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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

December 19, 2019

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Chris Borchert  
City of Hesperia  
9700 Seventh Ave.  
Hesperia, CA 92345

## STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report  
Hesperia Commerce Center II, State Clearinghouse No. 2019110418

Dear Mr. Borchert:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Hesperia Commerce Center II (Project), State Clearinghouse No. 2019110418. CDFW is responding to the NOP as a Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources (California Fish and Game Code Sections 711.7 and 1802, and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15386), and as a Responsible Agency regarding any discretionary actions (CEQA Guidelines Section 15381), such as the issuance of a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (California Fish and Game Code Sections 1600 et seq.) and/or a California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Permit for Incidental Take of Endangered, Threatened, and/or Candidate species (California Fish and Game Code Sections 2080 and 2080.1).

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

#### Project Location

The proposed Project is located in the City of Hesperia within San Bernardino County. The Project is bounded by Yucca Terrace Drive to the north, Highway 395 to the east, Phelan Road to the south, and Los Angeles Bureau of Water and Power utility corridor to the west. The Project area is approximately 194.8 acres of undeveloped habitat contained within Section 16, Township 4 North, Range 5 West, as depicted on the U.S. Geological Survey *Baldy Mesa, California* 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle map. The Assessor's Parcels Numbers for the Project area include 306435103, 306436101, 306439101, and 306440102.

#### Project Description

The proposed Project includes the construction of three industrial buildings, with a combined area of 3,742,590 square feet, and the construction of the associated loading docks, tractor-trailer stalls, and passenger vehicle parking spaces. The Project also includes landscaping.



## COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and the habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (i.e., biological resources); and administers the Natural Community Conservation Planning Program (NCCP Program). CDFW offers the comments and recommendations presented below to assist City of Hesperia (Lead Agency) in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, impacts on biological resources. The comments and recommendations are also offered to enable CDFW to adequately review and comment on the proposed Project with respect to impacts on biological resources. CDFW recommends that the forthcoming DEIR address the following:

### Assessment of Biological Resources

Section 15125(c) of the CEQA Guidelines states that knowledge of the regional setting of a Project is critical to the assessment of environmental impacts and that special emphasis should be placed on environmental resources that are rare or unique to the region. To enable CDFW to adequately review and comment on the Project, the DEIR should include a complete assessment of the flora and fauna within and adjacent to the Project footprint, with particular emphasis on identifying rare, threatened, endangered, and other sensitive species and their associated habitats. CDFW recommends that the DEIR specifically include:

1. An assessment of the various habitat types located within the Project footprint, and a map that identifies the location of each habitat type. CDFW recommends that floristic, alliance- and/or association-based mapping and assessment be completed following *The Manual of California Vegetation*, second edition (Sawyer et al. 2009). Adjoining habitat areas should also be included in this assessment where site activities could lead to direct or indirect impacts offsite. Habitat mapping at the alliance level will help establish baseline vegetation conditions.
2. A general biological inventory of the fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, and mammal species that are present or have the potential to be present within each habitat type onsite and within adjacent areas that could be affected by the Project. CDFW's California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) in Sacramento should be contacted at (916) 322-2493 or [CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov) to obtain current information on any previously reported sensitive species and habitat, including Significant Natural Areas identified under Chapter 12 of the Fish and Game Code, in the vicinity of the proposed Project. CDFW recommends that CNDDDB Field Survey Forms be completed and submitted to CNDDDB to document survey results. Online forms can be obtained and submitted at: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>.

Please note, CDFW's CNDDDB is not exhaustive in terms of the data it houses, nor is it an absence database. CDFW recommends that it be used as a starting point in gathering information about the potential presence of species within the general area of the Project site.

3. A complete, recent inventory of rare, threatened, endangered, and other sensitive species located within the Project footprint and within offsite areas with the potential to be affected, including California Species of Special Concern (SSC) and California Fully Protected



Species (Fish and Game Code § 3511). Species to be addressed should include all those which meet the CEQA definition (CEQA Guidelines § 15380). The inventory should address seasonal variations in use of the Project area and should not be limited to resident species. Focused species-specific surveys, completed by a qualified biologist and conducted at the appropriate time of year and time of day when the sensitive species are active or otherwise identifiable, are required. Acceptable species-specific survey procedures should be developed in consultation with CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where necessary. Note that CDFW generally considers biological field assessments for wildlife to be valid for a one-year period, and assessments for rare plants may be considered valid for a period of up to three years. Some aspects of the proposed Project may warrant periodic updated surveys for certain sensitive taxa, particularly if the Project is proposed to occur over a protracted time frame, or in phases, or if surveys are completed during periods of drought.

### **Species in Project Area**

CDFW recommends species-specific surveys for the threatened desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel. CDFW approved desert tortoise pre-construction surveys cover 100 percent of the project area and adjacent habitat using the methods described in the most recent *United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Field Manual. The Mohave Ground Squirrel Survey Guidelines* (Department of Fish and Game, July 2010) are available on CDFW's website (<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=83975&inline>).

CDFW also recommends a survey for burrowing owl, a Species of Special Concern. Survey recommendations and guidelines are provided in the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (Department of Fish and Game, March 2012) (<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=83843&inline>).

Development of a desert kit fox and American badger mitigation and monitoring plan is recommended. Desert kit fox is a protected species, and American badger is a Species of Special Concern.

CDFW also recommends a thorough, recent, floristic-based assessment of special status plants and natural communities, following CDFW's *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Natural Communities* (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Plants>).

### **Analysis of Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts to Biological Resources**

The DEIR should provide a thorough discussion of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts expected to adversely affect biological resources as a result of the Project. To ensure that Project impacts to biological resources are fully analyzed, the following information should be included in the DEIR:

1. A discussion of potential impacts from lighting, noise, human activity, and wildlife-human interactions created by zoning of development Projects or other Project activities adjacent to natural areas, exotic and/or invasive species, and drainage. The latter subject should address Project-related changes on drainage patterns and water quality within, upstream,



and downstream of the Project site, including: volume, velocity, and frequency of existing and post-Project surface flows; polluted runoff; soil erosion and/or sedimentation in streams and water bodies; and post-Project fate of runoff from the Project site.

2. A discussion of potential indirect Project impacts on biological resources, including resources in areas adjacent to the Project footprint, such as nearby public lands (e.g. National Forests, State Parks, etc.), open space, adjacent natural habitats, riparian ecosystems, wildlife corridors, and any designated and/or proposed reserve or mitigation lands (e.g., preserved lands associated with a Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other conserved lands).
3. An evaluation of impacts to adjacent open space lands from both the construction of the Project and long-term operational and maintenance needs.
4. A cumulative effects analysis developed as described under CEQA Guidelines § 15130. Please include all potential direct and indirect Project related impacts to riparian areas, wetlands, vernal pools, alluvial fan habitats, wildlife corridors or wildlife movement areas, aquatic habitats, sensitive species and other sensitive habitats, open lands, open space, and adjacent natural habitats in the cumulative effects analysis. General and specific plans, as well as past, present, and anticipated future Projects, should be analyzed relative to their impacts on similar plant communities and wildlife habitats.

### **Mitigation Measures for Project Impacts to Biological Resources**

The DEIR should include appropriate and adequate avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures for all direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that are expected to occur as a result of the construction and long-term operation and maintenance of the Project. When proposing measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts, CDFW recommends consideration of the following:

1. *Fully Protected Species*: Several Fully Protected Species (Fish and Game Code § 3511) have the potential to occur within or adjacent to the Project area, including, but not limited to: White-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), and golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*). Fully protected species may not be taken or possessed at any time. Project activities described in the DEIR should be designed to completely avoid any fully protected species that have the potential to be present within or adjacent to the Project area. CDFW also recommends that the DEIR fully analyze potential adverse impacts to fully protected species due to habitat modification, loss of foraging habitat, and/or interruption of migratory and breeding behaviors. CDFW recommends that the Lead Agency include in the analysis appropriate avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures to reduce any possible indirect impacts to fully protected species.
2. *Sensitive Plant Communities*: CDFW considers sensitive plant communities to be imperiled habitats having both local and regional significance. Plant communities, alliances, and associations with a statewide ranking of S-1, S-2, S-3, and S-4 should be considered sensitive and declining at the local and regional level. These ranks can be obtained by querying the CNDDDB and are included in *The Manual of California Vegetation* (Sawyer et al. 2009). The DEIR should include measures to fully avoid and otherwise protect sensitive plant communities from Project-related direct and indirect impacts. A S-2 ranked species, short-joint beavertail, has the potential to occur within or adjacent to the Project area.



**Example Mitigation Measure for Sensitive Plant Species:**

Minimization measures may include transplanting perennial species, seed collection and dispersal from annual species, and other conservation strategies that will protect the viability of the local population. If minimization measures are implemented, monitoring of plant populations will be conducted annually for 5 years to assess the mitigation's effectiveness. The performance standard for mitigation will be no net reduction in the size or viability of the local population.

3. *Mitigation:* CDFW considers adverse Project-related impacts to sensitive species and habitats to be significant to both local and regional ecosystems, and the DEIR should include mitigation measures for adverse Project-related impacts to these resources. Mitigation measures should emphasize avoidance and reduction of Project impacts. For unavoidable impacts, onsite habitat restoration and/or enhancement should be evaluated and discussed in detail. If onsite mitigation is not feasible or would not be biologically viable and therefore not adequately mitigate the loss of biological functions and values, offsite mitigation through habitat creation and/or acquisition and preservation in perpetuity should be addressed.

The DEIR should include measures to perpetually protect the targeted habitat values within mitigation areas from direct and indirect adverse impacts in order to meet mitigation objectives to offset Project-induced qualitative and quantitative losses of biological values. Specific issues that should be addressed include restrictions on access, proposed land dedications, long-term monitoring and management programs, control of illegal dumping, water pollution, increased human intrusion, etc.

4. *Nesting Birds and Migratory Bird Treaty Act:* Please note that it is the Project proponent's responsibility to comply with all applicable laws related to nesting birds and birds of prey. Migratory non-game native bird species are protected by international treaty under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918, as amended (16 U.S.C. 703 *et seq.*). In addition, sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 of the Fish and Game Code (FGC) also afford protective measures as follows: Section 3503 states that it is unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird, except as otherwise provided by FGC or any regulation made pursuant thereto; Section 3503.5 states that it is unlawful to take, possess, or destroy any birds in the orders Falconiformes or Strigiformes (birds-of-prey) or to take, possess, or destroy the nest or eggs of any such bird except as otherwise provided by FGC or any regulation adopted pursuant thereto; and Section 3513 states that it is unlawful to take or possess any migratory nongame bird as designated in the MBTA or any part of such migratory nongame bird except as provided by rules and regulations adopted by the Secretary of the Interior under provisions of the MBTA.

CDFW recommends that the DEIR include the results of avian surveys, as well as specific avoidance and minimization measures to ensure that impacts to nesting birds do not occur. Project-specific avoidance and minimization measures may include, but not be limited to: Project phasing and timing, monitoring of Project-related noise (where applicable), sound walls, and buffers, where appropriate. The DEIR should also include specific avoidance and minimization measures that will be implemented should a nest be located within the Project site. If pre-construction surveys are proposed in the DEIR, CDFW recommends that they be



required no more than three (3) days prior to vegetation clearing or ground disturbance activities, as instances of nesting could be missed if surveys are conducted sooner.

**Example Mitigation Measure for Burrowing Owl:**

Preconstruction survey for burrowing owls will be conducted in areas supporting potentially suitable habitat and within 30 days prior to the start of construction activities. If ground-disturbing activities are delayed or suspended for more than 30 days after the pre-construction survey, the site will be resurveyed. Surveys for burrowing owls will be conducted in accordance with protocols established in the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (Department of Fish and Game, March 2012) or current version.

If burrowing owls are detected, disturbance to burrows will be avoided during nesting season (February 1 through August 31). Buffers will be established around occupied burrows in accordance with guidance provided in the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (Department of Fish and Game, March 2012) or current version.

Outside of the nesting season. Passive owl relocation techniques approved by CDFW will be implemented. Owls would be excluded from burrows in the immediate Project area and within a buffer zone by installing one-way doors in burrow entrances. These doors will be placed at least 48 hours prior to ground-disturbing activities. Compensatory mitigation for permanent loss of owl habitat will be provided following the guidance in the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (Department of Fish and Game, March 2012) or current version. The Project area will be monitored daily for one week to confirm owl departure from burrows prior to any ground-disturbing activities.

Where possible, burrows will be excavated using hand tools and refilled to prevent reoccupation. Sections of flexible plastic pipe will be inserted into the tunnels during excavation to maintain an escape route for any wildlife inside the burrow.

5. *Moving out of Harm's Way:* The proposed project is anticipated to result in the clearing of natural habitats that support native species. To avoid direct mortality, CDFW recommends that the lead agency condition the DEIR to require that a CDFW-approved qualified biologist be retained to be onsite prior to and during all ground- and habitat-disturbing activities to move out of harm's way special status species or other wildlife of low or limited mobility that would otherwise be injured or killed from project-related activities. Movement of wildlife out of harm's way should be limited to only those individuals that would otherwise be injured or killed, and individuals should be moved only as far as necessary to ensure their safety. Furthermore, it should be noted that the temporary relocation of onsite wildlife does not constitute effective mitigation for the purposes of offsetting project impacts associated with habitat loss.

**California Endangered Species Act**

CDFW is responsible for ensuring appropriate conservation of fish and wildlife resources including threatened, endangered, and/or candidate plant and animal species, pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). A CESA Incidental Take Permit (ITP) is issued to conserve, protect, enhance, and restore State-listed CESA species and their habitats. CDFW recommends that a CESA ITP be obtained if the Project has the potential to result in "take"



(California Fish and Game Code Section 86 defines "take" as "hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill") of CESA-listed species.

Take of any CESA-listed species is prohibited except as authorized by state law (Fish and Game Code, §§ 2080 & 2085). If the Project, including the Project construction or any Project-related activity during the life of the Project, results in take of CESA-listed species, CDFW recommends that the Project proponent seek appropriate authorization prior to Project implementation through an ITP. Desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel are two CESA-listed threatened species that have potential to occur within the Project Area, presence needs to be determined by protocol surveys required by the Lead Agency.

CDFW encourages early consultation, as significant modification to the proposed Project and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures may be necessary to obtain a CESA ITP. Please note that the proposed avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures must be sufficient for CDFW to conclude that the Project's impacts are fully mitigated and the measures, when taken in aggregate, must meet the full mitigation standard.

### **Lake and Streambed Alteration Program**

Fish and Game Code section 1602 requires an entity to notify CDFW prior to commencing any activity that may do one or more of the following: Substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of any river, stream or lake; Substantially change or use any material from the bed, channel or bank of any river, stream, or lake; or Deposit debris, waste or other materials that could pass into any river, stream or lake. Please note that "any river, stream or lake" includes those that are episodic (i.e., those that are dry for periods of time) as well as those that are perennial (i.e., those that flow year-round). This includes ephemeral streams, desert washes, and watercourses with a subsurface flow. It may also apply to work undertaken within the flood plain of a body of water.

Upon receipt of a complete notification, CDFW determines if the proposed Project activities may substantially adversely affect existing fish and wildlife resources and whether a Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Agreement is required. An LSA Agreement includes measures necessary to protect existing fish and wildlife resources. CDFW may suggest ways to modify your Project that would eliminate or reduce harmful impacts to fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW's issuance of an LSA Agreement is a "Project" subject to CEQA (see Pub. Resources Code 21065). To facilitate issuance of an LSA Agreement, if necessary, the DEIR should fully identify the potential impacts to the lake, stream, or riparian resources, and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, and monitoring and reporting commitments. Early consultation with CDFW is recommended, since modification of the proposed Project may be required to avoid or reduce impacts to fish and wildlife resources. To obtain a Lake or Streambed Alteration notification package, please go to <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/LSA/Forms>.

## **Filing Fees**

The Project, as proposed, would have an impact on fish and/or wildlife, and assessment of 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 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.)

## **Further Coordination**

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the NOP of a DEIR for the Hesperia Commerce Center II State Clearinghouse No. 2019110418 and recommends that the City address CDFW's comments and concerns in the forthcoming DEIR.

If you should have any questions pertaining to the comments provided in this letter, or wish to schedule a meeting and/or site visit, please contact Ashley Rosales at (909) 980-8607 or at [Ashley.Rosales@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Ashley.Rosales@wildlife.ca.gov)

Sincerely,



Scott Wilson  
Environmental Program Manager

ec: State Clearinghouse

## Literature Cited

Sawyer, J. O., T. Keeler-Wolf, and J. M. Evens. 2009. A manual of California Vegetation, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. California Native Plant Society Press, Sacramento, California. <http://vegetation.cnps.org/>