

**Biological Technical Report for the
Sierra Sands Unified School District
Richmond Elementary School Project**

November 5, 2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| <u>Section</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------|
| 1.0 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 | Project Location | 1 |
| 1.2 | Project Description..... | 1 |
| 1.2.1 | Facilities | 1 |
| 1.2.2 | Utilities | 2 |
| 1.2.3 | Site Access | 2 |
| 1.2.4 | Stormwater Drainage..... | 3 |
| 1.2.5 | Construction Activities..... | 3 |
| 1.3 | Physical Description and Land Use | 4 |
| 2.0 | METHODS | 5 |
| 2.1 | Background Research | 5 |
| 2.2 | Biological Surveys | 5 |
| 2.2.1 | Vegetation Mapping..... | 6 |
| 2.2.2 | Burrowing Owl Surveys | 6 |
| 2.2.3 | Sensitive Plant Surveys..... | 6 |
| 2.2.4 | Sensitive Wildlife Habitat Assessments | 6 |
| 2.2.5 | General Jurisdictional Wetlands/Waters Assessment..... | 6 |
| 2.3 | Survey Limitations..... | 7 |
| 2.4 | Nomenclature..... | 7 |
| 3.0 | RESULTS | 8 |
| 3.1 | Vegetation Communities and Land Cover Types..... | 8 |
| 3.1.1 | Upland Habitats | 8 |
| 3.1.2 | Other Land Cover Types..... | 8 |
| 3.2 | Plant Species Observed..... | 8 |
| 3.3 | Animal Species Observed or Detected | 9 |
| 3.4 | Jurisdictional Areas..... | 9 |
| 4.0 | SENSITIVE RESOURCES | 10 |
| 4.1 | Sensitive Vegetation Communities..... | 10 |
| 4.2 | Sensitive Plant Species | 11 |
| 4.2.1 | Sensitive Plants Observed..... | 11 |
| 4.3 | Sensitive Animal Species..... | 11 |
| 4.3.1 | Sensitive Animals Observed or Detected | 12 |
| 4.4 | Wildlife Corridors | 12 |
| 4.5 | Jurisdictional Wetlands/Waters | 13 |
| 4.6 | Migratory Bird Treaty Act..... | 13 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

| <u>Section</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------|
| 4.7 | Local Ordinances and Policies..... | 13 |
| 4.8 | Regional Conservation Plans | 13 |
| 4.8.1 | West Mojave Plan | 14 |
| 4.8.2 | Draft Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan | 14 |
| 5.0 | PROJECT IMPACTS | 15 |
| 5.1 | Direct Impacts | 15 |
| 5.1.1 | Vegetation Communities | 15 |
| 5.1.2 | Sensitive Plant Species | 15 |
| 5.1.3 | Sensitive Animal Species..... | 15 |
| 5.1.4 | Jurisdictional Areas (Corps, CDFW, and SWQCB)..... | 16 |
| 5.1.5 | Wildlife Corridors | 16 |
| 5.1.6 | Migratory Bird Treaty Act | 16 |
| 5.1.7 | Local Ordinances and Policies..... | 16 |
| 5.1.8 | Regional Conservation Plans | 16 |
| 5.2 | Indirect Impacts | 16 |
| 6.0 | MITIGATION MEASURES | 17 |
| 6.1 | Desert Tortoise and Mohave Ground Squirrel..... | 17 |
| 6.2 | Migratory Bird Treaty Act | 17 |
| 7.0 | REFERENCES | 18 |

LIST OF APPENDICES

| <u>Letter</u> | <u>Title</u> |
|----------------------|--|
| A | Burrowing Owl Survey Report |
| B | Plant Species Observed |
| C | Animal Species Observed or Detected |
| D | Sensitive Animal Species with Potential to Occur |

LIST OF FIGURES

| <u>Number</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Follows Page</u> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Regional Location Map..... | 2 |
| 2 | Project Location Map..... | 2 |
| 3 | Biological Resources/Impacts..... | 8 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

LIST OF TABLES

| <u>Number</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|----------------------|--|--------------------|
| 1 | Proposed Buildings | 1 |
| 2 | Biological Surveys Conducted..... | 5 |
| 3 | Impacts to Vegetation Communities..... | 15 |

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the existing biological resources on the proposed Sierra Sands Unified School District (SSUSD) Richmond Elementary School Replacement Project (project) site and evaluates the potential impacts to sensitive resources that may occur as a result of project implementation. This report is intended to provide the SSUSD with information necessary to assess significant impacts to biological resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The approximately 77-acre proposed project is located in the northeastern portion of Kern County, California on Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake (NAWSCL) adjacent to the City of Ridgecrest at the intersection of Ridgecrest Boulevard and Richmond Road (Figures 1 and 2).

1.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The SSUSD will be applying for a Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) Grant for the modernization or replacement of its Richmond Elementary School. The current Richmond school site is owned and maintained by the SSUSD on real property leased from the United States Navy. However, the existing Richmond school structures are in excess of 50 years old; therefore, construction of a new school is being pursued by the SSUSD.

1.2.1 Facilities

The new school would accommodate existing and future growth for students in TK through 5th grade, with seats for up to 822 students. As shown in Table 1, at full buildout the campus would consist of 99,853 square feet in five 1-story buildings.

| Table 1 Proposed Buildings | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Building | Description | Square Feet |
| A | Administration, Multipurpose, Kitchen, Cafeteria, Medically Fragile/Life Skills/Physical Therapy/Adaptive Physical Education | 29,563 |
| B | Information Center (Media/Library), Computer Lab, Counseling, 8 Kindergarten Classrooms | 22,748 |
| C | 12 Primary (1–3) Classrooms | 18,814 |
| D | 8 Intermediate (4–5) Classrooms | 23,661 |
| E | STEAM classroom (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), 2 intermediate (4-5) classrooms) | 5,067 |
| Total | | 99,853 |

Additionally, the campus would include:

- 8 basketball courts
- Track and turf play fields
- Hardcourt play areas with covered shade areas
- Kindergarten playground
- Covered lunch shelter
- Landscape (turf, trees, shrubs, etc.)
- Sensory and participatory gardens
- Vehicle circulation and parking

1.2.2 Utilities

The parking lots, walkways, and buildings would have security lights. All lights would be shielded to avoid light spill onto adjacent properties. The play fields would not have nighttime lighting. The SSUSD would coordinate with Southern California Edison to install decorative street lighting adjacent to the school property along Gold Canyon Street, Ridgecrest Boulevard, Richmond Road, and Gateway Boulevard.

Underground utilities would be brought to the site from available connection points of the utility companies from adjacent streets. All fire hydrant location would be coordinated with the Kern County Fire Department.

On-campus solar electrical generation adequate to provide power for this campus through a power purchase agreement is accommodated and would provide shading of the main parking area.

1.2.3 Site Access

Access to the campus for students that walk and bike would be via open space trails and local roadways to internal walkways. A six-foot-wide, on-campus walkway would run from Gateway Boulevard diagonally northeast to the campus drop-off/pick-up area. Additionally, a six-foot-wide, on-campus walkway would run from the Gold Canyon Street/Richmond Road intersection diagonally southwest to the bus area. Subject to approval by the City of Ridgecrest (Gateway Boulevard), Caltrans (Ridgecrest Boulevard), and NAWSCL (Richmond Road), other roadway improvements would include:

- Widen Gateway Boulevard to the east to its full secondary street design standard, with curb, gutter, and six foot-wide sidewalk from Richmond Road to the new crosswalk (about 800 linear feet).
- Widen Richmond Road to the west to its half-width collector road design standard,¹⁷ with deceleration and merge lanes for southbound traffic and designated turn lanes for northbound traffic, and curb and gutter from about 400 feet south of Gold Canyon to Ridgecrest Boulevard. Roadwork also includes a six-foot wide sidewalk from the southernmost access driveway to Ridgecrest Boulevard (about 1,120 linear feet).

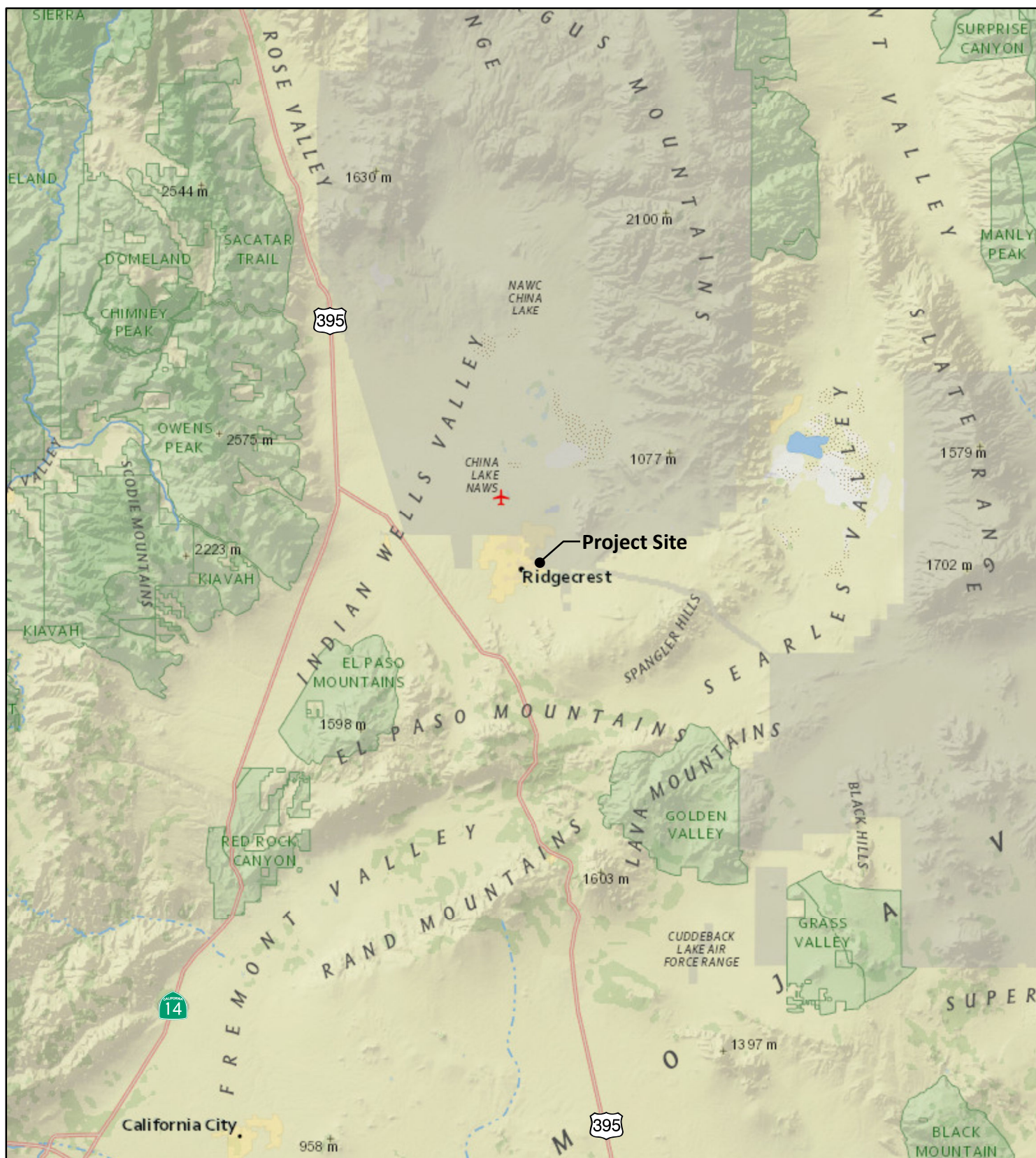
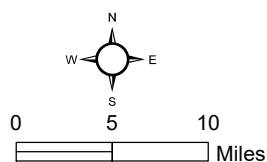


Figure 1

Regional Location

SIERRA SANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
 RICHMOND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
 REPLACEMENT PROJECT



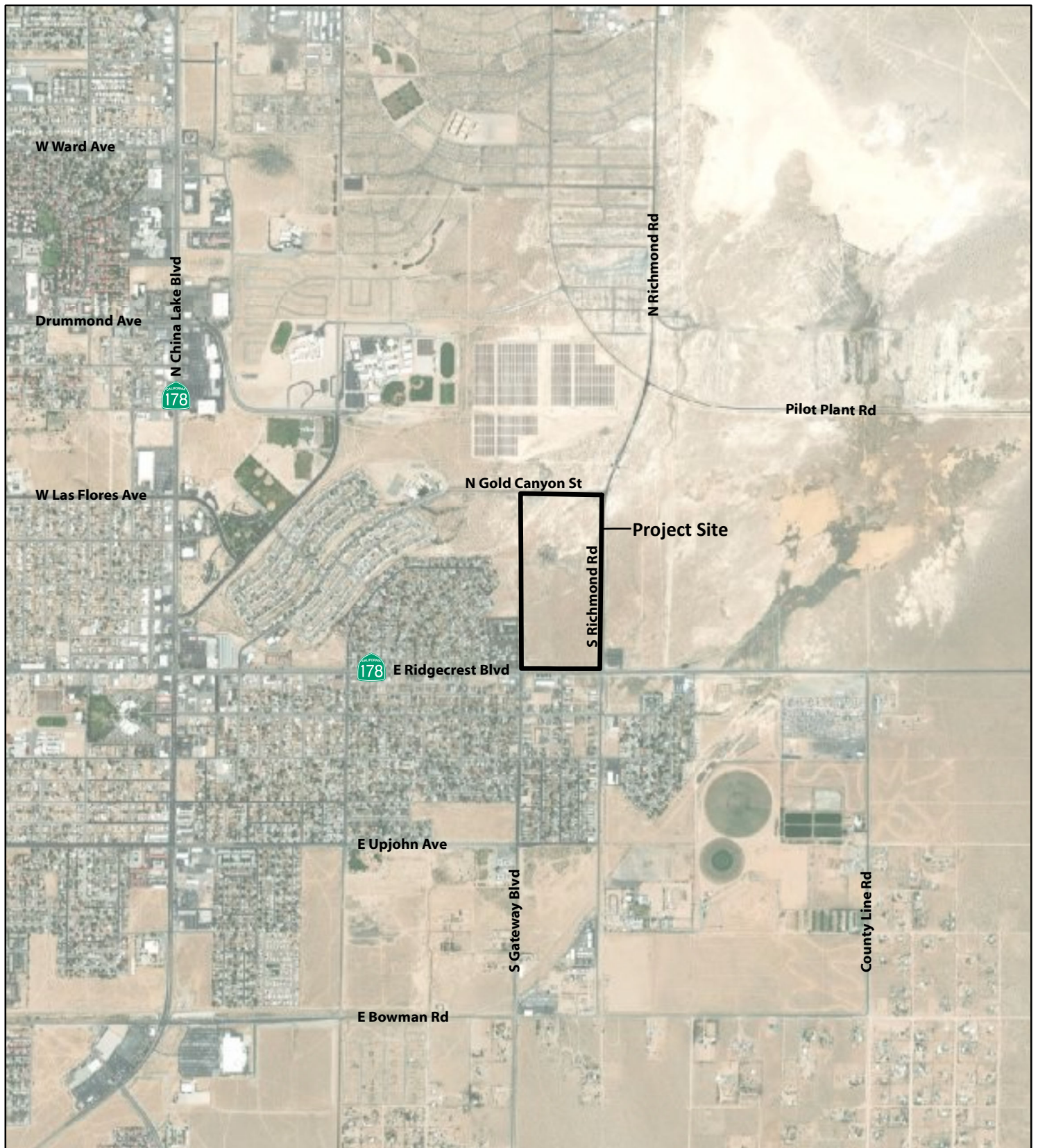
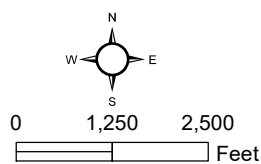


Figure 2

Project Location

SIERRA SANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
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- Install school area warning signs on Ridgecrest Boulevard, Richmond Road, and Gold Canyon Street that state “School – Speed Limit 25 – When Children Are Present” and install a school zone sign on Gateway Boulevard.
- Repaint the crosswalks at the Ridgecrest Boulevard/Richmond Road intersection with yellow or thermoplastic paint.

1.2.4 Stormwater Drainage

The project would not change or obstruct the historical drainage, coming from the west and continuing across the northwest corner of the site and under Gold Canyon Street. No school campus construction would occur on or near this drainage feature. The campus would have four retention basins to collect and hold stormwater runoff from impervious areas of the campus. The retention basins would hold a 10-year, 5-day storm event. The site would not generate additional off-site runoff to the surrounding streets or drainage system compared to existing conditions.

1.2.5 Construction Activities

Project construction is anticipated to start in Summer 2021 and take about 24 months to complete, with occupancy in fall 2023. Construction activities would include vegetation removal, excavation, site preparation and rough grading, utility trenching, fine grading, building construction, architectural coating, asphalt paving, finishing, and landscaping. The project would require earthwork on about 40 acres of the 77-acre parcel.

- Demolition. The site vegetation would be removed and cleared. Site grading and excavation. Rough grading and fine grading would involve approximately 30,000 cubic yards of earth movement and would be balanced with no export or imported of soil or fill material.
- Utility Trenching. Utility trenches would be excavated, and utility pipes and cables would be laid in trenches and connected to existing lines. Maximum depth of trenching for storm drains and sewers would be about 8 feet.
- Construction. Five one-story modular buildings (built in a factory, transported, and assembled on-site).
- Asphalt and Concrete. Paving and off-site street work for parking lots, hardcourts, walkways, road widening, and curb and gutter. Total surface parking lot to be paved = 60,820 square feet; non parking asphalt (e.g., internal circulation; hardcourts) = 240,430 square feet; hardscape (e.g., concrete curb, walkways) = 174,800 square feet.
- Architectural Coating. Inside and outside building painting.
- Finishing and Landscaping. Indoor finishing work such as installing of carpet, utility and telecommunications, furniture; outdoor installation of landscaping and field. Total landscaped areas = 94,500; total turf play fields = 329,000 square feet.

The SSUSD requires its construction contractors to comply with all applicable rules and regulations in carrying out the construction of the proposed project. Project implementation would also comply with the SSUSD construction best management practices (BMP), which are established and refined as part of the SSUSD’s current building efforts.

The SSUSD requires its contractors to submit a worksite traffic control plan to the City of Ridgecrest Public Works Department and Caltrans District 9 for review prior to construction. The plan would show the location of haul routes, construction hours, protective devices, warning signs, and access to abutting properties.

1.3 PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION AND LAND USE

The project site consists of vacant land; there are no buildings, structures, or improvements. The project site is relatively flat with a slight slope across the site, with elevations from 2,266 feet above mean sea level in the southwest to 2,259 feet in the northeast.

The project site is bordered by Gold Canyon Street, vacant land, and the 118-acre, 13.78-megawatt NAWSCL solar farm to the north; Ridgecrest Boulevard (State Route 178), Gateway Center (office and retail), and single-family residences to the south; Richmond Road, a NAWSCL Park and Ride lot, and vacant land to the east; and single- and multifamily development and vacant land to the west.

2.0 METHODS

This section provides a summary of the methods used to evaluate the biological resources within the proposed project limits.

2.1 BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Prior to conducting the biological fieldwork, background research was conducted to obtain information on the existing biological conditions within the project vicinity. Background research included a review of current local, state, and federal regulations, historical and current aerial photographs, and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps.

A review of the California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) was performed to identify sensitive biological resources known from the proposed project vicinity. The CNDDB, which is administered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), provides an inventory of vegetation communities, plant species, and wildlife species that are considered sensitive by state and federal resource agencies, academic institutions, and other conservation groups. Historical occurrences of sensitive species from the proposed project vicinity were used to determine species with a potential to occur within and adjacent to the proposed project area.

2.2 BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS

Biological surveys performed for the proposed project include vegetation mapping, rare plant surveys, burrowing owl surveys (*Athene cunicularia*), wildlife habitat assessments, and a general jurisdictional wetland/waters assessment (Table 2).

| Table 2 Biological Surveys Conducted | | |
|---|---|--------------------|
| Date | Survey Type | Surveyor(s) |
| 8/19/2019 | General biological survey, vegetation map, riparian/riverine habitat assessment, and burrowing owl habitat assessment | Greg Mason |
| 4/1/2019 | Burrowing owl survey, sensitive plant survey, and desert tortoise habitat assessment | Brian Leatherman |
| 5/15/2020 | Burrowing owl survey, sensitive plant survey, and desert tortoise habitat assessment | Brian Leatherman |
| 6/8/2020 | Mohave ground squirrel habitat assessment | Philippe Vergne |
| 6/23/2020 | Burrowing owl survey and desert tortoise habitat assessment | Brian Leatherman |
| 7/15/2020 | Burrowing owl survey and desert tortoise habitat assessment | Brian Leatherman |

2.2.1 Vegetation Mapping

A general biological survey and vegetation mapping visit was conducted on August 19, 2019. The entire site was surveyed on foot. Vegetation communities were mapped according to Holland (1986) classifications. Plant and animal species detected on site were recorded. Special attention was paid to the potential for the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), and Mohave ground squirrel (*Xerospermophilus mohavensis*).

2.2.2 Burrowing Owl Surveys

Burrowing owl surveys were conducted according to the survey methods in the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFG 2012). The 2020 survey consisted of 4 site visits conducted by biologist Brian Leatherman on separate days (April 11, May 15, June 23, and July 15, 2020). A separate burrowing owl survey letter report was prepared and is enclosed as Appendix A.

2.2.3 Sensitive Plant Surveys

Focused spring sensitive plant survey were conducted in conjunction with the burrowing owl surveys (April 11 and May 15, 2020). The entire site was surveyed to provide 100 percent coverage of the suitable habitat within the proposed project area. Sensitive plants also were surveyed for opportunistically during all site visits. Plant and wildlife species detected on site were recorded during the focused rare plant surveys.

2.2.4 Sensitive Wildlife Habitat Assessments

Focused habitat assessments were conducted for the burrowing owl, desert tortoise, and Mohave ground squirrel.

The burrowing owl habitat assessment was conducted during the initial vegetation mapping site visit (August 19, 2019). The site was inspected for suitable burrowing owl habitat characteristics including burrows and evidence of squirrel presence per the 2012 CDFW protocol.

The desert tortoise habitat assessment was conducted in conjunction with the four burrowing owl survey visits. Evidence of desert tortoise presence (burrows, scat, carcasses, drinking depressions, etc.) were searched for, following the transect method established for the burrowing owl surveys to ensure 100% site coverage.

The Mohave ground squirrel habitat assessment was conducted on June 8, 2020. The entire site was walked to identify habitat with the potential to support this species. The assessment included searching for burrows, tracks, scat, and major plant species that support the species including the Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) and winter fat (*Krashennikovia lanata*).

2.2.5 General Jurisdictional Wetlands/Waters Assessment

The site also was assessed for wetland/riparian features that could be considered jurisdictional by state and federal agencies. A formal jurisdictional delineation was not conducted.

2.3 SURVEY LIMITATIONS

Few survey limitations exist for the site. Since the site visits were conducted during daylight hours, the presence of nocturnal animals such as coyotes (*Canis latrans*), raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), and rodents could be determined only by indirect sign (e.g., tracks, scat, burrows). A complete list of these species would require night surveys and trapping, but is not warranted because these species are not considered sensitive and because of the low potential for these species to occur on site.

2.4 NOMENCLATURE

Nomenclature used in this report is from the following sources: Holland (1986); Hickman, ed. (1993); CNPS (2017); Crother (2008); American Ornithological Society (2017); Jones, et al. (1992); and CDFW (2017).

3.0 RESULTS

This section describes the existing conditions within the proposed project area, including the vegetation communities, plant species, wildlife species, and potential jurisdictional areas.

3.1 VEGETATION COMMUNITIES AND LAND COVER TYPES

Four upland vegetation communities and land cover types occur on site, including disturbed creosote brush, disturbed white bursage scrub, disturbed habitat, and developed land (Figure 3). These are discussed in detail below. No wetland/riparian vegetation communities occur within or adjacent to the proposed project area.

3.1.1 Upland Habitats

Creosote Bush Scrub – Disturbed

The site supports approximately 28.5 acres of disturbed creosote bush scrub. This common desert community is dominated by creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) and also supports white bursage (*Ambrosia dumosa*) and brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*) as sub-dominant species. Creosote Bush Scrub is typically an open and sparse community, with an abundance of bare soil between plants. On site this community has been heavily disturbed by vehicular use, pedestrian traffic, and dumping of trash.

White Bursage Scrub – Disturbed

Approximately 38.8 acres of disturbed white bursage scrub occurs on site. This community is dominated by white bursage and also supports scattered creosote bush and brittlebush individuals. As with the creosote bush scrub, this habitat is sparse on site and heavily disturbed by pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

3.1.2 Other Land Cover Types

Two other land cover types, disturbed habitat and developed land, occur within the proposed project area. Disturbed habitat on site consists of dirt roads and bare, mostly unvegetated areas where previous development occurred. Developed areas include sidewalks, curbs, and paved roads. Approximately 0.2 of disturbed habitat and 1.1 acre of developed areas occur on site. These areas are not considered to be sensitive habitat.

3.2 PLANT SPECIES OBSERVED

The site is highly disturbed with few plant species present, and no sensitive plant species were observed. A list of plant species observed is included as Appendix B.

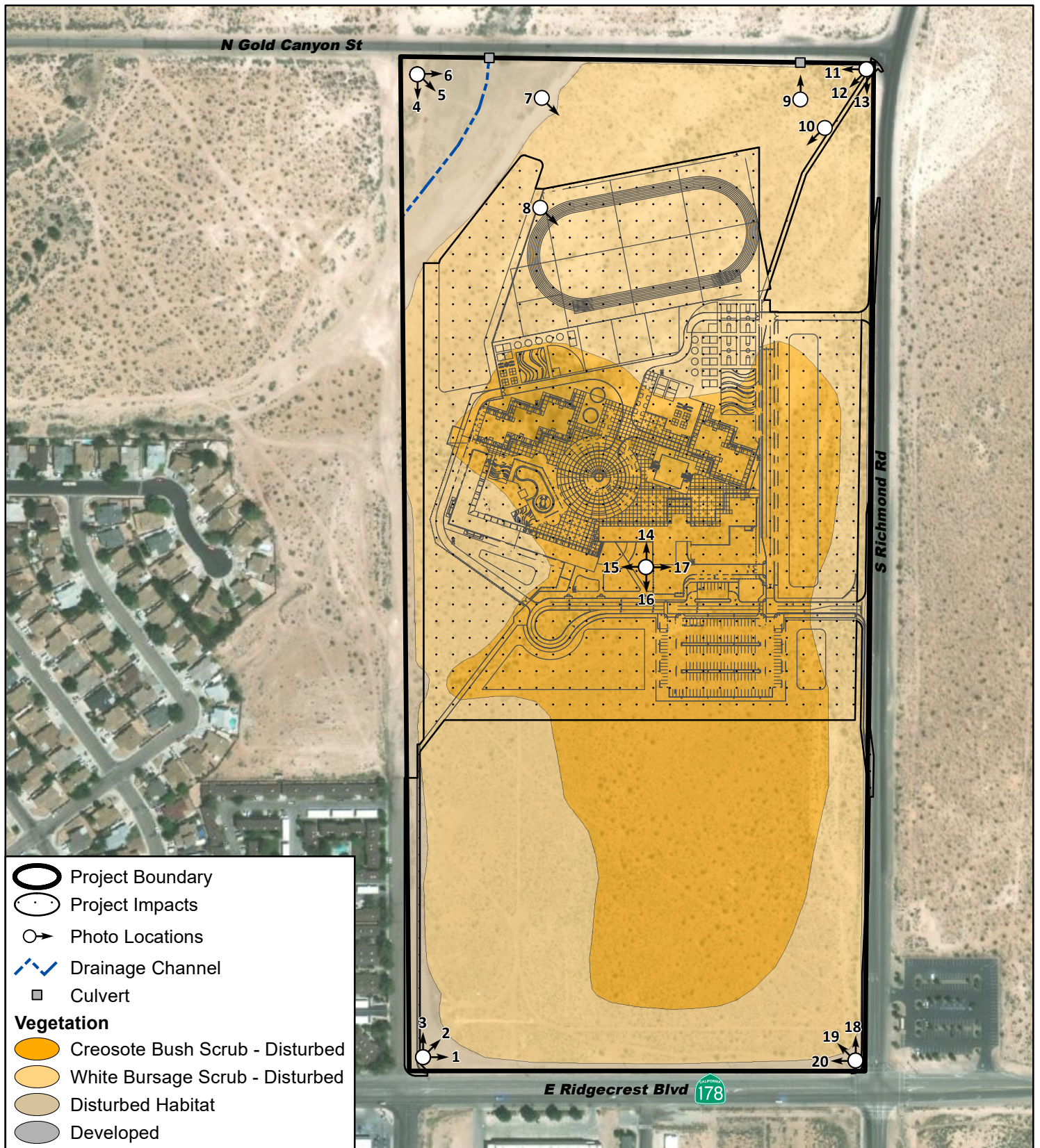
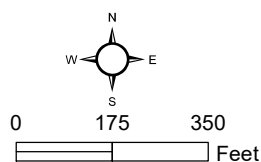


Figure 3

Biological Resources/Impacts

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3.3 ANIMAL SPECIES OBSERVED OR DETECTED

No sensitive animal species were observed on site. A list of animal species observed or detected is included as Appendix C.

3.4 JURISDICTIONAL AREAS

There is an existing drainage channel that conveys flows from the southwest to the northeast across the north western corner of the site (Figure 3). While a formal jurisdictional delineation was not conducted, this channel is not anticipated to be considered jurisdictional by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) as it is isolated and does not connect to a Corps jurisdictional Waters of the U.S. (WUS). Additionally, the channel located on Federal land and is not anticipated to be under the jurisdiction of California State Water Quality Control Board (SWQCB) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

4.0 SENSITIVE RESOURCES

Sensitive biological resources include sensitive vegetation communities, sensitive plant species, sensitive wildlife species, wildlife movement corridors and nursery sites, and wetland resources. In general, the principal reason that a species, subspecies, or variety is considered sensitive is the documented or perceived decline or limitation of its population size or geographical extent and/or distribution resulting in most cases from habitat loss. Wildlife movement corridors or linkages also are considered sensitive by local, state, and federal resource and conservation agencies because these corridors allow wildlife to move between adjoining open space areas that are becoming increasingly isolated as open space becomes increasingly fragmented from urbanization, rugged terrain, or changes in vegetation (Beier and Loe 1992). In addition, wetland resources are considered sensitive because of their limited distribution and high wildlife value.

Sensitive biological resources are known to occur or have the potential to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project area based on historical data for the region identified through a query of the CNDDDB, the presence of suitable habitat within the project vicinity, and/or presence of other requisite environmental components within the project vicinity. The following section describes the sensitive biological resources with the potential to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project area and provides definitions for each of these sensitive biological resources.

4.1 SENSITIVE VEGETATION COMMUNITIES

Sensitive vegetation communities are vegetation assemblages, associations, or subassociations that have cumulative losses throughout the region, have relatively limited distribution, support or potentially support sensitive plant or wildlife species, or have particular value to other wildlife. Typically, sensitive vegetation communities are considered sensitive whether or not they have been disturbed. Sensitive vegetation communities are regulated by various local, state, and federal resource agencies. The CNDDDB provides an inventory of vegetation communities that are considered sensitive by state and federal resource agencies, academic institutions, and conservation groups such as the CNPS. Determination of the level of sensitivity is based on the Nature Conservancy Heritage Program Status Ranks that rank both species and plant communities on a global and statewide basis according to the number and size of remaining occurrences as well as recognized threats such as proposed development, habitat degradation, and invasion by non-native species.

Based on a CNDDDB search, no sensitive vegetation communities were identified on any of the sites. In addition, no sensitive vegetation communities were identified during the biological reconnaissance and sensitive plant surveys conducted for the project. The only native vegetation communities mapped are creosote bush scrub and white bursage scrub. These common native communities are not, in and of themselves, considered to be sensitive.

4.2 SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES

For purposes of this report, sensitive plant species include those that are (1) listed or proposed for listing by state or federal agencies as threatened or endangered; (2) on List 1B (considered endangered throughout its range) or List 2 (considered endangered in California but more common elsewhere) of the CNPS's *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California* (CNPS 2017); or (3) considered rare, endangered, or threatened by the CDFW (CDFW 2017) or other local conservation organizations or specialists. Noteworthy plant species are considered to be those on List 3 (more information about the plant distribution and rarity needed) and List 4 (plants of limited distribution) of the CNPS *Inventory*. The CNPS is a statewide resource conservation organization that has developed an inventory of California's sensitive plant species. The CNPS listing is sanctioned by the CDFW and essentially serves as an early warning list of potential candidate species for threatened or endangered status.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), a federally endangered species is defined as a species facing extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its geographic range, and a federally threatened species is defined as a species that is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant part of its range. The CDFW defines an endangered species as one whose prospects of survival and reproduction are in immediate jeopardy, a threatened species as one present in such small numbers throughout its range that it is likely to become an endangered species in the near future in the absence of special protection or management, and a rare species as one present in such small numbers throughout its range that it may become endangered if its present environment worsens.

Species that are federally or state-listed threatened or endangered species and/or are designated as CNPS List 1B or 2 species are afforded a degree of protection that entails a permitting process, including specific mitigation measures to compensate for impacts to the species. Species that are proposed to be listed by the USFWS are treated similarly to listed species by that agency. Recommendations of the USFWS, however, are advisory rather than mandatory in the case of proposed species. Although plant species that are classified as List 3 or 4 species by CNPS are not provided legal protection, this designation is used to identify declining plant species that are considered sensitive by the CNPS but not considered threatened or endangered.

4.2.1 Sensitive Plants Observed

No sensitive plant species were observed during the focused rare plant surveys conducted on site, and no sensitive plant species are expected to occur within or adjacent to the proposed project area due to the heavily disturbed nature of the site.

4.3 SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES

For purposes of this report, sensitive wildlife species include those that are (1) listed or proposed for listing as threatened or endangered by USFWS or CDFW; and/or (2) designated as California Fully Protected by the CDFW. In addition, raptors (birds of prey) and active raptor nests are protected by the California Fish and Game Code 3503.5, which states that it is “unlawful to take, possess, or destroy any birds of prey or to take, possess, or destroy the nest or eggs of any such

bird” unless authorized. The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), which restricts the killing, taking, collecting, selling, or purchasing of native bird species or their parts, nests, or eggs, also provides legal protection for almost all breeding bird species occurring in the United States. Noteworthy wildlife species are those given the informal designation of California Species of Concern by the CDFW. This designation applies to animals not listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) or the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) but which nonetheless (1) are declining at a rate that could result in listing, or (2) historically occurred in low numbers and known threats to their persistence currently exist.

According to the USFWS, a federally endangered species is defined as a species facing extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its geographic range, and a federally threatened species is defined as a species that is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant part of its range. The CDFW defines an endangered species as one whose prospects of survival and reproduction are in immediate jeopardy, a threatened species as one present in such small numbers throughout its range that it is likely to become an endangered species in the near future in the absence of special protection or management, a fully protected species as one that is rare or faces possible extinction, and a California Species of Concern as one that is declining in numbers.

Species that are federally or state-listed threatened or endangered species are afforded a degree of protection that entails a permitting process, including specific mitigation measures to compensate for impacts to the species. Species that are proposed to be listed by the USFWS are treated similarly to listed species by that agency. Recommendations of the USFWS, however, are advisory rather than mandatory in the case of proposed species. As regulated by the CDFW, fully protected species may not be taken or possessed at any time and no licenses or permits may be issued for their take except for collecting these species for necessary scientific research and relocation of the bird species for the protection of livestock. Wildlife species classified as California Species of Concern by the CDFW are not typically provided legal protection; however, there are exceptions for some species such as the burrowing owl.

4.3.1 Sensitive Animals Observed or Detected

No sensitive animal species were detected within or adjacent to the proposed project area during the general biological reconnaissance survey, habitat assessments, focused burrowing owl surveys, or the sensitive plant surveys.

No sensitive animal species are anticipated to occur on site based on the results of the focused habitat assessments performed for the project. The site does have low potential to support the Mohave ground squirrel as the habitat is nominally suitable; however, this species is not anticipated to occur.

4.4 WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

Wildlife movement corridors or linkages also are considered sensitive by local, state, and federal resource and conservation agencies because these corridors allow wildlife to move between adjoining open space areas that are becoming increasingly isolated as open space becomes

increasingly fragmented from urbanization, rugged terrain, or changes in vegetation (Beier and Loe 1992). The site is located on the NAWSCL and surrounded by development. There are no local or regional wildlife corridors on the site; therefore, no permanent or temporary direct impacts to wildlife corridors are anticipated. .

4.5 JURISDICTIONAL WETLANDS/WATERS

Jurisdictional wetland and riparian resources are regulated by the Corps under the Federal Clean Water Act. The drainage on site flows northeasterly toward a large depressional area off site that is not connected to a Waters of the U.S. In addition, this drainage is ephemeral in nature and only conveys flows during or immediately following rainfall events. For these two reasons (isolated and ephemeral status), the drainage would be considered non-jurisdictional by the Corps. The CDFW and SWQCB regulate jurisdictional features per State of California regulations. As the drainage is located on federal land, it would not be regulated by these State agencies. In addition, the project would avoid this drainage area to help maintain existing flow patterns. Given the project design avoidance, isolated/ephemeral nature of the drainage, and its presence on federal land, agency permits for aquatic resources impacts are not anticipated to be required.

4.6 MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

The MBTA is an international treaty that makes it unlawful to take, possess, buy, sell, purchase or barter any migratory bird listed in Title 50 CFR §10.13, including feathers or other parts, nets, eggs or products, except as allowed by implementing regulations. The MBTA requires that disturbance of active nesting territories be reduced or eliminated during critical phases of the nesting cycle (February 1 through September 1, annually). Bird species covered by the MBTA include both tree/shrub and ground nesting birds (e.g. burrowing owl). Disturbance that causes nest abandonment and/or loss of reproductive effort or the loss of habitat upon which the birds

4.7 LOCAL ORDINANCES AND POLICIES

The project site is located within the limits of NAWSCL. The NAWSCL Environmental Management Division (EMD) is responsible for compliance with federal and state environmental laws, as well as environmental policies of the US Department of Defense (USDOD) and the Navy. The project would comply with Navy and USDOD environmental policies enforced by EMD. No other local policies or ordinances would apply; therefore, the project would not pose a conflict.

4.8 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PLANS

The project area is within the limits of two regional conservation plans, the West Mojave Plan (WMP) and the Draft Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).

4.8.1 West Mojave Plan

The West Mojave Plan, adopted by BLM in 2006, covers approximately 9.3 million acres of the western portion of the Mojave Desert in California, including parts of Inyo, Los Angeles, Kern, and San Bernardino counties. The WMP is an interagency habitat conservation plan (HCP) that was prepared by the BLM in collaboration with federal and state agencies. NAWSCL is a participating agency in the WMP.

The purpose of the WMP is to conserve and protect the desert tortoise and nearly 100 other sensitive plant and wildlife species as well as the habitats on which these species depend, while providing developers of public and private projects with a streamlined program for compliance with FESA and CESA by reducing delays and expenses, eliminating uncertainty, and applying the costs of compensation and mitigation equitably to all agencies and parties. The WMP allows incidental take of covered species and is consistent with the resource management plans adopted by each of the region's five military bases as well as with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. As such, the project would not conflict with the WMP.

4.8.2 Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) covers approximately 22.5 million acres of federal and nonfederal lands in the California deserts and adjacent lands in Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties. It is a collaboration between state (e.g., California Energy Commission, CDFW) and federal (e.g., BLM, USFWS) agencies, with input from local governments, environmental organizations, industry, and other interested parties to provide effective protection, conservation, and management of desert ecosystems while allowing for appropriate development and timely permitting of renewable energy projects. Portions of NAWSCL are within the DRECP Plan area.

The project site would be leased by the SSUSD as a prospective school site. No renewable energy projects are proposed on site, and the project would not conflict with the DRECP.

5.0 PROJECT IMPACTS

5.1 DIRECT IMPACTS

The following section describes the potential permanent and temporary direct impacts that may result from implementation of the proposed project.

5.1.1 Vegetation Communities

Approximately 36.6 acres would be impacted upon implementation of the proposed project (Figure 3; Table 3). No sensitive vegetation communities are present; therefore, no permanent or temporary direct impacts to sensitive vegetation communities are anticipated. As such, vegetation community impacts would not be considered significant and would not require mitigation.

| Table 3 IMPACTS TO VEGETATION COMMUNITIES | |
|--|--------------|
| Vegetation Communities | Acres |
| Disturbed creosote bush scrub | 18.5 |
| Disturbed white bursage scrub | 16.8 |
| Disturbed habitat | 1.1 |
| Developed land | 0.2 |
| TOTAL | 36.6 |

5.1.2 Sensitive Plant Species

No sensitive plant species were observed on site and none are anticipated to occur; therefore, no significant impacts to sensitive plant species are expected. As such, no mitigation would be required.

5.1.3 Sensitive Animal Species

No sensitive animal species were observed on site and none are anticipated to occur; however, the habitat assessment did note that the habitat on site could support the Mohave ground squirrel. No Mohave ground squirrel sign has been observed on site and the potential for this species to occur is considered to be low. If the species were present during construction then there could be significant impacts to this state listed species (the species is not federally listed). The project includes mitigation measures for this potential impact (Section 6.0). No other significant permanent or temporary direct impacts to wildlife species are expected. As such, no additional mitigation would be required.

5.1.4 Jurisdictional Areas (Corps, CDFW, and SWQCB)

The drainage on site is not anticipated to be considered jurisdictional by the Corps. Additionally, the project would occur on Federal land and state regulatory agencies are not anticipated to regulate the channel. Finally, the drainage will be avoided. As such, no regulatory agency permits or mitigation would be required.

5.1.5 Wildlife Corridors

No local or regional wildlife corridors are present within or adjacent to the proposed project site; therefore, no permanent or temporary direct impacts to wildlife corridors are anticipated. As such, no mitigation would be required.

5.1.6 Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The project would result in the removal of vegetation with the potential to support nesting migratory birds if conducted during the avian nesting season (February 1 through September 1). Impacts to such species are prohibited under the MBTA and would be considered significant.

5.1.7 Local Ordinances and Policies

The project would be located on NAWSCL and would not result in any conflicts with or impacts to local ordinances and policies.

5.1.8 Regional Conservation Plans

The project would conform to the WMP and the DRECP; therefore, no conflicts with regional conservation plans would occur.

5.2 INDIRECT IMPACTS

There is a diversity of land uses surrounding the proposed project area. Land use to the west and south includes residential and commercial development. Roadways bound the site to the east and north. There are no conserved areas or wildlife corridors in the vicinity of the project site. Given the lack of adjacent sensitive biological resources, the proposed project would not result in a significant indirect impact to biological resources, including those caused by project noise and lighting.

6.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

The project would not require mitigation for direct impacts to sensitive biological resources as none are anticipated. The project does, however, have the potential to impact the Mohave ground squirrel and bird species protected under the federal MBTA if present at the time of construction. However, through the precautionary measures would be taken to mitigate any potential impacts. Therefore, potentially significant impacts to biological resources would be reduced to less than significant levels.

6.1 DESERT TORTOISE and MOHAVE GROUND SQUIRREL

Prior to construction, a desert tortoise/Mohave ground squirrel protection education program will be presented to all construction personnel to ensure that they are aware of the significance to the project should this species occur on site during construction. The education program will include the following:

- The legal and sensitive status of the species;
- a brief discussion of the species life history and ecology;
- mitigation measures designed to reduce adverse effects;
- and protocols to follow if either species is encountered, including appropriate contact point(s).

A final site clearance survey will be conducted within 7 days of the start of construction to confirm that no tortoises or Mohave ground squirrel are present on site. The clearance survey will be conducted by a USFWS approved biologist in accordance with the current USFWS protocols. If either species is found within the project area, activities should be modified to avoid injuring or harming it. If activities cannot be modified, then construction will be postponed until a relocation/avoidance procedure can be implemented, in conjunction with the.

6.2 MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

If site clearing will occur outside the avian breeding season (February 1 through September 1) then no impacts to MBTA protected species would occur and no mitigation would be required. If clearing is to occur during the breeding season then a pre-construction survey will be conducted 3 days prior to clearing or grading activities to determine if breeding or nesting avian species occur within impact area. If no nesting birds (or birds displaying breeding or nesting behavior) are present then clearing may proceed. If nesting birds are present then a no- construction buffer will be placed around the active nest(s). The size of the buffer will depend upon the species present and will be determined in conjunction with the EMD. Construction in these areas will not be resumed until the biologist has confirmed that the birds are no longer nesting. In the case of burrow nesting species like the burrowing owl, the biologist will confirm that the burrow is empty prior to being destroyed by construction activities.

7.0 REFERENCES

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Appendix A

BURROWING OWL SURVEY REPORT

July 23, 2020

Mr. Dwayne Mears
Placeworks
3 MacArthur Place, Suite 1100
Santa Ana, California 92707

Subject: Burrowing Owl Survey Report for the Richmond Elementary School Project (Site 3)

Dear Mr. Mears:

This letter presents the results of the 2020 nesting season survey for the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*; BUOW) conducted on the potential future Richmond Elementary School Project Site 3.

LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

The potential school site (Potential Site 3) is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of East Ridgecrest Boulevard (CA 178) and North Richmond Road on Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake and within/adjacent to the City of Ridgecrest (Figures 1 and 2).

Potential Site 3 is an undeveloped with elevation ranging from 2,260 to 2,270 feet amsl. The site is bounded by undeveloped land to the north; undeveloped land and a Park & Ride feature to the east; residential and undeveloped land to the west; and commercial development to the south.

METHODS

The 2020 survey consisted of 4 site visits conducted by biologist Brian Leatherman on separate days (Table 1) according to the survey methods in the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFG 2012). Representative photographs were taken and are enclosed as Attachment A.

The entire site was surveyed for burrowing owls and potential burrows or perches that could be used by the owl. Burrowing owls are known to occupy ground squirrel burrows; therefore, particular attention was paid to any areas along fence lines, or other locations where squirrel activity has been observed in the past, was observed presently, or was likely to occur. Dirt piles, drainages, and culverts were also carefully examined as these sites can often provide cavities that can support the species. The determination of owl presence was made by direct owl observation or by owl signs such as, but not necessarily limited to, excavated soil, whitewash (excrement), castings (pellets), and/or feathers.

Surveys on the school development portion consisted of 100% coverage survey by walking parallel belt transects spaced at 10 meters. The remainder of the site was surveyed with parallel belt transects spaced 25 meters. The project site is surrounded by asphalt roads to the north, east, and south, and by a dirt road to the west. No surveys were conducted beyond the asphalt roads, and surveys were extended to the west by scanning suitable habitat areas and potential perch sites with binoculars (except at the SW corner where an apartment complex is adjacent to the property). The location of belt transects on the property outside the school site were varied during each survey so that all the property was surveyed.

In addition to the BUOW survey, focused surveys for special status plants also were conducted during the first two survey visits when those species would have been identifiable.

Sign for the desert tortoise also was searched for while walking the transects for the BUOW surveys.

| Table 1 Burrowing Owl Survey Information | | | | |
|---|-------------|------------------|-------------|---|
| Survey Number | Date | Biologist | Time | Weather Conditions (start/stop) |
| 1 | 4/11/20 | Brian Leatherman | 0600-1115 | 5%, 56°F, wind 0-2 mph/ 0%, 58°F, wind 0 mph |
| 2 | 5/15/20 | Brian Leatherman | 0600-1130 | 0%, 56°F, wind 0-2 mph/ 0%, 83°F, wind 2-4 mph |
| 3 | 6/23/20 | Brian Leatherman | 0500-1030 | 0%, 75°F, wind 0-2 mph/ 0%, 94°F, wind 4-7 mph |
| 4 | 7/15/20 | Brian Leatherman | 0500-1000 | 0%, 64°F, wind 0-2 mph/ 0%, 85°F, wind 0-2 mph |

SURVEY RESULTS

No BUOW or potential BUOW sign/evidence was observed on the site during any of the visits. The site does support the white-tailed antelope squirrel (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*); however, none of its burrows exhibited any evidence of current or previous BUOW presence. Based on the negative results of the 2020 field surveys, the site is not anticipated to be occupied (active burrows) by the BUOW.

Additionally, no special status plant species or evidence of the desert tortoise were observed on the site.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Mason', is displayed within a rectangular box.

Greg Mason
Senior Biologist

Enclosures:

| | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Figure 1 | Regional Location Map |
| Figure 2 | Project Location Map |
| Figure 3 | BUOW Survey Map |
| Attachment A | Representative Photographs |
| Attachment B | Animal Species Observed |

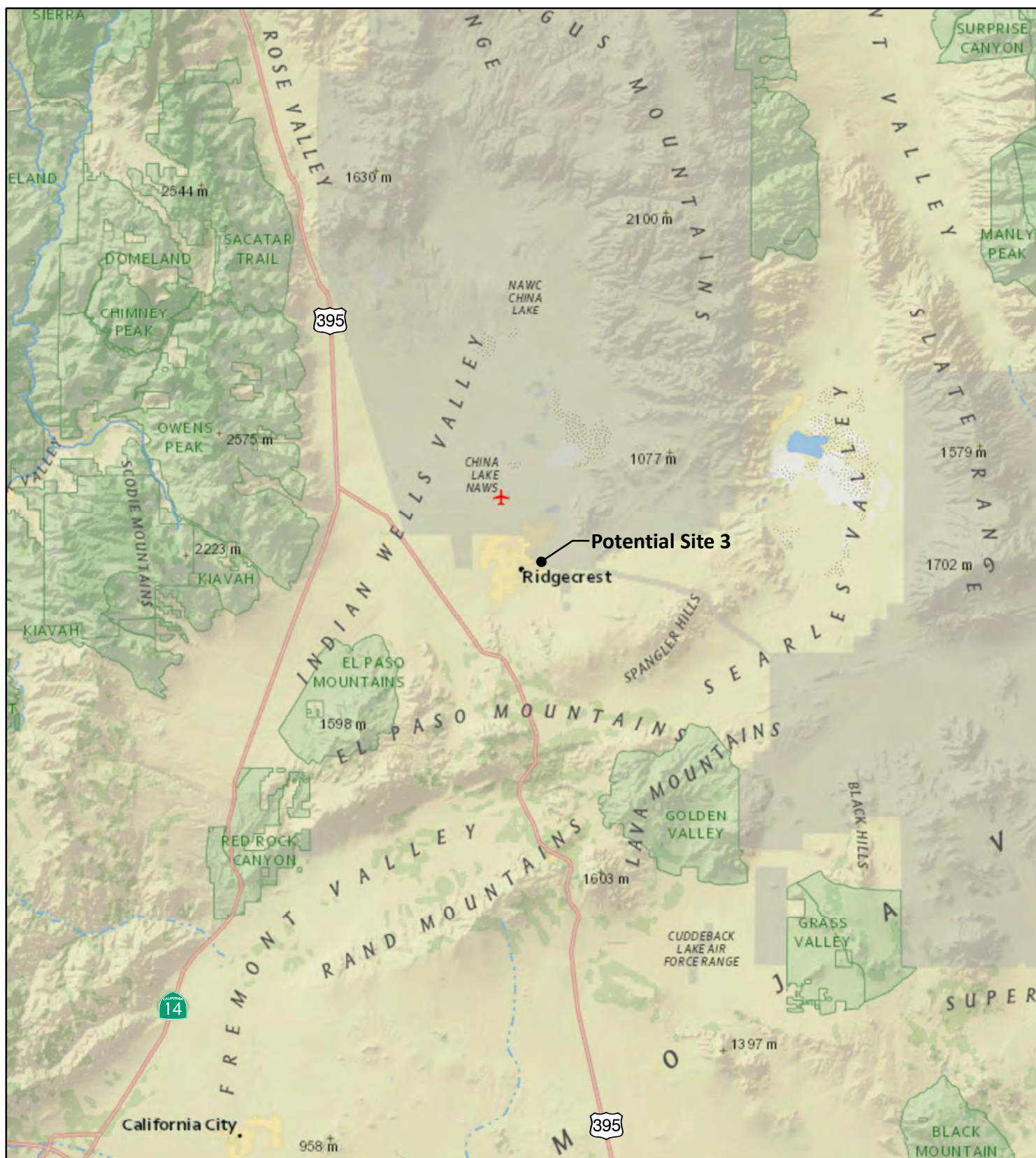
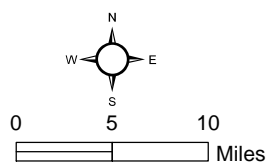


Figure 1

Regional Location

RICHMOND ES REPLACEMENT
POTENTIAL SITE 3



ALDEN
ENVIRONMENTAL, INC.

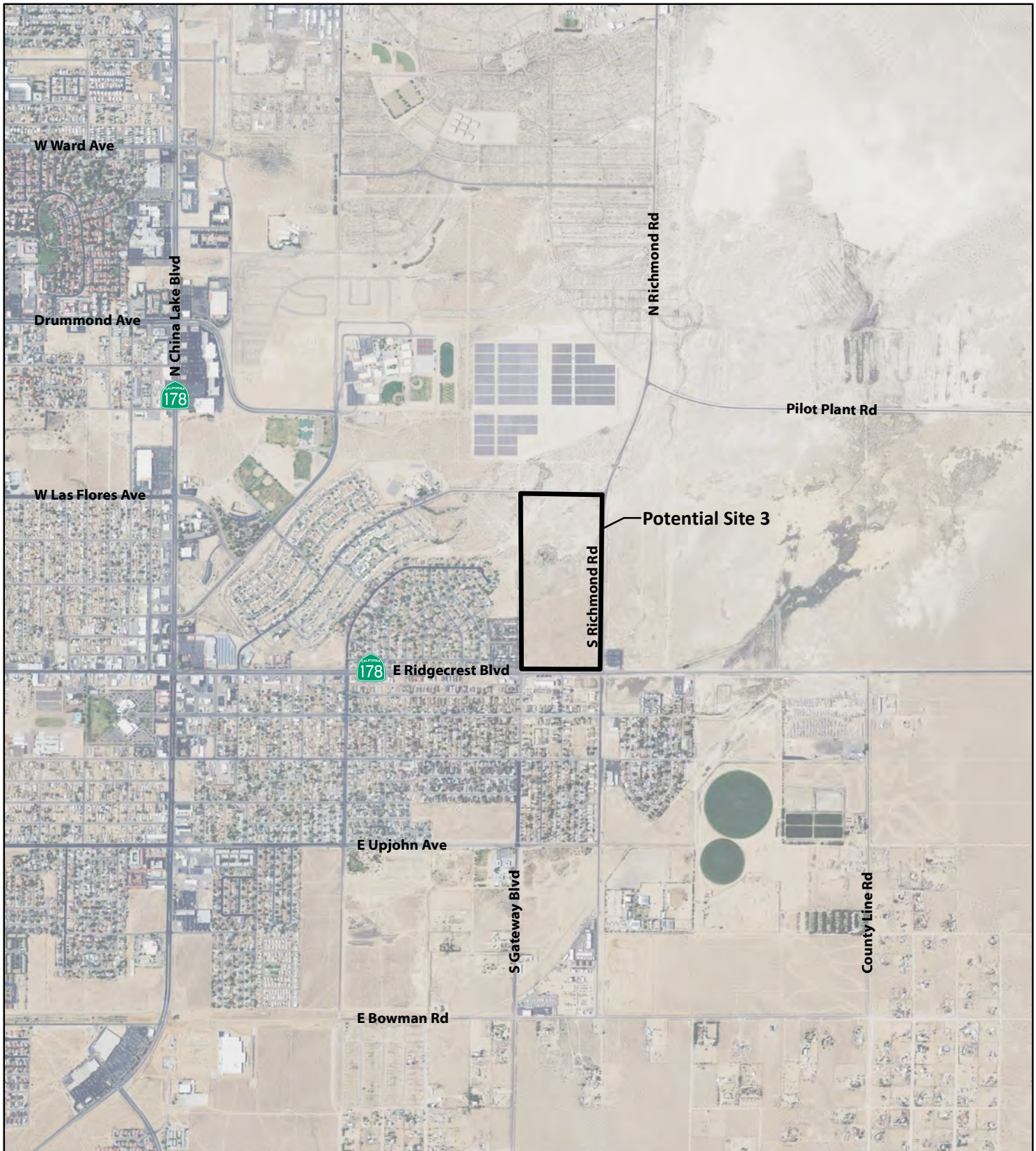


Figure 2

Project Location

RICHMOND ES REPLACEMENT
POTENTIAL SITE 3

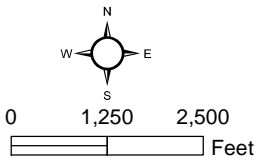
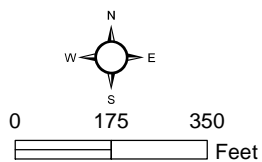




Figure 3

Burrowing Owl Survey Area

RICHMOND ES REPLACEMENT
POTENTIAL SITE 3



ALDEN
ENVIRONMENTAL, INC.

Attachment A

Representative Photographs

Representative Photographs



Photo Point 1



Photo Point 2



Photo Point 3



Photo Point 4



Photo Point 5



Photo Point 6



Photo Point 7



Photo Point 8

Attachment B

Animal Species Observed

COMMON NAME

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Reptiles

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Desert iguana | <i>Dipsosaurus dorsalis</i> |
| Zebra-tailed lizard | <i>Callisaurus draconoides</i> |
| Common Side-blotched lizard | <i>Uta stansburiana</i> |
| Desert night lizard | <i>Xantusia vigilis</i> |
| Tiger whiptail | <i>Aspidoscelis tigris</i> |

Birds

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Great-tailed grackle | <i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i> |
| Western tanager | <i>Piranga ludoviciana</i> |
| American kestrel | <i>Falco sparverius</i> |
| House finch | <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i> |
| Red-tailed hawk | <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i> |
| Anna's hummingbird | <i>Calypte anna</i> |
| Common raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> |
| Horned lark | <i>Eremophila alpestris</i> |
| Northern mockingbird | <i>Mimus polyglottos</i> |
| Lesser nighthawk | <i>Chordeiles acutipennis</i> |
| House sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> |
| Rock dove | <i>Columba livia</i> |
| Eurasian Collared-dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> |
| Mourning dove | <i>Zenaida macroura</i> |
| Loggerhead shrike | <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i> |
| Tree swallow | <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i> |
| Barn swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> |
| Say's phoebe | <i>Sayornis saya</i> |
| Vermilion Flycatcher | <i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i> |
| Verdin | <i>Auriparus flaviceps</i> |
| Yellow-rumped warbler | <i>Setophaga coronata</i> |
| Black-throated sparrow | <i>Amphispiza bilineata</i> |
| Sagebrush Sparrow | <i>Artemisiospiza nevadensis</i> |
| White-crowned sparrow | <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i> |
| Turkey vulture | <i>Cathartes aura</i> |

Mammals

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Coyote (scat, tracks) | <i>Canis latrans</i> |
| Desert cottontail | <i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i> |
| Black-tailed jackrabbit | <i>Lepus californicus</i> |
| Kangaroo rat (burrows) | <i>Dipodomys</i> sp. |
| White-tailed antelope squirrel | <i>Ammospermophilus leucurus</i> |

Appendix B

PLANT SPECIES OBSERVED

| PLANT SPECIES OBSERVED | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| FAMILY | SCIENTIFIC NAME | COMMON NAME |
| MONOCOTYLEDONS | | |
| Poaceae | <i>Bromus tectorum</i> | cheat grass |
| | <i>Schismus barbatus</i> | Mediterranean grass |
| DICOTYLEDONS | | |
| Asteraceae | <i>Ambrosia dumosa</i> | white bursage |
| | <i>Encelia farinosa</i> | brittlebush |
| | <i>Malacothrix glabrata</i> | desert dandelion |
| Chenopodiaceae | <i>Atriplex canescens</i> | four-winged saltbush |
| | <i>Atriplex confertifolia</i> | saltbush |
| Geraniaceae | <i>Erodium cicutarium</i> | red-stemmed filaree |
| Zygophyllaceae | <i>Larrea tridentata</i> | creosote |

Appendix C

ANIMAL SPECIES OBSERVED or DETECTED

| ANIMAL SPECIES OBSERVED OR DETECTED | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| SCIENTIFIC NAME | COMMON NAME |
| INVERTEBRATES | |
| <i>Apis mellifera</i> | European honey bee |
| <i>Camponotus</i> sp. | carpenter ant |
| <i>Vanessa annabella</i> | west coast lady |
| VERTEBRATES | |
| <u>Birds</u> | |
| <i>Amphispiza bilineata</i> | black-throated sparrow |
| <i>Artemisiospiza nevadensis</i> | sagebrush Sparrow |
| <i>Auriparus flaviceps</i> | verdin |
| <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i> | red-tailed hawk |
| <i>Calypte anna</i> | Anna's hummingbird |
| <i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i> | house finch |
| <i>Cathartes aura</i> | turkey vulture |
| <i>Chordeiles acutipennis</i> | lesser nighthawk |
| <i>Columba livia</i> | rock dove |
| <i>Corvus corax</i> | raven |
| <i>Falco sparverius</i> | American kestrel |
| <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | barn swallow |
| <i>Mimus polyglottos</i> | northern mockingbird |
| <i>Passer domesticus</i> | house sparrow |
| <i>Piranga ludoviciana</i> | western tanager |
| <i>Sayornis saya</i> | Say's phoebe |
| <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | Eurasian Collared-dove |
| <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i> | tree swallow |
| <i>Vermilion Flycatcher</i> | vermillion Flycatcher |
| <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i> | white-crowned sparrow |
| <u>Mammals</u> | |
| <i>Ammospermophilus leucurus</i> | white-tailed antelope ground squirrel |
| <i>Canis latrans</i> | coyote (scat) |
| <i>Dipodomys</i> sp. | kangaroo rat (burrows) |
| <i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i> | desert cottontail rabbit |
| <i>Lepus californicus</i> | black-tailed jackrabbit |
| <u>Reptiles</u> | |
| <i>Aspidoscelis tigris</i> | tiger whiptail |
| <i>Callisaurus draconoides</i> | zebra-tailed lizard |
| <i>Dipsosaurus dorsalis</i> | desert iguana |
| <i>Uta stansburiana</i> | common side-blotched lizard |
| <i>Xantusia vigilis</i> | desert night lizard |

Appendix D

SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES WITH POTENTIAL TO OCCUR

| APPENDIX D SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES WITH POTENTIAL TO OCCUR | | | | |
|--|------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| SCIENTIFIC NAME | COMMON NAME | STATUS* | HABITAT DESCRIPTION | POTENTIAL TO OCCUR |
| Reptiles | | | | |
| <i>Gopherus agassizii</i> | desert tortoise | FT ¹ ST ² | Desert scrub, washes, dunes, and rocky slopes with firm but not hard pan soils. Elevations from sea level to approximately 5,200 feet. | Not expected to occur on site due to disturbance and lack of suitable habitat. |
| Birds | | | | |
| <i>Athene cunicularia</i> | burrowing owl | CSC ³ | Dry, open areas with low-growing vegetation in grasslands, deserts, prairies, and agricultural lands often associated with burrowing mammals. | Not expected to occur. No owls or owl burrows were observed during focused surveys on site. |
| Mammals | | | | |
| <i>Xerospermophilus mohavensis</i> | Mohave ground squirrel | ST | Sandy to rocky soils of relatively flat, sparse, desert scrub habitat, including creosote brush scrub, desert salt-brush scrub, desert sink scrub, desert greasewood scrub, shadscale scrub, and Joshua tree woodland. | Low. No suitable habitat identified during the focused habitat assessment. |

¹Federal listed as Threatened

²State listed as Threatened

³California Species of Special Concern