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August 19, 2024

Jane Hinton
Planes of Fame Air Museum
14998 Cal Aero Drive
Chino, CA 91710

SUBJECT: PHASE I BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES ASSESSMENT FOR THE PLANES OF FAME AIR MUSEUM AT THE SANTA MARIA AIRPORT.

Dear Ms. Hinton:

David Wolff Environmental (DWE) is pleased to submit this Phase I Biological Resources Assessment (BRA) for the proposed development of the Planes of Fame Air Museum an approximately 24-acre lease property on an infill site at the Santa Maria Airport (Airport). DWE is providing this BRA at your request for use with the City of Santa Maria environmental review process under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The purpose of the BRA is to document the existing conditions of the lease property, to determine the suitability and presence/absence of special-status plant or wildlife species, and to evaluate the potential for any direct or indirect significant impacts on biological or wetland resources, or adverse effects on any rare, threatened, or endangered plant or wildlife species (special-status species) from development of the lease property.

METHODS

DWE Principal Ecologist David Wolff reviewed available background information and aerial photography, and conducted a field reconnaissance survey of the lease property on July 29, 2024 to document existing conditions of biological resources and determine the presence/absence of special-status plant or wildlife species. Surveys were conducted by walking the entirety of the lease property recording plant species observed and general site characteristics. Conditions for the site survey were conducive for the purpose of documenting and establishing existing conditions in terms of habitat for plant and wildlife species. The survey data collected on plant species and habitat conditions, and conclusions presented in this BRA are based on the methods and field reconnaissance as described above.

SETTING & PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The approximately 24-acre lease property is located along the north and south sides of Airpark Drive to the south of and directly abutting the Radisson Hotel and Airport Operating Area (AOA), extending to near the end of the Airpark Drive cul-de-sac on the south. A western portion of the lease property is within the AOA with access to taxiways and

runways, with the remainder outside the AOA extending to Skyway Drive to the east. There are two existing paved access roads from Airpark Drive to AOA gates, the southern most of which abuts a stand of eucalyptus trees and a portion of an active agriculture field. Most of the lease property is either paved or essentially vacant land of non-native annual grassland.

The vacant lease property is typically mowed twice annually, and dragged to smooth and remove surface vegetation, and watered/compacted, for airshow parking annually (DWE personal communication with Ric Tokoph, SMX Manger of Operations and Maintenance).

The proposed project initially will develop the Planes of Fame Museum and appurtenant facilities on the lease property inside and outside the AOA west of Airpark Drive from the Radisson Hotel to the south access road. While within the lease property, no development is currently proposed east of Airpark Drive or to the south of the access road in the eucalyptus trees and active agricultural operations. See attached Figures 1 and 2 existing conditions.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The approximately 24-acre lease property is composed mostly of disturbed non-native annual grassland with developed paved areas, roads, eucalyptus trees and active agricultural operations. The non-native annual grassland inside and outside the AOA is dominated by Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), bur clover (*Medicago polymorpha*), and cut leaf plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) that are typical of regularly disturbed areas. Other species observed scattered in the disturbed non-native annual grassland included short podded mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), brome grasses (*Bromus* spp.), ryegrass (*Festuca* sp.), Australian saltbush (*Atriplex semibaccata*), and wild radish (*Raphanus sativus*). Abundant gopher activity (mounds) and ground squirrels were observed throughout the grassland areas. No wetlands or riparian habitat or other waters of the U.S./State occur on the lease property. The lease property is an infill site surrounded by development and agriculture on all sides with no connectivity to any natural habitat areas. See Figure 3 Representative Photographs.

SPECIAL-STATUS BOTANICAL RESOURCES

The lease property is mowed twice annually and regularly dragged to smooth and remove surface vegetation, and watered/compacted, for airshow parking. Plant species observed are typical of highly disturbed areas with no native plant species observed. As such, no special-status botanical resources area expected to occur and none were observed during the DWE field survey.

SPECIAL-STATUS WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The lease property is mowed twice annually and regularly dragged to smooth and remove surface vegetation, and watered/compacted, for airshow parking. As such, there is no suitable habitat for any special-status wildlife resources, none were observed during the DWE field survey, and none are expected to occur. The lease property is an infill site surrounded by development and agriculture with no connectivity to any natural habitat areas so future occupation by special-status wildlife species is not expected. The following substantiates this conclusion.

UPLAND SPECIES

- The northern legless lizard (*Anniela pulchra*) is known from the vicinity of the lease property and lives mostly underground associated with sandy or very friable loamy soils under coastal scrub or woodland vegetation with soil moisture and vegetative cover being essential. The Blainvilles's (coast) horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii*) occurs in a wide variety of habitats with sandy soils, abundant ant colonies for food, open areas for sunning, and shrubs for needed cover. While the observed sandy nature of the onsite soils are suitable for these species, the regular vegetation removal and soil compaction render the site uninhabitable for either species.
- The American badger (*Taxidea taxus*) is a grassland species needing abundant small mammal prey and are easily detected by their distinctive half-moon shaped burrows. While abundant gopher and ground squirrel activity was observed (prey species), there was no evidence of badger use observed on the project site during the DWE field survey. Further, the regular vegetation removal and soil compaction render the site uninhabitable for the American badger.

AQUATIC/RIPARIAN SPECIES

The project site is an entirely upland area and does not support aquatic breeding habitat for any of the highly aquatic species known from Airport lands or within the vicinity of the Airport such as the western pond turtle (*Emys marmorata*), vernal pool fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*), California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*; CTS), western spadefoot (toad) (*Spea hammondi*), or California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*; CRLF).

There are known seasonal breeding ponds for the CTS and western spadefoot (SAMA-6 and SAMA-7) on Airport lands to the east of Blosser Road approximately 1.2 miles from the nearest edge of the lease property. Currently, intervening lands from the lease property to Blosser Road are developed Airport, the mobile home park, or active strawberry fields that are not CTS habitat and represent barriers to both CTS and western spadefoot upland dispersal. According to Western spadefoot upland use studies, dispersal distances between upland refugia and aquatic habitat may be up to 1,968 feet with a mean dispersal distance of 131 to 450 feet. The lease property is well beyond the maximum expected upland dispersal distance from a breeding pond for the western spadefoot.

The California tiger salamander spends most of its life in upland underground refuges in small mammal burrows and can disperse upwards of 1.3 miles from their temporary (seasonal) breeding ponds. Known breeding ponds SAMA-6 and SAMA-7 are approximately 1.2 miles west of the lease property on airport lands. As noted above the site is surrounded by development and active agriculture that is not CTS habitat and separates the lease property from these known breeding ponds representing a positive barrier to any CTS dispersal to the site. Former CTS breeding pond SAMA-10 that was closer to the lease property to the south, and prior grazing lands between the site and Blosser Road have been converted to agriculture and is no longer CTS habitat.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The DWE review of available background information and field survey on July 29, 2024 is sufficient to; 1) adequately establish existing conditions of the infill lease property; 2) determine the lack of occurrence or suitable habitat for special-status plant species; 3) determine the lack of suitable habitat or occurrence special-status wildlife species.

Botanical Resources – The proposed project within the lease property would convert highly disturbed low-species diversity non-native annual grassland habitat to developed uses. No rare, threatened, or endangered plant species or natural communities of special concern occur in the study area so none would be impacted from development. **As such, impacts on botanical resources would be considered less than significant and no mitigation is recommended.**

Wildlife Resources – The proposed project within the infill lease property would convert highly disturbed non-native annual grassland habitat to developed uses that would not result in any substantial effect on any wildlife species or wildlife habitat. No special-status wildlife species are expected to occur on the infill property so none would be impacted. **As such, impacts on wildlife species would be considered less than significant and no mitigation is recommended.**

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings described above establishing the existing conditions of biological resources within the lease property, implementation of the proposed project would not result in any substantial adverse effects on biological, botanical, or wetland habitat resources.

Therefore, direct and indirect project impacts on biological resources would be considered to be less than significant.

Thank you very much for using DWE for your environmental consulting services. Please contact me directly if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Very truly yours,



David K. Wolff, Principal Ecologist

ATTACHMENTS:

- FIGURE 1 – AUGUST 2022 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH
- FIGURE 2 – FEBRUARY 2024 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH
- FIGURE 3 – REPRESENTATIVE PHOTOGRAPHS