



Ruffin Canyon Enhancement Planning

DRAFT Workshop 1, Notes

September 28, 2016; 6:45 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Serra Mesa Library, 9005 Aero Dr., San Diego, CA 92104

Stakeholder Attendees

San Diego Canyonlands Staff

Eric Bowlby – Executive Director

Dave George – GIS/Ecologist

Lauren Kahal – RECON Environmental Volunteer/Note taker

Ruffin Canyon Stakeholders

Will ??

Alan Nations

Jeffrey Jenkins

Michael Michael

Kevin Johnston

Pat Herron

Rob Hartman

Dave Claypool

Susan Midwalls

Mr. & Mrs. Enos

Frank Enrick

Kathleen Ford

Nancy Barnhart

Lois Lippold

Cindy Moore

Mary Reich

Sher Longworth

John Raifsnider

Glenn Torbett

Monica Fuentes

Loretta ?

Betsy Winters

Mary J. Johnson

Brad Weber

Terry O'Regan

Bob Crider

Mike Feanell

Carl Demas

Jason Allen

Cindy McIntyre

Bonnie Hardin

John & Beverly Hammon

Bob Garner

1. Introductory Comments & CEP Process:

- There will be subsequent meetings, some of which will be in Ruffin Canyon
- Eric gives brief CEP history
- Goals: 1) Build stewardship groups, 2) assemble existing conditions maps, 3) Outreach and stakeholder planning workshops, create enhancement action plan, 4) seek support, funding, and permits as needed, 5) execute action plans/projects

2. Opportunities and Constraints

- Most enhancements are within City of San Diego lands and require agreements and approvals from community stakeholders, planning groups, Parks and Recreation Department (including Open Space Division), Development Services Department, and City Council
- Street rights-of-way and lands with public easements through private property
 - Private property owners are important stakeholders and if interested/willing may involve their land, acquisition of land from willing sellers may be recommended

3. Land Jurisdiction and Regulatory Agencies

- Environmentally Sensitive Lands with regulations designed to protect wildlife and resource values that Canyonlands complies with in planning and implementation
- Resource agencies are stakeholders that may require permits

4. Canyonlands Enhancement Plan Goals:

- Balance conservation of resources with open space enjoyment and nature educational opportunities;
- Provide public access to nature and connections to other trails or key destinations;
- Incorporate recreation in ways that are compatible with natural resources.

5. Stakeholder Introductions and Brief Comments

- Mike Feanell – lives near canyon; has planted natives on his steep slope and is interested in native plants of canyon; his son has been involved as well; goal to participate and shape new canyon plan into something he and neighbors enjoy
- John Raifsnider – lives in Escala at base of canyon; Escala owns canyon land with a public access easement through it; he is enraptured with the canyons (refers to as mini Yosemite) and enjoys nature viewing; would like to ensure that the Escala community (over 700 residents) is represented so that the canyon trail can run all the way through Escala property rather than ending before it.
- Pat Herron – native San Diegan and has fond memories of nature in canyons; saw some canyons filled in with development; belongs to Friends of Ruffin Canyon; trails are worrisome as she thinks the main concern is wildlife and plant species preservation
- Dave Claypool – lives near entrance and walks dog in canyon weekly; interested in CEP process
- Margie Enos – lives on Marathon; hikes in Tierrasanta because Ruffin’s trails are dangerous/ankle-twisting problems, would like to see them maintained
- (Margie’s husband) – agrees with Margie’s statements and enjoys the canyon as well
- Alan Nations – lives against canyon near middle school; considers canyon a great resource
- Jeffrey Jenkins – also lives against canyon; they both keep an eye on the canyon and see some transients in area; he is interested in canyon enhancement process and how it will evolve
- Michael Michael – noted that a trail would be nice because he’s often unsure if he’s allowed to be in the canyon and noted that there is a lack of signage
 - Eric noted that safe and sustainable trails would help achieve balance b/t nature and use/enjoyment of canyon
 - Michael said he noticed camp sites on the map and Eric explained that they were existing, illegal transient encampments identified by mapping teams
- Mary Reich – Lives near Sand Rock Canyon; slope covered in pickle-weed that she is interested in restoring; trail along drainage ditch is near her home and she is curious about impact of more people coming to area
- John Hammon – has lived here over 50 years, watched canyon progress and loves it; concerned about non-native trees at top of canyon (have also impacted his property/fence); notes erosion problems
- Beverly Hammon – noted that their boys loved playing in canyon (access to nature)
- Brad Weber – noted that “nature deficit disorder” affects children and adults; the more people

connected to the canyon, the more able we are to preserve the canyon; he's a mountain bicyclist and the trail covered in cobble is not ideal; would like a mountain biking trail in canyon in a shaded area rather than on top of slope in full sun

- Frank Enrick – 50 year resident; general interest as a citizen in Serra Mesa
- Cindy Moore – agrees with what Brad has said regarding cobblestone; it's hard to get across trail; a canyon trail that is open and people know about would be positive in this urban area
- Cindy McIntyre – native San Diegan; hikes with Sierra Club children programs (Inspiring Connections Outdoors); has helped clean canyons and reports cleanup needs; would like more formalized trails to help with trash cleanups
- Bob Crider – likes to take shorter walks in canyon using walking sticks; it would be nice to have more finished trails and routes so that there aren't so many [other] use trails branching off
- Kevin Johnston – Is a regular volunteer with Friends of Ruffin Canyon. He noted that there is \$100,000 in funding in a Development Services Dept. account for permitting reviews for trail plans that needs to be used by 2020; interested in restoration opportunities but also interested in bringing the next generation to canyons; there are over 200 signatures from Escala and Serra Mesa residents in support of a Ruffin Trail connection between Serra Mesa and Mission Valley.
- Loretta?? – there is over-growth in the area of palm trees; doesn't walk down there much but her kids used to go down into canyon to play
- Betsy Winters – lived in Serra Mesa Longer Court, which she then sold to her daughter; now she lives in Mission Valley, but spends a lot of time here in Serra Mesa
- Ranger Jason Allen – Senior Park Ranger at Open Space Division of City Parks and Recreation; offered to answer any questions; he has about 40 canyons adding up to 3,500 acres throughout city to manage with very few staff; noted the canyons program; has worked in Ruffin Canyon a lot for years; needs community members/volunteers to help with canyon maintenance; primary goals are preservation and safety, then habitat restoration & trails
- Glenn Torbett – has been involved with canyon planning for about 20 years; would love to see a science community center added to the community garden adjacent to the school; would like to see a trail around the Taft Middle School with handicapped/disabled access; would also like to see a trail that goes all the way down to Mission Valley; concept for the trail to be on benches toward the bottom of the canyon (but not too far down b/c of cobble problems and maintenance/drainage issues); noted that iceplant does not necessarily protect against fire
- Eric Bowlby noted that Ruffin Canyon has had an active Friends Group since about 2002
- Bonnie Hardin – interested in hearing about the canyon and in preserving wildlife and plants of the canyon; relieved to hear that the trail is not going to be close to Walker Drive; concerns that now it's quiet and peaceful and trails bringing more people to the area might disrupt that
- Eric Bowlby clarified that one of number one goals is sustaining stewardship groups for maintenance of trails and habitats,
- Lois Lippold– lived on canyon for over 40 years; has mapped coyote groups and keeps track of birds and wildlife as well as behavior of people using the canyon; has reported people for illegal behavior and is protective over the canyon; concerns are with unmonitored people using the canyon (bee bee guns and paintball guns could hurt wildlife); would like someone such as docent or interested person to take watch to ensure people are following the canyon rules rather than relying on signage alone; has seen the loss of a large number of wildlife and would like to protect what we still have
 - Eric noted San Diego is one of 35 internationally recognized biodiversity hotspots

- Bob Garner – SDG&E is planning expansion of a mission switching facility within the land they own inside the canyon that people should be aware of
- Terry O’Regan – family has been resident of Serra Mesa for 50+ years; Ruffin Canyon means a lot to him and he has concerns with wildlife/plant conservation; would like to see trails more hiker friendly (without cobblestones); when developing canyon to make more user-friendly, would like to ensure erosion is considered because when people go off trails it causes erosion problems; he is spearheading a local newspaper (Serra Mesa Connection) to be published next month and looking for content from local residents and SD Canyonlands; would like to discuss using Canyonlands’ input, statistics, and subsequent meeting notices in the paper
- Mary Johnson – 56 years Serra Mesa resident; appreciates Canyonlands and other people involved in the community; noted that Council member Valerie Stallings made sure there would be public access down to SD river/protecting ROW through Escala in 1987; thinks canyon lands are such an asset and would like to preserve the canyons
- Monica Fuentes – chair of Friends of Ruffin Canyon; would like to see canyon between library and rec center converted to open space as it is frequented by transients/camps; right now it is not open space but is controlled by Parks and Rec and they don’t have plans to do anything with it (Eric noted that we can call this area Library Canyon for discussion purposes; noted there is a vernal pool near the canyon)
- Kathleen Ford – also in Friends of Ruffin Canyon; agrees with statement regarding dedicating Library Canyon as open space; would like to see a reduction in transients using the canyon; would like to see established trail to rectify current safety problems of use trails
- Sher Longworth - lives on Broadview; family has utilized preserved canyons for generations; where she lives on Broadview everything has been scraped off and was not protected, so she appreciates the preserved open space
- John Raifsnider asked if there is a way to get in touch with SDG&E to ensure they develop their portion of the canyon with consideration of the native habitat
 - Eric Bowlby said he has a liaison at SDG&E (Jeff Sykes) that has been responsive and attentive to the canyon enhancement process
 - Canyons have utilities within them, so coordination with SDG&E and other utilities is necessary

6. Review Existing Conditions Maps

- Eric Bowlby and Dave George noted that SDCanyonlands.org/cep is where you can find information and maps on canyon programs; stakeholder meeting minutes will be put up here as well
- Eric explained the following maps and topics:
- Topo-Geographical Map shows where steep slopes are (25-40% and over 40%)
- Socio-Infrastructure Map shows where the utility infrastructure is
- These two maps work together so you can see what’s in this canyon
- Vegetation and Existing Communities map helps SD Canyonlands target habitat restoration
 - Close trails that are not approved/impacting habitat and restoring these and disturbed land back to a native state, but also maintaining or providing approved trails that are least impactful
 - California Coastal Conservancy (Coastal Conservancy) is funding CEP projects because

all these drainages are connected to the ocean and the Coastal Conservancy sees it as a way to restore coastal health

- they are interested in Canyonlands restoring the natural filtration and erosion prevention that these natural, healthy canyon lands could provide
 - Coastal Conservancy Funding will help Canyonlands to study trails and do design work – designs that stakeholders come up with will be sent to Canyonlands' design team and submitted to the City's development process
- A trail that links Ruffin Canyon down to the San Diego River would also help people walk to bike through
- Prop 1 passed in 2014 for water resources, which can fund Canyonlands restoration plans
- What we are doing now in the stakeholder meetings is the beginning of the entire process
- Stakeholder Note: trails for wildlife are necessary for wildlife to get back into the river system

7. Review of Socio-Infrastructure Conditions (North to South) - Stakeholder Input

- Eric noted that what we need to consider is what amenities will and will not work in this canyon
- We have existing trails that come from the north that might need improvement, but not necessarily full-scale realignments about down to Shawn Finger;
- Farther south, where Shawn Finger Canyon connects with Ruffin Canyon, there is a rocky/cobblestone pathway that is a sewer access road. Canyonlands would not be allowed to remove the cobble as it serves erosion control purposes
 - When rain comes down during storms, boulders and other debris move across the trail and cause uneven surfaces
 - Idea would be to move the trail up and out of the drainage/creek-bed
- The Escala easement is through the rocky creek bottom of the canyon and within wetlands, which are important habitat. It would be hard to maintain trails here due to heavy flows during rain storms; idea would be to get the trails up out of the creek and riparian area onto a slope,
- The greater vision is to connect the Ruffin trail to the SD River: we are capable of doing this, but need neighbors at Escala have some concerns
- The vision for San Diego River trail is to connect the coast all the way to the headwaters in Julian
- Access to nature, the coast, and the mountains of Julian without having to get into cars
- Suggestion from a stakeholder: database with wildlife viewing, rare plants, etc. would be helpful; so that trail users are aware of what's in the canyon
- Another stakeholder suggestion: noted there are natural 'benches' on the lower west and east slopes that could be used for a potential trail, and would remain over 200' from any private property lines of the houses on the canyon rim.
- Eric said that the goal is to work with property owners to address their concerns and see how we can address them or mitigate them through the CEP process
- Canyonlands is hoping to discuss alternative easements with Escala –to get the trail up onto a bench with better views of the trees and the canyon
- Question from a stakeholder: is it possible to add parts or short distances of an elevated walkway along cobble area so that it's above the streambed?
 - Eric noted that it would be vulnerable to rain that moves the boulders along/washing it

- away, but added that the idea should be explored by experienced engineers;
 - Ranger Jason noted that he has seen boardwalks where there's a lot of rain with unstable ground, but not in a condition like San Diego; there could be some maintenance costs associated with it
 - What about spots with a shelf along the side of the cobble so that you can bypass the cobble? Eric said that it's worth discussing with qualified engineers.
 - Ranger Jason notes that there is a portion where you have to walk in the creek-bed, but also some spots where you might be able to put in a shelf
- Eric moved back to the Socio-Infrastructure Map; he heard an idea from this group about a trail around the perimeter of Taft Middle School for the disabled community, which would provide them visual access to the canyon since often disabled people cannot physically enter it
 - Funding allows Canyonlands to plan amenities for disabled community
- Opportunities for children to get into the canyon and learn about native habitats was suggested
- There is a trail that comes down from Gramercy with switchbacks, that follows the sewer access road. Perhaps there are some improvements that can be made there, such as signage, viewpoints, etc.?
 - Bob noted there is a joint-use park being planned at Taft (funds are in place, it's going through design and approvals). District is considering putting in a stage with the canyon as a backdrop.
 - Another stakeholder added that plans for the park project (with this stage) has gone through the Serra Mesa Community Park and Rec Council and is going to the board. They will monitor this and ask that it stays included; however, the school and Serra Mesa Community Parks and Rec staff were not very excited about these plans. There will be something that provides visual access if not a stage.
- Eric noted that the endangered species California gnatcatcher is in Ruffin Canyon and noise is harmful to their nesting behavior (February 15 – September 15 is nesting season) so some uses on edge of canyon should be carefully considered
- A stakeholder noted that San Diego has too many chain-linked fences and would like to see fences scaled back in the canyon (if not able to remove, can they be shorter?). Start with removing chain linked fences around the school, but would have to work with the school district
 - Taft Middle School just finished putting up more and higher chain linked fences around the school
 - Another stakeholder mentioned that you could possibly inset the fencing by several meters and allow a pathway on the outside of it, which could help provide handicapped people with actual access and views of canyon not blocked by fencing
 - A semi-retired teacher noted that these fences would remain there because it's part of the school's safety and is mandated by the state law for all schools
- There is a good trailhead at the northernmost access of the canyon from Gramercy; however, it often seems damaged by rain.
 - Trailhead to the southeast of this, on the other side of Taft, was noted by a stakeholder to be an even better trail with more scenic quality. Need a better junction of these two trailheads where the trails meet south of the entrances as it is very steep slope.
- Eric asked if the joint use park program would be an official allowance for the public to enter

the canyon through school property?

- It might be a problem as you can only use the access when school is not in session.
However, the City website already shows trails as existing on their maps.
- Stakeholder asked if they have to have an official recognition by the school for that portion on the school property.
- Monica invited all stakeholders to be involved in the Friends of Ruffin Canyon, for cleanup activities or even help out with less intensive tasks
- Bob to act as liaison with school during planning process to see if trail around the perimeter of Taft this could be agreed upon.
 - Stakeholder noted that it would take a lot to get school to agree to doing this because of liability and cost

8. Next Meeting & Stakeholder Field Trips

- Canyonlands will notify everyone who signed in of the next stakeholder events and of other Canyonlands events (e.g., Friends of Canyon programs)
- Next meeting will be at the Serra Mesa Library or the Mission Valley Library, and we will continue the discussion about the trails in Ruffin Canyon
- Subsequent meetings will include field visits so that we can discuss ideas and solutions on the ground

Main Points:

- Generally, this group of stakeholders seemed very supportive of the enhancement process
- Many are concerned with preservation of wildlife and plants, as well as enhancing the natural state
- Others are concerned with security and transient issues
- Trail “desires” include trails through shaded areas, easier walking around cobble stone, and mountain biking, gentler slopes, and a docent or other type of canyon watch program
- Suggestion for a trail around the Taft Middle School with handicapped access outside the school’s fence