Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

We Make a Difference

August 15, 2025 JN 202609

VICTOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Joe Pont, Director of Facilities, Maintenance, Grounds, & Transportation
14875 South Mojave Drive
Victorville, California 92395

RE: 2025 Focused Burrowing Owl Survey Report for the Challenger Elementary School Track & Field Project in the City of Victorville, San Bernardino County, California

Dear Joe Pont:

Michael Baker International, Inc. conducted a focused burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*; BUOW) survey during the 2025 breeding season for the proposed Challenger Elementary School Track & Field Project (project) located in the City of Victorville, San Bernardino County, California. Qualified biologists Stephen Anderson, Samantha Bilicki, and Emily Edgington surveyed both the project footprint and areas within 500 feet that provided suitable habitat—together referred to as the survey area—in accordance with the survey protocols listed in the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (California Department of Fish and Game [CDFG] 2012). This 2025 survey was conducted to confirm BUOW presence/absence within the survey area. This report includes the methods, existing site conditions, results, and conclusions/recommendations for future actions based on the survey results.

PROJECT LOCATION

The approximately 11.63-acre project site is located in the City of Victorville, San Bernardino County (Attachment A, Figure 1, Regional Vicinity). The project site is located just southwest of the Gloria Lane and Cahuenga Road intersection and is within Section 7 of Township 5 North, Range 5 West of the *Victorville, California* 7.5-minute United States Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangle map (Attachment A, Figure 2, Project Vicinity). Specifically, the project site is located within and adjacent to the existing Challenger Elementary School (Attachment A, Figure 3, Project Area). The project site is not within any natural communities conservation plan or habitat conservation plan area.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project involves the construction and operation of a new sports complex at the Challenger School campus. The new facility would include a lighted synthetic track and field with home and visitor bleacher seating for 2,000 spectators. Appurtenant improvements would be installed,

75-410 Gerald Ford Drive, Suite 100 | Palm Desert, CA 92211
Office: 760-346-7481

including a 1,440-square-foot building with restroom facilities and concessions on the southeastern side of the track, as well as a 480-square-foot separate restroom facility located northwest of the proposed track. A new approximately 237-space parking lot would be developed south of the existing school parking lot along Cahuenga Road. The proposed sports complex would serve the existing physical education and sports programs at Challenger Elementary School. When not used by the school, the proposed facility would be available for other events sponsored by the Victor Elementary School District (District) or the Victorville community, pursuant to the California Civic Center Act and District policies. Additionally, the project may include construction of a portion of the improvements associated with planned City of Victorville roadways along the eastern project site boundary (southern extension of Cahuenga Road) and southern project site boundary (future Enmarada Road), as the District may be responsible for roadway development to the centerline (Attachment A, Figure 3, Project Area).

SPECIES BACKGROUND

The BUOW is a grassland specialist distributed throughout western North America, where it is known to occupy a wide variety of arid and semi-arid open areas in shrub, desert, and grassland environments. BUOWs require large, open, sparsely vegetated areas on rolling or level terrain with an abundance of fossorial mammal burrows (less than 4 inches in diameter). In addition, BUOWs require open vegetation allowing open line-of-sight of the surrounding habitat to forage as well as watching for predators. BUOWs are dependent upon the presence of burrowing mammals (e.g., California ground squirrel [*Otospermophilus beecheyi*], coyote [*Canis latrans*], and American badger [*Taxidea taxus*]) whose burrows are used for roosting and nesting (Haug et al. 1993). The presence or absence of fossorial mammal burrows is often a major factor that limits the presence of BUOW. Where mammal burrows are scarce, BUOWs have been observed both digging their own burrows in soft, friable soil and utilizing man-made cavities such as buried and non-functioning storm drainpipes, standpipes, and dry culverts. Additionally, BUOWs may burrow beneath rocks and debris or large, heavy objects such as abandoned cars, concrete blocks, or concrete pads, which stabilize burrow entrances from collapse and may inhibit excavation by predators.

Adult BUOWs are small owls (approximately 7.5 to 9.8 inches) with long legs and short tails that are speckled brown and white, with yellow eyes and yellow bill. A bold white throat and eyebrows are also typical distinguishing features. Juvenile BUOWs are usually less mottled than adults, with buffy-yellow underparts. BUOWs have crepuscular (dawn and dusk) hunting habits but are often observed perched in or near the burrow entrance during the day. One burrow is typically selected for use as the main nest burrow; however, BUOWs also utilize satellite burrows that are often located in the immediate vicinity of the main nest burrow. BUOWs prey upon invertebrates and small vertebrates through the low growing vegetation, which allows for foraging visibility, and

they typically forage in short grass, mowed or overgrazed pastures, golf courses, and airports (Thomsen 1971). BUOWs in California may migrate southerly but often remain in their breeding area during the non-breeding months. BUOWs were once abundant and widely distributed in Southern California, but have declined precipitously in counties such as Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino.

On October 10, 2024, the CDFW officially listed BUOW as a Candidate Species under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). While the CDFW makes the final determination on the status of BUOW, BUOW are given the same protection and regulation as a listed species under CESA. The project site is not within any natural community conservation plan or habitat conservation plan area; therefore, take authorization for individual BUOW, nests, or eggs is not provided for this species. Coordination with the CDFW is required, which may require a BUOW exclusion plan, additional avoidance measures, and/or an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) prior to construction.

METHODS

Michael Baker biologists conducted a focused burrowing owl survey following the guidelines in the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (CDFG 2012). The guidelines recommend conducting a habitat assessment to determine if suitable habitat for BUOW exists on the project site and surrounding buffer zone, followed by four separate surveys to determine presence/absence of the species during the breeding season. At least one survey must occur between February 15 and April 15, while the remaining three surveys are recommended to occur at least three weeks apart between April 15 and July 15, with at least one survey occurring after June 15. The guidelines recommend avoiding surveys when wind speeds exceed 20 kilometers per hour (approximately 12.4 miles per hour) or if there is precipitation or dense fog. All surveys were conducted between morning civil twilight and 1000 to provide the highest detection probabilities per the guidelines (CDFG 2012). Survey dates, times, biologists, and conditions are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF SURVEY CONDITIONS

Date	Survey	Biologists	Time (start-end)	Temperature / Cloud Cover / Wind (start-end)
03/19/2025	Focused BUOW Survey #1/Focused Burrow Survey	SA, SB	0650-0925	47-59 F / 0-0% CC / 1 mph
04/23/2025	Focused BUOW Survey #2	SA, EE	0700-0930	52-75 F / 0-0% CC / 1-4 mph
05/14/2025	Focused BUOW Survey #3	SA, EE	0700-0930	56-63 F / 0-0% CC / 2-5 mph
06/24/2025	Focused BUOW Survey #4	SA, EE	0715-0930	63-73 F / 25% CC / 1-5 mph

Biologists: SA - Stephen Anderson, SB - Samantha Bilicki, EE - Emily Edgington
Conditions: F - Fahrenheit, CC - cloud cover, mph - miles per hour

During the surveys, Michael Baker biologists walked meandering transects (spaced approximately 20 to 60 feet apart) across the survey area in search of natural and modified habitats for nesting and foraging. BUOW habitat includes, but is not limited to, native and non-native grassland, interstitial grassland within shrub lands, shrub lands with low density shrub cover, golf courses, drainage ditches, earthen berms, unpaved airfields, pastureland, dairies, fallow fields, and agricultural use areas. Locations with suitable habitat, burrows, or species detections in the survey area were recorded with a GPS receiver and on field maps.

Methods to detect the presence of BUOW included direct observation, aural detection, and signs of presence including pellets, whitewash, feathers, or prey remains. All suitable burrows/nest sites were thoroughly examined for signs of presence and all burrows, if encountered, were examined for shape, scat, pellets, feathers, tracks, and prey remains. Binoculars were used to scan areas that were inaccessible due to lack of right-of-entry to observe and identify distant birds; identify any suitable, occupied, and remnant burrows consisting of natural and non-natural substrates; and identify any activity around potential suitable habitat for BUOW.

RESULTS

Existing Conditions

The survey area consists of an area of undeveloped land just south of the existing Challenger School of Sports and Fitness. The survey is relatively flat with little elevation change, with a slight increase in elevation within the surrounding survey area south and west of the project site. Elevations on-site range from approximately 2,890 feet in the northeast corner to 2,920 feet in the southwest corner. The project site consists of disturbed land cover and one natural

vegetation community. Two natural vegetation communities are present throughout the entire survey area, with disturbed and developed land cover present as well.

Refer to Attachment B for representative photographs taken throughout the survey area.

Survey Results

The survey area contains burrows capable of providing roosting and nesting opportunities for burrowing owls (refer to Figure 4, Focused Burrow Survey Results). The majority of the suitable burrows are located within and near the mostly unvegetated area just south of the existing school grounds, with a few suitable burrows within the eastern portion of the survey area. Suitable burrows mainly consist of ground squirrel burrows and substrates that are favorable for burrow construction. Of the multiple suitable burrows present within the survey area, two were occupied by burrowing owl.

A total of six burrowing owls, consisting of two adult pairs and two juveniles, were observed within the survey area during the focused burrowing owl surveys (refer to Figure 5, Focused Burrowing Owl Survey Results). Both of the occupied burrows were located within the slopes along the edge of the mostly unvegetated area of land just south of the existing school grounds. The sections below describe the burrowing owls found in the survey area.

A total of 16 wildlife species were detected in the survey area during the focused surveys, including 13 bird species and 3 mammal species. Commonly detected bird species included burrowing owl, house sparrow (*Passer domesticus),* American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), rock dove (*Columba livia*), and desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*). A complete list of wildlife species detected during the focused surveys is provided in Attachment C, Species Compendium.

Burrow #1 (2 adults)

An adult pair was observed outside a suitable burrow located within the central portion of the survey area during the March 19, April 23, May 14, and June 24, 2025, surveys. (Refer to Figure 5, Focused Burrowing Owl Survey Results). The surveying biologists observed the adult pair near the entrance of a burrow along the south-facing slope just south of the existing school grounds. The final burrowing owl count for burrow #1 is two: one adult pair.

Burrow #2 (2 adults, 2 juveniles)

An adult pair was observed outside a suitable burrow located within the central portion of the survey area during the March 19, April 23, May 14, and June 24, 2025, surveys. (Refer to Figure 5, Focused Burrowing Owl Survey Results). The two juveniles were not observed until the final survey on June 24. The surveying biologists observed the two burrowing owl juveniles and an

adult pair near the entrance of a burrow located along the north-facing slope at the southern edge of the mostly unvegetated slope, just south of the existing school grounds. The surveying biologists observed the adults and juveniles foraging near and around the burrow entrance. The final burrowing owl count for burrow #2 is four: one adult pair and two juveniles.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A total of six burrowing owls, consisting of two adult pairs and two juveniles, were observed during the 2025 breeding season burrowing owl focused surveys conducted for the Challenger Elementary School Track & Field Project. The population of burrowing owls associated with the survey area is mainly restricted to the central and southern portions of the project site due to the presence of open foraging habitat and suitable burrows (> 4 inches in diameter).

Due to the presence of occupied burrows within the project footprint, a burrowing owl mitigation and monitoring plan is required, and an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) will be required prior to project implementation.

The burrowing owl mitigation and monitoring plan will describe the monitoring requirements, avoidance and minimization measures, procedures for preconstruction surveys, and avoidance of species impacts prior to project staging and during construction activities, and, if permitted, methods for relocation (passive or active) and eviction from active burrows. The burrowing owl mitigation and monitoring plan will be developed in coordination with the CDFW along with any other compensatory requirements such as mitigation for loss of occupied habitat. Consultation with the CDFW will also be necessary during acquisition of the ITP.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at stephen.anderson@mbakerintl.com should you have any questions or require further information about this report or survey effort.

Sincerely,

Stephen Anderson

Stephen Anderson
Senior Biologist

Attachments:

Attachment A. Figures
Attachment B. Site Photographs
Attachment C. Species Compendium

REFERENCES

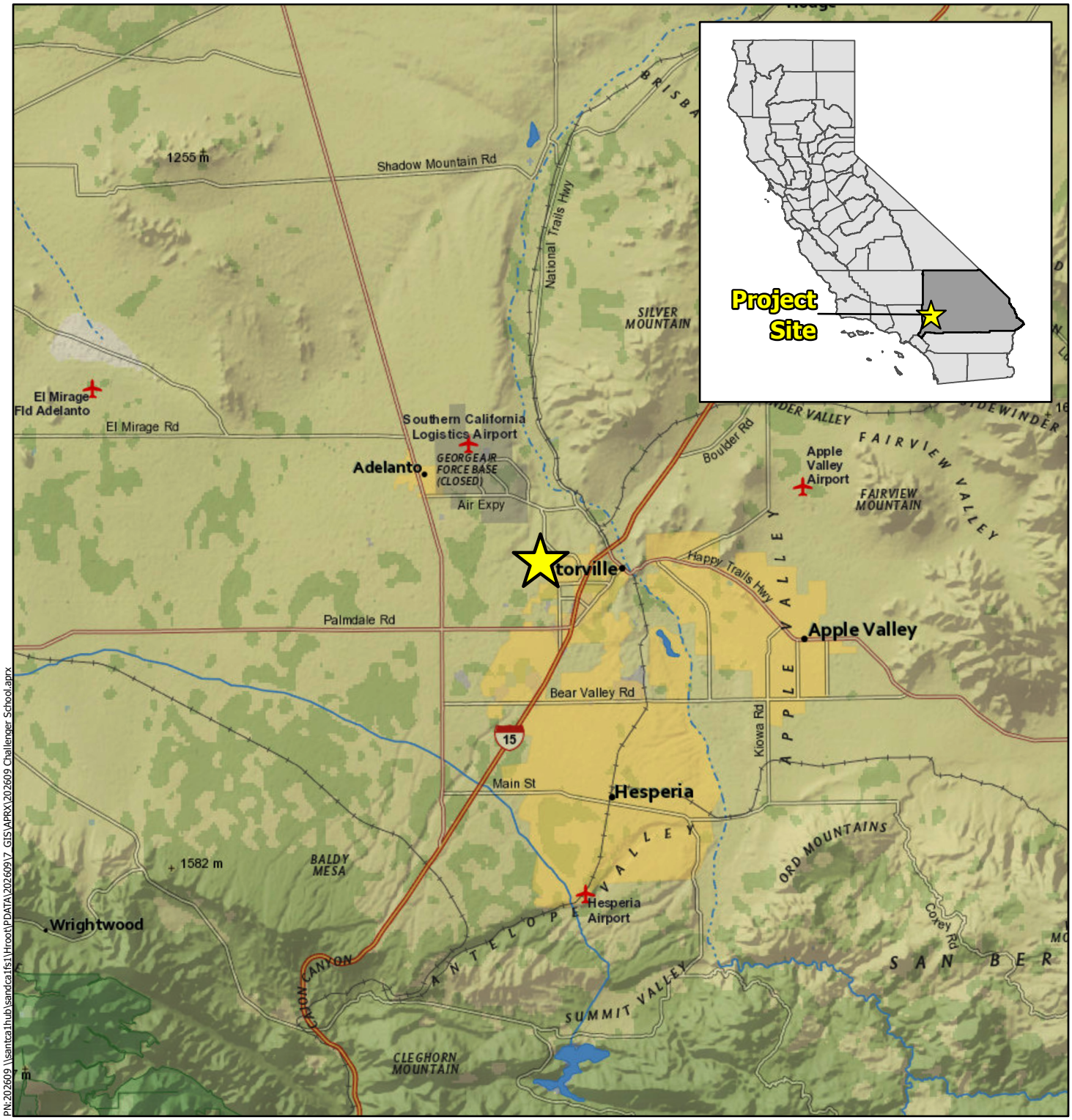
CDFG (California Department of Fish and Game). 2012. *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation*. State of California Natural Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game.

Haug, E. A., B. A. Millsap, and M. S. Martell. 1993. "Burrowing Owl (Speotyto cunicularia)." In *Birds of North America*, No. 61, edited by A. Poole and F. Gill. Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Science; Washington DC: The American Ornithologists' Union.

Thomsen, L. 1971. "Behavior and Ecology of Burrowing Owls in the Oakland Municipal Airport." *Condor* 73: 177-192.

Michael Baker
INTERNATIONAL

ATTACHMENT A.
FIGURES



PN:202609 \\santra1hub\sandca1fs1\Hroot\PDATA\202609\7 GIS\APRX\202609 Challenger School.aprx

Legend

Project Location

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

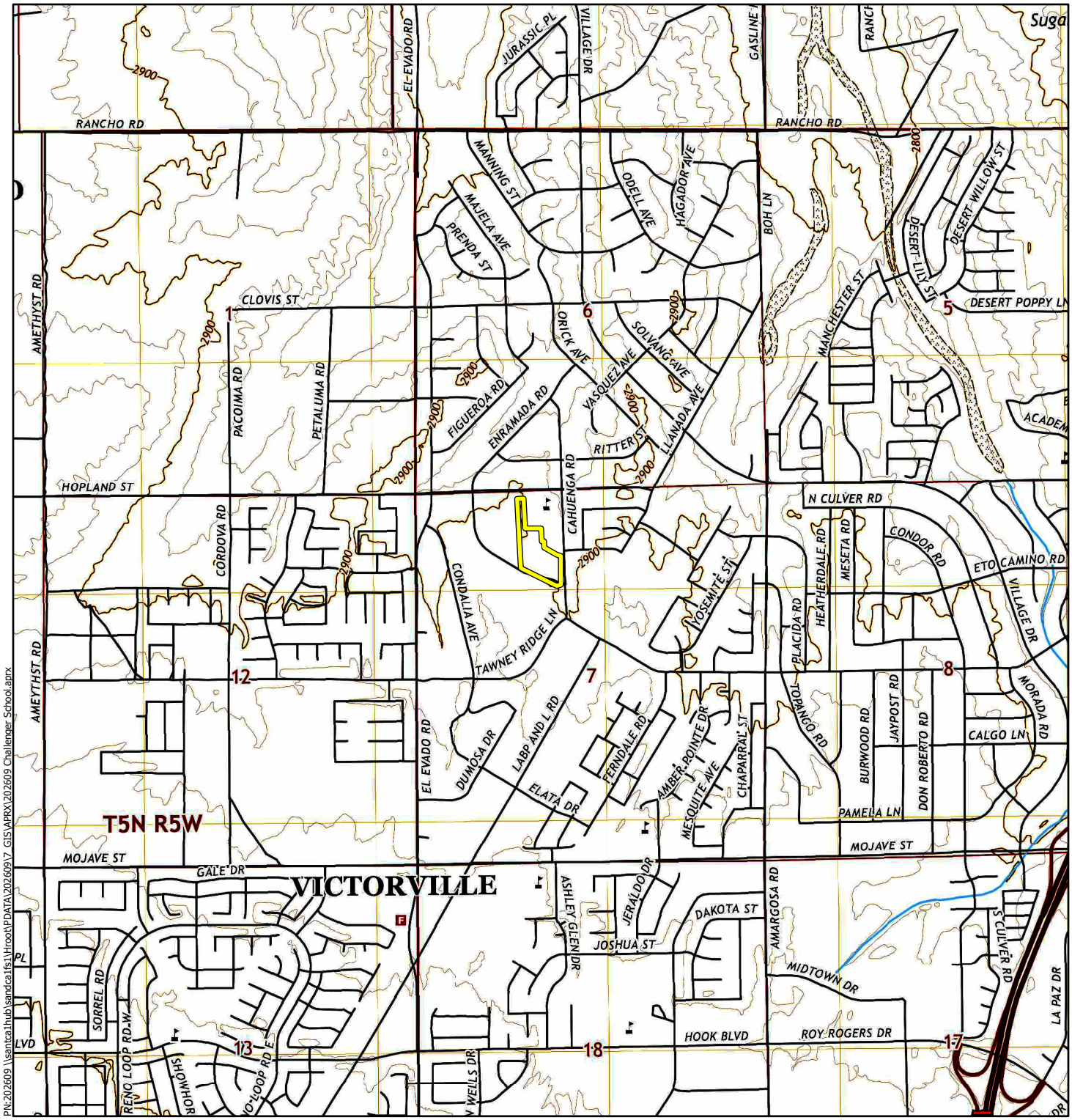
0 2.5 5 Miles

Source: Esri National Geographic World Map, Esri USA_Counties

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUS SURVEY REPORT

Regional Vicinity

Figure 1



PN:202609 \\santca1hub\sandca1fs1\Hroot\PDATA\202609\7 GIS\APRX\202609 Challenger School.aprx

Legend

Project Site

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUS SURVEY REPORT

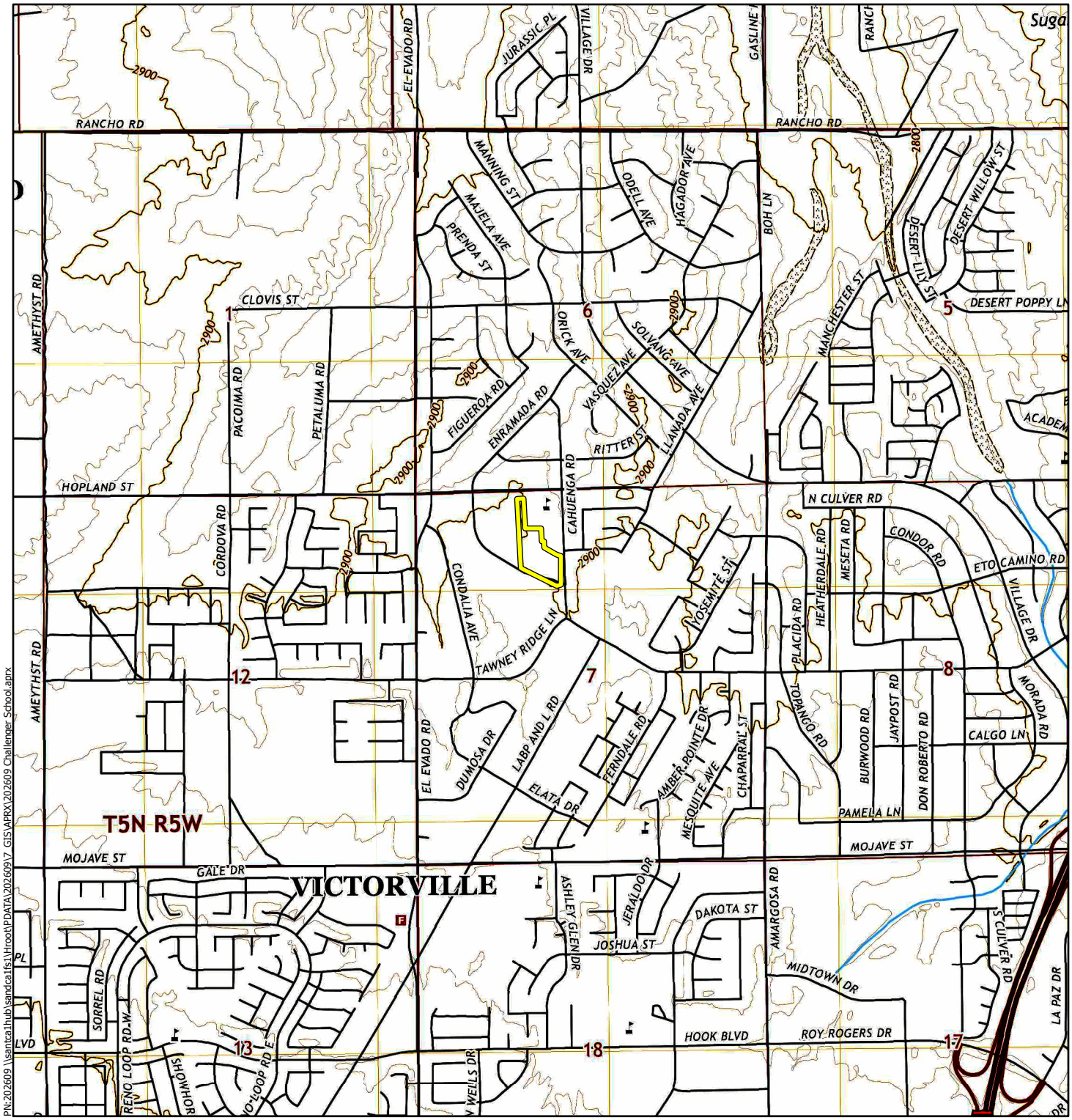
Project Vicinity

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

0 1,000 2,000 Feet

Source: USA Topo Maps

Figure 2



PN:202609 \\santca1hub\sandca1fs1\Hroot\PDATA\202609\7 GIS\APRX\202609 Challenger School.aprx

Legend

Project Site

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUS SURVEY REPORT

Project Vicinity

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

0 1,000 2,000 Feet

Source: USA Topo Maps

Figure 2



PN:202609 \\santra1hub\sandca1fs1\hroot\PDATA\202609\7_GIS\APRX\202609 Challenger School.aprx

Legend

- Project Site
- Survey Area

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

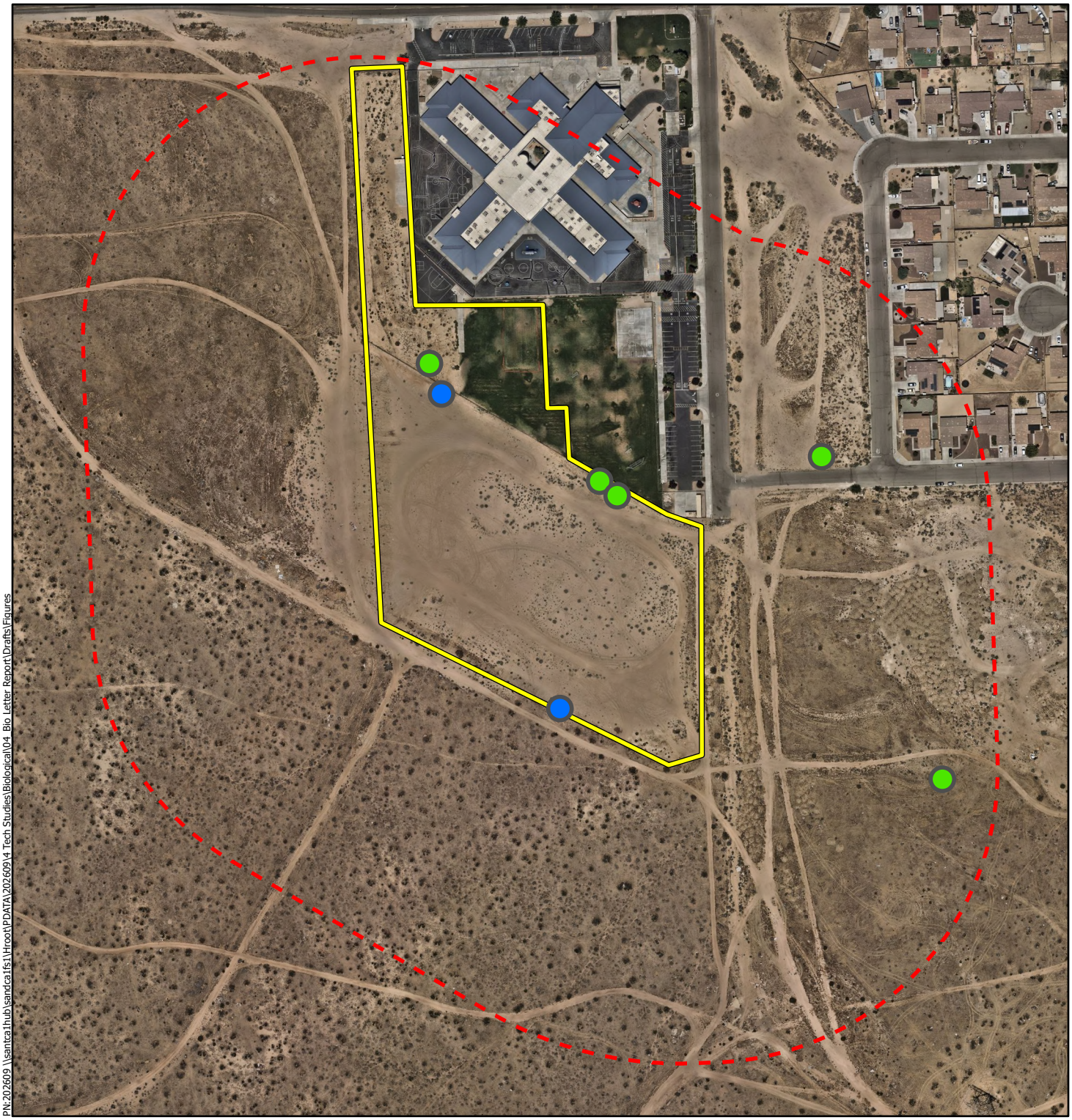
0 150 300 Feet

Source: 2025 Nearmap, Esri World Imagery Hybrid

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUS SURVEY REPORT

Project Area

Figure 3



PN:202609 \\santra1hub\sandca1fs1\Hroot\PDATA\202609\4 Tech Studies\Biological\04_Bio Letter Report\Drafts\Figures

Legend

- Project Site
- Survey Area (500-ft Buffer)
- Occupied burrow
- Suitable burrow

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

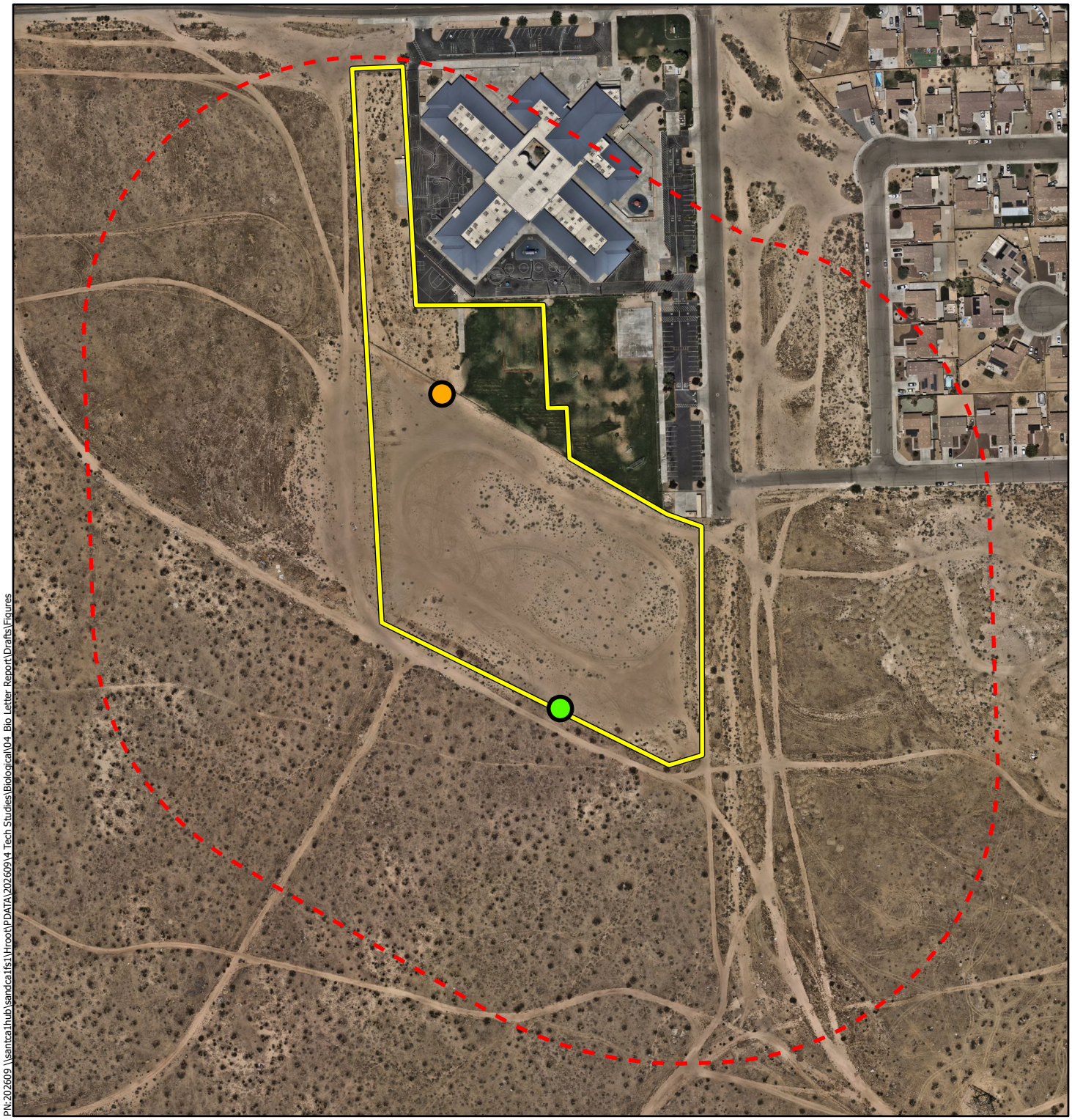
0 150 300 Feet

Source: Esri World Imagery Hybrid

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUSED SURVEY REPORT

Focused Burrow Survey Results

Figure 4



PN:202609 \\santra1hub\sandca1fs1\Hroot\PDATA\202609\4 Tech Studies\Biological\04_Bio Letter Report\Drafts\Figures

Legend

- Project Site
- Survey Area (500-ft Buffer)
- Burrow #1 (Pair, 2 Adults)
- Burrow #2 (2 Adults, 2 Juveniles)

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

0 150 300 Feet

Source: Esri World Imagery Hybrid

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUSED SURVEY REPORT

Focused Burrowing Owl Survey Results

Figure 5

Michael Baker
INTERNATIONAL

ATTACHMENT B.
SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1. East-facing view of the burrowing owl pair along the southern slope south of the school grounds.



Photograph 2. View looking northwest towards the burrowing owl present along the northwestern slope south of the school grounds.



Photograph 3. View of the southern portion of the survey area.



Photograph 4. View of the western portion of the survey area.

Michael Baker
INTERNATIONAL

ATTACHMENT C.
SPECIES COMPENDIUM

WILDLIFE COMPENDIUM

TAXONOMY	SPECIAL STATUS LISTING

PASSERELLIDAE—NEW WORLD SPARROWS

***Zonotrichia leucophrys* —white-crowned sparrow**

CORVIDAE—CROWS & JAYS

***Corvus brachyrhynchos* —American crow**

STRIGIDAE—TYPICAL OWLS

***Athene cunicularia* —burrowing owl**

TROGLODYTIDAE—WRENS

***Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus* —cactus wren**

CANIDAE—WOLVES & FOXES

Canis familiaris* —domestic dog

PARULIDAE—WOOD-WARBLERS

***Setophaga coronata* —yellow-rumped warbler**

TURDIDAE—THRUSHES

***Sialia currucoides* —mountain bluebird**

CHARADRIIDAE—LAPWINGS & PLOVERS

***Charadrius vociferus* —killdeer**

FRINGILLIDAE—FRINGILLINE & CARDUELINE FINCHES & ALLIES

***Haemorhous mexicanus* —house finch**

COLUMBIDAE—PIGEONS & DOVES

Columba livia* —rock pigeon (rock dove)

TYRANNIDAE—TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

***Sayornis saya* —Say's phoebe**

LEPORIDAE—HARES & RABBITS

***Lepus californicus* —black-tailed jackrabbit**

***Sylvilagus audubonii* —desert cottontail**

MIMIDAE—MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

***Mimus polyglottos* —northern mockingbird**

PASSERIDAE—OLD WORLD SPARROWS

Passer domesticus* —house sparrow

STURNIDAE—STARLINGS

Sturnus vulgaris* —European starling

*signifies introduced (non-native) species



PN:202609 \\santra1hub\sandca1fs1\hroot\PDATA\202609\7_GIS\APRX\202609 Challenger School.aprx

Legend

- Project Site
- Survey Area

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

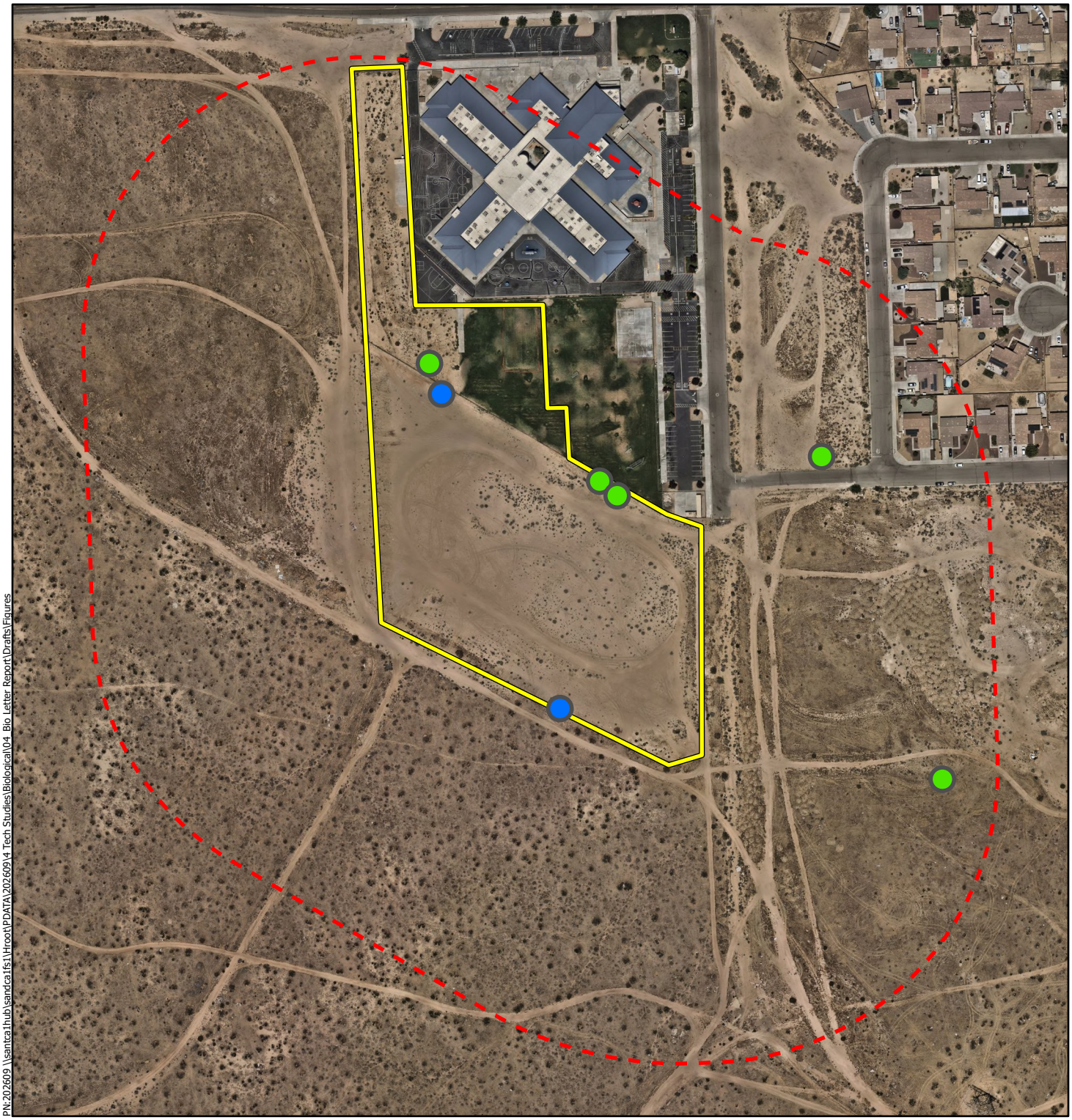
0 150 300 Feet

Source: 2025 Nearmap, Esri World Imagery Hybrid

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUS SURVEY REPORT

Project Area

Figure 3



PN:202609 \\santra1hub\sandca1fs1\Hroot\PDATA\202609\4 Tech Studies\Biological\04_Bio Letter Report\Drafts\Figures

Legend

- Project Site
- Survey Area (500-ft Buffer)
- Occupied burrow
- Suitable burrow

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

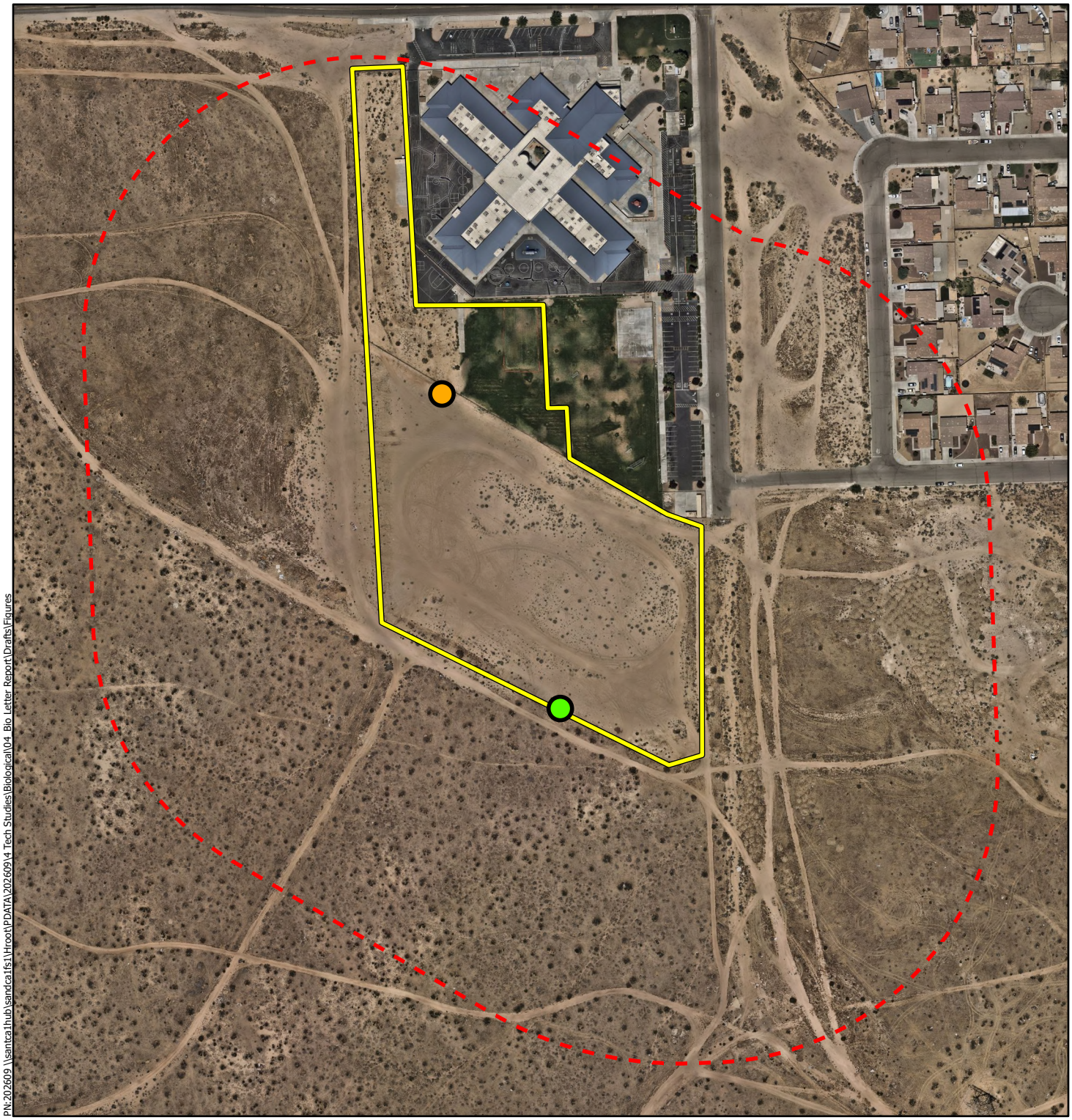
0 150 300 Feet

Source: Esri World Imagery Hybrid

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUSED SURVEY REPORT

Focused Burrow Survey Results

Figure 4



PN:202609 \\santra1hub\sandca1fs1\Hroot\PDATA\202609\4 Tech Studies\Biological\04_Bio Letter Report\Drafts\Figures

Legend

- Project Site
- Survey Area (500-ft Buffer)
- Burrow #1 (Pair, 2 Adults)
- Burrow #2 (2 Adults, 2 Juveniles)

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL

0 150 300 Feet

Source: Esri World Imagery Hybrid

CHALLENGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD PROJECT
BURROWING OWL FOCUSED SURVEY REPORT

Focused Burrowing Owl Survey Results

Figure 5

Michael Baker
INTERNATIONAL

ATTACHMENT B.
SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1. East-facing view of the burrowing owl pair along the southern slope south of the school grounds.



Photograph 2. View looking northwest towards the burrowing owl present along the northwestern slope south of the school grounds.



Photograph 3. View of the southern portion of the survey area.



Photograph 4. View of the western portion of the survey area.

Michael Baker
INTERNATIONAL

ATTACHMENT C.
SPECIES COMPENDIUM