COUNTY OF VENTURA
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: December 2, 1998
Requestor: Scott Ellison
Project: Tentative PM-5166 and Zone Change Z-2927

Field Study: ☒ Yes ☐ No
Justification: Project site located in an area known to contain sensitive plant and animal species.

A. CHECKLIST

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
S = Significant effect; MND or EIR required
U = Unknown; EIR required

B. DISCUSSION

The project site lies on a hillside in the Tierra Rejada Valley. Most of the southern and eastern portion of the site has recently been cleared of vegetation preparatory to housing construction (Figure 1). A June 1, 1998 survey and Biological Initial Study by Rincon Consultants on the adjacent parcel (PM5145) indicates that the project vicinity is vegetated with primarily non-native annual grassland and this was the probable vegetation type at the site prior to grading. During the November 25, 1998 survey it was observed that the northern portion of the project site is dominated by shrubs and grassland, including purple sage (Salvia leucophylla), goldenbush (Hazardia squarossa), California sagebrush (Artemisia californica) and wild oats (Avena sp.), as is the case with the adjacent parcel. The area has been used in the past for grazing and exotic plants are common at the site, including black and summer mustard, ripgut and red brome, hare barley, hood canary grass, cocklebur, yellow star thistle (tocalote), storksbill, prickly lettuce, bull thistle, and horehound. Although past the blooming season and not evident during the November survey, the June 1, 1998, survey noted that on the adjacent parcel near rock outcroppings, native wildflowers were observed, including blue dicks, fiddleneck, phacelia, goldfields, fascicled tarweed, plantain, blow-wives, lupine, and dwarf bladder clover. It was also noted in the June survey that the adjacent site had scattered native grasses, including purple needlegrass (Nassella pulchra). The majority of the project site was graded prior to the November field visit and remaining grasses appeared to consist of primarily

annual grasses. Summer to fall-blooming species observed in the November survey include the native California fushia (Epilobium canum) and cudweed (Lessingia filaginifolia) and the exotic doveweed (Eremocarpus setigerus). Spikemoss and lichens are common on the rocky outcroppings throughout the site. No significant wetland vegetation was observed at the site.

The project site contains outcroppings of Conejo volcanics on the northern portion that provide suitable habitat for several federally threatened and endangered species, in particular, the endangered Lyon's pentachaeta (Pentachaeta lyonii) and threatened Conejo live-forever (Dudleya abramsii spp. parva). The pentachaeta and Conejo dudleya were not found at the site during the November 1998 field survey. Conejo dudleya is described by Jepson (Hickman, 1993) as a vernal species, blooming and having leaves only in the spring. The fall survey was performed at the wrong time of year to detect Conejo dudleya. The volcanic rock outcroppings on site provide sufficient habitat and Conejo dudleya has been located on adjacent parcels to the west and east therefore, it is likely that this species is within the project site. Figure 1 shows the expected onsite locations of Conjeo dudleya and Figure 2 shows the known locations of the dudleya on PM5145 to the west. It is probable that grading done on Parcel 2 has already disturbed rock outcroppings. Since the areas onsite are exposed to additional land clearance such as has already occurred on the southern and eastern part of the site, the project as proposed could have a significant project and cumulative effect on the threatened Conejo dudleya. In addition, Catalina mariposa-lily (Calochortus catalinae), a List 4 plant as indicated in the CDFG Special Plant List, is also present on the adjacent parcel in the outcrops and scattered through the grassland.

The rock outcroppings onsite also provide habitat for nonvascular plants. Nonvascular plants include lower plant forms such as mosses, liverworts, and lichens. According to the Bridle Ridge Project EIR (1998), little is known about special-status lichen species, largely because much is still unknown about the distribution of California lichens. Lichens are pioneer plants that are adapted to sterile substrates, and help the decomposition process. The saxicolous (rock-loving) lichen flora, found primarily on the numerous rock outcrops of the project site, appears to be relatively rich based on the coverage and multitude of lichen colors observed onsite. Lichens are segregated on each rock outcrop or boulder according to microhabitat requirements, including angle of incidence (to the sun), amount of shade, relative moisture gradient, and other related factors, some of which may not be known. Therefore, disruption of rocks by grading or movement can alter the habitat that allowed the lichen or liverwort to exist in that location. Grading and disruption of rocks containing lichens and liverworts has already occurred on the southern and eastern portions of the site. The area where Conejo dudleya is expected at the northern portion of the site currently has intact lichen-rich rock outcroppings and the area was not graded at the time of the November 1998 field visit.

The grassland habitat provides suitable habitat for several common animal species. Mammals observed directly or by sign (track, scat, burrow, etc.) were cottontail, California meadow mouse, pocket gopher, mule deer, and horse. Birds seen were white-tailed kite, mockingbird, mourning dove, grasshopper sparrow, Anna's hummingbird, turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, raven, meadowlark, and California towhee. The June 1998 survey on the adjacent parcel additionally noted coyote, lesser goldfinch, cliff and barn swallows, horned lark and California quail. Western fence lizard and gopher snake observed in July were not seen in November, possibly due to cooler temperatures during the November field visit. Western rattlesnake is

expected to be common, though it was not observed. The California horned lark had previously been listed as a sensitive species (CDFG, 1994, Special Animals), but is no longer considered so due to improving population levels. The white-tailed kite is a California Fully Protected (FP) species and a Federal Species of Concern (FSC). The grassland onsite is part of the kite's winter foraging habitat, but due to the lack of trees, no sufficient breeding habitat exists onsite. Sensitive species potentially at the site, but not observed include loggerhead shrike and various bat species. Only the loggerhead would potentially breed at the site. The proposed project in itself may eliminate a few breeding sites for this species, but would not result in a substantial population loss. On a cumulative basis, the project represents an incremental loss of the habitat that supports these species, but on a regional basis, the amount of acreage loss is less than significant.

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 ☒

The following mitigation measures are required to reduce the potential for significant impacts to the threatened Conejo dudleya and additionally Lyons pentachaeta and Catalina mariposa-lily.

1. A spring survey of the project site shall be performed during the blooming season of the Conejo dudleya (May-June), Lyons pentachaeta (March- Aug.) and Catalina mariposa-lily (Feb.-May). The ideal time for the survey would be during the month of May as all three blooming periods overlap at that time. If the species are found onsite, Mitigation Measure 2 shall be implemented. Prior to the spring survey, the site shall not be graded. Limited grazing is allowable, at no more than one horse or cow per 5 acres. Sheep or goats should not be permitted to graze within the area mapped in Figure 1.

2. If a spring survey is not performed or if the survey is performed and the species in Mitigation Measure 1, above, are located onsite, the land containing the known threatened plant populations shall either be conveyed through title or by fee easment to a conservation agency, such as the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency, or it shall be fenced and deed restricted from future development prior to sale. Limited grazing is allowable, at no more than one horse or cow per 5 acres. Sheep or goats should not be permitted to graze within the fenced conservation area.

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FROM A BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

EIR Required ☐ Negative Declaration ☒

Reviewer: Kathleen Freyer Date: 12/2/98

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F. REFERENCES

California Department of Fish and Game (July 1997a). *Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Plants of California*. 14 pgs. Natural Heritage Division, Plant Conservation Program

California Department of Fish and Game (July 1997b). *Endangered and Threatened Animals of California*. 11 pgs. Natural Heritage Division, Natural Diversity Data Base.

California Department of Fish and Game (July 1997c). *Special Plants List*. 112 pgs. Natural Heritage Division, Natural Diversity Data Base.

California Department of Fish and Game (August 1994). *Special Animals.* 28 pgs.

Hickman, J. (1993). *The Jepson Manual; Higher Plants of California.* University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

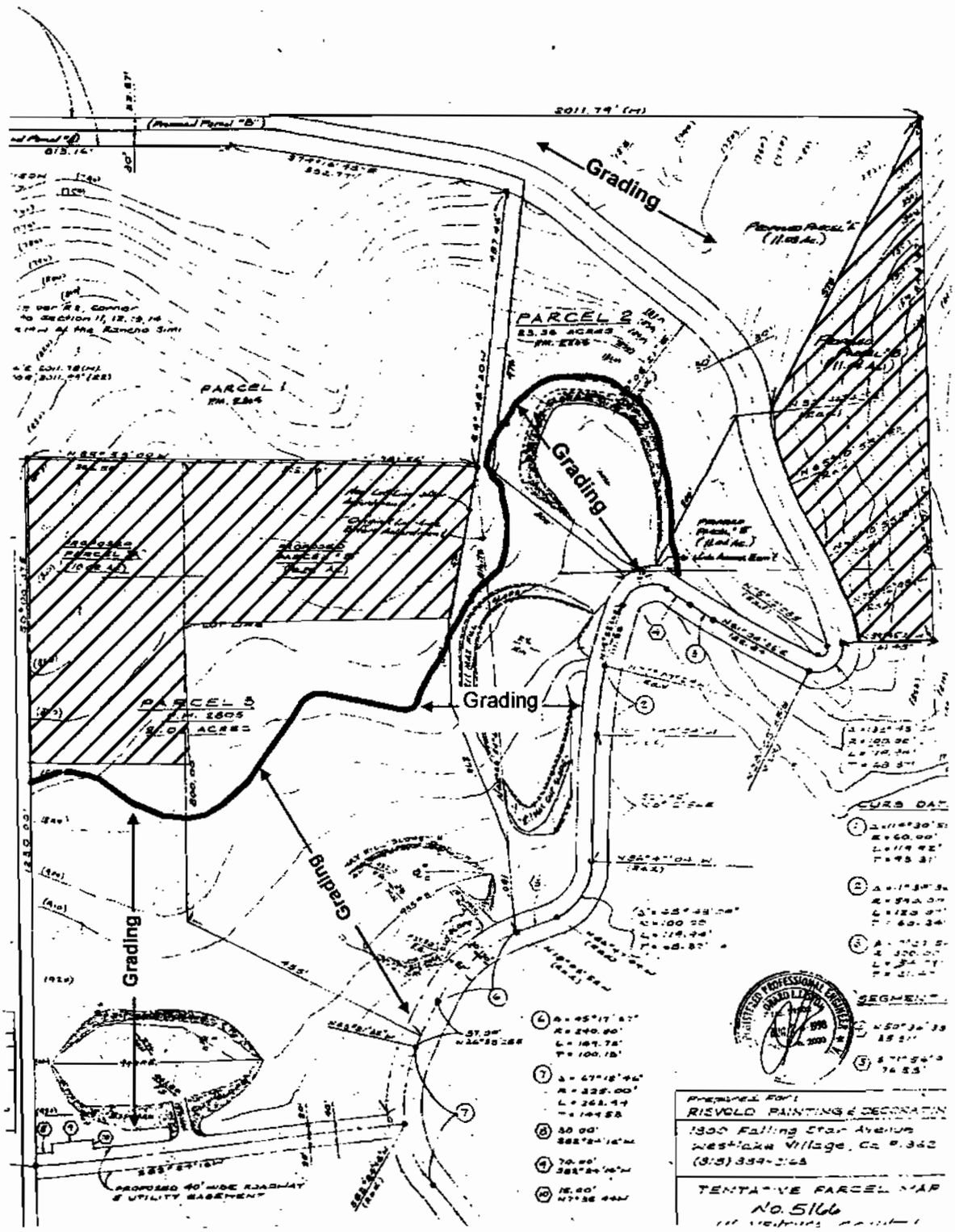
Holland, Robert F. (October 1986). *Preliminary Descriptions of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California.* California Department of Fish and Game, Nongame Heritage Program. 156 pgs.

Rincon Consultants, Inc. (1998). *Bridle Ridge Project Draft Environmental Impact Report.* Prepared for the County of Santa Barbara, California.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (January 31, 1997). *US Listed Flowering Plant Species Index by Lead Region and Status, as of January 31, 1997.*

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (February 28, 1996). *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Review of Plant and Animal Taxa That Are Candidates for Listing as Endangered or Threatened Species.*

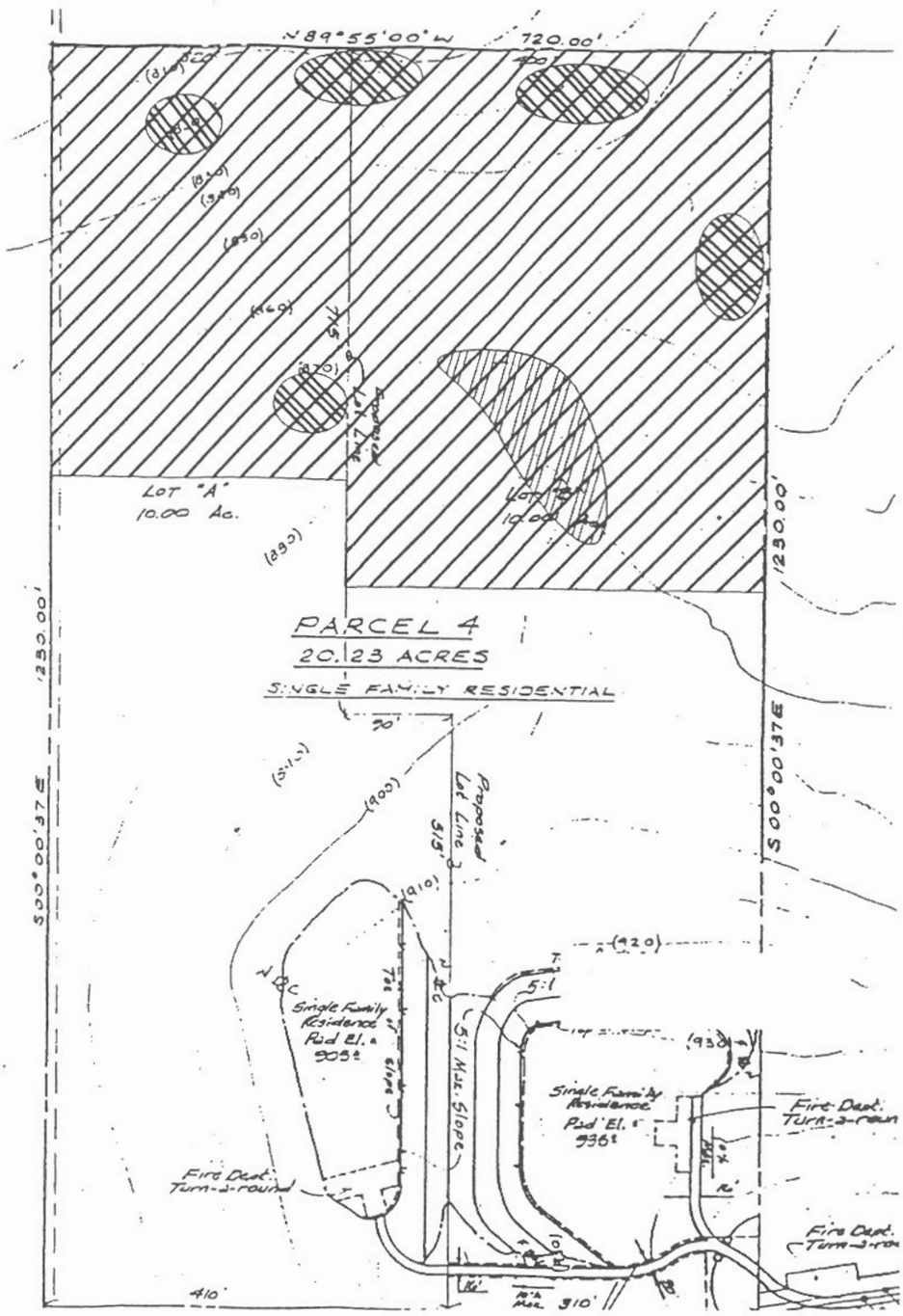
Zeiner, D., W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr., and K.E. Mayer (May 1988). *California's Wildlife.* California Statewide Wildlife Habitat Relationship System, Volumes I, II, & III. California Department of Fish and Game.



Proposed Conservation Easement/Restriction Area
Expected location of Conejo dudleya

Sensitive Biological Resources and Site Grading

Figure 1



Conejo dudleya populations

Proposed Conservation Easement/Restriction Area

NORTH

Sensitive Biological Resources

Figure 2