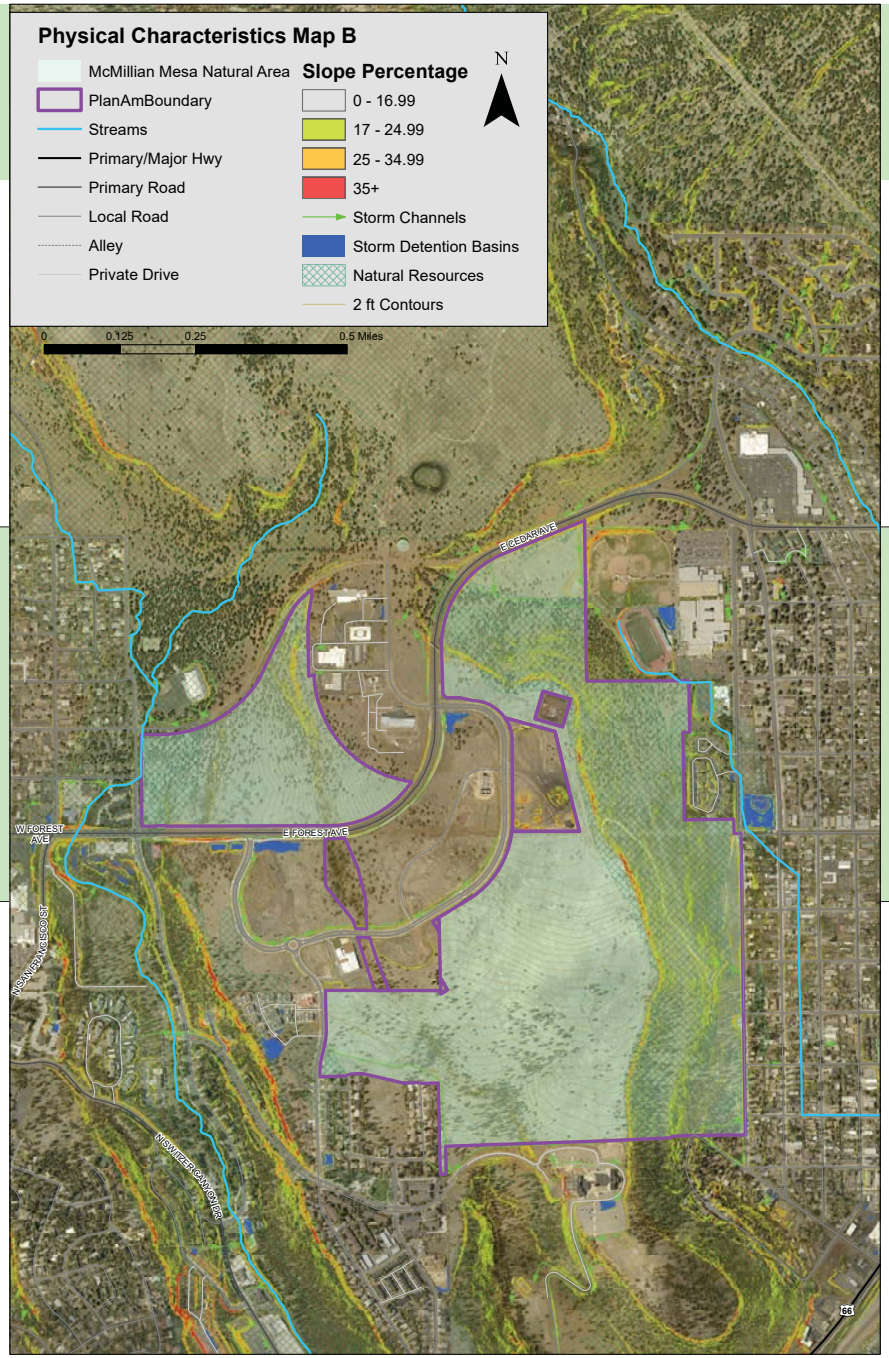
Parks and Open Space



Natural Resources

The majority of the McMillan Mesa Natural Area is a Montane grassland habitat that is known for supporting small mammals and birds of prey. Animals include prairie dog colonies and threatened birds of prey like the Mexican Spotted Owl and Northern Goshawks. Invasive grass and forb species are present through the grassland. The drought hardy invasive plants have the potential to dominate the grassland ecosystem.

Steep slopes, rocky outcrops and forest resources exist on the eastern side of the Natural Area. Dramatic viewsheds exist throughout the area and along Cedar and Forest Avenues, which are designated as Great Streets in the Regional Plan. The Area does not have significant water resources and has very little floodplain or floodway.

Open Space Use and Management

The City's Open Space Specialist is preparing a Management Plan for the use and improvements associated with this open space as part of a process separate from this Major Plan Amendment. The Buffalo Park/McMillan Mesa Natural Area complex will become the City's second largest park/open space area. Its size and connections to the Forest Service trails will enhance recreational opportunities in the area. The Natural Area will be open year-round and will provide passive outdoor recreation.

The Management Plan will be structured around improving the area. Access is provided via the FUTS from surrounding neighborhoods and via transit along NAIPTA's Blue Line. Multiple roads intersect the Natural Area for vehicular access but there is only one public parking lot at Buffalo Park. Access improvements will be evaluated. The City will manage the issue of invasive species on the mesa. The forests will be managed to achieve a forest structure that is resistant and resilient to wildfire and continues to provide ecosystem services. The Area will maintain and enhance a diversity of habitats that support native wildlife species with an emphasis on rare habitats and special-status species.

The Natural Area will be programmed to support education on the area's natural and cultural history. There can be information for visitors that introduces the native flora and wildlife via interactive walks and watchable wildlife locations. Studies have uncovered petroglyph panels and evidence of grinding slicks along the rocky outcroppings north of Cedar Ave. Portions of Cedar Ave seem to follow the Beale Wagon Rd, which was the primary access in the area from 1850 until the railroad came in the 1880s. These and other cultural resources will be managed for preservation and protection.