

2.2.3 Parks and Recreational Facilities

This section is based on the findings of the Supplemental Section 4(f) Evaluation in Appendix A and the Supplemental Community Impact Assessment (California Department of Transportation [Caltrans] 2026) for the Project.

2.2.3.1 Regulatory Setting

The Park Preservation Act (Public Resources Code Sections 5400–5409) prohibits local and state agencies from acquiring any property which is in use as a public park at the time of acquisition unless the acquiring agency pays sufficient compensation or land, or both, to enable the operator of the park to replace the park land and any park facilities on that land.

2.2.3.2 Affected Environment

The study area for analyzing impacts on park and recreational resources consists of the Section 4(f) study area, which is defined as the area within 0.5 mile of the Project limits.

A park or recreational facility qualifies for protection under Section 4(f) if 1) the property is publicly owned, 2) the park is open to the general public, 3) the major purpose is for park, recreational, or refuge activities, and 4) it is considered significant by the official with jurisdiction. The park must be publicly owned at the point at which “use” occurs.

As shown in Table 2.2.3-1 and Figure 2.2.3-1, there are 14 public parks and recreational resources within the Section 4(f) study area, consisting of three public schools with recreational areas, nine public parks/recreational areas/open space resources, and two trails. All 14 properties qualify as Section 4(f) resources and are protected under the Public Park Preservation Act.

Table 2.2.3-1. Parks and Recreational Facilities within the Study Area

Park/Recreational Resource	Location	Owner (Official with Jurisdiction)	Facilities	Approximate Distance to Project
Cavanaugh Park	23782 Cavanaugh Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630	City of Lake Forest	A 6.27-acre park with a lighted half basketball court, small playground structure, picnic table, and large open grass area with scattered trees.	The Project intersects a portion of the park boundaries.
Olivewood Elementary School	23391 Dune Mear Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630	Saddleback Valley Unified School District	A 10.36-acre public school in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District with roughly 479 students in grades transitional kindergarten (TK) through 6. It has a playground, library, and two computer labs.	Within 0.32 mile of the Project limits.
Ralph A. Gates Elementary School	23882 Landisview Ave., Lake Forest, CA 92630	Saddleback Valley Unified School District	A 10.20-acre public school in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District with roughly 1,039 students in grades kindergarten through 6.	Within 0.41 mile of the Project limits.
La Tierra Early Childhood Center (adjacent to part of Sycamore Park)	24150 Lindley St., Mission Viejo, CA 92691	Saddleback Valley Unified School District	An 8.98-acre public school serving students in preschool and TK in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District. It has a playground.	Within 0.43 mile of the Project limits and adjacent to Sycamore Park.
Veterans Park (formerly known as Village Pond Park)	23102 Ridge Route Dr., Lake Forest, CA 92630	City of Lake Forest	A 4.70-acre park, formerly known as Village Pond Park and later rededicated as Veterans Park. It has a new 1-acre pond, meandering sidewalks, and a butterfly garden. The park honors five branches of military with a new monument and art designs.	Within 0.44 mile of the Project limits.
Mountain View Park	24061 Dylan Ave., Lake Forest, CA 92630	City of Lake Forest	A 5.3-acre park with a baseball field, full- and half-court basketball, outdoor exercise equipment, a playground, tennis courts, picnic tables, barbecues, and restrooms.	Within 0.42 mile of the Project limits.
El Toro Park	23701 Los Alisos Blvd., Lake Forest, CA 92360	City of Lake Forest	A 10-acre park with a paved bicycle path, shade trees, a playground, and tennis courts.	Within 0.39 mile of the Project limits.
Sycamore Park	25101 Charlinda Dr., Mission Viejo, CA 92691	City of Mission Viejo	A 6.5-acre park with a sand volleyball court and playground equipment, picnic tables, and barbecues.	Within 0.30 mile of the Project limits.

Park/Recreational Resource	Location	Owner (Official with Jurisdiction)	Facilities	Approximate Distance to Project
Clarington Park	24701 Jorie Dr., Laguna Hills, CA 92653	City of Laguna Hills	A 3.49-acre public park with swings, a grass area, and access to a walking trail, picnic tables, benches, a sports field, and a tot lot.	Within 0.16 mile of the Project limits.
Beckenham Park	24901 Wilkes Pl., Laguna Hills, CA 92653	City of Laguna Hills	A 2.75-acre public park with benches, a drinking fountain, lighting, picnic tables, a sports field, tot lot, and walkways.	Within 0.41 mile of the Project limits
Laguna Woods Dog Park	23190 Ridge Route Dr., Laguna Woods, CA 92637	City of Laguna Woods	A 0.33-acre dog park with a play space.	Within 0.36 mile of the Project limits.
Aliso Park	189 Avenida Majorca, Laguna Woods, CA 92637	County of Orange – OC Parks	A 28.21-acre community park, now under the jurisdiction of OC Parks.	Within 0.27 mile of the Project limits.
Aliso Creek Regional Bikeway and Riding and Hiking Trail	Lake Forest, Laguna Hills, and Mission Viejo, CA	Orange County Flood Control District and County of Orange – OC Parks	On land owned by the Orange County Flood Control District and maintained by OC Parks, the 15-mile bikeway and recreational trails extend from the foothills of Orange County to the boundary of Laguna Beach. The continuous asphalt bikeway is designed for multi-use travel through five South County cities. Trail types include equestrian trails, fitness trails, mountain bike trails, nature trails, and urban trails.	The closest segment of the trail is 75 feet from the Project limits.
Avila Trail	Laguna Hills, CA	County of Orange	Dirt trail between Paseo De Valencia and the City of Laguna Hills Aliso Creek Access Trail. Maintained by the County of Orange.	The closest segment of the trail is 45 feet from the Project limits.

Source: Caltrans 2026.

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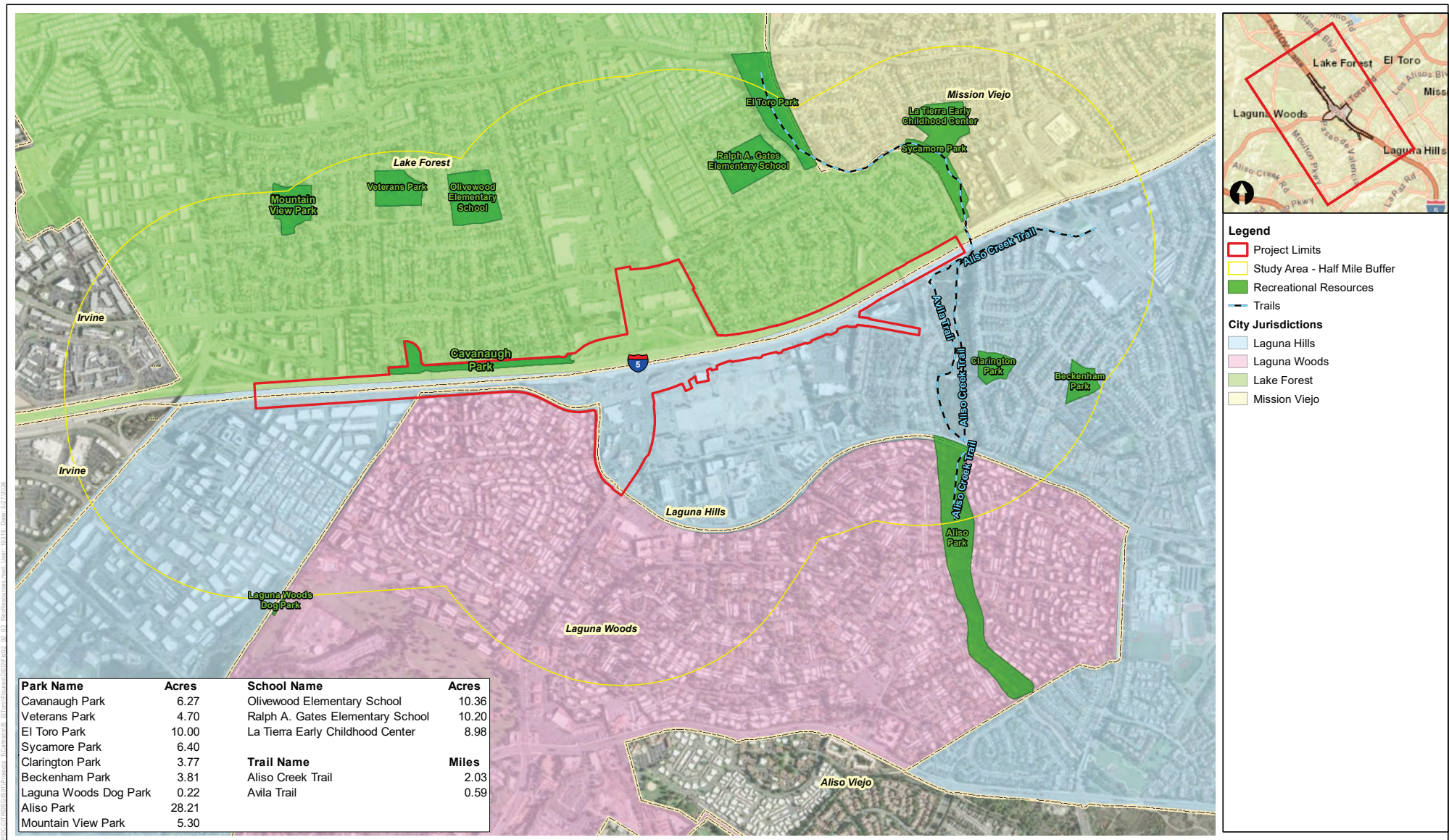


Figure 2.2.3-1
I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Parks and Recreational Facilities

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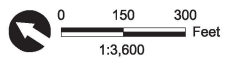


Figure 2.2.3-2
I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Section 4(f) Use of Cavanaugh Park

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2.2.3.3 Environmental Consequences

The 14 parks and recreational facilities within the study area, as identified in Table 2.2.3-1, are protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966. With the exception of Cavanaugh Park, no other recreational resources identified in the study area would be affected by the Project because Project activities would be confined to the interchange area and would not extend into or otherwise modify any of the remaining parks or trails; therefore, the Project would not “use” those facilities, as defined by Section 4(f).

The summary that follows describes the coordination with the City of Lake Forest (City) that occurred regarding the Project and discusses how the Project has been integrated into the City’s planned redevelopment of Cavanaugh Park.

Caltrans has coordinated with the City of Lake Forest since 2018 regarding potential effects on Cavanaugh Park. This included early meetings and a follow-up coordination letter in 2025 with updated Project alternatives. The City has concurrently advanced plans to redevelop Cavanaugh Park. This included public outreach in 2025. Specifically, the City has coordinated with Caltrans to integrate the Project into the park’s design and avoid conflicts. Construction is anticipated to start in late 2028. Project-related acquisitions from Cavanaugh Park (less than 10 percent of the park’s total acreage) would not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes that qualify the park for Section 4(f) protection and therefore support a preliminary *de minimis* determination. A request will be sent to the City for concurrence on the *de minimis* determination prior to approval of the final environmental impact report/environmental assessment (EIR/EA). See Appendix A under the heading “Resources Evaluated Relative to the Requirements of Section 4(f)” for additional details. In addition, Build Alternative 3 would not result in any ground disturbance or other activities that would affect parks and recreational facilities. As such, Build Alternative 3 is not discussed further because no temporary or permanent impacts on parks and recreational facilities would occur.

Temporary Impacts

Build Alternatives

Build Alternative 1

Build Alternative 1 would require temporary use of approximately 0.5 acre of Cavanaugh Park during construction of the Project. Temporary construction easements (TCEs) would be needed for access and staging during construction (refer to Figure 2.2.3-2). As a result, the park’s half basketball court, playground equipment, picnic table, and portions of its open grass area would be temporarily unavailable for public use during construction. As described in more detail in Appendix A, *Section 4(f)*, field visits were conducted between June and October 2025 to observe the types of activities and number of people frequenting the park. Implementation of construction under the Build Alternatives would result in a “*de minimis* use” of this facility, as defined by Section 4(f).

To minimize temporary impacts on recreational users of Cavanaugh Park during construction, the following Project Features (PFs) would be implemented: **PF-TRA-1**, **PF-CI-1**, **PF-CI-2**, and **PF-N-1**. The Project Features would include implementing a transportation management plan (**PF-TRA-1**), maintaining a neat job site in areas visible to the public (**PF-CI-1**), restoring damaged work areas to the same state as before the damage (**PF-CI-2**), and controlling and monitoring noise resulting from work activities (**PF-N-1**). **PF-CI-1** and **PF-CI-2** are described in detail below.

PF-CI-1 During construction, implement Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 5-1.31, which requires that the job site be neatly maintained in areas visible to the public.

PF-CI-2 During construction and before contract acceptance, implement Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 5-1.39, which requires restoration of damaged work areas to the same state as before the damage.

With these Project Features, temporary impacts on Cavanaugh Park would be minimal; therefore, Caltrans has made a preliminary *de minimis* determination. Prior to finalizing the EIR/EA and supplemental Section 4(f) documentation, a request will be sent to the City of Lake Forest for concurrence on the *de minimis* determination.

The City of Lake Forest is currently in the process of revitalizing Cavanaugh Park, with construction anticipated to begin in early 2027. If the City of Lake Forest project moves forward ahead of the Caltrans Project, the impacts outlined above would be reduced because relocation of the affected facilities would no longer be necessary. Caltrans will continue to coordinate with the City of Lake Forest regarding the timing for both projects. Please see Appendix A, *Section 4(f)*, for additional details.

Design Variation: Build Alternative 1a

Temporary impacts on parks and recreational facilities for Build Alternative 1a would be the same as Build Alternative 1. Refer to the discussion above under Build Alternative 1.

No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative would maintain the current configuration of the I-5/EI Toro Road interchange within the Project limits. Under the No-Build Alternative, the Project would not be constructed, and no temporary impacts on parks and recreational facilities would occur.

Permanent Impacts

Build Alternatives

Build Alternative 1

There are parks and recreational facilities in the Project vicinity that are protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966. This Project will result in a “use” of Cavanaugh Park as defined by Section 4(f). Please see Appendix A, *Section 4(f)*, for additional details. Build Alternative 1 would result in a permanent partial acquisition of approximately 0.59 acre from Cavanaugh Park, which is adjacent to the

Interstate (I-) 5 corridor. To accommodate the proposed northbound I-5 on-ramp improvements, an existing 16-foot noise barrier that separates I-5 from Cavanaugh Park would be demolished. As a result, a new barrier to reduce traffic noise would be constructed along I-5 adjacent to Cavanaugh Park. Permanent use of a portion of the park would remove several existing recreational features, including the half basketball court, playground, and picnic table, along with some of the park's open space along I-5 (refer to Figure 2.2.3-2).

The permanent use of approximately 0.59 acre of Cavanaugh Park amounts to less than 10 percent of the park's total acreage. Cavanaugh Park's existing facilities are modest and older compared to those of other parks in the City of Lake Forest, which may contribute to low usage by nearby residents. In addition, observations suggest that the area occasionally attracts transient activity.

The City of Lake Forest is currently planning a separate park revitalization project that includes relocation and upgrading of park amenities. If the City's project is implemented prior to construction, impacts to park facilities would be limited to vegetated areas because the existing park features would have already been relocated. If the City's project does not proceed, Avoidance and Minimization Measures **LU-4 (Section 4f-1)** and **LU-5 (Section 4f-2)** would be implemented to address impacts on park features, consistent with the Section 4(f).

If implemented, Minimization Measure **LU-4 (Section 4f-1)** would provide park facilities/features similar to those that are being removed, such as the half basketball court, playground, and picnic table, within the remaining Cavanaugh Park limits, in coordination with the City of Lake Forest. In addition, Minimization Measure **LU-5 (Section 4f-2)** would require public outreach during the design phase of Cavanaugh Park to seek the community's input on the types of park facilities/features that are preferred for replacement. Caltrans would coordinate with the City of Lake Forest to ensure that replacement recreational facilities are installed in a manner consistent with the City's ongoing revitalization of Cavanaugh Park. These improvements would upgrade existing park amenities and may increase park visitation once the work is completed.

If the City project does not occur prior to construction of the Project, Caltrans would compensate the City of Lake Forest for the park acreage acquired for the Project in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (**REL-1**).

For visual impacts that may occur due to the partial acquisition, an Architectural Design Review Team, consisting of local representatives and the Caltrans District 12 Landscape Architect, would ensure that proposed architectural treatments would comply with the aesthetic requirements of the City of Lake Forest and that any replaced park facilities would provide the same—if not improved—visual quality for the community compared to existing park facilities. In addition, the Build Alternatives would include the preservation of existing landscaping (Avoidance and Minimization Measure **VIS-1**) and replacement landscaping (Avoidance and Minimization Measure **VIS-2**).

With the inclusion and implementation of the aforementioned Project Features and measures, permanent impacts on Cavanaugh Park would be minimal; therefore, Caltrans has made a preliminary *de minimis* determination. Prior to finalizing the EIR/EA and supplemental Section 4(f) documentation, a request will be sent to the City of Lake Forest for concurrence on the *de minimis* determination.

Design Variation: Build Alternative 1a

Permanent impacts on parks and recreational facilities for Build Alternative 1a would be the same as Build Alternative 1. Refer to the discussion above under Build Alternative 1.

No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative would maintain the current configuration of the I-5/EI Toro Road interchange within the Project limits. Under the No-Build Alternative, the Project would not be constructed, and no permanent impacts on parks and recreational facilities would occur.

2.2.3.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Implementation of the Project Features and Project-specific minimization measures, as provided below, would avoid and minimize adverse impacts on Cavanaugh Park and be consistent with the features and measures identified in the supplemental Section 4(f). As discussed in Section 2.2.5, *Relocations and Real Property Acquisitions*; Section 2.2.7, *Transportation*; Section 2.2.8, *Visual Resources/Aesthetics*; and Section 2.3.6, *Noise*, Project Features and measures **REL-1**, **PF-TRA-1**, **VIS-1**, **VIS-2**, and **PF-N-1** would be implemented to minimize the temporary impacts of construction on park and recreational facilities.

LU-4 (Section 4f-1) Caltrans, in coordination with the City of Lake Forest, shall install new park facilities, similar to those removed, such as the half basketball court, playground, and picnic table, within the remaining Cavanaugh Park limits. This measure shall be implemented in conjunction with measure LU-5, providing an opportunity to enhance and upgrade the park, based on the community's input.

LU-5 (Section 4f-2) Caltrans and the City of Lake Forest shall perform outreach activities during the design phase to seek the community's input on the choice of park facilities/features.