

APPENDIX B2
BURROWING OWL REPORT



September 26, 2022
(2021-113.01)

Mr. Paul Onufer
JPMB Investments, LLC
556 S. Fair Oaks Ave. #337
Pasadena, California 91105

SUBJECT: Results of Protocol-Level Focused Burrowing Owl Surveys at the Menifee 91 Residential Development Project in Menifee, California

Dear Mr. Onufer,

The purpose of this letter report is to document the findings of protocol-level focused surveys for burrowing owls at the 27.5-acre proposed Menifee 91 Residential Development Project (Project) located on Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs) 330-230-024 and 330-230-023 in the City of Menifee, Riverside County. ECORP Consulting, Inc. (ECORP) conducted four protocol-level focused burrowing owl surveys on June 11, August 17, August 20, and August 25, 2021, in accordance with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (Staff Report; CDFG 2012) and the *Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area* (WR MSHCP; Riverside County Land Management Agency [RCTLMA] 2006).

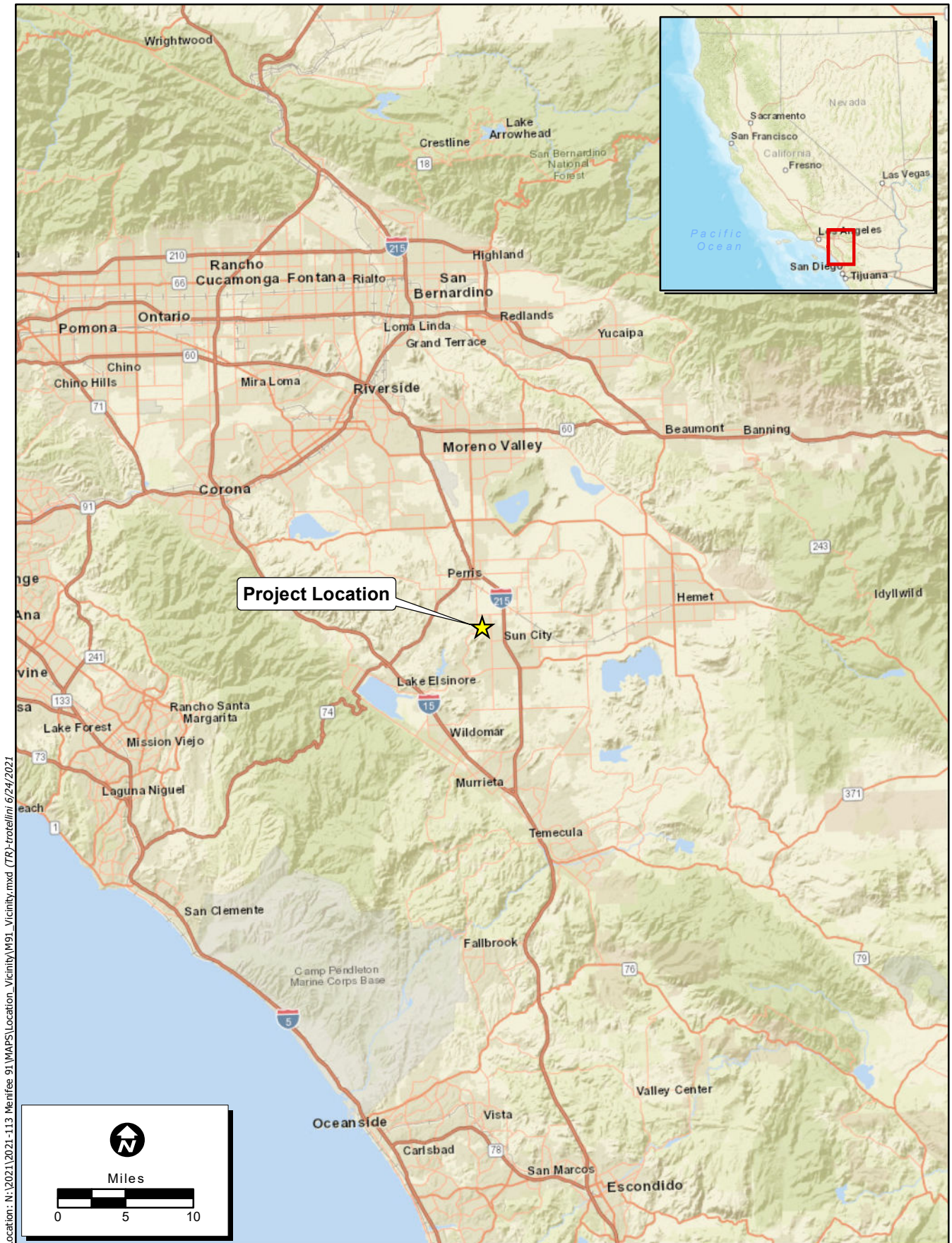
Project Description and Location

The proposed Project involves the construction of single-family residences on approximately 27.5 acres (APNs 330-230-023 and 330-230-024) in the City of Menifee, Riverside County. The Project site is located west of Interstate 215 and southwest of the intersection of Troy Lane and Byers Road, within the City of Menifee (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The Project site, as depicted on the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Romoland 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle, is located within Section 17, Township 5 South, Range 3 West. Elevation at the Project site is approximately 1,500 feet above mean sea level.

Project History

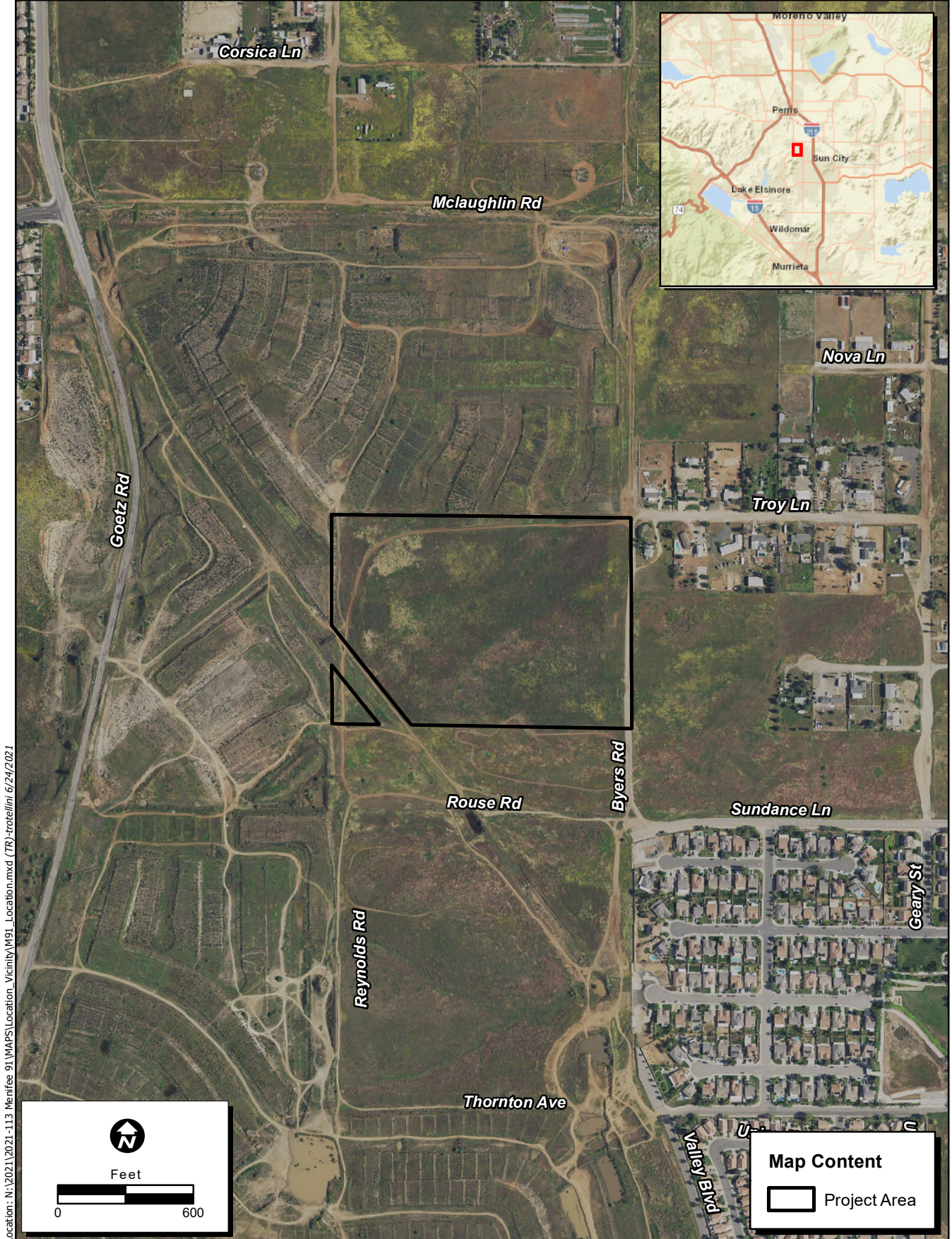
Literature Review and Biological Reconnaissance Survey

Prior to conducting the protocol-level burrowing owl surveys, ECORP conducted a review of CDFW's California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) and CDFW's Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS). The purpose of the literature review was to determine whether burrowing owls had been previously reported within the Project site or the surrounding USGS 7.5-minute topographic quadrangles (Romoland, Winchester, Lakeview, Perris, Steele Peak, Lake Elsinore, Wildomar, Murrieta, and Bachelor Mtn.) and if so, when these occurrences were recorded. Numerous occurrences for burrowing owl were documented within five miles of the Project site between 2002 and 2016 (CDFW 2021).



Map Date: 6/24/2021
 Service Layer Credits: Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), NGCC, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Figure 1. Project Vicinity



Location: N:\2021\2021-113 Menifee 91\WAPS\Location_Vicinity\M91_Location.mxd (TR): trote/lin/6/24/2021

Map Date: 6/24/2021
 Service Layer Credits: Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), NGCC, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Figure 2. Project Location

2021-113 Menifee 91

The Project site is located within a WR MSHCP designated burrowing owl survey area (RCTLMA 2006). The MSHCP provides information on plant and wildlife species of concern to the County of Riverside and outlines goals for their conservation (RCTLMA 2014). Due to the Project's location and numerous previously recorded burrowing owl observations within the immediate vicinity of the Project site, a burrowing owl habitat assessment was conducted simultaneously with the Biological Reconnaissance Survey conducted by Ecorp biologists in June 2021. The completed burrowing owl habitat assessment met the requirements of the focused burrow survey in part A of the *Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area* (RCTLMA 2006). During the habitat assessment, the presence of suitable habitat, including two potentially suitable burrows and one occupied burrow complex with sign, was recorded (Ecorp 2021). Therefore, three additional protocol-level burrowing owl surveys are required under part B of the *Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area* to determine the presence of owls in the Project area (RCTLMA 2006).

Burrowing Owl Natural History

Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC), a CDFW Species of Special Concern (SSC), and a WR MSHCP-Covered Species. The burrowing owl is a small, migratory owl found in various habitats throughout North America. Habitat requirements for burrowing owls consist of arid, open areas with sparse vegetation cover such as deserts, abandoned agricultural areas, grasslands, and disturbed open habitats. Burrowing owls can excavate their own burrows for shelter and breeding purposes; however, they often occupy abandoned mammal burrows such as those constructed by California ground squirrels (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*). Burrowing owls have also been known to nest within natural rock cavities, debris piles, culverts, and pipes (Rosenberg et al. 1998).

Methods

Protocol Focused Burrowing Owl Surveys

Four protocol-level burrowing owl surveys were conducted on four separate days in June and August 2021 by qualified biologists. The biologists walked pedestrian transects spaced 20-30 meters apart across the entire Project site and 500-foot buffer (survey area), where access was permissible. Surveys were conducted during the burrowing owl breeding season (February 1- August 31) and in accordance with the *Staff Report* (CDFG 2012) and the *Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area* (RCTLMA 2006). In locations where the survey area was inaccessible due to unknown property ownership; biologists visually surveyed the area with binoculars. Prior to the start of a transect, biologists visually surveyed the transect and surrounding area. The biologists visually inspected any burrows, rocky areas, or man-made materials within the survey area for potential burrowing owl occupation. All burrows encountered were inspected for presence or sign of burrowing owl (e.g. whitewash, pellets, feathers, and/or prey remains) and classified according to the guidelines in the *Staff Report* (CDFG 2012).

Data collected for each burrow included the condition and size of the burrow, number of entrances, presence of burrowing owl sign near the burrow, and location. The location was marked using a Global Positioning System (GPS). Burrows were individually numbered and classified into two categories based on definitions found in the *CDFG Staff Report* (CDFG 2012): occupied burrow or potential burrow.

Burrows classified as occupied showed sign (consisting of whitewash, feathers, pellets, and/or bones of prey outside the burrow), indicating burrowing owl presence and/or use at some point in time. Potential burrows were defined as burrows that are large enough for a burrowing owl but do not show sign of use by the species. Data were recorded on survey sheets and photographs were taken.

Weather data was recorded at the time of the surveys (including time, temperature, cloud cover, and wind speed at the start and end of the survey). Surveys were not conducted during rain, high winds (over 20 mph), dense fog, or temperatures over 90 °F. The initial focused burrow survey was completed at the time of the burrowing owl habitat assessment. The remaining three focused burrowing owl surveys were conducted in the morning one hour before sunrise and up to two hours after sunrise. Although efforts were made to complete each survey within two hours after sunrise, the final two surveys took a little longer and were completed shortly after the two hours after sunrise, while the weather conditions remained suitable for observing owls outside their burrows and detecting any sign of burrowing owl. Biologists also recorded the major plant and wildlife species observed or detected during the surveys.

Results

The protocol-level burrowing owl surveys were conducted by Ecorp biologists Lauren Simpson, Chelsie Brown, Alden Lovaas, and Joshua Harris on June 11, August 17, August 20, and August 25, 2021. Weather conditions during the surveys are provided in Table 1. Representative site photographs and potential burrows identified during the surveys can be found in Attachment A. A complete list of wildlife species observed is included in Attachment B and field data sheets are included in Attachment C.

Table 1- Weather Conditions

Date	Surveyors	Time		Temperature (F)		Cloud Cover (%)		Wind Speed (mph)	
		Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End
6/11/21	Gregory Hampton, Alexandra Dorough, Chelsie Brown,	1031	1310	76	86	0	0	0-2	4-5
8/17/21	Alden Lovaas & Chelsie Brown	0545	0810	69.4	81.6	0	0	1-3	0-2
8/20/21	Lauren Simpson & Chelsie Brown	0551	0838	62.8	66.7	60	100	0-1	1-3
8/25/21	Lauren Simpson & Joshua Harris	0600	0845	64.7	76.6	5	0	1-3	0-1

Project Site Description

The Project site consisted of a disturbed vacant lot composed of primarily nonnative vegetation, scattered trash, and several dump sites in the Project buffer. Evidence of historical disturbance (e.g. discing) was present on the project and recently disced or graded areas were present within the survey buffer adjacent to the Project site. Off-highway vehicle tracks and a dirt road are also present on the site. The plant communities within the survey area included disturbed wild oat and annual brome grassland (*Avena* spp. – *Bromus* spp. Herbaceous Semi-natural Alliance), disturbed California buckwheat

scrub (*Eriogonum fasciculatum* Shrubland Alliance), and mulefat thickets (*Baccharis salicifolia* Shrubland Alliance) with a disturbed/developed land cover present.

Burrowing Owl Presence

No burrowing owls were observed during the surveys and no occupied burrows were observed on the Project site. Two occupied burrows were observed north of the Project site and three occupied burrow complexes with burrowing owl sign (e.g., whitewash, pellets, feathers, bones of prey items) were observed east of the project site within the survey buffer. An additional six potential burrows and one potential burrow complex was also observed within the eastern and southwestern survey buffers (Attachment A - Figure 3).

Discussion

Four protocol-level focused surveys for burrowing owl were conducted by ECORP biologists on June 11, August 17, August 20, and August 25, 2021 within the survey area. Potentially suitable habitat was present in the survey area. Potential and occupied burrowing owl burrows and occupied burrowing owl complexes with burrowing owl sign were observed during the surveys. However, no burrowing owls or occupied burrowing owl burrows were observed or detected on the Project site.

Due to the mobile nature of the species, the previous documentation of potential burrows, identified occupied burrow complexes and burrows, and based on the presence of California ground squirrel activity, it is possible for burrowing owl to occupy the site before the start of construction of the project. Therefore, a pre-construction surveys for burrowing owl will be required within 30 days prior to ground disturbance activities, as described in the *Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area* (RCTLMA 2006).

Thank you for the opportunity to work on your project. If you have any questions regarding the contents of this letter report, please contact me at (909) 307-0046/pwasz@ecorpc consulting.com.

CERTIFICATION: I hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits present data and information required for this biological evaluation, and the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

SIGNED: 

Phillip Wasz
Senior Wildlife Biologist
ECORP Consulting, Inc.
215 N. 5th Street
Redlands, CA 92374

DATE: September 26, 2022

Attachment A: Figure 3. Burrowing Owl Survey Results

Attachment B: Representative Site and Burrow Photographs

Attachment B: Wildlife Species Observed

Literature Cited

California Department of Fish and Game [CDFG]. 2012. Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. State of California, Natural Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Wildlife.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW]. 2021. RareFind California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). California. Sacramento, CA, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Biogeographic Data Branch.

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Riverside County Land Management Agency [RCTLMA]. 2021. Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Available from:
<http://rctlma.org/Portals/0/mshcp/volume1/index.html>

_____. 2014. About Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (WR-MSHCP). Available from: <https://rctlma.org/epd/wr-mshcp>.

_____. 2006. Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Available from:
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Rosenberg, D. K., J. A. Gervais, H. Ober, and D. F. DeSante. 1998. An adaptive management plan for the burrowing owl population at Naval Air Station Lemoore, California, USA. Publication 95, Institute for Bird Populations, P.O. Box 1346, Pt. Reyes Station, CA 94956.

ATTACHMENT A

Figure 3. Burrowing Owl Survey Results

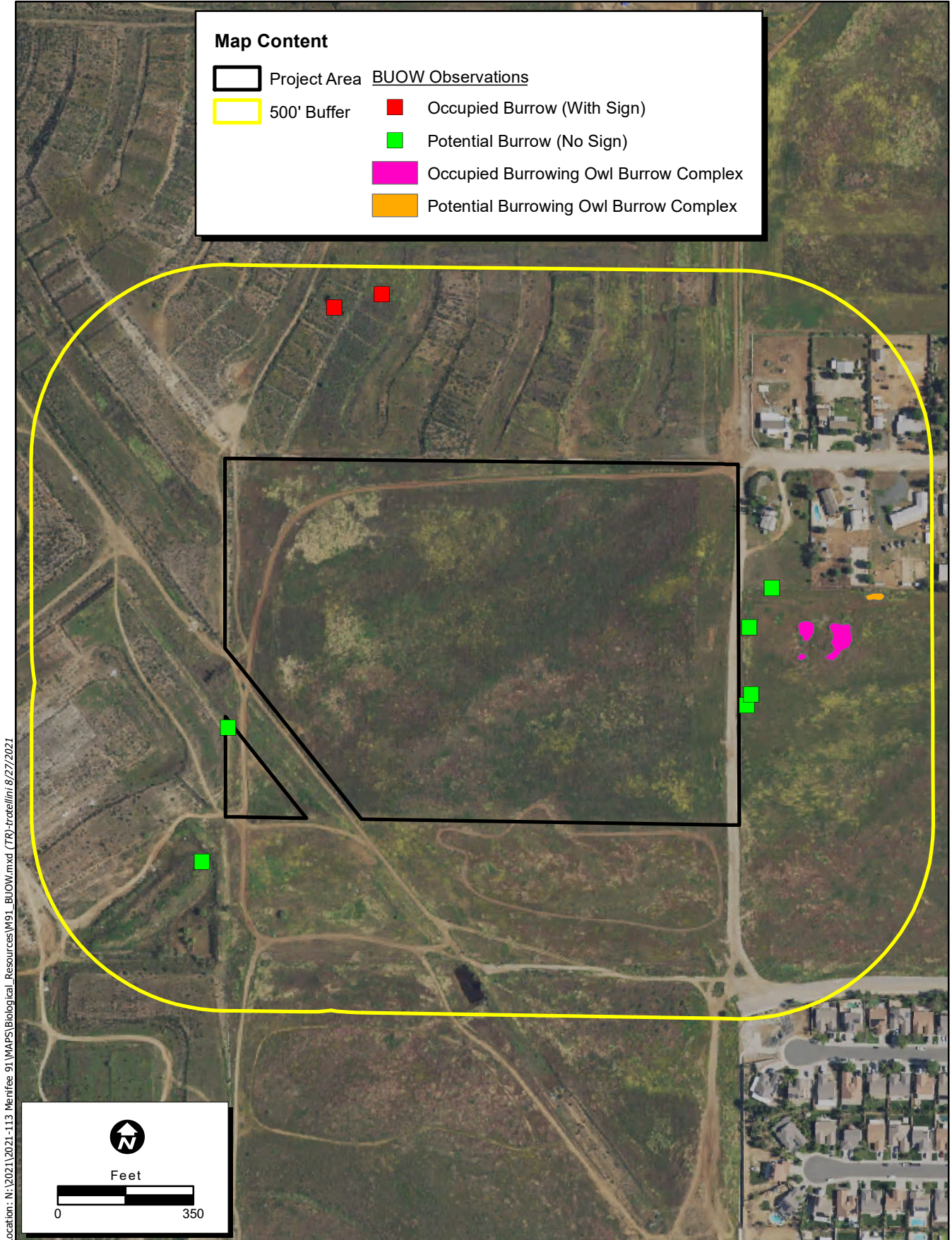


Figure 3. Burrowing Owl Survey Results

ATTACHMENT B

Representative Site and Burrow Photos



Photo 1: Disturbed wild oat and annual brome grassland on Project site, facing west



Photo 2: Project site from northern boundary, facing east



Photo 3: Vehicle tracks and dirt roads throughout the site, facing south



Photo 4: Project site from northeast corner of Project site, facing southwest



Photo 5: Vehicle tracks through project site, facing west



Photo 6: Dump site along the southern boundary of the Project, facing northeast



Photo 7: Dump site and disturbed California buckwheat scrub in northern Project buffer, facing northwest



Photo 8: Occupied burrow complex with approximately 40 burrows, within 500-foot buffer east of Project site



Photo 9: Occupied burrow complexes, within 500-foot buffer east of Project site



Photo 10: Occupied burrow complex with approximately 36 burrows, within 500-foot buffer east of Project site



Photo 11: Potential burrow complex with approximately 15 burrows, within 500-foot buffer east of Project site



Photo 12: Owl pellet found at burrow complex to the east of Project site



Photo 13: Bones of prey located at occupied burrow complex in eastern Project buffer.



Photo 14: Occupied burrows in berm with bones of prey present, within 500-foot buffer north of Project site



Photo 15: Potential burrow at base of berm, within 500-foot buffer southwest of Project site

ATTACHMENT C

Wildlife Species Observed

SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME
AVES	BIRDS
ALAUDIDAE	LARKS
<i>Eremophila alpestris actia</i>	California horned lark
ACCIPITRIDAE	EAGLES AND HAWKS
<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Cooper's hawk
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed hawk
<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	Northern harrier
<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	White-tailed kite
CAPRIMULGIDAE	NIGHTJARS
<i>Chordeiles acutipennis</i>	Lesser nighthawk
CATHARTIDAE	NEW WORLD VULTURES OR CONDORS
<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Turkey vulture
CHARADRIIDAE	PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS
<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	Killdeer
COLUMBIDAE	DOVES AND PIGEONS
<i>Streptopelia decaocto*</i>	Eurasian collared dove
<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Mourning dove
CORVIDAE	CROWS AND JAYS
<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common raven
CUCULIDAE	ROADRUNNERS
<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	Greater roadrunner
FALCONIDAE	FALCONS AND CARACARAS
<i>Falco sparverius</i>	American kestrel
FRINGILLIDAE	FINCHES & EUPHONIAS
<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	House finch
HIRUNDINIDAE	SWALLOWS, MARTINS, & SAW-WINGS
<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	Cliff swallow
ICTERIDAE	NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS
<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	Western meadowlark
LANIIDAE	SHRIKES
<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Loggerhead shrike
MIMIDAE	MOCKINGBIRDS
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Northern mockingbird
PASSERELLIDAE	NEW WORLD SPARROWS
<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	Savannah sparrow
<i>Passerellidae spp.</i>	Sparrow spp.
POLIOPTILIDAE	GNATCATCHERS
<i>Polioptila californica californica</i>	Coastal California gnatcatcher
STRIGIDAE	OWLS
<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Burrowing owl (old sign observed, no live owls)
TROCHILIDAE	HUMMINGBIRDS
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's hummingbird
<i>Selasphorus sasin</i>	Allen's hummingbird
TYRANNIDAE	TYRANT FLYCATCHERS
<i>Sayornis saya</i>	Say's phoebe

TYTONIDAE	BARN-OWLS
<i>Tyto alba</i>	Barn owl
MAMMALIA	MAMMALS
CANIDAE	DOGS
<i>Canis latrans</i>	Coyote
SCIURIDAE	SQUIRRELS
<i>Ostospermophilus beecheyi</i>	California Ground Squirrel
LEPORIDAE	RABBITS
<i>Lepus californicus bennettii</i>	San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit
<i>Sylvilagus sp.</i>	Cottontail rabbit