



INFORMATION SUMMARY

- A. Report Date: April 28th, 2015
- B. Report Title: MSHCP Focused Burrowing Owl Surveys for the 37.08 Acre Decker Parcels I Project Site, Unincorporated Western Riverside County, California
- C. Case #: N/A
- D. APN#s: 314-040-001, 314-040-002, 314-040-003, and 314-040-008.
- E. Project Location: USGS 7.5' series Steele Peak Quadrangle, Riverside County, Township 4 South, Range 4 West, northeastern portion of Section 2. Located immediately southeast of the intersection of Decker Road and Old Oleander Avenue.
- F. Applicant: Trammell Crow Company
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- G. MOU Principal: Cadre Environmental
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Contact: Ruben S. Ramirez, Jr. (949) 300-0212
USFWS permit #TE780566-12
- H. Date of Surveys: August 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st 2014.
- I. Summary: The 37.08 acre Project Site is dominated by disturbed habitats, gravel road/sprays, non-native trees, and existing structures which is described in the following letter and illustrated in Figure 1, *Biological Resources Map*.
- The Project Site is located within the western portion of the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Mead Valley Plan Area. The Project Site is not a part of an MSHCP Criteria Cell or Area Plan Subunit (SU).

The MSHCP has determined that all of the sensitive species potentially occurring onsite have been adequately covered (MSHCP Table 2-2 Species Considered for Conservation Under the MSHCP Since 1999, 2004). However, additional surveys may be required wildlife species if suitable habitat is documented onsite and/or if the property is located within a predetermined “Survey Area” (MSHCP 2004).

The Project Site is located within a predetermined Survey Area for the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) and a single burrowing owl was recorded onsite in 2006 (CNDDDB 2014). Based on this historic observation and the presence of suitable habitat documented during the habitat assessment within and adjacent to the Project Site, focused surveys were required.

A single (1) adult burrowing owl was detected foraging and utilizing a network of burrow sites within the property. At a minimum and as a condition of approval, a 30-day preconstruction survey will be required immediately prior to the initiation of construction to ensure protection for this species and compliance with the conservation goals as outlined in the MSHCP.

SUBJECT

MSHCP Focused Burrowing Owl Surveys for the 37.08 Acre (Decker Parcels I) APNs 314-040-001, 314-040-002, 314-040-003, and 314-040-008 Project Site, Unincorporated Western Riverside County, California

This report presents the findings of focused burrowing owl surveys conducted for the approximately 37.08-acre project site (“Project Site”), (APNs) 314-040-001, 314-040-002, 314-040-003, and 314-040-008 in the unincorporated region of Western Riverside County, California.

The 37.08 acre Project Site is located in Western Riverside County and occurs within the US Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5’ series Steele Peak Quadrangle, Township 4 South, Range 4 West, northeastern portion of Section 2. The Project Site is located immediately southeast of the intersection of Decker Road and Old Oleander Avenue. The Project Site is located entirely within the Western Riverside County MSHCP Mead Valley Area Plan. The Project Site is not located within an MSHCP Criteria Area Cell or Area Plan Subunit.

This report incorporates the findings of a literature review, compilation of existing documentation, and a field reconnaissance and focused surveys conducted on August 28th, 29th, 30th, and 31st 2014.

This documentation is consistent with accepted scientific and technical standards and the requirements of the MSHCP. When appropriate, general biological resources are described in summary form in an effort to provide the reader with adequate background information.

METHODS OF STUDY

APPROACH

Prior to visiting the Project Site, a review of all available and relevant data on the biological characteristics, sensitive habitats, and species potentially present on or adjacent to the Project Site was conducted. Additionally, aerial photography, a USGS topographic map, and digital ortho quarter quadrangle (DOQQ) data were examined. After reviewing the available information, Cadre Environmental conducted a physical site assessment/burrow and focused survey.

As required by the MSHCP, and during the initial property assessment process, all Project Site APN's were searched using the Conservation Report Summary Generator to determine if additional surveys for wildlife not adequately covered by the MSHCP may be required. The Project Site is located within a predetermined Survey Area for the burrowing owl.

Plant Community/Habitat Classification and Mapping

Plant communities were preliminarily mapped with the aid of an aerial photograph using the MSHCP uncollapsed vegetation communities classification system and Holland (1986)/CDFG (2003) vegetation community classification systems when appropriate. When a vegetation community could not be accurately characterized using this information, an updated community classification code was developed to more accurately represent onsite habitat types.

General Wildlife Inventory

General wildlife surveys were not conducted during the general biological habitat assessment. However, animals identified during the reconnaissance survey by sight, call, tracks, nests, scat, remains, or other signs were recorded in field notes. All wildlife was identified in the field with the aid of binoculars and taxonomic keys (if applicable). Vertebrate taxonomy followed in this report is according to Stebbins (1985) for amphibians and reptiles, the American Ornithologists' Union (1983 and supplemental) for birds, and Jones et al. (1997) for mammals. Scientific names are used during the first mention of a species; common names only are used in the remainder of the text (if applicable).

Burrowing Owl Surveys

In accordance with the MSHCP Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions (2006), survey protocol consists of two steps, Step I – Habitat Assessment and Step II – Locating Burrows and Burrowing Owls. Step II is comprised of two parts, Part A: Focused Burrow Surveys and Part B: Focused Burrowing Owl Surveys.

Each step is briefly outlined below, followed by the methodology and results of each survey conducted within the Project Site. All initial habitat assessment, burrow and focused surveys were conducted by Ruben Ramirez.

Surveys were conducted during weather that is conducive to observing owls outside their burrows and detecting burrowing owl sign. Surveys were not conducted during rain, high winds (> 20 mph), dense fog, or temperatures over 90 °F. None of the surveys were conducted within five (5) days of measurable precipitation.

In addition to the MSHCP guidelines, field notes were taken daily. These notes recorded the date, location, animal species observed, and general habitat characteristics of each area and habitat examined that day.

Step I – Habitat Assessment

Step 1 of the MSHCP habitat assessment for burrowing owl consists of a walking survey to determine if suitable habitat is present onsite. Cadre Environmental

conducted the habitat assessment on August 21st and 25th 2014. Upon arrival at the Project Site, and prior to initiating the assessment survey, Cadre Environmental used binoculars to scan all suitable habitats on and adjacent to the property, including perch locations, to ascertain owl presence.

All suitable areas of the Project Site were surveyed on foot by walking slowly and methodically while recording/mapping areas that may represent suitable owl habitat onsite. Primary indicators of suitable burrowing owl habitat in western Riverside County include, but are not limited to, native and non-native grassland, interstitial grassland within shrub lands, shrub lands with low density shrub cover, golf courses, drainage ditches, earthen berms, unpaved airfields, pastureland, dairies, fallow fields, and agricultural use areas. Burrowing owls typically use burrows made by fossorial mammals, such as ground squirrels (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) or badgers (*Taxidea taxus*), but they often utilize man-made structures, such as earthen berms, cement culverts, cement, asphalt, rock, or wood debris piles, or openings beneath cement or asphalt pavement. Burrowing owls are often found within, under, or in close proximity to man-made structures.

According to the MSHCP guidelines, if suitable habitat is present the biologist should also walk the perimeter of the property, which consists of a 150-meter (approximately 500 feet) buffer zone around the Project Site boundary. If permission to access the buffer area cannot be obtained, the biologist shall not trespass, but visually inspect adjacent habitats with binoculars. In addition to surveying the entire Project Site all adjacent natural habitats located immediately adjacent to the northeast boundary was assessed.

Results from the habitat assessment indicate that suitable resources for burrowing owl are present throughout the Project Site primarily within the disturbed and rock outcrop habitats as illustrated in Figure 1, *Biological Resources Map*. Accordingly, if suitable habitat is documented onsite, both Step II surveys and the 30-day pre-construction surveys are required in order to comply with the MSHCP guidelines.

Step II – Locating Burrows and Burrowing Owls

Concurrent with the initial habitat assessment, a detailed focused burrow survey was conducted and included documentation of appropriately sized natural burrows or suitable man-made structures that may be utilized by burrowing owl - as part of the MSHCP protocol, which is described below under Part A.

Part A: Focused Burrow Survey

A systematic survey for burrows, including burrowing owl sign, was conducted by walking across all suitable habitats mapped within the Project Site on August 28th 2014. Pedestrian survey transects were spaced to allow 100% visual coverage of the ground surface. The distances between transect centerlines were no more than 20 meters (approximately 66 ft.) apart, and owing to the terrain, often much smaller. Transect

routes were also adjusted to account for ridge lines and in general ground surface visibility.

All observations of suitable burrows or dens, natural or man-made, or sightings of burrowing owl, were recorded and mapped during the survey.

Part B: Focused Burrowing Owl Surveys

Four (4) focused burrowing owl surveys (in addition to the initial focused burrow survey – Step II, Part A) were conducted in August 2014 from one hour before sunrise to two hours after sunrise as outlined in Table 1, *Burrowing Owl Survey Schedule*. During visual surveys, all potentially suitable burrow or structure entrances were investigated for signs of owl occupation, such as feathers, tracks, or pellets, and carefully observed to determine if burrowing owls utilize these features, when present. All burrows are monitored at a short distance from the entrance, and at a location that would not interfere with potential owl behavior, when present. In addition to monitoring potential burrow locations, all suitable habitats in the Project Site were walked along transects averaging 20 meters (approximately 66 feet) between centerlines.

Table 1 – Burrowing Owl Survey Schedule

Survey	Dates (Conditions) 2014
1	August 28 th - 68°F to 84°F, winds 0-2mph, no rain
2	August 29 th - 66°F to 82°F, winds 2-4mph, no rain
3	August 30 th - 62°F to 86°F, winds 0-4mph, no rain
4	August 31 st - 63°F to 84°F, winds 2-4mph, no rain

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The majority of the Project Site is flat, however some low, gently rolling topography are present with the highest point at 1,610 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) in the southwest corner of the Project Site and the lowest point at 1,557 feet AMSL in the northeast corner. The Project Site is occupied by disturbed habitats, gravel road/splays, non-native trees, and structures.

The Project Site is bound by residential development to the south, industrial areas to the northeast, and open space to the east, west, and north. Interstate 215 is located approximately 2,300 feet to the east of the Project Site.

Plant Community/Habitat Classification

Natural community names and hierarchical structure follows the CDFW “*List of California Terrestrial Natural Communities*” or Holland (1986) classification systems, which have been refined and augmented where appropriate to better characterize the habitat types observed onsite when not addressed by the MSHCP classification system.

Disturbed (31.04 acres)

Disturbed habitats include those regions of the Project Site generally devoid of vegetation and/or dominated by ruderal and other disturbance-adapted species. The Project Site (primarily APN 314-040-001) appears to have been disked for agricultural purposes in the recent past. Species found within these habitats include a large diversity of non-native species including red brome (*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*), Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), summer mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), and tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*). Native species are also common throughout and include telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), vinegarweed (*Trichostema lanceolatum*), dove weed (*Croton setigerus*), spurge (*Chamaesyce* sp.) common sandaster (*Corethrogyne filaginifolia*), Palmer's goldenbush (*Ericameria palmeri*), and coyote gourd (*Cucurbita palmate*).

Rock outcrops, are also common throughout these disturbed habitats and provide refugia for native species such as valley cholla (*Opuntia parryi*) and California buckwheat (*Erigonum fasciculatum*).

Gravel Road/Splay (5.36 acres)

A substantial gravel splay is present in the northeast region of the Project Site (within APN 314-040-001). Disturbance-adapted species, listed above, are colonizing these areas, but they remain largely unvegetated. Gravel roads are also found in APNs 314-040-002 and 3124-040008, and are associated with the onsite residence.

Structure (0.37 acres)

A single residence and several outbuildings are present on the Project Site, primarily in and around APNs 314-040-002 and 314-040-008.

Olive (0.22 acres)

Two stands of non-native olive (*Olea europaea*) trees are present onsite in the north-central portion of APN 314-040-008.

Peruvian Pepper Tree (0.07 acres)

Peruvian pepper trees (*Schinus molle*) are common on the Project Site, primarily in and around APNs 314-040-002 and 314-040-008.

Mexican Palo Verde (0.02 acres)

Mexican palo verde (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) trees are present in the extreme southeast corner of the Project Site in APN 314-040-003.

WILDLIFE POPULATIONS

General wildlife species documented onsite or within the vicinity during the site visit and/or during previous surveys include side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), rock dove (*Columba livia*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), black phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*), Say's phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), western kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*), house finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), and European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). Mammals documented onsite include California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*), San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus bennettii*; California Species of Special Concern [CSC]), domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*), and coyote (*Canis latrans*).

RESULTS

Suitable burrowing owl foraging habitat was documented throughout the Project Site and potential burrow structures were concentrated within and near the rock outcrops as illustrated in Figure 2, *Current Project Site Photographs*.

A single (1) adult burrowing owl was detected foraging and utilizing a network of burrow sites within the property as illustrated in Figure 1, *Biological Resources Map*. At a minimum and as a condition of approval, a 30-day preconstruction survey will be required immediately prior to the initiation of construction to ensure protection for this species and compliance with the conservation goals as outlined in the MSHCP.

REFERENCES

- American Ornithologist Union (AOU). 1998. Check-list of North American Birds. 7th ed. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, DC.
- Cadre Environmental. 2015. Final Draft General MSHCP Habitat Assessment, Regulatory Constraints Analysis, and Consistency Analysis for the 37.08 Acre Decker Parcels, in Unincorporated Western Riverside County, California.
- California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB). 2014. Sensitive Element Record Search for the Steele Peak Quadrangle. California Department of Fish and Game. Sacramento, California.
- California Department of Fish and Game. 2011. Special Animals. Natural Heritage Division, Natural Diversity Data Base.
- California Department of Fish and Game. 2012. Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation, State of California Natural Resources Agency.
- County of Riverside. 2006. Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions – Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area.
- Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP) Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), March 2004.

ATTACHMENTS

Figure 1 - Biological Resources Map

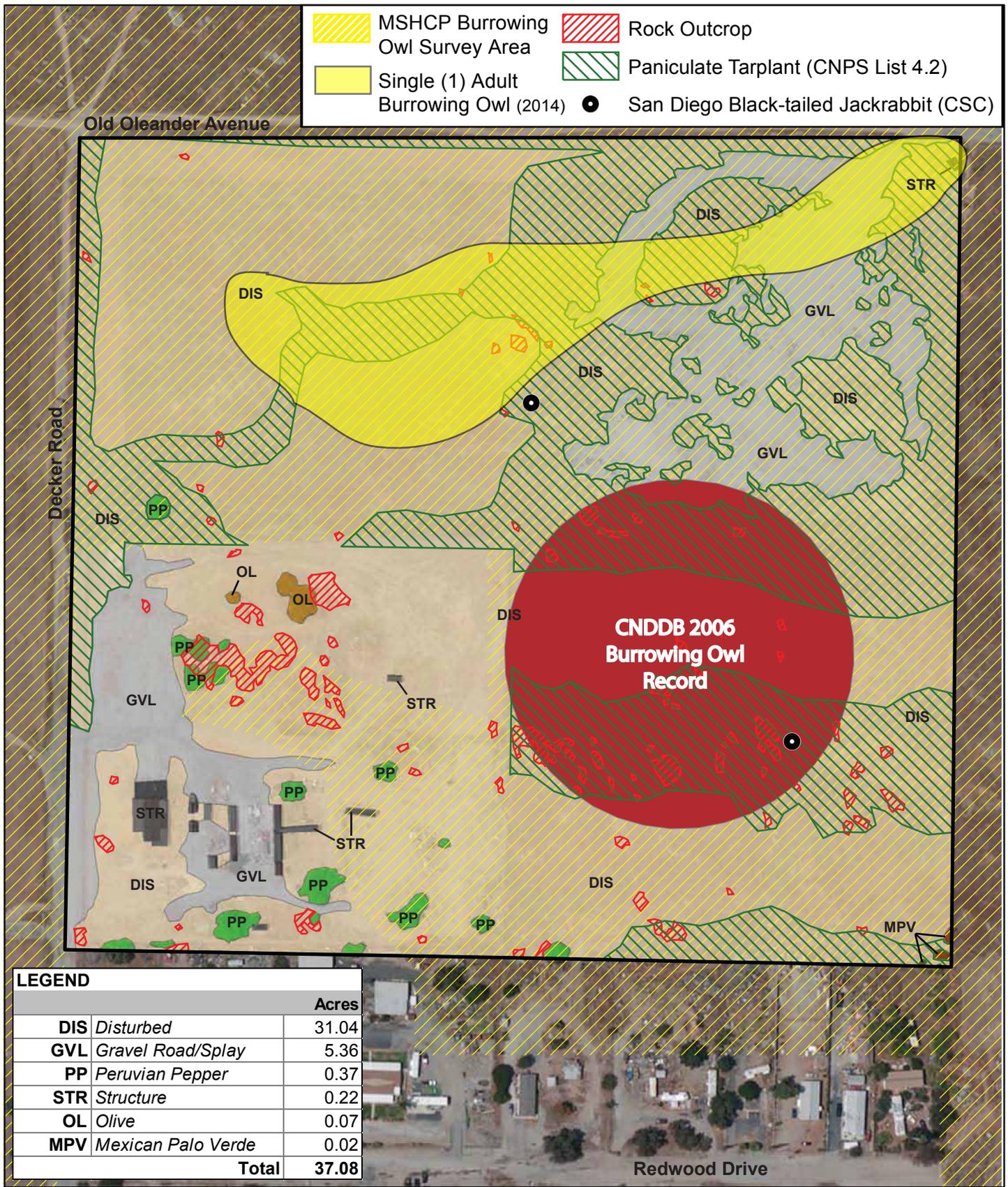
Figure 2 - Current Project Site Photographs

Certification

“I hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits present the data and information required for this biological evaluation, and that the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.”

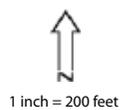
Author:  Date: April 28th, 2015

Fieldwork Performed By: 



APNs: 314-040-001, 314-040-002, 314-040-003, and 314-040-008

Figure 1 Biological Resources Map
 MSHCP Burrowing Owl Survey Report
 Decker Parcels I





PHOTOGRAPH 1 - Southwestern view from northeastern region of APN 314-040-003; disturbed habitats are prevalent throughout the Project Site and represent suitable habitat for burrowing owl.



PHOTOGRAPH 2 - Northwestern view from eastern region of APN 314-040-003; rock outcrops and burrows are common throughout the Project Site and provide suitable habitat for the burrowing owl.