20256-01

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August 13, 2007

Ms. Andrea Ozdy
County of Ventura
Resource Management Agency, Planning Division
800 South Victoria Ave.
Ventura, CA 93009
Submitted via email: Andrea.Ozdy@ventura.org

Subject: Initial Study for the Rancho Las Posas Project (Case No. SD07-0001)

Andrea:

Provided below is Section 6, Biological Resources, of the Initial Study for the Rancho Las Posas Project.

If you have any questions or need any more information regarding this report, please call me at (805) 681-3100, or email me at michelle.bates@tetratech.com.

Sincerely,

TETRA TECH, INC.

Michelle Bates
Senior Biologist

Section A. Project Description

Project Name: Rancho Las Posas Large Lot Subdivision
Project Number: Case No. SD07-0001

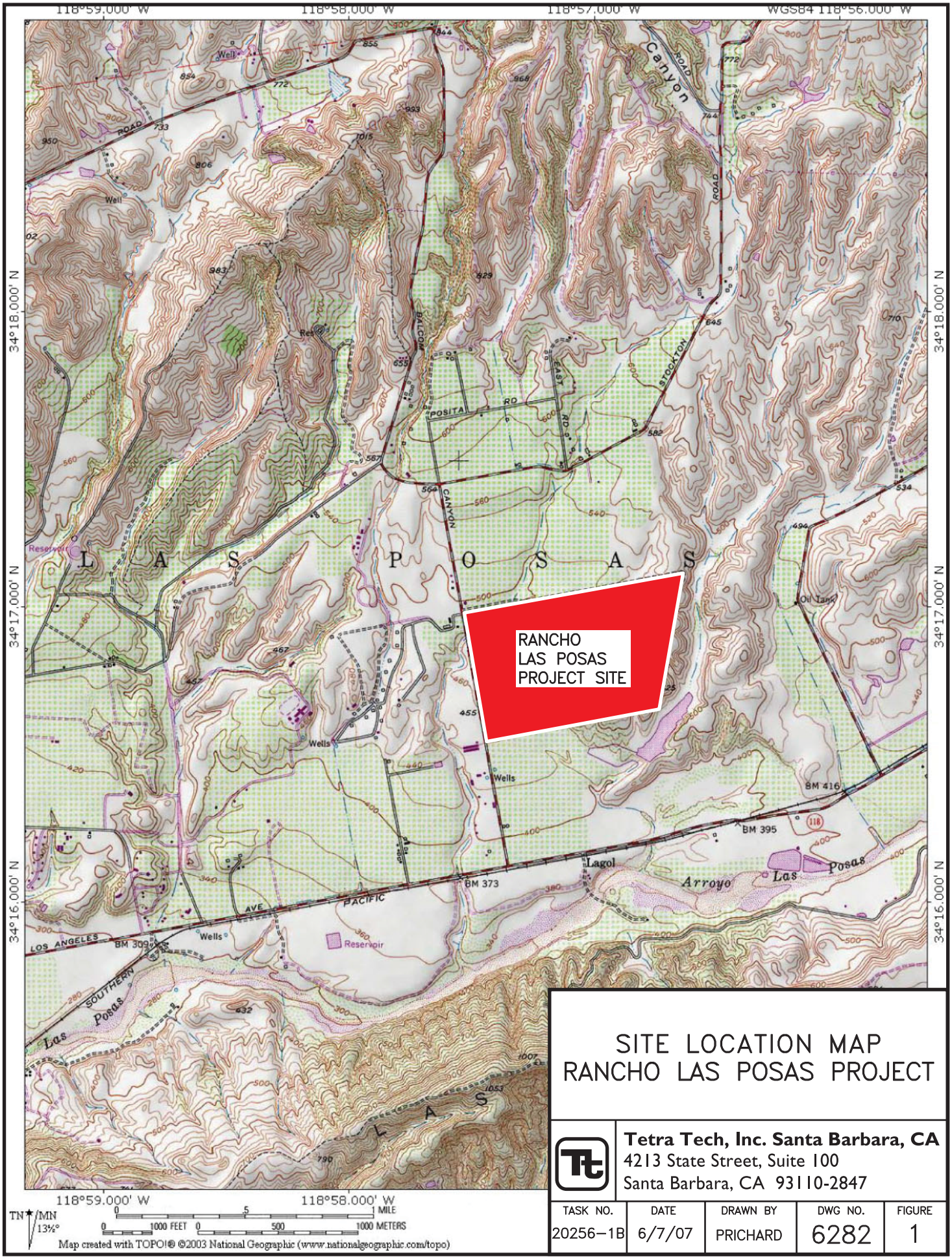
Project Location: 4896 Balcom Canyon Road, Moorpark, APN 503-0-040-115. Also see Figure 1.

Nature and Purpose of Project: The proposed project consists of subdividing one large lot into four parcels, APN: 503-0-040-115 is to be subdivided as Parcel "1" (126.33 acres), Parcel "2" (41.35 acres), Parcel "3" (40.56 acres), and Parcel "4" (40.25 acres).

Description of Physical Alterations/Improvements and Project Facilities: The proposed project would subdivide one lot into four parcels. As of this time there are no indications of additional buildings planned.

Methodology: This biological resources portion of the Initial Study Checklist has been prepared in order to evaluate the impacts of the proposed project on biological resources pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Impacts were evaluated according to the criteria provided in the *Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines* (Ventura County 2006a).

Site Description: Rancho Las Posas is just north of Highway 118. The majority of the project site is planted agriculture including avocados, oranges, and lemons. The southwestern portion of the property has a drainage ditch, residences, a barn, various structures, and equipment. A portion of Long Canyon Creek, including an intact riparian corridor, runs through the northwestern corner of the site. This creek was dry during the site visit; it does not contain water perennially. The southeastern corner of the site contains a small area that is unimproved with steep cliffs that is dominated by non-native plant species, although a few native shrubs are also present (California sage brush and coyote brush). Photos of the site are provided within Appendix A and a site location map is provided in Figure 1.



SITE LOCATION MAP
RANCHO LAS POSAS PROJECT

Tetra Tech, Inc. Santa Barbara, CA
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Santa Barbara, CA 93110-2847

TASK NO.	DATE	DRAWN BY	DWG NO.	FIGURE
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Section B. Initial Study Checklist

Section 6 of the Initial Study Checklist for the Rancho Las Posas project is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Initial Study Checklist

6. Biological Resources:	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			X				X	
b. Wetland Habitat			X				X	
c. Coastal Habitat	X				X			
d. Migration Corridors			X				X	
e. Locally Important Species/Communities			X				X	

Degree of Effect:
N = No Impact.
LS = Less Than Significant.
PS-M = Potentially Significant Impact Unless Mitigation Incorporated.
PS = Potentially Significant Impact.

Section C. Discussion of Responses to Checklist

a. Endangered, Threatened, or Rare Species.

For the purposes of this report, special-status species meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Federal or state listed threatened or endangered species,
- Federal or state proposed threatened or endangered species,
- Federal candidate species,
- State rare species,
- Species of special concern according to the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG),
- Species fully protected by the California Department of Fish and Game's Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB),
- Species monitored by the CNDDB,
- Plant species on the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) List.

In order to assess the potential presence of special-status species within the project site, a site visit was conducted by Tetra Tech on May 4, 2007. A search of the CNDDB (Commercial Version, data to expire December 2, 2007) was also completed on March 19, 2007 for the Moorpark Quadrangle in order to determine which special-status species could occur within the project site.

Special-status wildlife species that could occur within the project site according to the CNDDB are provided in Table 2. Species for which no habitat is present at the project site (i.e., fish species that would be found in perennial creeks and rivers) have not been included in Table 2. No special-status wildlife species were found during the survey completed May 4, 2007.

Table 2 Special-Status Wildlife Species that Could Occur at the Project Site

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal Status	State Status	Source
Amphibians				
Spea (=*Scaphiopus*) *hammondii*	Western spadefoot	-	CSC	CNDDB
Mammals				
Neotoma lepida intermedia	San Diego desert woodrat	-	CSC	CNDDB
Reptiles				
Phrynosoma coronatum (*blainvillii* population)	Coast (San Diego) horned lizard	-	CSC	CNDDB

Notes:
CSC – CDFG Species of Special Concern
CNDDB – California Natural Diversity Database search (Moorpark Quadrangle)

The western spadefoot is classified as a species of special concern by the CDFG. This species is found in the western half of California. In order for the western spadefoot to complete its life cycle, the species needs vernal pools as well as adjacent upland habitats (grasslands and woodlands). The species is found mostly below 3,000 feet, but can occur up to 4,500 feet. The nearest previously known location of this species is approximately 5 miles to the northeast of the Las Posas site. Given that the project site is currently used for agriculture and the lack of perennial water at the site, this species is unlikely to occur.

The San Diego desert woodrat is classified as a species of special concern by the CDFG. San Diego desert woodrats are found in a variety of shrub and desert habitats, primarily associated with rock outcroppings, boulders, cacti, or areas of dense undergrowth. This species has been previously observed at a location approximately 3 miles to the east of the project site. The project site does not contain these habitats.

The coast horned lizard is classified as a species of special concern by the CDFG. The coast San Diego horned lizard occurs throughout the foothills and coastal plains from southern California to northern Baja California. This species has been previously observed at a location approximately 6 miles to the north of the project site. Its habitat ranges from open, sandy areas to coastal sage scrub, chaparral and grasslands. Given that the majority of the project site is in active agriculture, little habitat for this species is present at the site.

The western spadefoot, San Diego desert woodrat, and coast horned lizard are unlikely to occur at the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would have a less than significant impact on special-status wildlife species.

Special-status plant species that have been previously found within the Moorpark quadrangle are provided in Table 3. No special-status plant species were found during the survey completed May 4, 2007.

Table 3 Special-Status Plant Species that Could Occur at the Project Site

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal Status	State Status	CNPS Status	Source(s)
Calochortus plummerae	Plummer's mariposa lily	-	-	1B	CNDDB

CNDDB – California Natural Diversity Database search (Moorpark Quadrangle)
California Native Plant Society (CNPS) List:
1B – Rare or endangered in California and elsewhere

The Plummer's mariposa lily is a slender-branched perennial that inhabits dry, rocky slopes, sandy sites, grasslands and openings in chaparral below 5,000 feet. It may occasionally be found in coastal scrub and blooms from May to July. The Plummer's mariposa lily is common after fire. The project site consists of dense agriculture, riparian habitat, and steep cliffs with degraded habitat dominated by non-native species. Since the only possible habitat on project site is a very small, highly degraded area dominated by non-native species (in the southeastern corner of the site), this species is not expected to occur at the site. Therefore, less than significant impacts to the Plummer's mariposa lily would be generated by the project.

Development of the project site could generate indirect impacts to the special-status species listed in Table 2 and 3. Impacts would be generated by lighting at the project site, noise generated during construction and operation at the site, increased sedimentation into Long Canyon Creek caused by activities at the site, and loss of habitat. Wildlife are likely to relocate due to construction noise. The implementation of best management practices (erosion control, etc.) will reduce sedimentation impacts to Long Canyon Creek. Mitigation Measures BR-1 and BR-2 are required to reduce impacts to special-status species to less than significant levels.

Mitigation Measures

Measure BR-1. A 100-foot setback between the upland edge of the riparian corridor of Long Canyon Creek and the project site must be established. The 100-foot setback must be surveyed by a licensed surveyor and recorded through a restrictive covenant, which must be recorded on the property title. A fence shall be placed 5 feet from the upland edge of the riparian corridor. The fence must be a split-rail fence, to allow for wildlife movement. A biological monitor shall be present during installation of the fence. All development shall be prohibited within the 100-foot setback. Brush clearance is prohibited within the 100-foot setback and riparian and wetland habitats. Any proposed future development within the setback would require discretionary review and approval by the County of Ventura and would require permits from the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). RMA Planning shall monitor the implementation of this measure.

Measure BR-2. Preconstruction surveys for nesting birds must be conducted prior to construction, within 14 days of any proposed ground disturbance. If nesting birds are found during the survey, construction cannot commence during the nesting season (February 15 – September 1). RMA Planning shall monitor the implementation of this measure. The measure must be implemented prior to the issuance of grading permits.

b. Wetlands Habitat.

A formal wetlands delineation of the project site has not been completed. A small pond is present in the central area of the project site. This area lacks riparian vegetation and does not visibly support wildlife species. No other standing areas of water or other wet habitats were observed within the project site. The northwestern portion of the site includes a portion of Long Canyon Creek and associated riparian habitat. This portion of Long Canyon Creek was dry during the May 4, 2007 site visit. Any future proposed building must be set back at least 100-feet from the upland edge of the riparian habitat located along the Long Canyon Creek. A topographic survey is required to establish the location of this setback.

If ground disturbing activities are proposed within 100-feet of the riparian area, permits will be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (404 permit), Regional Water Quality Control Board (401 certification), and California Department of Fish and Game (1600 agreement). These permits may require a formal wetlands delineation.

Project impacts to the wetland habitat would be potentially significant without the establishment of a 100-foot setback. The establishment of the 100-foot setback between Long Canyon Creek and the project site is necessary to reduce the project impacts to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Measures

Implementation of Measure BR-1, as described above, would reduce impacts to wetlands to a less than significant level.

c. Coastal Habitat.

The project site (located approximately 18 miles from the coast) is outside the boundary of the coastal zone and does not contain coastal habitats. Therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on coastal habitat.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

d. Migration Corridors.

In order to assess project impacts to wildlife corridors, the *Roads and Biodiversity Project: Guidelines for Safe Wildlife Passage* was reviewed (Ventura County 2005), as well as wildlife migration maps provided by Ventura County. The project site is located just outside an area identified as a landscape linkage (borders the southwest corner of site).

The project site includes a portion of Long Canyon Creek, which is likely used for wildlife migration. Any proposed development within the site has the potential to significantly impact this wildlife migration corridor. Development would also cause habitat fragmentation of the creek and riparian habitat. Establishment of a 100-foot setback between the creek and the project site would reduce impacts to wildlife migration corridors to a less than significant level. Any proposed fencing at the project site must allow for migration of wildlife through the project site.

Mitigation Measures

Implementation of Measure BR-1, as described above, would reduce impacts to wildlife migration corridors to a less than significant level.

e. Locally Important Species/Communities.

Locally important species are those on the Ventura County Locally Important Species List or that meet Ventura County's definition of a Locally Important Species (Ventura County 2006b). Locally important communities are those that meet Ventura County's definition of a Locally Important Community, which includes habitats that are tracked by the CNDDB.

The CNDDB tracks natural plant communities that are considered sensitive. Sensitive communities are those that have a global or state rank. The global rank indicates the overall condition of the community throughout its global range. The state rank indicates the condition of the community in California and also includes a threat designation. A description of the global and state ranks is provided in Table 4.

Table 4 Description of Global and State Ranks

Global Rank	Description
G1	Less than 6 viable element occurrences or less than 1,000 individuals or less than 2,000 acres.
G2	6 to 20 element occurrences or 2,000 to 10,000 acres.
G3	21 to 100 element occurrences or 3,000 to 10,000 individuals or 10,000 to 50,000 acres.
G4	Apparently secure, this rank is clearly lower than G3 but factors exist to cause some concern.
G5	Population or stand demonstrably secure to ineradicable due to being commonly found in the world.
GH	All sites are historic; the element has not been seen for at least 20 years, but suitable habitat still exists.
GX	All sites are extirpated; the element is extinct in the wild.
GXC	Extinct in the wild, but exists in cultivation.
G1Q	The element is very rare, but there is a taxonomic question associated with it.
State Rank	**Description**
S1	Less than 6 element occurrences or less than 1,000 individuals or less than 2,000 acres S1.1 = very threatened S1.2 = threatened S1.3 = no current threats known
S2	6 to 20 element occurrences or 3,000 individuals or 2,000 to 10,000 acres S2.1 = very threatened S2.2 = threatened S2.3 = no current threats known
S3	21 to 100 element occurrences or 3,000 to 10,000 individuals or 10,000 to 50,000 acres. S3.1 = very threatened S3.2 = threatened S3.3 = no current threats known
S4	Apparently secure within California; this rank is clearly lower than S3 but factors exist to cause some concern. No threat rank.
S5	Demonstrable secure to ineradicable in California. No threat rank.
SH	All California sites are historic; the element has not been seen for at least 20 years, but suitable habitat still exists.
SX	All California sites are extirpated; this element is extinct in the wild.

Table 5 summarizes the results of the CNDDB search for sensitive plant communities for the Moorpark Quadrangle (CNDDB 2007). The results indicated that Southern Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest, Southern Riparian Scrub, and Southern Willow Scrub communities are known to occur within the quadrangle. The field survey found that these plant communities do not occur within the project site.

Table 5 Plant Communities that Could Occur within the Project Site

Plant Community	Global Ranking	State Ranking
Southern Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest	G4	S4
Southern Riparian Scrub	G3	S3.2
Southern Willow Scrub	G3	S2.1

Source: CNDDB 2007
Note: Plant communities with a global and state rank are considered sensitive habitat.

The project site contains multiple mature trees including pines and oaks. Ventura County has tree protection regulations that protect qualified trees. Removal of protected tree species must be avoided whenever possible. Any proposed project that would remove oak, alder, cottonwood, pine, sycamore trees, etc. would result in a significant impact. Any protected tree removed at the project site (alder, cottonwood, sycamores, etc.) must be replaced in accordance with the County of Ventura Tree Protection Regulations and Guidelines. Replacement should be conducted on site when feasible and

offsite only when no realistic replacement onsite is available. With implementation of Mitigation Measure BR-3, impacts to locally important species/communities would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

Measure BR-3. Any protected tree removed at the project site (oak, alder, cottonwood, pine, sycamores, etc.) must be replaced according to the County of Ventura Tree Protection Regulations and Guidelines. Replacement should be conducted on site when feasible and offsite only when no realistic replacement onsite is available.

Cumulative Impacts:

The Rancho Las Posas project is a subdivision and there is no planned construction at this time. Mitigation measures required for this project would reduce the impacts to biological resources to less than significant levels. A list and map of proposed projects near the Rancho Las Posas area was provided by Ventura County and was reviewed to analyze cumulative impacts. Little to no development is proposed within 1 mile of the Rancho Las Posas site. Going further than 1 mile from the Rancho Las Posas site, there are a few small proposed projects, including lot line adjustments, subdivisions, lot legalizations, and the construction of greenhouses, single family dwellings, an animal hospital, and metal storage buildings. There are no large projects proposed in the immediately vicinity of the Rancho Las Posas site. Since there is little proposed development within the vicinity and since the majority of the proposed projects in the vicinity consists of small-scale projects, the proposed project would generate less than significant cumulative impacts.

Section D. Mandatory Findings of Significance

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 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?	X	
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 that occurs in a relatively brief, definitive period of time while long-term impacts will endure well into the future.)		X
3. Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? "Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effect of other current projects, and the effect of probable future projects. (Several projects may have relatively small individual impacts on two or more resources, but the total of those impacts on the environment is significant).		X
4. Does the project have environmental effects that will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?		X

Section E. Determination of Environmental Document

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.
[X]	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 in Section C of the Initial Study will be applied to the project. A **Mitigated Negative Declaration** should be prepared.
[ ]	I find the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An **Environmental Impact Report** is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
[ ]	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or Negative Declaration pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or Negative Declaration, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, **nothing further is required**.

References:

California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB)

2007 Rarefind: A database application for the California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Heritage Division data, California Diversity Data Base, Sacramento. Commercial Version, data to expire December 2, 2007. Accessed on March 19, 2007.

Ventura County

2005 *Roads and Biodiversity Project: Guidelines for Safe Wildlife Passage.* A joint effort of the Ventura County Planning Division and the Donald Bren School of Environmental Science & Management at the University of California, Santa Barbara. June 2005.

2006a *Initial Study Assessment Guidelines.* Available online: http://www.ventura.org/planning/ordinances_regs/ords_regs.htm. February, 2006.

2006b Ventura County's list of Locally Important Species. Available online: http://www.ventura.org/planning/programs_services/bio_resources/bio_resources.htm).

Appendix A: Site Photos

Location: 4896 Balcom Canyon Road, Moorpark, CA **APNs:** 503-0-040-115 **Date:** 5/4/07 **Direction:** Southeast **Notes:** Drainage in southwestern portion of site.	

Location: 4896 Balcom Canyon Road, Moorpark, CA **APNs:** 503-0-040-115 **Date:** 5/4/07 **Direction:** South **Notes:** Dense agriculture.	

Location: 4896 Balcom Canyon Road, Moorpark, CA **APNs:** 503-0-040-115 **Date:** 5/4/07 **Direction:** West **Notes:** Barn and corrals.	
Location: 4896 Balcom Canyon Road, Moorpark, CA **APNs:** 503-0-040-115 **Date:** 5/4/07 **Direction:** South **Notes:** Reservoir in the north central area of the site.	

Location: 4896 Balcom Canyon Road, Moorpark, CA **APNs:** 503-0-040-115 **Date:** 5/4/07 **Direction:** Southwest **Notes:** Long Canyon Creek, northwestern area of site.	
Location: 4896 Balcom Canyon Road, Moorpark, CA **APNs:** 503-0-040-115 **Date:** 5/4/07 **Direction:** Southeast **Notes:** Steep open space in southeastern portion of site.