

**San Antonio Del Desierto  
Mobile Home Park Expansion Project  
Mecca, Riverside County, California**

**Biological Resources Assessment**



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**Biological Resources Assessment**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the results of a biological resources assessment conducted by Wood Environment and Infrastructure Solutions, Inc. (Wood E&I) for a proposed renovation and expansion of an existing mobile home park (Project) located near Mecca, Riverside County, California. Wood E&I was contracted to perform this work by Terra Nova Planning and Research. This report presents the regulatory framework, methods, and results of baseline biological surveys for the proposed project.

**1.1 Project Description**

San Antonio del Desierto, formerly known as St. Anthony Mobile Home Park (MHP), is a 100 unit MHP which houses farm workers and low-income families and has been approved by Riverside County for a total of 136 mobile home spaces. The park is located between State Highway 111 and Lincoln Street, south of Avenue 66 and north of Avenue 68 in the unincorporated community of Mecca. The purpose of this Project is to replace the existing 100-unit MHP with a larger, 136-unit MHP. The Project will be implemented in two phases. Phase 1 would consist of existing park stabilization, which includes the installation of a reverse osmosis water filtration system and electrical repairs, along with the construction of 92 new mobile home spaces. Phase 2 would construct 44 new mobile home spaces, and construct a 6,200 square foot community center with a building height of 20 feet, a child care center, a community park, and recreational facilities. Primary and secondary road access is from dedicated public road easements from Avenue 68 and State Highway 111.

**1.2 Project Site Description/Existing Conditions**

The project is located within Section 17 of Township 7 South, Range 8 East, as shown on the United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5 minute Mecca, California quadrangle. As shown on Figure 1, the Project is bounded on the west by Lincoln Street and mostly undeveloped land (but partially formerly developed, as shown by old concrete foundations), and on the east by many dry ponds that were presumably parts of the defunct St. Anthony fish farm, or former duck ponds. North of the Project is primarily undeveloped land and the western portion of the town of Mecca. South of the Project area the land is mostly current or former fish ponds and/or duck ponds. An agricultural drain (ditch) runs parallel along the east side of Lincoln Street for the entire project length. Elevations within the project site range from approximately 193 to 205 feet below mean sea level (BMSL). The average rainfall for the area (Mecca) is 3.12 inches per year and the average snowfall is 0 inches per year (Western Regional Climate Center 2014).







## 1.3 Regulatory Framework

### 1.3.1 Federal

*Endangered Species Act (ESA)* – The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service are the designated federal agencies accountable for administering the ESA. The ESA defines species as “endangered” or “threatened” and provides regulatory protection at the federal level.

Section 9 of the ESA prohibits the “take” of listed (i.e., endangered or threatened) species. The ESA’s definition of take is “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or attempt to engage in such conduct.” Recognizing that take cannot always be avoided, Section 10(a) includes provisions for take that is incidental to, but not the purpose of, otherwise lawful activities. Specifically, Section 10(a)(1)(A) permits (authorized take permits) are issued for scientific purposes. Section 10(a)(1)(B) permits (incidental take permits) are issued for the incidental take of listed species that does not jeopardize the species.

Section 7 (a)(2) requires federal agencies to evaluate the proposed project with respect to listed or proposed listed, species and their respective critical habitat (if applicable). Federal agencies must employ programs for the conservation of listed species and are prohibited from authorizing, funding, or carrying out any action that would jeopardize a listed species or destroy or modify its “critical habitat.”

As defined by the ESA, “individuals, organizations, states, local governments, and other non-federal entities are affected by the designation of critical habitat only if their actions occur on federal lands, require a federal permit, license, or other authorization, or involve federal funding.

Section 10(a) of the ESA authorizes the issuance of incidental take permits and establishes standards for the content of habitat conservation plans (see Section 3.3 below).

*Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA)* – Treaties signed by the U.S., Great Britain, Mexico, Japan, and the countries of the former Soviet Union make it unlawful to pursue, capture, kill, and/or possess, or attempt to engage in any such conduct to any migratory bird, nest, egg or parts thereof listed in the document. As with the ESA, the MBTA also allows the Secretary of the Interior to grant permits for the incidental take of these protected migratory bird species.

*National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)* – If portions of a proposed project could fall under the jurisdiction of a federal agency (i.e., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) they are subject to environmental review pursuant to NEPA. NEPA establishes certain criteria that must be adhered to for any project that is “financed, assisted, conducted or approved” by a federal agency. The federal lead agency is required to “determine whether the proposed action will significantly affect the quality of the human environment.”

*Section 404 of the Clean Water Act* – This section of the Clean Water Act, administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), regulates the discharge of dredged and fill material into “waters of the United States.” The USACE has created a series of nationwide permits that authorize certain activities within waters of the U.S. provided that the proposed activity does not exceed the impact threshold of 0.5 acre for nationwide permits, takes steps to avoid impacts to wetlands where practicable, minimizes potential impacts to wetlands, and provides compensation for any remaining, unavoidable impacts through activities to restore or create wetlands. For

projects that exceed the threshold for nationwide permits, individual permits under Section 404 can be issued.

### 1.3.2 State

*California Endangered Species Act (CESA)* – This legislation is similar to the federal ESA, but it is administered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW – formerly Department of Fish and Game). The CDFW is authorized to enter into “memoranda of understanding” with individuals, public agencies, and other institutions to import, export, take, or possess state-listed species for scientific, educational, or management purposes. CESA prohibits the take of state-listed species except as otherwise provided in state law. Unlike the federal ESA, the CESA applies the take prohibitions to species currently petitioned for state-listing status (candidate species). State lead agencies are required to consult with CDFW to ensure that actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any state-listed species or result in the destruction or degradation of occupied habitat.

*California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)* – The basic goal of CEQA is to maintain a high-quality environment now and in the future. The specific goals are for California's public agencies to:

- 1) identify the significant environmental effects of their actions; and, either
- 2) avoid those significant environmental effects, where feasible; or
- 3) mitigate those significant environmental effects, where feasible.

CEQA applies to "projects" proposed to be undertaken or requiring approval by state and local government agencies. Projects are activities that have the potential to have a physical impact on the environment and may include the enactment of zoning ordinances, the issuance of conditional use permits and the approval of tentative subdivision maps. Where a project requires approvals from more than one public agency, CEQA requires one of these public agencies to serve as the "lead agency."

A "lead agency" must complete the environmental review process required by CEQA. The most basic steps of the environmental review process are to:

- 1) Determine if the activity is a "project" subject to CEQA;
- 2) Determine if the "project" is exempt from CEQA;
- 3) Perform an Initial Study to identify the environmental impacts of the project and determine whether the identified impacts are "significant". Based on its findings of "significance", the lead agency prepares one of the following environmental review documents:
  - a) Negative Declaration if it finds no "significant" impacts;
  - b) Mitigated Negative Declaration if it finds "significant" impacts but revises the project to avoid or mitigate those significant impacts;
  - c) Environmental Impact Report (EIR) if it finds "significant" impacts.

While there is no ironclad definition of "significance", Article 5 of the State CEQA Guidelines provides criteria to lead agencies in determining whether a project may have significant effects.

*The Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA)* – The NPPA includes measures to preserve, protect, and enhance rare and endangered native plant species. Definitions for “rare and endangered” are different from those contained in CESA. However, the list of species afforded protection in accordance with the NPPA includes those listed as rare and endangered under CESA. NPPA provides limitations on take as follows: “no person will import into this state, or take, possess, or sell within this state” any rare or endangered native plants, except in accordance with the provisions outlined in the act. If a landowner is notified by CDFW, pursuant to section 1903.5 that a rare or endangered plant is growing on their property, the landowner shall notify CDFW at least 10 days prior to the changing of land uses to allow CDFW to salvage the plants.

*Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Program* – The NCCP, which is managed by the CDFW, is intended to conserve multiple species and their associated habitats, while also providing for compatible use of private lands. Through local planning, the NCCP planning process is designed to provide protection for wildlife and natural habitats before the environment becomes so fragmented or degraded by development that species listing are required under CESA. Instead of conserving small, often isolated “islands” of habitat for just one listed species, agencies, local jurisdictions, and/or other interested parties have an opportunity through the NCCP to work cooperatively to develop plans that consider broad areas of land for conservation that would provide habitat for many species. Partners enroll in the programs and, by mutual consent, areas considered to have high conservation priorities or values are set aside and protected from development. Partners may also agree to study, monitor, and develop management plans for these high value “reserve” areas. The NCCP provides an avenue for fostering economic growth by allowing approved development in areas with lower conservation value. See further discussion in Section 3.3 below.

*Sections 1600-1603 of the State Fish and Game Code* – The California Fish and Game (Wildlife) Code, pursuant to Sections 1600 through 1603, regulates all diversions, obstructions, or changes to the natural flow or bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake that supports fish or wildlife resources. Under state code, CDFW jurisdiction is assessed in the field based on one, or a combination, of the following criteria:

- 1) At minimum, intermittent and seasonal flow through a bed or channel with banks and that also supports fish or other aquatic life.
- 2) A watercourse having a surface or subsurface flow regime that supports or that has supported riparian vegetation.
- 3) Hydrogeomorphically distinct top-of-embankment to top-of-embankment limits.
- 4) Outer ground cover and canopy extents of, typically, riparian associated vegetation species that would be sustained by surface and/or subsurface waters of the watercourse.

The CDFW requires that public and private interests apply for a “Streambed Alteration Agreement” for any project that may impact a streambed or wetland. The CDFW has maintained a “no net loss” policy regarding impacts to streams and waterways and requires replacement of lost habitats on at least a 1:1 ratio.

*Section 2081 of the State Fish and Game Code* – Under Section 2081 of the California Fish and Game Code, the CDFW authorizes individuals or public agencies to import, export, take, or possess state endangered, threatened, or candidate species in California through permits or

memoranda of understanding. These acts, which are otherwise prohibited, may be authorized through permits or “memoranda of understanding” if (1) the take is incidental to otherwise lawful activities, (2) impacts of the take are minimized and fully mitigated, (3) the permit is consistent with regulations adopted in accordance with any recovery plan for the species in question, and (4) the applicant ensures suitable funding to implement the measures required by the CDFW. The CDFW shall make this determination based on the best scientific information reasonably available and shall include consideration of the species’ capability to survive and reproduce.

*Section 3505.5 of the State Fish and Game Code* – This section makes it unlawful to take, possess, or destroy any birds in the order Falconiformes or Strigiformes (birds-of-prey, e.g.: owls, hawks, eagles, etc.) or to take, possess, or destroy the nest or eggs of any bird-of-prey.

### **1.3.3 CVAG/Coachella Valley Conservation Commission**

*Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP)/ Natural Community Conservation Plan* – Subsequent to the establishment of the Fringe-toed Lizard HCP in the early 1980s, continued growth in the Coachella Valley impacted other species and their habitats. Several species that occur in the Coachella Valley have been listed as threatened or endangered, and several more have been proposed for listing or identified as candidates for listing. A scoping study was prepared for the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) by the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) in 1994. It recommended that a MSHCP be prepared for the entire Coachella Valley and surrounding mountains to address potential state and federal ESA issues in the MSHCP area. Subsequently, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed to govern the preparation of the MSHCP. In late 1995 and early 1996, the cities of Cathedral City, Coachella, Desert Hot Springs, Indian Wells, Indio, La Quinta, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, and Rancho Mirage, Coachella Valley Water District, Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, Imperial Irrigation District, the County of Riverside, USFWS, CDFW, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U. S. Forest Service (USFS), and the National Park Service (NPS) signed the MOU to initiate the planning effort. In late 1996 and early 1997 the parties to the MOU approved an amendment stipulating that the MSHCP will meet the intent of the NCCPs as well as the CESA and the FESA, and, further, that the MOU constitutes an agreement to prepare a NCCP. Final state and federal resource agency approval and permitting for this MSHCP occurred in September and October 2008.

The MSHCP serves two main purposes: balancing environmental protection and economic development objectives in the MSHCP area, and simplifying compliance with endangered species related laws. The MSHCP intends to accomplish this through the following means.

Conserving adequate habitat in an unfragmented manner to provide for the protection and security of long-term viable populations of the species that are either currently listed as threatened or endangered, are proposed for listing, or are believed by the Scientific Advisory Committee, USFWS and CDFW, to have a high probability of being proposed for listing in the future if not protected by the MSHCP. It is intended to proactively address requirements of the state and federal endangered species acts to avoid disruption of economic development activities in the MSHCP area.

For species that are currently listed as threatened or endangered, the MSHCP is the basis for securing incidental take permits. For species that are not currently listed, the MSHCP addresses

the conservation of the species and its habitat as if the species were listed, so that if the species is subsequently listed, an incidental take permit will be issued on the basis of the MSHCP, and no further mitigation requirements will be imposed. A further goal of the plan is to remove the need to list species as threatened or endangered by taking proactive conservation measures.

It should be recognized that the MSHCP does not address Section 404 of the Clean Water Act nor the Streambed Alteration Agreement provisions of the California Fish and Game Code, (Section 1600). Projects that currently require a Section 404 permit or Streambed Alteration Agreement will continue to do so notwithstanding the MSHCP. Additionally, the MSHCP does not provide a means of compliance with the federal MBTA.

The Riverside County Land Information System website was consulted (County of Riverside 2014) to determine the parcel numbers that were surveyed on the subject project site, and the status with regards to the various county plan areas. According to this website and a review of the approved MSHCP, the subject parcels are not located within any conservation areas established by the Coachella Valley MSHCP, but do fall within the CVMSHCP Fee Area (please see Section 4.2 for an explanation of requirements for the Fee Area as related to this project).

## **2.0 METHODS**

Methods employed in the performance of this biological assessment consisted of a literature review, followed by a site survey to obtain a general inventory of plant and wildlife species on the project site; and to determine the potential for, or presence of, sensitive biological resources or their habitat on the project site. In addition to the general biological assessment described herein, a Wood E&I biologist also performed a habitat assessment for burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) on the project site in accordance with the methodology presented in the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (California Department of Fish and Game, March 7, 2012).

### **2.1 Literature Review**

A literature review was conducted to identify sensitive biological resources known from the vicinity of the project site. This included a review of the CDFW's California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB 2015 and 2019) computerized data base (Rarefind 5), and a review of the California Native Plant Society's (CNPS) *Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California* (2015 and 2019). The Coachella Valley MSHCP was also reviewed. Pertinent documents from the Wood E&I library and files were also consulted.

### **2.2 Biological Reconnaissance of the Project Site**

The project site was surveyed on foot from 0830 to 1050 on 17 April 2019, by Wood E&I biologist Stephen J. Myers. Weather conditions during the survey were clear skies with temperatures ranging from 72°F to 84°F (degrees Fahrenheit), and light winds between 2 and 8 mph. Surveys were conducted systematically, visually inspecting all areas of the site and adjacent accessible areas for components of sensitive species habitat.

The assessment of the potential for occurrence of sensitive biological resources known from the project vicinity was based on geographic range, CNDDDB records, habitat associations, the biologists' experience in the region, general site conditions, and soil types. All plant and vertebrate species observed were recorded in field notes. The plant and animal species lists



were augmented by species recorded during surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015 by Wood E&I for a related sewer line project in the same general area (Amec Foster Wheeler 2014, 2015).

Some wildlife species were identified through indirect sign (e.g. scat, tracks, nests, burrows, vocalizations, etc.). Scientific nomenclature for this report is from the following standard reference sources: plant communities, Holland (1986) and Sawyer et al. (2009), reptiles and amphibians, Stebbins (2003); birds, California Bird Records Committee (2015); and mammals, CDFG (2011). Vegetation nomenclature follows The Jepson Manual, Vascular Plants of California, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Baldwin 2012). When The Jepson Manual does not list a common name, common name nomenclature follows the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA) Plants Database (USDA 2013).

During the general biological field surveys, it was determined that habitat suitable for the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) was present. Therefore, in accordance with the currently accepted protocols for burrowing owl surveys (CDFW 2012), a burrow search was conducted by Myers on 21 October 2015 and 17 April 2019. During the burrow search, all habitat open enough for burrowing owl occupation was examined on foot and any burrows or artificial structures suitable for owls were recorded with a handheld global positioning system unit. In addition, notes were made regarding the presence of any burrowing owl sign present.

### 3.0 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Soils

The USDA online Web Soil Survey (based on the Riverside County, Coachella Valley Area, California Soil Survey) (Soil Survey Staff 2014) was consulted to determine the soil types mapped as occurring within the Project area. Soils within the study area occur on alluvial fans or river channels. The study area contains two soil types (Figure 3):

- Indio very fine sandy loam, wet, (It)
- Salton silty clay loam, wet, (Sb)

#### 3.2 Vegetation and Flora

Appendix 1 includes the scientific and common names for plant species identified during the surveys. Twenty-nine plant species were identified. Of the plant species detected on the site during the survey, 38% were non-native species.

The Project site occurs in an area that has experienced significant development and disturbance during the past. In addition to the MHP, the area surrounding the MHP has been severely altered from its natural state, with large ponds occurring over much of the area. Most of the ponds, which were originally built for fish farming or as duck ponds, are now dry and overgrown, mostly with saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*), arrow-weed (*Pluchea sericea*), and big saltbush (*Atriplex lentiformis*), with smaller stands dominated by iodine bush (*Allenrolfea occidentalis*), and bush seepweed (*Suaeda nigra*).







### 3.3 Wildlife

The list of vertebrate animals detected on the project site during the surveys totaled 68 species (1 amphibian, 2 reptiles, 63 birds and 2 mammals). The inventory was limited by the seasonal timing and short duration of the survey period, and by the nocturnal and fossorial habits of many animals.

The only amphibian detected during the surveys was the Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*) – one was heard calling in the existing MHP sewage lagoons.

Two reptiles were observed, the Great Basin [tiger] whiptail (*Aspidoscelis* [= *Cnemidophorus*] *tigris tigris*) and side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*). A few additional species would be expected to occur, including, but not limited to, the desert iguana (*Dipsosaurus dorsalis*), gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*), and coachwhip (*Coluber* [= *Masticophis*] *flagellum*). The disturbed nature of the project site reduces the potential for use of the site by a greater variety of desert reptiles, as many of these species require better quality natural habitats, and some are substrate specialists (typically on dunes or wind-deposited sands).

Birds observed during the survey included a mix of species common to desert scrub and developed areas of the Coachella Valley. Some of the birds observed included the verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*), black-tailed gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*), Gambel's quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), great-tailed grackle (*Quiscalus mexicana*), Abert's towhee (*Melospiza aberti*), house finch (*Haemorrhous mexicanus*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), and northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*). A few water bird species were present, associated with the agricultural drain that parallels Lincoln Street and the MHP sewage lagoons. The water birds observed included the green heron (*Butorides virescens*), great egret (*Ardea alba*), snowy egret (*Egretta thula*), white-faced ibis (*Plegadis chihi*), double-crested cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auratus*) and American coot (*Fulica americana*). During the surveys in 2014 for the sewer line improvements, a black-necked stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) nest with four eggs was found on a levee between the sewage lagoons, and a pair of ruddy ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) was accompanied by several young ducklings on one of the sewage lagoons.

The coyote (*Canis latrans*) and desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) were the only mammals detected during the surveys. Other mammals that may be present include the black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), kangaroo rats (*Dipodomys* sp.), and various other small rodents.

### 3.4 Sensitive Elements

Plant or animal taxa may be considered "sensitive" due to declining populations, vulnerability to habitat change or loss, or because of restricted distributions. Certain sensitive species have been listed as Threatened or Endangered by the USFWS or by the CDFW, and are protected by the federal and state ESAs and the California Native Plant Protection Act. Other species have been identified as sensitive by the USFWS, the CDFW, or by private conservation organizations, including the CNPS, but have not been formally listed as Threatened or Endangered. Impacts to such species can still be considered significant under CEQA.

The literature review and Wood E&I biologists' knowledge of the project vicinity indicated that as many as fifteen (15) sensitive biological resources potentially occur in the vicinity of the project

site. For a summary of sensitive species and habitats known to occur or potentially occurring in the vicinity of the project site, see Tables 1 through 6.

**Table 1. Sensitive Plants: San Antonio del Desierto Project.**

Species	Protective Status	Habitat	Flowering Period	Occurrence Probability
<i>Astragalus lentiginosus</i> var. <i>coachellae</i> Coachella Valley Milk-vetch	F: END C: ND CNPS List: 1B.2 State Rank: S2.1 MSHCP: Yes	Sandy flats, washes, alluvial fans, sand field, dunes and dune edges, 130 – 2,150 feet, a CA endemic	February - May	Absent (Project site is not in the known range of this species, and no suitable habitat is present on site for this species)
<i>Astragalus sabulorum</i> Gravel Milk-vetch	F: ND C: ND CNPS List: 2B.2 State Rank: S2 MSHCP: Yes	Desert dunes, Mojavean desert scrub, Sonoran desert scrub, sandy or gravelly flats, washes, and roadsides. -195 – 3,050 feet.	February - June	Absent (suitable habitat is not present on site for this species)
<i>Nemacaulis denudata</i> var. <i>gracilis</i> Slender Cottonheads	F: ND C: ND CNPS: List 2B.2 State Rank: S2 MSHCP: No	Coastal and desert dunes, in Sonoran Desert Scrub: ~0 – 1,850 feet	April – May (rarely March)	Absent (suitable habitat not present on site for this species)
<i>Xylorhiza cognata</i> Mecca-aster	F: ND C: ND CNPS: List 1B.2 State Rank: S2 MSHCP: Yes	Grows on steep canyon slopes on sandstone and clay substrates, 65 – 1,000 feet elevation	January - June	Absent (suitable habitat not present on site for this species)

**Table 2. Sensitive Fish: San Antonio del Desierto Project.**

Species	Protective Status (F=Federal, C=California)	Habitat	Occurrence Probability
Desert Pupfish ( <i>Cyprinodon macularis</i> )	F: END C: END State rank: S1 MSHCP: Yes	Desert ponds, marshes, streams, agricultural drains	Low (May be present in the Lincoln Street agricultural drain, however, if present, the proposed project will not be impacting the agricultural drain and therefore not impact this species)



**Table 3. Sensitive Amphibians: San Antonio del Desierto Project.**

Species	Protective Status (F=Federal, C=California)	Habitat	Occurrence Probability
Couch's Spadefoot ( <i>Scaphiopus couchii</i> )	F: ND C: ND State rank: S2S3 MSHCP: No	Temporary desert rainpools that last at least 7 days	High (suitable habitat present adjacent to roadways. A recent CNDDB records [2007] recorded from approximately 0.1 miles northeast of project site)

**Table 4. Sensitive Reptiles: San Antonio del Desierto Project.**

Species	Protective Status (F=Federal, C=California)	Habitat	Occurrence Probability
Flat-tailed Horned Lizard ( <i>Phrynosoma mcallii</i> )	F: ND C: Candidate State rank: S2 MSHCP: Yes	Low elevation sandy habitats in the Colorado Desert, favors dune/hardpan interface areas	Absent (habitat probably no longer suitable. Historical CNDDB records [1908] from "Mecca" recorded near project site)
Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard ( <i>Uma inornata</i> )	F: THR C: END State rank: S1 MSHCP: Yes	Sandy areas of the Coachella Valley (dunes and sand field habitats)	Absent (suitable habitat not present on site for this species)

**Table 5. Sensitive Birds: San Antonio del Desierto Project.**

Species	Protective Status (F=Federal, C=California)	Habitat	Occurrence Probability
Burrowing Owl ( <i>Athene cunicularia</i> )	F: ND C: CSC State rank: S2 MSHCP: Yes	Inhabits a variety of open habitats (including edges of ag. fields), often occupies unused ground squirrel burrows	Low (Focused burrow search survey was negative at the time of the survey). However, suitable habitat is present on site (especially along agricultural drains); and future occupation is possible.
Prairie Falcon ( <i>Falco mexicanus</i> )	F: ND C: ND State rank: S3 MSHCP: No	Inhabits a variety of open terrain, nests on cliffs	Low (Foraging only, no nesting habitat present)
Loggerhead Shrike ( <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i> )	F: ND C: CSC State rank: S4 MSHCP: No	A variety of open habitats throughout southern California, fairly dense shrubs and/or brush used for nesting	High (Both foraging and nesting habitat present, throughout the site)
Yuma Ridgway's Rail ( <i>Rallus obsoletus yumanensis</i> Z)	F: END C: THR State rank: S1S2 MSHCP: Yes	Marsh habitats dominated by cattails and bulrushes. Home ranges are 15+ acres of marsh.	Absent (marsh habitat on the site is restricted to a narrow margin along the shorelines of the ponds, much less marsh than is required by the rails)
Crissal Thrasher ( <i>Toxostoma crissale</i> )	F: ND C: CSC State rank: S3 MSHCP: Yes	Dense vegetation along streams and washes, mesquite, microphyll woodland	Species is present on site.
Le Conte's Thrasher ( <i>Toxostoma lecontei</i> )	F: BCC C: CSC State rank: S3 MSHCP: Yes	Resident of open desert wash, scrub, alkali scrub, succulent scrub habitats, nests in dense spiny shrubs and cacti in washes	Low (Nesting Habitat present on site in suitable shrubs; however, there are no recent CNDBB records from this area, which has been thoroughly surveyed for birds over many years [e.g., Christmas Bird Count]. CDFW sensitive designation is only for San Joaquin Valley population)

Note: Several additional bird species are noted in the CNDBB, but they are associated with aquatic habitats of the nearby Salton Sea. Most are herons and egrets that nest colonially in trees; no such rookeries are located at or near the Project site.

**Table 6. Sensitive Mammals: San Antonio del Desierto Project.**

Species	Protective Status (F=Federal, C=California)	Habitat	Occurrence Probability
Pallid San Diego Pocket Mouse ( <i>Chaetodipus fallax pallidus</i> )	F: ND C: CSC State rank: S3 MSHCP: No	Often in desert border areas in desert wash, scrubs, pinyon- juniper, canyons	Absent (No suitable habitat on site for this species. Suitable habitat is found on valley floor, not desert edge or canyon)
Palm Springs Round-tailed Ground Squirrel ( <i>Xerospermophilus tereticaudus chlorus</i> )	F: ND C: CSC State rank: S1S2 MSHCP: Yes	Restricted to the Coachella Valley. Prefers desert succulent scrub, desert wash, desert scrub, alkali scrub, & levees.	Low (Species not observed during surveys and very little suitable habitat (burrows) found on site.)

Note: Four bat species of concern are noted in the CNDDDB, but no suitable roosting or maternity sites occur at or near the Project site. One or more of these species may forage in the area. **Definitions of status designations and occurrence probabilities.**

**Definitions of occurrence probability:**

*Occurs:* Observed on the site by Wood personnel, or recorded on-site by other qualified biologists.

*High:* Observed in similar habitat in region by qualified biologists, or habitat on the site is a type often utilized by the species and the site is within the known range of the species.

*Moderate:* Reported sightings in surrounding region, or site is within the known range of the species and habitat on the site is a type occasionally used by the species.

*Low:* Site is within the known range of the species but habitat on the site is rarely used by the species.

*Absent:* A focused study failed to detect the species, or, no suitable habitat is present.

**Federal designations: (federal Endangered Species Act, US Fish and Wildlife Service):**

END: Federally listed, Endangered.

THR: Federally listed, Threatened.

BCC: Birds of Conservation Concern

C: Candidate for Federal listing

ND: Not designated.

**State designations: (California Endangered Species Act, California Dept. of Fish and Game)**

END: State listed, Endangered.

THR: State listed, Threatened.

RARE: State listed as Rare (Listed "Rare" animals have been re-designated as Threatened, but Rare plants have retained the Rare designation.)

CSC: California Special Concern Species.

ND: Not designated.

**California Native Plant Society (CNPS) designations:** (Non-regulatory, compilation by a non-profit organization which tracks rare plants)

**CNPS California Rare Plant Ranks (CRPR)** Note: According to the CNPS

([http://www.cnps.org/programs/Rare\\_Plant/inventory/names.htm](http://www.cnps.org/programs/Rare_Plant/inventory/names.htm)), ALL plants on Lists 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B meet definitions for state listing as threatened or endangered under Secs. 2062 and 2067 (California Endangered Species Act) of the California Department of Fish and Game Code. Certain plants on Lists 3 and 4 do as well.

The CDFW ([http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hcpb/species/t\\_e\\_spp/nat\\_plnt\\_consv.shtml](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hcpb/species/t_e_spp/nat_plnt_consv.shtml)) states that plants on Lists 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B of the CNPS Inventory consist of plants that may qualify for listing, and recommends they be addressed in CEQA projects (CEQA Guidelines Section 15380). However, a plant need not be in the Inventory to be considered a rare, threatened, or endangered species under CEQA. In addition, CDFW recommends, and local governments may require, protection of plants which are regionally significant, such as locally rare species, disjunct populations of more common plants, or plants on the CNPS Lists 3 and 4.

- List 1A:** Plants presumed extinct in California .
- List 1B:** Plants rare and endangered in California and throughout their range.
- List 2A:** Plants presumed extirpated in California, but more common elsewhere.
- List 2B:** Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California, but more common elsewhere.
- List 3:** Plants for which more information is needed.
- List 4:** Plants of limited distribution; a "watch list."
- CA Endemic:** Taxa that occur only in California

**CNPS Threat Code:**

- .1 - Seriously endangered in California (over 80% of occurrences threatened / high degree and immediacy of threat)
- .2 – Fairly endangered in California (20-80% occurrences threatened)
- .3 – Not very endangered in California (<20% of occurrences threatened or no current threats known)

**Note:** All List 1A (presumed extinct in California) and some List 3 (need more information- a review list) plants lacking any threat information receive no threat code extension. Also, these Threat Code guidelines represent a starting point in the assessment of threat level. Other factors, such as habitat vulnerability and specificity, distribution, and condition of occurrences, are also considered in setting the Threat Code.

**CDFW CNDDDB rankings: Animals**

- S1** = Extremely endangered: <6 viable occurrences or <1,000 individuals, or < 2,000 acres of occupied habitat
- S2** = Endangered: about 6-20 viable occurrences or 1,000 - 3,000 individuals, or 2,000 to 10,000 acres of occupied habitat
- S3** = Restricted range, rare: about 21-100 viable occurrences, or 3,000 – 10,000 individuals, or 10,000 – 50,000 acres of occupied habitat
- S4** = Apparently secure; some factors exist to cause some concern such as narrow habitat or continuing threats
- S5** = Demonstrably secure; commonly found throughout its historic range
- SH** = all sites are historical, this species may be extinct, further field work is needed

**CDFW CNDDDB rankings: Plants and Vegetation Communities**

- S1** = Less than 6 viable viable occurrences OR less than 1,000 individuals OR less than 2,000 acres
  - S1.1 = very threatened
  - S1.2 = threatened
  - S1.3 = no current threats known
- S2** = 6-20 viable occurrences OR 1,000-3,000 individuals OR 2,000-10,000 acres
  - S2.1 = very threatened
  - S2.2 = threatened
  - S2.3 = no current threats known
- S3** = 21-80 viable occurrences or 3,000-10,000 individuals OR 10,000-50,000 acres
  - S3.1 = very threatened
  - S3.2 = threatened
  - S3.3 = no current threats known
- S4** = Apparently secure within California; this rank is clearly lower than S3 but factors exist to cause some concern; i.e. there is some threat, or somewhat narrow habitat.
- S5** = Demonstrably secure to ineradicable in California.

Table 1 lists four sensitive plants known from the general project vicinity, and none of these species would be expected to occur on the project site due to lack of habitat, incorrect elevational range, and unsuitable microhabitat characteristics. These include: Mecca-aster (*Xylorhiza cognata*), gravel milk-vetch (*Astragalus sabulonum*), Coachella Valley milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae*), and slender cottonheads (*Nemacaulis denudata* var. *gracilis*).

Regardless of its status on the site, Coachella Valley milk-vetch is a “covered species” under the Coachella Valley MSHCP, and possible impacts would be mitigated through payment of the MSHCP fee. The Project site is not located in a MSHCP Conservation Area, or in a Fluvial Sand Transport Special Provision Area.

Desert pupfish has been documented in the agricultural drainage channels near the site, but are highly unlikely in the ponds on the site. The ponds are not connected to the agricultural drainages.

Couch’s Spadefoot may occur on the site following substantial rain events (if pooled rainwater persists), but its relatively low protective status suggests that even if impacts occur, the impacts would not be considered significant.

Table 2 lists two sensitive reptile species that are known to occur in the region: Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma inornata*) and flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*). A search of the current CNDDDB online database revealed that Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard had been recorded from approximately 4 miles northwest of the project site in 1975, but virtually all suitable habitat near the Project site has been developed or severely altered since that time. Flat-tailed horned lizard was recorded in the Mecca area in 1908, but no recent records exist from this area (CNDDDB 2014), and little, if any suitable habitat remains. It is Wood’s opinion that these species are absent from the Project area.

One of the five sensitive bird species listed in Table 3 was detected on the site, the Crissal thrasher (*Toxostoma crissale*). This species was only detected during the burrowing owl assessment conducted in 2015, and has not been detected since. It is likely that the species does not breed on the site, but could breed in suitable habitat nearby.

The open nature of the project site, and specifically, habitat found along the Lincoln Street agricultural drain, provides potential habitat for burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia*). In California, burrowing owls often occur in association with colonies of the California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) or other ground squirrel species, where they often make use of the squirrels’ burrows. In southern California, burrowing owls are not only found in undisturbed natural areas, but also fallow agricultural fields, margins of active agricultural areas, berms and levees of flood control and creek channels, livestock farms, airports, golf courses, and vacant lots. The burrowing owl has been designated a Species of Special Concern (CSC) by CDFW, and is protected by the federal MBTA and the California Fish and Game Code. See Section 3.4.1 for the results of focused burrowing owl burrow surveys.

One other sensitive bird species with a moderate probability of occurrence is the loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*). This species usually requires large shrubs (or small trees) for nesting, and likely periodically forage on the site. Loggerhead shrikes are not listed as threatened or endangered, and are not a covered species under the Coachella Valley MSHCP. They are considered a CDFW California Special Concern Species (CSC).

The Prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) has a low probability of foraging over the project site, but no suitable nesting habitat (cliffs) is present on or adjacent to the site. This species was not observed during the site surveys, and implementation of the proposed project is not expected to negatively impact prairie falcons. Two CSC thrasher species, the crissal thrasher and Le Conte’s thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*), occur (or have been known to occur) in the project region. Crissal thrasher



was observed during the field surveys, but the probability of occurrence at the project site for Le Conte's thrasher is extremely unlikely.

No sensitive mammal species were observed on the project site during the surveys. Of the two mammals listed in Table 4 only the Palm Springs round-tailed ground squirrel (*Xerospermophilus tereticaudus chlorus*) has a very low potential to occur on or near the project site. The Palm Springs round-tailed ground squirrel is not listed as Threatened or Endangered, but is a covered species under the Coachella Valley MSHCP and are considered a CDFW CSC.

### **3.4.1 Results of Burrowing Owl Burrow Search Surveys**

No burrowing owls were observed during the general biological surveys or the focused surveys for potential burrowing owl burrows. During focused burrowing owl surveys for the sewer improvements project during 2014, twenty-one burrows or burrow clusters were mapped that appeared to be suitable for burrowing owl occupation. However, the vast majority of these were in the Lincoln Street agricultural drain. The agricultural drain has been dredged since 2014, and no burrows could be found in the drain during the burrow search conducted on 21 October 2015. Two holes caused by erosion were noted within berm roads on the project site. Several other erosion features were observed, but all of these were rather open, and more like crevices than burrows. A few debris piles on the project site contained pipes that were of sufficient size to accommodate burrowing owls, but these were in areas containing vegetation too dense to be considered suitable burrowing owl habitat. No burrowing owl sign (feathers, pellets, or whitewash) were found during the burrow search surveys. Based on the scarcity of burrows and lack of owl sign, Wood E&I determined that focused owl surveys for this project were not necessary. CDFW concurrence with this determination was obtained through email correspondence with Karen Riesz of the CDFW Bermuda Dunes office.

## **4.0 DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Potential Impacts of the Proposed Project**

#### **4.1.1 Potential Impacts to Federally Listed Endangered or Threatened Species or Listed Critical Habitat**

Based on the results of this biological resource assessment, Wood E&I has determined that no adverse effects will occur to federally listed Endangered or Threatened species, proposed Endangered or Threatened species, federally-designated Critical Habitats, or to state-designated listed or sensitive species. As a precautionary measure, Wood E&I advises that prior to any ground-disturbing activities or any irretrievable commitment of resources, that appropriate state and Federal resource agencies be encouraged to review this document for appropriate comments.

#### **4.1.2 Potential Impacts to Nesting Birds**

All native birds are protected while nesting by the MBTA. Grading and other project activities have the potential to impact nesting birds, including in those areas containing open ground.

## 4.2 Suggested Mitigation Measures

As stated previously, the Project site is not located in an area that is to be conserved under the MSHCP; therefore, any impacts will be mitigated through payment of the MSHCP fee, as appropriate.

The MSHCP does not provide a means of compliance with the federal MBTA. To comply with the MBTA, any vegetation removal, or grading or other site disturbance occurring between February 1 to August 31 and having the potential to impact nesting birds shall require a qualified biologist to conduct at least one nesting bird survey, and more if deemed necessary by the consulting biologist, ending no less than 3 days prior to grading. All vegetation and suitable nesting habitat (including open ground) on the project site, whether or not it will be removed or disturbed, shall be surveyed for nesting birds. If active nests of any native birds are found on the site, they will be avoided until after the young have fledged. If there are no nests present, ground disturbance activities can move forward. Conducting construction activities outside the breeding season (September 1 through January 31) can avoid having to implement these measures, although even non-occupied raptor nests are protected under *Section 3505.5 of the State Fish and Game Code* and permission must be granted by CDFW to remove them.

Because the project site does contain suitable habitat for burrowing owls, CDFW recommends that there be two take avoidance burrowing owl surveys for the project. These “preconstruction” surveys ensure that no owls have occupied the site subsequent to this report. The CDFW recommends that the first survey take place between 14 and 30 days prior to ground disturbance, and the second survey within 24 hours of any ground-breaking activities.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **PLANTS AND VERTEBRATE ANIMALS OBSERVED ON THE SITE OF THE SAN ANTONIO DEL DESIERTO PROJECT**

## Vascular Plants

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### EUDICOT FLOWERING PLANTS

#### **Aizoaceae**

*Sesuvium verrucosum*

#### **Amaranthaceae**

*Amaranthus albus*\*

#### **Asteraceae**

*Dicoria canescens*

*Isocoma acradenia*

*Pluchea sericea*

#### **Boraginaceae**

*Heliotropium curassavicum*

*Tiquilia plicata*

#### **Chenopodiaceae**

*Allenrolfea occidentalis*

*Atriplex canescens*

*Atriplex lentiformis*

*Chenopodium* sp.\*

*Salsola tragus*\*

*Suaeda nigra*

#### **Fabaceae**

*Parkinsonia aculeata*\*

*Prosopis glandulosa* var. *torreyana*

#### **Myrtaceae**

*Eucalyptus* sp.\*

#### **Salicaceae**

*Populus fremontii*

*Salix gooddingii*

#### **Tamaricaceae**

*Tamarix ramosissima* \*

#### **Iceplant Family**

western sea-purslane

#### **Amaranthus Family**

tumbleweed

#### **Sunflower Family**

desert dicoria

alkali goldenbush

arrow-weed

#### **Borage Family**

alkali heliotrope

fanleaf crinklemat

#### **Goosefoot Family**

iodine bush

fourwing saltbush

big saltbush

goosefoots

Russian thistle

bush seepweed

#### **Pea Family**

Mexican palo verde

honey mesquite

#### **Myrtle Family**

gum tree

#### **Willow Family**

Fremont cottonwood

Goodding's black willow

#### **Tamarisk Family**

saltcedar

## MONOCOT FLOWERING PLANTS

### Aracaceae

*Phoenix dactylifera*\*  
*Washingtonia filifera*  
*Washingtonia robusta*\*

### Poaceae

*Cynodon dactylon*\*  
*Distichlis spicata*  
*Leptochloa fuscus* ssp. *uninervia*  
*Polypogon monspeliensis*\*  
*Sorghum halapense*\*

### Typhaceae

*Typha domingensis*  
*Typha latifolia*

### Palm Family

date palm  
California fan palm  
Mexican fan palm

### Grass Family

Bermudagrass  
salt grass  
Mexican sprangletop  
rabbitfoot grass  
Johnson grass

### Cattail Family

southern cattail  
broadleaf cattail

\* - denotes a non-native species

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## Vertebrate Animals

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### AMPHIBIANS

#### True Frogs

American bullfrog

### REPTILES

#### Iguanids

side-blotched lizard

#### Whiptails and Allies

Great Basin whiptail

### BIRDS

#### Ducks, Geese, and Swans

mallard

ruddy duck

#### New World Quail

Gambel's quail

#### Pigeons and Doves

rock pigeon\*

Eurasian collared-dove\*

white-winged dove

mourning dove

#### Hummingbirds

Anna's hummingbird

Costa's hummingbird

#### Rails, Gallinules, and Coots

common gallinule

American coot

#### Avocets and Stilts

black-necked stilt

#### Plovers

killdeer

#### Sandpipers

least sandpiper

long-billed dowitcher

### AMPHIBIA

#### Ranidae

*Rana catesbeiana*

### REPTILIA

#### Iguanidae

*Uta stansburiana*

#### Teiidae

*Aspidooscelis tigris tigris*

### AVES

#### Anatidae

*Anas platyrhynchos*

*Oxyura jamaicensis*

#### Odontophoridae

*Callipepla gambelii*

#### Columbidae

*Columba livia*

*Streptopelia decaocto*

*Zenaida asiatica*

*Zenaida macroura*

#### Trochilidae

*Calypte anna*

*Calypte costae*

#### Rallidae

*Gallinula galeata*

*Fulica americana*

#### Recurvirostridae

*Himantopus mexicanus*

#### Charadriidae

*Charadrius vociferus*

#### Scolopacidae

*Calidris minutilla*

*Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Wilson's snipe  
greater yellowlegs

**Cormorants**  
double-crested cormorant

**Hérons and Egrets**  
great blue heron  
great egret  
snowy egret  
green heron

**Ibises and Spoonbills**  
white-faced ibis

**New World Vultures**  
turkey vulture

**Hawks, Eagles, Kites**  
red-shouldered hawk

**Kingfishers**  
belted kingfisher

**Woodpeckers**  
ladder-backed woodpecker

**Caracaras and Falcons**  
American kestrel

**Tyrant Flycatchers**  
ash-throated flycatcher  
western kingbird  
black phoebe  
Say's phoebe

**Jays, Magpies, and Crows**  
common raven

**Swallows**  
northern rough-winged swallow  
cliff swallow

*Gallinago delicata*  
*Tringa melanoleuca*

**Phalacrocoracidae**  
*Phalacrocorax auritus*

**Ardeidae**  
*Ardea herodias*  
*Ardea alba*  
*Egretta thula*  
*Butorides virescens*

**Threskiornithidae**  
*Plegadis chihi*

**Cathartidae**  
*Cathartes aura*

**Accipitridae**  
*Buteo lineatus*

**Alcedinidae**  
*Megasceryle alcyon*

**Picidae**  
*Picoides scalaris*

**Falconiformes**  
*Falco sparverius*

**Tyrannidae**  
*Myiarchus cinerascens*  
*Tyrannus verticalis*  
*Sayornis nigricans*  
*Sayornis saya*

**Corvidae**  
*Corvus corax*

**Hirundinidae**  
*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*  
*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*



barn swallow

**Verdins**

verdin

**Wrens**

Bewick's wren

**Gnatcatchers**

blue-gray gnatcatcher

black-tailed gnatcatcher

**Mockingbirds and Thrashers**

Crissal thrasher

northern mockingbird

**Starlings**

European starling\*

**Silky-Flycatchers**

phainopepla

**Old World Sparrows**

house sparrow\*

**Wagtails and Pipits**

American pipit

**Fringilline and Cardueline Finches**

house finch

lesser goldfinch

**New World Sparrows**

Abert's towhee

song sparrow

white-crowned sparrow

**Blackbirds, Meadowlarks, Orioles**

hooded oriole

Bullock's oriole

red-winged blackbird

brown-headed cowbird

Brewer's blackbird

great-tailed grackle

*Hirundo rustica*

**Remizidae**

*Auriparus flaviceps*

**Troglodytidae**

*Thryomanes bewickii*

**Poliophtilidae**

*Poliophtila caerulea*

*Poliophtila melanura*

**Mimidae**

*Toxostoma crissale*

*Mimus polyglottos*

**Sturnidae**

*Sturnis vulgaris*

**Ptiliogonatidae**

*Phainopepla nitens*

**Passeridae**

*Passer domesticus*

**Motacillidae**

*Anthus rubescens*

**Fringillidae**

*Haemorhous mexicanus*

*Spinus psaltria*

**Passerellidae**

*Melospiza aberti*

*Melospiza melodia*

*Zonotrichia leucophrys*

**Icteridae**

*Icterus cucullatus*

*Icterus bullockii*

*Agelaius phoeniceus*

*Molothrus ater*

*Euphagus cyanocephalus*

*Quiscalus mexicanus*

**Wood-Warblers**

orange-crowned warbler  
common yellowthroat  
yellow-rumped warbler  
black-throated gray warbler

**Parulidae**

*Oreothlypis celata*  
*Geothlypis trichas*  
*Setophaga coronate*  
*Setophaga nigrescens*

**Cardinals and Grosbeaks**

blue grosbeak

**Cardinalidae**

*Passerina caerulea*

**MAMMALS****Hares and Rabbits**

desert cottontail

**MAMMALIA****Leporidae**

*Sylvilagus audubonii*

**Foxes, Wolves, and Relatives**

coyote (scat)

**Canidae**

*Canis latrans*

\* - denotes a non-native species

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SAN ANTONIO DEL DESIERTO PROJECT SITE**



Photograph 1. Photo shows the western edge of the project site, with the Lincoln Street agricultural drain to the right of the earthen berm (*not visible*). Lincoln Street is immediately west of the drain.



Photograph 2. Photo showing view to the east of Goodding's willows surrounding the southern ponds.



Photograph 3. Photo showing the west view of the dry northern ponds.





Photograph 4. Photo showing Big saltbush located within the north portion of project site as seen facing west.



Photograph 5. Photo showing the central portion of project site just west of the existing mobile home park. Note photo shows several piles of debris which denotes previous disturbance.



Photograph 6. Photo showing the north view of developed mobile home part as seen on the eastern boundary of Project site.



Photograph 7. Photo showing cattails located along the side margin of the south-central pond as seen facing east.





Photograph 8: Photo showing the southeastern most pond as seen facing west.  
Photo shows cattails along the pond margins on the opposite shore.



Photograph 9. Photo showing the southwestern (dry) pond as seen facing south.



Photograph 10. Photo showing cattails, big saltbush, and Goodding's willows surrounding the south-central pond as seen facing east.

