

Biological Assessment Letter Report

for the
Rider and Redlands
Redevelopment Project
City of Perris

Project #

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report documents the findings of an evaluation of biological resources conducted by BLUE for the proposed East Rider Street and Redlands Avenue redevelopment Project (Project). The proposed Project includes the development of approximately 16.25 acres within 5 parcels within the City of Perris, County of Riverside, California. The Project is bound on all sides by rural residential lots, farm land and industrial development (to the north). The western property line is adjacent to Redlands Avenue and the northern property line is adjacent to Rider Street.

The Project is located within the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Mead Valley Area Plan and is comprised of a total of 16.25 acres. The Project is not located within any MSHCP designated Criteria Areas or Subunits. As such, the Project is not subject to Cell Criteria compliance under the MSHCP. The Project footprint does not fall within any Public/Quasi-Public (PQP) or other MSHCP Conserved Lands.

The Biological Study Area (BSA) includes the Project parcels, plus a 100-foot buffer. The BSA is located within the United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute Perris Topographic Map. The Project falls within the San Bernardino Meridian, Section 5, Township 4 South, Range 3 West on the Perris, CA 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle map (USGS 1979) in the city of Perris, at an approximate elevation of 1,449 feet. The Project BSA is composed of existing single-family residential housing, industrial use, agricultural use and disturbed vegetation with generally flat undeveloped terrain that receives frequent weed abatement (i.e., chain flail mowing, disking). The surrounding land use consists of industrial development, disturbed open areas, and residential development.

The intended use of this document is to disclose and evaluate habitat conditions and determine the potential for occurrence of common and special-status species and their habitats within survey area limits pursuant to the MSHCP. Special-status species refers to any species that has been afforded special protection by federal, state, or local resource agencies (e.g., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS], California Department of Fish and Game [CDFW]) or resource conservation organizations (e.g., California Native Plant Society [CNPS]). The term “special-status species” excludes those avian species solely identified under Section 10 of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) for federal protection. The MBTA species protected by Section 10 are afforded avoidance and minimization measures per state and federal requirements.

2.0 METHODS

Prior to beginning the field survey, a literature review was completed to determine locations and types of biological resources having the potential to exist within the region (USFWS Critical Habitat Mapper and File data [USFWS 2019a], USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) [USFWS closed and not accessible], CDFW California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) [CDFW, 2018], and CNPS Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants [CNPS, 2015]). CNDDDB and CNPS file data was queried for records of occurrence of special-status species and habitats within the Perris quadrangle. The MSHCP Transportation and Land Management Agency Geographic Information Services Database and Riverside County Integrated Plan Conservation Summary Report Generator was also reviewed (County of Riverside, 2012a; County of Riverside, 2012b and 2019).

In addition to utilizing on-line databases and mapping tools, the Perris topographic map was reviewed to determine the locations of any potential special aquatic resource areas (e.g., wetlands or other Waters of the United States or Waters of the State) under regulatory jurisdiction of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), CDFW, and Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and Riparian/Riverine habitats prior to beginning field surveys of the BSA.

Additionally, the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) on-line Web Soil Survey tool (NRCS 2015) and Figure 2-4 of the MSHCP were reviewed to determine the types and percent cover of soils within the BSA.

Lands within the BSA that were potentially suspected of being potential special aquatic resource and Riparian/Riverine habitats were then assessed by visual observation during the field survey. No potential special aquatic resource areas and riparian/riverine habitats were not observed and additional further evaluation is not required.

Michael Jefferson, senior qualified BLUE biologist, conducted a pedestrian-based biological survey to observe, document, and evaluate plant and wildlife resources and determine the potential for occurrence of special-status plant and wildlife species. Approximately 100-foot wide meandering transects were utilized to provide visual coverage of the BSA.

Vegetation community type descriptions were based on observed dominant vegetation composition and derived from the criteria and definitions of vegetation classification systems (Holland, 1986; Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf, 1995; Sawyer et al., 2009). Plants were identified in the field to the lowest taxonomic level sufficient to determine positive identity and status. Plants of uncertain identity were subsequently identified using taxonomic keys, and scientific and common species names were recorded according to Baldwin (2012).

The presence of a wildlife species was based on direct observation or wildlife sign (e.g., tracks, burrows, nests, scat, or vocalization). Field data compiled for wildlife species included scientific name, common name, and evidence of sign when no direct observations were made. Wildlife of uncertain distinctiveness was documented and subsequently identified from field guides and related literature (Burt and Grossenheider, 1980; Halfpenny, 2000; Sibley, 2000; Elbroch, 2003; and Stebbins, 2003).

The BSA was also assessed for its potential to support special-status species, based on habitat suitability comparisons with reported occupied habitats.

The following definitions were used to determine the need for subsequent surveys and to assess project-related effects to special-status species:

- Absent (A): No habitat occurs within the survey area and no further surveys are necessary
- Habitat Present (HP): Habitat is present within the survey area
- Present (P): The species was observed within the survey area during the survey
- Critical Habitat (CH): The survey area is located within designated critical habitat

3.0 RESULTS

BLUE biologist Mike Jefferson conducted a biological survey for the Project on July 15, 2019; beginning at 9:35 and ending at 11:00. Weather conditions during the surveys included 90% clear skies, with temperatures ranging from 78° to 86° Fahrenheit, and winds from 1 to 3 miles per hour.

3.1 VEGETATION COMMUNITIES/LAND COVER TYPES

A total of two (2) vegetation community/land cover types were observed onsite; Agricultural/Disturbed is the dominant habitat with the balance comprised of industrial use, residential development and paved areas (parking/roads); Table 1; Figure 3). No native plant species were located within the survey area.

Table 1: On-Site Vegetation

Community Type	Acres
Agricultural/Disturbed	8.32
Developed	7.93
Total	16.25

Communities/Land Cover Types Observed Onsite

3.1.1 AGRICULTURAL/DISTURBED

Developed and semi-urban areas contain numerous and varied horticultural plantings located within landscaping, residential yards, active-use parklands, and golf courses. In the older, urbanized portions of the City, tall exotic plantings, such as pepper and eucalyptus trees (*Eucalyptus* sp.) with allelopathic toxins that tend to inhibit understory growth, form well developed, and dense woodlands. Occasionally, other planted woodlands such as introduced pines, ash, and elm are present. Disturbed areas are typically located adjacent to urbanization and contain a mix of primarily weedy species, including non-native forbs, annuals, and grasses, usually found pioneering on recently disturbed soils. Characteristic weedy species include prickly sow thistle (*Sonchus asper*), common sow thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), bristly ox-tongue (*Picris echioides*), Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), giant reed, hottentot-fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*), wild lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), castor-bean (*Ricinus communis*), pampas grass, smooth cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris glabra*), red-stem filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*), short-beak filaree (*Erodium brachycarpum*) and white-stem filaree (*Erodium moschatum*). These urban lands do not typically contain native vegetation or provide essential habitat connectivity; and therefore, tend to have reduced biological value.

Onsite Agricultural/Disturbed lands are the dominant habitat within the BSA. These areas are farmed currently, or in the recent past, and are actively utilized/maintained. The plant community is dominated by *erodium* spp., Tree tobacco, Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*) and prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), all non-native species. No herbaceous layer was present.

3.1.2 DEVELOPED

Developed/Disturbed lands within the BSA consist of paved roadways, residential and industrial use/development. Mature pepper and eucalyptus trees are present within this area and are associated with the residences. No native vegetation is present within this land cover type.

3.2 PLANT AND WILDLIFE SPECIES

Plant and wildlife species observed within the survey area were typical of developed and disturbed habitats. All plant and wildlife species observed within the survey area are listed in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 2: Plant Species Observed within the Survey Area

Species	Common Name
<i>Erodium cicutarium</i> *	red-stem erodium
<i>Lactuca serriola</i> *	prickly lettuce
<i>Nicotiana glauca</i> *	tree tobacco
<i>Salsola tragus</i> *	Russian thistle
* non-native species	

Table 3: Wildlife Species Observed within the Survey Area

Scientific Name	Common Name
Birds	
Columbidae	Pigeons and Doves
<i>Columba livia</i>	rock dove (pigeon)
Corvidae	Jays and Crows
<i>Corvus corax</i>	common raven
Tyrannidae	Tyrant Flycatchers
<i>Sayornis saya</i>	Say's phoebe
Mammals	
<i>Sylvilagus</i> sp.	rabbit (sign)

3.2.1 SPECIAL-STATUS PLANTS

Eleven special-status plant species have been reported to occur within the Perris quadrangle (Appendix B) (CDFW 2015, CNPS 2015, County of Riverside 2003). Three species are designated with federal and/or state listing status: San Jacinto Valley crownscale (*Atriplex coronata* var. *notatior*), thread-leaved brodiaea (*Brodiaea filifolia*), and spreading navarretia (*Navarretia fossalis*).

All eleven special-status plant species were determined to have an "Absent" potential for occurrence within the survey area and no further survey is necessary to determine presence or absence of those species.

3.2.2 SPECIAL-STATUS WILDLIFE

Fifteen special-status wildlife species have been reported to occur within the Perris quadrangle (Appendix C) (CDFW 2015, County of Riverside 2003). Three species, Stephens' kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys stephensi*), coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) and least Bell's vireo (*Vireo belli pusillus*) are listed as federally and/or state threatened or endangered.

All fifteen special-status wildlife species were determined to have an "Absent" potential for occurrence within the

survey area and no further survey is necessary to determine presence or absence of these species.

3.2.3 WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN (MSHCP)

The Project is located within the Mead Valley Area Plan outside of any MSHCP designated Criteria Cells or Cell Groups (Table 4) (County of Riverside, 2012a). The Project is not subject to Cell Criteria compliance under the MSHCP. The Project does not include any MSHCP Conserved Lands or PQP lands. Public and private development projects that are carried out within the Mead Valley Area Plan, but outside of the Criteria Areas and Public/Quasi-Public Lands (e.g., such as this Project), are permitted under the MSHCP subject to compliance with MSHCP policies that apply outside Criteria Areas.

A burrowing owl assessment was completed according to the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area (County of Riverside 2006). Due to the location (surrounded by disturbed/developed area, not adjacent to quality habitat) as well as the active use and maintenance of the land, in addition to a lack of mammal burrows, no burrowing owls or suitable habitat were located during the assessment.

3.2.4 RIPARIAN/RIVERINE

Section 6.1.2 of the MSHCP defines Riparian/Riverine areas as “lands which contain Habitat dominated by trees, shrubs, persistent emergents, or emergent mosses and lichens, which occur close to or which depend upon soil moisture from a nearby fresh water source; or areas with fresh water flow during all or a portion of the year.” Riparian/Riverine areas as defined by the MSHCP are not present within the survey area and will not be impacted by the Project.

No riparian/riverine and/or jurisdictional features were observed within the survey area.

3.2.5 VERNAL POOL AND FAIRY SHRIMP

Vernal pools, vernal swales, alkali scalds or flats, or other seasonal wet habitats were not identified within the BSA during field surveys conducted in January by a qualified biologist.

The BSA lacks suitable habitat for fairy shrimp species or other vernal pool species, including plants.

3.3 AQUATIC RESOURCES

The BSA does not contain any special aquatic resource area such as wetlands or areas under the regulatory jurisdiction of the USACE, CDFW, and RWQCB.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

No sensitive riparian/riverine, upland vegetation and/or special aquatic resource areas were discovered within the BSA and none are expected to be impacted by the potential Project.

The literature review and field assessment data confirm that no special-status species currently utilize the BSA. The BSA lacks suitable habitat that would typically support special-status species or receive state or federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections. Consequently, there is no reasonable presumption of adverse impact to any special status species or their habitats as a result of Project implementation.

No Narrow Endemic Plant Species/Criteria Area plant species were observed on site during the habitat assessment. Given the site’s exposure to recurring surface disturbances associated with vegetation management, these species

are not expected to occur on site. The BSA supports no riparian/riverine/vernal pool habitats or species associated with these habitat types were observed on site.

No suitable habitat for burrowing owl was present within the survey area and no direct observations or burrowing owl sign (feathers, pellets, fecal material, prey remains, etc.) were made during the site assessment. No potentially suitable burrows were present on site due to extensive disturbances associated with chain flail mowing/disking activities, which can reduce the site's suitability to support small mammal colonies (e.g. ground squirrel) which may provide potentially suitable burrows for burrowing owl. No ground squirrels (an important indicator species) were observed on site.

Burrowing owl has historically been observed in the project vicinity; however, no evidence of burrowing owl was observed within the survey area. The nearest previously-documented burrowing owl occurrences were located approximately 2 miles northwest of the BSA and were observed in 2001, and five burrowing owl were observed downstream in the flood control channel in 2009 (CDFW 2015). An additional occurrence of three burrowing owls located approximately 2 miles south of the BSA was observed in 2007.

Although no burrowing owl was observed, they could potentially inhabit the survey area in areas that were previously determined to be unoccupied. Per MSHCP Section 6.3.2, this Project is within a mandatory Burrow Survey Area and is obligated to survey for burrowing owls during the environmental review process as indicated in the MSHCP "Additional Survey Needs and Procedures." As such, a pre-construction protocol survey for burrowing owls following the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area (County of Riverside 2006) should be conducted to determine whether burrowing owls are subsequently occupying the survey area. As previously indicated, such a survey was conducted by an BLUE biologist on July 15, 2019 at which time no individuals or suitable burrows were observed.

Surveys must be conducted within at least 30-days prior to any ground disturbance.

To comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and relevant sections of California Fish and Game Code (e.g., Sections 3503, 3503.4, 3544, 3505, et seq.), vegetation clearing should take place outside of the typical avian nesting season (i.e., February 1st -August 31st), to the maximum extent practical. If avoidance is not possible, Mitigation Measure (MM) Bio 1 will be implemented (below).

MM Bio 1: In order to avoid violation of the MBTA and the California Fish and Game Code, if site-preparation activities (removal of trees and vegetation) are required between February 1 and August 31, a pre-activity field survey and findings report will be completed and provided to City of Perris.

5.0 REFERENCES

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