



State of California – Natural Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
Inland Deserts Region  
3602 Inland Empire Boulevard, Suite C-220  
Ontario, CA 91764  
[www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov)

**GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor**  
**VALERIE TERMINI, Acting Director**



February 6, 2026  
*Sent via email*

Adrian Moreno  
Associate Planner  
City of Coachella  
53990 Enterprise Way  
Coachella, CA 92236  
[amoreno@coachella.org](mailto:amoreno@coachella.org)

Coachella Vault Project (PROJECT)  
Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)  
SCH# 2026010502

Dear Adrian Moreno:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a Notice of Intent to Adopt an MND from the City of Coachella (City) for the Project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

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, we appreciate 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.

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<sup>1</sup>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.

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, 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**

**Proponent:** Myers Concrete Corp.

**Objective:** The Project proposes the development of a storage facility and office/clubhouse on an 11-acre property. The office/clubhouse will be two stories and 3,970 square feet. The buildout of the proposed Project is anticipated to generate increased levels of light and glare from interior and exterior building lighting, safety and security lighting, landscape and signage lighting, and vehicles accessing the site. Project landscaping will include a mix of various trees, shrubs, and ground coverings to provide shade for pedestrians.

**Location:** The Project site is located in the City of Coachella, County of Riverside, California. The site is located east of Harrison Street and approximately 1,300 feet south of Avenue 48. The site is located within Accessor's Parcel Number 603-290-005.

**Timeframe:** The MND does not indicate a timeframe for construction.

## **COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

CDFW has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (i.e., biological resources). 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 and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. The MND has not adequately identified and disclosed the Project's impacts (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative) on biological resources and whether those impacts are reduced to less than significant.

CDFW's comments and recommendations on the MND are explained in greater detail below and summarized here. CDFW is concerned that the MND does not adequately identify or mitigate the Project's significant, or potentially significant, impacts to biological resources. CDFW requests that additional information and analyses be added to a revised MND, along with avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures that avoid or reduce impacts to less than significant.

### Existing Environmental Setting

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 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 may provide an incomplete analysis of Project-related environmental impacts.

The MND lacks a complete assessment of biological resources including nesting birds, burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), and desert kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis arsipus*) within the Project site and surrounding area. A complete and accurate assessment of the environmental setting and Project-related impacts to biological resources is needed to both identify appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures and demonstrate that these measures reduce Project impacts to less than significant.

### Mitigation Measures

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 are not adequate to avoid or reduce impacts to biological resources to below a level of significance. To support the City in ensuring that Project impacts to biological resources are reduced to less than significant, CDFW recommends adding mitigation measures for nesting birds, American badger, desert kit fox, the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP), and artificial nighttime lighting, as well as revising the mitigation measure for burrowing owl.

#### **1) Nesting Birds**

It is the Project proponent's responsibility to comply with all applicable laws related to nesting birds and birds of prey. Fish and Game Code sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 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 Fish and Game Code or any regulation made pursuant thereto. Fish and Game Code section 3503.5 makes 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 Fish and Game Code or any regulation adopted pursuant thereto. Fish and Game Code section 3513 makes it unlawful to take or possess any migratory nongame bird except as provided by rules and regulations adopted by the Secretary of the Interior under provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 703 et seq.).

With regard to the CVMSHCP, per its associated Implementing Agreement and Permits from CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Wildlife Agencies), Take associated with Covered Activities will not be in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and will be consistent with Fish and Game Code sections 3503 and 3503.5; therefore, all Covered Activities within and outside Conservation Areas must undertake measures to avoid the take of individuals, nests, and eggs of nesting birds. The CVMSHCP includes a general conservation measure that applies to all bird species to avoid impacts to habitat for nesting birds during the nesting season (CVMSHCP Section 9.7). Per IA Section 13.2, the City of Coachella (the CVMSHCP Permittee that would be conferring Authorized Take to this Project) is obligated to ensure the projects to which it confers Take Authorization under the CVMSHCP comply with all terms and requirements of the CVMSHCP, the Wildlife Agencies' Permits that create the CVMSHCP, and the Implementing Agreement, including compliance with laws that protect nesting birds.

The MND lacks both a discussion of the potential for birds to nest within and surrounding the Project site and a mitigation measure for nesting birds. The MND describes the history of the Project site and how it has been cleared of vegetation several times in recent history. Based on review of historical aerial imagery using Google Earth, CDFW notes that vegetation, including shrubs that are suitable to support nesting birds, have re-occupied the Project site following past grading and vegetation removal activities. CDFW considers the Project site to contain suitable habitat for birds that nest on the ground and in shrubs and trees within and surrounding the Project site.

Without an analysis of the potential for nesting birds to occupy the Project site and appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures, CDFW considers the MND to be inadequate in avoiding or reducing impacts to nesting birds to a level less than significant. CDFW recommends to the greatest extent feasible that initial ground disturbing and vegetation removal activities are conducted outside of the peak nesting bird season to align with the CVMSHCP's general conservation measure for nesting birds (see further above). CDFW also recommends the completion of nesting bird surveys *regardless* of the time of year to ensure that impacts to nesting birds and their nests and eggs are avoided. The timing of the nesting season varies greatly depending on several factors, such as bird species, weather conditions in any given year, and long-term climate changes (e.g., drought, warming, etc.). In response to warming, birds have been reported to breed earlier, thereby reducing temperatures that nests are exposed to during breeding and tracking shifts in availability of resources (Socolar et al., 2017<sup>2</sup>). CDFW staff have observed that climate change conditions may result in the nesting bird

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<sup>2</sup> Socolar JB, Epanchin PN, Beissinger SR and Tingley MW (2017). Phenological shifts conserve thermal niches. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 114(49): 12976-12981.

season occurring earlier and later in the year than historical nesting season dates. CDFW recommends that disturbance of occupied nests of migratory birds and raptors within the Project site and surrounding area be avoided any time birds are nesting on-site. CDFW therefore recommends the completion of nesting bird surveys *regardless of the time of year* to ensure compliance with all applicable laws pertaining to nesting and migratory birds.

To support the City in avoiding or reducing impacts to nesting birds to a level less than significant, CDFW recommends the following mitigation measure is added to a revised MND:

### **Mitigation Measure BIO-[A]: Nesting Birds**

**To the greatest extent feasible, the Project will avoid construction and any ground-disturbing activities during the peak nesting season (January 15 through September 15). Regardless of the time of year, nesting bird surveys shall be performed by a qualified avian biologist no more than 3 days prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. Preconstruction surveys shall focus on both direct and indirect evidence of nesting, including nest locations and nesting behavior. The qualified avian biologist will make every effort to avoid potential nest predation as a result of survey and monitoring efforts. If active nests are found during the preconstruction nesting bird surveys, a qualified biologist shall establish an appropriate nest buffer to be marked on the ground. Nest buffers are species specific and shall be at least 300 feet for passerines and 500 feet for raptors. A smaller or larger buffer may be determined by the qualified biologist familiar with the nesting phenology of the nesting species and based on nest and buffer monitoring results. Construction activities may not occur inside the established buffers, which shall remain on-site until a qualified biologist determines the young have fledged or the nest is no longer active. Active nests and adequacy of the established buffer distance shall be monitored daily by the qualified biologist until the qualified biologist has determined the young have fledged or the Project has been completed. The qualified biologist has the authority to stop work if nesting pairs exhibit signs of disturbance.**

Pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines, section 15097(f), CDFW has prepared a draft mitigation monitoring and reporting program (MMRP) in Attachment 1 for revised MM BIO-1, as well as CDFW-recommended MM BIO-[A] through MM BIO-[E].

### **2) *Burrowing Owl***

On October 10, 2024, the Fish and Game Commission determined that western burrowing owl warrants protection as a candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.). During the candidacy period, western burrowing owl will be afforded the same protection as threatened and endangered species under CESA. If Project activities, including relocation, could result

in take, appropriate CESA authorization (i.e., Incidental Take Permit under Fish and Game Code section 2081) should be obtained prior to commencement of Project activities.

Take of individual burrowing owls and their nests or eggs is defined by Fish and Game Code section 86, and prohibited by sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513. Take is defined in Fish and Game Code section 86 as “hunt, pursue, catch, capture or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture or kill.” Fish and Game Code sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 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 Fish and Game Code or any regulation made pursuant thereto. Fish and Game Code section 3503.5 makes 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 Fish and Game Code or any regulation adopted pursuant thereto. Fish and Game Code section 3513 makes it unlawful to take or possess any migratory nongame bird except as provided by rules and regulations adopted by the Secretary of the Interior under provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 703 et seq.).

With regard to the CVMSHCP, the CDFW Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) Permit #2835-2008-001-06 does not provide Take Authorization for burrowing owl individuals, nests, or eggs. To the contrary, section 3.5.6 of the NCCP Permit states burrowing owl “pairs or individuals will not be Taken” and reiterates that the “HCP/NCCP does not authorize Take of [burrowing owl] nests [or] eggs[.]” Therefore, throughout the CVMSHCP area—both within and without Conservation Areas—Permittees must ensure that activities occurring within their jurisdictions do not result in the take, possession, or destruction of burrowing owl individuals, nests, or eggs. Any activity occurring within the CVMSHCP area that results in the take of burrowing owl individuals, nests, or eggs would be unlawful and would not be a Covered Activity under the CVMSHCP. Per Implementing Agreement Section 13.2, the City is obligated to ensure the projects to which it confers Take Authorization under the CVMSHCP comply with all terms and requirements of the CVMSHCP, the Wildlife Agencies’ Permits that created the CVMSHCP, and the Implementing Agreement, including compliance with laws that protect burrowing owls.

Page 38 of the MND states that “no burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia*) were observed during the surveys, and no sign of the presence of burrowing owls were observed. However, the project site has a history of burrowing owl sightings and contains prime foraging habitat for the species. Additionally, several large holes were observed on the project site.” Given the presence of suitable burrows and sparse cover of vegetation within the Project site and surrounding area, CDFW considers the Project site and surrounding area to contain suitable nesting and foraging habitat for burrowing owl. The Project site is adjacent to the Whitewater River where occurrences of burrowing owl have been reported less than 500 feet and less than 1000 feet from the Project site

(California Natural Diversity Database, Unprocessed Data). There is potential for Project site conditions for burrowing owl to change relatively quickly. For example, new suitable burrows for burrowing owls may be dug by ground squirrels and/or other burrowing mammals, and those burrows may become occupied by burrowing owls. Burrowing owls also frequently move into disturbed areas prior to and during construction activities because they are adapted to highly modified habitats.<sup>3,4</sup>

Regarding the methodology of the biological surveys, page 37 of the MND indicates that “general and focused surveys were conducted from October 1st through October 20th, 2023,” and that the “animal surveys were conducted simultaneously with plant surveys.” To obtain a complete and accurate assessment of biological resources with respect to burrowing owl, CDFW recommends focused surveys specifically for burrowing owl and consistent with the timing and frequency of surveys described in Appendix D of the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation*,<sup>5</sup> which describes surveys during the breeding season and nonbreeding season. These focused surveys should not be combined with survey efforts for other species.

Because the MND lacks the findings of focused surveys for burrowing owl consistent with the guidelines in the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation*, the number and locations of suitable and occupied burrows within the Project site are unknown. As a result, CDFW is limited in its ability to provide biological expertise to support the City in reducing impacts to burrowing owl to a level less than significant. CDFW recommends that the MND is revised to include the results of focused surveys for burrowing owl within the entire Project site and surrounding area, including survey reports,<sup>6</sup> consistent with the guidelines outlined in Appendix D of the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* and to incorporate appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for burrowing owl. Focused surveys are needed to inform appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures and support the City and Project proponent in avoiding or reducing impacts to burrowing owl to a level less than significant. CDFW requests that if burrowing owls are detected during focused surveys,

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<sup>3</sup> Chipman, E. D., N. E. McIntyre, R. E. Strauss, M. C. Wallace, J. D. Ray, and C. W. Boal. 2008. Effects of human land use on western burrowing owl foraging and activity budgets. *Journal of Raptor Research* 42(2): 87-98.

<sup>4</sup> Coulombe, H. N. 1971. Behavior and population ecology of the Burrowing Owl, *Speotyto cunicularia*, in the Imperial Valley of California. *Condor* 73:162–176.

<sup>5</sup> California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). 2012. Staff report on burrowing owl mitigation. State of California, Natural Resources Agency. Available for download at: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=83843&inline>

<sup>6</sup> Survey reports should include details on survey methods and results, including, but not limited to, the names and qualifications of surveyor(s); a description of survey methods; a description of the conditions of the project site and recent photos; map(s) showing the locations of all suitable burrows, occupied burrows, burrowing owls, and burrowing owl sign; descriptions of burrowing owl behavior observed; California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) field survey forms, etc. For more information, see Appendix D, Survey Reports, of the CDFW 2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation.

survey results are submitted to the CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the City initiate consultation with CDFW and USFWS to identify a path forward regarding the protection of burrowing owls. Early coordination with CDFW and USFWS is important in identifying appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures and reducing the chance of Project delays.

The MND includes Mitigation Measure BIO-1 for burrowing owl. CDFW considers the measure to be inadequate in scope and timing to avoid or reduce impacts to burrowing owl to a level less than significant. To support the City in avoiding or reducing impacts to burrowing owl to a level less than significant, CDFW recommends that Mitigation Measure BIO-1 is revised with the following additions in **bold** and removals in ~~strikethrough~~:

### **Mitigation Measure BIO-1: Burrowing Owl Focused and Preconstruction Surveys**

**Suitable burrowing owl habitat has been confirmed on the site; therefore, focused burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted by a CDFW-approved qualified biologist prior to any Project activities, including vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. CDFW strongly recommends that focused surveys are conducted in accordance with the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (2012 or most recent version)<sup>7</sup>. If burrowing owls are detected during the focused surveys, the qualified biologist and Project proponent shall begin coordination with CDFW and USFWS immediately, and shall submit the results of focused surveys to CDFW and USFWS as soon results become available and before commencement of any Project activities, including any vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. CDFW recommends that the information included in the survey results be consistent with Appendix D of the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation*, including a detailed map showing locations of all burrowing owls, burrowing owl sign, potential burrows, and occupied burrows (occupied means at least one burrowing owl or its sign has been observed within the last three years; may be indicated by owl sign including feathers, pellets, prey remains, eggshell fragments, or excrement at or near a burrow entrance or perch site); a description of the behavior of burrowing owls during surveys; a description of survey methods; and other items listed in Appendix D of the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* under “Survey Reports.” Consultation with CDFW and USFWS must be completed prior to commencement of any Project activities, including vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. If impacts to occupied burrowing owl habitat or burrow(s) or burrowing owl individuals, nests, or eggs cannot be avoided, CESA authorization (i.e., Incidental Take Permit under Fish and Game**

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<sup>7</sup> California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2012. Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. State of California, Natural Resources Agency. Available for download at: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=83843>.

**Code section 2081(b)) should be obtained from CDFW prior to commencement of Project activities, including vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities.**

**Preconstruction burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted no less than 14 days prior to the start of Project-related activities and again within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance, in accordance with the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (2012 or most recent version). Preconstruction surveys should be repeated when there is a pause in construction of more than 30 days. Preconstruction surveys shall be performed by a CDFW-approved qualified biologist following the recommendations and guidelines provided in the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation*. If the preconstruction surveys confirm occupied burrowing owl habitat, Project activities shall be immediately halted and the qualified biologist shall coordinate with CDFW and USFWS. Project activities shall not recommence until consultation with CDFW and USFWS is completed.**

~~Per the 2012, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (CDFW Staff Report), a burrowing owl clearance survey shall be performed by a certified avian biologist 30 days prior to any site disturbance (grubbing, grading, and construction). The pre-construction survey is required to use the accepted protocol of the CDFW Staff Report. The survey shall contain the project site and a 550-yard radius of the site. If no active burrows are found in the survey area, site disturbance may commence providing a biological monitor is onsite.~~

~~Another pre-construction survey shall be conducted 24 hours before ground disturbance. If owls are observed during this survey, a biological monitor, with the authority to halt or redirect grading, should be present whenever grading or construction vehicles are present and operating at the project site. The function of the monitor is to protect burrowing owls that arrive on or near the project site after the clearance survey during the construction period.~~

~~If owls are found to be present during the breeding season (February 1 through August 31), no construction disturbances of any kind should occur within 550 yards of an active burrow, as demarcated by the certified avian biologist, during this time period. No construction activity shall occur until the certified avian biologist has determined that the nest site is inactive. Thus, on a project site, it is recommended that grading should take place from September 1st through January 30th to avoid restriction or cancellation of grading permits because of the presence of burrowing owls during the breeding season.~~

~~If resident owls are present on or near the project site outside of breeding season, in some cases, the owl(s) can be relocated to other sites by a permitted biologist under the authorization of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.~~

### **3) American Badger**

American badger is a California Species of Special Concern. The MND lacks a discussion of the potential for American badger to occupy the Project site and surrounding area. CDFW notes that the Project site contains predicted suitable habitat for American badger, including areas with medium and high suitability ranks, per California Wildlife Habitat Relationships range maps, accessed using CDFW's Biogeographic Information and Observation System. Page 38 of the MND also indicates that "several large holes were observed on the project site." CDFW notes that American badgers excavate dens for the purposes of protection, sleeping, food storage, places to give birth, and as focal areas for foraging<sup>8</sup>. American badger has the potential to occupy the Project site, and CDFW recommends the MND is revised to indicate their potential presence. The MND lacks a mitigation measure for American badger. Without appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for American badger, such as preconstruction surveys and avoidance measures if individuals, dens, or sign are detected, CDFW considers that the MND has not avoided or reduced potential impacts to American badger to a level less than significant. Further, given the MND's lack of an assessment of biological resources and impacts associated with American badger, CDFW is limited in its ability to provide biological expertise to support the City in reducing impacts to American badger to a level less than significant. CDFW recommends that the MND is revised to include the results of focused surveys for American badger within the Project site and surrounding area.

To support the City in avoiding or reducing impacts to American badger to a level less than significant, CDFW recommends the City add the following mitigation measure to a revised MND:

**Mitigation Measure BIO-[B]: American Badger Preconstruction Surveys**

**No more than 30 days prior to the beginning of ground disturbance and/or construction activities, a qualified biologist(s) shall conduct surveys to determine if potential American badger burrows are present in the Project area. Surveys shall encompass both the Project site and a buffer distance adequate to determine the potential for direct or indirect impacts. Surveys shall attain 100% visual coverage and be conducted using 10-m transects (or reduced based on topography and vegetation), to determine the presence or absence of individuals, dens, and sign. If American badger burrows are located, the City and Project proponent shall have a qualified biologist(s) monitor the burrows using observation and tracking material and/or trail cameras over a three (3) day period to determine the status of the burrow. If non-natal active dens can be avoided and**

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<sup>8</sup> California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Life history account for American Badger. California's Wildlife, Volume I-III. California Depart. of Fish and Game, Sacramento California.

**buffered from Project activities, the biologist shall flag a minimum 100-foot disturbance-free buffer zone. A minimum 500-foot disturbance-free buffer shall be placed around the natal den and maintained until juvenile independence is determined by the biologist. The biologist has the authority to halt or stop work if individuals exhibit signs of disturbance. Established buffers shall remain until the biologist determines the young have dispersed or the den is no longer active, or until Project activities cease. If American badger is proposed to be relocated from an active den or an active den will be impacted, an exclusion plan, including compensatory mitigation, shall be prepared for CDFW review and approval that will be performed outside of breeding season and after juvenile dispersal.**

#### **4) *Desert Kit Fox***

Desert kit fox is protected as a fur-bearing mammal under Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (Chap. 5, §460) and may not be taken at any time. The MND lacks a discussion of the potential for desert kit fox to occupy the Project site and surrounding area. CDFW notes that the Project site contains predicted suitable habitat for desert kit fox, including areas with medium and high suitability ranks, per California Wildlife Habitat Relationships range maps, accessed using CDFW's Biogeographic Information and Observation System. Page 38 of the MND also indicates that "several large holes were observed on the project site." CDFW notes that desert kit fox dig dens in level areas with loose-textured, sandy and loamy soils<sup>9,10</sup> and use dens for cover and reproduction among other uses. Desert kit foxes also use dens throughout the year and regularly use dens for thermal regulation and water conservation<sup>11</sup>. CDFW considers that the MND has not avoided or reduced potential impacts to desert kit fox to a level less than significant. CDFW recommends the MND is revised to include a discussion of the potential for desert kit fox to occupy the Project site and surrounding area and appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. Because desert kit fox has high fidelity to natal dens, it is crucial to adequately assess whether desert kit fox is present on the Project site well in advance of commencing Project activities. If desert kit fox is found on-site during breeding season, it could delay Project activities until appropriate vegetation and construction buffers can be established on the Project site. Further, given the MND's lack of an assessment of biological resources and impacts associated with desert kit fox, CDFW is limited in its ability to provide biological expertise to support the City in reducing impacts to desert kit fox to a level less than significant. CDFW recommends that the MND is revised to include an assessment of

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<sup>9</sup> Laughrin, L. 1970. San Joaquin kit fox: its distribution and abundance. Calif. Dept. Fish and Game, Sacramento. Wildl. Manage. Br. Admin. Rep. No. 70-2. 20pp.

<sup>10</sup> Morrell, S. 1972. Life history of the San Joaquin kit fox. Calif. Fish and Game. 58:162-174. O'Farrell, T. P., and L. Gilbertson. 1979. Ecological life history of the desert kit fox in the Mojave Desert of southern California. USDI Bur. Land Manage., Riverside. Draft Final Rep. 95pp.

<sup>11</sup> Golightly, R. T., Jr. 1981. The comparative energetics of two desert canids; the coyote and the kit fox. Ph.D. Diss., Arizona State Univ., Tempe. 174pp.

biological resources and impacts associated with desert kit fox within the Project site and surrounding area.

To support the City in avoiding or reducing impacts to desert kit fox to a level less than significant, CDFW recommends the following mitigation measure is added to a revised MND:

**Mitigation Measure BIO-[C]: Desert Kit Fox Preconstruction Surveys**

**Preconstruction surveys for desert kit fox shall be conducted by a qualified biologist(s) within 14 days prior to the start of construction. The survey area shall include the Project area plus a 500-foot buffer during the breeding season (January 15 through August 31 or until pups are foraging on their own) and a 250-foot buffer outside the breeding season. Preconstruction surveys should include 100-percent visual coverage of the Project area and buffer using 10-m transects (or reduced based on topography and vegetation) to determine the presence or absence of individuals, dens, and sign. Potentially occupied burrows in the Project area and the survey buffer shall be mapped, and the qualified biologist(s) shall utilize daily on-site monitoring, tracking stations, and wildlife cameras to determine whether the burrows are occupied. If a burrow is determined to be occupied by desert kit fox during the breeding season, the burrow shall be demarcated with a 500-foot buffer. No disturbance of active dens shall take place when juvenile desert kit fox may be present and dependent on parental care. If a burrow is determined to be occupied outside the breeding season, it shall be demarcated with a 250-foot buffer. The biologist has the authority to halt or stop work if individuals exhibit signs of disturbance. Burrows determined to be unoccupied shall be demarcated with a 50-foot buffer. If occupied burrows are found in Project disturbance areas and cannot be avoided, the City and Project proponent shall consult with CDFW on an appropriate path forward. The loss of desert kit fox habitat shall be mitigated at no less than a 2:1 ratio.**

***5) Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan***

The Project is located within the CVMSHCP Plan Boundary and contains habitat for Covered Species and/or conserved natural communities. Per CVMSHCP Section 5.2.1.1 and Implementing Agreement Sections 12.2.1 and 13.2, the City is obligated to impose a local development mitigation fee for new development within the Plan Area that impacts vacant land containing Habitat for Covered Species and/or conserved natural communities, including small vacant lots within urban areas that contain natural open space, and to transmit collected fees to the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission at least quarterly and prior to impacts to Covered Species and their Habitats. To document the City's obligation to impose and transmit a Local Development Mitigation Fee for the Project, CDFW recommends the City add the following mitigation measure to a revised MND:

## **Mitigation Measure BIO-[D]: CVMSHCP Local Development Mitigation Fee**

**Prior to construction and issuance of any grading permit, the City shall ensure compliance with the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) and its associated Implementing Agreement and shall ensure the collection of payment of the CVMSHCP Local Development Mitigation Fee and transfer of revenues to the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission.**

### **6) Artificial Nighttime Lighting**

Page 22 of the MND states that “buildout of the proposed project can be expected to generate increased levels of light and glare from interior and exterior building lighting, safety and security lighting, landscape and signage lighting and vehicles accessing the site. However, lighting and glare levels are not expected to exceed typical levels within the surrounding urban environment. The project will be required to adhere to the lighting standards established in the Coachella Municipal Code.” The MND lacks additional information on lighting plans and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. The MND also lacks an analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of artificial nighttime lighting, including impacts associated with long-term operations, on biological resources including migratory birds that fly at night, burrowing owls, bats, and other nocturnal and crepuscular wildlife. The Project is located adjacent to agricultural areas to the south, vacant areas to the east, and the Whitewater River—areas that provide suitable nesting, roosting, foraging, and refugia habitat for birds, migratory birds that fly at night, burrowing owls, bats, and other nocturnal and crepuscular wildlife. The Project’s proposed artificial nighttime lighting has the potential to significantly and adversely affect wildlife in these areas adjacent to the Project site. Artificial lighting alters ecological processes including, but not limited to, the temporal niches of species; the repair and recovery of physiological function; the measurement of time through interference with the detection of circadian and lunar and seasonal cycles; the detection of resources and natural enemies; and navigation.<sup>12</sup> Many species use photoperiod cues for communication (e.g., bird song<sup>13</sup>), determining when to begin foraging,<sup>14</sup> behavioral thermoregulation,<sup>15</sup> and migration.<sup>16</sup> Phototaxis, a phenomenon that results in attraction and movement towards light, can disorient, entrap, and temporarily blind wildlife species that experience it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gatson, K. J., Bennie, J., Davies, T., Hopkins, J. 2013. The ecological impacts of nighttime light pollution: a mechanistic appraisal. *Biological Reviews*, 88.4: 912-927.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, M. W. 2006. Apparent effects of light pollution on singing behavior of American robins. *The Condor* 108:130–139.

<sup>14</sup> Stone, E. L., G. Jones, and S. Harris. 2009. Street lighting disturbs commuting bats. *Current Biology* 19:1123–1127.

<sup>15</sup> Beiswenger, R. E. 1977. Diet patterns of aggregative behavior in tadpoles of *Bufo americanus*, in relation to light and temperature. *Ecology* 58:98–108.

<sup>16</sup> Longcore, T., and C. Rich. 2004. Ecological light pollution - Review. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 2:191–198.

CDFW recommends that the MND is revised to include both an analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of artificial nighttime lighting associated with the Project's long-term operations on biological resources, and appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures that will avoid or reduce impacts to less than significant.

To support the City in avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating for the Project's direct and indirect impacts of artificial nighttime lighting on biological resources, CDFW recommends that the City include in a revised MND the following mitigation measure:

### **Mitigation Measure BIO-[E]: Artificial Nighttime Lighting**

**Throughout construction and the lifetime operations of the Project, the City shall eliminate all nonessential lighting throughout the Project area and avoid or limit the use of artificial light at night during the hours of dawn and dusk when many wildlife species are most active. The City shall ensure that all lighting for the Project is fully shielded, cast downward and directed away from surrounding open-space and agricultural areas, reduced in intensity to the greatest extent possible, and does not result in lighting trespass including glare into surrounding areas or upward into the night sky (see the International Dark-Sky Association standards at <http://darksky.org/>). The City shall ensure use of LED lighting with a correlated color temperature of 3,000 Kelvins or less, proper disposal of hazardous waste, and recycling of lighting that contains toxic compounds with a qualified recycler.**

### **7) Landscaping**

Page 22 of the MND states that "Project landscaping will include a mix of various trees, shrubs and ground coverings to provide shade for pedestrians, and vertical variation and interest." The MND lacks additional information on landscaping plans. CDFW recommends that the MND include recommendations regarding landscaping from Section 4.0 of the CVMSHCP "Table 4-112: Coachella Valley Native Plants Recommended for Landscaping" (pp. 4-180 to 4-182; <https://cvmshcp.org/plan-documents/>). CDFW recommends xeriscaping with locally native California species and installing water-efficient and targeted irrigation systems (such as drip irrigation). Native plants support butterflies, birds, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, bees, and other pollinators that evolved with those plants. More information on native plants suitable for the Project location and nearby nurseries is available at Calscape: <https://calscape.org/>. Local water agencies/cities and resource conservation cities in your area may be able to provide information on plant nurseries that carry locally native species, and some facilities display drought-tolerant locally native species demonstration gardens. Information on drought-tolerant landscaping and water-efficient irrigation systems is available on California's Save our Water website: <https://saveourwater.com/>.

## 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 the California Natural Diversity Database (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 types of information reported to CNDDDB can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plants-and-Animals>.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FILING FEES

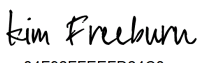
The Project, as proposed, would have an impact on fish and/or wildlife, and assessment of environmental document filing fees is necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW. Payment of the environmental 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 MND to assist City in identifying and mitigating Project impacts to biological resources. CDFW concludes that the MND does not adequately identify or mitigate the Project's significant, or potentially significant, impacts to biological resources. CDFW recommends that revised and additional mitigation measures and analysis as described in this letter be added to a revised MND.

CDFW personnel are available for consultation regarding biological resources and strategies to avoid and minimize impacts. Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Jacob Skaggs, Senior Environmental Scientist Specialist, at [jacob.skaggs@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:jacob.skaggs@wildlife.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
  
84F92FFEEFD24C8...

Kim Freeburn  
Environmental Program Manager

**Attachment 1:** MMRP for CDFW-Proposed Mitigation Measures

Adrian Moreno, Associate Planner  
 City of Coachella  
 February 6, 2026  
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ec:

Heather Brashear, CDFW  
[Heather.Brashear@Wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Heather.Brashear@Wildlife.ca.gov)

Mary Beth Woulfe, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
[marybeth\\_woulfe@fws.gov](mailto:marybeth_woulfe@fws.gov)

Lory Salazar-Velasquez, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
[lory\\_salazar-velasquez@fws.gov](mailto:lory_salazar-velasquez@fws.gov)

Noelle Ronan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
[noelle\\_ronan@fws.gov](mailto:noelle_ronan@fws.gov)

Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse, Sacramento  
[state.clearinghouse@lci.ca.gov](mailto:state.clearinghouse@lci.ca.gov)

**ATTACHMENT 1: MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM (MMRP)**

Mitigation Measures	Timing and Methods	Responsible Parties
<p><b>Mitigation Measure BIO-[A]: Nesting Birds</b></p> <p><b>To the greatest extent feasible, the Project will avoid construction and any ground-disturbing activities during the peak nesting season (January 15 through September 15). Regardless of the time of year, nesting bird surveys shall be performed by a qualified avian biologist no more than 3 days prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities. Preconstruction surveys shall focus on both direct and indirect evidence of nesting, including nest locations and nesting behavior. The qualified avian biologist will make every effort to avoid potential nest predation as a result of survey and monitoring efforts. If active nests are found during the preconstruction nesting bird surveys, a qualified biologist shall establish an appropriate nest buffer to be</b></p>	<p><b>Timing:</b> No more than 3 days prior to vegetation removal or ground-disturbing activities.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> See Mitigation Measure.</p>	<p><b>Implementation:</b> City of Coachella and Project Proponent</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Reporting:</b> City of Coachella</p>

<p>marked on the ground. Nest buffers are species specific and shall be at least 300 feet for passerines and 500 feet for raptors. A smaller or larger buffer may be determined by the qualified biologist familiar with the nesting phenology of the nesting species and based on nest and buffer monitoring results. Construction activities may not occur inside the established buffers, which shall remain on-site until a qualified biologist determines the young have fledged or the nest is no longer active. Active nests and adequacy of the established buffer distance shall be monitored daily by the qualified biologist until the qualified biologist has determined the young have fledged or the Project has been completed. The qualified biologist has the authority to stop work if nesting pairs exhibit signs of disturbance.</p>		
<p><b>Mitigation Measure BIO-1: Burrowing Owl Focused and Preconstruction Surveys</b></p> <p>Suitable burrowing owl habitat has been confirmed on the site; therefore, focused burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted by a CDFW-approved qualified biologist prior to any Project activities, including vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. CDFW strongly recommends that focused surveys are conducted in accordance with the <i>Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (2012 or most recent version)</i><sup>17</sup>. If burrowing owls are detected during the focused surveys, the qualified biologist and Project proponent shall begin coordination with CDFW and USFWS immediately, and</p>	<p><b>Timing: Focused surveys:</b>        Consistent with timing in Appendix D of the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation and prior to commencement of any Project activities, including vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities.</p> <p><b>Preconstruction surveys:</b> No less than 14 days prior to start of Project-related activities</p>	<p><b>Implementation:</b>        City of Coachella and Project Proponent</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Reporting:</b> City of Coachella</p>

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<sup>17</sup> California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2012. Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. State of California, Natural Resources Agency. Available for download at: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=83843>.

<p><b>shall submit the results of focused surveys to CDFW and USFWS as soon results become available and before commencement of any Project activities, including any vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. CDFW recommends that the information included in the survey results be consistent with Appendix D of the <i>Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation</i>, including a detailed map showing locations of all burrowing owls, burrowing owl sign, potential burrows, and occupied burrows (occupied means at least one burrowing owl or its sign has been observed within the last three years; may be indicated by owl sign including feathers, pellets, prey remains, eggshell fragments, or excrement at or near a burrow entrance or perch site); a description of the behavior of burrowing owls during surveys; a description of survey methods; and other items listed in Appendix D of the <i>Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation</i> under “Survey Reports.” Consultation with CDFW and USFWS must be completed prior to commencement of any Project activities, including vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. If impacts to occupied burrowing owl habitat or burrow(s) or burrowing owl individuals, nests, or eggs cannot be avoided, CESA authorization (i.e., Incidental Take Permit under Fish and Game Code section 2081(b)) should be obtained from CDFW prior to commencement of Project activities, including vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities.</b></p> <p><b>Preconstruction burrowing owl surveys shall be conducted no less than 14 days prior to the start of Project-related activities and again within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance, in accordance with the <i>Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation</i> (2012 or most recent version). Preconstruction surveys should be repeated when there is a</b></p>	<p>and again within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance and when there is a pause in construction of more than 30 days.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> See Mitigation Measure.</p>	
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<p>pause in construction of more than 30 days. Preconstruction surveys shall be performed by a CDFW-approved qualified biologist following the recommendations and guidelines provided in the <i>Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation</i>. If the preconstruction surveys confirm occupied burrowing owl habitat, Project activities shall be immediately halted and the qualified biologist shall coordinate with CDFW and USFWS. Project activities shall not recommence until consultation with CDFW and USFWS is completed.</p>		
<p><b>Mitigation Measure BIO-[B]: American Badger Preconstruction Surveys</b></p> <p>No more than 30 days prior to the beginning of ground disturbance and/or construction activities, a qualified biologist(s) shall conduct surveys to determine if potential American badger burrows are present in the Project area. Surveys shall encompass both the Project site and a buffer distance adequate to determine the potential for direct or indirect impacts. Surveys shall attain 100% visual coverage and be conducted using 10-m transects (or reduced based on topography and vegetation), to determine the presence or absence of individuals, dens, and sign. If American badger burrows are located, the City and Project proponent shall have a qualified biologist(s) monitor the burrows using observation and tracking material and/or trail cameras over a three (3) day period to determine the status of the burrow. If non-natal active dens can be avoided and buffered from Project activities, the biologist shall flag a minimum 100-foot disturbance-free buffer zone. A minimum 500-foot disturbance-free buffer shall be placed around the natal den and maintained until</p>	<p><b>Timing:</b> No more than 30 days prior to the beginning of ground disturbance and/or construction activities.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> See Mitigation Measure.</p>	<p><b>Implementation:</b> City of Coachella and Project Proponent</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Reporting:</b> City of Coachella</p>

<p><b>juvenile independence is determined by the biologist. The biologist has the authority to halt or stop work if individuals exhibit signs of disturbance. Established buffers shall remain until the biologist determines the young have dispersed or the den is no longer active, or until Project activities cease. If American badger is proposed to be relocated from an active den or an active den will be impacted, an exclusion plan, including compensatory mitigation, shall be prepared for CDFW review and approval that will be performed outside of breeding season and after juvenile dispersal.</b></p>		
<p><b>Mitigation Measure BIO-[C]: Desert Kit Fox Preconstruction Surveys</b></p> <p><b>Preconstruction surveys for desert kit fox shall be conducted by a qualified biologist(s) within 14 days prior to the start of construction. The survey area shall include the Project area plus a 500-foot buffer during the breeding season (January 15 through August 31 or until pups are foraging on their own) and a 250-foot buffer outside the breeding season. Preconstruction surveys should include 100-percent visual coverage of the Project area and buffer using 10-m transects (or reduced based on topography and vegetation) to determine the presence or absence of individuals, dens, and sign. Potentially occupied burrows in the Project area and the survey buffer shall be mapped, and the qualified biologist(s) shall utilize daily on-site monitoring, tracking stations, and wildlife cameras to determine whether the burrows are occupied. If a burrow is determined to be occupied by desert kit fox during the breeding season, the burrow shall be demarcated with a 500-foot buffer. No disturbance of active dens shall take</b></p>	<p><b>Timing:</b> Within 14 days prior to the start of construction.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> See Mitigation Measure.</p>	<p><b>Implementation:</b> City of Coachella and Project Proponent</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Reporting:</b> City of Coachella</p>

<p>place when juvenile desert kit fox may be present and dependent on parental care. If a burrow is determined to be occupied outside the breeding season, it shall be demarcated with a 250-foot buffer. The biologist has the authority to halt or stop work if individuals exhibit signs of disturbance. Burrows determined to be unoccupied shall be demarcated with a 50-foot buffer. If occupied burrows are found in Project disturbance areas and cannot be avoided, the City and Project proponent shall consult with CDFW on an appropriate path forward. The loss of desert kit fox habitat shall be mitigated at no less than a 2:1 ratio.</p>		
<p><b>Mitigation Measure BIO-[D]: CVMSHCP Local Development Mitigation Fee</b></p> <p>Prior to construction and issuance of any grading permit, the City shall ensure compliance with the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) and its associated Implementing Agreement and shall ensure the collection of payment of the CVMSHCP Local Development Mitigation Fee and transfer of revenues to the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission.</p>	<p><b>Timing:</b> Prior to construction and issuance of any grading permit.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> See Mitigation Measure.</p>	<p><b>Implementation:</b> City of Coachella and Project Proponent</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Reporting:</b> City of Coachella</p>
<p><b>Mitigation Measure BIO-[E]: Artificial Nighttime Lighting</b></p> <p>Throughout construction and the lifetime operations of the Project, the City shall eliminate all nonessential lighting throughout the Project area and avoid or limit the use of artificial light at night during the hours of dawn and dusk when many wildlife species are most active. The City shall ensure that all lighting for the Project is fully shielded, cast downward and</p>	<p><b>Timing:</b> Throughout construction and lifetime operations of the Project.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> See Mitigation Measure.</p>	<p><b>Implementation:</b> Project Proponent</p> <p><b>Monitoring and Reporting:</b> City of Coachella</p>

<p><b>directed away from surrounding open-space and agricultural areas, reduced in intensity to the greatest extent possible, and does not result in lighting trespass including glare into surrounding areas or upward into the night sky (see the International Dark-Sky Association standards at <a href="http://darksky.org/">http://darksky.org/</a>). The City shall ensure use of LED lighting with a correlated color temperature of 3,000 Kelvins or less, proper disposal of hazardous waste, and recycling of lighting that contains toxic compounds with a qualified recycler.</b></p>		
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