

COUNTY OF VENTURA BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES INITIAL STUDY

Date: April 12, 2006

Requestor: Dan Klemann

Project: SD06-0010

Field Study: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Justification: Known occurrence of special-status biological resources onsite. Field check performed to determine presence of specialized habitat conditions for rare plant and animals.

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 type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. coastal habitat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. locally important species/communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 proposes to convert one 20-acre parcel at 1580 Theising Drive into two 10-acre parcels for two single family residences and equestrian facilities. The zoning for this parcel would also be changed from OS-40AC to OS-10AC. The parcel is located off of Tierra Rejada Road in the Tierra Rejada Valley with site access from Esperance Drive. The parcel would generally be split with a vertical line from north to south. The site is located on the USGS 7.5' Quad Simi Valley West, Township 2 North, Range 19 West, Section 11.

An Initial Study and site visit was conducted for Ventura County in June 1998 by Rincon Consultants Inc. At that time, the presence of Conejo dudleya (*Dudleya abramsii parva*) and Catalina mariposa lily (*Calochortus catalinae*) was detected on the northern slopes of the site. A site visit was conducted by Rincon biologist Nancy Fox-Fernandez on April 3, 2006 to determine the general extent of biological resources onsite. The field visit included a reconnaissance of the entire property on foot. The site currently contains two homes on the southwest and southeast corners, various building materials, and equestrian facilities on the southwest side. Landscape vegetation lines the south boundary, and a strip of landscape vegetation and ruderal vegetation line the west side of the property. Plans indicate another



horse-keeping facility is planned on the west side of the property. The northern portion of the site is sensitive coastal sage scrub with scattered volcanic rock outcrops. Land use adjacent to the site is mostly open space and rural housing, and Theising Road to the south.

The project site is located in unincorporated Ventura County and the Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance applies. U.S. Geologic Survey topographic maps and aerial photos were reviewed utilizing digital topographic maps (March, 2003). Topography onsite ranges from flat to gently sloping on the south half to 25% slopes on the north side. Elevation ranges from approximately 800 – 950 feet above sea level, generally sloping down to the north, towards a ranch below the site. Soil types onsite include Conejo volcanics (Diblee, 1992) and Cropley clay (U.S. Department of Agriculture, April, 1970).

The northern third of the proposed project area contains a mixture of coastal sage scrub species. The majority of the remaining habitat onsite contains ruderal species in disturbed areas (see Figure 1). Near the two houses onsite on the south side, much of the site is landscaped vegetation and sod grass. The north side is mostly native species, and would be considered California sagebrush series (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf, 1995), or Coastal Scrub (Holland, 1986). Primary species include sawtooth goldenbush (*Hazardia squarrosa*), rancher's fireweed (*Amsinckia menziesii*), California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), mustard (*Hirshfeldia incana*), storksbill (*Erodium moschatum*), brome (*Bromus* sp.) and wild oats (*Avena* sp.). Secondary species include California goldfields (*Lasthenia californica*), blue dicks (*Dichelostema capitatum*), purple nightshade (*Solanum xanti*), purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), plantain (*Plantago* sp.), California four o'clock (*Mirabilis californica*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), spikemoss (*Selaginella* sp.), and various lichens. Ruderal species on the northeast sections and near the future horse arena (middle of the property) include wild oats (*Avena* sp.), prickly lettuce (*Lactuca seriola*), bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), brome (*Bromus* sp.), and yellow star thistle (*Centaurea* sp.). This area would be considered California annual grassland series (Sawyer and Keller Wolf, 1995) or Valley and foothill grassland (Holland, 1986). Species also seen onsite during the 1998 site visit include caterpillar phacelia (*Phacelia cicutaria*), fascicled tarweed (*Hemizonia fasciculata*), blow-wives (*Achyrrachaena mollis*), lupine (*Lupinus* sp.), purple needlegrass (*Nasella pulchra*), and dwarf bladder clover (*Trifolium depauperatum*). A drainage on the northeast section of the property contained running water at the time of the site visit.

Wildlife seen on the property included desert cottontail (*S. audubonii*), and California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*). Coyote (*Canis latrans*) scat was also observed. Several species of birds were also noted throughout the 20 acre parcel, including northern rough-winged swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), Say's phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), California quail (*Callipepla californica*), wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata*), and American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*). A northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), a California Species of Special Concern, was seen foraging for small mammals over the site. Additional species or their sign seen onsite in 1998 include California meadow mouse (*Microtus californicus*), pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), lesser goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*), Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), cliff (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) and barn (*Hirundo rustica*) swallows, California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*), western fence lizard (*Sceloporus*



occidentalis), gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*), and horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*). No invertebrates were noted onsite.

A search and review of the California Department of Fish and Game California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) listed 16 animals, and 17 plants that could potentially be found onsite. Habitat characteristics such as soil type, geology, elevation, and habitat type were used to assess the potential for sensitive wildlife and plant species to occur onsite using previous studies of the area, the CNDDB, and the Ventura County Sensitive Plant and Animal Lists. These are listed in the table below. Species that are most likely to occur onsite are shaded for ease of reference.

Table 1 Special-Status Species Potentially Occurring in the Project Vicinity

Species	Scientific Name	Status (Fed./State/ CNPS/Vta)	Habitat Requirements	Potential Occurrence
<i>Plants</i>				
Agoura Hills Dudleya	<i>Dudleya cymosa</i> <i>agourensis</i> / <i>ovatifolia</i>	FT/---/1B/---	Shaded, rocky slopes in chaparral, coastal scrub/volcanic; elevation 500- 5,500 feet.	Out of elevational range, not seen onsite. Known 9 miles south.
Verity's dudleya	<i>Dudleya verityi</i>	FT/---/1B/---	Chaparral, cismontane woodland, coastal scrub/volcanic; elevation 200- 400 feet	Volcanic rock and other dudleyas onsite, but not observed. Known 9 miles southwest.
Conejo dudleya	<i>Dudleya abramsii</i> <i>parva</i>	FT/---/1B/yes	Coastal scrub, valley and foothill grassland/rocky or gravelly, clay; elevation 200- 1,500 feet	Suitable habitat onsite. Known onsite (1998) and 2.5 miles to the southwest. Although dudleyas seen onsite, not keyable to species during site visit.
Blochman's dudleya	<i>Dudleya</i> <i>blochmaniae</i> <i>blochmaniae</i>	---/---/1B/yes	Coastal scrub, coastal bluff scrub on rocky slopes in clay soils.	Not observed onsite. Known 8 miles southwest.
Santa Susana tarplant	<i>Deinandra</i> <i>minthornii</i>	---/SR/1B/---	Sandstone and Conejo volcanic outcrops & crevices in chaparral & scrub in Los Angeles & Ventura Co.; Elevational range 900-2,500 feet	Appropriate habitat onsite, but species not observed. Known 2.5 miles to southwest.
Plummer's mariposa lily	<i>Calochortus</i> <i>plummerae</i>	---/---/1B/yes	Coastal sage scrub, chaparral, valley & foothill grassland, cismontane woodland, and lower montane coniferous forest. Elevational range 300- 5,300 feet.	Although not observed, appropriate habitat onsite. Known 4 miles to east.
Catalina mariposa lily	<i>Calochortus</i> <i>catalinae</i>	---/---/4/---	Chaparral, cismontane woodland, coastal scrub, valley and foothill grassland; elevation 50-2,000 feet	Known onsite (1998), but not blooming during time of 2006 site visit.
Hollisteria	<i>Hollisteria lanata</i>	---/---/---/yes	Grasslands, clay soil; 50-3,200 feet	Suitable habitat onsite, but not observed.
Lyon's pentachaeta	<i>Pentachaeta lyonii</i>	FE/SE/1B/---	Chaparral, coastal scrub, valley and foothill grassland; elevation 100-2,000 feet	Suitable habitat onsite, but not observed onsite. Critical habitat 1 mile south and 1 mile east.
Braunton's milk vetch	<i>Astragalus</i> <i>brauntonii</i>	FE/---/1B/---	Burns, disturbed areas, clay soils of closed-cone coniferous forests, chaparral, or coastal scrub	Known 3 miles south, critical habitat 3 miles south, not seen onsite. No suitable soils present.



Table 1 Special-Status Species Potentially Occurring in the Project Vicinity

Species	Scientific Name	Status (Fed./State/ CNPS/Vta)	Habitat Requirements	Potential Occurrence
Round-leaved filaree	<i>Erodium macrophyllum</i>	---/---/2/---	Cismontane woodland, valley and foothill grassland, clay soils; elevation 50-4,000 feet	Suitable habitat onsite, but not seen onsite. Known 1 mile east.
Conejo buckwheat	<i>Eriogonum crocatum</i>	---/SR/1B/yes	Chaparral, coastal scrub, valley and foothill grassland/Conejo volcanic outcrops, rocky; elevation 164-1,900 feet	Suitable habitat onsite, but this shrub not present onsite. Known 4 miles southwest.
Invertebrates				
Riverside fairy shrimp	<i>Streptocephalus woottoni</i>	FE/---/---/---	Vernal pools in Riverside and San Diego County; elevation 1141-1354 feet	Critical habitat occurs within a mile southwest of the site. No vernal pools onsite.
Mammals				
Hoary bat	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	---/---/---/yes	Is found all over California but generally prefers moths, large trees, water, and open habitats	Not seen onsite or known in the area.
Townsend's big-eared bat	<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>	---/CSC/---/---	Principally feeds on moths, hibernates in rock and caves	Not seen onsite or known in the area.
Pallid bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	---/CSC/---/---	Eats many insects, day roosts are variable but prefers rocky outcrops, cliffs, and crevices	Not seen onsite or known in the area.
Western mastiff bat	<i>Eumops perotis</i>	---/CSC/---/---	Prefers extensive open areas with abundant roost locations in crevices in rock outcrops and buildings	Not seen onsite or known in the area.
Birds				
Coastal California Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliophtila californica californica</i>	FT/CSC/--/--	Permanent resident of coastal sage scrub below 2500 feet	Project within proposed critical habitat. Known breeding pair and juvenile 2 and 3 miles northwest (URS, 2004). Not seen onsite.
Northern harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	--/CSC (nesting)/-- /yes	Inhabits annual grassland up to lodgepole pine forests and alpine meadow habitats; elevation 0-10,000 feet	Seen onsite foraging at site, breeding unlikely.
Grasshopper sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	---/---/---/yes	Prefers dense, dry grassland; prefers hillsides and mesas; primarily eats insects	Known onsite (1998).
Horned lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris actia</i>	---/CSC/---/---	Prefers open habitats; eats arthropods and forbs	Known onsite (1998).
Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	--/CSC (nesting)/--/--	Prefers open habitats with scattered tall perches; nests in shrubs or small trees, carnivorous	Although suitable habitat exists onsite, not seen onsite. Project not likely to negatively affect population.
Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow	<i>Aimophila ruficeps canescens</i>	FE/SE/---/---	Coastal sage scrub and sparse mixed chaparral; rocky hillsides with forb patches	Known 3 miles south. Although suitable habitat exists onsite, not seen onsite.

1B = CNPS List 1B, plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere; Vta = Ventura County Locally Important Species List; CSC = California Species of Concern; FE = Federal Endangered; FT = Federal Threatened; SR = State Rare; and SE = State Endangered.

Virtually 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 associated with the proposed development include:

- a. **Endangered, Threatened or Rare Species.** Sensitive plants are known onsite, including Conejo dudleya and Catalina mariposa lily. Because the presence of other sensitive plants could not be determined during this particular time of year (many are annuals and were not yet blooming), the potential full impact to sensitive plants are not known. However, sensitive species are located in the natural coastal sage scrub community in the northern portion of the site, which is also where all other sensitive plants would be likely. While the previously constructed residences and facilities do not directly affect these plants, future activities such as clearing for horse grazing, conversion to avocado groves or brush clearance for fire safety would have a significant impact on these plants and their habitat.

Although no **coastal California gnatcatchers** (*Polioptila californica californica*) were evident during the site visit, they could potentially use the site for foraging or breeding, as this site lies within proposed revised critical habitat for the species (US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2003). They are present in coastal sage scrub within 5 miles of the project site. Therefore, impacts to this species are considered potentially significant, but mitigable.

A **northern harrier** was seen foraging at the site, but this species is not likely to breed here. Usually this species nest on the ground in shrubby vegetation at the edges of marshes. Nests are usually made of sticks piled together, which were not seen onsite. Project implementation is therefore not expected to significantly affect this species.

A **grasshopper sparrow** was seen onsite during a 1998 site visit. This is a Ventura County locally important species. This grassland species has suffered declines in population numbers as a result of habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation. Any further removal of native vegetation has the potential to negatively affect this species.

A **horned lark** was seen onsite during a 1998 site visit. This species is a California Species of Special Concern. Major causes of mortality are predation and human activities (mostly agriculture) that remove breeding habitat or directly destroys nests. The site provides limited breeding habitat for this species and future activities at the site would have an adverse but less than significant impact.

- b. **Wetland Habitats.** A drainage is located on the northeast section of the property. This drainage may be considered jurisdictional by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and/or the CA Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). Although lot subdivision in itself is not likely to have a significant effect on jurisdictional waters, any future development activity in this area may negatively affect jurisdictional waters.



- c. **Coastal Habitat.** The proposed project area is located within the Non-Coastal Zone of the Ventura County General Plan. Therefore, the project would not impact coastal resources.
- d. **Migration Corridors.** The proposed project area and the surrounding property are immediately adjacent to recognized wildlife corridors. The Tierra Rejada Valley Big Mountain Wildlife Movement Corridor (a contiguous area approximately 2-3 miles wide and 1-2 miles long at the southeast corner of Tierra Rejada Road and Highway 23) lies less than 1 mile north of the project site. The site is also immediately adjacent (on the north, east, and south sides, and about a mile away on the west side) to general wildlife movement corridors according to the County of Ventura Wildlife Movement shapefile. The site does not appear to be within the corridor, but because of the proximity, animals using the adjacent wildlife movement corridors may also travel through the site as well. Therefore, although the project itself is not likely to introduce barriers to migration, future development on the project site may impose impacts to migration corridors. Depending on the nature of the development, these impacts may be considered significant.
- e. **Locally Important Species/Communities.** None of the communities listed by CNDDDB as within 10 miles of the project site were observed in the project area. Therefore, impacts related to communities of special concern are not expected.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does the project have impacts, which are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

D. MITIGATION MEASURES

Recommended ☐ Required for Negative Declaration ☒

a. Endangered, Threatened or Rare Species.

CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER – This site is within the area for proposed critical habitat for California gnatcatcher (USFWS, April 2003). 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.

PLANTS AND OTHER SENSITIVE WILDLIFE SPECIES – As sensitive plants and birds are known to occur onsite, the applicant shall deed restrict the native coastal sage scrub habitat as indicated on Figure 1. Deed restrictions shall be recorded with the county recorder, prior to recordation of the Parcel Map. All structures shall be located at least 100 feet from the conservation boundary and no fire clearance shall occur within the boundaries of the conservation area. This area shall be clearly fenced to delineate boundaries of this area.


- b. **Wetland Habitats.** The drainage on the northeast section of the property may be considered a jurisdictional drainage by the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the CA Department of Fish & Game (CDFG). If construction is planned in this section of the property, 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. According to the Ventura County non-coastal zoning ordinance (Sections 8107-9.8.13 & 22.4.12), a 100 foot setback of wetlands from material stockpiled for mining, construction-related material, and/or fill material is also required.
- d. **Migration Corridors.** The project area is near Wildlife Movement areas according to Ventura County. Therefore, if fencing is ultimately installed around the property perimeter or for large portions of the property, ranch-style or barbed wire fencing is recommended to avoid obstructing wildlife movement.

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FROM A BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Negative Declaration ☐ Mitigated Negative Declaration ☒ EIR Required ☐



Reviewer:


Nancy Fox-Fernandez
Associate Biologist

Date: April 12, 2006
April 12, 2006

Rincon Consultants, Inc.
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F. REFERENCES

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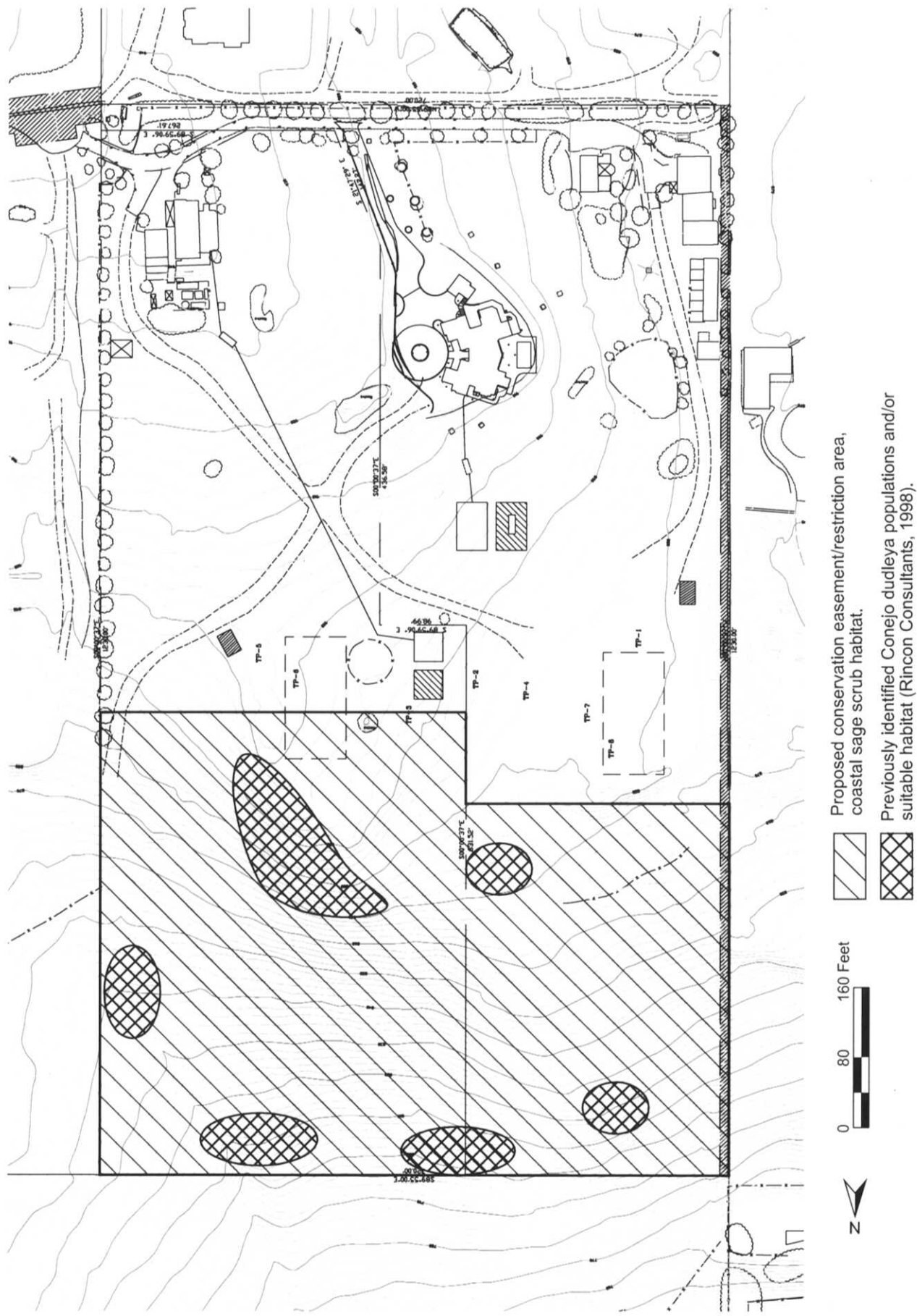
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Sensitive Biological Resources

Figure 1