

# The Escondido Creek Conservancy Strategic Plan

2015 to 2020



The Escondido Creek Conservancy

P.O. Box 460791, Escondido, CA 92046

*The* **ESCONDIDO CREEK**  
*Conservancy*

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 1989, a small group of Elfin Forest neighbors went on a hike up Meisha Creek, a tributary of Escondido Creek, to a picnic lunch under an oak grove which is now under the water of the Olivenhain Reservoir. Present were Steve and Nona Barker, Martha Blane, and Leonard Wittwer.

At that time development was taking off in North County. The friends had worked together for years to fight development via the governmental regulatory process, but their experience was disappointing; even if a development was denied by elected officials after a long fight, it just came back in a year or two in a different configuration. There was never a real sustainable victory for the land.

That day the group talked about how they could become more proactive to save land *before* it was developed. They were tired of fighting housing projects and wanted instead to work *for* land conservation. An idea that started on that walk up Meisha Creek many conversations later became a discussion at Martha and Leonard's kitchen table which led to the incorporation of The Escondido Creek Conservancy (TECC) in 1991.

Since that time TECC has helped preserve over 3,000 acres of land, is currently seeking to preserve an additional 1,000+ acres, and manages over 1,300 acres. Since 1991, TECC has purchased or facilitated the purchase of some of the most biologically sensitive properties in the Escondido Creek Watershed.

While much has been accomplished, especially in the Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove area, there are major challenges ahead. The preserved lands must be managed in perpetuity. A new generation of conservationists must be engaged. Water quality must be improved. And other areas of the watershed need TECC's attention.

As TECC's founders move on to other chapters of their lives, this strategic plan was written to help guide the next phase of the Conservancy's growth and accomplishment.

~ Kevin Barnard, President, December 2014

Board of Directors		Staff	With our Thanks
<i>Brent Alspach</i>	<i>Jerry Harmon</i>	<i>Ann Van Leer, Executive Director</i>	<i>Richard Murphy, Photography</i>
<i>Steve Barker</i>	<i>Betsy Keithly</i>	<i>Ann Hough, Managing Director</i>	<i>Jeff Anderson, Photography</i>
<i>Kevin Barnard</i>	<i>Greg McBain</i>	<i>Simon Breen, Education Manager</i>	
<i>Tim Costanzo</i>	<i>Richard Murphy</i>		
<i>Jon Dummer</i>	<i>Jeff Swenerton</i>		
<i>Ron Forster</i>	<i>Leonard Wittwer</i>		

## II. CORE IDEAS

### MISSION

*To Preserve and Restore the Escondido Creek Watershed.*

### VISION

*Through the Conservancy's leadership, the Escondido Creek Watershed will become a model of vibrant urban communities and viable natural ecosystems thriving together.*

## III. CHALLENGES AHEAD

### Ensuring Land Stewardship in Perpetuity:

*"The importance of money flows from it being a link between present and future."*

-British Economist John Maynard Keynes

In its two plus decades of conservation, TECC has directly helped facilitate the preservation of over 3,000 acres of wild lands in the Escondido Creek Watershed and influenced the preservation of thousands of additional acres. TECC has targeted lands for acquisition that are critical to the creation of a sustainable natural system of preserved lands in north San Diego County--regardless of whether it had funds available to maintain that land in perpetuity. These were calculated strategic decisions. As a result, TECC saved hundreds of acres of wild lands that would have otherwise been lost. TECC currently owns or manages 1,300 acres and is in pursuit of an additional 1,000 acres. Lands under the stewardship of The Escondido Creek Conservancy are collectively known as the Escondido Creek Conservation Area (Conservation Area).



Thirty percent of the lands in the Conservation Area have an endowment used to support land stewardship (i.e. maintenance and monitoring to ensure biological viability). Unfortunately, for 900 acres of the Conservation Area, there is no endowment. Consequently, TECC must continually fundraise to ensure it has the resources to protect this land. Providing adequate funding for these TECC-owned "orphan" properties, and any additional orphan properties TECC purchases in the future, is an ongoing challenge. To meet that challenge, TECC decided in 2014 to initiate a campaign to create a \$5 million orphan endowment fund. Once established, the interest earned from the endowment funds will be used to protect these properties in perpetuity.

While TECC is actively managing its lands, it is also concerned that the thousands of acres of preserved lands in the Escondido Creek Watershed owned or managed by its partners are *also* maintained in perpetuity. Working collaboratively with all conservation stakeholders to ensure that *all* the preserved lands in the watershed are adequately maintained in perpetuity is critical.

Growing the Next Generation of Conservationists:

*"Every child needs nature. Not just the ones with parents who appreciate nature... Every child." -Writer Richard Louv*

In 2008, TECC partnered with the Olivenhain Municipal Water District (OMWD) and raised over \$565,000 to build the Elfin Forest Interpretive Center honoring Susan J. Varty (IC). Originally envisioned as a simple public kiosk, TECC thought the site was worth creating a building that would honor the creek and welcome the public to the Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve (hereafter referred to as "Reserve"). Now completed, this extraordinary building gives a voice to the Escondido Creek Watershed.

The IC serves as the hub for dynamic watershed-based education programs for school children and adults, primarily operated with the support of volunteer docents overseen by OMWD rangers and, more recently, TECC's Education Manager. TECC's education programs, in partnership with OMWD, the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, and the San Diego Zoo, serve from 400–500 children every year, primarily from the City of Escondido.



***Elfin Forest Interpretive Center***

Another aspect of the education program is docent led hikes and other docent-led activities that serve from 300–350 people per year. The program also includes a Family Lecture Series that annually serves over 150 adults and families with programs about nature, culture, art, and natural history. There are additional special programs every year such as artist receptions and Earth Day that reach an additional 150–200 people.

As demand for access to the outdoors and for environmental educational programs has grown, it has been very difficult for OMWD rangers, whose primary responsibilities lay elsewhere in the Reserve, to meet it. Demand is expected to further increase, with the population of San Diego County expected to grow by an additional one million people by 2030.

As a result, in 2014, TECC hired an Education Manager to help support OMWD's rangers and expand watershed education programs to more residents and visitors. Many of the young people in our education programs today will be the community leaders of the future. It is critical that we engage them in understanding and appreciating their local flora and fauna so that they will also become future stewards of the Escondido Creek Conservation Area.

Although these measures are essential to help grow the next generation of conservationists, there are costs associated with providing these programs and TECC must continually fundraise to meet this need.

Protecting the Land from Too Much Love:

*"The earth will not continue to offer its harvest, except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land and then take steps to destroy it." -Pope John Paul II*

As San Diego County continues to grow, the demand for outdoor recreation also grows. We relish the opportunity to get outdoors and encourage the public to enjoy our last wild places. However, wildlife--especially more sensitive species--can be negatively affected by contact with humans. While we help people enjoy nature we must also make sure there are places for wildlife to be left undisturbed by human activity so that a part of wild California will continue to exist when we are gone.

It may be hard for people to understand that not every place is appropriate for a trail or other public use, however seemingly minimal. They do not realize that for some species even the careful step of a wildlife photographer can make an animal leave its young, putting them at risk from predators. TECC must model land stewardship practices in the Escondido Creek Conservation Area that make certain that sensitive wildlife can thrive undisturbed in some areas, while enabling the public to enjoy recreational pursuits like hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian activities in others.

A test of this is currently underway as TECC and OMWD work together to develop and implement a strategic plan for the extremely popular Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve that earnestly balances recreation and wildlife protection. Unfortunately, the Reserve is so popular with the public that it is at risk for being "loved to death" through overuse. TECC has committed assistance to OMWD to help OMWD lessen the impacts associated with current and future public uses at the Reserve. The Reserve's draft strategic plan notes: "Going forward, the Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve must manage its growth with the sober realization that current funding resources will not likely suffice."<sup>1</sup>

TECC's Escondido Creek Conservation Area and other lands in the Escondido Creek Watershed managed by our partners are all subject to the same realization--demand is increasing faster than management funding and wildlife often ends up the loser. This will be an ongoing challenge as north San Diego County grows into the future.



***The shoulder on Harmony Grove Road becomes a parking lot on busy weekends***

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<sup>1</sup> OMWD and TECC, *Draft -Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve Strategic Plan*, 1/10/2014, page 3

## IV. STRATEGIC GOALS

### 1. COMPLETE THE VISION - VIABLE NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS AND URBAN COMMUNITIES THRIVING TOGETHER

#### Connecting Places for People and Wildlife:

Currently the TECC-owned or managed Escondido Creek Conservation Area consists of approximately 1,300 acres located throughout the Escondido Creek Watershed. TECC is only one of a number of conservation land management organizations in the Escondido Creek Watershed, which includes perhaps the largest collection of preserved lands in coastal North County. Much of the land has been set aside as part of the region's [Multiple Species Conservation Program](#).

While not all these preserved lands are open to the public, Escondido Creek Watershed public lands include:

- ✓ 1,450 acres owned by the County of San Diego (the 400-acre Escondido Creek Preserve and additional Preserves) Sage Hill and Bottle Peak Preserves and part of the Del Dios Highlands Preserve;
- ✓ 6,500 acres owned by the City of Escondido (including 3,150 acres at Daley Ranch); and
- ✓ 200 acres adjacent to our watershed in the City of San Marcos' park system, plus an additional 1,800 acres in the City of San Marcos associated with the San Elijo Hills development project now controlled by its Home Owner's Association (HOA).

The Escondido Creek Watershed also includes other significant resource lands held by HOA's including the Rancho Cielo HOA as well as tribal lands.

Additionally there are at least 2,000 acres of privately preserved lands in the watershed that, while not under legal conservation ownership, for all intents and purposes, are conserved. This includes the Christward Ministry (Questhaven) Retreat and the Deer Park Monastery.



***Lands of the Deer Park Monastery***

While TECC has been focused on creating the Conservation Area, it has also joined in partnership with other conservation land managers, such as the City of Escondido, the City of San Marcos, San Diego County Department of Parks and Recreation (San Diego County DPR), the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, the State of

California, and the OMWD to address regional conservation challenges and opportunities. What these preserved areas together represent is a significant natural system of conservation lands with, enhancements such as key land acquisitions and trail connections, could create a truly spectacular regional natural system connecting urban and rural communities in inland North County.

This integrated system of preserved lands is a regional asset that inland North County communities should embrace, similar to the manner in which coastal cities embrace the ocean as

a lifestyle icon. The scale of what has already been preserved is a unique attribute that will draw visitors, residents, and employers to the Escondido area. In fact, studies show that employers and educated workers seeking jobs choose areas to live with a high quality of life. In a study by Endeavor, entrepreneurs, in responding to a question as to why they started their business in a particular place, cited "quality of life factors, such as access to nature or local cultural attractions."<sup>2</sup>

Escondido Creek Can and Should Be Beautiful, Clean and Healthy:

Escondido Creek is the 26-mile ribbon that ties the top of the watershed above Lake Wohlford in Valley Center through the City of Escondido to the bottom of the watershed where Escondido Creek meets the Pacific Ocean at the San Elijo Lagoon in the cities of Encinitas and Solana Beach. Escondido Creek has historically been classified as ephemeral, although it presently flows year round. The reason for the present flow during the dry season comes from urban over-irrigation and other flows into the existing City of Escondido Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4). Dry season flows have been estimated at between 3 to 6 cubic feet per second (cfs) (2 to 4 million gallons per day). For comparison purposes, the 100 year (design) flow for Escondido Creek at the end of the flood control channel is approximately 19,000 cfs.

San Diego Coastkeeper has been monitoring Escondido Creek for a number of water quality parameters for over 5 years and, based on the most recent bacterial testing, the water quality in Escondido Creek is presently considered "Fair" at the flood control, improving downstream to "Good" at the San Elijo Lagoon. Previous testing by San Diego Coastkeeper for bacteria have indicated that the Rec. 1 Beneficial Use criteria have been exceeded for Total Coliform, Fecal Coliform, and Enterococcus bacteria, for both wet and dry weather flows. Wet weather flows have indicated the highest levels.

TECC has also been measuring water quality in Escondido Creek for over three years, and it's testing has been consistent with San Diego Coastkeeper's sampling results for nutrients, dissolved oxygen, pH, and temperature. In 2009 TECC was involved in performing bioassessments of Escondido Creek, which measures the health of the aquatic invertebrates in the creek. Based on this analysis, the creek rated "Poor" in water quality. This testing has not been conducted recently, and therefore it is not known if there has been an improvement.

Longtime residents of Escondido and surrounding communities can recall swimming and fishing in Escondido Creek only a few short decades ago. While currently the creek is not suitable for swimming, some people still do, including many children.

Critical to the overall restoration of the creek is the restoration/enhancement of the seven miles of concrete channel in the city limits of Escondido, which represents almost a third of the entire length of the watershed. The restoration of this section of the creek represents a proportionally much larger opportunity for the entire



*Escondido Creek Channel in the City of Escondido*

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<sup>2</sup> Endeavor, *What do the Best Entrepreneurs Want in a City?*, Endeavor Insight, 2/11/2014, page 6

watershed in terms of water quality, environmental health, and access to recreation for the greatest number of residents possible.

Like most streams in southern California, Escondido Creek is not pristine. However, with restoration and enhancement it could be a wonder of a natural free-flowing stream, supporting native plants and wildlife (including native fish) along its entire length. In designing that restoration, TECC advocates for a watershed-wide approach that balances the effects of actions in one part of the watershed with the impacts in another.

- **Strategic Steps**

- A. **Secure conservation properties that complete large areas of preserved lands or connect existing preserved lands to ensure wildlife corridors and ecosystem viability throughout the Escondido Creek Watershed and adjoining watersheds.**

While the Escondido Creek Watershed has many acres of preserved lands, those acres don't always connect for wildlife or people. In some cases, intervening lands between two preserved properties may currently be undeveloped, yet they aren't necessarily preserved. Should those intervening lands later be developed, that development could undermine the long-term biological viability of the adjacent preserved lands.

TECC will focus its efforts on completing those gaps to ensure that wildlife can move freely throughout the Escondido Creek Watershed and to adjacent watersheds.

- B. **Create walk-able, ride-able, and bike-able trail connections to preserved lands from urban communities.**

In the Escondido Creek Watershed, thousands of people live within a 15-minute walk or bicycle ride of preserved lands but often cannot get there safely without driving a car. This is especially bedeviling for residents of the City of Escondido who could literally walk or ride from the heart of the city along Escondido Creek to preserved open space lands but are now restricted by fences and locked gates. Residents of the new Harmony Grove Village 700-plus home development at the City of Escondido/County of San Diego border will be faced with a similar predicament in both directions--they will live in a semi-rural area but won't be able to walk safely to the City of Escondido or directly to preserved lands near their community.

The City of Escondido has adopted a vision document for its seven mile section of the creek called *Reveal Escondido Creek*<sup>3</sup> which recommends improvements to the creek within the city that would enhance the visitor experience and make the city more walk-able and accessible to both pedestrians and cyclists. TECC will work with the city government and city residents to help implement improvements to the creek that are both visual enhancements *and* enhancements to water quality and wildlife movement.

- C. **Create wildlife habitat enhancements and water quality improvements to Escondido Creek and its tributaries such that it is freely passable to native fish and supports additional use by native wildlife.**

The Escondido Creek Watershed Restoration Action Strategy (Action Strategy) identified a number of restoration alternatives for the watershed based on discussions from 2005 with the Escondido Creek Watershed Alliance (ECWA). The Action Strategy, authored by the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, is "meant to be a living document" and the recommended projects are "by no means an exhaustive list."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 606 Studio, Department of Landscape Architecture, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, *Revealing Escondido Creek*, 2010

<sup>4</sup> The San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, *The Escondido Creek Watershed Restoration Action Strategy*, 11/29/2005, page 8

The Action Strategy is a very good starting point to revisit restoration opportunities in the watershed. Current hydrologic and hydraulic assessments for the Escondido Creek Watershed, as well as sediment transport and geomorphologic assessments, haven't been updated since 1968–1970 when the Soils Conservation Service assisted in funding the Escondido Flood Control Channel. Sediment transport and geomorphologic studies of the watershed also date back to that time frame. Yet, the watershed has undergone extensive urbanization since that time. To be most successful, any restoration strategy for the Escondido Creek Watershed should be coupled with updated hydrological and hydraulic assessments such that proposed restoration or floodplain improvement projects can be modeled, and that modeling used to inform project design. Watershed and creeks are dynamic systems and changes in one area can create unintended consequences downstream if not designed in context.



**Steelhead Trout**

In tandem with habitat restoration, TECC has made improving the watershed for native fish such as steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) a priority. Urban development of the watershed has created impassable areas like sandbars and drop structures that limit the ability of steelhead to move up the creek to protected pools where they would otherwise spawn before returning to the ocean. These barriers fragment important habitats and impede fish and other aquatic life from accessing existing higher quality habitats upstream.

By removing impediments to fish passage and working to return the creek and watershed to a more natural hydrological regime and creating sections of the creek that allow for spawning, TECC will not only encourage the movement of fish, but also enhance habitat for other native plant and animal species.

## ■ Prioritized Implementation Steps

### A. Year One

- ✓ Update TECC target conservation property priorities map for the Escondido Creek Watershed, including mapping of wildlife linkages between watersheds, with special attention to properties east and north of Harmony Grove and west of Lake Wohlford.
- ✓ Work with stakeholders (especially OMWD, the County of San Diego, the City of Escondido, ECWA, the San Dieguito Joint Powers Authority, and the San Dieguito Conservancy), to update TECC's watershed trail linkages map, mapping key priorities for trail connections.
- ✓ Plan *Willow Walk*<sup>5</sup> improvements and trail connections from Willow Walk to Harmony Grove Village to preserved lands in the Harmony Grove community. Work with partners to identify trail



**Escondido Creek**

<sup>5</sup> A former mitigation site, the Willow Walk is the most western portion of the creek still within the City of Escondido. The name comes from the City of Escondido's *Reveal Escondido Creek* report.

connections from the Willow Walk, Harmony Grove Village, and the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve and San Diego County's Del Dios Highlands Preserve.

- ✓ Seek a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Escondido on creek improvements needed to help to implement the *Reveal Escondido Creek* report.
- ✓ Secure an agreement with the City of Escondido and other stakeholders on a scope of work for a watershed-wide hydrologic and hydraulic assessment to be used to design and model habitat and creek restoration alternatives throughout the watershed.
- ✓ Complete at least two key target conservation acquisitions.

**B. Years Two to Four**

- ✓ Secure a purchase agreement on at least two new significant target conservation properties, closing at least one.
- ✓ Take title or easement of at least one large currently undermanaged conservation property to add it into the Conservation Area, after securing endowment.
- ✓ Facilitate approval and implementation of one to two key trail connections.
- ✓ Help the City of Escondido open Willow Walk to the public.
- ✓ Secure funding for—and begin implementation of—the scope of work for the watershed-wide hydrologic and hydraulic assessment.

**C. Year Five**

- ✓ Complete the purchase of at least two to three new significant target conservation properties.
- ✓ Complete implementation of the watershed-wide hydrologic and hydraulic assessment; begin implementation of at least one major restoration project.

## 2. MODEL THE VISION - ENSURING LAND STEWARDSHIP IN PERPETUITY

### Setting a High Standard for Conservation Land Management:

The primary management goal for all TECC-owned or TECC-managed Conservation Area lands is conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitat. TECC strives to provide the highest level of land management that can be used as a model by others; this includes frequent site visits and annual wildlife surveys to track the health of the ecosystems and to identify any changes in stewardship that may be warranted. At some sites, public access is not allowed due to the sensitivity of the habitat or easement restrictions. At other sites, respectful public access for the enjoyment of nature is both allowed and encouraged.

Conservation Area lands are protected by TECC with a combination of fee ownership, conservation easements, and management agreements. TECC has relied on volunteers to do most of its basic land management, such as trash pickup and access control,



Richard Murphy

**Red Tailed Hawk**

but will occasionally hire biologists, as required, for sensitive species studies and biological monitoring. While volunteers are essential to TECC's land management program, their work is complemented with professional services needed to ensure the land is maintained at a consistent high standard in perpetuity.

TECC implements a proactive model of conservation land management where TECC representatives are actively visiting preserved lands to anticipate issues before they arise, such as invasions of non-native plants and animals that threaten native species, so problems can be addressed before they escalate. This is the conservation version of the "broken windows" theory of crime prevention.<sup>6</sup> This approach is labor intensive, which TECC has been able to undertake with a small band of loyal volunteers augmented by paid skilled workers.

As discussed earlier, TECC manages both endowed properties (that have a dedicated endowment fund that earns interest, proceeds from which are used to maintain the property) and unendowed properties (where no funds are dedicated). The unendowed properties have been manageable with volunteers until fairly recently because the number of acres and sites could be overseen by TECC's long-time volunteer land manager. However, because TECC has taken on larger properties without endowments in recent years, it's becoming more difficult to maintain TECC's land management standards as the Conservancy is currently organized and funded.

Additionally, while TECC maintains an internal high standard for conservation land management, the Conservancy urges the same of other land managers. TECC works with our conservation partners and the development and business communities to encourage best conservation practices and include land use that minimizes impacts to the environment while maximizing economic opportunity.



**Volunteers in Escondido Creek**

Connecting People to the Landscape:

One of TECC's primary conservation partners in the Escondido Creek Watershed is the OMWD, which manages the 784-acre Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve. The Reserve is--both geographically and ecologically--the heart of the Escondido Creek Watershed. In 2014, TECC helped OMWD fund

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<sup>6</sup> According to this theory of criminology, maintaining and monitoring urban environments in a pristine and orderly condition can deter vandalism and stymie deviant activities that potentially escalate to more serious criminal behavior (Wilson & Kelling, [The Atlantic Monthly](#), 1982).

the development of its own strategic plan to help refine land management within the Reserve, given the high visitor use. TECC is committed to helping OMWD implement the recommendations of the Reserve's strategic plan such that land management between Conservation Area lands and Reserve lands is complementary. While TECC's Conservation Area lands are managed primarily for wildlife preservation, and management of the Reserve must emphasize both recreational use *and* conservation, if TECC and OMWD (and TECC's other conservation partners) work closely together in coordinating their activities, all the open space lands in the watershed will benefit.

Volunteers are key to both TECC's and OMWD's programs. OMWD and TECC have implemented a highly successful volunteer training program to train docents at the Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve; the docents have primarily served in support of the education program at the Reserve's Interpretive Center. More recently, with the hiring of TECC's Education Manager, this program will be expanded to train volunteers to also serve as trail patrol docents on the Reserve and will eventually be expanded to include volunteer trail patrols on TECC's Conservation Area lands. Rather than create a new volunteer training program when an exceptional program already exists, TECC has recently begun to expand the OMWD/TECC docent training program to also train volunteers for other TECC activities, including land management in the Conservation Area and an expanded trail patrol.

TECC's education outreach program seeks to reach current watershed residents, both young people and adults, to introduce them to the wonders of this area. The schools program, a partnership of TECC, OMWD, the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, and the San Diego Zoo, has grown to serve from 400–450 students per year, primarily students residing in the City of Escondido. In 2013, the San Diego Zoo decided to change its education program such that it would no longer bring students to the Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve, and will instead run education programs at the Zoo.

- **Strategic Steps**

- A. Implement consistent management across all Conservation Area lands.**

While TECC's land management is good, continuous improvement should be the goal. Not all Conservation Area properties currently have management plans, and management protocols must be improved. Signage could be more consistent across Conservation Area lands. Trail construction and trail management protocols should be clearly documented so that trails are constructed and maintained in a manner protective of sensitive biological resources. "Exotic" or invasive non-native plant control and habitat restoration should be expanded. Management practices should be consistent with evolving fire department protocols such as closure of Conservation Area lands during periods of high fire danger.



**Restoration Sign**

**B. Establish management endowments for all Conservation Area lands.**

While TECC has been successful staying current with maintenance of Conservation Area lands, as it continues to secure additional lands, most of which do not have endowments, it has become more critical to make certain there is an ongoing revenue stream available to manage the "orphan" (unendowed) Conservation Area properties in perpetuity.

**C. Increase volunteer involvement in Conservation Area lands.**

As TECC has taken on additional lands to manage, the need for additional volunteers has also increased, making it critical to recruit and train new volunteers to help steward Conservation Area lands. TECC will create a program for volunteers interested in becoming land stewards who will "adopt" a Conservation Area property similar to that in which trained volunteers regularly care for segments of the Appalachian Trail or the Pacific Crest Trail. This new group of trained volunteers, overseen by TECC staff and TECC's land managers, will help TECC maintain a high standard of land management in the Conservation Area even as TECC takes ownership of additional conservation lands.



***Bobcat with GPS tracking device***

**D. Assist OMWD by providing volunteer trail patrols on Reserve lands.**

A recommendation of the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve Strategic Plan is to create a volunteer trail patrol program. Doing so will help OMWD manage its lands and complement TECC's management of Conservation Area lands.

**E. Improve measurements of success for wildlife viability.**

The region-wide Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) includes an ongoing component of monitoring and management of regional habitat plans to ensure that initial program goals are met. While great progress has occurred following the adoption of the first MSCP in 1998, there are still key questions associated with performance of the preserve system over time. "Implementation of a cost-effective and rigorous monitoring and management program for a multiple-species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan is challenging. Ecological systems like those conserved under the MSCP are difficult to monitor and manage because they are inherently complex and variable across space and through time."<sup>7</sup>

While TECC is participating in the MSCP process, it is cognizant that relying *only* on regional MSCP-driven monitoring, which has also been subject of constrained funding, could jeopardize the long-term viability of Conservation Area lands if TECC doesn't also supplement and complement the work undertaken on behalf of the entire MSCP. For example, the special needs of each parcel should be identified and addressed. Conservation Area lands should be viewed as a science lab with conservation practices tied to environmental education.

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<sup>7</sup> San Diego State University, *Monitoring and Management in the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program: Results from a Structured Workshop*, February 2012, page 2

**F. Encourage land development within the Escondido Creek Watershed consistent with the vision.**

TECC has directly competed with land developers to purchase land before it can be developed. Sometimes TECC has won those competitions, sometimes not--as usually developers can move faster and have access to greater financial resources. TECC acknowledges that developers are important partners in long-term conservation of Escondido Creek Watershed lands. TECC has actively engaged land developers, builders, and their representatives to encourage good land development practices and conservation management, including preservation of large blocks of connected conservation lands and implementation and maintenance of trails and trail linkages. TECC currently manages lands that developers were required to set aside as conservation mitigation for their developments.

**G. Support OMWD's implementation of Best Practices at the Elfin Forest Recreation Reserve.**

As one of TECC's primary conservation partners, TECC will continue to assist OMWD in its effort to manage the Reserve as a place for recreation *and*



**Olivenhain Reservoir in the Reserve**

wildlife, in coordination with San Diego County DPR, the Bureau of Land Management, and the San Diego County Water Authority.

**H. Improve and Enhance TECC/OMWD Education Programs.**

TECC, OMWD, the San Diego Zoo, and the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy have developed an exceptional education program for students and adults. With the recent change in Zoo policy, the number of children attending the program from the San Diego Zoo will be reduced. This provides an opportunity to revisit the purpose of the program and plan for the future.



**Escondido Creek Watershed**

■ **Prioritized Implementation Steps**

A. Year One

- ✓ Review and update TECC's land management protocols and complete management plans for all Conservation Area properties.
- ✓ Begin "Orphan Property" fundraising campaign with goal to raise at least \$5 million in five years to create an endowment for all unendowed Conservation Area properties. Orphan funds will remain with TECC, even if lands are subsequently transferred or sold to other conservation partners, so that TECC can continue to acquire additional orphaned conservation targets.
- ✓ Review the trail standards of our conservation partners, and develop a TECC trail standard to apply on Conservation Area lands.
- ✓ Expand docent training program to include a volunteer Trail Patrol program and Conservation Area land volunteer steward "Adoption" program.
- ✓ Install consistent signage and fencing across all Conservation Area properties.
- ✓ Assist OWMD in creating and implementing the Elfin Forest Reserve Advisory Committee to help with implementation of the Elfin Forest Reserve Strategic Plan.
- ✓ Begin Education Strategic Plan for youth and adults; incorporate success measurements.



***Trail in the Escondido Creek Conservation Area***

B. Years Two to Four

- ✓ Develop enhanced success management initiatives to measure progress of biological integrity on Conservation Area lands. Establish a fund to pay for bobcat or other species surveys as a way to establish baseline habitat connectivity/quality across Conservation Area lands.
- ✓ Implement Trail Patrol and Conservation Area land "Adoption" program. One hundred percent of Conservation Area lands should be covered by year four.
- ✓ Develop a partnership with the City of Escondido to provide trained (or jointly trained) docents to the City for stewardship of the Escondido Creek Trail.
- ✓ Complete and implement Education Strategic Plan.
- ✓ Strengthen TECC's conservation partnerships, such as those with San Diego County DPR and through the Escondido Creek Watershed Alliance (ECWA), by co-sponsoring at least one event per year with an organization TECC has not recently collaborated with (e.g., Friends of Daley Ranch or City of San Marcos).

C. Year Five

- ✓ Complete \$5 million Orphan property fund raising campaign.

### 3. COMMUNICATE THE VISION-DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

In 1991, TECC was formed to preserve a place—at that time the Elfin Forest Harmony Grove area—as that was where many of the Board members lived. Almost immediately, the grass roots effort to preserve a neighborhood's quality of life became much larger as TECC's vision extended to the entire Escondido Creek Watershed.

TECC cannot divorce humans from the landscape; they are its greatest threat and its greatest champion. Underlying all TECC's current work is the engagement of people as champions of our landscape, as volunteer land managers, as donors, as education docents, and as advocates for preserving the places we love. We must connect people to our landscape, to the Escondido Creek



*Sycamore and Oaks near Escondido Creek*

Watershed, and to Conservation Area lands, to lands preserved by our partners such as at the City of Escondido, Olivenhain Municipal Water District, and San Diego County DPR, so that residents and visitors will become current and future champions of this special place.

But how does TECC reach them?

In our fast-paced world there are many competing interests vying for the public's attention. Defining TECC's message in a compelling manner such that we can reach those who could

become our champions is very challenging.

TECC must tell its story in a way that drives people to join, to participate, to donate, to volunteer. How do we engage people to action? Social media is a part of how we tell our story, but how does TECC know it is effectively communicating via social media or other means? TECC's communications strategy must include metrics that allow the accurate measurement of progress so it can make adjustments to enhance TECC's effectiveness.

Additionally, we should be regularly asking our supporters how TECC can better serve them, what information is useful to them, and how they'd like it delivered.

Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Our challenge is to take that thought even further. Not only do we want people to feel they are making a difference by supporting TECC, we want them to make a difference, to translate their support into actions that will *Preserve and Restore the Escondido Creek Watershed*.

- **Strategic Steps**

- A. **Develop and articulate a clear vision of what TECC is and what it can be.**

While its Board of Directors and long-term supporters know what TECC has accomplished and what it

hopes to accomplish in the future, TECC hasn't done a very good job articulating its mission and vision to its supporters and the larger watershed community.

**B. Expand engagement of watershed residents in TECC's activities through targeted coordinated outreach campaigns.**

TECC has been very busy doing conservation work and less engaged telling people about it. Specific communications outreach campaigns can be developed to help TECC reach key constituencies to build its base and extend its reach beyond traditional constituencies. Targeted campaigns will also help TECC reach new people and organizations that may have a unique ability to help TECC implement its mission, such as residents of planned communities and people living directly adjacent to preserved lands.

**C. Encourage new, innovative and unconventional conservation partnerships.**

TECC's challenge is to identify and reach those people who can assist it to meet its goals. It needs to do a better job reaching new constituencies and engaging them to action.

▪ **Prioritized Implementation Steps**

**A. Year One**

- ✓ Create a first TECC *Progress Report* with a central story, using it to develop the case for support. The document should tell TECC's story quickly and visually to the media, donors and supporters.
- ✓ Develop a TECC communications strategy, including target audiences, messaging, media plan, and communication tools.
- ✓ Develop and implement at least two targeted coordinated community outreach campaigns including the social media content, video content, speaker presentation tools, and training needed to execute the campaigns.
- ✓ Secure and implement at least one non-traditional conservation partnership.
- ✓ Conduct a field survey with current supporters to characterize interests/hot-buttons and communication preferences.
- ✓ Implement communications strategy including modification of TECC website and other communications instruments consistent with strategy. Shift to use of visual and video content in social media.



***Chalk Dudleya***

**B. Years Two to Four**

- ✓ Develop and implement at least three additional targeted outreach campaigns that support the plans to *Complete the Vision* and *Model the Vision*.
- ✓ Have TECC messaging incorporated in the communications of more than five community leading businesses and government agencies.
- ✓ Update the TECC *Progress Report* annually.

C. Year Five

- ✓ TECC's media platforms become the go-to source the public turns to first to find out what is going in the watershed, including conservation issues, educational events and content, and recreational opportunities.



*Escondido Creek Reflections*