

MEMORANDUM

To: Joe Decruyenaere, Senior Biologist, Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning
From: Michael Cady, Senior Biologist, Dudek
Subject: Trails at Lyons Canyon Project—Offsite Mitigation Option—Natural Resources Analysis for APNs 2826-018-034, 2826-017-044, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-041, 2826-014-057, and 2826-014-067
Date: March 8, 2024
Cc: Jonathan Frankel, New Urban West Inc.; Kristin Starbird, Dudek; Daria Saraf, Dudek
Attachment: Figure 1a and 1b. Vegetation Desktop Assessment; Figure 2a and 2b. Aquatic Resources Desktop Assessment

This memorandum documents the analysis of the natural resources located on four parcels that are proposed for preservation as mitigation for impacts that would occur for the construction of the Trails at Lyons Canyon Project (“Project”). The Project is in unincorporated Los Angeles County and within the Santa Susana Mountains/Simi Hills Significant Ecological Area (SEA) established by the County of Los Angeles’ (County) SEA Ordinance. The four parcels are located within the same SEA, approximately one mile south-southwest of the Project site. The Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN) are 2826-018-034, 2826-017-044, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-041, 2826-014-057, and 2826-014-067. The approximately 491-acres of the four parcels was assessed to determine if SEA Resource Category 1, 2, 3, and 4 vegetation resources were present.

Methods

Dudek Senior Biologist Michael Cady conducted a reconnaissance survey on APN 2826-018-034 on October 17, 2023. Access was made into the northern portion of the parcel by taking a trail that branched off an official trail in the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park that is in Towsley Canyon. Vegetation communities within view of the surveyor were mapped using the Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri) Collector, a mobile data collection application, on a digital aerial-based background. Vegetation communities were mapped using A Manual of California Vegetation, Online Edition.¹ Following the completion of the fieldwork, the remaining portions of Parcel #17 were mapped using the areas that were mapped and extrapolated to other areas using Google Earth imagery (1985-2023) and National Agriculture Imagery Program imagery, including four band imagery, color infrared, and Normalized Difference Vegetation Index, using Esri ArcGIS software.

In January 2024, an airplane was used to collect one-foot topography of bare earth values (derived from LiDAR collected data at one hundred points per square meter) and aerial orthoimagery of the four parcels. Following the processing of the data, Mr. Cady used the high-resolution data to complete the desktop vegetation classification for the remaining parcels and to refine the classification for APN 2826-018-034. The LiDAR data was used to determine topography and flow channels in the parcels to determine where streams occurred. Three types of streams were classified and given buffers to estimate width between top of streambank: 2.0 acres contributing area or more (5-foot buffer), 1.0 acres contributing area or more (2.5-foot buffer), and 0.2 acres contributing area

¹ California Native Plant Society. 2023. A Manual of California Vegetation, Online Edition. Accessed October 2023. <https://www.cnps.org/vegetation>.

or more (1-foot buffer). A 15-foot buffer was done for these classified streams to capture adjacent oak trees within the *Pseudotsuga macrocarpa*–*Quercus agrifolia* Association and *Quercus agrifolia* Association to define oak riparian forest. Per the SEA Implementation Guidelines, this riparian vegetation would be considered an SEA Resource Category 1 (Water Resources).

Results

Except for roads and a small, developed area in 2826-017-041, the parcels contain contiguous, mature vegetation communities. Additionally, the parcels have numerous drainages that have hardwood forests and shrub vegetation.

Vegetation Communities

Nine vegetation communities were mapped in the six parcels, as listed in Table 1, and shown in Attachment A. One community, *Quercus agrifolia* Association - southern coast live oak riparian forest, is considered a SEA Resource Category 1 because it is associated with the streams within the parcels. Two SEA Resource Category 3 communities, *Pseudotsuga macrocarpa*–*Quercus agrifolia* Association (bigcone Douglas fir-coast live oak forest) and *Quercus agrifolia* Association (coast live oak woodland and forest) occur, primarily on north-facing slopes and canyon bottoms. The seven SEA Resource Category 4 communities are shrub-dominated and consist of chaparral and coastal scrub species.

Table 1. Vegetation Communities on APNs 2826-018-034, 2826-017-044, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-041, 2826-014-057, and 2826-014-067

Vegetation Community	Acres
SEA Resource Category 1	
<i>Quercus agrifolia</i> Association - southern coast live oak riparian forest (Water Resources)	27.47
SEA Resource Category 3	
<i>Pseudotsuga macrocarpa</i> – <i>Quercus agrifolia</i> Association	4.02
<i>Quercus agrifolia</i> Association	50.89
<i>Sub-Total:</i>	54.91
SEA Resource Category 4	
<i>Adenostoma fasciculatum</i> – <i>Salvia leucophylla</i> Association	11.35
<i>Adenostoma fasciculatum</i> – <i>Salvia mellifera</i> / mixed shrub Association	1.16
<i>Adenostoma fasciculatum</i> Association	77.08
<i>Artemisia californica</i> – <i>Eriogonum fasciculatum</i> Association	2.08
<i>Ceanothus crassifolius</i> – <i>Adenostoma fasciculatum</i> – <i>Rhus ovata</i> Association	249.26
<i>Ceanothus crassifolius</i> – <i>Adenostoma fasciculatum</i> Association	14.37
<i>Malacothamnus fasciculatus</i> – <i>Salvia leucophylla</i> Association	2.54
<i>Malosma laurina</i> – <i>Eriogonum fasciculatum</i> Association	12.93
Wild oats and annual brome grasslands Semi-Natural Alliance	12.24
<i>Sub-Total:</i>	383.01

Table 1. Vegetation Communities on APNs 2826-018-034, 2826-017-044, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-041, 2826-014-057, and 2826-014-067

Vegetation Community	Acres
Other Land Cover	
Urban/Developed	1.31
Total:	466.70

Table 1 Notes: Totals may not add up due to rounding.

Streams and Riparian Vegetation

The drainages in the six parcels are part of the Wiley Canyon and Towsley Canyon watersheds that contribute to the South Fork of the Santa Clara River, as shown in Attachment B. The desktop analysis resulted in 13.30 acres of potential streams in the six parcels. The method for determining potential adjacent riparian oak forest resulted in 27.47 acres of SEA Category 1 Water Resources. The remaining 54.91 acres of *Pseudotsuga macrocarpa*–*Quercus agrifolia* Association and *Quercus agrifolia* Association would be considered upland and SEA Resource Category 3.

Other Natural Resources

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database² (CNDDDB) includes mapped areas of southern coast live oak riparian forest, valley oak woodland, and California walnut woodland on the southern parcels. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has designated critical habitat for coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) that overlaps the three northernmost parcels.³ The desiccated remains of lilies were observed during the reconnaissance survey on APN 2826-018-034, with their being numerous slender mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *gracilis*) mapped occurrences in the CNDDDB to the east and west of the southern parcel. There are numerous rocky, vertical cliff faces with cracks and crevasses that could support roosting bats.

Discussion

The proposed Project includes the preservation of vegetation communities within an onsite Conservation Area, as required by Mitigation Measure- (MM-) BIO-1. As shown in Table 2, the Conservation Area provides sufficient acreage to fully offset impacts to SEA Resource Category 4 vegetation communities⁴ and to partially offset impacts to SEA Resource Category 3.⁵

² CDFW. 2024. California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). RareFind 5.0 (Commercial Subscription). Sacramento, California: CDFW, Biogeographic Data Branch. Accessed January 2024. <https://nrmsecure.dfg.ca.gov/cnddb/Default.aspx>.

³ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2024. Accessed January 2024. Critical Habitat Mapper; online viewer <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/table/critical-habitat.html>

⁴ For SEA Resource Category 4, preservation can be out-of-kind if the resource is of the same category.

⁵ For this discussion, the creation of vegetation communities within the *Brassica nigra*–*Centaurea melitensis* Herbaceous Semi-natural Stands is not included; however, if oak trees are planted as replacement for SEA protected trees, then an argument will be made that planted oaks also constitute the creation of oak woodland.

Table 2. Impacts to SEA Resource Category Communities and Proposed Preservation for the Trails at Lyon’s Canyon Project Using APNs 2826-018-034, 2826-017-044, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-041, 2826-014-057, and 2826-014-067

SEA Resource Category	Total Impacts (Acres)	Mitigation Requirement (Acres) ¹	On-site Preservation (Acres) ²	In-Kind Offsite Preserved Acres Needed ³	In-Kind Acres Provided by the Six Parcels ⁴	Out of--Kind Offsite Preserved Acres Needed ⁵	Out of--Kind Acres Provided by the Six Parcels ⁶	Total Preservation (Acres)	Preservation to Impact Ratio: Required	Preservation to Impact Ratio: Provided
1	3.67	18.35	0.52	17.83	0	26.74	27.47	27.99	5:1	7.6:1
3	13.53	40.59	12.40	32.01	28.94	4.74	54.91	67.31	3:1	5.0:1
4 ⁷	33.07	66.16	120.16	0	383.01	NA	NA	503.17	2:1	15.2:1
5 ⁸	33.99 ⁹	NA	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Table 2 Notes: NA=Not Applicable

- ¹ This determined by the impacts multiplied by the ratio of preservation required per the County of Los Angeles’ SEA Implementation Guide (5:1 for Category 1, 3:1 for Category 3, and 2:1 for Category 4).
- ² Preserved in the Conservation Area established by the proposed MM-BIO-1.
- ³ In-kind preservation within the Santa Susana Mountains/Simi Hills SEA, per proposed MM-BIO-2.
- ⁴ Out-of-kind preservation within the Santa Susana Mountains/Simi Hills SEA is at 1.5:1 for same category and 1.25:1 for a higher category, per proposed MM-BIO-2.
- ⁵ APNs 2826-018-034, 2826-017-044, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-041, 2826-014-057, and 2826-014-067
- ⁶ Out-of-kind preservation of SEA Resource Category 1 (southern coast live oak riparian forest and coast live oak woodland)
- ⁷ For SEA Resource Category 4, preservation can be out-of-kind if the resource is of the same category.
- ⁸ No preservation ratio is needed for SEA Resource Category 5, per se, only that the values that it supports (such as movement opportunities) are preserved.
- ⁹ 50.62 acres if MM-BIO-3, Habitat Mitigation and Monitoring Plan is fully implemented.

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SUBJECT: TRAILS AT LYONS CANYON PROJECT–OFFSITE MITIGATION OPTION–APNS 2826-018-034, 2826-017-044, 2826-017-043, AND 2826-017-041

MM-BIO-2 requires the remaining impact to vegetation communities be mitigated by preserving areas offsite. The mitigation measure allows for different preservation scenarios that include in-kind and out-of-kind vegetation communities, and within and outside the Santa Susana Mountains/Simi Hills SEA. Multipliers to the ratios of preservation required per the County of Los Angeles' (County) SEA Implementation Guide are used for out-of-kind and out of SEA preservation. Out-of-kind preservation must use a vegetation community classified as the same SEA Resource Category or a higher category.

As shown in Table 2, the 27.47 acres of SEA Category 1 Water Resources and the 54.91 acres of SEA Resources Category 3 provides the necessary acres of preservation for these two categories. The parcels provide an additional 26.72 acres of SEA Resource Category 3 vegetation communities in the form of *Quercus agrifolia* Forest and Woodland, which results in 5.0:1 preservation for this category.

Per Chapter 8 of the SEA Ordinance Implementation Guide, proposed mitigation areas may also be given added conservation value should they possess the following characteristics:

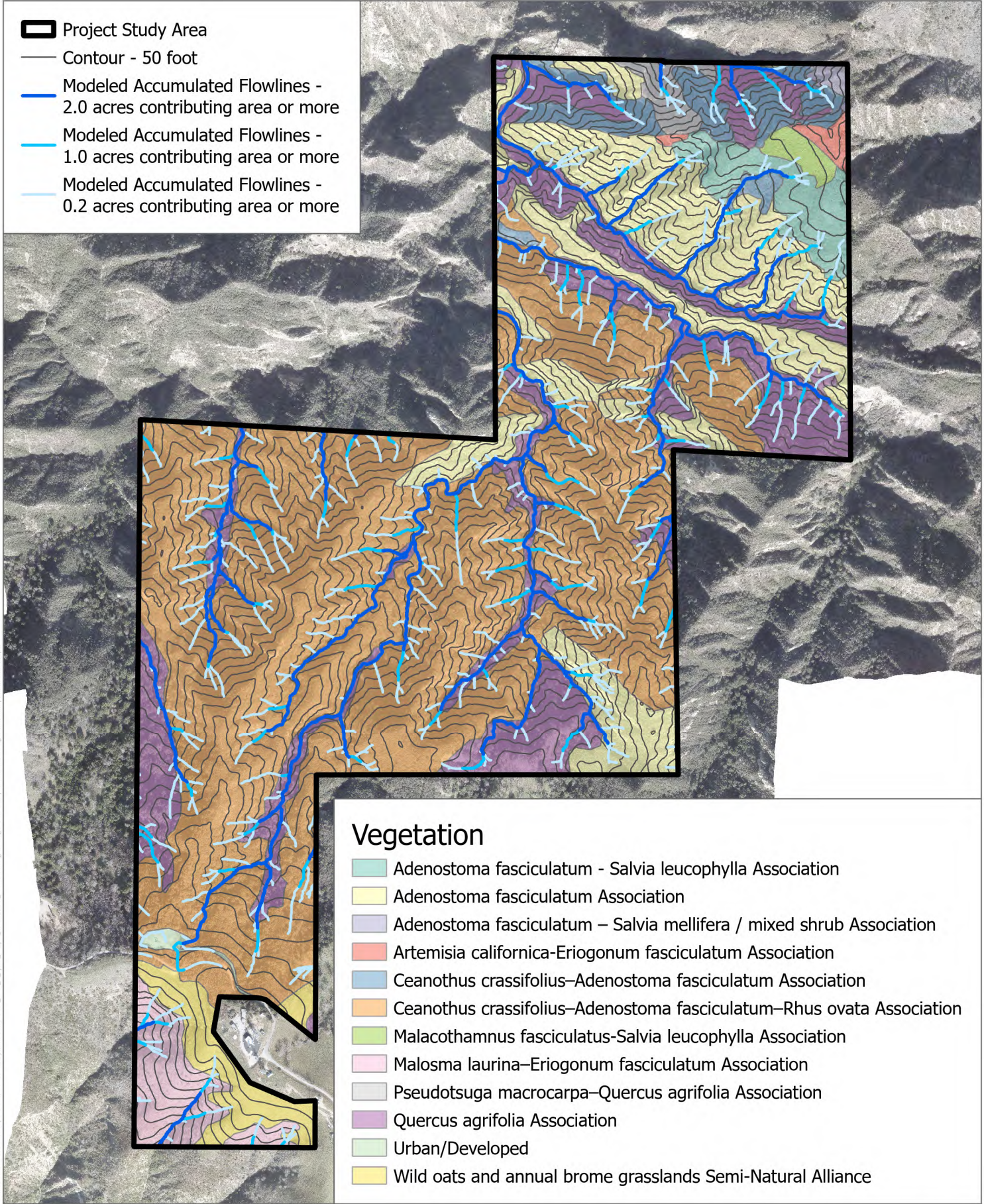
“Added value” can be given to proposed natural open space areas if they also contain unique or valuable habitat linkage resources, additional special-status species, surface waters, or sensitive habitats, etc. Proposed open-space with such added-value characteristics may be allowed to be smaller than the area that would typically be required and still be determined to be consistent with the SEA Program goals subject to the discretion of the Department and a determination of consistency with the SEA Findings by SEATAC.”

The Conservation Area and the six parcels proposed for preservation provide over 617 acres of relatively undisturbed vegetation that would be expected to support numerous plant and wildlife species, including the special-status species found on the Project site and in the vicinity. The parcels provide numerous potential streams and many acres of sensitive woodland habitats associated with uplands and riparian areas. The parcels are immediately adjacent to the approximately 3,250-acre Santa Clarita Woodlands Park that is managed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. As such, the four parcels would be a valuable addition to the preserved lands within the Santa Susana Mountains/Simi Hills SEA by preserving sensitive resources and increasing the habitat linkages in the region.

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Attachment A

Vegetation Desktop Assessment



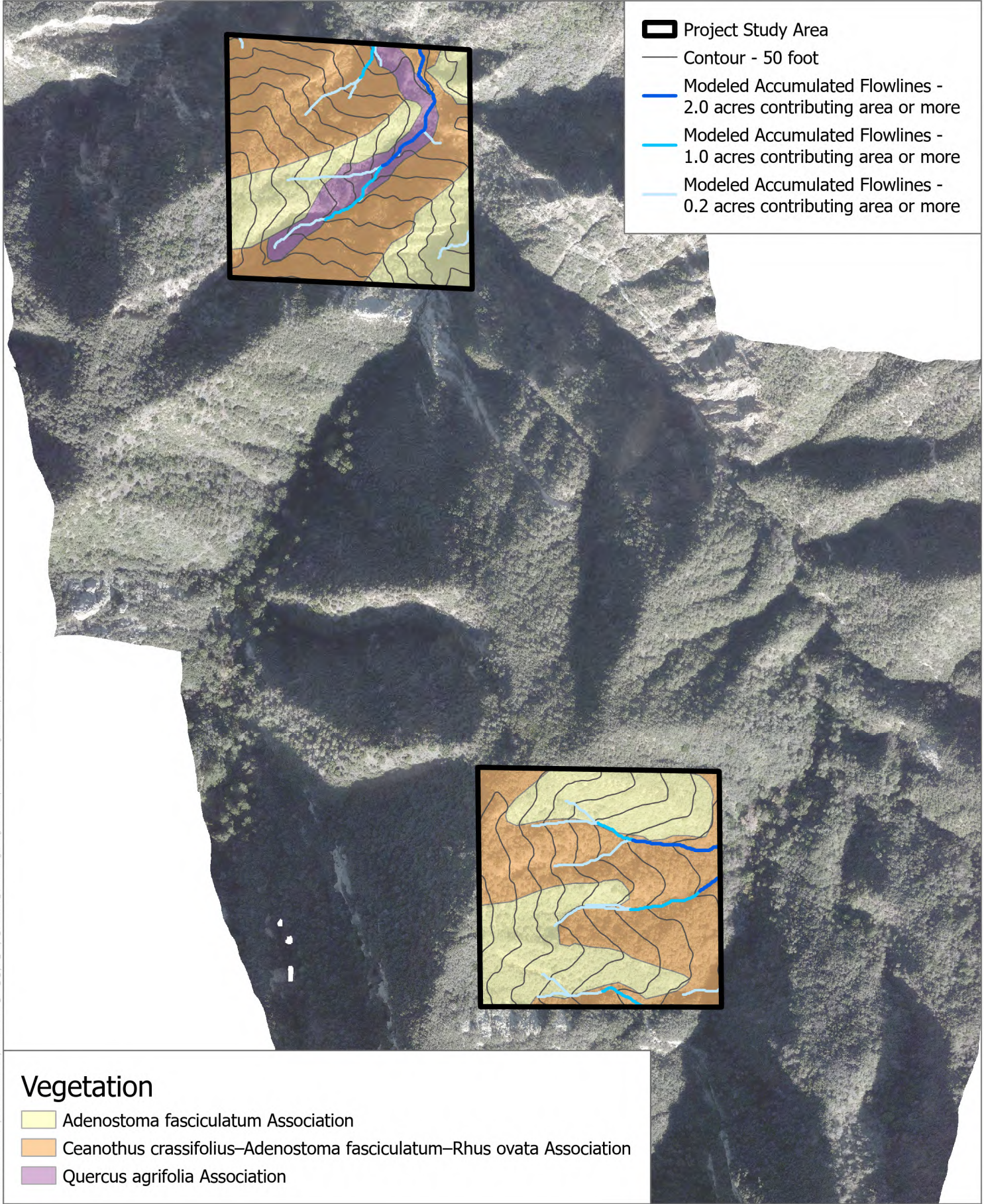
SOURCE: Dudek








Figure 1a
Vegetation Desktop Assessment




Trails at Lyons Canyon; APN 2826-017-041, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-044, 2826-018-034

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-  Project Study Area
-  Contour - 50 foot
-  Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 2.0 acres contributing area or more
-  Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 1.0 acres contributing area or more
-  Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 0.2 acres contributing area or more

Vegetation

-  Adenostoma fasciculatum Association
-  Ceanothus crassifolius-Adenostoma fasciculatum-Rhus ovata Association
-  Quercus agrifolia Association

SOURCE: Dudek

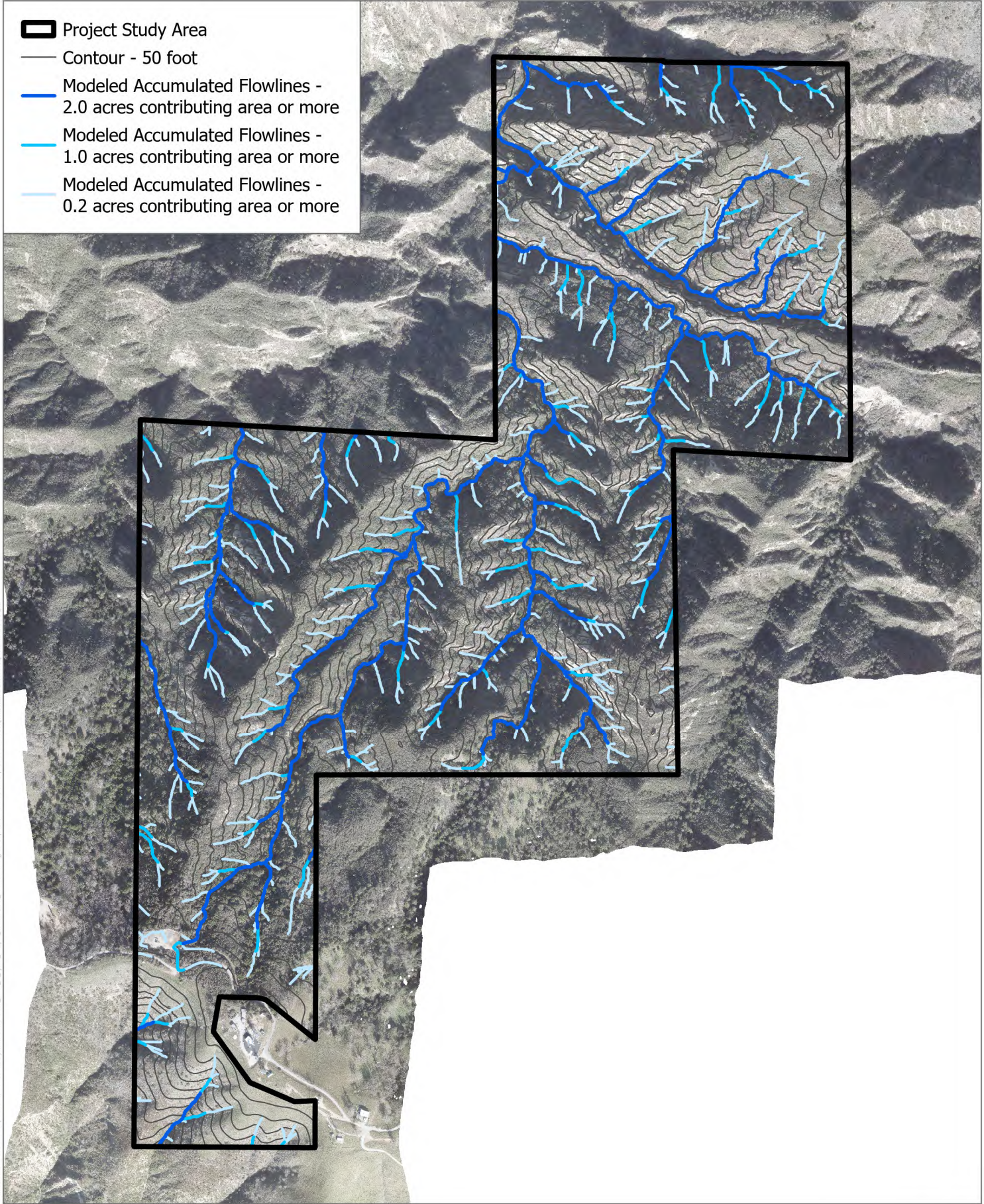


Figure 1b
 Vegetation Desktop Assessment
 Trails at Lyons Canyon; APN 2826-014-057, 2826-014-067

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Attachment B

Aquatic Resources Desktop Assessment



- Project Study Area
- Contour - 50 foot
- Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 2.0 acres contributing area or more
- Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 1.0 acres contributing area or more
- Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 0.2 acres contributing area or more

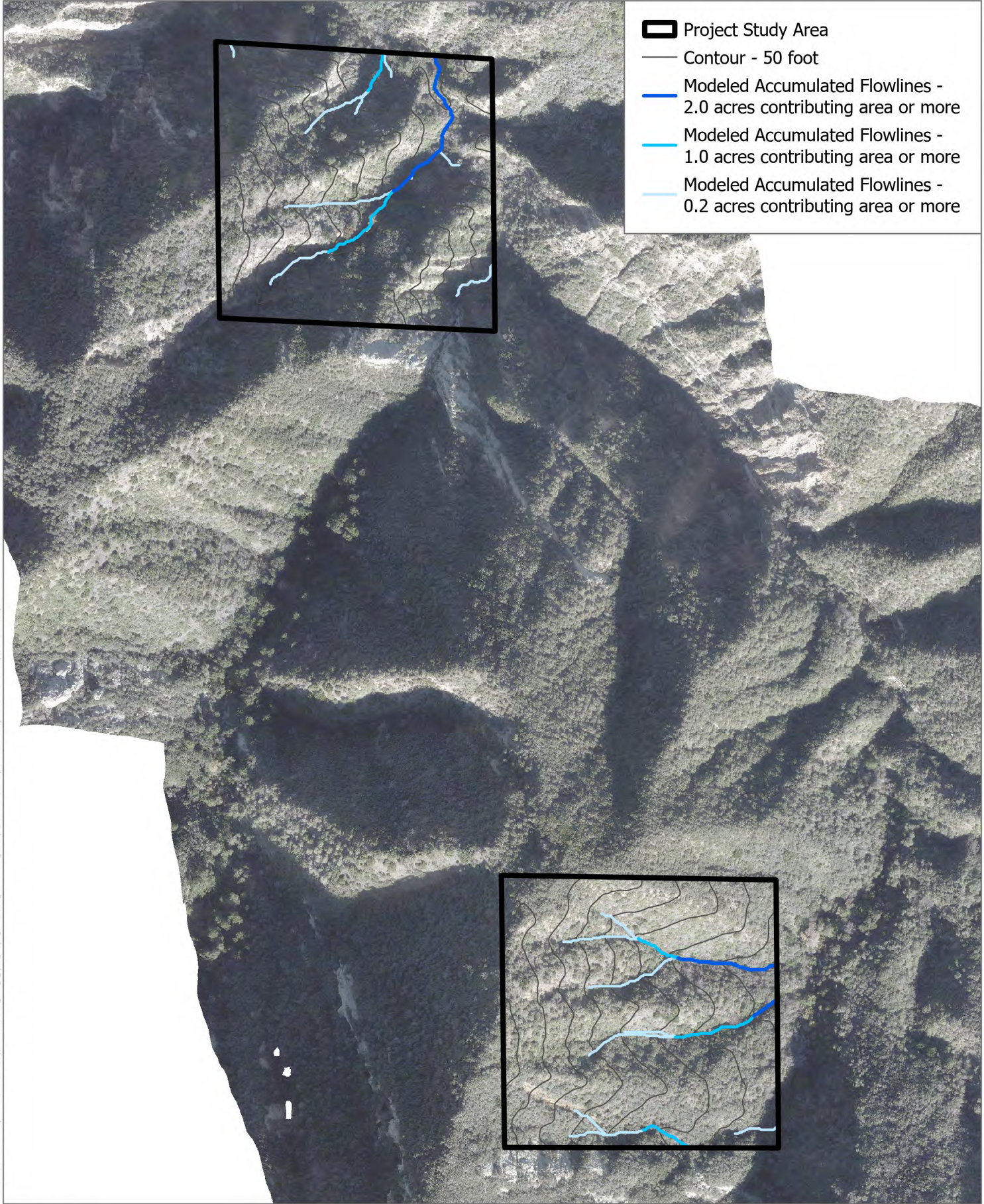
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SOURCE: Dudek



Figure 2a
 Aquatic Resources Desktop Assessment

Trails at Lyons Canyon; APN 2826-017-041, 2826-017-043, 2826-017-044, 2826-018-034



- Project Study Area
- Contour - 50 foot
- Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 2.0 acres contributing area or more
- Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 1.0 acres contributing area or more
- Modeled Accumulated Flowlines - 0.2 acres contributing area or more

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SOURCE: Dudek



Figure 2b
 Aquatic Resources Desktop Assessment
 Trails at Lyons Canyon; APN 2826-014-057, 2826-014-067