

California Environmental Quality Act Environmental Checklist Form

Biological Resources

County of Ventura, Planning Division

PROJECT REFERENCE NO.: PM-5210 (DMEC PN 99-0111-_)	PROJECT PLANNER: Kim Rodriguez
DATE: 27 September 2000	PROJECT BIOLOGIST: Carl G. Thelander and David L. Magney, David Magney Environmental Consulting

PROJECT LOCATION: Hidden Meadows Estates, Santa Rosa Valley, Lot 15 of Tract 2732 (APN 519-0-071-17; 519-0-082-08)

PROJECT ADDRESS: None provided

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: Rezone from R-E-20 Acre to R-E-10 Acre; Subdivision of approximately 21.59 acres into two parcels of 10.74 and 10.85 acres each.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING: The project site is on Marvella Court, south of Santa Rosa Valley Road near its intersection with Moorpark Road and west of Norwegian Grade. The area is a mix of disturbed, ruderal vegetation near existing and proposed housing development mixed with patches of native vegetation such as Coastal Sage Scrub, Southern Cactus Scrub, California Annual Grassland, and Coyote Brush Scrub. Scattered rock outcrops contain a rich lichen flora.

Due to the seasonal timing of the field survey, we observed few wildlife species and few annual plant species. The field visit revealed the presence of scrub jays, common ravens, red-tailed hawk (1), coyote (scat), brush rabbits, California quail, roadrunner, mockingbirds, house finches, mourning doves, western flycatcher, and brown towhees.

The vegetation of the property consists of Coastal Sage Scrub, Coyote Brush Scrub, Southern California Walnut Woodland, Perennial Needlegrass Grassland, and Ruderal Grasslands [including areas dominated by Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*) and Sweet Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)]. Coastal Sage Scrub, Perennial Needlegrass Grassland, and Southern California Black Walnut Woodland are all considered sensitive plant communities. The location of each of the vegetation types is delineated on Figure 1.

Native plant species observed within the scrubland habitats at the site include: California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), Lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), Coast Prickly Pear (*Opuntia littoralis*), Southern California Black Walnut (*Juglans californica* ssp. *californica*) (a special-status species – CNPS List 4), White Sage (*Salvia apiana*), Purple Sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), California Wild Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), Blue Elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), Giant Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica* ssp. *holosericea*), a locoweed (*Astragalus* sp.), Giant Ryegrass (*Leymus condensatus*), and Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). A list of plant species observed during the 27 September 2000 botanical field survey is included as Table 1.

Grassland areas contained Slender Wild Oat (*Avena barbata*), Black Mustard, Summer Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), Yellow Star-thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), California Everlasting (*Gnaphalium californicum*), Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*), fiddleneck (*Amsinckia* sp.), Soft Chess (*Bromus hordeaceus*), Ripgut Brome (*Bromus diandrus*), White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), Sweet Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus*), and Red Brome (*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*). Many other plant species are expected to occur onsite; however, they were not visible or identifiable due to the seasonal life cycles of many California annual plant species.

Several species of lichen are present onsite, primarily on old Coyote Brush scrubs and rock outcrops on the southern portion of the parcel.

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A search of the California Natural Diversity Database records and the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California* for the area indicate habitat is present onsite, or in the Santa Rosa Valley region, for several special-status species, including those listed below.

Special-Status Wildlife Species:

Riverside Fairy Shrimp (*Streptocephalus woottoni*)
California Red-legged Frog (*Rana aurora draytoni*)
Coastal Western Whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris multiscutatus*)
Two-striped Garter Snake (*Thamnophis hammondi*)
California Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica*)
Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)
Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) – nesting
San Diego Desert Woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*)

Special-Status Plant Species:

Braunton's Milkvetch (*Astragalus brauntonii*)
Catalina Mariposa Lily (*Calochortus catalinae*)

Plummer Mariposa Lily (*Calochortus plummerae* ssp. *plummerae*)
Small-flowered Morning-glory (*Convolvulus simulans*)
Conejo Live-forever (*Dudleya abramsii* ssp. *parva*)
Blochman Live-forever (*Dudleya blochmaniae* ssp. *blochmaniae*)
Verity Live-forever (*Dudleya verityi*)
Conejo Buckwheat (*Eriogonum crocatum*)
Santa Susana Tarplant (*Hemizonia minthornii*),
Southern Spikeweed (*Hemizonia parryi* ssp. *australis*),
Southern California Black Walnut (*Juglans californica*),
California Orcutt Grass (*Orcuttia californica*),
Lyon Pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*),
Rayless Ragwort (*Senecio aphanactis*).

There are also approximately fifteen (15) species of lichens in Ventura County that are considered rare (Magney 1999)¹, one or more of which may occur at the project site:

Acarospora theloccoides
Caloplaca chrysophthalma
Caloplaca epithallina
Caloplaca invadens
Caloplaca supyracella
Endocarpon subnitescens
Parmotrema austrosinense
Pertusaria flavicunda
Phaeophyscia kairamoi
Phaeophyscia sciastra
Protoparmelia punctilla
Vermilacinia ceruchoides
Xanthoparmelia angustiphylla

¹ Magney, D. L. 1999. Preliminary List of Rare California Lichens. *California Lichen Society Bulletin* 6(2):22-27.

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IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES:	PROJECT IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT²				CUMULATIVE IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT			
What level of impact will the proposal have on:	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	
<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, ore 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:

Subdividing this property and permitting two home sites will alter the natural character and biodiversity of the uppermost parcel that would be created. The area currently contains a single dwelling housing along Marvella Court. The 20+-acre parcel in question has two major components. The lower elevations of the parcel, which would become one parcel, is disturbed habitat and supports relatively low wildlife values and

² N = No Impact; LS = Less Than Significant; PS-M = Potentially Significant Impact Unless Mitigation Incorporated; PS = Potentially Significant Impact.

is dominated by invasive exotic plant species, such as Sweet Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*). This is the area that is immediately adjacent to Marvella Court. It is the uppermost (southern) portion of the parcel, above the existing water tank, that continues to provide valuable wildlife habitat with its mix of grasslands, Southern Cactus Scrub, Southern California Black Walnut Woodland, and Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation (all three vegetation types are considered sensitive plant communities). The subdivision proposal will significantly alter the existing conditions of this upper portion of the property in terms of its importance as wildlife habitat and an area supporting native vegetation.

By creating a second building site on the property, a new access road will be required. To do this involves extensive grading up a steep grade supporting native Coastal Sage Scrub, Southern Cactus Scrub, and Southern California Black Walnut Woodland vegetation, and rock outcrops containing a rich lichen flora (some of which may be rare). This will result in a loss of native vegetation and wildlife habitat. Erosion control measures will likely need to be implemented on such steep hillsides. There is evidence of a drainage ditch extending from the upper portions of the property down to Marvella Court. Much of the road-grading activity to the uppermost parcel will directly impact this hillside.

Long-term activities associated with the uppermost home site would negatively impact native wildlife and vegetation. These activities may include clearing brush for fire safety, landscaping practices that may introduce invasive exotic plant and animal species, and the removal of important native vegetation for a building site, landscaping, and access. The significance of these impacts to wildlife is unknown.

Seasonal field surveys for special-status plants need to be conducted to determine if any special-status species are present onsite. Botanical surveys should be conducted during spring (March-May) for vascular plants (the late-summer period is covered by the 27 September 2000 field survey). Botanical surveys should be floristic in nature as described by Ferren et al. (1995)³, and be conducted by qualified botanists and lichenologists familiar with the region's flora. Lichen surveys may be conducted at any time of the year.

Surveys for the presence/absence of sensitive wildlife species, especially California gnatcatchers, should be conducted using methods consistent with protocols already established by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Surveys for other sensitive species such as cactus wrens should also be conducted. We believe that the likelihood of California gnatcatchers nesting onsite is relatively low; however, in light of a recent nesting record for the species in the Moorpark area, surveys for the California gnatcatcher are warranted and recommended. All surveys should be conducted by qualified wildlife biologists.

Recommendations:

Recommended Mitigation Considerations:

1. Granting the request to rezone and subdivide will restrict and minimize any planning alternatives possibly needed to reduce impacts created by siting and constructing on the new 10+-acre parcel on the upper elevations of the property. Marvella Court adequately serves (with curbside access and sidewalks) the lower 10-12+ acres of the property. The proposed (upper elevation) 10-acre parcel resulting from the rezoning and subdivision will need access via an extended road originating at Marvella Court. This new access road will require extensive grading and result in the loss of Coastal Sage Scrub, Southern Cactus Scrub, and lichen habitats, and may impact special-status plant and wildlife species.

Denying the subdivision and retaining the existing zoning will eliminate any significant impacts if development occurs in the lower elevations immediately adjacent to Marvella Court, and in a manner

³ Ferren, W.R., Jr., D.L. Magney, T. Sholars. 1995. The Future of California Floristics and Systematics: collecting guidelines and documentation techniques. *Madroño* 42(2): 197-210, April-June.

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consistent with the other homes on Marvella Court. Furthermore, denying the request to rezone and subdivide the property will provide suitable planning and siting alternatives within the existing 20+ acres to develop the property with minimal impacts to native vegetation and wildlife.

2. If the request is granted, development should be located in areas not containing sensitive habitat or populations of any special-status species. These resources need to be surveyed and mapped by qualified biologists and botanists.
3. Buildings and facilities, including fire hazard safety zones, shall be designed, constructed, and maintained to avoid impacts to all sensitive biological resources.
4. Activities beyond the designated building envelopes that would alter the natural vegetation should be restricted or prohibited per deed restriction or other suitable legal method.
5. No development or ground disturbance should be allowed in areas with sensitive native vegetation, including Coastal Sage Scrub, Southern Cactus Scrub, Southern California Black Walnut Woodland, or Needlegrass Grassland. A portion of the walnut woodland could be disturbed in adequate replacement mitigation was conducted onsite. This could be accomplished onsite by removing Peruvian Pepper Trees in the woodland area and replacing them with Southern California Black Walnut trees.
6. Invasive exotic plant species should be removed and controlled from all areas on the parcel. No invasive exotic plant species should be allowed or planted in future landscaping to avoid further contamination of the existing natural vegetation onsite and on adjacent properties.
7. All site disturbance shall be kept 100 feet from the riparian vegetation onsite, represented by the Southern California Black Walnut Woodland, which is growing along a well-defined channel onsite.
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D. <u>MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>	<u>Yes/Maybe</u>	<u>No</u>
Based on the information contained with Section B6:		
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 C 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 on e 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