DEC 1 3 2002

COUNTY OF VENTURA
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: December 1, 2002
Requestor: Kim Rodriguez
Project: TT 4410

Field Study: ☐ Yes ☒ No
Justification: Prior field survey at project site done by McClelland Consultants, January 1989. Review of geologic mapping indicates that site lacks soils potentially suitable for special-status plants.

A. CHECKLIST

Biological Resources Issues	Project Impact Degree of Effect N	LS	PS-M	PS	Cumulative Impact Degree of Effect 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 is based on the results of a review of the biological field survey of the site conducted in January of 1989 by McClelland Consultants for the TT-4410 16 unit subdivision, the tentative tract map for the site, California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) data, United States Geological Survey (USGS) ortho-photography (06/01/1994), the Dibblee Geological Foundation maps (Camarillo-Newbury Park Quadrangle, 1992), and a review of pertinent literature.

Past uses of the project site includes orchards, graded lots, and lots with houses. The project proposes to remove some existing houses, remove trees from an orchard that is dead, and grade these areas for a housing development. Drainage of the western side of the site is conveyed via a concrete drainage swale that borders Lot 12 on the west side, and another natural swale drains through Lots 8 and 9, but has no riparian vegetation. Native sage scrub vegetation is located on the steep hillside that forms the northern portion of the site.

The predominant geology on all of the lots is older alluvial terrace deposits that grade into Saugus formation rocks on the hillside. Per the Dibblee Camarillo-Newbury Park geologic map,

Conejo volcanic rocks and soils are located just outside of the northern edge of the Lot 1 property boundary. Conejo Volcanics are know to support several sensitive species, including Lyon's pentachaeta (*Pentacheta lyonii*), Pummer's mariposa lily (*Calochortus Plummerae*), Conejo dudleya (*Dudleya parvA*), and Conejo buckwheat (*Eriogonum crocatum*). These species are particulary noted for occurring in rocky outcrop and cliff faces of coastal sage scrub or chaparral communities, such as occur at the outside edge of the property. However, they would not be expected to occur within the site based on the geological mapping and the prior field investigation. The aerial photograph indicates that the site lacks wetlands and vernal pools, and the soils mapping does not indicate alkaline soils that are required to support other species that the CNDDB search indicated may occur in the Camarillo-Newbury quad.

Grading plans for the site indicate that most of the natural vegetation remaining on the northern portion of the site, particularly that within Lots 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7, would not be affected directly by grading. Given the steepness of the slopes, it is anticipated that except for fuel modification clearing near the structures that this vegetation will remain in place under the future residential land uses. The County General Plan indicates that coastal sage scrub is a local community of concern and removal of this plant community would be considered an adverse effect. However, review of the aerial photograph indicates that this patch of scrub is relatively isolated and therefore has reduced habitat values for the maintenance of wildlife populations and preservation of plants. Therefore, this impact is considered less than significant because of the limited extent of undisturbed scrub onsite and because most of it is anticipated to not be removed.

No wetland habitat was determined to be present in the 1989 field study so no impacts are anticipated.

The project site is not within the coastal zone and no impacts would be anticipated.

As previously stated, most of the proposed project site has been previously disturbed by agricultural and residential land uses and the area is surrounded by such uses. The project is not known to be within a specific migratory route and given the anticipated retention of scrub on the hillsides, is not expected to affect the movement of animals in the area. No significant impacts are anticipated.

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 ☐

No mitigation measures are required.

Reviewer: _____ Date: 12/4/02

Rincon Consultants, Inc.

Phone: 641-1000

F. REFERENCES

Dibblee Geological Foundation maps, 1992, Camarillo-Newbury Park Quadrangle

National Geographic, 2001, TOPO! Seamless USGS Topographic Maps on CD-ROM

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

California Department of Fish and Game (July 2002a). *State and Federally Listed Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Plants of California.* 16 pgs. Habitat Conservation Division.

California Department of Fish and Game (July 2002b). *State and Federally Listed Endangered and Threatened Animals of California.* 9 pgs. Habitat Conservation Division.

California Department of Fish and Game (July 2002c). *Special Vascular Plants, Bryophytes, and Lichens List.* 141 pgs. Habitat Conservation Division, Natural Diversity Database.

California Department of Fish and Game (July 2002d). *Special Animals.* California Natural Diversity Database.

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.

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

Ventura County (September 2000). *Initial Study Assessment Guidelines.* 208 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.

RACHEL·
TIERNEY
CONSULTING

May 18, 2001

Dave Perkins
C/o Horton Kabey
9600 East Arapahoe Road, Suite 260
Englewood, CO 80112

RE: Rare Plant Survey and Ca. Gnatcatcher Assessment
50-acre site off Santa Rosa Road, Ventura County

Dear Dave,

This letter describes the results of a focused sensitive plant survey and assessment of potential habitat for California Gnatcatcher on a 50 acre parcel in the Santa Rosa Valley area of Ventura County. The rare plant survey was conducted on April 29, 2001. The gnatcatcher assessment was conducted on May 8, 2001.

METHODS

RARE PLANT SURVEY: At the time of the rare plant survey, all potentially occurring sensitive plant species would be observable and in flower. The entire parcel was surveyed on foot. Plant communities were determined following the classification system used by the Department of Fish and Game (Holland, 1986). All plant species encountered were identified to determine the presence or absence of sensitive species. Plant species were noted in the field or collected for identification. The systematic treatment for plants follows the Jepson Manuel (Hickman, 1994). Special attention was focused on evaluating the suitability of existing habitats for supporting sensitive plant species that are known or suspected to occur within the vicinity of the project site.

CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER ASSESSMENT: The assessment was conducted by James Greaves, who is permitted through the US Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct gnatcatcher surveys in California. Prior to visiting the site, Mr. Greaves stopped for 45 minutes at a site in Moorpark with one known nesting pair to determine if the birds would respond to a recorded tape of gnatcatcher calls. They responded to the tape almost instantly. Mr. Greaves then surveyed the subject property using visual and tape response to determine presence.

Post Office Box 1113
Santa Barbara
California
93102

Tel 805.957.1100
Fax 805.957.2050

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The southerly portion of the subject property south of Voltaire Drive consists of an abandoned avocado orchard with many introduced exotics and weedy species. Vegetation observed in this area consisted of California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), Brewer's salt bush (*Atriplex lentiformis ssp. breweri*), coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*), and giant wild rye (*Leymus condensatus*) intermixed with a number of introduced species.

The area north of Voltaire Drive is comprised of coastal sage scrub that is progressively less disturbed to the north. Dominant species in the lower portion of the property include California sagebrush, California sunflower (*Encelia californica*), coyote brush and black sage (*Salvia mellifera*) intermixed with Peruvian pepper, Eucalyptus sp. and old citrus trees. North of the saddle the vegetation is less disturbed and becomes more diverse with additional species such as mock heather (*Ericameria ericoides*), ashy buckwheat (*Eriogonum cinereum*), chaparral yucca (*Yucca whipplei*), chaparral mallow (*Malacothamnus fasciculatus*) and foothill needlegrass (*Nassella lepida*) becoming more common. A single Catalina mariposa lily *(Calochortus catalinae*) was found growing out of a yucca in the vicinity of the north property line.

The ephemeral drainage on the west side of the property was thickly vegetated with chaparral mallow, Mexican elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*) and purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*). The drainage on the east side of the property was somewhat more disturbed with old citrus trees, non-native grasses (*Brome, Avena, Hordeum*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*) and such natives as California sagebrush, coyote brush and deer weed (*Lotus scoparius*).

The following birds were noted within the coastal sage scrub:

Anna's hummingbird - 2
Bewick's wren - 4 (one carried food)
Bushtit - 4, one nest (unable to determine status)
California towhee - 5, 2+ juveniles
California quail - 8
House finch - 4, probably more numerous
Lesser goldfinch - 2
Northern mockingbird - 3
Phainopepla - 3
Song sparrow - 1 (in ravine next to Voltaire Drive locked gate)
Spotted towhee - 3

(Many roosters in cages)

RESULTS

RARE PLANT SURVEY: No listed or candidate plant species were noted during the site survey. Catalina mariposa lily, which is a CNPS List 4 plant, was seen near the northern property boundary. No other special status species were found nor are any expected, based on lack of suitable habitat.

The following sensitive plant species are known from the general area of the project site and were looked for during this survey. Most of the listed species are restricted to a particular type of substrate (rock outcrops, carbonate soils) that is not present at the site. Probability of the occurrence of these species is low due to the lack of suitable habitat and the highly disturbed nature of the parcel. Information for this section has been derived from the California Natural Diversity Database and the Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California (CNPS, 1994).

POTENTIALLY-OCCURRING LISTED AND CANDIDATE PLANT SPECIES

Astragalus brauntonii (Braunton's Milkvetch)

CNPS: 1B
State/Federal: /Endangered
Habitat/Distribution: This species is most commonly (and most abundantly) seen after chaparral burns, and appears to be endemic to calcareous soils. Small populations have also been noted following artificial, mechanical disturbance such as grading. It is known from only a handful of locations within the foothills bordering the Los Angeles plain, and from the Santa Monica, Santa Ana and San Gabriel Mountains. Occasionally, individuals in other parts of its range have been located after seed has fallen or been washed down-slope from a main population, presumably scarified by abrasion. Temporary populations, such as this one, may be an important dispersal strategy for this plant.
Potential for Occurring On-Site: Low. Braunton's Milkvetch is a short-lived, perennial herb that is usually seen only after fires or major mechanical disturbance. The preferred soil characteristics for this species (limestone) are not apparent on the site

Calochortus plummerae (Plummer's Maripesa Lily)

CNPS: 1B
State/Federal: /Species of Concern (formerly Candidate Category 2)
Habitat/Distribution: This species is found in scattered populations in Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. The perennial herb is seen in chaparral, sage scrub, woodlands and grasslands, often on granitic soils. Flowering period is from May-July.
Potential for Occurrence: Moderate. Suitable habitat is found on-site.

Dudleya abramsii spp. parva (Conejo Dudleya)

CNPS: List 1B
State/Federal: /Threatened
Habitat/Distribution: Found on north-facing volcanic slopes. Populations are scattered in several locations in Simi Valley and the Santa Monica Mountains.
Potential for Occurrence: Low. Typical habitat is not present.

Hemizonia minthornii (Santa Susana Tarplant)

CNPS: 1B
State/Federal: Rare/Species of Concern
Habitat/Distribution: Santa Susana rock outcrops in chaparral. A recent population was located outside of the Santa Susana rock formation.
Potential for Occurrence: Low. Typical habitat is not present.

Pentachaeta lyonii (Lyon's Pentachaeta)

CNPS: 1B
State/Fed: Endangered/ Endangered
Habitat/Distribution: This member of the Aster family is known from thin grasslands and coastal sage scrub communities, and is almost always associated with annual Polemones. Populations are scattered in several locations in Simi Valley and the Santa Monica Mountains, including Stunt Ranch and Malibu Hills.
Potential for Occurring On-site: Moderate. Suitable grasslands are not present, however this species also occurs in small openings within scrub habitat similar to what may have been present in very small areas with the site. This species was not located during an in-season survey.

OTHER SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES

The following plant species are considered sensitive by the CNPS. These species are not listed or candidates for listing at this time, however, their status may change in the future.

Baccharis plummerae (Plummer's Baccharis)

CNPS: 4 (a watch list)
State/Federal: None
Habitat: Shaded canyons.
Potential for Occurrence: Moderate. Not seen during a spring survey.

Calochortus catalinae (Catalina Mariposa)

CNPS: 4 (a watch list)
State/Federal: None
Habitat: Common in grasslands and openings in scrub.
Potential for Occurrence: **Located near northern property boundary.**

CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER ASSESSMENT: No response was heard or seen to the gnatcatcher tape played throughout the entire site. The areas with relatively undisturbed coastal sage scrub are too steep to support this species. In addition, the more level areas containing scrub and riparian elements are too disturbed. Althougli some vegetational elements are present, it is the opinion of Mr. Greaves that a formal survey of California gnatcatcher is not required at this site. As required under his permit conditions, Mr. Greaves has sent the results of his survey to Rick Ferren, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Office.

Please call if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Rachel Tierney

REFERENCES

California Native Plant Society, 1994. Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California.

Greaves, J. 2001. Verbal and written results of a field investigation of a 50-acre site in the Santa Rosa Valley area of Ventura. May 8-10, 2001.

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Holland, R., 1986. Preliminary Description of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California. Nongame Heritage Program, California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California.

Reed Jr., P.B., 1988. National List of Plant Species That Occur in Wetlands: California Region. Prepared for the National Wetlands Inventory, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Biological Report: 88 (26.10).

United States Army Corps of Engineers, 1987. Wetland Delineation Manual, Final Report.