



CEQA EXEMPTION DETERMINATION FORM (rev. 06/2022)
NEPA CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION FOR MIDDLE-MILE BROADBAND NETWORK
PROJECTS DETERMINATION FORM (rev. 5/23)

<u>Project Information</u>	
Project Name (if applicable): Middle-Mile Broadband Network	
DIST-CO-RTE: 11-SD-78	PM/PM: 17.4/T17.7, 35.1/35.55
EA: 11-4B002/1122000085	Federal-Aid Project Number:
<u>Project Description</u>	
The project proposes to install broadband conduit and fiber as a part of the Middle Mile Broadband Network (MMBN) for 0.85 miles and two network repeater hubs in San Diego County on State Route 78 (SR-78) from Escondido Blvd overcrossing to Escondido Park and Ride and from SR-78 Olive Street intersection to Ramona at SR-67/SR-78 separation to improve affordability and accessibility to high-speed internet in San Diego County. For more information, please see the Continuation Sheet and NEPA/CEQA CE/CE.	

Caltrans CEQA Determination (Check one)

- Not Applicable** – Caltrans is not the CEQA Lead Agency
- Not Applicable** – Caltrans has prepared an IS or EIR under CEQA

Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, the project is:

- Exempt by Statute.** (PRC 21080[b]; 14 CCR 15260 et seq.)
- Categorically Exempt. Class 1.** (PRC 21084; 14 CCR 15300 et seq.)
 - No exceptions apply that would bar the use of a categorical exemption (PRC 21084 and 14 CCR 15300.2). See the [SER Chapter 34](#) for exceptions.
- Covered by the Common Sense Exemption.** This project does not fall within an exempt class, but it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant effect on the environment (14 CCR 15061[b][3].)

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Marc Baza		11/25/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date

Project Manager

Wameedh Tozy		11/26/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date



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Caltrans NEPA Determination

Caltrans has determined this project meets the conditions set forth below and therefore is categorically excluded from the requirements to prepare an EA or EIS under NEPA.

The actions listed in Appendix A, Number 6 (“Actions including, but not limited to, right-of-way use agreements, encroachment permits, and consent letters that are subject to subpart D of 23 CFR 710”) of the 23 USC 326 CE Assignment MOU between FHWA, California Division and the California Department of Transportation (2022) may be classified as a categorical exclusion, provided the following conditions are met:

- The action is required in order to implement a project that is part of the California Middle-Mile Broadband Network
- The Federal Action consists of: Approval of a non-highway use of the right-of-way/grant of a right-of-way use agreement
- The action does not, either individually or cumulatively, have any significant environmental impacts as described in 23 CFR 771.117(a); and
- The action does not involve unusual circumstances as described in 23 CFR 771.117(b):
 - Significant environmental impacts;
 - Substantial controversy on environmental grounds;
 - Significant impact on properties protected by Section 4(f)¹ requirements or Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; or
 - Inconsistencies with any Federal, State, or local law, requirement or administrative determination relating to the environmental aspects of the action.
- The action can be authorized under a Section 404 Nationwide Permit, or Regional General Permit, including one specific to Middle-Mile Broadband Network activities when issued. Sufficient information to issue a Wetlands Only Practicable Alternative Finding must be included in the CE documentation; and
- The action would not significantly encroach on the base floodplain and no impacts to the natural and beneficial floodplain values are anticipated; and
- The action would not impact the features or attributes of a designated scenic river that make it eligible for inclusion in the National System of Wild and Scenic Rivers published by the U.S. Department of Interior/U.S. Department of Agriculture; and
- The action does not require any U.S. Coast Guard construction permits;
- The use of this CE certifies that the project has been evaluated and is designed to prevent unauthorized releases of hazardous materials. Caltrans would maintain compliance with the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Soil Management Agreement for Aerially Deposited Lead-Contaminated Soils effective July 1, 2016, and

¹ Middle-Mile Broadband Network Projects are not considered transportation projects and therefore exempt from the requirements of 23 CFR 774



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that there are no known Cortese sites within the project footprint based on a record search; and

- The action does not require formal Section 7 Consultation for effects to federally listed or proposed species or critical habitat (likely to adversely affect determination for any species or critical habitat), or can be covered under an existing Programmatic Biological Opinion or the specific Programmatic Biological Opinion for Middle-Mile Broadband Network activities when issued; and
- The action is consistent with the State's Coastal Zone Management Plan, if applicable.

The proposed project(s) are in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. It is anticipated that no impacts would occur with the construction and implementation of the Middle-Mile Broadband Network.

Categorical Exclusion (CE) issued by Caltrans approving certain actions subject to subpart D of 23 CFR 710 for projects that are a part of the California Middle-Mile Broadband Network.

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Marc Baza		11/25/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date

Project Manager/ DLA Engineer

Wameedh Tozy		11/26/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date

See Attached District Prepared Middle-Mile Broadband Network CE Checklist
 See Attached District Prepared Environmental Commitment Record.



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Continuation sheet:

Project Description

The project (11-4B002) is part of the Middle Mile Broadband Network (MMBN) initiative program which includes the installation of broadband infrastructure throughout California within the State Highway System (SHS), including Interstate routes.

As part of the Caltrans/CDT middle mile partnership, District 11 is constructing 0.85 miles of Middle Mile Broadband Network in San Diego County and two network repeater hubs on SR-78 from post mile R17.4 – T17.7 and 35.1 – 35.55. The project is intended to provide internet access to close key gaps in the rural high speed internet network (see Description of Work).

Purpose and Need

Purpose: This project will install two broadband repeater hubs along with broadband conduit and fiber in San Diego County on SR-78 from Escondido Blvd overcrossing to Escondido Park and Ride and from SR-78 Olive Street intersection to Ramona at SR-67/SR-78 separation as part of the Middle-Mile Broadband Network identified as Project .11-4B002 / 1122000085 in the Interagency Agreement between the California Department of Technology (CDT) and California Department of Transportation (DOT).

Need: Build out of a critical statewide broadband network is needed to enhance access to, and increase affordability of, high-speed Internet for all Californians.

Description of Work

The project proposes the installation of the MMBN along 0.85 miles on SR-78 including the installation of subsurface broadband conduit and fiber, network repeater hubs (hubs), pull or splice vaults, and road markers at approximately 500-foot intervals along the route, if needed. All work will be performed within the Caltrans right-of-way. The details are as follows:

- Linear installation of broadband conduit and fiber installation, generally consisting of one 2-inch conduit, with minimum cover of 24 to 42 inches depending on location.
 - The four methods for underground installation of fiber optic conduit are plowing, trenching, trenching in pavement, and horizontal directional drilling (HDD).
 - Trenching in pavement would occur under asphalt pavement when off-pavement solutions are not feasible due to site-specific restrictions, with the depth of cover over conduit in paved areas a minimum of 24 inches.



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- For bridges or culverts, fiber optic conduits would be placed within structure cells, attached underneath the structure, hung underneath the structure, or attached to the barrier on the structure.
- Vaults spaced approximately every 2,400 feet, with intermittent “splice vaults” to allow for last mile connections; vaults would generally measure a maximum of approximately 48 inches (width) x 48 inches (length) x 48 inches (height) and be generally flush with the ground surface (or 2 inches above unpaved areas).
- Cable marker posts installed at approximately 500-foot intervals to alert to the presence of the fiber optic cable, if needed.

Hub Details

- Network hubs installed to provide retransmission and reamplify the signal. Two network hubs are located along this project segment and would have the general following components:
 - Standard hub exterior dimensions would be 12-feet (width) x 20-feet (length) x 10-feet (height), not including wall-mounted apparatus (air conditioners, electrical panels, etc.) and other non-structural protrusions.
 - In situations where 12-feet x 20-feet would not fit on a site (with the required setbacks), a smaller sized hub of 12-feet x 16-feet hub size may be used.
 - The hub building exterior aesthetics would be uncolored concrete panels and fractured rib/fin form liner texture. The hub building doors would be gray to blend with the natural concrete color.
 - Total enclosed space would measure from approximately 29 feet x 32 feet up to 50 feet x 50 feet and the ground would be unvegetated within 30 feet of the shelter (surface may be gravel). The network hub shelter, vault, generator pull box, and splice vaults would be enclosed by an 8-foot high fence topped by looped razor.
 - The network hub would also have a standby generator location and underground propane tank and supply line.
 - Access roads may be designed to connect the hub to the conduit fiber and allow for maintenance.

Two network hubs are proposed on EA 11-4B002.

- Hub 82 is sited at 33.047286, -116.87446, on Olive Street in Ramona, located on Caltrans-owned parcel, APN: 2811223100. Connection from conduit within SR-78 and the hub would extend through areas outside of Caltrans right-of-way/ownership and would be completed by CDT; portions outside of Caltrans right-of-way/ownership are not included in this review.



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- Hub 207 is sited at 33.131721, -117.08854, east of I-15 in Escondido, within Caltrans right-of-way and the North Broadway Park and Ride Lot.

Environmental Factors

If project scope should change, the Division of Environmental Analysis shall be notified to determine whether the current environmental documentation and technical assessments are adequate or further documentation for a reevaluation will be required.

The project would not affect agriculture and forestry, air quality, a wild or scenic river, energy, geology/soils, greenhouse gas emissions, land use/planning, mineral resources, noise, population/housing, public services, recreation, transportation, utilities/service systems, or wildfire potential.

Avoidance of Sensitive Resources

- This project has been independently evaluated for sensitive resources prior to construction. Caltrans intends to identify and avoid potential environmental impacts throughout construction.
- Sensitive locations have been noted as areas to be avoided during construction and would be further protected using biological, cultural, and tribal monitors during construction, as needed.
- Caltrans shall use Caltrans Standard Special Provisions (SSP), Non-Standard Special Provisions (NSSP), pre-construction training, and Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) flagging to avoid potential impacts.
- Environmental reevaluation would be required if the scope of the project changes to include additional areas or activities, or if previously unknown cultural, biological, or other unidentified environmental resources were discovered.
- The contractor would not be allowed to park, stage, or store equipment or materials outside of the project impact area or on sensitive areas identified within Caltrans right-of-way.
- Staging areas would shift along the alignment as construction progresses and be limited to temporary equipment parking at each vault/connection location and would remain within existing right-of-way or Caltrans-owned land. Work would remain within the project footprint and within the area cleared for construction and as identified in the plans and environmental commitments record (ECR).

Technical Studies Prepared



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Biological Resources

A Natural Environmental Study (NES) No Effect Memo was prepared in September 2024 for the project and found biological resource impacts would be avoided with the avoidance and minimization measures discussed below. The project limits extend through urban and rural areas, and is located within the boundaries of the roadway, shoulders, and connectors.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

To ensure that potential temporary effects to biology during construction and operation are minimized, the following avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented:

- From postmiles 17.35 – 17.5, coastal sage scrub (CSS) vegetation is found on slopes south of SR-78. Areas where CSS vegetation is present are an ESA. At these locations, work must be limited to disturbed or unvegetated areas outside of CSS vegetation. No personnel, equipment, or debris are allowed in the ESAs.
- If tree/vegetation removal or trimming is required in non-ESA areas, it should be done outside of the bird breeding season (February 15th to August 31st). If work cannot be avoided within this time period, the district biologist must be given 2 weeks' notice from the start of work to complete a pre-construction nesting survey within 72 hours of the start of work. If nesting activity is detected, work will have to wait until young have fledged and nesting is no longer detected. Nesting bird surveys are only good for 7 days and will have to be repeated if the area is not cleared within that time frame.
- Cover trenches and other hazards. Ensure that wildlife cannot become trapped in construction areas. Trenches shall not be left open when not being worked on and shall be checked for trapped wildlife before work resumes. Take all appropriate measures to prevent wildlife from inhabiting stockpiled materials, such as pipe, and these shall be checked before being moved.
- ESAs must be included on final plans. Work will remain within the roadway structure and immediate bare or disturbed shoulder not exceeding the ESA boundary. Work, staging, equipment, personnel, and vegetation removal are not to occur within ESAs.
- Vegetation removal outside of ESAs should be limited to the maximum extent possible. Any questions regarding vegetation or ESAs can be directed to the district biologist.
- Any changes to the project will require subsequent review by the district biologist.

Water Resources

A No Effect Memo was prepared in September 2024 and found bridges along the route that will require crossing. At these locations, work would be constrained to the



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pavement or bridges and ground disturbance including trenching, vault construction, staging, and storage would not occur further than the immediate unvegetated shoulder adjacent to the pavement.

The proposed project would not involve major reconstruction, and there would be no changes in grade or hydraulic capacity. The proposed project would maintain the original purpose of original drainage facilities and would not substantially increase or change existing impervious surface areas.

The project would not impact wetlands or substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow or substantially change or use material from the bed, channel, bank of rivers, streams, or lakes. Project design would not require the depositing or disposal of debris, waste, or other material containing crumbled, flaked, or ground pavement where it may pass into water resource.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

To ensure that water quality and resources are not affected during project construction and operation, the following avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented:

- From postmiles 35.26 – 35.32, Santa Maria Creek crosses under SR-78. Work within the vicinity of the creek must be constrained to the pavement or bridge and any ground disturbance including trenching, vault construction, staging, and storage are not to occur further than the immediate unvegetated shoulder adjacent to the pavement on the bridge approaches. Any area outside of the unvegetated or disturbed shoulder is an ESA.
- Construction site best management practices (BMPs) will be implemented to minimize potential short-term water quality impacts, as required in Caltrans Standard Specification 13-1.
- To minimize impacts to fish and wildlife resources associated with an inadvertent frac-out, HDD operations underneath CDFW jurisdictional features will be monitored by a Biologist who will work with construction personnel to stop work in the event that frac-out occurs.
- Middle Mile Broadband Network specification 77-2.03H(4) establishes Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) BMPs that will be followed for prevention, mitigation, and containment of a potential frac-out.

Stormwater

Middle Mile Broadband Network (MMBN) projects are subject to two NPDES permits to regulate stormwater runoff: (1) the Construction General Permit (CGP), and (2) the Caltrans NPDES Permit. This project would be designed in compliance with 2009

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Construction General Permit (CGP) and the 2022 Caltrans MS4 Permit. MMBN projects will be covered under the 2009 CGP through 9/1/2025, when the regulatory transition (i.e., grandfather period) ends. MMBN projects must adhere to requirements of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) statewide storm water permits. The project would develop procedures to address potential water quality impact and control construction site erosion through the implementation of effective erosion and sediment control measures in accordance with the 2009 CGP. The proposed project would not violate water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, withdraw a large amount of groundwater or entail features or activities that would obstruct groundwater infiltration, substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the construction sites in a manner that would result in substantial onsite or offsite erosion or siltation, or substantially increase impervious surfaces or alter the sites in a way that contributes to the volume of stormwater runoff at the sites, and would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan.

Cultural Resources

Based on the findings of the Historic Property Survey Report (HPSR) prepared in October 2024 for the project, Caltrans made a finding of No Historic Properties Affected. The Area of Potential Effects (APE) was established as the area of direct impact (ADI). Because all project activities will occur along a previously developed transportation corridor and are at grade, it was determined that the APE did not need to be expanded beyond the ADI to account for any further direct or indirect potential effects.

The APE for the undertaking is within the Ramona Main Street Colonnade Historic District. However, the APE does not include the entirety of the rather large District due to minimal potential to effect because the undertaking only has the potential to affect a small portion of the Historic District.

While the proposed undertaking is within the Ramona Main Street Colonnade Historic District, the minimal work within the Historic District is restricted to the conduit line in the center of the roadway (SR-67). The roadway itself is not a character-defining feature of the Historic District and is exempt from evaluation; the trees lined on either side of the roadway that characterize the Historic District will not be affected either directly or indirectly by the undertaking, therefore no avoidance or minimization measures are needed.

Paleontology

A Paleontological Identification Report/Paleontological Evaluation Report and Paleontological Mitigation Plan (PIR) was prepared for this project in April 2023. Areas of paleontological sensitivity are located between PM R17.4 to T17.7.



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Paleontological resources in these areas may be impacted by construction operations involving earthwork during trenching for broadband fiber optic conduit, and excavation of access vaults within areas assigned a high paleontological potential ranking.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

To ensure potential effects involving paleontological resources during construction are avoided, the following avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented:

- Retain a qualified project paleontologist to monitor ground disturbance activities during construction of the project where areas of paleontological sensitivity are anticipated.
- Attend pre-construction meetings to consult with grading and excavation contractors.
- Prior to start of construction, paleontological resource training workshops shall be presented to ensure that earth excavation personnel understand paleontological monitoring requirements, roles and responsibilities, and appropriate actions in the event of a discovery.
- In the event of a discovery, a qualified paleontological monitor may immediately initiate recovery, or temporarily stop construction to consult with the project paleontologist. Consult with paleontological monitor and construction liaison for next steps. Fossil remains collected during the monitoring and salvage portion of the mitigation program will be cleaned, prepared, sorted, and cataloged.
- A Paleontological Monitoring Report (PMR) will be prepared to document the results construction monitoring, fossil salvage laboratory preparation of salvaged specimens, curation of prepared specimens, and storage of curated specimens.
- Although fossils collected remain the property of the State, the collection must be properly curated at an approved facility (preferably local to the project location) and preserved for future researchers. A complete set of field notes, geologic maps, stratigraphic sections, and a copy of the final report will be curated with the fossils.

Hazardous Waste

A Hazardous Waste Memo was prepared by Caltrans in September 2024, which included discussions of typical waste issues that could affect the proposed project. Environmental Engineering staff at Caltrans reviewed the Investor (DTSC) and GeoTracker (State Water Resources Control Board) databases for nearby hazardous waste/unauthorized release facilities that may have impacted the environmental condition of the project area. No facilities were identified.

It is possible to discover previously unknown contamination and hazards during construction activities. If previously unknown hazardous substances are encountered, the District has an on-call Construction Emergency Response Contract managed by the



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Environmental Engineering branch that would be accessed to have appropriate testing and disposal performed.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

To ensure potential effects involving hazardous materials/ waste during construction are avoided, the following avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented:

- A Lead Compliance Plan (LCP), prepared by a certified industrial hygienist (CIH), is required and would be provided by the Contractor and implemented for all workers handling hazardous or non-hazardous soil as well as removal/application of hazardous or non-hazardous lead-based paint, thermoplastic, painted traffic stripe, and/or pavement marking. Regulations containing specific Cal/OSHA requirements when working with lead include 8 CA Code of Regs § 1532.1. The plan must:
 - Document the compliance program to prevent or minimize worker exposure to lead.
 - Include items listed in 8 CA Code of Regs § 1532.11(2)(B).
 - Be sealed and signed by a CIH with knowledge of and experience complying with 8 CA Code of Regs.

Allow 7 days for review. Obtain authorization for the plan before starting any activity that presents the potential for lead exposure.

- The Contractor is responsible for identifying the appropriate permitted landfill to receive excavated material and for associated trucking and disposal costs, including additional sampling and analysis required by the receiving landfill.
- Aerially deposited lead (ADL) contamination is generally found in unpaved soil adjacent to the roadway due to historical use of lead containing fuel. ADL impacts in soils are generally present laterally up to 20 feet from the edge of the paved road and to depths of two feet below ground surface (ft-bgs), sometime extending to five ft-bgs. The project will disturb unpaved areas to install fiber optic vaults and conduits; therefore, there is concern that ADL-contaminated soil will be encountered. Existing material within the project limits has not be characterized, therefore nSSP 14-11.08 Regulated Material Containing Aerially Deposited Lead will be required. This nSSP needs HQ sponsor approval and will require a Lead Compliance Plan.
- If removal of painted or thermoplastic traffic striping and pavement is included during grinding or cold planing, SSP 36-4 *Residue Containing Lead from Paint and Thermoplastic* shall be followed. An LCP would be required.
- If removal of traffic stripes and/or pavement markings is separate, SSP 84-9.03B *Remove Traffic Stripes and Pavement Markings Containing Lead* shall be followed. An LCP would be required.
- If Treated Wood Waste is determined to be present, Environmental Engineering would provide SSP 14-11.14 *Treated Wood Waste*.



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- If previously unknown hazardous substances are encountered, the District will contact the on-call Construction Emergency Response Contract managed by the Environmental Engineering branch to have appropriate testing and disposal performed.

Aesthetics and Visual Resources

A Visual Impact Assessment was prepared by the Caltrans Environmental Division in September 2024. The project would involve detours, ground disturbance, removal of vegetation, equipment staging area, fiber optic trenching, and two network repeater hubs.

Developed land uses at the west end of the freeway are predominantly residential, commercial, and light industrial of moderate visual quality. The middle segment of the corridor is predominately agricultural. The east end of the corridor passes through the City of Ramona and includes open space areas of high visual quality and cohesiveness.

Hub 82 is sited on Olive Street in Ramona, outside of Caltrans right-of-way but within a Caltrans-owned parcel. The site is an industrial area with a nearby auto body shop and self-storage facility. The site has low visual quality and cohesiveness. Public sensitivity to changes in the visual setting would be low.

Hub 207 is sited east of I-15 within SR-78 right-of-way and within the North Broadway Park and Ride Lot. The hub would be located at the rear of the Park and Ride lot behind trailers and would not be visible from North Broadway. The proposed hub would be sited below the freeway and would not obstruct ridgeline reviews for freeway viewers. Public sensitivity to changes in the visual setting would be low.

Affected viewers are primarily motorists on SR-78 traveling at moderate to high speeds. Motorists have a high viewer exposure due to the number of motorists. The visual quality/character of the corridor would become more urban due to broadband vaults/conduit and vegetation removal, and construction of hubs.

Due to the quantity of viewers experiencing the project, the viewer exposure is considered high. Viewer sensitivity and response to the anticipated visual change caused by trenching and vaults is considered low. Collectively, the 'low' change in visual resources combined with the 'low' viewer response to changes indicates the Project will cause a 'low' visual impact with the inclusion of impact avoidance measures.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

To ensure visual resources are not affected by construction, the following avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented:

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- Hub 82 and Hub 207 aesthetics will be standard Tier 3 (Basic Hub Model).
- Trucks and equipment shall be confined to dirt road and previously disturbed areas to the extent possible.
- Protect vegetation outside of the work area by prohibiting staging areas, material storage, parking, and construction access in vegetated areas.
- If tree pruning is required, work shall be performed under the direct supervision of a certified arborist and as directed and approved by the State's Inspector. Pruning shall not detract from the appearance, compromise the function, or adversely impact the maintainability or longevity of the tree.
- No equipment, material storage, or vehicles are allowed under tree dripline.
- Protect trees and sensitive vegetation outside of grading limits/contractor use areas with temporary fencing.
- BMPs such as fiber rolls, felt fiber fabric, gravel bags (if used) must be made of biodegradable materials. (No plastic)
- Remove temporary ESA fence and temporary silt fence (if used) prior to vacating the construction site.
- Disturbed soil shall be hydroseeded or hand-seeded with a CA native seed mix approved by the Caltrans Biologist.
- Avoid trenching under tree canopies. If trenching under a tree canopy cannot be avoided, then trenching must be done manually by hand to avoid cutting through critical roots.