## HARMONY GROVE VILLAGE SOUTH

## APPENDIX E

## BIOLOGICAL TECHNICAL REPORT

to the

## DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

PDS2015-GPA-15-002; PDS2015-SP-15-002 PDS2015-TM-5600; PDS2015-REZ-15-003 PDS2015-MUP-15-008; PDS2015-ER-15-08-006

**APRIL 2017** 

Prepared for:
County of San Diego
Planning & Development Services
5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 310
San Diego, California 92123



# **Harmony Grove Village South Project**

Biological Technical Report

PDS2015-GPA-15-002; PDS2015-SP-15-002 PDS2015-TM-5600; PDS2015-REZ-15-003 PDS2015-MUP-15-008; PDS2015-ER-15-08-006

April 2017

**Project Proponent:** 

**RCS Harmony Partners, LLC** 

2305 Historic Decatur Road, Suite 100 San Diego, CA 92106

Prepared for:

County of San Diego Planning & Development Services

5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 310 San Diego, CA 92123

Karl Osmundson

County-approved Biological Consultant

Prepared by:

**HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.** 

7578 El Cajon Boulevard La Mesa, CA 91942

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## **Biological Technical Report**

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5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 310
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Project Proponent:

RCS Harmony Partners, LLC 2305 Historic Decatur Road, Suite 100 San Diego, CA 92106

Prepared by:
Karl Osmundson
County-approved Biological Consultant
HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
7578 El Cajon Boulevard
La Mesa, CA 91942

April 2017

## Harmony Grove Village South Project Biological Technical Report

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At the request of RCS Harmony Partners, LLC (Project Proponent), HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. (HELIX) has completed this biological resources technical report for the Harmony Grove Village South Project (Project), which is proposed in the unincorporated community of Harmony Grove in San Diego County, California. The Project would generally consist of a residential community with 453 single- and multi-family dwelling units in five neighborhoods, park and recreational uses, open space, a potential on-site wastewater reclamation facility, and related roadway and utility infrastructure improvements within Assessor Parcel Numbers (APNs) 235-011-06-00, 238-021-08-00, 238-021-09-00, and 238-021-10-00. The Project would occur within an approximately 111-acre area, referred to herein as the Project site. Off-site roadway improvements to Country Club Drive are also anticipated, consisting of the addition of a third lane to the segment south of Harmony Grove Road; potential replacement of the Arizona crossing over Escondido Creek with a new bridge, also currently under consideration by the County; and installation of utility lines in paved roadways. The off-site improvements would occur within an approximately 5.0-acre area.

In preparing the biological resources technical study for the Project, HELIX established a 143-acre study area encompassing the 111-acre Project site and approximately 32 acres of off-site areas within 100 feet of the site, including the off-site improvement areas. The purpose of this report is to document the existing biological conditions within the study area and provide an analysis of potential impacts to sensitive biological resources with respect to local, state, and federal policy. This report provides the biological resources technical documentation necessary for review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by the County of San Diego (County) Planning & Development Services (PDS).

HELIX conducted general biological surveys, jurisdictional delineations, rare plant surveys, and protocol-level surveys for the Hermes copper butterfly (*Lycaena hermes*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*), and least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) during the period of April to November 2014. In total, 25 surveys were completed in 2014. Another survey was performed in January 2016 to obtain additional data on vegetation and jurisdictional waters and wetlands. The study area supports 11 vegetation communities/habitat types: non-native vegetation, disturbed habitat, urban/developed, Diegan coastal sage scrub (including disturbed), coastal sage-chaparral transition, southern mixed chaparral, non-native grassland, southern [willow] riparian scrub, mule fat scrub, coast live oak woodland, and eucalyptus woodland. Sensitive natural communities requiring compensatory mitigation for impacts include Diegan coastal sage scrub, coastal sage-chaparral transition, southern mixed chaparral, non-native grassland, southern riparian scrub, mule fat scrub, and coast live oak woodland.

Five special status plant species were observed within the study area during 2014 rare plant surveys: ashy spike-moss (*Selaginella cinerascens*), San Diego sagewort (*Artemisia palmeri*), southwestern spiny rush (*Juncus acutus* var. *leopoldii*), summer holly (*Comarostaphylis diversifolia* ssp. *diversifolia*), and wart-stemmed ceanothus (*Ceanothus verrucosus*). The southern portion of the study area supports a substantial population of wart-stemmed ceanothus, consisting of an estimated 20,000 individuals. In addition, the study area supports five individual

coast live oak (Quercus agrifolia) trees that are not associated with areas mapped as oak woodland habitat.

Thirteen special status animal species were observed within the study area during the 2014 and 2016 surveys: American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), barn owl (*Tyto alba*), coastal California gnatcatcher, great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), green heron (*Butorides virescens*), least Bell's vireo, northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), western bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*), white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*), and yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*). Of these, four species were determined to use the study area for breeding and/or roosting: barn owl, coastal California gnatcatcher, yellow warbler, and yellow-breasted chat. The remaining eight species were observed on occasion flying over, foraging, and/or perching within various portions of the study area during 2014 and 2016 surveys.

The study area supports a reach of Escondido Creek, where an existing low-water crossing occurs for Country Club Drive, in addition to several unnamed ephemeral drainage features that are tributary to Escondido Creek. These features would qualify as wetland and non-wetland waters of the U.S. subject to the regulatory jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) pursuant to Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA); wetland and non-wetland waters of the State subject to the regulatory jurisdiction of the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA; riparian-vegetated and unvegetated streambed subject to the regulatory jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) pursuant to Sections 1600 *et seq.* of California Fish and Game Code (CFG Code); and wetlands subject to the regulatory jurisdiction of the County pursuant to the Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO).

The study area occurs within the boundaries of the Draft Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) North County Plan (Draft North County Plan), which has not yet been approved or adopted. Within the Draft North County Plan, the study area occurs within lands identified as Pre-Approved Mitigation Area (PAMA) and supporting habitat values of Low to Very High on the Habitat Evaluation Model. The Del Dios Highlands Preserve abuts the study area to the south. Expansive open space continues beyond the Del Dios Preserve into the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve and other undeveloped lands to the south, east and west as part of a large, regional core area. The majority of the study area is characterized by non-native grassland and chaparral. Scrub and chaparral habitat in the southern and southeastern portions of the study area are contiguous with off-site habitat associated with this core area.

Potential significant impacts were identified for special-status species, sensitive natural communities, jurisdictional waters and wetlands, and wildlife corridors and linkages. Following County Guidelines, a total of 77.9 acres of on-site impacts would occur either by direct physical removal of the habitat or by habitat fragmenting, isolating, and degradation. An additional 0.1 acre on site would be considered impact neutral due to location within an existing easement that would remain in place. Approximately 34.8 acres (31 percent) would be placed in biological open space which would protect the resources in perpetuity, including recordation of a biological open space easement, preparation of an Resource Management Plan (RMP) approved by the County and Wildlife Agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] and CDFW,



collectively), and long-term management by a qualified entity approved by the County and Wildlife Agencies. The proposed Project would also restore and create an additional 1.8 acres of Diegan coastal sage scrub within the biological open space, which would help minimize the overall impact on the habitat. Approximately 4.6 acres of off-site impacts would occur, a portion of which would include a new bridge over Escondido Creek, thereby enhancing hydrologic and biological conditions, including wildlife movement functions. Mitigation measures are proposed to fully mitigate potential significant impacts on special status species, sensitive vegetation communities/habitats, jurisdictional waters and wetlands, and wildlife corridors and linkages. Implementation of these mitigation measures would mitigate the potential impacts to below a level of significance.

In addition to the 34.8 acres of on-site preservation in biological open space, mitigation will include 51.5 acres of off-site preservation of biological open space, to also include recordation of a biological open space easement, preparation of an RMP approved by the County and Wildlife Agencies, and long-term management by a qualified entity approved by the County and Wildlife Agencies. To the extent available, off-site mitigation shall occur within land designated as PAMA in the Draft North County Plan and located in the Elfin Forest-Harmony Grove Planning Area, northern coastal foothills ecoregion, or other location deemed acceptable by the County and Wildlife Agencies. Mitigation may also include purchase of conservation and mitigation credits at approved conservation and mitigation banks, as deemed acceptable by the County, Wildlife Agencies, USACE, and/or RWQCB.

Based on feedback from the Wildlife Agencies and County, this report analyzes both the proposed project and an alternative, referred to herein as the "Biologically Superior Alternative," that provides for increased avoidance and conservation of Diegan coastal sage scrub. The Biologically Superior Alternative would result in a wider habitat connection and avoidance of additional coastal sage scrub on the east side of the project site, including habitat supporting a breeding pair of coastal California gnatcatchers. Approximately 46.5 acres (42 percent) would be placed in on-site biological open space under the Biologically Superior Alternative. No on-site restoration or creation of Diegan coastal sage scrub would occur under the Biologically Superior Alternative. The alternative is only discussed under those subject areas and guidelines where the impact would be different from that of the proposed project.



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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

At the request of RCS Harmony Partners, LLC, HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. (HELIX) has completed this biological resources technical report for the proposed Harmony Grove Village South Project (Project). The purpose of this report is to document the existing biological conditions within an approximately 143-acre study area and provide an analysis of potential impacts to sensitive biological resources with respect to local, state, and federal policy. This report provides the biological resources technical documentation necessary for review under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by County of San Diego (County) Planning and Development Services (PDS).

#### 1.2 PROJECT LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The approximately 143-acre study area for the biological resources technical study described in this report includes the Project site and areas within 100 feet of the site and potential off-site improvements.

### 1.2.1 Project Location

The property that encompasses the approximately 111-acre Project site is generally located northwest of County Route S6, south of State Route (SR) 78, east of Interstate (I-) 5, and west of I-15 in the unincorporated community of Harmony Grove in north San Diego County, California (Figure 1). More specifically, the site occurs immediately south of Harmony Grove Road and east of Country Club Drive, just outside and west of the City of Escondido (Figure 2). The site is depicted within Sections 30 and 31 of Township 12 South, Range 2 West of the Rancho Santa Fe, California U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle map (Figure 3). Primary access to the site is provided by Country Club Drive. The Project site occurs within Assessor Parcel Numbers (APNs) 235-011-06-00, 238-021-08-00, 238-021-09-00 and 238-021-10-00.

The study area occurs within the boundaries of the Draft Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) North County Plan, which has not yet been approved or adopted. Within the Draft MSCP North County Plan, the study area occurs within areas identified as Pre-Approved Mitigation Area (PAMA; Figure 4).

#### 1.2.2 Project Description

The proposed Project would contain 453 residential units and a small commercial area with limited retail/commercial uses (the Center House). In addition to on-site uses, the proposed Project would require the construction of on- and off-site infrastructure improvements associated with roads, water, and sewer. Refer to Figure 5, Proposed Project Site Plan, for the location of proposed uses. The total square footage of structures associated with the Center House use would be approximately 5,000 square feet, with a minimum of 500 square feet of commercial use. The residential units would be a mix of multi- and single-family units.



Roadways would be improved off site to accommodate access into the Project site. The current crossing of Escondido Creek would be substantially upgraded. When the creek floods, flood waters have historically been high enough that existing residents south of the creek cannot cross it. The existing at-grade, concrete pavement crossing, underlain by culverts and supported by substantial rip-rap, would be removed and replaced with a bridge. In addition, Country Club Drive, from Harmony Grove Road to the southern Project entrance, is planned to be widened to three lanes.

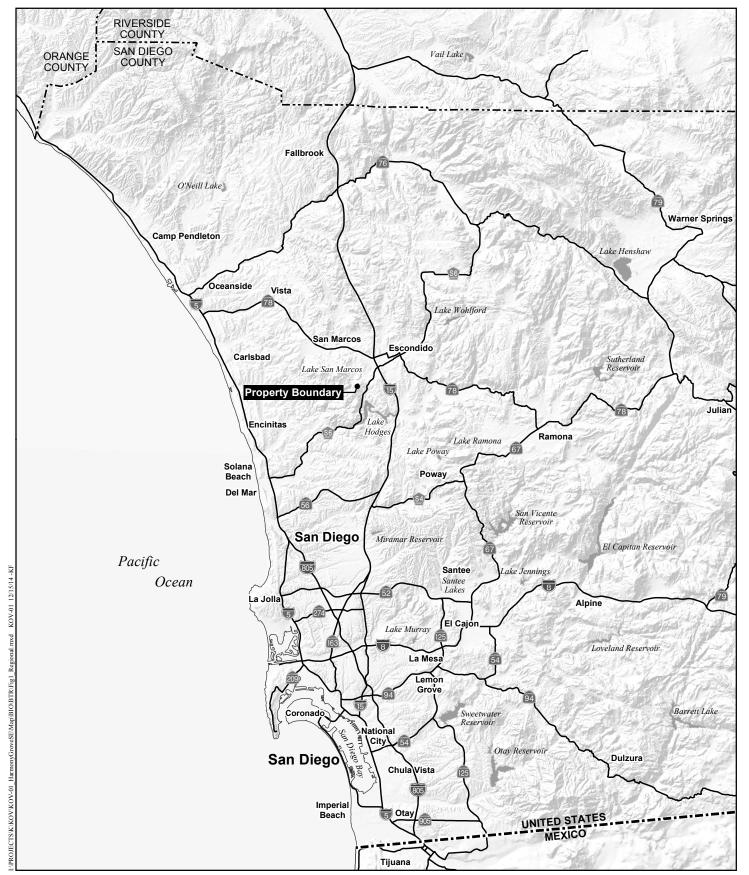
The Project design includes an on-site wastewater treatment and water reclamation facility (WTWRF) located in the northwestern portion of the site<sup>1</sup>. This facility would provide treatment for all wastewater generated on site, and would produce reclaimed effluent per applicable regulatory standards for irrigation of on-site landscaping. Based on the loading and design criteria used in the 180,000 gallons per day (gpd) Harmony Grove plant design, a scaled-down version could be constructed to serve the Proposed Project.

There is an existing unimproved trail across the southwestern portion of the project site. The Elfin Forest Trail starts from the Del Dios Highlands Trail in the Del Dios Highlands Preserve and runs along the western edge of the site from the southwestern corner of the property to Country Club Drive. The portion of the trail within the development footprint would be improved as a 6- to 8-foot-wide public rural trail. The portion within proposed biological open space would utilize the existing alignment as much as possible; however, some sections would have to be improved to meet the County requirement for a trail that is 4 to 6 feet wide and slopes outward 2 to 5 percent. A 20-foot-wide trail easement will be dedicated to the County along the entire trail length. Because the actual footprint of trail improvements has not been determined, the full area of the 20-foot trail easement is counted as an impact where it crosses chaparral. The actual impacts will be minimized by designing the trail improvements to avoid removing wartstemmed ceanothus to the maximum extent practicable, in consultation with the County. The existing trail alignment crosses an ephemeral streambed qualifying as non-wetland waters of the U.S./State, and the surrounding coast live oak woodland is California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)-jurisdictional riparian habitat. The improved trail through this area will be designed to avoid any fill, discharge, or dredging of jurisdictional waters and removal of coast live oak trees or their roots; therefore, no impacts would occur to jurisdictional waters or coast live oak woodland from trail improvements in that area.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>As described in the Project EIR Chapter 4.0, Alternatives, alternative design scenarios were evaluated for the treatment of wastewater. Of the possible scenarios, the full on-site WTWRF proposed for the Project would result in the greatest biological impacts, and was therefore included in this analysis as a worst case.



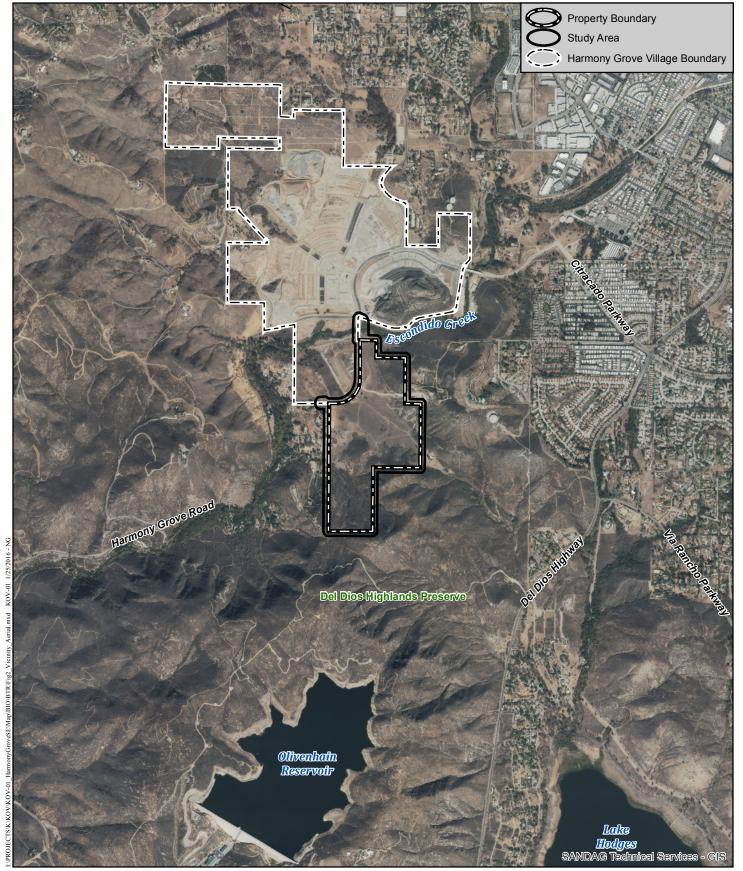
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## **Regional Location Map**



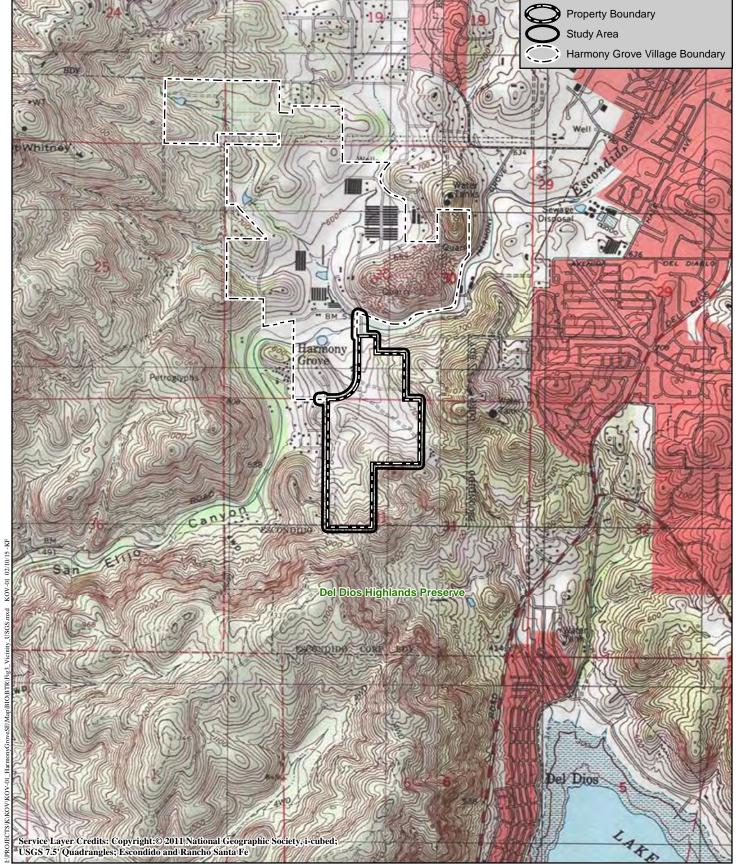




**Project Vicinity Map (Aerial Photograph)** 

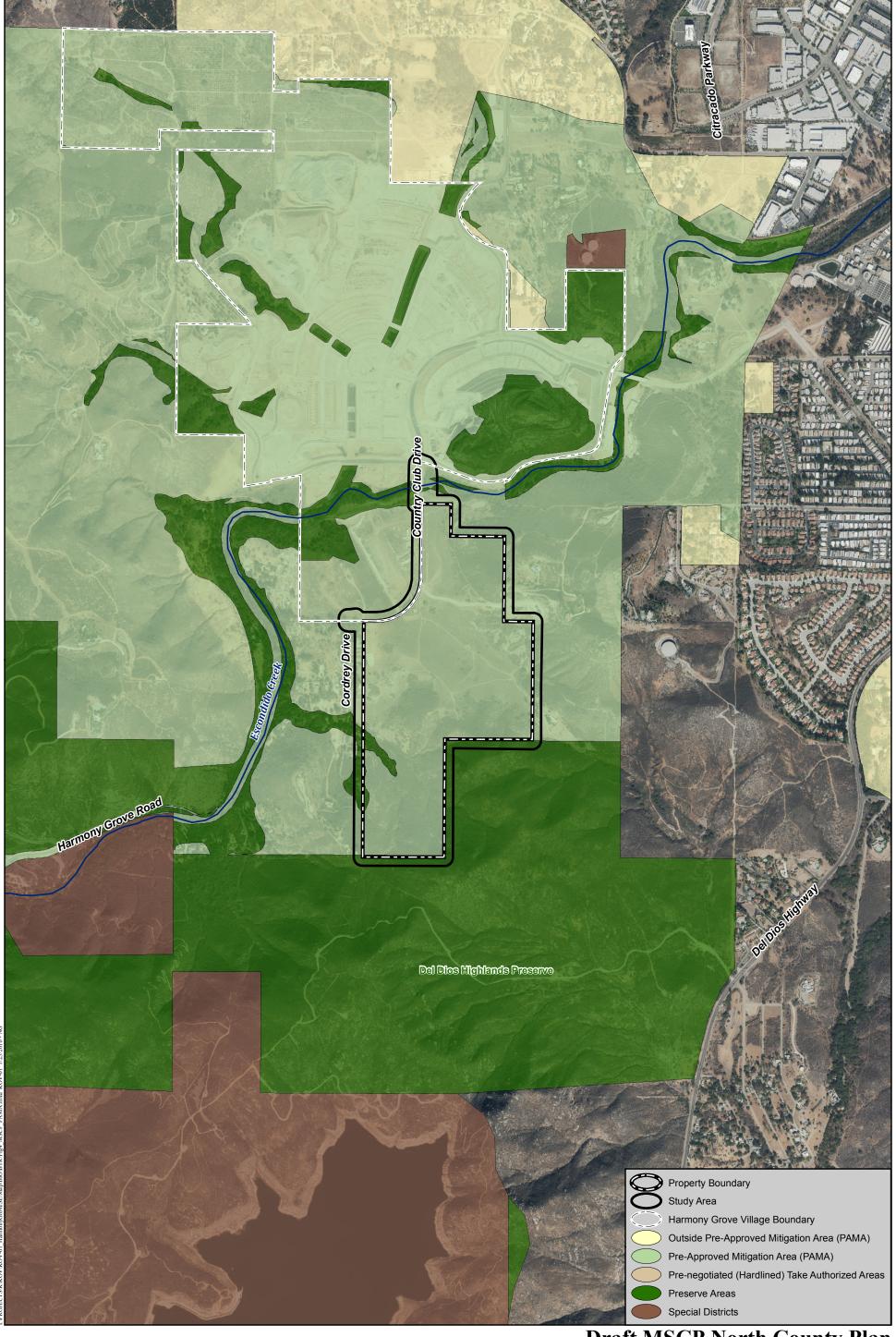






**Project Vicinity Map (USGS Topography)** 





**Draft MSCP North County Plan** 



Site Plan

This report also analyzes a Biologically Superior Alternative (alternative) that was developed based on input from the CDFW, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and County during batching meetings held in 2015. The alternative would avoid the highest quality, intact coastal sage scrub habitat on the site; increase the total coastal sage scrub preservation on site from 2.3 to 6.9 acres; include the gnatcatcher nest location from 2014 in open space; and improve overall wildlife movement along the east side of the project. Refer to Figure 6 for the layout of the alternative.

#### 1.3 METHODS

### 1.3.1 Literature Review

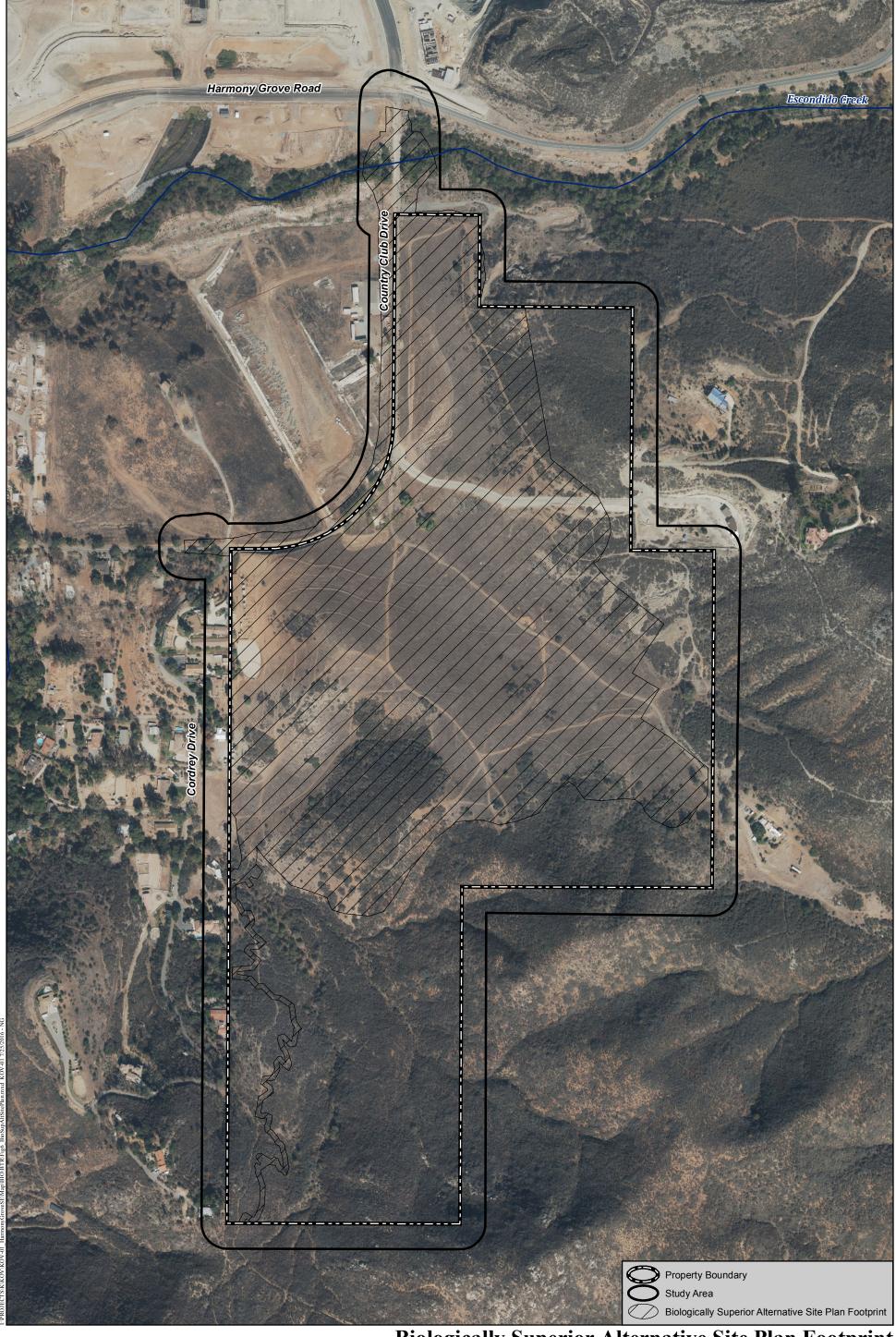
Prior to conducting biological field surveys in 2014, HELIX conducted a search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) for information regarding sensitive species known to occur within 2 miles of the study area, as well as a review of USFWS, SanBIOS, and MSCP sensitive species databases. A search of the San Diego Plant Atlas (SDNHM 2010) was also conducted.

### 1.3.2 General Biological Surveys

General biological surveys of the study area were conducted by HELIX on March 7 and August 26, 2014. Updated surveys were conducted by HELIX on September 4, 2015 and March 31 and April 3, 2017 to confirm existing conditions. Vegetation was mapped on a 1"=100' scale aerial of the site. A minimum mapping unit size of 0.10 acre was used when mapping upland habitat; 0.01 acre was used when mapping wetland and riparian habitat. The study area was surveyed on foot and with the aid of binoculars and spotting scopes. Representative photographs of the site were taken, with select photographs included in this report as Appendix F. Plant and animal species observed or otherwise detected were recorded in field notebooks. Animal identifications were made in the field by direct, visual observation or indirectly by detection of calls, burrows, tracks, or scat. Plant identifications were made in the field or in the lab through comparison with voucher specimens or photographs. The locations of special status plant and animal species incidentally observed or otherwise detected were mapped. The study area was examined for evidence of potential jurisdictional waters and wetlands, including vernal pools. In addition to the general biological surveys, HELIX conducted a formal jurisdictional delineation, rare plant surveys, and year 2014 protocol-level surveys for Hermes copper butterfly (Lycaena hermes), burrowing owl (Athene cunicularia), coastal California gnatcatcher (Polioptila californica californica), and least Bell's vireo (Vireo bellii pusillus). Table 1 provides a summary of biological surveys conducted for the Project.

Table 1 BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS							
SURVEY TYPE	DATE	HELIX PERSONNEL					
2014							
General biological survey, vegetation	March 7	Stacy Nigro, Benjamin Rosenbaum					
community/habitat type mapping,	July 24	Karl Osmundson					
habitat assessment, and basic wetland delineation	August 26	Karl Osmundson					
Formal jurisdictional delineation	March 14	Larry Sward, Benjamin Rosenbaum					
	April 30	Amy Mattson					
Rare plant	August 26	Karl Osmundson					
_	November 3	Erica Harris					
	May 21	Amy Mattson, Laura Moreton					
Hammas aannan hystanfly	June 4	Amy Mattson, Jenna Hartsook					
Hermes copper butterfly	June 13	Amy Mattson, Jenna Hartsook					
	July 7	Amy Mattson, Benjamin Rosenbaum					
	April 9	Tara Baxter, Benjamin Rosenbaum					
Dumaying avul	May 14	Tara Baxter, Benjamin Rosenbaum					
Burrowing owl	June 5	Benjamin Rosenbaum, Jesse Miller					
	July 3	Tara Baxter, Jenna Hartsook					
	May 13	Erica Harris					
Coastal California gnatcatcher	May 20	Erica Harris, Tara Baxter					
	May 29	Erica Harris					
	April 25	Tara Baxter					
	May 6	Stacy Nigro					
	May 21	Tara Baxter, Jenna Hartsook					
Least Bell's vireo	June 2	Stacy Nigro					
Least Bell's vileo	June 12	Tara Baxter					
	June 23	Tara Baxter					
	July 2	Laura Moreton					
	July 14	Tara Baxter					
	2015						
Site visit, general biological survey	September 4	Karl Osmundson					
	2016						
Chaparral assessment, jurisdictional delineation	January 13	Larry Sward, Beth Ehsan					
2017							
Site visit, general biological survey,	March 31	Karl Osmundson					
rare plant survey	April 3						





**Biologically Superior Alternative Site Plan Footprint**