APPENDIX C

Biological Resources Study

HABITAT AND NATURAL RESOURCES ASSESSMENT FOR THE LANCASTER HEALTH DISTRICT LANCASTER, CALIFORNIA

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July 28, 2016

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

BioResource Consultants, Inc., (BRC) has prepared this Habitat and Resource Assessment Report for the analysis of biological resources, including the potential for occurrence of special-status species and their habitats, at the proposed Lancaster Health District (Project) site within the city of Lancaster, Los Angeles County, California.

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The Project site is located within the City of Lancaster (City) in Los Angeles County, California. The Project site is approximately 288 acres and consists of multiple parcels bordered by West Avenue J to the north; 15th Street West, Kinglee Avenue, West Avenue J-5, and 13th Street West to the east; West Avenue K to the south; and the Antelope Valley Freeway (SR-14) to the west. The Project islocated at 34.684803°N, -118.160411°W, Township 7 North, Range 12 West, Section 21 on the *Lancaster West* United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute series topographic quadrangle (Figure 1).

1.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed Project includes the development of a Master Plan to guide development within the Project boundary with a mix of land uses including hospital/medical, retail, and multifamily use (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Project Location

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 LITERATURE AND DATABASE REVIEW

Prior to conducting the on-site biological surveys, BRC conducted standard database searches and reviewed reports from previous surveys of the Project area to obtain pertinent information regarding potential special-status species and sensitive natural communities that occur within the Project vicinity. The results of these preliminary database searches provided a basis for addressing the appropriate special-status species within the Project area. The following resources were reviewed:

- CNDDB *Rarefind 5* (CDFW 2015) data within the U.S. Geological Survey *Lancaster West* and surrounding 7.5 minute topographic quadrangles
- California Native Plant Society's (CNPS) online *Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants* containing species-specific habitat requirements for plant species (CNPS 2015)
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) database of designated Critical Habitat
- *The Jepson Manual*, second edition (Baldwin et al. 2012)
- *A Manual of California Vegetation* (Sawyer et al. 2009)
- *eBird* website (eBird 2012).

Using information from the various listed sources, the potential for special-status species to occur within the Project area was assessed as High, Medium, or Low based on the following criteria:

- High: CNDDB or other documented occurrences have been recorded within one mile of the Project area and suitable habitat is present; or, individuals were observed during field surveys.
- Medium: CNDDB or other documented occurrences have been recorded within five miles of the Project area and suitable habitat is present. Individuals were not observed during field surveys, but have potential to occur during breeding season.
- Low: Habitat is not present or marginal habitat may occur in the Survey area but no CNDDB records exist for the species within five miles of the Project area; or, the species in question was potentially misidentified for CNDDB reporting; or, individuals of the species were not observed during field surveys and are not anticipated to be present.

2.2 BIOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEYS

On July 20, 2016, BRC biologist Stephen Jones, who is familiar with the natural resources and sensitive species of the region, conducted a reconnaissance-level natural resources survey of the Project area. The survey area included the entire approximately 288-acre Project site. The area was methodically surveyed on foot to document the existing conditions as well as wildlife and plant species present and to map plant communities.

Due to the timing of the survey it was not possible to schedule the field survey during the optimum survey period for all of the special-status plant and wildlife species known to occur in

the region. Therefore, the objective of the field survey was to determine the likelihood of occurrence of any special-status plant or wildlife species based on the presence/absence of suitable habitat and other natural history elements that might predict their occurrence.

The survey conditions and timing of the survey were deemed suitable for determining potential biological constraints for the proposed Project. The biologists recorded all dominant plant species encountered during the field surveys. Scientific nomenclature follows the Jepson Interchange *List of Currently Accepted Names of Native and Naturalized Plants of California* (Jepson Flora Project 2012).

Surveys for wildlife species included searching for and identifying species' diagnostic sign (i.e. audible calls, prints, scat, nests, skeletal remains, burrows, etc.) and habitat features (i.e. rock or debris piles, cavities, and rock outcrops) that may attract and/or support special-status species. Taxonomy and nomenclature for wildlife generally follows Collins and Taggert (2009) for amphibians and reptiles, American Ornithologists Union (AOU 2012) for birds, and Baker et al. (2003) for mammals.

2.3 VEGETATION MAPPING

Vegetation communities were determined by identifying the dominant and co-dominant plant species. Once the dominant and co-dominant species were determined, the community boundary was delineated and mapped for the Project area. The delineated boundary was hand-drawn onto field maps and representative GPS coordinates were taken along the boundary to provide reference points for subsequent GIS mapping of vegetation community polygons. The vegetation communities were defined to an alliance and association level based on the guidelines within the *Manual of California Vegetation: Second Edition* (Sawyer et al. 2009).

2.4 WETLANDS AND WATERS

A preliminary delineation of the extent of potentially jurisdictional wetland and non-wetland Waters of the United States pursuant to the Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) and that of lakes, rivers, or streambeds and associated riparian vegetation pursuant to the California Fish and Game Code was conducted at the Project site. The survey focused on the United States Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) three mandatory criteria (hydric soils, hydrology, and hydrophytic vegetation), to determine the need for further analysis based on the routine onsite delineation method described in the *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual* (1987), and in accordance with the methods identified in the *Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual Arid West Region (Version 2.0)* (2008).

The boundaries of non-tidal, non-wetland waters were delineated at the ordinary high water mark (OHWM), as defined by 33 CFR 328.3 and in accordance with *A Field Guide to the Identification of the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) in the Arid West Region of the U.S., A Delineation Manual* (August 2008). The boundaries of aquatic resources potentially subject to regulation by the CDFW were delineated using agency-issued guidance under the California Fish and Game Code, related CDFW guidance materials, and standard practices by CDFW personnel.

CDFW jurisdiction was delineated by measuring the outer boundaries of the greater of either the top of bank measurement or the extent of associated riparian or wetland vegetation.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

The 288-acre Project site is located within the city of Lancaster in Los Angeles County. Elevation at the Project site ranges from 2,348 to 2,394 feet above mean sea level. The Project site consists of developed land characterized by a variety of commercial, industrial, retail, and medical facilities with vacant, undeveloped parcels dominated by native and non-native plant assemblages. Several ornamental non-native trees are found on the vacant undeveloped parcels. A flood control channel forms the southwestern boundary and intersects the southern portion of the Project site. The Project site is surrounded by development and is highly disturbed due to alteration from compaction of soil, dumping and excavation, off-road vehicle use, and other man-made disturbances.

3.2 VEGETATION COMMUNITIES

The following vegetation communities/alliances were identified within the Project survey area (Table 1; Figure 3).

3.2.1 *Atriplex canascens* Shrubland Alliance (Fourwing Saltbush Scrub)

The Fourwing Saltbush Scrub is dominated by fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canascens*) with rabbitbrush scrub (*Ericemeria nauseous*) as co-dominant in the scrub canopy with Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*) and Mediterranean grass (*Schismus barbatus*). The herbaceous layer is variable with seasonal herbs and non-native grasses (Sawyer 2009).

3.2.2 *Schismus barbatus/Salsola tragus* Herbaceous Alliance (Mediterranean Grass/Russian Thistle Scrub)

The Mediterranean Grass/Russian Thistle Scrub is dominated by Mediterranean grass and Russian thistle, with storksbill (*Erodium cicutatium*) also occurring. This community is not described in *A Manual of California Vegetation* (Sawyer 2009).

3.2.3 Disturbed/Developed

Within the Project area, areas classified as disturbed/developed include graded areas, old foundations, existing structures, cleared areas, and roads. This community is not described in *A Manual for California Vegetation* (Sawyer 2009).

Table 1. Vegetation communities within the Project site.

Vegetation Community	Acres Within Project Site
Atriplex canascens Shrubland Alliance (Fourwing Saltbush Scrub) (FWSS)	22
Schismus barbatus/*Salsola tragus*(Mediterranean Grass/Russian Thistle Scrub) (MG/RTH)	80
Disturbed/Developed (D)	171
Flood Control Channel	15
Total	**288**

3.3 SENSITIVE HABITATS

No sensitive habitats are present at the Project site.

3.4 WATERS AND WETLANDS

No areas meeting the three mandatory criteria (hydrophytic vegetation, hydrology and hydric soils) for wetland Waters of the U.S. occur at the Project site. In addition, no natural non-wetland waters of the U.S regulated by the United States Army Corps of Engineers pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act or California Department of Fish and Wildlife streambeds or riparian habitat regulated by Section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code are present at the Project site. An improved flood-control channel forms the southwestern boundary and traverses the extreme southern portion of the Project Site. The drainage is cement-lined to naturally-lined with high banks and is bounded by a chain link fence (Figure 3). No impacts are expected form future Project development.

Figure 2. Vegetation communities within the Project site.

3.5 SPECIES

A total of 25 plant species were observed, including 15 native and 10 non-native species. A total of seven wildlife species were observed within the Project survey area. Refer to Appendix B for a full list of observed plant and wildlife species.

3.5.1 Special-Status Plant Species

Several special-status plant species are documented to occur within the vicinity of the Project area (Figure 5). No special-status plant species were documented within the Project area during the survey.

Based on the absence of suitable habitat within the Project area, all of the documented potential special-status plant species have a low likelihood to occur within the Project area and are not expected (Appendix A, Table 1).

A complete list of observed plant species is presented in Appendix B, Table 2.

While no special-status species occur in the Project area, Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) are present (Figure 5). Joshua trees are considered a significant resource in the Mojave Desert. However, the City of Lancaster does not have Joshua tree protection ordinance and the Project is not within unincorporated Los Angeles County; therefore, the Joshua trees onsite would not be protected or require a permit for removal.

Figure 3. Joshua Tree Locations

3.5.2 Special-Status Wildlife Species

Several special-status wildlife species are documented to occur in the vicinity of the Project site (Figure 5). No special-status wildlife species were observed within the Project site at the time of the survey.

The Project site does not contain designated critical habitat for sensitive wildlife species.

Based on the presence of suitable habitat within the Project area and nearby documented occurrences, two special-status wildlife species have a medium likelihood to occur. The remaining special-status species have a low likelihood to occur within the Project area and are not expected (Appendix A, Table 1).

A complete list of observed plant species is presented in Appendix B, Table 3.

Blainville's horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii*), a California Species of Special Concern (SSC). Blainville's horned lizard has a medium likelihood of occurrence, as ssuitable habitat is present on the Project site within the vacant non-developed parcels. The species inhabits open areas of sandy soil and low vegetation in valleys, foothills and semiarid mountains. Typically found in grasslands, coniferous forests, woodlands, and chaparral with open areas and patches of loose soil, this species could occur throughout the Project site. This species was not observed during Project surveys.

Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), a California SSC. Loggerhead shrikes have a medium likelihood of occurrence, as suitable habitat is present on the Project site within the vacant undeveloped parcels. Shrubs at the Project site provide nesting habitat for this species and the remainder of the Project site provides foraging habitat. Loggerhead shrikes inhabit open country with short vegetation and well-spaced shrubs or low trees, particularly those with spines or thorns. They frequent agricultural fields, pastures, old orchards, riparian areas, desert scrublands, savannas, prairies, golf courses, and cemeteries. The species was not observed during Project surveys.

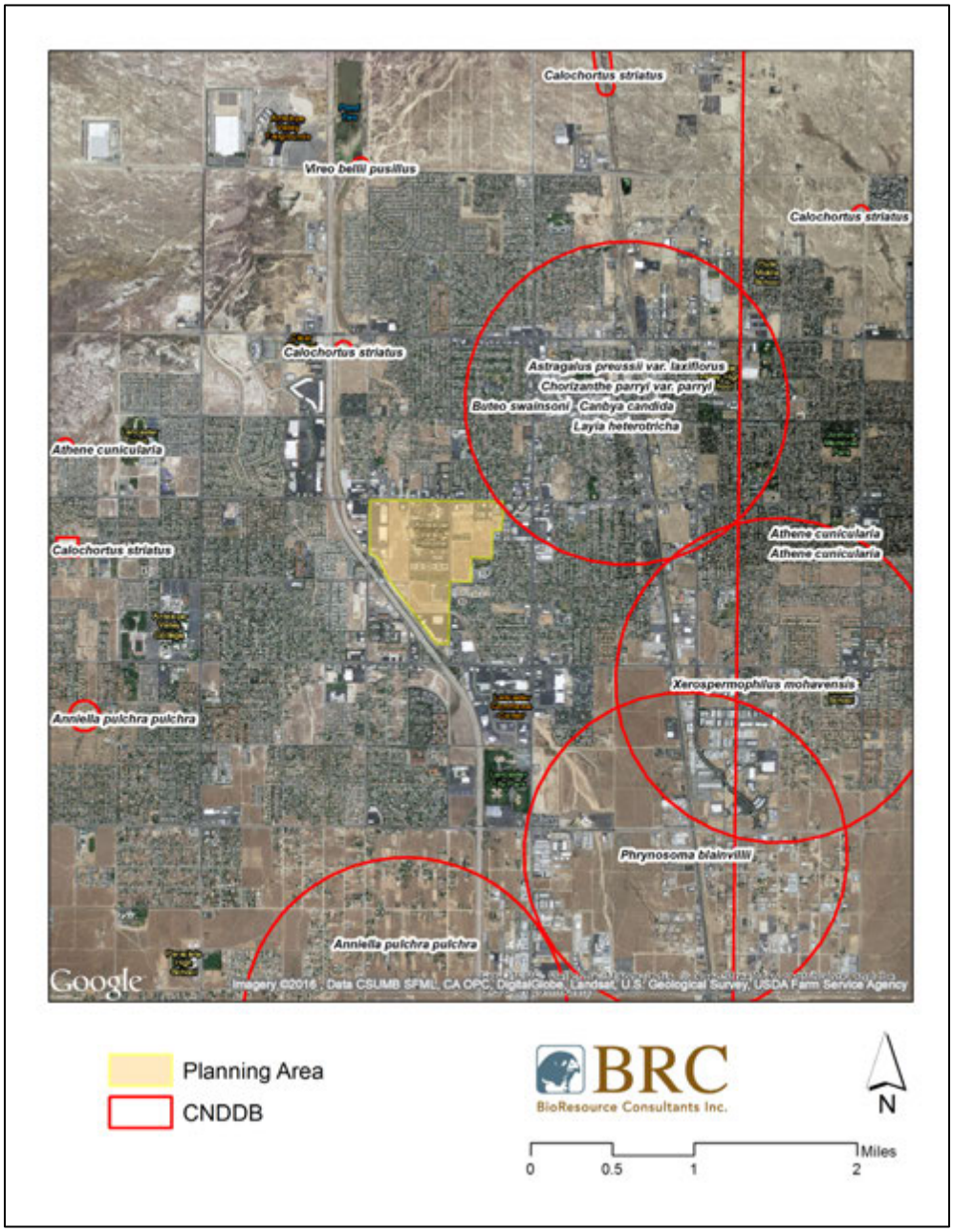

Figure 4. Documented occurrences of special-status species (CNDDB records) within the vicinity of the Project site.

3.5.3 Nesting Birds

The trees and shrubs at the Project site provide suitable nesting, roosting and perching habitat for migratory birds and raptors. It is anticipated that nesting birds protected by the MBTA and CDFW, fully-protected species, and species of special concern could nest at the Project site. No nesting birds were observed during Project surveys.

4.0 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

Future Project development could result in the loss of native and non-native plant assemblages due to potential grading and construction. All of the vegetation communities in the Project site could be affected. In total, 102 acres of vegetated communities and171 acres of non-vegetated, Disturbed/Developed land could be affected by Project development.

4.1 SPECIES

4.1.1 Special-Status Wildlife Species

4.1.1.1 Loggerhead Shrike

Direct Impacts

Future Project development could result in the loss of suitable foraging, roosting and potential nesting habitat.

Indirect Impacts

Indirect impacts could occur due to potential elevated noise levels and vibration associated with future construction development, possibly resulting in the abandonment of nests, eggs, or young.

Mitigation

To the extent feasible, future Project construction should be conducted outside the general bird nesting season, which usually occurs between February 1 and August 31. If construction must occur within the nesting season, prior to any construction activity (including vegetation disturbance) a qualified biologist should conduct a survey for nesting birds, including owls and raptors, in all breeding/nesting habitat within 300 feet of any disturbance areas both within the Project site and adjacent to the Project site. The surveys shall be conducted no earlier than 30 days prior to initiation of ground or vegetation disturbance by the Project. If no breeding/nesting birds are observed, preparation and construction activities may begin.

If breeding activities and/or an active bird nest are located, the breeding habitat/nest site shall be delineated by a biological monitor to a minimum of 300 feet (500 feet for raptors) in all directions and this area shall not be disturbed until the nest becomes inactive, the young have fledged, the young are no longer being fed by the parents, the young have left the area, or the young will otherwise no longer be impacted by the Project.

4.1.1.2 Blainville's Horned Lizard

Direct Impacts

Future Project development could impact habitat for or individual Blainville's horned lizards due to vegetation removal and compaction from grading and construction.

Indirect Impacts

Indirect impacts could occur due to potential elevated noise levels and vibration associated with future construction development.

Mitigation

A qualified, permitted biologist will conduct a pre-construction survey within 72 hours of future Project construction. If lizards are not found during the pre-construction survey, work can commence. If lizards are observed, no work will commence until the individuals have left the area or have been relocated by a qualified biologist.

4.1.2 Nesting Birds

Direct Impacts

Project construction and implementation would result in the loss of suitable foraging, roosting and potential nesting habitat for birds within vegetated Fourwing Saltbush Scrub and Mediterranean Grass/Russian Thistle Herbaceous Alliance, totaling 102 acres, on the Project site.

Indirect Impacts

Indirect impacts could occur due to potential elevated noise levels and vibration associated with future construction development, possibly resulting in the abandonment of nests, eggs, or young.

Mitigation

Pre-construction nesting bird surveys shall occur as described in Section 4.1.1.1.

5.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Numerous species, including birds protected by the MBTA, occur in the region and development projects may adversely affect their suitable habitat and/or individuals of these species. With the implementation of Project-specific impact avoidance and mitigation measures, the proposed Project is not expected to substantially contribute to cumulative impacts on biological resources.

6.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A:
Table of California Natural Diversity Database Special-Status Species with Potential to Occur

Table 1. Summary of special-status species that could occur or have been documented to occur within the Project area.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status	Potential to Occur Onsite
Plants			
Astragalus hornii var. *hornii*	Horn's milk-vetch	!B.1	Low
Astragalus preussii var. *laxiflorus*	Lancaster milk-vetch	1B.1	Low
Calochortus clavatus var. *clavatus*	club-haired mariposa-lily	4.3	Low
Calochortus clavatus var. *gracilis*	slender mariposa-lily	1B.2	Low
Calochortus striatus	alkali mariposa-lily	1B.2	Low
Calystegia peirsonii	Peirson's morning-glory	4.2	Low
Canbya candida	white pygmy-poppy	4.2	Low
Chorizanthe parryi var. *parryi*	Parry's spineflower	1B.1	Low
Cryptantha clokeyi	Clokey's cryptantha	1B.2	Low
Eriastrum rosamondense	Rosamond eriastrum	1B.1	Low
Eriophyllum mohavense	Barstow wooly sunflower	1B.2	Low
Loeflingia squarrosa var. *artemisiarum*	sagebrush loeflingia	2B.2	Low
Opuntia basilaris var. *brachyclada*	short-joint beavertail	1B.2	Low
Packera ionophylla	Tehachapi ragwort	4.3	Low
Puccinella simplex	California alkali grass	1B.2	Low
Amphibians			
Emys marmorata	Western pond turtle	SSC	Low
Rana draytonii	California red-legged frog	FT, SSC	Low
Reptiles			
Anniella pulchra pulchra	silvery legless lizard	SSC	Low
Gopherus agassizii	Desert tortoise	FT, ST	Low
Phrynosoma blainvillii	coast horned lizard	SSC	Low
Thamnophis hammondii	two-striped garter snake	SSC	Low
Birds			
Accipiter cooperii	Cooper's hawk	CDFW:WL	Low
Agelaius tricolor	tricolored blackbird	SE, SSC	Low

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status	Potential to Occur Onsite
Aimophila ruficeps canescens	southern California rufous-crowned sparrow	CDFW:WL	Low
Aquila chrysaetos	golden eagle	CDFW: FP, WL	Low
Artemisiospiza belli belli	Bell's sage sparrow	CDFW:WL	Low
Asio flammeus	short-eared owl	SSC	Low
Athene cunicularia	burrowing owl	SSC	Low
Buteo regalis	ferruginous hawk	CDFW: WL	Low
Buteo swainsoni	Swainson's hawk	ST	Low
Charadrius alexandrines nivosus	Western snowy plover	SSC	Low
Charadrius montanus	mountain plover	SSC	Low
Falco columbarius	merlin	CDFW:WL	Low
Lanius ludovicianus	loggerhead shrike	SSC	Medium
Plegadis chihi	White-faced ibis	WL	Low
Toxostoma lecontei	Le Conte's thrasher	SSC	Low
Vireo bellii pusillus	least Bell's vireo	FE, SE	Low
Mammals			
Corynorhinus townsendii	Townsend's big-eared bat	SCT, SSC	Low
Onychomys torridus ramona	southern grasshopper mouse	SSC	Low
Taxidea taxus	American badger	SSC	Low
Xerospermophilus mohavensis	Mohave ground squirrel	ST	Low

Key:

Status:
FE: Federally Endangered
FT: Federally Threatened
FD: Federally Delisted
SE: State Endangered
ST: State listed as threatened
SCT: State candidate for listing as Threatened
SR: State listed as rare
SD: State Delisted
SSC: California Species of Special Concern
FP: Fully protected by the state of California
WL: CDFW Watch List

California Rare Plant Rank:
1B = Rare or Endangered in California and elsewhere
2B= Plants Rare, Threatened, or Endangered in California, But More Common Elsewhere
4 = Plants of limited distribution - Watch list
.1 = Seriously endangered in California (>80% of occurrences threatened)
.2 = Fairly endangered in California (20-80% occurrences threatened)
.3 = Not very endangered in California (<20% of occurrences threatened)

APPENDIX B:
Plants and Wildlife Observed During Field Surveys

Table 2. Plant and wildlife species observed within the Project area.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Family	Native/Non-Native
Amaranthus blitoides	prostrate pigweed	Amaranthaceae	Native
Ambrosia psilostachya	western ragweed	Asteraceae	Native
Ambrosia salsola	Russian thistle	Chenopodiaceae	Non-native
Atriplex canascens	Four-winged saltbush	Chenopodiaceae	Native
Atriplex polycarpa	allscale	Chenopodiaceae	Native
Bromus diandrus	ripgut brome	Poaceae	Non-native
Bromus. rubens	red brome	Poaceae	Non-native,
Chenopodium album	goosefoot	Chenopodiaceae	Non-native
Conyza canadensis	horseweed	Asteraceae	Native
Croton californica	croton	Euphorbiaceae	Native
Datura stramonium	jimson weed	Solanaceae	Native
Distichilis spicata	saltgrass	Poaceae	Native
Ericemeria nauseosa	rubber rabbitbrush	Asteraceae	Native
Heliotropum convolvulaceum	phlox heliotrope	Boraginaceae	Native
Helminthotheca echioides	bristly ox-tongue	Asteraceae	Non-native
Hirschfeldia incana	summer mustard	Brassicaceae	Non-native,
Marrubium vulgare	horehound	Lamiaceae	Non-native
Plantago erecta	California plantain	Plantaginaceae	Native
Rumex acetosella	common sheep sorrel	Polygonaceae	Native
Rumex hymenosepalus	dock	Polygonceae	Native
Schismus barbatus	meditrianian schismus	Poasceae	Non-Native
Stephanomeria runcinata	wire lettuce	Asteraceae	Native
Tamarix sp.	saltcedar	Tamaricaceae	Non-native
Tribulus terrestris	Puncture vine	Zygophyllaceae	Non-native
Yucca brevifolia	Joshua tree	Agavaceae	Native

Table 3. List of wildlife observed within the Project Site

Scientific Name	Common Name
Reptiles	
Sceloporus occidentalis longipes	Great Basin fence lizard
Birds	
Cathartes aura	turkey vulture
Columba livia	rock pigeon
Corvus corax	common raven
Haemorhous mexicanus	house finch
Mammals	
Otospermophilus beecheyi	California ground squirrel
Lepus californicus	Jackrabbit

APPENDIX C:
Site Photographs

Photo 1. *Atriplex canascens* Shrubland Alliance (Fourwing Saltbush Scrub).

Photo 2. *Atriplex canascens* Shrubland Alliance (Fourwing Saltbush Scrub).

Photo 3. *Schismus barbatus/Salsola tragus* Herbaceous Alliance (Mediterranean Grass/Russian Thistle Scrub).

Photo 4. Non-vegetated disturbed areas with Mediterranean Grass/Russian Thistle Scrub.

Photo 5. Joshua tree.