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February 29, 2008

City of Salinas  
Planning and Zoning Department  
200 Lincoln Avenue  
Salinas, CA 93901

*RE: Biological survey report for the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park, Abbott Street and Harris Road, Salinas, CA. APNs 177-133-004, 177-133-005, 177-133-007.*

Dear Planners of the City of Salinas:

I surveyed the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property on February 23, 2008.

**METHOD OF SURVEY**

I surveyed the entire property on foot. Binoculars were used for observation of birds and other wildlife and to insure that all areas were thoroughly covered visually. The data obtained was used for this report and for the attached species list. Observations took place from afternoon through early evening.

I also quickly looked over the surrounding area adjacent to the project site to check for the presence of sensitive habitat and rare, endangered or threatened species (sensitive species) that could be indirectly impacted by this development.

**THE PROPERTY AND PROJECT**

The entire property is 257.7 acres in size. It is roughly rectangular in shape with its long axis oriented in a northwest to southeast direction. It has frontage on Abbott Street on its northeastern side and frontage on Harris Road on its southeastern side.

The property is currently entirely in agricultural usage for row crops. The property is proposed for development of agriculturally related industries.

**ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW**

The geography of the property is relatively flat, valley floor. All portions of the property were plowed into rows, but were not planted, at the time of my survey with dirt roads bisecting the property along boundaries of separate fields.

I found the natural values of the property to be very low, with naturalized, non-native annual weeds dominating. Unplanted vegetation is sparse on the property and the habitat is best classified as

ruderal with some elements of the non-native grassland plant community present. Over 95 percent of the plant species present are naturalized, non-native annuals.

No plant or animal species classified as a sensitive species, or sensitive habitat, such as wetland habitats, were found on or within 100 feet of any portion of the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property on my survey.

#### SENSITIVE HABITAT

No sensitive habitat was found on or within 100 feet of the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property on my survey.

The closest areas of sensitive habitat to the property are wetland habitats such as the riparian habitat bordering the Salinas River, which reaches its closest approach to the property approximately 1.75 miles to the south. There are also some drainage ditches and agricultural reservoirs to the north and east of the property that could potentially contain some wetland habitat. The most likely possibilities for this are close to or over two miles to the east.

There used to be some riparian habitat along the course of the nearby Alisal Slough, which is actually an alternate channel of the Salinas River to the north and east of its primary channel. A bend of the Alisal Slough used to border the southwestern corner of the property, but all that is now left of it are some low areas that are in the process of being filled. I did not observe any wetland habitat in these low areas, although they contained water, due to recent heavy rains, at the time of my survey. Since the course of most of the Alisal Slough is through what is now prime agricultural land and the City of Salinas, it has largely been filled and most of its original path is difficult to locate.

#### SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES

No sensitive plant species were observed on or within 100 feet of the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property on my survey.

California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Data Base records for the Salinas Quadrangle and Natividad Quadrangle and surrounding areas do not show any records for sensitive plant species on the property.

The following are records for sensitive plant species from the current California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Data Base for the Salinas Quadrangle and Natividad Quadrangle and surrounding areas that could possibly exist in the habitats present on the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property.

1. Congdon's tarplant (*Centromadia parryi* ssp. *congdonii*). The closest records for this plant are present at approximately 3.9 miles to the southeast, approximately 4.6 miles to the southeast, approximately 3.8 miles to the east-northeast and approximately .9 miles to the north-northwest of the property. Congdon's tarplant is only found in relatively level grassland areas in the central coast area. It is threatened by continuing development. It is

a federal species of special concern and is on the California Native Plant Society's list 1B, which includes plants rare, threatened and endangered in California and elsewhere.

2. Alkali milk vetch (*Astragalus tener* var. *tener*). A record for this plant is present at approximately 2.5 miles to the north-northwest. This record is from 1889 and this population is likely to be extinct since the natural habitat that once supported this occurrence has been almost entirely replaced by urban and agricultural environments. This plant is also threatened by continuing development and is also on the California Native Plant Society's list 1B.

These plants were specifically searched for on the property and none were found.

Most of the other sensitive plant species found on the Salinas Quadrangle and Natividad Quadrangle and surrounding areas have records that are farther away from the property and are less likely to be present in the habitats present on it. Many of them are found in the central maritime chaparral plant community which is most commonly found on the sandy soils of the Fort Ord area and north Monterey County and are not likely to be present in valley floor habitats like that of the project site.

All sensitive plant species that have been found on the Salinas Quadrangle and surrounding area were thoroughly searched for in my survey as were other sensitive plant species known to occur in the greater local area from California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Data Base records and from occurrences known to myself and other botanists familiar with the local area.

#### SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES

No sensitive animal species were observed on or within 100 feet of the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property on my survey.

California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Data Base records for the Salinas Quadrangle and Natividad Quadrangle and surrounding areas do not show any records for sensitive animal species on the property.

The only sensitive animal species with California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Data Base records for the Salinas Quadrangle and Natividad Quadrangle and surrounding areas within a three-mile radius of the property is the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*). The closest records for this species to the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property are approximately .7 mile to the northeast around the Salinas Municipal Airport, 2.5 miles to the northeast and 3 miles to the northwest.

Burrowing owls are found in and around the Salinas Valley, usually in association with California ground squirrel colonies since they use their abandoned burrows for nesting sites. None were observed on my survey. It is not likely that they would be nesting on the on the property since no California ground squirrel colonies or other suitable nesting areas were found on the property. The property does not contain optimum habitat for foraging by burrowing owls, but numerous burrows of valley pocket gophers and other rodents were observed on some of the berms between fields and these could potentially serve as food for burrowing owls and other predatory birds.

Burrowing owls are not a state or federally listed species. They are, however, classified as a Species of Special Concern by the California Department of Fish and Game, a Bird of Conservation Concern by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, a Sensitive Species by the Bureau of Land Management and a Threatened Species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Burrowing owls are declining in numbers in Monterey County due to such impacts as development of their nesting and foraging areas and predation by the introduced red fox, cats and dogs and other predators. They are now quite rare in northern Monterey County but are still locally abundant in some areas of south Monterey County.

There are three listed species of amphibians that have been found in and near wetland habitats in Monterey County. These species are the California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*), which is federally listed as threatened and is a state species of special concern, the California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum californiense*), which is federally listed as threatened and the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum croceum*), which is listed as endangered by both the state and federal governments.

It is unlikely that they could be present on the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property since wetland habitat is not present on the property, but wetland habitat is present along the Salinas River approximately 1.75 miles to the south and others may be present within a two-mile radius. Dispersal of these amphibians to the project property from any suitable habitat would be highly unlikely due to the inhospitable terrain of intensively farmed agricultural land, roads, businesses and Highway 101 that would have to be crossed to get to it.

The California red-legged frog and the California tiger salamander are much more likely to be present in suitable habitats in this area than the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander. Temporary as well as permanent water sources can serve as breeding areas for these amphibians. No evidence of these amphibians was observed on my visual search of the terrestrial habitats on the property for adults.

There are several other significant animal species with ranges that include the local area that are not state or federally listed, but are classified by various agencies as species of special concern, protected or sensitive species. Some of these are candidates for listing and many are simply uncommon and/or restricted in distribution. These species are the western pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*), California legless lizard (*Anniella pulchra pulchra*), California horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum frontale*), two-striped garter snake (*Thamnophis hammondi*), white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*), ornate shrew (*Sorex ornatus*), pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), Monterey dusky-footed woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes luciana*), and badger (*Taxidea taxus*).

California legless lizards and more rarely, California horned lizards, are occasionally found in Monterey County. California legless lizards burrow in loose, sandy soils. They are highly secretive and difficult to find but appear to be widespread in sandy soils, such as those of active and prehistoric sand dunes, which are widespread in north Monterey County. Neither of these reptiles was found on my survey and they are unlikely to be present in the heavy, fine-grained, adobe type soil that I observed on the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property.

No evidence of two-striped garter snakes or of other sensitive species of reptiles was found on my survey. Dead vegetation and other refuse was turned over in my search for these and other animals.

No Monterey dusky-footed woodrat nests were found on my field survey. They are most likely to be present in coast live oak forest habitat, which is not present on the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property.

No evidence for the presence of badgers was observed on the property. They are occasionally reported in the more rural areas of Monterey County.

#### **IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

Impacts to biological values on the property from this project will be minimal. All development and construction related disturbance will be on areas with very low biological values that are highly disturbed from ongoing, intensive row-crop agriculture. No sensitive habitat or sensitive plant or animal species were observed on my survey on or within 100 feet of the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property.

#### **MONITORING AND ADDITIONAL WORK**

Monitoring inspections will not be necessary on this property due to the low level of impacts to biological values present on the property produced by the proposed development.

A spring survey of biological resources will not be necessary since the survey for preparation of the species list was done in late February of a wet year and the significant elements of the local annual flora were identifiable.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE PROJECT**

The project proposed for the Salinas Agricultural-Industrial Business Park Property is consistent with the biological values present. Impacts of the proposed development will be a level of insignificance and the proposed project is in compliance with the regulations and standards of the City of Salinas concerning biological values and county, state and federal agencies concerned with the maintenance of habitat quality and protection of biological resources.

Please call me if you have any questions.

Ed Mercurio  
Biological Consultant

