

## MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION (MND)

**Lead Agency:** Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District  
15415 W. Sand Street, #103  
Victorville, CA 92392

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**Project Title:** Mojave Desert Land Trust Palisades Ranch Restoration Project

**State Clearinghouse Number:** Not Yet Assigned

**Project Location:** Palisades Ranch is located in San Bernardino County, California, approximately 25 miles southwest of Barstow, California. The nearest cross streets are Bryman Road and Heritage Road. It consists of  $\pm 1,647$  acres (21 parcels), approximately  $\pm 3.5$  miles along a north-south axis and  $\pm 1.25$  miles wide on an east-west axis. The project site is located within the USGS Topo 7.5-minute map for Helendale, CA and the rough center of the 1,647-acre project site is located in Section 12, Township 6 North and Range 4 West. The approximate GPS coordinates of the project site are 34.47166, -117.34820.

The property forms an irregular shape and varies topographically from horizontal expanses to vertical cliffs. Steep, 80-foot bluffs separate the river channel in the eastern part of the property from the alluvial flats to the west. For the most part, the property sits vacant, unimproved, and unused. Approximately 820 acres of the project site lies in the Mojave River floodplain. This means approximately 820.80 acres lie outside a floodplain. A small portion of the property had been previously used to grow hay/alfalfa and as a fruit orchard. Neither of these uses are currently operational, and the fields lie fallow. The property includes four residences, two steel buildings, an office and apartment, two open sided hay barns, wells and water tanks, and miscellaneous improvements.

**Project Description:** The Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) intends to implement a conceptual restoration and design plan for Palisades Ranch that meets state and regional priorities to identify restoration measures for critical hydrological processes and habitat health. The objectives of the restoration plan were to improve riparian and aquatic habitats for special status species (including San Emigdio blue butterfly, Mojave tui chub, southwestern willow flycatcher, western yellow-billed cuckoo, least Bell's vireo, and Lucy's warbler) while keeping in mind water allocation (groundwater/aquifer recharge, water conservation) and maintenance required for sustainable and successful restoration. Given that MDLT proposes to implement a habitat restoration plan within an area of conservation, Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District (MDRCD or District) has agreed to serve as the CEQA Lead Agency for this project.

The restoration plan involves reconnecting a 170-acre abandoned agricultural field that was historically riparian habitat to the Mojave River by reestablishing a nested floodplain that resembles historic floodplain conditions. This would entail constructing a 6,600-foot main side channel, a 1,425-foot west branch side channel, and two higher elevation 5-year return interval channels within the proposed nested floodplain in the abandoned agricultural field. This approach would restore the historic floodplain and braided channel form during annual high flows, promote natural recruitment of riparian vegetation and beaver colonization, and boost groundwater storage of the floodplain aquifer. Approximately 130 acres of riparian habitat would be restored as a result of this project. The design would also include a 2-acre pond that would provide habitat for Mojave tui chub. The design would not be hard engineering, rather the design would create a system that allows natural processes to take place, creating the greatest ecological benefit possible.

The Implementation of the proposed Palisades Ranch Restoration Project—which includes fence installation, habitat restoration, and installation of signage—is anticipated to require up to 5 years (60 months) with a target completion date of 3 years (36 months), with the anticipated start date of construction in October 2022. The project could be completed as early as October 2025, though it may be completed at the latest around October of 2027.

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**Finding:** The District's decision to implement this proposed project is a discretionary decision or "project" that requires evaluation under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Based on the information in the project Initial Study, the District has made a *preliminary* determination that a Mitigated Negative Declaration will be the appropriate environmental determination for this project to comply with CEQA.

**Initial Study:** A copy of the Initial Study and all other material which constitutes the record of proceedings upon which the District based its decision to adopt this MND may be obtained at District office at 15415 W. Sand Street, #103 Victorville, CA 92392), and electronically at the District's website <https://www.mojavedesertcd.org/palisades-ranch>. The CEQA-required public review period of the Initial Study/MND began May 19, 2022 and ends on June 17, 2022 (30-days). Written comments on the Initial Study were submitted to Dana Raponi at the mailing address listed above no later than June 17, 2022 by 5:00 PM. Ms. Dana Raponi may be contacted at (760) 900-9120 or [Dana.Raponi@ca.nacdnet.net](mailto:Dana.Raponi@ca.nacdnet.net)

**Mitigation Measures:** All mitigation measures identified in the Initial Study are summarized on pages 118-125 and are proposed for adoption as conditions of the project. These measures will be implemented through a mitigation monitoring and reporting program if the MND is adopted.

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DRAFT Signature	Title	Date
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