BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES ASSESSMENT
FOR THE NEEDLES WELL PROJECT
CITY OF NEEDLES, CALIFORNIA

Prepared for:

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May 2021

Contents

SECTION 1.0 - INTRODUCTION

Jennings Environmental, LLC (Jennings) was retained by Lilburn Corporation (Lilburn) to conduct a literature review and reconnaissance-level survey for the proposed Needles Well Project (Project). The survey identified vegetation communities, the potential for the occurrence of special status species, or habitats that could support special status wildlife species, and recorded all plants and animals observed or detected within the Project boundary. This biological resources assessment is designed to address potential effects of the proposed project to designated critical habitats and/or any species currently listed or formally proposed for listing as endangered or threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) or species designated as sensitive by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) or the California Native Plant Society (CNPS). Information contained in this document is in accordance with accepted scientific and technical standards that are consistent with the requirements of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and (CDFW).

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The project is generally located in the northwestern portion of Section 19, Township 9 North, Range 23 East and is depicted on the *Needles and Needles SW* U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic map. More specifically the project is located within Assessor Parcel Number (APN) 0660-081-32, within the City of Needles, San Bernardino County, California. The Project site is located just east of the intersection of River Rd. and State Route 66, just north of Interstate 40. The site is surrounded by undeveloped parcels on the north, east and south with a storage unit facility and the Firehouse Switchyard (electrical substation) to the west. (Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix A).

1.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed Project includes the installation of a new potable well to assist the City in meeting the drinking water standards set by the California State Water Resources Control Board's Division of Drinking Water. Additional improvements include underground water lines and electrical lines, a 0.46-acre detention basin, and a concrete pad and steel shade structure for well pump placement.

2.0 – METHODOLOGY

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to performing the field survey, existing documentation relevant to the Project site was reviewed. The most recent records of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) managed by CDFW (CDFW 2021), the USFWS Critical Habitat Mapper (USFWS 2021) and the California Native Plant Society's Electronic Inventory (CNPSEI) of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California (CNPS 2021) were reviewed for the following quadrangles containing and surrounding the Project site: *Needles, Needles SW, Needles NW* and *Needles NE* USGS 7.5-minute quadrangles. The *Needles NW* and *Needles NE* quads were included in this search due the sites proximity to their borders. These databases contain records of reported occurrences of federal- or state-listed endangered or threatened species, California Species of Concern (SSC), or otherwise special status species or habitats that may occur within or in the immediate vicinity of the Project site.

2.2 BIOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE-LEVEL SURVEY

Jennings biologist, Gene Jennings, conducted the general reconnaissance survey within the Project site to identify the potential for the occurrence of special status species, vegetation communities, or habitats that could support special status wildlife species. The surveys were conducted on foot, throughout the Project site between 0830 and 0930 hours on May 21, 2021. Weather conditions during the survey included temperatures ranging from 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit, with no cloud cover, no precipitation, 5 to 10 mile per hour winds. Photographs of the Project site were taken to document existing conditions (Appendix B).

2.3 VEGETATION

All plant species observed within the Project site were recorded. Vegetation communities within the Project site were identified and qualitatively described. Plant communities were determined in accordance with the *Manual of California Vegetation*, *Second Edition* (Sawyer et al. 2009). Plant nomenclature follows that of *The Jepson Manual, Second Edition* (Baldwin et al. 2012). A comprehensive list of the plant species observed during the survey is provided in Appendix C.

2.4 WILDLIFE

All wildlife and wildlife signs observed and detected, including tracks, scat, carcasses, burrows, excavations, and vocalizations, were recorded. Additional survey time was spent in those habitats most likely to be utilized by wildlife (native vegetation, wildlife trails, etc.) or in habitats with the potential to support state- and/or federally listed or otherwise special status species. Notes were made on the general habitat types, species observed, and the conditions of the Project site. A comprehensive list of the wildlife species observed during the survey is provided in Appendix C.

SECTION 3.0 – RESULTS

3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS

According to the CNDDB, CNPSEI, and other relevant literature and databases, 24 sensitive species, 7 of which are listed as threatened or endangered, and one sensitive habitat have been documented in the *Needles, Needles SW, Needles NW* and *Needles NE* quads. This list of sensitive species and habitats includes any State and/or federally listed threatened or endangered species, CDFW designated Species of Special Concern (SSC) and otherwise Special Animals. “Special Animals” is a general term that refers to all of the taxa the CNDDB is interested in tracking, regardless of their legal or protection status. This list is also referred to as the list of “species at risk” or “special status species.” The CDFW considers the taxa on this list to be those of greatest conservation need.

An analysis of the likelihood for the occurrence of all CNDDB sensitive species documented in the *Needles, Needles SW, Needles NW* and *Needles NE* quads is provided in Table 2, in Appendix C. This analysis takes into account species range as well as documentation within the vicinity of the project area and includes the habitat requirements for each species and the potential for their occurrence on the site, based on required habitat elements and range relative to the current site conditions. According to the databases, no sensitive habitat, including USFWS designated critical habitat, occurs within or adjacent to the project site.

3.1.1 SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES BACKGROUND

Desert Tortoise

The desert tortoise is a State and federally listed threatened species. Throughout its range, it is threatened by habitat loss, domestic grazing, predation, collections, and increased mortality rates. The desert tortoise is typically found in creosote bush scrub. They are most often found on level or sloped ground where the substrate is firm but not too rocky. Tortoise burrows are typically found at the base of shrubs, in the sides of washes and hillsides. Because a single tortoise may have many burrows distributed throughout its home range, it is not possible to predict the exact numbers of individuals on a site based upon burrow numbers.

In 1992 the US Bureau of Land Management issued the *California Statewide Desert Tortoise Management Policy* which included categorizing habitat into three levels of classification. The management goal for Category I areas is to maintain stable, viable populations and to increase the population where possible. The management goal for Category II areas is to maintain stable, viable populations. The management goal for Category III areas is to limit population declines to the extent feasible. In April 1993, the BLM amended the CDCA plan to delineate these three categories of desert tortoise habitat on public lands. Although habitat categories apply only to public lands administered by the BLM, regulatory agencies typically determine habitat compensation ratios based on the nearest BLM habitat categories (Desert Tortoise Compensation Team 1991). With the adoption of the West Mojave Plan (U.S. Bureau of Land Management 2005), all lands that are outside Desert Wildlife Management Areas, including the subject parcel, are characterized as Category 3 Habitat, which is the lowest priority management area for viable populations of the desert tortoise.

Burrowing owl (BUOW)

The BUOW is a state and federal SSC. This owl is a mottled, brownish and sand-colored, dove-sized raptor, with large, yellow eyes, a rounded head lacking ear tufts, white eyebrows, and long legs compared to other owl species. It is a ground-dwelling owl typically found in arid prairies, fields, and open areas where vegetation is sparse and low to the ground. The BUOW is heavily dependent upon the presence of mammal burrows, with ground squirrel burrows being a common choice, in its habitat to provide shelter from predators, inclement weather, and to provide a nesting place (Coulombe 1971). They are also known to make use of human-created structures, such as cement culverts and pipes, for burrows.

BUOW spends a great deal of time standing on dirt mounds at the entrance to a burrow or perched on a fence post or other low to the ground perch from which they hunt for prey. BUOW frequently hunt by hovering in place above the ground and dropping on their prey from above. They feed primarily on insects such as grasshoppers, June beetles, and moths, but will also take small rodents, birds, and reptiles. They are active during the day and night but are considered a crepuscular owl; generally observed in the early morning hours or at twilight. The breeding season for BUOW is February 1 through August 31. Up to 11, but typically 7 to 9, eggs are laid in a burrow, abandoned pipe, or other subterranean hollows where incubation is complete in 28-30 days. Young BUOW fledges in 44 days. The BUOW is considered a migratory species in portions of its range, which includes western North America from Canada to Mexico, and east to Texas and Louisiana. BUOW populations in California are considered to be sedentary or locally migratory.

Throughout its range, the BUOW is vulnerable to habitat loss, predation, vehicular collisions, and destruction of burrow sites, and the poisoning of ground squirrels (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Zarn 1974, Remsen 1978). BUOW has disappeared from significant portions of their range in the last 15 years and, overall, nearly 60% of the breeding groups of owls known to have existed in California during the 1980s had disappeared by the early 1990s (Burrowing Owl Consortium 1993). The BUOW is not listed under the state or federal Endangered Species Act but is considered both a federal and state Species of Special Concern. The BUOW is a migratory bird protected by the international treaty under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and by State law under the California Fish and Game Code (CDFG Code #3513 & #3503.5).

Additional Threatened or Endangered Species

There were also six (6) additional threatened or endangered species that are found within the *Needles, Needles SW, Needles NW* and *Needles NE* Quads. However, the site is either outside the know range for the species or suitable habitat does not occur within the Project area. Therefore, no further discussion or recommendations are required for the following species:

- Western yellow-billed cuckoo
- Gilla woodpecker
- Elf owl
- Yuma Ridgeway's rail
- Arizona Bell's vireo
- Razorback sucker

3.2 FIELD STUDY RESULTS

3.2.1 HABITAT

The habitat on-site consists of bare ground with sparse vegetation along the perimeter and ruderal vegetation. The Project site is currently being used as a storage yard for the electrical substation. The site is heavily disturbed and maintained. A complete list of all plants observed along the perimeter is provided in Table 1 of Appendix C.

3.2.2 WILDLIFE

Several birds were seen or heard during the survey. Species observed or otherwise detected on or in the vicinity of the project site during the surveys included; mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), and common raven (*Corvus corax*). A complete list of all species observed is provided in Table 1 of Appendix C.

The project site is located within a relatively undeveloped area of Needles. Portions of the project site have been disturbed by humans. There is no habitat within the proposed project footprint that is suitable for some sensitive species identified in the CNDDB search (Table 2 in Appendix C).

3.2.3 SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES

Desert Tortoise

No suitable habitat for desert tortoise exists within the Project site or surrounding area. There are no documented desert tortoise occurrences within the Project site and the nearest occurrence is 0.5 miles southwest of the Project site, on the south side of Interstate 40. There is also no suitable habitat on-site or within in the immediate surrounding area and this species are not expected to occur within the project area. Additionally, the Project site is outside of the Designated Critical for this species. Therefore, no potential direct or indirect impacts to desert tortoise can be identified, and presence/absence surveys for this species are not warranted or recommended.

Burrowing owl (BUOW)

Based on the May 2021 field survey, the site does not contain suitable habitat for this species. The property is continually maintained and is mostly gravel road base. No burrowing owls were observed during the site visit. No burrows of any kind were located within the property site. No portion of the project site showed any evidence of past or present BUOW activity. No feathers, whitewash, or castings were found and no suitable burrow surrogate species are present on-site. No suitable habitat exists on-site; therefore, no focused surveys are required.

Designated Critical Habitat

The site is not located within or adjacent to any USFWS designated Critical Habitat. No further action is required.

Nesting Birds

The Project site and immediate surrounding area does contain habitat suitable for nesting birds. Nesting bird surveys should be conducted prior to any construction activities taking place during the nesting season to avoid potentially taking any birds or active nests. In general, impacts to all bird species (common and special status) can be avoided by conducting work outside of the nesting season (generally March 15th to September 15th), and conducting a worker awareness training. However, if all work cannot be conducted outside of the nesting season, a project-specific Nesting Bird Management Plan can be prepared to determine suitable buffers.

Section 4.0 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

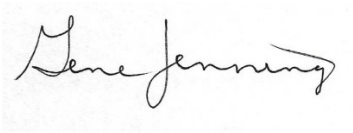
Based on the literature review and personal observations made in the immediate vicinity, no State and/or federally listed threatened or endangered species are documented/or expected to occur within the Project site. Additionally, no plant species with the California Rare Plant Rank (CRPR) of 1 or 2 were observed on-site or documented/expected to occur on-site. No other sensitive species were observed within the project area or buffer area.

Additionally, since there is some habitat within the project site and adjacent area that is suitable for nesting birds in general, a preconstruction nesting bird survey is recommended before the commencement of any project-related work activities to avoid any potential project-related impacts to nesting birds.

I hereby certify that the statements furnished herein, and in the attached exhibits present data and information required for this analysis to the best of my ability, and the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. This report was prepared in accordance with professional requirements and standards. Fieldwork conducted for this assessment was performed by me. I certify that I have not signed a non-disclosure or consultant confidentiality agreement with the project proponent and that I have no financial interest in the project.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 909-534-4547 should you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,



Gene Jennings
Principal/Regulatory Specialist

Appendices:

- Appendix A – Figures
- Appendix B – Site Photos
- Appendix C – Tables

Section 5 – REFERENCES

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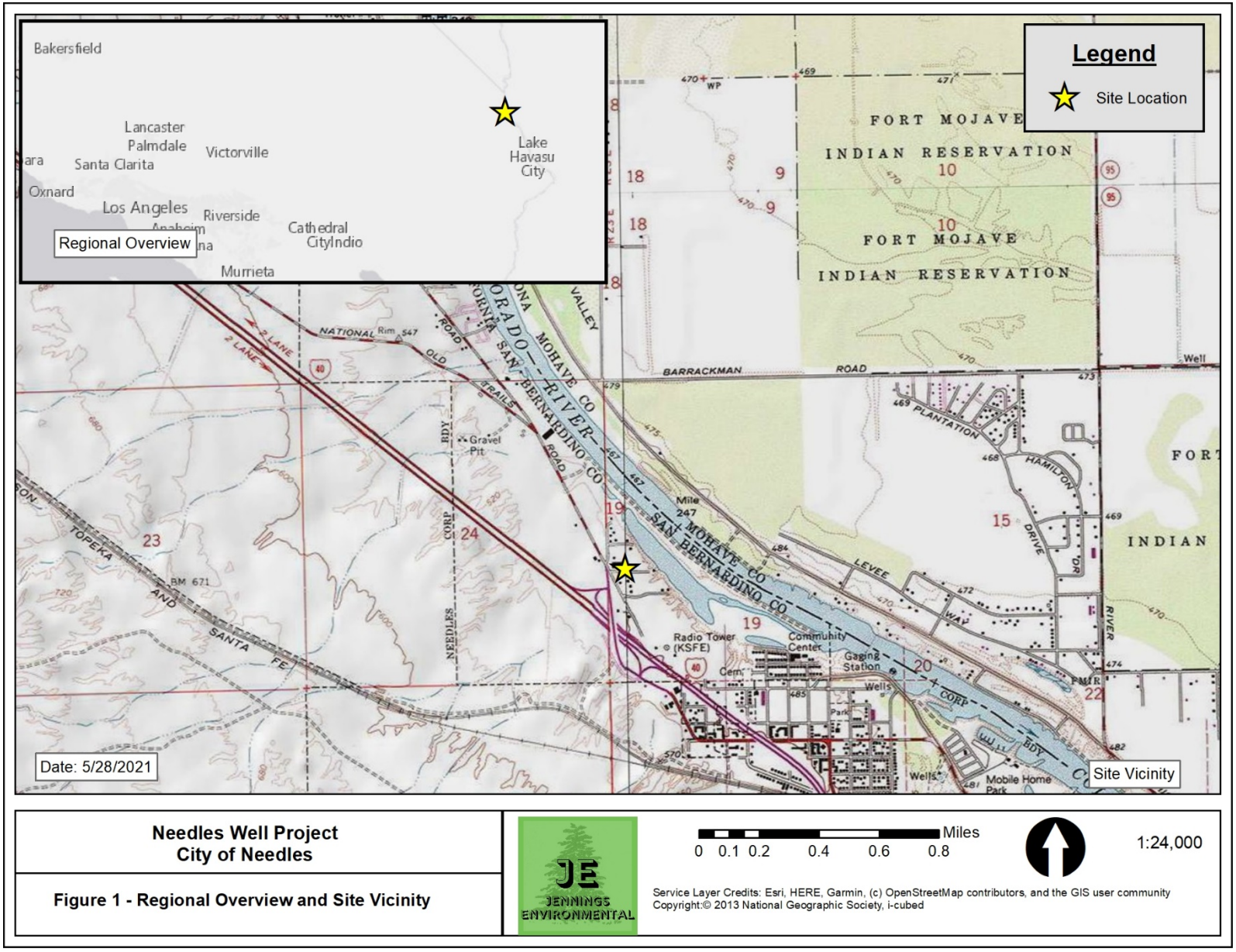
Appendix A - Figures


Legend
Site Location
Regional Overview
Bakersfield
Lancaster
Palmdale
Victorville
Santa Clarita
Oxnard
Los Angeles
Riverside
Cathedral City
Indio
Murrieta
Lake Havasu City
FORT MOJAVE INDIAN RESERVATION
BARRACKMAN ROAD
PLANTATION
HAMILTON
DRIVE
LEVEE
MOHAVE CO — RIVER — SAN BERNARDINO CO
Mile 247
Gravel Pit
Radio Tower (KSFE)
Community Center
Gaging Station
Wells
Mobile Home Park
TOPEKA AND SANTA FE
NEEDLES
NATIONAL TRAILS ROAD
2 LANE
Date: 5/28/2021
Site Vicinity
Needles Well Project
City of Needles
Figure 1 - Regional Overview and Site Vicinity
JE JENNINGS ENVIRONMENTAL
0 0.1 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 Miles
1:24,000
Service Layer Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community
Copyright:© 2013 National Geographic Society, i-cubed

Needles Well Project
City of Needles

Figure 2 - Site Location

JE JENNINGS ENVIRONMENTAL

Feet
0 30 60 120 180 240

1:1,368

Service Layer Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors
Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community
Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Appendix B - Photos

	Photo 1 – Eastern portion of parcel, facing west. Showing disturbed bare ground.
	Photo 2 – Eastern portion of parcel, facing west. Showing equipment storage and disturbed bare ground.

	Photo 3 – Southern edge of parcel, facing west. Showing existing access road alignment.
	Photo 4 – Western edge of parcel, facing east. Showing existing access road and the Colorado River in the background.

Appendix C – Tables

Table 1. Species Observed On-Site

Common Name	Scientific Name
Plants	
Winter fat	*Krascheninnikovia lanata*
Arrowweed	*Pluchea sericea*
Burrobush	*Ambrosia dumosa*
Bush seepweed	*Suaeda nigra*
Birds	
Mouring dove	*Cyanocitta stelleri*
Brown-headed cowbird	*Molothrus ater*
Common raven	*Corvus corax*

Table 2 – CNDDB Potential to Occur

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal/State Status	Other Status	Habitat	Occurrence Potential
Antrozous pallidus	pallid bat	None, None	G4, S3, CDFW-SSC	Deserts, grasslands, shrublands, woodlands and forests. Most common in open, dry habitats with rocky areas for roosting. Roosts must protect bats from high temperatures. Very sensitive to disturbance of roosting sites.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Athene cunicularia	burrowing owl	None, None	G4, S3, CDFW-SSC	Open, dry annual or perennial grasslands, deserts, and scrublands characterized by low-growing vegetation. Subterranean nester, dependent upon burrowing mammals, most notably, the California ground squirrel.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Cardinalis cardinalis	northern cardinal	None, None	G5, S1, CDFW-WL	Extremely rare resident along the Colorado River. Dense, brushy river bottom thickets, well-vegetated dry washes and dense desert scrub.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Catostomus latipinnis	flannelmouth sucker	None, None	G3G4, S1	Colorado River bordering California. Spawns in riffles, usually over a substrate of coarse gravel.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal/State Status	Other Status	Habitat	Occurrence Potential
Charadrius montanus	mountain plover	None, None	G3, S2S3, CDFW-SSC	Short grasslands, freshly plowed fields, newly sprouting grain fields, & sometimes sod farms. Short vegetation, bare ground, and flat topography. Prefers grazed areas and areas with burrowing rodents.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Coccyzus americanus occidentalis	western yellow-billed cuckoo	Threatened, Endangered	G5T2T3, S1	Riparian forest nester, along the broad, lower flood-bottoms of larger river systems. Nests in riparian jungles of willow, often mixed with cottonwoods, with lower story of blackberry, nettles, or wild grape.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Falco mexicanus	prairie falcon	None, None	G5, S4, CDFW-WL	Inhabits dry, open terrain, either level or hilly. Breeding sites located on cliffs. Forages far afield, even to marshlands and ocean shores.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Gopherus agassizii	desert tortoise	Threatened, Threatened	G3, S2S3	Most common in desert scrub, desert wash, and Joshua tree habitats; occurs in almost every desert habitat. Require friable soil for burrow and nest construction. Creosote bush habitat with large annual wildflower blooms preferred.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal/State Status	Other Status	Habitat	Occurrence Potential
Icteria virens	yellow-breasted chat	None, None	G5, S3, CDFW-SSC	Summer resident; inhabits riparian thickets of willow and other brushy tangles near watercourses. Nests in low, dense riparian, consisting of willow, blackberry, wild grape; forages and nests within 10 ft of ground.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Incilius alvarius	Sonoran Desert toad	None, None	G5, SH, CDFW-SSC	Breeds in temporary pools and irrigation ditches along the Colorado River and southern Imperial Valley.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Lontra canadensis sonora	southwestern river otter	None, None	G5T1, S1, CDFW-SSC	Aquatic habitats along the Colorado River. Needs abundant food sources and sufficient water for shelter and foraging.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Melanerpes uropygialis	Gila woodpecker	None, Endangered	G5, S1	In California, inhabits cottonwoods and other desert riparian trees, shade trees, and date palms. Cavity nester in riparian trees or saguaro cactus.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Mentzelia tricuspis	spiny-hair blazing star	None, None	G4, S2,2B.1	Mojavean desert scrub. Sandy or gravelly slopes and washes.150-1280 m.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Mesquite Bosque	Mesquite Bosque	None, None	G3, S2.1	Riparian forest	This habitat is NOT present on-site.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal/State Status	Other Status	Habitat	Occurrence Potential
Micrathene whitneyi	elf owl	None, Endangered	G5, S1	In California, nesting area limited to cottonwood-willow & mesquite riparian zone along the Colorado River. Nests in deserted woodpecker holes, often in larger trees which offer insulation from high daytime temperatures.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Myiarchus tyrannulus	brown-crested flycatcher	None, None	G5, S3, CDFW-WL	Inhabits desert riparian areas along the Colorado River, as well as other desert oases and riparian areas NW to Victorville. Requires riparian thickets, trees, snags, and shrubs for foraging perches, nesting cavities, and cover.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Ovis canadensis nelsoni	desert bighorn sheep	None, None	G4T4, S3, CDFW-FP	Widely distributed from the White Mtns in Mono Co. to the Chocolate Mts in Imperial Co. Open, rocky, steep areas with available water and herbaceous forage.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Piranga rubra	summer tanager	None, None	G5, S1, CDFW-SSC	Summer resident of desert riparian along lower Colorado River, and locally elsewhere in California deserts. Requires cottonwood-willow riparian for nesting and foraging; prefers older, dense stands along streams.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal/State Status	Other Status	Habitat	Occurrence Potential
Pyrocephalus rubinus	vermilion flycatcher	None, None	G5, S2S3, CDFW-SSC	During nesting, inhabits desert riparian adjacent to irrigated fields, irrigation ditches, pastures, and other open, mesic areas. Nest in cottonwood, willow, mesquite, and other large desert riparian trees.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Rallus obsoletus yumanensis	Yuma Ridgway's rail	Endangered, Threatened	G3T3, S1S2, CDFW-FP	Nests in freshwater marshes along the Colorado River and along the south and east ends of the Salton Sea. Prefers stands of cattails and tules dissected by narrow channels of flowing water; principle food is crayfish.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Setophaga petechia sonorana	Sonoran yellow warbler	None, None	G5T2T3, S2, CDFW-SSC	Summer resident of Colorado River Valley, in riparian deciduous habitat. Below 600 ft elevation. Inhabits cottonwoods and willows, particularly the crown foliage; nests in understory, usually 2-16 ft above ground.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Toxostoma crissale	Crissal thrasher	None, None	G5, S3, CDFW-SSC	Resident of southeastern deserts in desert riparian and desert wash habitats. Nests in dense vegetation along streams/washes; mesquite, screwbean mesquite, ironwood, catclaw, acacia, arrowweed, willow.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal/State Status	Other Status	Habitat	Occurrence Potential
Vireo bellii arizonae	Arizona Bell's vireo	None, Endangered	G5T4, S1S2	Summer resident along Colorado River. Chiefly inhabits willow thickets with undergrowth of Baccharis glutinosa. Nests in willow, mesquite, or other small tree/shrub, within 8 ft (usually 2-3 ft) of ground.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.
Xyrauchen texanus	razorback sucker	Endangered, Endangered	G1, S1S2, CDFW-FP	Found in the Colorado River bordering California. Adapted for swimming in swift currents but also need quiet waters. Spawn in areas of sand/gravel/rocks in shallow water.	Suitable habitat for this species does not occur on site. As such, this species is considered **absent** from the Project site.