Biological Assessment

APPENDIX D

Biological Assessment

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project

Santa Barbara County, California

March 18, 2026







Prepared by

EMC Planning Group

BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

SANTA MARIA RIVER LEVEE TRAIL PROJECT

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

PREPARED FOR

County of Santa Barbara
Public Works Department, Transportation Division
123 E. Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
Tel 805.568.3310
Kalani Durham, Engineering Environmental Planner/Coordinator
kdurham@countyofsb.org

PREPARED BY

EMC Planning Group Inc.
601 Abrego Street
Monterey, CA 93940
Tel 831.649.1799
Janet Walther, MS, Principal Biologist
walther@emcplanning.com
www.emcplanning.com

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this biological assessment is to review the proposed Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project in sufficient detail to determine to what extent the proposed action may affect any threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The biological assessment will also review the potential project-related impacts on the Southern California Distinct Population Segment steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and its designated critical habitat regulated by NOAA Fisheries. The analysis in this document focuses on the potential impacts of the project on biological resources at the project site, and recommends mitigation measures, including seasonal restrictions and best management practices, to reduce or avoid these impacts. The analysis has been prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the federal and state Endangered Species Acts, and the California Environmental Quality Act.

The project site, in northern Santa Barbara County, California, consists of an approximately 6.7-mile-long segment of the Santa Maria River levee that stretches west from North Blosser Road in the City of Santa Maria, to the State Route 1 bridge in the City of Guadalupe.

The goal of proposed project is to expand and improve public access to the Santa Maria River levee for pedestrians and bicyclists and provide an alternative east-west transportation corridor from Santa Maria to Guadalupe. The trail would enable a future connection to the coast, the California Coastal Trail, and the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes. Modifications will be made to the levee top along with the development of new levee access routes.

A reconnaissance-level biological survey of the project site was conducted in July 2024 by EMC Planning Group to evaluate the biological resources at the project site, including potential special-status plant and wildlife species and protected wetlands and wildlife habitat. The assessment also included a review of the California Natural Diversity Database, the official project species list from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Information Planning and Conservation System, existing scientific literature, aerial photographs, technical background information, site plans, and policies applicable to projects located in Santa Barbara County.

The Santa Maria River is formed by the confluence of the Cuyama and Sisquoc Rivers east of Santa Maria, before flowing westward 20 miles to the coast. The river demarcates the project's northern boundary and agricultural field bound the site to the south. Existing conditions at the project site include both natural and disturbed habitat including arroyo willow riparian woodland, coyote brush scrub, ruderal vegetation, and agricultural ponds and drainages.

The aquatic habitat within the Santa Maria River and agricultural ponds near the project site, along with agricultural drainage channels bisecting the project site, are known to support federally-listed California red-legged frog and potentially support western spadefoot. Willow riparian habitat growing alongside the levee is also known to support the federally-listed least Bell's vireo and nesting birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

State-listed species which are known to occur in the project vicinity, and could potentially be present on the project site, include American badger, coast horned lizard, northern California legless lizard, burrowing owl, yellow warbler, and special-status bat species.

The Santa Maria River is considered a jurisdictional aquatic feature and any potential project impacts to the river channel are regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Impacts to areas within the top of bank are also regulated by the Regional Water Quality Control Board and impacts to the riparian corridor are regulated by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

For purposes of analyses under the California Environmental Quality Act, impacts to state-listed species have been determined to be less-than-significant with mitigation.

For purposes of analyses under the National Environmental Policy Act, the proposed project may affect, and is not likely to adversely affect, federally-listed steelhead, southwestern pond turtle, arroyo toad, and southwestern willow flycatcher.

The proposed project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, federally-listed California red-legged frog, western spadefoot, least Bell's vireo, and nesting birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Section 7 consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may be necessary.

The biological assessment concludes with conservation measures to be implemented to avoid or minimize potential adverse effects of the project on state- and federally-protected plants, animals, sensitive natural communities, and wetlands and waterways. These measures are dependent on regulatory agency coordination and approval of associated permit conditions where permits are required.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Report Purpose

The purpose of this biological assessment (BA) is to review the proposed Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project in sufficient detail to determine to what extent the proposed action may affect any of the threatened, endangered, or proposed species and designated or proposed critical habitats listed below. In addition, the following information is provided to comply with statutory requirements to use the best scientific and commercial information available when assessing the risks posed to listed and/or proposed species and designated and/or proposed critical habitat by proposed federal actions. This BA is prepared in accordance with legal requirements set forth under regulations implementing Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. This BA addresses species that fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). In addition, for purposes of state permitting, species listed under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) are also considered.

The action addressed within this document does not fall within designated or proposed critical habitat for any federally protected terrestrial species. Critical habitat for La Graciosa Thistle is located immediately west of the project site and extends from State Route 1 to the coast. In addition, Santa Maria River is designated critical habitat for Southern California steelhead.

1.2 Project Description

On June 2, 2020, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors accepted a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy to study the feasibility of developing a trail on the Santa Maria River Levee. At the meeting, the Board directed staff to focus on outreach, particularly to landowners and stakeholders in the agricultural community. In 2021, the County initiated the Santa Maria River Levee Trail Study (2022 trail study) to provide a conceptual-level feasibility study that explored the constraints or obstacles to extending the existing trail on the Santa Maria River Levee to the City of Guadalupe. The study was intended as an informational tool rather than a prescriptive set of standards. Further work on the trail was identified as needed along with additional engineering and coordination to take place prior to finalizing a trail design. The goal of the study was to engage with the community and help identify constraints and opportunities associated with the trail. In May 2022, the County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 to continue work on the proposed trail and allocated funding for additional survey, design, and environmental work related to the trail.

The goal of the proposed Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project is to expand and improve public access and provide an alternative east-west active transportation corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists from Santa Maria to Guadalupe. The trail would enable future connection to the coast, the California Coastal Trail, and the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes. An alternative connection under consideration at the Guadalupe access point would extend the trail under the railroad crossing connecting to 12th Street near State Route 1.

The proposed project consists of a series of design improvements to an existing 6.7-mile-long segment of the south bank of the Santa Maria River Levee that stretches from the eastern terminus of the Tom Urbanske Multi-Purpose Trail in the City of Santa Maria to a western terminus in the City of Guadalupe at Peralta Street.

Staging Areas/Entry Nodes

Proposed locations for staging areas would be the Santa Maria and/or Guadalupe connection points and at the midpoint of the trail near the Bonita School Road crossing/box culvert. Amenities at staging areas/entry nodes include kiosks, maps, trailheads, and parking.

Surface Treatment

The current levee surface is composed of washed Class 2 surface or decomposed granite suitable for multi-use trail use. The location of new surface treatments would be limited to staging areas/entry nodes, or other areas where conceptual amenities, furnishings, and signage are placed.

The surface of the trail would consist of a Class 2 base similar to the existing surface of the levee and nearby Tom Urbanske Multi-Purpose Trail. The County could also choose to pave the levee surface with asphalt or concrete.

Fencing

Proposed fencing for the Santa Maria River Levee Trail would consist of chain link fencing with vinyl paneling and no trespassing signs. Due to the configuration of the trail, fencing may be considered along the path corridor and near trail crossings to deter pedestrians from going off the trail into farmland.

Lighting

A lighting plan has not yet been prepared; however, the County proposes safety and security lighting to include both overhead (solar) and accent (in-ground) lighting at staging areas/entry nodes, as well as within the Bonita School Road box culvert. While lighting would only be used for several hours depending on the operational hours of the trail, it is an important aspect of keeping the trail safe during the evening hours.

Signage

Signage improvements, including kiosk wayfinding, no trespassing signage, and/or mile markers are proposed.

Informational, regulatory, and warning signs would be strategically located at trailheads to inform trail users of agricultural considerations, rules, and etiquette. Trail users would be advised to stay on the trail and be alert to operating machinery and equipment near the trail. Signs noting on-going agricultural activities would be posted at entrances to the trail, stating that the trail user agrees to use of the trail at their own risk and that intermittent closures are to be expected due to agricultural and levee maintenance activities. Signage would note that the trail may be subject to closure without notice to accommodate agricultural operations which may include pesticide spraying, agricultural dust and debris, and burning activities in accordance with State and local laws and ordinances. Signs at the trailheads would also include language stating the legal ramifications for trespassing on adjacent properties or using the trail while closed.

Landscaping

Landscaping the project site could include new trees and vegetation at the staging areas/entry nodes. Landscaping would be required to comply with Santa Barbara County regulations. Landscaping along the trail alignment is not proposed. The surface of staging areas/entry nodes could consist of asphalt, concrete, decomposed granite or a similar material.

Other Amenities

Other trail amenities currently under consideration by the County include the following:

- Parking;
- Trash Receptacles;
- Benches, Bike Racks, and Hydration Stations;
- Cultural Art/Placemaking Features;
- Restroom Facilities; and
- Emergency Call Boxes.

Final amenity details will be documented in the project's CEQA documentation.

Project Operation and Maintenance

Trail Users

Trail users are anticipated to be members of the general public but more specifically residents of both the cities of Guadalupe and Santa Maria. The trail would be primarily intended for pedestrians and bicyclists. Motorized vehicles and other motorized devices would not be permitted.

Hours of Operation

Permitted hours of operation of the trail would be from sunrise to sunset, which are the same hours as the adjacent Tom Urbanske Multi-Purpose Trail. Gates and signs would be provided at trailheads and crossings for County staff to close the trail to the public. The trail may need to be closed due to flooding, trail/levee maintenance work, or to facilitate agricultural operations. Agricultural activities that may require temporary closure in specific areas include but are not limited to:

- Pesticide spraying;
- Agricultural burning;
- Livestock crossing; and/or
- Vehicle & machinery crossing.

The trail would be designed with the ability for its physical closure of isolated segments. The County Agricultural Commissioner currently implements a plan for receiving notices of impending spraying activity from neighboring farmers with follow-up actions. The County Agricultural Commissioner would notify relevant County staff of agricultural activities that may require temporary closure in specific areas; the responsibility for ensuring that temporary closure and reopening of trail gates would be delegated to Santa Barbara County staff.

Trail Maintenance

Trail maintenance responsibility would be largely be assigned to the Santa Barbara County staff and the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe addressing maintenance activities along those trail segments within their own jurisdictions.

General maintenance activities anticipated for the trail include the following:

- Weed control;
- Trash/recycling collection and disposal and waste collection bags restock;
- Trail surface sweeping and repair;
- Fence repair and replacement;
- Signage repair and replacement;
- Lighting repair and replacement; and
- Trail structure inspection and required maintenance.

Additionally, the trail would be inspected for damage and signs of excessive erosion and potential washout following major storm events. If necessary, appropriate actions would be taken to minimize the risk to trail users. Such actions could include trail segment closure, structural improvements, or trail relocation.

Project Construction

Construction Vehicle Access, Equipment, and Staging

Construction of the project would require light equipment work (per list below), minor traffic control, and anticipates a three to five-person construction crew for fence and gate installation. Use of the following construction equipment is anticipated:

- Backhoe with Auger;
- Bobcat or Skid-steer with Loader and Auger; and
- Pickup Truck with Trailer.

Likely depths of project excavation/grading would be a four to six feet maximum height for fence and gate posts. Potential locations of temporary construction staging areas may include undeveloped land near State Route 1, Bonita School Road, a farm crossing at APN 117-020-043, and the trail staging area/entry node near Santa Maria. Construction is anticipated to occur over six to 12 months. The total amount of ground disturbance would be approximately 1,185,000 square feet (27.2 acres).

Tree Removal

No trees will be removed associated with construction of the project.

1.3 Project Location

The project site consists of an approximately 6.7-mile-long segment of the Santa Maria River levee that stretches west from North Blosser Road in Santa Maria to the State Route 1 bridge in Guadalupe. The project site is located entirely within an unincorporated area of the County of Santa Barbara though immediately borders the boundary with the County of San Luis Obispo to the north, the City of Guadalupe to the west, and the City of Santa Maria to the east. Figure 1-1, Project Location, shows the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe and the project site in the regional setting of northwestern Santa Barbara County.

An aerial photograph showing existing conditions on the project site and adjacent areas is included as Figure 1-2, Aerial Photograph, and representative site photographs are presented in Figure 1-3, Site Photographs. Appendix A, Site Plans, includes the proposed project construction plans.

1.4 Environmental Setting

The project site is bordered by the Santa Maria River to the north, which forms the boundary of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties; active agricultural fields to the south; State Route 1 and the City of Guadalupe to the west; and the City of Santa Maria to the east. The northern area of Santa Maria adjoining the project site consists primarily of residential neighborhoods. Guadalupe includes

both commercial and residential land uses. The Santa Maria River levee is bisected in its approximate midway point by the north-south oriented Bonita School Road. Agricultural fields growing primarily strawberries and broccoli are adjacent to the project site on the south side of the levee, with native willow and scrub vegetation growing in the Santa Maria River channel to the north.

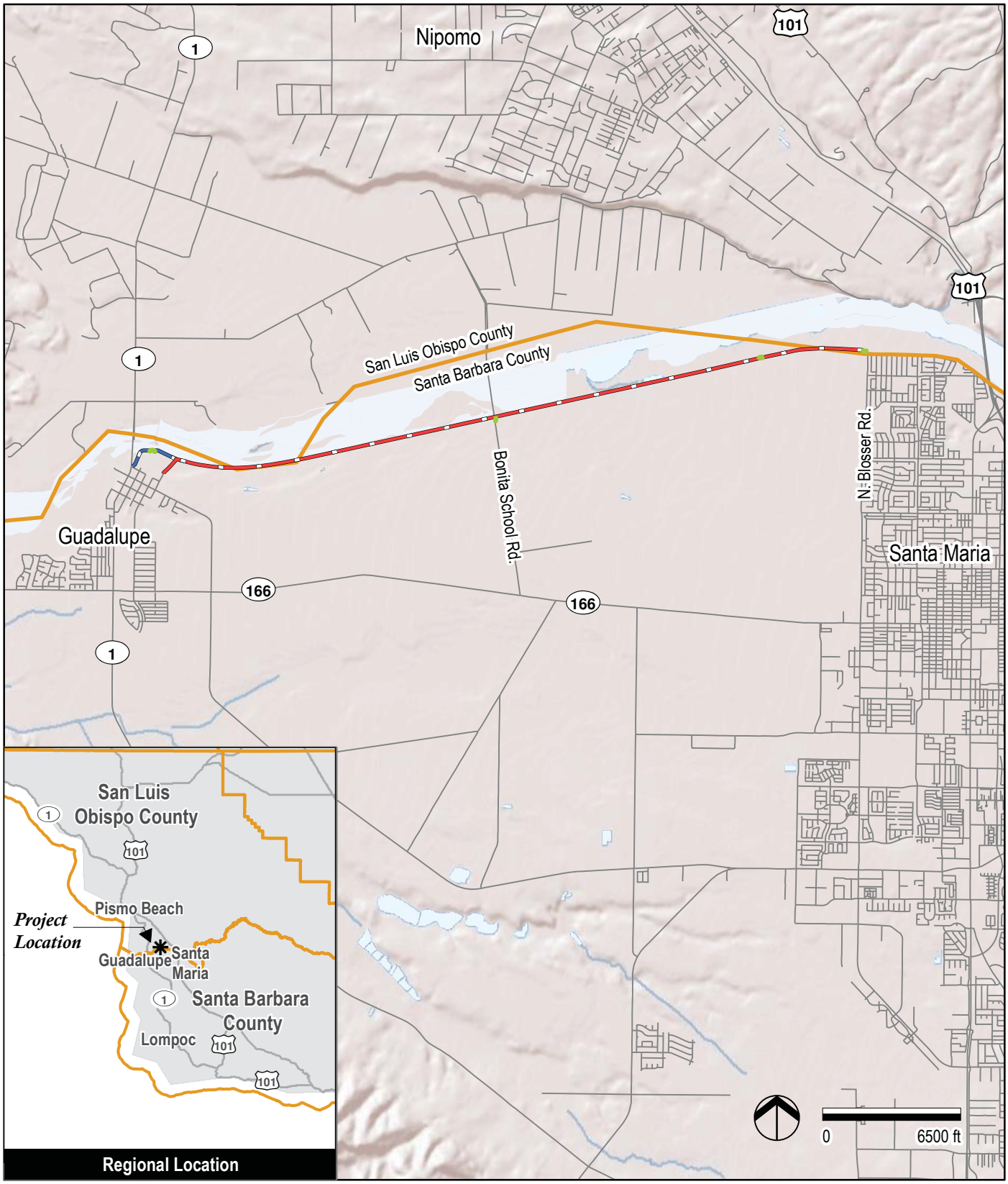
The project site is mapped on the Santa Maria and Guadalupe U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute quadrangle maps with approximate elevations of 185 feet above sea level in Santa Maria and 85 feet above sea level in Guadalupe (USGS 2024). Soils on the project site are largely Corducci and Typic Xerofluvents, 0 to 5 percent slopes, occasionally flooded and Metz loamy sand, 0 to 2 percent slopes. These soils are well-drained and derived from alluvial parent materials of igneous and sedimentary rock (NRCS 2024).

The project site experiences a Mediterranean-type climate, which can be characterized as having cool, rainy winters and warm, rainless summers. Rainfall between the months of May and October is relatively rare. Moisture-bearing winter storms originate to the west and north over the Pacific Ocean bringing the greatest amount of rainfall in January, with an average monthly precipitation total of 2.9 inches. Average annual precipitation is around 14.2 inches. Average maximum temperatures range from 63.5 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 75.5 degrees Fahrenheit in September. Average minimum temperatures range from 38.7 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 52.6 degrees Fahrenheit in August (WRCC 2024).

1.5 Santa Maria River Watershed

The Santa Maria River is formed at the confluence of the Sisquoc River and Cuyama River east of Santa Maria and from there runs about 20 miles west before discharging into the Pacific Ocean. The Cuyama River headwaters are in the Chumash Wilderness area of the Los Padres National Forest in Ventura County. The Sisquoc River flows freely about 50 miles from its headwaters in the San Rafael Mountains, also in the Los Padres National Forest, to its confluence with the Cuyama. The Twitchell Dam on the Cuyama river blocks Southern California steelhead access to about 66 miles of habitat and spawning grounds.

The lower watershed is dominated by residential and agricultural land uses including ranches, row crops, greenhouses, and orchards. Other land uses include recreation and oil refining. Plant communities within the watershed include coastal scrub, coast live oak woodland, freshwater marsh, and grassland (California Trout 2024; EPA 2024).



Source: ESRI 2025, Santa Barbara County 2020

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Route

Construction Staging Areas

County Line

Figure 1-1

Project Location

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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0 4000 feet

Trail Alignment

Alternative Trail End

Construction Staging Areas

Source: ESRI 2025, Santa Barbara County 2020, Wallace Group 2025

Figure 1-2

Aerial Photograph

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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Photo 1. Top of Levee with the Santa Maria River Corridor to the North and Agricultural Fields to the South



Photo 2. Vegetation Adjacent to Levee Within River Corridor



Photo 3. Example of Active Agricultural Ditch Adjacent to Levee



Photo 4. Dry Drainage Parallel to Levee



Photo 5. Dense Red Willow North of Levee



Photo 6. Levee With Culverted Drainage Crossing

Source: EMC Planning Group 2024

Figure 1-3

Site Photographs

Santa Maria River Bike Trail Biological Assessment

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2.0 Regulatory Setting

This section includes a summary of regulations for the protection of biological resources applicable to the project.

2.1 Federal Regulations

Endangered Species Act

The federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 protects species that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has listed as Endangered or Threatened. Permits may be required from USFWS if activities associated with a proposed project would result in the "take" of a federally listed species or its habitat. Under the Act, the definition of "take" is to "harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct." USFWS has also interpreted the definition of "harm" to include significant habitat modification that could result in take. "Take" of a listed species is prohibited unless (1) a Section 10(a) permit has been issued by the USFWS or (2) an Incidental Take Statement has been obtained through formal consultation between a federal agency and the USFWS pursuant to Section 7 of the Act.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 prohibits killing, possessing, or trading in migratory birds, and protects the nesting activities of native birds including common species, except in accordance with certain regulations prescribed by the Secretary of the Interior. Over 1,000 native nesting bird species are currently protected under the federal law. This Act encompasses whole birds, parts of birds, bird nests, and eggs.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a proposed rule to clarify prohibitions governing the "take" of birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act on February 3, 2020. This proposed rule clarifies that the scope of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act applies only to intentional injuring or killing of birds. Conduct that results in the unintentional (incidental) injury or death of migratory birds is not prohibited under the Act. On January 7, 2021, the final regulation defining the scope of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was published in the Federal Register. The rule went into effect on February 8, 2021.

On October 4, 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a final rule revoking the January 7, 2021, regulation that limited the scope of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. With this final and formal revocation of the January 7 rule, the USFWS returns to implementing the Migratory Bird Treaty Act as prohibiting incidental take and applying enforcement discretion, consistent with judicial precedent and long-standing agency practice prior to 2017. This final rule went into effect on December 3, 2021.

Clean Water Act

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1972 regulates the discharge of dredge and fill material into "Waters of the U.S.". "Waters of the U.S." are waters such as oceans, rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands subject to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Regulatory Program jurisdiction under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Certain artificial drainage channels and wetlands have also been considered jurisdictional "Waters of the U.S."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are in receipt of the U.S. Supreme Court's May 25, 2023, decision in the case of *Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency*. On August 29, 2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a final ruling amending the regulatory definition of "waters of the United States" to conform with the *Sackett* decision.

The USACE determines the extent of its jurisdiction as defined by ordinary high-water marks on channel banks, wetland boundaries, and/or connectivity to a navigable water. Wetlands are habitats with soils that are intermittently or permanently saturated or inundated. The resulting anaerobic conditions naturally select for plant species known as hydrophytes that show a high degree of fidelity to such soils. Wetlands are identified by the presence of hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soils (soils intermittently or permanently saturated by water), and wetland hydrology according to methodologies outlined in the 1987 *Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual* and the 2008 *Interim Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Arid West Region (Version 2.0).*

Activities that involve the discharge of fill into jurisdictional wetlands or waters are subject to the permit requirements of the USACE. Discharge permits are typically issued on the condition that the project proponent agrees to provide compensatory mitigation which results in no net loss of area, function, or value, either through wetland creation, restoration, or the purchase of credits through an approved mitigation bank. In addition to individual discharge permits, the USACE also issues nationwide permits applicable for certain activities.

Pursuant to the USACE Manuals, key criteria for determining the presence of wetlands are:

- The presence of inundated or saturated soil conditions resulting from permanent or periodic inundation by ground water or surface water; and
- A prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions (hydrophytic vegetation).

Explicit in the definition is the consideration of three environmental parameters: hydrology, soil, and vegetation. Positive wetland indicators of all three parameters are normally present in wetlands. The assessment of all three parameters in normal circumstances enhances the technical accuracy, consistency, and credibility of a wetland determination and is required per the USACE Manuals.

2.2 State Regulations

California Endangered Species Act

Pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act and Section 2081 of the California Fish and Game Code, an Incidental Take Permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is required for projects that could result in the "take" of a state-listed Threatened or Endangered species. "Take" is defined under the Act as an activity that would directly or indirectly kill an individual of a species; "take" is defined in Section 86 of the California Fish and Game Code as "hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill." If a proposed project would result in the "take" of a state-listed species, then a CDFW Incidental Take Permit, including the preparation of a species conservation plan, would be required.

Nesting Birds and Birds of Prey

Sections 3505, 3503.5, and 3800 of the California Fish and Game Code prohibit the take, possession, or destruction of birds, including their nests or eggs. Birds of prey (the orders Falconiformes and Strigiformes) are specifically protected under provisions of the California Fish and Game Code, Section 3503.5. This section of the Code establishes that it is unlawful to take, possess, or destroy any birds of prey or to take, possess, or destroy the nest or eggs of any such bird except as otherwise provided by this Code. Disturbance that causes nest abandonment and/or loss of reproductive effort, such as construction during the bird nesting season, is considered "take" by the CDFW.

Streambed Alterations

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has jurisdiction over the bed and bank of natural drainages according to provisions of Sections 1601 through 1603 of the California Fish and Game Code. Diversions, obstructions, or changes to the natural flow or bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake in California that supports wildlife resources and/or riparian vegetation are subject to CDFW regulations. Activities that would disturb these drainages are regulated by the CDFW; authorization is required in the form of a Streambed Alteration Agreement. Such an agreement typically stipulates certain measures that will protect the habitat values of the drainage in question.

California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act

Under the California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) may necessitate Waste Discharge Requirements for the fill or

alteration of "Waters of the State," which according to California Water Code Section 13050 includes "any surface water or groundwater, including saline waters, within the boundaries of the state." The RWQCB may, therefore, necessitate Waste Discharge Requirements even if the affected waters are not under USACE jurisdiction. Also, under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, any activity requiring a USACE Section 404 permit must also obtain a state Water Quality Certification (or waiver thereof) to ensure that the proposed activity will meet state water quality standards. The applicable state RWQCB is responsible for administering the water quality certification program and enforcing National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

CEQA Guidelines Appendix G contains standards of significance to indicate that a project may have a significant effect on biological resources if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse 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 the CDFW or USFWS;
- Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS;
- Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means;
- Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites;
- Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance; and/or
- Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan.

2.3 Regional/Local Regulations

County of Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara County has guidelines for the evaluation of biological impacts and significance thresholds for projects in the County which are described in the County's *Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual* (revised August 2024) and A Planner's Guide to Conditions of Approval and Mitigation Measures (revised March 2016).

Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual

The Biological Resources Guidelines in the Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual, provides technical background information about biological resources for use when evaluating project impacts on vegetation, wildlife, and habitats.

Biological Habitat Descriptions and Project Design Suggestions provide brief descriptions of some, though not all, of the habitats occurring in Santa Barbara County, an explanation of the habitat's importance, and project design suggestions for minimizing impacts to habitats, as well as individual plant and animal species.

Project design suggestions for project impacts to riparian areas consist of the following:

1. Incorporate into project design a vegetated buffer from the upland edge of the riparian canopy at least 50 feet in width.
2. Inclusion of adjacent upland vegetation in the buffer. Upland vegetation is important as habitat for a large number of species, particularly amphibians, and also aids in stabilizing the banks, which reduces erosion and sedimentation potential.
3. Retain animal dispersal corridors, including the understory.
4. Construction activity can be planned to avoid critical time periods (nesting, breeding) for fish and other wildlife species.
5. Careful siting of some projects such as bridges and pipelines can limit the disturbance area to previously disturbed locations.
6. Restoration or enhancement of riparian habitat on a project site can enhance the ecological value of the creek, stream, or river, both upstream and downstream.

A Planner's Guide to Conditions of Approval and Mitigation Measures

The planner's guide recommends conditions of approval and mitigation measures for discretionary projects and the permits that follow them. Recommendations that apply to biological resources include the following:

7. Tree Protection. The Owner/Applicant shall submit a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) prepared by a Planning and Development Department-approved arborist.
8. Tree Replacement. The Owner/Applicant shall submit for Planning and Development Department approval a Native Tree Replacement Plan prepared by a Planning and Development Department-approved arborist/biologist.
9. Arborist Report Requirement. The Owner/Applicant shall hire a Planning and Development Department -approved arborist/biologist to evaluate all proposed native tree and shrub removals within 25 ft of potential ground disturbances.

10. Habitat Setback. All ground disturbances and vegetation removal shall be prohibited in a 50-foot setback from either side of the top-of-bank of waterway or sensitive riparian habitat area. The area shall be fenced with a fencing type and in a location acceptable to Planning and Development Department.
11. Fencing for Animal Passage. The minimum distance from ground level to any fence's first rung shall be 18 inches. Barbed-wire fencing shall not be installed along property boundaries.
12. The Owner/Applicant shall submit for Planning and Development Department approval a Riparian Area Restoration Plan prepared by a Planning and Development Department - approved biologist.
13. Equipment Storage-Construction. The Owner/Applicant shall designate one or more construction equipment filling and storage areas on the project site to contain spills, facilitate clean-up and proper disposal and prevent contamination from discharging to the storm drains, street, drainage ditches, creeks, or wetlands. The areas shall be no larger than 50 x 50 foot unless otherwise approved by Planning and Development Department and shall be located at least 100 feet from any storm drain, waterbody or sensitive biological resources.
14. Use Natives. All landscaping shall be with native plants and seed stock from locally obtained sources.

County of Santa Barbara Code of Ordinances

Chapter 28, Roads, Article II, Street Trees, of the County of Santa Barbara's Code of Ordinances, is referred to as the "Street Tree Regulations of Santa Barbara County" and regulates the removal and replacement of all street trees along county roads. Trees located within the road right-of-way or in any publicly owned property shall not be removed, cut down, mutilated or otherwise injured, except upon the approval of the county road commissioner or director of parks.

Chapter 35, Zoning, Article IX of the County of Santa Barbara's Code of Ordinances is referred to as "The County Deciduous Oak Tree Protection and Regeneration Ordinance" and promotes the protection of deciduous oak trees such as valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) and blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*). An Oak Tree Removal Permit is required for the removal of either species of oak.

CEQA Guidelines Appendix G Thresholds

A significant impact would occur if implementation of the proposed project would:

- Have a substantial adverse 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 the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service;
- Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means;

- Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service;
- Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites;
- Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance; or
- Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional or state habitat conservation plan.

Supplemental Santa Barbara County Thresholds

Guidelines for evaluation of biological impacts and significance thresholds are contained in the *County of Santa Barbara Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual* (August 2024) and the Santa Barbara County *A Planner's Guide to Conditions of Approval and Mitigation Measures* (2016). Determination of significance for disturbance to habitats or species within Santa Barbara County is based on the following criteria:

a. Conflict with adopted environmental plans and goals of the community where it is located;

b. Substantially affect a rare or endangered species of animal, plant or the habitat of the species;

c. Interfere substantially with the movement of any resident or migratory fish or wildlife species; or

d. Substantially diminish habitat for fish, wildlife, or plants.

Impacts to biological resources may be significant based on substantial evidence in the record (not public controversy or speculation), if they substantially impact significant resources in the following ways:

1. Substantially reduce or eliminate species diversity or abundance;
2. Substantially reduce or eliminate quantity or quality of nesting areas;
3. Substantially limit reproductive capacity through losses of individuals or habitat;
4. Substantially fragment, eliminate, or otherwise disrupt foraging areas and/or access to food sources;
5. Substantially limit or fragment range and movement (geographic distribution or animals and/or seed dispersal routes); or
6. Substantially interfere with natural processes, such as fire or flooding, upon which the habitat depends.

Impacts to biological resources may be less than significant if little or no importance is given to a habitat and it is presumed that disruption would not create a significant impact. Examples of areas where impacts to habitat are presumed to be insignificant include:

1. Small acreages of non-native grassland if wildlife values are low;
2. Individuals or stands of non-native trees if not used by important animal species such as raptors or monarch butterflies;
3. Areas of historical disturbance such as intensive agriculture;
4. Small pockets of habitats already significantly fragmented or isolated, and degraded or disturbed; or
5. Areas of primarily ruderal species resulting from pre-existing man-made disturbance.

Additional County Guidelines

Additional County guidelines are provided for specific biological communities. These are used in conjunction with the general impact assessment guidelines described above.

Wetland Impact Assessment Guidelines

The following types of project-created impacts may be considered significant:

1. Projects which result in a net loss of important wetland area or wetland habitat value, either through direct or indirect impacts to wetland vegetation, degradation of water quality, or would threaten the continuity of wetland-dependent animal or plant species are considered to have a potentially significant effect on the environment (California Environmental Quality Act: Guidelines, Appendix G; items c, d, and t).
2. Wildlife access, use, and dispersal in wetland habitats are key components of their ecosystem value. For example, many upland species of wildlife could not persist without access to water. Movement between contiguous habitats through riparian areas (e.g.: from mountainous chaparral to valley grassland or coastal mesa) allows for many species to continue to persist and prevents genetic isolation. Projects which substantially interrupt wildlife access, use and dispersal in wetland areas would typically be considered to have potentially significant impacts.
3. The hydrology of wetlands systems must be maintained if their function and values are to be preserved. Therefore, maintenance of hydrological conditions, such as the quantity and quality of run-off, etc., must be assessed in project review.

Riparian Impact Assessment Guidelines

The following types of project-related impacts may be considered significant:

1. Direct removal of riparian vegetation.

2. Disruption of riparian wildlife habitat, particularly animal dispersal corridors and or understory vegetation.
3. Intrusion within the upland edge of the riparian canopy (generally within 50 feet in urban areas, within 100 feet in rural areas, and within 200 feet of major rivers listed in the previous section), leading to potential disruption of animal migration, breeding, etc. through increased noise, light and glare, and human or domestic animal intrusion.
4. Disruption of a substantial amount of adjacent upland vegetation where such vegetation plays a critical role in supporting riparian-dependent wildlife species (e. g., amphibians), or where such vegetation aids in stabilizing steep slopes adjacent to the riparian corridor, which reduces erosion and sedimentation potential.
5. Construction activity which disrupts critical time periods (nesting, breeding) for fish and other wildlife species.

Individual Native Trees

Native specimen trees, regardless of size, are considered potentially significant, and rare native trees, which are very low in number or isolated in distribution (such as Island Oak) may be particularly significant. The significance evaluation is done on a case-by-case basis and considers tree size, numbers, location, relationship to habitat, etc.

Specimen trees are defined, for biological assessment purposes, as mature trees that are healthy and structurally sound and have grown into the natural stature particular to the species.

In general, the loss of 10 percent or more of the trees of biological value on a project site is considered potentially significant.

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3.0 Methods

This section of the report includes a summary of the methods used in the biological survey and analysis.

3.1 Background Research

Prior to the field survey, aerial photographs, natural resource database accounts, and other relevant scientific literature were reviewed. This included searching the USFWS *Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC)* list of threatened and endangered species (Appendix B, USFWS 2024a), USFWS *National Wetland Inventory* (USFWS 2024b), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) *California Natural Diversity Database* (CDFW 2024a), and California Native Plant Society (CNPS) *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants* (CNPS 2024) to identify special-status plants, wildlife, and habitats known to occur in the vicinity of the project site. Special-status species in this report are those listed as Endangered, Threatened, or Rare, or as Candidates for listing by the USFWS and/or CDFW; as Species of Special Concern or Fully Protected species by the CDFW; or as Rare Plant Rank 1B or 2B species by the CNPS.

A search of the CDFW's *California Natural Diversity Database* was conducted for the Santa Maria and Guadalupe USGS quadrangles and eight surrounding quads covering Oceano, Nipomo, Huasna Peak, Twitchell Dam, Sisquoc, Orcutt, Casmalia, and Point Sal in order to evaluate potentially occurring special-status plant and wildlife species in the project vicinity (CDFW 2024a, 2024b). Records of occurrence for special-status plants were reviewed for those same USGS quadrangles in the CNPS Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants (CNPS 2024). An official U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service list of threatened and endangered species that may occur in the proposed project location or may be affected by the proposed project was generated using the IPaC project planning database (Appendix B, USFWS 2024a).

3.2 Field Survey

EMC Planning Group senior biologist Patrick Furtado, MS, conducted a reconnaissance-level biological survey of the project site on July 16, 2024. For purposes of this analysis, the Biological Survey Area (BSA) includes the trail alignment plus a 50-foot buffer on both sides of the alignment. All species observed were recorded in field notes, along with information on plant communities and

wildlife habitats. Qualitative observations of plant cover, structure, and species composition were used to determine plant communities and wildlife habitats. Plant species were identified in the field or collected for subsequent identification. Searches for reptiles and amphibians were performed by overturning and then replacing rocks and debris. Birds were identified by visual and/or auditory recognition. Mammals were identified by diagnostic signs, including scat and tracks.

Please note that the 2024 version of this report was revised in 2026 based on changes to the project description in support of a CEQA document.

4.0 Existing Biological Conditions

This section of the report documents the biological resources observed during the field survey.

4.1 Plant Communities

A plant community is an assemblage of plant species that co-occur in an area and are linked by their interactions with each other and their environment. Different communities are defined by their growth forms and species composition. Plant community composition is driven by factors such as soil type, topography, climate, and human disturbance. The project site contains several plant communities – arroyo willow riparian woodland, coyote brush scrub, freshwater emergent wetland, riparian scrub, and ruderal/disturbed vegetation. Plant communities are shown on Figures 4-1 through 4-4, Habitat Map Segments 1-4.

Arroyo Willow Riparian Woodland

Growing primarily along the northern base of the river levee are patchwork stands of riparian woodland dominated by arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*; Manual of California Vegetation: *Salix lasiolepis* Shrubland Alliance). Co-dominant with willow are patches of boxelder (*Acer negundo*). These riparian areas are fed directly by the Santa Maria River and indirectly from agricultural irrigation runoff.

Other plant species were observed growing singly or in patches within the canopy of arroyo willow including red willow (*Salix laevigata*), sandbar willow (*Salix exigua*), coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*), elderberry (*Sambucus* sp.), tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*), giant reed (*Arundo donax*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), and mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*).

Coyote Brush Scrub

Patches of coyote brush scrub (*Baccharis pilularis*, Manual of California Vegetation: *Baccharis pilularis* Shrubland Alliance) are found throughout the project site, with the largest areas found on the north side of the river levee. Deerweed (*Acmispon glaber*) is co-dominant in most of these areas. Also observed interspersed with these species are bush lupine (*Lupinus* sp.), buckwheat (*Eriogonum* sp.), mock heather (*Ericameria ericoides*), castor bean (*Ricinus communis*), mulefat, elderberry, fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), tree tobacco, and mustard.

Freshwater Emergent Wetland

Freshwater emergent wetlands are found on and adjacent to the project site primarily where irrigation runoff channels flow into or through the project site and within neighboring agricultural ponds. Plant species found in these areas include water cress (*Nasturtium officinale*), rush (*Juncus* spp.), cattail (*Typha* spp.), curly dock (*Rumex crispus*), umbrella sedge (*Cyperus eragrostis*), whitetop (*Lepidium draba*), giant reed, and sandbar willow.

Riparian Scrub

Seasonal flooding in the Santa Maria River creates unstable alluvial substrates on which this plant community grows. Non-willow areas within the river channel and bordering the project site are largely dominated by mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*) and patches of sandbar willow (*Salix exigua*).

Ruderal/Disturbed Vegetation

Ruderal/disturbed vegetation covers most of the south side of the river levee, along the dirt track at the base of the levee, and along access routes to the project site. Occasional maintenance operations along the levee slopes likely include mowing and the spraying of herbicides and prevent the establishment of a native plant community. Weedy species predominate in these areas and include species such as mustard, fennel, poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), yellow sweetclover (*Melilotus officianalis*), whitetop, ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), and foxtail barley (*Hordeum murinum*). Native plant species in these disturbed areas include jimsonweed (*Datura wrightii*), deerweed, mugwort (*Artemisia douglasiana*), and evening primrose (*Oenothera elata*).

4.2 Wildlife Habitats

Riparian habitat is the terrestrial or upland area adjacent to freshwater bodies, such as the banks of creeks and streams, the shores of lakes and ponds, and springs and seeps. In California particularly, riparian woodlands support the greatest diversity and abundance of wildlife species of any habitat. Because of the available water and the complex vegetation structure, insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, and amphibians use the riparian forest for nesting, food, shelter, and as corridors for movement (RHJV 2004).

The arroyo willow woodland riparian habitat on the project site is dense and structurally complex making this plant community exceptionally diverse in the wildlife it harbors. Bird diversity is especially high and includes visiting species from the American tropics. These birds are known as Neotropical migrants and include attractive passerine species such as Townsend's warbler (*Setophaga townsendi*) and yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*). Abundant riparian food and cover allow them to nest and rear their young successfully before returning to their winter accommodations in the tropics.



0 850 feet

Biological Survey Area
Drainages
Arroyo Willow Riparian Woodland
Coyote Brush Scrub
Ruderal/Distrubed
Agricultural
Bare/Gravel

Source: Santa Barbara County GIS 2024, ESRI 2025, Wallace Group 2025

Figure 4-1
Habitat Map Section 1

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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0 850 feet

Biological Surveys Area
Drainages
Arroyo Willow Riparian Woodland
Coyote Brush Scrub
Ruderal/Distrubed
Agricultural
Bare/Gravel

Source: Santa Barbara County GIS 2024, ESRI 2025, Wallace Group 2025

Figure 4-2
Habitat Map Section 2

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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Source: Santa Barbara County GIS 2024, ESRI 2025, Wallace Group 2025

Figure 4-3
Habitat Map Section 3

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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0 850 feet

Biological Survey Area
Arroyo Willow Riparian Woodland
Ruderal/Distrubed
Bare/Gravel
Drainages
Coyote Brush Scrub
Agricultural

Source: Santa Barbara County GIS 2024, ESRI 2025, Wallace Group 2025

Figure 4-4
Habitat Map Section 4

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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Birds observed using the arroyo willow riparian woodland at the project site during the July 2024 biological survey include song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), western kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), black phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottus*), and yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*).

Birds observed using the coyote brush scrub on the project site included California quail (*Callipepla californica*), wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata*), and spotted towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*). Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) and nesting cliff swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) were observed using the project site wetland areas. and turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*) and red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) foraged and hunted overhead.

On the levee top and in ruderal areas, greater roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), and Eurasian collared-dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) were observed. An American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) was seen perched on one of the tall poles installed on top of the levee for raptor use. A red-tailed hawk perched on a tree adjacent to the river levee.

The river-facing levee slope is well armored with large riprap stone along the length of the project site. Among the riprap, California ground squirrels (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) and their burrows were ubiquitous. Larger ground squirrel burrows can provide roosting and nesting habitat for burrowing owl. Pipes, culverts, and the undersides of bridges on and immediately adjacent to the project site can provide nesting space for burrowing owl and roosting habitat for bats.

Other wildlife species that potentially or likely use the project site are urban-adapted species such as coyote (*Canis latrans*) and small mammals such as raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), and Botta's pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*).

4.3 Wetlands and Waterways

The Santa Maria River flows intermittently immediately adjacent to levee and the project site. Riparian and wetland communities within the channel are classified as freshwater forested/shrub wetland habitat with intermittently flooded and temporarily flooded water regimes. Several types of wetlands also occur within and adjacent to the project site, including agricultural ponds and drainages with freshwater emergent wetland vegetation south of the levee.

Wetlands and waterways observed on the project site during the July 2024 biological survey are discussed, along with their potential jurisdictional status, in Section 5.7, below.

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5.0 Special-Status Biological Resources

5.1 Overview

Special-status species in this report are those listed as Endangered, Threatened, or Rare, or as Candidates for listing by the USFWS or CDFW under the state and/or federal Endangered Species Acts. The special-status designation also includes CDFW Species of Special Concern and Fully Protected species, CNPS Rare Plant Rank 1B and 2B species, and other locally rare species that meet the criteria for listing as described in Section 15380 of CEQA Guidelines. Special-status species are generally rare, restricted in distribution, declining throughout their range, or have a critical, vulnerable stage in their life cycle that warrants monitoring.

Appendix B, Special-Status Species with Potential to Occur within the Project Vicinity, lists special-status species documented within the project vicinity, their listing status and suitable habitat description, and their potential to occur on the project site. Appendix C, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Official Species List, includes the list generated for the project site by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service IPaC website (USFWS 2024a). Figure 5-1, Special-Status Species Documented within the Project Vicinity, shows locations of recorded observations within three miles of the project site. Discussion of special-status species with potential to occur on the site (or otherwise requiring special explanation) is included in the following section.

A total of 18 federally threatened, endangered, or candidate species was listed on the project's USFWS Official Species List (USFWS 2024a). These are plant and wildlife species that may be affected by the proposed project.

There are no critical habitats for terrestrial species within the proposed project area. Critical habitat for La Graciosa Thistle is located immediately west of the project site and extends from State Route 1 to the coast. The IPaC does not display listed species or critical habitats under the sole jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries, however the Santa Maria River is designated critical habitat for Southern California steelhead.

5.2 Federally-Listed Plant Species

Federally-listed plant species occurring in the project vicinity were evaluated for their potential to occur on the project site. As illustrated in Figure 5-1, Special-Status Species Documented Within the Project Vicinity, and/or listed in Appendices B and C, eleven federally-protected plant species have

been reported as occurring within the general project vicinity, including beach layia (*Layia carnosa*), California jewelflower, Gambel's watercress, Gaviota tarplant (*Deinandra increscens* ssp. *villosa*), La Graciosa thistle, Lompoc yerba santa (*Eriodictyon capitatum*), marsh sandwort (*Arenaria paludicola*), Nipomo Mesa lupine (*Lupinus nipomensis*), Pismo clarkia (*Clarkia speciosa* ssp. *immaculata*), salt marsh bird's-beak, and spreading navarretia. Please note that this list includes species not listed on the project's USFWS official species list but are recorded in the project vicinity in the CNDDB database.

Only La Graciosa thistle has been determined to have the potential to be on the project site due to the presence of suitable riverbank habitat for this species and a known CNDDB occurrence near the project site. This species is discussed below. Suitable habitat for the remaining federally-listed plant species is not present on the project site.

La Graciosa Thistle

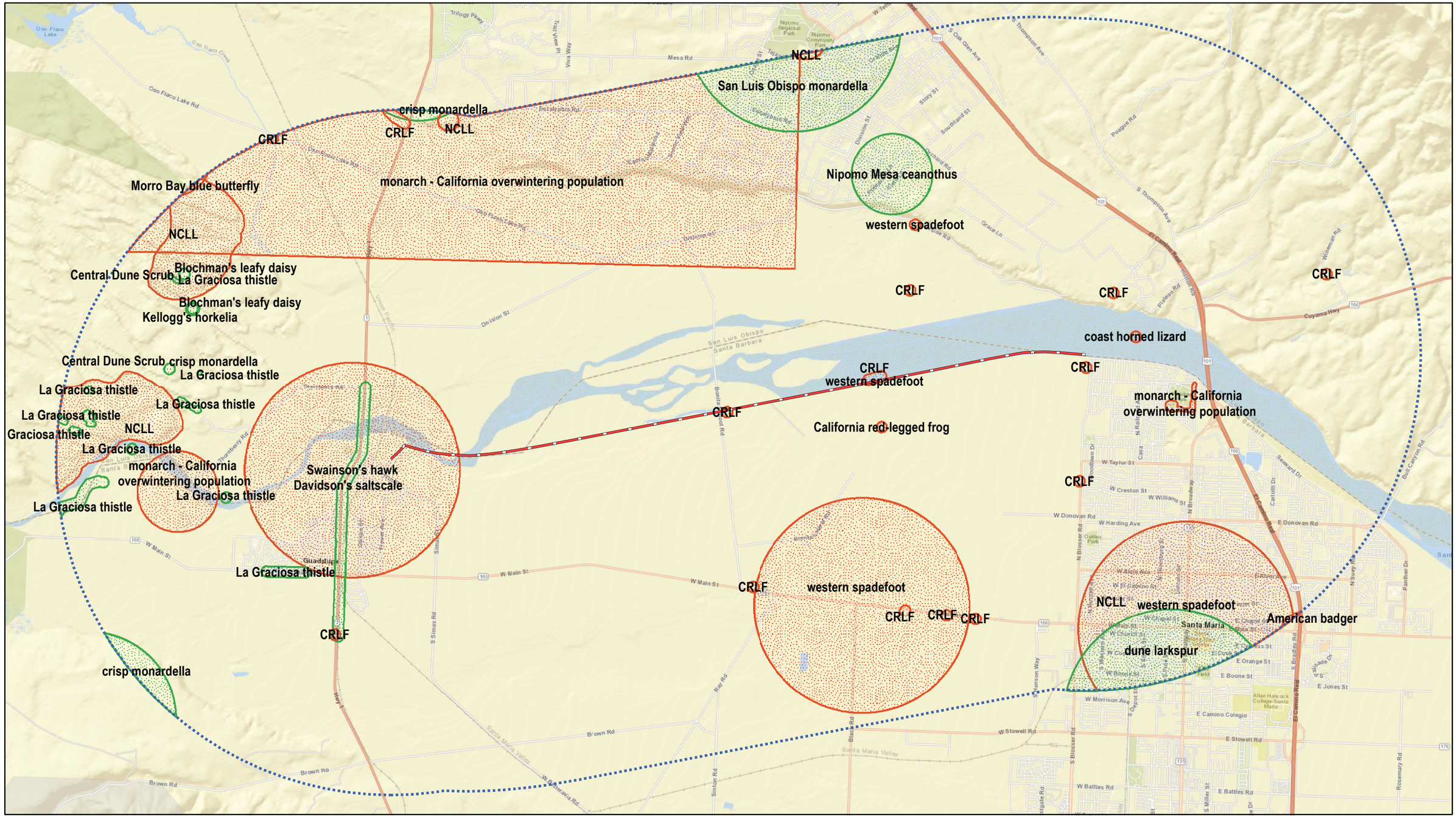
La Graciosa thistle grows in riparian habitat, often around seeps or in marshes, most often in coastal dune or scrub areas. It is only found on the coast of southern San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties. La Graciosa thistle has probably always had a limited range, but it has declined significantly in population numbers and number of occurrences in recent decades (USFWS 2011).

Critical habitat for La Graciosa Thistle is located immediately west of the project site and extends from State Route 1 to the coast. There are only eight extant occurrences of La Graciosa thistle among four populations at Callender Dune Lakes, Oso Flaco, Guadalupe Dunes, and the Santa Maria River (CNDDB 2024, USFWS 2011).

As there are known occurrences near the project site and suitable riparian and freshwater marsh habitats within the impact area, La Graciosa thistle has a low potential to be present on the project site. If present, impacts as a result of the project may potentially adversely affect the federally-listed La Graciosa thistle.

5.3 Federally-Listed Wildlife Species

As illustrated in Figure 5-1, Special-Status Species Documented Within the Project Vicinity, and/or listed in Appendices B and C, a number of federally-listed wildlife species have been reported as occurring within the overall project vicinity (USFWS 2024a). Federally-listed wildlife species potentially occurring in the project vicinity were evaluated for potential to occur on the project site. Appendix B includes a table listing federal- and state-listed wildlife species potentially occurring in the project vicinity, including listing status and suitable habitat conditions.



Source: CDFW CNDDB 2024, ESRI 2024

Figure 5-1

Special-Status Species Documented Within the Project Vicinity

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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Of the federally-listed wildlife species with the potential to occur in the project vicinity, the following species were determined to have the potential to occur on the project site due to the presence of suitable habitat: steelhead, southwestern pond turtle, arroyo toad, California red-legged frog, western spadefoot, least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, and nesting birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Federally-listed wildlife species with the potential to be present on the project site are discussed in more detail, below.

Steelhead

A federally-listed threatened species, steelhead are anadromous coastal rainbow trout, and are made up of populations downstream of manmade or natural barriers throughout their range. Steelhead (also known as steelhead trout or rainbow trout) show a tremendous amount of juvenile and adult life history variation to match the varied systems they inhabit, though all adult runs occur during the winter. Wild steelhead trout hatch in gravel-bottomed, fast-flowing, well-oxygenated rivers and streams. Some stay in fresh water all their lives and are called rainbow trout. Steelhead trout that migrate to the ocean typically grow larger than the ones that stay in freshwater. They then return to freshwater to spawn. Steelhead are vulnerable to many stressors and threats including blocked access to spawning grounds and habitat degradation caused by dams and culverts.

Throughout the West Coast, 11 species (Distinct Population Segments, DPS) of steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus*) are protected under the Endangered Species Act. The Santa Maria River marks the boundary between the South-Central California Coast DPS Population 9 (north of the river) and the Southern California DPS Population 10 (south of the river). Steelhead potentially using the Santa Maria River are categorized as belonging to the Southern California DPS. The Santa Maria River is designated critical habitat for Southern California steelhead (NOAA Fisheries 2023, NOAA Fisheries 2024).

The Santa Maria River is formed at the confluence of the Sisquoc River and Cuyama River and from there runs about 20 miles before discharging into the Pacific Ocean. The Cuyama River headwaters are in the Chumash Wilderness area of the Los Padres National Forest in Ventura County. However, Twitchell Dam on the Cuyama river blocks steelhead access to about 66 miles of upstream habitat and spawning grounds. The Sisquoc River flows freely about 50 miles from its headwaters in the San Rafael Mountains, also in the Los Padres National Forest, to its confluence with the Cuyama (California Trout 2024).

Seventy years ago, the Santa Maria River had the second largest steelhead run in Santa Barbara County. By some estimates as many as 10,000 fish traveled up the watershed in wet years, with the Sisquoc River in the Los Padres National Forest being the most important spawning tributary within the stream network (Environmental Defense Center 2017).

Depending on annual precipitation and the operation of Twitchell Dam, river discharge can be intermittent or nonexistent in the Santa Maria River downstream of the confluence with the Sisquoc River. The Santa Maria River is designated critical habitat for steelhead. A freshwater migration corridor in the river coincides with wet-season river flows.

All proposed project work that could potentially affect steelhead habitat will be conducted between May 1 and October 31. As the river adjacent to the project site is expected to be dry during the time of the proposed project development, steelhead are not expected to be present.

The proposed project is not likely to adversely affect federally-listed Southern California DPS steelhead or critical habitat designated for this species under the Endangered Species Act. Steelhead will not be discussed further in this biological assessment.

Southwestern Pond Turtle

A federally-proposed threatened species and California Species of Special Concern, the southwestern pond turtle is uncommon to common in suitable aquatic habitat from Monterey Bay to northern Baja California, Mexico including freshwater marshes, stock ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams. This species is considered omnivorous. Aquatic plant material, including pond lilies, beetles and a variety of aquatic invertebrates as well as fishes, frogs, and even carrion have been reported among their food. Pond turtles require basking sites such as partially submerged logs, rocks, mats of floating vegetation, or open mud banks. Turtles slip from basking sites to underwater retreats at the approach of humans or potential predators (Jennings and Hayes 1994, Thomson et al. 2016).

The closest recorded observation of southwestern pond turtle in the CNDDB was recorded approximately 4.3 miles northwest of the project site at Oso Flaco Lake (Occurrence No. 75, Undated). The next closest observation is 5.2 miles south of the project site in a freshwater pond (Occurrence No. 151, 1995).

Southwestern pond turtle was not observed during the reconnaissance-level biological field survey. However, its habitat, including small freshwater marshes and ponds, were observed on and adjacent to the project site. The Western Pond Turtle Predicted Habitat Dataset also shows a high likelihood of southwestern pond turtle occurring along the Santa Maria River and within the project area (CDFW 2025e). The closest California Natural Diversity Database occurrence of southwestern pond turtle to the project site is approximately 4.8 miles south and was recorded in 1995 (Occurrence No. 151, CDFW 2025a and CDFW 2025b).

Arroyo Toad

A federally-listed endangered species and California Species of Special Concern, arroyo toad is primarily nocturnal and feeds predominantly on nocturnally active ant species. Adults typically emerge from retreats approximately 30–40 min after sunset, with nocturnal activity increased during wet periods.

Males begin calling at varying times of the year depending on local conditions and elevation. Choruses generally begin in late February in coastal populations and late March or April at higher elevation inland sites, and they may continue into July. Eggs are laid near the male's calling site on a substrate of mud, sand, or gravel, away from vegetation and other submerged debris. Hatching occurs after 4–6 days at typical water temperatures (12–16°C), although the larvae remain associated with the egg mass for an additional 5–6 days. Metamorphosis can occur in as few as 65 days, although typically 72–80 days are required. The seasonal activity period for adults extends roughly from the beginning of the breeding season to late June or July, after which most toads become inactive. Juveniles may remain active into October or later following rains.

Arroyo toad may have the most specialized habitat requirements of any North American anuran This species requires shallow, slow-moving stream and riparian habitat. In some areas they may occupy first-order streams, although most populations inhabit second- to sixth-order streams that have extensive braided channels and sediment deposits of sand, gravel, or pebbles that are occasionally reworked by flooding. Arroyo toads will use either permanent or seasonal streams, although seasonal streams must flow for a minimum 4–5 months for successful reproduction and recruitment.

Almost all populations of arroyo toad occur along the coast of central California or on the coastal slopes of the southern California mountains. The present distribution of arroyo toad is considerably smaller than it once was. It is estimated that this species had disappeared from 76% of its former range in California, although more recent estimates place this loss at 65% (Jennings and Hayes 1994; Thomson et al. 2016).

The closest recorded CNDDB observation of this species is approximately 11.3 miles southeast of the project site, along the Sisquoc River, a tributary of the Santa Maria River (Occurrence No. 8, 1992). There appear to be no known populations along the lower Santa Maria River.

As there are no known occurrences near the project site, the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect federally-listed arroyo toad. Arroyo toad will not be discussed further in this biological assessment.

California Red-Legged Frog

A federally-listed threatened species and California Species of Special Concern, California red-legged frog occurs in lowlands and foothills primarily in perennial or ephemeral ponds, pools, and streams where water remains long enough (14-28 weeks) for breeding and metamorphosis of tadpoles. Specific breeding sites include streams, creeks, ponds, marshes, sag ponds, deep pools, backwater areas, dune ponds, lagoons, and estuaries. California red-legged frog may disperse from their aquatic breeding habitats to upland habitats during the dry season. They prefer upland habitats that provide moisture to prevent desiccation and protection from predators, including downed logs, woody vegetation, boulders, moist leaf litter, or other refugia during the dry season. In areas where upland

habitats do not contain structure, California red-legged frog take refuge in burrows. However, if there is sufficient water at their breeding location, they may remain in aquatic habitats year-round instead of moving to adjacent uplands.

During wet seasons, frogs can move long distances between habitats, traversing upland areas or ephemeral drainages. Dispersal distances are typically less than 0.3 miles, with a few individuals moving 1.2-2.2 miles. Seeps and springs in open grasslands can function as foraging habitat or refugia for wandering frogs (Jennings and Hayes 1994; Thomson et al. 2016; USFWS 2005).

The California red-legged frog is found primarily in coastal drainages of central California, from Marin County south to northern Baja California, Mexico. There are several CNDDB observations of this species on or immediately adjacent to the project site along the Santa Maria River levee (Occurrence Nos. 664, 139, and 954). Occurrence Number 664 (from 2003) consisted of 14 adults observed at Bonita School Road in an agricultural ditch used to convey irrigation runoff to the Santa Maria River. Occurrence Number 139 (from 2003) was a single adult in willow riparian habitat immediately north of the Santa Maria River levee with a steady flow of irrigation runoff (identified as "Santa Maria River Pond" on the map). Occurrence Number 954 (from 2007) was a single adult found just south of the Santa Maria River in a storm water channel at the north end of Blosser Road. All areas consisted of highly disturbed habitat surrounded by ruderal and agricultural areas.

California red-legged frog is known to use the aquatic habitat found on the project site and within adjacent agricultural drainage channels and ponds for breeding. Potential upland habitat may also be present on the project site and frogs may take refuge in the numerous ground squirrel burrows found throughout the site.

As there are known occurrences and suitable habitat on and adjacent to the project site, California red-legged frog has the potential to be present on the project site. Impacts as a result of the project may potentially adversely affect the federally-listed California red-legged frog.

Western Spadefoot

A federally-proposed threatened species and California Species of Special Concern, western spadefoot occurs primarily in grassland habitats, but can be found in valley-foothill hardwood woodlands. It breeds in winter and spring (January - May) in quiet streams and temporary pools. The historical range of western spadefoot is from the vicinity of Redding in Shasta County, California, southward to northwestern Baja California, Mexico (USFWS. 2024d).

Western spadefoots are primarily terrestrial and inhabit underground burrows. It is estimated that western spadefoot individuals can burrow approximately three feet below ground during the dry season to avoid temperature extremes and desiccation. During a majority of their life cycle, western spadefoot remains in a torpor state in underground burrows in upland areas surrounding their aquatic (breeding) habitat. Spadefoots emerge from their burrows to forage and breed in ephemeral pools following seasonal rains in winter and spring. Emergence is likely related to a sound or

vibration cue from the rain Most surface activity is nocturnal, presumably to reduce water loss. Depending on temperature and annual rains, western spadefoot breeding and oviposition generally occurs from October to May, most often in temporary pools and non-flowing drainage areas from winter or spring rains (USFWS 2023).

There is one CNDDB observation of this species on the project site and several within the immediate vicinity of the project. Occurrence Number 80 (from 1995) consisted of a tadpole in willow riparian habitat with a steady flow of irrigation runoff. Occurrence Numbers 1139 (1988) and 1140 (1923) are both approximately 1.2 miles south of the project site and included egg masses and adults in pools within agricultural areas.

Western spadefoot is known to use the aquatic habitat found on the project site and within adjacent agricultural drainage channels and ponds for breeding. Potential upland habitat may also be present on the project site. As there are known occurrences recorded on the project site and in the project vicinity and suitable habitat on and adjacent to the project site, western spadefoot has the potential to be present on the project site. Impacts as a result of the project may potentially adversely affect western spadefoot.

Least Bell's Vireo

A federal- and state-listed endangered species, least Bell's vireo is an obligate riparian breeder that was once abundant from coastal southern California, east to the Sierra Nevada foothills, north to the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, and south to Mexico. In fact, least Bell's vireo was characterized as one of the most common birds found in riparian habitat throughout the state (Riparian Habitat Joint Venture 2004). By the 1980s, the species was extirpated from most of its historic range, confined to counties south of Santa Barbara. Primarily due to the management of the nest-parasitic brown-headed cowbird, the species has begun to recover and is expanding its range north into counties within its historic range, including Santa Barbara.

This species usually breeds in dense, shrubby riparian forest near permanent water or intermittent streams. They are associated with willow, cottonwood, mulefat, blackberry, mugwort, and mesquite. Nests may also be located on terraces in the floodplain that are vegetated by upland species such as summer mustard, coast live oak, star thistle and annual grasses, and at the edge of riparian and upland habitats (USFWS 2006).

Least Bell's vireos are migratory and winter in Mexico. They head south by September and return to California by mid-March to early April. Egg laying occurs in May to early-June. The incubation period is from 14-15 days and the nestling period from 10-12 days (Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2024).

The closest least Bell's vireo CNDDB occurrence to the project is from 1979 along the Sisquoc River, a tributary of the Santa Maria River, approximately 14.5 miles southeast of the project site (Occurrence No. 66). There are no recent project vicinity detections in the CNDDB. However, least

Bell's vireo was detected nesting and successfully fledgling within the project site in 2023. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's 2023 range expansion surveys along the central coast of California observed ten least Bell's vireo singing (territorial) males in willow dominated riparian areas on the Santa Maria River (project site) and one on the Sisquoc River. Of the eleven territorial vireo males at these two sites, seven were confirmed paired (Griffith Wildlife Biology 2024).

As there are known occurrences on the project site as recently as 2023, and suitable habitat on and adjacent to the project site, least Bell's vireo has the potential to be present on the project site. Impacts as a result of the project may potentially adversely affect the federally-listed least Bell's vireo.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

A federal- and state-listed endangered species, the southwestern willow flycatcher requires dense willow thickets for nesting and roosting, and it occurs near streams, rivers, wet meadows, ponds or backwaters. Breeding males defend territories during the breeding season and can be detected by their singing behavior. In late May to early June, the female lays eggs which she incubates for 12–15 days, and then both the female and male tend the young during the 12–15 day nestling stage.

After fledging, young stay close to the nest for a few days, and do not leave the natal area for at least 14–15 days. During this time, both adults respond to the loudly begging fledglings by bringing them food. Some pairs will attempt to raise a second brood later in the season, particularly if their first nesting attempt fails. Nests with eggs have been observed as late as 30 August, with nestlings into mid-September (Riparian Habitat Joint Venture 2004, USFWS 2017).

The breeding range of the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher includes southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, southwestern Colorado, and extreme southern portions of Nevada and Utah.

The closest southwestern willow flycatcher CNDDB occurrences to the project are from 1989 (Occurrence No. 39) and 1995 (Occurrence No. 1) approximately 27 miles southeast of the project site along the Santa Ynez River. However, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's 2023 range expansion surveys of least Bell's vireo along the central coast of California incidentally detected a southwestern willow flycatcher male at the Santa Ynez River in Buellton (the male was confirmed paired in June) (Griffith Wildlife Biology 2024).

As there are no known occurrences in the project vicinity, it is unlikely to be present on the project site. Southwestern willow flycatcher will not be discussed further in this biological assessment.

Nesting Birds and Raptors

Many passerine bird species and raptors have the potential to nest in the dense riparian woodland and scrub habitat at the project site. Birds may also nest on buildings, on open ground, or in any type of vegetation.

Conclusion. As there are known occurrences in the project vicinity and suitable habitat on and adjacent to the project site, nesting birds and raptors have the potential to be present on the project site. Impacts as a result of the project may potentially adversely affect the federally-protected nesting birds and raptors.

5.4 State-Listed Plant Species

Special-status plant species potentially occurring in the project vicinity were evaluated for potential to occur on the project site. Information on special-status plants, including listing status, suitable habitat conditions, and potential to occur on the site is presented in Figure 5-1 and Appendix B.

Although no special-status plant species were found during the reconnaissance field survey, the considerable size of the project site and insufficient level of survey effort prohibit defensible presence/absence determinations.

Most of the state-listed special-status plant species identified in Appendix B have very specific habitat requirements such as coastal dune, closed-cone coniferous forest, brackish marshes, or higher elevation chaparral. Due to their close proximity to the project site and potential suitability of habitat found, three state-listed species have some potential to occur on the project site: Blochman's leafy daisy (*Erigeron blochmaniae*), dune larkspur (*Delphinium parryi* ssp. *blochmaniae*), and Kellogg's horkelia (*Horkelia cuneata* ssp. *sericea*). These species are discussed below.

Blochman's Leafy Daisy

Blochman's leafy daisy is listed as a CNPS 1B.2 species, fairly endangered in California (20-80% occurrences threatened). Blochman's leafy daisy is a perennial herb (rhizomatous) that is native to California, and endemic (limited) to California, where it is found only along the coastlines of San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties. It typically blooms from June to August and occurs on sand dunes and hills in coastal scrub and coastal dunes. CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of Blochman's leafy daisy to the project site was recorded in 2014, approximately 2.1 miles northwest of the project site (Occurrence No. 29, CNDDB 2024a). This special-status plant species has the potential to occur on the project site's scrub habitats. Project development could result in impacts to this species during construction.

Dune Larkspur

Dune larkspur is listed as a CNPS 1B.2 species, fairly endangered in California (20-80% occurrences threatened). Dune larkspur is a perennial herb that is native to California, and endemic (limited) to California, where it is found in coastal areas of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties. It typically blooms from April to May and occurs rocky and sandy substrates in chaparral and coastal dunes. CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of dune larkspur to the project site was recorded in 1969, approximately 3.2 miles north of the project site (Occurrence No. 24, CNDDB 2024a). This special-status plant species has the potential to occur on the project site's scrub habitats. Project development could result in impacts to this species during construction.

Kellogg's Horkelia

Kellogg's horkelia is listed as a CNPS 1B.1 species, seriously endangered in California (over 80% of occurrences threatened/high degree and immediacy of threat). Kellogg's horkelia is a perennial herb that is native to California, and endemic (limited) to California, where is grows primarily in the Central Coast region. It typically blooms from April to September and occurs in sandy or gravelly openings in several habitats including closed-cone coniferous forest, maritime chaparral, and coastal scrub. CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of Kellogg's horkelia to the project site was recorded in 2013, approximately 2.1 miles northwest of the project site (Occurrence No. 47, CNDDB 2024a). Although not observed during the site reconnaissance survey, this special-status plant species has the potential to occur in scrub habitats on the project site. Project development could result in impacts to this species during construction.

5.5 State-Listed Wildlife Species

As illustrated in Figure 5-1, Special-Status Species Documented Within the Project Vicinity, and/or listed in Appendix B, a number of state-protected wildlife species have been reported as occurring within the overall project vicinity.

Of the state-listed wildlife species with the potential to occur in the project vicinity, the following species were determined to have the potential to occur on the project site: American badger, southwestern pond turtle (see sections 5.3 and 6.2), arroyo toad (see sections 5.3 and 6.2), California red-legged frog (see sections 5.3 and 6.2), coast horned lizard, Northern California legless lizard, western spadefoot (see sections 5.3 and 6.2), Crotch's bumble bee, burrowing owl, least Bell's vireo (see sections 5.3 and 6.2), southwestern willow flycatcher (see sections 5.3 and 6.2), yellow warbler, special-status bat species, and nesting birds and raptors (see sections 5.3 and 6.2).

A CNDDB record from 1896 identifies Swainson's hawk as occurring in the Guadalupe area. However, this species breeding population is generally considered to be extirpated from the central California coast.

State-listed wildlife species with the potential to occur on the project site are discussed in more detail, below. For state protected species that are also federally-listed, see section 5.3 above.

American Badger

A California Species of Special Concern, American badger is an uncommon, permanent resident found throughout most of the state, except in the northern North Coast area. This large member of the weasel family uses most shrub, forest, and herbaceous habitats with friable soils suitable for burrows. Prey species include fossorial rodents such as rats, mice, chipmunks, ground squirrels, and pocket gophers. Badger diet shifts seasonally depending on the availability of prey and may also include reptiles, insects, earthworms, eggs, birds, and carrion. Mixed oak woodland, coastal scrub, and grassland habitats provide cover, drier soils for burrowing, and prey resources for this species (CDFW 2000a, CDFW 2024e, Jameson and Peeters 2004).

CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of American badger to the project site was recorded in 1988, a road kill on Highway 101 (US 101), approximately 2.7 miles southeast of the project site (Occurrence No. 111, CNDDB 2024a). The next closet occurrence was recorded in 2006 in the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, approximately 4.3 miles northwest of the project site (Occurrence No. 391, CNDDB 2024a).

American badger could potentially use the scrub and ruderal habitat found on the project site for denning and hunting. The abundance of ground squirrels and their burrows on the project site could attract badgers to this area. As there are known CNDDB occurrences in the project vicinity and suitable habitat for this species on the project site, American badger may be present and potentially adversely impacted by project construction.

Coast Horned Lizard

A California Species of Special Concern, coast horned lizard relies on camouflage for protection and often hesitates to move at the approach of a predator. Horned lizards often bask in the early morning on the ground or on elevated objects such as low boulders or rocks. Predators and extreme heat are avoided by coast horned lizards by burrowing into loose soil. They forage on the ground in open areas, usually between shrubs and consume many ants.

Coast horned lizard is uncommon to common in suitable habitat. It occurs in foothill woodlands, conifer, and riparian habitats, as well as in juniper and annual grassland habitats. Coast horned lizard can be found in the Sierra Nevada foothills and throughout the central and southern California coast (CDFW 2000b; Jennings and Hayes 1994; Thomson et al. 2016).

CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of coast horned lizard to the project site was recorded in 2008, within the Santa Maria River and immediately adjacent to the project site in sandy soils with coyote brush, willow, and mulefat (Occurrence No. 675, CNDDB 2024a). Other nearby CNDDB occurrences are located to the west of the project site in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes.

Coast horned lizard could potentially use the riparian scrub and ruderal habitat found on the project site for foraging. As there are known CNDDB occurrences in the project vicinity and suitable habitat for this species on the project site, coast horned lizard may be present and potentially adversely impacted by project construction.

Northern California Legless Lizard

A California Species of Special Concern, the Northern California legless lizard is a secretive fossorial lizard with no legs that lives mostly underground, burrowing in loose, sandy soil. It forages in loose soil, sand, and leaf litter during the day. It does not bask in direct sunlight, but is sometimes found on the surface at dusk and at night.

Northern California legless lizard is common in suitable habitats in the Coast Ranges from Contra Costa County south to the Mexican border. Common in several habitats but especially in coastal dune, valley-foothill, chaparral, and coastal scrub types (CDFW 2000d; Jennings and Hayes 1994; Thomson et al. 2016).

CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of Northern California legless lizard to the project site was recorded in 1988, within the vicinity of Santa Maria, 1.5 miles south of the site (Occurrence No. 257, CNDDB 2024a). Numerous additional occurrences are found within four miles of the project site to the south, west, and north.

Northern California legless lizard could potentially use the riparian scrub and ruderal habitat found on the project site for foraging. Treeless, open areas with sandy soils and sparse vegetation are present throughout the project site and provide suitable habitat for legless lizard. As there are known CNDDB occurrences in the project vicinity and suitable habitat for this species on the project site, Northern California legless lizard may be present and potentially adversely impacted by project construction.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

Crotch's bumble bee is a candidate species for state listing as endangered under the California Endangered Species Act. Crotch's bumble bees inhabit open grassland and scrub habitats and forage throughout the duration of the colony (spring through fall), colony nest sites, and overwintering sites for the queens (Xerces Society 2018). Crotch's bumble bees are generalist foragers (i.e., they do not depend on any one flower type). Documented food plants for Crotch's bumble bees include milkweeds (*Asclepias* sp.), pin cushions (*Chaenactis* spp.), lupines (*Lupinus* spp.), burclovers (*Medicago* spp.), fiddlenecks (*Phacelia* spp.), and sages (*Salvia* spp.) (Xerces Society 2018). Crotch's bumble bees, like most bumble bee species, nest underground, particularly within abandoned rodent holes (Xerces Society 2009). The flight period for Crotch's bumble bee is from late February to late October, peaking in early April and again in July. The flight period for workers and males extends between late March and September (Xerces Society 2018). There are no recorded observations of Crotch's bumble bee within the project vicinity, however the project site is within the known range for this species. Crotch's bumble bee is considered a generalist and has the potential to occur foraging on flowering plants or nesting in small burrows within the project site.

Burrowing Owl

A California Species of Special Concern and a candidate for higher listing under CESA, burrowing owls live and breed in burrows in the ground, especially in abandoned California ground squirrel burrows. Optimal habitat conditions include large open, dry and nearly level grasslands or prairies with short to moderate vegetation height and cover, areas of bare ground, and populations of burrowing mammals.

Nest and roost burrows of burrowing owl in California are most commonly dug by ground squirrels, but they may use badger (*Taxidea taxus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), and fox (*Vulpes* spp.) dens or holes. Because the owls may excavate their own burrows in the soft earthen banks of the ditches and canals in agricultural areas, availability of mammal burrows may not limit population size in these areas. Structures such as culverts, piles of concrete rubble, and pipes also are used as nest sites (CDFW 1999, Shuford and Gardali, (eds.) 2008).

Riparian scrub and riparian understory habitats provide suitable foraging and nesting habitat for burrowing owl. In agricultural environments, such as those bordering nearly the entire length of the project site, burrowing owls nest along roadsides and water conveyance structures (open canals, ditches, culverts, and drains) surrounded by crops.

Male gives courtship display and notes in front of the nesting burrow. Breeding occurs from March through August, with peak in April and May. Young emerge from burrow at about two weeks, and fly by about four weeks. Burrowing owl are semicolonial and probably the most gregarious owl in North America.

Burrowing owl were formerly common in appropriate habitats throughout the state, excluding the humid northwest coastal forests and high mountains. However, their numbers have been markedly reduced in recent decades (CDFW 1999, Shuford and Gardali (eds.) 2008).

CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of burrowing owl to the project site was recorded in 2008, approximately 3.5 miles south of the site (Occurrence No. 1803, CNDDB 2024a). Burrowing owl have also been observed within the project site on the Santa Maria River levee (Signorelli 2024).

Burrowing owls could potentially use larger California ground squirrel burrows found throughout the project site for nesting. The open irrigation channels and culverts on the project site also provide suitable habitat. As there are known CNDDB occurrences in the project vicinity and suitable habitat for this species on the project site, burrowing owl may be present and potentially adversely impacted by project construction.

Yellow Warbler

A California Species of Special Concern, the yellow warbler occurs principally as a migrant and summer resident in California from late March through early October with breeding occurring from April to late July.

Yellow warblers generally occupy riparian vegetation in close proximity to water along streams and in wet meadows. They are typically found in willows (*Salix* spp.) and cottonwoods (*Populus* spp.), and in California they are found in numerous other species of riparian shrubs or trees, varying by biogeographic region. As a generalist, yellow warblers appear to adapt its foraging to variation in

local vegetation structure. Their diet includes ants, bees, wasps, caterpillars, beetles, true bugs, flies, and spiders. Brown-headed cowbird parasitism is a commonly reported cause of yellow warbler declines in California.

Yellow warbler breeds throughout California, except for most of the Mojave Desert. Historically, they also bred in the Central Valley but are now close to extirpation there (CDFW 2005, Shuford and Gardali, (eds.) 2008).

CNDDB records indicate that the closest known occurrence of yellow warbler to the project site was recorded in 1999, in riparian habitat along the Sisquoc River, a tributary of the Santa Maria River, approximately 12.5 miles southeast of the site (Occurrence No. 72, CNDDB 2024a).

The abundant willow thickets on the project site provide suitable breeding and foraging habitat for yellow warbler. During the July 2024 biological survey, yellow warbler was observed on the project site vocalizing within the willow thickets along the river levee.

As the species was observed during the survey, there are known CNDDB occurrences in the project vicinity, and suitable habitat for this species is found on the project site, yellow warbler may be present and potentially adversely impacted by project construction.

Special-Status Bat Species

Trees and/or buildings or structures on or adjacent to the project site could potentially provide roosting habitat for bats listed as California Species of Special Concern, including hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*), pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), and Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*). All three species can be found in coastal areas of northern Santa Barbara County (CDFW 2024b).

The hoary bat is the most widely distributed North American bat. It may be found throughout California, but is generally distributed in wooded areas. This common, solitary species winters along the central coast and in southern California, breeding inland and north of its winter range. In winter, it can be found roosting on the vertical trunks of trees as low as only one meter above the ground. Habitats suitable for bearing young include all woodlands and forests with medium to large-size trees and dense foliage. Mating occurs in autumn, in migration or on the wintering grounds, but is followed by delayed fertilization. The young are born from mid-May through early July. The offspring are capable of flight after 33 days (CDFW 1990a, Jameson and Peeters 2004).

The pallid bat is found in low elevations throughout California. It occupies a wide variety of habitats including grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, and forests. Pallid bats may roost in woodlands and forests but prefer open, dry, and rocky habitats. They can also roost in abandoned buildings, bird boxes, road culverts, and under bridges. Mating occurs from late October-February. However, fertilization is delayed and young are born from April-July. The altricial young are weaned in seven weeks and are observed flying in July and August (CDFW 1990b, Jameson and Peeters 2004).

Townsend's big-eared bats inhabit a diversity of habitats, including coastal conifer forests, oak woodlands, grasslands, and deserts. Known roosting sites in California include limestone caves, lava tubes, mine tunnels, buildings, and other human-made structures. Females typically roost in large maternity colonies which are highly susceptible to disturbances by humans. Males usually roost singly or in small groups and are probably not affected as much as females by disturbances (CDFG 1986, Jameson and Peeters 2004).

Construction activities at the project site could result in the disturbance of roost and natal sites occupied by special-status bats, if present. As there are known CNDDB occurrences in the project vicinity and suitable habitat for these species on the project site, special-status bat species may be present and potentially adversely impacted by project construction.

5.6 Sensitive Natural Communities and Riparian Habitat

The arroyo willow riparian woodland along the Santa Maria River levee (Figures 4-1 through 4-4, Habitat Maps Segments 1-4) is classified by CDFW as a "Sensitive Natural Community." Sensitive natural communities are communities that are of limited distribution statewide or within a county or region and are often vulnerable to environmental effects of projects. These communities may or may not contain special-status plants or their habitats (CDFW 2018).

5.7 Jurisdictional Wetlands and Waters

The USFWS is the principal federal agency tasked with providing information to the public on the extent and status of the nation's wetlands and waterways, as well as changes to these habitats over time. Wetlands and waterways found within and adjacent to the project site are documented on the Service's National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) and displayed through the online Wetlands Mapper (USFWS 2024b) (Figure 5-2, National Wetlands Inventory).

A query of the NWI shows several types of wetlands within and adjacent to the project site including the Santa Maria River to the north and agricultural ponds and drainages to the south. The NWI has several classifications for wetlands within the Santa Maria River channel. The river itself is classified as a riverine system with two different water regimes: intermittently flooded water regime (R4SBJ) and, temporarily flooded water regime (R4SBA). Other wetlands within the channel are classified as freshwater forested/shrub wetland habitat with intermittently flooded and temporarily flooded water regimes (PSS1J and PSSA).

The NWI also identifies and classifies agricultural ponds located immediately south of the project site as freshwater pond habitats (PUSCx and PABFx), agricultural irrigation/drainage channels as riverine habitat with seasonally flooded water regimes (R4SBCx), and freshwater emergent wetland habitat (PEM1Cx)

The Santa Maria River flows intermittently immediately adjacent to levee and project site. Impacts to areas within the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) are regulated by the USACE. Impacts to areas within the top of bank are regulated by the RWQCB. Impacts to the riparian corridor are regulated by the CDFW.

Other potentially jurisdictional wetlands and waters located on or near the project site occur south of the levee and include agricultural ponds and drainages (Figures 4-1 through 4-4, Habitat Maps Segments 1-4).

5.8 Wildlife Movement Corridors and Habitat Connectivity

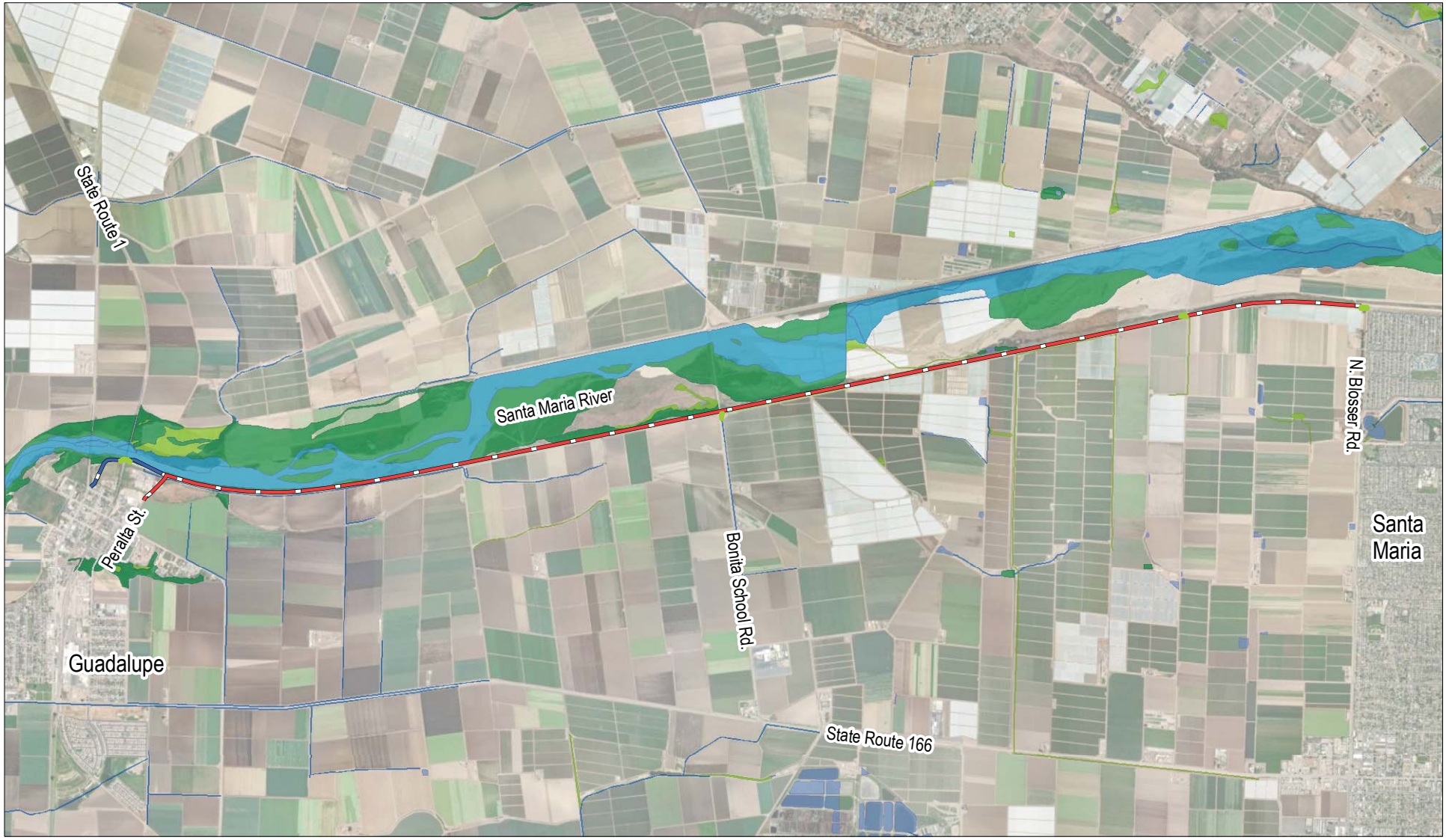
Ensuring wildlife movement through a landscape, to enable the acquisition of resources for feeding, cover, and reproduction, has been recognized as critical for the survival of animal populations. Habitat "connectivity" is the ability of an individual or population to move between habitat patches that provide these resources (Hilty et al. 2006).

A species can undertake several types of movement events, which generally take place at different spatial and temporal scales at various life history stages. Daily movement can occur in the procurement of food and water, shelter, or other resource requirements. Seasonal movement, or "migration," generally occurs at a much larger spatial scale. Long distance juvenile dispersal or other colonization events might take place once in an individual's life, occurring only after a lapse of several generations. These various types of movement, along with species-specific differences, lead to numerous ways in which to measure a landscape's connectivity in terms of habitat needs.

The California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project provides a statewide wildlife habitat connectivity map using the CDFW's Biogeographic Information and Observation System (CDFW 2024d). This system was queried to determine the presence or absence of wildlife corridors on the project site. Query results showed that the project site is not mapped on the system within an Essential Habitat Connectivity Area or corridor. However, river corridors, including river channels and riparian vegetation, provide key wildlife movement corridors for many species, including fish, mammals, and birds. Upstream and downstream habitats of the Santa Maria River are connected along with adjacent flood plain habitat.

5.9 Regulated Trees

The County of Santa Barbara regulates the removal of certain trees within the County, as discussed in Section 2.3 Regional/Local Regulations. According to project plans, no trees are proposed for removal along the extent of the trail route.



0 4000 feet

Trail Alignment
Alternative Trail End
Construction Staging Areas
Freshwater Emergent Wetland
Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland
Freshwater Pond
Riverine

Source: ESRI 2025, Santa Barbara County 2020, Wallace Group 2025, USFWS NWI 2020

Figure 5-2

National Wetlands Inventory

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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6.0 Effects Analysis and Conservation Measures

This section of the report identifies potential adverse effects to protected biological resources and recommends mitigation to minimize these effects.

The CEQA standards of significance and NEPA and ESA effects determinations were used to determine potentially significant or significant impacts to biological resources. Please refer to Figure 5-1 and Appendices B and C for summaries of special-status plant and animal species potentially occurring in the project vicinity that were considered as part of the impact analysis. The project site's impact area, in relation to on-site plant communities, is depicted in Figures 4-1 through 4-4, Habitat Maps Segments 1-4.

6.1 Conclusions

Protected biological resources, including state and federally listed wildlife species, may be impacted by the proposed project if present. Therefore, measures are recommended in this section to avoid or minimize impacts to biological resources as a result of the proposed project. These measures are dependent on regulatory agency coordination and approval of associated permit conditions if permits are required. Therefore, final minimization and avoidance measures should be established in consultation and coordination with all involved regulatory agencies and other project permitting authorities, if necessary.

6.2 Federally-Listed Plant Species

As there are known occurrences near the project site and suitable riverbank habitat on the project site, La Graciosa thistle has the potential to be present on the project site. The proposed project may affect, not likely to adversely affect, the federally-listed La Graciosa thistle. If compensatory mitigation is required to offset impacts to special-status plant species, an area would be chosen within the Biological Survey Area and not offsite. Possible mitigation or restoration areas are shown on Figure 6-1, Possible Mitigation/Restoration Areas within the Biological Survey Area. The following conservation measures will be incorporated into project plans or as conditions of approval to avoid, minimize or mitigate potential impacts to this species.

Recommended Conservation Measures

BIO-1 Focused Plant Surveys. Prior to ground disturbance, a biologist qualified in botany should conduct a focused survey for federally- and state-listed special-status plant species at the project site in accordance with current California Department of Fish and Wildlife and California rare plant survey protocols (CDFW 2018 and CNPS 2001). The survey should occur during the peak blooming period for these species to determine their presence or absence. Some special-status plant species are only identifiable during their blooming periods and surveys are only considered valid if they occur when blooms are visible. Based on the known blooming periods of the special-status plant species potentially present, two surveys would be necessary to adequately survey the project site: the first in May and the second in July/August. If possible, known reference populations of the target species in the project vicinity should first be visited to verify that the species is observable, and the focused survey should be conducted within two weeks of observing the reference population in full bloom.

The biologist should then prepare a brief report documenting the results of the surveys which will be submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department prior ground disturbance. If the focused surveys conclude that special-status plant species are not present within the project site boundary, or if they are present but impacts to them can be completely avoided, then no further measures would be required.

If the focused surveys identify special-status plant species within the project site boundary and they would be affected by the proposed project, then appropriate avoidance and minimization measures should be developed by the biologist and implemented by the project applicant prior to ground disturbance. Measures may include, but are not limited to:

a. A qualified biologist should identify an on-site or off-site mitigation area suitable for restoration of habitat and seed transplantation for any special-status plant species.

b. Prior to ground disturbance, a qualified biologist or native plant specialist should perform seed collection from all special-status plants located within the impact areas and implement seed installation at the mitigation area at the optimal time. Additionally, topsoil from the special-status species occurrence area(s) should be salvaged (where practical) for use in the mitigation area.



0 4000 feet

Biological Survey Area

Possible Mitigation/Restoration Areas

Source: ESRI 2026, Santa Barbara County 2020, Wallace Group 2025

Figure 6-1

Possible Mitigation/Restoration Areas within the Biological Survey Area

Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project Biological Assessment

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c. A maintenance and monitoring program should be developed by a qualified biologist and established for a minimum of five years after mitigation area installation to verify that restoration activities have been successful. Maintenance activities may include, but not be limited to, watering during the plant establishment period, supplemental seed planting as needed, and removal of non-native plants. Monitoring should include, at a minimum, quarterly monitoring reports for the first year and annual reports for the remaining four years. The performance standard for successful mitigation should be a minimum 3:1 replacement ratio (i.e., three plants observed in mitigation area for each plant lost from the project site) achieved in at least one of the five years of monitoring.

6.3 Federally-Listed Wildlife Species

The proposed project may affect, and is not likely to adversely affect, federally-listed steelhead, southwestern pond turtle, arroyo toad, and southwestern willow flycatcher.

The proposed project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, California red-legged frog, western spadefoot, and least Bell's vireo, and nesting birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The following conservation measures may be incorporated into project plans or as conditions of approval to avoid, minimize or mitigate potential impacts to these species.

California Red-legged Frog and Western Spadefoot

The aquatic habitats on the project site could potentially provide breeding habitat for California red-legged frog and western spadefoot. Construction activities within or adjacent to the project site's aquatic habitats could result in impacts to these species, if present. Therefore, project impacts may affect, and are likely to adversely affect California red-legged frog and western spadefoot. The county will need to coordinate with the USFWS to determine the appropriate course of action per the requirements of FESA (e.g., obtaining Incidental Take Permits) and implement the permit requirements prior to ground disturbance. Final conservation measures will be determined during the Incidental Take Permitting process; however, the following conservation measures are recommended to minimize impacts to the extent possible.

Recommended Conservation Measures

BIO-2 California Red-Legged Frog and Western Spadefoot. California red-legged frog and western spadefoot have been recorded in proximity to the proposed project and may occur within stream or riparian habitats associated with the Santa Maria River and agricultural drainages within and adjacent to the project site. One of the following two options should be followed:

Option 1: Assume presence of California red-legged frog and western spadefoot.

The applicant should obtain an Incidental Take Permit from the USFWS for potential project impacts to California red-legged frog and western spadefoot and implement all avoidance, minimization, and compensatory mitigation measures required by these permits. The biologist should also implement the avoidance and minimization measures identified below before/during construction to minimize the potential for "take" of California red-legged frog and western spadefoot.

Conservation measures may include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. At least 15 days prior to ground disturbance, the biologist should submit the name and credentials of the project biologists who would conduct activities specified in this measure. No project activities should begin until the biologist has received written approval from the USFWS that the biologists are qualified to conduct the work.

2. The biologists should have the authority to halt construction work at any time to prevent harm to California red-legged frog or western spadefoot or when any of the permit-specified protection measures have been violated. Work should re-commence only when authorized by the biologists. If work is stopped due to potential harm to protected species, the project biologists should contact the USFWS by telephone or email on the same day to communicate the event and coordinate appropriate action.

3. A biologist should conduct biological construction monitoring in all work areas with potential to impact California red-legged frog and western spadefoot. Before the start of work each day, a biologist should check for wildlife under any equipment such as vehicles and stored pipes within active construction zones. A biologist should also check all excavated steep-walled holes or trenches greater than one foot deep for trapped animals. If California red-legged frog or western spadefoot is observed within an active construction zone, a biologist should be notified immediately and all work within 100 feet of the individual animal should be halted and all equipment turned off until the biologist has captured and removed the individual from the work area. California red-legged frog or western spadefoot should be relocated to a USFWS -approved off-site location according to permit specifications.

Option 2: Conduct Protocol-Level Focused Surveys for California red-legged frog and western spadefoot.

A USFWS-approved biologist should conduct protocol-level surveys for California red-legged frog and western spadefoot following the guidelines presented in the *Revised Guidance on Site Assessments and Field Surveys for the California Red-legged Frog* (USFWS 2005). Based on the results of the focused surveys, one of the following outcomes will apply:

1. California red-legged frog or western spadefoot are not present. Confirmation of the negative finding should be obtained from the USFWS, and no further avoidance/minimization measures are required.

2. California red-legged frog and/or western spadefoot is present. The applicant should coordinate with the USFWS to determine the appropriate course of action per the requirements of FESA (e.g., obtaining Incidental Take Permits) and implement the permit requirements prior to ground disturbance as described in Option 1.

BIO-3 Worker Awareness Training. Prior to ground disturbance, a qualified biologist should conduct a training session for all construction personnel. At a minimum, the training should include a description of special-status species potentially occurring in the project vicinity, including, but not limited to, California red-legged frog, western spadefoot, southwestern pond turtle, least Bell's vireo, American badger, coast horned lizard, northern California legless lizard, Crotch's bumble bee, burrowing owl, yellow warbler, special-status bats, and nesting birds and raptors. Their habitats, general measures that are being implemented to conserve species as they relate to the project, and the boundaries within which construction activities will occur should be explained. Informational handouts with photographs clearly illustrating the species' appearances should be used in the training session. All new construction personnel should undergo this mandatory environmental awareness training.

The qualified biologist should train biological monitors selected from the construction crew by the construction contractor (typically the project foreman). Before the start of work each day, the monitor should check for animals under any equipment such as vehicles and stored pipes within active construction zones. The monitor should also check all excavated steep-walled holes or trenches greater than one foot deep for trapped animals. If a special-status species is observed within an active construction zone, the qualified biologist should be notified immediately and all work within 50 feet of the individual should be halted and all equipment turned off until the individual has left the construction area.

The applicant should document evidence of completion of this training prior to ground disturbance and submit them to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department.

Southwestern Pond Turtle

Southwestern pond turtles are known to occur in the project vicinity and could be present on the project site. Project development could result in impacts to these species from injury or mortality during construction, if present on the project site. Moreover, buildout of the project may eliminate foraging, breeding, or nesting habitat and refugia for this species.

Loss or harm to southwestern pond turtle is considered a significant adverse environmental impact. Implementation of the following mitigation measure, with oversight by the Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department, would reduce potentially significant impacts to southwestern pond turtle to a less than-significant-level.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-4 A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-qualified biologist shall survey for the presence/absence of southwestern pond turtle adhering to survey methods described in the *Draft USGS Western Pond Turtle* (Emys marmorata) *Visual Survey Protocol for the Southcoast Ecoregion* (USGS 2006). Surveys for southwestern pond turtles shall be conducted during the time of greatest pond turtle activity, typically during the breeding season (May - July), and when pond turtles have not left the water to aestivate or overwinter in the uplands. The qualified biologist shall prepare a report documenting the results of the presence/absence survey for submittal to the Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department prior the start of construction. Based on the results of the focused surveys, one of the following outcomes will apply:

1. Southwestern pond turtle is not present. Confirmation of the negative finding shall be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and no further avoidance/minimization measures are required.

2. Southwestern pond turtle is present. The County shall coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the appropriate course of action per the requirements of Federal Endangered Species Act (e.g., obtaining Incidental Take Permit if the species is listed) and implement the permit requirements prior to ground disturbance.

   Permit requirements may include, but not be limited to, the following:

   a. Within 24 hours prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities within 200 feet of aquatic habitat, the County shall retain a qualified biologist to conduct a preconstruction survey for southwestern pond turtle. If any southwestern pond turtles are found in or adjacent to the development area, construction activities shall not commence until the individuals have left the area or the qualified biologist relocates the southwestern pond turtle to nearby suitable habitat a minimum of 300 feet from the construction area. southwestern pond turtle relocation shall only be conducted in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

   b. During all initial ground-disturbing activities within 200 feet of aquatic habitat, the qualified biologist shall monitor construction activity to assess the potential impacts to turtles, if present. If a southwestern pond turtle nest

is discovered during initial ground-disturbing activity, all work shall stop and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shall be contacted for guidance on how to proceed. Relocation of pond turtles and/or their nests shall only be conducted in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

c. Disturbance to aquatic vegetation shall be avoided to the extent possible. Placement of all staging areas, access roads, and other construction related facilities shall be located a minimum of 100 feet away from aquatic habitat.

d. Within 200 feet of aquatic habitat, all construction-related holes shall be covered at the end of each workday to prevent entrapment of southwestern pond turtles.

e. The qualified biologist shall prepare a report documenting the results of the preconstruction survey for submittal to the Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department prior to the start of construction.

Implementation of this mitigation measure would reduce the potential significant impact to southwestern pond turtle to a less-than-significant level by requiring focused and pre-construction surveys for their presence or absence, determining the appropriate course of action per the requirements of FESA (e.g., obtaining Incidental Take Permits), and the implementation of permit requirements prior to ground disturbance.

The County will be responsible for implementing this mitigation measure with oversight by the Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department as needed. Compliance with this measure shall be documented and submitted to the Planning and Development Director, where it will be kept on file, prior to vegetation clearance, grading, or the initiation of any construction activity within the project site.

Least Bell's Vireo

As there are known occurrences of least Bell's vireo documented at the project site as recently as 2023, and suitable habitat is present on and adjacent to the project site, least Bell's vireo has the potential to be present on the project site. Project impacts may affect, and are likely to adversely affect least Bell's vireo.

Recommended Conservation Measures

BIO-5 Least Bell's Vireo. Least Bell's vireo has been recorded in proximity to the proposed project and may occur within riparian habitats associated with the Santa Maria River. Construction activities within 500 feet of least Bell's vireo occupied habitat should be completed outside of the breeding season (March 15 to September 15). If construction cannot avoid the breeding season, one of the following two options should be followed:

Option 1: Assume presence of least Bell's vireo.

The applicant should obtain Incidental Take Permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) for potential project impacts to least Bell's vireo and implement all avoidance, minimization, and compensatory mitigation measures required by these permits. The biologist should also implement the avoidance and minimization measures identified below before/during construction to minimize the potential for "take" of least Bell's vireo.

Conservation measures may include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Between March 15 and September 15, no clearing, grubbing, or grading of occupied least Bell's vireo habitat should be permitted. Areas restricted from such activities should be staked or fenced under the supervision of a qualified biologist;

2. Between March 15 and September 15, no construction activities should occur within any portion of the site where construction activities would result in noise levels exceeding 60 dB(A) hourly average at the edge of least Bell's vireo habitat. An analysis showing that noise generated by construction activities would not exceed 60 dB(A) hourly average at the edge of occupied habitat should be completed by a qualified acoustician and/or qualified biologist (possessing current noise engineer license or registration with monitoring noise level experience with listed animal species) and approved by the USFWS and CDFW at least two weeks prior to the commencement of construction activities. Prior to the commencement of any construction activities during the breeding season, areas restricted from such activities should be staked or fenced under the supervision of a qualified biologist;

3. If construction activities must be conducted adjacent to habitat determined to be occupied by least Bell's vireo during pre-construction surveys, then at least two weeks prior to the commencement of construction activities, under the direction of a qualified acoustician and/or qualified biologist, noise attenuation measures (e.g., berms, walls) should be implemented to ensure that noise levels resulting from construction activities will not exceed 60 dB(A) hourly average at the edge of habitat occupied by the least Bell's vireo. Concurrent with the commencement of construction activities and the construction of necessary noise attenuation facilities, noise monitoring should be conducted at the edge of occupied area to ensure that noise levels do not exceed 60 dB(A) hourly average. If the noise attenuation techniques implemented are determined to be inadequate by the qualified acoustician and/or biologist, then the associated construction activities should cease until such time that adequate noise attenuation is achieved or until the end of the breeding season (September 16). Construction noise should continue to be monitored at least twice weekly on varying days, or more frequently depending on the construction activity, to verify that noise levels at the edge of occupied habitat are maintained below 60 dB(A) hourly average or to the ambient noise level of it

already exceeds 60 dB(A) hourly average. If not, other measures should be implemented in consultation with the biologist as necessary, to reduce noise levels to below 60 dB(A) hourly average or to the ambient noise level if it already exceeds 60 dB(A) hourly average. Such measures may include, but are not limited to, limitations on the placement of construction equipment and the simultaneous use of equipment.]

Option 2: Conduct Protocol-Level Focused Surveys for least Bell's vireo.

A USFWS-approved biologist should conduct eight (8) focused surveys within suitable least Bell's vireo habitat between April 10 and July 31, spaced a minimum of 10 days apart, in accordance with the *Least Bell's Vireo Survey* Guidelines (USFWS 2001). The eight focused protocol surveys should be completed and the results of the surveys should be submitted in a draft report to the County of Santa Barbara Public Works, Transportation Division for review within 21 days of the completion of surveys. A final report should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department, CDFW, and the USFWS within 45 days following the completion of the surveys. Based on the results of the focused surveys, one of the following outcomes will apply:

1. Least Bell's vireo is not present. Confirmation of the negative finding should be obtained from the USFWS and CDFW, and no further avoidance/minimization measures are required.

2. Least Bell's vireo is present. The applicant should coordinate with the USFWS and CDFW to determine the appropriate course of action per the requirements of FESA and CESA (e.g., obtaining Incidental Take Permits) and implement the permit requirements prior to ground disturbance as described in Option 1.

Nesting Birds

Native birds protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, including least Bell's vireo and yellow warbler, may be present on the project site and may nest on and adjacent to the project site, especially in the riparian woodland canopy. If protected species are nesting on or adjacent to the project site during the nesting bird season (February 1 to August 31), then construction activities could result in the loss of fertile eggs or nestlings, or otherwise lead to the abandonment of active nests. The effects determination is that the proposed project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, nesting migratory birds and birds of prey. The following conservation measure may be incorporated into project plans or as a condition of approval to avoid, minimize or mitigate potential impacts to nesting migratory birds and birds of prey and to ensure enforcement with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Recommended Conservation Measure

BIO-6 Protected Nesting Birds. To avoid impacts to nesting birds during the nesting season (January 15 through September 15), all construction activities should be conducted between September 16 and January 14, which is outside of the bird nesting season. If construction occurs during the bird nesting season, then a qualified biologist should conduct a pre-construction survey for nesting birds to ensure that no nests would be disturbed during project construction.

If project-related work is scheduled during the nesting season (February 15 to August 30 for small bird species such as passerines; January 15 to September 15 for owls; and February 15 to September 15 for other raptors), a qualified biologist should conduct nesting bird surveys.

a. Two surveys for active bird nests should occur within 14 days prior to start of construction, with the final survey conducted within 48 hours prior to construction. Appropriate minimum survey radii surrounding each work area are typically 250 feet for passerines, 500 feet for smaller raptors, and 1,000 feet for larger raptors. Surveys should be conducted at the appropriate times of day to observe nesting activities. Locations off the site to which access is not available may be surveyed from within the site or from public areas. If no nesting birds are found, a letter report confirming absence should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department and no further mitigation is required.

b. If the qualified biologist documents active nests within the project site or in nearby surrounding areas, an appropriate buffer between each nest and active construction should be established. The buffer should be clearly marked and maintained until the young have fledged and are foraging independently. Prior to construction, the qualified biologist should conduct baseline monitoring of each nest to characterize "normal" bird behavior and establish a buffer distance, which allows the birds to exhibit normal behavior. The qualified biologist should monitor the nesting birds daily during construction activities and increase the buffer if birds show signs of unusual or distressed behavior (e.g., defensive flights and vocalizations, standing up from a brooding position, and/or flying away from the nest). If buffer establishment is not possible, the qualified biologist or construction foreman should have the authority to cease all construction work in the area until the young have fledged and the nest is no longer active. Once the absence of nesting birds has been confirmed, a letter report should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department.

6.4 State-Listed Plant Species

It should be noted that although not required to be addressed under NEPA due to the lack of a federal listing, the following plant species listed as California Rare Plant Rank 1.B have moderate potential to occur on or adjacent to the project site and may be adversely impacted by project development:

- Blochman's leafy daisy;
- Dune larkspur; and
- Kellogg's horkelia.

Impacts to state-listed special-status plant species are considered potentially significant under CEQA. If compensatory mitigation is required to offset impacts to special-status plant species, an area would be chosen within the Biological Survey Area and not offsite. Possible mitigation or restoration areas are shown on Figure 6-1, Possible Mitigation/Restoration Areas within the Biological Survey Area. Implementation of the recommend conservation measure in Section 6.2 would mitigate this impact to a less than significant level.

6.5 State-Listed Wildlife Species

Impacts to state protected wildlife species that are co-listed under FESA are discussed in Section 6.2 above.

It should be noted that although not required to be addressed under NEPA due to the lack of a federal listing, the following wildlife species listed under the CESA have moderate potential to occur on or adjacent to the project site and may be adversely impacted by project development:

- American badger;
- Coast horned lizard;
- Northern California legless lizard;
- Crotch's bumble bee;
- Burrowing owl;
- Yellow warbler;
- Hoary bat;
- Pallid bat; and
- Townsend's big-eared bat.

American Badger

If American badger is present on or adjacent to the project site, project construction activities could result in the loss or disturbance of individual animals. Impacts to American badger are considered potentially significant under CEQA. Implementation of Recommended Conservation Measure BIO-3 (above), which requires a training session on special-status species potentially present on the project site for all personnel, and the following mitigation measure, will reduce this potential, significant impact to American badger to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-7 Not more than 14 days prior to the commencement of ground disturbance or vegetation removal activities, a qualified wildlife biologist should conduct surveys to identify any potential American badger burrows/dens. If the survey results are negative (i.e., no badger dens observed), a letter report confirming absence should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department prior to ground disturbance or vegetation removal activities and no further mitigation is required.

If the results are positive (badger dens are observed), the qualified biologist should determine if the dens are active by installing a game camera for three days and three nights to determine if the den is in use.

a. If the biologist determines that a den may be active, coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife should be undertaken to develop a suitable strategy to avoid impacts to American badger. The strategy may include the following: the biologist should install a one-way door in the den opening and continue use of the game camera. Once the camera captures the individual exiting the one-way door, the den can be excavated with hand tools to prevent badgers from reusing them. If the biologist determines that the den is a maternity den, project activities should be delayed during the maternity season (February to August), or until the badgers leave the den on their own accord or the biologist determines that the den is no longer in use.

b. If the game camera does not capture an individual entering/exiting the den, the den can be excavated with hand tools to prevent badgers from reusing them.

c. After dens have been excavated and the absence of American badger confirmed, a letter report should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department, prior to ground disturbance or vegetation removal.

Coast Horned Lizard and Northern California Legless Lizard

If coast horned lizards or Northern California legless lizards are present on or adjacent to the project site, project construction activities could result in the loss or disturbance of individual animals. Impacts to coast horned lizard or Northern California legless lizard are considered potentially significant under CEQA. Implementation of Recommended Conservation Measure BIO-3 (above), which requires a training session on special-status species potentially present on the project site for all personnel, and the following mitigation measure, will reduce this potential, significant impact to coast horned lizard and Northern California legless lizard to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-8 Prior to ground disturbance, site clearing, grading, excavation, and/or construction, the following measures to avoid or minimize impacts to Northern California legless lizards and coast horned lizard will be implemented:

a. Not less than three months prior to the start of grading activities (including staging and mobilization), a qualified biologist should place coverboards in impact areas with suitable habitat (coastal dune scrub and disturbed maritime chaparral mixed with coastal dune scrub) for Northern California legless lizards and coast horned lizard. The coverboards should be at least four feet by four feet and constructed of untreated plywood placed flat on the ground. The coverboards should be checked by the biologist once per week for each week after placement up until the start of vegetation removal. All Northern California legless lizards and coast horned lizards found under the coverboards should be captured and placed in five-gallon buckets for transportation to relocation sites. If areas are left undisturbed for a period of three months or longer, the coverboards will be replaced and relocation efforts will be repeated prior to the re-initiation of ground disturbance activities.

b. All relocation sites should be approved by Santa Barbara County and/or the implementing entity and should consist of suitable habitat. Relocation sites should be as close to the capture site as possible but far enough away to ensure the animal(s) is/are not harmed by construction of the project. Relocation should occur on the same day as capture. California Department of Fish and Wildlife California Natural Diversity Database Native Species Field Survey Forms should be submitted to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for all special-status species observed.

c. During all initial ground vegetation removal activities, a qualified biologist should be on the site to recover any Northern California legless lizards or coast horned lizards that may be excavated/unearthed. If the animals are in good health, they should be immediately moved to relocation sites. If they are injured, the animals should be released to a wildlife recovery specialist until they are in a condition to be released into relocation sites.

d. A report of all preconstruction survey efforts and monitoring during initial ground vegetation removal should be submitted to the implementing entity within 30 days of completion of the survey/monitoring efforts to document compliance. The report should include the dates, times, weather conditions, and personnel involved in the surveys and monitoring. The report should also include for each captured special-status animal, the Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates and habitat descriptions of the capture and release sites, the length of time between capture and release, and the general health of the individual(s).

Crotch's Bumble Bee

Crotch's bumble bee has the potential to occur foraging on flowering plants or nesting in the small burrows within the project site. Loss or harm to the Crotch's bumble bee is considered a significant adverse impact. Implementation of Recommended Conservation Measure BIO-3 (above), which requires a training session on special-status species potentially present on the project site for all personnel, and the following mitigation measure, will reduce this potential, significant impact to Crotch's bumble bee to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-9 Crotch's Bumble Bee. Suitable foraging and nesting habitat for Crotch's bumble bee is present within the project boundary. If Crotch's bumble bee is listed prior to project implementation, one of the following options should be implemented prior to vegetation removal:

Option 1: Seasonal Avoidance

Clear vegetation and conduct ground-disturbing activities outside of the colony active period (April through August) to avoid peak flight season and discourage bumble bees from nesting in the project area.

Option 2: Assume presence of Crotch's bumble bee

Assume presence and obtain Incidental Take Authorization from the California Department of Fish and Game (Section 2081 of the Fish and Game Code. Avoidance measures identified in the permit will be implemented. Compensatory mitigation, such as land acquisition and habitat restoration or enhancement would be required.

Option 3: Conduct focused surveys for Crotch's bumble bee

If seasonal avoidance is not possible, consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife should occur at least one year prior to ground disturbance to evaluate potential impacts and other feasible avoidance measures, including habitat assessments and/or surveys.

Surveys should occur during the colony active period for the Crotch's bumble bee (April through August) prior to vegetation clearance, grading, or the initiation of any construction activity in any undeveloped area of the project site, developers of future individual projects should hire a qualified biologist to conduct a pre-construction survey of small mammal burrows and thatched/bunch grasses. If the survey results are negative (i.e., no bumble bee activity observed), a letter report confirming absence should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department, where it will be kept on file, and no further mitigation is required.

If bumble bee nests are detected and the area can be avoided, a qualified biologist should supervise the installation of protective fencing/flagging a minimum of 50 feet around the nest area prior to construction and phase vegetation removal, to retain patches of floral resources during construction. The fencing/flagging will be checked at least once per week by a biological monitor until construction is complete to ensure that the protective fencing/flagging remains intact. The qualified biologist can conduct the weekly checks or train a biological monitor selected from the construction crew by the construction contractor (typically the project foreman) to check the fencing/flagging and provide weekly updates. Documentation of the fencing/flagging installation should be provided to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department prior to the start of ground disturbance activities. Documentation of the weekly checks and timely maintenance of fencing/flagging (if needed) should be provided to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department quarterly during construction.

If bumble bee nests are detected and the area cannot be avoided, the qualified biologist should coordinate with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to obtain Incidental Take Authorization. Compensatory mitigation, such as land acquisition and habitat restoration or enhancement would be required.

Burrowing Owl

If burrowing owl is present on or adjacent to the project site, ground disturbance and vegetation removal activities could result in the loss or disturbance of individual animals. Impacts to burrowing owl are considered potentially significant under CEQA. Implementation of Recommended Conservation Measure BIO-3 (above), which requires a training session on special-status species potentially present on the project site for all personnel, and the following mitigation measure, will reduce this potential, significant impact to burrowing owl to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-10 Burrowing Owl. To avoid loss of or harm to burrowing owl during project construction, the following measures should be implemented:

a. To avoid/minimize impacts to burrowing owls potentially occurring within the project site, a biologist qualified in ornithology should conduct surveys for burrowing owl prior to ground disturbance or vegetation removal. The qualified biologist should conduct a two-visit (i.e., morning and evening) presence/absence survey at areas of suitable habitat on and adjacent to the project site boundary no less than 14 days prior to the start of construction or ground disturbance activities. Surveys should be conducted according to the methods for take avoidance described in the *Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines* (CBOC 1993) and the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (CDFG 2012). If no burrowing owls are found, a letter report confirming absence should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department and no further measures are required.

b. Because burrowing owls occupy habitat year-round, seasonal no-disturbance buffers, as outlined in the *Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines* (CBOC 1993) and the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (CDFG 2012), shall be in place around occupied habitat prior to and during any ground disturbance activities. The following buffer recommendations are based on the time of year and level of disturbance (CDFG 2012), unless a qualified biologist approved by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife verifies through non-invasive measures that either: 1) birds have not begun egg laying and incubation; or 2) that juveniles from the occupied burrows are foraging independently and are capable of independent survival.

    - From April 1 through August 15: 200-meter buffer for low level of disturbance, 500-meter buffer for medium and high levels of disturbance;

    - From August 16 through October 15: 200-meter buffer for low and medium levels of disturbance, 500-meter buffer for high level of disturbance; and

    - From October 16 through March 31: 50-meter buffer for low level of disturbance, 100-meter buffer for medium level of disturbance, and 500-meter buffer for medium and high level of disturbance.c. If burrowing owl is found and avoidance is not possible, burrow exclusion may be conducted by qualified biologists only during the non-breeding season, before breeding behavior is exhibited and after the burrow is confirmed empty through non-invasive methods, such as surveillance. Occupied burrows should be replaced with artificial burrows at a ratio of one collapsed burrow to one constructed artificial burrow (1:1). Evicted burrowing owls may attempt to colonize or re-colonize an area that would be impacted, thus ongoing surveillance during project activities should be conducted at a rate sufficient to detect burrowing owls if they return.

d. If surveys locate occupied burrows in or near construction areas, consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife should occur to interpret survey results and develop a project-specific avoidance and minimization approach. Once the absence of burrowing owl has been confirmed, a letter report should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department.

Special-Status Bat Species

Trees and/or buildings or structures on or adjacent to the project site could provide roosting habitat for state-listed species of special concern hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*), pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*) and Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*). Construction activities at the project site could result in the disturbance of roost and natal sites occupied by special-status bats on or adjacent to the project site, if present. Impacts to special-status bats are considered potentially significant under CEQA. Implementation of Recommended Conservation Measure BIO-3 (above), which requires a training session on special-status species potentially present on the project site for all personnel, and the following mitigation measure, will reduce this potential, significant impact to special-status bats to a less-than-significant level.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-11 Special-Status Bats. Within 14 days prior to construction activities, a qualified biologist should conduct a habitat assessment for bats and potential roosting sites in trees or structures (such as bridges) within 50 feet of the construction site. These surveys should include a visual inspection of potential roosting features (bats need not be present) and a search for presence of guano within the construction site, construction access routes, and 50 feet around these areas. Cavities, crevices, exfoliating bark, and bark fissures that could provide suitable potential nest or roost habitat for bats should be surveyed. Assumptions can be made on what species is present due to observed visual characteristics along with habitat use, or the bats can be identified to the species level with the use of a bat echolocation detector such as an "Anabat" unit. Potential roosting features found during the survey should be flagged or marked.

If no roosting sites or bats are found, a letter report confirming absence should be prepared and submitted to the County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department and no further mitigation is required.

If bats or roosting sites are found, bats should not be disturbed without specific notice to and consultation with California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

If bats are found roosting outside of the nursery season (May 1 through October 1), California Department of Fish and Wildlife should be consulted prior to any eviction or other action. If avoidance or postponement is not feasible, a Bat Eviction Plan should be

submitted to California Department of Fish and Wildlife for written approval prior to project implementation. A request to evict bats from a roost includes details for excluding bats from the roost site and monitoring to ensure that all bats have exited the roost prior to the start of activity and are unable to re-enter the roost until activity is completed. Any bat eviction should be timed to avoid lactation and young-rearing. If bats are found roosting during the nursery season, they should be monitored to determine if the roost site is a maternal roost. This could occur by either visual inspection of the roost bat pups, if possible, or by monitoring the roost after the adults leave for the night to listen for bat pups. Because bat pups cannot leave the roost until they are mature enough, eviction of a maternal roost cannot occur during the nursery season. Therefore, if a maternal roost is present, a 50-foot buffer zone (or different size if determined in consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife) should be established around the roosting site within which no construction activities such as ground disturbance should occur until after the nursery season.

6.6 Sensitive Natural Communities

The riparian woodland along the Santa Maria River is classified by California Department of Fish and Wildlife as a "Sensitive Natural Community." Impacts to sensitive natural communities are considered significant under CEQA. If compensatory mitigation is required to offset impacts to sensitive natural communities, an area would be chosen within the Biological Survey Area and not offsite. Possible mitigation or restoration areas are shown on Figure 6-1, Possible Mitigation/Restoration Areas within the Biological Survey Area. As the proposed project will have temporary impacts from the removal native riparian vegetation, implementation of the following mitigation measure, in combination with the analysis and measure in Section 6.7, Jurisdictional Wetlands and Waters, below, would reduce this potential impact to less than significant.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-12 After preparation of detailed project construction plans and prior to vegetation clearance, grading, or the initiation of any construction activity within the project site, the County shall retain a biologist qualified in botany to survey and map all sensitive natural communities and riparian vegetation potentially found on the project site following the guidelines presented in CDFW's *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities* (CDFW 2018).

The biologist shall then prepare a report documenting the results of the survey, which will be submitted to the Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department, where it will be kept on file. If the survey concludes that sensitive natural communities and/or riparian vegetation are present but impacts to them can be completely avoided, then no further mitigation would be required.

If sensitive natural communities and/or riparian vegetation are found and cannot be avoided, the County shall follow one of the following mitigation strategies to protect and/or mitigate the loss of sensitive natural communities and/or riparian vegetation prior to ground disturbance:

- Option 1. Avoid disturbance to the sensitive natural community and/or riparian vegetation found on the site.
- Option 2. If avoidance cannot be accommodated within project plans, on-site and/or off-site mitigation for the loss of sensitive natural communities is recommended. If off-site mitigation is preferred, similar habitat as that lost as a result of the project shall be protected in perpetuity through a conservation easement or similar instrument for conservation at a minimum 1:1 preserved to impacted acreage ratio.

If on-site mitigation is preferred, then the County shall implement the following mitigation prior to the issuance of any grading permit. A habitat mitigation plan shall be designed by a qualified biologist and shall include the following:

a. A qualified biologist shall oversee selection of an appropriate on-site mitigation area that shall be protected in perpetuity through a conservation easement. To mitigate impacts to sensitive natural communities and/or riparian vegetation, the mitigation area after restoration shall contain acreage at a minimum 1:1 replacement ratio for the habitat lost due to project implementation.

b. A maintenance and monitoring program shall be established for a minimum of five years to implement restoration and verify that activities have been successful. Maintenance activities performed by a qualified restoration or native landscaping company may include irrigation, planting, and removal of non-native plants. Monitoring shall include quarterly reports for the first year and annual reports for the remaining four years.

c. If site performance requirements are not met within five years, then remedial restoration measures and contingency planning shall be necessary along with additional maintenance and monitoring.

BIO-13 Native Riparian Plant Landscaping Plan. . After preparation of detailed project construction plans and prior to the start of construction, a qualified biologist/landscape architect shall prepare a native riparian plant landscape plan for the project. This plan shall indicate the locations and species of plants to be installed throughout the project site. All project landscaping shall be limited to drought-tolerant species with preference to riparian plant species native to coastal Santa Barbara County. Species from the

California Invasive Plant Council's (Cal-IPC) Invasive Plant List (Cal-IPC 2025) shall be removed if present and not included in any new landscaping. Species selected for planting shall be similar to those species found in adjacent native habitats.

6.7 Jurisdictional Wetlands and Waters

The Santa Maria River is considered a jurisdictional aquatic feature. Impacts to areas within the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) are regulated by the USACE. Impacts to areas within the top of bank are regulated by the RWQCB. Impacts to the riparian corridor are regulated by the CDFW. If compensatory mitigation is required to offset impacts to jurisdictional features, an area would be chosen within the Biological Survey Area and not offsite. Possible mitigation or restoration areas are shown on Figure 6-1, Possible Mitigation/Restoration Areas within the Biological Survey Area. To avoid, minimize, and mitigate for impacts to jurisdictional aquatic features, the following conservation measures are recommended:

Recommended Conservation Measures

BIO-14 Delineation of Wetlands/Waterways. After preparation of detailed project construction plans and prior to the start of construction activities with the potential to impact project site wetlands and riparian habitat, the County shall retain a qualified biologist to determine the extent of potential wetlands and waterways regulated by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), CDFW, and/or Santa Barbara County. If the USACE claims jurisdiction, the County shall retain a qualified biologist to obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide Permit. If the impacts to the drainage features do not qualify for a Nationwide Permit, the County shall proceed with the qualified biologist in obtaining an Individual Permit from the USACE. The County shall then retain a qualified biologist to coordinate with the RWQCB to obtain a Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification. If necessary, the County shall also retain a qualified biologist to coordinate with the CDFW to obtain a Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement.

BIO-15 Per the Santa Barbara County Planning and Development Department's *A Planner's Guide to Conditions of Approval and Mitigation Measures* and *Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual*, a minimum 50-foot wetland buffer area as measured from the edge of site disturbance to the closest edge of defined wetlands shall be maintained to prevent degradation to wetland features or detract from the natural resource values.

BIO-16 Water Quality Protection. Construction-related storm water discharges to surface waters are regulated through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program and the County is required to obtain a NPDES permit prior to construction.

Best management practices (BMPs) in the NPDES permit may include, but are not limited to, silt fencing, fiber rolls, straw bales, or other measures and shall be implemented during construction to minimize dust, dirt, and construction debris from leaving the construction area and entering adjacent surface waters.

BIO-17 After preparation of detailed project construction plans and prior to the start of construction activities with the potential to impact project site wetlands regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and/or Santa Barbara County, the County shall submit jurisdictional wetland delineation reports to the USACE for a jurisdictional determination.

If impacts to a federally jurisdictional features may occur, a Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide Permit may be needed. If the proposed activity would not otherwise qualify for a Nationwide Permit, the County will proceed with obtaining an Individual Permit from the USACE.

If impacts to a wetland not subject to federal jurisdiction, but subject to state jurisdiction may occur, fill authorization shall be sought from the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Mitigation shall be sufficient to ensure no net loss of wetland area, function, or value, either through wetland creation, restoration, or the purchase of wetland credits through an approved wetland mitigation bank.

A Water Quality Certification (Section 401 of the Clean Water Act) from the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will also be obtained if determined necessary through the wetland assessment and subsequent regulatory agency consultation.

BIO-18 If impacts to jurisdictional wetlands are unavoidable, compensation for temporary and/or permanent impacts to jurisdictional wetlands shall be mitigated as required by the regulatory permits. Mitigation would be provided through one or more of the following mechanisms:

a. A Wetland Mitigation and Monitoring Plan shall be developed that outlines mitigation and monitoring obligations for impacts to wetlands and other waters as a result of construction activities. The Wetland Mitigation and Monitoring Plan would include thresholds of success, monitoring and reporting requirements, and site-specific plans to compensate for wetland losses resulting from the project. The Wetland Mitigation and Monitoring Plan shall be submitted to the appropriate regulatory agencies for review and approval during the permit application process.

b. To compensate for permanent impacts, the purchase and/or dedication of land to provide suitable wetland restoration or creation shall ensure a no net loss of wetland values or functions. If restoration is available and feasible, a minimum 1:1 impact to mitigation ratio would apply to projects for which mitigation is provided in advance.

6.8 Wildlife Movement Corridors and Habitat Connectivity

The Santa Maria River channel is considered to be a wildlife corridor. However, it is anticipated that the proposed project would not alter the paths of wildlife utilizing the Santa Maria River corridor for wildlife movement. Therefore, impacts to wildlife movement are considered negligible. See Section 5 for further discussion.

6.9 Regulated Trees

The proposed project does not include the removal of trees. No further measures are necessary.

7.0 Report Preparers and Sources

7.1 Report Preparers

Patrick Furtado, MS
Senior Biologist

Janet Walther, MS
Principal Biologist

Stuart Poulter, AICP, MCRP
Principal Planner

Matt Papurello
GIS and Graphics Technician

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Site Plans

A

APPENDIX



OVERALL SITE 1 OF 4

SANTA MARIA RIVER LEVEE TRAIL

LEVEE SURFACE

August 20, 2025

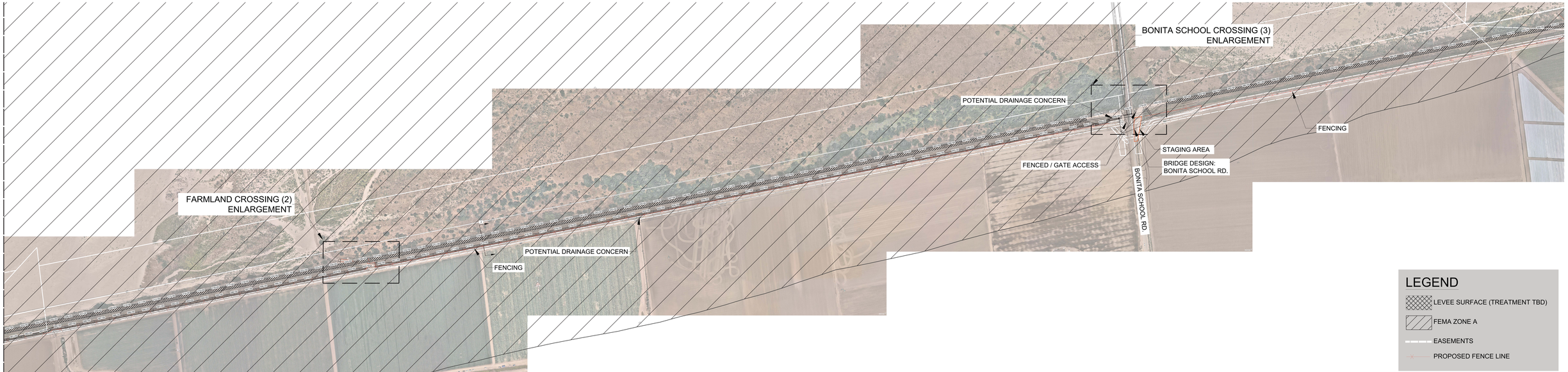
GRAPHIC SCALE

0 50 100 200

(IN FEET)

1 IN = 100 FT

WALLACE GROUP®



OVERALL SITE 2 OF 4

SANTA MARIA RIVER LEVEE TRAIL
LEVEE SURFACE
August 20, 2025

GRAPHIC SCALE
0 50 100 200
(IN FEET)
1 IN = 100 FT

WALLACE GROUP®

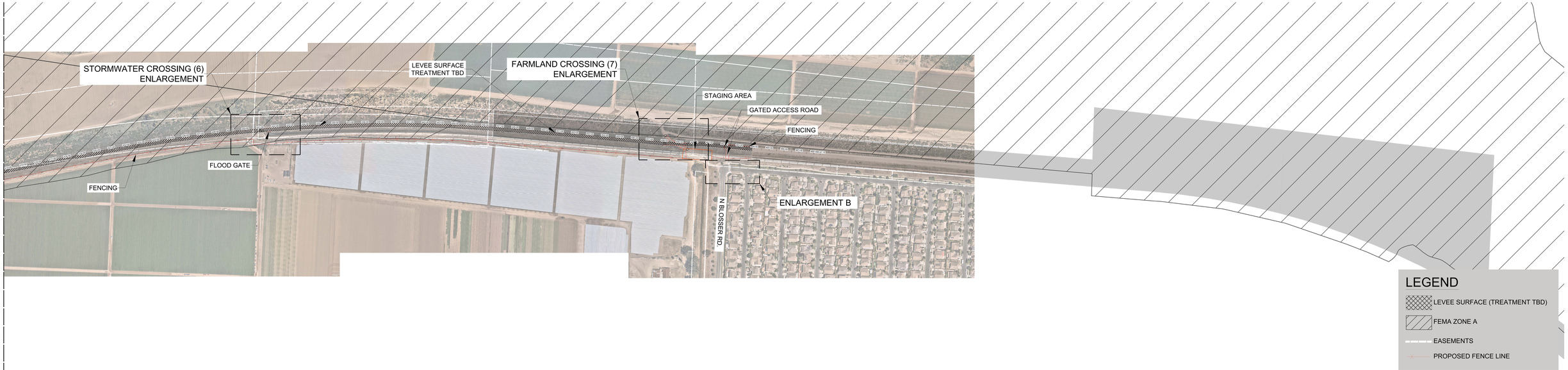


OVERALL SITE 3 OF 4

SANTA MARIA RIVER LEVEE TRAIL
LEVEE SURFACE
August 20, 2025

GRAPHIC SCALE
0 50 100 200
(IN FEET)
1 IN = 100 FT

WALLACE GROUP®



OVERALL SITE 4 OF 4

SANTA MARIA RIVER LEVEE TRAIL
LEVEE SURFACE
August 20, 2025

GRAPHIC SCALE
0 50 100 200
(IN FEET)
1 IN = 100 FT

WALLACE GROUP®

Special-Status Species with the Potential to Occur in the Project Vicinity

APPENDIX B

Appendix B Special-Status Plant Species with the Potential to Occur in the Project Vicinity

Species	Status (Federal/State/ CNPS)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on the Project Site
Alice's lovely bushmallow *(Malacothamnus eastwoodiae)*	--/--/1B.1	Chaparral (maritime), coastal scrub, riparian woodland. Found in Burton Mesa maritime chaparral; many plants found on the edge between chaparral and more open areas; elevation 25-130 m. Blooming Period: May - August.	Unlikely. Suitable Burton Mesa maritime chaparral habitat not found at the project site.
Aparejo grass *(Muhlenbergia utilis)*	--/--/2B.2	Meadows and seeps, marshes and swamps, chaparral, coastal scrub, cismontane woodland. Sometimes alkaline, sometimes serpentinite; elevation 25-2325 m. Blooming Period: March - October	Unlikely. Suitable alkaline or serpentinite habitat not found at the project site.
Aphanisma *(Aphanisma blitoides)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal bluff scrub, coastal dunes, coastal scrub. On bluffs and slopes near the ocean in sandy or clay soils; elevation 3-305m. Blooming Period: March - June.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Beach layia *(Layia carnosa)*	FE/SE/1B.1	Coastal dunes, hugely reduced in range along California's north coast dunes, on sparsely vegetated semi-stabilized dunes, usually behind foredunes; elevation 0-75m. Blooming Period: March - July.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Beach spectaclepod *(Dithyrea maritima)*	--/ST/1B.1	Coastal dunes, coastal scrub. Sea shores, on sand dunes, and sandy places near the shore; elevation 3-60m. Blooming Period: March - May.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Black-flowered figwort *(Scrophularia atrata)*	--/--/1B.2	Closed-cone coniferous forest, chaparral, coastal dunes, coastal scrub, riparian scrub. Sand, diatomaceous shales, and soils derived from other parent material; around swales and in sand dunes; elevation 10-445m. Blooming Period: March - July.	Unlikely. Suitable sandy swale or sand dune habitat not found at the project site.
Blochman's dudleya *(Dudleya blochmaniae* ssp. *blochmaniae)*	--/--/1B.1	Coastal bluff scrub, chaparral, coastal scrub, valley and foothill grassland, soils often rocky, clay or serpentine; elevation 5-450m. Blooming Period: April - June.	Unlikely. Suitable clay or serpentine habitat not found at the project site.
Blochman's leafy daisy *(Erigeron blochmaniae)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal dunes, coastal scrub. Sand dunes and hills; elevation 0-185m. Blooming Period: June - August.	Low. Species known from project vicinity and potentially suitable scrub habitat found at the project site.
Blushing layia *(Layia erubescens)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal dunes, coastal scrub. Prefers loose, fine sand of stabilized dunes and sandhills; elevation 10-245 m. Blooming Period: March - June.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal dune or coastal scrub habitat not found at the project site.
Bolander's water-hemlock *(Cicuta maculata* var. *bolanderi)*	--/--/2B.1	Marshes and swamps. In fresh or brackish water; elevation 0-20m. Blooming Period: July - September.	Unlikely. Suitable undisturbed marsh or swamp habitat not found at the project site.
California jewelflower *(Caulanthus californicus)*	FE/SE/1B.1	Chenopod scrub, valley and foothill grassland, pinyon and juniper woodland. Sandy soils; elevation 65-1860 m. Blooming Period: February - May.	Unlikely. Suitable scrub or dry habitats not found at the project site.
California saw-grass *(Cladium californicum)*	--/--/2B.2	Meadows and seeps, marshes and swamps (alkaline or freshwater). Blooming Period: June - September.	Unlikely. Suitable undisturbed marsh or seep habitat not found at the project site.

Species	Status (Federal/State/ CNPS)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on the Project Site
Coast woolly-heads *(Nemacaulis denudata* var. *denudata)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal dunes; elevation 0-5m. Blooming Period: April - September. Freshwater or alkaline moist habitats; elevation 40-2150 m.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Coastal goosefoot *(Chenopodium littoreum)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal dunes. Generally on sandy soils, and on dunes; elevation 5-40m. Blooming Period: April - August.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Compact cobwebby thistle (*Cirsium occidentale var. compactum*)	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral, coastal dunes, coastal prairie, coastal scrub. On dunes and on clay in chaparral; also in grassland; elevation 5-245m. Blooming Period: April - June.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Crisp monardella *(Monardella undulata* ssp. *crispa)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal dunes, coastal scrub. Often on the borders of open, sand areas, usually adjacent to typical backdune scrub vegetation; elevation 5-125m. Blooming Period: May - September.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Dune larkspur *(Delphinium parryi* ssp. *blochmaniae)*	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral, coastal dunes (maritime). On rocky areas and dunes; elevation 18-305m. Blooming Period: April - May.	Low. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
Gambel's water cress *(Nasturtium gambelii)*	FE/ST/1B.1	Marshes and swamps. Freshwater and brackish marshes at the margins of lakes and along streams, in or just above the water level; elevation 5-305m. Blooming Period: April - October.	Unlikely. Suitable undisturbed marsh or swamp habitat not found at the project site.
Gaviota tarplant *(Deinandra increscens* ssp. *villosa)*	FE/SE/1B.1	Coastal scrub, valley and foothill grassland, coastal bluff scrub. Known from coastal terrace near Gaviota; sandy blowouts amid sandy loam soil; grassland/coast scrub ecotone; elevation 10-430m. Blooming Period: May - October.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Hoover's bent grass *(Agrostis hooveri)*	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral, cismontane woodland, closed-cone coniferous forest, valley and foothill grassland. Sandy sites; elevation 60-765m. Blooming Period: April - July.	Unlikely. Suitable chapparal or forest habitat not found at the project site.
Kellogg's horkelia *(Horkelia cuneata* ssp. *sericea)*	--/--/1B.1	Closed-cone coniferous forest, maritime chaparral, coastal scrub, sandy or gravelly openings; elevation 10-200m. Blooming Period: April - September.	Low. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
La Graciosa thistle *(Cirsium scariosum* var. *loncholepis)*	FE/ST/1B.1	Coastal dunes, coastal scrub, brackish marshes, valley and foothill grassland, cismontane woodland. Lake edges, riverbanks, other wetlands; often in dune areas. Mesic, sandy sites; elevation 3-220m. Blooming Period: May - August.	Low. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
La Purisima manzanita *(Arctostaphylos purissima)*	--/--/1B.1	Chaparral, coastal scrub. Sandstone outcrops, sandy soil; elevation 60-470m. Blooming Period: November - May.	Unlikely. Suitable chaparral or coastal scrub habitat not found at the project site.
Lompoc yerba santa *(Eriodictyon capitatum)*	FE/SR/1B.2	Closed-cone coniferous forest, chaparral, coastal bluff scrub, oak woodland. Sandy soils on terraces; elevation 60-505m. Blooming Period: May - August.	Unlikely. Suitable forest, chaparral or woodland habitat not found at the project site.

Species	Status (Federal/State/ CNPS)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on the Project Site
Marsh sandwort *(Arenaria paludicola)*	FE/SE/1B.1	Sandy openings in freshwater or brackish marshes and swamps; elevation 3-170m. Blooming Period: May - August.	Unlikely. Suitable undisturbed marsh or swamp habitat not found at the project site.
Mesa horkelia *(Horkelia cuneata* var. *puberula)*	--/--/1B.1	Chaparral, cismontane woodland, coastal scrub. Sandy or gravelly sites; elevation 15-1645m. Blooming Period: February - July.	Unlikely. Suitable chaparral, cismontane woodland, or coastal scrub habitat not found at the project site.
Miles' milk-vetch *(Astragalus didymocarpus* var. *milesianus)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal scrub. Clay soils; elevation 50-385 m. Blooming Period: March - June.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal scrub habitat not found at the project site.
Nipomo Mesa ceanothus *(Ceanothus impressus* var. *nipomensis)*	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral. Sandy; elevation 10-215m. Blooming Period: April - May.	Unlikely. Suitable chaparral habitat not found at the project site.
Nipomo Mesa lupine *(Lupinus nipomensis)*	FE/SE/1B.1	Coastal dunes. Dry sandy flats, restricted to back dunes, associated with central dune scrub habitat - a rare community type; elevation 20-30m. Blooming Period: February - June.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Pale-yellow layia *(Layia heterotricha)*	--/--/1B.1	Cismontane woodland, pinyon and juniper woodland, valley and foothill grassland / alkaline or clay; elevation 300-1600m. Blooming Period: March - June.	Unlikely. Suitable alkaline or clay habitat not found at the project site.
Pismo clarkia *(Clarkia speciosa* ssp. *immaculata)*	FE/SR/1B.1	Chaparral, cismontane woodland, valley and foothill grassland. On ancient sand dunes not far from the coast. Sandy soils; openings; elevation 30-185m. Blooming Period: May - July.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Refugio manzanita *(Arctostaphylos refugioensis)*	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral. On sandstone; elevation 60-765 m. Blooming Period: December - March.	Unlikely. Suitable chaparral habitat not found at the project site.
Salt marsh bird's-beak *(Cordylanthus maritimus* ssp. *maritimus)*	FE/SE/1B	Coastal dunes, marshes and swamps (coastal salt); elevation 0-30m.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
San Bernardino aster *(Symphyotrichum defoliatum)*	--/--/1B.2	Meadows and seeps, cismontane woodland, coastal scrub, lower montane coniferous forest, marshes and swamps, valley and foothill grassland. Vernally mesic grassland or near ditches, streams and springs; disturbed areas; elevation 3-2045m. Blooming Period: July - November.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
San Luis Obispo County lupine *(Lupinus ludovicianus)*	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral, cismontane woodland. Open areas in sandy soil, Santa Margarita formation; elevation 85-525m. Blooming Period: April - July.	Unlikely. Suitable soils not found at the project site.
San Luis Obispo monardella *(Monardella undulata* ssp. *undulata)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal dunes, coastal scrub. Stabilized sand of the immediate coast; elevation 5-200m. Blooming Period: May - September.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
San Luis Obispo owl's-clover *(Castilleja densiflora* var. *obispoensis)*	--/--/1B.2	Valley and foothill grassland, meadows and seeps. Sometimes on serpentine; elevation 9-485m. Blooming Period: Unknown.	Unlikely. Suitable valley and foothill grassland or meadows and seeps habitat not found at the project site.

Species	Status (Federal/State/ CNPS)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on the Project Site
Sand mesa manzanita *(Arctostaphylos rudis)*	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral, coastal scrub. On sandy soils in Lompoc/Nipomo area; elevation 20-335m. Blooming Period: November - February.	Unlikely. Suitable chaparral or coastal scrub habitat not found at the project site.
Santa Barbara ceanothus *(Ceanothus impressus* var. *impressus)*	--/--/1B.2	Chaparral. Sandy; elevation 10-340m. Blooming Period: April - May.	Unlikely. Suitable chaparral habitat not found at the project site.
Santa Margarita manzanita *(Arctostaphylos pilosula)*	--/--/1B.2	Closed-cone coniferous forest, chaparral, broad-leafed upland forest, cismontane woodland. Shale outcrops and slopes; reported growing on decomposed granite or sandstone; elevation 60-1220m. Blooming Period: December - March.	Unlikely. Suitable granite or sandstone habitat not found at the project site.
Seaside bird's-beak *(Cordylanthus rigidus* ssp. *littoralis)*	--/SE/1B.1	Closed-cone coniferous forest, maritime chaparral, cismontane woodland, coastal dunes, coastal scrub, sandy often disturbed sites; elevation 0-215m. Blooming Period: May - October.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.
Slender bushmallow *(Malacothamnus jonesii* var. *gracilis)*	--/--/1B.1	Chaparral. Dry, rocky slopes; elevation 150-335 m. Blooming Period: May - October.	Unlikely. Suitable chaparral habitat not found at the project site.
Southern curly-leaved monardella *(Monardella sinuata* ssp. *sinuata)*	--/--/1B.2	Coastal dunes, coastal scrub, chaparral, cismontane woodland. Sandy soils; elevation 20-305m. Blooming Period: April - September.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal, chaparral or woodland habitat not found at the project site.
Spreading navarretia (*Navarretia fossalis*)	FT/--/1B.1	Vernal pools, chenopod scrub, marshes and swamps, playas. San Diego hardpan and San Diego claypan vernal pools; in swales and vernal pools, often surrounded by other habitat types; elevation 15-850 m. Blooming Period: April - June.	Unlikely. Suitable undisturbed marsh or vernal pool habitat not found at the project site.
Surf thistle *(Cirsium rhothophilum)*	--/ST/1B.2	Coastal dunes, coastal bluff scrub. Open areas in central dune scrub; usually in coastal dunes; elevation 3-60m. Blooming Period: April - June.	Unlikely. Suitable coastal habitat not found at the project site.

SOURCE: CDFW 2024, CNPS 2024

NOTE: Status Codes:

Federal (USFWS)

FE: Listed as Endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

FT: Listed as Threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

FC: A Candidate for listing as Threatened or Endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

FSC: Species of Special Concern.

FD: Delisted under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

State (CDFW)
SE: Listed as Endangered under the California Endangered Species Act.
ST: Listed as Threatened under the California Endangered Species Act.
SR: Listed as Rare under the California Endangered Species Act.
SC: A Candidate for listing as Threatened or Endangered under the California Endangered Species Act.
SSC: Species of Special Concern.
SFP: Fully Protected species under the California Fish and Game Code.
SD: Delisted under the California Endangered Species Act.

CNPS Rare Plant Ranks and Threat Code Extensions
1B: Plants that are considered Rare, Threatened, or Endangered in California and elsewhere.
2B: Plants that are considered Rare, Threatened, or Endangered in California, but more common elsewhere.
.1: Seriously endangered in California (over 80% of occurrences threatened/high degree and immediacy of threat).
.2: Fairly endangered in California (20-80% occurrences threatened).
.3: Not very endangered in California (<20% of occurrences threatened or no current threats known).

Potential to Occur
Present: Observed during field surveys, known occurrence of species within the site
High: Known occurrence of species in the vicinity from the CNDDB or other records; presence of suitable habitat conditions
Moderate: Known occurrence of species in the vicinity from the CNDDB or other records; presence of marginal habitat conditions
Low: Species known to occur in the vicinity from the CNDDB or other records; presence of low quality habitat conditions
Unlikely: Species not known to occur in the vicinity from the CNDDB or other documentation; no suitable habitat is present
Not Present: Species not observed during surveys

Appendix B Special-Status Wildlife Species with the Potential to Occur in the Project Vicinity

Species	Status (Federal/State)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on Project Site
American badger *(Taxidea taxus)*	--/SSC	Most abundant in drier, open stages of most shrub, forest, and herbaceous habitats. Need sufficient food and open, uncultivated ground with friable soils to dig burrows. Prey on burrowing rodents.	Moderate. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
American peregrine falcon *(Falco peregrinus anatum)*	FD/SD, SFP	Occurs near wetlands, lakes, rivers, or other waters on cliffs, banks, dunes, mounds, and human-made structures. Nest consists of a scrape on a depression or ledge in an open site.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Arroyo chub *(Gila orcuttii)*	--/SSC	Native to streams from Malibu Creek to San Luis Rey River basin. Introduced into streams in Santa Clara, Ventura, Santa Ynez, Mojave and San Diego river basins. Slow water stream sections with mud or sand bottoms. Feeds heavily on aquatic vegetation and associated invertebrates.	Unlikely. Project site is outside of known species range.
Arroyo toad *(Bufo californicus)*	FE/SSC	Semi-arid regions near washes or intermittent streams, including valley-foothill and desert riparian, desert wash, etc. Rivers with sandy banks, willows, cottonwoods, and sycamores, loose, gravelly areas of streams in drier parts of range.	Moderate. Marginally suitable upland and aquatic habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
Burrowing owl *(Athene cunicularia)*	--/SSC, SC	Open, dry, annual or perennial grasslands, desert, or scrubland, with available small mammal burrows.	Moderate. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
California black rail *(Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus)*	--/ST	Inhabits freshwater marshes, wet meadows, and shallow margins of saltwater marshes bordering larger bays. Needs water depth of about 1 inch that does not fluctuate during the year and dense vegetation for nesting.	Unlikely. Suitable marsh or shoreline habitat not found at the project site.
California condor *(Gymnogyps californianus)*	FE/SE	Requires vast expanses of open savannah, grasslands, and foothill chaparral in mountain ranges of moderate altitude. Deep canyons containing clefts in the rocky walls provide nesting sites. Forages up to 100 miles from roost/nest.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
California horned lark *(Eremophila alpestris actia)*	--/SSC	Coastal regions, chiefly from Sonoma County to San Diego County, also within the main part of the San Joaquin Valley and east to the foothills. Prefers short-grass prairie, mountain meadows, open coastal plains, fallow grain fields, alkali flats.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
California least tern *(Sternula antillarum browni)*	FE/SE	Nests along the coast from San Francisco Bay south to northern Baja California. Colonial breeder on bare or sparsely vegetated, flat substrates (sand beaches, alkali flats, landfills, or paved areas).	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.

Species	Status (Federal/State)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on Project Site
California red-legged frog *(Rana draytonii)*	FT/SSC	Rivers, creeks, and stock ponds with pools and overhanging vegetation. Requires dense, shrubby or emergent riparian vegetation, and prefers short riffles and pools with slow-moving, well-oxygenated water. Needs upland habitat to aestivate (remain dormant during dry months) in small mammal burrows, cracks in the soil, or moist leaf litter.	Moderate. Marginally suitable upland and aquatic habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
California Ridgway's rail *(Rallus obsoletus obsoletus)*	FE/SE	Found in saltwater and brackish marshes, traversed by tidal sloughs in the vicinity of San Francisco Bay. Associated with abundant growths of pickleweed, but feeds away from cover on invertebrates from mud-bottomed sloughs.	Unlikely. Suitable marsh or shoreline habitat not found at the project site.
California tiger salamander *(Ambystoma californiense)*	FT/ST	Grasslands and oak woodlands near seasonal pools and stock ponds in central and coastal California. Needs upland habitat to aestivate (remain dormant during dry months) in small mammal burrows, cracks in the soil, or moist leaf litter. Requires seasonal water sources that persist into late March for breeding habitat.	Unlikely. Suitable upland or aquatic habitat not found at the project site.
Coast horned lizard *(Phrynosoma blainvillii)*	--/SSC	Arid grassland and scrubland habitats; prefers lowlands along sandy washes with scattered low bushes. Requires open areas for sunning, bushes for cover, patches of loose soil for burrowing, and abundant supply of ants and other insects for feeding.	Moderate. Suitable sandy habitat is present within the project site.
Crotch's bumble bee *(Bombus crotchii)*	--/SCE	Open grassland and scrub habitats. Require flowering plants and suitable nesting sites. Documented food plants include *Asclepias* sp., *Chaenactis* sp., *Lupinus* sp., *Medicago* sp., *Phacelia* sp., and *Salvia* sp.	Low. Suitable flowering plants not observed at the project site, however species is a generalist and project site is within known range.
Foothill yellow-legged frog *(Rana boylii)*	--/SSC	Partly shaded, shallow streams and riffles with rocky substrate in a variety of habitats. Requires at least some cobble-sized substrate for egg-laying and 15 weeks of available water to attain metamorphosis.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Giant kangaroo rat *(Dipodomys ingens)*	FE/SE	Annual grasslands on the western side of the San Joaquin Valley, marginal habitat in alkali scrub. Needs level terrain and sandy loam soils for burrowing.	Unlikely. Suitable grassland habitat not found at the project site.
Hoary bat *(Lasiurus cinereus)*	--/SSC	Prefers open habitats or habitat mosaics, with access to trees for cover and open areas or habitat edges for feeding. Roosts in dense foliage of medium to large trees. Feeds primarily on moths. Requires water.	Moderate. Marginally suitable habitat is present within the project site.
Least Bell's vireo *(Vireo bellii pusillus)*	FE/SE	Summer resident of southern and central California in riparian habitats below 2,000 feet in elevation. Often nests in large shrubs, along margins of bushes or on twigs projecting into pathways.	Moderate. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.

Species	Status (Federal/State)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on Project Site
Marbled murrelet *(Brachyramphus marmoratus)*	FT/SE	Feeds near shore, and nests up to six miles inland from coast from Half Moon Bay to Santa Cruz in old-growth redwood forests, often in Douglas fir trees.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Monarch butterfly *(Danaus plexippus)*	FC/--	Winter roost sites. Wind protected tree groves (Eucalyptus, Monterey pine, cypress) with nectar and water sources nearby.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Northern California legless lizard *(Anniella pulchra)*	--/SSC	Sandy or loose loamy soils under sparse vegetation, moist soils. *Anniella pulchra* is traditionally split into two subspecies: *A. pulchra pulchra* (silvery legless lizard) and *A. pulchra nigra* (black legless lizard), but these subspecies are typically no longer recognized.	Moderate. Suitable sandy habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
Pallid bat *(Antrozous pallidus)*	--/SSC	Deserts, grasslands, scrublands, woodlands, and forests. Most common in open, dry habitats with rocky areas for roosting. Roosts must protect bats from high temperatures.	Moderate. Marginally suitable habitat is present within the project site.
Southwestern pond turtle *(Clemmys marmorata pallida)*	FPT/SSC	A thoroughly aquatic turtle of ponds, marshes, rivers, streams, and irrigation ditches with aquatic vegetation. Need basking sites and suitable (sandy banks or grassy open fields) upland habitat for egg-laying.	Moderate. Marginally suitable aquatic habitat is present within the project site.
Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii eximus*)	FE/SE	Riparian woodlands in Southern California.	Moderate. Suitable habitat is present within the project site.
Steelhead *(Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus)*	FT/--	Coastal stream with clean spawning gravel. Requires cool water and pools. Needs migratory access between natal stream and ocean.	Moderate. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
Swainson's hawk *(Buteo swainsoni)*	--/ST	Breeds in grasslands with scattered trees, juniper-sage flats, riparian areas, savannahs, and agricultural or ranch lands with groves or lines of trees. Requires adjacent suitable foraging areas, such as grasslands or agricultural fields supporting rodent populations.	Unlikely. Project site is outside of current known species range. Nearby CNDDB occurrence is from 1896.
Tidewater goby *(Eucyclogobius newberryi)*	FE/SSC	Brackish water habitats, found in shallow lagoons and lower stream reaches, still but not stagnant water with high oxygen levels.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Townsend's big-eared bat *(Corynorhinus townsendii)*	--/SCT	Inhabits a wide variety of habitats. Most common in mesic sites. Roosts in the open, hanging from walls and ceilings. Roosting sites limiting. Extremely sensitive to human disturbance.	Moderate. Marginally suitable habitat is present within the project site.
Tricolored blackbird *(Agelaius tricolor)*	--/SE	Areas adjacent to open water with protected nesting substrate, which typically consists of dense, emergent freshwater marsh vegetation.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Two-striped garter snake *(Thamnophis hammondii)*	--/SSC	Coastal California from sea level to about 7,000 feet in elevation. Highly aquatic, found in or near permanent fresh water, often along streams with rocky beds and riparian growth.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.

Species	Status (Federal/State)	Suitable Habitat Description	Potential to Occur on Project Site
Unarmored threespine stickleback *(Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni)*	FE/SE, SFP	Weedy pools, backwaters, and among emergent vegetation at the stream edge in small Southern California streams. Cool (<24 C), clear water with abundant vegetation.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Vernal pool fairy shrimp *(Branchinecta lynchi)*	FT/--	Endemic to the grasslands of the Central Valley, Central Coast Mtns., and South Coast Mtns. in astatic rain-filled pools. Inhabits small, clear-water sandstone depression pools and grass swale, earth slump, or basalt-flow depression pools.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Western snowy plover *(Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus)*	FT/SSC	Sandy beaches, salt pond levees, shores of large alkali lakes; sandy, gravelly, or friable soils for nesting.	Unlikely. Suitable habitat not found at the project site.
Western spadefoot *(Spea hammondii)*	FPT/SSC	Occurs primarily in grassland habitats, but can be found in valley-foothill hardwood woodlands, breeds in winter and spring (January - May) in quiet streams and temporary pools.	Moderate. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. This species has been observed in the project vicinity.
Yellow warbler *(Setophaga petechia)*	--/SSC	Riparian plant associations in close proximity to water. Also nests in montane shrubbery in open conifer forests in Cascades and Sierra Nevada. Frequently found nesting and foraging in willow shrubs and thickets, and in other riparian plants including cottonwoods, sycamores, ash, and alders.	Moderate. Suitable habitat is present within the project site.
Yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)	FT/SE	Riparian forest nester, along the broad, lower flood-bottoms of larger river systems. Nests in riparian jungles of willow, often mixed with cottonwoods, with lower story of blackberry, nettles, or wild grape.	Unlikely. There are no CNDDB occurrences of this species in Sanat Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties.

SOURCE: CDFW 2024, CNPS 2024

NOTE: Status Codes:

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FE: Listed as Endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

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SD: Delisted under the California Endangered Species Act.

Potential to Occur
Present: Observed during field surveys, known occurrence of species within the site
High: Known occurrence of species in the vicinity from the CNDDB or other records; presence of suitable habitat conditions
Moderate: Known occurrence of species in the vicinity from the CNDDB or other records; presence of marginal habitat conditions
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Not Present: Species not observed during surveys

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Official Species List

APPENDIX C

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
Email Address: FW8VenturaSection7@FWS.Gov

In Reply Refer To: 09/29/2024 22:45:37 UTC
Project Code: 2024-0150851
Project Name: Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project

Subject: List of threatened and endangered species that may occur in your proposed project location 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

Project Code: 2024-0150851
Project Name: Santa Maria River Levee Trail Project
Project Type: Levee / Dike - Maintenance/Modification
Project Description: The project site consists of an approximately 6.7-mile-long segment of the Santa Maria River levee that stretches west from North Blosser Road in Santa Maria to the State Route 1 bridge in Guadalupe, connecting both cities within Santa Barabara County, California.

The goal of proposed project is to expand and improve public access and provide an alternative east-west active transportation corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists from Santa Maria to Guadalupe. The trail would enable future connection to the coast, the California Coastal Trail, and the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes.

Project Location:

The approximate location of the project can be viewed in Google Maps: https://www.google.com/maps/@34.98197865,-120.50521139663539,14z



Counties: San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, California

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT SPECIES

There is a total of 18 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 Fisheries[1], 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.

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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
Giant Kangaroo Rat *Dipodomys ingens* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6051	Endangered

BIRDS

NAME	STATUS
California Condor *Gymnogyps californianus* Population: Wherever found, except where listed as an experimental population There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8193	Endangered
California Ridgway"s Rail *Rallus obsoletus obsoletus* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/4240	Endangered
Least Bell's Vireo *Vireo bellii pusillus* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/5945	Endangered
Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus* Population: U.S.A. (CA, OR, WA) There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/4467	Threatened
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher *Empidonax traillii extimus* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6749	Endangered
Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* Population: Western U.S. DPS There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3911	Threatened

REPTILES

NAME	STATUS
Southwestern Pond Turtle *Actinemys pallida* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/4768	Proposed Threatened

AMPHIBIANS

NAME	STATUS
California Red-legged Frog *Rana draytonii* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2891	Threatened

NAME	STATUS
Western Spadefoot *Spea hammondii* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/5425	Proposed Threatened

FISHES

NAME	STATUS
Tidewater Goby *Eucyclogobius newberryi* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/57	Endangered

INSECTS

NAME	STATUS
Monarch Butterfly *Danaus plexippus* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9743	Candidate

CRUSTACEANS

NAME	STATUS
Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp *Branchinecta lynchi* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/498	Threatened

FLOWERING PLANTS

NAME	STATUS
California Jewelflower *Caulanthus californicus* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/4599	Endangered
Gambel's Watercress *Rorippa gambellii* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/4201	Endangered
La Graciosa Thistle *Cirsium loncholepis* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6547	Endangered
Salt Marsh Bird's-beak *Cordylanthus maritimus ssp. maritimus* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6447	Endangered
Spreading Navarretia *Navarretia fossalis* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/1334	Threatened

CRITICAL HABITATS

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

YOU ARE STILL REQUIRED TO DETERMINE IF YOUR PROJECT(S) MAY HAVE EFFECTS ON ALL ABOVE LISTED SPECIES.

IPAC USER CONTACT INFORMATION

Agency: Private Entity
Name: Patrick Furtado
Address: 601 Abrego St
City: Monterey
State: CA
Zip: 93940
Email furtado@emcplanning.com
Phone: 8316491799