

# Fresno 198 Culvert Rehabilitation

State Route 198

Fresno, California

06-FRE-198-0.51/19.5

EA: 06-0X060 Project ID: 0618000015 SCH: 2020039062

## **Initial Study with Mitigated Negative Declaration**



Prepared by the  
State of California Department of Transportation

October 2020

Volume 1



## **General Information About This Document**

For individuals with sensory disabilities, this document is available in Braille, in large print, on audiocassette, or on computer disk. To obtain a copy in one of these alternate formats, please write to or call Caltrans, Attention: Richard Putler, Southern San Joaquin Valley Management Branch 1, 855 M Street, Suite 200, Fresno, CA 93721; 559-445-5286, or use California Relay Service 1 (800) 735-2929 (TTY), 1 (800) 735-2929 (Voice), or 711.

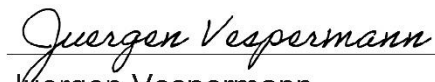
SCH: 2020039062  
6-FRE-198-PM 0.51/19.5  
EA: 06-0X060 Project ID: 0618000015

Culvert Rehabilitation on State Route 198  
from post mile 0.51 to post mile 19.5 in Fresno County

**INITIAL STUDY  
with Mitigated Negative Declaration**

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
Department of Transportation

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Juergen Vespermann  
Office Chief, Southern San Joaquin Valley  
Central Region  
California Department of Transportation

10-22-2020  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# Mitigated Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

State Clearinghouse Number: 20200396062

District-County-Route-Post Mile: 06-FRE-198-0.51/19.5

EA/Project Identification: 06-0X060/0618000015

## ***Project Description***

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to rehabilitate 82 culverts on State Route 198 from post mile 0.51 to post mile 19.5 in Fresno County. The rehabilitation would repair, replace and clean culverts to address worn out and damaged drainage facilities.

## ***Determination***

Caltrans has prepared an Initial Study and determined the proposed project will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons.

The project will have no effect on: aesthetics, agriculture and forest resources, air quality, cultural resources, paleontological resources, energy, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, utilities and service systems, and wildfire.

The project will have less-than-significant effects on greenhouse gas emissions.

The project will have less-than-significant effects on biological resources with mitigation.

- One mitigation credit shall be purchased from an appropriate bank within the service area.



Juergen Vespermann  
Office Chief, Southern San Joaquin Valley  
Central Region  
California Department of Transportation

10-22-2020

Date

# Section 1 Project Description and Background

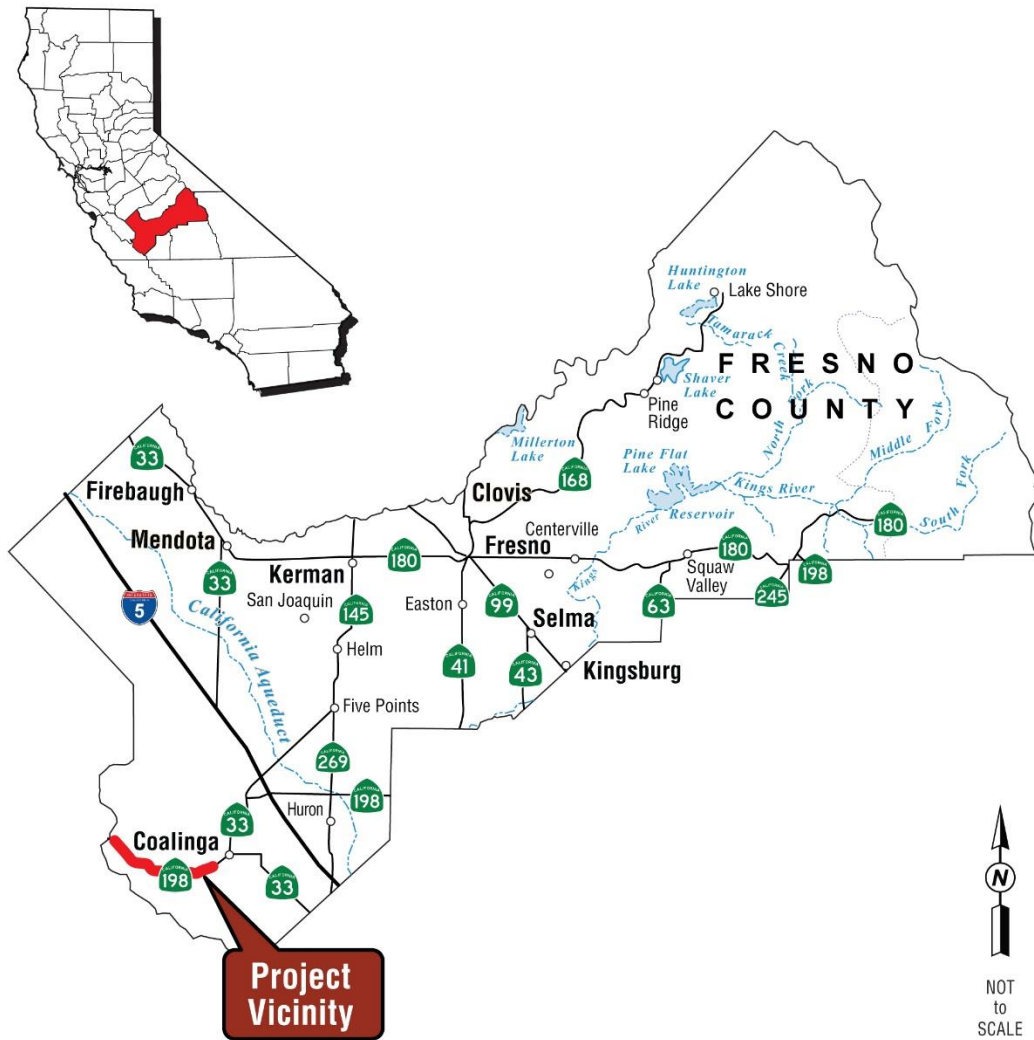
## 1.1 Project Title

Fresno 198 Culvert Rehabilitation

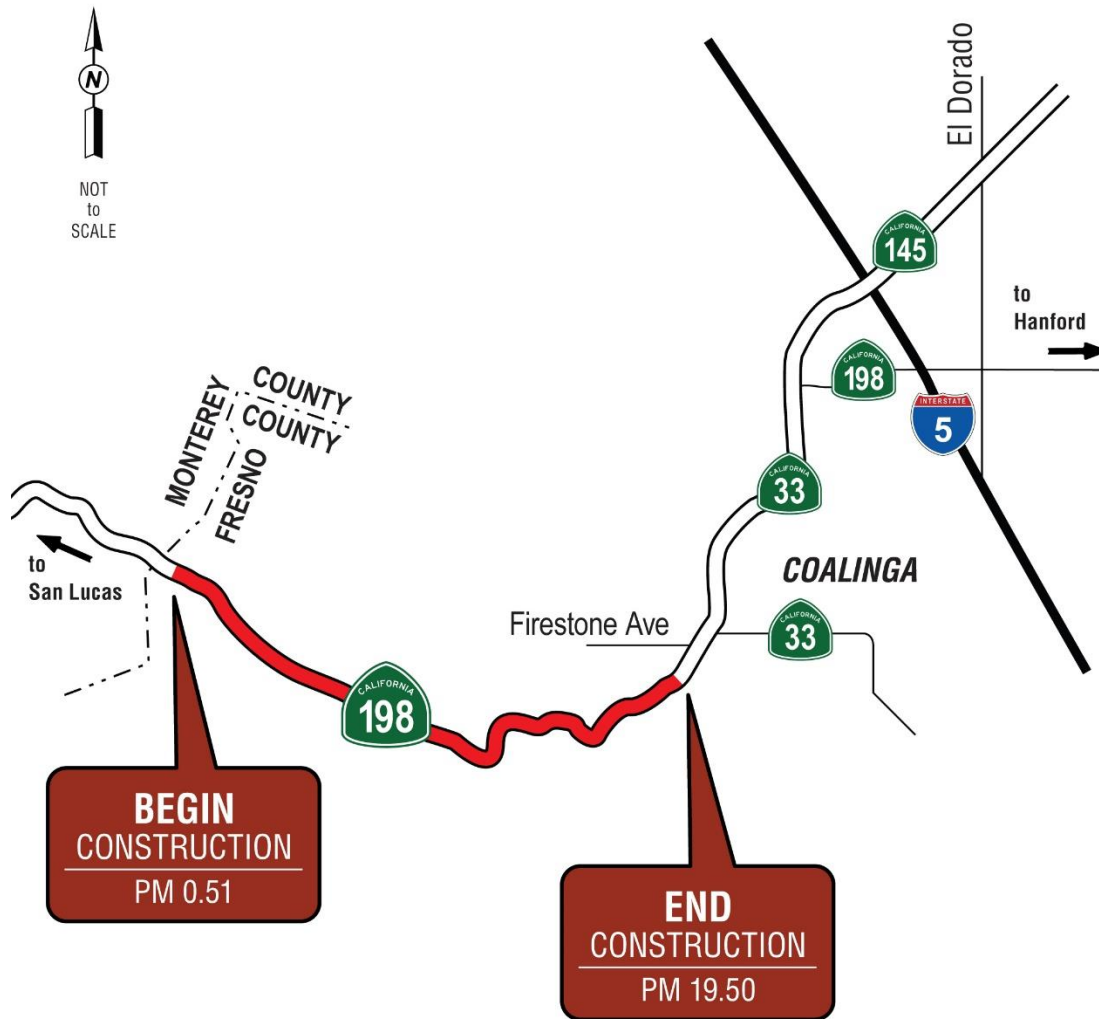
## 1.2 Project Location

The project is in Fresno County. It begins just east of the Monterey County line at post mile 0.51 and extends through the foothills of the Coast Range to about 2 miles southwest of the City of Coalinga at post mile 19.50. See Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 Project Vicinity Map



**Figure 2 Project Location Map**



### 1.3 Description of Project

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to repair, replace, or clean 82 culverts at various locations along State Route 198 from the Monterey/Fresno County line at post mile 0.51 to post mile 19.50, southwest of the City of Coalinga. The existing culverts are either undersized or so damaged that they will require cleaning, repair, or replacement. Specific culverts have become so clogged with material that they allow very little water to pass through.

The project is needed to maintain proper drainage, prevent flooding, and prevent further pavement deterioration in those areas. Work will include relining and replacing culverts, installing or repairing headwalls, and doing

general maintenance repairs. See Table 1 for a list of the culvert locations and work to be performed.

**Table 1 State Route 198 Culvert Locations and Work to be Performed**

<b>Culvert</b>	<b>Post Mile</b>	<b>Culvert Diameter (feet)</b>	<b>Proposed Work</b>
1	0.51	2	Culvert lining
2	0.57	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
3	0.60	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
4	0.66	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
5	0.77	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
6	1.04	1.5	Replace flared-end section
7	1.57	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
8	1.66	1.5	Culvert lining
9	1.97	1.5	Culvert lining
10	2.04	2	Culvert lining
11	2.25	2	Culvert lining
12	2.76	3.5	Replace with 42-inch reinforced concrete pipe
13	2.87	3	Replace with 36-inch reinforced concrete pipe
14	2.92	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
15	3.09	3	Replace with 36-inch reinforced concrete pipe
16	3.51	2.5	Culvert lining
17	3.56	2	Culvert lining
18	3.65	2.5	Culvert lining
19	4.18	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
20	4.57	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
21	4.75	2	Culvert lining
22	4.85	2	Culvert lining

<b>Culvert</b>	<b>Post Mile</b>	<b>Culvert Diameter (feet)</b>	<b>Proposed Work</b>
<b>23</b>	5.17	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>24</b>	5.29	2.5	Culvert lining
<b>25</b>	5.56	2.5	Culvert lining
<b>26</b>	6.06	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>27</b>	6.21	5	Replace with 60-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>28</b>	6.40	4.5	Concrete invert lining
<b>29</b>	6.54	2	Culvert lining
<b>30</b>	6.69	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>31</b>	6.86	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>32</b>	7.13	4	Concrete invert lining
<b>33</b>	7.24	5	Concrete invert lining
<b>34</b>	7.60	2	Culvert lining
<b>35</b>	7.77	2.5	Culvert lining
<b>36</b>	7.86	2	Culvert lining
<b>37</b>	7.95	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>38</b>	8.20	2.5	Culvert lining
<b>39</b>	8.38	2	Culvert lining
<b>40</b>	8.45	2	Culvert lining
<b>41</b>	8.82	4	Fix and replace headwall
<b>42</b>	9.91	2-1.5	Replace flared-end section
<b>43</b>	10.45	1.5	Replace with 36-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>44</b>	10.69	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>45</b>	10.84	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>46</b>	10.92	1	Replace with 30-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>47</b>	11.07	1	Replace with 30-inch reinforced concrete pipe



<b>Culvert</b>	<b>Post Mile</b>	<b>Culvert Diameter (feet)</b>	<b>Proposed Work</b>
48	11.18	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
49	11.27	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
50	11.31	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
51	11.58	2	Replace with 36-inch reinforced concrete pipe
52	11.83	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
53	12.03	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
54	12.10	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
55	12.33	4	Replace with reinforced concrete box
56	12.48	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
57	12.60	2	Culvert lining
58	12.67	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
59	12.76	2	Culvert lining
60	13.07	2	Culvert lining
61	13.15	2	Culvert lining
62	13.58	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
63	13.77	2	Culvert lining
64	13.93	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
65	14.45	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
66	14.74	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
67	15.26	2	Culvert lining
68	15.60	4	Culvert lining
69	15.98	2	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
70	16.33	1	Replace with dual 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
71	16.56	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
72	17.33	1.5	Culvert lining

<b>Culvert</b>	<b>Post Mile</b>	<b>Culvert Diameter (feet)</b>	<b>Proposed Work</b>
<b>73</b>	17.58	0	Repair
<b>74</b>	17.68	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>75</b>	18.17	0	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>76</b>	18.22	dual 2.5	Replace with dual 30-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>77</b>	18.26	dual 2.5	Replace with dual 30-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>78</b>	18.33	1.5	Culvert lining
<b>79</b>	18.46	1.5	Culvert lining
<b>80</b>	18.61	4	Replace with 54-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>81</b>	18.71	1.5	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe
<b>82</b>	19.50	1	Replace with 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe

## 1.4 Surrounding Land Uses and Setting

State Route 198 from the Monterey/Fresno County line to the City of Coalinga is a winding, paved two-lane mountain highway. The project area is developed with a mix of land uses consisting mostly of livestock grazing, recreational use (such as Curry Mountain Trailhead), and minor residential development.

## 1.5 Other Public Agencies Whose Approval is Required

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Permit/Approval</b>	<b>Status</b>
Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board	401	The 401 certification (permit) will be obtained prior to the start of construction.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Biological Opinion	Formal consultation initiated on December 4, 2019. Biological Opinion received September 23, 2020.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	1600	The 1600 permit will be obtained prior to start of construction.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Wildlife Incidental Take Permit	The ITP permit will be obtained prior to start of construction.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	404	The 404 permit will be obtained prior to start of construction.

## **Section 2** CEQA Environmental Checklist

---

### **2.1 CEQA Checklist**

This checklist identifies physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. Potential impact determinations include Significant and Unavoidable Impact, Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated, Less Than Significant Impact, and No Impact. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with a project will indicate that there are no impacts to a particular resource. A No Impact answer reflects this determination. The words “significant” and “significance” used throughout the following checklist are related to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), not National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), impacts. The questions in this checklist are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

Project features, which can include both design elements of the project, and standardized measures that are applied to all or most Caltrans projects such as Best Management Practices and measures included in the Standard Plans and Specifications or as Standard Special Provisions, are considered to be an integral part of the project and have been considered prior to any significance determinations documented below.

#### **2.1.1 Aesthetics**

##### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics**

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

##### **No Impact**

b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

##### **No Impact**

c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

**No Impact**

d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

**No Impact**

**2.1.2 Agriculture and Forest Resources**

**CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forest Resources**

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Would the project:

a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?

**No Impact**

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?

**No Impact**

c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?

**No Impact**

d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

**No Impact**

e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

**No Impact**

**2.1.3 Air Quality**

**CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality**

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Would the project:

a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?

**No Impact**

b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?

**No Impact**

c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?

**No Impact**

d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?

**No Impact**

**2.1.4 Biological Resources**

**CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources**

Would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

**Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**—A Biological Assessment and Natural Environment Study were prepared by Caltrans to determine to what extent the proposed project may affect threatened,

endangered or candidate or sensitive species. Species lists are included in the Natural Environment Study.

Special-status animal species listed for protection under the California Endangered Species Act that may be impacted by the proposed project include: American badgers, blunt-nosed leopard lizards, California glossy snakes, California tiger salamanders, Crotch bumble bees, Giant Kangaroo Rat, Nelson's antelope squirrels, Northern California legless lizards, San Joaquin coachwhips, and western spadefoot toads.

### ***American Badger***

#### *Survey Results*

No American badgers or their signs were observed during reconnaissance-level site visits, but marginal suitable habitat is present within the action area. Ground squirrel burrows are present nearby, and they could be enlarged for a badger. Two historic observations of this species occur about 2.5 miles south of the project location. Based on these results, American badgers could potentially be within the biological study area but are unlikely to occur within the project footprint.

#### *Project Impacts*

Temporary, indirect impacts may occur over a span of 240 working days. Due to work occurring during daylight, it is unlikely the species will be directly impacted. Indirect impacts such as collapsing potential dens and removing potential prey may deter the species from the area and alter foraging movement. No permanent impacts are expected; therefore, the American badger is not likely to be adversely affected by the project.

#### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Pre-construction surveys will be performed by a Caltrans-approved biologist 30 days prior to any ground disturbance. Surveys will identify American badgers or their signs within 50 feet of any proposed culvert replacement. Potential burrows in the right-of-way will be avoided as much as possible. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. A Worker Environmental Awareness Training describing special-status species will be presented to all contract workers. No direct impacts to the species are expected, and no compensatory mitigation is proposed.

### ***Blunt-Nosed Leopard Lizard***

#### *Survey Results*

No blunt-nosed leopard lizards were seen during reconnaissance-level site visits; however, marginally suitable habitat is present near the eastern locations between post miles 17.33 and 19.50. There are three historic observations (dated 1935, 1979, and 1989) roughly 2.5 miles east of post mile 19.5. Vegetation in the area is dense; therefore, the potential for finding

blunt-nosed leopard lizards in the biological study area and project footprint is low.

#### *Project Impacts*

No impacts are expected.

#### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Protocol-level surveys will occur the year prior to construction. Results will be submitted to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Negative findings are expected. A pre-construction survey will occur within 30 days prior to beginning construction. A Worker's Environmental Awareness Training describing special-status species will be presented to all contract workers. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. No direct impacts to the species are expected. No compensatory mitigation is proposed.

### **California Glossy Snake**

#### *Survey Results*

No California glossy snakes were seen during reconnaissance-level site visits; however, suitable habitat is present within the biological study area. Historic occurrences have been noted within three miles east of the proposed culverts. Observations have been made at the Curry Mountain Trailhead. A good prey source is present at the location. Based on these results, there is potential for California glossy snakes to be within the biological study area and project footprint.

#### *Project Impacts*

Disruption of habitat and foraging areas will be temporarily and permanently impacted due to clearing and grubbing, culvert extension, and the compaction of any sandy soils. Direct impacts such as crushing are unlikely to occur due to individuals avoiding the loud disturbance. Use of heavy equipment may collapse potential burrows used by the species. However, additional microhabitat may be created from clearing and grubbing.

#### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Pre-construction surveys will be conducted by a Caltrans-approved biologist, 30 days prior to any ground disturbance. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. A Worker Environmental Awareness Training describing special-status species will be presented to all contract workers. No compensatory mitigation is proposed.

## ***California Tiger Salamander***

### *Survey Results*

No California tiger salamanders were seen during the reconnaissance-level site visit; however, the visit occurred during the dry months when any salamanders would be in burrows. Suitable upland habitat is present within the biological study area, and potential breeding habitat is within one mile of the proposed project. An observation was made in 2017 about four miles south of State Route 198. Based on these results, there is potential for California tiger salamanders to be present within the biological study area, but presence is unlikely within the project footprint.

### *Project Impacts*

Temporary and negligible permanent impacts are expected. Temporary impacts to upland habitat such as potential burrows, leaf litter cover, and foraging habitat may be caused from off-pavement equipment use, foot traffic, and the need to clear and grub vegetation. Negligible permanent impacts to foraging habitat and ground cover may result from the installment of larger headwalls, though suitability of habitat directly surrounding the headwalls is very low.

The following information from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has been added since the draft environmental document to address additional project impacts to the California Tiger Salamander:

Since burrows will need to be collapsed to construct the project, an Incidental Take Permit is required from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The following information from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been consolidated to address the additional avoidance, minimization, and compensatory mitigation measures since the draft environmental document for the California Tiger Salamander:

### *Avoidance, Minimization, & Compensatory Mitigation*

1. A Worker Environmental Awareness Training will be presented to all contract workers describing special-status species.
2. A Service-approved biologist will conduct a preconstruction survey of upland and aquatic habitat no more than 14 days prior to the start of groundbreaking or other general construction activities that could affect the California tiger salamander. The survey will emphasize detecting any burrows, crevices, and other cover sites that may be used as refugia. The survey will be performed prior to exclusion fencing installation along the proposed work area(s) boundary to maximize project footprint clearing and minimize trapping individuals in fenced area(s). Caltrans will provide the Service with a written report that sufficiently documents the survey efforts. If construction stops for a period of two weeks or longer, a new



preconstruction survey will be completed no more than 24 hours prior to work restarting.

a) Burrows will be flagged or otherwise marked and avoided by at least 50 feet. If burrows cannot be avoided, where feasible, they will be inspected and excavated by the Service-approved biologist in accordance with the proposed Relocation Plan, which will establish the procedures, practices, conditions, and methodologies for excavating burrows and capturing, handling, and relocating California tiger salamanders outside of the project footprint. This Relocation Plan will be submitted to the Service prior to the start of construction for their review and approval. If an individual is found, the Service-approved biologist will relocate it to a suitable burrow outside of the construction zone, ideally as close as possible to its original capture location.

3. Prior to the start of work, and following preconstruction surveys and any burrow excavations, Caltrans will install temporary silt fencing, or other exclusion fencing of a type/design that will not entangle the California tiger salamander, along the limits of the proposed work area(s) to preclude construction equipment, vehicles, and personnel from encroaching on environmentally sensitive areas outside of these limits, and to prevent the species from entering active work areas. Fencing will include one-way funnels placed at regular intervals, to be determined in coordination with the Service, to allow individuals that become trapped inside the fenced area to leave, but not re-enter the project footprint. Fencing will be at least three feet in height and buried at least six inches below the ground to prevent California tiger salamanders from attempting to burrow or move under the structure. The fencing will also serve to prevent run-off from the project area. All fencing will be kept in good condition throughout the course of construction and will be removed following project completion.

a) For any work occurring during the wet season (i.e., defined as approximately November 1 through May 31, which is when breeding adults are most likely to be above ground and actively migrating to and from aquatic habitat to breed as well as when eggs and larvae are developing in aquatic habitat), the proposed exclusion fencing must be in place prior to the onset of rain (i.e., when aquatic habitat is still dry) to prevent individuals from moving into active work areas where they could be disturbed, injured, or killed by construction activities, equipment, or crews, and to prevent any breeding adults from becoming trapped in aquatic habitat in work areas.

b) To provide shelter for any individuals trapped along exclusion fencing, coverboards will be installed along the construction side of the fence line at regular intervals. This will be determined by the Service-approved biologist.

4. No construction activities will be conducted in upland or aquatic habitat areas where the California tiger salamander may occur if: (1) it is raining,

(2) there is a greater than 70 percent chance of rain based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service forecast on any given work day, or (3) a rain event greater than 0.25-inch has occurred within the past 48 hours.

a) Following a rain event, a Service-approved biologist will conduct visual encounter surveys in all active work areas, including access roads and staging areas, prior to resuming construction activities and the use of access routes and staging areas.

5. A Service-approved biologist will be present on-site to monitor for the species (1) during the installation, replacement, and removal of exclusion fencing, (2) at least once per week, over the entire course of construction, to inspect the fencing for damage, to report any required remedial actions, and to clear the fenced area, (3) during initial ground disturbing activities and vegetation removal activities (i.e., clearing, grubbing, grading, excavation, filling, etc.). Any time the Service-approved biologist is present on-site, s/he will check for trapped individuals in the fenced areas and sheltering under the coverboards prior to the start of each work day, and (4) in active work areas whenever there is a greater than 70 percent chance of rain based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service forecast on any given work day, and for five days following a rain event greater than 0.25-inch. When not present on-site, the Service-approved biologist will be available on-call during all construction periods in the event the species is detected.

a) If a live California tiger salamander is encountered at any point during preconstruction or construction activities, work will stop in the vicinity of the individual and will not resume until the Service-approved biologist has monitored the individual and allowed it to move away unharmed without being disturbed. If this is not possible, and the individual is trapped in the construction zone and/or is at imminent risk of injury or death due to project work, a Service-approved biologist with demonstrated experience handling the species safely, will capture and move the individual, using methodologies described in the proposed Relocation Plan, to appropriate habitat located outside the fencing, and as close as possible to its capture location, where it will not be affected by construction. If a dead individual is found, Caltrans will notify the Service as soon as possible of any such encounter and provide a summary of the dates, locations, a description of the habitat in which it was found, and any other pertinent information.

6. Prior to being moved, vehicles and equipment will be checked for any California tiger salamanders or other federally listed species sheltering underneath them. In the event federally listed species are observed, the vehicles/equipment will not be moved until the individual has vacated the area of its own accord.

7. To prevent the inadvertent entrapment of the California tiger salamander or other sensitive wildlife during construction, all excavated, steep-walled holes or trenches measuring more than six inches deep either will be covered at the close of each working day using plywood or similar materials, without openings, or will be provided with one or more escape ramps constructed of earth fill or wooden planks if holes/trenches cannot be fully covered. All holes or trenches will be checked daily for trapped wildlife. They will also be thoroughly inspected before being filled. If at any time a trapped animal is discovered, the Service-approved biologist will install escape ramps or other appropriate structures, if not already in place, to allow the individual to escape.
8. All construction pipes, culverts, or similar structures stored on the construction site for one or more overnight periods will be capped or sealed with tape, or similar materials, or stored at least three feet above ground level. They will be inspected thoroughly for the California tiger salamander before being buried, capped, or otherwise used. The Service-approved biologist will be notified immediately should an individual be discovered during these inspections. If the species is observed in the fenced construction zone, the biologist will relocate the species outside the fenced area in accordance with the proposed Relocation Plan.
9. To avoid entangling the California tiger salamander, erosion control methods will not utilize plastic monofilament, jute, or similarly tightly woven fiber netting or other such materials. Acceptable substitutes include coconut coir matting, tackified hydro-seeding compounds, or other similar materials.
10. The use of temporary artificial lighting on-site will be limited, except when necessary for construction, or for driver and pedestrian safety. Any artificial lighting used during construction, particularly at night, will be confined to areas in the construction footprint and directed away from surrounding sensitive habitat. Caltrans will limit non-target casting of light by installing shielding around the light source to further confine the illumination to minimize its effects on the species.
11. Caltrans proposes to provide compensatory mitigation for adverse effects to the California tiger salamander resulting from construction impacts to aquatic (non-breeding) and upland habitats. Prior to the start of work, Caltrans will verify the areas of impacts and proposed compensation. If the amount of affected habitat increases, Caltrans may need to consider reinitiating consultation.
  - a) Caltrans proposes either to (1) purchase a total of 0.64-acre worth of Central California tiger salamander credits at a Service-approved conservation bank whose service area covers the action area and credits will be purchased prior to the start of groundbreaking or (2) fund a conservation

easement on a total of 0.64-acre of land suitable for the species and the easement will be recorded prior to the start of construction. Should Caltrans choose to undertake permittee-responsible mitigation, its efforts will be consistent with the standards set by the Service's Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office. The Service-approved conservation easement will be held by a Service-approved third-party entity and managed according to a Service-approved long-term management plan. A Service-approved endowment will be established to fund the long-term management, maintenance, and monitoring activities on the site. The final long-term management plan, along with an endowment analysis, will be submitted to the Service for approval prior to the recordation of the conservation easement. The Service will review and approve any proposed preservation lands.

### ***Crotch Bumble Bee***

#### *Survey Results*

No Crotch bumble bees were seen during site visits; however, historic observations occur along State Route 198 within the biological study area near the eastern portion of the project. Appropriate plant species are present within the Caltrans right-of-way to provide pollen and nectar. Based on these results, there is potential for Crotch bumble bees to be present within the biological study area and project footprint.

#### *Project Impacts*

Potential foraging and nesting habitat may be temporarily impacted from clearing and grubbing vegetation and the use of off-pavement vehicles. It is unlikely the Crotch bumble bee will be directly impacted due to the evasive nature of bees.

#### *Avoidance, Minimization, & Compensatory Mitigation*

Pre-construction surveys will be conducted by a Caltrans-approved biologist, 30 days prior to any ground disturbance. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. A Worker Environmental Awareness Training describing special-status species will be presented to all contract workers.

The following information from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has been added since the draft environmental document to address possible compensatory mitigation for the Crotch Bumble Bee:

If any Crotch bumble bees are detected during pre-construction surveys the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be consulted and an incidental take permit will be acquired.

## ***Giant Kangaroo Rat***

### *Survey Results*

No giant kangaroo rats were observed during surveys; however, surveys occurred during daylight when the rats are not active. No dust baths or seed curing/collection was observed within the action area. The most recent observation is roughly 30 miles south from 1985 while the closest observation is roughly 20 miles north from 1979. Giant kangaroo rats are known to have isolated populations in Lokern, Kettleman Hills, Elk Hills, Taft, Panoche, and McKittrick. Burrows observed within the action area were absent of tail drag markings. Based on these results, there is potential for giant kangaroo rat to be present within the action area and project footprint, but the likelihood is low.

### *Project Impacts*

Foraging and burrowing habitat may be temporarily impacted from clearing and grubbing of vegetation and the use of off-pavement vehicles. If the species is present, an increase in vehicle use may increase the potential for direct impacts; however, the increase is anticipated to be negligible in comparison to everyday traffic.

### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

- Preconstruction surveys based on the protocol described in the Service's *Survey Protocol for Determining Presence of San Joaquin Kangaroo Rats* (dated March 2013) will be conducted in the project footprint as well as within 50 feet of the footprint at least one year before construction starts. If special-status kangaroo rats are detected, the Service will be consulted prior to the start of construction activities.
- Environmental Sensitive Area fencing will be installed around the project footprint to delineate the work zone. Construction equipment staging areas shall be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans approved biologist prior to use. Staging shall occur in pre-disturbed areas.
- If feasible, burrows will be avoided by at least 50 feet.

No compensatory mitigation is proposed.

## ***Nelson's Antelope Squirrel***

### *Survey Results*

No Nelson's antelope squirrels were seen during the site visits; however suitable habitat is present at the eastern edge of the biological study area between post miles 19.5 and 12.3. Historic observations were made about 3 miles southeast of the project area in lower elevations. Potential burrows were noted within the study area but decreased in number within the project footprint. Based on these results, there is potential for Nelson's antelope squirrels to be present within the survey area but unlikely within the project footprint.

### *Project Impacts*

No impacts are expected. Survey results are expected to support this determination.

### *Avoidance, Minimization, & Compensatory Mitigation*

Reconnaissance surveys will occur one and two years prior to the start of construction. Two years prior to construction, camera trapping and visual/auditory surveys will be conducted. Camera trapping details will be discussed with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife later. One year prior to construction, reconnaissance surveys will be conducted during blunt-nosed leopard lizard surveys. Negative findings are expected. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. A Worker Environmental Awareness Training describing special-status species will be presented to all contract workers.

The following information from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has been added since the draft environmental document to address possible compensatory mitigation for Nelson's Antelope Squirrel:

If any Nelson's antelope squirrels are detected during pre-construction surveys the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be consulted and an incidental take permit will be acquired.

### ***Northern California Legless Lizard***

#### *Survey Results*

No Northern California legless lizards were seen during reconnaissance-level site visits; however, observations were made roughly 2 miles north of State Route 198 at Curry Mountain Trailhead. Suitable habitat is present at various culvert locations due to moisture within culverts. Based on these results, there is potential for Northern California legless lizards to be within the project footprint.

#### *Project Impacts*

Disruption of habitat and foraging areas will be temporarily and permanently impacted due to clearing and grubbing, culvert extension, and compaction of any sandy soils. Direct impacts such as crushing are unlikely to occur due to individuals avoiding the loud disturbance. Stress from construction may cause individuals to "drop" their tail in defense. However, increasing the culvert capacity may create new moist habitat and positively impact the species.

#### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Pre-construction surveys will be conducted by a Caltrans-approved biologist, 30 days prior to any ground disturbance. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. A Worker Environmental

Awareness Training describing special-status species will be presented to all contract workers. Any areas expected to be cleared or grubbed by off-pavement vehicles will be gently raked by the contractor prior to clearing to ensure no lizards are in the area. Any lizards found will be allowed to leave on their own accord. No direct impacts to the species are expected, and no compensatory mitigation is proposed.

### ***San Joaquin Coachwhip***

#### *Survey Results*

No San Joaquin coachwhips were seen during reconnaissance-level site visits; however, a historic observation was made near the eastern culverts. Suitable habitat is present within Caltrans' right-of-way because potential burrows are available within the biological study area. Prey is plentiful within the project area. Based on these results, there is potential for San Joaquin coachwhips to be in the biological study area.

#### *Project Impacts*

Disruption of habitat and foraging areas will cause temporary and permanent impacts due to clearing and grubbing, culvert extension, and compaction of any sandy soils. Direct impacts such as crushing are unlikely to occur due to individuals avoiding the loud disturbance. Use of heavy equipment may collapse potential burrows used by the species. However, additional microhabitat may be created from clearing and grubbing.

#### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Pre-construction surveys will be conducted by a Caltrans-approved biologist, 30 days prior to any ground disturbance. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. A Worker Environmental Awareness Training describing special-status species will be presented to all contract workers. Also, any small roadkill animals found along the state route will be removed from the area to prevent luring San Joaquin coachwhips to the roadway. No compensatory mitigation is proposed.

### ***Western Spadefoot Toad***

#### *Survey Results*

No western spadefoot toads were seen during the reconnaissance-level site visit; however, suitable upland habitat is present within the biological study area. Warthan Creek is south of the state route and offers suitable aquatic and terrestrial habitat. The most recent reported observation is from 2005 about 3.6 miles south of the project location near Jacalitos and Salt creeks.

#### *Project Impacts*

Temporary direct impacts to potential habitat may occur for approximately six months. Due to work occurring during the daylight, it is unlikely the amphibian

will be directly harmed (such as being crushed by equipment). Use of heavy equipment may collapse occupied or potential burrows and directly impact the species. Potential impacts decrease as work is performed outside of rainy periods. Minimal permanent impacts to potential foraging habitat are anticipated due to the installation of culvert headwalls.

#### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Pre-construction surveys for the western spadefoot toad will be conducted by a Caltrans-approved biologist, 30 days prior to any ground disturbance. If precipitation is expected during construction, a Caltrans approved biologist will be consulted to determine whether additional surveys are warranted. Surveys will identify western spadefoot toads or their signs within 50 feet of proposed culvert replacements. Potential burrows in the right-of-way will be avoided as much as possible. Construction equipment staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a Caltrans-approved biologist prior to use. Staging will occur in pre-disturbed areas. No compensatory mitigation is proposed.

The following information from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been consolidated to address the additional avoidance and minimization measures since the draft environmental document for the special-status animal species listed above:

#### *Multi-Species Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

- Prior to the start of ground disturbance and/or construction, Caltrans will submit to the Service the names and qualifications of suitable individuals (e.g., resumes) for the Service's approval to work as biologists and monitors on the project.
- Prior to the start of work, a Service-approved biologist will provide worker environmental awareness training for all construction personnel, including contractors, subcontractors, and contractors' representatives, covering the status of all listed species addressed in this document including how to identify these species and their habitats, the importance of avoiding impacts to the species, the laws that protect them, and the appropriate procedure if an individual is encountered during construction. New construction personnel added to the project after the training is first conducted, will also be required to take the training. Documentation of the training, including sign-in sheets, will be kept on-file.
- Construction best management practices consistent with the most recent Caltrans manuals, including the Construction Site Best Management Practices Manual and the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and Water Pollution Control Program Manuals, will be developed for the project and implemented throughout construction to avoid or reduce adverse effects to water quality. Best management practices associated with an erosion control plan will be prepared for avoiding pollutant discharge into aquatic habitats. Caltrans personnel and the contractor will



perform routine inspections of the construction area to verify the best management practices are properly implemented and maintained and operating effectively as designed. A water quality inspector will inspect the site before and after a rain event to ensure that stormwater best management practices are adequate.

- An Emergency Spill Prevention Plan will be prepared to minimize the risk of fluids or other materials (e.g., oils, transmission and hydraulic fluids, cement, fuel, etc.) from entering water features and sensitive upland habitats. The plan will be kept on-site and easily accessible throughout construction.
- Vehicle and equipment fueling, and maintenance operations will occur at least 50 feet away from water features, except at established commercial gas stations or vehicle maintenance facilities. All equipment will be maintained such that there will be no leaks of automotive fluids such as gasoline, oils, or solvents.
- Water trucks and dust palliatives will be used to control dust in excavation and fill areas and for covering temporary stockpiles of dirt or other loose construction materials when weather conditions require.
- All grindings and asphaltic-concrete waste will be stored in previously disturbed areas that no longer provide suitable habitat for the species and are located a minimum of 150 feet from any aquatic habitat, culvert, or drainage feature.
- The stockpiling of materials, equipment (including portable equipment), vehicles, and supplies will be restricted to designated construction staging areas.
- To avoid introducing non-native, invasive species to the action area, all earthmoving equipment will be cleaned thoroughly before arriving on-site and all seeding equipment (i.e., hydroseed trucks) will be cleaned prior to re-seeding work. To avoid transferring any invasive species already present on-site to off-site areas, all equipment will be cleaned thoroughly before leaving the action area.
- All project-related vehicles will observe a daytime speed limit of no more than 20 miles per hour and a nighttime speed limit of no more than 10 miles per hour in all project areas, except on the highway.
- All food-related trash items such as wrappers, cans, bottles, and food scraps will be disposed of in closed containers and removed daily from the project site to reduce the potential for attracting predator species.
- To eliminate the potential for disturbance or injury to, or death of, any species resulting from the presence of pets and firearms, except for firearms carried by authorized law enforcement officials, neither will be allowed on the project site.

- To control erosion and restore habitat value, all areas in the action area that are disturbed during construction (e.g., graded, denuded) will be re-contoured, if necessary, and stabilized as soon as possible. Following the completion of construction, areas will be revegetated via hydro-seeding with an appropriate, weed-free native plant seed mixture.

### ***Migratory Bird Protection***

The Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (15 U.S. Code 703-711), 50 Code of Federal Regulations Part 21 and 50 Code of Federal Regulations Part 10, prohibits killing, possessing, or trading of migratory birds. Executive Order 13186 requires that any project with federal involvement address impacts of federal actions on migratory birds. Although these species are not protected under federal or state endangered species acts, the Fish and Game Code (Sections 3503, 3513, and 3800) does protect them from harassment or harm and protects their eggs and nestlings. Disturbance that causes nest abandonment or loss of reproductive effort or both is considered “take” by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Red-tailed hawks have been seen in the biological study area. The project location is surrounded by suitable nesting area for a variety of migratory birds. If work must occur during nesting bird season (February 1 to September 30), pre-construction surveys will be conducted to identify nests. If a nesting raptor is found, a 500-foot buffer will be used. If nesting migratory birds are found, a 100-foot buffer will be used.

### ***Special-Status Plant Species***

The plants listed below are of special concern based on (1) federal, state, or local laws regulating their development; (2) limited distributions; and/or (3) the presence of habitat required by the special-status plants occurring onsite. Habitat associated with Eastwood’s buckwheat, Hall’s tarplant, Hernandez spineflower, Hoover’s eriastrum, Indian Valley bush-mallow, pale-yellow layia, showy golden madia, and western Heermann’s buckwheat were found to be present in the project area.

### ***Project Impacts***

Temporary indirect impacts are unlikely to occur due to clearing and grubbing of vegetation. Direct impacts may result from ground-disturbing activities that would occur during the culvert removal and replacement process. Individual plants might be crushed by off-pavement equipment or foot traffic. These impacts are unlikely to occur due to use of avoidance and minimization measures and Caltrans Best Management Practices. All plant species listed have similar project impacts.

### ***Avoidance and Minimization Efforts***

The following avoidance and minimization efforts are proposed for the plant species listed below.

- Pre-construction surveys during appropriate blooming periods will be conducted.
- If presence of the species is confirmed within 50 feet of any of the culvert impact areas, the identified plant will be flagged and avoided.
- If the work will occur during the blooming season and the plant cannot be avoided, the California Native Plant Society will be consulted.
- If the work will occur outside of the blooming season and the species is discovered within the project footprint, the topsoil will be preserved to ensure the seed bank remains in place.
- All employees of the contractor will attend a Worker Environmental Awareness Training to gain knowledge of special-status species.

No compensatory mitigation is proposed at this time.

### ***Eastwood's Buckwheat***

#### ***Survey Results***

Eastwood's buckwheat was not found during the reconnaissance-level site visit; however, suitable habitat is present throughout the project area. Similar buckwheat varieties are known to occur in the area, and Eastwood's buckwheat was found about 2.5 miles away from the biological study area. Caltrans' right-of-way is highly disturbed, and the soil has higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is beneficial for invasive species. Based on these results, it is unlikely Eastwood's buckwheat will be found in the biological study area.

### ***Hall's Tarplant***

#### ***Survey Results***

Hall's tarplant was not found during the reconnaissance-level site visit. Ten individuals were seen and reported in 2017. They were found 2.4 miles north of Culvert 39 (see Table 1). One individual was seen at the western edge of the project in 2019 by the Bureau of Land Management. Suitable habitat is present at the outer edges of the biological study area. Caltrans' right-of-way is highly disturbed habitat and contains higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is beneficial for invasive species. Based on these results, it is unlikely Hall's tarplant will be found in the biological study area.

### ***Hernandez Spineflower***

#### ***Survey Results***

The Hernandez spineflower was not found during the reconnaissance-level site visit. A historic observation was made near the eastern edge of the project. Additional observations have been made more than 8 miles north of the project area. Caltrans' right-of-way is highly disturbed and contains higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is beneficial for invasive species.

Based on these results, it is unlikely the Hernandez spineflower will be found in the biological study area.

### ***Hoover's Eriastrum***

#### *Survey Results*

No Hoover's eriastrum was found during the site visit. The most recent observation is from 1991; the closest is right along the state route but is from 1987 along Warthan Creek. Botanical experts from the area agree the likelihood of observing rare plants is low. Caltrans' right-of-way contains higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is more beneficial to invasive species. Based on these results, it is unlikely Hoover's eriastrum will be found in the biological study area.

### ***Indian Valley Bush-Mallow***

#### *Survey Results*

The Indian Valley bush-mallow was not found during the reconnaissance-level site visit; however, suitable habitat is in the biological study area. Several observations along State Route 198 were made in the past few years, specifically near Culvert 39 (see Table 1) and Crump Lane. Botanists from the area confirm potential for this species to occur. Caltrans' right-of-way is highly disturbed and contains higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is beneficial for invasive species. Based on these results, it is unlikely the Indian Valley bush-mallow will be found in the biological study area.

### ***Pale-Yellow Layia***

#### *Survey Results*

No pale-yellow layia was found during the reconnaissance-level site visit; however, potential habitat is in the biological study area. The most recent documented observation is more than 8 miles southeast of the project. Historic observations have been documented along the state route but are older than 30 years. Caltrans' right-of-way is highly disturbed and contains higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is beneficial for invasive species. Based on these results, it is unlikely the pale-yellow layia will be found in the biological study area.

### ***Showy Golden Madia***

#### *Survey Results*

No showy golden madia was found during the reconnaissance-level site visit. Based on Calflora, there are historical observations along the state route; however, the most recent observation is more than 10 miles north of the biological study area. Caltrans' right-of-way is highly disturbed and contains higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is beneficial for invasive species. Based on these results, it is unlikely the showy golden madia will be found in the biological study area.

## ***Western Heermann's Buckwheat***

### *Survey Results*

No western Heermann's buckwheat was found during the reconnaissance-level site visit. Suitable habitat and similar species are in the biological study area. Historic observations have been made along the state route near Crump Lane, but the most recent occurrence is roughly 10 miles northwest of the project. Caltrans' right-of-way is highly disturbed and contains higher than average levels of nitrogen, which is beneficial for invasive species. Based on these results, it is unlikely the western Heermann's buckwheat will be found in the biological study area.

b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

**Less Than Significant Impact**—A Biological Assessment and Natural Environment Study were prepared by Caltrans to determine to what extent the proposed project may affect riparian habitat or other sensitive natural communities.

## ***Habitats and Natural Communities of Special Concern***

Habitats or natural communities of special concern in the biological study area, which may be affected by implementation of the project, include oak woodlands.

## ***Oak Woodlands***

### *Survey Results*

Oak woodland habitat lies within the biological study area and the project footprint. Some blue oaks and live oaks are near culvert inlets and outlets and may need to be trimmed to access the culvert. Many of the oaks near culverts are under 10 inches in diameter at breast height. No presence of Sudden Oak Death was observed on oaks within the project footprint.

### *Project Impacts*

Temporary direct impacts are expected. Some culvert locations have oaks growing very close to the inlets and outlets. These oaks will need to be trimmed to allow equipment in the area. At this time, it is unknown if any oaks will have to be completely removed; however, oaks that could be removed are below 10 inches diameter at breast height. At this time, no heritage oaks are expected to be affected by the proposed project.

### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Removal of oaks will be avoided wherever feasible. Trimming of trees will be the first solution in gaining access to the culverts. Establishment of

environmentally sensitive areas around the dripline of individual trees will be put in place for oaks that do not require trimming.

Currently, no oaks are expected to be removed. If removal is necessary and diameter at breast height exceeds 4 inches, replanting may be required.

c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?

**Less Than Significant Impact**—A Biological Assessment and Natural Environment Study were prepared by Caltrans to determine if substantial adverse effects on state or federally protected wetlands would occur.

#### *Jurisdictional Areas*

Waterway and wetland jurisdictional areas were delineated during the rainy season of 2019/2020 (December 2019–February 2020). Delineations will follow the procedures described in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Wetlands Delineation Manual of January 1987. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board will be notified of delineations to gain applicable permits.

#### *Avoidance and Minimization Efforts*

Once waterway and wetland delineation are completed, appropriate avoidance or minimization measures will be determined, if needed.

d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?

#### **No Impact**

e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?

#### **No Impact**

f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?

#### **No Impact**

### **2.1.5 Cultural Resources**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources**

Would the project:

a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?

**No Impact**

b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?

**No Impact**

c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.6 Energy**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy**

Would the project:

a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?

**No Impact**

b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.7 Geology and Soils**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils**

Would the project:

a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:

i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42?

**No Impact**

ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?

**No Impact**

iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?

**No Impact**

iv) Landslides?

**No Impact**

b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?

**No Impact**

c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?

**No Impact**

d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?

**No Impact**

e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?

**No Impact**

f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?

**No Impact**

## **2.1.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

Would the project:

a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?

**Less than Significant Impact**—While the proposed project will result in greenhouse gas emissions during construction, it is anticipated that the project will not result in any increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions. With implementation of construction greenhouse gas-reduction measures, the impact would be less than significant.



b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?

**Less than Significant Impact**— The proposed project does not conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases.

## **2.1.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials**

### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials**

Would the project:

a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?

**No Impact**—Standard Special Provisions (SSP) 7-1.02K(6)(j)(ii) Lead Compliance Plan and Non-Standard Special Provisions 14-11.10 Disturbance of Soil Containing Naturally Occurring Asbestos apply to this project. With these provisions, the project would not result in a significant hazard to the public or the environment through transport, use or disposal of hazardous materials. (Preliminary Site Investigation Summary, December 9, 2019)

b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?

#### **No Impact**

c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?

#### **No Impact**

d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?

#### **No Impact**

e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?

#### **No Impact**

f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?

**No Impact**

g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.10 Hydrology and Water Quality**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality**

Would the project:

a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?

**No Impact**

b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?

**No Impact**

c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:

i) Result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;

**No Impact**

ii) Substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or off-site;

**No Impact**

iii) Create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or

**No Impact**

iv) Impede or redirect flood flows?

**No Impact**

d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?

**No Impact**

e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.11 Land Use and Planning**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning**

Would the project:

a) Physically divide an established community.

**No Impact**

b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.12 Mineral Resources**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources**

Would the project:

a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?

**No Impact**

b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.13 Noise**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise**

Would the project result in:

a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in

the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?

**No Impact**

b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?

**No Impact**

c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.14 Population and Housing**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing**

Would the project:

a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?

**No Impact**

b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.15 Public Services**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services**

a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:

Fire protection?

**No Impact**

Police protection?

**No Impact**

Schools?

**No Impact**

Parks?

**No Impact**

Other public facilities?

**No Impact**

**2.1.16 Recreation**

**CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation**

a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?

**No Impact**

b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?

**No Impact**

**2.1.17 Transportation**

**CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation**

Would the project:

a) Conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?

**No Impact**

b) Conflict with or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?

**No Impact**

c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?

**No Impact**

d) Result in inadequate emergency access?

**No Impact**

### **2.1.18 Tribal Cultural Resources**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources**

Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or

**No Impact**

b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.

**No Impact**

### **2.1.19 Utilities and Service Systems**

#### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems**

Would the project:

a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?

**No Impact**

b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?

**No Impact**

c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the

project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?

**No Impact**

d) Generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?

**No Impact**

e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?

**No Impact**

**2.1.20 Wildfire**

**CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire**

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:

a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?

**No Impact**

b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?

**No Impact**

c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?

**No Impact**

d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?

**No Impact**

## **2.1.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance**

### **CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance**

a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?

#### **No Impact**

b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)

#### **No Impact**

c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?

#### **No Impact**



## **Appendix A** List of Preparers

---

This document was prepared by the following Caltrans Central Region staff:

Alyssa Anderson, Environmental Planner (Natural Sciences). B.S., Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation, California State University, Sacramento; 4 years of experience in ecology, restoration, and wildlife biology. Contribution: Natural Environment Study

David Arredondo, Associate Environmental Planner. B.A., Sociology, University of California, Davis; 12 years of environmental planning experience. Contribution: Environmental Generalist and prepared the Initial Study.

Jon L. Brady, Associate Environmental Planner/Architectural Historian. M.A., History, California State University, Fresno; B.A., Political Science and Anthropology; more than 30 years of experience as a consulting archaeologist and historian. Contribution: Archaeological Survey Report (ASR)/Historical Property Survey Report (HPSR).

Adam Inman, Engineering Geologist. M.Sc., Geology, California State University, Fresno; B.Sc., Geology with a minor in Applied Geology, California State University, Stanislaus; 5 years of engineering and environmental geology experience. Contributions: Hazardous Waste Study.

David Lanner, Associate Environmental Planner (Archaeologist). B.F.A., Art, Utah State University; 26 years of cultural resources experience. Contribution: Archaeological Survey Report (ASR)/Historical Property Survey Report (HPSR).

Rogério Leong, Engineering Geologist. B.S., Geology, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil; 17 years of environmental site assessment and investigation experience. Contribution: Water Quality Report.

Mandy Macias, Associate Environmental Planner (Archaeology). B.A., Anthropology, California State University, Fresno; more than 20 years of California and Great Basin archaeology and cultural resources management experience. Contribution: Prehistoric Archaeology, Native American Consultation.

Kai Pavel, Engineering Geologist. Professional Geologist (P.G.). M.A., Geography, Geology, Heinrich Heine Universitaet Dusseldorf, Germany; 14 years of hazardous waste/materials, water quality, environmental technical studies experience. Contribution: Paleontological Study.

- Richard Putler, Senior Environmental Planner. M.A., City and Regional Planning, California State University, Fresno; B.A., Political Science, University of California, Davis; 20 years of environmental planning experience. Contribution: Oversight review of the Initial Study.
- Kendra Reif, Associate Environmental Planner (Generalist and Air Quality Specialist). M.P.A., Public Administration, California State University, Fresno; B.A., Political Science, University of Nevada, Reno; 3 years of transportation and environmental planning experience; 2 years of air quality analysis experience. Contribution: Air Quality Report.
- Denesse Segura, Associate Environmental Planner (Natural Sciences). M.S., California State University, Dominguez Hills; B.S., Biology, University of California, Los Angeles; 10 years of experience in California biology. Contribution: Natural Environment Study
- Jane Sellers, Associate Environmental Planner. B.A., Journalism, California State University, Fresno; 18 years of environmental compliance experience, focusing on Quality Assurance/Quality Control and reviewing and editing NEPA and CEQA environmental documents. Contribution: Quality Assurance/Quality Control Technical Editor.
- Lea Spann, Engineering Geologist. B.A., Environmental Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara; over 20 years of hazardous waste/materials experience and 6 years of environmental planning experience. Contribution: Hazardous Waste Study.
- Jennifer H. Taylor, Environmental Office Chief. Double Bachelor of Arts in Political Studies and Organizational Sciences, Pitzer College; more than 30 years of experience in environmental and land use planning. Contribution: Oversight review of the environmental document.
- Juergen Vespermann, Senior Environmental Planner. Civil Engineering Degree, Fachhochschule Muenster, Germany; more than 20 years of experience in transportation planning/environmental planning. Contribution: Oversight review of the environmental document.
- Vladimir Timofei, Transportation Engineer. M.S., Civil Engineering, California State University, Fullerton; 18 years of environmental technical studies experience. Contribution: Noise Quality Report.

# Appendix B Title VI Policy Statement

---

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

Gavin Newsom, Governor

## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
P.O. BOX 942873, MS-49  
SACRAMENTO, CA 94273-0001  
PHONE (916) 654-6130  
FAX (916) 653-5776  
TTY 711  
www.dot.ca.gov



Making Conservation  
a California Way of Life.

November 2019

## NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT

The California Department of Transportation, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ensures *"No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."*

Related federal statutes, remedies, and state law further those protections to include sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and age.

For information or guidance on how to file a complaint, or obtain more information regarding Title VI, please contact the Title VI Branch Manager at (916) 324-8379 or visit the following web page:  
<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/business-and-economic-opportunity/title-vi>.

To obtain this information in an alternate format such as Braille or in a language other than English, please contact the California Department of Transportation, Office of Business and Economic Opportunity, at 1823 14<sup>th</sup> Street, MS-79, Sacramento, CA 95811; (916) 324-8379 (TTY 711); or at Title.VI@dot.ca.gov.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Toks Omishakin".

Toks Omishakin  
Director

*"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability"*

## **List of Technical Studies**

Air Quality Memo: May 6, 2019

Noise Study Report: July 8, 2019

Water Quality Report: March 15, 2019

Biological Assessment: December 4, 2019

Biological Opinion: September 23, 2020

Natural Environment Study: February 28, 2020

Initial Floodplain Study: November 20, 2015

Historic Property Survey Report: December 17, 2019

Archaeological Survey Report: December 17, 2019

Preliminary Site Investigation Summary (Task Order): December 17, 2019

Paleontological Identification Report: May 6, 2019

Climate Change Analysis: December 17, 2019

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports as included in Volume 2 or the Initial Study, please send your request to the following email address: [d6.public.info@dot.ca.gov](mailto:d6.public.info@dot.ca.gov)

Please indicate the project name and project identifying code (under the project name on the cover of this document) and specify the technical report or document you would like a copy of. Provide your name and email address or U.S. postal service mailing address (street address, city, state and zip code).

## **Appendix C** Comment Letters and Responses (Added Since Draft)

---

This appendix contains the comments received during the public circulation and comment period of the Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration. A public notice was posted in the *Fresno Bee* stating the public comment period ran from March 23, 2020 to April 21, 2020 and offered the public an opportunity to request a public hearing.

There were no requests for a hearing during public circulation. Three comments were received—the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit, the Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi-Yokut Tribe, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (see below). A Caltrans response follows these comments. Each of these comments is provided below exactly as they were received, including any spelling, grammatical, and typographical errors.

### ***Text of Comment from the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit***

The State Clearinghouse (SCH) would like to inform you that our office will transition from providing close of review period acknowledgement on your CEQA environmental document, at this time. During the phase of not receiving notice on the close of review period, comments submitted by State Agencies at the close of review period (and after) are available on CEQAnet.

Please visit: <https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/Search/Advanced>

- Filter for the SCH# of your project **OR** your “Lead Agency”
  - If filtering by “Lead Agency”
    - Select the correct project
  - Only State Agency comments will be available in the “attachments” section: **bold and highlighted**

Thank you for using CEQA Submit.

Meng Heu

Office of Planning and Research (OPR)

State Clearing House

### ***Response to Comment from the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit***

Thank you for circulating the Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Fresno 198 Culvert Rehabilitation project and acknowledging Caltrans’ compliance with California Environmental Quality Act requirements pursuant to State Clearinghouse guidelines. Caltrans has recorded the corresponding State Clearinghouse number for this project.

**Comment from Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi-Yokut Tribe.**

Dear Jeannie,

We were contacted by Sharri Ehlert regarding the 198 Culvert Rehabilitation Project and were told to contact you for any additional information. Regarding this project the Tribe would like to know what kind of ground disturbance will be done due to the sensitivity of the area. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me directly or the Santa Rosa Rancheria Cultural Department. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Samantha McCarty

Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi-Yokut Tribe

Cultural Specialist II

SMcCarty@tachi-yokut-nsn.gov

(559) 924-1278 x 4091

**Response to Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi-Yokut Tribe comment:** Ground disturbance is anticipated to occur anywhere from 30-50 feet around each culvert inlet and outlet. This would include clearing/grubbing of vegetation and culvert replacement. Some locations at lower post miles (such as 0.51 etc.) have the culvert outlet down a steep slope which will require access from equipment. Actual excavation is estimated to occur within 20 feet of the culvert inlet and outlets that are proposed for replacement.

**Comment from California Fish and Wildlife Service.**

Mr. Putler,

Please see the attached letter.

If you have any questions, please contact Jim Vang, Environmental Scientist, by telephone at (559) 243-4014 extension 254, or by electronic mail at Jim.Vang@wildlife.ca.gov.

Thank you,

Monica Martinez

Office Technician

CEQA/CESA Project tracking

CDFW Central Region 4

**Comment 1:**

**California Tiger Salamander (CTS)**

**Issue:** The Project activities will involve varying degrees of ground disturbance at discreet locations along an approximately 19-mile stretch of SR 198. Significant ground disturbance would result in those Project work areas involving culvert replacement while less significant and possibly no ground disturbance will occur in those Project work areas involving culvert lining. Ground disturbance in occupied CTS habitat could result in take as defined in section 86 of Fish and Game Code. CDFW does not agree that Caltrans' plans, as outlined in the IS, to avoid and minimize impacts to CTS, will necessarily avoid take of individual CTS in those Project work areas involving ground disturbance encompassing suitable small mammal burrows within 1.3 miles of potential CTS breeding habitat. Project-related take of CTS should be considered a significant effect under CEQA, and in the absence of incidental take authorization, is a violation of CESA.

**Specific Impacts:** In the IS, Caltrans reports that CTS are known to have occurred within 4 miles of the Project site as recently as 2017, that potential breeding habitat exists within one mile of the Project site, and that potential upland habitat for the species exists adjoining the Project site. Caltrans also reports that "CTS are not likely present within the Project work area" but does not support this statement. To reduce the Project-related impacts to CTS to less-than-significant levels, Caltrans plans to conduct pre-construction



surveys of the Project work areas and avoid potential burrows as much as possible.

**Evidence impact would be significant:** Up to 75% of historic CTS habitat has been lost to development (Searcy et al. 2013). Loss, degradation, and fragmentation of habitat are the primary threats to CTS. Contaminants and vehicle strikes are also sources of mortality for the species (CDFW 2015, USFWS 2017). The Project Action Area is within the range of CTS, encompasses known occupied areas of CTS, and is surrounded by suitable breeding and upland habitat (i.e. grasslands and oak woodlands interspersed with burrows and suitable breeding pools). CTS have been determined to be physiologically capable of dispersing up to approximately 1.3 miles from seasonally flooded wetlands (Searcy and Shaffer 2011) and have been documented within 4 miles of the Project Site (CDFW 2019). Given the presence of suitable breeding habitat within 1 mile of the Project site, and suitable upland habitat adjoining the Project site, CDFW does not agree that Project-related impacts to the species can be avoided.

#### **Recommended Potentially Feasible Avoidance and Mitigation**

**Measure(s)** Because suitable breeding habitat for CTS is present within 1 mile of at least some of the Project work areas, and because suitable upland habitat exists adjoining others or the same Project work areas, CDFW recommends the following edits to the CTS Avoidance and Minimization Efforts section of the IS. Further, CDFW recommends these “efforts” constitute mitigation measures and be made conditions of Project approval.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: Recommended Edit to the Avoidance and Minimization Efforts for CTS on page 12 of the IS.**

Currently, under Avoidance and Minimization Efforts, Caltrans proposes: “Pre-construction surveys will be conducted by a Caltrans-approved biologist, 30 days prior to any ground disturbance” within the Project work areas. Further under that same heading, Caltrans proposes “potential burrows in the right-of-way will be avoided as much as possible.”

Caltrans has not provided enough information describing why suitable CTS upland habitat exists adjoining the Project work areas but not at the Project work areas. CDFW recommends protocol-level surveys at (and within 50 feet of) all Project work areas where ground disturbance will involve areas of suitable small mammal burrows within 1.3 miles of a potential breeding pool. If CTS are not detected during protocol-level surveys, Caltrans would have confidence that the species does not occur, and Project-related take could be avoided.

**Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: Recommended Edit to the Avoidance and Minimization Efforts for CTS on page 12 of the Initial Study.**

If CTS are detected, CDFW recommends Caltrans seek incidental take coverage under section 2081(b) of Fish and Game Code prior to ground disturbance at those Project work areas. CDFW recommends the Avoidance and Minimization Efforts section under CTS be revised to include a discussion of Caltrans' plans to seek incidental take coverage in advance of ground disturbance in the event individual CTS are detected during those surveys.

**Response to comment 1:** Caltrans plans to apply for an Incidental Take Permit in May 2022 and will mitigate upland habitat with a 3:1 ratio for permanent impacts and a 1:1 ratio for temporary impacts. Currently, 0.64 acre of CTS habitat will be mitigated.

Additionally, temporary silt fencing/exclusionary fencing will be installed to delineate CTS habitat. Fencing will include one-way funnels for passing CTS and coverboards to offer shelter. The fence will be checked approximately once a week during the life of construction.

**COMMENT 2:**

**Crotch Bumble Bee (CBB)**

**Issue:** The Project activities will involve varying degrees of ground disturbance at discreet locations along an approximately 19-mile stretch of SR 198. Significant ground disturbance would result in those Project work areas involving culvert replacement while less significant and possibly no ground disturbance will occur in those Project work areas involving culvert lining. Ground disturbance in occupied CBB habitat could result in take of overwintering CBB, as it is defined in section 86 of Fish and Game Code.

**Specific Impacts:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for CBB, potentially significant impacts associated with ground- and vegetation-disturbing Project-related activities could occur. The impacts are associated with the loss of foraging plants, changes in foraging behavior, burrow collapse, nest abandonment, reduced nest success, reduced health and vigor of eggs, young and/or queens, in addition to direct mortality in violation of Fish and Game Code. In the IS, Caltrans proposes pre-construction surveys by an approved biologist 30 days prior to any ground disturbance at those Project work areas which constitute suitable CBB habitat. Further, Caltrans proposes consultation with CDFW if individual CBB are detected during those surveys. However, Caltrans does not indicate how

Project-related activities will proceed if through consultation it is determined that avoidance of the species is not feasible. Caltrans also indicates that no compensatory mitigation is proposed for take of individuals of the species.

**Evidence impact would be significant:** CBB was once common throughout most of the central and southern California, however, it now appears to be absent from most of it, especially in the central portion of its historic range within California's Central Valley (Hatfield et al. 2014). Analyses by the Xerces Society et al. (2018) suggest there have been sharp declines in relative abundance by 98% and persistence by 80% over the last ten years. Given the reported presence of suitable foraging, nesting, and overwintering habitat in the vicinity of at least some of the Project work areas, avoidance may not be feasible and incidental take authority may be needed.

### **Recommended Potentially Feasible Avoidance and Mitigation**

**Measure(s)** Because suitable foraging, nesting, and overwintering habitat for CBB is present in the vicinity of at least some of the Project work areas, CDFW recommends the following edits to the CBB Avoidance and Minimization Efforts section of the IS. Further, CDFW recommends these "efforts" constitute mitigation measures and be made conditions of Project approval.

### **Recommended Mitigation Measures 3: Recommended Edit to the Avoidance and Minimization Efforts for CBB on page 13 of the Initial Study.**

Currently, under Avoidance and Minimization Efforts, Caltrans proposes: "Pre-construction surveys will be conducted by a Caltrans-approved biologist, 30 days prior to any ground disturbance"; and "consultation with CDFW if individual CBB are detected." CDFW recommends the Avoidance and Minimization Efforts section under CBB be revised to include a discussion of Caltrans' plans to seek incidental take coverage in advance of ground disturbance in the event individual CBB are detected during those surveys.

**Response to comment 2:** The recommended mitigation measure has been accepted.

### **COMMENT 3:**

#### **Nelson's Antelope Squirrel (NAS)**

**Issue:** The Project activities will involve varying degrees of ground disturbance at discreet locations along an approximately 19-mile stretch of SR 198. Significant ground disturbance would result in those Project work areas involving culvert replacement while less significant and possibly no ground disturbance will occur in those Project work areas involving culvert

lining. Ground disturbance in occupied NAS habitat could result in take of NAS, as it is defined in section 86 of Fish and Game Code.

**Specific Impacts:** Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for NAS, potentially significant impacts associated with ground-disturbing Project-related activities could occur. The impacts are associated with the loss of equipment strikes, burrow collapse, inadvertent entrapment, reduced reproductive success, reduction in health and vigor of young, and direct mortality of individuals. In the IS, Caltrans proposes pre-construction surveys prior to any ground disturbance at those Project work areas which constitute suitable NAS habitat. Further, Caltrans proposes consultation with CDFW if individual NAS are detected during those surveys. However, Caltrans does not indicate how Project-related activities will proceed if through consultation it is determined that avoidance of the species is not feasible. Caltrans also indicates that no compensatory mitigation is proposed for take of individuals of the species.

**Evidence impact would be significant:** Habitat loss resulting from agricultural, urban, and industrial development is the primary threat to NAS. NAS have disappeared from many of their smaller habitat clusters and habitat loss due to agriculture, urbanization, and the use of rodenticides for ground squirrel control are primary threats (ESRP 2018b).

#### **Recommended Potentially Feasible Avoidance and Mitigation**

**Measure(s)** Because suitable NAS habitat is present in the vicinity of at least some of the Project work areas, CDFW recommends the following edits to the NAS Avoidance and Minimization Efforts section of the IS. Further, CDFW recommends these “efforts” constitute mitigation measures and be made conditions of Project approval.

#### **Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: Recommended Edit to the Avoidance and Minimization Efforts for NAS on page 13 of the Initial Study.**

Currently, under Avoidance and Minimization Efforts, Caltrans proposes NAS camera surveys and transect surveys be conducted coincident with blunt-nosed leopard lizard surveys two years and one year, respectively, prior to Project implementation. CDFW recommends the Avoidance and Minimization Efforts section under NAS be revised to include a discussion of Caltrans’ plans to seek incidental take coverage in advance of ground disturbance in the event individual NAS are detected during those surveys.

**Response to comment 3:** The recommended mitigation measure has been accepted.