
MEMORANDUM

TO: Robert Fletcher, San Diego Gas & Electric

FROM: Melissa Busby, Busby Biological Services, Inc.

DATE: March 26, 2015

RE: Response to Data Request #9, Issue 4: Provide a Technical Memo Documenting the Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment Methodology and Results for the Evergreen Staging Yard (and the Camino Del Sur Staging Yard)

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.

The Black Mountain Community Park staging yard is no longer part of the Proposed Project. As such, it will not be discussed further in this memorandum.

This memorandum provides a description of the methods and results used for the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment conducted at the Camino Del Sur staging yard and the Evergreen Nursery staging yard (Figure 1). The methods and results of the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment conducted at the Encina Hub work area is covered in a separate 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 Camino Del Sur staging yard and the Evergreen Nursery staging yard.

Historical Burrowing Owl Occurrence Data

Because the Camino Del Sur staging yard and the Evergreen Nursery staging yard are along the main alignment and adjacent to the previous BSA, BBS utilized the historical burrowing owl occurrence data obtained for the November 2014 burrowing owl habitat assessment to inform the focused burrowing owl habitat assessment at these newly added staging yards.

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. Following the general biological surveys that were conducted at the Camino Del Sur staging yard and the Evergreen Nursery staging yard, BBS thoroughly evaluated the potentially suitable burrowing owl habitat 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 Camino Del Sur staging yard and the Evergreen Nursery staging yard.

Historical Burrowing Owl Occurrence Data

No historical burrowing owl occurrences are known within a 5-mile radius of the Proposed Project. In addition, current literature also indicates that the burrowing owl is not anticipated to occur within the Proposed Project vicinity (BBS 2015).

Focused Field Evaluation

No burrowing owls or burrowing owl sign were observed during the focused habitat assessments conducted at the Camino Del Sur staging yard and Evergreen Nursery staging yard.

BBS evaluated three polygons (approximately 37.98 acres) of potentially suitable burrowing owl habitat, two polygons (approximately 27.38 acres) at the Camino Del Sur staging yard and one polygon (approximately 3.54 acres) at the Evergreen Nursery staging yard. All three of these polygons provide suitable burrowing owl habitat.

Brief descriptions of the suitable habitat polygons identified at the Camino Del Sur staging yard and the Evergreen Nursery staging yard 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.

Camino Del Sur Staging Yard

The focused burrowing owl habitat assessment at the Camino Del Sur staging yard was conducted on February 18, 2015. In addition to the suitable burrowing owl habitat polygons that were identified during the November 2014 burrowing owl habitat assessment (Figure 2; Polygons 17, 18, and 19), two polygons (Polygons 37 and 38) of suitable burrowing owl habitat were identified within and immediately surrounding the Camino Del Sur yard. These polygons are contiguous with the suitable habitat previously identified in the BSA (Figure 2).

Polygon 37 is approximately 7.06 acres. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 37 consists of sparse, nonnative grassland, with coastal sage scrub, nonnative grassland, and developed land immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 37 contains friable soils with a few to moderate amount of small mammal burrows, a few burrow complexes, and other burrowing features (i.e., slopes, berms, drainage banks) and is contiguous with nonnative grassland foraging habitat. Based on the site conditions, BBS determined that there is a low to moderate potential for occurrence for burrowing owl within this polygon.

Polygon 38 is approximately 27.38 acres. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 38 consists of sparse, nonnative grassland, with southern willow scrub, nonnative grassland, and developed land immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 38 contains friable soils with a moderate amount of small mammal burrows, a few burrow complexes, and other burrowing features (i.e., slopes, berms) and is contiguous with nonnative grassland foraging habitat. Based on the site conditions, BBS determined that there is a low to moderate potential for occurrence for burrowing owl within this polygon.

Evergreen Nursery Staging Yard

The focused burrowing owl habitat assessment at the Evergreen Nursery staging yard was conducted on January 26, 2015. In addition to the potential suitable burrowing owl habitat polygons that were assessed during the November 2014 burrowing owl habitat assessment (Figure 3; Polygons 22 and 23), one small polygon (Polygon 39) of suitable burrowing owl habitat was identified to the northeast of the Evergreen Nursery staging yard and is adjacent to but not contiguous with the original BSA (Figure 3).

Polygon 39 is approximately 3.54 acres. The dominant vegetation within Polygon 39 consists of sparse, disturbed coastal sage scrub and disturbed habitat, with Diegan coastal sage scrub, disturbed habitat, ornamental vegetation and developed land immediately adjacent to the polygon. Polygon 39 contains friable soils with a few small mammal burrows, burrow complexes, other burrowing features (i.e., slopes, drainages) and is adjacent to a moderate amount of patchy foraging habitat, including disturbed habitat and openings within disturbed coastal sage scrub. 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 Camino Del Sur staging yard and Evergreen Nursery staging yards.

One round of focused burrowing owl surveys was conducted during the week of March 22, 2015 and included all suitable burrowing owl habitat identified within the Proposed Project 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.

REFERENCENCES

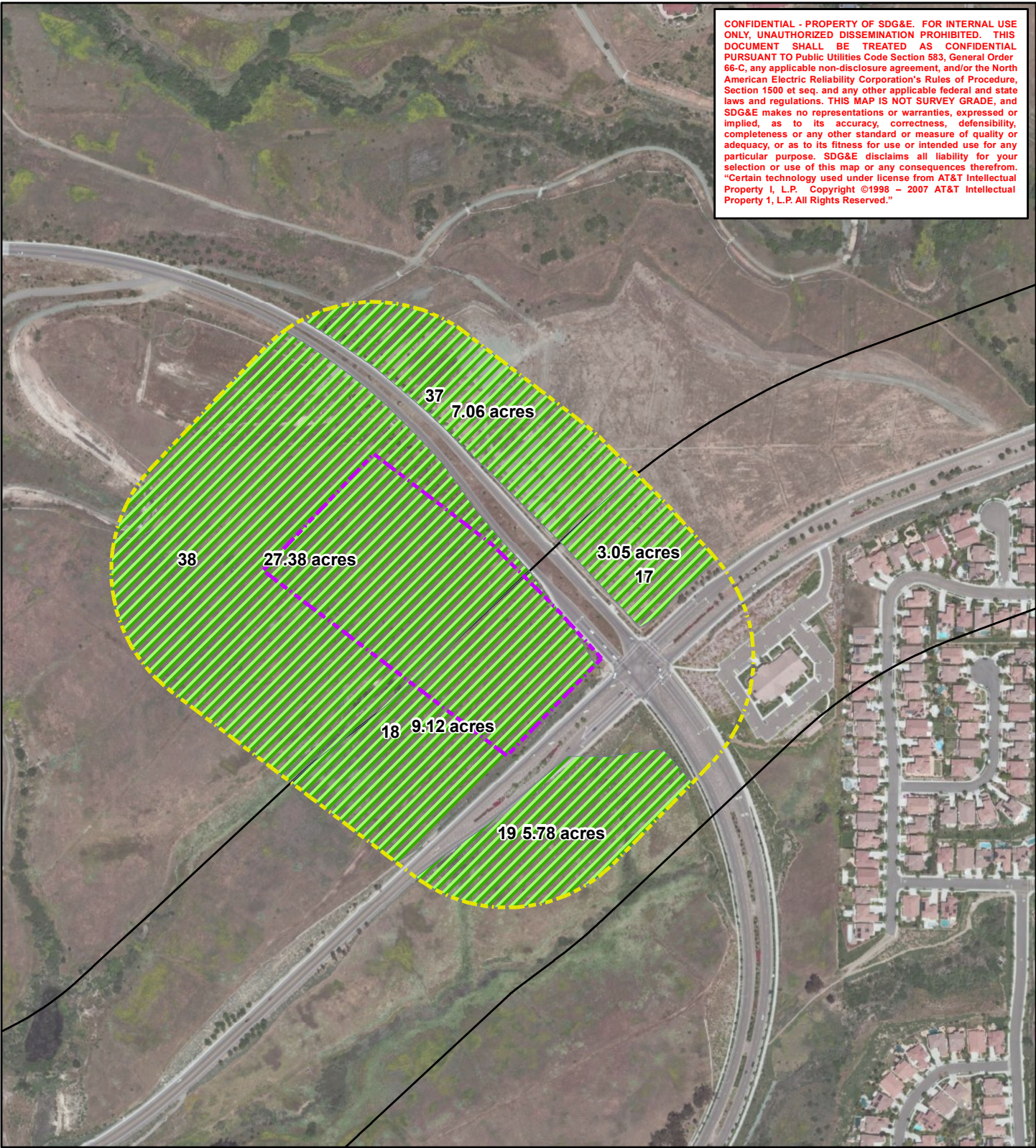
Busby Biological Services, Inc. (BBS)

- 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.*

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- Staging Yard
 - 500ft Buffer
 - BurrowingOwlHabitatSurveyArea2
- Potential for Occurrence**
- Not Expected
 - Suitable

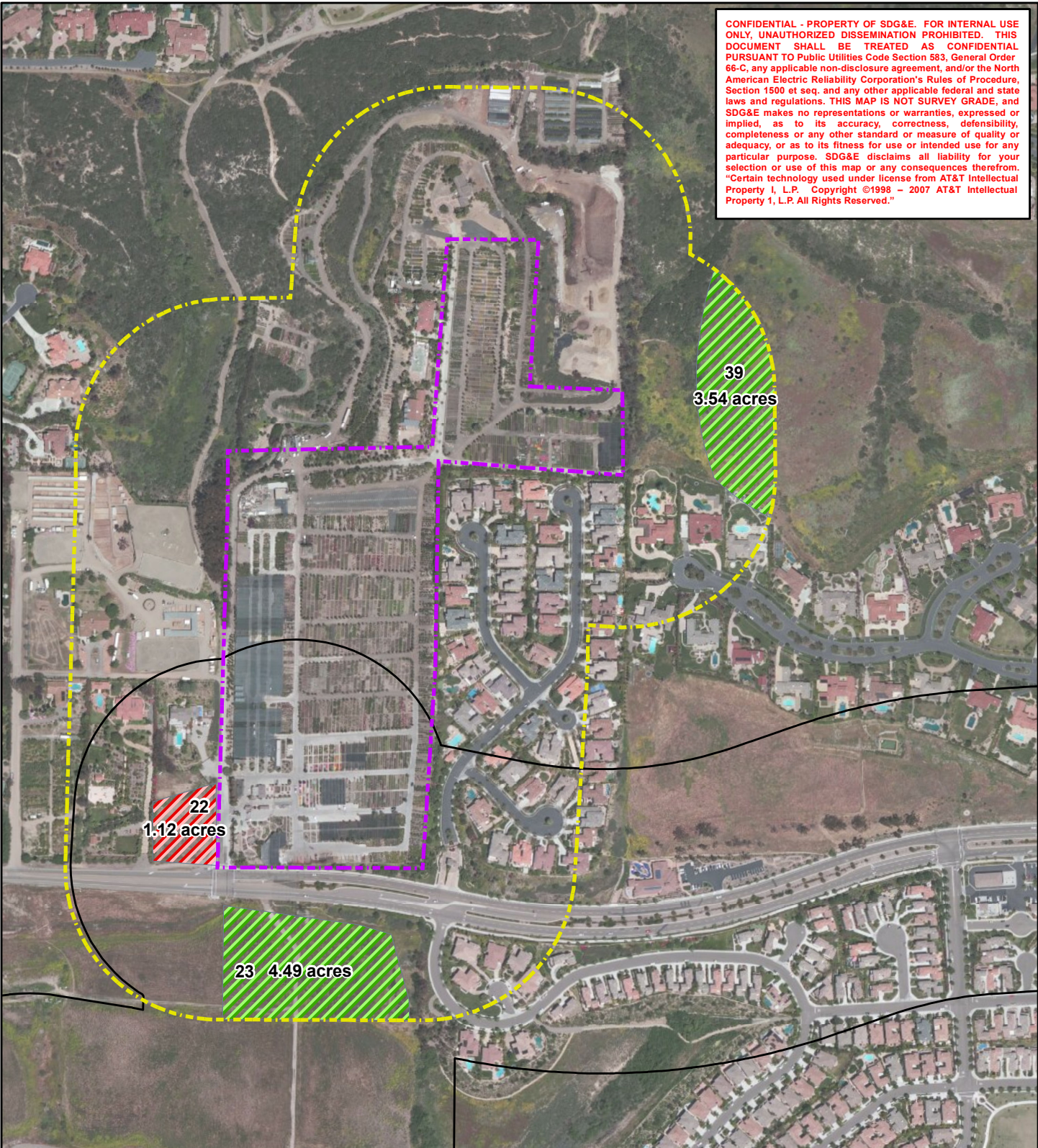
Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230kV Transmission Line Project
 Camino Del Sur Staging Yard Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment Results

Figure 2

0 280 560 840 Feet

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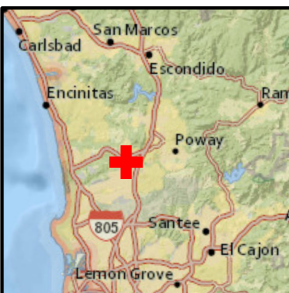
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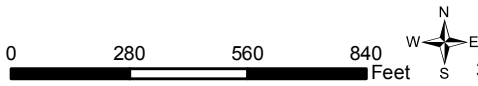
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Sycamore to Peñasquitos 230kV Transmission Line Project
 Evergreen Nursery Staging Yard Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment Results

Figure 3



- Staging Yard
 - 500ft Buffer
 - BurrowingOwlHabitatSurveyArea2
- Potential for Occurrence**
- Not Expected
 - Suitable



3/26/2015