



State of California – Natural Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
Central Region  
1234 East Shaw Ave  
Fresno, California 93710  
[www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov)

**GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor**  
**CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director**



November 18, 2020

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

**Nov 18 2020**

Hector Guerra  
Chief Environmental Planner  
Tulare County Resource Management Agency  
5961 S. Mooney Blvd.  
Visalia, California 93277

**STATE CLEARINGHOUSE**

**Subject: Kebo Oil and Gas Inc. SUP No. PSP 20-023  
MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION (MND)  
SCH No.: 2020100365**

Dear Mr. Guerra:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a Notice of Intent to Adopt an MND from Tulare County Resource Management Agency for the Project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under the Fish and Game Code.

### **CDFW ROLE**

CDFW 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; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, 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, CDFW 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.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a **Responsible Agency** under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to

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<sup>1</sup> CEQA is codified in the California Public Resources Code in section 21000 et seq. The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

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exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, the Project may be subject to CDFW'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 may be required.

**Water Pollution:** Pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 5650, it is unlawful to deposit in, permit to pass into, or place where it can pass into "Waters of the State" any substance or material deleterious to fish, plant life, or bird life, including non-native species. It is possible that without mitigation measures, activities associated with the Project could result in pollution of Waters of the State from storm water runoff or construction-related erosion. Potential impacts to the wildlife resources that utilize these watercourses include the following: increased sediment input from road or structure runoff; toxic runoff associated with development activities and implementation; and/or impairment of wildlife movement along riparian corridors. The Regional Water Quality Control Board and United States Army Corps of Engineers also has jurisdiction regarding discharge and pollution to Waters of the State.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY**

**Proponent:** Kebo Oil and Gas, Inc.

**Objective:** The objective of the Project is to construct a new well pad and to drill one exploratory oil and gas well to a depth not to exceed 5,000 feet true vertical depth (TVD) subsurface. If there is enough oil and gas discovered in the proposed well, permanent equipment will be installed at the well site and long term production will begin. If the well is not viably commercial, the well will be plugged and abandoned.

**Location:** APN 338-200-005; Three and a half miles north of the City of Richgrove; 0.5 mile south of the intersection at Avenue 40 and County Road J44.

**Timeframe:** Unspecified

## **COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist Tulare County Resource Management Agency in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the document.

The Project site is on non-native grassland area and surrounded by almond orchards, cherries, and vineyards. The non-native grasslands could provide habitat for special status species. These resources may need to be evaluated and addressed prior to any approvals

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that would allow ground-disturbing activities or land use changes. The MND indicates there are potentially significant impacts unless mitigation measures are taken but the measures listed do not consider all special status species that have potential to occur near the Project site. CDFW is concerned regarding potential impacts to special-status species including, but not limited to: State species of special concern American badger (*Taxidea taxus*). In order to adequately assess any potential impacts to biological resources, focused biological surveys should be conducted by a qualified wildlife biologist/botanist during the appropriate survey period(s) in order to determine whether any special-status species and/or suitable habitat features may be present within the Project area. Properly conducted biological surveys, and the information assembled from them, are essential to identify any mitigation, minimization, and avoidance measures and/or the need for additional or protocol-level surveys, especially in the areas not in irrigated agriculture, and to identify any Project-related impacts under CESA and other species of concern.

## **I. Environmental Setting and Related Impact**

**Would the Project have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by CDFW or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)?**

### **COMMENT 1: American Badger**

**Issue:** American badger has the potential to den near the Project site. The Project location is within the known American badger range and the species occurs throughout the area (CDFW 2020). Badgers occupy sparsely vegetated land cover with dry, friable soils to excavate dens, which they use for cover, and that support fossorial rodent prey populations (i.e. ground squirrels, pocket gophers, etc.) (Zeiner et. al 1990). The Project site may support these requisite habitat features. Therefore, the Project has the potential to impact American badger.

**Specific impact:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for American badger, potentially significant impacts associated with ground disturbance include direct mortality or natal den abandonment, which may result in reduced health or vigor of young.

**Evidence impact is potentially significant:** Habitat loss is a primary threat to American badger (Gittleman et al. 2001). As a result, ground-disturbing activities have the potential to significantly impact local populations of American badger.

### **Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)**

To evaluate potential impacts to American badger associated with the Project, CDFW recommends conducting the following evaluation of the Project sites, incorporating the following mitigation measures into the MND prepared for this Project, and that these measures be made conditions of approval for the Project.

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### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: American Badger Surveys**

CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for American badger and their requisite habitat features (dens) to evaluate potential impacts resulting from ground- and vegetation-disturbance.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: American Badger Avoidance**

Avoidance whenever possible is encouraged via delineation and observation of a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer around dens until it is determined through non-invasive means that individuals occupying the den have dispersed.

## **II. Editorial Comments and/or Suggestions**

**Lake and Streambed Alteration:** The Project contains activities that may result in the Project site being subject to CDFW's regulatory authority pursuant Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. Fish and Game Code section 1602 requires an entity to notify CDFW prior to commencing any activity that may (a) substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of any river, stream, or lake; (b) substantially change or use any material from the bed, bank, or channel of any river, stream, or lake; or (c) deposit debris, waste or other materials that could pass into any river, stream, or lake. "Any river, stream, or lake" includes those that are ephemeral or intermittent, such as the unnamed stream within the Project site, as well as those that are perennial in nature.

For additional information on notification requirements, please refer to CDFW's website (<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/LSA>) or contact our staff in the Lake and Streambed Alteration Program at (559) 243-4593. It is important to note, CDFW is required to comply with CEQA, as a Responsible Agency, when issuing a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA). If inadequate, or no environmental review, has occurred, for the Project activities that are subject to notification under Fish and Game Code section 1602, CDFW will not be able to issue the Final LSAA until CEQA analysis for the project is complete. This may lead to considerable Project delays.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DATA**

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a data base which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e).) Accordingly, please report any special status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). The CNDDDB field survey form can be found at the following link:

<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>. The completed form can be mailed electronically to CNDDDB at the following email address: [CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov).

The types of information reported to CNDDDB can be found at the following link:

<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plants-and-Animals>.

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## FILING FEES

The Project, as proposed, would have an impact on fish and/or wildlife, and assessment of filing fees is necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW. Payment of the fee is required in order for the underlying project approval to be operative, vested, and final. (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 14, § 753.5; Fish & G. Code, § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089.)

## CONCLUSION

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the MND to assist Tulare County Resource Management Agency in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources.

More information on survey and monitoring protocols for sensitive species can be found at CDFW's website (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols>). Please see the enclosed Mitigation Monitoring (MMRP) table which corresponds with recommended mitigation measures in this comment letter. Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Aimee Braddock, Environmental Scientist at (559) 243-4014 extension 243 or [aimee.braddock@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:aimee.braddock@wildlife.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
  
FA83F09FE08945A...  
Julie A. Vance  
Regional Manager  
Attachments

A. MMRP for CDFW Recommended Mitigation Measures

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

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## **REFERENCES**

- CDFW. 2020. Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS).  
<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/BIOS>. Accessed November 03, 2019.
- Gittleman, J. L., S. M. Funk, D. MacDonald, and R. K. Wayne, 2001. Carnivore conservation. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom.
- Zeiner, D. C., W. F. Laudenslayer, Jr, K. E. Mayer, and M. White. 1990. California's Wildlife Volume I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, editor. Sacramento, CA, USA.

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**Attachment 1**

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM  
(MMRP)**

**PROJECT: Kebo Oil and Gas Inc. SPU No. PSP 20-023**

**SCH No.: 2020100365**

<b>RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE</b>	<b>STATUS/DATE/INITIALS</b>
<i>Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation</i>	
Mitigation Measure 1: American Badger Surveys	
<i>During Construction</i>	
Mitigation Measure 2: American Badger Avoidance	