

Town of Los Gatos Ad Hoc Wildfire Committee Report

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**Town of Los Gatos
110 East Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030**

Prepared by
Ad Hoc Wildfire Committee

Coordinated with
Santa Clara County Fire Department

ATTACHMENT 2

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Committee Introduction and Goals

Los Gatos is listed as a Community at Risk from wildfires on the Federal and the California Fire Alliance list of Communities at Risk in Santa Clara County. Wildfires occur in the vicinity of Los Gatos and present a significant danger to people and property within the Town. The Town of Los Gatos considers wildfire mitigation to be a top tier priority for the safety of its citizens and an economic imperative.

Recognizing this significant risk, the Los Gatos Town Council convened an Ad Hoc Wildfire Committee to study a broad variety of wildfire mitigation policy and project options to improve the Town's wildfire resiliency. The Committee consisted of Mayor Marcia Jensen, Vice Mayor Barbara Spector, Assistant Fire Chief Brian Glass, Community Member Rob Stump, Community Member Brad Gordon, Assistant Town Manager Arn Andrews, and Parks and Public Works Director Matt Morley. Mr. Stump chaired the Committee.

The Committee's goal was to identify a variety of mitigation strategies that could be implemented within the next two years and three to five-year timeframes. Collectively identified strategies would reduce wildfire risk and improve community preparedness in response to wildfire. The Committee examined best practices of similar communities within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), lessons learned from recent fires, and other relevant areas of wildfire science. The following report identifies areas for emphasis of future Council wildfire mitigation efforts.

This report describes the Los Gatos WUI and then identifies specific mitigation topics. For each topic, goals, action items, and metrics are identified.

Key Terms

Defensible Space Defensible space means an area around the perimeter of structures in which vegetation, debris, and other types of combustible fuels are treated, cleared, or reduced to slow the rate and intensity of potentially approaching wildfire or fire escaping from structures.

Hillside Collector Streets A hillside collector street is a low-to-moderate-capacity road which serves to move traffic from local streets to arterial roads. Unlike arterials, collector roads are designed to provide access to residential properties.

Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) The concept of the home ignition zone was developed by retired USDA Forest Service fire scientist in the late 1990s, following some breakthrough experimental research into how homes ignite due to the effects of radiant heat. The HIZ is divided into three zones; immediate (0 to 5 feet), intermediate zone (5 to 30 feet), extended zone (30 to 100 feet).

Temporary Refuge Areas (TRAs) Pre-identified area(s) where firefighters and the public can immediately take refuge for temporary shelter and short-term relief in the event that access to an established safety zone is compromised.

Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) State law requires that all local jurisdictions identify very high fire hazard severity zones within their areas of responsibility. Inclusion within these zones is based on vegetation density, slope severity and other relevant factors that contribute to fire severity.

Wildland Fire Specialist Conducts inspections for residences living in the high fire hazard areas, providing information, advice, and assistance to property owners. Initiates defensible space surveys and develops and maintains a positive and productive dialog with the community. Identifies and coordinates hazard abatement projects to mitigate the effects of wildfire within the District.

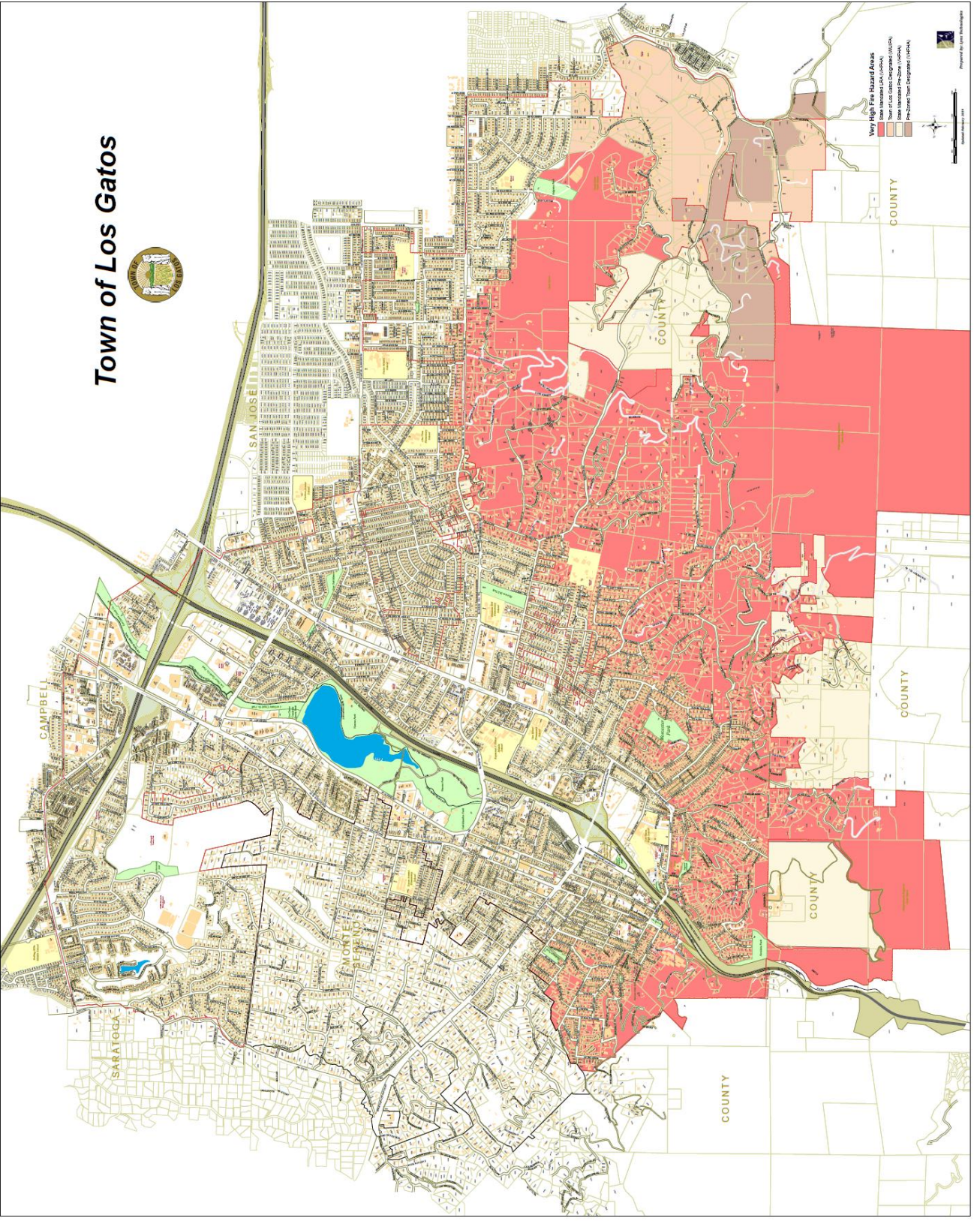
Los Gatos Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area is best described as an area that transitions from a natural condition (wildland) to human settlements. Homes and other development in the WUI are at risk of catastrophic wildfire due to the presence of vegetation that could fuel a wildfire. The WUI creates an environment in which fire can move readily between structural and vegetative fuels, increasing the potential for wildland fire ignitions and the corresponding potential loss of life and property.

The Los Gatos WUI planning area includes primarily Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone areas on the southern side of Los Gatos. The areas shaded in red on the map on the following page illustrate the extent of WUI lands within the Town. Approximately a quarter of the Town's total residences are located within the WUI. Of an estimated 2018 Town total of 13,299 residences the WUI contains approximately 3,091. In addition, at an estimated 2.2 residents per household the WUI is home to approximately 6,800 residents out of a Town total of 30,250.

The majority of the northern perimeter of the WUI tends to be flatter terrain with higher concentrations of the WUI residences. To illustrate this residential concentration, 1,784 of the 3,091 residences in the WUI are concentrated within a quarter mile of the northern boundary.

For a better geographic illustration of the WUI the Town currently utilizes preestablished areas for the maintenance and execution of its Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. The CERT maps contained in the Appendix also illustrate the main routes of ingress/egress within the CERT boundaries.

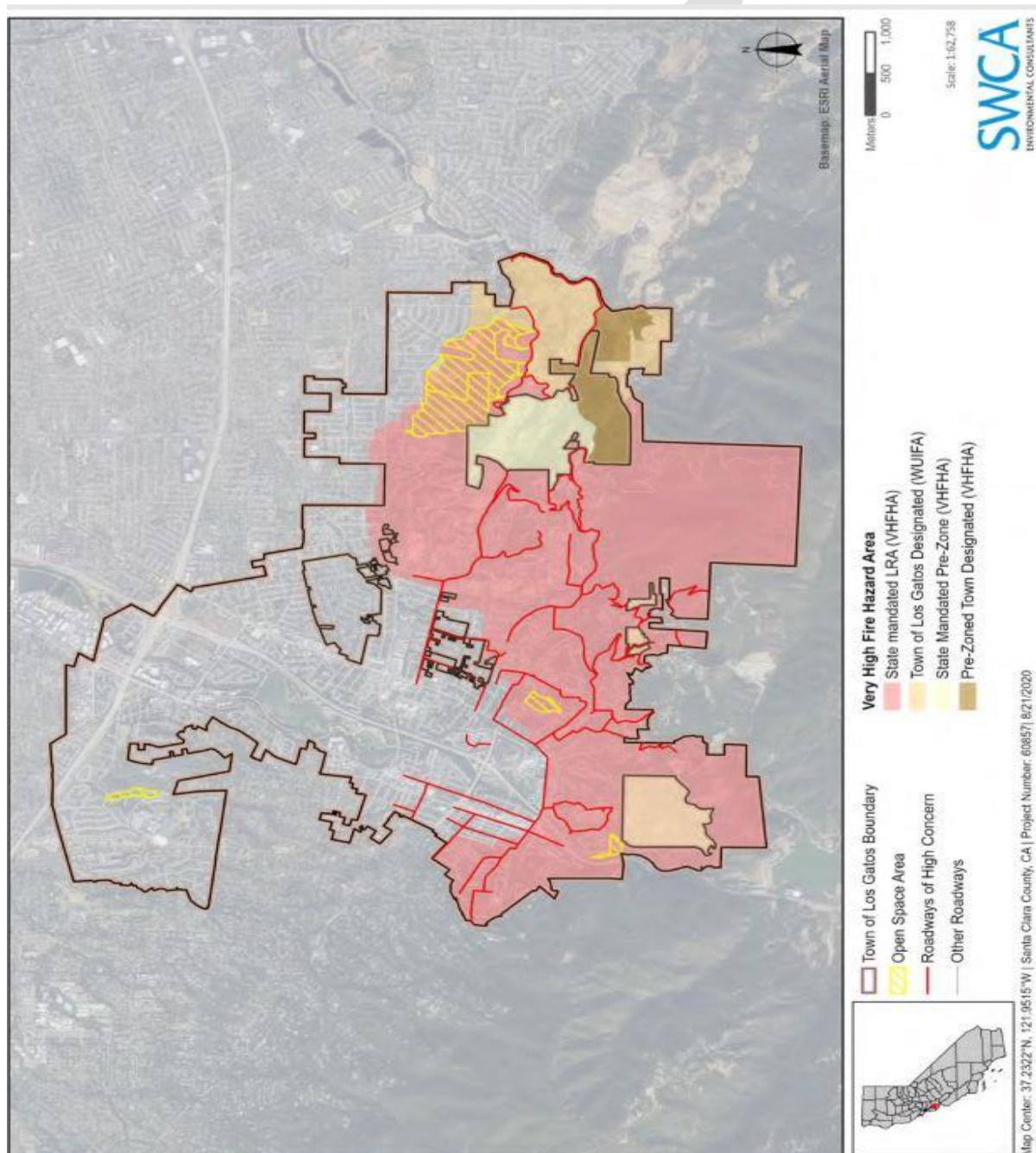


Town of Los Gatos



Roadside Fuel Reduction

Roads are generally maintained to primarily serve the transportation needs of the public; however, roadsides are frequently the site of ignition for wildfires and evacuees may need to use the roadways to leave the area even if the vegetation on both sides of the road is on fire. Routes may also be blocked due to consequences associated with an incident including; fallen trees, spot fires, smoke, intense heat, long flame lengths, downed power lines, or vehicle accidents. The following map illustrates 31.09 miles of roadways of highest concern for vegetation management.



GOAL:

Vegetation along primary hillside roadways should be maintained to achieve a clearance of 20 feet horizontally and 13 feet six inches vertically above roadways, as well as clearance of non-fire-resistant vegetation within 10 feet of the roads.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Complete current 11-mile Fuel Reduction project by February 28, 2021.
- Enact a plan to ensure that the 31.09 miles of highest roadway concern achieves a 6-year management cycle (5 miles per year).
- Identify/map all private roadways in the WUI and work with residents to implement vegetation management for these private properties.

METRICS:

TBD

Open Space and Residential Land Management

California Public Resources Code (PRC) 4291 mandates 100 feet of defensible space around structures in high fire severity zones. Defensible space means an area around the perimeter of structures in which vegetation, debris, and other types of combustible fuels are treated, cleared, or reduced to slow the rate and intensity of potentially approaching wildfire or fire escaping from structures.

The creation of reasonable and adequate defensible space focuses on measures to modify and break up the hazards emanating from the continuity of fire fuels, both horizontal (across the ground) and vertical (from the ground up into the crowns of brush and trees). Fuels that exhibit a large degree of both vertical and horizontal continuity are the most hazardous; in particular when they are on slopes. Thus, mitigation of wildfire hazards within the defensible space perimeter focuses on breaking up the continuity of horizontal and vertical fuels, while also addressing environmental concerns like habitat and erosion protection. In addition to the defensible space requirements around structures in the WUI, the Town and other public/private agencies are stewards of large open spaces and undeveloped parkland.

GOAL:

Ensure that all public and private property owners are maintaining the mandated defensible spaces.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Conduct annual defensible space inspections and enforce compliance with state and local fire codes.
 - Develop strong neighborhood relationships to educate all property owners of their defensible space obligation.

- Hire/fund/partner on a Wildland Fire Specialist to develop relationships with VHFHZ homeowners and drive compliance through education and inspection.
- Increase resident awareness of the SCCFD Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) inspection program.
- Explore region partnership with SCCFD fuels crews and defensible space inspectors.
- Explore SCCFD performing defensible space citation function.
- Explore expansion of SCCFD defensible space inspection “check list”.
- Develop private driveway fuel reduction initiative.
- Develop Eucalyptus eradication plan for Town property and residential removal within the WUI. Develop incentive program (cost share) possibly utilizing tree replacement fund.
- Develop new/replacement prohibition of highly flammable plants for properties within the WUI.

METRICS:

TBD

Emergency Evacuation

The majority of the Town’s WUI neighborhoods are served by Hillside Collector Streets. Hillside collector streets serve properties located in hillside areas, carrying traffic to either arterial streets, collectors, or neighborhood collectors. Many of the hillside collector and local roadways are one-way in and one-way out designs. During wildfire events, the routes emergency responders take to the fire are often the same routes being used by residents who may be attempting to flee from the fire. Due to the critical importance of roads for providing ingress for firefighting apparatuses while simultaneously evacuating the public, certain factors such as width, grade, and turning radius need to be considered. Often roads may be too narrow to accommodate two-way traffic of responders and evacuees simultaneously.

GOAL:

To the greatest extent feasible given physical constraints, create and maintain the conditions for efficient and effective evacuations.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Identify and explore the development of roadside and other Temporary Refuge Areas (TRAs) throughout the WUI.
- Assess and address evacuation feeder routes leading out of the WUI throughout Los Gatos.
 - Identify areas for elimination of on-street parking where appropriate.
- Implement reflective home address signage throughout the WUI.
- Identify and develop alternate evacuation routes throughout the WUI.

- Identify potential road widening, turnout projects throughout the WUI. Develop a multi-year project to implement needed improvements.
- Develop and practice annually simulated evacuations in WUI neighborhoods.
- Leverage SCCFD Zone Haven GIS platform for the planning/implementation of evacuations.

METRICS:

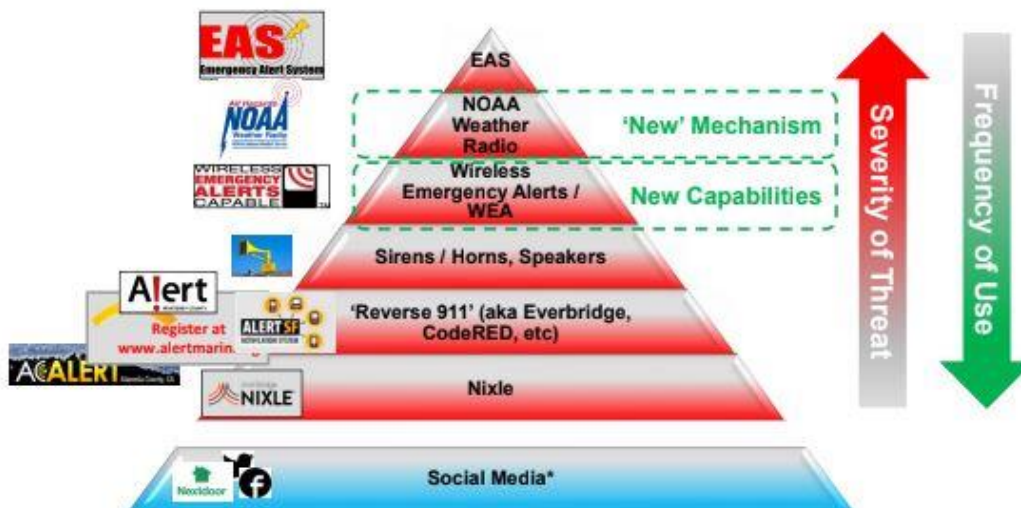
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Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency, it is an inherent responsibility of local government organizations to keep the public informed about natural, human-caused, and technological disasters. Studies show that people rarely act on a single warning message alone. To be effective, warnings should be delivered in various formats across multiple media platforms. Multiple platforms help to increase the reliability of warning delivery and provide a sense of corroboration that will encourage recipients to take protective actions. In addition, many emergency subscription platforms are opt-in systems which leave non-adopters out of the information loop.

As illustrated in below many notification systems are dependent on functioning internet and cell service. As evidenced by recent fires neither cell service or internet service are reliable during large scale events, especially if an event coincides with a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS).

Mass Notification Landscape



GOAL:

All residents should receive emergency communications in a timely manner.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Maximize the use of Nixle/AlertSCC and ensure that existing communication systems are fully utilized.
- Explore additional non-cell/internet reliant emergency communication systems e.g. siren system.
- Increase Ready, Set, Go programs in Town.
- Explore adding electronic message boards in front of fire stations and possibly police station.

METRICS:

TBD

Emergency Partnerships

The nature of wildfire spread requires a regional approach to wildfire mitigation. Following is a partial list of governmental and private entities that are landowners with vegetation management responsibilities within Los Gatos. In addition, several entities also provide the ability to help educate and partner on residential property resilience.

Santa Clara County Fire District (SCCFD): Santa Clara County Fire Department is an all-risk fire department and provides fire suppression inclusive of structure and vegetation/wildland fire mitigation, technical rescue operations, emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials (HazMat) mitigation, fire prevention, community education and risk reduction services (CERRS), disaster preparedness, community emergency preparedness and service responses.

Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E): PG&E provides electricity to the Town of Los Gatos. The Los Gatos area encompasses right-of-way for overhead transmission and distribution lines. The Town collaborates with PG&E to treat vegetation in the WUI along PG&E's electric transmission line right-of-way to increase power reliability and reduce ignition potential and resulting wildland fire hazard.

Santa Clara County Firesafe Council: The Town of Los Gatos supports and collaborates with the Santa Clara Firesafe Council. The Firesafe Council is a non-profit organization that provides resources to coordinate public and private landowners in Santa Clara County to reduce the threat of wildfire.

Santa Clara County Parks: The Parks Department uses prescribe fire to manage non-native vegetation, reduce fuel loading, promote biodiversity and native vegetation, and provide training in resource-type burns and wildfire firefighting. When the Department uses prescribe fire as a training tool for Park staff and local fire departments, there

needs to be a resource benefit, typically invasive plant control or re-establishing natural fire regimes into the natural system.

West Valley Cities of Monte Sereno and Saratoga: The West Valley cities of Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, and Saratoga share the characteristics of a very high wildfire severity zone (see appendices). Due to the nature of wildfire spread, an incident in one jurisdiction could easily spread to neighboring jurisdictions.

Mid-Peninsula Open Space District (Midpen): Midpen is an independent special district that has preserved nearly 65,000 acres of public land and manages 26 open space preserves. In Los Gatos, Midpen manages significant land holdings across the southern border of Town (see Appendices). Wildland fire prevention, preparation and response are part of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's ongoing land stewardship. Midpen reduces wildland fire severity and risk in our region by managing vegetation in the preserves with a focus on ecological health and wildland fire resilience.

County Roads, Valley Water, and CalTrans: These regional governmental partners each have properties/rights-of-way within the Town of Los Gatos or adjacent to the Town. These agencies must meet a shared specification for roadside fuel reduction and support safety in general.

San Jose Water Company (SJW): San Jose Water is an investor owned public utility, and is one of the largest urban water systems in the United States. SJW serves over 1 million people in the greater San Jose metropolitan area. San Jose Water maintains critical infrastructure in Town essential to fire suppression and manages watershed lands near Los Gatos.

GOAL:

Ensure all regional partners are implementing consistent land management practices to reduce wildfire risk on their properties and rights-of ways.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Advocate for the continuation and increased coordinated vegetation management among Town partners.
- Ensure timely communications between the Town and these entities regarding activities that may affect another partner's land management.
- Work with neighboring city and towns to consolidate efforts and planning.
- Explore regional projects outlined in CWPP for possible grant funding.

METRICS:

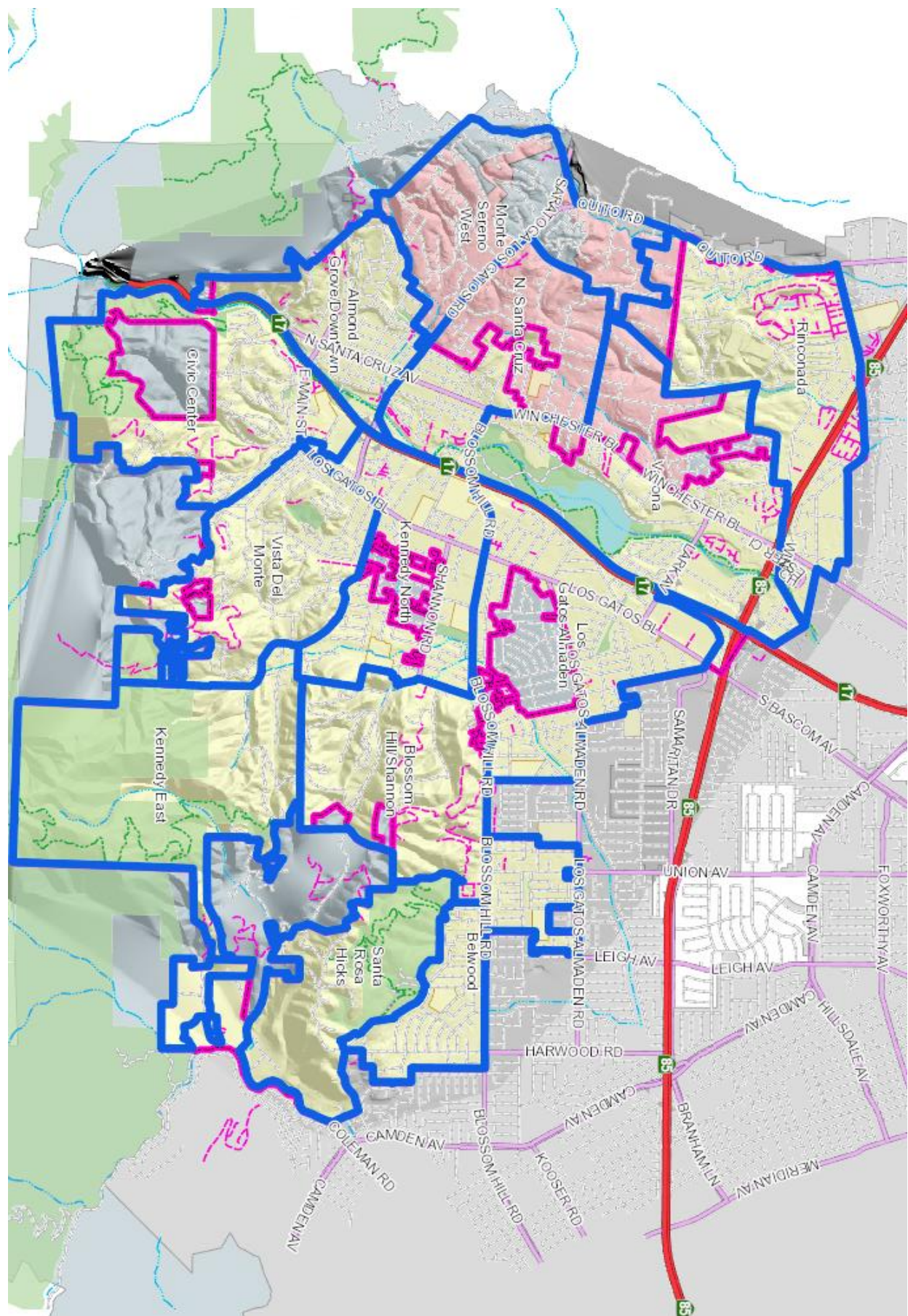
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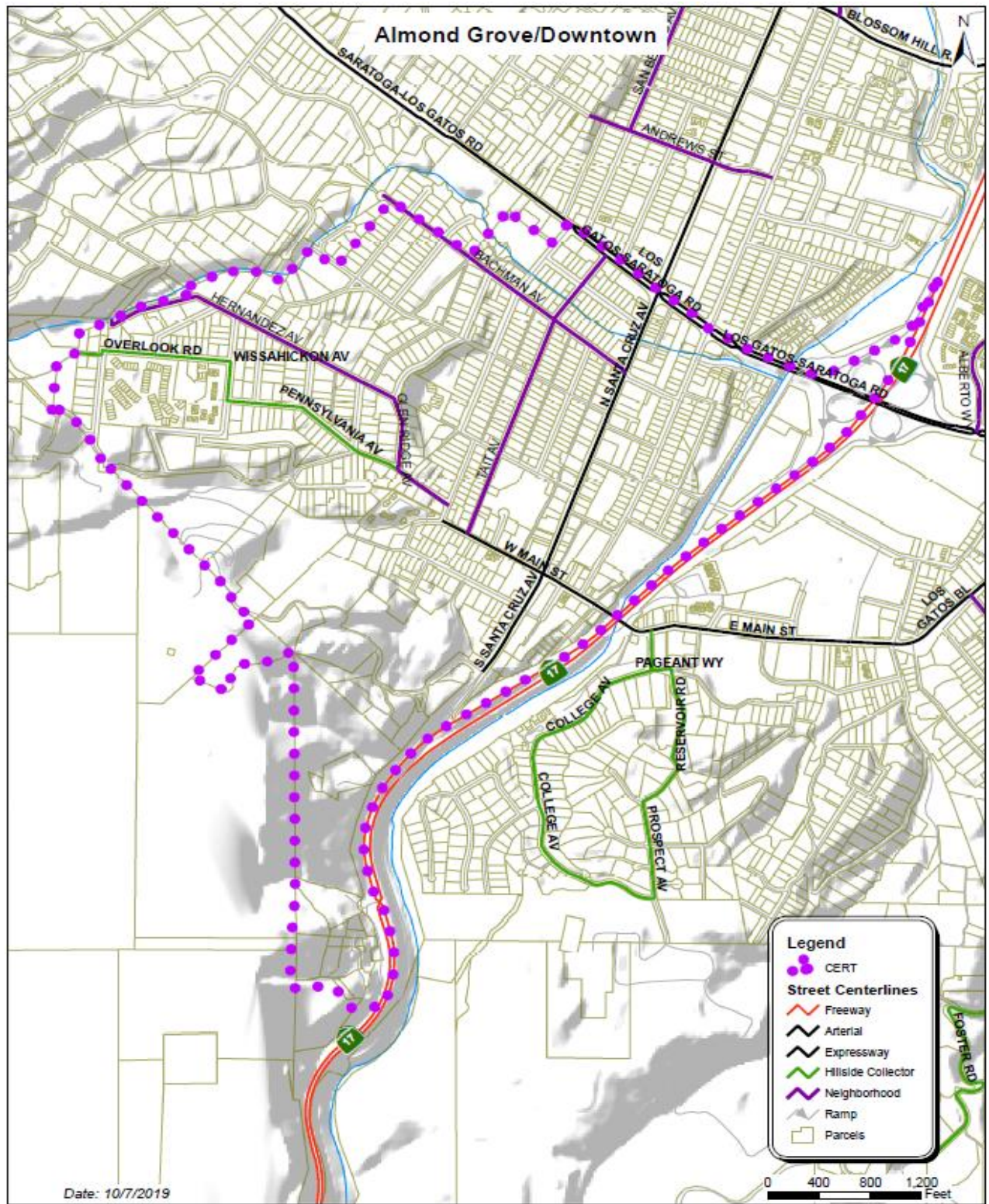
Additional Action Items

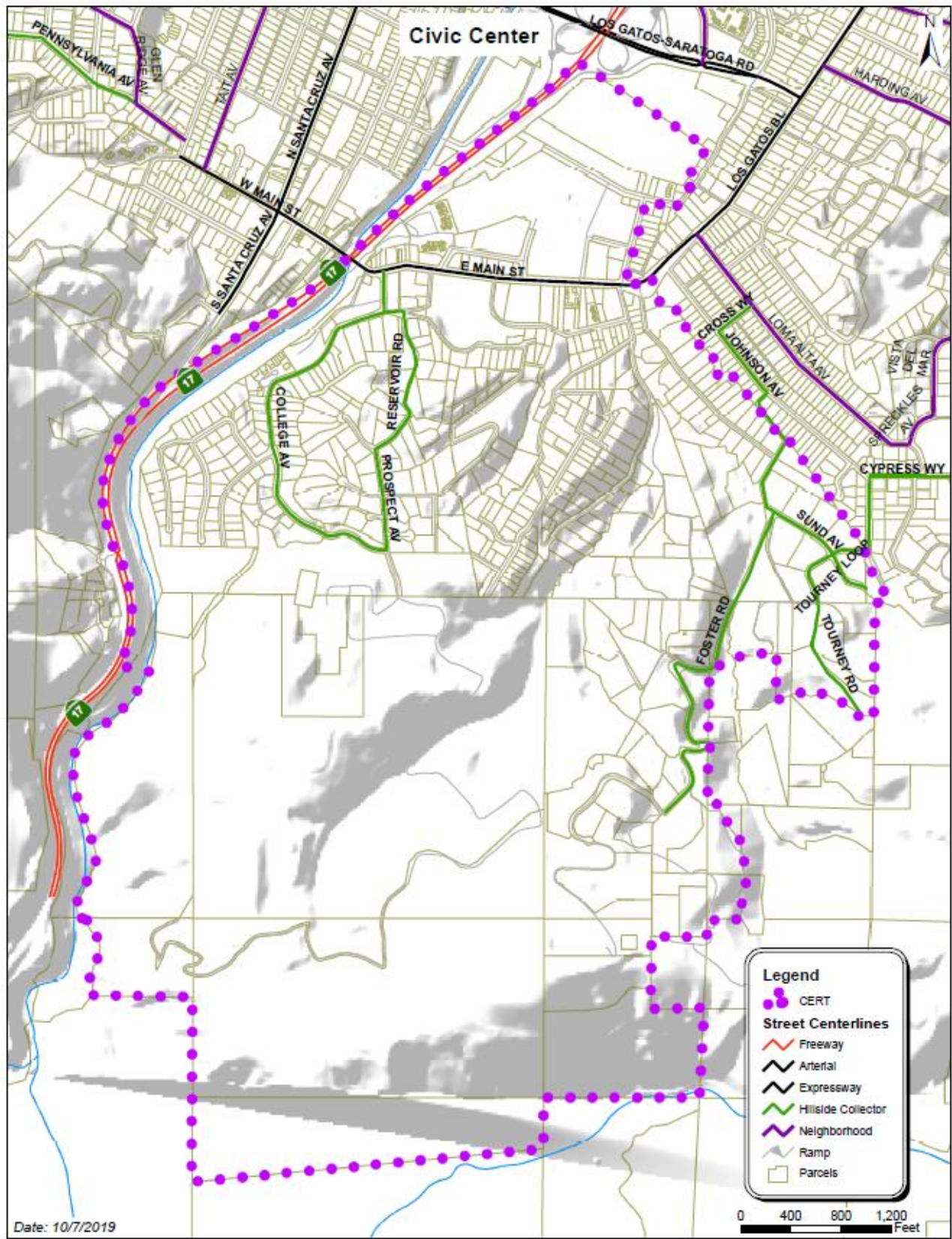
- Advocate for the continuation of homeowners insurance.
- Pursue Firewise status for WUI hillside neighborhoods to satisfy homeowners Insurance requirements.
- Address areas within the hillside that do not have public fire hydrant systems.
- Explore additional funding sources
 - Parcel Tax
 - Assessment Districts

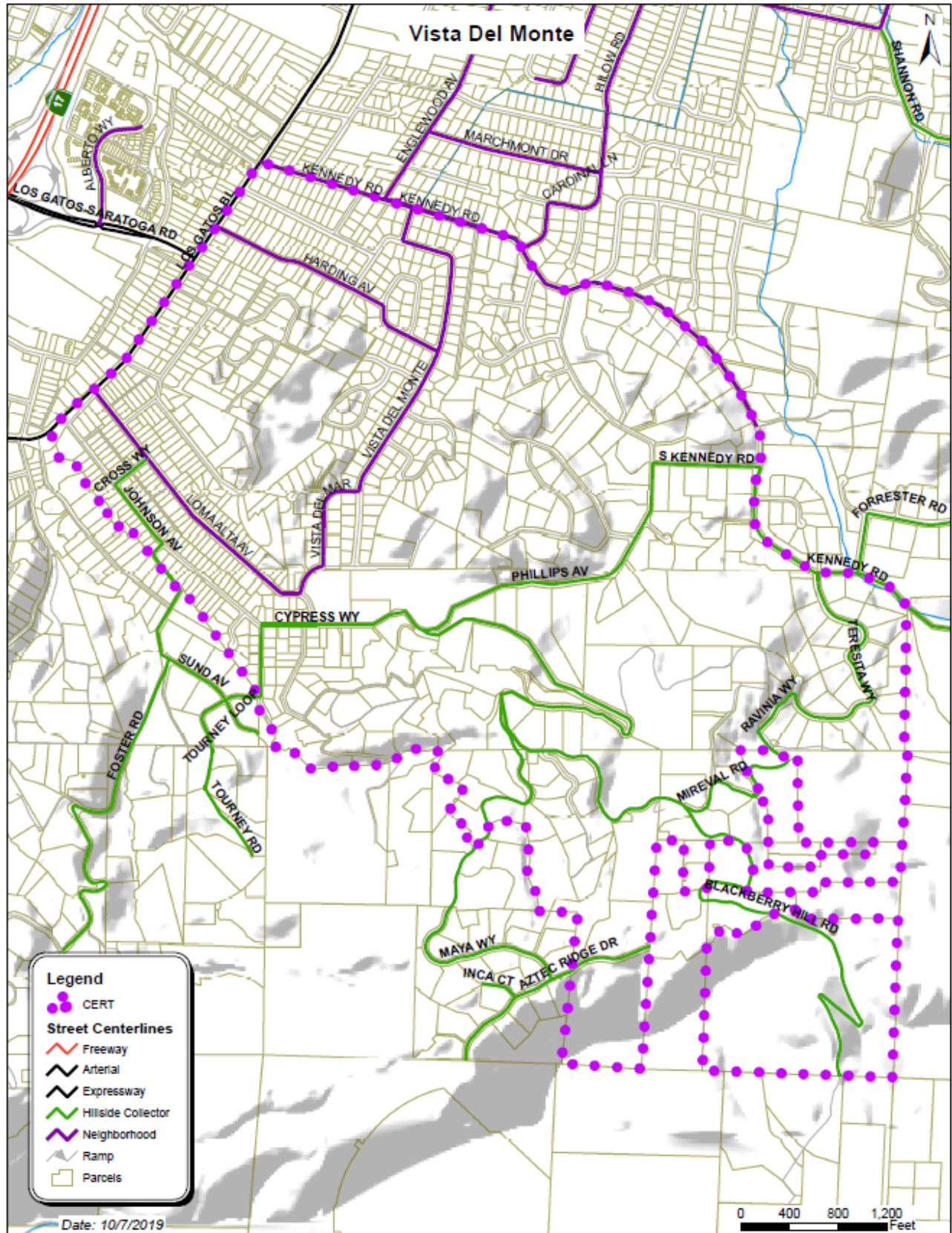
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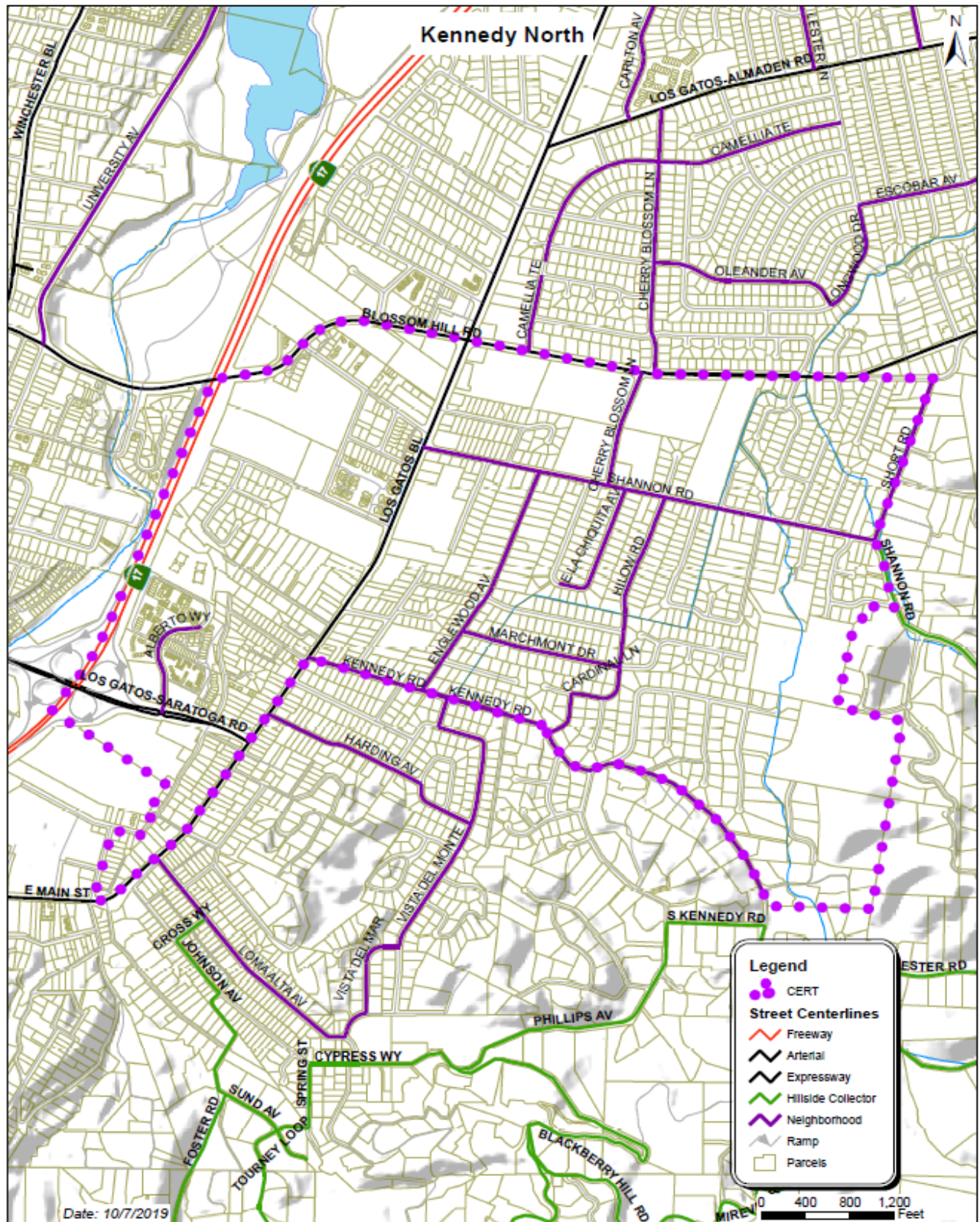
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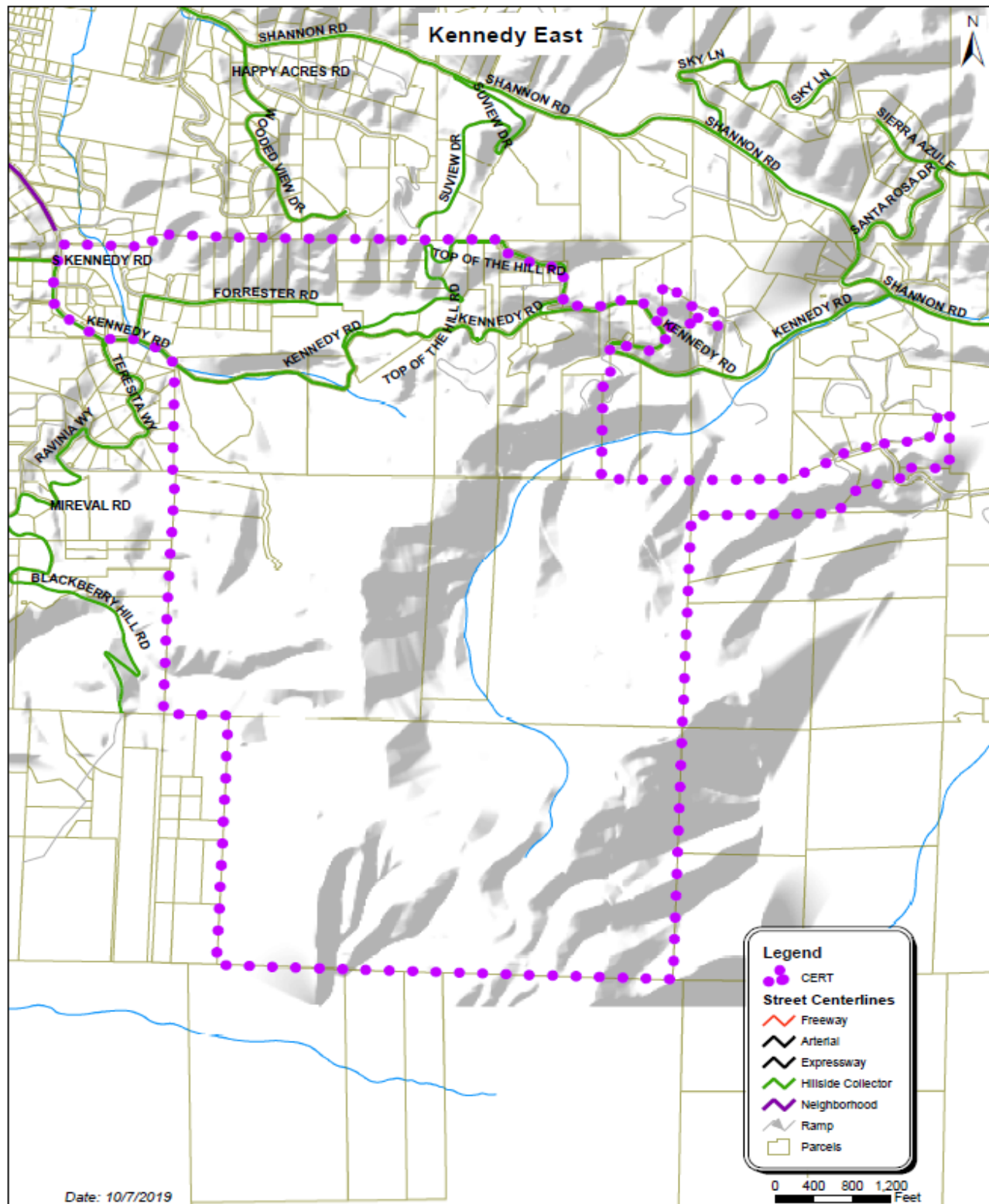


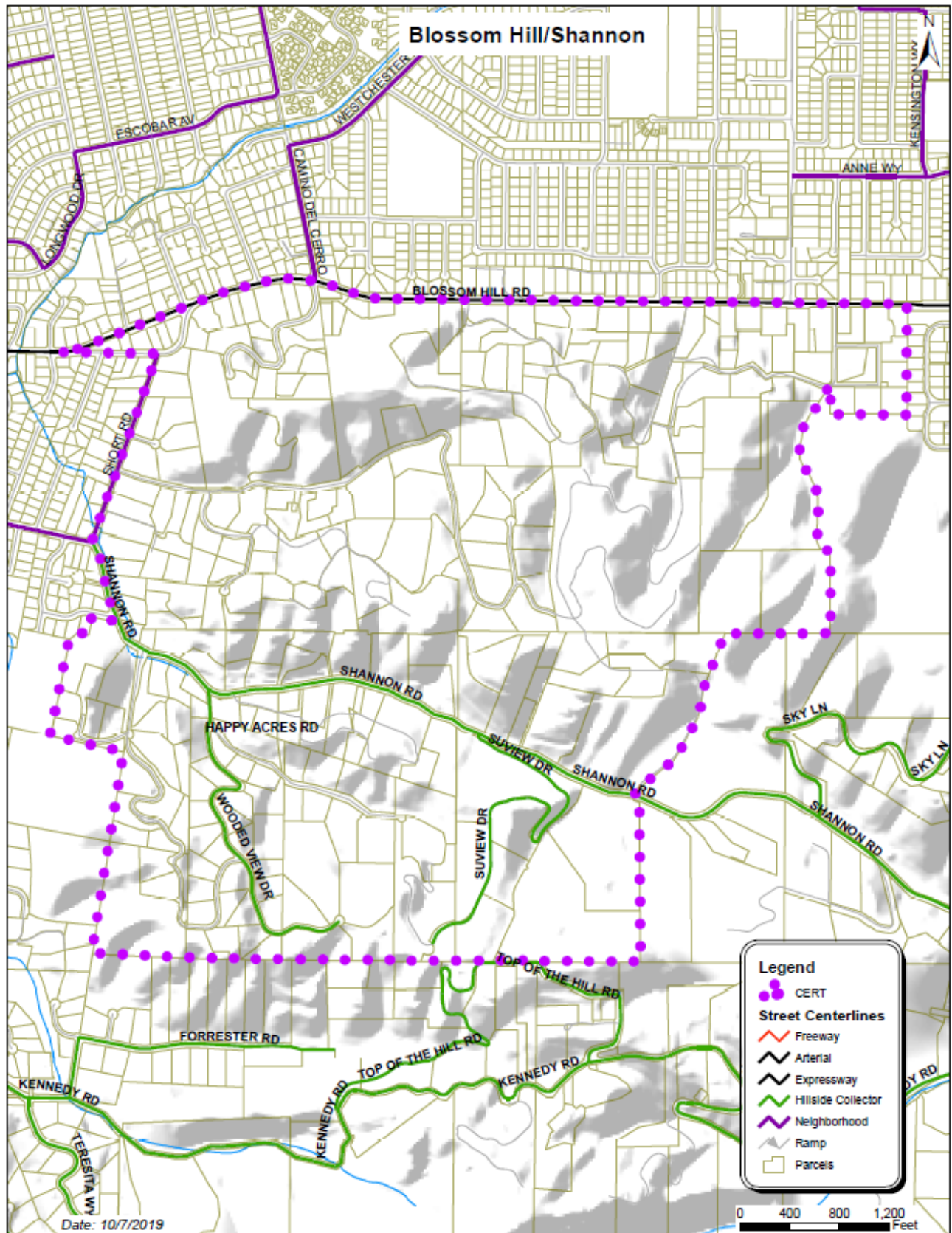


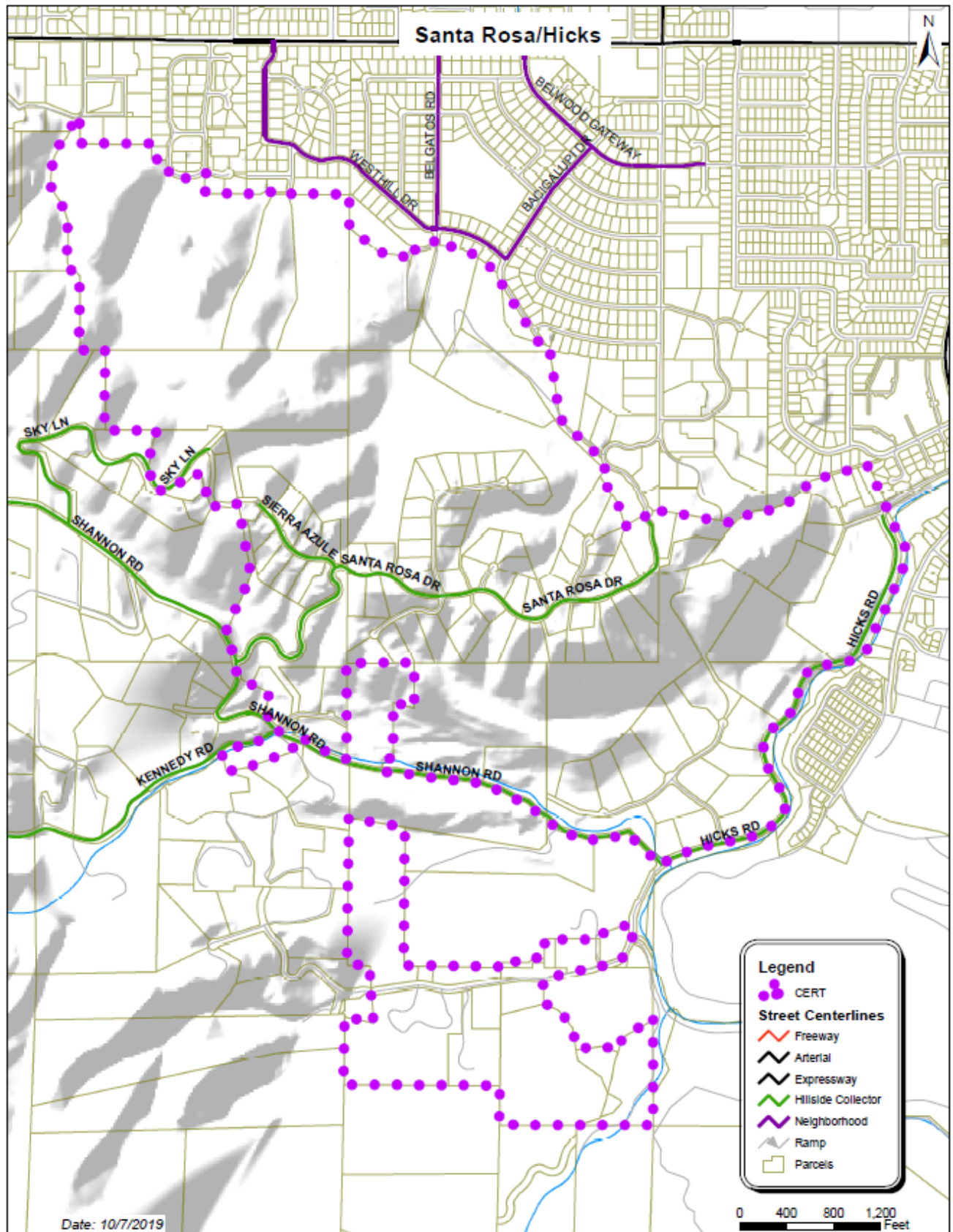




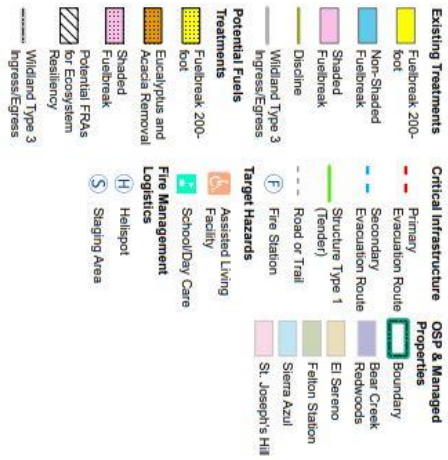




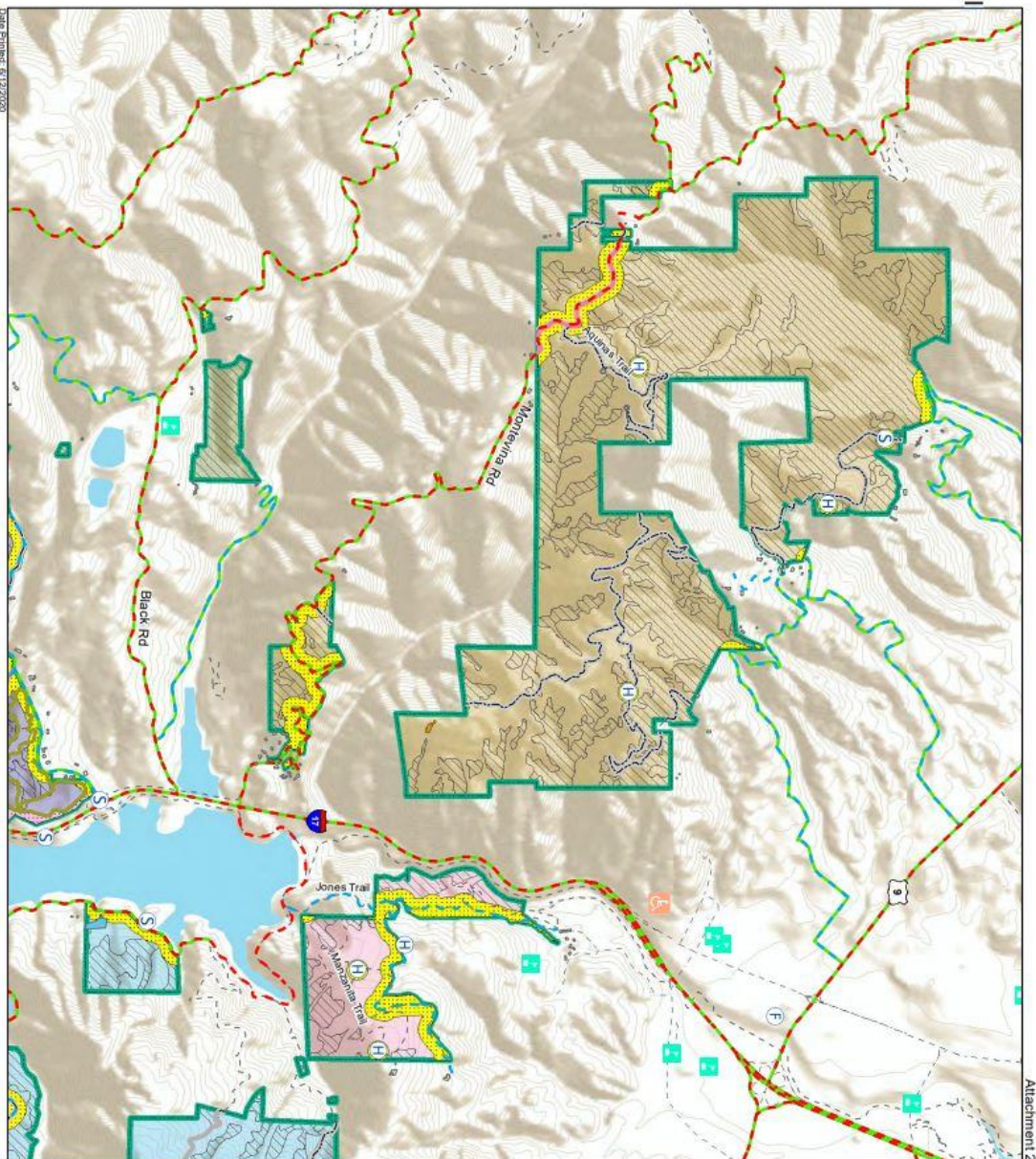
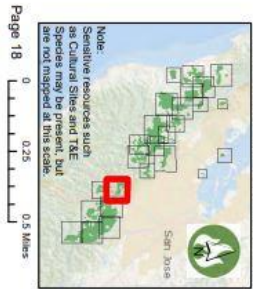




Existing and Potential Treatments El Sereno/Felton Station/St. Joseph's Hill

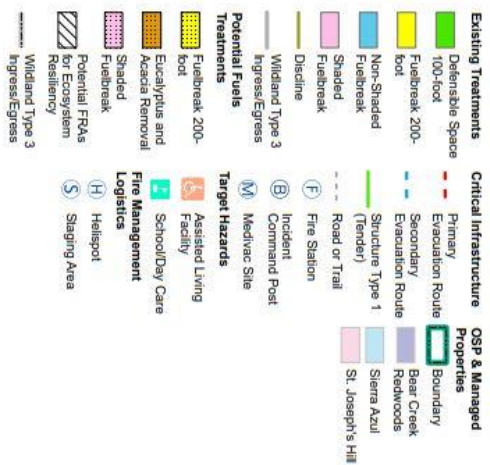


* See Table of Contents page for additional symbology.
 ** Fuel break widths are maximums. Fuelbreaks may be constructed at any width up to the maximum width.

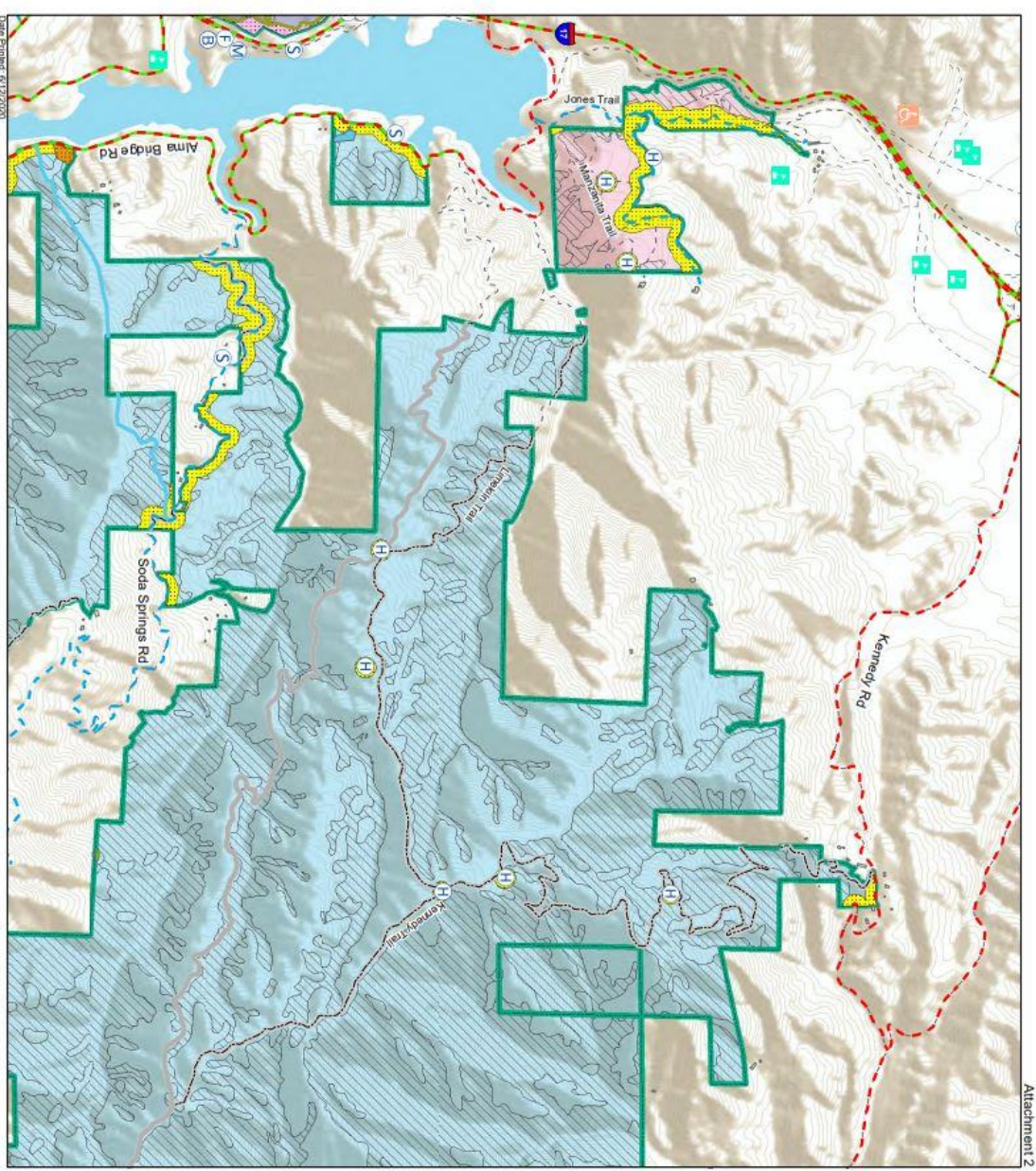
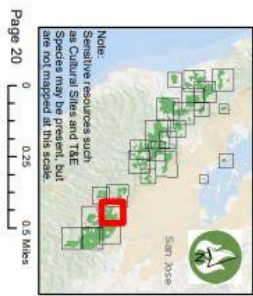


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Existing and Potential Treatments Sierra Azul (1 of 5)



* See Table of Contents page for additional symbology.
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