DEC 1 6 2002

COUNTY OF VENTURA
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: October 8, 2002
Requestor: Janie King
Project: PMW-117LLS
Field Study: ☐ Yes ☒ No
Justification: Time of year not suitable to determine presence of sensitive plant species for which project may cause a significant California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) impact.

A. CHECKLIST

Biological Resources Issues	Project Impact Degree of Effect				Cumulative Impact Degree of Effect			
	N	LS	PS-M	PS	N	LS	PS-M	PS
a. endangered, threatened, or rare species	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
b. wetland habitat	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
c. coastal habitat	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
d. migration corridors	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
e. locally important species/communities	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐

Degree of Effect Explanation
N= No effect
LS = Less than significant effect
PS-M = Potentially Significant effect; Mitigation incorporated for a ND
PS = Potentially Significant effect; EIR required

B. DISCUSSION

The following discussion of the PMW-117LLS site is based on research from existing California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) data, United State Geological Survey (USGS) ortho-photography (06/01/1994) and the Dibblee Geological Foundation maps (Simi Quadrangle, 1992). The county of Ventura is processing a permit waiver for a large lot subdivision. The action is needed to legalize an illegal lot formed after Moorpark Road was re-aligned through the property at some time in the past. The site is in agricultural use and the owner has not requested permits for any change of use. However, the parcel map waiver is subject to CEQA as a discretionary project.

The site is a row crop agricultural field that is interspersed with small hills of the "Conejo volcanics" and "Upper Topanga sandstone" formations. The agricultural operation at the site preserved these formations in native vegetation and they may support endangered, threatened or sensitive species.

The CNDDB (California Department of Fish and Game, dataset dated September 5, 2002) was queried for the Simi and Thousand Oaks quadrangle using the Rarefind software. Twenty-seven endangered, threatened or sensitive species are reported to occur in the general vicinity. Of those, 10 may be present within the remnant suitable habitat at the site (listed in Table 1).

Table 1: Threatened, Endangered And Sensitive Species Potentially Present At The Site

Species	Scientific Name	Current Agency Status (Federal/ State/Local-Other) [1, 2]	Species Abbreviation
Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow	*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*	CDFG SC	RCS
Plummer's mariposa lily	*Calochortus plummerae*	CNPS 1B	PML
Coastal western whiptail	*Cnemidophorus Tigris multiscutatus*	Special animal	CWW
Conejo Dudleya	*Dudleya parva*	FT / CNPS 1B	CD
Conejo Buckwheat	*Eriogonum crocatum*	CNPS 1B / CDFG rare	CB
Lyon's pentachaeta	*Pentachaeta lyonii*	FE / SE CNPS 1B	LP
San Diego desert woodrat	*Neotoma lepida intermedia*	CDFG SC	SDWR
Coastal California gnatcatcher	*Polioptila californica*	FT / CDFG SC	CCG
Golden Eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*	CDFG SC	GE

CDFG SC= California Department of Fish and Game Species of Concern, CDFG rare= California Department of Fish and Game Rare, CNPS 1B= California Native Plant Society plants eligible for state listing as threatened or endangered, FT= federally threatened, FE= federally endangered, SE= State endangered.

Coastal sage scrub vegetation had been previously identified by the California Department of Fish and Game as a sensitive plant community, but revisions to the California Natural Diversity Data Base *List of California Terrestrial Natural Communities* (October 2000) has further subdivided this habitat type into several series, most of which are not considered "rare". The type of sage scrub that is likely to be present in the native vegetation areas at the site was not identified in the Rarefind search, but sage scrub is usually associated with the Conejo and Upper Topanga sandstone formations in the native vegetation areas.

There is a slight potential for the federal threatened California gnatcatcher to be present at the site. A somewhat disjunct population of gnatcatchers are known in the Moorpark area within about one mile north of the site. Gnatcatchers may use the habitat as a stopover to other suitable habitat, however, it is too small and disjunct to be used as breeding habitat.

The rufous-crowned sparrow occurs in sparse coastal sage scrub and grassland habitats throughout southern California, generally associated with rock outcroppings and thin soils. This species requires yuccas and tall shrubs for perches for singing and breeding displays. It could potentially occur on the sage covered hillsides of the site. Under the existing land use, no significant impacts to this species would be anticipated.

The golden eagle is considered a "species of special concern" by CDFG and/or USFWS occur in southern California as residents or winter migrants. There is no suitable roosting or nesting habitat at the site, and it would offer only marginal foraging habitat for this species.

The San Diego desert woodrat is potentially present in dry, rocky chaparral and sage scrub habitats in the area, particularly where beavertail cactus is present. While this species may be located at the site, the existing land use is not expected to significantly affect it. In addition, isolation of the hills has affected the viability of this remnant habitat for the woodrat.

The hillsides could support remnant populations of Lyon's pentachaeta, Conejo dudleya, Conejo buckwheat, and Plummer's mariposa-lily. The specific action requested (permit waiver) and ongoing land use is not expected to adversely affect these species if no further use is made of those hills. However, a future agricultural owner could choose to modify the hillsides

without the requirement of a permit from the County. This would cause a significant impact if these species are present.

Review of the aerial photography indicates that no residual wetland habitat appears to remain at the site. It is noted that the area soils indicate the potential for vernal pools to have once been located at the site and, if so, portions of the site may be considered "farmed wetlands." Changes in land use in the future would then potentially require a Clean Water Act permit.

The project site is not in the coastal zone and no coastal resources would be affected.

The remnant sage scrub habitat is isolated by farming activities and so does not serve as an important migratory corridor.

C. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

	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?	☒	☐
2. Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals?	☒	☐
3. Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable?	☒	☐

D. MITIGATION MEASURES

Recommended ☐ Required for Negative Declaration ☒

The following measure is recommended:

- The hillsides containing the remnant sage scrub community shall be conveyed through title or by fee easement to a conservation agency, such as the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency.
- If the land is not conveyed to a conservation agency, it shall be fenced and deed restricted from future development.

As an alternative to the above actions, the applicant can demonstrate that rare plants are not located on the hillsides. This would require a rare plant survey to be conducted in accordance with the guidelines recommended by the CNPS and the California Department Fish and Game (CDFG), including:

- Conducting the survey at the proper time of year when rare plants are both evident and identifiable. This is typically during the flowering period.
- Surveys that are floristic in nature. That is that all plant species noted in the field should be identified to the level necessary to determine if it is rare, threatened, or endangered.

- Conducting the survey using systematic field techniques in all habitats of the site to ensure a reasonable and thorough coverage.
- Up to three visits to the site may be necessary to ensure that seasonal variations in the flowering period of the target species are adequately covered.

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FROM A BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Negative Declaration ☐ Mitigated Negative Declaration ☒ EIR Required ☐

Reviewer: _____ Date: 12/11/12

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F. REFERENCES

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United State Geological Survey,1994, ortho-photography. Available through http://terraserver.homeadvisor.msn.com.

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Zeiner, D., W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr., and K.E. Mayer (May 1988). *California's Wildlife.* California Statewide Wildlife Habitat Relationship System, Volumes I, II, & III. California Department of Fish and Game.