



August 23, 2021

Mr. Ryan Fowler, Senior Planner
Community Development Department/Planning Division
29844 Haun Road
Menifee, California 92586
rfowler@cityofmenifee.us

Subject: Results of a Burrowing Owl Survey for the Boulders Mixed-Use Project in the City of Menifee, Riverside County, California (LSA Project No. CIM2002)

Dear Mr. Fowler:

This report documents the results of a burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) survey for the Boulders Mixed-Use Project (project). The approximately 9.92-acre project is located at northeast corner of Normandy Road and Berea Road in the City of Menifee (City), Riverside County, California (Figure 1; all figures attached).

The survey results were negative for burrowing owl as no owls or their sign were observed. Three suitable burrows were observed during the survey but showed no sign of burrowing owl use.

BACKGROUND

Burrowing owls are found in open, dry grasslands; agricultural and range lands; desert habitats; and grass, forb, and shrub stages of pinyon and ponderosa pine habitats. They nest in abandoned burrows of ground squirrels or other animals, in pipes, rock and debris piles, and in other similar features.

Burrowing owls and their nests and eggs are protected from “take” under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3800 of the California Fish and Game Code. Activities that cause destruction of active nests, or that cause nest abandonment and subsequent death of eggs or young, may constitute violations of these laws.

Burrowing owl is a species of special concern as determined by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and is a covered species under the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). In addition, the MSHCP has established survey areas for burrowing owl where focused surveys are required if suitable habitat is determined to be present.

SURVEY AREA

The area surveyed with transects (Figure 2) is approximately 9.92 acres and includes the entire project site, which is potentially suitable for burrowing owl. The entire project site is within the MSHCP burrowing owl survey area. The topography of this area is a mix of flat terrain and hillsides.

Vegetation within the project site is undeveloped and highly disturbed due to current and historic routine maintenance for fire suppression and/or weed control and resource extraction. The site is bordered to the north by a concrete-lined storm water channel and residential development, to the west by Berea Road and commercial development, to the east by undeveloped areas, and to the south by Heroes Court and Spirit Park. The site is more or less flat and level except for boulder outcroppings and a low hilly area located in the southeastern portion of the study area. The site elevation ranges from approximately 1,410 to 1,435 feet above mean sea level.

Vegetation and land cover on the site is primarily sparse and ruderal in nature (Figure 2). Vegetation and land cover present on site consists of coastal sage scrub, ruderal vegetation, and developed. There are no native or non-native trees within the project site. Dominant species within coastal sage scrub include California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) and shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*). Dominant species within ruderal areas are limited to non-native species and include shortpod mustard, tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*), stinknet (*Oncosiphon pilulifer*), foxtail barley (*Hordeum murinum*), foxtail brome (*Bromus madritensis*), rattail sixweeks grass (*Festuca myuros*), and red-stemmed filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*). There are no other plant communities on the site. Areas mapped as “developed” in Figure 2 consist of well-traveled dirt roads and residential, commercial, and paved areas that do not allow for the establishment of vegetation. Figure 3 shows recent photographs of on-site conditions.

METHODS

The surveys were conducted by LSA biologist Stan Spencer according to the *County of Riverside Guidelines for Burrowing Owl Surveys* (revised March 29, 2006). A total of four surveys were conducted from March to July 2021. The surveys were conducted by walking approximately 30-meter transects throughout areas of suitable habitat to look for burrowing owls, potential burrows (burrows greater than 11 centimeters [cm] in diameter and 150 cm deep), and burrowing owl sign. Burrows encountered during the survey were examined for owl sign (e.g., feathers, pellets, whitewash, and prey remnants). Burrows with presence of burrowing owl sign and/or burrowing owls were to be recorded using a handheld global positioning system (GPS) unit and mapped onto an aerial photograph. Potential habitat within 500 feet and visible from the site was surveyed using binoculars.

Table A provides dates, times, and weather conditions of site visits. Surveys were conducted during weather conducive to observing owls outside their burrows and to detecting burrowing owl sign. No rain had occurred within five days prior to the site visits.

Table A: Focused Survey Dates, Times, and Weather Conditions

Survey	Personnel	Date (2021)	Time (24-Hour) (start/finish)	Temp. (°F) (start/finish)	Wind (mph)	Sky
Burrow Survey, Burrowing Owl Survey 1	Stan Spencer	March 29	0730/0840	53/64	<1	1% cloud cover
Burrowing Owl Survey 2	Stan Spencer	April 27	0613/0753	48/52	1–3	15% cloud cover
Burrowing Owl Survey 3	Stan Spencer	June 10	0555/0738	50/60	<1	0% cloud cover

Table A: Focused Survey Dates, Times, and Weather Conditions

Survey	Personnel	Date (2021)	Time (24-Hour) (start/finish)	Temp. (°F) (start/finish)	Wind (mph)	Sky
Burrowing Owl Survey 4	Stan Spencer	July 14	0632/0752	70/76	1–3	2–30% cloud cover

RESULTS

No burrowing owls or burrowing owl sign were found to be present within the survey area. Three burrows suitable for burrowing owl occupation were observed within the survey area but showed no sign of burrowing owl use. Suitable habitat is present throughout the project site consisting of ruderal and coastal sage scrub as both vegetation communities contain low-growing plant species. Although coastal sage scrub is not always considered suitable for burrowing owl due to shrub density and height, shrubs present within coastal sage scrub on site are generally spaced far apart and are relatively short due to past maintenance disturbances making the community suitable. Some areas within the southeastern portion of the project site lack suitability for burrowing owl due to the presence of large boulders that prevent the creation of burrows. Developed areas on site generally lack suitable habitat for burrowing owl as they consist of well-traveled dirt roads that have been maintained in their current location and condition since at least 2016 and are subject to vehicular and pedestrian travel, illegal dumping, and inundation in some areas due to the presence of road ruts.

Areas within 500 feet of the project site generally lack suitable habitat for burrowing owl as they primarily consist of developed land cover including residential and commercial uses and a park. There is suitable habitat for burrowing owl adjacent to and east of the project site where the area is undeveloped and consists of similarly composed ruderal and coastal sage scrub vegetation communities as can be found on the project. Suitable habitat also occurs within Salt Creek to the west of the project site. Based on historic aerial imagery, vegetation within Salt Creek has been maintained since at least 2009 and is considered ruderal.

Wildlife species detected during the survey included granite spiny lizard (*Sceloporus orcutti*), common side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Anna’s hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), black phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*), Say’s phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), Bewick’s wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), house finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*), lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*), lark sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*), white-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*), Botta’s pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*), and desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*).

DISCUSSION

Since the project site is suitable for burrowing owl and burrowing owl could occupy the site prior to construction, a pre-construction burrowing owl survey will be required within 30 days prior to ground disturbance. If burrowing owl is found during the pre-construction survey, the project proponent will

need to inform the CDFW and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and prepare a Burrowing Owl Protection and Relocation Plan for approval by these agencies prior to initiating ground disturbance.

If you have any questions concerning the report, I can be contacted at (626) 257-0215 or ryan.villanueva@lsa.net.

Sincerely,

LSA ASSOCIATES, INC.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ryan Villanueva", written over a faint, light blue circular watermark or stamp.

Ryan Villanueva
Senior Biologist

Attachments: Figure 1: Regional and Project Location
Figure 2: Survey Results and Vegetation Map
Figure 3: Site Photographs