

PROJECT REFERENCE NO.: CUP-5044

PROJECT PLANNER: Lisa Woodburn

DATE: 1 October 1998, revised 30 October 1998

PROJECT BIOLOGIST: David L. Magney,
David Magney Environmental Consulting

PROJECT LOCATION: The proposed AirTouch Cellular site is located on the southern side of the Santa Clara River Valley on the foothills of the western portion of the Santa Susanna Mountains on Newhall Ranch property, near Piru, California, Val Verde, Calif. 7½-minute quadrangle; Latitude 34°23'42"N, Longitude 118°42'54"W; at an elevation of approximately 1,305 feet above mean sea level.

PROJECT ADDRESS: 6116 C Telegraph Road, Piru, California 93040, on Newhall Ranch property.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: The purpose of the project is to install a new telecommunications facility, including a 10x20-foot equipment building, and a 45-foot pole for antenna arrays and microwave dishes.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING: The project site occurs on a gentle, north-facing slope in a highland area of the Santa Clara River Valley on the north flank of the Santa Susanna Mountains (Oak Ridge), a east-west-trending mountain ridge that is part of the western Transverse Ranges. The AirTouch project site is approximately ½ mile south of State Route 126/Telegraph Road and east of Tapo Canyon. The vegetation types present on and in the vicinity of the property include Coastal Sage Scrub and ruderal (disturbed) grassland.

The project site is located within a disturbed dirt access road leading to and adjacent to two existing cellular phone communication facilities. Citrus orchards are also present on the Newhall Ranch property outside the project site on the generally level areas of the property. Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation occurs to the south, east, and west of the project site, and ruderal herbaceous vegetation to the north.

The vegetation of this Coastal Sage Scrub plant community includes the following: Purple Sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), Sawtooth Goldenbush (*Hazardia squarrosa*), Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), Purple Needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*), and California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). This plant association is referred to as California Sagebrush-Purple Sage Series according to the California Native Plant Society's 1995 *Manual of California Vegetation*, by John Sawyer and Todd Keeler-Wolf. (See Photo 1, attached, for an annotated photograph of the project site.)

A portion of the project site and the utility line corridor consists of ruderal (disturbed) vegetation. It is dominated by nonnative Mediterranean grasses that include Red Brome (*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*), Soft Chess Brome (*Bromus hordeaceus*), Ripgut Grass (*Bromus diandrus*), and Coastal Sage Scrub shrubs that are recolonizing the previously disturbed area. The forbs that are also present in the ruderal areas with the grasses include: Summer Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), Prickly Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), Twiggy Wreath Plant (*Stephanomeria virgata*), Common Horsetweed (*Conyza canadensis*), and Dove Weed (*Eremocarpus setigerus*). (See Photo 2, attached, for an annotated photograph of the utility line corridor habitats.)

Several special-status plant species are known to occur in the region of the project site, and the site has suitable habitat for many of these plants. The special-status plants that could occur in the vicinity of the project site include: *Antirrhinum ovatum*, *Baccharis plummerae* ssp. *plummerae*, *Calochortus catalinae*, *Calochortus plummerae*, *Galium cliftonsmithii*, *Juglans californica* ssp. *californica*, and *Polygala cornuta* ssp. *fishae*. No special-status plant species were found during the preliminary site survey; however, several of the special-status plant species expected to occur at the project site are not visible during the fall season. Seasonal surveys during the spring are necessary to determine if these plants are or are not present.

The revised project site is located within a previously disturbed area currently used for access to the two existing cellular communications facilities and contains only a few weedy nonnative plant species. The project site vegetation is of little value to wildlife; however, the adjacent areas containing natural Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation is considered a sensitive habitat; therefore, special consideration in this evaluation is warranted.

Wildlife observed during the site visit included common and special-status species typical for Coastal Sage Scrub habitats of the region, including Common Raven, American Crow, Brown Towhee, Scrub Jay, Wrentit, and Brush Rabbit.

One special-status mammal species, San Diego Desert Woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*), a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species of Special Concern, was observed onsite as evidenced by a typical midden-type stick nest in the Coastal Sage Scrub habitat. San Diego Desert Woodrat has also been observed at the Toland Road Landfill several miles to the west (between Santa Paula and Fillmore). This nest is located in intact habitat that is adjacent to the proposed development site, which would not be developed for this project.

Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation dominated by California Sagebrush is also habitat for the threatened California Coastal Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*). While no gnatcatchers were observed at the time of the survey, suitable habitat is present, with the nearest reported occurrence near Moorpark, approximately 10 miles to the southwest.

California Environmental Quality Act Environmental Checklist Form
Biological Resources
County of Ventura, Planning Division



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Maybe</u>	<u>No</u>	Discussion of Impact, Significance, and Mitigation Measures
IV. PLANT LIFE. <i>Will the proposal result in:</i>				
a) Change in the diversity of species, or number of any species of plants (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X	Natural vegetation, Coastal Sage Scrub, would be removed.
b) Reduction of the numbers of any unique, rare, or endangered species of plants?			X	Several special-status plant species occur in the region of the project site and may be present onsite. Seasonal field surveys (spring) are required to determine their presence or absence.
c) Introduction of new species of plants into an area, or in a barrier to the normal replenishment of existing species?		X		The proposed project is not expected to result in introduction of new plant species into the area, or create a barrier to normal replenishment of existing species. To prevent invasive, exotic plant introduction, any future landscaping should not include invasive, exotic plant species.
d) Reduction in acreage of any agricultural crop?			X	The proposed project would not reduce the acreage of an existing agricultural crop. The project site is currently used for grazing.
V. ANIMAL LIFE. <i>Will the proposal result in:</i>				
a) Change in the diversity of species, or numbers of any species of animals (birds; land animals, including reptiles; fish and shellfish, benthic organisms, or insects)?			X	The proposed project would slightly change/reduce the diversity of species, or numbers of any species of animals in the Santa Clara River Valley area. The reduction would be slight because the project site is small.
b) Reduction of the numbers of any unique, rare, or endangered species of animals?		X		The proposed project would result in the reduction of at least one unique, rare, or endangered species of animals. In particular, the project would eliminate habitat for and one nest of the Desert Woodrat, and suitable habitat for the California Coastal Gnatcatcher.
c) Introduction of new species of animals into an area, or result in a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?			X	The proposed project is not expected to result in the introduction of new species of animals, or result in a barrier to migration or movement of animals.
d) Deterioration to existing fish or wildlife habitat?			X	The proposed project is expected to deteriorate existing fish or wildlife habitat because native vegetation will be removed.

MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECT

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Maybe</u>	<u>No</u>
a. Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of major periods of California's history or prehistory?		X	
b. Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals?			X
c. Does the project have environmental effects which are individually limited but are cumulatively considerable?		X	
d. Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?			X
<u>Alternatives to the Proposed Action.</u> Does the project require the discussion and evaluation of a range of reasonable alternatives which could feasibly attain the basic objectives of the project?			X

Mitigation Recommendations:

Installation of additional utilities along the current utility line could facilitate invasion of the natural vegetation in the area by additional invasive exotic plant species, or expand the area dominated by these undesirable plant species. To mitigate for this adverse impact, disturbed areas should be seeded, planted, or hydroseeded with native plant species only. The seeds used for revegetation purposes should be collected from sources within the Santa Clara River Valley region to maintain and protect the genetic integrity of the local native plants. This revegetation will also reduce potential for erosion of the disturbed areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYST:

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

I find the proposed project will NOT have a significant adverse environmental effect, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.

X I find that although the proposed project could have a significant adverse environmental effect, there would not be a significant effect in this case if the mitigation measures described herein are included in the project, A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.

I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant adverse environmental effect, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT should be prepared.


Signature

30 October 1998
Date

David L. Magney
Initial Study Preparer