



State of California – Natural Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
Central Region  
1234 East Shaw Avenue  
Fresno, California 93710  
(559) 243-4005  
[www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov)

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



Governor's Office of Planning & Research

**Apr 06 2022**

April 6, 2022

## STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
2700 "M" Street, Suite 100  
Bakersfield, California 93301

**Subject: Carbon TerraVault 1 by California Resources Corporation (Project)  
Notice of Preparation (NOP)  
State Clearinghouse No. 2022030180**

Dear Ms. Hoover:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a NOP for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) from Kern County, as Lead 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, CDFW appreciates 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. While the comment period may have ended, CDFW would appreciate if you will still consider our comments.

### 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

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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.

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 2

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 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 will be required.

As a responsible agency, CDFW is responsible for providing, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts (e.g., CEQA), focusing specifically on project activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources. CDFW provides recommendations to identify potential impacts and possible measures to avoid or reduce those impacts.

CDFW has jurisdiction over fully protected species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and fish, pursuant to Fish and Game Code sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515. Take of any fully protected species is prohibited and CDFW cannot authorize their incidental take.

**Other Rare Species:** Species of plants and animals need not be officially listed as Endangered, Rare or Threatened (E, R, or T) on any State or federal list pursuant to CESA and/or the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) to be considered E, R, or T under CEQA. If a species can be shown to meet the criteria for a listing as E, R, or T under CESA and/or ESA as specified in the CEQA Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, Chapter 3, § 15380), it should be fully considered in the environmental analysis for the Project.

**Nesting Birds:** CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their eggs and nests include, §§ 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession or needless destruction of the nest or eggs of any bird), 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession or destruction of any birds-of-prey or their nests or eggs), and 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird).

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY**

**Proponent:** California Resources Corporation

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 3

**Objective:** The Carbon TerraVault 1 Project, as proposed by California Resources Corporation would develop an approximate 5,745 acre carbon capture and sequestration field, associated Class VI geologic sequestration injection wells, and related improvements for storage of Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). The proposed project would take local industrial sources of CO<sub>2</sub> that are transported by a combination of truck, pipeline and/or rail to the dedicated Class VI injection wells for the project. Potential sources and locations of sources will be specifically identified and analyzed to the extent legally required by CEQA in the Draft EIR. The CO<sub>2</sub> would then be injected into identified geographically confined reservoirs for storage in perpetuity.

**Location:** Central Valley portion of unincorporated Kern County, west side of Elk Hills Road and north side of Skyline Road, within the Elk Hills Oil Field, approximately 26 miles from the City of Bakersfield, approximately 8.5 miles from the City of Taft, and approximately 4 miles from the unincorporated community of Buttonwillow, also being located within sections 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 26 of Township 30 South, Range 23 East, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian (MDBM), County of Kern, State of California.

**Timeframe:** Unspecified

## COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist the County 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 CEQA document.

The Project area is known to support high densities of several special-status animal species including the State and federally endangered and State fully protected blunt-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia sila*); the State and federally endangered giant kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys ingens*); the State threatened and federally endangered San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*); the State threatened Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) and San Joaquin (also known as Nelson's) antelope squirrel (*Ammospermophilus nelsoni*); the State species of special concern American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), short-nosed kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys nitratoides brevinasus*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), and California glossy snake (*Arizona elegans occidentalis*). The Project area is also in the range of several special-status plant species including but not limited to the State and federally endangered and California rare plant rank (CRPR) 1B.1 California jewelflower (*Caulanthus californicus*)

There is an abundance of information about the extensive rare biological resources present throughout the Elk Hills Oil Field (EHOF), due to its history as the Naval

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 4

Petroleum Reserve 1 (NPR1). NPR1 was sold to Occidental Petroleum as part of the 1996 National Defense Act that directed the Department of Energy to sell the oilfield; Occidental Petroleum (OXY) completed the purchase in 1998. In addition to the extensive biological information collected by DOE, a joint PEIR/SEIS was prepared by DOE/Kern County in 1997 to support the transfer. CDFW issued a 1997 CESA MOU and subsequent amendments, which was then superseded by a 2014 Incidental Take Permit (ITP), supported by the Kern County Oil and Gas EIR. CDFW's 2014 ITP permitting effort was supported by extensive biological survey information and related modeling provided by OXY. CDFW requests that the EIR fully identify potential impacts to biological resources, including the above-mentioned species by evaluating the extensive existing biological information. CDFW can provide some of this information if needed, as we relied heavily upon it for our more recent permitting efforts. CDFW recommends that the following be incorporated into the EIR.

#### **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: Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard (*Gambelia sila*; BNLL)**

**Issue:** Comprehensive BNLL population monitoring has been conducted across the EHOFF for over the last 45 years. As a result, areas of BNLL occurrences within the EHOFF are well known and documented by repeated survey efforts. At the EHOFF, BNLL seem to prefer the flat, open, gently sloping terrain of perimeter areas of the EHOFF and sandy bottomed flat washes that occur in the flat, gently sloping terrain of perimeter areas. The distribution of blunt-nosed leopard lizards on the EHOFF is primarily restricted to the northeast and southwest flatter portions of the EHOFF, with some sightings in the northwest corner. The majority of sightings are in the Buena Vista Valley. An extensive habitat use study of blunt-nosed leopard lizard microhabitat and home range characteristics was conducted on the EHOFF and published in 1998 (Warrick et al. 1998). Based on the studies conducted, it was determined that optimal habitat for the blunt-nosed leopard lizard at the EHOFF would be characterized by flat terrain, numerous small mammal burrows, sufficient vegetation to support an abundant and diverse prey base and interconnected patches of bare ground or sparse vegetation distributed throughout the landscape. A majority of the best habitat with suitable features for sensitive species such as the BNLL, and others, has been placed into conserved status in the Elk Hills Conservation Area along the north and south flanks of the EHOFF. This area provides 7,878 acres of undisturbed habitat that is preserved in perpetuity and wherein future development is strictly limited to no more than 10% on a quarter section basis.

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 5

**Specific impact:** It appears based on the Project Description in the NOP that the project is proposed in at least a portion of what is known as the highest quality BNLL habitat within the EHOFF. Potentially significant impacts associated with ground-disturbing activities include habitat loss, burrow collapse, reduced reproductive success, reduced health and vigor of eggs and/or young, and direct mortality. Given the Fully Protected status of BNLL, it is unclear that the Project could be implemented and avoid a violation of Fish and Game Code Section 5050.

**Evidence impact is potentially significant:** Habitat loss resulting from agricultural, urban, and industrial development is the primary threat to BNLL (ESRP 2020a). Little suitable habitat for BNLL remains in central Kern County (USFWS 1998). The Project and surrounding area contain some of the highest quality remaining habitat for BNLL; therefore, subsequent ground disturbing activities and conversion of suitable habitat associated with the Project may have the potential to significantly impact local BNLL populations. Due to the significant loss of habitat for the species from land conversion and incompatible land use, CDFW advises that a robust cumulative impact analysis is warranted and addressed in the CEQA document prepared for the Project.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: BNLL Surveys**

CDFW recommends conducting surveys in the proposed Project Area in accordance with the “Approved Survey Methodology for the Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard” (CDFW 2019). This survey protocol, designed to optimize BNLL detectability, reasonably assures CDFW that BNLL would be detected if present.

CDFW advises that BNLL surveys be completed by a qualified wildlife biologist as described in the survey protocol above across the entire Project site prior to CEQA analysis. These surveys must be also be conducted no more than one year prior to initiation of ground and/or vegetation disturbance. Protocol-level surveys for BNLL are not synonymous with 30-day “preconstruction surveys” often recommended for other wildlife species. In addition, the BNLL protocol specifies different survey effort requirements based on whether the disturbance results from maintenance activities or if the disturbance results in habitat removal (CDFW 2019).

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: BNLL Take Avoidance**

BNLL detection during protocol-level surveys warrants consultation with CDFW to discuss how to implement ground-disturbing activities and avoid take. Because BNLL is a State Fully Protected species, no take incidental or otherwise, can be authorized by CDFW.

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 6

CDFW's recommendation for avoiding take, providing for individual and population persistence, and conforming to the applicable recovery goals is to design the project to avoid all occupied BNLL habitat, and base that avoidance on known spatial ecology of BNLL. The design should reflect known home range estimates and movement distances, with the intent to avoid fragmenting occupied habitat and habitat necessary to support and recover the species. CDFW recommends using maximum observed home range areas and movement distances instead of average home range areas, which underestimate the area that many BNLL individuals are known to use. This is particularly significant in areas that may be subject to high ecological or climatological variability, such as the Project site.

To determine a buffer that has a reasonable chance of preventing take, CDFW reviewed the best available scientific information on the area which individual BNLL use (home range) and the distances that individuals are known to move between points. Below is a summary of relevant findings from the available published literature and unpublished data on BNLL spatial ecology.

Tollestrup (1983): Seventeen BNLL were marked, recaptured, and observed visually (no telemetry). Home ranges were derived from a one-month study period and considered to be underestimated. Seasonal shifts in activity areas were detected, specifically between the breeding and non-breeding season. One individual moved 1,509 feet between successive capture points.

Warrick et al (1998): Five females and eleven males were tracked with radio telemetry for 17-71 days. One lizard's home range steadily increased even after 40 days. The authors conclude that ten of the lizards' home ranges, which were based on less than 30 locations, should be considered minimum values. One lizard exhibited a dramatic home range shift which was not included in its home range estimate. Female home range estimates (convex polygon) were 1.2 to 11.0 acres. Male home range estimates were 3.9 to 21.7 acres. Where upland habitat had relatively dense vegetation, washes were used significantly more than the upland areas. Where vegetation was sparse in grasslands, grassland habitat was used more than other habitats, including washes.

Unpublished Data: Dr. David Germano of California State University Bakersfield provided some summary statistics of unpublished telemetry data from 2002-2004. Thirty-three males and 24 females were tracked in three different years. It is unknown as of yet how many individuals were tracked in multiple years and how many were tracked for single years. Female home range estimates (95% minimum convex polygon) were 1.1 to 16.5 acres. Male home range estimates were 1.8 to 52.4 acres. These estimates excluded three females which used home ranges greater than 98.8 acres (unknown how much greater).

Cindi Hoover  
 Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
 April 6, 2022  
 Page 7

Table 1 summarizes the maximum home range and movement distances detected.

**Table 1. Maximum Known Home Range Estimates and Movement Distances**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Maximum Movement Distance Detected (ft)</b>	<b>Maximum Home Range Estimate (acres)</b>
Tollestrup (1983)	1509	4.4
Warrick et al. (1998)	NA	21.7
Germano 2002-2004 data (unpublished)	NA	98.8

Several factors make predicting the locations of BNLL when construction commences highly uncertain. These uncertainties make the proposal unlikely to avoid direct mortality of individual BNLL during Project construction. For example, the lizards would be detected when on the surface; between the detection date and the start of construction, they will move and occupy unknown locations underground, possibly long distances from the point of detection. The lizard's location underground when construction commences is not predictable and unlikely to be encompassed by a five-acre buffer of any shape. Also, when a lizard is detected, it is unlikely to be at the center of its home range. It may be on the margin or elsewhere within an irregularly-shaped home range area. Predicting the size and shape of the home range is not feasible unless there are completely unsuitable habitat types which would limit spatial use. The entire Project site consists of potential habitat for BNLL. They may be in any burrow during the inactive season, including undetectable burrows that lizards construct themselves and small mammal burrows that are backfilled.

Predicting home range locations based on habitat type is also highly uncertain. One of the two study sites in Warrick et al (1998) was 80% grassland, and lizards used that area in proportion to its availability, even with open wash habitats available.

If the maximum known distance moved (1509 feet) were used as a radius for prescribing buffer areas, the buffer area would need to be 164 acres. This approach would be based on only one study (Tollestrup 1983) and is probably an underestimation of spatial use. The two studies which used more reliable, radio telemetry methods did not present any movement distances.

The maximum home range estimate of 98.8 acres was observed with three female lizards. Females typically exhibit smaller home ranges than males. Of the BNLL studied in the two available telemetry studies, approximately one in 25 had home ranges that exceeded 98.8 acres (Warrick et al. 1998, Dr. David Germano, California State University Bakersfield, unpublished data). That rate would increase to one in 20 lizards if considering only the study where those observations were made.

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 8

If one in 20-25 lizards has a home range greater than 98.8 acres, then CDFW expects some lizards on the Project site to use areas of similar size. CDFW recommends using 98.8 acres as a minimum starting point for BNLL take avoidance buffers. Prescribing a 98.8-acre buffer around a detected lizard may encompass a wide range of expected home ranges. However, placing an avoidance buffer around the lizard observation assumes that we know where the lizard's home range is relative to the location of the observation. Since we have no way of predicting the size or shape of the home range based on a single observation of a lizard, a reasonable plan for avoidance is to assume that the lizard might utilize up to 98.8 acres in any direction from where it was observed. A circular home range could be assumed due to the uncertainty of home range shape. The diameter of a 98.8-acre circle is 2340.8 feet. Using that distance as a buffer from the point where the lizard is detected yields an approximately 395-acre circle which could be prescribed as a buffer area.

#### **COMMENT 2: San Joaquin Kit Fox (SJKF)**

**Issue:** SJKF is known to occur in high densities throughout Project site (CDFW 2022). Aerial imagery shows that the project area consists of oil wells, agricultural field, non-native annual grassland habitat, and patches of ruderal habitat, habitat types, some of which, are suitable to support SJKF. In addition to grasslands, SJKF den in a variety of areas such as rights-of-way, vacant lots, agricultural and fallow or ruderal habitat, dry stream channels, and canal levees, and populations can fluctuate over time. SJKF are also capable of occupying urban environments (Cypher and Frost 1999). SJKF may be attracted to the Project area due to the type and level of ground-disturbing activities and the loose, friable soils resulting from intensive ground disturbance. As a result, there is potential for SJKF to occupy the Project site and surrounding area.

**Specific impact:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for SJKF, potential significant impacts associated with Project related activities include, den collapse, inadvertent entrapment, reduced reproductive success, reduction in health and vigor of young, and direct mortality of individuals.

**Evidence impact is potentially significant:** Habitat loss resulting from land conversion to agricultural, urban, and industrial development is the primary threat to SJKF (Cypher et al. 2013). Western Kern County supports relatively large areas of high suitability habitat and one of the largest remaining populations of SJKF (Cypher et al. 2013). The Project and surrounding area contain undeveloped land; therefore, subsequent ground disturbing activities and conversion of suitable habitat associated with the Project may have the potential to significantly impact local SJKF populations.



Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 9

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: SJKF Surveys**

CDFW recommends assuming presence of SJKF in the Project Area based on extensive biological information collected previously within the Project Area. Conducting den surveys by conducting surveys following the USFWS' "Standardized recommendations for protection of the San Joaquin kit fox prior to or during ground disturbance" (2011) may provide some index of the potential Project related impacts to SJKF.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: SJKF Avoidance**

Avoidance of Project Related Impacts to SJKF is likely infeasible. To minimize direct impacts to dens, CDFW recommends implementing no-disturbance buffers, as described in the USFWS "Standardized recommendations for protection of the San Joaquin kit fox prior to or during ground disturbance" (2011) around den sites.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 5: SJKF Take Authorization**

This Project warrants consultation with CDFW and acquisition of an an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) prior to ground-disturbing activities, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b). The existing ITP issued to OXY/CRC does not include the proposed Project as a Covered Activity.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 6: Perimeter Fences**

CDFW recommends all perimeter fencing be raised five to seven inches above ground level and knuckled under to allow SJKF movement through the Project site and to minimize impacts to SJKF habitat connectivity.

### **COMMENT 3: Giant Kangaroo Rat (GKR) Tipton Kangaroo Rat (TKR) and Short-Nosed Kangaroo Rat (SNKR)**

**Issue:** GKR, TKR, and SNKR have been documented to occur near the Project site (CDFW 2022), and the Project Area supports some of the best GKR habitat present on the EHO. These species inhabit sandy-loam soils located in grassland habitat with scattered shrubs. Suitable habitat includes areas of grassland, upland scrub, and alkali sink habitats that contain requisite habitat elements, such as small mammal burrows. The land use described in the NOP indicates that suitable habitat is present on the Project site therefore, there is potential for these species to occupy or colonize the Project.

**Specific impact:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for GKR, TKR, and SNKR, potential significant impacts from Project activities include

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 10

loss of habitat, burrow collapse, inadvertent entrapment of individuals, reduced reproductive success such as reduced health or vigor of young, and direct mortality of individuals.

**Evidence impact is potentially significant:** Habitat loss resulting from agricultural, urban, and industrial development is the primary threat to GKR, TKR, and SNKR. Further, habitat fragmentation may accelerate the decline of these species. The Project and surrounding area contain undeveloped land; therefore, if the Project area is occupied by GKR, TKR, and/or SNKR subsequent ground disturbing activities and conversion of suitable habitat associated with the Project may have the potential to significantly impact local populations of these species.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 7: GKR, TKR, and SNKR Trapping Surveys**

CDFW recommends that a trapping plan for determining presence of GKR, TKR, and SNKR be submitted to and approved by CDFW prior to subsequent trapping efforts. CDFW recommends these surveys be conducted by a qualified biologist who holds a CDFW Memorandum of Understanding for GKR, TKR, and SNKR, and any appropriate USFWS permit(s). CDFW further recommends that these surveys be conducted between April 1 and October 31, when kangaroo rats are most active and well in advance of ground- and/or vegetation-disturbing activities in order to determine if impacts to GKR, TKR, and/or SNKR could occur. Once completed, all survey results should be sent to CDFW.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 8: GKR, TKR, and SNKR Avoidance**

If potential habitat is present and trapping is not feasible, CDFW advises maintenance of a 50-foot minimum no-disturbance buffer around all small mammal burrow entrances. In addition, CDFW advises that Fish and Game Code Section 86 defines take as hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill. Although these recommended buffer distances may be sufficient to avoid direct mortality or burrow destruction, encircling a burrow with development activities may inhibit the ability of GKR, TKR, and SNKR to freely disperse to and from burrows and has the potential to be considered "capture" and/or ultimately result in take in the form of mortality. Therefore, CDFW recommends that in addition to the buffer distances, that no burrow is surrounded more than 180 degrees by development activities.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 9: GKR and TKR Take Authorization**

If GKR or TKR are found within the Project area during trapping as described above, preconstruction surveys, or construction activities, consultation with CDFW is advised immediately to discuss how to implement the Project. Given the known high

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 11

densities of GKR on the Project Site, CDFW recommends acquisition of an ITP pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 2081(b) with GKR as a covered Species prior to any ground-disturbing activities. The existing ITP issued to OXY/CRC does not include the proposed Project as a Covered Activity.

#### **COMMENT 4: San Joaquin (also known as Nelson's) Antelope Squirrel (SJAS)**

**Issue:** SJAS are known to occur throughout the EHOF, even within the High Production Area. SJAS inhabit sandy-loam soils in areas of grassland, upland scrub, and alkali sink habitats that contain requisite habitat elements, such as small mammal burrows.

**Specific impact:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for SJAS, potential significant impacts include loss of habitat, burrow collapse, inadvertent entrapment of individuals, reduced reproductive success such as reduced health or vigor of young, and direct mortality of individuals.

**Evidence impact is potentially significant:** Habitat loss resulting from agricultural, urban, and industrial development is the primary threat to SJAS. Further, habitat fragmentation may accelerate the decline of the species. Very little suitable habitat for this species remains outside of the western Kern County and eastern San Luis Obispo County area (ESRP 2020e, USFWS 1998). The Project Area is known to support SJAS; therefore, subsequent ground disturbing activities and habitat conversion associated with the Project may have the potential to significantly impact local SJAS populations.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 10: SJAS Surveys**

Prior to initiating ground- and/or vegetation- disturbing activities, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused daytime visual surveys for SJAS using line transects with 10- to 30-meter spacing. CDFW further advises that these surveys be conducted between April 1 and September 20, during daytime temperatures between 68° and 86° F, to maximize detectability (CDFG 1990). All survey results should be sent to CDFW after completion.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 11: SJAS Avoidance**

CDFW recommends maintenance of a 50-foot minimum no-disturbance buffer around all small mammal burrow entrances until the completion of Project activities. As recommended for GKR and SNKR, CDFW recommends that in addition to the buffer distances, that no burrow is surrounded more than 180 degrees by development activities.

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 12

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 12: SJAS Take Authorization**

CDFW recommends acquisition of a take authorization through the acquisition of an Incidental Take Permit (ITP), pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081(b) with SJAS as a covered species to comply with CESA. The existing ITP issued to OXY/CRC does not include the proposed Project as a Covered Activity.

### **COMMENT 5: Swainson's Hawk (SWHA)**

**Issue:** SWHA have been documented to occur in the areas bordering Elk Hills (CDFW 2022). Therefore, SWHA have the potential to nest near the Project site, and forage within the Project site. The habitat types present at the Project site all provide suitable foraging habitat for SWHA, increasing the likelihood of SWHA occurrence within the vicinity. In addition, any trees in the Project vicinity have the potential to provide suitable nesting habitat.

**Specific impact:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for SWHA, potential significant impacts that may result from Project activities include nest abandonment, loss of nest trees, loss of foraging habitat that would reduce nesting success (loss or reduced health or vigor of eggs or young), and direct mortality. All trees, including non-native or ornamental varieties, near the Project site may provide potential nesting sites.

**Evidence impact would be significant:** SWHA exhibit high nest-site fidelity year after year and lack of suitable nesting habitat limits their local distribution and abundance (CDFW 2016). If potential nest sites occur in the Project vicinity, approval of the Project may lead to subsequent ground-disturbing activities that involve noise, groundwork, construction of structures, and movement of workers that could affect nests and has the potential to result in nest abandonment and/or loss of foraging habitat, significantly impacting local nesting SWHA. In addition, conversion of undeveloped land can directly influence distribution and abundance of SWHA, due to the reduction in foraging habitat.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 13: Focused SWHA Surveys**

To evaluate potential Project-related impacts, CDFW recommends that a qualified wildlife biologist conduct surveys for nesting SWHA following the entire survey methodology developed by the SWHA Technical Advisory Committee (SWHA TAC 2000) prior to Project implementation (during CEQA analysis). SWHA detection during protocol-level surveys warrants consultation with CDFW to discuss how to implement Project activities and avoid take.

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 13

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 14: SWHA Avoidance**

CDFW recommends that if Project-specific activities will take place during the SWHA nesting season (i.e., March 1 through September 15), and active SWHA nests are present, a minimum ½-mile no-disturbance buffer be delineated and maintained around each nest, regardless of when it was detected by surveys or incidentally, until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival, to prevent nest abandonment and other take of SWHA as a result of Project activities.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 15: SWHA Take Authorization**

CDFW recommends that in the event an active SWHA nest is detected, and a ½-mile no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an Incidental Take Permit (ITP), pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081(b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 16: Loss of SWHA Foraging Habitat**

CDFW recommends compensation for the loss of SWHA foraging habitat as described in CDFW's "Staff Report Regarding Mitigation for Impacts to Swainson's Hawks" (CDFG 1994) to reduce impacts to foraging habitat to less than significant. The Staff Report recommends that mitigation for habitat loss occur within a minimum distance of 10 miles from known nest sites. CDFW has the following recommendations based on the Staff Report:

- For projects within 1 mile of an active nest tree, a minimum of 1 acre of habitat management (HM) land for each acre of development is advised.
- For projects within 5 miles of an active nest but greater than 1 mile, a minimum of ¾ acre of HM land for each acre of development is advised.
- For projects within 10 miles of an active nest tree but greater than 5 miles from an active nest tree, a minimum of ½ acre of HM land for each acre of development is advised.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 17: SWHA Tree Removal**

CDFW recommends that the removal of known SWHA nest trees, even outside of the nesting season, be replaced with an appropriate native tree species planting at a ratio of 3:1 at or near the Project area or in another area that will be protected in

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 14

perpetuity. This mitigation would offset the local and temporal impacts of nesting habitat loss.

#### **COMMENT 6: Special-status Plants**

**Issue:** Several special-status plant species meeting the definition of rare or endangered under CEQA section 15380 have been documented to occur near the Project area, including but not limited to, the State and federally endangered and CRPR 1B.1 California jewelflower (CDFW 2022).

**Specific impact:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for special-status plants, potential significant impacts associated with subsequent construction include loss of habitat, loss or reduction of productivity, and direct mortality.

**Evidence impact would be significant:** The California jewelflower and many other special-status plant species are threatened by grazing and agricultural, urban, and energy development. Many historical occurrences of these species are presumed extirpated (CNPS 2020). Though new populations have recently been discovered, impacts to existing populations have the potential to significantly impact populations of plant species.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 18: Special-Status Plant Surveys**

CDFW recommends that individual Project sites be surveyed for special-status plants by a qualified botanist following the “Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Natural Communities” (CDFG 2018). This protocol, which is intended to maximize detectability, includes the identification of reference populations to facilitate the likelihood of field investigations occurring during the appropriate floristic period.

#### **Recommendation Mitigation Measure 19: Sensitive Natural Communities**

In addition to surveying for special-status plants as stated above, CDFW recommends the Project area is also surveyed for the presence of sensitive natural communities, which is also part of CDFW’s botanical survey protocol (CDFW 2018). If sensitive natural communities are found, CDFW recommend impacts to them are fully evaluated in the CEQA document.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 20: Special-Status Plant Avoidance**

CDFW recommends that special-status plant species be avoided whenever possible by delineating and observing a no-disturbance buffer of at least 50 feet from the

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 15

outer edge of the plant population(s) or specific habitat type(s) required by special-status plant species. If buffers cannot be maintained, then consultation with CDFW may be warranted to determine appropriate minimization and mitigation measures for impacts to special-status plant species.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 21: Listed Plant Species Take Authorization**

If a State-listed plant species is identified during botanical surveys, consultation with CDFW is warranted to determine if the Project can avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization is warranted. Take authorization would occur through acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081(b).

### **COMMENT 7: Burrowing Owl (BUOW)**

**Issue:** BUOW have been documented in the Project vicinity (CDFW 2022). BUOW inhabit open grassland and similar habitat types containing small mammal burrows, a requisite habitat feature used by BUOW for nesting and cover. The NOP reports that these habitat features are present on the Project site, therefore, there is potential for BUOW to occupy or colonize the Project.

**Specific impact:** Potentially significant direct impacts associated with subsequent activities and land conversion include habitat loss, burrow collapse, inadvertent entrapment, nest abandonment, reduced reproductive success, reduction in health and vigor of eggs and/or young, and direct mortality of individuals.

**Evidence impact is potentially significant:** BUOW rely on burrow habitat year-round for their survival and reproduction. Habitat loss and degradation are considered the greatest threats to BUOW in California's Central Valley (Gervais et al. 2008). The Project and surrounding area contain undeveloped land; therefore, subsequent ground-disturbing activities associated with the Project have the potential to significantly impact local BUOW populations. In addition, and as described in CDFW's "Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation" (CDFG 2012), excluding and/or evicting BUOW from their burrows is considered a potentially significant impact under CEQA.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 22: BUOW Surveys**

CDFW recommends assessing presence or absence of BUOW by having a qualified biologist conduct surveys following the California Burrowing Owl Consortium's "Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines" (CBOC 1993) and the "Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation" (CDFG 2012), which suggest three or more surveillance surveys conducted during daylight with each visit occurring at

Cindi Hoover  
 Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
 April 6, 2022  
 Page 16

least three weeks apart during the peak breeding season (i.e., April 15 to July 15), when BUOW are most detectable. In addition, CDFW advises that surveys include a minimum 500-foot buffer area around the Project area.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 23: BUOW Avoidance**

Should a BUOW be detected, CDFW recommends that no-disturbance buffers, as outlined in the “Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation” (CDFG 2012), be implemented prior to and during any ground-disturbing activities. Specifically, CDFW’s Staff Report recommends that impacts to occupied burrows be avoided in accordance with the following table unless a qualified biologist approved by CDFW verifies through non-invasive methods that either: 1) the birds have not begun egg laying and incubation; or 2) that juveniles from the occupied burrows are foraging independently and are capable of independent survival.

Location	Time of Year	Level of Disturbance		
		Low	Med	High
Nesting sites	April 1-Aug 15	200 m*	500 m	500 m
Nesting sites	Aug 16-Oct 15	200 m	200 m	500 m
Nesting sites	Oct 16-Mar 31	50 m	100 m	500 m

\* meters (m)

### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 24: BUOW Passive Relocation and Mitigation**

If BUOW are found within these recommended buffers and avoidance is not possible, it is important to note that according to the Staff Report (CDFG 2012), excluding birds from burrows is not a take avoidance, minimization, or mitigation method and is instead considered a potentially significant impact under CEQA. However, if it is necessary for Project implementation, CDFW recommends that burrow exclusion be conducted by qualified biologists and only during the non-breeding season, before breeding behavior is exhibited and after the burrow is confirmed empty through non-invasive methods, such as surveillance. CDFW recommends replacement of occupied burrows with artificial burrows at a ratio of one (1) burrow collapsed to one (1) artificial burrow constructed (1:1) to mitigate for evicting BUOW and the loss of burrows. BUOW may attempt to colonize or re-colonize an area that will be impacted; thus, CDFW recommends ongoing surveillance at a rate that is sufficient to detect BUOW if they return.



Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 17

### **COMMENT 8: Other State Species of Special Concern**

**Issue:** San Joaquin pocket mouse, California glossy snake, and American badger have the potential to occur in the Project area. These species have been documented to occur in the vicinity of the Project site, which supports requisite habitat elements (CDFW 2022).

**Specific impact:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for these species, potentially significant impacts associated with ground disturbance include habitat loss and nest/den/burrow abandonment, which may result in reduced health or vigor of eggs and/or young, and direct mortality.

**Evidence impact is potentially significant:** Habitat loss threatens all of the species mentioned above (Gittleman et al. 2001, Shuford and Gardali 2008, Thomson et al. 2016). The Project and surrounding area contain undeveloped land; therefore, subsequent ground disturbing activities and habitat conversion associated with the Project may have the potential to significantly impact local the populations of these species.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 25: Habitat Assessment**

CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct a habitat assessment in advance of project implementation, to determine if project areas or their immediate vicinity contain potential habitat for the species mentioned above.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 26: Surveys**

If potential habitat is present, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for applicable species and their requisite habitat features to evaluate potential impacts resulting from ground and vegetation disturbance.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 27: Avoidance**

Avoidance whenever possible is encouraged via delineation and observance a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer around dens of mammals like the American badger as well as the entrances of burrows that can provide refuge for special-status small mammals and California glossy snake.

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

**Federally Listed Species:** CDFW recommends consulting with USFWS regarding potential impacts to federally listed species including but not limited to the blunt-nosed leopard lizard, giant kangaroo rat, and San Joaquin kit fox. Take under the Federal

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 18

Endangered Species Act (FESA) is more broadly defined than CESA; take under FESA also includes significant habitat modification or degradation that could result in death or injury to a listed species by interfering with essential behavioral patterns such as breeding, foraging, or nesting. Consultation with the USFWS in order to comply with FESA is advised well in advance of any Project activities.

**Lake and Streambed Alteration:** If streams, swales, or drainages occur on the Project site, Project activities may be 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 (including the removal of riparian vegetation); (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 as well as those that are perennial.

CDFW is required to comply with CEQA in the issuance of a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA); therefore, if the CEQA document approved for the Project does not adequately describe the Project and its impacts to lakes or streams, a subsequent CEQA analysis may be necessary for LSAA issuance. For information on notification requirements, please refer to CDFW's website (<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/LSA>) or contact CDFW staff in the Central Region Lake and Streambed Alteration Program at (559) 243-4593.

**Nesting Birds:** CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their eggs and nests include sections 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession or needless destruction of the nest or eggs of any bird), 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession or destruction of any birds-of-prey or their nests or eggs), and 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird).

CDFW encourages Project implementation to occur during the bird non-nesting season; however, if Project activities must occur during the nesting season (i.e., February through mid-September), the Project applicant is responsible for ensuring that implementation of the Project does not result in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or relevant Fish and Game Codes as referenced above.

To evaluate Project-related impacts on nesting birds, CDFW recommends that a qualified wildlife biologist conduct pre-activity surveys for active nests no more than 10 days prior to the start of ground disturbance to maximize the probability that nests that could potentially be impacted by the Project are detected. CDFW also recommends that surveys cover a sufficient area around the work site to identify nests and determine their status. A sufficient area means any area potentially affected by a project. In

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 19

addition to direct impacts (i.e., nest destruction), noise, vibration, and movement of workers or equipment could also affect nests. Prior to initiation of construction activities, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct a survey to establish a behavioral baseline of all identified nests. Once construction begins, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist continuously monitor nests to detect behavioral changes resulting from the project. If behavioral changes occur, CDFW recommends that the work causing that change cease and CDFW be consulted for additional avoidance and minimization measures.

If continuous monitoring of identified nests by a qualified wildlife biologist is not feasible, CDFW recommends a minimum no-disturbance buffer of 250 feet around active nests of non-listed bird species and a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer around active nests of non-listed raptors. These buffers are advised to remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival. Variance from these no-disturbance buffers is possible when there is compelling biological or ecological reason to do so, such as when the construction area would be concealed from a nest site by topography. CDFW recommends that a qualified wildlife biologist advise and support any variance from these buffers and notify CDFW in advance of implementing a variance.

### **Impacts to Conserved Lands**

As a condition of previous CDFW and USFWS permits, OXY placed 7,878 acres of high quality habitat within the EHOF into permanently conserved status via recordation of a Conservation Easement in favor of CDFW. The so called Elk Hills Conservation Area is present along the north and South flanks of the EHOF, which appears to be within or adjacent to the Proposed Project. The EIR prepared for this project should analyze any potential direct or indirect impacts to this conserved habitat and the associated special status species.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DATA**

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database, 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 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>.

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 20

## 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 NOP to assist Kern County in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources.

If you have any questions, please contact Jaime Marquez, Environmental Scientist, at the address provided on this letterhead, by telephone at (559) 580-3200, or by electronic mail at [Jaime.Marquez@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Jaime.Marquez@wildlife.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
*Bob Stafford*  
5343A684FF02469...

Bob Stafford for Julie A. Vance  
Regional Manager

Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 21

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Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 22

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Cindi Hoover  
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department  
April 6, 2022  
Page 23

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**Attachment 1**

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

**PROJECT: Carbon TerraVault 1  
SCH No.: 2022030180**

<b>RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE</b>	<b>STATUS/DATE/INITIALS</b>
<i>Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation</i>	
Mitigation Measure 1: BNLL Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 3: SJKF Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 5: SJKF Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 7: GKR, TKR, and SNKR Trapping Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 9: GKR, TKR, and SNKR Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 10: SJAS Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 12: SJAS Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 13: Focused SWHA Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 15: SWHA Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 16: Loss of SWHA Foraging Habitat	
Mitigation Measure 17: SWHA Tree Removal	
Mitigation Measure 18: Special-Status Plant Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 19: Sensitive natural Communities	
Mitigation Measure 21: Listed Plant Species Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 22: BUOW Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 24: BUOW Passive Relocation and Mitigation	
Mitigation Measure 25: Habitat Assessment	
Mitigation Measure 26: Surveys	
<i>During Construction</i>	
Mitigation Measure 2: BNLL Take Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 4: SJKF Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 6: Perimeter Fencing	
Mitigation Measure 8: GKR, TKR, and SNKR Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 11: SJAS Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 14: SWHA Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 20: Special-Status Plant Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 23: BUOW Avoidance	



Mitigation Measure 27: Avoidance	
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