COUNTY OF VENTURA
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: May 9, 2006
Requestor: Dan Klemann
Project: PM-5415 and Zone Change No. Z-2960
Field Study: ☐ Yes ☒ No (reconnaissance level site visit May 3, 2006)
Justification: This revision is in response to a plan change which includes an additional access road over an unnamed blue line stream. The original Initial Study is dated September 26, 2003 (also completed by Rincon Consultants).

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= None
LS = Less than significant effect
PS-M = Significant effect; Mitigation incorporated for a ND
PS = Potentially Significant effect; EIR required

B. DISCUSSION

The County of Ventura is processing a parcel map for a three lot subdivision, an associated zone change and 20-foot wide secondary access road. The project parcel is approximately 40.32 acres and would be subdivided into three lots at a minimum size of ten acres. The proposed zone change would be from "OS-40 ac" (Open Space, 40 acre minimum lot size) to "OS-20 ac" (Open Space, 20 acre minimum lot size) and "O-S-10 ac" (Open Space, 10 Acre Minimum). The proposed project includes a Tentative Parcel Map to subdivide the subject property into one approximately 20-acre lot and two approximately 10-acre lots. The project site is located adjacent to and north of an existing private access road, approximately ½ mile east of Happy Camp Canyon Road- Happy Camp Canyon Regional Park within an unincorporated area near the City of Moorpark.

Pursuant to the Ventura County Fire Protection District's (VCFPD's) review of the original project description and cumulative impacts, a secondary access road would be required across the southern portion of proposed Parcel 1 within an existing 20 foot wide access/utility easement. An alternative access or secondary access road (40-foot right-of-way) would be constructed from the southeast corner of the property along existing lot lines to connect to Pecan Avenue to the southeast of the property. This access road crosses an ephemeral stream at a point approximately 150 feet west of Pecan Avenue and 1,500 feet southeast of the site. This

stream flows from the hills to the northwest and through the eastern portion of the subject property. It is in a natural state to the north of the crossing and is contained within a flood control channel south of the crossing.

The following discussion is based on a reconnaissance level site visit performed on May 2, 2006 by Rincon biologist Michelle Tollett, review of the most recent California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) data (December, 2005), USGS topographic maps (National Geographic, 2001), Dibblee Geological Foundation maps (Simi Quadrangle), and orthophotography (GlobeXplorer AirPhotoUSA), Rincon's prior analyses (September 26, 2003 and letter dated June 2, 2004) and The Planning Corporation's *Environmental Constraints Analysis* (January 18, 2004).

The onsite elevation of the subject property ranges from approximately 700 to 840 feet above mean sea level. The site is located on a hillside that slopes downward to the east towards a drainage that flows through the central and eastern portions of proposed Parcels 2 and 3. The site is currently undeveloped, though it appears that the property was at one time in agricultural production similar to the contiguous property to the west, which is currently an orchard, based on the presence of eucalyptus windrows. Based on the database research and site visit, habitats on the property are primarily non-native grassland with some small areas of remnant or returning sage scrub habitat. The site also shows evidence of burning from the 2003 Simi Valley fires. The USGS quad map indicates the onsite drainage as a "blue line," which ultimately drains into the Arroyo Simi approximately one mile to the south. Based on review of the geologic map of the area (Dibblee Jr., Ehrenspeck, 1990/92), it appears the site is generally underlain by the pebbly conglomerate sandstone material of the Saugus formation. The lower drainage area on the eastern portion of the site is underlain by alluvial gravel and silt.

The CNDDB record search identified 30 wildlife species, 17 plants species, and 11 communities of concern within the area (10 mile radius from the property). This search area includes a broad range of habitats and conditions, many of which do not occur on the subject site. Several species shown on the CNDDB database include fish, amphibian, and bird species that are dependant on or associated with perennial water sources that are not present at the site.

Special-status wildlife species that have the potential to occur on the property include:

- Coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*); resident of sage scrub in arid washes and slopes. Federally threatened and State species of concern.
- Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*); found in coastal sage scrub and chaparral. State species of concern.
- Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*); foothills and mountain areas. State species of concern.
- Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*); dry grassland areas with low-growing vegetation. State species of concern.
- San Diego desert woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*); abundant in rock outcrops, cliff areas, and slopes. State species of concern.
- Coast horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum*); inhabits coastal sage scrub and chaparral in arid and semi-arid climate conditions along friable, rocky or shallow sandy soils. State species of concern.
- Western spadefoot toad (*Spea hammondii*); occurs primarily in grassland habitats, but can be found in valley-foothill hardwood woodlands. State species of concern.

- American badger (*Taxidea taxus*); abundant in drier open stages of most shrub, forest and herbaceous habitats with friable soils, prey on burrowing rodents, dig burrows. State species of concern.

Special-status plant species that were considered for potential to occur on the property include:

- Braunton's milk-vetch (*Astragalus brauntonii*); occurs in chaparral, coastal scrub, and grassland. Federal endangered and CNPS List 1B species.
- San Fernando Valley spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var *fernandina*); occurs in coastal scrub in sandy soils. A Federal candidate species, State endangered, and CNPS List 1B plant.
- Lyon's pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*); found in chaparral and grassland areas. A Federal and State endangered species and CNPS List 1B species.
- Santa Susana tarplant (*Deinandra minthornii*); Chaparral, coastal scrub on sandstone outcrops and crevices. A State listed rare species and a CNPS List 1B plant.

Biological resources issues:

a. **Endangered, threatened, or rare species.** The proposed subdivision and zone change would have no direct impacts to endangered, threatened, or rare species that may be located on this site. However, any future grading and structural development could affect listed species if present. The site is occupied by fragmented, recovering (from the Simi Valley fire, 2003), and relic coastal sage scrub habitat. The federally threatened California gnatcatcher, a species that has been documented to occur in the Moorpark area approximately one mile from the site, occurs in older aged, well-developed coastal sage scrub typically dominated by *Artemesia* and *Encelia* species. Since the 2003 fire, the Moorpark population formerly known for the site vicinity has not been re-discovered, and their continued existence in the area is unknown. Given the limted extent and disturbed nature of sage scrub habitat onsite, it is unlikely that this species occupies the project site as a resident. However, it is possible that gnatcatchers may use onsite habitats as a stopover enroute to other suitable habitat. Given the large lot development and prior disturbance at the site, the three lot subdivision is unlikely to have a direct , significant impact on this species unless a nest is destroyed during grading activities. Mitigation regarding this issue is discussed below. On a cumulative basis, the other five parcels near to the site that could undergo similar lot splits are generally in orchard use and lack suitable habitat for the gnatcatcher, with the exception of a hillside adjacent to Happy Camp Regional Park on APN 500028120, and a natural hillside in the southeastern portion of APN 500028121, just west of the site's secondary access road. Both of these hillsides appear to contain denser stands of intact, unburned suitable sage scrub habitat than is present at the site based on aerial photography rovided by the County of Ventura (September 2005) and the gnatcatcher is potentially present on those hillsides. While the proposed project development would have a less than considerable effect on the gnatcatcher population, development on those hillsides could potentially be cumulatively significant. No other animals listed as endangered or threatened under the federal or state Endangered Species Acts are known or anticipated to occur at the site.

Braunton's milkvetch is associated with calcareous soils that are not present within the site, and Lyon's pentachaeta is associated with Conejo volcanic soils, which are also not present at the site. The project site also does not lie within the boundaries of the currently proposed critical habitat for these species (USFWS, November 10, 2005). Project development would not significantly impact these species.

The state listed rare Santa Susana tarplant is associated generally with the massive sandstone bedrock formation that borders the eastern portion of Simi Valley, and has also been found on Conejo volcanics in the Santa Monica Mouintains. Suitable habitat for this perrennial plant is not present at the site, it was not observed onsite, and no impact is anticipated.

The San Fernando Valley spineflower has been found on thin, mineralized soils derived from marine formations in eastern Ventura County. Habitats present on site contain too dense of grass and shrub cover and soils do not appear conducive to this species. This plant has also never been recorded this far to the west, with the nearest known population approximately 13 miles to the east. No impact from site development is anticipated. No other plants listed as endangered, threatened, or rare under the federal or state Endangered Species Acts are known or anticipated to occur at the site or in the near vicinity, and no cumulatively significant impacts are expected.

b. **Wetland Habitat.** Two ephemeral drainages occur on the property, the "blue line" stream previously described above and a small drainage that is parallel to the south property line and which flows into the larger stream to the east. While these drainages contain limited riparian habitat, they do contain "waters of the U.S." and "waters of the State" under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, and California Department of Fish and Game. The proposed stream crossing of the smaller drainage for the site access road on Parcel 1 and the off-site crossing of the larger drainage near Pecan Avenue will both require permits from the above listed agencies. In addition, the offsite alternative/secondary access road follows an existing unpaved road that is located within 100 feet of the blue line stream. Ventura County resource protection policies recommend a minimum setback of 100 feet from significant wetland habitats and the future widening of this road per proposed parcel map would be within the 100-foot setback distance. However, given the limited resources present in this primarily barren channel, this stream is not considered a significant wetland habitat and this setback distance is not applicable.

The other adjacent sites that are subject to the cumulative analysis generally lack a well-defined drainage corridor similar to the site, but nonetheless may contain waters of the U.S. and State subject to jurisdictional permitting requirements. Since such regulatory permitting includes actions to minimize the loss of significant wetland and riparian habitat, no significant cumulative impacts to wetlands and riparian habitats would be anticipated.

c. **Coastal Habitat.** The site is not located within the coastal zone and no project or cumulative impacts would occur to coastal habitats.

d. **Migration Corridors**. The western hillside portion of the site proposed for residential home sites is generally disturbed (previously an orchard), whereas the lands east of the main drainage appear to have less disturbance with more intact native communities. The ephemeral stream provides little cover for use by animals moving through the area, and urban development is located both east and south of the site, thereby limiting the potential for migratory movements along this drainage feature and through the site. Potential future development as large acreage parcels (10+ acres) would not present a significant barrier to wildlife movements. No significant impacts are expected nor is mitigation required. Similarly, the adjacent parcels in orchard use are not within a wildlife corridor and no cumulatively significant impacts associated with those parcels would be anticipated.

e. **Locally Important Species/Communities**. The Ventura County Lists of Locally Important Plant Species (March 2005) and Locally Important Animal Species (May 2005) were reviewed to assess the potential for locally important species to occur onsite. In addition, the County considers several plant communities such as wetlands, coastal dunes, walnut woodlands, oak woodlands, oak savannas, and other communities to be locally important. The following discusses those communities and species that have potential to be present at the site.

Native California black walnuts (*Juglans californica*) were observed on the south and southeast portions of the site during the field visit. These trees are included within the Ventura County Locally Important Plant Species (March 2005). The proposed subdivision, zone change and secondary road access does not involve specific construction activities within 5 feet of the drip line of these trees, therefore this action would not significantly impact these trees. Although the project site is not within the Scenic Resource Protection Overlay Zone or the Scenic Highway Protection Overlay Zone, as defined by the Ventura County Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance, conversations with Ventura County officials resulted in an agreement to notify the County if any native California black walnut trees will be removed, as native trees are protected by Ventura County Zoning Ordinance (including *Juglans californica*) and loss of these trees could result in a potentially significant impact. In addition, they may fall under the jurisdiction of California Department of Fish and Game, given their proximity in and around the unnamed blue line stream. Any future development actions that would impact native tree resources would require mitigation, per County zoning ordinance requirements.

Oak trees are considered a locally important species by Ventura County. No mature oak trees were observed during the reconnaissance site visit, May 2, 2006, by a Rincon Consultant's biologist. In addition, per the *Environmental Constraints Analysis of Tentative Parcel Map No. 5415* prepared by The Planning Corporation, (January 18, 2004), no native protected trees were observed onsite.

The hillsides, primarily those on the eastern portion of the site, could support limited populations of Plummer's mariposa-lily, a species on the Ventura County List Of Locally Important Plant Species (March 2005). The specific action requested (lot subdivision and zoning change) is not expected to adversely affect these species.

The proposed grading of the western hillsides would occur in an area previously disturbed by agricultural activities, which is generally not conducive to the survival of bulbiferous plants like the mariposa lily. Therefore, it is unlikely to occur within the proposed development area, and no significant impacts to this plant are anticipated. Nonetheless, it may occur on the hillside east of the drainage. No mariposa-lilies were seen at the site during the brief reconnaissance.

Fuzzy horkelia (*Horkelia cuneata ssp. puberula*) and California spineflower (*Mucronea californica*) are known to occur within 2 miles of the project site on a sandy slope of coastal sage scrub similar to habitats present at the site. Given past disturbance of the western hillside where the homesites are proposed, it is unlikely that these plants occur within the proposed grading area; however, they could occur on the eastern side of the project site in the less disturbed area. No specific direct impacts by the proposed project on these plants are anticipated.

The following list represents plant species with potential to occur onsite, although presence is highly unlikely within the project boundaries as outlined in the current project plans, and for reasons indicated in the list. None of the species in the following list were seen onsite during the reconnaissance site visit, May 2, 2005. In addition, the distribution and range of these plants within the Ventura County region is still relatively widespread and even if present, the large lot subdivision is unlikely to have a significant impact on their total populations.

- *Baccharis salicina [emoryi]* Gray, Emory's Baccharis; Creosote Bush Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub, Riparian (rivers & creeks), Yellow Pine Forest; streams, washes or salt marshes up to 2000 feet msl in coastal sage or creosote bush scrub, perennial shrub; site lacks well-developed riparian corridor that could contain this species.
- Southern tarplant (*Centromadia parryi* ssp. *australis*); occurs in swamp margins, grassland, and vernal pools, often in disturbed sites; project site lacks marshy areas suitable for this plant.
- *Castilleja attenuata (Gray) Chuang & Heckard,* Valley Tassels, valley grassland, foothill woodland, chaparral, yellow pine forest, mixed evergreen forest, occurs below 7000 ft msl, annual; site appears too arid for this species; no *Castellija* species, which are relatively obvious, were seen during the field reconnaissance.
- Blochman's dudleya (*Dudleya blochmaniae* ssp *blochmaniae*); coastal scrub and grassland areas in open rocky slopes; project site lacks suitable open rocky habitat and is west of the area where this plant is typically found.
- Round-leaved filaree (*Erodium macrophyllum*); found in cismontane woodland and grassland areas in clay soils; project site generally lacks clay soils.
- Rayless ragwort (*Senecio aphanactis*) cismontane woodland and coastal scrub in alkaline flats; no alkaline flats seen within project site.

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 has a low probability of occurring within sage scrub areas of the site, and would most likely be found on the eastern portion of the site, distant from the proposed home sites. Given this animal's presence throughout

much of the region and the limited development proposed (three parcels/ homesites), the proposed development would have an insignificant effect on its population.

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

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 has potential to occur at the site, the presently disturbed nature of onsite vegetation, particularly in the proposed developed pad area on the western side of the site, limits the areas and suitable materials available for woodrat nesting and utilization of the site. No woodrat nests or other evidence of woodrat occupation of the site were observed during the site visit. No significant impacts to woodrat populations would be anticipated.

The coast horned lizard potentially inhabits the coastal sage scrub and chaparral associated with the sandy, friable soils that were observed adjacent to the proposed road crossing and bordering the ephemeral stream on the eastern portion of the site. A preferred food source (large red Harvester ants, *Pogonomyrmex* spp.) for this species was noted in several places on the property during the site visit, and coast horned lizards are known to occur in the hills to the north of the site. Individual coast horned lizards could be adversely affected during construction of the drainage crossings.

The western spadefoot toad occurs primarily in grassland habitats, but can be found in valley-foothill hardwood woodlands. This species is recorded within the vicinity of the Arroyo Simi and associated tributaries. The project site lacks intermittent water sources that are present for a sufficient time period to allow for this species to complete its life cycle onsite, and it is not expected at the site. No significant impact to this animal is expected.

American badger has the potential to occur onsite within the drier open stages of the recovering coastal sage scrub areas, the eucalyptus forest, and herbaceous habitats with friable soils. This species of special concern preys on burrowing rodents, which were abundant onsite during the site visit. However, sign of this animal (digging, burrows, prints or scat) was not noted during the reconnaissance site visit. No significant impact on this animal is expected.

The glossy snake is known from Happy Camp Canyon and so may occur at the project site and vicinity. This snake inhabits barren to sparse shrubby desert, sagebrush flats, grassland, sandhills, chaparral slopes, oak-hickory woodland; generally in open areas with sandy or loamy soil, though rocks may be present. It is still widely distributed throughout southern California, and is more commonly found in desert areas. The species populations extend from California through the desert regions of Arizona and New Mexico to west Texas, and extending south into

Baja California and Mexico. The project and adjacent cumulative development would adversely affect the local population of this species, but would not have a significant effect on the population as a whole because this snake is present within large expanses of open space areas under governmental control (Los Padres National Forest for example).

Night snake is found in the Simi Hills and Point Mugu State Park, and is potentially present at the site. This snake uses grassland, deserts, woodlands, etc. and prefers rocky and sandy areas. Its populations are distributed throughout arid regions of the western U.S., from eastern Washington to west Texas and also further south into Mexico. Similar to the glossy snake, the project and cumulative development would have an adverse, but less than significant effect on this snake as it has secure populations in areas under governmental control and managed for wildlife.

Nesting birds and particularly raptors (birds of prey) are protected under California Fish and Game Code from disturbance during the breeding season. During the reconnaissance site visit, several bird species were noted in the eucalyptus trees. The eucalyptus trees provide suitable nesting habitat for several species onsite, such as red-tailed hawk observed during the May 2, 2006 site visit (*Buteo jamaicensis*). Many trees (including the *Populus* sp. near the future housing pads) were damaged during the Simi fire of 2003, which now show sign of nesting opportunities for cavity nesters, as several trees were observed with cavities that appear to have been hollowed by a type of woodpecker or flicker; these birds were not observed during the site visit. Disturbance to nesting birds, particularly raptors, is considered a potentially significant effect since it could be in violation of an existing environmental law.

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 ☒

Although this parcel map waiver and zone change would not result in direct significant impacts to biological resources, future grading for development and the alternative/secondary access road may impact sensitive biological resources. Therefore, the following measures are required prior to any grading.

a. **Sensitive Fauna.** Coast horned lizards are potentially present at the stream crossings and along the access roads. Prior to grading, a pre-construction clearance survey and relocation for the coast horned lizard shall occur within 3 days of the initiation of construction. Lizards shall be searched for by lightly raking sandy areas, particularly in the vicinity of harvester ant nests, and within the construction right-of-way. Lizards shall be captured and transported at least 500 feet from the construction area and released within the upstream portion of the main drainage within Parcels 2 and 3 on the site.

b. **Breeding Birds.** If the project occurs during nesting season (February 1-September 15), surveys for breeding bird species shall be performed within one week of clearing activities. If nests are present within the development areas, a buffer area of at least 50 feet shall be imposed around passerine nests and 250 feet from raptor nests until the young have fledged and are no longer dependent on the nest. The actual buffer width shall be determined by the survey biologist based on the specific species and shall be done in coordination with the County of Ventura.

c. **Wetland Habitat.** Proposed on and offsite stream crossings will require permits from the Army Corps of Engineers (Section 404), California Department of Fish and Game (Streambed Alteration Agreement), and Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (Section 401 Certification of the Section 404 Permit). No grading shall be permitted within the site until the applicant has obtained such permits and filed a copy with the County of Ventura. If onsite mitigation of riparian habitats is required by these permits, the County shall not issue a grading permit until such time that an approved mitigation plan has also been filed with the County.

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FROM A BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Negative Declaration ☐ Mitigated Negative Declaration ☒ EIR Required ☐

Reviewer: _____ Date: _____

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F. REFERENCES

California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Diversity Database (January 2006). Special Vascular Plants, Bryophytes, and Lichens List. Quarterly publication, Mimeo. 97 pp.

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