



Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project:

Draft
Environmental
Impact Statement
and Report (DEIS/R)

Draft

BALLONA WETLANDS RESTORATION PROJECT

Environmental Impact Statement/
Environmental Impact Report

State Clearinghouse No. 2012071090

Prepared for
United States Army Corps of Engineers,
Los Angeles District
California Department of Fish and Wildlife,
South Coast Region (Region 5)

September 2017



Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve



NEPA Statement of Purpose and Need

The purposes, pursuant to NEPA, of the Project are to:

1. Restore Ecological Functions and services within the Ballona Reserve, in part by increasing tidal influence to achieve predominantly estuarine wetland conditions.
2. Ensure any alteration/modification to the Los Angeles County Drainage Area (LACDA) project components within the Ballona Reserve maintain the authorized LACDA project levels of flood risk management, which in this section of Ballona Creek, includes ensuring there is no reduction to the conveyance capacity of up to 68,000 cubic feet per second (cfs)⁹ and that LACDA project features reduce flood risk to the surrounding communities and infrastructure for up to the 100 year flood event.

NEPA Statement of Purpose and Need

“The need for the Project under NEPA is to restore coastal aquatic resources to increase available breeding and foraging habitat for wildlife while maintaining flood protection for surrounding communities; and to provide public access for compatible recreational and educational opportunities that are not currently widely available within the Ballona Reserve. A substantial portion of California’s historic coastal aquatic resources have been lost. The Ballona Reserve aquatic ecosystem is one of the last remaining opportunities for major coastal habitat restoration in Los Angeles County. It is estimated that historically the Ballona Creek watershed supported a great diversity of aquatic resources.”

CEQA Project Objectives

“CEQA requires an EIR to include a “statement of objectives sought by the project” (CEQA Guidelines §15124). The statement of objectives assists the State lead agency in developing a range of alternatives to evaluate in the EIR. CDFW’s objectives in proposing this Project are supported by the Science Advisory Committee¹⁰ for the Project and by the public stakeholder group members that participated in a day-long design charrette at the beginning of the planning process.

The NEPA purpose and need and the CEQA Project objectives are aligned in their focus on restoring wetland and other ecological functions within the Ballona Reserve and maintaining existing levels of flood risk management provided by the Ballona Creek flood risk management channel and levee system. While the purpose and need and Project objectives are stated differently, they are connected by the overarching Project purposes.”

CEQA Project Objectives

They CEQA objectives are as follows:

1. Restore, enhance, and create estuarine and associated habitats:
 - a) That support a natural range of habitat formations and functions, including multiple habitat types, in the Ballona Reserve, to create a regionally important wetland area;
 - b) That are self-sustaining by allowing for adaptation to sea level rise, minimizing the need for active management, and reducing impacts of human activities and invasive species through the provision of large, contiguous areas of diverse intertidal wetland habitats with wide transition and buffer areas;
 - c) That sustain multiple levels of biodiversity associated with estuarine and associated systems by strategically preserving, restoring, enhancing, and developing multiple habitats (including a variety of wetland types and upland habitats) and incorporating transitional and upland habitat connections to the wetlands to support recruitment and the various life stages of a diverse native flora and fauna;
 - d) That contribute to the biodiversity and health of the Ballona Reserve by providing for the management of native upland habitat; and

CEQA Project Objectives

2. Protect and respect cultural and sacred resources, to enable cultural use of the Ballona Reserve by Native Americans and provide appropriate interpretive information about prior human uses of the Ballona Reserve.
3. Establish natural processes and functions within the Ballona Reserve that support estuarine and associated habitats through measures such as improving tidal circulation into the wetlands to enlarge the amount of area that is tidally inundated, increasing tidal prism and excursion, lowering residence time of water, ensuring a more natural salinity gradient, and creating dynamic hydrologic interactions between the Ballona Creek channel, wetlands within the Ballona Reserve, and the Santa Monica Bay.

CEQA Project Objectives

4. Develop and enhance wildlife dependent uses and secondary compatible on-site public access for recreation and educational activities by:
 - a) Providing a system of walking trails with interpretation and learning opportunities focused on the natural resources and cultural context of the restored and enhanced native uplands habitat; and
 - b) Providing new access for cyclists along the new levees.
5. Protect and avoid impacts to existing and planned roadways, utilities, adjacent properties and uses by maintaining or improving flood protection and storm water management, ensuring consistency with future implementation of regional plans, and limiting the need for significant modification to regionally important infrastructure.

CEQA Project Objectives

6. Provide oversight of the Ballona Reserve to accomplish management functions such as ensuring public safety and resource protection while minimizing security and maintenance costs by:
 - a) Encouraging appropriate and legal public use throughout the Ballona Reserve through a system of trails signage; providing for safe traffic and parking; and deterring dumping, camping, and other uses that are incompatible with the Ballona Reserve's habitat values; and
 - b) Maintaining the existing on-site office and maintenance yard locations for CDFW staff to accommodate increasing CDFW presence for management and monitoring throughout the Ballona Reserve.
7. Ensure that alterations/modifications to LACDA project components do not adversely impact the LACDA project by:
 - a) Retaining the authorized conveyance capacity within the Ballona Creek Channel; and.
 - b) Ensuring that structural changes to LACDA project features satisfy Corps and Los Angeles County Department of Public Works-Flood Control District (LACFCD)¹¹ criteria for functional, operational, and maintenance purposes.

Restoration Alternatives

Alternative 1: NATURALIZED CREEK

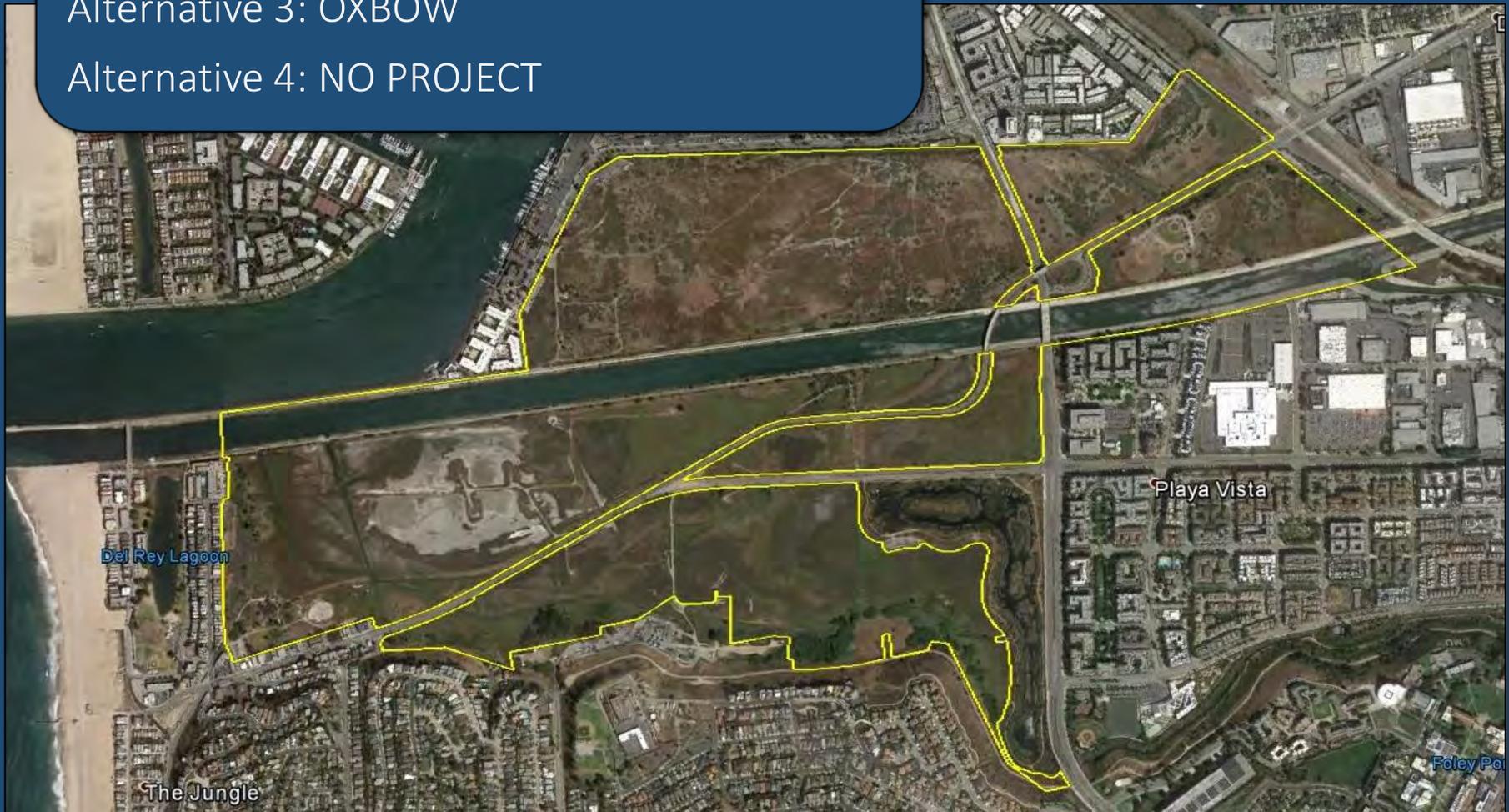
Alternative 2: PARTIAL NATURALIZED CREEK

Alternative 3: OXBOW

Alternative 4: NO PROJECT

State Lead Agency: **CDFW**

Federal Lead Agency: **Army Corps**





Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project (Alternative 1 – DRAFT graphic illustration)

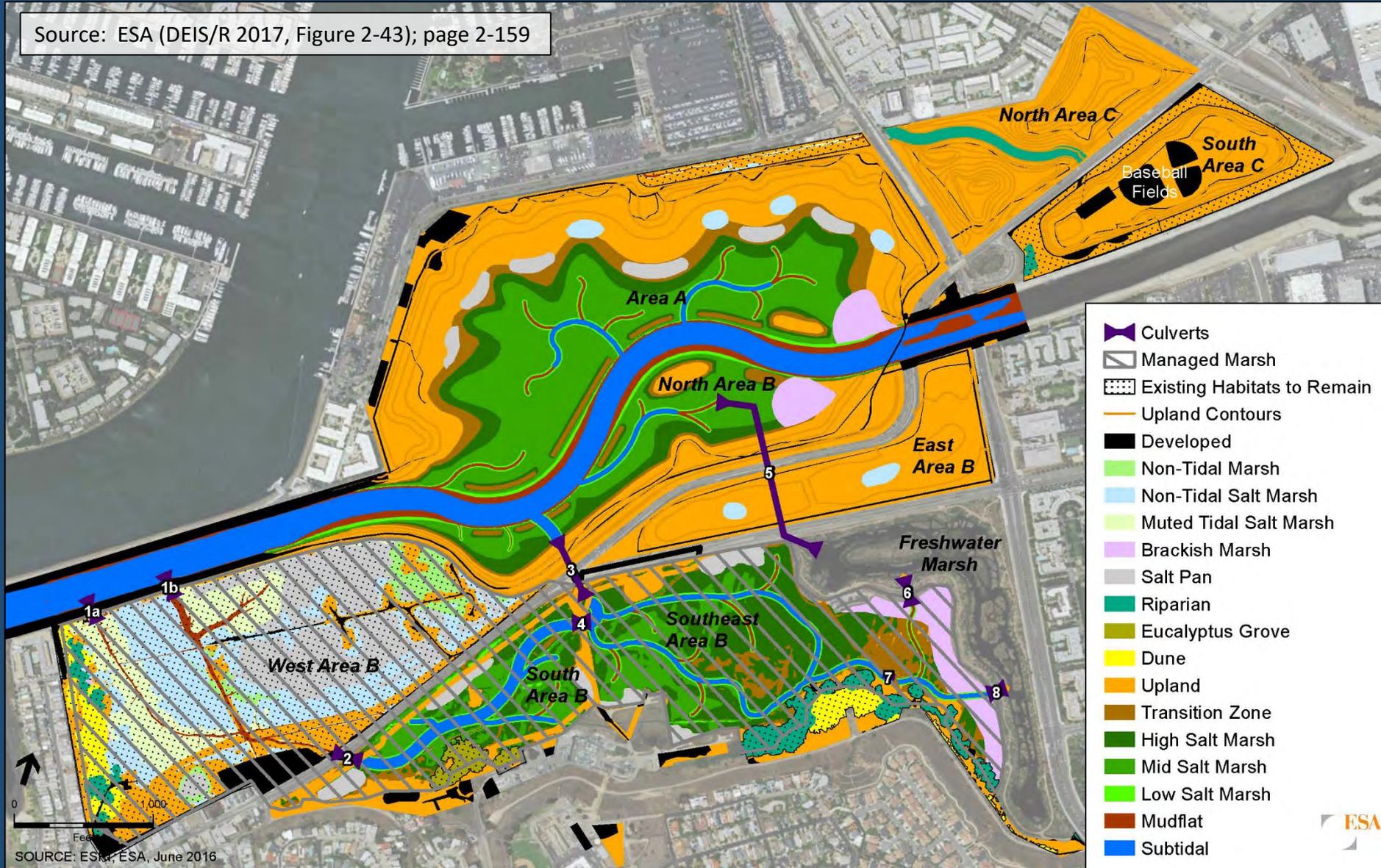
Source: ESA (DEIS/R 2017, Figure 2-1); page 2-31





Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project (Alternative 2 – DRAFT graphic illustration)

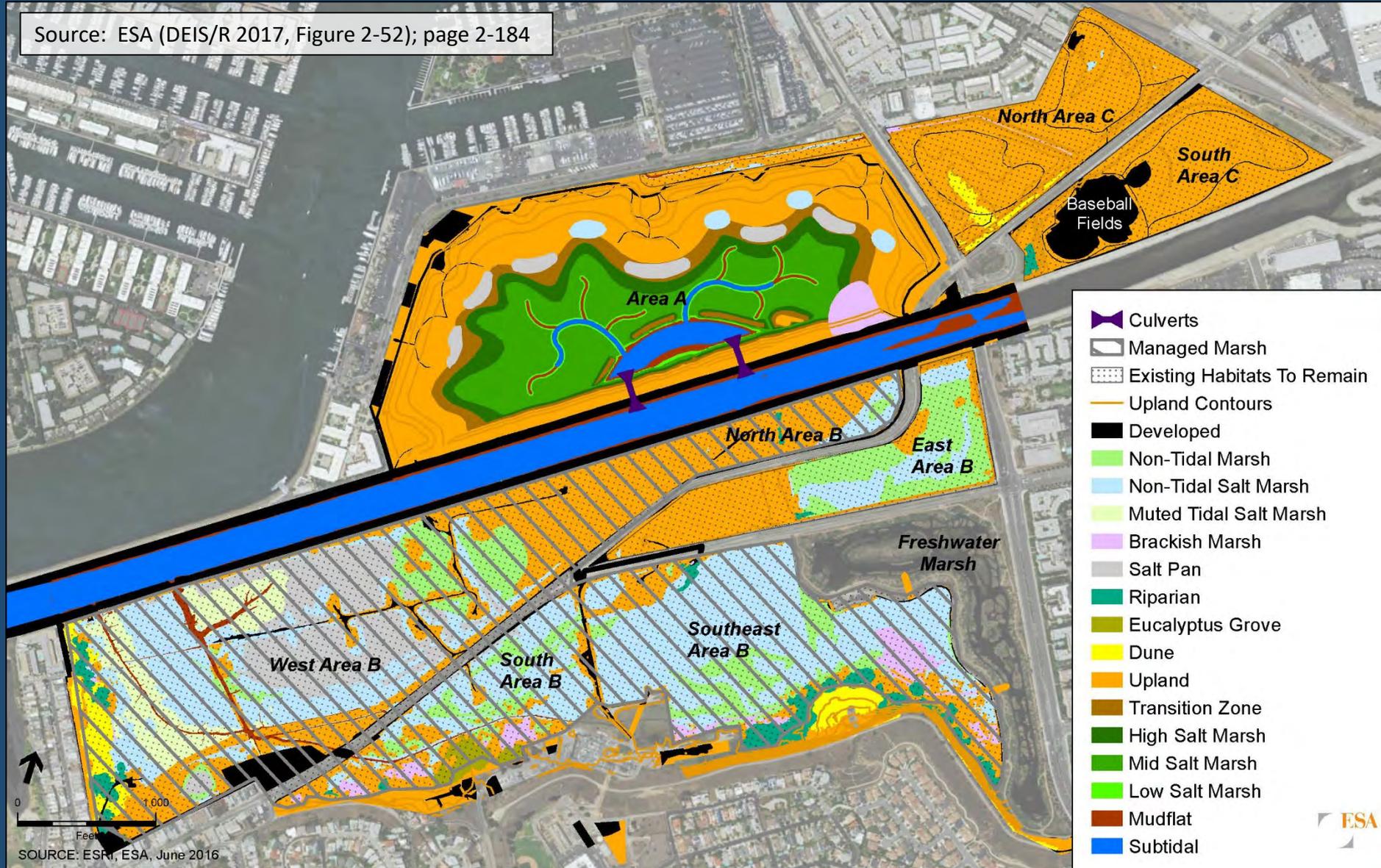
Source: ESA (DEIS/R 2017, Figure 2-43); page 2-159





Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project (Alternative 3 – DRAFT graphic illustration)

Source: ESA (DEIS/R 2017, Figure 2-52); page 2-184





Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project

(Alternative 4 – No Project)

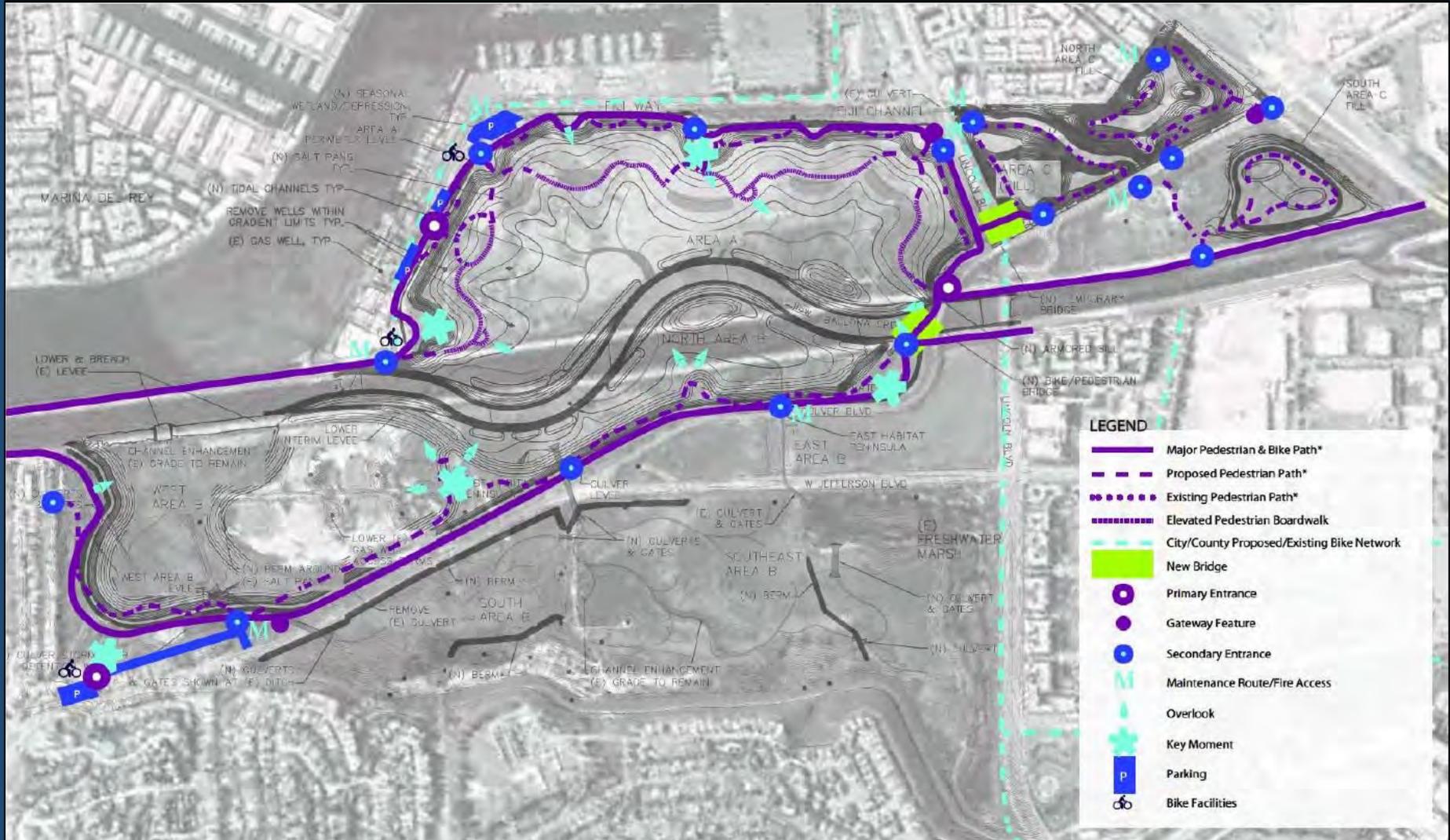
No change.

- Existing management and community volunteer restoration efforts would continue.
- Ongoing influence of sea level rise would substantially impact tidal wetlands and related habitats over time
- Invasive species would continue to invade the Project site and degradation that has been documented for the past six years would continue.

2.2.1 TABLE 2-1c Summary of Alternatives:
Alternative 4 Ecosystem Restoration pg. 2-16



Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project (Alternative 1 – DRAFT public access)

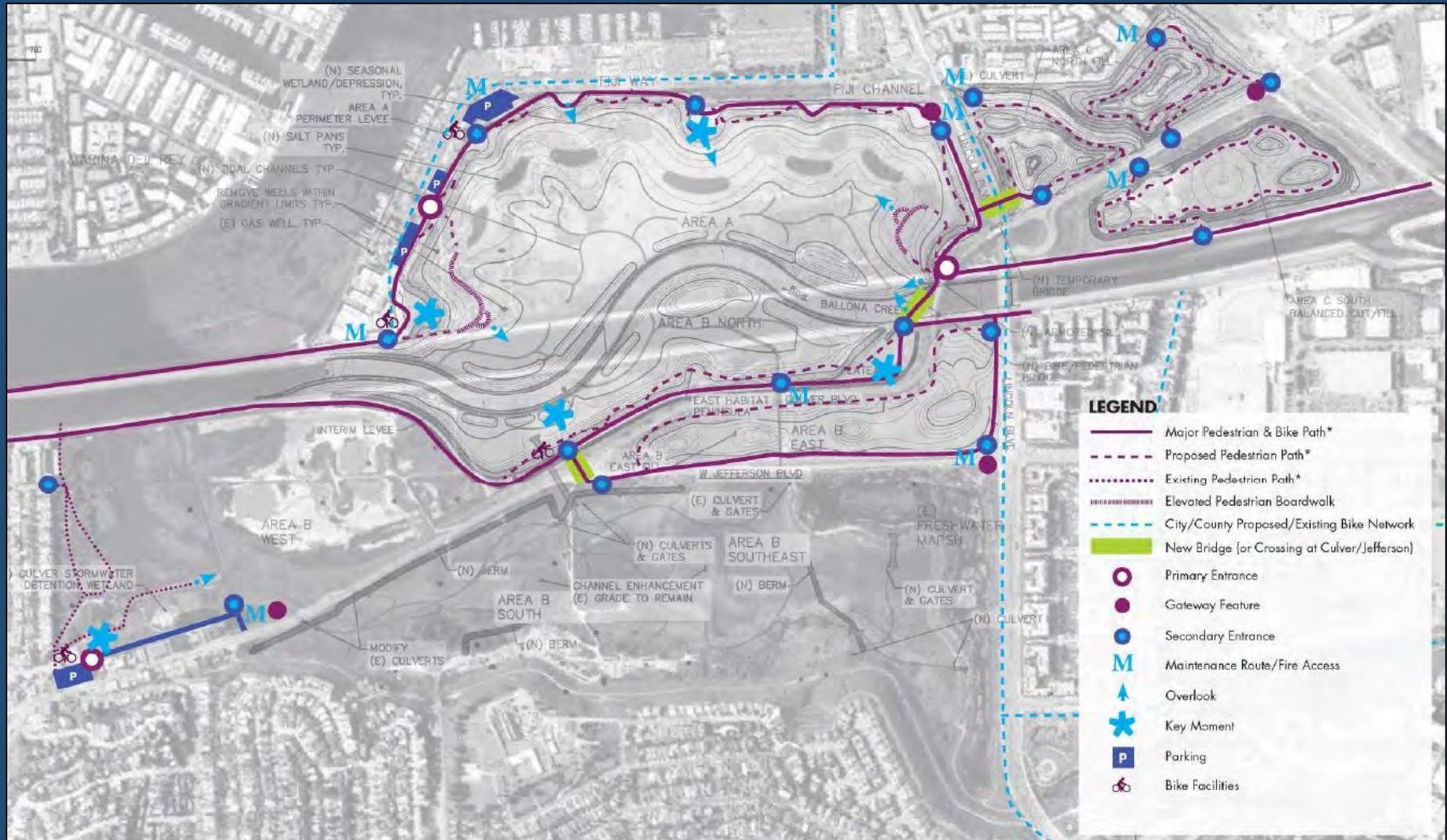


Note: paths shown are approximate

Source: Melendrez and ESA (DEIS/R 2017, Figure 2-23); page 2-101



Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project (Alternative 2 – DRAFT public access)

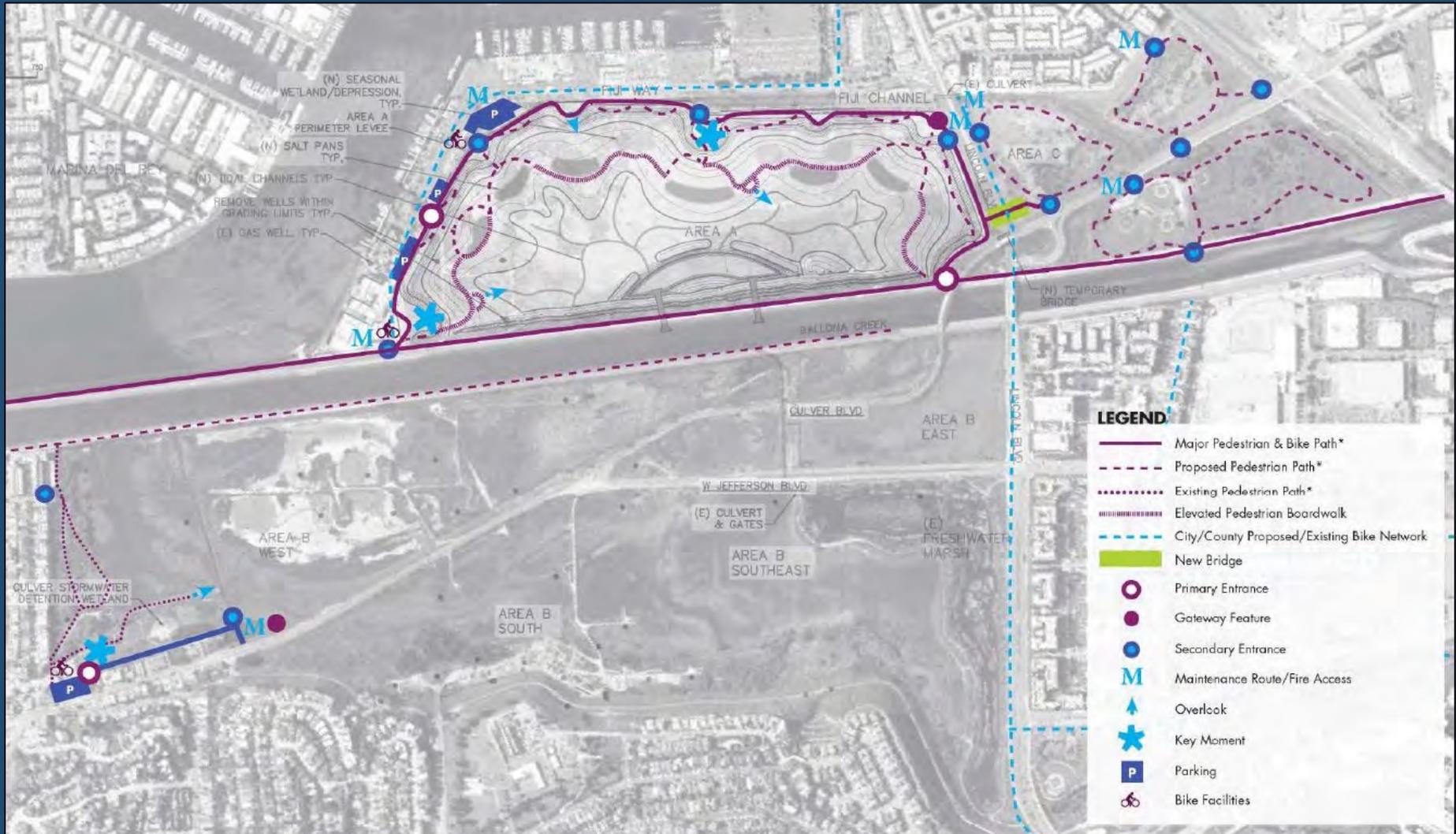


Note: paths shown are approximate

Source: Melendrez and ESA (DEIS/R 2017, Figure 2-45); page 2-162



Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project (Alternative 3 – DRAFT public access)



Note: paths shown are approximate

Source: Melendrez and ESA (DEIS/R 2017, Figure 2-54); page 2-186



Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project

(Alternative 4 – DRAFT public access)

No change

- No new visitor or recreational amenities would be provided
- Existing public access restrictions would continue
- No parking structure would be built, and no improvements to existing parking areas would be made.

2.2.1 TABLE 2-1c Summary of Alternatives:
Alternative 4 Public Access and Visitor Amenities pg. 2-16

How to Submit a Public Comment on the DEIS/R:

Submit public comments to CDFW or Army Corps of Engineers through 5 February 2018:

<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Regions/5/Ballona-EIR>

Email: BWERcomments@wildlife.ca.gov

Mail: Richard Brody, CDFW
c/o ESA (jas)
550 Kearny Street, Suite 800
San Francisco, CA 94108