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April 2, 2018

Steve Byrne
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310-867-3302
1blueheightsdrive@gmail.com

Re: Biological Assessment, 1830 & 1849 Blue Heights Drive, Los Angeles, California (APN 5558-015-019 & 5558-001-010); SWCA Project No. 49294

Dear Steve:

This letter provides the results of a biological assessment conducted of the property located at 1830 Blue Heights Drive, Los Angeles, California (APN 5558-015-019), and the off-site area proposed for grading located to the north at 1849 Blue Heights Drive (APN 5558-001-010). The approximately 0.85-acre vacant parcel is in the Bel Air – Beverly Crest neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles (City). The proposed project entails development of a single family home on the parcel. Off-site grading will be necessary at 1849 Blue Heights Drive, directly north of the subject property. Figures 1 and 2 at the end of this letter illustrate the location of the property and the parcel boundaries, respectively. These graphics were prepared by Meridian Consultants, LLC, and included in the Initial Study.[1] They are used here with Meridian's permission.

The City requested a biological assessment due to the parcel's location in a Habitat Block per the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) and Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority (MRCA) *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map*.[2] The purpose of this survey is to satisfy the City's requirement for a biological assessment.

Literature Search

Prior to the March 2018 site visit, a literature search was completed to discover previously identified special status flora, fauna, or habitats within a one-mile radius of the property. Data for U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5 minute Beverly Hills quadrangle (quad), where the property is situated, and the adjacent Hollywood quad to the east were queried. A review of Google Earth aerial photos was conducted to understand the local and regional context of the subject property.

MRCA personnel were consulted regarding the Habitat Block map noted above and derivation of those blocks, and potential implications for wildlife linkages. The tree report was prepared in March 2018 in accordance with the City's Protected Tree Ordinance was reviewed.[3]

Field Survey

SWCA Senior Biologist Jackie Worden conducted a field survey of the property on March 1 and April 1, 2018. All portions of the site were visually surveyed by walking transects throughout the accessible areas. Very steep portions of the parcel were surveyed using 10 x 40 binoculars, for safety. All flora and fauna found on-site were recorded, and photographs were collected from various viewpoints throughout the parcel. The adjacent parcel to the north were offsite grading would occur was also surveyed.

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[1] Meridian Consultants, LLC, March 2018. *Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration*. 1830 Blue Heights Residence Project Case # ENV-2016-4327-MND.

[2] Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority. January 23, 2017. *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map*.

[3] The Tree Resource, March 28, 2018. *Protected Tree Report*. Prepared for A&T Development LLC.

Special attention was given to the identification of special status species, including flowering plants and other flora (shrubs; trees) and wildlife. Signs of wildlife use were searched for, such as tracks, scat, burrows, nests, and vocalizations. Particular focus was given to searching for trails and tracks indicative of wildlife movement through the property.

Erosional features and/or vegetation patterns characteristic of potential jurisdictional waters were searched for. A formal delineation was not conducted.

Findings/Existing Conditions

The subject property and the off-site grading area to the north are vacant and very steep, sloping downward to the southwest and southeast. Soils are granitic and highly friable, with a few small boulders. No erosional features or plants indicating riparian or aquatic habitats were found.

A paved road forms the upper (north-northeast) boundary of the parcel, while existing residential development is present to the east and below the site to the southwest and southeast. The property is fenced along Blue Heights Drive. A high retaining wall is present along and outside of the lower property boundary, rising from behind the houses along Viewmont Drive, south of the subject parcel.

Flora

A review of Google Earth aerial photos indicates the parcel was cleared of most shrubs sometime after March 2015. Aerial photos through the most recent one of December 2017 show the site has been kept clear of shrubs, perhaps in accordance with Fire Department fuel modification safety requirements. Two California black walnut trees (*Juglans californica*) are present within the proposed building footprint. The arborist reported them to be in poor health due to disease, and recommended removal.[4] One additional black walnut is present to the north of the parcel in the off-site grading footprint. This is a multi-trunk bush, with many small diameter trunks; as such, it is below the protected tree size under the City's ordinance.

One California black walnut and one western sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*) of protected size are located just outside the boundaries of the project boundaries, and are proposed to be retained in place. (Refer to the arborist report for specific information regarding the location of these trees).[5]

The ground layer of vegetation on-site is strongly dominated by invasive, non-native fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*), with a relative cover of 50-70 percent. Castor bean (*Ricinus sativa*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) and filaree (*Erodium* spp.) are the other common non-native species on the property.

A few native shrubs are present, limited to scattered California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), deerweed (*Acmispon glaber*), and multi-trunk laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*). Some of the sumac have been cut and are stump sprouting. There are scattered non-native trees, including Aleppo pine (*Pinus halapensis*), lemon-scented gum trees (*Eucalyptus citriodora*), and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*). Planted ornamentals are present outside the east and southern property boundaries.

Fauna

Wildlife identified on the property during the field surveys included California [Beechey] ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*), Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), and American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) overhead. No evidence of larger mammals (tracks; scat), such as deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) or coyote (*Canis latrans*) was detected.

[4] Op. sit. The Tree Resource, March 28, 2018

[5] Ibid.

Special Status Species

No special status plants or wildlife was detected on the project site or the off-site grading area. Given the disturbed condition of the soils and dominance of invasive non-native grasses, special status plants are not expected to be found.

One special status species was reported within the one-mile radius of the property, Braunton's milk-vetch (*Astragalus brauntonii*), last reported on the Beverly Hills quadrangle in 1930. This perennial herb is a federally-listed endangered species, and is listed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) with a Rare Plant Rank (RPR) of 1B.1 (plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere).[6] No milk-vetch was found on the property during the March field survey. This is a distinctive plant with gray-green leaves that would have been seen if present.

Special Status Habitat

No special status habitats, such as oak woodland, wetlands, or riparian corridors, were reported previously or found on the property or the off-site grading area during the site surveys.

Habitat Linkages & Wildlife Corridors

Habitat linkages and wildlife corridors are features that promote habitat connectivity, allowing the flow of genetic information through and between habitats. Habitat linkages are large scale, regional networks of corridors and large natural open space areas that encompass an adequate diversity and acreage of useable habitats to provide long-term resilience of ecosystems against the detrimental effects of habitat fragmentation, which creates isolated "islands" of wildlife habitat. Wildlife corridors are typically discrete linear features within a landscape that are constrained by development or other non-habitat areas.

Habitat Blocks: The SMMC and MRCA embarked on a study of land uses in the Santa Monica Mountains to study potential habitat linkages and movement corridors to help prioritize land acquisition for conservation. This work is illustrated on the *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map*[7], which mapped vacant property to appraise potential connectivity.

The proposed developed is located within Habitat Block 53/58 on this map, as shown on the Figure 3 at the end of this letter (approximate parcel boundaries in blue). Habitat blocks are outlined in red; possible wildlife corridors are indicated by yellow lines.

The origin and intent of this map was explained by Marc Shores of the Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority (MRCA) as follows:

> "The numbers are purely for natural resource planning purposes only, the blocks were numbered east to west, with the Griffith Park area receiving A-X. Our goal is to discern the gaps and obstacles between the blocks that hinder wildlife movement. Once those areas are quantified, we then have a better tool for strategic acquisition/management planning. No biological datasets were created in conjunction with the habitat block dataset. It is merely a tool to map areas of undeveloped open space. The method used to identify each block was researching multiple year Google Earth imagery and Assessor parcel data."[8]

As such, this mapping does not infer any biological significance or confer any special protections.

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[6] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. January 2018. Special Vascular Plants, Bryophytes, and Lichens List. California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB).

[7] Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority (SMMC/MRCA). January 23, 2017. *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map*.

[8] Marc Shores. February 22, 2018. Email to Jackie Worden. Marc.shores@mrca.ca.gov.

The subject parcel is surrounded on all sides by residential buildings, fences, walls, and roads, all of which limit wildlife movement through the property. The project vicinity contains highly fragmented pockets of vacant land. Movement is expected to be limited to species common in urbanized areas, such as coyote (*Canis latrans*), Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) and common raccoon (*Procyon lotor*). Mountain lion (*Puma concolor*) tracking conducted by the National Park Service (NPS) has not discovered lions between the 405 and 101 freeways in the Hollywood Hills, where the subject parcel is located.[9] Although lions could occur in the project vicinity, there no record of such sightings was discovered during the literature search for this report. The primary food source for mountain lion in the region is mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*); no evidence of mule deer usage on the project site was found.

Conclusions

The subject parcel and the adjacent off-site grading area do not provide unique or high-quality biological habitat values. There is no evidence of wildlife movement through the development area, although common wildlife could pass through the vicinity. The proposed project is located in a developed residential neighborhood and is likely to be visited infrequently by wildlife typical of such neighborhoods and tolerant of human activity.

No special status species of plants or animals, special status habitats, or jurisdictional waters were discovered on the project site or off-site grading area. Nesting bird activity is possible in large trees and, to a lesser extent, in the vegetation found in the lower southwest areas of the parcel. Compliance with applicable State and Federal laws pertaining to the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (Sections 3503, 3503.5 and 3513 of the California Fish and Game Code) would reduce these potential impacts to less than significant levels.

Development of the project as proposed is not anticipated to result in significant adverse impacts to special-status or protected biological resources, given implementation of the mitigation measures regarding breeding/nesting bird surveys and avoidance described in the Initial Study.[10]

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Bowland Worden
Senior Biologist/Natural Resources Project Manager

[9] Santa Monica Mountains September 16, 2014. *Mountain Lion Locations Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area*. Available online at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/santamonicamtns.

[10] Op. Sit. Meridian Consultants, LLC. March 2018.

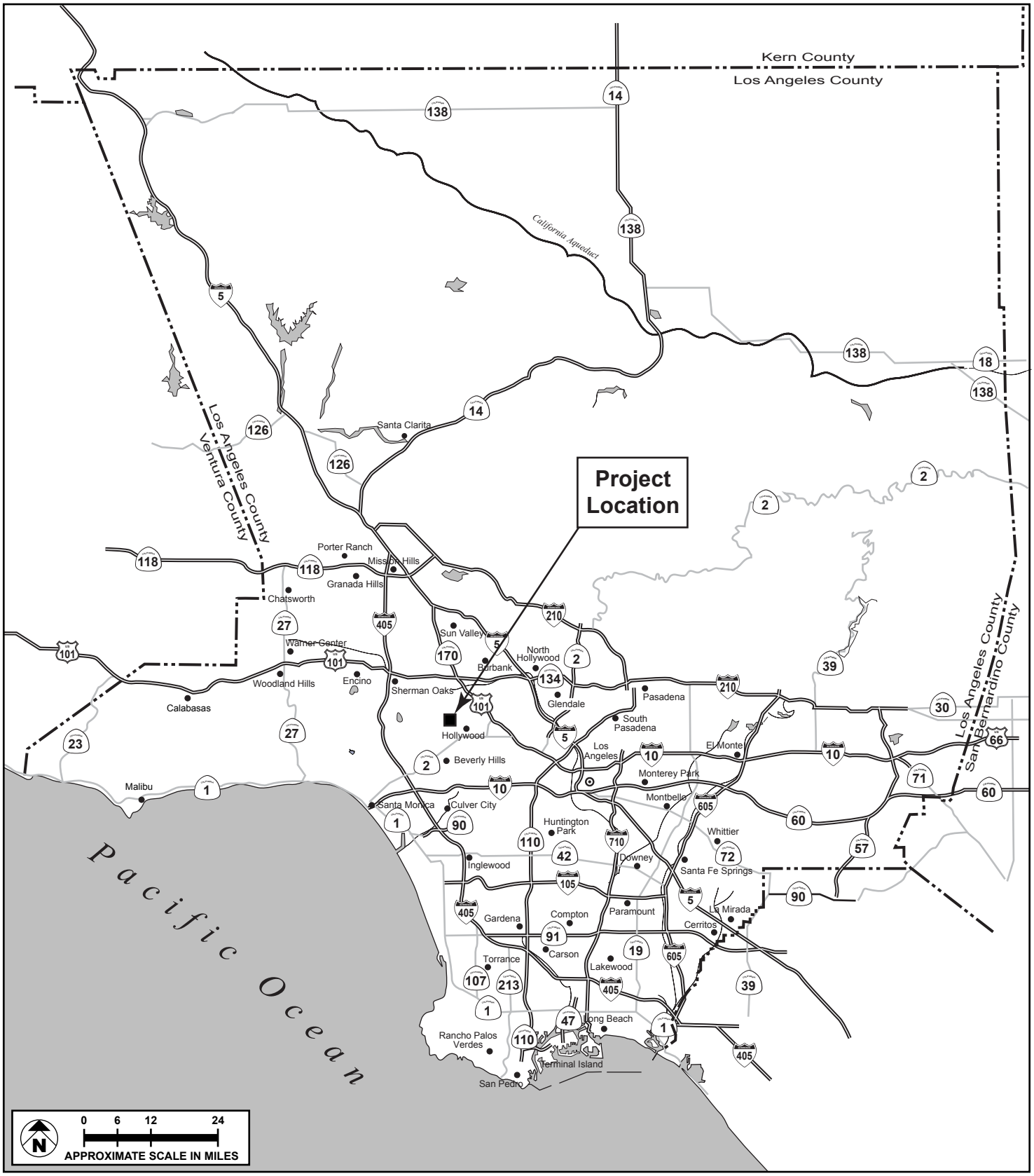

FIGURE **2.0-1**

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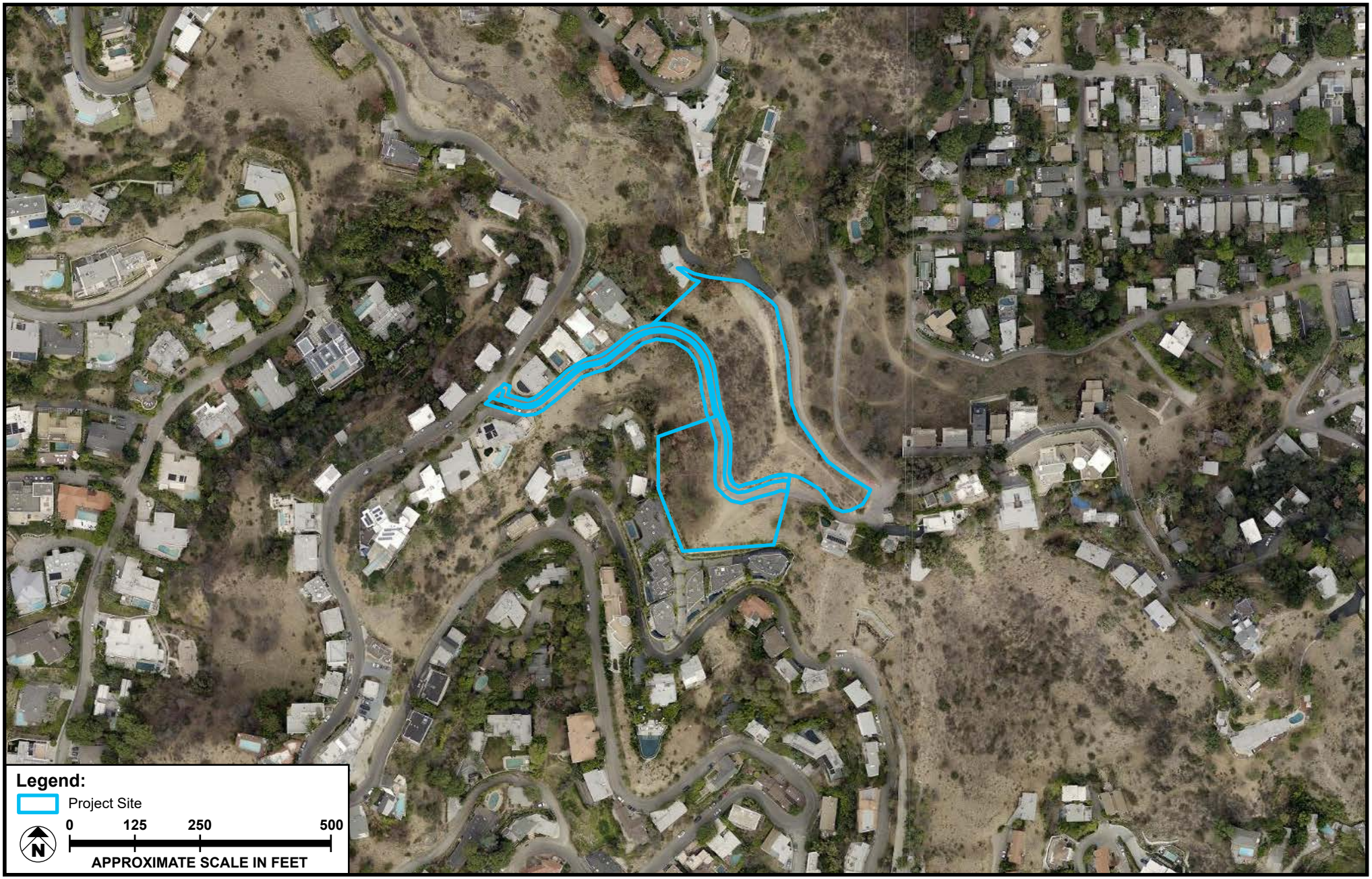
Project Location Map

147-001-16



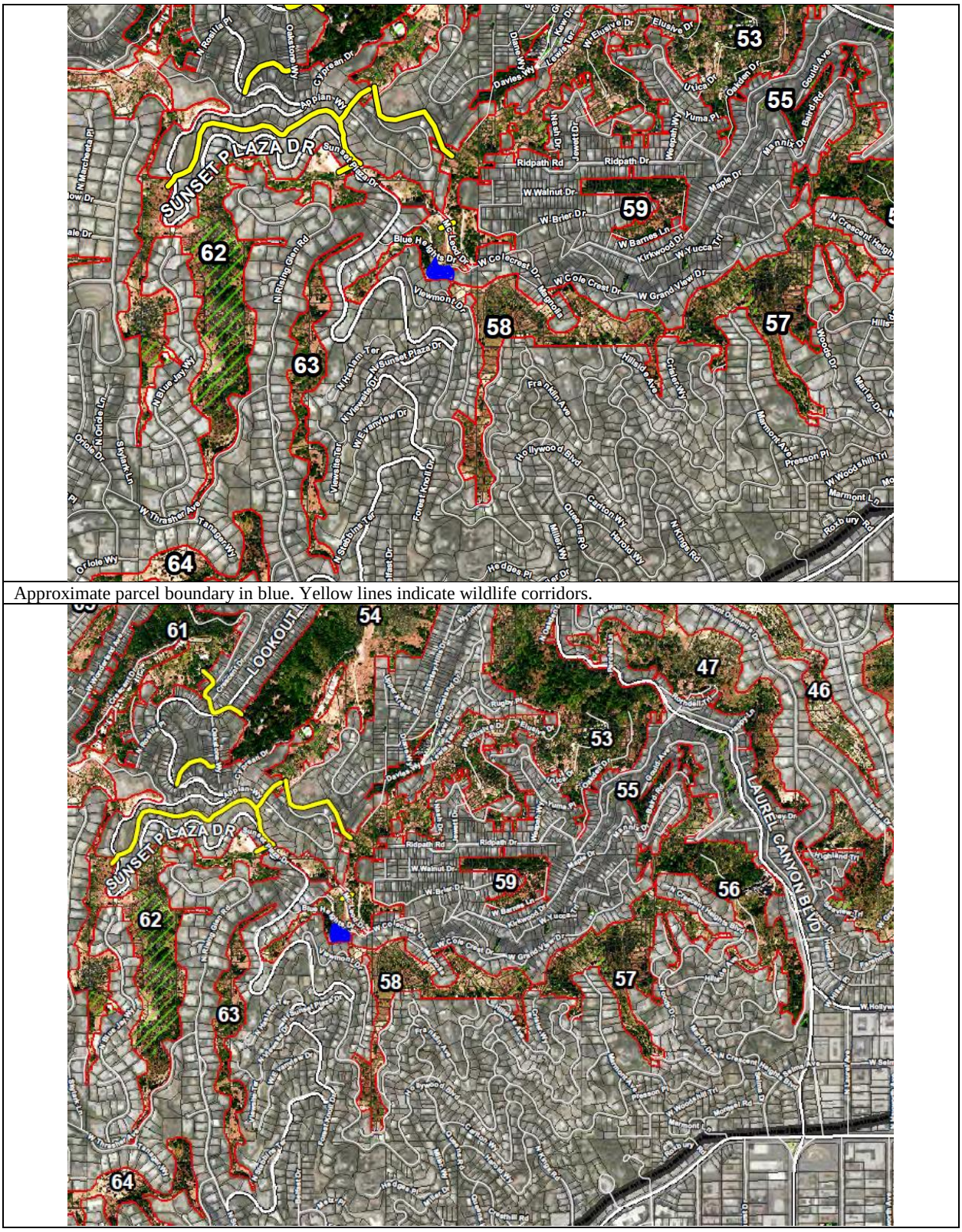
SOURCE: Navigate LA - 2018

FIGURE **2.0-2**

Meridian Consultants

Aerial Photograph of the Project Site

147-001-16



Approximate parcel boundary in blue. Yellow lines indicate wildlife corridors.

Figure 3. Habitat Blocks in the Project Vicinity from the *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map*.