

**TOWN OF QUEEN CREEK  
SAN TAN FOOTHILLS AREA PLAN  
MAY 2007**



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## I. INTRODUCTION

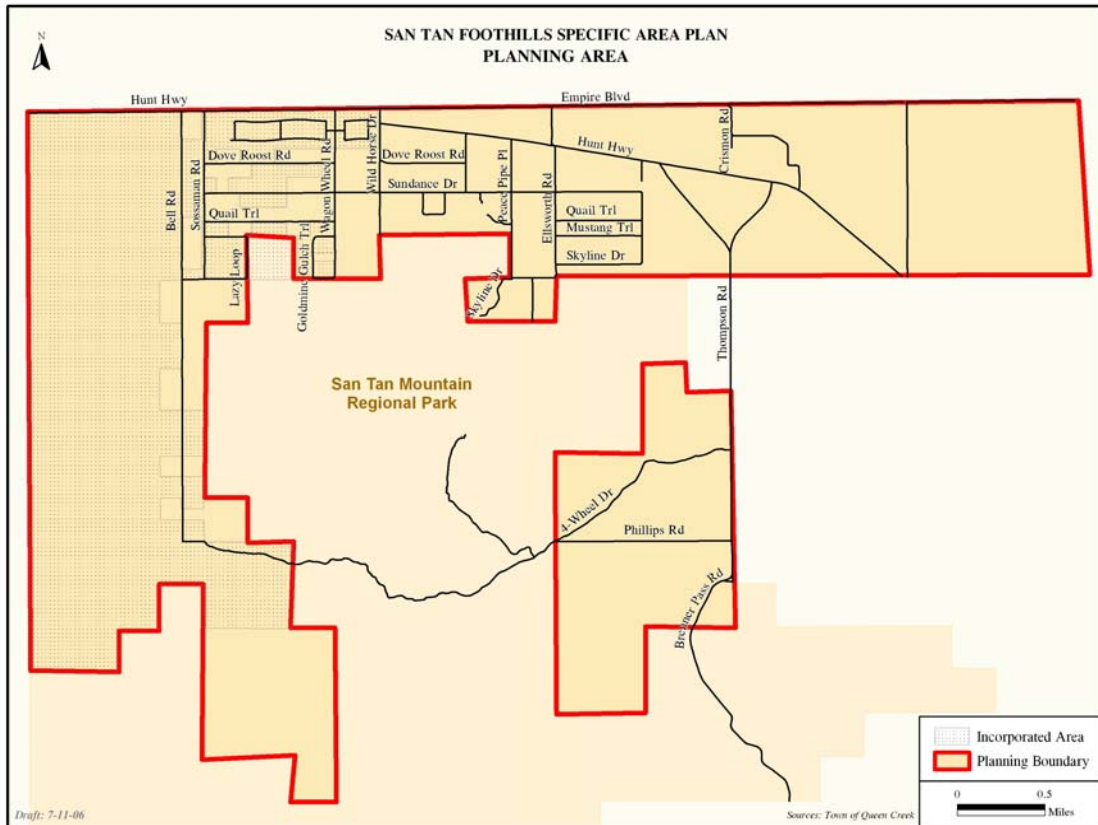
In fall 2005 the Town of Queen Creek initiated the San Tan Foothills Area Plan project. The Queen Creek General Plan 2002 identified a 10-square-mile area (within the Town's planning area, not entirely within its corporate boundaries) as an important community asset that should be included in the Town's long-range planning. The area's mountains, slopes, and potential recreational opportunities were identified as environmentally sensitive, and the area was recognized as a significant, unique community amenity. Ensuring San Tan Mountains Regional Park access and protection was also a concern that motivated the area planning effort. At the time the General Plan was being developed, it was undetermined if or how much of this planning area would eventually be incorporated by the town.



A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of residents of the town, residents in the San Tan Foothills Planning Area, and two Town Council Members was assembled to work with the project consultant, Partners for Strategic Action, Inc. to complete the process. The original planning area is indicated below. During the specific area planning process, research showed that the land in the two square miles east of the Thompson Road alignment had been under development or included

in a Pinal County approved master plan. It was determined that the Town of Queen Creek would have very little if any influence on the area's future development. The Town Council removed this land from the San Tan Foothills Specific Area Plan study area at a January 2007 briefing.

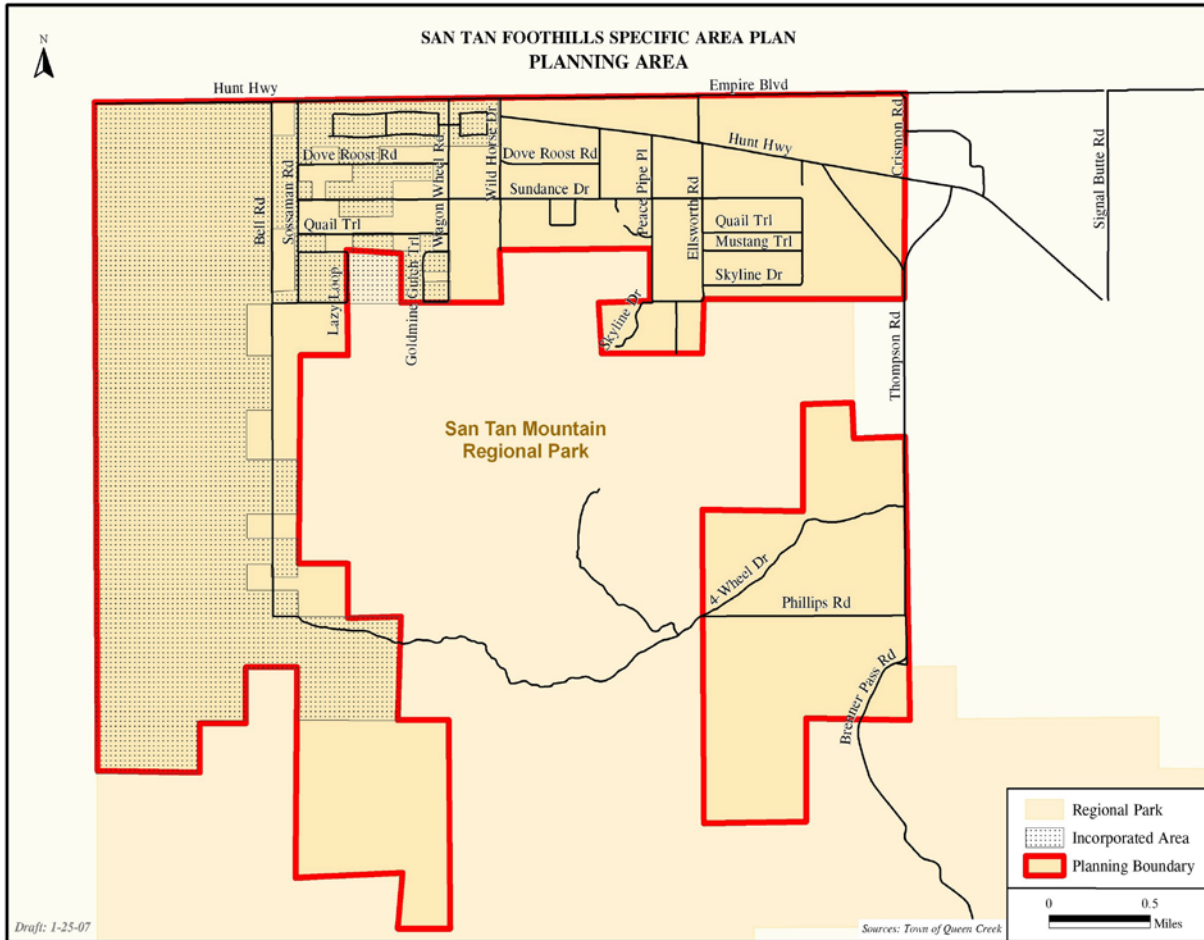
## San Tan Foothills Area Plan Planning Area ORIGINAL



The entire revised Planning Area is in Pinal County. The area is within Area 1B of the 2001 adopted Pinal County's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan states that this area should be given special attention. To minimize hillside disturbance, encourage the preservation of the natural character and aesthetic value of the desert, and preserve rural values and lifestyles. Several policies are articulated to accomplish this statement, such as addressing building types and elevations, lighting, walls and fences, drainage, slope development (discouraged above 15% slope), and vegetation.

Though the planning area is all within Pinal County, a portion of it (approximately 35 percent) is within the Town of Queen Creek's incorporated boundaries. Therefore, some of this area falls within the Town's planning, zoning, and development responsibilities and other areas are Pinal County's responsibility.

**San Tan Foothills Area Plan Planning Area FINAL**



The Town of Queen Creek area is designated “Incorporated” by Pinal County with other parcels designated as “Urban,” “Rural,” and “Development Reserve.” Much of the area is zoned “Suburban Ranch” (minimum lot size 3.3 acres). Portions of the Planning Area are designated by Pinal County as a “fissure zone.”

The San Tan Foothills Specific Area Plan’s purpose is to:

1. Determine a desired future condition for the area as it develops
2. Identify tools that will be needed to ensure compatible development with the natural surroundings
3. Communicate Queen Creek’s desires for the area to other jurisdictions



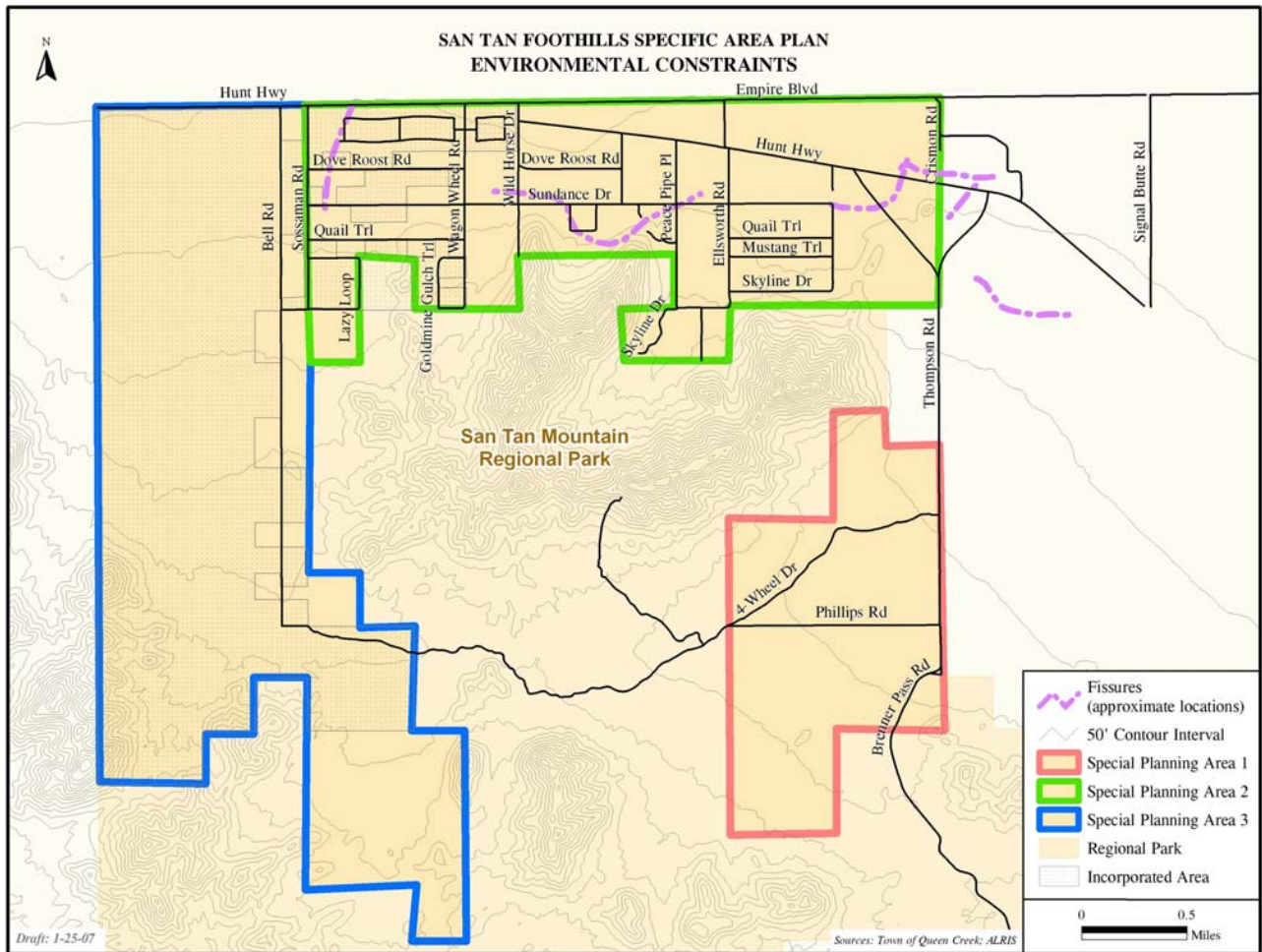
To address the above-stated purpose, the Planning Area includes three distinct land use areas, each with identified unique challenges. These have been designated as Special Planning Areas (SPA). They are:

**SPA 1: Eastern Slope** - located in the planning area's southeastern portion

**SPA 2: Rural Residential** - located across the Pinal/Maricopa Counties line in the planning area's central portion

**SPA 3: Western Slope** - located on the west side of the San Tan Mountains Regional Park

### Special Planning Areas and Environmental Constraints



The document contains four additional chapters:

- II. Public Involvement - recaps the key input received from the two public forums held during the process
- III. San Tan Foothills Vision for the Future - enunciates the desired future for the area
- IV. Planning Area Action Plan - identifies Focus Areas, Goals, and Policies to be implemented
- V. Land Use and Mobility - identifies recommended land use philosophy and mobility requirements to implement this philosophy

## II. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Ensuring extensive public involvement by area residents, landowners, and stakeholders was critical to the planning project's success. In addition to access to project information on the Town of Queen Creek Website and interaction throughout the process with the citizen-based Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), two major public events, an "Issues Forum" and "Solutions Forum", were held at key planning junctures. Approximately 100 people were involved through these events. Following is a summary of the process and key results of these two events.

### A. Issues Forum

On Thursday July 20, 2006, the Town of Queen Creek held a public meeting to gather input for the San Tan Foothills Specific Area Plan project. The event was held early in the project to allow citizens, landowners, and stakeholders to identify planning area critical issues and present their ideas about the future.



The event was attended by 54 citizens and stakeholders, 5 town staff, and the project consultant. Over one-third of the participants lived in the planning area but were not residents of the Town of Queen Creek.

Each participant received a planning area map. The event began with a brief planning process overview, study area boundaries description, and some basic planning area statistics. Attendees were also given a survey and event evaluation form to complete.

The attendees then participated in a facilitated discussion. The participants were asked two questions: "What are the key issues the plan should address?" and "What is your desired outcome or vision for the area?" Their responses were then prioritized.

#### Priority Issues

- Scarring of mountain sides, leveling of hillsides and slopes
- Retaining rural character with large lot sizes, stop lot splitting
- Sensitivity to noise and traffic
- Keeping equestrian legacy
- Preserving views, no power lines or tall buildings

- Maintaining dark skies
- Purchasing land to preserve
- Properly planning for minimal commercial development
- Preserving natural washes and riparian areas
- Enforcement of zoning
- Protecting the park
- Native plant, vegetation, and wildlife preservation
- Stringent stipulations for development with building envelopes, no clearing
- Carefully considering the impact of potential resorts
- People who live here should have a say in the future.
- Developing creative ways to preserve the area

### **Vision Components**

- Open spaces maintained
- Large lot, low density development, controlled growth
- Mountain visibility with no houses on the sides
- Equestrian friendly
- See the stars
- Still have wildlife
- Hunt Highway is still 2 lanes but with turn lanes
- Groundwater pumping is minimal
- Appropriate architectural styles
- Xeriscaping for the entire area
- Bike and equestrian trails that are safe and clean
- Desert land protected
- Education on how to take care of the desert
- Desert vegetation is intact and not relocated
- Utilities carefully buried
- No littering, broken glass
- Park facilities - sports, family recreation
- Retain rural character
- Mixed housing types
- Protected washes
- Maintained unique southwest identity
- No block walls



## B. Solutions Forum

The second community event was held on Thursday September 21, 2006, to gather input regarding potential planning area solutions. Citizens and stakeholders reviewed work completed to date and provide input on the planning area vision, focus areas and goals, and draft land use alternative.

The event was attended by 45 citizens and stakeholders, town staff, and the project consultant. Each participant received an issue paper containing the draft Vision Statement, Focus Areas and Goals, and an analysis of the draft land use alternative. A brief planning process overview was provided, study area boundaries described, and some basic planning statistics presented. An overview of the key results of the Issues Forum held in July was provided and a questionnaire completed. Following is a summary of input received.



### Key Results - Vision Statement

- Participants felt the Vision Statement accurately reflected desires for the future.
- Detailed strategies are needed to implement the vision.

### Key Results - Goals and Policies

- Concerns about lot splitting
- Protection of the rural character and park are key solutions desired
- Need strategies to deal with water conservation and transportation
- Address air pollution
- Preserving flora and fauna should be a goal through needing to obey ordinances
- Highway/Empire Road used as a bypass speedway; need a strategy
- Need strong cut regulations
- Building heights should be set and strictly enforced
- Disturbance area and footprint should be used to preserve desert
- Boarding of horses is a concern. Some are abusing the privilege for commercial use and enforcement is a problem.
- Walls ruin the character and should be avoided in the planning area.
- Design standards need to be developed to ensure buildings are compatible with surroundings.

**Key Results - Land Use Alternative**

- The draft Land Use Alternative was widely accepted.
- Landowners might not agree with five-acre lots; this seems excessive and unfair.
- Need more clarification on the impacts and type of the resort
- In favor of high-quality, low-impact development in Environmentally Sensitive area without lot size restriction
- Conservation areas should only be accessible by pedestrians and equestrians and any uses should have low impact.
- Preserve status for the State Land should be pursued, but if the funding does not materialize, the area should be designated Very Low Density Residential.
- Flooding problems need to be addressed and clarified.
- Want comprehensive water plan
- Maintaining “Rural Appearance” is key.
- Minimizing commercial growth in neighborhoods
- Need to have restrictions on recreation facilities (e.g., no camping)
- Designate conservation areas and have policies to reinforce them.
- Limit commercial development to SPA 2.

### **III. San Tan Foothills Vision for the Future**

Based on input from the public at the Issues and Solutions Forums and TAC discussions, a San Tan Foothills Vision Statement was developed. The statement is expressed in the present tense but does not reflect the current situation. It is an expression of a desired future condition decades from now. It assumes that the Town of Queen Creek, Pinal County, and other entities have successfully collaborated on area planning issues and balanced development and preservation efforts. The Vision Statement will be used to serve as a reference point for making decisions and also to measure the success of this and other plans' implementation efforts.

#### **A. San Tan Foothills Vision Statement**

The Town of Queen Creek and Pinal County have united to jointly maintain, support, and defend the rural and equestrian character of the San Tan Foothills Area that functions as the transitional buffer between the urbanized southeast Valley and the San Tan Mountain Regional Park. The character of the area is achieved through maintaining the pristine mountain slopes, carefully integrating the built environment with the hillsides, and maintaining large lot residential development. Natural washes, environmentally sensitive areas, wildlife corridors, and archaeological sites have been protected from disturbance through innovative planning and acquisition. Flooding and subsidence issues have been successfully mitigated through the development of strong policies and standards.

The San Tan Mountains are a major recreational destination for the over 3,000,000 people of the Southeast Valley and northern Pinal County. The park area has been vigorously protected by a consortium of surrounding cities and towns, public agencies, non-profit organizations, and the Gila River Indian Community so as to maintain its natural character and the areas around the park has followed the same preservation ethic. Access has been preserved to the park without negatively impacting the residents who live nearby.

Commercial development in the Foothills is minimal. Resort development is only considered on a small scale and only if it complements the surroundings and is supported by the local community. In all developments, open space, native vegetation, and a mindset toward water preservation are required to maintain the Sonoran Desert character. It is one of the few places left in one of the nation's largest metropolitan areas where you can still see the stars.

## IV. Planning Area Action Plan

The San Tan Foothills Vision Statement outlines the area's desired future condition that maintains the special character of the land and its location. This vision must be balanced by the fact that the landowners have the right to develop their properties and that there will be significant demand for this property due to the area's qualities and location.

The area's success in achieving the vision will hinge on the level of cooperation that occurs between the local jurisdictions, landowners, and developers. The Town of Queen Creek's current development standards have been very effective in guiding growth in areas that are relatively flat and/or have been converted to other uses from agriculture. The Town does not have specific standards tailored to the terrain, vegetation, drainage challenges, and character of much of the San Tan Foothills area. For this reason, this action plan outlines specific steps that are recommended to be taken through a series of Focus Areas. Within each Focus Area, specific Goals and Policies are presented, that when implemented will provide the best opportunities for the area to reach its full potential in accordance with the area's vision. The Focus Areas are:

- Sonoran Desert Character
- Environmental Constraints
- Resource Preservation
- Residential Development
- Non-Residential Development
- Slopes and Hillsides
- Mobility
- Coordination and Collaboration

*Any planning tools developed, based on the policies presented, will pertain only to the land that is legally incorporated in the Town of Queen Creek. However, it is the community's desire that Pinal County leaders will use this plan as a guide to develop and/or implement similar tools for guiding development within the county's jurisdiction.*

## Focus Area: Sonoran Desert Character

The San Tan Foothills area is a classic example of the Sonoran Desert that is now within a fast-growing urban region. The community values the Sonoran Desert environment and believes strongly that this characteristic should be preserved and protected.

**Goal: Protect the Sonoran Desert flora and fauna to be enjoyed in perpetuity.**

### Policies:

1. Maintain a native plant ordinance specifically for the San Tan Foothills area.
2. Provide public education focused on protecting the desert areas from damage.
3. Prohibit off-road vehicles in non-designated areas.



**Goal: Encourage native vegetation in the Foothills area.**

### Policies:

1. Enforce the native plant ordinance.
2. Provide educational materials identifying acceptable plants and landscaping.

**Goal: Develop/expand upon native plant transplanting regulations in developed areas.**

### Policies:

1. Maintain specific procedures and guidelines in the native plant ordinance regarding transplanting and re-vegetation, including the use of temporary nurseries on development sites to preserve removed plants for later transplanting on the site.
2. Maintain requirements that site plans and development proposals include a landscaping plan.

**Goal: Develop regulations to provide that portions of the natural desert landscape are untouched, not just re-vegetated.**

Policies:

1. Locations of mature trees, plants, and cacti should be used in determining building envelopes in addition to topographical and drainage constraints.
2. Utilize building envelopes to retain native vegetation in its current place as much as possible.



**Goal: Preserve air quality and dark skies.**

Policies:

1. Develop a dark skies ordinance specific to the San Tan Foothills Area.
2. Provide education programs regarding installation of low-impact lighting.
3. Work with regional agencies to promote clean air efforts.
4. Develop guidelines for roadway design standards to minimize particulates and dust.
5. Maintain construction regulations to minimize dust at construction sites.



## **Focus Area: Environmental Constraints**

Protecting the health and safety of residents and their investments is an important function of local, regional, and state government. The community will continue to be vigilant in identifying environmental risks and implement policies to minimize them. The Town will need to continually monitor data generated by state and federal agencies relating to ground subsidence and fissure issues.

**Goal: Develop planning tools to minimize earth fissure and subsidence risks.**

Policies:

1. Using data from the new Arizona Geological Survey, adopt a provision within the General Plan Environmental Element that utilizes a “Known Earth Fissures” map to be used to review projects.
2. Adopt specific construction standards to address known or potential earth fissures by local amendment to the current International Building Code.
3. Ensure that conceptual planning, rezoning and entitlement, Planned Area Development (PAD) procedures, and preliminary plat checklists contain requirements to map and design around or mitigate known or potential earth fissures.

**Goal: Minimize flood damage to structures.**

Policies:

1. Develop and maintain a Foothills Area drainage master plan.
2. All new developments require a comprehensive drainage plan.
3. Utilize building envelopes and finished floor heights to protect structures from potential flooding damage.
4. Landscaping plans should enhance on-site drainage capabilities.



**Focus Area: Resource Preservation**

Water, washes, and wildlife are all key elements of the character of the San Tan Foothills area. Protection of washes in their natural state, managing water runoff appropriately, conserving water resources, and ensuring that wildlife corridors are maintained are important parts of the area’s quality of life.

**Goal: Protect water resources and minimize water usage.**

Policies:

1. Maintain a low-water desert landscaping ordinance for residential and commercial uses.
2. Encourage green building and conservation techniques that minimize water usage.

**Goal: Preserve natural washes.**

Policies:

1. Define natural washes and inventory those to be protected.
2. Use building envelopes and other planning tools to maintain natural washes.
3. Restore washes that need to be modified back to a natural appearance when feasible.



**Goal: Maintain wildlife corridors and ensure connectivity with other regional wildlife corridors identified.**

Policies:

1. Assemble data generated by other regional agencies that identify wildlife corridor locations and wildlife travel patterns. Use this data to evaluate development proposals and maintain these corridors.
2. Work with Pinal County, Gila River Indian Community, Maricopa County, and other municipalities to ensure connectivity of wildlife corridors.





**Goal: Minimize disruption of native wildlife habitats.**

Policies:



1. Protect riparian areas and natural washes from disturbance.
2. Continue to require landscaping and re-vegetation activities to use native plants that serve as habitats for indigenous species.

**Goal: Protect archaeological sites from degradation.**

Policies:

1. Continue to require surveys and agency review of development proposals in regard to archaeological sites, since many of the sites locations are confidential.
2. Work closely with the state agencies (e.g., State Historic Preservation Office) to identify and preserve archaeological sites.
3. Collaborate with Pinal County, Gila River Indian Community, and park authorities to preserve and protect archaeological sites.



**Focus Area: Residential Development**

Residential development should be compatible and within the context of the natural surroundings. A balance between preserving the desert character while respecting personal property rights should be achieved.

**Goal: Maintain rural character as defined.**

Policies:

1. Work with Pinal County to maintain currently allowable zoning densities without any increases.



2. Review and provide input to development proposals within Pinal County's jurisdiction.
3. Adopt a new land use designation "Environmentally Sensitive Residential" for inclusion in the General Plan.
4. Adopt a new land use designation "Suburban Ranch" for inclusion in the General Plan.
5. Revise Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances to reflect new land use designations.
6. Support maintaining the equestrian lifestyle of the area.

**Goal: Ensure that neighborhoods and homes are not negatively impacted by park activities.**

Policies:

1. Provide buffers and setbacks from roadways carrying park traffic.
2. Collaborate with other agencies to address park entrance and parking issues as park visits increase.
3. Implement circulation plan policies to minimize impact of park traffic on neighborhoods and homes.
4. Work with regional park authorities to develop creative solutions to expanding future parking facilities.



**Goal: Integrate structures into the landscape to preserve views.**

Policies:

1. Uphold standards for building heights.
2. Develop standards for peripheral appliances that may impact views (e.g., satellite receivers, antennae).



3. Utilize the building envelope concept to sensitively place structures on lots to preserve views.

## **Focus Area: Non-Residential Development**

Many residents expressed a desire to maintain the area's residential character with minimal commercialization.

### **Goal: Minimize commercial development.**

#### Policies:

1. Rezoning additional property for commercial uses in the planning area, unless it is required for resort development in the designated areas on the land use map, shall be discouraged.
2. Review commercial development proposals in light of maintaining neighborhood and rural-character compatibility.
3. Monitor commercial activities to minimize potential negative affects on residents and neighborhoods.

### **Goal: Resort development will be sensitive to the land and not disrupt the rural lifestyle and character.**

#### Policies:

1. Create resort development standards by working with citizens and landowners to ensure visual and environmental compatibility, transportation access, and a high-quality, environmentally-sensitive project.
2. An inclusive public process will be followed for the review of resort development proposals.
3. Desired resort development will not include high-water usage and be sensitively integrated with the natural surrounding.

**Goal: Employment within the San Tan Foothills Area will be consistent with SPA definitions.**

Policies:

1. Enforce the Home-Based Business Ordinance to ensure residences and neighborhoods are not adversely impacted by commercial activities.
2. Enforce ordinances to ensure that employment is consistent with permitted activities in the zoning code.
3. Work with Pinal County to mitigate employment activities that may negatively affect surrounding residences and neighborhoods.



**Focus Area: Slopes and Hillsides**

The San Tan Mountains are a unique visual landmark in the Southeast Valley. Development in the area should minimize damage and scarring.

**Goal: Preserve environmentally-sensitive areas specifically within the planning area.**



Policies:

1. Maintain hillside preservation regulations (above 15 percent slope) and include guidelines for building height to slope ratios.
2. Initiate and maintain a building envelope process that includes disturbance boundaries.
3. Maintain cut and fill regulations.
4. Maintain a hillside disturbance ordinance.
5. Maintain density transfer policies.



## Focus Area: Mobility

The planning area has one major arterial street that runs along the northern perimeter and bisects SPA 2. The area circulation network focuses on maintaining a rural, multimodal system to serve local residents, provide access to the regional park, and accommodate pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian modes.

**Goal: Develop a transportation system to accommodate anticipated travel volumes based upon development density and projections.**

### Policies:

1. Coordinate with the Town's transportation plan to divert non-local traffic away from planning area residential neighborhoods.
2. Maintain roadway design standards that help minimize damage due to floods and other drainage issues.
3. Maintain street and driveway standards that require improvements necessary for adequate dust control and drainage.
4. Maintain procedures and design criteria for traffic-calming devices.
5. Include the planning area and potential buildout projections in future transit planning.



**Goal: Provide non-motorized modes of transportation.**

### Policies:

1. Maintain design standards for bicycle and pedestrian pathways and equestrian trails.
2. Develop a pedestrian and equestrian circulation network that is consistent with the Queen Creek Parks, Trails, and Open Space Element.
3. Establish bicycle lanes and facilities where appropriate in conjunction with the development and improvements of arterials, collectors, and local streets.



4. Develop equestrian, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities that connect the regional park, and/or planning area open spaces.
5. Improve direct pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian trail access to the regional park.
6. Develop equestrian trail linkages throughout the planning area compatible with area development.
7. Maintain guidelines for equestrian crossings of arterial and collector roadways and implement improvements.
8. Accommodate trail intersections in roadway designs.

**Goal: Establish guidelines regarding appropriate access control to and from streets and adjacent properties.**

Policies:

1. Develop guidelines for driveway access spacing and street intersection spacing and lighting standards in order to maintain capacity, efficiency, and safe traffic flow on the roadway facilities.
2. Establish street intersection spacing and alignment requirements that reflect the topography of the planning area.
3. Consider the needs of non-motorized users (pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians) in traffic management plans.
4. Develop uniform guidelines for preparing Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) for new developments or additions to existing developments within the San Tan Foothills area.
5. Require analysis of the impact of roadway improvements on surrounding landscape character.

## **Focus Area: Coordination and Collaboration**

The San Tan Foothills Specific Area Plan involved many residents, landowners, and stakeholders that have a specific interest in how the planning area grows and changes. The planning process set the standard for future collaborative planning efforts. These entities and individuals must continue to be engaged in the process as the plan is implemented to ensure that the San Tan Foothills area character is maintained as development occurs.

**Goal: Work closely with Pinal County and other jurisdictions.**

Policies:

1. Expand and enhance the working relationships with Pinal County in regard to plan review, upholding zoning ordinance and development standards, and other development issues.
2. Continue to coordinate with the Gila River Indian Community, especially as development is proposed in SPA 3.
3. Development proposals in the San Tan Foothills Planning Area should be reviewed by park authorities to evaluate potential impacts.

**Goal: Coordinate with area advocacy groups.**

Policies:

1. The town will serve a facilitative role in engaging various groups to encourage collaboration, coordination, and reaching joint solutions.
2. As part of the development review process, at least one neighborhood meeting is required to be held by the applicant, as is documentation that area residents and groups were consulted.

**Goal: Establish an advisory group to monitor the implementation of the Specific Area Plan.**

Policy:

1. Appoint an advisory group comprised of town and county residents to provide feedback on potential new developments and monitor the plan's implementation.

## V. Land Use and Mobility

The Land Use and Mobility section reflects the public input received, the current planning and zoning of Pinal County and the Town of Queen Creek, the existing development pattern, and natural or physical constraints. The land uses have been established to estimate the area's carrying capacity for infrastructure and transportation planning purposes.

### A. Special Planning Areas

To address the unique set of opportunities and challenges, three distinct areas have been identified. Within each of these SPAs, land use designations are provided and a discussion of what special development considerations should be implemented.

#### Special Planning Area 1: Eastern Slope

The area is approximately 1.5 square miles or 960 acres and is the only noncontiguous parcel to the Town of Queen Creek's incorporated boundary. It is currently sparsely developed with several parcels containing residences. The area abuts the regional park to the west and subdivided property in Pinal County to the east. None of this area is within the Town of Queen Creek's corporate boundary and could not legally be annexed without an extension of the town's incorporated boundary (per State statute requirements) to connect to SPA 1.



The Queen Creek General Plan has designated this area (approximately 320 acres) as Recreation/Conservation. This parcel of land, owned by the Arizona State Land Trust and managed by the Arizona State Land Department, was designated as such as part of the Arizona Preserve Initiative and is protected until 2007. At the time of the development of Queen Creek's General Plan in 2002, the Town intended to purchase this property through a grant and designate it for preservation purposes. Financing for this effort has not materialized.

A resort site is designated on the Town's General Plan in the northeast portion of SPA 1.

Two-thirds of the land in SPA 1 is privately-held land with the balance owned by the Arizona State Land Trust.

The land is gently sloping from southwest to northeast, and no known earth fissures exist.



Except for the area designated in Recreation/Conservation, the Queen Creek General Plan designates all of the land as Very Low Density Residential (0-1 du/ac.).

### Recommendations

- This SPA should be developed at the Very Low Density land use category with up to 1 dwelling unit per acre.
- The Town should support steps to keep the State Trust land in preserve status.
- Traffic on Phillips Road should be monitored over time. Traffic may increase significantly, because it is one of the regional park entrances. Careful consideration should be given to development placement along this road, including development ingress and egress and noise mitigation.
- Should the State Trust land be reclassified from the preserve designation, it should be developed similarly to the balance of the SPA with Very Low Density up to 1 dwelling unit per acre.

### Special Planning Area 2: Rural Residential

This area of approximately 2.94 square miles (1,881 acres) is bordered by the Hunt Highway/Empire Road alignment to the north, Crismon/Thompson Road alignment to the east, the regional park to the south, and Sossaman Road to the west.

All of the land in SPA 2 is privately held. Approximately 27 percent of this area is within the corporate boundaries of the Town. SPA 2 has different allowable densities depending upon if the property is within the Town of Queen Creek or under the Pinal County jurisdiction.



The area within the Town of Queen Creek is zoned R1-54 (less than one dwelling unit per acre) and is designated in the Queen Creek General Plan as Very Low Density Residential. The property in Pinal County is zoned as Suburban Ranch at 3.3 dwelling units per acre.

Most of SPA 2 has developed or is developing as large lot, rural residential with a wide array of housing quality and values. The Town of Queen Creek estimates a total of 149 dwelling units in this area.



The topography of the area's northern portion is fairly level. Significant elevation change occurs toward the planning area's southern third and a large box canyon protruding into the regional park. Mountain and rock outcroppings rise several hundred feet in some areas. Sonoqui Wash traverses the eastern third of the SPA. Several earth fissures have been identified in this special planning area with the most significant being a mile-long fissure aligned from east to west in the center of SPA 2.

### Recommendations

- The residential development in SPA 2 is designated at the Suburban Ranch level with one dwelling unit per 3.3 acres and the Very Low Density Residential level with up to one dwelling unit per acre.
- Implementation of policies to keep development from being impacted by fissures is critical.
- Commercial development should be carefully evaluated and monitored to minimize negative impacts on neighboring residences.
- Traffic patterns and effects should be a major factor when evaluating development proposals.

### Special Planning Area 3: Western Slope

SPA 3 is approximately four square miles (2,560 acres) of mostly uninhabited land on the western side of the regional park. It is bounded on the north by Hunt Highway, on the east by the Sossaman Road alignment and regional park, on the south by the regional park, and on the west by the Queen Creek planning area/Power Road Alignment.



Approximately 75% of the land in SPA 3 is in the town's corporate boundaries and is zoned R1-54 (minimum 1.25 acre lots). The remainder is zoned in Pinal County and is zoned at 1 dwelling unit per acre. The entire SPA is designated in the Queen Creek General Plan as Very Low Residential. All of the land in SPA 3 is privately held. Most of the land in SPA 3 is owned by three property owners.

A resort in the southern portion of SPA 3 is indicated in the Queen Creek General Plan, and a Recreation/Conservation easement has been designated from the west portion of the SPA to the regional park.

The topography varies significantly in this SPA with fairly gently sloping areas in the northern portion contrasting with significant slopes, mountains, and rock outcroppings of several hundred feet to the south.

## **Recommendations**

- Since the majority of the land is currently unoccupied and represented by three landowners, there is a significant opportunity to collaborate and sensitively develop the area. Based on the physical location, this could be one of the most beautiful residential areas in the southwest.
- The site lends itself to some techniques like Planned Area Developments, building envelopes, clustering, and other methods to preserve the natural character and ambiance of the SPA.
- Because of the linear nature of this SPA, careful planning and coordination with other developments needs to occur during roadway design to ensure access but to not overbuild the system creating unnecessary disturbance, noise, and drainage issues.
- The potential for a resort in this area is high. Based on the public's input, an eco-resort of some type could be an excellent fit not only as an eco-tourism asset but as a community amenity.

## **B. Land Use Plan and Designations**

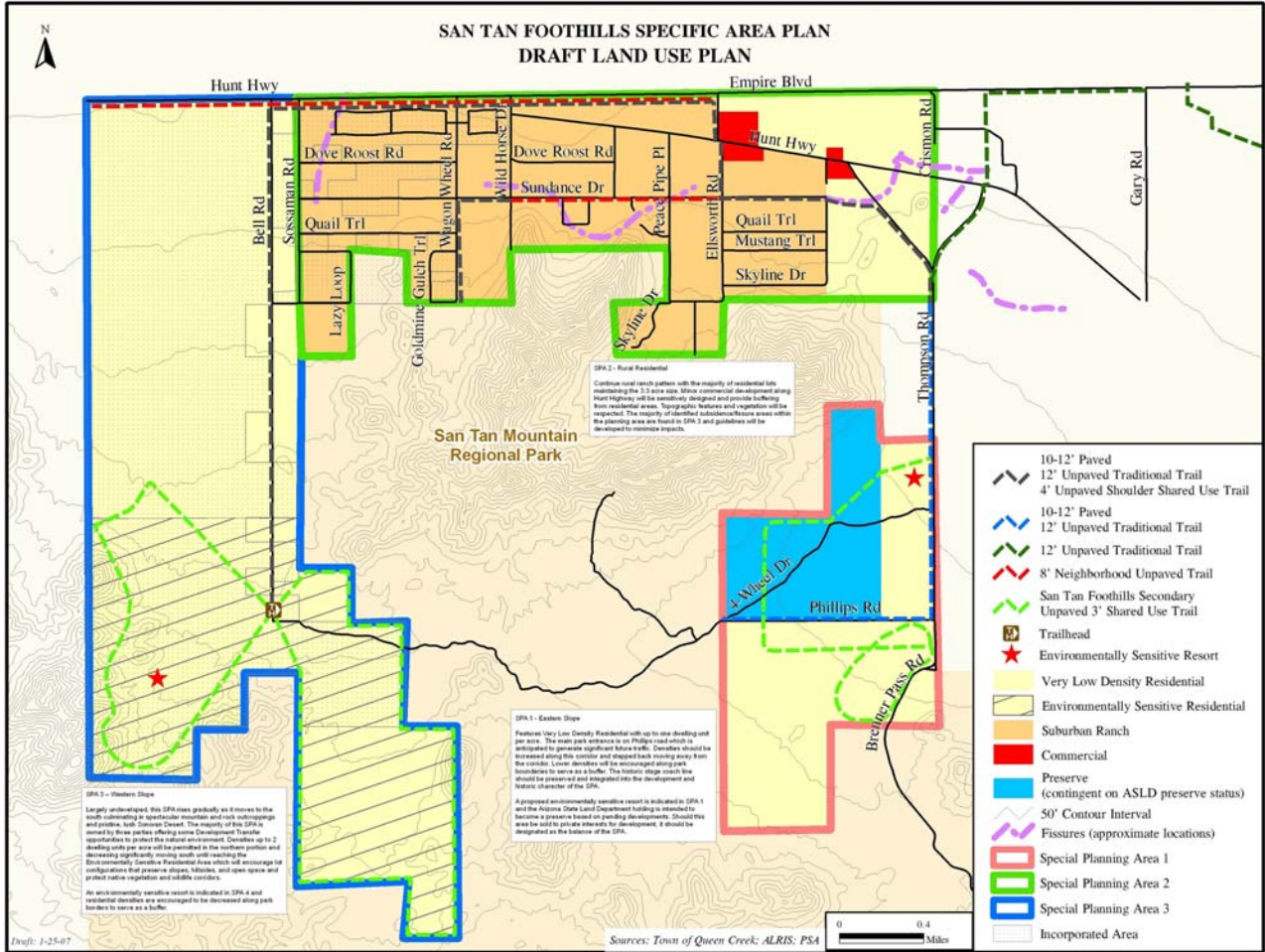
The Land Use Plan was developed based on current zoning and designations in the Queen Creek General Plan and Pinal County Comprehensive Plan, coupled with the desire to keep the area rural and low density in nature

### **Commercial**

This land use designation consists of small scale retail development, including storage facilities, convenience stores, and restaurants. Total commercial designation in the planning area is 21.4 acres.

### **Very Low Density Residential**

This land use designation is the same as in the Queen Creek General Plan, which permits up to one dwelling unit per acre. This is intended to be large lot, low-density residential areas. The planning area includes 2,298.68 acres of this land use designation.



## Suburban Ranch

This land use designation is based on the county zoning of 3.3 acre ranchette lots. This large lot residential development is encouraged, although some properties have already developed at a higher density. There is a planning area total of 1,436.04 acres of this land use designation.

## Environmentally-Sensitive Residential

This planning area land use designation is identified in areas that are environmentally sensitive and is intended to allow large lot residential development of a minimum of 1 acre per lot. Environmental constraints and a desire to protect this sensitive area should reduce overall residential development to below one unit per acre. It is anticipated that buildings will be designed to coexist with the natural environment through the use of building envelopes, transfer of development rights, and clustering to protect slopes and native vegetation. There is a planning area total of 1,270.23 acres of this designation.

**Preserve**

An area designated for non-development contingent on funding being received to compensate the Arizona State Land Department. This area consists of 325.19 acres of Arizona State Trust lands. If funding to preserve this area is not achieved, than according to State law the designated area could develop at one dwelling unit per acre.

**C. Land Use Implications**

It is estimated that the following number of dwelling units are possible at buildout within the different land use designations. Build out calculations assist transportation system and future infrastructure and services planning and development. Each of the planning areas offers challenges that necessitate a different set of assumptions to project future development. Following are the SPA assumptions:

**SPA 1 Assumptions** - 75% of the acreage will be residentially developed; 25% will be considered public right of way, public facilities, and natural drainage areas.

**SPA 2 Assumptions** - 70% of the acreage will be residentially developed.; 30% will be considered public right of way, natural drainage areas, and fissure buffering.

**SPA 3 Assumptions** - 70% of the acreage will be residentially developed; 30% will be considered public right of way and natural drainage areas.

**Projected Housing Units and Population**

Using the above noted assumptions, projected housing units and population estimates are presented below:

Very Low Density Residential  
1.0 Average dwelling units per acre  
Total Units: 1,632

Suburban Ranch  
.30 dwelling units per acre  
Total Units: 302 dwelling units

Environmentally Sensitive Residential  
.5 Average dwelling units per acre  
Total Units: 356 dwelling units

**Total Dwelling Units Estimated in Planning Area: 2,290**  
**Total Population based on 3.2 persons per household: 7,328**

## Circulation and Mobility Plan

The Circulation and Mobility Plan purpose is to support the prescribed land uses and potential new development, maintain access to the regional park, and sensitively plan the transportation network to minimize traffic impact on the residents and environment. It also provides a hierarchy of roadways that support the proposed land use pattern outlined previously.

The general Circulation and Mobility Plan guiding principles are:

- A vehicular and non-vehicular circulation system that meets the needs of San Tan Foothills area residents and visitors at an acceptable level of service.
- An efficient and environmentally sensitive circulation system that maintains the study area's rural and equestrian character.
- A transportation system that is carefully integrated with the planning area's pedestrian, bicycle, hiking, and equestrian trails system.

Currently the San Tan Foothills area consists of mostly two-lane paved roadways and unpaved roadways. Sossaman Road, Wagon Wheel Road, Ellsworth Road, Bell Road, Hawes Road, and Thompson Road are the key north-south streets providing connectivity to Queen Creek and other areas north. Hunt Highway traverses a diagonal path to the south, providing access to other cities in Pinal County. Following are the major roadways in each of the SPAs:

**Special Planning Area 1:** Thompson Road is the only major north-south street in SPA 1. Phillips Road traverses east-west providing access to the San Tan Mountains Regional Park.

**Special Planning Area 2:** Wagon Wheel Road and Ellsworth Road are the main north-south streets. Empire Boulevard, Sundance Drive, Hawes Road, and Hunt Highway are the only east-west streets.

**Special Planning Area 3:** Sossaman and Bell Roads are the only major north-south streets in SPA 3. There are no major east-west streets in SPA 3.

The entire study area is estimated to generate approximately 23,000 average daily trips for the buildout scenario. This figure is quite high considering most residents will have to leave the area for employment, basic services, shopping, educational activities.

Functional classification is the process by which roads are grouped into classes or systems based on the character of service they provide. For circulation planning, as well as specific design criteria, roadways are most effectively classified by function. Factors that determine the functionality of a roadway are the level of access and travel mobility. The proposed functional classification system includes four categories: Principal

Arterial, Major Collector, Minor Collector, and Local streets. Each roadway in the area is classified based on the operational characteristics, trips served on the streets, and adjacent land use character.

### **Arterial Streets**

An Arterial street serves the highest-volume travel corridors and provides for long-distance traffic movement, connecting the San Tan Foothills area to neighboring cities and areas. Arterial streets should carry the major portion of trips entering and exiting the Town in addition to serving trips that travel through the Town. Mobility is the primary function of the Arterial roadways. Access to Arterial streets is limited to the number and location of driveways, median breaks, and traffic signals to major developments, such as large commercial, industrial, or office complexes and master-planned communities.

Hunt Highway located in SPA 2 and a small length of Hunt Highway in SPA 3 is the only Arterial street in the study area.

### **Major Collector Streets**

Major Collector streets supplement the network of Principal Arterials; however, they usually carry lower traffic volumes than the Principal Arterials. Traffic movements for Major Collector streets provide for moderate trip lengths with lower speeds and less restrictive access to adjacent properties. Although mobility is still the primary function, traffic movements for Major Collector streets also consist of driveways that also do not enter residential neighborhoods.

Major Collector streets in the study area include Empire Boulevard, Skyline Drive, and Ellsworth Road.



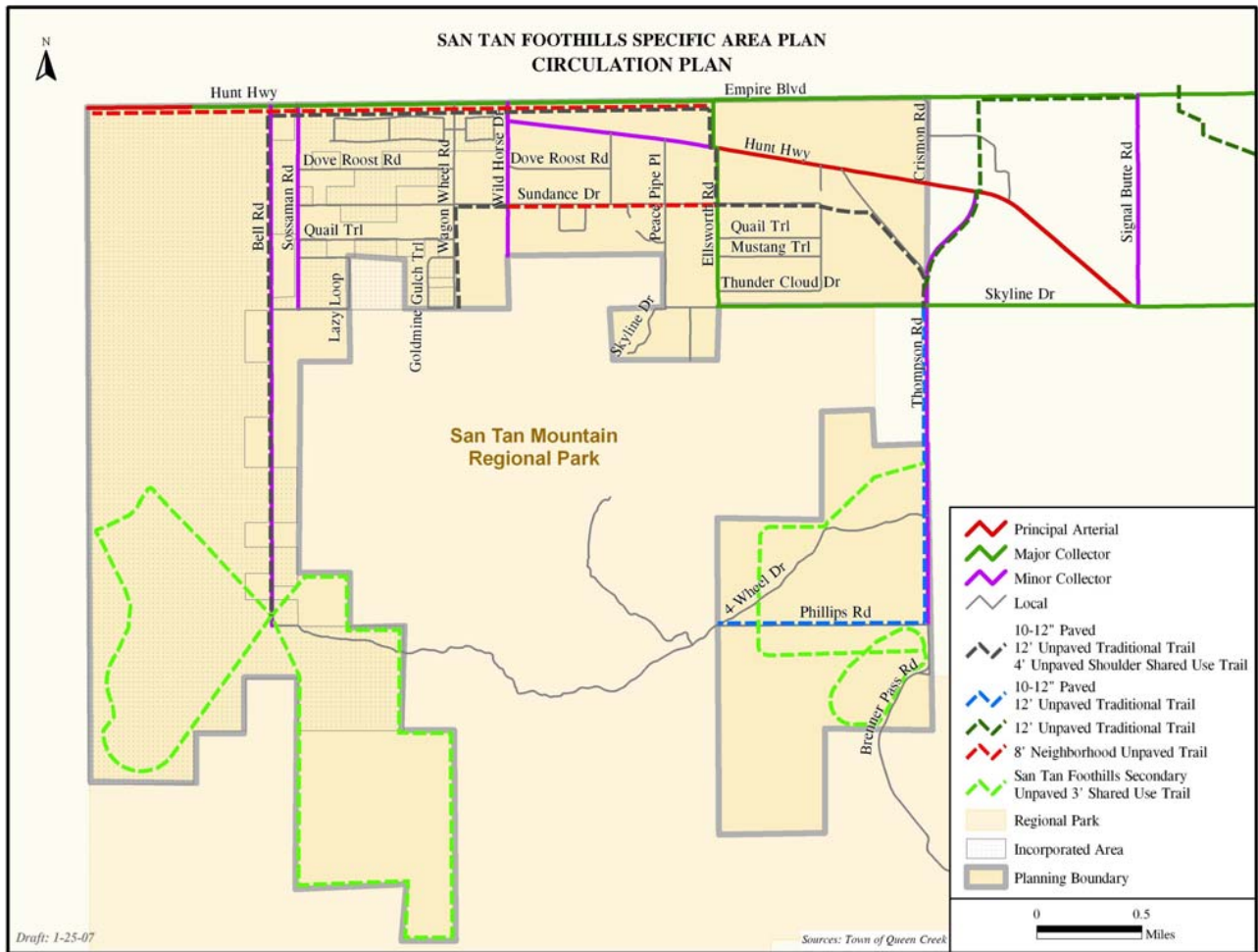
### **Minor Collector Streets**

Minor Collector streets primarily function to collect and distribute traffic between local streets and channel it to Major Collectors or Arterials. A Minor Collector carries trips for short-distance movements and also provides internal circulation within a neighborhood or activity center. Traffic movements are subject to high levels of activity coming from residential neighborhoods and commercial and employment areas. Minor Collectors in the study area include Thompson Road, Signal Butte Road, Hawes Road, Wild Horse Drive, Sossaman Road, and Bell Road.

### **Local Streets**

Local streets are primarily the neighborhood streets that provide direct access to adjacent land. Traffic from local streets feed into collectors. Local streets do not typically carry through traffic.

**SAN TAN FOOTHILLS SPECIFIC AREA PLAN - CIRCULATION MAP**



All other roadways in the study area not classified as arterials, major collectors or minor collectors are classified as local streets.

**Trails System**

The Town of Queen Creek recently completed the “Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan”, which includes the San Tan Foothills area. The Plan’s Guidelines will be utilized in developing a comprehensive trails system for the San Tan Foothills area. The purpose of the trails system is to provide for non-motorized modes of transportation that facilitate a variety of uses and experiences through the development of on and off-road bicycle facilities, pedestrian pathways, equestrian paths, and multi-use trails. Trails will serve recreation, commuting, shopping and other purposes for bicyclists, walkers, equestrians, and joggers.



## **APPENDIX A – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Councilmember Gary Holloway

### **Pinal County**

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Lima & Associates, Transportation and GIS  
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