



11.2 Habitat Evaluation



January 17, 2018

Azusa Todd LLC
11777 San Vicente Blvd. Ste. 780
Los Angeles, Ca. 90049

SUBJECT: *Results of a Habitat Suitability Evaluation, ±23-acre Azusa Business Center Site, City of Azusa, Los Angeles County, California*

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This letter report presents findings of a reconnaissance-level survey conducted to generally evaluate the suitability of a ±23-acre site to support sensitive biological resources in support of the environmental review process.

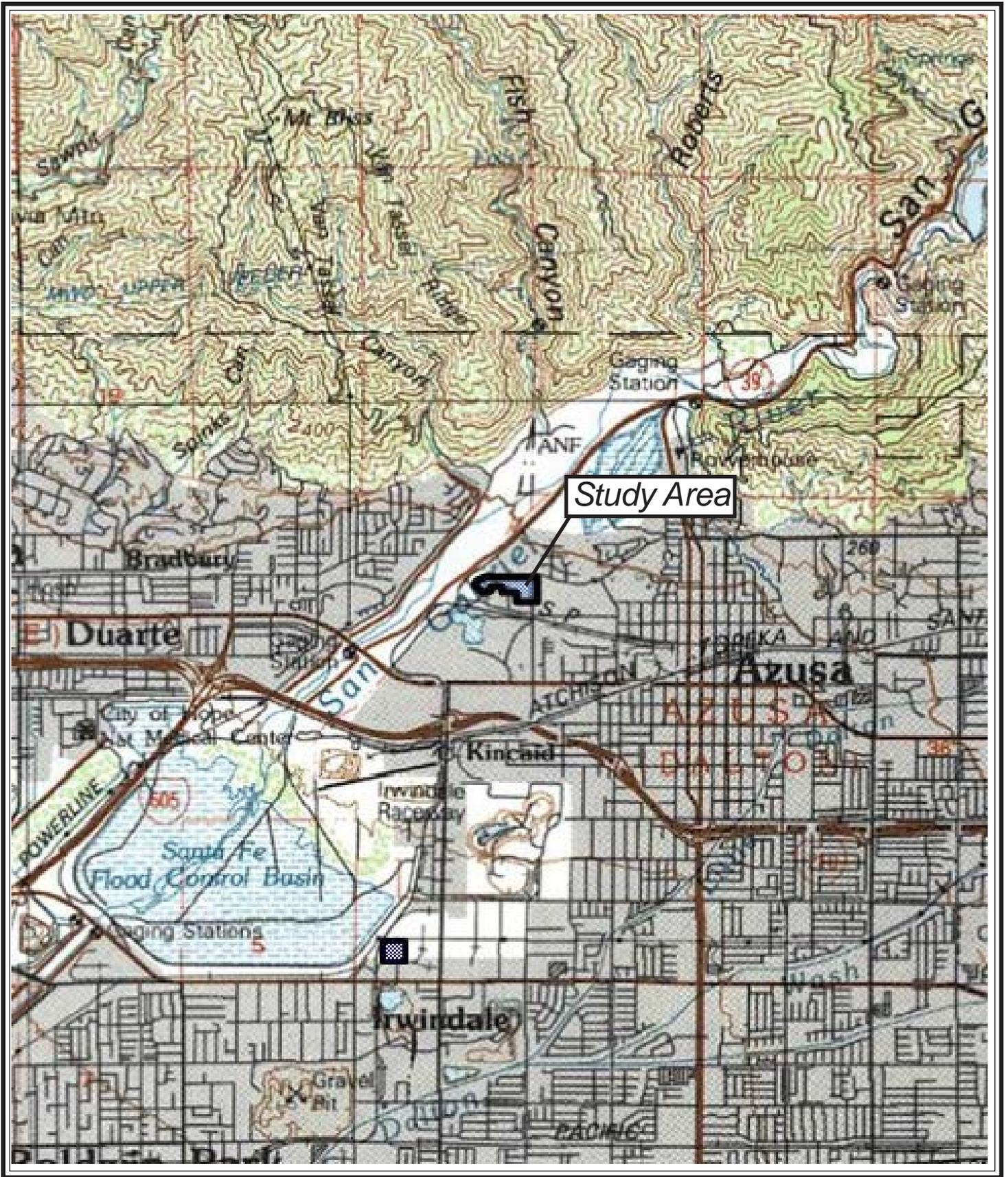
Introduction

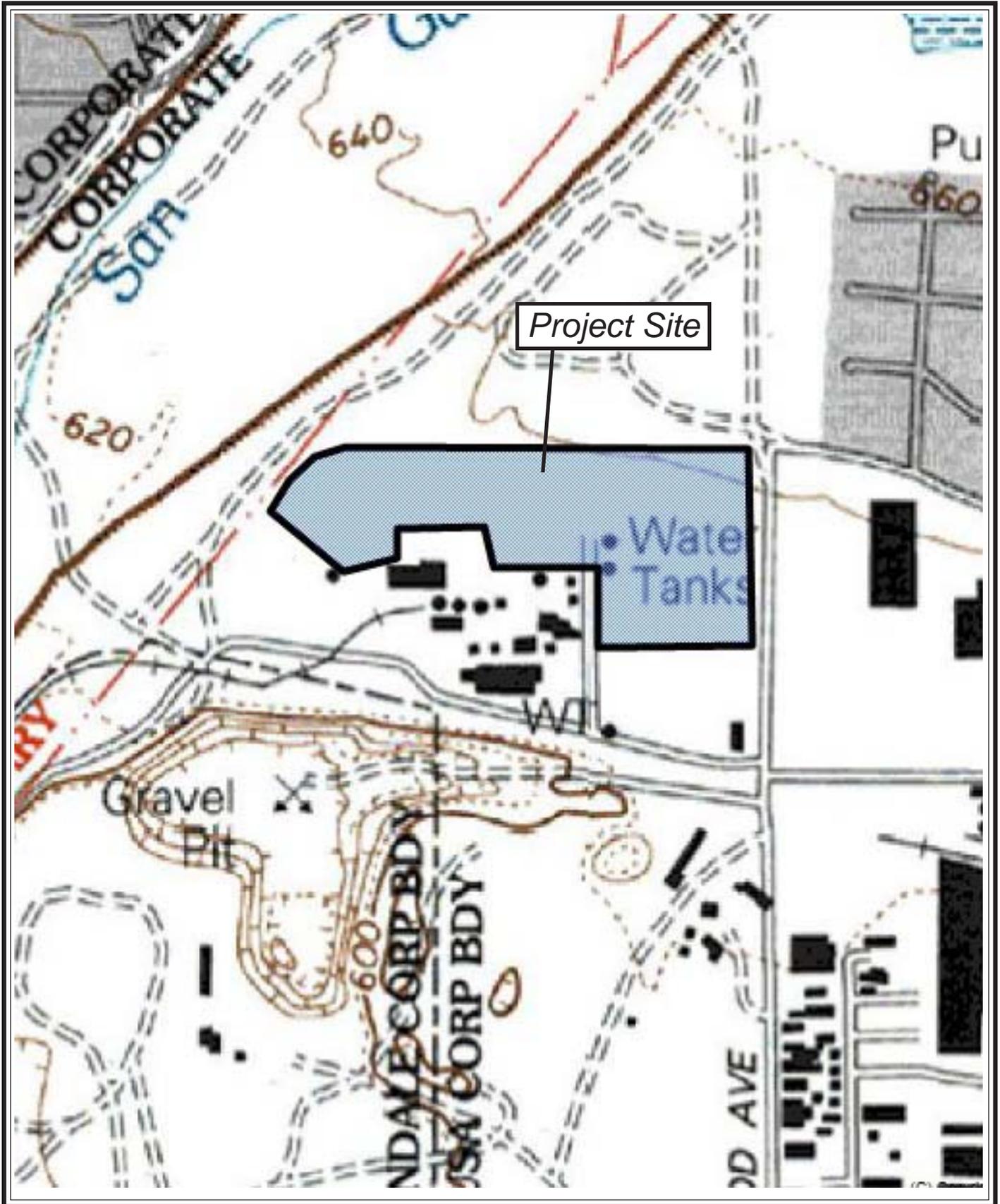
The subject ±23-acre site is regionally located in the City of Azusa, Los Angeles County, California (**Plate 1**). More specifically, the site is located south of Sierra Madre and west of Todd Avenue. The site occurs on the "Azusa" U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic map, unnumbered Township, Range, Section (**Plate 2**). Projects proposed in the area that contain potentially suitable habitat to support sensitive biological resources must demonstrate to reviewing agencies that potential project-related impacts to sensitive biological resources are adequately addressed and mitigated pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the federal Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended. Accordingly, results of this habitat suitability evaluation are intended to provide the applicant and resource agencies with biological information required for planning and permitting decisions concerning the proposed project. Conclusions relative to potential presence or absence of selected sensitive biological resources are based on the nature of habitat present.

Regulatory Setting

Biological resources within the project site may fall under the jurisdiction of several federal and state agencies, including, but not necessarily limited to, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW/CDFG), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), County of Los Angeles (County), City of Azusa (City), Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

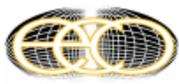
Potential constraints posed by biological resources upon the project site were generally evaluated by ranking the following sensitive biological issues, listed in descending order of significance: (1) a federally or state-listed endangered or threatened species of plant or animal; (2) streambeds, wetlands, and their associated vegetation; (3) habitats suitable to support a federally or state-listed endangered or threatened species of plant or wildlife; (4) species designated as candidates for federal listing; (5) habitat, other than wetlands, considered sensitive by regulatory agencies or resource conservation organizations; and (6) other species or issues of special concern to agencies, resource conservation organizations, or other interest groups. This analysis of biological resources is based on information compiled through field reconnaissance, extensive literature review, and by applicable reference materials. Methods used in this study are outlined below.





Site Vicinity

23-acre Azusa Business Center Site



ECOLOGICAL SCIENCES, INC.

September 2017

Methodology

Literature Search

Documentation pertinent to the biological resources in the vicinity of the site was reviewed and analyzed. Primary data sources reviewed to evaluate the occurrence potential of special-status resources on the subject site, included, but were not necessarily limited to: (1) California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB 2017) and (2) California Native Plant Society (CNPS) online inventory for the "Azusa" and surrounding USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle maps (Waterman Mountain, Crystal Lake, Glendora, Baldwin Park, Mt. Wilson), (3) available literature pertaining to habitat requirements of special-status species potentially occurring in the project site; and (4) historic distributional data contained in Hall (1981); Grinnell and Miller (1944); Garrett and Dunn (1981); Holland (1986); Stebbins (1985); Hickman (1993); and CNPS (2001).

Field Survey

Ecological Sciences biologists conducted a reconnaissance-level field survey to characterize on-site habitats and to generally evaluate their potential to support sensitive species on September 16, 2017. Plant species and vegetation communities (where present) were primarily identified by walking meandering transects over the site. All direct observations of wildlife were recorded, as was wildlife sign. In addition to species actually detected, expected use of the site by other wildlife was evaluated from habitat analysis of the site, combined with known habitat preferences of locally occurring wildlife species. The site was also evaluated for the potential presence of plant, animal, or habitat considered rare, threatened, sensitive, endangered, or otherwise unique by regulatory or resource agencies. Weather conditions during the survey included 1-3 m.p.h. breeze, partly cloudy skies, and air temperatures of approximately 77-82 °F.

Existing Site Conditions

The site is characterized as an active wholesale nursery (Colorama) with associated infrastructure (e.g., office, service buildings, row covers, shade netting, soil/fertilizer piles, containers, detention/retention basins, clarification ponds, parking areas, etc.). The site is fully developed with no open space. Landscaping plant species predominate the entire site. No other plant species are a significant component on the site and the periphery is well maintained. Surrounding land uses include development to the north, south, and east. To the west is the San Gabriel River (River) and Trail that is separated from the site by chain link fencing and a driveway/roadway, then followed by residential development. **Plate 3** provides an aerial view of the site. **Plate 4** illustrates existing land uses.

Wildlife

Common bird species observed during the survey included Anna' hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), and house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). No reptiles or mammals were observed.

Sensitive Biological Resources Evaluation

Discussed in this section are plant and wildlife species potentially present in the study area that have been afforded special recognition by federal or state agencies. The focus of this discussion is on those species that would potentially pose considerable constraints on the proposed project because of their high sensitivity status (listed or proposed for listing as rare, threatened, or endangered) with state and/or federal resource agencies. In addition, plants included on Lists 1, 2, 3, or 4 of the CNPS inventory are also considered of special-status. Vegetation communities that are unique, of relatively limited distribution, or of particular value to wildlife and considered sensitive by state and/or federal resource agencies are also generally discussed.





View to south



View to west

In general, those species presented in **Tables 1 and 2** that are “not expected” or that have a “low occurrence potential” generally correspond to “less than significant” under CEQA. The occurrence potential of special-status plant and wildlife species is primarily based on habitat types present, occurrence records of sensitive species from the site vicinity, and results of the on-site reconnaissance survey. No focused botanical or zoological surveys were conducted.

Special-Status Plant Species

No special-status plant species were detected on site during the reconnaissance survey and none are expected due to lack of suitable habitat. Special-status plant species known from the region that potentially occur within the project site are summarized below in **Table 1**.

Table 1
Special-Status Plant Species Known to Occur in the Site Vicinity¹

Common Name <i>Scientific Name</i>	Status			Habitat Requirements	Occurrence Potential
	Federal	State	CNPS		
Plummer's mariposa lily <i>Calochortus plummerae</i>	FSC	--	1B	Chaparral, cismontane woodlands, coastal scrub, Lower coniferous forests, and grasslands; associated with granitic soils.	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present on site
Many-stemmed dudleya <i>Dudleya multicaulis</i>	FSC	--	1B	Chaparral, coastal scrub, and grasslands; often associated with clay soils.	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Mesa horkelia <i>Horkelia cuneata</i> ssp. <i>puberula</i>	--	--	1B	Chaparral, cismontane woodland, coastal scrub; sandy or gravelly	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Brands' star phacelia <i>Phacelia stellaris</i>	--	--	1B	Coastal strand, coastal sage scrub	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
San Bernardino aster <i>Symphyotrichum defoliatum</i>	--	--	1B	Meadows and seeps, marshes and swamps; coastal scrub, woodlands; mesic grassland; ditches	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present

KEY: ¹Based primarily on review of 2017 CNDDDB and CNPS online databases. Because of the developed nature of the site, not all plant species known from the site vicinity were included in this table.

Federal	CNPS
FE: Federally Endangered	List 1A: Plants presumed extinct in California.
FT: Federally Threatened Species	List 1B: Plants rare and endangered in California and elsewhere
FPE: Federally Proposed Endangered	List 2: Plants rare and endangered in California, but more common elsewhere
FPT: Federally Proposed Threatened	List 3: Taxa about which more information is needed
FC: Federal Candidate Species	List 4: Plants of limited distribution
FSC: Federal Species of Concern	
State	
CE: State Endangered	
CT: State Threatened	
CR: State Rare	

Special-Status Wildlife Species

No special-status wildlife species were directly observed on site, and none are expected due to absence of suitable habitat. Sensitive wildlife species known from the site vicinity are summarized below in **Table 2**.



Table 2

Special-Status Wildlife Species Known from the Site Vicinity¹

Common Name Scientific Name	Status		Habitat Requirements	Occurrence Potential
	Federal	State		
REPTILES				
Coast horned lizard <i>Phrynosoma blainvillii</i>	FSC	CSC	Relatively open grasslands, scrublands, and woodlands with fine, loose soil.	Not Expected: no suitable habitat present
Coastal western whiptail <i>Aspidoscelis tigris multiscutatus</i>	--	◆	Sage scrub, chaparral, grassland	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
BIRDS				
Cooper's hawk (nesting) <i>Accipiter cooperi</i>	--	CSC	Dense stands of live oaks and riparian woodlands.	Not Expected: no suitable habitat present
Ferruginous hawk (wintering) <i>Buteo regalis</i>	FSC, MNBMC	CSC	Grasslands, agricultural fields, and open scrublands.	Not Expected: no suitable habitat present
Western burrowing owl (burrow sites) <i>Athene cunicularia hypugea</i>	FSC, MNBMC	CSC	Grasslands and open scrub.	Not Expected: no suitable habitat present
California coastal gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila californica californica</i>	FT	CSC	Coastal sage scrub in areas of flat or gently sloping terrain	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Least Bell's vireo <i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i>	FE	CE	Willow dominated riparian habitat with dense understory	Not expected; suitable habitat not present
Bank swallow <i>Riparia riparia</i>	CT	--	Sandy, vertical banks along rivers and lakes	Not expected; suitable habitat not present
Western yellow-billed cuckoo <i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i>	--	CE	Riparian forest nester, lower flood-bottoms of larger river systems	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Yellow-breasted chat <i>Icteria virens</i>	--	CSC	Riparian thickets and riparian woodlands with dense understory	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
California horned lark <i>Eremophila alpestris actia</i>	--	CSC	Grasslands, disturbed areas, agriculture fields, and beach areas.	Not Expected: no suitable habitat present
Loggerhead shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	FSC, MNBMC	CSC	Grasslands with scattered shrubs, trees, fences or other perches.	Low Potential: marginally suitable habitat present
MAMMALS				
San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit <i>Lepus californicus bennettii</i>	FSC	CSC	Chaparral, coastal scrub, grasslands	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Pallid bat <i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	--	CSC	Arid habitats, including grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, and forests; prefers rocky outcrops, cliffs, and crevices with access to open habitats for foraging	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Western yellow bat <i>Lasurus xanthinus</i>	--	CSC	Valley foothill riparian, desert riparian, palm oasis	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Western mastiff bat <i>Eumops perotis</i>	FSC (ssp. <i>californicus</i>)	CSC	Primarily arid lowlands and coastal basins with rugged, rocky terrain, along with suitable crevices for day-roosts; primarily a cliff-dweller	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Pocketed free-tailed bat <i>Nyctinomops femorosaccus</i>	--	CSC	Pine juniper woodlands, desert scrub, palm oasis, desert wash, desert riparian; rocky areas with high cliffs	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
Big free-tailed bat <i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i>	--	--	Low lying arid areas in California; needs high cliffs or rocky outcrops for roosting	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present
American badger <i>Taxidea taxus</i>	--	CSC	Drier open stages of shrub, forest, and herbaceous habitats with friable soils	Not Expected: suitable habitat not present

KEY: ¹Based primarily on review of 2017 CNDDDB; (nesting) = For most taxa the CNDDDB is interested in sightings for the presence of resident populations. For some species (primarily birds), the CNDDDB only tracks certain parts of the

Table 2-continued

Special-Status Wildlife Species Known from the Site Vicinity¹

species range or life history (e.g., nesting locations). The area or life stage is indicated in parenthesis after the common name. Because of the developed nature of the site, not all wildlife species known from the site vicinity were included this table.

Status:

<u>Federal—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service</u>		<u>State—California Department of Fish and Wildlife</u>	
FE:	Federally Endangered	CE:	California Endangered
FT:	Federally Threatened	CT:	California Threatened
FPE:	Federally Proposed Endangered	CCE:	California Candidate (Endangered)
FPT:	Federally Proposed Threatened	CCT:	California Candidate (Threatened)
FC:	Federal Candidate for listing as threatened or endangered	CFP:	California Fully Protected
FSC:	Federal Species of Concern- no formal protection is granted to this designation	CP:	California Fully Protected
MNBMC:	Migratory Nongame Birds of Management Concern	CSC:	California Species of Special Concern
		◆	California Special-animal

Special-Status Habitats

Special-status habitat types are vegetation communities that support concentrations of sensitive plant or wildlife species, are of relatively limited distribution, or are of particular value to wildlife. Although sensitive habitats are not necessarily afforded legal protection unless they support protected species, potential impacts to them may increase concerns and mitigation suggestions by resources agencies. Special-status habitats known from the site vicinity include Riversidean Alluvial Fan Sage Scrub, Walnut Forest, and California Walnut Woodland. These habitat types are all associated with the San Gabriel River located to the west of the site. No special-status habitats were recorded on the site due to long-standing site disturbances associated with wholesale nurseries.

Jurisdictional Resources

Based on the field investigation conducted by Ecological Sciences, USACE “waters of the United States” per Sections 401-404 of the Federal Clean Water Act and “streambeds” per Section 1600-1603 of the CDFW Code were not present on the site. Although the San Gabriel River is located to the west, the River is separated from the site by chain link fencing and a paved driveway/roadway. No impacts would occur to adjacent areas associated with River jurisdictional areas.

Wildlife Movement Corridors

The proposed project site is surrounded by existing development, and therefore, the subject site does not occupy an important location relative to regional wildlife movement. Although the San Gabriel River is located to the west and would be considered a movement corridor, the River is separated from the site by chain link fencing and a paved driveway/roadway. No impacts would occur to adjacent areas associated with potential wildlife movement along or within the River area or the Los Angeles County San Gabriel Canyon Significant Ecological Area (SEA). As such, development of the site would not have any substantial effect on local or regional wildlife movement nor impact the adjacent SEA.

Discussion

The level of constraint that a sensitive biological resource would pose to potential development typically depends on the following criteria: (1) the relative value of that resource; (2) the amount or degree of impact to the resource; (3) whether or not impacts to the resource would be in violation of state and/or federal regulations or laws; (4) whether or not impacts to the resource would require permitting by resource agencies; and (5) the degree to which impacts on the resource would otherwise be considered “significant” under CEQA. On-site habitats have been assigned a low biological constraint rating based on the degree

in which expected impacts to on-site resources would meet the criteria discussed above. This designation is primarily due to the high level of site disturbances (associated with existing development and/or other anthropogenic disturbances) resulting in low biological diversity (i.e., replacement and exclusion of most native species with just a few non-native species) and an low potential for special-status species to utilize or reside within areas proposed for development due to absence of suitable habitat.

No **special-status plant species** are expected on site due to the absence of suitable habitat. Long-standing use of the site for commercial purposes and other anthropogenic disturbances have altered substrate characteristics such that any uncovered soils are not capable of supporting sensitive plant species known from the site vicinity. Site development would not eliminate significant amounts of habitat for potentially occurring special-status plant species, nor reduce population size of sensitive plant species below self-sustaining levels on a local or regional basis. No CEQA significant impacts are expected.

No **special-status wildlife species** were directly recorded on site and no special-status wildlife species are expected because of the developed nature of the site. Site development would not eliminate any habitat for special-status species, nor reduce population sizes below self-sustaining levels on a local or regional basis. No CEQA significant impacts are expected.

Cultivar trees present on site could provide potential nesting sites for several common **native bird species**. These potentially occurring common native birds are not protected by state or federal endangered species acts, however many native species are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-711) and CDFG Code sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3800 which prohibits take, possession, or destruction of birds, their nests or eggs (in particular raptor species). If it were later determined that active nests would be lost or disturbed as a result of site-preparation, it could result in adverse impacts and would be in conflict with these regulations.

If site preparation activities occur during the nesting season (generally February 1 through August 31, or as early as January for some raptors), a **pre-construction nesting bird survey** (within 3-7 days of construction) is recommended to determine if active nests of species protected by the MBTA and/or CDFW are present in the construction and buffer zone for CEQA compliance and subsequently evaluate appropriate measures that may reduce potential adverse project-related impacts. If ground-disturbing activities are delayed or suspended for more than 7 days after the survey, the site and buffer areas should be resurveyed if suitable habitat is present. Should eggs or fledglings be discovered in any native nest, these resources cannot be disturbed (pursuant to CDFW guidelines) until the young have hatched and fledged (matured to a stage that they can leave the nest on their own). Take of active nests should always be avoided.

Compliance with the MBTA and CDFW codes would be necessary prior to development; however no special permit or approval is typically required in most instances. Development activities performed outside of the avian breeding season would generally eliminate the need to conduct pre-activity nesting surveys for most common native species known from the site vicinity, and likely ensure that there were no constraints to construction relative to the MBTA/CDFW code.

Conclusion

Results of the habitat suitability evaluation conducted in August 2017 indicate that habitats located within the ±23-acre site represent low biological resource values based on the degree in which expected impacts to on-site resources would meet the criteria discussed above (1-5) and the context in which they occur (e.g., highly disturbed site conditions present in a predominantly degraded and isolated environment). The existing degraded condition of the site is the direct consequence of long-standing use of the site for commercial trucking activities resulting in low biological diversity (e.g., dominance of non-native species), absence of special-status plant communities, and low potential for special-status species to utilize or reside on site. Construction activities would not directly impact federal- or state-listed threatened or endangered species, jeopardize the continued existence of listed species (or special-status species), nor directly impact designated critical habitat. Site development would also not substantially alter the diversity

of plants or wildlife in the area because of current degraded site conditions. The loss of such habitats as those present on site would not substantially affect special-status resources or cause a population of plant or wildlife species to drop below self-sustaining levels.

Although no native habitat types are present, and no listed species (currently protected by state or federal endangered species acts) are expected to occur due to absence of suitable habitat, the potential presence of native nesting birds on or adjacent to the site (e.g., San Gabriel River potentially associated with construction noise effects during the nesting season) may impose some degree of constraint to development depending upon the nature of both direct and indirect impacts on these resources (if present), as well as on the particular species and seasonal timing of construction activities. During permitting procedures, certain measures (e.g., preconstruction nesting bird survey) to avoid or further reduce potential project-related impacts to sensitive biological resources may be necessary pursuant to CEQA.

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I hereby certify that the statements and exhibits furnished herein present the data and information required for this biological survey, and that the facts, statements, and information presented herein are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. If you have any questions regarding the results presented in this report, please don't hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Ecological Sciences, Inc.



Scott D. Cameron
Principal Biologist

References

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