Prepared for:
County of Ventura, Planning Department
California

Initial Study Checklist Update for Nichols Property County of Ventura, California

ENSR Corporation
February 2006
Document No.: 07020-019-013

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SECTION B

INITIAL STUDY CHECKLIST

Job: PMW 1249

Requester: Debbie Morrisset

Applicant: Richard and Susan Nichols

Date: February 20, 2006

Survey Type: Field and Office

Rationale: Grading for development of single family residences on 4 parcels

Site Description*:* ENSR conducted a field visit of the project site (Parcel no. 155-0-270-22 & 24) on February 20, 2006. The 192.47 acre property is located approximately 300 yards south of East Los Angeles Avenue (Highway 118) and Aggen Road, in Ventura County, California. The project area, consisting of 4 parcels, is hilly and vegetated with typical coastal sage scrub plants. Cleared areas along the top of the hill are vegetated with annual grasses and non-native invasive weed species. An area within each of the 4 parcels is proposed for grading and development for a single family residence. Two canyon areas will be filled using the cut material from the grading for the single family residences.

The development of four single family residences is planned along the top of the hill in each of the four parcels. Most of the area to be developed on the first three parcels has been partially cleared and is vegetated with sweet fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), sawtooth golden bush (*Hazardia squarrosa*), weedy grasses, and non-native species. Down the slope from the three proposed developments is a thick coastal sage scrub vegetation with purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), California sage (*Artemisia californica*), coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), saw tooth goldenbush, and yucca (*Yucca whipplei*). Farther down the slope, straddling parcel 1 and 2 is a gently sloping canyon area which will be filled. A drainage pipe will be constructed to carry water down the slope to a storm drain. Vegetation in this canyon is similar to that on the slopes except that there is also present wild elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), giant wild rye (*Leymus condensatus*), and bladder pod (*Isomeris arborea*). An access road will be constructed along the eastern edge of the property, initially following an older existing road. Some cutting will occur along the road, which will curve back and forth down the hill to Highway 118 at the north. Vegetation where the access road will be built is coastal sage scrub, not much different from the coastal sage on the north facing slopes of the property.

Along the road between parcel 1 and 2 is disturbed coastal sage scrub vegetation as well as the occasional California sunflower (*Encelia californica*). Farther west, lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*) is also present. Prior to reaching parcel 4, there is a rather deep depression with California pepper (*Schinus molle*) along with lemonade berry. Beyond this point, the soil becomes very sandy with concurrent changes in vegetation. Along the road, is coast buckwheat (*Eriogonum cinereum*), considerable lemonade berry, and croton (*Croton californicus*), a plant often found on dunes along the coast or in the desert, California sunflower, and deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), along with coast prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia littoralis*). Occasional soap lilies (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*) can be seen to have sprouted.

The development that will occur in the 4th parcel is north of the existing road. This, again, is vegetated with a thick coastal sage scrub including lemonade berry, yucca, coast prickly pear cactus, purple sage, California sage, giant wild rye, and coyote brush. On the far western portion of the property, in parcel 4, there will be another fill area in a gently sloping canyon. Vegetation in the canyon is largely lemonade berry with coyote brush, sages, and yucca. A site map is provided in **Attachment A** and photographs of the project site are provided in **Attachment B.**

SECTION C

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSES

	Project Impacts				Cumulative Impacts			
	Degree of Effect				Degree of Effect			
	N	LS	PS-M	PS	N	LS	PS-M	PS
6. Biological Resources								
a. Endangered, threatened or rare species		✓				✓		
b. Wetland Habitat	✓				✓			
c. Coastal Habitat	✓				✓			
d. Migration Corridors		✓				✓		
e. Locally important species/communities			✓			✓		

N: No impact
LS: Less than significant
PS-M: Potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance
PS: Potentially significant, even after mitigation

a. Endangered, Threatened or Rare Species

According to the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB), several special-status species occur within five miles of the project site (see **Attachment C**). However, the results of the CNDDB search did not reveal occurrences of special-status species within the boundaries of the project site. Additionally, these species were not observed during ENSR's site visit nor are they expected to be present on site.

Plants:

The following candidate, rare, threatened, or endangered plant species have been reported within 5 miles of the project site:

- **Blochman's dudleya** (*Dudleya blochmaniae ssp. blochmaniae*), a species listed by CNPS as rare, threatened and/or endangered in California and elsewhere, is found in coastal scrub and coastal bluffs, on rocky slopes or rocky areas with shallow to little soil. This species also has been observed in Long Grade Canyon, southeast of California State University Channel Islands. The plant occurs on steep rocky areas and is associated with California sagebrush, chalk live-forever, and *Dudleya verityi*. There are no exposed rocky outcrops on the property, so Blochman's dudleya would not be expected.

- **Conejo buckwheat** (*Eriogonum crocatum*), state listed as rare, is usually found in chaparral or coastal sage scrub on rocky, volcanic outcrops. Previous sightings of this plant have been approximately 7 miles south of the project site, east of California State University Channel Islands. No appropriate habitat is present for Conejo buckwheat on the property. No evidence of this plant was observed on our site visit.

- **Conejo dudleya** (*Dudleya parva*), a federally threatened species and a species listed by CNPS as rare, threatened and/or endangered in California and elsewhere, are usually found on rock slopes and grassy hillsides in clayey or volcanic soils. No appropriate habitat for Verity's dudleya is present on the property, so no impact is expected.

- **Dune larkspur** (*Delphinium parryi ssp. blochmaniae*), a federal species of concern, is usually found in rocky areas and coastal dunes. Previous sightings of this plant have been in coastal sage scrub, along Potrero Road in Long Grade Canyon. Although the soil in the western portion of the property is sandy, the habitat is not rocky and it is believed to be unlikely that the dune larkspur is present on the property. Therefore, impact to this plant would be less than significant.

- **Plummer's mariposa lily** (*Calochortus plummerae*), a species listed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) as rare, threatened and/or endangered in California and elsewhere, is usually found in coastal sage scrub on rocky and sandy sites. Although the closest report of the occurrence of this species is in the Santa Monica Mountains, approximately 7 miles from the proposed project site, the coastal sage scrub community does provide a possible habitat for this rare species. Areas to be developed have been largely cleared and would not likely have Plummer's mariposa there. The fill areas are very densely vegetated, and usually the lily requires more exposed areas with sunlight. It is possible that the lily does occur on the slopes, but most of this will not be disturbed. Therefore, it is believed that the impact to the Plummer's mariposa lily will be less than significant.

- **Rayless ragwort** (*Senecio aphanactis*), a species of local importance, based on its habitat and value to the local biota, is found in coastal scrub and cismontane woodland, along drying alkaline flats. This species had been reported along Long Grade Canyon, southeast of California State University Channel Islands. The rayless ragwort is not expected to occur on the property, because there is no cismontane woodland or drying alkaline flats on the property. Impact to this plant is expected to be less than significant.

- **Verity's dudleya** (*Dudleya verityi*), a federally threatened species endemic to Ventura County, is usually found on rocky volcanic outcrops in the Santa Monica Mountains. Sightings of this plant have been in the Santa Monica Mountains, east of California State University Channel Islands. No appropriate habitat for Verity's dudleya is present on the property, so no impact is expected.

Animals:

The following candidate, rare, threatened or endangered animal species have been reported within 5 miles of the project site:

- **Arroyo chub** (*Gila orcutti*), a state species of special concern, requires coastal streams with mud or sand bottoms and slow moving water. No such habitat exists on the project site therefore the arroyo chub is not expected to be present on site.

- **Two striped garter snake** (*Thamnophis hammondii*), a state species of special concern, is a highly aquatic and requires permanent fresh water. It is typically found along streams with rocky beds and riparian growth. No such habitat exists on the project site therefore the two-striped garter snake is not expected to be present on site.

Plant Communities:

CDFG and CNPS have identified several native plant communities that are rare and/or diminishing within California. Substantial losses of these plant communities may be considered "significant" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The following sensitive plant communities have been reported within 5 miles of the project site:

- **southern riparian scrub** is a riparian community often found in dense thickets adjacent to creeks and ponded areas, and in less dense stands near seeps and areas with high water tables. This habitat is usually associated with areas of loose, sandy alluvium, and requires frequent flooding or scouring to prevent succession to a riparian forest dominated by cottonwoods and sycamores. Dominant species typically include arroyo willow shrubs and mulefat. No such habitat was present on site.

b. Wetland Habitat

The property does not contain a wetland habitat, so there should be no destruction of a wetland habitat.

c. Coastal Habitat

Although the project site is not located in the vicinity of the coast, the presence of coastal sage scrub indicates that there could be a potential for federal and state listed special status species. Possible presence of such species is indicated in **Part a**, above. Otherwise, this area is some 7 to 8 miles from the coast and would not be considered a coastal habitat.

d. Migration Corridors

North of the project site, agricultural activities occur, and beyond that is Highway 118. To the east, is a residential neighborhood and to the west is undisturbed land interspersed with agricultural activity. To the south, there is also undisturbed land, but beyond this is also residential and urban development. Therefore, it is unlikely that the project site is a major corridor for wildlife movement. The relatively small loss of land that will occur with the development should not disturb the wildlife that is endemic to the area. Therefore, the proposed development should not create a significant impact on migration corridors, and should be considered less than significant.

e. Locally Important Species/Communities

Coastal sage scrub is considered to be a locally important community and is present in the project area. It has the potential for supporting federal and state listed special status species. The specific areas to be developed in the 4 parcels will involve removal of some coastal sage scrub. To make the impact less than significant it is recommended that it be mitigated as indicated in **Section E**.

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?	✓	
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).		✓
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).	✓	
4. Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?		✓

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.

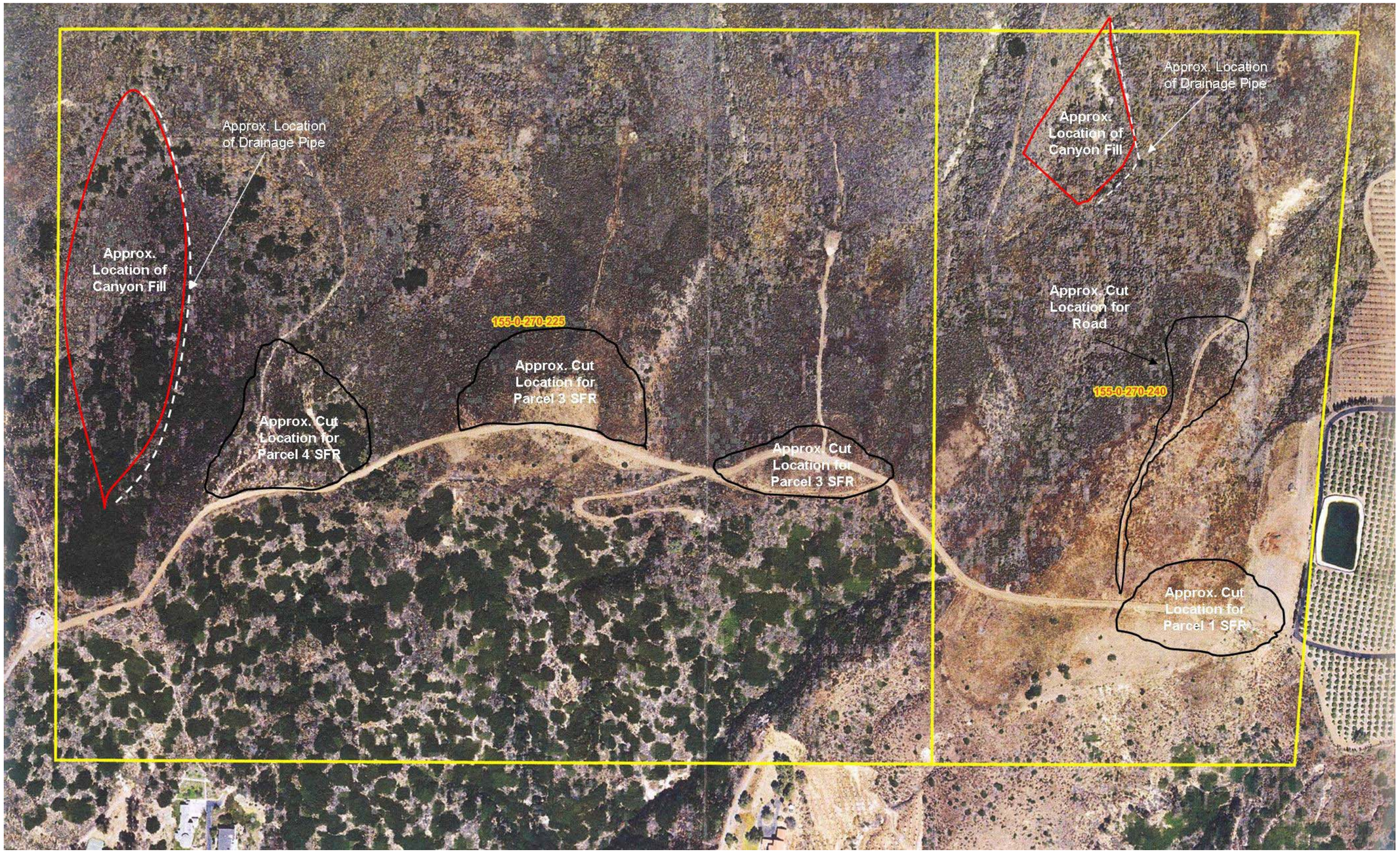
Mitigation Measures

The coastal sage scrub vegetation on the property is considered to be a locally important community. To avoid impacts to the disturbed areas of coastal sage scrub, the fill areas should be revegetated with typical coastal sage scrub species, such as those presently on the property. It is recommended that the upper layer of soil, where grading and soil removal will occur, be preserved as a preliminary seed bank to start revegetation activities. Techniques to prevent erosion should also be employed.

To avoid impacts to nesting birds, initial removal of coastal sage vegetation should be carried out before the spring nesting season. If initial land disturbance is carried out during the potential nesting period then a survey for active nests within the project area should be carried out by a qualified biologist, no more than two weeks before the construction activities. If active nests are identified, construction should occur no closer than 100 feet from the nests until the adults and young are no longer reliant on the nest site, as determined by an approved Ventura County biologist.

ATTACHMENT A

SITE MAP



REVISIONS			
NO:	DESCRIPTION:	DATE:	BY:

DESIGNED BY: CDM
DRAWN BY: CDM
CHECKED BY: MS
APPROVED BY:

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SITE MAP
Nichols Property
APN: 15500-270-22 & 24)
County of Ventura, California

SCALE: XXX
DATE: 3/1/06
PROJECT NUMBER: 07020-019-013

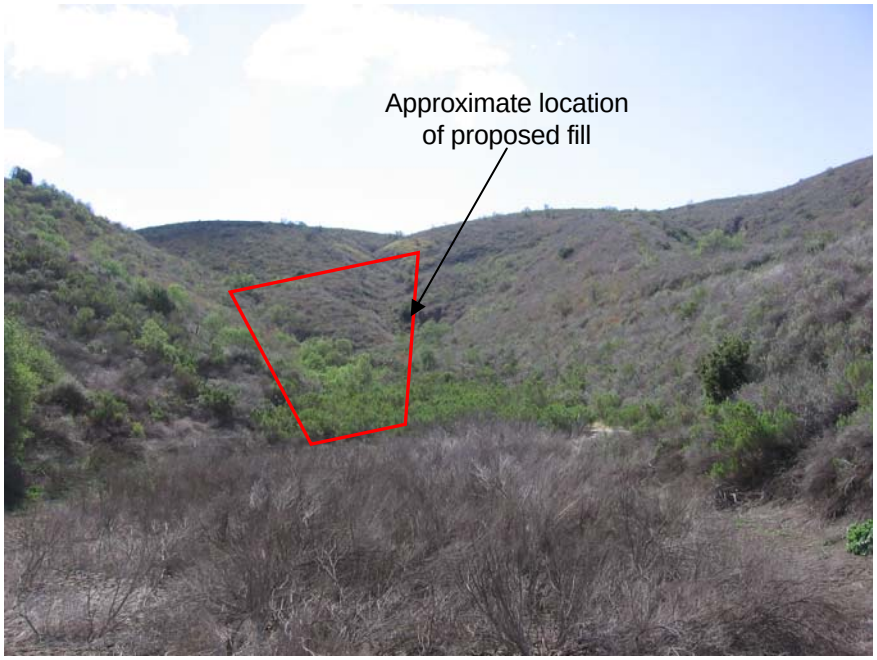
FIGURE NUMBER:

Appendix A

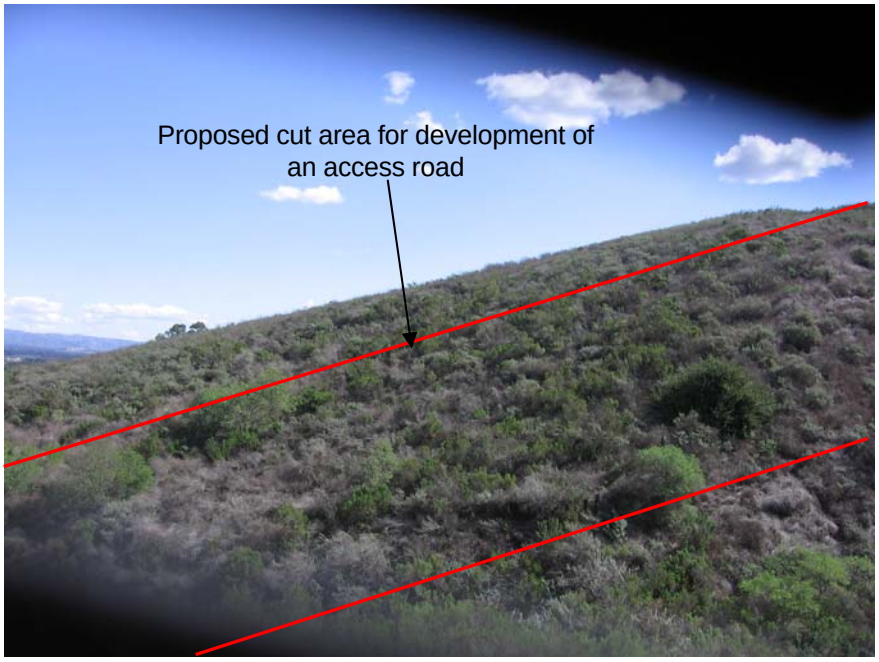
SHEET NUMBER:

ATTACHMENT B

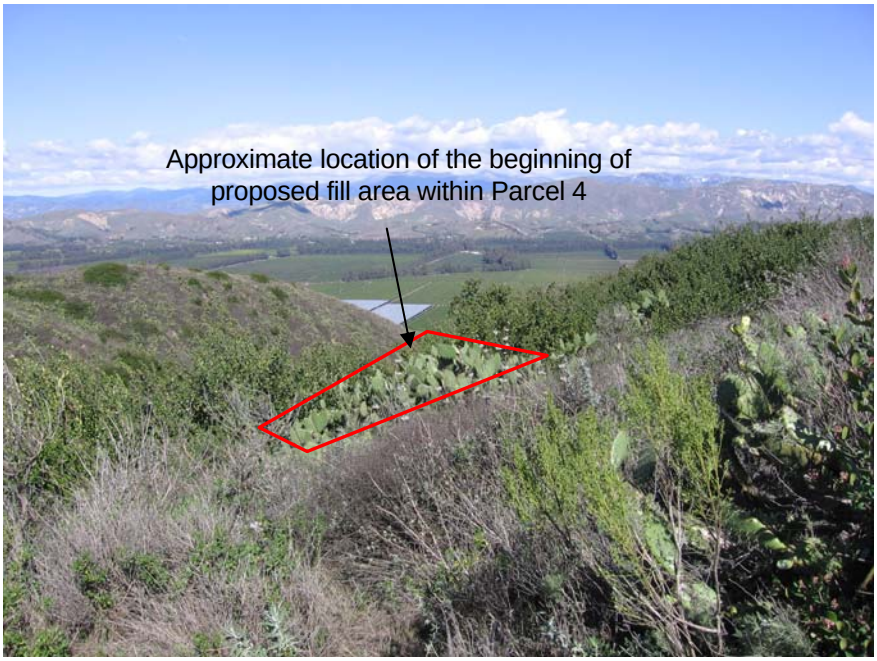
SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



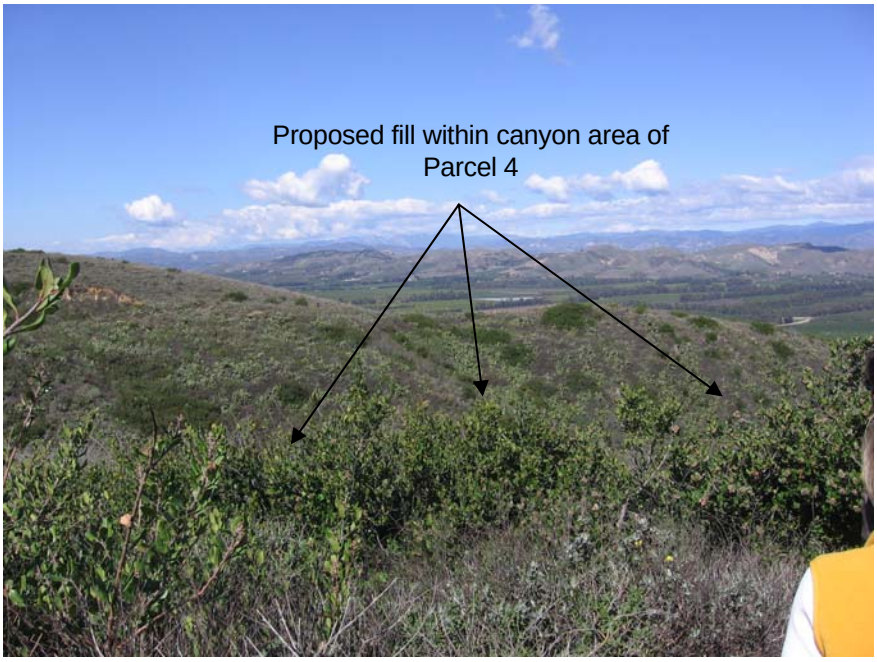
View looking south of proposed fill area straddling Parcel 1 and Parcel 2. This area will be filled with soil from the cut activities from the proposed road which will be located east of the fill and from the single family residence located south of the fill on the top of the hill.



View looking south east of the approximate location of the proposed cut area for the development of an access road for the proposed single family residences.



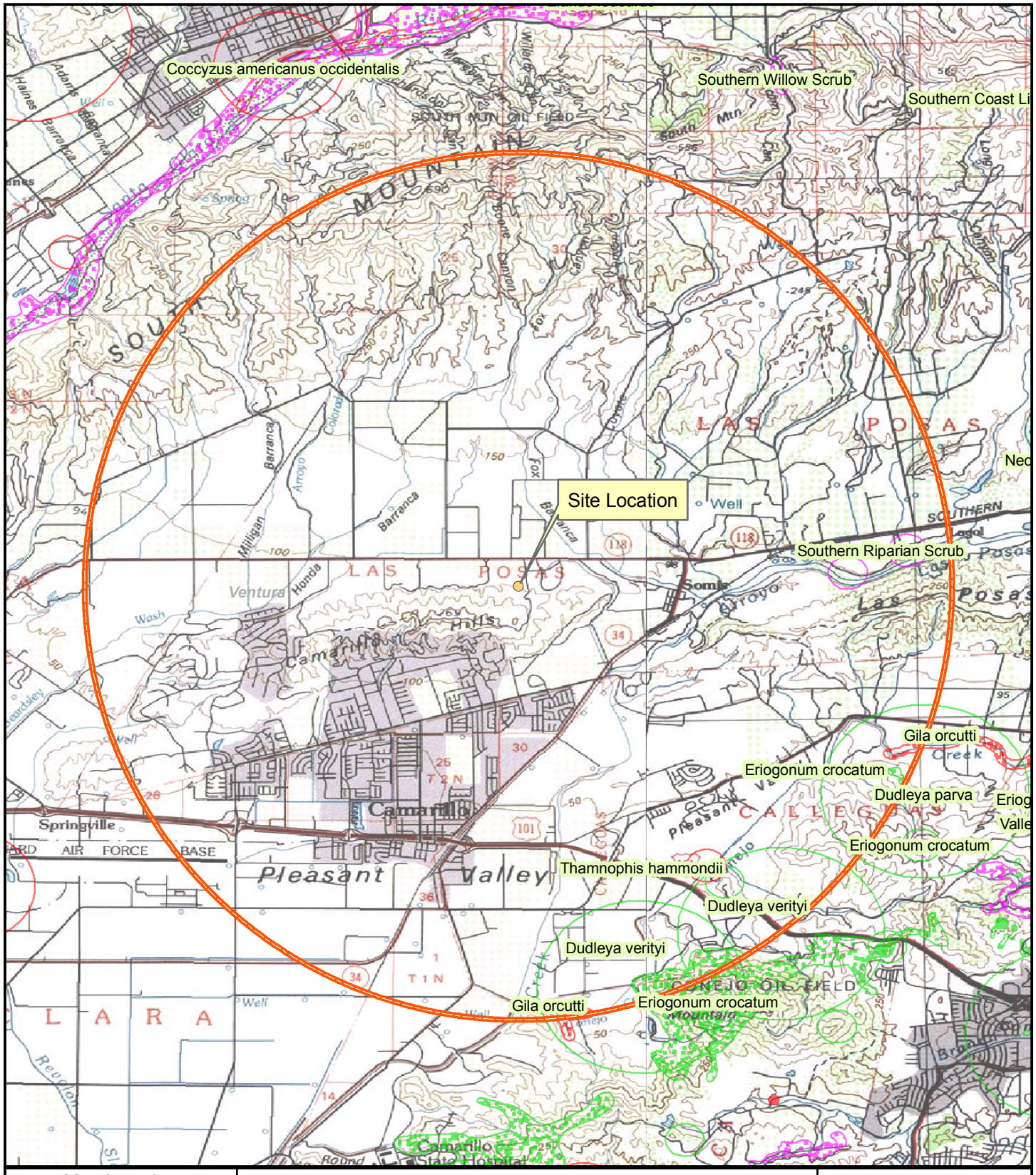
View looking north of the southern portion of the proposed fill area in Parcel 4. This area continues down the canyon and will be filled with soil from the cut activities for the proposed single family residence located east of the fill area on the top of the hill.



View north west from the top of the hill looking down on the proposed fill area in Parcel 4. The fill will be located within the canyon.

ATTACHMENT C

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES MAP



Map Location

Nichols Property
APN 155-0-270-22 & 24
Ventura County, California

Legend

- 5 Mile Buffer
- Animal (specific)
- Animal (circular)
- Terr. Comm. (specific)
- Terr. Comm. (circular)
- Plant (specific)
- Plant (circular)

Scale: 1:100,000

0 2,500 5,000 10,000 15,000 Feet

USGS 100K Topo Map

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Figure:

Date: February 2006

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