Historic Biological Reports
Scan Control Sheet

County Project Number(s): CUP-5107

Report Type (check one):
- ☒ Initial Study
- ☐ Species Inventory/Survey
- ☐ Focused Study
- ☐ EIR
- ☐ Draft EIR
- ☐ EIS
- ☐ ND
- ☐ MND
- ☐ Other

Report Date (Month/Day/Year): 03/14/2000

Check if the following apply to the report:

- ☐ Wetland and/or aquatic habitat
- ☐ Within designated Coastal Zone
- ☒ *Potential movement corridor for fish and/or wildlife*

COUNTY OF VENTURA
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: March 14, 2000
Requestor: Kim Rodriguez
Project: CUP 5107 - Happy Camp Canyon Regional Park

Field Study: ☐ Yes ☒ No
Justification: Biological Assessment prepared by Padre Associates, November 1999

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

A Biological Baseline Assessment for the park property was prepared in November 1999 by Padre Associates. This assessment included field studies of the 724 acre project site for general communities, plants, and animals; a detailed mapping and assessment of protected trees; and a wetland delineation/jurisdictional determination for Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting. Nine plant communities were identified at the site: scalebroom scrub, purple sage scrub, white sage scrub, coast prickly pear scrub, mulefat scrub, California walnut woodland, coast live oak woodland, California sagebrush scrub, and annual grassland. The vast majority of the site (73%) contains annual grassland, a low sensitivity biological habitat. Three of the onsite communities were identified by Padre Associates as considered sensitive by the California Department of Fish and Game: scalebroom scrub (70.9 acres), white sage scrub (24.2 acres), and California walnut woodland (2.1 acres). In addition, the coast prickly pear scrub (23.1 acres) is considered by Fish and Game to be sensitive.

The site is primarily a wide canyon bounded by steep to rounded slopes on the east and west. The canyon bottom is largely annual grassland, except for the alluvial wash area that contains primarily scalebroom scrub. Upper plateaus in the northwest portion of the site and the southwest corner contain annual grassland, while the slopes are primarily sage scrub mixed with live oak and walnut woodland.

Due to the lack of hydric soils at the site, federal wetlands are not present, though about 4.6 acres of jurisdictional "waters of the U.S." are present. State wetland habitats present at the site would include these jurisdictional watersin addition to walnut woodland and mulefat scrub, totaling approximately 8 acres.

No state or federally listed rare, threatened, or endangered plant species were observed at the site during the field studies conducted by Padre Associates. Work was conducted at the time and in season for listed species with the potential to occur at the site, but none were observed. Special status plants that were observed included those protected by the Ventura County Tree Protection Ordinance (coast live oak, western sycamore, and southern California black walnut) and an unusual, unique occurrence of bur sage, a plant normally found in the southwestern deserts of San Diego County, Arizona and northern Mexico. This unique occurrence is considered to be the probable result of seeds transported to the area via mining trucks or other means.

Wildlife habitat value of the site was considered "high" by Padre Associates due to the presence of several rare and declining species. Specifically, sensitive species known or highly probable at the site include the coast horned lizard (California and federal species of concern [SC]), coastal western whiptail (federal SC), silverly legless lizard (state and federal SC), coastal cactus wren (state SC), Cooper's hawk (state SC), loggerhead shrike (state and federal SC), California horned lark (state SC), golden eagle (state SC), northern harrier (state SC), burrowing owl (state and federal SC), southern California rufous-crowned sparrow (state and federal SC), San Diego desert woodrat (state and federal SC). The white-tailed kite, a fully protected species (as are all other raptorial birds) was also seen at the site. No state or federal listed endangered or threatened animals are known to exist at the site, though there is the 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 of the site, and suitable breeding habitat is present at the site within the coastal sage scrub present on the canyon slopes and hills.

The golf course layout for the site (dated February 15, 2000) has been redesigned to reduce potentially significant impacts to the purple sage scrub habitat adjacent to the tee box for hole No. 7. This area has the potential to provide breeding habitat for the California gnatcatcher. Hole 10 has been moved farther from this habitat, but still removes most of the patch of white sage scrub present at the site. There is a low probability that the gnatcatcher resides within this small patch. In addition, the gnatcatcher tends to live in areas of relatively senescent older scrub that has not been burned for several decades. Introduction of the golf course may increase the frequency of fire in those areas adjacent to the course, and or may require the clearance of brush to reduce fire hazard for residences located to the south and southeast. Brush clearance and increased frequency of fire would potentially reduce the suitability of onsite sage scrub habitat for the California gnatcatcher. Since it is not known if the gnatcatcher is present at the site, impacts are considered potentially significant and require additional species specific study.

The project would reduce the amount of habitat available for the coast horned lizard, however, it would not eliminate the habitats used by this species at the site. Therefore, it is expected that though its numbers would be reduced, it would still probably persist at the site if still present

(the Padre Associates report indicates that it was not seen during the recent surveys, though it was present in prior surveys). This species is expected to occur primarily in the scalebroom scrub area, though it could occur throughout the site. The golf course design includes landscaping for fairways, greens, and tee boxes in primarily annual grassland habitat, but has several flight lines that cross the scalebroom scrub habitat and six golf cart crossings. Based on communication with the GSA, these flight lines are to be maintained in scalebroom scrub vegetation and the golf course has been redesigned to reduce the loss of scalebroom scrub. However, it is probable that golfers may intrude into this area in search of errant golf balls, creating a modification of habitat, which is considered a potentially significant impact to coast horned lizard due to loss of habitat and onsite isolation of individuals. No significant impacts to other sensitive species are anticipated based on the golf course design since these species are expected to occur in greatest numbers in the other undisturbed natural habitats present at the site.

No protected tree species are proposed for direct removal by the golf course design, and based on the project description, irrigation will be directed away from coast live oak trees to prevent secondary losses. No listed sensitive plant species are known to occur at the site; therefore, no impacts to sensitive plant species are anticipated.

No significant wetland habitat is present at the site based on the Padre Associates report. Therefore, no impacts to wetland are anticipated. Nonetheless, a Section 404 permit from the Army Corps of Engineers and a Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and Game will be required for site development.

The project site is not within the coastal zone, but rather is in an upper watershed of the Arroyo Simi, which eventually drains to Calleuguas Creek. Because of the distance from the coast, no impacts on coastal resources are anticipated.

Padre Associates identify Happy Camp Canyon as an important wildlife migration corridor. Development of the site as proposed with a golf course is not expected to significantly decrease the movement of larger animals through the site as the course would not be lighted at night and no particular barriers to movement would occur such as fencing. The alteration of habitat features through the introduction of maintained landscaping would primarily effect smaller animals by altering the connectivity of local populations by the introduction of unsuitable habitat. Except for the coast horned lizard, no small animal species are likely to be significantly affected by such isolation since sufficient open space lands are retained along the east and west slopes of the canyon and upper plateaus. Impacts to migration corridors is considered a less than significant impact given the current golf course conceptual design (open links with minimal fairway and landscape alteration).

Scalebroom scrub is considered to be a sensitive plant community due to past losses of this alluvial fan-related series by suburban development and flood control projects. The proposed golf course would result in a direct loss of 0.3 acres of this habitat within the project site due to golf cart paths and possibly additional impacts if there is unrestricted access, as discussed above. This is considered a potentially significant impact. No walnut woodland or prickly pear scrub is proposed for removal and no impacts to these communities are anticipated. A small

portion of white sage scrub habitat would be removed, but the amount to be removed is not considered significant on a local or regional basis.

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 GSA has indicated that a California gnatcatcher survey following Fish and Wildlife Service protocol will be conducted to determine if the golf course has the potential to cause impacts to this species. If there is the potential for removal of nesting locations either directly or incidentally through increased fire risk, the following measures may be necessary.

Redesign golf course features (tee boxes, paths, fairways, greens) to be at least 50 feet from any known nesting location.

Smoking restrictions shall be posted at tee boxes adjacent to the coastal sage scrub habitats (purple sage scrub, prickly pear scrub, and sagebrush).

The following measures are recommended for inclusion as conditions to project approval to reduce impacts to sensitive species and communities.

- If fairway roughs are to be constructed, then they shall be revegetated with native perennial bunch grasses at a mix of 2:1 to non-native species. These roughs shall be maintained as native perennial grasslands unless after three years of effort, it is shown that such revegetation would be unsuccessful.

- An Integrated Pest Management Plan shall be prepared for the golf course in accordance with the current practices advised by the Statewide Integrated Pest Management Project, University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

- A 25-foot buffer zone of native vegetation shall be retained between the edge of any fairway, tee box, green, or any maintained landscaping and the top of the bank of the drainages. A similar buffer shall be maintained between landscaped areas and any walnut woodland.

- Construction workers shall be notified through pre-construction meetings that a variety of sensitive wildlife are present at the site and that they shall not willfully harm any species, especially snakes and other reptiles. During the construction meeting, the proper method of moving snakes from construction zones shall be illustrated.

- The loss of scalebroom scrub habitat shall be replaced onsite at a minimum 2:1 ratio by converting annual grassland areas outside of the fairway and adjacent to retained scalebroom scrub. This shall be done by decreasing the elevation of the restoration area to that which is likely to be flooded by the 10- to 25-year storm event, the removal of topsoil to create a sandy to cobble substrate, and replanting with native shrubs. The recommended location for the mitigation effort is the annual grassland west of the 18th fairway. Any mandatory wetland mitigation required by the Corps or Fish and Game could also occur within that area.

- A split-rail fence shall be installed adjacent to any fairway or tee box that is within 50 feet of the scalebroom scrub habitat. This would apply to Hole Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, and 18 as currently designed. In addition, where the golf cart path crosses the scale broom scrub, the entries shall be fenced in either side of the path for a distance of at least 150 feet parallel to the scalebroom scrub habitat.

Install swallow boxes in the retained natural areas between the fairways as part of the Integrated Pest Management plan for the site. Also consider the installation of bat boxes to be located at least 800 feet from residential areas.

With incorporation of the above measures, potential biological impacts asociated with the golf course would be reduced to a less than significant level.

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FROM A BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Negative Declaration ☐ Mitigated Negative Declaration ☒ EIR Required ☐

Reviewer: _____ Date: 3/14/00

Rincon Consultants, Inc.

Phone: 641-1000

F. REFERENCES

California Department of Fish and Game (October 1999a). *State and Federally Listed Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Plants of California.* 16 pgs. Natural Heritage Division, Plant Conservation Program

California Department of Fish and Game (October 1999b). *State and Federally Listed Endangered and Threatened Animals of California.* 12 pgs. Natural Heritage Division, Natural Diversity Data Base.

California Department of Fish and Game (June 1999a). *Special Plants List.* 119 pgs. Natural Heritage Division, Natural Diversity Data Base.

California Department of Fish and Game (June 1999b). *Special Animals.* 42+ pgs.

County of Ventura (august 3, 1999). *Administrative Supplement to State CEQA Guidelines for the Implementation of California Environmental Quality Act.* 72 pgs.

Holland, Robert F. (October 1986). *Preliminary Descriptions of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California.* California Department of Fish and Game, Nongame Heritage Program. 156 pgs.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (November 30, 1998). *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.* Special Reprint, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 50, Part 17, Subpart B.

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.

Padre Associates, Inc. (November 1999). Final Biological Baseline Assessment for Lower Happy Camp Canyon Regional Park, Ventura County, California. Prepared for Ventura County General Services Agency.