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State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
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January 08, 2026

Derek Chambers, Contract Planner
City of Farmersville
909 West Visalia Road
Farmersville, California 93223
(559) 802-3052
derekc@4-creeks.com

Subject: Plum Blossom Residential Development Project (Project)
Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND)
State Clearinghouse No.: 2025120494

Dear Derek Chambers:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received an MND from the City of Farmersville (City) for the above referenced Project pursuant 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 Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project 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 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

[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.

Docusign Envelope ID: 8D8476E2-F551-43DA-B091-19208C61DEAC

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.

Nesting Birds: CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with the potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their eggs, or 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, R, or T, as specified in the CEQA Guidelines section 15380, CDFW recommends it be fully considered in the environmental analysis for the Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: Steven Macias, Plum Blossom JV

Objective: The Project proposes to subdivide and develop approximately 39.6 acres of land into a residential development with 187 single-family residential lots and includes a park and ponding basin.

Location: The Project site is located in Tulare County on the south side of the Southern Pacific Railroad between the Tulare Irrigation District Canal to the west and Virginia Avenue to the east. The Project site is located within Assessor Parcel Number (APN) 128-080-002.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist the City in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project'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 MND prepared for this Project.

The MND notes the Project site is comprised of agricultural row crops. Aerial imagery shows the Southern Pacific Railroad on the northern boundary of the Project site, a ponding basin and residential community on the eastern boundary, agricultural

Docusign Envelope ID: 8D8476E2-F551-43DA-B091-19208C61DEAC

cultivation along the southern border, and the Tulare Irrigation District Canal along the western border.

Currently, the MND acknowledges that the Project site is within the geographic range of several special-status animal species but determined suitable habitat to be absent from the Project site. As such, the MND notes impacts are anticipated to be less than significant and one biological resource mitigation measure is provided for nesting birds. CDFW does not concur that habitat is absent for special-status species and is concerned that the nesting bird mitigation measures is insufficient to reduce impacts to less than significant and avoid unauthorized take for special-status animal species, including but not limited: the State threatened Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) and the State candidate western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*).

Swainson's Hawk

The Project site is within the known geographic range of Swainson's hawk (SWHA). SWHA are known to breed within the Central Valley of California and prefer to nest and forage in alfalfa, fallow fields, field crops, and grassland habitats with a sufficient source of small mammals (CDFG 1994). Based on aerial imagery, the Project site and surrounding lands contain suitable habitat for SWHA foraging. In addition, there are trees located within the vicinity of the Project area that may provide suitable nesting habitat. Therefore, CDFW recommends the MND include the following measures:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: SWHA Surveys Prior to Construction
CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for nesting SWHA following the entire survey methodology developed by the SWHA Technical Advisory Committee (SWHA TAC 2000) the survey season immediately prior to construction.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: SWHA Avoidance Buffer
If Project-specific activities will take place during the SWHA nesting season (i.e., March 1 through September 15), and active SWHA nests are present, CDFW recommends a minimum ½-mile no-disturbance buffer be delineated and maintained around each nest, regardless of whether it was detected by surveys or observed incidentally. These buffers would 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 parental care for survival, to prevent nest abandonment and other take of SWHA as a result of Project activities.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: SWHA Take Authorization
CDFW also recommends that in the event an active SWHA nest is detected, and a ½-mile no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an Incidental Take Permit (ITP), pursuant to

Docusign Envelope ID: 8D8476E2-F551-43DA-B091-19208C61DEAC

Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Western Burrowing Owl

The Project site is within the known geographic range of western burrowing owl (BUOW). BUOW are known to utilize agricultural areas and have been documented breeding and foraging along canal banks and roadways within agricultural settings. Aerial imagery shows potential habitat along the Tulare Irrigation District Canal on the western boundary of the Project site. As suitable habitat appears to be present within the Project site, CDFW recommends the MND include the following measures:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: BUOW Pre-construction Surveys
CDFW recommends that focused surveys, following the 2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (2012 Staff Report) (CDFG 2012), be conducted the survey season immediately prior to construction. Please note that the 2012 Staff Report necessitates multiple surveys prior to the initiation of construction.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 5: BUOW Avoidance Buffer
Should a BUOW or known BUOW den (active or inactive) be detected, either during pre-construction surveys or construction activities, CDFW recommends that no-disturbance buffers, as outlined in the 2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFG 2012), be implemented prior to and during any ground-disturbing activities. CDFW also recommends that these buffers be implemented for both wintering and breeding BUOW.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 6: BUOW Take Authorization
If a BUOW or known BUOW den (active or inactive) is detected, and the no-disturbance buffers outlined in the 2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Mitigation are not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Editorial Comments and/or Suggestions

Nesting Birds: To protect nesting birds, CDFW recommends that Project ground-disturbing and vegetation-disturbing activities occur during the bird non-nesting season; however, if ground-disturbing or vegetation-disturbing activities must occur during the nesting season (February 1 through September 15), the Project applicant 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.

Docusign Envelope ID: 8D8476E2-F551-43DA-B091-19208C61DEAC

If the nesting season cannot be avoided, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct a pre-construction survey 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 the Project site to identify nests and determine their status. A sufficient area means any area potentially affected, either directly or indirectly, by the Project. In addition to direct impacts (i.e., nest destruction), noise, vibration, and movement of workers or equipment could also affect nests. CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist establish a behavioral baseline of all identified nests. Once Project activities begin, CDFW recommends having a qualified biologist continuously monitor nests to detect behavioral changes resulting from the 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 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 site 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.

CNDDB Positive Submission of Data: Please note that the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) is populated by and records voluntary submissions of species detections. As a result, species may be present in locations not depicted in the CNDDB but where there is suitable habitat and features capable of supporting species. A lack of an occurrence record in the CNDDB does not mean a species is not present. In order to adequately assess any potential Project-related impacts to biological resources, surveys conducted by a qualified wildlife biologist/botanist during the appropriate survey period(s) and using the appropriate protocol survey methodology are warranted 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 Project surveys to CNDDB. The CNDDB field survey form can be filled out and submitted online at the following link:

Docusign Envelope ID: 8D8476E2-F551-43DA-B091-19208C61DEAC

https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Submitting-Data. The completed form can be mailed electronically to the CNDDB at the following email address: CNDDB@wildlife.ca.gov. The types of information reported to CNDDB can be found at the following link: https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Plants-and-Animals.

FILING FEES

The Project, as proposed, could 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 MND to assist the City in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources. A Mitigation and Monitoring Program (MMRP) (Attachment 1) is included to assist the City with incorporating the recommended mitigation measures provided above. Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to John Riedel, Environmental Scientist, at (559) 807-1453 or John.Riedel@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Julie Vance
FA83F09FE08945A...
Julie A. Vance
Regional Manager

Attachment- MMRP Table

ec: State Clearinghouse
Land Use and Climate Innovation
state.clearinghouse@lci.ca.gov

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References

California Department of Fish and Game. 1994. Staff report regarding mitigation for impacts to Swainson's hawks (*Buteo Swainsoni*) in the Central Valley of California. Sacramento, California, USA.

California Department of Fish and Game. 2012. Staff report on burrowing owl mitigation. Sacramento, California, USA.

Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee. 2000. Recommended timing and methodology for Swainson's hawk nesting surveys in California's Central Valley. Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee.

Docusign Envelope ID: 8D8476E2-F551-43DA-B091-19208C61DEAC

Attachment 1

Docusign Envelope ID: 8D8476E2-F551-43DA-B091-19208C61DEAC

Attachment 1

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

PROJECT: Plum Blossom Residential Development Project

SCH No.: 2025120494

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE	STATUS/DATE/INITIALS
Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation	
Swainson's Hawk (SWHA)	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: SWHA surveys prior to construction	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: SWHA take authorization	
Western Burrowing Owl (BUOW)	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: BUOW surveys prior to construction	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 6: BUOW take authorization	
During Construction	
Swainson's Hawk (SWHA)	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: SWHA avoidance buffer	
Western Burrowing Owl (BUOW)	
Recommended Mitigation Measure 5: BUOW avoidance buffer	