Blackhawk Environmental, Inc.
1720 Midvale Drive
San Diego, CA 92105
Phone: 619.972.7932
Phone: 619.972.8714
www.blackhawkenv.com

PACIFICA ALESSANDRO PROJECT

(APN 487-470-022)

FOCUSED BURROWING OWL SURVEY REPORT

CITY OF MORENO VALLEY, RIVERSIDE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Prepared for:

EPD Solutions, Inc.
2 Park Plaza, Suite 1120
Irvine, CA 92614
Contact: Rafik Albert
Project Manager
Telephone: 949.794.1182
E-mail: rafik@epdsolutions.com

Prepared by:

Blackhawk Environmental, Inc.
1720 Midvale Drive
San Diego, CA 92105
Contact: Hayley Milner
Associate Biologist
Telephone: 585.739.9864
E-mail: hayley@blackhawkenv.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blackhawk Environmental conducted a literature review, field reconnaissance survey and biological assessment of the proposed Pacifica Alessandro Project (Project) site on July 26, 2021, to assess existing site conditions, as well as assess the potential for special-status species or habitats to occur within and/or adjacent to the Project site. The results of this survey effort are summarized in the *Pacifica Alessandro Western Riverside MSHCP Habitat Assessment Report* (Blackhawk Environmental 2021). The Project is an approximately 18.48-acre development proposed in the city of Moreno Valley, Riverside County, California. The Project site is located on Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 487-470-022. The Project is located within the boundaries of the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). The site is best characterized as previously graded and/or disked, disturbed land that is regularly mowed. The Project is located within an area necessitating surveys for burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*; BUOW). The Blackhawk Environmental Habitat Assessment Report (HAR) identified habitat suitable for burrowing owl, as well as suitable burrows, during the July 26, 2021 site visit. Pursuant to MSHCP Section 6.3.2 *Additional Survey Needs and Procedures*, focused surveys for burrowing owl are required within designated survey areas of the Plan and suitable habitat.

To support Project consistency with Plan guidelines, Blackhawk Environmental was contracted to perform focused surveys for burrowing owl per the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Plan Area (2006). The initial habitat assessment/focused burrow survey and this focused burrowing owl survey effort resulted in the detection and mapping of numerous burrows suitable for burrowing owl within the Project and associated 150-meter buffer (Survey Area). No burrowing owls or sign were observed during the surveys.

Following the MSHCP recommendation of a preconstruction burrowing owl survey within 30 days prior to construction, no negative impacts to burrowing owl are anticipated. Preconstruction presence/ absence surveys for burrowing owl should be conducted within the Project area within 30 days prior to ground disturbance to avoid direct take of burrowing owls. Preconstruction survey methods should follow those described in the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the MSHCP Plan Area; *Pre-construction Surveys* (2006). If burrowing owls are determined to occupy the site or the immediate vicinity, the City of Moreno Valley Planning Department will be notified, and avoidance measures will be implemented during the breeding season (March 1 through August 31). If burrowing owls are present during the non-breeding season (September 1 through February 28), burrowing owl exclusion measures may be implemented in accordance with the Plan.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Blackhawk Environmental (Blackhawk) was contracted under EPD Solutions to conduct focused burrowing owl surveys at the Pacifica Alessandro Project (Project) site, located on approximately 18.48 acres of previously undeveloped lands in the city of Moreno Valley, Riverside County, California. The Project site is within the MSHCP area; however, the Project is not located within a MSHCP Cell Group or MSHCP Criteria Cell(s).

Focused surveys for burrowing owl were required for the Project site as identified within the *Pacifica Alessandro Western Riverside MSHCP Habitat Assessment Report* (Blackhawk Environmental 2021). Specifically, this habitat assessment was conducted to determine if habitat was present for species identified in the County of Riverside's MSHCP Information Application (RCA 2021) that may require additional focused species survey efforts, including burrowing owl.

The initial habitat assessment was conducted on July 26, 2021, which identified suitable habitat for burrowing owl, including potential burrows. Based on the presence of suitable habitat and burrows within the Project and surrounding 150-meter buffer (Survey Area), additional focused surveys for burrowing owl were required for consistency with the Plan. This report describes the results of the focused burrowing owl survey effort conducted for the Project site.

1.1 Project Description

The Project proposes complete buildout of the 18.48-acre parcel in the City of Moreno Valley. Proposed development engineer plans may involve the construction of commercial spaces and/or residential homes, paved streets and sidewalks, landscaped areas and all associated infrastructure and would permanently convert the vacant land to development. The Project site is identified as APN 487-470-022.

The proposed Project is located within previously graded/disked, regularly mowed, vacant land dominated by low-growing non-native and ruderal vegetation. The site is surrounded by urban development in addition to several scattered vacant lots. The site is bounded to the north by Bay Avenue, to the east by a vacant lot, to the west by private residential homes, and to the south by Alessandro Boulevard (Figure 1). The site shows signs of recent anthropogenic impacts such as mowing, trash dumping, disking, and vehicle use. The Project site consists of a mostly flat lot; elevations within the Project site range from 1,583 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) in the southwest corner at its lowest point, and up to 1,608 feet AMSL at the northeastern corner at its highest point.

2.0 REGULATORY SETTING

The Plan is a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) focusing on conservation of species and their associated habitats in Western Riverside County.

The Plan serves as an HCP pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA), as well as the Natural Communities Conservation Planning (NCCP) under the NCCP Act of 2001. The Plan will be used to allow the participating jurisdictions to authorize "take" of plant and wildlife species identified within the Plan area. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) (together, Wildlife Agencies) have authority to regulate the take of threatened, endangered, and rare species. Under the Plan, the Wildlife Agencies will grant "take authorization" for otherwise lawful actions, such as public and private development that may incidentally take or harm individual species or their habitat outside of the Plan Conservation Areas, in exchange for the assembly and management of a coordinated MSHCP Area through collection of Plan Mitigation Fees. The Plan is designed to provide mitigation compliance under the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA), California Endangered Species Act (CESA), California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) with payment of a development mitigation fee to the appropriate local jurisdiction and completion of requisite habitat assessments/focused surveys for projects within those jurisdictions.

Pursuant to MSHCP Section 6.3.2 *Additional Survey Needs and Procedures*, focused surveys for burrowing owl are required within designated survey areas of the Plan and suitable habitat. The Project is located within a Cell requiring habitat assessments for burrowing owl. An initial HAR for the Project site identified the Project site as within a survey area for burrowing owl, and suitable habitat and burrows were identified on site; therefore, focused burrowing owl surveys became required for Project approval (Blackhawk Environmental 2021).

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Step I: Habitat Assessment

An initial habitat assessment was conducted by Blackhawk biologists Hayley Milner and Desiree Johnson on July 26, 2021 by walking meandering transects throughout the entirety of the Survey Area. The habitat assessment identified the presence of suitable burrowing owl habitat and suitable burrows within the Survey Area. When it was not possible to access the 150-meter buffer zone, the Survey Area was visually inspected with binoculars. Habitat was mapped in the field on the ESRI ArcGIS Collector application for later use in Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis and figure creation.

3.2 Step II, Part A: Focused Burrow Survey

A systematic search of the Project Survey Area for BUOW-suitable burrows and burrowing owl sign was conducted concurrently with the initial habitat assessment, described in *Step 1: Habitat Assessment,* on July 26, 2021 by two biologists walking transects through suitable habitat. Survey transects were spaced 15 to 30 meters apart to provide 100 percent visual ground coverage. Where habitat, terrain or other factors necessitated, transect width was reduced to achieve 100 percent visual ground coverage. For inaccessible areas, biologists scanned the area with binoculars to ascertain presence/absence of burrowing owls. During the search, suitable burrowing owl habitat mapped during the habitat assessment was verified and updated, as needed. All suitable burrowing owl burrows, man-made structures that could potentially support burrowing owls, and potential burrowing owl sign was mapped in the field on aerial photos and Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates were recorded.

Table 1. Habitat Assessment, Focused Burrow Survey, and Focused BUOW Pass #1 Conditions

Biologist(s)	Date	Time	Temperature (°F)	Wind Speed (mph)	Cloud Cover (%)	Precipitation
Hayley Milner Desiree Johnson	7/26/2021	0530-0740	71-69	0-2	100	Sprinkling

3.3 Step II, Part B: Focused Burrowing Owl Survey

Focused burrowing owl surveys were conducted on four separate days during the burrowing owl breeding season (March 1 through August 31). The first focused burrowing owl survey was conducted concurrently with the initial habitat assessment, described in *Step 1: Habitat Assessment*, and the focused burrow survey, described in *Part A: Focused Burrow Survey.*

Three additional focused surveys for burrowing owl were conducted on separate days and spaced at least one week apart from one another. All surveys began within one hour of sunrise, concluded within two hours after sunrise, and were conducted in weather conditions conducive to detecting burrowing owls outside their burrows and observing burrowing owl sign. Survey methods followed those described in the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Plan Area (2006).

Prior to starting transects and upon arrival to the Project site, the biologist scanned the Survey Area with binoculars to ascertain presence/absence of burrowing owls. Following the initial scan of the

Survey Area, the biologists followed the same survey protocol described in Section 3.2. During the focused surveys, all suitable burrows were first scanned for occupation by burrowing owl. If no owls were observed, suitable burrows were directly inspected for changes in status and burrowing owl sign.

Table 2: Focused BUOW Survey Passes #2-4 Conditions

Biologist(s)	Date	Time	Temperature (°F)	Wind Speed (mph)	Cloud Cover (%)	Precipitation
Desiree Johnson, Tawni Gotbaum	8/3/2021	0545-0730	67-79	0-1	0	none
Desiree Johnson	8/10/2021	0550-0715	68-72	0-2	5	none
Hayley Milner, Katie Quint	8/19/2021	0550-0750	67-72	0-4	95	none

4.0 RESULTS

An initial habitat assessment, focused burrow survey, and first BUOW survey were conducted concurrently during the July 26, 2021 site visit per the *Step 1: Habitat Assessment, Step 2 Part A: Focused Burrow Surveys,* and *Step 2 Part B: Focused Burrowing Owl Surveys* of the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Plan Area (2006). Surveys were conducted in accordance with the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Plan Area (2006) and were not conducted within five days following a rain event. The sprinkles during the initial survey on July 26, 2021 were so light that they did not impede survey efforts or diminish burrowing owl sign (whitewash, pellets, decorations, etc.).

Burrowing owl habitat within the Project site includes all Disturbed Areas (Blackhawk Environmental 2021). While the Project site is composed of regularly disked, open, disturbed vegetation suitable for burrowing owl foraging, nesting opportunities are limited to those areas supporting potential host burrows (Attachment B). Within the Survey Area, the vacant lots east and south of the Project Site were surveyed due to potential for suitable burrows. Developed areas surrounding the Project Site were excluded from the surveys due to lack of suitable burrows or burrow surrogates.

The Project site exhibits previously graded and/or disked soils that are regularly mowed and disturbed through other anthropogenic activities such as trash and debris dumping, off road vehicle use and foot traffic. The site is dominated by low-growing non-native grasses and ruderal vegetation. Suitable burrows occur throughout the entire site and portions of suitable habitat within the Survey Area. All the burrows documented showed no BUOW sign or occupation and the vast majority showed very recent signs of California squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) use, such as cleared runways between burrows, footprints, scat, and dig-outs.

Due to the presence of suitable burrowing owl habitat onsite, four focused burrowing owl surveys were conducted, the first of which was conducted concurrently with Step I and Step II: Part A, described above.

A total of 123 individual BUOW-suitable burrows and 17 BUOW-suitable burrow complexes were identified within the Survey Area. Burrow complexes (3 or more burrows) were mapped collectively due to the proximity of burrows to one another (generally within two meters). Specific locations of all suitable burrowing owl burrows can be found in Figure 2. No burrowing owls and/or burrowing owl sign

were observed during the focused surveys. Furthermore, most burrows were identified as either having fresh California ground squirrel sign, or debris, spiderwebs, and other items partially covering the burrow opening. Burrows were generally evenly distributed throughout the Project Site, apart from a near absence in the northwest quarter corner of the parcel. Optimally suitable areas were correlated with high California ground squirrel activity.

Burrows ranged in size from 8 to 20 centimeters in diameter, with the majority of suitable burrows being California ground squirrel burrows. Ground squirrels were directly observed throughout the site and many of the potential burrows showed sign of current occupation by ground squirrels (fresh soil aprons, scat, tracks, plant debris, etc.). Burrows were located within areas of non-native grasses and areas of previously disturbed soil. Maps depicting all suitable burrowing owl burrows and burrow complexes, as well as potential foraging and nesting habitat, are included in Attachment A – Figures. Representative photographs of the Project site, suitable habitat, and BUOW-suitable burrows observed during the survey period are included in Attachment B – Site Photographs.

Avian species observed included: American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), American kestrel (*Falco* sparverius), European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), house finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Eurasian collared-dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), Costa's hummingbird (*Calypte costae*), Cassin's kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*), horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), tree swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*), Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), and barn owl (*Tyto alba*).

5.0 POTENTIAL IMPACTS

No burrowing owls or burrowing owl sign were identified during the survey efforts, therefore, no impacts to burrowing owls are anticipated to occur. Furthermore, while suitable burrows were present onsite, the majority appeared to be currently occupied by California ground squirrels or were covered by debris and/or spiderwebs, indicating no occupancy. Based on the Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Plan Area (2006), preconstruction presence/absence surveys for burrowing owls should be conducted within 30 days prior to ground disturbing activities to avoid potential direct impacts to burrowing owls.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Focused BUOW surveys took place on the 18.48-acre Project Site and associated 150-meter survey buffer for the proposed Pacifica Alessandro Project in the city of Moreno Valley, Riverside County, California. While there were numerous suitable BUOW burrows mapped in the Survey Area, no burrowing owl or their sign were observed during the focused BUOW surveys. With the recommendation of a preconstruction BUOW survey within 30 days prior to construction, no negative impacts to the species are anticipated. The reported final (fourth) focused BUOW survey conducted on August 19, 2021, satisfies this recommendation if initial ground disturbance for the Project begins within 30 days of this survey. An additional pre-construction BUOW take avoidance survey is therefore only recommended for ground disturbance occurring on or after September 19, 2021.

With the implementation of the proposed mitigation measure for potential Project-related impacts to burrowing owl, the Project will fulfill the requirements related to biological resources pursuant to CEQA and the Plan.

- MM-BUOW 1: Within 30 days of construction, conduct take avoidance surveys for burrowing owl per guidelines specified in the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Burrowing Owl Survey Instructions for the Plan Area (2006).

- MM-BUOW 2: If burrowing owls are observed to occupy the Project site and/or adjacent areas during take avoidance surveys or incidentally during construction, the City of Moreno Valley Planning Department will be notified, and avoidance measures may be implemented during the breeding season (March 1 through August 31). If burrowing owls are present during the non-breeding season (September 1 through February 28), burrowing owl exclusion measures may be implemented in accordance with the Plan.

7.0 SURVEYOR CERTIFICATION

All data, statements, analyses, findings and attachments within this report are accurate and truthful in terms of describing the existing conditions at the time of the surveys and the Project as proposed to Blackhawk Environmental, Inc.. By adhering to the mitigation measure proposed within this report and/or payment of appropriate fees, compensatory mitigation related to the complete the Project will be met to CEQA significance thresholds for burrowing owl.

Hayley Milner
Associate Biologist

8.0 REFERENCES

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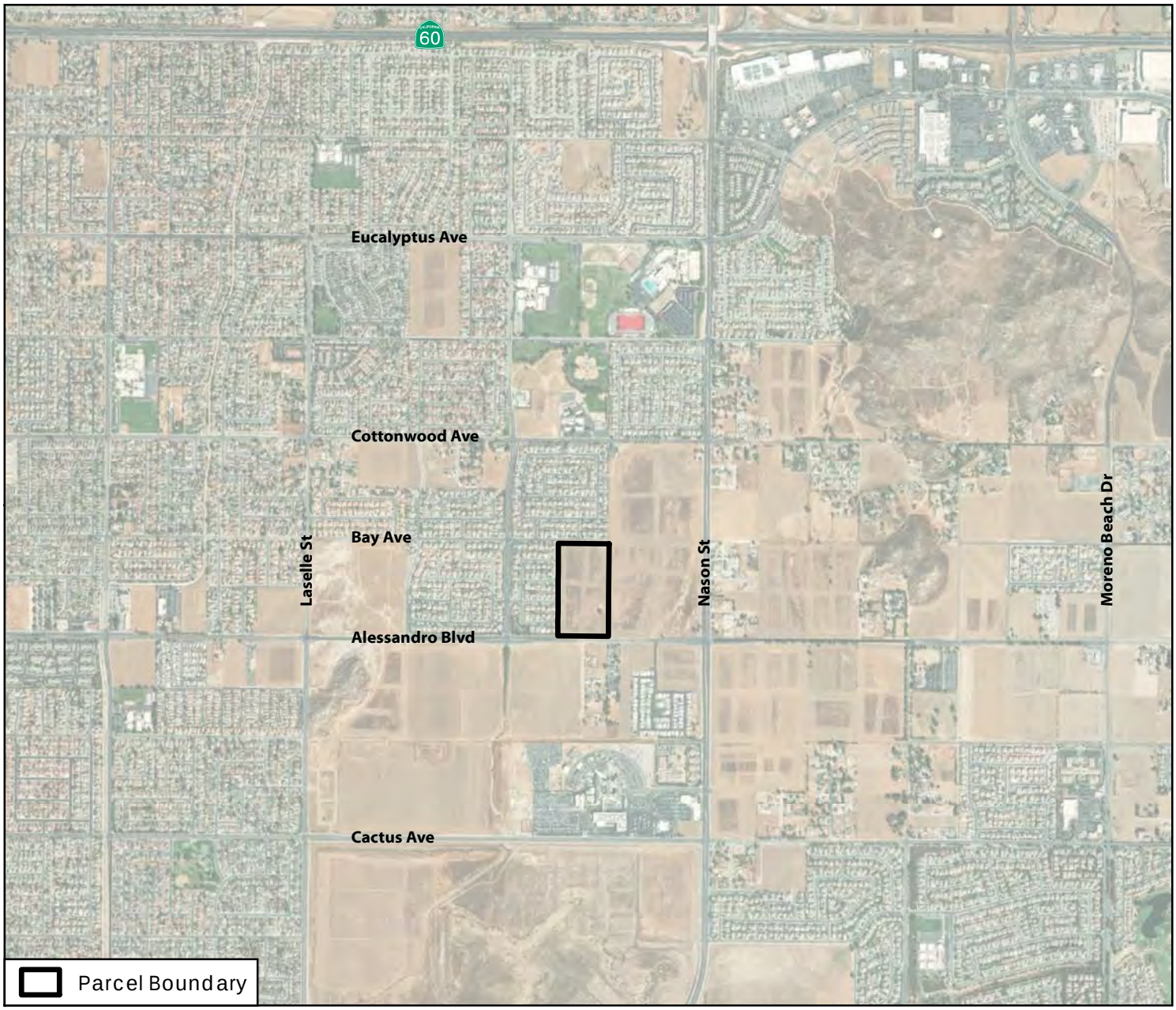
ATTACHMENT A

Figures

Blackhawk Environmental



Source: Maxar, Esri 2020

Figure 1

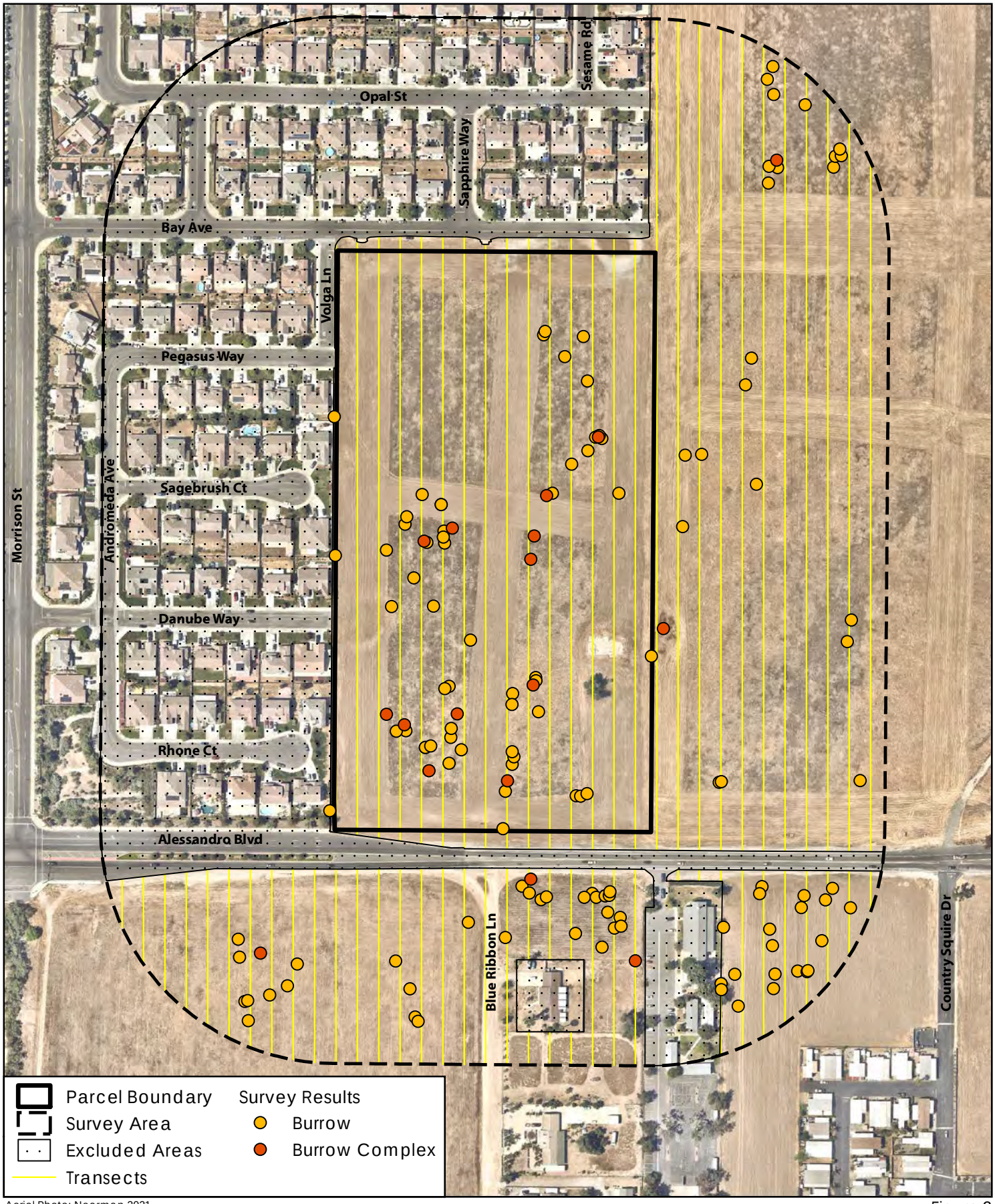
Project Vicinity and Location

Pacifica Alessandro Project

BLACKHAWK Environmental

N

0 2,000 Feet



Aerial Photo: Nearmap 2021

Figure 2

Burrowing Owl Survey Results

Pacifica Alessandro Project

BLACKHAWK Environmental

N

0 270 Feet

ATTACHMENT B

Site Photographs

Blackhawk Environmental

Photograph 1: East-facing photo of southern boundary of Project Site consisting of disturbed habitat of non-native grasses and recently disked soils.

Photograph 2: North-facing photo of western boundary of Project Site bordered by residential housing.

Photograph 3: East-facing photo of northern boundary of Project Site, bordered by Bay Avenue and residential housing.

Photograph 4: Northeast-facing photo showing a large area of disked soils and the single pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) within the Project Site.

Photograph 5: South-facing photo of the vacant, disturbed land within the Survey Area along east boundary of the Project Site.

Photograph 6: Northeast-facing photo of vacant land in southern portion of the Survey Area.

Photograph 7: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow along the western boundary concrete wall.

Photograph 8: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow in a rubble pile located within the Project Site.

Photograph 9: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow showing signs of a ground squirrel runway.

Photograph 10: Representative photo of a suitable burrow with no sign of BUOW activity.

Photograph 11: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow covered with spider webs, indicating inactiveness.

Photograph 12: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow complex with sign of ground squirrel activity located within the Project Site.

Photograph 13: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow located in a rubble pile within the Project Site.

Photograph 14: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow covered with debris, indicating inactiveness.

Photograph 15: Representative photo of a BUOW-suitable burrow with the opening covered by debris and a gopher carcass nearby.