COUNTY OF VENTURA
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: October 8, 2002
Requestor: Craig Malin
Project: CUP 5272
Field Study: ☒ Yes ☐ No
Justification: sensitive flora known in the vicinity

A. CHECKLIST

Biological Resources Issues	Project Impact Degree of Effect				Cumulative Impact Degree of Effect			
	N	LS	PS-M	PS	N	LS	PS-M	PS
a. endangered, threatened, or rare species	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
b. wetland habitat	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
c. coastal habitat	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
d. migration corridors	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
e. locally important species/communities	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐

Degree of Effect Explanation
N= None
LS = Less than significant effect
PS-M = Significant effect; Mitigation incorporated for a ND
PS = Potentially Significant effect; EIR required

B. DISCUSSION

The project consists of the periodic use of 50 of 100 acres of open land as an outdoor paintball park located on the south side of Tierra Rejada Road, just west of 1250 Tierra Rejada Road west of the Simi Valley area, Ventura County, California. The northern portion of the site would be used for the park. Elements of the planned use include: discharge of water soluble, biodegradable and non-toxic paintballs; a 8 x 32 foot mobile office trailer; a 8 x 30 foot storage container; parking for 80 vehicles in an open lot (one acre graded); barbed wire fencing around the perimeter of the property; generator and air compressor at center of property; rentals, refreshments, and staging area with picnic tables and cleaning supplies; and portable toilets. According to the applicant, approximately 60 people per day will utilize the site, on weekends and holidays. The pertinent Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) indicates that paintballs are made of soft gelatin capsules containing colored liquid and are non-hazardous (US Dept of the Interior BLM, March 2002). However, a search of the Internet indicates that some paintballs may contain small amounts of heavy metals and ethylene glycol (the later to prevent freezing). Metals and ethylene glycol have the potential for toxic effects to animals.

A search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) via the RAREFIND2 software (September 2002) listed several special-status species that could be present within the communities onsite. Attachment A includes a map showing the results of the CNDDB 10-mile radius search for sensitive biological resources and a table of the resource-listing status of these

species

The USDA Soil Survey for the Ventura Area, CA (1970) was reviewed for soil types. The Simi Valley West USGS topographic quadrangle (1969) was also reviewed prior to the site visit. The onsite elevation ranges from approximately 680 to 900 feet above mean sea level. The northern and eastern portion of the property at the lower elevational range gently slopes toward the center of the property. An outcropping hillside in the southeastern quadrant steeply slopes to all sides.

The project site is dominated by non-native grassland, characterized by oat (*Avena* sp.) and brome (*Bromus* sp.) grasses and non-native forbs that were dry and brittle at the time of the site visit. Remnant stalks of non-native prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), mustard and fennel dominate the site to a height of approximately four feet above the grass ground cover. Narrow-leaved milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) was in bloom and seed at the time of the site visit. The project area contains scattered coastal sage scrub, characterized by coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis* ssp. *consanguinea*), coastal sagebrush (*Artemesia californica*), and bush sunflower (*Encelia californica*). The project site also contains non-native pepper trees along the northern border and along a drainage through the center of the property. A knoll in the southeastern quadrant contains outcroppings of rock that appear to be part of the Conejo volcanics. The knoll is dominated by sage scrub including sagebrush, sage (*Salvia* sp.), and deerweed along with cactus (*Optunia* sp.).

The site exhibits an uneven terrain and the soil was dry and cracked at the time of the site visit. Culverts exist at the southwest and northeast borders. A blue line stream runs east to west through the site, as observed on the U.S. Geological Society (USGS) Simi Valley West topographical quadrangle map (1969) and verified onsite. Waters of the U.S., under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) jurisdiction, appear to exist onsite in the drainage, although it is not known whether waters would meet the three parameters necessary for wetland determination under USACE definition: hydric soil, hydrophytic vegetation and hydrology. No water was observed in the drainage. Habitat within the drainage area is as stated above. Per the 1969 USGS map, ephemeral ponding of water occurs within the site.

The grassland provides suitable habitat for several common animal species. Mammals observed directly or by sign (track, scat, burrow, etc.) were cottontail, mule deer, and coyote. Birds seen were mockingbird, red-tailed hawk, California towhee, and California quail. Western fence lizard, gopher snake and western rattlesnake are expected to be common onsite.

No sensitive wildlife species were observed during the October 7, 2002 site visit, although habitat exists for several of the wildlife species listed by the CNDDB (Attachment A). Sensitive wildlife species that may utilize the project area, include: western spadefoot toad in wetlands, burrowing owl in cracks or burrows in grassland, San Diego desert woodrat in rock outcrops, and coastal western whiptail throughout the site. The scrub within the playfield areas is scattered and limited and does not appear be suitable habitat for southern California rufous-crowned sparrow or California gnatcatcher. The knoll area provides suitable nesting habitat for the rufous-crowned sparrow, which is known to occur on adjacent property to the south.

No sensitive plant species listed by CNDDB (Attachment A) were observed onsite, although the October site visit was outside of the blooming period when most of the species potentially onsite would be most obvious. Sensitive plant species have the potential to occur within grassland onsite, include: Braunton's milk-vetch, Plummer's mariposa lily, southern tarplant (wetlands also), round-leaved filaree, and Lyon's pentachaeta. Sensitive plant species that have the potential to occur on volcanic outcrops onsite include: Santa Monica Mountains dudleya, Conejo dudleya, Verity's dudleya, Blockman's dudleya, and Conejo buckwheat. Conejo dudleya is known to occur to the southwest (Biological Initial Study, Tentative PM 5145, June 1998). Additionally, Santa Susana tarplant has the potential to occur on sandstone outcrops, rayless ragwort has the potential to occur in scrub, and California Orcutt grass may occur in wetland habitat. Catalina mariposa lily (*Calochortus catalinae*), a list 4 California Native Plant Society plant species, is known to occur to the southwest in grassland (Biological Initial Study, Tentative PM 5145, June 1998), and has the potential to occur onsite.

a. **Endangered, threatened or rare species.** Improvements to the property or the use of the site for recreational purposes may result in the loss or disturbance of the sensitive species listed above or the loss of habitat supporting those species. Although limited habitat for the San Diego desert woodrat exists onsite, no woodrat stick nests were observed, therefore, the desert woodrat likely does not nest within the proposed disturbance area and the project would not result in significant impacts to this species. Spadefoot toad and burrowing owl are California species of concern and coastal western whiptail is a federal species of concern. Due to the availability of alternative nesting and foraging areas within the region for these three species, loss of habitat would be considered less than significant due to project impacts. Burrowing owl is additionally protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and if nesting burrowing owl is observed onsite, the lost or disturbance of nesting birds would be considered significant. Construction restrictions would apply to avoid nest destruction during the nesting season. Therefore, mitigation is suggested to protect burrowing owl, if present.

b. **Wetland Habitat.** The proposed project may adversely affect waters of the U.S., and/or wetlands if present, through grading associated with the parking lot. Additionally, paint used for recreation onsite may adversely affect water quality from direct discharge or surface flow into the drainage. Additionally, the contents of the pellets may be a pollutant to waters. Therefore, mitigation is suggested to protect waters, as stated below.

c. **Coastal Habitat.** The proposed improvements are not located in the coastal zone. No mitigation is required.

d. **Migration Corridors.** Construction and operational disturbance (noise, dust, human presence) would occur during daylight hours and would not form a barrier to wildlife movement. Therefore, project impacts to migration corridors are considered less than significant. The project would not contribute to cumulative impacts on migration corridors. No mitigation is required.

e **Locally important Species/Communities.** The project may result in the loss of Catalina mariposa lily, although due to the availability of alternative habitat within the region for this species, loss of grassland would be considered less than significant due to project impacts. No locally important communities occur in the immediate project area, therefore, the project would not result in adverse impacts or contribute to cumulative impacts to locally important species or communities. No mitigation is required.

C. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

	Yes/Maybe	No
1. Does the project have the potential to significantly 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?	☒	☐
2. Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals?	☒	☐
3. Does the project have impacts, which are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable?	☒	☐

D. MITIGATION MEASURES

Recommended ☒ Required for Negative Declaration ☐

Burrowing Owl. The CDFG has specific protocols for dealing with burrowing owls, with the goal of protecting the birds along with their burrowing habitats. To avoid potentially significant impacts the following mitigation measures are included:

A field survey for evidence of burrowing owl residence and/or breeding should be conducted immediately prior to the start of construction;

- If burrowing owls are found, CDFG must be consulted regarding the appropriate mitigation measures;
  If during the non-breeding season (September 1 – January 31) a burrow is found unoccupied, it may be collapsed. If a burrow is found occupied, but does not contain a nest, it may be collapsed after it is certain that the owl is out of the burrow (burrow should be carefully hand excavated).
- If a burrow can be avoided, then no disturbance should occur within 50 meters of occupied burrows during the nonbreeding season of September 1 through January 31 or within 75 meters during the breeding season of February 1 through August 31.

With the incorporation of the above mitigation measures, impacts to special status species would be less than significant.

Federally listed bird species. Due to the potential for California gnatcatcher to occur in the vicinity, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) should be contacted. This contact should be made in order to confirm that USFWS agrees with the conclusion that scrub habitat in the play area does not appear to be suitable for this federally protected bird species.

Sensitive Flora. Surveys for sensitive plant species should be performed during the blooming period, when species potentially onsite may be more easily observed and may be identified to species. If sensitive species occur onsite, they should be avoided and fenced to prevent disturbance. If avoidance is not feasible, it should be determined whether replacement mitigation is acceptable for the species in question and a habitat restoration plan should be prepared.

b. **Wetlands.** The following measures shall be included to protect waters and wetland habitat and water quality on and offsite.

The applicant should provide the Material Safety Data Sheets for the manufacturer of the paint to be used onsite. Only non-toxic paintballs that contain no metals or ethylene glycol shall be used. Only paintballs that meet these specifications shall be purchased and available at the site for use. Players may not purchase and use their own paintballs.

A buffer of 50 feet shall be maintained around waters and wetlands onsite. No project activity shall occur within this area.

If localized erosion control is necessary, native plant species or sterile wheat grass should be used. If any federal or state candidate, or federal or state listed plant species are encountered in the proposed project or buffer area, it should be buffered and fenced from the activity.

- Organic matter (litter, duff, and small limbs) should be raked to cover areas of exposed soil resulting from the recreational activity. This would be completed at the end of the permitted use season. Activity would not be allowed when conditions are wet and muddy, which could result in heavy disturbance of the soil surface.

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FROM A BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Negative Declaration ☐ Mitigated Negative Declaration ☒ EIR Required ☐

Reviewer: Kathy Frye

Date: 10/8/02

Kathy Frye
Senior Biologist for
Rincon Consultants, Inc
Phone: 641-1000 Ext. 19

October 8, 2002

F. REFERENCES

California Department of Fish and Game, California Natural Diversity Database. September 2002. RAREFIND2 software.

California Department of Fish and Game. October 2002. *State and Federally Listed Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Plants of California.* Natural Heritage Division, Plant Conservation Program

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California Department of Fish and Game. July 2002. *Special Plants List.* Natural Heritage Division, Natural Diversity Data Base.

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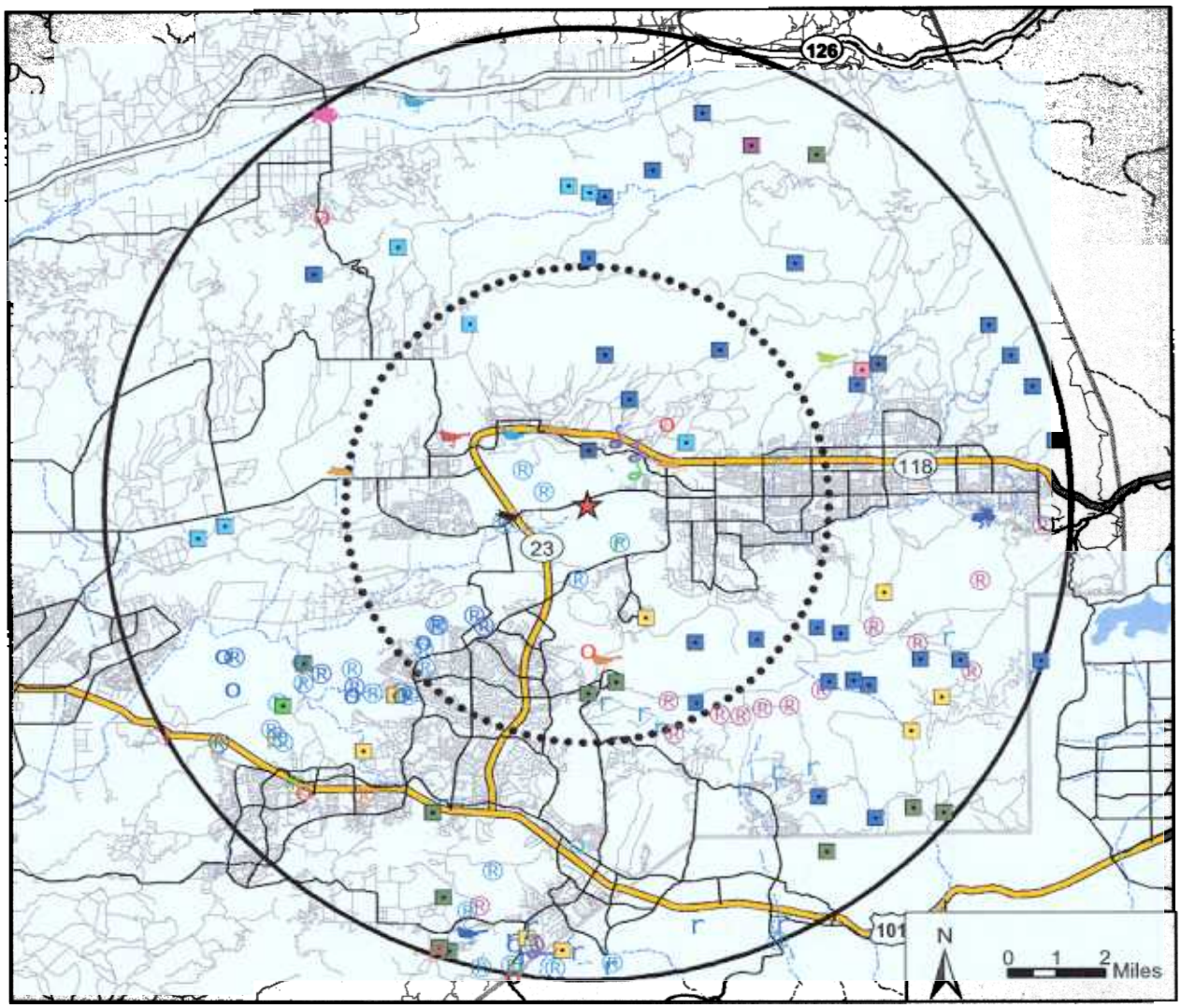
Dale, Nancy. 1986. Flowering Plants, The Santa Monica Mountains Coastal and Chaparral Regions of Southern California. Capra Press. Santa Barbara.

Holland, Robert F. October 1986. *Preliminary Descriptions of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California.* California Department of Fish and Game, Nongame Heritage Program. 156 pgs.

USGS. 1969. Simi Valley West Topographical Quadrangle Map.

US Dept of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM). March 2002. *Environmental Assessment for the Special Recreational Permit Application – Commercial Paintball Operation (EA # OR110-02-10).*

Zeiner, D., W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr., and K.E. Mayer. May 1988. *California's Wildlife.* California Statewide Wildlife Habitat Relationship System, Volumes I, II, & III. California Department of Fish and Game.



Source: CNDDB, June 2002.

Ventura Co. RMA CUP 5272
5-mile radius
10-mile radius
97-2799_simi

AAABF01030, WESTERN SPADEFOOT
ABNSB10010, BURROWING OWL
ABPAU08010, BANK SWALLOW
ABPBJ08080, CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER
ABPBW01114, LEAST BELL'S VIREO
ABPBX91091, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA RUFOUS-CROWNED SPARROW
AFCJB13120, ARROYO CHUB
AMAFF08041, SAN DIEGO DESERT WOODRAT
ARACJ02140, COASTAL WESTERN WHIPTAIL
ARADB36160, TWO-STRIPED GARTER SNAKE
CTT32310CA, CISMONTANE ALKALI MARSH
CTT61300CA, SOUTHERN RIPARIAN FOREST
CTT61310CA, SOUTHERN COAST LIVE OAK RIPARIAN FOREST
CTT62400CA, SOUTHERN SYCAMORE ALDER RIPARIAN WOODLAND
CTT63300CA, SOUTHERN RIPARIAN SCRUB
CTT63320CA, SOUTHERN WILLOW SCRUB
CTT71130CA, VALLEY OAK WOODLAND
CTT71210CA, CALIFORNIA WALNUT WOODLAND
ICMAL76010, RIVERSIDE FAIRY SHRIMP
PDAST4R0J0, SANTA SUSANA TARPLANT
PDAST4R0P4, SOUTHERN TARPLANT
PDAST60080, LYON'S PENTACHAETA
PDAST8H090, RAYLESS RAGWORT
PDCRA04016, CONEJO DUDLEYA
PDCRA04051, BLOCHMAN'S DUDLEYA
PDCRA040A7, SANTA MONICA MTNS. DUDLEYA
PDCRA040J0, VERITY'S DUDLEYA
PDFAB0F1G0, BRAUNTON'S MILK-VETCH
PDGER01070, ROUND-LEAVED FILAREE
PDPGN081G0, CONEJO BUCKWHEAT
PDRAN0B1B1, DUNE LARKSPUR
PMLIL0D150, PLUMMER'S MARIPOSA LILY
PMPOA4G010, CALIFORNIA ORCUTT GRASS

Sensitive Elements Reported by the California Natural Diversity Database