

November 30, 2018
Job Number: 2338-001
21419 and 21425 Cajalco Road, Mead Valley, CA 92570

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

2.6 2338-001.MFR02

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FROM: Sapphos Environmental, Inc.
(Ms. Paulette Loubet and Mr. Bruce Eilerts)

SUBJECT: Results of Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment for the Proposed New
Construction at 21419 and 21425 Cajalco Road, Mead Valley,
California

FIGURES:

1. Project Vicinity Map
2. Topographic Map with USGS 7.5-Minute Quadrangle Index
3. Conceptual Site Plan
4. Project Site Map with Transects
5. CNDDDB Burrowing Owl Occurrences within 3 Miles

APPENDIX: A. Site Photographs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Memorandum for the Record (MFR) documents the results of a habitat assessment for burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) that was conducted on November 5, 2018, for the proposed new construction at 21419 and 21425 Cajalco Road (proposed project) located in Mead Valley, an unincorporated section of Riverside County, California. The burrowing owl is listed as a U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) sensitive species, a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) species of special concern, and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) Bird of Conservation Concern. The habitat assessment was conducted according to the methods described in current survey guidelines accepted by CDFW and Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area.^{1,2} Suitable habitat for burrowing owl is characterized by annual and perennial grasslands, scrublands with low vegetation, and areas with less than 30 percent canopy cover of trees and shrubs. Burrowing owls depend on burrows for shelter throughout the year, typically using shelters such as abandoned mammal burrows, but can also occupy manmade structures such as cement culverts, cement asphalt or wood debris piles, or openings beneath cement or asphalt pavement. No portion of the project site or survey area was identified as suitable habitat for burrowing owls. No burrows, sign, or live owls were observed during the survey. As no potential burrows or suitable habitat were identified, it is anticipated that no additional focused burrowing owl surveys will be required for the proposed project area.

¹ California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2012. Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation.

² Regional Conservation Authority, Western Riverside County. 2006. Burrowing Owl Survey Instruction for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area. Available at: https://www.wrcrca.org/archivecdn/Monitoring/Burrowing_Owl_Survey_Instructions.pdf

INTRODUCTION

The property owner proposes the construction of a new shopping center, service gas station, and a paved parking lot at 21419 and 21425 Cajalco Road in Mead Valley, an unincorporated section of Riverside County, California 92570 (proposed project). Sapphos Environmental, Inc. was contracted by the owner to provide a Burrowing Owl Assessment prior to the proposed new construction on the property. The Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) requires Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessments for properties located in the Burrowing Owl Survey Area in Western Riverside County.^{3,4} This Memorandum for the Record (MFR) was prepared to characterize the potential for the occurrence of burrowing owl at the proposed project.

Burrowing owls occur in many areas of California and occupy a wide range of open habitat types. In all areas, suitable habitat is characterized by short sparse vegetation with few shrubs, level to gentle topography, and well-drained soils. They may also inhabit agricultural areas, ruderal grassy fields, vacant lots, and pastures if the vegetation structure is suitable and there are useable burrows and foraging habitat.⁵ Burrowing owls also require shelter, which can include burrows, rock piles, hollow logs, culverts, and similar sites. Burrowing owls often occupy burrows constructed by other animals and occasionally dig their own burrows. High-quality shelters such as burrows are needed during the breeding season to protect eggs and young, but during the non-breeding season a wider range of shelters may be used. Breeding season is typically between February 1 and August 31, with peak nesting occurring between April and July.

Burrowing owls are listed as a sensitive species by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) when breeding and as a Bird of Conservation Concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The largest threat to burrowing owls is habitat loss and degradation, which can result in a loss of nesting burrows and foraging habitat. These impacts may cause a decline in food supply and eventually lead to population declines. A habitat assessment for burrowing owl was conducted to determine the potential for occurrence within the proposed project property and within a 150-meter buffer. The methods used in the habitat assessment were described in the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the MSHCP Staff Report submitted to the BLM and subsequently approved by Regional Conservation Authority, County and Wildlife Agencies and Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area.^{6,7}

³ Regional Conservation Authority, Western Riverside County. 2003. Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Available at: <http://www.wrc-rca.org/about-rca/multiple-species-habitat-conservation-plan/>

⁴ Regional Conservation Authority, Western Riverside County. 2005. Report Regarding Burrowing Owl Surveys. Available at: http://www.wrcrca.org/species/survey_protocols/Birds/Burrowing%20Owl%20Survey%20Instructions%20complete.pdf

⁵ California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2012. Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation.

⁶ Regional Conservation Authority, Western Riverside County. 2005. Report Regarding Burrowing Owl Surveys. Available at: http://www.wrcrca.org/species/survey_protocols/Birds/Burrowing%20Owl%20Survey%20Instructions%20complete.pdf

⁷ Regional Conservation Authority, Western Riverside County. 2006. Burrowing Owl Survey Instruction for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area. Available at: https://www.wrcrca.org/archivedn/Monitoring/Burrowing_Owl_Survey_Instructions.pdf

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The burrowing owl and other nesting bird species are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918, which states that it is unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, or kill; attempt to take, capture, or kill; or possess any migratory bird, part, nest, egg, or product, manufactured or not, of any such bird listed in wildlife protection treaties between the United States, Great Britain, Mexico, Japan, and the former Soviet Union.

California Fish and Game Code (Sections 3503 and 3503.5)

Sections 3503 and 3503.5 of the California Fish and Game Code provide regulatory protection to resident and migratory birds and all birds of prey within the State of California, including the regulation of the taking of nests and eggs, unless otherwise provided for by the California Fish and Game Code. Specifically, it is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird, or destroy the nest or eggs of any bird of prey, except as otherwise provided.

County of Riverside General Plan, Land Use Element; Open Space, Habitat and Natural Resource Preservation

The County of Riverside values the unusually rich and diverse natural environment within the County and is committed to maintaining sufficient areas of natural open space to afford the human experience of natural environments as well as sustaining the permanent viability of the unique landforms and ecosystems that define this environment. The County has set goals, guidelines, policies, and strategies for its air quality resources, biological resources, cultural resources, energy resources, mineral resources, soil resources, visual resources, and water resources. Policies in this Element require that development protect environmental resources by compliance with the Multipurpose Open Space Element of the General Plan and federal and state regulations such as the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act.

Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

The goal of the MSHCP is to establish habitat reserves for the conservation and protection of species while expediting the construction of infrastructure projects. The MSHCP requires Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessments, and focused surveys in some cases, for properties located in the Burrowing Owl Survey Area. A portion of the proposed project site is located within the Burrowing Owl Survey Area, triggering the need for a Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project is located at 21419 and 21425 Cajalco Road, within Mead Valley, an unincorporated section of Riverside County, California 92570 (Figure 1, *Project Vicinity Map*). The proposed project is in Mead Valley, a census-designated location in the County. The proposed project is located within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute series Steele Peak topographic quadrangle in Township 4S, Range 4W, Section 10 (Figure 2, *Topographic Map with USGS 7.5-Minute Quadrangle Index*).

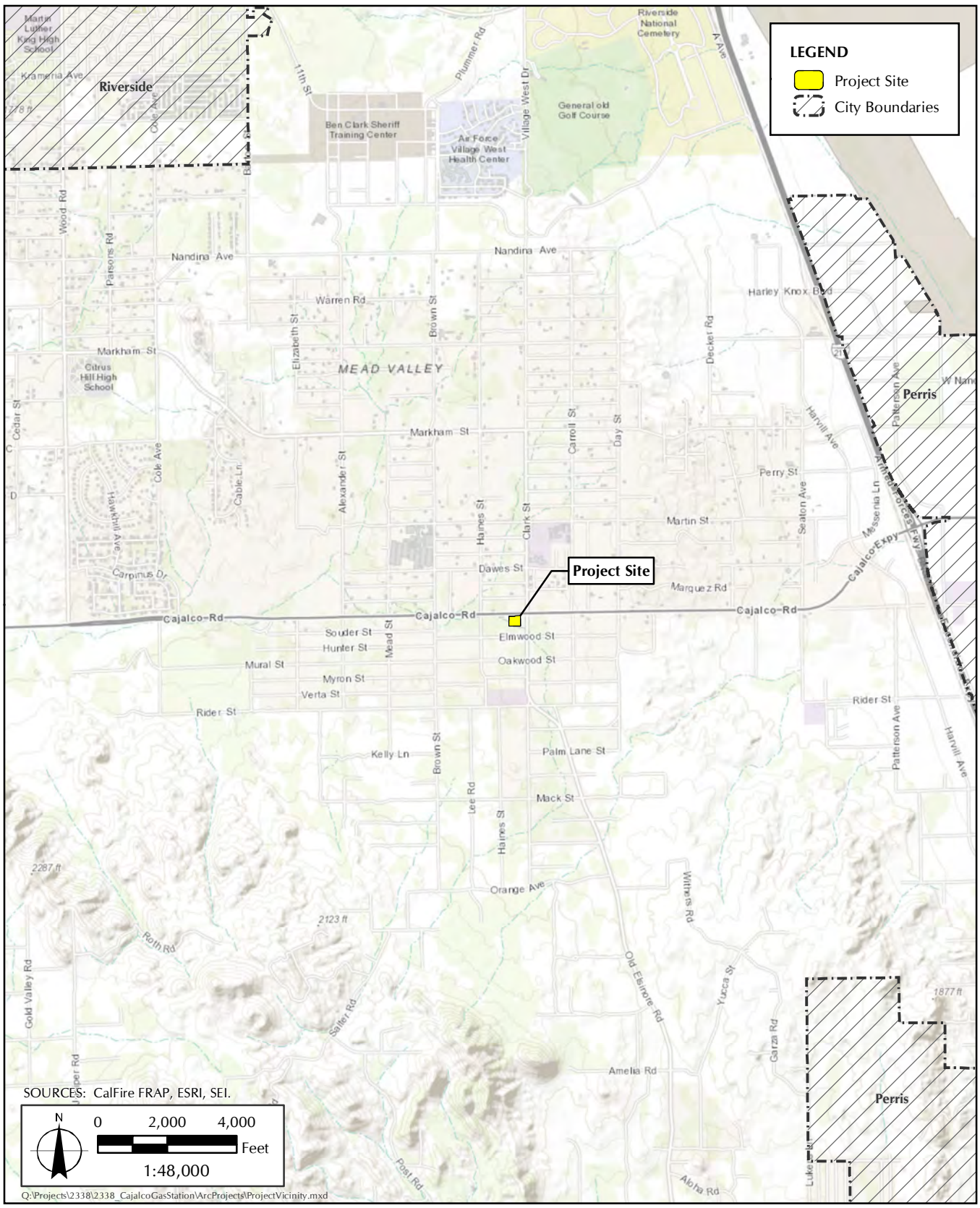


FIGURE 1
Project Vicinity Map

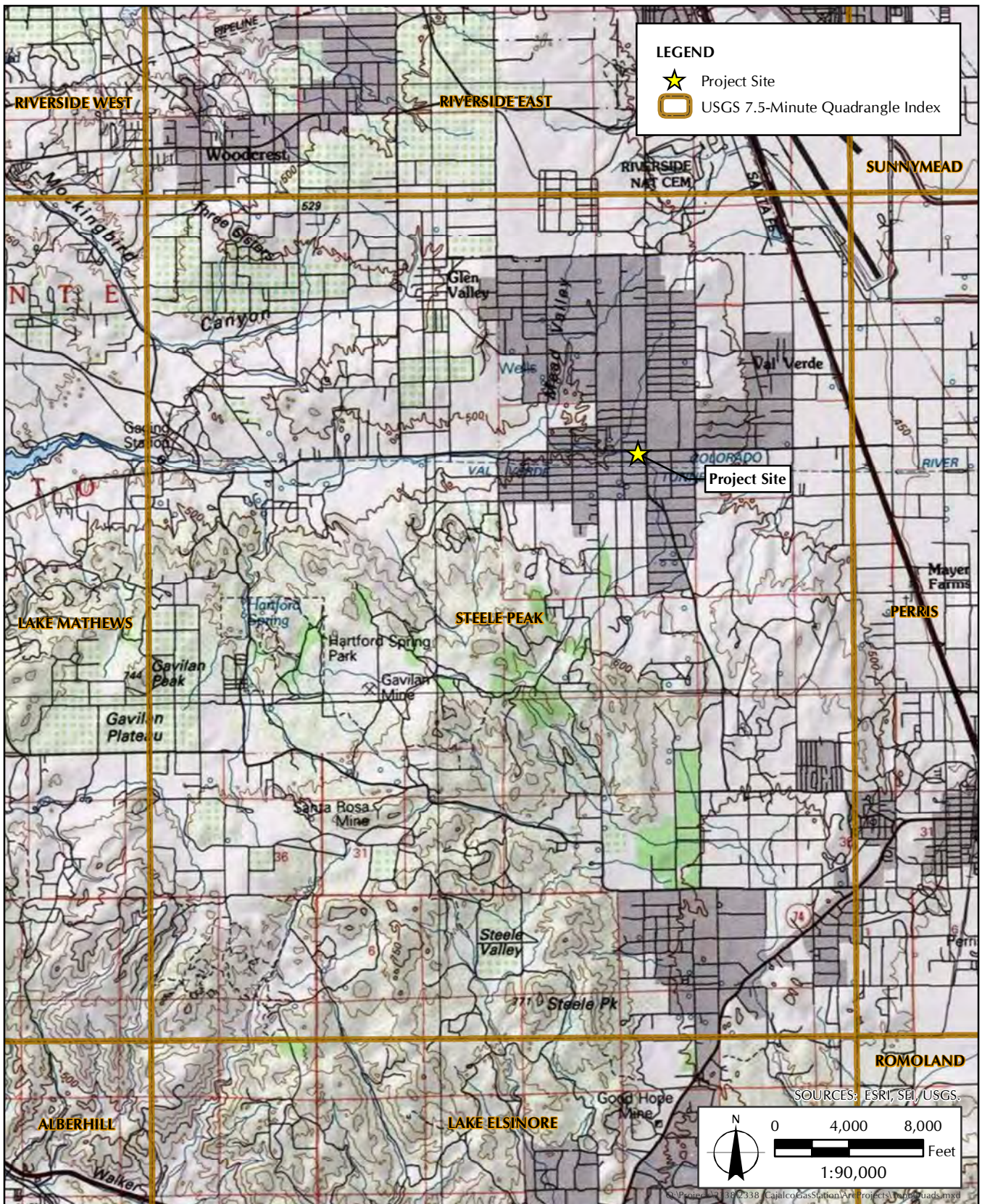


FIGURE 2

Topographic Map with USGS 7.5-Minute Quadrangle Index

Existing conditions at the proposed project location is generally characterized as disturbed vacant lot with nonnative vegetation and has little to no potential to support sensitive plant or wildlife species. The site is located adjacent to paved roads, Cajalco Road and Clark Drive Street, and is accessible from these roads by taking Cajalco Road west from the U.S. 215 Freeway.

The property owner has negotiated an improvement plan with the County encompassing two undeveloped parcels, Assessor Parcel Numbers (APNs) 318-140-010 and 318-140-009, that total 73,332 square feet (project footprint). The proposed project involves the construction of a new shopping center with a restaurant, minimart, service gas station, and 79 parking spaces (Figure 3, *Conceptual Site Plan*). The proposed project requires clearance from the County under CEQA.

METHODS

The survey methods were followed in accordance with the Regional Conservation Authority Report Regarding Burrowing Owl Surveys,⁸ the Burrowing Owl Survey Instruction for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area⁹ and recommendations included in the CDFW Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation¹⁰ and California Burrowing Owl Consortium (CBOC) Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines.¹¹

Prior to conducting fieldwork, the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) was referenced for nearby records of burrowing owl. A 3-by-3 quadrangle search was performed of the USGS 7.5-minute series Steele Peak quadrangle, where the project site is located, and eight surrounding quadrangles. Potential burrowing owl habitat was identified in a geographic information system (GIS) mapping effort using recent large-scale, high-resolution color imagery. Areas of potentially suitable habitat for burrowing owls were identified, including annual and perennial grasslands, scrublands with low vegetation, as well as areas with less than 30 percent canopy cover of trees and shrubs.

The habitat assessment covered the entire proposed project footprint, as well as a 150-meter buffer around the project property, to ensure the complete coverage of potential burrowing owl habitat (Figure 4, *Project Site Map with Transects*). The terrain in the vicinity of the proposed project is mostly flat and includes highly disturbed and developed areas of residential, commercial, and small-scale farming. Soils on the site are classified as Monserate sandy loam, 0 to 5 percent slopes, and Pachappa fine sandy loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes, eroded.¹²

⁸ Regional Conservation Authority, Western Riverside County. 2005. Report Regarding Burrowing Owl Surveys. Available at:

http://www.wrcra.org/species/survey_protocols/Birds/Burrowing%20Owl%20Survey%20Instructions%20complete.pdf

⁹ Regional Conservation Authority, Western Riverside County. 2006. Burrowing Owl Survey Instruction for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area. Available at:

https://www.wrcra.org/archivecdn/Monitoring/Burrowing_Owl_Survey_Instructions.pdf

¹⁰ California Department of Fish and Game. 2012. Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. Sacramento, CA.

¹¹ California Burrowing Owl Consortium. April 1993. Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines. Available at: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/nongame/docs/boconsortium.pdf>

¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. n.d. Web Soil Survey, websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm (accessed 28 November 2018).

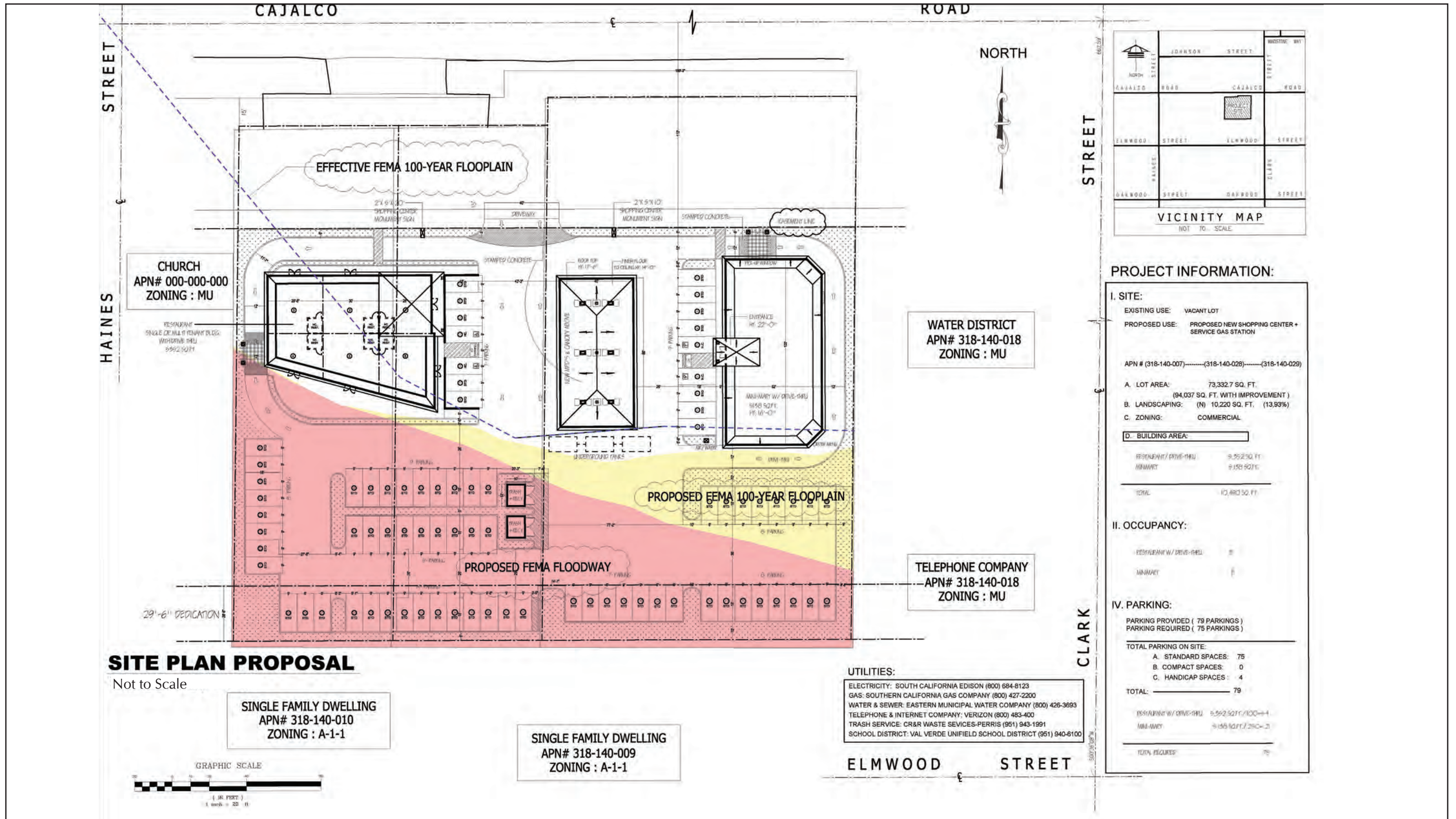


FIGURE 3
Conceptual Site Plan



FIGURE 4
Project Site Map with Transects

The field survey was conducted November 5, 2018, concurrently with a general biological resource assessment of the site, which is provided under separate cover.¹³ A qualified Sapphos Environmental, Inc. biologist (Ms. Paulette Loubet), who is familiar with the species, conducted all background research, GIS coordination, field surveys, and compilation of the survey data used in the habitat assessment. The project property and a 150-meter buffer zone around the project boundary were walked to identify the presence of burrowing owl habitat and sign. Within the project property, pedestrian survey transects were spaced approximately 65 feet apart to allow for 100 percent visual coverage of the ground (Figure 4). Any areas within the buffer that were not accessible were visually inspected for suitable habitat with binoculars.

A Trimble handheld global positioning system (GPS) device was used to ensure site visitation accuracy and mark any biological resources of interest. The total area surveyed was approximately 33.7 acres. Site photos were taken to document site conditions and biological resources observations such as plants, animals, nesting birds, or signs thereof (Appendix A, *Site Photographs*).

RESULTS

No CNDDDB records of burrowing owl were found for the proposed project property. The closest occurrences are just over 1 mile north west and 1.7 miles north within large undeveloped areas surrounded by residential and commercial buildings (Figure 5, *CNDDDB Burrowing Owl Records within 3 Miles*).

The site survey was conducted on November 5, 2018. The burrowing owl habitat assessment of the proposed project property took place from 0800 to 0930, with a starting temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit and wind speeds of 1 to 3 miles per hour and an end temperature of 71.5 degrees Fahrenheit and a wind speed of 0 miles per hour. The conditions during the survey were clear and sunny. After transects were walked within the project area, the buffer area was survey on foot, where accessible.

During the field survey, the Sapphos Environmental, Inc. biologist did not identify any suitable habitat for burrowing owls within in the entire 33.7 acres (Figure 4). The proposed project is located at the intersection of Cajalco Road and Clark Street, both busy roadways. The proposed project footprint is within a highly disturbed area with mostly flat bare ground having a sparse covering of desiccated nonnative grasses, cheeseweed (*Malva parviflora*), puncture vine (*Tribulus terrestris*), red stem filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*), and Russian thistle (*Salsola* spp). A stand of large red gum eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) borders the south and west fence line. Although closed gopher mounds were observed within the project site, no suitable surrogate burrows were identified.

Within the 150-meter proposed project buffer, the biologist did not identify any suitable habitat for burrowing owls. These areas included scattered residential properties and disturbed but undeveloped areas composed mostly of non-native grass and weedy species that are regularly maintained by mowing or grubbing (Appendix A, Photos 1–3). No mammal burrows were observed at any of these sites.

¹³ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 2018. Memorandum for the Record No. 1: Results of Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment for the Proposed New Construction at 21419 and 21425 Cajalco Road, Perris, California. Project No. 2338-001.

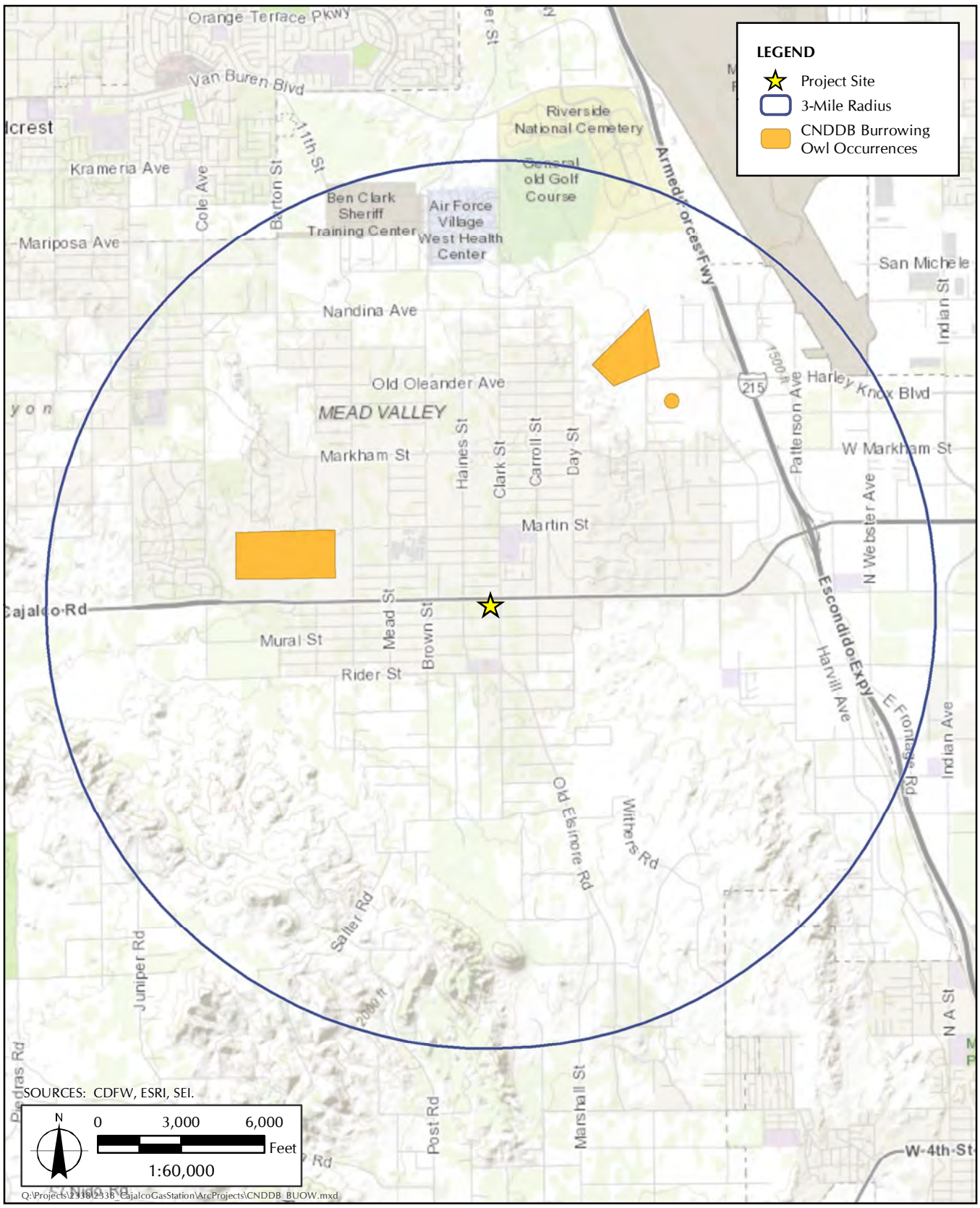


FIGURE 5
CNDDDB Burrowing Owl Occurrences within 3 Miles of the Project Site

As required by the Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation guidelines, all animals observed during the survey were documented.¹⁴ Animal species observed during the survey included house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), house finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*), European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), yellow-rumped warbler (*Setophaga coronata*), white-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*), Nuttall's woodpecker (*Picoides nuttallii*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), ruby crowned kinglet (*Regulus calendula*), American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), Cassin's kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*, carcass), great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*, pellets), western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), coyote (*Canis latrans*, scat and tracks), opossum (*Didelphimorphia*, tracks) and feral cat tracks. Domestic chickens, cows and horses were also observed on properties surrounding the project site.

DISCUSSION

As a result of the habitat assessment, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. determined that the proposed project footprint and 150-meter buffer area do not contain suitable habitat for burrowing owls. No live burrowing owls or sign (presence of individuals, feathers, pellets, prey remains, eggshell fragments, or whitewash) were observed during the field survey. Although recent CNDDDB records show occurrences of burrowing owls within 3 miles of the proposed project area, the amount of continued disturbance and lack of mammal burrows within the project boundary and buffer area make the site unsuitable for the species to occupy and/or nest.

The survey was conducted outside of breeding season (February 1 to August 31). Since no suitable habitat was determined to be present within the proposed project property and the buffer area, further or focused surveys are not necessary. Similarly, no pre-construction surveys for burrowing owls will be necessary.

The burrowing owl is included on three lists relevant to the proposed project: (1) BLM sensitive species in California; (2) USFWS birds of conservation concern in Bird Conservation Region 33, the Mojave and Sonoran deserts; and (3) CDFW species of special concern. It is not listed as a threatened, endangered, or candidate species by CDFW or the USFWS. The BLM is directed to conserve species on its sensitive species list at a level that meets or exceeds the protections afforded a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).¹⁵ However, candidate species or birds of conservation concern do not receive any formal protections under the ESA; cooperative conservation agreements are encouraged for candidate species. Like other species listed as USFWS birds of conservation concern, the burrowing owl is "deemed a priority for conservation actions, and the lists will be consulted for actions taken on Federal lands" by the BLM.¹⁶ The burrowing owl is also listed as a species of special concern by the CDFW when it is breeding. Species of special concern do not have specific formal protections such as those afforded under the ESA.

¹⁴ California Burrowing Owl Consortium. April 1993. Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines. Available at: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/nongame/docs/boconsortium.pdf>

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Special Status Species Management. Revision to BLM Manual 6840. Available at: http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/ca/pdf/pdfs/pa_pdfs/biology_pdfs.Par.9d22a8ee.File.dat/6840_ManualFinal.pdf

¹⁶ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management. 2008. Birds of Conservation Concern 2008.

Should there be any questions regarding the information contained in this MFR, please contact Ms. Paulette Loubet at (626) 683-3547.

REFERENCES

California Burrowing Owl Consortium. April 1993. Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines. Available at: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/nongame/docs/boconsortium.pdf>

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U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Special Status Species Management. Revision to BLM Manual 6840. Available at: http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/ca/pdf/pdfs/pa_pdfs/biology_pdfs.Par.9d22a8ee.File.dat/6840_ManualFinal.pdf

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. n.d. Web Soil Survey, websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm (accessed 28 November 2018).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management. 2008. Birds of Conservation Concern 2008.



PHOTO 1

Northeast corner of the project site, facing southwest



PHOTO 2

Northwest corner of the project site, facing south





PHOTO 3

Southwest corner of the project site, facing east



PHOTO 4

Southwest corner of the project site, facing north





PHOTO 5

Photo Point 1, drainage area, facing southwest



PHOTO 6

Photo Point 2 Water District Station, facing west





PHOTO 7

Photo Point 3, disturbed maintained field, facing north



PHOTO 8

Photo Point 4, disturbed bare and developed site, facing north





PHOTO 9
Photo Point 5, disturbed, mostly paved site, facing south



PHOTO 10
Photo Point 6, showing active mowing and maintenance of vacant lots, facing northwest





PHOTO 11

Photo Point 7, disturbed, developed Church lot, facing southwest



PHOTO 12

Photo Point 8, vacant maintained lot, facing north





PHOTO 13

Photo Point 9, vacant maintained lot, facing west





PHOTO 14

Nests 1, 2 and 3 in Eucalyptus on northwest corner of the property, facing west





PHOTO 15
Nest 2



PHOTO 16
Nest 3





PHOTO 17
Nest 4





PHOTO 18
Nest 5





PHOTO 19
Nest 6 (Raptor Nest)



PHOTO 20
Nest 7

