

Hollister Municipal Airport Runway/Taxiway Safety Project

Biological Assessment



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Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY	1
1.1	Consultation to Date	2
2	DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	2
2.1	Project Overview	2
2.2	Project Location	2
2.3	Action Area	2
3	STUDIES CONDUCTED.....	7
3.1	Literature Review and Database Queries.....	7
3.2	Field Survey	7
4	AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	8
5	EFFECTS ANALYSIS	8
5.2	Indirect Effects.....	12
5.3	Cumulative Effects.....	12
6	AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES	12
7	EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT	15
7.1	Direct Effects	15
8	CONCLUSION AND EFFECTS DETERMINATION.....	16
8.1	No Effect.....	16
8.2	May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect.....	17
8.3	May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect.....	17
8.4	Restoration and Mitigation to Offset Effects on Species.....	17
9	LITERATURE CITED	19

List of Figures

Figure 1. Project Location.....	3
Figure 2. Action Area	4
Figure 3. CNDDDB Records of Federally Listed Species Near the Action Area	5
Figure 4. Aquatic Habitats Near the Action Area.....	6

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Special-Status Species Considered for Analysis	
Appendix B: Representative Photographs taken July 15, 2020	
Appendix C: Official List of Species with Potential to Occur in the Action Area	

Abbreviations Used

AMM	avoidance and minimization measure
BA	biological assessment
BMP	best management practices
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
CNDDB	California Natural Diversity Database
CRLF	California red-legged frog
CTS	California tiger salamander
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
IPaC	Information for Planning and Consulting
Project	Hollister Municipal Airport (CVH) Runway/Taxiway Safety Project
SJKF	San Joaquin kit fox
USC	U.S. Code
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey

1 INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The City of Hollister (City) is required by FAA regulations to make improvements to the Hollister Municipal Airport (CVH) by creating a new taxiway and modifying an existing runway. The proposed project includes two elements: 1) the demolition and removal of the approximately 3.91 acres of paved taxiway preceding (west of) Runway 6, and 2) construction of an approximately 0.23-acre perpendicular taxiway connecting Runway 6 and the southern taxiway. Work areas consist of paved runways and taxiways, adjacent hardscape shoulder, and non-native upland grassland.

The purpose of this biological assessment is to review the proposed project in sufficient detail to determine to what extent the proposed action may affect the threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species listed below. This biological assessment is prepared in accordance with legal requirements set forth under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1536 (c)).

Based on a literature review and a field visit on July 15, 2020, this BA considers the following species:

- California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*) (CTS) - Threatened
- California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) (CRLF) - Threatened
- San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*) - Endangered

The project addressed by this biological assessment does not fall within critical habitat for the CTS or CRLF. A final ruling on critical habitat for these species was established by USFWS (2005, 2010). Critical habitat has not been designated for the San Joaquin kit fox.

The project will result in permanent effects on approximately 0.23 acres of CTS upland habitat and temporary impacts to 0.31 acres of upland habitat. These effects will be offset by a total of 3.91 acres of hardscape and compacted gravel that will be removed and restored with vegetation as part of the proposed project, resulting in a net gain of 3.68 acres of upland habitat for the CTS. No impacts to breeding or non-breeding aquatic habitat for the CTS or CRLF will occur.

The City will minimize the potential to adversely affect the CTS, CRLF, and SJKF by implementing the avoidance and minimization measures described in Section 6 of this biological assessment.

Other federally listed species may be present near the action area, but the project is anticipated to have no effect on these species.

1.1 CONSULTATION TO DATE

No consultation between the project proponent and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has occurred to date.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

2.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The overall goal of the project is to comply with required airport design changes implemented by the FAA for safety of operations at the Hollister Municipal Airport. This project is located within the City of Hollister (City), in San Benito County (Figure 1), approximately 2.5 miles north of the city center. The proposed project includes two elements: 1) removal of the taxiway preceding (west of) Runway 6, and 2) construction of a perpendicular taxiway connecting Runway 6 and the southern taxiway.

Removal of the taxiway west of Runway 6 will include the demolition and removal of paved areas and minor grading. Installation of the taxiway connecting Runway 6 and the south taxiway will include grading of non-native grassland habitat, paving, and installation of runway safety lighting and signage. Lighting and signage will conform to FAA safety standards. A map of the proposed work area is provided in Figure 2.

2.1.1 SCHEDULE

Construction is anticipated to begin in 2022 and be completed the same year. Construction will occur during the dry season, between April 1 and October 31.

2.2 PROJECT LOCATION

The project is located in the City of Hollister, in San Benito County Section 17, Township 12S, Range 5E of the USGS 7 ½ minute San Felipe Quadrangle. An overview of the project location is shown in Figure 1. Surrounding land consists primarily of agricultural fields. Industrial development occurs east of the airport, and a concrete facility is present immediately northwest of the action area.

2.3 ACTION AREA

The action area is defined as “all areas to be affected directly or indirectly by the Federal action and not merely the immediate area involved in the action” (Code of Federal Regulations Title 50, Section 402.02). The project footprint, which includes Runway 6 and the south taxiway, west to the end of the paved taxiway, represents the limits of the action area (Figure 2). All construction activity would be confined to the previously identified work area limits, and no additional impacts to habitat for listed species would occur as a result of the project

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Figure 1. Project Location

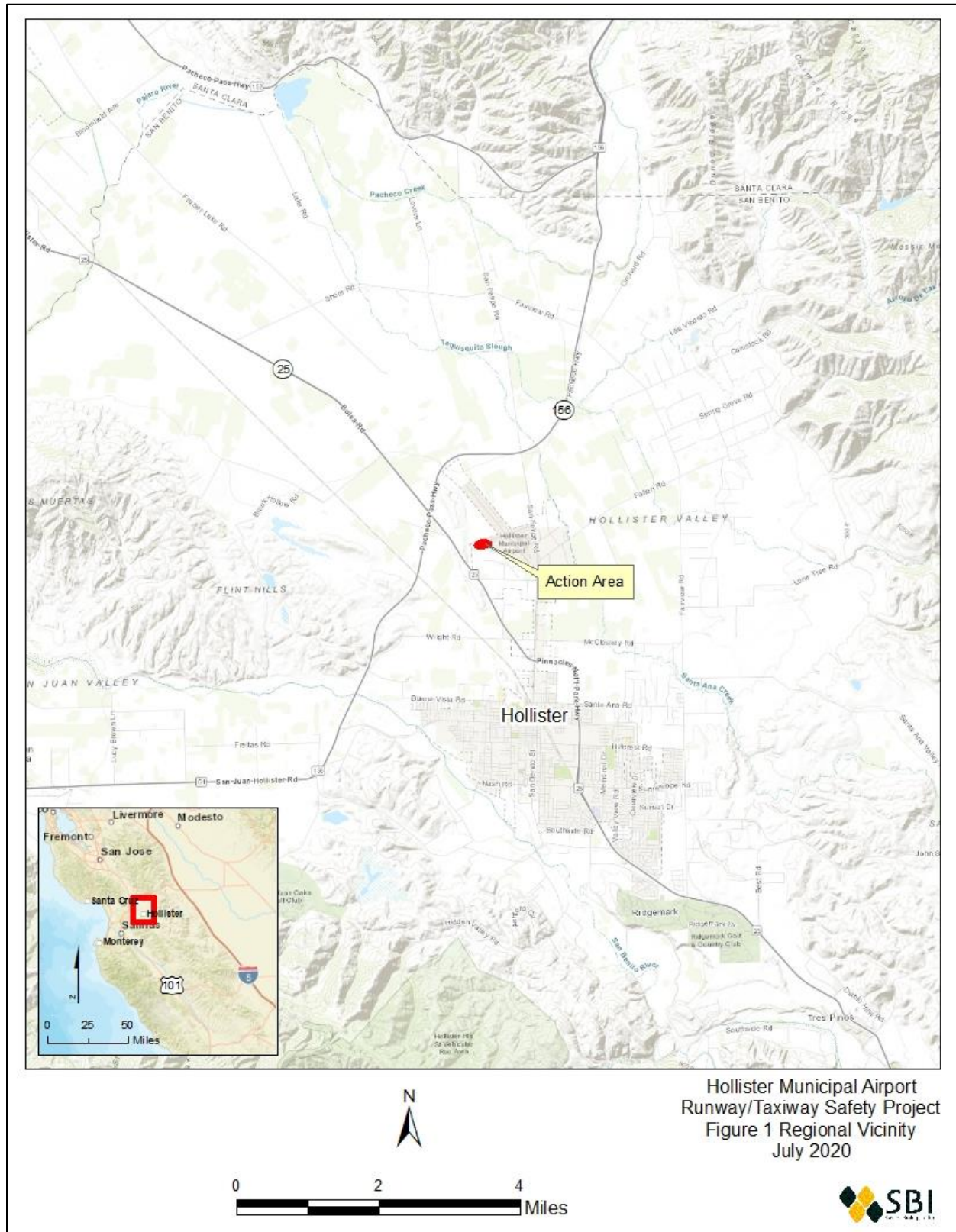


Figure 2. Action Area



CNDDB Occurrences
CDFW - July 2020

- California red-legged frog
- California tiger salamander
- San Joaquin kit fox
- vernal pool fairy shrimp

CRLF Critical Habitat
CTS Critical Habitat

Hollister Municipal Airport Runway/Taxiway Safety Project
Figure 3 - CNDDB Records of Federally Listed Species Near the Action Area July 2020

SBI

Figure 4. Aquatic Habitats Near the Action Area



3 STUDIES CONDUCTED

3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW AND DATABASE QUERIES

A query of federally listed wildlife species for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute quadrangles encompassing the action area was obtained from the USFWS's Sacramento Endangered Species Office Information for Planning and Consulting (IPaC) website on July 14, 2020.

Additional information about the distribution of special-status species in the area was compiled from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) for occurrences of special-status species within a 5-mile radius of the action area, and for occurrences of San Joaquin kit fox within a 10-mile radius of the action area (CNDDDB 2020); from aerial photographs of the project area; and from USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle maps of the project area. Information on the distribution of special-status species with potential to occur in the project region was also compiled from published literature. Figure 3 shows the CNDDDB records of federally listed species and USFWS designated critical habitat within five miles of the action area.

The database searches identified eight federally listed fish and wildlife and one plant species with potential to occur within the project vicinity (Appendix A). The official list is provided in Appendix C.

3.2 FIELD SURVEY

Swaim Biological, Inc. biologists Jeff Mitchell and Bridget Sousa conducted a reconnaissance-level survey on July 15, 2020 to aid in determining the status of listed species within the project vicinity. A focused survey for burrows suitable for SJKF (i.e., at least five inches in diameter and not narrowing within two feet of the surface) and for sign of SJKF occupancy was conducted within the action area and a surrounding 250-foot buffer. Representative photographs of the action area are provided in Appendix B.

4 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Two general land cover or habitat types were present within the action area. These are paved/hardscape and non-native annual grassland (Figure 3).

Paved areas include the existing airport runway and taxiway, which are bordered by a graveled shoulder.

Non-native annual grassland habitat borders the runways and taxiways and occurs between Runway 6 and the south taxiway. Grasslands throughout the airport are regularly mowed and may also be graded or tilled as part of the routine operations and maintenance of the airport. During the July field survey, dozens of pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*) burrows were present throughout grassland habitats in the action area and approximately a dozen California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) burrows also were present in the action area. Areas adjacent to the action area supported similar densities of small mammal burrows.

A drainage ditch immediately south of the action area and adjacent to several structures owned by the airport conveys runoff through three concrete culverts, approximately one foot in diameter. Wetland vegetation was not observed within or near the ditch. A wetland delineation of the airport conducted in 2011 concluded that the ditches drain only upland habitat and are not connected with any waters or wetlands (Analytical Environmental Services 2011). These ditches are not expected to pond water, except for short periods during heavy rain events (Analytical Environmental Services 2011).

5 EFFECTS ANALYSIS

The following section provides a discussion of species that may be affected by the project. Appendix A contains a complete list of species considered for analysis and includes species on which the project was determined to have no effect, and the reasons for those determinations. Areas in which temporary and permanent project impacts to listed species habitat will occur are shown in Figure 2.

5.1.1 CALIFORNIA TIGER SALAMANDER

5.1.1.1 Status and Distribution

The central population of the CTS is listed as threatened under both federal (USFWS 2004) and California State endangered species legislation. Critical habitat was designated in 2005 (USFWS 2005). The project is located outside of designated critical habitat for the species. The nearest designated critical habitat unit is the Ana Creek Unit, located approximately 3.8 miles southeast of the action area.

The CTS is strongly associated with grassland habitat but also occurs in other habitat types, including oak savanna, the edges of mixed woodlands, and foothill coniferous forests (Stebbins 2003). Adults spend most of the year in underground retreats, particularly in burrows of California

ground squirrels and pocket gopher, and occasionally are found in man-made structures. CTS make seasonal migrations from upland areas to breeding ponds starting with the onset of fall rains. Seasonal pools are most commonly used but CTS may also use permanent ponds if predatory fish are absent. After breeding, CTS adults return to their upland retreats after a few days or weeks. Juveniles require approximately 10-12 weeks to achieve metamorphosis. The juveniles then disperse to upland areas after spending a few hours or days near the edges of aquatic habitats.

5.1.1.2 Assessment Results

The nearest recorded observation of CTS is located immediately west of the action area within the Hollister Municipal Airport where a dead salamander was found outside of a burrow near Runway 6 during a survey in 2007 (CNDDDB 2020). Based on the specimen size and location, it is believed that the salamander may have been a dispersing juvenile that desiccated prior to finding suitable aestivation habitat. The surveyor who recorded this occurrence noted that suitable breeding habitats were not present in areas directly surrounding the specimen (CNDDDB 2020), however subsequent assessments identified multiple suitable breeding sites within the potential movement distance of the species (ESA 2018).

During a 2012 assessment, aquatic habitats that could potentially support CTS breeding were identified within about 1.3 miles of the proposed project site. These included a detention basin directly south of Runway 6 and several quarry ponds approximately 0.5 mile north of Runway 6 (ESA 2018). The detention basin holds water for at least part of the year and could support CTS breeding. The quarry ponds are subject to high levels of human disturbance associated with quarry operations and were not considered potential breeding habitat. Another assessment conducted in 2018 identified two additional features with potential to support CTS aquatic breeding, a 3.5-acre seasonal pond located 0.3 mile southwest of Runway 6, and a 2-acre ephemeral pool located near the intersection of McConnell Road and Hwy 25, about 0.3 mile west of Runway 6 (ESA 2018). Both features appeared to be surrounded by potential CTS upland habitat and may provide CTS aquatic breeding habitat when water persists long enough to support metamorphosis which typically occurs from May through July. These aquatic habitats are shown in Figure 4.

Grassland habitats in the action area contain low-growing vegetation and low densities of ground squirrel burrows that are suitable for use by CTS as underground retreats. No significant barriers to movement are present between the project area and nearby aquatic habitats that could support CTS breeding, therefore the portions of the action area containing grassland and small mammal burrows are suitable upland habitat for CTS. The portions of the project area that do not contain small mammal burrows may serve as dispersal habitat by CTS, and during the breeding season CTS may pass through the project area as they make overland movements to and from nearby breeding sites. Dispersing CTS also may move through or into the project area during the spring months when breeding ponds dry and recently metamorphosed juveniles disperse into the surrounding upland areas.

5.1.1.3 Project Effects

Project impacts on CTS could occur within portions of the action area containing grassland habitat as these areas provide suitable upland and dispersal habitat for the salamander. Small mammal burrows were present in the grassland habitat that will be affected by the project, and in these areas,

CTS may be directly impacted in their underground retreats by earthmoving activities. In paved areas, CTS dispersal could be impacted by the presence of open excavations and obstacles (e.g. BMP fencing) that may impede salamander movements. Migrating CTS that pass through the action area could become entrapped overnight or take cover under surface objects within the work area and be subject to injury or mortality. Project effects on CTS may therefore occur in all grasslands habitats that are temporarily or permanently impacted by the project. Project effects to CTS in the paved portions of the project area are only likely to occur if work occurs during rainy periods when salamanders are making breeding migrations or during the spring when metamorphosing juveniles leave breeding sites in search of suitable uplands.

5.1.2 CALIFORNIA RED-LEGGED FROG

5.1.2.1 Status and Distribution

The CRLF is listed as federally threatened (USFWS 1996) and is considered a Species of Special Concern by CDFW. Critical habitat was designated in 2006 and revised in 2010 (USFWS 2006, 2010). The project is located outside of designated critical habitat for the CRLF. The nearest designated critical habitat unit is STC-2, located approximately 4.4 miles north of the action area.

The CRLF breeds in wetlands, lakes, ponds, and other still or slow-moving sources of water that remain inundated long enough for larvae to complete metamorphosis, which typically occurs from 11–20 weeks after hatching (Storer 1925). During summer months, CRLF may take refuge in cool, moist areas, including small mammal burrows and soil crevices within a few hundred feet of aquatic habitats. Adult CRLF tend to be most active at night during wet weather, but they may make forays through upland areas at any time during the year (USFWS 2002).

5.1.2.2 Assessment Results

The nearest recorded observation of CRLF in the CNDDB (2020) consists of three juveniles observed in shallow construction pools in 1997, approximately 3.3 miles southeast of the action area. Other nearby records include observations of adult CRLF associated with pitfall trapping in the Flint Hills, 4.2 miles northeast of the action area; tadpoles observed within a pool in Pacheco Creek, 4.1 miles northeast of the action area; and adults observed in Tequisquita Slough, approximately 4.2 miles north of the action area. Observations of CRLF at these locations occurred between 1990 and 2006. No other extant records are known within a distance of five miles of the action area.

CRLF have been recorded dispersing as far as two miles from their breeding ponds (Bulger et al. 2003). Several areas that could provide CRLF non-breeding aquatic habitat were identified within two miles of the action area, and are described in Section 5.1.1, above, however aerial imagery indicates that the ephemeral pond and seasonal wetland do not maintain a sufficient hydroperiod to support CRLF breeding (Google Earth 2020). None of the aquatic features located within potential movement distance of CRLF contain emergent or bankside vegetation necessary to support CRLF egg mass attachment and provide cover from predators. The nearest known CRLF breeding ponds are located more than four miles from the action area.

Adult and juvenile CRLF spend the majority of their time either in close proximity to their breeding habitat or in other moist habitats, although they are known to disperse across a variety of upland

habitats, including grasslands and agricultural lands (Fellers 2005, Fellers and Kleeman 2007). The non-native annual grassland habitat in and adjacent to the action area could provide suitable dispersal habitat for CRLF if aquatic breeding habitat were present nearby, however no suitable breeding habitat was identified within at least two miles of the action area.

5.1.2.3 Project Effects

No suitable breeding habitat or records of the CRLF are present with the maximum known movement ability of the species, and CRLF are therefore not expected to occur within the action area. In the unlikely event that CRLF are present within aquatic sites near in the action area, the implementation of AMMs to protect CTS, such as preconstruction surveys, biological monitoring, and limiting work to periods of dry weather, would further reduce the potential for project impacts on CRLF. For these reasons project effects on the CRLF are not expected to occur.

5.1.3 SAN JOAQUIN KIT FOX

5.1.3.1 Status and Distribution

The SJKF is listed as federally endangered (USFWS 1967) and State threatened. Kit foxes are typically associated with arid lands with sparse or absent shrub cover, sparse ground cover, and short vegetation. They construct underground burrows and tend to occur in areas with sandy soils that are relatively stone-free to several feet below the surface. They are primarily nocturnal and are active throughout the year. Burrows suitable for use by SJKF are generally at least four to five inches in diameter at the surface and extend at least two feet below the surface without narrowing below four inches. Critical habitat has not been designated for the SJKF.

5.1.3.2 Assessment Results

Of the seven recorded observations of SJKF that occur within a 10-mile radius of the action area, none were recorded within the past 10 years, and most date from the 1970s (CNDDB 2020). The most recent record of SJKF was recorded in 1992 approximately 3.0 miles southwest of the action area, west of Highway 25. The record noted a female and three of her litter of four to five pups were found dead at this location.

During field surveys no burrows large enough to support SJKF were observed within the action area, or within grasslands occurring within 250 feet of the action area. A series of culverts to the south and outside of the action area could provide marginally suitable denning habitat for the species in dry months, but no sign of occupancy by kit fox was observed during surveys. Because SJKF can travel over a wide variety of habitats, including across agricultural fields, highways and aqueducts, all habitats within the action area are suitable for kit fox dispersal.

5.1.3.3 Project Effects

No suitable den habitat was observed in the action area, or within 250 feet of proposed work areas. Although suitable dispersal habitat for the SJKF is present within the action area it is extremely unlikely that project impacts on kit foxes will occur. The project is located near the western extent of the species' range and no recent sightings have been documented near the action area. If a potential SJKF den is present in the action area and cannot be avoided, the measures listed in Section 6, below, will be implemented to ensure that no impacts on SJKF will occur.

5.2 INDIRECT EFFECTS

Indirect effects are defined by USFWS as effects that are caused by the action and occur later in time but are still reasonably certain to occur. The proposed project is not expected to increase traffic at or utilization of the Hollister Municipal Airport in any significant way. Therefore, no long-term effects on federally protected wildlife populations near the action area are anticipated as a result of project activities. Once the project is completed, the temporarily affected habitat in the action area will be restored and it is expected to continue to provide suitable CTS upland habitat. Permanent impacts in the form of new hardscape features will be small in scale and will be entirely offset by the larger area of pavement and compacted gravel that will be demolished and revegetated. Therefore, no indirect effects to listed species or their habitats are expected to occur.

5.3 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

No future State, Tribal, local or private actions were identified that are anticipated to occur within the action area. Therefore, no cumulative effects arising from future non-federal actions are anticipated. Future maintenance or construction at the airport that could impact federally listed species would be subject to separate consultation under the federal Endangered Species Act.

6 AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES

The following conservation measures will be implemented as part of the proposed project to avoid and/or minimize the risk of potential impacts to listed species and their habitats.

1. **Approved Biological Monitor.** A USFWS-approved biologist(s) will be onsite during all activities that may result in take of the California tiger salamander (CTS), including the initial ground disturbance in areas containing small mammal burrows. The qualifications of the biologist(s) will be submitted to the USFWS for review and written approval at least thirty (30) calendar days prior to the date ground disturbance is initiated at the project site.
2. **California Tiger Salamander Preconstruction Survey.** No more than twenty-four (24) hours prior to the date of initial ground disturbance, a preconstruction survey for the CTS will be conducted by a USFWS-approved biologist at the project site. The survey will include a visual examination of mammal burrows, such as California ground squirrels or gophers, to the extent feasible. If any CTS are found, the USFWS will be contacted to determine if moving any of the individuals is appropriate.
3. **San Joaquin Kit Fox Preconstruction Survey.** A USFWS-approved biologist will conduct a preconstruction survey, within the limits of the proposed temporary and permanent impacts in grassland and ruderal habitat, no less than 14 days before the beginning of ground disturbance or other activity that could affect the San Joaquin kit fox (SJKF). If any potential kit fox dens are present, their disturbance and destruction will be avoided. If potential dens are located within the proposed work area and cannot be avoided during construction, a qualified biologist will determine if the dens are occupied or were recently occupied using a remote camera, track plate, or other methodology coordinated with the USFWS. If unoccupied, the qualified biologist shall collapse these dens. If

occupied, the biologist shall consult with USFWS regarding best practices for encouraging the SJKF(s) to move to alternate dens outside the work areas, including excavation or construction of artificial dens.

4. **Preconstruction Survey for Nesting Birds.** If construction must be performed in the bird nesting season (February 1 through August 31), a qualified biologist shall survey the proposed project area for nesting birds no more than 14 days prior to construction activities. If active nests are observed, no-construction buffer zones shall be established around nests, with a buffer size established by the qualified biologist in consultation with USFWS. Buffer zones shall be avoided during construction activities until young have fledged or the nest is otherwise abandoned.
5. **Worker Training.** The USFWS-approved biologist will conduct employee education training for employees working on earthmoving and/or construction activities. Personnel will be required to attend the presentation which will describe the CTS, CRLF, and SJKF, the avoidance and minimization measures being implemented to protect listed species, legal protection of the animals, and penalties for unauthorized take of listed species. All attendees will sign a training log with their printed name, and company or agency indicating that they have attended the training.
6. **Minimize and Identify Project Footprint.** The applicant will minimize adverse effects to listed species habitat by limiting, to the maximum extent possible, the extent of access routes, construction areas, equipment staging, storage, parking, and stockpile areas. Prior to the date of initial ground disturbance at the project site, any areas located in listed species habitat that may be disturbed will be identified and clearly marked in the field with wooden staking, high visibility flagging, or other methods.
7. **Avoid Small Mammal Burrows.** Prior to the start of construction, a USFWS-approved biologist will identify burrows suitable for use by CTS in the temporary work area and mark the burrows for avoidance using high visibility flagging or another similar method. The flagging will remain in place during project construction and the burrows will be avoided by heavy equipment and vehicle traffic to the extent feasible. After construction is completed the flagging will be removed from the site.
8. **Seasonal Work Restriction.** To the extent practicable, project activities will be avoided between November 1 and March 31 because that is the time period when CTS are most likely to be moving through upland areas. When project activities must take place between November 1 and March 31, a USFWS-approved biologist will conduct a survey of the project area prior to the start of work to ensure no listed species are present.
9. **Wildlife Exclusion Fencing.** If work must occur between November 1 and March 31, temporary wildlife exclusion fencing will be installed to enclose the project work areas. The fencing, which can be made of silt fence, wood, geotextile fabric, or other durable material, will be a minimum of two feet in height and will be buried at least six inches underground. Gates will be installed to allow vehicles to enter from access roads. These gates will be closed at the end of each workday. Exit funnels may be installed where

appropriate to allow small vertebrates to leave the work area unharmed. The exclusion fencing will remain in place for the duration of the wet season (i.e., November 1 through March 31) while project activities are ongoing. A USFWS-approved biologist will regularly inspect the fence for proper functioning and the fence will be maintained in good working condition for the duration of the wet season. Wildlife exclusion fencing will be removed following project completion.

10. **Use of Existing Roads.** All project-related vehicle traffic will be restricted to established roads, paved or disturbed areas, or designated construction areas. Off-road vehicle use outside of designated project work areas will be prohibited.
11. **Stormwater Pollution Prevention.** Stormwater pollution prevention plans (SWPPPs) and erosion control BMPs will be developed and implemented to minimize any wind- or water-related erosion. The applicant will include provisions in construction contracts for measures to protect sensitive areas and prevent and minimize stormwater and non-stormwater discharges. Protective measures will include, at a minimum, those listed below.
 - a. No discharge of pollutants from vehicle or equipment cleaning will be allowed into any storm drains, water courses, or drainage ditches.
 - b. Vehicle and equipment fueling and maintenance operations will be at least 50 feet away from water courses, except at established vehicle maintenance facilities.
 - c. Concrete waste and water from curing operations will be collected in washouts and will be disposed of and not allowed into water courses.
 - d. Spill containment kits will be maintained onsite at all times during construction operations and/or staging or fueling of equipment.
 - e. Dust control measures will be implemented in areas of ground disturbance and for temporary soil stockpiles when weather conditions require.
12. **Equipment Leaks.** The applicant will maintain all construction equipment to prevent leaks of fuels, lubricants, or other fluids.
13. **Litter and Trash Management.** All food scraps, wrappers, food containers, cans, bottles, and other trash from the work area will be disposed of in closed trash containers. The trash containers will be removed from the project site on at least a weekly basis.
14. **Entrapment Hazards.** Any pipes, conduits and other materials greater than one inch in diameter shall be capped if stored overnight, elevated above ground to reduce the potential for animals to climb into them, or thoroughly inspected before they are moved or buried. Excavations greater than one foot in depth that area left open overnight will include escape ramps set at an angle less than 33 degrees to ensure that wildlife can climb out.
15. **No Plastic Monofilament.** Plastic monofilament netting (erosion control matting or similar material in any form will not be used at the project site because CTS can become

entangled and trapped in it. Appropriate substitute materials may include burlap, coir fiber, or jute fiber netting,

16. **Work During Dry Weather.** To the maximum extent practicable, no construction activities will occur during rain events or within 24-hours following a rain event while wet conditions persist. Prior to construction activities resuming, a USFWS approved biologist will inspect the project area and all equipment/materials for the presence of listed species.
17. **Work During Daytime Hours.** To the maximum extent practicable, night-time construction will be minimized or avoided by the applicant. Earthmoving construction activities will cease no less than 30 minutes before sunset and will not begin again prior to no less than 30 minutes after sunrise. Except when necessary for safety, artificial lighting at the project site will be prohibited during the hours of darkness to the maximum extent practicable. Artificial lighting, if used, will be directed downward, and will only be used in the immediate workspace.
18. **Restore Disturbed Areas.** Any grassland habitats temporarily disturbed by project construction shall be restored to pre-project conditions. To the extent practicable, topsoil will be salvaged for future replacement. Once grading and construction are complete, the salvaged topsoil will be distributed on the surface of the disturbed soil areas. Areas where hardscape is removed will be seeded with native California plants, or with a seed mix consistent with existing grassland vegetation.
19. **Report Unanticipated Take.** The applicant will report any information to the USFWS about take or suspected take of federally listed wildlife species. The USFWS will be notified via electronic mail and telephone within twenty-four (24) hours from the time of the discovery. Notification will include the species, number of individuals, sex (if known), date, time, location of the incident or of the finding of a dead or injured animal, how the individual was taken, photographs of the animal, and names of the persons who observe the take and/or found the animal. The individual animal will be preserved, as appropriate, and held in a secure location until instructions are received from the USFWS regarding the disposition of the specimen or the USFWS takes custody of the specimen.

7 Effects of the Project

The ways in which the project may affect federally listed species and their habitats are described as follows.

7.1 Direct Effects

Effects that take place at the time of the proposed action are considered direct effects. Direct effects to habitat for the CTS are anticipated to occur as a result of the project. Impacts to other federally listed species are not anticipated.

Permanent impacts on CTS upland and dispersal habitat will occur from installation of the taxiway connecting Runway 6 and the south taxiway, which will remove an estimated 0.23 acre of suitable

upland habitat. Removal of the paved runway/taxiway west of the proposed connecting taxiway will result in the addition of 3.91 acres of upland habitat once restoration is complete and small mammal burrows become established in the area.

An additional 0.31 acres of temporary impacts on upland habitat will occur during project implementation as a result of the temporary workspace that will be required around the new taxiway. Vegetation within this area will be restored to approximate pre-project conditions within one year of initial ground disturbance, therefore the effects are considered temporary. The quality of habitat in the restored areas is expected to meet or exceed that of the pre-project conditions.

7.1.1 CALIFORNIA TIGER SALAMANDER

Impacts on habitat for the CTS will be limited to upland and dispersal habitat. Within the action area CTS may occur in non-native grasslands where small mammal burrows are present. Because of their small size and cryptic nature, impacts to individual CTS that occupy the action area may not be detected, but ground disturbing activities could result in direct effects to individuals. Conservation measures have been incorporated into the project to address potential effects and it is anticipated that these measures will reduce the risk of these effects occurring.

The installation of a perpendicular taxiway and removal of existing hardscape will result in a net increase in grassland habitat, and small mammals from adjacent grasslands are expected to begin to colonize the area soon after project completion. Thus, project implementation is not expected to affect the ability of CTS to use the action area for upland and dispersal habitat after construction is complete.

7.1.2 CALIFORNIA RED-LEGGED FROG

The CRLF is extremely unlikely to occur in the action area, therefore direct impacts on the CRLF or on its habitat are not expected to occur as a result of the project. The installation of the perpendicular taxiway and removal of existing hardscape will result in a net increase in grassland habitat which could serve as dispersal habitat for the CRLF if a population becomes established in the area in the future.

7.1.3 SAN JOAQUIN KIT FOX

The SJKF is extremely unlikely to occur in the action area, therefore direct impacts on the SJKF or on its habitat are not expected to occur as a result of the project. If present in the project vicinity, the installation of additional hardscape, and net increase in grassland habitat would not affect the ability of SJKF to disperse across the action area after construction is complete. In the unlikely event that a kit fox enters the project area, implementation of the AMMs in Section 6, above, will prevent direct impacts from occurring.

8 CONCLUSION AND EFFECTS DETERMINATION

8.1 NO EFFECT

Species for which the action was determined to have no effect include the marsh sandwort (*Arenaria paludicola*), vernal pool fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*), blunt-nosed leopard lizard

(*Gambelia silus*), California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*), least bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), and southwest willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). Suitable habitat for these species is absent from the action area, therefore, no effects on these species are expected to occur as a result of project activities. A list of all species considered for this BA, and the reasons for this determination, are provided in Appendix A, and an official species list for the project, generated from the USFWS IPaC website, is provided in Appendix C.

8.2 MAY AFFECT, NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT

The action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the CRLF and SJKF. Suitable breeding habitat is largely unavailable within the maximum dispersal distance of the CRLF from the action area. The detention basin immediately south of the project lacks suitable emergent and bankside vegetation for CRLF egg attachment and is unlikely to be used by the species for breeding. Given the lack of nearby breeding habitat, and distance to known occurrences of the species, it is extremely unlikely that the species will occur in the action area. Measures to protect the CRLF that will be incorporated into the project, including preconstruction surveys, seasonal work restrictions, and biological monitoring, will further help to ensure that the project does not result in adverse effects on the CRLF.

Suitable SJKF den habitat is absent from the action area, and the species is not expected to occur in the area, therefore adverse effects on the SJKF are extremely unlikely. Although SJKF sometimes move through a range of habitat types that are adjacent to their core habitat, the action area is not located adjacent to high-quality habitat, few records of the species occur in the region, and no observations of the species have been recorded in the region in the past 10 years. Measures to protect the SJKF that will be incorporated into the project, including preconstruction surveys and biological monitoring, will further help to ensure that the project does not result in adverse effects to the SJKF.

8.3 MAY AFFECT, LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT

Project activities are likely to adversely affect the CTS if individuals are present in the action area. The movement of vehicles and equipment within work areas, clearing and grading, and the placement of materials and spoils piles may affect individuals that are present within vegetation, under surface objects, or inhabiting underground burrows. CTS that may attempt to move through the project area could become entrapped in open excavations or entangled in erosion control devices. Implementing the AMMs described in Section 6 are expected to reduce the potential for these effects to occur.

It is estimated that a total of 0.23 acres of combined CTS upland and dispersal habitat would be permanently affected as a result of project activities and that 0.31 acres of CTS upland and dispersal habitat would be temporarily impacted. An estimated 3.91 acres of new upland and dispersal habitat is expected to be added as a result of project activities. No effects on CTS critical habitat would occur.

8.4 RESTORATION AND MITIGATION TO OFFSET EFFECTS ON SPECIES

The project will incorporate measures to avoid and minimize effects on listed species and their habitats. Effects on habitat will be minimized through the implementation of the AMMs described

in Section 6 of this biological assessment that have been incorporated into the project. Following the completion of project activities, all construction material and debris will be removed and disposed of appropriately. Unpaved work areas will be restored to conditions similar to those existing on adjacent areas.

The action will result in permanent impacts to 0.23 acre, and in the removal of 3.91 acres of hardscape, resulting in a net gain of 3.68 acres of non-native grassland habitat, therefore compensation in the form of in-perpetuity habitat protection is not proposed.

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Appendix A: Special-Status Species Considered for Analysis

Eight federally listed wildlife species and one federally listed plant species were identified as having the potential to occur in the vicinity of the project. This list follows the official list of threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate species, as well as proposed and final designated critical habitat, under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) that may occur within the boundary of the action area.

Common Name (Scientific Name)	Listing Status ¹ : Federal/State/Other	Associated Habitats	Potential for Occurrence
Plants			
Marsh sandwort (<i>Arenaria paludicola</i>)	FE/SE	Occurs in freshwater marshes and swamps. In California, known to occur in only two natural and two reintroduced locations in San Luis Obispo County.	None. Suitable marsh habitat is absent from the action area and the species is not known to occur in San Benito County.
Crustaceans			
Vernal pool fairy shrimp (<i>Branchinecta lynchi</i>)	FT/--	Vernal and ephemeral freshwater pools in the San Francisco Bay Area and Central Valley.	None. Suitable habitat is absent from the action area.
Amphibians			
California red-legged frog (<i>Rana draytonii</i>)	FT/SSC	Still or slow-moving water with emergent or riparian vegetation (breeding). Cool, moist areas with adequate cover (non-breeding). Requires barrier-free areas to allow movement between breeding and upland habitats.	Unlikely to occur. Marginally suitable aquatic non-breeding habitat is present within potential movement distance. Suitable upland dispersal habitat is present, but provides few foraging or refugial opportunities. No known occurrences of the species have been recorded within the maximum movement distance of the species.
California tiger salamander (<i>Ambystoma californiense</i>)	FT/ST	Breeds in ponds and vernal pools in grasslands and oak woodlands. Uses small mammal burrows in grasslands for upland habitat.	May occur. Marginally suitable breeding habitat occurs within potential dispersal distance of the action area and a record of occurrence is present just west of the airport (CNDDB 2020). Suitable upland habitat is present in the action area.

Common Name (Scientific Name)	Listing Status ¹ : Federal/State/Other	Associated Habitats	Potential for Occurrence
Reptiles			
Blunt-nosed leopard lizard (<i>Gambelia silus</i>)	FE/SE	Expansive, arid areas with scattered vegetation; nonnative grassland and alkali sink scrub communities In the foothills of the southern San Joaquin Valley and Carrizo Plain; they occur in the chenopod community which is associated with nonalkaline; sandy soils.	None. Suitable habitat is absent from the action area and the action area is outside of the known range of the species.
Birds			
California condor (<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>)	FE/SE/FP	Prefers mountains; gorges; and hillsides; which create updrafts; thus providing favorable soaring conditions. Foraging habitat consists mainly of open foothill grassland areas and oak savannah foothills that support populations of deer and cattle. Nests in caves or clefts among boulders on cliffs or hillsides.	None. Suitable habitat is absent from the action area.
Least bell's vireo (<i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i>)	FE/SE	Inhabits riparian areas during breeding season. Typically inhabits structurally diverse woodlands along watercourses; including cottonwood-willow forests; oak woodlands and mule fat scrub. Winters in southern Baja California in Mexico.	None. Suitable riparian habitat is absent from the action area.
Southwest willow Flycatcher (<i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>)	FE/SE	In California, breeding range from Santa Ynez River south; breeds in dense riparian habitats along rivers, streams, other wetlands; vegetation dominated by dense growths of willows, seepwillow, other shrubs; presence of dense vegetation is most important through all vegetation layers; within close proximity of water.	None. Suitable habitat is absent from the action area.
Mammals			
San Joaquin kit fox (<i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i>)	FE/ST	Grasslands and scrublands and agricultural mosaics of row crops; irrigated pastures; orchards; vineyards; and grazed annual grasslands	Unlikely to Occur. Suitable den sites are absent from the action area and areas within 250 feet. Agricultural fields surrounding the action area act as a barrier to movement between the action area and suitable habitats in the Hollister area. Further, high levels of human disturbance associated with airport operations are likely to deter kit fox from using habitats within the action area. Thus, the species is not expected to occur within the action area, except as a rare transient.

¹ Status codes are defined as follows:

Federal status: USFWS Listing

FE = Listed as endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act

FT = Listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act

California State Status: CDFW Listing

SE = Listed as endangered under California Endangered Species Act

ST = Listed as threatened under California Endangered Species Act

SSC = Species of Special Concern

FP = Fully protected

Appendix B:
Representative Photographs taken July 15, 2020



Photo 1. Overview of the action area, facing west. Runway 6 is located on the right side of the photograph.



Photo 2. Gopher burrows present within the action area.



Photo 3. One of about a dozen California ground squirrel burrows present within the action area. Taken facing west.



Photo 4. Runway 6 hardscape to be removed. Taken facing east.



Photo 5. Drainage ditch and culvert located immediately south and outside of the action area. Taken facing west.



Photo 6. Seasonally flooded detention basin located southwest and outside of the action area. Taken facing south.

Appendix C:
Official List of Species with Potential to Occur in the Action Area



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ventura Fish And Wildlife Office
2493 Portola Road, Suite B
Ventura, CA 93003-7726
Phone: (805) 644-1766 Fax: (805) 644-3958



In Reply Refer To:

July 14, 2020

Consultation Code: 08EVEN00-2020-SLI-0520

Event Code: 08EVEN00-2020-E-01081

Project Name: Hollister Municipal Airport Runway/Taxiway 6 Safety Project

Subject: List of threatened and endangered species that may occur in your proposed project location, and/or may be affected by your proposed project

To Whom It May Concern:

The enclosed list identifies species listed as threatened and endangered, species proposed for listing as threatened or endangered, designated and proposed critical habitat, and species that are candidates for listing that may occur within the boundary of the area you have indicated using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Information Planning and Conservation System (IPaC). The species list fulfills the requirements under section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). Please note that under 50 CFR 402.12(e) of the regulations implementing section 7 of the Act, the species list should be verified after 90 days. We recommend that verification be completed by visiting the IPaC website at regular intervals during project planning and implementation for updates to species lists following the same process you used to receive the enclosed list. Please include the Consultation Tracking Number in the header of this letter with any correspondence about the species list.

Due to staff shortages and excessive workload, we are unable to provide an official list more specific to your area. Numerous other sources of information are available for you to narrow the list to the habitats and conditions of the site in which you are interested. For example, we recommend conducting a biological site assessment or surveys for plants and animals that could help refine the list.

If a Federal agency is involved in the project, that agency has the responsibility to review its proposed activities and determine whether any listed species may be affected. If the project is a major construction project*, the Federal agency has the responsibility to prepare a biological assessment to make a determination of the effects of the action on the listed species or critical habitat. If the Federal agency determines that a listed species or critical habitat is likely to be adversely affected, it should request, in writing through our office, formal consultation pursuant to section 7 of the Act. Informal consultation may be used to exchange information and resolve conflicts with respect to threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat prior to a

written request for formal consultation. During this review process, the Federal agency may engage in planning efforts but may not make any irreversible commitment of resources. Such a commitment could constitute a violation of section 7(d) of the Act.

Federal agencies are required to confer with the Service, pursuant to section 7(a)(4) of the Act, when an agency action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any proposed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat (50 CFR 402.10(a)). A request for formal conference must be in writing and should include the same information that would be provided for a request for formal consultation. Conferences can also include discussions between the Service and the Federal agency to identify and resolve potential conflicts between an action and proposed species or proposed critical habitat early in the decision-making process. The Service recommends ways to minimize or avoid adverse effects of the action. These recommendations are advisory because the jeopardy prohibition of section 7(a)(2) of the Act does not apply until the species is listed or the proposed critical habitat is designated. The conference process fulfills the need to inform Federal agencies of possible steps that an agency might take at an early stage to adjust its actions to avoid jeopardizing a proposed species.

When a proposed species or proposed critical habitat may be affected by an action, the lead Federal agency may elect to enter into formal conference with the Service even if the action is not likely to jeopardize or result in the destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat. If the proposed species is listed or the proposed critical habitat is designated after completion of the conference, the Federal agency may ask the Service, in writing, to confirm the conference as a formal consultation. If the Service reviews the proposed action and finds that no significant changes in the action as planned or in the information used during the conference have occurred, the Service will confirm the conference as a formal consultation on the project and no further section 7 consultation will be necessary. Use of the formal conference process in this manner can prevent delays in the event the proposed species is listed or the proposed critical habitat is designated during project development or implementation.

Candidate species are those species presently under review by the Service for consideration for Federal listing. Candidate species should be considered in the planning process because they may become listed or proposed for listing prior to project completion. Preparation of a biological assessment, as described in section 7(c) of the Act, is not required for candidate species. If early evaluation of your project indicates that it is likely to affect a candidate species, you may wish to request technical assistance from this office.

Only listed species receive protection under the Act. However, sensitive species should be considered in the planning process in the event they become listed or proposed for listing prior to project completion. We recommend that you review information in the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Natural Diversity Data Base. You can contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife at (916) 324-3812 for information on other sensitive species that may occur in this area.

[*A Biological Assessment is required for construction projects (or other undertakings having similar physical impacts) that are major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment as defined in the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4332(2) (c)). For projects other than major construction activities, the Service suggests that a biological evaluation similar to a Biological Assessment be prepared to determine whether the project may affect listed or proposed species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat. Recommended contents of a Biological Assessment are described at 50 CFR 402.12.]

Attachment(s):

- Official Species List

Official Species List

This list is provided pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and fulfills the requirement for Federal agencies to "request of the Secretary of the Interior information whether any species which is listed or proposed to be listed may be present in the area of a proposed action".

This species list is provided by:

Ventura Fish And Wildlife Office

2493 Portola Road, Suite B

Ventura, CA 93003-7726

(805) 644-1766

Project Summary

Consultation Code: 08EVEN00-2020-SLI-0520

Event Code: 08EVEN00-2020-E-01081

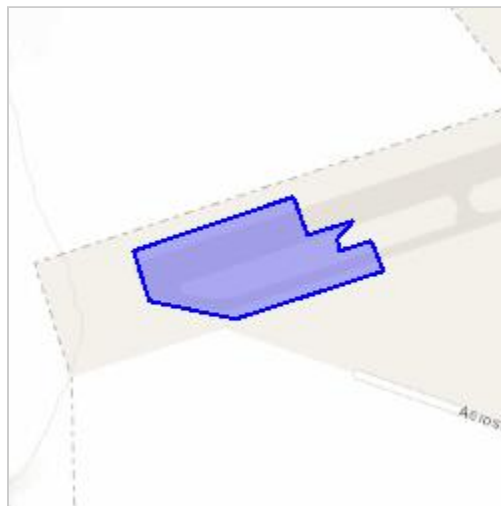
Project Name: Hollister Municipal Airport Runway/Taxiway 6 Safety Project

Project Type: TRANSPORTATION

Project Description: Hollister Municipal Airport will be conducting the following activities at Runway 6: construction of a partial parallel Taxiway K and removal of taxiway preceding Runway 6.

Project Location:

Approximate location of the project can be viewed in Google Maps: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/36.88930989633437N121.41410652526551W>



Counties: San Benito, CA

Endangered Species Act Species

There is a total of 9 threatened, endangered, or candidate species on this species list.

Species on this list should be considered in an effects analysis for your project and could include species that exist in another geographic area. For example, certain fish may appear on the species list because a project could affect downstream species.

IPaC does not display listed species or critical habitats under the sole jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries¹, as USFWS does not have the authority to speak on behalf of NOAA and the Department of Commerce.

See the "Critical habitats" section below for those critical habitats that lie wholly or partially within your project area under this office's jurisdiction. Please contact the designated FWS office if you have questions.

-
1. [NOAA Fisheries](#), also known as the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce.

Mammals

NAME	STATUS
San Joaquin Kit Fox <i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i> No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2873	Endangered

Birds

NAME	STATUS
California Condor <i>Gymnogyps californianus</i> Population: U.S.A. only, except where listed as an experimental population There is final critical habitat for this species. Your location is outside the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8193	Endangered
Least Bell's Vireo <i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i> There is final critical habitat for this species. Your location is outside the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/5945	Endangered
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher <i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i> There is final critical habitat for this species. Your location is outside the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6749	Endangered

Reptiles

NAME	STATUS
Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard <i>Gambelia silus</i> No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/625	Endangered

Amphibians

NAME	STATUS
California Red-legged Frog <i>Rana draytonii</i> There is final critical habitat for this species. Your location is outside the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2891	Threatened
California Tiger Salamander <i>Ambystoma californiense</i> Population: U.S.A. (Central CA DPS) There is final critical habitat for this species. Your location is outside the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2076	Threatened

Crustaceans

NAME	STATUS
Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp <i>Branchinecta lynchi</i> There is final critical habitat for this species. Your location is outside the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/498	Threatened

Flowering Plants

NAME	STATUS
Marsh Sandwort <i>Arenaria paludicola</i> No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2229	Endangered

Critical habitats

THERE ARE NO CRITICAL HABITATS WITHIN YOUR PROJECT AREA UNDER THIS OFFICE'S JURISDICTION.