

COUNTY OF VENTURA

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: February 7, 2005

Requestor: Kim Rodriguez, ACIP

Project: SD04-0065 (Parcel Map 5508)

Field Study: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Justification: Potential habitat onsite to support several rare plants and wildlife and jurisdictional waters present on site.

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 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. wetland habitat | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. coastal habitat | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. migration corridors | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. locally important species/communities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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 project consists of the subdivision of three legal parcels totaling about 855 acres into 21 individual parcels with private access roads to each parcel. The proposed parcel sizes range from 40.1 to 45.7 gross acres. The project is located in Somis Valley, north of Los Angeles Avenue (State Highway 118) and west of Bradley Road with access from the south via Berylwood Road. The majority of the project site is currently in agricultural production with lemon orchards. There is one residential estate, two ranch houses, two mobile homes, a work shed, and an office trailer at the site. The parcels are designated open space and agricultural by the Ventura County General Plan and Zoned "A-E" (Agricultural Exclusive - 40 acre minimum). The property is currently under Land Conservation Act (LCA) Contract No. 51-3.4. The applicant proposes to rescind the LCA contract and re-enter into 21 new LCA contracts prior to recording the final parcel map.

USGS topographic maps were reviewed utilizing computer topographic maps (National Geographic, 2001) and available aerial photography was also reviewed (Ventura County RMA, Mapping Services - GIS). The onsite elevation ranges from approximately 483 to 1,073 feet above mean sea level. The site is generally situated between Fox Canyon Barranca to the west and Coyote Canyon to the east, private grazing land to the north, and agricultural land to the south. The site consists of rolling topography with moderate to steep slopes throughout the property. The site generally drains southward towards the Las Posas Valley.



A site visit was conducted by Rincon biologist John Dreher on February 4, 2005 to determine the general extent of biological resources on the property. The field visit included a reconnaissance of the agricultural production portion of the property via windshield surveys and a cursory review of the vegetation located in the open areas.

Farm roads are present throughout the site and are typically devoid of vegetation or have minimal amounts of ruderal vegetation. Two main farm access roads are paved with asphalt. A small portion of the site at the northern boundary and the slopes along the western property line above the Fox Canyon drainage consist of undeveloped steep hillsides that are not in agricultural use. These areas were apparently burned during the 2003 wildfire and support a recovering coastal sage scrub habitat. Several small pockets of coastal scrub vegetation occur throughout the site, typically in areas too steep for agricultural production. Additionally, a number of wind-rows were noted throughout the site and consisted primarily of eucalyptus trees.

Upon review of the geologic map of the area (Dibblee, Jr., 1990) the site is underlain by the Saugus formation with alluvial gravel, sand, and silt within the drainages. No Conejo volcanic soils are present at the site. Native habitat onsite consisted of Venturan coastal sage scrub. This habitat type includes California sagebrush (*Artemesia californica*), giant rye (*Leymus condensatus*), black sage (*Salvia melifera*), buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum* and *E. cinereum*), deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), and Spanish bayonet (*Yucca whipplei*). Associated species often include toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), white and purple sage (*Salvia apiana* and *S. leucophylla*), wild cucumber (*Marah macrocarpus*), and gooseberry (*Ribes* sp.).

No native coast live oak trees (*Quercus agrifolia*) were identified on the developable portions of the property. Several wind-row trees were scattered throughout the site, however, none are anticipated to be removed.

Two major tributaries to the Fox Canyon Barranca occur at the site. The first is the Fox Canyon drainage located along the western boundary. The second is an unnamed drainage located in the central portion of the property. Other small drainages also occur at the site. With the exception of the Fox Canyon drainage, onsite drainage courses have been highly manipulated as a result of agricultural activities.

A search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) via the RAREFIND2 software (January 2005) listed several special-status species that could be present within native coastal sage scrub areas of the property. Given the native habitats on site, the elevation range, and the underlying geology, the following special-status species have the potential to occur on the site.

- Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), a wide-ranging species found in mountains, foothills, and adjacent grasslands. A State species of concern.
- Plummer's Mariposa lily (*Calochortus plummerae*), found in chaparral, cismontane woodland, and coastal scrub. A CNPS List 1B species that blooms from May to July.
- Coastal western whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris multiscutatus*), found in deserts, semi-arid areas, and in woodland and riparian habitats. A Federal species of concern.
- Coast horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum*), found in coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats. A State species of concern.
- Coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*); resident of sage scrub in arid washes and slopes. Federally threatened and State species of concern.
- Lyon's pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*), an annual herb that is found in chaparral, valley



grassland and foothill grassland habitats. A Federal and State endangered and CNPS List 1B species that blooms from March to August.

- San Diego desert woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*); found in moderate to dense canopies; abundant in rock outcrops and rocky slopes. A State species of concern.
- Rayless ragwort (*Senecio aphanactis*), an annual herb found in chaparral, cismontane woodland, and coastal scrub. A CNPS List 2 species that blooms from January to April.

It is noted that nearly all native birds, their nests, eggs, and young are protected under the California Fish and Game Code and Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). A variety of common birds are likely to use the site for nesting and foraging activities.

Biological resources issues:

- a. **Endangered, threatened, or rare species.** This parcel subdivision would have no immediate direct impacts to endangered, threatened, or rare species located on this site. Agricultural production within the property has already disturbed the majority of the site. However, any future development actions that could encroach on the natural habitat along the western and northern property lines could affect listed species if present. Species of particular concern are Rayless ragwort, Plummer's mariposa-lily, and coastal California gnatcatcher. The loss of these species or their habitat would be considered significant. Therefore, mitigation is suggested for the protection of sensitive species and associated habitat, at the time that further development plans are proposed.

It is noted that given the recent fire activity at the site, the coastal California gnatcatcher has a very low potential to occur at the site within the next decade or so. Nonetheless as the coastal sage scrub habitat recovers, this species may become present in this area. Therefore, consultation with the regulatory agencies is recommended prior to the removal of coastal sage scrub from the site.

Although there is the potential for the coast horned lizard, western whiptail, San Diego desert woodrat, and golden eagle to occur onsite, none of these species are listed as endangered, threatened, or rare. If present, impacts to these species are anticipated to be less than significant given the anticipated size and scale of future development. No mitigation would be required.

- b. **Wetland Habitat.** Potential wetlands and jurisdictional waters exist onsite in the vicinity of the drainages located along the central and western portions of the property. Wetland habitat onsite appears to be confined to the Fox Canyon drainage and along the lower third of the central drainage, which contains sparse riparian vegetation including willows. No other potential wetland habitat or topographic depressions were observed onsite.

The proposed road improvements would occur on preexisting farm roads. No encroachment on significant wetland habitats is anticipated as a result of proposed activities. Nonetheless, if fill or grading were to occur within jurisdictional waters, then adverse impacts may result. Fill or grading within jurisdictional waters require a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act Section 404 permit, Regional Water Quality Control Board Section 401 Certification, and a California Department of Fish and Game Streambed Alteration Agreement.



Access road improvements along the western and central drainages including the drainage crossings would require jurisdictional review and permitting prior to the issuance of a grading permit. The access road improvements, including any bank stabilization that would extend beyond the top of the bank of the drainages (i.e. within Lot 4) may be considered within Fish and Game jurisdiction, thus requiring agency consultation.

- c. **Coastal Habitat.** The site is not located within the coastal zone. As such, it would not have any coastal resources.
- d. **Migration Corridors.** The parcel is approximately 855 acres in size and is surrounded by agricultural uses, rural residential, cattle grazing land, and native habitat areas. As this property is to remain in agricultural production under LCA Contract and the grazing and agricultural lands surrounding the site are currently fenced, potential future development would not be a significant barrier to migration and project impacts to migration corridors would be considered less than significant. The project would not contribute to cumulative impacts on migration corridors. No mitigation is required.
- e. **Locally Important Species/Communities.** Native trees exist on the site within the riparian area including willows. Native trees are protected by the Ventura County Zoning Ordinance per section 8107-25.5 and loss of native trees would result in a potentially significant impact. The current action would not impact any of the riparian resources and future actions would require appropriate setbacks and mitigation for this area per Ventura County ordinance and/or mitigation per regulatory requirements. Therefore, no other mitigation would be required.

C. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

| | <u>Yes/Maybe</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 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? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Does the project have impacts, which are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

D. MITIGATION MEASURES

Recommended ☒

Required for Negative Declaration ☒

Future development inclusive of fire clearance may impact biological resources potentially present onsite. Activities that would disturb or remove native coastal sage scrub could impact sensitive biological resources. To avoid potentially significant impacts to biological resources, the following measures are recommended prior to any future development or grading.



- **Coastal California gnatcatcher.** Prior to the issuance of a building permit for any future development including fire clearance, the applicant shall provide written proof that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been contacted regarding potential impacts to gnatcatcher. This documentation should include evidence of the completion of any recommendations and mitigation measures to reduce impacts to gnatcatcher to a less than significant level. Should surveys be required and the results conclude the presence of gnatcatcher, a conservation easement shall be placed on such portions of the property that contain occupied habitat.
- **Sensitive Flora.** Prior to the issuance of a building permit for any future development, surveys for sensitive plant species shall be performed during the appropriate season, when species potentially onsite are observable and can be identified to species. If endangered, threatened, or rare species occur onsite, they shall be avoided and fenced to prevent disturbance. A conservation easement shall be placed on such portions of the property that contains those species including a 50-foot buffer.

Or

The applicant shall deed restrict the native coastal sage scrub habitat not planned for future development and perform floristic surveys only in those areas anticipated for future impacts. If sensitive plant species are discovered, they shall be conserved through a deed restriction including a 50-foot buffer area surrounding the identified populations(s). Deed restrictions shall be recorded with the county recorder, prior to recordation of the Parcel Map.

- **Wetland Habitat.** Access road improvements would likely require fill, grading or encroachment within jurisdictional waters (i.e. drainage crossings). The applicant shall consult with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Clean Water Act Section 404 permit), Regional Water Quality Control Board (Section 401 Certification), and the California Department of Fish and Game (Streambed Alteration Agreement) regarding potential impacts to jurisdictional waters. The applicant shall provide evidence of the jurisdictional review and permitting prior to the issuance of a grading permit. All terms, conditions, and mitigation requirements must be implemented to reduce potential impacts to a less than significant level.

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FROM A BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Negative Declaration ☐ Mitigated Negative Declaration ☒ EIR Required ☐

Reviewer: _____

Date: _____

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February 7, 2005



F. REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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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.

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