COTTONWOOD SAND MINE PROJECT – TOPICAL RESPONSES TO COMMENTS

A number of comments received on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) and Recirculated Draft EIR (RDEIR) addressed the same or similar issues and environmental concerns. Rather than repeat responses to recurring comments in each letter, the common responses are outlined in the following topical responses, which are referenced by number in the responses to comments.

- Topical Response 1 – Reason for Recirculation of the DEIR and the Recirculated DEIR Process
- Topical Response 2 – CEQA Requirements for Responding to Comments
- Topical Response 3 – EIR Errata and Updated Technical Reports
- Topical Response 4 – Reclamation Process, Timing, and Final Use
- Topical Response 5 – Imported Material and Backfilling Process
- Topical Response 6 – Public Health Effects
- Topical Response 7 – Noise Impacts
- Topical Response 8 – Traffic Impacts
- Topical Response 9 – Wildlife Corridors and Species Connectivity Impacts
- Topical Response 10 – Cumulative Impacts
- Topical Response 11 – Consistency with Plans and Policies
- Topical Response 12 – Flood Control and Bridge Design

TOPICAL RESPONSE 1 – REASON FOR THE RECIRCULATION OF THE DEIR AND THE RECIRCULATED DEIR PROCESS

Several comments have questioned why portions of the Cottonwood Sand Mine Draft DEIR were recirculated for public review, whether the public should expect additional substantive changes to the Project following circulation of the RDEIR, and why additional truck trips were added to the Project by way of the RDEIR.

Typically, an EIR is circulated for only one public review and comment period. However, in some circumstances, an EIR, or portions of an EIR, must be recirculated for an additional public review and comment period. Recirculation is generally required when new information is added to an EIR that would deprive the public of a meaningful opportunity to comment on substantial adverse environmental impacts. (California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] Guidelines, Section 15088.5.) The purpose of recirculation is to give the public and agencies the opportunity to

evaluate changes in the project, new information or analysis, or new conclusions relating to the significance of impacts, and submit comments on the same.

Here, the Project's DEIR was originally circulated for a 75-day public review and comment period, from December 16, 2021 to February 28, 2022. All interested persons and organizations had an opportunity during the DEIR's public review period to submit their written comments on the DEIR to the County.

After the close of the original DEIR public review and comment period, the County and Applicant reviewed all comment letters received from government agencies, organizations, tribes, and interested persons. One purpose of this review was to identify whether comments received raised any specific issues with the Project or the DEIR's analyses that would require changes to the DEIR to remedy and subsequent recirculation.

As a result of some comments received during the public review and comment period, the Applicant determined that a change to the Project was necessary. Specifically, comments raised concerns with the available amount of backfill required to meet the reclamation plan's proposed post-reclamation elevation. In other words, to fulfill the reclamation plan, the Applicant determined, in response to comments received on the DEIR, that additional backfill would be required. Thus, the Project was revised to include an additional 58 round-trip truck trips per day to bring suitable backfill material to the Project site. Because these additional 58 truck trips per day were not included in the Project Description presented in the DEIR, it was determined that a RDEIR would be necessary to notify the public of this change, and disclose the potential for this change in the Project to result in environmental impacts different than those disclosed in the DEIR.

As a result of comments received from the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) during the DEIR public review and comment period, the County determined that additional biological surveys should be completed. These additional surveys determined there was a potential for the Project to impact three additional special status plant species that were not previously identified in the DEIR (Palmer's goldenbush [*Ericameria palmeri var. palmeri*], San Diego sagewort [*Artemisia palmeri*], and southwestern spiny rush [(*Juncus acutus* ssp. *Leopoldii*]), and additional special status animal species (white-tailed kite [*Elanus leucurus*], small-footed myotis [*Myotis ciliolabrum*], Townsend's big-eared bat [*Corynorhinus townsendii pallescens*], western mastiff bat [*Eumops perotis*], western red bat [*Lasiurus blossevillii*], and Yuma myotis [*Myotis yumanensis*]). To reduce potential impacts to these species to a less than significant level, new mitigation measures, and revisions to mitigation measures included in the original DEIR, were required. Because these potential impacts and new and revised mitigation measures were not disclosed in the DEIR, it was determined that a RDEIR would be appropriate to notify the public of these impacts and disclose the level of impact that might occur as a result of the Project.

Finally, as a result of comments received from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) during the DEIR public review and comment period, the County determined, at RWQCB's request, that an additional Stormwater Quality Management Plan (SWQMP) for Priority Development Projects (PDPs) should be prepared for the Project. The SWQMP describes how the Project would comply with the applicable requirements of the County of San Diego Best Management Practices (BMP) Design Manual and the County of San Diego Watershed Protection

Ordinance. Because this SWQMP was not included in the original DEIR, it was included in the RDEIR to provide the public with the opportunity to review and comment upon its contents.

The RDEIR recirculated for a second round of public review and comment between June 29, 2023 and August 14, 2023. The RDEIR consisted of Chapter 1.0, *Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting*; Subchapter 2.2, *Biological Resources*; and the PDP SWQMP. Comments received on the RDEIR questioned why only these portions of the DEIR were recirculated and not other sections of the EIR. As summarized in Topical Response 3, *EIR Errata and Updated Technical Reports*, potential impacts to other environmental issue areas resulting from the additional truck trips were evaluated prior to recirculation. None of the additional information, clarifications, or analysis resulting from this evaluation changed the significance determinations of any impacts disclosed in the DEIR. As indicated in CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088.5(b) and (c), recirculation is not required where the new information added to the EIR merely clarifies, amplifies, or makes insignificant modifications, and where the revisions or additions to a previously circulated Draft EIR are limited to a few chapters or portions of the EIR, only those chapters or portions must be recirculated for an additional round of public review and comment.

Since the RDEIR was released for public review and comment, no additional changes have been made that require additional recirculation. While this Final EIR (FEIR) does include errata, additional analysis provided in response to comments, and refinements of some discussions included in the EIR, none of these changes have triggered recirculation of any portion of the document for an additional round of public review and comment in accordance with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088.5(b).

TOPICAL RESPONSE 2 – CEQA REQUIREMENTS FOR RESPONDING TO COMMENTS

Comments have been submitted that do not raise an issue concerning the environmental analysis or adequacy of the DEIR or RDEIR, are beyond the scope of the DEIR and RDEIR, or do not provide details or expand upon the commenters' concerns. As required by CEQA, the responses to comments included in this FEIR address those comments that raise "significant environmental issues." (Public Resources Code, Section 21091(d)(2)(B) ["written response shall describe the disposition of each significant environmental issue that is raised by commenters"]; CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088 ["lead agency shall respond to comments raising significant environmental issues received during the noticed comment period"].) A lead agency is not required to respond to each comment made during the review process; however, it must respond to the most significant environmental questions presented. (*Browning-Ferris Industries v. City Council* (1986) 181 Cal.App.3d 852, 862.)

CEQA Guidelines, Section 15204(a), outlines parameters, guidelines, and recommendations for submitting comments. This section reads:

> *In reviewing draft EIRs, persons and public agencies should focus on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing the possible impacts on the environment and ways in which the significant effects of the project might be avoided or mitigated. Comments are most helpful when they suggest additional specific alternatives or mitigation measures that would provide better ways to*

> *avoid or mitigate the significant environmental effects. At the same time, reviewers should be aware that the adequacy of an EIR is determined in terms of what is reasonably feasible…. CEQA does not require a lead agency to conduct every test or perform all research, study and experimentation recommended or demanded by commenters.*

When responding to comments, lead agencies need only respond to comments which raise significant environmental issues and do not need to provide all information requested by reviewers, so long as a good-faith effort at full disclosure is made in the EIR. CEQA Guidelines, Section 15204(c), further advises that commenters explain the basis for their comments, and submit data or references offering facts, reasonable assumptions based on facts, or expert opinion supported by facts in support of their comments. CEQA Guidelines, Section 15204(d), also states that each responsible and trustee agency focus its comments on environmental information germane to that agency's statutory responsibility. CEQA Guidelines, Section 15204(e), reads: "This section shall not be used to restrict the ability… of the lead agency to reject comments not focused as recommended by this section."

Given the above, comments on a project's merits, comments expressing general support or opposition for a project, comments encouraging a lead agency to approve or disapprove a proposed project, and comments opining that a project's benefits do not outweigh its environmental impacts, do not raise "significant environmental issues" for purposes of CEQA. However, these comments are considered by the lead agency and decisionmaker, the entity that will ultimately make the decision on the project's merits, even though CEQA does not require a specific response to be included in the EIR.

Comments that touch upon, but do not expand upon or raise specific issues with, topics covered in the DEIR or RDEIR, also do not directly raise a "significant environmental issue" requiring a detailed response. (*City of Irvine v. County of Orange* (2015) 238 Cal.App.4th 526, 553.)

For comments that do raise "significant environmental issues," the level of detail required in a response depends on factors such as the significance of the issues raised, the level of detail of the proposed Project, the level of detail of the comment, and the extent to which the matter is already addressed in the EIR or responses to other comments. (*City of Long Beach v. Los Angeles Unified School District* (2009) 176 Cal.App.4th 889, 901.) The level of detail in a response may match the level of detail provided in the comment. (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088(c)). A general response is appropriate when a comment does not explain the relevance of evidence submitted with it, or includes references to information that is not readily available to the lead agency. (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088(c).)

Neither CEQA nor the CEQA Guidelines prescribe a specific format for responses to comments, and any format is adequate so long as a good faith and reasoned analysis of significant environmental issues is provided. These responses to comments utilize both topical and individual responses. Where a Topical Response or a prior individual response adequately addresses an environmental issue, later responses may refer the reader back to the relevant response.

Neither CEQA nor the CEQA Guidelines require a lead agency to respond to comments submitted to the agency after the close of the public comment and review period. (Public Resources Code,

Section 21091(d).) The public comment and review period for the DEIR ran from December 16, 2021 to February 28, 2022. The public comment and review period for the RDEIR ran from June 29, 2023 to August 21, 2023. Comment letters received by the County after February 28, 2022, on issues raised or presented in the DEIR are late comments and do not require a response. Comment letters received by the County after August 21, 2023, on the issues raised or presented in the RDEIR are also late and do not require a response. Per CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15088.5(c), where revisions or additions to a previously circulated Draft EIR are limited to a few chapters or portions of the EIR, only those chapters or portions must be recirculated for an additional round of public review and comment. Per Section 15088.5(f)(2) a lead agency may request that comments be limited to the parts of the EIR that are being recirculated. Consistent with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088.5(f)(2), the County noted in its various notices relating to the RDEIR, the Recirculation Reader's Guide, and the RDEIR itself that reviewers of the RDEIR should limit their comments to the contents of the recirculated documents only.

Finally, the County directed in its notices that all comments must be submitted to the County Planning & Development Services in writing to be included in the FEIR. Thus, comments made by commenters orally, including those made at the July 25, 2023 community meeting, where a formal transcription was not made by a court reporter, are not included in this FEIR.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 3 – EIR ERRATA AND UPDATED TECHNICAL REPORTS

As part of this FEIR, updates to the information provided in the text of the DEIR and some of the technical studies supporting the analyses of the DEIR have been updated. (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15132.) Changes and updates to the text of the DEIR are provided in redline errata. Updates to the technical studies are generally provided in addenda to the technical studies. With the exception of updates to the biological resources chapter and technical study, which were recirculated in the RDEIR, the changes and updates do not affect the significance determination of any impact disclosed in the DEIR, or otherwise present significant new information, as that term is defined by CEQA. Where updates or clarifications were made to the text of the DEIR or to a technical study in response to specific comments received during the DEIR or RDEIR comment periods, the written responses to those comments address and further explain the changes or clarifications made.

The following text summarizes updates made to technical reports in response to comments received on the DEIR that are now incorporated into this FEIR.

Appendix D – Archaeological Inventory and Assessment

Comments received from the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation (Sycuan) during public review of the DEIR requested that additional information be provided in the Ethnohistory discussion of the Project Archaeological Inventory and Assessment, included as Appendix D to the DEIR. In the Revised Archaeological Inventory and Assessment provided in the FEIR, additional ethnographic context was provided from two sources referenced in the Sycuan letter—the 1980 *SDG&E Interconnection Project System Environmental Study Phase II Corridor Studies: Native American Cultural Resources* study prepared by Wirth Associates and the 1986 *Archaeological Testing and Site Significance Assessment for the Singing Hills Specific Plan PRD, Areas Three and Four* prepared by WESTEC Services, Inc. The additional information provided to the County

after the circulation of the DEIR and added to the technical report as part of this FEIR does not change any of the significance determinations presented in the DEIR.

A comment letter on the DEIR received from James W. Royle, Jr., on behalf of the San Diego County Archaeological Society, Inc., provided information on curation of cultural material from prehistoric archaeological resources site CA-SDI-4765. This has been incorporated into Section 3.3.1.1 of the Revised Archaeological Inventory and Assessment following a review of the online list of curated collections at the San Diego Archaeological Center. There were no changes to the report's impact analysis or mitigation measures.

Appendix F – Acoustical Site Assessment Report

Comments received during public review of the DEIR challenged some of the assumptions and methods used in the Acoustical Site Assessment Report. An addendum to the Acoustical Site Assessment Report has been prepared to provide additional clarifications and refinements to the assumptions and methodology to address these comments. The addendum is included as part of Appendix F to the FEIR and summarized below. None of the clarifications described below change any of the noise-related significance determinations presented in the DEIR.

Operational modeling assumptions were updated related to on-road vehicles and on-site equipment to account for the additional 58 truck trips per day required for the import of backfill material and for a second on-site conveyor that would be used to transport backfill materials to reclamation areas. As described in the addendum, in addition to the low rumbling noise generated by the conveyor as it operates, noise would result from the backfill material (assumed to be gravel for modeling purposes) falling off the end of the conveyor into a pile. Noise generated by the on-site equipment used for backfilling activities is the same as previously considered in the noise modeling for excavation area grading.

Mining operation noise impacts from processing plant, grading, material extraction, backfilling, and on-road hauling activities at the exterior use areas of the same 14 noise sensitive land uses (NSLUs) evaluated in the DEIR were analyzed with and without implementation of mitigation measure NOI-1 (refer to addendum Table A, *Mining Operation Noise Levels*, Table B, *Mitigated [8-foot Barrier] Mining Operation Noise Levels*, and Table C, *Mitigated [12-foot Barrier] Mining Operation Noise Levels*). Noise associated with the Project's updated operations was evaluated for two scenarios: (1) as combined with existing noise levels associated with traffic along Willow Glen Drive to determine noise impacts to NSLUs anticipated to be subject to noise from both sources; and (2) as combined with cumulative project traffic Willow Glen Drive to determine noise impacts to NSLUs anticipated to be subject to noise from the cumulative sources. The results of the analyses are provided for both with and without implementation of mitigation measure NOI-1. Due to the cumulative impact identified at residential group 5 (refer to addendum Figure 1c), a 12-foot barrier is now required between Project excavation activities and NSLUs represented by residential group 5. The provision of a 12-foot barrier instead of the previously identified 8-foot barrier would reduce the increase in noise from the Project's updated operational noise combined with cumulative Project traffic noise to a less than significant level. Mitigation measure NOI-1 was updated to reflect this change, as shown in ~~strikeout~~/underline format in the addendum.

Finally, in response to comments on the DEIR indicating that the Project's mining operation noise levels should be compared to pre-existing ambient noise levels, HELIX placed sound level meters at locations around the Project site and collected 24-hour measurement data to determine the applicability of the County Guidelines for Determining Significance for Noise threshold related to a 10 decibel (dB) Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) increase over pre-existing conditions. As indicated in the County of San Diego Report Format and Content Requirements – Noise (County 2009b), an increase over pre-existing conditions need only be considered if existing ambient noise levels are 49 CNEL or less. The measured CNEL levels ranged from 50.7 to 77.5 dB CNEL. Since each measurement location was above 49 CNEL, the applicable guideline for determining significance of the Project's mining operations noise is comparison to the 60 A-weighted decibel (dBA) CNEL threshold, which is the threshold used in the DEIR and addendum.

The information presented in the addendum is consistent with the findings disclosed in the Acoustical Site Assessment Report prepared in support of the DEIR. With incorporation of revised mitigation measure NOI-1, noise-related impacts remain less than significant, consistent with the findings in the DEIR.

Appendix I – Air Quality Technical Report

Comments received during public review of the DEIR challenged some of the assumptions and methods used in the Air Quality Technical Report. An addendum to the Air Quality Technical Report has been prepared to provide additional clarifications and refinements to the assumptions and methodology that address the comments raised. The addendum is included as part of Appendix I to the FEIR and summarized below. None of these clarifications change the significance determinations for air quality-related impacts disclosed in the DEIR.

Operational emissions modeling was updated for each mining phase to account for the additional 58 truck trips per day required for the import of backfill material. Criteria air pollutant emissions from on-road vehicle trips associated with each mining phase of the Project were modeled using the California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) Version 2020.4.0, as was done in support of the DEIR. As a result of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) withdrawing the Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient Vehicles Rule (SAFE) on March 9, 2022, the CalEEMod option to account for the SAFE Vehicles Rule in accordance with California Air Resources Board (CARB) off-model adjustments factors was not selected for the updated modeling.

Fugitive dust emissions from vehicle and equipment movement on unpaved surfaces were updated based on guidance provided by the San Diego Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD) in their memorandum titled *Haul Road Emissions* last updated January 6, 2022. Where the DEIR analysis used the empirical equation provided in the USEPA *Compilation of Air Pollutant Emission Factors, 5th Edition, Volume 1* (AP-42) Chapter 13 – Miscellaneous Sources, 13.2.2 (Unpaved Roads) dated November 2006, the SDAPCD memorandum points to AP-42 Chapter 13 – Miscellaneous Sources, 13.2.2 (Unpaved Roads) dated January 1995.

The updated analysis in the Addendum to the Air Quality Technical Report also corrects overly conservative assumptions related to the mining activity that were applied in the technical report circulated with the DEIR, but were inconsistent with the DEIR's Project Description. As stated in

DEIR Chapter 1.0, "Approximately 4.3 million cubic yards (cy) (6.40 million tons) of material are proposed to be extracted (p. 1-3)" and "sand extraction operations would be conducted approximately 260 days per year (p. 19)." However, the modeling applied in the Draft EIR assumed up to 7.05 million tons of material extracted with operations occurring approximately 251 days per year.

The revised operational emission estimates, accounting for the changes to the methods and assumptions described above, are provided in Addendum Table B, *Estimated Daily Operational Emissions*. As shown in that table, Project emissions of criteria pollutants and ozone precursors during operation of all mining phases would not exceed the daily screening thresholds that apply for the determination of the significance of impacts. Therefore, the Project's operational emissions would remain less than significant, just as disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

As part of the air quality impact analysis, the DEIR circulated for public review and comment included a detailed health risk assessment (HRA) (Section 3.1.1, *Air Quality*; Appendix I, *Air Quality Technical Report*). The HRA is closely tied to the air quality impact analysis and, as such, was updated to account for the same changes to the methods and assumptions described above related to import truck trips, the USEPA SAFE Vehicles Rule, SDAPCD guidance related to fugitive dust, and correction of previously overly conservative assumptions related to mining activity.

The results of the revised health risk estimates are provided in Table C, *Health Risks from TAC Emissions*, of the Addendum to the Air Quality Technical Report. As shown in Table C, Project emissions of toxic air contaminants (TACs) during operation of all mining phases would not exceed the thresholds that apply for the determination of the significance of impacts for increased incremental cancer risk, acute health risk, or chronic health risk. Therefore, the Project's operational emissions would remain less than significant, just as disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

Appendix K – Greenhouse Gas Emissions Technical Report

An Addendum to the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Technical Report has been prepared to provide additional clarifications and refinements to the assumptions and methodology used in the analysis provided in the DEIR. The Addendum is included as part of Appendix K to the FEIR and summarized below. None of the additional information provided in the technical report changes the significance determination presented in the DEIR.

Operational greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were re-modeled for each mining phase to account for the additional 58 truck trips per day required for the import of backfill material. GHG emissions from on-road vehicle trips associated with each mining phase of the Project were modeled using CalEEMod Version 2020.4.0, as was done in support of the DEIR. As a result of the USEPA withdrawing SAFE on March 9, 2022, the CalEEMod option to account for the SAFE Vehicles Rule in accordance with CARB off-model adjustments factors was not selected for the updated modeling. The updates to the GHG modeling also correct overly conservative assumptions applied in the DEIR related to the mining activity, as described above for the Air Quality Technical Report.

The majority of the Project's GHG emissions would be associated with truck trips for hauling sand and backfill material. As detailed in the Addendum to the Transportation Impact Analysis included as part of Appendix V to the FEIR, even with the additional 58 daily truck trips, the Project would result in a net reduction in County vehicle miles traveled (VMT) associated with construction grade sand transport, with a corresponding reduction in GHG emissions. Nonetheless, to be conservative and to follow the same methodology applied in the DEIR, all mobile GHG emissions associated with the Project were included in the Project GHG emissions inventory and no discount was taken for the fact that, overall, substantially fewer VMT would occur in the region with implementation of the Project.

Further, the updates to the GHG modelling take into account a one-time loss of sequestered carbon dioxide (CO_2) by removing existing on-site trees. To ensure that Project GHG emissions are fully accounted for and disclosed, emissions from this loss of sequestered CO_2 have been estimated according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Good Practice Guidance for Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry* (IPCC 2003).

After updating the operational emission estimates to account for the changes to the methods and assumptions described above, the Project would result in a peak annual net increase of 3,707 metric tons (MT) of CO_2 equivalent (CO_2e) per year. This is greater than the peak annual net increase of 1,815.8 MT CO_2e per year previously disclosed in the DEIR, but still substantially below the South Coast Air Quality Management District screening level for industrial sources of 10,000 MT CO_2e per year. Therefore, the Project would not generate GHG emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment. The Project's GHG emissions would remain less than significant, just as disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

Appendix O – CEQA-Level Drainage Study

Comments received on the Drainage Study raised specific questions regarding the use of berms, grouted riprap, and drop structures to maintain hydrological conditions through the Project site, and effects related to the transfer of water from Loveland Reservoir to Sweetwater Reservoir. The Introduction to the Drainage Study has been updated to remove reference to the use of berms and describe how the bed and lower portion of the banks of the existing on-site trapezoidal channel would be undisturbed in order to allow water transfer to continue along its current path without impacts. Mining activities would lower the channel banks, but the banks would remain at 3.5 feet in height to adequately convey water transfers with a factor of safety. For mined areas behind the banks, the ground would be sloped at no steeper than 4:1 (horizontal:vertical) to meet the ground surface. The trapezoidal channel that would remain during and after mining would convey water transfer flow rates similar to pre-project conditions. This would avoid water transfer flow and capture beyond the channel limit and would not require the use of berms as previously evaluated. The proposed use of drop structures and riprap to prevent erosion is discussed in Topical Response "Flood Control and Bridge Design."

To specifically address comments submitted by Sweetwater Authority, further information supporting and clarifying the hydrologic and hydraulic conclusions of the DEIR is provided in the revised Drainage Study appended to this FEIR. These clarifications specifically address Sweetwater Authority's water transfers based on their Loveland Reservoir releases through the bunger valve in combination with precipitation events. The analyses were based on transfer data

provided by Sweetwater Authority from six release dates spanning from 2010 to 2021, as well as precipitation records from the same time period. Rainfall contribution to each water transfer was factored into the flow rate evaluation. The analyses are used to size the existing on-site trapezoidal channel so that it can continue to convey the maximum water transfer flow rate anticipated based on data from the last 12 years. Rainfall and stream gauge records showed that the maximum water transfer associated with rainfall during the water transfer periods primarily remained at or below 400 cubic feet per second (cfs). In 2021, rainfall caused the water transfer to reach 421 cfs on one day. In 2017, the water transfer on the initial release date reached 591 cfs due to heavy rainfall exceeding 2 inches on the preceding day. Using these data, the on-site channel has been designed to convey the maximum historic water transfer measured at 591 cfs.

Based on these analyses, the report's conclusions were further clarified to reiterate that the Project would not substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area or propose substantial impervious areas that would result in an increase in the rate or amount of surface runoff. Flows would not be impeded or redirected through the site. None of the updates described above identified any new significant impact relating to hydrology or drainage. The Project's hydrological drainage impacts would remain less than significant, just as disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

Appendix S – Sediment Load Analysis

Comments received on the Sediment Load Analysis requested an introductory or background section to describe the purpose of the analysis, clarification on how the ponds located upstream of the Sweetwater Reservoir are evaluated relative to water quality effects and the existing "sedimentation pond" terminology used to describe them, and reformatting of Appendix S Table 6, *Pollutant Load Estimate*, to display values in decimal notation to present the amount of incremental pollution estimated at Sweetwater Reservoir in the unmitigated condition. An Introduction and Background section has been added to describe the Project and purpose of the report. The term "sedimentation pond" has been revised throughout to simply reference "pond." It should be noted that the analysis did not assume that the existing pond located above Jeep Trail would be used for Project mitigation; rather, modeling results of sediment transport are simply reported based on the hydrography that exists downstream of the facility. The pond is separated from the main reservoir in the USGS National Hydrography Dataset, USGS maps dated 1955 to 2018, and aerial photography on Google Earth from 1994 to present, and is described accordingly in the report. Finally, Table 6 was revised to display values in decimal format instead of scientific notation format.

To further clarify and support the findings of the DEIR, and to respond to specific comments received on the DEIR, a Streamflow Infiltration to Groundwater Technical Memorandum was prepared to address comments received regarding streamflow infiltration to groundwater during water transfers and potential impacts to surface water or groundwater as a result of proposed sand mining and reclamation activities. The total volume of infiltrated groundwater was estimated by conducting a series of calculations using a numerical model called Darcy's law, which was formulated to evaluate the flow of a fluid through a porous medium, in this case water through a bed of sand. Darcy's Law uses factors such as vertical flow (Q), hydraulic connectivity (K), hydraulic gradient (i), and the area of the channel (A) to estimate the downward streamflow infiltration to groundwater. The evaluation assumed that the existing Sweetwater River channel

would remain unaltered up to a bank height of 3.5 feet during mining operations and in the future restored condition, as described in the CEQA-Level Drainage Study. The hydraulic connectivity (K) was estimated from surface soil classifications from boring logs obtained on site.

Vertical water flow (Q) is directly proportional to both channel area (A) and hydraulic conductivity (K), so if either the channel area or the channel surface soil type is modified, the vertical flow (i.e., transfer loss to groundwater within the site) would also be modified proportionately. Since soil hydraulic connectivity (K) and channel area (A) would remain the same, downward infiltration (Q) would remain unchanged. For areas outside the channel where backfilling would occur following mining, this result would be independent of the texture of imported fill as long as the K remains unchanged in the upper soil column (approximately the top 3 feet). The Project would be conditioned to ensure that the top 3 feet of material used to backfill the site consists of materials with a similar hydraulic connectivity as the existing conditions to maintain downward infiltration. The additional clarifications, updates, and study do not indicate that any previously undisclosed impact relating to infiltration would occur. The Project's hydrological infiltration impacts would remain less than significant, just as disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

Appendix T – Water Quality Evaluation Report

Minor revisions to the Water Quality Evaluation Report (Appendix T) were made to specifically respond to comments on Appendix T, Table 3, *Water Quality Comparison – Surface Water*, and Table 4, *Water Quality Comparison – Groundwater*, related to monitoring of oil and grease. Table 3 was edited to include oil and grease data that had been obtained from Project surface water sampling. Table 4 was edited to include oil and grease data from supply well groundwater sampling. Footnotes were added to both tables to explain the table shading and formatting. The additional updates and clarifications do not indicate that any previously undisclosed impact relating to infiltration would occur. The Project's water quality impacts would remain less than significant, just as disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

Appendix V – Transportation Impact Analysis

The DEIR circulated for public review and comment included an analysis of potential transportation impacts in the Transportation Impact Analysis (TIA; Appendix V), including an analysis of impacts associated with VMT. Following public circulation of the DEIR, the VMT analysis was updated to account for the 58 additional haul trucks per day required for the import of backfill material not previously evaluated in the DEIR. An addendum to the Appendix V TIA was prepared to summarize the changes to the report. With the additional heavy truck trips associated with the backfill operations, the Project is still considered to have a *less than significant* impact because it meets the *small project* screening criteria outlined in the County's Transportation Study Guide and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research's Technical Advisory on SB 743 implementation. Both documents state that projects that generate fewer than 110 passenger and light truck trips are screened out from further VMT analysis and considered to have a less than significant impact for transportation.

Out of the abundance of caution, the DEIR, RDEIR, and the Project TIA appended to the EIR provide a supplemental VMT analysis with a project specific threshold that examines heavy truck operations and the effect that a local source for sand would have on existing sand imports to the

region. The addendum includes information regarding the backfill import, truck trips, and operations to Section 2.2 (Project Description); updating Section 5.3 (Analysis Approach and Methodology for Project-Specific Threshold) to include the steps for determining the VMT associated with importing backfill material; and updating Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.3 to include the VMT calculations associated with importing backfill material in the Existing and Near-Term conditions. The Existing Plus Project and Near-term Plus Project VMT calculations are provided in Tables A and B of the addendum. With the inclusion of additional trips associated with importing backfill material to the site, the reduction in VMT for existing and near-term conditions was calculated to be 44.8 percent and 35.8 percent, respectively, compared to the 15-percent VMT reduction threshold used to determine the level of significance for the supplemental VMT analysis. The additional import trips would result in impacts that would be less than significant under both existing and cumulative conditions, and do not change the conclusions presented in the previously circulated DEIR and TIA related to VMT. Additional details related to the Project VMT analysis are provided in Topical Response 8 "Traffic Impacts."

Appendix W – Local Mobility Analysis

Following public circulation of the DEIR, local mobility effects related to the backfill material import operation were evaluated. Based on coordination with the County and San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), the conceptual striping plan for proposed improvements to Willow Glen Drive was refined to avoid SDG&E utilities and optimize multimodal travel on Willow Glen Drive along the Project frontage. Comments during public review of the DEIR related to impacts to bicyclists and pedestrians have also been addressed, including counts conducted in July 2022 to document the existing bicycle and pedestrian activity at each intersection in the study area during the commuter AM/PM peak hours.

An addendum to the Appendix W Local Mobility Analysis Report was prepared to summarize the minor updates made to the report and included in the appendix. The addendum includes information regarding the backfill import, truck trips, and operations to Section 2.2 (Project Description); edits to Sections 5.4 (Existing Bicycle Network) and 5.5 (Existing Pedestrian Network) to include an inventory of the existing bicycle and pedestrian networks and existing bicycle and pedestrian counts; updates to Section 7.0 (Trip Generation, Distribution and Assignment) to include the trip generation associated with the backfill import operations; and updates to Section 9.0 (Project Improvements) to document revisions to the vehicular mobility improvements and include the pedestrian and bicycle improvements that were previously recommended in the DEIR but not included in the report. Updated trip generation assumptions were based on a maximum of 146 daily one-way heavy vehicle trips, which includes 88 trucks for export of saleable material and 58 trucks for import of backfill material. The addendum included Tables A and B, which tabulate the Project traffic generation for Phase 1 and Phases 2 and 3, respectively. The citation of 147 daily one-way heavy vehicle trips used in the RDEIR was a typographical error that has been corrected in the FEIR to show 146 daily one-way heavy vehicle trips and does not change the conclusions related to Project's local mobility effects.

As shown in Appendix W addendum Figure A, Class II non-buffered bike lanes are currently provided on both sides of Willow Glen Drive within the Project study area. Existing bicycle counts conducted at every intersection in the study area during the commuter AM/PM peak hours showed that no existing bicycle activity was observed within the study area during the peak commute

hours. Similarly, the existing pedestrian network was documented, including areas with missing sidewalks, pedestrian barriers, and crosswalks.

The Project improvements were updated based on coordination with County staff. The Project proposes to restripe Willow Glen Drive between Steele Canyon Road and the Project ingress driveway to provide a raised median and Class II buffered bike lanes on both sides of the roadway. As part of the refinements to the striping plan, the raised median has been extended past the ingress driveway to provide separation between the eastbound and westbound traffic. The bike lane was extended to the easterly property line from the easterly outbound project driveway and the bike buffer increased from 2.5 to 3.5 feet, while vehicular lane widths for both directions were designed to ensure consistency with County standards. To facilitate deceleration of right-turning vehicles into the Project ingress driveway, a dedicated right-turn lane would also be constructed. An acceleration lane would be constructed between the ingress and egress project driveways, which would serve as a refuge lane for trucks to complete their outbound maneuver. Willow Glen Drive between Steele Canyon Road and Hillsdale Road is classified in the Mobility Element as a 4.*1B: Major Road with Intermittent Turn lanes.* The Project frontage along this stretch extends between Steele Canyon Road to approximately 1,000 feet west of Hillsdale Road. In addition to the above improvements, the Project proposes to provide an Irrevocable Offer of Dedication along the Project frontage as needed to accommodate the ultimate roadway classification of Willow Glen Drive. None of these elements result in any change to the less than significant hazards impacts disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 4 – RECLAMATION PROCESS, TIMING, AND FINAL USE

Several comments asked questions about the timing of reclamation, how the County would ensure that reclamation would occur, and whether the site would or could be developed with other uses once reclamation is complete.

Reclamation Process and Timing

Reclamation is the combined process by which adverse environmental effects of surface mining are minimized and the mined lands are returned to a beneficial end use. Beneficial end uses include open space and wildlife habitat, which would be the end use for the Project site following mining. The components of reclamation include removing all equipment and artificial structures, controlling erosion and sedimentation, stabilizing slopes, backfilling of excavation areas, topsoil replacement, revegetation with suitable plant species, and the monitoring of revegetation success.

As described in Chapter 10.0 of the DEIR, the Project site would be reclaimed in a phased process, as the mining areas move across the Project site. The Project site would be mined in three main mining phases conducted over the course of 10 years. The mining would occur in subphases of less than 30 acres per phase—in other words, no more than 30 acres of the site would be mined at any given time. The first phase would occur on the Lakes Course, west of the Steele Canyon Road bridge. Reclamation would be an ongoing process as mining proceeds to the east and would continue in each 20- to 30-acre subphase, concluding for each phase approximately two years after mining of the subphase concludes. Thus, the earliest mining subphase would be reclaimed long before the close of the 10-year mining period. A fourth phase, lasting no more than two years, would occur after all mining on the site has ceased. This fourth phase would consist of additional

site cleanup, equipment removal, and any final reclamation actions that are outstanding. This progressive reclamation is intended to reduce impacts to the community, so that areas impacted by mining would be reclaimed immediately following completion of mining activity.

Reclamation Assurance Mechanism

Before mining can begin, the operator is required to provide a Financial Assurance Mechanism (FAM), usually in the form of a surety bond, to demonstrate that the costs of reclamation are covered. The financial assurance amount is calculated in a Financial Assurance Cost Estimate (FACE). State law requires that the FACE be updated annually to account for current prices and site conditions. The FACE is reviewed and approved by both the local lead agency (here, County of San Diego) and the California Department of Conservation's Division of Mine and Reclamation.

In addition, the County must perform annual inspections to confirm that the mining activities align with the approved plans and that reclamation is progressing as scheduled. The County must produce an annual inspection report and note if any violations have occurred at the site. The California Department of Conservation's Division of Mine and Reclamation must also review the County's report and provide comments. If any violations are found, the County shall instruct the operator to rectify the issue. The County may also take enforcement actions or issue citations if necessary and appropriate.

At the completion of reclamation, the operator must prove to both the County and the State that the standards of the approved reclamation plan have been met before the FAM is released back to them. Both the County and California Department of Conservation's Division of Mine and Reclamation must perform a final inspection before approving the final reclamation and releasing the FAM back to the operator.

Some comments raised concerns about other mining sites within the County that have not yet undergone reclamation as a concern for the Project. While there are sites that have yet to be reclaimed, there have also been several successful reclamation projects in the County. Some examples include Mission Valley, the majority of which was previously mined and has now been reclaimed and developed with other uses; and Carroll Canyon, a former mining site that has been successfully reclaimed and now is being developed with other uses. There are also several mining areas within the County that are still active mines. Reclamation of these sites would not take place until mining operations have ceased. Not all mines have proposed phased reclamation like the Cottonwood Sand Mine, and therefore, reclamation activities would likely not begin until the mining operations are no longer active.

Future Development

The Project's end use is described in Chapter 1.0 as open space, multi-use trails, and any other use that is consistent with the current General Plan and Zoning Code land use designations. There is no General Plan Amendment or Zoning Code amendment proposed as part of this Project. The reclamation plan proposed for the site does not include any future development pads. Future development of the site for an end use other than open space is not contemplated or anticipated. If

it is contemplated in the future, it would require several discretionary permits, and likely require a General Plan or Zoning Code amendment, and separate CEQA review.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 5 – IMPORTED MATERIAL AND BACKFILLING PROCESS

Comments received on the RDEIR requested additional detail regarding inert debris processing, material types, contamination, and origination. Chapter 1.0 of the RDEIR was updated to address the use of imported backfill to meet the Project site's final elevations. The revisions included a description of the type and quantity of imported materials that would be used to backfill the site:

> *The imported material would consist of inert debris that may be used in an inert debris engineered fill operation as defined in Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Section 17388 and excavated soil and rock from development projects. The Project would be conditioned to only accept materials suitable for the end use of the site. Imported inert debris would be transported to backfill areas using the same approach described above for wash fines and materials undesirable for processing.*

Chapter 1.0 revisions also included the identification of an Inert Debris Engineered Fill Operation (IDEFO) regulated by the San Diego County Solid Waste Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) in the *Matrix of Project Approvals/Permits* in RDEIR Section 1.6.1. Additional details regarding the IDEFO, waste discharge requirements, and inert debris operation and materials are provided below.

Inert Debris Engineered Fill Operation (IDEFO) Definition

An IDEFO is an activity exceeding one year in duration in which only the following inert debris may be used: fully cured asphalt, uncontaminated concrete (including steel reinforcing rods embedded in the concrete), crushed glass, brick, ceramics, clay, and clay products, which may be mixed with rock and soil. Where an engineered fill is required to facilitate productive use(s) of land, those materials may be spread and compacted under controlled conditions to achieve a uniform and dense mass which is capable of supporting structural loading, as necessary, or supporting other uses such as recreation, agriculture, and open space. Filling above the surrounding grade shall only be allowed upon the approval of all governmental agencies having jurisdiction. The engineered fill shall be constructed and compacted in accordance with all applicable laws and ordinances and in accordance with specifications prepared and certified at least annually by a Civil Engineer, Certified Engineering Geologist, or similar professional licensed by the State of California and maintained in the operating record of the operation.

IDEFO RWQCB Waste Discharge Requirements

As documented in California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 14, Section 17388.3, an IDEFO is required to submit Enforcement Agency Notification and comply with all applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) waste discharge requirements, as follows:

(a) Each operator of an inert debris engineered fill operation shall submit a copy of its waste discharge requirements or a letter of exemption from the applicable RWQCB to the LEA together with its notification of intent to operate.

(b) Inert debris engineered fill operations shall be inspected by the LEA at least once every three months to verify compliance with State Minimum Standards unless the LEA approves, with California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) concurrence, a reduced inspection frequency. The LEA may approve a reduced inspection frequency only if it will not pose an additional risk to public health and safety or the environment but in no case shall the frequency be less than once per calendar year.

(c) Each operator of an inert debris engineered fill operation shall file an "Operation Plan" (as specified in CCR, Title 14, Article 5.95, Section 17390) with the LEA together with its notification of intent to operate. The information contained in the Plan shall be reviewed by the LEA to determine whether it is complete and correct as defined in CCR, Title 14, Section 18101.

(d) All inert debris engineered fill operations shall comply with the State Minimum Standards set forth in Title 27 CCR, Division 2, Chapter 3.0, Subchapter 4, Article 1 (Operating Criteria), and Article 3 (Handling, Equipment and Maintenance), and Article 4 (Controls) (except sections 20515, 20640, 20880, and 20890).

(e) By March 1 of each year, the operator shall report to the LEA and CalRecycle the total amount of inert debris deposited during the previous year. However, the operator is not subject to the disposal reporting record requirements of Title 14 CCR, Division 7, Chapter 9, Article 9.2 or the disposal fee specified in Public Resources Code Section 48000 and Revenue and Taxation Code Section 45151.

(f) All inert debris engineered fill operations, upon completion or cessation of fill activities for more than one year and upon any transfer of any part of the land subject to the operation prior to completion of fill activities, shall comply with the requirements in Title 27 CCR, subsections 21170(a)(1, 2, and, if applicable, 3).

(g) Upon the final placement of waste at the site, the operator shall cover the site of fill with three feet of compacted soil above the fill area or with other final cover as determined by the LEA. The LEA may determine, on the basis of substantial evidence, that a lesser amount of final cover or no final cover is needed, based on potential impacts to public health, safety and the environment.

(h) If an inert debris engineered fill operation exceeds any combination of the following requirements three or more times within any two-year period which the LEA determines constitutes a violation of this Article, the facility no longer qualifies for an Enforcement Agency Notification under this section. Upon the third such violation, the LEA shall notify the operator in writing that the facility no longer qualifies for an Enforcement Agency Notification, and the operator must within 30 days apply for a Full Permit as if it were a Construction Demolition and Inert Debris (CDI) Waste Disposal Facility pursuant to Title 14 CCR, Section 17388.5. In addition, the LEA shall issue a cease and desist order pursuant to Title 14 CCR, Section 18304 directing, among other things, that the operator immediately cease accepting material at the site until the operator has demonstrated to the LEA that it has corrected the violation and eliminated the cause

of the violation. Notwithstanding, the LEA may at any time take any additional enforcement action the LEA deems appropriate.

The requirements to which this subdivision applies are:

1. Disposal of any wastes not authorized by Title 14 CCR, subsection 17388(l);

2. Failure to comply with the requirements for certification by an engineer specified in Title 14 CCR, subsection 17388(l);

3. Failure to comply with requirements for operator certification of materials disposed in the fill as required in Title 14 CCR, subsection 17388(l).

(i) Inert debris engineered fill operations are not required to meet the notification requirements of this Article if the operation is occurring at a disposal facility that has a full solid waste facilities permit and the permit authorizes the activity either through a specific condition in the permit or as described and approved in the Report of Disposal Site Information.

Cottonwood Sand Mine Inert Debris Engineered Fill Operation

The Cottonwood Sand Mine inert debris engineered fill operation (IDEFO) must comply with state law including Public Resources Code Division 30, and CCR Titles 14 and 27, as well as the California Water Resources Control Board laws and regulations. Title 14, CCR requires the operator to submit an Enforcement Agency Notification with a copy of the site's Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) or a letter of exemption from the RWQCB, an IDEFO Operation Plan, proof of compliance with CEQA, correspondence from the local planning department that compliance with CEQA is not required for the operations to obtain local land use approval, or correspondence to the local planning department of the operator's intent to commence operations. The Enforcement Agency Notification is reviewed by the San Diego County Solid Waste LEA to determine whether it is complete and correct in compliance with Title 14, CCR sections 18103, 18103.1 and 17388.3(a) and (c). The information contained in the Operation Plan shall be reviewed by the LEA to determine whether it is complete and correct as described in Title 14, CCR, Section 18101.

Operation Plan – The contents of an Operation Plan are specified in Title 14 CCR Section 17390. Information such as design capacity, compaction standard, description of fill procedures, etc., are included in the Operation Plan. The Operation Plan is submitted to the LEA for their review and to determine if it is complete and correct with regulatory requirements.

Report of Waste Discharge – A Report of Waste Discharge is required to be submitted to the RWQCB. The Report of Waste Discharge would include information such as type and design of discharge, description of quality control, BMPs, etc. The RWQCB reviews the Report of Waste Discharge to determine if Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) are necessary. WDRs include provisions and prohibitions regarding discharge of waste to land. If WDRs are issued, they may include provisions such as a Waste Load Checking Program, Groundwater Monitoring Plan, or Climate Change Plan.

If the RWQCB determines WDRs are not needed, a Waiver of Waste Discharge would be issued. The submittal of the Report may require a filing fee. The WDRs or Waiver of Waste Discharge are submitted to the LEA as part of the Enforcement Agency Notification with the Operation Plan and an intent to operate. These steps all take place close to the initiation date of the IDEFO and are not required during the EIR approval process.

Contamination/Pollutants/Toxic Materials

No hazardous wastes or contaminated materials would be accepted as part of the Project's inert debris engineered fill operation. A waste load checking program would be designed and implemented to prevent the acceptance of unapproved materials and hazardous wastes. This is required as part of the Operation Plan and would be reviewed by the San Diego County Solid Waste LEA before the fill operation can begin.

Additionally, construction sites producing inert fill materials complete Phase 1 Environmental Audits to identify the potential for hazardous materials. Prior to exporting materials, on-site testing is typically completed and repeated every 5,000 cubic yards to ensure that non-toxic materials are being accepted at the receiver (fill) site. This standard operating procedure in combination with implementation of the waste load checking program, would ensure that contamination from pollutants and/or toxic materials within fill materials would be avoided.

Material Types Suitable for Cottonwood

As noted above in the summary of Chapter 1.0 revisions related to imported backfill material, the imported material would consist of inert debris that may be used in an inert debris engineered fill operation as defined in Title 14 CCR Section 17388 and excavated soil and rock material from development projects would be accepted. The acceptable materials would be outlined in the Operation Plan prior to initiation of the Project and the engineered fill must be constructed and compacted in accordance with all applicable laws and ordinances and in accordance with specifications prepared and certified at least annually by a Civil Engineer, Certified Engineering Geologist, or similar professional licensed by the State of California and maintained in the operating record of the operation. Consistent with the IDEFO definition and requirements, the chosen fill material would be appropriate for the end use of the Project (e.g., open space, multi-use trails, and land suitable for uses allowed by the General Plan and existing zoning classifications).

As described in Section 3.1.4, *Grading Contractor*, of the Conceptual Revegetation Plan (Appendix N to the Biological Resources Technical Report recirculated with the RDEIR, included as Appendix C to this FEIR), imported soil material used in the native revegetation areas also would be required to meet specifications provided by the Restoration Specialist to ensure that the soils are appropriate for the targeted vegetation types. Imported soils within native revegetation areas are anticipated to be used in construction of the upland slopes and backfilling of an excavation pit in Phases 2 and 3, but not across the entire native revegetation area. Additionally, the Project proposes to salvage and store topsoil on site to maintain living soil microorganisms and support revegetation. Final grading, use of imported soil material, and topsoil application would be coordinated with the Restoration Specialist (please see also Section 3.1.6, *Restoration*

Specialist, for additional discussion of roles and responsibilities assigned to achieve revegetation success).

Backfill Origination

Fully cured asphalt, uncontaminated concrete (including steel reinforcing rods embedded in the concrete), crushed glass, brick, ceramics, clay and clay products are generated from development and maintenance projects. Soil and rock are generated from a variety of sources, but typically is a by-product of sub-grade excavations for parking garages or development that results in export of naturally occurring soil and rock. Where inert landfills are unavailable in the local community, these inert debris materials are disposed of in local sanitary landfills or hauled to locations where receiver sites or processing facilities are available. Aggregate production and surface mining sites hold the greatest potential for accepting a relatively large quantity of these types of inert debris materials, soil, and rock. The development and operation of an inert debris engineered fill operation is a compatible use with these types of sites. There are a number of mining operations throughout southern California that utilize inert fill material to backfill and compact the mining void in order to reclaim the site to useable land.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 6 – PUBLIC HEALTH EFFECTS

Comments raised during public circulation of the DEIR and RDEIR addressed a number of potential public health effects, including those related to toxic air pollution, health impacts at schools and related to children walking to school over the Steele Canyon Road bridge, silicosis/silica exposure, valley fever, and allergies and asthma.

Toxic Air Contaminants

As discussed in Topical Response 3, a Health Risk Assessment (HRA) was prepared as part of the DEIR and updated in the Addendum to the Air Quality Technical Report to evaluate the potential impacts on the health of nearby potentially sensitive receptors and off-site workers due to toxic air contaminants (TACs) generated by operation of the Project (refer to Appendix I of the DEIR). The HRA was completed following the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) *Air Toxics Hot Spots Program–Risk Assessment Guidelines – Guidance Manual for Preparation of Health Risk Assessments* (2015). Localized concentrations of pollutants were modeled using the Lakes American Meteorological Society/Environmental Protection Agency Regulatory Model (AERMOD) View version 10.0.1. The Lakes program utilizes the USEPA's AERMOD gaussian air dispersion model. Because each phase of mining would concentrate the operation of sand extraction equipment in different areas of the Project site, potentially affecting different sensitive receptors, separate dispersion models were completed for each mining phase area (Phases 1, 2, and 3).

The closest existing sensitive receptors to the Project site are the ADEONA Healthcare facility and single-family homes adjacent to the existing and former golf courses south and east of the Project site. In addition, there are single- and multi-family homes along the primary routes for aggregate delivery trucks entering and exiting the site, including along Willow Glen Drive and

Jamacha Road. The closest school is the Jamacha Elementary School approximately 1,280 feet (0.24 mile) south of the Phase 2 mining area. The sensitive receptor locations are shown in Figure 4 of the Air Quality Technical Report included as Appendix I to the DEIR.

The HRA considered project-generated diesel particulate matter (DPM) emissions and fugitive dust trace TACs from the use of off-road diesel equipment, on-road haul trucks, and sand processing operations. Fugitive dust trace TACs analyzed include arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, chromium (hexavalent and non-hexavalent), copper, manganese, mercury, nickel, selenium, and crystalline silica.

Health risks were conservatively evaluated for each scenario (Phases 1, 2, and 3) assuming a full 10 years of exposure (the anticipated duration of mining activities for the entire Project), even though sand extraction for each phase would only last 3 to 4 years. All receptors were included in each scenario. Results of the analysis are presented in FEIR Appendix I, Air Quality Technical Report Addendum, Table C, *Health Risks from TAC Emissions*. Impacts are evaluated relative to the maximally exposed individual resident (MEIR), which is the individual resident with the highest estimated increased cancer risk and/or health hazard index; the MEIR located at a rural residence off Ivanhoe Ranch Road southeast of the Project site. The County Guidelines for the Determination of Significance for TAC exposure are based on a maximum incremental cancer risk of greater than 10 in 1 million with the application of Toxics-Best Available Control Technology (T-BACT) or a health hazard index greater than 1. As shown in the analysis, the MEIR was modeled to have an incremental increased cancer risk of 2.9 in 1 million, an acute health hazard index of 0.05, and a chronic health hazard index of 0.07 during Phase 2, the operational phase in which the MEIR would experience the highest estimated increased cancer risk and/or health hazard index. The increased incremental cancer risk isopleths (i.e., mapped locations of areas experiencing equal effects) and the location of the MEIR are shown in DEIR Appendix I, Figure 5, *Increased Residential Cancer Risk.* The maximum exposed individual worker (located on Willow Glen Drive just east of the Jamacha Road intersection) was modeled to have an incremental increased cancer risk of less than 0.01 in 1 million, an acute health hazard index of less than 0.01, and a chronic health hazard index of less than 0.01 during Phase 1. Based on the results of the analysis, the thresholds for increased incremental cancer risk, acute health risk, and chronic health risk would not be exceeded for the maximum exposed individual non-project worker or resident.

Comments received during public review of the DEIR challenged some of the assumptions and methods used in the Air Quality Technical Report included as DEIR Appendix I. An addendum to the Air Quality Technical Report was prepared to address the comments and provide clarifications and refinements to the assumptions and methodology. The HRA also was updated as follows to account for changes to the methods and assumptions (refer also to Topical Response "*Updates to Technical Reports*"):

- Operational emissions modelling was updated for each mining phase to account for the additional 58 truck trips per day required for the import of backfill material.

- The CalEEMod option to account for the SAFE Vehicles Rule per CARB off-model adjustments factors was not selected for the updated modeling.

- Fugitive dust emissions from vehicle and equipment movement on unpaved surfaces were updated based on guidance provided by the SDAPCD in their memorandum titled *Haul Road Emissions* last updated January 6, 2022.

- Overly conservative assumptions that were inconsistent with the DEIR Project Description were corrected to assume that approximately 4.3 million cy (6.40 million tons) of material would be extracted, with sand extraction operations conducted approximately 260 days per year, consistent with DEIR Chapter 1.0.

The results of the revised health risk estimates are provided in addendum Table C, *Health Risks from TAC Emissions*. None of these updates changed the significance determinations of the DEIR in relation to health risk. As shown in addendum Table C, the MEIR located at the north end of Cottonwood View Drive, south of the project site, would have incremental increased cancer risk of 7.89 in 1 million, an acute health hazard index of 0.08, and a chronic health hazard index of 0.16 during Phase 2. The driver for acute hazard is the fugitive dust TACs released from the mining activity. With the reduction in assumed excavated material from 7.05 to 6.40 million tons, the acute hazard is reduced from the value previously reported in the DEIR. Since vehicle exhaust DPM is the driver for cancer risk and chronic hazard, the increase in trucking activity attributed to the 58 additional daily round trips results in increases to those two metrics when compared to the values presented in the DEIR. The increased incremental cancer risk isopleths and the location of the MEIR are shown in addendum Figure A, *Increased Residential Cancer Risk.* The maximum exposed individual worker (located on Willow Glen Drive just east of the Jamacha Road intersection) would have an incremental increased cancer risk of 0.04 in 1 million, an acute health hazard index of 0.04, and a chronic health hazard index of 0.01 during Phase 1. Project emissions of TACs during operation of all mining phases would not exceed the thresholds for increased incremental cancer risk, acute health risk, or chronic health risk. Therefore, the Project's operational emissions would remain less than significant, just as disclosed in the previously circulated DEIR.

Health Impacts at Schools and Children Walking to School over Steele Canyon Road Bridge

The closest school to the Project site is Jamacha Elementary School approximately 1,280 feet (0.24 mile) south of the Phase 2 mining area. This school is located farther from the Project site than the nearest residents described above. Students at the school would, therefore, be exposed to lower concentrations of TACs resulting in reduced health risks when compared with the closer residents. Students may temporarily pass closer to the Project site as they walk to and from school. For example, students living in the neighborhood to the north of the Project site and attending Jamacha Elementary School might walk along Steele Canyon Road, which transects the Project site. Health-related risks associated with diesel-exhaust emissions are primarily linked to long-term exposure and the associated risk of contracting cancer. The amount to which the receptors could be exposed, which is a function of concentration and duration of exposure, is the primary

factor used to determine health risk. The exposure of a pedestrian in the vicinity of the Project site would be variable, short-term, and sporadic due to the continued movement of the pedestrian receptor. In contrast, with respect to residential receptors, the analysis conservatively assumes that residents would be standing and breathing at the location of the property line closest to the Project site or haul route every day between 17 and 21 hours per day (depending on the age group, starting with fetuses in utero in the third trimester of pregnancy) for 10 years, the duration of Project operations. Appendix D, *Health Risk Assessment*, to DEIR Appendix I provides figures of the modeled cancer risk and acute and chronic non-cancer risks. Appendix G, *Health Risk Assessment (Revised)*, to FEIR Appendix I provides figures of the revised modeled cancer risk and acute and chronic non-cancer risks. As shown in these figures, the residential risks along Steele Canyon Road all fall below the thresholds. In other words, if a school aged child were to stand on Steele Canyon Road for up to 21 hours per day, every day, for 10 years, the risks would still be less than significant.

Silicosis/Silica

Comments raised during public review of the DEIR expressed concerns related to exposure to airborne silica dust, which can result in a lung disease called silicosis and other adverse health effects. As noted above, crystalline silica was one of the constituents analyzed in the Project HRA. A discussion of respirable crystalline silica and the associated potential health risks is provided in Section 3.1.1.1 of the DEIR under "Toxic Air Contaminants." As a common mineral found in materials like sand and stone, the Project analysis assumed that crystalline silica would be present in all fugitive dust particulate matter emitted during Project operations, namely from the use of off-road diesel equipment, on-road haul trucks, and sand excavation and processing operations. Project impacts associated with exposure to respirable crystalline silica were evaluated relative to the County's Guidelines for the Determination of Significance, Air Quality, noted above. As detailed in DEIR Section 3.1.1.2, the HRA concluded that health risks associated with constituents such as crystalline silica would be below the County's thresholds, resulting in less than significant impacts. This would also apply for other constituents commonly found in soil, including mica. As part of a Fugitive Dust Control Plan, the Project would implement T-BACT, specifically BMPs and water application for dust suppression during sand processing, which would reduce potential exposure to silica and other soil constituents.

Valley Fever

Comments raised concerns about the potential for the Project to cause valley fever and associated health risks. Coccidoidomycosis, more commonly known as valley fever, is addressed in DEIR Section 3.1.1.1 under "Other Concerns Related to Air Emissions," as well as in the Valley Fever Report prepared for the DEIR (Appendix J). Valley fever is an infection contracted through inhalation of airborne spores of the *Coccidioides immitis* fungus that may be present in suitable soils, typically those that are generally undisturbed, alkaline, silty, well-aerated with relatively high-water holding capacity, sparsely vegetated, and with a high salinity level. The on-site soils that would be disturbed from mining activities include Tujunga sand, Visalia sandy loam, and Riverwash. These soils are not alkaline, are sandy rather than silty (gravelly in the case of

Riverwash), are excessively drained (low water holding capacity), have very low salinity, and are well aerated (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2021). These soil factors do not favor the occurrence of the *Coccidioides* fungus. The Project site is currently used by the public for golfing activities. The still-operating Ivanhoe course is fertilized, heavily irrigated, and managed throughout the year including with pesticides and fungicides to maintain the turf conditions. The Lakes course was managed the same way until it closed in 2017. The practice of turf management (irrigation, fertilization, and the application of fungicides) results in the soil being considered disturbed; this disturbed condition of the soils also does not favor the occurrence of the *Coccidioides* fungus.

The on-site soil properties and current and past golf course turf management activities do not favor the occurrence of the *Coccidioides* fungus, and the Project would implement a Fugitive Dust Control Plan (a draft of which is attached as Appendix A to the Appendix I Air Quality Technical Report and includes each of the applicable regulations and operational thresholds) as a project design feature. This would control emissions of fugitive dust and other soil materials, and would ensure that the Project would have a less than significant impact with respect to valley fever.

Allergies and Asthma

The Air Quality Impact Analysis trigger levels, and by proxy the screening-level thresholds used in determining the significance of impacts related to emissions, were developed by the SDAPCD with the purpose of attaining the national and state ambient air quality standards (AAQS). The AAQS, as discussed in Section 2.4 of DEIR Appendix I, identify concentrations of pollutants in the ambient air below which no adverse effects on the public health and welfare are anticipated. Therefore, these screening criteria can be used as numeric methods to demonstrate that a project's total emissions would not result in an adverse effect on human health. By resulting in less than significant impacts related to emissions, the Project would not adversely affect children with allergies or asthma.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 7 – NOISE IMPACTS

Comments on the DEIR and RDEIR expressed concerns related to noise and vibration effects on the surrounding communities and wildlife resulting from implementation of the Project. Concerns included the applicability of the thresholds used in the analysis; noise and vibration generated during excavation, processing, and on- and off-site transport of materials, including noise from both stationary (e.g., processing equipment) and mobile (e.g., excavation equipment and trucks) noise sources; consideration of an "amphitheater" or "canyon" effect causing increased noise levels at further distances; and adequacy of the proposed mitigation measures. Additionally, comments referenced a 1,300-foot setback between mining activities and residential land uses that was suggested to be applied to the Project. Refer to the Topical Response "Updates to Technical Reports" for a discussion of the addendum to the Acoustical Site Assessment Report (DEIR Appendix F) that was prepared to address noise comments and provide clarifications and refinements to the assumptions and methodology. Additional discussion follows on the other specific comments noted above.

Noise Thresholds

Comments questioned whether the appropriate noise significance thresholds were used in the analysis. The 60-A weighted decibels (dBA) Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) limit specified in the County's Guidelines for Determining Significance, Noise, is based on noise compatibility guidelines set forth in the County General Plan Noise Element. As stated in the Noise Element, these guidelines "are incorporated into land use planning to reduce future conflicts between noise and land use. This is achieved by specifying acceptable noise exposure ranges for various land uses throughout the County." For residential uses, the "acceptable" noise exposure level is 60 dB CNEL. This "acceptable" exposure level indicates that standard construction methods would attenuate, or reduce, exterior noise to an acceptable indoor noise level and that people can carry out outdoor activities with minimal noise interference. As such, for consideration of noise impacts at receiving properties, the 60-dB CNEL limit, which was thoroughly considered in the DEIR, is the applicable limit. Refer to the Topical Response "Updates to Technical Reports" for a summary of the additional analysis conducted to further explain and amplify the applicability of the 60 dBA CNEL threshold compared to an increase-over-ambient-noise threshold.

Operational Noise Analysis

The noise analysis prepared for the Project considered the various prominent noise sources associated with the Project's mining activities, including grading of excavation areas with a dozer; material extraction and on-site transport using an excavator, dump truck, and conveyor belt; processing plant operations, including a screening machine and haul trucks being loaded with a loader; and on-road haul trucks traveling west of the Project site along Willow Glen Drive. The Addendum also evaluated potential noise impacts resulting from the additional import trips needed to achieve final elevations; approximately 2.5 million cubic yards of backfill material would be imported to the Project site, which would require an additional 58 truckloads of import per day and result in a total (import and export) of 146 truckloads per day, or 23 truckloads per hour between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. These noise sources were included together in the noise model to calculate combined noise levels at NSLUs in the vicinity of the Project site. While the processing plant remained stationary in the analysis, the dozer used for grading and the equipment and conveyor belt used for material extraction and transport were set at different locations throughout the Project site to calculate noise levels when the sources were at their closest point to each individual receptor. Note that no blasting or rock crushing would be performed during implementation of the Project, and therefore, potential noise impacts associated with such activities were not considered.

Specific components of the various noise sources were incorporated into the model, including appropriate heights for the equipment noise sources and backup alarms. The mobile heavy equipment (e.g., dozer) noise source heights in the noise model were set to the height of the equipment radiator, which is the primary-noise generating component and is typically located at a height of approximately two meters. Backup alarms were considered as part of the overall equipment noise, as equipment noise levels used in the model are from the Federal Highway Administration's Roadway Construction Noise Model and are inclusive of the various noise-generating components associated with a given piece of equipment (e.g., backup alarm, radiator, engine exhaust).

Comments questioned whether all appropriate noise receptors were included in the analysis. Receptors surrounding the Project site that were specifically included in the analysis include single-family residences, Hilton Head County Park, and the ADEONA Healthcare facility. As noted in DEIR Section 2.4.2.1:

> *...[d]ue to the large number of residential properties adjacent to the Project site, surrounding residences were categorized into 11 different residential groups based on general location and anticipated proximity to the Project's various mining operations. For noise modeling, each group included one modeled receiver location that was estimated to be representative of the maximum noise levels that would be experienced by residences in that group.*

Contrary to public comments, this analysis methodology allows for consideration of impacts to the numerous residences in the vicinity of the Project site, not just to those individual receptors included in the noise model. The individual receptor within each residential group was determined to be the receptor with the potential for exposure to the highest noise levels from the Project's operations based on proximity to the Project site. All other residences in the respective residential group would experience similar or lower noise levels than the individual receptor used as the modeled receiver location. Noise modeling at these receptors was conducted using the Computer Aided Noise Abatement (CadnaA) model, which incorporates area-specific topographical information to account for the elevated locations of residences surrounding the Project site. The level of impact at the individual receptors included in the model was conservatively applied to all residences within that residential group, despite some of the residences being located further away and/or shielded from the Project site by intervening homes, which would result in lower noise levels at these residences. Based on the level of impact identified for the entire residential group, appropriate mitigation was applied to the entire residential group to ensure noise levels from the Project's operations would be within applicable standards.

Jamacha Elementary School

As indicated in several comments, noise impacts to Jamacha Elementary School were not specifically evaluated in the DEIR. This is due to distance from the Project's proposed mining areas to the school (approximately 1,280 feet or 0.24 mile) and because receptors closer to the site than the school were considered in the analysis. Specifically, the ADEONA Healthcare facility receptor is located between the Project site and Jamacha Elementary School, approximately 500 feet from the Phase 2 mining area at its closest point. Per the County's General Plan Noise Element, noise levels below 65 CNEL are compatible with school uses. As shown in Table 2.4-1 of the DEIR, the unmitigated noise level from the Project's mining operations at the ADEONA Healthcare facility was calculated to be 60.7 CNEL. Therefore, at a greater distance than the ADEONA Healthcare facility, noise levels at Jamacha Elementary School would be lower than 60.7 CNEL, and thus would be within County standard for compatibility with schools (i.e., below 65 CNEL) and would not be significantly impacted by the Project. Similar conclusions would apply to other locations noted in various comments that are farther in distance than the ADEONA Healthcare facility.

Noise Impacts on Wildlife Species

The Biological Resources Technical Report prepared by HELIX and included as Appendix C to the FEIR provides analysis regarding the effects of construction and operational noise on various sensitive wildlife species, per the County Report Format and Content Requirements – Biological Resources (County 2010). As indicated in the report, construction, mining, and reclamation activities would require the daily use of heavy equipment that would elevate existing noise levels at and around the site, as well as on-road hauling of imported and exported material. Noise associated with these activities adjacent to active nests could result in adverse indirect impacts to nesting coastal California gnatcatcher, least Bell's vireo, Coopers hawk, red-shouldered hawk, and white-tailed kite, among other nesting bird species. As a result of the increased noise levels, breeding birds may temporarily or permanently leave their territories to avoid disturbances from human activities, which could lead to reduced reproductive success and increased mortality. Potential short-term noise impacts would occur incrementally, meaning that not all areas would be impacted at once, as mining activities would begin within Phase 1 and generally progress eastward following completion of earlier phasing. Noise effects would be considered potentially significant if noise levels generated during construction, mining, and/or reclamation activities exceed a level of 60 dBA L_{EQ} (equivalent continuous noise level) or ambient (whichever is greater) adjacent to sensitive nesting bird and raptor species. If construction, mining, and/or reclamation activities occur within 500 feet of coastal California gnatcatcher or least Bell's vireo during their breeding seasons (March 1 to August 15 and March 15 to September 15, respectively) or occur within 300 feet of nesting raptors, effects resulting from noise would be potentially significant. These impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level through the implementation of mitigation measures BIO-2, BIO-4, BIO-5, and BIO-7 that are included in the Biological Resources Technical Report.

The mitigation measures prescribe various methods to mitigate the potential impacts that noise would have on sensitive species. Mitigation measures BIO-2 and BIO-4 prescribe pre-construction surveys if clearing and grubbing must occur during the breeding season. If the species are found during the pre-construction surveys, they would be avoided within a buffer of 500 feet. Indirect impacts to nesting gnatcatcher, vireo, raptors, and other nesting birds due to noise would be mitigated though the methods prescribed in mitigation measures BIO-5 and BIO-7, which involve pre-construction surveys within the areas potentially impacted by noise and the use of avoidance or temporary noise barriers if the species are found during pre-construction surveys. Additionally, if noise barriers are used, the type(s) and location(s) of noise barrier(s) shall be provided to the County and Wildlife Agencies (CDFW and USFWS, as applicable) along with the associated noise measurements demonstrating compliance with required noise level reductions. With the inclusion of the described mitigation, indirect noise impacts to sensitive species would be less than significant.

Amphitheater/Canyon Effect

Comments questioned whether an "amphitheater effect" or "canyon effect" would affect noise propagation. Reflection of noise energy occurs in all situations, including flat ground, and is accounted for in noise modeling by the consideration of the degradation of noise over distance. In certain topographical instances, a "canyon effect" or echo can occur, which results in increased reflection of noise energy in a given area. A "canyon effect" is limited to instances where the

topography includes steep, vertical hard surface (i.e., rock) walls that are highly reflective. Other canyon-type areas with non-vertical walls, such as the general area of the proposed Project, do not exhibit increased noise reflection or "canyon effects." Further, vegetation that is often present in such non-vertical canyon areas breaks up and absorbs acoustic energy, thus resulting in lower noise reflection. Noise modeling generally uses highly reflective ground surface conditions, which will tend to provide projections of noise greater than the actual conditions of vegetated areas, thus leading to a conservative scenario.

Mitigation Measures

Comments questioned the efficacy of the proposed mitigation to attenuate the Project's operational noise to below a level of significance. Noise barriers substantially attenuate noise when the barrier interrupts the straight-line path (i.e., line-of-sight) between a noise source and receiver. To achieve this, mitigation measure M-N-1 requires excavation to the lowest feasible elevation within the Project's excavation areas and the provision of 8-foot or 12-foot barriers between mining activities and off-site NSLUs when excavation is occurring within 400 feet of off-site NSLUs. Extensive noise modeling of the proposed mitigation was performed to ensure noise levels would be within County standards. Noise modeling was conducted using the CadnaA model, which incorporates area-specific topographical information. This allows for the placement of receivers at locations representative of actual elevated locations on slopes and ridges surrounding the Project site. In the noise model, excavation equipment was located at an elevation of 10 feet below the existing ground surface and barriers were located between the Project's excavation areas and off-site NSLUs. As discussed in Section 2.4.6 of the DEIR, "[t]he below grade excavation in combination with noise barriers would effectively break the line-of-sight between the mining equipment and NSLUs," resulting in noise levels being attenuated to within applicable County standards. In addition, during actual Project operations, excavation depths would average 20 feet below ground surface, with some areas excavated to a maximum depth of 40 feet below ground surface. Equipment would operate at depths greater than what was considered in the noise model, which would provide greater noise attenuation.

1,300-foot Setback

Comments questioned whether a 1,300-foot setback between mining activities and residential land uses should be applied to the Project. This 1,300-foot setback was identified in the *San Diego Region Aggregate Supply Study* prepared by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) in January 2011. As noted in this 2011 Study, the setback is considered in the 2008 County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements to mitigate noise at residential areas. It is indicated in the County Guidelines that "a general noise setback area of approximately 1,300 feet is usually an adequate distance for most typical potential extractive operations to achieve allowable noise levels."

The general 1,300-foot setback distance from residential land uses was used in the 2011 Study as part of an effort to identify suitable locations for mining operations within the County. However, as noted in the 2011 Study, "the 1,300-foot setback is not an absolute requirement, and proper mitigation would be decided on a site-by-site basis. Other mitigation factors, such as topography, noise-reduction technology, or landscape design, could be used in place of setbacks, depending on the site." Similar discussion is provided in the County Guidelines: "The range of the setback area

may vary, depending on the noise levels produced by the quarry, proposed blasting, production methods, extent of crushing and screening activities, topographic and site conditions, etc. … The size of the setback may also vary depending on the presence of natural or man-made noise barriers between the noise source and the property line."

The Project-specific acoustical analysis evaluated noise levels resulting from the Project's mining operations based on Project-specific (e.g., equipment) and site-specific (e.g., topographical and surrounding sensitive receptor location) information. Based on the calculated operational noise levels, mitigation in the form of noise barriers and below-grade material extraction requirements was identified to achieve applicable noise standards. The mitigation was determined to reduce noise from the Project's mining operations to within the applicable noise standards; therefore, a 1,300-foot setback is not necessary for the Project.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 8 – TRAFFIC IMPACTS

Comments on the DEIR and RDEIR expressed concerns related to traffic impacts from implementation of the Project. Concerns included increased congestion, the need for updates to the transportation analyses to address the additional import trips, specific assumptions used in the analysis (e.g., extent of study area, trip distribution/direction of traffic flow, timing of traffic counts), truck-related safety issues and emergency access, and roadway improvements needed to support area traffic. Refer to the Topical Response "Updates to Technical Reports" for a discussion of the addenda to the Transportation Impact Analysis (Appendix V) and Local Mobility Analysis Report (Appendix W) that were prepared to address traffic comments and provide clarifications and refinements to the assumptions and methodology. Additional discussion follows on the other comment topics noted above.

Congestion and VMT

As described in Section 3.1.7 of the DEIR and Section 4.0 of the Transportation Impact Analysis, transportation impacts of the proposed Project are evaluated based on VMT as required by the CEQA Guidelines and Senate Bill 743. Prior to the passing of Senate Bill 743 in 2013, transportation impacts were evaluated by examining whether a project was likely to cause automobile delay at intersections and congestion on roadway segments, and whether this delay would exceed a certain threshold of significance (this is known as Level of Service or LOS analysis). Pursuant to Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21099 (b)(2), CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, and as discussed in DEIR Section 3.1.7, automobile delay—as described solely by LOS or similar measures of vehicular capacity or traffic congestion—shall, as of July 1, 2020, no longer be used as the metric to evaluate transportation impacts on the environment for a land use project under state law. Thus, the evaluation of potential transportation impacts associated with the Project using VMT as its metric is consistent with Senate Bill 743 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3. For more information regarding VMT replacing LOS as the metric for analyzing transportation impacts under CEQA, please see Section 3.1.7 of the EIR.

As described in the DEIR, RDEIR, and the Transportation Impact Analysis appended to the EIR, the Project is considered to have a *less than significant* impact because it meets the *small project* screening criteria outlined in the County's Transportation Study Guide and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research's Technical Advisory on SB 743 implementation. Both documents state

that projects that generate less than 110 passenger and light truck trips are screened from further VMT analysis and considered to have a less than significant impact for transportation. Site-specific trip generation was calculated for the Project, which includes a total of 14 employee and visitor light vehicles and 4 vendors. Based on this calculation, the Project's total car and light truck trips generate 36 average daily trips, which is far below the 110 daily trip screening threshold of significance (Appendix V).

While the Project would meet the small project screening criteria, out of an abundance of caution, the DEIR, RDEIR, and the Transportation Impact Analysis appended to the EIR provides a supplemental VMT analysis with a project specific threshold that demonstrates that the Project would reduce overall regional VMT because it would provide a local source of sand to meet regional demand. Currently, concrete batch plants in San Diego County must import mined sand from locations outside of the region, including from Mexico and Lake Elsinore. Providing a local source would reduce the overall truck haul miles in the region, as it would replace longer trips to and from sand mines further away, with shorter, local haul truck trips. Based on the findings from this supplemental analysis, the transportation impacts were determined to be less than significant. Refer to Appendix A to the Transportation Impact Analysis for additional discussion and reference information regarding how estimated aggregate demand for San Diego County was considered in the VMT analysis.

Import Truck Trip Transportation Analyses

Comments requested additional analysis of import truck trips and their associated transportation impacts. As was disclosed in the RDEIR, after the close of the public review and comment period on the DEIR, it was determined that additional materials would be required to backfill the mined areas of the Project site, and to achieve the Project's proposed post-reclamation elevations. The importation of the additional backfill materials was conservatively determined to require an additional 58 trucks to and from the site per day. As described in the Topical Response "Updates to Technical Reports," additional analysis conducted to evaluate the import trips required for backfilling of the Project site was documented in addenda to the Transportation Impact Analysis (Appendix V) and Local Mobility Analysis Report (Appendix W). The findings of this additional analysis were included in the RDEIR, which described the effect of the additional trips on the Project's VMT analysis. As discussed in the RDEIR, the addition of these import truck trips did not result in new significant impacts. Even with the additional truck trips, VMT-associated impacts remain less than significant.

The DEIR circulated for public review and comment included an analysis of potential transportation and traffic impacts, which concluded that the Project met the small project screening criteria outlined in the County's Transportation Study Guide and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research's Technical Advisory on SB 743 implementation. The addition of 58 trucks does not change this determination since only passenger vehicles and light trucks are to be considered.

The supplemental project-specific VMT analysis of potential transportation impacts concluded that without the Project, the regional demand for 570,000 tons of aggregate (the amount to be produced annually by the Project) is assumed to be satisfied by the current regional suppliers, resulting in a daily VMT of 13,498.77. The DEIR also determined that the daily VMT associated

with the Project producing and locally distributing that same 570,000 tons of sand annually was only 2,806.15 VMT. Thus, the DEIR concluded that the Project would reduce the regional daily VMT for the importing of 570,000 tons of sand annually by 10,692.62 VMT. The DEIR explained that this constituted a 79.2 percent reduction in the area wide VMT. Therefore, the DEIR determined that the Project would result in a reduction in VMT of greater than 15 percent and no significant impact would occur.

As discussed in the RDEIR, the additional trips associated with importing backfill material to the site do not change this conclusion. Specifically, backfill material import VMT was calculated assuming 58 trucks per day are required for the import of the backfill materials, and by applying a 40-mile average one-way trip length between the Project site and the locations where the backfill material would be obtained. Therefore, the daily VMT associated with backfill import to the Project site is approximately 4,640 (58 trucks per day multiplied by 80 miles roundtrip).

The sum of the VMT associated with obtaining 570,000 tons of sand from the Project site rather than being imported from sources to the north and south and the VMT associated with the backfill import is, together, 7,446.15 VMT (2,806.15 + 4,640). This is 6,052.62 VMT less than the existing VMT of 13,498.77. This corresponds to a 44.8 percent reduction in VMT, which remains a less than significant impact. For additional information, please see RDEIR Section S.2.2, and the addenda to the Transportation Impact Analysis appended to the FEIR.

Project Study Area

Comments questioned whether the Project study area for the Local Mobility Analysis should extend beyond the area identified, including potentially extending out to State Routes 54, 94 and/or 125. Study area intersections are determined by the number of project trips at the intersection, or if the project would create safety or operational concerns. The study area for the Project that was evaluated in the Local Mobility Analysis Report included the intersections of Jamacha Road/Willow Glen Drive, Willow Glen Drive/Muirfield Drive/Project Driveway, Willow Glen Drive/Steele Canyon Road, Willow Glen Drive/Project Driveway (East), and Willow Glen Drive/Project Driveway (West). Direction from County Staff and the County Board of Supervisors has been to focus transportation study areas only on intersections that receive at least 50 of the total peak hour project-generated trips or 50 percent of total project-generated trips if the project does not contribute 50 peak hour trips total to any intersection. This is reiterated in the County's Transportation Study Guidelines adopted in September 2022, which provide guidance for developing the study area for a local mobility analysis. Since the heavy trucks would be conditioned to operate outside of the peak periods, the Project would only generate 15 AM and 15 PM peak hour trips, and therefore would not contribute more than 50 peak hour trips, nor would 50 percent of the total Project-generated peak hour trips occur at any intersection within or beyond the study area. Therefore, the Project study area has not been expanded.

Trip Distribution

Comments questioned the distribution of Project traffic evaluated in the transportation analyses. Project traffic distribution was developed based on coordination with the Project Applicant regarding potential truck routes using the location of the various concrete batch plants (which are spread across San Diego County) to which the material could be delivered, existing roadway

classifications, and traffic in the Project area. Refer to Figure 7-1 of the Local Mobility Analysis Report (Appendix W) for a depiction of the Project trip generation. Based on the assumptions developed through this coordination, no trucks importing or hauling are assumed to use Steele Canyon Road given the lack of potential destinations for mined material in that direction. Similarly, no trucks would travel eastbound from the Project toward Hillsdale Road; therefore, evaluating all trucks traveling westbound on Willow Glen Drive from the Project egress driveway is the most conservative analysis. Since Project-related traffic would cause no deficiencies within the study area as evaluated, no changes have been made to the trip distribution or local mobility transportation analysis.

Traffic Count Timing

Comments raised concerns that traffic counts were conducted during the pandemic and should be updated to reflect current conditions. However, no traffic counts relied upon in the analysis were taken during the pandemic. Instead, two sets of traffic counts, one pre-dating the pandemic, and one post-dating the pandemic, were taken.

First, in order to determine existing intersection traffic volumes used in the local mobility analysis, weekday morning and afternoon peak hour intersection turning movement volume counts were conducted on Thursday, August 30, 2018, which predates the pandemic. The intersection counts were conducted between the hours of 7:00 to 9:00 AM and 4:00 to 6:00 PM to capture peak commuter activity. Area schools were in session during the time of the counts.

Additional traffic counts were conducted on November 1, 2022, to evaluate whether the counts conducted in 2018 and the related analysis remained accurate post-pandemic. A comparison of the traffic count survey data is provided in the table below. As shown, the baseline 2018 traffic conditions evaluated in the Project transportation analyses use traffic counts that are higher than those obtained in 2022 and are therefore considered conservative compared to "existing" conditions.

EXISTING TRAFFIC COUNTS COMPARISON

Segment	**2022**	**2018**	**Δ**	**Δ (%)**
Willow Glen Drive				
1. Jamacha Road to Steele Canyon Road	18,202	18,256	-54	-0.35
2. Steele Canyon Road to Project Driveway	10,985	13,892	-2,907	-26
3. Project Driveway to Hillsdale Road	8,644	13,611	-4,967	-57

Additionally, several comments described traffic conditions during peak hours, including school traffic with the Project's proximity to Steele Canyon High School, Valhalla High School, and Jamacha Elementary School. For comments stating that the analysis is "incomplete" or missing data during non-peak hours, standard practice for evaluating existing traffic volumes is to conduct counts during peak hours, which is the "worst-case" traffic condition when the most vehicles would be on the road. The Project has been designed to limit trucking operations to Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm to avoid peak traffic periods in the area and would not contribute to the peak hour traffic conditions that were noted in some comments.

Emergency Access

Comments questioned the adequacy of the emergency access evaluation, including concerns related to response times and evacuation during a wildfire. Evaluation of emergency access, fire and emergency services, and wildfire risk are discussed in Sections 3.1.7.2, 3.2.5, and 3.2.8 of the FEIR, respectively. During pre-mining activities and construction of the proposed Willow Glen Drive improvements, a Traffic Control Plan would be implemented as a condition of Project approval. The Traffic Control Plan would establish procedures for coordinating with local emergency service providers to maintain adequate emergency access. During mining, the Project was estimated to generate an increase in on-road traffic attributed to haul trucks (a maximum of 146 trucks per day totaling an estimated 730 average daily trips as adjusted for passenger car equivalence) and worker commute vehicles (14 mining employees and visitors and 4 vendors totaling an estimated 36 average daily trips). Based on the Local Mobility Analysis conducted for the Project, this increase is not calculated to cause deficiencies along roadways in the Project area based on the County of San Diego's Transportation Study Guidelines.

Relative to fire and emergency services, FEIR Section 3.2.5 evaluates the Project's demand for fire and emergency services and potential effects to response times. The average response time for the nearest fire station to the Project site, Station 22 located approximately 0.3-mile north of the Project, is cited in the DEIR as approximately 6.5 minutes. The Project would implement a variety of measures to minimize hazards related to fires and would not generate increased demand for fire protection or place a significant strain on the existing fire protection facilities.

Roadway Improvements

The Local Mobility Analysis Report was prepared for the Project to assess the transportation effects of the Project on mobility, access, and circulation in the proximate area of the Project. Per the criteria and the assessment methodology presented in the report, under the Existing and Near-Term conditions, Project-related traffic would cause no deficiencies within the study area; however, the Project would implement improvements per coordination with County staff to improve roadway conditions along the Project frontage. Improvements include restriping Willow Glen Drive between Steele Canyon Road and the Project ingress driveway to provide a raised median and Class II buffered bike lanes on both sides of the roadway. To facilitate deceleration of right-turning vehicles into the Project ingress driveway, a dedicated right-turn lane would be constructed. The Project also would construct an acceleration lane between the ingress and egress Project driveways, which would serve as a refuge lane for trucks to complete their outbound maneuver. The northbound approach of the Willow Glen Drive/Steele Canyon Road intersection would be restriped to provide one dedicated left-turn lane and one shared left-through-right lane. Additionally, the Project would provide an Irrevocable Offer of Dedication along the Project frontage to accommodate the ultimate roadway classification of Willow Glen Drive.

In addition to the vehicular mobility improvements, bicycle and pedestrian mobility would be enhanced through proposed Project improvements. A pedestrian pathway would be constructed along the northern Project frontage/Willow Glen Drive east of Steele Canyon Road to provide pedestrian access within the Project vicinity where there are no existing sidewalks. To enhance bicycle mobility, the Project would provide Class II buffered bike lanes on both sides of Willow

Glen Drive between Steele Canyon Road and the Project easterly property line to separate bicyclists from vehicle travel lanes.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 9 – WILDLIFE CORRIDORS AND SPECIES CONNECTIVITY IMPACTS

Comments on the DEIR and RDEIR expressed concerns related to the Project's effect on wildlife movement, habitat linkages, and connectivity. Concerns included the timing of the biological surveys; description and characterization of wildlife use and movement within and through the Project site; the Project site's position and relation to Biological Core Resource Areas (BCRAs) and local preserves, particularly the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge (SDNWR), and designation as a habitat linkage between adjacent BCRAs; and analysis of the Project's effect on wildlife movement (particularly during the mining phase) and habitat linkages and connectivity, with particular concern on the site's ability to function as a habitat linkage during and following Project implementation.

As disclosed in the RDEIR, after the close of the public review and comment period for the DEIR, and in response to comment letters received during the public review and comment period from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), additional biological resource surveys of the Project site were conducted in 2022. These surveys included the deployment of motion-activated cameras to document wildlife presence, use, and movement throughout the Project site.

Because the results of these post-DEIR biological surveys provided new information and identified new impacts to be mitigated to a less than significant level, the RDEIR included a new biological resources analysis (Subchapter 2.2 of the RDEIR) and attached a revised and updated Biological Resources Technical Report (Appendix C of the RDEIR). These were circulated for public review and comment and supersede and replace the biological resources analysis and technical study originally circulated with the DEIR.

Biological Surveys

As summarized in Section 2.2.1.1 of RDEIR and further detailed in the Project's Biological Resources Technical Report (Appendix C of the RDEIR), biological surveys were conducted over a multi-year survey effort between 2018 and 2022 and included:

- Vegetation mapping
- General plant and animal inventories
- Rare plant surveys
- Southwestern pond turtle (*Actinemys pallida*) surveys
- Acoustical bat surveys
- Wildlife camera trapping surveys
- Protocol-level surveys for arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*), coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*), least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), and southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)

Biological surveys were conducted in accordance with County's biological survey requirements, as described in the *Biological Resources Report Format and Content Requirements* (2010), and followed the current USFWS protocols, where required. Several of the focused species surveys conducted in 2019 were updated in 2022, including the rare plant survey and southwestern willow flycatcher survey. Following comments received by CDFW and USFWS on the DEIR, additional surveys for coastal California gnatcatcher, southwestern pond turtle, and bats (acoustical and emergency surveys) were conducted in the spring and summer of 2022. In addition, wildlife camera trapping surveys were conducted over a 10-week period in the spring and summer of 2022 to gather data regarding wildlife use and movement within the Project site. The surveys involved the deployment of three motion-activated cameras in multiple locations throughout the Project site that covered both the active golf course (located east of Steele Canyon Road) and the inactive golf course (located west of Steele Canyon Road) and sampled a range of a habitat types that occur within the Project site.

Some commenters questioned the accuracy of the survey results, suggesting that animal species presence and movements may have been suppressed during Project surveys based on drought conditions. However, the biological surveys were conducted over multiple years with varying rainfall amounts, including during two years that received above average rainfall (as recorded at Lindbergh Field); 125 percent of average in 2019 and 132 percent of average in 2020 (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; available at: https://www.cnrfc.noaa.gov/rainfall_data.php). As summarized in Section 2.2.1.1 of the RDEIR and further detailed in Sections 1.4.7 and 1.4.10 of the Biological Resources Technical Report, and as noted by several of the commentors, numerous animal species were documented during biological surveys conducted for the Project, including 23 special status animal species. A total of 129 animal species were observed or otherwise detected during biological surveys, including 14 invertebrate, one fish, four amphibian, six reptile, 85 bird, and 19 mammal species. A total of 21 animal species also were detected on the wildlife cameras. Contrary to public comments, the biological surveys were conducted over multiple years, during the appropriate periods, and under suitable conditions that allowed for detection of numerous animal species, including federally listed species and other special-status species.

Habitat Linkages and Wildlife Movement

Several commenters referenced the Project site's location between two BRCAs, the McGinty Mountain/Sycuan Peak-Dehesa BRCA to the east and Sweetwater Reservoir/San Miguel Mountain BRCA to the west, and the site's identification as a habitat linkage in the County's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) that connects these two BRCAs. Sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.12 of the Biological Resources Technical Report provide a detailed description of portions of the Project site that occur within or adjacent to lands designated in the County's MSCP as having high to very high habitat value and lands targeted for conservation, such as those within the County's pre-approved mitigation area (PAMA); lands within and surrounding the Project site designated as BRCAs and habitat linkages; the Project site's geographical positional along the Sweetwater River; and the Project site's relation to local and regional open space areas and preserved lands, including the SDNWR, McGinty Mountain Ecological Reserve, McGinty Mountain Preserve, and Sweetwater Reservoir. These areas are further depicted in Figures 4 and 14 of the Biological Resources Technical Report, along with a spatial depiction of expected wildlife movement trends between these areas on Figure 14. As described in Section 1.4.1 of the Biological Resources Technical Report, "The majority of the site is mapped as developed on

Attachment J (Habitat Evaluation Map) of the Biological Mitigation Ordinance (BMO [County 2010c]), though small portions of the Project site along southern boundary are also mapped as having low, moderate, high, and very high habitat value." These areas also overlap with lands designated as PAMA, Minor Amendment Area, and BRCAs. As stated in Section 1.4.1, "Lands designated as PAMA, totaling 16.40 acres within the project site, occur along the northeastern, southeastern, and southern project boundaries." Lands designated as PAMA represent approximately 5.9 percent of the 276.6-acre Project site. Lands designated as BRCA primarily occur outside of the Project site, though the outer regions of the BRCAs extend onto small portions of the site at the southeastern, western, and southwestern boundaries.

Commenters questioned the description of the on-site habitat condition and wildlife use and movement within and throughout the Project site included in the RDEIR and Biological Resources Technical Report, with some commenters incorrectly suggesting that the analysis concluded that the Project site is untenable for wildlife movement. Section 1.4 of the Biological Resources Technical Report provides a detailed description of the on-site habitat condition, including current and past land uses and site disturbances; existing vegetation communities and land use types that were mapped in accordance with the Holland code classification system, as modified by Oberbauer, and the County's biological survey requirements; plant and animal species detected within and adjacent to the Project, including those with potential to occur; and waters, wetlands, and riparian habitat subject to the jurisdiction of state and federal agencies, as well as the County. The Project site is characterized as a public golf course that has been in operation since the 1960s, though golf play and irrigation of landscaped turf in the portion of the site located west of Steele Canyon Road was discontinued in 2017. As summarized in Section 1.4.3 of the Biological Resources Technical Report:

> *The portion west of Steele Canyon Road, which consists of the closed golf course, is characterized by ruderal vegetation, artificial ponds, disturbed habitat, and a mixture of native and non-native planted trees. The eastern portion of the site, which represents the active golf course, is characterized by landscaped turf grass, artificial ponds, native and non-native planted trees, cart paths, parking lots, a clubhouse, and other maintenance facilities.*

Existing vegetation communities and land uses are described in Section 1.4.5 of the Biological Resources Technical Report, summarized in Table 4, and depicted on Figure 10. Vegetation within the Project site has been heavily modified by the past golf course development and ongoing operations and maintenance. There are patches of native habitat located within the Project site, primarily along northeastern, southeastern, southern, and southwestern boundaries. The largest patches of native habitat consist of riparian habitat located along the southern border just east of Steele Canyon Road and an approximately 2,360-foot stretch of Sweetwater River in the southwestern portion of site.

Pages 2.2-22 through 2.2-25 of the RDEIR and Section 1.4.12 of the Biological Resources Technical Report provide a detailed discussion on habitat linkages, wildlife connectivity, and wildlife movement within and through the Project site. Public comments indicated that the report either minimized wildlife movement within the Project site or concluded that the site did not support wildlife movement. Contrary to these comments, the analysis identified portions of the Project site that contain suitable resources that are likely to facilitate wildlife movement, portions

of the site that have connectivity to adjacent open space and preserve lands, and animal species that are likely to utilize the site based on the results of the wildlife camera surveys and other biological surveys. Regarding portions of the Project site that support resources that are likely to facilitate wildlife movement, the analysis concludes, "Scattered patches of mature riparian forest, eucalyptus woodland, and non-native woodland habitats more conducive to wildlife use and movement occur along the southern project boundary." (See p. 2.2-23 of the RDEIR.) These areas also provide greater connectivity to open space and preserve areas located to the northeast, south, and southwest of the Project site. As stated in the Biological Resources Technical Report and the RDEIR, "The downstream section of Sweetwater River, approximately 0.5 mile of the 1.9 miles of Sweetwater River that runs through site, contains riparian habitat, which maintains connectivity to off-site habitat within the SDNWR." (See p. 2.2-23 of the RDEIR.) The analysis discusses animal species that are expected to utilize the site for foraging, dispersal, and breeding activities, as well as those that may move though the site. For example, in relation to least Bell's vireo, the analysis concludes that the species "likely forages, disperses through, and breeds within the Project site based on observations made during the 2019 and 2022 biological surveys, which included the positive identification of a breeding pair with fledglings in the eastern portion of the Project site." (See p. 2.2-24 of the RDEIR.) The report also states that "amphibians, reptiles, and small- to medium-sized mammals are expected to regularly move through the Project site and utilize the site for foraging, dispersal, and breeding activities where suitable habitat/conditions are present, especially in the southwestern portion of the Project site where greater connectivity to the SDNWR is present." (*Ibid.*) There are portions of the site where wildlife movement is likely to be impeded or constrained where streets, such as Willow Glen Drive and Steele Canyon Road, and residential development are present. These areas occur to the north, south, and east of the site.

Project Impacts to Wildlife Movements and Habitat Linkages and Connectivity

Commenters expressed concerns regarding the Project's impact on habitat linkages and wildlife movement, particularly during the mining phase of the Project. The comments indicated that mining operations lasting 10 to 12 years would result in habitat fragmentation and isolation of wildlife communities, thereby affecting the site's ability to function as a habitat linkage during and following Project implementation. Though sand mining operations would occur over a 10-year span, mining would occur incrementally over three major phases, with three to four subphases in each major phase. A final fourth phase would occur following the completion of mining activities, which would involve site cleanup, equipment removal, and final reclamation. Mining activities would begin with Phase 1 in the western portion of the site, and generally progress eastward following completion of earlier phasing. The Project site would be progressively reclaimed following the completion of mining activities with reclamation activities, including the restoration and revegetation of native habitats, beginning after the first subphase of mining, and conducted on a continuous basis following the subsequent completion of each mining subphase. As such, Project impacts would not occur simultaneously throughout the entire site and portions of the site that are not being actively mined or reclaimed would either remain undisturbed or be in the restoration and revegetation monitoring period. Furthermore, mining activities would predominately occur within portions of the site already disturbed and developed by the golf course development.

It should also be noted that the Project would not result in direct impacts to the entire site. Portions of the Project site located outside of the Major Use Permit boundary, primarily along the site's southern boundary, would remain undisturbed and in the current condition. The southwestern tail

of the Project site, located south of Sweetwater River and immediately adjacent to the SDNWR, would not be impacted by the Project and ultimately would be preserved within the Project's Biological Open Space (BOS) easement, which would protect these lands in perpetuity and restrict future uses to protect their biological value. The portions of the Project site with the highest biological value (i.e., existing stands of native riparian habitat to the east of Steele Canyon Road and in the southwestern portion of the site along the Sweetwater River) would be avoided by Project activities and would ultimately be preserved within the Project's BOS easement.

Sections 2.4 and 6.0 of the Biological Resources Technical Report provide a detailed analysis of the Project's potential impact on wildlife linkages and corridors, wildlife connectivity, and wildlife movement, including discussions on potential impacts and wildlife use of the Project site during each mining phase. As summarized in Section 2.4 of the report, "The phased nature of mining activities and avoidance of higher quality habitat areas would reduce potential temporary adverse effects that mining operations would have on local wildlife." Though wildlife use and access to different portions of the site would be temporarily constrained during each individual subphase, overall access to Project site would not be significantly or permanently constrained by Project activities. Portions of the Project site located outside of active work areas would still be available for wildlife access and use. The Project would retain connectivity to existing open space and preserve areas to the south and west of the site, particularly those associated with the SDNWR, during mining and reclamation activities by avoiding areas of higher biological value located in the southwestern portion of the Project site and along the downstream reach of Sweetwater River. Reclamation and native habitat restoration and revegetation activities would first occur adjacent to existing riparian habitat along the Sweetwater River channel in the western portion of the site. As mining activities progress eastward and reclamation is completed, active revegetation areas would provide a buffer between later mining phases and existing riparian habitat in the western portion site, and other off-site habitat areas, thereby reducing potential Project impacts to wildlife use and movement. As such, potential impacts to wildlife linkages, wildlife connectivity, and wildlife movement during mining and reclamation activities would be less than significant as these impacts would be temporary in nature, reduced to areas of active mining and reclamation grading, and would not significantly or permanently constrain overall access to the Project site and suitable habitat areas that provide foraging, breeding, and dispersal habitat for animal species found to occur or with potential to occur within the Project site and surrounding area.

As part of the Project's reclamation process, the Sweetwater River channel and associated floodplain would be expanded throughout the entire length of the Project site (approximately 10,040 linear feet). Following mining and reclamation activities, the final Project landform would consist of a relatively flat upper plain that gently slopes downward from east to west, with an expanded floodplain, approximately 450 to 720 feet in width, bisecting the length of the site. The expanded floodplain would be revegetated with native wetland and riparian habitat and the slopes bordering the expanded floodplain would be revegetated with coastal sage scrub habitat as described in the Project's Conceptual Revegetation and Conceptual Wetland Mitigation Plan, which are included as Appendices N and O, respectively, to FEIR Appendix C, the Biological Resources Technical Report. Maintenance and monitoring of the restored and revegetated native habitat areas would continue until final performance standards are met. These areas would be preserved within the Project's BOS easement, which would be managed by a long-term manager approved by the County in accordance with a final Resource Management Plan, to be approved by the County and Wildlife Agencies, that is similar in nature to the Project's Conceptual Resource

Management Plan (included as Appendix P to the Biological Resources Technical Report). The Project would ultimately provide additional higher quality foraging, breeding, and dispersal habitat for animal species documented to occur within the local area and would be biologically superior to the site's existing condition as an active and inactive golf course. The post-reclamation condition would restore and substantially improve functional connectivity of the Project site and the mapped habitat linkage to BRCAs and preserved lands to the east, west, and south of the site, as depicted on Figure 22 of the Biological Resources Technical Report. The improved connectivity would promote wildlife access to higher quality habitat resources within the Project site and would facilitate wildlife use and movement in the local area and the surrounding region. Therefore, the overall Project would have a beneficial effect on habitat linkages, wildlife connectivity, and wildlife movement.

As summarized on page 2.2-78 of the RDEIR:

> *The Project would comply with the requirements of the BMO and MSCP, including preserve design criteria related to corridors and linkages. In addition, the Project would improve habitat quality and connectivity compared to the site's current state as a golf course. The Project's proposed reclamation would preserve, rehabilitate, and restore native riparian and upland habitats along the Sweetwater River. This would result in [a] widened riparian corridor that re-establishes functional connectivity to BRCAs located to the east and west of the Project site, including the SDNWR. The contribution of the Project to the cumulative impact on wildlife movement would not be cumulatively considerable and would be less than significant.*

Further, as stated on p. 2.2-88 of the RDEIR, "With the Project's proposed open space, incorporation of design features, and implementation of [mitigation measures], impacts to wildlife movement, corridors and linkages, and nursery sites would be less than significant and no additional mitigation measures are required."

TOPICAL RESPONSE 10 – CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Comments received on the DEIR and RDEIR questioned the adequacy of the cumulative impact analysis. Comments were primarily focused on existing uses that are part of the baseline environmental conditions within the Project study area, including other existing mining operations such as Hester's Granite Quarry/Robertson's Ready Mix and Superior Ready Mix, as well as casinos such as Sycuan Casino and Resort and Jamul Casino. As stated in Section 1.8 of the DEIR, Sections 15065 and 15130 of the State CEQA Guidelines require that an EIR address cumulative impacts of a project when the project's incremental effects would be cumulatively considerable; i.e., the incremental effects of the project would be "considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects and the effects of probable future projects." DEIR Table 1-14, *Cumulative Projects in the Vicinity of the Proposed Project*, provides a list of cumulative projects within five miles of the Project site. The list of projects was determined in coordination with County staff based on projects with applications that were pending or recently approved at the time of the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of the DEIR. Each individual technical subject area within Chapters 2.0 and 3.0 analyzes cumulative impacts of the Project in relation to

those projects that could potentially combine with the Project to result in cumulatively considerable impacts. The impact analyses factor in existing conditions, which includes baseline operating conditions of existing uses such as the mining facilities and casinos mentioned above; project-specific impacts; and impacts related to each cumulative project to evaluate the significance of potential impacts.

Since the circulation of the DEIR, County staff identified three new projects that were not included in the baseline cumulative project research completed for the Project at the time of the NOP:

- Jonna Tentative Parcel Map (TPM) – TPM-21310, located at APN 502-193-19
- Kim-Lee TPM – TPM-21328, ER-23-19-001, located at APN 519-094-44
- Hester's Quarry Major Use Permit (MUP) – MUP-20-010/RP-79-017W1, located at Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 517-020-80

These three additional cumulative projects are now reflected in Chapter 1.0, Table 1-14 of the FEIR. The cumulative impact analyses presented in Chapters 2.0 and 3.0 of the FEIR were reviewed to determine whether the inclusion of these three projects required modifications to the cumulative impacts analysis, or whether the conclusions of the cumulative impacts analysis have changed.

The Jonna TPM is a subdivision proposal located approximately 1.5-mile northwest of the Project site at 11229 Explorer Road, La Mesa, CA 91941 that is ministerially approved for a two-lot subdivision and/or the development of two single-family residential units pursuant to Senate Bill 9. The Kim-Lee TPM is a three-lot subdivision for residential use located approximately 3.6 miles southeast of the Project site at 14792 Skyline Truck Trail, Jamul, CA 91935 for which a CEQA Negative Declaration is currently being prepared. These two residential projects would not contribute to a cumulatively considerable impact in combination with the effects of the proposed Project due to the small scale of the projects (two and three residential units) and their distances from the Project site.

The Hester's Quarry MUP is an application requesting implementation of a modification to an approved reclamation plan for an additional 7.0 acres of land that would serve to extend the currently operating vested mining operation life by adding reserves. The increased area would yield less than 10 percent of the vested quarry operations (93.66 acres) from the 1980 Reclamation Plan. Therefore, even with approval of the Hester's Quarry MUP, the historic production characteristics, production rates, service radius, and other characteristics of Hester's Quarry would remain unchanged. Operation of the existing Robertson's Ready Mix/Hester's Quarry mining facility pursuant to the existing reclamation plan, including the presence and rate of trucks as observed during traffic counts conducted for the Project, was factored into the environmental baseline conditions and cumulative impact analysis conducted in the DEIR. This includes evaluation of impacts related to truck traffic, air quality, and noise conditions raised in the

comments. Therefore, modification to include an additional 7.0 acres would not result in an additional impact not already factored into the Project's cumulative impact analysis.

Given the above, it was determined that any potential impacts associated with each of the three additional cumulative projects would not change the analysis or conclusions of the cumulative analysis presented in the DEIR, therefore no modifications to this analysis are required.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 11 – CONSISTENCY WITH PLANS AND POLICIES

Several commenters questioned whether the proposed Project was consistent with the County's land use plans, policies, ordinances, and codes. As described in DEIR Section 3.1.6, *Land Use and Planning*, the land use plans, policies, and ordinances that apply to the Project site are contained in the County of San Diego General Plan, Valle de Oro Community Plan, and the County Municipal Code and Zoning Ordinance. As described in the DEIR, the designations applicable to the Project site allow the proposed mining uses with approval of a Major Use Permit. In other words, if the County were to approve the Project's Major Use Permit, extractive mining uses would be consistent with all applicable plans and ordinances.

The County's General Plan designates the Project site as "Open Space-Recreation (OS-R)." The General Plan describes this designation as applying to large, existing recreational areas. The Valle de Oro Community Plan also designates the Project site as "Open Space (Recreation)."

Several zoning designations may apply within the Open Space designations of the General Plan and Valle de Oro Community Plan. The three zoning designations that apply to the Project site are S80 (Open Space), S90 (Holding Area, and S88 (Specific Planning Area). The County Zoning Ordinance also identifies a Special Area Designator that applies to the Project site, Special Area Designator F (Flood Plain). Special Area Designators are applied to areas with special interest or unusual value; the Special Area Designator F (Flood Plain) is intended to protect the public health, safety, and welfare from flooding.

The Project is consistent with these zoning designations. Specifically, extractive use (such as the sand mining use proposed as part of this Project) can be permitted within the S80 and S90 classifications with approval of a Major Use Permit. The S88 (Specific Planning Area) designation applies to 32 acres in the southwestern portion of the Project site that are not used for golf course operations and are part of the Rancho San Diego Specific Plan. This zoning designation restricts extractive uses to site preparation, which allows the off-site removal of materials when it is secondary to the future use of the site.

A policy-by-policy consistency analysis was provided in Appendix B of the DEIR to evaluate the Project's consistency with applicable land use policies. A project is consistent with a general plan if, "considering all its aspects, it will further the objectives and policies of the general plan and not obstruct their attainment." (*San Francisco Tomorrow v. City and County of San Francisco* (2014) 229 Cal.App.4th 498, 513-514.) State law does not require conformity with each and every individual goal and policy of a general plan prior to a finding that a project is generally consistent

and compatible with the general plan. (*Ibid.*) Here, the County has determined that the Project is consistent with 55 goals and policies of the General Plan, and in the long-term will be compatible with the remaining three. Despite non-permanent visual impacts to select viewers as mining proceeds across the Project Site in 30-acre subphases, the Project does not obstruct the attainment of any goal or policy of the San Diego County General Plan, including COS-11, COS-11.1, and COS 11.2, and therefore is consistent with the San Diego County General Plan.

The analysis presented in Appendix B considers each applicable goal, objective, and policy of the County General Plan and the Valle de Oro Community Plan and analyzes whether the Project would be consistent with each. This analysis determined that the Project would be consistent with the majority of the applicable goals, objectives, and policies, with the exception of effects associated with the following:

County of San Diego General Plan

- Goal COS-11: Preservation of Scenic Resources
- COS-11.1: Protection of Scenic Resources
- COS-11.2: Scenic Resources Connections

Valle de Oro Community Plan

- Community Character Goal
- Community Character Policy 6
- Land Use Industrial Goal
- Scenic Highways Policy 1
- Scenic Highways Policy 2

The Project was determined to be inconsistent with these goals and policies during the mining phase, when notable physical changes in the composition of the visual environment, as viewed from Willow Glen Drive, Steele Canyon Road, and surrounding recreational and residential areas, would result in reduced visual quality of the site and surrounding area and detract from the existing character of the community. As described in DEIR Section 3.1.6.4, while the Project would result in conflicts with goals and policies related to aesthetics, the environmental effects of which are evaluated in DEIR Subchapter 2.1, the Project would comply with applicable goals and policies to the extent feasible for an extractive use and would implement a comprehensive reclamation plan to ensure that mined areas are backfilled and revegetated with appropriate vegetation communities. The Project would be consistent with all applicable goals and policies in the long-term reclaimed condition.

TOPICAL RESPONSE 12 – FLOOD CONTROL AND BRIDGE DESIGN

Some comments raised questions relating to the purpose and/or design of the Project's proposed drop structure. Drop structures, similar to riprap structures, pass water to a lower elevation in a controlled way, primarily to prevent erosion. As described in the DEIR, the Project proposes a

drop structure at the eastern end of the site where the Sweetwater River enters the property, and a similar riprap structure on the west side of the Steele Canyon Road bridge. The purpose of these structures is to prevent upstream headcut erosion that could otherwise result from the Sweetwater River flow entering into an open mining pit during infrequent, high flow storm events. Without these erosion control structures, the upstream mining pit slopes could erode during these infrequent, high flow storm events due to high velocity river flow down the slope.

Both structures would be constructed on and extend somewhat downstream of the upstream pit slopes. They will span the 100-year floodplain in order to contain the 100-year design flow. They would be constructed of grouted riprap, which is able to withstand the flow velocities. The grouted riprap would prevent erosion of the pit slope and act as a grade control that would prevent degradation of the upstream channel bed. In other words, the drop structures would allow for the upstream channel bed elevation to be maintained at or above the upper elevation of the drop structures. The lower end of the grouted riprap would extend a short distance horizontally into the pit floor to dissipate the high flow velocities flowing down the pit slope.

The final design of the drop and riprap structures would be refined during final engineering design. However, final design details are not necessary to complete environmental review because the structures are shown on the engineering drawings, and would be a condition of the Project approval. The County's Hydraulic Design Manual defines the 100-year flow as the design event. As a result, the structures would be sized to provide protection up to the 100-year flow. CEQA-level hydraulic analyses have also been performed for the Project. Based on this data, the EIR has concluded that impacts relating to the alteration of drainage patters, erosion, sedimentation, or flooding onsite or offsite would be less than significant. (See DEIR, pp. 3.1.5-17 through 3.1.5-19.)

Additionally, some comments questioned whether the proposed Project, and in particular, the Project's hydrological system, would result in impacts to Steele Canyon Road bridge. The Project's westerly drop structure would be constructed just downstream of the bridge. This would maintain the channel bed elevations at the bridge and prevent adverse erosion. The Project does not propose obstructions below the bridge that would adversely raise water surface elevations or reduce the bridge capacity or freeboard. No impacts to Steel Canyon Road bridge are anticipated as a result of the proposed Project.