

APPENDIX C

Biological Resources Constraints Survey,
RECON Environmental, Inc.



An Employee-Owned Company

June 1, 2023

Mr. Joseph Broadhead
Principal Water Resource Specialist
Eastern Municipal Water District
2270 Trumble Road
Perris, CA 92572

Reference: Biological Resources Survey for the Steeplechase Booster Pump Station Project
(RECON Number 9295.16)

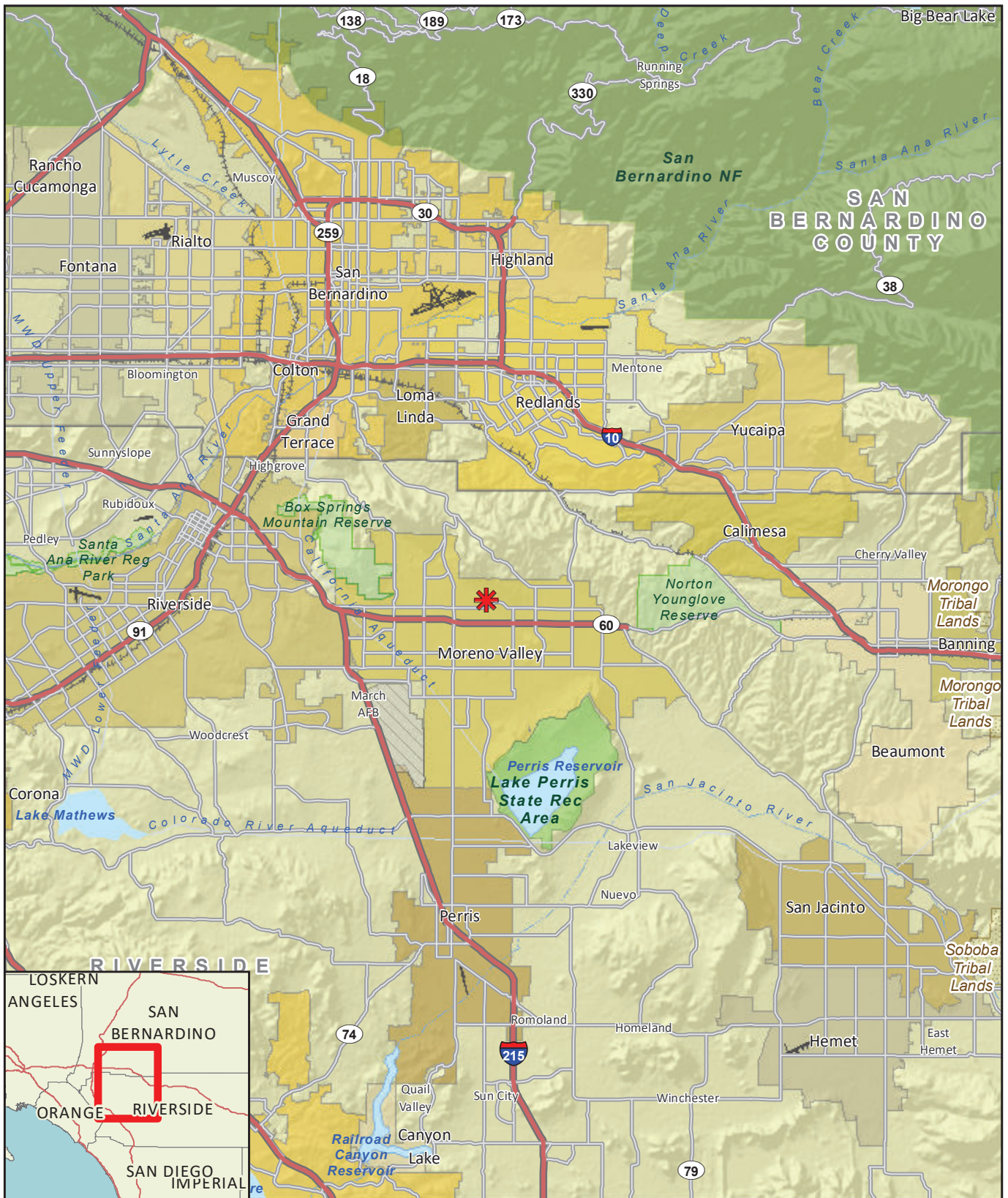
Dear Mr. Broadhead:

This letter details the results of a biological resources survey conducted for the Steeplechase Booster Pump Station Project (project). This biological technical letter has been prepared to provide necessary information to the Eastern Municipal Water District (District) for environmental analysis of the project.

1.0 Project Description and Location

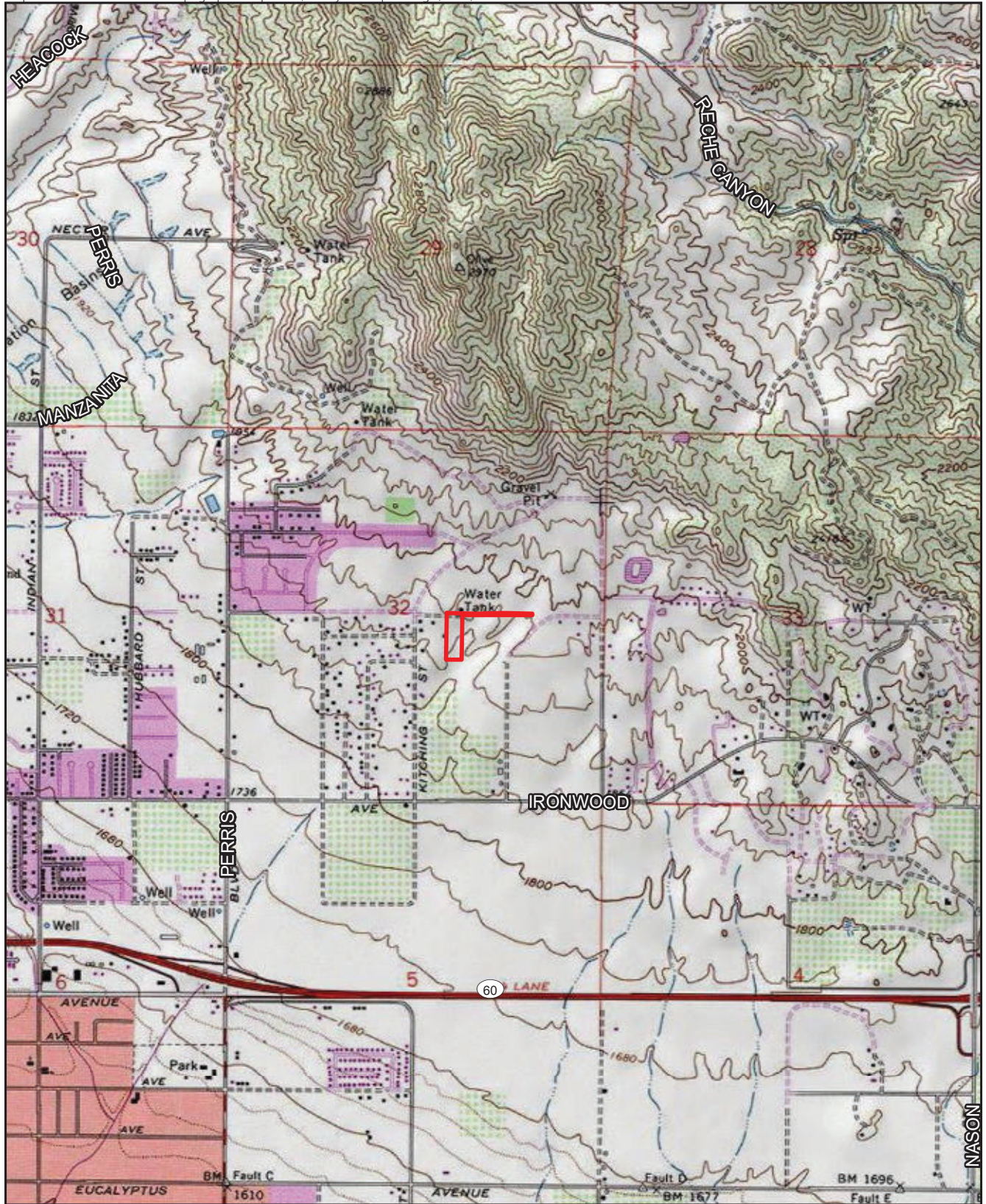
The proposed project would remove existing hardscape and landscaping and construct a new booster pump station enclosed in a masonry block wall building, a retaining wall with a maximum height of 15 feet, three access gates, hardscape, and landscaping. In addition, approximately 1,209 linear feet of 12-inch pipeline would be constructed via trenching within Kalmia Avenue. The project site is located on District property at the District's existing Kalmia Avenue tank site, just west of Kayal Avenue, within the city of Moreno Valley, California (Figures 1 through 3). Access to the site is regionally provided by Interstate 215 (I-215). Local access is provided from I-215 by Ironwood Avenue to the north on Kitching Street, to the east on Kalmia Avenue. The project site is located approximately 5.2 miles from I-215. The project site is in the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Sunnymead quadrangle, Township 2 South, Range 3 West (USGS 1980; see Figure 2). The project site is comprised of a partially unimproved lot with an existing District water tank, paved access, and landscaped vegetation, as well as portions of Kalmia Avenue, private residences, and several unimproved lots. The project is primarily surrounded by dense residential development with scattered undeveloped lots.

The project is located within the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) plan area (County of Riverside 2003). No components of the project are within or adjacent to any existing or proposed criteria areas or reserves defined in the MSHCP. The project site is located within the MSHCP survey area for burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*). The project site is not located within any other MSHCP survey area for narrow endemic plants or criteria area plants, amphibians, mammals, or any special linkage areas.



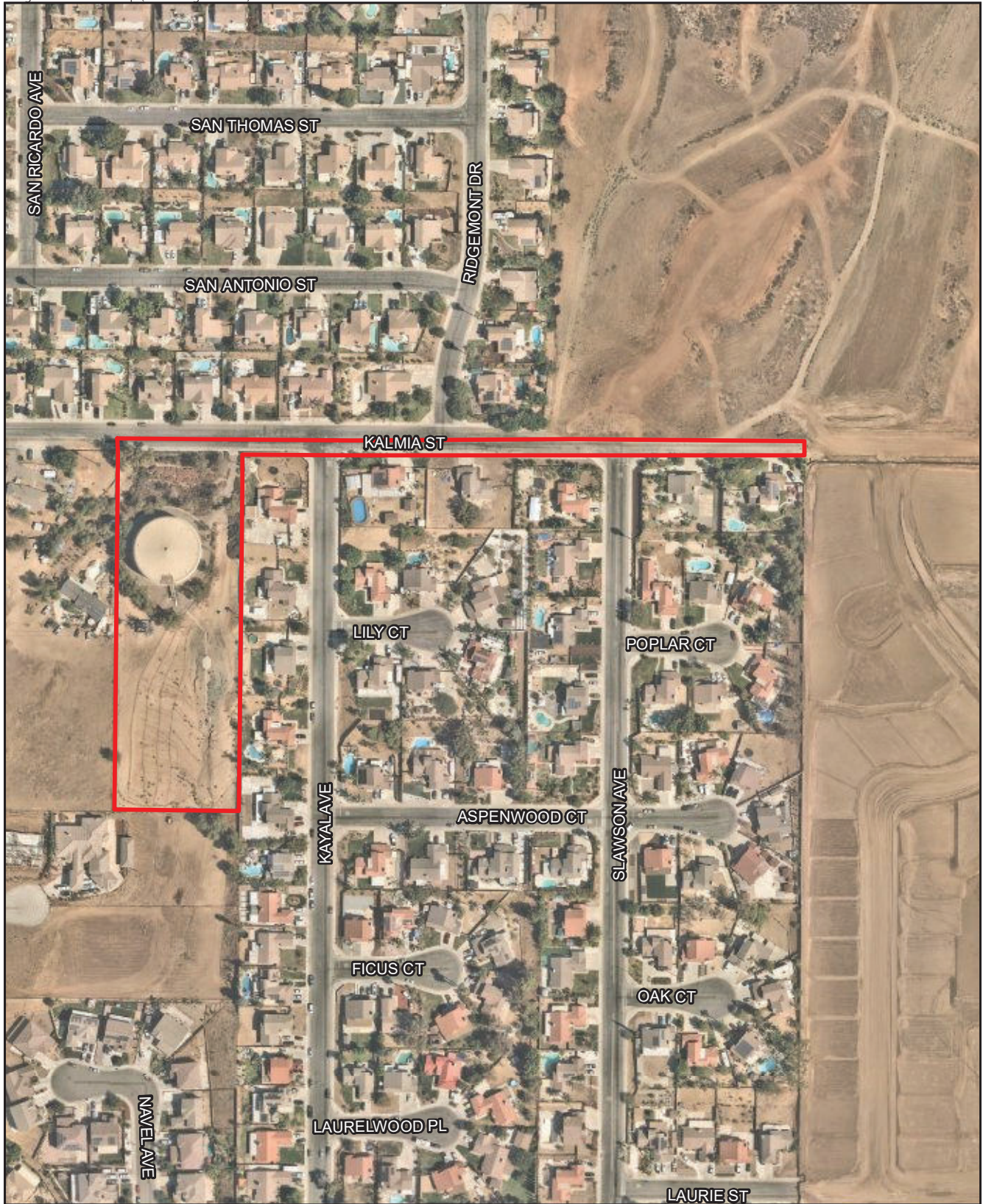
 Project Location

FIGURE 1
Regional Location



 Project Boundary

FIGURE 2
Project Location on USGS Map



 Project Boundary

FIGURE 3
Project Location on Aerial Photograph

2.0 Methods

RECON Environmental, Inc. (RECON) biologist Alex Fromer conducted a general biological survey on February 4, 2022 to evaluate the resources within the project site. A 77.3-acre survey area, including all areas to be potentially impacted (3.93 acres) and a 500-foot buffer, were evaluated to determine the current condition of the biological resources present within and adjacent to the project (see Figure 3). During the general biological survey, Mr. Fromer mapped vegetation communities, recorded vegetation and habitat characteristics, and noted wildlife and plant species apparent at the time of the survey. Vegetation communities were mapped in the field on a 1:600 scale aerial photograph of the survey area. Plants were visually identified in the field and wildlife species were identified visually with the aid of binoculars, based on identification of calls, scat, tracks, or burrows. Private property was surveyed with binoculars from either within the project boundary or public right-of-ways.

In addition, the project site and surrounding 500-foot buffer was evaluated for the potential to support western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*), a California species of special concern. Due to the presence of suitable habitat, focused burrowing owl surveys were conducted during the species' breeding season (March 1 through August 31) in suitable habitat in accordance with the guidelines developed by the County of Riverside (Riverside County Transportation and Land Management Agency 2006). A burrowing owl habitat assessment (Step I) was conducted during the general biological survey on February 4, 2022. A focused burrow survey (Step II–Part A), was conducted concurrently with the first focused burrowing owl survey. Focused burrowing owl surveys (Step II–Part B) were conducted on March 3, 9, 16, and 23, 2022, to determine the presence or absence of this species.

3.0 Background Research

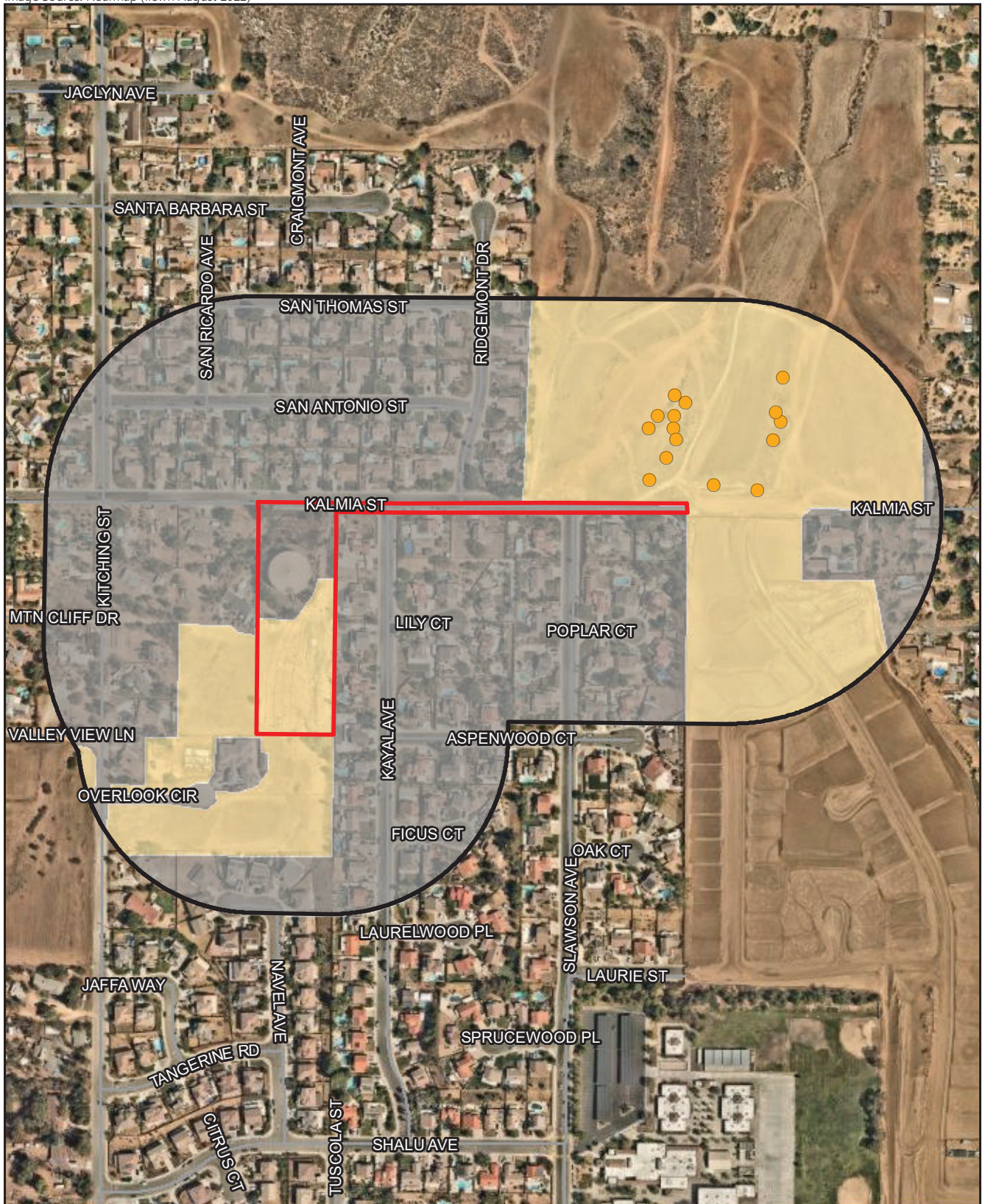
Prior to conducting field surveys, RECON conducted a search of existing biological data for the project site, including a review of biological databases for sensitive plant and animal species reported within two miles of the project site, and a review of the site's physical characteristics (e.g., location, elevation, soils/substrate, topography). Databases consulted included the California Natural Diversity Database (California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW] 2022) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) All Species Occurrences Database (USFWS 2022a). In addition, a review of the National Wetlands Inventory was conducted to identify any potential wetlands or water resources present in the vicinity of the project site (USFWS 2022b).

Based on the database search, there are a number of sensitive species known from a 2-mile radius surrounding the project site; however, there are no known occurrences of sensitive species closer than 0.5 mile. The project site is primarily surrounded by residential development with adjacent open space habitat to the north of the eastern portion of the project site. Thus, the potential for many species to occur is evaluated based on the habitats within the project site, as well as within the open space available near the project. The following sensitive species were determined to have some potential to occur within the project vicinity and are discussed further in this report: Parry's spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *parryi*), burrowing owl, coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*), and Stephens' kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys stephensi*).

4.0 Existing Biological Resources

4.1 Vegetation Communities and Land Cover Types

The survey area supports two vegetation communities/land cover types: disturbed habitat and urban/developed (Figure 4). The acreages of these vegetation communities and land cover types are listed in Table 1 and described below.



- Project Boundary
- Survey Area
- Burrows
- Vegetation Community**
- Disturbed Habitat
- Urban/Developed



FIGURE 4
Existing Biological Resources

The urban/developed consists of paved roads and residential development including ornamental vegetation.

The disturbed habitat is comprised of undeveloped land in the northwestern portion of the survey area and undeveloped lots or portions of private properties in the southwestern and southeastern portions of the survey area. The disturbed land in the northwestern portion of the survey area is dominated by common fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menziesii*) and appears to see frequent disturbance. Brome (*Bromus* sp.), barley (*Hordeum* sp.), and redstem filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*) are also found throughout. Small, sparse patches of brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*) also exist within the central portion of this area that is predominantly comprised of open ground, with scattered to dense non-native weeds, native wildflowers, and low-lying annual grasses. This area of disturbed land also includes open areas and access roads created by off-road vehicles and a few soil and debris piles. The disturbed land in the southwestern and southeastern portions of the survey area are primarily comprised of open ground, with moderate to dense non-native weeds and low-lying annual grasses in addition to a large patch of bare ground with erosion within the southern portion of the project boundary. The eastern portion of the site contains a small patch of dense deerweed (*Acmispon glaber*) with an understory of non-native ruderal vegetation.

Vegetation Communities	Project Site	Survey Area
Disturbed Habitat	1.82	27.22
Urban/developed	2.11	50.10
TOTAL	3.93	77.32

4.2 Sensitive Plants

No sensitive plants were detected at the time of the survey and none are expected to occur given the disturbed nature of the project site and soils. The project site also occurs outside of any MSHCP Narrow Endemic Plant Species Survey Area or Criteria Area Plant Species Survey Area. A record of Parry's spineflower is found in the California Natural Diversity Database within two miles of the survey area; however, is not expected to occur within the project site due to the age of the single observation (1950s) of this species, lack of suitable coastal sage scrub, chaparral, cismontane woodland, or grassland habitat, and disturbed nature of the site and soils.

4.3 Sensitive Wildlife

Burrowing Owl. No burrowing owl individuals or any sign of burrowing owl activity were detected within the 500-foot burrowing owl assessment buffer. However, the disturbed land in the northeastern portion of the survey area supported several squirrel burrows that were large enough to potentially support burrowing owl. The remaining disturbed habitat in the southwestern and southeastern portions of the survey area contains open areas within the 500-foot burrowing owl assessment buffer. While no burrowing owl or burrowing owl sign were detected during surveys, the disturbed habitat within and adjacent to the project area does have potential to support burrowing owl. Therefore, a pre-construction survey would be required prior to the commencement of construction to ensure no burrowing owls have entered the area to avoid direct or indirect impacts to the species or any active nests, if present. A detailed discussion of the results of the survey conducted are provided separately as the Habitat Assessment and Burrowing Owl Focused Survey Results at Steeplechase Booster Pump Station Project (RECON 2022).

Stephens' Kangaroo Rat. This species has low potential to occur due to the high level of soil disturbance and lack of suitable grassland habitat within the survey area. The survey area is located outside the core areas for this species

identified within the MSHCP (County of Riverside 2003). Additionally, this species is not known to occur within one mile of the survey area.

Coastal California Gnatcatcher. This species is not expected to occur due to a lack of suitable coastal sage scrub habitat. While some small patches of native shrubs (e.g., brittlebush, deerweed) exist within the survey area, none of the patches are large enough or provide the appropriate vegetation structure to support breeding coastal California gnatcatcher.

Migratory and Nesting Birds. The majority of the survey area, including the man-made structures and ornamental vegetation found within the urban/developed lands and disturbed habitat, has potential to support migratory and nesting bird species. Urban adapted species in particular have been known to nest within ornamental vegetation or the eaves of houses or openings in structures. In addition, several ground nesting species have the potential to nest within the open areas found within the disturbed habitat and urban/developed lands within the survey area.

4.4 Aquatic Resources

No potential jurisdictional wetlands or waters, including riparian/riverine areas or vernal pools, were observed within or adjacent to the project site.

4.5 Wildlife Movement Corridors and Nursery Sites

The project site is located on partially unimproved lots and roadways that are primarily surrounded by dense residential development. No components of the project are within existing or proposed criteria areas or reserves defined by the MSHCP. Though the project site likely provides habitat for urban-adapted species, the project site does not provide a throughway for wildlife movement due to the site's location in a developed area and lack of connectivity to off-site areas of open space. Also, the project site is unlikely to support wildlife nursery sites or large roosting or breeding colonies due to the disturbed nature of the site.

5.0 Project Impacts and Proposed Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures

As discussed above, project impacts to disturbed habitat and urban/developed lands would be less than significant and would not require mitigation. The project would also not impact any sensitive plant species, potential jurisdictional wetlands/waters, wildlife movement corridors, or nursery sites; therefore, no mitigation would be required. Potential direct and/or indirect impacts to burrowing owl and migratory and nesting birds would be addressed through the following avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures below.

5.1 Vegetation Communities and Land Cover Types

The project would result in a total of 1.82 acres of direct impacts to disturbed habitat and 2.11 acres of urban/developed land (see Figure 4). Impacts to disturbed habitat and urban/developed land are not considered significant as these land cover types are not considered sensitive. Thus, no mitigation is required for impacts to vegetation communities as a result of the project.

5.2 Sensitive Wildlife

The project has a low potential to impact burrowing owl, a CDFW Species of Special Concern, and migratory and nesting birds, which are protected under both federal and state regulations. The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed to reduce these impacts to less than significant.

AMM-BIO-1: Pre-Construction Special-Status Species Sensitivity Training

Prior to the start of construction activities, a qualified biologist shall prepare a Worker Environmental Awareness Program (WEAP) that provides a description of the potentially occurring special-status species that could be affected by the proposed project. The WEAP training shall:

- Include information on identifying special-status species.
- Include measures to avoid special-status species during construction activities.
- Be provided to all construction personnel by a qualified biologist.
- Be documented for all construction personnel on a sign-in sheet maintained on-site at all times during construction activities.

When applicable, the qualified biologist shall also verify fencing or marking limits of disturbance (marking habitat suitable to support special-status species and sensitive vegetation communities) prior to the start of construction activities.

Burrowing Owl. Burrowing owl is a CDFW Species of Special Concern. To avoid indirect impacts to burrowing owls, a pre-construction take avoidance survey would be necessary within 500 feet of work areas prior to the commencement of any construction to verify no burrowing owls occur within or immediately adjacent to work areas in accordance with the CDFW Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. If burrowing owls are present, avoidance measures (e.g., buffers, best management practices, monitoring) would be required based on the proposed level of disturbance at the discretion of a qualified biologist to demonstrate there are no indirect impacts from adjacent construction. While the results of the focused surveys for burrowing owl were negative, suitable burrows were identified during the MSHCP protocol habitat assessment and focused surveys. Measures to avoid impacts to burrowing owl are described below.

AMM-BIO-2: Western Burrowing Owl

A pre-construction take avoidance survey for this species would be required within all suitable habitat located inside the burrowing owl survey area (suitable habitat within the project footprint, plus a 500-foot buffer). Per the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFW 2012), take avoidance surveys require an initial survey no less than 14 days prior to the start of ground disturbance activities and a final survey conducted within 24 hours of ground disturbance. If burrowing owls are detected, the CDFW must be notified within 48 hours and avoidance measures and/or mitigation would be required.

If active burrowing owl burrows are identified within or adjacent to the impact area, the project shall avoid disturbing active burrowing owl burrows (nesting sites) and burrowing owl individuals. The following measures will be implemented and incorporated into the WEAP, upon authorization from CDFW:

- Buffers shall be established around occupied burrows in accordance with guidance provided in the CDFW Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFW 2012) based on the proposed level of disturbance. For low disturbance projects, initial setback distances for avoidance of active burrows shall be 200 meters (approximately 656 feet) from April 1 to October 15 and 50 meters (164 feet) from October 16 to March 31. Exceptions can be made to the avoidance distance for areas with natural (hills, trees) or artificial (buildings, walls) barriers in place. The final avoidance buffer shall be at the discretion of the biologist.
- If, after consideration of a reduced buffer, an adequate avoidance buffer cannot be provided between an occupied burrow and required ground-disturbing activities, then passive relocation activities during the

non-breeding season (September 1 through January 31) may be authorized in consultation with CDFW, which would include preparation, approval, and implementation of a Burrowing Owl Exclusion Plan in accordance with protocol described in the CDFW Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation.

Migratory & Nesting Birds. Direct impacts to nesting and migratory birds could potentially result should vegetation removal or grading within the project impact footprint occur during the general avian breeding season (January 15 through August 31). These species are protected by the California Fish and Game Code Section 3503.5, and direct impacts to nesting individuals would need to be avoided. Measures to avoid impacts to nesting and migratory birds are described below.

AMM-BIO-3: Migratory and Nesting Birds

When construction activities occur during the nesting season (January 15 through August 31) pre-construction surveys for breeding and nesting birds and raptors are required. Beginning 14 days prior to construction activities, a qualified biologist shall conduct weekly surveys within 500 feet of the construction limits to determine and map the location and extent of breeding birds that could be affected by the project. Surveys shall include the following:

- Conduct surveys at appropriate nesting times.
- Concentrate on potential roosting or perch sites.
- Conduct surveys on a weekly basis with the last survey conducted not more than three days prior to the start of construction activities.

When an active nest is located the following shall be implemented to minimize potential impacts:

- Clearing and construction activities, within appropriate buffers as determined by a qualified biologist, shall be postponed until the nest is vacated, the juveniles have fledged, and there is no evidence of a second attempt at nesting.
- The buffer zone will be established in the field with flagging and stakes.
- Temporary fencing and signage shall be maintained during the duration of the project.
- Construction personnel shall be instructed on the sensitivity of the area and be advised not to work, trespass, or engage in activities that would disturb nesting birds near or inside the buffer.
- On-site monitoring may be required to ensure that no direct or indirect impacts occur to the active nests.
- Project activities may encroach into the buffer only at the discretion of the qualified biologist.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please call me at (619) 308-9333, extension 193.

Sincerely,



Alexander Fromer
Biologist

APF:jg

References Cited

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation. March.

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