

IV. Environmental Impact Analysis

E. Paleontological Resources

1. Introduction

This section of the Draft EIR provides an analysis of the Project's potential impacts to paleontological resources. The analysis is based on data provided by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, as included in Appendix E of this Draft EIR.

2. Environmental Setting

a. Regulatory Framework

(1) California Environmental Quality Act

Paleontological resources are afforded protection under CEQA. Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines provides guidance relative to significant impacts on paleontological resources. Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines states that a Project could have a potentially significant impact on the environment if it could directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature.

(2) Los Angeles General Plan Conservation Element

Section 3 of the Los Angeles General Plan Conservation Element, adopted in September 2001, includes policies for the protection of paleontological resources. As stated therein, it is the City's policy that paleontological resources be protected for historical, cultural research, and/or educational purposes. Section 3 sets as an objective the identification and protection of significant paleontological sites and/or resources known to exist or that are identified during "land development, demolition, or property modification activities." Section 5 of the Conservation Element recognizes the City's responsibility for identifying and protecting its cultural and historical heritage. The Conservation Element establishes the policy to continue to protect historical and cultural sites and/or resources potentially affected by proposed land development, demolition, or property modification

activities, with the related objective to protect important cultural and historical sites and resources for historical, cultural, research, and community educational purposes.¹

b. Existing Conditions

Paleontology is the study of fossils, which are the remains of ancient life forms. On March 12, 2018, a Project-specific paleontological records search was conducted through the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The results of the paleontological records search, which are included in Appendix E of this Draft EIR, indicate there are no vertebrate fossil localities that lie directly within the Project Site. However, there are localities that have been identified nearby from the same sedimentary deposits that occur at depth within the Project area, as identified below.

Surface deposits throughout the Project area consist of soil on top of older Quaternary Alluvium, derived as alluvial fan deposits from the Hollywood Hills to the north. As provided by the Natural History Museum in their letter included in Appendix E of this Draft EIR, the uppermost layers of these deposits typically do not contain significant fossil vertebrate remains.

Four vertebrate fossil localities, LACM 6297-6300, were found to the northeast of the Project area east of the Hollywood Freeway. These localities were collected from late Pleistocene deposits at depths between 47 and 80 feet below ground surface along Hollywood Boulevard between the Hollywood Freeway and Western Avenue during excavations for the Metro Red Line tunnels and stations. Fossil specimens of horse, bison, camel, and mastodon, were recovered from these localities.

Near the Ranch La Brea asphalt deposits to the southwest in the Hancock Park region, fossil vertebrates have been recovered at shallower depths. The closest vertebrate fossil locality in these older Quaternary sediments at shallow depth is LACM 5845, southeast of the Project area near the intersection of Western Avenue and Council Street. LACM 5845 produced a specimen of fossil mastodon, *Mammutidae*, at a depth of 5 to 6 feet below ground surface. To the southeast of the Project area, the vertebrate fossil locality LACM 3250 produced a fossil specimen of mammoth, *Mammuthus*, at a depth of about 8 feet below ground surface. To the southwest of the Project area, near the intersection of Sierra Bonita Avenue and Oakwood Avenue, vertebrate fossil locality LACM 3371 produced specimens of fossil bison, *Bison antiquus*, at a depth of 12 feet below ground surface.

¹ City of Los Angeles General Plan, Conservation Element, September 2001, pp. II-6 through II-9.

3. Project Impacts

a. Thresholds of Significance

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, the Project would have a significant impact related to paleontological resources if it would:

Threshold (a): Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?

For this analysis, the Appendix G Threshold listed above is relied upon. The analysis utilizes factors and considerations identified in the City's 2006 L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide, as appropriate, to assist in answering the Appendix G Threshold question.

The L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide identifies the following factors to evaluate paleontological resources:

- Whether, or the degree to which, the project might result in the permanent loss of, or loss of access to, a paleontological resource; and
- Whether the paleontological resource is of regional or statewide significance.

b. Methodology

To address potential impacts to paleontological resources, formal records searches were conducted by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County to assess the paleontological sensitivity of the Project Site and vicinity. In addition, an evaluation of existing conditions and previous disturbances within the Project Site, the geology of the Project Site, and the anticipated depths of grading were evaluated to determine the potential for uncovering paleontological resources.

c. Project Design Features

No specific project design features are proposed with regard to paleontological resources.

d. Analysis of Project Impacts

Threshold (a): Would the Project directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?

(1) Impact Analysis

As previously discussed, a records search conducted for the Project Site indicates there are no previously encountered fossil vertebrate localities located within the Project Site. The closest identified localities in proximity to the Project Site were collected at depths between 47 and 80 feet below the surface area. The paleontological records search indicates that grading or very shallow excavations in the uppermost layers of soil and Quaternary Alluvium deposits in the Project Site are unlikely to discover significant vertebrate fossils. However, according to the paleontological records search, deeper excavations have the potential to encounter significant remains of fossil vertebrates. As discussed above, grading to a maximum depth of approximately 42 feet would occur within the Project Site. Thus, the possibility exists that paleontological artifacts that were not recovered during prior construction or other human activity may be present. As set forth in Mitigation Measure PAL-MM-1, below, a qualified paleontologist would be retained to perform periodic inspections of excavation and grading activities of the Project Site. In the event paleontological materials are encountered, the paleontologist would temporarily divert or redirect grading and excavation activities in the area of the exposed material to facilitate evaluation and, if necessary, salvage. **Therefore, implementation of Mitigation Measure PAL-MM-1 would ensure that any potential impacts related to paleontological resources would be less than significant.**

With regard to unique geologic features, there are no distinct and prominent geologic or topographic features (i.e., hilltops, ridges, hillslopes, canyons, ravines, rock outcrops, water bodies, streambeds, or wetlands) on the Project Site or vicinity. **Therefore, the Project would not destroy any distinct and prominent geologic or topographic features, and impacts to a unique geologic feature would be less than significant.**

(2) Mitigation Measures

PAL-MM-1: A qualified paleontologist shall be retained by the Applicant to perform periodic inspections of excavation and grading activities at the Project Site. The frequency of inspections shall be based on consultation with the paleontologist and shall depend on the rate of excavation and grading activities and the materials being excavated. If paleontological materials are encountered, the paleontologist shall temporarily divert or redirect grading and excavation activities in the area of the exposed material to facilitate evaluation and, if necessary, salvage. The paleontologist shall then assess the discovered material(s) and prepare a survey, study or report evaluating the impact. The Applicant shall then comply with the recommendations of the evaluating paleontologist, and a copy of the paleontological survey report shall be submitted to the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum and the Department of City Planning. Ground-disturbing activities may resume

once the paleontologist's recommendations have been implemented to the satisfaction of the paleontologist.

(3) Level of Significance After Mitigation

Project-level impacts related to paleontological resources would be less than significant with implementation of Mitigation Measure PAL-MM-1.

e. Cumulative Impacts

As indicated in Section III, Environmental Setting, of this Draft EIR, there are a total of 104 related projects in the vicinity of the Project Site. While the majority of the related projects are located a substantial distance from the Project Site, as shown in Figure III-1 in Section III, Environmental Setting, of this Draft EIR, several related projects are located in proximity to the Project Site. Collectively, the related projects near the Project Site involve a mix of residential, retail, restaurant, commercial, and office uses, consistent with existing uses in the vicinity of the Project Site.

(1) Impact Analysis

With regard to potential cumulative impacts related to paleontological resources, such potential impacts are generally site specific as they relate to the particular underlying conditions of a site. Notwithstanding, the Project Site vicinity is highly urbanized and has been substantially disturbed and developed over time. As such, paleontological resources that may have been present within some of the related project sites may have already been discovered. In addition, as part of the environmental review processes for the related projects, it is expected that mitigation measures would be established similar to the Project to address the potential for uncovering of paleontological resources. Therefore, cumulative impacts to paleontological resources would be less than significant.

(2) Mitigation Measures

Cumulative impacts related to paleontological resources would be less than significant. Therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

(3) Level of Significance After Mitigation

Cumulative impacts related to paleontological resources were determined to be less than significant without mitigation. Therefore, no mitigation measures were required or included, and the impact level remains less than significant.