



GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS STATE PARK GENERAL PLAN

JUNE 30, 2025 | STAKEHOLDER MEETING #2





Team Organization and Roles

- California State Parks Team
 - Headquarters Staff
 - Senior Park and Recreation Specialist: Katie Metraux
 - Deputy Director, Planning: Alex Stehl
 - Associate Park and Recreation Specialist: Jason Finley
 - Associate Park and Recreation Specialist: David Block
 - Central Valley District Staff
 - District Superintendent: Danielle Gerhart
 - Sector Superintendent: Duke Heberling
 - Natural Resources Manager: Heather Reith
 - Senior Park and Recreation Specialist: Paige Haller
 - Environmental Scientist: Collette Bradley
 - Museum Curator/Cultural Resources Specialist: Lee Eal
- Consulting Team (Ascent)
 - Principal: Curtis Alling
 - Project Director: Adam Lewandowski
 - Project Manager: Lily Bostrom
 - Park and Recreation Planner: Lindsay Kageyama
 - Engagement Specialist: Luis Montes
 - Environmental Planner: Nicole Greenfield

Agenda

- 1 Background
- 2 Process to Date
- 3 Concept Alternatives
- 4 Mural Board Discussion



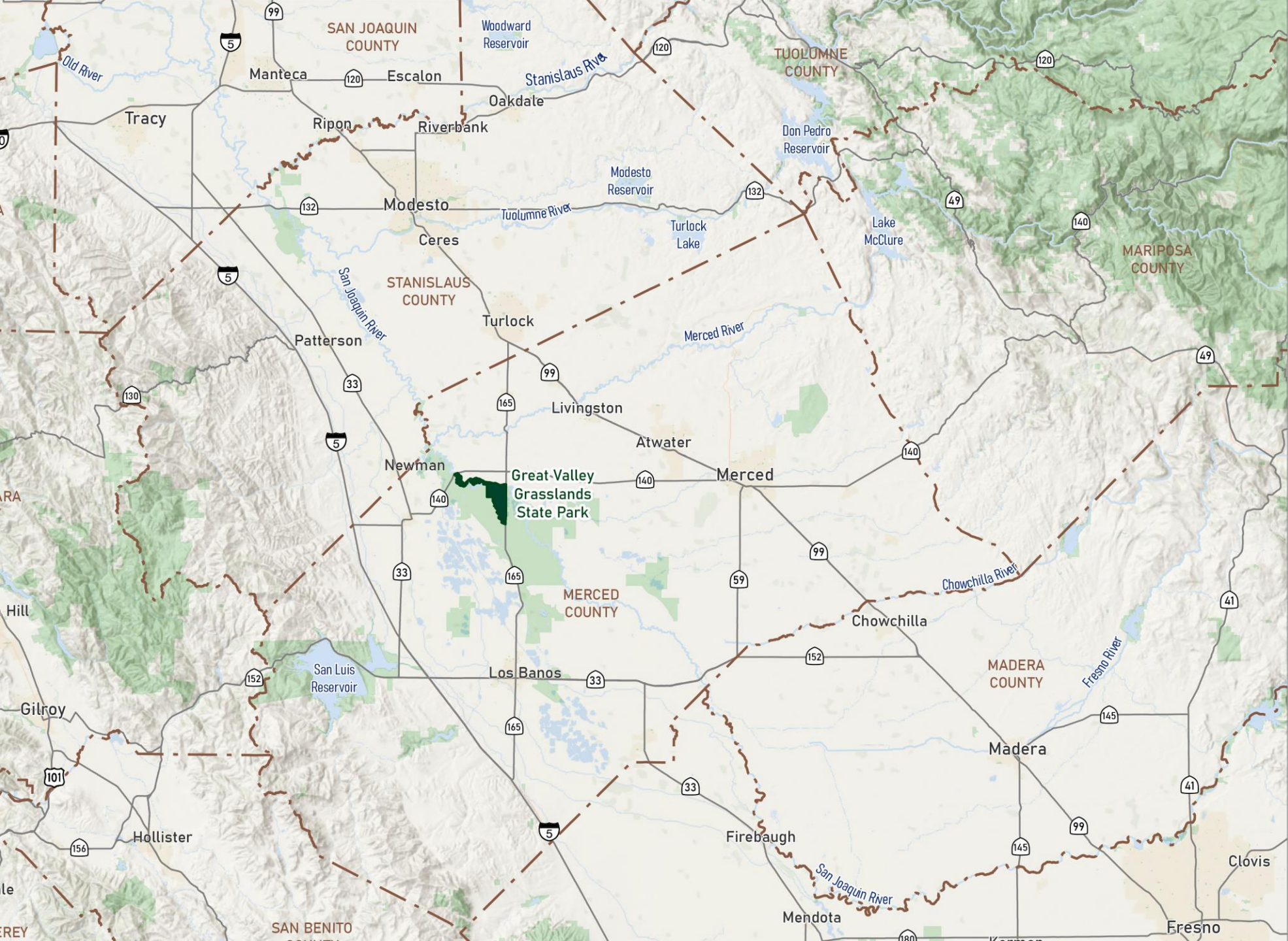
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Background

GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS

STATE PARK

- Great Valley Grasslands State Park
- Public Land



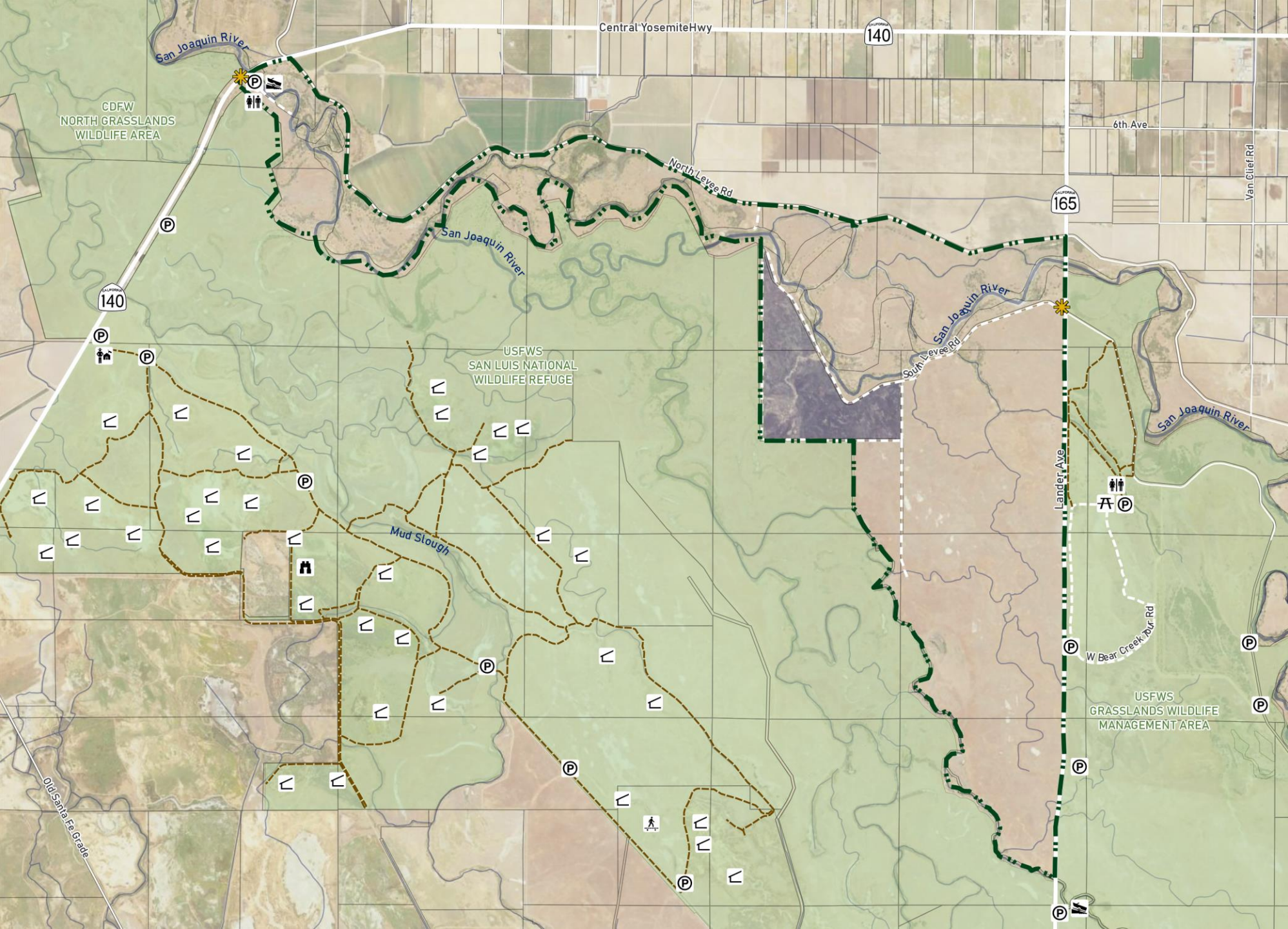


Park Overview

- State Park classification
- 2,826 acres
- San Joaquin River runs through park
- Grasslands, vernal pools, riparian channels, sloughs, riparian woodlands
- Park is largely unknown and has low visitation
- Recreation facilities:
 - Boat launch
 - Parking and vault restroom
 - 5.3 miles of unpaved roads
- Recreation activities:
 - Fishing
 - Boating
 - Hiking
 - Biking
 - Birdwatching

GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS

STATE PARK



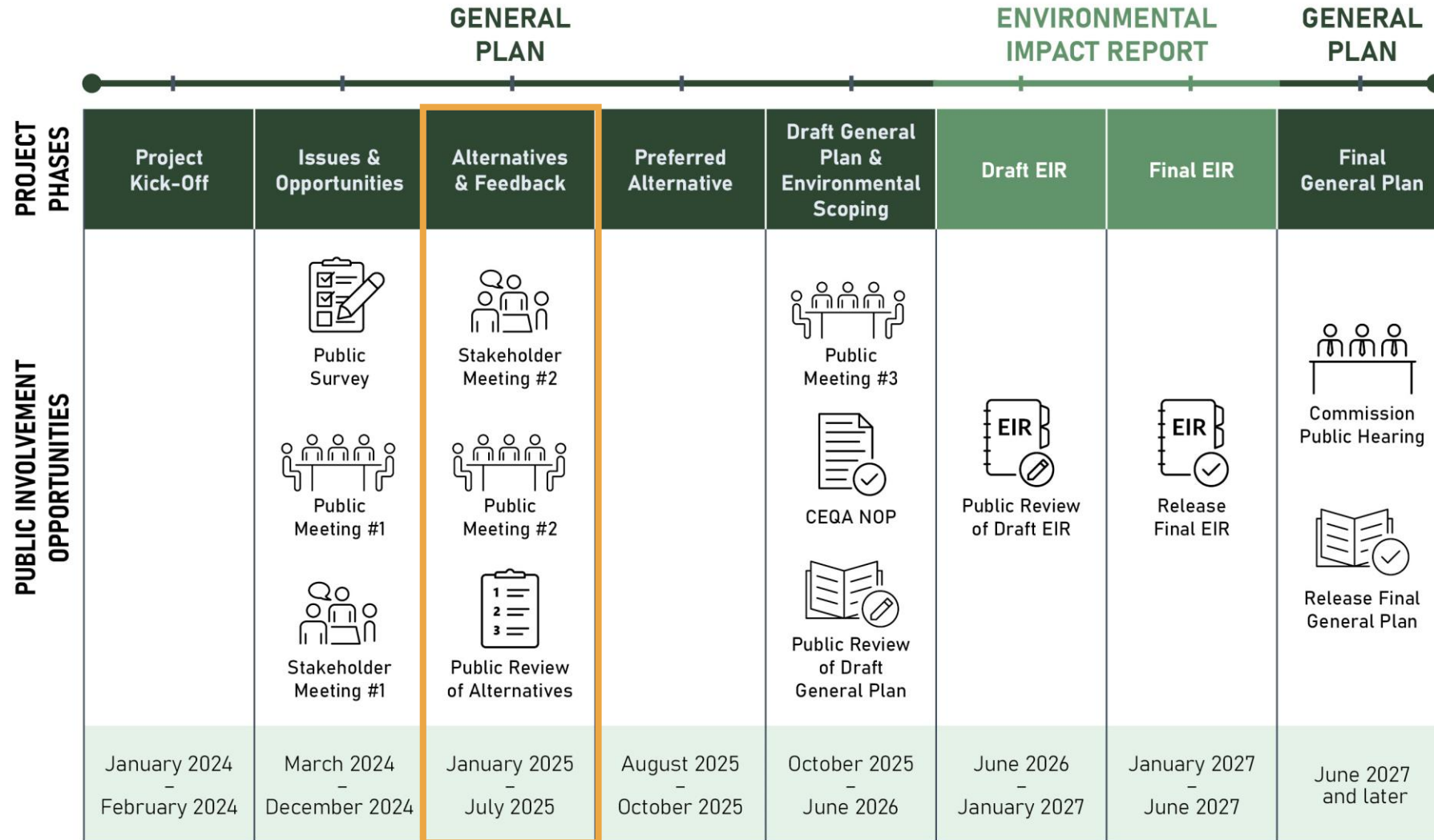
- Park Boundary
- Park Entrance
- Boat Launch
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Restroom
- Hunter Check Station
- Hunting Blind
- Observation Tower
- Foot Bridge
- Unpaved Trail
- Major Road
- Paved Road
- Unpaved Road
- Waterways
- Parcels



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Process to Date

PROCESS AND SCHEDULE



WE ARE HERE

Existing Conditions



2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

2.1 Regional Land Use and Facilities

This section provides an overview of regional influences on Great Valley Grasslands State Park (GVGSP or park) related to land use, recreational facilities, transportation, and potential hazards.

Regional Land Use

GVGSP lies within California's San Joaquin Valley within the Great Central Valley which extends from Redding to Bakersfield. The area is rural and has a lower population density than much of the state. The region is bordered on either side by mountain ranges—to the west of the park is the coastal Diablo Range and to the east is the Sierra Nevada. GVGSP is within Merced County, which has six incorporated cities: Gustine, Los Banos, Merced, Livingston, Atwater, and Dos Palos (Figure 2-6). There are numerous other small unincorporated rural communities surrounding the park, including Newman, Hilar, Delhi, and Santa Nella.

95 percent of Merced County's land area is zoned for agriculture—which includes farming, ranching, wildlife habitat, open space, and recreational uses.

1 GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS STATE PARK GENERAL PLAN

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Grasslands Preservation

GVGSP is part of the Grasslands Ecological Area (GEA), which is a 240,000-acre area within the San Joaquin River Basin of the California Central Valley set aside for grasslands and wetlands preservation. It includes marshes, riparian corridors, vernal pools, meadows, and native uplands and grasslands. The area consists of the largest contiguous block of remaining freshwater wetlands in the western United States (US) and is home to several endangered and threatened species and waterfowl wintering habitat.

Regional Recreation Context

Federal Lands

Many of the protected lands surrounding GVGSP are owned or managed by federal agencies (Figure 2-4). The two main federal landowners include USFWS and the US Bureau of Reclamation. The Fretitas and West Bear Creek Units of the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) border the park to the south and east, respectively. There is a visitor center and activities on these lands include auto touring, hiking, fishing, and hunting. Other surrounding USFWS lands include the Merced and San Joaquin River NWRs.

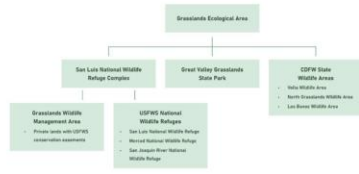


Figure 2-2 Land Management Hierarchy of the Grasslands Ecological Area

2 GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS STATE PARK GENERAL PLAN

EXISTING CONDITIONS

GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS STATE PARK

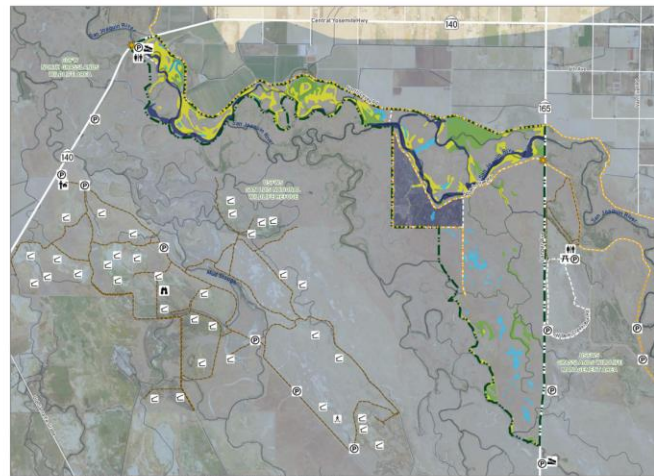


Figure 2-9 Hydrology

Sources: Data downloaded from CA Natural Resources Agency, CA State Parks, County of Merced, FEMA, and USFWS in 2023

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EXISTING CONDITIONS

GREAT VALLEY GRASSLANDS STATE PARK

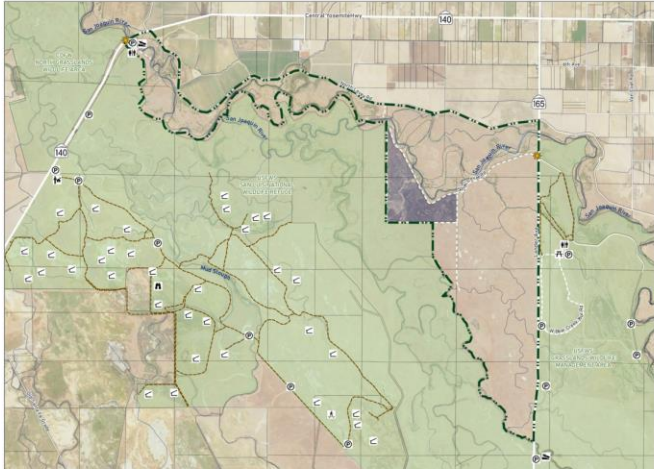


Figure 2-6 Existing Park Facilities and Features

Sources: Data downloaded from CA State Parks, County of Merced, and USFWS in 2023

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EXISTING CONDITIONS

U.S. Drought Monitor

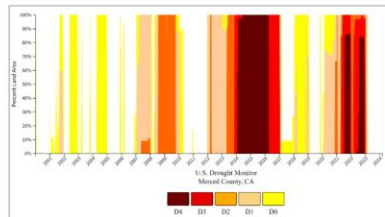


Figure 2-5 Drought Monitoring in Merced County from 2001-2024

Regional Hazards and Risks

Drought

The San Joaquin Valley experiences periodic drought, and it is expected that dry years will become more frequent and more intense due to climate change, which will also exacerbate existing water supply challenges in the region (Figure 2-5) (Merced County 2023). Historical drought data for Merced County and the San Joaquin Valley region indicate there have been five significant multi-year droughts in the last 75 years; this equates to a five percent chance of a drought in any given year (Merced County 2023).

The area features record low groundwater levels due to water diversions for agricultural uses, growing urbanization, and decreased rainfall. During low water years, the San Joaquin River can be completely dry for

Source: Chart downloaded from the National Integrated Drought Information System in March 2024.
Note: D0 = Abnormally Dry; D1 = Moderate Drought; D2 = Severe Drought; D3 = Extreme Drought; D4 = Exceptional Drought

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EXISTING CONDITIONS

2.7 Planning Influences

Systemwide Planning

State Parks Mission

The mission of CSP is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



State Park System Plan

The 2002 State Park System Plan addresses the activities and needs of the system. It describes the challenges, goals, policies, objectives, and proposals for new programs and initiatives needed to guide the state park system. Some of the priorities from the plan that are relevant to GVGSP include:

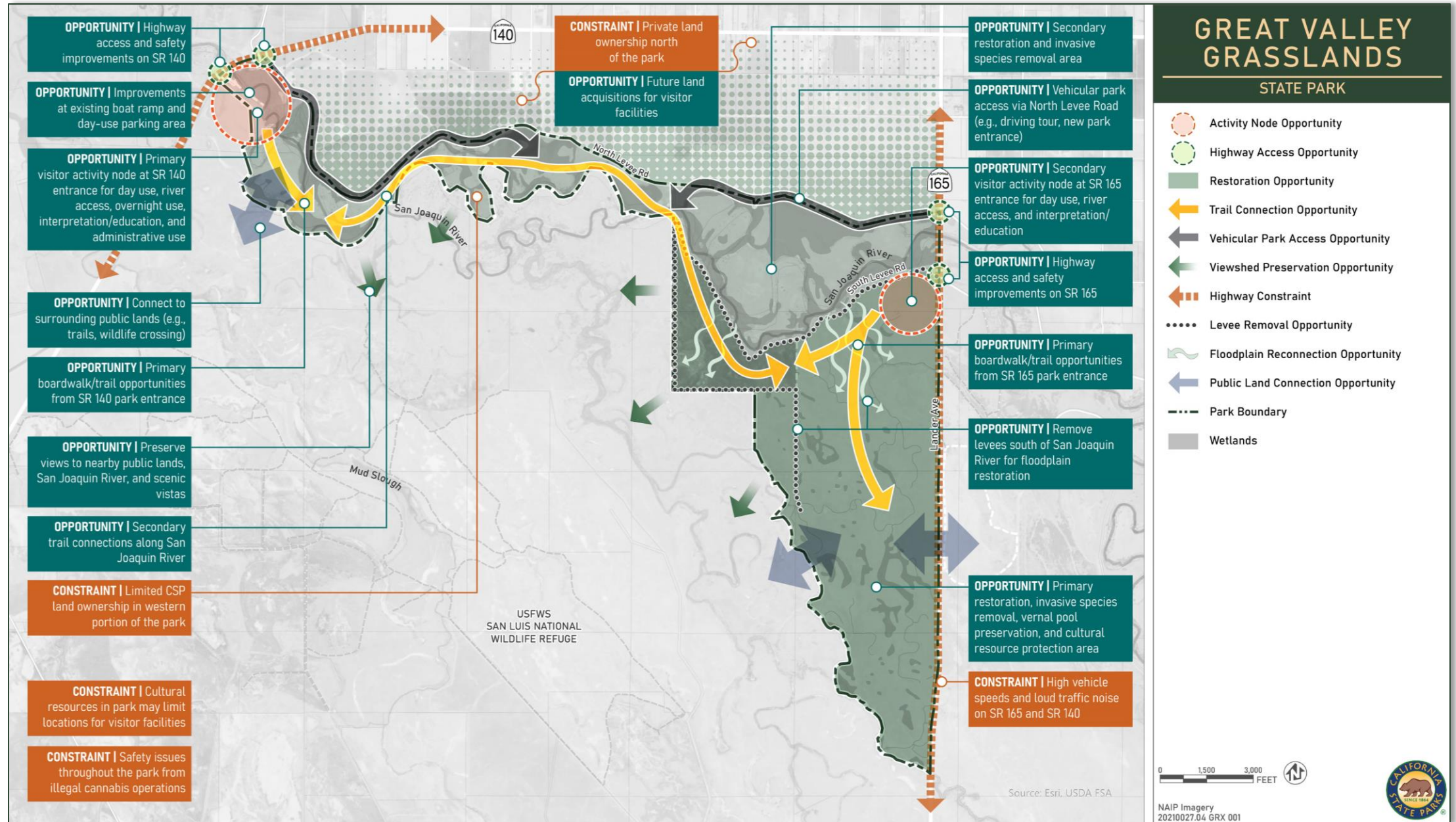
- Continue to develop and expand data systems to gather information about the physical and biotic resource condition upon which resource management goals, objectives, policies, programs and projects are based.
- Work actively with state, federal and regional land management agencies and with private landholding organizations, so that each may cooperate and coordinate in the accomplishment of common goals for the benefit of the entire natural resource base of the state.
- Support a statewide ongoing archaeological site assessment and maintenance program that will allow more effective identification, preservation and protection prehistoric and historic archaeological sites for current and future generations.
- Research current information and trends on the demographic, economic, social, political and technological

Path Forward Strategic Plan

CSP released their five-year strategic plan in 2024 to help strengthen operations by focusing on key priorities and directing resources to ensure that everyone works together to achieve the goals of the plan. The vision of the plan is: "As innovative stewards, DPR inspires

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Issues and Analysis





Issues

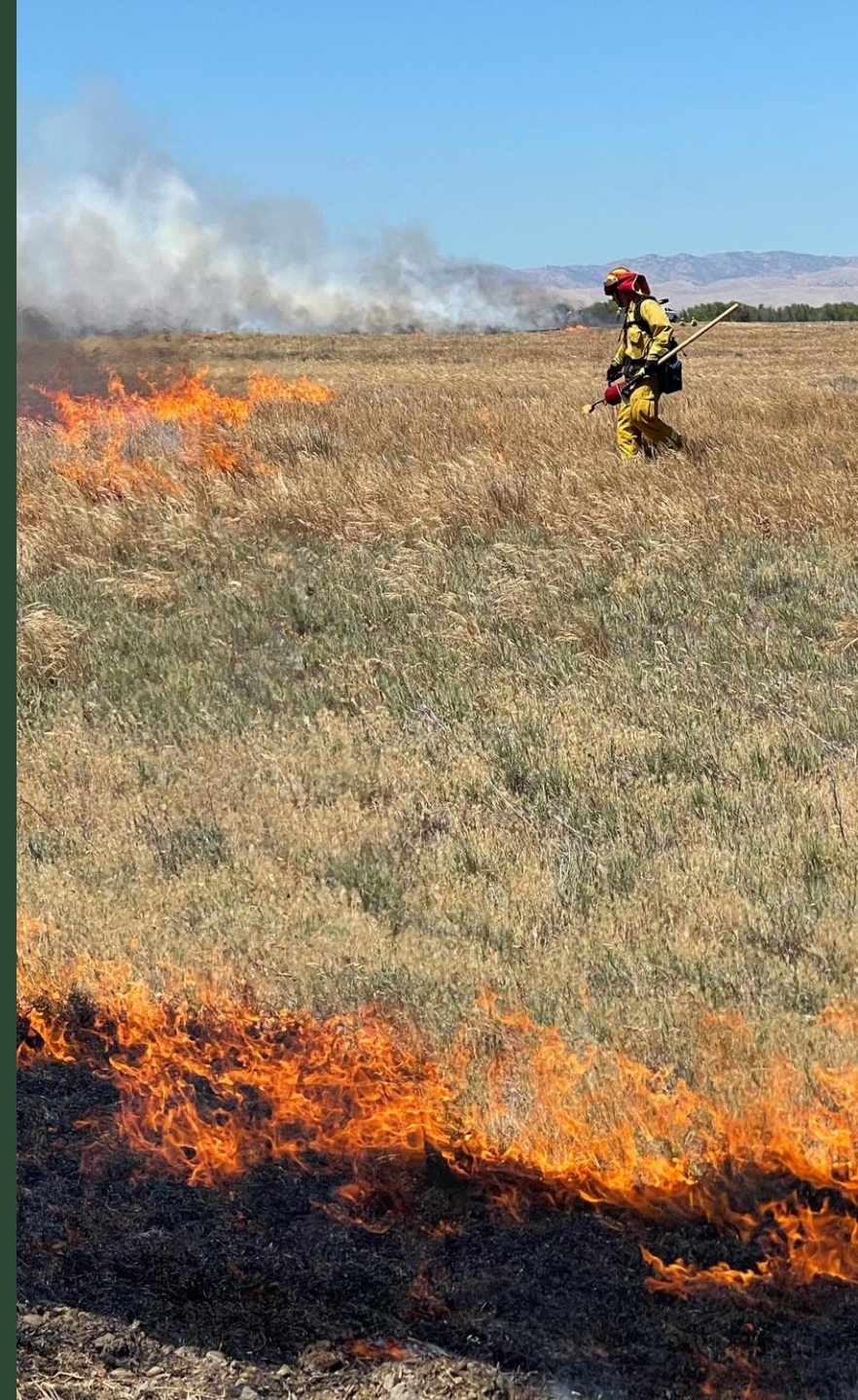
VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND RECREATION

- Limited recreational opportunities
- Limited trails and trail connectivity
- Lack of universal accessibility
- Compatibility with adjacent land uses
- Limited information, education, and interpretation
- Public safety risks
- Access for underserved communities
- Limited awareness of GVGSP

Issues

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Disruption of natural hydrologic processes
- Conservation of sensitive natural resources
- Threats from invasive species
- Preservation of scenic views
- Protection of significant cultural resources
- Collaborative tribal management





Issues

INFRASTRUCTURE, FACILITIES, AND PARK OPERATIONS

- Park access limitations
- Adequacy of administrative and maintenance facilities
- Limited utility infrastructure
- Potential for facility inundation
- Staffing and funding limitations

Issues

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Adapting to rising temperatures and extreme heat
- Adapting to extreme precipitation, flooding, and drought
- Adapting to increased wildfire
- Greenhouse gas emissions generated by operations



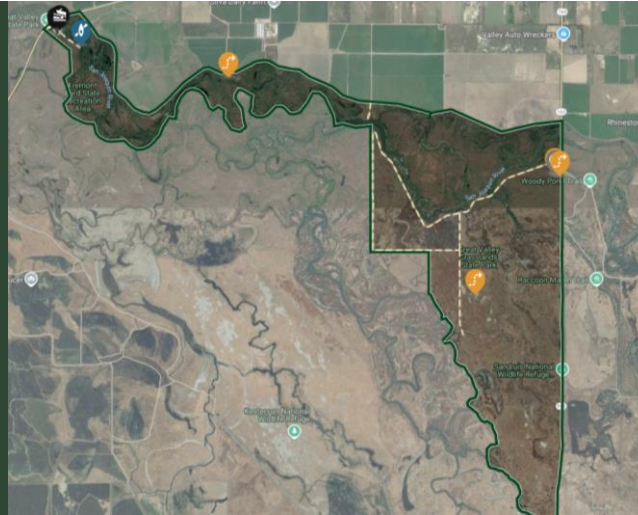
Slido Question #1: Are there other major issues that should be addressed in the General Plan?

Results

- Need year-round parking along Highway 165 and improved signage.
- Is there a way to connect outreach opportunities and programming in coordination with Dos Rios?
- Provide safe coal disposal to minimize wildfire risk, as well as fishing line disposal containers and educational information.
- No parking on the Highway 165 side.
- Will there be opportunities for the public to get involved in restoration efforts?
- Would additional infrastructure require user fees?
- Increase opportunities for passive, non-motorized recreation (e.g., trails, kayak launch sites).
- The river is constantly changing—safety and cleanliness are only snapshots in time. It's not possible to predict the future.
- Staff should be available to offer multilingual programming (Spanish).
- Is it better to leave the park less impacted by humans—preserving it as is—rather than developing it for human benefit?
- It looks like you're considering floodplain reconnection and siting recreational facilities away from sensitive plant areas—that's good!
- Will there be specific opportunities for cultural events led by the local tribal community?
- Will it be safe and clean to swim in the river at the park?
- Include bilingual signage (Spanish).

Public Engagement

VIRTUAL BILINGUAL PUBLIC WORKSHOP



POP-UP EVENTS ~500 people engaged

IMAGINE
THE
FUTURE
AT GREAT VALLEY
GRASSLANDS
STATE PARK

Active poll

What educational topics are you and your family most interested in learning about at Great Valley Grasslands?
¿Qué temas educativos están más interesados en aprender usted y su familia en Great Valley Grasslands?



ONLINE SURVEY AND INTERACTIVE MAP



PROJECT WEBPAGE

Planning Charrettes

- Planning Charrette #1:
Development of alternative themes
- Planning Charrette #2:
Development of the three concept alternatives





3

Concept Alternatives



Management Actions Relevant to All Alternatives

- Grassland management and floodplain restoration
- Cultural resource management
- Interpretation and education
- Operations and maintenance projects
- Interagency coordination
- Tribal collaboration
- Prescribed burning
- Cannabis grow operation removal

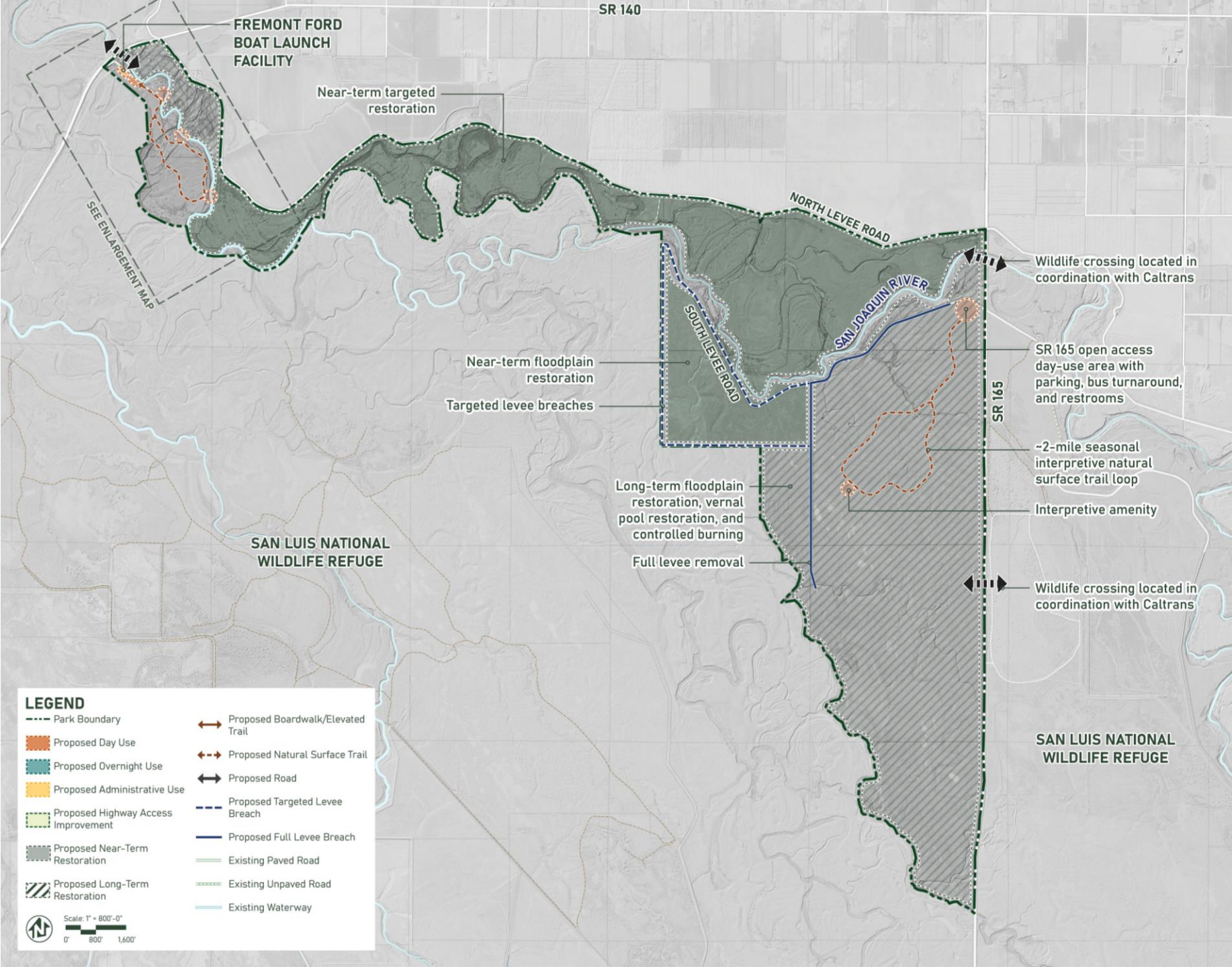
Alternatives Overview



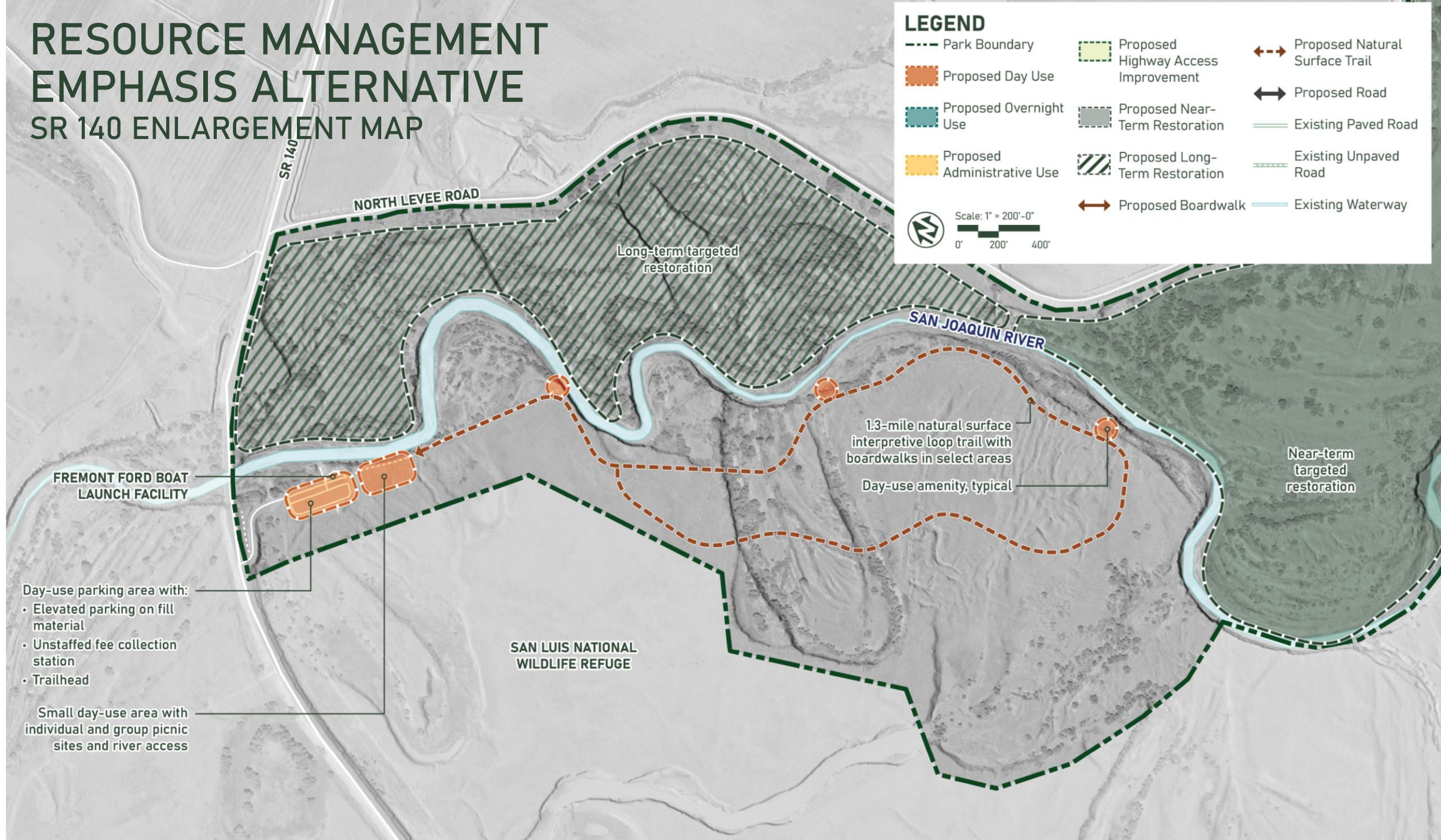
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE

Summary of Improvements

Park Entrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Existing SR 140 entrance
Day Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">2 day-use areas
Administrative Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">None
Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none">3.3 miles natural surface trail with boardwalks in select locations
Overnight Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">None
Ecological Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1.9 miles full levee breaches3.0 miles targeted levee breaches



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE SR 140 ENLARGEMENT MAP



**RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT
EMPHASIS
ALTERNATIVE
SR 165
ENLARGEMENT MAP**

Near-term floodplain
restoration

Targeted levee breaches

Long-term floodplain
restoration, vernal
pool restoration, and
controlled burning

Full levee removal

NORTH LEVEE ROAD

SOUTH LEVEE ROAD

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

SR 165

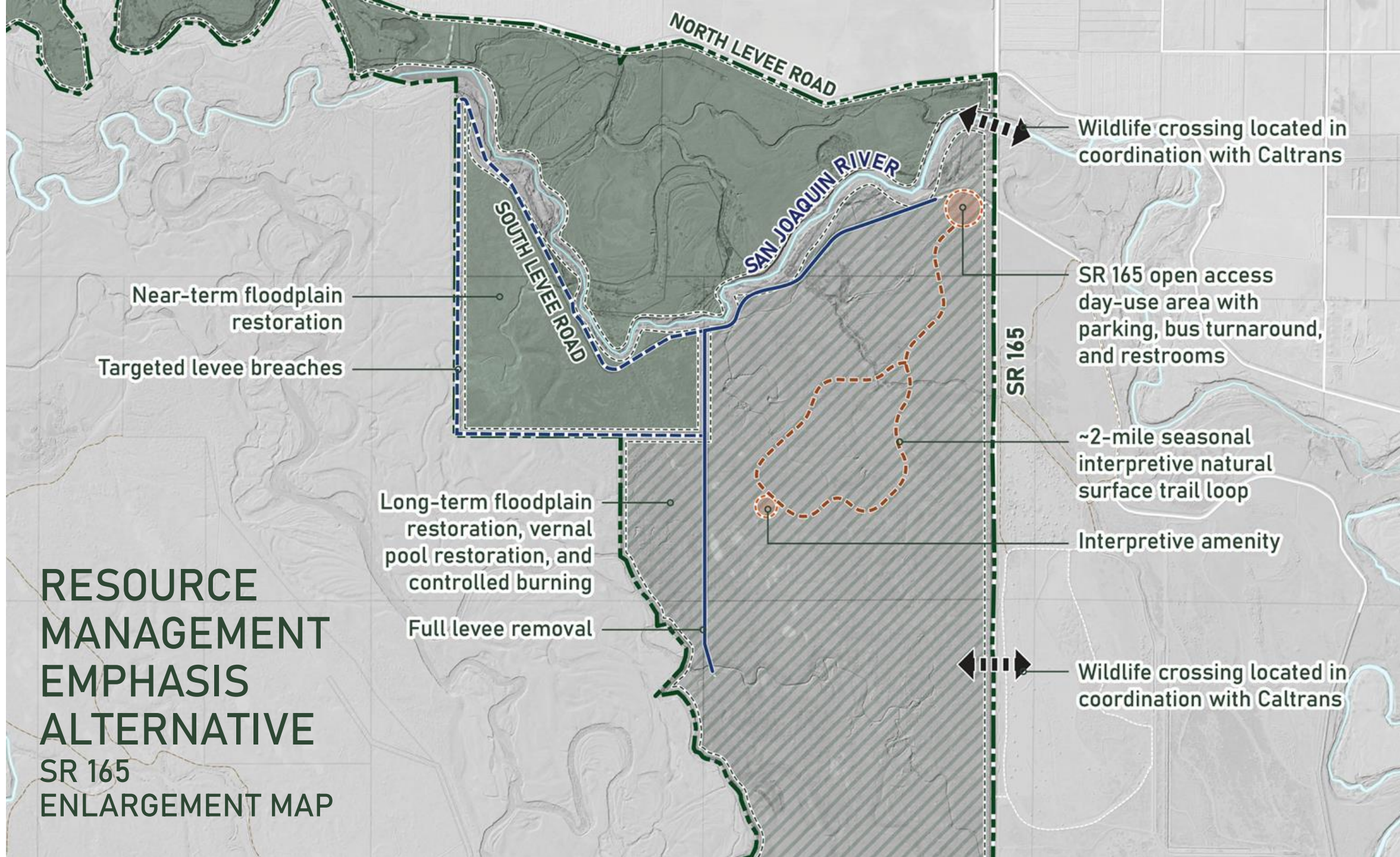
Wildlife crossing located in
coordination with Caltrans

SR 165 open access
day-use area with
parking, bus turnaround,
and restrooms

~2-mile seasonal
interpretive natural
surface trail loop

Interpretive amenity

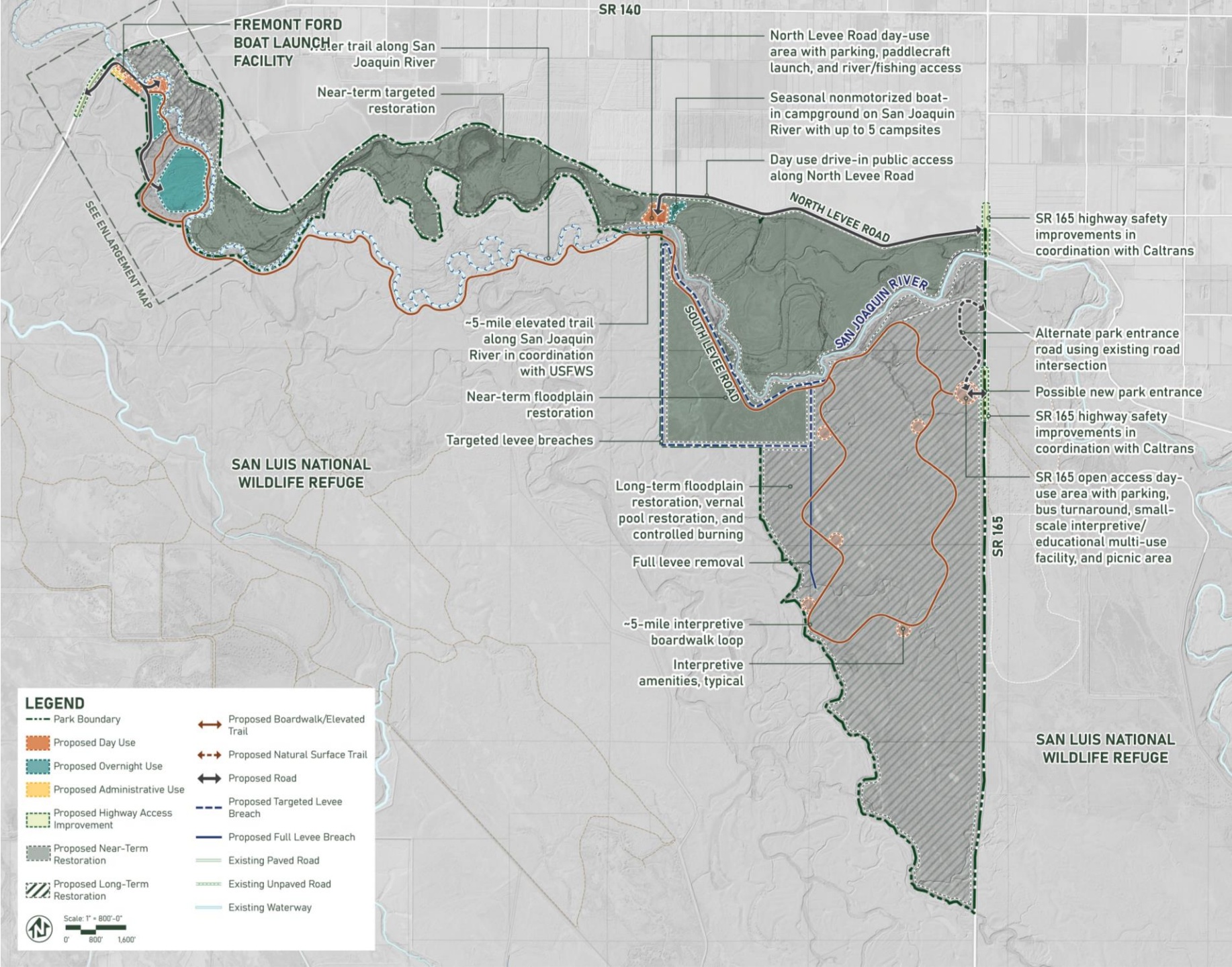
Wildlife crossing located in
coordination with Caltrans



RECREATION EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE

Summary of Improvements

Park Entrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Improve existing SR 140 entrance2 new SR 165 entrances
Day Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">4 day-use areas
Administrative Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Administrative and maintenance area
Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none">6.5 miles boardwalk5 miles elevated trail
Overnight Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Up to 30 year-round campsites elevated on fillUp to 100 seasonal at-grade campsitesUp to 5 nonmotorized boat-in campsites
Ecological Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">0.7 miles full levee breaches3.8 miles targeted levee breaches



RECREATION EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE SR 140 ENLARGEMENT MAP

SR 140

NORTH LEVEE ROAD

Long-term targeted restoration

1.5-mile interpretive boardwalk loop

Water trail along San Joaquin River



Scale: 1" = 200'-0"
0' 200' 400'

LEGEND

- Park Boundary
- Proposed Day Use
- Proposed Overnight Use
- Proposed Administrative Use
- Proposed Highway Access Improvement
- Proposed Near-Term Restoration
- Proposed Long-Term Restoration
- ↔ Proposed Natural Surface Trail
- ↔ Proposed Road
- Existing Paved Road
- - - Existing Unpaved Road
- Existing Waterway
- ↔ Proposed Boardwalk

Large day-use area with individual and group picnic sites and river access

Small day-use area with individual picnic sites and river access

Water trail to nearby public lands

FREMONT FORD BOAT LAUNCH FACILITY

Administrative area with:

- Elevated facilities on fill material
- Administrative offices
- Maintenance area
- Employee housing

Visitor entrance station

Realigned park entrance road

SR 140 highway safety improvements in coordination with Caltrans

Year-round campground (up to 30 campsites) elevated on fill material with:

- Tent campsites
- RV campsites with hookup considerations
- Group campsites
- Employee trailer sites
- Combo buildings

Day-use area with:

- Elevated facilities and parking on fill material
- Expanded parking area
- Primary visitor information kiosk/open air visitor center
- Trailhead

SAN LUIS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Seasonal at-grade campground (up to 100 campsites) with:

- Tent campsites
- Group campsites
- Combo buildings
- River access

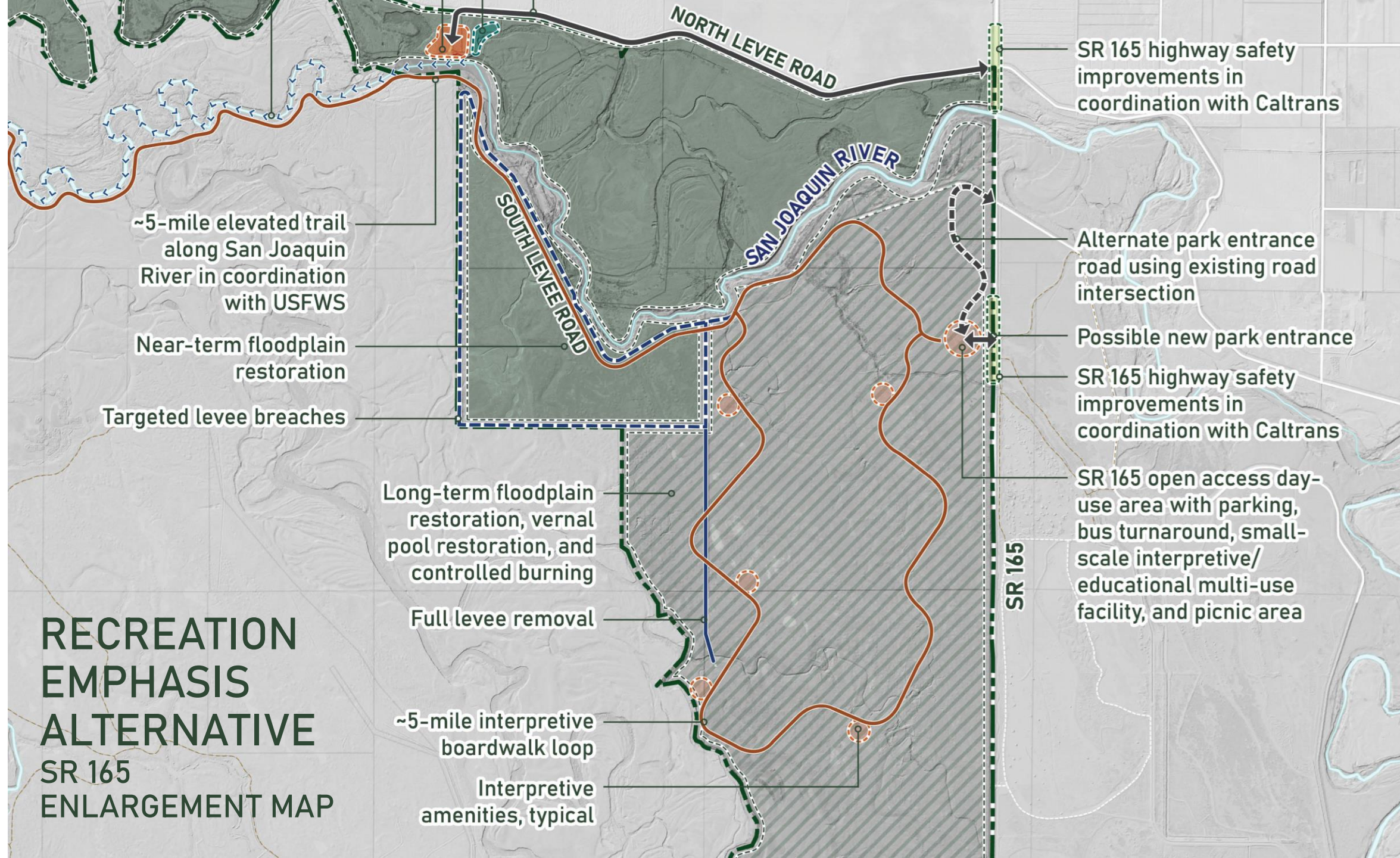
Day-use amenity, typical

Near-term targeted restoration

Elevated trail connection to SR 165 park entrance

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

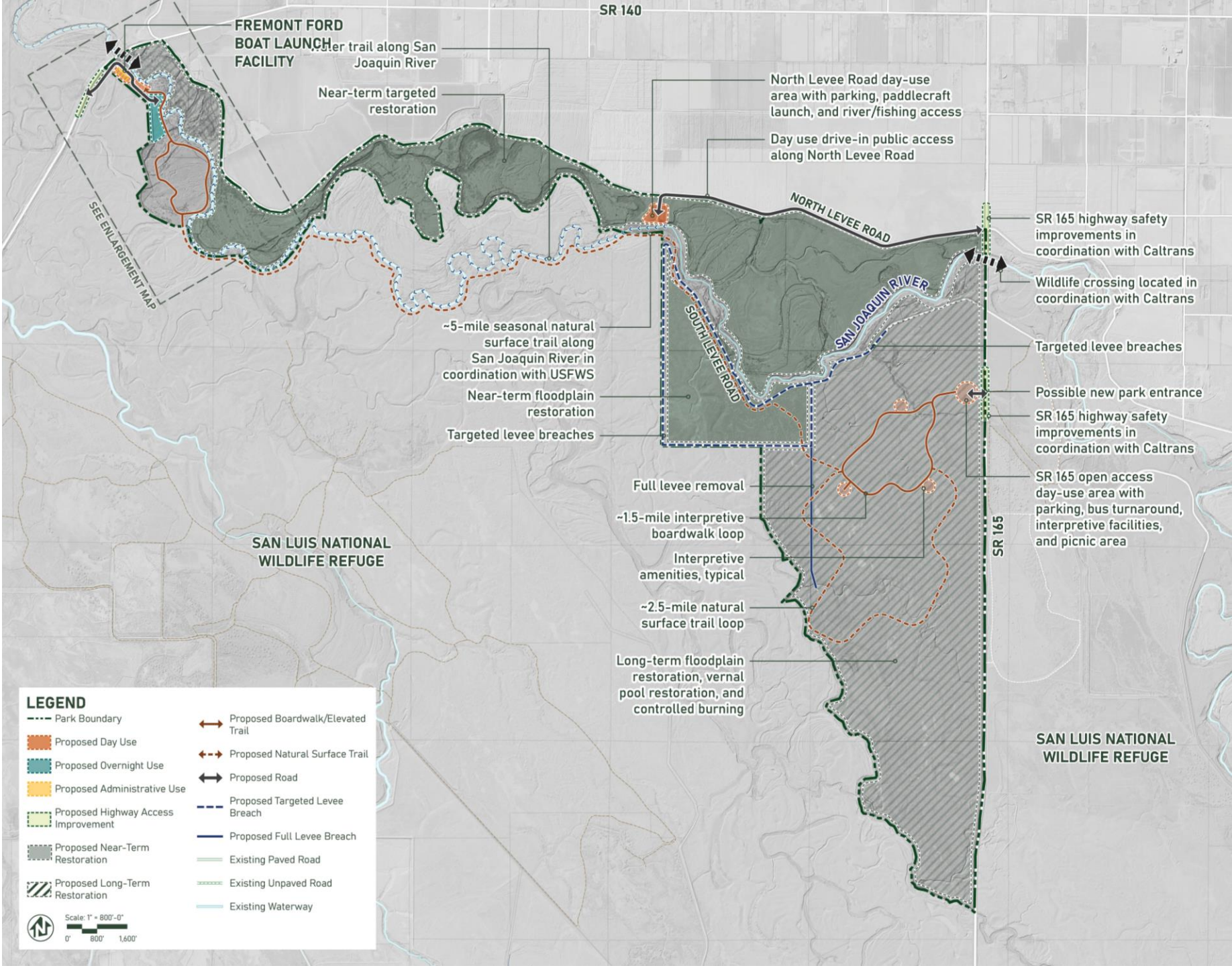
RECREATION EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE SR 165 ENLARGEMENT MAP



BLEND ED RECREATION & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

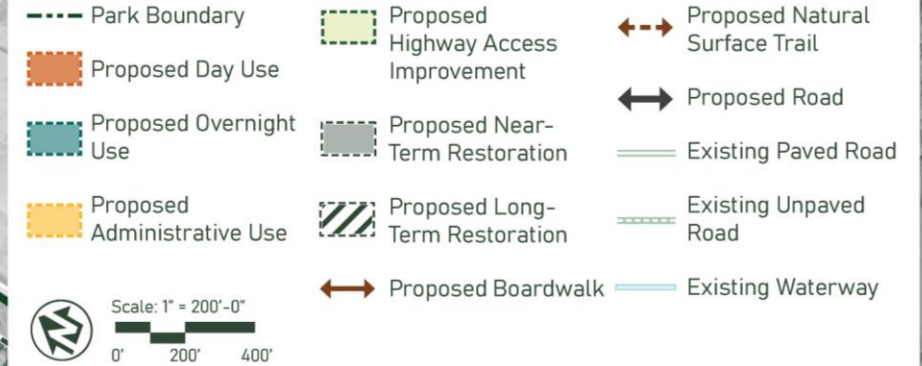
Summary of Improvements

Park Entrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve existing SR 140 entrance 2 new SR 165 entrances
Day Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 day-use areas
Administrative Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance area
Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.5 miles natural surface trail 3.0 miles boardwalk/elevated trail
Overnight Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 30 campsites elevated on fill
Ecological Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.7 miles full levee breaches 3.8 miles targeted levee breaches



BLENDED RECREATION & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE SR 140 ENLARGEMENT MAP

LEGEND



SR 140

NORTH LEVEE ROAD

Long-term targeted restoration

Water trail along San Joaquin River

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

Day-use area with individual and group picnic sites and river access

Water trail to nearby public lands

FREMONT FORD BOAT LAUNCH FACILITY

Day-use and administrative area with:

- Parking and facilities elevated on fill material
- Expanded parking area
- Primary visitor information kiosk/ open air visitor center
- Trailhead
- Maintenance area

Visitor entrance station

Realigned park entrance road

SR 140 highway safety improvements in coordination with Caltrans

Campground (20 to 30 campsites) elevated on fill material with:

- Tent campsites
- RV campsites
- Group campsites
- Employee trailer sites
- Combo buildings

Campground to potentially be open seasonally depending on public and operational needs

SAN LUIS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

1.5-mile boardwalk interpretive loop trail

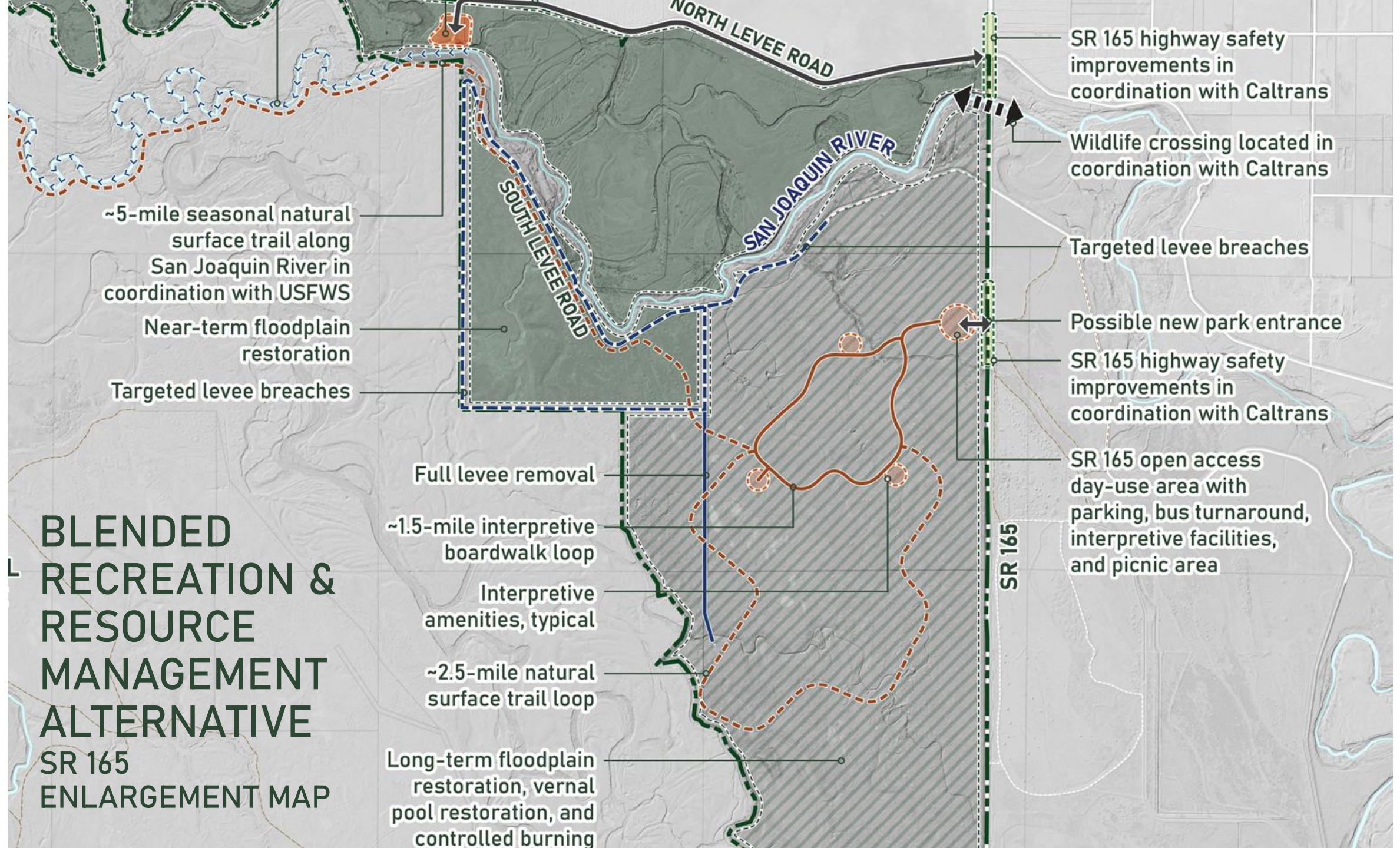
Day-use amenity, typical

Near-term targeted restoration

Natural surface trail connection to SR 165 park entrance

BLEND RECREATION & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

SR 165 ENLARGEMENT MAP

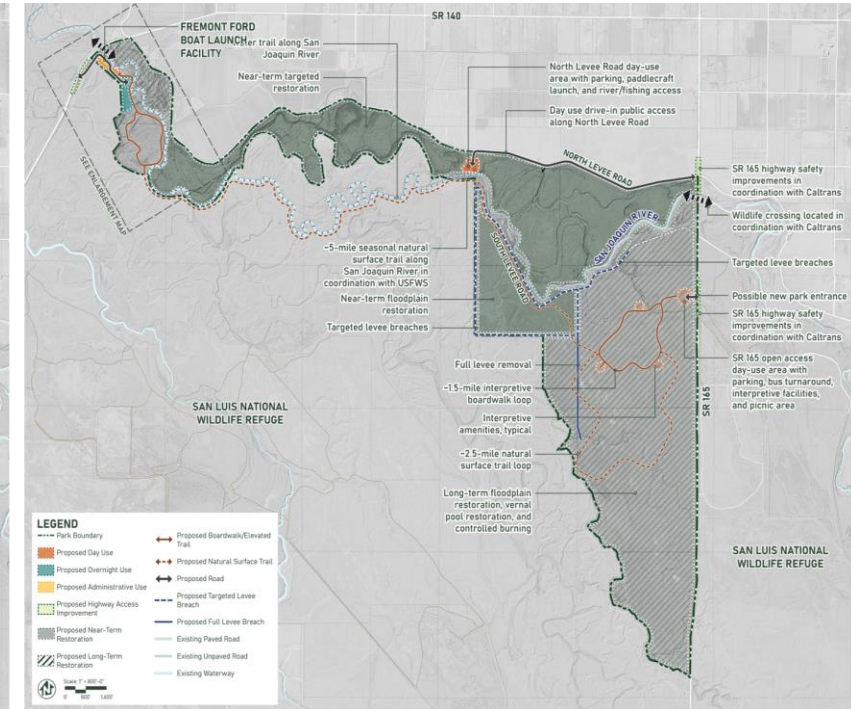
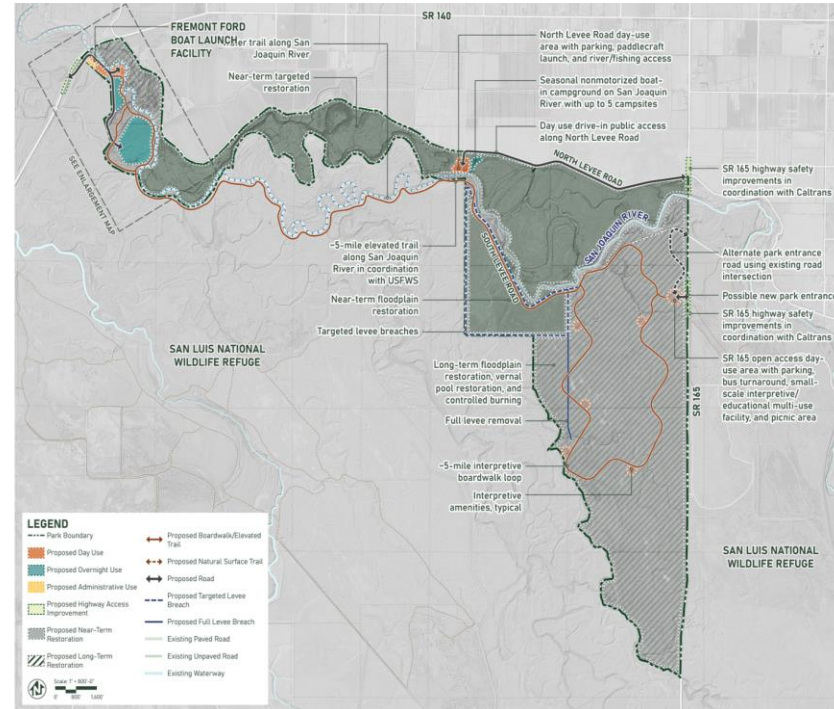
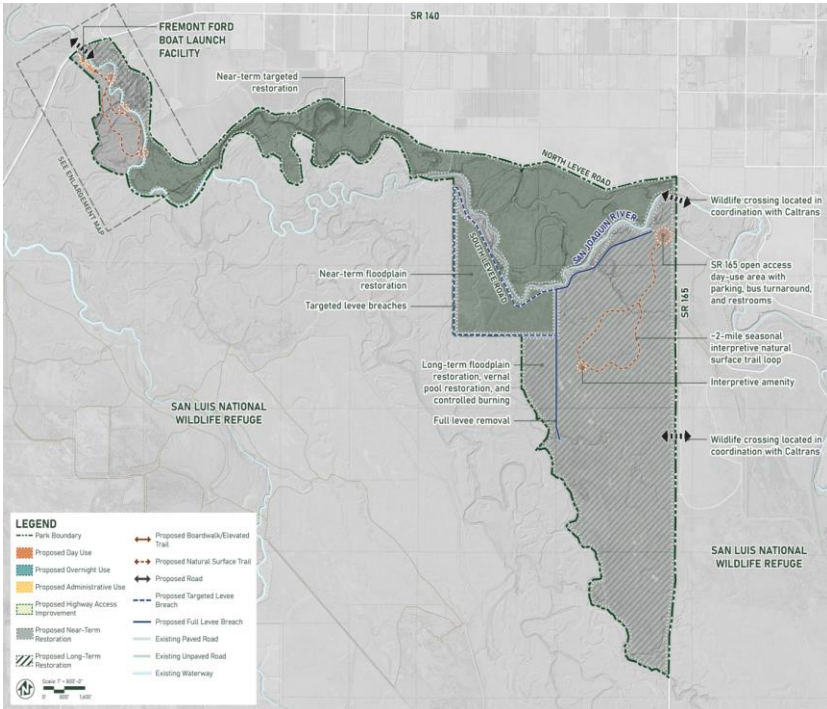


ALTERNATIVES COMPARISON

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE

RECREATION EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE

BLENDED RECREATION & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE



Slido Question #2: Based on what you know so far, is there an alternative that you prefer?

Results

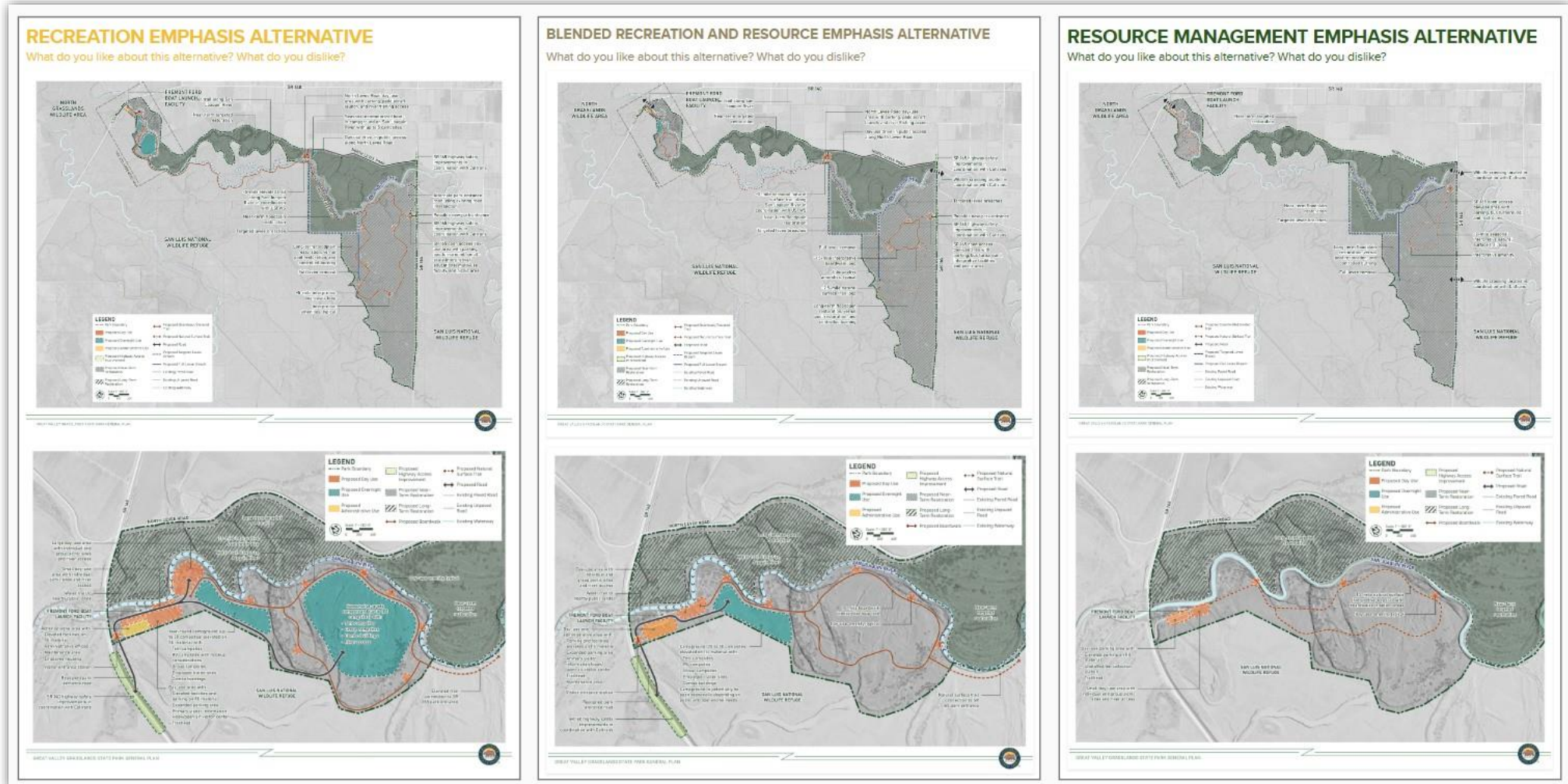
- Recreation Emphasis: 0%
- Resources Emphasis: 6 votes (55%)
- Blended Recreation and Resource: 5 votes (45%)
- Not sure/Need more information: 0 votes

4

Mural Board Discussion

MURAL BOARD DISCUSSION

Discuss what you support and do not support for each of the 3 alternatives. Input will be used to create the preferred alternative for the General Plan. We will have 50 minutes for this exercise.



THANK YOU

