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

DMEC

PROJECT REFERENCE NO.: PMW-990 (DMEC PN 00-0011-1)	**PROJECT PLANNER:** Kim Rodriguez
DATE: 19 January 2000; field site visit conducted on 14 January 2000	**PROJECT BIOLOGIST:** David Magney, David Magney Environmental Consulting, and Carl Thelander, BioResource Consultants

PROJECT LOCATION: South Mountain Road; SE¼ S9 & SW¼ S10, T3N, R20W, Moorpark Quadrangle (7.5 minute series), Ventura County, California.

PROJECT ADDRESS: No address number.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: Parcel Map Waiver/Large lot subdivision to divide property into two parcels, one on the north side of South Mountain Road, and one on the south side of South Mountain Road; in conjunction with Recision of LCA Contracts 3-12.2, 3-12.2a, and 3-12.2b; and reentry into two LCA's to coincide with proposed new legal lot configuration.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING: The project site is located approximately ¼ mile east of the intersection of South Mountain Road and Balcom Canyon Road (approximately one mile south of Santa Clara River).

The proposed north lot of the property consists of relatively flat topography, and is primarily citrus orchard with no native vegetation or habitat. The proposed south lot has varying topography, from flat to rolling hills and steep slopes. It consists of abandoned and currently maintained citrus orchards, a few large eucalyptus groves (Tasmanian Blue Gum Eucalyptus [*Eucalyptus globulus*]), and some intergrading native Coastal Sage Scrub habitat at the southern boundary. The Coastal Sage Scrub extends far south and spreads out east and west of the property, inhabiting most of the hills south of the project site.

The predominant shrubs of the abandoned citrus orchard and the small Coastal Sage Scrub areas onsite include: California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), Brewer Saltbush (*Atriplex lentiformis* ssp. *breweri*), Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), Giant Wildrye (*Leymus condensatus*), Lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), Purple Sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), Blue Elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), and Douglas Nightshade (*Solanum douglasii*). The herbaceous groundlayer species, growing as an understory, include: Western Ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*), Narrowleaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*), Morning-glory (*Calystegia macrostegia* ssp. *cyclostegia*), Calabazilla (*Cucurbita foetidissima*), Jimson Weed (*Datura wrightii*), White Everlasting (*Gnaphalium canescens* ssp. *microcephalum*), Annual Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), Tenuated Cliff-aster (*Malacothrix saxatilis* var. *tenuifolia*), and California Figwort (*Scrophularia californica*).

Before the orchards were created onsite, the dominant habitat was primarily Coastal Sage Scrub. Although the natural habitat is already disturbed as a result of the citrus orchards, the northern portion of the south lot (where the orchards have been abandoned) shows beginning stages of successional Coastal Sage Scrub reestablishment. Additionally, the southern portion of the south lot contains intergrading Coastal Sage Scrub from South Mountain, which are currently occupied by the native scrub habitat. However, as a result of the pre-existing human impacts, such as the orchards and planted eucalyptus groves, the invasive exotic plant species have readily established/colonized the

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disturbed and open areas of the entire property. These nonnative plants are expanding into adjacent native vegetation, and the species diversity of the natural Coastal Sage Scrub is currently outnumbered by the introduced plant species.

The highly invasive exotic plants that are of significant concern onsite include: Bladder Flower (*Araujia sericofera* [noxious perennial vine specifically of citrus orchards]), Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*), Italian Thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*), Sweet Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Tree Tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), and Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*). Other invasive exotics observed growing throughout the two lots include: annual grasses (*Bromus hordeaceus, B. diandrus, B. madritensis* ssp. *rubens,* and *Poa annua*), Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*), Lambs Quarters (*Chenopodium album*), South American Horseweed (*Conyza bonariensis*), Redstem Filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*), Summer Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), Prickly Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), Cheeseweed (*Malva parviflora*), White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), White Sweetclover (*Melilotus alba*), Smilo Grass (*Piptatherum miliaceum*), and Russian Thistle (*Salsola tragus*), Common Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*). The exotic tree species (mostly planted), besides orchard trees, observed during the field survey include: Tasmanian Blue Gum Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Canary Island Date Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*), and Peruvian Pepper Tree (*Schinus molle*).

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:

IV.a. No special-status plant species were observed during the field study; however, a search of the RareFind 2 Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB 1999 [California Department of Fish and Game,

Sacramento, California]) revealed that a few special-status plant species are known to occur in the vicinity of the project site. The special-status plants with the potential of occurring in the vicinity of the project site include: Plummer Mariposa Lily (*Calochortus plummerae*), Ojai Fritillary (*Fritillaria ojaiensis*), and Abram Oxytheca (*Oxytheca parishii* var. *abramsii*).

The project site contains portions of Coastal Sage Scrub, which is considered a sensitive habitat type at risk. The significant and substantial losses of Coastal Sage Scrub are primarily a result of vegetation clearing for agricultural expansion, fire hazard control, and urban development regionally and statewide. Coastal Sage Scrub is also habitat to some special-status wildlife species that are known to occur in the vicinity of the project site (NDDB 1999 [CDFG]), including the federal species of special consern, San Diego Desert Woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia* [species of concern]) and California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica* [federally listed threatened]). At present, the US Fish and Wildlife Service requires protocol-level surveys for the latter species when projects may impact coastal sage scrub south of the Santa Clara River. That agency (Ventura Field Office 805/644-1766) should be consulted regarding any specific requirements to conduct such surveys for this project.

IV.d. During the field visit, we observed Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus)* (<10 individuals in 30 minutes) using the eucalyptus grove. This species relies on these groves as roosts during migration, and the presence of six individuals in a short period of time provides some indication that the eucalyptus groves onsite may be used as winter roosts; however, aggregate roosting was not observed at the time of the brief site visit. It is the only insect known to make a long-distance migration round trip. The removal of the eucalyptus may impair the ability of some individuals to survive their migration.

In general, a lot split such as proposed, should not have a significant impact on biotic resources; however, existing land management practices onsite, in particular the southern lot, has resulted in indirect impacts to sensitive habitats, and will likely cause additional indirect impacts onsite and to adjacent habitats by not properly controlling invasive exotic plant species onsite, as described above.

Future grading and land use changes, not currently requested, may cause additional impacts to biotic resources and should be investigated and evaluated at such time they are proposed.

Recommendations:

IV.a. Seasonal field surveys for botanical resources should be conducted to determine whether special-status plant species are present onsite prior to changes in land use or grading. At least two field surveys are recommended, one in March or early April, and another in May or early June, to capture the periods that most plants are identifiable (in bloom and fruit). The botanical surveys should be floristic in nature and should include vascular and nonvascular plants.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should be contacted regarding any requirements they may have to conduct protocol surveys for California Gnatcatchers, a threatened species that may occur in the area in coastal sage scrub.

IV.b. Although the property is only sparsely inhabited by the sensitive Coastal Sage Scrub habitat, most of it and the other areas (groves, orchards) of the property are invaded by many nonnative plant species; and the invasive exotic species are expanding into adjacent native vegetation. The species of most concern onsite is Bladder Flower (*Araujia sericofera*), which is a noxious viney weed that is typically found invading abandoned citrus orchards. The effects of Bladder Flower on the orchards are not of great concern from a biological resources perspective; however, it is the Coastal Sage Scrub habitat onsite, and inhabiting the hills immediately south of the property, which is being encroached upon by this competitive introduced species. Bladder Flower and the other invasive exotic species of concern, which were observed onsite and that are listed above in the Environmental Setting, need to be controlled over time, using appropriate methods of eradication and removal that do not harm biotic resources or harm native and planted vegetation. These measures are important to reduce unnatural competition levels for the remaining and successional native Coastal Sage Scrub plant species that are required for maintaining wildlife habitat functions.

IV.d. The eucalyptus grove should not be significantly reduced in size or extent to minimize potential impacts to Monarch Butterflies. Any existing County ordinances regarding the protection of this species, or known roosting sites, should be enforced.

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.
[X]	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.
[ ]	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.

David L. Magney, Biological Resources Initial Study Preparers

2 February 2000
Date