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Preliminary Biological Assessment
Gillibrand Aggregate Mine
Adjustment of Mining Operations Area
Simi Valley, California
APN No. 615-0-070-105 and 615-0-080-855
CUP No. 1367-4

Prepared by:
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Prepared for:
The County of Ventura
Resource Management Agency
Planning Division
Scott Ellison, Planner

October 24, 2005

Introduction

The Resource Management Agency Planning Division of the County of Ventura is processing an application by P.W. Gillibrand Co., Inc. to exchange an existing, approved mining area for adjusting the mining boundary. The Case Planner is Scott Ellison (805) 654-2495. A biological resources assessment of the project was prepared for the applicant by West Coast Environmental and Engineering on June 15, 2005. Condor Environmental has been asked to review the biological resources assessment, visit the site if necessary, and to prepare the biological resources section of the Initial Study pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Photo 1: Northerly portion of project site, October 2005. *Photograph by Elihu Gevirtz.*

Location

The project site is located 3.5 miles north of the City of Simi Valley, approximately one mile north of Tapo Canyon Road at the northern end of Bennett Road. It is a surface aggregate mine that operates within a 1,117 acre site under Conditional Use Permit No. 1367-4. The site is at an approximate elevation of 1,800 feet; latitude 34.33957 and longitude -118.70387.

Methods

The Biological Assessment by West Coast Environmental and Engineering was reviewed. The California Natural Diversity Database (California Department of Fish and Game 2005) was queried and a list of locally rare plants of Ventura County was consulted (Magney 2004).

The project site was briefly surveyed on foot by Condor Biologists Elihu Gevirtz and Vince Semonsen on August 23, 2005 from 1:00 p.m. to 2:15 p.m., and on October 6, 2005 from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Site conditions as well as plants and animals observed were noted. The level fields and the northerly hilly areas were surveyed in a crisscross pattern looking for herpetofauna and burrow systems. Ten power and eight power binoculars were used to observe and identify any animals in and around the property. Animals were noted by site, sound, tracks, and scat. Plants were identified in the field and unknown species were clipped and brought back to the office for identification. The timing of the survey (late summer/early fall) precluded the ability to identify all plants on the site.

Results

The surveys were both conducted in mid-day under sunny skies with high temperatures 90 degrees or greater) and slight breezes. Nearly all of Area 2 and at least half of Area 1 have been previously disturbed. According to the owners of the mine, the southerly portion of the 40 acre expansion area had been previously mined. This appears to be true, as most of the acreage had been leveled into three tiered fields with short, steep slopes between them. These slopes support native coastal sage scrub and looked to be somewhat undisturbed. The vegetation in the previously mined areas, consists mostly of black mustard (*Brassica nigra*) and other non-native annuals that are indicative of this history. One hill at the lower end of Area 1 has several small, shallow drainages that are short in extent and are dominated by mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*). Associated native species that comprise the coastal sage scrub include coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), California sage (*Artemisia californica*), black sage (*Salvia melifera*), and elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*). A windrow of Eucalyptus occurs along the site's western boundary.

The northern portion of Area 1 appears to have had less disturbance in the past (compared to the area to the south), and may not have been farmed. The vegetation in this section consists of non-native annual grassland. Very few animals were observed during the site visits. This may be due to the combination of several factors, including: the disturbed nature of the site, the dry vegetation, the lateness of the season, the hot dry days, and the time of day on which the surveys were conducted. Overall, the site appears to have very low to low habitat value.

Roosting and Nesting

No evidence of nesting or roosting by raptors or vultures was found.

Endangered Species

No rare, threatened or endangered species, or candidates for such listing, were observed on the project site.

Wetlands

There are several small, shallow drainages that are short in extent and are dominated by mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*). This common species frequently occurs in drainages, as well as streambeds and riverbeds. It is a facultative wetland plant (Reed 1988), meaning that it can occur within wetlands and outside of them. On the project site it occurs on a hill and at the base of the hill located near the southern end of Area 1. As can be observed in the current aerial photograph (West Coast Environmental 2005) this vegetated hill is surrounded to the north, south, and east by previously disturbed land. A wetland delineation on the site was not conducted by Condor. There was no standing water anywhere on the site at the time of the surveys, and drainages occupied by mule fat did not appear to have saturated soil, based on a very cursory examination. Soils tests were not conducted. Superficially, this area does not appear to have high ecosystem values; but if necessary, it could easily be avoided without interfering with the proposed mine expansion.

Coastal Habitats

The project site is outside of the Coastal Zone.

Habitats Providing Seasonal Concentrations or Migration of Fish and Wildlife

Such habitats and areas do not exist at the project site.

Locally Important Species and Communities

No species listed by the California Natural Diversity Database, or the California Native Plant Society were observed onsite.

Adequacy of Prior Study

The Biological Resources Assessment by West Coast Environmental (2005) appears to be sound and to provide an accurate assessment of the conditions on the site, descriptions of sensitive taxa, and their potential for occurring on the site.

Mitigation Measures

A qualified biologist should be retained to survey the site for special status plant and animal species prior to all future phases of mining activities. If any special status animals are found that could be impacted by mining, the biologist should relocate the animal(s) to a safe location. Silt fencing or other type of exclusionary fencing should be installed to prevent special status animals from entering into the area to be mined. If any sensitive plants are found, the biologist should work with the County staff biologist and California Department of Fish and Game and/or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff to identify appropriate mitigation. Depending on the sensitivity of the species, appropriate mitigation might include transplanting, seed collection and cultivation for use in revegetation elsewhere on the site, or complete avoidance by excluding the area from future mining activities.

Table 1

Partial List of Plant Species Observed Onsite

Scientific Name	Common Name
Baccharis pilularis	Coyote brush
Baccharis salicifolia	Mule fat
Artemisia californica	Sagebrush
Haplopappus squarrosus	Sawtooth goldenbush
Salvia mellifera	Black sage
Sambucus mexicana	Mexican elderberry

Table 3
Wildlife Species Observed Onsite

Scientific Name	Common Name
Reptiles	
Sceloporus occidentalis	Western fence lizard
Uta stansburiana	Side-blotched lizard
Birds	
Thryomanes bewickii	Bewick's wren
Falco sparverius	American kestrel
Buteo jamaicensis	Red-tailed hawk
Corvus brachyrhynchos	American crow
Sturnella neglecta	Western meadowlark
Mammals	
Thomomys bottae	Botta's pocket gopher (burrows)
Spermophilus beecheyi	California ground squirrel
Sylvilagus bachmani	Brush rabbit
Canis latrans	Coyote (scat)

References

California Department of Fish and Game, 2005. California Natural Diversity Database, Rare Find 3.

Magney, D. 2004. Locally Rare and Uncommon Plants of Ventura County.

Reed, P.B. 1988. National List of Plant Species That Occur in Wetlands: California (Region 0). Biological Report 88 (26.10). USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C.

West Coast Environmental and Engineering 2005. Biological Resources Assessment; P.W. Gillibrand Co., Inc. CUP Boundary Adjustment. Simi Valley, California. June 15.

INITIAL STUDY CHECKLIST

Gillibrand Mine Boundary Adjustment
PROJECT NO. XXXXX , ZONE NO. X

	ISSUE (Responsible Department)	PROJECT IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT*				CUMULATIVE IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT*			
		N	LS	PS -M	PS	N	LS	PS -M	PS
GENERAL:	**1. General Plan Environmental Goals and Policies (Plng.)**								
LAND USE:	**2. Land Use (Plng.):**								
	A. Community Character								
	B. Housing								
	C. Growth Inducement								
RESOURCES:	**3. Air Quality (APCD):**								
	A. Regional								
	B. Local								
	4. Water Resources (PWA):								
	A. Groundwater Quantity								
	B. Groundwater Quality								
	C. Surface Water Quantity								
	D. Surface Water Quality								
	5. Mineral Resources (Plng.):								
	A. Aggregate								
	B. Petroleum								
	6. Biological Resources:								
	A. Endangered, Threatened, or Rare Species			x					
	B. Wetland Habitat	x							
	C. Coastal Habitat	x							
	D. Migration Corridors	x							
	E. Locally Important Species/Communities			x					
	7. Agricultural Resources (Ag. Dept.):								
	A. Soils								
	B. Water								
	C. Air Quality/Micro-Climate								
	D. Pests/Diseases								
	E. Land Use Incompatibility								