VCS Environmental
EXPERTS IN STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

April 1, 2024

To: Matthew Esquivel

From: Wade Caffrey

Subject: La Sierra and Victoria Project Biological Resources Assessment

This memo provides the results of a biological site visit conducted on March 22, 2024, by VCS biologist Vanessa Tucker within the approximately 8.8-acre La Sierra & Victoria Project located in the County of Riverside and confirms the results of the biological resources survey previously completed in 2014 by Victor M. Horchar and the burrowing owl survey conducted in 2019 by Gonzales Environmental Consulting, LLC. While general biological resources are discussed, the focus of this assessment is on those resources considered to be sensitive and to determine any changes in conditions from the prior studies. This letter report was prepared based upon the results of a literature review and field visit on March 22, 2024.

Project Information

The Project site is in the City of Riverside, Riverside County, California. The Project site is regionally accessible from State Route 91 (SR-91). Cross streets are Victoria Avenue (Ave) and La Sierra Ave. A Regional and Aerial Map are included as Figures 1 and 2, respectively. The Project site is located within Township 3 South, Range 6 West, and Section 25 of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Topographic Map, 7.5 Minute Series, Riverside West Quadrangle, Assessor's Parcel Number 136-220-016.

The Project site is approximately 8.8 acres and sits on relatively topographically flat land, with elevations ranging from 820 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to 843 feet MSL. Previous land uses include agricultural purposes. A majority of the site contains orange groves with remnants of a modular office and an old playground structure. The site is surrounded by single-family residences to the north and west across Victoria Avenue and La Sierra Avenue respectively, as well as to the east and south. The Project is located approximately 2.8 miles northwest of Lake Mathews and approximately one mile northwest of undeveloped open space that is adjacent to Lake Mathews Estelle Mountain Reserve.

Past Biological Survey Efforts

The Environmental Checklist in the City of Riverside Planning Commission Memorandum for P19-0380 and P19-0480 (July 25, 2019) described the previous onsite biological resources as follows:

> *"Original Project: Less than Significant Impact / No Impact. The Original Project site is within the boundary of the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP); however, it is not within a Criteria Cell; is not classified as Public/ Quasi-Public (P/ QP) land; and it not within an identified Linkage. The Original Project site is within the MSHCP survey area for burrowing owl. As part of the 2014 Initial Study, a project-specific habitat assessment and focused burrowing owl study was prepared. The findings of these studies concluded that the Original Project was in compliance with the MSHCP and no candidate species, sensitive species, species of concern, or special status species or suitable habitat for such species were present on the Original Project site. Additionally, the Original Project site did not support riparian habitat or any other sensitive natural community. For these reasons, the 2014 Initial Study concluded that implementation of the Original Project would result in no impact with regard to candidate, sensitive or special status species; riparian habitat; the movement of native or migratory species; or conflict with the provisions of the MSHCP. The 2014 Initial Study concluded that due to the Original Project site being located within an urban built-up area and having a long history of severe site disturbance, implementation of the Original Project would not have a substantial effect on federally protected wetlands; therefore impacts would be less than significant. The 2014 Initial Study also concluded that impacts with regard to local policies protecting trees would be less than significant because the planting and maintenance of street trees proposed as part of the Original Project will be in compliance with the City's Urban Forest Tree Policy Manual.*
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> *Revised Project: No Substantial Change from Previous Analysis. As with the Original Project, the Revised Project must be consistent with and comply with the provisions of the MSHCP and the City's Urban Forest Tree Policy Manual. Gonzales Environmental Consultant, LLC, conducted a burrowing owl survey in March 20192 (the 2019 survey) to determine if site conditions had changed since the 2014 surveys conducted for the Original Project. The results of the 2019 survey confirm the findings of the 2014 surveys; specifically, there is no suitable burrowing owl habitat; no owl burrows or burrowing owls present on the site or in adjacent areas. Additionally, there are no stock piles of material or areas that burrowing owls would be found. Thus, the 2019 survey concurred with the findings of the 2014 surveys. Because the 2019 survey confirmed the results of the earlier surveys and the Revised Project will comply with the MSHCP and City's Urban Forest Tree Policy Manual, the Revised Project will result in the same impacts as the Original Project."*

Survey Methods

Prior to the field visit, the following available literature and databases were reviewed to identify sensitive habitats and special status wildlife species, specifically burrowing owls (BUOW), in the vicinity of the study area:

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) for special-status wildlife, sensitive plant communities and special status plants within a two-mile radius of the Project site.

- The Riverside Conservation Authority Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Online Mapper.
- City of Riverside, California Code of Ordinances Regarding the Removal of Trees on Private Property, Chapter 13.06 Vegetation Maintenance.

The field visit was conducted on March 22, 2024, by VCS biologist Vanessa Tucker. During the survey, the biologist walked the entirety of the Project site paying special attention to those areas that could host sensitive vegetation communities or had the potential to provide suitable habitat for special status plant species. Plant species were identified using plant field and taxonomical guides, such as The Jepson Manual: Vascular Plants of California, second edition (Baldwin et al. 2012).

The vegetation communities and habitat conditions were inspected to confirm the presence and habitat quality of the vegetation found onsite. Where appropriate, descriptions of vegetation communities from the Manual of California Vegetation (Sawyer et al. 2008) were also utilized. Any deviations from standard vegetation classifications were made on best professional judgment when areas did not fit into a specific habitat description provided by the Manual.

During the survey, VCS paid special attention to those habitat areas that appeared to provide suitable habitat for burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*, BUOW). The methods used to detect and identify BUOW included direct sighting of BUOW and observation of key signs such as scat, tracks, burrows, nests, and calls.

Onsite soil conditions, topography, vegetative communities, and habitat quality were documented during the field surveys. All wildlife species encountered visually or audibly during the field survey were identified and recorded in field notes. Binoculars were used to aid in the identification of observed wildlife. Photographs were taken to document existing conditions within the study area. Photo pages are attached (Appendix A).

Results

Vegetation

The Project site is surrounded by single-family residences to the north and west across Victoria Avenue and La Sierra Avenue respectively, as well as to the east and south. A majority of the site contains orange groves with remnants of a modular office, an old playground structure, and undeveloped land in the southeast corner of the site. There are several large mature trees such as citrus, avocado, sycamore, jacaranda, and pine that could support nesting birds within the Project site. The vegetation observed within the Project site include:

- Citrus tree (*Citrus* sp.)
- Avocado tree (*Persea* sp.)
- Western Sycamore tree (*Platanus racemosa*)
- Jacaranda tree (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*)
- Pine tree (*Pinus* sp.)
- Red brome grass (*Bromus* sp.)

Jurisdictional Waters

During the field visit, no jurisdictional waters or water features were observed within the Project site. The results of the March 2024 survey confirm that the site conditions have not changed since the 2014 and 2019 surveys. The site does not support riparian habitat or any other sensitive natural community, and no candidate or sensitive species or suitable habitat for such species was present on the Project site.

Wildlife

CNDDB occurrences for coastal California gnatcatcher (CAGN, *Polioptila californica californica,* federally threatened, MSHCP covered), occur approximately 0.6 miles south of the site (CDFW 2024). However, no suitable habitat was observed within the Project site. Therefore, no focus surveys are required. In addition, CNDDB occurrences for Stephen's kangaroo rat (SKR, *Dipodomys stephensi*, MSHCP covered and federally threatened) occur approximately 0.5 miles southwest of the site (CDFW 2024). However, no suitable habitat was observed within the Project site. Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA) requires a SKR mitigation fee because the Project site falls within Riverside County's SKR Plan Fee.

During the field visit, the following birds were observed/detected:

- Red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)
- House finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)
- Mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*)
- Song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*)
- White-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)
- European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)
- House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
- Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*)
- American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

Burrowing Owl

No BUOW or active signs thereof (whitewash, pellets, etc.) were observed within the Project site. The results of the March 2024 survey confirm the findings of the habitat assessment and focused burrowing owl study conducted in 2014 by Victor M. Horchar and the burrowing owl survey conducted in 2019 by Gonzales Environmental Consulting, LLC, which reported no suitable burrowing owl habitat or evidence thereof is present within the Project site or surrounding areas.

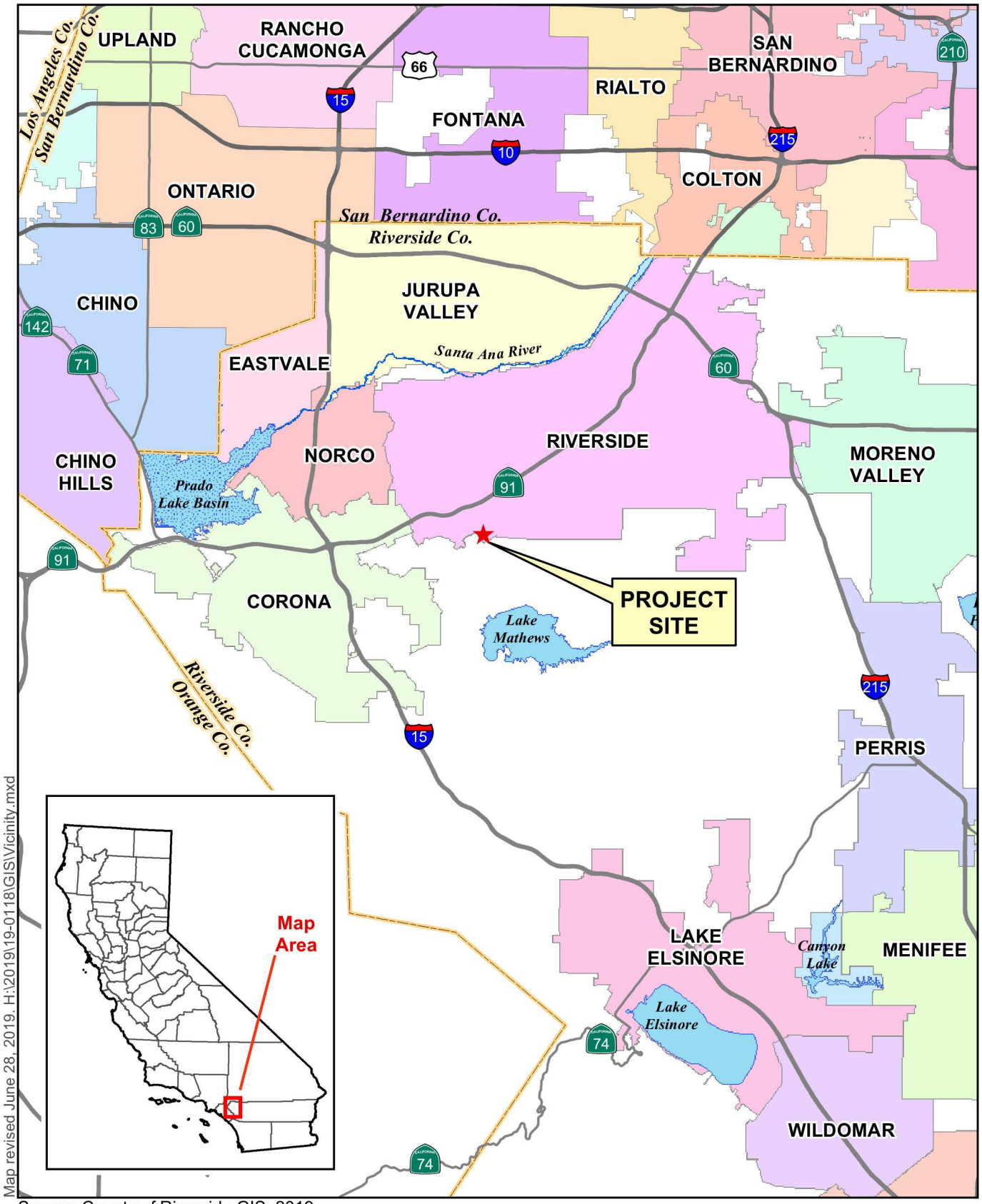
Conclusion

The conditions within the Project site are consistent with the 2014 and 2019 surveys. The VCS Habitat Assessment and burrowing owl survey confirms the findings of the previous habitat assessments and focused burrowing owl studies. A 30-day preconstruction survey is required pursuant to the MSHCP.

Additionally, we recommend a pre-construction nesting bird survey be conducted 3-days before the start of the Project if project clearing/grubbing and/or grading is initiated between February 15 and September 15 to avoid impacts to nesting birds, pursuant to the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

The site does not support riparian habitat or any other sensitive natural community, and no candidate or sensitive species or suitable habitat for such species was present on the Project site. The Project is in compliance with the MSHCP and the City's Urban Forest Tree Policy Manual.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at WCaffrey@vcsenvironmental.com or 949.234.6076.



Map revised June 28, 2019. H:\2019\19-0118\GIS\Vicinity.mxd

Source: County of Riverside GIS, 2019

Figure 1 – Regional Map

P19-0380 (TTM 37764)/P19-480 (VR)

0 2 4 6 Miles

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Sources: Riverside Co. GIS, 2019;
USDA NAIP, 2016.

Figure 2 - Aerial Map

P19-0380 (TTM 37764)/P19-480 (VR)

0 250 500 750 Feet

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Photo 1: West-facing view of the northern portion of the survey area off Millsweet Place.

Photo 2: Southwest-facing view of the southern portion of the Project site.

Photo 3. West-facing view of the middle portion of the Project site.

Photo 4. North-facing view of middle portion of the Project site depicting the citrus orchard in the background.

Photo 5. North-facing view of middle portion of the Project site depicting developed land and large pine trees.

Photo 6. East-facing view of citrus trees on the southeast corner of the Project site.