

Appendix B:
Cooper Ecological Monitoring Report



Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.

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Habitat Connectivity and Wildlife Permeability Assessment

APN 557-202-4006
3003 N. Runyon Canyon Rd.
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Prepared for:
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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
LOCATION	3
PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	3
REGULATORY BACKGROUND	4
HABITAT CONNECTIVITY/WILDLIFE PERMEABILITY	4
EXISTING CONDITIONS AND METHODS	5
SETTING	5
VEGETATION	5
METHODS	5
FINDINGS	6
WILDLIFE MOVEMENT	6
POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION	6
APPENDICES	7
APPENDIX A: MAPS AND SITE PHOTOGRAPHS	8
APPENDIX C: CV FOR DANIEL S. COOPER	14

Introduction

Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc. (CEM) is pleased to submit an assessment of habitat connectivity and wildlife permeability for the vicinity of 3003 N. Runyon Canyon Rd., Los Angeles, 90046, located within Runyon Canyon Park. The property is proposed for development of a single-family home by the owner, which would be constructed on the western side of the ridge that currently supports an existing home.

This assessment was initiated to satisfy city building conditions that seek to reduce obstruction of the wildlife corridor formed by the eastern Santa Monica Mountains between Topanga Canyon State Park/Central Santa Monica Mountains and Griffith Park. This document identifies the existing habitat connectivity present at the site, as well as any impediments to wildlife movement posed by the current or proposed development there.

We conclude that while the site is used by wildlife including mule deer, due to its location surrounded by open space, the proposed development will not appreciably affect the movement of this and other local species using the site.

Location

The study site, APN 557-202-4006, is located at 34.113654° N, 118.350978° W, between 1050'-1150' elevation in the city of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California. The site occupies c. 4.74 acres and is specifically located within Runyon Canyon Park within a fairly undeveloped area. Access to the site is only obtained through a private gate and roadway, and the surrounding area is accessible to hiking trails open to the public. (Figure 1).

Proposed Development

The new home would be constructed essentially into to the western side of the hill below existing (developed) ridgeline, south of the existing house, but would expand the existing footprint of development at the site. Currently, the existing house occupies 2,018 s.f. Under the proposed plan, new construction would expand the developed footprint to 19,167 s.f. (inclusive of existing structures), covering 9.7% of the property. (Figure 2).

Regulatory Background

Habitat Connectivity/Wildlife Permeability

The eastern Santa Monica Mountains are generally considered to lie between Sepulveda Pass in the west and Cahuenga Pass in the east. They represent the most highly-constricted portion of the Santa Monica range, which extends from Pt. Mugu in the west to Griffith Park and the Los Angeles River in the east. In response to a decade of development of small patches of open space that has constricted this corridor even further, on April 23, 2014, Los Angeles City Councilman Paul Koretz proposed a motion (#14-0518), to:

- Issue any building or grading permits only once a project applicant ensures that they will “permanently accommodate wildlife habitat connectivity as part of their development projects”;
- Require easements and deed restrictions in perpetuity to project wildlife habitat connectivity;
- Formally designate the area as a “Regional Wildlife Habitat Linkage Zone” in the Municipal Code; and
- Require that each new building project undergo a “habitat connectivity and wildlife permeability review within areas of concern.”

This motion unanimously passed on April 22, 2016. Building conditions in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains/“Hollywood Hills” are now subject to a review of wildlife connectivity.

No formal guidelines exist on how to document an urban/suburban wildlife corridor. However, under the California Environmental Quality Act, a typical threshold of impact would be, “Would the Project interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?”

Based on our extensive experience working on wildlife issues and development impacts in the area, we consider “camera traps” – motion-detecting, remote-operated cameras set in areas with a high likelihood of wildlife usage – to be the best way of documenting wildlife movement, particularly that of larger mammals such as mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), bobcat (*Felis rufus*) and coyote (*Canis latrans*). Ground-dwelling chaparral bird species such as California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) and California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*) may also be captured on motion-detecting cameras, but since they are more mobile than mammals, their occurrence can also be inferred by the sheer amount of open/undeveloped habitat in the vicinity of the property. While more images of wildlife are obtained the longer cameras are deployed, in our experience, 2-3 weeks is generally enough time to document at least the more common species using a given site.

Existing Conditions and Methods

Setting

The site covers 4.74 acres and is located on a steep ridgeline in the upper portion of Runyon Canyon Park, a city-owned open space park in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains (Runyon Canyon covers 160 acres, and receives hundreds of visitors year-round). The subject property is surrounded by open space/parkland.

The subject property is reached via the main trail/fireroad which starts approximately 650 meters to the north, at Mulholland Dr. It consists of a single-family home with a pool, plus a flat area of lawn to the south, overlooking the city. A small (unused) horse paddock area is situated northwest of the house, toward the northwestern corner of the property. It is surrounded on three sides by a 6'-high chainlink fence (Figure 3a, 3b), and features a taller metal gate at the base of the driveway in the northeastern corner of the property. The steepest portion of the property at the southern and southeastern edge is not fenced. The nearest single-family homes to the north and east are located c. 250 meters away; those to the west are 650 m away, and solid residential development is located c. 1 km to the south.

Vegetation

Ornamental vegetation surrounds the area adjacent to the existing house and pool, but the surrounding slopes – both inside and outside the property fence – support a mix of low-elevation chaparral and coastal sage scrub typical of the eastern Santa Monica Mountains and Griffith Park, with laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), bigpod ceanothus (*Ceanothus megacarpus*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), and California sunflower (*Encelia californica*) dominant (Figure 4). A 200' swath around the existing home is regularly thinned for fuel modification/brush clearance, and now supports dense non-native weeds, including black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), filaree (*Eriodinium* sp.) and annual grasses (Figure 5).

Methods

On March 27, 2017, we (Daniel S. Cooper and Courtney McCammon) installed two wildlife cameras (Bushnell 12MP Trophy Cam HD Essential Low Glow Trail Camera, outfitted with 32GB memory cards, secured with Bushnell Bear Safe Security cases with locking cables) in two locations of the subject property (Figure 6). In addition to the camera results, we assessed the likely wildlife movement of the surrounding landscape, taking into account topography, existing roads/trails, fences, and human disturbance such as human presence, lighting, noise, and other impacts.

We were present at the site between 10:30 – 11:30 on March 27, 2017, and McCammon returned twice to check on the cameras and download images from the memory cards, first on March 30, 2017, and again on April 8, 2017, meaning both cameras were deployed for a total of 13 days each.

Findings

Wildlife Movement

Our initial observations on March 27 did not reveal any obvious signs of wildlife movement on subject property. However, McCammon flushed a young male mule deer near the horse paddock area on April 8, 2017 while checking/retrieving the cameras (Figure 7). She also observed (on April 8) deer tracks leading up from this same area, toward the swimming pool adjacent to the house (Figure 8; we note that during our initial visit on March 27, the owner reported seeing deer eating freshly-planted flowers in the past along the driveway in this same area, and we observed newer freshly-planted flowers here). A check of the camera images revealed a grainy image that appears to be the hindquarters of a mule deer, taken on April 7, 2017 (Figure 9).

Thus, from these very preliminary results, the property is being used by mule deer, and probably by other species of wildlife as well. It is unlikely the 6' perimeter fence poses much of an impediment to deer, which are known to jump/scale even higher fences to get to foraging habitat.

Potential Impacts and Mitigation

The proposed development, which occupies roughly the same footprint as an existing structure and landscaped area of the property, is unlikely to result in any permanent negative impact to wildlife using the site. Currently, mule deer appear to be moving up onto the site to forage on ornamental vegetation from the surrounding fireroad at the base of the ridge where the house is situated. There is nothing in the proposed new house plan that would appear to block this from continuing, provided the fence height is not raised. The fireroad that winds around the base of the ridgetop to the south would continue to be open, so mule deer and other species would continue to be able to move around the site to reach drainages east and west of the property.

We recommend limited outdoor lighting in future development plans, since lights tend to disrupt the natural ecology of any natural area, and the surrounding slopes appear to retain considerable natural elements. Finally, we urge the applicant to use locally-native plant species in the landscaping of the new development.

Appendix A. Maps and Site Photographs



Figure 1. Location of Runyon Canyon Dr. property.



Figure 3b. Representative view of chainlink fence along northern edge of property.



Figure 4. Native vegetation surrounding property (laurel sumac in foreground).



Figure 5. Non-native vegetation in fuel break surrounding dwelling.



Figure 6. Map of camera locations.



Figure 7. Image of young male mule deer, April 8, 2017.



Figure 8. Mule deer track, April 8, 2017.



Figure 9. Image of mule deer (facing right/away from camera) captured by wildlife camera on April 7, 2017.

Appendix B. CV for Daniel S. Cooper

Contact Information

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Overview

Daniel S. Cooper is the author of [Important Bird Areas of California](#) (Audubon California 2004), and is an authority on California bird ecology, identification and distribution. He has a strong background in natural history and biodiversity, and has designed and managed numerous monitoring and assessment projects for a variety of clients, both in the U.S. and abroad. He is an associate editor of the journal *Western Birds*, and works as an independent consultant and researcher.

Areas of Expertise

- Biological assessments for public and private lands;
- Bird and wildlife surveys, including protocol-level surveys;
- Environmental compliance (CEQA/NEPA) and monitoring

Years of Experience

CEM, Inc.: 11 years
Audubon California: 5 years

Education

BA/1995/Harvard University
MSc (Biogeography)/1999/UC Riverside

Certifications

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Permit No. TE-100008-2 (Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, California Gnatcatcher).
CDFG Scientific Collecting Permit SC-10615 (as above; add: San Diego Cactus Wren)
USGS Master Station Banding Permit #23049 (2001-2004)

Recent Boards

Associate Editor, *Western Birds*, 2014 -
Southern California Academy of Sciences, 2012 - 2015
Southern California Beach Metrics Working Group, 2009 -
Los Angeles Co. Dept. of Regional Planning - Sensitive
Environmental Areas Tech. Adv. Com., 2009 - 2014.

Teaching/Advising

California State University, Los Angeles, CA. Advisor,
graduate student committee member.
Loyola Marymount Univ. (CUREs), Westchester, CA. Co-
taught BIO 398 (field biology); advisor, graduate student
committee member.
UCLA Extension School, Los Angeles, CA. Instructor
(conservation biology and bird monitoring)
University of California, Riverside, CA. Graduate Teaching
Assistant, geomorphology, natural disasters, & astronomy.

Daniel S. Cooper

President, Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.

Long-term Projects

Griffith Park Natural History Survey

Researched and co-authored Griffith Park Wildlife Management Plan. Supervised development of website (www.griffithparkwildlife.org; with Cartifact, Inc.). Developed first-ever study of wildlife of Griffith Park, focusing on the 2007 burn area, including plants, breeding/wintering birds, reptiles/amphibians, and bats (ongoing).

Local Coastal Plan updates, Los Angeles Co. Worked with County Department of Regional Planning to develop conservation & management plan for Marina del Rey's LCP update, and to inventory and map biodiversity hotspots in central Santa Monica Mountains for the L.A. Co. Coastal Zone LCP update (2009-2014).

Baseline Bird Survey, Ballona Wetlands, Los Angeles.

Designed, organized and carried-out first major all-bird survey of entire Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve and adjacent lands for Santa Monica Bay; coordinated protocol-level and volunteer-led surveys for sensitive species, waterbirds, raptors, and breeding songbirds of the 500-acre site (2009-2012).

Harvard Forest, Petersham, MA. Visiting researcher in 2011, 2013, and 2016, studying the changes in avifauna and lepidoptera since 1993 surveys (as an undergraduate student) (ongoing).

Selected Publications

- Cooper, D.S. and A.E. Muchlinski. 2015. Recent decline of lowland populations of the western gray squirrel in the Los Angeles area of southern California. *Bull. Southern California Acad. Sci.* 114(1):42-53.
- Bonebrake, T.C. and D.S. Cooper. 2014. A Hollywood drama of butterfly extirpation and persistence over a century of urbanization. *Journal of Insect Conservation* 18(4):683-692.
- Cooper, D.S., L.S. Hall and A.J. Searcy. 2014. A population census of the cactus wren in Ventura County, California. *Western Birds* 45(1):43-56
- Cooper, D.S. 2012. Rare plants of Griffith Park, Los Angeles, California. *Fremontia* 38(4)/39(1):18-24.
- 2008. The use of historical data in the restoration of the avifauna of the Ballona Wetlands, Los Angeles County, California. *Natural Areas Journal* 28:83-90.