State of California – Natural Resources Agency
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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
MEGHAN HERTEL, Director

October 28, 2026
Sent via e-mail

Elena Barragan, Senior Planner
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Subject: San Bernardino County's Re-Circulated Mitigated Negative Declaration, Hume SoCal Campground Expansion Project, SCH# 20251104453

Dear Elena Barragan:

On January 7, 2026, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) submitted comments on the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the Hume SoCal Campground Expansion Project (SCH# 2025110453; Project). CDFW submitted the comments in its capacity as Trustee and Responsible Agency (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069 & 21070; Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802). On September 30, 2026, San Bernardino County (County) published a Notice of Completion for the re-circulated MND along with responses to CDFW's original comments.

To support the County in its environmental review efforts for this Project, CDFW provides the following additional guidance related to the comments provided in the re-circulated MND.

Adequacy of Biological Assessment

In CDFW's comment letter from January 7th, 2026, CDFW raised concerns that the environmental baseline had not been sufficiently established and that the scope and timing of the biological assessment may not be sufficient for the County to determine the extent and significance of Project-related impacts (referred to as "Comment R2-2"). The applicant's response to "Comment R2-2" states that "CEQA does not require surveys to the degree mentioned for all special-status species for which there is no substantial evidence of likely occurrence. The IS/MND identifies potential species and incorporates mitigation measures that require pre-construction surveys and avoidance, ensuring impacts would be reduced to less than significant."

Once the biological assessment determined probability of occurrence, focused or protocol-level surveys should be performed for the detection of special-status species with the potential to occur on the Project site and in the surrounding area and to determine the level of occupancy and potential significance of impacts resulting from the Project. The 2023 field assessments are not adequate in scope and timing to establish the potential for direct and indirect impacts to special-status species resulting from the Hume SoCal Campground Expansion Project. Without the findings of focused surveys, CDFW is concerned that the County has not adequately identified potentially significant impacts.

Compliance with CEQA is predicated on a complete and accurate description of the environmental setting that may be affected by the proposed Project. CDFW is concerned that the assessment of the existing environmental setting with respect to biological resources has not been adequately analyzed in the MND. CDFW is concerned that without a complete and accurate description of the existing environmental setting, the MND likely provides an incomplete or inaccurate analysis of Project-related environmental impacts and whether those impacts have been mitigated to a level that is less than significant.

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, that special emphasis should be placed on environmental resources that are rare or unique to the region, and that significant environmental impacts of the proposed Project should be adequately investigated and discussed. CDFW is concerned that a preconstruction survey is not

adequate in timing or scope to detect special-status wildlife or reduce impacts to biological resources to less than significant. The revised Mitigation Measure BIO- [1] in the re-circulated MND does not provide sufficient evidence that it would reduce impacts to biological resources to less than significant. CDFW is concerned that the County has not adequately analyzed the significance of the Project's potential impacts on wildlife, including special-status species.

Potential Impacts to California Spotted Owl

In CDFW's comment letter from January 7th, 2026, CDFW raised concerns that potential impacts to California spotted owl have not been sufficiently identified and because of that, cannot determine that impacts are reduced to a level less than significant (referred to as "Comment R2-6"). Comment R2-6 stated that the IS/MND acknowledges that there is high potential for California spotted owl to occur throughout the Project site, but provides no specific mitigation measures to ensure that impacts to California spotted owl are less than significant.

The applicant's response to Comment R2-6 suggests that MM BIO – [1], a pre-construction clearance survey, would be sufficient to ensure impacts to California spotted owl are less than significant.

A general pre-construction clearance survey would not be sufficient in scope or timing to adequately assess the potential for California spotted owl to occur throughout the Project site. Protocol-level, focused surveys during the appropriate time(s) of year would be required for this species to adequately assess the potential for California spotted owl to occur. Additionally, potential impacts to California spotted owl extend beyond the presence or absence of an individual during construction. The greatest threats to California spotted owl include the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of habitat (Forsman, 1976). The destruction of high-quality habitat for this species should be appropriately analyzed and assessed in the MND.

Consistent with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15380, California spotted owl is a California Species of Special Concern, and the Coastal-Southern California Distinct Population Segment is proposed for listing as an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act. Impacts to this species must be analyzed during preparation of environmental documents relating to CEQA because they meet the definition of rare or endangered under CEQA Guidelines §15125 (c) and/or §15380. Additionally, the loss and degradation of California spotted owl habitat could require a mandatory finding of significance by the County (CEQA Guidelines, § 15065).

The changes to Mitigation Measure BIO- [1] in the County's response letter do not reduce impacts to California spotted owl to less than significant. Because of the potential for impacts to California spotted owl to occur as a result of Project activities, CDFW continues to recommend inclusion of Mitigation Measure BIO-[E], as follows, in the MND, to ensure that impacts to this species are avoided or reduced to less than significant:

MM BIO – [E]: California Spotted Owl

Prior to Project activities, a qualified biologist shall complete necessary surveys, impact assessments, and associated reports following the protocols provided within the *Protocol for Surveying Proposed Management Activities That May Impact Northern Spotted Owls* (USFWS, 2012). The Project shall not conduct any Project activities during the California spotted owl nesting season (February 1 to August 15) if owls could be present. California spotted owl nesting and/or roosting habitat is identified within 0.25 miles of Project site activities. Therefore, the Project shall develop a plan to completely avoid impacts to the species and submit it to CDFW for review and approval prior to commencing Project activities. Prior to Project activities, the qualified biologist shall evaluate the Project site and surrounding area for any known California spotted owl Activity Centers using CDFWs Spotted Owl Database (https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Spotted-Owl-Info). No Project

activities shall occur within 0.25 miles from known California spotted owl Activity Center(s). These buffers should be maintained during the breeding season and until surveys that support probable absence, non-nesting, nest failure, or fledgling flight can be conducted. To compensate for the degradation and/or loss of California spotted owl habitat, the Project shall, no less than 3 months prior to the initiation of Project activities, acquire, permanently protect (through recordation of a conservation easement), and perpetually manage (through a long-term management plan and non-wasting endowment), suitable replacement habitat within the San Bernardino Mountains at no less than a 3:1 (mitigation-to-impact) ratio.

Potential Impacts to Southern Rubber Boa

In CDFW's comment letter from January 7th, 2026, CDFW raised concerns that potential impacts to southern rubber boa have not been sufficiently identified and because of that, cannot determine that impacts are reduced to a level less than significant (referred to as "Comment R2-7"). Comment R2-7 stated that the IS/MND acknowledges that there is moderate potential for southern rubber boa to occur throughout the Project site but provides no specific mitigation measures to ensure impacts to southern rubber boa are less than significant.

The applicant's response to Comment R2-7 suggests that MM BIO – [1], a pre-construction clearance survey, would be sufficient to ensure impacts to southern rubber boa are less than significant. The response also states that the Project will have "impacts to non-disturbed land which provides suitable habitat for southern rubber boa" but provides no further explanation as to how impacts to this species through habitat loss and degradation will be reduced to less than significant.

A general pre-construction clearance survey would not be sufficient in scope or timing to adequately assess the potential for southern rubber boa to occur throughout the Project site. Detecting southern rubber boa requires protocol-level surveys, as general biological assessments are insufficient to detect all southern rubber boa that are present within the Project footprint. Southern rubber boa are in the duff layer and underground for the majority of the year, and are very rarely found on the surface of the ground, and therefore are not reliably detectable by a general pre-construction survey.

The greatest threats to southern rubber boa include development, increased recreational use in their habitat, timber harvesting practices, and habitat degradation. This species is endemic to the San Bernardino Mountains and San Jacinto Mountains of Southern California. Being limited to a small geographic area makes them vulnerable to potential impacts and particularly susceptible to localized extinction (Grismer, et al. 2022). The forest between Crestline and the Snow Valley Ski Resort has long been considered the best southern rubber boa habitat in the San Bernardino Mountains (Stewart, 1991). The IS/MND does not address the loss and degradation of southern rubber boa habitat overtime as a Cumulative Impact.

Southern rubber boa is a threatened species pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2050 et seq.). Impacts to this species must be analyzed during preparation of environmental documents relating to CEQA because they meet the definition of rare or endangered under CEQA Guidelines §15125 (c) and/or §15380. The mortality of southern rubber boas and loss and degradation of their habitat could require a mandatory finding of significance by the County (CEQA Guidelines, § 15065).

The changes to Mitigation Measure BIO- [1] in the County's response letter do not reduce impacts to southern rubber boa to less than significant. Because of the potential for impacts to southern rubber boa to occur as a result of Project activities, CDFW continues to recommend inclusion of Mitigation Measure BIO-[F], as follows, in the MND, to ensure that impacts to this species are avoided or reduced to less than significant:

MM BIO-[F]: Southern Rubber Boa

Suitable habitat for Southern Rubber boa occurs throughout the Project site. As a result, Permittee shall ensure that impacts to southern rubber boa(s) are fully avoided through the implementation of CDFW-approved surveys and a protection plan that includes ongoing monitoring and establishment of avoidance measures. Because southern rubber boa are difficult to detect and the Project cannot ensure complete avoidance, the Project shall obtain CESA authorization prior to initiation of Project activities. Appropriate authorization from CDFW may include an Incidental Take Permit (ITP), a consistency determination, or other permitting options (Fish and G. Code, §§ 2080.1, 2081, subds. (b), (c)). CDFW encourages early consultation, as significant modification to the proposed Project and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures may be necessary to obtain a CESA ITP. To compensate for the degradation and/or loss of southern rubber boa habitat, the Project shall, no less than 3 months prior to the initiation of Project activities, acquire, permanently protect (through recordation of a conservation easement), and perpetually manage (through a long-term management plan and non-wasting endowment), suitable replacement habitat within the San Bernardino Mountains at *no less* than a 3:1 (mitigation-to-impact) ratio, to be determined by CDFW to ensure impacts to southern rubber boa are fully mitigated, pursuant to CESA.

CONCLUSION

Compliance with CEQA is predicated on a complete and accurate description of the environmental setting that may be affected by the proposed Project. CDFW is concerned that without a complete and accurate description of the existing environmental setting, the MND may provide an incomplete analysis of Project-related environmental impacts. CEQA requires that an MND include mitigation measures to avoid or reduce significant impacts. CDFW is concerned that the mitigation measures proposed in the MND and the County's response letter received on September 30, 2026, are not adequate to avoid or reduce impacts to biological resources to below a level of significance.

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide additional guidance on the Hume SoCal Campground Expansion Project to assist San Bernardino County in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources to reduce impacts to below a level of significance. CDFW requests that the County address CDFW's concerns prior to adoption of the MND.

Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Julia Charpek, Environmental Scientist, at 909.354.0937 or Julia.Charpek@wildlife.ca.gov .

Sincerely,

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REFERENCES

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