

Appendix B: Methodology for Identifying Potential Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems

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INTRODUCTION

Groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs) within the Paso Robles Subbasin are identified in accordance with §354.16(g) of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan regulations. The procedure for identifying GDEs follows guidance developed by

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and detailed in the *Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Guidance for Preparing Groundwater Sustainability Plans* report (Rohde et al., 2018). This process differentiates between indicators of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (iGDEs), potential Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems, and true Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems.

- iGDEs were developed by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and DWR using the best available statewide data. The iGDEs are identified using locations of springs and seeps, wetlands, and vegetation known to use groundwater. The Nature Conservancy also uses the term “Natural Communities Commonly Associated with Groundwater” to refer to these iGDEs.
- Potential GDE are iGDEs that, through mapping analyses, may be connected to shallow groundwater and therefore be supported by shallow groundwater.
- True GDEs are potential GDE’s that have been field verified to establish that they are supported by groundwater. The methodology described herein does not identify true GDEs.

The procedure consists of the following steps:

- Review geospatial data from TNC that showing indicators of groundwater dependent ecosystems (iGDEs) within the Subbasin
- Assess the connection to groundwater for indicators of groundwater dependent ecosystems
- Identify potential GDEs. Potential GDEs are iGDEs that might be connected to groundwater. Potential GDEs should be field verified before they are established as true GDEs.

Geospatial data showing iGDEs were downloaded from TNC’s website for Natural Communities Commonly Associated with Groundwater

(NCCAG; <https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/NCDataSetViewer>). The iGDEs present in the Paso Robles Subbasin include potential GDEs identified as Wetlands or GDE Vegetation. All iGDEs in the Subbasin, as identified by TNC, are shown on Figure B-1.

Datasets used to assess the potential connection of the iGDEs to groundwater include the San Luis Obispo (SLO) County surface geologic map (County of San Luis Obispo, 2007), measured groundwater levels in the San Luis Obispo County groundwater monitoring network, geospatial data included in the National Hydrographic Dataset (NHD) provided by the U.S. Geological Survey showing the location of mapped springs and seeps, and the updated numerical groundwater flow model of the Paso Robles Subbasin.

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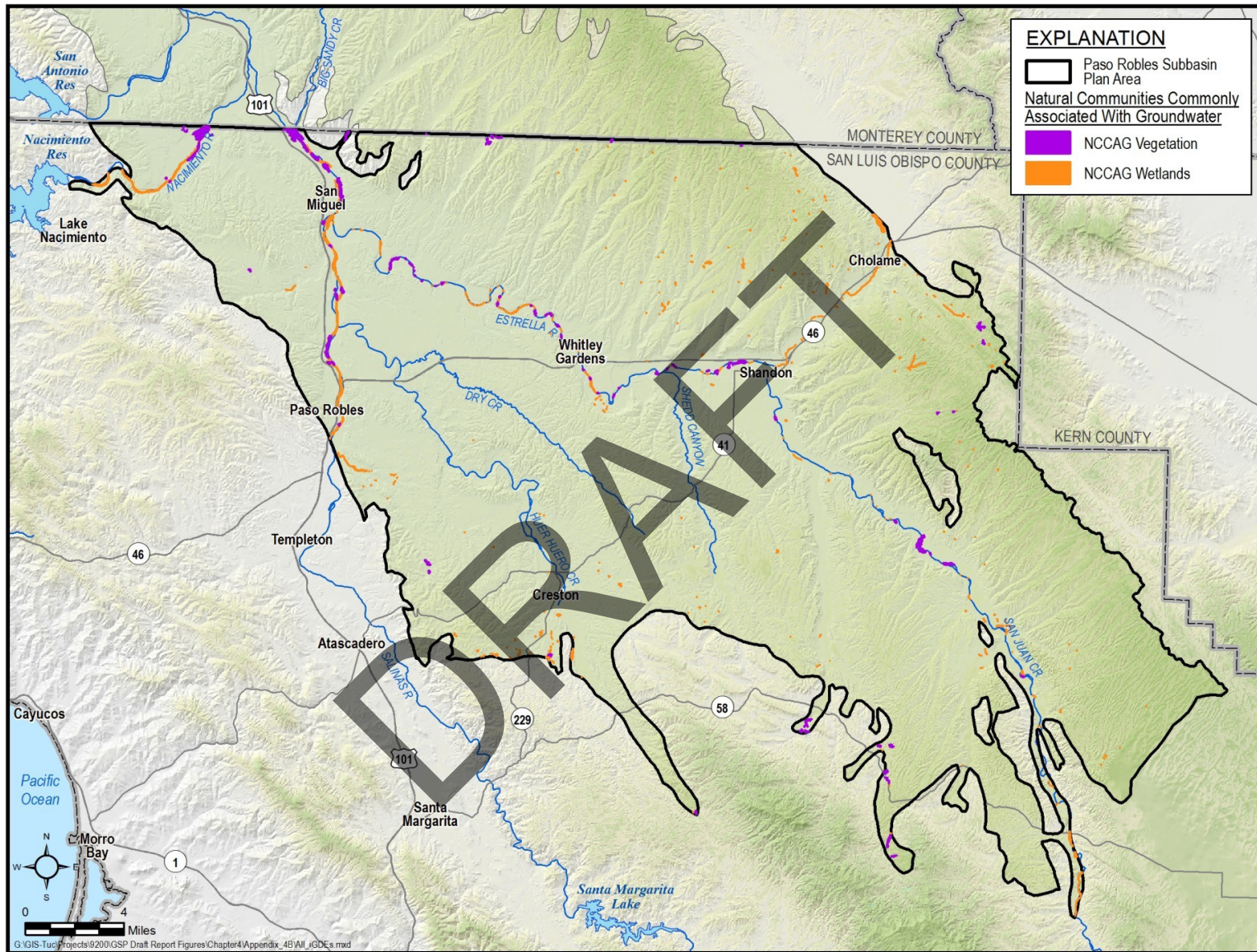


Figure B-1: Areas with Indicators of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (iGDEs) (from TNC)

CRITERIA FOR CONNECTION TO GROUNDWATER

The iGDEs identified by TNC data can only be potential GDEs if they are connected to a groundwater source that supports the vegetation or wetlands. Potential iGDEs that are supported by streamflows, soil moisture, or shallow perched aquifers, rather than by a regional groundwater aquifer, are not considered GDEs for this report. The report by Rohde et al. (2018) provides a general list of questions, or criteria, applicable to all iGDEs for assessing connection to groundwater. These general questions are:

- Is the iGDE underlain by a shallow unconfined or perched aquifer that has been delineated as being part of a Bulletin 118 principal aquifer in the Subbasin?
- Is the depth to groundwater under the iGDE less than 30 feet?
- Is the iGDE located in an area known to discharge groundwater (e.g. springs/seeps)?

The datasets described above are used to assess the potential connection of iGDEs to groundwater based on the three criteria listed above. To be considered a potential GDE, the iGDEs must satisfy at least one of the three criteria described above; or the landforms around the iGDE must suggest the area could support potential GDEs. Following the suggestions in Rhode (2018), example landforms that could support potential GDEs might be mapped springs, seeps, or a break in the slope of the ground. In the absence of more formal field reconnaissance, the results of this screening level analysis only identify potential GDEs in the Subbasin. Additional field verification is necessary to definitively determine the true GDEs in the Paso Robles Subbasin.

Question 1: Is the iGDE underlain by a shallow unconfined or perched aquifer that has been delineated as being part of a Bulletin 118 principal aquifer in the Subbasin?

Bulletin 118 (DWR, 2003) identifies two primary water-bearing formations in the Subbasin: Quaternary alluvium (Qa) and the Plio-Pleistocene-age Paso Robles formation (QTp). The Qa's thickness ranges from 30 to 130 feet and is highly permeable relative to the QTp. Groundwater in the Qa occurs under unconfined, or water-table conditions. The Qa extent shown on Figure B-2 was determined based on the surficial geologic map of San Luis Obispo County (San Luis Obispo County, 2007). This analysis assumes that all iGDEs that overlie the Quaternary alluvial unit are connected to shallow groundwater Qa sediments, and are therefore classified as potential GDEs as recommended by Rohde and others (2018). The Qa's extent and coincident potential GDEs are shown on Figure B-2. Most iGDEs within the Subbasin fall within the Qa extent.

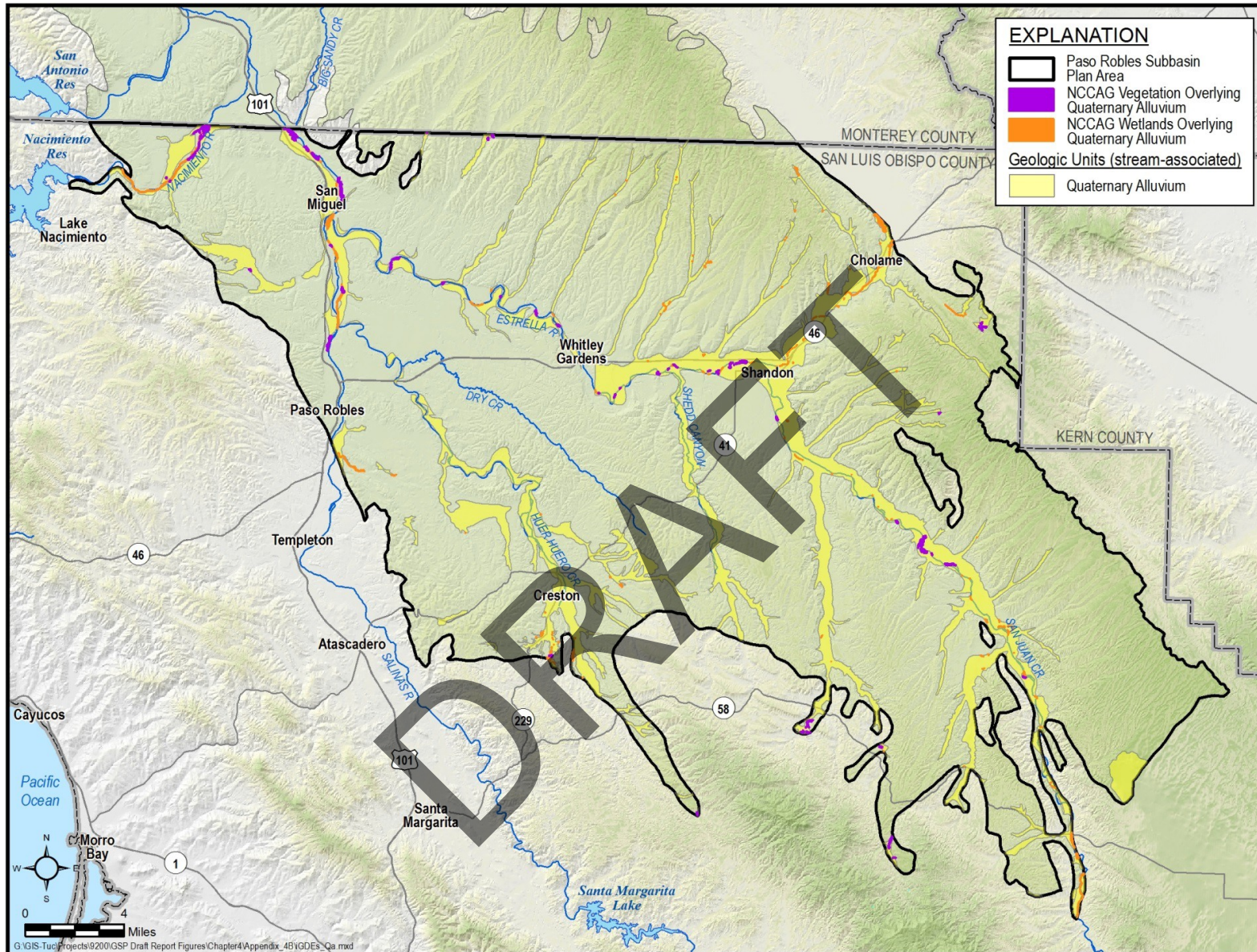


Figure B-2: iGDEs Associated with the Shallow, Unconfined Quaternary Alluvial (Qa) Aquifer

This criterion clearly has the potential to overestimate the number of potential GDEs in the Subbasin. The subjective assessment of what constitutes a shallow unconfined aquifer may result in identifying potential GDEs in areas that do not have the underlying groundwater to support the GDE. This emphasizes the need for field verification of the potential GDEs identified in this GSP.

Question 2: Is depth to groundwater under the iGDE less than 30 feet?

Depth to water is routinely measured by San Luis Obispo County staff within a network of monitoring wells. Figure B-3 shows the locations of San Luis Obispo County monitoring wells completed in the Qa. This analysis uses spring 2017 depth to water data where available. A representative value for spring depth to water was used based on review of historical groundwater levels to establish depth to water for wells at which spring 2017 data were unavailable. Wells where depth to water is less than 30 feet are shown in blue on Figure B-3. Wells where depth to water is greater than 30 feet are shown in yellow. Results from the groundwater model were used to supplement the measured groundwater level data. The simulated spring 2016 groundwater elevations were analyzed to further identify areas where depth to water is less than 30 feet. Based on the measured groundwater level data and model results, iGDEs overlying areas where estimated depth to groundwater is less than 30 feet are shown on Figure B-3.

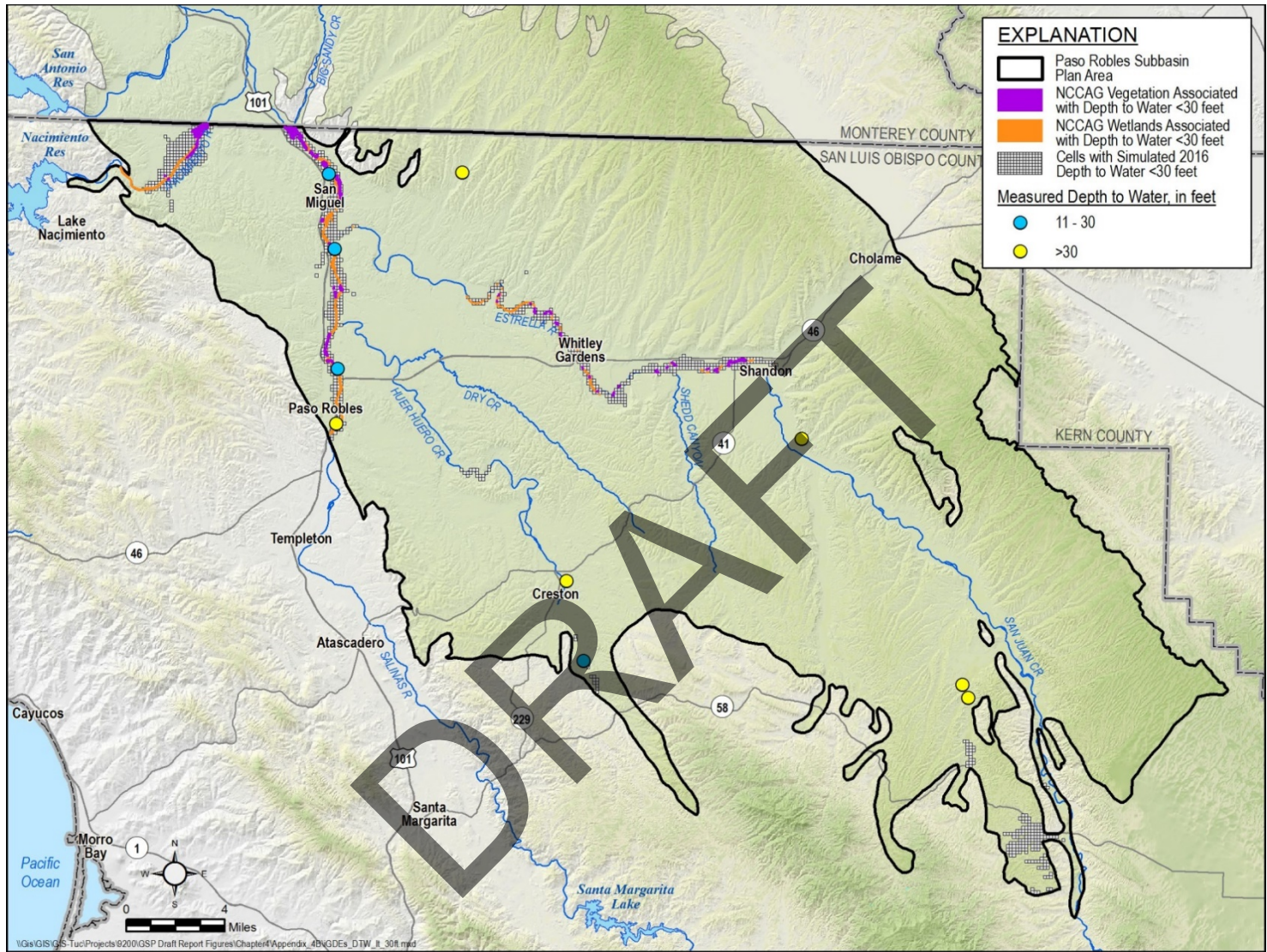


Figure B-3: Qa monitoring wells, Model Cells with Depth to Water Less than 30 Feet, and Potential GDEs based on Depth to Groundwater Less than 30 Feet

Is the iGDE located in an area known to discharge groundwater (e.g., springs/seeps)?

Springs and seeps in the Subbasin identified in National Hydrography Dataset (NHD) tend to be located in the foothills of the Santa Lucia and Temblor mountain ranges, which bound the Subbasin to the west and east, respectively.

Figure B-4 shows the location of NHD seeps and springs. iGDEs within 0.5 miles of a seep/spring point are classified as potential GDEs.

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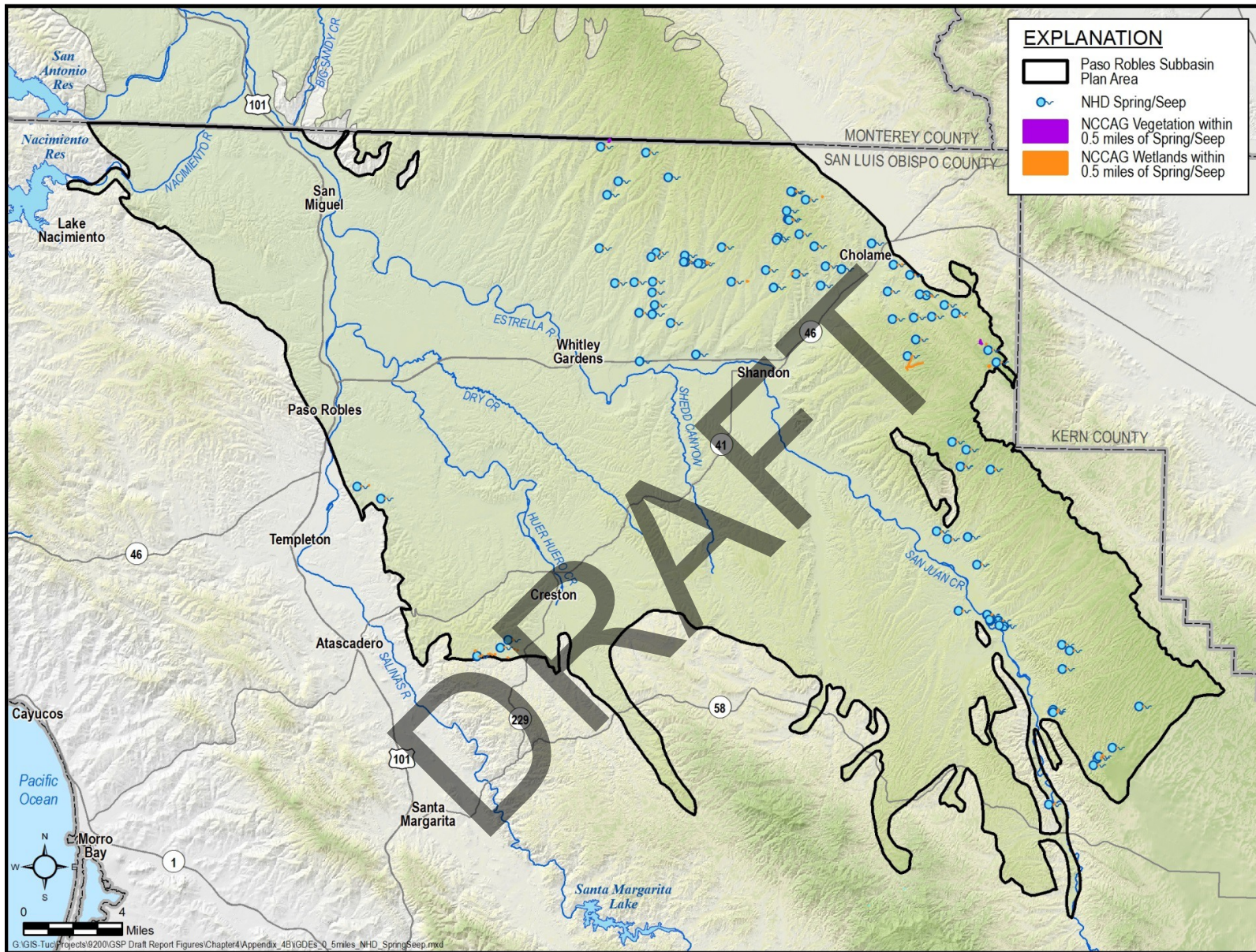


Figure B-4: NHD Springs and Seeps and iGDEs Within 0.5 Miles of a Spring or Seep

FINAL DELINEATION OF POTENTIAL GROUNDWATER DEPENDENT ECOSYSTEMS

After evaluating the three criteria listed above for connection to groundwater, additional iGDEs were identified that should be classified as potential GDEs based on landforms that suggest potential GDEs, effectively loosening the criteria for association with either the shallow alluvial aquifer or springs and seeps. The purpose for this task was to ensure that the extent of potential GDEs would err on the side of estimating maximum GDE extent. Specifically:

1. iGDEs within 0.5 miles of the mapped Qa outcrop are assumed to be hydraulically connected to the shallow alluvial aquifer. Furthermore, iGDEs that appear to be physically connected with other identified potential GDEs in the Qa were manually identified and added to the extent of potential GDEs. Figure B-5 shows all potential GDEs resulting from this analysis.
2. Remaining iGDEs were evaluated to determine their relationship to areas where seeps and springs might occur. These include areas near mapped clusters of seeps and springs such as the northeast mountainous region of the Subbasin shown on Figure B-6; or areas with breaks in the slope of the land surface that may cause “groundwater to emerge or vegetation to congregate on the surface” (Rohde and others, 2018). Figure B-6 shows all potential GDEs associated with known springs or seeps or located in areas that potentially host springs or seeps.

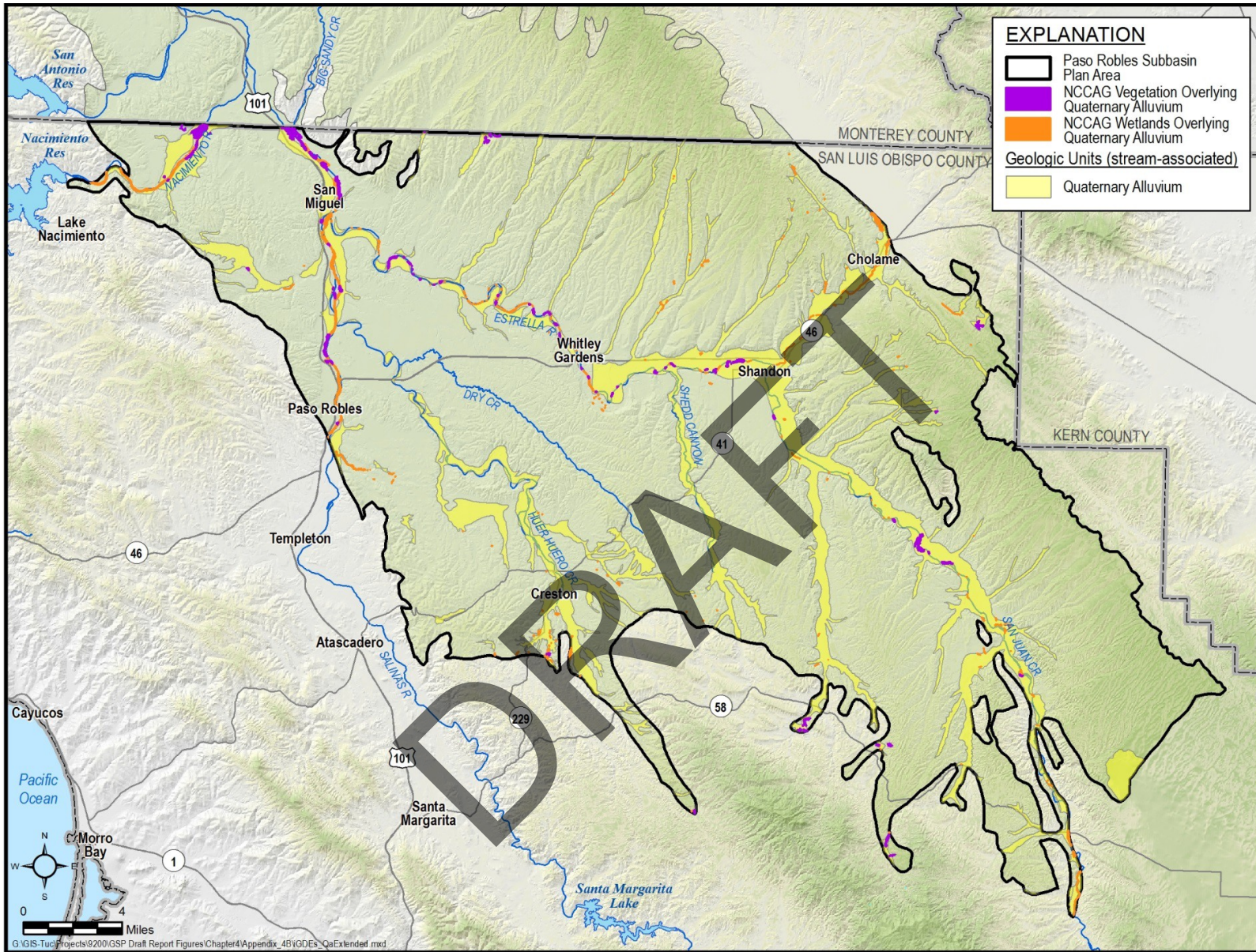


Figure B-5: iGDEs Associated with Quaternary Alluvium (Overlying, Within 0.5 miles, or Manually Selected)

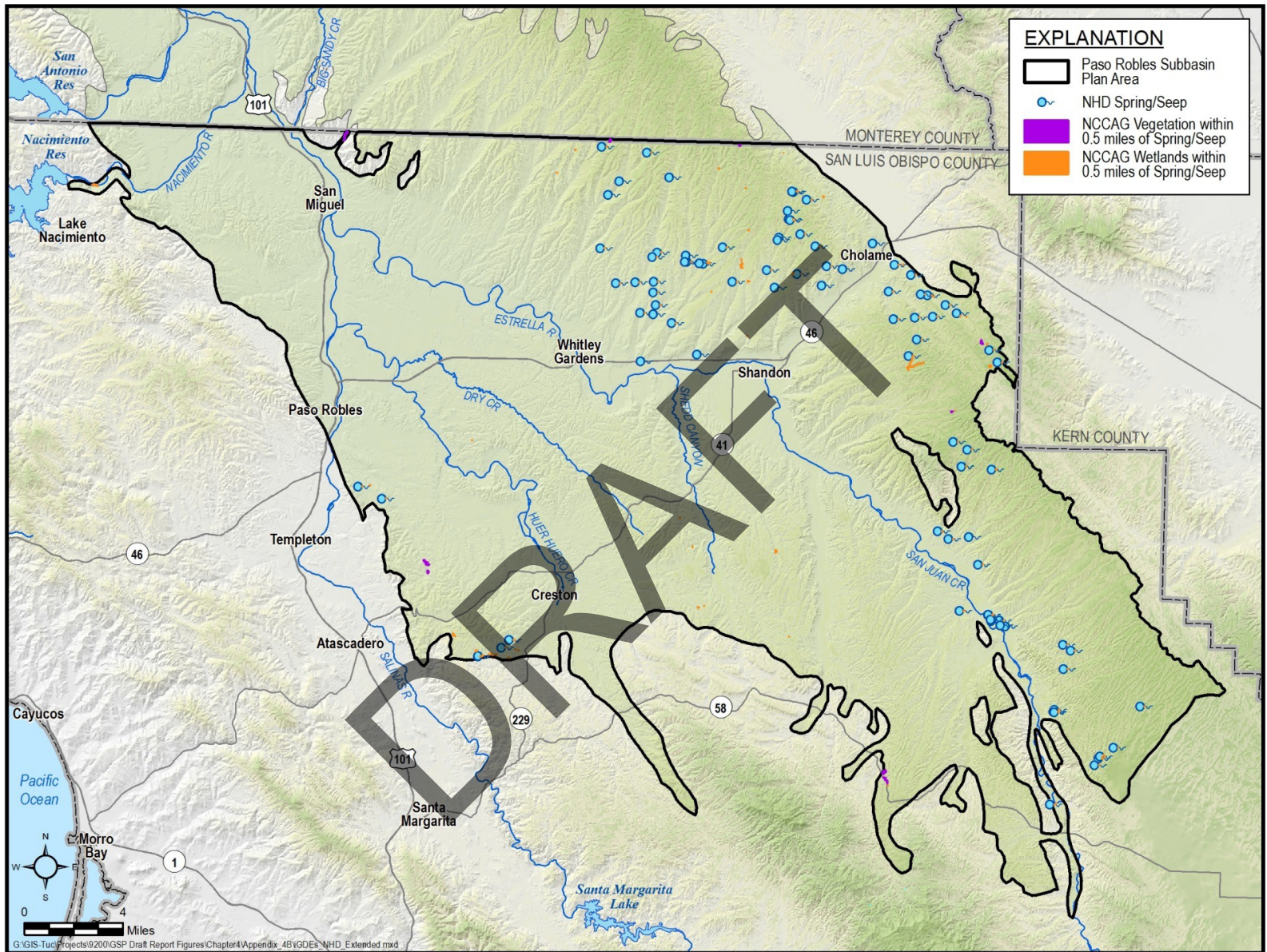


Figure B-6: iGDEs Associated with Springs or Seeps or Located in an Area with Potential Springs or Seeps

Measured groundwater levels within SLO County do not suggest additional areas where groundwater is close enough to the surface to be a significant source for natural communities. The report by Rhode et al. (2018) lists additional spatial data that could be considered for identifying GDS including Critical Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species, California Protected Areas, and Areas of Conservation Emphasis. None of these datasets show additional potential GDEs in the Subbasin. No additional potential GDEs were identified based on a review of local water and environmental management reports.

The final set of potential GDEs in the Subbasin are shown in Figure B-7. Field verification is necessary to assess whether these potential GDEs are true GDEs.

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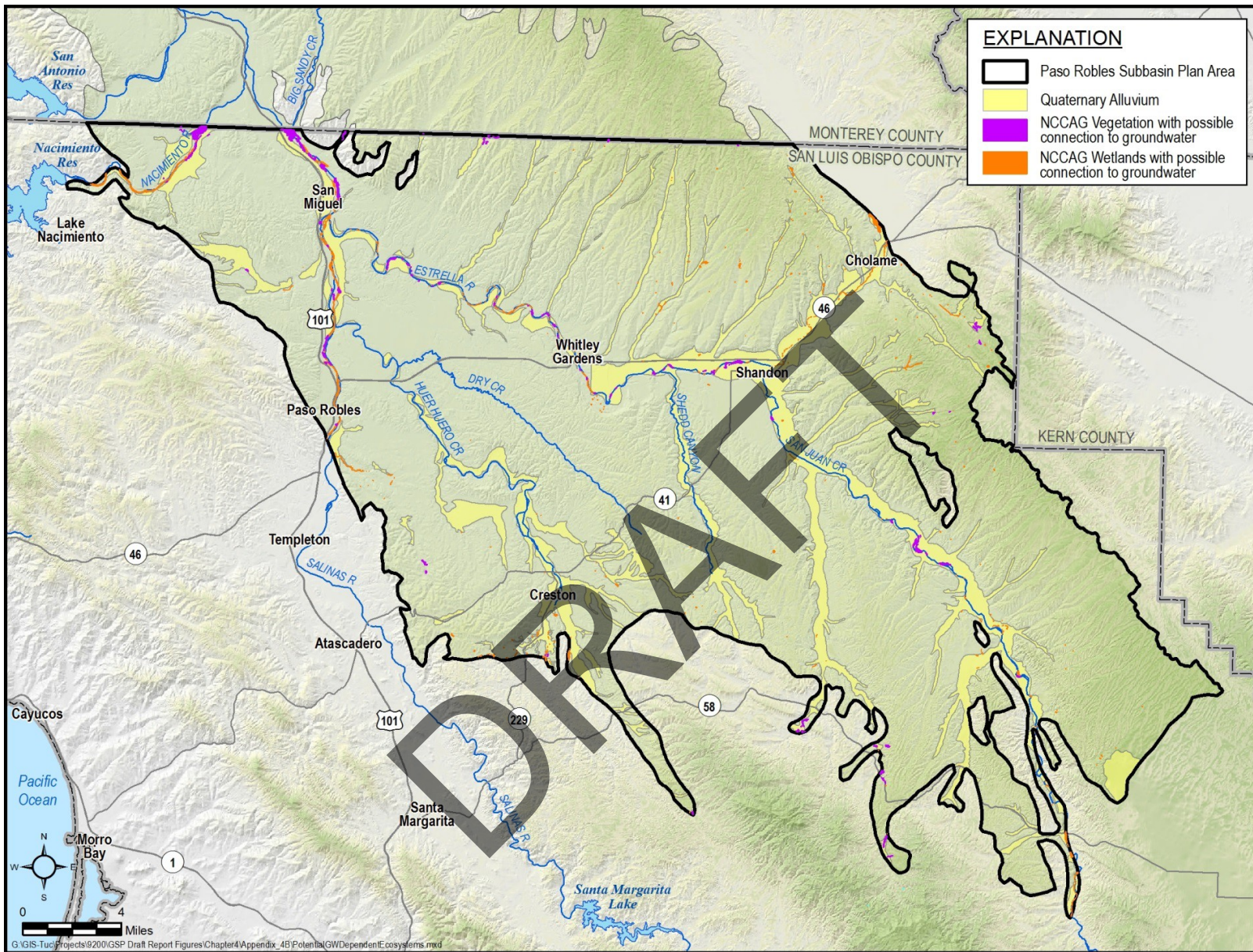


Figure B-7: Extent of Potential GDEs

REFERENCES

Rohde, M. M., S. Matsumoto, J. Howard, S. Liu, L. Riege, and E.J. Remson, 2018, Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Guidance for Preparing Groundwater Sustainability Plans: The Nature Conservancy, San Francisco, California.

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County of San Luis Obispo, Planning and Building Department, 2007, Surface geology map, accessed at <https://lib.calpoly.edu/gis/browse.jsp?by=e&e=2>

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