Compliance Biology, Inc., "Results of Focused Western Spadefoot Toad Surveys on the River Village Project Site and Associated Borrow Sites" (November 3, 2004; 2004E)

compliance·biology

November 3, 2004

Mr. Glenn Adamick
Newhall Land Company
23823 Valencia Boulevard
Valencia, CA 91355

Subject: Results of Focused Western Spadefoot Toad Surveys on the River Village Project Site and Associate Borrow Sites

Dear Mr. Adamick,

The purpose of this letter report is to provide you with the results of focused surveys for the western spadefoot (*Spea* [Scaphiopus] *hammondii*) conducted on the River Village project site and its associate borrow sites located in an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County, California.

BACKGROUND

The western spadefoot is a small toad that is currently considered by California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) as a California Species of Special Concern. This status does not afford the species protection under the state Endangered Species Act, but impacts to the species from projects are considered when those projects are reviewed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Western spadefoot toad adults only enter aquatic habitats for breeding. They spend most of the year in a dormant to semi-dormant state in small mammal burrows in upland habitat adjacent to seasonal rainpools. This species requires seasonal rainpools that last a minimum of four weeks as eggs take from 1 to 6 days to hatch and metamorphosis can be completed within 3 to 11 weeks (Jennings and Hayes 1994). Breeding habitat must be seasonal such that predators including bullfrogs and predatory fish do not become established. Breeding adults typically emerge during and/or immediately following relatively warm rains in late winter to early spring. Female western spadefoot toads deposit small clusters of 10 to 42 eggs to plant stems or other debris in the pool (Jennings and Hayes 1994).

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In spring 2004, around the time of these surveys, breeding populations of western spadefoot toads were identified in three areas of Newhall Land holdings. Three populations were identified on the River Park project site approximately 5.2 miles to the east, one population was identified on the West Creek project site approximately 4 miles to the northeast, and one population was identified on the Valencia Commerce Center site approximately 1.5 miles to the north.

In an effort to ensure impacts to this species are avoided or minimized, Newhall Land directed Compliance Biology to perform focused surveys throughout the remaining project areas within their holdings. The River Village project is one of those areas.

The concurrent surveys on the other Newhall project sites in the area suggest the likely presence of western spadefoot toad on the Mesas West project site approximately 0.5 miles to the east of the south borrow site and 0.25 miles south of the River Village site, on the Mesas East project site approximately one mile southeast of the River Village site and 1.5 miles east of the south borrow site, and approximately 1.5 miles south of the south borrow site on the Portrero Valley project site.

METHODOLOGY

On March 9, 2004 Compliance Biology biologists surveyed the River Village project site and on March 23, 2004 the associated borrow sites were systematically transected for the purpose of evaluating the potential presence of western spadefoot toad. All of the flat lowland portions of the site were methodically walked and hilltops were utilized as vantage points to survey remaining areas for standing water. Additionally, all dirt roads were surveyed as western spadefoot toads are known to utilize deep road ruts that fill with rainwater (personal observation).

Surveys were conducted during the known breeding season for this species as evidenced by the identification of other breeding populations in the region. Although temperatures following the last rain of the season had increased dramatically, resulting in the rapid evaporation of potentially suitable breeding pools, it is expected that if western spadefoot were present on site, there would still be visible evidence detectable at the time of surveys.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project area is located in Los Angeles County (**Exhibit 1**). The River Village project site is situated south of SR 126 along the north side of the Santa Clara River. The north borrow site is

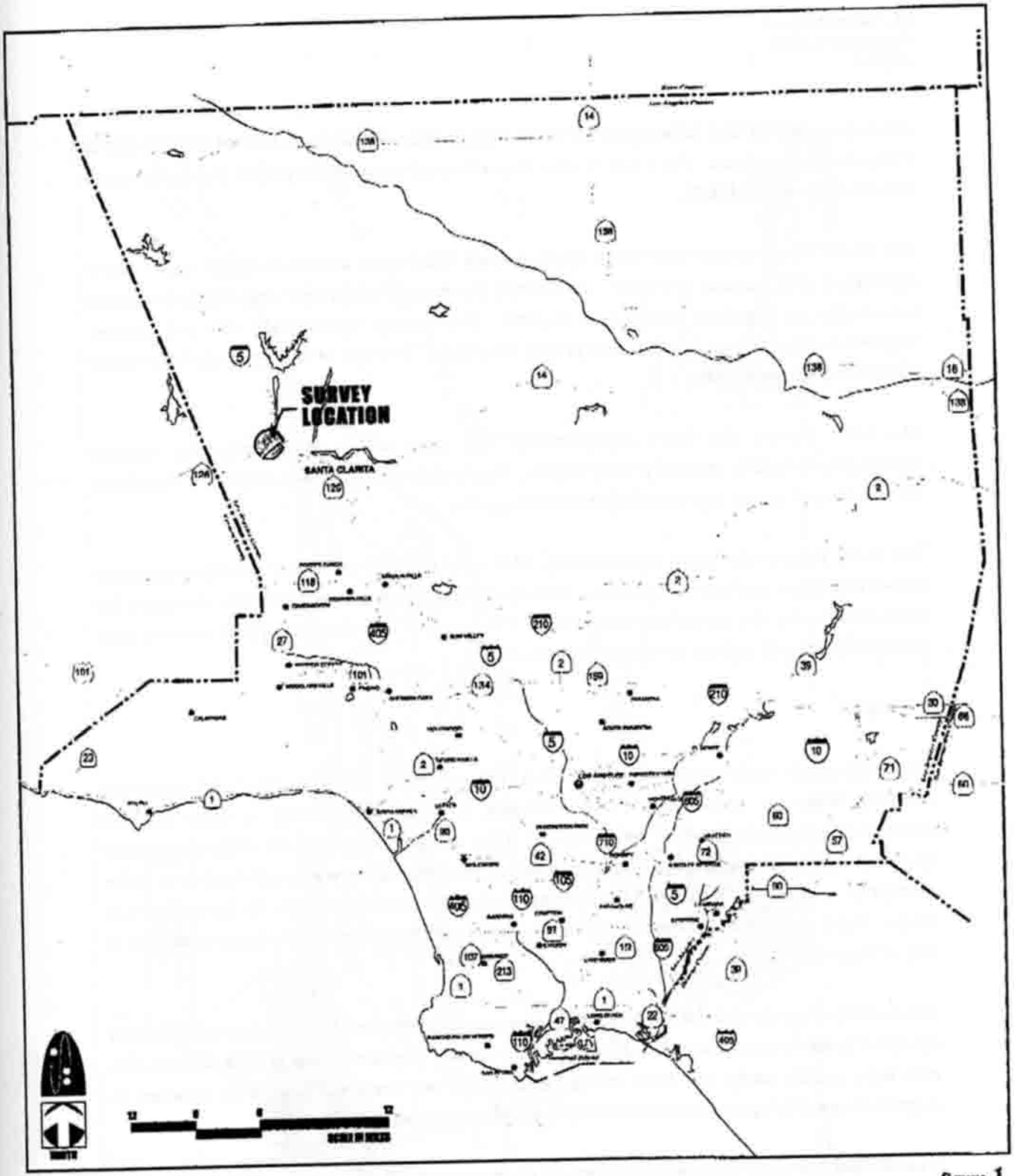


figure 1
Regional Location

situated northwest and adjacent to the River Village site, on the north side of SR 126 east of Chiquito Canyon Road. The south borrow site is located opposite the project site on the south side of the river (**Exhibit 2**).

The River Village project site totals approximately 292.5 acres and is currently under active agriculture with seasonal row crops. As a result, the majority of the land area within the project boundaries are regularly disked and planted. Topography is essentially flat and riparian vegetation occurs along the southern project boundary. A series of dirt roads provide access around and across the site.

The north borrow site totals approximately 25.2 acres and is characterized by variable topography including relatively steep slopes. Vegetation on the north borrow site includes a combination of coastal sage and chaparral scrub species.

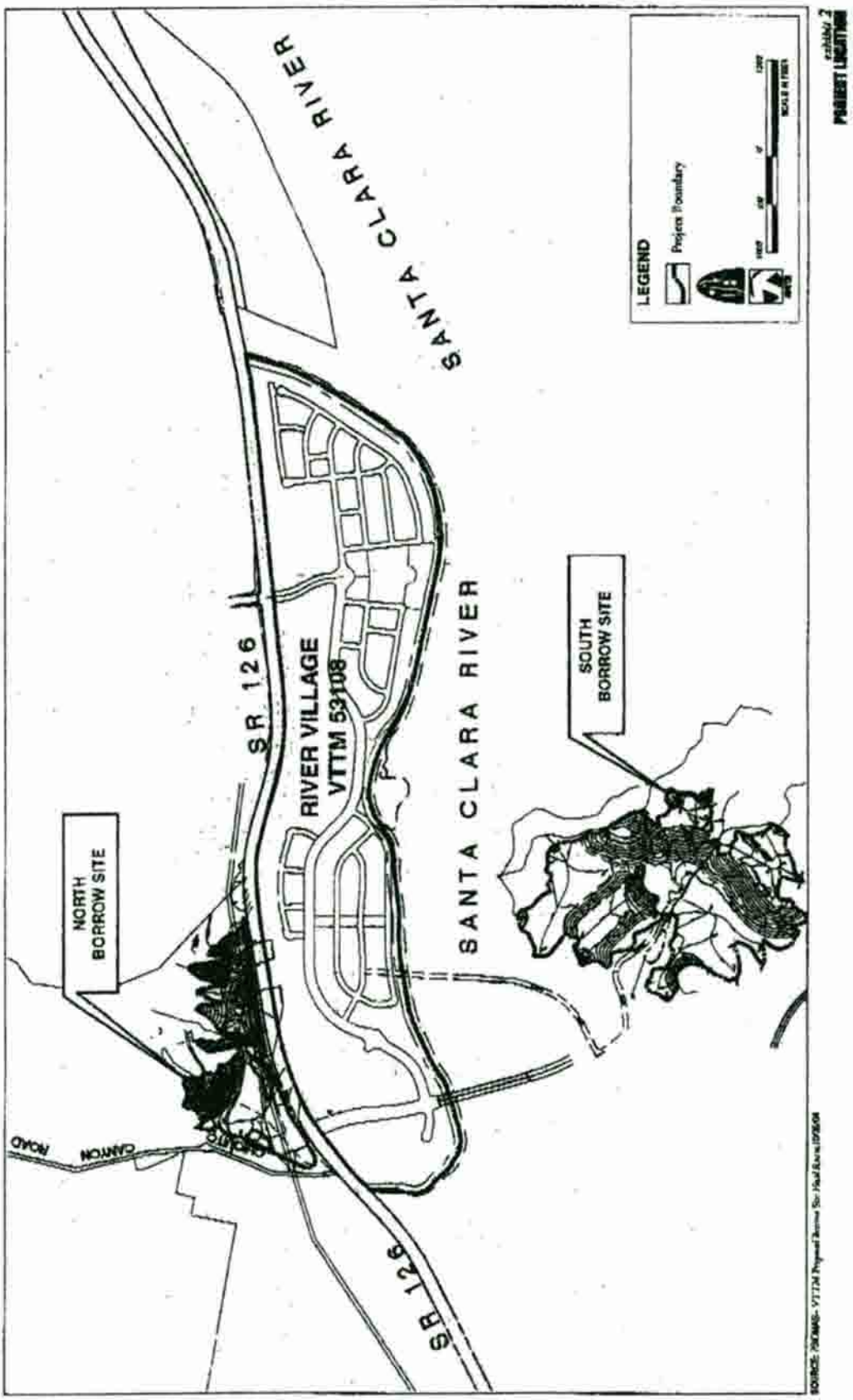
The south borrow site totals approximately 84.6 acres and also supports variable topography with steep slopes and scrub vegetation. Several dirt roads occur throughout this site and a flat mesa occurs near the central portion of site. Areas within this flat area appear to have been historically scraped and are devoid of vegetation.

RESULTS

Five depressions were observed on the River Village project site that either still supported standing water, or cryptogammic soils (crusting layer with indications of algae and silt sediments), suggesting that they held standing water in the recent past. All of the depressions occurred within existing dirt roads and those still supporting surface water appeared to be either a result of, or persistent because of the irrigation system that provided water for the agricultural crops. There were no direct observations or indications of the presence of western spadefoot at any of these depressions.

The north borrow site did not support any depressions that either still held surface water or that appeared to have recently supported surface water for any extended period of time. Soils in this area were mostly sandy and there was no evidence of any areas that would be expected to support seasonal rainpools suitable for breeding western spadefoot toads.

As described, the south borrow site has several dirt roads and a flat cleared area. One depression supporting cryptogammic soils was observed in a dirt road and two depressions with shallow surface water were observed within the flat mesa. There were no direct observations or indications of the presence of western spadefoot at any of these depressions.


SANTA CLARA RIVER
SR 126
RIVER VILLAGE
VTTM 53108
SANTA CLARA RIVER
NORTH
BORROW SITE
SOUTH
BORROW SITE
SR 126
LEGEND
Project Boundary

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the focused surveys indicate that the depressions occurring on the River Village project site and the south borrow site did not provide any evidence of breeding western spadefoot toads. There were no adults, egg masses, tadpoles, or new metamorphs observed and no indications that they have occurred on this site. Further no western spadefoot toads or suitable conditions for breeding spadefoot toads were apparent on the north borrow site. As such, the potential for spadefoot toad occurrence at the south borrow site is not expected.

Because of the recent documented occurrences of this species in the area, occurrence of western spadefoot toads on the River Village site and south borrow site cannot be entirely ruled out. However, because surveys were conducted during the peak breeding season and no evidence of their presence was detected, their potential for occurrence on these properties is considered low.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

To ensure no western spadefoot toads would be impacted by grading or other site preparations, a final focused survey should be conducted on the River Park site and south borrow site during the next late winter or early spring rains to fully determine presence or absence. Should the species be determined to be absent, no further action would be required. Should evidence of western spadefoot toad be discovered within either of the subject areas, the applicant should consult with CDFG regarding possible relocation of the animals to adjacent open space areas.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the information provided in this report.

Sincerely,

Dave Crawford
President/Principal Biologist

REFERENCES

California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB). Wildlife & Habitat Data Analysis Branch. Department of Fish and Game. August 1, 2004. Commercial Version. Newhall and Val Verde, California USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle maps.

CDFG. 2003. Special Animals. State of California, The Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game, Natural Heritage Division, Natural Diversity Data Base, January 2003 update.

Jennings, Mark R. and Marc P. Hayes. 1994. *Amphibian and Reptile Species of Special Concern in California.* Final report submitted to California Department of Fish and Game. Contract No. 8023.

Stebbins, R. C. 1985. *Western Reptiles and Amphibians.*, 2nd Ed. Houghton-Mifflin Company. Boston, Massachusetts.