

CONFLUENCE NATURE PARK

Final Plan

Approved May 15, 2007

Washington County Commission

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine it is a hot October day in 1776 and you are a member of the expedition led by Spanish explorers and missionaries Father Dominguez and Father Escalante. You are trying to find a way back home to Santa Fe and you are hungry, thirsty, tired and not sure of the best route to take. Imagine your surprise when you come to a special place where two streams join a river, where an Indian group had established cornfields and irrigation ditches and you will be able to rest and stock up on provisions for your journey ahead.

This special place is known to us now as The Confluence, the area where Ash Creek and LaVerkin Creek join the Virgin River. Since that time in 1776 others have visited here - trapper Jedediah Smith, explorer John C. Fremont, early Mormon pioneer groups led by Parley Pratt, John D. Lee and Nephi Johnson - all leading to the ultimate establishment of the communities of Hurricane, LaVerkin, and Toquerville. While these communities have grown, this confluence area has been left largely in agriculture or a natural state.

The canyon where Ash and LaVerkin Creeks join the Virgin River provides unparalleled opportunities for picnicking, hiking, bird watching and horseback riding among shady stands of cottonwood and sandy beaches. Although the river is in a deep canyon both up and downstream, the confluence area itself is easily accessible from both LaVerkin and Hurricane.

Fresh creek water feeds into the mineral-rich river below Pah Tempe Hot Springs, providing critical habitat to native fish species including the Woundfin, Virgin River Chub, and Virgin Spinedace. Local, state and federal agencies are working in concert to provide adequate water for a growing population while protecting native fish. Protecting the confluence area contributes to these efforts.

The Washington County Commission recognized the benefits of setting this area aside for the public's use and enjoyment and for the preservation of its historic and natural resources. The County has worked with the Virgin River Land Preservation Association, a local nonprofit organization, to acquire the property. Over 330 acres have been purchased or secured, and agreements are being negotiated for additional acres. These acquisitions have been possible because of the support of local citizens and government officials. Generous funding was donated by many partners, including the State of Utah Quality Growth Commission, George S. and Dolores Dore' Eccles Foundation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Virgin River Resource Management and Recovery Program ("Virgin River Program"), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Chums LTD, and other private funders.

Conservation easements were placed on the property to protect the interests of donors and to ensure, for posterity, that the property is jointly managed as a public park and nature preserve.

The County commissioned a team to prepare a concept of how this area can best be used and managed. This Concept Plan presents the consensus results of the team's work.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This plan outlines proposed uses of the property and locates critical improvements to provide for public access while working within the restrictions of the conservation easements that protect the values of the site. Planning team members (see appendices) included representatives of the three primary affected communities—Hurricane, LaVerkin and Toquerville—as well as the Utah Department of Natural Resources (UDNR), the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), the Bureau of Land Management, the Virgin River Program, the Virgin River Land Preservation Association, and Washington County.

The team was charged with:

- Articulating a long-term vision, setting the direction for future uses;
- Recommending resource protection objectives and methods;
- Developing both short and long-term recommendations;
- Identifying management needs and operating budget; and
- Suggest appropriate rules and regulations and a name for the park

Further refinement of the plan will occur as the county continues to work collaboratively with the public. Additional work remains on suggesting appropriate rules and regulations for the park and developing architectural guidelines.

VISION STATEMENT

The planning team developed the following vision statement:

“Confluence Park is a special place set aside for enjoyment and use by people and for preservation, protection and enhancement of the area's rich cultural history, wildlife and natural resources.”

The team also developed its own mission statement as a guide during the plan preparation process.

TEAM MISSION STATEMENT

Develop management strategies which:

Preserve and protect significant historic and prehistoric resources

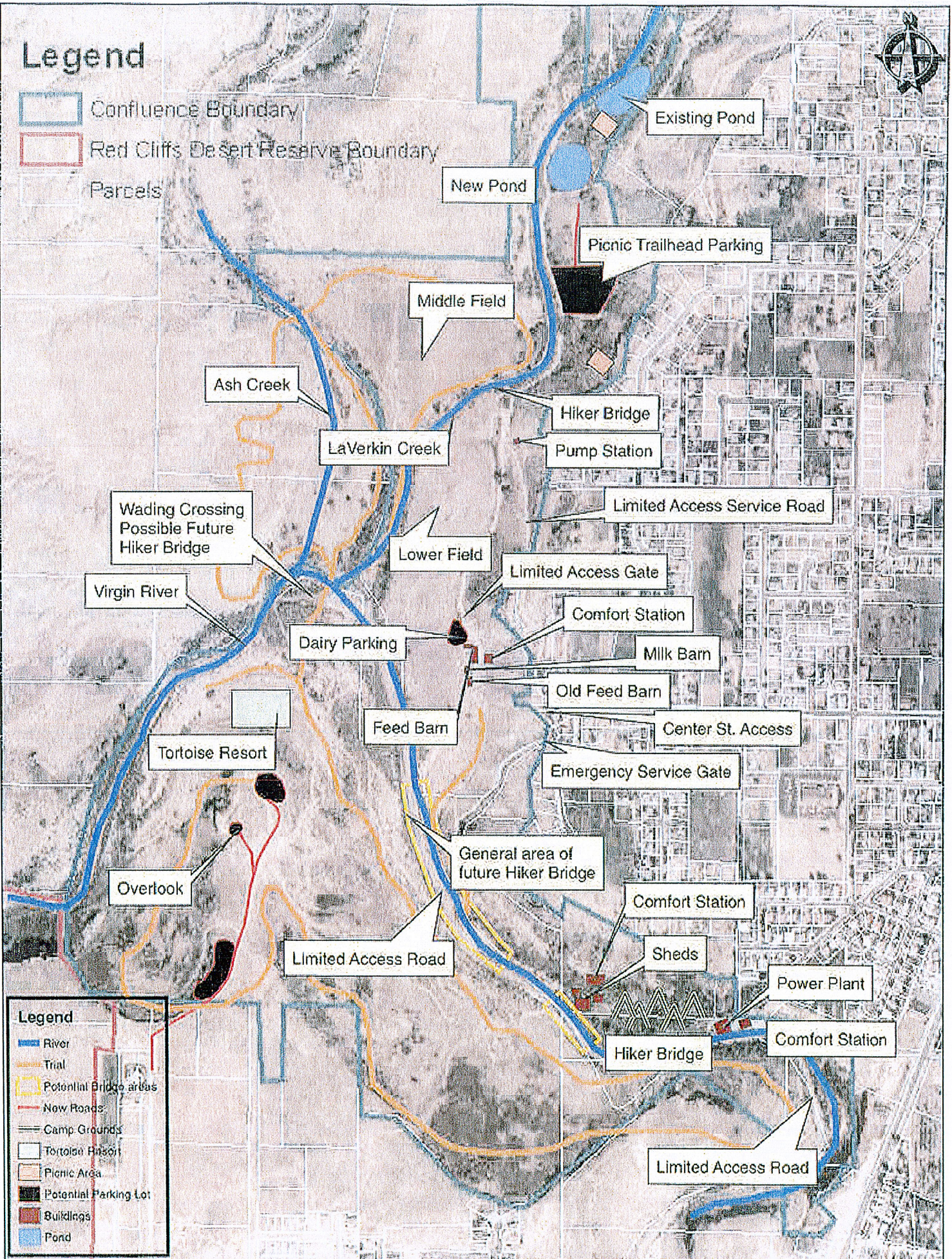
- Protect the area's unique solitude and scenic vistas
- Preserve protect and enhance habitat for protection of native species
- Provide educational experiences that enhance an appreciation of the area's rich cultural history, wildlife and natural resources
- Foster mutual supportive partnerships with private and public organizations and individuals to achieve visitor use and resource protection goals

Project Overview

The Washington County Commission protected this area for public use and enjoyment and for the preservation of its historic and natural resources. The County worked with the Virgin River Land Preservation Association, a local nonprofit group, to acquire the property. Over 330 acres have been purchased or secured, and additional acres are being negotiated. These acquisitions have been possible because of the support of local citizens, government officials, and many generous donors.

Legend

- Confluence Boundary
- Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Boundary
- Parcels



Legend

- River
- Trial
- Potential Bridge areas
- New Roads
- Camp Grounds
- Tortoise Resort
- Picnic Area
- Potential Parking Lot
- Buildings
- Pond

RECOMMENDATIONS

All recommendations are intended to be consistent with the recorded conservation easements that protect the conservation values on the property. Uses that are incompatible with the conservation goal of the project, such as the excessive or careless use of harmful pesticides or herbicides, are not allowed. A primary premise of the plan is that, through careful planning and design, recreational and agricultural uses can be compatible with long-term habitat protection. This is achieved using methods such as locating heavily-used activity areas away from the most sensitive habitat, the “hardening” of appropriate sites to increase their durability and the channeling of users to these sites, and limiting vehicular access in some areas. Recreational use of ATV/OHV’s is not consistent with a nature park nor is it allowed by the conservation easements.

It is recognized that handicap access to some areas such as the river is important. A process will be identified to facilitate such access.

Short-term Recommendations

Short-term recommendations focus on immediate priorities to improve the property so it is safe for public access and to stabilize conservation values.

Top priorities for immediate funding and implementation include:

- install irrigation system and reseed LaVerkin Creek pastures to minimize erosion and to out-compete invasive weeds;
- install fences and gates to control access consistent with conservation goal and this plan;
- grade and surface primary parking area along LaVerkin Creek to initially serve a minimum of 40 vehicles, install toilets;
- prune dead and dying limbs from mature cottonwoods as necessary for public safety;
- reduce fire hazard by clearing excessive dead and down wood;
- remove noxious weeds, including Russian olive and tamarisk trees;
- apply surface cap material to stabilize the sandy road section between the Wilkinson Dairy and the Wood Farm;
- stabilize feed barn structure, replace trusses and refinish roof;
- construct and install key informational and directional signs;
- arrange for property management by leasing agricultural areas; and
- assist Utah Division of Natural Resources in developing an easement monitoring program.

A primary premise of the plan is that, through careful planning and design, recreational and agricultural uses can be compatible with long-term habitat protection.

Long-term Recommendations

Other amenities, though they enhance the public enjoyment of the property are not critical at this time, should be the focus of a long-term funding strategy. Public use of the property will not be hindered if these improvements are postponed while stable funding sources are developed.

The team envisions that even substantial use at the Confluence Nature Park can be compatible with habitat conservation goals if public use areas are well defined, natural shrub barriers are used to deter access from sensitive areas, and the public is educated on the dual purpose of the park.

This plan carefully considered the location of uses, access to use areas, and impacts to habitat and visitor experience. Many areas are vehicle-accessible, yet vehicular access is intentionally limited in other areas to provide portions of the park where visitors can escape the sights and sounds of the city. Generally, the deeper into the property and the closer to the confluence you get, the more remote and natural the park experience will become.

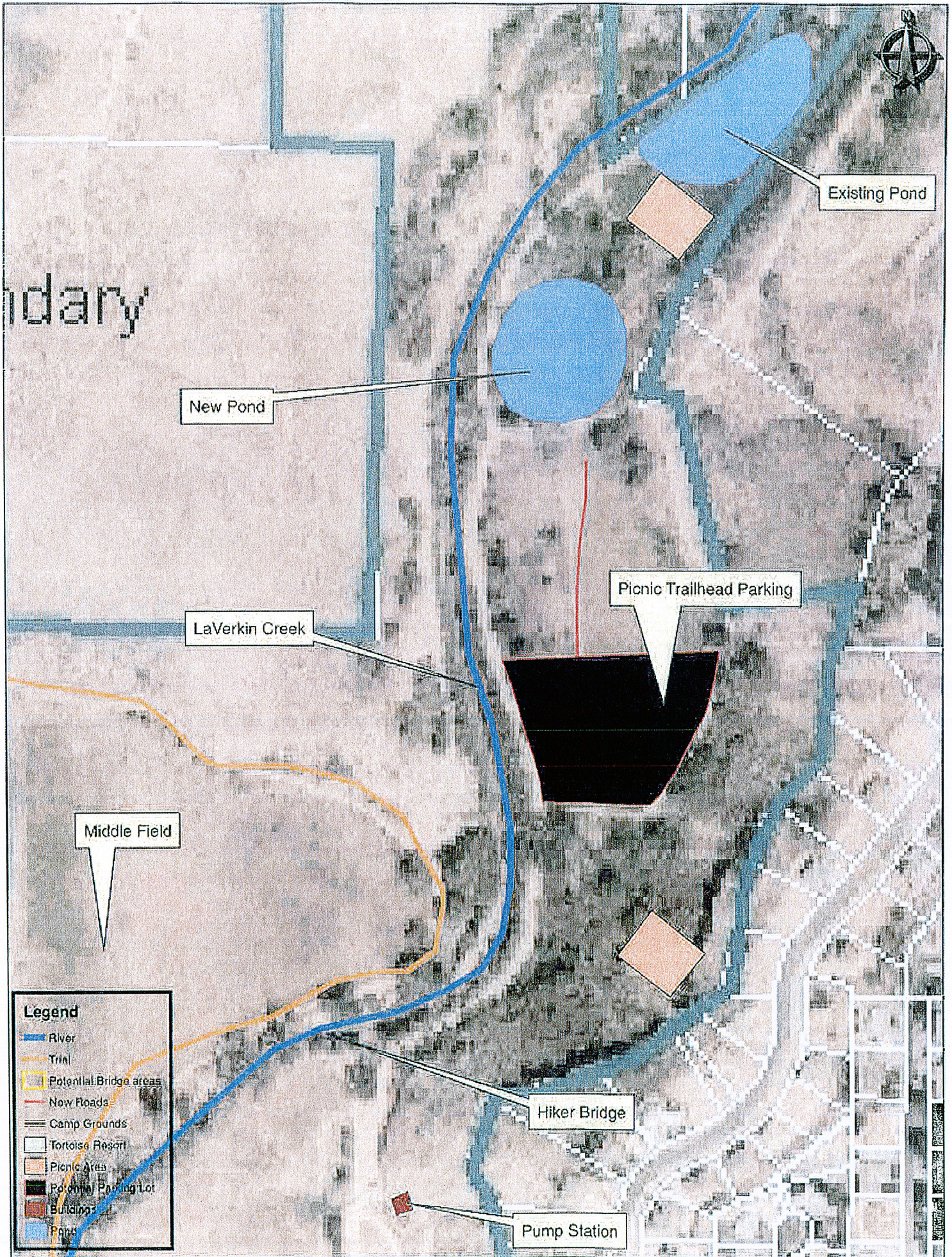
To facilitate planning, the park was divided into functional “planning areas.” Each planning area is surprisingly unique, both in the recreational opportunities available, and in the geological and cultural history hidden in the rocks.

Long-term recommendations are identified for each of the ten different planning areas on the maps that follow. These recommendations highlight recreation improvements. Specific resource protection objectives for the park are summarized beginning on page 14.

Long-Term Recommendations...

The Ponds

- Remove tamarisk and other non-native species
- River restoration (channel relocation, establishment of wetlands and other habitat improvements such as planting of native plants)
- Interpretation of natural resources
- All-weather road and primary parking area (50 spaces subject to further study) for camping and trailhead uses and dairy uses
- Education kiosk
- Daytime pavilions
- Picnic areas
- Comfort stations (flush toilets)
- Establish an irrigation system
- Portion of loop trail with low water crossing or footbridge across LaVerkin Creek
- Pond management:
 - periodic draining to prevent colonization by non-native fish
 - shallow, intermittent ponds



Boundary

New Pond

Existing Pond

LaVerkin Creek

Picnic Trailhead Parking

Middle Field

Hiker Bridge

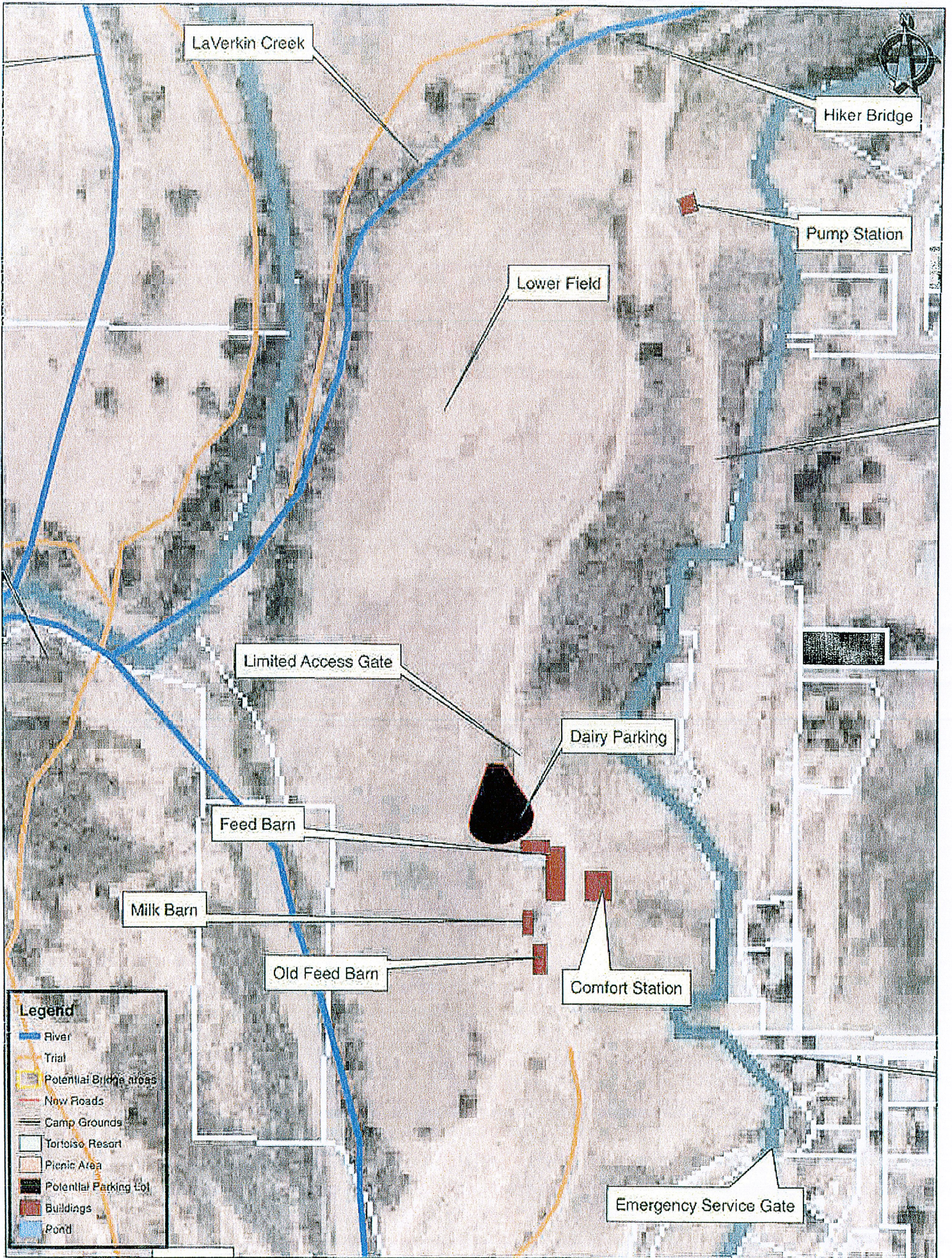
Pump Station

- Legend**
- River
 - Trail
 - Potential Bridge areas
 - New Roads
 - Camp Grounds
 - Tortoise Resort
 - Picnic Areas
 - Potential Parking Lot
 - Buildings
 - Ponds

Long-Term Recommendations...

Wilkinson's Dairy

- Stabilization and adaptive use of dairy and feed barn for multiple use facility (**especially education facilities**, and other multi-uses to include family reunions, community events, etc)
- Comfort station (flush toilets)
- Gravel road and parking (20-30 car capacity with possible future expansion)
- Limited access road doubles as trail system
- Interpretation of human use of this area (Paiute Indians, early explorers, pioneer settlement and recent agricultural uses)
- Agricultural uses: lower field for grazing or for hay, corn, or other crops
- Development of a native plant nursery (especially drought tolerant species)



Long-Term Recommendations...

Wood Farm

- Agricultural uses: maintain pastures for grazing and maintain orchard
- Maintain the existing irrigation system
- Trail bridge crossing the Virgin River to Hurricane (Part of the Three Rivers Trail) for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding
- River recreation in the Virgin River (managed to protect riparian habitat)
- Grass controlled access road to campground
- Camping at designated sites by permit only
- Wildlife viewing and bird watching
- Comfort station (flush toilet)
- Stabilization and interpretation of power plant (preserve history)



Tortoise Resort

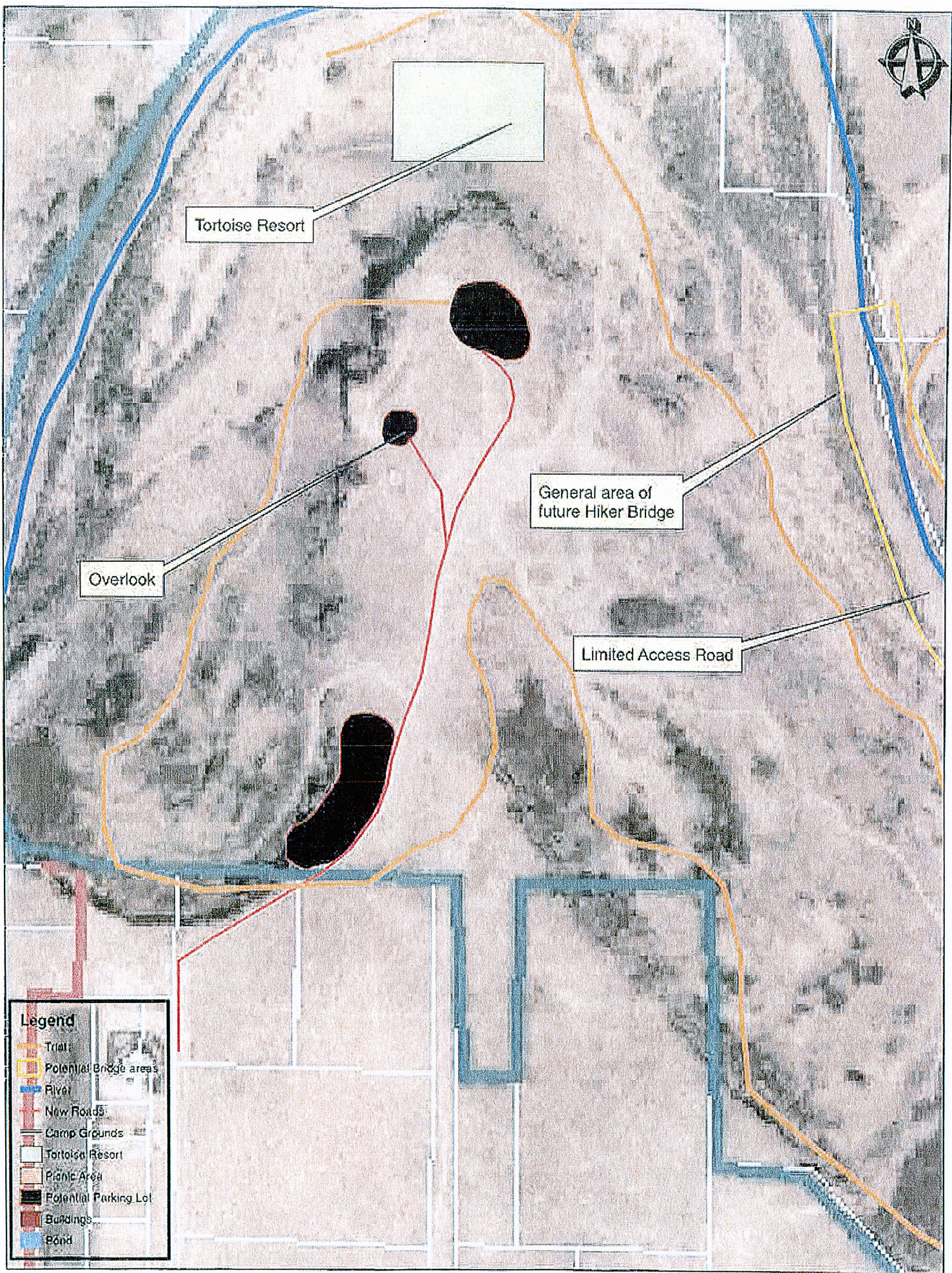
General area of future Hiker Bridge

Overlook

Limited Access Road

Legend

- Trial
- Potential Bridge areas
- River
- New Roads
- Camp Grounds
- Tortoise Resort
- Picnic Area
- Potential Parking Lot
- Buildings
- Pond



Sidebar Page 12:

Long-Term Recommendations...

Riverbend & Basalt Hills

- Paved road access
- Parking area, (20 spaces with possible allowance to expand) located at base of hill away from sensitive areas, for river access
- Trail system connecting to the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve, the Three Rivers Trail and other trails for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding
- River recreation in the Virgin River (managed to protect riparian habitat)
- Riverside area activities (managed to protect habitat)
- Maintain and interpret "Tortoise Resort"
- Comfort station (pit toilets)
- Interpret natural resources
- Paved road to overlook
- Overlook is primary location for site orientation and interpretive kiosk
- Trail system connecting to the Three Rivers Trail and other trails for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding
- Picnic areas along trails
- Interpretive signage featuring archeological sites, natural resources and the area's history

Ash Creek

Wading Crossing
Possible Future
Hiker Bridge

LaVerkin Creek

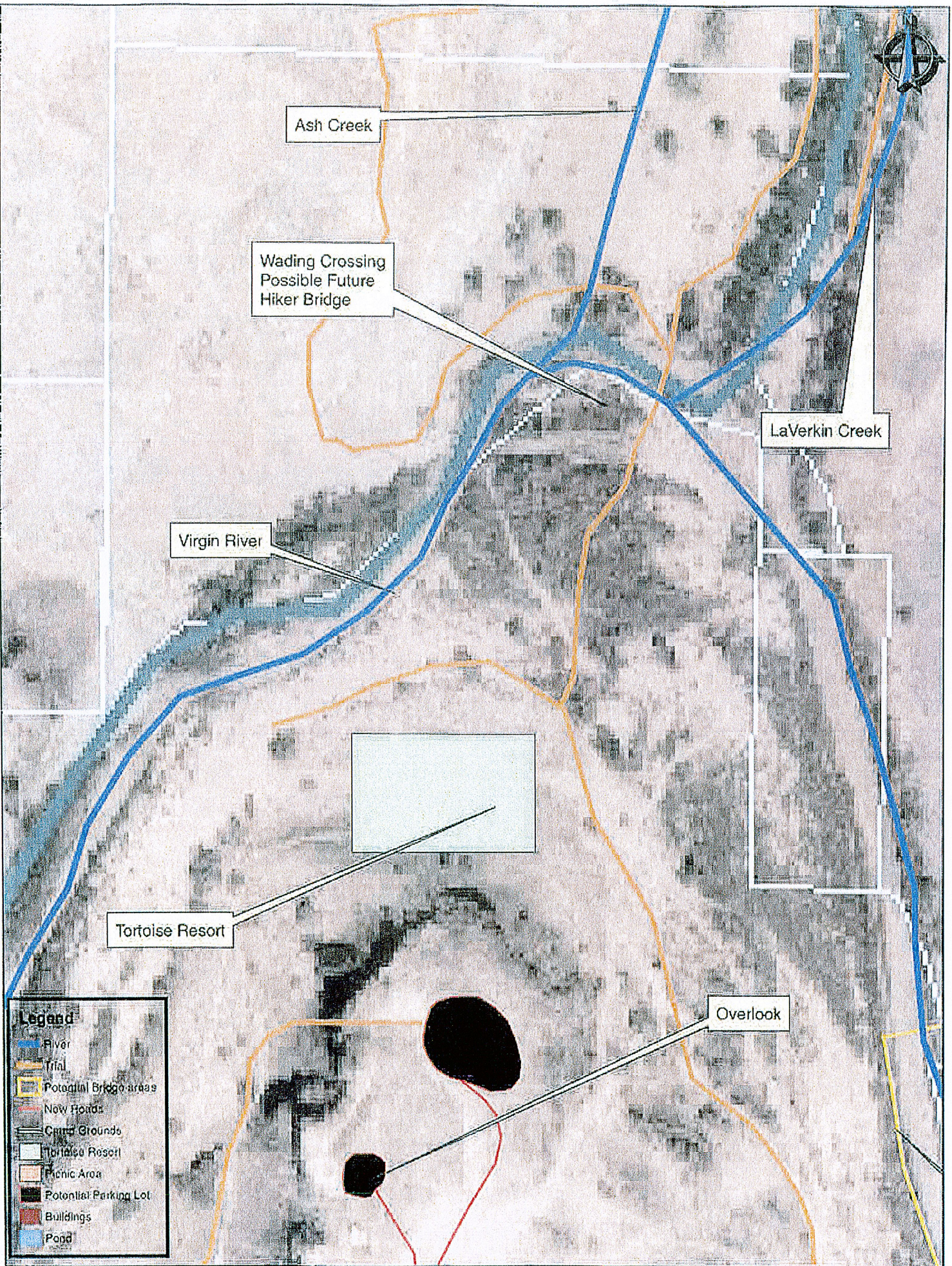
Virgin River

Tortoise Resort

Overlook

Legend

-  River
-  Trail
-  Potential Bridge areas
-  New Roads
-  Camp Grounds
-  Tortoise Resort
-  Picnic Area
-  Potential Parking Lot
-  Buildings
-  Pond





Center St. Access

Emergency Service Gate

Comfort Station

General area of future Hiker Bridge

Sheds

Power Plant

Comfort Station

Hiker Bridge

Limited Access Road

Limited Access Road

Legend

- River
- Trail
- Potential Bridge Areas
- New Roads
- Camp Grounds
- Tortoise Resort
- Picnic Area
- Potential Parking Lot
- Buildings
- Pond



Long-Term Recommendations...

Middle Field

- Group camping by permit only
- Comfort station (pit toilet)
- Portion of loop trail with low water crossing or footbridge over LaVerkin and Ash Creek
- Agricultural uses compatible with group camping: possible uses include grazing, crop production, native plant nursery, orchards, community supported agriculture/gardens
- Service road as potential access road from Riverwood Subdivision

Long-Term Recommendations...

Hideout

- Replanting of stream channels and protection of riparian areas
- Portion of loop trail with crossing or footbridge to Middle Field



Middle Field

LaVerkin Creek

Ash Creek

Lower Field

Wading Crossing
Possible Future
Hiker Bridge

Limited Access Gate

Dairy Parking

Legend

- River
- Till
- Potential Bridge areas
- New Roads
- Camp Grounds
- Tortoise Resort
- Picnic Area
- Potential Parking Lot
- Buildings
- Pond

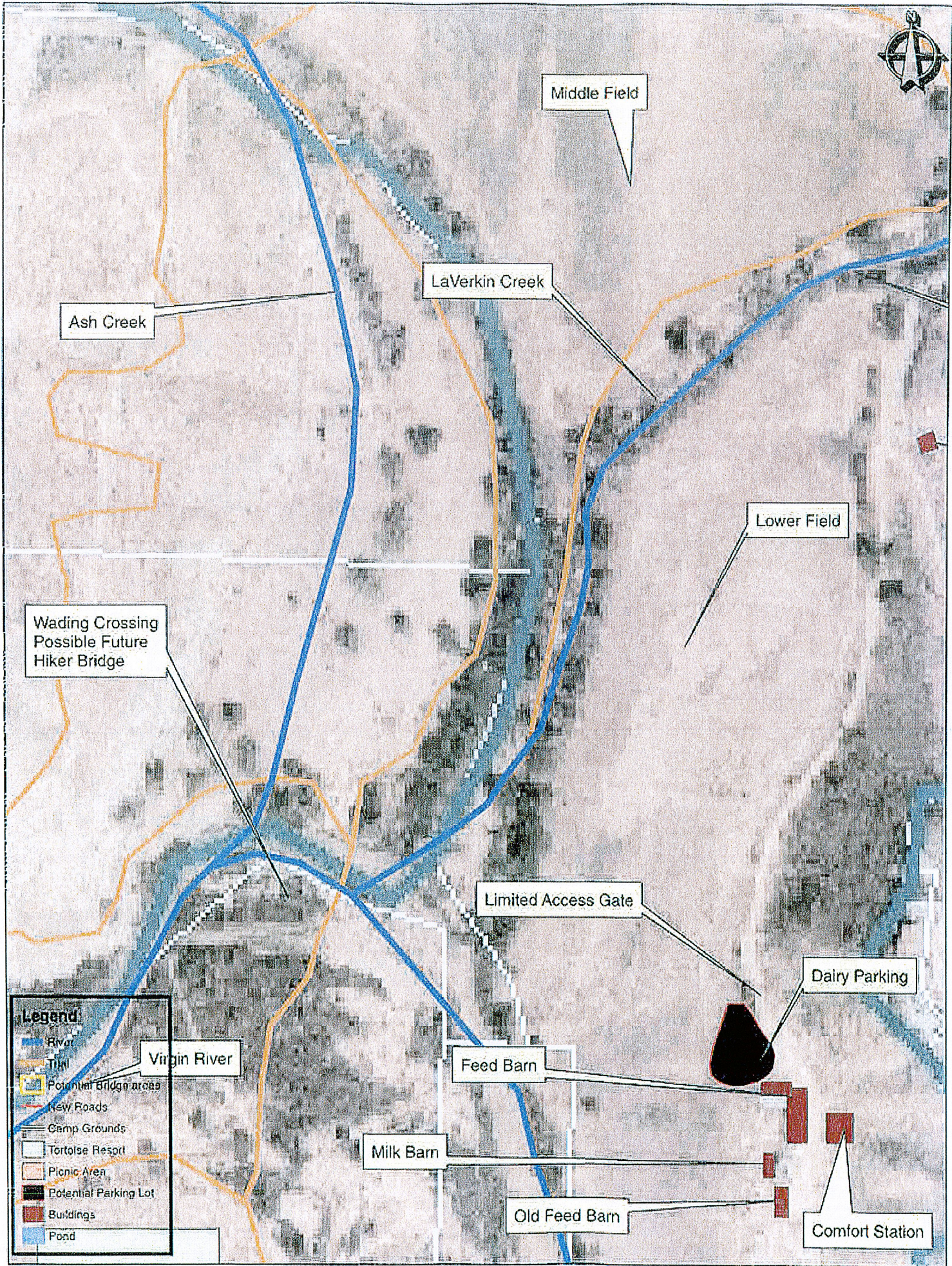
Virgin River

Feed Barn

Milk Barn

Old Feed Barn

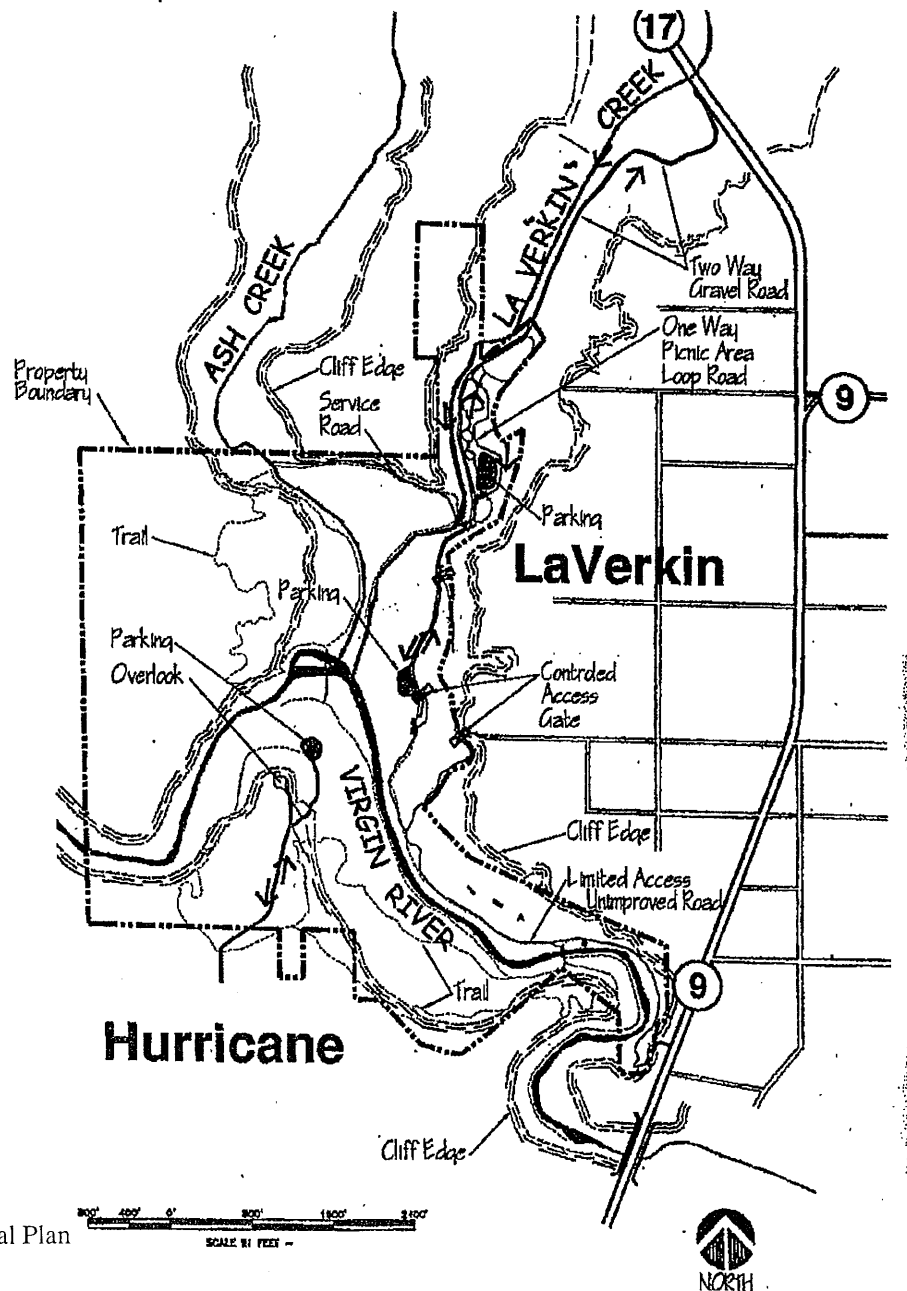
Comfort Station



Long-Term Recommendations...
Vehicle Circulation Plan

The special nature of the canyon where the creeks flow into the Virgin River, its feeling of remoteness and natural quiet sheltered from the noise of city traffic is one of the park's greatest assets. The planning team worked very hard to design passenger vehicle access to the park while protecting this sense of being removed from the city. Many areas of the park are designed to be accessed by vehicles only for special events, property management, or emergency purposes. Much of the park is accessed by an extensive trail system serving hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikes.

Mr. Anderson's road easement across the Virgin River may be relocated to the north boundary area of the park and could then cross both creeks.



Resource Protection Objectives and Methods

The underlying objective of the park, and a primary purpose of the funding used to acquire park properties, is conservation of the natural, agricultural and historical values of the site. This plan would not be balanced if it didn't equally address resource protection objectives and recreation facility improvements. These objectives are restated here to provide a clear and concise picture of this aspect of future park management.

Suggested methods are provided to achieve identified objectives.

Resource Objective	Method(s)
Protect area as sanctuary for wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •restrict vehicular traffic to areas away from streams, river •discourage dispersed public use of riparian areas •concentrate public use along stream, river in hardened or durable sites •discourage public access to identified sensitive sites •encourage research efforts that seek to improve habitat and/or stabilize or enhance native populations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Protect Historic and Cultural Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •develop a long-term plan for protecting and interpreting Native American, Spanish, and historic sites •construct monument dedicated to early explorers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Maintain native vegetation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •protect cottonwood trees by controlling beavers and installing protective wire mesh •reclaim disturbed areas with native seed and plants •concentrate public use along stream, river in hardened or durable sites to avoid damage to riparian vegetation •remove non-native vegetation

Maintain agricultural uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •secure irrigation water and install new irrigation system for fields along LaVerkin Creek •encourage alternative agricultural uses, including native plant nursery •allow grazing to continue in fenced pastures •manage grazing practices using sustainable techniques
Enhance habitat for native riparian and upland species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •prohibit firewood cutting and restrict firewood gathering •protect stands of native willow •protect water quality: prevent runoff of pollutants; maintain functioning riparian area; and monitor water quality •prevent excessive soil erosion •restore natural stream channels as appropriate •maintain natural floodplains
Support species conservation efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •maintain and increase public visibility of the county's tortoise care facility "tortoise resort" •add educational components to "tortoise town" to increase public awareness of species conservation activities •provide adequate security to "tortoise resort" to prevent vandalism and theft •manage the Ponds area to prevent colonization of non-native fish species •maintain instream flows •support research activities on site
Protect water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •manage agricultural uses to prevent runoff or migration of nutrients/herbicides/pesticides •prevent excessive and unnatural soil erosion

Protect experiences of remoteness, solitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •plan and design facilities to avoid noise and light pollution •work with neighboring communities to protect the park’s skyline with reasonable setbacks for structures •limit vehicular access to special areas of the park, including the Wood Farm, the Hideout, the Riverbend’s beach, and the confluence area itself.
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Each planning area is surprisingly unique, both in the recreational opportunities available, and in the geological and cultural history hidden in the rocks.

Management Alternatives

The team brain-stormed a wide variety of long-term management options for the park.

- Establish a county recreation department to manage the future county parks and trails facilities; or
- Establish a “recreation district” similar in structure to a special service district; or
- Establish an interlocal cooperative entity, defined by a carefully crafted legal structure that spells out participant’s individual and joint roles and responsibilities.

Management Recommendations

The Final Draft Plan team recommends that the county adopt a resolution and interlocal agreement allowing LaVerkin City to initiate a partnership to manage the nature park with support from an advisory team including the representatives from the three communities, the Utah Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Virgin River Land Preservation Association, Washington County Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Administration, and the Washington County Commission which will best accomplish the purposes for which the park was established and which will achieve the goals and objectives of this plan. This document is considered to be that plan. After approval by the county commission, an interlocal agreement will be drafted

Funding should be supplemented with grants to address immediate management needs, (such as construction of trailhead facilities, parking, and re-establishing agricultural fields), since the HCP fees used to manage the reserve generally are available only for actions associated with the county's Habitat Conservation Plan.

Other resources are also available to help with short term needs; scout groups should continue to be utilized, as may other volunteer groups, such as college and local community service programs.

Funding Strategies

To date, funds for land acquisition have been generously contributed by private foundations and individuals, from state and federal agencies, or from the county's habitat conservation plan funding. Local support and the compelling reasons for the project have contributed to its success. This project has proceeded despite challenging times for the county economically. For the foreseeable future, because of other commitments, innovative funding strategies will be required to implement the recommendations of this plan.

For the short term, the county should continue to seek funding from grant programs which support the project's goals, should explore to what level the adjoining communities can contribute resources, and should continue to welcome the volunteer groups that contribute their time and energy to improving the property.

Potential Long-Term Funding Strategies

Land and Water Conservation Funds
County or City appropriated funds
General Obligation Bonds
Sales Tax Revenue Bonds
Interlocal Cooperative
User fees and/or donations
Lease proceeds from agricultural uses

The county should continue to welcome the volunteer groups that contribute their time and energy to improving the property.

Appendices

Conservation Easement Summary
Planning Team Participant List
Draft Plan Finalization Team Participant List

Appendix A

CONSERVATION EASEMENT SUMMARY

FOUNDATION

Grantor is Washington County, ownership is fee simple
Grantee us UDNR & UDWR
Easements apply to all parcels owned by Washington County (330 acres).
Properties owned by the Conservation Fund have similar restrictions to protect conservation values.

PURPOSE

General

Retain the property in its natural, open space condition and prevent use that would impair the conservation values for which the property is protected.

Specific

Protect and enhance water quality and water supplies
Protect wildlife habitat and maintain habitat connectivity to ensure biodiversity
Protect riparian areas
Maintain and restore natural ecosystem functions
Protect prehistoric and historic cultural sites
Protect and enhance non-motorized, outdoor recreational opportunities
Protect scenic vistas
Maintain agricultural uses
Protect historic values
Encourage public awareness and appreciation of the conservation values of the property

RESERVED RIGHTS

- Maintenance and replacement of utilities in existing easements
- Vegetation management activities
- Agricultural uses and activities pertaining to crop and livestock production, and commercial uses such as sale of crops and small scale livestock operations including stabling, boarding, lessons and guided excursions
- Recreational uses-hiking, bicycling, horse riding, picnicking and wildlife viewing
- Scientific research activities-biological, geological and archeological
- Enhancement of habitat to provide for populations of listed species
- Public access consistent with the management plan

CONSERVATION EASEMENT SUMMARY, continued

- New facilities for education, cultural preservation and species enhancement (roads, trails, bridges, parking, nature center, outdoor amphitheater, equipment storage sheds, residential and non-residential caretaker facilities, fencing, and habitat improvement structures)

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Washington County is responsible for developing and implementing a management plan in consultation with UDNR and UDWR. This document is considered to be that plan. After approval by the Washington County Commission, an interlocal agreement will be drafted between applicable parties.

The management plan is to designate special management areas, develop management prescriptions for uses as defined in this easement and develop architectural guidelines to guide construction and maintenance of facilities.

PROHIBITED USES

- No subdivision into smaller parcels
- No structures or improvements (temporary or permanent houses, towers, satellite dishes, sheds, tanks, mobile homes, dams, impoundments, or communications equipment) except as allowed as a Reserved Right
- No mineral development
- No easements except as needed to conform with Reserved Rights or to enhance conservation values
- No changes to existing topography
- No use as dumps, landfills or storage or treatment of waste materials
- No industrial, commercial or residential uses except as permitted as a Reserved Right
- No signs or billboards except as noted
- No new utility rights-of-way
- No introduction of non-native species except for livestock and agricultural crops allowed as a Reserved Right
- No organized sports facilities
- No hunting, trapping or fishing except as authorized by the management plan
- No grazing of livestock outside of fenced pastures or within the riparian corridor
- No construction of new roads except to facilitate stream relocation or provide access to permitted improvements
- No use of motorized recreation vehicles

Appendix B

ORIGINAL PLANNING TEAM PARTICIPANTS

Chairman	Don Falvey
LaVerkin	Douglas Wilson
	Gary McKell
Hurricane (3 representatives, changed over time)	Doug Bringhurst (1)
	Mac Hall (2)
	Floyd Wilkinson (3)
Toquerville	Annette Kleinman
Utah Department of Natural Resources	Kathleen Clark, Director
Director's designee:	Ann McLuckie
Virgin River Land Preservation Association	Bill McMurrin
Virgin River Program	Steve Meisner
Land Use Planning	Ira Hodges
Washington County/Red Cliffs Desert Reserve	Lori Rose
BLM	Bob Douglas

Appendix C

2007 Final Draft Plan Participants

LaVerkin

Karl Wilson
Doug Beecher
Ray Justice
Kyle Gubler
Chris Olsen
Lamar Gubler
Debi Groves
Clark Fawcett
Ken Powell
Reed Harris
Larry Crist
Bill McMurrin
Steve Meismer
Bill Mader

Hurricane

Toquerville

Utah Department of Natural Resources

U. S. Fish & Wildlife

Virgin River Land Preservation Association

Virgin River Program

Washington County/ HCP

Washington County Commission