
MEMORANDUM

TO: Robert Fletcher, San Diego Gas & Electric

FROM: Melissa Busby, Busby Biological Services, Inc.

DATE: March 27, 2015

RE: Response to Data Request #9, Issue 4: Provide a Technical Memo Documenting the Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment Methodology and Results for the Encina Hub

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has identified data needs for the proposed San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project (Proposed Project), Application No. 14-04-011. Data Request #9, Issue 4 states the following:

***“Provide a technical memo documenting the burrowing owl habitat assessment methodology and results for the Evergreen Nursery staging yard, the Black Mountain Ranch Community Park staging yard, and the Encina Hub work area. SDG&E provided burrowing owl GIS data in response to Data Request #7 with no accompanying technical assessment.*”**

In the assessment, explain why there is a polygon of unlabeled area surrounded by labeled burrowing owl suitable habitat at the Black Mountain Ranch Community Park between potential habitat areas 15 and 16. Based on aerial imagery, this polygon appears to also be suitable habitat. Refer to Attachment A for the specific location in question.”

Busby Biological Services, Inc. (BBS) conducted a focused burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) habitat assessment within the Biological Survey Area (BSA) in November 2014. Since the burrowing owl habitat assessment was conducted, several new areas – the Evergreen Nursery staging yard, the Black Mountain Ranch Community Park staging yard, the Camino Del Sur staging yard, and the Encina Hub work area – have been added to the BSA that require a focused burrowing owl habitat assessment.

BBS conducted general biological surveys (i.e., vegetation mapping and habitat assessments) within the Black Mountain Ranch Community Park staging yard, Evergreen Nursery staging yard, and the Encina Hub work area. BBS also conducted the general

biological surveys at the newly added Camino Del Sur staging yard. In addition to the general surveys, BBS conducted a focused burrowing owl habitat assessment in all of these areas.

This memorandum provides a description of the methods and results used for the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment conducted at the Encina Hub work area (Figure 1). The methods and results of the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment conducted at the Camino Del Sur staging yard and the Evergreen Nursery staging yard is covered in a separate memorandum. The Black Mountain Community Park staging yard is no longer part of the Proposed Project. As such, it is not discussed in a memorandum.

The information in this memorandum is intended to supplement the information provided in the letter survey summary report for the November 2014 burrowing owl habitat assessment, titled *Focused Burrowing Owl (Athena cunicularia) Habitat Assessment Report for the Proposed San Diego Gas & Electric Company Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project, San Diego County, California* and dated January 14, 2015. This letter documents the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment that was performed and provides the Proposed Project description, burrowing owl species and historical occurrence information, the habitat assessment methods, and the results of these surveys.

For additional information pertaining to the Proposed Project description, regulatory setting, and biological resources associated with the Proposed Project, please refer to the Biological Technical Report (BTR) prepared for the Proposed Project (BBS 2014).

METHODS

This section briefly describes the background research and field evaluation methods used for the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment at the Encina Hub work area.

Historical Burrowing Owl Occurrence Data

BBS obtained historical burrowing owl occurrence data for the Encina Hub work area and an approximately 5-mile buffer from the SanBIOS database (County of San Diego 2014) and CDFW *California Natural Diversity Database* (CNDDDB; CDFW 2014a). BBS also reviewed other sensitive species resources, including the CDFW Special Animals (CDFW 2014b); Proceedings of the California Burrowing Owl Symposium (Barclay et al. 2007); San Diego County Breeding Bird Atlas (Unit 2004); North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results Analysis 1966-2012 (Sauer et al. 2014); eBIRD (<http://ebird.org>); Gervais et al. (2008); the San Diego Natural History Museum (SDNHM) Bird Atlas Project (SDNHM 2014); and other regional and site-specific relevant information, data, and literature.

Focused Field Evaluation

BBS used the results of the historical occurrence database search along with other background research to evaluate the potentially suitable burrowing owl habitat in the field. BBS thoroughly evaluated the potentially suitable burrowing owl habitat located within the Encina Hub work area and a 500-foot buffer on foot to determine which polygons have the potential to support burrowing owl and require focused burrowing owl surveys.

Areas of suitable burrowing owl habitat were drawn onto the map by hand in the field. In addition, photographs were taken of each polygon evaluated in the burrowing owl habitat assessment area.

To consistently and systematically evaluate each patch of potentially suitable habitat within the burrowing owl habitat assessment area for the potential to support the burrowing owl, BBS recorded data on the following criteria:

- polygon patch size
- dominant vegetation and land use within and adjacent to the polygon
- presence of adjacent foraging habitat
- vegetation height and shrub density within the polygon
- presence of friable soils within the polygon
- presence and quantity of burrows and burrow complexes within the polygon
- other evidence of fossorial animal use and burrow features within the polygon
- slope steepness within the polygon

BBS used this data to assess the overall potential of each potentially suitable burrowing owl habitat polygon to support the burrowing owl, taking into consideration the historical occurrence data and the evaluation criteria. Each habitat patch was either determined as not expected to support burrowing owl, or as having a low, moderate, or high potential to support burrowing owl.

RESULTS

This section briefly describes the results of the background research and field evaluation for the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment at the Encina Hub work area.

Historical Burrowing Owl Occurrence Data

While the CNDDDB search did not result in any historical burrowing owl occurrences within a 5-mile radius of the Encina Hub work area, several historical burrowing owl occurrences were found in the SanBIOS database search. These data did not have any specific location attributes to them, so the exact location of these points is not known. However, they do indicate that burrowing owl is known to occur historically within the vicinity of the Encina Hub work area.

Focused Field Evaluation

No burrowing owls or burrowing owl sign were observed during the focused habitat assessments conducted at the Encina Hub work area.

On January 22, 2015, BBS evaluated six polygons (approximately 7.04 acres) of potentially suitable habitat located within the Encina Hub work area and a 500-foot buffer (Figure 2; Polygons 1 through 6). Of the six polygons evaluated, four of the polygons (Figure 2; Polygons 1, 2, 4, and 5) – totaling approximately 4.99 acres – do not provide suitable burrowing owl habitat, and two of the polygons (Figure 2; Polygons 3 and 6) – totaling approximately 4.05 acres – provide suitable burrowing owl habitat.

Brief descriptions of both the unsuitable and suitable habitat polygons identified at the Encina Hub work area are provided in this section. The data associated with these polygons are summarized in this memorandum and will be added to the habitat assessment table and included in the final burrowing owl survey summary report.

Unsuitable Burrowing Owl Habitat Polygons

The four polygons that do not provide suitable burrowing owl habitat are described in this section. Because these polygons do not provide suitable habitat, the burrowing owl is not expected to occur in these polygons.

Polygon 1 is approximately 1.41 acres. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 1 consists of disturbed habitat, with revegetated coastal sage scrub, nonnative grassland, Diegan coastal sage scrub, and developed land immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 1 contains compact soils with no small mammal burrows or burrow complexes and is contiguous with only a small patch of nonnative grassland foraging habitat. Polygon 1 was classified as unsuitable for burrowing owl because of the small polygon size, compact soils, and absence of burrows and burrow complexes.

Polygon 2 is approximately 0.46 acre. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 2 consists of disturbed habitat, with active agriculture (tall and dense crops), southern mixed chaparral, Diegan coastal sage scrub, and developed land immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 2 contains friable soils with a few small mammal burrows and a few burrow complexes, but there is no adjacent foraging habitat. Polygon 2 was classified as unsuitable for burrowing owl because of the small polygon size, high level of disturbance resulting from the adjacent active agricultural practices that do not support suitable burrowing owl foraging crops, and continued active development within the immediate vicinity.

Polygon 4 is approximately 0.78 acre and is located within an existing golf course. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 4 consists of short, ornamental grasses associated

with the golf course landscaping, with Diegan coastal sage scrub immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 4 contains compact soils that are matted with ornamental grasses, and it does not support any small mammal burrows or burrow complexes. The golf course provides adjacent foraging habitat. Polygon 4 was classified as unsuitable for burrowing owl because of the small polygon size, compact soils, absence of burrows and burrow complexes, and a high level of human activity associated with the golf course.

Polygon 5 is approximately 0.35 acre and is located within the same existing golf course as Polygon 4, above. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 5 consists of short, ornamental grasses associated with the golf course landscaping, with Diegan coastal sage scrub and mulefat scrub immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 5 contains compact soils that are matted with ornamental grasses, and it does not support any small mammal burrows or burrow complexes. The golf course provides adjacent foraging habitat. Polygon 5 was classified as unsuitable for burrowing owl because of the small polygon size, compact soils, absence of burrows and burrow complexes, and a high level of human activity associated with the golf course.

Suitable Burrowing Owl Habitat Polygons

The two polygons that provide suitable burrowing owl habitat along with the potential for occurrence for the burrowing owl within the polygon are described in this section.

Polygon 3 is approximately 2.24 acres. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 3 consists of nonnative grassland and Diegan coastal sage scrub, with Diegan coastal sage scrub, southern mixed chaparral, disturbed habitat, bare ground, and developed land immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 3 contains friable soils with a few small mammal burrows, but no burrow complexes. It is adjacent to a golf course and nonnative grassland that provide suitable foraging habitat. Based on the site conditions, BBS determined that there is a low potential for occurrence for burrowing owl within this polygon.

Polygon 6 is approximately 1.81 acres. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 3 consists of nonnative grassland and disturbed coastal sage scrub, with Diegan coastal sage scrub, southern mixed chaparral, and nonnative grassland immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 6 contains friable soils that have been compacted in some areas and also supports a moderate number of small mammal burrows and a few burrow complexes. Openings in adjacent coastal sage scrub provide suitable foraging habitat. Based on the site conditions, BBS determined that there is a low potential for occurrence for burrowing owl within this polygon.

DISCUSSION

No burrowing owls or burrowing owl sign were observed during the focused habitat assessments conducted to date for the Proposed Project.

Focused burrowing owl surveys are required in all suitable habitat that is located within the Proposed Project area and a 500-foot buffer of the Proposed Project area, including the suitable habitat identified at the Encina Hub work area.

One round of focused burrowing owl surveys was conducted on March 17, 2015 and included all suitable burrowing owl habitat identified within the Encina Hub work area footprint and the 500-foot buffer, including the suitable habitat discussed in this memorandum. During this first round of surveys, the boundaries of the suitable habitat polygons were refined.

No burrowing owls or burrowing owl sign were observed during the first round of surveys.

Additional focused surveys are planned for spring and summer 2015, following the most recent California Department of Fish and Wildlife protocol (CDFW 2012). The results of the focused habitat assessment and the focused surveys will be summarized in a survey summary report once the surveys have been completed.

REFERENECES

Busby Biological Services, Inc. (BBS)

2014 *Biological Technical Report for Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project*, City of San Diego, San Diego County, California. March 2014.

2015 *Focused Burrowing Owl (Athena cunicularia) Habitat Assessment Report for the Proposed San Diego Gas & Electric Company Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project*, San Diego County, California. January 14.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)




2012 *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation*. State of California. Natural Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game. March 2012.



G:\SDGE_SX2PQandTL6961\SDGE_SunriseSX2PQ\MXD\SXtoPQ_BusbyRegionalLocation(CCGS).mxd

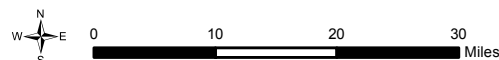
CONFIDENTIAL - PROPERTY OF SDG&E. FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY. UNAUTHORIZED DISSEMINATION PROHIBITED. THIS DOCUMENT SHALL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL PURSUANT TO Public Utilities Code Section 583, General Order 66-C, any applicable non-disclosure agreement, and/or the North American Electric Reliability Corporation's Rules of Procedure, Section 1500 et seq, and any other applicable federal and state laws and regulations. THIS MAP IS NOT SURVEY GRADE, and SDG&E makes no representations or warranties, expressed or implied, as to its accuracy, correctness, defensibility, completeness or any other standard or measure of quality or adequacy, or as to its fitness for use or intended use for any particular purpose. SDG&E disclaims all liability for your selection or use of this map or any consequences therefrom. *Certain technology used under license from AT&T Intellectual Property I, L.P. Copyright ©1998 - 2007 AT&T Intellectual Property I, L.P. All Rights Reserved.*

Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230 kV Transmission Line Project

-  Project Location
-  StagingYards_Feb2015
-  Proposed Project

Proposed Project Location

Figure 1



3/26/2015



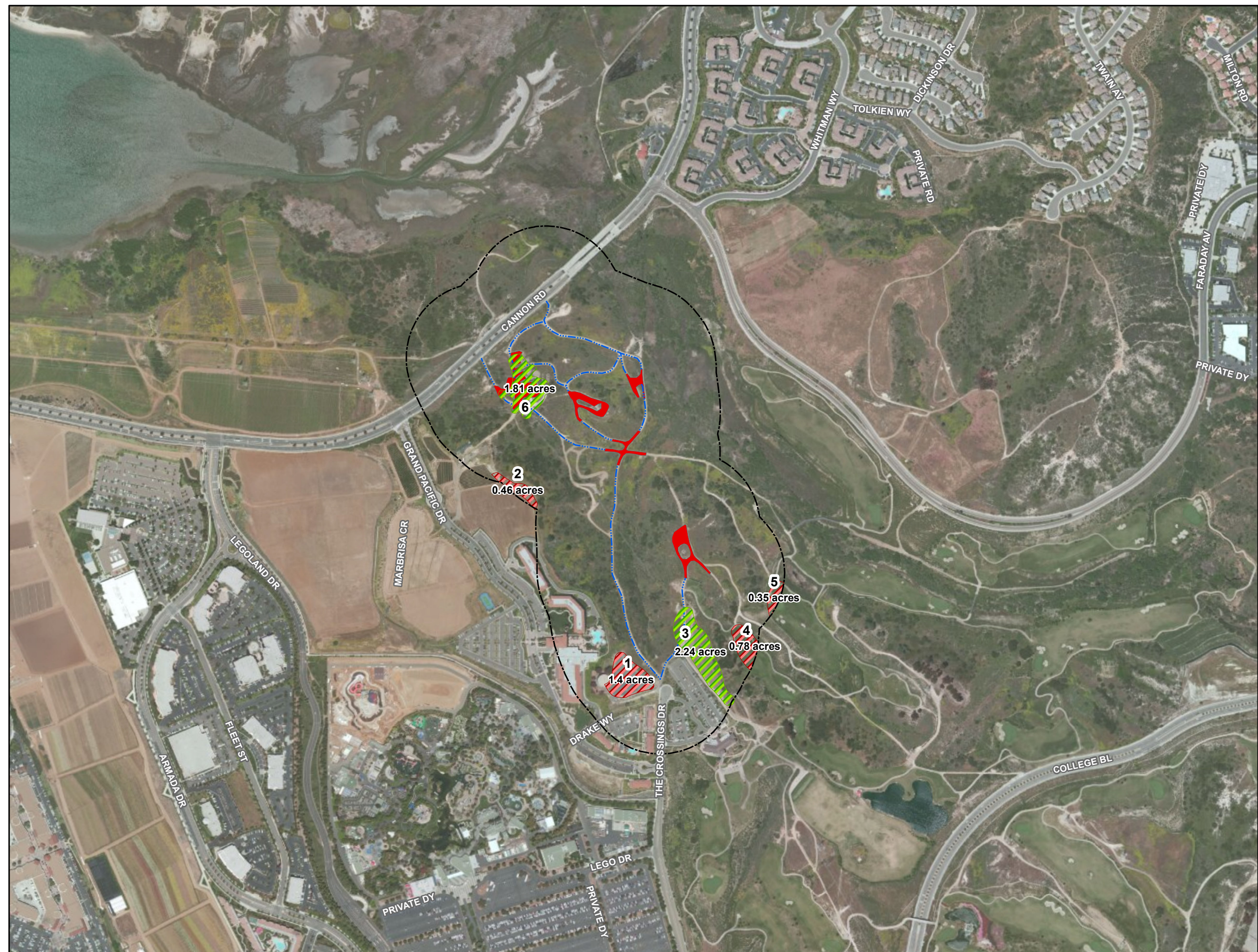
Sempra Energy utility

Sources: SDG&E; Content may not reflect National Geographic's current map policy. Sources: National Geographic, Esri, DeLorme, HERE,

**Sycamore to Peñasquitos
230 kV Transmission Line Project**

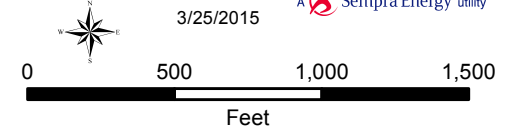
**Burrowing Owl Habitat
Assessment Results**

Figure 2



- Project Access Roads
- Encina Hub Work Areas
- BurrowingOwl_EncinaHub
- Burrowing Owl Survey Area
- Potential for Occurrence**
- Not Expected to Occur
- Potential to Occur

CONFIDENTIAL - PROPERTY OF SDG&E. FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY. UNAUTHORIZED DISSEMINATION PROHIBITED. THIS DOCUMENT SHALL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL PURSUANT TO Public Utilities Code Section 583, General Order 66-C, any applicable non-disclosure agreement, and/or the North American Electric Reliability Corporation's Rules of Procedure, Section 1500 et seq. and any other applicable federal and state laws and regulations. THIS MAP IS NOT SURVEY GRADE, and SDG&E makes no representations or warranties, expressed or implied, as to its accuracy, correctness, defensibility, completeness or any other standard or measure of quality or adequacy, or as to its fitness for use or intended use for any particular purpose. SDG&E disclaims all liability for your selection or use of this map or any consequences therefrom. "Certain technology used under license from AT&T Intellectual Property I, L.P. Copyright ©1998 - 2007 AT&T Intellectual Property I, L.P. All Rights Reserved."



Source: CA Dept Fish and Wildlife, CNDDB Nov2014, SanBIOS, Nov 2014; Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community. Content may not reflect National Geographic's current map policy. Sources: National