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NOTICE OF PREPARATION DOCUMENTATION

DATE: March 10, 2026

PROJECT NAME: STREAMLINING PATHWAYS FOR HOUSING AND AGRICULTURE

PROJECT APPLICANT: County of San Diego – Planning & Development Services

PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION:

The County of San Diego (County) is sending notice that the Streamlining Pathways for Housing and Agriculture Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be prepared to address potential impacts associated with amendments to the County's Grading, Clearing, and Watercourses Ordinance (Grading Ordinance)[1] and Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO)[2] and the development of streamlining pathways for housing and agriculture (together referred to as the project). The County is seeking input from the public and agencies on potential environmental impacts of the project, ways to mitigate those impacts, and alternatives that may lessen those impacts. The purpose of the project is to modernize the County's Grading Ordinance and RPO to provide more streamlining pathways for housing and agriculture, such as objective design standards and checklists to replace discretionary review in appropriate areas where sensitive resources can be avoided.

The County will conduct stakeholder outreach for the project following release of the Notice of Preparation (NOP). The NOP is the first step in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process.

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

In 2018, the County Board of Supervisors (Board) considered various actions to address housing affordability in the unincorporated areas of San Diego County (county). These actions focused on modifying regulatory and permitting processes and investigating opportunities to streamline housing in the county.

In 2021, the County adopted its 6th Cycle Housing Element, which identifies 44 Housing Element sites previously identified in prior planning periods and reused to accommodate the 6th Cycle Regional Housing Needs Assessment. Assembly Bill (AB) 1397 requires jurisdictions to provide

[1] The purpose of the County's Grading Ordinance (Division 7, Section 87.101) is to regulate land-disturbing activities associated with land development and agriculture, including grading, clearing, grubbing, grazing, tilling, and trenching, to protect biological resources and ensure water quality standards are met during construction and agricultural activities.

[2] The County's RPO, adopted in 1989, plays a critical role in identifying and safeguarding the county's most sensitive environmental and cultural resources, including steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, sensitive habitats, and cultural sites.

a by-right approval process for re-listed (i.e., previously identified) housing sites. To comply with AB 1397 and support implementation of Housing Element programs, the Board directed County staff to establish the state-mandated By-Right Approval Program for the 44 re-listed Housing Element sites and to conduct an environmental constraints and feasibility analysis to evaluate a similar local by-right pathway for additional Housing Element sites, provided the housing projects include at least 20 percent affordable units. In 2023, the Board directed County staff to develop and present a range of options to facilitate the County's Prohousing Designation[3] and to further reduce barriers to housing production. In October 2024, the Board directed County staff to establish an expanded By-Right Housing Program that would extend by-right eligibility to additional sites (not covered by AB 1397) that meet certain affordability thresholds and site location requirements.

The Board also directed County staff to update the Grading Ordinance to streamline housing and agricultural projects while maintaining necessary environmental and safety protections. Specifically, the Board directed County staff to explore ordinance amendments to streamline housing through ministerial grading permits and to look for opportunities to remove barriers for farming by streamlining the agricultural grading and clearing permit requirements.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The primary goals of the project are to advance regulatory changes that support housing streamlining and to identify opportunities to support permit streamlining for agriculture while maintaining protections for sensitive resources. The project would implement previous Board direction to identify processes to allow streamlined and by-right housing within certain areas of the county and to pursue amendments to the Grading Ordinance that facilitate streamlining for both housing and agriculture. Potential amendments to the RPO are included as part of the project scope, primarily to consider how the RPO could be amended to support housing streamlining while ensuring protections for sensitive resources remain strong.

The project would develop new streamlined pathways for housing through development of rules and objective standards that support compliance with emerging state housing laws (e.g., AB 1397 and AB 2162). This effort intends to streamline housing development within appropriate areas of the county. The project would include the development of criteria to determine a process by which projects may qualify for a streamlined or by-right process. Areas that may be considered for streamlining or by-right processing include but are not limited to land with a history of disturbance or prior development characterized by infill areas, vehicle miles traveled-efficient areas, urban areas (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau), and Villages identified in the 2011 General Plan. The project would define the objective criteria that must be met for a housing project to qualify for streamlining, ensuring protections for environmental resources remain in place. To maximize opportunities for housing streamlining, the project may identify mechanisms to reduce the number of discretionary permits required for housing, such as site plan permits triggered by certain design review requirements. The project may develop objective design standards for communities that do not have existing standards in place that could function as a replacement for the discretionary design review process for certain qualifying projects. To implement streamlining, the project may consider mechanisms such as checklists, codification

[3] The County was designated Prohousing by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, which recognizes jurisdictions advancing housing production and provides priority in state funding programs for affordable housing.

of typical conditions of approval (e.g., biological and cultural resources monitoring requirements, pre-construction nesting surveys), implementation of process improvements, and updates to the County's Grading Ordinance and RPO. As part of establishing new streamlining pathways, the project would analyze and incorporate project elements to ensure development on Housing Element sites can occur by-right, ensuring effective implementation of AB 1397 and increasing the transparency of requirements associated with building housing on Housing Element sites.

The project would amend the Grading Ordinance to streamline and simplify the rules that apply to grading and clearing for land development and agricultural projects throughout the unincorporated areas of the county. Proposed changes may include developing new, streamlined permit processes for residential grading and agricultural clearing to reduce time and cost for permitting and compliance. The project may also adjust permit thresholds that trigger grading and clearing permits and identify opportunities that allow common activities to be processed ministerially. Additionally, the project would consider amending the current requirement that existing agricultural land must have been in production for at least 1 of the prior 4 years.

To support effective implementation of housing and agricultural streamlining, the project would consider whether amendments to the RPO could facilitate permit streamlining while ensuring sensitive environmental resources remain protected. For example, avoidance of environmentally sensitive lands (County Code of Regulatory Ordinances, Section 86.602) as defined by the RPO could be referenced as one of the requirements to qualify for streamlining. Updates to the RPO are intended to support clear and transparent requirements to facilitate streamlining while retaining environmental protections and local standards. Updates to the RPO could include revising definitions where appropriate, modifying applicability provisions, and proposing ordinance revisions needed to meet the project's objectives (i.e., simplify requirements, facilitate more objective approvals for housing while protecting sensitive environmental resources). The project aims to identify an approach to standardize and codify objective requirements that can support impact avoidance (e.g., biological, archaeological, and Native American monitoring) to allow more projects to qualify for streamlined processing. Changes to RPO are not intended to reduce or remove existing environmental resource protections.

The project would establish a clear, objective, streamlined process for approving certain housing projects that qualify. Additionally, the By-Right Housing Program would establish a by-right pathway for projects complying with state law. These pathways for projects on eligible sites means replacing the current requirements the County has for discretionary review (and subsequent CEQA review) and substituting with an objective and standardized approach that does not rely on project merits or staff discretion. On the application and entitlement side, this could affect the Site Plan Review process, resulting in an existing discretionary process becoming ministerial in certain situations. A streamlined process would be defined to secure entitlements, allowing qualifying projects to proceed to obtain building, grading, engineering, and other necessary permits for construction without further discretionary review. For projects subject to the Subdivision Map Act, the project would aim to maximize streamlining opportunities, recognizing the map process is discretionary.

CEQA REQUIREMENTS:

This project is subject to CEQA review. CEQA requires public agencies to consider the potentially significant adverse environmental effects of projects, over which they have

discretionary approval authority, before acting on those projects (California Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et seq.). According to California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15064(f)(1), preparation of an EIR is required when a project may result in a significant adverse environmental effect. An EIR is an informational document used to inform public agency decision-makers and the public of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to mitigate or avoid the significant effects, and describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project that could feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project while substantially lessening or avoiding any of the significant environmental impacts. Public agencies are required to consider the information presented in the EIR when determining whether to approve a project.

The project would identify programs and update existing ordinances to streamline housing projects and grading activities. As such, consistent with the requirement of CEQA Guidelines, Section 15168, the County is preparing a Program EIR that evaluates the scope of actions proposed under the project.

PROJECT LOCATION:

The County of San Diego is in the southwestern corner of the state and is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west, Riverside County to the north, Imperial County to the east, Orange County to the northwestern, and Mexico to the south (Figure 1).

The project would apply to housing development within areas located on land with a history of disturbance or prior development characterized by infill areas, urban areas (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau), and Villages identified in the 2011 General Plan, including all Housing Element sites and vehicle miles traveled-efficient and infill areas. Potential areas where streamlining pathways for housing may apply within the unincorporated county are shown on Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4. The Grading Ordinance amendments would apply to grading and clearing for land development and agricultural projects throughout the county.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

The impact analysis in the EIR will be conducted in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines and the County's Guidelines for Determining Significance.

Potential impacts on the existing environment to be analyzed in the EIR include the following environmental topics:

Aesthetics	Land Use and Planning
Agriculture and Forestry Resources	Mineral Resources
Air Quality	Noise
Biological Resources	Population and Housing
Cultural Resources	Public Services
Energy	Recreation
Geology and Soils	Transportation
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Tribal Cultural Resources
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	Utilities and Service Systems
Hydrology and Water Quality	Wildfire

The EIR, consistent with CEQA, will include sufficient information to facilitate meaningful public review and informed public decision-making regarding the significant effects on the environment that may be caused by the project. The EIR will include information regarding the environmental baseline, including the past, current, and reasonably foreseeable future environmental impacts of implementing the project on the project site. Where needed, the EIR will identify potentially feasible mitigation measures to avoid and/or substantially lessen any significant adverse effects identified in the EIR's impact analysis.

The EIR will also address the cumulative environmental consequences of the project in combination with other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects in the area. This will serve to satisfy CEQA requirements regarding potential regional cumulative effects.

In compliance with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.6, the EIR will describe and evaluate the effects of a reasonable range of alternatives to the project and will compare the impacts of the alternatives to the impacts of the project. The EIR will also identify any alternatives that were considered but rejected by the lead agency as infeasible and briefly explain the lead agency's reasoning. The EIR will provide an analysis of the No Project Alternative and identify the Environmentally Superior Alternative. The alternatives analyzed in the EIR will be developed during the environmental review process and will consider input received during the public scoping period.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING:

Consistent with CEQA (California Public Resources Code, Section 21083.9), a public scoping meeting will be held to solicit comments regarding the scope and analysis of the EIR. The scoping meeting will be for information gathering; it is not a public hearing, and no public testimony will be taken. No decisions about the project will be made at the public scoping meeting. This meeting will be held virtually, and the meeting date and time are as follows:

Date: March 24, 2026

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Please follow this link for instructions on how to participate in the virtual scoping meeting: https://bit.ly/46DoZkY

SUBMITTING COMMENTS:

At this time, the County is soliciting comments on the NOP regarding your views on how the project may affect the environment. This information will be considered when preparing the EIR's discussion of environmental topics, significant effects, mitigation measures, and alternatives. Because of time limits mandated by state law, comments should be provided no later than April 9, 2026 (the end of the 30-day comment period, which starts on March 10, 2026).

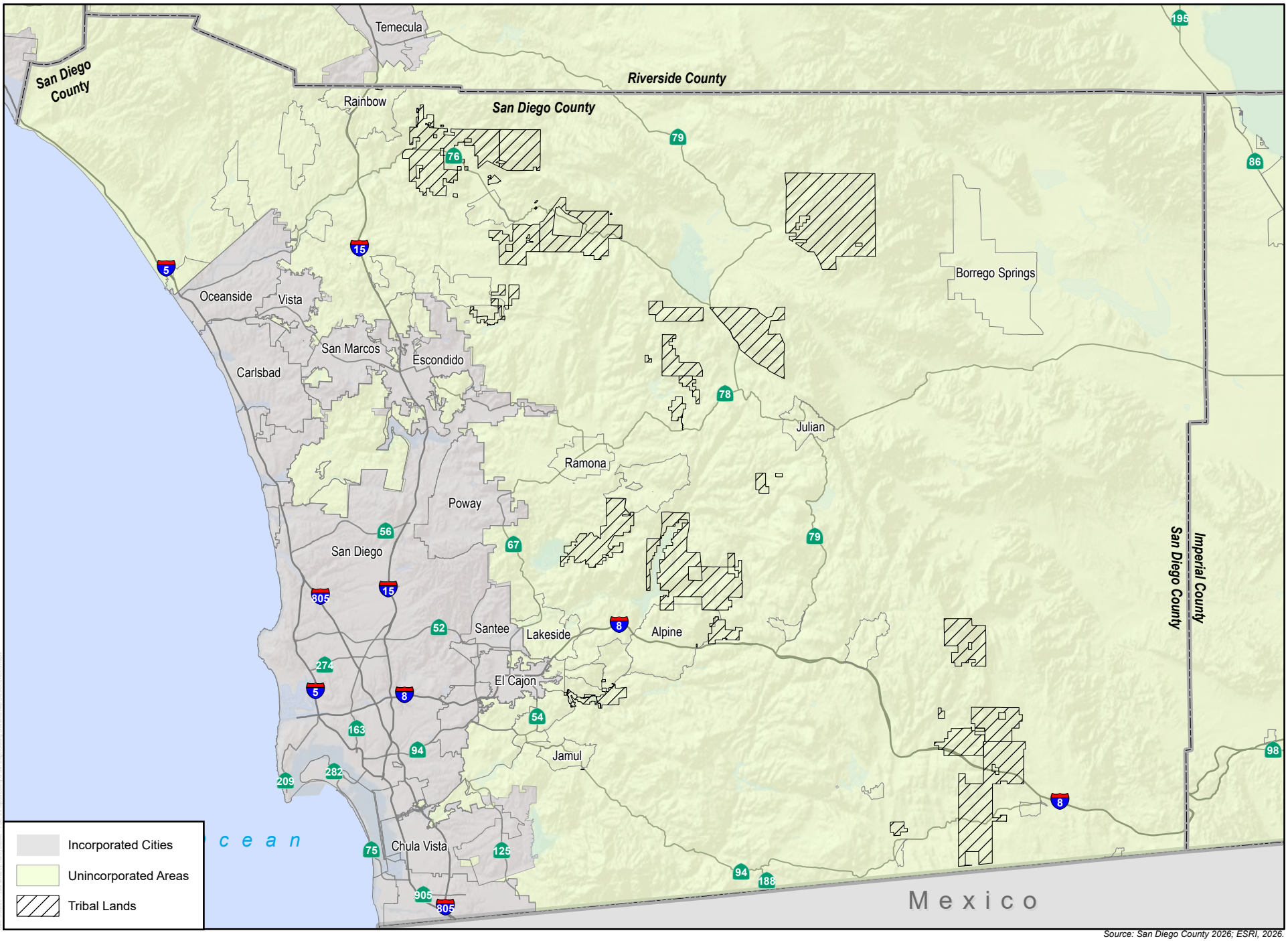
Comments on the NOP must be sent to the County Planning & Development Services via email or to the address listed below and should reference the project name (County of San Diego Streamlining Pathways for Housing and Agriculture).

Comment letters may be submitted electronically via email at makenna.welsch@sdcounty.ca.gov. The County requests that all comments be provided electronically. If a hard copy submittal is necessary, it may be submitted to:

County of San Diego
Planning & Development Services
Attention: Makenna Welsch
Project Manager
5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 310
San Diego, California 92123

Attachments:

Figure 1, Project Location
Figure 2, Potential Housing Streamlining Areas
Figure 3, Potential Housing Streamlining Areas Inset A
Figure 4, Potential Housing Streamlining Areas Inset B



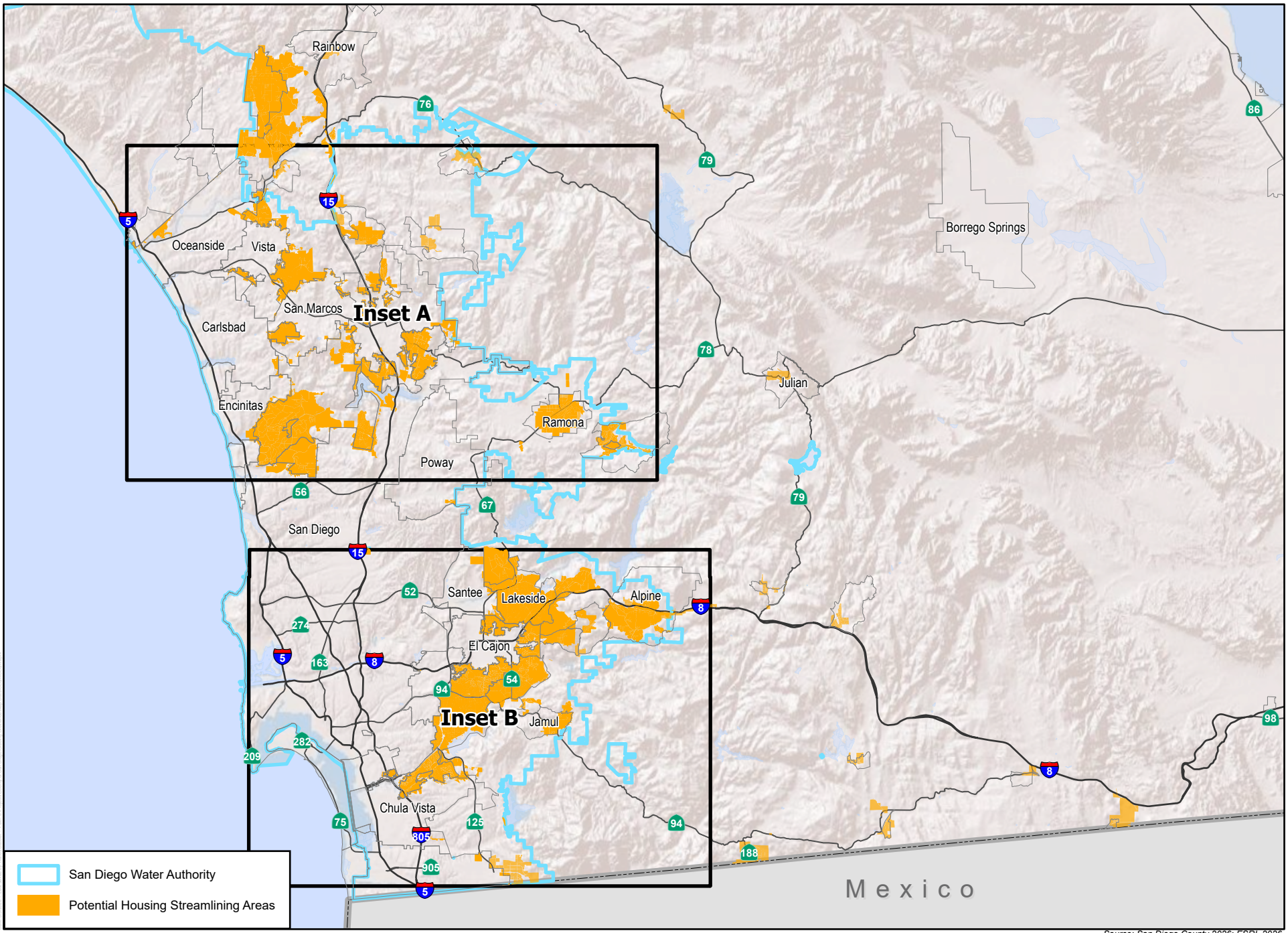
Source: San Diego County 2026; ESRI, 2026.

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Figure 1

Project Location

Streamlining Pathways for Housing and Agriculture



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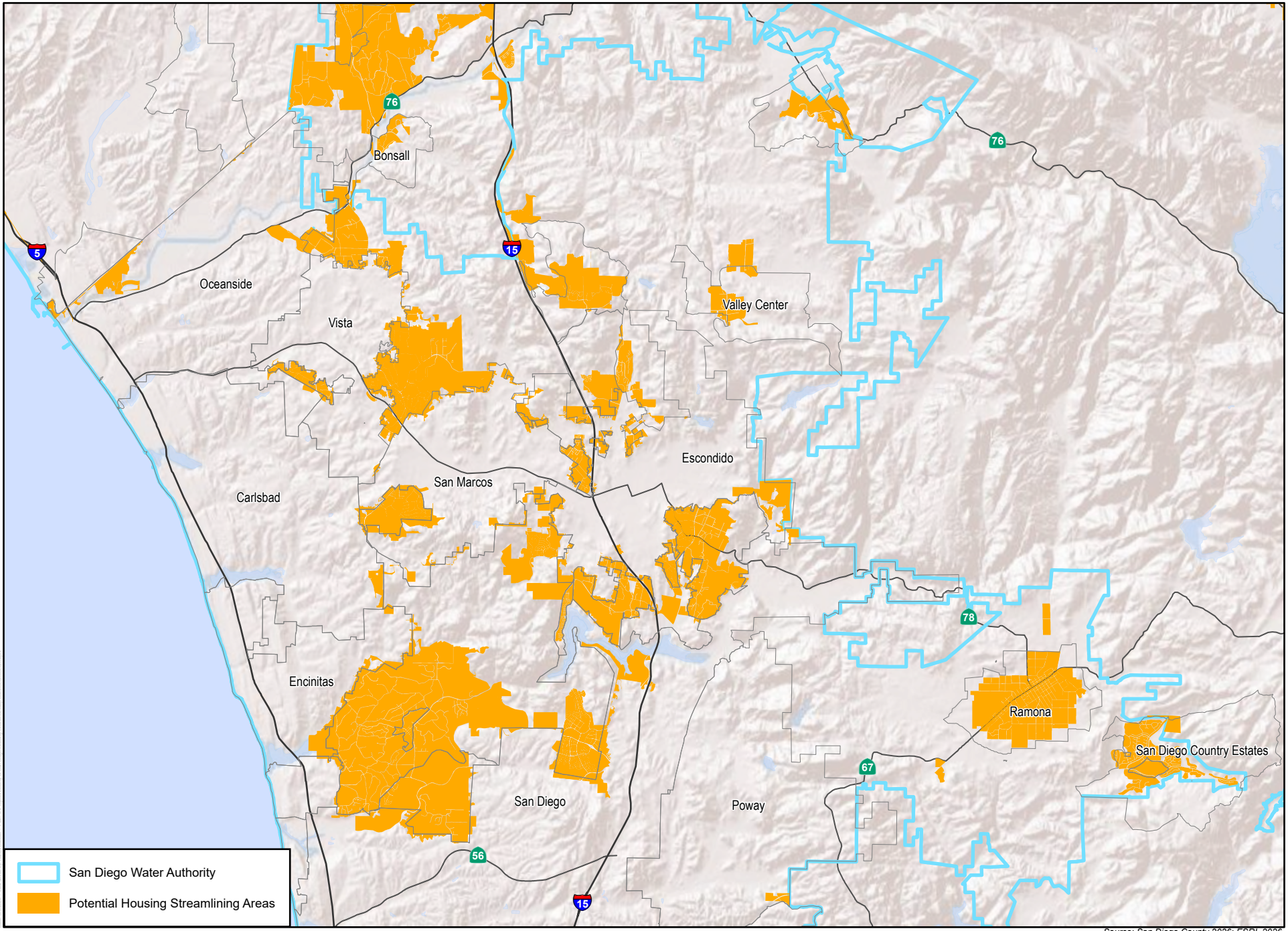
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Disclaimer: These maps contain potential areas where streamlining pathways for housing may apply. The entire area may not be available for streamlining pathways due to environmentally sensitive areas. These draft maps were created by including all Housing Element sites, VMT efficient and infill areas, Villages, and census designated urban areas then removing most sensitive habitats; open space, conservation, and biological easements; conservation land; and South County Multiple Species Conservation Plan preserve areas.

Source: San Diego County 2026; ESRI, 2026.

Figure 2
Potential Housing Streamlining Areas

Streamlining Pathways for Housing and Agriculture



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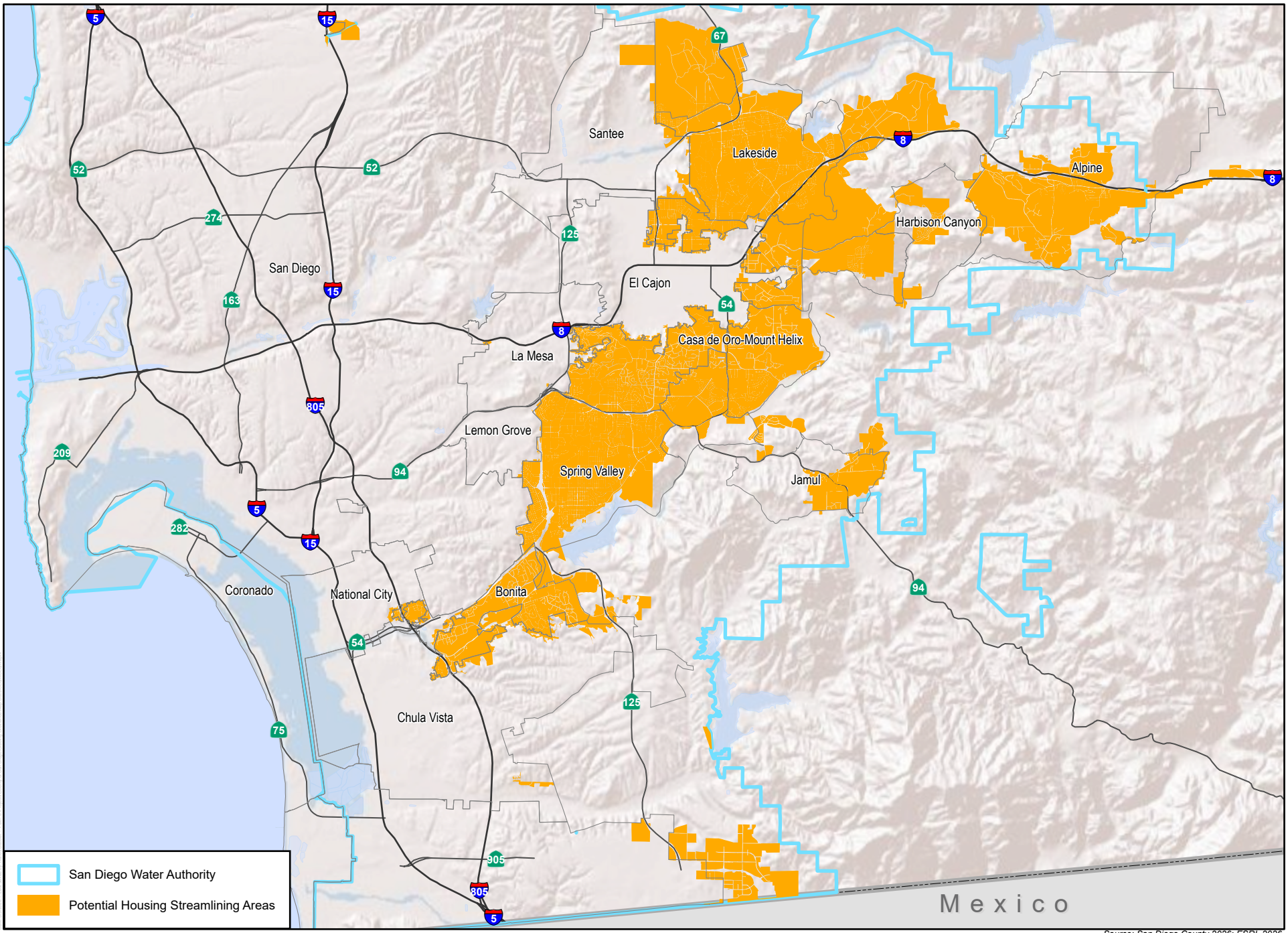
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Source: San Diego County 2026; ESRI, 2026.

Figure 3
Potential Housing
Streamlining Areas Inset A



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Source: San Diego County 2026; ESRI, 2026.

Figure 4
Potential Housing
Streamlining Areas Inset B