

**BURROWING OWL SURVEY**  
*(Athene cunicularia)*

**TENTATIVE PARCEL MAP NO. 19569**  
**APN 3070-141-17**

**SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**  
(USGS Baldy Mesa, CA Quad., Township 8 North, Range 4 West, Section 19)

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**Project No: RCA#2014-75BUpdated**

**July 10, 2018**  
**(Date Report Prepared)**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project proponent is proposing a tentative parcel map (TMP No. 19569) for a 10 acre parcel northeast of Phelan, CA in San Bernardino County, CA (Township 4 North, Range 6 West, Section 3) (Figures 1, 2, and 3). The site currently supports a relatively undisturbed creosote bush community. The common perennials observed included creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), Joshua tree (*yucca brevifolia*), yellow-green matchweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), and burrobrush (*Franseria dumosa*). Common annuals on the site included schsimus (*Schismus barbatus*), brome grasses (*Bromus sp.*), and ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*).

The property is located within the known distribution of the burrowing owl; therefore, focused surveys were performed for the species on July 10, 2018 in conjunction with a focused survey for the desert tortoise. The nearest owl populations are about 4-miles southeast of the site (Occurrence #917, CNDDDB, 2018).

The owl surveys were conducted as per survey protocol guidelines established by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW, March 7, 2012). Surveys were performed from approximately 0700 to 1100 hours. Surveys were not conducted in the zone of influence due to the presence of houses to the north, south, east, and west. All of the surveys were performed by Randall Arnold using the standard survey protocol for the species as required by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

**No burrowing owls were observed during the field investigations conducted on July 10, 2018. Furthermore, no owl sign (burrows, castings, whitewash, etc.) were observed during the surveys.** (Note: If burrowing owls are observed on the site in the future, the owls should not be removed, harassed, or in anyway disturbed regardless of the results of this survey. To do so may constitute a violation of State regulations. If owls are encountered during future development activities, all activities should cease and California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW] should be notified.)

## 1.0 PROJECT AND PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

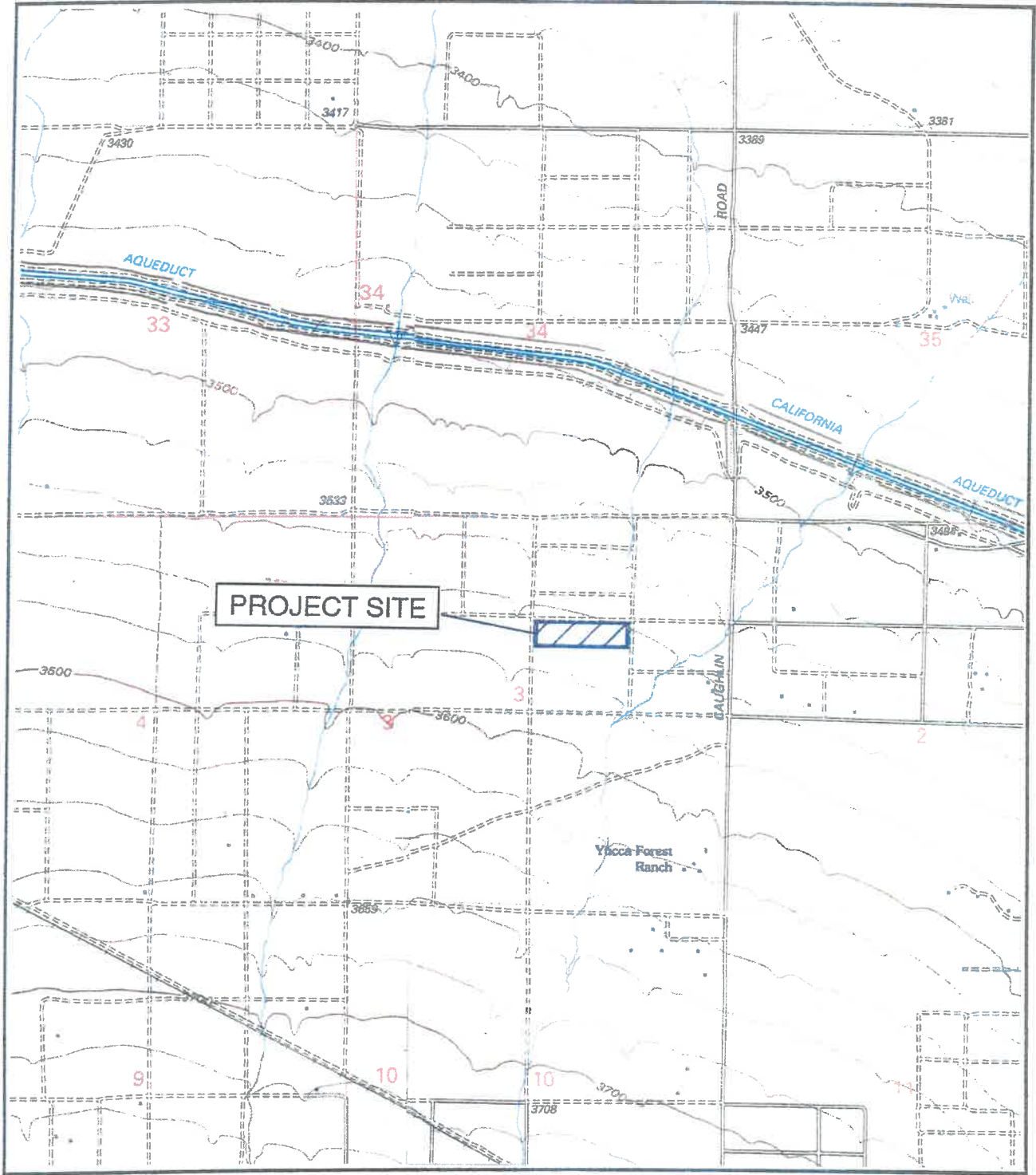
The property is located at the southeast corner of Middleton Road and Seventh Street, Township 4 North, Range 6 West, Section 3 in San Bernardino County, California (Figures 1 and Figure 2). The site is approximately 10-acres in size and currently supports an undisturbed creosote bush plant community.

General biological surveys were conducted on the property on July 10, 2018 during which data on the existing biological conditions were recorded, and the results of the survey are presented in the General Biological Assessment Report. The site is dominated by creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), Joshua tree (*yucca brevifolia*), yellow-green matchweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), and burrobush (*Franseria dumosa*) (Figure 3). See Section 4.0 for a more detailed discussion of the biological resources.

The proponent is proposing to subdivide the site into 4 parcels (1.99-acres, 2.27-acres, 2.24-acres & 2.03-acres) as part of Tentative Parcel Map No. 19569 (Figure 1). Elevations ranged from about 3,550 to 3,570 feet (MSL) with a slight slope to the north (Figure 2). Soils consisted of sandy loam with a few small rocks. The site is bordered on the north, south, east and west by existing single family homes.

The USGS Baldy Mesa, CA Quadrangle does not show any blue-line channels on the site, and no streams, desert washes or other water features were observed during the July 10, 2018 field investigations. No wildlife corridors bisect the property, and no sensitive wildlife species were observed during the general biological surveys or the focused/protocol surveys for the desert tortoise and burrowing owl. There are no document observations of any special status species in the immediate area according to the California Natural Diversity Data Base (2018). Weather conditions during the July 10, 2018 field investigations consisted of winds of 5 to 10 mph from the south, temperatures of 70 to 85 (°F) (AM) with no cloud coverage.





**FIGURE 2**  
**PROPERTY LOCATION**  
 (Tentative Parcel 19569)  
 (Source: USGS Baldy Mesa, CA Quad., 1996)





CENTER OF SITE LOOKING EAST



CENTER OF SITE LOOKING NORTH

FIGURE 3  
PHOTOGRAPHS OF SITE  
(TENTATIVE PARCEL MAP NO. 19569)



CENTER OF SITE LOOKING WEST



CENTER OF SITE LOOKING SOUTH

FIGURE 3, cont.  
PHOTOGRAPHS OF SITE  
(TENTATIVE PARCEL MAP NO. 19563)



## 2.0 LITERATURE AND RECORD REVIEW

As part of the environmental process, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) data sources were reviewed prior to initiation of field surveys to determine if burrowing owls have been documented within the project area or in the surrounding area. Based on the literature review and evaluation of the CNDDDB database, it was determined that the project area is located within the general distribution of the burrowing owl. In addition, populations of owls have been identified in the immediate surrounding area according to CNDDDB (2018) with the nearest documented owl populations about 4-miles southeast of the site (Appendix A: Table 1 [Occurrence #917]).

The burrowing owl is a year-long resident of open, dry grassland and desert habitats. The species was formerly common throughout central and southern California; however, the species has seen a significant reduction over the last few decades due to development activities; farming activities, predation by dogs and cats, and habitat destruction (CDFG, 1990). Conversions of grassland and desert habitats to agricultural fields and residential developments have contributed to the greatest amount of habitat destruction in recent decades. The reduction in population levels was noted as early as the 1940s. Burrowing owls primarily prey upon insects; although, small mammals, lizards, birds, and carrion make up a portion of the owl's diet (CDFG, 1990). Burrowing owls typically utilize abandoned rodent burrows for roosting and nesting.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

Burrowing owls are typically found in a wide variety of habitats including disturbed grassland and agricultural areas, and it was determined that the project area does support potential habitat for the species. Therefore, focused surveys were conducted on July 10, 2018 from about 0700 to 1100. As required by survey protocol, 30 meter, parallel belt transects were walked in a north-south direction in conjunction with the tortoise surveys conducted on the site. During the survey, the site was checked for owls and/or owl sign (burrows, tracks, scats, etc.). The survey protocol also requires that zone of influence (ZOI) surveys be conducted in the surrounding area out to a distance of 500 feet; however, ZOI surveys were not conducted due to the presence of houses and private property in the adjacent areas.

All transects were walked at a pace that allowed careful observations along the transect routes and in the immediate vicinity. Field notes were recorded regarding native plant assemblages, wildlife sign, and human affects in order to determine the presence or absence of suitable owl habitat. Surveys combined with identification of the habitat on the site and in the surrounding area will provide data on the potential presence or absence of burrowing owls. Temperatures during the March and April surveys were in the low 70's to low 85's (°F), wind speeds of about 0 to 10 mph, and cloud coverage from 0 to 15 percent cloud cover. No precipitation was recorded during the survey.

#### **Limitations:**

The results of this report do not constitute authorization for the "take" of burrowing owls or any other listed or sensitive wildlife species. The authorization to impact the burrowing owl can only be granted by CDFW. If owls are observed during future project activities, project activities should cease immediately and CDFW should be contacted to discuss mitigation measures which may be required for the species.

#### 4.0 GENERAL BIOLOGICAL SURVEY RESULTS

A creosote bush community covers the entire site and is relatively undisturbed. Most of the vegetation throughout the site consists of moderately tall creosote bushes (1 to 5 feet) and other shrubs about 1 to 3 feet in height (Figure 3). About thirty Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) were also scattered throughout the site. Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), Joshua trees, and burrobush (*Franseria dumosa*) were the most common perennials. (Appendix A, Table 2). Annuals scattered throughout adjacent areas included schsimus (*Schismus barbatus*), brome grasses (*Bromus sp.*), and ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*). Figure 4 depicts the general biological resources present on the site and in the surrounding area.

Ravens (*Corvus corax*), desert cottontail (*sylvilagus audubonii*), sage sparrows (*Artemisiospiza*), and side-blotched lizards (*Uta stansburiana*) were the only wildlife species observed during the July 10, 2018 surveys. Coyotes (*Canis latrans*), which are the most common carnivore in the desert, occasionally traverse the site during hunting activities as indicated by the presence of scats and tracks. Other common species which may occur on the site include California ground squirrels (*Spermophilus beecheyi*), western whiptail lizards (*Cnemidophorus tigris*), and desert spiny lizards (*Sceloporus magister*) (Appendix A, Table 3). No distinct wildlife corridors were identified on the site or in the immediate surrounding area, and no breeding activities were observed among any of the wildlife observed.



FIGURE 4  
AERIAL VIEW OF SITE  
(TMP NO. 19569, NOT TO SCALE)

## **5.0 RESULTS – BURROWING OWL**

The project area supports suitable habitat for burrowing owls based on the results of the field investigations; however, no owls or owl sign was identified during the focused survey conducted on July 10, 2018. The absence of owls and owl sign on the property indicates that the site does not support any populations of the species. The population levels of the species in the general area surrounding the site are relatively low; therefore, based on the results of the field investigations and the current population levels, it is the opinion of RCA Associates, Inc. that burrowing owls are not expected to migrate onto the site in the near future.

## 6.0 IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 SIGNIFICANT CRITERIA

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines define “significant effect on the environment” as a “substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in the environment.” The CEQA Guidelines further indicate that there may be significant effect on biological resources if a project will:

1. Cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels.
2. Threaten or eliminate a plant or animal community.
3. Substantially affect, reduce the number, or restrict the range of unique, rare, or endangered species of animal or plant, or the habitat of the species.
4. Substantially diminish or reduce habitat for fish, wildlife, or plants.
5. Interfere substantially with the movement of resident or migratory fish and wildlife species.
6. Change the diversity of species, or number of any species of plants or animals.
7. Introduce new species of plants and animals into an area, or act as a barrier to the normal replenishment of existing species.
8. Deteriorate existing fish and wildlife habitat.
9. Conflict with any approved regional Habitat Conservation Plan.

### 6.2 IMPACTS

*Would the proposed project cause a fish and wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels or threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15065)?:* The proposed project would result in the removal of 10-acres of a creosote bush community; however, the results of the July 10, 2018 survey indicates that the site is not occupied by the burrowing owls. Furthermore, any future construction activities are not expected to cause any direct or indirect mortality of the burrowing owl.

*Would the proposed project substantially diminish or reduce habitat for fish, wildlife, or plants (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15065)?:* Loss of 10-acres of creosote bush habitat would not be considered an adverse impact due to the absence of burrowing owls on the site and in the zone of influence.

*Would the proposed project interfere substantially with the movement of resident or migratory fish or wildlife species (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15065)?:* Although the proposed project would result in the loss of 10-acres of a creosote bush community, the project is not expected to have a significant impact on the movement of any resident or migratory fish or wildlife (including the burrowing owl). No migratory corridors occur within the boundaries of the property.

*Would the proposed project introduce new species of plants or animals into an area, or act as a barrier to the normal replenishment of existing species (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15065)?*: The proposed project is not expected to introduce any new species to the site or surrounding area, nor is the project expected to act as a barrier to the replenishment of existing species, including the burrowing owl.

*Would the proposed project conflict with any approved Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15065)?*: The proposed project will not conflict with any HCP being prepared for any other project in the area.

*Would the proposed project change the diversity of species, or number of any species of plants (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15065)?*: The proposed project will not change the diversity of species or number of any species, nor will the proposed project have an adverse impact on the burrowing owl population levels in the region. In addition, the proposed residential project is not expected to cause a disruption of any continuity of any important wildlife habitat or habitat/wildlife corridors.

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

No additional investigations are recommended at this time; however, the survey results for the burrowing owl are only valid for 30-days based on CDFW requirements. An additional owl survey (i.e., “30-day pre-construction” survey) may be required by CDFW prior to the start of future development activities. In addition, the property cannot be modified, graded, or cleared prior to receipt of project approval. Such action prior to project approval may violate State regulations and could be considered grounds for denial of the project. Mitigation and restoration plans may also be required under such actions. Although the proposed project is not expected to have any adverse impact on the burrowing owl, CDFW should be contacted for concurrence with the conclusions presented in this report as per agency requirements.

## **7.0 PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES**

The site does not support any burrowing owls at the present time and future development activities are not expected to impact the species. No mitigation measures are proposed at the present time; however, CDFW may require implementation of “standard” measures during future construction activities such as (1) Participation of all construction personnel in a “burrowing owl awareness” program; (2) Minimize cross-country vehicle use during the construction phase; and (3) Keeping vehicle speeds to 20-mph on the project site. In addition, if burrowing owls are observed on the property during future construction activities, CDFW should be contacted to initiate consultations, and to discuss additional mitigation measures which may be required. CDFW is the only agency which can grant authorization for the “take” of the burrowing owl.

No additional investigations are recommended at this time. However, CDFW will likely require the Client perform a pre-construction survey 30-days (or less) prior to the start of any future construction activities to determine if any owls have moved onto the property site since completion of the focused survey on July 10, 2018.



## 8.0 REFERENCES

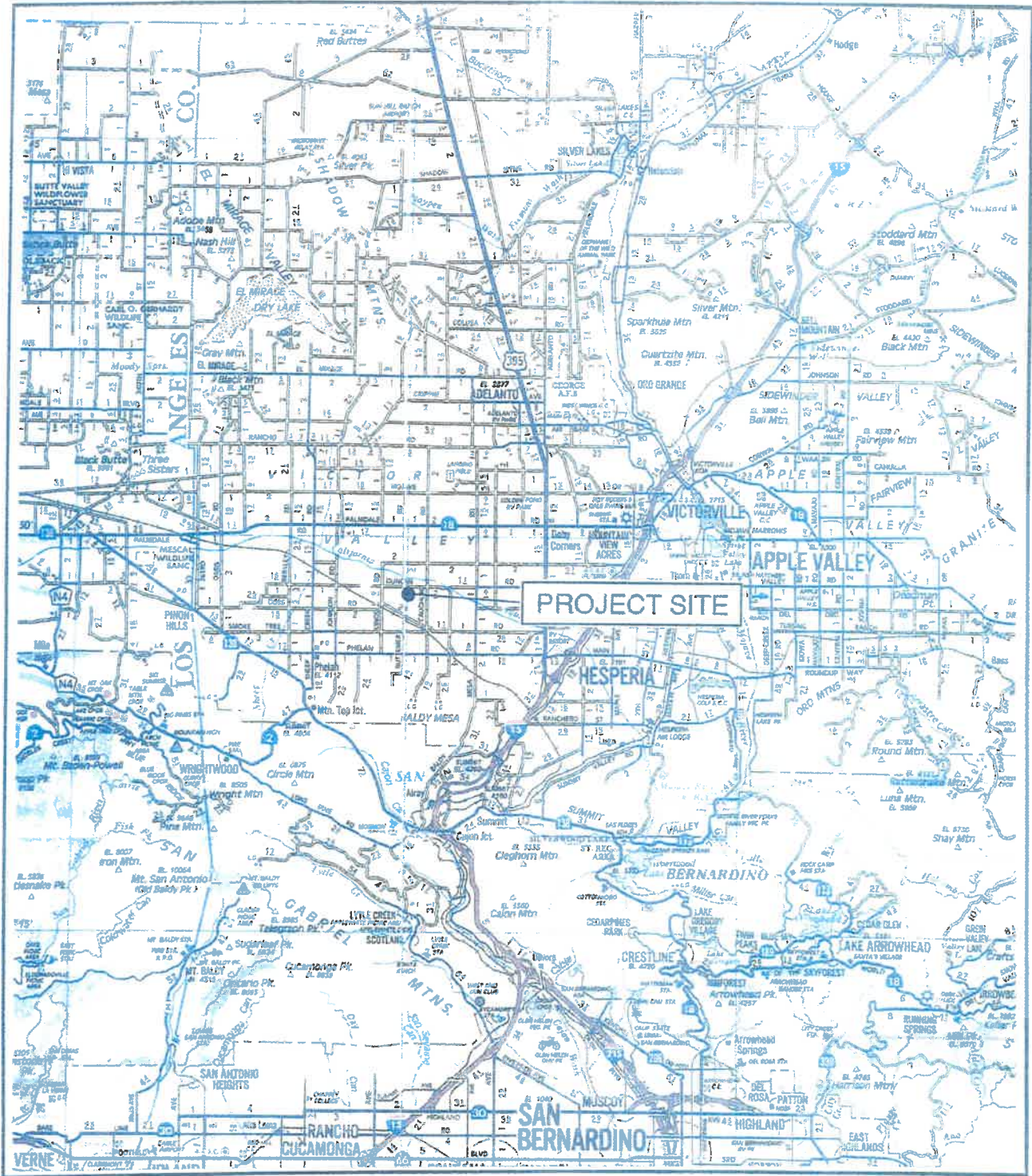
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**Table 1. Burrowing Owl occurrences within 5 miles of the site based on California Diversity Data Base (2013). (SC = Species of special concern)**

Name	Listing Status	Habitat Requirements	Presence/Absence	Comments
Burrowing owl <i>(Athene cunicularia)</i>	CDFG: SC	Various: desert scrub, agricultural lands, disturbed areas	Site supports suitable habitat.	A. Occurrence #917; 4-miles southeast of the site.

**FIGURES**

**Vicinity Map**



VICINITY MAP

(Tentative Parcel 19569)  
 (Source: ACSC Map Source, 2014)



**SITE PHOTOGRAPHS**



SOUTHWEST CORNER LOOKING NORTHEAST



NORTHWEST CORNER LOOKING SOUTHEAST

SITE PHOTOGRAPHS  
(TENTATIVE PARCEL MAP NO. 19563)

**APPENDIX A**

**Flora and Fauna Compendium Tables**

**Table 2 - Plants observed on the site and in the immediate surrounding area.**

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Yellow-green matchweed	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	On-site & ZOI.
Joshua tree	<i>Yucca brevifolia</i>	“
Burrobush	<i>Franseria dumosa</i>	“
Creosote bush	<i>Larrea tridentata</i>	“
Ricegrass	<i>Oryzopsis hymenoides</i>	“
Brome grasses	<i>Bromus sp.</i>	“
Schismus	<i>Schismus barbatus</i>	“

**ZOI = Zone of Influence (surrounding area)**

**Table 3 - Wildlife observed on the site and those species expected to occur in surrounding area.**

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	On-site & ZOI
Song sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	ZOI
Mourning dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	“
Side-blotched lizard	<i>Uta stansburiana</i>	May occur on-site.
Western whiptail lizard	<i>Cnemidophorus tigris</i>	“
Desert spiny lizard	<i>Sceloporus magister</i>	“
Desert cottontail rabbit	<i>Sylvilagus auduboni</i>	On-site
Coyotes	<i>Canis latrans</i>	On-site & ZOI
California ground squirrel	<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>	May occur on-site & ZOI
Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus californica</i>	On-site & ZOI

**ZOI = Zone of Influence (surrounding area)**

Note: The above Tables are not comprehensive lists of every plant or animal species which may occur in the area, but are a list of those common species which were identified on the site during the one-day survey or which are common in the region.



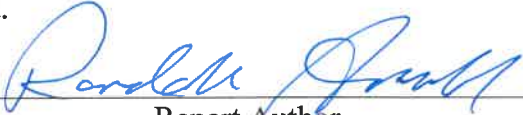
**APPENDIX B**

**Certification**

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## CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits, present the data and information required for this biological evaluation, and that the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. Fieldwork conducted for this assessment was performed by me or under my direct supervision. I certify that I have not signed a non-disclosure or consultant confidentiality agreement with the project applicant or applicant's representative and that I have no financial interest in the project.

Date: 7-10-2018 Signed:   
Report Author

Field Work Performed By: Randall Arnold  
Senior Biologist