SECTION B

INITIAL STUDY CHECKLIST

Job:	LU-04-0064	**Requester:**	Terry Newman
Applicant:	Ventura County General Services Agency	**Date:**	Revised July 5, 2006
Survey Type:	Field	**Rationale:**	Adjacent stream

Site Description: The proposed project is a day-use equestrian facility composed of 3 arenas, a round pen, covered grandstand, restroom and parking. The project would require fill material which would be provided by grading associated with the Ventura County Watershed Protection District's Riparian Habitat Plan. This Plan includes grading and habitat restoration of the eastern bank of Arroyo Conejo immediately west of the equestrian facility site, and has been included as a project component of the equestrian facility for the purposes of impact analysis.

Field visits of the site (Parcel no. 520-0-180-135) were conducted on September 7, 2004 and May 16, 2006. The site is located in Hill Canyon, immediately north of the City of Thousand Oaks. The Parcel consists of a former agricultural field surrounded by Arroyo Conejo and Arroyo Santa Rosa, and hillsides to the east and south of Arroyo Conejo. The proposed equestrian facility would be located within the former agricultural field, adjacent to Hill Canyon Road. Vegetation of the equestrian facility site is entirely ruderal, dominated by summer mustard (*Hischfeldia incana*) and Italian thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*). The equestrian facility site is located approximately 200 feet northeast of Arroyo Conejo and 750 feet south of Arroyo Santa Rosa. Arroyo Conejo supports willow riparian forest dominated by arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*), red willow (*Salix laevigata*) and giant reed (*Arundo donax*). Arroyo Santa Rosa also supports willow riparian forest, but the willows are generally smaller and giant reed is less common.

	Project Impact Degree of Effect*				**Cumulative Impact Degree of Effect***			
	N	**LS**	**PS-M**	**PS**	**N**	**LS**	**PS-M**	**PS**
6. Biological Resources								
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		

*N No Impact
LS Less Than Significant Impact
PS-M Potentially Significant Impact Unless Mitigation Incorporated
PS Potentially Significant Impact

SECTION C

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSES

a. Plant or animal species listed under either the Federal or California Endangered Species Acts reported within 5 miles of the site include:

- Lyon's pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*, Federal and State Endangered) – reported 1.2 miles to the south (LSA, 1996);
- Conejo dudleya (*Dudleya abramsii* ssp. *parva*, Federal Threatened) – reported 1.1 miles to the south (LSA, 1996);
- Conejo buckwheat (*Eriogonum crocatum*, State Rare) – reported 1,000 feet to the southeast (Ingamells, personal observation, 2004);
- Braunton's milkvetch (*Astragalus brauntonii*, Federal Endangered) – known from Arroyo Conejo, 1.7 miles to the south-southeast (Ingamells, personal observation, 2003);
- Least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*, Federal and State Endangered) – nesting was confirmed along Arroyo Santa Rosa on June 19, 2006, approximately 500 feet east of the area to be graded as part of the Riparian Habitat Plan;
- California gnatcatcher (*Ptiloptila californica*, Federal Threatened) – reported from near Moorpark, 5 miles to the north-northeast (NDDB, 2006).

The equestrian facility site does not provide suitable habitat for threatened or endangered species known from the project area. Grading associated with the Riparian Habitat Plan would result in some short-term loss of suitable habitat for least Bell's vireo, but would not affect the known nesting site. Grading would occur in the fall, when least Bell's vireo has migrated to Mexico or Central America. Sufficient riparian habitat would be available at the known nesting site and adjacent areas the following spring to support nesting by least Bell's vireo. In the long-term, implementation of the Riparian Habitat Plan would increase the area and quality of least Bell's vireo nesting habitat at the project site. Therefore, project-specific and cumulative impacts to rare, threatened or endangered species are considered less than significant.

b. Arroyo Conejo and Arroyo Santa Rosa support wetlands. Grading associated with the Riparian Habitat Plan would result in temporary disturbance of about 0.04 acres of wetlands along the toe of the east bank of Arroyo Conejo (based on two-foot wide strip). In the long-term, the area and habitat quality of wetlands would be increased through implementation of the Riparian Habitat Plan as wetland species such as willow, western sycamore, Fremont cottonwood, mulefat, yerba mansa and monkeyflower would be planted. Overall, impacts would be beneficial.

   Proposed drainage for the equestrian facility site is planned as radial sheet flow to the north, west and south. Storm run-off from the proposed equestrian facilities may contain high levels of nitrogen and coliform bacteria, and would sheet flow into Arroyo Conejo and Arroyo Santa Rosa, which would affect water quality of these wetlands. However, the project includes the implementation of a Manure and Nutrient Management Plan that would ensure equestrian waste would be collected, stored and removed on a regular basis. Based on implementation of this Plan, water quality impacts to wetlands would be less than significant.

c. The site is located approximately nine miles northeast of the coastal zone and coastal resources do not occur in the vicinity of the site. Mugu Lagoon is an important coastal resource, which lies at the confluence of Calleguas Creek (of which Arroyo Conejo is a tributary) and the Pacific Ocean. Project-related pollutants discharged to Arroyo Conejo through storm run-off would be sufficiently diluted by storm flows that significant impacts to Mugu Lagoon are not expected.

d. Arroyo Conejo passes through the Arroyo Conejo Nature Preserve and may facilitate a connection between the Simi Hills and western Santa Monica Mountain via Mountclef Ridge. Deer, coyote and bobcat are routinely observed moving along Arroyo Conejo. Grading associated with the Riparian Habitat Plan would occur within the Arroyo Conejo movement corridor, and may temporarily adversely affect wildlife movement. Impacts to this movement corridor are considered less than significant as grading would occur for only a few weeks, no barriers to wildlife movement would occur during grading and no grading would occur at night (when most movement occurs).

   Equestrian events would be conducted infrequently (maximum of 24 per year), and during daylight hours. Therefore, operation of the proposed equestrian facility would not significantly reduce the value of Arroyo Conejo as a wildlife movement corridor.

e. Special-status species known from Hill Canyon include southern California black walnut, Catalina mariposa lily, Plummer's mariposa lily, Blochman's dudleya, oak trees, coastal western whiptail, two-striped garter snake, southwestern pond turtle, mountain kingsnake, loggerhead shrike, Cooper's hawk, cactus wren, northern harrier, southern California rufous-crowned sparrow, yellow warbler and yellow breasted chat (LSA 1996, Padre Associates 1998, Padre Associates 1999). In particular, Padre biologists have observed two-striped garter snake, southwestern pond turtle, yellow warbler and loggerhead shrike in the immediate vicinity of the Riparian Habitat Plan site or equestrian facility site. Two-striped garter snake, southwestern pond turtle, yellow warbler, yellow-breasted chat and Cooper's hawk may be adversely affected by direct mortality during grading for the Riparian Habitat Plan. However, the Plan includes pre-construction biological surveys to identify any special-status wildlife species in the area to be graded. If such species are found, work will be postponed until the Corps of Engineers, California Department of Fish and Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are contacted and protective measures are developed, approved and implemented. These measures would prevent significant impacts to two-striped garter snake, southwestern pond turtle, yellow warbler, yellow-breasted chat, Cooper's hawk and other breeding birds.

   Five mature southern California black walnut trees (a plant of limited distribution) occur within the area to be graded for the Riparian Habitat Plan and would be removed. The Riparian Habitat Plan includes planting about 250 southern California black walnut trees (1.3 acres, planted on 15 foot centers), which would substantially increase the local southern California black walnut population. Therefore, impacts to this species are considered beneficial.

   The equestrian facility site provides suitable foraging habitat for loggerhead shrike and this species was observed here on September 7, 2004. The proposed project would result in the loss of 5 acres of foraging habitat for loggerhead shrike. The site does not provide breeding habitat for loggerhead shrike, due to the rarity of shrubs or other woody vegetation. Due to the relative abundance of grassland foraging habitat in the region, the loss of up to 5 acres of foraging habitat is not expected to substantially affect local population levels and is considered a less than significant impact to loggerhead shrike.

References:

California Department of Fish and Game. 2006. Natural Diversity Data Base (RAREFIND3) output for the Newbury Park 7.5' quadrangle map.

LSA Associates, Inc. 1996. *Updated Biological Constraints Analysis Hill Canyon Regional Recreational Facility*. Prepared for Golf Dimensions.

Padre Associates, Inc. 1998. *Final Program Environmental Impact Report for the Unit W & Unit F Interceptor Reconstruction Project*. Prepared for the City of Thousand Oaks.

Padre Associates, Inc. 1999. *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for Phase II of the Unit W Interceptor Reconstruction Project*. Prepared for the City of Thousand Oaks.

SECTION D

MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on the information contained within Sections B and C:	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, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California 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 which 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 which are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (Several projects may have relatively small individual impacts on two or more resources, but the total of those impacts on the environment is significant).	___	X
4. Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	___	X

SECTION 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 environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because the mitigation measure(s) described below 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 environment and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.

Signature of Preparer Date