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

PROJECT REFERENCE NO.: CUP-5233 – Operating Engineers – Lockwood Valley	**PROJECT PLANNER:** Scott Ellison
DATE: 18 April 2002 Site visit conducted in 1 April 2002	**PROJECT BIOLOGIST:** Carl G.Thelander (BioResource Consultants) and David L. Magney

PROJECT LOCATION: southern Lockwood Valley

PROJECT ADDRESS: APN 005-010-08, 09; 055-020-01, 02, Lockwood Valley Road south of Boy Scout Camp Road and north of Thorn Meadows Road

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: Develop training facility for use of heavy earthmoving equipment on approximately 50 acres of a 315-acre parcel.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING:

The project site contains natural vegetation comprised of several plant communities and associations, including: Great Basin Sagebrush Scrub, Cushion Buckwheat Scrub, Wildflower Field (dominated by annual buckwheat species and other native annuals), Arroyo Willow Scrub, Freshwater Marsh, Scalebroom Scrub, Pinyon-Juniper Woodland, and Yellow Pine Forest.

The landscape is varies but generally gently rolling, dissected by streambeds and gullies, small hills, and flats. An old illegal dump occurs in an intermittent streambed along the western edge of the project site and extends from near the existing driveway northward towards Lockwood Creek.

Panoramic view E from small hill W of CUP site. 1 April 2002

Numerous special-status plant species are present onsite (see comments section).

IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES:	PROJECT IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT[1]				CUMULATIVE IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT			
What level of impact will the proposal have on:	**N**	**LS**	**PS-M**	**PS**	**N**	**LS**	**PS-M**	**PS**
A. Endangered, Threatened, or Rare Species				X				X
B. Wetland Habitat			X				X	
C. Coastal Habitat	X				X			
D. Migration Corridors			X				X	
E. Locally Important Species/Communities				X				X
Will the proposal:								
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, ore regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?				X				X
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?				X				X
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetland as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?			X				X	
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?			X				X	
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?				X				X
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	X				X			

[1] N = No Impact; LS = Less Than Significant; PS-M = Potentially Significant Impact Unless Mitigation Incorporated; PS = Potentially Significant Impact.

Additional comments or explanations:

Rincon Consultants conducted a preliminary biological resources investigation of the project site in July 2001. Rincon reported 75 vascular plant taxa onsite. Of these, 28 taxa (37%) are rare in Ventura County, with ten or fewer populations in the County, or otherwise listed as a special-status species. Of these, some represent new records either for Ventura County or for Lockwood Valley. In either case, their presence onsite is significant. Impacts to these taxa would be considered a significant impact due to their rarity in Ventura County, which include:

Camissonia micrantha, *Carex douglasii*, *Castilleja linariifolia*, *Ceanothus cordulatus*, *Cirsium occidentale* var. *venustum*, *Eleocharis macrostachya*, *Epilobium brachycarpum*, *Epilobium canum* ssp. *latifolium*, *Eriogonum hooveri* (misidentified as *E. inflatum* by Rincon), *Eriogonum nudum* vars, *Eriogonum spergulinum* ssp. *reddingianum*, *Eriogonum umbellatum* sspp., *Euphorbia palmeri* var. *palmeri*, *Gilia achilleifolia* ssp. *multicaulis*, *Juncus phaeocephalus*, *Lessingia tenuis*, *Lomatium* spp., *Lupinus breweri* var. *bryoides*, *Malacothamnus fremontii* (identified as *M. orbiculatus* by Rincon), *Mentzelia congesta*, *Mucronea californica* var. *californica*, *Muhlenbergia rigens*, *Oenothera deltoides* (represents a new record for Ventura County), *Orobanche californica* ssp. *feudgei*, *Horkelia rydbergii* (identified as *Potentilla bolanderi* var. *parryi* by Rincon), *Podiemelum californicum* (identified as *Psoralea californica* by Rincon), *Quercus douglasii*, and *Quercus turbinella*.

Many plants are not identified completely to subspecies or variety levels, which is necessary to determine their complete identity and if they are rare or not. Taxonomy used by Rincon was often not current or consistent with currently accepted nomenclature. The botanical field survey was conducted only during late July, which may have precluded detection of spring or late-summer flowering taxa. Additional seasonal field surveys are recommended during these seasons to ensure complete coverage of potential impacts to the flora, which Rincon also recommended. It is apparent that Rincon botanists did not contact other local knowledgeable botanists as part of their assessment, rather it appears they relied simply on the CNDDB report, which is not current and does not track many special-status plant species rare in Ventura County.

No indication or site mapping of the flora was provided in the Rincon report; therefore, it is not possible to determine for certain whether the proposed project would directly impact the rare plants reported to occur on the 315-acre parcel, even though only a portion of the site is proposed for development or habitat alteration. Based on the site visit on 1 April 2002 by David Magney for this Initial Study, several of the plants considered rare in Ventura County were observed onsite, many of which occur within the proposed disturbance area:

Allium sp. (could be one of five rare species)
Artemisia tridentata var. *vaseyanna*

- *Camissonia micrantha*
- *Castilleja linariifolia*
- *Cirsium occidentale* var. *venustum*
- *Epilobium brachycarpum*
- *Equisetum arvense*
- *Eriastrum sparsiflorum*
- *Eriogonum heermanni* var. *heermanni*
- *Eriogonum hooveri*
- *Eriogonum nudum* var.

- *Eriogonum spergulinum* ssp. *reddingianum*
- *Eriogonum umbellatum* spp. *munzii*
- *Eriophyllum confertiflorum* var. *laxiflorum* (first and only known occurrence in Ventura County)
- *Euphorbia palmeri* var. *palmeri*
- *Gilia achilleifolia* ssp. *multicaulis*
- *Horkelia rydbergii*
  Juncus rugulosus
- *Lessingia tenuis*
  Lomatium utriculatum
  Lupinus breweri var. *bryoides*
  Mentzelia congesta
  Oenothera deltoides (first and only known occurrence in Ventura County)
  Purshia tridentata var. *glandulosa*
  Swertia parryi (identified as *Swertia neglecta* by Rincon)
  Tauschia parishii

Other rare plant species are expected to occur in the project impact area; however, seasonal surveys will be needed to determine where they occur onsite.

The project site contains many special-status vascular plant species. Some of these rare plants are only known in Ventura County from the project site, representing a significant biological resource. *Eriogonum kennedyi* and *Eriogonum wrightii* ssp. *subscaposum* form low, dense mat-forming shrubs that represent a rare plant community, referred to here as Cushion Buckwheat Scrub. Cushion Buckwheat Scrub occurs on gravelly sandy loam soils resembling the Pebble Plains of the San Bernardino Mountains in the Big Bear area. The buckwheat plants that dominate this plant community are likely quite old, some possibly over 100 years old.

No assessment of the lichen flora has been made of the project site. Several species of lichens were observed onsite, primarily crustose-type species growing on rock. A survey of the lichen flora is recommended to determine if any of the lichen species present are considered rare by the California Lichen Society.

The Rincon report appear to fairly and adequately addresses the wildlife resources of the property. Several sensitive species may occur on site and additional field surveys are needed to determine their use of the site, if any.

This dump should be assessed for hazardous wastes and cleaned up as the dump materials may adversely impact biological resources onsite and downstream.

Recommendations:

We recommend that seasonal field surveys for sensitive plants and wildlife be conducted. The botanical survyes should be floristic in nature, and conducted according to CNPS document and survey guidelines (available at www.cnps.org) to determine the location and extent of all special-status plant species present onsite. Such surveys are needed to determine which species will be impacted by the proposed project. All occurrences of each special-status species should be mapped and population size determined. Surveys should also be conducted in portions of the property that may be considered as alternative project sites, since one or more special-status plant and wildlife species are known or expected to occur within the currently proposed project site.

Botanical field surveys should be conducted during May, late-June or early July, and late-August to early September to properly identify and map all special-status species onsite. Wildlife surveys also needed to be correctly timed to maximize the likelihood of encountering the targeted species. Where appropriate, established survey protocols should be followed. We recommend consultations with the USFWS and Calif. Dept. Fish and Game for specific information on the survey needs.

A survey of the lichen and bryophyte floras should be conducted to determine if any lichen or bryophyte species present onsite are considered to be rare or of local significance.

All wetland areas should be classified and mapped according to County General Plan policies. A simple delineation for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulatory purposes should also be conducted, but should only be considered a subset of the wetlands present onsite.

An assessment of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts the project will have on onsite wetlands should be performed, such as by using a hydrogeomorphic assessment model, to determine project-related changes in one or more wetland functions.

Since transplantation of rare plants has usually failed as mitigation, avoidance of the impact is recommended. Alternative sites for the proposed project may be feasible on the 315-acre parcel; however, surveys of all suitable alternative sites should be conducted as part of the alternatives analysis.

Natural vegetation should be classified, mapped, and quantified at the plant association level and sensitive or unique communities identified. All wetland habitats and the "Cushion Buckwheat Scrub" communities should be included in this analysis.

D. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE Based on the information contained with Section B6:	**Yes/Maybe**	**No**
1. 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	
2. Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals? (A short-term impact on the environment is one that occurs in a relatively brief, definitive period of time while long-term impacts will endure well into the future.)		X
3. Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? "Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effect of other current projects, and the effect of probable future projects. (Several projects may have relatively small individual impacts on two or more resources, but that total of those impacts on the environment is significant.)	X	
4. Does the project have environmental effects that will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?		X

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT:

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

[ ]	I find the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.
[ ]	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environmental, there would not be a significant effect in this case because the mitigation measure(s) described in section C of the Initial Study will be applied to the project, A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.
[ ]	I find the proposed project, individually and/or cumulatively, MAY have a significant effect on the environmental, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
[X]	I find that the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environmental, but at least on e effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in and earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
[ ]	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

(805) 646-3932 1 May 2002