SECTION B
INITIAL STUDY CHECKLIST

Job: SD04 0049 (PMW LLS)

Requester: Debbie Morrisset

Applicant: Marr Ranch

Date: February 15, 2005

Survey Type: Office

Rationale: Large lot subdivision

Site Description: ENSR conducted a field visit of the project site on October 2, 2004. The 381.60 acre property is located at 4730 Tapo Canyon Road in unincorporated, Ventura County, California just east of Tapo Canyon Road and about 3 miles north of the Simi Valley Freeway. The project, as outlined in application PMW-LLS SD04 0049, requests authorization to split the lot to meet the prior requirements of PMW-LLS 1049 condition for "Remainder parcel".

Due to access limitations from steep canyons and the large size of the subject property, the site visit performed by ENSR was primarily concentrated in the northern, western and southern portions of the subject property. The topography of the property is distinctly hilly with an approximately 300 ft. difference in elevation. The vegetation is predominantly coastal sage scrub with scattered valley oaks (*Quercus lobata*) and numerous coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) in the canyons. Dominant plants on the slopes are California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), giant wild rye (*Leymus condensatus*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*) and wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). Upper slopes contain chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), bush monkey flower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*), and laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*). Areas closer to the road are predominately vegetated with non-native grasses, weedy annuals, Palmer's goldenbush (*Ericameria palmeri* var. *pachylepis*) and horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*). Mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*) occurs in drainage areas between slopes. One area in the southwestern portion of the property had several California pepper trees (*Schinus molle*) planted along with some tamarisk (*Tamarix aphylla*). Photographs taken of the subject property during ENSR's site visit are provided in **Appendix A**.

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 have the potential to occur within the project site. However, none of the species described below were observed the day ENSR visited the proposed project site.

Plants:

- **Santa Susana tarplant** (*Deinandra minthornii*), a federal species of concern, has been observed within 4 miles of the project site, in the hills of eastern Simi Valley. The Santa Susana tarplant grows in crevices of sandstone boulders and around rocky sandstone outcrops. Associated species include wild buckwheat, chamise, purple sage, California sagebrush, toyon, and bush monkey flower. The presence of Santa Susana tarplant on the project site is possible in some of the deeper canyons where rocky sandstone outcrops were observed. No evidence of the plant was observed during the survey. Based on this potential to occur at the site, impacts to this species are considered potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-1.**

- **The San Fernando Valley spine flower** (*Chorizanthe parryi var. Fernandina*), a federal candidate for endangered status, has recently been observed at Ahmanson Ranch (1999 and 2000). It had previously been thought to be extinct. The habitat of the spineflower is on sandy soil of coastal sage scrub. It is possible that the San Fernando Valley spineflower does occur on the project site. A survey at the time of blooming, usually late May and June, would be necessary to determine its presence. Based on this potential to occur at the site, impacts to this species are considered potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-1.**

- The federal endangered plant, the **Slender-horned spineflower** (*Dodecahema leptoceras*), had been observed within 5 miles of the project site. However, it may now be extirpated. It is found in alluvia fan sage scrub, in flood deposited terraces and washes, associated with, *Encelia, Dalea,*and *Lepidospartum.* No such habitat occurs on the project site, so the presence of the slender-horned spineflower would not be expected.

- **Plummer's mariposa lily** (*Calochortus plummerae*), a federal species of concern, has been observed within 5 miles of the project site, in the Santa Susana Pass area. The lily is usually found in coastal sage scrub or valley and foothill grassland. Soil is usually sandy or alluvial. The habitat of the project site could be suitable for the presence of Plummer's mariposa lily. A survey at the time of blooming, usually late May and June, would be necessary to determine its presence. Based on this potential to occur at the site, impacts to this species are considered potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-1.**

- **California Orcutt grass** (*Orcuttia californica*), a federal and state endangered species has been observed in vernal pools, East of Tierra Rejada Valley. No vernal pool habitat was observed on the project site, so the presence of California Orcutt grass is unlikely.

- **Lyon's pentachaeta** (*Pentachaeta lyonii*) is state and federal listed as endangered. It has been reported within 5 miles of the project site. Lyon's pentachaeta occurs in chaparral or coastal sage scrub, usually in clearings or exposed areas on compact clay soil. It is often associated with goldfields (*Lasthenia chrysostoma*) and grasses. Soil on the project site was extremely sandy making it unlikely that Lyon's pentachaeta is present. However, since the entire property was not accessible, a survey at the time of blooming would be necessary to definitively determine the presence or absence of Lyon's pentachaeta at the project site. Based on this potential to occur at the site, impacts to this species are considered potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-1.**

Animals:

Several special-status wildlife species have been reported within 5 miles of the project site:

- The **western spadefoot toad** (*Scaphiopus hammondii*) has been observed west of Black Canyon. The toad requires pools, streams, and/or rivers for breeding and egg-laying, and no such habitat was found on the project site. Therefore, the western spadefoot would not be expected to occur.

- The **burrowing owl** (*Athene cunicularia*), a state Species of Special Concern, has been sighted in Upper Dry Canyon, about 1.5 miles west of the project site. The burrowing owl is found in low-growing vegetation, typical of that found on the site. The owl requires burrowing mammals for food, usually the California ground squirrel. The project site could be a suitable habitat for the owl. Ground squirrels and ground squirrel burrows were visible. Therefore, the proposed project has the potential to support this species and impacts are considered potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-2.**

- Found within 5 miles of the project site, in the Rocky Peak area is the **San Diego desert woodrat** (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*), a state species of special concern. The woodrat's habitat is a dense chaparral with chamise, scrub oak, laurel sumac, black sage, and California sagebrush. The woodrat is particularly abundant in rock outcrops and rocky cliffs and slopes. No such habitat was present on the project site. Rocks were alternating layers of shale and a friable sandstone with no rocky cliffs or sandstone boulder outcrops.

- The **coastal California gnatcatcher** (*Polioptila californica californica*), is a federally threatened species, found in low, coastal sage scrub in arid washes and on mesas and slopes. It is known to be a permanent resident of coastal sage scrub below 2500 feet in southern California. Because the proposed project site supports the habitat for this species, the site has the potential to contain this

species and impacts are considered potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-2.**

- The **Riverside fairy shrimp** (*Streptocephalus woottoni*), a federal endangered species, occurs in vernal pools. It would not be expected on the property because no ponds or vernal pools were noted, a necessary habitat for the fairy shrimp.

- The **Least Bell's Vireo** (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) is both state and federal listed as endangered. The vireo's habitat is usually in dense riparian woodland dominated by willows. Although mule fat was present in the project site, it was never in a dense thicket and little to no willow was present. Therefore, it is unlikely that the vireo is present on the site.

The site visit was not performed at the optimal time for identifying the special status plant species described above. Further, the site visit performed by ENSR was cursory and was not performed at the level of detail necessary to identify both special status plant and animal species that could exist for the entire 381.60 acre property.

b. Wetland Habitat

There is no wetland habitat on the project site, so there should be no disturbance of such a site. During the rain season, water inevitably will drain down from the upper slopes, but there is no permanent wet area inhabited by willows.

c. Coastal Habitat

This project is not located within the coastal zone, thus no impact on a coastal habitat should occur.

d. Migration Corridors

The project site is likely a migration corridor for many animals. Subdividing the larger parcel should not affect the migration pattern. However, if development were to occur on the property then this impact would be considered potentially significant and further evaluation would be necessary. **See Mitigation Measure MM-3.**

e. Locally Important Species/Communities

No riparian woodland occurs in the parcel to be subdivided, but many of the canyons are densely populated with coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*). Reported within 5 miles of the project site are several locally important plant communities. A coast live oak riparian forest has been observed in Las Llajas Canyon, a tributary to Tapo Canyon, about 2 miles east of the property. Also observed in the same canyon is a southern mixed riparian forest with sycamore, cottonwood, coast live oak, and willow. Subdividing the larger parcel should not affect the coast live oaks present on the property. However, if development were to occur on the property then this impact would be considered potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-4.**

Coastal scrub is a vegetation community found in the area that is considered locally important and disturbance should be limited. A substantial amount of the proposed project area is covered with coastal scrub plants. This vegetation community has the potential to support several federally and state listed special status species, as well as animals endemic to the area which use the site for foraging and shelter. Because coastal scrub occurs throughout the proposed project site, and is being reduced throughout the

County, impacts are considered cumulative and potentially significant, unless mitigated to a level of insignificance. **See Mitigation Measure MM-4.**

A cismontane alkali marsh has also been observed along a tributary of Tapo Canyon, with such species as *Distichlis spicata*, *Juncus mexicanus*, *Apium graveolens*, and *Xanthium strumarium*. No such alkali marsh is present on the project site, so there should be no impact on this community.

West of Tapo Canyon, about 3 miles north of the project site is a Valley Oak woodland. Although valley oaks are found on the project site, these are spaced rather far apart and the area would not be considered a woodland.

Finally, a southern willow scrub with dense willow, and scattered cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) has been observed in the vicinity of Tapo Canyon. The habitat is a deeply incised channel with a silt loam substrate. No such habitat is present on the project site, so there will be no impact on this community.

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 undisturbed areas of the property provides habitat for several federally and state listed special status species, as well as coastal scrub vegetation community. The following mitigation measures (**MM**) should be implemented prior to any construction or grading activities to the proposed project site.

MM-1: Prior to ground disturbing activities (grading, surveying, construction, etc.), a pre-construction survey for federally and state and locally important plant species (special status species) shall be conducted by a Ventura County-approved plant ecologist. These surveys shall be performed at the appropriate time of year to identify the presence of special status plant species (e.g. during florescence). If special status species are identified, the Ventura County-approved plant ecologist shall determine the level of protection required for the identified species including the required mitigation ratios for reestablishment of the identified species by the appropriate agencies (Federal: US Fish and Wildlife; State: California Department of Fish and Game; locally important: County of Ventura).

Monitoring:
The County of Ventura will verify inclusion of required mitigation measures on development plans in consultation with a Ventura County-approved plant ecologist.

MM-2: In order to avoid impacts to nesting birds, including birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, initial ground disturbing activities should be limited to the time period between September 1 to March 1 (i.e., outside the nesting season). If initial site disturbance, cannot be conducted during this time period, a pre-construction survey for active nests within the project site shall be conducted by a qualified biologist at the site no more than two weeks prior to any construction activities. If active nests are identified, then all construction work shall be conducted at least 100 feet from the nests, until the adults and young are no longer reliant on the nest site, as determined by a Ventura County-approved biologist. The Ventura County-approved biologist shall determine the final buffer distance, to be dependant on the species potentially affected.

Monitoring:

The County of Ventura will verify inclusion of required mitigation measures on development plans in consultation with a Ventura County-approved biologist.

MM-3: Prior to ground disturbing activities (grading, surveying, construction, etc.), a pre-construction survey for areas of the property used by wildlife as migration corridors shall be conducted by a Ventura County-approved wildlife biologist. Migration corridors identified on-site will be protected to a level consistent with Ventura County Planning Department's policies. The county approved wildlife biologist shall coordinate with the County of Ventura in determining the level of protection required for the identified migration corridors.

Monitoring:
The County of Ventura will verify inclusion of required mitigation measures on development plans in consultation with a Ventura County-approved wildlife biologist.

MM-4: Prior to ground disturbing activities (grading, surveying, construction, etc.), a pre-construction survey for sensitive and/or locally important vegetation communities such as coastal scrub shall be conducted by a Ventura County-approved plant ecologist. The surveys should assess the amount of vegetation present and the minimum amount that would need to be removed to the greatest extent feasible for the future development of the subject property. The areas that will be disturbed and require the removal of coastal scrub or other locally important plant communities should be re-vegetated to encourage use of these areas by native plant and animals. Further, the approved plant ecologist shall coordinate with the County of Ventura in determining the level of protection required for the identified plant community including the appropriate mitigation ratios for reestablishment of the vegetation communities identified for removal.

Monitoring:
The County of Ventura will verify inclusion of required mitigation measures on development plans in consultation with a Ventura County-approved plant ecologist.

Catina Maggiardi

Signature of Preparer

February 15, 2005

Date