

SECTION B

INITIAL STUDY CHECKLIST

PMW-1005

Requester: Debbie Morrisset

Applicant: Seneca Resources Corporation

Date: April 23, 2001

Survey Type: Field

Rationale: Sensitive habitat

Site Description: A field visit of the site (Parcel nos. 040-060-030, -070, -150 and 040-040-050) was conducted on March 17, 2000. The parcels include portions of the mouth of Santa Paula Canyon, the western portion of Santa Paula Ridge, and the western portion of Anlauf Canyon. Based on a brief site visit, the parcels support arroyo willow series, purple sage series, California sagebrush series, coast live oak series, California walnut series, California sycamore series and California annual grassland series.

The project includes permanent preservation of all drainages and associated County-defined wetlands, and buffer areas consistent with Ventura County General Plan Policy 1.5.2-4. The areas to be preserved under deed restriction are identified on the attached Wetland Resource

	Project Impact Degree of Effect*				Cumulative Impact Degree of Effect*			
	N	LS	PS-M	PS	N	LS	PS-M	PS
6. <u>Biological Resources</u>								
a. endangered, threatened, or rare species		X				X		
b. wetland habitat		X				X		
coastal habitat	X				X			
d. migration corridors		X				X		
e. locally important species/communities		X				X		

*N No Impact

LS **Less Than Significant Impact**

PS-M Potentially Significant Impact Unless Mitigation Incorporated

PS Potentially Significant Impact

SECTION C

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSES

- a. Plant or animal species listed under either the Federal or California Endangered Species Acts reported in the vicinity of the parcels (California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Data Base [NDDDB], 2001) is limited to southern steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*, Federal Endangered)-reported from the Santa Paula Creek diversion dam, two miles to the south. The affected parcels include a portion of Santa Paula Creek and Anlauf Canyon creek. The recent completion of the fish ladder at the diversion dam allows steelhead to access these areas. Future development of the parcels may result in siltation of steelhead habitat and barriers to fish passage. However, the project includes preservation of on-site drainages and buffer areas to prevent potential impacts to steelhead habitat.
- b. Santa Paula Creek and Anlauf Canyon creek support County and Corps-defined wetlands. Ventura County (Ventura County General Plan; Goals, Policies and Programs) defines wetlands as:

“Lands which are transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is periodically covered with shallow water. The frequency of occurrence of water is sufficient to support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands include marshes, bogs, sloughs, vernal pools, wet meadows, river and stream overflows, mudflats, ponds, springs and seeps.”

Based on this definition, areas supporting wetland (hydrophytic) vegetation and defined drainage channels were considered wetlands. The “prevalence of vegetative life” was established by identifying dominant plant species and determining the hydrophytic class (i.e., facultative [FAC], facultative wetland [FACW], or obligate wetland species [OBL]) listed in National List of Plant Species That Occur in Wetlands: California (Region 0) (Reed, 1988). The FAC classification indicates that a plant species occurs in wetlands 34 to 66 percent of the time. The FACW classification indicates that a plant species occurs in wetlands 67 to 99 percent of the time. The OBL classification indicates that a plant species occurs in wetlands greater than 99 percent of the time.

Wetlands were delineated based on field surveys conducted in October 2000, and interpretation of color aerial photographs (dated 6/20/89, 1/12/96, 6/24/96). Field surveys consisted of mapping wetland vegetation and measuring the width of drainage channels (based on ordinary high water) within Parcels 1, 2 and 3 as shown on PMW-1005. However, field effort was concentrated on minor drainages in the eastern portion of PMW-1005, where the occurrence of wetlands was less obvious. Very little field work was conducted on Santa Paula Creek due to difficult access and lack of any expected development.

Policy 1.5.2-4 of the Ventura County General Plan requires discretionary development to be sited a minimum of 100 feet from significant wetland habitats. Wetland habitats located within PMW-1005 were evaluated to determine their significance, based on the potential to perform the following functions:

- Ground water recharge;
- Flood flow alteration;
- Sediment stabilization;
- Sediment/toxicant retention;
- Ecosystem production export; and
- Wildlife habitat (aquatic and terrestrial)

Policy 1.5.2-4 allows the buffer to be increased or decreased based on soil type, slope stability, drainage patterns, presence or absence of endangered, threatened or rare plants or animals, and compatibility of the proposed development with wildlife use of the wetland habitat area. The width of the buffer, including that surrounding non-significant wetland habitats, was based on these criteria.

Wetlands are mapped on the attached Wetland Resource Map, including buffer areas. Santa Paula Creek and Anlauf Canyon Creek were determined to represent significant wetland habitats based on their potential to support steelhead and other special-status species, and other wetland functions listed above. The other drainages located within PMW-1005 are not considered significant wetland habitats. These small drainages support very little wetland vegetation and associated riparian habitat for special-status species. In addition, these drainages support surface water for only a very short period, limiting other wetland functions.

Consistent with General Plan Policy 1.5.2-4, the recommended buffer area for Santa Paula Creek and Anlauf Canyon Creek is 100 feet wide. Based on the small amount of potential development currently allowed, a larger buffer was determined to be unnecessary. Although the smaller drainages are not considered significant wetland habitats, a buffer area is recommended to minimize impacts of future development. A 50-foot-wide buffer is recommended for Drainage 2, due to the instability of the steep slopes along this incised drainage. A 25-foot-wide buffer is recommended for Drainages 1, 3 and 4, to minimize impacts to wildlife and maintain wetland function (primarily flood flow alteration). However, a 50-foot-wide buffer is recommended along the slope north of Drainage 1, due to steep unstable slopes. Preservation of the wetlands and buffer areas mapped on the Wetland Resource Map (as indicated in the project description) would prevent significant impacts to wetlands associated with future development.

- c. The parcels are located approximately 16 miles northeast of the coastal zone and coastal resources do not occur in the vicinity of the site. Coastal resources are not expected to be adversely affected by potential future development of the parcels.

- d. Santa Paula Creek provides a linkage from the Santa Ynez Mountains to the Santa Clara River Valley, and is expected to be an important wildlife migration corridor. Future development of Parcel nos. 040-060-150 and 040-040-050 may result in barriers to wildlife movement. However, these areas are located within the floodway, such that minimal development is expected. In addition, preservation of the wetlands and buffer areas mapped on the Wetland Resource Map (as indicated in the project description) would prevent significant impacts to wildlife movement associated with future development.
- e. Southwestern pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata pallida*), yellow warbler (*Dendroica petechia brewsteri*) and Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*) have been reported from Santa Paula Creek (ENSR, 1997) and may also occur within Anlauf Canyon creek. Two-striped garter snake (*Thamnophis hammondi*) may also occur in Santa Paula Creek and Anlauf Canyon creek. Future development of the parcels may result in habitat loss for these California species of special concern. However, preservation of the wetlands and buffer areas mapped on the Wetland Resource Map (as indicated in the project description) would prevent significant impacts to these special-status species associated with future development.

Special-status plant species that may occur on the affected parcels are limited to Ojai fritillary (*Fritillaria ojaiensis*) and Catalina mariposa lily (*Calochortus catalinae*). Ojai fritillary has been reported from Santa Paula Canyon, two miles to the northeast of the parcels (NDDDB, 2001). This species is considered by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) to be rare, endangered or threatened in California. Due to the small amount of suitable habitat for these species and limited development allowed under current zoning, future development of the affected parcels is not expected to result in significant impacts to Ojai fritillary.

Catalina mariposa lily is on the CNPS watch list (List 4), which indicates that its distribution is limited, but vulnerability or susceptibility to threat appears low at this time (Skinner and Pavlik, 1994). Catalina mariposa lily was not observed on the affected parcels during the winter site visit, but may occur in low numbers. Since the threat of regional extirpation of this species is low, potential future impacts are considered less than significant.

Arroyo willow series, California walnut series and California sycamore series occur in Anlauf Canyon, and are considered rare by the NDDDB. However, preservation of the wetlands and buffer areas mapped on the Wetland Resource Map (as indicated in the project description) would prevent significant impacts to these locally important communities associated with future development.

The NDDB does not presently track purple sage series as a sensitive community. However, coastal sage scrub communities are becoming increasingly rare throughout their range and are considered endangered by much of the scientific community (Westman, 1981; Westman, 1986; Atwood, 1990). Davis et al. (1995) consider coastal sage scrub a natural community at risk because less than five percent of this community is protected in parks, reserves, and conservation easements. Furthermore, the historical extent of coastal sage scrub has been reduced substantially. Therefore, purple sage series will be considered a sensitive community for the purposes of this initial study. Due to the distribution of this community (steep slopes) and limited amount of development allowed under current zoning, future development is not expected to result in significant losses of this locally important community.

The parcel supports numerous coast live oak trees, considered protected under the Zoning Code. Future development may result in the loss of oak trees. Provided the applicant complies with the Tree Protection Regulations (Section 8107-25 of the Zoning Code), loss of oak trees is considered a less than significant impact.

References

- Atwood, J.L. 1990. *Status Review of the California Gnatcatcher (Poliophtila californica)*. Manomet Bird Observatory.
- Davis, F.W., P.A. Stine, D.M. Stoms, M.I. Borchart, and A.D. Hollander. 1995. Gap analysis of the actual vegetation of California, 1. Southwestern bioregion. *Madrono* 42(1):40-78.
- ENSR. 1997. Biological Impact Analysis for the Sulphur Mountain Road/SR 150 Interconnect Pipelines. Prepared for Petru Corporation.
- California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB). 2001. RAREFIND2 output for the Santa Paula Peak 7.5' quadrangle map.
- Reed, P.B. Jr. 1988. *National List of Plant Species that occur in Wetlands: California (Region 0)*. (U.S. Fish and Wildl. Serv. Biol. Rep. 88(26.10)). St. Petersburg, FL.
- Skinner, Mark W. and Bruce M. Pavlik. 1994. *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California*. Special Publication No. 1. California Native Plant Society. Sacramento, CA.
- Westman, W.E. 1981. Diversity relations and succession in California coastal sage scrub. *Ecology* 62:170.
- Westman, W.E. 1986. Implications of ecological theory for rare plant conservation in coastal sage scrub. In: *Conservation and Management of Rare and Endangered Plants*. California Native Plant Society. Sacramento, CA.

SECTION D
MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on the information contained within Sections B and C:

YES/MAYBE

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, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?
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 which occurs in a relatively brief, definitive period of time while long-term impacts will endure well into the future).
3. Does the project have impacts which are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (Several projects may have relatively small individual impacts on two or more resources, but the total of those impacts on the environment is significant).
4. Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?

— X

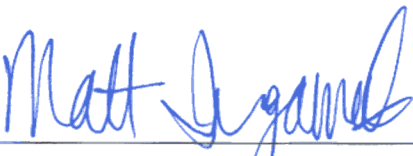
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SECTION E

DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

- ☒ I find the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.
- ☐ I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will 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.
- ☐ I find the proposed project, individually and/or cumulatively MAY have a significant effect on the environment and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
- ☐ I find the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an 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.
- ☐ 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.



Signature of Preparer

April 23, 2001
Date