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August 21, 2025

Julie Newton
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County of Sacramento - Planning and Environmental Review
827 7th Street, Room 225
Sacramento, CA 95814
CEQA@saccounty.gov

Subject: GrandPark Trails Specific Plan
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (DEIR)
SCH No. 2025071275

Dear Julie Newton:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received and reviewed the Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) from the County of Sacramento (the County) for the GrandPark Trails Specific Plan (Project) in Sacramento County pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) statute and guidelines.[1]

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that it, by law, may need to exercise its own regulatory authority under the Fish and Game Code (Fish & G. Code).

CDFW ROLE

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

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

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

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

The Project site is located north of Elkhorn Boulevard and the City of Sacramento, east of Highway 99, south of Sutter County, and west of East Levee Road, Steelhead Creek, and the unincorporated communities of Rio Linda and Elverta. The site lies three miles east of Sacramento International Airport and is located approximately seven miles northwest of downtown Sacramento in the Natomas Basin area.

The Project consists of 16,056 residential units across a range of densities, including Estate, Low, Medium, Medium High, and High Density Residential. The Project also includes approximately 1.2 million square feet of commercial and mixed-use development, which would provide neighborhood- and community-serving retail and services, as well as employment opportunities. Four K–8 school sites would be constructed and located adjacent to centrally located neighborhood parks to allow for joint use and walkable access. Parks and open space would comprise approximately 1,369 acres (nearly 40 percent of the total Plan Area), organized around the "Grand Parkway", a multi-purpose community open space spine that also serves as a flood control corridor, and linear green spaces (referred to as armatures in the Specific Plan) that connect neighborhoods to the Grand Parkway through Class I trails and bike/pedestrian linkages.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations presented below to assist the County in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, impacts on biological resources. The comments and recommendations are also offered to enable CDFW to adequately review and comment on the proposed Project with respect to impacts on biological resources. CDFW recommends that the forthcoming EIR address the following:

Project Description

The Project description should include the whole action as defined in the CEQA Guidelines § 15378 and should include appropriate detailed exhibits disclosing the Project area including temporary impacted areas such as equipment stage area, spoils

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areas, adjacent infrastructure development, staging areas and access and haul roads if applicable.

As required by § 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines, the EIR should include an appropriate range of reasonable and feasible alternatives that would attain most of the basic Project objectives and avoid or minimize significant impacts to resources under CDFW's jurisdiction.

Assessment of Biological Resources

Section 15125(c) of the CEQA Guidelines states that knowledge of the regional setting of a project is critical to the assessment of environmental impacts and that special emphasis should be placed on environmental resources that are rare or unique to the region. To enable CDFW staff to adequately review and comment on the Project, the EIR should include a complete assessment of the flora and fauna within and adjacent to the Project footprint, with emphasis on identifying rare, threatened, endangered, and other sensitive species and their associated habitats. CDFW recommends the EIR specifically include:

1. An assessment of all habitat types located within the Project footprint, and a map that identifies the location of each habitat type. CDFW recommends that floristic, alliance- and/or association-based mapping and assessment be completed following, *The Manual of California Vegetation*, second edition (Sawyer 2009). Adjoining habitat areas should also be included in this assessment where site activities could lead to direct or indirect impacts offsite. Habitat mapping at the alliance level will help establish baseline vegetation conditions.

2. A general biological inventory of the fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, and mammal species that are present or have the potential to be present within each habitat type onsite and within adjacent areas that could be affected by the Project. CDFW recommends that the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB), as well as previous studies performed in the area, be consulted to assess the potential presence of sensitive species and habitats. A nine United States Geologic Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle search is recommended to determine what may occur in the region, larger if the Project area extends past one quad (see *Data Use Guidelines* on the CDFW webpage www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Maps-and-Data). Please review the webpage for information on how to access the database to obtain current information on any previously reported sensitive species and habitat, including Significant Natural Areas identified under Chapter 12 of the Fish and Game Code, in the vicinity of the Project. CDFW recommends that CNDDB Field Survey Forms be completed and submitted to CNDDB to document survey results. Online forms can be obtained and submitted at: https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Submitting-Data.

   Please note that CDFW's CNDDB is not exhaustive in terms of the data it houses, nor is it an absence database. CDFW recommends that it be used as a starting point in gathering information about the *potential presence* of species

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within the general area of the Project site. Other sources for identification of species and habitats near or adjacent to the Project area should include, but may not be limited to, State and federal resource agency lists, California Wildlife Habitat Relationship System, California Native Plant Society Inventory, agency contacts, environmental documents for other projects in the vicinity, academics, and professional or scientific organizations.

3. A complete and recent inventory of rare, threatened, endangered, and other sensitive species located within the Project footprint and within offsite areas with the potential to be affected, including California Species of Special Concern and California Fully Protected Species (Fish & G. Code § § 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515). Species to be addressed should include all those which meet the CEQA definition (CEQA Guidelines § 15380). The inventory should address seasonal variations in use of the Project area and should not be limited to resident species. The EIR should include the results of focused species-specific surveys, completed by a qualified biologist and conducted at the appropriate time of year and time of day when the sensitive species are active or otherwise identifiable. Species-specific surveys should be conducted in order to ascertain the presence of species with the potential to be directly, indirectly, on or within a reasonable distance of the Project activities. CDFW recommends the County rely on survey and monitoring protocols and guidelines available at: www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols. Alternative survey protocols may be warranted; justification should be provided to substantiate why an alternative protocol is necessary. Acceptable species-specific survey procedures should be developed in consultation with CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where necessary. Some aspects of the Project may warrant periodic updated surveys for certain sensitive taxa, particularly if the Project is proposed to occur over a protracted time frame, or in phases, or if surveys are completed during periods of drought or deluge.

4. A thorough, recent (within the last two years), floristic-based assessment of special-status plants and natural communities, following CDFW's *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Natural Communities* (see www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Plants).

5. Information on the regional setting that is critical to an assessment of environmental impacts, with special emphasis on resources that are rare or unique to the region (CEQA Guidelines § 15125[c]).

Analysis of Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts to Biological Resources

The EIR should provide a thorough discussion of the Project's potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on biological resources. To ensure that Project impacts on biological resources are fully analyzed, the following information should be included in the EIR:

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1. The EIR should define the threshold of significance for each impact and describe the criteria used to determine whether the impacts are significant (CEQA Guidelines, § 15064, subd. (f)). The EIR must demonstrate that the significant environmental impacts of the Project were adequately investigated and discussed, and it must permit the significant effects of the Project to be considered in the full environmental context.

2. A discussion of potential impacts from lighting, noise, human activity, and wildlife-human interactions created by Project activities especially those adjacent to natural areas, exotic and/or invasive species occurrences, and drainages. The EIR should address Project-related changes to drainage patterns and water quality within, upstream, and downstream of the Project site, including: volume, velocity, and frequency of existing and post-Project surface flows; polluted runoff; soil erosion and/or sedimentation in streams and water bodies; and post-Project fate of runoff from the Project site.

3. A discussion of potential indirect Project impacts on biological resources, including resources in areas adjacent to the Project footprint, such as nearby public lands (e.g., National Forests, State Parks, etc.), open space, adjacent natural habitats, riparian ecosystems, wildlife corridors, and any designated and/or proposed reserve or mitigation lands (e.g., preserved lands associated with a Conservation or Recovery Plan, or other conserved lands).

4. A cumulative effects analysis developed as described under CEQA Guidelines section 15130. The EIR should discuss the Project's cumulative impacts to natural resources and determine if that contribution would result in a significant impact. The EIR should include a list of present, past, and probable future projects producing related impacts to biological resources or shall include a summary of the projections contained in an adopted local, regional, or statewide plan, that consider conditions contributing to a cumulative effect. The cumulative analysis shall include impact analysis of vegetation and habitat reductions within the area and their potential cumulative effects. Please include all potential direct and indirect Project-related impacts to riparian areas, wetlands, wildlife corridors or wildlife movement areas, aquatic habitats, sensitive species and/or special-status species, open space, and adjacent natural habitats in the cumulative effects analysis.

Mitigation Measures for Project Impacts to Biological Resources

The EIR should include appropriate and adequate avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures for all direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that are expected to occur as a result of the construction and long-term operation and maintenance of the Project. CDFW also recommends the environmental documentation provide scientifically supported discussion regarding adequate avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures to address the Project's significant impacts upon fish and wildlife and their habitat. For individual projects, mitigation must be roughly proportional to the level of impacts, including cumulative impacts, in accordance with the provisions of

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CEQA (Guidelines § § 15126.4(a)(4)(B), 15064, 15065, and 16355). In order for mitigation measures to be effective, they must be specific, enforceable, and feasible actions that will improve environmental conditions. When proposing measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts, CDFW recommends consideration of the following:

1. *Fully Protected Species:* Several Fully Protected Species (Fish & G. Code § 3511) have the potential to occur within or adjacent to the Project area, including, but not limited to: white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*). Project activities described in the EIR should be designed to completely avoid any fully protected species that have the potential to be present within or adjacent to the Project area. If fully protected species cannot be completely avoided, the Project should obtain incidental take coverage for all species that have the potential to be present within or adjacent to the Project Area[2]. CDFW also recommends the EIR fully analyze potential adverse impacts to fully protected species due to habitat modification, loss of foraging habitat, and/or interruption of migratory and breeding behaviors. CDFW recommends that the County include in the analysis how appropriate avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures will reduce indirect impacts to fully protected species.

2. *Species of Special Concern:* Several Species of Special Concern (SSC) have the potential to occur within or adjacent to the Project area, including, but not limited to: western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*), Northern harrier (*Circus hudsonius*), Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Song sparrow ("Modesto" population) (*Melospiza melodia*), American white pelican (*Pelacanus erythrorhynchos*), Purple martin (*Progne subis*), Yellow-headed blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*), and Pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*). Project activities described in the EIR should be designed to avoid any SSC that have the potential to be present within or adjacent to the Project area. CDFW also recommends that the EIR fully analyze potential adverse impacts to SSC due to habitat modification, loss of foraging habitat, and/or interruption of migratory and breeding behaviors. CDFW recommends the County include in the analysis how appropriate avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures will reduce impacts to SSC.

3. *Sensitive Plant Communities:* CDFW considers sensitive plant communities to be imperiled habitats having both local and regional significance. Plant communities, alliances, and associations with a statewide ranking of S-1, S-2, S-3, and S-4 should be considered sensitive and declining at the local and regional level. These ranks can be obtained by querying the CNDDB and are included in *The Manual of California Vegetation* (Sawyer 2009). The EIR should include measures to fully avoid and otherwise protect sensitive plant communities from Project-related direct and indirect impacts.

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2 CDFW may only issue incidental take permits for specified projects if certain conditions are satisfied per SB 147.

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4. *Mitigation:* CDFW considers adverse Project-related impacts to sensitive species and habitats to be significant to both local and regional ecosystems, and the EIR should include mitigation measures for adverse Project-related impacts to these resources. Mitigation measures should emphasize avoidance and reduction of Project impacts. For unavoidable impacts, onsite habitat restoration, enhancement, or permanent protection should be evaluated and discussed in detail. If onsite mitigation is not feasible or would not be biologically viable and therefore not adequately mitigate the loss of biological functions and values, offsite mitigation through habitat creation and/or acquisition and preservation in perpetuity should be addressed.

   The EIR should include measures to perpetually protect the targeted habitat values within mitigation areas from direct and indirect adverse impacts in order to meet mitigation objectives to offset Project-induced qualitative and quantitative losses of biological values. Specific issues that should be addressed include restrictions on access, proposed land dedications, long-term monitoring and management programs, control of illegal dumping, water pollution, increased human intrusion, etc.

5. *Habitat Revegetation/Restoration Plans:* Plans for restoration and revegetation should be prepared by persons with expertise in the regional ecosystems and native plant restoration techniques. Plans should identify the assumptions used to develop the proposed restoration strategy. Each plan should include, at a minimum: (a) the location of restoration sites and assessment of appropriate reference sites; (b) the plant species to be used, sources of local propagules, container sizes, and seeding rates; (c) a schematic depicting the mitigation area; (d) a local seed and cuttings and planting schedule; (e) a description of the irrigation methodology; (f) measures to control exotic vegetation on site; (g) specific success criteria; (h) a detailed monitoring program; (i) contingency measures should the success criteria not be met; and (j) identification of the party responsible for meeting the success criteria and providing for conservation of the mitigation site in perpetuity. Monitoring of restoration areas should extend across a sufficient time frame to ensure that the new habitat is established, self-sustaining, and capable of surviving drought.

   CDFW recommends that local onsite propagules from the Project area and nearby vicinity be collected and used for restoration purposes. Onsite seed collection should be appropriately timed to ensure the viability of the seeds when planted. Onsite vegetation mapping at the alliance and/or association level should be used to develop appropriate restoration goals and local plant palettes. Reference areas should be identified to help guide restoration efforts. Specific restoration plans should be developed for various Project components as appropriate. Restoration objectives should include protecting special habitat elements or re-creating them in areas affected by the Project. Examples may include retention of woody material, logs, snags, rocks, and brush piles. Fish and Game Code sections 1002, 1002.5 and 1003 authorize CDFW to issue permits for the take or possession of plants and wildlife for scientific, educational, and

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propagation purposes. Please see our website for more information on Scientific Collecting Permits at www.wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Scientific-Collecting#53949678-regulations-.

6. *Nesting Birds:* Please note that it is the Project proponent's responsibility to comply with all applicable laws related to nesting birds and birds of prey. Migratory non-game native bird species are protected by international treaty under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918, as amended (16 U.S.C. 703 *et seq.*). CDFW implemented the MBTA by adopting the Fish and Game Code section 3513. Fish and Game Code sections 3503, 3503.5 and 3800 provide additional protection to nongame birds, birds of prey, their nests and eggs. Sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 of the Fish and Game Code afford protective measures as follows: section 3503 states that it is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird, except as otherwise provided by the Fish and Game Code or any regulation made pursuant thereto; section 3503.5 states that is it unlawful to take, possess, or destroy any birds in the orders Falconiformes or Strigiformes (birds-of-prey) or to take, possess, or destroy the nest or eggs of any such bird except as otherwise provided by the Fish and Game Code or any regulation adopted pursuant thereto; and section 3513 states that it is unlawful to take or possess any migratory nongame bird as designated in the MBTA or any part of such migratory nongame bird except as provided by rules and regulations adopted by the Secretary of the Interior under provisions of the MBTA.

   Potential habitat for nesting birds and birds of prey is present within the Project area. The Project should disclose all potential activities that may incur a direct or indirect take to nongame nesting birds within the Project footprint and its vicinity. Appropriate avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures to avoid take must be included in the EIR.

   CDFW recommends the EIR include specific avoidance and minimization measures to ensure that impacts to nesting birds or their nests do not occur. Project-specific avoidance and minimization measures may include, but not be limited to: Project phasing and timing, monitoring of Project-related noise (where applicable), sound walls, and buffers, where appropriate. The EIR should also include specific avoidance and minimization measures that will be implemented should a nest be located within the Project site. In addition to larger, protocol level survey efforts (e.g., Swainson's hawk surveys) and scientific assessments, CDFW recommends a final preconstruction survey be required no more than three (3) days prior to vegetation clearing or ground disturbance activities, as instances of nesting could be missed if surveys are conducted earlier.

7. *Moving out of Harm's Way:* The Project is anticipated to result in the clearing of natural habitats that support native species. To avoid direct mortality, the County should state in the EIR a requirement for a qualified biologist with the proper handling permits, will be retained to be onsite prior to and during all ground- and habitat-disturbing activities. Furthermore, the EIR should describe that the qualified biologist with the proper permits may move out of harm's way special-status species or other

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wildlife of low or limited mobility that would otherwise be injured or killed from Project-related activities, as needed. The EIR should also describe qualified biologist qualifications and authorities to stop work to prevent direct mortality of special-status species. CDFW recommends fish and wildlife species be allowed to move out of harm's way on their own volition, if possible, and to assist their relocation as a last resort. It should be noted that the temporary relocation of onsite wildlife does not constitute effective mitigation for habitat loss.

8. *Translocation of Species:* CDFW generally does not support the use of relocation, salvage, and/or transplantation as the sole mitigation for impacts to rare, threatened, or endangered species as these efforts are generally experimental in nature and largely unsuccessful. Therefore, the EIR should describe additional mitigation measures utilizing habitat restoration, conservation, and/or preservation, in addition to avoidance and minimization measures, if it is determined that there may be impacts to rare, threatened, or endangered species.

The EIR should incorporate mitigation performance standards that would ensure that impacts are reduced to a less-than-significant level. Mitigation measures proposed in the EIR should be made a condition of approval of the Project. Please note that obtaining a permit from CDFW by itself with no other mitigation proposal may constitute mitigation deferral. CEQA Guidelines section 15126.4, subdivision (a)(1)(B) states that formulation of mitigation measures should not be deferred until some future time. To avoid deferring mitigation in this way, the EIR should describe avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures that would be implemented should the impact occur.

California Endangered Species Act

CDFW is responsible for ensuring appropriate conservation of fish and wildlife resources including threatened, endangered, and/or candidate plant and animal species, pursuant to CESA. CDFW recommends that a CESA Incidental Take Permit (ITP) be obtained if the Project has the potential to result in "take" (Fish & G. Code § 86 defines "take" as "hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill") of State-listed CESA species, either through construction or over the life of the Project.

State-listed species or candidate species with known to occur in the area include, but are not limited to: Giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*), Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) and Tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*)

The EIR should disclose the potential of the Project to take State-listed species and how the impacts will be avoided, minimized, and mitigated. Please note that mitigation measures that are adequate to reduce impacts to a less-than significant level to meet CEQA requirements may not be enough for the issuance of an ITP. To facilitate the issuance of an ITP, if applicable, CDFW recommends the EIR include measures to minimize and fully mitigate the impacts to any State-listed species the Project has potential to take. CDFW encourages early consultation with staff to determine appropriate

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measures to facilitate future permitting processes and to engage with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and/or National Marine Fisheries Service to coordinate specific measures if both State and federally listed species may be present within the Project vicinity.

Native Plant Protection Act

The Native Plant Protection Act (Fish & G. Code §1900 *et seq*.) prohibits the take or possession of State-listed rare and endangered plants, including any part or product thereof, unless authorized by CDFW or in certain limited circumstances. Take of State-listed rare and/or endangered plants due to Project activities may only be permitted through an ITP or other authorization issued by CDFW pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 14, section 786.9 subdivision (b).

Lake and Streambed Alteration Program

The EIR should identify all perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral rivers, streams, lakes, other hydrologically connected aquatic features, and any associated biological resources/habitats present within the entire Project footprint (including utilities, access and staging areas). The environmental document should analyze all potential temporary, permanent, direct, indirect and/or cumulative impacts to the above-mentioned features and associated biological resources/habitats that may occur because of the Project. If it is determined the Project will result in significant impacts to these resources the EIR shall propose appropriate avoidance, minimization and/or mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code requires an entity to notify CDFW prior to commencing any activity that may do one or more of the following:

1. Substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of any river, stream or lake;

2. Substantially change or use any material from the bed, channel or bank of any river, stream, or lake; or

3. Deposit debris, waste or other materials where it may pass into any river, stream or lake.

Please note that "any river, stream or lake" includes those that are episodic (i.e., those that are dry for periods of time) as well as those that are perennial (i.e., those that flow year-round). This includes ephemeral streams and watercourses with a subsurface flow. It may also apply to work undertaken within the flood plain of a body of water.

If upon review of an entity’s notification, CDFW determines that the Project activities may substantially adversely affect an existing fish or wildlife resource, a Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Agreement will be issued which will include reasonable measures necessary to protect the resource. CDFW’s issuance of an LSA Agreement is a “project” subject to CEQA (see Pub. Resources Code 21065). To facilitate issuance of an LSA Agreement, if one is necessary, the EIR should fully identify the potential impacts to the lake, stream, or riparian resources, and provide adequate avoidance,

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mitigation, and monitoring and reporting commitments. Early consultation with CDFW is recommended, since modification of the Project may avoid or reduce impacts to fish and wildlife resources. All LSA Notification types must be submitted online through CDFW's Environmental Permit Information Management System (EPIMS). For more information about EPIMS, please visit https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/EPIMS. More information about LSA Notifications, paper forms and fees may be found at https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/LSA.

Please note that other agencies may use specific methods and definitions to determine impacts to areas subject to their authorities. These methods and definitions often do not include all the needed information for CDFW to determine the extent of fish and wildlife resources affected by activities subject to Notification under Fish and Game Code section 1602. Therefore, CDFW does not recommend relying solely on methods developed specifically for delineating areas subject to other agencies' jurisdiction (such as United States Army Corps of Engineers) when mapping lakes, streams, wetlands, floodplains, riparian areas, etc. in preparation for submitting a Notification of an LSA.

CDFW relies on the lead agency environmental document analysis when acting as a responsible agency issuing an LSA Agreement. CDFW recommends lead agencies to coordinate with us as early as possible, since potential modification of the proposed Project may avoid or reduce impacts to fish and wildlife resources and expedite the Project approval process.

The following information will be required for the processing of an LSA Notification and CDFW recommends incorporating this information into any forthcoming CEQA document(s) to avoid subsequent documentation and Project delays:

1. Mapping and quantification of lakes, streams, and associated fish and wildlife habitat (e.g., riparian habitat, freshwater wetlands, etc.) that will be temporarily and/or permanently impacted by the Project, including impacts from access and staging areas. Please include an estimate of impact to each habitat type.

2. Discussion of specific avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to reduce Project impacts to fish and wildlife resources to a less-than-significant level. Please refer to section 15370 of the CEQA Guidelines.

Based on review of Project materials, aerial photography and observation of the site from public roadways, the Project site supports tributaries to lakes and streams within the Natomas Basin. CDFW recommends the EIR fully identify the Project's potential impacts to the stream and/or its associated vegetation and wetlands.

Regional Habitat Conservation Plans

CEQA Guidelines section 15125(d) states that EIRs must discuss any inconsistencies between projects and applicable plans (including habitat conservation plans/natural community conservation plans). If the Project contemplates the viability of offsite mitigation, the EIR should include a discussion of each Project alternative's consistency

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with any approved habitat conservation plan that overlaps with the Project's mitigation area or the Project itself. Such plans would include the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (NBHCP), Metro Air Park Habitat Conservation Plan (MAP HCP), Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan, South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan (SSHCP), and the Placer County Conservation Program.

Local Habitat Conservation Plans

The Project area is within the NBHCP and is in close proximity to the MAP HCP. Both the NBHCP and MAP HCP have been in implementation for more than 20 years, conserving to date more than 5,000 acres of land in the Natomas Basin. These conserved lands provide tremendous benefit to wildlife in Sacramento and Sutter Counties, and the larger surrounding region. Additional development is authorized under both plans, conditioned on in-perpetuity conservation obligations, such as land acquisition and commitments to agriculture, not yet completed within the Natomas Basin. Therefore, a robust analysis of whether, in what way, and to what extent the Project may affect future implementation and the continued viability of the NBHCP and MAP HCP in the Natomas Basin is essential to Sacramento County's informed review of the Project.

CDFW appreciates the Project proponent and Sacramento County's previous commitment to prepare a related effects analysis as part of Sacramento County's review of the Project. The analysis will provide critical information essential to a meaningful understanding of the Project's regional setting. That, in turn, will also help ensure the EIR's environmental analysis is robust and includes all the potentially significant effects on fish and wildlife that may be caused by the Project.

Section 15125 of the CEQA guidelines states that special emphasis should be placed on environmental resources that are rare or unique to that region and would be affected by the project, while also discussing any inconsistencies between the proposed project and applicable general plans, specific plans and regional plans. To identify any potential inconsistencies with the Natomas Basin plans and provide special emphasis on rare or unique resources in compliance with CEQA, CDFW recommends that the EIR address, specific to the effects analysis, the following:

- Persistence of NBHCP and MAP HCP Covered Species in the Natomas Basin;
- Impacts to established reserve land managed by the Natomas Basin Conservancy (TNBC);
- Reduction of available reserve land in the Natomas Basin under the NBHCP and MAP HCP (with appropriate buffers and setbacks as detailed in the NBHCP);
- Reduction of available agricultural land in the Natomas Basin that serves as buffers for habitat reserves and supporting ecological functions of the Covered Species that rely on agricultural resources (Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, Page IV-11 through Page IV-13);

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- Reduction of ability for TNBC to establish or enhance Covered Species range and habitats in the southern Natomas Basin;

- Continued viability of the land uses in the Natomas Basin as detailed in the NBHCP and MAP HCP;

- Financial impacts to TNBC and feepayers under the NBHCP and MAP HCP; and

- Cumulative impacts of the Project, in combination with other proposed and approved development in the Natomas Basin that is outside of the permitted development area of the NBHCP (e.g., levee improvements by the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, the Greenbriar project, the Airport South Industrial Project, GrandPark Southwest Specific Plan, and the Upper Westside Specific Plan).

Although not a Permittee, Sacramento County is the CEQA Lead Agency for projects carried out in the MAP HCP and as such, the County has vested interest in the success of the MAP HCP. The two plans are linked, such that MAP HCP cannot be implemented without the structure of the NBHCP. The MAP HCP and the related ITP authorization under CESA serve as a regulatory platform for development of 1,892 acres of mixed use and industrial uses directly adjacent to the Sacramento International Airport, with over 1,000 acres still to be built out under the MAP HCP, providing significant economic benefit to the County. The Project's potential effect on the continued success of the MAP HCP should be an important consideration for the County as it considers the proposed developments, and the MAP HCP's reliance on structure provided by the NBHCP.

Joint Vision

The 2002 Joint Vision Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlines a shared vision by Sacramento County and City of Sacramento (the City) for land use and revenue by the two agencies in the Natomas Basin. The MOU, importantly, recognizes the City as the agent of development in the Sacramento portion of the basin and the County as the agent of permanent open space, habitat, and farmland/ranchland preservation. The MOU, in this respect, defines a set of guiding principles for the County and City to jointly implement a number of goals, including proactively guiding future urban growth for more efficient land use, while securing permanent preservation of open space at a mitigation ratio of at least one-to-one. The Joint Vision MOU, also acknowledges and has served to bolster the coordinated effort by the NBHCP and MAP HCP permittees, and TNBC to minimize the effects of other projects on fish and wildlife resources in the basin. Sacramento County and the City's Joint Vision MOU has been a cornerstone for land use planning in the Natomas Basin for nearly two decades.

The 2002 Joint Vision MOU also informed CDFW's issuance of the related CESA ITPs to the City, Sutter County, and TNBC in July 2003. Sacramento County and City's Joint Vision has been a key benchmark for CDFW as it monitors the nearly two-decade implementation of the NBHCP and the MAP HCP by the permittees. This Project is

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departure by Sacramento County from the principles detailed in its shared vision with the City.

Swainson's Hawk

The Natomas Basin is known for its importance to Swainson's hawk within the Sacramento Valley (NBHCP 2003). Over 100 documented nesting occurrences occur within 10 miles of the Project area (The Natomas Basin Conservancy 2023 Implementation Annual Report), making high value foraging habitat present in a majority of the Project area and contributing to the foraging ability for hundreds of Swainson's hawks. This highlights the Natomas Basin's unique contribution to providing valuable nesting and foraging habitat, both of which are essential for the species' life history. As such, a thorough evaluation in the EIR of the Project's impacts to both nesting and foraging habitat will be crucial, focusing on the value of the Natomas Basin for the species. The EIR should cite survey methodology, specifically a full set of protocol surveys using the *Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson's Hawk Nesting Surveys in California's Central Valley* (Swainson's Hawk Tech. Advis. Comm., 5/2000), empirical data, and discuss how proposed avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for the Project are informed by that information. Having this information in the EIR facilitates more efficient and detailed review and feedback from CDFW.

Due to the density of known nest sites, CDFW recommends the EIR analyze the individual nesting and foraging behavior patterns associated with each known nesting pair and propose avoidance, minimization and mitigation that specifically addresses those patterns, rather than simply acknowledging presence. CDFW also recommends the EIR analyze the Project's regional impacts to the species, both to the overall persistence of Swainson's hawk within the Natomas Basin and indirect impacts to individual Swainson's hawk that may depend on the Project area's foraging habitat. Data from such studies can more effectively inform a mitigation strategy that complies with CESA.

Giant Garter Snake

The giant garter snake is listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act and California Endangered Species Act. The Natomas Basin is known for its importance to giant garter snake within the Sacramento Valley (NBHCP 2003). The giant garter snake habitat present within the Project area contributes to breeding and dispersal ability within the Natomas Basin. The unique contribution of the Natomas Basin provides valuable upland and aquatic habitat, both of which are essential for the species' life history. As such, a thorough evaluation in the EIR of the Project's impacts to both upland and aquatic habitat as independent factors will be crucial, considering the value of the Natomas Basin for the species. The EIR should cite survey methodology, a habitat assessment and full consideration of the NBHCP measures, empirical data, and discuss how proposed avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for the Project are informed.

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Due to the density of nearby giant garter snake populations and associated marsh complexes, CDFW recommends the EIR analyze behavior patterns associated with the species and propose avoidance, minimization and mitigation that specifically addresses those patterns, rather than simply acknowledging presence. CDFW also recommends the EIR analyze the Project's regional impacts to the species, both to the overall persistence of giant garter snakes within the Natomas Basin and indirect impacts to individual giant garter snakes that may depend on the Project area's aquatic and terrestrial habitats. Data from such studies can more effectively inform a mitigation strategy that complies with CESA.

Other Covered Species

The Natomas Basin has significant biological resources, including habitat and documented occurrences for 22 Covered Species under the NBHCP and other sensitive species. While CDFW recognizes the need for focus on Swainson's hawk and giant garter snake, further detail on the other Covered Species is needed so that all impacts to fish, wildlife, and plant resources can be adequately assessed. Specific focus on the resources likely to be most impacted, including the 22 Covered Species, and robust analysis of these species can strengthen the Project's mitigation strategy.

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 Project surveys to CNDDB. The CNNDB field survey form can be found at the following link: https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Submitting-Data. The completed form can be submitted online or mailed electronically to CNDDB at the following email address: CNDDB@wildlife.ca.gov.

FILING FEES

The Project, as proposed, would have an effect on fish and wildlife, and assessment of filing fees is necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the County 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, § 753.5; Fish & G. Code § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089.)

CONCLUSION

Pursuant to Public Resources Code sections 21092 and 21092.2, CDFW requests written notification of proposed actions and pending decisions regarding the Project. Written notifications shall be directed to: California Department of Fish and Wildlife North Central Region, 1701 Nimbus Road, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670 or emailed to R2CEQA@wildlife.ca.gov.

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CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Preparation of the EIR for the GrandPark Trails Specific Plan and recommends that the County addresses CDFW's comments and concerns in the forthcoming EIR. CDFW personnel are available for consultation regarding biological resources and strategies to minimize impacts.

If you have any questions regarding the comments provided in this letter, or wish to schedule a meeting and/or site visit, please contact Harvey Tran, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist) at (916) 358-4035 or harvey.tran@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Tanya Sheya
1ABC45303752499...

Tanya Sheya
Environmental Program Manager

ec: Dylan Wood, Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory)
Harvey Tran, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist)
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, State Clearinghouse, Sacramento

REFERENCES

Sawyer, J. O., T. Keeler-Wolf, and J. M. Evens. 2009. A Manual of California Vegetation, 2nd ed. California Native Plant Society Press, Sacramento, California. http://vegetation.cnps.org/

2023 Biological Effectiveness Monitoring Report for the Natomas Basin HCP Area, Available at: https://natomasbasin.org/reports/monitoring-reports/

California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2025. California Natural Diversity Database