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Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office
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TO:

	FAX NUMBER:
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FOR: Karen Goebel and Doreen Stadtlander (x.223)

SUBJECT:

DBESP - City of Corona Foothill Parkway Westerly Rd Extension
Riverside County

COMMENTS:

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In Reply Refer To:
 FWS/CDFG-08B0415-08TA0460

Clint Herrera, P. E.
 Senior Civil Engineer
 City of Corona
 400 South Vicentia Avenue
 P.O. Box 940
 Corona, California 92878-0940

APR 15 2008

Subject: Determination of Biologically Equivalent or Superior Preservation for the Foothill Parkway Westerly Road Extension, City of Corona, Riverside County, California

Dear Mr. Hererra:

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (Department), collectively the "Wildlife Agencies," have reviewed the subject Determination of Biologically Equivalent or Superior Preservation (Determination) that we received from the City of Corona on February 20, 2008. The Determination has been submitted to address unavoidable impacts to riparian/riverine habitats in accordance with the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Protection of Species Associated with Riparian/Riverine Areas and Vernal Pools policy (Riparian/Riverine Policy).

The proposed project includes construction of approximately 2 miles of a four lane road through undeveloped terrain in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains in the City of Corona, Riverside County, California. Cleveland National Forest is directly west of the proposed project, and Prado Flood Control Basin and the Santa Ana River are approximately 1.5 miles north. The study area described in the Determination totals approximately 150 acres that includes the project impact area and a 100-foot buffer. Vegetation types within the study area include oak woodland (1.21 acres), alluvial fan sage scrub (2.67 acres), riparian forest (4.60 acres), coastal sage scrub (~40 acres), chaparral (49.36 acres), and non-native grassland/disturbed/developed (~50 acres).

The majority of riparian riverine impacts are proposed to Wardlow Wash with approximately 5,000 linear feet of the wash in the direct path of the proposed road. In addition, Maybey Creek and several other unnamed drainages would be impacted by road crossings. Although estimates of riparian riverine impacts were detailed in the Determination, discussions during a field visit on March 20, 2008, indicated that the current estimates of impacts differ from those in the Determination. The Determination needs to clearly identify impacts to riparian and riverine habitats.

As stated in the MSHCP (page 6-24), Permittees shall ensure that, through the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, project applicants develop project alternatives demonstrating efforts that first avoid, and then minimize direct and indirect effects to riparian/riverine resources. The proposed project has not undergone the CEQA review process nor has information

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Carolyn Syms Luna, Director FWS/CDFG-08B0415-08TA0460

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been provided in the Determination that demonstrates avoidance and minimization measures of riparian and riverine habitats have been thoroughly explored. For instance, it appears that a westerly shift of the northern approximate 5000 feet of the road from its current proposed location could eliminate most of the impacts to Wardlow Wash. In addition, incorporating bridge crossings into the proposed project could minimize riparian impacts.

For those impacts to riparian and riverine habitat that are not feasible to avoid, the Determination needs to evaluate the functions and values of the impacted resources and downstream Conservation Areas (e.g. Santa Ana River) including the effects to the hydrologic regime, nutrient retention and transformation, sediment trapping and transport, wildlife habitat, and aquatic habitat. Ultimately, the Determination needs to demonstrate that the project including any mitigation measures would be biologically equivalent or superior to an avoidance alternative.

It appears that several acres of suitable habitat for least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*; vireo) are available on the project site. It is our understanding that surveys are being conducted this breeding season since the previous survey in 2006 is now outdated. Please note that if vireo are found, the MSHCP calls for 90 percent avoidance of habitat that provides for the long-term conservation of this species. If avoidance is not feasible, a Determination must be submitted to address the vireo.

The current mitigation outlined in the Determination included several options ranging from 3.62 acres to 12.58 of replacement, restoration, and enhancement. Details of where, and what types of habitat would be created/restored or enhanced were not provided. Due to lack of information pertaining to habitats being impacted and vague mitigation measures, we cannot evaluate if the proposed project would provide equal or superior preservation than an avoidance alternative.

We recommend that a revised Determination be submitted that details the unavoidable impacts to riparian/riverine resources, all mitigation measures, and the results of the vireo survey. In submitting the revised Determination, Section 6.1.2 of the MSHCP should be revisited to ensure all aspects of the Riparian/Riverine Policy are adequately addressed. Detailed plans including planting palettes, monitoring plans, success criteria, location and means by which the mitigation land will be conserved in perpetuity should be included with the revised Determination.

If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact, Kathleen Pollett of the Service at (760) 431-9440 extension 357 or Magdalena Rodriguez of the Department at (909) 945- 3294.

Sincerely,



for Karen A. Goebel
Assistant Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Leslie MacNair
Senior Environmental Scientist
California Department of Fish and Game

cc:

Amber Oneal, BonTerra Consulting, Costa Mesa, CA