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January 28, 2026

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**Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Report for the American Jewish University –
 Camp Alonim Project, SCH No. 2023110297, Ventura County, CA**

Dear Michael Conger:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) from the County of Ventura (County) for the American Jewish University – Camp Alonim Project (Project) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines¹.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding Project activities that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under the Fish and Game Code.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the state (Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Fish & G. Code, § 1802). Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW may also act as a Responsible Agency under CEQA. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for

¹ CEQA is codified in the California Public Resources Code in section 21000 et seq. The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

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example, the Project may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.). Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law² of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA; Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.) or the Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA; Fish & G. Code, §1900 et seq.), the Project proponent may seek related take authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: John Friedman, American Jewish University

Objective: The Project proponent requests a major modification to Conditional Use Permit No. 1776 for the development of additional facilities at Camp Alonim. Proposed facilities include a welcome center, 13 camper cabins, three head counselor cabins, an arts pavilion, and a parking lot with 58 new parking spaces. Landscaping improvements would occur around the new structures. In addition to the new development, six existing structures would be demolished. Lastly, the Project would require the removal of 15 protected trees on site.

Location: The 2,588-acre Project site is located at 1101 Peppertree Lane in the City of Simi Valley, Ventura County. The Project site is located near the base of the Santa Susana Mountains and is bordered by undeveloped open space. The Assessor Parcel Numbers associated with the Project include 685-0-051, -040, -050, -140, -190, and -210.

Biological Setting: A portion of the Project site is currently developed with the American Jewish University's Brandeis-Bardin Campus, which includes Camp Alonim, the Brandeis Collegiate Institute, and other associated uses. The proposed facilities would be constructed near the existing campus within 328 acres of the 2,588-acre Project site. Beyond the immediate borders of the Project site lies Sage Ranch Park and Rocketdyne Santa Susana Field Lab to the south and residential communities to the north. South of the proposed parking lot is an ephemeral stream that feeds into East Tributary Meier Canyon, which flows into channelized Arroyo Simi. East of the proposed parking lot is the upstream portion of the ephemeral stream that is fed from drainages in the adjacent Simi Hills.

Survey Area 1 (Project site with a 100-foot Fuel Modification Zone and an additional 300-ft buffer) was surveyed in February 2022. Survey Area 2 (SA2) includes the proposed cabin area, welcome center, parking lot, and a stretch of the ephemeral stream. SA2 was surveyed in April, May, and July 2022. A bat assessment survey was conducted in March 2024 within and adjacent to SA2. According to the DEIR, no other focused surveys have been conducted for any other special status species within the

² "Take" is defined in Section 86 of the Fish and Game Code as "hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill."

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Project site. Sensitive vegetation communities observed within the Project site include: *Platanus Racemosa/Quercus agrifolia* South Coast Woodland/Forest Association (State Rank (S) 3; 3.85 acres total; 1.35 acres impacted), *Quercus agrifolia/Quercus berberidifolia* Woodland/Forest Association (S3; 0.39 acre total; 0.39 acre impacted), California sagebrush - purple sage shrubland Association (S4; 0.49 acre total; no impacts), scrub oak shrubland Association (S4; 0.35 acre total; no impacts), California sagebrush shrubland Association (S4; 0.26 acre total; 0.26 acre impacted), and purple sage shrubland Association (S4; 0.09 acre total; 0.03 acre impacted).

Sensitive species that are of potential concern include, but are not limited to, Crotch's bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*; CESA candidate endangered), California legless lizard (*Anniella stebbinsi*; California Species of Special Concern (SSC)), coastal whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris stejnegeri*, SSC), coast horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii*; SSC), western yellow bat (*Lasiurus xanthinus*; SSC), and pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*, SSC).

The DEIR proposes mitigation measures regarding protection and restoration of Catalina mariposa lily (*Calochortus catalinae*); fuel modification plan; monarch butterfly habitat assessment, protocol surveys, and take avoidance; native milkweed planting; prohibition on non-native milkweed; Crotch's bumble bee habitat assessment, protocol surveys, and take avoidance; nighttime and acoustic bat surveys; bat avoidance and protection plan; minimization of night lighting for bat habitat; nesting bird avoidance, survey, and protection plan; special status reptile avoidance, protection, and relocation plan; pre-construction survey and site clearance; biological monitoring; focused surveys for special status wildlife; special status species avoidance and protection; contractor education; development and implementation of a habitat restoration and/or replacement plan; best management practices; low impact lighting plan; protected tree mitigation and protection plan; and tree health monitoring and reporting.

Project History: CDFW previously commented on the Notice of Preparation in December 2023. Comments consisted of local wildlife movement, Crotch's bumble bee, oak trees, bat species, wetlands, streams and riparian areas, facility sites, lighting design, and nesting birds and raptors.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist the County in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Additional comments or other suggestions are also included to improve the document.

COMMENT # 1: Impacts to Crotch's Bumble Bee

Issue: Project activities (i.e. vegetation removal and ground disturbance) could adversely impact Crotch's bumble bee. The DEIR does not include survey results for the presence or absence of Crotch's bumble bee.

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Specific impact: Mitigation measure BIO 7 may be improved to ensure impacts to Crotch's bumble bee are appropriately mitigated. Mitigation measure BIO 7 does not specify avoidance protocols if the species is detected and instead deferred to consulting with CDFW. This may result in missed observations of the species and adverse impacts at the time of construction.

Why impact would occur: The DEIR states that the Project site contains potential nesting and foraging habitat for Crotch's bumble bee. These results are based on a biological reconnaissance assessment, which do not equate to actual surveys for the presence or absence of Crotch's bumble bee. Crotch's bumble bee primarily nest in late February through late October underground in abandoned small mammal burrows but may also nest under perennial bunch grasses or thatched annual grasses, under-brush piles, in old bird nests, and in dead trees or hollow logs (Williams et al. 2014; Hatfield et al. 2018). Overwintering sites utilized by Crotch's bumble bee mated queens include soft, disturbed soil (Goulson 2010), or under leaf litter or other debris (Williams et al. 2014).

CDFW appreciates the incorporation of MM BIO-7 to include pre-construction surveys for Crotch's bumble bee. As currently written, avoidance measures, such as specific buffer distances or a halt in construction if the species is detected, are not included and state that CDFW shall be consulted if detected. The lack of specification and relying on consultation with CDFW at the time of detection may not adequately reduce adverse impact to the species and would be considered deferred mitigation. Additionally, the measure does not include a discussion regarding obtaining an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) in the event Crotch's bumble bee is found within the Project site. This may result in impacts to Crotch's bumble bee occurring without appropriate take authorization under CESA. Moreover, this does not address impacts to floral resources. Crotch's bumble bee can be adversely impacted when their floral resources are removed. Ground disturbance and vegetation removal associated with Project implementation during the breeding season could result in the incidental loss of breeding success or otherwise lead to nest abandonment in areas adjacent to the Project site. Without sufficient avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures, the Project may result in undisclosed and unmitigated temporal or permanent loss of colonies, and suitable nesting and foraging habitat.

Evidence impact may be significant: The California Fish and Game Commission accepted a petition to list the Crotch's bumble bee as endangered under CESA, determining the listing "may be warranted" and advancing the species to the candidacy stage of the CESA listing process. Take of any endangered, threatened, candidate species that results from the Project is prohibited, except as authorized by State law (Fish & G. Code, §§ 86, 2062, 2067, 2068, 2080, 2085; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 786.9). CDFW considers impacts to species that are candidates for CESA listing to be significant, under CEQA. Accordingly, the Project may have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a

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candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

CEQA Guidelines §15070 and §15071 require the document to analyze if the Project may have a significant effect on the environment as well as review if the Project will 'avoid the effect or mitigate to a point where clearly no significant effects would occur'. Relying on future surveys, the preparation of future management plans, or mitigating by obtaining permits from CDFW, are considered deferred mitigation under CEQA. In order to analyze if a project may have a significant effect on the environment, the project related impacts, including survey results for species that occur in the entire project footprint need to be disclosed during the public comment period. This information is necessary to allow CDFW to comment on alternatives to avoid impacts, as well as to assess the significance of the specific impact relative to the species (e.g., current range, distribution, population trends, and connectivity).

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

CDFW requests the following recommendations and mitigation measures are incorporated into the final CEQA document:

Mitigation Measure #1: Mitigation Measure BIO-7 Crotch's Bumble Bee Habitat Assessment, Protocol Surveys, and Take Avoidance - CDFW recommends the County revise Mitigation Measure BIO-7 to incorporate the underlined language and remove the language in strikethrough:

A County-approved qualified biologist shall conduct a habitat assessment survey within one year prior to the start of vegetation removal and/or ground-disturbing activities to determine if the Project Construction Footprint contains habitat suitable to support Crotch's bumble bees. If suitable habitat is present, the qualified biologist shall assess presence of foraging and nesting Crotch's bumble bees by conducting focused protocol surveys consistent with CDFW's ~~the~~ Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species. Focused surveys shall also be conducted throughout the entire Project area and during the appropriate flying season (April to August) to ensure no missed detection of Crotch's bumble bee occurs. Surveys for Crotch's bumble bee shall be conducted every year that Project activities will occur, as bumble bees are known to move their nests each year. The pre-construction surveys shall be conducted prior to ground-disturbing activities. ~~If Crotch's bumble bees are documented using areas within the Project Construction Footprint for foraging, nesting, and/or overwintering, Project proponent shall consult CDFW for recommended take avoidance measures, which may include buffer zones to avoid disturbing any nests and/or on-going biological monitoring during vegetation removal, prior to the start of ground-disturbing activities.~~

If Crotch's bumble bees are not detected during the pre-construction surveys but suitable habitat is present, a qualified biologist shall be present during ground-disturbing project activities that occur during the Crotch's bumble bee colony active period, to

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ensure that no impacts occur to a previously unidentified Crotch's bumble bee nest. No additional work restrictions with regard to Crotch's bumble bee shall be implemented for the remainder of the colony active period. If Crotch's bumble bees are detected, ground-disturbing activities shall be prohibited within 100 feet of any known, occupied Crotch's bumble bee nest, or as determined by the qualified biologist, who shall demarcate the 100- foot buffer via flagging. If any individual Crotch's bumble bee or a Crotch's bumble bee nest is found on a project site, the applicant will obtain an Incidental Take Permit from CDFW for impacts to this species. Work shall not resume in this area for the duration of the Crotch's bumble bee colony active period, unless concurrence from CDFW has been granted.

Mitigation Measure #2: No Net Loss - If the California Fish and Game Commission does not list Crotch's bumble bee under CESA, it will still remain an invertebrate of conservation priority under the [California Terrestrial and Vernal Pool Invertebrates of Conservation Priority](#). Thus, there shall be no net loss of suitable habitat for Crotch's bumble bee. The County shall offset impacts on habitat for Crotch's bumble bee at no less than 2:1, so there is no net loss of suitable habitat.

Recommendation #1: CEQA - CDFW's issuance of an ITP for a Project is subject to CEQA. As a Responsible Agency, CDFW may consider the CEQA document from the lead agency/Project proponent for the Project. However, additional documentation may be required as part of an ITP application for the Project in order for CDFW to adequately develop an accurate take analysis and identify measures that would fully mitigate for take of CESA-listed species. To minimize additional requirements by CDFW pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 and/or under CEQA, a project's CEQA document should fully identify the potential impacts to Crotch's bumble bee and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring, and reporting commitments for issuance of the ITP.

Recommendation #2: Updated Biological Assessment Surveys - CDFW generally considers biological field assessments for wildlife to be valid for a one-year period, and assessments for rare plants may be considered valid for a period of up to three years. CDFW strongly recommends the County retain a qualified biologist to perform an updated biological survey to account for the current state of the Project site and the inventory of biological species that may be present. The survey should be conducted at the appropriate time of year and time of day when sensitive species are active or otherwise identifiable for both wildlife and plants. Based on the survey results, the final CEQA document should propose avoidance and specific mitigation for Project impacts to special-status species. Findings from the updated general field surveys should be disclosed in the CEQA document for public review.

COMMENT # 2: Impacts to Streams

Issue: The Project may indirectly impact riparian vegetation associated with the ephemeral stream on site.

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Specific impact: Project activities (i.e. grading and ground disturbance) may cause indirect impacts, such as sedimentation and erosion, to the ephemeral stream and associated species. Based on the DEIR, it is unclear that CDFW will be notified for a Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Agreement for Project activities occurring on site.

Why impact would occur: Project construction and activities occurring adjacent to and within the 100-foot buffer of the stream could impact it and associated riparian vegetation. The DEIR claims that approximately 3.85 acres of streambed and California Sycamore-Coast Live Oak South Coast Woodland may be considered riparian and under the authority of CDFW. Moreover, approximately 0.26 acres, potentially under the authority of CDFW, may be impacted by Project activities. While the DEIR outlines when permit triggers for an LSA Agreement, there is no specific language that a notification will be submitted for Project activities.

Evidence impact would be significant: CDFW exercises its regulatory authority as provided by Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. to conserve fish and wildlife resources, which includes rivers, streams, or lakes and associated natural communities. Fish and Game Code section 1602 requires any person, state or local governmental agency, or public utility to notify CDFW prior to beginning any activity that may do one or more of the following:

1. Divert or obstruct the natural flow of any river, stream, or lake;
2. Change the bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake;
3. Use material from any river, stream, or lake; or
4. Deposit or dispose of material into any river, stream, or lake.

The Project may adversely affect the existing water features and the hydrology pattern of the Project site. Inadequate avoidance and mitigation measures will result in the Project continuing to have a substantial adverse direct and cumulative effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by CDFW.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

CDFW requests the following recommendations and mitigation measures are incorporated into the final CEQA document:

Mitigation Measure #3: Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement - CDFW has regulatory authority over activities in streams that will divert or obstruct the natural flow, or change the bed, channel, or bank (which may include associated riparian resources) of any river, stream, or lake or use material from a river, stream, or lake. For any such activities, the Project proponent must provide written notification to CDFW pursuant to section 1600 et seq. of the Fish and Game Code. Based on this notification and other information, CDFW determines whether an LSA Agreement with the applicant is required prior to conducting the proposed activities. CDFW's issuance of a LSA

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Agreement for a project that is subject to CEQA will require CEQA compliance actions by CDFW as a Responsible Agency. A notification package for a LSA Agreement may be obtained by accessing CDFW's [Lake and Streambed Alteration Program](#)³ website.

Recommendation #3: CEQA - CDFW's issuance of an LSA Agreement for a project that is subject to CEQA will require CEQA compliance actions by CDFW as a Responsible Agency. As a Responsible Agency, CDFW may consider the CEQA document from the County for the Project. To minimize additional requirements by CDFW pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1600 *et seq.* and/or under CEQA, the Project's CEQA document should fully identify the Project's potential impacts on stream or riparian resources and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring, and reporting commitments for issuance of the LSA Agreement. As such, CDFW recommends the County consider CDFW's comments and revise the DEIR by incorporating the mitigation measures recommended in this letter into the Project's environmental document. To compensate for any on- and off-site impacts to aquatic and riparian resources, additional mitigation conditioned in any LSA Agreement may include the following: erosion and pollution control measures, avoidance of resources, protective measures for downstream resources, on- and/or off-site habitat creation, enhancement, or restoration, and/or protection, and management of mitigation lands in perpetuity.

COMMENT # 3: Impacts to Bats

Issue: The mitigation measure for bats may be improved to ensure adequate surveys occur prior to the start of construction to reduce potential adverse impacts.

Specific impact: Potential direct impacts include Project construction on structures or trees that may provide roosting habitat and therefore has the potential for the direct loss of bats. Indirect impacts to bats and roosts could result from increased noise disturbances, human activity, dust, vegetation clearing, ground disturbing activities (e.g., staging, access, excavation, grading), and vibrations caused by heavy equipment. Demolition and grading activities may impact bats potentially using man-made structures or surrounding trees as roost sites.

Why impact would occur: The DEIR states that there are potential direct Project impacts resulting in the demolition of existing buildings and/or removal of mature trees. The Project site contains suitable habitat for several bat species that have the potential to occur on the Project site including western yellow bat and pallid bat. MM-BIO-9 does not specifically call for construction to be halted if the species is detected during preconstruction surveys, which means that impacts to bats may occur without appropriate take authorization. Moreover, the mitigation measure does not provide specific compensatory mitigation to offset the permanent loss of confirmed roosting

³ <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/LSA>

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sites for bats. Without replacement of habitat, the Project would contribute to the ongoing loss of suitable habitat on a local and regional scale.

Evidence impact would be significant: Bats are considered non-game mammals and are protected by state law from take and/or harassment (Fish and Game Code § 4150, CCR § 251.1). Several bat species are also considered Species of Special Concern, which meet the CEQA definition of rare, threatened, or endangered species (CEQA Guidelines §15065). CDFW considers adverse impacts to a SSC, for the purposes of CEQA, to be significant without mitigation. Mitigation is not just exclusion from maternity roosts, wintering sites, night roosts, mating roosts and foraging sites, but providing similarly functioning habitat to what is impacted.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

CDFW requests the following recommendations and mitigation measures are incorporated into the final CEQA document:

Mitigation Measure #4: Mitigation Measure BIO-8 Nighttime Bat Surveys – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-8 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough:

A qualified bat specialist, with the appropriate handling permits and approved by the County, shall conduct a nighttime survey to identify bat species, habitat usage, and roost locations within or adjacent to the Project Construction Footprint. The nighttime emergence survey should occur on a warm, dry night, when predicted nighttime lows are not less than 45°F. The survey shall begin 30 minutes prior to the time of sunset and continue until one hour after sunset. During the nighttime survey, the bat biologist shall inspect each tree in and within a 100-foot buffer of the Development Footprint. All trees shall be examined and categorized on the basis of their suitability as day or maternity roosting habitat. Depending on the locations of roosts and number of roost exits, multiple surveyors may be required. The bat biologist and team of surveyors shall conduct acoustic surveys, aided by acoustic recognition technology (e.g., AnaBat or similar) during the nighttime survey. The length and extent of acoustic surveying depends on the time of year and target species. Acoustic monitoring nighttime surveys should be conducted for at least 3 nights in the summer and up to 10 nights in the winter to confirm absence. Visual surveys shall be conducted at the time of emergence with high quality night vision goggles (Generation 3+) and bat detectors. Several surveyors at multiple vantage points may be required to ensure adequate visual coverage, especially around large trees. Surveyors shall station themselves such that roost exit points are backlit with the sky and that their survey areas do not overlap. The visual survey shall start at sunset and continue for at least 75 minutes, as roosting bats do not all emerge simultaneously.

The bat biologist conducting nighttime surveys shall provide to the County and CDFW a report of survey results, including any species detected and a map of identified roost sites. Nighttime surveys shall be timed to allow species identification and the

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development of an appropriate Bat Avoidance and Protection Plan (BAPP), provided for formally in MM-BIO-10, below.

Mitigation Measure #5: Mitigation Measure BIO-9 Acoustic Bat Surveys – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-9 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough:

To confirm the presence of bats and identify species, passive acoustic detectors shall be deployed within the Project Construction Footprint for at least seven nights. The qualified bat biologist shall determine if acoustic data suggest a pattern of bats leaving at the expected emergence time and returning at dawn. Number of acoustic calls recorded during ten-minute intervals in the first 75 minutes after sunset shall be analyzed to determine if monitored trees or structures likely support a bat roost. A visual emergence survey, as described above, shall be conducted to confirm if potential roost structures are used by bats. If presence of individual bats is confirmed, the bat biologist shall halt Project activities until it has been determined that all individual bats have left the Project site and Project activities may resume.

The bat biologist conducting acoustic surveys shall provide to the County and CDFW a report of survey results, including any species detected and a map of identified roost sites. Acoustic surveys should be timed to allow species identification and the development of an appropriate BAPP.

Mitigation Measure #6: Mitigation Measure BIO-10 Bat Avoidance and Protection Plan – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-10 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough:

If the visual and acoustic surveys (described in Mitigation Measures MM-BIO-8 and MM-BIO-9) are positive for the presence of bats, the bat biologist shall prepare a Bat Avoidance and Protection Plan (BAPP). Depending on the bat species present and roost locations, the plan may include the following elements:

- Required pre-construction surveys and monitoring
- Timing considerations for temporal avoidance (e.g., outside of the maternity season, May 1 - August 15, if the project may potentially impact a maternity roost or non-flying juvenile bats)
- Humane relocation and exclusion methods to remove and/or exclude bats from roosting sites within structures or vegetation slated for removal
- Protective fencing or signage to avoid impacts to potential roosting habitat that shall remain on site
- Best Management Practices for minimizing the effects of noise, human activity, dust, lighting, and ground vibrations on bats
- On and/or off-site mitigation measures to compensate for lost roosting habitat, including installation of alternative roosting habitat
- Mitigation monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of bat-related mitigation

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The County shall review the BAPP and ensure that all applicable mitigation measures are implemented prior to, during, and post-completion of Project activities, as required. If the installation of alternative habitat is required to offset the loss of roosting sites, a qualified biologist shall monitor the alternative habitat for the duration recommended in the BAPP.

Mitigation Measure #7: Bat Compensatory Mitigation – If the Project shall impact confirmed habitat of bats and avoidance is not achievable, the Project proponent shall provide compensatory mitigation for temporary and permanent loss of any habitat supporting SSC. There shall be no net loss of habitat supporting SSC (CEQA Guidelines, § 15370(e)). Compensatory mitigation shall be provided within the Project boundary at no less than 2:1. Mitigation shall provide appropriate habitat (depending on the species), refugia, and habitat structures that supports that species. A proposed mitigation area/plan shall be provided to the County and include a discussion on the territory size; roosting and foraging locations; food availability; and how all life cycle functions will be mitigated. The replacement habitat shall also be protected in perpetuity under a conservation easement dedicated to a local land conservancy or other appropriate entity, which should include an appropriate endowment to provide for the long-term management of mitigation lands.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Additional comments or other suggestions are also included to improve the document.

Mitigation Measure BIO-10 Special Status Reptile Avoidance, Protection, and Relocation Plan – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-13 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough:

A County-approved qualified biologist shall develop a relocation plan for coastal whiptail, coast horned lizard, and California legless lizard if the species is not able to be passively ushered out of harm's way to an area that is unaffected by the Project. At a minimum, the relocation plan shall include the following elements:

- Timing and location of focused surveys that shall be conducted for each species, with greater survey effort allotted to locations with the highest quality habitat and/or greatest potential for impacts
- Habitat and conditions of proposed relocation sites in nearby, undisturbed areas
- Protocols for trapping and relocating individuals of each species
- Protocols for documenting and reporting the number of individuals/species relocated

If the Project results in permanent impacts on documented habitat for these species, compensatory mitigation for the affected species at a minimum 2:1 ~~4:1~~ ratio shall be required. Compensatory mitigation may include on- and/or off-site restoration or enhancement of suitable habitat. Depending on the vegetation communities impacted, impacted habitat for special status reptiles may be mitigated through implementation of

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a standalone mitigation and monitoring plan, or through inclusion in a larger habitat mitigation and monitoring plan developed for the entire Project (refer to Mitigation Measure MM-BIO-19 [Development and Implementation of a Habitat Restoration and/or Replacement Plan]).

The relocation plan shall be submitted to the County and CDFW for approval at least 60 days prior to any ground disturbing activities within potentially occupied habitat. The qualified biologist shall prepare a report documenting the relocation survey results and site clearance activities. The original and final locations of any special status reptile relocations shall be recorded and mapped.

During the recognized activity period of the special-status reptiles (March-November), a qualified biologist shall conduct at least three relocation surveys beginning thirty days prior to the start of construction. If construction occurs during the period of low activity for these species (December to February), the surveys shall be conducted prior to this period and exclusion fencing shall be placed around the construction impact areas to limit recolonization of the site.

A qualified biologist shall be present during the course of the ground-disturbing activities within or adjacent to suitable coastal scrub, oak woodland, and riparian habitat, and shall conduct clearance surveys for special status reptiles prior to the start of construction each day. The qualified biologist shall report the results of the relocation surveys to the County and CDFW. Monitoring of on- or off-site compensatory mitigation shall be conducted at least annually for five years following initial mitigation implementation to track the progress of the site towards established success criteria and adjust maintenance activities accordingly. Annual monitoring reports shall be submitted to all agencies that have jurisdiction over the resource (refer to Mitigation Measure MM-BIO-18 [Development and Implementation of a Habitat Restoration and/or Replacement Plan]).

Mitigation and Monitoring Reporting Plan. CDFW recommends the Project's environmental document include mitigation measures recommended in this letter. CDFW has provided comments via a mitigation monitoring and reporting plan to assist in the development of feasible, specific, detailed (i.e., responsible party, timing, specific actions, location), and fully enforceable mitigation measures (CEQA Guidelines, § 15097; Pub. Resources Code, § 21081.6). The Lead Agency is welcome to coordinate with CDFW to further review and refine the Project's mitigation measures. Per Public Resources Code section 21081.6(a)(1), CDFW has provided a summary of our suggested mitigation measures and recommendations in the form of an attached Draft Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (Attachment A).

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations. (Pub. Resources Code, §

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21003, subd. (e).) Accordingly, please report any special status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). The [CNDDDB website](#)⁴ provides direction regarding the types of information that should be reported and allows on-line submittal of field survey forms.

In addition, information on special status native plant populations and sensitive natural communities, should be submitted to CDFW's Vegetation Classification and Mapping Program using the [Combined Rapid Assessment and Relevé Form](#)⁵.

The County should ensure data collected for the preparation of the DEIR is properly submitted.

FILING FEES

The Project, as proposed, would have an impact on fish and/or wildlife, and assessment of environmental document filing fees is necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW. Payment of the environmental document filing fee is required in order for the underlying project approval to be operative, vested, and final. (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 14, § 753.5; Fish & G. Code, § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089.)

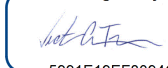
CONCLUSION

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the DEIR to assist the County in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources. CDFW requests an opportunity to review and comment on any response that the County has to our comments and to receive notification of any forthcoming hearing date(s) for the Project (CEQA Guidelines, § 15073(e)).

Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Joleena De La Fe⁶, Environmental Scientist.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:



5991E19EF8094C3...

Victoria Tang

Environmental Program Manager
South Coast Region

⁴ <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB>

⁵ <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/VegCAMP/Natural-Communities/Submit>

⁶ Phone: (858) 354-3527; Email: Joleena.delafe@wildlife.ca.gov

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Program

cc: California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Victoria Tang, Environmental Program Manager
Frederic (Fritz) Rieman, Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisor)
Joleena De La Fe, Environmental Scientist

Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
State.Clearinghouse@lci.ca.gov

REFERENCES

[CDFW] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2023. Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Candidate Bumble Bee Species. Available from: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=213150&inline>

[CDFW] California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2026. Lake and Streambed Alteration Program. Available from: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/LSA>

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ATTACHMENT A: DRAFT MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM (MMRP)

CDFW provides the following language to be incorporated into the MMRP for the Project.

Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
Recommendation #1: CEQA - CDFW's issuance of an ITP for a Project is subject to CEQA. As a Responsible Agency, CDFW may consider the CEQA document from the lead agency/Project proponent for the Project. However, additional documentation may be required as part of an ITP application for the Project in order for CDFW to adequately develop an accurate take analysis and identify measures that would fully mitigate for take of CESA-listed species. To minimize additional requirements by CDFW pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 and/or under CEQA, a project's CEQA document should fully identify the potential impacts to Crotch's bumble bee and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring, and reporting commitments for issuance of the ITP.	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency/Project Proponent
Recommendation #2: Updated Biological Assessment Surveys - CDFW generally considers biological field assessments for wildlife to be valid for a one-year period, and assessments for rare plants may be considered valid for a period of up to three years. CDFW strongly recommends the County retain a qualified biologist to perform an updated biological survey to account for the current state of the Project site and the inventory of biological species that may be present. The survey should be conducted at the appropriate time of year and time of day when sensitive species are active or otherwise identifiable for both wildlife and plants. Based on the survey results, the final CEQA document should propose avoidance and specific mitigation for Project impacts to special-status species. Findings from	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency/Qualified Biologist

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
the updated general field surveys should be disclosed in the CEQA document for public review.		
Mitigation Measure #1: Mitigation Measure BIO-7 Crotch's Bumble Bee Habitat Assessment, Protocol Surveys, and Take Avoidance - CDFW recommends the County revise Mitigation Measure BIO-7 to incorporate the underlined language and remove the language in strikethrough: A County-approved qualified biologist shall conduct a habitat assessment survey within one year prior to the start of vegetation removal and/or ground-disturbing activities to determine if the Project Construction Footprint contains habitat suitable to support Crotch's bumble bees. If suitable habitat is present, the qualified biologist shall assess presence of foraging and nesting Crotch's bumble bees by conducting <u>focused protocol surveys consistent with CDFW's the Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species. Focused surveys shall also be conducted throughout the entire Project area and during the appropriate flying season (April to August) to ensure no missed detection of Crotch's bumble bee occurs.</u> Surveys for Crotch's bumble bee shall be conducted every year that Project activities will occur, as bumble bees are known to move their nests each year. <u>The pre-construction surveys shall be conducted prior to ground-disturbing activities.</u> ~~If Crotch's bumble bees are documented using areas within the Project Construction Footprint for foraging, nesting, and/or overwintering, Project proponent shall consult CDFW for recommended take avoidance measures, which may include buffer zones to avoid disturbing any nests and/or on-going biological monitoring during vegetation removal, prior to the start of ground-disturbing activities.~~	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
<u>If Crotch's bumble bees are not detected during the pre-construction surveys but suitable habitat is present, a qualified biologist shall be present during ground-disturbing project activities that occur during the Crotch's bumble bee colony active period, to ensure that no impacts occur to a previously unidentified Crotch's bumble bee nest. No additional work restrictions with regard to Crotch's bumble bee shall be implemented for the remainder of the colony active period. If Crotch's bumble bees are detected, ground-disturbing activities shall be prohibited within 100 feet of any known, occupied Crotch's bumble bee nest, or as determined by the qualified biologist, who shall demarcate the 100- foot buffer via flagging. If any individual Crotch's bumble bee or a Crotch's bumble bee nest is found on a project site, the applicant will obtain an Incidental Take Permit from CDFW for impacts to this species. Work shall not resume in this area for the duration of the Crotch's bumble bee colony active period, unless concurrence from CDFW has been granted. If the California Fish and Game Commission decides not to list Crotch's bumble bee under CESA, this measure will no longer be required.</u>		
Mitigation Measure #2: No Net Loss - If the California Fish and Game Commission does not list Crotch's bumble bee under CESA, it will still remain an invertebrate of conservation priority under the California Terrestrial and Vernal Pool Invertebrates of Conservation Priority. Thus, there shall be no net loss of suitable habitat for Crotch's bumble bee. The County shall offset impacts on habitat for Crotch's bumble bee at no less than 2:1, so there is no net loss of suitable habitat.	All Stages of Project Implementation	Lead Agency

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
Mitigation Measure #3: Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement - CDFW has regulatory authority over activities in streams that will divert or obstruct the natural flow, or change the bed, channel, or bank (which may include associated riparian resources) of any river, stream, or lake or use material from a river, stream, or lake. For any such activities, the Project proponent must provide written notification to CDFW pursuant to section 1600 <i>et seq.</i> of the Fish and Game Code. Based on this notification and other information, CDFW determines whether an LSA Agreement with the applicant is required prior to conducting the proposed activities. CDFW's issuance of a LSA Agreement for a project that is subject to CEQA will require CEQA compliance actions by CDFW as a Responsible Agency. A notification package for a LSA Agreement may be obtained by accessing CDFW's Lake and Streambed Alteration Program website.	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency/Project Proponent
Recommendation #3: CEQA - CDFW's issuance of an LSA Agreement for a project that is subject to CEQA will require CEQA compliance actions by CDFW as a Responsible Agency. As a Responsible Agency, CDFW may consider the CEQA document from the County for the Project. To minimize additional requirements by CDFW pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1600 <i>et seq.</i> and/or under CEQA, the Project's CEQA document should fully identify the Project's potential impacts on stream or riparian resources and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring, and reporting commitments for issuance of the LSA Agreement. As such, CDFW recommends the County consider CDFW's comments and revise the DEIR by incorporating the mitigation measures recommended in this letter into the Project's environmental document. To compensate for any on- and off-site impacts to aquatic and riparian resources, additional mitigation conditioned in any LSA Agreement may include the following: erosion and pollution control measures, avoidance of resources, protective measures for downstream resources, on-	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency/Project Proponent

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
and/or off-site habitat creation, enhancement, or restoration, and/or protection, and management of mitigation lands in perpetuity.		
Mitigation Measure #4: Mitigation Measure BIO-8 Nighttime Bat Surveys – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-8 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough: A qualified bat specialist, <u>with the appropriate handling permits and</u> approved by the County, shall conduct a nighttime survey to identify bat species, habitat usage, and roost locations within or adjacent to the Project Construction Footprint. The nighttime emergence survey should occur on a warm, dry night, when predicted nighttime lows are not less than 45°F. The survey shall begin 30 minutes prior to the time of sunset and continue until one hour after sunset. During the nighttime survey, the bat biologist shall inspect each tree in and within a 100-foot buffer of the Development Footprint. All trees shall be examined and categorized on the basis of their suitability as day or maternity roosting habitat. Depending on the locations of roosts and number of roost exits, multiple surveyors may be required. The bat biologist and team of surveyors shall conduct acoustic surveys, aided by acoustic recognition technology (e.g., AnaBat or similar) during the nighttime survey. The length and extent of acoustic surveying depends on the time of year and target species. Acoustic monitoring nighttime surveys should be conducted for at least 3 nights in the summer and up to 10 nights in the winter to confirm absence. Visual surveys shall be conducted at the time of emergence with high quality night vision goggles (Generation 3+) and bat detectors. Several surveyors at multiple vantage points may be required to ensure adequate visual coverage, especially around large trees. Surveyors shall station themselves such that roost exit points are backlit with the sky and that their survey areas do not overlap. The	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
visual survey shall start at sunset and continue for at least 75 minutes, as roosting bats do not all emerge simultaneously. The bat biologist conducting nighttime surveys shall provide to the County and CDFW a report of survey results, including any species detected and a map of identified roost sites. Nighttime surveys shall be timed to allow species identification and the development of an appropriate Bat Avoidance and Protection Plan (BAPP), provided for formally in MM-BIO-10, below.		
Mitigation Measure #5: Mitigation Measure BIO-9 Acoustic Bat Surveys – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-9 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough: To confirm the presence of bats and identify species, passive acoustic detectors shall be deployed within the Project Construction Footprint for at least seven nights. The qualified bat biologist shall determine if acoustic data suggest a pattern of bats leaving at the expected emergence time and returning at dawn. Number of acoustic calls recorded during ten-minute intervals in the first 75 minutes after sunset shall be analyzed to determine if monitored trees or structures likely support a bat roost. A visual emergence survey, as described above, shall be conducted to confirm if potential roost structures are used by bats. <u>If presence of individual bats is confirmed, the bat biologist shall halt Project activities until it has been determined that all individual bats have left the Project site and Project activities may resume.</u> The bat biologist conducting acoustic surveys shall provide to the County and CDFW a report of survey results, including any species detected and a map of	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
identified roost sites. Acoustic surveys should be timed to allow species identification and the development of an appropriate BAPP.		
Mitigation Measure #6: Mitigation Measure BIO-10 Bat Avoidance and Protection Plan – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-10 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough: If the visual and acoustic surveys (described in Mitigation Measures MM-BIO-8 and MM-BIO-9) are positive for the presence of bats, the bat biologist shall prepare a Bat Avoidance and Protection Plan (BAPP). Depending on the bat species present and roost locations, the plan may include the following elements: • Required pre-construction surveys and monitoring • Timing considerations for temporal avoidance (e.g., outside of the maternity season, May 1 - August 15, if the project may potentially impact a maternity roost or non-flying juvenile bats) • Humane relocation and exclusion methods to remove and/or exclude bats from roosting sites within structures or vegetation slated for removal <u>shall be reviewed by CDFW and the County prior to implementation</u> • Protective fencing or signage to avoid impacts to potential roosting habitat that shall remain on site • Best Management Practices for minimizing the effects of noise, human activity, dust, lighting, and ground vibrations on bats • On and/or off-site mitigation measures to compensate for lost roosting habitat, including installation of alternative roosting habitat • Mitigation monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of bat-related mitigation	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
The County shall review the BAPP and ensure that all applicable mitigation measures are implemented prior to, during, and post-completion of Project activities, as required. If the installation of alternative habitat is required to offset the loss of roosting sites, a qualified biologist shall monitor the alternative habitat for the duration recommended in the BAPP.		
Mitigation Measure #7: Bat Compensatory Mitigation – If the Project shall impact confirmed habitat of bats and avoidance is not achievable, the Project proponent shall provide compensatory mitigation for temporary and permanent loss of any habitat supporting SSC. There shall be no net loss of habitat supporting SSC (CEQA Guidelines, § 15370(e)). Compensatory mitigation shall be provided within the Project boundary at no less than 2:1. Mitigation shall provide appropriate habitat (depending on the species), refugia, and habitat structures that supports that species. A proposed mitigation area/plan shall be provided to the County and include a discussion on the territory size; roosting and foraging locations; food availability; and how all life cycle functions will be mitigated. The replacement habitat shall also be protected in perpetuity under a conservation easement dedicated to a local land conservancy or other appropriate entity, which should include an appropriate endowment to provide for the long-term management of mitigation lands.	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency/Project Proponent
Mitigation Measure BIO-10 Special Status Reptile Avoidance, Protection, and Relocation Plan – The County should revise Mitigation Measure BIO-13 to incorporate the underlined language and omit language in strikethrough: A County-approved qualified biologist shall develop a relocation plan for coastal whiptail, coast horned lizard, and California legless lizard <u>if the species is not able</u>	Prior to Project Initiation	Lead Agency

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
<u>to be passively ushered out of harm's way to an area that is unaffected by the Project.</u> At a minimum, the relocation plan shall include the following elements: • Timing and location of focused surveys that shall be conducted for each species, with greater survey effort allotted to locations with the highest quality habitat and/or greatest potential for impacts • Habitat and conditions of proposed relocation sites in nearby, undisturbed areas • Protocols for trapping and relocating individuals of each species • Protocols for documenting and reporting the number of individuals/species relocated If the Project results in permanent impacts on documented habitat for these species, compensatory mitigation for the affected species at a <u>minimum 2:1 4:4</u> ratio shall be required. Compensatory mitigation may include on and/or off-site restoration or enhancement of suitable habitat. Depending on the vegetation communities impacted, impacted habitat for special status reptiles may be mitigated through implementation of a standalone mitigation and monitoring plan, or through inclusion in a larger habitat mitigation and monitoring plan developed for the entire Project (refer to Mitigation Measure MM-BIO-19 [Development and Implementation of a Habitat Restoration and/or Replacement Plan]). The relocation plan shall be submitted to the County and CDFW for approval at least 60 days prior to any ground disturbing activities within potentially occupied habitat. The qualified biologist shall prepare a report documenting the relocation survey results and site clearance activities. The original and final locations of any special status reptile relocations shall be recorded and mapped.		

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Mitigation Measure	Timing	Responsible Party
During the recognized activity period of the special-status reptiles (March-November), a qualified biologist shall conduct at least three relocation surveys beginning thirty days prior to the start of construction. If construction occurs during the period of low activity for these species (December to February), the surveys shall be conducted prior to this period and exclusion fencing shall be placed around the construction impact areas to limit recolonization of the site. A qualified biologist shall be present during the course of the ground-disturbing activities within or adjacent to suitable coastal scrub, oak woodland, and riparian habitat, and shall conduct clearance surveys for special status reptiles prior to the start of construction each day. The qualified biologist shall report the results of the relocation surveys to the County and CDFW. Monitoring of on- or off-site compensatory mitigation shall be conducted at least annually for five years following initial mitigation implementation to track the progress of the site towards established success criteria and adjust maintenance activities accordingly. Annual monitoring reports shall be submitted to all agencies that have jurisdiction over the resource (refer to Mitigation Measure MM-BIO-18 [Development and Implementation of a Habitat Restoration and/or Replacement Plan]).		