

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE



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July 3, 2026

California Department of Transportation, District 4
ATTN: Xenia Rangaswami, Environmental Scientist
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Subject: Solano State Route 12 Pavement Preservation Project (04-0AA53), Mitigated Negative Declaration, SCH No. 2026060207, City of Fairfield, Solano County

Dear Ms. Rangaswami:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a Notice of Intent to Adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for the Solano State Route 12 Pavement Preservation Project (04-0AA53) (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, 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.

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 (LSA) 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: Caltrans

Objective: The proposed Project activities (Project Activities) include pavement dig-outs, cold planing, asphalt concrete (AC) overlay, AC dikes, centerline and shoulder (edge line)

¹ CEQA is codified in the California Public Resources Code in section 21000 et seq. The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

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rumble strips, shoulder widening, and drainage improvements, upgrade metal beam guardrail, upgrade traffic signing panels, and delineate (pavement (e.g. center lines, edge lines, lane dividers).

Location: The Project Area consists of the area surrounding State Route (SR)-12 east of the City of Fairfield (City), Solano County, and along SR-12 between postmile (PM) 14.10 and 20.68, approximately 0.6 miles west of Denverton Overhead to Currie Road. Approximate GPS coordinates 38.183546°N 121.842583°W.

Timeframe: Construction is expected to begin Spring 2029 and end Winter 2030. Work will be primarily at night and will take place over two construction seasons, with one rainy season in between. The Build Alternative is expected to take approximately 120 working days to construct.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist Caltrans in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the document.

COMMENT 1: California Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*), MND pages 3-14 to 3-16, B-7 to B-8

Issue: The MND does not adequately evaluate and mitigate potential impacts to California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*) to less-than-significant levels from disruptions during nocturnal activity periods or fully contemplate all impacts from habitat loss. The MND appears to partially base this determination on an incorrection assumption no California tiger salamander can be active in the summer and states: "California tiger salamander *aestivate (become dormant) in burrows during the dry months.*"

The Project includes considerable night work and could result in unmitigated impacts to California tiger salamander and their upland or breeding habitat, including, but not limited to: 1) direct impacts in the entire Project area where suitable California tiger salamander habitat occurs. Direct impacts would include permanent and temporary habitat loss from ground-disturbing activities and mortality of California tiger salamander, and 2) indirect impacts, such as increased lighting and other edge effects and hydrological modifications that alter offsite habitat, which also may result in injury or mortality of California tiger salamander.

Additionally, the Project Feature (PF) PF-BIO-1, Wildlife Exclusion Fencing, and Avoidance and Minimization Measure (AMM) AMM-BIO-3, Biological Monitoring, do not adequately address the level of protection necessary to ensure California tiger salamander impacts are properly minimized and fully mitigated (California Fish and Game Code, § 2081(b)(2) (2026)). Therefore, for the reasons identified, Project impacts on California tiger salamander would be potentially significant without additional evaluation and supporting protective measures.

Supporting Evidence: A recent Caltrans project (EA 04-2X550; ITP# 2081-2024-012-03) documented regular night activity mid-July through the driest and hottest months of the year. During these warmer months the project experienced many mortalities until the days became shorter and weather conditions were more amiable (e.g. cooler temperatures and periods of precipitation).

California tiger salamander are most active at night during dry months and artificial lighting can disrupt the production of melatonin in *Ambystoma* salamanders if they are exposed to it, altering metabolic rates and reducing tolerance to high temperatures (Perry et al. 2008). In addition, *Ambystoma* salamanders can become disoriented and miss the cue to migrate if there is artificial light, which could affect breeding (Perry et al. 2008).

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California tiger salamander is a CESA listed threatened species, and the Central California distinct population segment is also federally listed as threatened. Thus, California tiger salamander is considered threatened under CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15380. Therefore, if California tiger salamander habitat is present on or adjacent to the entire Project area where suitable California tiger salamander habitat occurs, including, the Project may substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a threatened species, which would be a *mandatory finding of significance* pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15065, subdivision (a)(1).

Recommended Mitigation Measures and/or Guidance: To reduce potential impacts to California tiger salamander to less-than-significant and comply with CESA, CDFW recommends developing (or improving) AMM's associated with PF References below.

- Include an AMM associated with PF-BIO-3, Wildlife Exclusion Fencing, to include more descriptive details in how California tiger salamander impacts will be avoided and minimized in areas of active construction by incorporating the following measure:
 - Temporary Covered Species Barrier. Prior to construction a wildlife exclusion fence plan shall be provided to CDFW for review and written approval. Upon approval, exclusion fencing shall be installed to prevent California tiger salamander from dispersing into the Project Area. Exclusion fencing shall be designed to allow California tiger salamander to leave the Project Area using a one-way funnel or other method approved by CDFW. Exclusion fencing shall remain in place and be maintained throughout all phases of construction. A Qualified Biologist or other trained staff shall inspect exclusion fencing daily throughout all phases of the project. After each exclusion fence check, a Qualified Biologist or other trained staff shall prepare an exclusion fence Inspection Report documenting type and location of any damage to the temporary barrier. Any exclusion fence damage shall be repaired within 48 hours. As part of the wildlife exclusion fence plan, refuge opportunities, such as coverboards (3-foot x 3-foot plywood) or straw wattles shall be provided every 100 feet along both sides of the exclusion fence. All exclusion fencing shall be removed within 30 days after completion of construction.
- Include the AMM's associated with PF-BIO-5, Prevention of Inadvertent Entrapment and Entanglement, to include the following measures:
 - Inspection of Pipes and Culverts. Permittee shall ensure that all construction pipes or similar structures with a diameter of two inches or greater (including any hollow openings of battery storage containers) that are stored in the Project Area for one or more overnight periods shall be either securely capped prior to storage or thoroughly inspected by a Qualified Biologist and/or Biological Monitor for California tiger salamander or other animals before the pipe is subsequently buried, capped, or otherwise used or moved in any way.
 - Open Trenches and Keyways. To prevent inadvertent entrapment of the California tiger salamander during construction, a Qualified Biologist shall check all excavated open holes, sumps, trenches, caps in culvert connections, and keyways for California tiger salamander no later than 0900 each day for trapped animals. At the close of each working day, a Qualified Biologist shall ensure all excavated, steep-walled holes or trenches more than 6 inches deep are provided with one or more escape ramps constructed of earthen fill or wooden planks with a slope of 3:1 (run: rise). Before Permittee fills trenches or holes, a Qualified Biologist shall thoroughly inspect them for trapped California tiger salamander. If a California tiger salamander is discovered by a Qualified Biologist or anyone else, work shall stop and CDFW consulted immediately.

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- Improve AMM-BIO-3 to include biological monitoring needs when night work activities is occurring by incorporating the following measure:
 - Biological Monitoring. A Qualified Biologist shall be on-site for the entire duration of any day or night construction activities where take of a listed species could occur. The Qualified Biologist may stop work at any time if necessary to protect listed species and will coordinate with the Caltrans Point of Contact (POC) Biologist and CDFW on how to proceed before work resumes.

COMMENT 2: Swainson’s Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), MND pages 2-8, 2-9, 3-18, 3-19, and 3-29

Issue: The MND discloses multiple Swainson Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) occurrences near the Project Area but is mainly limited in its evaluation to only potential temporary impacts to foraging habitat and states: *“There is some potential for construction to result in temporary disturbance to nesting activity if active nests occur near the BSA. Given nearby nesting records and suitable habitat, the proposed Project would impact SWHA primarily through temporary disturbance to foraging habitat”,* and that *“Compensatory mitigation is not required, as impacts are limited to temporary disturbance of foraging habitat and potential construction-related disturbance to nesting.”*

In addition to foraging habitat impacts, the Project has the potential to impact nesting Swainson’s hawk through artificial lighting, auditory, and/or visual disturbances above ambient levels within 0.5 miles of Project activities. Direct and/or indirect disturbances from Project Activities may result in Swainson’s hawk nest abandonment, loss of nests, loss of eggs or reduced health and vigor and loss of young and decreased foraging opportunities. The MND does not identify a suitable buffer to ensure avoidance of the *“potential temporary construction related impacts to nesting”* Swainson’s hawk.

Supporting Evidence: There are at least six California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) Swainson’s hawk nests documented in or within three miles of the Project area. If a Swainson’s hawk nest is disturbed by the Project, the Project may result in a substantial reduction in the number of a threatened species, which is considered a *mandatory* finding of significance pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15065, subdivision (a)(1).

Recommended Mitigation Measure: To reduce potential impacts to Swainson’s hawk, to less-than-significant and comply with CESA, and Fish and Game Code section 3503.5, CDFW recommends the addition of a specific Swainson’s hawk mitigating measure to include the below measure.

Mitigation Measure BIO-5 (Swainson’s Hawk Surveys and Avoidance Buffer): If Project activities are scheduled during the nesting season for Swainson’s hawks (March 1 to September 15), prior to beginning work on the Project, a qualified biologist shall conduct surveys according to the Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson’s Hawk Nesting Surveys in California’s Central Valley (<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=83990&inline>) and prepare a report documenting the survey results. The Project shall obtain CDFW’s written approval of the qualified biologist and survey report prior to starting construction activities between March 1 and September 15. Survey methods shall be closely followed by starting early in the nesting season (late March to early April) to maximize the likelihood of detecting an active nest (nests, adults, and chicks are more difficult to detect later in the growing season because trees become less transparent as vegetation increases). Surveys shall be conducted: 1) within a minimum 0.5-mile radius of the Project site or a larger area if needed to identify potentially impacted active nests, unless otherwise approved by CDFW in writing, and 2) for at least the two survey periods immediately prior to initiating Project-related construction activities. Surveys shall occur annually for the duration of the Project. The qualified biologist shall have a minimum of two years of experience implementing the survey methodology. If active Swainson’s hawk nests are detected, the Project shall immediately notify CDFW and implement a 0.5-mile construction avoidance buffer around the nest until the nest is no

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longer active as determined by a qualified biologist, unless otherwise approved by CDFW in writing. Any detected nesting Swainson's hawk shall be monitored by the qualified biologist to ensure it is not disturbed during construction activities, unless otherwise approved in writing by CDFW. If take of Swainson's hawk cannot be avoided and/or alterations of these buffers and survey requirements are needed, the Project shall consult with CDFW pursuant to CESA and obtain an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) before Project activities commence.

COMMENT 3: Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*), MND pages 3-21 to 3-22, 3-30

Issue: The MND does not adequately evaluate and mitigate potential impacts to burrowing owl. AMM-BIO-5 (MND, Page 3-30) describes measures to take if an active burrowing owl nest is found, however it does not specify during the breeding AND non-breeding season. Burrowing owl are dependent on burrows at all times of the year for survival or reproduction, therefore abandonment or eviction from nesting, roosting, overwintering, and satellite burrows or other sheltering features may lead to indirect impacts or "take" which is prohibited under CESA and Fish and Game Code section 3503.5.

Additionally, AMM-BIO-5 does not specify an avoidance buffer distance for active burrowing owl burrows. This species can be impacted by audio and/or visual disturbances up to 500 meters (1,640 feet) away according to the *Department of Fish and Game Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (2012). There are multiple CNDDDB burrowing owl occurrences within and near the Project Area. Therefore, the Project could result in burrowing owl burrow abandonment, loss of young, reduced health and vigor of owlets, injury or mortality of adults, and permanent wintering (i.e., non-nesting) or nesting habitat loss.

Supporting Evidence: Burrowing owl is a CESA-candidate threatened species because the species' population viability and survival are adversely affected by risk factors such as precipitous declines from habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation; evictions from nesting sites without habitat mitigation; wind turbine mortality; human disturbance; and eradication of California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) resulting in a loss of suitable burrows required by burrowing owl for nesting, protection from predators, and shelter (Shuford and Gardali 2008; *Department of Fish and Game Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (2012)). Preliminary analyses of regional patterns for breeding populations of burrowing owl have detected declines both locally in their central and southern coastal breeding areas, and statewide where the species has experienced breeding range retraction (*Department of Fish and Game Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (2012)). Information indicates a decline in burrowing owl range over time, with burrowing owl experiencing population declines in regions of California, and threats to burrowing owl, coupled with long-term population declines, suggest a high degree and immediacy of threat to burrowing owl in California (CDFW 2024). If burrowing owl are wintering or nesting on or within 500 meters of the Project area, Project impacts to burrowing owl would be *potentially significant*.

Recommended Mitigation Measures: To reduce potential impacts to burrowing owl to less-than-significant and comply with CESA and Fish and Game Code section 3503 et seq., CDFW recommends revising AMM-BIO-5 to include the below measure.

Burrowing Owl Survey and Avoidance Buffer: A qualified biologist shall conduct a burrowing owl habitat assessment within 500 meters (1,640 feet) of the Project area pursuant to the *Department of Fish and Game* (now CDFW) *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (CDFW 2012 Staff Report, available at: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols#377281284-birds>), unless otherwise approved in writing by CDFW. The qualified biologist shall have a minimum of two years of experience implementing the CDFW 2012 Staff Report survey methodology resulting in detections. The habitat assessment shall focus on searching the CNDDDB and potentially other sources (e.g., iNaturalist) for any burrowing owl records on or within one mile of the Project area, vegetation type and height, suitable burrows (with an opening greater than 11 centimeters [cm] in diameter and a depth greater than 150 cm), burrow surrogates (culverts, piles of concrete rubble, piles of soil, burrows

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created along soft banks of ditches and canals, pipes, and similar structures), and presence of burrowing owl sign (tracks, molted feathers, cast pellets, prey remains, egg shell fragments, owl white wash, and nest burrow decoration material), and the presence of burrowing owl individuals or pairs. If the habitat assessment does not identify suitable habitat and surveys are not conducted as described below, an additional habitat assessment shall be conducted within 14 days prior to construction and if new potentially suitable burrowing owl refugia are present surveys shall be conducted as described below, unless otherwise approved in writing by CDFW. The results of the habitat assessment shall be emailed to the CDFW contact below, or if unavailable another CDFW representative, and the Project shall obtain CDFW's written approval of the habitat assessment prior to starting Project activities.

If suitable burrowing owl habitat is observed, 4 surveys shall be conducted to detect the presence of burrowing owl pursuant to the CDFW 2012 Staff Report. The site visits shall be spread evenly throughout the breeding or non-breeding season. The Project shall obtain CDFW's written approval of the survey results prior to starting Project activities. In addition, a survey shall be completed within 14 days prior to the start of construction, as described in the CDFW 2012 Staff Report. Surveys shall occur during burrowing owl nesting and wintering seasons for the duration of the Project, unless otherwise approved in writing by CDFW.

If burrowing owl is detected, the Project shall immediately notify CDFW. The Project shall avoid impacts to the burrowing owl and implement a 1,640-foot buffer area around the owl site in which no Project activities shall occur, unless otherwise approved in writing by CDFW. A qualified biologist shall monitor any detected owl to ensure it is not disturbed.

If the Project cannot ensure burrowing owl and their burrows are fully avoided, the Project shall consult with CDFW and obtain a take authorization or otherwise demonstrate compliance with CESA. Take is likely to occur and the Project shall obtain an ITP if:

1) burrowing owl surveys of the Project area detect burrowing owl occupancy of burrows or burrow surrogates, or 2) there is sign of burrowing owl occupancy on the Project area within the past three years and habitat has not substantially changed. Occupancy means a site that is assumed occupied if at least one burrowing owl has been observed occupying a burrow or burrow surrogate within the last three years. Occupancy of suitable burrowing owl habitat may also be indicated by burrowing owl sign including its molted feathers, cast pellets, prey remains, eggshell fragments, or excrement at or near a burrow entrance or perch site. If burrowing owl, or their burrows or burrow surrogates, are detected within 500 meters (1,640 feet) of the Project area during burrowing owl surveys, but not on the Project area, the Project shall consult with CDFW to determine if avoidance is feasible or an ITP is warranted, and shall obtain an ITP if take cannot be avoided and comply with the ITP. The City shall mitigate the loss of unoccupied wintering or nest sites through preservation, through a conservation easement or purchase of wintering or nesting burrow credits from a CDFW approved conservation bank, of other known wintering or nest sites, as applicable, at a ratio of 2:1 unless another ratio is required by an ITP, in which case the City shall comply with the ITP.

Caps, Pipes, and Hoses: To prevent burrowing owl from sheltering or nesting in exposed material; all construction pipes, culverts, hoses or similar materials greater than two inches in diameter stored at the Project area shall be capped or covered before the end of each work day and shall be inspected thoroughly for wildlife before the pipe or similar structure is buried, capped, used, or moved.

COMMENT 4: Light Impact Analysis, MND page B-3

Issue: The MND states that roadway pavement, grinding, and resurfacing will take place at night to minimize traffic disruption. The Project is situated in an undeveloped section of SR-12 and requires a significant amount of night work over two construction seasons. The MND proposes to mitigate night lighting (PF-BIO-6, Night Lighting) by “*all lighting will be shielded and directed downward toward the active construction area to avoid exposing nocturnal*

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wildlife to excessive glare". Artificial light pollution has the potential to significantly and adversely affect wildlife species and the habitat that supports them, alter predator-prey dynamics, and can serve as an impediment to wildlife movement and connectivity, therefore PF-BIO-6, Night Lighting, does not adequately minimize the project specific light impacts during night work.

Supporting Evidence: Burrowing owls are highly sensitive to nighttime sensory disturbance where ALAN can alter nocturnal movement patterns, foraging behavior, and prey availability, creating ecological traps near lit areas (Scobie et al. 2016) (Sarasola 2020). With burrowing owl currently treated as protected under CESA as a CESA-candidate, these disruptions may constitute take without adequate minimization measures. California tiger salamander and Swainson's hawk are also vulnerable to nighttime disturbance. Increased illumination can disrupt amphibian movement corridors and elevate predation risks for California tiger salamander, while nesting Swainson's hawk may experience nighttime stress and decreased reproductive success due to elevated sensory disturbance.

Recommendationss: The MND should acknowledge that unavoidable artificial light at night (ALAN) associated with night work may significantly affect multiple sensitive species known or expected in the project vicinity, including burrowing owl, California tiger salamander, and Swainson's hawk.

Because ALAN impacts cannot be fully avoided, the MND should require stricter lighting minimization using fully shielded, low-intensity, amber-spectrum fixtures and illumination restricted only to active work zones, along with adaptive controls to limit duration and extent of lighting consistent with wildlife-sensitive lighting principles (DCCEEW 2023). Expanded nighttime buffers should be applied around active burrows, California tiger salamander upland refugia and movement areas, and Swainson's hawk nests, supplemented by nocturnal monitoring to detect behavioral changes and adjust lighting or work timing accordingly. Where significant residual impacts remain after minimization, compensatory habitat measures should be included to offset long-term sensory and ecological disturbance.

Recommended Mitigation Measures:

Temporary and Permanent Artificial Light at Night (ALAN) Emission Restrictions: All (temporary and permanent) ALAN design should meet the recommendations of the lighting resources described in the Dark Sky Society Guidelines (2020) (<https://www.darkskysociety.org/handouts/LightingPlanGuidelines.pdf>) and incorporate fully shielded (full-cutoff) or zero uplight as defined in Dark Sky Guidelines to ensure light is directed downward onto the roadway, preventing upward light pollution and reducing stray light and shall not be directed into natural areas outside of the road surface to prevent additional light pollution and disruption of nocturnal wildlife activity. All Project lighting should also use amber or orange, low-wavelength lights (typically 560nm–610nm), which are less visible to many animals and insects.

COMMENT 5: Wildlife Connectivity Improvements

Issue: The MND does not identify or address wildlife connectivity issues in this stretch of SR-12 identified as part of a priority barrier for terrestrial wildlife (Barrier ID: W155; Barrier Name: SR-12 (Walters Road to SR-113) (CDFW 2021). After Assembly Bill (AB) 2344 passed in 2022, Caltrans plays a central role in the implementation to remediate existing wildlife connectivity priorities. In addition, CDFW created a team to assist Caltrans with the implementation of AB 2344, developed the Terrestrial Wildlife Connectivity Barriers Dataset, and provide technical advice regarding wildlife connectivity to Caltrans and advance connectivity science in California. CDFW's Bay Delta Region staff remain interested and available to assist Caltrans meet priority wildlife connectivity remediation needs for this project.

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Supporting Evidence: SR-12 (Walters Road to SR-113) barrier is over 16 miles in length affecting California tiger salamander and other herpetofauna. The road elevation and parallel roadside drainages create a barrier that is difficult for amphibians to traverse. Caltrans SR-12 pavement projects may have the opportunity for undercrossing enhancements by implementing movement studies, culvert, and road studies to develop well-designed undercrossings. Surveys conducted in 2025 found California tiger salamander on both sides of SR12, within the right of way, and California tiger salamander have been found deceased on the roadway (Sarah Estrella, email, June 25, 2026).

A recent Caltrans project (EA 04-2X550; ITP# 2081-2024-012-03) (that is also part of a priority barrier for terrestrial wildlife SR-12 (Walters Road to SR-113)) is immediately west of the proposed project and incurred an unexpected, yet unprecedented amount of California tiger salamander occurrences (over 150 occurrences between July 2025 and Jan 2026) due to a pond near the Project site. Connectivity features were developed as ITP mitigation without proper movement or road studies to adequately improve the needs of the species. As a result, no additional culverts were installed, direction curbs directing California tiger salamander safely away from the roadside were not connected, and proper long-term cover was not provided for California tiger salamander that found themselves exposed during daylight hours.

Recommended Mitigation Measure: To reduce potential impacts to California tiger salamander and other herpetofauna, to less-than-significant and comply with CESA, AB 2344, and Senate Bills 1250 and 790, CDFW recommends early engagement with CDFW's Caltrans connectivity liaison to improve connectivity features and recommend including the measure below.

Permanent Barrier Restriction to Support Wildlife Connectivity. The Permittee shall design and implement the Project to avoid and/or restrict the installation of permanent barriers to wildlife movement. Project design shall be consistent with CDFW Wildlife Connectivity Priority Barriers recommendations and Caltrans wildlife connectivity guidance, and in alignment with state policy direction under AB 2344 and Senate Bills 1250 and 790, which emphasize integrating wildlife connectivity and collision reduction into transportation planning and infrastructure. The Project shall avoid continuous or impermeable features (e.g., solid fencing, walls, or roadway elements) within mapped or known movement corridors unless demonstrated to be necessary for public safety and only where wildlife permeability is maintained or improved.

Where barriers cannot be avoided, the Permittee shall incorporate wildlife-permeable design features, such as crossing structures, strategically placed openings (e.g. escape ramps), and exclusion fencing (e.g. median and roadside cement barriers) designed to guide wildlife to safe crossing locations rather than impede movement, consistent with Caltrans requirements to improve connectivity (per AB 2344). Project design shall develop in coordination with CDFW and Caltrans to ensure the project does not create new or exacerbate existing movement barriers and supports long-term functional landscape connectivity.

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 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>.

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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 Caltrans in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources. Due to the issues presented in this letter, CDFW concludes that the MND does not adequately identify or mitigate the Project's significant, or potentially significant, impacts on biological resources. Deficiencies in the Lead Agency CEQA document can affect later project approvals by CDFW in its role as a Responsible Agency. In addition, because of these issues, CDFW has concerns that Caltrans may not have the basis to approve the project or make "findings" as required by CEQA unless the environmental document is modified to eliminate and/or mitigate significant impacts, as reasonably feasible (CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15074, 15091 & 15092).

Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Karen Taylor, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at (707) 287-2144 or Karen.Taylor@wildlife.ca.gov; or Jason Faridi, Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory), at Jason.Faridi@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Erin Chappell
Regional Manager
Bay Delta Region

ec: Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, State Clearinghouse (SCH No. 2026060207)
Craig Weightman, CDFW Bay Delta Region – Craig.Weightman@wildlife.ca.gov
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Brian Hansen, USFWS - Brian_Hansen@fws.gov

REFERENCES

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