

California Environmental Quality Act Environmental Checklist Form
Biological Resources
County of Ventura, Planning Division



PROJECT REFERENCE NO.: CUP-5103 (DMEC PN 99-0111-3)	PROJECT PLANNER: Debbie Morrisset
DATE: 29 November 1999 (site visit conducted on 24 November 1999)	PROJECT BIOLOGIST: Cher Wellonen & David L. Magney, David Magney Environmental Consulting

PROJECT LOCATION: Approximately 600 feet north from Highway 150, at Osborn Road, Upper Ojai Valley, Ventura County; Ex Mission San Buenaventura, south of Section 18 and north of Section 19 (Sulphur Mountain), T4N, R21W, San Bernardino Base Meridian, Santa Paula Peak, California 7½-minute quadrangle; Latitude 34°26'23.8"N, Longitude 119°07'37.7"W; at an elevation of approximately 1,200 feet above mean sea level.

PROJECT ADDRESS: 13675 Ojai Road, Santa Paula, California 93060.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: The purpose of this project is to install a new, unmanned, Sprint PCS telecommunications facility, which would include one 58-foot tall monopole with two sectors of four-panel antennas (each 6' tall by 8" wide), and six ground-mounted equipment cabinets (6' tall by 2' wide).

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING: The project site occurs on a moderately steep, south-facing slope, in a lowland area near the Upper Ojai Valley (in the western Transverse Ranges), and occurs on the north side of the west-east-trending section of Sisar Creek (before it merges with Santa Paula Creek). Several oil facilities and drill rigs occupy a small portion of the property. The project site is located just north of an existing oil well, which is currently being pumped for oil. Sprint proposes to install the telecommunication facility behind (north of) the oil pumps, and in a way that it will not be noticeable from the highway. Several homes are also located near the property (west and north of the site).

The vegetation types present onsite include Sumac-Ceanothus Chaparral mixed with Coastal Sage Scrub, Yucca-Coast Prickly Pear Scrub, and Mulefat Scrub. The Sumac-Ceanothus Chaparral and the Yucca-Coast Prickly Pear Scrub consist of primarily woody perennial, small and large shrubs that are characteristically fire- and drought-adapted. The Mulefat Scrub onsite is represented by scattered trees among dominating large evergreen and deciduous shrubs growing between a riparian zone and upland vegetation. Sumac-Ceanothus Chaparral covers the majority of the south-facing slope on which the site occurs; Yucca-Coast Prickly Pear Scrub exists on the southeast side of the site; and Mulefat Scrub occurs at the southern perimeter of the site, as the Sisar Creek riparian zone transitions into upland vegetation.

The dominant habitat type onsite is Sumac-Ceanothus Chaparral, which includes a mixture of several Coastal Sage Scrub species. The dominants of this mixed vegetation type include the following: Buck Brush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*), Hoary Ceanothus (*C. oliganthus*), Greenbark Ceanothus (*C. spinosus*), Birchleaf Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus betuloides*), California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), Laurelleaf Sumac (*Malosma laurina*), and Purple Sage (*Salvia leucophylla*). Other important plant species contributing to this habitat type include: Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), Morning-glory (*Calystegia macrostegia*), Deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), Hollyleaf Redberry (*Rhamnus ilicifolia*), and Black Sage (*Salvia mellifera*). The understory consists of annual grasses (*Avena*

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barbata, *Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*, *Bromus hordeaceus*), Green Everlasting (*Gnaphalium californicum*), Saw-toothed Goldenbush (*Hazardia squarrosa*), Manroot (*Marah fabaceus*), Purple Needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*), and Smilo Grass (*Piptatherum miliaceum*).

The Yucca-Coast Prickly Pear Scrub is dominated by Our Lord's Candle (*Yucca whipplei*) and Coast Prickly Pear (*Opuntia littoralis*), while other contributing species include: Chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), Purple Needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*), and White Sage (*Salvia apiana*). The Mulefat Scrub vegetation type onsite is dominated by Mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*), and consists of important canopy contributors, such as Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), Summer Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus*), Tree Tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), scattered Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) and California Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*) trees, Arroyo Willow (*Salix lasiolepis*), and Blue Elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*). Several scattered ruderal species are present onsite, and they include: Italian Thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*), Tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*), Sweet Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Telegraph Weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), Tree Tobacco, and Russian Thistle (*Salsola tragus*).

Several special-status plant species are known to occur in the region of the project site, and the site has suitable habitat for many of the plants' potential establishment. The special-status plants that could occur in the vicinity of the project site include: *Antirrhinum ovatum*, *Baccharis plummerae* ssp. *plummerae*, *Calochortus catalinae*, *Calochortus plummerae*, *Fritillaria ojaiensis*, *Galium cliftonsmithii*, *Juglans californica* ssp. *californica*, and *Polygala cornuta* ssp. *fishiae*.

Only one *J. californica* ssp. *californica* was observed in the riparian zone just south/southeast of the site. No other special-status species were found at the project site; however, the initial study survey should not be considered thorough, nor was it performed in the appropriate seasons to detect and/or identify many special-status species, particularly the annual or seasonal species. The property occurs on a south-facing slope, and most of the above mentioned special-status species require a north-facing slope with much wetter and shadier conditions. In general, chaparral vegetation, such as Sumac-Ceanothus Chaparral, is not considered sensitive because abundant areas of this community still exist in the region; however, fire hazard brush clearance requirements around structures increases the amount of natural vegetation removed and contributes to the cumulative loss in the region. Regardless, plant communities dominated by Prickly Pear cactus is referred to as Southern Cactus Scrub (Magney 1992¹) and is considered a sensitive plant community by the California Native Plant Society² and the California Department of Fish and Game³.

The wildlife observed during the site visit includes: Red-tailed Hawk, Scrub Jay, Northern Flicker, Acorn Woodpecker, American Gold Finch, Common Raven, Coyote (scat), and Brown Towhee. No special-status wildlife species were observed during the survey; however, the special-status reptile species San Diego Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillei*) and the special-status mammal species San Diego Desert Woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*) are the two wildlife special-status

¹ Magney, D.L. 1992. Descriptions of Three New Southern California Vegetation Types: Southern Cactus Scrub, Southern Coastal Needlegrass Grassland, and Scalebroom Scrub. *Crossossoma* 18(1):1-9, June.

² Sawyer, J.O., and T. Keeler-Wolf. 1995. *A Manual of California Vegetation*. California Native Plant Society, Sacramento, California.

³ Natural Diversity Data Base. 1987. Natural Communities: List of Natural Communities Indicating Highest Inventory Priorities. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California.

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species most likely to occur in the suitable Sumac-Ceanothus Chaparral/Coastal Sage Scrub habitat onsite.

Other special-status wildlife species that have the potential to occur at (or in the vicinity of) the project site include: Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), California Red-legged Frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*), Red-sided Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis infernalis*), Coastal Western Whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris multiscutatus*), Coast Patch-nosed Snake (*Salvadora hexalepis virgultea*), Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), White-tailed Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Pallid Bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), and Greater Western Mastiff Bat (*Eumops perotis californicus*).

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IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES:	PROJECT IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT ⁴				CUMULATIVE IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT			
	N	LS	PS-M	PS	N	LS	PS-M	PS
What level of impact will the proposal have on:								
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
<i>Will the proposal:</i>								
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?				X				X
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?			X				X	
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetland as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	X				X			
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?		X				X		
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?			X				X	
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	X				X			

Additional comments or explanations:

IV.A. Potential exists for one or more endangered, threatened, or rare species to use the project site; however, detailed and seasonal surveys have not been conducted to determine their presence or absence. Therefore, until such time as qualified botanists and wildlife biologists can conduct

⁴ N = No Impact; LS = Less Than Significant; PS-M = Potentially Significant Impact Unless Mitigation Incorporated; PS = Potentially Significant Impact.

appropriate field surveys, the preparer must assume the project would result in a significant impact on one or more special-status species. Additional comments are provided below.

- IV.B. No wetland habitat is present at the project site; however, a riparian wetland corridor exists in the vicinity, south of the oil well drilling pad, which is south of the project site.
- IV.C. The project site is well inland from coastal habitat, by approximately 15 miles.
- IV.D. The project would not likely create a significant barrier to plant and animal movement or migration.
- IV.E. The project site contains, or potentially contains, sensitive locally important species and plant communities. Loss of these biotic resources is considered significant if not mitigated. The project may also contribute to the cumulative loss of locally sensitive species and habitats, especially because of vegetation removal for fire hazard control (100 feet from all structures). Additional information is provided below.
- IV.a. As discussed in the “Environmental Setting” section above, the project site is within the known range of a number of special-status species. The proposed project may result in a reduction of unique, rare, or endangered species. Suitable habitat is present for the San Diego Horned Lizard and San Diego Desert Woodrat and the plants listed previously. One individual *Juglans californica* var. *californica* was observed on the far side of the adjacent oil well pad. The Ventura County Fire Department fire hazard clearance zone (100 feet from all structures) may adversely affect this plant or prevent natural recruitment and regeneration into adjacent habitat.
- IV.b. Native chaparral and Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation and trees would be removed, resulting in a direct and permanent loss of natural vegetation and contribute to the cumulative loss of these habitats in the region. Coastal Sage Scrub, Southern Cactus Scrub, and Southern California Walnut Woodland⁵ plant communities are all present onsite or adjacent to it, and would be directly and indirectly adversely affected by the project. The fire hazard clearance zone around structures will result in the removal of all native shrubs and trees within 100 feet, which will expose currently vegetated soil to recruitment by invasive exotic plants. This in turn could also result in degradation of adjacent undisturbed habitats by competition by invasive exotic plants. The required vegetation clearing will not likely create a barrier to normal replenishment of existing species; however, it would result in a cumulative loss of habitat.
- IV.c. No wetlands occur at the project site or within 100 feet. A riparian corridor does exist on the south side of the existing oil well pad to the south of the project site.
- IV.d. The proposed project is expected to deteriorate existing wildlife habitat because of the removal/clearing of chaparral/scrub vegetation and contributing to the cumulative loss and

⁵ Coastal Sage Scrub, Southern Cactus Scrub, and Southern California Walnut Woodland are considered sensitive plant communities by the California Department of Fish and Game (Natural Diversity Data Base. 1987. Natural Communities: List of Natural Communities Indicating Highest Inventory Priorities. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California.)

degradation of habitat for wildlife of the region. No significant wildlife corridors or nursery sites are known in the immediate vicinity of the project site.

IV.e. One mature Coast Live Oak tree occurs at the southern and northern edge of the project site and the existing oil well pad, respectively, and may need to be removed for access and/or establishing the fire hazard safety zone. This is in conflict with the intent of the existing County policy and ordinance to protect native trees.

IV.f. No HCPs, NCCPs, or other habitat conservation plans have been established or adopted in the Ojai-Santa Paula area.

Recommendations:

While the building of the Sprint PCS facility in itself will result in only a small impact to natural vegetation and wildlife, cumulative losses of chaparral and, more importantly, Coastal Sage Scrub and Southern California Walnut Woodland, are considerable on the long-term. The quantity of vegetation and wildlife habitat lost is much greater when fire hazard measures around structures are required and implemented. To reduce the magnitude of vegetation and habitat losses imposed for fire safety zones, structures should be located on previously disturbed sites, and/or immediately adjacent to other developed sites. This would reduce the edge effect of placing a structure in the middle of natural habitat.

The project site potentially contains several special-status species; however, the timing of this initial study assessment is improper for conducting seasonal field surveys. Seasonal field surveys for special-status plant and wildlife species should be conducted during the spring (March-April) and early summer (June-July). Without these surveys, the preparer must assume that one or more special-status species are present and the project would result in a significant adverse impact. Note: transplantation of rare plants as mitigation has been found to fail 99% of the time. Therefore, transplantation should not be considered a viable or reasonably feasible mitigation measure should individual special-status plant species are found onsite.

All impacts could be avoided by locating the Sprint PCS facility on to the existing oil well pad, which is over one acre in size, and larger than necessary to service the pumps, or even redrill the wells. Alternatively, the facility could be located immediately adjacent to the oil well pad.

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D. <u>MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>	<u>Yes/Maybe</u>	<u>No</u>
Based on the information contained with Sections B and C:		
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 major periods of California's 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 that 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

E. <u>DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT:</u>	
On the basis of this initial evaluation:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I find the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environmental, there would not be a significant effect in this case because the mitigation measure(s) described in section IV of the Initial Study will be applied to the project, A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I find the proposed project, individually and/or cumulatively, MAY have a significant effect on the environmental, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I find that the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environmental, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in and 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.
<input type="checkbox"/>	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.

David L. Magney, Biological Resources Initial Study Preparer

Date