

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

SOUTH CENTRAL COAST AREA
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W-10a



DATE: July 20, 2006

TO: Commissioners and Interested Persons

FROM: Jack Ainsworth, Deputy Director
Gary Timm, South Central Coast District Manager
Steve Hudson, Supervisor, Planning and Regulation
Melissa Hetrick, Coastal Program Analyst

SUBJECT: **Notice of Impending Development (NOID) 2-06**, for the Lagoon Island Prescribed Burn and Restoration, for Public Hearing and Commission Action at the August 9-11, 2006, Commission Meeting in San Pedro.

SUMMARY AND STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The impending development consists of a 0.7-acre prescribed burn to reduce the impact of non-native grasses on Lagoon Island near Campus Lagoon on the Main Campus of the University of California at Santa Barbara. The purpose of the project is to research the potential restoration of coastal sage scrub species on portions of Lagoon Island that are dominated by a persistent, thick cover of non-native grasses and mustards that inhibit natural recruitment of native habitats. A 0.7-acre study area has been established that would be burned and subsequently planted with local native seeds and seedlings. The burned area occupies only a small portion of Lagoon Island located away from the perimeter of the island and eucalyptus and other trees on the island. Lagoon Island is designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area in the certified 1990 LRDP.

The required items necessary to provide a complete notice of impending development were received in the South Central Coast Office and the notice was deemed filed on July 6, 2006.

Staff is recommending that the Commission determine that the impending development **is consistent** with the certified University of California at Santa Barbara Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) as submitted. The project consists of prescribed burns and restoration activities on 0.7-acres of Lagoon Island. Though the work would take place within the Lagoon Island Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area, the project will not adversely impact coastal resources, the project is an allowable use pursuant to the Long Range Development Plan, and the project is consistent with all resource protection policies and provisions of the Long Range Development Plan. See associated Motion and Resolution beginning on **Page 2**. The standard of review for the proposed NOID is the policies of the certified LRDP.

I. PROCEDURAL ISSUES

Section 30606 of the Coastal Act and Article 14, §13547 through §13550 of the California Code of Regulations govern the Coastal Commission's review of subsequent development where there is a certified LRDP. Section 13549(b) requires the Executive Director or his designee to review the notice of impending development (or development announcement) within ten days of receipt and determine whether it provides sufficient information to determine if the proposed development is consistent with the certified LRDP. The notice is deemed filed when all necessary supporting information has been received.

Within thirty days of filing the notice of impending development, the Executive Director shall report to the Commission the pendency of the development and make a recommendation regarding the consistency of the proposed development with the certified LRDP. After public hearing, by a majority of its members present, the Commission shall determine whether the development is consistent with the certified LRDP and whether conditions are required to bring the development into conformance with the LRDP. No construction shall commence until after the Commission votes to render the proposed development consistent with the certified LRDP.

II. STAFF RECOMMENDATION: MOTIONS & RESOLUTIONS

A. NOID 2-06: APPROVAL AS SUBMITTED

MOTION I: *I move that the Commission determine that the development described in the Notice of Impending Development 2-06 (Lagoon Island Prescribed Burn and Restoration), as submitted, is consistent with the certified University of California at Santa Barbara Long Range Development Plan.*

STAFF RECOMMENDS A YES VOTE: Passage of this motion will result in a determination that the development described in the Notice of Impending Development 2-06 as submitted, is consistent with the certified University of California at Santa Barbara Long Range Development Plan, and adoption of the following resolution and findings. The motion passes only by affirmative vote of a majority of the Commissioners present.

RESOLUTION I: TO DETERMINE DEVELOPMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH LRDP:

The Commission hereby determines that the development described in the Notice of Impending Development 2-06, as submitted, is consistent with the certified University of California at Santa Barbara Long Range Development Plan for the reasons discussed in the findings herein.

III. FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL OF THE NOTICE OF IMPENDING DEVELOPMENT, AS SUBMITTED

The following findings support the Commission's approval of the Notice of Impending Development, as submitted. The Commission hereby finds and declares as follows:

A. PROJECT DESCRIPTION & BACKGROUND

The impending development consists of a 0.7-acre prescribed burn to reduce the impact of non-native grasses on Lagoon Island near Campus Lagoon on the Main Campus of the University of California at Santa Barbara (**Exhibit 1 and 2**). The project is proposed by the UCSB Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration (CBER) as part of ongoing restoration activities within campus natural areas. The project also provides graduate research opportunities to explore scientifically based tools for non-native, invasive plant removal and restoration of coastal sage scrub vegetation. The Santa Barbara County Fire Department will also use the project for hands-on training of their fire crew.

The 0.7-acre site of the proposed prescribed burn and restoration project on Lagoon Island is part of the 94-acre Campus Lagoon Management Area. In 1999, the Commission approved an amendment to UCSB's certified Long Range Development Plan to incorporate the Lagoon Management Plan into the LRDP. The purpose of the plan is to manage Campus Lagoon and its surrounding environment in a manner that protects, enhances, and restores the area and continues to provide public access and education opportunities.

Lagoon Island is surrounded to the west, north, and east by Campus Lagoon, and to the south by natural dune and beach habitat. Several established and informal trails cross the island. The island is also designated as Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) in UCSB's 1990 LRDP. The portion of the island proposed for burning and restoration has been dominated by a persistent, thick cover of non-native grasses and wild radish for many years. According to UCSB biologists, this vegetation appears to inhibit the natural recruitment of coastal sage scrub species, locking the system into a stable condition of weed dominance. The goal of the project is to explore ways to break the site out of this condition and start it on a successional trajectory towards a diverse coastal sage scrub community while improving the aesthetic and wildlife values of the campus natural areas.

The 0.70-acre prescribed burn is proposed in five discrete 20-meter by 30-meter burn plots. Burning activities will be kept distant from any perimeter vegetation on the island and trees. The prescribed burn is proposed to control the following species: *Bromus diandrus* (Rip Gut Brome), *Raphanus sativa* (Wild radish), a few *Baccharis pilularis* (Coyote brush) and a few incidental *Scrophularia californica* (figwort). Burning will occur under permit conditions specified by the Fire Department. While the isolated location of Lagoon Island and nature of the fuel all contribute to a low risk of fire escape, the fire department will have two engines with water and a staff of 20 people on site at the time

of the burn. Prior to the burn, a hand crew from the fire department will create firebreaks around each plot. The larger coyote bush would be cut down in order to get the burn closer to the ground. The burn would be kept clear of all existing eucalyptus trees. No debris removal would be conducted after the prescribed burn. Following the prescribed burn, the burned patches would be planted using locally collected native seeds and seedlings. Sub-sets of the burned plots (0.25 acres, respectively) would be burned again in 2007 and 2008 in order to fully retire the non-native seed and evaluate repeat burning as a restoration strategy.

Biologists from UCSB's Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration would monitor the proposed burn and restoration activities. If any sensitive species are identified within the burn area, if work outside the scope of the notice of impending development occurs, or if any unforeseen sensitive habitat issues arise, the University would cease work and notify the Executive Director of the Coastal Commission. If significant impacts or damage occur to sensitive habitat or species, the University would submit a revised program to mitigate such impacts. CBER would access the cover of seeded and planted areas within the prescribed burn site, conduct quarterly photo monitoring of the site, and prepare written reports to document the success of the burn and restoration effort for at least three years after the prescribed burn.

B. CONSISTENCY ANALYSIS

The standard of review for a Notice of Impending Development is consistency with the certified Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). UCSB's LRDP was certified by the Commission in 1990 and contains policies and provisions that identify areas for campus development while protecting coastal resources including environmentally sensitive habitat areas, scenic and visual resources, and public access and recreation. Since 1990, the Commission has approved several amendments to UCSB's LRDP, including LRDP Amendment 1-98 certified in June 1990, which incorporated the Lagoon Management Plan into the LRDP. The Lagoon Management Plan ensures that Campus Lagoon and its surrounding environment is managed in a manner that protects, enhances, and restores the area and continues to provide public access and education opportunities. Lagoon Island, the subject of Notice of impending Development 2-06, is located in the area covered by the Lagoon Management Plan.

The purpose of the proposed project is to research the potential restoration of coastal sage scrub species on portions of Lagoon Island that are dominated by a persistent, thick cover of non-native grasses and mustards that inhibit natural recruitment of native habitats. A 0.7-acre study area has been established that would be burned and subsequently planted with local native seeds and seedlings. The burned area occupies only a small portion of Lagoon Island vegetated by non-native grasses, wild radish, and small areas of coyote bush. The areas surrounding the burn plots would, therefore, provide refuge for any wildlife species on Lagoon Island during the burning events. As a precaution, the University has proposed biological surveys of the project area prior to any burning activities to prevent any impacts to sensitive species, including birds and

other wildlife. Following planting of the burned areas, the University has also proposed biological monitoring of the area for at least 3 years.

Lagoon Island is designated as Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) in UCSB's 1990 LRDP. According to provisions and policies in the LRDP, habitat restoration is an allowable use in designated ESHA areas. Control of invasive and exotic plants is also consistent with the types of management actions described in the Lagoon Management Plan. The Lagoon Management Plan specifies the following management goals and objectives for the Campus Lagoon area:

Management Goal VH: Protect and improve opportunities for maintaining and increasing populations of native plants and wildlife and outstanding horticultural specimens in the Campus Lagoon Management Area.

Objective VH-1: Maintain and enhance existing vegetation resources

Action VH-1.1 Invasive plants should be controlled using appropriate chemical and mechanical methods to reduce their adverse effects on special status plant species and other native plant habitats in areas (E.G. vernal pools and coastal sand dunes) that may contain special-status plants.

While the Lagoon Management Plan does not have any specific provisions for control invasive species on Lagoon Island using prescribed burns, the LRDP does discuss the potential use of burning as a vegetation management tool. Provisions in the management plan state:

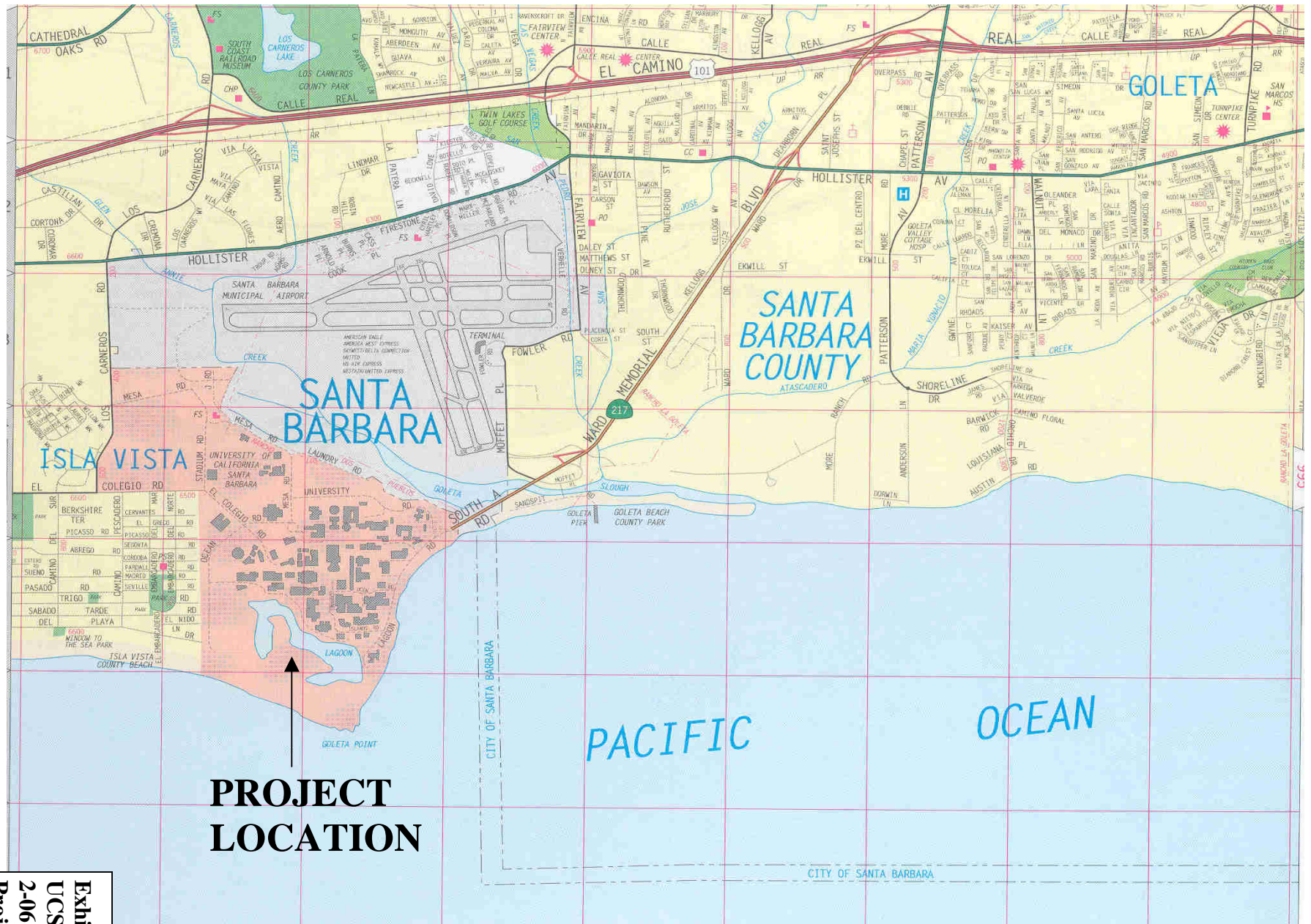
...fire is a natural component of grassland and scrub vegetation types in Californian, and the native plants have adapted to periodic wildfires. In fact, if properly applied, fire could be an effective vegetation management tool (i.e. to control some invasive exotic plants, such as annual grasses and herbs).

The University has proposed several best management practices to protect sensitive wildlife and plant species and water quality on Lagoon Island and Campus Lagoon. The University has designed the burn plots to avoid trees, allow for wildlife refuge in neighboring areas, and to provide a buffer areas from the lagoon. The university is also proposing immediate planting of the burned areas with native vegetation, which will prevent erosion of the site consistent with Section 30231.1 (g) of the 1990 LRDP, which states: "When vegetation must be removed on campus, the method shall be one that will minimize the erosive effects from the removal." Finally, the University has proposed biological monitoring of the project area prior to burning activities and on a regular basis following the burns for a minimum of three years. The Commission finds that these measures will prevent adverse impacts to coastal resources, including ESHA and water quality.

The Commission notes that the area proposed for burning and restoration is located adjacent to a designated trail that follows the perimeter of Lagoon Island. This trail will be temporarily blocked from public access during the prescribed burn. Immediately

following the burn, the University will open the trail to public use. The Commission finds that the temporary trail closure will not significantly impact public access to the island and the beach.

The proposed project is consistent with the requirements of the Lagoon Management Plan, which allow for removal of non-native vegetation and habitat restoration, and would not adversely impact coastal resources, including ESHA, water quality, and/or public access. For these reasons, the proposed project does not raise new policy issues and is consistent with the policies of the LRDP and the Coastal Act as submitted.



**PROJECT
LOCATION**

Source: Thomas Brothers Maps, 1998.

**Exhibit 1
UCSB NOD
2-06
Project
Location**

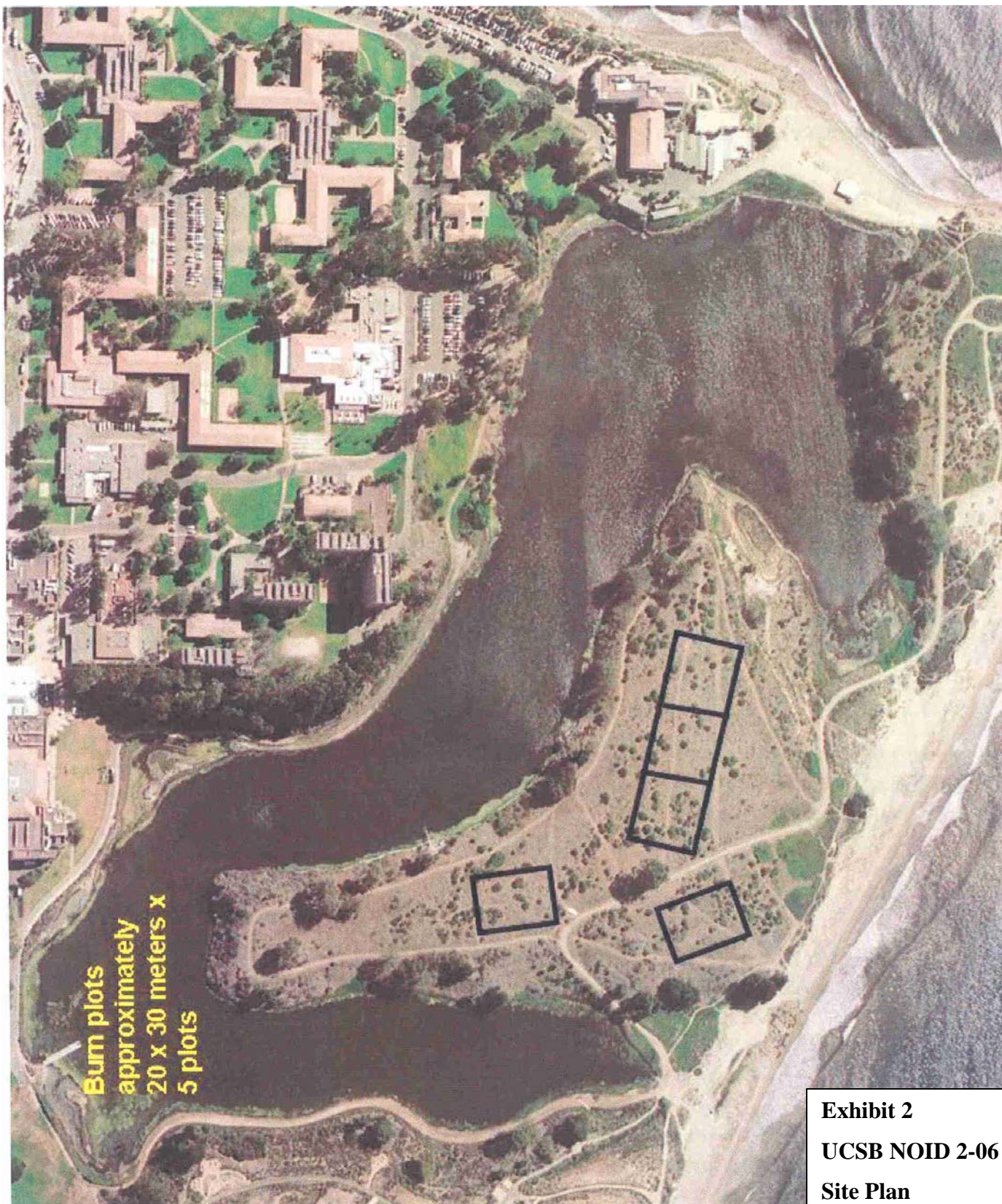


Exhibit 2
UCSB NOID 2-06
Site Plan