

Appendix B.3



**SUN LAKES BOULEVARD EXTENSION PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUSED SURVEY**



City of Banning and Unincorporated Riverside County, California

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Updated May 2024**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Albert A. Webb and Associates (Webb), WSP USA Inc. (WSP) conducted a focused survey for the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) on the site of the Sun Lakes Boulevard Extension project (project). The project is in the city of Banning, Riverside County, California (Figure 1) and includes the extension of Sun Lakes Boulevard eastward from its current termination point at Highland Home Road to the anticipated connection at Sunset Avenue.

2.0 PROJECT / SITE DESCRIPTION

The project is generally located south of Interstate 10, west of Sunset Avenue and east of Highland Home Road between the terminus of Sun Lakes Boulevard on the west and the terminus of paved Westward Avenue on the east. It can be found in Section 7 of Township 3 South, Range 1 East of the *Beaumont, California*, United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle map (Figure 2). The elevation of the project site ranges from approximately 2,383 to 2,525 feet above sea level. The geographic coordinates near the middle of the site are 33.5512.85° North latitude and -116.5516.29° West longitude. Vegetation communities on site consist of primarily grassland and scrubs.

The proposed project is a transportation project including construction of a new section of Sun Lakes Boulevard from Highland Home Road to Sunset Avenue (Figure 3) and intersection improvements within the City of Banning's existing and future road right-of-way (ROW). The project encompasses approximately 19.4 acres of direct footprint (permanent impacts) and another 9.1 acres of temporary construction disturbance area (temporary impacts). Project staging and stockpiling will occur within the City's ROW. Currently, Westward Avenue is a straight east-west unpaved dirt road between Highland Home Road and Sunset Avenue. The proposed Sun Lakes Blvd. alignment will include two curves to the north. The project crosses over three creeks, from west to east: Highland Wash, Smith Creek, and Pershing Creek. The project will include the construction of three sets of culverts to cross said creeks.

3.0 BACKGROUND ON THE BURROWING OWL

The burrowing owl is a small, tan, short-tailed, ground-dwelling owl that occupies underground burrows. A member of the Strigidae (typical owls' family), this species is associated with grasslands and other arid open terrain throughout much of the western United States. Burrowing owls are opportunistic in their selection of burrows, typically utilizing the burrows of small mammal burrows, drainpipes, culverts, and other suitable natural or manmade cavities at or below ground level. In California, the species often occurs in association with colonies of the California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyii*), where it makes use of the squirrel's burrows. The entrance of the burrow is often adorned with animal dung, feathers, debris, and other small objects. The species is active both day and night and may be seen perching conspicuously on fence posts or standing at the entrance of their burrows. Due to the characteristic fossorial habits of burrowing owls, nest burrows are a critical component of their habitat.

In southern California, burrowing owls are not only found in undisturbed natural areas, but also fallow agricultural fields, margins of active agricultural areas, livestock farms, airports, and vacant lots. The declines in burrowing owl populations are attributed to loss and degradation of habitat, to ongoing residential and commercial development, and to rodent control programs. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) Special Animals List (2020) shows that burrowing owl is currently designated a "California Species of Concern" by the CDFW, a "Bird of Conservation Concern" by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and "Sensitive" by the U. S. Bureau of Land Management. Burrowing owl is protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (USFWS 2021), California Fish and Game Code Sections 3503, 3503.5, 3513, and 3800 (California Legislative Information 2021), and the MSHCP.

4.0 METHODS

The project site lies within the Western Riverside County Multiple-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) survey area for the burrowing owl (Figure 4). All burrowing owl surveys were conducted in accordance with protocol provided by the Riverside County Transportation and Land Management Agency (Environmental Programs Department "RCTLMA EPD" 2006a). Step I habitat assessment and Step II, Part A focused burrow surveys were conducted on 17 July 2020 by WSP senior biologist Nathan Moorhatch and WSP biologist Alec Williams. The non-native grassland vegetation and portions of the various drainages with California ground squirrel and other manmade "burrow surrogates" on and immediately adjacent to the project site provide suitable habitat for burrowing owls. The site was surveyed on foot, mapping the locations of California ground squirrel burrows and/or manmade "burrow surrogates" that were suitable for burrowing owl use. Step II, Part B focused burrowing owl surveys were then conducted by Moorhatch or Williams on 24 & 31 July, and 6 & 12 August 2020. Surveys were completed via pre-dawn/early morning pedestrian transects spaced at 10 meters apart over 100% of those areas of the site identified in the burrow search as having burrows or structures capable of supporting burrowing owls. Areas with tall shrubs or tall mustard were not surveyed as they are not suitable for burrowing owls. Binoculars were used to visually inspect potential perching locations (i.e., rocks, debris, dirt mounds) as well as the entrances to all on-site mammal burrows and debris providing potential shelter (i.e., piles of concrete slabs, cement drainpipes). Potential burrows were carefully examined

for evidence of burrowing owl occupation (i.e., animal dung, feathers, whitewash, pellets, debris, etc.). Permission to survey adjacent properties on foot within the protocol 500-foot buffer was not obtained. Therefore, buffer areas were visually inspected using binoculars in accordance with protocol. Table 1 presents information on all burrowing owl survey visits (i.e., date, surveyor, survey duration, and weather variables). All vertebrate wildlife detected was recorded in field notes and a list is included in Appendix A. Photos included in Appendix B are representative of the general site conditions at the time of the focused surveys.

Table 1. Burrowing Owl Survey Data & Results

Date (2020)	Surveyor*	Time	Cloud Cover, Wind in miles per hour	Temperature °Fahrenheit	Burrowing Owl Observed?
Habitat Assessment & Burrow Survey 17 July	NM, AW				No
Focused Survey 1 24 July	AW	0445-0754	Clear (0% cloud cover), winds ~ 0-2 mph	57-81°F	No
Focused Survey 2 31 July	NM	0510-0728	Clear (0% cloud cover), winds ~ 0-4 mph	79-83°F	No
Focused Survey 3 6 August	NM	0545-0805	Clear (0% cloud cover), winds ~ 2-8 mph	71-72°F	No
Focused Survey 4 12 August	NM	0547-0752	Partly cloudy (0-50% cloud cover), winds ~0-4 mph	63-78°F	No

*AW – Alec Williams, NM – Nathan Moorhatch

5.0 RESULTS

No burrowing owls, or evidence thereof, were observed on the project site or within the adjacent 500-foot buffer zone area during the focused surveys. It should be noted, however, that an occupied burrow with at least two burrowing owls was observed approximately 0.35 miles south of the eastern project buffer.

Approximately thirty burrows suitable for burrowing owl use were detected (Figure 5).

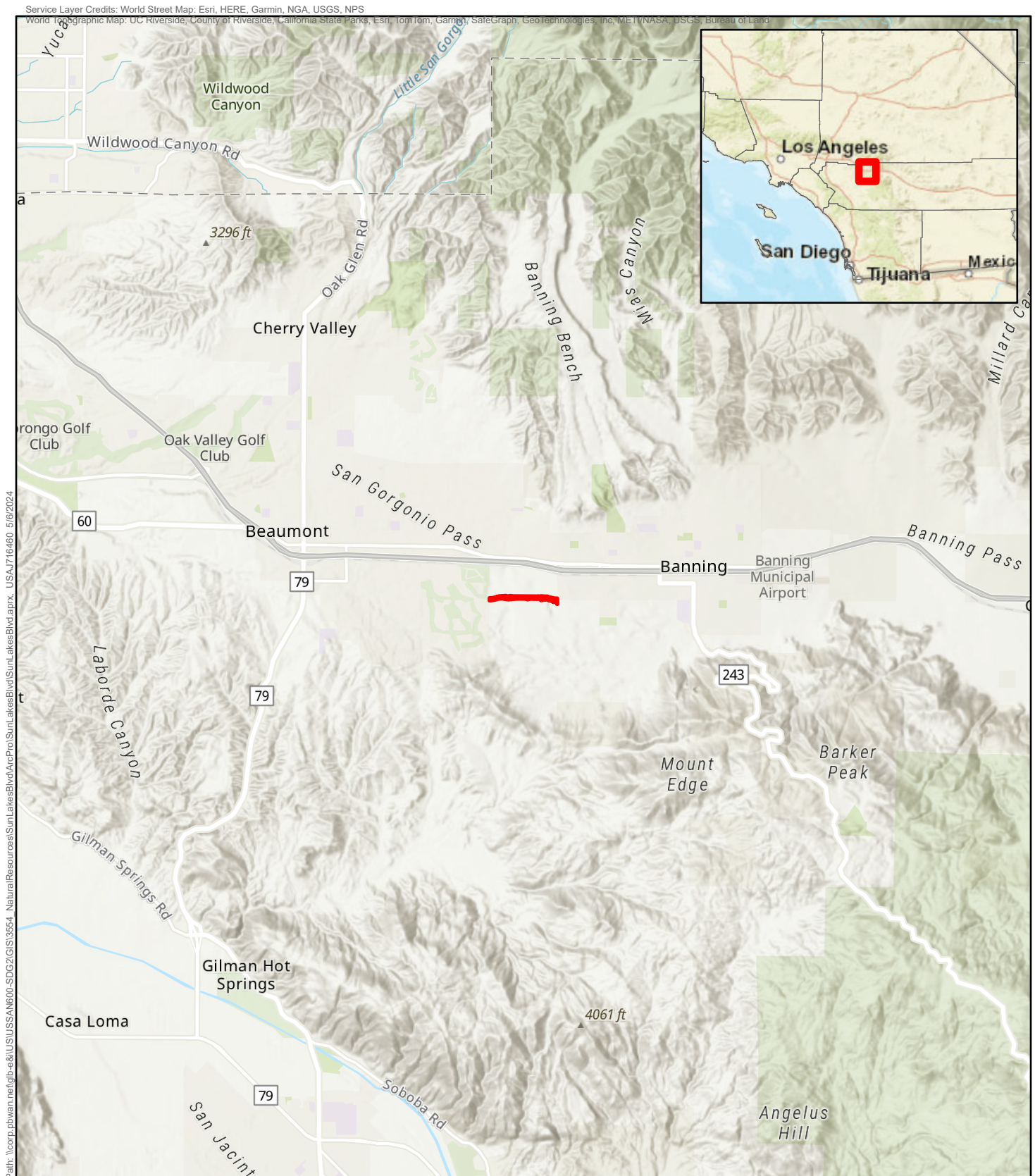
The project site contains suitable unoccupied habitat. Therefore, burrowing owls may colonize the site at any time. Therefore, additional focused surveys may be required since construction has not initiated within one year of completion of this survey. In addition, the MSHCP requires, at a minimum, a one visit preconstruction survey of all suitable habitat within 30-days prior to any proposed vegetation removal, grading, or any other disturbance to the project site (RCTLMA EPD 2006a and 2006b).

6.0 REFERENCES

- California Bird Records Committee. 2019. Official California Checklist. Accessed online at: http://californiabirds.org/ca_list.asp
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2020. Special Animals List. July. Periodic publication.
Sacramento, CA. Accessed online at:
<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=109406&inline>
- CDFW. 2016. Complete List of Amphibian, Reptile, Bird and Mammal Species in California. Accessed online at: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=87155&inline>
- California Legislative Information. 2021. Fish and Game Code of California. <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codesTOCSelected.xhtml?tocCode=FGC&tocTitle=+Fish+and+Game+Code+-+FGC>
- Riverside County Transportation and Land Management Agency, Environmental Programs Department (RCTLMA EPD). 2006a. Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area. March. Accessed online at: https://www.rctlma.org/Portals/3/EPD/consultant/burrowing_owl_survey_instructions.pdf
- RCTLMA EPD. 2006b. MSHCP 30-day Pre-Construction Burrowing Owl Survey Report Format. August. Accessed online at: https://rctlma.org/Portals/3/EPD/consultant/epd_30_day_buow_survey_report_requirements.pdf
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2021. A Guide to the Laws and Treaties of the United States for Protecting Migratory Birds. Accessed online at: <https://www.fws.gov/birds/policies-andregulations/laws-legislations.php>
- Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (WRCRCA). 2021. Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Accessed online at: <https://www.wrcrca.org/documentlibrary/>
- WSP. 2019. Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Consistency Analysis, City of Banning, Ivy Substation Project. Unpub. technical report submitted to Albert A. Webb Associates on 5 December 2019.

APPENDIX A

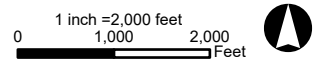
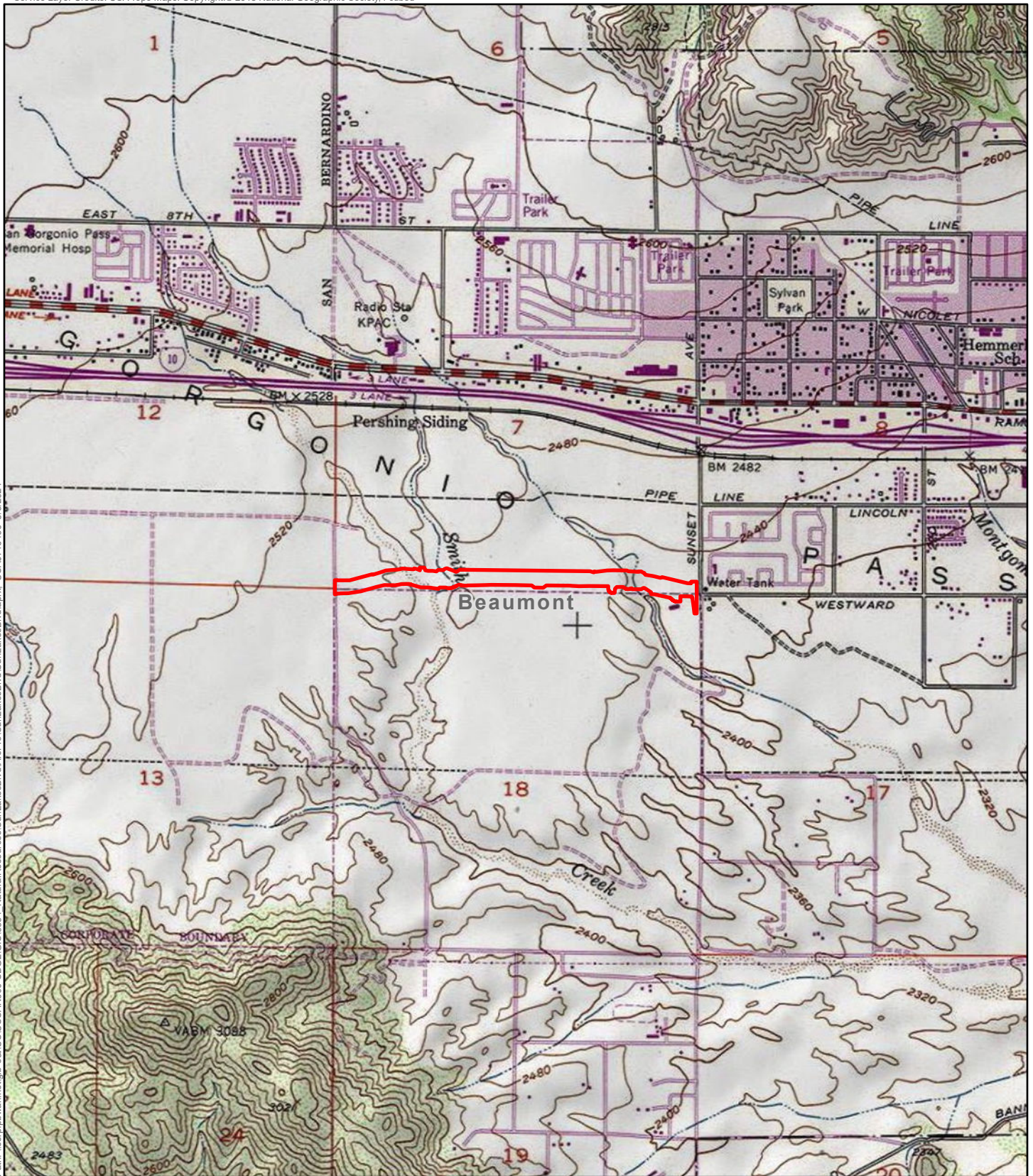
FIGURES



 Project Alignment

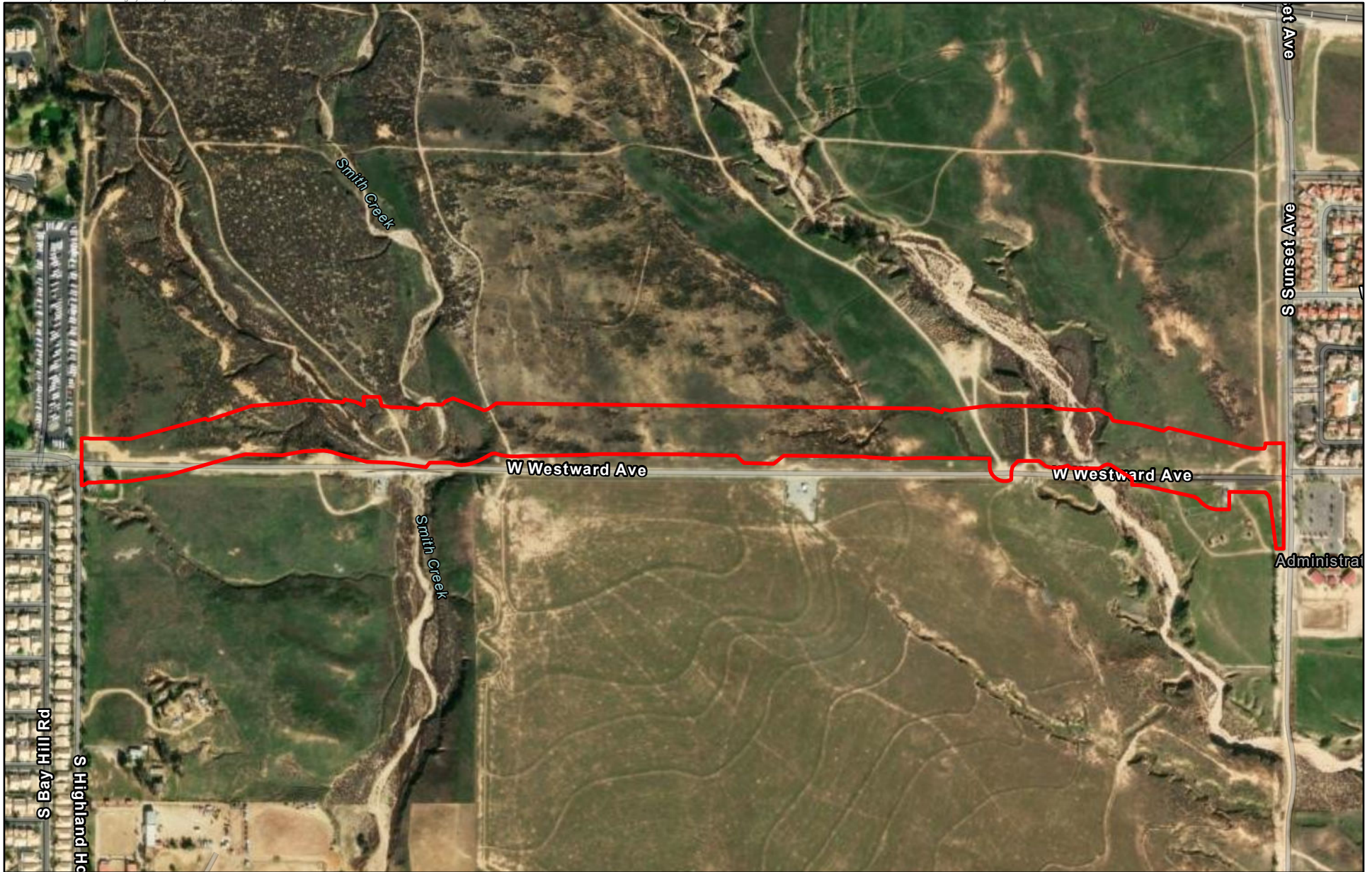
0 1 2 Miles
1 inch = 2 miles

FIGURE 1
Project Vicinity and Location
Burrowing Owl Survey Report
Sun Lakes Blvd. Realignment Project
Banning, CA



 Project Alignment

FIGURE 2
USGS 7.5' Topo Quad: Beaumont
Burrowing Owl Survey Report
Sun Lakes Blvd. Realignment Project
Banning, CA



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 Project Alignment

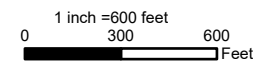
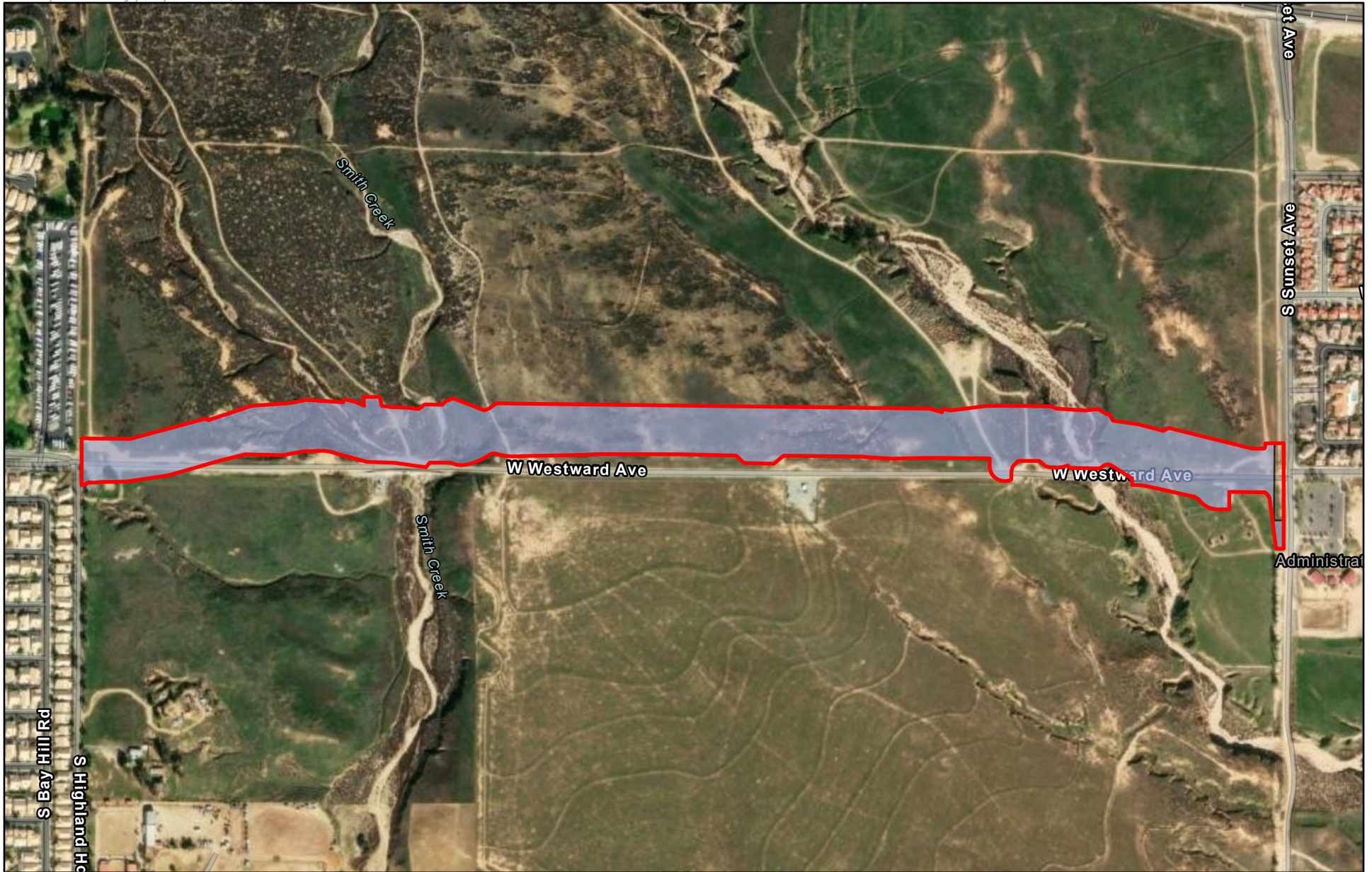


FIGURE 3

Local Vicinity
Burrowing Owl Survey Report
Sun Lakes Blvd. Realignment Project
Banning, CA



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-  Project Alignment
-  MSHCP Burrowing Owl Survey Area

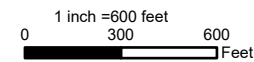
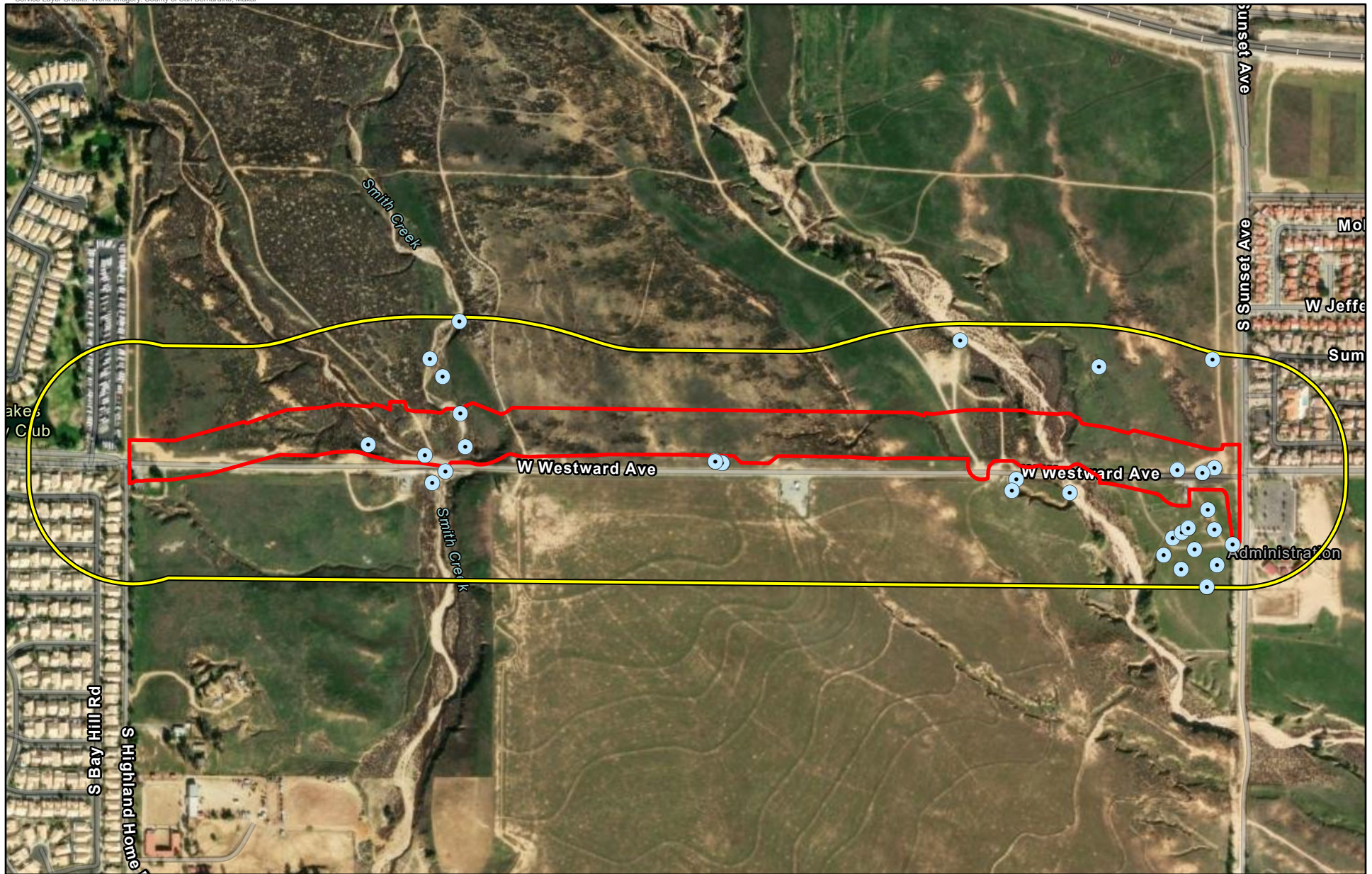


FIGURE 4

MSHCP BUOW Survey Area
Burrowing Owl Survey Report
Sun Lakes Blvd. Realignment Project
Banning, CA



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-  Potential Burrowing Owl Burrow Detections July-August 2020
-  Project Alignment
-  Survey Area

1 inch = 650 feet
0 325 650 Feet



FIGURE 5

Survey Results
Burrowing Owl Survey Report
Sun Lakes Blvd. Realignment Project
Banning, CA

APPENDIX B
SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1. View of the existing dirt road alignment. View facing east.

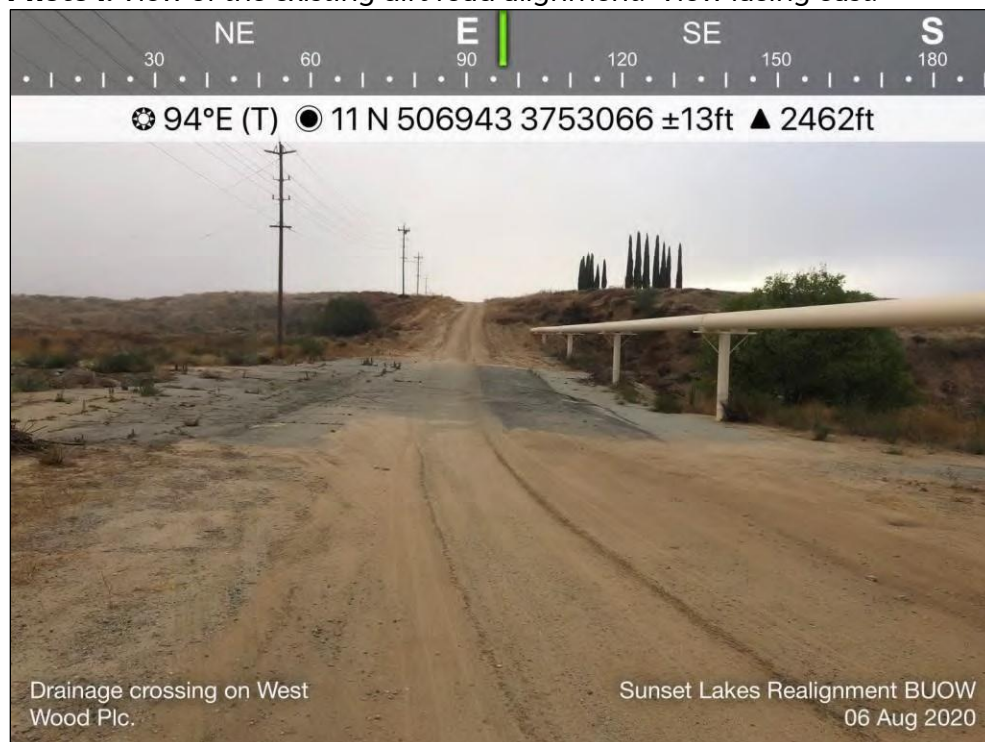


Photo 2. View of the road alignment passing through the western drainage crossing. View facing east.



Photo 3. Eastern gate (entrance) to road alignment.

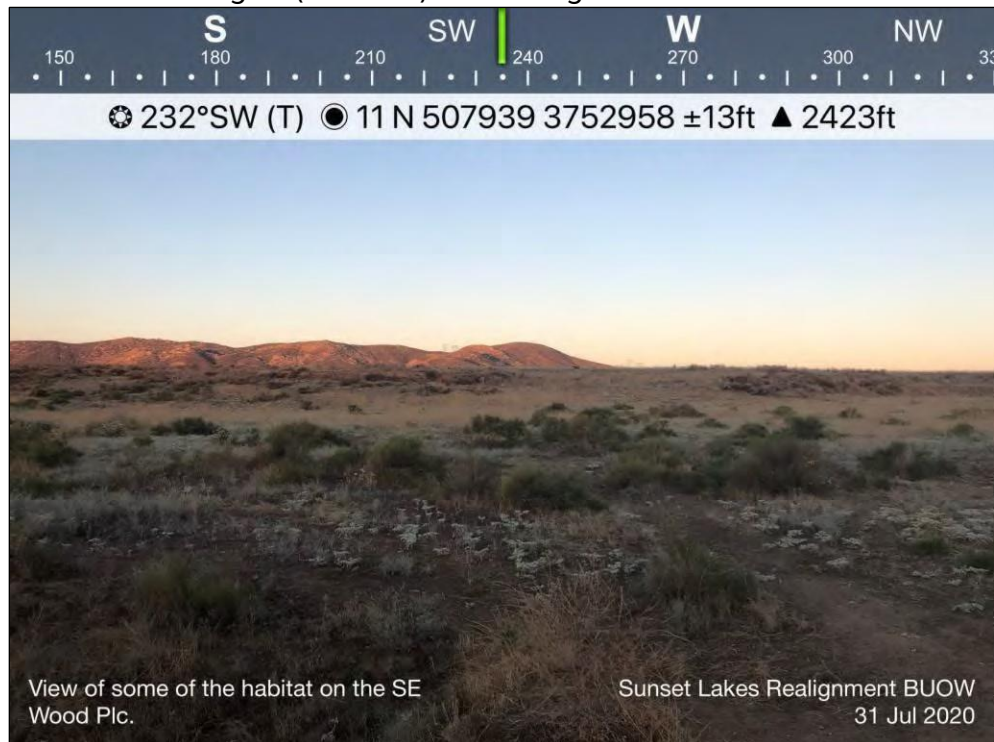


Photo 4. View of the habitat on the southeastern buffer area of the survey.



Photo 5. Abandoned farm equipment on the southeast buffer area.



Photo 6. One of several concrete rubble piles surveyed for potential burrowing owl presence (none of which were occupied).



Photo 7. Representative view of the one of the potential burrows found on the buffer area of the site (in the large western drainage), none proved to be occupied by burrowing owls.



Photo 8. Another California ground squirrel burrow near the edge of the existing road way.

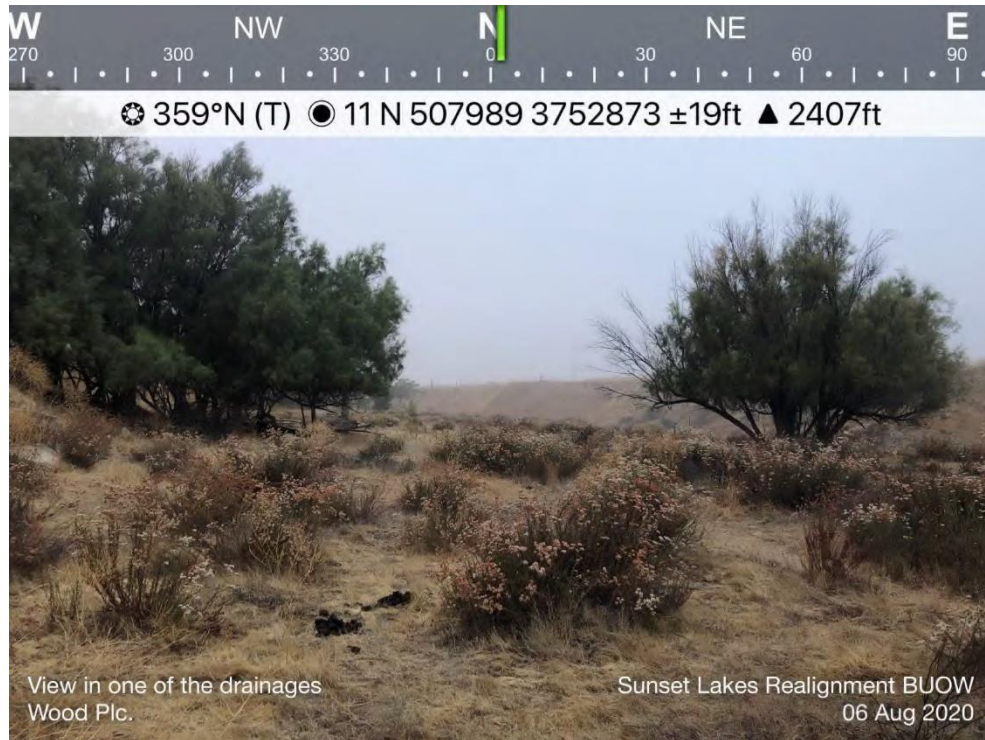


Photo 9. View inside the easternmost large drainage, south of the roadway, in the buffer area of the survey.

APPENDIX C
WILDLIFE SPECIES LIST

This list reports only the wildlife observed on and/or immediately adjacent to the project site by this study. Other species may have been overlooked or undetectable due to their activity seasons. In general, nomenclature and systematics follow California Bird Records Committee (2020) for avifauna, and CDFW (2016) for herpetofauna and mammals.

HERPETOFAUNA

Phrynosomatidae

Sceloporus occidentalis longipes
Uta stansburiana

Teiidae

Aspidoscelis tigris stejnegeri

AVIFAUNA

Columbidae

**Columba livia*
Zenaidura macroura

Cuculidae

Geococcyx californianus

Trochilidae

Calypte anna

Laridae

Larus delawarensis

Accipitridae

Circus hudsonius
Buteo jamaicensis

Tytonidae

Tyto alba

Falconidae

Falco sparverius

Tyrannidae

Sayornis nigricans
Sayornis saya
Tyrannus vociferans
Tyrannus verticalis

Laniidae

Lanius ludovicianus

Corvidae

Corvus brachyrhynchos
Corvus corax

Alaudidae

Eremophila alpestris actia

Hirundinidae

Petrochelidon pyrrhonota

Aegithalidae

Psaltiriparus minimus

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Spiny Lizards & Relatives

Great Basin fence lizard
side-blotched lizard

Whiptails & Relatives

coastal western whiptail

BIRDS

Pigeons and Doves

rock pigeon
mourning dove

Cuckoos, Roadrunners and Anis

greater roadrunner

Hummingbirds

Anna's hummingbird

Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers

ring-billed gull (flyover)

Hawks, Kites, and Eagles

northern harrier
red-tailed hawk

Barn and Grass Owls

barn owl

Caracaras and Falcons

American kestrel

Tyrant Flycatchers

black phoebe
Say's phoebe
Cassin's kingbird
western kingbird

Shrikes

loggerhead shrike

Jays, Magpies, and Crows

American crow
common raven

Larks

California horned lark
Swallows
cliff swallow

Long-tailed Tits and Bushtits

American bushtit

Troglodytidae

Salpinctes obsoletus
Thryomanes bewickii

Mimidae

Mimus polyglottos

Sturnidae

**Sturnus vulgaris*

Passeridae

**Passer domesticus*

Fringillidae

Haemorhous mexicanus

Passerellidae

Chondestes grammacus
Melospiza crissalis

Icteridae

Sturnella neglecta
Icterus cucullatus
Euphagus cyanocephalus

Cardinalidae

Passerina caerulea

MAMMALS**Leporidae**

Lepus californicus
Sylvilagus audubonii

Sciuridae

Otospermophilus beecheyi

Geomyidae

Thomomys bottae

Canidae

Canis latrans

Wrens

rock wren
Bewick's wren

Mockingbirds and Thrashers

northern mockingbird

Starlings

European starling

Old World Sparrows

house sparrow

Fringilline and Cardueline**Finches**

house finch

New World Sparrows

lark sparrow
California towhee

Blackbirds & Relatives

western meadowlark
hooded oriole
Brewer's blackbird

Cardinals and Allies

blue grosbeak

Rabbits

black-tailed jackrabbit
Audubon's (Desert) Cottontail

Squirrels

California ground squirrel

Pocket Gophers

Botta's pocket gopher

Foxes, Wolves, and Relatives

Coyote (scat)

SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS:

* Non-native species

** Special-status species