

PROTECTED PLANT PRESERVATION PLAN

**CITY OF VICTORVILLE, CALIFORNIA
APN: 3090-501-03**

Prepared for:

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1.0 SUMMARY

At the request of the project proponent, RCA Associates, Inc. surveyed a 22-acre property (approximate) located about 2 mile north of Bear Valley Road and Directly west of Ridgecrest Road in the city of Victorville, California (APN 3090-501-03) (Figures 1 and 2). The property site is located in Section 27, Township 5 North, Range 4 West (USGS Hesperia, CA 7.5-minute quadrangle).

The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the Joshua trees present on site and determine which trees were suitable for relocation and which trees could be discarded prior to site clearing activities. This report provides the results of the Joshua tree survey performed on February 22, 2021. Following completion of the survey, RCA Associates, Inc. prepared this Protected Plant Preservation Plan to assist the project proponent with future relocation of the Joshua trees. Information on the Joshua trees which will need to be relocated-transplanted in the future is provided in Section 4.0. The City of Victorville Municipal Code has a chapter (Chapter 13.33) stating the purpose of Joshua Tree preservation and the consequence of removing one, and follows the County of San Bernardino Plant Protection Plan and Management (Chapter 88.01) to help protect and preserve desert vegetation, including Joshua trees. The requirements of the Ordinance (Chapter 88.01) are provided in Appendix B.

Based on the results of the field investigations there are 24 Joshua trees which occur within the boundaries of the property (Figures 1, 2, and 3). Based on the evaluation and analysis of each tree it was determined that 8 of the 24 Joshua trees (33.3%) are suitable for transplanting. These trees are marked in red in Table 4-1. The remaining 16 Joshua trees (66.7%) were determined to be unsuitable for transplanting due to a variety of factors such as size, condition, damage, dying, excessive leaning, possibly disease, clonal, etc.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT LOCATION

The area surveyed is located about 2 mile north of Bear Valley Road and Directly west of Ridgecrest Road in the city of Victorville, California (Figures 1 and 2). The biological resources on the site consist of a desert scrub community typical of the area with creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*), rubber rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*), Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*), broom snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothae*), and California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) observed on the site. Residential developments are located immediately south and east with vacant lands to the north and railroad tracks to the west (Figure 1 and 2).

Joshua trees occur throughout the Mojave Desert in Southern California and are typically found at an elevation of 400 to 1,800 meters (~1,200 to ~5,400 feet). Joshua trees within the western portion of the Mojave Desert typically receive more annual precipitation during “normal” years; consequently, cloning occurs more often resulting in numerous trunks sprouting from the same root system (Rowland, 1978). Joshua tree habitats provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species including desert woodrats (*Neotoma* sp.) and night lizards (*Xantusia* sp.) both of which utilize the base of the trees. A variety of birds also utilize Joshua trees for nesting such as hawks, common ravens, and cactus wrens. CDFW consider Joshua tree woodlands as areas that support relatively high species diversity and as such are considered to be a sensitive desert community. Joshua trees are also considered a significant resource under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and are included in the Desert Plant Protection Act, Food and Agricultural Code (80001 – 80006).

3.0 METHODOLOGIES

Pedestrian surveys were walked throughout the site and biologists from RCA Associates, Inc. evaluated each Joshua tree to determine which trees were suitable for relocation/transplanting based on a general health assessment. Each Joshua tree received a metal numbered tag which was affixed on the north side of each tree for orientation purposes during future transplanting. Surveyor flagging was also placed around those trees suitable for transplanting to facilitate future identification. The precise location of each tree was recorded using a Garmin GPS unit and a Bushnell Yardage Pro rangefinder was utilized to determine the extent of the property boundaries. Those Joshua trees which occur on the property site are presented in Table 4-1 and the locations are provided in Figure 2.

The factors utilized to determine which Joshua trees were suitable for transplanting include the following factors:

1. Trees from about 1 foot in height up to approximately 12 feet,
2. No visible signs of damage to the tree such as absence of bark due to rodent or other animals,
3. Minimal number of branches (No more than 2 or 3 branches),
4. No excessive leaning of the tree,
5. No yellow or brown fronds,
6. Proximity to other Joshua trees (i.e., clonal), and
7. No exposed roots at the base of the tree.

4.0 RESULTS

There are 24 Joshua trees on the property and the GPS locations of the Joshua trees are provided in Table 4-1. A total of 8 Joshua trees (33.3%) are suitable for relocation/transplanting based on the seven factors listed in Section 3.0 (Table 4-1). The Joshua trees suitable for transplanting should be relocated/transplanted on-site, which is the preferable option, or to an off-site area approved by the City of Victorville. Those Joshua trees that are not suitable for relocation/transplanting due to size, health of the tree, presence of damage, excessive branches, excessive leaning, clonal, and exposed roots should be disposed of as per City requirements.

Table 4-1: Joshua tree census. (Note: The GPS locations of the Joshua trees are provided below and those trees which are suitable for transplanting on-site as part of project landscaping are highlighted in red.)

Total Number of Joshua Trees On Site		Joshua Trees to be Transplanted	Number of Clonal Trees	Number of Non-Clonal Trees
128		34	37	91

Tag	Height (ft)	Location	Condition	Panicles Branches	Clonal	Transplantable
2082	11	N 34°29.936 W 117°16.729	Good	1P 2B	X	No
2083	4	N 34°29.932 W 117°16.747	Good	0P 0B		Yes
2084	8	N 34°29.926 W 117°16.748	Good	1P 3B		Yes
2085	14	N 34°29.910 W 117°16.760	Good	3P 3B	X	No
2086	3	N 34°29.908 W 117°16.765	Good	0P 0B		Yes
2087	14	N 34°29.908 W 117°16.764	Good- Size	4P 3B		No

Tag	Height (ft)	Location	Condition	Panicles Branches	Clonal	Transplantable
2088	12	N 34°29.916 W 117°16.769	Good	10P 2B	X	No
2089	6	N 34°29.931 W 117°16.768	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2090	9	N 34°29.938 W 117°16.765	Good	0P 0B		Yes
2091	2	N 34°29.962 W 117°16.771	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2092	3	N 34°29.968 W 117°16.752	Good	0P 0B		Yes
2093	10	N 34°29.984 W 117°16.755	Good	1P 2B		Yes
2094	15	N 34°29.003 W 117°16.747	Good- Size	2P 2B		No
2095	3	N 34°29.982 W 117°16.766	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2096	7	N 34°29.996 W 117°16.810	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2097	3	N 34°29.995 W 117°16.809	Good	0P 0B		Yes
2098	6	N 34°29.997 W 117°16.870	Good	1P 0B	X	No
2099	4	N 34°29.969 W 117°16.863	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2100	7	N 34°29.965 W 117°16.884	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2101	1	N 34°29.903 W 117°16.898	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2102	12	N 34°29.905 W 117°16.853	Good- Multiple Branches	7P 4B		No
2103	3	N 34°29.940 W 117°16.850	Good	0P 0B	X	No
2104	7	N 34°29.947 W 117°16.829	Fair- leaning	0P 0B		No
2105	7	N 34°29.961 W 117°16.842	Good	0P 0B		Yes

(Note: The Tag numbers correspond to the numbers placed on the Joshua trees.)

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

There are 24 Joshua trees located on the property and only 8 of the trees are suitable for relocation/transplanting. This conclusion was based on: (1) trees which were one foot or greater in height and less than twelve feet tall (approximate); (2) in good health; (3), two branches or less; (4) density of trees (i.e., no clonal trees); no exposed roots; and (6) trees that are not leaning over excessively. As indicated in Table 4-1, the majority of the Joshua trees which were not suitable for relocation are relatively large ranging from about 15 to 35 feet in height.

The City of Victorville's Municipal Code (Chapter 13.33) requires preservation of Joshua trees given their importance in the desert community. A qualified City-approved biologist or arborist should be retained to conduct any future relocation/transplanting activities and should follow the protocol of the County's Municipal Code (Appendix B: Chapter 88.01). The following criteria will be utilized by the contractor when conducting any future transplanting activities.

A. The Joshua trees will be retained in place or replanted somewhere on the site where they can remain in perpetuity or will be transplanted to an off-site area approved by the City where they can remain in perpetuity. Joshua trees which are deemed not suitable for transplanting will be cut-up and discarded as per City requirements.

B. Earthen berms will be created around each tree by the biologist prior to excavation and the trees will be watered approximately one week before transplanting. Watering the trees prior to excavation will help make excavation easier, ensure the root ball will hold together, and minimize stress to the tree.

C. Each tree will be moved to a pre-selected location which has already been excavated and will be placed and oriented in the same direction as their original direction. The hole will be backfilled with native soil. As noted in Section 3.0, a numbered metal tag was placed on the north side of the trees and the trees were also flagged with surveyor's flagging. A watering regimen will be developed to ensure the survival of the transplanted

trees. The watering regimen will be based upon the needs of the trees and the local precipitation.

As of September 22, 2020, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife temporarily listed the western Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) as an endangered species for one year until a final decision is made in 2021. Therefore, any attempt to remove the Joshua tree from its current position will require an Incidental Take Permit (ITP).

6.0 REFERENCES

- Brittingham, S. and W. Lawrence. 2000. Facilitation of *Yucca brevifolia* Recruitment by Mojave Desert Shrubs. *Western North American Naturalist* 60(4), pp. 374-383.
- City of Victorville. 1990. Native Desert Vegetation Ordinance, Municipal Code: Chapter 13.33.
- Hickman, James C. *The Jepson Manual Higher Plants of California*. University of California Press. Berkeley, CA. 3rd Edition. 1996.
- Holland, Robert F. 1986 Preliminary Description of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California. Prepared for the California Natural Diversity Data Base. California Department of Fish and Game. Sacramento, California. 160 pp.
- Johnson, H. 1976 vegetation and Plant Communities of Southern California Deserts- a functional view. In *Symposium proceedings: Plant communities of Southern California*. June Latting, editor. California Native Plant Society, Spec. No. 2 Berkeley, CA.
- Munz, Philip A. 1974. *A Flora of Southern California*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California. 1086 pp.

7.0 CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits, present the data and information required for this Joshua tree survey and that the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. Field work conducted for this survey was performed by Lisa Cardoso and Ryan Hunter.

Date: February 24, 2021 Signed: *Ryan Hunter*
Lisa Cardoso

Field Work Performed by: Ryan Hunter
Environmental Scientist/Biologist

 Lisa Cardoso
Wildlife Biologist

APPENDIX A

Figures

APPENDIX B

**City of Victorville
Municipal Code: Chapter 13.33**

**County of San Bernardino
Municipal Code: Chapter 88.01**