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DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE



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August 31, 2026

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**Subject: County of Monterey Sixth Cycle (2023-2031) Housing Element (Plan)
Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (DPEIR)
State Clearinghouse No.: 2024100963**

Dear Sarah Wikle:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a DPEIR from the County of Monterey (County) for the above-referenced Plan pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.¹

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

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's **Trustee Agency** for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State. (Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species. (*Id.*, § 1802.) Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public

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

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agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a **Responsible Agency** under CEQA. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381.) CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, future projects tiered from the Plan may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.). Likewise, to the extent implementation of a future project may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code may be required.

Fully Protected Species: CDFW has jurisdiction over fully protected species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and fish, pursuant to Fish and Game Code sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515. Fully protected species may not be taken or possessed at any time and no licenses or permits may be issued for their take except as follows:

- Take is for necessary scientific research;
- Efforts to recover a fully protected, endangered, or threatened species, live capture, and relocation of a bird species for the protection of livestock; or
- They are a covered species whose conservation and management is provided for in a Natural Community Conservation Plan (Fish & G. Code, §§ 3511, 4700, 5050, & 5515).

Additionally, specified types of infrastructure projects may be eligible for an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for unavoidable impacts to fully protected species if certain conditions are met (Fish & G. Code § 2081.15). Project proponents should consult with CDFW early in the project planning process if an ITP may be pursued for projects tiered from the Plan.

Nesting Birds: CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their nests, and eggs include sections 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession or needless destruction of the nest or eggs of any bird), 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession or destruction of any birds of prey or their nests or eggs), and 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird).

Unlisted Species: Species of plants and animals need not be officially listed as endangered, rare, or threatened on any State or federal list pursuant to CESA and/or the federal Endangered Species Act to be considered endangered, rare, or threatened under CEQA. If a species can be shown to meet the criteria specified in the CEQA

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Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, Chapter 3, § 15380), it should be fully considered in the environmental analysis for the Plan.

PLAN DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: County of Monterey (County)

Objective: The County proposes to amend the Monterey County General Plan to update the Housing Element for the Sixth Cycle 2023-2031 planning period (“HEU6”). To implement the HEU6, the County proposes to amend applicable Land Use Plans (“LUPs”) and Coastal Implementation Plans of the County’s Local Coastal Program (“LCP”), Monterey County Zoning Code (Title 20, Coastal Zone, and Title 21, Inland Areas), and other necessary components to implement the HEU6 and comply with state law. Updates to the General Plan would include amendments to the Circulation Element, Conservation and Open Space Element, Land Use Element, Public Services Element, Carmel Valley Master Plan, Central Salinas Valley Area Plan, Fort Ord Master Plan, Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plan, Greater Salinas Area Plan, North County Area Plan, Toro Area Plan, and to LCP components, including the Carmel Area LUP and North County LUP.

The Plan also includes consideration of a by-right housing ordinance to facilitate by-right uses under HEU6 implementation programs and other future state law that requires by-right housing programs. The by-right housing ordinance would include objective design standards and environmental protection measures to facilitate one of two streamlined processing pathways for future qualifying (i.e., by-right housing) projects.

Location: The Plan area includes Monterey County (unincorporated countywide). A portion of the Plan area also occurs within the incorporated limits of the City of Marina.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist the County in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Plan’s significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (FPEIR). CDFW previously commented on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Plan in a letter dated November 27, 2024 (Attachment 1).

Special-Status Species

Previously, in response to the NOP for the Plan, CDFW recommended that the species identified in Attachment 1 be considered as part of the DPEIR for the Plan. While a portion of these species were evaluated and addressed, it appears that species such as Crotch’s bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*) were not, as they were not captured in the

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desktop review conducted in support of the DPEIR. All of the species previously listed in Attachment 1 have the potential to occur in the Plan area and be impacted by future development associated with the Plan. As such, CDFW recommends that all species listed in Attachment 1 be evaluated and addressed as part of the FPEIR and prior to any approvals that would allow ground-disturbing activities.

The DPEIR provides Mitigation Measure (MM) MM-BIO-OBJ-1 and MM-BIO-CONS-2 for special-status species, which requires a qualified biologist, as approved by the County, to conduct a biological survey documenting biological resources, including environmentally sensitive habitats, sensitive plant and wildlife species, and jurisdictional aquatic resources, found on the site and within 100 feet of the site. MM-BIO-OBJ-1 further states, "The project-specific biological evaluations shall be conducted using the best available scientific information, including documented species occurrences, applicable database records, habitat suitability, field reconnaissance, and project-specific site conditions, to evaluate the potential for sensitive, special-status, federally or state-listed, candidate, or otherwise protected species to occur on the site and within 100 feet of the site."

CDFW is concerned that a 100-foot buffer may not be adequate for evaluating indirect impacts to biological resources associated with all future projects tiered from the Plan. For example, a 100-foot buffer may not provide an adequate survey area to evaluate indirect impacts to special-status species from noise, light, dust, and/or runoff. To ensure future projects tiered from the Plan adequately evaluate potential indirect impacts to special-status species, CDFW recommends modifying MM-BIO-OBJ-1 to require biological surveys/evaluations within the project site plus an appropriate buffer determined by a qualified biologist. CDFW also recommends referencing the following species-specific survey methodology as appropriate:

- **Bald eagle:** Protocol for Evaluating Bald Eagle Habitat and Populations in California (Jackman and Jenkins 2004)
- **Foothill yellow-legged frog:** Considerations for Conserving the Foothill Yellow-Legged Frog (CDFW 2018a)
- **San Joaquin kit fox:** Standardized Recommendations for Protection of the San Joaquin Kit Fox Prior to or During Ground Disturbance (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 2011)
- **Swainson's hawk:** Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson's Hawk Nesting Surveys in California's Central Valley (Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee 2000)

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- **Tricolored blackbird:** Staff Guidance Regarding Avoidance of Impacts to Tricolored Blackbird Breeding Colonies on Agricultural Fields in 2015 (CDFW 2015)
- **California tiger salamander:** Interim Guidance on Site Assessment and Field Surveys for Determining Presence or a Negative Finding of the California Tiger Salamander (USFWS 2003)
- **Golden eagle:** Interim Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring Protocols; and Other Recommendations guidelines (Pagel et al. 2010)
- **Western burrowing owl:** Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (California Department of Fish and Game 2012)
- **Crotch's bumble bee:** Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species (CDFW 2023)
- **California red-legged frog:** Revised Guidance on Site Assessment and Field Surveys for the California Red-legged Frog (USFWS 2005)
- **Special-status plants:** Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special-Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities (CDFW 2018b)

Furthermore, MM-BIO-OBJ-1 states, "The qualified biologist shall document the survey results in a memorandum with maps, consistent with the requirements of Monterey County Code, Sections 20.66.020 (coastal) and 21.66.020 (inland), that is signed attesting that there are no sensitive biological resources present on the project site or that if present, they shall be avoided. The County shall review the memorandum and maps to confirm that no sensitive biological resources are present or that if present, they are avoided. [...] If sensitive biological resources are present on the project site but avoided by project design, a qualified biological resources monitor shall be present when earthwork is within 100 feet of the sensitive biological resource to avoid indirect impacts."

CDFW has concerns with the ability of MM-BIO-OBJ-1 to facilitate avoidance of direct and/or indirect impacts to biological resources associated with future projects tiered from the Plan. If sensitive biological resources, such as special-status species, special-status plants, or sensitive natural communities, are present on or adjacent to the project site, consultation with CDFW is recommended for guidance on appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. CDFW recommends similar guidance for MM-BIO-CONS-2.

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Western Spadefoot

The DPEIR states that western spadefoot (*Spea hammondi*; WESP) has been documented in the Plan area and lists this species as a State species of special concern. Please be advised that the California Fish and Game Commission (FGC) approved WESP as a candidate for potential listing as a protected species under CESA on August 13, 2026, and is in the process of publishing the Notice of Findings in the California Regulatory Notice Register. Once the Notice of Findings is published, WESP will be designated as a candidate under CESA and as such will receive the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2074.2 & 2085). If potentially suitable habitat is identified, consultation with CDFW is recommended for guidance on appropriate WESP surveys, and for guidance on appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP is necessary to comply with CESA, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b).

Special-Status Bats

MM-BIO-OBJ-3 states, "Prior to the issuance of any permit to allow for the removal or demolition of trees and existing structures within the survey area (particularly any ornamental trees and existing buildings in the developed land areas), the qualified monitoring biologist shall conduct clearance surveys to flush out any wildlife species nesting, roosting, or otherwise occupying the trees or structures. If wildlife species are encountered within any of the trees or structures (outside the general bird nesting season), the qualified monitoring biologist shall remove them, if possible, or provide them with a means of escape and allow the species to disperse. If tree-roosting bats are suspected, slow removal by gently pushing the tree over with heavy equipment is required." CDFW has concerns with this measure as it could result in potentially significant impacts to special-status bats (or special-status resident birds, if present).

As such, CDFW recommends modifying MM-BIO-OBJ-3 to reflect the following recommendations below. CDFW recommends similar guidance for MM-BIO-CONS-4.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: Bat Pre-Activity Surveys

No more than 30 days prior to initiating vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities, CDFW recommends assessing presence/absence of special-status bat roosts by conducting focused surveys where suitable habitat is present during the appropriate period of bat activity. Focused survey methodology is advised to include visual surveys of bats (observation of presence of bats during foraging period), inspection for suitable habitat or bat sign (guano), and use of ultrasonic detectors (Anabat, Sonobat, etc.) as part of dusk emergence and pre-dawn re-entry surveys. To maximize detectability, each survey needs to be conducted within one 24-hour period.

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Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: Bat Roost No-Disturbance Buffer

If bats are present, CDFW recommends that a 100-foot no-disturbance buffer be placed around the roost and that a qualified biologist monitor the roost for signs of disturbance to bats from project-related activities. If a bat roost is present and work is planned to occur during the maternity season, CDFW recommends that no disturbance to maternity roosts occur and that CDFW be consulted to determine measures to prevent breeding disruption or failure.

California Endangered Species Act (CESA)

Future projects tiered from the Plan may be subject to CDFW's regulatory authority pursuant to CESA. In the event that species listed under CESA are detected during surveys, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the project(s) and avoid "take," or if avoidance is not feasible, to acquire a State ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b), prior to any vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. In addition, CDFW recommends that mitigation measures for the CESA-listed species be fully addressed in the CEQA document(s) prepared for any future projects tiered from the Plan.

Siting of Opportunity Sites

The DPEIR identifies "Opportunity Sites" from the "Sites Inventory" that have been evaluated for potential development. Previously, in response to the NOP for the Plan, CDFW expressed concerns with certain Opportunity Sites that were located on lands that contain natural habitats with the potential for special-status species such as Santa Cruz long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum croceum*), California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*; CTS), and California red legged frog (*Rana draytonii*), as well as Opportunity Sites located on lands bordering conserved natural lands such as the Fort Ord National Monument. While the DPEIR notes that the County reduced the number of sites included in the Sites Inventory from the initial list, certain sites that are still under consideration for potential development, such as Opportunity Sites 31, 40, 47, 52, and 53, are known or have the potential to support special-status species, including but not limited to those previously listed in Attachment 1, as well as sensitive natural communities such as central maritime chaparral and Monterey pine forest.

Specifically, CDFW has concerns that potentially significant impacts to the State endangered seaside bird's-beak (*Cordylanthus rigidus* ssp. *littoralis*) and the federally endangered and State threatened Monterey gilia (*Gilia tenuiflora* ssp. *arenaria*) could occur at Opportunity Sites 31, 47, and 53 without appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. Furthermore, Opportunity Site 53 is directly adjacent to the Imjin Parkway Conservation Easement (CE), which is a mitigation site established to

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offset impacts from a previously approved regional project, and is being managed for the perpetual conservation of Monterey gilia. CDFW is concerned that development within Opportunity Site 53 could result in indirect impacts to habitats and species within the Imjin Parkway CE. Please note that although the DPEIR states that seaside bird's-beak and Monterey gilia have been documented in the Plan area, the DPEIR does not show or discuss in greater detail the specific locations within and adjacent to the Opportunity Sites where seaside bird's-beak and Monterey gilia have been documented based on occurrence data from the California Natural Diversity Database (CDFW 2026), nor does the DEIR discuss potentially significant impacts to these special-status plants. Project applicants should be aware that take of seaside bird's-beak and/or Monterey gilia would require acquisition of an ITP to comply with CESA. Project applicants should also note that an ITP would require measures to minimize and fully mitigate the impacts of the proposed taking, such as an ecologically defensible compensatory mitigation proposal, which typically requires a conservation easement and an endowment to fund perpetual conservation and management. It is important to note that lands that are both available for conservation and which support these plants are increasingly rare in the region due to previous development related habitat destruction, which makes satisfying mitigation requirements for additional development related impacts to these species quite difficult.

As such, CDFW recommends changing the proposed designation of lands with the potential to result in potentially significant impacts to special-status species and/or sensitive natural communities to Resource Conservation, or split zoning of these lands to maintain a portion of the property dedicated to Resource Conservation (a similar approach to the proposed split zoning of Opportunity Site 52). Any projects tiered from this Plan within or adjacent to natural habitats and conserved lands should fully consider the potential for direct and indirect special-status species impacts, and early consultation with CDFW should occur prior to project implementation for guidance on developing appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Connectivity

California wildlife is losing the ability to move and migrate as habitat conversion and built infrastructure disrupts species habitat and cuts off migration corridors. California Senate Bill (SB) 790, Assembly Bill (AB) 2344, and AB 1889 all address wildlife connectivity in California and assert authority and responsibility to CDFW and/or local and State agencies to implement wildlife connectivity actions by identifying where they are needed, coordinate and implement those actions, and establish compensatory mitigation credits for actions taken. AB 1889 requires the conservation element of general plans to consider the effect of development on wildlife connectivity. The Bill also requires that lead agencies consider incorporating appropriate standards, policies, and feasible implementation programs, consult with specified entities, and consider relevant best available science on identifying and maintaining essential linkages and corridors that are essential to maintain landscape connectivity.

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The DPEIR states, “The project area is likely to be used as a movement corridor for both sensitive and common wildlife species because of the native vegetation communities, undeveloped open space, Pacific Coast shoreline, inland mountainous regions, and numerous freshwater aquatic resources within and adjacent to the project area. Although transportation corridors and areas of urban development may impede some east–west wildlife movement in the northern portion of [Unincorporated Monterey County], the open space in most of the project area has the potential to provide important habitat connectivity both locally and regionally.”

The DPEIR further states, “The project opportunity sites are proposed primarily in areas in and adjacent to existing development and would include temporary impacts that occur during construction activities on the sites. Although the project is not expected to have a significant impact on wildlife corridors and habitat linkages over the long-term, project activities may temporarily disrupt wildlife movement through the project area during construction.” CDFW does not concur with this conclusion as future projects tiered from the Plan have the potential to result in long-term, cumulative impacts to wildlife connectivity for wildlife species within and adjacent to Opportunity Sites including but not limited to Sites 47, 52, and 55.

These impacts can lead to reduction of habitat; reduced reproductive success; reduced health and vigor; nest abandonment; loss of foraging habitat that would reduce nesting success (loss or reduced health or vigor of eggs or young); and introduction of debris and/or deleterious materials into river habitats. Narrow riparian buffers are considerably less effective in minimizing the effects of adjacent development than wider buffers (Castelle et al. 1992, Brososke et al. 1998, Kiffney et al. 2003, Moore et al. 2005). As such, CDFW recommends the Plan establish, and tiered projects incorporate, sufficient conservation buffer zones within the Plan area that limits development within and adjacent to undeveloped open space and riparian habitats. CDFW also recommends the County consult with CDFW to assist with determining appropriate buffer distances.

Additionally, CDFW recommends that projects tiered from the Plan that are located within or adjacent to undeveloped open space and riparian habitats incorporate project-specific wildlife movement studies to evaluate the potential for the project to significantly impact wildlife connectivity and to guide the development of wildlife corridor mitigation measures to mitigate for connectivity impacts. For projects where wildlife corridor improvement is considered, pre-construction study results should be used to develop biologically feasible movement corridor improvements. Post-construction monitoring should also assess the use of wildlife movement corridors. CDFW recommends that monitoring data be analyzed, summarized, and results discussed in reports, and that these reports be posted for interested parties and submitted to CDFW and other agencies or organizations that have a duty or interest in the effectiveness of wildlife movement corridors. On- or off-site compensatory mitigation should be implemented to completely offset unavoidable impacts from Plan implementation to avoid significant

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impacts to existing wildlife corridors. The FPEIR should include an analysis of beneficial and feasible wildlife movement corridors and/or crossings at off-site locations that could be improved or constructed to enhance wildlife connectivity.

Editorial Comments and/or Suggestions

Nesting Birds: CDFW encourages that vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities occur during the bird non-nesting season; however, if vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities must occur during the nesting season (February 1st through September 15th), the project proponent is responsible for ensuring that implementation of the project does not result in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or relevant Fish and Game Code sections as referenced above.

CDFW further recommends that a qualified biologist conduct pre-project surveys for active nests no more than 10 days prior to the start of vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities to maximize the probability of detecting nests that could potentially be impacted. CDFW also recommends that surveys cover a sufficient area around each future project area to identify nests and determine their status. A sufficient area means any area potentially affected, either directly or indirectly, by a project. In addition to direct impacts (i.e., nest destruction), noise, vibration, and movement of workers or equipment could also affect nests. Prior to initiation of vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct a survey to establish a behavioral baseline of all identified nests.

Once vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities begin, CDFW recommends having a qualified biologist continuously monitor nests to detect behavioral changes resulting from the activities associated with each project. If behavioral changes occur, CDFW recommends halting the work causing that change and consulting with CDFW for additional avoidance and minimization measures. If continuous monitoring of identified nests by a qualified biologist is not feasible, CDFW recommends implementing a minimum 250-foot no-disturbance buffer around active nests of non-listed bird species and a minimum 500-foot no-disturbance buffer around active nests of non-listed raptors. These buffers are advised to remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or on-site parental care for survival. Variance from these no-disturbance buffers is possible when there is a compelling biological or ecological reason to do so, such as when the project area would be concealed from a nest site by topography. Prior to implementing a variance from these no-disturbance buffers, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist assess the site-specific circumstances, provide a biological or ecological justification to support a variance, if possible, and notify CDFW.

Water Rights: CDFW has concerns that future development within Opportunity Sites served by Carmel River diversions could result in impacts to aquatic ecosystems and fish and wildlife resources. CDFW recommends that the FPEIR include an analysis of

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the impacts of diverting currently unallocated flows, including a hydrologic study, water availability analysis, and other information that identifies and analyzes the impacts to aquatic ecosystems and fish and wildlife resources.

As Trustee Agency, CDFW is consulted by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) during the water rights process to provide terms and conditions designed to protect fish and wildlife prior to appropriation of the State's water resources. Given the potential for impacts to special-status species and their habitats, it is advised that details be disclosed during the CEQA process and that required consultation with CDFW occur well in advance of any SWRCB water right application process.

Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems: Future project-related activities such as extraction of groundwater could result in groundwater water quality impacts, subsidence impacts, and result in changes to available groundwater supply. Many sensitive ecosystems and public trust resources such as streams, springs, riparian areas, and wetlands are dependent on groundwater and interconnected surface waters. CDFW recommends that the FPEIR detail how the Plan would affect environmentally beneficial uses and users, including groundwater-dependent ecosystems and interconnected surface waters.

CDFW also recommends that the FPEIR include requirements to identify, evaluate, and monitor all groundwater-dependent ecosystems that would be affected by future project-related activities, and develop a plan to offset losses of groundwater-dependent ecosystems caused by changes in hydrology associated with the Plan. CDFW recommends the FPEIR also include appropriate mitigation measures to mitigate for impacts to the habitat value and function of these ecosystems to achieve a minimum no net loss of these habitats, as outlined in the Fish and Game Code policy on Wetlands Resources.

Cumulative Impacts: Currently, the DPEIR has a very broad analysis of cumulative impacts to biological resources and does not adequately evaluate impacts to specific resources. As such, the conclusions reached in the cumulative impacts analysis are not supported by substantial evidence, and the analysis lacks sufficient rigor and transparency to adequately develop reasonable and feasible measures to reduce harm. This is especially concerning given the DPEIR's finding that cumulative impacts on biological resources would be significant and cumulatively considerable. To address this, CDFW recommends that the FPEIR conduct a cumulative impact analysis for all specific biological resources that would either be significantly or potentially significantly impacted by implementation of the Plan, including those whose impacts are determined to be less than significant with mitigation incorporated or for those resources that are rare or in poor or declining health and would be impacted by future projects tiered from the Plan, even if those impacts are relatively small (i.e., less than significant). CDFW recommends cumulative impacts be analyzed using an acceptable methodology to evaluate the impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects on

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resources and be focused specifically on the resource, not the projects. An appropriate resource study area should be identified and mapped for each resource being analyzed and utilized for this analysis. CDFW staff is available for consultation in support of cumulative impacts analyses as a trustee and responsible agency under CEQA.

California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB): Please note that the CNDDDB is populated by voluntary submission records of species detections. As a result, species may be present in locations not depicted in the CNDDDB, but where there are suitable habitat and features capable of supporting species. A lack of an occurrence record, or lack of recent occurrence records, in the CNDDDB does not mean a species is not present. All projects tiered from the Plan should adequately assess any potential project-related impacts to biological resources by ensuring biological surveys conducted by a qualified biologist/botanist during the appropriate survey period(s) and using the appropriate protocol survey methodology as warranted in order to determine whether or not any special-status species are present at or near the project site.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e).) Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during surveys to the CNDDDB. The CNDDDB field survey form can be filled out and submitted online at the following link: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>. The completed form can be mailed electronically to CNDDDB at the following email address: CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov. The types of information reported to CNDDDB can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plants-and-Animals>.

FILING FEES

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

CONCLUSION

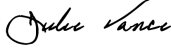
CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the DPEIR to assist the County in identifying and mitigating the Plan's impacts on biological resources. More information

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on survey and monitoring protocols for sensitive species can be found at CDFW's website (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols>).

Please see the enclosed, Attachment 2, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) table, which corresponds with recommended mitigation measures in this comment letter. If you have any questions regarding this letter or further coordination, please contact Stephanie Manzo, Environmental Scientist, at the address provided on this letterhead, by telephone at (559) 578-0409, or by electronic mail at Stephanie.Manzo@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

FA83F09FE08945A...

Julie A. Vance
Regional Manager

Attachment 1: CDFW NOP Comment Letter November 27, 2024

Attachment 2: Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

ec: State Clearinghouse
Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
state.clearinghouse@lci.ca.gov

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Attachment 1



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Central Region
1234 East Shaw Avenue
Fresno, California 93710
(559) 243-4005
www.wildlife.ca.gov

GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



November 27, 2024

Jaime Scott Guthrie, AICP, Senior Planner
County of Monterey Housing and Community Development Department
1441 Schilling Place, South 2nd Floor
Salinas, California 93901-4527
(831) 755-5025
GeneralPlanUpdates@countyofmonterey.gov

**Subject: County of Monterey Sixth Cycle Housing Element (2023-2031) Project
(File Number REF220020) (Plan)
Notice of Preparation (NOP)
SCH No.: 2024100963**

Dear Jaime Scott Guthrie:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received an NOP from Monterey County for the Plan pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.

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

CDFW ROLE

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

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870

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specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a **Responsible Agency** under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, Section 21069; CEQA Guidelines, Section 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, reasonably foreseeable future project's tiered from this Plan may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & Game Code, Section 1600 et seq.). Likewise, to the extent implementation of reasonably foreseeable future project's tiered from this Plan may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & Game Code, Section 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code may be required.

Fully Protected Species: CDFW has jurisdiction over fully protected species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and fish, pursuant to Fish and Game Code sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515. Fully protected species may not be taken or possessed at any time and no licenses or permits may be issued for their take except as follows:

- Take is for necessary scientific research,
- Efforts to recover a fully protected, endangered, or threatened species, live capture, and relocation of a bird species for the protection of livestock, or
- They are a covered species whose conservation and management is provided for in a Natural Community Conservation Plan (Fish & G. Code, §§ 3511, 4700, 5050, & 5515).

Additionally, specified types of infrastructure projects may be eligible for an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for unavoidable impacts to fully protected species if certain conditions are met (see Fish & G. Code §2081.15). Project proponents should consult with CDFW early in the project planning process if an ITP may be pursued.

Nesting Birds: CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their eggs and nests include sections 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession or needless destruction of the nest or eggs of any bird), 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession or destruction of any birds-of-prey or their nests or eggs), and 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird).

Unlisted Species: Species of plants and animals need not be officially listed as Endangered, Rare, or Threatened (E, R, or T) on any State or federal list to be considered E, R, or T under CEQA. If a species can be shown to meet the criteria for E,

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R, or T, as specified in the CEQA Guidelines section 15380, CDFW recommends it be fully considered in the environmental analysis for the Plan.

PLAN DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: Monterey County

Objective: The Plan involves amending the County of Monterey General Plan to update the Housing Element for the Sixth Cycle 2023-2031 planning period (“HEU6”), as well as amending other components of the General Plan, including the Circulation Element, Conservation and Open Space Element, Land Use Element, Public Services Element, Carmel Valley Master Plan (“CVMP”), Central Salinas Valley Area Plan (“CSVAP”), Fort Ord Master Plan (“FOMP”), Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plan (“GMPAP”), Greater Salinas Area Plan (“GSAP”), North County Area Plan (“NCAP”), Toro Area Plan (“TAP”); and to Local Coastal Program (“LCP”) components, including the Carmel Area Land Use Plan (“CALUP”) and North County Land Use Plan (“NCLUP”), amendments to the Monterey County Zoning Code (Title 20 Coastal Zone and Title 21 Inland Areas), and other approvals as necessary to implement the HEU6 and comply with state law.

Location: The Plan area includes Monterey County (unincorporated countywide)

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the following comments and recommendations to assist Monterey County in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Plan’s significant, or potentially significant, direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the document for this Plan.

The NOP indicates that the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) prepared for the Plan will consider and analyze potential environmental effects to determine the level of significance. The DEIR will also identify and evaluate alternatives to the proposed Plan. When a DEIR is prepared, the specifics of mitigation measures may be deferred, provided the lead agency commits to mitigation and establishes performance standards for implementation.

Special-Status Species

Based on aerial imagery and species occurrence records from the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) (CDFW 2024) as well as CDFW familiarity with biological resources in the Plan Area, the proposed Plan area is known to and/or has the potential to support special-status species, and these resources need to be evaluated and addressed prior to any approvals that would allow ground-disturbing activities. CDFW

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recommends that the species identified in Attachment 1 of this letter be considered as part of the DEIR that will be drafted for this Plan.

Siting of Opportunity Sites

The Plan NOP identifies “Opportunity Sites” that will be evaluated within the Plan’s DEIR for potential development, and it appears that several of these Opportunity Sites, such as Site 47 and Site 61, are located on lands that contain natural habitats with the potential for special-status species such as Santa Cruz long toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum croceum*), California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*), and California red legged frog (*Rana draytonii*). It also appears that certain Opportunity Sites may be located on lands bordering conserved natural lands such as the Fort Ord National Monument. As such, CDFW recommends that projects tiered from this Plan within or adjacent to natural habitats and conserved lands fully consider the potential for direct and indirect special-status species impacts, and that early consultation with CDFW occur prior to project implementation.

Cumulative Impacts

Given that a Plan serves primarily as a planning tool and that future project-level CEQA documents are expected to be tiered from it, CDFW recommends that a cumulative impact analysis be conducted for all potential biological resources that will either be significantly or potentially significantly impacted by implementation of the Plan, including those whose impacts are determined to be less than significant with mitigation incorporated or for those resources that are rare or in poor or declining health and will be impacted by any future project, even if those impacts are expected to be relatively small (i.e. less than significant). CDFW recommends cumulative impacts be analyzed using an acceptable methodology to evaluate the impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects on resources and be focused specifically on the resource, not the project. An appropriate resource study area identified and utilized for this analysis is advised. CDFW staff is available for consultation in support of cumulative impacts analyses as a trustee and responsible agency under CEQA.

California Endangered Species Act

Reasonably foreseeable future projects tiered from this Plan may be subject to CDFW’s regulatory authority pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). In the event that species listed under CESA are detected during surveys, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the project and avoid “take,” or if avoidance is not feasible, to acquire a State ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b), prior to any ground disturbing activities. In addition, CDFW advises that mitigation measures for the CESA listed species be fully addressed in the CEQA document prepared for any future project tiered from this Plan.

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CDFW therefore recommends that the DEIR for this Plan include information related to these requirements and advises that projects tiered from this Plan retain a qualified biologist to determine if potential impacts to CESA listed species may require the need to obtain a 2081 ITP.

Lake and Stream Alteration

Reasonably foreseeable future projects tiered from this Plan may be subject to CDFW's regulatory authority pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. Fish and Game Code section 1602 requires project proponents to notify CDFW prior to commencing any activity that may (a) substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of any river, stream, or lake; (b) substantially change or use any material from the bed, bank, or channel of any river, stream, or lake; or (c) deposit debris, waste or other materials that could pass into any river, stream, or lake. "Any river, stream, or lake" includes those that are ephemeral or intermittent as well as those that are perennial in nature. For additional information on notification requirements, please contact our staff in the Lake and Stream Alteration Program at (559) 243-4593, or R4LSA@wildlife.ca.gov.

CDFW therefore recommends that the DEIR for this Plan include information related to these requirements of Fish and Game code and advise that projects tiered from this Plan retain a qualified biologist to determine if potential impacts to streams may require the need to notify pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1602.

Botanical Surveys

CDFW recommends that the DEIR for this Plan include a measure requiring that projects tiered from this Plan located within natural habitats be surveyed by a qualified botanist for any possible special-status plants following the "Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special-Status Native Plant Populations and Natural Communities" (<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=18959&inline>). CDFW recommends that the plant surveys be floristic and, if necessary, utilize a known reference site for any special-status plants in order to provide a high level of confidence in the effort and results.

If a special-status plant is found, CDFW recommends that the special-status plant species be avoided whenever possible by delineating and observing a no disturbance buffer of at least 50 feet from the outer edge of the plant population(s) or specific habitat type(s) required by special-status plant species. If buffers cannot be maintained, then consultation with CDFW is warranted to determine appropriate minimization and mitigation measures for impacts to special-status plant species. If a State or federally listed plant species is identified during botanical surveys, it is recommended that

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consultation with CDFW and/or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) be conducted to determine permitting needs.

Nesting birds

CDFW recommends that all projects tiered from this Plan occur during the bird non-nesting season; however, if ground-disturbing or vegetation-disturbing activities must occur during the breeding season (February 15 through September 15), each future project applicant is responsible for ensuring that implementation of their project does not result in a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or relevant Fish and Game Codes as referenced above.

To evaluate future project-related impacts on nesting birds, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct an assessment of nesting habitat during biological surveys in support of each project's CEQA document, and then conduct pre-activity surveys for active nests no more than 10 days prior to the start of ground or vegetation disturbance to maximize the probability that nests that could potentially be impacted are detected. CDFW also recommends that surveys cover a sufficient area around each future project site to identify nests and determine their status. A sufficient area means any area potentially affected by a project. In addition to direct impacts (i.e., nest destruction), noise, vibration, and movement of workers or equipment could also affect nests. Prior to initiation of construction activities, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct a survey to establish a behavioral baseline for all identified nests. Once construction begins, CDFW recommends having a qualified biologist continuously monitor nests to detect behavioral changes resulting from each future project. If behavioral changes occur, CDFW recommends halting the work causing that change and consulting with CDFW for additional avoidance and minimization measures.

If continuous monitoring of identified nests by a qualified biologist is not feasible, CDFW recommends a minimum no-disturbance buffer of 250 feet around active nests of non-listed bird species and a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer around active nests of non-listed raptors. These buffers are advised to remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or on-site parental care for survival. Variance from these no-disturbance buffers is possible when there is compelling biological or ecological reason to do so, such as when the construction areas would be concealed from a nest site by topography. CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist advise and support any variance from these buffers and notify CDFW in advance of implementing a variance.

CEQA Alternatives Analysis

CDFW recommends that the information and results obtained from the cumulative impacts analysis conducted as part of this Plan's DEIR be used to develop and modify

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the Plan's alternatives to avoid and minimize impacts to biological resources to the maximum extent possible. Please note that when efforts to avoid and minimize impacts have been exhausted for projects tiered from this Plan, remaining impacts to sensitive biological resources may need to be mitigated to reduce impacts to a less than significant level, if feasible.

CNDDDB

Please note that the CNDDDB is populated by voluntary submissions of species detections. As a result, species may be present in locations not depicted in the CNDDDB but where there is suitable habitat and features capable of supporting species. A lack of an occurrence record in the CNDDDB does not mean a species is not present. All projects tiered from this Plan should adequately assess any potential project-related impacts to biological resources by ensuring biological surveys are conducted by a qualified wildlife biologist during the appropriate survey period(s) and using the appropriate protocol survey methodology as warranted in order to determine whether or not any special-status species are present at or near the project area.

Federally Listed Species

CDFW recommends projects tiered from this Plan consult with the USFWS on potential impacts to federally listed species. Take under the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) is more broadly defined than CESA; take under FESA also includes significant habitat modification or degradation that could result in death or injury to a listed species by interfering with essential behavioral patterns such as breeding, foraging, or nesting. Consultation with the USFWS in order to comply with FESA is advised well in advance of any ground disturbing activities.

Environmental Data

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations. (Pub. Resources Code, Section 21003, subd. (e).) Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to the CNDDDB. The CNDDDB field survey form can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>. The completed form can be mailed electronically to CNDDDB at the following email address: CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov. The types of information reported to CNDDDB can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plants-and-Animals>.

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Filing Fees

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

CONCLUSION

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the NOP to assist Monterey County in identifying and mitigating this Plan's impact on biological resources.

More information on survey and monitoring protocols for sensitive species can be found at CDFW's website (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols>). Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Evelyn Barajas-Perez, Environmental Scientist, at (805) 503-5738 or evelyn.barajas-perez@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

E9964E60293D40A...

For Julie A. Vance
Regional Manager

ec: CESA R4CESA@wildlife.ca.gov

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FWS steve_henry@fws.gov

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REFERENCES

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Common Name	Scientific Name	Status	
		State	Federal
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	E; FP	-
California condor	<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>	E; FP	E
California Ridgway's rail	<i>Rallus obsoletus obsoletus</i>	E; FP	E
Foothill yellow-legged frog - central coast DPS	<i>Rana boylei</i>	E	T
Foothill yellow-legged frog - South coast DPS	<i>Rana boylei</i>	E	E
Santa Cruz long-toed salamander	<i>Ambystoma macrodactylum croceum</i>	E; FP	E
Least bell's vireo	<i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i>	E	E
Willow flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii</i>	E	-
Beach layia	<i>Layia carnosa</i>	E	T
Coastal dunes milk-vetch	<i>Astragalus tener var. titi</i>	E	-
Hickman's cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla hickmanii</i>	E	E
Menzies' wallflower	<i>Erysimum menziesii</i>	E	E
Monterey clover	<i>Trifolium trichocalyx</i>	E	E
Santa Lucia mint	<i>Pogogyne clareana</i>	E	-
Seaside bird's beak	<i>Cordylanthus rigidus ssp. littoralis</i>	E	-
Tidestrom's lupine	<i>Lupinus tidestromii</i>	E	E
San Joaquin kit fox	<i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i>	T	E
Bank swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	T	-
California black rail	<i>Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus</i>	T; FP	-
Swainson's hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	T	-
Tricolored blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>	T	-
California tiger salamander - central California DPS	<i>Ambystoma californiense</i>	T	T
Longfin smelt	<i>Spirinchus thaleichthys</i>	T	-
Monterey gilia	<i>Gilia tenuiflora</i>	T	E

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Northern elephant seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>	FP	-
Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	FP	-
White-tailed kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	FP	-
Mountain Lion	<i>Puma concolor</i>	C	-
Western burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia hypugaeae</i>	C	-
Crotch's bumble bee	<i>Bombus crotchii</i>	C	-
Western bumble bee	<i>Bombus occidentalis</i>	C	-
Adobe sanicle	<i>Sanicula maritima</i>	R	-
Pismo clarkia	<i>Clarkia speciosa ssp. immaculata</i>	R	-
American badger	<i>Taxidea taxus</i>	SSC	-
Monterey dusky-footed woodrat	<i>Neotoma macrotis luciana</i>	SSC	-
Monterey shrew	<i>Sorex ornatus salarii</i>	SSC	-
Pallid bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	SSC	-
Salinas pocket mouse	<i>Perognathus inornatus psammophilus</i>	SSC	-
Townsend's big-eared bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	SSC	-
Western mastiff bat	<i>Eumops perotis californicus</i>	SSC	-
Black swift	<i>Cypseloides niger</i>	SSC	-
Grasshopper sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	SSC	-
Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	SSC	-
Northern harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	SSC	-
Olive-sided flycatcher	<i>Contopus cooperi</i>	SSC	-
Purple martin	<i>Progne subis</i>	SSC	-
Short-eared owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	SSC	-
Yellow warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>	SSC	-
Yellow-breasted chat	<i>Icteria virens</i>	SSC	-
Western snowy plover	<i>Charadrius nivosus nivosus</i>	SSC	T
Coast horned lizard	<i>Phrynosoma blainvillii</i>	SSC	-

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Northern California legless lizard	<i>Anniella pulchra</i>	SSC	-
San Joaquin coachwhip	<i>Masticophis flagellum ruddocki</i>	SSC	-
Western pond turtle	<i>Emys marmorata</i>	SSC	PT
Arroyo toad	<i>Anaxyrus californicus</i>	SSC	T
Coast range newt	<i>Taricha torosa</i>	SSC	-
California red-legged frog	<i>Rana draytonii</i>	SSC	T
Western spadefoot	<i>Spea hammondi</i>	SSC	PT
Monterey hitch	<i>Lavinia exilicauda harengus</i>	SSC	-
Pacific lamprey	<i>Entosphenus tridentatus</i>	SSC	-
Southern coastal roach	<i>Hesperoleucus venustus subditus</i>	SSC	-
Steelhead-south-central California coast DPS	<i>Onchorhynchus mykiss irideus pop. 9</i>	SSC	T

E= Endangered; T=Threatened, C= Candidate for listing as Threatened or Endangered, R= Rare, SSC= Species of Special Concern, FP= Fully Protected, PT=Proposed Threatened

Attachment 2

Attachment 2

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM
(MMRP)

PLAN: County of Monterey Sixth Cycle (2023-2031) Housing Element

SCH No.: 2024100963

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE	STATUS/DATE/INITIALS
<i>Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation</i>	
Special-Status Bats	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: Bat Pre-Activity Surveys	
<i>During Construction</i>	
Special-Status Bats	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: Bat Roost No-Disturbance Buffer	