EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

APPLICANT: County of Fresno, Department of Public Works and Planning, Design Division

APPLICATION NOS.: Initial Study No. 7946

DESCRIPTION: The project proposes a culvert replacement along Dinkey Creek Road over Markwood Creek. The replacement bridge will consist of a concrete slab with two 12-foot-wide travel lanes and two 4-foot-wide shoulders with a vertical limit of roadway construction no to exceed 6 feet in depth. The replacement bridge is proposed to be constructed along a new alignment of Dinkey Creek Road downstream of the existing road alignment.

LOCATION: The project site is located along Dinkey Creek Road, approximately 4.84 miles east of Highway 168.

I. AESTHETICS

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:

A. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project site is located along Dinkey Creek Road over Markwood Creek between Auberry Road and State Route 168. This section of Dinkey Creek Road is located within the foothills area that separates the valley floor from the Sierra Nevada mountain range. With the foothills be the predominate feature of the area, scenic vistas of the surrounding foothills could be affected by development. However, in the case of this project, the intent is to replace the existing bridge with an up-to-code bridge where the bridge would be located at ground-level and not impact scenic vistas.

B. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION MEASURES:

Consideration of the existing environmental at each project site indicates that tree and rock removal may occur at the site to accommodate the new bridge structures. Per the

Fresno County General Plan Figure OS-2, Dinkey Creek Road at the project site is not designated as a scenic roadway. Potential removal of rocks and trees at the project sites were not identified as important scenic resources and would not result in a significant impact if removed.

The project implementation would not result in substantial adverse impacts to the visual character and quality of the surrounding area. Temporary changes in the visual quality and character of the site through vegetation removal to allow for the construction of the bridge and realignment of Dinkey Creek Road would occur. Due to the potential removal of vegetation during construction of the project the VIA recommended implementation of a Mitigation Measure to offset the change in visual quality and character of the site. The recommended Mitigation Measure will include the revegetation of disturbed areas with a native seed mix to ensure that the project site would be returned to a state close to pre-project conditions.

Biotic Habitat/Land Use	Impacts (acres)		
	Permanent	Temporary	Total
Sierran mixed conifer forest	0.01	1.33	1.34
Dry montane meadow	---	0.20	0.20
Wet montane meadow	<0.01	0.01	0.01
Sierran willow scrub	<0.01	0.01	0.01
Snowbush chaparral	0.03	0.76	0.79
Perennial channel of Markwood Creek	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Ephemeral roadside ditch	---	---	---
Ruderal roadside	0.06	0.88	0.94
Paved road (Dinkey Creek Road)	0.14	0.34	0.48
Total	**0.25**	**3.53**	**3.77**

Source: Compiled by LSA (2023).
BSA = Biological Study Area

* ***Mitigation Measure(s)***

1. *Prior to construction, prior to the start of construction, a qualified botanist shall conduct focused surveys for special-status vascular plants, and a qualified bryologist shall conduct focused surveys for special status bryophytes. The surveys shall be conducted during the appropriate flowering or identification period for each species.*

C. In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project intends to replace the existing bridges with bridges that would be compliant with current standards for design and safety. The project site is public right-if-way that

would be constructed at ground-level where degradation of the existing visual character would not occur.

D. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project does not proposed the addition of street lighting to illuminate the right-of-way. Outside of construction activities that may necessitate the use of lighting, the operation of the project would not result in a new source of light or glare which would negatively impact the surrounding area.

II. AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Dept. of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment project; and forest carbon measurement methodology in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board. Would the project:

A. Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The 2016 Fresno County Important Farmland Map indicates that the project sites are designated Grazing Land. Construction activities related to the bridge replacement project indicate that land would be converted from this agricultural use to accommodate the bridge realignment and replacement. Although a conversion could occur, the site is not designated Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Therefore, no impact is seen.

B. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act Contract?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The area around abutting the roadway is designated for agricultural use and is mainly orchards. The project will result in no conversion or confliction with agricultural use as the project is within the boundaries of the roadway.

C. Conflict with existing zoning for forest land, timberland or timberland zoned Timberland Production; or

D. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project sites are no zoned for forest land, timberland or timberland zoned Timberland Production and would not result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

E. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project intends to remove and replace three existing bridges that have been determined to be substandard. Replacement bridges would be compliant with current standards and regulations. Although conversion of farmland is expected to occur due to right-of-way acquisition, the project would not result in additional conversion of farmland to non-agricultural or use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

III. AIR QUALITY

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations. Would the project:

A. Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable Air Quality Plan; or

B. Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) were included in the review of the project. No concerns were expressed by the SJVAPCD nor any other reviewing agency or department regarding the project's impact on criteria pollutant generation. No applicable Air Quality Plan was identified as being in conflict with the project.

Temporary increases to criteria pollutants would occur during construction and demolition activities related to the project. These activities will be subject to regulatory requirements established by the SJVAPCD. Project compliance with SJVAPCD regulatory requirements would ensure that the project does not conflict with an applicable Air Quality Plan and result in less than significant impacts in relation to

pollutant increases associated with project activities. Once project activities are complete, criteria pollutant generation is expected to return to pre-project conditions.

C. Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations; or

D. Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

No comments were received regarding air quality concerns for this project. The project is anticipated to return to baseline traffic following construction because no additional through lanes are proposed. Given the limited scope, this proposed project is not expected to conflict with or obstruct implementation of the application Air Quality Plan or violate any air quality standard or result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in any criteria pollutant for which the project region is designated a non-attainment area, under ambient air-quality standard.

In consideration of the distance between sensitive receptors, emissions and pollutant concentrations resulting from construction of the project would have a less than significant impact on sensitive receptors. Additionally, emissions and pollutant concentration increases would be a result of construction and demolition activities and be temporary in nature. Once construction and demolition are complete, site conditions would return to pre-project conditions.

IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

A. 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 the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED:

A Biological Study Area (BSA) was prepared for the project in March 2023 by LSA encompassing approximately 2.37 acres (ac) that includes the culvert and a potential staging area, a potential staging area west of the culvert totaling 1.26 ac, and a potential staging area east of the culvert totaling 1.40 ac. All three segments of the BSA occur along a 2,000-foot (ft) stretch of Dinkey Creek Road.

Species	Determination	Rationale for the Determination
Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*)	Not Likely to Adversely Affect	With implementation of mitigation measures listed above.
Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (*Rana sierrae*)	Not Likely to Adversely Affect	Habitat marginal due to presence of trout in the creek; modern regional occurrences are absent.
Yosemite toad (*Anaxyrus canorus*)	No Effect	Project outside of species range.
Delta smelt (*Hypomesus transpacificus*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.
Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.
Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus* ssp. *dimorphus*)	No Effect	Project outside of species range.
Foothill yellow-legged frog (*Rana boylii*)	Not Likely to Adversely Affect	With implementation of mitigation measures listed above.
Vernal pool fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.
Mariposa pussypaws (*Calyptridium pulchellum*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.
Succulent owl's clover (*Castilleja campestris* ssp. *succulenta*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.
Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii henshawi*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.
Keck's checkerbloom (*Sidalcea keckii*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.
San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*)	No Effect	Habitat absent.

Mitigation Measure(s)

1. Prior to construction, the County shall implement the following measures to reduce potential impacts to special-status plant species. Special-status plants are under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). a. Prior to construction, a qualified botanist shall conduct focused surveys for special-status vascular plants, and a qualified biologist shall conduct focused surveys for special status bryophytes. The surveys shall be conducted during the appropriate flowering or identification period for each species. The surveys will be conducted no more than 1 year prior to onset of construction.

b. If special-status plants are identified during the surveys, a salvage and relocation plan shall be prepared. At a minimum, the plan shall include the following:

i. Construction limits in habitats occupied by special-status plant species shall be staked prior to ground-disturbing activities. A preconstruction survey will be conducted during the appropriate identification period of any special-status plant species to determine the location of individuals relative to the limits of the Project in order to evaluate how much of the population will be impacted.

ii. If special-status plants are identified outside of the proposed disturbance area and will not be directly impacted by the Project, brightly colored Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) fencing shall be placed along the limits of the work to protect the adjacent plants. Fencing shall be maintained in good condition for the duration of the construction activities, and entry within these zones shall be prohibited.

iii. If special-status plants are identified within the proposed disturbance area and will be directly impacted by construction activities, viable seeds shall be salvaged from the affected plants at the appropriate point in the flowering process to be sown within the Project area following construction. Alternatively, the topsoil associated with the existing population(s) shall be salvaged prior to construction and stored in a
weed-free location until construction activities are complete. The topsoil shall consist of the upper 12 inches (approximately) of soil and associated vegetation. Following completion of construction activities, graded areas shall be ripped or otherwise decompacted, if necessary. The salvaged topsoil shall then be spread evenly on the graded areas and lightly compacted (e.g., “track-walked”).

iv. Seed collection and distribution and/or topsoil salvage and replacement shall be performed by a qualified biologist or botanist.

v. Monitoring and reporting requirements shall be established and approved by the CDFW and/or USFWS.

2. Prior to construction, the County of Fresno (County) shall implement the following measures to reduce the spread of invasive species:

a. All earthmoving equipment to be used during project construction shall be cleaned thoroughly before arrival on the Project site.

b. All seeding equipment (e.g., hydroseed trucks) shall be thoroughly rinsed at least three times prior to beginning seeding work.

c. To avoid spreading any nonnative invasive species already existing on site to off-site areas, all equipment shall be thoroughly cleaned before leaving the site.

3. Prior to construction, the County shall implement the following measure to reduce potential impacts to nesting birds:

a. If possible, all trees that will be impacted by Project construction shall be removed during the non-nesting season (between September 1 and January 31) unless they are identified as potential bat habitat trees.

b. If work begins between February 1 and August 31, preconstruction surveys for nesting birds within the BSA and within a 500-ft buffer for nesting raptors shall be conducted by a qualified biologist no more than 14 days prior to tree removal or initiation of any construction activities.

c. If no nesting activity is observed, work may proceed as planned. If active nests are identified, a qualified biologist shall evaluate the potential for the work activities to disturb typical nesting behavior of the birds and, if needed, establish appropriate buffers to protect nesting activity. The width of the buffer zone shall be based on a site-specific analysis considering the species, nest location, and observed behavior prepared by a Qualified Biologist. Initial buffer standards shall be a minimum of 25 ft for non-raptor bird species and a minimum of 250 ft for raptor species. All construction work shall be conducted outside any designated avoidance zones. Standard buffer zones shorter or larger than minimum buffers may be required depending upon the status of the nest and the construction activities occurring in the vicinity of the nest. The biologist shall have full
discretion for establishing a suitable buffer. The buffer area(s) shall be closed to all construction personnel and equipment until the young are no longer reliant on the nest site.

d. The qualified biologist should perform at least two hours of preconstruction monitoring of the nest to characterize “typical” bird behavior. The qualified biologist should monitor the nesting birds and may

increase the buffer if the qualified biologist determines the birds are showing signs of unusual or distressed behavior by project activities. Atypical nesting behaviors which may cause reproductive harm include, but are not limited to, defensive flights/vocalizations directed towards project personnel, standing up from a brooding position, and flying away from the nest.

e. The qualified biologist should have authority, through the resident engineer, to order the cessation of all project activities if the nesting birds exhibit atypical behavior that may cause reproductive failure (nest abandonment and loss of eggs and/or young) until an appropriate buffer is established.

f. To prevent encroachment, the established buffer(s) should be clearly marked by high-visibility material. If any work is proposed within this buffer, the CDFW should be notified and should have the authority to reassess protective buffers and/or establish other avoidance and minimization measures.

g. Disturbance of active nests should be avoided until it is determined by a qualified biologist that nesting is complete and either the young have fledged or the nest has failed. If work is allowed to proceed, a qualified biologist should be on site during the start of construction activities to monitor nesting activity. The biologist should have the authority to stop work if it is determined that the Project is adversely affecting nesting activities. Any sign of nest abandonment should be reported to the CDFW within 48 hours.

4. Prior to construction, the County shall implement the following measures to reduce potential impacts to bats:

a. Work activities shall be limited to daylight hours to avoid potential effects to foraging bats.

b. Potential bat habitat trees, identified by a qualified bat biologist during a tree habitat assessment conducted several months prior to tree removal, shall be removed only between approximately March 1 and April 15, prior to parturition of pups, and when evening temperatures remain above 45°F and rainfall does not exceed 0.5 inch in 24 hours. The next acceptable period is after pups become self-sufficiently volant between September 1 and about October 15, or prior to evening temperatures dropping below 45°F and onset of rainfall greater than 0.5 inch in 24 hours.

c. Bat habitat trees should be removed only during seasonal periods of bat activity as described above, and only after:
i. Negative results from a night emergence survey conducted no more than one to two nights prior to tree removal by a qualified bat biologist using night vision and/or infrared sensitive camera equipment and bioacoustic recording equipment, or;

ii. All other vegetation other than trees within the limits of work is removed prior to bat habitat tree removal during seasonal periods of activity and, preferably, within 4 days of commencing a two-step removal of habitat trees in accordance with the following measures:

1. Two-step tree removal over 2 consecutive days (e.g., Tuesday and Wednesday, or Thursday and Friday). With this method, small branches and small limbs containing no cavity, crevice, or exfoliating bark habitat on habitat trees as identified by a qualified bat biologist are removed first on Day 1, using chainsaws only (no dozers, backhoes, etc.). The following day (Day 2), the remainder of the tree is to be removed. The disturbance caused by chainsaw noise and vibration, coupled with the physical alteration of the tree, has the effect of causing colonial bat species to abandon the roost tree after nightly emergence for foraging. Removing the tree the next day prevents re-habituation and re-occupation of the altered tree.

2. Trees containing suitable potential habitat must be trimmed with chainsaws on Day 1 under initial field supervision by a qualified bat biologist to ensure that the tree cutters fully understand the process

and avoid incorrectly cutting potential habitat features or trees. After tree cutters have received sufficient instruction, the qualified bat biologist does not need to remain on the site.

d. If non-habitat trees or other vegetation must be removed outside the seasonal periods outlined above, a 100 ft buffer around each habitat tree should be observed to reduce the potential for disturbing non-volant young during maternity season or torpid bats during winter months.

5. Prior to construction, the County shall implement the following measures to reduce potential impacts to western pond turtles, foothill yellow-legged frog (FYLF), and Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (SNYLF):

a. Worker environmental awareness training shall be conducted by a qualified biologist for all construction personnel. The training shall instruct workers about the purpose of ESA fencing and the resources being protected.

b. Prior to the start of construction activities within Markwood Creek, the BSA shall be surveyed by a qualified biologist for the presence of special-status amphibians and reptiles. If any special-status species are observed in the BSA, work shall be
stopped and the individual shall be allowed to passively relocate outside of the work area.

c. Any emergent or submergent aquatic vegetation shall be retained as practical within the constraints of the Project. Where vegetation removal is necessary, rapidly sprouting plants, such as willows, shall be cut off at the ground line and the root systems left intact when feasible.

6. Prior to and during construction, the County shall implement the following measures to reduce potential impacts to aquatic resources. These Best Management Practices (BMPs) are intended to prevent erosion and sedimentation outside of work areas, prevent impacts to upland areas outside of designated work zones, control dust, and prevent accidental fuel or oil spills in or near wetlands and other waters.

a. Brightly colored ESA fencing shall be placed along the limits of work to prevent unnecessary encroachment into seasonal wetlands. Fencing shall be maintained in good condition for the duration of construction activities.

b. Any emergent or submergent aquatic vegetation shall be retained as practical within the constraints of the Project. Where vegetation removal is necessary, rapidly sprouting plants, such as willows and tule, shall be cut off at the ground line and the root systems left intact.

c. Designate vehicle and equipment staging areas that are located at least 100 ft from wetlands and other waters. All Project vehicles and equipment shall be stored in these areas overnight or when not in use. Any vehicle fueling or other maintenance shall only occur within designated staging areas.

d. Stake the boundaries of designated work areas and ensure all vehicles and equipment stay within the designated boundaries.

e. Clean up accumulated garbage and construction debris on a daily basis.

f. All personnel involved in the construction activities shall be briefed on water quality and special-status species concerns associated with the Project. All heavy equipment shall be maintained to prevent fluid leaks.

g. Fueling and maintenance of vehicles shall take place at least 100 ft away from wetlands and other areas where potential leaks could travel into the creek.

h. The Project will be required to implement a compensatory mitigation plan that identifies mitigation to address permanent loss, including functions and values, of jurisdictional aquatic resources. Compensatory mitigation may involve the restoration, establishment, enhancement, and/or preservation of aquatic resources through one or more of the following methods:

i. Purchase of credits from an agency-approved mitigation bank.

ii. Preservation of aquatic resource through acquisition of property.

iii. Establishment, restoration, or enhancement of aquatic resources.

B. Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED:

Construction of the proposed Project would result in potential impacts to nesting and foraging habitat for birds and bats; foraging and denning habitat for fisher; and aquatic habitat for western pond turtle, FYLF, and SNYLF. The Project will result in permanent and temporary impacts to natural communities, including Sierra mixed conifer forest, dry montane meadow, wet montane meadow, Sierran willow scrub, snowbush chaparral, the perennial channel of Markwood Creek, the ephemeral roadside ditch, and ruderal roadside. The proposed Project would include the removal of eighteen (18) surveyed trees: six (6) incense cedar, four (4) Jeffery pine, three (3) red fir, two (2) white fir, two (2) willows, and one (1) ponderosa pine (see Section A).

C. Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally-protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

The project intends to replace three bridges located along Dinkey Creek Road. Work conducted within the creek is subject to permit and review by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and is mandatory. The Natural Environment Study (NES) also concluded that measures in accordance with Executive Order 11990 for the protection of wetlands be included to allow protection of wetlands and is expected to be complied with as a regulatory requirement. Therefore, construction of the replacement bridges will be subject to regulatory requirements established by CDFW and in accordance with Executive Order 11990 and would not result in a substantial adverse effect on state or federally-protected wetlands.

D. 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?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Once construction and demolition are complete, the new bridge is not anticipated to interfere substantially with the movement of any wildlife species. There were no migratory corridor or wildlife nursery site identified on the project site. Therefore, due to the temporary impacts associated with construction activities, a less than significant impact is seen. The prepared Natural Environment Study did not identify any Critical Habitats on or near the project site.

E. Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance; or

F. Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state Habitat Conservation Plan?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

There were no conflicting policies or ordinances identified as a result of the analysis. The project is required to be in compliance with Federal, State, and local regulations and statutes for biological resources. As noted, sensitive natural communities and riparian habitat are addressed, and the project would not significantly impact habitat where a conflict with a conservation plan would occur.

V. CULTURAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

A. Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5; or

B. Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5; or

C. Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED:

The project would allow construction of replacement bridge for purposes of realignment of the right-of-way and removal of the existing bridge after the replacement is constructed. Reviewing agencies and departments did not express concern with the project to indicate the presence of a historical or archeological resources on the project site. As the proposed bridges are planned to be located in previously undisturbed area, mitigation measures shall be incorporated to properly address a cultural or tribal cultural resource, should they be unearthed during ground-disturbing activities.

Mitigation Measure(s)

1. *In the event that cultural resources are unearthed during ground-disturbing activities, all work shall be halted in the area of the find. An Archeologist shall be called to evaluate the findings and make any necessary mitigation recommendations. If human remains are unearthed during ground-disturbing activities, no further disturbance is to occur until the Fresno County Sheriff-Coroner has made the necessary findings as to origin and disposition. All normal evidence procedures should be followed by photos, reports, video, etc. If such remains are determined to be Native American, the Sheriff-Coroner must notify the Native American Commission within 24 hours.*

VI. ENERGY

Would the project:

A. Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation; or

B. Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project would be subject to all applicable state and local regulations for energy efficiency. Construction of the project would result in the use of energy resources related to equipment usage. Upon completion of the project, operation of the right-of-way would not result in the use of energy resources.

VII. GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Would the project:

A. Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:

1. Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Per the Earthquake Hazards Zone Application maintained by the California Department of Conservation, there are no known earthquake faults or ruptures of a known earthquake fault located on or near the project site.

2. Strong seismic ground shaking?

3. Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Per Figure 9-5, the project sites are located in an area designated as having a 0%-20% peak horizontal ground acceleration during a probabilistic seismic hazard assuming a 10% probability in 50 years. The project is not likely to be negatively affected by strong seismic ground shaking or seismic-related ground failure as the surrounding area has been identified as being affected by a lower chance of reaching peak ground acceleration during a seismic hazard. The project would be constructed to current building code standards which would consider site conditions and seismic conditions.

4. Landslides?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

According to Figure 9-6 of the FCGPBR, the project sites are not located in an area identified as having a moderate or high landslide hazard.

B. Result in substantial soil erosion or loss of topsoil?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

The project intends to construct replacement bridge along Dinkey Creek Road. Work within and around the creek is expected to complete the project. These construction activities may impact the creek and result in changes to soil erosion patterns, however regulatory permits required by the Regional Water Quality Control Board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife would ensure that the project would not result in substantial soil erosion. Therefore, a less than significant impact is seen as a result of the project.

C. Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

No geologic unit or unstable soil was identified on the project site. The project will be constructed to current building and safety codes and would take into account site conditions.

C. Be located on expansive soil as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Figure 7-1 of the Fresno County General Plan Background Report (FCGPBR), the project will not be sited on soils exhibiting moderately high to high expansion potential.

D. Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water; or

E. Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project does not require or propose the construction of a septic system or alternative wastewater disposal system. There were no paleontological resource or unique geologic feature identified on the project site.

VIII. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Would the project:

A. Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment; or

B. Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

A Greenhouse Gas Analysis Memorandum was prepared in January 2021 by Analytical Environmental Services for the project. This memo identifies applicable regulatory settings including State and Federal GHG emission reduction goals. The memo estimates approximately 299 metric tons of Carbon Dioxide Emissions (CO_2e) resulting from project construction. The project does not alter existing traffic patterns and therefore would not increase GHG emissions. The analysis concludes that the project would not result in substantial emissions of GHGs during construction and have no effect on long term traffic operations. The project would also not conflict with the goals and objectives of any applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing GHG emissions. A less than significant impact is seen due to the incremental contribution to GHG emissions.

VIII. HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Would the project:

A. Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials; or

B. Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

The project would not result in a significant hazard to the public and environment during construction/demolition activities related to the project. Upon completion of the construction of the project, operation of the use would not result in a significant hazard as there is no utilization of hazardous materials associated with the right-of-way.

C. Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

There are no schools within a one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school.

D. Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

According to the NEPAssist database, there are no listed hazardous materials sites within a half-mile radius of the project sites.

E. For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project sites are not located within an airport land use plan and not within two miles of a public airport or public use airport.

F. Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan; or

G. Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Reviewing agencies and departments did not express concern with the project to indicate an impairment of implementation of an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. Additionally, no comments concerning risk due to wildland fires were expressed by reviewing agencies and departments. Concerning the possible emergency response vehicles, two of the bridge sites are proposed to be realigned where the existing bridge will remain until the replacement bridge is completed. This will avoid lengthy detours and provide continuous right-of-way for this area. The other

bridge will construct a temporary creek crossing area while the existing bridge is demolished and replaced.

X. HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

Would the project:

A. Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality; or

B. Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED:

An Aquatic Resources Delineation (ARD) prepared by LSA IN 2023 for the project found that potential water quality effects from project-related construction activities could occur. Implementation of best management practices and compliance with regulatory requirements will minimize and reduce the projects impact on water quality. As recommended in the report, focusing on BMPs will be implemented to ensure short-term and long-term impacts to water quality impacts resulting from the project and would not be substantial. In addition to the recommended mitigation measures, the project is also expected to comply with regulatory requirements through permit and approval from responsible agencies including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and potential requirements from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. With these considerations, the project will not violate water quality standards or waste discharge requirements and would not decrease groundwater recharge or supplies.

C. Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would result in substantial erosion or siltation on or off site?

1. Result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;

2. Substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or offsite?

3. Create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or

4. Impede or redirect flood flows?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

As discussed, the project is subject to permit and approval from regulatory agencies to ensure that no significant impact occurs to the course of Markwood Creek. The project will be constructed to current code and meet classification requirements under the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Temporary impacts resulting from the rerouting of the water course should construction activity be needed within Markwood Creek would be permitted through the applicable regulatory agency and would not result in significant impact. When construction and demolition is complete, the course alteration will be removed, and post-project conditions will not result in significant impact. This will ensure that no substantial erosion or siltation occurs, the rate of surface runoff will not result in flooding and would not impede or redirect flood flows.

D. In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED:

Review of applicable FEMA FIRM Panels indicate that the subject site is subject to flooding from the 100-year storm event. The proposed bridge replacement and right-of-way realignment could result in pollutant risk during construction. Once construction is complete, the replacement is expected to meet current standards and is planned to better handle flooding during the 100-year storm event when compared to the existing functionally obsolete bridge. Mitigation measures as recommended in the prepared Water Quality Report (WQR) will require that equipment and vehicle storage and maintenance be located at least 60 feet from riparian habitat or water bodies to avoid spills and inundation risks that could potentially drain into the body of water. This will reduce its risk of pollutant release to a less than significant impact. There are no bodies of water to indicate increased risk due to tsunami or seiche events.

E. Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

As noted in the previous sections, the project is subject to review and permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Compliance through permit requirements of both regulatory agencies will ensure that the project does not conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan. The project does not utilize water resources to the extent that a groundwater management plan would be impacted.

XI. LAND USE AND PLANNING

Would the project:

A. Physically divide an established community; or

B. Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project intends to replace a bridge that has been determined to be functionally obsolete and replace it with a bridge that would be constructed to current standards. Construction of the replacement bridge would occur first with the existing bridge remaining to avoid traffic detour. Once the replacement bridge is constructed, the existing bridge will be demolished. The project would not physically divide an established community.
There were no land use plan, policy or regulation identified that would be in conflict with the project.

XII. MINERAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

A. Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state; or

B. Result in the loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local General Plan, Specific Plan or other land use plan?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Per Figure 7-7 of the Fresno County General Plan Background Report, the project site could potentially be located in the vicinity of an identified mineral resource. However, the project site is located along public right-of-way and is not likely to result in the loss of availability of the known mineral resource. According to Figure 7-8 the project site is not located near a principal mineral producing location.

XIII. NOISE

Would the project result in:

A. Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies; or

B. Generation of excessive ground-borne vibration or ground-borne noise levels?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Temporary increases in noise generation related to construction and demolition activities associated with the project would occur. The closest sensitive receptor from the site is located approximately 4 miles west of the bridge site. The project will be subject to the regulations under the Fresno County Noise Ordinance. In consideration of nearby sensitive receptors and compliance of the project with the Fresno County Noise Ordinance, the project will have a less than significant impact.

C. For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels; or

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project sites are not located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or airport land use plan, nor are they located within two miles of a public airport or public use airport.

XIV. POPULATION AND HOUSING

Would the project:

A. Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?; or

B. Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project intends to demolish and replace three bridge sites that were determined to fall below current state and local design and safety standards. The project would not induce substantial unplanned population growth or displace a substantial number of people or housing.

XV. PUBLIC SERVICES

Would the project:

A. Result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically-altered governmental facilities, or the need for new or physically-altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services?

1. Fire protection;

2. Police protection;

3. Schools;

4. Parks; or

5. Other public facilities?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project would not result in the requirement or provision of new or physically-altered governmental facilities. As noted, the project proposes to demolish and replace three bridges along Dinkey Creek Road and would not result in the need for additional public services.

XVI. RECREATION

Would the project:

A. Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated; or

B. Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities, which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project proposes to demolish and replace three bridges along Dinkey Creek Road. The project does include or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities nor would it increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional recreational facilities.

XVI. TRANSPORTATION

Would the project:

A. Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities; or

B. Would the project conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?; or

C. Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?; or

D. Result in inadequate emergency access?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project proposes to demolish and replace the existing bridge along Dinkey Creek Road. As determined by the California Department of Transportation, the existing bridge sites were classified as structurally deficient and requires replacement. The project does not propose an increase in lanes or capacity where Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) would increase. There are no identified programs, plans, ordinances, or policies that would be in conflict with the project. There were no design features identified as increasing hazards.

XVIII. TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

A. Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

1. Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or

2. A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED:

Under the provisions of Assembly Bill 52 (AB 52), participating California Native American Tribes were notified of the project and given the opportunity to enter into consultation with the County of Fresno. No request for consultation was received and no concerns were expressed by notified California Native American Tribes.

Given the project scope, mitigation measures are proposed to be implemented to ensure proper procedure is in place, should a cultural resource be unearthed during project construction and demolition.

* ***Mitigation Measure(s)***

1. See Section V. Cultural Resources, Mitigation Measure #1

XIX. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

Would the project:

A. Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project does not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities.

B. Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project does not require the use of water for operation and there would not have an impact on water supplies.

C. Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project does not require provision of a wastewater treatment system or provider.

D. Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals; or

E. Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Reviewing Agencies and Departments did not express concern with the project to indicate solid waste generation in excess of State or local standards. The prepared Initial Site Assessment indicated possible hazardous substances within the solid waste produced from activities related to the bridge demolition. Management of the hazardous substances produced from bridge demolition solid waste would be handled and disposed of in accordance with local and state regulations.

XX. WILDFIRE

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:

A. Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

Per the Fresno County Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map, the project is located within a State Responsibility Area (SRA) and is classified as moderate severity. The project would not substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evaluation plan. With consideration of the project scope, the project would not impair emergency response or evacuation and would have no impact.

B. Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire; or

C. Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment; or

D. Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

The project requires installation of a bridge, but would not result in substantial impacts to the environment that would exacerbate fire risk. Reviewing agencies and departments did not express concern with the project indicating an increased fire risk due to project construction.

XXI. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Would the project:

A. Have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT WITH MITIGATION INCORPORATED:

The project has the potential to affect the environment through modification of habitat for wildlife species. As discussed in Section IV Biological Resources and reviewed in

the prepared BRE report, certain special-status species were identified as having habitat present in and near the project site. Mitigation measures for identified special-status species and by comment from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife are to be implemented so that project impacts would not negatively impact the species. With the recommended mitigation measures being implemented, a less than significant impact would occur.

B. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)?

FINDING: LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

No cumulatively considerable impact was identified as a result of the analysis. Impacts related to Aesthetics, Agricultural and Forestry Resources, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Hydrology and Water Quality, and Tribal Cultural Resources were identified as being less than significant with implementation of mitigation measures and were not considered cumulative impacts.

C. Have environmental effects, which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?

FINDING: NO IMPACT:

No substantial adverse effects on human beings were identified as a result of the analysis.

CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

Based upon the Initial Study prepared for the Markwood Creek Bridge Replacement Projects, staff has concluded that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment. It has been determined that there would be no impacts to Energy, Land Use Planning, Mineral Resources, Population and Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation, Utilities and Service Systems, and Wildfire.

Potential impacts related to Air Quality, Geology and Soils, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, and Noise have been determined to be less than significant. Potential impacts relating to Aesthetics, Agricultural and Forestry Resources, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Hydrology and Water Quality, and Tribal Cultural Resources have determined to be less than significant with compliance with recommended mitigation measures.

A Mitigated Negative Declaration is recommended and is subject to approval by the decision-making body. The Initial Study is available for review at 2220 Tulare Street, Suite A, street level, located on the southwest corner of Tulare and "M" Street, Fresno, California.