

3.11 Hazards & Hazardous Materials

This section examines whether implementation of the General Plan will expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires. Through the Initial Study, issues regarding transport, release, and handling of hazardous materials and implementation of an adopted emergency response plan were found to have a less-than-significant impact. Issues regarding airport safety hazards were found to have no impact.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Rancho Santa Margarita is subject to both wild and urban fires. Weather, topography and vegetation type all affect the intensity of fires. Given the large portion of land that remains as open space with rugged topography with highly flammable native vegetation, wildland fires are a significant risk. Figure 20 shows the various levels of potential fire risk in the City. Extreme fire severity zones are located in the northwest, west, and northeast areas of the City.

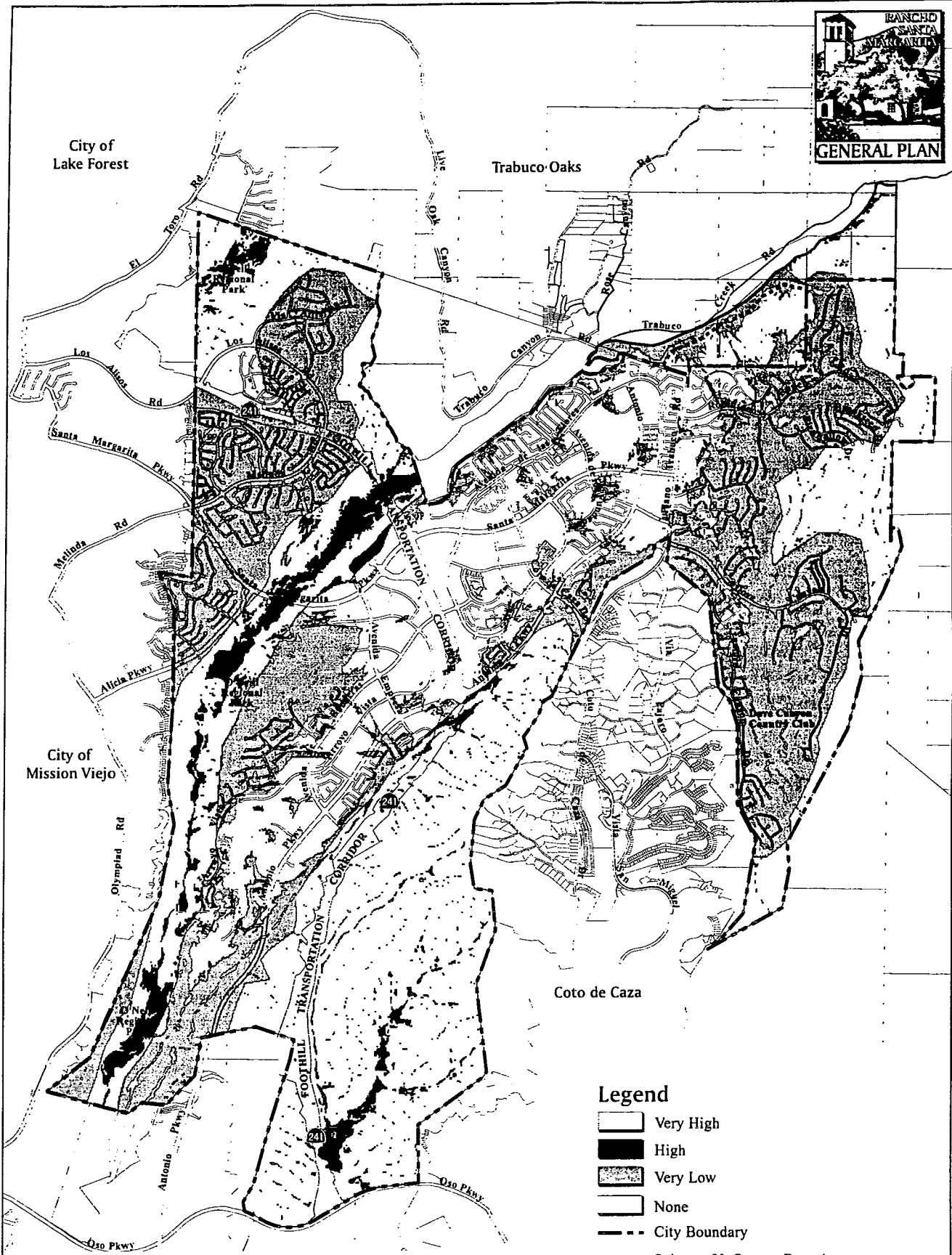
Areas posing a significant risk to the City are subject to the Public Resources Code, Section 4291-4299, which requires property owners to conduct maintenance to reduce the fire danger. The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) has responsibility for wildfire suppression on all private land in Rancho Santa Margarita. Any proposed development plans are reviewed by the OCFA to determine if fuel modification plans or other preventative measures are required. The Planned Communities that are now incorporated in the City included fuel modification requirements in the Feature and Development Plans. The fire flow rates from the Uniform Fire Code are also implemented by the OCFA and reviewed for any new development.

THRESHOLDS USED TO DETERMINE LEVEL OF IMPACT

For purposes of this EIR, a significant impact would occur if implementation of the General Plan would expose people or structures to a significant loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Implementation of the General Plan will result in the development of new residential and non-residential uses in areas of high wildland fire hazard. The interface between the urban areas and natural vegetation will be expanded with the development of the Northeast Future Planned Community, resulting in a greater potential for wildland and urban fires.



Legend

- Very High
- High
- Very Low
- None
- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence Boundary
- Future Planned Community Boundary

Sources: Orange County Land Base, 2001;
Cotton/Bridges/Associates, 2001.

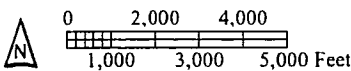


Figure 20
Wildfire Hazard Areas

The General Plan includes the following goals and policies regarding reducing the risk of wildland fires:

Goal 1: *Reduce the risk to the community from hazards related to geologic conditions, seismic activity, wildfires, structural fires, and flooding.*

Policy 1.3: Reduce the risk of wildfire hazards by working with the Homeowner Associations, business park associations, and community foundations to maintain fire retardant landscaping and buffer zones in areas of high wildfire risk.

Policy 1.4: Reduce the risk of fire to the community by coordinating with the Orange County Fire Authority.

The City will continue to reduce the potential for dangerous fires by coordinating with the OCFA to implement fire hazard education, fire protection and fuel modification programs. The current Uniform Fire Code will be used to reduce structural fire hazards. In addition, the City will work closely with the local water districts and OCFA to ensure that water pressure is adequate for fire fighting purposes. With implementation of these goals, policies, and procedures, an otherwise potentially significant impact can be reduced or avoided.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The City will implement Implementation Program S-9 which requires the City to work closely with the Orange County Fire Department, coordinate with local water districts regarding water pressure, and implement Uniform Fire Code provisions.

LEVEL OF IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION

Implementation of the measures to reduce the risk of wildland fires, as called for in Implementation Program S-9, will reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level.

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