CEQA INITIAL STUDY FORM

1. **Project Title:** Rice Creek Re-Alignment and Restoration Project

2. **Lead Agency Name and Address:**

   California Regional Water Quality Control Board
   Los Angeles Region
   320 W. 4th St., Suite 200
   Los Angeles, CA 90013-2343

3. **Contact Person and Phone Number:** LB Nye
   (213) 576-6785

4. **Project Location:** Ventura River Preserve – See Attached Map

5. **Project Sponsor's Name and Address:** Brian Stark
   Ojai Valley land Conservancy
   P.O. Box 1092
   Ojai, CA 93024

6. **General Plan Designation:** Open Space

7. **Zoning:** Open Space

8. **Specific Plan/Redevelopment Plan Designation:** N/A

9. **Description of Project:**

   The project consists of the re-alignment of Rice Creek, a tributary of the Ventura River, from an artificial channel back into its native, natural channel. The project also includes planting approximately 10,000 native plants along the restored stream...

10. **Surrounding Land Use and Setting: (Briefly describe the project's surroundings.)**

    The project site is located on a protected open space preserve owned and managed by the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, a non-profit land trust. The surrounding 1,600 acres are open to the public for recreational and educational uses. The land is managed for improved wildlife habitats and recreational trails. Lands along the eastern border of the Preserve are developed in residential uses. Land to the south is privately owned and undeveloped. Land to the north is owned by the Casitas Municipal Water Company and houses water diversion facilities and fish passage facilities. To the west, the Preserve borders the Los Padres National Forest. The land is otherwise undeveloped. The project lies some distance to

neighboring properties and project activities are not anticipated to result in any off-site impacts or changes in land use.

11. Other public agencies whose approval is or may be required (e.g. permits, financing, approval, or participation agreement):

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CA Department of Fish and Game, CA Regional Water Quality Control Board, County of Ventura.

12. Sources consulted in preparing Initial Study.

Ventura County General Plan
RareFind3 Database - CNDDB
USFWS Critical Habitat Mapper
U.S. National Wetlands Inventory Mapping
Restoration Plan for the El Nido Ventura River Preserve
Ventura County Air Quality Assessment Guidelines
South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) CEQA Handbook
Safe Harbor Agreement Between the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
CDFG Avoidance Measures required in the CDFG Operation of Law Letter

Environmental Factors Potentially Affected

Environmental factors checked below would be potentially affected by this project as indicated by the checklist on the following pages.

Section 3. Geological problems
Section 4. Water
Section 5. Air Quality
Section 7. Biological Resources
Section 9. Hazards
Section 10. Noise
Section 14. Cultural Resources

Determination

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

☐ I found that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.

☒ I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because the mitigation measures described on an attached sheet have been added to the project. A NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.

☐ I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.

☐ I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect(s) on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets, if the effect is a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated." An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.

☐ I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environments, there WILL NOT be a significant effect in this case because all potentially significant effects (a) have been adequately addressed in an earlier EIR pursuant to applicable standards and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR, including revisions to the project design or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

Printed Name

CEQA INITIAL STUDY CHECKLIST

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
1. LAND USE AND PLANNING:				
A. Conflict with the general plan designation or zoning?	X			
B. Conflict with applicable environmental plans or policies adopted by agencies with jurisdiction over the project?	X			
C. Be incompatible with existing land use in the vicinity?	X			
D. Affect agricultural resources or operations (e.g. impacts to soils or farmlands, or impacts from the incompatible land uses)?	X			
E. Disrupt or divide the physical arrangement of an established community (including a low-income or minority community)?	X			
2. POPULATION AND HOUSING:	t			
A. Cumulatively exceed official regional or local population projections?	X			
B. Induce substantial growth in an area either directly or indirectly (e.g. through projects in an undeveloped area or extension of major infrastructure)?	X			
C. Displace existing housing, especially affordable housing?	X			
D. Displace substantial numbers of people, necessitating construction of replacement housing?	X			

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
3. GEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS:				
A. Fault Rupture?	X			
B. Seismic ground shaking?	X			
C. Seismic ground failure, including liquefaction?	X			
D. Seiche, tsunami, or volcanic hazard?	X			
E. Landslides or mudflows?	X			
F. Erosion, changes in topography or unstable soil conditions from excavation, grading, or fill?			X	
G. Expansive soils?	X			
H. Subsidence of the land?	X			
I. Unique geologic or physical features?	X			
4. WATER QUALITY / HYRDROLOGY				
A. Changes in absorption rates, drainage patterns, or the rate and amount or surface runoff?		X		
B. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?	X			
C. Discharge into surface water or other alteration of surface water quality (e.g. temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity)?		X		
D. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body?		X		
E. Changes in currents, or the course or direction of water movements?		X		

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
F. Change in the quantity of ground waters, either through direct additions or withdrawals, or through interception of an aquifer by cuts or excavations or through substantial loss of groundwater recharge or capability?	X			
G. Altered direction or rate of flow of groundwater?	X			
H. Impacts to groundwater quality?	X			
I. Substantial reduction in the amount of groundwater otherwise available for public water supplies?	X			
J. Placement of structures within the 100-year floodplain as mapped on a federal Flood Hazard Boundary or Flood Insurance Rate map or other flood delineation that may impede or redirect flood flow.	X			
5. AIR QUALITY:				
A. Violate any air quality standard or contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation?			X	
B. Expose sensitive receptors to pollutants?	X			
C. Alter air movement, moisture, or temperature, or cause any change in climate?	X			
D. Create objectionable odors?	X			
E. Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?				X

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
6. TRANSPORTATION/CIRCULATION:				
A. Increased vehicle trips or traffic congestion?	X			
B. Hazards to safety from design features (e.g. sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g. farm equipment)?	X			
C. Inadequate emergency access or access to nearby uses?	X			
D. Insufficient parking capacity on-site or off site?	X			
E. Conflict with adopted policies, plans, or programs regarding public transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities, or otherwise decrease the performance of safety of such facilities.	X			
7. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES:				
A. Endangered, threatened or rare species or their habitats (including but not limited to plants, fish, insects, animals, and birds)?			X	
B. Locally designated species (e.g. heritage trees)?			X	
C. Locally designated natural communities (e.g. oak forest, coastal habitat, etc.)?	X			
D. Wetlands habitat (e.g. marsh, riparian, and vernal pool)?			X	
E. Wildlife dispersal or mitigation corridors?	X			
F. Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	X			

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
G. Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan.	X			
8. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES:				
A. Conflict with adopted energy conservation plans?	X			
B. Use non-renewable resources in a wasteful and inefficient manner?	X			
C. Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of future value to the region and the residents of the State?	X			
D. 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.	X			
9. HAZARDS:				
A. A risk of accidental explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to: oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation)?			X	
B. Possible interference with an emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	X			
C. The creation of any health hazard or potential health hazard?	X			
D. Exposure of people to existing sources of potential health hazards?			X	
E. Increased fire hazard in areas with flammable brush, grass, or trees?	X			

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
F. Expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands.	X			
10. NOISE:				
A. Increases in existing noise levels?				X
B. Exposure of people to severe noise levels?				X
11. PUBLIC SERVICES:				
A. Fire protection?	X			
B. Police protection?	X			
C. Schools?	X			
D. Other governmental services?	X			
E. Maintenance of public facilities, including roads?	X			
12. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS:				
A. Power or natural gas?	X			
B. Communications systems?	X			
C. Local or regional water treatment or distribution facilities?	X			
D. Sewer or septic tanks?	X			
E. Storm waste disposal?	X			

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
F. Solid waste disposal?	X			
G. Local or regional water supplies?	X			
13. AESTHETICS:				
A. Affect the scenic vista or scenic highways?	X			
B. Have a demonstrable negative aesthetic effect?	X			
C. Create light or glare?	X			
14. CULTURAL RESOURCES:				
A. Disturb paleontological resources?	X			
B. Disturb archaeological resources?	X			
C. Affect historical resources?	X			
D. Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries.	X			
15. RECREATION:				
A. Increase the demand for neighborhood or regional parks or other recreational facilities?	X			
B. Affect existing recreational opportunities?	X			
C. Would the project increase use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?	X			

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
16. AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY				
A. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	X			
17. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS				
A. Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment.				X
B. Conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gasses.	X			
18. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE:				
A. Does the project have the potential to 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 important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	X			
B. Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals?	X			
C. 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.)	X			

WOULD THE PROPOSAL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:	No Impact	Potential Significant Impact	Less Than Significant when Mitigation Included	Less Than Significant Impact
D. Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	X			

EXPLANATION OF RESPONSES

LAND USE AND PLANNING

NO IMPACT

1. A. - E. The project lies on a protected open space preserve, and the project will result in no structural development. The project site is owned by the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, and existing deed restrictions prevent land uses that are not consistent with management of the property for use as open space in its natural condition. The land is currently zoned for Open Space in the Ventura County General Plan, and the project does not seek to re-zone the property.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

NO IMPACT

2. A. - D. The project does not propose any new housing and does not affect population growth. The project site is zoned for open space and deed-restricted to prevent development. No people will be displaced by the project.

GEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

NO IMPACT

3. A. – E., G. – I. While the project site lies within a seismically active area, the project site will not result in fault rupture, and will not cause ground shaking or liquefaction. The site is not subject to tsunami risks due to its distance from the ocean and elevation. The project site is relatively flat and the project will not cause landslides or mud flows. The project will not create or be affected by expansive soils and will not result in land subsidence. Finally, no unique geologic or physical features occur on the work site.

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT WHEN MITIGATION IS INCORPORATED

3. F. The project does have the potential to result in erosion associated with the disturbance of soil during excavation and re-direction of the water flow. This risk is mitigated by erosion control measures built into the project plan. Excavated portions of the active stream channel will be stabilized with facing class rock and be planted with fast-growing native vegetation such as willows. Excess fill material will be spread on a 1-acre area, raising the elevation slightly. This area will be treated with a mulch layer and seeded with native grass species for erosion control. The change in the topography will be negligible, and will not alter water flow of Rice Creek as it is outside of the 100 year floodplain of Rice Creek. There is a potential for mobilization of soil in the proposed new stream channel, but this channel will be re-vegetated with native riparian plants as part of the habitat restoration portions of the project.

Mitigation measures include:

1. All graded / disturbed areas shall be protected with suitable groundcover so as to stabilize graded surfaces and prevent erosion. In the stream channel, graded banks will be planted with native willows, and other native plants, and the surface covered with facing-class rocks to prevent scour of the newly graded banks. Along the new channel of Rice Creek, the channel banks will be planted with native riparian vegetation to stabilize the stream banks.

2. The location of excess fill material deposition will be located outside of the 100-year floodplain.

3. Excess fill will be deposited in a thin layer in a designated location, such that it does not appreciably change site topography. This material will be covered with a thin mulch layer and seeded with native grass materials to prevent erosion and sedimentation.

WATER

NO IMPACT

4. B., F. - J. The proposed project will not expose people or property to flooding. The project site is contained within the 100 year floodplain of Rice Creek and will not increase flooding. In fact, water entering the site is controlled on the upstream end by a culvert that limits water volume entering the site. Water in excess of the culvert capacity is captured by an adjacent water transport canal to be used for municipal purposes.

The Project will not impact groundwater as it does not involve any new water diversions, wells or intensification of water uses. The surface alterations of the project will not be substantial enough to impact groundwater flow directions, rate of flow, or quality. The project is not in an area where groundwater is captured for municipal use and there are no other groundwater impacts anticipated.

The project does not result in any structures shown in delineated flood hazard areas. The one structure that will be in the 100-year floodplain is being installed to reduce impacts of inundation of a historic fuel spill. The redirecting of floodwaters in this case does not threaten any other structures. The project site is remote with respect to any developed areas and Rice Creek is a small seasonal stream that is not shown on flood hazard maps.

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT WHEN MITIGATION IS INCORPORATED

4. A. The project will change the route of the existing Rice Creek channel by diverting it back into its historic natural channel location. The project will not, however, change the volume of flow. The project may, potentially, alter the velocity of water in the Rice Creek channel when compared to the velocity in the current artificial channel. Water velocity has been modeled and predicted to remain within velocities that do not pose undue risks to the project or adjacent lands. These potential impacts are mitigated by the addition of native vegetation installed along the proposed new route of Rice Creek that will reduce flow velocity and potential erosive affects.

4. C. There is a possibility of mobilization of soil from the excavated area of the project that could result in increases in turbidity of downstream waters. This risk is mitigated by the erosion control practices built into the project design. These include the planting of extensive areas in native vegetation and using facing rocks for some erodible stream banks. Release of turbidity is not anticipated during construction because the project site will be dry. Rice Creek is only a seasonal stream.

4. D. The amount of surface water in the historic / natural Rice Creek channel will be increased. This is part of the project's purpose, to place the stream back into its native route. Water volume will be reduced in the existing artificial channel of Rice Creek and the portions of the greater Ventura River floodplain where the existing channel discharges. The change in the stream's route is anticipated to be mitigated by the ability to create superior riparian habitats along the historic stream route than are possible on the lower floodplain of the Ventura River. The proposed route of the stream has deeper soil and better substrate for the development of native riparian habitat. Approximately 10,000 new native plants will be installed on the restored stream channel. The current habitats along the artificial channel are degraded by non-native plants and relative lack of native riparian vegetation. Moving the stream water is not likely to substantially change the habitats along the existing route of the stream located down on the Ventura River Floodplain because high flows from the Ventura River will still provide enough water to sustain existing plants, most of which do not require a great deal of water.

4. E. The course of Rice Creek will be moved by the project in order to create superior riparian habitat. The extent of new riparian habitats mitigate the movement of the water from a degraded route to one with better restoration potential.

Mitigation measures include:

1. Alteration of the stream course will be subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A permit must be issued by the Army Corps and the permit will contain a set of avoidance measures that must be implemented to protect environmental resources.

2. The project will also require a water quality certification by the Regional Water Quality Control Board, within which the agency will require practices that protect water quality during construction.

3. The project has been reviewed by the California Department of Fish and Game and an Operation of Law letter has been issued. The letter requires the project to conform with a strict set of actions and best management practices to prevent environmental impacts.

4. The project is scheduled for the fall when there is no flow in Rice Creek. Working in the dry season will eliminate impacts associated with water diversions and erosion caused by running water during construction.

5. Impacts to riparian vegetation in the existing stream channel caused by the diversion of water from this channel will be mitigated by the planting of approximately 10,000 native riparian plants along the new, and historic, route of Rice Creek.

6. Excess soil on the site will be stabilized in an area outside of the 100-year floodplain and will be stabilized using mulch and seeding with native grasses. The spreading of excess soil will be over an area large enough so the thin layer of soil will not change drainage patterns on the site.

7. All heavy equipment servicing and re-fueling will take place in a designated staging area located at least 150 feet away from any water body and outside of the 100-year floodplain.

AIR QUALITY

NO IMPACT

5. B. - D. Due to the scale and character of the project, it will not alter air movement, moisture, or temperature, or cause any change in climate. The site is distant from any known sensitive receptors, and no objectionable odors are anticipated. The proposed project is therefore not expected to negatively impact air quality.

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT WHEN MITIGATION IS INCORPORATED

5. A. The project will make use of heavy equipment potentially including loaders, graders, and trucks. This equipment emits compounds that may contribute to pollution in the greater Ojai Valley during this project. These emissions are temporary and only occur during an 8-10 day period. The project will not generate additional vehicle trips after the short construction period.

Project grading and construction has the potential to result in the generation of fugitive dust (particulates) that could impact surrounding properties. Impacts off-site are not anticipated because the site is located a sufficient distance from any receptors. Mitigation measures include wetting down soils, planting vegetative ground cover as soon as possible on construction sites, and physically covering all trucks hauling dirt, sand, or other loose materials to and from the site. The practices will limit fugitive dust emissions.

There are no sensitive receptors to air quality impacts in the project area. The site is located some distance from schools and health facilities, as well as homes or other businesses. Due to the scale and character of the project, it will not alter air movement, moisture, or temperature, or cause any change in climate. No objectionable odors are anticipated.

The temporary air quality impacts will be mitigated greatly by the installation of approximately 10,000 native plants that will serve to capture carbon and otherwise contribute to better air quality

Mitigation includes:

1. Wetting procedures or other dust palliative measures shall be maintained during earth moving operations to minimize fugitive dust emissions in compliance with applicable codes and ordinances pertaining to dust suppression requirements.

2. During construction, water trucks or sprinkler systems shall be used to keep all areas of vehicle movement damp enough to prevent dust from leaving the site. At a minimum this would include wetting down such areas in the later morning and after work is completed for the day and whenever wind exceeds 15 miles per hour.

3. Heavy-duty construction equipment shall be kept on-site when not in operations to minimize exhaust emissions associated with vehicles repetitiously traveling to and from the project site.

4. The number of pieces of equipment operating simultaneously should be minimized through efficient management practices.

5. Graded surfaces shall be vegetated as soon as feasibly possible after the completion of grading within the construction area.

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

5. E. See description in Item 5. A. above. The project site lies within the area covered by the Ventura County Air Quality Management Plan adopted in 2008. Construction equipment is listed in the Plan in the category of "Other Mobile Sources". Together with other sources in this category (Aircraft, ships, etc.), emissions from this category are generally small in comparison to other pollution sources. For NOx emissions, this category accounts for 14% of total emissions and for Reactive Organic gasses they comprise 24%. As described in the Plan, air pollution in Ventura County has been declining over the last 2 decades. Due to the small scale of the project, and the fact that the project does not create any lasting increases in local pollution levels, it is unlikely that the minor impacts of equipment use at this project site would significantly affect air quality in the local air basin.

TRANSPORTATION/CIRCULATION

NO IMPACT

6. A. - E. The project does not generate new uses on the property, which is currently used as open space and only accessible to the public via pedestrian access, bicycle, or on horseback. The project does not generate additional vehicle trips, except for temporary access for construction. The project occurs on a remote site that is distant from any public road, so it will cause no safety hazards on public roads. The project does not change current access for emergency purposes. There is no public parking at the project site, as it is only accessible on foot or on horseback or bicycle.

The project does not conflict with any transportation policies or programs because it does not, of itself, generate vehicle trips. The project is in a remote natural area that has not direct connections to public infrastructure.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT WHEN MITIGATION IS INCORPORATED

7. A. The project will occur in an area that provides potential habitats for endangered, threatened, or rare species. Table 1. The endangered, threatened, and rare species found in the greater Ventura River Watershed are listed, below. Of these, only three species known to be threatened or endangered may occur in the project area. These include California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*), least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), and southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus).* Of these three species, only California red-legged frog has been observed within the boundaries of the Ventura River Preserve.

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) has reviewed the project plan and issued an Operation of Law letter. Since a Streambed Alteration Agreement was not issued, the project must be constructed according to the submitted project plan. The project plan includes avoidance measures that protect all listed species. These are described below.

The project site is also covered by a Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The terms of this agreement specify actions and consultations that must be implemented for all work on the Preserve. Under the SHA, annual on-site surveys are conducted for the three listed species that may occur on the project site. The SHA also included baseline surveys for these species as well as the habitats upon which they depend. According to the SHA, no appropriate habitat exists on the Preserve for least Bell's verio or southwestern willow flycatcher. California red-legged frogs have been spotted on the Preserve in a pool located along the Ventura River. The sighting was not in waters associated with Rice Creek, but their presence in the area justifies specific avoidance measures and protections. These are described below.

Potentially Affected Species

Table 1. Special Status Wildlife and Plant Species of the Ventura River Watershed

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status[1]	Habitat
Mammals			
Antrozous pallidus	Pallid bat	SSC	Deserts and canyons. Roosts in buildings and crevices, caves, mines, hollow trees, and cliff overhangs.

[1] FE: federally listed as endangered
FT: federally listed as threatened
FSC: federally listed species of concern
SC: state candidate
SE: state listed as endangered
SSC: state species of special concern
ST: state listed as threatened
SFP: The Fish and Game Codes sections dealing with Fully Protected species state that these species "…may not be taken or possessed at any time and no provision of this code or any other law shall be construed to authorize the issuance of permits or licenses to take any fully protected" species, although take may be authorized for necessary scientific research.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status[1]	Habitat
Eumops perotis californicus	Western mastiff bat	FSC, SSC	Arid to semi-arid habitats including conifer and deciduous woodlands, coastal scrub, grasslands and chaparral. Roosts in crevices in cliff faces, buildings, and trees.
Birds			
Accipiter cooperii	Cooper's Hawk	SSC	Nests mainly in riparian trees and live oaks in canyon bottoms and river floodplains.
Athene cunicularia	Burrowing owl	SC, SSC	Burrow sites are located on open, dry annual or perennial grasslands, deserts and scrublands and are characterized by low growing vegetation.
Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus	Western snowy plover	FT	Sandy beaches, salt pond levees, and shores of large alkali lakes. Requires sand, gravel or friable soils for nesting.
Dendroica petechia brewsteri	Yellow warbler	SSC	Nests in riparian forests particularly in willows, cottonwoods, sycamores and alders. Also nests in montane shrubbery in open conifer forests.
Empidonax traillii extimus	Southwestern willow flycatcher	FE, SE	Riparian woodlands in southern California
Gymnogyps californianus	California condor	FE, SE	Vast expanses of open savannah, grasslands and foothill chaparral in mountain ranges of moderate altitude. Nests in clefts in rocky walls along deep canyons.
Icteria virens	Yellow-breasted chat	SSC	Summer resident of riparian thickets of willow and other brushy tangles. Nests within 10 ft of ground.
Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi	Belding's savannah sparrow	SE	Inhabits coastal salt marshes. Nests around margins of tidal flats on *Salicornia*.
Pelecanus occidentalis californicus	California brown pelican	FE, SE	Colonial nester on coastal islands.
Polioptila californica californica	Coastal California gnatcatcher	FT	Obligate, permanent resident of coastal sage scrub below 2500 ft particularly in arid washes, on mesas and slopes.
Sterna antillarum browni	California least tern	FE, SE	Nests along the coast. Colonial breeder on bare or sparsely vegetated, flat substratum; sand beaches, alkali flats, landfills or paved areas.
Vireo bellii pusillus	Least Bell's vireo	FE, SE	Summer resident of southern California in low riparian in vicinity of wet or dry river bottoms. Nests placed along margins of bushes usually on willow, or *Baccharis*.
Reptiles			
Aspidoscelis tigris stejnegeri	Coastal western whiptail	SSC	Found in deserts and semi-arid areas with sparse vegetation and open areas. Also found in woodland and riparian areas. Ground may be firm soil, sandy or rocky.
Emys (=Clemmys) marmorata pallida	Southwestern pond turtle	SSC	Inhabits permanent or nearly permanent bodies of water below 6000 ft. Require basking sites such as partially submerged logs, vegetation mats or open mud banks. Can nest on high dry banks along wetted stream channels.
Thamnophis hammondii	Two-striped garter snake	SC, SSC	Found along coastal California from sea level to 7000 ft. Highly aquatic, found in or near permanent fresh water along streams with rocky beds and riparian growth.
Amphibians			

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status[1]	Habitat
Rana aurora draytonii	California red-legged frog	FT, SSC	Lowlands and foothills in or near permanent sources of water with dense shrubby or emergent riparian vegetation.
Spea hammondii	Western spadefoot toad	FSC, SSC	Occurs primarily in grassland habitat but can be found in valley-foothill hardwood woodlands. Vernal pools are essential for breeding and egg laying.
Taricha taricha torosa	Coast range newt	SSC	Found in coastal drainages. Breeds in ponds, reservoirs and slow moving streams.
Fishes			
Eucyclogobius newberryi	Tidewater goby	FT, SSC	Brackish water habitat along the California coast in shallow lagoons and lower stream reaches. Require still but not stagnant water with high DO levels.
Gila orcutti	Arroyo chub	SC, SSC	Slow water stream sections with mud or sand bottoms. Feed heavily on aquatic vegetation and associated invertebrates.
Oncorhynchus mykiss	Southern steelhead trout	FE, SSC	Anadromous. Over-summer in deep pools with cool clear water and shade cover. Spawn in gravel beds.
Plants			
Baccharis plummerii	Plummer's baccharis	List 4.3	Broadleafed upland forest, chaparral, coastal scrub. 5-425 m
Fritillaria ojaiensis	Ojai fritillary	List 1B	Broadleafed upland forest, chaparral, lower montane coniferous forest. 300-670 m
Malacothamnus davidsonii	Davidson's bush mallow	List 1B	Coastal scrub, chaparral, riparian woodland on sandy washes. 180-855 m

Mammals

The listed mammals are both bats. Though they may access the site from time to time, the project site does not contain any nesting habitat for these species. It is unlikely that the project would impact either species.

Birds

Federally listed birds that may occupy nearby riparian areas include least Bell's vireo and southwestern flycatcher. The project site is outside of the current range for coastal California gnatcatcher and the remaining listed birds are associated with other habitat types that are not present on the project site. The least Bell's verio and southwestern willow flycatcher have not been observed on the projects site and a survey by the USFWS as part of a Safe Harbor Agreement covering the project site did not list either of these species as present. The baseline report for the FWS agreement indicates that suitable habitat for these species is not currently found on the project property and no critical habitat designation covers the project site.
It is unlikely that the project will affect birds in general as it will occur outside of the nesting season for most bird species and no mature native trees will be removed. The project goal, however, is to avoid impacts to all birds on the site. Potential impacts on bird species are mitigated by timing the construction to occur outside of the nesting season and to perform pre-project site surveys to identify any of the listed birds that may be onsite. The terms of the Safe Harbor Agreement specify steps to be taken in the event of a sighting of either of these two species, which include contacting the USFWS and acting directly on their recommendations.

Reptiles

The only reptile that may be encountered during the project is the southwestern pond turtle. While the site is some distance from any wetted area in the summer, there is a remote possibility of this species finding the construction site. The site will be too dry for two-striped garter snakes as they tend to stay closer to water. When complete, the project may create additional habitat for both species at least seasonally. Potential impacts to southwestern pond turtles are mitigated by the timing of the project in the dry season when Rice Creek does not contain habitat for this species.

Amphibians

Of the listed amphibians, only the California red-legged frog, and possibly the coast range newt may be present near the project site. Because the site will be dry, these species are not anticipated during the summer construction season. Potential impacts to California red-legged frog are mitigated by scheduling the project for the season when Rice Creek contains no appropriate habitat.

Fish

There will be no direct impacts to any listed fish species because the project will be constructed when the existing stream channel is dry. The historic channel has no summer flow either, so there will be no fish on site. It is possible that once flow is introduced to the new channel that impacts resulting from sediment mobilization could impact fish in the Ventura River. However, the project design includes elements designed to minimize these temporary construction impacts.

Plants

Of the plants listed above, none are anticipated to be found on the project area. Current vegetation in the project area consist mostly of non-native plants, including grasses, and remnants of the historic orange orchard. Some native plants are becoming established within the remaining orchard, including coyote brush and coast live oak. The oaks are generally small. Every effort will be made to protect these trees during construction, but some may need to be removed in the grading area. Where practical, these trees may be transplanted.

7. B. While there are several trees in the general project area (coast live oak) that meet the definition of heritage trees by the County of Ventura, these will not be impacted by the project. The project design specifically located project elements so these trees would not be damaged or removed. Any potential impacts will be mitigated by the location of project elements away from these trees. In addition, perimeters around the root zones of these trees will be fenced during construction to keep equipment away from the trees and prevent soil compaction of the root zones. These mitigation measures will protect heritage trees during construction. No other known species with local designations occur on the site.

7. D. The project involves a diversion of a stream that will change its course. The purpose of the project is to move Rice Creek from its current degraded and artificial channel and back into its natural

alignment. Rice Creek was channelized in the 1920's through an artificial channel and conveyed over a cliff onto the floodplain of the Ventura River, severing its natural hydrologic connection to the Ventura River. By moving the stream back to its natural drainage, the project will divert water from the existing channel of the stream. The current channel is degraded and provides poor riparian habitat.

Any potential impacts to the existing Rice Creek channel are mitigated by the restoration of the historic channel. In-fact, the newly restored habitat represents a net increase in riparian habitat. The existing artificial channel is 1,400 feet in length. The restored historic channel will be 3,000 feet in length, representing an increase of 1,600 linear feet of restored stream. In addition, the restored areas will be more bio-diverse and will restore a natural hydrologic confluence with the Ventura River. Finally, the restored channel will be planted with approximately 10,000 native plants.

Finally, the portion of the existing channel that flows along the lower floodplain of the Ventura River is not anticipated to degrade from its current condition. The 960 feet of this channel below the culvert is primarily colonized by native mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*). This species does not require substantial water to survive, and is common throughout the greater floodplain of the Ventura River, including areas with no active flow. The mule fat that is currently colonizing the existing channel upstream of the culvert will also likely remain except for a 100 foot section that will be subject to excavation as part of the proposed project.

NO IMPACT

7. C., E. - G. No locally designated natural communities are located in the project area. The project area currently consists of primarily non-native vegetation and ruderal native vegetation consisting mostly of a monoculture of one species (mule fat). There are oak trees in the general area, including some smaller trees under 3" diameter at breast height in the construction zone. These are not considered protected trees, but they will be transplanted during construction activities. None of the trees in the construction area meet the threshold for "heritage trees" described in the Ventura County Tree Ordinance.

The project does not negatively impact wildlife migration because no structures or fences will be erected on the site. In fact, by re-connecting the stream to its historic channel and re-activating the natural confluence of Rice Creek with the Ventura River, the project is anticipated to improve wildlife migration along the stream corridor. Stream corridors are some of the most used wildlife corridors. The current alignment of the stream prevents migration between the lower floodplain of the Ventura River and the terrace containing Rice Creek because of the 30 foot drop from the existing culvert.

The project site is not covered by any local, regional, or statewide conservation plans and is not listed as critical habitat for any federally listed species.

ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

NO IMPACT

8. A. - D. No known economic mineral resources are present on the site. The project will not result in energy consumption beyond the construction phase. The site is not shown on any specific plan as an important mineral recovery site. In fact, restrictions on the property deed prevent the use of the property for surface extraction of minerals.

HAZARDS

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT WHEN MITIGATION IS INCORPORATED

9. A., D. A portion of the project site is proximate to the location of an historic diesel fuel tank leak. The tank has already been removed and a remediation project was implemented that removed contaminated soil. Some hydrocarbons are still present in groundwater in the immediate area of the leak. Regular sampling of this groundwater shows a decline in hydrocarbon levels and the current levels fall below thresholds for regulatory actions. There is no surface expression of the contamination and the material lies in groundwater that is more than 9 feet underground. The presence of this material is not expected to affect construction of the proposed project because excavation depths in this area are substantially less than the depth to groundwater.

The potential impacts of exposing subsurface diesel contamination are mitigated through project design and avoidance measures. Specifically, the project design includes a berm in the area adjacent to the historic tank location to prevent the remaining crater (left following remediation) from being inundated with flow from Rice Creek. This prevents any remaining trapped hydrocarbons from floating to the surface where impacts may occur and will keep percolating water from mobilizing the groundwater. The berm is designed to prevent flooding of the crater during a 100-year interval storm flow.

The project design also calls for some excavation near one of the monitoring wells, but this excavation will only be about 3 feet in dept. This is still at least 6 feet above the highest-measured groundwater depth. The excavated area is for the purpose of installing a gradient control structure that will prevent channel degradation, which also prevents flows from eroding the channel and potentially cutting down to contamination depths. The excavated areas will be re-filled. If, during excavation, contaminated soil is found, it will be reported to the Ventura County Voluntary Clean-Up Program in accordance with the site's current enrollment in that program. All recommendations from the clean-up program will be implemented to safeguard environmental quality on the site.

The nature of the material on site is such that it does not pose an explosion risk and will not pose exposure risks associated with herbicides, chemicals, or radiation.

Mitigation includes:

1. A berm will be installed adjacent to the site of a historic diesel fuel leak to prevent inundation of the area and mobilization of soil.
2. The project design includes measures to locate the project a safe distance from the historic spill area, and project excavation will remain shallow enough to avoid exposing groundwater.
3. The project site has been enrolled with the Ventura County Voluntary Clean-up Program, through which the site has been monitored for several years. Regular reports have been filed that show pollution levels in the groundwater have been declining over time. The latest monitoring indicates that the pollution has attenuated below thresholds for regulation and case closure is pending. There is no surface expression of the spill, and mitigation measure # 15 will keep the area separated from stream flow.

NO IMPACT

9. B., C., E., F. The project will not interfere with emergency response or evacuation plans. The project is in a remote location away from populated areas.

The project will not create health hazards or potential health hazards. No hazardous materials will be brought on the project site, and the project does not include any land uses that would require such materials.

The project does not create increased threats or hazards related to fires. The project site is located in an open space area that may be prone to wildfires, but the uses of the project do not create any heightened threat in comparison to current threats. The project is some distance from any structures. In areas of the Ventura River Preserve that are adjacent to structures, the landowner is required to clear a defensible space buffer each season for the protection of these structures. This is done annually and inspected by the Ventura County Fire Department.

NOISE

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

10. A., B. Short-term noise impacts may occur during construction. Construction of the project is expected to require the use of earthmovers, bulldozers, and water and pickup trucks. These machines cause some noise, but not excessive noise. This noise will not impact surrounding areas because the site is remote, and distant form any sensitive receptors. Noise would only be heard on the construction site, and the hours of operation are restricted to daytime hours.

Mitigation includes:

1. During grading and construction, delivery of materials and equipment, outdoor operation of equipment, and construction activity shall be limited to the hours between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

2. All construction equipment, stationary or mobile, shall be equipped with properly operating and maintained mufflers.
3. All construction equipment shall be stored on the project site during the construction phase to eliminate daily heavy-duty truck trips on vicinity roadways.

PUBLIC SERVICES

NO IMPACT

11. A.,- E. Due to the nature and scale of the project, it will not increase the demand for any public services. No land uses will be changed.

UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

NO IMPACT

12. A. - G. The project will not result in impacts to utility systems for gas, power, communications, water distribution, sewers or septics, storm water systems, solid waste systems or water supply systems because the project will not interact with any of these systems and no land use changes will be made.

AESTHETICS

NO IMPACT

13.A. - C. The project is not visible from any public place. The only people that will see the project are guests visiting the preserve for recreation purposes.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

NO IMPACT

14. A. - D. There are no known historically or culturally significant resources, structures, buildings, or objects associated with the site. The only areas that will be disturbed during construction have already been substantially disturbed. At the upstream end, construction of the artificial channel and creation of a levee along this channel disturbed the surface area. The section of the levee that will be removed consists of disturbed soil from the site. In the downstream portion of the project, much of this area was excavated as part of the diesel spill remediation and replaced with clean fill material and no cultural evidence was observed. In the event that cultural resources are discovered during construction, the project manager shall notify the Ventura County Planning Department and shall halt or divert work until such time as a qualified specialist, as determined by the Ventura County Planning

Department, has been retained to assess the findings and initiate a recovery program, as appropriate. Because the area to be disturbed has a history of disturbance, it is unlikely that any human remains would be encountered during project construction. If any human remains were found, they would be reported in the same manner described above for cultural artifacts.

RECREATION

NO IMPACT

15.A.- C. Due to the nature and scale of the project, it will not increase demand for parks or other recreational facilities. It is possible that during construction, a recreational trail may be temporarily closed, but alternative trails already exist on the site. These trails are private trails that are open to the public, but are not technically public trails.

The project is located on a private, yet publicly accessible, recreational area owned by the applicant and is distant from any community recreational resources. The project does not provide new facilities that would increase the number of visitors. It may, however, improve the recreational experience of those utilizing the area as the habitat is improved and wildlife viewing opportunities expand.

The project does not create new facilities that would require construction of other facilities that may have adverse impacts on the environment. This is a natural habitat restoration project intended solely to benefit the environment.

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

NO IMPACT

16. A. The project site does not contain forest lands, so none will be disturbed or altered as part of the project.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

17. A. The project will use heavy construction equipment such as excavators, loaders, and trucks. The project will be undertaken in an 8-10 day period and will not create any new uses at the site that would contribute greenhouse gasses. The small scale and short duration of the impacts would not create a significant impact on the environment.

NO IMPACT

17. B. The project will make use of heavy equipment potentially including loaders, graders, and trucks. This equipment emits compounds that may contribute to pollution in the greater Ojai Valley during this project. These emissions are temporary and only occur during an 8-10 day period. The project will not generate additional vehicle trips after the short construction period. The Ventura County Air Pollution Control District does not regulate construction emissions from equipment and no local plans would be violated.

MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

NO IMPACT

18. A. No sensitive native plant communities are located on the site. No known cultural resources are associated with the site. The project does not have the potential to 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, or threaten to eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory

18. B. The project will not achieve short-term environmental goals at the expense of long-term environmental goals. The project's specific goal is to improve the environment on the site over a long term.

18. C. The project is small in scope and area, and is not anticipated to cause any cumulative effects. The project is an environmental restoration project, and all potential impacts are mitigated onsite.

18. D. The project does not have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on humans directly or indirectly. Potential impacts of the project do not rise to a level of significance and mitigation measures have been incorporated into project approval to reduce the effects on the environment.

Attachment 1. – Map of Project Location