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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

JUNE 14 2019

Thomas Duffy
 Department of Public Works
 County of San Diego
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STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Subject: Comments on the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Buckman Springs Road Bridge Widening Project (SCH# 2019059076)

Dear Mr. Duffy:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has reviewed the above-referenced Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the Buckman Springs Road Bridge Widening Project (Project) and provides the following comments and recommendations regarding those activities that may affect California fish and wildlife, and for those aspects of the Project that the Department, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under the Fish and Game Code.

Department Role

The Department is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources, and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State. (Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a).) The Department, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species. (*Id.*, § 1802.) Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, the Department is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

The Department is also a Responsible Agency under CEQA. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381) The Department may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, the project may be subject to the Department's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority. (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.) Likewise, to the extent implementation of the project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code will be required. The Department also administers the Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program. San Diego County (County) participates in the NCCP program through development of a draft East County Subarea Plan (EC-MSCP).

Project Location:

The project site is located along Buckman Springs Road where Cottonwood Creek crosses under the existing Buckman Springs Road Bridge in unincorporated San Diego County.

Project Description/Objective:

The project would widen the bridge up to a total of 6 feet, 9 inches to create two 15-foot-wide lanes. The foundations of four of the piers would be retrofitted by constructing the bottom of the pile cap approximately 10 feet below the ground surface, with the piles extending up to 75 feet below the ground surface. The project would include the installation of new girders, overhangs, bridge metal railings, and Caltrans' standard guardrail system. The bridge deck surface would be overlaid and restriped. Bridge deck drainage flows would be directed to three corners of the bridge at the approach ends. The drainpipe would convey the flows to energy dissipater riprap pads at the bottom of the embankment. Grading would be required at either end of the bridge. Four oak trees and seven cottonwood trees would be removed to accommodate grading. Graded areas would be revegetated with native species after construction, and trees would be replaced with in-kind species. Utilities would be relocated along the alignment of the new bridge. Construction of the project is expected to take approximately 12 months. During construction, a 16-foot-wide temporary road (for construction vehicles only) would be created immediately northeast of the Buckman Springs Road Bridge from Buckman Springs Road to enable construction vehicles to access the underside of the bridge. Construction staging would occur on a parcel one half mile away on Morena Stokes Valley Road. The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) would be temporarily relocated outside the project's impact area during construction. The trail relocation would not include any grading or ground disturbance. The ground beneath the bridge would be restored to pre-project conditions and replanted with native species after construction.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department offers the following comments and recommendations to assist the County in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources.

1. The MND requires in-kind, on-site restoration of temporarily impacted habitats. The Department recommends that the 0.5 acre of non-native grassland be restored using native species appropriate to the natural hydrology as part of a restoration plan. The Department recommends that all oak species removed be replaced at a ratio of at least 5:1 for trees between 5 and 12 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH), 10:1 for trees between 12 and 36 inches DBH, and 20:1 for trees greater than 36 inches DBH. Replacement trees should be locally sourced for genetic integrity. In addition, temporary impacts to cottonwoods and oaks or any other species of native tree should be limited to areas outside of the rootzone to avoid potentially permanent impacts to those trees that are not proposed for removal.
2. White-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), a State fully protected species, was observed in the biological study area as noted in the Natural Environmental Study for the project. As a fully protected species, the Department cannot authorize take as defined by Fish and Game Code section 86. The MND should include measures to avoid the potential for unauthorized take of white-tailed kite. The Department recommends that a mitigation

measure be included in the MND requiring surveys for white-tailed kites within 1,000 feet of the Project impact Area. The Department recommends that, should work occur during the nesting season, the mitigation measure require surveys with an emphasis for detecting nesting white-tailed kites. If surveys detect active white-tailed kite nests, a minimum 500-foot buffer from construction activities should be required.


3. Plans for restoration and revegetation required by mitigation measure A.1 should be prepared by persons with expertise in southern California ecosystems and native plant revegetation techniques. Each plan should include, at a minimum: (a) the location of the mitigation site; (b) the plant species to be used, container sizes, and seeding rates; (c) a schematic depicting the mitigation area; (d) planting schedule; (e) a description of the irrigation methodology; (f) measures to control exotic vegetation on site; (g) specific success criteria; (h) a detailed monitoring program; (i) contingency measures should the success criteria not be met; and (j) identification of the party responsible for meeting the success criteria and providing for conservation of the mitigation site in perpetuity.

CONCLUSION

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the MND to assist the County in identifying and mitigating project impacts on biological resources.

Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Eric Hollenbeck, Senior Environmental Scientist Specialist at (858) 467-2720 or Eric.Hollenbeck@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



for

Gail K. Sevens
Environmental Program Manager

ec: Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse, Sacramento

