

Tulare 198 Culverts Repair and Replacement Project

On State Route 198 in Tulare County

06-TUL-198-PM 0.0-44.0

Project ID Number 0618000045

State Clearinghouse Number 2021120503

Initial Study with Negative Declaration

Volume 1 of 2



Prepared by the
State of California Department of Transportation

May 2022



General Information About This Document

Document prepared by: Jason Adair, Associate Environmental Planner.

[The following text has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated.] The Initial Study was circulated to the public for 32 days between December 12, 2021, and January 12, 2022. Comments received during this period are included in Appendix C, which has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated. Elsewhere, language has been added throughout the document to indicate where a change has been made since the circulation of the draft environmental document. Minor editorial changes and clarifications have not been so indicated.

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Repair or replace 140 culverts at various locations on State Route 198 from
post miles 0.0 to 44.0 in Tulare County

**INITIAL STUDY
with Negative Declaration**

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Department of Transportation
and
Responsible Agency: California Transportation Commission



Jennifer H. Taylor
Environmental Office Chief, District 6
California Department of Transportation
CEQA Lead Agency

05/26/2022

Date

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Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

State Clearinghouse Number: 2021120503

District-County-Route-Post Mile: 06-TUL-198-PM 0.0-44.0

EA/Project Number: EA 06-0X260 and Project ID Number 0618000045

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to repair or replace 140 culverts on State Route 198 in Tulare County at various locations from the Kings/Tulare county line to Pumpkin Hollow Bridge on the Kaweah River, about half a mile west of the Sequoia National Park entrance.

Determination

An Initial Study has been prepared by Caltrans, District 6.

On the basis of this study, it is determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

The project will have no effect on aesthetics, agriculture and forest resources, air quality, cultural resources, paleontology, energy, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, utilities and service systems, and wildfires.

The project will have no significant effect on geology and soils (paleontological resources), greenhouse gas emissions, and biological resources.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads 'Jennifer H. Taylor'.

Jennifer H. Taylor
Environmental Office Chief, District 6
California Department of Transportation

05/26/2022

Date

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Chapter 1 **Proposed Project**

1.1 Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to repair or replace 122 culverts on State Route 198 in Tulare County at various locations from the Kings/Tulare county line to Pumpkin Hollow Bridge on the Kaweah River, about half a mile west of the Sequoia National Park entrance.

State Route 198 in Tulare County begins about 3.5 miles west of State Route 99 at the Kings/Tulare county line (Road 44) in a flat agricultural area consisting of row crops, fruit and nut orchards, and dairies. This state route extends eastward from State Route 99 through the City of Visalia for 9 miles through urban flat terrain. To the east and north of Visalia, State Route 198 runs through flat agricultural land within the San Joaquin Valley for about 14 miles; the highway is bordered by nut and fruit tree orchards, including citrus, vineyards, and rangelands. Approximately 1 mile north of Lemon Cove, State Route 198 climbs past Terminus Dam to Lake Kaweah. East of the lake, the state route follows the Kaweah River through the rural community of Three Rivers in mountainous terrain, ending just short of Pumpkin Hollow Bridge.

Currently, the segment of State Route 198 from the Kings/Tulare county line to the east of Road 68 is a four-lane expressway with 10-foot-wide outside shoulders and 5-foot-wide inside shoulders. The segment from east of Road 80 (Plaza Drive) to Outside Creek is a four-lane freeway. The highway segment from Outside Creek to State Route 245 is a four-lane expressway. The highway segment from State Route 245 to the Sequoia National Park boundary is a rural, conventional two-lane highway with 0- to 2-foot-wide outside shoulders.

The preliminary estimated construction cost of the project is \$11,087,000. The project is to be funded from the 2020 State Highway Operation and Protection Program's Drainage System Restoration Program in the 2022/2023 fiscal year.

Construction is scheduled to begin in April 2024 and will take 300 working days to complete. No night work is planned for this project.

1.2 Purpose and Need

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the project is to preserve the operational integrity of the highway system.

1.2.2 Need

Rehabilitation of drainage culverts is essential for this segment of State Route 198 in Tulare County to avoid possible future flooding damage and the resulting pavement failure caused by blocked and defective culverts. Maintaining culverts is necessary for the stability and proper functioning of the roadway.

These culverts have reached or exceeded their design life. They are perforated, heavily rusted, and have damaged end sections and separated joints. Repairing and replacing the culverts is necessary to maintain the highway in good operating condition.

1.3 Project Description

The project will repair or replace 122 culverts on State Route 198 in Tulare County at various locations from the Kings/Tulare county line to Pumpkin Hollow Bridge on the Kaweah River, about half a mile west of the Sequoia National Park entrance. See Figure 1-1 for the project vicinity map and Figure 1-2 for the project location map.

Figure 1-1 Project Vicinity Map

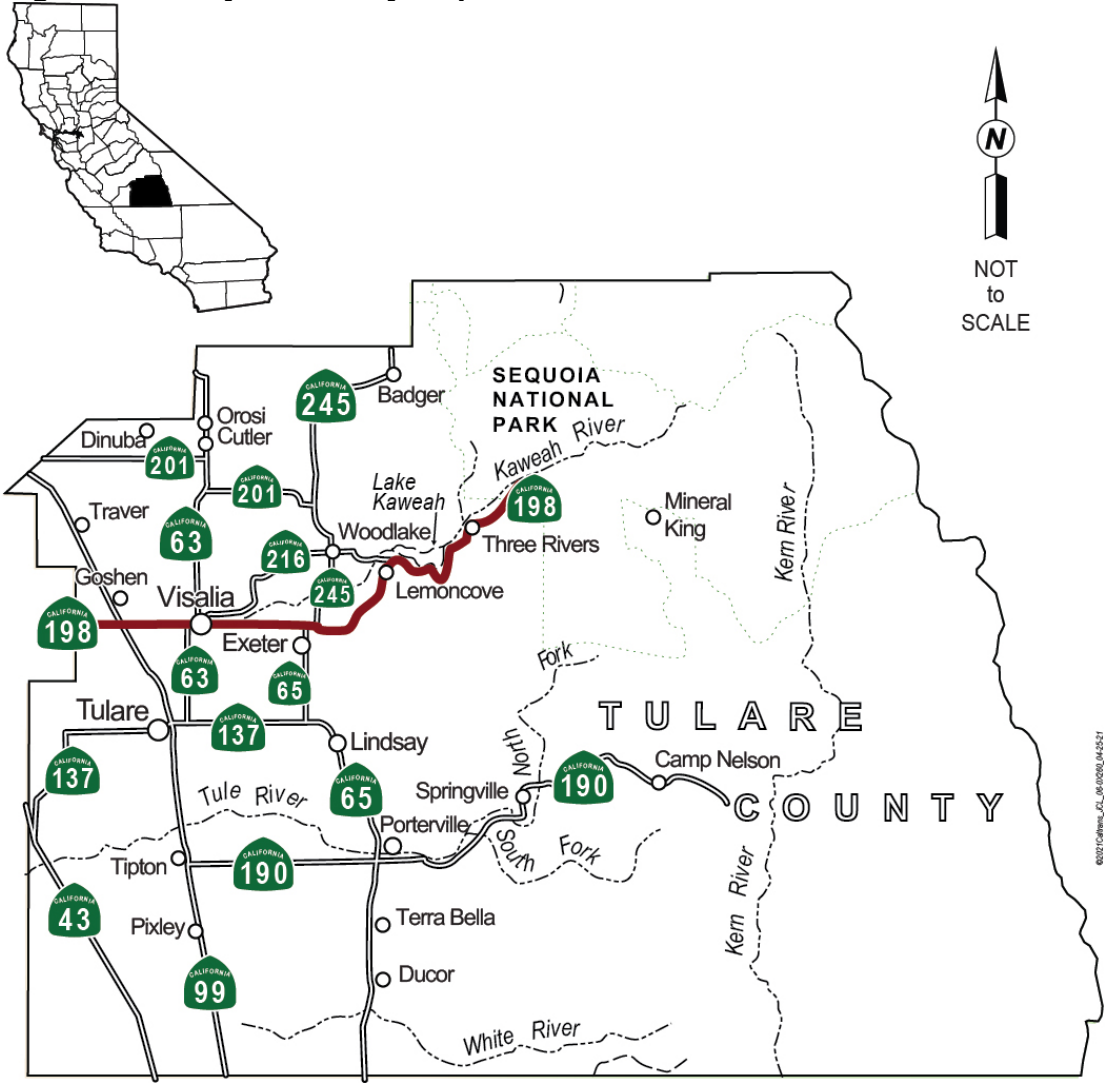
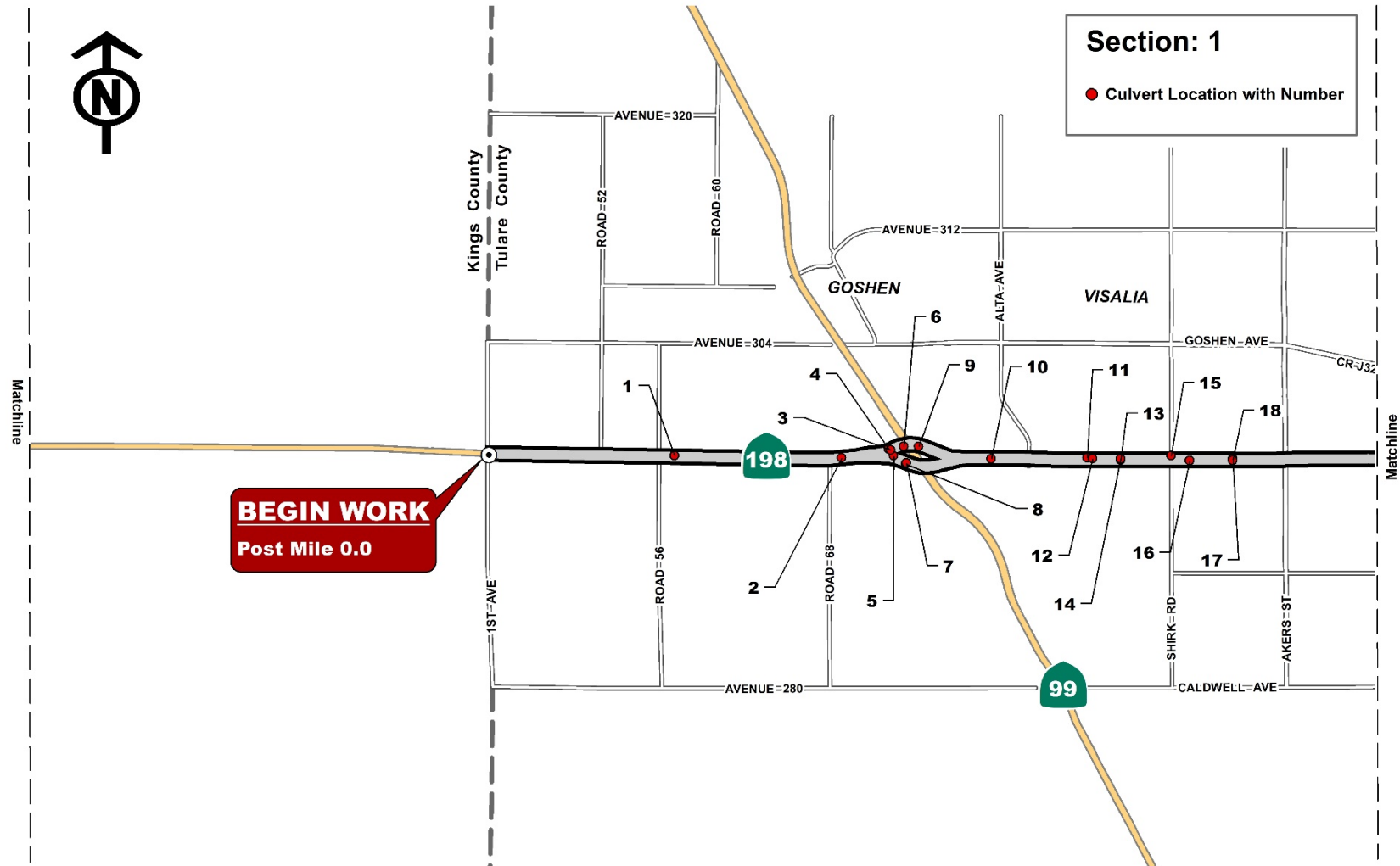
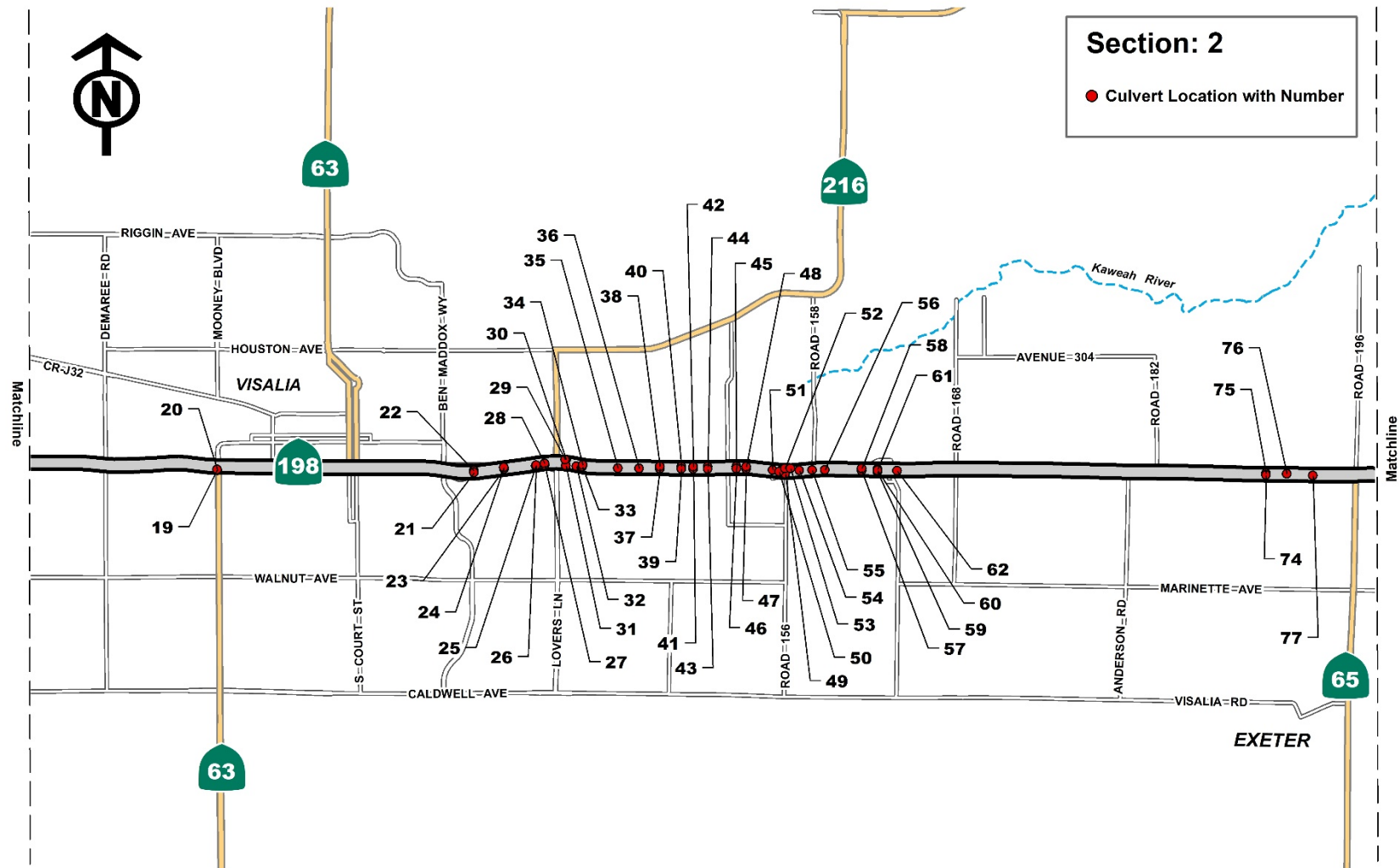
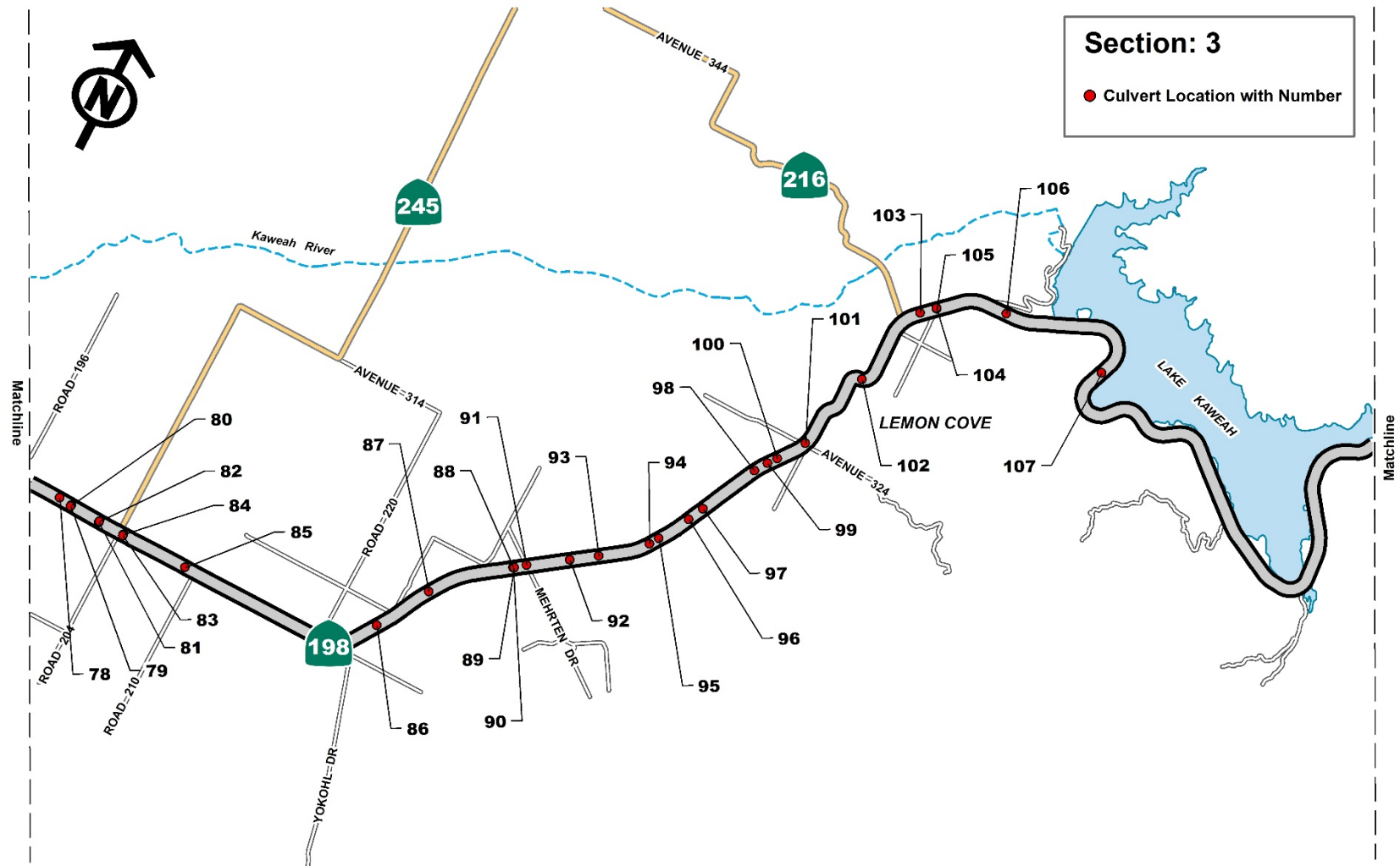
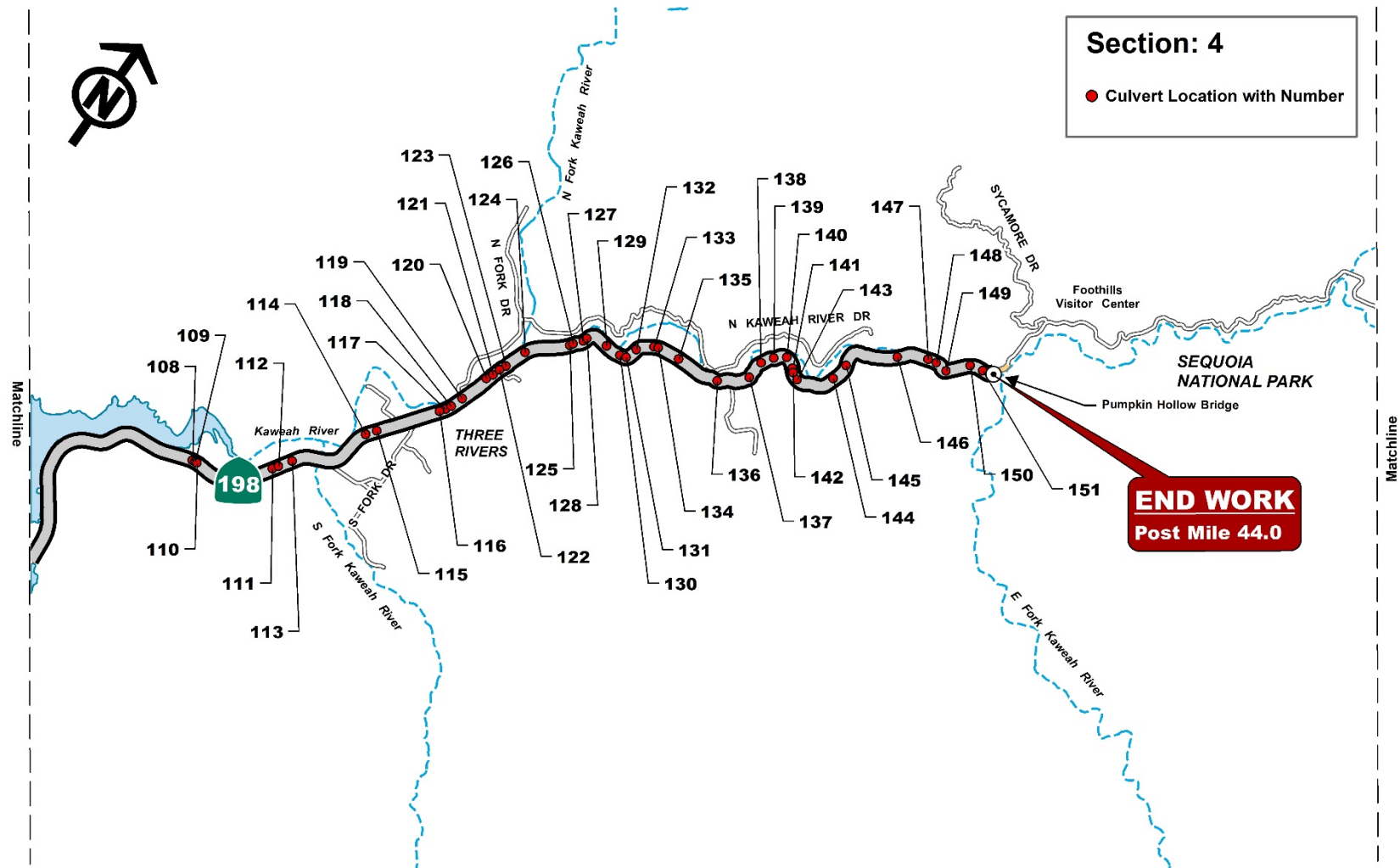


Figure 1-2 Project Location Map









1.4 Project Alternatives

1.4.1 Build Alternatives

The Build Alternative will restore the existing drainage system to good condition by repairing and/or replacing the identified deteriorating culverts within the project limits.

Most of the existing culverts are corrugated steel pipe (also known by the abbreviation CSP). A few culverts are high-density polyethylene (abbreviated HDPE) or concrete.

[The following sentence has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] An estimated 57 culverts will be replaced. All new culverts will be 24 inches in diameter, so smaller diameter culverts will be upgraded. The pipe materials will likely be reinforced concrete pipe at most locations; plastic culvert pipe may also be used at some locations. The line and grade of the new culvert will match that of the existing culvert unless the culvert needs to be lowered to maintain the minimum cover over the pipe, or if a change in the profile or alignment of the culvert is needed in order to install it properly. Existing inlets and headwalls will be replaced as well.

Two construction methods are proposed for installing the new culverts. [The following sentence has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] At 14 locations that are in freeway/expressway segments with high traffic volumes, trenchless excavation construction methods (jack and bore method) are proposed to minimize disruptions to existing traffic and to avoid needing to trench through concrete pavement. For new culverts on the two-lane conventional highway, open trench construction methods are proposed.

[The following sentence has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] Most of the repair work will involve installing culvert barrel linings using the cured-in-place pipe method at 62 locations. Grading around the inlet and outlet of the existing culvert will be minimal. Repairs at three culverts will include joint sealing and repair.

The existing slopes at the culvert outlet will be restored by stabilizing the slope with rock slope protection and erosion control.

At the time environmental studies began, 151 culverts were planned for repair or replacement. [The following sentence has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] Since that time, 29 locations were eliminated from the scope of work because they were in good shape based on a field inspection or they had been replaced during a prior construction project.

Table 1.1 lists each culvert location, the material of the existing pipe, and the diameter, length, and proposed improvements to repair or replace each culvert. In the table, the following abbreviations or terms are used: CSP—corrugated steel pipe; CSP arch—corrugated steel pipe that is bent to be flatter on the bottom; HDPE—high-density polyethylene; Dual—a set of two pipes of the same diameter lie abutting each other; APC—alternative pipe culvert—the contractor chooses the type of pipe from a list in the specifications.

[Table 1.1 has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.]

Table 1.1 Culvert Improvements on State Route 198

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 1.64 | HDPE | 24 | 83 | Joint sealing/repair |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 3 | 3.54 | CSP | 24 | 103 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 4 | 3.54 | CSP | 24 | 107 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 5 | 3.54 | CSP | 24 | 246 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 6 | 3.63 | CSP | 24 | 90 | Culvert barrel lining |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 8 | 3.73 | CSP | 24 | 191 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 9 | 3.83 | CSP | 12 | 40 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 10 | 4.45 | CSP | Dual 18 | 69 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 11 | 5.28 | CSP | 24 | 37 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 12 | 5.34 | CSP | Dual 18 | 64 | Culvert barrel lining |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 15 | 5.80 | CSP | 18 | 54 | Culvert barrel lining |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 17 | 6.31 | CSP/HDPE | 18 | 78 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 18 | 6.31 | CSP | 18 | 78 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 19 | 8.15 | Concrete | 15 | 23 | Joint sealing/repair |
| 20 | 8.15 | Concrete | 18 | 48 | Joint sealing/repair |
| 21 | 11.01 | CSP | 24 | 84 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 22 | 11.01 | CSP | 24 | 94 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 23 | 11.28 | CSP | 24 | 68 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 24 | 11.28 | CSP | 24 | 64 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 25 | 11.56 | CSP | 18 | 47 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 26 | 11.56 | CSP | 18 | 56 | Culvert barrel lining |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 29 | 11.79 | CSP | 18 | 46 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 30 | 11.79 | CSP | 18 | 46 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 31 | 11.81 | CSP | 18 | 62 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 32 | 11.91 | CSP | 18 | 48 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 33 | 11.96 | CSP | 24 | 83 | Culvert barrel lining |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|----------|-----------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 34 | 11.96 | CSP | 24 | 63 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 35 | 12.28 | CSP | 24 | 93 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 36 | 12.47 | CSP | 24 | 96 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 37 | 12.65 | CSP | 24 | 97 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 38 | 12.65 | CSP arch | 24 by 18 | 98 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 39 | 12.84 | CSP | 24 | 96 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 40 | 12.84 | CSP arch | 24 by 18 | 98 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 41 | 12.94 | CSP | 24 | 96 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 42 | 12.94 | CSP | 24 | 94 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 43 | 13.06 | CSP | 24 | 98 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 44 | 13.06 | CSP | 18 | 135 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 45 | 13.31 | CSP | 24 | 98 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 46 | 13.31 | CSP arch | 24 by 18 | 100 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 47 | 13.40 | CSP | 24 | 116 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 48 | 13.40 | CSP | 24 | 107 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 49 | 13.67 | CSP | 18 | 58 | Culvert barrel lining |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 51 | 13.67 | CSP | 18 | 44 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 52 | 13.67 | CSP | 24 | 117 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 53 | 13.67 | CSP | 18 | 46 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 54 | 13.67 | CSP | 18 | 63 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 55 | 13.67 | CSP | 18 | 45 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 56 | 14.09 | CSP | 24 | 96 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 57 | 14.42 | CSP | 24 | 100 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 58 | 14.42 | CSP | 18 | 108 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 62 | 14.72 | CSP | 18 | 63 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method |
| 74 | 17.98 | CSP | 24 | 86 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 75 | 17.98 | CSP | 24 | 87 | Culvert barrel lining |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 76 | 18.14 | CSP | 24 | 66 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 77 | 18.37 | CSP | 24 | 64 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 78 | 19.18 | CSP | 18 | 46 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 79 | 19.30 | CSP | 24 | 60 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 80 | 19.30 | CSP | 24 | 66 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 83 | 19.81 | CSP | 24 | 61 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 84 | 19.81 | CSP | 24 | 63 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 85 | 20.43 | CSP arch | 24 by 12 | 60 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 86 | 22.32 | CSP | 24 | 60 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 87 | 22.86 | CSP | 18 | 63 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 88 | 23.64 | CSP | 24 | 74 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 89 | 23.64 | CSP | 24 | 65 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|----------|-----------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 92 | 24.15 | CSP | 24 | 61 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 93 | 24.40 | CSP | 24 | 69 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 94 | 24.87 | CSP | 24 | 68 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 95 | 24.96 | CSP | 24 | 68 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 96 | 25.24 | CSP | 24 | 73 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 97 | 25.39 | CSP | 24 | 101 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 98 | 25.98 | CSP | 24 | 81 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 99 | 26.11 | CSP | 24 | 63 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 100 | 26.20 | Concrete/CSP | 12/18 | 58 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 101 | 26.49 | CSP | Dual 24 | 89 | Replace one pipe with a 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 102 | 27.29 | CSP | 24 | 98 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 103 | 28.12 | CSP | 24 | 135 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 104 | 28.28 | CSP | 18 | 20 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 105 | 28.28 | CSP | 18 | 74 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 106 | 28.91 | CSP | 36 | 278 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 107 | 30.29 | CSP | 48 | 169 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 108 | 35.86 | CSP | 24 | 64 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 109 | 35.89 | CSP | 18 | 67 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 110 | 35.89 | Concrete | 18 | 45 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 111 | 36.66 | CSP | 18 | 52 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 112 | 36.72 | CSP | 24 | 54 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 113 | 36.84 | CSP | 18 | 57 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 114 | 37.59 | CSP | 24 | 63 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 115 | 37.69 | CSP | 18 | 64 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 116 | 38.27 | CSP | 18 | 67 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 117 | 38.33 | CSP | 18 | 75 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 118 | 38.39 | CSP | 18 | 61 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 119 | 38.50 | CSP | 12 | 37 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 120 | 38.78 | CSP | 18 | 185 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe using the jack and bore method. |
| 121 | 38.82 | CSP | 18 | 42 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 122 | 38.91 | CSP | 24 | 59 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 123 | 38.99 | CSP | 12 | 45 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 124 | 39.20 | CSP | 12 | 40 | Culvert barrel lining |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 126 | 39.63 | CSP | 18 | 44 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 127 | 39.73 | CSP | 18 | 43 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 129 | 39.97 | CSP | 18 | 38 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 130 | 40.09 | CSP | 18 | 39 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 131 | 40.14 | CSP | 24 | 45 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 132 | 40.20 | CSP | 12 | 48 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 133 | 40.41 | CSP | 18 | 41 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 134 | 40.45 | CSP | 18 | 57 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 135 | 40.65 | CSP | 18 | 47 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 136 | 41.12 | CSP | 18 | 74 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 137 | 41.35 | CSP | 12 | 48 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 138 | 41.50 | CSP | 18 | 42 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 139 | 41.62 | CSP | 18 | 60 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 140 | 41.74 | CSP | 24 | 55 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 143 | 41.97 | CSP | 12 | 38 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 144 | 42.38 | CSP | 18 | 106 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |

| Location | Post Mile | Culvert Material | Existing Diameter (Inches) | Existing Length (Feet) | Proposed Improvement |
|----------|-----------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 145 | 42.54 | CSP | 12 | 57 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 146 | 43.11 | CSP | 24 | 46 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 147 | 43.39 | CSP | 18 | 36 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 148 | 43.47 | CSP | 18 | 41 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 149 | 43.59 | CSP | 18 | 40 | Culvert barrel lining |
| 150 | 43.80 | CSP | 12 | 46 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |
| 151 | 43.88 | CSP | 18 | 38 | Replace with 24-inch-diameter alternative pipe culvert |

[The following text has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated.] A total of 29 locations were eliminated from the scope of work because they were in good shape based on a field inspection or they had been replaced during a prior construction project.

[The following sentence has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] Temporary construction easements will be needed from approximately 36 parcels because Caltrans' right-of-way is very narrow along some parts of the rural highway near Lemon Cove and in the vicinity of Three Rivers. Table 1.2 shows the location and post mile, Assessor's Parcel Number, and area of temporary construction easements in fractions of an acre.

No right-of-way acquisition will be needed. [The following sentence has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] However, approximately 16 permanent drainage easements will need to be acquired from adjoining landowners where existing culverts extend beyond Caltrans' narrow right-of-way. Table 1.3 shows the location, Assessor's Parcel Number, and the area of permanent drainage easements in fractions of an acre.

Because construction work will take place in these permanent easements, the locations are also listed in Table 1.2 as requiring temporary construction easements.

[Table 1.2 and Table 1.3 have been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.]

Table 1.2 Temporary Construction Easements Needed

| Location | Post Mile | Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) | Temporary Construction Easement Area (Acre) |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 44 | 13.06 | (APN) 103-510-006 | 0.022 |
| 93 | 24.40 | (APN) 115-050-070 | 0.005 |
| 94 | 24.87 | (APN) 113-370-026 | 0.005 |
| 95 | 24.96 | (APN) 113-370-025 | 0.005 |
| 96 | 25.24 | (APN) 113-370-020 | 0.005 |
| 96 | 25.24 | (APN) 113-370-010 | 0.005 |
| 97 | 25.39 | (APN) 113-360-001 | 0.005 |
| 97 | 25.39 | (APN) 113-360-007 | 0.005 |
| 98 | 25.98 | (APN) 113-250-076 | 0.005 |
| 102 | 27.29 | (APN) 113-130-001 | 0.007 |
| Not Available | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 103 | 28.12 | (APN) 113-160-012 | 0.035 |
| 111 | 36.66 | (APN) 066-100-010 | 0.002 |
| 112 | 36.72 | (APN) 068-130-041 | 0.002 |
| 118 | 38.39 | (APN) 068-030-011 | 0.007 |
| 120 | 38.78 | (APN) 068-320-043 | 0.070 |
| 120 | 38.78 | (APN) 068-320-044 | 0.090 |
| 122 | 38.91 | (APN) 068-320-018 | 0.005 |
| 122 | 38.91 | (APN) 067-190-008 | 0.005 |
| 123 | 38.99 | (APN) 067-190-008 | 0.007 |
| 126 | 39.63 | (APN) 067-140-011 | 0.005 |
| 130 | 40.09 | (APN) 069-160-001 | 0.005 |
| 131 | 40.14 | (APN) 069-160-001 | 0.005 |
| 134 | 40.45 | (APN) 069-200-046 | 0.007 |
| 136 | 41.12 | (APN) 069-190-035 | 0.014 |
| 136 | 41.12 | (APN) 069-190-033 | 0.005 |
| 137 | 41.35 | (APN) 069-450-011 | 0.007 |
| 139 | 41.62 | (APN) 069-450-011 | 0.009 |
| 140 | 41.74 | (APN) 069-350-025 | 0.011 |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 142 | 41.89 | (APN) 069-420-003 | 0.005 |
| 144 | 42.38 | (APN) 069-040-03 | 0.035 |
| 144 | 42.38 | (APN) 069-040-012 | 0.005 |
| 145 | 42.54 | (APN) 069-050-038 | 0.002 |
| 145 | 42.54 | (APN) 069-050-039 | 0.002 |
| 146 | 43.11 | (APN) 069-300-014 | 0.007 |
| 148 | 43.47 | (APN) 069-300-020 | 0.006 |
| 149 | 43.59 | (APN) 069-060-040 | 0.004 |

Table 1.3 Permanent Drainage Easements Needed

| Location | Post Mile | Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) | Permanent Drainage Easement Area (Acre) |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 103 | 28.12 | (APN) 113-160-007 | 0.035 |
| 118 | 38.39 | (APN) 068-030-011 | 0.007 |
| 120 | 38.78 | (APN) 068-320-043 | 0.070 |
| 120 | 38.78 | (APN) 068-320-044 | 0.090 |
| 122 | 38.91 | (APN) 068-320-018 | 0.005 |
| 123 | 38.99 | (APN) 067-190-008 | 0.007 |
| 126 | 39.63 | (APN) 067-140-011 | 0.005 |
| 134 | 40.45 | (APN) 069-200-046 | 0.007 |
| 136 | 41.12 | (APN) 069-190-035 | 0.014 |
| 137 | 41.35 | (APN) 069-450-011 | 0.007 |
| 139 | 41.62 | (APN) 069-450-011 | 0.009 |
| 140 | 41.74 | (APN) 069-350-025 | 0.011 |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| 142 | 41.89 | (APN) 069-420-003 | 0.005 |
| 144 | 42.38 | (APN) 069-040-034 | 0.035 |
| 145 | 42.54 | (APN) 069-050-038 | 0.002 |
| 145 | 42.54 | (APN) 069-050-039 | 0.002 |

During construction along the two-lane conventional highway segment of State Route 198, one-way traffic control will be implemented during working hours. Within the freeway and expressway segments, shoulder closures are anticipated next to the construction areas.

The preliminary estimated construction cost of the project is \$11,087,000. The project will be funded from the 2020 State Highway Operation and Protection Program's Drainage System Restoration Program in the 2022/2023 fiscal year.

This project contains a number of standardized project measures that are used on most, if not all, Caltrans projects and were not developed in response to any specific environmental impact resulting from the proposed project. These measures are listed later in this chapter under "Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in all Build Alternatives."

1.4.2 No-Build (No-Action) Alternative

The No-Build Alternative will mean that the culverts identified for repair or replacement by this project will continue to deteriorate, causing potential flood damage and pavement failure. The No-Build Alternative will not meet the purpose and need of the project.

1.5 Identification of a Preferred Alternative

The Build Alternative was selected as the preferred alternative because it will preserve the operational integrity of the highway system. Repairing and replacing the culverts is necessary to maintain the highway in good operating condition. The Build Alternative is the only alternative that meets the purpose and need of the project.

1.6 Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in all Build Alternatives

The project may include, but will not be limited to, the following Standard Special Provisions:

- 7-1.02K(6)(j)(iii) Earth Material Containing Lead
- 13-2 Water Pollution Control Program
- 13-4 Job Site Management
- 14-1.02 Environmentally Sensitive Area: Pertains to environmentally sensitive areas marked on the ground. Do not enter an environmentally sensitive area unless authorized. If breached, notify the resident engineer.
- 14-6.03 Species Protection: Pertains to protecting regulated species and their habitat that occur within or near the job site. Upon discovery of a regulated species, notify the resident engineer.
- 14-6.03B Bird Protection: Pertains to protecting migratory and nongame birds, their occupied nests, and their eggs. Upon discovery of an injured or dead bird or migratory or nongame bird nests that may be adversely affected by construction activities, immediately stop all work and notify the resident engineer. Exclusion devices, nesting-prevention measures, and removing constructed and unoccupied nests may be used.
- 14-7.03 Discovery of Unanticipated Paleontological Resources: If paleontological resources are discovered at the job site, do not disturb the resources and immediately stop all work within a 60-foot radius of the discovery, secure the area, and notify the resident engineer. Do not move paleontological resources or take them from the job site.
- 14-9.02 Air Pollution Control: Comply with air pollution control rules, regulations, ordinances, and statutes that apply to work performed under the construction contract.
- 14-11 Hazardous Waste and Contamination: Includes specifications relating to hazardous waste and contamination.
- 14-11.04 Dust Control: Excavation, transportation, and handling of material containing hazardous waste or contamination must result in no visible dust migration. When clearing, grubbing, and performing earthwork

operations in areas containing hazardous waste or contamination, provide a water truck or tank on the job site.

- 14-11.12 (also 36-4 and/or 84-9.03B) Removal of Yellow Traffic Stripe and Pavement Marking with Hazardous Waste Residue: Includes specifications for removing, handling, and disposing of yellow thermoplastic and yellow-painted traffic stripe and pavement marking. The residue from the removal of this material is a generated hazardous waste (lead chromate). Removal of existing yellow thermoplastic and yellow-painted traffic stripe and pavement marking exposes workers to health hazards that must be addressed in a Lead Compliance Plan.
- 14-11.13C Safety and Health Protection Measures: Applies to worker protective measures for potential lead exposure.

1.7 Discussion of the NEPA Categorical Exclusion

This document contains information regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other state laws and regulations. Separate environmental documentation, supporting a Categorical Exclusion determination, has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. When needed for clarity, or as required by CEQA, this document may contain references to federal laws and/or regulations (CEQA, for example, requires consideration of adverse effects on species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—that is, species protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act).

1.8 Permits and Approvals Needed

The following permits, licenses, agreements, and certifications are required for project construction:

| Agency | Permit/Approval | Status |
|---|--|---|
| California Department of Fish and Wildlife | 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement | Will be applied for during the design phase of the project. |
| U.S. Army Corps of Engineers | Section 404 Nationwide Permit | Will be applied for during the design phase of the project. |
| Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board | Section 401 Water Quality Certification | Will be applied for during the design phase of the project. |

Chapter 2 CEQA Evaluation

2.1 CEQA Environmental Checklist

This checklist identifies physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. Potential impact determinations include Significant and Unavoidable Impact, Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated, Less Than Significant Impact, and No Impact. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with a project will indicate that there are no impacts to a particular resource. A “No Impact” answer reflects this determination. The questions in this checklist are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

Project features, which can include both design elements of the project and standardized measures that are applied to all or most Caltrans projects, such as Best Management Practices and measures included in the Standard Plans and Specifications or as Standard Special Provisions, are considered to be an integral part of the project and have been considered prior to any significance determinations documented below.

“No Impact” determinations in each section are based on the scope, description, and location of the proposed project as well as the appropriate technical report (bound separately in Volume 2), and no further discussion is included in this document.

2.1.1 Aesthetics

During the scoping phase of the project, it was determined, based on the type of project, that a Scenic Resources Evaluation did not need to be prepared; therefore, the following determinations have been made:

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics |
|--|---|
| a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista? | No Impact |
| b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway? | No Impact |

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics |
|---|--|
| c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality? | No Impact |
| d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area? | No Impact |

2.1.2 Agriculture and Forest Resources

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Considering that this project will not acquire any new right-of-way, the following determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forest Resources |
|--|--|
| a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use? | No Impact |
| b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract? | No Impact |

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forest Resources |
|--|--|
| c) Conflict with existing zoning, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))? | No Impact |
| d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use? | No Impact |
| e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use? | No Impact |

2.1.3 Air Quality

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Considering the information in the Air Quality Memorandum dated September 27, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality |
|---|---|
| a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan? | No Impact |
| b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard? | No Impact |
| c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations? | No Impact |
| d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people? | No Impact |

2.1.4 Biological Resources

Considering the information in the Natural Environment Study dated September 29, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources |
|--|---|
| a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries? | Less Than Significant Impact |
| b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service? | No Impact |
| c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means? | Less Than Significant Impact |
| d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites? | No Impact |
| e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance? | No Impact |
| f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan? | No Impact |

Affected Environment

a) For details of biological studies, please refer to the Natural Environment Study in Volume 2 (also available upon request—see the last page of this document).

For a list of Federal Endangered Species Act determinations for the project, see Appendix B.

Special-Status Plant Species

The following special-status plant species were not observed within the action area (the area that will be directly affected by the project, plus adjacent areas that may be indirectly affected) and are not expected to be present: San Joaquin adobe sunburst (*Pseudobahia peirsonii*) (Federally Threatened, State Endangered, and California Native Plant Society List 1B.1) and striped adobe lily (*Fritillaria striata*) (State Threatened, California Native Plant Society List 1B.1), and these California Native Plant Society-listed species: brittlescale (*Atriplex depressa*), calico monkeyflower (*Diplacus pictus*), and heartscale (*Atriplex cordulata* var. *cordulata*).

None of the following species were observed during the several botanical surveys conducted throughout the growing season. However, these species could potentially be present within the action area.

Four California Native Plant Society List 1B.2 plant species—Madera leptosiphon (*Leptosiphon serrulatus*), mouse buckwheat (*Eriogonum nudum* var. *murinum*), recurved larkspur (*Delphinium recurvatum*), and winter's sunflower (*Helianthus winteri*)—were not observed during botanical surveys; there is a very low potential that they are present in the action area. In addition, Springville clarkia (*Clarkia springvillensis*), another California Native Plant Society List 1B.2 plant species, which is also a California Endangered species, was not seen; there is a very low potential for this species to occur in the action area.

There is a low potential for these species listed on the California Native Plant Society rare and endangered plant inventory to be present within the action area: Kaweah monkeyflower (*Erythranthe norrisii*), Sierra Nevada monkeyflower (*Erythranthe sierrae*), lesser saltscale (*Atriplex minuscula*), Munz's iris (*Iris munzii*), and spiny-sealed button celery (*Eryngium spinosepalum*).

Although the following three species were not observed during botanical surveys, there is a moderate potential for these plants to grow in the project footprint.

Kaweah brodiaea (Brodiaea insignis)

The Kaweah brodiaea is a State of California Endangered species. The California Native Plant Society's rare and endangered plant inventory ranks this species as a List 1B.2 plant.

This species grows only in the southern Sierra Nevada foothills, especially around the Kaweah and Tule River drainages.

Kings River monkeyflower (*Erythranthe acutidens*)

The California Native Plant Society's rare and endangered plant inventory ranks the Kings River monkeyflower as a List 3 plant.

This monkeyflower species grows only in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Due to the ephemeral nature of water at most culvert locations, conditions within the action area generally remain drier than the moist sites preferred by this species.

Streambank spring beauty (*Claytonia parviflora* subsp. *grandiflora*)

The California Native Plant Society's rare and endangered plant inventory ranks the streambank spring beauty as a List 4.2 plant.

The streambank spring beauty is distributed throughout California's Sierra Nevada foothills.

While foothill woodland and seasonal ephemeral wet drainages and disturbed areas are present throughout the action area, this species was not seen during botanical surveys.

Special-Status Animal Species

The following special-status animal species were not observed within the action area (the area that will be directly affected by the project, plus adjacent areas that may be indirectly affected) and are not expected to be present or to nest within the action area.

Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)—(California fully protected species and Forest Service Sensitive Species, also federally protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Lacey Act).

California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*)—(federally and state listed as endangered and California fully protected species).

San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*)—(federally endangered and state threatened species).

Crotch's bumblebee (*Bombus crotchii*)—(California state candidate for endangered species).

The American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), Northern California legless lizard (*Anniella pulchra*), western spadefoot toad (*Spea hammondi*), and the tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) are California Species of Special Concern. The tricolored blackbird is also listed as threatened by the State of California.

Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

Swainson's hawk is listed as threatened by the State of California.

Most of the California population of Swainson's hawk is found in the Great Valley. During the summer months, this species eats mostly insects, smaller birds, and small mammals while occasionally taking reptiles, amphibians, and other invertebrates.

Swainson's hawks prefer open habitats for foraging, such as fallow or alfalfa fields and rangeland habitats. Although much of their native grassland habitat has been converted to agricultural land, this species has adapted to the changing environment. These hawks roost in scattered tree stands near suitable foraging areas and are often seen following field tractors that stir up small mammals in the field. Due to habitat conversion and the introduction of non-native grasses, perennial grasslands were replaced with annual grasslands (with low prey populations), as well as with agricultural crops.

Breeding habitat for this species is commonly associated with riparian areas in California, probably because some trees still remain there. Nesting usually begins in late March, and the young usually leave the nest by July. Nests are typically made out of sticks, bark, and fresh leaves and are usually placed near the top of a tree, which may be solitary or in a small grove along a stream. If a preferred nesting site is not available, Swainson's hawks occasionally nest on power poles or transmission towers or even in orchard trees. Nesting Swainson's hawks are somewhat tolerant of human activity. Nest sites are often near roads and houses and frequently near the edge of cultivated fields.

Several recent Swainson's hawk observations were recorded within 1 mile of the action area. Several nests were reported along State Route 198 between the Kings/Tulare county line and the City of Visalia, recorded between 1999 and 2016. Potential nesting trees are present within the Caltrans right-of-way throughout the project limits.

No nesting Swainson's hawks were seen during biological surveys conducted for the project. Protocol-level surveys for this species were not conducted.

It is anticipated that Swainson's hawks are likely to be present and nesting in suitable trees within or next to the action area during the breeding season.

c) Waters and Wetlands

The action area falls within the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Kaweah River/Tule River Watershed Service Area. Also, the project is within the Upper Kaweah sub-watershed (Hydrologic Unit Code 8 – 18030007) and the Upper Tule sub-watershed (Hydrologic Unit Code 8 – 18030006).

The project study area includes 28 potentially jurisdictional drainages. Of these jurisdictional channels, 26 are ephemeral in nature, containing water only immediately following a rain event and draining runoff from the adjacent hills. Two drainages (Locations 128 and 138) contain intermittent flows from human-made upstream retention ponds fed by several small ephemeral drainages.

Environmental Consequences

a) Special-Status Plant Species

No direct or indirect impacts to special-status plant species are anticipated from this project. Work will be confined mostly to the paved road surface, compacted shoulder areas, and very small areas around the inlets and outlets of existing culverts. No special-status species are known to be currently occupying areas within or right next to proposed worksites. Preconstruction species surveys, environmentally sensitive area fencing, and biological monitoring, if necessary, will enable the project to avoid and minimize impacts to special-status species.

Special-Status Animal Species

No impacts are expected to these species, their habitats, or nests: bald eagles, California condors, Crotch's bumblebees, American badgers, Northern California legless lizards, western spadefoot toads, pallid bats, western mastiff bats, San Joaquin kit foxes, and tricolored blackbirds.

No direct impacts to special-status animal species are anticipated from this project. Work will be confined mostly to the paved road surface, compacted shoulder areas, and very small areas around the inlets and outlets of existing culverts. No special-status species are known to be currently occupying areas within or right next to proposed worksites. The most likely impacts will be from construction-related disturbances resulting from noise, vibration, vehicle activity, and the presence of work crews, which could cause animals to be displaced from the work area. Preconstruction species surveys, nest-protection buffers, environmentally sensitive area fencing, and biological monitoring, if necessary, will enable the project to avoid and minimize impacts to special-status species.

Before construction begins, a qualified biologist will conduct a Worker Environmental Awareness Training for all work personnel to inform them of the special-status species potentially within the work area, protective measures, reporting procedures, and consequences of violating environmental laws and permit requirements.

Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

No impacts to the quality or quantity of available foraging habitat are anticipated to be caused by the project. Given the relatively low intensity of the proposed work, the short duration of work at each culvert site, and the

high baseline level of disturbance, no effects to Swainson's hawks are anticipated with the implementation of avoidance and minimization measures.

c) Waters and Wetlands

No wetlands are present within the project footprint.

While several blue-line drainages are present within the overall vicinity of the project, no impacts to these waterways are proposed or anticipated.

Of the 28 potentially jurisdictional drainages, 16 drainages are proposed for culvert replacement, with the remaining 12 proposed for relining. Work at drainages will be performed during no-flow conditions when possible. Culvert relining and minor repair work will have very minor, temporary impacts to waterways that will not involve fill or result in alterations to flow or carrying capacity. Culvert replacement work will result in impacts to waterways due to soil disturbance and the excavation of the culvert trench. No proposed actions will result in diminished streamflow or altered flow patterns. Streamflow capacity will be increased where culverts are being enlarged from a diameter of 18 inches to 24 inches.

Some locations proposed for work under this project are expected to fall under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board as ephemeral to intermittent natural drainages as Waters of the U.S.

A total of 0.13 acre of temporary impacts to ephemeral drainages is currently estimated.

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 Nationwide permit will be obtained for the project.

The project will also obtain a 401 Water Quality Certification from the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The project will obtain a 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement because this permit is required for impacts to natural channels, including ephemeral drainages. However, mitigation under a 1602 permit is typically required only for permanent impacts to jurisdictional channels, and no permanent impacts are anticipated at this time.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed for plant species:

- Focused botanical preconstruction surveys will be performed the flowering season before work at all worksites where ground disturbance is anticipated and suitable habitat for listed species exists.

- If populations of special-status plants are discovered in proximity to worksites, populations will be delineated and protected by an environmentally sensitive area buffer, clearly designated by high visibility fencing or flagging.
- For any flowering populations discovered within a worksite, immediately before any soil disturbance, the location of each population will be noted on a worksite plan. The plants will then be excavated along with sufficient blocks of the surrounding soil to retain the root structure. The plants and soil will be placed in a safe location near the worksite and kept moist. Upon completion of the work, the plants will be carefully placed within or as close to their original location as possible.
- For worksites where construction begins after the flowering period, if special-status plant populations are discovered in the worksite, the topsoil will be removed and stored safely near the work area and replaced after construction is finished to maintain the existing seed bank and ensure the continued growth of that population.

The following avoidance and minimization measure is proposed for animal species:

- Worker Environmental Awareness Training will be performed by a qualified biologist for all work personnel to inform them of the special-status species potentially within the work area, protective measures, reporting procedures, and consequences of violating environmental laws and permit requirements.

The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed for Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

- Protocol-level nesting surveys in accordance with the Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson's hawk Nesting Surveys in California's Central Valley will be completed the season before construction to determine if any Swainson's hawks are nesting in the project area.
- If nesting pairs are identified within 500 feet of the project footprint, additional avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented to avoid direct impacts. These measures will include, but will not be limited to, Environmentally Sensitive Area fencing enclosing the nest tree, a 500-foot buffer surrounding the nest, and a biological monitor will be present during construction activities that occur within this buffer.

Waters

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 Nationwide permit will be obtained due to an estimated total of 0.13 acre of temporary impacts to ephemeral drainages.

The project will obtain a 401 Water Quality Certification from the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The project will also obtain a 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement because this permit is required for impacts to natural channels, including ephemeral drainages. However, because no permanent impacts to 1602 jurisdictional channels are anticipated, no compensatory mitigation is proposed.

2.1.5 Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Historic Property Survey Report dated September 9, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources |
|--|---|
| a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5? | No Impact |
| b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5? | No Impact |
| c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries? | No Impact |

No cultural resources were identified within the Area of Potential Effects defined for the culvert locations work. Therefore, the Caltrans finding is No Historic Properties Affected.

On December 1, 2020, consultation with tribes was initiated by Caltrans to complete Section 106 and CEQA cultural studies compliance. Ten tribal representatives were contacted; additional information was mailed out on May 25, 2021, and August 30, 2021. Consultation is ongoing to date.

No specific tribal resources have been identified within the Area of Potential Effects for the project.

New archaeological surveys will be required if project plans are changed to include areas that have not been previously surveyed. Expanding the Area of Potential Effects for temporary construction and drainage easements will trigger the requirement for supplemental cultural resources studies if the easements are enlarged in the future.

If cultural materials or remains are encountered during construction, it is Caltrans' policy that work must stop in that area until a qualified archaeologist

can evaluate the nature and significance of the discovery. In addition, Caltrans will contact consulting parties.

2.1.6 Energy

Considering that the project will simply repair or replace existing culverts that are failing, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy |
|--|---|
| a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during project construction or operation? | No Impact |
| b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency? | No Impact |

2.1.7 Geology and Soils

Considering the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zones Map viewed at <https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/eqzapp/> and <https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/informationwarehouse/index.html?map=landslides> on June 18, 2021, the information included in the Water Quality Memorandum dated September 16, 2021, and the Paleontological Identification Report dated September 29, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils |
|--|--|
| a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42. | No Impact |
| a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: ii) Strong seismic ground shaking? | No Impact |

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils |
|--|--|
| a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction? | No Impact |
| a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: iv) Landslides? | No Impact |
| b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil? | No Impact |
| c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in onsite or offsite landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse? | No Impact |
| d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property? | No Impact |
| e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater? | No Impact |
| f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature? | Less Than Significant Impact |

Affected Environment

f) Paleontological Resources

From west to east within the Great Valley geomorphic province of the San Joaquin Valley, the geology underlying the project area consists of Holocene fan deposits, Pleistocene nonmarine sediments, and Holocene alluvium. The fan deposits include the Modesto Formation, and the Riverbank Formation is part of the Pleistocene nonmarine sediments.

Within the Sierra Nevada geomorphic province, the geologic materials consist of Mesozoic granitic rocks and Pre-Cretaceous metamorphic rock.

Due to recent discoveries, including at the State Route 99 Plainsburg Road/Arboleda Drive freeway project in Merced County, the paleontological sensitivity of the Modesto Formation and the Riverbank Formation is categorized as high. The high sensitivity of the Modesto Formation and the Riverbank Formation is equivalent to the high potential definition in the tripartite classification scale that Caltrans uses.

High potential includes rock units, which, based on previous studies, contain or are likely to contain scientifically significant vertebrates, invertebrates, or plant fossils.

Environmental Consequences

f) Paleontological Resources

High potential paleontological resources of the Modesto Formation and the Riverbank Formation underlie the project area. Based on the ground disturbance activities associated with the project, the resources will be impacted; however, the extent and intensity of the proposed ground disturbance activities are expected to be localized and limited to shallow soils that were previously disturbed when the original culverts were constructed. Because the soil has already been disturbed, it is now classified as fill. As a result, scientifically significant fossils are unlikely to be encountered. Paleontological mitigation is not recommended at this time.

If an unanticipated fossil discovery were to occur during construction, Specification Section 14-7.03 of the Caltrans 2018 Standard Specifications identifies the procedures required to protect the paleontological resource.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required.

2.1.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Considering the information in the Climate Change technical report dated September 15, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions |
|--|--|
| a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment? | Less Than Significant Impact |
| b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases? | Less Than Significant Impact |

Affected Environment

a, b) This project will repair or replace 140 culverts at spot locations along the 44-mile length of State Route 198 in Tulare County. The route goes through mostly flat agricultural, grazing, and urban land uses west of Lake Kaweah, then climbs past Terminus Dam to Lake Kaweah and follows the Kaweah River through the rural community of Three Rivers in mountainous terrain, ending just short of Pumpkin Hollow Bridge near the boundary of Sequoia National Park. Within the project limits, the route includes segments of a four-lane expressway, four-lane freeway, and rural conventional two-lane highway.

Environmental Consequences

a, b) This project will not add capacity to the highway. There will be no increase in operational emissions because the project will repair or replace existing culverts. With the implementation of construction greenhouse gas reduction measures, impacts will be less than significant.

Construction greenhouse gas emissions for the project were calculated using Caltrans' Construction Emissions Tool (CAL-CET) v1.1. Project construction is expected to generate approximately 688 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) during 300 working days.

While some construction greenhouse gas emissions will be unavoidable, implementing standard conditions or Best Management Practices designed to reduce or eliminate emissions as part of the project will reduce impacts to less than significant.

Measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions include:

- Alternative fuels such as renewable diesel to be used for construction equipment.
- Idling will be limited to 5 minutes for delivery and dump trucks and other diesel-powered equipment.
- Recycled water is to be used where possible to reduce the amount of potable water used by construction activities.
- Improved fuel efficiency by construction equipment will be obtained by maintaining equipment in proper working condition, using the right-sized equipment for the job, and using equipment with new technologies when possible.
- During preconstruction training for contractor workers, the Caltrans Environmental Construction Liaison must include information regarding methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to construction.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is needed.

2.1.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Considering the information in the Initial Site Assessment dated September 27, 2021, the Noise Compliance Memorandum dated September 21, 2021, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials |
|---|--|
| a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials? | No Impact |
| b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment? | No Impact |
| c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within 0.25 mile of an existing or proposed school? | No Impact |
| d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment? | No Impact |
| e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area? | No Impact |
| f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan? | No Impact |
| g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires? | No Impact |

2.1.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

Considering the information in the Water Quality Memorandum dated September 16, 2021, and the Location Hydraulic Study signed August 4, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality |
|---|---|
| a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface water or groundwater quality? | No Impact |
| b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin? | No Impact |
| c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would: (i) result in substantial erosion or siltation onsite or offsite; | No Impact |
| (ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding onsite or offsite; | No Impact |
| (iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or | No Impact |
| (iv) impede or redirect flood flows? | No Impact |
| d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation? | No Impact |
| e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan? | No Impact |

2.1.11 Land Use and Planning

Considering that the project will only involve the repair or replacement of existing culverts and that the project improvements will not affect the land use

of properties next to the highway, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning |
|--|---|
| a) Physically divide an established community? | No Impact |
| b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect? | No Impact |

2.1.12 Mineral Resources

Considering that the project will not acquire any new right-of-way, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources |
|---|---|
| a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state? | No Impact |
| b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan? | No Impact |

2.1.13 Noise

Considering the information in the Noise Memorandum dated September 21, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project result in: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise |
|---|---|
| a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies? | No Impact |
| b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels? | No Impact |

| Question—Would the project result in: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise |
|---|--|
| c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels? | No Impact |

2.1.14 Population and Housing

Considering that the project will not add capacity to the highway or acquire any new right-of-way, the following determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing |
|---|---|
| a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)? | No Impact |
| b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere? | No Impact |

2.1.15 Public Services

Considering that the project will not affect any government facilities or trigger the need for new facilities or government services, the following determinations have been made:

| Question: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services |
|---|---|
| a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services: Fire protection? | No Impact |
| Police protection? | No Impact |
| Schools? | No Impact |
| Parks? | No Impact |
| Other public facilities? | No Impact |

2.1.16 Recreation

Considering that the project will not affect parks or recreational facilities or trigger the need for more recreational facilities to be constructed, the following determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation |
|--|--|
| a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated? | No Impact |
| b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment? | No Impact |

2.1.17 Transportation

Considering that this maintenance project will not add capacity to the highway or reconfigure the roadway, the following determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation |
|--|--|
| a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities? | No Impact |
| b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, subdivision (b)? | No Impact |
| c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)? | No Impact |
| d) Result in inadequate emergency access? | No Impact |

2.1.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Historic Property Survey Report dated September 9, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

Will the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code Section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

| Question: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources |
|--|---|
| a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code Section 5020.1(k), or | No Impact |
| b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe. | No Impact |

2.1.19 Utilities and Service Systems

Considering that the proposed project is a highway maintenance project and will not trigger the need for utilities and service systems, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems |
|---|---|
| a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or stormwater drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects? | No Impact |
| b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years? | No Impact |
| c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments? | No Impact |
| d) Generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals? | No Impact |
| e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste? | No Impact |

2.1.20 Wildfire

Considering the information in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps and information in the Climate Change technical report dated September 15, 2021, the following significance determinations have been made:

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire |
|--|--|
| a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan? | No Impact |

| Question—Would the project: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire |
|--|--|
| b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire? | No Impact |
| c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment? | No Impact |
| d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes? | No Impact |

2.1.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance

| Question: | CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance |
|--|--|
| a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory? | No Impact |
| b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)? | No Impact |
| c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly? | No Impact |

Appendix A Title VI Policy Statement

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

Govin Newsom, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
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Making Conservation
a California Way of Life.

September 2021

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT

The California Department of Transportation, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ensures *"No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."*

Caltrans will make every effort to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its services, programs and activities, whether they are federally funded or not, and that services and benefits are fairly distributed to all people, regardless of race, color, or national origin. In addition, Caltrans will facilitate meaningful participation in the transportation planning process in a nondiscriminatory manner.

Related federal statutes, remedies, and state law further those protections to include sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and age.

For information or guidance on how to file a complaint, or obtain more information regarding Title VI, please contact the Title VI Branch Manager at (916) 324-8379 or visit the following web page:
<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/title-vi>.

To obtain this information in an alternate format such as Braille or in a language other than English, please contact the California Department of Transportation, Office of Civil Rights, at 1823 14th Street, MS-79, Sacramento, CA 95811; PO Box 942874, MS-79, Sacramento, CA 94274-0001; (916) 324-8379 (TTY 711); or at Title.VI@dot.ca.gov.

A blue ink signature of Toks Omishakin, consisting of a stylized 'T' followed by a series of loops and a final flourish.

Toks Omishakin
Director

"Provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment."

Appendix B Federal Endangered Species Act Determinations

| Species | Scientific Name | Status | Federal Endangered Species Act Determination |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| Fisher | <i>Pekania pennanti</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| Fresno kangaroo rat | <i>Dipodomys nitratoide exilis</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| San Joaquin kit fox | <i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| Tipton kangaroo rat | <i>Dipodomys nitratoide nitratoide</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| California condor | <i>Gymnogyps californianus</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| Blunt-nosed leopard lizard | <i>Gambelia sila</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| Giant garter snake | <i>Thamnophis gigas</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| California red-legged frog | <i>Rana draytonii</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| California tiger salamander | <i>Ambystoma californiense</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| Delta smelt | <i>Hypomesus transpacificus</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| Conservancy fairy shrimp | <i>Branchinecta conservatio</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| Vernal pool fairy shrimp | <i>Branchinecta lynchi</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| Vernal pool tadpole shrimp | <i>Lepidurus packardii</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| Greene's tuctoria | <i>Tuctoria greenei</i> | Federally Endangered | No effect |
| San Joaquin adobe sunburst | <i>Pseudobahia peirsonii</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| San Joaquin Valley Orcutt grass | <i>Orcuttia inaequalis</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| Springville clarkia | <i>Clarkia springvillensis</i> | Federally Threatened | No effect |
| California condor critical habitat | Not Applicable | Critical Habitat | No effect |

Appendix C Comment Letters and Responses

This appendix has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated.

This appendix contains the comments received during the public circulation and comment period from December 21, 2021, to January 21, 2022, retyped for readability. The comment letters are stated verbatim as submitted, with acronyms, abbreviations, and any original grammatical or typographical errors included. A Caltrans response follows each comment presented. Copies of the original comment letters and documents can be found in Volume 2 of this document.

A public notice in English and Spanish was posted in the Visalia Times-Delta on December 21, 2021. It stated the public review and comment period for the draft environmental document would run from December 21, 2021, to January 21, 2022, and offered the public an opportunity to request a virtual public hearing. There were no requests for a virtual public hearing during the public circulation.

Two comments were received during the circulation period—one from the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit and another from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Each comment is presented below, followed by a Caltrans response.

Comment from the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit

Comment 1:

The State Clearinghouse (SCH) would like to inform you that our office will transition from providing close of review period acknowledgement on your CEQA environmental document, at this time. During the phase of not receiving notice on the close of review period, comments submitted by State Agencies at the close of review period (and after) are available on CEQAnet. Please visit: <https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/Search/Advanced>

Filter for the SCH# of your project OR your “Lead Agency”

If filtering by “Lead Agency”

Select the correct project

Only State Agency comments will be available in the “attachments” section: bold and highlighted

Thank you for using CEQA Submit.

Mikayla Vaba

Office of Planning and Research (OPR)

State Clearing House

Response to comment 1: Thank you for circulating the Initial Study with Proposed Negative Declaration for the Tulare 198 Culverts Repair and Replacement Project and acknowledging Caltrans’ compliance with California Environmental Quality Act requirements pursuant to State Clearinghouse guidelines. Caltrans has recorded the corresponding State Clearinghouse number for this project.

Comment from Julie A. Vance, Regional Manager, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Comment 1:

January 20, 2022

Juergen Vespermann

California Department of Transportation, District 6

2015 East Shields Avenue, Suite 100

Fresno, California 93721

Subject: State Route 198 Culvert Repair/Replacement Project (Project)

Initial Study with proposed Negative Declaration

State Clearinghouse No. 2021120503

Dear Mr. Vespermann:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a proposed Negative Declaration (ND) and its supporting Initial Study (IS) prepared by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for the above-referenced Project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.¹ The IS was reportedly supported by a Natural Environment Study which was cited in the IS, but not provided or made available for review.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under Fish and Game Code.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State (Fish and G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Id., § 1802). Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency

environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a Responsible Agency under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, the Project may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.). Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code will be required.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: Caltrans

Objective: Caltrans proposes to repair or replace as many as 140 culverts which occur beneath the State Route 198 roadway between post mile 1 (near the Tulare/Kings county line) and post mile 44 (east of Lake Kaweah) in Tulare County (Project). All Project-related activities will occur within the existing right-of-way either within the paved travel lanes, paved shoulders adjoining the travel lanes, unpaved but compacted and engineered shoulder backing, or within the ruderal habitat areas beyond the travel lanes and shoulder backing. The Project will involve vegetation removal, temporary construction easements, and permanent drainage easements, but will be accomplished while the streams are naturally dry so water diversions will not be needed. Additionally, no nightwork is anticipated. Caltrans indicates that CDFW will be notified for those Project activities which will occur within streams.

Location: The 43-mile segment of State Route 198 (SR 198) where the subject culverts exist is entirely located within Tulare County, and is bound by urban, rural, and agricultural development, and natural lands along its length.

Timeframe: Unspecified.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During botanical and wildlife surveys conducted during preparation of the IS, Caltrans did not observe any special-status plants or animals. Caltrans plans to conduct additional botanical surveys in advance of commencing Project activities, as well as protocol-level surveys for the State threatened Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) (SWHA). However, Caltrans does not propose additional surveys for the State fully protected golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the State endangered and State fully protected bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), the State and federally endangered and State

fully protected California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*), the rare and endemic Crotch bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*) which is a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in California (CDFW 2015), or nesting birds in general in advance of commencing Project Activities. Caltrans indicates in the IS that if special status plant populations are detected during the pre-activity surveys, they will be avoided. Further, Caltrans indicates that if work is conducted during the SWHA nesting season, active nests will be avoided observing a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer. However, CDFW does not agree that these avoidance and minimization measures sufficiently reduce to less-than-significant the potential Project-related impacts to biological resources at and near the Project area.

CDFW offers the following comments to assist Caltrans in adequately identifying and sufficiently reducing to less-than-significant the potentially significant, direct and indirect Project-related impacts to fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the document.

I. Environmental Setting and Related Impact

Would the Project have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by CDFW or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)?

COMMENT 1: Migratory Birds including Swainson's Hawk (SWHA) and California Condor, golden eagle, and Bald Eagle

Issue: Migratory birds are known to nest in trees and shrubs along the entire 43-mile Project area. Additionally, SWHA are known to nest in trees along the western portion of the Project area, and bald eagle and California condor are known to occur in areas adjoining the eastern portion of the Project area. The Project activities will involve varying degrees of ground disturbance within the right-of-way and CDFW considers it possible that the Project-related activities would represent a novel stimulus which could result in nest abandonment if they occur in proximity to nesting birds. This nest abandonment would represent a significant impact to nesting birds, including SWHA, bald eagle, and California condor, and could result in take as it is defined in section 86 of Fish and Game Code.

Specific Impacts: In the IS, Caltrans states that because active SWHA nests could occur at or sufficiently close to the Project area, protocol level surveys will be conducted the nesting season prior to the commencement of Project activities. Further, Caltrans proposes the implementation of a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer around active SWHA nests in the event any are detected during these surveys. CDFW recommends these surveys, as well as surveys for bald eagle, California condor, and nesting birds in general be conducted

no more than 30 days prior to the commencement of Project activities (if those activities occur or extend into the nesting season). Further, CDFW considers the proposed 500-foot no-disturbance buffer for either SWHA, bald eagle, or California condor insufficient to avoid take of individuals of those species. Therefore, CDFW does not agree that the proposed pre-construction surveys for SWHA alone reduces to less-than-significant the potential Project-related impacts on nesting birds.

Evidence impact would be significant: SWHA in particular exhibit high nest-site fidelity year after year and lack of suitable nesting habitat in the San Joaquin Valley limits their local distribution and abundance (CDFW 2016). Adoption of the ND as it is written will allow activities that will involve ground disturbance, roadwork, grading, and excavation employing heavy equipment and work crews within ½-mile of active listed raptors including SWHA, bald eagle, and California condor nests, and within 500 feet of non-listed raptors, and within 250 feet of passerines. These activities could negatively affect these nests and have the potential to result in nest abandonment.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Avoidance and Mitigation Measure(s): Because the Project-related activities represent novel stimuli and threaten nest abandonment, CDFW recommends Caltrans propose surveying for, and maintaining a 250-foot no-disturbance buffer around active passerine nests, a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer around non-listed raptor nests, and a ½-mile no-disturbance buffer around listed raptor (e.g., SWHA, bald eagle, and California condor) nests in order to reduce to less-than-significant the Project-related impacts to nesting birds. CDFW recommends edits to the existing SWHA Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures section of the IS, and incorporation of similar measures providing for the complete avoidance of impacts to nesting bald eagle, California condor, and nesting birds in general. Further, CDFW recommends these revised/additional measures be made quantifiable and enforceable conditions of Project approval.

Recommended Edits to Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures section of the IS which begins on page 31 of the IS.

Currently, under the Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures section of the IS, Caltrans proposes conducting surveys for SWHA at and near the Project area the “season before construction” and implementation of a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer around active nests that are detected. CDFW recommends Caltrans conduct these surveys for SWHA no more than 30 days prior to starting Project activities at all culverts which occur within ½ mile of suitable SWHA nesting habitat. Further, CDFW advises Caltrans implement a ½-mile no-disturbance buffer around any active nest trees detected, until the young have fledged and are no longer reliant on parental care. Additionally, because golden eagle, bald eagle, California condor, and nesting birds in general may occur or near the Project area, CDFW recommends surveys for these species and nesting birds in general be

conducted no more than 30 days prior to commencing Project activities. Further CDFW recommends maintaining ½-mile no-disturbance buffers around all active fully protected raptor (e.g., golden eagle, bald eagle, and California condor) nests, 500-foot no-disturbance buffers around all active unlisted raptor nests, and 250-foot no-disturbance buffers around all active passerine nests.

If the aforementioned edits to the existing Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures section of the IS are not made for SWHA, and/or the aforementioned buffers are not feasible, CDFW recommends Caltrans obtain incidental take coverage under section 2081 subdivision (b) of Fish and Game Code and that the acquisition of an ITP be specified in the revised IS. In summary, if the edited avoidance measure is not feasible, mitigation (take authorization) would be required to reduce to less-than-significant the unavoidable Project-related impacts to SWHA. Due to the State fully protected status, CDFW cannot authorize incidental take of California condor, golden eagle, or bald eagle.

Response to comment 1: Both general preconstruction surveys and protocol Swainson's hawk surveys would capture any other migratory birds or raptors within the anticipated buffer. Caltrans has successfully avoided impacts to Swainson's hawk nesting along the State Highway System throughout the Central Valley with the implementation of a 500-foot radius no-disturbance buffer.

The bulk of the project is within developed residential, agricultural, and rural-residential areas of Tulare County. The project is unlikely to present novel stimuli given that the project area is frequently subject to high levels of vehicular, pedestrian, heavy equipment, and agricultural disturbance that results from human occupation of the action area, private construction, highway maintenance, fire fuels reduction work, and recreational traffic.

In the experience of Caltrans biologists, Swainson's hawk and other raptors nesting more than 500 feet from the State Highway System are frequently habituated to high levels of disturbance and unlikely to experience disruption by construction, especially given the low temporal and spatial impacts of culvert work at each location. Culvert replacements are not anticipated to extend beyond one working day at most culvert locations and are generally not visible from a distance of 0.5 mile.

COMMENT 2: Crotch Bumble Bee (CBB)

Issue: CBB have been documented to occur within areas of suitable habitat within the Project vicinity (CDFW 2022). Suitable CBB habitat includes areas of grasslands and upland scrub that contain requisite habitat elements, such as small mammal burrows. CBB primarily nest in late February through late October underground in abandoned small mammal burrows but may also

nest under perennial bunch grasses or thatched annual grasses, under brush piles, in old bird nests, and in dead trees or hollow logs (Williams et al. 2014; Hatfield et al. 2015). Overwintering sites utilized by CBB mated queens include soft, disturbed soil (Goulson 2010), or under leaf litter or other debris (Williams et al. 2014). Therefore, potential ground disturbance and vegetation removal associated with Project implementation may significantly impact local CBB populations.

While much of the land on both sides of the Project site exists as commercial development, there are discreet areas adjoining the west end of the Project area which persist as ruderal, scrub, and grassland habitat. CDFW recommends Caltrans conduct an assessment of these habitat areas adjoining the Project area for potentially suitable CBB habitat. If suitable CBB habitat exists in areas of planned Project-related ground disturbance, equipment staging, or materials laydown, potential CBB nesting sites in these areas would have to be avoided in order to reduce to less-than-significant the Project-related impacts to the species.

Specific Impacts: Without a determination with respect to the presence or absence of CBB habitat at and adjoining the Project area, CDFW cannot concur that the Project-related impacts to the species are less-than-significant. CBB nest in underground burrows and in thatched area and unless these potential nest sites are avoided, Project-related ground disturbance could result in take of the species. In the IS, Caltrans does not address the potential for the presence of CBB at or near the Project area.

Evidence impact would be significant: CBB was once common throughout most of the central and southern California; however, it now appears to be absent from most of it, especially in the central portion of its historic range within California's Central Valley (Hatfield et al. 2014). Analyses by the Xerces Society et al. (2018) suggest there have been sharp declines in relative abundance by 98% and persistence by 80% over the last ten years. CBB could continue to occupy the habitat areas within and adjoining portions of the Project Area and Project-related ground disturbance in these areas could result in significant impacts to the species.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measure: Because suitable CBB habitat may be present in the vicinity of at least portions of the Project Area, CDFW recommends the following measure be added to ensure that impacts to the species will be less-than-significant and completely avoided. Further, CDFW recommends these measures be made conditions of Project approval.

Recommended addition of Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Minimization Measures for CBB in the IS.

In order to determine if CBB occupy habitat areas of the right-of-way or adjoining lands, CDFW recommends Caltrans revise the Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures section of the IS to include plans to assess whether habitat areas within or adjoining the right-of-way constitute suitable habitat for CBB. If not, this should be addressed in the IS and no further measures would be needed. But if suitable habitat is present at or near the right-of-way, and suitable burrows or areas of thatch cannot be avoided, CDFW recommends the IS include a measure requiring surveys for CBB in advance of commencing Project activities. If no individuals or nests are detected during these surveys, Caltrans may in fact be able to accomplish the Project avoiding the species and significant impacts to the species. However, if CBB are found to occupy habitat areas at or near the right-of-way, the Project would have the potential to result in significant impacts to the species unless the potential nesting sites can be avoided. If this avoidance is not feasible, CDFW recommends Caltrans propose consultation with CDFW in the revised IS. II. Editorial Comments and/or Suggestions

Response to Comment 2: Habitat suitability assessments for Crotch's bumblebee were conducted during surveys and discussed in the Natural Environment Study. While Crotch's bumblebee has been historically documented in the vicinity, the only recent (less than 20 years) observation is greater than 35 air miles, with most adjacent observations predating 1979. Culvert ground disturbance is generally limited to the channel itself, with limited upland impacts. Given the tendency of bumblebees, in general, to avoid nesting and overwintering in seasonally inundated areas, disturbance of nests or overwintering queens is unlikely. Impacts to floral resources that may be used by the Crotch's bumblebee are discountable and minor, with minimal herbaceous vegetation removal anticipated for construction.

Appropriateness of ND: In summary, the above recommended revisions to the IS pertain to avoidance of nesting birds including SWHA, bald eagle, California condor and nesting birds in general within the specified buffers from the Project right-of-way to completely avoid significant effects to the species under this Negative Declaration. If surveys confirm the presence of nesting birds at or within the specified buffers, Caltrans may not be able to accomplish the Project while avoiding significant effects to these species without first obtaining incidental take authorization under section 2081 subdivision (b) of Fish and Game Code. Incidental take authorization would involve minimization of, and mitigation for, take of the permitted species. Considering this, CDFW recommends Caltrans incorporate the recommended revisions to the IS and propose an MND for the Project, in lieu of the currently proposed ND.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be

used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations (Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e)). Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to CNDDDB. The CNDDDB field survey form can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>. The completed form can be mailed electronically to CNDDDB at the following email address: CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov. The types of information reported to CNDDDB can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plants-and-Animals>.

FILING FEES

If it is determined that the Project has the potential to impact biological resources, an assessment of filing fees will be necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW. Payment of the fee is required in order for the underlying project approval to be operative, vested, and final (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 14, § 753.5; Fish & G. Code, § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089).

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Project to assist Caltrans in identifying and avoiding the Project's impacts on biological resources.

More information on survey and monitoring protocols for sensitive species can be found at CDFW's website (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols>). If you have any questions, please contact Steven Hulbert, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at the address provided on this letterhead, by telephone at (559) 575-6415 or by electronic mail at Steven.Hulbert@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Vance

Regional Manager

cc: United States Fish and Wildlife Service

2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-2605

Sacramento, California 95825

ec: State Clearinghouse

state.clearinghouse@opr.ca.gov

Steven Hulbert

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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CDFW. 2022. Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS). <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/BIOS>. Accessed January 10, 2022.

CDFW. 2015. California State Wildlife Action Plan, 2015.

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Goulson, D. 2010. Bumblebees: behaviour, ecology, and conservation. Oxford University Press, New York. 317pp.

Hatfield, R, S. Colla, S. Jepsen, L. Richardson, R. Thorp, and S. Foltz Jordan. 2014. Draft IUCN Assessments for North American *Bombus* spp. for the North American IUCN Bumble Bee Specialist Group. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, www.xerces.org, Portland, OR.

Williams, P. H., R. W. Thorp, L. L. Richardson, and S. R. Colla. 2014. The Bumble Bees of North America: An Identification guide. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 208 pp.

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, Defenders of Wildlife, and Center for Food Safety. 2018. A petition to the state of California fish and game commission to list the Crotch bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*), Franklin's bumble bee (*Bombus franklini*), Suckley cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), and western bumble bee (*Bombus occidentalis occidentalis*) as Endangered under the California Endangered Species Act. October 2018.

Attachment 1

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM (MMRP)

PROJECT: State Route 198 Culvert Repair/Replacement Project (Project)

SCH No.: 2021120503

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE

STATUS/DATE/INITIALS

Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation

Mitigation Measure 1:

SWHA, bald eagle, California condor, and nesting bird Avoidance

Mitigation Measure 2:

SWHA and bald eagle Take Authorization (if avoidance is not feasible)

Mitigation Measure 3:

CBB Avoidance

Mitigation Measure 4:

CBB Consultation with CDFW (if avoidance is not feasible)

List of Technical Studies Bound Separately (Volume 2)

Air Quality Memorandum

Noise Memorandum

Water Quality Memorandum

Natural Environment Study

Location Hydraulic Study

Historic Property Survey Report

- Historic Resource Evaluation Report
- Historic Architectural Survey Report
- Archaeological Survey Report

Hazardous Waste Memorandum

- Initial Site Assessment

Paleontological Identification Report

Climate Change Study

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports or the Initial Study, please send your request to:

Juergen Vespermann
District 6 Environmental Division
California Department of Transportation
2015 East Shields Avenue, Suite 100-200, Fresno, California 93726

Or send your request via email to: juergen.vespermann@dot.ca.gov
Or call Juergen Vespermann at 559-832-0051

Please provide the following information in your request:

Tulare 198 Culverts Repair and Replacement Project
State Route 198 in Tulare County
06-TUL-198-PM 0.0-44.0
Project ID number 0618000045