuity of habitat areas and prevent further habitat fragmentation and loss.

**Policy SJH-5: Wetland and Riparian Resources.** Preserve and protect Walnut Creek, wetland areas, and riparian corridors.

**Policy SJH-6: Water Quality.** Ensure implementation of water quality best management practices on properties with equestrian uses, horses, and livestock.

**Policy SJH-7: Walnut Creek Restoration.** Support efforts to naturalize the portions of Walnut Creek’s concrete channel, when and where feasible.

**Policy SJH-8: Critical Habitat Preservation.** Support the preservation of lands that are designated critical habitat for federally threatened wildlife, including the coastal California gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica*).

**Policy SJH-9: Wildlife Connectivity.** Seek opportunities to create and enhance the wildlife linkages in the East San Gabriel Valley SEA between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Puente Hills and Chino Hills, particularly in areas of discontinuous habitat blocks and patches.

**Policy SJH-10: Multi-Jurisdiction Collaboration.** Collaborate with local and regional agencies to prepare and adopt a protection program for the East San Gabriel Valley SEA designated areas that continue into adjacent jurisdictions, including West Covina, Walnut, San Dimas, and Covina. Identify measures to protect natural and biological resources, and to prevent further habitat fragmentation and loss.