

Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
P.O. Box 3044, 1400 Tenth Street, Rm. 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Habitat Conservation Planning Branch
Native Plant Program
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

Project Title: Santa Ana River Woollystar and Slender-Horned Spineflower Management in the Woolly Star Preserve Area (Project)

Project Location: The Project will take place in San Bernardino County in the Santa Ana River floodplains' Woolly Star Preserve Area (WSPA). The WSPA encompasses four main parcels that include six core project areas that differ in location relative to downstream gradients and/or physical separation. Seed viability testing will take place in Los Angeles County at the California Botanic Garden (CalBG) nursery facilities in Claremont, CA (34.11095, -117.71466).

Project Description: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife is issuing a California Endangered Species Act scientific, educational, or management permit pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081, subdivision (a) to San Bernardino County Flood Control District (Permit No. 2081(a)-26-006-RP) for a project to collect Santa Ana River Woollystar (SARWS) and Slender-Horned Spineflower (SHSF) seed, conduct seed viability and seedbank germination trials, and implement weed management within the WSPA. Together these actions will satisfy objectives of the Multi Species Habitat Management Plan for the WSPA, inform species distribution and viability assessments, and support the development of a seed repository for future management needs. A portion of the collected seed will be used to conduct germination trials to test seed viability. Remaining seed will be placed into long-term conservation storage to be used for future management needs that may include seed bulking, population enhancement, and restoration activities in the WSPA. Soil samples from the top 2-centimeters of soil will be collected from each of the 13 SHSF patches that were historically occupied but are presently unoccupied. Germination trials to determine whether a dormant viable seed bank remains will be conducted at CalBG. Approximately 1-quart of soil will also be collected from each patch for soil analysis of texture, nutrient levels, organic matter, pH, salinity, electrical conductivity, and cation exchange capacity. Weed management will be restricted to areas approved by the WSPA steering committee. A combination of herbicide application and physical control will be implemented based on the phenology of the target species. All physically controlled plant material will be removed from the treatment areas. During site monitoring visits, qualified biologists will remove non-native vegetation by hand in and around the two SHSF occupied patches. A 2-meter protection buffer will be delineated around each SHSF patch and non-native grasses will be treated from the buffer extending to 10 meters.

California Public Agency Approving Project: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Justin Wood, Senior Biologist, Aspen Environmental Group; Zachariah Smith, Planner III, San Bernardino County Flood Control District

Exempt Status:

- ☐ Ministerial;
- ☐ Declared Emergency;
- ☐ Emergency Project;
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. Type and section number: Section 15306, Class 6, and 15307, Class 7

Reasons why project is exempt: The Project consists of experimental management, and resource evaluation activities to conserve and recover California endangered Santa Ana River woollystar and slender-horned spineflower. The permit issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for the Project includes measures to ensure the existing populations of these two species are adequately protected.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Joanne Heraty

Area Code/Telephone/ Extension: (916) 594-4574

Signature:

Signed by:
Kevin Ponce
Kevin Ponce, Native Plant Program Manager

Date: 9/8/2026

☐ Signed by Lead Agency

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____